History’s Leftovers

Irish History and the Question of Identity in Sebastian Barry’s Revisionist Writings

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Introduction

“History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.”

(Joyce 43)

“A nation? says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place.
-By God, then, says Ned, laughing, if that’s so I’m a nation for I’m living in the same place for the past five years.
So of course everyone had a laugh at Bloom and says he, trying to muck out of it:
-Or also living in different places.
-That covers my case, says Joe.
-What is your nation if I may ask, says the citizen.
-Ireland, says Bloom. I was born here. Ireland.”

(Joyce 430)

Ever since its publication in 1922 James Joyce’s “Modernist masterpiece” (Nowak 546) Ulysses has given rise to countless volumes of literary criticism, and Joyce as a or maybe even the major Modernist Irish author has been an influence on generations of novelists, dramatists and poets. Through its at the time revolutionary narrative style, incorporating a stream-of-consciousness narration for great lengths, Ulysses touches upon a vast range of socio-political issues of Irish life still relevant today, not least among them Irish history and Irish national identity. For example, Stephan Daedalus’s comment on history in the first quote invites readers to a critical examination of Irish history and even the very nature of the concept of history itself. With Leopold Bloom’s inability to come up with a satisfying definition for the term ‘nation’ in the second quote, Joyce posits the question of what it is that constitutes a nation. Bloom’s blatant uncertainty carries social, cultural and political implications closely connected to narratives of the Irish past. In the year of the book’s publication, 1922, just six years after the Easter Rising and with the Irish Civil War barely at an end, nationalist Irish history had just culminated in years of violence and bloodshed, and so Bloom’s answer to the quarrelsome citizen - that merely one’s birthplace decides one’s national identity - must have seemed problematic to say the least.
Almost a hundred years later these same questions with their historical, political, philosophical and psychological implications reverberate strongly as central themes throughout the oeuvre of another Irish author, Sebastian Barry. Although modern Irish history is a major theme in Barry’s writings, especially Irish history from the turn of the century to the Second World War but also up until the present, his characters are the type of people who do not typically feature in history books. They do not stand at the head of armies or revolutionize their country’s political landscape. Barry’s characters are the small, the poor, at times even the mad, but nevertheless, people who like so many thousands of others find themselves crucially affected and altered by the rapid changes in their country in the twentieth century. In his introduction to Sebastian Barry’s first collection of plays, *Plays: 1*, Irish literary critic Fintan O’Toole stresses Barry’s choice of characters as a major distinguishing feature of his plays. O’Toole describes them as “men and women defeated and discarded by their times” (O’Toole vii). “History’s leftovers” (ibid.) he dubs them; in their case it is a history revolving around interwoven and often interdependent pairs of opposites: unionist/loyalist versus nationalist/republican, Protestant versus Catholic, British versus Irish.

Judging solely by Barry’s choice of characters, even without having read his plays and novels, one may easily guess that Barry’s writing will not present a typical, uncritical and unquestioning view of Irish history or, for that matter, a straightforward definition of ‘Irishness’. It is the aim of this paper to discern in detail how this Irish author uses these two concepts, history and identity, in his writing and how he presents the impact they had and still have today on thousands of Irish men and women, and hopefully, to show how this can add to our understanding of how these concepts influence our lives in general.

Having published a coming-of-age novel and a children’s novel as well as two novellas and two volumes of poetry in the 1980s, it was as a playwright that Barry gained increasing popularity during the 1990s, especially with *The Steward of Christendom*, first staged at the Royal Court Theatre London in 1995 (cf. Harte 197f.). In recent years, however, while defending his place in the world of Irish theatre, Barry has become increasingly popular as a novelist publishing seven novels between 1998 and 2016. Although a certain amount of literary criticism regarding Barry’s work already exists, much of it is focused mainly on his plays. Barry’s novels – not surprisingly maybe due to their recency – have been almost neglected by comparison. Even in *Out of History*, the first collection of essays focussing solely on Barry’s work, published in 2006, contributors mainly comment on the novel *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* and, to a lesser extent, on *A Long Long Way*, but
focus primarily on his plays. The popular success of Barry’s latest novels aside, there is another reason why we must not neglect them: as will be shown in the following parts of this paper, Barry’s plays and novels show an uncommonly high level of structural and thematic interconnectedness. Though his works are not a continuous series and no chronological order of reading seems overly preferable, their high level of interconnectivity not only allows for but rather necessitates a literary analysis of them as a unit instead of as individual works of fiction.

The play The Steward of Christendom, for example, is inseparable from the novels A Long Long Way, Annie Dunne and On Canaan’s Side. The three novels and the play all focus on the same family tragedy, showing its causes and effects from different perspectives, thus presenting a fuller and emotionally more involving picture than any one work does by itself, but while doing so they are as consistent in character presentation and content as if they were instalments in a series. So to study Barry’s plays in isolation while disregarding his novels or vice versa or studying each work in isolation would be like seeing only one half of a painting: what you see may be beautiful, but it still is only half the painting. As Barry’s works have so far been mostly studied in just such a selective manner, this paper hopes to draw a far more complete picture by a) analysing a large group of selected works as a unit, b) providing a more detailed theoretical basis regarding the central concepts ‘history’, ‘nation’ and ‘identity’ and their interdependency for this literary analysis than has been offered in the literary criticism of Barry’s work so far and c) by discussing the results of this analysis in connection to the aforementioned literary criticism and in the context of twentieth-century Irish revisionism.

Much of Barry’s narrative focuses on the events of Irish history between the end of the nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century, while some of it reaches into the twenty-first century. Thus, knowledge of certain events in Irish history regarding this time frame is crucial for a full understanding of Barry’s works as well as their implications. Hence, part one of this paper provides a concise overview of nationalist Irish history of that time, highlighting those events, organisations and personae that play a role in the narratives analysed later.

Part two then presents the theoretical background for the following literary analysis. Barry’s texts repeatedly touch upon nationalism as a concept. Although nations usually understand themselves as having their cultural roots in the ancient past, nationalism, paradoxically, seems to be quite a recent development – recent, admittedly, being used loosely here. Many if not most scholars associate the birth of nationalism with the rapid
technological and moreover social changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Irish nationalism is of pivotal importance in the character development in Barry’s works. It is thus not only appropriate but rather necessary that the first section of part two presents an introduction to the theoretical discourse regarding this concept – not an in-depth analysis of nationalism but an overview which allows for an interpretation of the author’s presentation of it in his works.

The analysis of Barry’s works will show that Barry’s character development is closely tied to the effects the events of nationalist Irish history, especially the Irish War of Independence and the ensuing Irish Civil War, have on the identity of Barry’s characters. That is why an overview of theories especially from the psychoanalytic tradition regarding the concept of identity and its influence on the human mind constitute the second section of this part. In this way, working definitions for the literary analysis are introduced, which differentiate between personal and national identity. The interconnectivity of these two concepts will be explained – as far as this is possible within the scope of this section – as well as how these concepts can result in mass loyalty to nationalist ideas.

Due to his presentation of Irish nationalism, Barry has repeatedly been labelled an Irish revisionist author (cf. e.g. Harte 199; Butler Cullingford 122). For this reason, section three consists of an overview of revisionism with regards to historiography in general and Irish historiography in particular. Furthermore, it provides additional information about how this movement has become influential in the field of Irish literature and introduces some popular modern Irish revisionist authors and a selection of their works to which Barry’s texts can then be compared. Such an overview seems necessary in order to fully understand the meaning of this label for an Irish author who writes about Irish history so as to appropriately discern typical characteristics of revisionist writing and to identify in detail Barry’s very own revisionist style.

Part three contains the actual analysis of Barry’s works. The first section introduces those of Barry’s texts that have been selected for this analysis. It divides them into two main groups according to which branch of Barry’s fictional family their narrative focuses on and provides an overview of the genealogy of Barry’s fictional family, outlining the relationships between his main characters. The following second section analyses in detail the character development of each of Barry’s main characters in the context of fictional and fictionalised events of nationalist Irish history as presented in Barry’s works. In particular, the analysis focuses on how Barry uses the concept of identity in the development of his characters and his plots. The third and final section identifies typical characteristics of Barry’s works
regarding the treatment of Irish history and identity and discusses these results in the context of the literary criticism of Barry’s work already in place. As part of this, Barry’s treatment of certain core concepts of Irish revisionism is compared to their treatment by other Irish revisionist authors introduced in part two.

In the conclusion the analytic process and, hopefully, progress throughout the paper is recapitulated and the ultimate findings are summarized. This final chapter also aims to ascertain to what extent Barry can be called a revisionist author based on the literary analysis in this paper in general and with regard to the findings of the previous subsection in particular. In this context, this final part will return to the two quotes from *Ulysses* trying to discern which, if any, answers Barry’s works offer regarding the fundamental questions posed by fellow Irish author James Joyce almost a hundred years earlier regarding the nature of Irish history and Irish national identity. More generally, it will suggest how Barry’s writing can make us re-evaluate our understanding of history and – keeping in mind the influence of history on identity – also our understanding of ourselves as well as the current socio-political climate in Europe.
I. Setting the stage – modern Irish nationalist history in a nutshell

The first part of this paper is intended to provide the historical background knowledge necessary to fully understand the analysis of Barry’s works in the main part of this paper, part three. It will set the stage, so to speak, by providing an outline of the main events in modern Irish history.

“For many [...] the twentieth century probably appears as the island’s [i.e. Ireland’s] most problematic and bloody century. It began with a constitutional crisis over home rule that would, after the devastation of the First World War, give way to a period of revolution and civil war. The century has ended with three decades of paramilitary violence, and a peace process that is as complex as the Gordian knot that it is trying to unravel.”

(Cronin 173)

In this excerpt historian Mike Cronin sums up in three short sentences all of Irish twentieth-century history. By pointing out the complexity of the peace process he already hints at the complex network of events, actions and reactions, organisations and counter-organisations which has shaped the island and its people over the past hundred years. Obviously, the goal of this part cannot be to present a complete account of the country’s modern history as such a scheme would doubtlessly far exceed the scope of this paper. However, as will be shown later, certain historical events play a major role in Barry’s plotlines, usually events either directly or indirectly related to the notion of Irish nationalism. Therefore, this chapter is intended to provide a practical working knowledge for the following literary analysis, a brief summary of the most crucial events and personae in Irish nationalist history with regards to Barry’s works.

A note of caution needs to be issued here: the literary analysis in this paper will imply a questioning of the veracity of any historical account and/or history writing as it is of its nature always subjective. That is why in writing the following account care has been taken to present for the most part largely undisputed facts and to refrain from including opinionated assessments or judgements. However, due to the selection of sources and events and the omission of those not pertaining to the literary analysis of Barry’s works, the following
overview is inevitably also a subjective and incomplete presentation and readers are strongly encouraged to turn to other sources for a broader and more objective picture of twentieth-century nationalist Irish history.

I.1 Parnell, Redmond and Home Rule

Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891) was without a doubt one of the most prominent figures in the political struggle for Irish nationalism in 19th century Britain (cf. R. Foster, “Modern” 400). He entered the House of Commons in 1875 and fought to “force nationalist Ireland’s concerns upon the agenda of London politicians” (English, “Irish” 195). In 1880 Parnell took the post of Chairman of the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP). One of his and his party’s main political goals, if not their main goal, was Home Rule for Ireland, a degree of political independence from Britain which would allow for the institution of an Irish parliament regulating most of its country’s politics autonomously while still being connected to Westminster on a higher political level.

By 1885 Parnell had partly achieved his goals as many Liberals were quite supportive of the ideas behind the Irish nationalist movement as represented by the IPP. William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898) became Prime Minister of Britain in 1886. He had often concerned himself with Irish problems and seeing the quite widespread acceptance of Parnell’s cause among Liberals, he took this struggle a step further by introducing a Home Rule Bill, the Government of Ireland Bill, to parliament in June 1886. However, this bill was defeated in the House of Commons, as was the Second Home Rule Bill, introduced by Gladstone in 1893, this time in the House of Lords (cf. English, “Irish” 209; Kee 385, 413-421).

John Redmond (1856-1918) succeeded Parnell as Chairman of the IPP after the latter’s death and held that post until his own death in 1918. Like his predecessor he fought for Home Rule. The following quote from one of his lectures presents a concise definition of what he meant by Home Rule:

“I mean by Home Rule the restoration to Ireland of representative government [...] I mean the internal affairs of Ireland shall be regulated by an Irish parliament – that all imperial affairs, and all that relates to the colonies, foreign states and common interests of the Empire, shall continue to be regulated by the imperial parliament as
However, a proposed Home Rule Bill had already been defeated twice and though support in the House of Commons might at some point have been enough to pass the Bill, it seemed quite improbable that Home Rule would ever be passed in the House of Lords. The Parliament Act of 1911, however, changed all that, as it greatly affected the entire legislative process from then on. The act stated that legislation passed by the House of Commons could be delayed by the House of Lords but not utterly prevented from becoming law (cf. English, “Irish” 246). Finally, with the legislative process thus altered, the Third Home Rule Bill passed the House of Commons in May 1914 and was to become law in September of that same year. Owing to the pressures of the First World War, the institution of Home Rule was postponed, however, “for twelve months or until the end of the war whichever were the longer period” (Kee 517; cf. English, “Irish” 253). At the time many people expected the war to be a short war not exceeding a year (cf. English, “Irish” 253f.). Whatever the length of the war, however, as will be shown in the following sections, the war years brought about great changes and at the end of the war Parnell and Redmond’s vision of Home Rule as presented here was not an option anymore and “Redmond’s triumph had turned to ashes” (Kee 518).

I.2 Ulster Volunteers vs. Irish Volunteers and Protestant ascendency

When talking about the struggle for Home Rule or for the Irish nationalist cause in general, it is important to keep in mind that not all people in Ireland supported this notion. Thinking only in terms of Irish versus British would crucially oversimplify the situation at the beginning of the twentieth century. Furthermore, this sort of black-or-white approach to such a complicated matter as Irish nationalist history would make it impossible to understand the reasons and reasonings behind certain central events in Ireland in the course of the twentieth century.
Looking at Ireland’s population at the beginning of the twentieth century, two major camps can be discerned, with nationalists on the one side and unionists on the other. While certainly not all nationalists favoured Home Rule¹, it is safe to say that almost all unionists were against it. It is true that most nationalists were Catholic and most unionists Protestant but, again, understanding the conflict of Irish nationalism as a purely religious one, Catholic versus Protestant in nature, would mean drastically oversimplifying the matter. Quite the same is true for a north-against-south attitude. Rather, one has to take into account religious as well as cultural, social and economic aspects. Nevertheless, it is true that only in Ulster in the north did unionists constitute the majority. Also, it seems safe to say that the majority of nationalists viewed Ireland as an inherently Catholic country. Nationalists generally took pride in their Gaelic culture and origin, and many felt not merely politically but also economically oppressed by Britain. Unionists, on the other hand, were mostly Protestant and had little affiliation with Gaelic culture.

Ulster in the north constituted the main centre of Protestant unionism mainly because in the seventeenth century it had become home to English and Scottish so-called plantations on Irish soil as part of the British colonization efforts (cf. Morgan, “plantation” 444ff.). The term Protestant ascendancy stems from this time and describes the “Protestant landed elite that dominated Irish society” (Morgan, “Protestant ascendancy” 466) and has also been used – though sometimes with a slightly different focus – to describe the ruling Protestant elite in Ireland in the nineteenth and twentieth century (cf. Morgan, “Protestant ascendancy” 466). The city of Belfast and especially its Protestant population had profited economically from the union with Britain and Belfast resembled British cities such as Manchester, Glasgow or Bristol rather than other Irish centres of population like Dublin or Cork (cf. English, “Irish” 250f.). In consequence, while nationalists fought for some kind of separation from Britain – Home Rule, complete independence or something in between – most unionists saw their political, religious, cultural and economic situation seriously endangered by the prospect of becoming a minority in an independent, mostly Catholic, Gaelic Ireland, no matter what level of independence would be agreed upon.

Thus, it is not very surprising that with the threat of Home Rule looming on the horizon, many unionists felt the need to voice their disapproval, to unite with others, in short to organise a sort of protest movement. In September 1912, 237,368 men signed the Solemn

¹ The Easter Rising and the Irish Civil War seem proof enough that at least a certain number of nationalists felt that anything short of complete independence from Britain was simply unacceptable (see sections I.4 and I.5 respectively for more information on these events).
League and Covenant, thereby openly opposing Home Rule, while another 234,046 women signed a similar kind of document. With the total Irish population at that time just above the four-million mark, almost half a million people signing their name to such document clearly shows how strong opposition to Home Rule was. More surprising to us in modern times may seem the fact that these people felt the need to organise a paramilitary force to defend their position, setting up the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in January 1913 (cf. English, “Irish” 248; Jackson, “Ulster Volunteer Force” 563). Provoked to an extent by the formation of the UVF, Irish nationalists in turn set up the nationalist paramilitary Irish Volunteers in Dublin in November 1913 (R. Foster, “Modern” 461). Thus the years of “1913-14 witnessed an extraordinary para-militarization of Irish politics, at least in terms of dressing, parading and training as soldiers” (English, “Irish” 252).

The Irish Volunteers are not to be confused with the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), which had come to life as a nationalist organisation some decades earlier. It had grown out of the revolutionary Fenian movement of the mid-nineteenth century and seems to have embraced more radical ideas as well as methods. The Home Rule movement enjoyed such popularity at the time, however, that the IRB “led a rather submerged existence seeking opportunities to exploit” (Loughlin 272). One such opportunity was to enlist among the Irish Volunteers and so when John Redmond as leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party (or Nationalist Party (cf. Hepburn, “Nationalist Party” 382)) allowed Brotherhood support for the Volunteers, Irish Volunteers membership numbers rose to 160,000 compared to about 90,000 in the UVF (cf. Augusteijn, “Irish (Nationalist) Volunteers” 270, Jackson, “Ulster Volunteer Force” 563). After 1919, however, the name Irish Republican Army would in time replace the name Irish Volunteers, denoting the militant nationalist organisation fighting the British in Ireland.

I.3 Larkin, the Dublin Lockout and the Sackville Street Riot

Probably the best-known labour leader and trade unionist in Ireland, James Larkin was born in Liverpool to parents of Irish decent and members of the city’s working class. After organising unionist activity in Belfast on behalf of the British-based National Union of Dock Labourers, Larkin, eventually feeling betrayed in his efforts by his superiors, founded the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union (ITGWU) in 1909 (cf. Collins 302). Using the
sympathetic strike tactic\(^2\), Larkin was so successful in his efforts that he succeeded in raising “the pay of unskilled workers who joined the ITGWU by 20 to 25 per cent in the first eight months of 1913” (Yeates xxiii).

Between January 1913 and the middle of August the same year, a total of 30 strikes had been effected. Chief opponent in Larkin’s struggle was capitalist and politician William Martin Murphy, who among other things had established the Dublin United Tramways Company and was the owner of the newspaper *Irish Independent*. He reacted to Larkin’s strikes by locking out employees who were members of the ITGWU – a tactic then adopted by other Dublin employers as well who would lock out 20,000 workers to break the ITGWU, which would in time coin the phrase ‘Dublin Lockout’ in reference to this time (cf. O’Connor 56f.).

In August 1913 tensions were running high. Arrested for seditious libel on the 28\(^{th}\) but bailed out soon afterwards, Larkin was scheduled to give a speech from the Imperial Hotel in O’Connell Street, then still named Sackville Street, on the 31\(^{st}\). Although the authorities tried to prevent Larkin from entering the hotel that day, he did so in disguise and succeeded in addressing the crowd outside as planned before being arrested and led away by the police (cf. O’Connor 57). Although it still seems difficult to explain exactly how and why it started, following Larkin’s arrest a street riot in Sackville Street took place in which the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP) is said to have acted with frightening ferocity, baton-charging against supposed rioters. The numbers of casualties differ somewhat depending on the source. However, it seems certain that at least a few hundred were wounded and at least one person was killed in the attack (cf. Kostick and Collins 9; Malcolm 163; O’Connor 57; Kee 49f.). Though the DMP was “[r]easonably popular, the force […] incurred considerable hostility when it brutally suppressed workers’ gatherings during the Dublin lockout” (Malcolm 163). The riot and the brutality shown by the DMP seem to have had “a traumatic effect on the atmosphere of Dublin. Violence now became more and more part of the everyday order of things” (Kee 495).

Among the commanding officers of the DMP that day was one Superintendent Dunne, who “sent his men racing over O’Connell Bridge as soon as he heard the commotion outside the Imperial Hotel” (Yeates 64). According to Sebastian Barry, this man was his

\(^2\) Until then employers used to exploit the deep well of available labour to replace any striking workers. Larkin managed to unite thousands of unskilled labourers in such a way that they would form a united striking front, thus closing the aforementioned well and forcing employers to the table (cf. Yeates xxiii).
ancestor who served him as inspiration for his fictional character Thomas Dunne (cf. Butler Cullingford 121f.).

I.4 The First World War and the Easter Rising

Having finally won Home Rule for Ireland in May 1914, Redmond as IPP leader now felt that the Irish should join the British in the First World War, thus proving their valour and strength, and last but not least also their continuing close relationship to Britain despite the coming of Home Rule. So in September 1914 Redmond urged the Irish, especially the Volunteers, the men in uniform, to enlist in the British army (cf. English, “Irish” 253). A small portion of the 188,000 Volunteers – about 13,500 men – broke away still clinging to the idea that England’s plight was Ireland’s opportunity and formed a splinter group called the Irish Volunteers while the remaining men continued as the Irish National Volunteers – or simply National Volunteers – under Redmond (cf. Kee 520). It turned out that Redmond, in his belief that the Irish should prove themselves worthy of their independence by fighting in the war, “was wholly in line with what the majority of the people of Ireland were thinking, and the recruiting figures from Ireland were soon to show it” (Kee 519).

After all his efforts, success for Redmond seemed only a small step away: Home Rule had already been given royal consent and was only postponed until after the end of the war – a war which through levying common service and inflicting suffering on unionists and nationalists alike was likely to unite these two factions more than any political compromise might have ever been able to before (cf. English, “Irish” 254). However, things turned out quite differently. Certainly, one reason for the change in people’s mood was the disillusionment brought about by the gruesome reality of war. However, any theory trying to explain the popular shift from support for Redmond and Home Rule before the Great War to a war for independence and a subsequent civil war must include the events and aftermath of the Easter Rising in 1916. This event has been repeatedly identified as “a watershed in Irish history and politics” (English, “Armed” 1).

The rising had been planned by the IRB military council together with a number of key members of the Irish Volunteers. They “wished to exploit the fact that the war distracted Britain from its Irish colony” (Ryan 33). However, the plans for the rising were concealed from other Volunteer commanders, especially commander-in-chief Eoin MacNeill (cf.
Milne 487f.). On Monday the 24th, 1916, Easter Monday, when the rising actually took place, it had no real chance of success (cf. English, “Irish” 261). Communication had been a huge problem, an attempt to land German arms in support of the rising failed and MacNeill had issued orders the day before that no rising was to take place. Hence, regarding the number of participants in this attempt at rebellion was relatively small and apart from some incidents in Wexford and Galway, the action was concentrated only in Dublin, where a total of just 1,200 rebels took control of some individual key buildings. Among these buildings was the General Post Office (GPO), which served the rebels as headquarters, and in front of which Commandant-General P.H. Pearse was to read the Proclamation of the Republic, by which the rebels declared Ireland’s independence from Britain (cf. English, “Irish” 261; O’Connor 81f.; Milne 487f.; R. Foster, “Modern 480f.; Ryan 20).

The proclamation is not without controversy as “[i]t referred to ‘gallant Allies in Europe’ [= the Germans] who were supporting Ireland, thereby blandly dismissing the fact that the flower of Ireland’s manhood had been fighting those allies in Europe for the past twenty months” (Kee 549). Apart from a unit of British Lancers who staged an unsuccessful frontal assault on the GPO (cf. Kostick and Collins 92ff.; O’Connor 87f.), the first units to move against the rebels in the GPO were “the 3rd Royal Irish Rifles and the 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers, themselves the product of the most recent British Army recruiting drive in Ireland” (Kee 549) and consisting of mainly Irish men. In the following days when the authorities had finally realised what they had on their hands, they reacted with due force, putting rebel positions under heavy bombardment including incendiary devices, explosives and a gunboat (cf. O’Connor 89; Kostick and Collins 96ff.). Under such heavy fire surrender was only a matter of time and so on Friday the 28th, after only four days, the leaders of the rebellion surrendered and the rising was defeated (cf. O’Connor 94f.).

According to Irish historian Roy Foster, “[t]he whole enterprise [= the Easter Rising] dumbfounded general opinion in Dublin” (R. Foster, “Modern” 481) at the time as it came as a total surprise to the majority of the Irish population, and reactions were initially quite varied. At first, anger directed at the rebels was quite a common reaction among the Irish. The subsequent change in popular opinion was not so much triggered by the rising itself but rather by the behaviour of the two parties after the rebellion was over. While the rebels showed themselves dignified and true to their ideals, the reaction of the British military command under General Maxwell was “crude and brutal […]. Maxwell arrested, court-martialled or detained 3,500 people – more than twice the number of participants in the
Rising” (Kostick and Collins 126). Then, over the first weeks of May, Maxwell had the leaders of the rebellion executed and Foster argues that

“[t]he fifteen grisly executions […] created as many martyrs. The case law, given the German connection, was conclusive for the death penalty: but in the circumstances of Ireland during 1916, the decision against commutation was inflammatory.”

(R. Foster, “Modern” 485)

“The letters and final statements of the men executed, along with the resolve with which they met their deaths, were introducing the leaders of the rebellion to a huge audience to whom they had previously been strangers” (Kostick and Collins 128). The entire aftermath of the rising is thought to have shifted popular opinion far more than the act of the rising itself. It “produce[d] an emotional high temperature, and a deepening of sympathy for the rebels […] [who] quickly became Irish national saints” (English, “Irish” 261f.). The commemoration of these people and their deed also had a political effect, as Richard English has stated in his history of Irish nationalism:

“And to the many dead and maimed, we must also add further victims of this burst of Irish political violence. For the most emphatic achievement of 1916 was to destroy a constitutional, parliamentary, conciliatory version of nationalism (a nationalism founded on the principles of compromise, trust, toleration, and opposition to political violence or coercion). Trust, in particular, was destroyed, the bloodshed of 1916 driving Ireland’s two political communities, nationalist and unionist, much further apart.”

(English, “Irish” 277f.)

In the following years the economic effects of the war on Ireland, e.g. high food prices and unemployment, together with the proposal of expanding conscription to Ireland (though this was never actually done) only strengthened anti-British sentiment in Ireland (cf. English, “Irish” 281f.; R. Foster, “Modern” 487f.). As a result, by the end of the war, support for the Nationalist Party, the IPP, and Home Rule had all but evaporated. The gulf between unionists and nationalists had widened. The political party Sinn Féin was reorganised,
consisting afterwards of radical republicans who had participated in the Easter Rising and more moderate members of the old Sinn Féin Party founded by Arthur Griffin in 1905. It soon replaced the IPP as the dominant political party. The party’s major aim was to secure “international recognition of Ireland as an independent Irish Republic” (Augusteijn, “Sinn Féin” 514; cf. also English, “Armed” 15). The opportunity for Home Rule had been lost.

I.5 The Anglo-Irish War and the Irish Civil War

The Anglo-Irish War is only one label given to the violent acts occurring in Ireland between 1919 and 1921.

“[T]he Anglo-Irish War, the War of Independence, the Troubles, the Tan War. None of these descriptions quite works. This conflict was emphatically not one between England and Ireland; [...] in any case there was far too much conflict between Irish people themselves for ‘Anglo-Irish’ to be adequate as a description. The ‘War of Independence’ label fails also, given the far from fully independent outcome of 1921 [...]. The ‘Troubles’ is far too vague a term, and the ‘Tan War’ simply too narrow [...].”

(English, “Irish” 285)

In fact, due to the many underlying conflicts, to the multiple perspectives and issues involved, it seems almost impossible to sum up these years of violence in Ireland under one single all-encompassing name. The term ‘war’ is itself quite questionable in this context, as the British were reluctant to declare war on the IRA³, as this would have granted them war party status with all the rights that would have entailed. Summing up as carefully as possible, trying not to overemphasize nor underestimate parts of this conflict, these years can perhaps be described as a series of violent actions undertaken by groups of Irish people under the banner of the IRA against British rule in Ireland followed and again newly caused by equally violent British acts of retribution. Although partly inaccurate as a label, for simplicity’s sake

³ From 1918 onwards the former Irish Volunteers became increasingly known as the Irish Republican Army although the name Irish Volunteers remained in use as well (cf. Augusteijn, “Irish Republican Army” 271).
and for want of a more poignant term, though, the name Anglo-Irish War will be used to refer to the violence of these years in this paper.

Although not all IRA members fought for the same goal and not all Irish republican politicians envisioned the same kind of independence, they all seemed to be united against the same enemy. The conflict itself is often said to have begun in January 1919 when the IRA killed two men of the Royal Irish Constabulary\(^4\) (RIC) (cf. English, “Irish” 287). After the prior shift in public opinion during the time after the Easter Rising and the successive shift in Irish politics towards a decidedly more nationalist focus it seems to have been inevitable that at some time words would be followed by action. Although the republicans can be stigmatised as the aggressors in this conflict, the truth is that both sides seem to have fought a rather ruthless war following an-eye-for-an-eye logic, with the victims more often than not being civilians (cf. English, “Irish” 287). Also, attacks on both sides often occurred not as a part of regular military action but when the victims were alone, unprepared and defenceless (cf. English, “Irish” 292).

As the RIC was soon deemed inadequate in terms of combating the IRA, the British government sent other troops called Auxiliaries and Black and Tans to Ireland in 1920 to support the RIC. Consisting mostly of British ex-soldiers, demobilised officers and sailors, these troops soon earned themselves a reputation for violence which seriously weakened public opinion and support of the RIC (cf. Empey 15; Malcolm, “Auxiliaries” 32; Malcolm, “Black and Tans” 47; Kee 670f.; R. Foster, “Modern” 498). The common use of the term ‘Tan War’ as a label for this conflict shows just how strongly the introduction of these British forces as well as their actions and behaviour have influenced Irish mentality. Although IRA raids were usually quite brutal in nature and a point of discussion or dissension even among nationalists (cf. English, “Irish” 291), the brutality of the reprisals staged by the Black and Tans may have actually helped the IRA’s cause by influencing public opinion of the British in a decidedly negative manner. At the beginning of 1921 large enough parts of the Irish population sided enough with the IRA “to make British government of nationalist Ireland impossible” (English, “Irish” 288), and although neither side had won the armed conflict or was even remotely likely to do so in the foreseeable future, this realisation led to the

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\(^4\) The RIC was a kind of paramilitary police force spread out over the entire country and controlled from Dublin Castle though not stationed in Dublin itself. When the conflict broke out in 1919, the RIC consisted of many Catholic constables. Many of them were nationalists themselves, which additionally complicated matters when they were ordered to fight against IRA forces (cf. Malcolm, “Royal Irish Constabulary” 491f.).
declaration of a truce in the summer of 1921 (cf. English, “Irish” 288; Empey 15; Kee 716) followed by a peace treaty that would lead to civil war in the years to come.

I.6 The Treaty, civil war and a new constitution

The Treaty succeeded where the war had failed: the bond between two of the most important figures in the Irish independence movement was severed over it. The president of the first Dáil\(^5\), Eamon de Valera, who had before been elected president of Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers, sent fellow nationalist leader Michael Collins to Britain as a member of the deputation headed by Arthur Griffith to negotiate the treaty.\(^6\) Collins is often mentioned in connection with the Anglo-Irish War as the man who “brilliantly master-minded” (Kee 651) the IRA campaign of terror and thus “single-handedly defeated the British forces” (Augusteijn, “Collins, Michael” 102). The treaty which the British, namely Prime Minister David Lloyd George, eventually pushed the Irish delegates to sign without being given the chance of reporting back to Dublin actually only differed to a small extent from that which De Valera had envisioned for Ireland (cf. O’Connor 191). However, it did include the condition that the Irish Free State would remain a member of the Commonwealth, being granted the status of dominion, much like Canada. Furthermore, it entailed the division of Ireland through separation of the Ulster counties (cf. McMahon, “Anglo-Irish treaty” 15). On their return the delegates “defended the treaty as the best settlement that could be obtained under the circumstances” (McMahon, “Anglo-Irish treaty” 15) and, as Collins reportedly remarked himself in that debate, the treaty “would bring freedom: not the ultimate freedom […] but freedom to achieve freedom” (O’Connor 193).

In the end, when a vote was cast in the Dáil, the treaty was accepted, though only with a small majority of seven votes. As a political result, de Valera and his followers left the Dáil. Their rejection of the treaty ultimately led to the Irish Civil War in 1922, in which the forces of the Provisional Government under Michael Collins as commander-in-chief of

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\(^5\) The term Dáil Éireann denotes the Irish parliament. The so-called first Dáil refers to the first Irish parliamentary assembly set up in 1919 by Sinn Féin politicians. It existed until it was replaced by the second Dáil at the end of the Anglo-Irish War in 1921 (cf. McMahon, “Dáil Éireann” 133f.).

\(^6\) R. Foster claims that de Valera sent Collins and did not go himself because he knew that the delegates would have to give in on the question of the separation of the island into North and South and he did not want to be seen as responsible (cf. R. Foster, “Modern” 505).
the Free State army fought the anti-treaty forces then termed Irregulars. The Irregulars soon resorted to guerrilla warfare but with only limited success and fighting stopped in May 1923. However, an official peace was never negotiated and thus the Civil War was never officially over (cf. Augusteijn, “Irish Civil War” 265). Nevertheless, maybe the best-known victim of that war was Collins himself, who died in an ambush on the 20th of August 1922 and has since often been idealized and hailed a hero and martyr for his role in Ireland’s path to independence (cf. O’Connor 197f.; Connolly 102).

Despite the treaty being the cause of the civil war, it seems that in the long run Collins had been right and it held the chance for Ireland to eventually win its independence. With the acceptance of the treaty the Irish Free State had been established. Ten years after the end of the civil war, in 1932, the former anti-treaty politicians now under the party name of Fianna Fáil, led by de Valera, won the general election and took over power in a peaceful and democratic way (R. Foster, “Modern” 532).

Arguably one of the party’s and especially de Valera’s most notable achievements was the drafting of a new constitution, which became law in December 1937. Many aspects of the former constitution of the Irish Free State ratified in 1922 were included in the new constitution, too. However, the new constitution also included article 2, which defined the entire island of Ireland as the national territory of the former Irish Free State, renamed Éire (Ireland) in the new constitution, although it did acknowledge a state of partition (cf. McMahon, “constitution of Ireland” 112). Furthermore, one crucial change was the fact that the formerly obligatory oath of allegiance to the British Crown was not included anymore (McMahon, “Dáil Éireann” 134). Fianna Fáil was a party dedicated to a Catholic Ireland. Thus, it is not surprising that the constitution is inherently a Catholic document and in many ways very conservative, especially concerning the view taken on family life and the status of women (cf. English, “Irish” 329).

While the IRA first welcomed Fianna Fáil’s rise to power, relations soon became worse. Once in power the political party left little doubt that they saw the state’s police and military force now governed by them as the only legitimate armed force within the country’s territory. Consequently, in 1939, the IRA was declared unlawful (cf. English, “Irish” 332; Augusteijn, “Irish Republican Army” 271). One thing becomes clear here: the views of Ireland’s future, of the kind of independence and governmental form Ireland should one day assume, differed greatly also within the group of all those fighting the British either physically or politically in the Anglo-Irish War. Once both members of the IRA, Collins and de Valera split over the issue of the treaty, and these former allies found themselves on
different sides during the civil war. Then, once in power, Fianna Fáil members, most of them former IRA members or at least sympathizers, banned the IRA. They all fought for an independent Ireland, but what form it was to take and with what means it was to be achieved was to remain a cause for conflict, also violent conflict, for years to come. In hindsight it seems that greatly more thought had been given to how to expel the British from Irish soil than to dealing with the very practical political, social and economic realities once this goal were achieved.

I.7 Blueshirts, the Second World War and economic reform

In the 1930s, probably in reaction to de Valera’s victory in the general election, the Army Comrades’ Association (ACA), which had consisted largely of ex-Free State Army men, rapidly grew in number. Many of the new members had no military background but were disappointed with the recent political development. The organisation’s attitude showed many similarities with continental European fascist movements of the time, being “suspicious of party politics, […] antipathetic towards communism, and nationalist in orientation” (Coakley, “Blueshirts” 49). The group was dissatisfied with Fianna Fáil’s economic policies and saw itself as protectors of the Irish against oppression by the IRA (cf. Coakley, “Blueshirts” 49; English, “Irish” 336). In 1933 members started wearing blue shirts as a sort of identification, which earned them the popular name ‘Blueshirts’.

In the Second World War, Éire officially assumed a neutral position. It appears that the decision not to take part in the war was the ultimate sign of Ireland’s independence from Britain. As historian Mike Cronin put it, the “decision of neutrality was driven, not by a choice between Nazism and Allied notions of democracy, but by a desire to demonstrate to the whole world that Éire was the master of its own destiny” (217). In reality Ireland did not stay completely neutral. While Allied aircrews crash-landing on Irish soil were sent home, Germans were detained. Also, some 50,000 Irishmen joined the war on the Allied side and when Belfast was bombed in 1941, Irish fire engines crossed the border to support Northern Ireland (cf. Cronin 217). However, possibly owing to a strong anti-Anglo sentiment among parts of Ireland’s population mixed with strong religious feelings, many people in Ireland supported Nazi Germany, especially the IRA, which was determined to aid the German war effort (cf. English, “Irish” 340).
In December 1948 the Irish government passed the Republic of Ireland Act, which finally, more than thirty years after the Easter Rising, cut all ties between the Commonwealth and Ireland and left the Republic of Ireland an independent country. However, the 1950s were a dire time for the Republic. Ireland was a country largely dependent on agriculture. Although emigration had never stopped, numbers increased dramatically in the 1950s. Young people in particular left their country looking for work abroad. Only when de Valera finally made room for Seán Lemass as Taoiseach did the situation improve. Lemass drove forward programs aimed at rapid industrialisation, and while Ireland was not by a long shot economically successful in the 1960s, in 1966 it did experience a population growth for the first time since the founding of the Republic. By the end of the 1960s more people were employed in the industrial sector than in agriculture. Within twenty years the country had seen a rapid industrial modernisation (cf. Cronin 223f.).

I.8 The Northern Ireland conflict

The province of Northern Ireland was created through the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. It consisted of six Ulster counties, and was to remain under British control while the southern part of Ireland gained dominion status. In these six Ulster counties, Protestants were in a two-thirds majority, in contrast to the rest of Ireland, which was for the most part Catholic (cf. Hepburn, “Northern Ireland” 390f.).

Over the years, tensions grew as more and more Catholics came to feel oppressed and mistreated by a dominantly Protestant government. Strict segregation between Catholic and Protestant institutions became common and increased these tensions. Catholic schools were badly funded, the housing shortage in many parts stayed largely unaddressed, unemployment stayed high in Catholic areas and most Catholics felt unfairly treated by police forces. It was a system of “consensual apartheid” (Cronin 210). In general, while the government did succeed fairly well in managing the ethnic divide, it did little to mitigate it (cf. Cronin 392). In the 1970s the tensions turned into violent conflict when the Provisional

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7 Taoiseach is the title of the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic under the new constitution of 1937 (cf. OALD, “Taoiseach” 1329 or McMahon, “Taoiseach” 534).
IRA\textsuperscript{8} began their military campaign in Northern Ireland, which would weigh on British-Irish relations for the following three decades, finally ending, at least officially, with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, a sort of peace treaty, in 1998. At that time the conflict “had claimed 3,588 lives, seen tens of thousands of people wounded and injured, and lasted longer than any other post-Second World War conflict except that in the Middle East, [which makes] the achievement [= the negotiation of the Good Friday Agreement in only 6 months’ time] nothing short of miraculous” (Moloney 483f.). In accordance with the treaty, final decommissioning was carried out in September 2005 (cf. Moloney 563). Nevertheless, the fact that the Agreement was quickly negotiated must not distract from the extremely difficult and exceedingly long peace process itself. Moloney argues that “almost two thirds of the thirty-six years the Troubles in Northern Ireland had lasted were spent in an effort to bring them to an end. […] [The process] took longer to consummate than some of the worst global conflicts” (Moloney 586). The length of the peace process can be an indicator of the complexities of a conflict, the roots of which can be traced hundreds of years back and are deeply connected to conflicting narratives of Irish history and equally conflicting notions of Irishness.

\textsuperscript{8} In 1969 the former IRA split into two main parts with the militarists who hoped to push the British out of Northern Ireland mainly by guerilla warfare coming together under the new name ‘provisional IRA’ (cf. Augusteijn, “Irish Republican Army” 272).
II. The complex relationship between nationalism, identity and revisionism

Studying modern Irish history or any work of art based on it seems almost impossible without also coming to terms with the movement that fostered the Easter Rising, the Irish War of Independence, the Irish Civil War and eventually even the founding of the Republic and which has, to a certain extent, kept the violence in Northern Ireland alive well to the end of the twentieth century: nationalism. This is why the first section of this part provides some theoretical background knowledge on the concept ‘nation’ and the corresponding movement, ‘nationalism’.

The second section presents a simplified theoretical approach to the concept of identity, in which nationality – at least in the Irish case – plays a big role. This basic, predominantly psychoanalytic knowledge is a necessary prerequisite to understanding how events in Irish history might have had the power not only to change the lives of Barry’s characters but of real people, to change the core of their existence, to question and even shatter their very sense of self. Incidentally, it also highlights how personal identity plays a role in the construction of nations. Moreover, and quite important for the following text analysis, this overview provides an adequately precise vocabulary with which to better study, describe and evaluate the character development in Barry’s works with regards to the characters’ sense of self.

In order to study modern Irish history in a literary context, it is also necessary to understand the controversy surrounding Irish historiography as this controversy seems to translate almost seamlessly into the literary realm. Hence the third section of this part offers a brief history of Irish historical revisionism as well as a definition of the term and an overview of how this approach has influenced modern Irish fiction. This will then provide the framework for an analysis of Barry’s texts with regards to these ideas.

II.1 The Irish nation – an imagined community

In the quote from *Ulysses* in the introduction, Leopold Bloom seems momentarily startled when asked to define the term ‘nation’ and ultimately ventures the half-hearted explanation
that a nation comprises “the same people living in the same place” (Joyce 430). Paradoxically enough, his attempt at an explanation may be as correct as it is false. The shortcomings of Bloom’s attempt at a definition already become clear when we ask for a more precise definition of the phrase ‘the same’ and it things become even more complicated when we want to include Bloom’s succeeding addition that one’s nationality is derived from one’s birthplace (cf. Joyce 430). However, Bloom may be forgiven because establishing a suitable definition of the term ‘nation’ has been found to be quite difficult even in modern academic publications.

Bloom unquestioningly uses the concept of nation as though nationality was naturally derived from a certain territory – in this example the territory encompassed by the political boundaries of the Irish state. Although this is not quite correct, in most cases nationalism as a movement aims at bringing both – ‘state’ and ‘nation’ – together, as we shall see later. It follows then that in order to define the term ‘nation’, one also has to define the term ‘state’. In this I will follow Ernest Gellner who, resting his understanding of the term primarily on Max Weber’s earlier definition, defines the state as “that institution or set of institutions specifically concerned with the enforcement of order […], such as police forces and courts” (Gellner 4). These institutions, according to Gellner, “are [Gellner’s italics] the state” (Gellner 4) exercising its power over a certain territory. It follows that state and nation are by no means synonymous.

Gellner identifies two conditions for people to belong to the same nation: firstly, “two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating […] [and secondly] if and only if they recognize [Gellner’s italics] each other as belonging to the same nation” (Gellner 6f.). The term ‘culture’ is used here, as Gellner admits himself, as a rather loose term which shall, however, suffice for the literary analysis intended in the scope of this paper, especially because more precise definitions of the term are often quite problematic. Hence Leopold Bloom may well be correct in saying that a nation “is the same people living in the same place” (Joyce 430) but only under one condition: everyone in that territory would need to share the same culture and all of these people would have to recognize each other as belonging to the same nation.

If the second condition is taken to be true and the existence of a nation depends upon the members of that nation recognizing each other as such based on shared values, then it

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9 Though granting both definitions some truth, Gellner also states that he feels both definitions are still inadequate for providing an all-encompassing formal definition for the term (cf. Gellner 7).
follows, according to Gellner, that nations are not naturally or otherwise predetermined groups of people but are, in fact, mere ideas or concepts which have their origin in the minds of people.

“Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long-delayed political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, often obliterates pre-existing cultures: that is a reality, for better or worse, and in general an inescapable one.”

(Gellner 47)

Most people in industrialised societies today think of themselves as being of one or another nationality (cf. Anderson 5). Traditionally, culture as defined by Gellner above is shared among a certain group of people. Obviously then, for people in modern societies, there must have been a time when the need arose for the aforementioned group of people to think of themselves, based on their shared culture, as belonging to one nation. If the notion of a nation does not naturally exist, one has to ask under which circumstances people are disposed to – as we have established – imagine the concept. Political scientist Benedict Anderson defines a nation as an “imagined political community” (6). According to Anderson, it was only possible for this community to be imagined in a time when three heretofore fundamental cultural notions were increasingly called into question.

“The first of these was the idea that a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth, precisely because it was an inseparable part of that truth. It was this idea that called into being the great transcontinental sodalities of Christendom, the Islamic Ummah, and the rest. Second was the belief that society was naturally organized around and under high centres – monarchs who were persons apart from other human beings and who ruled by some form of cosmological (divine) dispensation […] Third was a conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origins of the world and of men essentially identical. Combined, these ideas rooted human lives firmly in the very nature of things, giving certain meaning to the everyday fatalities of existence (above all death, loss, and servitude) and offering, in various ways, redemption from them.”

(Anderson 36)
The decline of these three fundamental notions has taken place “first in Western Europe, later elsewhere, under the impact of economic change, ‘discoveries’ (social and scientific), and the development of increasingly rapid communications” (Anderson 36). Many scholars have dated this point or rather the beginning of this development at the end of the eighteenth century with the onset of industrialization and the Reformation (cf. Anderson 4; Gellner 39; Hobsbawm 4f.). Only under these conditions was the emergence of nations at all possible.

A more detailed examination of this illuminates the inadequacies of Gellner’s earlier definition of a nation. Gellner himself admits in his book Nations and Nationalism that if all that were needed for a nation to exist were will and a shared culture, then both conditions would create almost endless possibilities, groupings of all kinds and sizes. He asserts that the two conditions of his earlier definition are only applicable in a social situation as described above when fundamental notions of personal identification have lost their meaning (cf. Gellner 52ff.). Anderson defines a nation as an “imagined political community […] because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 6). Only under the social conditions brought about by the age of industrialization was it at all possible for people to image such community. The age of nationalism, one may conclude then, is not so much just a collective term for the years in which certain nations self-asserted themselves but rather refers to a time which provided the conditions under which such self-assertion was at all possible and increasingly necessary. Hence, the age of nationalism with its questioning of former certainties, rapid scientific discoveries and social changes was actually a prerequisite for the birth of the nation (cf. Gellner 54).

Following this closer examination of the term, Gellner adds a general description of what one may then understand as nationalism.

“It is the establishment of an anonymous, impersonal society […] held together above all by a shared culture […]. Nationalism usually conquers in the name of a putative folk culture. Its symbolism is drawn from the healthy, pristine, vigorous life of peasants, of the Volk, the narod. There is a certain element of truth in the nationalist self-presentation when the narod or Volk is ruled by officials of another, an alien high culture, whose oppression must be resisted first by cultural revival and reaffirmation, and eventually by a war of liberation. If the nationalism prospers it eliminates the alien high culture, but it does not then replace it by the old local low culture; it
revives, or invents, a local high (literate, specialist-transmitted) culture of its own, though admittedly one which will have some links with the earlier local folk styles and dialects.”

(Gellner 56)

When Gellner states that sometimes nationalism ‘invents’ cultures, he implicitly refers to Eric Hobsbawm, Emeritus Professor of Economic and Social History at Birkbeck College, University of London, who in his introduction to the book *The Invention of Tradition* explains that in times when society undergoes rapid changes the practice of inventing traditions is quite common (cf. Hobsbawm “Introduction” 4). These invented traditions substituting other traditions which were linked to social patterns that became obsolete or unwanted are often meant to create a link with the past for the new social order. In general, it can be concluded that the invention of tradition is an integral part of nationalism as “so much of what subjectively makes up the modern ‘nation’ consists of such constructs and is associated with appropriate and, in general, fairly recent symbols or suitably tailored discourse (such as ‘national history’)” (Hobsbawm 14). In his essay “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe 1870-1914”, Hobsbawm presents many examples of what he calls invented traditions. He states that for example “[t]he rise of sport provided new expressions of nationalism through the choice or invention of nationally specific sports – Welsh rugby as distinct from English soccer, and Gaelic football in Ireland (1884)” (Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions” 300).

It has been established so far under which conditions nationalism could occur and spawn modern nations. However, this still does not answer the question why nationalist movements lead to civil wars in some countries while strengthening patriotic loyalty in others. Gellner’s view on this point is that in general nationalism occurs when the principle of congruity is breached. He explains that on the whole it is part of nationalist rationale that nation and state in a given territory should be congruent. There are many ways in which this principle could be violated: the political territory controlled by the state might fail to include all members of a nation or it might include all members but also many members of other groups.

“[T]here is one particular form of the violation of the nationalist principle to which nationalist sentiment is quite particularly sensitive: if the rulers of the political unit
belong to a nation other than that of the majority of the ruled, this, for nationalists, constitutes a quite outstandingly intolerable breach of political propriety. This can occur either through the incorporation of the national territory in a larger empire, or by the local domination of an alien group.”

(Gellner 1)

Ireland, as has been described at some length in the historical overview, constitutes just one such example.

As history tells us, the rise of nations against violations of the nationalist principle more often than not goes hand in hand with bloodshed and death. Ultimately, this begs the question why so many people were and still are willing to sacrifice their lives for an - according to Anderson - imagined concept, for a merely imagined bond with other people the majority of whom they have never met, seen or even heard of before. The following section tries to give an answer to this question.

II.2 Identity as an incentive in the creation of nations

The previous section was mainly concerned with answering the what, when and how, albeit neglecting to answer the more important why. Although by referencing Gellner, I have given a rudimentary explanation of what a nation is as well as when and under which conditions it can develop, the question of individual motivation, of incentive, still needs to be answered. A person may be loyal to a state merely because he acknowledges the state’s power to punish him should he not adhere to its rules. Fear is one of many explanations for showing loyalty to a state (cf. Bloom 7), but what needs to be explained with regards to Ireland and Irish nationalism is not predominantly the loyalty between individual and state but rather the loyalty which exists between the members of a nation who do not view themselves as belonging to the same nation as those who are the state. We have to explain what makes people feel so strong a bond with others who they view as belonging to the same imagined community that they are willing to risk their lives in order to protect this community. To understand nationalist movements and their effects, we have to look for the reasons behind mass loyalty and mass mobilisation. There are quite a few academic fields in which these relationships have been studied. However, as the intent of this paper is to show how
nationalism and its effects on society in the course of history can affect a person’s life and more importantly the person itself, it is necessary to understand how personal identity is developed and to what extent this identity is derived from and depends on the actions and attitudes of and interaction with others.

Social theorist William Bloom claims he was the first to apply identification as a psychological concept to social theory in general and international relations theory in particular (cf. Bloom x). In *Personal identity, national identity and international relations*, Bloom interlinks selected theories by Sigmund Freud, George Herbert Meads, Erik Erikson, Talcott Parsons and Jürgen Habermas to explain why “individuals and mass national populations give their loyalty to the nation-state” (Bloom x). With regard to the analysis of Barry’s works, we shall follow in Bloom’s footsteps to a certain extent. However, Bloom sets up a very general approach much focused on social sciences. For a literary analysis of Barry’s works and with special regard to the development of his characters, Bloom’s approach seems too broad. Hence, while I shall make use of some of his theories and the connections he has made, I will leave out certain aspects as well as go into more detail in others. More precisely, with regard to the authorities mentioned, I will leave aside Parsons’s ideas as well as most of Mead’s and Habermas’s findings, while focusing in more detail on the writings of Freud and Erikson.

