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‘Ere their story die’: The Rhetoric of Historical Responsibility in Sebastian Barry’s *A Long, Long Way*

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Abstract

'Ere their story die': The Rhetoric of Historical Responsibility in Sebastian Barry's *A Long, Long Way*

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Three important Irish texts use revelations about Irish involvement in the First World War as a lens through which to examine contemporary Ireland: Jennifer Johnston's novel *How Many Miles To Babylon* (1974), Frank McGuinness's play *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985), and Sebastian Barry's *A Long, Long Way* (2005). Because significant critical attention has been paid to the texts of Johnston and McGuinness, and because access to Barry's archive in the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas further illuminates the process by which Barry represents this crucial moment in Irish history, his novel is the focus of this paper. Unlike Johnston and McGuinness, whose projects use the First World War to interrogate the Ireland in which they are writing and force the reader to grapple with their own historically (or mythically) constructed identities, Barry's *A Long, Long Way* denies personal culpability and allows for a view of history in which the individual stands forever as a tragic or pathetic victim. Barry's novel details the experiences of one Irish soldier, Willie Dunne, on the Western Front and plots his changing attitude towards Irish

soldiers' involvement in the War following the Easter 1916 Rising. Exposed to both nationalist and loyalist perspectives, and to the horrors of war, Willie increasingly develops sympathy with the nationalist position, though he never abandons his principal loyalty to his father. While Willie's narrative presents a more complicated vision of the Dunne family—Barry's ancestors who have figured prominently in his *oeuvre*—it fails to escape the tragic impulse in much of Barry's fiction, in which history is an immovable and oftentimes malevolent force. Such a vision of history allows individuals like Willie Dunne to disavow responsibility for their personal fate and for their roles within a larger Irish history.

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'ERE THEIR STORY DIE': THE RHETORIC OF HISTORICAL RESPONSIBILITY IN SEBASTIAN BARRY'S *A LONG, LONG WAY*

Know that we fools, now with the foolish dead,
Died not for flag, nor King, nor Emperor,
But for a dream, born in a herdsman's shed,
And for the secret Scripture of the poor.
-T.M. Kettle[1]

Interest in Ireland's involvement in the First World War grew dramatically towards the end of the twentieth century, a fact which illustrates that the War, which had a profound impact on Ireland politically and culturally, continues to matter, and continues to shape the nation's historical legacy. Unionists and nationalists alike joined the British Army to fight the German invasion of Belgium in 1914, but the protracted struggle and the Easter Rising of 1916 caused nationalist opinion to shift against the war. The First World War and the Rising, which occurred in the same historical moment, led to two drastically different—and firmly entrenched—visions of Irish history. These events exacerbated political tensions that were already festering in Ireland prior to 1914, and it seems that the nation is still recovering from and attempting to make sense of their ramifications. In the republican imagination, the participation of scores of constitutional nationalists was for a long time largely omitted from collective memory in favor of

[1] Kettle's "To My Daughter Betty, A Gift of God." This fragment of the poem is contained in Sebastian Barry's notes on *A Long, Long Way*, collected in the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas. Kettle was a constitutional nationalist and sided with Redmond when the Irish Volunteers split; he died in battle at Ginchy in September 1916. The title of this paper is taken from another poetry fragment found in Barry's notes, this from Thomas Hardy's "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations,'" a poem written for the conservative *Saturday Review* in January 1916, a time in which Irish public opinion was beginning to turn against the war.

histories that glorified the long struggle for Irish independence, while unionist Northern Ireland incorporated its involvement in the War into an equally mythic glorious struggle that continues unbroken from the Battle of the Boyne to the Troubles. Neither position accounts for the reality of the war experience, which cannot be neatly situated within either nationalist or unionist historiographies.

Three important Irish texts use revelations about the Irish wartime experience as a lens through which to examine contemporary Ireland: Jennifer Johnston's novel *How Many Miles To Babylon* (1974), Frank McGuinness's play *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985), and Sebastian Barry's *A Long, Long Way* (2005). Johnston's novel and McGuinness's play—McGuinness's play in particular—have received significant critical attention for the ways in which they not only question long-standing Irish assumptions about the Great War, but also challenge their audiences to reassess the stories they tell about themselves. Both Johnston and McGuinness, writing during the decades-long violence in Northern Ireland, use the First World War as a metaphor for the Troubles. Behind the mythologies, the fictions, the rituals, and the memories stands always and ultimately the reality of violence: "Yet it is violence which pulls the whole issue of Northern Ireland into focus. The talks of multiplicity must dull when we realize the violence is not only symptomatic of the differences between both communities, but is also a carefully managed violence. Somehow the prerogative of history is violence."[2] Recognizing that individual identity production is necessarily tied

[2] Eamonn Jordan, *The Feast of Famine: The Plays of Frank McGuinness* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 1997), p. xii.

up with political rhetoric, Johnston and McGuinness reveal the violent imperative that always rests behind the politicized production of history. In an interview, Johnston states that she wrote *How Many Miles to Babylon*, which explores the pre-war and wartime relationship between two young men—Alec, a member of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, and Jerry, a working-class Catholic nationalist—as an attempt to represent "human relationships with the undercurrent of violence."[3] Johnston views her project as a way in which history can be used to heal the deep divisions within Ireland:

> I think that the two cultures in Ireland cannot live without each other and that we have created in the last fifty years a situation that is hanging by very narrow threads as to how we're going to go in the future. We have to ... we have to put our hands out to each other. We have to understand. We have to realize how much we gain from each other and from the past and the suffering.[4]

Johnston insists on difference as a form of connection, and *How Many Miles to Babylon* explores many of the ways in which conformity to entrenched ideologies rests on fragile social and political constructs. Alec and Jerry's relationship destabilizes the social and military hierarchies, and Alec's final, compassionate sacrifice for Jerry, which he makes for no cause other than his friendship, subverts the highly romanticized military belief in a mythic imperative for Irish blood sacrifice.

McGuinness's *Observe the Sons* examines the isolated Ulster wartime experience and the incorporation of the Somme into an unbroken history of blood sacrifice. This

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[3] Johnston, interviewed in the *Irish Literary Supplement*, vol. 3 (Fall 1984), p. 20.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 19.

violent imperative, the play warns, has led Ulster to the very brink of extinction. The myth of regenerative blood sacrifice is a lie; each generation that willingly adopts the loyalist political rhetoric further degenerates, until all that remains of Ulster is quite literally, *past* glory. McGuinness says of living through the Troubles: "'I'm angry at our own history—a history that has allowed blood to become a common language. I'm angry at my own part in it, even to have allowed my own tacit agreement to the spilling of that blood. I don't know how to stop it, other than to stand up and say that it's happening.'"[5] *Observe the Sons* does not ask the audience to forget the long history of bloody and violent conflict that has plagued Northern Ireland in the name of history; McGuinness's play instead reminds the audience of the critical need to reclaim the dead from a monolithic conformism before they are forever lost. McGuinness ultimately takes issue not with myth, memory, or history—which are integral as narrative forces that give shape and meaning to our world and as mistakes never to be forgotten or repeated—but with the deliberate reinvention and reconstitution of these forces according to present needs. The manipulation of the memory and history of the Ulstermen who fought and died at the Somme into political fodder during the Troubles (in the same way as the history of the Battle of the Boyne had been transformed into an origin myth), has led only to the sanctification and sanitization of seemingly endless and senseless violence.

Though Johnston's *How Many Miles to Babylon* and McGuinness's *Observe the Sons* have been the subjects of considerable scholarship, Sebastian Barry's *A Long, Long Way*, written two decades after *How Many Miles* and *Observe the Sons* in a new century

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[5] Purcell, 1988 interview cited in Jordan's *Feast of Famine*, p. xi.

of relative peace and prosperity for Ireland, has yet to be critically examined for the contributions it makes to the conversation about Irish involvement in the Great War. For this reason, and because my access to Barry's archive in the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas further illuminates the process by which Barry represents this crucial moment in Irish history, his novel will be the focus of this paper. Barry has long been writing about his Catholic Loyalist ancestors, whose role as guardians of the Empire puts them more often than not, in post-colonial Ireland, on the wrong side of history. *A Long, Long Way* continues this project. Barry's characters are frequently those who do not conform neatly to either the accepted unionist or nationalist narratives. Fintan O'Toole writes of Barry's plays: "The thread that runs through all of these plays, indeed, is the ambiguity of belonging. The fundamental opposition of Irish history – native on one side, foreigner on the other – is subverted in these figures who defy history by being at the same time both inhabitants and strangers."[6] The liminal position of many of his characters at historically crucial moments affords Barry the opportunity to use his texts to question ideologies that have too long dominated Irish history. He has long been accused of a kind of historical revisionism; certain voices are privileged over others, which does nothing to enrich the tapestry of Irish history, but serves only to invert the nationalist rhetoric. But this is less Barry's project in *A Long, Long Way* than is his commitment to presenting his main character, an unselfconscious Willie Dunne, as wholly passive in the face of the overwhelming force of history: "Barry avoids questions concerning larger, sectarian ideologies by choosing, instead, to interrogate history through his choice of

[6] O'Toole, p. xii.

protagonists for his plays. And Barry's characters are less interested in ideology than they are in simply getting by."[7] This strategy allows both Willie Dunne, fighting in the First World War, and Barry's present-day readers, who desperately need to recognize the complex history of Irish involvement in the First World War in order to move forward, to either disavow responsibility for the perpetuation of simplistic historical narratives or lament an Ireland lost forever. The cost of such a lament is high. Barry's representation of Willie as a passive victim caught up in the great storm of history neither complicates the entrenched ideologies that divided the nation in 1916 nor does it point towards a possible future in which both sides recognize the compound responsibilities that necessarily accompany the manufacture and maintenance of historical narratives.

A Long, Long Way continues Barry's project of recovering the forgotten histories of his loyalist ancestors, men who have been excluded from the mainstream nationalist narrative and relegated to the dark corners of Irish history. Within his own family history, the roles these Southern Unionist Catholics played in the crucial years leading up to and during the First World War, the Easter Rising, and the struggle for Irish independence run counter to the way the Republic has chosen to imagine its own history. The most formidable figure in Barry's family tree is James Patrick Dunne, Chief Superintendent of the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP), who led the deadly baton charge against striking labor workers during the Dublin Lockout in 1913. Chief Superintendent Dunne is the central character in Barry's play *The Steward of*

[7] Jude R. Meche, "Seeking 'The Mercy of Fathers': Sebastian Barry's *The Steward of Christendom* and the Tragedy of Irish Patriarchy," 47:3 *Modern Drama* (Fall 2004), p. 465.

