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TROUBLING WOMEN:  
FEMALE TEXTS AND VOICES OF THE NORTHERN IRISH CONFLICT, 1969-1998

by

KELLY TWILLEY

(Under the Direction of Howard Keeley)

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the bloody conflict in Northern Ireland between the Irish nationalist community, those desiring a united Ireland, and the Ulster loyalist community, those longing to remain a part of the UK, known as the Troubles (1969-1998). More specifically, this thesis centers on the strong and courageous women who played undeniably significant roles throughout the conflict. Some women campaigned for better and equal rights for women, some protested for political justice, some picked up guns to fight, and still others advocated for peace. Using the real women of history as a guide, it will create a lens through which to study these women as they are represented in literature, art, and film.

INDEX WORDS: Northern Ireland, the Troubles, Feminist criticism, Women, Gender studies

TROUBLING WOMEN:  
FEMALE TEXTS AND VOICES OF THE NORTHERN IRISH CONFLICT, 1969-1998

by

KELLY TWILLEY

B.A., Columbus State University, 2006

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

STATESBORO, GA

2009

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TROUBLING WOMEN:  
FEMALE TEXTS AND VOICES OF THE NORTHERN IRISH CONFLICT, 1969-1998

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KELLY TWILLEY

Major Professor: Howard Keeley  
Committee: Joe Pellegrino  
Steve Engel

Electronic Version Approved:  
May 2009

## DEDICATION

Firstly, I would like to dedicate this thesis to Tim, Julie, and Kim. Without my family's love and support for so many years, I would not have achieved my goals. I sincerely hope that every time my family looks upon this work, they will be proud. I also want to dedicate this thesis to Brandon, the brother I never had, and all the times he made me laugh and encouraged me. And finally, I want to dedicate this thesis to Steven, the one who appeared right when I needed him and always stands beside me. I love you all.

## ACKNOWLEDEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Pellegrino and Dr. Engel, and my thesis advisor, Dr. Keeley, for guiding me through this long, tedious, but rewarding process. Without you, I would still be on the introduction. I would also like to thank all the Irish women who took the time to share their Troubles experiences with me. Without their opinions and experiences, I would not know what it means to be woman in Ireland. They also made me aware that no two women had the same experience. I hope that my thesis will give credit to these brave and courageous women, and not simply give credit, but give these women a *voice* in a time of political violence.

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## Introduction

Before beginning this project, I was inspired by the words of Tom Kelly, one of the three Bogside Artists. Since 1993, Kelly, his brother William, and their peer Kevin Hasson have created a suite of large public murals in the predominantly nationalist and Catholic Bogside district of Derry (also known as Londonderry), the second-largest city in Northern Ireland. The murals depict key events and personages of the Northern Irish Troubles. In fall 2006, Tom Kelly shared with a large and very attentive audience at Georgia Southern University an account of decades of systemic anti-nationalist and anti-Catholic discrimination in Northern Ireland in general and Derry in particular. Psychological and physical scarring caused by that discrimination inspired the Bogside Artists to use art in a programmatic attempt to bring together and even heal divided communities.

Taking the Bogside Artists' creed that the unexamined wound can only fester, this thesis offers female perspectives on the Troubles: the most common term for the bloody conflict that persisted in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1998.<sup>1</sup> The primary antagonists were Irish nationalists, who desired a united Ireland, and Ulster loyalists, who sought to keep Northern Ireland part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the UK). In the pages that follow, I record and analyze words written and spoken by—and about—strong and courageous women who played undeniably significant roles related to the Troubles. Some women campaigned for better and equal

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<sup>1</sup> Dating the Troubles remains controversial. Some identify 1966 as the first year, citing the formation then of the loyalist Ulster Volunteer Force (which shares a name with a prior organization). I deem the so-called Battle of the Bogside, 12-14 August 1969, the key founding event, for it marked a serious escalation in sectarian violence. I also hold that 1998 signals the end of the Troubles: in April that year the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement was signed.

rights for women; some protested for political justice; some picked up guns to fight; and still others advocated for peace. My use of real women's narratives constitutes a relevant and compelling lens through which to study depictions of Northern Irish women in the art, movies, and (most especially) literature of the Troubles. Reflecting literary production between 1969 and 1999, eight hundred novels now belong to the category of "Troubles fiction" (Magee 114).

To begin my research, I traveled to Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland (and the historical province of Ulster), for a four-week visit during June and July 2008. While there, I used the Linen Hall Library's exclusive Northern Irish Political Collection to study historical accounts of the conflict, view posters and newspapers, and read relevant interviews. While my primary focus was adult women alive during the Troubles, I did not limit myself to specific ages or just one gender. Most special and irreplaceable about my experience in Belfast was face-to-face interviews with a variety of women of the Troubles. In the case of every woman interviewed, I made sure that she understood our conversation to be research for my master's thesis. I also asked the interviewees' permission to include their words and experiences in my work. Each woman graciously gave her consent. As their stories are not available in standard history books, I always expressed great appreciation for the women's time and input. Out of concern to protect the privacy and security of the interviewees, this thesis uses fictitious names, not their real names.

First, I spoke with Shelia Mahon, a forty-year-old Catholic who spent her entire life in the Catholic Falls neighborhood and witnessed much of the violence. I also discussed women's involvement in the political sphere with Coleen Douglass, a woman

who marched during Bloody Sunday in Derry, a peaceful civil rights protest on January 30, 1972. The march turned tragically violent when the British Parachute Regiment opened fire on the crowd, causing fourteen deaths. Emer Collins was also integral to the interview process, for she shared with me her experiences of the Troubles while working as a medical researcher at the Royal Victoria Hospital, located in the heart of the Falls. Finally, concerning my focus on women and their involvement as combatants, I spoke with Maureen O'Hare and Aileen Maguire, two former IRA volunteers.

Aileen Maguire claims, "Women within any struggle are always the least recognized. I don't think women are given their true place. History still does not reflect it. It's not the boys and girls of the old brigade. It's the songs and the history and everything that will reflect that men were the most in the struggle when it's not at all true" (Personal interview 4 July 2008). The most valuable aspect of this thesis is to give credit, and a voice, to these admirable women and all the different roles they played during the Troubles. Although women are not recognized to the full extent they deserve, it is interesting that women wrote, in the first eight years of the Troubles, twenty-five percent of Troubles fiction; and, by 1992, they were at thirty-nine percent. Patrick Magee, author of *Gangsters or Guerrillas? Representations of Irish Republicans in "Troubles Fiction"* (2001), claims, "the input of many women writers invigorated the genre, setting a new standard of sensibility in the writing" (114). In other words, women brought a fresh perspective to experiences of the Troubles.

Irish poet Eavan Boland focuses on multiple issues surrounding the female in Ireland. In particular, she addresses how the trope of "Ireland as Woman" is detrimental to the "real" women of today. From at least the seventh century, the notion of Ireland as

woman has been an identifiable tradition. Originally delivered orally, the nationalization of woman developed into a distinctive genre, the *aisling* (Gaelic for “vision”). Perhaps the most famous *aislings* emerged in response to the end of the Gaelic Order, generally dated to the Flight of the Earls in 1607. Broadly speaking, the *aisling* depicts Ireland as one of three different kinds of woman: the aged hag; the young Queen; or the sky-woman. The most familiar of these figures are Cathleen ní Houlihan and Róisín Dubh. Cathleen ní Houlihan became renowned as a nationalist symbol when the Jacobite poets of the eighteenth century began using her in their poetry.<sup>2</sup> Liam Dall Ó hIfearnáin was the first to coin the name as a nationalist representation in his poem, “Caitlín Ní Uallacháin.” Ó hIfearnáin “identifies her with the sovereignty of Ireland and with the blessed virgin, and this cluster of associations was carried over into Anglo-Irish literature and reinforced by similar invocations of Ireland under a female aspect” (Welsh 89). In essence, since the days of Ó hIfearnáin, Cathleen ní Houlihan has been regarded as the premier female nationalist symbol.

Within this tradition, Irish male poets have for centuries used symbolic women to inspire physical-force nationalism. Boland’s autobiographical work *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (1995), develops an arresting thesis concerning woman in Ireland. Boland focuses on how, because it is male-dominated, women authors have had a difficult time breaking into the Irish literary canon. She reflects, “I could not as a woman accept the nation formulated for me by Irish poetry and its tradition” (128). To Boland, the frequently eroticized Cathleen ní Houlihan and Róisín Dubh figures constantly limit real women’s presence on the Irish scene: “The

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<sup>2</sup> Jacobitism was a political movement dedicated to the restoration of the Stuart Kings to the thrones of England, Scotland, and Ireland. The movement took its name from the Latin form of “Jacobus,” the name of the names King James II and VII.

women in their [Irishmen's] poems were often passive, decorative, raised to emblematic status. This was especially true where the woman and the idea of the nation were mixed: where the nation became a woman and the woman took on a national posture" (135).

Boland develops her critique by drawing a distinction between poems that interrogate the variety and complexity of life and poems that merely advance polemics: "[I]nstead of poems about experience, I [get] poems that are experiences" (131). In other words, Boland argues that Ireland needs a new poetics to give women a real voice: to present and convey women's issues in the form of abiding lyrics. She believes that there is beauty in the "female ordinary"—that meaning abides within the woman's domestic space. She also advocates using woman-centered poetry to discuss such female issues as eating disorders, domestic violence, and hysterectomies. Boland challenges the women of modern-day Ireland to put the ideal of Ireland as woman away because not only has it ignored Irish women, it has also stolen their voices. Although Boland's challenge appears favorable initially, she did not live in the day-to-day war that Northern Irish women faced, nor does she share their heightened sense of nationalism.

In order to understand the modern-day Troubles in Northern Ireland, and women's experiences during it, one must first travel through history. Some trace England's control of Ireland to the Cambro-Norse (or Anglo-Norman or Old English) invasion in 1167. Dermot MacMorrough, King of Leinster, invited Henry II's comrade Richard de Clare, known as Strongbow, to land with a large army. Strongbow and his forces conquered much of the East of the island. Most accounts of this invasion highlight, in negative terms, two Irish women: MacMorrough's lover Devorgilla and his

daughter Aoife (or Eva). Both occupy the popular imagination as betrayers of Ireland. Their memory haunts much Irish literature, including modern and contemporary texts.<sup>3</sup>

In “Nestor” the second episode of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), Deasy, a misogynistic Ulster Protestant, recounts some Biblical, Classical Greek, and medieval Irish history:

A woman brought sin into the world. For a woman who was no better than she should be, Helen, the runaway wife of Menelaus, ten years the Greeks made war on Troy. A faithless wife first brought the strangers to our shore here. MacMurrough’s wife and her leman [lover], O’Rourke, prince of Breffni. A woman [Kitty O’Shea] too brought Parnell low. (29)

In this passage, “MacMurrough’s wife” is Devorgilla who abandoned her husband, Tiernan O’Rourke of Breffni, for Dermot MacMurrough. One account holds that MacMorrough sought Strongbow’s aid once O’Rourke attacked him to avenge his and Devorgilla’s adultery. Later, to consolidate his family’s power, MacMorrough offered Aoife in marriage to the victorious Strongbow.

Aoife features as a character in Mary Halpin’s *Shady Ladies*, an unpublished play that debuted at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin in 1988. As a ghost, Aoife appears to the character Niamh, a woman who suffered a nervous breakdown while performing the lead in Lady Gregory and W.B Yeats’s 1902 play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Aoife accuses her father of “[selling]” her to Strongbow, and deems him “the man who defeminized Ireland” (qtd. in Quinn 189). She claims that his lack of concern for women’s rights was far worse than the effects of the Cambro-Norse invasion on Ireland. This tension

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<sup>3</sup> Lady Gregory authored a play titled *Devorgilla* (1907).

between women's rights and military exigencies is, of course, very germane to the discussion of the Northern Ireland Troubles.

Led in part by two major female figures, Queens Mary I and Elizabeth I, the Tudor Re-conquest of Ireland marks a significant change in England's treatment of its western neighbor. Both half-sisters remain influential female archetypes in the Irish psyche. Mary, daughter of Henry VIII and the devout Catholic Catherine of Aragon, implemented a plantation system in the midland counties now known as Laois and Offaly. Under the scheme, land appropriated from the Irish was granted to Catholic British colonists. Mary's ruthlessness when attempting to rid England of Protestantism earned her the moniker "Bloody Mary." Once Elizabeth ascended the throne, she decided to make Protestant English dominance over Ireland a top priority.

Elizabeth is especially associated with the large-scale plantation of Munster, the southernmost of Ireland's four provinces. This plantation was implemented after the Desmond Rebellion, a native Irish and Cambro-Norse revolt against English control. Munster gained aid from Ulster's major Gaelic families, the O'Neills and the O'Donnells.

Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, spearheaded the portion of the conflict known as the Nine Years' War (1594-1603), which became identified as "Elizabeth's war." William Shakespeare comments on the Earl of Essex, leader of the Elizabethan forces, in the Prologue to Act V of *Henry V* (1599):

As, by a lower but loving likelihood,  
Were now the general [Essex] of our gracious empress,  
As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,  
Bringing rebellion broached on his sword. (lines 29-32)



Despite O'Neill's efforts, he was defeated, and he eventually quit Ireland.

One of Ireland's most popular nationalist ballads "Follow Me Up to Carlow" (1580) illustrates how fully the Irish associate Elizabeth with violence. This ballad celebrates the defeat of the British army at the Battle of Glenmalur, Co. Wicklow, during the second Desmond Rebellion:

From Tassagart to Clonmore, there flows a stream of Saxon gore  
 Och, great is Rory Óg O'More, sending the loons to Hades.  
 White is sick and Lane is fled, now for black FitzWilliam's head  
 We'll send it over, dripping red, to Queen Liza and the ladies. (lines 13-16)

The fact that the Irish would send a bloody severed head to a woman may seem unnatural initially, but it parallels the militant women of the modern-day Troubles. Like Elizabeth, there was no fear of violence among the female combatants of the Troubles because they believed they needed to do whatever necessary to achieve their goals. We will discuss this dedication and the relationship between women and violence in Chapters I and II.

The plantation contributing most directly to the Troubles is the Ulster Plantation, initiated in the early 1600s. All the estates of the O'Neills of Tyrone, the O'Donnells of Tyrconnell and their chief supporters were confiscated. These lands were then handed over to Protestant English and Scottish settlers, and dissent among the Catholics grew.

In direct response to the Ulster Plantation, Catholic rebels rose up out of sheer frustration over their marginal status: an event known as the 1641 Rebellion. Although the rebellion was sparked out of frustration, Catholics were ruthless in their war tactics, attacking victims who were easy targets, such as women and children. Modern research

calculates the actual number of deaths to be 12,000 out of a total Protestant population in Ulster at the time of 40,000 (Marshal 58). However, many Protestants, even today, claim this rebellion is a key factor for anti-Catholic prejudice on the part of the Irish Protestant community. During the rebellion, many Protestant women felt threatened because the Catholic rebels invaded and destroyed the home, the woman's domestic space.

After the 1641 Rebellion, England intensified its efforts to stamp out all Irish rebellion with the rise of Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell sought to crush any native Irish opposition. He implemented the Adventurer's Act, a piece of legislation that allowed those, including Irish Protestants, who helped defeat the Irish to claim a share of the confiscated lands. Massacres occurred, committed by both Catholic and Protestants alike, but Cromwell subdued most Catholics by 1653, killing hundreds. Tim Pat Coogan argues, "The massacres by Catholics of Protestants, which occurred in the religious wars of the 1640s, were magnified for propagandist purposes to justify Cromwell's subsequent genocide" (6).

However, despite this brutal treatment of Catholics during the Cromwellian Period, Charles II, with the reestablishment of the monarchy in England, bestowed mercy upon them. The Exclusion Bill, a bill designed to prevent Charles's brother and heir from taking the throne because he was Catholic, was strongly opposed by Charles. One could argue that Charles's opposition to this bill suggests his sympathy and protection for Catholics.

Despite Charles II's leniency toward Catholics, discrimination soon resurfaced. When James II, the new Catholic King, ascended the English throne in 1685, Irish Protestants were afraid of retribution for Cromwellian excesses. Therefore, they

challenged William of Orange, husband of James's Protestant daughter Mary, to make a bid for the throne. The question of how the crown should function continues to the present-day Troubles. During the Troubles, the loyalists claimed they were not loyal to the British Parliament, but rather to the British crown. It is interesting that Elizabeth II, a strong female, was the Queen of Great Britain and Northern Ireland throughout the Troubles. The question of how much she should get involved in the conflict was heavily debated.

To this day, the Battle of the Boyne (1690), where William of Orange defeated James II, is commemorated in Northern Ireland through the Orange Parades on July 12. Dominated by the Orange Order, this "marching season" remains controversial and causes protests and riots on the part of the nationalist Catholic community. Along with the Orange Order, there is a group called the Apprentice Boys of Derry. Each August 12, this group aims to memorialize the Siege of Derry (1688-1689), when the force loyal to Catholic James II laid siege to the walled city that harbored the local Protestant population. However, the Orange Order and the Apprentice Boys are exclusively masculine orders. Their "masculinized unionism" leaves little space for the female, yet they revere Queen Elizabeth II.

After becoming monarch, William of Orange intensified Penal Laws that limited Catholics' right with respect to ownership of property, education, and the bearing of arms. These laws also limited Catholics' involvement in politics. Coogan comments, "The penal laws bore severely on English Catholics also, but the difference between the Irish and the English Catholics was that in Ireland the laws were used as a means of

subjugating a race as much as a religion” (7). England allowed only the Protestant upper and middle classes the opportunity to serve in Parliament.

With the culmination of years of discrimination, the United Irishmen, led by Protestant Wolfe Tone, launched an uprising in 1798, known as the United Irishmen’s Rebellion. The rebellion was stamped out, and directly led to an Act of Union between Britain and Ireland in 1801. However, in the early nineteenth century, Daniel O’Connell advocated for the Catholic community by establishing the Catholic Association, which led to Catholic Emancipation in 1829. Despite the slightly improved conditions for the Catholic community, in 1831, the Stanley Education Act was implemented, commanding all Catholics to attend National Schools. Catholic children could no longer be taught their studies in Gaelic or study Irish culture or heritage. Soon after this Act, the Great Famine (1845-1849), a disaster brought upon by the potato blight, claimed hundreds of Irish lives and left Ireland devastated.

The 1870s saw the rise to political power of the Anglo-Irish landlord, Charles Stuart Parnell. A native of Co. Wicklow, Parnell campaigned for several causes, among which were land reform and Home Rule. Home Rule demanded an independent Irish Parliament based in Dublin. Over the years, three Home Rule Bills were presented to the British Parliament. However, after Parnell’s affair with Kitty O’Shea, wife of Captain O’Shea, he lost popularity in the eyes of moralists. The mixture of Parnell’s affair and other factors contributed to the rejection of the first two Home Rule bills.

Despite this double rebuff, Ulster unionists knew that Home Rule was inevitable. In 1912, out of a sense of being betrayed by Britain, they decided to inaugurate a paramilitary approach to maintain Northern Ireland’s status within the United Kingdom.

They established the Ulster Volunteer Force and other vigilante units. On September 28, 1912, unionists joined together for Ulster Day, during which they signed their names to the Ulster Covenant, a statement of opposition to Home Rule. The British author and imperialist Rudyard Kipling expressed their anxiety in his lyric “Ulster 1912.” In part, it declares,

We know the war prepared  
 On ever peaceful home  
 . . .  
 What answer from the North?  
 One Law, One Land, One Throne!  
 If England drives us forth  
 We shall not fall alone (lines 25-26, 37-40)

Kipling appeals to the heightened emotions of these fearful Ulster unionists by suggesting Home Rule will threaten the domestic space. He also makes clear that these Ulster unionists feel betrayed by the British Parliament, which is why they pledged their allegiance solely to the crown, and not to Parliament: “One Law, One Land, One Throne.”

The fin-de-siècle and the early twentieth century saw renewed interest in reviving Gaelic cultural awareness. This came in the forms of the Gaelic Athletic Association, an organization dedicated to reintroducing Irish sports like hurling, and the Gaelic League, a body devoted to reigniting passion for the Irish language. In addition, there sprang up arts entities—such as the Abbey Theater (1904)—devoted to reviving Irish culture

through drama, literature, painting, and handcrafts. Throughout the Irish Cultural Revival, women played major roles.

Lady Gregory was a key force in establishing the Abbey Theatre; and Maud Gonne performed the title role in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902). In 1905, appeared Sinn Féin, meaning “ourselves alone,” the main nationalist political organization. It is undeniable that Irish nationalism, accompanied with the strong efforts of women, was beginning to finally take precedence in Ireland.