II.2.1 Identification as a bio-psychological imperative

If we seek to understand the driving forces behind mass loyalty and mass mobilisation, we have to comprehend the psychological processes which play a role in the relationship between the individual and the group, may that group be race, caste, profession or, as in this case, the nation. According to Freud, the individual develops a kind of social instinct in relation to groups, and he places the earliest development of this instinct in the relationship of a child to its parents.10

Though Freud had used the term identification in his writings before11, he eventually linked it to the entity he called the super-ego or ego-ideal in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. While an academic in-depth study of Freud’s distinction between the

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10 Freud also refers to this instinct as herd instinct or group mind (cf. Freud “Group Psychology” 3).
id, ego and the super-ego is not necessary for the purpose of this paper, a basic understanding of these entities, especially the super-ego, is valuable. At the most basic level, we can make the following distinction between those three concepts: the id is that – for want of a better word – part of the human mind which represents our passions and instincts while the ego is concerned with perception. Reason and sanity are the workings of the ego as it influences the id based on its perceptions of the external world. However, both, ego and id, are not to be understood as separate parts of the mind. Rather, “the ego is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world” (Freud “Ego” 29). Freud compares the ego with a rider who has to keep his far stronger horse in check (cf. Freud “Ego” 30). Lastly, the super-ego represents “the higher, moral, spiritual side of human nature” (Freud “Ego” 46) and stems initially from a person’s experience of the Oedipus complex.

The Oedipus complex in its very basic form can best be described by looking at the development of a male child. According to Freud, the child will naturally develop a love of his mother which stems from the child’s earlier ‘relationship’ to her breast. Of course, the father will then be viewed as an obstacle to the child’s sexual wishes towards his mother. However, the father is also perceived as stronger, which limits the child’s chances of removing said obstacle. As a result “in order to avoid suicidal confrontation, the son takes on the attributes of the father […] [and] by, in a sense, becoming father, not only […] neutralise[s] the threat but […] may also now share in the father’s exclusive relationship with mother” (Bloom 29). Thus, we may say that the boy deals with this situation of Oedipal love by identifying himself with the father (cf. Freud “Ego” 40).

Usually, along with the aforementioned outcome of the Oedipus problem, the son’s sexual wishes regarding his mother are eventually given up and replaced by an even stronger identification with the father, which allows for a less intense and less sexual relationship with the mother (cf. Freud “Ego” 41). Similarly, for an infant girl, the outcome would be an identification with the mother. Although Freud presents these examples as the Oedipus complex in its simplest form, his analysis of the Oedipus complex is rather more in-depth, taking into account not only “the triangular character of the Oedipus situation […] [but also] the constitutional bisexuality of each individual” (cf. Freud “Ego” 40) 12. However, for the purpose of this paper it will suffice to know that according to Freud, the outcome of this phase of development in a person’s life is the identification with his or her parents which

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12 For a more detailed examination of this problem see Freud “Ego” 40-44.
takes form in a modification of the ego, creating, in contrast to the other parts of the ego, the super-ego or ego-ideal. Hence Freud’s super-ego is what is commonly referred to as a person’s conscience and is an ideal against which all actions, thoughts, dreams etc. are measured, created in its earliest form through the identification with the person’s parents.

Freud further postulates in *The Ego and the Id* that this identification process is not limited to identifications with one’s parents but actually presents the reason for any kind of group feeling:

“As a child grows up, the office of father is carried on by masters and by others in authority; the power of their injunctions and prohibitions remains vested in the ego-ideal and continues, in the form of conscience, to exercise the censorship of morals. […] Social feelings rest on the foundation of identifications with others, on the basis of an ego-ideal in common with them.”  

(Freud “Ego” 49)

In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* he had previously stated that

“identification is the original form of an emotional tie […] [which] may arise with every new perception of a common quality shared with some other person who is not an object of the sexual instinct. The more important this common quality is, the more successful may this partial identification become, and it may thus represent the beginning of a new tie. […] [T]he emotional tie between members of a group is in the nature of an identification of this kind”.

(Freud “Group Psychology” 65f.)

In summary, this means that our conscience, our moral code, in other words our personality, is formed first by internalising attributes of our parents and later through the same identification mechanism by internalising attributes of other figures of authority and people we perceive as members of the same group on the grounds of shared qualities.

In general, this is also what behaviourist George Herbert Mead believed. He stated that the “individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs” (qtd. in Bloom
According to Bloom, this means that the formation of one’s personality consists of internalising “the social roles of significant others” (31), leading him to postulate that one’s “personality is a purely social construct” (31).

Further interpretation of Freud and Mead strongly suggests that this mechanism of identification has a biological impetus. Both see humans as social creatures, which is apparent in their insistence that the formation of one’s personality is dependent on social contact. Furthermore, they see successful social contact as a prerequisite for physical survival, especially during the phases of infancy and childhood. Thus, assuming a biological human survival instinct, identification through social contact must be understood as a biological imperative. Bloom sums this up by stating that “identification is the result of social interaction, but its dynamic source is bio-psychological.” (33)

II.2.2 From identity to national identity and personality breakdown

So far, the process of identification has been explained in an academically concise manner, adequate for the overall purpose of literary study in this paper. It must not be forgotten, however, that much more academic work has been focused on said process. The same is true concerning the concept of identity. As a philosophic concept, identity - more precisely personal identity – has been a matter of some discussion, presumably founded on John Locke’s ideas published in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding (cf. J. Perry “Preface” vii). Starting with an analysis of the term identity in general, Locke comes eventually to propose a definition of what he sees as personal identity:

“For, since consciousness always accompanies thinking, it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things: in this alone consists personal identity, i.e., the sameness of a rational being; and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person”.

(Locke 39)
Admittedly, Locke’s ideas have sparked an ongoing controversy in philosophical writings and some writers have found fault with his ideas (cf. J. Perry, “Problem” 12-15). However, at a certain level of abstraction this initial philosophical definition is quite similar to the concept of personal identity which psychoanalyst Erik Erikson put forth more than two hundred years later to define his concept of ego identity:

“The conscious feeling of having a personal identity is based on two simultaneous observations: the immediate perception of one’s selfsameness and continuity in time; and the simultaneous perception of the fact that others recognize one’s sameness and continuity. What I propose to call ego identity concerns more than the mere fact of existence, as conveyed by personal identity; it is the ego quality of this existence. Ego identity, then, in its subjective aspect, is the awareness of the fact that there is a selfsameness and continuity to the ego’s synthesizing methods and that these methods are effective in safeguarding the sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for others.”

(Erikson “Life” 22)

Erikson connected Freud’s thoughts on the identification process as a bio-psychological imperative to a psychological definition of identity which apparently draws on philosophical roots as well. Furthermore, he explicitly linked this psychoanalytic area of study with the study of history:

“MEN WHO SHARE […] a historical era […] are guided by common images of good and evil […] [which] assume decisive concreteness in every individual’s ego development. […] On the other hand, students of history continue to ignore the simple facts that all individuals are borne [sic] by mothers; that everybody was once a child; that people and peoples begin in their nurseries; and that society consists of individuals in the process of developing from children into parents.”

(Erikson “Life” 17)

Hence, looking at Freud’s initial explanation of the identification process taking place first between child and parents and later between the individual and other members of society, Erikson adds to this scheme a historical component, making explicit the fact that all parents were once influenced similarly by their parents and the society of their times. Generally, he
states that identification is an ever-present process affecting the course of historical events as much as the course of historical events affects the identification process of the individual in time.

While acknowledging the theories of Freud and likeminded psychoanalysts, Erikson, in his own words, meant to aim “for greater specificity by exploring the way in which social organization codetermines the structure of the family” (Erikson, “Life” 19f.). Erikson is thus very specific about the relationship between what he terms ‘identity’ and ‘identification’ in *Identity and the Life Cycle*. For Erikson identity, more specifically in his terminology ego identity\(^{13}\), “develops out of a gradual integration of all identifications, but […] the whole has a different quality than the sum of its parts” (Erikson, “Life” 95). He writes that “final identity […] includes all significant identifications, but it also alters them in order to make a unique and a reasonably coherent whole of them” (Erikson, “Life” 121). This concept of identity is initially connected to Freud’s earlier findings while still concurring with Mead’s ideas and implicitly including initial philosophical thought. As Erikson’s definition allows us, as we shall see further on, to connect ‘identity’ with ‘nationalism’ and ‘history’, Erikson’s identity is what I will refer to as ‘identity’ in this paper. However, what will be most important in this context is that identity, like the identification processes which it subsumes, is a concept which is dependent on social interaction.

According to Bloom, Erikson was the first psychoanalyst to focus on the concept of identity in connection with the idea of ‘identity crisis’ (cf. Bloom 35). Erikson’s usage of the term ‘crisis’, however, does not necessarily denote a time of looming catastrophe. Rather, he refers to crisis as “a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another” (Erikson, “Crisis” 16). Adolescence presents a special phase of identity development. Erikson postulated that at the end of adolescence, on the verge of adulthood, most young individuals experience an identity crisis, a normative phase in which identity changes with the individual’s changing status within society (cf. Erikson, “Crisis” 17). However, although much of Erikson’s work is concerned with this stage of development, he clearly states in *Identity and the Life Cycle* that identity formation is a lifelong development, not limited to this stage (cf. Erikson, “Life” 122).

Erikson looked at the identity formation of people, especially adolescents, as members of society. While their identity is based on all the identifications made by them,

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\(^{13}\) For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between Erikson’s ego identity and Freud’s super ego and ego ideal – as well as Erikson’s interpretation of the difference between Freud’s terms – see Erikson, “Life” 158-161.
for Erikson it is clear that members of a certain social group would also share a certain outlook on life, a certain orientation. This is explicit in the following definition:

“[A]n ideological system is a coherent body of shared images, ideas, and ideals which (whether based on a formulated dogma, an implicit Weltanschauung, a highly structured world image, a political creed, or a “way of life”) provides for the participants a coherent, if systematically simplified, over-all orientation in space and time, in means and ends.”

(Erikson, “Life” 169)

Hence, a group identity based on such ideology includes the individual’s identity as much as it becomes part of it. In this aspect, drawn from the initial knowledge that identification is a social process, lies the psychological root of nationalism. According to Erikson, a sense of identity is tantamount to a sense of mental health and stability, of “psychological well-being” (Erikson, “Life” 127). Where identity is lost, Erikson speaks of identity diffusion or at times of identity confusion, both terms basically denoting similar concepts, while confusion in comparison to diffusion is taken to describe a more immediate state of upset. For the purpose of this paper, it seems permissible to disregard the minute terminological difference between these terms. Following Erikson’s initial and more widely applicable wording, I will use his term identity diffusion to denote any loss of identity and subsequent symptoms. The fundamental significance of Erikson’s texts for the explanation of violence and sacrifice accompanying nationalist movements is the realisation that a loss of identity is not only the cause of great psychological discomfort but that the individual will want to try to prevent such state at almost any cost.

Now, while not explicitly stated in Erikson’s works, it is Bloom’s interpretation that this allows us to draw from Erikson’s findings the reason for nationalist behaviour, for mass mobilisation and mass loyalty. Interpreting Erikson, he states that any threat to the individual’s sense of identity, e.g. under changed historical circumstances, causes identity diffusion, which inevitably results in a state of anxiety the individual will counter “by a dynamic adaptive reaction in which either (a) the already held identity [...] is protected, or (b) a new synthesis of identifications is made appropriate to the situation and its constraints.”

14 For Erikson’s own explanation of the difference between these two terms, please refer to Erikson, “Life” endnote 7, p. 183.
Furthermore, Bloom puts forward the idea that one of the ideologies the individual is confronted with in society is the nation – this imagined community - which in turn establishes a sense of nationality as part of the individual’s identity which he or she shares with others of this nation. Thus, Bloom arrives at the following definition of the term ‘national identity’:

“National identity describes that condition in which a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols – have internalised symbols of the nation – so that they may act as one psychological group when there is a threat to, or the possibility of enhancement of, these symbols of national identity.”

(Bloom 52)

Bloom founds his definition on the thesis that an ideology such as the nation becomes an integral part of the individual’s identity through the identification process as described above. Any threat to this ideology, e.g. by revolutionary ideas, consequently poses a threat to the individual’s sense of identity, which all those who share these common identifications will react to, seeking psychological well-being by pursuing one of only two options as presented above. Accordingly, national identity cannot result from external labelling of a mass of people but follows from a mass of people going through

“the psychological process of making that general identification with the nation [...] [and] this mass may act as one unit in situations which affect the shared identity. They may act together to make new identifications, or they may act together to enhance and protect identifications already made.”

(Bloom 52f.)

Hence, Bloom’s analysis of identification theory and especially the identification process of the individual can be used to explain mass loyalty to an imagined community such as the nation, linking to this behaviour a psychological drive resulting from the inner need for psychological well-being, making it a bio-psychological imperative.

15 The term here is restricted to Erikson’s usage of it as quoted above.
Regarding the analysis of character development in Barry’s works, the following observation first postulated in this form by Erikson and later used by Bloom for his theory on the reasons behind mass mobilization needs to be kept in mind: that a failure to either protect a set of identifications already made – as a set for instance constituting one’s national identity - or to resynthesize these identifications to fit the new situation in the face of identity diffusion ultimately leads to personality breakdown becoming apparent in disorders such as, for example, paranoia or depression (cf. Bloom 37).16

II.3 Irish historical revisionism – discussing the unreliability of history

An extremely broad categorization of twentieth-century Irish literature would differentiate between two major phases. The first one includes Irish literature, predominantly poetry and drama, produced in the years spanning the end of the nineteenth century up until the 1930s and is generally referred to as the “Gaelic Revival”, “Irish Literary Renaissance”, “Celtic Revival” or “Celtic Twilight”. It focused primarily on Irish legends and folklore in an attempt to rediscover – in a very Hobsbawmian fashion - the country’s cultural roots and thus add to or rather create an Irish identity at a time when the country was increasingly drifting towards some form of independence (cf. Powell 144f.; Scanlan 150). According to Margaret Scanlan, the most prominent authors of the time, “W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge, Lady Augusta Gregory, Douglas Hyde, Patrick Pearse and George Russell, envisioned a Celtic Ireland with a heroic past and a sacrificial revolutionary tradition” (Scanlan 150). It was only in the years after the Easter Rising, the Anglo-Irish War and the Civil War, once the Irish Free State had become a reality, that literature, especially prose fiction, that openly questioned these ideals and heroic traditions became more popular.

“Irishness as an issue, as something that needed to be defined, became a central preoccupation for writers in the post-revolutionary period […] [as] the romantic […] literature of the Literary Revival […] was not suitable in the changed mood of the country.”

(Harmon 45)

16 For a more detailed clinical description of actual ensuing disorders see Erikson, “Life” 128-158.
James Joyce’s *Ulysses* already exhibits a drastically different view of old certainties on the question of what in fact constitutes true Irishness, or in other words, an Irish national identity. The novel essentially highlights the subjectivity of individual experience (cf. Gessner-Utsch 148-151) through which also the concept of an objective writing of history is called into question as “the past is […] subjected to a constant change by individual perception” (Powell 138). Joyce’s work is often cited as one of the most prominent examples of literary Modernism. Accordingly, Richard Kearney cites Joyce when he argues that Modernism is the opposite or anti-thesis to Irish Revivalism.

“Modernism rejects both the aims and idioms of Revivalism. It affirms a radical breach in tradition and endorses a practice of cultural self-reflection where the whole concept of an homogeneous identity national or linguistic itself comes into question. Modernism is essentially a ‘critical’ movement in the philosophical sense of questioning the very notion of origins [Kearney’s italics]. And as such it challenges the ideology of identity [Kearney’s italics] which Revivalism presupposes. The modernist mind prefers discontinuity to continuity, diversity to unity, conflict to harmony. […] And most of those we might call Irish modernists deny the possibility of sustaining a direct continuous link between past and present. […] The modernist tendency in Irish culture is characterized by a resolve to demythologize the orthodox heritage of tradition in so far as it lays constraints upon the openness and plurality of experience. Joyce’s Stephen Daedalus exemplifies this impulse when he speaks of trying to awaken from the ‘nightmare of history’”.

(Kearney 82)

In this shift, modernist Irish literature mirrors a more general shift in popular but also clearly in the academic perception of Irish history and Irish history writing. In the 1930s, Irish historiography began to be increasingly critical of established narratives. This critical re-evaluation is often referred to as ‘revisionism’. The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines a ‘revisionist’ as someone “[d]edicated to the overturning of an established interpretation or widely shared assumption, especially in the contexts of politics and the study of history” (“Revisionist” 309). In a sense then, revisionist history writing is an expression of the influence of Modernism on historiography.

In an attempt at constructing a philosophy of history for modern times in his book *The Historian’s Paradox*, historian Peter Charles Hoffer states that an integral part of history – to different extents – is lying. For various reasons in the writing of histories, facts, events etc. may be omitted, changed or simply worded in a way that supports an underlying political
or otherwise biased agenda. For instance, post-World War II German and Japanese school history books supposedly omitted certain events of the war for much the same reason that US American history books often used to deal quite briefly and rather benignly with the issue of slavery (cf. Hoffer 87f.).

Historian T.W. Moody does not use the word ‘lies’ but has stipulated that most people’s view of their nation’s past, their version of their country’s history, is derived from a mixture of fact and fiction. He uses the word ‘myths’ to refer to these versions, thereby differentiating between them and a professional historian’s work. Moody states that generally these myths have the potential to be “sustaining or destroying, benign or malignant” (Moody 71). Basically, their perception depends on intention, use, outcome and, maybe most crucially, perspective. However, in the Irish context, as historian Richard Bourke points out, these myths have for the most part been “destructive, perpetuating sectarianism and contrast” (Bourke 273). According to Bourke, Moody was of the opinion that history, in contrast to ideology, could be neutral perpetuating understanding and peace. However, historians Aughey, Bew and Dixon seem to agree with Bourke that, on the contrary, at least in Ireland, historical narratives have all too often been used with an ideological agenda (cf. R. Perry, “Scholarship” 9f.). Consequently, Irish history or more to the point accounts of Irish history are often not, in fact, neutral interpretations of historical sources. In reality the different parties each promote a different interpretation of the past – one which supports their political position, intentions, traditions, etc.

Thus it seems that accounts of history may be biased for various reasons - political, academic, economic or otherwise. Nevertheless, the past decades have seen a change in the perception of history, also among historians themselves.

“The irreducible fact became a little argument built from pieces of evidence the historian selected and arranged. The selection and the arrangement, the emphasis and the argument, were the historian’s, not the document’s. Whether a story, an analysis, or a synthesis, history ceased to be ‘what actually was’ and became what historians thought had happened. The historian’s account became a big argument resting on a multitude of little arguments.”

(Hoffer 11)
By no means does this imply that histories shall never be trusted. Rather, it is meant to remind us that to every story there is often more than one side, that any event can be perceived from a multitude of perspectives and that the truth, if any can be found, possibly includes them all. Moreover, we must be aware that other factors impede a completely objective or one-hundred-percent correct version of any history, e.g. an author’s or witness’s choice of words, cultural differences or the need for generalisation and categorisation. In conclusion, although historians strive for certainties in history, any “philosophy of history must contend itself with a measure of uncertainty” (Hoffer 162). Historian Herman Paul agrees with Hoffer stating that generally, historical theorists today acknowledge “that everything people say, think or feel about that reality [= the past] is ‘constructed’ in their imagination on the basis of information, relics, ideas, and emotions available in the present” (Paul 27f.). Paul argues that this change in the academic understanding of history that Hoffer describes appears to be academically accepted as a postmodern paradigm shift. Generally, this admission of uncertainty in historiography would seem to not only allow for but rather invite revisionist interpretations of established historical narratives and for some it did and still does. Concluding the first article in the first issue of the newly founded The Irish Review in 1986, titled We Are All Revisionists Now, historian Roy Foster ascertains that the terms ‘historian’ and ‘revisionist’ should be interchangeable today (qtd. R. Perry 23). Regarding Irish historiography, however, revisionism as well as the work of historians committed to this ideal has become almost as controversially disputed as Irish history itself.

In the Irish context, scholars seem to have been incapable so far of agreeing on a common definition for the term. In much the same way, it remains a matter of discussion which historians can be considered revisionists. As Boyce and O’Day have pointed out, “[t]here has been remarkably little coherence to the debate on Irish ‘revisionism’” (Boyce and O’Day 4). Likewise, Perry postulates “that there is no all-embracing revisionist school of thought […] [but] that there are different types of histories and different types of historians” (R. Perry 9). Hence it seems that different kinds of Irish historical revisionism might be differentiated, although even the attempt at differentiation is contested. Though it seems hard to pinpoint the exact beginnings of Irish revisionism, a first generation of

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17 In his book Key Issues in Historical Theory, Paul points out that after the 1970s the separation between the two major fields of historical theory at the time, speculative philosophy of history and critical philosophy of history, was increasingly seen as problematic or even impossible. That is why in many cases the old nomenclature of ‘philosophy of history’ has been replaced by ‘historical theory’ although, according to Paul, some historical theorists still stick to the traditional term, e.g. Hoffer, whose stance clearly is that of a historical theorist (cf. Paul 3-15).
revisionists supposedly consists of the graduate students of the 1930s, who were the first to apply a so-called ‘value-free approach’ to Irish history (cf. Boyce and O’Day 6; R. Perry 18).

Not surprisingly, the late 1930s, 1938 to be precise, also saw the founding of the journal *Irish Historical Studies*, which became a medium for academic discussion about Irish history and Irish historiography and as such gave room to a more varied and simultaneously more critical discussion of Irish history despite the fact that at least at the time of its founding, there was an unwritten agreement that the contemporary period was to be excluded from study as the ongoing ideological and political struggle would doubtlessly influence the writing too much or be too much influenced by it (cf. R. Perry 11; Boyce and O’Day 6; Bourke 274; Hutchinson 102). Bourke goes so far as to say that there is support for the view – at least among those educated in the 1930s – that what can be considered “proper historical writing” (Bourke 274) with regards to Irish history had just begun in the 1940s, which implies that any prior history writing was viewed by them as unacademic and that caution would have to be applied when considering its veracity and objectivity. Similarly, John Murphy argued that “Revisionism […] is frequently a misnomer for research seriously undertaken for the first time” (Murphy 133). With regards to this time, it seems that Foster’s notion holds true as it seems hard to say where history writing ended and revisionism began.

The true birth of revisionism, however, is usually placed in the late 1960s and/or 1970s, with revisionism – following the Oxford Dictionary definition – denoting an overturning of established narratives. In these years a period of unrestrained growth of Irish revisionism seems to have begun (cf. Boyce and O’Day 6). Varying but nonetheless similar and somewhat overlapping ideas have been expressed over the years regarding the reasons for the emergence of revisionism in these years. John Hutchinson explains the emergence of revisionism

“in the late 1960s as a result of the resurgence of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland and the sense of failure of the Irish Republic as a state, marked by economic decline and puritanical restrictions on civil liberties, to realise the dreams of independence.”

(Hutchinson 103)
Robert Perry’s list of reasons for the emergence of revisionism is similar but a little more extensive or rather more detailed. In addition to the aspects mentioned by Hutchinson, Perry also stresses among other points the influences of the outside world on Ireland. For example, he states that “the development of north-Atlantic consumer capitalism [...] has tended to erode Irish nationalist cultural values” (R. Perry 11). Moreover, he stresses especially the importance of European culture and politics in the growth of Irish revisionism. For one, he mentions but does not specifically define a “European ideal, which was to challenge and transform past conceptions of nationalism, sovereignty and independence” (R. Perry 11). Secondly, he identifies the Republic’s accession to the European Economic Community, the EEC, in 1972 as another reason (cf. R. Perry 11). Historian Paul Bew views “the comprehensive failure of the ‘Sinn Féin’ approach to the problem of Irish development” (98) as the main cause of disillusionment of the Irish population in the 1960s. According to this view, through their own policies the nationalists created their agenda’s critical re-examination in the 1960s themselves.

In his essay *Irish Nationalism*, Hutchinson succeeds in summing up in only a few lines what has constituted the body of revisionist work in the past fifty years before elaborating on the individual points more extensively.

> “Irish historians have come to call into question almost all the verities of nationalist perspective: the idea of a pre-conquest Irish nation, the conception of Ireland as a victim eternally set against a ruthless and manipulative British oppressor, and in the modern period the idea that the nationalist tradition is continuous, nonsectarian, popular, necessarily primary, and all-Ireland.”
>
> (Hutchinson 103)

Hutchinson’s text makes it quite clear that revisionist work has in the main questioned and criticized cornerstones of Irish nationalist ideology. So even though in principle revisionist history is meant to be objective and neutral in its approach, Irish revisionist history has for the most part been recognized as providing disproportionally more criticism of Irish nationalism than of unionism. Unsurprisingly, this is exactly what Irish revisionists have been criticized for. It is noteworthy that historical revisionism of unionist Irish history also exists. Historians Alvin Jackson, Ian McBride, Brian Walker and Flann Campbell can be named in this context. For obvious reasons, most of the revisionist work in this field is
concerned with a re-interpretation of the traditional unionist narrative of the past in Northern Ireland. As is the case for revisionist nationalist Irish history, these re-interpretations seem to suggest that Ulster Protestantism is, and moreover was, a lot more fragmented and multi-faceted than has been presented in the past (cf. R. Perry 100f.). Indeed, Jackson sees obvious parallels between Irish nationalism and Irish unionism as both their historiographies have been equally under ideological influence.

“Unionism neither supplies nor demands a complex vision of its own past. This is far from saying that the Unionist historiographical tradition is as sporadic and monodimensional as the needs and perceptions of its beneficiaries would appear to imply. On the contrary, late nineteenth-century Unionist visions of the past were as varied and shifting as the demands of political debate. The fissiparous nature of Irish Unionism, no less than Irish Nationalism, meant that there was always a tendency towards producing a simplified and unifying historical creed for the consumption of the pious. But […] a more complex historiographical dogma has always been available to a material and intellectual elite.”

(Jackson “Irish Unionism” 120)

Nevertheless, despite revisionist exploration of unionist Irish history, revisionist Irish history has generally been identified and criticized as anti-nationalist, much like Revivalism is often equated with “cultural nationalism” (Kearney 80). In his essay on The Steward of Christendom, published in 1998, Jim Haughey explicitly equates the terms traditionalist and revisionist with nationalist and anti-nationalist respectively (cf. Haughey 290). While this equation clearly oversimplifies the issue, it is nevertheless an indication of how revisionism and the debate about revisionism were generally perceived at that time, some thirty years after the real emergence of revisionism.

Robert Perry names historians Brendan Bradshaw, Kevin Whelan, Desmond Fennell and Peter Berresford Ellis as critics of revisionism. The core of their criticism, or so Perry argues, is the revisionists’ supposed “attempt to rehabilitate the role of Britain in Irish history and politics” (R. Perry 10). The first on Perry’s list, Bradshaw, is one of the first most vocal and widely discussed critics of revisionism. Boyce and O’Day describe the Cambridge historian as a “nationalist and Catholic polemicist” (Boyce and O’Day 9). His article “Nationalism and historical scholarship in modern Ireland”, which was published in Irish Historical Studies in 1989, was an eloquent attack on Irish historical revisionism. Paul Bew
argues that Bradshaw criticized the revisionists’ value-free and supposedly objective approach to Irish history. In his view Bradshaw lamented that Irish revisionist historical writing failed to incorporate an Irish perspective in so far as it fails to pay tribute to “the prolonged suffering of the Irish people” (Bew 90) under British imperialism and thereby results in an interpretation of past events that is, as Boyce and O’Day put it, “unsympathetic to the suffering, struggle, heroism and sacrifice of those who liberated the nation” (Boyce and O’Day 6). Clearly, in his essay, Bradshaw strongly criticizes the value-free approach. As it tries to be objective, he feels it fails to “cope with the catastrophic dimensions of the Irish past” (Bradshaw 204) and is therefore ironically subjective as it omits this aspect. In his text the phrase ‘catastrophic dimensions’ specifically refers to the violence used by British colonizers and the trauma of the famine (cf. Bradshaw 109-204).

Desmond Fennell voices a similar concern in an article in 1988 when he defines Irish historical revisionism as a

“retelling of Irish history which seeks to show that British rule of Ireland was not, as we have believed a bad [italics in original] thing, but a mixture of necessity, good intentions and bungling; and that Irish resistance to it was not as we have believed, a good [italics in the original] thing, but a mixture of wrong-headed idealism and unnecessary, often cruel violence.”

(Fennel 184f.)

Fennell labels Irish historical revisionism as “the historiography of the Irish counter revolution” (qtd. R. Perry 15), which proves that Fennell views revisionism as clearly and purely anti-nationalist in nature. According to Perry, among other things Fennell blames revisionist historians for striving to create from the Irish “a people with no sense of where they came from or where their future should take them” (R. Perry 15). So from Fennell’s point of view revisionism does not help to enrich or define an Irish identity but rather serves to destroy it.

Just as revisionists are not without their critics, so the critics have been criticized themselves. Bew has criticized Bradshaw’s demand for greater empathy in Irish historiography. According to Bew, by empathy Bradshaw clearly means empathy for the victims of British rule and by extension sympathy for the nationalist cause. Bew questions Bradshaw’s premise that any completely and truly empathetic account could ever really
legitimize any one particular political project, whether nationalist or unionist (cf. Bew 91). Moreover, he determines that “demands for greater empathy with either the Nationalist (or Unionist) past are often demands to ignore not only experiences shaped by class, sexual or regional experience but even considerations of objective reality or political choice” (Bew 97). Basically, Bew criticizes Bradshaw’s demand because it suggests that this very multifaceted topic may be simply scaled down to nationalist versus unionist, disregarding the influence of other individual distinctions and identifications. Hugh Kearney seems even more direct in his criticism of Bradshaw. Kearney feels Bradshaw’s is saying “that the historian’s duty is to propagate a myth, despite its wrongness, for the sake of its supposedly beneficent consequences” (Kearney 247). Kearney goes on to openly question Bradshaw’s professionalism by stating that this “is surely the role of the politician or the journalist not that of a scholar” (Kearney 247). Perry uses the same quote to portray the controversy around revisionism and especially Bradshaw’s criticism of it (R. Perry 18). However, Perry disregards the fact that despite his criticism, Kearney in some measure sides with Bradshaw, stating that the latter is right in drawing attention to the revisionists’ “neglect of what he [Bradshaw] terms the catastrophic element in Irish history, exemplified in the long tale of massacre, conquest and colonization during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” (Kearney 248).

Historian Diarmaid Ferriter maintains that the debate about revisionism was necessary and praises Foster for setting the parameters for this debate. However, he also points out that in the course of the debate, revisionists were in danger of “making the same mistakes they were criticizing – establishing a framework of historical interpretation based on history as a morality tale of wrong and right” (Ferriter 23). On the other hand, historians Ronan Fanning and T.W. Moody defend revisionism and praise the intention of revisionists to debunk unsupported myths. Both agree in seeing a political agenda behind anti-revisionist criticism. At the time of their writing, in the 1980s and 1990s, prior to the Good Friday Agreement, violence in Northern Ireland was still very real and regularly in the news. Fanning and Moody postulate that the Provisional IRA uses nationalist myths of the past to justify said violence. Debunking these myths would eliminate their ideological basis, so naturally, they argue, those with a vested interest or firm ideological beliefs would feel compelled not only to refuse but to belittle revisionist thinking. This has led to a climate in which revisionist historians, such as for example Michael Laffan, feel ironically honored the more they are criticized by nationalists (cf. Perry 23f.).
With the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, the impetus to defend a seemingly moral basis for violence by rejecting revisionist ideas and clinging to a narrow nationalist narrative of the past has been somewhat lessened. In turn, it seems that the debate on revisionism has subsided by some degree in the years since. Richard Bourke goes so far as to say that in “2014 Irish historical revisionism itself had more or less come to an end” (Bourke 283). He sees the height of revisionism in the 1980s and 1990s. Perry admits that it is understandable to assume that with the armed conflict at an end, there will also be a decrease in the intensity and emotionalism in the debate on historical revisionism (cf. R. Perry 38). However, he goes on to expound upon the many goals of the Northern Irish peace process initiated by the Good Friday Agreement, which by the time of his writing, some fifteen years after the agreement, had not been achieved or only in a very limited fashion. Examples include the still disadvantaged socio-economic situation of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, the absence of any real move to initiate integrated education, the avoidance of tackling many controversial issues like flags, emblems and parades or the fact that the number of peace walls in Belfast has actually gone up instead of down (cf. R. Perry 135f.). So even though the Good Friday Agreement was a huge step into the direction of a peaceful future for Northern Ireland, the socio-economic, cultural and social problems that dominated the region for so long are still far from being fully resolved. Accordingly, it seems safe to assume that the ideological differences and prejudices have not vanished in the intervening years, which also means that Irish history and Irish nationalism will remain topics of debate for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, among other things, Perry points to the letter section of The Irish Times as proof that the discussion about Irish historiography, i.e. also Irish historical revisionism, is far from over (cf. R. Perry 38).

Despite the projected diminishing importance of revisionism in the Irish context in the future, there are some effects of the movement that will in all probability continue to influence Irish historiography. Hutchinson has stressed the “strength of […] revisionists to recognise the multiple levels of identity in existence in any population and to refuse to assume that even in nationalist campaigns individuals or groups are necessarily inspired by the goals attributed to them by their leaders” (Hutchinson 115). Likewise, Boyce and O’Day argue that if nothing else the debate of revisionism has managed to show “the protean nature” (Boyce and O’Day 12f.) of the study of history and the writing of the same.

So even if the importance of Irish historical revisionism were to diminish in years to come, there seems to be little doubt that revisionism constitutes more than simply an academic debate led by ivory-tower historians. Its influence and effects on Irish society and
culture can hardly be denied. Modern Irish literature, for example, and the debate of the works by many modern Irish novelists, poets and playwrights clearly prove that revisionist thinking has also spilled over into the literary realm. Moreover, through their novels, poetry and plays, these authors include the general public in a discussion of Irish history more compellingly than political or academic discussions could alone. Analyzing Irish literature since 1979 in the second to last chapter of his book *A History of the Irish Novel*, Derek Hand states that such a re-examination of Irish history, especially nationalist Irish history, as well as an examination of its influence on present predicaments in Irish society are central characteristics of novels from this period (cf. Hand 258).

Works by popular contemporary Irish novelists in particular exhibit these strong revisionist notions. In some, though not necessarily in all of them, revisionist notions are paired with an identity crisis, where the protagonist’s identity does not seem to correspond to socially accepted or acceptable norms. The common revisionist denominator in all of them is the desire to show that Irishness may include more than the often narrow definitions provided by nationalist ideology and a nationally tinted account of Irish history. Consequently, a criticism of Irish nationalism is also typical. In the following, a selection of Irish revisionist works and authors is given to provide a literary framework into which Barry’s work can then be placed and to which it can be compared. Although it will provide some literary background, considering the immense amount of modern Irish literature that shows revisionist tendencies, this list can by no means be exhaustive and is not meant to be. It is merely a point of reference for further research. Authors and their works have been chosen not solely on the basis of popularity and literary recognition but also with the intention of providing an example of the diversity of revisionism in more recent Irish literature. A common denominator of all works, however, is that they appear to be universally viewed as revisionist by (academic) critics. This seemed necessary in order to make an evaluation of revisionist notions in Barry’s texts possible. Nevertheless, as this paper disregards Barry’s poetry and focuses more on his novels than on his plays, this selection also focuses exclusively on Irish novelists.

In his novels *Doctor Copernicus*, *Kepler* and *The Newton Letter: An Interlude*, John Banville mixes historical facts, especially facts of these historical figures’ lives, with fiction. Joseph McMinn’s analysis of these three novels clearly stresses their revisionist nature.

“Figures such as Newton, Kepler and Copernicus might be read as unwitting, even unwilling deconstructionists, men whose ambitions begin with certainty about the
ability of linguistic and mathematical systems to explain the universe, but who eventually must concede that such ambitions are a vain folly, that there is no single, universal truth, that the old absolutes about human and divine order have been destroyed. In the place of the old securities comes a new, disturbing relativity, an unsettling arbitrariness about knowledge and meaning. ‘Nature’, it seems, is now a supreme fiction and not, as they had once thought, or needed to believe, an objective reality perfectly presented by their models and systems of inquiry. This new understanding of the relationship between language, truth and reality has a radical effect on the characters’ faith in their own narratives. Since most of Banville’s protagonists are in the process of constructing a version of their personal history, and since they come to a belated acceptance of the fictional fate of any narrative, they openly acknowledge the imaginative, invented nature of everything they write.”

(McMinn 86)

The revisionist idea with regards to Irish history is maybe strongest in the latest of these three novels, *The Newton Letter*, as its main protagonist is a historian in Ireland. According to Hand, it is clear that though the historian ironically fails to do so, the novel itself clearly shows that “the stereotyping of Irish character and Irish history have made certain notions [...] into hardened, immovable facts [...] [and that the] burden of the contemporary moment is to try to see beyond what is immutable and fixed” (Hand 261). Clearly, the notion of an objective Irish history is questioned.

Colm Toibín’s work is “characterized by its use of memory, both personal and historical, both private and public” (Sanders 655). His “particular area of concern [is] [...] human emotional identity and the affirmation of that identity” (Carter and McRae 516). In addition, Tom Herron argues that Tóibín’s novels show in a unique way the shortcomings of a post-independence Ireland as his characters try to distance themselves from the state and its nationalist constraints but ultimately fail in their attempts, like for example the main protagonist in his novel *The Heather Blazing*, the elderly high court judge Eamon Redmond. He finds himself bound in his judgements and general work by the constraints of the constitution and its “oppressive limits” (Herron 170). Hand and Herron both especially identify this novel by Tóibín as advertising revisionist notions (cf. Hand 263; Herron 170ff.).

In his essay “ContamiNation: Patrick McCabe and Colm Tóibín’s Pathographies of the Republic”, Herron sees clear similarities between the writing of these two Irish authors. Although both authors show this in distinctly different ways and styles of writing, both present in their work a “vision of post-independence Ireland as essentially a contaminated and pathological entity[, which] would tend to align them with the revisionist attempt to
debunk the nationalist meta-narrative” (Herron 171). McCabe’s novel The Butcher Boy features the boy Francie Brady, who grows up in small-town Ireland of the 1950s and 1960s as the son of an alcoholic father and a depressive mother and increasingly slips into madness as he fails to integrate himself in Irish society. Herron views both, Tóibín and McCabe, as revisionist writers. Regarding the differences between them he explains that while

“in Tóibín’s texts the ossifications of the last half-century are being rapidly eroded by dramatically changing social circumstances, new dispositions and styles of living, in McCabe’s narratives there is no access into the bright world of a new Ireland. For all their humour and surrealism, his novels promote a view of the nation and its progeny as utterly incapable of adapting to changing times”.

(Herron 171f.)

Despite these differences both of them seem to share, however, a criticism of the nationalist narrative as well as the state it supports and as such can clearly be viewed as literary examples of Irish revisionism.

One of the most popular Irish authors today, Roddy Doyle, has become very successful depicting working-class life in Dublin in a black-humored fashion. His novel A Star Called Henry, however, is different from his previous novels as it seems a lot more historical. He re-envisions the fight for Irish independence at the beginning of the twentieth century through the eyes of its main protagonist, Henry Smart. Smart becomes part of the Easter Rising through his relationship to James Connolly, who is like a father to him (cf. Carter and McRae 519; Hand 269). However, according to Hand, the novel presents the Citizen Army and Connolly as quite naïve and that it would suggest that “all Ireland’s contemporary ills […] stem from this single incident [=the Easter Rising]” (Hand 269). He strongly criticizes the supposedly stereotypical type of revisionist history writing in this novel and in the following two installments of the trilogy that A Star Called Henry is the first one of: Oh, Play that Thing and The Dead Republic.

“Henry Smart’s Tory anarchist stance confirms the systematic breakdown of power and influence of traditional Irish institutions such as school, Church, and government. In the modern world, and in modern Ireland, there is nothing left to believe in save the dominance and self-perseverance of the extraordinary self.”

(Hand 269f.)
Hand’s critical view aside, his evaluation of Doyle’s work clearly marks these works as pieces of revisionist writing. Their popular success, even though probably greatly indebted to Doyle’s darkly humorous narrative style, could be an indication of the reading public’s desire for a re-examination of Irish history and Irishness in general.

Another revisionist novel by an Irish author that focuses on the Easter Rising is Iris Murdoch’s *The Red and the Green*. In her text she “deconstructs both the patriotic version of that rebellion and the modernist impulse to recover the past as a coherent whole” (Scanlan 150).

Frank McCourt’s fictional memoir, *Angela’s Ashes*, recounts a fictionalized version of the author’s own childhood as he grew up in the slums of Limerick, Ireland, in the 1930s. The novel is a “portrait of a miserable, uncharitable post-independence Ireland” (Carruthers 119) and its huge success as well as that of the respective film adaptation have “made McCourt the most successful communicator of the impulse of revisionist Irish history in the latter half of the twentieth century” (Carruthers 119).

The final part of the following literary analysis returns to these works and uses them as points of reference for a more differentiated assessment of the level and type of revisionism in Barry’s works.
III. The treatment of history and identity in Barry’s writings

Following the introductory historical overview in part one and the elaborations on the concepts of identity, nationalism and revisionism in part two, this main part of the paper contains the literary analysis of Barry’s works. More specifically, this part analyses in detail the character development in a selection of Barry’s plays and novels with regards to the characters’ sense of identity and the role events in Irish national history play in that development.

The short first section attempts to structure Barry’s fictional world in two ways: firstly, by providing an overview of Barry’s main characters, their relationships and the works in which they appear, and secondly, by highlighting the historical context for each play and novel in reference to part one.

Section two contains the actual detailed analysis. Among other things this literary analysis will make use of much of the findings presented in part two of this paper, primarily the scientific theories on the concept of identity and its vulnerability in the context of nationalist movements. Of course, one has to keep in mind that the analysis focuses on fictional characters invented by an author rather than real people. While it has to be acknowledged that fictional characters cannot be analysed in the same way as real people for obvious reasons, the psychoanalytic theories presented earlier are nevertheless invaluable for the literary analysis as they provide a basic terminology and rationale. This allows us to discuss the psychological effects of Irish history on the identities of the author’s characters as presented in the analysed texts. Furthermore, it makes it possible to evaluate the extent to which Barry’s presentation of these effects is realistic. Hence, the scientific crossover of psychology, history and literature here improves the quality of the literary analysis.

Based on the results from section two, section three discusses possible interpretations of Barry’s texts. Since Barry has been repeatedly labelled a revisionist author, this section of the paper tries to ascertain which characteristics of his texts may be viewed as revisionist as well as the nature of the revisionism in his works as a whole. Integrating much of the literary criticism regarding this aspect of his writing and comparing Barry’s texts to the works of other Irish authors, it also prepares a final explanation in the subsequent conclusion of what constitutes an Irish identity today according to Barry’s texts, and how Irish history influences this Irish identity.
III.1 The structure of Barry’s works

To date, the corpus of Sebastian Barry’s published writings includes two volumes of poetry, nine novels and more than a dozen plays. For the purpose of the detailed analysis of this paper focusing on the use of identity and history in Barry’s character development, it is necessary to make a selection and even then to differentiate between primary texts for analysis and supplementary sources.

The volumes of poetry will be excluded as will Barry’s first two novels, published in the 1980s. With The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty, Barry took up the theme which has been prevalent in all his novel writing since and which had already connected most of his plays before: his own family history, however adapted and fictionalised it may be in his works. While some stories are based quite firmly on events in Barry’s actual family history, others are purely fictional stories of almost entirely forgotten ancestors in the Barry genealogy as he imagines them to have been (cf. OLS: Author’s note). Constituting a literary analysis, this paper does not endeavour to investigate Barry’s actual ancestry or rate the historical accuracy of the stories and biographies portrayed. Rather, his characters shall be viewed as fictional creations and as such they are open to literary analysis and interpretation. However, due to the fact that many of Barry’s works draw thematically on his family history or his fictionalised family history, the idea of lineage, of family relations, can be used as a tool for organising Barry’s works.

Ultimately, as with family relations in real life, many of Barry’s novels and plays stemming inspirationally from his own family show an interconnectivity in terms of characters and events. The same events and/or characters, depending on the specific works in question, are used as recurring plot devices in different works, thus creating a connection between them. Using lineage as the organising factor, Barry’s plays and novels can be divided into two main groups of works. These two main groups are the two main branches of Barry’s fictional family, the Dunnes and the McNultys, ultimately converging in the young boy who remains nameless in Barry’s novel Annie Dunne, but who can be identified as the fictional version of the writer himself.18 Having studied all of Barry’s novels and plays

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18 That the nameless boy in Annie Dunne is actually a fictional version of the author is a notion also supported by Professor of English Literature at Trinity College, Dublin, Nicholas Grene, who speaks of the “all but explicitly autobiographical presence of the author as the unnamed four-year-old ‘boy’” (Grene, “Out of History” 168). This insight can logically also be derived from the fact that, according to the author’s note in the methuandrama edition of the play Our Lady of Sligo, the character Mai O’Hara is based on Barry’s grandmother, which in connection with the family ties described in the novel Annie Dunne places Barry in the same spot in the fictional family tree as the nameless boy.
selected for this analysis and concentrating on the relations between the characters, it is possible to create a family tree of Barry’s fictional family as portrayed in figure 1.

With regards to this diagram a few aspects need to be clarified: first, not all characters in the selection of Barry’s works studied in this paper are mentioned by name in these works or only very rarely. For example, although the character of Roseanne Clear’s mother is quite an important character with regards to her influence on her daughter, who is the main character in Barry’s novel *The Secret Scripture*, she is mostly only referred to as ‘mother’. Similarly, Eneas McNulty’s mother is an important character in three of Barry’s novels but is almost exclusively referred to as Mrs McNulty. She was raised as Mary Byrne, but that name is almost never used. The names of the two children starring in the novel *Annie Dunne* are never mentioned. Although we can deduce from Barry’s comments on his play *Our Lady of Sligo* that the boy in *Annie Dunne* is actually a fictional version of himself, neither his own nor his sister’s or in fact any fictional name is used in the novel.

Even though characters, settings and events reappear in different works, the author sometimes treats these liberally, creating some minor inconsistencies when looking at the fictional family as one, e.g. Thomas’s daughter, who is called Dolly in the play *The Steward of Christendom* and in the novel *Annie Dunne*, goes by the name of Lilly in the novel *On Canaan’s Side*. In the following literary analysis only the name Dolly has been used for her to avoid confusion and to make for an easier reading. These – though on the whole minor – inconsistencies regarding events or characters in Barry’s works are pointed out in footnotes whenever necessary to avoid confusion.
Fig. 1: Family tree of Barry’s fictional family
Characters on the same horizontal level in the diagram can be viewed as being roughly of one generation. However, ages may vary. Hannah Hawke and John Hawke are brother and sister. Sarah Purdy is the sister of Fanny’s mother living with them. Wherever the connection is a marital one, a line has been drawn between characters on the same level. The only intimate relationship not of marital status is the relationship between Eneas and Roseanne. For reasons of practicality and clarity, the relationship between Roseanne and Eneas’s brother Tom has not been included in the diagram. Roseanne’s problematic relationships to Eneas and Tom are discussed in detail in the analysis of the development of the character Roseanne Clear in the following section. For simplicity’s sake the last names McNulty and Dunne have only been added to the parent generation. The names in bold in the diagram are the names of the central characters in the texts analysed in this paper. It is their development in the realm of Barry’s fictional Ireland that will be the focus of the literary analysis.

Although each of Barry’s texts focuses on a different character – or characters – several connections between these characters can be found when looking at the works in relation to each other. Furthermore, the main character of one text reappears again in other texts. It is important to note that when they appear again, not only is their presentation consistent with that in other texts, but, moreover, their personal histories are also consistent to such a degree that questions left open in one work are often answered in another with usually no logical contradiction. That is why the analysis of each character’s development will not be limited to one text but will be studied within the realm of all texts of its respective grouping, though usually one text is the main source for the study. As the characters are presented from different perspectives in different texts, such a cross-work approach allows for a more complete and rounded impression.

Figure 2 is a graphical representation of the grouping of works. Boxes shadowed in grey represent plays; white boxes represent novels. Dashed outlines indicate that these texts have been used as merely supplementary material. The size and position of each box show the narrated time central to each text. Major events in twentieth-century Irish nationalist history have been added on the timeline, but mainly those that are of some relevance to the texts analysed in this paper and which have been presented in part one. Due to graphical limitations, only abbreviated forms of the titles of Barry’s texts have been used. The full titles can be found in Table 1 below or in the bibliography attached to this paper. For the sake of readability, these abbreviations will also be used for the identification of in-text citations in the entire paper. Below each abbreviation in Figure 2, the name of the main
character is given, though it should be kept in mind that most of these characters appear as important characters in multiple texts. Figures 1 and 2 can be used in combination as a quick-reference guide for the following analysis.

Table 1: title abbreviations of Barry’s texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full title</th>
<th>Literary form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WEM</td>
<td>The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty</td>
<td>Novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSS</td>
<td>The Secret Scripture</td>
<td>Novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLS</td>
<td>Our Lady of Sligo</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTG</td>
<td>The Temporary Gentleman</td>
<td>Novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>The Only True History of Lizzie Finn</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSC</td>
<td>The Steward of Christendom</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Annie Dunne</td>
<td>Novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALLW</td>
<td>A Long Long Way</td>
<td>Novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCS</td>
<td>On Canaan’s Side</td>
<td>Novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Prayers of Sherkin</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The central characters on the McNulty side are Eneas McNulty and Roseanne Clear, whose love as well as their individual fates are told in the novels *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* and *The Secret Scripture*, as well as Jack and Mai McNulty, whose unhappy marriage is presented in the play *Our Lady of Sligo* and the novel *The Temporary Gentleman*. These four texts form the group of texts for the analysis of character development on the McNulty side of Barry’s fictional family. In addition to this, the play *The Only True History of Lizzie Finn* tells the story of the parents of Eneas’s mother providing additional ways of interpreting and evaluating this character’s behaviour towards her family, especially towards her son Eneas and Roseanne Clear in the two novels mentioned above. Hence, this play serves as a supplementary text for the analysis. However, the main characters of this play are not the focus of this literary analysis as the play’s setting, focus and theme do not fit the focus of this analysis and apart from the genealogical connection mentioned above show little connection to the other works studied here.19

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19 For an in-depth analysis of the themes in the play, please read Anthony Roche’s essay “Redressing the Irish Theatrical Landscape: Sebastian Barry’s *The Only True History of Lizzie Finn*” (cf. Roche).
1900: John Redmond takes over as leader of the IPP

1911: Parliament Act

1913: Formation of UVF and Irish Volunteers;
      Dublin Lockout;
      Sackville Street Riot

1914: Beginning of WW1

1916: Easter Rising

1918: End of WW1

1919: Anglo-Irish War;
      Auxiliaries and Black and Tans sent to Ireland in 1920 to
      support the RIC;
      Irish Volunteers become IRA
      Anglo-Irish Treaty concludes the war

1922: Irish Free State declared;

23: Irish Civil War;
    Death of Michael Collins

1932: Under Eamon de Valera Fianna Fáil wins general election

1933: ACA members start wearing blue shirts (Blueshirts)

1937: New constitution passed: Éire the new name for the Irish state

1939: IRA declared unlawful;

45: WW2: Ireland declares neutrality

1948: Republic of Ireland Act (comes into force 1949) declaring
      the Irish state a republic: ties to the Commonwealth cut

1960s: Economic reforms

1969: British troops sent to Northern Ireland;
      Beginning of the "Troubles" in NI

1972: Bloody Sunday: British soldiers shoot 13 unarmed people
      in Derry;
      Bloody Friday: 26 IRA bombs in Belfast kill 11 people

1990s: Celtic Tiger: rapid economic development

1998: Good Friday Agreement signed to end violence in Northern Ireland
In Greek and Roman mythology, the name Aeneas belongs to a Trojan hero, one of the few to survive the fall of Troy, being saved time and again by the hands of the gods. Leaving Troy behind, he sets sail with a fleet following a prophecy. After landing on several shores, he and his men are repeatedly driven from their new homes. Finally, years after setting out from Troy, their ships are destroyed in a god-sent storm and they are swept ashore at the North African coast near Carthage, where Aeneas then falls in love with the queen of Carthage, Dido. However, being reminded of his destiny by Jupiter, he leaves Carthage and Dido and in the end founds the city of Lavinia in Italy, which shall later lead to the founding of the city of Rome (cf. Wilkenson and Philip 80f.). In *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*, his near-identical namesake Eneas experiences a course of life quite similar to that of the Trojan warrior, though seemingly less heroic. He, too, is driven from his home, swept ashore in foreign lands as a soldier, with ships around him burning and sinking. He, too, after years of wandering, falls in love with a woman, but fate has it that he is forced to leave her again, yet in the end he finds a new home for himself.

The author compels the reader to make this comparison by having Eneas’s teacher point out the origin of the name. Barry implants this idea in his reader’s mind. However, he himself ironically questions the value of the comparison, having a fellow student of Eneas point out that “in Cork the name is pronounced anus” (WEM 28), thus making the comparison of young and simple Eneas with the more-than-human Greek hero seem rather far-fetched.