Christendom, which imagines him (in the play his name is Thomas; in *A Long, Long Way* he is rechristened James Patrick, the real name of Barry's ancestor) as a mentally-addled old man in the county home at Baltinglass fitfully recalling and rationalizing his life as a "Castle Catholic" and lamenting a newly liberated Ireland that has discarded him as no longer part of the national history (*SC* 243). In his introduction to *Plays: 1*, Barry expresses his personal anxiety at reclaiming a historical figure who was now viewed in the nationalist imagination as a villain: "I was in fear of it being discovered that I had such a relative, hiding you might say in my very blood. I was eager to conceal him, indeed to keep him concealed, to keep him concealed, to seal him in, where he lay unnamed and unmentioned in official history" (vii). Yet Barry determined that Dunne "would have to have his go," and presents him in the play as a tragic figure who, despite his lifelong loyalty to the Empire and service to the city of Dublin, has been abandoned by those he spent his life serving.

Barry's project importantly interrogates a highly sanitized nationalist narrative that suppresses the existence of the majority of southern Catholic Irishmen who, prior to 1916, strongly believed either in Ireland's place as a member of the Empire or in a more moderate path to Home Rule. His strategy of presenting his ancestral figures as an exploration of his personal history and a reclamation of lost identities, however, masks the inevitable project of historical revisionism that necessarily accompanies the narrative re-imagining of public figures whose lives are intertwined with critical moments in Irish history. The literary attention Barry pays to his ancestors has the potential to provoke an illuminating discussion of the dangers inherent in one-sided histories that are elevated to

mythic status in the nationalist and loyalist imagination. Unfortunately, he too easily becomes obsessed with creating an ancestral narrative that risks replicating those origin myths which have kept Ireland "alienated, angular and embattled" (O'Toole *SC* viii). To deem these stories solely familial narratives is to deny the political import of Barry's project.

Chief Superintendent Dunne looms large in *A Long, Long Way*, though the story belongs to his son, Willie Dunne, who dies estranged from his father during the final days of the First World War. The fraught father-son relationship literally haunts Thomas in *The Steward*; Thomas has hallucinations of Willie's ghost visiting him, so wracked is he with guilt over a lifetime privileging professional loyalties over family ones. Thomas's greatest regret, however, is for a son whose diminutive height bars him from service in the DMP and destroys their shared lifelong dream of the son following in his father's footsteps. In *The Steward*, Thomas laments Willie's enlistment and wishes instead his son could have been in the DMP: "I blame myself. There was no need for him to go off, except, he hadn't the height to be a policeman" (*Steward* 254). *A Long, Long Way* presents Willie's story as that of a naïve young man who struggles to live up to his father's expectations. Never reaching the required height for the DMP, Willie instead attempts to carry on his familial duty to the Empire by volunteering for service in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers at the outset of the First World War. The novel details his experiences on the front and his changing attitude towards Irish soldiers' involvement in the War following the Easter 1916 Rising. Exposed to both nationalist and loyalist

perspectives, and to the horrors of war, Willie increasingly develops sympathy with the nationalist position, though he never abandons his principal loyalty to his father.

While Willie's narrative presents a more complicated vision of the Dunne family, it fails to escape the tragic impulse in much of Barry's fiction, in which history is an immovable and oftentimes malevolent force. Such a vision of history allows individuals like Thomas and Willie to disavow responsibility for their personal fate and for their roles within a larger Irish history. Roy Foster comments on the function of history in Barry's oeuvre:

> [T]here are, in fact, no alternative futures. Despite odd transforming rays of light, Barry's vision is a dark one. History is presented as a juggernaut, like fate in classical tragedy. The characters observe it, comment upon it, even comprehend it, but for all their knowingness they remain impotent. Those great floods of speech which gloss and articulate their trapped lives present the audience with a dramatic imperative: understanding and thus expiation. Over and over again, the image recurs of redemption laying a suffering soul to rest. But this is located in a universe ruled by history rather than religion.[8]

Foster aptly reads Barry's historical sensibility as reminiscent of classical tragedy and his characters as helpless in the face of overwhelming forces. It is this impulse in Barry's work that allows audiences to experience the cathartic release that comes with tragedies of fate. History stands in here for fate; the audience doesn't have to grapple with the

[8] Roy Foster, "'Something of us will remain': Sebastian Barry and Irish History, *Out of History: Essays on the Writings of Sebastian Barry*, p. 195-6.

characters' decisions, because in this formulation any action is inconsequential. Far from challenging his audience with a "dramatic imperative," as Foster suggests, this act of catharsis (and *A Long, Long Way* is no exception) allows the audience to sympathize with characters that appear manhandled and discarded by the "juggernaut" of Irish history. And aside from how the audience identifies with Barry's characters, the emotional purification experienced by the audience more importantly and dangerously allows them to avoid examining their own historical moment, as well as their own relationship with history. Unlike Johnston and McGuinness, whose works use the First World War to interrogate the Ireland in which they are writing and force the reader to grapple with their own historically (or mythically) constructed identities, Barry's plays and fiction deny personal culpability and allow for a view of history in which the individual stands forever as a tragic or pathetic victim.

From the very beginning of *A Long, Long Way*, Willie—named for King William of Orange, a historical figure elevated in the Loyalist Ulster imagination as a mythic hero—is imagined as an innocent sacrificed to history's overwhelming power. In the first available typescript draft of the novel collected in the Harry Ransom Center at The University of Texas, Barry initially envisioned the novel opening with an epigraph announcing Willie's death: "*William Dunne, private, Royal Dublin Fusiliers. Killed on October 3rd, 1918, near St-Court, aged 22 years*" (box 14.1, p. 2). Though Barry eventually decided against announcing Willie's death from the outset and saved it for the novel's final climactic moments, and though Willie's death is an inevitability foretold throughout the novel and comes as little surprise, the epigraph's initial inclusion suggests

Barry's impulse to situate Willie as a fixed relic of the past whose memory rests now only with the author and the reader. Chapter Two in the original draft version of the novel opened with another announcement of Willie's death and what serves almost as a reminder of the singular tragedy of the story: "This is the story of small Willie Dunne, one of those fled millions given in blood to the new century, whose only true possession was a singing voice. Who loved his father though he had disappointed that dark man" (box 14.1, p. 18). History demands the blood of innocents; Barry here importantly frames Willie as a victim of a senseless and brutal conflict, and he also establishes the later possibility of Willie's saintliness. The diminution of "small Willie Dunne" physically positions him as helpless against the vast force of the insatiable twentieth-century. His small stature serves as a reminder throughout the novel of Willie's shortcomings as a son and of his inability to comprehend or combat the dark modern world taking shape around him. And in a bit of tragic irony, it is Willie's angelic voice—his sole talent and gift to the world—that ultimately leads to his death.

Both Johnston's *How Many Miles To Babylon* and McGuinness's *Observe the Sons* also announce from the beginning the climatic ending of their narratives, though both works' openings are delivered as challenging monologues from the main characters, who immediately accept responsibility for the tragic course of their lives. Both men also importantly acknowledge the malleability of history that necessarily accompanies narrative, cautioning the reader to remain skeptical of any version of events that claims to be the truth. Alec in *How Many Miles To Babylon*, as he waits for his execution day, writes: "So for the waiting days I have only the past to play about with. I can juggle a

series of possibly inaccurate memories, my own interpretation, for what it is worth, of events" (Johnston 1). And Pyper in *Observe the Sons* reproves the audience's attempt to assign meaning to his story: "Do not turn me into an example…You are the creator, invent such details as suit your purpose best" (McGuinness 9). Johnston and McGuinness reject the historicist impulse to present a vision of history and personal narrative as passively produced, and instead insist that their audience recognize the fraught process of "playing with the past" to suit one's ends.

Neither Willie nor the narrator of *A Long, Long Way* demonstrates the self-awareness or sense of irony of either Alec or Pyper, and instead the novel, even in its final form, is framed from the first pages as a tragedy for which no one is responsible and as a true history that has only recently been revealed. Willie, we are told, was born in "the dying days" of the nineteenth century, "but he was like a scrap of a song nonetheless, a point of light in the sleety darkness, a beginning" (*ALLW* 3-4). As a "point of light" and "a beginning" that emerges out of "the dying days," Willie, from a birth veiled in messianic language, is fated for sacrifice. In the first typescript draft of the novel, Barry repeatedly locates the Great War as a pregnant historical moment that signifies eschatological time. Chapter Two of the draft begins with this now excised passage: "Nineteen hundred and fourteen years since the birth of Christ. A new time. And that was a time of angels, angels to presage things, of courage, of remorse" (Box 14.1, p. 16). While the image Barry creates here is breathtaking and romantic, and while it is right to say that the Great War changed the course of Western history in Ireland and elsewhere, to cloak this recognition as an age ordained within a spiritual framework is to

remove culpability from the war's actors and to allow the reader to accept Willie's story not just as a history of the war, but as divinely inspired history.

This prophetic frame privileges a continuous historical narrative, one that figures events as types. Instead of challenging the nationalist rhetoric built around the mythology of the Easter Rising and providing a complex vision of how history is manufactured and used for present political ends, Barry instead privileges a historicist position that is similarly simplistic. He describes the fate of all young men around the world born at the turn of the century whose destinies led them to fight and die in the Great War: "…their fate was written in a ferocious chapter of the book of life, certainly." The memories of those boys, cherished by "millions of mothers," are "piled up in history in great ruined heaps, with a loud and broken music, human stories told for nothing, for ashes, for death's amusement, flung on the mighty scrapheap of souls, all those million boys in all their humours to be milled by the mill-stones of a coming war" (*ALLW* 4). The image of "history piled in great ruined heaps" so resonates with Walter Benjamin's famous Ninth Thesis about Klee's *Angelus Novus* that surely Barry was attempting to invoke his own angel of history, helplessly watching the wreckage of history amass at its feet.[9] The referent, however, is missing in Barry's figuration: whereas Benjamin was

[9] Thesis IX: "A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress." Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations*, p. 257-8.

troubled by fascism's deadening of the past and keenly aware of the perilous process of manufacturing histories, Barry resigns himself to a lament for the dead instead of a reinvigoration of the past in the present moment.

This backward-looking impulse in Barry's work relies on ideas of loyalty and tradition, qualities that are privileged in Barry's work. Fintan O'Toole writes in his Introduction to Barry's *Plays: 1*: "For Sebastian Barry writes from a perspective in which both the grand narrative of history and the framework of fixed ways of understanding the world are falling apart. The history that informs them is a history of obscurities and counter-currents, of lost strands, and untold stories" (*x*). Those unwilling to abandon their loyalties or shift their conceptions in a new world are those who get left behind, men like Thomas Dunne, whose service ultimately gets villainized or forgotten. There are several kinds of duty portrayed in *The Steward of Christendom* and *A Long, Long Way*: duty to one's job, duty to one's country, duty to one's king, and most importantly, duty to one's father. Thomas in *The Steward* unflaggingly demonstrates fealty to all of the above, though he fails miserably at his duty as a father, and it is this fundamental flaw that some of Barry's conservative champions overlook.

