

FROM PRIESTS TO PROSTITUTES: TRAUMA, SHAME, AND THE FORMATION
OF THE SEXUAL SELF IN THE EARLY WORKS OF JAMES JOYCE AND JOHN
MCGAHERN

A Senior Honors Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

By

Ashlie Strickland

December 2018

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ABSTRACT

The dynamics of early- to mid-twentieth- century Irish Catholicism that run across Joyce's and McGahern's early semi-autobiographical narratives, thwarted expectations of family, trauma, and shame, work together in *The Dark* and have a paralyzing effect on Young Mahoney, who spends the novel striving to be a person who is the opposite of his father. Whereas Joyce's most famous alter ego, Stephen Dedalus, ultimately (if temporarily) escapes Catholic Ireland at the end of *Portrait*, McGahern's Young Mahoney is held back by constant, emotionally crippling reminders of his father that pervade every space he enters, whether it is domestic, religious, or community.

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Introduction: Midnight Confession

Expectation is rooted in both past experience and a set of social beliefs that are ingrained from early childhood. For an adolescent male with the hope of becoming a priest, the expectation is that an uncle who also happens to be a priest would be a good person to talk to or with whom to work out any anxieties he might have about his vocation. This is exactly what Young Mahoney, the narrator of John McGahern's *The Dark*, does: he goes to stay with his uncle, Father Gerald, to discuss his potential for becoming a priest. Young Mahoney's primary concern in this respect is his sinful habit of masturbating while having fantasies about women, both real and imagined. His impulses are a source of deep shame, which cause him to describe himself as "a nothing and broken, cheap as dirt" (McGahern, *The Dark* 73). He hopes Fr. Gerald will be able to give him guidance, encouragement, and a sense of affective connection, which is what he needs to get past his deep feelings of shame about his lust.

The chance for an intimate connection does come about, but not at an opportune time. Young Mahoney is visited by Fr. Gerald in the middle of the night. The priest knocks, giving an impression of manners and a choice for Young Mahoney, but fails to wait for the narrator's assent to enter the room. This serves to highlight the fact that Fr. Gerald is in a position of authority over Young Mahoney, placing the narrator at a disadvantage. There are several parallels between this scene, in which Fr. Gerald encroaches on Young Mahoney's space, "lay[ing] side by side [with him] in the single bed," and a scene earlier in the novel in which Young Mahoney's father sexually abuses him (McGahern, *The Dark* 70). Young Mahoney harbors "suspicion" about "what...the priest [could] want...at this hour, the things that have to happen," recalling "midnight

horrors with [his] father” (70). This places Young Mahoney in a vulnerable position; he is in a prime position to be violated, and he knows it, but does not know how to escape. It is in this position that Fr. Gerald begins his questioning about Young Mahoney’s feelings toward the priesthood.

Still motivated by the desire for the joy of expiation and affective connection, like that he experiences after confession, the position that Young Mahoney finds himself in is one that puts him in a certain affective space; he has been conditioned through years of living with a violent and unpredictable father to acquiesce to the desires of paternal authority, so that when Fr. Gerald begins peppering him with questions, despite feeling “cornered and desperate, wanting to struggle far more free by this of the questions than the body and encircling arm, [sic]” Young Mahoney promptly answers all the questions put to him (McGahern, *The Dark* 71). That Young Mahoney wants to escape the questions more than the physical contact that reminds him of sexual abuse is telling, in that it shows how deeply disturbed the narrator is by the direction their conversation is going in, given that he has been deeply conditioned to answer a priest’s questions with unflinching honesty. This conversation between Fr. Gerald and Young Mahoney has three parts. It begins with Fr. Gerald broaching the question of Young Mahoney’s vocation, which is then followed by specific questions about his intimate habits, an interaction that mirrors Young Mahoney’s confession earlier in the novel, and then a role reversal in which Young Mahoney poses a question to Fr. Gerald that elicits a withdrawn and vague response from Fr. Gerald.

In the first section of their conversation, Young Mahoney is first suspicious, as previously discussed, and then, as the conversation progresses, he feels both shame and

dread of sharing that shame. After some prodding as to his uncertainty about his vocation, Fr. Gerald gets Young Mahoney to admit that he doesn't "think he's good enough" to be a priest, an admission which causes him to begin crying. The conversation turns when it appears that Fr. Gerald seems to figure out where Young Mahoney's trepidation stems from. This shift is noted with the description of the way that "suddenly [Fr. Gerald's] whole voice changed" when he asks about Young Mahoney's relationships with women (McGahern, *The Dark* 72). This shift, the first direct question about sexuality, hits Young Mahoney "with the shock of a blow" (72). The next question from Fr. Gerald, who asks if he ever wanted to kiss a girl, causes this emotional reaction: "the tears flowed hopelessly, just broken, he was cutting through to the nothingness and squalor of [Young Mahoney's] life...as low as the dirt" (72). The shame Young Mahoney is feeling at revealing this desire to Fr. Gerald is apparent in his negative self-image and causes him significant emotional difficulty throughout the novel.

The role of Catholicism as a formative influence in Young Mahoney cannot be underestimated. In an autobiographical essay titled "The Church and Its Spire," McGahern himself writes: "I was born into Catholicism as I might have been born into Buddhism or Protestantism or any of the other isms or sets, and brought up as a Roman Catholic in the infancy of this small state when the Church had almost total power: it was the dominating force in my whole upbringing, education, and early working life" (133). In this essay, McGahern describes the ways that religious ideals, the driving force of his formative years, were instilled, first in the home, then at school, and then in the Church. McGahern also describes his adolescent desire to become a priest, discussing "the

pressure to enter the priesthood, not from the decent Brothers but from within oneself' because of the threat of hell (142).

For McGahern, the idea "my end is my beginning" is the force that drives this "taking up, voluntarily, of our future death at the very beginning of life, as if sacrificing it to a feared God in order to avert future retribution" ("The Church and Its Spire" 142). In the social climate he describes, in which Church and State are essentially the same thing, "faith and obedience were demanded, mostly taking the form of empty outward observances and a busy interest that other people do likewise, which cannot be described as other than coercive," which inspired "an obsession with morality, especially sexually, which resulted in an almost complete exclusion of the spiritual" (146). This is the environment Young Mahoney inhabits in *The Dark*, McGahern's semiautobiographical novel. It is easy, then, to see why Young Mahoney reacts so strongly to the questions of Fr. Gerald; as a representative of the Church, Fr. Gerald seems to hold more sway over him than does even the terrifying Mahoney.

The second section of the conversation between Fr. Gerald and Young Mahoney reads like the confession scene earlier in the novel. In both scenes, Young Mahoney has to be prompted to confess his sexual sins – on which there is a very strong emphasis. In the confession scene, it seems easy for Young Mahoney to confess sins like lying, anger, and forgetting to say his prayers, but this easy litany is interrupted by the priest's question, "anything else, my child?," which makes it seem as if the priest is digging for Young Mahoney's hidden sexual shame (McGahern, *The Dark* 41). Unlike when he confesses anger and lies, when Young Mahoney hesitantly answers that he has "had impure thoughts and [done] impure actions," the priest pries for more information about

the specifics of his sins. He asks questions like “you deliberately excited yourself?...Did you cause seed to come?...How many times?,” rummaging through every intimate detail of his sins (41). There is the same prompting in the scene with Fr. Gerald, and the questions are very similar: “You excited yourself, brought them into your mind. You caused seed to spill in your excitement?...”How often did it happen?...Did you bring one woman or many women into these pleasures?” (73). This prompting and subsequent questioning portrays shame as unspeakable for Young Mahoney; although he knows he will have to answer (he describes the alternative as “worse than anything”), he is unable to bring up this sin himself.¹

The internal narration in both scenes stops as soon as these intrusive questions start. Leading up to the moment when Young Mahoney starts answering the priest’s questions in the confession scene, the narrator describes his internal state of mind, likening walking into the confessional as a condemned man walking to his execution and giving narration to his thoughts and feelings as the confession begins. This abruptly ceases during the question and answer, leaving only dialogue. Something very similar happens in the scene with Fr. Gerald; in the moments preceding Fr. Gerald’s questions, Young Mahoney describes his physical reaction, crying and “chok[ing] out” responses, as well as his mental state of self-deprecation, and, like the confession scene, this passage is written completely in dialogue. At the end of the confession scene, Young Mahoney feels nothing but joy at being forgiven and a sense of connection with the other newly clean penitents. At the end of the scene with Fr. Gerald, however, he has a notably different reaction, possibly caused by the accretion of shame owing to his repeated sinful offenses

¹ For prevalence of sex as the most significant category of sin, see the Maynooth Catechism

having been irremediably internalized as shame. He feels a tentative hope, but “still felt a nothing and broken, cheap as dirt, but hope was rising” and nothing like the happiness he feels after confession (73). This implies that Young Mahoney’s feelings of shame are still there during his confessions but are now entirely existing outside the realm of verbal or ritual expiations at a purely affective level. This inability to explicate his feelings is something that happens repeatedly when he goes into a nonintellectual space, as during the scenes of physical discipline and sexual abuse by his father and at the end the masturbation scene.

The third section of the conversation with Fr. Gerald is short. Young Mahoney asks Fr. Gerald if, as a teenager, he had issues with the same thing. This is Young Mahoney’s attempt at creating a connection with Fr. Gerald; after their conversation, he believes “everything [is] open, [they] could share [their] lives, both of [them] fellow passengers in the same rocked boat” (73). He is in a vulnerable place and needs a specific response from Fr. Gerald, some indication that he struggled in the same way as Young Mahoney is now struggling, but he is answered by a long pause. Though Fr. Gerald does give hints at what his struggle was in his youth, Young Mahoney is so wrapped up in his own shame, feeling he is “out there alone with [his] sins,” that he is unable to pick up on them. Fr. Gerald is thus unable to give Young Mahoney the reassurance he is looking for, and Young Mahoney reacts with a sense of affective alienation, humiliation, and anger.

I chose to do a close reading of the scene with Father Gerald because the reactions that Young Mahoney has to the nighttime interlude seem to encapsulate quite a bit of what I’m going to discuss in the following sections. The first section explores expectations and the response to the failure of those expectations. To do this, I will look

at the character Farrington in James Joyce's "Counterparts." Farrington has a specific definition of manliness that he strives to embody, which leads to a defined expectation of the place he should hold in the labor, social, and domestic spheres. When these expectations go unfulfilled, he has several methods of attempting to either ignore that fact or to feel he has regained a modicum of his manliness. This leads me into a discussion of McGahern's novel *The Dark* and the volatile patriarch that rules the life of Young Mahoney. Both Mahoney, the father, and Young Mahoney, the only name given to his son, the narrator of the novel, have expectations of the family and its place in their life as a happy object, which is an object that is socially accepted as bringing happiness. I will discuss how this idea is damaging and the characters reactions to that damage. In Mahoney, the focus is on his anger, while Young Mahoney fights shame and the struggles with the fear that he will become like his father.

In the second section, I will explore the intersection of the trauma of corporal punishment and sexual abuse and how they impact the formation of sexual desire. I will also discuss the role of shame, imparted both by the vicissitudes of adolescent sexual desire and a religious upbringing. To demonstrate this, I look at specific moments across Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* that show the relationship that develops between Stephen Dedalus's feelings towards women, religion and punishment, and the resulting shame he experiences. I will consider these moments in comparison with specific depictions of Young Mahoney, whose sexual fantasies about women retain traces of his abuse at the hands of his father. The dynamics of early- to mid-twentieth- century Irish Catholicism that run across Joyce's and McGahern's early semi-autobiographical narratives, thwarted expectations of family, trauma, and shame, work together in *The*

Dark and have a paralyzing effect on Young Mahoney, who spends the novel striving to be a person who is the opposite of his father. Whereas Joyce's most famous alter ego, Stephen Dedalus, ultimately (if temporarily) escapes Catholic Ireland at the end of *Portrait*, McGahern's Young Mahoney is held back by constant, emotionally crippling reminders of his father that pervade every space he enters, whether it is domestic, religious, or community.

