Pitted Against Patriarchy

Women's Identity in the North

Introduction

When studying the violent and divided society of the North[1] it is not unusual to find that much of the literature written focuses upon the recurrence of bombings, shootings and kidnappings, and on the men perpetrating those atrocities. The experiences of women are almost entirely neglected existing as they do on the margins of an overwhelmingly patriarchal society dominated by mythologies and political and religious formations which according to Coulter, reduces the women to 'subalterneity'.[2] Women in the North and particularly in Belfast have learned to live in a society where their own identity and interests have often been in danger of being submerged and, at one time or another, even censured, silenced or ignored.

It would be a fairly straightforward task to examine the identity of women through literature written during the Troubles but that would fail to acknowledge the influences and experiences preceding this period, which contributed to forming and molding those communities and situations and, in part, causing the conflict in Northern Ireland. It is important, therefore, to examine some of those novels written before as well as during the

[1] There are several terms used in reference to Northern Ireland such as Ulster, used mainly by Protestants, the six counties, used mainly by Catholics who recognise Ulster as the original pre-partitioned nine counties and the North, a term used by both Catholics and Protestants, referring to the part of Ireland partitioned from the South in 1922.

[2] C. Coulter, *Web of Punishment: An Investigation*, (Dublin: Attic Press, 1991)

'Troubles' which highlight the patriarchal structures dominating the lives of Northern Irish women. Even though women from Nationalist and Unionist communities cannot be viewed as homogenous they do share certain oppressive patriarchal structures. They are for the most part at the mercy of their husbands and/or sons, their respective churches, the Unionist movement (the Republican movement for Catholic women) and the British government.

It is these patriarchal structures which have dictated that women in the North should adhere to very specific roles- the wife, the mother and the homemaker-ensuring their needs remain a low priority. Until recently the impact of the conflict and patriarchal oppression upon the lives of those women has all but been ignored as was the complexity of their responses to oppression and violence. Over the last ten years, however, there has been a substantial amount of sociological research examining those very issues but the number of novels written about and by women has remained comparatively small.

Of the few novels to have emerged centralizing women, many of these have either focused on the new economic, social and political possibilities created by the fracturing of existing patterns, such as Mary Beckett's Give Them Stones[3] or upon the character pressurized into conforming with a particular community's expectations of maintaining those traditional values under threat, resulting in devastating consequences such as Judith Hearne in Brian Moore's The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne[4]. Interestingly, not all but most of these are by Nationalist, Catholic writers about Nationalist, Catholic women. But what of the

[3] Mary Beckett, *Give Them Stones* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988)
[4] Brian Moore, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (London: Bloomsbury, 1993)

Unionist/Protestant voice? And why is it so silent? These are questions which I shall seek to address and discuss during the course of my dissertation.

It is my intention to examine the identity of women initially through the works of Brian Moore, Janet McNeill, Jennifer Johnston and Mary Beckett. I will, however, refer in less detail to other novelists, travel writers such as Dervla Murphy, Sally Belfrage and Bernadette Devlin and include additional forms of literature which essentially succeed in giving women a voice. I will examine the ways in which women react to their placement within the dominant patriarchal framework and argue the importance of these patriarchal structures in defining the extent by which women can attain self-hood.

The first chapter will compare Brian Moore's The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne with McNeill's The Maiden Dinosaur.[5] Both novels are set before the 'Troubles' and each writer focuses upon the still further marginalization of unmarried women, though it has to said that the Protestant protagonist of The Maiden Dinosaur fares slightly better that her Catholic counterpart, Judith Hearne.

The second chapter will look at the ways in which women cope with aspects of incarceration and the material conditions imposed upon them by dominant patriarchal ideologies. Through Mary Beckett's Give them Stones with reference to Bernadette Devlin's The Price of My Soul[6] I will show the difficulties in striking out against such

[5] Janet McNeill, *The Maiden Dinosaur* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1984)
[6] Bernadette Devlin, *The Price of My Soul* (London: Pan Books Ltd,1969)

ideologies and attempting to eschew the patriarchal forces of Republicanism and the British Army which succeed in oppressing Northern Irish women's identity and self-hood.

The third chapter will examine two novels where the female protagonist has sought to escape from these patriarchal forces by leaving the North and seeking a second chance for happiness. Brian Moore's The Doctor's Wife[7] and Jennifer Johnston's The Railway Station Man[8] bear comparison since both women having married young and repressed their desires to pursue their own independence in order to adhere to their husband's expected roles. Unlike Sheila Redden, Helen finds success as an artist. Like Sheila Redden, however, she refuses a second offer of marriage in an attempt to shake off those binding patriarchal structures. Whilst both women finish the novel alone in an attempt to find selfhood, Helen Cuffe in spite of experiencing many personal tragedies, appears to be the more hopeful of the two. I will argue that Sheila Redden's unsatisfactory end is as a result of her being the creation of a male author and is therefore himself part of the patriarchy from which she is trying to escape.

The Fourth and concluding chapter will focus upon literature written during the latter half of the 'Troubles' and after. Through travelogues, I will explore the impressions of Northern Irish women formed by women writers from outside the North. Moreover, I will highlight the different ways in which women from both communities have found to articulate effectively within a place paralyzed by a dominant hegemony where women's identity is viewed as unimportant.

[7] Brian Moore, *The Doctor's Wife* (London: Flamingo,1994)
[8] Jennifer Johnston, *The Railway Station Man* (London: Flamingo, 1986)

I have not focused solely on women writers as I believe the identity of the women of Northern Ireland is formed through a diverse set of contexts whether they are social, economic or political. When examining such a dominant patriarchal society it seems logical to include a small number of works which throw light on the identity of women from that section of the society which seeks to marginalize them. I have therefore included two works by Brian Moore. Moreover, there is an ambivalent relationship between the politics of the North and the lived experience. Not all writers, whether they are men or women, are politically motivated yet their work is a reflection of the circumstances in which they write, the opportunities created by publishing and the challenges posed by attempting to challenge hegemonic discourses. I will seek to explore the circumstances, opportunities and challenges of living in the sectarian, industrialized, working class North and argue that those texts which centralize women are always dependent upon those dominant contexts.

With this in mind I set about researching my topic. I decided for my own organization that my research should initially try and follow some kind of chronological order, therefore the first area I will cover is work written before the Troubles.

Chapter One

Patriarchy is essentially about power, those who wield it and those who submit to it. Its chief institution is the family, around which the rest of society is built. Despite the fact that the two novels to be discussed in this first chapter, Brian Moore's The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne and Janet McNeill's The Maiden Dinosaur are set in Belfast, both female protagonists struggle with a patriarchal structure which is based on Ulster's rural society. It is a social structure which, whether Catholic or Protestant, recognizes the "father as the dominant figure in the family"[9] and where daughters remain at home, helping their mothers until they receive offers of marriage. Within the Nationalist community of Northern Ireland, the position of women tended to follow the ideology of the South where within Catholicism and Republicanism women were idealized in both public and private through the cult of the Virgin Mary and Cathleen ni Houlihan or Mother Ireland, but subordinated domestically and politically, confining the women to private spaces. This system conceives of women as complementary to rather than equal to men.

Likewise, Unionism, in spite of being closely tied with notions of modernity, industrialization and progress, viewing as they do the creation of Belfast as their achievement through their own hard work, is still highly conservative and overwhelmingly patriarchal. Ruth Moore maintains in her study that "Loyalist women, like their men are supposed to be loyal to the throne…but in addition they must be loyal to the male head of

[9]Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History1922-1985 (London: Fontana, 1985) p23-24*

the household - the proper wife, the working companion, the helpmate, the silent support and drive. And loyalism means containing the intense frustrations which arise from meeting these expectations"[10]

Against such implacable structures where roles are so sharply defined, women who fail to adhere to their community's expectations risks failure and alienation. They are at the mercy, within both communities of "an inquisitive, scandal-hunting, puritanical, passionless place characterized by the burger mentality of its Presbyterian rulers."[11] The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne and The Maiden Dinosaur are two novels which explore the Catholic and Protestant psychic malaise of middle class, middle aged unmarried women. Judith Hearne and her Protestant counterpart, Sarah Vincent in The Maiden Dinosaur have both failed to achieve the role of wife and mother expected of them by their respective communities. To a greater or lesser extent both women fall victim to those repressive, mainly patriarchal forces which dictate their lives - community expectations, conventional middle class morality, family duty and, in the case of Judith Hearne, religion. Both novels chart the social decline of Belfast's middle classes where unmarried women remain isolated within a male dominated society and where their failure to even occupy that assigned domestic space renders them as misfits.

In an interview with Richard B Sale, talking about Judith Hearne, Moore states: I wanted to write something about the ordinary person losing faith, not the intellectual losing faith; the intellectual things have been done by so many people. So I said why don't I do a woman.

[10] Ruth Moore, "Kissing King Billy Goodbye" *New Internationalist* 1994 May: p12-14
[11] John Wilson Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1974)p151

Women are so much more emotionally Catholic than men; it would be more shattering for a woman."[12] Moore's implications here could be construed in two ways. Firstly, if women are "more emotional" than men, men are therefore more rational and better able to cope. Secondly, Moore felt that in writing Judith Hearne he was able to express his "bitterness against the Catholic Church [his] bitterness against the bigotry in Northern Ireland."[13] That women are more "emotionally Catholic" would seem to suggest that they are more devout. Such devotion to a Church which inspires such feelings of bitterness in the author could, it may be argued, be evidence in his mind of their greater weakness, leading to a lack of respect on his part. That in itself has important consequences for his female characters. It is true that Moore exposes, in the character of Judith Hearne, those patriarchal structures which succeed in destroying her but he also reveals, either consciously or subconsciously, his own rather telling attitude toward women. His position as the male narrator in the novel therefore needs examination.