John Wilson Foster writes admiringly of Barry's representation of Thomas' loyalty and dignity (and the loyalty and dignity of the loyalist culture Thomas represents), qualities that he describes as "defensible and recuperable."[10] Foster rightly argues that the loyalist culture of which Thomas was a part and the thousands of loyalist and

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[10] J.W. Foster, "'All the long traditions': Loyalty and Service in Barry and Ishiguro," *Out of History*, p. 100.

nationalist Irishmen who fought in the Great War deserve recovery and recognition as part of the Irish story. A history of Ireland that includes only those who fought for independence discredits the long tradition of Irishmen who served, for a variety of reasons, the British Empire, and it willfully ignores the complex relationship between native and inhabitant that has always been at work in English-Irish relations. However, Foster's contention that Barry's work depicts an embattled and victimized "subculture" with "values [that] may even prove once again viable" represents the rigid strain of historical revisionism lurking behind much of Barry's work.[11] Romanticizing those Irishmen who stubbornly remained loyal to the British Empire after independence is to disremember history: "The triumph of the play [*Steward*] is its sympathetic understanding of the complexity of loyalty which at first glance—and with the grotesquely unfair view of Irish posterity—can seem like the mere puppetry of betrayal at worst, delusion at best."[12] Perhaps most troubling about Foster's defense of Barry's work is the passivity he ascribes to those who maintain steadfast loyalty. This passivity haunts much of his work; Barry removes responsibility from characters that have power over their situations, limited though it may be. Thomas willfully remains in the past—an absolutely active choice—and Willie remains paralyzed in indecision, desirous only for a ruined and unsustainable world.

In *A Long, Long Way*, loyalty and righteousness are the qualities that Willie most idolizes in his father. He struggles to "know his own mind" and wavers in his loyalty to

[11] *Ibid*., p. 100.
[12] *Ibid*., p. 106.

king and country, but his loyalty to his father stays constant. Though his father is absent from most of the novel's action, he is omnipresent in all of Willie's thoughts and deeds. Willie addresses the vast majority of his letters home to his father, he is known to his fellow soldiers as the Chief Superintendent's son, and his height—his greatest failure and his father's greatest disappointment—haunts him until his death. Declan Kiberd argues that during the revolutionary period in Ireland, the power dynamic between fathers and sons was reversed; the nationalist movement was in one sense the revolt of newly empowered sons against fathers long emasculated by the colonizing power.[13] While using psychoanalytic theory to analyze the relationships between colonists and the colonized is problematic—this type of analysis ascribes all forms of colonial revolt to the Freudian impulse to overthrow the tyrannical father—Kiberd is correct to note that father-son relationships figure prominently in Irish literature. Kiberd uses the literature of Joyce, Synge and O'Casey to demonstrate the failure of fathers, who are represented as simultaneously weak, tyrannical and nostalgic, to thrive (or even to function) in a rapidly changing modern world marked by revolution. Alec in Johnston's *How Many Miles* grapples with an enfeebled, passive father, and father figures are entirely absent in McGuinness's *Observe the Sons*. In both of these texts, the men look to their fellow soldiers for moral guidance and authority. Interestingly, in *A Long, Long Way*, Barry represents an intensely strong father-son relationship that is threatened by the growing independence movement at home. The greatest tragedy of the novel is not Willie's death, but the sundering of Willie and his father's relationship.

[13] Declan Kiberd, "Fathers and Sons," *Inventing Ireland* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 380-394.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator describes one of Willie's earliest memories of his father during a visit from King Edward VII, named in the text only as "the king of Ireland." Willie reverently remembers his father in his finest dress uniform, "put up on a big white horse" as looking "much finer than any King…Like God Himself, or the best man in God's kingdom" (*ALLW* 4-5). For Willie, his father occupies the place of heroic patriarch so many young men in Ireland found lacking in their own fathers. But his admiration for and loyalty to his father endures, despite his shifting beliefs. After the Easter Rising, he realizes that his country now views him as a traitor, and he admits to his father that he disagreed with the decision to execute the sixteen rebels. Though this admission causes a rift between the father and the son, Willie writes in his final letter to his father that though he has begun to "start thinking in a different light about things," these things "cannot change the fact that I believe in my heart that you are the finest man I know. When I think of you there is nothing bad that arises at all" (*ALLW* 279). His heartbreaking patriarchal loyalty and the tragedy of the separation between the father and the son (which is never repaired because of Willie's death) barely conceals the subtext that the Rising and subsequent shift in popular opinion has also done irreparable harm to the relationship between England, the kind but authoritative father, and Ireland, the submissive, thankful son.

The first available typescript draft of the novel illustrates the unfailing belief Willie maintains in his father's goodness and the emphasis Barry places on the son carrying on the traditions of the father. Many of the letters Willie writes to his father were heavily edited before the final version, and they demonstrate his unflagging filial

allegiance. This excised passage is taken from a letter he writes to his father upon returning from his first leave to Dublin, where he witnesses the beginning of the Easter 1916 Rising:

> I am sorry I never reached the six feet. I serve in the army not just for Ireland and what I know but also for you, because there is not a man in Ireland that has served her better nor looked out more close and clear for her. No one will ever know the deeps of your work, and how much it has cost you in body and spirit, and how much care you have given to the old city. (Box 14.1, p. 142)

What is most interesting in this selection and others like it is that Willie serves here as an apologist for his father's sins; while the father may make mistakes, he ultimately does what is best for his children. Thomas, as both an Irishmen and as a policeman vested with the authority of the empire, occupies a liminal space between the colonizer and the colonized. Whether posterity views him as a "steward" of the empire or as a traitor and a collaborator, Barry paints him as a single father and steadfast lover of king and country who does what he thinks best for his family and his empire. Thomas, of course, makes mistakes along the way, and history inevitably tramples the man who chooses the wrong side, and he therefore becomes the pathetic, ranting madman in *The Steward*. But Willie never lives to see the degradation of his father. *A Long, Long Way*, published ten years after *The Steward*, allows for a glimpse of Chief Superintendent Dunne in his prime, as a heroic figure to his son, and offers the possibility for the redemption of a great and troubled man subsumed by history.

Kiberd dismisses the notion that colonialism creates strong male role models within the colonized people: "[T]he evidence of Irish texts and case-histories would confirm the suspicion that the autocratic father is often the weakest male of all, concealing that weakness under the protective coverage of the prevailing system…Patriarchal values exist in societies where men, lacking true authority, settle for mere power."[14] In both *The Steward* and *A Long, Long Way*, it is interestingly the end of colonialism in Ireland that leads to the dissolution of the Dunne family and the waning of power in the patriarch. This reversal of Kiberd's theory of literary father-son relationships during the revolutionary period romanticizes individual identity production under an occupying power. Willie understands his identity only in relation to his father, and even in the published version of the novel, he laments a changing Ireland that no longer allows him to play this role.

Before Willie volunteers in Kitchener's army, Mr. Lawlor—the poor father of Willie's lover Gretta, and victim of the baton strike ordered by Chief Superintendent Dunne in 1913—tells him: "'The curse of the world is people thinking thoughts that are only thoughts which have been given to them. They're not their own thoughts. They're like cuckoos in their heads'" (*ALLW* 9). Willie does not fully comprehend Mr. Lawlor's advice, nor does he truly know his own mind. He ironically uses this as a justification to volunteer, though he admits to not really knowing why he did it. Essentially entering the war with "cuckoos in [his] head," he is filled with vague notions of living up to his father's unwavering loyalty to King and Country (in that order), protecting the honor of

[14] *Ibid*., p. 391.

Belgian women who he imagines as Gretta, and making Ireland safe for his sisters. Despite his inability to articulate exactly why he volunteers, Willie defends his decision to Gretta using Mr. Lawlor's argument: "'Your Da said himself that we have to know our own minds'" (*ALLW* 13). Gretta dismisses both Willie's rationalization and her father's posturing: "'That's only a thing he got out of a little book he reads. St. Thomas Aquinas, Willie. That's all'" (*ALLW* 13). During the course of the novel, Willie explains his decision to join up in a variety of different ways, but all of these are ultimately unsatisfactory. Finally, standing in the jail cell of Jesse Kirwan, a fellow soldier condemned to die for his allegiance to the rebels and refusal to continue his duties as a soldier, Willie admits the reason he volunteered: "'Because I never reached six feet'" (*ALLW* 156). He can never speak this truth outside of this cell, to a man who will never be able to repeat it; he cloaks his reason at points behind honor, duty, loyalty and chivalry, but the real reason is built upon a vision of his father as a romantic hero on a white horse wearing the godlike uniform of the DMP.

The uniform of the DMP occupies a prominent symbolic role in both *The Steward* and in *A Long, Long Way*. In *The Steward*, the delusional Thomas asks that his clothes be sewn with gold thread to remind him of his former glory in a DMP uniform. Later in the play, he remembers the horror of receiving Willie's uniform upon his son's death, and laments that it was still stained with trench mud. And in *A Long, Long Way*, Willie looks with reverence on his father's uniform, finding the khakis of the British Army inferior to the fine suits worn by the Dublin Police. Upon returning from the front on leave, he sizes up his father:

> The khaki uniform seemed stark alongside the trimness of the chief superintendent's black cloth and silver braid. The cuffs especially were elaborately decorated. Willie had never really noticed that before. He felt like water was pouring into him through a sewer-hole on the top of his head. He was being weighed down by it, whatever was the cause. (*ALLW* 245)

The disparity between the father and son's uniforms functions as the physical manifestation of Willie's failure in his own mind and in the eyes of his father to live up to, in both physical stature and political allegiance, a manly ideal. Fintan O'Toole describes Barry's interest in clothing as the author's way of highlighting the vulnerability of humanity, and John Wilson Foster argues that Barry's characters develop an obsession with their uniforms because it allows them to symbolically re-clothe the dignity that has been stripped away by history. But clothing instead functions for the characters in Barry's works as a means to produce and maintain a fixed identity. Thomas understands his identity solely in terms of his role as Chief Superintendent of the Dublin Metropolitan Police, as servant of the Empire and protector of Dublin. In a draft of a letter to his father from the training depot, Willie laments the inferiority of his uniform to that of his father's in a passage excised from the novel's final version: "Well, truth to tell, we do not have the full uniform. So far I have got only the britches. My ambition now is that khaki shirt. The jacket is just a vague dream. But still and all, eventually we are told we will have the lot" (Box 14.1, p. 20). Kiberd's argument about the changing relationship between Irish fathers and sons is here inverted; Willie's identity—beleaguered by an Ireland that no

longer respects or follows the tradition of the fathers—no longer has a set meaning. The son, instead of growing in power, diminishes.