Although the journey of his life is – to varying degrees – extended and explained in parts of *The Secret Scripture* and *Our Lady of Sligo*, it is mostly told in the novel *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* from the point of view of a third-person narrator, switching between omniscient narrator and personal narrative situation taking Eneas’s perspective.

In Barry’s novel *The Secret Scripture*, set in Ireland in 2010\(^{20}\), two first-person narrators alternately tell their life stories: Roseanne Clear, a roughly hundred-year-old patient at Roscommon Regional Mental Hospital, recounts her life in autobiographical form. Dr. William Grene, senior psychiatrist at that institution, has been appointed to organize the institution’s move from the old unsafe building into a new one and in the process to assess whether some of the patients are fit to be released into society again. Consequently, he also has to ascertain the medical history which led to their institutionalisation. For this reason, he meets repeatedly with Roseanne Clear and, somehow intrigued by her, he records his visits

\(^{20}\) The narrator Dr. Grene gives a date for the action stating that he was fifty-five years old at the turn of the century and is almost sixty-five now (cf. TSS 15f.). It follows that the novel is set in 2010.
to her as well as part of his own personal history in a sort of diary. Both narratives intertwine and in the end are linked together by the revelation that Roseanne, the woman whose mental health Dr. Grene spends his time assessing and whose personal history he becomes increasingly fascinated with, is in fact his own mother.

Although the revelation of the characters’ genetic connection functions as the climax of the narrative, it is, however, the account of Roseanne’s life rather than the doctor’s which forms the plot of the text leading up to the final revelation. Of course, to the reader Roseanne is presented as a very old patient in a mental hospital. Hence, for reasons of age as well as the possibility of mental instability readers are left constantly doubting the factual truth of Roseanne’s account. Here, the doctor’s narrative fulfils a supportive function as it verifies, further doubts or corrects Roseanne’s memories. It is through the combination of both narratives that a sense of the actual events in Roseanne’s personal history is attained. Nevertheless, Barry aptly balances certainty and doubt so that in many cases an objective account seems impossible. This questioning of the value and truth of historical accounts runs through the entire novel as a central theme. The story of Roseanne’s life stretches over most of the twentieth century and is set in Ireland. Very early in the novel the narrating doctor already hints at the truth behind Roseanne’s institutionalisation suggesting that some patients might have been “sectioned for social rather than medical reasons” (TSS 16).

The story of Jack McNulty21 and Mai Kirwin told in Barry’s play Our Lady of Sligo and his novel The Temporary Gentleman could be summed up as the sad account of a marriage – or rather of two people – utterly destroyed by alcohol. However, although this summary does in fact quite accurately describe the main development of the characters’ relationship, it falls short of including the social and historical criticism included in both works. On one level, certainly, alcoholism is the root of many personally devastating episodes for the characters in the play, but in addition to this, alcohol abuse itself is coupled with the stress brought on for the characters by events in Irish history at the turn and during the first half of the twentieth century. In Our Lady of Sligo, the development of Jack and

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21 In this play, Barry actually uses O’Hara as Jack’s last name and not McNulty. Mai’s ancestors’ surname is given as Kirwin and not O’Hara. However, it becomes quite clear from the description of Jack’s family in the play that Jack O’Hara in Our Lady of Sligo and Jack McNulty in The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty, The Secret Scripture and The Temporary Gentleman are the same man. Even though this is one example of a number of minor inconsistencies, the overall relationships between the characters as well as their nature remain unchanged. Hence, with regards to the focus of this paper, this inconsistency can be disregarded and the name McNulty is used as the surname of this character even when referring to the play.
Mai’s relationship is narrated in memories of Jack, Mai and their daughter Joanie\(^{22}\) in a room in Jervis Street Hospital, Dublin, in 1953, where Mai is staying as a dying cancer patient. In the novel *The Temporary Gentleman* Jack sits in a house in Accra, Ghana, which he has chosen as his place of voluntary exile, in 1957, a couple of years after Mai’s death, writing out the story of his life in an effort to come to terms with it. The picture painted by their memories is far from complete as they only show certain scenes from their time together, but these scenes are so carefully chosen that they convey a sense of the whole. Furthermore, while all the characters’ memories are questionable in terms of their objective veracity due to the nature of memories, they provide additional value by also displaying the feelings each of the characters harbours for the others.

For the study of the other side of Barry’s fictional family tree, a similar group of source material has been chosen: the novels *A Long Long Way, Annie Dunne* and *On Canaan’s Side* and the play *The Steward of Christendom* represent the group of texts for the study of character development on the Dunne side of Barry’s fictional family. The play *Prayers of Sherkin* can be consulted as a supplementary text. It tells the story of Jesse Kirwan’s parents, a character who plays a role in *A Long Long Way* and *Annie Dunne*. However, from an analytic perspective these characters have no connection to the other family members save the genealogical one detailed above. This is why in this paper, the play has solely been used to complete the fictional family tree in Figure 1, much like the play *The Only True History of Lizzie Finn* for the other side of the family.\(^{23}\)

In her introduction to the collection of essays on the writings of Sebastian Barry *Out of History*, Christina Hunt Mahony, Director of the Centre for Irish Studies at the Catholic University of America in Washington, praises Barry’s play *The Steward of Christendom* as “his most acclaimed achievement to date” (Hunt Mahony, “Introduction” 4). What makes the play so emotionally gripping and thus also possibly lies at the root of its popular success is the depiction of its main protagonist, former chief superintendent at Dublin Castle, Thomas Dunne. Barry contrasts the man Thomas Dunne once was with the man he has become at the time the play is set. The setting of the play is a county home in Baltinglass, County Wicklow, in the year 1932 (cf. TSC 236). In flashbacks patient Thomas Dunne

\(^{22}\) Jack and Mai’s daughter is named Joanie in the play while she goes by the name of Maggie in the novel. In the novel they also have another daughter, Maggie’s older sister Ursula, while Joanie is their only daughter in the play.

\(^{23}\) For an analysis of the play *The Prayers of Sherkin* and its implications please refer to Cregan 72-76, Hunt Mahony, “Children” 83-86 and Murray 245-247.
remembers his time as chief superintendent at Dublin Castle. This prestigious position clashes quite drastically with the depiction of the man we see in the county home.

As a character, his son William – or Willie – Dunne also appears in the play The Steward of Christendom and the novel Annie Dunne, but the novel that focuses specifically on him is A Long Long Way. What differentiates this novel from Barry’s other novels is that the narrated time is much shorter while the narration time is quite similar. Most of Barry’s novels span the entire lifetime of his main characters with the plot being narrated either chronologically as in The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty or using numerous flashbacks as in The Secret Scripture. A Long Long Way, however, mainly focuses on Willie’s experiences during the First World War. While Barry includes some flashbacks giving supporting information, the novel basically examines the character development of Willie Dunne as he is faced with the realities of the First World War and the changes in his home country in those four years.

In Barry’s fictional family Annie Dunne is one of the three daughters of former Chief Superintendent of DMP Thomas Dunne, the Steward of Christendom, and thus also Private William Dunne’s sister. The character Annie appears repeatedly in the play The Steward of Christendom and briefly in the novel A Long Long Way, but her life’s story serves as the basis for the plot in the novel Annie Dunne, in which she is the main character and first-person narrator. The novel is set in Kelsha, a rural part of County Wicklow in Ireland, in late 1959, where almost-sixty-year-old Annie lives on a small farm with her cousin Sarah, who is two years older. Although the novel’s narrated time only covers one summer, most of Annie’s life from her childhood in Dublin Castle up to the present is told in memories of and conversations about the past.

Dolly is Chief Superintendent Thomas Dunne’s youngest and also favourite daughter. As such she has a very strong emotional attachment to her father. In the other works, The Steward of Christendom, A Long Long Way and Annie Dunne, the character Dolly plays only a minor role. In all these works her beauty and the strong emotional attachment between father and daughter is basically used for two purposes: first, she represents a contrasting figure to Thomas’s hunchbacked daughter Annie. Second, she

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24 That Sarah is Annie’s cousin can be gleaned from Annie’s statement that “[h]er mother and my [Annie’s] mother were sisters” (AD 6).
25 Annie was born in 1900 and Sarah in 1898 (cf. AD 25).
26 The text states that the children arrive at the beginning of the summer (cf. AD 1) and when the children are picked up after the plot has unfolded, the first-person narrator Annie states that the summer is almost over (cf. AD 222). Hence the narrated time comprises one summer.
illuminates the importance of family ties in the mind-set of Willie and Thomas Dunne. The love Willie has for his youngest sister as well as the love Thomas has for his youngest daughter add immensely to the depiction of the feeling of loss both characters are confronted with in the course of their respective stories, Willie through the separation but more importantly through the estrangement from normal life caused by his war experience, and Thomas later through Dolly’s forced emigration to the USA.

As the main character in the novel *On Canaan’s Side*, Dolly is used to draw attention to a so far mostly disregarded aspect of Irish national history in Barry’s works: the fate of those Irish emigrants who elected or were forced to flee the island and sought a new home in the United States of America. In the novel, eighty-nine-year-old Dolly is the first-person narrator. In the framework plot of the novel, she has recently been informed of the suicide of her grandson Bill, whom she had raised herself, and is working up the courage to commit suicide as well. In the course of seventeen days she looks back on her life, mostly but not completely in a chronological order of events, trying to make sense of the events and the decisions which have brought her to this emotionally dark place at the end of her life. The events of Dolly’s personal history represent the true plot of this novel.

III.2 Identity as the key plot structuring element in Barry’s works

Most of Barry’s novels and plays are set in twentieth-century Ireland. Some span considerable amounts of time in terms of narrated time, e.g. *The Secret Scripture*, which encompasses the entire twentieth century, while the action of others takes place within only a few years, e.g. *A Long Long Way*, which spans just four years. Nevertheless, by comparison a certain pattern of character development can be discerned that appears to be typical of Barry’s texts as it is used in all selected texts. Naturally, each text ultimately shows a development of its main protagonist. As Barry stays so consistent in the presentation of his characters across all his writings, however, insights from other works in which that character is not the main character can be taken into consideration as well. These insights add to the findings from the main text. Barry’s texts thus seem unique insofar as they allow us to study character development not only within the realm of one text but within the realm of his fictional family history created by all his texts as a unit. For the following analysis this means that for each character, one work will be the main work of reference, but aspects of the
presentation of that work’s main character in other works pertaining to the same side of Barry’s fictional family will be included wherever they present a fuller picture of that character’s development. Comparing all selected texts, two observations can be made: firstly, that all main characters from both sides of Barry’s fictional family, the McNultys as well as the Dunnes, develop very similarly and secondly and more importantly, that their development is closely tied to the concept of identity. This is why the structure of the following subsections, which analyse the character development in Barry’s texts, follows the main steps of identity formation (and reformation) theory as laid out in part two of this paper.

The first section studies the formation of identifications and consequently the development of an identity for each of Barry’s characters as presented in his works. In their essays, other scholars have already identified some of Barry’s characters as Catholic Irish loyalists (cf. e.g. Butler Cullingford 121 or J. W. Foster 99-101). The main goal of this first section is to show that this observation indeed holds true for all of Barry’s characters studied here and to lay out the main reasons for this assessment.

The second section focuses on each of Barry’s main characters individually, showing a) how the character’s identity is questioned and b) how Barry presents the psychological effects of this questioning and examines how – if at all – Barry lets them overcome this state of identity diffusion.

As will be shown, this identity-based pattern in terms of character development also seems to be incremental regarding the plot structure in most of Barry’s works. In fact, in many cases, it is the very element that drives the plot forward. For this reason, the third and last section examines how Barry uses the concept of identity as a central plot structuring element.

III.2.1 Early identifications – a common ground to start from

All of Barry’s main characters analysed in this paper experience the same stages of development in terms of identity. As has been pointed out, according to Freud, the formation of identifications in a person’s life is initially based on the parent-child relationship. Barry’s fictional characters are portrayed as following suit. As presented through the narratives in Barry’s plays and novels, Barry’s main characters form identifications in their childhoods which identify as (Catholic) Irish loyalists. At least it is made clear that others would have
in all probability perceived them as such. This is probably most noticeable in Thomas Dunne’s confession of love for Queen Victoria in *The Steward of Christendom*, which shall be included here almost in full as it shows so completely the conviction with which his identifications with the British ruling class were made:

“I loved her for as long as she lived, I loved her as much as I loved Cissy my wife, and maybe more, or differently. [...] When I was a young recruit it used to frighten me how much I loved her. Because she had built everything up and made it strong, and made it shipshape. The great world that she owned was shipshape as a ship. All the harbours of the earth were trim with their granite piers, the ships were shining and strong. The trains went sleekly through the fields, and her mark was everywhere, Ireland, Africa, the Canadas, every blessed place. And men like me were there to make everything peaceable, to keep order in her kingdoms. She was our pride. Among her emblems was the gold harp, the same harp we wore on our helmets. [...] Ireland was hers for eternity, order was everywhere, if we could but honour her example. She loved her Prince. I loved my wife. The world was a wedding of loyalty, of steward to Queen, she was the very flower and perfecter of Christendom. Even as the simple man I was I could love her fiercely. Victoria.”

(TSC 250)

It becomes clear from these words that Thomas Dunne’s national identity, his sense of Irishness, is presented as being inevitably based on the political union of Britain and Ireland. The identifications he had made so far in his life in this respect made him understand Ireland only as part of the British Empire.

In the play Thomas mentions the fact that his father was steward of Humewood – an estate owned by absentee British landlords – several times, which shows the importance he attributes to this fact. Seeing as the post of steward was handed down from father to son in the Dunne family, the dignity and occasionally arrogance with which his father acted in this capacity and the respect other people bestowed on his father can only be understood as deeply shaping Thomas’s identity. When Thomas failed to excel in school, his father sent him to become a policeman instead of raising him to become the next steward of Humewood as would have been his birthright. On a tour through the countryside, Thomas’s son Willie remembers that his grandfather had often spoken of his son, Willie’s father, as a “fool” (ALLW 255). However, although Thomas has internalised the dignity of being born a Dunne, he never seems resentful of having been denied his post as steward. Though Thomas has memories of fearing his father, even at the end of his life he holds him in the highest esteem, saying that he “is golden, golden, golden, [and that] nothing that Da Da [father] do
[sic] takes away the sheen and the swoon of gold” (TSC 240). The golden taint attributed to his father symbolizes the high esteem and respect he has for his father despite his fear of the man.

Thomas’s declaration of love for the British queen attests that Thomas has carried this deep desire to serve and protect over into his career as a police officer in the DMP. In this position, the figures of authority which were at the heart of his earlier identifications, the aristocratic owners of Humewood, were replaced by a higher authority: Britain’s Queen Victoria. These identifications are so strong that Thomas uses the word ‘love’ to describe the emotion connected to them. According to Freud, identification denotes an emotional tie. Clearly, Thomas is presented as having made identifications that bind him to the British Queen. His job as policeman offers Thomas the chance to serve these powers like his father did before him even though he was denied the post of steward at Humewood.

This notion is presented as the most important connection, most crucial identification Thomas Dunne made in his early years. Not only can he only understand Ireland as part of the British Empire, Irish only in connection to British, but more importantly, he feels that the main purpose of his life is to serve and protect that same connection. These identifications make up an integral part of his national identity and so they also constitute his very understanding of his place in life in general. Hence, they lie at the very core of his personal identity. His father was the steward of Humewood and he sees himself as following in his father’s footsteps by metaphorically becoming a sort of steward to Queen Victoria in his capacity as policeman at the DMP. As he views the person of Queen Victoria as a symbol of the Christian faith in the world, he views himself not only as a protector and servant to her but to the Christian faith in general, which becomes evident when he describes himself to an hallucinated vision of his daughter as “the steward of Christendom” (273) in act one of the play by that name. Thomas’s sense of himself as the steward of Christendom is the very core of his personal identity, largely due to identifications with his father and that man’s views established in his childhood and further expanded and consolidated in his years of service to the British Crown.

Portraying quite realistically a parent’s shaping influence on his or her children while weaving the net of his fictional family, Barry presents Thomas’s children as deeply influenced by their father. One of Willie’s strongest childhood memories is that of his father sitting astride a white horse on the parade ground at the barracks at Phoenix Park in Dublin during a troop inspection by the British king. He remembers thinking that his father “looked much finer than any King […] Like God Himself, or the best man in God’s kingdom”
(ALLW 4f.). The way Willie remembers his father on that day shows the extent of his love but more importantly of his pride and esteem for that man. Naturally, one is bound to envision that in his childhood he has internalised many of the convictions held by his father, which eventually lead to him enrolling as an Irish soldier in the war.

When Willie is growing up, it is his father’s ambition for his son to become a policeman in the DMP. This desire is shown in the repeated measurement of Willie’s height by his father, who is eager for his son to reach six feet as this is the regulation height for new recruits. However, Willie does not reach that height and thus cannot join the police force. Instead he is apprenticed to a builder in Dublin. The text states that his failure to reach six feet makes him cry and that he curses his body for this failure (cf. ALLW 6). It is made particularly obvious that pleasing his father is very important to Willie. Furthermore, it becomes clear that Willie has a high regard not only for his father but in turn for all those things his father holds dear and represents. Many of his father’s opinions become Willie’s opinions, too. In terms of identity, many of the identifications Willie internalises in his childhood are tied closely to the image he has of his father as well as to his father’s beliefs.

According to the text (ALLW), Home Rule is the reason why many Irish join the British in the First World War, many to ensure the coming of it by fighting bravely alongside the British, others – the men from Ulster – to show their loyalty to the British and maybe prevent Home Rule. As a unionist Thomas Dunne naturally dismisses the idea of Home Rule. He tells his son that a man should fight for “King and Country and Empire” (ALLW 15). However, Willie sees a chance to finally make up for his height deficit by becoming a soldier and to make his father proud and win his respect after all.

“He felt so proud of himself he thought his toes might burst out of his boots. In fact he imagined for a moment that he had grown those wanting inches, and might go now after all and be a policeman if he chose, astonishing his father. […] Willie felt his body folding and folding over and over with pride like the very Wicklow mountains must feel the roll of heather and the roll of rain. […] The blood in his arms seemed to flush along his veins with a strange force. Yes, yes, he felt, though merely five foot six, that he had grown, it was surely an absolute fact, something in him had leaped forth towards this other unknown something. He could put it no clearer than that in his mind. All confusion he had felt, all intimations that troubled him and unsettled him, melted away in this euphoria.”

(ALLW 23)
Finally leaving for the war, Willie feels metaphorically as though he has grown. This notion is repeatedly pointed out and thus emphasized by the author. This may be interpreted to mean that Willie feels he has finally redeemed himself after not having been able to become a policeman. He is able to protect his identity. It seems that the identifications he has made so far in life, principally influenced by his father, have led him to feel the necessity to prove his worth by serving the Crown like his father. When he was not allowed to join the DMP these identifications were questioned, causing a state of discomfort which ends now that he can prove his worth another way. Volunteering is a way for him to protect his childhood identifications and his sense of identity, which relies heavily on pleasing his father at the time he joins the war. Clearly, he has internalised his father’s loyalist identifications and like his father before him ends up working as an agent of the British government to protect these identifications and make his father proud.

Thomas’s other children are equally influenced by him. Even at the age of eighty-nine, Willie’s sister Dolly still remembers the admiration she once held for her father. It becomes quite clear from the tone as well as the words of her memories that she idealized her father as a little girl much like her brother did. She vividly remembers finding fault with her teacher at the age of four when she explained to the children that God had made the world. In her view, none other could have made the world than her father (cf. OCS 19). Admittedly, Dolly may not be perfectly serious and includes a degree of humorous exaggeration in the account of her memories, but even such exaggeration is proof of the level of admiration she remembers having for her father as a little girl.

One of Dolly’s most important memories for multiple reasons is the day her father was made Chief Superintendent of the DMP. According to Dolly, the occasion was one that filled her father with pride as she remembers him saying that the girls’ dead mother would have enjoyed seeing it (cf. OCS 17). On the whole, the way Dolly recounts the occasion proves that she herself can still feel the pride she had in her father and his achievements even after all these years. She remembers her father on that day: the uniform with the white-feathered hat and the silver-looking darts on the cuffs, his big awe-inspiring stature. Furthermore, she remembers all the men under her father’s command standing to attention during the ceremony and remembers her pride in her father mirrored in their murmur of approval. Calling his face to mind she sees it “bursting with pride and certainty” (OCS 16) before her inner eye as he is made Chief Superintendent by the commissioner on that day. In terms of identity the narrative strongly implies that Dolly was heavily influenced in her identifications by her father. These fond memories alone make it quite clear that the deep
love she had for her father and her life at Dublin Castle among the men of the DMP and the British soldiers would have let her adopt her father’s unionist ideals quite naturally.

Through Willie’s death Dolly meets her future husband Tadg Bere, who fought alongside Willie and visits her family after the war to give his condolences to them (cf. OCS 34-38). Tadg’s former friendship to her brother and his work as a policeman – quite similar to that of her father – endear him to Dolly (cf. OCS 52). Summing up, her national identity is formed through her father’s influence and the memory of her brother as well as her newfound relationship to Tadg Bere, which only exists because of the former two. Clearly, she too is presented as having made identifications in her childhood and teenage years which mark her as a Catholic loyalist.

Dolly’s sister Annie also has fond memories of her father from her childhood, e.g. that he got a simple joy out of watching a fire in the fireplace or the many old sayings he used to utter (cf. AD 10).

“No morning comes but that I think of our quarters in Dublin Castle, the beautiful fireplaces there, far too grand, my father used to say, for a chief superintendent of modest outlook, but to me and my sisters the marble had almost a quality of singing. It sang to us of the future, of promises, of love. By such fires would duly come, we believed, good officers of the garrison, low and junior ones of course, but more than welcome with their English accents and their burning eyes.”

(AD 74)

This portrayal of Annie’s memories of her time living in the castle with her sisters, her brother and her father clearly suggests that this character envisioned for herself a promising, positive future. Although maybe partly a young girl’s foolish dream, being brought up in that place, she thought that she would eventually marry a young officer of the DMP. With her father’s status, the rooms in the castle and the respectful way the children were treated on their father’s account came for Annie a certainty that her future would be a happy one. Even though in the novel Annie Dunne all of Annie’s childhood memories seem to be steeped in bitterness, the content of these memories draws up a childhood version of an Annie who was happy and dearly loved her father. Accordingly, this strongly implies to readers that she, like her siblings, would have formed her identifications based on her
relationship to her father perceiving his position as demanding respect, which ultimately characterizes her, too, as a Catholic loyalist.

On the other side of the family, the loyalist tendencies seem less strong and less obvious. The mother of Eneas, Jack, Tom and Teresa is a character quite difficult to grasp. From her letters to Eneas and their conversations in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*, she might at first be characterised as a loving and caring mother, at least with regards to her sons. She says herself that it is they who “keep me [her] fixed to this earth […] [and that she would] kill for any of ye [sic], and kill anyone to preserve your [their] lives.” (WEM 199) However, there is much more to this character. Towards Roseanne she shows a behaviour that can only be described as utterly cold, cruel, deeply unsympathetic and bordering on the inhumane. Roseanne comes to her place in the midst of a storm, heavily pregnant and begging for help, but Mrs McNulty turns her away saying she is frightened of her (cf. TSS 266-268). Her cruel and unsympathetic behaviour towards Roseanne presents a stark contrast to the positive image of the loving and caring mother. The reason for her behaviour towards not only Roseanne but also her children as well as her fear of Roseanne must be sought in her very own ancestry, which can be pieced together from information presented in different texts.

Mrs McNulty was raised as Mary Byrne, but the Byrnes are merely her adoptive parents. Her real father was Mr. Robert Gibson, a member of the British landlord class in Ireland and army officer from Kerry. Her mother was Lizzie Finn, a woman from a poor Presbyterian Irish family working as a dancer in Weston-super-Mare in England when Mr. Gibson meets her. It is first at the beach in Weston-super-Mare and later at the music-hall where Lizzie works that they meet and their story forms the plot of Barry’s play *The Only True History of Lizzie Finn*. Eventually, Mr. Gibson marries Lizzie and takes her back home to his family’s estate near Castlemaine, county Kerry in Ireland, where Lizzie meets Robert’s mother and the local gentry (cf. LF). It becomes quite clear that Robert’s mother does not approve of the match. Even the old estate gardener finds her an inappropriate choice saying that “she will never do” (LF 207). In the end, Robert and Lizzie leave the almost bankrupt family estate to live somewhere else. As it happens, shortly after their daughter is born, Lizzie dies and as Robert’s family has never approved of the match in the first place, Robert’s daughter, the later Mrs McNulty, is given to his batman and his wife, the Byrnes, to be brought up as their own when Robert joins the army again and goes to India (cf. TSS 295 and WEM 198). Even though Mrs McNulty’s political views are never explicitly laid out in a text, her ancestry as presented in the texts implies a loyalist upbringing.
Both her sons, Eneas and Jack, form identifications in their youth at least partly influenced by their mother, not so much by her ideals as is the case with Thomas Dunne’s children but by her rumoured ancestry. The identifications Eneas makes during that time shape his identity in such a way that he makes a decision that will forever exile him from his homeland in the nationalist climate of the time and brand him as a loyalist at least in the eyes of Irish society: he sets out to join the British war effort in both world wars.

Eneas grows up in meagre circumstances with his parents working as tailor and seamstress in the lunatic asylum in Sligo. One childhood memory is presented as especially formative: Eneas and his mother walk into a café in Sligo, Café Cairo, seeking shelter from the rain on their way back home from church one day. The family’s poverty forces Mrs McNulty to place the smallest order possible and the salesgirl’s arrogant reaction highlights the family’s poverty for Eneas (WEM 11). Moreover, though, sitting in the café Eneas spots two old but apparently well-off ladies at another table staring at his mother and whispering. When he draws his mother’s attention to this fact, her face goes very red and she hurriedly leaves the café rather than confronting the two women. In the evening Eneas asks his father why the two women could have been staring at his mother and him. His father’s answer reveals part of his mother’s personal history:

“Some people have trouble that they never themselves did cause. Some people have a queer start in the world because those that have them in the first place don’t know what they’re at. Mams and Pappys are not the same, parish by parish. Some fall at the first fence, and little mites are left to fend for themselves. It’s a story old as mountains, your Mam’s own story. […] Who is it that talks under the stones, only slugs and weevils. […] Never mind, child, what you hear, the whispers of a little town, the little whispers of Sligo.”

(WEM 13)

This extract holds the key to many of Eneas’s as well as his mother’s actions in the remainder of Eneas’s life. When told by his father, Eneas does not quite understand all that his father’s account implies and the reader is similarly left wondering and speculating. Eneas is confronted with the truth – or at least the Sligo version of the truth – some years later in a conversation with Tuppenny Jane, a thirteen-year-old girl who is known in Sligo as a prostitute. Feeling judged by Eneas, Jane retaliates by telling him that his own mother was the illegitimate daughter of an aristocrat and a common girl, raised by foster parents because
the gentleman did not want the child. Eneas becomes angry partly because Jane insults his mother and partly because he suspects it might be true as it allows him to finally make sense of the incident at Café Cairo. It is clear that this knowledge fills him with immense shame (cf. WEM 25f.).

Eneas’s world is quite altered when he is suddenly not the only child anymore in the McNulty family. Three younger siblings, two brothers and one sister, are born and Eneas is bereft of the attention he was given by his parents all the previous years. Even worse, as the years pass, Eneas is left with a feeling of underachievement in the light of his siblings’ talents and skills.

“Jack shines at his schoolwork and he has been nominated brilliant by the schoolmasters and this never happened to Eneas. Well, he knows he is no fool himself, but you cannot compete with the brilliant. […] Even young Tom is admired for his scholarship and God knows he is only four. […] His suspicion is that he has been given his father’s brains and they have got hold of the Mam’s. He ate a feed of sheep’s brains the once, and as he ate he knew sorrowfully that his father’s brain and his own brain were such as he toyed with on his fork. He never ate such a sorrowful meal before nor since.”

(WEM 19f.)

In this simile Eneas’s and his father’s intelligence are compared to that of a sheep - an animal generally viewed as rather simple-minded. The simile shows how low Eneas views his own intellectual abilities in contrast to that of his siblings. Furthermore, the last sentence of the quote underlines clearly that the realisation of underachievement has affected Eneas quite drastically. At age fourteen, when the First World War has just begun, Eneas senses the overall notion that most people in Sligo support Irish involvement in the war.

“There is the war now beyond and a few of the men of Sligo have departed and many more are saying they will go. There is a great feeling in the town that they must send soldiers to the war […] Now the men, the few that are willing, are getting into the trains for Dublin and shipping to England and beyond. You can sense the press of men behind them, the truer flood of men, held in just as yet by the ramparts of the wishes of their wives. But all in all the war is there and the men of Sligo cannot resist for long […] [and] by God, he might chance it, should he live to see sixteen. Comfortably enough, that is some time off.”

(WEM 20f.)
Eneas is toying with the idea of joining the war. At that stage it is still only a thought, a fantasy safe in the realm of the impossible because of his age. However, in the following two years Eneas turns this fantasy into a plan.

When finally Eneas goes to his parents one evening to inform them of his plan, the ensuing conversation reveals that his parents don’t feel like Eneas regarding Irish involvement in the war. Two extracts from that conversation show this discrepancy quite clearly:

“‘Jesus, that’s for English boys, Eneas,’ says his Pappy, kindly.
‘No,’ says Eneas. ‘There’s rakes of Sligomen gone out.’”
[...]
“‘I don’t think I’d like you fighting in a foreigner’s war,’ says his Mam. [...] ‘What’s foreign? If there’s Irishmen in it?’”

(WEM 31f.)

Both these examples suggest that his parents see the First World War as a war that should not concern the Irish. Eneas’s counter-argument is the same in both cases, i.e. the number of Irishmen who have already gone to war. Basically, it seems that Eneas wants to join the British army following Redmond’s appeal to prove the worth of the Irish. However, the narrative suggests that Eneas feels by joining the war he can prove his own worth and maybe even more importantly that of his family, thereby alleviating or at least fighting the feeling of shame he carries as a central identification of his youth. The two identification processes outlined above drive him to this decision even against his parents’ advice. That decision irreversibly brands him a loyalist in the eyes of his hometown.

His brother Jack and Jack’s wife Mai begin their relationship both quite happy and awaiting their future as well as the future of their country full of confidence. Mai is born at the turn of the century 27 as the daughter of Frank Kirwin, a well-to-do insurance agent from Galway. Frank Kirwin’s father was a rich farmer who eventually lost all his three farms because of his alcoholism. However, Frank worked hard and became a successful insurance agent (cf. OLS 19f.). Frank constitutes what at the time is felt to become the new middle class in Ireland, and in her youth Mai can enjoy the privileges this entails. For example,

27 According to the stage directions at the beginning of act one, the play is set in 1953 and in the first act of the play the sister tells Mai that it says on her patient information chart that she is 53 years old (cf. OLS 10). Hence, Mai is born around 1900. According to TTG, Mai is born in 1902 (cf. TTG 288).
Frank Kirwin can afford to send Mai and her sister Cissie to an upper-class boarding school to ensure they are provided with a good education (cf. OLS 9, 17). When Jack first meets Mai, she is studying Commerce at Galway University and planning to become a teacher. She is a successful tennis player, the Junior Champion of Connaught, and also plays the piano very well (cf. OLS 21f.). In addition to this, Mai is extraordinarily beautiful according to Jack’s memories of her. He describes her as “the belle of Galway University” (OLS 26) looking “like the Queen herself […] sitting at her ease with a few mortal friends” (OLS 21) at her graduation. He tells her at one point that he “was dizzy half the time looking at you [her]” (OLS 26), which shows very clearly the degree of Jack’s deference to Mai in those days.

For him, a young man from a humble and - on account of his mother - quite rumoured background, Mai was a girl he did not honestly hope to make his wife. Nevertheless, Mai finds many things to like about him in the early stages of their relationship, too. Jack leaves Galway University with an engineer’s degree. In the evenings, especially at weekends, he can be found at the Plaza, his father’s dancehall, sharply dressed looking like an American movie star with a fedora on his head and a fine suit with a leather collar and as such quite different from most other young men there. With his father, Old Tom, as the owner of the popular dancehall in Strandhill near Sligo and the bandleader of Tom McNulty’s Orchestra, Jack’s family is popular in Sligo despite his mother and father working as seamsters in the asylum. Furthermore, as a young man Jack gathered experience in the British Merchant Navy and later, with his degree, he is employed as an engineer in the British Colonial Service, well-paid and far-travelled (cf. OLS 22f.).

Of course, due to her upbringing in her parents’ household, young Mai could certainly be termed loyalist or only slightly nationalist, as her father is a supporter of Redmond but not of Collins. However, she hopes for social changes in Ireland and after Redmond’s failure she initially supports Michael Collins but it seems more for emancipatory reasons than because of a nationalist ideology. Jack’s decision to work for the British, the posts he holds after university and his high regard for the Protestant ascendency show him as a loyalist, too.

Regarding Roseanne Clear, very little explicit information is provided about political views held in her family’s household during the time of her childhood. Roseanne begins her account in *The Secret Scripture* with the memory of her parents and her life during the years of the First World War. Her father holds the position of superintendent of Sligo’s graveyard. Roseanne describes him as a gentle and loving father, who was quite musical and usually
showed a happy demeanour. However, one of her father’s crucial qualities with regards to
the plot seems to be his religion. Joseph Clear’s own father had been a preacher and he was
a “passionate […] Presbyterian man” (TSS 6), so of Protestant denomination. It has been
said that viewing the struggle for Irish independence as Catholic nationalists versus
Protestant unionists is crudely oversimplifying a complex topic. However, as the war
progressed further and public support of the British in the war for Home Rule afterwards
dramatically decreased, especially in the aftermath of the Easter Rising, Protestant
denominations would have been taken as a sign of a unionist attitude by many people,
especially in the dominantly Catholic western counties. By no means shall this imply that all
Presbyterians were in fact against Irish independence from Britain, leaving aside the question
of what form of independence. Roseanne remembers her father – while devoutly
Presbyterian – being quite distraught by the way Protestantism was used as a means of
oppression in Ireland under British rule (cf. TSS 64). Nevertheless, generally, readers are led
to believe that people in Sligo would have viewed someone like Joseph Clear as a unionist.
Hence, by religion alone Joseph Clear is presented as holding a rather isolated position in
Sligo society, which is confirmed by Roseanne’s memories (cf. TSS 6, 41).

The most important aspect when analysing the Clears’ isolated, in fact outcast, social
position is a fact that Roseanne herself claims to have no knowledge of: before being given
the job as superintendent at the graveyard in Sligo, Joseph Clear was in the RIC. Roseanne
emphatically denies this when Dr. Grene asks her about it on the grounds of an old document
he found in her files (cf. TSS 116f.). However, the RIC police records in the town hall in
Sligo, which Dr. Grene later inspects to verify the information from the document, name a
Joseph Clear as a member of the RIC in the nineteen tens or twenties and so disprove
Roseanne’s statement. Additionally, Father Aloysius Gaunt’s accounts, which Dr. Grene
also studies, state that after Irish independence, i.e. after 1921, when the RIC was disbanded,
Joseph Clear was given the job at the graveyard. Dr. Grene understands that Joseph Clear
would have been a marked man in Sligo because of his past. Thus, he can only view the town
council’s job offer to Joseph Clear as an act of humiliation based on the assumption that this
job was one of the lowest in social standing (cf. TSS 187). Hence, the narrative makes it
abundantly clear that Joseph Clear’s standing in Sligo society would have been an isolated
one, the Clears ostracised for Joseph’s service in the RIC. Clearly, his daughter Roseanne
would have been seen as a loyalist by others in Sligo society.

Thus, all of Barry’s main characters analysed in this paper are presented as initially,
mainly in their childhood years, forming and carrying identifications which make them, or
at least outwardly mark them as – in the terminology of Irish nationalism – (Catholic) Irish loyalists. The author takes care to stress that these characters do not consciously choose to form these identifications but that they are created through the close relationship between parents and children.

III.2.2 Causes and symptoms of identity diffusion in Barry’s texts

Despite the differences in narrated time, the most important time in almost all of Barry’s works are the years between 1914 and 1922, from the beginning of the First World War until the end of the Irish Civil War and the reality of the Irish Free State. These years, or rather, the social and political changes in Ireland in these years are portrayed as having dramatic consequences for the lives of all of Barry’s main characters. The historical events of these years, mainly the Easter Rising, the Anglo-Irish War and the Irish Civil War, can be viewed as the culmination of Irish nationalist strife. After all, finally, after many a hundred years of violent clashes with the British, the population of the island – disregarding Northern Ireland for the time being - found themselves independent of Great Britain, at least with a certain degree of independence.

Prior to these events, loyalist opinions, while in the main not favoured, were at least universally accepted, but the following years saw a shift in public opinion. This is also implied in Barry’s writings. The increased level of violence, especially during the Anglo-Irish War and the following Irish Civil War, created even more of a social rift between pro- and anti-British sentiment, and did not allow for any middle ground to be taken in the question, at least according to Barry’s fictional presentation. As the side of anti-British, i.e. nationalist, sentiment becomes the dominant and majority party, the social exclusion and marginalization of people perceived as loyalists increases proportionally. Barry’s characters experience this shift in power as well as the social exclusion quite strongly. For most of Barry’s characters these changes are presented as having disastrous effects.

The sometimes drastic changes in the physical living conditions of some of Barry’s characters are almost always accompanied by a loss of social status within Irish society: a marginalization in and in some cases even the complete exclusion from said society on pain of death. Each text includes numerous examples of how Barry’s characters experience the social changes in Ireland and their oftentimes subsequent social exclusion and
marginalization. Each of the following subsections focuses on one of Barry’s main characters. The first part of each of the subsections outlines the most striking examples of how Barry’s characters come face to face with these changes and nationalist animosity. As far as possible the events chosen from each character’s life have been put into chronological order here to produce a more coherent picture of the character’s mental development although they sometimes stem from different texts and may appear in a different order in these texts.

Through the social changes in Ireland, Barry’s characters find their national identity repeatedly threatened. According to psychoanalytic theory, Barry’s characters are basically left with two options: they would either have to act in a way to protect their national identity, which would in this case mean some sort of action aimed at maintaining or reproducing the political status quo of pre-Anglo-Irish-War Ireland, or to form a new synthesis of identifications which would allow them to adapt to these changes, i.e. internalising the Irish nationalist ideology prevalent at the time. Clearly, this presents a psychological dilemma for Barry’s characters. Any action, political, violent or otherwise, aimed at a union between Britain and Ireland must certainly fail in its aim and ensure an even greater level of social exclusion after the creation of the Irish Free State – at least in a work of fiction that aspires to re-envision with some level of historical accuracy Irish society at the time. Option two, though, is an equally impossible task for Barry’s characters as the set of identifications shared by nationalists includes a disassociation from unionists, i.e. people like Barry’s characters - a requirement they can obviously never fulfil. Hence, Barry portrays his characters as left in a psychological trap, feeling their national identity permanently questioned during the revolutionary events and of course also after the creation of the Irish Free State but unable to adapt psychologically to the situation, as the exclusion of people like themselves is part of the set of identifications necessary to do so.

With part of their identity continuously questioned, all of them are shown to enter a state of identity diffusion which basically continues for the rest of their lives. Symptoms of this psychological state differ from character to character, but on the whole and in the light of their consequences can all be described as inherently destructive in nature for the characters themselves as well as for the people they hold dear. The second part of each of the following subsections shows how Barry portrays these symptoms in his texts and to what extent – if at all – these characters are shown to overcome their state of identity diffusion.

It is important to mention, however, that these psychological symptoms can hardly be analysed in isolation. As has been explained in part two, identity formation is a complex
process and a person’s identity is – in very broad terms – a conglomerate of a vast multitude of different identifications and also more than the sum of its parts. Any work of fiction that hopes to present realistic characters would have to allow for this fact in its character presentation. The result is that symptoms of identity diffusion in Barry’s texts cannot be studied solely in relation to the historical events presented as other non-historical experiences clearly affect the characters’ identity as well and, furthermore, determine how historical changes are experienced by these characters. Hence, while the following analysis focuses mainly on the way that Barry presents the effects of Irish nationalism on his characters’ sense of identity, other experiences are also included if they appear intricately connected to the characters’ state of identity diffusion. The following subsections first present the Dunnes and then the McNultys.

III.2.2.1.a Thomas Dunne faced with change

Beginning in 1913, certain events in Irish history or incidents in Thomas Dunne’s life connected to such events fundamentally threaten the identifications his identity is based upon, eventually leaving him in a state of mental instability. Although not necessarily the most crucial event but chronologically the first of these is his participation in the suppression of the riot in Sackville Street on 31 August 1913 during the time of the Dublin Lockout following the arrest of labour leader James Larkin. In contrast to Barry’s real relative, his fictional character Thomas Dunne is presented as having been the officer in command at that incident. In *The Steward of Christendom*, Smith, an orderly at Baltinglass county home, openly accuses Thomas of police brutality in no uncertain terms while washing him:

“Castle Catholic bugger that you were. [...] Chief superintendent, this big gobshite was, Mrs O’Dea, that killed four good men and true in O’Connell Street in the days of the lock-out. Larkin. Hah? His men it was [who] struck down the strikers. (*gentle hit with the drying cloth.*) [stage directions] Baton-charging. A big loyal Catholic gobshite killing poor hungry Irishmen. If you weren’t an old madman we’d flay you.”

(TSC 243)

28 See I.3 for further information on the Dublin Lockout, Larkin’s arrest and the ensuing riot in Sackville Street.
The nationalist accusation of police brutality, of the use of unnecessary force in clearing the gathering is obvious here. The orderly Smith makes it clear in his accusation that he feels that as commanding officer, Thomas Dunne was responsible for the charge and the unnecessary deaths. After Smith has left the room, Thomas tries to justify the use of force in Sackville Street to nurse Mrs O’Dea (cf. TSC 246). Passages in *A Long Long Way* suggest that he realised already on the day of the riot that the policemen were not fighting villains but ordinary people and that this realisation utterly questioned his own understanding of Irishness. The narrative situation in the novel is that of the personal narrative situation from the perspective of the main character, Willie Dunne. He remembers seeing his father the night after the Sackville Street riot sitting very still in the dark in the Dunnes’ quarters in the castle, still wearing his uniform and so deep in thought or shock that he would not answer his son’s questions (cf. ALLW 72f.).

After the event Thomas Dunne tries repeatedly to befriend a man called Lawlor, a carter at Dublin Castle. Lawlor was a follower of Larkin and attended Larkin’s speech that day. He was badly beaten over the head by policemen. Lawlor outright refuses all of Thomas’s proposals of friendship. To Thomas’s son Willie, his father’s stubbornness in pursuing this man’s friendship is initially a mystery (cf. ALLW 6-9). Choosing the personal narrative situation here, leaving the reader with a question the main character himself fails to answer, Barry succeeds in making the reader conceive of possible answers. His father’s behaviour the night after the event and his persistence in pursuing Lawlor’s friendship can at the very least be taken to symbolize that Thomas Dunne has strong feelings of remorse regarding his decisions and/or the police actions that day. In this way Barry presents his most loyalist character as emotional and empathetic to the hurt he has caused. It is a picture that could be viewed as intended to create sympathy for loyalists. As is ultimately revealed in the course of the play *The Steward of Christendom* as well as in the novels *A Long Long Way*, *On Canaan’s Side* and *Annie Dunne*, this event marks the start of a series of events in the course of which Thomas Dunne becomes further and further estranged from the general public he has vowed to serve and protect.

After being made Superintendent, Thomas Dunne is asked to have his picture taken in front of the entrance to the Dunnes’ new quarters at Dublin Castle. According to Dolly’s memories in the novel *On Canaan’s Side*, a big brown bear launches itself towards her father from the inside of the building. Even though the animal can be shot before having had the chance to do any real damage, Dolly can remember the look of shock on her father’s face as well as the urine stain on his uniform’s pants as he loses control of his bladder. The animal
had been stolen and led into Thomas Dunne’s new quarters as nationalist payback for his responsibility in dispersing the Sackville Street gathering (cf. OCS 15-23). In hindsight, Dolly seems certain that this moment and the ensuing sorrow never quite left her father for the rest of his life (cf. OCS 23).

Thomas Dunne’s national identity is further challenged in the form of doubts and opinions expressed by his own son, William. As a soldier at the end of his home leave, William takes part in the fighting at the General Post Office during the Easter Rising in 1916 on the side of the government forces. This experience as well as others made at the front cause him to question many of his convictions. Eventually, these doubts reach his father in the form of a letter. He expresses pity for a dead young rebel at the GPO and says he feels that the leaders of the Rising should not have been executed (cf. ALLW 139f.). When Willie eventually returns to Dublin on home leave and meets his father, the degree of his father’s anger becomes apparent. On meeting his son Thomas bursts into rage.

“They [the revolutionaries of the Rising] shot one of my recruits […] and brought havoc and ruckus to the city […] Through all these precious and important streets they put death and disorder. They put a mark on Dublin that can never be wiped away, a great, spreading stain of blood, Willie. And I read in a letter from my own son that he feels for them some stupid, ruinous feeling, that he has seen some bloody-handed gossoon killed in a doorway and wondered that he looked no older than himself. You stand here, Willie, in the uniform of your gracious king. Under solemn oath to defend him and his three kingdoms. You stand here in your own childhood home, your father a man that has strove to keep order in this great city and protect it from miscreants and the evil of traitors and rebels, for love of you all and in memory of your mother. […] Of course you think everything I am and all I’ve done is a heap of ould nothings. A big heaped-up mound of scraps and peelings! That the hens can peck over! Isn’t that it, Willie? With that treacherous gob on you!”

(ALLW 246f.)

For Thomas his son’s doubts represent the ultimate treachery. After all, he, Thomas, has sworn loyalty to the British Crown. His personal identity, which includes his national identity, is tightly connected to his position in the DMP. He sees himself as the steward, the preserver, of the status-quo, of Ireland as part of the Empire. Hence, in the Easter Rising, by rebelling against British rule, the rebels – the very people he had sworn to protect as policeman – also inevitably questioned his whole purpose in life and now his son shows
compassion for these people. His rage towards his son can thus be interpreted as the direct result of this psychological crisis.

Furthermore, his daughter Dolly eventually feels so disliked and excluded in Wicklow society that she decides to leave her father and emigrates to the USA. When questioned she admits that people shun her because of her father’s service in the DMP (cf. TSC 294 and AD 133). Thomas has always had a special regard for Dolly. Because his wife died while giving birth to her, he has always felt a special urge to protect her. That he should lose his favourite daughter on account of his position in the DMP affects Thomas’s psyche greatly. His national identity is not only threatened by the events around him but he has to realise that by defending his national identity and acting accordingly, he is personally responsible for driving his favourite daughter away. This realization weighs so heavily on his mind that according to Thomas’s daughter Annie, it breaks his heart (cf. AD 133).

III.2.2.1.b Thomas Dunne – rage and madness

Thomas’s wife Cecilia dies while giving birth to their daughter Dolly in Dalkey village (cf. TSC 273-275) and he moves on to Dublin where in the following 45 years of service he rises through the ranks of the Dublin Metropolitan Police stationed at Dublin Castle to become the chief superintendent of B Division with 300 men under his command. Quite proudly he states that he “had risen as high as a Catholic could go” (TSC 286). In the times of the First World War, the Easter Rising and the following Anglo-Irish War, Thomas Dunne lives with his children in his well-adorned quarters inside Dublin Castle as a Catholic high-ranking officer and proud and beloved single father (cf. AB 74f.).

The Thomas Dunne the audience actually gets to see in a performance of The Steward of Christendom is quite different from that proud high-ranking officer. At the age of seventy-five, Thomas is a patient in the county home in Wicklow seemingly drifting between moments of clarity and hallucination. The play starts with Thomas waking up one morning in the county home speaking in baby-tongue while remembering mornings in his childhood (cf. TSC 239f.). The entire play is a sequence of either conversations between him and the staff, the orderly Mr. Smith and the nurse Mrs O’Dea, or between him and visions created by his imagination, e.g. a recruit at Dublin Castle (cf. TSC 251ff.), his dead son Willie (cf.

Another inconsistency: in OCS the reasons for Dolly’s departure for the USA are more pressing. Besides the social exclusion she faces in Wicklow, her relationship to a Black and Tan and an IRA death sentence on his head force her to leave. Nevertheless, for an interpretation of Thomas Dunne’s state of mind, this inconsistency can be ignored. The end result - that he loses his favorite daughter Dolly and blames himself - is the same in both versions.
e.g. TSC 253) or his daughters (cf. e.g. 255f.). Thomas Dunne, who in his active days at the castle would wear a uniform brushed and starched by his daughters Annie and Maud and boots polished by his daughter Dolly (cf. TSC 247), now walks around “in a not-too-clean set of long johns” (TSC 240). Furthermore, after being washed by the orderly Mr. Smith and while being measured by Mrs O’Dea for a new suit to cover him, he admits to having given his old good suit to another of the patients in the county home, a patient who believes himself to be a dog and who has asked him for the suit in order to eat it (cf. TSC 242-244).

It is made clear that he does have moments of clarity in which he appears to understand his situation, e.g. he reprimands himself for talking to figments of his imagination and it is with this clarity that he remembers being taken to the county home and also why he was taken there (cf. TSC 252). After his time in the Dublin Metropolitan Police he lived with his daughters in Kiltegan for three years, a time in which he seems to have gradually slipped into bouts of rage and raving behaviour. It becomes clear from the conversations he has with the vision of his daughter Annie that he suffered bouts of extreme fear in which Annie had to sing to him to calm him down. These states of anxiety alternated with anger and aggression. In his ravings he seems to have driven away friends and neighbours (cf. TSC 271-273). Ultimately, his behaviour was thus one evening that Annie saw fit to have him institutionalised in the county home in Baltinglass, as she remembers in the novel *Annie Dunne*:

“My father in the old kitchen at Lathaleer raved and waved his ceremonial sword, with his shirt rended by himself and his trews bestained by urine, and cursed himself and my own life. I thought he would kill me, and when he reached the height of his raving he begged me to kill him, with his sword, across his poor addled head like a sword of Damocles.”

(AD 114f.)

The same episode is related in *The Steward of Christendom* played out on stage. Here, in Thomas’s memories, he is suffering from extreme fear thinking that Irish nationalists have come to kill him, which is why he asks his daughter to fetch him his sword, and when she refuses, trying to calm him down, he fetches it himself. Finally, when he does calm down,
he begs her to kill him with his sword (cf. TSC 297–299). Both versions paint the picture of a man who either suffers from paranoia or extreme bouts of rage or, in moments of clarity, realises his own social as well as mental degeneration and sees death as the only escape. Hence, Annie saw fit to have him institutionalised for his own safety.

In the novel *Annie Dunne*, Barry lets Annie as the first-person narrator describe the state of her father during his last years in that hospital and in almost poetical form the contrast between the man her father once was and the man she remembers visiting there is drawn:

“[I]n a room of that place [= Baltinglass county home], a veritable cell, my father descended, losing wits and sense, and even his clothes, which he gave away near the end to another man, a hero of his youth also incarcerated in that spot. And in I went one day and found my father in his long johns! I did not laugh, though I almost laugh now to think it. I suppose I did not see the humour then, because in truth there was none. It was all too bleak, his habit of command, as he called it, reduced to an ember of that fire, one coal in the grate, one fragment of coal, barely showing in the darkness.”

(AD 173f.)

In the last sentence of this memory Barry lets Annie use a metaphor to contrast the man her father once was with the man he has become. Here, Thomas Dunne’s commanding nature, the proud and dignified way he used to carry himself, his ‘habit of command’ which he had internalised from his early childhood onwards through watching his father as steward of Humewood, is the tenor of this metaphor. Fire is the vehicle here, so his commanding nature is attributed various traits associated with fire in the mind of the reader. It can be assumed to have shone brightly, been widely recognizable, and to have given off a heat which let people honour and fear, in other words respect him. In the same sentence Barry extends this metaphor to highlight the contrast between the chief superintendent of B Division Thomas Dunne and the senile old madman Thomas Dunne. Thomas’s ability to command respect in the last years of his life is contrasted to his earlier self by being depicted as a fragment of coal that is left from the once blazing fire. The light stemming from that

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31 For further information on the nature and components of metaphors, see e.g. “Metaphor.” *Handbook of Literary Terms: Literature, Language, Theory*. 2nd ed. Eds. X.S. Kennedy et al. New York: Pearson, 2009, 97.
fragment of coal can barely be seen in the dark, which then translates as there being almost nothing left of his commanding nature, of the man Thomas Dunne once was.