“Last Fight,” “Last Clash”: Shattered Expectations, Corrupted Happy Objects, and
Shame

Happiness can be fickle, both to define and to measure. Sara Ahmed addresses this in her introduction to *The Promise of Happiness*. She describes the “history of happiness” as “a history of associations. In wishing for happiness, we wish to be associated with happiness, which means to be associated with its associations” (Ahmed 2). In other words, some objects are already associated with being happy. So, it follows, the search for happiness means the pursuit of certain objects already proven to cause happiness. Ahmed describes this phenomenon: “by finding happiness in certain places, it generates those places as being good, as what should be promoted as goods. Correlations are read as causalities, which then become the basis of promotion” (6). It seems like an almost economic arrangement – if enough emotional profit is received from an object, it will be “promoted” as an object of desire due to its perceived status as the origin of happiness. Furthermore, it is not enough to simply attain the object because “ideas of happiness involve social as well as moral distinctions insofar as they rest on ideas of who is worthy or capable of being happy ‘in the right way’” (13). Put all together, this means that an individual must be the right sort of person who can go after happiness within the bounds of what is considered morally and socially acceptable. Enter Farrington of Joyce’s “Counterparts,” a character who is repeatedly foiled in his attempts to fulfill his desire to epitomize what he considers to be masculine. Farrington’s failures span a multitude of roles, in his work life, and in the domestic and social spheres.

To bear in mind that “desires [are] always...at the level of fantasy for Farrington” is helpful to the reader because his fantasized masculine feats of prowess define the

qualities he aspires to but fails to achieve (Hansen 200). Farrington has a very specific view of manliness, as James Hansen points out in his collaborative essay entitled “Counterparts” in Vicki Mahaffey’s *Collaborative Dubliners*: “Farrington clearly experiences some form of pleasure when he fantasizes about hitting Mr. Alleyne, about getting drunk, about beating Weathers, and about being the hero of an evening of male conviviality” (200). Each of these fantasies shed light on a different quality that Farrington wishes to possess in either his working or social life. Clocking his boss, Mr. Alleyne, would not only serve as a way to reclaim his pride, but it would also be a forceful seizure of control. Beating Weathers in a competition of strength would make Farrington an object of admiration, as would being the producer of a night of drunken mischief. Getting drunk is simply Farrington’s method of coping by escaping sobriety; that drinking is an inherently manly occupation is just a bonus. In other words, Farrington’s idea of an ideal man is one who, above all else, is in control of his life, which can be seen through an individual’s autonomy in his work, his popularity with the ladies and his male companions, and his happy home life.

Hansen asserts that Farrington “hopes to gain [this sort of] control over his life and environment by becoming the desired hypermasculine object,” but he is presented as an alcoholic, which shows that he doesn’t have sufficient control even over himself to achieve his goal (207). Farrington’s physical description at the beginning of the short story when he is described as having “a hanging face, dark winecoloured, with fair eyebrows and moustache” with eyes that “bulged forward slightly and the whites of them were dirty,” gives many indications of his habits (Joyce, “Counterparts” 70). For starters, his skin is “winecoloured,” referring directly to alcohol and suggesting that he is

completely saturated with it. This is contrasted with Farrington's "fair eyebrows and moustache," details which generate the image of a splotchy face that, if healthy, would be pale and match his fair facial hair. His bulging, "dirty" eyes suggest the yellowed eyes of a chronic alcoholic. After a confrontation with his boss about his work output, Farrington knows he faces discipline if he does not finish his work. Despite this, when he sees how much work he has left to complete, Farrington impulsively sneaks off for a drink, the covert nature of the outing showing more completely his awareness of the inadvisability of his actions. On his way back, Farrington "wonder[s] whether he could finish his copy in time," which acknowledges that his drinking habits are interfering with his work (72). When he reenters the office, his co-worker tells him that "five times in one day is a bit..." without finishing his thought, but implying that the number of times Farrington has snuck off that day is excessive (73). Farrington's compulsive day drinking has the effect of ruining part of his expectation of his night out as well; as the narrator observes, Farrington has "spent all his money and he had not even got drunk," because his high tolerance for alcohol prevents him from attaining the jovial inebriation with his friends that he hopes for (80).

Farrington also lacks control of his work and is, in fact, presented as an early version of the copy machine. He is a tool, just as the typewriter he uses is a tool, tasked with copying other people's words. Mr. Alleyne repeatedly berates him for incomplete work, throwing in threats like "if the contract is not copied before this evening I'll lay the matter before Mr Crosbie" and "you'll apologise to me for your impertinence or you'll quit the office instanter" (Joyce, "Counterparts" 71, 75). No attempt is made to explain who exactly the dreaded Mr. Crosbie is, but the tone of the comments is very clear: Mr.

Alleyne, via the authority borrowed from Mr. Crosbie, is in complete control of Farrington's terms of employment. As the source of the already impecunious Farrington's income, Mr. Alleyne is capable of making Farrington's "life...a hell to him" if he doesn't obey, with no recourse on Farrington's part (75). This is why when Farrington once again fails to control himself and mouths off to Mr. Alleyne with a snappy retort, he is forced to offer an "abject apology" (75). Joyce's use of alliteration in this instance serves to emphasize Farrington's humiliation not only in this moment, but also reminds the reader of earlier conversations between the two. The first confrontation with Mr. Alleyne is in private behind closed doors, but the others are in front of his co-workers or in front of Miss Delacour, who is not only a client but a woman, which increases Farrington's embarrassment. After work, he admits to himself that "he had made a proper fool of himself this time," showing that Farrington sees not only the ways that Mr. Alleyne has control of his work life, but also how Mr. Alleyne uses his power as a weapon to strip him of his pride (75). Farrington also acknowledges that he must return, describing what he is walking into as "hell" and a "hornet's nest," which are images that portray an inevitably horrible situation; hell invokes the idea of an inescapable fate (at least without a reformation of his habits), while a hornet's nest suggests an angry, unpleasant, and painful destination (not unlike hell). But the fact that he knows he's returning to an unpalatable situation just further emphasizes how trapped he is in this job; it is not only the way he pays for his booze, but it is also how he supports his family. The image of the "hornet's nest" also recalls Farrington's proclivity towards alcohol. The buzzing associated with hornets evokes the frayed nerve endings of an alcoholic "aching" for a

drink, a word which describes Farrington's state of being throughout the short story, and points to another way he is trapped.

While in the bar, Farrington spies a "striking" woman, described as brightly garbed, wearing "peacockblue muslin" on her hat and "bright yellow gloves" (Joyce, "Counterparts" 79). She has "plump arm[s] which she moved...with much grace," and "large dark brown eyes" he "admired." From the perspective of the narrator, she seems like she might be interested in Farrington; she shares a few glances with him and "brush[es] against his chair" as she's leaving, causing her to speak to him in apology, but Farrington is "disappointed" when she doesn't look back at him one last time (79). Farrington's interest in the unnamed woman would appear to be much greater than hers in him, however, as while she is there his "eyes wandered at every moment in [her] direction" (79). Though the amount of time they are both at the bar is unspecified, if he is almost constantly looking at her, she is not really paying him much heed if he only notes her returning his gaze a couple times. This recalls an earlier scene in the office before the final confrontation with Mr. Alleyne when Farrington delivers the copies he has ready; Farrington "put the correspondence on the desk and bowed respectfully but neither Mr Alleyne nor Miss Delacour took any notice" (73). The narrator notes that Farrington is dismissed by a "flick" of Mr. Alleyne's finger, but there is no indication in the text that Miss Delacour even acknowledges his presence (73). This, combined with being in the same role and situation as Miss Parker (another employee worried about finishing her copy), causes Farrington to internally rage at the "indignities" of his office and to consider alternate ways to get money, ostensibly to go out drinking (74). In the aftermath of the "striking" young woman's exit, "he cursed his want of money and cursed all the

rounds he had stood,” possibly because he can’t afford more to drown the humiliation he feels (79). This anger connects these two instances, showing that there is something about this situation that is affecting him strongly. The behavior of the second unnamed woman, which constitutes, for Farrington, rejection by the object of his desire, suggests that Farrington wishes to be the object of feminine admiration. The parallel between the easy dismissal of the woman in the pub and Miss Delacour shows another way that his illusion that he might be a notable, desirable man is shattered. His frustration and “sharp sensation of thirst” in this situation at the bar is the same as the anger and thirst that Farrington experiences after his first confrontation with Mr. Alleyne, which portrays his desire to drink as an eagerness for an escape from his inability to embody the version of manliness he prizes (71).

The happiest Farrington seems in the whole of “Counterparts” is when he is the center of attention telling the heroic story of his witty rejoinder to Mr. Alleyne. This attention is expected by Farrington, who ensures the maximum reaction to his account by “preconsider[ing] the terms in which he would narrate the incident” on his way to the bar (Joyce, “Counterparts” 76). He is “stood...a half one” and acknowledged for having attained a victory through his “clever” responses when his story compares favorably to another told by O’Halloran (77). Higgins, a co-worker, animatedly describes the scene and lays claim to Farrington as “my nabs,” showing his admiration and his eagerness to be associated with Farrington (77). All the while his friends are “roaring” at his story, “Farrington looked at the company out of his heavy dirty eyes, smiling and at times drawing forth stray drops of liquor from his moustache” (77). This creates an image of a man in a state of social fulfillment, enjoying the response of his friends to his exploits.

This relaxed manner changes when Farrington is “usurp[ed]...as the admired male, as the object of homosocial desire” by Weathers (Hansen 207). Attention first shifts to Weathers when he “promise[s] to get [the pub frequenters] in behind the scenes [at the Tivoli where he works] and introduce them to some nice girls,” which prompts some ribbing of Farrington due to his marital status (Joyce, “Counterparts” 78). In addition to Weathers having appropriated the other men’s attention, the men are also talking about an activity that Farrington cannot participate in, effectively alienating him from the rest of the group.

In the short absence of Weathers, an Englishman, Farrington “begin[s] to feel mellow” without his rival (Joyce, “Counterparts” 78). Without the excitement of the competition, there is a brief return of the same feeling of contentment Farrington expresses when he is being showered with admiration by his drinking companions. Upon Weather’s return, however, Farrington’s anxiety likewise begins to return, once again showing up first in thoughts of money; this time, “Farrington is reliev[ed] he drank a glass of bitter this time,” rather than the more expensive Irish and Apollinaris (78). As Farrington is bringing the drinks back, Weathers is “boasting” about feats of strength, prompting his companions to “[call] on Farrington to uphold the national honour” (79). This is just the opportunity Farrington needs to try to reclaim the attention and admiration of his friends, and an arm-wrestling contest is declared. Farrington is beaten twice, and he feels “anger and humiliation at having been defeated by such a stripling” (Joyce 80). As Hansen notes, that Weathers is an Englishman raises questions of the “colonial implications” of Farrington’s defeat (207). This brings up a more general argument about the Irishman’s place in British Ireland, but the important bit to hold on to here is that

Weathers “symbolizes a controlled exhibition of imperial identity and power” and, by extension, how little power the Irish have within the British colonial system (Hansen 207). It serves to portray another way that Farrington, an Irishman, doesn’t have control over his life.

Hansen asserts that “the primary tension of the story measures out Farrington’s struggle to sublimate his feminized, objectified identity [developed at work] and to realize his abiding desire to be an admired male subject” by his peers (203). In this, Farrington has completely failed, and it is this that he is focused on when going home still sober, again full of anger and “thirst.” All his frustrations culminate when he returns home to find his wife is at church and there is no dinner prepared. Much like his expectations of himself in the labor and social spheres, Farrington has expectations of his position in the domestic space he shares with his family, which may be seen through his questioning of his son Tom: “Where is your mother?... did she think of leaving any dinner for me?...Light the lamp. What do you mean by having the place in darkness? Are the other children in bed?...What’s for my dinner?” (Joyce, “Counterparts” 81). First of all, his wife is described as “bulli[ng] her husband when he [is] sober,” presenting her as a nagging kind of wife rather than the loving, fawning woman his ego would obviously prefer. Furthermore, he expects his family to be present and waiting for his return; instead, it is dark, most of the children are in bed, and Ada, his wife, is at church, showing that he is not the central, primary concern of the entire household any more than he was at the publichouse; his family has, for the most part, gone about their business while he has been out. In addition to this, his needs have not been taken into account; he has no dinner waiting, and the fire has gone out. His family has failed to live up to his

expectations as patriarch, emphasizing both his lack of prestige and control in his domestic life. This is also a pretty good indication of why this hypermasculinity-aspiring individual hates it at home and prefers to try to achieve his ideal of masculinity with his friends rather than his family.