One of the most interesting passages in the first available draft of the novel, later cut, concerns Superintendent Dunne's role in the Dublin Lockout of 1913, which figures prominently in *The Steward*. When Willie returns to Dublin on leave and to his father's house, he is overwhelmed by recollections of the riot. Barry privileges this moment dramatically by using it as a frame for the climatic reunion of the father and the son, and as a prelude for the novel's most intimate and moving scene, in which the strapping Chief Superintendent lovingly bathes his undersized son who has just returned from war, covered in mud and infested with lice. Because the incident occupies this crucial dramatic moment, it is clear that the Lockout weighed nearly as heavily on Willie's mind in *A Long, Long Way* as it did on Thomas's in *The Steward*. Barry chooses to highlight this tense historical moment in both texts for reasons that extend beyond his desire to tell the story of a father and his son, yet the political and social import of the riot's place in the novel are masked by the personal narrative. In the published novel, Willie mentions briefly his father's involvement as the man who ordered the baton charge against labor organizer James Larkin and the striking Irish General Workers Trade Union, which resulted in the death of four men (and in the novel, the physical impairment of Gretta's father, Mr. Lawlor). As Willie stands in his father's living room, memories of the Dublin Lockout and his father's participation rush back to him:

> His father went into the shop in Sackville Street. He had his men massed at the O'Connell Monument, and he telephoned headquarters to see what should

> be done, because there were hundreds of fellas out from the back streets, milling about, and there were scores of respectable people, and children, trying to make their way through the strange crowds. And headquarters told him to clear the streets.
>
> Oh, Willie knew all the details, and they were like embers now in his head, hurting him strangely. The darker details he had from Gretta's father, of course, the dark, hard details that had seemed bad enough going into his head, but had grown and spread there since.
>
> Four men left killed. It was odd that those four men meant so much, when he had seen so many others killed. But they did. (*ALLW* 72)

In this final version, it is clear that terrible things happened on Sackville Street, his father was one of the few Police Superintendents present that day who were in charge of the officers who did the killing, and his father was also responsible for relaying orders from headquarters and making sure these orders were carried out. But the "dark details" are never revealed, and neither is Chief Superintendent Dunne's role beyond his telephone call to headquarters. Willie goes on to express sympathy for the striking workers, and "wondered at himself that he couldn't stand in his father's quarters without rehearsing the story over again. He felt like a traitor really" (*ALLW* 73). Despite allusions to some darker knowledge he might possess about the man who ordered the baton strike and "whatever hard thoughts he had about him," Willie remarks that his "love for [his father] was entirely undiminished" (*ALLW* 76).

The first archived draft of the novel, however, contains a lengthy and detailed discussion of Chief Superintendent Dunne's involvement in the bloody riot in Sackville Street. Description of the baton charge is prefaced with an acknowledgement of the hard times workingmen faced during the years leading up to the Lockout, details that, had they remained in the novel, would have provided the reader with a more complete picture of the economic crisis facing Ireland in the years leading up to the Great War, and of the vast socio-economic gap between rich and poor:

> So many Dublin men went into the army those few years back when William Murphy the great owner of men and things, locked out those men from his factories, and others did likewise. That was a hard few months for his father too, trying to keep order in the habitual streets. There was no work then and a lot of lads joined up in '13, to get the pay, and it was bad luck in a way that the war should come just then the year after, because scores of those same lads were killed at Le Cateau and taken prisoner, and there was a great feeling in the back streets for the soldiers at the front even then, so that when hordes more were lost in Gallipolli, all those fine men coming down off the *River Clyde* and just shot to death in the water, never even reaching the blessed land of the Turks, there was a rage then of love and feeling for the soldiers, and there was a thousand mothers all about the streets with ribbons of mourning, and everyone in the markets talked about Michael or Johnny in the army, and how they were getting on. And there was a sense that Dublin was doing her best, even though there had been such dark trouble the week before.

The immense sympathy Barry expresses here for the striking union tram workers—who were locked out of their jobs by the infamous businessman, newspaper magnate and owner of the Dublin Tramway Company, William Martin Murphy—sheds light on the class conflict that stood at the heart of the riot on Sackville Street. It further describes the thousands of men who joined up prior to the Great War for reasons of economic desperation, and the great public sympathy felt in the early days of the war for those men who volunteered not in defense of a political ideology, but out of economic necessity. Barry accurately represents the complex reality of prewar and pre-Rising Ireland, in which the majority of the populace was nominal constitutional nationalists, yet many poor Catholic men joined the British Army and supported the Empire's cause abroad to support their families. This passage highlights Irish social unrest as a force that shaped the nation's history and provides a richer context through which the reader can understand an Ireland divided not just by political rivalries, but also by class conflict. Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, in her research of drafts of *The Steward of Christendom*, finds that Barry's extensive revisions to dialogue relating to the Lockout subtly privilege "national allegiances" over "class politics."[15] Cullingford's research reveals that the play initially opened with a monologue from the aging Chief Superintendent recounting the baton strike, a move that would have altered the dramatic weight of the play and emphasized Dunne's involvement in a class riot. In both the play and the novel, Barry shows a great deal of care in his presentation of the Dublin Lockout; the passages he chooses to cut and those that remain reveal how carefully he shapes the story of his

[15] Cullingford, "Colonial Policing," *Out of History*, p. 124.

ancestor's responsibility in a labor strike that does not fit neatly into either the personal or political story he is attempting to tell. Barry's decision to remove the above section from this important moment in *A Long, Long Way* flattens the historical importance of an event in which the Dublin Metropolitan Police sided with business over labor (and therefore Willie's father and the police force became tools not just of political might, but of social dominance), rendering Willie's recollection of it a vague personal memory of a public tragedy. Willie does, in the published novel, acknowledge that in retrospect, he feels guilty for working "all through the General Strike" for Dempsey the builder, who "would never employ a union man" (*ALLW* 72). But his momentary social conscience and lingering sympathy for the striking workers does not prevent him from later wishing that his life before the War could be magically restored, and he could return to Dublin and his work with Dempsey.

The extensive excised passage goes on to provide a detailed account of the events on Sackville Street, a small section of which appear in the published novel, as quoted earlier in this paper. But the most interesting passages that reveal the extent of Willie's knowledge about the riots and his father's involvement in the four deaths and hundreds of injuries of workingmen and woman do not appear in the published version of the novel:

> And that was the year, in '13, that his father was faced with the riot in Sackville Street that time, when Mr. Larkin against the orders of the government came out in disguise on the balcony of the Imperial Hotel, hoping to foment disorder on a scale never seen in Dublin before. It was like something you might hear of in Russia. His father went into a shop in Sackville Street, his men were

massed there at the O'Connell monument, and he went into the newsagents there and rang headquarters to see what should be done, because there were hundreds of fellas out from the backstreets, milling about, and there were dozens of other respectable people and children trying to make their way through the strange crowds. And headquarters told him to clear the streets.

So when Larkin appeared at that moment, some contingents of the Dublin Metropolitan police rushed the hotel, and before Larkin had three words spoken, he was pulled away and down through the hotel and arrested. And he was jubilant because he had done what he had said he would do and knew it was a great thing, and he had sent his speech that very morning to the newspapers so it could be printed for everyone to see.

And while this was going on Willie Dunne's father moved his men towards the crowds, who were quite strange and quiet, though their hero was being taken away, and the policemen held their truncheons in the required fashion, and when they reached a man they hit him if he so much as winked. And there were scores of Dublin men hit across the head and the shoulders, and some kind of heat stirred up in the policemen, and whatever was the reason for it, the long days of work and the strain of it, and of waiting for Larkin, or even the few beers they might have had at the station counters, they lashed out liberally at the crowd, and then there were women mixed into it, and those same decent people were also seized on and many of them were thrown down and beaten too, and it

> was reported that Countess Markiewicz herself was beaten by policemen, and Willie was sure his father had done his fair share of the beating.
>
> It was his father's work to keep order in his division of Dublin and that was how he had trained up his men to do it, without guns at least. And often in the Phoenix Park the recruits had been shown how to mass up and advance and clear out all before them, in a sort of grand melee. But something else tipped in to them that day, they were more like an army of old, advancing on a merciless enemy, and the seemed intent on slewing and wounding, and in four minutes Sackville street was in chaos, with humble crowds rushing up this way and down that way, trying to get away into the side streets, but there would be contingents blocking them, and there was a ruckus such as was never remembered, even in the days of old rebellions and pattern days and such half-ordered times of ruckus. (Box 14.1, p. 112-114)

This striking passage, and Barry's decision to exclude it from this dramatically important moment in the novel, reveals Chief Superintendent Dunne's direct culpability in the deaths of the four men in Sackville Street. Willie is "sure his father had done his fair share of the beating," and this revelation would certainly have complicated his relationship to the man he idolized, had it remained in the novel. The gifts his father sends to Mr. Lawlor through Willie would seem less a question of his father charitably making right a wrong done to the man than a shameful admission of misconduct. This selection further lends agency to his father's actions; not only was he ordered by headquarters to disperse the protestors and "keep order in his division," but he too was

carried away by “some kind of heat” and participated in the merciless beatings of the mostly peaceful protestors. The excision of these details allows Willie to acknowledge the injustices done to the strikers while maintaining the illusion that his father’s role was a result of his compulsory commitment to his work. An order sent down from headquarters and policemen who overreact to the tension of the moment is a far easier pill to swallow than an image of one’s own father savagely beating unarmed workingmen and women. Barry’s revisions to Willie’s recollection of the Dublin Lockout, more importantly than their exoneration of Thomas from direct involvement, reveal his careful shaping of Willie as a character whose innocence—or willful ignorance—of historical and political events of which he finds himself directly involved. These excisions further illustrate Barry’s self-conscious attention to the political implications of the Lockout. Such careful shaping of the narrative to elide Willie and his father’s complicity not only exonerates Barry’s characters politically, but also denies them the possibility of being complicated actors in their own drama.

Throughout the course of the novel Willie continues to measure himself against and futilely attempts to model himself after his father, the central figure of male authority in his life, but he begins to seek out new male role models in his father’s absence. Unlike many works about the Great War that focus on the bonds formed between fellow soldiers fighting side-by-side in the trenches (*How Many Miles to Babylon* and *Observe the Sons*, for example), *A Long, Long Way* largely dismisses the fluid ties of brotherhood, in which men are forced to negotiate among equals, in favor of less dynamic and more prescriptive—and heteronormative—relationships between fathers and sons. Willie does

profess to cherish his comrades, but the only two such relationships he has with fellow soldiers—with Jesse Kirwan and Pete O'Hara—are deeply troubled by conflict, ambivalence, and treachery. He instead looks to male authority figures—in particular his wartime surrogate fathers, Father Buckley and Captain Pasley—to reinforce romantic notions of a fixed manly ideal that is active, public, honorable, and heroic.[16] The delicate process of making a man in this context requires strict adherence to hierarchical structures and social norms—in order to learn how to "becomes a man," a man must first know his proper place. As the son of stewards of the empire, Willie is no stranger to following orders and deferring to his superiors, and he feels most comfortable when the social order is clearly defined. Some of his greatest moments of peace in the trenches come in either the presence of these surrogate father figures or when he is given a repetitive, menial task to do, and he can revert to the comforting role of laborer. He therefore seeks out male authority figures like Father Buckley and Captain Pasley, who, though they are caught in a decidedly unheroic war, maintain their belief in an ordered world, and die bravely. It is striking that Barry chooses to reinforce notions of a compulsory manliness built through a defined social order, a worldview that begins to change during the First World War.