As family is very important to Thomas Dunne, his function as a single father and as protector of his family constitutes an integral part of his personal identity. While the nationalist movement gathers support and public opinion moves away from Home Rule to complete independence, Thomas finds himself repeatedly forced to choose between defending his sense of national identity and defending his family. By staying loyal to the Crown, he often causes misery for himself and members of his family. Herealises this problem himself towards the end of the First World War after receiving an emotional letter from his son. In his return letter, apologizing for his angry outburst at his son during Willie’s prior home leave, Thomas writes that he “cannot have the first thing [his service to the Crown] make me [him] forget the second thing [his promise to his wife to take care of their children]” (ALLW 291). However, although he acknowledges the need to do so, he does not seem to have a solution for the dilemma. Sadly, it appears that his son does not get to read his father’s declaration of love in the letter, as it is dated October 1918 and Willie dies on 3 October that year. The realization that his son died without reading his father’s apology only increases Thomas’s feelings of guilt. This becomes evident in his conversation with a vision of his dead son in his room at the county home near the end of his lifetime:

“‘Hello, child. Are you warm?’
‘It’s cold in the mud, Father.’
‘I know child. I’m so sorry.’”

(TSC 253)

At the end of his life the loss of his son and especially his unpardoned accusations directed at his son weigh heavily on his soul, which is why he begs his son for forgiveness. Annie describes her father in his last years at Baltinglass County Home as “a man stripped of all uniforms and honours, duties and family, even kings and country” (AD 194). He appears psychologically broken.

Thomas Dunne shows no signs of healing prior to his death. Thomas’s hallucinations and ravings only increase in strength until he dies in Baltinglass mental hospital. At the end of his life, he seems to question his own convictions probably as a result of his downfall,
which is symbolized by his complaints about the missing gold thread in his uniform. At the beginning of the play Thomas insists that nurse O’Dea uses some gold thread when making a new suit for him (cf. TSC 241). Even though he eventually settles for yellow thread, the colour seems to have a special importance for him. He tells Mrs O’Dea he would not mind wearing a dead man’s shoes, but he would like to be buried in a suit with yellow thread in it (cf. TSC 247). In his conversation with her, he reveals that there would have been gold in his old uniform had he been given the post of commissioner instead of only chief superintendent. However, this post, as he goes on to point out, was not available for Catholics under British rule. Though he explains this in a very matter-of-fact way, his statement that “[t]here was never enough gold in that uniform” (TSC 245) suggests that he feels treated unfairly in retrospect. Quite clearly he feels that there should have been gold in his uniform, meaning that now, looking back, he feels he may have deserved to make commissioner on account of his efforts and dedication. This image reoccurs again later in the play in his memories of giving the castle over to Michael Collins (cf. TSC 286). So here, at the end of his life after his sense of identity has been broken beyond repair, Thomas finally begins to readjust his own identifications by questioning his earlier treatment by the British. Nevertheless, the play does not allow for any more than that and the fact that Thomas starts to question his own identifications at the end of his life, identifications which have made him stay loyal to the British even at great personal loss, only seems to increase the impression of loss.

III.2.2.2.a Willie Dunne faced with change

Thomas’s son Willie is personally confronted with different views on Irishness very dramatically at the end of his home leave in 1916. Shortly before being shipped out from Dublin, the soldiers at the docks, one of whom is Willie, are gathered into groups and marched back towards the city centre, where they are set against the rebels who have just seized the General Post Office. So Willie takes part in the first day of combat of the Easter Rising as one of the Irish soldiers under British command. Along with the soldiers present Willie experiences reactions of anger and bewilderment (cf. ALLW 86ff.), which culminate in the confused question of a fellow soldier asking whether it really is “us against us” (ALLW 90).
In the course of the fighting in Dublin Willie comes face to face with a young rebel about his own age who first wants to take him prisoner but then is shot through the neck and ends up dying in Willie’s arms. In his utter innocence concerning nationalist aspirations at the time Willie asks the rebel whether he is German – a question which shows the true degree of Willie’s naivety in such matters – to which the rebel answers perplexedly that he is “an Irishman […] [, that they are] all Irishmen in here, fighting for Ireland.” (ALLW 92) Of course this comes as quite a surprise to Willie, who enlisted in the British army for exactly the same reason. Willie is a witness to the boy’s death which Barry describes in gory details.

“It [= the rebel’s blood] started to fill his throat the wrong way and the young man began to splutter and choke, spraying Willie’s face and tunic. He was coughing now for dear life, for dear life itself. The grip [on Willie’s arm] began to loosen, to loosen and loosen, till the fingers fell away entirely. The man’s head tipped back and he was gurgling, in a nasty, metallic way, like banging lid. Choke, choke, choke. The blood was thrown over Willie again and again like a fisherman’s net, again and again, and then the man was as still as a dead fish. There was still a light in his eyes, just for a moment, and the eyes were staring into Willie’s. And then the light was gone.”

(ALLW 93)

The slow fading of the rebel’s strength is expressed through the repetition of the verb ‘loosen’ with regards to his grip, his increasing difficulty to breathe as his lungs fill with blood, through the repetition of ‘choke’ and the man’s rising terror of death through the repetition of the phrase ‘for dear life’. Finally, the repetition of the word ‘again’ denotes the increasing degree to which Willie is covered in the man’s blood, which seems to increase by the same degree that the man’s life fades away. Using these repetitions Barry presents the actual consequences of civil war very realistically not only to Willie but to the reader as well.

Turning the events of the Easter Rising over in his head, Willie realises that especially “the young man dying had shocked him, shifted his heart about, though he had seen a hundred deaths and more” (ALLW 102). A man as young as Willie himself gives his life shooting at soldiers but says in his death that he was fighting for Ireland. This experience at the Easter Rising now, for the first time, shakes Willie in his convictions and opens his eyes to the existence of different, warring notions of Irishness, something to which he was blind hitherto. In this way, Barry’s text proposes that loyalists and nationalists often fought on different sides but for the same reason, a love of their home country.
Willie is also portrayed as being heavily influenced by his fellow soldiers, one of which is Jesse Kirwan, whom he meets for the first time shortly before the Easter Rising. When Willie meets him, Kirwan tells Willie that he has enlisted because he wants to do what John Redmond has asked the Irish men to do: to join the British war effort in the First World War and thus prove that the Irish are worthy of and ready for Home Rule (cf. ALLW 86). Especially in the first part of the novel, Willie Dunne appears utterly neutral towards these political perspectives. Although influenced by his father, he does not show a strong unionist conviction. In fact, he is quite ill-informed concerning all political matters and he never quite goes so far as to criticize any side openly. Only through Jesse Kirwan does Willie learn about the different factions. Through the historical overview Kirwan provides for Willie, the same is provided for the reader. As Willie and Jesse experience the beginning of the Easter Rising, they learn who the rebels are and Kirwan starts weeping. His reaction symbolises quite clearly the emotional reaction that the majority of the Irish population may have felt. In a way the character of Jesse Kirwan is the personification of Irish public opinion.

Not surprisingly then, after the leaders of the Easter Rising have been shot, Kirwan’s views change. He tries to talk to the other soldiers about freedom and rebellion and finally declares he will not fight for the British any longer, for which he is imprisoned and to be court-martialled. A priest, Father Buckley, asks Willie to visit Kirwan so they meet a second time. Kirwan tells Willie that he “won’t serve in the uniform that lads wore when they shot the other lads.” (ALLW 155) The execution of the leaders of the Easter Rising by the British has turned Jesse’s opinion like it did public opinion in Ireland at the time. If different views on the Rising had existed before, the execution shifted the scales in favour of the rebels. Jesse Kirwan goes on to tell Willie why he does not mind being shot.

“I thought it would be a good thing to follow John Redmond’s words. I thought for my mother’s sake, her gentle soul, for the sake of my own children, I might go out and fight for to save [sic] Europe so that we might have the Home Rule in Ireland in the upshot. I came out to fight for a country that doesn’t exist, and now, Willie, mark my words, it never will. Don’t think I’m not gobsmacked by that news. I know you don’t think like me. I don’t know what has brought you out here. Maybe you think that Ireland is just fine as she is and you are fighting for that. Well, Willie boy, that’s an Ireland that maybe did exist two years ago as you set out, but I doubt if it will much longer.”

(ALLW 155)

32 In the cited edition, part one comprises pp.3-97.
Clearly, Kirwan understands that the Rising but also the British behaviour in the aftermath has destroyed any chance of Home Rule for Ireland. Kirwan’s complete conviction poses a huge problem for Willie. Not only is Kirwan’s Ireland unattainable but Willie is told with the certainty of someone who is willing to die for his convictions that the Ireland Willie came out to defend cannot exist in the future either. For Willie, Kirwan’s speech holds the possibility that, should he survive the war, he may come home only to find that the home he went out to protect does not exist any longer, or – in other words – that Ireland will not be his home anymore.

Of all the soldiers he meets Willie feels closest to his sergeant-major Christy Moran. The sergeant-major is the men’s real leader trying to protect the privates under his command as best he can. Moreover, in time Moran turns into a father figure for Willie. Willie often longs to discuss any news with him like he used to do with his father before the war. The sergeant-major joined the army for non-political reasons. When his wife accidentally burned her hand, she could not work as a seamstress anymore and he did not have any work at all at the time the war broke out, so he joined the army to provide for his family (cf. ALLW 218f.). He admits to the men in his group that he does not much like the idea of fighting for the British because he feels that the British have always suppressed and exploited the Irish (cf. ALLW 26). Regarding the influence Christy Moran has on Willie’s views on the social changes in Ireland, Moran resembles a sort of counter-point to the afore-mentioned Jesse Kirwan. Though Moran is not a unionist at all, as can be seen in his rants about the English oppression of the Irish, the way he sees the changes in Ireland differs greatly from Kirwan’s perspective. Both men, Moran and Kirwan, share an unsympathetic view of the British when they join the army. However, while Kirwan is first saddened by the division the Rising causes among the followers of the independence movement and eventually, after the execution of the rebel leaders, sympathises with the rebels so much that he accepts death rather than fight for the British any longer, Moran reacts quite differently. When Willie tells Moran about his experience of the Easter Rising, Moran curses the rebels and asks Willie how they can cause such trouble in Ireland when soldiers like Willie and himself are in the war “risking our [their] fucking lives for them” (ALLW 103). Though Moran does not explicitly state that he is a supporter of Home Rule, it seems obvious from the above-mentioned that he feels betrayed by those people whose cause - the independence of Ireland - he is supporting by risking his life in the war as a soldier. Thus, to Moran, though he says he did not enlist for political reasons, the act of the Rising ultimately implies a complete disrespect on the rebels’ side for the sacrifice not only he but all Irish soldiers are making by
being in the war. Where Kirwan feels sad for all the Irish lives lost in the fighting in Dublin, Moran is angry at the disrespect for all the dead Irish soldiers this act symbolizes. Kirwan and Moran represent the two different, dominant nationalist reactions to the Easter Rising. As both characters are close to Willie, he is left to make sense of these contrasting views.

Willie is also exposed to a very disrespectful treatment when he is sent to report to British Major Stokes after the second gas attack on their position who then asks Willie “What’s wrong with you fucking Irish? Can’t you take a bit of gas?” (ALLW 117) The crude language as well as the question itself shows that the major lacks any kind of respect for the soldiers’ situation in general, for the horror they just encountered in the attack and the many casualties of that attack. In the course of their conversation, the major tells Willie, a soldier who has just come from the site of the battle, having survived a gas attack and standing there covered in blood, that he “smell[s] like hell” (ALLW 118), then goes on to make fun of Willie’s name (cf. ALLW 120f.), calls him a “[l]ittle Irish midget with a shitty arse” (ALLW 120f.) and basically sends Willie back to his company with the words “[t]hose fucking Irish” (ALLW 121). The lack of respect especially for the Irish volunteers can be seen as yet another factor calling Willie’s previous identifications into question.

III.2.2.2.b Willie Dunne – total disillusionment

As can be expected of any postmodern writer writing about either of the two World Wars – or probably any war at all for that matter – Barry deconstructs the chivalrous and heroic notions with which his main protagonist Willie Dunne enters the First World War by letting them clash with the bloody realities of war. The longer Willie serves as a soldier, the more he is disillusioned. Barry’s novel A Long Long Way, in which Willie Dunne is the main character, can be read as an individual piece of fiction and can be understood and interpreted as an anti-war novel. Willie’s experiences in the novel leading to his increasing self-doubt and disillusionment certainly substantiate such a reading as the following examples will show.

Just after they arrive in France, the reality of war starts to press in on Willie. The strength he felt when leaving Ireland, the optimism, courage and euphoria have been exchanged by pure fear. On the truck ride to the front Willie throws up his breakfast and

33 The differentiation between the terms ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ literature as clear-cut categories is often difficult as they share some characteristics. Disregarding this difficulty for the moment, the adjective ‘postmodern’ here shall be understood as referring rather to the time of writing, i.e. the second half of the twentieth century or any time after the end of the second World War.
having arrived in the trenches he starts shivering from fear (cf. ALLW 24). Quite quickly Willie starts to realise that he is not the brave hero he felt like upon leaving Ireland and his comment on the well-known cowardice of the German soldiers appears quite ironic in the light of his own behaviour in the face of danger. Often, he cannot keep his hands from shaking (cf. ALLW 30), and he almost regularly loses control of his bladder (cf. ALLW 34f., 181, 268). Barry uses coarse language narrating this ‘ritual’, e.g. when checking the fences in the field at night Willie “had slightly pissed himself […] and Willie felt the warm piss seep again onto his legs” (ALLW 34f.). Later, a fellow soldier calls Willie a “pissy cunt” (ALLW 182). This use of language underlines the completely mundane, unheroic character of the deed. There is nothing chivalrous about it. It is a bodily reaction to the pressure of intense fear. As such it presents a stark contrast to the picture of the brave soldier Willie had in mind when leaving for the war. This contrast is highlighted by Barry through repetition as Willie loses bladder control almost every time he is sent into action and Willie finds himself “standing […] for the umpteenth time in pissy boots” (ALLW 268).

Willie Dunne is made to face all the horrors of the war, among others the German gas attacks. Eventually there is a gas attack by the Germans on the trenches of Willie’s division. German soldiers sneak up in the gas clouds wearing gas masks and assault the Allied trenches. Again Willie loses control of his bodily functions and defecates into his pants out of sheer terror and again Barry uses crude unpoetic language to describe the act (cf. ALLW 112). The ensuing combat scene in their trench is similarly unheroic. It seems that only chaos, fear and instinct dictate all actions in that trench. It is by sheer coincidence that Willie kills the German soldier who has jumped into the trench and assails him. Trying to hold his gas mask in place he accidentally drives the spike he is still holding – and which he has all but forgotten about – into his assailant’s neck. Other fights witnessed by Willie seem similarly chaotic. His new captain, Captain Sheridan, is saved by a new recruit who only out of terror fires his rifle into a German soldier’s back (cf. ALLW 113f.).

The power fear has over Willie is not only seen in his bodily reactions or his purely instinctive fighting style but also in the description of his perception of his assailant. As the German soldier jumps into the trench, Willie perceives him as a “grey monster in a mask […] enormous […] as big as a horse” (ALLW 113). When the fighting is over, Willie realizes that the German soldier was in fact quite a small and thin person “like a whippet after all” (ALLW 115). This goes to show that the fear instilled by the gas, the memories of the last gas attack, and the sight of German soldiers leaping into their trench distorts Willie’s
perception of reality. More generally, it shows how any person’s perception can be altered by fear.

Not only does Barry describe the soldiers’ behaviour in battle as unheroic, implying fear and instinct as the driving forces of the soldiers’ actions not bravery, but he also describes the burials of the fallen soldiers as unbecoming of heroes.

“There were no picket fences, headstones, or the like. Just row after row of irregular beds, like a poor man’s vegetable plot, and into these loamy beds were lain the vanished soldiers [my italics, C.C.R.]. If they were stiff, the living men broke a limb here and there, with muttered apologies to the slain. They were clothed in dark army sacks”.

(ALLW 122)

The term ‘vanished soldiers’ appears especially important in connection to the theme of heroes. Where true heroes’ courage should be honoured in the form of elaborate burials at carefully chosen sites, these soldiers here are stuffed into small unmarked holes in the ground, and though some of the men burying them may whisper an apology, in general the corpses are treated with little respect. In a sense, they truly vanish from the earth and only continue to exist in the sad memories of their families at home.

It becomes quite clear that Barry presents the First World War in a drastically unromantic, but in its brutality and gruesomeness very realistic way. Before long Willie is utterly disillusioned about the war. He despairs as he experiences day after day of fighting without any sign of approaching victory, without seeing any real change.

“The war would never be over. He had come out for poor Belgium and to protect his three sisters. He would always be there. […] The generals would count the dead men and mark their victories and defeats and send out more men, more men. For ever more. […] And one more altered soul inside that winter in Flanders.”

(ALLW 203)

All Willie sees is that as the war progresses many men die and more men come to replace them and the weight this bears on him is expressed stylistically in the repetition of the phrase
‘more men’. The word ‘more’ is even repeated a third time in the phrase ‘for ever more’ and while this phrase can be taken to mean ‘always’, it also carries a double meaning implying ‘always (= for ever) more men’. This reading of the triple repetition suggests how depressing the situation is to Willie and how little hope he has for himself or the end of the war, which he, like so many others, believed would come in early 1915 when he enlisted. The last sentence in this quote suggests that something inside Willie has changed, that he no longer holds the same convictions he held when he set out to war. Willie is shown as finally seeing himself as only a tiny part of this endless stream of men, who through their continuous replacement and disrespectful treatment in death appear ultimately interchangeable and equally unimportant, equally worthless. He is presented as one more changed man. This can be interpreted to mean that this alteration, a loss of belief and hope, is ultimately experienced by all soldiers in that war.

Thus, without a doubt, A Long Long Way can be read purely as an anti-war novel. However, this would disregard many of the underlying implications of the novel. Not only does it examine in literary form the disillusionment of soldiers in general but more specifically it portrays the exceptional situation of the Irish soldiers in that war. Like all soldiers they were faced with the reality of the war as detailed above but, despite the disrespectful treatment by British officers, they were additionally influenced by the social changes in their home country, which were going to leave many of them seemingly nationless. Quite close to end of the novel and thus also close to the end of Willie’s life, which he is made to feel coming before the bullet actually hits him, Willie realises that through these years of war he has become “a man with bits of himself broken” (ALLW 282). As Willie is physically whole, it is clear that he refers to a psychological injury. He feels like something inside of him, let it be called soul or sense of self or identity, has been damaged beyond repair.

Influenced by Jesse Kirwan and Christy Moran, partly sympathising with all points of view, Willie feels confused by the social changes in Ireland. He voices his initial confusion and his sympathy for the Home Rulers who fight beside him but also with the rebels who were shot, disapproving of their executions in a letter to his father, which causes their falling-out. When he has to return to the front, the falling-out with his father weighs heavily on Willie’s mind. The lack of respect especially for the Irish volunteers in the war can be seen as yet another factor calling Willie’s previous identifications into question. Nevertheless, “somehow he felt that it [= the abuse from Major Stokes] was all right. Given the new world that held sway over all things. And given that he himself, Willie Dunne, had
had to kill a man.” (ALLW 121) Willie is portrayed as feeling that these insults have lost their meaning. In fact, all insults have lost their meaning for him. On the one hand Willie accepts the insults silently out of regret over having had to kill a man but also because of a certain feeling of disconnectedness with the world in the light of the recent changes in his home country. In this sad way Barry’s text suggests that the social changes in Ireland have added a second layer of disillusionment for the Irish soldiers.

As the war goes on and public opinion in Ireland shifts in the aftermath of the executions of the Easter Rising’s leaders, disrespect slowly turns into mistrust. According to Willie’s sergeant-major Christy Moran, the British eventually believe all Irish soldiers to be rebels despite their sacrifices in the war. Eventually, towards the last year of the war, Willie can even read in the papers that the Irish soldiers in the army cannot really be trusted (cf. ALLW 281). Like hearing the words of Major Stokes, reading these words while having given four years of his life to fight for the British must have a disastrous effect on Willie’s sense of national identity, previously based as it was on the strong ties between the Irish and the British, ties which included a relationship of mutual loyalty. This loyalty he sees betrayed now, not just by the people in his home country but by the British as well.

While the soldiers were cheered on in the streets of Dublin when they left for the war in 1914 and 1915, the treatment of Irish soldiers by Irish civilians also changed dramatically in the course of the war. This change in public appreciation is incorporated in the novel as well. Willie notices that the number of volunteers from Ireland decreases ever more. As Willie is on home leave towards the end of 1917, he notices the change in general public sentiment towards the war and the Irish soldiers fighting in it.

“Dublin was no longer like a city intent on war. There were few uniforms about of men on furlough. In the streets he had seen troops, right enough, but they were soldiers about other matters, shipped in from England.”

(ALLW 253)

The fact that Willie sees fewer Irish soldiers on home leave shows that ever fewer Irish men enlist in the army. It is proof that public support of the war must have decreased. Moreover though, it seems that public support has not only lessened but rather changed into general opposition. The English soldiers on the streets of Dublin are a sure sign of this. The ‘other
matters’ given in the text can only really be understood to mean instances of rebellion or the increased threat of them through nationalism.

Willie experiences the nature of this change himself when, wearing his uniform, he encounters a group of Catholic boys in Dublin. He is shocked when he is hit by a stone thrown by one of the boys. Then one of the boys runs up to him and spits in his face (cf. ALLW 253f.), which is followed by the boys first laughing at him and chanting “‘Fucking Tommies, fucking Tommies, fucking Tommies, go home!’” (ALLW 254). Willie is taken aback and mutters to himself “‘I am home, you little bastards’” (ALLW 254). This exchange clearly shows Willie’s dilemma.

The disdain of the Irish population towards the British and consequently also the Irish serving in the British army is shown in the novel to increase even more under the threat of conscription towards the end of the war, as an officer tells Willie while he is in hospital (cf. ALLW 274). Eventually Willie realises that “[s]omething had come to an end before even the war was over.” (ALLW 275) It seems clear that the ‘something’ that was lost is meant to represent the idea of Home Rule for Ireland. Although Willie did not himself enlist with the aim of securing Home Rule for Ireland, he acknowledges that the majority of soldiers in his battalion did and that now, in the face of changed public opinion in Ireland, this sort of independence is no longer an option. With this comes the sad realisation that all those Irish lives that were lost in the war so far have been lost in vain (cf. ALLW 275).

Experiencing the horrors of war and the hateful treatment at home, Willie comes to ask himself whether these Irish soldiers are to be viewed as heroes or as fools (cf. ALLW 185). His sergeant-major described them before as “ruined men […] wretched fools of men come out to fight a war without a country to their name, the slaves of England and the kings of nothing” (ALLW 134) and eventually, as Willie witnesses their deaths in the war, their treatment by the British and by the Irish at home, he comes to agree with that view. Towards the end of the war, his own convictions have all but died and are described as “[a]n ember maybe only remaining, for his father’s sake” (ALLW 279) and he simply cannot see a future for himself anymore.

“He knew he had no country now. He knew it well. Finally the words of Jesse Kirwan had penetrated deep into the sap of his brain and he understood them. All sorts of Irelands were no more, and he didn’t know what Ireland there was behind him now. But he feared he was not a citizen, they would not let him be a citizen. […]"
“How could a fella [sic] go out and fight for his country when his country would dissolve behind him like sugar in the rain? How could a fella [sic] love his uniform when that same uniform killed the new heroes […]? How could a fella [sic] like Willie hold England and Ireland equally in his heart, like his father before him, like his father’s father, like his father’s father’s father, when both now would call him a traitor […]?”

(ALLW 286f.)

This very clearly shows the psychological dilemma that Willie increasingly feels himself placed in. On the one hand he sees himself as an Irishman. After all, he went out to war only to prove the worth of an Irishman. On the other hand, returning to Ireland the very people he believed to be fighting for treat him with open hatred, for example the boys in Dublin. Hence, he finds himself increasingly disrespected and mistrusted by the British soldiers and at the same time cast out by the people in his home country. By the British he is treated poorly because they see him as an Irish rebel and by the Irish he is treated poorly because they see him as a British slave. The quote shows clearly that Willie knows he will not be welcome in the Ireland that exists now. Furthermore, it shows that he feels the Ireland that exists towards the end of the war is quite different from the Ireland he left in 1915. In terms of identity, Willie realises that the identifications which together form the Irish national identity towards the end of the war are identifications which he does not hold. In fact, some identifications seem to be based on the exclusion of anything British, which obviously includes himself since he has served in the British army. So his realisation that he has no country anymore symbolizes his perceived loss of national identity.

Barry further highlights Willie’s state of identity diffusion when he lets Willie comment on the homeless people in France. He is portrayed as feeling jealous of them saying that “at least they were wandering and lost in their own land.” (ALLW 287) He feels he is doing the same but not in his own country. More to the point, he is also wandering and lost but without a country to call his home. The phrase ‘wandering and lost’ feels like a poetic description not only of his physical state but also of his psychological one. Barry presents Willie here as realising that at this point the life he once envisioned for himself in Ireland is already over, whether he survives the war or not. In the end, William Dunne is shot at the front after having been fully disillusioned and psychologically broken by the war and the changes in Ireland.
III.2.2.3.a Dolly Dunne faced with change

For Willie’s sister Dolly, the dancing bear incident at Dublin Castle is one of her earliest memories of public opinion turning against her family. Nevertheless, in time she is affected by the social changes in Ireland in a far more immediate way. After the war Dolly’s husband Tadg joins the Black and Tans. A death sentence is put on Tadg’s and Dolly’s heads by the IRA and both flee to the USA with the help of Dolly’s father (cf. OCS 49-51). As it turns out though, even by crossing the Atlantic Ocean they cannot leave the Irish conflict behind. Rather, it follows them in the person of Mr. Nolan, whose real name is Robert Doherty. Even before Dolly and Tadg arrive in the USA, he has been instructed by the IRA in Ireland to kill them both. Having arrived in the USA, Dolly and Tadg give false names and attempt to live quiet lives. However, Mr. Nolan eventually finds them in Chicago, just when Dolly believes they may have escaped the fears of their old life. In an art gallery he comes upon them and shoots Tadg at close range. In spite of his instructions, he leaves Dolly alive and flees the scene. Having shadowed her all his life – and hers – he admits to her at the end of his life that it was for her beauty that he could not bring himself to shoot her, too (cf. OCS 241-243). To Dolly, however, the murder of her husband Tadg is a clear sign that she has not succeeded in leaving the death threat behind – a realisation that will inform all her future decisions.

III.2.2.3.b Dolly Dunne – extreme paranoia

When Mr. Nolan confesses to murdering Tadg on his deathbed decades later, Dolly answers him that he should have killed her, too, that by killing Tadg, he took away her life as well (cf. OCS 243). Looking back on her life, Dolly has come to realise that this scene in the gallery was the beginning of a life which would never be free of fear. Thinking of Tadg she feels that even before they escaped to the USA “with a death sentence on his head, he [Tadg] felt a little murdered already, at least his life greatly altered.” (OCS 70) It turns out that the same is true of her, especially after she is forced to realise when Tadg is killed that she is not safe in the USA. Dolly remembers that inside the art institute right before Mr. Nolan entered and shot Tadg, she had an epiphany:

“I loved my father and my sisters and the memory of my brother, yet would most likely never see Ireland again. But there was this new ease with Tadg, this pleasant wandering, and surely now we would be married soon, and both of us glad that it would be so. I suddenly for that second, and maybe never so clearly again, knew who
I was, or thought I did, and knew who Tadg was, my husband [...] In my so-called clarity I thought I was lucky. I felt lucky.”

(OCS 74f.)

At this moment, Dolly feels that she was able to leave her troubles in Ireland behind, that despite having to leave her family and her home behind, the USA offers her a happy life together with Tadg and one free of fear. At that moment, she looks towards the future with a hopeful eye. Ironically, just a few minutes later Mr. Nolan kills Tadg and by doing so takes away her hopes and ultimately dooms her to a life ruled by fear. Looking back at her life, Dolly comes to realise that, like a force of nature, fear has come into every decision she has made since then, every relationship she has entered, that it has permeated almost every memory of her life.

Having run from the scene of the crime in terror, her fear makes her board the train which lets her end up in Cleveland, where by sheer luck she can find work as a servant. Once she has worked there for some time and even re-established contact with her sister Annie in Ireland, she is shocked to find Mr. Nolan one day watching her as she comes back from grocery shopping. Instantly, she is reminded of the man who killed Tadg in the art gallery and is thus overcome with extreme fear. Mr. Nolan admits to her later that it was in fact him and that again he couldn’t bring himself to kill her (cf. OCS 243). However, the shock of seeing him sits deep with her and the fear of him follows Dolly all her life. She can never quite be completely free of the death threat.

For example, after Dolly has married the policeman Joe Kinderman, she would really like to tell her sisters back home about him, but she restrains herself because she is afraid the news might get about and give the IRA an incentive to renew their efforts. As she puts it the “man in the shadows gave [...] [her] pause.” (OCS 137) It is obvious that ‘the man in the shadows’ literally refers to Mr. Nolan, whom she remembers getting out of the car that time and watching her standing in the shadows of the oak trees lining the street (cf. OCS 107). Metaphorically speaking however, ‘the man in the shadows’ represents more than just Mr. Nolan. He is merely the executive body of an organisation which is known for its covert violent assassinations, the IRA. Hence, in a way, when Dolly speaks of her fear of ‘the man in the shadows’, it is not just her fear of the man who killed her husband but the fear of the IRA as a whole, and it is this fear which causes her to restrain her wish to tell her sisters her great news.
All her life in America, Dolly is fearful of everyone Irish for fear of how they may think of her even when these people work for the law. When Joe is believed dead, his last partner arranges a ceremony in his memory. Despite all this, Dolly is still afraid of him for the simple reason that he is “a real Irishman, from Ireland” (OCS 161), which just goes to show how much fear has influenced her general attitude towards people. Looking back, Dolly remembers that to her, “every stranger [was] a possible demon or bear, till they proved otherwise.” (OCS 181) She is never able to forget her past. Her experiences have permanently altered her mind, her view of herself but especially the way she perceives and treats other people.

Joe Kinderman, when telling Dolly his own life story once they meet again, admits to her that he left her because he was so afraid of how Dolly would react when their baby was black. He was born quite fair-skinned in an otherwise mostly dark-skinned family and had taken to using lotions to keep his skin a light colour. He tells Dolly that in a way he was living a lie, pretending he was something he was not. Incidentally, he calls it living “in a big box of fear” (OCS 199). Ultimately, this was the reason he left her. Ironically, this is exactly the kind of mind-set that Dolly bears herself for most of her life. At the end of her life, envisioning it again, the author lets Dolly describe the strong influence fear has had on her life in the following metaphor:

“Fear is a force like seasickness, could you call it lifesickness, a terrible nausea caused by dread, creeping dread, that seems to withdraw a little in dreams while you sleep, but then, just a few moments after waking, rushes back close to you, and begins again to gnaw at your simple requirement for human peace. Gnawing, gnawing, with long ratlike teeth. No one can live through that without changing.”

(OCS 60)

Like a rat feasting on its prey, fear diminishes a person’s inner peace until all that is left is fear. Looking back, Dolly finds that even in times when she disregarded her fears, this sort of disregard did not mean that she forgot her fears but it was merely defiance in the face of a never vanishing threat (cf. OCS 140). Taking into account how much fear Dolly has to endure over the course of her life, it can be assumed with some certainty that Dolly also talks

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34 This is a reference to the dancing bear which attacked her father in front of their quarters at Dublin Castle. As a symbol it represents the nationalist threats against her family.
about herself when she says near the end of it that fear changes people. It has certainly changed her. In fact, she strongly believes it has changed her so much that it has even influenced her son through her, that it was not his experiences as a US soldier in the Vietnam War which were responsible for his mental problems but the fear she carried within herself all her life:

“I wondered if it was my fault, whether the nature of my life had affected him, innocent as he was. As soon as I had that thought, it shook my hand, and moved in with me. […] I thought I had caused, if not the demise, at least the demolition of my son’s inner spirit, his secret self. I had contaminated him […] The poison, the extract of deadly nightshade in me, was history.”

(OCS 205f.)

In her mind, she blames herself for her son’s derangement after the war. She cannot shake off the idea that somehow, unconsciously, her fear-filled mind may have infected her son’s mind with a similar illness, causing him to live like a hermit secluded from society. Although she acknowledges rationally that his experiences in the Vietnam War must have played a crucial role in his change, Dolly cannot free herself of the idea that ultimately she is to blame. As she puts it, the idea ‘moved in with her’, which basically means she could never completely erase it from her mind.

In hindsight, Dolly feels that her feelings of fear have influenced most of her choices in life. Obviously, the United States of America do not turn out to be the promised land for Dolly either. The novel’s title alludes to the idea that for many European emigrants, the USA may have seemed like the promised land, like Canaan for Abraham in the Old Testament (King James Bible, Gen. 12:1-5). Dolly is angry that the IRA “wouldn’t allow […] [her and Tadg] to cross into Canaan, […] and kill him [Tadg] on Canaan’s side. The land of refuge itself.” (OCS 83) She later admits to herself that “Ireland nearly devoured” (OCS 127) her. As her identity is threatened, she is kept from creating a new sense of national identity in the USA by her immense fear, which is in a very real sense kept awake by Mr. Nolan. In the end, Dolly professes ignorance on this subject of Ireland, perceiving Ireland only as “a huge graveyard, with […] [her] father and sisters buried in it.” (OCS 140) Professing her ignorance implies that she sees her life as mostly determined by forces and circumstances outside her sphere of influence. Ultimately, she seems to view herself as an innocent victim
in the process of change in Ireland, burdened by a life dominated by fear. When finally, with Mr. Nolan’s death, the main source of her fear disappears, she seems to realize that though gone now, it has left her with nothing much to live for anymore. She has lost all her loved ones and blames these losses on herself but more so on her lifelong fear. It really has ‘devoured’ all her chances of a happy life.

Ultimately, this realization has made her consider suicide and the novel ends with her purchasing some sleeping pills with the intent to use them for this purpose. The way she feels unburdened all of a sudden when she comes home carrying the pills suggests that now she has made her decision to go through with her plan and thus already looks forward to an unburdening in death (cf. OCS 252-256). As poetically as this is written, it should be noticed that her final suicide is also the ultimate consequence of her lifelong fear, which in turn was a consequence of the historical events in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century and her place within Irish society at that time.

III.2.2.4.a Annie Dunne faced with change

Annie’s life is also drastically and unequivocally altered by the social changes in Ireland. Basically, there are three factors which are presented as influencing this character psychologically: the guilt she feels on account of her treatment of her father, her unrequited love for her sister Maud’s husband Matt and her dependence on her cousin Sarah. These three seemingly separate influences have in common that they are all presented as being – at least in Annie’s mind – more or less direct consequences of the social changes in Ireland.

Whenever she thinks of her father, even reminiscing about good, happy moments, she also seems to come inevitably to remember the end of his career and the psychological deterioration it caused him, remembering his transformation from proud protector of the city to raving mental patient. Her father’s development has a great effect on her. After all, it was she who took care of him after he had lost his post in Dublin. Together they moved into a house in Lathaleer where Thomas’s mind slipped ever further. When she is old and living with her cousin, she still remembers him raving and how she finally had to put him into the mental hospital. Her memory of dropping her father off at the mental hospital is a recurring image in the novel. The fact that she thinks of that moment so often implies that it is a very important moment in her life. In fact, although she seems to acknowledge the necessity of
the act seeing that he posed a danger to her and to himself towards the end, she cannot but blame herself.

“Lathaleer was a site of sore suffering for me and him, and the poor end of it all was him bundled into Matt’s car on a wicked, cold Sunday, and driven down to the county home like an old bullock sent straight to the glue factory, there to be rendered down slowly by the havoc of his mind, and the indifference of his keepers. And at last, the cowardice of his daughter. Oh, well I know it. And God will curse me for it at day’s end.”

(AD 181ff.)

The simile of the bullock which is sent to the glue factory proves that she does not believe in treatment at the hospital. Like the bullocks which are killed in the glue factory, she believes she has sent her father to die in that place. She feels she has abandoned her father when he needed her, which is why she blames herself (cf. AD 174).

Having left her father in the county home in Baltinglass, Annie came to live with her sister Maud and Maud’s husband Matt. Her sister, Maud, suffered from a mental illness which in time would not allow her to leave her room and distance her from any real-life matters to the extent that she spoke only nonsense (cf. AD 2, 49). Annie took her sister’s place in all household matters. She would care for the children and her brother-in-law, Matt, do the washing, the cooking and all other such chores. However, the truth is that she did not only have a sister’s love for Matt. In fact, she felt a strong longing for him, a desire she still remembers vividly when she lives with her cousin Sarah.

“I have watched him secretly from behind a tree, and loved something about him then, the peace and the power of him, the unsmiling happiness. It was thus that Maud encountered him those long years ago in St Stephen’s Green in the heart of the city […]. I understood what took a hold of her. Even now when she is dead and he is surely sixty-six years of age, and all their kisses done, age falls away from him when he is painting, time falls away”.

(AD 112)
Although explicitly Annie only admits to understanding her sister’s admiration for Matt, her ability to understand her sister’s feeling in connection with the fact that she used to watch him secretly herself indicates quite strongly that she in fact had a similar feeling for Matt herself. Part of her may have been quite jealous of her sister when she married him. In the days when Maud was confined in her room due to her illness and Annie had taken over the household, she took a certain pleasure of being with Matt. Living with him in this way, doing the chores, taking care of the children and with Maud never seen, she felt like she actually was Matt’s wife, like he had married her and not Maud and she cherished these moments. In her memory Annie calls this “a queer little dream of peace and quietude, in which there was no Maud.” (AD 160) When her sister finally did die and Matt and Maud’s children had grown up, Annie was hopeful that now she might replace her sister in all aspects of married life as she admits to herself now, years later. However, instead of making Annie his wife, Matt started going out with an art student of his called Anna and eventually told Annie in quite clear, unemotional terms that he and Anna would get married and that Annie would then have to find somewhere else to live (cf. AD 160f.).

Of course, her unrequited love for her sister’s husband can hardly be seen as a result of the changes in Irish society at the time. However, for Annie, her inability to find love in life is quite clearly a result of these changes. As a girl Annie falls ill with polio and is left with a bowed back (cf. AD 12). According to Annie, this disfiguration was partly the cause of her loveless life. However, living in Dublin she still carried that dream of marrying a young officer inside her. She always hoped that “there might be a man in the end who might overlook […] [her] damnable hump and take the risk of loving […] [her]” (AD 80). With their social status changed and her father retiring, however, she first became the guardian of her decrepit father and then of her sister’s husband and children and her dream of finding love in Dublin died. So, for her, there is at least an indirect connection between the social changes in Ireland and her failure to find someone who loves her. In the end she feels the social changes forced her to exchange the beautiful fireplaces in Dublin Castle and her hope for love for the company and the “meagre house” (AD 74) of her spinster cousin Sarah, on whose small farms she finds refuge.

III.2.2.4.b Annie Dunne – paranoia and bitterness

Annie’s ancestors served as stewards of Humewood, and she describes them as “kings of the labouring men” (AD 41) on account of this position. This and her father’s position as chief superintendent in the DMP used to form the two pillars of her family pride during her
childhood. Like her father, she must then have felt all her identifications questioned in the course of the changes in Ireland. Analysing the text of the novel closely, it can be concluded that Barry made his character Annie Dunne thus that she has not or only partly been able to make new identifications congruent with the new notions of Irishness. This becomes quite clear in the way she speaks about the country’s development.

“[M]y brother Willie died away at the old war in 1917 […] when everything was otherwise, and Ireland was another Ireland altogether. There have been other Irelands too since, that have also passed away, so I must not entirely complain. But the world of my youth is wiped away, as if it were only a stain on a more permanent fabric. I do not know where this Ireland is now. I hardly know where I am.”

(AD 95)

Of course, the country itself, the soil and the stones of the island, basically its territory, have not been replaced. When talking about Ireland, Annie speaks of the Irish nation. This imagined community was – according to her – reimagined multiple times in her lifetime. Her own version, the version she identified with in her youth, was replaced by other versions as the set of identifications forming the Irish national identity changed repeatedly. The fact that she admonishes herself not to complain still shows that she feels she does have something to complain about. Her national identity has been questioned and she shows symptoms of identity diffusion: fear, jealousy, bitterness and a strong mistrust of people.

Her former family pride, however hurt, explains why she is inclined to look down her nose at some people, e.g. her and Sarah’s elderly neighbour Mary Callan or the handyman Billy Kerr, when in truth she herself is entirely dependent on Sarah’s mercy (cf. e.g. AD 20, 22, 26-30). However, she clearly realises that through the changes in Ireland there is no foundation for her family pride anymore.

“There are some who remember such things [= her family’s history] in their own way. They like to see me hanging on the mercy of Sarah, if that is what I am doing. They like to see a woman with nothing between herself and the county home but the kindness of a cousin, a woman whose relatives were kings of Kelsa one time. Poor Annie Dunne, they must say, if they are kind. They will find other things to say, if they are not. Well, if we were something then, I am nothing now, as if to balance such magnificence with a handful of ashes.”

(AD 20)
Through those changes Annie’s life has been stripped of all the comforts she enjoyed as a child. Moreover, though, besides these material losses, she believes that the former respect for her family has turned into glee at the sight of a Dunne having sunk so low, as the quote proves quite plainly. So she is presented as feeling constantly mocked by most people around her, and in turn, while showing sadness at her loss, she also seems very bitter and does not trust other people.

Billy Kerr exactly voices Annie’s fears when he tries to threaten her to keep out of his relationship with Sarah.

“You look down your ugly nose at me, but what are you? Little people that were once big people are all the more little now for that. And, if it was your father was the big noise, wasn’t he a big, traitorous arse-licker to a foreign king? And what are you like here, only a serving woman? No, no – you do not even get a wage from Sarah. You are a slave, a slave to work. […] no one in the world likes you.”

(AD 149)

Annie is shown to believe, as Billy says, that no one likes her and that, should Sarah and Billy get married, she will “be thrown away […], unloved, unwanted, and unseen.” (AD 129) What this prospect means to her becomes clear when she reflects on what she would like to tell Sarah.

“I am trying to tell her, what? That time has thrown me from my own family, that Matt has thrown me from my former niche, that Kelsha is my last refuge, my last stand, that the half of her warm bed is all my desire, that I will be glad to go to my grave from this small yard […] That always I have expected to be cast off, discarded, removed … My hurts and thoughts discounted. That we have, she and I, not a marriage of bodies but a marriage of simple souls, two women willing to do the work of a hard subsistence farm […] recognizing that there is no honey of a man here, no strong, hard limbs of man to crush us underneath him, and give that crazy pleasure that we have only heard tell of, that holy ecstasy that was not accorded to us […] But, none of these things I utter. None. Because I cannot get the words out”.

(AD 127)
This quote shows as much her fear of being cast out as it shows how bitter and sad, how cheated she feels because she was never allowed to experience the love of a man, neither physically nor spiritually. It also shows, however, how much she has already accepted this fate.

Although she herself has become very fond of her cousin Sarah, she just cannot believe that Billy’s interests towards Sarah are genuinely heartfelt. Rather, she strongly believes that Billy is mainly interested in gaining control of her farm through marriage. After all, thus run Annie’s thoughts, for a handyman like Billy, Sarah’s property has quite some value. She says so to her cousin Winnie and also, not being able to hide her fear, to Sarah herself (cf. AD 128). Her thoughts are clearly also influenced by a degree of jealousy of Sarah but also of other women. Of course, her sister Maud who married the man she desired and had his children is one example, just like the art student that Matt chose over her. Another object of her jealousy is her sister Dolly, who, in Annie’s words, “was prettier than many a lacquered film star” (AD 133) and who would be called on by many of the young soldiers and policemen in Dublin Castle. Annie takes it upon herself to protect her sister from any improper match and is as a result is accused of jealousy by her (cf. AD 21). Moreover, not only did Dolly draw all the young men’s attention, she also came first in her father’s heart. When Annie visited him in the county hospital, he oftentimes called her Dolly in his delirious state of mind (cf. AD 151) or, when recognising her, asked her repeatedly about her sister’s whereabouts instead of caring about her well-being (cf. AD 174). This seems unfair, as it is Annie who cared for him all those years after his retirement and who repeatedly visited him.

Thus, it seems clear that in her life Annie has forever only been allowed the role of guardian: first of her sister, then of her father and later of Maud and then Maud’s children. Each time, her own wishes were inconsequential and she was left alone and homeless in the end and she feels the exact same thing is going to happen again once Billy marries Sarah. Her anger at never being granted the joy of having her wishes fulfilled finally becomes evident in her reaction to the boy, her ward for the summer, who has found her birthday present for him, the green fire engine, prematurely and is skating around the yard on it one day.

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35 Annie also admits her jealousy of Maud to Sarah in a conversation (cf. AD 77).
“‘It [= the green wooden toy fire engine],’ I say, lifting his foot off the toy, and lifting the toy from the gutter, ‘is your birthday present.’

He basks me in a look of entire joy. But I crush that joy under the heel of my stare. ‘It was your birthday present,’ I say. ‘For it is no more. Now you have no present. Now I have gone to Baltinglass and spent a month’s money on this joke, and now it is destroyed, and you have no surprise.’

Of course, even as I allow my anger reign, […] I know it is not him who will have no surprise, but me who will have no pleasure in fetching the present in to him, on the bright morning of his birthday. […] my words strike harsh clouds across his eyes, I dim his lights for him. I can see it. I can feel it. But it does not stop me. I know I am murdering him, because I understand the small language of his looks. […] The smaller voice inside me cries out, mercy, grant him mercy, Annie. But some other loud, vicious, uncontrollable thing calls. I am as near to striking him, even to kicking, as puts a true fear into me.”

(AD 176)

Having carefully picked out a birthday present for the boy and then seeing it used by the boy in such a way makes her anger at the boy partly understandable. However, even part of herself is aware that her anger is out of proportion and she hints at the reason for that: by finding the toy himself the boy has unintentionally robbed Annie of the pleasure she was hoping to have in giving it to him. For Annie this is prototypical of her whole life. Now that she is under the constant threat of being turned even from Sarah’s house, of “losing […] [her] last niche in the world” (AD 26), the boy’s unintentional disregard for her plans and hopes makes Annie lose control of her anger. It seems like the feelings she has tried to bottle up over the years every time her own plans were thwarted culminate here in this moment in her rage at the boy. This ‘thing’ which she feels raging inside her can be interpreted as her hunger for revenge, for the world to acknowledge her for once. Her desire to be acknowledged by others is a normal psychological phenomenon. According to Erikson and others, not only one’s national identity but one’s identity as a whole is based on the necessity of being recognised by others. To Annie it seems that in the course of her life, her thoughts, feelings, hopes and dreams have never been recognised. She admits to herself that she “do[es] not understand the nature of […] [her] fate, […] [her] ill luck, […] [her] true place in the world” (AD 163) and that she feels merely like “a shadow among shadows” (AD 43).

In psychological terms this is the consequence of the questioning of what can only be called her identity. In short, she experiences a state of identity diffusion. Her intense rage in the situation quoted above can be seen as symptomatic of her psychological state at that moment, while other symptoms are certainly her strong mistrust of people and her bitterness.
In contrast to William and Dolly, however, their sister Annie appears to be able to overcome her state of identity diffusion with the help of her cousin Sarah and her task of looking after her niece and nephew. At last, as the plot of the novel is nearing its climax after the boy, her nephew, has disappeared after another fight with her, Annie starts to question some of her prejudices. When knowledge of the boy’s disappearance spreads, the entire neighbourhood shows up at Annie’s doorstep ready to help and she notices that “there is a district. It is […] [herself] that has no district, no sense of it, but it is there” (AD 210). Annie here starts to doubt her previously held prejudice that she is not accepted in the district. With all these people showing up to help her, she understands that in fact she is seen as part of the community there and that it was mostly herself - her shame, her anger, her jealousy, her prejudices in general – that prevented herself from seeing it.

Her fear of having lost the boy and the experience of the district’s support change something in Annie’s mind. This becomes partly obvious later in her conversation with the boy, in which she says that “[n]othing is ever the same as at the start. It changes, and then it is different, but it is good different oftentimes.” (AD 214) Annie Dunne has only ever been able to think and speak with sadness and bitterness of the changes in her life as these changes have always coincided with a disregard for her hopes and her losing her place in the world. That now, after this incident, she finds it in herself to tell the boy that changes are more often positive than not shows some incredible change of perspective. The complication introduced in the exposition is finally resolved when Sarah tells Billy she has “a sister’s love for Annie” (AD 218) and decides not to marry Billy Kerr because he threatened her. For once in Annie’s life, someone puts Annie first. This in turn helps her to heal psychologically. In the end she seems to accept her changed place in this world, in this new Ireland, living with her cousin Sarah on her farm and among the people of the district.

“We are like two spiders, in a dark corner of the world, things of no true importance, I am sure. But even the spiders leave a trace, a broken web blowing on the breeze. […] Even the halves of songs I know, our way of talking, our very work and ways of work, will be forgotten. Now I understand it has always been so, a fact which seemed to heal my father’s wound, and now my own. I think in the end he understood it too, and gained his salvation from that new courage he found, to go naked and unadorned into the next world. Even great kingdoms – Ireland, England herself – are subject to this law. […]”
Finally, towards the end of her life, Annie seems to make peace with the changes that had once forced her to abandon the life she desired and with the memory of her father. The guilt she has felt is lifted. Although she does not fully accept the new Ireland, she accepts change as an inevitable part of life. Her national identity may still be in question, but it seems that she finds peace by abandoning the concept of nationality altogether, thus also finally distancing herself from her loyalist family history. Annie finds the true value of life in – and obviously bases her own identity on – her friendship to her cousin Sarah. It seems that now, almost forty years after the changes in Ireland plunged her ever deeper into an identity crisis, she feels whole again, knowing and accepting her place in life. In terms of identity, it would appear that the diffusion has ended. However, only by recognising her own insignificance does she arrive at this state.

III.2.2.5.a Eneas McNulty faced with change

It is sad dramatic irony that for Eneas McNulty nationalist animosity comes in the form of his former boyhood friend Jonno Lynch. In Eneas’s memory Jonno features as “the captain of his boyhood” (WEM 16), with the choice of the word ‘captain’ indicating Jonno’s influence on Eneas, which makes it so sad that it is Jonno who causes Eneas’s exile and through it his state of identity diffusion and who eventually tries to kill him.

Eneas returns home to Sligo after the First World War only to find another war has started, “a war for the old prize of freedom for Ireland” (WEM 51). While acknowledging the Anglo-Irish War and even being aware that Jonno Lynch has become one of the freedom fighters, Eneas is presented as too naïve to understand what this entails regarding himself and his relationship with his former friend. He dreams that “[t]hey could pick up now where they left off at school, and be going about, and have the odd quiet drink here and there like gents, and be dandy, be easy and open-hearted” (WEM 51). In no way does Eneas realize how wide a gorge his year in the British Merchant Navy and respectively Jonno’s activism
in the fight for Irish freedom have cut between them, especially in a town like Sligo. Eneas tries to get in contact with his childhood friend, but is repeatedly sent away and when he finally happens to meet him in the street, Jonno just ignores Eneas. Confused, Eneas wanders home, where his eleven-year-old brother tries to explain the state of affairs in Sligo and Ireland to Eneas, but Eneas still seems unable to fully grasp the gravity of it (cf. WEM 51-54). It takes Eneas a year of unsuccessfully asking for work everywhere in and around Sligo to understand what his brother Jack at age eleven understood perfectly well.

It is then, with sadness, that Eneas makes his second and most life-determining decision: he joins the RIC. Eneas is not so uninformed as not to understand why he can get a job in the RIC when he cannot get one anywhere else (cf. WEM 55f.). He knows quite well the animosity felt towards the Castle-controlled armed police force, “he’s not the last innocent on earth” (WEM 55). The time in the RIC, which brings him face to face with the realities of bloody reprisal warfare, however, is portrayed as a time of deep disillusionment for Eneas. He is finally forced to realise that he is hated by many of his fellow countrymen when he is almost killed in an IRA ambush, after which he is honourably discharged but which leaves him shaken and afraid of the people in his own town, as becomes apparent in a conversation with his father (cf. WEM 62-69). Eventually Jonno finally pays Eneas a visit and makes him a final offer in the name of the IRA: if Eneas kills the Reprisal Man, an extremely cruel Black and Tan, his name will be taken off the blacklist. Eneas refuses despite Jonno’s threats (cf. WEM 74-84) and Jonno officially exiles Eneas from Ireland in the name of the IRA on pain of death (cf. WEM 110-120).

More than twenty years later, after the Second World War, in which Eneas takes part as a British soldier, and a subsequent stay at a mental home for military casualties, Eneas finally returns to his hometown Sligo after his mother has encouraged him in a letter saying “[s]urely […] [his] old trouble is long put to rest” (WEM 152). Returning to Ireland Eneas has doubts.