In Jean Michel Rabaté's portion of the *Collaborative Dubliners* essay "Counterparts," Rabaté quotes Joyce's statement in a letter to his brother that "I am no friend of tyranny, as you know, but if many husbands are brutal the atmosphere in which they live (vide Counterparts) is brutal and few wives and homes can satisfy the desire for happiness" (195). The summation of Farrington's life as "brutal" seems to sum up the way that the world has stripped him of his pride and emphasizes the ways that Farrington does not live up to the version of masculinity to which he aspires. All of the anger Farrington has felt as his hopes are undermined time and time again throughout the story is, as Rabaté observes, "turned to those persons who are closest to [him], wife or child" (194). In addition, owing to his status as patriarchal head of a household, Farrington's wife and children are more under his control than anyone else. Instead of Farrington being at the mercy of his boss or the opinions of young women and his companions, Tom, Farrington's son, is at Farrington's mercy. Through the act of beating his child, Farrington is able to feel that he has reasserted control over at least one aspect of his life. Furthermore, as Hansen points out, the beating allows Farrington "to imagine himself as a powerful man who can be feared and can control the body of another," redeeming his defeats throughout the day despite the deplorable nature of the act (209).

"Counterparts" serves as a useful introduction to John McGahern's *The Dark* because it allows for the exploration of a character similar to that of McGahern's abusive

father, Mahoney, in the condensed form of a short story. Like Farrington, Mahoney has a need for control that, when usurped, causes violent outbursts. Mahoney's assumption that the family is a happy object mirrors Farrington's idea of his masculinity as a source of happiness in that both characters' reactions to their compromised expectations are the same. The drive to assert power that Mahoney feels in the abject submission of his son seems to correspond to that which Hansen sees as Farrington's motives. Both men use the same phrase to justify their action: "I'll teach you to let the fire out," Farrington snarls, while Mahoney, in the earliest paragraphs of the novel, yells "I'm going to teach you a lesson for once," showing the purpose for their violence – which is to reassert control through fear and domination.

Along with these two tools, Mahoney uses humiliation to assert his control by making his son strip completely naked and administering his brutal punishment in front of a female witness (in a similar fashion, Farrington is forced to weather the tirade of Mr. Alleyne in the presence of Miss Delacour). When forcing his son to disrobe, Mahoney seems to enjoy the power that is betokened by Young Mahoney's humiliation and vulnerability – "He just moved closer. He didn't lift a hand, as if the stripping compelled by his will alone gave him pleasure" (McGahern, *The Dark* 8). Mahoney doesn't have to physically touch his child to terrify him, a point emphasized by the use of the word "just" and the phrase "didn't lift a hand." This is a running theme throughout this chapter; Mahoney never actually touches his son in this scene, but the impact is the same, if not worse, than if Young Mahoney had actually been beaten. It is important to note here that it is Mahoney's words that terrorize and traumatize Young Mahoney, not physical pain from the strap, because it immediately orients the reader to the familial dynamic that is

implied by the scene. Because Young Mahoney is not actually beaten, his response is read as one of terror, not pain, emphasizing the fear Mahoney inspires in his children, and firmly conveying Mahoney's tactics of terror and violence in the managing of his house.

Mahoney never explicitly tells Mona, Young Mahoney's sister, what Young Mahoney is being punished for; he simply tells her to stop crying "before [she] gets cause," which indicates that "cause" is anything that disrupts his idea of what a happy family should be (McGahern, *The Dark* 10). The lack of discussion on this subject emphasizes that Mahoney doesn't seem to care about the actual offense, only about any word or action that might shake his illusion of control. Young Mahoney's offense, in this case, is saying the word "fuck" (7). Mahoney describes it as a "profane and ugly word," evincing the "filth that's in [Young Mahoney's] head" and declares that it shows a lack of "respect for [Young Mahoney's] dead mother" (7). The invocation of Young Mahoney's mother serves not only to add to the boy's feelings of guilt and shame, but also brings up the idea of the ideal family unit. Mahoney and his children are already at a disadvantage – without the mother, there is a vital piece of the happy family missing. This makes Mahoney cling tightly in desperation to the ideals that he feels he can control. Mahoney's dialogue with his son constitutes the opening paragraphs of the novel and is descriptive of Mahoney's desire to be the head of a family that fulfills his idea of what a happy family should be, which certainly excludes his son's use of profane language. Furthermore, despite being the head of the household, Mahoney cannot be in control of everything, including his son's behavior, thoughts, and speech. This disruption of Mahoney's control is emphasized by Young Mahoney's lack of control over himself, as seen in the terrified boy's refrain: "I didn't mean, it just came out" and numerous variations on that phrase

(7). If Young Mahoney cannot control himself, what chance does Mahoney have in controlling him? Alternatively, if Mahoney can't control himself, what does that mean for Young Mahoney? Theoretically, one expects more self-control from an adult; in a patriarchy, even more so from a male adult. It is a tangled mess – Mahoney's sense of adequate adult masculinity is dependent on the child's self-control (or, rather, the child's maintenance of the image of a happy family). However, this appears to be a doomed setup because the child's example of masculinity is Mahoney; if the adult cannot control himself, how can the child be expected to? Mahoney's way to reassert his control is through fear. He repeats the phrase "I'll teach you a lesson for once" several times throughout the encounter, showing his feeble justification for his action (8). Mahoney acts with a "horrible measured passion" that is contrasted with the "blood [that] mount[s] to his face," showing both his anger and his implied control over it (8). McGahern also imbues both the belt Mahoney uses and Mahoney himself with animalistic qualities, which also seem to be at odds with this "measured passion." The belt itself "twitched against [Mahoney's] trousers" like "an animal's tail," while Mahoney addresses his son with "a white froth...on his lips" (7). This sort of violent atavism is also seen in the brutality of Mahoney's threats, such as "move and I'll cut that arse off you," and serves to further show both the ways that Mahoney enforces his authority and control while also illuminating why his children have such a strong fear response to him (9). When Mahoney's ideals are in any way violated, he loses control of himself; the way that he reestablishes control over both himself and his son is through the act of punishment.

As previously mentioned, Young Mahoney's punishment takes place in front of a witness, his sister Mona. According to Mahoney, he does this because it will serve as "a

lesson this house won't forget," indicating that the example he is going to make of Young Mahoney is intended as a warning to everyone. However, Mahoney does not explain the reason for Young Mahoney's punishment to Mona, which weakens his claim that his reaction is justified; a lesson is being taught here, but it is not one that Mahoney could admit to. This points to a very different reason for the scene to be witnessed, namely the humiliation of Young Mahoney at his command, which reinforces his feelings of dominance and control. The shame Young Mahoney feels doesn't originate from the presence of a witness, but rather is intensified by it. His humiliation stems from his nakedness, which makes him even more vulnerable, and because of this his reaction to Mahoney is even stronger. Mahoney seems to enjoy the power that is produced in a ritual way by the humiliation and vulnerability of Young Mahoney, and through the palpable terror he induces in his children. This fear of his father has the effect of increasing Young Mahoney's humiliation and "horror" at his reaction because it does not agree with his own ideas of what it means to be the eldest and a boy. His shame is further intensified when his sister asks him if he was hit – he cannot get out of there fast enough, to the point that he runs out of the room only partially dressed. Mona's humane and sympathetic response further emphasizes Young Mahoney's vulnerability in comparison to the control and power of their father. Because Young Mahoney is the eldest (and male), he feels that he is supposed to be strong and self-sufficient – to have the beginnings of the manliness that Farrington covets. By offering him comfort, Mona inadvertently reminds Young Mahoney of his failure in the face of their father.

In her essay "Happy Objects," Sara Ahmed discusses the way "sticky" objects (an object being more than just something tangible, but anything that creates an affective

response) are already perceived as either “good or bad,” the “cause of happiness or unhappiness” (35). The family is a happy object because it has been “passed around” as a “social good,” gaining “positive affective value” (35). The expectation, then, is that family will create happiness in the individual because enough people have a “shared orientation” towards it as a happy object (35). Society’s contribution to the idea that family is one of these happy objects can have one of two different impacts on the individual. When one of these “sticky” objects, in this case family, makes an individual happy, they are part of an “affective community” of individuals who feel the same thing (37). If one’s family does not create happiness, on the other hand, the individual will react with “an anxious narrative of self-doubt...or a narrative of rage” in response to feeling out of place in relation to others (37). In McGahern’s *The Dark*, underlying any joy the narrator may feel is another, usually negative, affect. In the case of the fishing scene in the second chapter, for instance, the emotion underpinning a happy family scene is fear, inspired by the mere physical presence of the narrator’s father, Mahoney. This trip is an obvious attempt on Mahoney’s part to act like a happy family, something that the children know from bitter experience makes him dangerous.

On the surface, this episode seems to depict a nice family day out on the river, something that can be considered a happy object. The narrator describes the family’s surroundings as their boat is “sliding on its own ripple...in the calm under the leaning trees of Oakport, wood strawberries in the moss...cattle in the fields” as they travel towards their picnic spot (McGahern, *The Dark* 13). The description of the setting, the scenery’s rustic appeal, along with the word “calm” that is used to characterize their surroundings, imbue this passage with rural charm. The father’s plans for the

procurement of “bottles of lemonade to drink with the sandwiches” on a picnic heightens the tranquil feeling of the scene (12). The children are excited about the day out and show it by “laugh[ing],” hoping for something “different” from their normal familial interactions (12). McGahern has created an idyllic family scene, involving a family outing, a picnic, and a success in a collective, traditional (and potentially lucrative) endeavor. The children (the author does not specify which child is speaking at this time, making it seem like a group decision to participate enthusiastically rather than as one individual’s choice) also interact more with their father than is usual, even going so far as to affirm Mahoney’s thoughts on the merits of going to church early, rather than waiting to attend second mass. There is a sense of affective alignment here that differs from the children’s usual stance of affective withholding toward Mahoney, whom they routinely freeze out and ignore, especially during and immediately after his periodic affective blow-ups.

This difference in attitude towards Mahoney is a major part of the apparent happiness of the scene because it presents a more loving relationship between children and father than is seen in the narrative around it, one that is more in line with the idea of family as a happy object. Fishing is described as difficult because “[the fish] could shake...free” during the “last fight at the side of the boat,” but things are going well for Mahoney nonetheless (McGahern, *The Dark* 13). By highlighting the struggle, and describing fishing as a “fight,” McGahern emphasizes the pride of accomplishment Mahoney feels. It is, after all, because of his guidance and commands to his children that everything has gone well, and he is happy; he feels he is living up to the obligations of a patriarch. He gloats over their catch and makes disparaging comments about those going

to second mass who will have “no length left in the day,” passing judgement on their perceived laziness (13). His success in already having a “right pike” indicates his own status as a proud and competent head of household and grants him license to criticize the actions of others (13). His children’s affirmation of his views only confirms what he already believes about himself and his role in his family’s life, which is that of the tortured martyr giving up everything to support his own under uniquely challenging conditions.

These adverse conditions, namely the family’s poverty, are made clear throughout the novel, including in a couple of instances in this selection. Their boat is described as “old” and as being “held together by tar and pitch and sand” (McGahern, *The Dark* 12). The use of polysyndeton – the sense of relentless accretion built up by and, and, and – brings attention to the state of the vessel and the “dead leaves” littering the bottom further suggest the boat’s age and a general state of disrepair. Some of Mahoney’s frustration must stem from the difficulty of keeping the family literally afloat; one challenge facing Mahoney’s ideal happy family is simply keeping them all fed. Furthermore, as Siobhan Holland points out in her essay “Marvellous Fathers in the Fiction of John McGahern,” Mahoney is a “compromised figure of authority who is haunted by his failure to assert influence in a society in which the domestic family is idealized, but not rewarded” (189-90). In other words, Mahoney struggles to keep his family going, despite living what he is obliged to see as the “ideal” life. His feelings of superiority to those going to late mass are bolstered by the fact that he has less materially, but more morally. Fishing is also a way to supplement their farm and keep them all fed, and the necessity of the activity adds

to the feeling of accomplishment in catching a fish before others have even attended church.