There was a clear conflict between the nineteenth-century ideals of honor, duty, and sacrifice and the reality of life in the trenches. The Great War mutilated men in both body and soul; the overwhelming firepower now characteristic of modern warfare

[16] George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 56.

assailed and disfigured their bodies, the outward expression of masculinity.[17] And shell shock psychologically emasculated soldiers, leaving those men who felt obliged to project stoicism and bravery fearful and hysterical. Because the First World War assaulted fixed ideals of masculinity, it became even more important that gender stereotypes be enforced in the trenches. Without the near-feudal code of chivalric honor and without the established system of consequences set in place by military discipline, the stability of the social good was at risk and the intrusion of new formations of masculinity was possible.[18] Eve Sedgwick, whose work has influenced subsequent studies about male friendship and desire, hypothesizes "the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted."[19] In the military, and especially during wartime, the continuum of male homosocial desire shifts dramatically, and the fluid possibilities of male friendship and desire become more visible. Yet wartime is still highly structured along lines of class, military hierarchy, and normative heterosexuality. In Johnston's *How Many Miles to Babylon* and McGuinness's *Observe the Sons*, father and authority figures are absent, inadequate, or oblivious, and relationships revolve instead around homosocial brotherhood. These texts present male friendships that interrogate and

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[17] Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the First World War* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1996), p. 15-16.

[18] Male friendship and intimacy in the trenches is the subject of substantial scholarship. Sarah Cole argues that the intimacy and trauma associated with male friendship during the First World War closely approximates the experience of modernity, itself a kind of collectively experienced trauma. And Santanu Das asserts: "Mutilation and mortality, loneliness and boredom, the strain of constant bombardment, the breakdown of language, and the sense of alienation from home led to a new level of intimacy and intensity under which the carefully constructed mores of civilian society broke down" (Das 52).

[19] Eve Sedgwick, p. 1.

transgress the normative masculinity, compulsory heterosexuality, and crumbling imperial hierarchies of the otherwise rigid space of wartime. Through the relationships of Alec and Jerry in *How Many Miles to Babylon* and Pyper and Craig in *Observe the Sons*, Johnston and McGuinness question the belief that male friendship within the carefully controlled public theater of war—with all of its notions of class distinctions, brotherhood, and codes of honor—is limited to comradeship. Barry, far from challenging these social codes, presents male friendships that exceed the boundaries of camaraderie as unreliable and potentially dangerous; the only stable ground Willie finds in *A Long, Long Way* comes from his allegiance to male figures of religious and imperial authority.

Captain Pasley occupies a particularly curious position within the novel. A kindly Protestant, he is the kind of battle leader who maintains control over his unit by demonstrating extraordinary concern for his men and leading always by example. He dies early in the novel in a horrific mustard gas attack, bravely (or stupidly, as the sergeant-major Christy Moran views it) holding his position while his unit runs for their lives, because he did not get an order from headquarters to fall back. Willie compares all subsequent officers to Captain Pasley, who represents a reassuring model of a new class of non-threatening, compassionate loyalists greatly diminished by the rise of the majority Catholic nationalists. Pasley's family—members of the dwindling ascendancy class "somewhere between strong farmers and minor gentry"[20]—owns a farm and small estate in Wicklow in close proximity to the estate where Willie's grandfather worked as steward for many years. On his last leave home, after a devastating fight with his father and the

[20] Roy Foster, p. 190.

loss of his lover, Gretta, his visit to the Pasley home proves Willie's only source of consolation.

Willie arrives in Tinahely, a land where "the whims of landlords" once reigned; it is here where his grandfather "had spent his whole life at the head of an army of estate workers, gardeners and farmhands, and was the vicar of the landlord on this earth, and as loyal as a wife" (*ALLW* 255). Though these estates are not as grand as they once were, and as Roy Foster points out, the Wicklow Protestants Barry presents are not "threatening dispossessors" belonging to the Ascendancy, the district remains isolated from and foreign to those not of this class.[21] Much like Alec's family in *How Many Miles to Babylon*, these Protestants are staunch loyalists who send their sons to fight and die in imperial wars. As Willie walks towards the Pasley estate, he has "enough sense to know he must approach the house from the lane that ran up the yards" instead of through the "fine gates" that guard the front avenue (*ALLW* 256). Willie's act of deference mirrors his grandfather and father's years of devoted service, and reinforces a hierarchy that continues outside the military. Captain Pasley's family warmly receive Willie, and he feels a sense of kinship between the Pasleys' fading world of imperial allegiances and his own failing loyalty to a family of Catholic stewards, two worlds that remain separate despite their intertwined fate. While Roy Foster is right to note that the interaction between the Pasleys and Willie describes " a far more complex and nuanced *couche sociale* than the simple dichotomy of planter-and-native," the deference Willie shows the Pasley family and the comfort he draws from his visit functions as a mutual lament for a

[21] *Ibid*., p. 190.

social order destroyed by war abroad and at home rather than as a possibility for union between historically divided classes. The trouble presented by this exchange between Willie and the Pasleys is not that Barry paints the Pasley family as likeable characters in an attempt to solicit the reader's empathy; the problem is that Barry asks for little more. Merely eliciting the reader's empathy with the untenable sociopolitical position of a decaying ruling class does little to provoke a new historical conversation.

Willie's troubled friendship with Pete O'Hara is one of the few relationships among enlisted men depicted at length in Barry's novel, and it results in Willie's greatest transgression—his visit to a prostitute—and the dissolution of his relationship with Gretta. Barry represents his love affair with Gretta in what Paul Fussell terms the "essentially feudal language" of the early months of the war; when he first sees her, Willie believes she has the "strange look of an old painting," and like all other things in *A Long, Long Way* that are good and pure, "looked like an angel" when she slept, her face like a light, and "her body a city of gold" (*ALLW* 8, 12).[22] Fussell notes that prior to and at the beginning of the war, military speeches and soldiers' letters were heavily laden with chivalric language, an important component for the maintenance of the masculine code of duty. Willie imagines that he fights in the war to protect Belgian women like Gretta, and while at the front he dreams of returning to her and living a long, happy life filled with innocence and joy. Distraught after the death of Captain Pasley and troubled that he has yet to receive letters from Gretta, Willie goes to a local estaminet with Pete to drown his sorrows. In a drunken stupor, he sees Gretta "dancing in his daft head with

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[22] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 21-22.

Captain Pasley in a silver trail of stars, in the tail of a comet that promised heaven to the world, and good purpose to all things, and the loving chant of God." But he suddenly finds himself in a backroom with a beautiful prostitute who is more goddess than angel, her dark black hair standing in sharp contrast to Gretta's golden locks, thus marking her as a "fallen girl" (*ALLW* 61). Willie maintains a passive role throughout the encounter; he is danced around, taken into a backroom, and offered sex in exchange for money. He does not even verbally agree to sex; as he lies on a mattress stunned by her beauty, the "fallen girl" straddles him. Pete, who later calls the prostitutes "fucking bitches," gets a venereal disease; implausibly Willie, who treats the women with characteristic innocence, escapes only with the guilt of betraying Gretta. This encounter has the potential to make Willie a complex character whose sins must be dealt with alongside his virtues. Yet Barry's decision to portray him as lacking agency—even in this moment when his responsibility is apparent—makes it clear that Barry's agenda has less to do with exploring the lives of his ancestors than it does with creating two-dimensional vehicles to promote a historical position.

This encounter is the first of several dark moments involving Pete that paint male friendship as unstable and potentially harmful. After the execution of Jesse Kirwan, Willie and Pete lie in their bunks discussing the horrors of the war. Jesse Kirwan's story makes Pete think of his past sins, and he tells his friend a gruesome story about the early days of the war. Entering a Belgian town only just plundered by the Germans, Pete and his patrol unit find a severely wounded and mentally stricken Belgian woman who was tied up, mutilated, and raped by the German soldiers. They halfheartedly attempt to

rescue her, but as they are caught in a firefight, one of Pete's fellow soldiers begins to rape the brutalized woman. Pete helps his friend by holding the woman down. Willie is horrified by Pete's wartime atrocity, for "all he could see in his mind's eye was Gretta; Gretta in that dark blue skirt, and that stupid, vicious lad getting a hold of her in a ditch like a dog" (*ALLW* 167). Instinctively he punches Pete, who tells Willie: "'It's just a story, Willie, a story of the war,'" to which Willie responds, "'You can keep your story, Pete. You can keep it'" (*ALLW* 168). Pete was using the moment to share something that was deeply troubling his soul with his friend, to use this moment as a kind of confession. Willie, however, has no interest in hearing Pete's gruesome war stories, because in some way, they make him feel both changed by the war and complicit in these crimes: "And if O'Hara and his pal did that at the start of the war, what would he be able to do now? What would Willie be capable of himself? Were they not mirrors of each other, mirror after mirror, in bed after bed, in billet after billet, in battalion after battalion…all across this ruined place?" (*ALLW* 169). He worries that Pete's story reflects a fundamental truth about his own susceptibility to corruption. If Pete is his brother and his mirror, he wonders, is he too implicated? Has the cause of righteousness been abandoned by all of humanity?

Willie's horrified reaction to Pete's story and the anxiety associated with his potential complicity is deeply complicated by an excised passage that appears early in the first draft of the novel. A few members of his unit go for a swim in the river, and a relaxed Willie lies on the bank daydreaming:

> Willie Dunne was idly thinking, the Irish nuns at Ypres had had to abandon their convent and school, he knew that, and all the girls had gone back to their homes in Ireland. He didn't know if any of them were raped or not, but he supposed some of them must have been, why not. Now he had a daydream in his head of a nice girl, about five foot high, in a summer dress, passing through the clean heat of the day, and a great German beast coming down at her, and bludgeoning her down, ruining her, and murdering her, leaving only a smudge of humanity on the soft grass.
>
> He was uncomfortable to realize that his pecker had stirred at these thoughts. He was confused by it, and prayed the others did not notice. (Box 14.1, 52-53)

Willie's rape fantasy mirrors Pete's wartime atrocity. Had Barry chosen to retain this scene, Willie would be forced to empathize with Pete on some level. Willie's daydream directly implicates him in the horrors of war; even before he has sex with the dark-haired prostitute or witnesses the gruesome deaths of any of his friends, he has violent, lustful thoughts incongruous with his otherwise innocent and peaceful nature. This incongruity not only situates Willie as a moral equal to his troubled friend, but also makes him a fascinating and nuanced character. The dramatic weight of Pete O'Hara's story is unbalanced without this passage: it becomes merely another incident of suffering that Willie must endure, another sign that the modern world consumes all that is good and pure. However, had this passage remained, its echo would resonate with Pete's story, particularly the gruesome image of Gretta being raped "in a ditch like a dog." His vision

of Gretta, which fills him with horror, is deeply complicated when set beside his own rape fantasy, which fills him with disconcerting sexual pleasure. Barry's decision to excise this passage illustrates his intention that Willie's function as a simplistic metaphor remain uncomplicated by troublesome sexual desire. Given the difficulties this passage presents to Willie's otherwise uncorrupted sexuality and morality, its presence in *A Long, Long Way* would have made him far less useful as a symbol of political innocence and goodness.