The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne is a study of the stultifying limitations of social convention in Catholic middle-class Belfast society where status is guaranteed only through participation in, and consolidation of, the family and Catholicism. Moore examines the effect of Irish Catholicism, a strongly patriarchal, monolithic and hierarchical structure on a "lonely, emotionally undeveloped character, unskilled in human relations and locked into sterile privacy"[14]

[12] Richard B. Sale, "An interview with Brian Moore." *Studies in the Novel 1* (Spring 1969) p72
[13] Brian Moore cited in Robert Sullivan's, *A Matter of Faith* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996) p.11
[14] Kerry McSweeney, *Four Contemporary Novels* (London: Scholar Press, 1983) P65

Moore's female characters and particularly Judith Hearne, are determined by Catholicism and though some of the women portrayed in his work attempt to reject it, they are unable to abandon it completely. The strictures of Catholicism serve to dictate the attitudes, behaviour and beliefs of both themselves and their communities. Freedom within such a structure is merely an illusion and any attempt to live outside its tenets result in psychological distress and final submission. So it is with Judith Hearne. Middle aged, unattractive, snobbish and a desperately lonely spinster, Judith Hearne is made to live out her life as the victim of those powerful patriarchal institutions of the family and the Church. The novel opens and ends with Judith Hearne arranging in her current lodgings those personal symbols reflecting those institutions: a picture of her dead aunt and an oleograph of the Sacred Heart. The events set between these two acts, chart the crisis experienced by Hearne as she recognizes the destructiveness and futility of these two objects which she has adopted as her family and which serve as "guide and comforter. And terrible judge."[15] Despite this realization, however, Judith Hearne clings to them like anchors in a world of chaos. Her identity is so inextricably entwined with these structures that independence from them is not an option. Moreover, she is only too aware that a renunciation of faith effectively silences and excludes her from a community which has already marginalized her.

Judith Hearne's actual experience of family life involves a rather desolate past where, as an orphaned child, she is taken in by her aunt D'Arcy who exploits her ruthlessly first as a companion and then as a Nurse to her lingering senility. Upon the aunt's eventual death, Judith Hearne is left desperately poor, almost friendless and without the skills to either

[15] Brian Moore *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne,* p146

support herself financially or emotionally. Hearne is left with no sense of self. Every aspect of her life and her happiness is dependent upon either her fantasies with a Mr. Right, whether it be James Madden or the screen idol, Victor Mature, or linked with the machinations of that patriarchal institution, the Catholic Church. These hopes and desires, however, become unraveled as one by one they reject her. Even Father Quigley, the bully from the pulpit, has not enough interest to listen to the doubts of a woman desperate for spiritual guidance. His inability to treat her or even see her as an individual in crisis is manifested in his espousing of Catholic dogma. The priest's choice of the Virgin Mother and the Holy Family as sources of comfort and guidance serve only to highlight those patriarchal ideals and structures which are denied to Judith Hearne and contribute to her desperate loneliness.

Judith Hearne fulfills no acceptable role as wife and mother and occupies no domestic space of her own; she is left rudderless with a nomadic existence, moving as she does from one boarding house to the next, existing on the margins of her community, Hearne is only ever a visitor to those domestic spaces assigned to women. She is never able to feel completely comfortable in these spaces as she simply has no knowledge of how to occupy them. Her uncertainty and lack of confidence can be seen in one of her visits to her landlady's parlour where she searches to find common ground upon which to converse. It is, perhaps, significant that the conversation between the two women eventually turns to that one area which dominates all their lives, the Church. As they exchange opinions about the Parish Priest, Father Quigley, Judith Hearne remarks that, "religion is a comfort, even

in conversation. If we hadn't the priests to talk about, where would we be half the time?"[16] reflecting the influence of the Church upon their daily life.

Hearne's status as a spinster within this patriarchal society leads her to appraise every man as a possible suitor, however unsuitable and repulsive. On her first morning at the boarding house she anticipates meeting the other boarders who would "most likely be, men. And what if one were charming?"[17] Later Judith Hearne is driven to contemplate a relationship with James Madden, a man whom she regards as socially inferior. Without a husband and children, she lacks the conversational and economic resources to operate effectively. It is inevitable therefore to appraise all men as potential suitors as full participation in the patriarchal family would allow her to increase her own prestige.

During this first visit to the landlady's parlour, Hearne meets her son, Bernard Rice for the first time. Rice's cool appraisal of Judith Hearne results in him "rejecting her as all males had before him."[18] This male rejection of Hearne is an important aspect of her marginalization and isolation. Later in the novel, although James Madden responds sympathetically to the persona projected by Judith Hearne for his benefit, he, like Bernard, rejects her on sexual grounds, preferring to view her as a potential business partner: "He smiled at her. Friendly she is. And educated. Those rings and that wrist-watch. They're real. A pity she looks like that."[19] It is these evaluative comments about Judith Hearne's sexuality which differentiates Moore's voice as author from Judith Hearne's, situating

[16] *Judith Hearne*, p.9
[17] *Judith Hearne* p19
[18] Ibid, p.4
[19] Ibid p.37

himself as a man who shares similar responses to other men, carefully establishing that, although the novel is dominated by Judith Hearne's voice, her voice does not reflect his own opinions and status. In constructing a wide range of gendered voices, Moore is still espousing a stereotypically-masculine viewpoint expressed in his interview with Richard B. Sale, often undercutting Judith Hearne's religiosity through ridicule. For example, the protagonist's devotion to the Sacred Heart is given an ironic twist by Moore when she is portrayed as Christ's crucifier: She suddenly remembers "the Sacred Heart, lying on the bed in the room upstairs, waiting for a hammer to nail Him up."[20]

It is this dissent from the protagonist in terms of her faith that also helps Moore to align himself with other male characters in the novel, particularly Bernard Rice, who sees himself, above all as a realist, constantly seeking to undermine the strictures of the Catholic Church, describing Hearne's oleograph of the Sacred Heart as "an idealized picture of a minor prophet."[21] Indeed Bernard Rice may be seen as the one character that reflects Moore's lack of respect for such devout displays and takes up the author's voice in challenging the already shaky faith held by Judith Hearne:

> He laughed, 'Religion is it? And what has religion ever done for you, may I ask? Do you think God gives a damn about the likes of you and me? I don't know what got you into this mess. I can only guess- you're no beauty and this is a hard country to find a man in – but I know what's keeping you this way. You're silly religious scruples. You're waiting for a miracle.[22]

Through Rice and as narrator, Moore is attempting to continually construct and re-state that very different stance from Judith Hearne's cultural position, to keep his voice

[20] *Judith Hearne* p.8
[21] Ibid p201
[22] Ibid p200

separate from hers and remain the rational, unemotional male. That it has to be so continually constructed and re-stated suggests that Judith Hearne is not the only one struggling with loss of faith. Moreover, in constructing Judith Hearne from the male perspective, Moore succeeds in disempowering her in a way which doesn't happen with female writers and which makes finding selfhood all the more difficult.

The marginalization of Judith Hearne is typical of the ways in which certain identities lie outside an ideal community. When she fails to live up to the community's expectations, Moore exposes the ways in which the community attempts to silence her and contain the disruption she causes. Judith Hearne, however, is not actually silent. She uses language on many occasions to attempt to establish her role within this community but is often rendered silent by social and economic circumstances. Conversation and the use of appropriate language within conversation are of great importance to her. She self consciously attempts to construct an ideal feminine voice in order to maximize her status with her married acquaintances, as an interesting, cultured and conservative 'lady' She is, however, clearly constrained as topics related to her single life are simply 'not heard' and she has to manipulate the discourses that are available to her as a single woman in order to appear engaging and of value:

> For it was important to have things to tell which interested your friends. And Miss Hearne had always been able to find interesting happenings where other people would find only dullness. It was, she often felt, a gift which was one of the great rewards of a solitary life. And a necessary gift. Because, when you were a single girl, you had to find interesting things to talk about. Other women always had their children and running a house to chat about. Besides which, their husbands often told them interesting stories. But a single girl was in a different position. People simply didn't want to hear how she managed things like accommodation and budgets.[23]

[23] *Judith Hearne* p8

In attempting to produce a performance of femininity Hearne exposes the performative status of gendered identity as cultural constructs. It is these cultural constructs which succeed in marginalizing women and as a single woman, Judith Hearne simply does not have the status and therefore the power to be subversive. She desires to be accepted into these patriarchal constructs and therefore attempts to play out these performances. Her failure is as a result of these acts being so poor, resulting in further marginalization and isolation. Her conservatism and adherence to social propriety are over played, often making her appear snobbish and at times ridiculous. It is the transgression of these cultural constructs and the realization that she will never be desirable or marriageable which drives her into crisis. Her drinking serves to block out the reality and allow her to step back into fantasy, thereby making her situation more tolerable.[24]

Equally, the community's response to such breaches of cultural constructs exposes them as complicit and controlling. It is this community which on the one hand punishes Judith Hearne for her inability to assimilate into it and on the other refuses to release her and therefore achieve independence. The O'Neill's are the familial representation of this community. Portrayed as the ideal family, they represent the stability and normality craved by Judith Hearne. But like Mrs. Rice's parlour, Miss Hearne is only ever a visitor. Even though she is allowed into their home and family circle, a kindness offered by few, she is only really tolerated and at times slyly ridiculed:

[24] In *Brian Moore,* (London: Associated University Press Inc., 1974) Jeanne Flood argues that in The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne, "The fantasizing of the spinster alcoholic is very like the imaginative activity of the creative artist; Miss Hearne in arranging the grim facts of her life into humanly pleasing patterns does what the artist does." P21

> There! She'd done it again, saying something she always said. She saw the cruel smile on Una's face-like the day I came into the room and she and Shaun were saying over and over, imitating me. 'Your mother will bear me out, won't you?' Over and over and it's what I always say.[25]

At the high point of her crisis, when she is testing God and facing up to the terrifying realization of living without "the organizing points of family and religion"[26] She turns to the O'Neill family in desperation. At this point she abandons her performance of femininity, shredding the last vestiges of dignity she may have when she frantically tells Moira O'Neill:

> That's not the worst when he's just anybody who might be eligible. You might as well forget about eligible men. Because you're too late, you've missed your market. Then you're up for offers. Marked down goods. You're up for auction, a country auction, where the auctioneer stands up and says what am I bid? …and somebody comes along, laughable, and you take him. If you can get him. Because it's either that or you're back on the shelf for you. Back to your furnished rooms and your prayers. And to your hopes.[27]

Judith Hearne succeeds not only in destroying the façade upon which she has built her rather flimsy status, but also exposes those secure identities and beliefs upon which her community is based through discursive strategies. This results in Judith Hearne alienating herself further and also making herself more dependent upon that community.

By the end of the novel Judith Hearne is passive in her hospital bed, both silenced and protected by those very forces which destroyed her. She is being financially maintained by the family who represent that repressive institution to which Miss Hearne so desperately longs to be a part. With her status destroyed through her fall from grace her

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[25] *Judith Hearne* p.93
[26] Jeanne Flood, *Brian Moore* p.23
[27] *Judith Hearne* p251

relationship with them is now even less equal than it was before. Judith Hearne, a victim of Catholic and familial patriarchal forces, is merely pitied. Her docile obedience and acceptance of the power of those repressive forces can be seen in her arranging her aunt's picture and the oleograph of the Sacred Heart. In spite of the realization of their destructive power over her, she acknowledges "[they are] still a part of me"[28]

If The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne exposes the repression and marginalization of a woman by a decaying middle class Catholic community then The Maiden Dinosaur is its Protestant counterpart.

Janet McNeill powerfully conveys the sense of complacency and unease which penetrates middle-class Protestant Belfast. The Maiden Dinosaur charts the progress of a large, plain, intelligent Presbyterian school mistress. Sarah Vincent, who at the age of fifty-two, like Judith Hearne, attempts to make sense of and face up to her own loneliness and isolation. Unlike Judith Hearne, however, Sarah Vincent is able to stand back from the possible despair that her tedious life promises and survey it in a rather ironic and deprecatory way. Sarah Vincent has reached that period of her life where she is made to reluctantly confront her sexual and intellectual decline. Like Judith Hearne, she has to grapple with that loss of youth which throws them into a state of limbo between hope and despair. In the character of Sarah Vincent, McNeill deals with a woman coming to terms not just with a life long frigidity but also with lesbian tendencies in a community which simply would not tolerate or recognize homosexuality. She is repressed and, like Miss Hearne, both marginalized and isolated by her unique status as a single woman, in a

[28] Ibid p.282

community built around the patriarchal structure of the family. Where this novel is quite different from Judith Hearne is in its portrayal of the family unit.

In Judith Hearne, the O'Neill family is set up as an institution which is a strong and powerful ideal with the father as the head. Most of the scenes take place in the parlour and living rooms, the heart of the home and family over which the wife and mother preside. It is the one aspect of the community toward which all others strive and an inability to achieve this, results in further isolation and in Judith Hearne's case, crisis. In The Maiden Dinosaur Sarah Vincent is surrounded by floundering marriages and relationships and where any children of these relationships are estranged. These dysfunctional marriages and relationships reflect the decline of the once prosperous Presbyterian community. These characters no longer possess the wealth to occupy these large Victorian houses which were once built by those successful shipbuilders, linen-merchants and businessmen. Now they occupy a small section, a couple of rooms or an apartment of these once grand houses. In the opening of A Child in the House, another novel by McNeill, she describes how "[s]ome people might say there was a stagnation about the crescent, for there are signs that its function has become outdated. It no longer houses those whose prosperity allows them to acquire culture, and whose culture instructs them to acquire prosperity. Multiple doorbells and name plates beside them show that most of the houses are now flats.[29] This is a decay which is echoed in Moore's Judith Hearne where, upon settling into her new bedsit and looking out from the window to survey the scene, Judith Hearne observes the decline:

[29] Janet McNeill, *A Child In The House* (London: Hodder and Staunton, 1985) p.7

> Miss Hearne stared at the houses opposite and thought of her aunt's day when there were only private families in this street, at least one maid to every house, and dinner was at night, not at noon. All gone now, all those people dead and all the houses partitioned off into flats, the bedrooms cut in two, kitchenettes jammed into linen closets, linoleum on the floors and 'To Let' cards in the bay windows.[30]

It is perhaps interesting to note that in Moore's novel those once grand and prosperous Victorian houses are now occupied by the characters that do not play a part in the institution of the family. Miss Hearne, James Madden, Mr. Lenehan, Miss Friel, all isolated in their own partitioned space within these decaying houses. The family unit represented by the O'Neills remains strong, occupying a much larger space. McNeill, however, draws together a collection of both single women and faltering married couples within a house which once belonged to Sarah Vincent, indicating the decline of the family within the middle class Protestant community. She also reflects this decay in the gardens of these big houses which have gradually gone to seed and where "[e]verything is overgrown and tangled now."[31] It is perhaps appropriate that McNeill, in painting this picture of decline within the Presbyterian community and family should present us with weak, passionless men, incapable of surviving without their partners. Despite being successful professionally, in their private life they appear impotent and infertile, leaving their women unfulfilled as it is between Adie and Gerald. Having fruitlessly attempted to initiate some sort of passion out of Gerald, Addie remarks on the unfairness of still feeling "hungry when the meal was evidently over…All her life she had lain in wait for ecstasies, enthusiasms, dilemmas, disasters, and had invented them for herself when

[30] *Judith Hearne* p2
[31] *The Maiden Dinosaur* p120

events had not obliged. What huge blossoms of frustration and despair Chekhov could have raised from her boredom"[32]

Drawing on the strength of the women around them to establish their own rather parasitical identity, these men are defined by their relationships with these women and that in "this women's world husbands were cardboard."[33] McNeill succeeds in highlighting the unjustness that such "cardboard" characters should enjoy such an elevated status within the community. Her women are undoubtedly stronger and cleverer than their male counterparts, yet they have to struggle within a male dominated community where women are expected to fit in to those assigned roles of intellectually unchallenging housewives or "intelligent half - women." [34] As John Wilson Foster observes, "McNeill's women secretly yearn for a man to dominate them; it is not so much sexual and intellectual parity these women desire as sexual and intellectual fulfillment in a society where men through commanding strength deserve their exalted position. In the absence of strong men, the energy of the women is turned destructively upon themselves." [35]

Indeed when these strong women do come up against chauvinistic behaviour so prevalent in a society dominated by patriarchy, they are made to feel patronized. This is certainly the case during the television interview where the young Belfast interviewer attempting to establish himself as an altogether more cosmopolitan figure, with an eye to London,

[32] *Ibid* p. 63
[33] *The Maiden Dinosaur* p.27
[34] John Wilson Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1974) p.233
[35] Ibid p.233

questions Sarah about her poetry in a most patronizing manner. His question of whether Sarah's "upbringing and environment [in Belfast] have, so to speak, been a restrictive element"[36] in her work, carries the full weight of his rather dismissive assumption that she is, in this male dominated world, a member of "[t]hese provincial poetesses, these circumspect minds, these canaries pecking lightly at life."[37] His belittling of her work is an attempt to promote himself at the expense of Sarah Vincent's confidence and value as a poet. It also exposes the attitude of Presbyterian men toward women, essentially discouraging them from any form of creative independence which may be seen as a departure from the accepted role of supporter assigned to them.

The scene marks one of the few instances where Sarah Vincent experiences the world beyond her own environment. The rest of the novel sees her move between places of safety within her own community, avoiding the possibility of the rejection she may suffer in a man's world of endeavor. By contrast Judith Hearne risks rejection in her desperate hope for a relationship with a man and a chance to become a family unit. She fantasizes about being the "gipsy girl on the chocolate box" or the lead woman in the Hollywood movie, *Sampson and Delilah* attempting to assimilate into that patriarchal commodification of women through photographic images and the cinema. Sarah Vincent on the other hand rejects this, refusing to play the part of the sexual participant and refusing to adopt those oppressive cultural forces which demand that a woman dress and behave in a manner of contrived beauty. Unlike Miss Hearne's conscientious endeavors, Sarah Vincent makes "her preparations hastily and with purposeful carelessness, in case

[36] *The Maiden Dinosaur* p99
[37] *The Maiden Dinosaur* p.99

it may appear that she had any hope of improving her appearance."[38] Everything about Sarah Vincent suggests that her efforts to preserve her selfhood against the patriarchal order which seeks to impose a particular role upon women, results in her adopting a more asexual role and earning her the nickname "Daddy Vincent". This selfhood is achieved only by a repression both within and without. For Sarah Vincent this repression serves as a form of self preservation. She never allows herself the opportunity to explore her sexuality in any way, remarking that "to share my body was unthinkable" yet it appears that this is a defense not just against men but against her lesbian tendencies toward her closest friend, Helen, which lie just below the surface.