At the start of World War II, Patrick Pearse, along with a select number of others, agreed that while England was preoccupied with the war it was the most opportune time to strike and stage a rebellion. In 1916, on the Monday after Easter Sunday, Pearse led the Easter Rising, along with two hundred members of Cumann na mBan, an all-female nationalist organization we will discuss in further detail in Chapter I. After some heavy fighting in downtown Dublin, the rebellion was crushed, and the leaders were sentenced to execution. After these men were executed, the Irish felt a greater need to draw toward the nationalist cause, as Pearse had planned.

The Irish Republican Army was the first to fire shots, igniting the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921). The IRA owes much of its success to Michael Collins for his guerilla campaign strategy, leading, at least in part, to nationalist victory. At the end of the war, the solution came in the form of partition of Ireland in the Government of Ireland Act (1920). This Act split Ireland into twenty-six counties comprising the Irish Free State, later known as the Republic of Ireland, and the six county region that sets the stage for the Troubles: Northern Ireland.

While partition did offer a solution, this led to a split among the nationalists and led to four more years of civil war. Meanwhile, Northern Irish Catholics continued to experience discrimination by England, more specifically Irish Protestants, referred to as loyalists or unionists. Thomas Hennessey comments, “The birth of Northern Ireland was a bloody one, accompanied as it was by widespread communal violence” (11). In other words, there was violence and unrest from the very formation of Northern Ireland.

In 1963, Viscount Brookeborough stepped down after twenty years in office as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. This event offered Catholics a sense of hope, for under Brookeborough, unionist domination had persisted through various avenues. For example, gerrymandering was unavoidable, the process of drawing governmental lines through neighborhoods to affect the outcome of elections in favor of the Protestant candidates. Not only were elections rigged in this manner, but also voting itself was restricted to those holding or renting properties, which limited large Catholic families. Catholics were also discriminated against on a day-to-day basis through public harassment by Protestants and police. It is understatement to claim that after centuries of discrimination Irish Catholics were ready for reform.

Terence O’Neill succeeded Brookeborough as Prime Minister and sought to improve the economy in Northern Ireland, but he realized that he first needed to address the social and political issues dominating Northern Ireland. Hennessey claims, “O’Neill believed that the economic benefits of the Union could be used to integrate Catholics into the Northern Ireland state” (121). However, the Catholic community, frustrated at a lack of improved conditions, formed along with sympathetic Protestants, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) in 1967. NICRA did not challenge partition, but

solely aimed to improve human rights. NICRA was inspired by the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, led by Martin Luther King Jr., in the United States. As we will discuss in more detail in Chapter III, women had a great involvement in NICRA. However, these peaceful NICRA protests soon began to provoke violent responses. For example, in August 1969, the “Battle of the Bogside” occurred between the Bogside residents, a Catholic community in Derry, and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), the police force. The RUC attempted to disperse the nationalists protesting outside of the nationalist area. The protestors refused, and when the British Army was sent in to remove the protestors, it ignited in violence (See Figure I.A, page 22).

The situation grew worse still with Britain’s introduction of internment in 1972, a government plan to imprison men without trial in order to extract information from them concerning paramilitary groups. While interned, these men were burned, starved, abused, and mistreated in many ways that left them emotionally scarred (Mahon). For the first time, women were left alone in the home to be the sole provider for the family. And although they felt it was an injustice concerning Britain’s mistreatment of their husbands, many of those women embraced their new freedom.

In response to internment, ten thousand men and women joined together in protest on January 30, 1972. What began as a peaceful NICRA protest against internment ended in bloodshed as the British Parachute Regiment opened fire on the group of protestors, killing fourteen, causing nationalists to label the day forever as Bloody Sunday (See Figure I.B, page 22). The army denied responsibility, claiming that its men shot only because they had been fired upon. Coogan writes, “After Bloody Sunday, Nationalist



Ireland was in such a state of outrage” (170).<sup>4</sup> Bloody Sunday was just what the Provisional IRA, an extremely militant nationalist organization, needed to launch its bombing campaign. The PIRA claimed that it would not allow everyday life to continue as normal until British authority was eliminated from Northern Ireland.

Six months after Bloody Sunday, the IRA detonated twenty-two bombs in the space of seventy-five minutes in Belfast, claiming eleven lives, an event to become known as Bloody Friday. When asked how it could kill innocent civilians, the IRA responded by apologizing for those deaths, but claimed that “this is war.” Following Bloody Friday, the British Army implemented “Operation Motorman,” an operation to invade “no-go” IRA areas searching for bombs and weaponry, essentially destroying the areas.

The years of the Troubles continued to grow bloodier and bloodier with both sides of the conflict issuing no mercy. Not only was the IRA violent, but also the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Ulster Freedom Fighters, and other loyalist paramilitary organizations. Hennessey writes, “Loyalist anger and frustration with the apparent refusal of Catholics to pledge allegiance to the Northern Ireland state, coupled with the increasing Provisional IRA bombing campaign, provided the impetus for loyalist

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<sup>4</sup>The Widgery Report, an inquiry set up to look into the events of Bloody Sunday, conducted by Lord Chief Justice Widgery, was produced eleven weeks after the day concluded the following: one, shots had been fired at the soldiers before they started the firing that led to the casualties; two, the soldiers acted as they did because they thought their standing orders justified it; and three, although there was no proof that any of the deceased had been shot while handling a firearm or bomb, there was a strong suspicion that some had been firing weapons or handling bombs in the course of the afternoon. Also, the Saville Inquiry, campaigned by Prime Minister Tony Blair, began in 1998 and is still ongoing today in order to discover the truth about those injured and killed.

paramilitaries to more towards a systematic campaign of sectarian assassination” (204). One particularly cruel gang of murderers was the Shankill Butchers headed by Lenny Murphy. The Shankill Butchers would typically kidnap Catholics at random and brutally murder them with butcher knives and axes. The group was named thus because the Shankill is a Protestant neighborhood that lies parallel to the Catholic Falls neighborhood.

Another milestone of the Troubles is represented through the male and female hunger strikers of the prisons Long Kesh and Armagh. In 1976, the UK government denied those jailed for terrorist offenses Special Category Status. That is, status as political prisoners, forced them to perform prison work, and wear prison uniforms, this ignited several protests among the prisoners. Due to a lack of results in achieving SCS through a series of protests, including a “no work” and “dirty” protest, Bobby Sands led several other men in hunger strike, which ended in the death of ten men. Coogan writes:

It [hunger striking] is a practice which has its roots deep in Irish history and is found also in Hindu tradition. Both the earlier Celts and the Hindus used self-immolation by starvation as a means of discrediting someone who had done them wrong...[they] would achieve satisfaction either through their wrong being rectified or through death sullyng forever the reputation of the wrongdoer.  
(268-69)

In Chapter I, we will discuss in great detail women’s involvement in the protesting of Special Category Status and the issues specific to women prisoners.

As violence progressed during the 1970s, women began to question the tactics behind the name of “freedom.” As Betty Williams watched on in horror, the three children of Anne Maguire were hit by a car and killed when an IRA member was shot by British troops, while attempting to escape after stealing a car. Mairéad Corrigan, Anne Maguire’s sister, claims:

I remember thinking, ‘How can we get even for this kind of violence, for this unprovoked attack? By joining the Provos? I asked myself the question in seriousness. When you live there and you’re subjected to that kind of thing, and when you see the people you love suffer from violence, it’s a question that comes naturally to mind.’ (qtd. in Darraj 37)

That night, after the deaths of Corrigan’s nieces and nephews, Williams went in search of signatures for a petition of peace. Corrigan was touched by the stranger’s compassion, and the two of them founded the Women’s Peace Movement in 1976.

It became evident that hundreds of women shared this desire for peace. For example, a young girl living in north Belfast claimed: “Nationalists believe that it should be part of a united Ireland, and loyalists believe that it should be part of Britain. And...they’re not even fightin’ for that no more! They’re fightin’ to show that they have power and control, you know. It’s really stupid, like” (qtd. in Dyer106). By the end of the month, Williams and Corrigan brought 35,000 people onto the streets of Belfast petitioning for peace. In August of 1976, Catholic women marched from the Falls to the Shankill and met Protestant women who embraced each other with tears. They believed that the most efficient way to end the violence was not violence, but re-education. For all

their efforts concerning the peace movement, Williams and Corrigan were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977.

John Hume, a Catholic from Derry, was also very influential to the peace movement. Hume founded the Social Democratic and Labor Party, a nationalist party that disagreed with the violent methods of the IRA and desired civil rights for Catholics and a united Ireland by peaceful, constitutional means. For his dedication to the peace of Northern Ireland, Hume, along with David Trimble, the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1998. He was also the recipient of the Gandhu Peace Prize and the Martin Luther King Award, the only recipient of the three major peace awards.

However, it was not until April 10, 1998 that the Belfast Agreement was finally signed, and Northern Ireland could begin putting the pieces back together after decades of violence and devastation. The Belfast Agreement maintained Northern Ireland as a part of Britain, but granted long-awaited freedoms and justice for the nationalist community. One specific clause demanded equality of social, economic, and cultural rights of all ethnic communities, including recognition of Irish and Ulster Scots languages. Also, women now hold thirty-three percent of political offices within Northern Ireland's political parties, and among Sinn Féin, women hold fifty percent of the positions. Although there is still much to be discussed and there remains tension between the two communities today, Northern Ireland is attempting to become a more peaceful place.

In Chapter I, I examine the unique relationship between women and violence, a relationship dating back to the eighth century. Beginning in the early twentieth century, discussing political groups such as *Inghinidhe na hÉireann* and *Cumann na mBan*, and

continuing on throughout the modern-day Troubles, we begin to understand why women stepped out of the domestic space and into the male space of violence. Using several poems and novels, including Valerie Miner's novel *Blood Sisters* (1972), we discover the representations of these real women of history as they are presented in literature. We will also see two other themes emerge: one is the complex relationship between violence and the female body. During the Troubles, women would inflict violence upon themselves, and sometimes women would inflict violence upon each other. Secondly, there exists a specific division between militant women and feminist advocates. In exploring this issue, we will learn how combatant women responded to these feminists.

Following in Chapter II, I expound on this relationship between women and violence by exploring Jude, the female commander of an IRA guerrilla unit in Neil Jordan's film *The Crying Game* (1992). I also discuss the complicated gender dynamics at play in Jordan's seminal movie. Analyzing key scenes, we discover how both Jude and Fergus, an IRA soldier, reflect the complexity of the discourse around women and violence in the Northern Irish Troubles.

Thirdly, in Chapter III, I explore a phenomenon called the "double revolution." During the Troubles, feminists appeared on the scene spouting their ideals and beliefs concerning the Women's Rights Movement. On the other hand, women, many for the first time, were stepping out of the domestic space and were protesting for political rights. (However, although these women were involved politically, it did not infer they approved of those women who participated in violence.) In essence, all three groups—combatants, feminists, and political protestors—were separate entities. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus solely on the women's rights movement and politically involved

women. Although each group believed there were different methods to achieving women's rights, it could be argued that women's equality was the ultimate goal for each group. In other words, while political protestors believed that achieving Ireland's independence would eventually lead to women's equality, feminists believed that women's rights should be the sole and most vital issue.

Finally, the epilogue will speak to the outcome of Northern Irish women after the signing of the peace agreement. I discuss women's advancement in the political sphere, whether they are or are not addressed in the Good Friday agreement, and how writers emerging as adults from the Troubles have allowed their childhood experiences to affect their literature.



Figure I.A  
"Petrol Bomber" Bogside Mural (1994)



Figure I.B  
"Bloody Sunday" Bogside Mural (1997)  
(Images Courtesy of the Bogside Artists)

These murals, by the Bogside Artists, are two of a suite of twelve on and near Rossville Street in the predominantly Catholic and nationalist Bogside neighborhood of Derry.

## Chapter I

### In Times of Violence: Irish Women, Conflict, and the Body

By discussing the foundation or tradition of women's involvement in politics and violence in Ireland, it will be easier to understand why women became involved as combatants in the modern-day Troubles. It will help to illuminate the dedication these women felt toward liberating their country. Because violence is typically considered the male space, men and women criticized these militant women, claiming they were betraying the domestic, female space. Despite this idea, these women continued from the start of the twentieth century onward to fight for independence through the use of arms.

Also, the combination of violence and the female body is a theme that surfaces when analyzing combatant women. Paradoxically, these women who participate in violence inflict violence upon their own bodies as an act of self-sacrifice, and some women impose violence upon each other. Finally, there will emerge a specific division between militant women and feminist advocates. During the Troubles, a woman had to choose a fight: women's rights or a political position.

The tradition of women and violence finds its roots in eighth-century Ireland with Queen Medb, the strong female protagonist in the Irish epic *The Tain*. *The Tain*, translated by Thomas Kinsella in his 1969 edition of *Tain Bo Cuailnge*, centers on Connacht King Allil and Queen Medb who, as they lie in bed, quarrel about the amount of wealth each possesses individually. Allil and Medb decide to steal the bull, Donn Cuailnge, to prove who is more powerful. Medb then assembles men from all four provinces of Ireland in an effort to retrieve the bull; however, one person stands in their



way: a teenage warrior by the name of Cúchulainn. After many battles, Medb manages to bring the bull back to Cruachan.

It is a gross understatement to say that Medb is strong and independent; she is a warrior to the core. She makes certain that her husband knows that she “was well enough off without [him]” (52). She describes herself in comparison to her sisters when she says, “I outdid them in grace and giving and battle and warlike combat” (52-53). It was Medb who formed the army to go in pursuit of the bull. This in many ways is similar to the function that women served in the IRA during the Troubles. Close to a hundred women were in charge of male units, taught them how to use weaponry and bombs, and commanded them during “operations” (Fairweather).

Medb continues to demonstrate her courage and warrior-like characteristics when she attempts to trick Cúchulainn into meeting her so she can lure him to his death. Cúchulainn decides to meet her because he assumes that she is not dangerous. This is also a concept that proved advantageous to both sides of the conflict during the Troubles. Both nationalists and loyalists utilized women as decoys to carry out operations because many viewed them as harmless; however, Medb, like the IRA women, was anything but harmless. Cúchulainn’s companion warns him: “Medb is a forceful woman. I’d watch out for her hand at my back” (138).

Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (1979-1990), is similar to Medb in her independent strength and hard-line tactics. Her no-nonsense approach to trade unions, her opposition to the Soviet Union, and her willingness to use violence earned her the title “The Iron Lady.” The nationalist revolutionary women of the Troubles were not only fighting Thatcher, but also the Queen of England to achieve their

goal of a united Ireland. This tends to complicate the colonial condition, where the colonizer is represented as male and the colonized as female. Female Irish combatants were literally fighting females, yet also fighting the “male” entity, England.

Medb was also, like many women of the IRA, unafraid to use sex as a tool to achieve her goals. Medb is not degraded by using sex to get what she wants: “And my own friendly thighs on top of that if needs be” (169). Along with embracing her sexuality to achieve her goals, Medb uses her strength and bravery to accomplish them as well. In the final battle for the bull, Medb is described: “[she] took up her weapons and hurried into battle” (247). Medb no longer sat back to dictate, but when the battle demanded her participation, without hesitation, she picked up her weapon and fought. The women who fought with the IRA during the Troubles looked after this strong warrior, Queen Medb, as a model. While women were conscious of the nationalist symbol of Medb, it was not until 1900 that women found a new, independent voice with the formation of *Inghinidhe na hÉireann*, translated from the Gaelic as the “Daughters of Erin.”

The birth of *Inghinidhe na hÉireann* occurred during the Gaelic revival, a movement that focused on reviving Irish arts and culture. Maud Gonne, the daughter of a British colonel, was the first to initiate the group, becoming its first president, and identified herself strongly with the nationalist cause. This organization upheld very specific aims: to re-establish the complete independence of Ireland; to encourage the study of Gaelic, Irish literature, history, music, and art; to support and popularize Irish manufacture; to discourage the reading of English literature (in essence to discourage any

English influence); and finally, to begin a fund called the National Purposes Fund to aid in all these objectives (Ward 51).

The goal of Inghinidhe to support Irish arts was certainly illustrated by their sponsoring the original production of W.B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory's nationalist play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* in 1902. In fact, Maud Gonne was the first actress to play the enigmatic, nationalist representation through the character of the Poor Old Woman. Inghinidhe na hÉireann member, Marie Shiubhlaigh, writes: "In her [Maud] the youth of the country saw all that was magnificent in Ireland. She was the very personification of the figure she portrayed on the stage" (qtd. in Ward 56-57). Women were finally beginning to be recognized as legitimate representations and active figures for nationalist Ireland.

In 1908, the next move for the organization was the establishment of the first women's paper ever to be produced in Ireland entitled *Bean na hEireann*, meaning "Woman of Ireland." The paper discussed women's issues in Ireland and abroad, while also bringing awareness to Ireland's public of nationalist activities. However, after the emergence of the *Irish Freedom*, a publication owned by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, a Fenian organization committed to Irish nationalism, *Bean na hEireann* ceased publication in 1912.

Although *Bean na hEireann* collapsed, it did not mean the end of Inghinidhe. Because of this group, it became routine and accepted to have women speakers at nationalist occasions; this organization also changed the traditional mindset that women were to only be patriotic in a passive manner. Ward comments, "Had Inghinidhe not existed, a whole generation of women would never have developed the self-confidence

which eventually enabled them to hold their own in organizations composed of both sexes” (86). In sum, not only did Inghinidhe present awareness for women rights, from a non-political standpoint, but also acknowledged women’s opinions and dedication toward Irish culture. However, it was not until the emergence of Cumann na mBan in 1914 that women began to be associated with nationalist paramilitary involvement.

After the loyalist paramilitary group, the Ulster Volunteer Force, was formed to oppose the Third Home Rule Bill, the Irish Republican Brotherhood responded by creating the Irish Volunteers to combat the UVF and help the nationalists establish an Irish Republic. The female republican organization Cumann na mBan initially formed as an auxiliary unit to the Irish Volunteers. Cumann na mBan began as a way to aid men in fighting by funding weapons for the defense of Ireland. Very similar to Inghinidhe na hÉireann, these women also had a list of aims, but with one major difference: to assist in arming and equipping Irishmen for the defense of Ireland.<sup>5</sup> However, Cumann na mBan soon declared that its constitution would insist upon its joining men in using force by arms against England’s domination.

The initial appeal to join Cumann na mBan was not directed toward “ordinary” women (those who were shop assistants, clerical workers, or working mothers), but to those who could devote themselves completely to their cause. Although the Yeats sisters, Susan and Elizabeth, belonged to the middle class, they advocated the employment of lower, working-class women for their business, Cuala Press (Lewis). Cuala was a business focused on embroidery work and printing, and although the sisters knew that most of their employees were involved in the republican movement, they did not

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<sup>5</sup> Their initial purpose was to raise money for the Irish Volunteers contributing to the Defense of Ireland Fund.

discourage the women's actions. Although initially most women joining Cumann na mBan were middle to upper class, women joined from all socio-economic backgrounds, with a majority in the working class, a characteristic that identifies the members of Cumann na mBan during the modern Troubles. Perhaps this switch from a member majority in the upper class to a majority in the lower class is due to the fact that most of the initial unrest during the Troubles was caused by economic strain on the poorer communities. Not only were the members from all socioeconomic backgrounds, but they also ranged in age from early teens to early thirties. The female junior wing, or the "girl scouts" as they were sometimes called, were coined *Caílíní*, Gaelic for "little" or "young girls."

In 1915, by negotiation of Constance Markievicz, *Inghinidhe na hÉireann* joined Cumann na mBan as a separate wing. Markievicz would soon be at the forefront as *the* representative of women and violence with her participation in the 1916 Easter Rising (See Figure 1.A, page 58). Staged in a studio, a photo of Markievicz comments on the female stepping out of her traditional, domestic role and into the male space of violence. The backdrop behind Markievicz is a Romantic-Sublime version of the Classical. One of the most famous Romantic-Sublime paintings is Wilhelm Tischbein's 1787 masterpiece "Goethe in the Roman Campagna" (See Figure 1.B, page 59). Goethe is positioned in a relaxed, reclined state with his garment draped in a way to expose his thigh. Behind his left knee, there are figures of women carved into a Greek marble ruin. Here, Goethe is a representative of the active man, and the carving represents the passive woman, a concept that Laura Mulvey identifies in her theory of the "male gaze," which she defines in her

1975 essay entitled “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (a concept we will discuss in detail within Chapter II).