Jennifer Johnston saw complex political and moral issues similarly elided during the Troubles, all for the sake of preserving a coherent historical narrative. She sought, through the process of writing *How Many Miles To Babylon*, to use the First World War as a metaphor for what she saw happening during the Troubles. She believes a strain of provincialism arose in Ireland following the War and grew during the second half of the twentieth century, a "narrowing" as she calls it, a period during which Protestants and Catholics, South and North, could no longer see the commonalities they shared and no longer had a complete sense of their own or each other's common histories. Like many other Irish people, Johnston believes that Home Rule would have become a reality for Ireland had the Easter Rising never happened. In an interview, she articulated her belief that Ireland missed an opportunity for both greater unity between North and South and Home Rule as a result of the War and the Rising:

> The effect that World War I had—the massacre of a whole generation of young men—embittered a large number of people who remained. In Ireland it was the beginnings of the troubles that we are now in. I'm not denigrating what happened

> in 1916 because I think it was a piece of magnificent romantic nonsense. It could never have happened, but it was magnificent, and it, in fact, probably is the reason why Ireland is in the terrible situation it is in now. I think that, had the uprising not happened, come 1918, we would have had Home Rule. There would have been no problems about the North because the British wouldn't have allowed there to be problems, and we would have moved on from there in some cumbersome but logical way to being a republic. Once that happened, something cracked in us and we suddenly saw ourselves as people with freedom dangling in front of us, and we couldn't wait any longer. Therefore, that war has had an extraordinary effect on the country.[23]

There remains a great deal of debate as to whether the suspended Home Rule bill would have passed following the war, and a much more contentious debate surrounding the question about the war's potential to unite Ulster with the rest of the country (or the British willingness to make sure there were no problems with the North). This perspective also does not account for the changing sentiment about Irish participation in the war on the home front, the conscription controversy, or the very different idea of unity the war created in Ulster, which McGuinness eloquently expresses in *Observe the Sons*.

The figures of John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party and a constitutional nationalist who encouraged Southern Catholic Irishmen to enlist in the

[23] Johnston, interviewed by Michael Kenneally in the *Irish Literary Supplement*, vol. 3 (Fall 1984), p. 20. Collected in *Writing Irish: Selected Interviews With Writers From the Irish Literary Supplement*.

belief that their participation would solidify Home Rule, and his brother William, known as Willie, an MP who volunteered and died in Flanders in 1917, rest at the center of these debates. Not only was John Redmond concerned that Home Rule and the nationalist cause would be upstaged by Ulster's enthusiasm for the war, but he was also convinced that nationalist participation in the war would show the British and the world that Ireland had made the sacrifice necessary to prove itself a nation. Following the outbreak of war on the continent, he encouraged those loyal to the nationalist cause to join the war effort, resulting in the split of the Irish Volunteers into the National Volunteers (the Redmondites) and the smaller Irish Volunteers (those republicans who opposed Irish participation in the war and later participated in the Rising). Neither of these factions of Volunteers should be confused with the Ulster Volunteers, or those unionist southern men like Willie Dunne who are volunteers in Kitchener's Army. Jesse Kirwan, a Redmondite, has to explain to a bewildered Willie the differing political and ideological positions of this "veritable tornado of volunteers" after they witness the beginning moments of the Rising on the Mount Street Bridge.

Both John and Willie Redmond figure prominently in *A Long, Long Way*, though neither brother appears as a character. John Redmond exists as an ideological position, one represented by the increasingly radical Jesse Kirwan and by the more moderate Father Buckley. Both men enlisted under Redmond's direction in the belief that the war would solidify Irish Home Rule. After the Rising and the execution of the rebel leaders, however, Jesse Kirwan no longer believes in Redmond's vision and cannot bring himself to continue his service in the British Army. Scheduled for execution because of his

refusal to follow orders, Jesse asks that Willie come and visit him in his jail cell. He warns Willie: "'I know you don't think like me. I don't know what brought you out here. Maybe you think that Ireland is just fine as she is and you are fighting for that. Well, Willie boy, that's an Ireland that maybe did exist two years ago as you set out, but I doubt if it will much longer'" (*ALLW* 157). Jesse willingly acknowledges his mistake and takes an ideological stand that will ultimately cost him his life. This notion unnerves Willie, who expresses a "dread of moving forward into the next moment, a dread of history and a dread of the future." He prefers to avoid all political talk, and in fact desires to go about his duties with blinders on and ignore the greater ramifications of his involvement. As in all matters, if Willie were to consider the implications of his actions, he would be forced to accept some measure of personal responsibility, and this overwhelms him.

Dissatisfied with Jesse's decision, Willie later asks Father Buckley: "'Why doesn't he just buckle down to the job and see it through and go home then and think his thoughts as he likes?'" Father Buckley, who unlike Willie is willing to accept that this moment in history is one of change and of action, responds, "'I wish he would. It's not time for that, maybe. People of all sorts are having notions. Maybe it's a time for notions, Willie. When death is all around'" (*ALLW* 159). Father Buckley maintains the hope that the war holds the power to unite an independent Ireland. He pins these hopes on Willie Redmond, whom the novel portrays as a martyred lost leader of a united, independent Ireland. The place Redmond occupies in the novel is much like the place Michael Collins occupies in Thomas's mind as an assassinated potential unifier of the nation in *The Steward of Christendom*. In both the play and the novel, Barry holds to the

idea that Ireland lost those men who had the ability to bring together unionists and nationalists, and that the loss of these great leaders created a future of exclusion and divisiveness. He writes bitterly in the Introduction to *The Inherited Boundaries* about how he felt growing up in the fifties: "Born into this bloodless flat catastrophe, being 'Irish' without being welcome, undefined, the wrong sort of Catholic, the wrong sort of Protestant (one that hadn't left), the wrong sort of agnostic (any agnostic), it is a wonder in a way that anything has been achieved at all."[24] Barry seems to believe that he would not have suffered as "the wrong sort of Catholic" had Willie Redmond survived and carried out his vision for Ireland's future.

Given the violent and divided reality of Irish history following Willie Redmond's death, it is easy to speculate that the nation would have achieved unity and a more utopian future had he survived. But it is of course easy to conjecture that history would look much different given any number of imagined events. Certainly Willie Redmond was deeply beloved both publicly and within the House of Commons, and he was of the opinion that the North and the South ought to move on from the old disputes and start afresh as Irishmen. In his final speech before the House in March 1917, delivered three months before his death, he passionately urged legislators from North and South to come together to find an amicable solution: "Are we ever to go on the lines of the old struggle of the Stuarts and the Battle of the Boyne?"[25] Redmond believed that the experience of Irishmen from the North and South fighting for a common cause in the trenches would

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[24] Barry, *The Inherited Boundaries*, p. 19.
[25] William Redmond, *Trench Pictures From France* (London: Andrew Melrose, Ltd.: 1917), p. 178.

create the kind of blood brotherhood necessary to overcome years of bitter opposition and mutual prejudice. The notion of blood sacrifice, however, is a romantic, dangerous ideal that perpetuates violent tribal identities and only serves to create new myths. And though Redmond was more moderate in his rhetoric and urged reconciliation between North and South, his feeling that only death would bring about Irish nationhood makes his viewpoint little different from that of Patrick Pearse. In the Introduction to Redmond's posthumously published *Trench Pictures From France*, E.M. Smith-Dampier describes Redmond as a "spiritual representative" of his men, "a hero-figure" who summed up their "finest valor, their most unselfish aims."[26] Redmond was a great leader of his men, and by all accounts, extraordinarily well loved by both Northern and Southern soldiers. The stretcher-bearers who carried him from the field of battle were men of the 36th Ulster Division, who carefully tended him in his dying moments. This fact has become an important piece of the mythology surrounding his death, and is included in *A Long, Long Way*. The elevation of the man to heroic status after his death, however, creates a conveniently saintly figure around which to construct a mythology of the lost leader. Smith-Dampier goes on to remark that Willie Redmond wanted to die for his country—in fact, he reacted gleefully to the news that he would lead the charge of the 16th and the 36th Divisions at the Battle of Messines, where he ultimately died—in order that the rift between North and South might be healed: "He was convinced that his blood would prove a sacrament of unity to his own countrymen, and lift up their hearts to a higher

[26] E.M. Smith-Dampier, *Trench Pictures From France*, p. 13-14.

plane."[27] Redmond wanted to be made a martyr, and in *A Long, Long Way,* Barry fulfills this desire.

When Willie asks Father Buckley what it means to fight for Ireland "through another," Father Buckley attempts to explain and give him a sense of purpose by invoking Willie Redmond's stirring speech before the House of Commons:

> 'That all this terrible war you've seen with your own eyes is for Ireland, that by fighting for all the poor people of Belgium in the army of the King, you are fighting at the end of the day for Ireland, to bring Home Rule and all the rest, to gather the raveled ends of Ireland together, the Northerners and the Southerners, the 36th and the 16th, and that it is all a good and precious thing. That's what Willie Redmond said in the House of Commons. He's an MP, Willie, and he's out here with us fighting for what he believes is a wonderful cause. For Ireland, Willie.' (*ALLW* 214-5)

Father Buckley's explanation of Willie Redmond's position reflects his idealistic conviction that the War had the capacity to "gather the raveled ends of Ireland together," and he emphasizes the War's meaning to Willie Dunne and himself. There is, however, no mention of whether or not the Northerners would agree. Barry made numerous revisions to this exchange and experimented with several iterations of Father Buckley's speech that shift the focus from Willie and onto all Irishmen fighting in the War. Two excised lines change the meaning of Father Buckley's speech significantly: "That the very experience of fighting in the same army will surely heal the rift between North and

[27] *Ibid*., p. 23.

South"; and "That when the Ulstermen saw what good fighters we made, they wouldn't mind at all a United Ireland, they might even join in" (Box 15.7, loose handwritten papers). These statements include Northern soldiers among those "fighting at the end of the day for Ireland" and reflect an untrue view of the Ulster position; Ulstermen fought in the war because of their fierce loyalty to the Empire, not to form a United Ireland. Barry most likely decided not to include these lines in Father Buckley's speech because he recognized it was a pure historical fiction that Ulstermen "might even join in" the fight for a United Ireland (though perhaps not a historical fiction that Willie Redmond believed this to be true). The final version of this scene, however, disregards the reality of what Ulstermen were fighting for by removing agency from the Ulster side. They become incorporated in Father Buckley's " good and precious thing," and engulfed by an inevitable chain of events foretold by Willie Redmond.