Sarah is not, however, completely immune from reacting to a man's touch, revealed by her slight response when she accidentally touches George. This suggests that her effort to suppress any sexual desires and preserving not just her body but her dignity carries with it a high price. Marginalized by her status as a single woman, her efforts of self-preservation and avoiding any kind of intimacy mean that she has to endure great loneliness. This is best reflected in her living arrangements where, despite living at the centre of a large house surrounded by people, some of whom are her friends, the walls act as barriers. Sarah Vincent, because it is essentially her home and therefore her territory, can dictate the level of contact with each character and the degree of intimacy. By remaining in her childhood home, however, she is always dominated by the memory of a traumatic childhood, where she witnessed the behaviour of her adulterous father whilst her mother lay dying. She is therefore, like Judith Hearne, prevented from moving on by her past and fossilized in the present as a "Maiden Dinosaur". Her father's indiscreet

[38] Ibid p14

sexuality has rendered her frigid and too frightened to allow any real intimacy with anyone, male or female, yet her aloofness keeps her from falling into the same state of crisis experienced by Judith Hearne.

In addition to her frigidity, Sarah Vincent, like Judith Hearne suffers a spiritual shrinkage. Unlike Judith Hearne's loss of faith which is dramatic and harrowing, Sarah Vincent's is gradual erosion, casting her into a limbo rather than a crisis. For both characters, however, this withdrawal from their male dominated church causes them to feel dislocated and isolated, reflecting the power and influence wielded within the respective communities. In the end Judith Hearne realizes this as she attends Mass out of routine and remarks, "Why the Mass was very long. If you did not pray, if you did not believe, then how many things would seem different. Everything: lives, hopes, devotions, thoughts. If you do not believe, you are alone. But I was of Ireland, among my people, a member of my people. Now I have no – and if no faith, then no people."[39] Similarly the decline in the religious affiliation of both Sarah Vincent and her coterie leaves them isolated even among the Protestant working class that was once the backbone of their community.

> For most of them, brought up in Provincial religious homes, faith as they grew older had become an individual solitary relationship, shy ingrown, a protest against the public emphasis on their Protestantism, against too loud Orange drums and the hysteria of spawning Mission Halls. They were products of their environment and generation who has retained the habit of faith as they had the habit of cleaning their teeth.[40]

[39] *Judith Hearne* p.279
[40] *The Maiden Dinosaur* p.175

Both novels reflect the societal malaise and decline within each community in a period between the Second World War and the start of the 'Troubles'. It is a time when women, unable to fit into the patriarchal structures imposed on them become isolated, marginalized and displaced. Both writers powerfully convey a real sense of Middle Class Belfast and explore both its complacency and its unease. As single women in both communities neither Judith Hearne nor Sarah Vincent have the means to successfully challenge the oppressive patriarchy dominating them. Only when those existing structures are fractured creating new economic, political and social possibilities can women seek to subvert such domination. Such subversion can be seen in Mary Beckett's Give Them Stones.

Chapter Two

This chapter sees a shift away from middle class Belfast of the fifties and early sixties to working class Belfast during the troubled periods of the 1970s. Mary Beckett's Give Them Stones which highlights the ways in which Republicanism, the Patriarchal family and the British State use the identity of Nationalist women for their own purpose. Further more, the material conditions imposed by these forces result in a form of incarceration for the female protagonist in this novel. I will therefore seek to explore themes of women's identity in working class Belfast, material conditions and incarceration whilst also referring to other forms of writing such as Bernadette Devlin's biography The Price of My Soul.

Mary Beckett's Give Them Stones presents one of the fullest examinations of the treatment of women in Northern Ireland. It brings a unique insight into the material conditions and sacrifices endured by women, highlighted politically by the young socialist M.P. Bernadette Devlin, about whom I shall talk later. Martha Murtagh the protagonist of the novel, like Helen Cuffe in Jennifer Johnston's The Railway Station Man attempts to tackle meaningful work which the "armed Patriarchy"[41] seems intent on destroying. Beckett's focus on such events as the General Strike, male unemployment and the lack of educational opportunities, allows a much greater understanding of the 'Troubles' as not simply a sectarian issue but also a class struggle and of particular

[41] This phrase for Northern Ireland was first used by the late Cathy Harkin, an activist in the women's movement from Derry and later cited by Margaret Scanlon in her essay "An Acceptable Level of Violence: Women, Fiction, And Northern Ireland" *Troubled Histories, Troubled Fictions, Twentieth Century Irish Prose* ed. Theo D'Haen and Jose Lanters Vol. 4 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995) p168

concern to women. Furthermore Give Them Stones charts Martha Murtagh's awakening to the fact that her identity as a Nationalist woman is used by Republicanism, the Patriarchal family and the British State as a site of exchange. In recognizing the importance of economic survival as opposed to political allegiance Martha ultimately rejects Nationalist politics.

As the events of the novel unfold an oppressive history seems to determine the course of Martha's life. Poverty, often caused by this oppression ensures that Martha is continually concerned with material conditions. This concern is revealed in a discussion with her mother-in-law, which also highlights the significant disparity between male and female employment in the cities particularly, and the acceptance of women that this should continue without enjoying parity within the marriage.

> "He doesn't have a job very often," I said to stop her making him out such a paragon.
> "And what man does?" she demanded and I thought to myself – Mary Brigid's husband does.
> "You'll keep working in the mill the way every other woman does."[42]

Martha, like most working class women in Northern Ireland is expected to provide financially whilst still having primary responsibility in caring for the children. Martha's husband, Dermot, whose employment record is sporadic, presumes that he is not expected to contribute any money he earns to the upkeep of the family. This confirms his power as the patriarch allowing him more freedom than Martha, forcing her to consider how she will feed the family.

[42] Mary Beckett, *Give Them Stones* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988)p79

The novel also covers the impact of internment upon women. Initially when Martha's father is interned during the Second World War, the financial burden is placed not only on her mother but also upon herself, being the eldest child. Educational opportunities are denied her and she becomes entrenched in a workforce at a very young age in order to support the family. In consciously focusing upon the impact of internment, the novel highlights the effects such laws had upon the community and follows the actions taken by women in attempting to resist such patriarchal oppression. For example, Martha refers to the banging of the lids, warning the district that the British soldiers were moving in to search and lift men from the area. The 'bin lid bashing' warning system effectively saw women taking a more active role against the armed forces. This, along with sit down protests in various parts of Belfast and the withholding of rent and rates marks women's increasingly influential role within the civil rights movement. Lynda Edgerton in her essay on women in Northern Ireland observes that;

> The 'security forces' were seen as a threat to working class homes; besides the arrests and internment, there was the constant annoyance of army raids, houses being ransacked and children harassed. In short, the traditional maternal role as guardian of the family was being confronted by external alien elements. Little wonder that working class women in besieged Nationalist areas were spurred to action.[43]

Following another wave of internment, Martha recalls that "[b]oys and men had been lifted all over the parish and more in the next where I had been reared…There were rumours too of men having been tortured."[44] As an adult, Martha is far more aware of the impact incarceration has upon the material conditions of the women who must "keep up the home front". Furthermore this invasion and destruction of homes, the domestic sphere

[43] Lynda Edgerton "Public Protest, Domestic Acquiescence: Women in Northern Ireland" in *Caught Up In Conflict: Women's Responses* ed. R Ridd and H. Calnan (1986: MacMillan, London) p67
[44] *Give Them Stones* p128

widely acknowledged to be the women's domain, highlights the impact upon women's lives as it is they who are left with the mess to clear up and it is they who are left to support the family when the husbands are lifted, making the economic issues hugely important to them.

During the novel Martha observes many of the events happening in Northern Ireland through the media. Her relationship with the media is an important one;

> "If I had a minute to glance at the *Irish News* in the evening that was all I got to read. But I had the wireless in the bakehouse and I heard the news in the morning when I was on my own, and in the summer of 1968 Dermot got a television."[45]

This regular contact ensures that Martha is drawn closer to the public life of women in Nationalist areas and that her private space is intermingled with that public sphere. It is on the television that she witnesses the events of the Falls Road Curfew. The Curfew was initiated by the Unionist-controlled Stormont with Westminster's support and carried out by the Royal Ulster Constabulary and British soldiers, all different facets of the male hegemony in Northern Ireland. The action, initially intended to quell Nationalist unrest, became an opportunity to harass suspected Republicans, where the soldiers searched for guns and broke up the houses. Watching the events unfold on television, Martha is deeply moved by the action of the women.

> I was crying, first with vexation and then with pride when a whole army of women with bread and milk came marching down from other streets further up and pushed the soldiers away, shouting at them to go home to England and learn some manners. They handed the food into the besieged houses.[46]

[45] *Give Them Stones* p115
[46] *Give Them Stones* p121

The scene is touching as it presents the two sides of Nationalist women's life in Northern Ireland. The women in the besieged houses directly suffer oppression at the hands of patriarchy, whilst resistance to such oppression is demonstrated by those women handing out food. In that very act, Beckett not only makes the link between women and their essential role as nurturers and providers but also women using food to subvert patriarchy

Subversion through food is repeated again by Martha when she resists both the British army and the I.R.A. As Martha's life drags on with a husband in and out of work and four sons in as many years, she finds the strength to change her life and strike out against those very specific roles which women are expected to adhere. She refuses to have any more children and opens a business in the form of a bakery within her own home. In his assessment of the novel Gerry Smyth highlights that search for independence from those Patriarchal forces that determine her life:

> Baking… is the one thing that she can call her own, the one means she has to express herself as well as to assert her independence. In essence, what Martha is (successfully) striving for is a room of her own – that is, a space in which she can interrogate and challenge through self-expression the discourses into which she has been born and which constitute the limits of her identity.[47]

It is not long before those forces attempt to use this space and her Nationalist status as a place of exchange and a site of conflict for their purposes. Her resistance to this 'armed patriarchy' results in the destruction of her shop.