Further in the background, are classical ruins of public buildings concerning affairs of estate, similar to the structures behind Markievicz. However, in the photo of Markievicz, the structure is without blemish, suggesting that the violence, as represented by the gun in her hand, will lead to civic government. Also, the Romantic-Sublime is yoked to nationalism, which is what Markievicz is fighting for. Just as “Goethe in the Roman Campagna” reflects both male and female representations, Markievicz is, within herself, both male and female. According to the rules of nationalist combat, she is dressed in a male uniform in order to hold or fire the gun she grips in her right hand, a phenomenon that we will discuss later. Although she is dressed in a masculine fashion and is holding the phallic symbol, her coat is cut in a V-shape, exposing the region of her genitalia. This illustrates that as women enter violence, they can represent both male and female.

Further demonstrating Markievicz’s militaristic attitude, she founded Fianna Eireann, a paramilitary organization instructing teenage boys in the use of firearms. She was also a member of the Irish Citizen Army, a small union organization established for the defense of workers against the police force. Under the ICA, Markievicz was a commanding officer, giving her power in decision-making, and giving her the privilege to carry arms. However, women were not allowed to fire a gun without being in proper uniform: “Many women, particularly those of the ICA, regarded themselves as comrades-in-arms to the men of their units and chose to wear the same uniforms as their male compatriots...in order to hold a gun, they had to wear pants” (Wiehman 233, 235).

During the 1916 Rebellion, Constance Markievicz held post as a sniper, supervised the setting up of barricades as the Rising began, and was in the middle of the fighting in St. Stephen's Green. She later demanded the ICA allow her to plant a bomb in the Shelbourne hotel. Ward writes: "Passers-by were confronted by the awesome figure of the 48-year-old countess in full military uniform, revolver in hand, with her best hat with plumed feathers perched jauntily on her head" (112). Also, Joshua Wanhope, in his 1917 review of *Doing My Bit* for the *New York Call*, comments on Margaret Skinnider, a female combatant, reflecting on Markievicz: "The Countess according to Miss Skinnider seems to have been a veritable superwoman. She was a dead shot, and Miss Skinnider relates no less than five killings—not woundings—to her account. Whenever her finger pressed the deadly trigger a Britisher was sure to bite the dust" (14).

After the public learned of revolutionary women like Constance Markievicz, "kissing her revolver before surrendering to the English," many thought that "in 1916 even Ireland's women were out of control" (Weihman 229). Despite this idea, ninety women played an active part in the rebellion, with Winifred Carney entering the General Post Office with revolver in hand. Women belonging to the Citizen Army Ambulance Corps were handed revolvers and charged the gates of Dublin Castle. Several of these women died during the rebellion; however, they considered it an honor to die in battle for their country (Ward).

After the Rising, over seventy women were arrested and imprisoned in Kilmainham Jail (Ward). Writing just after the Rising, Maurice Joy recounts, "an organization of determined fighting women could throw hand grenades and understood the use of bombs; in fact, they seemed to understand as much of the business of warfare

as their men” (Joy 144). Although there were those who opposed women’s participation in violence, the fact they participated in the Rising was not unexpected. This was mainly because Pearse claimed, like the posters displayed during the Troubles, that this fight was for “the suffrage of all her men and women” (Wiehman 229). Because many did not even know why the Rising occurred, Cumann na mBan dedicated itself to popularizing the memory of the leaders after the rebellion.

Because some of the members of the Irish Republican Army, the organization that fought during the Irish War of Independence, refused to participate in sectarian violence or launch an armed campaign against Northern Ireland, the organization split into two branches—the Official IRA (OIRA) and the Provisional IRA (PIRA). Although the OIRA did target some military and political figures during the Troubles, the PIRA was even more extreme in its violent approach for the liberation of Northern Ireland. The PIRA began allowing women directly into the organization in 1969. They believed that women, as well as men, had a cause to fight for Ireland’s independence, and also wanted to take advantage of using them as unsuspected decoys.

When women began joining the IRA (from here on when I refer to the IRA, I am referencing the PIRA) directly, it caused a divide between them and the women who joined Cumann na mBan. When the IRA first admitted women into their organization, some women claimed they were treated unequally in training and promotion. Some women felt they had to “prove” themselves to men and some believed: “as women working militarily alongside men, they stood on their individual merits, neither expecting nor wanting preferential treatment” (Ward 260). Still others claimed: “I think it’s true to say...that a woman has to be better than a man initially to prove herself. After that,



though, there's no obstacles. Whoever's most skilled is in charge, be it a woman or a man" (Fairweather 242). Aileen Maguire, a former IRA volunteer I interviewed, decided to join the IRA directly as a volunteer, and was one of the first women in the IRA, which she claims, "caused mayhem in Belfast" (Personal interview 4 July 2008). She also comments on men's attitudes toward female combatants: "The person that I was I think I rather terrified the rest of the men in the unit because of the courage that I would have shown...women were out there, brave women, strong women, opinionated and thank God for it" (Personal interview).

The IRA maintained Cumann na mBan as a separate wing of the IRA, but allowed them to be seconded into the IRA, meaning they were militarily active, but did not have status as full members. Cumann na mBan directed most of its recruiting to young girls in their teens, allowing them to join Caílíní, the female junior wing. Two of the women I interviewed got their start in the IRA by joining Caílíní in their early teens. These young teenagers would typically sell newspapers such as the *Republican News* (suggesting the strong emphasis placed on the written word as a means for reform), march at nationalist commemorations, and learn about Irish history and culture. Caílíní appealed to young girls who felt: "I suppose I had been brought up believing that it was the duty of every Irish woman to join in the fight for the liberation of her own country" (Fairweather 238).

During the 1970s, many women chose to join the IRA directly as opposed to Cumann na mBan because many felt the organization was too harsh with moral judgment. Cathleen, a young woman living on the Falls Road claims: "I had thought of joining Cumann na mBan but chose not to...they didn't take divorced women who were living with men or who had illegitimate babies. In other words, they didn't take ordinary

human beings” (Fairweather 237). Cumann na mBan’s response to this was that its name stood for the “Mother Ireland” image, arguing the only relationship a woman was supposed to have with a man was a married one. Although Cumann na mBan was challenged by some women for its judgmental attitude, many felt the main benefit of belonging to an all female group was that it gave them a sense of feminine camaraderie, and a freedom to share emotions about their dangerous involvement in the violence.

Cumann na mBan and the IRA trained hundreds of women in carrying guns, planting and making bombs, setting up operations, carrying out jobs, bringing weapons to use in operations, getting weapons away after jobs, and training male volunteers. These “jobs” or “operations” could range from planting a bomb, shooting a police officer, or bringing explosives to the site. One female IRA volunteer said simply, “I work with explosives,” to which a man with her replied, “She’s just being modest when she says that. She’s one of our top explosives experts, one of the best we have in the movement” (Fairweather 241). When the IRA wanted an “operation” carried out by a woman, they would allow Cumann na mBan to select her. However, this method did not appeal to Aileen Maguire because she felt that: “If I was going to ever die or be put in prison, then I wanted it to be because of me being a volunteer” (Personal interview). Many women shared Angela’s opinion and a tribute to them is illustrated in a women and violence mural I discovered in the Falls neighborhood. (See figure 1.C, page 60).

Comprising the outer border of the mural are several faces of women who represent all the combatant women involved in the conflict. In the middle of the mural, men are carrying nationalist flags, and the focal point of the entire mural is a female

combatant, dressed in black, wearing a beret, and holding a gun; she is fierce and a true warrior.

It is important to also mention that there were hundreds more women involved on the republican side of the conflict as opposed to the loyalist side. While the IRA was fighting to maintain Irish culture and heritage, loyalists were defending what they perceived as a rich, complex cultural and religious patrimony. Despite the smaller number (by the hundreds) of female loyalist combatants, there certainly were women involved in the Ulster Defense Association, the Ulster Volunteer Force, and the Ulster Freedom Fighters, three loyalist paramilitary groups. Tanya Higgins and Nancy Brown Diggs comment: “those [women] who are extreme unionists seem to be angrier, more militant than men” (20). This is evidenced in 1974 with the horribly brutal murder of Ann Ogilby by women in the UDA. After this murder, the women’s UDA disbanded on command of the male UDA leaders. Ogilby was thought to be taking parcels and having an affair with a prisoner in Long Kesh. While visiting him, he complained that his wife was not sending enough food parcels, which Ogilby mistakenly repeated in public. She was then brought before the UDA and although the male leaders forbade it, eighteen-year-old Henrietta Piper Cowan and seventeen-year-old Christine Kathleen Smith put a hood over her head, and beat Ann Ogilby to death with a brick. The horrendous nature of the murder caused revulsion throughout Northern Ireland and in the entire span of the Troubles it is the only instance in which a woman was tortured and killed by other women. The court sentenced Cowan and Smith to life imprisonment (Simpson).

The tension between the male leaders and female combatants in the Ann Ogilby murder is a tension that is illustrated in *The Tain*. Framing the myth, in the first chapter,

“Pillow Talk,” Allil and Medb are heatedly discussing their individual fortunes: “‘It struck me,’ Allil said, ‘how much better off you are today than the day I married you.’ ‘I was well enough off without you,’ Medb said” (52). This conversation sparked the war that followed, and offers insight into the relationship between militant women and male leaders. Tracing this tension back to medieval literature, it is certain that because there is a great tension between Allil and Medb, which produces violence, there is a direct connection with the gender conflicts during the Troubles, as evidenced in the Ann Ogilby murder. This connection between the myth and militant women is an accurate assessment because physical-force nationalism focused on restoring Irish culture and mythology.

Northern Irish playwright Gary Mitchell is also intrigued by the women of the UDA. In his play *Loyal Women* (2004), Mitchell explores the Ulster loyalist mindset through the power struggle between women in the UDA. The play is set in Rathcoole, a Protestant housing estate in the north of Belfast and features a group of women. First, there is Maureen, the woman in charge of the female unit who is about to retire; Gail, a younger, extremely violent woman in her thirties who dreams of replacing Maureen; Heather, Gail’s unscrupulous supporter; Brenda, the central character of the play and UDA member who murdered an IRA woman on the orders of the UDA, but who desires now to turn from her violent past; and Jenny, her daughter, who, in spite of her mother’s pleas, wants to join the UDA. Like with Ann Ogilby, the group must “have a chat” with Adele, a member of the UDA dating a Catholic man from the Falls. Although they do not murder Adele, they certainly demonstrate the violence they are capable of.

The action of the play takes place in Brenda's home, where she lives with three other females, illustrating the domestic space as completely female dominated; however, the domestic space is intruded upon by violence because the women of the UDA use her house as headquarters. After the peace agreement is signed, these UDA women do not have a "place," but because Brenda was willing to turn from her violent past, she feels she does indeed have a space.

Addressing female loyalist paramilitaries, Lily, a Protestant woman, claims: "Of course there are women in the UDA and the UFF...UDA women carried guns onto the Falls, and some men fired at the army to make it look like the IRA had done it. A woman UDA brigadier brought the guns back to the Shankill...they only say there are no women so they can use them as decoys" (Fairweather 304). This notion that women were often used in operations as decoys was commonly practiced, originating by nationalists during the 1916 Easter Rising. Ruth Taillon, a Cumann na mBan member, points out "that long skirts of early twentieth-century female dress proved useful for hiding guns and equipment during courier runs" (Wiehman 235). Wiehman goes on to comment that: "such manipulation and subversion of traditional femininity in the service of the nation significantly rescripted public perception of women's social roles" (235). Women's involvement in violence caused them to be viewed differently in social situations because they were not fulfilling the traditional role of mother and wife.

Returning to the notion of using women as decoys appears to be a wise method; however, it also presents new observations for these women in connection with motherhood. Sociology professor at the University of Ulster, Bill Rolston, who is author of *Mother, Whores, and Villains: Images of Women in Novels of the Northern Ireland*

*Conflict* (1989), asserts: “Their curse is that, having abandoned their natural vocation of motherhood, they can never be real ‘terrorists’ like men. Stuck in the middle, they do things which neither mothers nor men would do” (51). In other words, women who have abandoned their “mothering” nature are in a sense neither male nor female, and will perform operations that appear to directly conflict with their true nature. On the other hand, although some men and women, including Rolston, believe that a woman’s only roles to fill are that of mother and wife are sorely mistaken because if a woman is convicted enough, she will stop at nothing to achieve her goal.

For example, women would hide a bomb under a baby, usually someone else’s baby, in a stroller and approach a checkpoint. Often times the soldiers would be unwilling to bother with the child because of laziness, and therefore let them pass through. The “mother” would then grab the baby and the bomb would explode. Belfast-native Anna Burns explores this phenomenon, with a twist, in her novel *No Bones* (2001). As six-year-old Amelia walked down a secluded street, she noticed a woman pushing a stroller. As Amelia looked in the carriage, she noticed there was not a baby inside, or was there?

Was it a bomb? What did a bomb look like? I touched it. It felt leathery and dry and a bit soft. I pulled at the thick putty at the top to open it. And that’s when I realized the material was see-through. Most of the putty was on the inside only it wasn’t putty. It was a bit of a baby’s head. Then among the mash I saw a curled up foot, webby, like a duck’s. In the center was a black cord. I jumped away. (Burns 83-84)

Upon the first reading of this passage, one can feel the strangeness radiating from the page. The reader is confused and wonders what really is inside the carriage. Burns creates this uneasy and ambiguous feeling within her readers by telling the story through the eyes of a young child. Perhaps this was not a baby/bomb mixture, but rather the imagination of a child? Or perhaps Burns was commenting on women and their dedication as combatants. Whichever one chooses to accept, it is undeniable that women were willing to go to any lengths to contribute to their cause, even if some criticized them for “betraying” their true feminine nature.

Rolston also argues: “Violent women...represent raw, unadulterated emotion. They tremble with rage, shake with anger, get carried away in emotion...the violence of women is thus valuable in certain circumstances to paramilitary organizations, but it is dangerous in as far as it threatens to break away from all control” (50). Rolston acknowledges the fact that a woman’s emotions affect her tremendously, and subscribe to the misogynistic notions of women as fundamentally hysterical.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, women can perform operations because they are so driven by emotion that they will let nothing get in their way, which can be viewed as a positive attribute; however, a woman’s emotions can be so intense that they can cloud her perspective and create dangerous situations.

Next, we turn to the women prisoners of Armagh jail, an all-female prison in the heart of County Armagh, to understand the immense dedication these women felt to their cause, and the extreme lengths they would go to in order to achieve them. In discovering these women’s lives, a theme emerges: violence and the female body. Paradoxically,

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<sup>6</sup> Hysteria is a mental illness that literally has its roots linked to women. The word hysteria originates from the Greek word, “hysteron;” doctors believed women’s hysteric symptoms were caused by the uterus, thus the removal of the uterus is coined hysterectomy.

these violent, militant women have violence forced upon their bodies and, in some cases, inflict violence upon their own bodies. Leading Irish feminist Nell McCafferty uses her book, *The Armagh Women* (1981), to explore the conditions and reasons why the women went on strike, and illustrates their hearts and dedication through personal interviews.

To begin with, we must discuss why both male and female prisoners began a strike in Armagh and Long Kesh in 1976. Prior to 1976, those jailed for terrorist offenses were given Special Category Status, meaning they were categorized as “political prisoners,” did not have to wear the prison uniform, or perform prison work. In 1976, Margaret Thatcher felt that there was no such thing as a political murder or bombing, and therefore, decided she would no longer allow SCS to continue. This decision ignited a series of strikes on the part of both republicans and loyalists. The prisoners claimed they were fighting for the “Five Demands:” the right not to wear a prison uniform; the right not to do prison work; the right to intermingle with other prisoners, and the right to organize educational and recreational pursuits; the right for one visit, one letter and one parcel per week; and full restoration of remission lost through the protest (Corcoran 130).

Initially, the men participated in a blanket protest, refusing to wear the prison uniforms, but instead wearing nothing but a blanket. The women did not participate in this particular protest because they were still permitted to wear their own clothes. However, the women joined the fight by deciding to take part in the “no work” protest. These thirty women in Armagh stopped working, withdrew from educational programs, and refused to conform to prison discipline. The authorities responded by removing privileges like letters and visits, and replaced them with full cell confinement, took away days from remission, and locked them in their cells for twenty-three hours a day, not



allowing them out to shower or use the restroom. In an angry response, men and women prisoners, with the IRA's instruction, launched the ten-month long "dirty protest" or "no wash" protest. This particular political move required a large amount of dedication and discipline. These women did not shower or brush their teeth; they also spread excrement on the walls and urinated on the floor.

Women also had the extra element of menstrual cycles to add to the stench. The significance of menstrual cycles is illustrated with Queen Medb in *The Tain*. Once, when Cúchulainn comes upon Medb alone during her menstruation, she has to plead with him to spare her life. He responds to her with a haughty sneer, and claims that he will not be a killer of women and leaves. The environment in A-wing of Armagh was described as putrid, where the air smelled so foul that flies were dying in clumps. Áine, a prisoner on the "no wash" protest reports: "We thought if we escalated it because we were women, we could be used a propaganda for the better...we're sitting here with no visits, no parcels or anything like that; we're losing our remission, but we're not doing anything else" (qtd. in Corcoran 123).

IRA appointed Officer Commanding, Mairéad Farrell, to lead this group of women. As OC, Farrell was the only one in the group who spoke directly to the jail authorities. Farrell joined the IRA at age eighteen, and was imprisoned for her successful attempt to bomb Conway Hotel in Belfast at only twenty-nine years of age. When she was released from prison, she interviewed with American feminist critic, Elizabeth Shannon, in which she claimed that she would do it all over again if she had the chance. Shannon, author of *I Am of Ireland: Women of the North Speak Out* (1989), remembers: "She [Farrell] went swinging off in the direction of her house, her red scarf blowing out

in the wind. Small, determined, angry, ready to sacrifice her life or anyone else's to her cause, ready for whatever comes her way" (128). In 1988, a little over a year after this interview, Farrell was gunned down by Britain's Special Air Service for attempting to bomb Gibraltar, the base for the British Armed Forces and the Royal Navy. Although the character Gail, in Mitchell's play, *Loyal Women*, is unionist in her beliefs, she certainly shares this unrelenting and dedicated attitude of Farrell's. For example, Gail does not allow anyone to go against the UDA, so she makes certain that a fellow UDA member ceases to date a Catholic man.

Liz McCafferty and Margaretta D'Arcy, two feminists who protested against the living conditions of the Armagh women, served a three-month sentence for their efforts, and chose to live among the dirty protestors. They described the camaraderie that was among these women: they would sing songs, tell stories, and share their lives with each other. This feeling of camaraderie is one that Aileen Maguire remembers well:

You never lose that sense of comradeship. See, the women I spent time with in Armagh jail, they're my friends to this day. And even if I haven't seen them in twenty years, we walk up, we're sisters again, hugging and kissing. It's like a conversation starts you left twenty years ago can nearly start over again without any sort of gap...that bond of sisterhood is never broken. (Personal interview)

Female solidarity is a theme also present in many of the works of African-American novelist Toni Morrison. African-American women utilized cultural means for developing relationships; they would gather together in groups during the slavery era and even today to capture their history through artistic expression, such as quilting or singing.

The women in Armagh also created a sense of cultural bonding through story-telling and crafting poems while they sat in their cells. In fact, these women participated in poetry workshops within the jails.

*Voices Against Oppression: A Collection of Poems*, published by Sinn Féin's Women's Department in 1991, is one of the best representations of such poetry. This collection of thirteen poems was penned by republican women prisoners in Maghaberry and Durham jails. It is interesting that there are no individual names attached to any one poem, but instead, the poems are a single, collective voice. On the cover of the collection, the title is surrounded by the international symbol for female, suggesting the woman-identified tone and sense of female comradeship these women shared. The poems express these women's feelings toward being combatants, and address issues that all women face, such as subordination in a patriarchal society and domestic abuse.

Returning to Eavan Boland's argument that the nationalist woman figure represented through icons such as Cathleen ni Houlihan or Róisín Dubh is detrimental to the "real" women of Ireland, is a notion that could be argued is present in these poems in its absence. One would think that this traditional nationalist woman figure would be the cornerstone for these modern-day combatant women to follow; however, in these poems, there is not one mention of these archetypal women. For example, in "Volunteers," they write: We are Volunteers/many teachers we've known/ Connolly, Pearse/ Marx, and Tone" (lines 13-16). These revolutionary women prisoners are inspired by and desire to follow the path cut by these *men*. Where in these poems is Cathleen ni Houlihan? Where is Markievicz or Gonne? Even without the mention of these idealized or former 1916

combatants, the drive these modern-day women prisoners feel toward liberating their country is undeniable.