The ordering of the events in the beginning of the novel is affectively integral. The first chapter of the novel describes Mahoney's reaction to the narrator saying a curse word, a scene that is all action and dialogue with very little descriptive detail, which ends with the narrator stripped for a beating and terrified. The second chapter depicts the fishing scene and picnic, which, despite the optimistic beginning, ends poorly. The third chapter portrays the rape of the narrator by his father, an affectively more complex, less explicitly violent and terrorizing form of abuse that is habitual, on "the nights [Mahoney] wanted love" (McGahern, *The Dark* 17). The sinister sexual boundary violations experienced by Young Mahoney are, as he thinks to himself, what always happens. For the reader, the opening chapters create a sense of distrust not only of Mahoney, but all patriarchal figures (Father Gerald, for example). The terror of the opening paragraphs evokes the same sense of unease in the reader regarding the moods and behavior of Mahoney which translates into the fishing scene. This is the same feeling the children have at the proposal of a day out. They *want* to believe in the possibility that they can be a happy family, but they have little confidence in their father's proposition, as indicated by the repetition of the word "trust," which occurs three times in six lines of text (12). The repetition shows the children's struggle in the face of the potential for violence in one who is, by societal expectations, supposed to protect and love them. Also relevant is the phrase "he was their father," which indicates their knowledge that their relationship with Mahoney is meant to be a happier one (12). This relates back to the idea of a family being designated as a happy object by society. Because society has already defined

family in this way, the narrator and his siblings are morally compelled to feel at least a tentative hope for a nice, normal day out. This stems from the feeling that an unhappy family is in some way a sign of personal shortcomings.

Nevertheless, the violence of Mahoney, which is introduced in the opening pages of the novel, undermines and affectively haunts everything about this happy fishing scene in a manner made visible through the verbs and descriptions McGahern uses to describe Mahoney's actions while rowing and fishing. Mahoney "row[s] fiercely," "dr[ives]" the boat out onto the river, shouts, and "drag[s] the fighting fish" (McGahern, *The Dark* 12). There is repeated use of strong action words like these to describe Mahoney's "fight" with the fish, followed by a gruesome description of its death (13). He seems to exude violence, confirming his volatile character, which appears to be poised on the edge of anger at all times. Because this book is focalized through the point of view of his son, the portrayal of the father in this way shows the narrator's wariness and trust issues with his father, which remain detectably in effect even in the best circumstances.

The narrator's distrust is seen in the phrase "he had to say" in instances when Mahoney repeats himself (McGahern, *The Dark* 12). Such a simple phrase carries a strong connotation of warning and puts the reader on edge. The context of the phrase plays a large role in the worries it creates. Mahoney is attempting to bring in a fish, which is described as a stressful situation. To do this he needs the help of the children, so he tells them to "keep the boat shifting" (12). The children are too excited to do so, however, and Mahoney "*had*" to repeat himself. The connotation of this word, as in he "had" to do something rather than wanting to, creates an affective response in the reader. Combined with the violence of the imagery associated with Mahoney, there is the potential for a

swift and drastic change in his mood, especially if things should go poorly. If, for example, the fish were to get away, Mahoney's reaction would likely not be good.

The narrator's description of "the sinking of the heart" in response to an escaped fish shows his experience with this situation, and that their trip would, as a result, disintegrate into Mahoney's exclamations of "nothing right. Nothing ever done right...such cursed yokes to be saddled with. No help, no help" (McGahern, *The Dark* 13, 27). Although this specific rant of Mahoney's is from a different part of the novel, it is a good example of the repetitive and demoralizing nature of his words. When he is in that sort of mood, his children are afraid of his ability to turn violent; the paragraphs preceding the fishing passage that serves as the beginning of the chapter provides a good example of this in telling how "they all got beatings, often for no reason, because they laughed when he was in a foul humor" (11). Mahoney's anger and the children's fear recall the idea of "affects as contagious" that Ahmed discusses in her essay (36). The anger of Mahoney spreads to his kids but is translated into fear owing to its "angle of...arrival" (37). This means that affects don't just jump from one person to another unchanged, but that the people involved already have an expectation as to what will happen, creating an affective response accordingly. The narrator and his sisters already know what happens when their father gets angry, so their affective response to even the smallest sign of turbulence is one of fear due to his history of violence. Because of this, the periodic attempts on Mahoney's part to reconstruct his struggling, damaged, and under-resourced family back into a happy object also triggers fear in Young Mahoney – he dreads something going wrong.

The fish itself shares qualities with Mahoney. It is described as “vicious” and “dangerous,” and, as discussed before, as putting up a “fight,” in the face of forces beyond its control (McGahern, *The Dark* 12). The description of the actual pulling in of the fish is rather gruesome, as Mahoney grabs the fish “by the gills with his fingers” to get it out of the water and into the bottom of the boat (13). The family looks at the pike that has “gleaming yellow stripes across the back and the white swollen belly, the jaws with the vicious rows of teeth snapping air as blood trickled from the gills” (13). The use of terms such as “swollen” and “blood trickled” give a gross vividness to the death of the pike. The “vicious rows of teeth snapping” reiterate the danger of the fish, even as it is defeated, caught and dying. The repetition of “vicious,” both here as the fish is flailing at the bottom of the boat and in describing “the vicious teeth and the whiteness and the spoon hooked in the roof of its mouth,” seem to imply a connection between the combative father and the fish. The pike, described as monstrous, fights until the very end, when someone stronger finally brings it down.

The same thing begins to happen to Mahoney as the narrator matures and begins to stand up to him. The phrase “they watched the pike on the floorboards and they gloated” is reminiscent of the first chapter when the narrator is refusing to undress: “[Mahoney] just moved closer. He didn’t lift a hand, as if the stripping compelled by his will alone gave him pleasure” (McGahern, *The Dark* 8). His son’s acquiescence fuels Mahoney’s sense of power, just as watching the fish die does for the children. Everything is about control; the action of reducing the amount of space between himself and his son when forcing him to strip increases the tension of the situation and is quite threatening. As Mahoney moves closer, there is a sense of him filling the space, making him seem

like a formidable presence almost akin to a predatory beast. Being able to strike fear into his children with just a few words or a gesture is evidence of the way that Mahoney enforces that control through harsh words and violence. This seems to be the same feeling the children have when watching the dying pike; they have subdued a stubborn adversary through violence. In "Marvellous Fathers in the Fiction of John McGahern," Holland gives a source to Mahoney's need for control: "[McGahern's fathers] do not experience the authority available to them in the domestic sense as natural, inevitable, or fitting. Instead, they are preoccupied by the extent to which their authority is constrained and dependent on...the endorsement provided by other men beyond the home" (187). These same men are the ones Mahoney uses to "bolster his position" in the first chapter (188). By citing and using the terminology of "priests, teachers, and soldiers" while berating his son for cursing, he adds to his own domestic authority as a father, "which is marginal [when compared] to broader patriarchal structures" (189). Because of this, Mahoney feels quite powerful when tormenting his child, a feeling the children share when they bring down a fish as formidable as the pike described, "gloat[ing]" despite its gruesome end (McGahern, *The Dark* 13). Just as Mahoney draws authority from outside the home, so the children draw from their father's authority in their victory over the fish.

After the fishing is over and their picnic consumed, Mahoney naps with his hat over his face. Upon waking and musing on their day so far, he concludes "this is the way to live," a statement encompassing all of their family activities so far that day (McGahern, *The Dark* 14). By saying this, Mahoney is idealizing the family outing and praising his own good governance, which has produced this pleasurable leisure time. This sentiment represents another sticky happy object. Family leisure time, like the family

itself, is widely accepted as pleasurable and an emblem of social wellbeing, the epitome of the good life. Unfortunately, Mahoney doesn't like the way it makes him feel; his nap has given him a "damned headache" (14). For Mahoney, leisure time is a luxury – even the fishing aspect of the trip provides food for the family and can be considered a kind of work – and is a rarity throughout the novel.

Despite this, Mahoney repeatedly strives to present himself as the patriarch who provides these experiences for his children. This is seen in Mahoney's desire to take his son for dinner at the Grand Hotel, which is eventually granted, and his desire for family card nights. Take the end of the fishing trip – Mahoney ruins the trip with his foul mood on the way back. He is "tiring" with the exertions of the day and the rowing. The weather, something completely outside his control, is also causing him problems; he has to "fight the wind" and the "rough water" and "waves [that] fouled his stroke[s]" (McGahern, *The Dark* 14). Amidst Mahoney's "growing frustration," the children are "intent and anxious," aware of the results of his anger, and accidentally "let the lines cross and tangle without noticing," which is the final straw for Mahoney. He begins a verbal assault on the children, trying to incite guilt and shame by accusing them of being "cursed lazy" while he "break[s] his back against [the] wind" (14). His tirade continues with a lament for the time that will be lost untangling the lines, "it'll take a day to get that mess out," and the economic loss of not fishing to full potential on their return home, "we have to row home with one bait out" (14). Mahoney then engages in name calling – "a miserable crowd of ignoramuses" – and implies he knew going in what would happen, asking rhetorically, "what tempted me to bring you at all" (14). Mahoney has himself worked up; he "shout[s]," "grate[s] his teeth," and even goes so far as to [catch] two of

them and [shake] them violently” (14). The narrator notes that if it weren’t for the “dangerous rocking of the boat, his rage would have carried on its own impetus” (14). The lack of perfection caused by circumstances Mahoney cannot control accounts for his anger and over-reaction. The children, in turn, have a visceral reaction to Mahoney’s behavior. They “listen in hatred” and fantasize about “taking his throat,” showing the children’s anger and disappointment at their own foolhardy expectations for the day, as seen in the narrator’s assertion that “they shouldn’t have trusted” (14). The “nag-nag-nag” that the children hear from Mahoney on the way home is likened to “the screaming of seagulls” and described as “a hacksaw across...steel” (15). The actions of Mahoney that are out of sync with what the children hoped for are in this way presented as grating and irritating, something the children cannot wait to escape.

This brings to mind Lauren Berlant’s essay “Cruel Optimism.” In this essay, Berlant describes an object of desire as something that is really “a cluster of promises we want someone or something to make to us and make possible for us” (93). “Cruel optimism” comes in when these promises are unfulfilled; it is “a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, and toxic” (94). The children’s strong reaction to their father’s abrupt change in attitude is in response to the “cluster of promises” that has been broken. The scene of optimism is found both in the reluctant excitement in the children for the trip and in their response to Mahoney’s tirade. The statement that “they shouldn’t have trusted, they hadn’t even wanted to come out” shows they are regretting their choice to give in to the promises that the family represents (as happy object) and the hope for a normal relationship with their father, who often loses control and guilts, demeans, and

threatens violent retribution (McGahern, *The Dark* 14). The inherent danger of cruel optimism is that “the very vitalizing or animating potency of an object or scene of desire contributes to the attention of the very thriving that is supposed to be made possible in the work of attachment in the first place” (Berlant 94). The strong desire for an object gives way to disappointment about the object’s reality because it cannot live up to its promise. In the case of the children, Mahoney, the head of the family, destroys their perception of a happy day out which only increases the children’s sense of betrayal.

Cruel optimism is at work in Mahoney as well. Not only is his tantrum a result of his expectations being thwarted, but he also insists upon trying to salvage the day showing that he still firmly believes and strives for his elusive ideal of happiness. While the children have not yet forgotten his very recent behavior and are “utterly watchful,” Mahoney “enthuse[s] that ‘it was a good day’s outing...anyhow’” (McGahern, *The Dark* 15). This abrupt change in mood is his attempt to remind the children of their experience before his outburst. By doing this, Mahoney is attempting to return the family outing to a potentiality – “a cluster of promises” that he clings to in his desire to be perceived as a good patriarch. He reinforces this by stating “we must go out on the river oftener,” to which the children have no choice but to respond with an affirmative. To endanger Mahoney’s perception of himself is to invite danger because he is hyper-sensitive to any hint of disagreement. Mahoney further attempts to recapture the feeling of a happy patriarchy by playing cards with his children. Playing cards is another leisure activity they can enjoy together, like their picnic, and would be another way his leadership can be justified by the fun he expects his children will have. In addition to this, games have a predetermined set of rules that will allow him to be in a position of authority, recalling

Holland's "Marvellous Fathers" essay. Because Mahoney is the dealer, his authority is bolstered by the rules which allow him to assert his dominance over his children in a more subtle way.