Earlier in the novel, when she is initially asked by the I.R.A. to stop serving the soldiers she refuses, explaining that, "if I have an open shop I can't refuse to sell to people.

[47] Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation* (London: Pluto Press, 1997)p. 136

There's no way I could manage it."[48] This refusal is the first step in Martha's realization that women are merely used as a vehicle for action by one patriarchal structure against the other. It also awakens her to the realization that her political affiliations are not necessarily compatible with her economic needs. Later, for fear of the soldiers' lives, Martha does stop serving them, precipitating a visit from a British officer, demanding to know why she his refusing to sell to his men. Partly because of the area in which Martha lives and partly because Martha's brother was a known I.R.A. activist the officer questions her identity: "'Are you a Republican?' he asked and I shrugged. I was going to be a heroine but instead I said, 'I am a home baker'"[49]

In referring to herself as a "home baker", this self employed woman worker is moving away from the patriarchal family, the British State and Republicanism which have used her identity as a Nationalist woman for their own purposes. These forces see her status and identity as, according to Gayatri Spivak, "commodities in the strictest sense: something of an exchange." [50] As a result of Martha attempting to define herself as a female worker rather than a Nationalist both the State and the I.R.A. destroy her property in their attempt to bring her into line with their own agenda.

Following the closure of her shop for her Republican brother's funeral, she is visited by a British Officer who attempts to label her as a dissident, asking whether the closure was "'a gesture of defiance." Martha replies 'Listen you…it's my shop and my business and

[48] Ibid p.122
[49] *Give Them Stones* p123
[50] Gayatri Spivak, "Acting Bits/Identity Talk." *Critical Inquiry* 18, no.4 (Summer 1992): p803

I'll open and shut as I please and nobody intimidates me.'[51] The exchange results in Martha's shop being searched and hugely disrupted, making it extremely difficult to continue business. Her refusal to comply with the State results in the destruction of anything which they see as unproductive to them.

Likewise, the I.R.A. also seeks to punish her for her resistance to their demand of not serving British soldiers. It is no coincidence that the boy is shot against her wall. He, like Martha is seen as a transgressor, daring to step beyond the boundaries of Republican law and order. His punishment is deliberately executed within her workspace serving as a warning. As a nationalist woman, Martha is expected to acquiesce to their demands or else be "taught a lesson", contained and disciplined. Her bakery is torched. How appropriate, therefore, for both patriarchal forces to destroy her business, Martha's vehicle for subverting these forces.

In her article, Spivak makes the point that it is quite natural for women to identify with Nationalism, even though it is those Nationalist forces that succeed in oppressing women in their use of them to subvert the forces they themselves are fighting but "they have the immense *historical* potential of not being nationalists"[52] Martha's slide from being associated with Nationalism to eventually rejecting it, is a gradual one. Earlier in the novel, when she watches the civil rights marches of 1968 and 1969 she professes an admiration for Bernadette Devlin. At this particular time in the novel she still identifies with Nationalism revealed in her comment that she would have preferred that Devlin and

[51] *Give Them Stones* p126
[52] Spivak, p. 803

Gerry Fitt express a desire that "they wanted a united Ireland."[53] At this point in the novel Martha does not appreciate that Devlin recognizes the oppression of the whole Northern Irish working class, particularly women, by the patriarchal structures of Stormont and Westminster. By foregrounding Bernadette Devlin, Beckett is laying the foundations for Martha's eschewing of Nationalism, where she moves away from being a "medium of exchange".

Devlin, the youngest female M.P. at Westminster was instrumental in organizing the Civil Rights marches to Derry. Significantly, she always insisted that her primary concerns were the material conditions of the whole working class, irrespective of religious allegiances. During an interview in Derry Film Collective's *Mother Ireland,* Devlin reveals her concern for women's material conditions when she remarks that in spite of the civil rights marches, "women in Derry were still making three square meals a day and men in Derry were still eating them; women in Derry were still washing the dishes and men were holding up the corner at the bookie shop."[54]

In The Price of My Soul, Devlin notes that the purpose of her autobiography is to explain how "the complex of economic, social and political problems of Northern Ireland threw up the phenomenon of Bernadette Devlin"[55] Indeed, it was an extraordinary achievement for a young woman to have defied such patriarchy and succeeded in being elected to Parliament. As a female public figure, Devlin attempted to reach out across the religious

[53] *Give Them Stones* p117
[54] Ann Crilly, *Mother Ireland.* (Derry: Derry Film Collective, 1988) cited in *Border Crossings* ed. Katherine Fitzpatrick, (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2000) p.230
[55] *Price of My Soul* p.vii

divide and improve the material conditions of the whole working class, challenging those oppressive structures in the process. Her autobiography recalls that whilst standing for election, she found herself up against the manipulations of Irish Catholic patriarchy. Placed as a candidate that would not split the catholic vote in mid Ulster, she was fully aware that if elected, "they would control [her] afterwards."[56] She refused to "take part in their little schemes" and challenged the male hegemony of both Irish Catholicism and Westminster. Devlin was never going to succeed in bringing about the downfall of either but she did refuse to be a "medium for exchange" and in achieving this managed, in part, to subvert these structures. It is for this reason that Bernadette Devlin is consciously used by Beckett.

When we examine Martha's story, we see a woman who redefines her identity and relationship with the patriarchy which seeks to see her and use her as a commodity. Like Devlin, Beckett is aware that Martha cannot bring down these structures but can seek to subvert and therefore forge an independent identity, a difficult enough task within the confines of Belfast. Does this raise the question that success in achieving selfhood may involve exile, a moving away from Northern Ireland itself?

In the next chapter I will examine two women who, in seeking to establish an identity independent from the patriarchal structures of Northern Ireland, choose to leave to achieve it.

[56] Ibid p.191

Chapter 3

Northern Irish society is greatly influenced by both religions which dictate the role of the woman, decreeing that she be passive and unquestioning and situated firmly within the family. Women are discouraged from breaking free of these restraints. Within both women are not given prominence within their running and subsequently within the running of their own communities. When a woman steps out of the confines of family life she is often vilified or regarded as incompetent or both.

Jennifer Johnston's female protagonist in The Railway Station Man, Helen Cuffe, is a Protestant, situated within the patriarchal framework. Upon the murder by Republican terrorists, Cuffe is empowered by her author to develop as an individual and find freedom in the healing power of Art whilst consciously combating life's blows. In Brian Moore's The Doctor's Wife, the character Sheila Redden is also placed within the hierarchical structures of patriarchy but as a Catholic suffers greater entrapment by the past and by the religion she ostensibly rejects. Both women attempt to live outside the decreed roles, inbred injustices and violence of Northern Ireland and both move away from their respective cities, Helen from Derry and Sheila from Belfast. In spite of striving to escape the oppressive influence of their husbands and communities the two women are caught up by the violence they have sought to escape.

In her essay on Johnston,[57] Rachael Sealy Lynch examines the search throughout the author's novels to establish a female Protestant Irish identity and the difficulties in border crossings in pursuit of this identity. She writes that 'In the face of contemporary Irish social, religious and political realities, fragile female identities and private spaces become increasingly difficult, even dangerous to maintain.'[58] She continues that Johnston's female protagonists, in attempting to escape from the political patriarchy of the North often find their personal space "invaded and destroyed time after time by political reality."[59] Lynch is referring primarily to border-crossing from the North to the South attempted by Helen Cuffe as she moves to Donegal but the same can also be said of Sheila Redden who escapes to France and then to London. Both authors, Johnston and Moore make the point that once embroiled in the North, there is no safe dividing line where the female protagonist can construct an identity away from the politically charged, violent, male dominated North.