In “To Mum and Dad” they express: “nor could I bury my head in the sand/ let others fight for this beautiful land/ this war must be waged by everyone” (lines 13-15). In their use of the word “everyone,” they are placing emphasis on the importance of women, not just men, in the fight for independence. In other words, women have the same right as men to pick up arms and join them in the violent space.

Elizabeth Shannon comments: “Armagh prison will remain sacred in Irish republican lore as the place where women involved in the armed struggle for Irish unification won their place as heroines in the organization” (121). This opinion regarding these women as heroines is problematic to some because many of these women were imprisoned for bombing and shooting. However, Maureen O’Hare, a former IRA member I interviewed who served time in jail for shooting an RUC officer, claims: “for me, at that time, we had no alternative...we had a legitimate right to do what we did” (Personal interview 4 July 2008). It is important to note that while women’s rights were an issue to these extremist republicans, they pushed to the forefront the importance of achieving an independent Ireland first. Rhiannon Talbot, lecturer at Newcastle Law School in England, comments: “what motivated women to join the IRA in the early years of the conflict suggests, as for men, that the national issue was women’s priority, rather than forwarding a feminist agenda” (137).

However, we begin to see many women’s rights activists take an interest in these women, not because they necessarily agreed with the nationalist mindset, but because they began to view Armagh conditions as a feminist issue. Women’s rights activists and

republican prisoners began to realize they had a common ground. McCafferty expresses her desire to persuade these women to see their situation as lacking female rights: “How do you shout about feminism through a wall, to women who had spent their childhood and adolescence in war and entered prison as teenagers” (12). These feminist groups, such as Women Against Imperialism (1978) and Derry Women’s Aid (1975), began to rally about several issues.

Firstly, the network of the jail was geared to male domination: the governor, the assistant governor, and all doctors were male. The women were also not provided with sufficient amounts of feminine napkins, which caused serious health problems and infections. In addition, the women were constantly subject to mental abuse by male prison authorities through verbal taunting. Finally, the jails implemented strip-searching, a policy that was more about power and domination, than genuinely being concerned about incoming contraband. The process of strip-searching leads us back to the theme of violation of the female body. Not only did women feel physically violated, but they also felt “stripped” of mental control, and believed their gender completely violated. Because a woman’s body is the source of life and birth, probing and violating the female reproductive organs is mentally and physically damaging. Maureen O’Hare describes her experiences with strip-searching:

...[they] introduced things like strip-searching, which was a horrendous thing. When they were first introduced, we absolutely refused to do them. It was almost like the women’s prison was come back to more Draconian measures. They would have held you down, six or eight female screws (jailers) and the male screws would be in the next room so they could hear

everything that was going on. They mightn't been able to see it and they ripped your clothes off you. I know women who were gone out to give birth who were strip-searched. I know a woman who had a miscarriage in the prison who had to be strip-searched while she was still bleeding and the blood was literally running down that woman's legs before they would let her into the hospital. If you had your period, it didn't matter...that was a horrendous period for the women because there was a very small number of us. (Personal interview)

When O'Hare spoke of the male screws not seeing, but hearing, the strip-searching process, it complicates the traditional concept of the "male gaze," which will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter. Laura Mulvey argues that the viewing audience is often times forced to regard the action of the female characters from the perspective of a heterosexual man. In other words, women are solely defined from the male's perspective; the male asserts his gaze and forces it upon the female. Although the male screws could not literally assert their gaze, they could still assert humiliation by eavesdropping on the woman's violation. Strip-searching is explored through "Compassion" in *Voices Against Oppression*:

Pulling legs apart  
 To search between.  
 Does my struggle add to your fun?  
 My resistance give you pleasure  
 ...  
 As you degrade

You and I

And all of womanhood

By this disgusting act. (lines 5-8, 14-17)

This issue caused the most outrage among feminists, and they launched an extensive campaign including posters, newsletters, and picketing, often times outside Armagh itself. In using posters and newsletters, a written form of protesting, it suggests the importance these women placed on the written word as a means for reform. The Irish have historically believed in the power of literature as an agent to produce awareness and change. One particular poster Sinn Féin created entitled, “Stop strip-searching” (1984) captures a woman shielding her eyes, illustrating the shame these women experienced. She is also covering her breasts, an extremely private and feminine possession, that is being exposed and violated (See Figure 1.D, page 60).

Because the prison system desired an integrated prison, where loyalists and republicans mixed on wings, Armagh closed in 1986. All prisoners were then transported to Mourne House, the all-female section of Maghaberry prison. Maghaberry was located in Lisburn, an especially Orange settlement. The Orange neighborhoods were named thus after the Orange Order, which was loyal to Protestant King William of Orange because of his victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. The republican women prisoners at Maghaberry argued they were treated badly *because* they were women and because of their political beliefs. They also felt that the male facilities were markedly better than their own.

A majority of the history written about Armagh prison focuses on the republican woman prisoner and her fight to restore Special Category Status. And although loyalist

prisoners were also involved, loyalists were divided on the issue. Some felt that by participating in the strikes they would potentially be assisting the republican cause. Those who did join in the protests, received criticism from many, including sociologist Mary Corcoran that their efforts: “lacked political and strategic coherence in comparison” (104).

When the IRA realized that the British government was immovable on reinstating Special Category Status, it decided to take the strikes to the ultimate level by initiating a hunger strike. Three women joined the first attempt at the hunger strike, among them were Mairéad Farrell, Mary Doyle, and Mairéad Nugent.<sup>7</sup> These women realized that joining the hunger strike meant certain death, and yet they still longed to join the effort.

The fight over Special Category Status was quite a battle between the IRA leadership and the British government. After the blanket, “no work,” and “dirty” protests, the IRA had reason to believe that Britain was beginning to retract because British Parliament was drawing up a thirty-page proposed settlement; however, the document did not reach Belfast quickly enough and so the prisoners, both male and female, ended their strike to save the life of one of the strikers. After realizing the “five demands” were still yet to be granted, the IRA decided to attempt the hunger strike again, this time without the women, in which ten male prisoners died.

The Bogside mural “Hunger Strike” is remarkable in the beauty of the figures (See Figure 1.E, page 61). The male figure represents Raymond McCartney, one of the

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<sup>7</sup> Mairéad Nugent went to Armagh at age seventeen and was sentenced to twelve years for attempting to bomb the house of then governor of Armagh jail. Mary Doyle was sent to Armagh at age twenty-one and sentenced to eight years for possessing incendiary devices. Both Nugent and Doyle were dirty protestors and hunger strikers.



men who participated during the hunger strike at Long Kesh, and the woman represents the three women at Armagh who participated. Some feminists claim that the Bogside Artists are downplaying the significant role that women played in the hunger strike by painting her in the background; however, it can be argued that it is painted with McCartney in the foreground because no women actually died on the strike.

British filmmaker Steve McQueen was drawn to the men of the 1981 hunger strike because of their extreme dedication. This admiration led him to direct his film *Hunger* (2008). This film focuses on the life of Bobby Sands, the difficulty of death by starvation, and the strength of conviction these men possessed. Maureen O'Hare remembers this time: "I suppose in a sense that was probably the most difficult year...you knew people that were dying" (Personal interview).

After witnessing the dedication from the Armagh women, Sinn Féin began to recognize women in a political way. Gerry Adams, not much addressing women's republican efforts prior to the Troubles, claimed that their women's affairs department saw its role as: "politicizing women republicans to fight for their rights as women and politicizing male republicans to support equality for women" (14-15). *An Glor Gafa*, Gaelic for "The Captive Voice," is the republican magazine written in its entirety within the jails, and printed and distributed on the outside by Sinn Féin's POW Department. In one issue, it proclaimed: "Irish women are every bit as revolutionary as Irish men and their resistance is every bit as fierce, be they IRA volunteers, Sinn Féin activists, or campaign organizers and protestors." W. B. Yeats privileges the revolutionary woman in his poem, "Easter 1916" (1918):

That woman's days were spent  
 In ignorant good-will,  
 Her nights in argument  
 Until her voice grew shrill.  
 What voice more sweet than hers  
 When, young and beautiful,  
 She rode to harriers. (lines 17-23)

Yeats puts special emphasis on “that woman” in one of his most renowned and significant poems about the Irish nationalist struggle. Although he is specifically referring to Constance Markievicz, she is a representative of all the revolutionary women involved in the 1916 Easter Rising. Although these women were combatants, Yeats admires their strength and dedication, describing their voices as “sweet.” He also expresses that although these women are unafraid to use violence, they are still “young and beautiful;” they are still feminine.

Perhaps because of these strong combatant women, paramilitary organizations often targeted these women for their involvement in the conflict. For example, Maire Drumm was an IRA member and held position of Sinn Féin president while other officers were in prison; she was also given full military honors by the IRA. While at the hospital for eye surgery, three gunmen disguised as doctors shot and killed her. Irish journalist Malachi O’Doherty opines, “Maire Drumm seems almost to have been the woman imagined by the songwriters of ‘Four Green Fields’ who gave us the myth of the Irish mother passing on to the next generation the responsibility of fighting to free Ireland” (141).

In her efforts to free Ireland with her strong femininity, Drumm's source of inspiration stemmed from the Cathleen ni Houlihan figure in Lady Gregory and Yeats's seminal play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902). The Poor Old Woman requests a blood sacrifice from all the young men in Ireland to rise up and fight in order to retrieve Ireland from the colonizer's grasp. When the young Patrick agrees to abandon his impending marriage and fight for Ireland, the Poor Old Woman transforms into a young Queen, representing the aisling tradition, and claims all these men will be immortal in the nationalist memory. Drumm uses this inspiration of the Cathleen ni Houlihan figure to speak to this modern-day generation of women and violence, encouraging them to inspire others to fight for Ireland.

Women who participated in violence often performed many different roles. For example, four IRA women killed four British soldiers by luring them with sex, an act that is illustrated explicitly and deliberately in Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game*. Elizabeth Shannon writes: "IRA women used the ploy several more times, but it finally backfired; even the most ardent republican on the Falls Road did not approve of women using their sexuality for the cause of Ireland's freedom. Killing was ok; sex was out" (114). This comment suggests that a woman's sexuality, where sex is for intimacy and reproduction, should not be twisted or tainted, even if it does contribute to Ireland's independence.

Wiehman also comments, "Republican women recount similarly subversive deployments of gender performance, always conscious of the effect their female identity has on the soldiers they encounter" (232-233). This comment reflects back on the notion that non-combatant women and men felt that revolutionary women were traitorous to their true feminine identities. However, being women presented them with an advantage

over men because a woman's sexuality, whether used for gain or not, was still a powerful agent.

Having discussed the special participation women had in violence, the issues surrounding females crossing over into the male space, and the strong divide between combatants and feminists, we have created a lens through which to analyze American writer Valerie Miner's novel *Blood Sisters* (1982). Most of the novel is set in London and centers on cousins, Beth and Liz. Beth's mother, Gerry, and Liz's mother, Polly, are twin sisters who were both reared in Dublin. After their mother Elizabeth dies, a revolutionary during the 1916 Easter Rising, the sisters decide to leave Ireland. Polly marries an Irishman from Dublin and moves to California to escape Ireland, and Gerry marries a Connemara man and moves to London.

Much of the West of Ireland, including the Aran Islands and Connemara, still speaks Gaelic today, Ireland's native language, and believes in the purity of living off the land without industrial influence; in other words, the West can be viewed as the ideal of Ireland.<sup>8</sup>

In James Joyce's short story "The Dead" (1914), Joyce experiments with this notion of the "West as ideal Ireland." Michael Furey, Gretta's former lover, originates from the West and is employed with the Galway gas works. This is ironic because the gas works was a metropolitan business, and yet attempted to "corrupt" the innocence of the West. Also, the word "gas" finds its roots in Irish mythology and folklore with the word "geis," meaning curse or taboo. In light of this, Michael Furey, as representative of the West, is a curse on Gabriel, as representative of industrial Ireland.

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<sup>8</sup> Many novelists, poets, and playwrights feature this idea of the "West as ideal Ireland" in their work. For example, John Millington Synge's drama *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and Yeats's poem "The Fisherman" (1919).

In Gerry's decision to marry a Connemara man, she is demonstrating that she still possesses a hope for Ireland's future, a hope founded on the purity of the past. When Liz turns twenty five, she feels that she must discover more about her heritage and so travels to London to live with Gerry and Beth, in hopes she will travel to Ireland one day.

While in London, Liz and Beth become good friends; however, they differ in their ideals, and debate over which is more important to defining an Irish woman: fighting for Ireland or fighting for women's rights. While Beth is an active member of the Provisional IRA, Liz is actively involved in the women's rights movement. This divide is central to the novel and is representative of many women during the Troubles. While feminists believed women's rights were the most important issue of reform, revolutionaries believed that without Ireland's independence, women's rights would never occur. It is not to say that revolutionaries were not aware or concerned about the importance of women's rights, but they felt that without equal rights for all human beings, men and women alike, then the specific rights concerning women would never be a priority.

After a time, Liz falls in love with Beth; however, Larry, Liz's brother, pursues Beth. When Liz sees them together in an embrace, it is Liz's breaking point. Liz has become so involved with the women's movement that she has a mental and emotional breakdown, and her unrequited love for Beth makes life seem unbearable. One could argue that this novel does indulge in stereotypes of the lesbian feminist. Liz and her fellow feminists become so involved in the women's movement that they deem *all* men as a threat and seek comfort in women, including romantic relationships.

After Larry is injured in an IRA bombing attempt, Liz jumps at the opportunity to regain closeness with Beth. Bruce, Beth's former lover, approaches Beth convincing her that she must prevent an IRA bombing attempt on Whitehall, one of the establishments of British control over Northern Ireland. However, she soon learns that Bruce actually desired her to plant the bomb, knowing she is most familiar with the building. She agrees to plant the bomb, justifies it even, but unknowingly kills her mother in the explosion. Beth is seriously injured and the novel closes with Liz expressing that Beth will be sentenced to prison, and she now must write their family history. Liz illustrates how it is through writing that events are historicized and their survival is ensured through written memory. Moreover, it is the (female) writer, the painter, and the poet who has the significant responsibility to capture history through art.

For an analysis of women and violence represented in literature we turn to the character of Beth. Beth talks of her inspiration for joining the Provos, an act initiated by the events of Bloody Sunday in 1972. She knew that she could no longer sit back and remain inactive as England mistreated her people. Beth's opinion of the IRA and her reason for joining are very similar to the real women of history. Aileen Maguire, a former Volunteer expressed to me during an interview: "So then Bloody Sunday happened...and that was just it for me then. I thought no, you need to do something more than sell newspapers or collect money. I decided then that I would join" (Personal interview).

Beth also discusses how her mother was very frightened by her involvement in the IRA, which informs the outcome of the novel: "She [Beth] always felt nervous giving details over the phone. But the revolutionary in her was sometimes overwhelmed by the

good daughter” (20). In this respect, Beth serves as a counterpoint to Mairéad Farrell, the OC for the Armagh women prisoners, because Beth still cares very much about her family. Although Farrell may have loved her family, she would not have let anyone or anything come between her and a united Ireland. In her interview with Elizabeth Shannon in 1987, Farrell explicitly commented on her dedication to the IRA, her lack of regret for any operation, and expressed her acceptance of civilian casualties in time of war. This tension between familial and martial roles is one that some female combatants experienced. These revolutionaries often realized that protection of their families was not always possible during a state of war.

Beth claims, “She was fighting with the Provos for the two-and-a-half million women in Ireland like them and Gerry and herself” (21). In other words, Beth believes that fighting for Ireland’s independence will eventually lead to women receiving their own rights. However, Liz claims that the IRA are “pigs” in their “stand against abortion and birth control. They’re in collusion with the Catholic Church against women” (48). Many women felt this way after Eamon de Valera, in conjunction with the Catholic Church, rendered a woman’s role to be a traditional housewife. De Valera instituted laws in the 1947 Constitution that restricted women from obtaining jobs, outlawed abortion, and also prevented them from acquiring a divorce under any circumstances (this will be discussed further in Chapter III).

Liz feels that the IRA set feminists back in their fight; however, there were many in the IRA that believed women as equals to men. Seán MacStíofáin, chief of staff of the Provisionals claims: “In the early seventies, a selected number of suitable women were

taken into the IRA and trained. Some of the best shots I ever knew were women” (Shannon 218).

Beth’s first assignment for the IRA is to smuggle money into Amsterdam: “she had a chance to make an important contribution to her country’s freedom, merely by carrying a suitcase through the customs gate” (60). She fully admits that she was a jumble of nerves while she was flying over to Amsterdam, but her dedication to the IRA pushed her forward. Liz asks Beth why she believes so strongly in the Provos, and Beth responds by saying: “Because they’re doing something. They’re not sitting on their arses dreaming up policies and strategies. They’re doing something” (61). However, Liz challenges her by saying: “You don’t go blowing people up because you’re tired of waiting” (61). The opinion of women IRA volunteers is very much illustrated in Beth. They believed that performing an “operation” was not always easy, but it was essential to gaining an independent Ireland, and therefore necessary at any cost. Maureen O’Hare reflects on her time as a Volunteer: “Sometimes you wonder if your life had to be so different...you only resort to that type of method [violence] when you’ve nothing else, when your back’s against the wall. War is not nice, war is a bad thing and nobody unless they really have to should really go there...war’s hell” (Personal interview).

Another major revolutionary woman in this novel is not even physically present: the ever-present memory of Liz and Beth’s grandmother, Elizabeth. She was involved in the 1916 Rebellion, and is always a presence in the lives of Liz and Beth and their mothers, Polly and Gerry. They talk of how Elizabeth joined the Irish Women’s Council and collected money and guns for the fight that was coming. Beth comments: “Tradition says that Ireland is a woman...Kathleen ni Houlihan—and therefore patriotism is a



man's passion. But that tradition ignores the women who fought alongside the men for hundreds of years. It ignores patriots like our grandmother Elizabeth O'Brien" (118).

*Cathleen ni Houlihan*, the play whose first production was sponsored by Inghinidhe na hÉireann, is certainly a play featuring a woman's command for Ireland to fight for her. The trope of Ireland as woman is one that Ireland and its writers are all too familiar with. The neighbor, Miss. Fitz, tells Gerry that Beth is only following in the footsteps of her predecessors (her grandmother). Gerry responds: "But the IRA now isn't what it was in Elizabeth's day. Now they're just blowing up people, including themselves. I know it's my fault Beth is like this" (93).

Beth is certainly a fictional example of all the women in the IRA who followed after the model set for them by Cumann na mBan in 1914. Cumann na mBan believed strongly that it was also a woman's right, just like a man's, to literally pick up a gun and fight for her country. Figures like Beth, Mairéad Farrell, Aileen Maguire and Maureen O'Hare held fast to this tradition and belief. However, those women who did not share in these women's views, believed that violence would only lead to destruction and despair: "Beth's work in the Provisionals led in a steady, certain direction, a direction Liz could not bear to think about" (Miner 103).

Nearing the end of the novel, Beth agrees to perform an operation by planting a bomb in Whitehall. Bruce, a former lover and IRA member hiding from the police, approaches Beth about information he has concerning the IRA planning to bomb Whitehall. He convinces Beth, secretly with his own agenda, that he is against the plan, and she should persuade them not to plant the bomb. Bruce knows Beth would be best for the job because her mother works there, and Beth would know the layout of the

building. However, when she goes to convince the others not to plant the bomb, they end up persuading her that she should be the one to do it. As she is walking through the building, she thinks:

This building should go down. Of all the symbols in London, this *should* be destroyed. Whitehall, what an arrogant name. The Home Office, wheezing with hypocritical platitudes about human rights... The Home Office, which administered the Six Counties as British. (192)

Although Beth is initially a bit hesitant to perform the operation, she feels a conviction that she has, in the words of O'Hare, "a legitimate right to do what [she] did" (Personal interview). She desires to fight for her country's independence no matter the cost; however, this job does indeed cost her dearly. Unknown to Beth, her mother had to work late. As Beth rushes in to save her mother, the bomb explodes, killing Gerry and severely wounding Beth. After Beth recovers, she will be tried and sent to prison for the bombing. Beth has to live being torn between the regret of killing her mother, and believing she served her country by her conviction.

Despite Beth's hand in Gerry's death, one could argue that Miner presents a sympathetic character with Beth. One could also argue that Beth is idealized through her actions even though she does kill her mother. Perhaps this is suggesting that if Gerry represents the "Mother Ireland" image, then there is no space left for her in the modern-day Troubles. Beth remains true to her convictions and her desire for a united Ireland. Aileen Maguire claims: "I have no regrets for any of the things or any of the operations" (Personal interview). And Maureen O'Hare comments, "To me, there is another alternative now. I'm still a republican and I still have my beliefs and what I want, a

united Ireland's my goal. But at the same time, I see another way of getting there now" (Personal interview). Like Maguire and O'Hare, Beth had strong beliefs, yet was unable to "see another way of getting there." Despite the criticism that combatants betray their "true" nature, Beth's dedication makes her a heroine, and represents the real revolutionaries of history in a manner in which they will remain highly regarded.