If the fish can be read as an objective correlative for Mahoney, as I have argued, its struggle with death anticipates the shifting balance of power from the father to the son that occurs over the course of the novel. As he grows, the narrator takes control of his life; his fear of his father wanes as he decides to pursue his studies (despite knowing he will "be made [to] pay for it") and as he claims his own space, no longer forced to share with his father (McGahern, *The Dark* 26). He grows, physically and emotionally, from the frightened boy bent over a chair or lying awake, hating his father's shameful, needy groping, yet unable to escape it. Because of this, his father no longer targets him for abuse, and yet the narrator feels shame because "much of the worst in the house had shifted towards the others" (34). The abuse has gone on for so long that "watch[ing]...was little more than habit" (35). There is a specific moment in the text that shows the actual tipping point, when control shifts from Mahoney to his son, and which the narrator describes as "a last clash," which not only sounds like something inevitable, but also recalls the violence of the "last fight [with the fish] at the side of the boat (34). In this scene, the narrator stops his father from abusing his sister as Mahoney is swinging her around by her hair. The narrator is prompted to intervene by his shame, which stems, in turn, from his new consciousness of his ability and responsibility to stop to stop what, in the past, he has felt obliged to passively accept.

The narrator's shame is seen in different ways throughout the scene, beginning with the narrator's use of second person narration. This is the first instance of second

person in the novel, and it is emphasized by the repetitive use of “you” in the first sentence: “you had your own room with the red shelves...you had school and books, you were a growing man” (McGahern, *The Dark* 34). There are later chapters that also employ second person, all of which are associated with other actions he considers shameful (masturbating and sexual thoughts, giving up on becoming a priest, potentially failing at school). In this quote, he is pointing out the things he has that the others don’t; what is implied is that he gets to stay away from their father, which leaves the others even more exposed or vulnerable, and burdened with more domestic work as well. His shame is also seen in the narration just before he speaks up, “you’d watched it come to this, hatred rising with every word and move he’d made...you couldn’t bear any more this time,” which again uses second person (35). It is as if the narrator is using this form of narration to include the reader and allow them to summon the same affective feeling while also very specifically distancing himself. He is making this shame tellable by sharing it with the reader, as if the reader is participating in the shameful thing rather than just reading about it. “This time” again reiterates how many times the narrator feels he has let this happen, when he could have seized control of the situation, while “rising” suggests the growth the narrator has had to attain to come to this point.

The anger expressed by the narrator, in the above quote and other parts of the scene, is an index of his shame. In her book *Daring Greatly*, Brené Brown writes about different ways people react to shame. For men, it is usually one of two things, “pissed off or shut down,” but for this narrator, it is both (Brown 96). To begin with, the narrator strongly exhibits “pissed off;” “the fear and vulnerability” elicited by his shame are intolerable, so he lashes out at the perceived cause of his shame, which is his father. The

narrator's anger is seen not only in his "rising hatred," but also in his "shout[ing]," threatening, and fighting with Mahoney, "mad with strength" (McGahern, *The Dark* 36). The anger fades and the narrator shows the "shut down" reaction to shame. After "some of the tautness was gone," the narrator is "drained and sick of it all" as the violence turns to "jeering and mockery," and he no longer passionately rebuffs his father. Instead, he curtly contradicts his father with short sentences, such as "no. I'll not hit" (37). These seem more like sighs of resigned passivity, which are at odds with his anger moments earlier. The shift in control away from the father, seen through the narrator's action of stopping Mahoney, stems from the narrator's shame at watching the abuse take place; he has taken responsibility for his own life, leaving his siblings to suffer more, and so he now feels a responsibility for these domestic situations as well.

The "shut down" reaction may stem from another source of shame for the narrator, and that is the fear of being like Mahoney. There are a couple of sources from which this thought could originate. To begin with, the narrator reacts to Mahoney in the only way he has seen confrontations dealt with: violently. McGahern's language describing the narrator's anger mirrors the language used to portray Mahoney's violence in the fishing scene. The sentence structure of both passages is the same, using long sentences that separate events or thoughts with commas. A comparison of the struggle with the fish, "and then the fish was sliding towards the boat on the surface, the mouth open, showing the vicious teeth and the whiteness and the spoon hooked in the roof of the mouth," with the narrator's threat of violence, "you knew or felt nothing, except once the raised hand moved you'd get him by the throat, you knew you'd be able, the fingers were ready," shows this similarity (McGahern, *The Dark* 13, 36). McGahern also uses the

same words in both passages, such as “drove” to describe Mahoney’s actions with the boat and “drive” to describe the narrator’s intent (12, 36). Mahoney grabs the fish “by the gills with his fingers” to drag it into the boat, and the narrator’s “fingers were ready” to subdue Mahoney (13, 36). Mahoney grabs the gills, the closest body part a fish has to a human throat, which is what the narrator is aiming for on his father.

Alternatively, Mahoney’s reaction to the violence in his son recalls that of the fish after it is caught. The pike’s “jaws, with the vicious rows of teeth snapping air as blood trickled from the gills,” represent the fish’s pugnacity, which is mirrored in Mahoney’s tirade against his son when the fight is over (13). Mahoney is full of stubborn cruelty, “snapping” insults at his children. He even uses animal imagery, recalling the fishing scene, through the repeated use of “pig” and “pup” (37). He, like the fish, struggles until the end, even after he is clearly defeated. Mahoney’s “incomprehension and fear” and the repeated stating of “I reared a son that’d lift a hand to his father,” which are his initial reactions, appear to make the narrator realize what he is doing (36). The narrator states that his sister obeys “as decisively as if you were Mahoney” (a return to second person), which further emphasizes the parallel between the two (37). This is the point when the anger drains away and he becomes passive, showing the shame he feels at his behavior. The narrative arc I have traced in this section focuses on two fictions that both register the intricate affective circuitry of early-to-mid-twentieth-century Irish masculinity, power and violence. As we shall see in my second section, despite the primacy of crude physical confrontations in both Joyce’s and McGahern’s early fiction, it is through the shame that lingers in the wake of these cyclical violent upsurges that the physical and emotional

cruelty which Joyce and McGahern both foreground leaves its most salient traces, on the sexual development of the maturing protagonists of *Portrait* and *The Dark*.

The Virgin Mary and a Woman in the Newspaper: Trauma and the Formation of Sexual
Desire in *Portrait* and *The Dark*

Abuse, whether sexual or physical – such as Farrington’s of his son, Tom, the abuse of a priest of Stephen Dedalus, or Mahoney’s physical and sexual abuse of Young Mahoney – often leaves its marks on the abuse victim’s sexual formation. Though the short story “Counterparts” ends with the beating of Tom, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *The Dark* continue beyond childhood abuse and show the characters Stephen Dedalus and Young Mahoney not only as they are young and in vulnerable positions, like Tom is in “Counterparts,” but also as they are going through various stages of maturation and burgeoning sexual awareness. Both Stephen and Young Mahoney are raised in Irish Catholic households, and both associate any sort of sexual behavior with sin and shame. These two protagonists provide a compelling lens through which to look at the ways that sexual desire, and the affects associated with that desire, are formed through the practice of physical punishment coupled with mid-century Ireland’s intense association of sexual desire with shame. Stephen and Young Mahoney are in similar situations, but there are key differences. While Stephen suffers his most painful humiliation at the hands of Father Dolan, while the other endures the tirades and sexual advances of his father at home. And although the associations they make from the abuse are different, both Stephen and Young Mahoney exhibit signs of their abuse in sexual situations. For Stephen, the discipline of a priest is repeated and seen through a different light in the advances of a prostitute, while Young Mahoney puts himself in the place of his father in his sexual fantasies about the woman in an advertisement. Despite these differences, both have similar difficulties in reconciling their sexuality with their beliefs,

which are considerably worsened due to the role sex comes to play as not only a source of shame, but as a compulsive means of briefly numbing their shame.

In her introduction to *Affect Theory, Shame and Christian Formation*, Stephanie Arel describes the way in which Christian individuals “present themselves to be changed by worship” by “exposing their most vulnerable selves. Susceptible and open, they avail themselves to be modeled, and traces of the Christian tradition remain to emerge in their behavior, words, and deep-seated beliefs” (1). Arel discusses the consequences of this vulnerability in the rhetoric of guilt and sin as “detrimental” because it to shame being “interred, stored in the body to function maladaptively in the Christian self” (2, 1). This interment occurs due to the habit of Christian rhetoric to either overlook shame or treat it as the same thing as guilt, when they are not, in fact, experienced in the same way affectively. Over the course of her argument, Arel demonstrates that “the affect of shame functions embedded but eclipsed in Christian texts and praxis” and emphasizes that theology “demonstrates the potential power...both to shame bodies *and* to address that shame” (4). What this essentially means is that shame will either be a normal part of the human experience – something that everyone goes through – if it is confronted and dealt with properly, or “toxic” and “interred” if it is ignored and allowed to fester without open discussion (2). The latter seems to be at work in Stephen, who throughout the novel, despite his sense of shame about sex, continuously makes connections between sex and religious images. Young Mahoney also struggles with this shame throughout *The Dark*; at every turn, he struggles with his experience with lust and what it means in terms of his spiritual wellbeing (and even his potential future as a priest).

Stephen Dedalus, in *Portrait*, passes through the same stages of sexual awakening as does Young Mahoney in *The Dark*. The intermingling of religion with a kind of traumatic eroticism starts early for both Stephen and Young Mahoney, however, unquestionably Joyce produces the more explicit working out of Irish Catholic traumatized eroticism. From the first chapter of *Portrait*, before Stephen knows what is happening or why, he is frightened by an image of eagles “pull[ing] out his eyes” (Joyce, *Portrait* 4). This threat by Dante is in reaction to an offhand comment that Stephen intends to one day marry Eileen Vance, the protestant girl next door. Also important in Stephen’s case specifically is the idea that the outcome of a relationship with a woman that is deemed inappropriate (or other sinful behavior) is a painful punishment of some sort. This idea that pain, love and religion intermingle makes Stephen’s character perfect for describing the intricacies of shame, sex and religion.

In the first chapter of *Portrait*, Stephen goes through a series of powerful experiences that create associations that spread out like threads that can be followed throughout the novel, experiences that build on one another connecting objects and concepts in interesting ways. Take, for example, Joseph Valente and Margot Backus’s essay “‘An iridescence difficult to account for’: Sexual Initiation in Joyce’s Fiction of Development.” In this essay, they look at this scene with Dante, Stephen and Stephen’s mother:

Stephen’s first awareness of people beyond his own family, the Vances, is described in the same paragraph that conveys his ill-fated pronouncement that he will grow up to marry the Protestant Eileen Vance. Initiating a painful narrative and intrapsychic pattern, the little boy’s imaginative exploration of growing up

and marrying precipitates an evident frenzy in his female caretakers, who chase Stephen under a table, and threaten that eagles will pull out his eyes if he does not recant (2). This threat to his eyes, in addition to invoking the Oedipal complex, also connects to Stephen's later recollection of Eileen having put "her hands over his eyes: long and white and thin and soft" (36). In these juxtaposed images of enigmatic trauma and pleasure, we can sense the open-endedness of the sexual signifier for Stephen, its enigmatic quality (533).

In this essay, Valente and Backus discuss the power of Jean Laplanche's "enigmatic signifier," which is "coded material which enables without demanding and solicits without enforcing sexual constructions and responses at the unconscious level," in the works of Joyce (527). These "ambiguous psychic messages" elicits the child's attempt to make sense of the "introduction of (adult) sexuality into the child's life horizon," and it's attendant "traumatic enjoyment" (527). The enigmatic signifier is "the vehicle of a sensory or affective power exceeding its capacity for determinant meaning or function" (527). Essentially, the child takes something they can grasp, and applies it to an intensely charged experience that they do not understand, thus forming an association between the two.