Not every Irishman believed that the war was a fight for the "wonderful cause" of Ireland. Willie characteristically responds to Father Buckley's speech, "'I don't think my father would like the sound of that, either, Father.'" Interestingly, in the drafts of the novel, Barry considered having Willie's line here read, ""I don't know, but I don't think any blessed Ulsterman would like the sound of that" (Box 15.7, loose handwritten papers). Willie's response was altered because it reflects the uncomfortable truth that many an Ulstermen would, in fact, object to Father Buckley's utopian vision. While Home Rule might be a good thing for Irish nationalists, it would be anathema to the staunchly unionist 36th. There were certainly many instances of camaraderie between the 16th and the 36th, but there was still a great deal of separation between the two regiments,

and a world of separation between North and South at home. And as D.G. Boyce notes, the world of the trenches had almost no "permanent impact on the fundamentals of political divisions in Ireland. As these Irishmen, Ulstermen and Englishmen were taking tentative steps towards each other, the UVF Headquarters Council was seeking recruits to keep the organization alive in Ulster," the UVF that formed the basis of the Ulster Special Constabulary, who played an important role in the violent conflicts of the early nineteen-twenties.[28] Even Willie Redmond, whose final speech before the House of Commons is otherwise free of finger-pointing, accuses the Northern politicians of dragging their feet: "What stands in the way of a settlement? The attitude of a section of our countrymen in the North of Ireland!"[29] Whatever sort of brotherhood was formed between unionist and nationalist Irish soldiers in the trenches did not extend to the political arena in Ireland, nor did it extend to how the soldiers aligned themselves politically at home.

Father Buckley, following the death of Willie Redmond, travels to the site where he was killed "to see what [he] could see": "'And there they were, back-slapping each other, North and South, and it was a grand moment. It was Willie Redmond's moment, if only he could have seen it. But he was killed. He was killed. That is the pity of it'" (*ALLW* 229). This lament for an alternate utopian future in which Northern and Southern Irishmen are united, based on one "grand moment," is a beautiful fantasy at best. While Willie Redmond by many accounts was, as Father Buckley claims, "a most sincere and gentle man," the unity he inspired as a brave leader in the trenches would have surely

[28] D.G. Boyce, "Nationalism, Unionism, and the First World War," *Ireland and the Great War*, p. 199.
[29] *Trench Pictures From France,* p. 177.

been challenged in the increasingly fractured Ireland at home. And Barry's insistence on representing Willie Redmond as a martyred lost leader reflects the symmetry between his project and the republican rhetoric he claims to complicate.

Barry's idealistic portrait of Willie Redmond's blood sacrifice parallels Willie Dunne's transformation from a naïve soldier into a sacrificial lamb sent to the slaughter. Late in the novel, a new recruit named Timmy Weekes joins the regiment. Though he comes from London, Timmy shares a natural affinity with Willie; his father is a gardener "to one of the big houses in Hampstead," a steward of the property of great men, much like Willie's own father and grandfather. Timmy brings into the trenches several books, the favorites among them Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. *The Idiot* especially captivates the men, because it "wasn't about them at all…but somehow it was about them." It is this book that fascinates Willie and is ultimately associated with him; Christy Moran gives it to him after the death of Timmy Weekes, and it is returned to Willie's father along with his uniform after Willie dies. Willie feels a natural affinity with both Myshkin, the novel's central character, and with the Russians fighting the Germans on the Eastern Front. He says of Myshkin: "He didn't know if he admired the Idiot or not. He didn't know if the Idiot was an idiot or a saint, or both" (*ALLW* 206). Dostoevsky conceived of the epileptic Prince Myshkin as an experiment; he wanted to know how an entirely good man would behave and how the world would receive him. The novel came about partly from Dostoevsky's fascination with Holbein's *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb*, which graphically depicts the dead body of Jesus. The painting suggests the possibility that Christ was, as Richard

Pevear notes in the Introduction to *The Idiot*, "sublime and ideal, but with no power to redeem mankind…what if Christ were not the incarnate God but, in this case, simply a 'positively beautiful man?'"[30] Holbein's painting essentially questions whether or not Jesus Christ was resurrected. Myshkin views the painting in the novel and comments that it could make a man lose his faith. Both *The Idiot* and *A Long, Long Way* explore, in very different ways, the uncertain, anxious space between Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. It is a dark time when even the most devout believers question the fundamental principles upon which their faith is built.

The epileptic Myshkin, recently returned to Russia from a sanatorium in Switzerland and thrown into the hostile society of St. Petersburg, finds himself caught between two women—Natasya, the fallen woman to whom he proposes out of a kind of Christian love, and Anglaya, the beautiful, young woman whom he loves romantically. Though the people around him profess reverence for his unfailing righteousness, Myshkin is destroyed by a materialistic and opportunistic society that uses him up. Through the course of the novel, Myshkin's candor turns to reticence, and his compassion becomes ambiguous. A sanatorium is ultimately the only place for such a good man as Myshkin, a premise Barry follows, making heaven the only place for a man such as Willie. Dostoevsky's theological test reveals that the entirely good man and modern society are, in the end, irreconcilable. This incompatibility leads to the novel's central question: has society advanced beyond such a simple character as Myshkin, and

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[30] Richard Pevear, Introduction to Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, translated by Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Classics, 2003), p. xiv.

therefore rendered a wholly good man an idiot, or has modern society become so corrupt that it will utterly consume a saint? This highly philosophical novel explores questions of spirituality and faith in the modern world, and casts doubts on the possibility of a truly beautiful man—even a Christ-like figure—existing in a land of sin and self-interest.

Dostoevsky importantly thought of his novel as an experiment: Could he create such a beautiful man? Beauty, after all, is an ideal realized only in Christ. Would the world embrace this man as a saint, or would they deride him as an idiot? Critics have spent years debating whether or not Dostoevsky's experiment was a success, and it is these literary challenges presented by the novel that make it interesting. But Sebastian Barry's decision to evoke Myshkin through the character of Willie is a deeply problematic ideological move: Barry does not look at *A Long, Long Way* as an experiment; he has already determined for the reader the answers to these questions. Barry's attempts to present Willie as a saint-like character deflect responsibility away from him and allow him to maintain his innocence despite his knowledge of and participation in events that have critical implications. Comparisons to Myshkin further obfuscate the pressing historical and political questions raised by Willie's involvement in the war effort and by his own crisis of faith. The association between the two men is misplaced; the formula for Dostoevsky's hero—who in many ways is an aesthetic exploration of ideal beauty and a litmus test of spirituality's vitality in the modern world—cannot be neatly applied to Willie, a man whose actions are firmly grounded in historical and political events that remain, in the present moment, contentious.

In his review of *A Long, Long Way*, John Kenny recognizes Barry's tendency to create characters victimized by circumstance:

> It is difficult to separate Barry's wish, deeply evident in all his work, for there to be goodness and redemption in the world from his tendency to politically sanctify his mouthpieces. A chief strategy has been to prevent the heightened innocence of his heroes being sullied, and thus ideologically complicated, by the dirt of volitional experience; things tend to happen to—rather than by or because of—his usually guileless principals.[31]

Whether this tendency stems from Barry's desire to see "goodness and redemption in the world" or from an impulse to redeem his discarded ancestors, Kenny's assertion that Barry "politically sanctif[ies] his mouthpieces" certainly describes Thomas Dunne in *The Steward* and suggests reasons that Barry chooses to portray Willie as a Myshkin-esque hero. While Kenny rightly points out that Barry's portrait of Willie is more nuanced and measured than some of his previous heroes, he fails to see the equally subtle strokes with which Barry paints Willie as a saint when he claims that the sheer number of misfortunes that befall Willie earn him the "elegiac inscriptive ending Barry grants him." The last part of the novel—which traces Willie's injury and miraculous recovery, his epiphanic apprehension of a world ruled by death and corruption that has no place for him, the secession of both desire and suffering, and his glorious, tragic death—reveal Barry's urgent need to create an unambiguously good man sacrificed for the age, "given in blood to the new century."

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[31] John Kenny, "His Heart is There," *The Irish Times* 26 March 2005, Weekend Book Review: 10.

After Willie suffers burns and intense shell shock in a battle, he finds himself in the hospital with uncontrollable bodily tremors. These seizures echo Myshkin's epileptic fits in *The Idiot*; both men's convulsions represent the level of suffering ingenuous men must endure in a forgetful world. In the military hospital, feeling utterly abandoned by his family and his country, Willie seeks the sympathy of a kind nurse:

> 'Will – you – will you – hold me?' he said with a gasp, and many a stupid-sounding splutter. He was no better than an idiot like that, well he knew it. He would have no world at all like that, for ever more . . . Then the tender miracle happened. He would have to call himself the Miraculous Dunne after that, like old Quigley himself, God rest him. Oh, God rest him, and God rest them all. His own body was suddenly strangely at rest, and deliciously. (*ALLW* 276-77)

Willie resigns himself to a life as an "idiot" who will no longer have "a world at all like that"; his tremors make a romantic relationship with a woman forever impossible. He instead experiences a deep compassion for the little nurse—a Christian love much like Myshkin feels for Natasya—and "the tender miracle" happens. The nurse's gesture of mercy envelops Willie in an extraordinary peace, and "the Miraculous Dunne" experiences an instantaneous recovery. His mind turns instantly to the suffering of others: he selflessly wishes for the eternal peace of his fallen friends, and in a moment of prescience, wonders if it is the kind nurse's deep sadness that cures him. This beautiful revelation, which is brought about by his acceptance of chaste love over romantic love, marks Willie's transcendence out of the world of suffering and begins his progression from a "positively good man" to an angelic figure.

Willie's revelatory experience in the hospital brings him to "start thinking in a different light" thoughts that "had nothing to do with kings and countries, rebels or soldiers." His loyalty to the "old faith" has died out, save for an "ember maybe only remaining, for his father's sake." Willie now believes "that Death himself had made all of those things ridiculous . . . You couldn't blame King George, God knew. You couldn't even hardly blame the fucking Kaiser. Not any more. Death now had a hold on the whole matter" (*ALLW* 279). Willie's revelation seems only to conform to Barry's own project, not to a greater awareness that he has been an ignorant player in a fatal game played not by history or fate or God or Death, but by men. Death here is the great actor, and even the leaders of nations—King George and "the fucking Kaiser," men who most certainly are due a fair share of blame for the disastrous war and for the narratives that came out of it—have no control over such an immeasurable force. Such sanitization of reality also contradicts the political stance that the narrative immediately adopts upon Willie's return to the front.