“[H]e has assumed that, as he has suffered in a mighty war and lain ill in a great asylum in England, his old sins will not be set against him. Now he’s not so certain. He smells Ireland outside the window of the train, and she smells very much the same as always, as twenty years ago she smelled. Trouble, trouble […] in all […] things he senses as he sits in the knocking train the old strains and presences of trouble, even there, four hundred miles from Sligo.”

(WEM 162)
In this excerpt Barry lets Eneas correctly anticipate what sentiment he will eventually encounter on his return. The author foreshadows in Eneas’s thoughts the ill success of his return home. At home Eneas is confused by the hidden tragic dramas of the other members of his family: Jack and Mai’s unhappy marriage, Tom’s relationship with Roseanne Clear and his sister’s fate of having been forced into becoming a nun. “The world of Sligo is a deepening puzzle” (WEM 187) to him. Eventually, and not quite surprisingly, Eneas receives a letter stating that the sentence of death which was promised him should he ever return to Ireland is now invoked. Shortly after, he understands the reality of the threat when he only narrowly escapes an assassination attempt (cf. WEM 189-195). He realises that he has to leave Ireland again and after the one night of intimacy in his life with his brother’s thwarted wife, Roseanne Clear, he does.

After spending years in Africa and eventually having to flee from Lagos just like he had to flee from Sligo before, he is swept once more and for the last time onto the shores of his home country and the first person he meets is Jonno Lynch. Jonno acts friendly and glad to see him, but Eneas gets mad and demands the truth, and it is then that he learns that although time has passed and the country has changed in some ways, the old groups still exist and so do their grudges against people like Eneas (cf. WEM 266-270). Implicit to the end of the conversation between Jonno and Eneas is the knowledge that, if he wants to live, Eneas will have to leave Ireland again and even then might not be safe. At his parents’ new house, he asks after Roseanne and they tell him that they had her institutionalised at Leitrim county home. Eneas visits her but it quickly becomes clear that the chance for any continuation of their short relationship has been destroyed by the intervening years. So eventually he leaves Ireland again and he and Harcourt purchase the Northern Lights Hotel on the Isle of Dogs. However, as the Troubles in Northern Ireland grow in momentum, Eneas is located by the IRA, and Jonno Lynch and Mr. O’Dowd come to kill Eneas (cf. WEM 287-308). Hence throughout his life Eneas is repeatedly faced with agitators of Irish nationalism and is effectively exiled from Irish society all his life.

III.2.2.5.b Eneas McNulty – wandering in exile

Exiled, Eneas is plunged into a permanent state of wandering, of drifting from place to place, without ever really finding a substitute home for himself. All the while he feels that he is not welcome anymore in the only place he would in his heart call home and hated by the people he would like to think of as his countrymen. The years of his exile are marked by a permanent feeling of being lost.
Barry underlines the purposelessness of these endless wanderings by repeatedly constructing quite drastic discrepancies between narration time and narrated time. For example, Barry details the first twenty years of Eneas’s life in more than one hundred pages. Then, leaving Sligo in his early twenties, Eneas spends ten years working on an English fishing boat sailing from Grimsby, all of which is told in a matter of only about ten pages. The contrast of narration and narrated time here illuminates the monotony of Eneas’s days. It seems that Barry passes over years and decades in a matter of sentences only to point out how inconsequential they feel to Eneas, and whenever he pauses to focus on an event, it is in this part of the novel an event which only illustrates all the more vividly Eneas’s feelings of loneliness, of being lost and literally homeless. For example, at one point during his time as a fisherman Eneas sees a ship of Jews fleeing persecution in Nazi Germany in search of a new home (cf. WEM 131ff.). Seeing the ship and reading about the sad fate of the people aboard that ship makes Eneas angry and frustrated because “as a hated man Eneas feels the force of their useless journey” (WEM 132). Like the Jews, Eneas had to flee his own home facing a death threat and like them he knows he can never return. The sight of the ship is a reminder for him of his own condition. Despite a certain undeniable criticism of nationalist policy regarding this situation, Barry uses the ship of Jews as a symbol for Eneas’s feelings of homelessness.

However, working far out at sea, Eneas also experiences feelings of comfort and reconciliation with his countrymen. He tries to understand them and to understand how it can be that they show such hatred towards him.

“Out in the immaculate waste world of ice and sea […] it is possible somehow to hold Sligo in his head, floating, particular. And the hatred his countrymen have for him is a class of signpost, a class of explanation for the ruin of their tenderness. For they are not tender people now. And savage years among a civilized people have done that to them, because when there is murder and murder, the heart is killed like a rat with poison”.

(WEM 129f.)

Telling himself that these were once good, tender people who have been transformed into these hateful creatures only through years of civil war, hence mainly through outer circumstances, he finds empathy for them. In a way, out there at sea, exiled from his home,
he even seems to pity his countrymen, feeling “at times something akin to love for Sligo, at least it sits there in his mind, his Mam and Pappy and his toiling siblings, and all the turbulent citizens, Sligo, Sligo” (WEM 130).

However, these feelings alternate with feelings of hatred and anger in these years (WEM 130). Barry uses the stylistic device of contrast to show how torn his main character feels, to show the emotional and mental gash that his state of exile has created. He almost artistically strengthens these contrasting emotions by using tell-tale settings. The peaceful, understanding and sympathetic emotions are mirrored by peaceful and calming descriptions of nature.

“[a] world of ice and sea and herring, with companionable whales and rarely betimes a narwhal nosing past, where animals are black and white and only the moon and the Northern Lights themselves, extravagant and chill and high, are shadows, remembrances of colours”.

(WEM 129)

Passing whales, described as ‘companionable’ probably because they are a source of comfort in the loneliness of Eneas’s life, as well as the fantastic display of nature’s beauty shown in the display of the Northern Lights convey a notion of being one with nature and all beings on earth and consequently support pictorially Eneas’s feelings of reconciliation.

The contrasting feelings which Barry then introduces on just the following page are supported by a cold and dark setting, depicting Eneas “in the narrow adjunct to the Captain’s house that is Eneas’s land home, lying in the fixed dark, the room rooted on the sandy earth” (WEM 130). There is no sign of comfort in this room, no floor, no light or companion. His new ‘home’ is not even his own but only a lean-to to his captain’s house. This description incites a cold and lonely atmosphere. It strengthens the notion of feeling alone, forgotten and rejected by the world. Barry thus supports his character’s emotional state with his settings.

The example above shows quite clearly that Eneas is torn between two contrasting emotions. On the one hand he hates Sligo and his former countrymen for exiling him while on the other he feels an extreme longing to be one of them, to be a Sligoman again. This dilemma of contrasting emotions is the main feature of the second part of the novel. It determines much of his life and keeps him from ever really finding a home for himself in the world or even a purpose in life.
When Eneas eventually arrives at “those old fields of France” (WEM 134) as a British soldier in World War Two, it is in the heat of the Allied mission at Dunkirk, which Eneas miraculously survives. However, the horrors of the war with all the young men killed by the thousands only deepen his feelings of uselessness. It almost drives him mad that he should live while all the others die. Their lives have been given to save France. They have had a purpose and by contrast highlight that his does not (cf. WEM 141). Eventually he finds himself in the care of an old farmer on whose farm he agrees to work mainly because in a twisted way he feels he can give his life a purpose again; by helping the old farmer Eneas feels that in a way he becomes the “sudden saviour” (WEM 148) of the dilapidated French farm. He feels “as Jean’s [= the old farmer’s] servant he serves his old dreams” (WEM 148). By helping the Frenchman, he can pretend to save a little part of France and thus accomplish what he set out to do. Moreover, on a psychological level, he defends his prior identifications believing that saving France proves the Irish nation’s valour and value and in turn his own. However, working on the farm, miraculously secluded from the war, Eneas understands full well that neither fighting in the war nor working on this farm will alter his situation:

“He [= Eneas] is puzzled too by the absence of English troops or any other of the Allied soldiers. Unless some celestial magician has taken him from the glades of the earth he cannot think why he sees no one, hears nothing of anyone, and is left alone moreover to live with Jean. […] It is as if he cannot be found amid the soldiers, as if the war eludes him on purpose. Firstly he stood amid the dead by the edge of the sea and secondly now he works the rows of vines not so much as a living man but a vanished man. Of course he understands this is his natural condition. He is not required as a Sligoman and now he is not required as a British soldier.”

(WEM 150f.)

Eneas’s feelings of purposelessness and homelessness are only exaggerated by the unbelievable circumstance that he seems to magically evade any kind of confrontation. It almost seems as if he has not only been exiled by the IRA from his home country but rather by some higher power from life itself. When first he comes to Dunkirk beach, he remembers lines from the King James Bible about the book of life: “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life […] was cast into the lake of fire” (WEM 137). Even though he takes part in one of the most gruesome events of the Second World War, not a single bullet finds him and nor does he hurt or help anyone. His life, it seems to him, is utterly without
consequence for anyone else in the world. He thinks of himself as a ‘vanished man’, a
description Barry uses also in A Long Long Way to describe the soldiers in the First World
War and Willie Dunne, who like Eneas feel exiled from regular human life.

Barry quite elaborately describes the psychological consequences this state of mind
has for Eneas. Barry repeatedly switches from omniscient narrator to personal narrative
situation striving to portray Eneas’s innermost feelings stemming from said diffusion. Eneas,
who sees himself as “an unwanted or extra Irishman […] beyond healing” (WEM 223) and
ironically deems himself “the notorious enemy of the Irish people” (WEM 221), is
eventually shaken to the core by immense feelings of fear and self-doubt.

“Sometimes he lays down his spade and shivers in the lengthening ditch, he shivers
with an ague like malaria but it isn’t so simple. […] He is mortally exhausted
sometimes by being this Eneas McNulty. The wicked idea strikes him that his would-
be murderers were in the right, that there’s nothing to recommend him, that his life
has been ill led, that he deserves tremendous and afflicting punishment. When he
thinks this he trembles worse. He’s lost in a childhood state and he fears the
displeasure of God the King of good and the Demon of evil. He lies fast in the bed
of himself with the starched sheets binding his legs, and the ministers of God
approach the bedroom of himself and will be in the window like a fiery bolt to accuse
and torment him and he feels it will be well merited.”

(WEM 228)

After years of exile and identity diffusion, Eneas actually doubts his own right to live. These
feelings of self-doubt are expressions of the inner turmoil that has been caused through the
fundamental questioning of his identity by the constant threats to all those identifications
which have made up his national identity and consequently part of his personal identity. It
is obvious that, as he is constantly forced to wander further, his psychological health
increasingly deteriorates, symptomatically starting with frustration, sadness and anger but
then turning into feelings of utter purposelessness, extreme self-doubt and depression.

It is in Harcourt that Eneas seeks comfort and eventually finds the chance to restore
his sense of identity. When Eneas finally meets Harcourt again, he is overjoyed and realises
that “never, never in all his living days has he taken delight, such delight, in the mere sighting
of another human being” (WEM 282). It seems at this point that Eneas realises that his friend
Harcourt has for many years now been the only true nation he still belongs to:
“It is strange that though many years separate the freedoms of their homelands, Eneas and Harcourt are scraps of people both, blown off the road of life by history’s hungry breezes. Therefore their hotel must be both homeland and home, though homeland and home have but two citizens. The craziness of it doesn’t drive them crazy. Side by side they are citizenry enough and their constitution provides for their concealment and abandonment. Abandonment is the proudest principle of their order.”

(WEM 284f.)

Harcourt and Eneas have both made quite similar experiences regarding the relationship to the other members of their former nation. Both have almost been killed by their former countrymen for clinging to sets of identifications which have been overcome or at least changed considerably in the course of their country’s struggles for freedom. Both have neither family nor wives to turn to. Both have become ‘nationless’ through revolutions in their countries, and both, through these shared identifications, form a new nation of the outcast. Psychologically, synthesising identifications to fit this new idea of a nation of the nationless, they construct a new national identity which basically includes all those who share the feeling of not belonging to any other nation. This interpretation is underlined by the observation that Harcourt and Eneas open their hotel’s doors to the type of people who seem to find themselves in similar states: “the battered wanderers, the weary sailors, the refugees from ferocious lives, the distressed alcoholics, the repentant murderers […] and the general flotsam of the great port river of life” (WEM 282). The Northern Lights Hotel becomes a homeland for the nation of the outcast.

Thus finally restoring a sense of national identity, Eneas has the chance to heal psychologically as the identity diffusion is overcome and a full sense of identity is restored. At the age of seventy, close to fifty years after being exiled and the beginning of his identity diffusion, Eneas is again at peace with himself. The crucial role that his friendship with Harcourt has played in this healing process is depicted by Barry’s use of an allegorical flashback: Eneas remembers a man from the times of his father’s dancehall, Sam Dickens. Sam Dickens had a club foot, and one would expect that due to this deformation he would refrain from dancing or, dancing, he would be ridiculed looking rather foolish at best. However, as Eneas remembers it, Sam Dickens could use his club foot in such a way that he danced with great virtuosity and style showing great self-certainty in conversation with other men and women and in turn being widely praised and accepted. Sam Dickens had found a
way to utilize his deformation in ways which brought him more social acceptance. The entire episode can be read as an allegory as Eneas has a sort of social deformation but he can utilize his friendship with Harcourt in the same way that Sam could use his leg when dancing. Through Harcourt’s friendship Eneas is able to overcome the constraints of his social deformation much like Sam Dickens could overcome the constraints of his physical deformation through his dance moves. This final observation is also made in a similar form by the author himself at the end of this flashback (cf. WEM 287).

When Eneas learns that he has been located by Jonno Lynch and Mr. O’Dowd, the news deeply alters how he feels. He says he feels “like a hundred and ninety years old” (WEM 292), implying a feeling of exhaustion and weakness. However, that Eneas has overcome his identity diffusion can be seen in his refusal to run away. Even being urged to do so by his friend he is certain he will not run from these people anymore:

“If they come they come. I’ll tell you, most of my born days I waited for them to come. They said a few times they’d come and they never did. But lately, these last years, I haven’t cared about that. I don’t care about it now. […] Did anything ever happen in your life you could avoid? I don’t think so. […] Ah, no, Harcourt, better have it out with them now, I’m too old for that old life of fear at the back of the head and nowhere to call home.”

(WEM 294)

In a way Eneas’s reaction to the news presents a deterministic outlook on life. The rhetorical question he asks his friend seems to contain the realisation that he himself has never been able to influence the course of his life in any meaningful way. He has come to realise that no matter what he pursued in his life, he has never been able to fully avoid the consequences of his initial life-changing decision to join the British when he was sixteen and maybe even that decision was not quite his own. However, one could argue that by running from them he has also been running from the consequences of his decision or, in more abstract terms, the consequences of the threat to his national identity by Irish nationalism. Eneas has run from having to resynthesize his sense of identity and hence kept himself in a state of identity diffusion. Thus, his unwillingness to run could be taken to mean that in a way his sense of identity has been restored. Though they threaten his life, his pursuers do not threaten his sense of identity anymore.
Eneas even feels the urge to defend his new identity which includes the identification he has made with Harcourt and the Northern Lights Hotel. He understands himself now not anymore as an Irishman but rather as a citizen of the nation of the nationless on the Isle of Dogs. The text states that Eneas “doesn’t mind having a go for freedom” (WEM 298) when the others make ready to kill him. This statement is highly ambiguous. On the one hand, the others have come looking for Eneas in the name of Irish freedom, and after being or at least feeling chased all his life, Eneas does not mind giving them a good fight. On the other hand though, Eneas may well take up this fight for the sake of his own freedom. Interpreting the statement in this way means that Eneas is finally waging his own war of independence, a war for Eneas’s independence from Irish history. Psychologically, by fighting he defends his new readjusted sense of identity, which does not understand Ireland as his home anymore and hence will not allow others to imply that it is.

III.2.2.6.a Roseanne Clear faced with change

Roseanne Clear’s fate in The Secret Scripture is similar to that of Eneas McNulty in The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty and partly interlinked with it. Like Eneas, Roseanne becomes an outcast in their hometown Sligo through events in twentieth-century national Irish history, during the course of which her identity is repeatedly called into question. Right at the beginning of the novel, Roseanne herself basically introduces her account with this accusation of the inhabitants of her former hometown, saying that “Sligo made me and Sligo undid me” (TSS 3). Through Barry’s presentation, Roseanne’s personal history stays strangely elusive. On the one hand, two different accounts are presented and furthermore, both accounts are established as not completely reliable: Roseanne Clear is a hundred-year-old patient in a mental hospital, so the reliability of her memory is dubitable. However, Father Gaunt’s account is equally unreliable as he would be biased due to his role in Roseanne’s life and her ultimate institutionalisation. Three different aspects seem most consequential in Roseanne’s life: the arrest of the Irregulars at the graveyard, her relationship to her parents and her father’s death, and thirdly her relationship to Tom McNulty.
After the Free State came into being and Joseph Clear, her father, was given the job at the cemetery, one evening a group Irregulars\textsuperscript{36} come to the graveyard carrying a corpse. It becomes clear in the ensuing conversation that the dead man’s name is Willie Lavelle, the seventeen-year-old brother of one of the other three members of the group, John Lavelle. The boy was allegedly shot by Free State soldiers after he had put down his weapons and surrendered to them. They tell Roseanne’s father about witnessing the murder of their comrade and ask him to bury him in the graveyard. Joseph Clear decides that he cannot bury a man in the graveyard without the blessings of a priest and eventually Roseanne is sent to fetch Father Gaunt. If Roseanne’s account is to be believed, she hurries along to Father Gaunt’s as quickly as she can, frightened for her father’s life because she feels that “those three living men had seen horrors, and those who see horrors may do horrors just as bad” (TSS 42). Father Gaunt follows the girl to the hut in the graveyard where he finally agrees to absolve the dead man from his sins, contrary to the Irish bishops’ decree, which viewed the Irregulars’ war as wrong.\textsuperscript{37}

Not much later, however, the situation becomes violent as suddenly the group of Free State soldiers who earlier shot the young boy appear. As they come in, two of the Irregulars attack them and are gunned down. It is a dangerous situation and Roseanne is almost hit by a bullet. When the firing ceases and the Irregulars are arrested, the soldiers’ commander turns his attention first to Joseph Clear but after introductions mainly to Father Gaunt. Enraged that Father Gaunt would act against the bishops’ decree, he puts a gun against Father Gaunt’s head and considers killing the man kneeling in front of him. In the end the Father is not killed as the Free State soldiers do not want to be known as killers of their country’s priests. The commander does reprimand Father Gaunt, though, before leaving with his group and the arrested Irregulars (cf. TSS 50-55).

This scene at the graveyard has devastating consequences for Joseph and Roseanne Clear. First, as can be interpreted from his subsequent actions, Father Gaunt comes out of this episode feeling deeply humiliated and with an urge to avenge himself on Joseph Clear for being put into this position. When the other soldiers leave, he tells Joseph Clear that Joseph has done him wrong by dragging him into this situation (cf. TSS 55). Shortly afterwards, it is he who visits the Clears and tells Mr. Clear that he has been dismissed from

\textsuperscript{36}The term ‘Irregulars’ refers to those people who through armed conflict opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the new Irish Free State because in terms of independence the treaty did not go far enough for them. Later these would again call themselves IRA. See I.6 and the following sections for further information.

\textsuperscript{37}See TSS 38-44 to reread this part of the event.
his office as superintendent at the graveyard and may now take the job as the town’s rat-catcher (cf. TSS 56-62). Although Father Gaunt makes out that this decision was not his doing, it can be interpreted from the way he treats Joseph Clear in this situation that this actually does represent his revenge for being drawn into this situation. For example, without hesitation, he tips his cigarette’s ash into Joseph Clear’s hand (cf. TSS 59) and also suggests that Mr. Clear should be thankful for his endeavours in securing for him the post as rat-catcher – an occupation that is, as Dr. Grene remarks, “surely the ultimate insult to such a man” (TSS 187). That Father Gaunt at least in later years does not have the high esteem for Joseph Clear that Roseanne first thinks he has can be gathered from Dr. Grene’s quoting him with regards to Joseph Clear’s new job, that “[a]s he had hunted down his fellow countrymen like rats, it might be said he was qualified for the job” (TSS 187). Father Gaunt here refers to Joseph Clear’s time in the RIC.

In Father Gaunt’s papers, read by Dr. Grene, the event is presented differently. In his account Roseanne witnesses Irregulars burying weapons and secret documents in the graveyard and informs her father who, together with Father Gaunt, has the coffin disinterred the next day, after which the Irregulars are arrested by the police (cf. TSS 159f.). Although the outcome of this account would be the same, i.e. that Father Gaunt feels put into a difficult, possibly dangerous position as he may be seen as responsible by the Irregulars, it does put a different light on the incident. According to this account, the Irregulars did not simply come to Joseph Clear and his daughter followed by the police, but he and his daughter play a crucially more active role in the capture of the Irregulars. Which account is true cannot be ascertained as Dr. Grene doubts Father Gaunt’s honesty (cf. TSS 159).

By all accounts the narrative insinuates that until this incident in the graveyard, Roseanne had led a fairly happy and safe family life, notwithstanding the facts that (a) due to her father’s earlier occupation and his religious belief the family would have held an outcast, low social status in the community and (b) that Father Gaunt’s account describes Joe Clear as a man prone to drinking (cf. TSS 187). With this incident and its aftermath, Roseanne’s life takes a turn sliding gradually towards a life of isolation, pain and desperation, fatefully entangled with Father Gaunt.

Even at the end of her life Roseanne does not know for certain how exactly her father died and Barry keeps an element of factual uncertainty in the text. According to Roseanne’s knowledge, her father finally hangs himself for many reasons: firstly, he received a death sentence from the IRA because of his and/or his daughter’s assumed betrayal during the graveyard incident. This much Roseanne has gathered from a conversation with John Lavelle.
(cf. TSS 112). Secondly, through a mistake as rat-catcher Joseph Clear is responsible for the death of 123 girls in a Protestant orphanage (cf. TSS 74-79), which weighs heavy on his mind. Lastly, because he lost his job at the cemetery and was forced to work as rat-catcher, he does not earn as much as before, which eventually drives Roseanne’s mother to openly regret having married him seeing how little they can afford and increasingly drift into a state of mental instability (e.g. cf. TSS 70f., 88-90).

While it seems comprehensible that Joseph Clear should hang himself overpowered by the sad turns his life has taken, this is not what happened according to Father Gaunt’s account. According to this account, to which Dr. Grene turns to find out about Roseanne’s past, Roseanne’s father did not kill himself but was actually killed by the IRA. Supposedly, he was taken up into the top of the tower in the cemetery, his mouth filled with white feathers and then he was beaten with hammers ultimately to be thrown out through the window to his death. However, as Joseph Clear did not fit through the small window, the IRA men finally hung him in a derelict building close by (cf. TSS 186-188).

In fact, according to Father Gaunt’s account, Roseanne was a witness to the attempted murder in the tower standing in the yard and looking up towards the window through which the men were trying to throw her father. She did not witness the hanging because she was knocked unconscious by one of the hammers her father was beaten with when it was thrown out the window.

Despite her father’s violent death, Roseanne finds some sort of normality for herself. One day she rescues a woman’s baby at the beach. It turns out that the woman is the wife of the owner of the Café Cairo and out of gratitude Roseanne is offered a job as waitress there through which, at the age of roughly eighteen, she is able to sustain herself, take care of her ill mother as well as make some friends with whom she goes out at the weekends or after shifts (cf. TSS 186-188). A few years later Roseanne comes close to drowning at the beach but is saved by Tom McNulty, a man she knows as a customer from the Café Cairo and who knows her. After going out for some time Tom McNulty and Roseanne Clear finally get married. However, from Roseanne’s account of her first meeting with Tom’s mother, Mrs McNulty, it becomes quite clear that she did not really approve of Roseanne as a daughter-in-law on the grounds of her religion (cf. TSS 167-169). His mother’s disapproval is implied as the reason why Tom decided to get married in Dublin instead of Sligo (cf. TSS 176f.). This allowed her to stay Presbyterian. For the same reason they set up house in a small house in Strandhill, where Tom runs the dancing hall together with his father, and not in Sligo. Roseanne later says about that time that “married women never worked in those days” (TSS
182), which means that after their marriage Roseanne spends her time in their little house in Strandhill, not working in the Café Cairo anymore. Basically, this way, “Tom kept […] [her] in quarantine in Strandhill, till he could get his mother to relent in her hostility to […] [her]” (TSS 180). Roseanne is well aware that her marriage with Tom caused quite a scandal in Sligo (cf. TSS 195). With their marriage Roseanne has become effectively exiled from Sligo society apart from the few times that Tom takes her out on a Saturday night. She is twenty-five at the time.

However much she may have regretted her exile, she was in love with Tom and he was apparently in love with her, too. Then, one evening at the movies, Roseanne meets John Lavelle again, who invites her to meet him on a Sunday, and out of a feeling of bonding founded on their meeting the one night at the graveyard, she does go to meet him. Unfortunately, their meeting is witnessed by Father Gaunt (cf. TSS 196-200). Although nothing more than a conversation takes place between them, the meeting alone is enough for Father Gaunt and Mrs McNulty to take away whatever happiness she still has in her life. It is not long after that day that Tom McNulty does not come home to her anymore, but instead Father Gaunt comes to her and announces that her marriage with Tom has been officially annulled on the grounds that she supposedly suffered from insanity, in her case nymphomania, at the time of their wedding and thus any contract with her has to be viewed as invalid. It is thus that she is exiled to her little shack in Strandhill outside Sligo and away from any social contact. These years constitute the first stage of her imprisonment.

Months later the degree to which the McNulty family has turned away from Roseanne becomes quite clear. Heavily pregnant with Eneas’s child Roseanne starts feeling very sick. In her helplessness she undertakes the long walk to the McNultys’ bungalow in stormy and cold weather and begs Tom’s parents for help. In Roseanne’s memory Mrs McNulty brusquely and pitilessly turns her away. Roseanne staggers out into the storm again. In an attempt to shorten the way home, she takes to wading through the ebbing water, almost getting lost but in the end succeeds in reaching firm high ground again, where she finally breaks down and delivers her baby. Upon waking from a fit of unconsciousness following the birth, she is rescued by an ambulance team but her child has been taken away in the meantime. Taken to hospital Roseanne, never gets to know anything more about the life of her child other than that a place was found for the boy in the orphanage Nazareth House (cf. TSS 268-278). The birth of that child then serves as final proof of her previously diagnosed condition and the reason for her institutionalization.
Roseanne meets Eneas shortly after Belfast is bombed by the Germans, which took place in 1941, and some seven to nine months later Roseanne gives birth to their child, after which she is committed to Sligo Mental Hospital. As the time of the action in The Secret Scripture can be identified as 2010, Barry’s narrative lets Roseanne Clear spend another 68 years institutionalised in this hospital or later Roscommon Regional Mental Hospital. These years represent her complete exile not just from Sligo but from the outside world and as such the second and final stage of her imprisonment. Her imprisonment is the ultimate physical consequence for her of the social changes in Ireland.

III.2.2.6.b Roseanne Clear – another form of exile

Even at an old age, when she writes her account, Roseanne presents a distorted view of the attempted murder of her father. In her mind her father was trying to show her that all things fall at the same rate, hammers and feathers alike, and that it was this experiment which she witnessed (cf. TSS 19-23). This distortion of memory could be taken as a sign of identity diffusion in the widest sense along with Roseanne’s view of her father.

Throughout the book Roseanne’s account remains dubitable with regards to factual accuracy. Despite her assurance of giving an “honest-minded history” (TSS 5) of herself, the subjective nature of her account and the distortion of her memories as proven by the contrasting accounts makes it possible to extrapolate from her memories something about the impact these events are presented as having on her sense of identity. The narrative suggests that as a child Roseanne would have made the following observations about her father: (a) he saw himself as an Irishman, (b) he was a Presbyterian, (c) he was always happy when he came home, (d) proud of having won the hand of the most beautiful woman in Sligo, (e) proud of his job at the cemetery, (f) well-liked by everyone in the community and (g) held in high esteem by the parish priest. Many of these observations would have turned into identifications to form her own identity as an Irishwoman, a Presbyterian and a member of her family and of Sligo community.

Analysing, as has been done above, all the information about Roseanne’s childhood and teenage years up to the murder of her father = either in Roseanne’s own account or the information Dr. Grene gathers = it becomes quite clear that Roseanne’s own view of her father even at the end of her life, after many years spent reflecting on the events, clashes quite drastically with the reality that all other accounts suggest. All of Roseanne’s basic

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38 Looking back, Roseanne is not quite sure about the time. She suggests at one point that she was maybe seven months pregnant (cf. TSS 257). So the child might have been born early.
identifications are completely destroyed, some of them even before the murder of her father, all of them finally with it. Presbyterians were not well-liked in mainly Catholic rural Ireland. Joseph Clear was not simply happy when he returned from work in the evening, he was quite drunk, which distorts the image of the caring family-oriented father. His wife eventually loses her radiant beauty in the face of the meagre life he is only able to offer her and in the end regrets having married him (cf. TSS 67-71). Roseanne’s notion of her father being held in high esteem by the parish priest clashes with her memory of her father’s utter humiliation in his own house by the priest. Although this could to some extent have been interpreted by Roseanne as an act of revenge on Father Gaunt’s part for the graveyard incident, the manner in which both men play their roles in that situation does suggest a familiar air of stark inequality even prior to this event and Roseanne intrinsically feels this as she states she “knew somehow […] [she] must never apologise to Fr Gaunt” (TSS 100). The act of the murder, finally, severely damages the last of her identifications, namely the notions of her father being Irish and of being well-liked in Sligo. During the graveyard incident with the Irregulars the following short dialogue ensues between one of the Irregulars and Joseph Clear:

“‘The whole of Ireland is our plot. You can set us down in it anywhere. Because we are Irishmen. Maybe that’s something you don’t know anything about?’
‘I hope I am an Irishman too,’ said my father, and I knew he was offended by the remark.’

(TSS 41)

Implied in this dialogue, more specifically in the question of the Irregular, is the accusation that those who do not help them, those who do not oppose the treaty, are not truly Irish. It becomes clear that Joseph Clear thinks of himself as Irish. Joseph Clear’s national identity is an ‘Irishness’ which includes different religions, also Presbyterianism, and which, while not necessarily opposing IRA endeavours, permits pro- as well as anti-British notions. His murder implies that his question of whether he is also an Irishman is answered in the negative, that he is, in fact, not a true Irishman in the eyes of those people.

Roseanne claims she does not know that her father was an RIC man. She denies the mere idea outright. However, her ignorance of this fact would only have increased the degree of incomprehensibility in the face of the murder attempt she witnesses at the tower. After
all, with no knowledge of his RIC past, the hatred vented on her father would have been even harder to understand. Notwithstanding the fact that a hammer to the head is capable of doing considerable damage, the fact that she has not completely forgotten the event – hence not lost her memory of the event – but rather vividly envisions a completely distorted educational experiment suggests that the psychological impact of the deed itself was the main damage. By witnessing this scene, some of the basic identifications forming her personal as well as national identity are questioned to such a degree that her entire sense of identity is questioned as well, a state which can be described as identity diffusion. As it might have been impossible for her mind in that situation to change identifications in such a way as to still allow for a continued sense of identity, her mind appears to have protected the identifications through the utter distortion of the memory of the event itself and by excluding any kind of criticism of her father thenceforth, which is evident in her continued overly positive view of her father laid out in her written account. The fact that even more than eighty years later she still presents this distorted version is proof of the immense stress her sense of identity was put under.

Through the political climate and the power and importance of the Catholic Church as well as through the blame inherited from her father, Roseanne ends up in Roscommon Regional Mental Hospital. Her imprisonment can be seen as a declaration of her un-Irishness and it has an influence on her sense of identity, which becomes quite clear when studying the wording of her and Dr. Grene’s accounts closely. Roseanne says of herself that she is “only a thing left over, a remnant woman” (TSS 4). She feels that in the course of her life in Sligo she somehow lost herself (cf. TSS 201) and she became “like a ghost to [herself]” (TSS 201), which already shows a kind of mental estrangement from her previously formed sense of personal identity. When the doctor talks to Roseanne, he calls her Mrs McNulty and she feels that she is “too weary to explain yet again, for the millionth time in sixty years and more, that […] [she] wasn’t Mrs McNulty. That […] [she] wasn’t anybody, wasn’t in fact anybody’s wife. […] [She] was just Roseanne Clear” (TSS 253). However, the author artfully highlights the problems for Roseanne as well as for Dr. Grene to explain who exactly ‘just’ Roseanne Clear is. According to Dr. Grene, her “life spans everything, she is as much as we can know of our world, the last hundred years of it. She should be a place of pilgrimage and a national icon” (TSS 190). Yet he also acknowledges that “she lives nowhere and is nothing. She has no family and almost no nation.” (TSS 190) At the end of her life, after years of imprisonment – first in the shack in Strandhill, then in Sligo and Roscommon Mental Hospitals – Roseanne has lost much of her identity. The narrative and especially the
dubitable character of her account convey the impression that her exclusion from Sligo society, from family, from marital, religious and communal life has left her deeply scarred. Any identifications made with those people – husband, family, religious leaders, other citizens – would have had to be questioned by her imprisonment. Clearly, Roseanne feels that she is not included in the new Ireland, that she is in fact not perceived as Irish by others. Her imprisonment, her complete exclusion from society, does not allow her to make any new identifications, to re-establish a national identity. That part of her identity is utterly destroyed in the course of the social and political changes in the first half of the twentieth century in Ireland as they indirectly lead to her imprisonment.

Her isolation, her state of identity diffusion, of not belonging anywhere manifests itself of course in her unreliable memory but also quite clearly in her fear of being released from hospital years later. Dr. Grene asks her twice whether she would like to gain her freedom but after more than sixty years in an institution, after even more years of being excluded from Irish society, she is afraid of what kind of life she would be able to live (cf. TSS 29, 82). Reflecting on his duty to reassess his patients, Dr. Grene states at one point that he feels he is “interviewing them for […] their expulsion, their ruin. That if they manifest wellness, then, they must be sent into exile in that blessed ‘community’” (TSS 46). His estimation does not seem far-fetched in Roseanne’s case. After all, she has by far outlived everyone she once knew, has no idea of life in Ireland in the twenty-first century, knows no one and no one knows her. In the end, after discovering that Roseanne is in fact his mother, Dr. Grene is in the position to give her back her freedom. Here Barry artistically closes both story arcs by bringing them together. However, a great sadness stays behind as it seems quite clear that should Roseanne leave the hospital, she would in all probability only exchange one sort of exile for another, as she would be an exile in this new world, too. The fact remains that Irish national history has deprived her of most of her life by imprisoning her in one way or another and has fundamentally wounded if not destroyed her sense of identity, her sense of who she really is. Twenty-first-century Irish society is as foreign to her as any other nation and she realises that integrating herself into this society at her age would be impossible. She knows that she has only little time left to live. In a way Barry lets her appear content with this, but her sense of identity seems to remain shattered to her as well as to the reader.
III.2.2.7.a Jack and Mai faced with change

In the early stages of Jack and Mai’s relationship, they expect a bright future full of opportunities, with both of them excelling in their fields of study, Jack having an easy way with people and Mai being born into a family of high social standing and being smart as well as exceptionally beautiful. The interesting twist that Barry uses to turn Jack’s life into a tragedy is not so much Jack’s ambitiousness alone, but rather his ambitiousness combined with the social and political revolutions in Ireland. This is stated quite openly by Mai when she tells her friend Maria about Jack and his ambitions in life.

“And the death of a notion like that can kill you. The withholding of it. At least Jack turned himself into the thing he admired in Sligo as a child, those Middletons and Jacksons and Pollexfens, big-house Protestants who would never have spoken to the likes of him. And by the time he did that, those people were gone, or sunken back into a different life, and all their sons or many of them killed in the Great War. Jack tried to turn himself into a sort of British gentleman but by the time he achieved it, death and independence had erased his template. There were no posh Protestants left in Sligo to notice the Catholic butterfly painfully emerged from the dank caterpillar he had been. It probably broke his heart just as much as marrying me did. I suppose he thought he was marrying royalty when he married me, the poor gom.”

(OLS 48f.)

The notion Mai refers to can be seen as the prevailing idea at the time of the start of their relationship of what Irish freedom would be like. This may well have been the idea of Home Rule in Ireland or at least a republic which would provide a reward for those who were prepared to model themselves as closely to the former British ruling class as possible, and Jack was a case in point.

It is quite obvious that despite his humble background, e.g. his mother’s rumoured ancestry and his parents’ lowly jobs as seamstresses for the asylum, Jack has worked exceptionally hard in the first half of his life to climb up the social ladder of his hometown. He went to university and left with a degree in engineering. Moreover, he first joined the Merchant Navy and later became an officer in the British army – a position which would have commanded respect in a predominantly British society. Marrying the daughter of a generally highly-regarded family was to solidify his ascend on the social ladder. This is also obvious in Jack’s respectful memories of Mai’s wider family connections and the pride he feels at being accepted by them (cf. TTG 107). In a Redmondite Ireland, an independent
Ireland having been granted Home Rule and retaining relatively close ties to the former colonizing power, Jack would in all probability have become a person of the highest social standing in Sligo and independent Redmondite Ireland. Mai’s father was a supporter of Redmond (cf. TTG 48), but Mai even saw the same chances for them under Collins. Jack remembers a conversation on his first visit to Mai’s parents in which she enthusiastically states that “Collins is just John Redmond with guns” (TTG 48). Disregarding the dubitable historical veracity of her statement, it does show nevertheless that Mai envisions a bright future for herself and her family even with Collins as their national leader.

However, while Jack was feverishly working towards his ascend on the social ladder of the time, the ladder itself – to retain the metaphor – was turned upside-down almost completely in the wake of the Anglo-Irish War and the kind of independence which was brought on by the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the formation of the Irish Free State and Michael Collins’s death. In fact, the more Jack pursues the ambitions he formed with the earlier social structure in mind, the more he inevitably ostracises himself and also Mai from Irish society.

This is shown very well in the contrasting ways he is treated in England and Ireland when he comes home on leave as a soldier. The job and position in the British Colonial Service, which was supposed to command respect and social status, is spurned by the citizens of this new Ireland and he has trouble finding a job (cf. TTG 130). During the Second World War Jack serves as a British officer in the bomb disposal squad first in London and later in Africa. In English pubs he was given free drinks when the people saw the insignia of the bomb disposal squad and he uses the word ‘chivalry’ to describe the work of an officer in such squad as he was the only one who would defuse the bombs (cf. TTG 207-210). Thus, exactly because the work was so dangerous, he took a lot of pride in it and is treated with respect in England. In Ireland, however, Jack remembers being met with disdain on account of his service in the British Army. Sitting in Accra, he thinks back on a time of furlough coming home to Mai and getting into an argument with her.

“‘I am away at the war. Away at the war. The whole world is away at the war.’
‘What the hell are you doing going out there?’ she said. ‘Nobody in Ireland gives a tuppenny damn about it.’
[…]
‘Why are you at that war, Jack?’ And then she was weeping, weeping.”

(TTG 204f.)
Now that he is doing the most dangerous and hence most chivalrous work of his life, he has to realize that in his own home country no one acknowledges his sacrifice. In fact, he is spurned precisely because of this work and even his own wife does not understand his reasons and does not seem to see the valour of his work. In Accra many years later Jack remembers that he went home when the war was over and that he was proud of having served but that “pride in that ‘foreign’ war meant little in Ireland […] [and that he] went home to silences [and] to surprise in people’s faces, as if they had forgotten […] [he] was away” (TTG 235f.). Just like his brother, he has to change out of his uniform on the boat back to Ireland during furloughs (cf. TTG 48). So, like his brother Eneas, who sets out to join the British army in order to prove the worth of the Irish and then comes home to find an Ireland which exiles him for doing just that, Jack finds himself in a similar situation, though less persecuted but still utterly marginalised by the complete obliteration of his chances of fulfilling his ambitions in this new kind of Irish society.

III.2.2.7.b Jack and Mai – slaves to the bottle
In general, Jack and Mai’s story, told in The Temporary Gentleman and Our Lady of Sligo, is the sad account of a family destroyed by alcohol abuse. It is, however, set against the background of twentieth-century Irish history. This subsection presents the disastrous effects of alcohol abuse first and then discusses how these are connected to Irish history.

According to Mai’s as well as Jack’s memories, it is Jack who first introduces this demon into their relationship. In fact, Jack’s drinking is partly the reason why Mai’s father does not like Jack (cf. TTG 54). However, only when Mai finally also takes to drinking does their relationship deteriorate rapidly. In Our Lady of Sligo, Mai’s father leaves Grattan House to Mai after his death to ensure his daughter’s financial security (cf. OLS 32). At the beginning of the 1930s, Jack has incurred quite high debts with gambling. At that time Mai and Jack, together with their daughter Joanie, live at Grattan House. Mai’s most valued childhood memories are connected to that place. Even in her last days as a dying cancer patient at Jervis Street Hospital she retains very important memories from that time, e.g. she remembers days with her sister in the back garden of the house running around naked or trying to console her father sitting in his big armchair after the death of her sister Cissie (cf. OLS 31). Hence, when she is informed that she has to give up the house to pay her husband’s

39 In The Temporary Gentleman, the house is left to Mai’s brother after her father’s death but then given to her by her brother (cf. TTG 126-128). Despite the discrepancy, it is clear that the house is of the utmost importance for Mai’s happiness.
debts, she is devastated (cf. TTG 137-140). The day she has to give up her father’s house is the day she has her first drink (cf. OLS 32). Mai clearly remembers that this day drastically changed her life, introducing a darker, more violent and hateful time in their marriage.

“So the losing of the house was a great change in matters, altogether. Everything was darker and worse then. And it was the best part of ten years then in Harbour House, in bloody Sligo. And that was truly death [my italics, C.C.R.]. Drinking, running out into the street naked, and whipping and cutting and slashing at Jack like there was no tomorrow. And there was none. Night, filth and darkness. Because I became the devil [my italics, C.C.R.] in my own house and the soul was gone out of me and my child was afraid of me.”

(OLS 32f.)

Barry’s choice of words (see italics) underlines the sense of despair and sadness attributed to the character of Mai in this scene. All the words can be associated with the idea of hell. The use of these words highlights how much she – in retrospect – abhors this time but also the person she became because of the loss of her parents’ house. Mai says losing the house meant ‘death’. This metaphor depicts her own sense of the dramatic change in life. It suggests that her life can be separated into two parts: a happier, hopeful time before this day and a time of despair, of drunkenness and hatred afterwards. Close to her death she remembers a time in the mid-thirties when she tried to escape from her life with Jack by taking Joanie and driving to her friend Maria in Omard. She remembers telling Maria about having to sign away Grattan House saying “it was not so much shameful, as murderous. It murdered me [= her]” (OLS 18). The loss of her father’s house was brought on by her husband through his careless drinking and gambling, which means in turn that she sees him as the murderer of her happiness. According to Jack, the day they had to give up Grattan House was the day May stopped talking to him and demanded separate bedrooms (cf. OLS 18). More to the point, that day marks the decisive moment in their relationship in which it started to become a destructive prison for both of them as well as their children.

At the end of her life, Mai blames Jack for causing this change in their relationship and thus, at least partly, also for the disastrous consequences of her own drinking. In turn though, it is for these disastrous consequences that Jack cannot bring himself to forgive her, at least not during her lifetime. When Mai is in her late thirties, she and Jack have a baby boy, Colin. According to Mai’s memory, having this new innocent child in the house lets
her stay sober. She turns to Jack again for comfort and looks back at that time as a rebirth of their once happy relationship. Cruelly though, after roughly seven weeks Colin dies one night. In Mai’s memory Colin’s is a case of cot death, without her having any chance of preventing it. However, everyone around her appears to think that her alcoholism was the cause of it. For example, the midwife they call on that occasion and who can only confirm the boy’s death says in Mai’s memory that “perhaps it was to be expected” (OLS 35), which at least from Mai’s point of view only leaves two possible interpretations: either she believes that Colin died because of the influence of Mai’s excessive alcohol consumption during pregnancy or she means to say that in the home of two alcoholics it would have been a wonder had the boy survived. Either way, from the way Barry lets Mai relate her memories it becomes clear that she blames herself for Colin’s death. This is further confirmed when she repeats Jack’s accusations dating from roughly a year after the event.

“[O]ne night when Jack was as drunk as me […] and we were shouting and banging about in the bedroom as in days of yore, with terrible things said and the air all knives and hurt and evil, I suddenly saw Joanie in the door, and not more than nine I should think, but as wise and broken as a dog, with that look of murdered sleep in her face. And he shouted at her, you see this mother of yours, look at her, look at her, that killed our boy […] with your drinking and your filthiness and your slime […] and I looked at Joanie. And I knew that she believed him and I knew that I believed him and I was sentenced to death on that ferocious night. I did kill that little baby with his hands opening and closing, with my drinking.”

(OLS 36)

This excerpt shows quite clearly, as Mai confirms in the last lines, that not only others think her at least indirectly responsible for Colin’s death but she herself does, too. Barry again uses a death-related metaphor, saying she is ‘sentenced to death’. This is the second time in her life this happens to her. With Colin’s death, all meaning has once again been taken from her life and out of grief she re-enters her prior state of hopelessness and despair, which Barry’s choice of words clearly insinuates here as he uses the same metaphor again.

With the child dead, Jack takes on a commission in the British army and Mai, left at home alone with her grief, starts drinking again (cf. TTG 175-185). Mai and Jack go on to

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40 In *The Temporary Gentleman*, Colin is born dead. However, the influence the pregnancy and the child’s death have on their relationship is the same as in the play.
live their life in Sligo constantly quarrelling and drinking. It is in quite unadorned and colourful words that Barry lets their daughter Joanie describe the circumstances of her broken childhood home when she visits her mother in hospital much later. She describes her sleeping drunken mother as “the whale in the bed […] snoring like a man, and [making] those extraordinary farts […] in the cowl of smeared sheets” (OLS 42f.). Barry’s crude choice of words mirrors the ugliness of the experience for Joanie. Jack himself reminisces that the children grew up being “witnesses maybe mostly of their [parents’] darknesses” (TTG 167). Not only did Joanie have to live with the constant quarrelling between Jack and Mai and their periods of drunkenness, but one time in her childhood she is also witness to her mother’s adultery with Dr. Byrd. Besides obvious neglect and disastrous domestic circumstances, the children have to suffer physical abuse as Mai is prone to hitting her children, so that Jack sees the only solution in giving his daughter into the care of his parents while he is away in the war (cf. TTG 201ff.).

While the texts obviously allow deep emotional insights into the dramatic effects of alcohol abuse on families, the influence that Irish history has in the deconstruction of the characters’ once happy future must also not be overlooked. As in A Long Long Way, it adds a second layer to the general theme. Of course, it can be debated to what extent Jack and in turn Mai are actually forced by the social changes in Ireland into a position where alcoholism is the only means of escape or temporary relief. However, the ultimate psychological states of the characters towards the ends of their lives are presented as being as much a consequence of alcohol abuse as the result of broken hopes and dreams.

Both, Jack as much as Mai, are first secure in the knowledge that they will succeed in life, their personal identity entails a national identity which relies on a strong belief into a free Ireland but which is based on the very notions encapsulated by Redmondite Home Rule. They study and work towards making their mark in this kind of Irish society, solidifying their national identity and in turn their whole sense of identity through the identifications they make with these very notions of an independent Ireland. When they finally graduate and start into their life, prepared to reap the fruits of their labour, their notion of national identity is shattered as they realize that the nation they are now part of does in fact despise the very identifications they have made. In a society which relentlessly persecutes those who cling to these identifications, their identifications are necessarily threatened and inevitably their sense of national identity is repeatedly called into question as the Irish nation they have envisioned is quite different from the nation they find themselves in.
For Mai, Collins’s death symbolizes the destruction of her national identity. Jack poetically captures this destruction in his memory by saying that the bullet which killed Collins “might have as well passed through his body into all the countless hearts that loved him, like Mai’s [, that s]he had loved him, the idea of him, and the future that he seemed to hold in his gift” (TTG 61). Jack comes to view Collins’s death as the decisive moment that changed the course of their lives. In time, Mai is disillusioned by the government which came after Collins’s death and especially after DeValera came to power. Both realize that the political and social changes have influenced their lives negatively. Although spelled with only one ‘l’, the naming of their child strongly suggests an allegorical reading of the death of their son: Mai and Jack’s son is named Colin and with his death his parents’ hopes of a happy family relationship are shattered, just as with Michael Collins’s death any chance of a happy future in Ireland is shattered for them. The memories of their family life mirror their version of Irish history almost perfectly.

Jack and Mai cannot defend their sense of national identity, but it seems that they also find themselves unable to make new identifications with the prevailing symbols and ideas. Hence, as their national identity is questioned, their sense of identity as such is threatened as well. Looking back at his life, Jack realizes the effects his life has had on his sense of self.

“I don’t feel like myself, or rather, my self. ‘I’m not myself,’ we say, but what does it mean? Until I began to write everything down I didn’t have the slightest notion what it purported to mean.”

(TTG 176)

Obviously, Jack feels that he has lost any sense of self, that he does not have enough identifications anymore by which to ascertain his own identity. Eventually he admits to himself that his whole life seems to him quite “disproportionate now, and witless, and without explanation.” (TTG 234) One might say he fails to make sense of his life and his place in the world. Jack remembers being posted at the Suez Canal and one day throwing his British passport away for reasons of safety as Colonel Nassar’s troops were approaching. His reminiscences on the act allow an insight into his sense of nationality and sense of self at the time of writing, i.e. his national and personal identity.
“Of course I was born British, like all my generation. British. Such a strange word. It means a hundred different things. People mean by it what they choose. It is a mysterious word. The British Isles, where do they lie, in what ocean? I threw my British passport into the canal and I might as well have thrown the rest of me too. It wasn’t just the part of me that had tried to think of myself as a gentleman that was over – a member of the professional classes, a British officer, a district officer in the British Foreign Service, a radio operator in the British Merchant Marine – it was the whole kit and caboodle that had been Jack McNulty. The passionate drinking man was gone, the husband was gone.”

(TTG 292f.)

Jack’s words express a questioning of the concept of nationality. His life has brought him to the point where he feels he cannot understand such an arbitrary concept or rather why so many people place so much importance on so elusive a concept. Furthermore, his words prove that he feels he has lost himself. He feels stripped of all the identifications he used to rely on when ascertaining the identity of Jack McNulty. The fact that he feels he could have thrown himself in, too, suggests that he feels completely unimportant in this world, much like his brother Eneas as described above.

The desire to find relief in the excessive consumption of alcohol might be interpreted as a symptom of identity diffusion. The questions whether Jack and Mai’s alcohol consumption can be seen as connected to their threatened sense of identity or to what extent – at least in Jack’s case, as Mai may well be seen as having been influenced by Jack in that respect – it presents a separate addiction can of course not be clearly established, as Jack and Mai are fictional characters. In any case, both deficiencies are presented as existing side by side and mutually supportive: social exclusion encourages their alcohol abuse and the ramifications of excessive alcohol abuse intensify the degree of their social exclusion. However, it would be neglectful of much of the historical as well as psychological implications in Barry’s work, were one to arrive at the interpretation that alcohol abuse is the sole destructive factor in Jack and Mai’s marriage, and Barry seems to encourage this reading especially through the presentation of his characters’ thoughts near the ends of their lives.

In the final moments of Act Two in Our Lady of Sligo Barry lets Jack envision a life without the bane of nationalism, without the pressure of having to be part of any nation,
where personal identity is free from national identity, where all they are is determined by the feelings they have for each other (cf. OLS 61f.). It is as close as Jack comes to admitting in the play that he wishes they could start over again in different circumstances. However, here it seems not a confession of personal responsibility but rather an acknowledgement of the weight the historical circumstances have had on the course of their lives. It is only later in this character’s life, as detailed in The Temporary Gentleman, that Jack fully takes responsibility for the grief Mai has to experience during her life (cf. TTG 233). Jack remembers that at Mai’s funeral Queenie Moran, a former friend of his wife, blamed him for Mai’s sad life and ultimately her death, and after all these years without her he admits that this may well have been true as he takes stock of the times he did Mai wrong (cf. TTG 277). At this point the title itself seems as much a description of his social status as it is a judgement of his character. The term ‘temporary gentleman’ was used for officers in the British army, whose commission was only temporary, i.e. for the duration of a war, and who had otherwise no claim to any aristocratic title. Hence, they were only gentlemen for the duration of their service (cf. O’Callaghan). This is also the case for Jack. However, it may be taken as a judgement of his character as well, as he shows and takes pride in gentlemanly qualities like valour and honour, e.g. when working in the bomb disposal squad, but betrays these qualities at home when he gambles away Mai’s inheritance or engages in drunken and abusive shouting matches with Mai in front of their daughter. He is a gentleman but only temporarily, and as their story progresses increasingly less often towards his own wife and family. Jack enjoys presenting himself as the duty-bound officer in the British army or UN official, honor obligating him to leave his family behind to do his duty on foreign shores. The revelations that he was willing to gamble away his wife’s childhood home or that he was let go by the UN based on accusations of smuggling arms (cf. TTG 84-86) suggest that he is a very dishonourable man, who simply repeatedly flees the obligations to his family at home after bringing misery to them. It is a stark contrast to the mythological Greek hero Aeneas who is alluded to already prior to the beginning of the first chapter of the novel The Temporary Gentleman through references to Virgil’s Aeneid and Nahum Tate’s Dido and Aeneas. The comparison is darkly ironic. While Jack’s brother Eneas is an almost comically sad but for the most part innocent representation, Jack seems far from blameless of his fate or his wife’s for that matter.