Thus, Dante's terrifying threats to blind Stephen for contemplating sex with a protestant in the first pages of the novel resurfaces in the Christmas dinner scene. Stephen spends this meal trying to make sense of the argument going on around him about Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell, and the Church's role in politics. Importantly, while the intense sexual/affective content of the Christmas dinner argument would not have been consciously understood by Stephen, Stephen's dreamy chain of associations

demonstrate his unconscious awareness that everyone's anger relates to scandalous sex. Prompted by Dante's insistence that not even "the blackest protestant in the land" would blaspheme the way John Casey and Simon Dedalus have at the table, and Mr. Casey's indignant reaction, Stephen begins thinking about how Dante "did not like him to play with Eileen because Eileen was a protestant," because the protestant children of Dante's own childhood "used to make fun of the litany of the Blessed Virgin" (Joyce, *Portrait* 34, 35). His thoughts continue to circle around Eileen and her hands, and he comes to a realization: Eileen's hands, described as "long and white and thin and cold and soft" are "ivory," "a cold white thing. That was the meaning of *Tower of Ivory*" (35). Stephen's puzzlement regarding the protestant children's mockery -- "how could a woman be a tower of ivory or a house of gold" -- marks the beginning of his associations between women and religion.

The Virgin Mary becomes an enigmatic emblem for his associations with women; he has taken something familiar (how Eileen's hands look and feel) and imbued this signifier with the enigmatic desire and terror associated with Dante's explosive reaction to Stephen's first infantile speculation about adult sexual bonding. The repetition of "and" in this passage shows the continuance of the narrator's comparisons, as if he keeps thinking of adjectives and adding them on, suggesting an internal velocity that builds as it goes. Further along in the chapter, Stephen repeats that Eileen's hands are "cool and thin and soft" several times and describes her "fair hair" as resembling "gold in the sun," so that the desirable/terrifyingly forbidden body of Eileen is now both replaced by, and indistinguishable from, the Blessed Virgin, which in turn simultaneously represents Catholicism's one permissible female object of love and desire, and also its emblem of an

otherwise nonexistent female purity, and thus an insuperable obstruction standing between Stephen's desires and their satisfaction (Joyce, *Portrait* 43). The image of ivory shows up again at different points throughout the novel, all in association with the women in his life and the relationships he cannot have with them.

Stephen complexly eroticizes moments of sexualized renunciation – of Mercedes (in *The Count of Monte Cristo*), and on the tram ride after the party, and finally when he entirely sublimates, for a time, his sexuality into Catholic piety – and throughout all of this, seems to fantasize about Mary herself. After he loses his virginity to the prostitute, but before the retreat, Stephen's mind is wandering during his lessons. His thoughts land on the beauty of the Virgin Mary. Stephen describes Mary as a “refuge...after the frenzy of his body's lust had spent itself” (Joyce, *Portrait* 112). At first, he idealizes the Blessed Virgin to the point where he considers reforming, stating that “if ever he was impelled to cast sin from him and to repent the impulse that moved him was the wish to be her knight” (112). The use of “knight” and the violence of “cast[ing]” off sin gives the impression of valor and honor, like a courtly lover overcoming obstacles. As his eroticized submission to Mary develops in the passage, however, he sexualizes the situation, “when her names were murmured softly by lips whereon there still lingered foul and shameful words, the savour itself of a lewd kiss” (112). The “savour” comes from Stephen's feelings of rebelliousness (he has, after all, committed a mortal sin), followed by thoughts of innocence defiled, showing a different way Stephen's eroticism is complexly mixed up in religion. It is as if he derives pleasure from not just a given sexual act, but also from the thought of that act's transgressiveness. Combining an image

of Mary and a “lewd kiss” together is profaning the image of purity, which is a fantasy that repeatedly causes him shame later in the novel.

The sequence of idealization, followed by some sort of mental defilement, is a common thread in Stephen’s thoughts regarding women. There is also a connection between not just the Virgin Mary and Eileen, but also Mary and Emma. On the tram, Stephen feels “sprays of...fresh warm breath flow” from Emma’s “cowled head” (Joyce, *Portrait* 72). The image of a cowl, which covers both hair and ears, leaving the face visible, is reminiscent of common renderings of the Virgin Mary. She is usually depicted wearing a long mantle, which is draped over her head and flows to the ground. “Fresh” gives the impression of innocence, also connecting the two. This association is furthered later in the novel, when Stephen masturbates, which is not specifically stated, but implied, while composing a poem about Emma. Different stages of his desire are seen in different parts of the passage. First, as the household comes to life, Stephen rejects the “common noises, hoarse voices, sleepy prayers” of those around him and draws his blanket over his head “making a cowl” (240). This forms a connection between what Stephen is doing and Emma by bringing back an image from their tram ride. The repeated use of “scarlet” shows his passion and dismissal of the waking world around him (240). The exclamation of “Weary! Weary!,” with the use of repetition and exclamation points shows his growing excitement, while the “gradual warmth” and “languorous weariness pass[ing] over him, descending along his spine from his closely cowled head” show his relief (240). The cowl image is brought up again here, reiterating the focus of his thoughts at the time. Emma is the link between Stephen’s pursuits and Mary and show how his idealization of a religious figure colors his fantasies and sexual activities.

The fantasy of the violation of purity that accompanies the act of masturbation is something that Stephen and Young Mahoney share. For Young Mahoney, it is the “dream of flesh in woman,” inspired by an advertisement for the removal of “superfluous hair” (McGahern, *The Dark* 30). The woman in the black and white image wears a white lace and silk nightgown and is stretched out with her arms over her head. Young Mahoney “devour[s] her with his eyes, and fantasizes about “biting” her and arousing her, inciting desire in her and forcing her out of her position of restful repose. Another of these fantasies, later in the novel, is even more telling because it projects the impurity onto the woman, thereby transferring the shame of sexual desire onto the object of desire. As the novel progresses, Young Mahoney becomes more and more occupied with what it means that he cannot control his sexual urges, and he has begun to worry about how he would respond, as a priest, to the confession of a young woman who reluctantly reveals her intimacy with a young man. He considers a range of possibilities:

And what would you do? Stay quiet and begin, “Don’t you know, my child, that you are only permitted to do these things in Holy Matrimony. You must avoid places and temptations to that sin, you must promise me that.”

Or would you sit quiet and excite your own seed in the box with your hand or pressing against the wood and let it flow in the darkness, same as Onan; her rustling clothes and voice and smell sweeping through the wire grille. Her flesh beyond the wire hungered too for its fodder, the thrusting body of a man for her own.

Or would you burst out of the box and take her in madness? She’d said she’d been a virgin. She’d cried out with hurt in the river meadows but the man

would not stop, he took her against her will. Would she cry too when you the priest tore her clothes off and took her on the stone floor of the church? (55).

Stephen Dedalus has a similar moment of self-doubt after his meeting with the director of studies in which the two discuss the possibility of Stephen becoming a priest. This commonality does not seem to be a coincidence; both Stephen and Young Mahoney are raised Catholic, with the same idea that a priest is the ideal embodiment of Catholic purity they should strive for, which makes it likely that many children raised in a similar manner envision becoming a priest or nun. In this way, celibacy becomes the ideal sexual norm, one which both Stephen and Young Mahoney struggle with and find seemingly impossible. This is a major source of the sexual shame both characters experience, a shame which they project onto others in an attempt to process it. In the above passage, Young Mahoney is the priest, charged with hearing and absolving the young woman's sins. Through her penitence, the girl is trying to become pure again. Although his first thought is quite priestly, Young Mahoney's desire is to sully this interaction, which is shown through the progression of the above quote. First, he thinks about using his hand – defiling himself. Second, he envisions “pressing against the wood” – using the confession box to enhance his pleasure. In both cases, Young Mahoney is defiling something of the church. The second half of this quote shows the defilement of the girl, first by her own choice - “her flesh...hungered too for its fodder, the thrusting body of a man for her own” – and then coercively in a scenario of outright violation – “would she cry too when you...tore her clothes off and took her?” It is unclear whether his speculations about her pained response represent moral misgivings or an extension of the pleasure of an imagined violation. In the former example, he seems to be imagining a not-quite-

repentant sinner – one whose “thighs had opened submissively wide for another...[that] might open wide as that for [him]” (55). In the second case, he is defiling someone who is still, essentially, an innocent – her first encounter appears to have been a rape, and “she’d been a virgin [and] cried out in hurt,” something he imagines her repeating for him. The progression of his fantasy is both mirrored and enhanced by the structure of the passage. These paragraphs are very short; each expresses a specific course of action – that of a priest, that of a lover, and that of a rapist – and each represents a version of himself he could be as an adult, two of which have no place in the priesthood. This is the source of Young Mahoney’s shame. He wants desperately to become a priest (because of a promise made to his mother, which I will return to later), but fears that he has “no control over [his] lusts” (54). The paragraphs, emphasized by “or” at the outset of the last two paragraphs, show a progression of the placement of his vice, outward from himself, to the church, and then to the unnamed girl (who represents not just herself, but her entire gender).

As with the protagonist of *The Dark*, Stephen’s emerging spiritual and erotic affect similarly reflect various ways that pain and pleasure become to be complexly associated with one another. The scene in *Portrait* in which the older boys are discussing the punishment of the boys caught “smuggling” is confusing for Stephen because he is unsure why the other boys find the subject amusing, or even, he may sense, arousing, especially because of his own fear of punishment (Joyce, *Portrait* 42). This scene also enigmatically combines the ideas of sexual pleasure with shame and pain for Stephen. A good example of Stephen’s confusion is his response to the laughing response of the older (more knowing) boys to the phrase “please, sir, let me off” and Well’s “rubbing”

himself in an unspecified place (45). The omission seems to deliberately call the reader's attention to the crudeness of the movement and joke and emphasizes the double meaning in both words and actions. Stephen's confusion, and the overtones of the next passage, seem to indicate that the nature of the second meaning is sexual. Stephen is so young in the first chapter that he doesn't yet understand sexuality, but he is well aware that there is something that he is not catching on to.

Euphemistic allusions to unspeakable sexual desires are humorously entangled with shame and punishment throughout this scene. To start with, Athy's joking poem, "It can't be helped; it must be done, so down with your breeches, and out with your bum," emphasizes the fact that the flogging will take place on the "vital spot" (Joyce, *Portrait* 45). This, in turn, pleurably emphasizes the nakedness and vulnerability of the boy being punished. Stephen further accentuates the point by further accentuates the point by reflecting on how it would feel to disrobe in front of someone. He thinks of the feeling as "cold" and "shivery," adjectives that are associated repeatedly with Stephen's imagined discomfort in response public exposure throughout the passage. Stephen's feelings of exposure are contrasted with the image of Gleeson, who is in the position of power in their interaction and, although he bares some of himself when he "roll[s] up his sleeves," is still fully dressed and in a much less vulnerable position. Stephen also raises the question of "who had to let [the boy's trousers] down" (45). This places that image (a priest undressing a young boy), like it or not, in the reader's mind and further turns the reader's attention to the sexual nature of the passage. Stephen's thoughts on pain are all mixed up with his pleasurable fascination with words and sounds. He asserts that "there were different kinds of pain for all the different sounds," and "wonder[s] what was the

pain like,” points that the narrator emphasizes through repetition (45). The different implements are what cause the varying sounds, like “pock” or “whistle” (45). These sounds mimic the sounds of the boys at play, further confusing the nature of pleasure and pain. Stephen’s curiosity, discussed at length, makes it appear that he is anticipating the experience of corporal discipline with a sort of eager dread.