Having experienced the shooting of her husband by Republican paramilitaries, Helen Cuffe attempts to both isolate and insulate herself against the violence of the North by beginning a new life in a remote tip of Donegal. Determined to create a sanctuary and an environment in which she can express herself Helen pursues a long neglected interest in painting, an aspect of her life discouraged by her deceased husband, Dan. As the novel unfolds the problems within their marriage are exposed. Helen's difficulty in adhering to the proscribed role of wife and mother serves to alienate her from both the husband and

[57] Rachael Sealy Lynch, "Public Spaces, Private Lives: Irish Identity and Female Selfhood in the Novels of Jennifer Johnston" *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities* ed. by Kathryn Kirkpatrick, (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 2000)
[58] Ibid p.250
[59] Ibid p.252

the son. Aware of what he sees as her inadequacies as a wife and mother, Dan seeks to restrict her within acceptable boundaries, telling her, "You can be vague, careless, introspective, anything you like Helen, but you must keep within the structures." [60] Dan's death serves to free Helen from the oppression endured by her during his life time. In an assessment of their relationship, Christine Van Boheemen makes the point that the husband regards her as little more than "the house of passage in which the father and son meet, the means of exchanging patriarchal power" [61] Helen herself becomes aware that she has lived her life under patriarchal dominance when she admits that his death brings "an amazing sense of relief, liberation"[62] This liberation leads to an abandonment of the constraints of her marriage where she was made to feel inadequate and marginalized by both Dan and their son, Jack. Most of all, Helen is freed from the his latent violence;

> He believed in the hierarchy of power. He believed that it was possible to impose, to keep peace by the use of violence….He wouldn't call it violence though.[63]

Helen's isolation is a reaction against a lifetime of oppression and violence. She begins to enjoy this freedom, until her solitude is interrupted by another outsider who, like Helen, is seeking to escape from the violence which has left him scarred and mutilated. Roger Hawthorne, who becomes her lover, is a victim of the Second World War and is working to restore a disused old railway station which will never be of any value and which, like Helen's life will be impinged upon by the ever present violence spilling over the

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[60] *The Railway Station Man* p.13
[61] Christine Van Boheemen, "The Fiction of Identity and the Identity of Fiction." *The Novel as Family Romance: Language Gender and Authority from Fielding to Joyce* (Ithaca, New York: Cornel University Press, 1987)p32
[62] *The Railway Station Man* p.11
[63] Ibid p.56

Northern Irish borders. Both characters, in their desire to preserve, restore and create, find temporary refuge against the violence which seeks to destroy their world. Yet despite the relationship with Roger being more empathetic and enjoying greater parity, she still rejects his offer of marriage. Her painful experience has made her reluctant to endure more boundaries, teaching her that "marriage isn't a cure for loneliness anyway"[64] and that it would "be like a prison... I'd rather love you outside that"[65]

We learn of the railway station's destruction at the beginning of the novel when it is described as "derelict again" and a "memorial to the deaths of four men."[66] What we do not learn until the end is, that two of those four men are her lover and her son. Her son, Jack, who throughout the novel seeks to identify more with the father in condemning Helen's slovenly housekeeping and absent-mindedness, joins an obscure arm of the Republican movement and is responsible for the explosion which destroys himself and Roger along with two other men and the restored railway station. His motivation for joining an organization linked with the death of his father is to "cancel out some of the labels they hang on me…West Brit, shoneen, bourgeois"[67] If his mother seeks isolation, then Jack seeks to avoid it, resulting in his involvement in and association with 'armed patriarchy.' Helen, aware of this involvement curses Jack for "throwing this rock into the pool of my isolation."[68] She is only too aware that Jack is the vehicle for bringing to her world that which she desperately seeks to escape, shattering any remaining shreds of illusionary safety. She will never be free to lead a life untainted by the surrounding

[64] Ibid p.177
[65] Ibid p.175
[66] Ibid p.3
[67] *The Railway Station Man* p.179
[68] Ibid p.148

realities and although left to "mourn the needless dead" she, like Martha Murtagh in Give Them Stones still attempts to engage in that meaningful work once threatened by the 'armed patriarchy' around her. Her work is used to forge an identity which reflects her experiences but is without boundaries;

> On canvas, I belong to the world. I record for those who wish to look, the pain and the joy and loneliness and fear that I see with my inward and my outward eye.[69]

* * *

Brian Moore's Sheila Redden and Johnston's Helen Cuff are similar in that they both marry young resulting in them denying themselves a career, each has a son who has been culturally inscribed by his father and each attempts to disengage from the patriarchy which has dominated their lives by leaving Northern Ireland. Sheila Redden is the Doctor's wife, an appropriate title as she is defined throughout the novel by her relationship to men. Moore rarely if ever uses her actual name. As if to reinforce her loss of individual identity, she is nearly always referred to as Mrs. Redden.

The novel opens in Paris and moves from there to the French Riviera, back to Paris and eventually to London. Sheila Redden is waiting to be joined by her husband who is delayed by work back in Belfast. Initially she is angered by his delay being made to wait and feeling once more the victim of an oppressive relationship which has shaped her life. We are told that "All her life, it seemed, he had forced her to wait. He was the bread winner: he made the plans, and he changed them. He rarely consulted her. He was the

[69] *The Railway Station Man* p.186

man, he paid the bills:"[70] Whilst in Paris she meets an American, Tom Lowry, a man ten years her junior. Her affaire with him presents her with the opportunity to choose between returning to her restrictive world in Belfast with her husband Kevin or turning her back on it. Her dilemma is that in leaving Belfast she also has to give up her son. After a period where she vacillates between a guilty conscience and freedom, Sheila Redden chooses the latter and the novel closes with her working in a laundry and living in a London attic. Like Helen Cuffe she also rejects an offer of marriage but is ultimately left alone at the end through her own choosing rather than by circumstances. Unlike Helen Cuffe it is a solitude that sits uncomfortably.

Throughout the novel, Belfast - in the form of the 'Troubles', her domineering husband and her residual religious conscience – breaks in upon her time with Lowry reminding her that the patriarchal structures of Belfast are a harsh reality which she will find difficult to shake off. When she is having coffee with Tom in Paris, for example, she recalls the Abercorn restaurant bomb, one of the bloodiest atrocities of the 1970s;

> But there sitting laughing in the Café de Tournon, she felt again as though she were a deserter from home. Again, she saw the woman in the Queen's Arcade after the Abercorn Café explosion, the dirt matted blond hair, the blood on the woman's cheek, the priest kneeling on the pavement saying an act of contrition over a dying man, Mrs. Redden, standing beside the priest, holding the priest's hat for him, and, when the woman ran out and saw this, her face became all hate and she lifted her arm and struck the priest's hat out of Mrs. Redden's grasp and hit Mrs. Redden in the face, shouting, "Fucking Fenian Gets!" as if Mrs. Redden and the priest and the dying old man had set the bomb off and were not victims like herself.[71]

[70] *The Doctor's Wife* p.50
[71] *The Doctor's Wife* p.42

It is from this harsh world, where she feels imprisoned by the violence inflicted on the city and an oppressive husband that Sheila Redden searches to escape by creating a kind of Eden. Like Helen Cuffe, Sheila's marriage to Kevin is revealed little by little through reminisces and snatches of conversation remembered. Kevin Redden, like Dan regards his wife as a dreamer. He accuses her of living her life through the books she reads, continually reminding her of her habit of "dancing in the dark". His continual repression of her drives her to a point of quiet desperation and a desire for a freedom. Her unhappiness is alleviated by forays into a fragile alternative through literature and then into a relationship with Lowry.

Even with Lowry she allows herself to be dominated and organized. Sexual exploration is an important aspect in her liberation from the very conservative constraints of Belfast and one particular sexual episode where Lowry positions her so that he may enter her from behind, describes Sheila Redden as being "like a victim on a block". This particular aspect of male dominance foreshadows the more brutal rape of his wife by Kevin Redden, who interrupts her idyll with Lowry with the intention of forcing her back to reality. Reality for Sheila Redden is male dominated Belfast, not only her husband but her brother, also a doctor, who is prepared to diagnose her as temporarily insane to stop her from traveling to America and her son, Danny, "who hardly knows if I'm in the house or out as long as his meals are on time".[72] Sheila Redden is aware that if she is to achieve any kind of independence she must escape from the male hegemony which seeks to dominate her life and disempowers her. It is for this reason that she rejects not only a future with her husband and son but also a future with Tom Lowry.

[72] *The Doctor's Wife* p.170

If Helen Cuffe searches for isolation through a solitary existence then Sheila Redden, searches for anonymity. One of the recurring themes of the book is that in striving for independence, Sheila wishes to simply disappear, to be like that man who "walks out of his house saying he's going down to the corner shop to buy cigarettes...[and] he's never heard of again."[73] This anonymity however, is far more troubled than Helen's solitariness. We are left with the feeling that despite the many tragedies endured by Helen, Johnston has instilled in her character an inner strength from the restorative power of Art which is lacking in Moore's Sheila Redden. It is true that Moore has permitted her, at the age of thirty seven, the power to make the most important decision in her life - to abandon her family and attempt to build an identity away from the oppressive patriarchy of Northern Ireland - but we are left feeling unsure about her strength to succeed.

In many ways the choices made by Sheila Redden are more difficult than those made by Helen Cuff, simply because many of the choices were made for Helen. Moreover, Johnston empowers her female characters to "have the strength to move the shit aside."[74] Sheila Redden, on the other hand, is a female character created by a male author and therefore seen from a male perspective. She is not completely empowered with the strength to establish an identity beyond patriarchy for that very reason. In an essay on Moore's female characters Longley writes that "the ultimate irony of Moore's portrayal of his heroine's is that theoretically he is on their side" [75] I would agree with this but his

[73] Ibid p.153
[74] Karen McManus, "Plodding Republicanism." Interview with Jennifer Johnston. Fortnight April 1995: 36-37
[75] Edna Longley, "Brian Moore's Women." Fortnight Dec.-Jan. 1982: 24-25

position as a male author and therefore as part of that dominant patriarchy makes it difficult for his female characters to disengage completely from a received history.

In considering his female characters as more emotionally Catholic than men, they are therefore caught in a double bind, of patriarchy and Catholicism, making the quest for an identity independent of these structures primarily more difficult. Sheila Redden feels throughout the novel that even though her faith has lapsed, like many of Moore's female characters "religion is part of their psychological climate, and when they are in the doldrums, as it were, they turn to it for assurance."[76] That assurance can be seen in her seeking out a priest when she experiences suicidal notions but it can also impede her quest for happiness, evident in her wondering about the price she will have to pay for her new found freedom. The price, it seems, will be that she will never be able to completely disengage from those forces which have sought to oppress her. Sheila Redden, like Judith Hearne before her has her own dreams and aspirations but as Robert Sullivan remarks, "it is their relationship to the social, its constrictions and ideological boundaries that ultimately decides their fate."[77] It is also their relationship with their author. Novels are, after all crafted objects and the characters therein are only as free as the consciousness creating the work allows them to be.