Eventually, at the end of his account, Jack reaches the conclusion that what essentially defined him was his relationship with Mai. Finally, it seems, he completely sheds any form of nationality and sees his relationship to Mai as the sole identity-defining factor.
“I cannot really go home. Mai was my village and my country. Perhaps I may be a kind of exile everywhere, since I have lost her – until I see her again. Maybe then we will have a better chance of peace, and freedom.”

(TTG 307)

In this passage Jack defines ‘home’ not as a country or place but rather equates it with a person, specifically with Mai. He feels that only through the relationship with her can he define himself. His identity, finally void of national ties, solely depends on identifications which connect him to her, and the experiences, attitudes, feelings, and actions which they have shared over the years. Hence, without her, one may conclude, his whole existence becomes meaningless. Taken to the extreme, the last part of the quote starting with ‘until I see her again’ can be read as a death wish, showing Jack’s certainty that without Mai, he will not ever feel whole again. At the very least, the final sentence can be interpreted as Jack’s regret that they were not able to thrive under this kind of Irish freedom. Jack’s wish is for a second chance, for their story to be – to quote the character – “returned to a blank page, and nothing written on it, only perhaps the very first promise of our love.” (TTG 240) Thus, Jack’s last words of his account appear as a final declaration of his love for Mai. However, the fact that Barry chooses to allude to the social and political changes in Ireland here again, at the very end of the novel, by using the phrase ‘a better chance at freedom’ (see quote above), strongly emphasizes the importance of the influence Irish history has had on both characters’ lives.

Much like Jack, Mai also subconsciously wishes herself back to a time when historical events (or Jack) had not yet destroyed her life. When the nurse tries to draw her attention to the presence of her husband, she denies ever having been married (cf. OLS 62). Moreover, in her last days, she envisions her father at her side, which can be interpreted to show her longing for the carefree time of her childhood when she felt protected by her father and when her sister was still alive. In one of Mai’s earlier memories of her father in Act One of the play Our Lady of Sligo, Mai’s father says to her that she “come[s] from people who always had a boat to row across the dark waters of the Irish story” (OLS 20). In hindsight, at the end of the play it becomes quite clear that contrary to her ancestors, metaphorically speaking, Mai has drowned in exactly those dark waters, which make this statement seem
grossly ironic almost mirroring the irony encapsulated in reference to the Aeneid in *The Temporary Gentleman*.

Borrowing from the metaphors of death Barry uses so often in the play and the novel, the analysis of both works shows that to a certain extent – either in conjunction with or in addition to alcoholism – the defeat of Home Rule and the murder of Collins also kill Jack and Mai in that these two events destroy their chances of a happy life and psychologically force them into a state of on-going identity diffusion. In his last days in Accra shortly before his death, Jack admits to himself that he has no sense of belonging anywhere, no notion of national identity. His desire to do right by his children and grandchildren in the time he has left, however, seems to have the power to render his identity crisis less important than before. With the realization that his life has been wasted, that he has not been and never will be able to acquire the kind of status in this different Irish society he and Mai aspired to in their youth comes the freedom to abandon this need and in a way accept this sense of not-belonging as part of his identity. Similarly, his wife Mai is presented as dying of cancer with the feeling of being a social outcast with all her dreams and hopes shattered by a life destroyed by alcohol but also by the changes in Ireland. In contrast to Jack, however, this character does not show any signs of psychological healing prior to her death.

III.2.2.8 Mrs McNulty – a life ruled by fear

Mrs McNulty is a character that is different from the other characters studied above insofar as she does not feature as a main character in any of the selected works by Barry nor in any other of his works to date. However, even though as a consequence there is only limited information available in terms of character development, which in addition is spread out over all the texts pertaining to her side of the family, analysing the presentation of this character still seems valuable as she is presented as such a powerful influence on the other characters’ development and is herself presented as being influenced in a similar fashion by the changes in Ireland. Hence, this extra subsection presents what information can be found in the texts regarding her own past and her motives for her behaviour and attitude towards the other characters.

While in modern societies, with single parent and patchwork families increasingly common, the idea of illegitimacy would not cause much alarm, in rural Catholic Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was one that entailed a great deal of shame and this
shame was heaped upon Mrs McNulty, conjured upon her, transferred into her own sense of self through the lifelong treatment by Sligo society. Identity, as has been said, is a social construct, and for Mrs McNulty this means that she would have at least partly identified with the shame others see in her ancestry.

She is presented as being talked about wherever she goes but not talked to. An example of this is the Café Cairo incident detailed above in the analysis of the character Eneas McNulty. As a result, such a person would feel excluded from Sligo society and would know the pangs of such exclusion. Consequently, the texts in which Mrs McNulty appears give the impression that she has resolved that her own children will not have to endure such a fate, and that she would probably quite literally “kill anyone to preserve […] [their] lives” (WEM 199). Interpreting her expression in the light of her own social situation detailed above, it seems that the word ‘lives’ not only refers to her children’s physical state but also to their social lives, their places within Sligo society.

Furthermore, being made to feel ashamed repeatedly because of her supposedly shameful ancestry, it seems that Mrs McNulty has reacted by becoming herself extremely Catholic-conservative. Her intense devotion to the Catholic faith becomes a leading motif in all her actions and decisions combined with the urge to defend her children from any kind of slander on that account. This is exactly why she cannot allow Roseanne Clear into her family, why she disapproves of her son’s choice from the very beginning. When Tom brings Roseanne to his parents’ house in order for them to get to know Roseanne, his mother leaves the room after a short while, eventually followed by her husband and lastly Tom himself. When only Tom returns, it becomes quite apparent that the implied conversation the three must have had in the meantime without Roseanne did not end in her favour. Tom is left to say as much to Roseanne.

“‘Did she not like me?’ I said.
‘Well, well, she is concerned about your own mother. Well, she might be said to take a professional interest in that. But it isn’t the main thing. No. And I thought it might be. But no. The mother is very religious […] That’s the real difficulty.’”

(TSS 168)

It seems that Mrs McNulty, having Presbyterian ancestors herself and a much-rumoured ancestry, knows the social dangers of being non-Catholic in Sligo at the time – or most of
Ireland for that matter. Hence the reason for her behaviour in this instance as well as her further treatment of Roseanne is that she sees too much of herself in Roseanne: having learned all the pangs of social exclusion through a youth and adulthood full of whispered comments and public slights, she cannot but do her utmost to protect her son Tom from a fiancée who, with her mentally unstable mother and her Presbyterian faith, holds such a high potential for social exclusion.

In the two novels *The Secret Scripture* and *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*, Barry constructs the relationship between Mrs McNulty and Roseanne Clear in such a way as to present a prime example of irony of fate.\(^{41}\) The tragicomic discrepancy between what Mrs McNulty longs to achieve with her behaviour towards Roseanne and the ultimate result grows with every confrontation. She disapproves of Roseanne, afraid that her religious belief may lead to her son being shunned by Sligo society. Tom then secretly marries her anyway in Dublin and moves into a house with her outside of Sligo. Later she works together with Father Gaunt to have Roseanne’s marriage with her son annulled on the grounds of nymphomania, which leads to Roseanne being talked about and shunned in Sligo. Eventually, however, it also leads to Roseanne seeking comfort in the arms of Mrs McNulty’s other son, Eneas, which results in Roseanne arriving at Mrs McNulty’s door one night heavily pregnant in the middle of a storm with Eneas’s child, i.e. her grandchild. It is ironic that the more Mrs McNulty works to protect her family from the influence Roseanne may have on their social status, the more Roseanne turns into a representation of all of Mrs McNulty’s own dark fears.

In fact, Roseanne turns into Mrs McNulty to some degree, which, however, only Mrs McNulty realizes. This realization becomes evident the night Roseanne seeks help at her door. Mrs McNulty outright refuses to help Roseanne and in the course of their conversation says that she is frightened of Roseanne (cf. TSS 266). Roseanne doesn’t understand why Mrs McNulty would be frightened of her and tries to plead with her by pointing out the similarities between her situation and Mrs McNulty’s troubles in the past. Ironically, this is exactly why Mrs McNulty is so frightened by Roseanne.

> ‘I know you have had your own troubles in the past,’ I said […]
> ‘Don’t!’ she shouted. And then she shouted, ‘Tom!’
> Then she whispered, as woundable as a wounded bird.

‘What did he tell you, what did Jack tell you?’
‘Nothing. Vicissitudes.’
‘Filthy gossip,’ she said. ‘All it was.’”

(TSS 267)

It becomes clear from the way Barry describes Roseanne’s impression of Mrs McNulty’s tone while she is whispering to Roseanne that Roseanne hit the mark more than she is aware of when she appealed to the similarity between them. It is not until much later that Roseanne learns why. In his letter to Roseanne begging for her forgiveness, Jack McNulty reveals that Tom and Jack do not have the same father, that in fact Tom is not Old Tom’s son (cf. TSS 296). Jack remembers many years later in Accra that his mother got married at the age of sixteen when she was already pregnant (cf. TGG 282f.). So first, Roseanne threatens the social status of the McNulty family through her parents’ religious beliefs, reminding Mrs McNulty of her own treatment in Sligo society on account of her ancestry. Then Roseanne turns up at Mrs McNulty’s doorstep having conceived a child outside marriage exactly like Mrs McNulty had in her youth. She sees her own faults so humiliatingly mirrored in Roseanne that she does everything in her power to distance herself and her family from her, even turning away a heavily pregnant woman begging for help and shelter in a stormy night.

In his letter to Roseanne Jack describes his mother as being “a slave to her own ideas of rectitude, as only a person who thinks they have fallen can be” (TSS 296). This seems a most precise analysis of her character. Seeing herself as laden with sins, Mrs McNulty becomes extremely pious. In her attempts to absolve herself, to redeem her family in the eyes of God, she only sins more, judging by today’s moral standards. Not only does she send away Roseanne when she is begging her for help, she also sacrifices her own daughter’s happiness. In The Secret Scripture, Barry lets Dr. Grene find out that Mrs McNulty wanted to be a nun herself but could not because she was still married and her husband was still alive. This implies that she sacrificed her daughter’s happiness instead to make up for what she saw as her sins (cf. TSS 284). Teresa’s unhappiness is mostly only alluded to in Barry’s texts, more implicitly insinuated than explicitly told. The first time Eneas visits his sister, she appears strong and well set-up as a mendicant nun. Although she hints at always having imagined a family of her own, she does not seem too sad about her lot. However, at the end of the scene, Eneas’s thoughts hint at the truth as he “hopes she [=Teresa] wanted this and it isn’t some plan of his mother’s. He suspects his mother in the matter” (WEM 161). His
suspicion is proven true when he returns home and the conversation between him and his parents turns to his visit at Nazareth House in Bexhill-on-Sea where Teresa is a nun. In a letter, his mother told Eneas that she sent Teresa to be a nun (cf. WEM 157). Interpreting Old Tom’s body language during their conversation, it becomes clear that he did not think that sending Teresa to be a nun was a good idea. When Eneas tells his parents that he has found Teresa quite well, his father grimaces in a way that implies that the opposite is the case, even though Eneas himself is presented as unable to read his father’s thoughts. This is proven by his father’s non-verbal reaction to his wife’s assurance that Teresa “was sure of her vocation” (WEM 172). Eneas’s father’s quiet snort contradicts his wife’s premise that it was Teresa’s wish to become a nun, and strengthens the notion that her mother sent her to become a nun against her will, probably to repent for her own sins.

This interpretation is proven to an extent in The Secret Scripture when Dr. Grene talks about Mrs McNulty and her daughter on the phone to another nun who knew them well (cf. TSS 284). Indeed, her son Jack, writing his memoirs in Accra, remembers that his mother had promised her daughter to the nuns many years before she sent her to Bexhill-on-Sea (cf. TTG 148). Eventually, when Eneas meets his sister a second time years later, she seems quite changed to him. She shows him a tumor on her leg and then ends up crying in his arms, and when she whispers the words “Rescue, rescue” (WEM 263) to him, one wonders together with Eneas whether she cries simply for fear of death or for a life she was never allowed to live having been imprisoned in her life as a nun.

Summing up, Mrs McNulty is a deeply scarred character like all of Barry’s other characters. The information presented in Barry’s texts about this character’s past suggests such social torment in Sligo in her youth and also in later life on the grounds of her uncertain ancestry, for religious reasons and her own extramarital transgressions that she feels overly compelled to identify with the predominant notion of Irishness in her town. She swears that her sons shall not have a life of such social exclusion and to that end becomes entirely enthused with the Catholic faith. She perceives it a necessity for her and her family to adhere to it in order to be accepted as part of the Irish community around them, which is why she finally acts against all common principles of brotherly and parental love by sending pregnant Roseanne out into a storm and sacrificing her own daughter’s happiness for her own pious beliefs. In other words, her experiences of social exclusion, of not being part of the community around her, have imbued her with such a fear of her family being considered un-Irish that she is willing to do anything to comply with prevailing notions of Irishness. This
compulsion is so strong that even as pious as she is, she finds herself compelled to act inhumanely.

III.2.3 Barry’s ‘trademark’ identity-based plot structure

While the degree of social exclusion and in turn the symptoms of identity diffusion and their consequences vary from character to character in keeping with their individual life stories, all of Barry’s main characters show a very similar pattern of development. First there is a time of inner peace. Whether as part of the ongoing narration as in A Long Long Way, an episodic one as in the second part of The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty or in the form of memories or flashbacks as in Annie Dunne or The Steward of Christendom for example, each work depicts a time in its main character’s life when they feel or felt secure of their place in the world, in Ireland, in their respective community, in their family. In most cases, except for Thomas Dunne and Mrs McNulty, who belong to the parent generation, this time encompasses the characters’ childhood years but generally the part of their lives prior to the revolutionary changes in Ireland between 1914 and 1922. By no means does this imply that all the characters’ experiences during these years were purely positive. For example, Thomas Dunne in his seventies still carries the scars of his father’s abuse and occasionally remembers with longing his wife Cecilia, who died giving birth to his daughter Dolly. Consequently, his children remember either losing or living without their mother. However, for the most part, these years prior to Irish independence are presented by the author as memories cherished by his characters.

This time of inner peace is then followed by years – most often decades – of identity diffusion, in which the characters’ psychological and often physical well-being continuously deteriorates as their lives are increasingly under the influence of their respective psychological derangements: extreme fear or even paranoia accompanied by a strong mistrust of people, and generally depression and anger often in combination with extreme feelings of guilt, shame and bitterness. Alcoholism can be added to the list even though it may be seen as some characters’ means of temporary relief and not necessarily a psychological symptom itself.

\[42 \text{ cf. TSC 281 for abuse and TSC 255 for wife’s death.} \]
Hence, in keeping with the similarity in character development across all of Barry’s works analysed here, the texts also share a common plot structure. In fact, they share the same plot structure precisely because of their similarity in character development. Although the individual stories may vary in each novel or play just like the length of narrated time and the setting, the plot structure of each work is closely linked to its main character’s development, especially their psychological development. As all of Barry’s characters show a similar pattern of psychological development, their identity formation and the subsequent loss of identity become the main plot-structuring elements: the time in each character’s life when he or she forms identifications constituting an (Catholic) Irish loyalist identity, usually during an overall happy childhood, takes the place of the exposition. The social and political changes in Ireland, mainly between 1914 and 1922 but also afterwards, introduce the complication which presents itself as the beginning of a state of severe identity diffusion as the characters’ national identity is questioned. Regardless of setting and length of narrated time, each work then focuses in the main on the depiction of the symptoms of its principal character’s identity diffusion, as detailed above, as well as their inevitably unsuccessful attempts to overcome said diffusion and restore their identity, which constitute the rising action in terms of plot structure.

As part of Barry’s universal plot structure, all climaxes show similarities in terms of content, too: the characters’ struggles with their identity diffusion induced by the changes in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century end with the death or approaching death of the main character and the repeated reference to an inability to restore an Irish national identity. While some characters are unable to resolve their identity crisis at all prior to their deaths, others appear to at least partially overcome their identity diffusion. However, the final stages of character development universally present the characters as worn out, psychologically and often physically broken after years – often decades – of internal struggle, and even those who partially succeed in restoring their sense of identity are shown as realising with extreme clarity that they have not much of a life left to live. In general, Barry’s characters face their death with a sense of purposelessness, loneliness and loss, unsure of who they are or where they belong.

Through this plot structure the author artistically lets his characters appear as innocent victims of the historical events of nationalist Irish history at the beginning of the
twentieth century and as such all of them show similarities to classically tragic heroes as defined by Greek philosopher Aristotle\textsuperscript{43}.

“In Aristotle’s formulation in the Poetics, tragedy is a genre that evokes pity and fear in the audience, but not simply through a plot that culminates in suffering. Several elements besides mere violence, loss, and misfortune are required to bring about a tragic situation. One, the hero must be fundamentally good, for the fall of an evil man would not call for pity or fear. He should be good, though, but not perfect, for we must be able to identify with the hero so that we might feel we share a common world of mischance. Two, the hero must fall because of an unwitting error (the \textit{tragic flaw} \[\text{bold in the original}\]) or an unavoidable run-in with fate, not because of an immoral nature or deed. Indeed, in many cases the tragedy lies in the fact that in acting properly the hero brings about his own ruin. [...] Finally, the work must conclude the suffering in a way that reconciles the spectators to what they have witnessed. Without some form of resolution, the suffering seems senseless and irrational, and the pity and fear that have been aroused remain unpurged (that is, the \textit{katharsis} \[\text{italics and bold in the original}\] must be enabled by something in the action that transcends the specific sufferings portrayed). [...] Tragedy lies in the fact that probity doesn’t save him or her [i.e. the tragic hero] from catastrophe.”

(Kennedy “tragedy” 158)

Of course, this definition refers to classical tragedies and especially in modern and postmodern literature, literary rules and forms have been opened to creative variation, in plays as well as novels (cf. “modernism” and “postmodernism” in Ousby 263, 309, Kennedy 101, 121f. and Baldick 230f, 288f.). Nevertheless, Barry’s works invariably seem to follow Aristotle’s theory regarding their plot structure and the portrayal and development of Barry’s main characters. Their ‘fall’ occurs on two levels: one, socially, as presented by their loss of social status within Irish society and two, psychologically, in terms of identity with the onset of identity diffusion as a result. What marks them as tragic heroes is the fact that none of them cause the fall through any kind of moral shortcoming.\textsuperscript{44} Rather, as Barry’s characters are mostly portrayed as fundamentally good, their fall is precipitated not in spite of their high moral values but through them. Not only does their probity fail to save them from catastrophe, but it is instrumental in bringing about catastrophe for them. John Wilson

\textsuperscript{43} According to the \textit{Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms}, Aristotle’s definition is the most influential (Baldick “tragedy” 361).

\textsuperscript{44} Jack McNulty may be seen as the exception to the rule on account of his many morally questionable decisions, for example gambling away his wife’s childhood home or smuggling arms as a UN official.
Foster, Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, describes the play *The Steward of Christendom* as a political, domestic and moral tragedy (J. W. Foster 108f.). He identifies Thomas’s high sense of loyalty as the source of his fall and goes on to argue that Thomas’s children become “casualties of his career and values” (J. W. Foster 115). This is certainly true as they have formed their first identifications under the influence of their father. However, though part of their fall is certainly caused by their father’s and their own upbringing, their own heightened sense of loyalty seems to play a part, too. In fact, as this analysis proves, Foster’s initial thesis of the Steward holds true for most of Barry’s main characters. Their strong sense of loyalty drives them to actions which prove to be instrumental in their fall, i.e. their social exclusion and consequently their struggle with identity diffusion. Roseanne, Jack and Mai, however, correspond only partly to this generalisation. Clearly, Roseanne, too, experiences social exclusion and more drastically than many of the other characters. However, in contrast to Willie Dunne or Eneas McNulty for example, she is hardly an active agent in her fall. While most of the other characters bring about their fall at least partly through decisions and actions of their own, Roseanne more than anything appears as a victim of the decisions and actions of others. The same is true for Mai, who is first and foremost a victim of her husband’s shortcomings. Her husband Jack certainly brings about his own fall, but he is different from all the others of Barry’s characters, as he is painted by Barry as markedly less morally superior, less as morally innocent.

Nevertheless, all characters presented here share a high sense of loyalty to pre-1916 Ireland as they have all formed identifications which mark them as Irish loyalists. However, other, at times conflicting feelings of loyalty must be considered as well. In William Dunne’s case, he is loyal to his father but later also loyal to his fellow soldiers, some of whom – like Jesse Kirwan – champion nationalist ideas. As these opposing feelings of loyalty clash, they heighten Willie’s sense of disillusionment and displacement. Annie Dunne’s identity diffusion is also severely influenced by conflicting feelings of loyalty. For much of her life she was loyal to her father, managing his household in Dublin Castle and later his house in County Wicklow after his retirement. When she finally finds herself incapable of dealing with his growing dissociative behaviour and has him institutionalized in Baltinglass mental hospital, she feels she has abandoned him. Both seem to share feelings of guilt as they fail to stay loyal to their father: Willie failing to unquestioningly uphold his father’s ideals and Annie failing to care for the increasingly paranoid and deranged man. Furthermore, Annie has always shown loyalty to her sister Maud, but her sisterly loyalty comes into conflict with
her own feelings of desire for her sister’s husband. These conflicting loyalties add to her psychological stress. Dolly would like to show her loyalty to her husband as well as to her friends and employers by telling them about her past. However, her fear leads her to continually hide her past and this only intensifies her inner conflict.

Mrs McNulty is guided by extreme fear in all her actions as well. However, she does not fear for herself so much as for her sons’ well-being and social status. Hence, her loyalty to her sons is what lies at the bottom of her fear and in turn forms the matrix of her cruel actions towards Roseanne. Eneas McNulty sets out to join the British war effort out of a sense of loyalty to his mother as well as to the Irish people in general, hoping to prove the Irish loyalty to the British in order to show that they are worthy of self-government. Jack and Mai are loyal to each other as well as to their initially formed ideas about their future life in Ireland. Neither can abandon the other, though both are alcoholics and would fare better secluded from the influence of the other. Thus, the essentially positive quality of a high sense of loyalty proves to be instrumental in the fall of Barry’s characters. In most cases the word loyalty could be substituted by the word love. A strong desire for loyalty is presented here as a product of emotional attachment, especially but surely not exclusively in the case of Thomas Dunne, which is quite apparent in his praise of Queen Victoria, a thought shared by Foster as well (cf. J.W. Foster 107).

Foster goes on to describe Thomas’s loyalty as a “resistance to the idea of changing sides” (J.W. Foster 108) despite the changing socio-political climate in Ireland at the time. In fact, all of Barry’s characters share this quality. They all act according to their sense of loyalty and do what they believe is right despite an apparent danger to their lives and/or social standing. This essentially positive quality becomes their tragic flaw when the system they have proven loyal to ceases to exist and is replaced by one that punishes loyalty to the previous. For many of Barry’s characters changing sides becomes impossible after their initial decisions between 1914 and 1922. Marked as loyalists, some even with death sentences on their heads like Dolly or Eneas, they are marginalized or even exiled from Irish society so that even a mental changing of sides, an adjustment of loyalties so to speak, becomes impossible as they can never be accepted by members of the other side. So, when their loyalty is tested by the events of nationalist Irish history, all of Barry’s main characters become social pariahs to varying degrees because they stay true. Hence, their loyalty is clearly presented as their tragic flaw. This loyalty is in turn based on the strong identifications formed prior to these changes. As their loyalty is criticised and punished, their
identifications and consequently their national identity is called into question, which throws them into a continued state of identity diffusion.

As it is the events in Irish nationalist history at the beginning of the twentieth century that turn Barry’s characters’ fundamentally positive quality, their loyalty, into their tragic flaw, thereby initiating their fall, his characters are presented as morally innocent of their fall. This is what allows us to label them as tragic heroes. They are all fundamentally good but fall not despite but because of their goodness. Christina Hunt Mahony points out in an essay on Barry’s characters that a central common characteristic of all his characters is “a degree of sustained innocence and a purity of soul and spirit which seems to defy any negative experience life might have dealt them […] [as they all] in their damaged or thwarted conditions, convey an astounding lack of bitterness.” (Hunt Mahony, “Children” 83) Of the works studied in this paper, Hunt Mahony focuses only on The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty, Annie Dunne and A Long Long Way in her essay. However, what she says about the characters in these works certainly seems to hold true for the main characters in Barry’s other works as well. Hunt Mahony explicitly calls Barry’s characters “innocents” (Hunt Mahony, “Children” 83) and as such they can be likened to tragic characters in the traditional sense with the exception that they are not the high and mighty of society but rather the everyman. This, however, has been found to be quite typical of modern tragedies (cf. “tragedy” in Ousby 394 and Baldick 361f.). Young notes that “modern would-be writers of tragedy have challenged Aristotle’s assumption. Tragedy, they insist, can be democratic: neither good fortune nor, therefore, the tragic ‘reversal’ is confined to the aristocracy” (Young 35).

Of course, Barry’s characters differ in many ways from the characters in classical Greek tragedies, e.g. in the simple fact that Barry presents them as fully rounded characters with a multitude of character traits and emotions instead of as “adamantine embodiments of an idée fixe [italics in the original]” (Young 116) as Hegel would describe the classical Greek tragic hero. However, according to Young, Shakespeare’s tragic heroes, e.g. Hamlet, suffer the same shortcoming (cf. Young 125f.). A comparison to Hegel has been chosen because “Hegel’s account of tragedy is the most impressive since Aristotle’s” (Young 110). Hegel focuses on Greek tragedies and finds modern tragedies inferior to them for a number of reasons. Nevertheless, Hegel’s observations regarding the cause of the tragic conflict appear in keeping with Aristotle’s opinion and generally seem to hold equally true for Barry’s works.
“[L]ike Aristotle, Hegel rejects the view that tragedy can be about innocence brought down by ‘fate’. That would be merely a ‘sad story’ […]. Tragedy is not about victimhood. Rather, the suffering of the tragic hero must be self-inflicted, must be the result of some ‘fault’ for which the hero is ‘blameworthy’ […]. Hegel identifies the fault in question as consisting in ‘one-sidedness’ […].”

(Young 118)

Undisputedly, modern tragedies – including Shakespeare’s works as well as Barry’s – differ from classical Greek tragedies in myriad ways. Nevertheless, Barry’s heroes as well as his works seem to retain enough of the qualities of (classical Greek) tragedies, albeit in quite adapted forms, as to allow us to categorize them, respectively, as modern tragic heroes and modern tragedies even though Hegel probably would have called The Secret Scripture and The Temporary Gentleman sad stories rather than tragedies. In general, though, the high sense of loyalty of Barry’s characters, to one another as well as to a vanishing system, causes their downfall. Their loyalty is their ‘one-sidedness’ or ‘harmatia’.

The subsequent fall of the hero evokes the audience’s – or, in the case of the novels, the readers’ – pity, which according to Aristotle’s earlier definition is meant to be purged in the resolution, thus leading to catharsis. Theoretically, the overall achievement is a social benefit as through catharsis “the audience learns compassion for the vulnerabilities of others, and absorbs lessons in justice and other civic virtues” (Kennedy, “Katharsis” 88). This can be true for The Temporary Gentleman and The Secret Scripture as well, even if one may argue that they are not strictly speaking tragedies. What remains to be asserted, then, is the question of the nature of the lessons in justice and civic virtue that can be gleaned from Barry’s modern tragedies against the backdrop of Irish history.

The endings of Barry’s works constitute the final resolutions of his tragedies. As such they carry a special importance in terms of interpretation. Of course, the tragedy-like structure of the plot as well as the corresponding portrayal and development of the characters already prepare for an emotional response to their deaths, but the true power of this response must at least partly be attributed to the poetic prose Barry uses in these final scenes as well as the subtle change in tone he affects through his characters’ thoughts in these moments.

45 According to the Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, with regard to modern and postmodern fiction it has become accepted practice to label novels as tragedies as well if they share the same characteristics (cf. Baldick “tragedy” 361f.).
Nicholas Grene postulated in an essay on Barry’s works that “a highly wrought poetic prose […] has been the hallmark of Sebastian Barry’s writing […] [and that he] give[s] to his dramatic characters an eloquence and articulacy beyond the ordinary” (Grene, “Out of History” 175). He goes on to explain that while this is obvious in the speech of his characters on the stage, in his novels this eloquence can often be perceived in the characters’ thoughts, too, in their inner monologue and musings about the world (cf. Grene, “Out of History” 175). Contrary to what might be expected, Barry doesn’t create an angry, accusatory tone in his works even when implying criticism. Despite occasional bouts of bitterness, most notably probably in Annie Dunne, Barry’s tone in all his novels and plays is actually one of melancholy mixed with despair: it is predominantly with sadness, not anger, that the lives that could have been, the ruined dreams and hopes of Barry’s characters, are mourned. Ingrained in most of his works, in all his characters’ hearts, is a deep love of their home country Ireland. Of course, it is a notion of an Ireland free from nationalist or religious struggle. Nevertheless, praise for the natural beauty of the Irish landscape and even the people as individuals can be found in many of Barry’s works. It is this deep love of the country which creates the melancholic tone, this sad and desperate longing for something inaccessible. As much as Barry’s characters may be excluded from Irish society, this love prevents them from ever fully letting go. Dolly Dunne’s observation that “Ireland nearly devoured […] [=her], but she has […] [=her] devotion” (OCS 127) is a prime example of the inner conflict Barry’s characters experience as well as of his poetic prose, here shown by the alliteration and by the personification of the country.

Even though the melancholic tone which permeates all narratives from beginning to end still remains in the final scenes of each work, Barry succeeds in these scenes in carefully manipulating the tone to make his characters’ suffering meaningful for a reader or audience. In tone and content these final scenes show clear similarities.

In his death Eneas is first met by an image of his sister Teasy, whom he has always cherished and who sends his soul on its way. His soul’s ascendance from earth is described in almost lyrical form.

“Even as he rises he understands that the thread that binds the dark turns and mazes of a life is bright with that feeling, yellow with it, as important as any letter. […] Now that he looks so intently at the people he has known […] they blaze for him,

Hand also identifies the use of lyrical style as typical of Barry’s plays as well as his novels (cf. Hand 260).
they bloom. They are treasure. A good answer. And he waves to them like a small boy leaving with excitement and sorrow his local station.

He rises, he rises. Fast as a hen pheasant breaking from cover he rises.

And in bidding farewell to the lonesome earth, he knows suddenly and clearly the hard sadness of leaving the beautiful stations, the soft havens and hammered streets. And he gives recognition, with a lonesome prayer, to the difficulties of all living persons, and wishes them good journey through the extreme shoals of the long lake of life – with a last fare-thee-well and a God bless. To Harcourt in particular, his living brother.

His whereabouts, his troubles, his sun-marked face, his songs and chattels are nothing now. And if there is a book of life – which there may be – he knows in the upshot no person’s name is written there, and all are thrown at last without reprieve, king and commoner, into the lake of fire, and the great steam of stars. But the lake of fire into which all men are thrown is admirable, eternal, and clear. Once through the fire they are given their suits of stars. God the Tailor accepts the fabulous lunatics of the earth and stitches the immaculate seams. Sense invigorates the cloudy souls. With charity cloth beyond all redemption, they are redeemed.”

(WEM 307f.)

The quote above is full of enumerations and alliterations which heighten the poetic impression these last lines of the novel make. The idea of God accepting everyone is the dominant notion in this ending. So, as Eneas takes leave of the world of the living, he remembers his friend Harcourt fondly for one last time, just like he thinks benignly of all of the people he knew. Finally, Eneas can let go of his earthly troubles, finds a sort of freedom in death and appears reconciled with God and men.

As Willie Dunne dies at the end of A Long Long Way, he envisions four characters, Jesse Kirwan, Father Buckley, the German soldier he killed and Captain Paisley, as angels. All four characters influenced him in different, quite contrary ways in his life just like the different people in Eneas’s life have influenced him. As Willie dies, he understands them as “captains of his soul” (ALLW 290) and then muses on the nature of souls.

“A soul in the upshot must be a little thing, since so many were expended freely, and as if weightless. For a king, an empire and a promised country. It must be that that country was in itself a worthless spot, for all the dreams and the convictions of that place were discounted. There was nothing of it that did not quickly pass away. Nothing of worth to keep. Some thirty thousand souls of that fell country did not register in the scales of God.

47 This is explained in more detail in III.3.2.
Under that heaving swell of history was buried Willie and all his kindred soldiers, in a forgotten graveyard without yews or stones.

He saw four angels, but angels in those days were common sights.”

(ALLW 290)

It has already been said that the entire novel can be characterised as an anti-war novel and so it is little surprising that the notion of disillusionment, of futility, is stronger here than in the other works. It is here quite openly stated that in Willie’s mind the things he fought and died for, a vision of Home Rule Ireland as the promised country, are revealed to him in death to be essentially meaningless. Furthermore, especially the last line suggests that wars, as futile as they may be, always demand death as, by interpretation, every angel represents a casualty of war. Of course, these lines include a criticism of Irish nationalism as through nationalist strife Home Rule became impossible and this will be discussed further in the following section. However, included in these lines is also the implication that in the end, despite contradictory views, even despite the fact that they tried to kill each other, in death all men are equal, that they all join the undiscriminating all-encompassing legion of the angels. This interpretation is supported by Willie’s thoughts right before his death when he hears the German soldier sing “Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht”, i.e. “Silent Night, Holy Night”.

“The sheep lay down in the darkness fearful of the wolves. But were there any wolves in the upshot? Or just sheep against sheep? Silent night, holy night. Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht. Heilige, holy, a word he had not looked at in his mind since Father Buckley was taken. Holy. Could they not all be holy? Could God not reach down and touch their faces, explain to them the meaning of their travails, the purpose of their long sojourn, the journey out to a foreign land that became a sitting still among horrors?”

(ALLW 289)

Willie compares the soldiers in the war to sheep which are afraid of bloodthirsty wolves. Metaphorically Barry implies through Willie’s initial questions that both sides view themselves as victims, as defenders, and essentially that German and Irish or British soldiers, in fact all soldiers in wars anywhere for that matter, if reduced to an individual, personal
level, are quite alike, that they are all afraid and only there because they have to be and fight because their enemy leaves them no choice, like sheep hiding from the wolves.

In the concluding segment of Roseanne Clear’s journal in *The Secret Scripture*, she, too, speaks of angels, but differently than Willie. She equates angels with people who treated her well. She comes to the conclusion that “we measure the importance of our days by those few angels we spy among us” (TSS 277). This implies by interpretation that the true meaning of life resides within our relationships with other people, the special emotional bond with the people around us. Her very last musings suggest these relationships make all the hardships in life worthwhile, that they are despite the hurt they can cause “a hint of some coming paradise” (TSS 278).

In *On Canaan’s Side*, Dolly Dunne’s plan for suicide is clearly stated but the deed itself as well as her death are only alluded to in Barry’s typical poetic prose:

“But still I stood there. This old lady who intended to take her own life […] I felt I would never know anything again, I was not in any way dismayed by the feeling. I was absolutely in cahoots with that moment, because contained in it I sensed both my disappearance and my queer victory. I carried Bill in my breast, and now instead of it being a stony weight that would kill me, crush the last breath from me, it was something else entirely, a lightness, a veritable possession, as if I was a little cart for him, to carry his lightest of souls into heaven. […] The darkness enfolded on itself, like a fog made miniature, it turned and turned and advanced, and framed suddenly in great clarity and lovely simplicity, a creature dancing, dancing slowly, its collar studded with glass jewels, glinting darkly, dancing, dancing, the long, loose-limbed figure of a bear.”

*(OCS 255f.)*

The darkness that slowly engulfs her can certainly be viewed as a metaphor for her death, her experience of dying. The image of the bear in the final sentence is symbolic. It makes reference to one of her earliest childhood memories as told at the beginning of the novel. Republicans had put a chained dancing bear in her family’s new quarters at Dublin Castle as an act of protest and to scare her father. It is her very first memory of a nationalist act aimed at hurting her family. The bear caused her to fear for her father and fear of the bear caused her father to lose control of his bladder, which made her feel ashamed for her father (cf. OCS 20f.). Essentially, the bear can be seen as symbolic of all the nationalist deeds which have caused her and her family misery. The fact that the bear was the very first memory of such
an act lends its recurring image in her last moments special importance. It appears that finally, in her death, Dolly has come to view the bear as non-threatening. Though throughout her life an image carrying shame, anger and fear, as she is dying the bear loses these qualities and welcomes her to whatever comes after death. Thus, the way Dolly’s experience of her own death is narrated suggests that finally she is free of the terrors which have dominated her life and feels reunited even with those who have caused these terrors. Likewise, death frees her of the guilt she feels on account of her son.

Barry’s play *The Steward of Christendom* ends with Willie Dunne, here a hallucination of his father, helping his father Thomas Dunne to bed in Baltinglass mental hospital, where both then lie down to sleep. Though not clearly stated, this scene can be understood as Thomas’s death. Although the play clearly gravitates around events in Irish nationalist history and its effects on Thomas Dunne as well as others, it ends with Thomas seeing his son, feeling love for his son and relaying to him a childhood memory that more than anything highlights the love of a father for his son (cf. TSC 299-301). His beloved dog has killed one of his father’s sheep and thus is to be killed, but Thomas cannot bring himself to do that and, not knowing what to do, just waits in the woods until at night search groups find him. Thomas expects his father to be furious, but his father is only glad that he is safe and does not reprimand Thomas and nor does he kill the dog. Essentially, it is a story about the mercy and love of a father for his son, and as such it is a cry for mercy to his dead son Willie, begging Willie to understand how much a father can love his son despite their differences. The episode can also be read as an analogy, with the dog representing Thomas, who by staying loyal to the British has betrayed the Irish like the dog betrayed his herd by killing a ewe (cf. Haughey 5f.). Reading it this way, it is also a cry for mercy – Thomas’s cry for mercy to Irish society. The message is essentially the same: the audience is asked to be merciful because Thomas’s actions were driven by love.

His daughter, Annie Dunne, like many of Barry’s characters realises in the end that in the great scheme of things, given the lifespan of the earth, a single human life, a person’s troubles, even entire nations and their conflicts are irrelevant, but that friendship, or by extension any loving relationship, is the only really meaningful aspect of life.

“Even the halves of songs I know, our way of talking, our very work and ways of work, will be forgotten. Now I understand it has always been so, a fact which seemed to heal my father’s wound, and now my own. I think in the end he understood it too, and gained his salvation from that new courage he found, to go naked and unadorned
into the next world. Even great kingdoms – Ireland, England herself – are subject to this law. How could this simple yard in Kelsha be exempt? There is nothing in our lives that is important. Everything will be removed by that Great Fall.

But although it will be winter soon, the wind of friendship will blow eternally from the south. And even after we have gone, something of that friendship will surely linger hereabouts.”

(AD 227f.)

These final paragraphs of the novel are once again given over to musings on the importance of friendship, to the main character realising the importance of a companion and praising it above all else. The reference to winter in the final lines of the quote could be seen as a metaphor for hard times or probably death. Like a wind from the south would give warmth in winter, friendship is then metaphorically praised as either making hard times easier or – more transcendental in thinking – as overcoming or surviving death.

The play Our Lady of Sligo and the novel The Temporary Gentleman, both detailing the story of Mai O’Hara and Jack McNulty, end quite similarly. In Our Lady of Sligo, the last long monologue, the final speech prior to Mai’s death, is given by Jack to an unconscious Mai in her hospital bed. He declares his love for her and mourns their dead son as well as the life they could have had. Likewise, in The Temporary Gentleman, Jack’s last lines in his diary, Jack’s last words before he is killed just as he is about to go home to Ireland, focus on his love for Mai (cf. III.2.2.7.b). Jack here equates home with his dead wife, which in this example essentially suggests a dominance of human relationships over nationalist tendencies. At the same time, he is looking forward to death as the time when he will be reunited with Mai. Clearly then, death is viewed in a positive light as it has the power to overcome the troubles that in life have not allowed them to lead a peaceful life. Keeping in mind the influence of nationalist strife on the relationship of Mai and Jack, it seems at least possible to further specify the troubles that death helps to leave behind as those imposed on them by nationalism.

All in all, as in classical tragedies, it certainly seems possible to read Barry’s works, and especially to interpret his endings, in such a way as to arrive at an understanding of the whole that transcends the suffering of the individual characters. Comparing the final scenes as presented above, two main ideas seem predominant as they reoccur to varying degrees in all endings. The first is the idea of freedom or redemption in death. In his analysis of another of Barry’s plays, Whistling Psyche, David Cregan finds that in its ending Barry “asserts the
hope of a divine redemption of human experience” (Cregan 69). As has been shown, the same can be said for the endings of all works analysed in this paper. The melancholic tone typical of all works analysed here is accompanied in these final scenes by a sort of relief that some characters find and others – those whose story ends sometime prior to their death – long for in death. Death is presented as a cleansing act. In death, persecution stops, fear becomes unnecessary, guilt and shame are taken away and artificially constructed differences, especially nationality or political affiliation, are eradicated until all that is left is a single human soul which is alike to all other human souls. For example, in Dolly’s case the dancing bear has always been a symbol of nationalist antipathy against her family. However, in death the bear loses this quality as these differences become irrelevant and she calmly lets it lead her to whatever lies ahead. Willie sees friends and foes alike as angels when he dies and Eneas “gives recognition, with a lonesome prayer, to the difficulties of all living persons, and wishes them good journey” (WEM 307). Though Jack McNulty’s experiences during death are not narrated by Barry, it is clear nevertheless that he expects this state of mind, this relief, to be part of death. In death he sees a chance to be reunited with his wife but in a realm apart from the social constraints which have in his mind sabotaged their chances of a happy relationship in life. As pain, suffering and guilt cease to exist, death as presented in Barry’s works offers his characters redemption, peace of mind and freedom.

The second predominant idea put forth in Barry’s endings is praise of love and friendship above all else as the only really meaningful aspects of human existence. As they die, envision their death or come close to it, all of Barry’s characters, without exception, imagine before them or think of the people they held dear in life. At the same time all other distinctions, foremost among them nationality, are revealed to be entirely meaningless in death. Throughout all endings, the importance of love and friendship is not only retained by Barry’s characters but emphasised. In fact, these feelings are presented as the only meaningful identifications a person forms in life.

Seen as the final parts in the tragedy-like structure of Barry’s works, the endings can be understood as catharsis-enabling elements. The suffering and death of his characters become meaningful through the lesson which can be learned from them. Through the artistic presentation of the two predominant notions detailed above – redemption in death and love and friendship as the only meaningful aspects of human existence - in all of his works, Barry offers a message to be gleaned from his characters’ stories. It is essentially the meaninglessness of the characters’ deaths, when coupled with the reasons for their suffering
and their eventual deaths, that allows for this meaningful lesson to be learned: in the case of Barry’s characters, all their suffering and their eventual deaths are presented as consequences of national identifications. In their deaths, they are freed of these identifications as these identifications are simultaneously revealed to be artificial and unimportant. Thus, the endings seem to encourage a general devaluation of a segregating national identity and simultaneously a heightened appreciation of a unifying human identity. On a basic level, the overall message which can be gleaned from Barry’s works through their endings is the belief that a person’s life should always be valued more highly than nationalist distinctions, that we must always be more concerned with the fate of people than the fate of nations. Barry’s works in general encourage a search for similarities instead of differences against the backdrop of Irish nationalism and Irish history. As such, more specifically, Barry’s works also encourage a re-evaluation of our perception of Irish history, which will be examined further in the following section.

III.3 Barry’s characters as vehicles of Irish historical revisionism

As all of Barry’s texts encourage a re-evaluation of our perception of Irish history, it is easy to understand why Barry has repeatedly been identified as an Irish revisionist author. Barry’s novels and plays seem to share revisionist notions similarly ingrained in the works of, for instance, Doyle, McCourt and Murdoch - a characteristic for the degree of which he has also been heavily criticised. In fact, Elisabeth Butler Cullingford views this as the weak spot in Barry’s works as represented by the two which her essay focuses on: The Steward of Christendom and The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty. Her criticism may serve as a starting point for a closer examination of the nature of the revisionist notions in Barry’s writing.

Generally, Butler Cullingford’s essay on Barry’s two works seems at times problematic due to its tone and her choice of words: for instance, she chooses to speak of Barry’s supposedly basic concept of historical revisionism as an “ideology” (Butler Cullingford 124), criticises the “single-mindedness of its [= the novel’s] anti-nationalist allegory” (Butler Cullingford 131), calls Barry’s characters “native collaborators” (Butler Cullingford 132) and as a side note sarcastically says of Michael Collins that “luckily for his reputation [he] died before he had to begin the messy business of running the country he had liberated” (Butler Cullingford 136). Butler Cullingford’s choice of words in these examples
strays quite far from a neutral analytic voice – a criticism also voiced by Professor of Irish History Roy Foster (cf. R. Foster, “Something” 187). Leaving aside the seemingly biased tone of her essay, in terms of content she clearly accuses Barry of presenting a fully anti-nationalist re-imaging of Irish history, which in the case of The Steward of Christendom and The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty she finds extremely one-sided and seemingly exaggerated:

“To advance the historically defendable argument that decolonization was disaster for some native collaborators, Barry offers a complementary but less legitimate generalization: all nationalists, with the inevitable exception of Michael Collins, are killers and crooks, and freedom itself is the disaster.”

(Butler Cullingford 132)

In light of this extreme criticism of these two works by Barry, it seems logical as much as necessary to examine in more detail the revisionist notions present not only in these two but in all of Barry’s works analysed here in the hope of ascertaining the extent to which the label revisionist is appropriate for them as well as for Barry as an Irish author. In order to do this, the following constitutes an analysis of the presentation of three fundamental topics of Irish revisionism in Barry’s works, namely the presentation of nationalism, religion and history. The presentation of these topics in Barry’s texts is further compared to their presentation in a selection of works by other popular Irish authors which are generally regarded as pieces of Irish revisionist fiction to allow for a more nuanced evaluation of the revisionist tendencies in Barry’s works and consequently a more reliable commentary on the criticism voiced so far also, but by no means exclusively, by Butler Cullingford.

Incidentally, these three core concepts of Irish revisionist literature are also intricately interwoven with the identity formation of Barry’s characters and their eventual deconstruction in the course of their individual stories. The use of ‘identity’ in Barry’s works as a plot-structuring element has already been fully explored in the preceding chapters. Adding to these preceding findings, the analysis in this part allows for an assessment of how Barry, through his texts, comments on the concept of the Irish identity.
III.3.1 The presentation of nationalism in Barry’s works

Butler Cullingford’s main thesis is that these two works, *The Steward of Christendom* and *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*, principally aim to “explain and justify Irish loyalty to the British Crown” (Butler Cullingford 121), and that they “would have been more powerful had they been less driven by their anti-Republican thesis, less concerned to refute a one-sided version of history by offering an equally one-sided […] rebuttal” (Butler Cullingford 144). She repeatedly accuses Barry of subordinating his writing too universally under the idea of historical revisionism (cf. Butler Cullingford 122, 124).

Thus, in essence, she has two concerns: firstly, Barry’s writing is supposedly too one-sided and secondly, she criticises the effect Barry’s supposedly quasi-political agenda has on the portrayal of his characters. Eneas McNulty in particular, as an example of a Catholic Irish loyalist, she considers too “sanitized” (Butler Cullingford 133). She criticises that he is presented all-round as a victim and laments the utter implausibility of the narrative twists which are used by the author to ensure this image, e.g. the fact that he never actually kills anyone despite being a soldier or that no one in the army ever comes to ask where he was during his summer in France (cf. Butler Cullingford 133-136, 140).

Likewise, Butler Cullingford essentially laments that like Eneas, Thomas is presented as too much of a blameless victim. The Sackville Street incident during the Dublin Lockout, fundamentally a matter of local labour disputes, is supposedly used by Barry to support the political message of the play *The Steward of Christendom* as Thomas Dunne justifies his actions as chief policeman with his extreme sense of loyalty to Queen Victoria. He becomes a victim of his feelings of loyalty. Butler Cullingford finds Thomas’s passionate desire for the queen exaggerated, improbable and a deception on the author’s part to justify Irish loyalism (cf. Butler Cullingford 128f.).

She is not alone in her criticism. Derek Hand also describes Eneas’s complete innocence as a cheap trick by which Barry evades the necessity of letting his character come to terms with any violent actions on his own part, much like the character Forrest Gump in the eponymous popular movie (cf. Hand 258-260). While Hand acknowledges Barry’s novel *A Long Long Way* as “a more measured and nuanced exploration of divided loyalties [than *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*]” (Hand 260), Liam Harte criticises Barry’s portrayal of the Volunteers, especially of Willie Dunne, in that novel for much the same reason that Butler Cullingford criticises the portrayal of Thomas and Eneas in the other two works. He, too, believes that Barry places “undue emphasis on the cultivation of sympathy” (Harte 209).
Taking into account the tragedy-like plot structure of all of Barry's works as laid out earlier, in plays as well as novels, including *The Steward of Christendom*, *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* and *A Long Long Way*, it seems fair to say that Barry at times substitutes the improbable for the realistic to ensure his readers’ sympathy in keeping with the requirements of the traditional tragedy format. As his critics have pointed out, a more realistic portrayal would certainly have been possible, but only at a cost. Had Barry portrayed Eneas McNulty, for example, as actively involved in the bloody reprisal warfare between the RIC/Black and Tans and the IRA or nightmarishly killing enemy soldiers at Dunkirk, or passionately hating his friend Jonno instead of lamenting the loss of his friendship till the end, Eneas would certainly appear more realistic. However, it is highly doubtful that this version would achieve the same emotional response. Following the traditional definition of tragedy, the tragic hero must be essentially good to create an emotional response to his fall in the audience, which in turn encourages them to absorb the author’s message. For better or worse, Barry appears to have striven to maximise the sympathy his characters can instil in the reader by portraying them as true innocents.

Postponing a further discussion about the need for more realism until the conclusion, what remains to be ascertained in this subsection is to what extent Barry’s texts can be called revisionist regarding the presentation of Irish nationalism. As in many Irish revisionist works, in Barry’s texts nationalism is presented and usually criticized in more than one way. Three main methods seem dominant in the works studied for this paper: a) through the description of the consequences of nationalism on the lives of Barry’s characters, b) through descriptions of and commentary on iconic figures of the Irish nationalist movement in particular as well as nationalists in general and c) through a fictional recreation of at least parts of Irish society and their desperate or life-threatening circumstances in Ireland during the revolution and later, after independence, under a nationalist government.

As has been shown in detail and at length in the previous sections of this paper, Irish freedom certainly is presented in Barry’s texts as having disastrous consequences for all of Barry’s main characters in terms of social status as well as psychological health. Unsurprisingly, all of Barry’s characters view Irish freedom and accordingly nationalists, the instigators of freedom for Ireland, negatively; Eneas McNulty, for example, metaphorically calls Irish independence “the shipwreck of freedom” (WEM 110). This section will compare Barry’s presentation of nationalism to that by other Irish revisionist authors focusing on the two other ways in which nationalism is presented and criticized in Barry’s texts.
With regards to iconic figures of Irish nationalist history, two are commented on repeatedly in many of Barry’s works: Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera. In general, many of Barry’s characters view Collins in a positive or at least neutral light while de Valera is heavily criticised. In remembering officially handing over control of Dublin Castle to Collins, Thomas Dunne describes Collins as big, strong, handsome and glamorous. He remembers their meeting fondly and with a tinge of sadness envisions a close relationship with the man under different circumstances (cf. TSC 285f.). He seems to envision a shared set of values which leads him to hold the man in high regard despite ideological differences. This may also be why he remembers ordering his men to salute Collins’s coffin later (cf. TSC 299). He tells a nurse that he still remembers the sorrow he felt after Collins had been shot (cf. TSC 262). His daughter Annie also remembers her father’s sorrow (cf. AD 154). However, she has only bitter words for both men. In Thomas’s memory she says Collins is not a gentleman but a criminal (cf. TSC 254, 256). In her mind she calls de Valera and the nationalists “those mad gunmen […] who thought to throw everything over with a dark frenzy of blood and murder.” (AD 20) Clearly, her choice of words expresses a negative view of this group. She expressly blames them for ruining her family’s life, stating that her family’s “glory” (AD 20) only lasted until the nationalists took over. At the end of her life, her sister Dolly looks back at her childhood years in Dublin and calls the IRA men “those new murderers” (OCS 35), a choice of words which clearly expresses a negative attitude towards these men.