Stephen describes Gleeson’s hands as “shiny,” “clean,” “white,” “gentle,” and “strong” though they have “terribly long and pointed nails” (Joyce, *Portrait* 45-46). Fear of punishment, seen in the description of Gleeson’s “cruel” fingernails, is what the reader expects to see in this situation. However, the inclusion of depictions of dreaded punishment also serve to emphasize the surprisingly positive attributes the narrator also ascribes to Gleeson’s hands, particularly “gentle” and “white,” which would better fit with the descriptions of Eileen’s hands earlier in the novel (46). Stephen also describes a “feeling of queer quiet pleasure inside him to think of the white fattish hands,” further emphasizing Stephen’s conflicting fear and desire in the response to the spectacle of public punishment for an unspeakable sexual offense (46). The use of alliteration in “queer quiet pleasure” marks the drastic shift in this sentence, which before had been about the “chill” of nakedness and the “whistling sound of the cane” (46). The narrator then repeats phrases from earlier in the conversation, such as “and Fleming had said he would not because it was best of his play not to” (46). This recapitulation of different bits of the earlier conversation makes it seem as if Stephen realizes there’s something there that he just can’t grasp, so he’s replaying the most important bits of the conversation to see if he can formulate an idea of what it is. Stephen’s innocence at this part of the novel plays a large part in the feeling of confusion, which the reader and Stephen share, but the

adult perspective of the reader allows them to notice things that the narrator cannot grasp. In this case, the potential for a student to be taken advantage of sexually in a discipline situation is clearly implied, with the assumption that since it is sexual in nature, it would be something the boys would make fun of each other for. This passage is especially important to this discussion of Stephen's adolescent sexuality because it introduces a religious figure as both disciplinarian and sexual being.

The scene in which Father Dolan disciplines Stephen for breaking his glasses recalls the sound associations from Stephen's previous conjecture about what pain might be like; Stephen hears the "swish of the sleeve of the soutane" before he hears the "loud crack" that brings the pain to his hands (Joyce, *Portrait* 51). This discipline scene is not one that immediately seems to connect back to the ideas of discipline as a sexual situation, yet this scene, of all Stephen's experiences of Catholic morality and punishment, becomes the greatest influence on Stephen's thought processes when he loses his virginity to a prostitute, as we shall see. In the moments after his hand is hit, Stephen describes a "hot burning," which can be compared with the "burn[ing]" of the "fierce longings" he seeks to fulfill when wandering the street and the "warmth" he finds with the prostitute (51, 105, 107). In the classroom, he is "trembling," "shaking," and "quiver[ing]," all words that can indicate either fear or desire. In the Dublin scene, he is also "trembling" in the face of the "women...dressed in long vivid gowns" (107). When Father Dolan enters the classroom, "Stephen's heart [is] beating and fluttering," and it "jump[s] suddenly" when he is first addressed by Father Dolan (50). "Beating" and "fluttering" have two separate connotations, one violent (seemingly appropriate for the situation) and one mild. "Fluttering" doesn't seem out of place when the scene as is read

a whole, but it also doesn't quite fit with the harshness of the rest of the situation; it appears to act as a sort of bridge between the two passages.

Similarly, when approached by a woman, Stephen's "heart [is] clamouring against his bosom in a tumult" (Joyce, *Portrait* 107). "Clamouring" and "tumult" are harsh terms which seem somewhat out of place within this passage and act in the same way as does "fluttering" in the pandying scene. After being hit for the first time by Father Dolan, "though the tears scalded his eyes and his limbs quivered with pain and fright, [Stephen] held back the hot tears and the cry that scalded his throat," only to have tears "burst forth from his eyes" and to "burst out into a whine of pain" shortly thereafter (51, 52). The structure of an emotional emission withheld and released in increments mirrors the scene on the street in which he "moan[s] to himself like some baffled prowling beast" and when "the cry that he had strangled for so long in his throat issued from his lips...[breaking] from him like a wail of despair" (Joyce, *Portrait* 106). When he is with the prostitute, he "all but burst into hysterical weeping" (107). In both situations, emotion overcomes Stephen so strongly that he either cries out or weeps. The same verb also connects these two different circumstances, "burst," a word that implies that he cannot help but to react as he does, and that reinforces the fact that his reactions are the same. Tellingly, in both cases, Stephen's vision is also impaired. At Clongowes, not only are his glasses broken, but he is also "blinded by fear" and voluntarily "close[s] his eyes" as he holds out his hand in obedience to Father Dolan's command (51). Among the women, "his eyes grew dim" and his vision is described as "troubled" (107). This seems to be an indication that Stephen is moving into uncharted territory; his obscured vision reflects his inability to see what lies ahead. These situations are uncharted for Stephen because they are points at

which his physical responses take over – points at which his intellect is no longer in control and which he, therefore, cannot navigate.

These situations are so new to Stephen that he is left speechless and paralyzed, and in both cases, he is prompted to action by a figure who controls him. With Father Dolan, he cannot defend himself because “he [can] not speak with fright” (50). While with the prostitute, he “trie[s] to bid his tongue speak that he might seem at ease” in an effort to hide his inexperience, but he is ultimately unable to mobilize his rational mind into speech (Joyce, *Portrait* 107). Furthermore, Stephen cannot be the instigator of the sexual interaction, seen when “his lips would not bend to kiss her” (107). The woman is the initiator in this encounter, using a firm command, “give me a kiss,” and an accompanying physical action, pulling him down to her, to control the situation (107). Her strong tone parallels that of Father Dolan’s “out with your hand this moment” (51). Both Father Dolan and the prostitute take control of Stephen not just verbally, but also physically. Stephen relates the “firm touch of the prefect of studies when he...[steadies] the shaking fingers,” while later the prostitute “[lays] her hand on his arm to detain him” (52, 107). Both characters use their hands to move Stephen in the way they wish. Furthermore, the focus on hands in both passages recalls Stephen’s earlier meditation about Gleeson’s hands as both simultaneously pliantly soft and likewise ominously sharp when pondering the nature of pain. The prostitute’s “long pink gown” is reminiscent of the priest’s soutane, which is a long flowing garment, which further solidifies the connection between the two figures. These similarities in situation, affect, and the presence of a controlling character cannot be simply coincidence. They highlight the connection between religion, shame and lust that characterize Stephen’s relationship with

women by using similar elements in scenes that seem, on the surface, completely unrelated.

Like Stephen, Young Mahoney shows traces of his childhood abuse in his maturing sexuality in later parts of *The Dark*. The context of the above passage is a cycle between chastity and sin, in which Young Mahoney “go[es] weeks without committing any sin, in often ecstatic prayer and sense of God, again replaced by weeks of orgy sparked by a fit of simple boredom or unhappiness” and struggles to confess his sins each time, “haunted by the repetitive hypocrisy of [his] life” (McGahern, *The Dark* 53). But, in contrast to Stephen, Young Mahoney’s sexuality is less colored by religion and the abuses of priests than by his experiences with his father. The religious shame he feels comes after the abuse, rather than during. In her book *Thou Shalt Not be Aware*, Alice Miller discusses the ways in which prior trauma often recurs in the victim, with the victim now in the place of the abuser. In other words, a victim will have the compulsion, aware or not, to attempt to work through their trauma by repeatedly inflicting the behaviors they suffered to others in their power. This appears to be what is happening in the case of Young Mahoney in his fantasies while masturbating. In his fantasy, he becomes the aggressor once again, in much the same way as do the children in the fishing scene relative to the pike.

Both the masturbation scene and the rape scene begin the same way – with Young Mahoney waiting for someone. In chapter 3, it is a feeling full of dread: “the strain of waiting for him to come to bed, no hope of sleep in the waiting - counting and losing count of the thirty-two boards across the ceiling, trying to pick out the dark circles beneath the varnish. Watch the moon on the broken brass bells at the foot of the bed.

Turn and listen and turn” (McGahern, *The Dark* 17). Young Mahoney’s anxiety is apparent, as is the repetitive nature of these encounters. Young Mahoney has a strong affective response – fear – that comes about through this repetition, which can be seen in the rote knowledge he has of the room. He is clearly familiar with this process to such an extent that he knows the exact number of tiles and where to find the flaws in the finish of the ceiling. The sentence structure of this passage is also important. Each phrase in the first sentence is a fragment, but the ideas are still connected. The next sentence is shorter and without a subject, showing an increase in anxiety and Young Mahoney’s diminished ability to distract himself. The final sentence is just waiting: “turn and listen and turn.” His restless agitation comes to an end when he hears his father’s “habitual noises” as he prepares for bed (17). His dread culminates in a packed and ominous one sentence paragraph: “He was coming and there was nothing to do but wait and grow hard as stone and lie” (17).

Chapter five begins with him waiting, but this time in the hope that “one day she would come to [him]” (McGahern, *The Dark* 30). What seems unspoken here is that the nameless “she” is as distinctly different from Mahoney as a figure could be, making this scene explicitly a pleasurable alternative to the protagonist’s nights with his father. His mystery woman is an image from an ad of a woman lying with “her arms stretched above her head” preparing to rise, much like Young Mahoney is mentally preparing for the arrival of Mahoney. The woman’s lips are “open in a yawn” (30). As this is a photograph from an ad, it is safe to assume that the woman was posed in this enticing manner for the purposes of the advertisement to “remove superfluous hair” (30). This implies a stiffness and sense of acting in the figure of the woman, one that is seen also in Young Mahoney

as he lies pretending to be asleep. Young Mahoney's *aide memoire* is an advertisement on a "tattered piece of newspaper," a detail that suggests its frequent use and thus the repetition of this fantasy, as if he is trying to replace the frequency of the abuse with these fantasy encounters.

The scene in *The Dark* that depicts the sexual abuse that Mahoney inflicts on his son occurs early in the novel and only once. However, the scene is loaded with important information that, however painfully, a reader needs to bear in mind as Young Mahoney grows and develops sexually. In the early abuse scene, Young Mahoney feels "hands put about him," while Young Mahoney's fantasy about the newspaper woman begins with him kissing her before he "get[s his] hands under her" (McGahern, *The Dark* 20, 31). What is especially notable is his desire to arouse the woman. He imagines the way that "she stirs to life," describing it in this manner: "I have her excited, she too is crazy" (31). This seems to mirror Mahoney's repetitions of "you like that" and "it's good for you" five times throughout the early abuse scene (20). Mahoney uses his son's supposed desires and needs to justify his sexual violation of his son. A similar kind of projection is repeated in the younger Mahoney's fantasies. His fantasy woman is "torn" from a newspaper, an action which suggests violent appropriation (30). He wants his fantasy woman aroused by his hand, but he imagines forcibly inciting her desire, with a violence that can be seen in such words in the passage putting Young Mahoney in the place of the aggressor: "devour," "touch," "press," "slip," "go biting along," and "get hands under her" (30-31). Young Mahoney puts himself in the place of his father, the perpetrator of his own violation. Repeatedly throughout the Mahoney/Young Mahoney abuse scene, Mahoney is the instigator – he is the one who moves his face "close" to Young Mahoney,

and it is him whose “hands are put about” Young Mahoney, “caressing and shoving up the nightshirt” (20).

Mahoney is also constantly asking questions like “would you like me to rub you here?...You like that?” as if Young Mahoney has a choice in the matter (McGahern, *The Dark* 20). Young Mahoney’s response in the affirmative might be surprising, but in his mind “there was nothing else to say, it was better not to think or care” (20). By this point, Young Mahoney has affectively shut down. His response is one that has been conditioned – much like the children’s tacit agreement that the fishing trip was “good” or that another outing would be “nice” (15). Agreement has become a habit of repetition and protection for Young Mahoney – disagree with Mahoney or face the consequences. He even remarks that “the hands – the rhythmic words – were a kind of pleasure if thought and loathing could be shut out...it was easy except for the waves of loathing that would not stay back” (20-21). This remark reveals an even deeper loathing of his father than has been seen thus far. Young Mahoney, that is to say, has been violated not only physically, but at a much deeper level: his father has forcibly imposed into his unconscious his own self-serving fantasy of what Young Mahoney’s desires are.

Also similar to the role of Mahoney in the abuse scene, in his fantasy Young Mahoney wants what he shouldn’t – he wants to “touch the black [armpit] hair with the lips, salt of sweat same as [his] own,” despite the ad being for the removal of precisely that (McGahern, *The Dark* 30). In a fashion, Young Mahoney *is* Mahoney’s forbidden replacement for his dead wife. And in both cases, despite the obvious transgressive desires that both Mahoney and Young Mahoney are satisfying, each details the “love” he has for the object of his desire. Mahoney requires the agreement of his son, frequently

asking about the family's emotional state of affairs and if Young Mahoney "love[s] his father," also repeating the phrase "your father loves you" throughout the sexual encounter (20). Conversely, as he reaches his climax alone in his bedroom, Young Mahoney states "I love you, I love you, oh my love, I love you to the end of the world, my love," the first dialogue of the chapter (31). This repetition could be just a boy spouting nonsense, but in this context his sexual rationale bears an alarming resemblance to the justifications and declarations of Mahoney in the scene depicting Young Mahoney's rape.