Figure 1.A

Constance Markievicz in Uniform: Studio Portrait, c. 1915  
(Image Courtesy of Multitext Project in Irish History, University College Cork)



Figure 1.B

Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein, *Goethe in the Roman Campagna* (1786)  
Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main  
(Image: <http://www.staedelmuseum.de/sm/index.php?StoryID=337&ObjectID=287>)



Figure 1.C

“Republican Paramilitary Mural: Women and Violence”  
 (Image: Kelly M. Twilley, July 2008)

This mural is located in the predominantly Catholic Falls neighborhood.



Figure 1.D

“Stop Strip-Searches” (1984)  
 (Image Courtesy of Troubled Images: Northern Ireland Political Collection  
 Linen Hall Library Belfast, Northern Ireland)



Figure 1.E

“Hunger Strike” Bogside Mural (2000)  
(Image Courtesy of the Bogside Artists)

This mural, by the Bogside Artists, is one of a suite of twelve on and near Rossville Street in the predominantly Catholic and nationalist Bogside neighborhood of Derry.

## Chapter II

### In Reel Times: “Real” Women and *The Crying Game*

Neil Jordan, the Academy Award winning Irish filmmaker, is noted for directing films with unconventional themes. His nineteen movies to date include *In Dreams* (1999) and *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005), both of which offer something specific concerning the bending of gender roles. For example, *In Dreams* focuses on Claire Cooper, a mother who is haunted by her daughter’s murderer, a cross-dressing child serial killer. Also, *Breakfast on Pluto* explores the quest for identity and love of the transgendered Patrick “Kitten” Braden in Ireland in the 1970s. As regards “gender bending,” *The Crying Game* (1992)—which the Sligo-born Jordan wrote as well as directed—may be seen as Jordan’s most sustained big-screen essay.

Now a celebrated movie moment, the film critic Ruth Barton’s 2006 book-length study *Acting Irish in Hollywood* opines (in a chapter called, “Stephen Rea: Politics and the Actor”), “*The Crying Game* remains the most discussed of Jordan’s films, with writers more divided over the nature of its gender politics than its commentary on the state of Northern Ireland” (150). For its part, Martin McLoone’s *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (2000), asserts: “The only uninterrogated aspect of the film is the portrayal of the one (‘real’) woman in the film, the IRA woman Jude. Her character hardens (or is masculinized) as the narrative proceeds, in contrast to Fergus, who softens as he is ‘feminized’” (182).

While Barton and McLoone make a strong, accurate assertion that Jordan privileges a complex plot that weaves in and out through his characters to blur the lines of

gender and that critical attention could focus more on the character of Jude, they do not pay close attention to the significance of the gender associations with the character names, Jude and Fergus. These names present a strong commentary on Jordan's theme of confusion between gender roles.

Initially, the name Jude blurs gender lines simply because Jude is most typically a male name. Especially in largely Catholic countries like Ireland, the name Jude suggests St. Jude, one of Jesus's twelve apostles. According to *Catholic Online*, St. Jude is most associated with the concept of conversion and suffered martyrdom, while attempting to convert the Armenians in 65 AD.<sup>9</sup> Jordan's Jude is very familiar with this notion of converting others for a cause. Although Fergus initially supports the workings of the IRA, Jude must convert Fergus into believing he should perform an assassination later in the film. In Jude's participation of Fergus's conversion, in a way, she is also converting the Irish male. In other words, some women were more intense and passionate than some men. For example, Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, although using a non-violent approach, is hard-line in her advocating for Irish nationalism. Devlin concentrated on converting women from passive roles to active roles, and inspired many men for the cause of Irish independence.

St. Jude's attribute is a club, suggesting a weapon or male genitalia. This comments on Jordan's Jude as a representative of violence and her cross-over into the male space. St. Jude is also known as the Patron Saint of "lost causes," meaning that he was often called upon when all other avenues were closed. Like former IRA volunteer Maureen O'Hare explains: "You only resort to that type of method [violence] when

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<sup>9</sup> It is interesting that St. Jude was martyred in Persia, often used as a placeholder for Ireland. Persia was known as "Iran," sounding close to "Erin," an anglicized name for Ireland in the eighteenth century.



you've nothing else, when your back's against the wall" (Personal interview). Like violence was the method pursued in the Troubles when all other approaches were deemed ineffective, Jude, as representation of all female combatants, saw her "last resort" as stepping out of her traditional domestic role and into violence. It could also be argued through this link with St. Jude, that a woman joining in violence is the key to victory.

This notion of martyrdom exemplified in St. Jude is one that the nationalist community utilized throughout its struggle for independence from England, as illustrated through the Long Kesh hunger strike and the hundreds of "operations" men and women carried out during the Troubles. Jude is certainly one of these nationalists who would go to any length—even death—if it would aid Ireland in achieving her independence.

The first part of Jude's name also has significance in the lingering sound of "Ju," suggesting Jew. One can read James Joyce's Jewish protagonist Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses* (1922) as an invitation to contemplate Irish identity as a complex proposition (in fact, Stephen Rea, who plays Fergus in *The Crying Game*, also played the character of Bloom). The viewer is reminded of Bloom as the cuckold who walks the streets of Dublin, while knowing his wife is being sexually satisfied by the man in the green coat. Through Bloom, Joyce successfully offers a new model of Irish masculinity. He argues that the Irish man who is typically viewed as a rural warrior is no longer realistic, and he is now an urban sophisticate or as Joyce calls Bloom, "the new womanly man" (Joyce 403). Just as men became slightly more feminized during the Troubles, combatant women crossed over and became more masculine. Also, like Jews, in the Western imagination are the "nation without a nation," Jude is fighting for Irish nationhood.

And finally, one cannot escape the similarity of sounds between Jude and Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus. The traditional notion of the woman dwelling in the domestic space could very well argue that combatant women are betraying their true nature, that of nurturer and mother. Men could also feel a sense of betrayal because women are imposing on the male space of violence. Perhaps the men felt that these women did not trust the men to protect them and make the necessary changes. Is the female combatant female? Is she male? Or has she created a new space, a third space, where she can be both?

Just as the cultural and religious associations of the name Jude offered confusion of gender, in the same way, so does the name of Fergus. Fergus is known in Irish mythology, more specifically in the Irish epic *The Tain*, as the representation of the phallic principle or male libido. In *The Tain*, Fergus is the epitome of a masculine warrior, leading Medb's army in retrieving the bull. His sexual appetite is also insatiable; for example, Fergus sneaks into the forest to sexually ravish Queen Medb. Fergus comments that his sexual appetite can be satisfied only by "30 women or Medb." Fergus exudes confidence and masculinity. However, in *The Crying Game*, Fergus complicates this idea that he is traditionally representative of masculinity because he is the character that sympathizes with the prisoner and assumes a more traditionally feminine role.

As even a cursory glance at the hermeneutic possibilities inherent in these names, *The Crying Game* takes female participation in the Troubles seriously. What follows is a discussion of the complicated gender dynamics at play in Jordan's seminal movie. Analyzing key scenes, we will discover how both Jude and Fergus reflect the complexity of the discourse around women and violence in the Northern Irish Troubles. Also, *The*

*Crying Game* seeks to illustrate how the women of the early twentieth century, those involved in Inghinidhe na hÉireann and Cumann na mBan, made themselves militant. In other words, they had limited support from men and were often discouraged from entering the male space, but those women of the early twentieth century and the women exemplified in Jude, created a space for women to participate in violence. Jordan also uses his characters, specifically Jody, to explore the complicated gender dynamics related within the “colonial condition,” which we will discuss in further detail later. First, it is useful to recap the key plot elements of *The Crying Game*.

The film focuses on four major characters: Jude, Fergus, Jody, and Dil. Jude, the female commander of an IRA guerrilla unit, lures Jody—an Afro-Caribbean British soldier—away from a funfair crowd. Jude’s male accomplices then seize Jody and take him hostage. Fergus, an IRA “foot soldier” or volunteer, is appointed head watchman over Jody and forms a strong bond with him, which suggests that Stockholm syndrome is at play here. This syndrome is typically characterized as a psychological response in the hostage where he begins to feel a sense of loyalty to the hostage-takers. Here, Jordan echoes Frank O’Connor’s short story “Guests of the Nation” (1931), which interrogates the humane relationship between IRA hostage takers and their two British captives during Ireland’s War of Independence (1919-1921). As IRA volunteer Jeremiah Donovan leads the British hostages out to shoot them, his partner Bonaparte reflects: “Hawkins wanted to know...why did any of us want to plug him? What had he done to us? Weren’t we all chums? By this time we’d reached the bog, and I was so sick I couldn’t even answer him” (O’Connor 1989).

Although O'Connor's story ends with execution, in Jordan's work, when the time arrives for Fergus to shoot Jody, he cannot bring himself to pull the trigger because he has developed a close relationship with him. Ironically, when Jody attempts to escape, he is killed by a British Saracen, an armored vehicle, on maneuvers. Fergus then travels to London to keep his promise to Jody that he will protect Dil, Jody's former lover. After Fergus develops romantic feelings for Dil, he learns that Dil is in fact transgendered, appearing female, but genetically male. At this turning point in the action, Fergus's immediate response is repulsion.

Next, Jude discovers Fergus living in London and orders him to assassinate a British judge. Once Fergus confesses to Dil that he knew Jody and was in some part responsible for his death, Dil becomes mad with rage and ties Fergus to the bed, preventing him from meeting Jude for the assassination. As Jude enters Dil's apartment to kill Fergus, Dil shoots Jude. Because Fergus feels guilt from his role in the lives of Jody and Dil, he admits responsibility for the killing and allows Dil to flee persecution.

When the film begins and the credits are rolling, Jordan ironically chooses to play Percy Sledge's, "When a Man Loves a Woman." This song has many paradoxical meanings concerning gender throughout the entire film. Such ironic meaning is illustrated through the opening scene with Jody and Jude, the complex relationship between Fergus and Dil, Jody and Dil, and the complete switch of gender roles between Fergus and Jude.

On first encountering Jude, Jordan paints a seemingly innocent scene: it is late afternoon at a carnival; there are carousels, children laughing, and Jody is throwing rings around bowling pins to win stuffed animals for Jude. She is flirting with Jody, kissing

him, laughing with him, and promising him sexual favors if they can get off alone. The significance of the carnival setting can find its root in the Spanish word “carne,” meaning “meat.” In a way, Jude is prostituting herself at a “meat market” to trap the British soldier, much like Ireland was often thought of prostituting itself to England. Joyce highlights this dynamic in the “Circe” episode of *Ulysses* (1922), which occurs in the vast red-light district that developed in Dublin, largely in response to the city’s several British military installations. Jordan’s Jude wears a short blue jean skirt and jacket, with a low-cut, hot pink shirt underneath.<sup>10</sup> Jude uses her sexuality to lure Jody away from the crowd of the fair and while his hand creeps up her skirt, Fergus, and the other IRA men, hold Jody at gunpoint, put a sack over his eyes, and throw him into the getaway car.

The sack they put over Jody’s face is likened to the masks the IRA and other paramilitary groups wore during operations and dangerous paramilitary activity. These masks were often times black with holes cut out specifically for the eyes, much like a balaclava. Masks were also regularly deployed during paramilitary funerals. The pallbearers and the soldier who fired the shot into the air at the end of the funeral would also wear these masks. Because it is the IRA that places the sack over Jody’s face, it is an index of what will be Jody’s fate. These masks worn by paramilitaries provided them with a certain sense of anonymity, which allowed them to perform actions they would not otherwise be free to act upon. In Belfast today, there are several murals placed

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<sup>10</sup> In this reference to clothing, one must highlight the dress in the Bogside mural “Bernadette” to illustrate the significance of women’s clothing during the Troubles. Bernadette, the literal voice of the mural through political protesting, is dressed in very masculine identified clothes—blue jeans and a baggy, green sweatshirt. However, in the background, the woman is wearing a feminized, short dress. Although she is participating in political action as well, warning the neighborhood of an impending raid by the British army during Internment by banging bin lids, she remains dressed in the epitome of a woman’s identity. Perhaps some women felt that in order to be heard they must clothe themselves in a masculine garment, whereas other women embraced femininity, despite their political aims (See Figure 2.A, page 86).

throughout the city that illustrate the use of masks worn by paramilitaries on both sides of the conflict, an example of which is depicted in the “UFF, East Belfast Brigade” mural (See Figure 2.B, page 86). The soldier is dressed in military uniform, a black mask, and holding a gun which is a haunting and foreboding image.

In addition, the sack or mask also completely removes Jody’s “male gaze.” The “male gaze” is a term coined by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” Mulvey argues, from a psychoanalytic viewpoint, that in cinema, the viewing audience is often times forced to regard the action and characters from the perspective of a heterosexual man. In other words, women are solely defined from the male’s perspective; the male asserts his gaze and forces it upon the female, objectifying her as a sexual object. Mulvey claims, “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects his phantasy onto the female figure” (137).

Jordan, however, does not allow the camera to inflict “violence” upon Jude. She is not objectified or intruded upon by the male gaze; instead, Jordan uses the camera to empower her. For example, when Fergus questions Jude about having sex with Jody, the camera zooms in closely to her face and she says with conviction, “There’s certain things I wouldn’t do for my country.” In Jordan’s close up of Jude, he is making the viewer pay close attention to her words. In this shot, Jude is commenting on an important aspect of Irish nationality that we will discuss later in this chapter: the fear of the “act of union” metaphor.

While returning to Jude’s house with Jody, Jude follows the car, legs straddled, on a symbol of masculinity—a phallic motorcycle. But, as she enters the house, or the

woman's domestic space, she takes off the helmet, shaking and running her fingers through her hair. Hair becomes a peculiar gender marker as the film progresses. Jude's hair is long and beautiful, her "crowning glory" throughout the film. Although she cuts it shorter and dyes it red midway through the film, it remains vibrant with feminine beauty. Jude dyes her hair in an effort to disguise herself after British helicopters attack her home in search of Jody.

Dil also complicates this notion of hair as a truly feminine possession by being transgendered and a hairdresser. When Fergus attempts to hide Dil from the IRA, he forces her to cut her locks completely off. He desires to save her life, but in the process of cutting her hair, he "rapes" her of the feminine identity she feels within herself.<sup>11</sup> Commenting further on the connection between women and hair as feminine definition and this notion of "raping" the lock linked specifically to Northern Ireland, is illustrated in Seamus Heaney's poem "Punishment" (1975).

In this poem, there is a woman who is sacrificed to Nerthus, the goddess of fertility, for her adulterous actions. Heaney describes her: "her shaved head/like a stubble of black corn" (lines 17-18). As a punishment for her crimes, she is being stripped of her feminine beauty, represented through her hair. Further along in the poem, Heaney parallels this situation with the atrocious ritual being done to women merely witnessed conversing with British soldiers in the streets of Northern Ireland. These women were stolen from their homes, their *heads shaved*, hot tar poured over their bodies, and left tied to a railing to be humiliated. If anyone helped them, they would also

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<sup>11</sup> Representative of this notion of hair as feminine identity is illustrated in Alexander Pope's poem, "The Rape of the Lock" (1714). This poem focuses on the Baron who lusts after beautiful Belinda and her hair. Belinda can be read as a link to Catholicism being persecuted by the Baron as a representative of Protestant England. He justifies himself as a power over her, with connotations of gender power and colonial power, and cuts a lock of her hair without permission.

be punished. The justification of this ritual was rooted in the idea that they were “protecting the tribe” from the foreign enemy:

when your betraying sisters  
 cauled in tar  
 wept by the railings  
 who would connive  
 in civilized outrage  
 yet understand the exact  
 and tribal, intimate revenge. (lines 38-42)

This notion of the tribe is to suggest what anthropologists refer to as societies organized largely on the basis of kinship. Although this act was painful and humiliating, the tribe felt it necessary to protect itself from outsiders. These women were traitors and should be corrected and punished to learn the weight of their error. Also, although some within the tribe may have felt sympathy as they witnessed these women screaming in pain, they understood “the exact/and tribal, intimate revenge” (lines 41-42).

Next, while in Jude’s house, Fergus suggests they offer some tea to Jody. Jude is the one who automatically goes to fetch it, as though although she is keen for violence, she still privileges, at least to some degree, the domestic space. It is also interesting that this IRA activity is occurring in Jude’s house, the domestic space, the woman’s domain. This situation makes a strong comment on the trope of “Ireland as Woman.” Ireland is often thought of as a demure, meek woman needing a domineering, colonial force, England, to provide for her. Seamus Heaney comments on this trope in his poem, “Act of Union” (1975).



Heaney describes England's rape of Ireland in terms that suggest that Ireland had no choice and must accept her fate: "...No treaty/I foresee will salve completely your tracked/And stretchmarked body, the big pain/That leaves you raw, like opened ground, again" (lines 25-28). However, as woman, Jude is not accepting this fate because she is entering into the male space of violence, and not simply entering, but enjoying this violent space, thus blurring gender lines once again. For instance, Jude feels a certain sense of power over Jody when she assists in his capture, she is the one who is violent with Jody when Fergus cannot be, she orders Fergus to assassinate a judge, and she is willing to carry out IRA orders at any cost, even if that means she must kill Fergus. Jude is willing to perform any task that contributes to her cause, thus giving her power.

Continually, as Fergus and Jude sit on the living room floor, Fergus asks Jude if she gave way to the British soldier's lust, to which she replies, "There's certain things I wouldn't do for my country." Jude, as well as all Irish women, would be aware of this trope of "Ireland as Woman" and England's rape of Ireland through colonial metaphor. By Jude claiming that "There's certain things I wouldn't do for my country," Jude makes a strong statement about women's attitudes toward England and the Irish race. In Jude's rejection to fuse a sexual union between her and Jody, she illustrates her absolute refusal to participate in the "act of union" metaphor. Perhaps to Jude, the root of the Troubles is a sexual fear of the "other." Jude fears miscegenation because she views Ireland as a pure race; after all, the removal of England was the aim of the IRA. Shelia Mahon, a Catholic woman I interviewed in June 2008, emphasized the strong opposition both sides of the conflict felt concerning mixed marriages. She recounts instances where many Catholic men were murdered who chose to marry a Protestant woman and vice versa.

This focus on ethnic or racial purity was no longer centered between Ireland and England, but rather situated between groups within Ireland itself.

To further complicate this notion of racial purity as it comments on the colonial condition is illustrated through Jody. Jody's original nationality is an area in the West Indies, an extremely colonized British region. However, he came to England and assimilated into their culture, making it ironic that the figure representing the colonizer is, in reality, the colonized. While Jude desires to keep the Irish race pure, Jody's pure black race has also been tainted by the male colonizer. In other words, Jude is refusing the male colonizer, but in actuality, Jody is the female colonized. Also, Jody's name, like Fergus, complicates gender and this colonial metaphor because Jody is typically a feminine name. Moreover, although Dil is transgendered, she still possesses male genitalia, and therefore, Jody, the person who is supposed to represent the male colonizer, is homosexual.

Next, Neil Jordan signals a dynamic shift through removal of the action to the shed, where Jody is being held. This shed appears to be a liminal space; a space that is not quite feminine or masculine. It could be argued, however, that it is more of a feminine, domestic space because the shed is in fact a greenhouse. Like women, greenhouses are often called "nurseries" and are symbols of fertility, germination, and nurturing. It is also interesting that Jude enters the shed only when she must relieve Fergus, illustrating her reluctance to enter the female space. However, at the climax of the film, Jude invades Dil's domestic space with gun in hand, completely consumed with a lust for violence directed toward Fergus. Not knowing that Dil is transgendered,

therefore not fully feminine, Jude violates Dil's domestic space anyway, assuming she is genetically female.

The fact that women were not reluctant about violating the domestic space is exemplified by the women who had no reservations about hiding weapons or soldiers in their homes during the Troubles or the 1916 Rebellion. *The Irish Volunteer* comments on female combatants: "Each rifle we [the women] put in their hands will represent to us a bolt fastened behind the door of some Irish home to keep out the hostile stranger. Each cartridge will be a watchdog to fight for the sanctity of the hearth" (qtd. in Ward 93).