Eneas McNulty shares Thomas’s positive view of Collins. He, too, disconnects the man from the group of people he represents and the ideology they champion. He simply does not think of Collins as the enemy and from the way his fellow RIC men talk about him, he senses that they do not do so either (cf. WEM 60). From the way he thinks about de Valera and Collins after the latter’s death, it seems that while he may have thought Collins capable of successfully leading this new country into a positive, peaceful future, he doubts de Valera’s competence to do the same, thinking that he “never read a word of sense that man said” (WEM 162). From the way Roseanne Clear recounts her husband Young Tom’s views on the events of the Irish nationalist history, it seems that she may partly agree with him now. As a supporter of the Irish Free State, he also holds Collins in respect but strongly criticises de Valera (cf. TSS 163, 178f., 200). Jack and Mai’s views follow this pattern. Jack tells the nurse in the hospital that they could have rallied under Collins’s politics, that under him as head of state they would have had a bright future if only he had not been killed by the opposing side, which at the time was led by Eamon de Valera (cf. OLS 22). That man’s
spirit, in contrast, he calls “deadening, deficient” (OLS 23) and in one of Mai’s visions of Jack, he calls him a “gunman” (OLS 48). Mai points out de Valera’s questionable political decisions to the nurse, making him out to be a fascist (cf. OLS 48). According to Jack, she was always a strong supporter of Michael Collins, but when de Valera became head of state in 1932, she states that they were wrong to support nationalists at all, that “these lads are not the lads we thought they were.” (TTG 129)

Thus, while most of Barry’s characters at least hint at the possibility that independence under Collins may have left them with a chance of future happiness, de Valera is presented as having destroyed that chance and consequently their hopes for the future with Collins’s death. Studying revisionist works by other Irish authors, this more positive presentation of Collins compared to a rather negative portrayal of de Valera as in Barry’s works is not uncommon. Generally, revisionist Irish literature seems to question a one-sided nationalist narrative by discarding or at least de-mystifying iconic personae in Irish nationalist history, but it seems that on the whole the heroic image of Collins is less fiercely deconstructed – often even upheld – than that of other such figures, especially Eamon de Valera. A good example of this is Roddy Doyle’s novel *A Star Called Henry*, in which the de-mystifying of such national figures is a central theme and not limited to Collins and de Valera alone.

Doyle’s portrayal of Connolly is similar to Barry’s portrayal of Collins. Doyle lets his protagonist Henry describe Connolly as the inspirational, idealistic figurehead of the movement, saying Connolly “wasn’t just a man; he was all of us. We all needed him. He’d made us believe in ourselves” (Doyle 127). However, Collins is also still presented quite positively although the heroic image which permeates much of Barry’s work is de-mystified in Doyle’s novel as he is presented as more afflicted by human emotions. Doyle presents him as an apt military leader in the 1916 Easter Rising (cf. e.g. Doyle 112), ingenious in the use of propaganda and extremely efficient in evading capture by the British (cf. Doyle 191f.). The main character Henry Smart seems to have a high regard for Collins and thus a positive image of Collins is presented.

However, Collins is also presented as a person with human weaknesses, e.g. he is shown to be a sore loser and quite arrogant and childish, trying to impress a girl by starting a fight with Henry and then hitting Henry after actually losing their fight (cf. Doyle 198ff.). Here Collins is presented as quite human and less like the heroic military genius. Nevertheless, Doyle’s portrayal still upholds the overall positive image of Collins similar to Barry’s.
The image of de Valera is at least partly deconstructed in Doyle’s novel. Doyle has Henry experience the Rising and the succeeding imprisonment of the rebels first hand. Henry’s refusal to call de Valera ‘Dev’ already implies a dislike on Henry’s part. Then follows a revisionist re-writing of how the famous photograph of Éamon de Valera as the “last man to surrender” (Doyle 138) was taken and it serves to show how artificially constructed photos, and by extension propaganda or history writing itself, can be.

“The famous photo. The last man to surrender. Hands behind his back, a Tommy on each side of him, another behind. I was there, to the left of de Valera (I never called him Dev). […] The first time I saw that photo my elbow was still in it, but even that went in later versions. No room for Henry’s elbow. Just all of de Valera and his guards, three English kids barely bigger than their rifles. […] It became the photograph of Éamon de Valera. It became proof, part of the legend. There he is, the soldier, the father of the state. A foot taller than his guards. Serious and brave, undaunted and straight. I was there. He was wearing red socks and he smelt of shite.”

(Doyle 139)

In revisionist fashion, the worth of this photograph or any photograph for that matter as proof of de Valera’s valor is questioned but also, consequently, the perception of de Valera as a hero. The same holds true for the portrayal of Patrick Pearse in Doyle’s novel. Doyle’s description also questions a heroic picture of the man when Henry remembers “Commandant Pearse arrive […] cycling over Butt Bridge, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Irish Republic and President-Elect, struggling across the bridge and sweating like a bastard” (Doyle 91) and that Pearse “was fat and [that] his arms had no more muscle than his poetry” (Doyle 124).

In her novel The Red and the Green Irish Murdoch also presents Connolly through the eyes of nationalist Pat Dumay as a figure commanding respect and admiration and a fascinating orator (cf. Murdoch 89f.). Pearse is criticised for over-romanticising the war and “Ireland’s heroic past, which he peopled not only with Red Branch Knights, but also with ghosts and fairies and leprechauns in which he himself seemed half to believe” (Murdoch 90). This presentation implies a certain incapability or unwillingness on Pearse’s part to fully acknowledge the pain and suffering that comes with war and in turn to really understand the sacrifice the revolutionaries are prepared to make.
Hence, in general, it seems that Barry’s presentation of important personae of the Irish nationalist movement is congruent with that by noted revisionist Irish authors. With regards to the presentation of nationalists in general, there also seem to be similarities between Barry and other Irish revisionist writers. Apart from the negative view of nationalists that all of Barry’s characters share, nationalists are also presented negatively in Barry’s works through their deeds or by description. For example, the IRA men in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*, among them first and foremost Jonno Lynch and Mr. O’Dowd, and the unknown murderers of Roseanne Clear’s father in *The Secret Scripture* are shown as cruel, cold-blooded and violent killers. Furthermore, one of the most elaborate criticisms of freedom in Ireland, or rather more specifically, of the violence nationalists used to achieve it is the presentation of Nigeria’s independence movement as experienced by Eneas in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*.

Eneas eventually ends up working in Africa, where he meets Harcourt again, a man from Nigeria he met on the boat back to Ireland a year before. It is the one lasting friendship Eneas ever enters into. In a way, with Harcourt, Eneas befriends another version of himself. Harcourt and Eneas spend eight years in Nigeria, some of them in the capital Lagos, and Harcourt explains to Eneas why he doesn’t really want to be in Lagos.

“It’s not easy to be at home. I didn’t want to hang about in Lagos. Things have changed here, brother, it’s not my town any more. […] Lagos is full of wild men these days, wild-talking men. With the war over some men want great things, big things, and especially that big thing you have in your sweet country, and I’m talking about independence. And those sort of men don’t like my father’s sort and they don’t like me, who was in the army, you know, and leads a quiet life, and takes things as they come … Death-threats are all the fashion now in Lagos, let me tell you.”

(WEM 217)

There is an extraordinary resemblance between Harcourt’s situation and Eneas’s own: like Eneas, Harcourt was in the army, an occupation now frowned upon by the majority of people in the country. As in Eneas’s home country in the years before, Lagos is in a state of revolution with large parts of the population fighting among themselves in the name of independence. Like Eneas, Harcourt feels unwanted in his home country and is afraid of a death sentence carried out against him, knowing full well that he does not belong to the group of people which is taking control of the country (cf. WEM 241). Almost allegorically,
the situation in Nigeria as experienced by Eneas mirrors the fight for independence in Ireland. The obvious similarity between Eneas’s fate and Harcourt’s is repeatedly and quite explicitly illuminated. Harcourt himself remarks “that Lagos is almost the same word as Sligo, give or take an i or an a” (WEM 241). Standing at a road watching a police convoy passing by, Eneas is reminded of his own past in Ireland: “Past they go, the spick-and-span police, in wagons very like the Crossley tenders of yore along the rhododendron backways of the county Sligo. […] These fellas, the Nigerian police, are just like them, in the wrong suits to please the patriots.” (WEM 242) In Nigeria “the patriots are trying to tear the old Britishness out of Nigeria, erase the men and emblems of the very Queen herself” (WEM 241). Obviously, a comparison is drawn between the nationalist movement in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century and the same movement in Nigeria in the 1960s. The brutality used by nationalist forces in Ireland is implicitly criticised for example by highlighting the cruelty with which the Nigerian patriots have killed Harcourt’s father, who was a servant of the British in the country: they stuffed a tin funnel down the man’s throat and pumped his son’s self-made alcohol into the man until he died (cf. WEM 245ff.).

Roseanne Clear also associates murder with the gaining of freedom in Ireland (cf. TTS 29). Similarly, in Dolly Dunne’s account of the gas explosion at the East Ohio Gas Company in *On Canaan’s Side*, the violence the fight for freedom causes is implicitly criticised.

“A bit of gas started to leak out of a new storage tank, that they had proudly built to help the war effort, up at the East Ohio Gas Company. It must have just put its white swirling face out, sniffed the Ohio air, liked the sense of freedom, and decided to sally forth. But it had not been born to know freedom, and soon as it mingled with that air, it blew up. The whole storage tank blew up, in one vast end-of-the-world whoosh of fire, the fire grew into armies, and with a devilish hunger devoured whole streets of houses.”

(OCS 156f.)

Barry’s choice of words here, obviously the word freedom but also the description of the fire as armies destroying streets of houses, mirrors Dolly’s memories of the situation in Dublin at the beginning of her life. Having already read so much about Dolly’s own life story, it is hard not to read her description of the explosion as an allegory for the destruction the fight for Irish independence caused in Dublin and other cities throughout Ireland.
The criticism of violence as a means to an end is also criticised in Murdoch’s *The Red and the Green*. One character, Kathleen, puts forth the idea that “[n]o political reform is worth shedding one drop of blood” (Murdoch 57). This clashes with the desire for violence of another character, her son Pat Dumay, who is a Catholic Irish nationalist and an Irish Volunteer. Pat dedicates his life to the liberation of Ireland and firmly believes that “Ireland’s freedom must be bought with blood” (Murdoch 94). A friend of Kathleen, Christopher Bellman, whom she urges to intercede in her debate with her son, also voices the opinion that “Ireland’s honour demands a fight” (Murdoch 209), to which she replies that “Ireland’s honour means nothing but the vanity of a few murderous men” (Murdoch 210). In contrast to Barry and Doyle, Murdoch mainly refrains from passing any judgement, whether directly or indirectly. A wide spectrum of different opinions on the question of Ireland’s independence and the fight for freedom are voiced by the characters in her novel, while the omniscient third-person narrator stays strategically and almost infuriatingly impartial (cf. e.g. Murdoch 38-44). It seems completely up to the reader to decide which way to lean. As such though, it includes the possibility of reading Pat’s and Christopher’s statements in connection with Kathleen’s admonishment as a criticism of the violence of nationalists. Published in 1965, Murdoch’s novel was special insofar as it offered a multitude of perspectives on Irish nationalist history in the 19th and early 20th century, a drastically broader picture than the one painted by nationalist historians and politicians in the preceding years.

The presentation of nationalists as cruel and cold-blooded is also a central element in Roddy Doyle’s novel *A Star Called Henry*. The main protagonist and first-person narrator, IRA member Henry Smart, repeatedly describes his acts of violence in the name of the IRA. However, the real criticism of nationalists comes with the climax. Here, it is not the brutality which they use to achieve independence that is criticised but their hypocrisy. The nationalists in power by the end of the War of Independence are depicted as cold-blooded, greedy and entirely self-serving. This becomes clear, for example, in Henry’s final confrontation with a former brother-in-arms, Ivan Reynolds. Disillusionment comes instantaneously, not only for Henry but for the reader as well. In their last conversation towards the end of the novel, Ivan opens Henry’s eyes to his real motives.

“‘But here’s the truth now. All the best soldiers are businessmen. There had to be a reason for the killing and late nights, and it wasn’t Ireland. Ireland’s an island, […]"
a dollop of muck. It’s about control of the island, that’s what the soldiering’s about, not the harps and martyrs and the freedom to swing a hurley. […] I’ve freed fucking Ireland. Nobody works without the nod from Ivan. A sweet doesn’t get sucked without a good coating of the profit ending up on Ivan’s tongue. I’m a roaring success.”

(Doyle 314)

Ivan then goes on to threaten Henry so that he would stop his wife from waging a one-woman guerrilla war on the British against all odds because it is bad for business. Henry is presented as finally realising not only Ivan’s duplicitous nature but that of all nationalist leaders at the end of the war.

“I was a complete and utter fool, the biggest in the world. It had been niggling away at me for years but now I knew. Everything I’d done, every bullet and assassination, all the blood and brains, prison, the torture, the last four years and everything in them, everything had been done for Ivan and the other Ivans, the boys whose time had come. That was Irish freedom, since Connolly had been shot – and if the British hadn’t shot him one of the Ivans would have; Connolly would have been safely dead long before now, one of the martyrs, dangerous alive, more useful washed and dead. […] I was a slave, the greatest fuckin’ eejit ever born.”

(Doyle 318)

Clearly, Henry realises that the nationalist leaders who are in charge by the end of the war are all self-serving and cold-blooded, and as such far from the nationalist heroes who fought for independence and started the war for idealistic reasons. The generalisation that Doyle uses here with the phrase “the Ivans” is mirrored in Barry’s character Eneas’s lament that there are “just O’Dowds and DeValeras left” (WEM 162) after Collins’s death. Mrs McNulty, Eneas’s mother, voices a similar criticism. Opening up to Eneas during one of his visits, she admits that she feels Ireland is a “country of hypocrites and demons” (WEM 198), which might not be aimed at nationalists exclusively but must certainly include them as they constitute the majority.

In Colm Tóibín’s novel The Heather Blazing the criticism of nationalists is more subtle, more measured. Generally, it becomes more rounded as the political history of the main character himself, elderly High Court judge Eamon Redmond, is revealed bit by bit. In one of Eamon’s memories, de Valera is praised, but a party member clearly suggests that
some nationalists were only after their own profit at the end of the Irish Civil War, saying that “[o]nce they got power they wouldn’t give it up, they were worse than the British” (Tóibín 163). This description of nationalist politicians as power-hungry mirrors the attitude of Ivan Reynold in Doyle’s novel. The more the reader learns about Eamon’s father’s deeds in the War of Independence, Eamon’s own role and even pride as a young boy in supporting an aging de Valera in his election campaign, the more one can understand his inner conflict as he comes to question the laws passed by the very party he helped to power and that has helped him to his post. In his most recent case, a teenage mother has filed a lawsuit against her former school because the school expelled her on the grounds that she had a child out of wedlock. Eamon decides against the young mother but his verdict is questioned by his own family, his wife and his daughter, the latter ironically being in a similar situation as the young girl: unmarried and raising a baby as a single parent (cf. Tóibín 92ff.). The personal life of this man clashes with his professional life. The increasing state of self-doubt of the main character, such a loyal supporter of de Valera’s party, clearly suggests a criticism of the conservative policies of Fianna Fáil in the twentieth century as outdated, un-emancipated and too rooted in the past to face the challenges of a modern society (cf. Harte 114f.; Walshe 45-51). According to Harte, Eamon’s eroding certainties of nationalist ideology are symbolically mirrored in the eroding Wexford coastline.

“Eamon is continually reminded that the site upon which the 1798 insurgents staged their rebellion, the very land they died defending, is inexorably crumbling into the advancing sea […] This image […] is perfectly weighted to invoke the incremental process of social change and the erasure of seemingly immutable orthodoxies and allegiances.”

(Harte 122).

However, Tóibín is content with describing Eamon’s feelings of sadness and loneliness after his wife’s death, which brings about his self-reflection but leaves the reader with this. Tóibín uses sadness where Barry uses more severe methods to show the psychological consequences for his characters, e.g. paranoia, depression and suicide. Hence, the social criticism seems more subtle and quieter in Tóibín’s novel.

Likewise, the story of Francie Bradie in Patrick McCabe’s *The Butcher Boy* can be understood as a severe criticism of post-independence Irish society. According to Brian Shaffer, in McCabe’s *The Butcher Boy*, the description of the poverty-stricken and
dysfunctional family home of the main protagonist, Francie Brady, clashes drastically with de Valera’s presentation of Irish home life in his radio address in 1943 (cf. Shaffer 181). Moreover though, Shaffer highlights the social implications of the work that transcend the family setting as such and are directed at Irish society in the 1960s in general.

“The Butcher Boy is far more than a portrait of an unstable boy within an impoverished and dysfunctional family, however; it is also a searing portrait of a society that fails to address the well-being of its children when the parents in question are neglectful, abusive, or mentally ill.”

(Shaffer 176)

Francie is institutionalised multiple times, but institutions as well as society as a whole fail to support the boy in any real way. Rather, the way society treats Francie’s family paves the way for his increasing derangement. Francie’s psychosis starts with an argument between Francie’s mother and their neighbour, Mrs Nugent, which ends with Mrs Nugent calling Francie’s family ‘pigs’ (cf. McCabe 4). This leaves an impression of shame on Francie he can never shake off. McCabe himself states in the afterword to his novel that he sees the word pigs “as a metaphor for the inheritance of malignant, perhaps colonial shame” (McCabe 238). Liam Harte explains McCabe’s statement in two ways. First of all, the Nugents, who emigrated to England and have only just returned to Ireland, have adopted the values and also the prejudices of the British towards the Irish. These feelings of British superiority over the Irish are expressed through the common reference to the Irish as ‘pigs’.

Furthermore, the Nugents are a financially well-off and all in all happy family. As such they are the exact opposite of the Bradys. Harte argues that Francie’s parents are aware and more importantly ashamed of their shortcomings while not acknowledging them, and, referencing psychoanalytic shame theory, that Francie internalises his parents’ unacknowledged shame. In Harte’s words The Butcher Boy can be understood “as a powerful dramatization of the corrosive impact of parentally transmitted shame-rage” (Harte 87). This feeling is intensified by his mother’s suicide, for which he blames himself. The extent of the psychological impact of this development on Francie is exposed through Francie’s shockingly violent murder of Mrs Nugent, whom Francie comes to blame for all his misfortunes, after which Francie uses her blood to write the word PIGS on the walls of the upstairs room (cf. McCabe 213ff.). The murder is the final escalation of the shame-rage spiral which is initially triggered by Mrs Nugent’s comment.
In his introduction to the Picador Classic edition of McCabe’s novel, fellow author Ross Raisin points out that “Francie is from the beginning an ostracised figure, kept always at a watchful distance by a populace eager to whisper its judgements” (Raisin xii). This suggests that inherent in McCabe’s novel is a kind of social criticism. Of course, it is possible to read McCabe’s novel as the story of a dysfunctional family but this would neglect many of the work’s implications. Francie’s madness is primarily caused by his parents’ feelings of shame but the shame as well as in turn Francie’s madness are intensified by the social circumstances: like the Nugents, Francie’s uncle, his father’s brother, has left his home country but also a girl he loved for a job in England and a marriage with an English woman he does not care for, only to be celebrated as the family success story every time he visits while Francie’s father remains unemployed and poor (cf. McCabe 27-37). The Nugents’ success in England and their high status in Irish small-town society serve to highlight Francie’s father’s shortcomings. In this way McCabe’s novel criticises a certain level of hypocrisy in Irish society: It professes to hate everything British but marvels at an Irishman’s economic success even if that success was only possible through emigration to Britain, but at the same time looks down on its unemployed at home. Francie’s shame is certainly inherited, but it is caused as much by his parents’ personal shortcomings – like his father’s alcoholism – as by their place in Irish society and the attitudes and values of that society.

With regards to the concept of inherited shame and connected social criticism, there are clear similarities between McCabe’s novel and Barry’s writings. Mrs McNulty, for example, is in a similar position as Francie. She suffers from her inherited shame all her life, having to endure the whispers of Sligo, e.g. in Café Cairo, and this makes her act cruelly and mercilessly towards Roseanne, much like Francie acts in the end towards Mrs Nugent, though by no means quite as drastically. In Eneas McNulty’s case, nationalist Irish society is depicted as almost ironically unfair. He joins the British Merchant Navy to prove the valour of the Irish, the worthiness of Ireland, only to be degraded and eventually exiled upon his return. Similarly, Willie Dunne in A Long Long Way takes up arms in World War One, steadfastly believing to do right by his country only to be spat at and abused in Dublin during home leave. A similar situation is presented in the novel The Temporary Gentleman. In Ghana, which has just won its freedom from the British, Jack McNulty finds himself employing a man called Tom Quaye. Tom served in the Gold Coast Regiment under British command but now, after independence, most of those former soldiers cannot find a job and so ironically Tom starts to work for Jack, who has suffered the exact same fate back home in Ireland (cf. TTG 16ff.). In fact, Tom’s own story grows in meaning when readers of The
Temporary Gentleman are familiar with Eneas McNulty’s and William Dunne’s stories. Tom’s personal fate is almost completely a mirror image of theirs. He joins the Gold Coast Regiment believing to do something patriotic by fighting to protect the Gold Coast from the French, much like Willie who joins the British war effort in World War One as an Irish Volunteer or Eneas McNulty in both wars. On returning home years later, he finds that he has been declared dead by his tribe and as such is socially dead to his people, most sadly even to his wife (cf. TTG 70ff.). His state of literally being perceived as dead by the members of his tribe almost comically mirrors the way Eneas and Willie, and to lesser degree Jack, are treated when they return to Ireland.

Frank McCourt’s novel Angela’s Ashes shows the exclusion of certain groups of people from Irish social life in similar ways. The treatment of the first-person narrator’s father partly mirrors that of Barry’s characters. Frank’s father comes from the North but he claims that he “fought with a Flying Column during the Troubles [and that] he had to be smuggled out of Ireland because of the price on his head” (McCourt 60). As such he should be entitled to some money from the IRA, but the man in charge just sends him away again claiming he cannot find his name despite Frank’s father’s ability to remember names, places, missions, etc. McCourt presents Frank’s father as an intensely idealistic though equally ridiculous figure. A slave to the drink, he is unable to hold down a job and spends his wages or the dole money in the pub instead of using the money to provide for his family, which lives in utter poverty (cf. e.g. McCourt 178f., 211). However, at the same time, whenever he comes home drunk at night, he wakes his children and makes them stand up straight and swear to die for Ireland (cf. e.g. McCourt 47f.). The repetition of this scene in the narrative gives an impression of the regularity of this event. So although he is unable to provide for his family, it is clear that he is full of nationalist ideals. That is why it seems so unfair that his family is punished by nationalist society on his account. Of course, it also ridicules the idea of dying for Ireland as well. As he has a North Ireland accent, work is often withheld from him (cf. McCourt 74). His wife, Frank’s mother, is told that “there’s hardly enough for the poor people of Limerick without Yanks coming over and taking the bread out of […] [their] mouths” (McCourt 75). He had to flee to America because of his involvement in the nationalist movement and now that he is back, he is ostracised as a Yankee instead of welcomed back as a brother-in-arms. Through Frank’s father McCourt criticizes the policy of organisations of the Irish state and Irish society in general for putting labels on people and ostracising parts of the population. This becomes clear when McCourt lets Frank’s father comment on the situation saying “Remember this, Francis. This is the new Ireland. Little
men in little chairs with little bits of paper. This is the Ireland men died for.” (McCourt 60) This statement clearly suggests that the people who are in power in the new Irish Free State do not share the ideals and virtues of those who started the revolution. Hence, McCourt’s criticism of nationalist Irish society as hypocritical and unfair mirrors Doyle’s, McCabe’s and Barry’s depiction.

However, McCourt highlights the social segregation within Irish society after Irish independence even more strongly and clearly when he lets his main character explain why he isn’t allowed to talk to his cousins.

“People in families in the lanes of Limerick have their ways of not talking to each other and it takes years of practice. There are people who don’t talk to each other because their fathers were on opposite sides in the Civil War in 1922. If a man goes off and joins the English army his family might as well move to another part of Limerick where there are families with men in the English army. If anyone in your family was the least way friendly to the English in the last eight hundred years it will be brought up and thrown in your face and you might as well move to Dublin where no one cares. […] In every lane there’s always someone not talking to someone or everyone not talking to someone or someone not talking to everyone.” (McCourt 162f.)

In his description of the clear marginalization of anyone with connections to the British, McCourt illustrates exactly what happens to Eneas and Jack McNulty and Willie Dunne. Their connection to the British army is what ultimately has them excluded from society. Furthermore, McCourt’s description also suggests the idea of inherited shame as postulated by McCabe, that people are guilty by relation. However, whereas McCabe’s novel focuses more on the internal effects of this inherited shame, showing Francie’s increasing psychosis, McCourt’s novel focuses more on the external effects showing the treatment of the McCourts.

The idea of inherited shame in general is a principle that Barry’s entire family tragedies are based upon, too. For example, Roseanne’s husband Tom McNulty has other reasons beside the accusations put forth by Father Gaunt and his mother to leave her. He is very active politically, first in the Free State (cf. TSS 153ff.), later also as a Blueshirt for some time - until he experiences war first-hand in Spain (cf. TSS 200-203, 251) - and also later as the mayor of Sligo (cf. TSS 171). Even so, in Sligo it is hard for him to separate
himself from the reputations of his brother Eneas and his wife’s father. For example, a popular Republican man greets him by saying, “‘Ah Tom […] the policeman’s brother’” (TSS 162), which shows that at least by some he is acknowledged more because of his brother’s unpopular loyalist past than because of his own nationalist endeavors. From a political angle, marrying the Presbyterian daughter of an ex-RIC-man would have been extremely disadvantageous. Roseanne’s own account supports this idea:

“In the war of independence it wasn’t just soldiers and policemen had to be killed, even those stupid fellas that had gone out to the Great War without thinking what they were doing, but also tinkers and tramps and the like. People that were dirtying up the edges of things, those people that stood at the edges of photographs of nice places and in certain people’s eyes were starting to stink them up. […] I knew that in the eyes of Tom’s friends outside, gathered in the Plaza, if they knew everything about me, they would want to – I don’t know, extinguish me, judge me, put me outside the frame of the photographs of life.”

(TSS 201f.)

Roseanne reflects on the political climate of the time when Tom was active in the Blueshirts, probably towards the end of the 1930s, and firmly believes that at least according to them, she does not fit their idea of an Irish woman. Furthermore though, it is also a more general criticism of the marginalization of whole groups of people and the policy of punishing people for the deeds of their relatives.

Nevertheless, this is not the only aspect in which post-independence Irish society is criticised in Barry’s writing. In On Canaan’s Side, Dolly Dunne accuses the nationalist leaders of focusing too much on gaining independence and too little on making plans for providing for the population economically once freedom was achieved by saying that they gave “freedom to her [Ireland’s] sons and daughters quicker than a future” (OCS 45). In other words, she criticizes those who fought and ultimately achieved Irish freedom for forcing hunger and deprivation on many a family in Ireland in the name of freedom. Political changes were not, from her perspective, accompanied by a social agenda which guaranteed the livelihood and social security of the Irish population as a whole. They are criticised as focusing too heavily on the political aspect while disregarding social realities and necessities. In Annie Dunne, Annie’s dire personal economic situation as well as her and her cousin
Sarah Cullen’s simple living conditions also imply that the nationalist government was incapable of alleviating much of the poverty of pre-independence Ireland.

Other authors make this criticism more poignantly, e.g. by describing in detail scenes of extreme poverty among some parts of the Irish population. Although Colm Tóibín includes a scene in his novel *The Heather Blazing*, in which the main character remembers his father and a priest visiting poor families and giving out food vouchers in the name of the St. Vincent de Paul Society (cf. Tóibín 15ff.), the most drastic description of poverty in the selection of works for comparison in this paper is surely McCourt’s rendering of the living conditions of his family in Limerick. The prevalence of consumption is supposedly so high in Limerick that McCourt lets a citizen describe the town as the “capital city of the weak chest” (McCourt 72). The McCourt family ends up living in a small house with two rooms at the top and two at the bottom next to a shed with a lavatory that is the lavatory for the entire lane - for eleven families in total - and which is never cleaned except if the McCourts do it themselves. The bottom rooms are always damp and flooded during heavy rains so that the family actually only lives in the top rooms (cf. McCourt 111f, 117f.). They can get that room hot but only if the children can find enough pieces of coal or turf on the streets to start a fire although sometimes they burn the wood of the walls to stay warm. The whole family almost always suffers from malnutrition. Frank’s father uses old tires to repair Frank’s and his brother’s shoes. Frank is eventually even grateful for his rubber shoes as many students at his school do not have any shoes at all (cf. McCourt 128f.).

As the above has demonstrated, there are clear similarities regarding the presentation of Irish nationalism and independence between Barry’s plays and novels and works by Irish authors which have been identified as revisionist. Despite all the criticism of nationalism and Irish independence which can be found in Barry’s works, it should be noted though that, albeit decidedly more one-sided in presentation than Murdoch’s more objective approach, Barry’s presentation is not completely one-sided. With regards to the actual fighting forces, Barry also criticises the nationalists’ counterparts on the unionist side, which becomes unequivocally clear in the descriptions of the Black and Tans or Auxiliaries in his works. Clearly, their deployment is presented as intensifying the violence of the conflict. Eneas describes the Black and Tans as men who “have come back [from the war] altered for ever and in a way more marked by atrocity than honoured by medals. They are half nightmare themselves” (WEM 58). The criticism is accompanied by a note of pity as these men’s violence is presented as a consequence of their own extreme experiences. Nevertheless, this description strongly suggests that these men were different from the RIC men, crueller, more
violent and with fewer moral scruples. Eneas’s brother Jack accuses them of “causing mayhem, havoc, and despair all over Ireland” (TTG 291).

Hence, in this respect, Barry’s presentation of the struggle appears quite realistic as he clearly presents the reprisal warfare of the Troubles as including atrocious deeds on both sides. So although the violence of nationalists is criticised repeatedly by different characters in Barry’s works as well as through the presentation of the nationalists themselves, it is also strongly suggested that the use of extreme violence, including cold-blooded murder and torture, as a means to an end was by no means exclusive to the nationalists. In this respect similarities can be found between Barry and Doyle. In Doyle’s novel Henry Smart also paints a violent picture of the Black and Tans criticising their way of waging war: dragging people from their houses and shooting them, shooting children too, beating up school boys, destroying farm machinery and starving entire towns (cf. Doyle 263f.). Also, having his character Henry wake up in prison and trying to sift through memories of his imprisonment, Doyle presents a gruesome picture of the interrogation methods the British use that can only be called torture (cf. Doyle 293ff.). The signs of severe bodily harm Henry can see or feel incites the reader’s mind to fill in the blanks in Henry’s memory with the cruellest of possibilities. Altogether the degree of the described and then necessarily imagined violence is shocking and clearly presents the British – and so unionist – side as equally violent as the nationalists.

Furthermore, it should also be noted that Barry’s works contain quite positive portrayals of nationalists, too, for example the character of Jesse Kirwan or Christy Moran in A Long Long Way or – to a less detailed degree – John Lavelle in The Secret Scripture, who all appear idealistic, brave and sympathetic to the pain and suffering of others. If one looks for heroes on the nationalist side in Barry’s works, these characters make for far better ones than iconic heroes of the nationalist elite such as de Valera.

In summary, Butler Cullingford’s initial assessment of The Steward of Christendom and The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty as revisionist in nature regarding the presentation of Irish nationalism appears true enough, at least if one understands Irish revisionism as purely a criticism of Irish nationalism. Furthermore, her view translates to Barry’s other texts studied in this paper as well. In his summary of decades of Irish historical revisionism Hutchinson states that revisionism has questioned the foundations of an Irish nationalist tale of the country’s history, its “verities” (Hutchinson 103). As the above shows, Barry’s texts certainly criticise Irish nationalism for different reasons and in different ways: a) by showing the dramatic changes in the lives of Barry’s loyalist characters as well as the ensuing
psychological consequences, he criticises post-independence Irish society for marginalising entire groups of people, and b) by portraying historic personae of Irish nationalism or Irish nationalists in general negatively, for example as unheroic, violent, self-serving, greedy or vengeful, Barry’s texts criticise the leaders of the movement as well as the post-independence government and demythologize the heroic depiction of the Irish freedom fighter. In this, Barry’s writings show clear similarities to works by other Irish revisionist authors. Due to the favourable depiction of some nationalists and negative presentation of the violence of the Black and Tans, however, it seems at least slightly exaggerated to label Barry’s works as completely one-sided although they certainly include more criticism of the nationalist side. The allegorical descriptions of situations in newly independent countries such as Nigeria and Ghana criticise the negative effects of the independence movement in Ireland, but, furthermore, they also suggest that these negative effects are by no means exclusive to the Irish situation, having been elements of independence movements in many countries.

III.3.2 The presentation of religion in Barry’s works

Until only relatively recently, the Troubles in Northern Ireland have stood as proof that in Ireland national identity and religion were intricately connected. Of course, if there is one thing that Barry’s choice of characters and their sad personal histories can demonstrate, it is that nationalist versus loyalist was by no means always the same as Catholic versus Protestant. However, despite or maybe exactly because of the fact that Barry’s characters are loyalist as well as Catholic, an examination of the presentation of religion in Barry’s works, at least in connection to character development, is included here.

References to a Christian belief are abundant in Barry’s works, though to varying degrees. The titles of some of Barry’s works already imply as much: the novel focusing on Dolly Dunne carries the title *On Canaan’s Side*, clearly referencing the proverbial Promised Land (*King James Bible*, Gen. 12:1-5), the word ‘scripture’ in the title *The Secret Scripture* obviously plays on religious connotations as the word ‘Scripture’ is usually understood to refer to the Holy Bible (OALD, “Scripture” 1148) and ‘Our Lady’ as in *Our Lady of Sligo* commonly refers to the Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ (OALD, “Lady” 718). The texts themselves, all texts indeed, are full of religious imagery and listing them all would certainly
go beyond the scope of this paper. However, in the context of revisionism and criticism of dominant modes of belief and thinking, religion does not seem to play such an important role in this selection of Barry’s works. Two aspects seem relevant with regards to the presentation of religion in Barry’s works: the presentation of the representatives of the Catholic Church as they come into contact with Barry’s main characters and the presentation and development of Barry’s characters’ faith.

Interestingly enough, representatives of the Catholic Church are curiously absent in most of the works analysed in this paper or play only a minor role in the development of their respective main character. However, the novel The Secret Scripture is the exception to this rule. Here, Father Gaunt plays a major role in the life of its main character Roseanne Clear. The presentation of the self-righteous priest certainly paints an unfavourable picture of the Catholic Church and its power in the early years of the Irish Free State. For instance, although Roseanne does not openly blame Father Gaunt for her father’s assumed suicide, she certainly does feel that Father Gaunt’s decision to take away his position at the graveyard had a severe impact on her father’s psychological well-being. She feels that for her father “to lose the job was to lose in some extraordinary fashion himself” (TSS 65) and she evaluates Father Gaunt’s action as “a little murder” (TSS 63), witnessing the mental change that the occupational change brought about in her father. Unconsciously blaming Father Gaunt for her father’s deterioration, she decides to refuse his offer of converting her to the Catholic faith and marrying her to Catholic Joe Brady. Hearing his offer, she is actually physically sick in front of him, which shows her revulsion (cf. TSS 96-101).

Disregarding the bias with which Roseanne’s own account is necessarily tinted, the act of offering precisely that man as husband to Roseanne who was previously chosen to take the job which in her mind meant the world to her father shows how little empathy Father Gaunt has for Roseanne or how cruel a man he is. In fact, throughout her story, he is portrayed as a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Dr. Grene’s own interpretation of Father Gaunt’s style of writing, choice of words as well as the content of his account supports this analysis of the Father’s character. In Dr. Grene’s understanding Father Gaunt must have been an “all-knowing, stern-minded, and entirely unforgiving” (TSS 236) priest who

“betrays at every stroke an intense hatred if not of women, then of the sexuality of women, or sexuality in general. For him it is the devil’s cloak and hood […] It is also crystal clear that he regards her Protestantism as a simple, primal evil in itself. His anger that she would not let herself be made a Catholic at his request is absolute.”

(TSS 238f.)
Roseanne later says about him in her account that he “was certainly qualified to write quite an intimate history of […] [her] life, since he had been witness to certain curious parts of it.” (TSS 229) After coming to know Roseanne’s full story as the plot is revealed bit by bit in the alternating accounts of Roseanne and Dr. Grene, this statement about Father Gaunt sounds quite ironic as it is a crucial understatement of the real impact Father Gaunt had on Roseanne’s life. The truth of the matter is that in the course of events after Roseanne’s father’s death and her refusal to be converted, Father Gaunt’s anger towards her is so strong that in time he – together with Mrs McNulty – is the means of her separation from her husband, her exclusion from Sligo society and finally of her imprisonment at Roscommon Regional Mental Hospital.

Father Gaunt’s two-faced attitude becomes apparent when Barry, with the utmost irony, lets Roseanne recall Father Gaunt’s words regarding the annulment of her marriage to Tom McNulty on the grounds of her supposed mental illness, i.e. nymphomania:

“It [=having her marriage annulled] is a monumentally complex undertaking. Something like this is never granted lightly. Deep, deep thought at Rome, and my own bishop of course. Weighing everything, sifting through everything, my own deposition, Tom’s own words, the elder Mrs McNulty who of course has experience of the troubles of women, in her work. […] The courts sit in careful judgement. No stone unturned. […] You may rest assured every possibility of justice has been afforded to you.”

(TSS 231f.)

The dark dramatic irony inherent in this speech lies in the stark contrast between the vehemence with which Father Gaunt highlights the justice of this ruling on the one hand and the – at least to our modern mind – unjust process and the insignificance of the crime on the other. After all, Roseanne did not have intercourse with John Lavelle, which she also explains to Father Gaunt, who only shrugs off her insistence as a lie. Repeatedly, Father Gaunt points out the effort to which the clerical judges have gone in analysing all available information. However, Roseanne’s own testimony was never demanded and no one could obtain one from John Lavelle because he had died in the meantime. Also, Roseanne has never seen any doctor or psychologist prior to the annulment or indeed – or so it seems from the narrative – her institutionalisation. All these facts show quite drastically that contrary to Father Gaunt’s affirmation quite a few stones were left unturned. Also, the idea that Mrs
McNulty is esteemed as having experience in the field of women’s mental illnesses only because she is a seamstress in Sligo Asylum does seem quite far-fetched. In the end, it seems that the clerical ruling was solely based on Father Gaunt’s personal wishes. From the idea Dr. Grene has formulated of Father Gaunt’s character, it can be assumed that he felt very self-satisfied at being able to declare Roseanne insane thus healing his injured pride. The irony is certainly not lost to the reader. It is used by Barry to focus the readers’ attentions on the injustice dealt to and felt by Roseanne and highlight her feeling of complete helplessness as she comes to realise that her fate lies completely in the hands of others.

It is Father Gaunt’s personality which takes affront at Roseanne’s attitude and religion, but it is the political climate in the first half of the twentieth century that grants Catholic priests such high social status, such decision-making power. Barry highlights this idea through his narrator, Dr. Grene, who reflecting on de Valera’s return to power points out that de Valera officially established close connections between the political sphere and the clerical, enshrining the Catholic clergy in the new constitution (cf. TSS 236). Dr. Grene eventually comes to the conclusion that Roseanne was institutionalised for social reasons. He says with regards to the power that the Catholic Church held in Ireland during this time that “absolute power of such as Fr Gaunt leading [sic] as day does to night to absolute corruption” (TSS 237). This quote implies that Father Gaunt’s decisions are also corrupted, driven forwards by his own wounded pride rather than true understanding of people’s needs. Roseanne becomes a victim of the power invested in representatives of the Catholic Church by the new government under de Valera. Through Roseanne’s fate and the portrayal of Father Gaunt, Barry criticises the extent of power of the Catholic Church, suggesting that without proper state control executives of that Church exploited that power for their personal goals and gains.

With regards to the influence of the Catholic Church in the new Free State and later in the Republic, Barry’s presentation does not seem exaggerated. In fact, after the Civil War, the Irish government and the Catholic Church can each be said to have strengthened the other’s position in the public sphere. It seems clear that “Irish Catholicism in the 1920s sought, as one of its major objectives, to help reinforce the legitimacy of the new state […] [as] the political climate […] suited and reassured members of a Catholic hierarchy” (Keogh 28). In return, de Valera’s “political resurrection” (Ferriter 333) was made possible by the active support of the Irish Catholic Church. Although recent research suggests that the Irish Catholic Church was within itself or at least among its senior members much more divided on political issues than has so far been acknowledged (cf. Ferriter 351), its influence on
governmental decisions and thus on social realities in Ireland, especially in the 1920s and 1930s but also in and after the Second World War, can hardly be underestimated. This is evident in the nature of legislation passed in these years, which reflects the teachings of a conservative Catholic Church, e.g. a Bill legalising divorce – even if only between Protestants – was not passed. On the contrary, against the vehement criticism of popular literary figures such as William Butler Yeats and George Bernard Shaw, a Censorship Bill was introduced in 1928 and the first censorship board set up in February 1930, which among many other things censored any literature on the procurement and methods of contraception (cf. Keogh 30f. and English 322).

Quite in keeping with the close cooperation of Church and state in the matters mentioned above, the government’s view of the role of women would probably have been described as conservative at the time, but must be called sexist from a modern perspective. The Irish Constitution of 1937 formally stated “that a woman’s natural and proper place is in the home as a full-time wife and mother” (Owens Weekes 100). Owens Weekes goes on to point out that the government’s legislation “effectively denied women a full public and political identity” (Owens Weekes 102). In this light Roseanne Clear’s story as presented by Barry appears quite realistic. Apparently, the Irish Catholic Church implemented campaigns against heterosexual friendships, seeing them as a source of immorality (cf. Owens Weekes 102). It seems that unsupervised meetings of unmarried people were quite frowned upon. In Barry’s novel such a meeting between John Lavelle and Roseanne Clear is taken as proof of her mental illness. It seems absurd that Roseanne should be committed on such vague grounds. However, according to one historian, a report on the state of Irish hospitals in the 1920s suggests that a “very flexible definition of insanity, often without any scientific basis, seemed to exist” (Ferriter 320) in Irish mental hospitals at the time. Together with the overall assertion of the political influence of the Catholic Church and thus the importance of its local priests in their respective communities, this piece of historical evidence regarding the state of hospitals in Ireland lends Barry’s plot quite an unsettling degree of probability.

Criticism of the influence of the Catholic Church can also be found in other Irish revisionist texts, either in general or through a negative depiction of some of its members. In Roddy Doyle’s A Star Called Henry, it is a nun who throws Henry and his brother out of school because they are pagans in her eyes (cf. Doyle 75-78). Clearly, the influence of the Catholic Church on education in Ireland is highlighted. In Angela’s Ashes, Frank remembers how the children in school were made to practice the Holy Communion until it was perfect. The master repeatedly points out the great importance of this event by stating that through
receiving Holy Communion they will become members of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, “that most glorious congregation […] [of which many have] bared […] [their] necks to the Protestant axe” (McCourt 130). The priest will come to the school and examine each boy on the catechism. The great influence of the Church on education becomes unequivocally clear. Of course, a religious influence in schools must not necessarily be viewed negatively, but McCourt uses other scenes to render it so. The superior of The Christian Brothers, a secondary school, refuses to let Frank attend the school despite a recommendation from his school’s headmaster. He even outright refuses to let Frank enter the premises and just says that they have no room, closing the door in his face (cf. McCourt 364f.). This is the second time that the Catholic Church closes a door in Frank’s face. Before this incident Frank is refused as altar boy. Here, too, a door is closed in his face and the explanation given is exactly the same: they have no room for him. McCourt lets Frank’s mother make the criticism explicit.

“‘Tis class distinction. They don’t want boys from the lanes on the altar. They don’t want the ones with scabby knees and hair sticking up. Oh, no, they want the nice boys with hair oil and new shoes that have fathers with suits and ties and steady jobs. That’s what it is and ‘tis hard to hold on to Faith with the snobbery that’s in it.”

(McCourt 184)

Clearly, McCourt criticises the Catholic Church for practicing social segregation. McCabe draws an even darker picture of the Catholic Church as he includes a very graphic description of child abuse in his novel. One of the priests in the Catholic juvenile home that Francie is taken to after breaking into the Nugents’ house molests Francie on multiple occasions, buying Francie’s silence with sweets and cigarettes (cf. McCabe 86-90, 93ff.). What turns this incident into an even greater criticism of the institution of the Catholic Church as a whole instead of only single members of it is the fact that when this comes to the attention of the Church’s authorities, it is hushed up. No legal charges and no actual punishment – neither public nor within the realm of the Church itself – is passed on Father Sullivan, the molesting priest (cf. McCabe 103ff.).

Hence with regard to the criticism of the Catholic Church through the presentation of the character of Father Gaunt, Barry’s novel The Secret Scripture is similar to some revisionist works. However, apart from this character, there is very little real criticism of
members of the Church in Barry’s narratives. The presentation of Father Buckley in *A Long Long Way* is like a counterweight to the presentation of Father Gaunt. As a character he does not have the same impact on the main character’s - Willie Dunne’s - life as Father Gaunt has on Roseanne Clear’s, but nevertheless, throughout the years of Willie’s time as a soldier until his eventual death Father Buckley is portrayed as a brave priest who cares deeply about the men of his congregation. He listens to their fears and doubts, gives them advice and strength. Hence, Barry does seem to criticise unequivocally the power of the Catholic Church in the new Irish Free State, but only in that it gave single unfitting members of its priesthood too much influence. He does not seem to criticise all members of it nor necessarily the Church itself, at least not in the texts analysed for the purpose of this paper.

Furthermore, though not exclusively Catholic, most of his characters are portrayed as true believers. Gradually, through the misfortunes in their lives – the constant questioning of their identity through mostly nationalist strife – they are compelled to question their faith, but they are all presented as sharing a belief in a higher power. Nevertheless, the fact that it is relevant that many of Barry’s characters come to question their beliefs as a result of this growing uncertainty is a narrative tool to show more clearly how the identity diffusion that stems from the constant questioning of their national identity affects other identifications as well.

The most elaborate example of the use of religious imagery in Barry’s works as well as of a character doubting his religious belief can be found in the novel *A Long Long Way*. Here Willie Dunne is made to face all the horrors of the war, among others the German gas attacks. After Willie has just narrowly escaped the gas attack, he wanders back across the field towards the trench he fled from and Barry describes Willie’s impressions in religious imagery.

“He wandered back along the way of fear and no one said a word to him. Soon there were bodies everywhere strewn about, and burial details were busy composing them into sudden little graveyards. He passed through the retched bottleneck and the drowned men in the craters floating face-down […] [and looking into his former trench he finds it] filled with bodies […] The faces were contorted like devils’ in a book of admonition, like the faces of the truly fallen, the damned, and the condemned. Horrible dreams hung in their faces as if the foulest nightmares had gripped them and remained visible now frozen in direst death. Their mouths were ringed and caked with a greeny slime, as if they were the poor Irish cottagers of old, who people said in the last extremity of hunger had eaten of the very nettles in the fields. And still the echo, foul in itself, of that ferocious stench hanging everywhere.
And down on the fire-step across the chasm of the trench […] with a face to match the other faces tortured eternally in a last agony […] Captain Paisley.”

(ALLW 49f.)

The sights Willie encounters in the aftermath of the gas attack remind him of the Revelation of St. John (cf. ALLW 49), i.e. the devastated landscape after the gas attack makes him think of the end of the world. It seems an otherworldly experience to him. Barry plays on this image in the entire description of the scene as Willie sees more and more of the consequences. The foul stench, the lines of slouching men and the look of torture and pain stencilled in the men’s faces are powerful religious images which go to show how deep an impression the scene leaves on Willie. As a Catholic, Willie has the feeling that he quite literally sees hell on earth. For him the gas attack represents a level of atrocity which far surpasses the limits of mere human cruelty.

Willie’s complete inability to justify all the death he experiences in the war can be read to represent the inability of all soldiers to come to terms with the scale of the bloodshed in that war. It is shown quite clearly in Willie’s thoughts already shortly before the beginning 1917.

“Suddenly he wanted to say to his sergeant-major, that it was all an ugly, vicious, bullying trick, it didn’t fucking matter if it was a Plumer or a Gough, good general or bad, everything ended always in the ghastly tally of wrenching deaths. His head was heavy now, sore as a boxer’s, he wanted to have the matter explained to him, he wanted God Himself to come down to where they were talking there, and tell them what could be set against the numberless deaths, to stop their minds inwardly weeping, like cottages without roofs in a filthy rain.”

(ALLW 207)

His thoughts clearly show that he cannot find anything to justify the sheer number of deaths in the war. He cannot find a reason, a good cause, which would balance out the loss of life in that war. It seems that the convictions with which he started into the war fail to truly justify the slaughter. The fact that he wants God to explain it to him can be interpreted to mean that the war has made him question his religious beliefs. Implied in his wish for God to justify these deaths is the accusation that a benign God would not allow such wars. Hence, one
reading of this is certainly that the experience of the war has made Willie question the existence of God, has made him despair of his religious beliefs in the face of the millions killed in that war. The survivors, though sometimes victorious and cheered on by the people liberated, become “ghosts in their hearts” (ALLW 186), which is how Willie describes himself and his fellow soldiers after their victory at Guichy.

Much like Willie, Eneas McNulty is also shown to doubt God. Eventually, he returns to Ireland again. “God brings Eneas again to the shore. He supposes it might be God Himself, fearing any other truth. He hopes it is God.” (WEM 153) These three short sentences launching his eventual return to Sligo allow for further interpretation regarding Eneas’s state of mind. He hopes that it is God who drives him on. Doubtlessly, at this point in his life, the alternative scares him: on the whole, at this point, Barry’s character is already shaken by the idea that he has been cut off from human life, that he is doomed to lead a lonely life without purpose, aimlessly drifting from place to place. If it was God who led him back to Ireland, he can see his coming journey as a journey back into life, into human interaction blessed with a purpose intended by God. However, should it only be his feelings of lonesomeness or homesickness, his own fickle emotions, which brought him there, then his coming journey would only be another purposeless trip in his general condition of aimlessly drifting from place to place. Hence, it is hardly surprising that he dearly holds on to the little thread of belief he can muster, hoping for a higher power, for God urging him on, as his faith is all that is left to him after his sense of family, friendship and home has been taken from him. Clearly though, these lines express his hope as much as his doubt.

Although the description does imply a certain element of doubt on Eneas’s part, in general it still shows him to be a believer, and incidentally, this is how most of Barry’s characters are presented. Despite a certain level of doubt that they all experience at some stage, they all seem to hold on to a belief into a higher power, which becomes especially apparent in or close to the end of their lives. However, maybe contrary to their (mostly) Catholic upbringing, this higher power is not a punishing, judging God. Most works by Barry promote an all-embracing, all-loving God that does not distinguish between believers and non-believers, sinners or saints, who – more generally – does not make the kinds of distinction that have so deeply influenced the lives of Barry’s characters. That is why for them there is freedom, peace and redemption in death.48 More than anything, this is expressed in Eneas’s final moments. Eneas McNulty is anxious all his life contemplating

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48 For a detailed analysis of the endings of Barry’s works, refer to section III.2.3.
whether or not his name is written in ‘the book of life’, but in death he has the epiphany that “no person’s name is written there, and all are thrown at last […] into the lake of fire” (WEM 308). These lines refer to the Revelation of St. John and the Last Judgement (King James Bible, Rev. 20:12-15). According to the Bible, the ‘book of life’ is said to contain the names of the saved and during the Last Judgement, the second coming of Christ, it will be used to divide all living and dead into two groups: the unsaved or damned who will be thrown into the ‘lake of fire’ – at that point not representing hell as hell itself will be thrown into the lake of fire afterwards, but representing a final place of doom – and the saved who will go on to live in God’s new kingdom on earth (King James Bible, Rev. 21:1-4; King James Bible, “Notes on the Revelation of St. John” 440).

Liam Harte has commented on this recurring Bible reference in the novel, saying “[t]he biblical epigraph to The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty – ‘And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire’ – speaks to the restorative and corrective impulses that undergird his [= Barry’s] entire œuvre [italics in the original].” (Harte 198) However, Harte fails to elaborate on his thesis further even though the reasoning behind it does not seem entirely self-evident. Quite on the contrary, yes, the epigraph is a reoccurring motif in the novel. However, Eneas’s final epiphany does not adhere to the traditional reading of the Revelation as he comes to believe that the separation into saved and unsaved does not take place. In fact, by saying that “all are thrown […] into the lake of fire” (WEM 308), he is shown to realise that everyone is a sinner, that everyone has faults and has made mistakes in his life, but that in death all that ceases to matter. He comes to think that in the end all men are equal before God and the lake of fire, whatever it is, is a mere cleansing act that all men must undergo before eternal peace. He does not see it as a painful punishment but as a stripping off of personal faults and irrelevant distinctions. Quite in contrast to conservative Catholic belief, according to Eneas, God welcomes everyone into his kingdom. So, while a restorative function can no doubt be ascertained, the idea that the epigraph carries a corrective impulse would have to be explained further and seems ambiguous. However, it can clearly be ascertained that Eneas’s case demonstrates very well that on the whole Barry’s characters retain a form of religious belief even in death though not necessarily congruent with a conservative Catholic belief system.