Clearly, many of the novels discussed have focused upon those elements of patriarchy which have sought to oppress the central female characters. It is notable that in highlighting notions of identity, issues of nationalism, ethnicity and class, as well as

[76] Robert Sullivan, *A Matter of Faith The Fiction of Brian Moore* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996) p25
[77] Ibid p.37

gender, have played an important part within the structures of these and other novels. Interestingly, most of the writing by women which has emerged predominantly from Nationalist communities shows very little allocation of political responsibility on individuals of the "other" community. Rather, responsibility for oppression is placed firmly on those systems that marginalize and oppress women in both communities.

So far I have discussed novels written in the period leading up to and during the Troubles, dealing with women's identity and their ability to cope with patriarchal oppression. In the concluding chapter I will tackle the period stretching from the latter half of the Troubles up to the present day, examining a more diverse selection of writing which seeks to give Northern Irish women a voice and centralize the issues affecting them.

Chapter 4

The concept of identity has always been at the centre of both the Catholic and Protestant communities and their writing, resulting in polarizing them both politically and culturally. Both communities have operated within the binaries of Irish/British, Nationalist/Unionist and Catholic/Protestant. Women living in the North have been trapped within these binaries and expected to conform, denying them the chance to establish their identity in terms of gender. It is also significant that within the two communities, dominant ideologies of sovereignty have meant that the issue of gender was simply unimportant. If the literature of such a culture reflects such ideologies of identity it can be of little surprise that writing centralizing women is a little thin on the ground. When this form of identity is as overwhelming as it is in Northern Ireland it suffocates any other kind of identity.

The small amount of work which has emerging from the Troubles and beyond has been from the working class communities, which differs from its more middle class contemporaries, for example in the Republic of Ireland and elsewhere. The reason for this may lay in the claim by Monica Williams[78] that the women's movement in Northern Ireland has been most effective in bringing about political change within these working class communities. The influences of feminism however must not be overestimated. Margaret Scanlon argues that whilst some women have gone on to play prominent roles within Northern Irish society, for example Bernadette Devlin, who became an MP at the

[78] Monica Mc Williams 'The Church, The State and The Women's Movement in Northern Ireland' in *Irish Women's Studies Reader,* ed . Ailbhe Smythe. (Dublin: Attic Press, 1993)

age of twenty one, Betty Williams and Anne Corrigan who won the Nobel Peace prize in 1977 for their part in founding the Peace People and other women , mostly Republicans who joined paramilitary organizations, very few women have had any success in changing their life compared with "other English-speaking countries or in Northern Europe." She goes on to say, "One could of course blame the churches, which have encouraged a model of feminine passivity and domesticity…that the preoccupation of the omnipresent Troubles has made feminism seem like a low priority."[79] Women's participation in public life has been fitful and rather spurious in success. Any attempt to change their status within Northern Irish society has never gone far enough and as Catherine Shannon notes, "So long as Ulster politics retains its sterile, confrontational, triumphalist style, the goals and aspirations of women will be ignored and marginalized."[80]

As I discussed in my introduction, any analysis of the identity of women in Northern Ireland might lead to the conclusion that they could appear as a homogeneous group based on their commonality of experiences. Certainly much of the fiction writing of both groups makes use of a central, female protagonist who interacts with her particular community and through whom the author chooses to say something about that community. But women's writing from the two communities also reveals significant differences, most notably in the quantity of literary output: there is, for example, considerably more written by Catholic women. One possible explanation for this is that Nationalism does have a greater tradition of female iconography both within the church and the Nationalist movement. Moreover,

[79] Margaret Scanlan, "An acceptable Level of Violence: Women Fiction and Northern Ireland" in *Troubled Histories, Troubled Fictions, Twentieth century Anglo- Irish Prose* ed. by Theo d'Haen and Jose Lanters (Amsterdam; Antlanta, G.A: Ridolphi, 1995) p160

[80] Catherine Shanon, 'Catholic Women and the Northern Irish Troubles' in *Ireland's Terrorist Trauma* ed. by Yonah Alexander and Alan Day,(New York: Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1989) p246

many of the novels foregrounding women involve aspects of rebellion. Since Republicanism has a tradition of rebellion and dissent, often questioning authority, the Protestant community may see highlighting the plight of women as a Republican issue, rather divisive and not particularly worthy of any real attention in the more 'masculine' envisaged Unionist culture. Within the Protestant middle class, women may have followed the Betty Friedan model of liberating women where "the wives of professional men …join the professions themselves"[81] This disparity suggests that life for women, both as women and as writers is different within each community and if compared with other industrialized countries, may even appear impoverished and conservative. For this reason I felt it important to broaden my study to include not just works of fiction but also travelogues and pamphlets, in order to explore the ways women have found to articulate their hopes and fears in both communities.

In examining women's identity within Northern Ireland it can be useful to look from the outside in. Travelogues written by women can offer an alternative woman's perspective, bringing with them their own experiences from beyond Northern Ireland. Moreover they attempt to highlight the struggle endured by women from both sides of the community, challenging stereotypes and misconceptions. As Dervla Murphy remarks in her book A Place Apart, "It helps to stand back and look at these two communities in an international context". [82] This is her intention, but as a Southern Irish Writer with a largely Irish American readership this intention is sometimes compromised. The book is a combination

[81] Margaret Scanlon, *Women, Fiction and Northern Ireland* p.161
[82] Dervla Murphy, *A Place Apart* (London: Penguin, 1978) p112

of historical explanations intended to clarify the Northern Irish situation, anecdotes and authorial commentary. Murphy deals with the whole community, men and women, Catholic and Protestant, moving from one community, often in a rather judgmental way.

On one particular visit to a Republican area Murphy interviews a young woman just released from jail with definite Republican views. The visit is interesting as it provides a contrast with Beckett's Martha Murtagh in Give Them Stones. Murphy asks the young woman whether her time in jail has changed "her ideas and attitudes" toward the situation in Northern Ireland, to which the girl replies, "Republican attitudes don't change in three years – or in thirty, or in three hundred years. And if they're still around in another eight hundred we'll still be fighting them." Attempting to apply her more "international" view on the situation Murphy suggests, somewhat naively, that "young people are becoming less nationalistic and more concerned about *human beings*". The young woman responds with:

> Whoever cares in Stormont or Westminster about *human beings* if they were Irish Catholics? It's fine for you to preach in grand words about "change". What change have we ever seen in the past eight hundred years? No change, nothing but poverty and injustice and humiliation. And who owns the Six Counties? *We do!* Not the people who are kicking us around. *We own them.*[83]

The young woman's answer illustrates the argument put forward by Spivak which is one's desire and need to identify with Nationalism and that women are especially vulnerable to that version of identity politics that is co-opted by the state and nationalist forces.[84] Beckett, through the character of Martha moves from this view to a position where identity politics is eschewed. Unlike the woman interviewed by Murphy, Beckett's character, Martha, is uncomfortable with violence even though she adheres to the Nationalist ideology

[83] Ibid.p241
[84] This point is taken from Gayatri Spivak's, "Acting Bits/Identity Talk." *Critical Inquiry* 18, no.4 (Summer 1992);p.770-803

taught to her as a child. When her sister, Mary Brigid questions her political loyalties, Martha remains emphatic in her allegiance:

> 'I'm always thinking of baking bread and selling it and feeding my family and what they'll be when they grow up but the thought of the border's like a nail sticking up in my shoe. I've got used to it but it's never comfortable.'[85]

Martha eventually moves away from this ideological stance when her concern with material conditions takes precedence over her nationalism. This young woman, however, identifies so completely with the quest to "liberate their country from invaders"[86] that she is prepared to become part of the "armed patriarchy" normally associated with men.

In Murphy's book Protestant women are conspicuous by their absence. Apart from the odd married couple there isn't a single interview of any depth which succeeds in clarifying their identity within such a male dominated community. Perhaps this in itself is revealing, reflecting Rosemary Sales' assessment of Protestant women's identity, where she maintains that the Unionist ideology "promoted by mainstream religious and political movements denies women legitimacy in the public sphere."[87] The woman's place is in the home.

Another travelogue, also written by a woman but with dual British/American nationality focuses far more on Northern Irish women from both communities. The Crack by Sally Belfrage has far less authorial comment and far greater reportage. Belfrage succeeds in accessing the Protestant women's community but with some difficultly. One Protestant woman gives the reason for this being that "we're just a wee bit more suspicious than the

[85] Mary Beckett, *Give Them Stones* p.118
[86] *A Place Apart* p.244
[87] Rosemary Sales, "Gender, Ethnicity and Politics: The Protestants of Northern Ireland." *Thinking Identities* ed. Avtar Brah, Mary J. Hickman, Martin Man an Ghaill, (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1999) p.150

Catholic community".[88] Belfrage's persistence is rewarded with a very interesting interview which takes place in the offices of the Ulster Defence Association involving its secretary, Hester. The atmosphere in the office is "heavily male and male heavy at that". When asked about the invisibility of Protestant women, Hester replies:

> "Women are changing over here but very, very gradually. With social issues they're probably more inclined to complain among each other than actually stand up and be counted. If you talk to them about nuclear war – even if they felt strongly about it, because of the Troubles it would be secondary. If people are being shot down in your own home town and your county's being held to ransom, if you're wanting to do something it's a case of starting at home"[89]

Essentially, this reflects the insularity of the community, where all other issues become secondary to the Protestant/Unionist ideology which seeks to be British and resist any Southern Irish influences.