The one thing that distances the two men is the word "cold" used in association with the woman in the ad. After his encounter with his father, Young Mahoney attempts to "stay far out on the bed's edge" (McGahern, *The Dark* 21). He is doomed to failure when he becomes "bitterly cold" and describes the way "the loathing had to perish in the cold" (21). Still a child, this represents the child's need for the parent. The cold – a metaphor for the child's dependence – far outweighs the emotional damage caused and shows the way the child is forced to maintain a bond with the only parent he has on any terms, however destructive. The woman in the advertisement is presented in black and white, which provides stark contrast between her features and the white of her clothing. The image is complete with the "cold" of her silks. Because of Young Mahoney's attraction to the cold, all of these elements seem to distance the fantasy encounter from the real encounter with his father and seem to foreshadow a newfound sense of independence and willingness to defend himself and his siblings from his father.

Though there are associations between the encounter with Young Mahoney's father and his fantasy woman that are similar to the ways that Stephen connects a sexual interaction with his punishment at school, there is one distinct difference. Stephen is

constantly aware of religion – it inserts itself even when he is in the midst of losing his virginity. For Young Mahoney, on the other hand, religion rears its head only in the wake of climax and release. As his fantasy recedes, the “day of the room returns,” revealing everyday items like “red shelves and [a] black wooden crucifix” as he thinks about what he has done (McGahern, *The Dark* 31). The “torn piece of newspaper” is evidence of his sin on the pillow beside him (31). As when he tries to distance himself physically from his father after he has been sexually abused earlier in the novel, Young Mahoney tries to distance himself from the shame he feels at his behavior by physically removing the image from his line of sight: “it is as easy to turn over” (31). The literal removal from his line of sight cannot remove the thoughts from his head, however.

In the aftermath of orgasm, Young Mahoney recounts to himself the different fantasies he has had during his time sequestered in his room. He describes each time he has masturbated as a “sin” and “filthiness,” and the room he is in is “dead as dirt” (McGahern, *The Dark* 31). These are similar images to those that Stephen relates to his own experiences wandering the streets before encountering the prostitute, connecting the thoughts of both boys and showing a commonality between their two situations. Both boys feel a deep sense of sexual shame, and yet the very pain of their self-loathing compels them back to the briefly soothing sex acts that feed the whole system. Stephen feels an uncontrollable need to “sin with another of his kind,” “moan[ing] to himself like some baffled prowling beast” (106). It almost seems like he is moving through a haze, but he moves forward “undismayed” until he finds what he is looking for (107). Young Mahoney admits to masturbating a number of times in his room on the morning of his fantasy, though each time more difficult to reach completion, until he “had

to...concentrate and use [his] imagination,” showing the willful effort he puts in. Despite his ability to ignore his sense of shame for the duration of each instance of masturbation, Young Mahoney knows what he is doing is sinful, and he is inescapably aware of the consequences to his actions (McGahern, *The Dark* 31). After all, he eventually must ultimately confess every one of his sins to a priest which he has accrued at five sins a day. As he lies in bed considering this, he “shudder[s]” to think about how difficult it is going to be to confess the “one hundred and forty impure actions with himself” (31). This sense of wrongdoing is exacerbated by his father’s berating him when he ventures downstairs, this time about the inevitable wear on the children’s shoes.

When Young Mahoney seeks the solace of distraction from his school work, a “Memoriam card slip[s] out of the first book” reminding him of his mother and deepening his sense of shame (McGahern, *The Dark* 33). This reminder of his mother relates back to the punishment scene at the beginning of the novel. Young Mahoney’s father seeks to increase his son’s shame through the evocation of his dead mother, and in this case it works. Young Mahoney feels a sense of shame that is cripplingly acute. He states that he “promised her that one day [he]’d say Mass for her. And all [he] did for her now was listen to Mahoney’s nagging and carry on private orgies of abuse” (33). Young Mahoney is very hard on himself – all he reproaches his physically and sexually abusive father for is “nagging,” while he accuses himself of “private orgies of abuse.” Young Mahoney thus fully takes the blame for the sexual and emotional damage his father has inflicted upon him. He has internalized his father’s shame to the extent he feels he cannot be a priest: “I’d never be a priest. I was well to be honest. I’d never be anything. It was certain” (33). After the long sentences describing his current life, this paragraph of

stunted sentences is startling and seem to express the sense of desolation the narrator is feeling.

It is this acute sense of shame that leads me back to the discussion of Young Mahoney's interaction with Father Gerald. When visiting Fr. Gerald, Young Mahoney is put into a situation in which he is once again violated, this time specifically emotionally and spiritually. The scene opens in much the same way as does the nighttime scene with his father. It is dark, Young Mahoney is having difficulty sleeping, and an adult male walks into the room and asks if he is awake. He is even in the same position as the fantasy woman he mentally violates, raised up on his arms, preparing to get up. Young Mahoney is aware of the impropriety of the priest's visit, wondering "what could the priest want in the room at this hour, the things that had to happen" and "was this to be another of the midnight horrors with [his] father" (McGahern, *The Dark* 70). After laying down in bed with Young Mahoney, Father Gerald does touch Young Mahoney, putting his arm "about [his] shoulders...the roving fingers touch[ing] his throat" (70-71). Though Fr. Gerald does not explicitly sexually abuse Young Mahoney, Young Mahoney is well aware that his actions are sexually motivated, so that the best that could be said of this episode is that the priest's activities do not move past the "grooming stage." As discussed in the introduction, Father Gerald proceeds to interrogate Young Mahoney about his vocation and pries all sorts of shameful details about his masturbation habits out of him in a scene strikingly similar to his confession earlier in the novel. He takes his problems to his uncle, hoping he would "restore the wreckage" and give him the reassurance he needs. He does get this, and for a brief moment he is happy – "joy rose, the world was beautiful again, all was beautiful" (73).

The problem comes in when he searches for a sense of communion with the priest, asking if he “ever [had] to fight that sin as a young man” and receives a long, awkward pause in response (McGahern, *The Dark* 73). Mary Ann Melfi discusses this scene in her essay “‘The Fascination of the Abomination’: The Always Futile Search for God in *The Dark*,” stating that “the boy feels more threatened by the subtle molestation of his character than of his body, which speaks volumes about where the real damage is being inflicted on him” (114). Cruel optimism is once again at work here: Father Gerald is another patriarchal figure in whom Young Mahoney places his trust, but who is unable to meet Young Mahoney’s (reasonable) adolescent needs. His desire in sharing is for a sense of affective community, a sense that he can share his shame and know that he is not alone in his struggle. Young Mahoney’s reaction to Fr. Gerald’s explicit repudiation is anger: “He had broken your life down to dirt, he’s reduced you to that, and no flesh was superior to other flesh...what right did he have to come and lie with you in bed, his body hot against yours...almost as those cursed nights when your father used to stroke your thighs” (74). His reaction to Fr. Gerald’s violation, and his father’s, is the same – he works to distance himself. He seeks physical separation from his father by putting as much space between them on the bed as possible, while he wishes for affective separation from the priest. He expresses this through his desire to start the night over so he could “give [the priest] nothing” (74).

To Young Mahoney, it appears that this is an intentional violation, as if Father Gerald wanted to get his hopes up just to dash them. So much about the situation with Father Gerald reminds Young Mahoney of his father and, as Melfi points out, “he is primed to overreact to emotionally devastating triggers [or enigmatic signifiers] which he

sees everywhere and which remind him of home and his father (McGahern, *The Dark* 116). The shame that results from this interaction is one of two reasons why he decides to tell Father Gerald he doesn't want to become a priest, seemingly closing that door for good. The second reason is his sister, Joan, who is working for a shopkeeper, Mr. Ryan, who has been sexually assaulting her. After meeting Fr. Gerald at the beginning of his stay, Young Mahoney and Fr. Gerald visit Joan. This first visit, during their brief time alone before being interrupted by Mrs. Ryan, she describes her place with the Ryans as "worse than home," prompts Young Mahoney to visit her again the next day. When they get some time alone, she describes her experience to Young Mahoney: "The first day...I was on a stool...and he put his hands right up my dress and that was only the beginning. Once he got me in the bathroom and it was horrible. I'm always afraid. And then he takes it out on you in other ways" (92-93). The first incident is explained, but the rest of the narrative is vague, implying that these experiences are unspeakable for Joan. Just telling Young Mahoney this much takes a toll on her; she is described as "breaking" and "cry[ing] violently" (92, 93). In addition to this, Young Mahoney finds the story unbearable to hear, thinking to himself that he "didn't want to hear anything more" (93).

Young Mahoney is every inch the protective brother, and he has a tripartite reaction to Joan's story. His first response is one of violent anger: "how your hands hungered for their throats...if you could get him into that bathroom for one minute you'd choke him" (McGahern, *The Dark* 93). This reaction recalls both the fishing scene and the scene in which he stands up to his father and seems to represent his conditioned response to upsetting situations. His second response is the realization that he doesn't want to know more, which is immediately followed by the desire "to get her away" (93).

The reason he feels such a strong need to protect her is that Mr. Ryan's sexual misconduct towards Joan is another reminder of his father's towards him. As Melfi puts it, "grandiose pedophiles abound. The primary imprint on the spirit...is thus far in the narrative formed by three drastically failed authority figures...: his father, the priest, and Ryan" (115). His desire to protect Joan from these "failed authority figures" stems from his desire for the happy object and, in a way, to provide Joan with what he cannot find for himself – a masculine figure to protect and support her. Throughout the novel, he strives to be what his father is not, first his desire to become a priest, and then his abortive university career. Notably, neither of these come to fruition.

For Young Mahoney, "the familiar (family)...is everywhere – at home, at church, in the community, and in the university. Since 'home' is a state of mind...in [Young] Mahoney, the doors to fulfillment feel closed no matter which direction he contemplates" (Melfi 116). The final chapter of the novel shows Young Mahoney and his father preparing for bed after a decision has been made: Young Mahoney will leave the university and pursue a job in Dublin instead. Because of the men who consistently remind him of Mahoney (Father Gerald, Mr. Ryan, the professor who kicks him out of class, and the dean at the university), Young Mahoney is stuck, his "adaptive powers" exhausted, and, in despair, "embraces the safety of familiarity" (116, 120). Because he cannot find a masculine role model that fulfills his idea of what a father – or a man – he falls back on what he knows before "going out into the world on [his] own" (McGahern, *The Dark* 190). The reason he gives for giving up his scholarship is that he is "afraid [he] might get sick or fail and there's more in the house besides" – marking his fear of failing the family (the happy object) as his reason for leaving (187). Leaving for Dublin is his

way of distancing himself both from this fear and his father, who, it appears, will always be a specter that affectively haunts him, as will the shame of not being “good enough” for the priesthood or the university (72).

The affective space Young Mahoney grows up in is a combination of a constant desire for the happy object, the trauma of both physical and sexual abuse, and the intense feelings of shame imparted by a religious upbringing with such a strong emphasis on celibacy and purity. In an interview with Eamon Maher, McGahern discusses his thoughts about the church, stating “I have nothing but gratitude to the Church. I would think if there is one thing injurious about the church, it would be its attitude to sexuality. I see sexuality as just a part of life” (73). I think this is why works like *Portrait* and *The Dark* are so important. They shed light on the intersections of adolescent sexuality and shame by showing different manifestations of childhood trauma. Young Mahoney’s formative spaces end up holding him back from his dreams. Patterns of paralysis of this nature seem prevalent in the works of both Joyce and McGahern, giving the impression that there is also a pattern of shame and unfulfilled expectations within social constructs like the family. The exploration of the connections between shame, happy objects, and formative spaces like the home and Church are important because, when compounded and unaddressed, they can take the choice out of any action, holding back even those who have proven themselves to be talented, like Stephen Dedalus and Young Mahoney. These elements are prevalent in both the works of Joyce and McGahern, suggesting gender and family formations were interacting more broadly throughout 20th century Ireland in patterns that drew men young and old to frantically pursue happiness and fulfillment as

manly men and family patriarchs in ways that might have taken a variety of forms, but which we see to have all been equally illusory, toxic, and self-perpetuating.

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