In this respect Barry’s writing is quite different from that of Doyle or McCourt, for example. In McCourt’s novel, aspects of religious – usually Catholic – belief are often ridiculed to some degree. This slightly comic stance on Catholic traditions becomes apparent already at the very beginning of the novel. The first-person narrator points out that the only
really dry place in the town of Limerick is the local church and that “Limerick gained a reputation for piety, but it was only the rain” (McCourt 10) which drove the people to the church. Obviously, what is implied here is a questioning of the belief of the churchgoers in Limerick. There are many examples of this sort of comic ridicule, e.g. Frank’s grandmother’s obsession with the confession (cf. McCourt 158) or Frank’s homework assignment, in which he has to explain how the world would be different if Jesus had been born in Limerick (cf. McCourt 256). The narrative voice of Frank never directly criticises Catholic belief but uses overly serious adherence to religious tradition in a way that creates humour and thus criticism of belief. For example, when Frank has been sick in his grandmother’s backyard after his First Communion breakfast, the narrator goes on to say that “Grandma won’t talk to Mam anymore because of what […] [he] did with God in her backyard” (McCourt 162). McCourt lets Frank use the symbolism of the Holy Communion wafer too literally. It thus ridicules if not the religious tradition then too firmly a belief in it. Andrea Beck argues that the narrative voice of the child narrator succeeds in highlighting the analogy of religious and political ideologisation, its unnaturalness and compulsiveness (Beck 182, translated C.C.R.)49.

Doyle goes further by having his character and first-person narrator Henry crudely and unabashedly discredit the idea of religious belief. If at all, God is portrayed as vicious and deadly. His narrative suggests that neither belief nor the Church really changed the situation of poverty in the slums of Dublin at the turn of the century. Life there is described as “an endless race to stay a few inches in front of the greedy hand of God” (Doyle 28). In his memory of being kicked out of school by a nun, Henry discredits the Church as well as belief in God in very crude terms.

“Miss O’Shea [the friendly teacher who had let them in] had just been a bit of good fortune. […] The nun had been the normal one. Mother, she’d wanted to be called. Never. Not even Sister. Fuck her. And religion. I already hated it. Holy God we praise Thy name. [italics in the original] Fuck Him. And your man on the cross up over the blackboard. Fuck Him too. That was one good thing that came out of neglect: we’d no religion. We were free. We were blessed.”

(Doyle 79)

49 The original German reads “das kindliche Bewußtsein erkennt intuitiv die Analogie zwischen religiöser und politischer Ideologisierung, spürt die Unnatürlichkeit und Zwanghaftigkeit” (Beck 182).
Clearly, religious belief is considered a burden by Henry, not a blessing. Freedom for him includes freedom from religious doctrine – a notion that seems quite challenging considering the very real socio-political ties between the Catholic Church and the state of Ireland and a good deal of nationalist propaganda advertising a Catholic Ireland.

In keeping with this initial portrayal, Doyle also has his character Henry refuse to believe in the afterlife, in heaven or hell, quite in contrast to many of Barry’s characters. This becomes clear in his reaction to his younger brother’s death.

“He was dead. I wouldn’t let myself be fooled into thinking anything softer. I wasn’t going to see him up there with the other stars, with the first Henry [=another dead sibling by the same name] – burning gas, a celestial fart – and all his brothers and sisters, twinkling up there in a happier place. He was dead. I wasn’t even going to look at the sky.”

(Doyle 81)

That he describes the stars, in which his mother used to see his dead brother Henry, as a “celestial fart” undermines the romantic idea of it and as such of any notion of a happy afterlife, of heaven. Henry is presented as categorically refusing to believe, which also becomes clear when he narrowly escapes death later as a rebel and says “there was no God out there to thank” (Doyle 269). Hence, apart from the language, which is obviously generally different in tone from Barry’s, both writers, Doyle and Barry, also differ in the way they incorporate and comment on religion within the context of the nationalist movement in Ireland while McCourt takes a place somewhere between these two extremes.

III.3.3 The presentation of history in Barry’s works

Butler Cullingford identifies Barry’s underlying goal as the desire to show that many loyalists were affected negatively by Irish freedom, thus painting a very critical and one-sided picture of nationalists and freedom in general. However, leaving the question of the veracity of her theory aside for the moment, her analysis of Barry’s aim – or at least the
wording thereof – also seems to disregard part of the revisionist idea she clearly sees in Barry’s writing as she is accusing him of pushing it too adamantly. Admittedly, nationalists are generally presented negatively in Barry’s works – at least when presented through the eyes of his characters – and Irish independence does spell disaster for his characters. The previous subsections have made this abundantly clear. Surely, however, this is not the sole possible reading or the only meaningful lesson that Barry’s works offer. This becomes quite clear when what has been presented so far is viewed in connection to the presentation of history in Barry’s texts.

Throughout Barry’s works, history is presented in two main ways. First, in the form of the actual historical - and often historic - events of Irish nationalist history in the twentieth century, history is a major destructive force in the lives of Barry’s characters, “like fate in classical tragedy” (Roy Foster, “Something” 195), according to Roy Foster, Professor of Irish History at Hertford College in Oxford. This presentation of history, especially but not exclusively Irish history, is a recurring motif not just in the works analysed by Foster in his essay but in fact in all of Barry’s works studied in the scope of this paper. The disastrous effects of events in Irish history on the lives of the characters have already been shown at length. Moreover, history is also repeatedly identified by Barry’s characters themselves as a destructive force often in the form of different stylistic devices, most prominently metaphors and personification: as the “great wheels of history were turning” (TSS 68), lives were “piled up in history in big ruined heaps” (ALLW 4), and became the “heavy-hearted tales of history” (OCS 9), “damn history” (TSC 246), as they drown in “the dark waters of the Irish story” (OLS 20). Of course, all these quotes stem from different works and must be attributed to different characters, but they show how frequently Barry lets his characters remind the reader or his audience of the destructive effects history has had on many people’s lives in Ireland. It is a reminder that encourages a more critical stance towards historical accounts in general, highlighting the oftentimes unmentioned social effects of historical events.

Besides being presented as a destructive force, though, another presentation of history is at least as prominent: history as a subjective and fabricated story of what happened. The idea of history as an objective account of causally linked events is repeatedly challenged in Barry’s works. Having been socially marginalized, hated, persecuted and/or exiled, and sometimes forgotten, all of Barry’s main characters eventually, in thought or speech, propagate the notion that objectivity in historiography is an illusion, rather, that it is people, most often people in power, who decide the nature of any historical account, who in effect
make history. For example, Willie Dunne’s thoughts as he is lying in the mud at the front suggest as much.

“This was not a scene of bravery, but it seemed to Willie in his fear and horror that there was a truth in it nonetheless. It was the thing before a joke was fashioned about it, before an anecdote was conjured up to make it safe, before a proper story in the newspaper, before some fellow with the wits would make a history of it.”

(ALLW 111)

Willie’s thoughts here suggest that there is a great difference between the event itself and the account of the event afterwards, that for the sake of acquiring a meaningful structure necessary for a joke, anecdote or even a newspaper report, a reorganisation and revision of the actual events necessarily takes place. Furthermore, the final sub-clause suggests that in fact the same is true for the writing of history. Based on their own experience, Barry’s characters seem to agree that the way they, or people in general for that matter, feature in any historical narrative depends heavily on the perspective of the author of that narrative. An example of this can be found in Jack McNulty’s musings on the life of his brother Eneas.

“What strange men were about the earth, after this half century of wars. Men who once were true, and their very trueness turned into betrayal, as the pages of history turn in the wind. Men who were vicious oftentimes and ruthless, turned into heroes and patriots. And a hundred shades and mixtures of both.”

(TTG 248)

Quite poetically, Barry has Jack criticise that the way men’s actions are seen by later generations depend on the outcome of conflicts as history tends to be written by the winning side. Like so many other Irishmen at the time, his brother Eneas heeded Redmond’s call and joined the British war effort firmly believing it to be a sacrifice for his fellow countrymen, a mind-set they ironically shared with the revolutionaries who participated in the Easter Rising in 1916. Despite a similar mind-set, though, men like Eneas have often been ostracised as traitors in nationalist accounts of Irish history while nationalist revolutionaries have been turned into Irish heroes and martyrs for the good cause, as the aftermath of the Easter Rising
fundamentally changed popular opinion. Jack’s inner monologue above suggests that, had popular opinion not been changed so crucially – maybe if the British had refrained from executing the leaders of the Rising – Eneas might perhaps have ended up revered as a national hero. The different perceptions of the soldiers and the Irish revolutionaries today result, according to Jack’s comment, only from the fact that the nationalists won the Anglo-Irish War. In *The Secret Scripture*, Roseanne poses the question “[h]ow does good history become bad history by and by?” (TTS 119). Essentially, the question appears rhetorical in the context and suggests the exact same sentiment as Jack’s musings above. In general, Barry suggests through his characters’ statements and thoughts but more crucially through their personal histories that the presentation of facts and personae in historical narratives is dependent on the dominant political perspective of the writer.

Clearly then Barry’s texts force their readers to contemplate the nature of history, or rather historical writing, and the degree of accuracy which we attribute to it. The basic problem is one of objectivity. Our understanding of history has changed considerably even in the course of only the last century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, many historians believed in the objectivity of history, the irrefutability of their facts, which were the basis for their writing. Sources like e.g. letters, diary entries or newspapers provided them with these facts and it was universally believed that the historian’s task was simply to put these facts into a complete historical account. Given enough of these irrefutable facts, their accounts would be complete and also irrefutable. They would be objective (cf. Hoffer 9f.). However, in the course of the twentieth century, the academic perception of history gradually shifted to a much more sceptical viewpoint regarding the objectivity of facts and just as much of the histories which were and are spun around and out of them. Subjectivity already starts with the selection of sources to be used and events to be recounted. Furthermore, considering also the subjectivity of any account and the fact that relics from the past are interpreted with a present-day mindset, it seems that any historical account is constructed and as such subjective to a degree – a sentiment that has encouraged revisionists to construct alternative accounts of history. 50

Barry’s characters almost mirror this thesis in their musings about the nature of history. Their perception of history is admittedly often negatively tinted in tone, which is, however, quite understandable given their situation. Nevertheless, partly through their musings but even more through Barry’s reimagining of their personal histories, their

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50 Please refer to section II.3 for a more detailed summary of Hoffer’s ideas as well as historical theory in general and a discussion of Irish revisionism in the context of Irish historiography.
touching life stories, the veracity of an Irish history that excludes or categorically marginalizes people like them is called into question. The tragic nature of Barry’s texts thus counsels its readers that a critical view of historical accounts, basically following Hoffer’s thesis, is crucially important when dealing with a topic as controversial as Irish history.

The notion that history is fabrication is not unique to Barry’s works. Indeed, it seems a basis for much revisionist literature as multiple examples of this notion can be found in Irish revisionist literature. John Banville’s novella *The Newton Letter* suggests that the reason for this sort of prejudiced historiography and in turn history lies in the historian him- or herself. Historians themselves are in danger of being influenced by their own preconceptions and therefore of crudely misinterpreting the sources or situations in front of them. In Banville’s text the first-person narrator, an Irish historian, spends some weeks lodging with a landed family in Ireland. Based on a foundation of misconceptions and prejudice, he constructs in his mind an incestuous family drama around the family there which turns out to be quite untrue. However, even though he is confronted repeatedly with proof that his premises are false, he keeps reconstructing his account but does not question his initial theory, only to learn at the very end that he was wrong all along (cf. Beck 113). For example, for quite a while he thinks that the family are landed Protestant gentry which had slipped into poverty since independence. When he learns that they are actually Catholic, he is flustered and acknowledges that he has to revise his conception of them, but the realisation does not make him question his equally misconstrued idea of a dark family secret (cf. Banville 64). As an allegory, Banville’s text suggests that historians are often influenced by their own experiences, stances and preconceptions. It also highlights the fact that historians tend to become victims of their intention to see and construct stories – in the narrative sense of the word – where there are only individual events. The text implies that a historian tends to make connections where there are none. A historian’s history becomes literally his story of what happened. Banville’s text strongly suggests that history is fabrication and has been identified as a revisionist text for that very reason.

While Banville presents the fabrication of history as an honest mistake on the unwitting historian’s part, other revisionist works have taken a more critical stance and imply or outright state that often a historical account is fabricated and as such subjective, not because of unrecognised misconceptions but because the person who writes or uses the account – be it a historian, politician, teacher etc. – wants or needs it to be this way, that historiography bends to a purpose, to an agenda, instead of aiming for objectivity. For example, in *Angela’s Ashes*, Frank’s teacher Mr. O’Dea teaches his students “how the
English tormented the Irish for eight hundred long years” (McCourt 253), clearly a one-sided generalisation of events, albeit one frequently championed by Irish nationalists. McCourt also includes a counter example: the head teacher himself, Mr. O’Halloran is different in that he teaches a more balanced version (cf. Beck 184f.). However, Frank’s account describes him as a unique exception to the rule, as different from all the other teachers he encounters (cf. McCourt 258ff.). This way McCourt implies that in Irish schools a very one-sided version of history used to be taught, thus encouraging the young generations to make nationalist identifications by playing on their sense of justice, in other words: indoctrinating them (cf. Beck 180).

Tóibín’s novel The Heather Blazing is a point in case, too. The text clearly makes the point that through the physical authority over reports, basically over historically important sources in general, governments have a great influence on historiography. In the novel, high court judge Eamon Redmond remembers that he wrote an analysis of Irish nationalist feeling for the Irish government in the 1970s. As this decade marked the beginning of extreme violence in Northern Ireland, Redmond’s analysis was supposed to advise the government how to keep nationalist feeling in the Republic under control in such a way that the violence in Northern Ireland may stay confined there and not influence policies, politics or public opinion in the South too severely. His report is never published by the government. Indirectly, with Redmond’s report, Tóibín presents the Irish nationalist government of the time as hypocritical. Officially the government never accepted the separation of the island. In publications and speeches, the longterm goal of unification was declared, but when the Troubles in Northern Ireland erupted in the 1970s and nationalists in the North rebelled, the government in the Republic, according to Tóibín’s novel, hoped to keep public opinion in the South in check in such a way that the public would not call for any involvement in the North. Despite their cries for unification and their bemoaning of the unjust separation of the island under the treaty, their main concern was protecting the status quo. Harte also stresses this aspect of the novel, saying it shows “the gap between irredentist rhetoric and partitionist practice in the Southern state” (Harte 119). As Redmond is approached by a historian who hopes to learn more about that report, he holds back information just like the government had done because he believes that from today’s perspective his conclusions in the report as well as his wording would be misunderstood or misinterpreted (cf. Tóibín 178-180). While it is certainly not only possible but quite probable that with hindsight, historical sources will often be viewed differently than in the time of their creation, this example from Tóibín’s novel quite clearly shows that the authority over
sources pertaining to an event, the power to control their availability, to a degree also gives authority over the historical account of this event.

McCabe’s novel *The Butcher Boy* shifts the revisionist focus from national history to personal history. However, regarding the nature of history, the text clearly also proposes that any historical account is subjective, that it is fabricated to a certain degree by its author. Furthermore, it shows in dramatic ways how this fabrication can dramatically influence a person’s identity and how the deconstruction of this basis can similarly deconstruct a person’s identity. In this McCabe’s work is essentially similar to Barry’s novel *The Secret Scripture* as here, too, the focus is more on personal history rather than national history as Roseanne Clear’s personal history becomes the field of study for Dr. Grene and simultaneously for the reader as well when Dr. Grene attempts to establish the facts of this history. Here, too, the unreliability of personal accounts is strongly implied as Roseanne’s account often contradicts other sources.

In McCabe’s novel, one of Francie Brady’s most important identifications is that with the story of his parents’ happy honeymoon in Bundoran. There would be music at a boarding house called Over the Waves in the evenings, and in this story his father would be asked to sing at the boarding house repeatedly on account of his good singing voice and his mother would be proud of him. They would lie in bed and listen to the sound of the sea coming through the open window at night. Supposedly, it was the happiest time of their lives and the woman at the boarding house would describe them as her “special guests […] [t]he lovebirds […] Benny and Annie Brady” (McCabe 92). When bit by bit Francie’s ties to society and reality, his identifications, become eroded, this story is one of the last to ground him, which becomes obvious when he journeys to Bundoran to be reassured of this story by the former hostess of the boarding house. However, once there he learns that his father’s story was mostly fabrication. The woman at the boarding house tells Francie that his father was drunk most of the time and behaved terribly towards his mother and the local priest (cf. McCabe 190-198). Francie has to realise that his father’s account of his parents’ stay at Bundoran was a lie, a fabrication he had founded much of his sense of self on.

As this identification is taken away, all he has left is his friendship with Joe Purcell, which is then proven to him similarly imaginary. This time the story was fabricated by Francie himself. They used to be best friends but prior to Francie’s institutionalisation. This identification is taken away, too, as Francie seeks out Joe at his school and is forced to realise that Joe does not want him to be there nor that he sees him as a friend anymore (cf. McCabe 204-208). With both of these fundamental identifications gone, Francie loses all grounding
in society and goes to kill Mrs Nugent, whom he in his addled mind blames for his losses. One’s personal history is proven to be part of the set of identifications that make up a person’s personal identity and when these identifications are questioned, a person’s identity becomes endangered as well. McCabe lets his character Francie allude to this. When Joe cannot understand why Francie has come to visit him, not seeing Francie as a friend anymore, Francie says he feels himself “draining away” (McCabe 207), which means he loses any sense of who he is.

McCabe’s novel is similar to Barry’s in another and connected aspect as well. The time of narration in both novels is decades removed from the actual narrated events. In The Secret Scripture, Roseanne gives an account of her personal history towards the end of her hundred-year life but focuses mostly on events which have taken place at least fifty years earlier. In The Butcher Boy, first-person narrator Francie Brady narrates the events of his life supposedly at least twenty years in the past. According to Herron, “[s]uch a time-lag creates insurmountable problems in any assessment of the status and (fictional) authenticity of events narrated” (Herron 173). This intentional questioning of the authenticity of the accounts is further encouraged in both texts by presenting the narrators as unreliable due to their psychological conditions. Shaffer highlights this fact in his analysis of McCabe’s novel calling Francie Brady “an ‘unreliable’ narrator of colossal proportions” (Shaffer 178). Both, Francie and Roseanne, are patients at a mental hospital at the time of the narration. While McCabe’s narrator Francie Brady clearly exhibits signs of madness through his narration, the presentation of Roseanne is less drastic. She seems clear-headed enough and her story suggests an institutionalisation for other reasons as explained in the previous section. However, the conflicting account of the graveyard incident still leaves the reader in doubt as to her mental condition and as such also regarding the reliability of her account.

In summary, all these examples suggest that history writing can only ever be as true to the actual events as the availability of sources allows and even with all available sources open to the historian, the historical account will still depend on the historian’s intention and preconceptions. Furthermore, the literary examples above suggest that sources, also personal accounts, are subjective at best or pure fabrication at worst, depending on the mental conditions of the witnesses as well as their intentions in giving an account. Their reliability is further questioned by the length of time which has passed between an event and the writing of its account. Hence, that history is fabrication can be identified as a notion often voiced in revisionist literature. This clearly shows the influence of the revisionist debate in Irish literature. In historiography this train of thought is usually perceived as the foundation of
revisionist histories as at its very core, revisionism is the questioning of established narratives.\textsuperscript{51}

Clearly, as has been shown, Barry’s texts encourage this view of history. However, at least in comparison to the other Irish revisionist novels studied here, Barry’s works seem unique with regards to the amount of narration spent on highlighting this idea. The very notion itself is alluded to repeatedly in different works and many of Barry’s characters suggest or even explicitly state it. As Doctor Greene, the son of Eneas McNulty and Roseanne Clear, finally learns the truth about Roseanne’s personal history and hence his own ancestry, he contemplates the nature of history thus:

“But I am beginning to wonder strongly what is the nature of history. Is it only memory in decent sentences, and if so, how reliable is it? I would suggest, not very. And that therefore most truth and fact offered by these syntactical means is treacherous and unreliable. And yet I recognise that we live our lives, and even keep our sanity, by the lights of this treachery and this unreliability, just as we build our love of country on these paper worlds of misapprehension and untruth. Perhaps it is our nature, and perhaps unaccountably it is part of our glory as a creature, that we can build our best and most permanent buildings on foundations of utter dust.”

(TTS 304f.)

Obviously, Dr. Grene views history as a subjective narrative of selected events rather than an objective account of what actually took place. Within the realm of the novel this is little surprising as Dr. Grene is faced with the oftentimes conflicting accounts of Roseanne Clear and Father Gaunt. What is more, however, in addition to doubting the reliability of history, he also connects this criticism of history to the concept of national identity. Included in his musings is the notion that a person’s national identity, in theory made up of a set of agreed upon identifications, is partly founded on that nation’s history and as such founded on an unreliable basis. As nations are established on such ‘unreliable foundations’, it follows that nations themselves must be seen as purely artificial concepts. With this idea Barry’s text echoes Gellner’s, Hobsbawm’s and especially Anderson’s views.

Having finally learned the full truth about Dr. Grene’s ancestry, but, more importantly, having learned through different accounts the sad, if in some points probably

\textsuperscript{51} See II.3 for more information on revisionism.
also unreliable personal history of Roseanne Clear, we may be forced to wonder how the Irish nation, this artificial concept, can be important enough to justify Roseanne’s treatment. Though Barry does not let his character raise this question openly, it is nevertheless one that is implied at that point in the narrative through Dr. Grene’s inner monologue.

In Barry’s play *The Only True History of Lizzie Finn*, Robert Gibson asks that very question explicitly: Gibson wonders “[w]hy are we so ruled by imaginary distinctions?” (LF 226). Soothing Lizzie, who is upset because of the way she is treated in her new home, Robert tells her that he believes people “are all very much equal under the clothes that history lends us [=them]” (LF 203). Again, history is depicted as a force much like fate, and the clothes Robert refers to metaphorically represent characteristics given to everyone through birth, e.g. nationality but also skin colour, language, etc. Through the character Robert Gibson, Barry stipulates that our natural similarity as one species, our common humanity, should outweigh the differences, certainly those that are purely random and artificial, or as Gibson terms it, imaginary.

Both of the examples above clearly bring to mind Benedict Anderson’s view of nations as *imagined communities* and at the same time imply a criticism of people’s blind adherence to this concept: as nations are purely imagined communities with many of their distinguishing characteristics based on an unreliable and probably prejudiced tale of the past, on “foundations of utter dust” (TTS 305) according to Dr. Grene, then the question that hovers just behind these lines is why we value them so highly. Hence, through the presentation of history as a fabricated concept, echoing Hoffer’s view on historiography, Barry also presents nations as fabricated concepts.

An Irish revisionist piece of fiction would hope to bring about a change in the way Irish history is still often generally perceived. Obviously, as the above demonstrates, this is exactly what Barry appears to achieve in his works and what Butler Cullingford’s criticism seems to disregard or at least does not credit enough. She laments that Barry is too focused on replacing a one-sided version of history, the nationalist tale, with an equally one-sided one (cf. Butler Cullingford 144) and only intends to discredit nationalists and the independence movement (cf. Butler Cullingford 132). Barry’s texts clearly make the case that in the aftermath of the changes in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century, at least after the creation of the Irish Free State, a whole loyalist culture was marginalized to a point where it seemingly vanished. The set of identifications forming the new Irish national identity excluded loyalist tendencies, with the result that following generations viewed these loyalist identifications purely negatively, an attitude that Professor John Wilson Foster calls...
“the condescension of Irish posterity” (J. W. Foster 112). However, Barry’s narratives are simultaneously explanations for and reminders of this exclusion. In essence, admittedly, they can be read as a defence of loyalism, an attempt at redemption, and not only the two texts Butler Cullingford refers to but to varying degrees all the texts studied in the paper. However, this is a very limited view on the implications that Barry’s texts offer. Through the special pattern of character development in his works, using identity, especially national identity, as a plot structuring element, Barry inspires and encourages a kind of postmodern criticism of two interrelated concepts, of ‘history’ and ‘nation’, a criticism which transcends the realm of his texts, which clearly goes beyond the question of nationalist versus loyalist and the historical context of twentieth-century Irish history.

Not only do Barry’s narratives encourage a personal reassessment of the very nature of these concepts in general and their importance in our individual lives as well as in our society as a whole, but they also in a very postmodern fashion suggest their impossibility. While Sir Richard Evans’s critical claim that postmodernism has made historiography simply “a species of literary endeavour” (qtd. in McHale and Platt 3) can be seen critically, it is usually acknowledged that “postmodernism made an assault on the very idea of historical narrative [at least when] reconfigured […] as contaminated master narrative” (McHale and Platt 2). Master narratives, according to Herman Paul, “are simple linear stories of progress and regression […] They create order and coherence in a jumble of historical events, but they do so selectively and without much sense of complexity” (Paul 62). In contrast, the central element of postmodernism is the idea of plurality and consequently complexity (cf. Beck 341; Shaffer 7). Barry’s tragic characters, whose life stories form the basis for these narratives in terms of content and whose identity development and diffusion form the basis in terms of plot structure, question the master narrative of Irish history and hence must be viewed as vehicles of postmodern Irish historical revisionism. However, it is not the kind of one-sided Irish revisionism that solely strives to undermine Irish nationalism as e.g. Bradshaw or Fennel argue and as which Butler Cullingford would like to have Barry’s texts understood but a kind of revisionism that unilaterally questions axiomatic beliefs in general.
Declan Kiberd, professor for Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama at University College Dublin, states in his introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of Joyce’s *Ulysses* that “just one year after the declaration of the Irish Free State [i.e. 1922], Ulysses proclaimed itself a central text of national liberation” (Kiberd “Introduction” lxiv) and, further on, that “Joyce and his contemporaries […] saw Ireland’s conscience as ‘uncreated’, and from this vacuum they hoped to build a vibrant land” (Kiberd “Introduction” lxxiv f.) – a sentiment or an aim, rather, which certainly also reverberates in the works of Sebastian Barry today, almost a century after the book’s publication. According to Bettina Gessner-Utsch, the question of identity formation and the subjective construction of reality are central themes in Joyce’s text (cf. Gessner-Utsch 148-151), and the same can be said of Barry’s oeuvre.

The analysis of Barry’s works has clearly identified certain characteristics which are typical of his writing. First of all, Barry’s central characters are all part of one fictional family, which is loosely based on his own ancestry. In this aspect and in the way Barry makes use of it, Barry’s literary work markedly distinguishes itself from that of other Irish writers. Only some authors who focus on Irish history in their writing widen the scope of their narratives, creating multiple instalments in some kind of a literary series or other kinds of connected titles, as e.g. Roddy Doyle or John Banville. Each of Barry’s plays and novels can be appreciated and analyzed as an individual piece of literature. However, the continuity and consistency of his characters’ interrelated fictional personal histories throughout the entire canon of his writings make his works truly unique. He creates a fictional family history which is for the most part consistent across all titles and allows us, from an analytic point of view, to study his characters and their development not just within the limits of one text but to study the development of each character throughout all pieces of writing pertaining to their respective side of Barry’s fictional family. Although characters, locations and situations reappear in different works, their reoccurrence can rarely be viewed as a mere repetition. Some minor inconsistencies aside, the content of one work oftentimes adds to the impact and implications of another. If situations presented in one work reoccur in another, they are usually presented from the perspective of another involved character, giving an outside perspective to the interior perspective narrated in the previous work, thus often verifying, falsifying or questioning that character’s assessment of the situation, which in turn highlights
one important message of Barry’s texts: the subjectivity of personal experience. Gaps in the personal history presented in one piece of fiction are often filled in another. Moreover, though, the high level of consistency across and interconnectedness of his works strengthens the emotional involvement of the reader in the personal histories of Barry’s characters and thus advances his overall revisionist message in a way that no set of unconnected accounts could achieve.

Secondly, not just the central characters in the works analyzed by Butler Cullingford, Foster and others in their respective essays but in fact the central characters in all of Barry’s works – the members of his fictional family – studied in this paper can be classified as Catholic Irish loyalists, though not all of them are actually Catholic or show the same degree of loyalty to the idea of the union, as has been laid out in full detail earlier. Hence, Irish history is presented from the perspective of an increasingly marginalized group of the Irish population. Through his re-imagination of their lives, a re-examination of Irish history from this rather uncommon perspective, Barry’s writing as essentially revisionist writing challenges a predominantly nationalist version of Irish history but, moreover, also the very idea of any objective historical account. In all his works, history in the form of events and personae from modern nationalist Irish history is presented as a destructive force much like fate in classical tragedies, which ultimately causes the inevitable tragic fall of the central character. Although his works differ greatly in narrated time, for all of Barry’s characters nationalist Irish history in the twentieth century is truly ‘the nightmare from which they are trying to awake’, just as it is referred to by Stephen Dedalus in Joyce’s Ulysses. According to Powell, by that statement “Stephen is implying history’s simultaneous capacity to seem tangible and unreal” (Powell 134). The same seems to be the case in Barry’s works. While history in the form of nationalism is presented as a very real destructive force, it is also simultaneously, ironically and unequivocally presented as a constructed and thus artificial concept in all of his works.

Thirdly, all his works, plays and novels alike, exhibit a structure that lets them be classified under the heading of ‘tragedy’. Even when studied across the entire canon of his work, most of his characters are portrayed so that he or she adheres to the general concept of the tragic hero: although they are morally good – often morally superior even to those around them – they encounter personal disaster brought on by forces outside their control, and their good qualities are instrumental in their downfall. Admittedly, the degree to which the forces of their destruction are outside of his characters’ control varies decidedly. For example, the most blameless for her own fate is Roseanne Clear, who hardly ever actually
finds herself in a position to steer her own history. Eneas McNulty is equally presented as the victim of external forces although, in contrast to Roseanne, he does make the initial decisions which set him on this path. Jack McNulty, however, would be positioned on the other end of the spectrum. Although he, too, is affected by changes in society, he is repeatedly placed in a position to make a conscious decision, which in his case usually is to leave Ireland temporarily and consequently abandon his wife, and he is presented as educated enough to anticipate the consequences of his decisions. He is thus much less presented as a victim than most of the other characters. Generally, however, despite varying degrees of ‘innocence’ and with Jack McNulty as at least a partial exception, Barry’s characters can still be viewed as tragic characters.

In the case of Barry’s characters, their ‘tragic flaw’ is the loyalty to their family and to their Irish loyalist identifications. Each work focuses on the personal history of one of Barry’s fictional family members, but – as previously stated – information about that character in other works adds to the personal history presented in it. The structure of each work is closely connected to the character development of that central character, which in turn is based on the development of that character’s sense of identity. In fact, the concept of identity is the most prominent theme in all of Barry’s works, the questioning of the same, at least regarding the characters’ national identity, the ever-recurring leitmotif. These characteristic aspects of Barry’s writing, the good character overwhelmed by an overly powerful external force and the questioning of the concept of national identity, marks Barry as a postmodern author, according to the following definition.

“There is the individual; solitary, responsible for his or her own destiny, yet powerless when set against the ineluctable forces of the universe. This is one of the basic conflicts of the post-Modern condition, and one which gives rise to the immense variety of explorations of recent writings in English. Identity is a common theme: sexual identity, local identity, national identity, racial identity, spiritual identity, intellectual identity.”

(Carter and McRae 413)

Barry uses the concept of identity as a plot structuring element: phases of identity formation, identity crisis and identity diffusion are used as exposition, complication and rising action respectively. The scenes revealing whether and how the diffusion is overcome
serve as the climax in each work. The central characteristic with regards to this aspect is that the development of each of the characters highlights the importance of national identity in the formation of a person’s personal identity. Each character’s inability to readjust the set of identifications which form their national identity to the dominant notions of Irishness in the wake of post-revolutionary Ireland – more often than not a task made impossible through circumstances beyond their control – inevitably leads to a prolonged and damaging state of identity diffusion. Ultimately, especially through the emotionally gripping poetic prose of Barry’s catharsis-inducing endings, the constructed quality of the concept of a nation, this imagined community as Anderson calls it, is stressed. The pitiful death of Barry’s characters or their pitiable state at the end of each work in general, which are also typical characteristics of all his works, emphasize the necessity to reassess the concept’s importance not only in modern Irish but in all and any human society.

In summary, through his writing Barry presents an unusual, multifaceted vision of the Irish conscience, of “Irishness” in general, which clashes with the rather conformist, one-dimensional nationalist representation it has often been advertised as in the course of the past century. In this Barry’s body of work seems typical of Irish literary ambition after the Second World War.

“Irish fiction in the second half of the twentieth century implicitly raises the question of who or what it is, precisely, that tells the Irish that they cohere as a group. Nation, history, family, and other traditional tropes of belonging are all found wanting as these constructed conceits are seen, very often, to bring destructive pressures. It is in the strategies of social realism and demythologization that Irish fiction is helping to make the nation a place much easier to locate, though no less problematic than it has ever been.”

(Carruthers 119)

In Barry’s works it is predominantly the concepts of (Irish) history and the nation that are portrayed as constructed or, in Anderson’s words, imagined, and that exert a destructive force on his characters. As has been shown, Barry’s works analyzed in the scope of this paper can be seen as examples of Irish revisionist historical fiction. Though not intending to create an “Irishness” from scratch, as Kiberd said of Joyce and his contemporaries, it appears that by “imagining the other” (Grene, “Politics” 242), i.e. by providing unusual, out-of-the-ordinary perspectives on the events of twentieth-century Irish
history, Barry aspires to add to our understanding of what it means to be Irish. In their revisionist character, Barry’s works show similarities to those of other modern and postmodern revisionist Irish authors, among others Banville, Murdoch, Tóibín, McCabe, Doyle and McCourt. In fact, in this regard his works also show parallels to the ambition of the Field Day movement in Northern Ireland, which “mobilized writers to imagine an alternative vision of Irish history, a mythical ‘fifth province’ where Protestant and Catholic claims could be reconciled” (Scanlan 151). This is little surprising as the Troubles in Northern Ireland gave increasingly more weight to “the question of how to achieve a humane modernization of national traditions” (Kiberd, “Inventing Ireland” 578). Regarding this question Kiberd identifies and praises the modern Irish revisionists’ intention “to invent a more ecumenical and inclusive definition of Irishness than the one with which many of them had grown up in the southern state” (Kiberd, “Inventing Ireland” 642).

However, Kiberd also criticizes revisionist historians.

“Most of the historians, like the British, remained fixated on a nationalism which they repeatedly deplored but could not transcend by any truly innovative methodology. Telling the old story from the other side’s viewpoint was scarcely a breakthrough […] In exculpating the British, they certainly did justice to some persons who had been unfairly demonized by nationalist historians, but they also passed rather too swiftly over instances of imperial guilt; and, in the process, they invented some new demons of their own. […] If nationalism was the thesis, revisionism was the antithesis: of its nature it was not so much wrong as incomplete. The dialectic needed to be carried through to a synthesis.”

(Kiberd, “Inventing Ireland” 644)

Kiberd is by no means alone in his criticism. Historians Brendan Bradshaw and Desmond Fennell, for example, have shown themselves as two of the harshest critics of Irish historical revisionism. Summarised very crudely, Bradshaw views the revisionists’ supposedly value-free approach to Irish history as unsympathetic to the suffering of all those who fought to achieve independence from Britain, and Fennell sees it as so anti-nationalist in nature that it destroys any notion of an Irish national identity for the Irish today.53 However, they, too, have been criticised by supporters of revisionism. The term itself seems so contested und

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52 Here Scanlan refers to the historical division of the whole of Ireland into the four provinces Connacht, Leinster, Munster and Ulster.
53 Please refer to II.3 for more information on Bradshaw’s or Fennell’s theories.
hard to grasp that the discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of the movement is a difficult and multi-layered one at best. However, with regard to Barry’s texts it seemed necessary to try and evaluate more clearly the nature of revisionism in his work and compare it to the literary criticism voiced so far but also with the criticism of Irish revisionism in general as laid out above.

Kiberd’s general criticism of revisionist historians, that their accounts are often ultimately as one-sided as those of their nationalist counterparts, is mirrored in Butler Cullingford’s, Hand’s and Harte’s literary criticism of The Steward of Christendom, The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty and A Long Long Way. However, others view Barry’s writings as exceptional and praise his works as adding to our understanding of what it means to be Irish, most notably Grene, Foster and Hunt Mahony. It is quite difficult to decide which of these two main academic views carries more weight for a number of reasons: in his criticism of Barry, Hand references Butler Cullingford’s essay and at least partly seems to simply restate her views as previously presented in her essay54, which is understandable seeing as his book is a broader literary history and not so much an analytic essay. Hence, he adds little to Butler Cullingford’s initial thesis regarding the two works she focuses on. In addition, Irish historian Roy Foster openly criticizes Butler Cullingford’s assessment of Barry’s works as biased (cf. Roy Foster, “Something” 187). At the same time though, Kiberd identifies Foster as a leading revisionist historian and directs much of his criticism of revisionist history writing at him, which makes Foster’s opinion of Butler Cullingford’s literary criticism of Barry seem equally biased (cf. Kiberd, “Inventing Ireland” 642ff.). Hence, it seems that within the field of academic literary criticism the literary value of Barry’s writing has at least partly been dependent on the reviewer’s general view of Irish historical revisionism. The answer to the question of which group of academic critics of Barry’s work is to be given more weight can thus only be ascertained by a close study of Barry’s works with regards to the presentation of core concepts of Irish historical revisionism, as has been attempted in this paper. Incidentally, in pursuing this aim, the paper takes on the challenge postulated by scholar Tom Herron in his essay on Irish revisionist writers Patrick McCabe and Colm Tóibín that “too little attention has been paid to the ways in which the revisionist debate has figured in literary form” (Herron 171).

On the one hand, the analysis proves that Butler Cullingford’s, Hand’s and Harte’s examination of the presentation of nationalism in Barry’s works is correct insofar as it is

54 Hand explicitly references Butler Cullingford’s essay as the source for his presentation of The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty.
mostly presented in a negative way and not only in the works studied by them but moreover, as can now be ascertained after the literary analysis, in all the eight works studied in the scope of this paper. Although there is criticism of imperial or unionist activity as well and some nationalists are presented positively, even heroically, a negative view of nationalism is given far more ground. Also, there is merit to their criticism that Barry has used some fairly unrealistic plot twists in his works to further his overall message, e.g. that Eneas McNulty stays impossibly non-violent even though he takes part in multiple wars.

Butler Cullingford claims that Barry’s “subordination of two such richly imagined individuals [Eneas McNulty and Thomas Dunne] to a schematic political allegory lessens the impact of their personal tragedies” (Butler Cullingford 144), and Harte’s criticism is that Willie’s innocence “distorts and detracts from what is otherwise a richly textured and deeply moving account” (Harte 213). Essentially Butler Cullingford as well as Hand and Harte suggest that the possible impact of Barry’s works could have been greater had the central characters been portrayed more realistically, more as decision-making agents rather than pitiable victims – or in Hunt Mahony’s more positive words: innocents. Whether this is true for the works they studied or maybe even also correct for Barry’s other works seem unanswerable questions. In the end it depends on the individual reader’s willingness to accept a lesser degree of realism for the benefit of a more intense emotional involvement.

The popular success of Barry’s works suggests that the sometimes artificially intensified call for sympathy does not diminish their overall impact. Barry’s lyrical prose lets multiple passages in his novels and plays appear exceedingly poetical. Maybe it is due to this poetical writing style that readers or audiences are more prepared to accept an exaggeration of innocence. This seems at least true for A Long Long Way, the novel Harte’s criticism is focused on, as it “won the 2005 Kerry Group Irish Fiction Award, and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and the Impac Prize” (cf. M. Doyle). Hand claims that the poetical style “deflects attention away from what are quite stark political interpretations” (Hand 259), the political interpretations which are transmitted through Barry’s tragedy-like structure and hence through the exaggerated innocence of his modern tragic heroes. However, the poetical language no doubt intensifies the emotional response in the reader or audience. It may be the element that makes Barry’s political message believable but it also seems the very aspect that endears people to Barry’s stories. A more realistic portrayal would be possible, maybe – according to Hand, Harte or Butler Cullingford – even beneficial for a more nuanced political interpretation, but it might very well also impede the use of such rich poetical language which apparently at least to some extent endears so many to Barry’s work.
All in all, what can be ascertained is that a portrayal of Barry’s main characters as innocents is a typical feature in Barry’s texts and a central element in their tragedy-like plot structure. It is, furthermore, supported by Barry’s expansive use of lyrical language, which is another typical feature in all his works.

In their criticism of Irish nationalism and nationalists, Barry’s works show similarities to those of other Irish revisionist authors. Both Doyle and Barry paint a cruel and bloody picture of nationalists and of nationalism in general. However, while Doyle uses profane language and shocking descriptions of violence and duplicity, Barry uses this type of language only for the direct speech of single nationalist characters. In contrast to Doyle, he imbues his main characters with a poetic, sad and melancholic voice which also sets the tone in his work. While Doyle tries to shock his readers to incite criticism, Barry poetically laments the loss of his characters hoping to create pity. In Murdoch’s novel criticism of nationalists is also included, but the presentation of it stays decidedly more objective and the criticism of nationalists and unionists more evenly proportioned.

McCourt’s and McCabe’s novels focus more on life in Ireland and the social realities after independence in their criticism. What they have in common with Barry’s works is a criticism of the marginalization of certain groups of people in Irish society under a nationalist government. However, while McCourt puts the spotlight on the realities of life, the physical consequences of marginalisation, especially the extreme poverty of some marginalized people, McCabe and Barry try to present the psychological consequences of social marginalization. In Tóibín’s novel the criticism is more subtle but also focused on the psychological consequences. Though free of any depiction of true violence, the central character’s identity is increasingly questioned as his personal and professional lives clash. Though even more a novel of thought than Barry’s texts, with regards to tone it is very similar and it mirrors Barry’s use of identity as an element in plot development, although Tóibín uses it less forcefully, holding back where Barry completely deconstructs his characters psychologically. Thus, Barry’s work does without a doubt present nationalists, nationalism and freedom negatively and it is similar in that respect to modern popular revisionist texts by other Irish authors.

On the other hand, claiming that as a result, Barry’s texts inevitably leave the reader with only the extremely one-sided generalisation that “all nationalists are killers and crooks, and freedom itself is the disaster” (Butler Cullingford 132), as Butler Cullingford does in her essay, seems to fall short of their possible implications for multiple reasons, which is
probably also why Butler Cullingford’s interpretation deviates from generally more positive assessments of Barry’s works – especially those two pieces of his writing – by other scholars.

First of all, it would seem any attempt at realistically portraying what unionists may have felt during and after the establishment of Irish freedom, as Barry is doing in his works, must certainly demonstrate that these people’s beliefs were as strong as those of nationalists, and that their feelings, their whole identity even, was just as intricately tied to their beliefs as was true for their nationalist counterparts. This clearly then necessitates a negative view of nationalists and Irish freedom on the side of Barry’s characters. For Barry to present his characters as feeling any differently towards nationalists or Irish freedom would certainly be even more inconceivable than their exaggerated innocence may seem. Furthermore, as has been discussed earlier, a less innocent presentation of Barry’s characters may have proven more realistic, but from a reader’s point of view far less emotionally compelling and from a narrative point of view less useful.

Secondly, and more importantly, in no work does Barry’s narrative stop at showing how unfairly and pitifully a few individual unionists suffered under nationalist strife. In his introduction to the Methuen Drama edition of Barry’s play Our Lady of Sligo, Roy Foster states that Barry’s aim “is one of recovery – stitching back into the torn fabric of Irish history the anomalous figures from an extended Irish family” (Roy Foster, “Introduction”). However, it is not just these forgotten members of his family that Barry tries to revive in his works. As Nicholas Grene, Professor of English Literature at Trinity College in Dublin, has remarked, “to re-imagine them [=Barry’s ancestors] […] was also to re-imagine the larger history of the nation and the parts of that narrative that have tended to be forgotten or suppressed” (Grene “Out of History” 168). So the fates of Barry’s fictional family members can be seen as exemplary of many an Irish loyalist’s story in the twentieth century. What Barry does succeed in conveying through his writing is the certainty that any definition of the Irish nation that excludes Irish loyalists and, in broader terms, any group that has been marginalized in post-revolutionary Irish society – as well as in its post-revolutionary history writing – must be incomplete. He thereby suggests a re-evaluation of two concepts of substantial importance in Irish society: nation and history.

In his essay on Barry’s play The Steward of Christendom, Jim Haughey states that in this play Barry not only criticises nationalist but also revisionist versions of history (cf. Haughey 298). He comes to the conclusion that with this text, Barry “reminds us of the

55 This is a notion supported by other scholars as well, e.g. Professor John Wilson Foster of the University of Vancouver (cf. J. W. Foster 101).
importance of examining the ideological value of literary texts and of the ongoing need to question rather than simply accept inherited versions of the past” (Haughey 301). As this analysis has shown, Haughey’s conclusion holds true for Barry’s other texts studied in this paper as well. However, maybe because he only focuses on that one single text, Haughey at least partly underestimates the implications of Barry’s texts. All of Barry’s works include several passages in which the very concepts of history and nation are criticized as constructed. With regards to history Barry’s work shows similarities to works by McCourt, Banville or Tóibín, but Barry’s texts seem unique in the weight and narrative space ascribed to this idea. All of them suggest that any historical account depends on the availability and quality of sources as well as the intentions and preconceptions of the historian. The subjective fabrication of any historical account is repeatedly either strongly implied or explicitly stated. Similarly, through his characters’ stories the artificial quality of the concept of a nation and as such of a national identity is highlighted. Barry’s texts strongly imply the necessity to reassess the very idea of any one true account of Irish history and in fact of an Irish identity. It seems to be the nature of Barry’s works, even when studied as a unit, that in the end, instead of providing definitive answers, they leave the reader with a feeling that these definitive answers are themselves impossibilities. So while Barry’s characters fail to present a more illuminating definition of a nation, or the Irish nation in particular, than Leopold Bloom in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, their stories seem to promote the idea that these concepts are themselves entirely impossible or by nature can only be multifaceted concepts at best, that an Irish history consists of a multitude of Irish histories, that an Irish identity includes a multitude of Irish identities.

At least partly this is what distances Barry’s kind of Irish revisionism from the kind that Bradshaw’s criticism is based on. Generally, it seems unfair to say that Barry’s texts aim to devalue the sacrifice of many who fought for Irish freedom. Certainly, Barry’s texts include criticism of nationalists, but *A Long Long Way*, for example, includes two very positive and quite heroic portrayals of different kinds of nationalists in the characters of Jesse Kirwin and Christy Moran. Their presentation more than anything praises the suffering and sacrifice of Irish nationalists. Secondly and more importantly though, the fact that Barry’s texts offer a different, in this case loyalist perspective, and through it hope to create empathy for those who suffered because of Irish independence does not in itself mean that he aims to lessen the sacrifice of others. This thesis seems like a logical error. At the very least, it strongly suggests that Bradshaw’s theory is based on the assumption that a person’s feelings for each group of sufferers must be inversely proportional, i.e. the more empathy you feel
for one group, the less you feel towards the other. This does not need to be true. In fact, because Barry’s texts propagate an inclusive idea of Irish identity as detailed above, it seems that they aim to create empathy for both groups of sufferers. Bradshaw’s criticism of revisionism is based on the assumption that one has to choose sides in this conflict, while Barry’s texts very much seem to criticize the very notion of sides advertising an inclusive identity. Hence, although Barry can be called an Irish revisionist regarding different aspects of his writing, his kind of revisionism is different and more inclusive than the history writing Bradshaw refers to in his essay.

This inclusive approach is mirrored in Barry’s treatment of religion in his works. Although many of his characters come to doubt their faith, they all seem to remain believers – not in the Christian God of the Catholic Church, but they all share a belief in some kind of higher power, some version of God that gives life meaning beyond mere physical human existence. Especially in the endings it becomes clear that Barry promotes belief in a merciful and kind God who loves everyone indiscriminately. The significance of the fact that Barry chooses to portray most of his characters as Catholics but incorporates this notion can hardly be overestimated. By doing so he expressly devalues the long-lasting differences between Catholic and Protestant which have for centuries added a second, religious layer to the conflict of British versus Irish. In proposing this all-embracing version of God, Barry promotes a devaluation of religious differences in modern Irish society but at the same time gives credit and respect to everyone’s religious beliefs. In this way Barry is different from other revisionist Irish authors: in McCourt’s and Doyle’s novels religious faith is ridiculed or all-round refused. While ridiculing religious faith also suggests a discrediting of this aspect in the British-Irish conflict, it does not promote the sort of connectedness like Barry’s all-embracing version of God and nor does it retain respect for the sacrifice of those believers who gave their life in the struggle for freedom because of their belief.

Kiberd ends his study of modern Irish literature with the observation that Ireland has become “a quilt of many patches and colours, all beautiful, all distinct, yet all connected too. No one element should subordinate or assimilate the others: Irish or English, rural or urban, Gaelic or Anglo, each has its part in the pattern” (Kiberd, “Inventing Ireland” 653). Despite mainly portraying a fictionalized version of the pains of Irish loyalists, it is not – at least surely not only - loyalist redemption but in fact Kiberd’s inclusive vision of ‘Irishness’ that seems to reverberate strongest through the entirety of Barry’s works. Under close examination, all of Barry’s works – though admittedly to varying degrees – imply this very thesis and it is this characteristic that ultimately lets us view them as more than just the
revisionist justification of Catholic Irish loyalism as which Butler Cullingford and Hand mainly present them. The main message in all of Barry’s works is one of love, friendship and forgiveness, and the conviction that these characteristics transcend and must outweigh imagined distinctions like nationality. Especially, but not exclusively, Barry’s endings suggest the notion of a unifying bond between all of humankind, indiscriminate of national or religious allegiance, on the simple grounds of our shared human experience. So it is essentially through the deconstruction of his characters’ identities by nationalist history that a more inclusive Irish identity and a multi-faceted and multi-perspective Irish history are promoted. Regarding Fennell’s criticism of Irish revisionism, it is correct that Barry’s texts as literary specimens of postmodern Irish revisionism deconstruct a mainly nationalistically orientated national Irish identity but not in a way as to erase any sense of Irish identity, and – maybe more importantly – neither trying to erase nationalist identifications as part of that identity. Scholars Liam Harte and Michael Parker have stated that contemporary Irish “novelists attempt to reimagine ‘Ireland’ as a syncretic space, thereby interrogating established narratives of identity and difference” (Harte and Parker 4). This seems to hold true for Barry as well as he, too, questions established master narratives of Irish history and in turn an established master Irish identity. However, ultimately, his texts strive to propagate an Irishness that aims to encompass all Irish experience, including conflicting beliefs as such conflict is also part of this identity. Barry’s oeuvre is imbued with the call for the appreciation of all kinds of Irish experience and Irish identifications so that on this basis a more inclusive Irish identity can be constructed. In this way and at least partly in contrast to other, more accusatory revisionist writing, e.g. Doyle’s A Star Called Henry, Barry’s revisionist writing can be seen as striving for the ‘synthesis’ Kiberd is hoping for and can be seen as promoting the nation’s further peaceful unification.

Barry’s kind of revisionism is not an anti-nationalism as its goal is not necessarily a criticism of Irish nationalism or even nationalism as such but rather a criticism of one-sidedness and intolerance, whether intentional or unintentional. However, in the current political climate in Europe, with an increasingly blatant and open reappearance of nationalist agendas and propaganda in answer to the insecurities ignited or increased by economic instability and ever-growing refugee numbers, Barry’s canon of works can most certainly also be understood as a warning, as in his texts parallels are repeatedly drawn between the suffering caused by nationalist movements in Ireland and that caused by nationalist movements in other places around the world, thus pointing out the universality and timelessness of the dangers of said movements. Inherent in this is the hope that when we
allow for the necessity and understand the value of a multi-faceted inclusive sort of history writing such as defined by Hoffer and as promoted by Barry’s work, we will also be prepared to learn from this and try to avoid the mistakes of the past, i.e. the social marginalization, oppression, exclusion or silencing of any social non-conformist group and the act of putting national interests before human kindness, that we will shift the focus from defending exclusionary nationalisms to constructing more inclusive European societies. Hopefully, in doing so, we will be able to prevent more people from becoming history’s leftovers.
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