In addition, the shed or greenhouse is parallel to the colonial relationship between Ireland and England, where Ireland is the "shed" and is located in the backyard of the "big house," or England. The colonial dimensions of the shed in *The Crying Game* are also significant because the shed's glass panes are destroyed by a British army helicopter, a super-symbol of colonialism. There is a famous adage that warns, "People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones," illustrating the fragile colonial state between Ireland and England. Also, during the Troubles, children from both sides of the conflict would literally throw stones at each other as to illustrate the prejudice of both sides.

Returning to the notion of the shed as a domestic space, during the Troubles, mothers were very concerned about their children and the sacredness of the home, as though it was in itself a refuge. Shelia Mahon remembers: "We'd be in the parlor, then the living room, then the kitchen. My mother didn't care if there were a hundred kids...all sitting talking [having] cups of tea. Our house seemed to be like the headquarters...so we wouldn't be injured; we wouldn't be hurt. She tried to shade you from as much as she possibly could" (Personal interview 2 July 2008). Mahon's mother

used the home to shield her children, as well as other children, from the horrors of the outside. Mahon's mother demonstrates her belief in the sacredness of the home and her opposition to the violence. It could be argued that Mahon's mother was a representative of the women who felt women participating in violence were traitorous to femininity.

Next in the film, when Jude comes in to relieve Fergus from watching Jody, she chastises Fergus for talking to Jody and for taking off his hood. By removing Jody's hood, Fergus is ironically allowing the male gaze to be asserted directly onto him. William Butler Yeats's poem "Who Goes with Fergus" (1892) is very much a masculine, Fenian poem. Yeats challenges men through national discourse and asks them who is fighting for Ireland: "Who will go drive with Fergus now/And pierce the deep wood's woven shade" (lines 1-2). Yeats asks if it will be the masculine, brawny men of the Irish who will rise up for Ireland. In his use of the word "pierce," Yeats suggests the sexual element associated with the traditional masculine warrior.

Inverting Yeats's poem, in this case, it is Jude, the woman, who is fighting for Ireland and not the man, or feminized man, Fergus. This illustrates how Fergus's feminine tendencies complicate the idea that Fergus is typically the phallic principle. On the other hand, knowing Fergus's cultural significance, it eroticizes the scene in Jordan's film where Fergus allows Jody's male gaze to be directed at him, suggesting that his sexuality is ambivalent. It could be argued that the male gaze could now be termed the homoerotic gaze.

Because under the male gaze women are traditionally the ones exposed and held captive, it is ironic that it is the male character Jody who is literally held captive. Being imprisoned or tied up is often viewed as erotic, and men frequently used eroticism as a

weapon against women. One could claim that when women enter the male space of violence, they are familiar with the “codes” of female (mis)treatment, and the women long to shut down these practices. For example, because the Cathleen ni Houlihan figure is such an archetypal symbol, men force this ideal upon the “real” women of the Troubles, and they cannot live up to this expectation. It could be argued that although Jody is male, Jude re-covers Jody with the hood in defense of all the women who are constantly objectified by the male gaze. On the other hand, while Jude has the power to objectify and eroticize the male in this situation, turning the male gaze into the female gaze, she does not assert this power upon him.

To interpret this scene another way, we return to the process of strip-searching. If women commit to violence, they know they risk being imprisoned, and it is certain they will be strip-searched: a process that physically and mentally humiliates them. Therefore, Jody is more sexually vulnerable than women because he is covered up by a hood, unable to assert his own gaze upon the strip-searchers.

Continually, when Jody realizes that Jude has entered the shed, he shouts: “Don’t leave me with her, she’s dangerous! You got no feelings woman.” She then puts the hood back over Jody’s face, disallowing the male gaze to be asserted onto her, and hits him in the face with the barrel of a gun, an extremely phallic symbol, causing his mouth to bleed profusely. After she leaves, Jody confides to Fergus that, “women are trouble ...some kinds of women are,” to which Fergus replies, “She can’t help it.”<sup>12</sup> In 1982, an International Women’s Day poster was issued that claimed: “This is not just a man’s war, but a people’s war” (See Figure 2.C, page 87). Fergus acknowledges that, as

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<sup>12</sup> One might relate Jody’s use of “women are trouble” to a play on words concerning women and the Troubles.

untraditional as it seems for a woman, it is in Jude's nature to be physically violent because of her dedication to the IRA.

After Jody is killed by the British Saracen, Fergus travels to London on his promise to Jody to protect Jody's girlfriend, Dil. Here, Jordan signals another dynamic shift in placing the remainder of the film in London, the imperial capital. Fergus adopts the classic navy role, a term applied to manual laborers, by working at a construction site in London. His inferior position as Irish is continually underscored by his working beside a cricket ground. The game of cricket was officially banned by the Gaelic Athletic Association, or GAA. The GAA sought to reintroduce traditional Irish cultural values through sports and they deemed Cricket as a "foreign game." In other words, cricket was the game of the colonizer.

While in London, Jude awaits Fergus's return to his room. Like an animal patiently waiting for its prey, she springs on Fergus with demands that he join her, along with the IRA's command, to assassinate a British judge. It is intriguing that although Jude masterminds the "operation," she does not execute the deed. Perhaps this is not because she lacks the skill or emotional drive to perform the deed, but rather because she is the one in power and illustrates more command by getting someone else to perform the "dirty work," freeing her up to oversee the entire operation.

When Fergus tells her that he is "out" and wants nothing to do with the violence, Jude replies, "You're never out." Perhaps this statement is a pun on homosexuals "coming out of the closet" because Fergus is so often presented as feminine, and is developing sexual feelings for the transgendered Dil. Also, Jude apparently has a desire

to “out” herself as other than the female domestic stereotype, suggesting that this culture of violence during the Troubles allows women to transcend this stereotype.

Jude is dressed in a uniform of sorts: a masculine blazer, but with a knee-length feminine skirt. During the 1916 Easter Rising, women combatants were not permitted to shoot a gun out of uniform. Margaret Skinnider, a combatant during the 1916 Rebellion, writes: “I confess that, although I never used it [a gun], I often felt tempted...I was not in uniform, however, and had had orders not to shoot except thus clothed and so a member of the Republican Army” (qtd. in Weihman 235). A significant difference between Jude and the earlier IRA combatants was that during the 1916 Easter Rising, women’s uniforms had to include pants: “women changed from skirts to trousers when their shifts as nurses or couriers ended and more snipers were needed; in order to hold a gun, they had to wear pants” (Weihman 235; See Figure 2.D, page 87). Weihman further comments, “Armed women undoubtedly tested traditional expectations, for the women who did pick up their guns and fight did so clothed as male soldiers. Through their clothing and behavior they thus enacted a problematic gender masquerade, shifting rapidly between feminine and masculine identities” (231).

However, it is as though as the modern Troubles progressed, Jude is allowed to demonstrate her femininity in dress (as evidenced through the skirt), thus suggesting that there is a space for femininity in violence. In other words, to fight, women did not have to simply disguise themselves as men, but could still be feminine.

Returning to the idea of hair as feminine adornment, Jude has cut her hair in a beautifully styled, red bob and her makeup is flawlessly applied. She also uses her sexuality in a masculine way when she grabs Fergus’s crotch and says, “Fuck me

Fergus,” and when he shows no interest, she says, “Am I to take that as a no?” Jude, the woman, is taking control over the man by using sex to get what she wants: an act of violence. Even in her use of the word “fuck,” she is taking the masculine view of sex being physical rather than emotional. When Fergus refuses to kill the judge, she pulls a gun, a phallic symbol, out of her purse, a feminine symbol, and forces it into his face. Jude is the one in control, the one with the power, the one using violence to achieve her goals.

Furthermore, Jude is the character, not the IRA leader, who teaches Fergus the proper way to assassinate the judge. She tells him that she will be the one to bring “the gear” for the operation. As she is dressing for the assassination, she is once again in the masculine blazer and the feminine skirt. This time, she also adorns herself with three feminine articles: earrings, a pearl necklace, and high heels. Her dress, with the mixture of the masculine blazer and the feminine accessories, illustrates Jude’s daring to continually complicate gender roles and the difference between her and earlier twentieth century combatants. Her lipstick and makeup are again flawless, and as she puts her earrings on, she gazes at herself in a tri-fold mirror.

With the mirror, Jordan presents four Judes: a feminine Jude, a purpose-driven, violent Jude, the physical Jude, and a mixture of all three. Perhaps Jordan is suggesting that a female combatant does not have to abandon all femininity because she exists in the male space. As Jude gazes at herself in the mirror, she is exhibiting the feminine gaze upon herself, a gaze that has no space for the male gaze. Perhaps she is contemplating the gender-duality between her connection to violence as a woman, and she feels justified being a part of the violent space. The camera also zooms in closely to Jude’s expression,



with the lighting directly on her face in an otherwise dimly lit room. Both the camera angle and lighting focus on Jude's intent stare that displays her lack of apprehension concerning the deed that is about to unfold.

At the very least, during this self-reflective moment before the assassination, Jordan is forcing us to pay close attention to Jude's mixed attire. She is able to maintain her feminine qualities, while also being able to illustrate her dedication to the operation through the uniform. Aileen Maguire compared republican paramilitary women and loyalist paramilitary women in appearance: "they were quite rough even in appearance...those girls had tattoos on their breasts of eagles and I thought, who could sit with your breast exposed? They were rough, they were very common-spoken...we were republicans and therefore we had standards" (Personal interview). Maguire refers to the women who brutally murdered Ann Ogilby, and their apparent disregard for feminine respect. These women used their bodies as literal texts for others to write on. They also allowed violence to be inflicted upon their bodies by needles, just as they too inflicted violence upon Ann Ogilby.

As Jude turns away from the mirror, she grabs the gun and rubs it in her hand, further suggesting her cross into masculinity. Suspenseful, eerie music plays in the background, creating nervous anticipation for the operation that is to take place next. The room is dim except for the light from a window that frames Jude's silhouette, forcing the viewer to focus on nothing but the actions of Jude as she takes the gun from the drawer. The viewer is not seeing Jude from the male perspective, but she is viewing Jude's actions without intrusion from anyone. McLoone claims, "Jude's final appearance, as a power-dressed and determined terrorist with gun in hand, is the most traditional of

‘castrating women’ stereotypes” (182). In this final appearance, Jude is not dressed in a pant suit, like women of early Cumann na mBan, but she has transcended into the male space, yet remaining feminine.

Next, Fergus does not appear for the operation because Dil, like Jude did to Jody, holds him hostage. Jude then charges into Dil’s apartment, gun in hand, to kill Fergus. She embodies qualities of a man seeking revenge—anger, hatred, and dedication to the cause. This dedication is exemplified through many female IRA members during the Troubles. Aileen Maguire comments, “I have no regrets for any of the things or any of the operations” (Personal interview). In a way, perhaps women, especially young women, had to be more violent than men to “prove themselves.” Maguire states: “The person that I was I think I rather terrified the rest of the men in the unit because of the courage that I would have shown...women were out there, brave women, strong women, opinionated and thank God for it” (Personal interview).

Like Maguire’s description of strong women, Jude enters the apartment, and Dil emerges from behind the curtain. Dil is consumed with rage because she knows that Jude used her sexuality to lure Jody to his impending death.<sup>13</sup> Dil shoots Jude several times and as she dies, Jude is *still attempting to use violence* as she picks up the gun in an effort to shoot Dil. However, her efforts are in vain and she falls lifeless to the floor. Dil, realizing that she will never be a real woman, kills Jude partly because she was responsible for Jody’s death and partly because of jealousy.

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<sup>13</sup> Like a web that connects, a woman was attending a dinner party with the former governor of Armagh jail who claimed that the women prisoners had adored him. Little did he know that this woman was Aileen Maguire’s sister. Maguire, along with other IRA women prisoners, took the governor of Armagh jail hostage in effort to support improved conditions in Long Kesh.

McLoone also states: “Male redemption in this film is at the expense of the woman who has to be eliminated before any kind of resolution can occur for Fergus and Dil” (182). Perhaps Jordan is suggesting that Jude must be killed at the end of the film because once the resolution phase begins there is no longer a place for violent women. Possibly, the dedication of these women to their cause to die rather than submit (i.e. hunger strikers) and their reluctance to disarm causes them to no longer have a space in violence or otherwise.

However, it is worth mentioning that the women involved in the Ladies’ Land League (which we will discuss in Chapter III) and women politically acting on men’s behalf during the Troubles while they were locked away in Long Kesh, formed resentment when the men returned and demanded they get back in the kitchen. Maud Gonne expresses her discontent with returning male leaders in her memoir, *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne: A Servant of the Queen* (1938). Gonne heavily participated in the LLL and many male leaders respected her, including John O’Leary; however, she claims, “But you don’t want women’s work. None of the parties in Ireland want women” (119). Once the male leaders of the Land League were released from jail, they demanded Gonne step down and disband the LLL, despite all of her dedication and hard work.

Aileen Maguire and Maureen O’Hare are both now employees of the Sein Féin POW department. Maguire recounts: “Turning fifty and first time councilor, I was elected on my own volition...I would say I’ve gone full circle from being a revolutionary, through being a mother, and back to now being an elected representative” (Personal interview). One could argue that while in resolution combatant women have no

place to pick up a gun, if they chose to, they can have a place in the peace process; however, they are not necessary to that process.

As the credits are rolling across the screen at the close of the film, Tammy Wynette's song, "Stand by Your Man" softly plays in the background. As Jordan begins the film ironically playing "When a Man Loves a Woman," he further complicates gender roles because transgendered Dil is "standing by her man." Because Jude has been eliminated, she does not have to adhere to the traditional role of standing by her man because in choosing violence, she has chosen to "stand" by herself and her country.

Finally, *The Crying Game* is one of relatively few movies concerning the Troubles that interrogates the theme or matter of women and violence. One that touches on the topic of women and violence is Ken Loach's *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006). This film is set during the Irish War of Independence, where one of the main protagonist's sweetheart is a Cumann na mBan message runner.

By contrast to *The Crying Game*, Jordan's Hollywood-focused film *Michael Collins* (1996) concerns the Troubles of the nineteen teens and twenties and restricts its main female character (played by Julia Roberts) to, essentially, a passive supporting role. Also, Jordan's Fergus, played by Stephen Rea, presents a willingness to complicate received "macho" Irish nationalist narratives by participating in a film with such complex gender bending. This is illustrated in the great difference between the characters of Collins and Fergus. Where Collins, played by Liam Neeson, is the tall, dark, and handsome figure, Fergus is not as attractive, weaker, and is more feminized. It is likely, however, that Stephen Rea recognized the specialness of the female narratives in *The*

*Crying Game* when determining to commit his considerable domestic—and even international—prestige to the project.

It is certainly no mistake or coincidence that Jordan chose Rea as his male protagonist because Rea is not simply “any other actor.” His mere presence in *The Crying Game* brings to the production certain political and cultural messages. Because Rea was a co-founder of the Field Day Theatre Company in 1980, it is as though Field Day is endorsing *The Crying Game* and legitimizing women and violence. Through Field Day, Rea, Brian Friel, and Seamus Deane desired to create a means where opposition in politics could be mended through an artistic outlet. They founded the company in Derry, the breaking ground for the Troubles, and hoped Field Day would initiate a major theatre company in Northern Ireland, and attempt to mend the divide so prominent between nationalists and loyalists.

Rea’s personal life further intersects with the screen through his marriage to Dolorous Price. Where critic Ruth Barton makes the connection to the importance this presents, she fails to explain why Dolorous Price would be so vital. Dolorous was one of the infamous Price Sisters who were detained at Heathrow in connection with two car bomb explosions in London, killing one person and injuring 200 others in 1973. They were ordered to serve their twenty-year sentences in England, but the sisters desired to serve their sentences in Northern Ireland. They were refused their request and protested by embarking on a hunger strike.

However, England did not want the sisters to die and receive the status of martyr, so they began to force feed them, which was a very painful process. For the same reason women joined Cumman na mBan to receive a sense of female camaraderie, the women at

Armagh jail joined the hunger strike in support of the Price Sisters.<sup>14</sup> Once the doctors declared the sisters anorexic, they were released and were free to return to Ireland, where they resumed their education and participation in the IRA.

Rea warned the media not to confuse his and his wife's politics, but of course, people often did. Although Rea did not want others to merge his and Price's political affiliation together, did not necessarily indicate that Rea was opposed to the idea of women in violence. The mere fact that he agreed to participate in a film that depicts such a woman of intense violence comments that perhaps Rea accepted that women had a place and right to fight with the IRA for Ireland's independence. By having now discussed Jude in *The Crying Game*, we can see that she is an accurate representation of the militant woman: dedicated, unafraid, and strong.

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<sup>14</sup> *The Crying Game* highlights the immense connectivity between Ireland and England. The Troubles exceeded Ireland ever since the bombing attempt on an English jail by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, one of the first terrorist organizations. This link is illustrated through Jude's desire to assassinate a British judge in London.



Figure 2.A

“Bernadette” Bogside Mural (1996)  
 (Image Courtesy of the Bogside Artists)

This mural, by the Bogside Artists, is one of a suite of twelve on and near Rossville Street in the predominantly Catholic and nationalist Bogside neighborhood of Derry.



Figure 2.B

“UFF, East Belfast Brigade”  
 (Image: Kelly M. Twilley, June 2008)

This mural is located in East Belfast, a predominately loyalist and unionist neighborhood.



Figure 2.C

“Women” (1982)

Image Courtesy of CAIN website and Sinn Féin Department of Women's Affairs



Figure 2.D

Margaret Skinnider dressed as a boy in a *Fianna* costume.

Image Courtesy from *Doing My Bit for Ireland* (1917).



### Chapter III

#### Righting the Times: Women's Political Activism beyond the Gun

In this chapter, we will discuss what one may refer to as a “double revolution” present during the Troubles. At the start of the Troubles, there emerged several women's rights groups who were beginning a revolution to advance women in a patriarchal society. On the other hand, many other women of Northern Ireland rose up in revolution against the British authority and began, many for the first time, to become politically involved, though with a non-violent approach. They moved out from their expected place in the home into the public eye. Just as there is a strong divide between feminists and combatant women, there is a stark division among politically involved women and feminists as well. In other words, during this time, women were focused on one or the other revolutionary view point with very little merging between the groups. One could argue that women's rights are a shared goal with *all* these groups of women; however, these groups simply believe there are different ways of getting there.

Initially, the fight for women's rights was a battle that many women saw need for decades earlier with de Valera's Ireland. At the start of the twentieth century, many women were actively involved in the political domain, including those involved in the 1916 Easter Rising; however, with the Constitution of 1937, Eamon de Valera, in conjunction with the Catholic Church, implemented several restrictions upon women: he legally prohibited a woman from working outside the home, from acquiring a divorce under any circumstances, eliminated women's rights to choose abortion or birth control,

and restricted a woman's right to her own body in every possible way. A woman was to be a mother, a wife, and remain in the home.

Hugo Hamilton comments on this issue in his autobiography *The Speckled People* (2003). Hamilton centers much of the work on his mother Irmgard, a woman never encouraged by her husband or Irish society to transcend the domestic space. However, Irmgard certainly is a strong female character because she was unafraid to seek help when the family was in financial trouble, and she also defended herself and her children against her husband, a strict dictator taking Irish nationalism and language to the extreme. When he breaks their son's nose because young Franz refuses to stop singing in English, Irmgard hurries to pack their bags. Irmgard promises, "we were not going to be trapped again" (Hamilton 31). Young Hugo remembers: "He [the father] closed the front door and said she was married now, so she sat down on the suitcase and cried" (Hamilton 32). Because Irmgard was a woman living in de Valera's Ireland, she had no alternative.

When the civil rights campaign began in the 1960s, women realized that there was a dire need for women to acquire their own rights. They noticed that something had to be done about discrimination towards women concerning employment and domestic violence. They also deserved the right to decide upon personal issues like abortion and contraceptives. In *Voices Against Oppression*, the female prisoners challenge women in their poem "From Eve:"

‘Woman you are no less than man  
Redeem your pride and make a stand’  
So woman continues and still she fights  
To gain equality and assert her rights. (lines 11-14)

Feminists believed that if a Catholic man deserved the same rights as a Protestant man, in the same way, a Catholic or Protestant woman deserved equality with men as well. They headed up the housing action committee, housing being one of the central concerns of Catholic discrimination leading up to the outbreak of the Troubles, and helped to form some of the demands of NICRA.

During marches, women proudly carried the sign, “One man, one vote,” but did not realize, at the time, that it reflected a sexist connotation. This idea is reflected in the Bogside Mural “Civil Rights” (See Figure 3.A, page 114). The crowd is a mixture of both men and women, suggesting the importance that women contributed to NICRA during the beginning of the Troubles. However, the sign, “One man, One Vote,” blares loudly to take emphasis off women and place it solely on the *man*’s right. Men did not mind women campaigning for men’s political rights, but if they started fighting for their own rights, it could create serious hostility in the home and often caused domestic violence.