Hester's story, which involves her family being driven out of their homes during sectarian clashes, reveals a woman who does not generally conform to the stereotypical Protestant woman occupying the private sphere of home and family. Her role in the U.D.A. sees her breaking into the almost exclusively male dominated public space but in no way does she seek to subvert the oppressive hegemony which has contributed to the violence she has experienced. Indeed, far from challenging their highly conservative family ideology, Hester works to reinforce this male hegemony. With such an agenda it is of little surprise that little or no emphasis is placed upon women's needs and identity. That is not to say that women do not have a function within politics, whether it be within the U.D.A. the Orange Order or indeed the Unionist Parties but it would appear to be

[88] Sally Belfrage, *The Crack,* (London: Grafton Books,1988) p.76
[89] Ibid p.142

more in the line of organizing jumble sales and refreshments, while throughout the annual 12th of July celebrations the women's role is confined to that of cheerleaders.

Rhonda Paisley, whilst adopting a specifically Unionist position politically, exposes the deep seated adversity to addressing women's needs, making Protestant women the most marginalized group in Northern Ireland. She writes that "there exists very little room for feminism within the ranks of Unionism…Feminism and Unionism remain miles apart. To say anything else is to fool ourselves, and there is no evidence to argue otherwise – our representation is not growing."[90]

In her book, Locked in the Family Cell, Kathryn Conrad discusses the dynamics of power in terms of gender and sexuality. She examines the way in which women's bodies are implicit in the politics of Northern Ireland. Women on both sides of the sectarian divide "through the often masculinist discourse of sectarian groups" have the role of out breeding the other community. Conrad continues:

> This construction of women's place in the political sphere is more often tacit than explicit, coded in idealized images of passive women articulated through patriarchal church teachings, punishments for women who cross the sectarian lines, and taboos about discussing reproductive choices.[91]

According to Rebecca Pelan, "There exists in Northern Ireland …a patriarchal ideology…most apparent in the extreme version of Protestantism that has developed there."[92] With such a dominant ideology in place it is hardly surprising that Protestants in particular, place such little value on the creative arts which foreground women and

[90] Rhonda Paisley "Feminism, Unionism and the 'Brotherhood.'" *Irish Reporter* 8, no.4 1992: p.32-33
[91] Kathryn Conrad, *Locked in the Family Cell* (Winsconsin: University of Winsconsin Press, 2004) p.119
[92] Rebecca Pelan, *Two Irelands* (New York: Syracuse University Press,2005) p.97

women's issues, and which consciously or subconsciously subvert the oppressive male hegemony.

More recently women have sought other means by which to articulate their views. Many community based work groups have sprung up in the North, particularly in working class areas, allowing women to express themselves in particular about material conditions. One project, bringing together a group of Protestant women from the Shankhill Road, Belfast with a group of Catholic women from the Shanty Educational Project in Dublin, has sought to encourage a mutual understanding and explore each other's cultural identities. After two years of cross border meetings between the two groups, the Shankhill women appeared able to transcend the received cultural ideologies and form an identity as women rather than two separate cultures. As one woman from the South remarks, the "Catholic and Protestant thing then just went out of the window, and I met them as women and found they had the same problems as we had, and they were really no different."[93] These women possessed the social skills to smash the boundaries imposed upon them by patriarchal structures, which have sought to establish an identity reflecting a predominantly masculine ideology of nationhood. The views expressed by the women reflect their belief that "politicians have stopped us from seeing that we all have the same issues that we want to address. We want houses sorted out, the jobs problem sorted out, the health service. At the end of the day those are our main concerns as women, but politicians use all these other issues to keep things going."[94] Both Mary Beckett in Give Them Stones and Bernadette Devlin highlighted similar concerns. Moreover, the border,

[93] "A Tale of Two Cities" *Farset Community Think Tank.*ed. Michael Hall, (Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim: Island Publications, 2004) p.17
[94] "A Tale of Two Cities" p. 17

which initially presented itself as an insurmountable barrier between the two groups, was no longer an issue. A woman from the Shankill community declared that:

> "I don't feel as if there is a border at all, I feel as if we have so much in common, you know. It's Ireland, whether it's North, East, South or West, and we have got so much in common. Okay, we've got our different identities but at the same time these barriers are completely broken down now…Whereas before I just felt my own identity only ever reached to the border, it would never have crossed the border…I am completely across that border now." [95]

Their realization of this is perhaps best expressed by Virginia Woolf who maintained that "as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world."[96]

The fact that within this group borders and boundaries are no longer a means of segregation and disunity stands in stark contrast to another pamphlet published a month before, entitled Reflections on the 'Peace Dividend.' The views of women from Nationalist North Belfast. This pamphlet examines the sectarianism and socio-economic deprivation felt most acutely in interface areas. In his introduction to A Tale of Two Sister Cities Michael Hall concludes with "My hope is that the Protestant and Catholic communities *within* Northern Ireland will eventually begin to develop similar relationships." In the introduction of this pamphlet he explains that the purpose for these discussions is to provide the women with an opportunity to share and explore their everyday experiences. He adds, however:

> This pamphlet relays the main concerns voiced during these discussions and to some it makes depressing reading, for it reveals that sectarianism remains as

[95] "A Tale of Two Cities" p.12
[96] Virginia Woolf. *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* ed. Morag Shiach, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) P.313

> undiluted as ever, that contact between the two [communities] is at an all time low.[97]

It is ironic that the women from the Catholic and Protestant communities across the border found it easier to identify with each other than Catholic and Protestant women from within the same city who had shared histories in terms of conflict.

There are many issues explored in this second pamphlet but the one issue which stood as a contrast to the unity experienced in the Two Sister Cities pamphlet is on the subject of housing and boundaries. The peace walls are a system designed initially to provide safety for the two rioting communities. This residential segregation often promotes a common set of values relating to a specific cultural heritage. It can also succeed in blocking in and marginalizing its inhabitants. In the pamphlet, the women describe the feeling within the community as being restricted by the peace walls turning "communities into ghettos."

> "In 'The Bone' we're hemmed in: we have an interface on the one side and one on the other; the population is expanding, but there's no houses to expand to…We've asked for Torrens, but we just can't get it, so we're hemmed in by these peace-walls that don't need to be there. We're feeling as a community that we can't expand, we're either pushed up the Oldpark or people have to move to other districts."[98]

The perplexity of living is most acutely experienced by women. The reason being, according to Rosemary Sales, that women are "less likely to work outside their own communities, are even less likely than men to come into contact with people from the other community."[99] They are at once shut inside these areas and shut out and marginalized from the rest of the city. Isolation through enforced enclosure imposed by

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[97] "Reflections on the Peace Dividend" *Farset Community Think Tank* ed. Michael Hall (Newtownabbey Co. Antrim, 2004) p.3
[98] "Reflections on the Peace Dividend" p17
[99] Rosemary Sales, *Women Divided: Gender, Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland.* (London: Routledge, 1997) p.7

patriarchy is nothing new. Virginia Woolf explored the same theme back in the 1920s, where women were denied wealth, opportunity and indeed "space" by the needs of men being a greater priority and the confinement of women within the home. In A Room of One's Own she remarks, "I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse to be locked in;"[100] It is a statement with particular relevance to the women from both working class communities in the North.

There exists in Northern Ireland, then, a patriarchal ideology against which women from Unionist and Nationalist communities are pitted. This brings to mind the northern playwright Christina Reid's characterization, "The public faces of the Protestant and Catholic paramilitaries are men…the people who talk about religion and the Church are men. The politicians are men…Ian Paisley and the Pope are basically in total agreement over what a woman's role in the home should be" [101]By examining the identity of women through various novelists from both sections of the community, I have attempted to highlight the difficulties they have encountered in negotiating a hegemony which marginalizes and often isolates women. Wayne Booth, in The Rhetoric of Fiction writes: "The author's judgment is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it….Though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear."[102] This applies equally to all the writers covered, reflecting the influences, ideologies and experiences which shape their characters. In the case of Judith Hearne and Maiden Dinosaur in foregrounding women within such a patriarchal society,

[100] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin, 2004) p.28
[101] Michael Herbert, "Across the Great Divide." *Irish Post* 22nd Sept. 1990 : p.4
[102] Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961)p.20

Moore and McNeill succeeded in highlighting the differences between men and women rather than challenging them. During the period of the "Troubles" and beyond, those differences and the effort of achieving self hood, whilst still being highlighted, were challenged by such novelists as Beckett, Johnston and Moore. The inclusion of the only male novelist in Brian Moore is, I believe, an important one. However sympathetic his portrayal is of Judith Hearne and Sheila Redden, these female protagonists are perceived from the "male gaze" of a dominant patriarchal ideology. This therefore makes it far more difficult for Moore's "more emotionally catholic" women to find a satisfactory selfhood.

An examination of non fiction reveals than within both communities their progress toward achieving selfhood is slow, their gains always being contingent on the fragility of northern politics and the nature of their relationship with their communities. On the whole, it has been Nationalist women who have best found a way to balance gender issues with those of nationalist politics. With just a few exceptions, northern unionist women have so far largely failed to find a way out from under the immensely powerful weight of patriarchy to articulate creatively an identity based on gender rather than just on unionism. The Protestant women of the North, therefore, remain one of the most silenced groups on the island.