Willie returns to his regiment with a sense of relief and happiness, at least "to the extent that a man with the soul filleted out of him could be happy," because his fellow soldiers are now the only men who will understand him. Willie recognizes that the "thoughts and deeds of '14" were "all dried up" and "gone the way of all old, finished things." The Rising of 1916 drastically altered the tide of public opinion in Ireland, and Willie now feels rightly betrayed by his countrymen and by an army that "derides you for your own slaughter" (*ALLW* 281). Barry draws attention to the contempt for Irish soldiers at home and the distrust of the Irish that was only growing within the British

Army after the Rising, but these factors do not account for the conclusion that "the fact that the war didn't make a jot of sense any more hardly came into it" (*ALLW* 282). Responsibility is assigned to both the republicans and to the British Empire, but those young men who choose to fight—whether they be Catholic loyalists like Willie, members of the Protestant ascendancy, staunch unionist Ulstermen, impoverished men who joined out of economic necessity with more class allegiance than political, or Home Rulers answering Redmond's call, and however misled they were by their fathers, their politicians, and their country—are massed together as dispossessed victims of Barry's simplistic political narrative.

Willie and Dostoevsky's Myshkin are both reduced to the status of foreigners in their own countries. Myshkin is the son of a crumbling family of landowning gentry who returns to Russia from a sanatorium in Switzerland with no money, no home, no family, and no comprehension of how to navigate the treacherous social world of St. Petersburg. Myshkin tells Rogozhin, whom he meets on the train on his return home, "'There are no Prince Myshkins at all now except me; it seems I'm the last one.'"[32] Inevitably there is no longer a place for him in Russia either, and the novel ends with his lapse into insanity and return to the Swiss sanatorium. Like Myshkin, Willie's world at home is falling apart; he is the son of a dying class of loyalist Irish stewards of the Empire. During his final leave in Dublin, he has a falling out with his father, discovers that Gretta has married another man and had a child, and in a final insult, is spit on by children in the street who mistake him for an Englishman, call him a "fucking Tommie," and tell him to

[32] Dostoevsky, p. 9.

go home. The Rising reverses the tide of popular support for the war at home and provokes mistrust among English and Northern Irish soldiers on the front. Willie no longer feels any of the old allegiances. Like many soldiers with years of horrific war behind them and facing a bleak future that has already forsaken him, he contemplates the dissolution of his past reality:

> He knew he had no country now. He knew it well. Finally the words of Jesse Kirwan had penetrated deep into the sap of his brain and he understood them. All sorts of Irelands were no more, and he didn't know what Ireland there was behind him now. But he feared that he was not a citizen, they would not let him be a citizen … How could a fella go out and fight for his country when his country would dissolve behind him in the rain? How could a fella love his uniform when that same uniform killed the new heroes, as Jesse Kirwan said? How could a fella like Willie hold England and Ireland equally in his heart, like his father before him, like his father's father, and his father's father's father, when both now would call him a traitor, though his heart was clear and pure, as pure as a heart can be after three years of slaughter? What would his sisters do for succour and admiration in their own country, when their own country had gone? They were like these Belgian citizens toiling along the roads with their chattels and tables and pots, except they were entirely unlike them, because, destitute though these people were, and homeless, at least they were wandering and lost in their own land. (*ALLW* 286-7)

This poignant and nuanced glimpse into the mind of a veteran soldier confronted with the possibility that his only country now is a ravaged land of trenches, mud, and death is compromised by Barry's insistence on Willie's untarnished innocence. He maintains a purity of mind and body lost on a poisoned society. The greatest miracle of all is that Willie's heart remains "clear and pure" despite his willful ignorance of his father's responsibility in the deaths of striking workers, the men he has killed in battle, his participation in the assault on the rebels in Dublin, his visit to a prostitute and subsequent decision to not tell Gretta, and despite his hesitance to show compassion and stand witness for Jesse Kirwan. Not only do these declarations of Willie's passive goodness ignore reality, but they also stubbornly form a two-dimensional character out of a potentially interesting subject. The final unfounded comparison between Willie's sisters and the war ravaged people of Belgium adds an element of absurdity to what has the promise to be a revelatory moment for Willie and the reader alike.

Willie's death, ordained in a novel that demands a martyr, conforms nicely to Barry's pattern. Willie's determination that "the wrong men were up and the wrong went down" contains hints of Thomas's mocking quotation of Larkin's words to his son at the end of *The Steward*: "The great appear great because we are on our knees. Let us rise."[33] The final moments of the novel contain echoes of Thomas's closing monologue in *The Steward*, in which he tells Willie's ghost a story from his own childhood about a beloved sheepdog that attacked one of his domineering father's sheep. Though the young Thomas is fearful of his father's anger, the God-given "mercy of fathers" overshadows the desire

[33] Barry, *A Long, Long Way*, p. 286; *The Steward*, p. 299.

for retribution, and the transgressions of the son and of the dog are forgiven. Images of dogs and sheep and the theme of forgiveness also precede Willie's death, which occurs on a strangely quiet and possibly "holy" night in the trenches, when the officers' tent looks like a "shepherd's hut" and Willie can hear the German soldiers singing Silent Night. Willie marvels at the beauty of the song:

> There was something of the end of the world, or rather, he meant, the end of the war in the song. The end of the world. The end of many worlds. Silent night, holy night. And indeed the shepherds were in their hut and their flocks were scattered round about in these lovely woods. The sheep lay down in the darkness fearful of the wolves. But were there any wolves in the upshot? Or just sheep against sheep? … Could they not all be holy? (*ALLW* 289)

The apocalyptic tone of Willie's musings echoes *Isaiah 11:6*, which reads: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb." This image of peace and reconciliation implies also the rest of Isaiah's prophecy concerning the Lord's judgment, when he will smite the wicked, reward the faithful, "recover the remnant of his people," and "assemble the outcasts of Israel."[34] The strange moment of quiet Willie experiences is ripped from historical time and situated firmly within eschatological time, a time in which the righteous shall be restored to their proper place. The prophecy of the return and final judgment of the heavenly father in *Isaiah* and the dawn of a peaceful age on earth mirrors the "mercy of fathers" demonstrated in *The Steward*, just as in his final moments Willie decides that all will be forgiven in death. Willie lifts up his voice in the still night to join the German

[34] *Isaiah 11:11-12, Holy Bible*, King James Version, Cambridge Edition.

chorus—a voice that sings "like an angel might sing if an angel were ever so foolish as to sing for mortal men"—and a single shot easily picks him off (*ALLW* 133). Not surprisingly, Willie dies for his peaceful gesture.

Four angels hover over Willie as he dies—Jesse Kirwan, Father Buckley, the first German he killed, and Captain Pasley. In a final nod to Dostoevsky's spiritual experiment, Willie does not know if they are "old Russian icons" or if they are "angels of God, of earth, or just extremity" (*ALLW* 290). The visitation of angels solidifies Willie's saint-like status, and the vision of Jesse, a poor nationalist Catholic, Father Buckley, a devout Redmondite, Willie's German, a supposed enemy, and Captain Pasley, a member of the Protestant ascendancy, suggests an idealistic union of disparate people in the afterlife. Though in his death Willie becomes a martyr, he is a forgotten one, buried "under that heaving swell of history." Initial drafts of the novel close with a lengthy and tedious elegy to Willie and a lament for all the Irishmen who fought in the war and were tossed aside by their countrymen. The following excised passage from the first manuscript of the novel guides the reader's interpretation of Willie's death:

> William Dunne, at close of day, though disastrous in his demise and chaotic in his heart, like a ruined town, was well-beloved. No human soul is a Jerusalem, new or otherwise, the four gates are sundered, the towers lie along the ground. The promised angels are shadows and dust. A person may be sent out very far, a long long way, right to the edge of the pit – but the fact that our secret heart calls him back, both for his sake and our own, may be his salvation." (Box 14.2, p. 337).

Willie's sacrifice, much like Myshkin's, no longer has meaning in a senseless modern

world that consumes people for its own benefit. But it is possible, Barry seems to suggest, that we can build a Jerusalem in our collective memory out of the confusion of human experience. He tells us that we must listen to "our secret heart," which is desirous of such a model human being as Willie. Instead of pointing to Willie's significance as a representative of those who have been omitted from the Irish narrative, this recovery of Willie from "the edge of the pit" points only to some secret need we have to create an idealized, mythic past out of historical reality. The conclusion that the world needs more saints to worship hardly addresses the urgency and complexity of a desperately needed project of historical reclamation.

As a literary reexamination of Ireland's participation in the Great War, *A Long, Long Way* occupies a place alongside Jennifer Johnston's *How Many Miles to Babylon* and Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. Barry's novel, however, does not live up to the challenges Johnston and McGuinness's texts present to the continuing ideological struggles over the stories the Irish choose to remember, the narratives they choose to forget, and those histories that are greatly altered to accommodate political rhetoric. While Barry offers, through the story of Willie Dunne, a fresh and much-needed perspective from which to view the complexities of an individual Irishman's involvement in the War, and while stories like Willie's deserve remembrance, Barry's careful preservation of Willie's innocence does little else than add another saint to Ireland's already considerable collection. Johnston and McGuinness require their audiences to examine unpleasant and complicated national events and accept responsibility for their role in perpetuating the simplistic historical narratives that keep

Ireland shackled to a monolithic past. But history in Barry's novel is both monolithic and insistent; it demands the blood of innocent men like Willie and buries them among its ruins.

While in the final version of the novel, Barry depicts Willie's transcendent suffering and death in a series of lyrical, deeply moving scenes, the creation of a Christ-like figure too good to live in a world of nationalist rhetoric, unionist entrenchment, and senseless death on all sides provides neither a fresh nor challenging perspective on Irish involvement in the Great War. Thousands of Irishmen—unionist and nationalist, those men who died in battle and those who lived to see their story remade into the stuff of both treachery and myth—suffered immensely from the war and its aftermath. But such suffering need not so neatly fit into either the political or spiritual sacrificial imperative that has long troubled the Irish cultural imagination. The lifelong psychological torture Pyper endures in *Observe the Sons* and the selfless sacrifice of Alec in *How Many Miles to Babylon* do not prevent McGuinness and Johnston from demanding that both their protagonists and their audiences acknowledge personal and collective culpability for the reinvention and reconstitution of history according to present needs. Barry rejects this imperative with his claims that the great storm of history is not a part of his project, and we therefore cannot "go looking for the pertinences and the changing lights" of his work, nor can we ask that the texts "explain themselves, or be orderly, intelligent or truthful."[35] A close examination of Barry's revisions to *A Long, Long Way*, however, illustrates his awareness of the political and historical implications of his text and exposes his

[35] Barry, Preface to *Plays: 1*, p. xv.

conscious whitewashing of his characters. The end result is a text that, despite Barry's claims to the contrary, works to exculpate his characters from historical responsibility. He has taken interesting and complicated narratives that pose demanding questions to his readers and, as his revisions show, drastically simplified them. If Willie Dunne were presented as a complex figure—a man neither all good nor all bad—it would become less easy to justify violence in the name of one-sided political positions and aggrandized histories. Instead of presenting the readers of *A Long, Long Way* with a main character whose entangled and questionable loyalties, fraught revelations, and fundamentally flawed humanity challenge the reader to reexamine the shape and meaning of their own stories, Barry gives us an idiot/saint, whose undeserved suffering and heartbreaking death point only to the existence of evil in the world.

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