Feminists realized there was a need within the communities for women to find education, freedom from housework, and discover a place of solace. In response to these desires, began the Women’s Centers of the Falls and the Shankill neighborhoods, Catholic and Protestant respectively. These Women’s Centers, formed in the 1980s, provided educational classes and childcare. They also sought to promote good relations between the two communities and created for women the opportunity to focus on themselves rather than to always be defined solely as a wives and mothers.

Irish author Moy McCrory explores the complex relationship between women of differing religious backgrounds. While these women indeed share many similarities as

women, they still hold fast to the prejudices of war. In her short story “Bleeding Sinners” (1988), McCrory exposes the inner thoughts of Catholic-raised Eithne and Protestant born Evelyn as they wait in a gynecologist’s office in Belfast. At the beginning of the story, rather than the women defining themselves as individuals, both women define themselves by the statuses of their husbands: “she was a farmer’s wife...she was a labourer’s wife” (McCrory 40-41).

In addition, both Eithne and Evelyn suffer from a severe case of fibroids, causing them to bleed profusely during their menstrual cycles. This condition eventually led to their hysterectomies, and in turn, led to their freedom from childbirth: “It felt good. Energy was flooding back. No more periods, no more pregnancies. Freedom” (McCrory 57). Despite their painful condition, these women were also taught that they should not share this aspect of their femininity with men. Evelyn’s aunt claimed: “‘they [men] would go right off if they ever found the half of it!’ she said, wrinkling her nose in disgust. ‘I’ve made sure that he hasn’t been troubled by anything like that’” (McCrory 51). Because menstruation was to be kept secret, it was as though women were supposed to be ashamed of being a woman. Republican prisoners, in their collection *Voices Against Oppression*, address this very issue in their poem “Reflections:”

Have patience with my monthly  
Brain storms  
Which can breed a red alert, danger-zone mind, and  
We will laugh about this later. (lines 11-14)

These prisoners understand that menstruation is normal and is an aspect of femininity that all women share, no matter their religious affiliation. They also argue that women should not have to be ashamed or hide their femininity from anyone.

However, after a bomb explosion at a construction site in Belfast's city center, both Eithne and Evelyn become overwhelmed with worry for their husbands' lives. Despite the similarities these women of differing religious backgrounds share—menstruation, childbirth, hysterectomies, husbands in danger—Evelyn ends the story murmuring: ““Catholic scum”” (McCroory 76). This story suggests that there is certainly a sense of absurdity in the hatred between Catholics and Protestants. However, the Women's Centers of the Falls and Shankill did attempt to bridge the gap between the communities.

Many of the founders of the Falls and Shankill Women's Centers were the key women involved in the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement (1975). Founded in Belfast, NIWRM demanded equality with British laws on women's rights. Also, in 1977, another women's rights group, the Women's Belfast Collective, split from NIWRM to become more focused on the nationalist movement, and was especially concerned with women's prisoner issues, such as those in Armagh.

Although the women's movement began with a focus on issues of domestic violence, rape, and unequal job opportunity, in the 1980s, the women shifted their emphasis to lower community activities. For example, they sought for the development of inter-church groups and desired movement toward integrated schools. Monica McWilliams, co-founder of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, comments about women advocating for their rights: “[they] expend extraordinary energy and imagination

in order to put themselves into ‘the big picture’ of political conflict in Northern Ireland” (29).

With political action dominating Northern Ireland’s attention, feminists had to battle even harder to have their opinions heard over the loud sounds of war. Also, Michelle Kirsch argues: “Feminism, the word, as opposed to the ideal, has a bit of an image crisis. Too many people, too many women, have taken the lazy option of associating the word with its caricature instead of its character” (1). In essence, feminists were not only fighting for their issues to be heard in the midst of a political revolution, but they were also fighting to be taken seriously and not be viewed merely, as Beth puts it in Valerie Miner’s novel *Blood Sisters* (1982), as “clitocentric” (Miner 54).

Because women desired a new and equal place in society, there emerged the concept of the “new woman.” She was the woman who could move away from the traditional domestic space set aside for her and decide what would benefit her best as an individual. She was also a strong and independent woman whose sexuality was to be embraced and celebrated. Peggy, an ex-prisoner, argues:

Aye, men think I’m wild because I was in prison. My marriage broke up when I was in prison. When the men get out of prison women line up to welcome the man back from his years of celibacy. Those women, who would go off for the night with the men weren’t wild, but I was because I came back from prison just as horny as any of the men. (qtd. in Dowler 169)

Peggy, along with many other women, was finally challenging what it meant to be woman in Ireland: what her rights were, what her place was, and what her sexuality meant as a woman.

Robert McLiam Wilson, author of the Troubles-centered novel *Eureka Street* (1999), suddenly breaks from his main plot to focus on Rosemary Daye, a representation of this “new woman.” We get a glimpse into the thoughts of Rosemary as she embraces her sexuality while thinking about the sexual encounter she will have later that evening: “People wanted their flesh to touch flesh, warm skin on warm skin. What could be the harm in that” (Wilson 220). She is twenty-six years old, the number of the counties comprising the Republic of Ireland and has had four sexual lovers, where Sean will make her fifth. One can easily connect the number of Rosemary’s lovers to the provinces of Ireland: Munster, Leinster, Connacht, Ulster, and the former province, Meath. This is illustrated when Sean pleads, “Oh, let me be your fifth” (221).

As Rosemary enters a sandwich shop, a bomb explodes, killing her instantly. Perhaps Wilson is not suggesting, through Rosemary’s death, that there is no space for the “new woman,” but is illustrating that she does indeed exist, and she will be able to truly emerge after the violence of the Troubles has ended. Once again, like politically active women and combatant women believed, once the Troubles ended and Ireland achieved its independence, the “new woman” could surface. The female prisoners who penned *Voices Against Oppression* agree strongly with the concept of the “new woman” as illustrated in their poem, “Woman:”

But watch the *new woman* emerge  
 Growing strength loosens his grip

Her inner transformation

Challenges his power

And robs him of control.

Watch this new woman

No longer does she bear his misery

See her stand strong and proud. (my emphasis; lines 8-15)

These women know that despite the patriarchal society, the “new woman” is close at hand. She will be independent, powerful, and strong.

As the Troubles progressed, women began to realize there was a dire need, some realizing for the first time, that women should become involved in a political way.

Women’s involvement in politics initially began in 1881, when Irishwomen were approached by Irishmen to take control of the Land League: a movement that was at its most intense concerning the fight of tenant farmers against rack rents and landlord power. Margaret Ward writes: “for the first time in Irish history, women were given the opportunity to participate in a political movement...free to assert their own principles and to develop their own organizational skills” (4).

Anna and Fanny Parnell, sisters of Charles Stuart Parnell, acclaimed in 1880 as the “uncrowned king of Ireland,” were most heavily involved with the Land League, although figures like Maud Gonne, a woman soon to become the embodiment of nationalist Ireland, also heavily participated. Because of the sisters’ status as products of an impoverished Protestant family, they were not initially viewed as agents of reform for a nationalist cause. Anna’s involvement in the Land League led her to write articles focusing on other issues concerning women, such as the deprivation of voting rights or



society's disallowing women to take political office. Andrew Kettle, a close friend of Charles Stuart Parnell, spoke highly of Anna and considered her to have

A better knowledge of the lights and shades of Irish peasant life, of the real economic conditions of the country, and of the social and political forces which had to be acted upon to work out the freedom of Ireland than any person, man or woman, I have ever met...Anna Parnell would have worked the Land League revolution to a much better conclusion than her great brother. (qtd. in Ward 14)

Although women were given the privilege of controlling the Land League because most of its male leaders were jailed, it did give women a considerable power because they were in control over a debate concerning land ownership that had become central to Irish identity.

The Ladies' Land League (LLL), as they called themselves, supported evicted families by giving money or providing the evicted family with shelter. They also looked after the families of the jailed League leaders, and sought to extend their campaign of resistance by raising more money to aid those in need. Of course, there was talk about the inability of these women to truly make a difference. *The Times* sneered: "when treason is reduced to fighting behind petticoats and pinafores it is not likely to do much mischief" (qtd. in Ward 22). However, despite the negative attitudes, the LLL decided that to truly attack the system, they must direct their action against the landlord power. Because Charles Stuart Parnell felt threatened by these strong women and the male leaders were released from jail, they collectively decided the LLL must be dissolved.

Despite this setback, it was undeniable that women were emerging onto the political scene.

This undeniable fact was illustrated among unionists as well. In 1912, Home Rule looked inevitable, and the Ulster unionists, goaded on by British novelist Rudyard Kipling, believed British rule in Northern Ireland would soon be threatened. Because of this fear, they established the Ulster Volunteer Force, a loyalist paramilitary organization, and several vigilante units. On September 28, 1912, unionists joined together for Ulster Day, an event that allowed the loyalist population to sign their names in opposition to Home Rule.

All of the men signed the “Solemn League and Covenant,” a contract stating that Protestants would never give Northern Ireland over to the nationalists. Most important for the discussion of politically active women, a women’s document was created as well. It was entitled the “Ulster Covenant Women’s Declaration.” In this declaration, the women signed their: “desire to associate ourselves with the men of Ulster in their uncompromising opposition to the Home Rule Bill.” It is unquestionable that because women signed the covenant, they felt it important to be politically involved. However, one could read this another way. Because there were two separate covenants, one for men and one for women, it could be argued that women were not as important because they could not sign the “real” document. Either way, women chose to be politically involved, and because of that, proved their significance.

Some women were drawn to become politically active because they saw an injustice and longed to make a difference. However, others participated simply because the men were absent, due to government plans like internment, and they were forced into

fighting because they were the ones left behind. Internment was a plan that was re-introduced by the British Government in 1971, where the British Army would sweep through neighborhoods arresting men, and detaining them without trial because they suspected them of participating in illegal paramilitary groups. The army would then proceed to torture the men by refusing them food and burning them with cigarettes to extract information concerning these paramilitary groups. During internment, 1,874 Catholics (men and women) were detained, yet only 107 Protestants were seized. Shelia Mahon, a woman I interviewed who grew up on the Falls Road, talks about her experience:

He went out for a bottle of milk and he never came back. He was just picked up off the street...you didn't have to be doing anything or you didn't have to have any suspicions about you being involved in kind of terrorist activity. They just did a mass swoop. He was away for a good three years. He was interned in Long Kesh. His toenails was pulled out; his fingernails was pulled out. He was burned with electric fires, but he doesn't talk about things. My mom was fumbling through the Troubles and then going up to jail to visit my dad. She had a loose tooth and that's how she got messages in and out was because she would have the paper and wrote the message [on it] that it would have been so precisely folded up to fit into that gap for the tooth to go over so as when she kissed my daddy on the way out, she transferred the piece of paper from her tooth...that's how he knew what was going on outside. (Personal interview 2 July 2008)

In 1995 at the University of Ulster, Valerie Morgan delivered a lecture entitled “Peacekeepers? Peacemakers? Women in Northern Ireland 1969-1995,” where she claimed that the long-term impact and consequence of living during violent times weighs most heavily on women because of bereavement and separation from her loved ones. During internment, women’s husbands and sons were being ripped from their homes, and the injustice and ache of separation caused these women to take to the streets in protest.

As depicted in the Bogside mural “Bernadette,” the women in the background are banging bin lids. Many women would bang lids in effort to warn the neighborhood of the impending army’s raid to take men for internment. Emer Collins, a woman I interviewed working at the Royal Victoria Hospital, located in the heart of the Catholic Falls neighborhood, remembers her experience: “And then the Troubles came and disaster was all around. When a policeman was shot, some people would be very pleased about that. And you would hear that [banging the bin lids] in the hospital” (Personal interview 29 June 2008).

There was a particular group in the mostly Catholic city of Newry known as the Petticoat Brigade, who would emerge from their houses raising mops and dusters in defense of the army. Although these women were fighting for the freedom of their men, with groups like the Petticoat Brigade, women, for the first time, were literally moving the domestic space into the street and into the political world.

Irish novelist Mary Beckett comments on the domestic transcending into the political realm with her novel *Give Them Stones* (1989). Her novel follows the struggles and bravery of republican Martha Hughes, a middle-aged Belfast woman desiring to make a difference during the Troubles, and cope with female subordination in a male

dominated society. Out of her nationalist ideals, she begins to profit from her domestic ability to bake bread, and selling it to give the proceeds to the IRA: “she opts to give the people bread, not stones, adapting the traditional female role of nurturer to an economic and business agenda” (Kennedy-Andrews 245).

However, when the IRA cripple a young boy, she refuses to give them any further financial support, and she must withstand the IRA’s threats to hold fast to her dignity and beliefs. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, author of *(De-) constructing the North: Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles since 1969* (2003), comments that the novel uncovers: “the struggle of a strong, independent-minded woman to define and maintain a sense of herself in an oppressively patriarchal society, amidst the pressures not only of marriage and family, but of colonialism and paramilitarism” (243-244). In essence, Martha was unafraid to move the domestic space into the political sphere, but she also did not abandon the sanctity of the domestic space when it was threatened.

When women decided to become politically involved, their roles in the household changed. For example, wives of internees learned to be single parents, and they experienced a break from pregnancy providing within them a sense of freedom. Seth Linder quotes Mary Nelis in his essay:

When most of our men went into prison they left us at the kitchen sink, washing the dishes and looking after the babies. When they got out and expected to find their dinners on the table we weren’t there. We were out on the streets with our placards and they had to make their own dinners. That’s how the Troubles have changed us. (5)

These women tasted freedom by emerging from the home, going to political meetings, and protesting in the streets.

What began as a fight for their men, metamorphosed into something liberating: women realized they had potential as individuals, rather than only filling the traditional roles of wife and mother. In *Voices Against Oppression*, republican women prisoners express their discontent toward the opinion that woman's role is solely domestic in their poem "From Eve:"

From the rib of Adam she was formed  
 And from that hour she had but mourned  
 Mourned the injustice in her life  
 Made to accept the role of wife. (lines 1-4)

Upset at this limited role, a woman discusses life after her husband returned from internment: "He sits up there in the club, talking about when he was in Long Kesh...this bloody house is like Long Kesh to me...I'm in here on my own staring at these four walls" (82). Also, with their political involvement, women noticed they were moving into the male's space, and it was a feeling, although unfamiliar, that many women embraced: "In times of conflict...the lives of men as well as women become more politically focused; but for women this experience can be the more intense when they encounter what is conventionally deemed to be the male domain" (1).

However, in discussing a problem concerning republican women, Nell McCafferty argues: "[women have] seldom risen to positions of authority except where they adopt the male ideals, aims, and discipline of the movement" (22). McCafferty claims that in order for women to be involved in the political movement, they ultimately

have to assume male ideals, rather than ideals of their own. One cannot deny, however, the prominent role women did play.

They were involved in a number of activities during the Troubles: they bestowed extreme verbal abuse toward police officers and soldiers, they provided shelter and protection for “wanted” men, young girls were the ones escorting their boyfriends home so they would not get “lifted” by a paramilitary group, and NICRA set up local branches and committees that were composed mainly of women.

Martin Dillon, author of *God and the Gun: The Church and Irish Terrorism* (1997), writes: “[Eileen] was addicted to Valium as much as she was addicted to the conflict. She admitted that during lulls in the violence, she didn’t know what to do with herself” (147). Shelia Mahon also discusses the eeriness at the lack of violence now that the peace agreement has been signed: “Growing up for us violence was normal. Life here was normal chaos. This is not normal for us, the peace and the quiet...this life’s not normal for me because normality for me as a kid growing up was ducking and diving. We’re suspicious of the peace and suspicious of the quiet” (Personal interview).

In 1970, the British Army moved to disarm the Official IRA in the lower Falls area by raiding homes for guns; however, these raids were met by opposition from republicans, and turned into three days of rioting and gun battle between the British Army and republican paramilitaries. In response to the violence, the British implemented the Falls Road Curfew, also referred to as the “Rape of the Lower Falls,” and flooded the area with 3,000 troops. This curfew sparked one of the first all-women demonstrations: 3,000 women from outside the area marched to the Falls bringing milk and bread to women inside the zone. This march broke the curfew and it was never reinstated.

Women were liberated at the realization that their marches and protests could make such a difference. In 1972, a traffic reporter gives information on a protest staged in East and North Belfast:

What are the reasons for these diversions? Bomb scares? Rioters? Assemblies? Not on your sweet life. Something more effective, difficult to handle, extremely dangerous and highly explosive. Something to make the toughest para or policeman shiver in their size 12s. The womenfolk of Belfast are in action. The girls are out in force with their poster, flags, prams, and shopping bags. They form large circles and walk about in the center of the road for up to an hour at a time occupying the road from footpath to footpath, so that traffic cannot pass.

In Nell McCafferty's book, *The Armagh Women* (1981), she quotes Rose McAllister, a republican prisoner: "What I liked best about those years... was the way women in the area organized themselves into vigilante groups and such, blowing whistles and banging bin lids and picketing at the drop of an insult. The Brits are terrified of women" (51). It is undeniable that these fierce women existed. For example, republican, Sean talks about his mother:

"Me ma Annie was the bravest person I knew. Braver than anyone in the Ra. When the soldiers would come to round up men to be interned, Annie would get into the back of the Saracens and say, 'You're not taking these boys today' and she'd push us out. The soldiers didn't know what to do. But they never stopped her, they would just leave and round up some other poor bastards." (qtd. in Dowler 166)



Mothers were unafraid to emerge from the domestic sphere when her offspring were threatened. Thomas comments: “When the soldiers would come up the road all the men would be standing in the background with our guns at our sides ready to use, but the women would go right up to the soldiers and yell at them and spit in their faces. They had the balls. The men had the guns, but they had the guts” (qtd. in Dowler 167).

There were also several prominent women who were unafraid to stand up for their beliefs no matter what it cost them. For instance, Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, simply called Bernadette amongst her Irish comrades, first became interested in politics when she attended Queens University Belfast, and filled a prominent role in a student-led civil rights political party, known as The People’s Democracy. At the age of twenty-one, she was elected to Westminster Parliament becoming, and still remains as, the youngest woman ever to have been elected to Parliament. Her activism in the Troubles began with her inciting the Battle of the Bogside in 1969; the riot is said to have initiated the beginning of the Troubles.

Due to her involvement, she served a six-month jail sentence in Armagh, yet still remained dedicated to her duties in Parliament from her cell. After Bloody Sunday, the bloody massacre of fourteen Irishmen by the British Parachute Regiment and the reason many women joined the IRA, Bernadette punched the Home Secretary for his claiming the British Army only shot in self-defense. She argued their “shooting in self-defense” was difficult to accept because many of the men gunned down were shot in the back attempting to escape.

She also attacked The Peace People, the peace movement initiated by Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, as being dishonest. She felt that: “the peace process is

the worst thing that has happened to us since we lost the 1798 Rebellion” (57). She argued that the peace process: one, did not highlight or seek to rectify the past; two, the role the British served was downplayed; and thirdly, England still had control over Northern Ireland. In 1981, the loyalist paramilitary group, the Ulster Freedom Fighters, shot Devlin and her husband in their home. Fortunately, they both survived and the assailants were arrested.

Eamon Dunphy interviewed Niall O’Dowd, founder and publisher of *Irish America*, an Irish magazine, and the New York-based newspaper *Irish Voice*, about his efforts with the peace movement. Dunphy inquired how O’Dowd was able to persuade Arkansas governor Bill Clinton to get involved in Northern Ireland. O’Dowd informed Dunphy that before he could approach Clinton, Clinton claimed that during his time at Oxford, he became inspired and sympathetic to the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland solely because of Bernadette Devlin. Clinton discovered a woman who would allow nothing to stand in her way of achieving a fair and equal Northern Ireland for *all* of her citizens.

Perhaps inspired by the figure of Devlin, Robert McLiam Wilson privileges one such woman who believed in the importance of political thought and action in his novel *Eureka Street* (1996). On a blind double date with his friend Chuckie, Jake meets Aoirghe. After Jake makes a comment about her not being “Catholic enough,” she illustrates how important politics is to her through her passion. She responds:

‘Very good,’ she taunted. ‘Does that amount to a political position?’

‘A political position. Oh, for fuck’s sake.’

‘Oh. I’m sorry, do you have some problem with politics?’

‘Yes,’ I replied, my voice low. Aoirghe was practically purple now.  
(Wilson 95-96)

In the same way, Emma Groves is also a woman unafraid to demand justice. Groves was in her home when she heard loud fighting outside. When she emerged to discover the cause of the problem, she was shot in the face by a rubber bullet: “The rubber bullet hit me full in the face. Everything went black for me. I was carried out of the house with a towel over my face...I arrived at the hospital in such a serious condition that they had to remove both my eyes” (18-19).

After the shooting, Groves sunk into a deep depression at having unfairly lost her sight, and struggled with anger at the man who shot her. Her depression was so great that her daughter had to attend to the house and the children. England had not only imposed its dominance on Northern Ireland, but now it had imposed its dominance on the woman’s domestic space. Northern Irish poet Medbh McGuckian is renowned for her poetry privileging the sacredness of the domestic space, yet its limited nature as well. In her poem, “The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter,” McGuckian focuses on a woman’s sole position in the domestic space:

A woman steadfast in looking is a callot  
And any woman in the wrong place  
Or outside of her proper location  
Is, by definition, a foolish woman. (lines 5-8)

McGuckian illustrates society’s patriarchal attitude by claiming that if a woman is outside the home, then she is a “foolish woman” because she is not adhering to the traditional

role. However, McGuckian then goes on to explain that if a woman did challenge society's attitude, the only other option left her would be to become a harlot:

The harlot is talkative and wandering  
 By the way, not bearing to be quiet.  
 Not able to abide still at home.  
 Now abroad, now in the streets. (lines 9-12)

After Groves began, as best she could, to cope with the loss of her sight, she decided something must be done about rubber bullets. Initially, rubber and plastic bullets were to be shot on the ground and bounce up on the target to cause them enough pain to stop their actions. However, the British Army began shooting people point blank with no regard for their lives. After twelve deaths since 1976, including children, she founded the United Campaign Against Plastic Bullets.

Literally depicting a child's death by rubber bullets is presented in the Bogside mural "Death of Innocence" (See Figure 3.B, page 114). This mural captures the injustice of child killings during the Troubles. Fourteen-year-old Annette McGavigan was sent out by her teacher to collect items for a still-life painting class. As she bent over to pick up a rubber bullet lying on the ground, she was shot by a British sniper and killed instantly. The mural was originally painted with an unfinished butterfly, and at her right side, a rifle. It was not until recently, in 2006, that the mural has been repainted with the butterfly colored in and the rifle broken, reflecting the progress of the peace process.

Anna Burns is a novelist who focuses on the child perspective of the Troubles. In her novel *No Bones* (2001), Burns narrates the difficulty of living during a violent conflict through the voice of young Amelia. Amelia, like Annette McGavigan, collected

rubber bullets, hiding them in her treasure chest: “best of all by far were the thirty-seven black rubber bullets she’d collected ever since the British Army started firing them. She’d run for them, dived for them, traded other children for them and saved them up” (53). It is unfortunate that these children innocently collected rubber bullets, only to have their lives claimed by them.

Because of the killings, Groves decided rubber bullets must be banned so she headed to New York to discuss her concerns with the manufacturer of the bullets. She took along with her an eighteen-year-old rubber bullet victim from Derry who had lost an eye, causing serious disfigurement to his face. After their meeting, the manufacturer stopped making the bullets. After twenty years, not a single British soldier has been tried for blinding her or for the many children who were wounded or killed. However, Groves is a model woman who was unafraid to fight against an injustice.

Coleen Douglass, a woman I interviewed, was another such politically involved woman, and she heavily participated in women’s political rights. She claims, “It [the Troubles] affected me very deeply.” She was at school when the Troubles began, and she remembers watching the news every day to learn of what was happening in Northern Ireland. She began participating in NICRA, serving as secretary of the student branch, and was involved in The People’s Democracy when she attended Queens as a law student. With the People’s Democracy, she marched in Bloody Sunday at age nineteen: “That was probably one of the most fundamental experiences of my life. Being there, in a march, being tear-gassed, shooting and then trying to escape...not knowing what was happening. Not knowing the full impact until you went home” (Personal interview 1 July 2008). She was the first female president of a student union in Ireland, and as president,

she led many demonstrations. She was also involved in the peace process, being a part of Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP).

Returning now to Valerie Miner's novel *Blood Sisters*, we will use Liz to comment on all the women dedicated to the women's rights movement during the Troubles. Liz and Beth often discuss their differing views, contemplating which is more important: fighting for women's rights or fighting for Ireland's independence. Perhaps Liz feels, as Irish poet Eavan Boland, that the women of Ireland have no place in an "Ireland as Woman" nationalist tradition. How can "real" Irish women live up to the expectation and ideal of the Cathleen ni Houlihan figure? Their inadequacy stems from this ideal and explains why women so desperately fought for their individual rights as women. Many who fought for women's rights believed that if Ireland achieved independence then it would have freedom from one oppressor, but women would remain prisoner to a patriarchal society; however, combatants and politically-centered women believed Ireland's independence was the path leading to women's rights.

Although Beth does become involved, at least in part, in the women's movement, Liz never participates in paramilitary action: "Liz had several times tried to convince Beth that the real revolution was the Women's Movement. But Beth had told her cousin she didn't want to wind up in a lace ghetto" (21). Many women thought that by becoming feminists they would somehow ostracize men completely, and others would think them possessing an "all-female, all-the-time" attitude. In other words, feminists were so entangled with the idea that women needed retribution for their subordinate status that women no longer wanted to be *equal* to men, but believed themselves *better*

than men. Beth argued that the women's movement shunned all help from men, claiming they were the ultimate enemy.

When Beth is asked to smuggle money into Amsterdam for the IRA, several of the men claim that as a woman she cannot do the job as well. However, her lover Bruce defends Beth, declaring that: "there was a place for her here" (22). Beth feels that the IRA allows women a place, but the women's movement allows no such space for men. Beth also claims that while it is important for women to gain their rights, they cannot forget that they also have nationalities.

Throughout the novel, Liz and Beth often have disagreements concerning Irish nationality and women. Liz argues that Irish men are not fighting for Irish women, and she illustrates this passivity by linking Irish women to those living abroad in Russia, Cuba, and Tanzania. Liz believes that Irish women are attempting to fight against a history of such passivity. Beth attempts to refute Liz's view by claiming that there are many women who are involved in fighting for Northern Ireland's independence, like the Price Sisters, and that women play a vital role in the struggle. Liz responds, "The struggle, hell, yes... women have always been allowed to struggle" (48).

Liz then expresses her discontent concerning the statues and busts made in honor of the great heroes of Ireland's struggle for self-rule, claiming: "didn't they have enough granite left for the women" (48). Beth agrees that the IRA "has its problems" falling prey to a patriarchal attitude; however, she asserts that female combatants are progressive because they have transcended into the male space of violence (48).

Maire, a woman involved with Women's Report, the feminist group Liz belongs to, claims: "Ok, Irish people are all exploited, but Irish *women* are most exploited" (48).

Later, Beth defends women's rights to Bruce, when she says: "I told him that he was exploiting women with some of his attitudes...much the same way that England holds down the Irish. I explained that feminism was a very political issue" (54). However, Liz and Beth never agree, and they believe fighting for women's rights and fighting for political rights are separate entities, although approaching the same aim with different methods: "'Your real interest is in women,' said Beth, as if she might spring on her cousin. 'You don't care about Ireland, admit it.' 'Does Ireland care about its women?' asked Liz" (56).

Beth wondered, however, what feminists really knew about the lives of mothers living through the conflict: "What did Liz or Gwen know about these women's lives? What did dykes without children know about the average mother's daily struggles? Did Liz know what it was like being a woman of Turf Lodge in Belfast, sending your kids out to school each morning, not knowing whether they would come back alive" (145).

Even Liz's Irish mother Polly experienced women's oppression in her American home, further illustrating female subordination as global: "Mark [her husband] didn't like the idea of a wife going out to work. 'And I want you to know, once I get the raise that's due me,' he said, 'you're going back in the home where a woman belongs'" (35). Miner explains that the media and public written material would also try to enforce a woman's role by using emotional tactics. For example, a magazine would claim that if a woman chose to work, then her child would ultimately become a juvenile delinquent:

Challenging the breadwinner role of the father, causing stress over authority positions in the marriage, depriving the children of nurturing during the formative years, impressing them that the home is not always



open and available to them. These symptoms lead to an insecurity in youth that expresses itself in aggression or in the need for attention or in both.

(36)

Like de Valera in 1937, these magazines enforced the opinion that women should not challenge their place in the home; they are to be wives and mothers, and remain in the home. They are not to go out working, they are not to have political beliefs, and they certainly should not go out protesting for political issues or women's rights.

Liz's women's rights involvement began with her political work with the feminist group Women's Report. This group offered her a sanctuary of support and helped her to: "survive the male atmosphere" (44). While involved with Women's Report, Liz came to realize that the anti-war movement, the civil rights struggle, and feminism, "was all one fight, really" (45). This is a valid point because it would only serve to make sense that people fighting to gain equal rights for all Catholics and Protestants would eventually turn into a battle concerning equal rights between men and women.

Unfortunately, due to several issues, Liz begins to have some extreme emotional problems. With her intense and overly committed involvement in the women's movement, accompanied with newly realized lesbian feelings, Liz begins to spiral downwards. Liz admits to harboring feelings of love for Beth; however, Beth falls in love with Liz's brother Larry causing the final break from Liz's grip on reality.

She visits a therapist who helps her to work through her issues. After Larry survives an IRA bomb explosion and Polly learns that Liz had no involvement, she is surprised: "Liz was the one she would have expected trouble from. Liz had always been the demonstrator, the picketer, the socialist, the feminist, the...lesbian...yet here was Liz

today, in this calm voice, telling her that Larry had been blown up” (154). Despite Liz’s emotional breakdown, Liz is the one who pulls herself together and is the strong, calm one.

Also, after Beth plants a bomb, has killed her mother, and is lying in the hospital bed severely wounded, Liz is the one who remains by her side. One could argue that her involvement in the women’s movement has not caused her to become so extreme in her feminist views that she shuns all characteristics of the nurturing woman. She illustrates through these two situations that she is indeed nurturing, loving, and kind. By looking at Liz as a representative of women’s rights depicted in fiction, it can be argued that she is indeed a heroine. Miner portrays her as a caring woman that is dedicated to her beliefs and dedicated to her family.

In sum, women’s roles and voices are extremely complicated during this period. On the one hand, the Troubles advanced women’s voices because they were active and involved. For example, militant women felt it their “duty” to fight for independence or loyalty to the crown. Although some men and women labeled them as betrayers, they felt they were essential to the conflict. Also, although political activists were somewhat pushed into becoming politically involved because their husbands and sons were absent from the home, they discovered they enjoyed having a political voice and being free from the domestic space. However, one could argue that the Troubles impeded women’s voices because although the civil rights issues were pertinent to women, when violence took over, women were pushed into the background. It was not until after the peace agreement was signed in 1998 that women’s rights issues began to be recognized and amended. Lastly, studying at women throughout a range of literature, art, and film, we

see that women are indeed depicted as strong and courageous, no matter what they were fighting for. During the conflict and after it, women were finally provided an avenue to find their voices.



Figure 3.A

“Civil Rights” Bogside Mural (2004)  
(Image Courtesy of the Bogside Artists)



Figure 3.B

“Death of Innocence” Bogside Mural (1999)  
(Image Courtesy of the Bogside Artists)

## Epilogue

### Writing the Times: Women after the Belfast Agreement

Since the signing of the Belfast Agreement (or Good Friday Agreement) in 1998, many women, including combatants, political protestors, and feminists, appear to be in accordance with and encourage the peace that has accompanied the agreement. The women who formerly fought as combatants claim that “peace is a good thing.” However, these women do have different approaches to defining “peace.”

According to Megan Sullivan, author of *Women in Northern Ireland* (1999), some women believe that peace means a cessation of violence, creating a future for women to step into leadership roles. Others insist that peace translates for women to acquire skills in order to help them participate in an Ireland that encourages less dependence on England. And, still others argue that peace means for women to be involved in political parties and community groups (169). Despite the differing views, one common theme emerges: peace is not enough simply on its own. Peace must be accompanied by equal rights for all people, men and women, nationalist and loyalist, pertaining to employment, education, housing, violence against women, and other issues.

The most significant group aiming to increase female involvement in politics at the close of the Troubles, and since the Belfast Agreement, is the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition. The NIWC’s “Manifesto Election Communication” stated that their goal was to “get at least two women to all party talks” during the peace negotiations (Sullivan 171). NIWC includes women from all religious and socio-economic backgrounds who desire for women to make political progress. One of NIWC’s first

political breakthroughs occurred in 1996, when NIWC won two seats to all the party talks concerning the peace agreement.

The women's movement is also still thriving today in an effort to have their voices heard. Sullivan writes, "many women still believe the movement has the potential to be a catalyst for change in Northern Ireland...that to be effective, the women's movement must strive to include women from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and political beliefs" (173). Like NIWC, the women's movement realizes that to make a difference and see reform, they must band together, no matter their differing backgrounds.

Aileen Maguire and Maureen O'Hare, two former IRA volunteers I interviewed, are both members of Parliament for Sinn Féin's POW department. This suggests that women who chose to participate in violence still have a space during a time of peace. Maureen O'Hare claims:

I suppose I've seen a lot down through the years. I've watched a lot of good friends and comrades lose their lives. I've also watched a lot of families be torn apart by the struggle. I've seen a lot of the dark side and never want it for this generation. So I suppose, in a sense, that's why I become so frustrated and sometimes so angry at some of the groups now; [those] who would feel that there's still a legitimate right to take this all forward by using violent means. To me, there is another alternative now. I'm still a republican and I still have my beliefs and what I want: a united Ireland's my goal. But, at the same time, I see another way of getting there now. (Personal interview)

I also questioned Aileen Maguire concerning her feelings toward the peace agreement, and she responded by saying:

I think it's a good thing. I think it's good because I certainly wouldn't want a daughter of mine doing the things I did at the age that I did. And experience the horrors of war that we all experienced; we've lost many friends. People have lost many family members, and people have died horrible deaths. I really wouldn't want my children or grandchildren to experience what I went through. So peace is a good thing as long as it comes with justice and equality and all the things that every human being is entitled to. (Personal interview)

Maguire also discussed the progress of women within Sinn Féin since the Troubles. She explained that Sinn Féin has implemented "affirmative action." This concept is to provide a fifty-fifty opportunity for both male and female representatives to be elected. She also states that if a woman was removed from her position for any reason, her position could only be filled by another woman. This illustrates that men are beginning to recognize women as central to politics.

In order to determine if women's roles have changed since the Troubles, it is helpful to turn to the Belfast Agreement. The first mention of women is found under the Human Rights clause which states, "The parties affirm their commitment to the mutual respect, the civil rights and the religious liberties of *everyone* in the community. Against the background of a recent history of communal conflict, the parties affirm in particular...the right of women to full and equal political participation" (Northern Ireland Office; my emphasis). This statement addresses that women should have the full

possibility to participate in a political manner. Although it was not until after the Troubles that women were beginning to be recognized as legitimate political activists, had women not heavily participated in the Troubles, this clause would have never been included. The phrase “full and equal,” expresses that women should be involved politically, not limiting the manner of involvement (including violence, protesting, or peace).

Also, the Rights, Safeguards, and Equality of Opportunity clause states: “Pending the devolution of powers to a new Northern Ireland Assembly, the British Government will pursue broad policies for sustained economic growth and stability in Northern Ireland and for promoting social inclusion, including in particular community development and the advancement of women in public life” (Northern Ireland Office). In this statement, the British Government is addressing the importance of economic and social stability in Northern Ireland. Within the social aspect, the government draws out women as a “particular” and specific group deserving recognition and equality.

It is evident, through these clauses, that women were a top priority while crafting the peace agreement, and that the Irish woman is progressing in Northern Irish society. Since the Troubles have ended, reports prove that women are presented with more working, educational, and political opportunities. According to the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Investment report concerning women in Northern Ireland published February 28, 2006, women account for fifty-one percent of all employees, sixty percent of all students enrolled in Northern Irish Universities, and of the twenty-six Districts Councils in Northern Ireland, three have women as Mayor or Chair, and six have women as Deputy Mayor or Chair. Having analyzed the special relationship women have with

political involvement in Chapter III, it is easy to understand why women were essential to the peace talks and to the Belfast Agreement.

In addition, it is important to explore the trends in regards to women writing post-Troubles literature, or men writing post-Troubles literature privileging female protagonists. By doing this, we will understand if these writers are using literature as a means to cope with the tragedies they experienced during the Troubles, or if writers are avoiding all Troubles-related themes, as though avoidance of painful memories is their avenue of coping.

One could argue that Anna Burns is one such novelist that uses her Troubles-centered fiction to cope with her childhood. Born in Belfast in 1962, Burns was seven when the Troubles began, so in effect, she was a child of the Troubles. In her novel *No Bones* (2001), Burns discusses her feelings toward the horrors of the Troubles by constructing her fictionalized novel through the eyes of a six-year old girl.

On the other hand, Irish novelist and screenwriter Ronan Bennett, born in 1956, was initially brought into the public eye with his novel *The Catastrophist* (1998). While this novel does privilege a politically-driven plot, it does not center on the politics surrounding the Troubles. This novel is set in the Belgian Congo, using Patrice Lumumba, an African anti-colonial leader in the Congo, as the background; the story itself centers on a doomed love affair between James Gillespie, an Irish novelist, and Ines, an Italian journalist. Out of her convicted communist ideals, Ines illustrates her strong political beliefs by continually putting herself in harm's way so she can write the best story. Ines can certainly be likened to the strong politically-active women of the Troubles. Like them, she will not stay in the domestic space, but rather she will



fight for what she believes is right. Although one can infer a parallel between Bennett's Ines and politically involved women of the Troubles, Bennett is one such Northern Irish novelist who turned away from the Troubles as a subject for his fiction, and as a result, it allowed him the opportunity to cope with his past memories.

Like Anna Burns, Paula Cunningham is a Northern Irish poet who also needed to center on tragic events in her poetry in order to cope. However, there is one key difference between them. While Burns wrote an autobiography about her experiences during the Troubles, Cunningham uses her poetry to speak to tragedies post-Troubles. For example, Cunningham wrote a thought-provoking poem entitled "A Dog Called Chance" (1999) in response to the Omagh bombing tragedy. The Omagh bombing took place mere months after the signing of the Belfast Agreement. The Real IRA, an extremist branch of the Provisional IRA opposed to the Belfast Agreement, planted a car bomb which exploded killing twenty-nine people. Looking at this poem, we will see how it not only responds to the bombing itself, but it will also address several issues this thesis uncovers.

Cunningham divides her poem into two sections. One may argue that the first section addresses women's experiences during the Troubles and the second section privileges the post-Troubles era. Cunningham begins her poem with a domestic scene. The speaker of the poem is in a beauty salon when the bomb explodes, and her first instinct is a domestic one:

You noticed rubble on the stairs  
Your first concern for someone tripping  
Somehow found a brush and swept it up.

If there'd been ironing there you would have done it. (lines 10-13)

Because of the traditionalist mindset, during the Troubles, women were expected to remain in the domestic space and conduct themselves as wife and mother. Pre-Troubles women, like those involved with the Ladies' Land League, often had a taste of political freedom; however, after the men returned, usually from jail, they were forced to go back into the home. The same was true for women living during the Troubles, but these women decided they had tasted political freedom, and they would not go back into the kitchen. Because these women were no longer accepting to fill the traditional role of woman and were refusing to "wait," perhaps Cunningham is suggesting the Troubles exist in a reality that men do not understand (line 5).

Cunningham addresses this new role of women in the second half of her poem. The speaker is now "hiding in this great big bed in Glasgow," illustrating her displacement, much like Joyce or Synge (line 14). As she lies in her bed, she watches men "washing dishes, cooking, eating/ breakfast/ dressing & undressing," suggesting her sexuality (lines 17-19). In these lines, the speaker is not only suggesting the transformation that men have made post-Troubles, but she is also exhibiting qualities of the "new woman" because she embraces her sexuality. While she speaks directly about her fondness for men, she also hints at lesbianism: "I return cruising/ Lesley's nineteen-fifty Shorter O.E.D" (lines 20-21). In Ireland, "cruising" is a term often used to describe the act of picking up a prostitute. After these lines Cunningham continues, "counting the words I have that weren't available/ to you" (lines 22-23). In these lines, we see that the speaker is looking up words in the dictionary. This is especially important because the woman is searching for words, words to define her. In the same way, women during the

Troubles were seeking a way to define themselves, whether she defined herself as a combatant, a political activist, or a fighter for women's rights. I hope my thesis has helped these women of the Troubles to find their voices, to finally be able to discover the right words.

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