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## Stuck in Ireland: Representations of Purgatory in Irish Literature

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Stuck in Ireland  
Representations of Purgatory in Irish Literature

An honors thesis written by Rebecca Maher under the supervision of Professor Mary Burke

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**Introduction:**

Purgatory has been a common trope in Irish literature for the past millennium. It is present in the plots and actions of books, sometimes in subtle references, while other times as an overt theme of the story. It is often present through tropes of repetition, forgetfulness, generational stasis, or a lack of progress — whether in character progression or in the plot itself. The reason why this trope has persisted over the centuries in Irish literature and in literature about Ireland, is largely due to Ireland's particular history with the Catholic concept of Purgatory. As the home of the pilgrimage site of Lough Derg, or St. Patrick's Purgatory — which was believed by the medievals to be a physical entrance into Purgatory used to cleanse the soul of sins prior to death — Irish people wrote stories and poems that helped to develop the idea of what Purgatory and the afterlife is in the popular imagination of what used to be thought of as Western Christendom. After the Reformation made Protestant cultures skeptical of the Catholic Church, the belief that Purgatory was a real location faded away, and yet the existence of these stories — told and retold with every generation — survived, and with it Purgatory was able to evolve into an important, largely secularized metaphorical device. Its presence in more recent texts indicates an underlying commentary on societal problems in Ireland and Irish communities. In this thesis, I will investigate this transformation of Purgatory, and the way it was used in literature as the centuries progressed.

But what is the strictly religious definition of Purgatory? One of the underlying problems of Purgatory is that it cannot be supported by the Scriptures, and yet it was accepted into Catholic doctrine in the eleventh century. *Catholic Encyclopedia* — a website that provides online versions of Catholic works — explains that in accordance with Catholic doctrine, the current definition of Purgatory is “a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who,

departing this life in God's grace, are, not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions.”<sup>1</sup> According to *Catholic Encyclopedia*, “temporal punishment” is a period in the afterlife where someone is forced to atone for sins they committed while alive, that they had not repented before their death. But, it’s important to remember that in Catholic doctrine there are two types of sin — venial and mortal. Venial sins include “the daily faults of human frailty,” or the less important sins people accidentally commit. These sins can be purged in Purgatory, allowing souls to ascend to Heaven. Mortal sins are far more serious, usually describing murder, rape, adultery, etc. These sins cannot necessarily be purged and would likely result in a sentence to Hell. That being said, there are many versions of Purgatory,<sup>2</sup> some of which may be more lenient than that of *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

Although Purgatory has been an established aspect of the Catholic Church since Peter Damian listed it as “one of the five regions in which the souls of men can be received” before his death in 1072<sup>3</sup> — according to Jacques Le Goff’s *The Birth of Purgatory* — it has had a rather problematic history, especially in terms of indulgences and suffrages. In *The Basics: Roman Catholicism*, Michael Walsh explains how Pre-Reformation Christians were able to shorten their own stay in Purgatory, as well as the stay of others, through penance, prayer, acts of goodwill, or by purchasing indulgences. These indulgences could be granted in exchange for a task or could be bought with money. Walsh said that when they were granted, “they were calculated, as it were, in relation to so many days, weeks or even years of a suitable penance,” to accordingly take time off someone’s sentence in Purgatory.<sup>4</sup> The promise of “plenary” indulgences —

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Purgatory’ entry in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*.’ Online.

<sup>2</sup> This paper will be discussing literary versions of Purgatory such as *Tundale’s Vision* and *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*, among others, which are often strikingly different from the Purgatory supported by the Catholic Church.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, University of Chicago Press, 1986, 362.

<sup>4</sup> Walsh, Michael, *Roman Catholicism: The Basics* (Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge 2016), 137.

“which remitted all the guilt remaining for sins committed, thus seeming to guarantee immediate entrance into heaven at death” — caused many noblemen to participate in the crusades of the eleventh century. Promises such as this, which were used to motivate people through fear of Purgatory, manipulated the masses into doing the Church’s bidding. Stephen Greenblatt investigates the issues surrounding Purgatory and indulgences in further detail in *Hamlet in Purgatory*, suggesting that by the sixteenth century it was more than Catholic doctrine that encouraged the idea of Purgatory, “but also chants, gestures, images, and the very air that the faithful breathed said the same thing: the border between this world and the afterlife was not firmly and irrevocably closed.”<sup>5</sup> By paying for suffrages — which included prayers, fasts, almsgiving, masses, and indulgences<sup>6</sup> — the living were able to help their dead kin in Purgatory, in a way that they could not if the deceased was in the permanent destination of Heaven or Hell. Greenblatt said much of the discourse and imagery surrounding Purgatory encouraged generous acts, such as “alms to the poor, subsidized education, hospitals for the sick, assistance in giving the indignant a proper burial.”<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, since it is “impossible to deduce the existence of such a state, or a place, from the Scriptures,”<sup>8</sup> many people suspected by the sixteenth century that the real motivations of the Church’s Purgatory were corruption and greed. The Reformation began as people started to doubt the motivations of the Catholic Church. And by the 1570s, a popular satirical jingle began that said, “Purgatory brings Rome more gold a day ... Than two horse well loaden will carry away.”<sup>9</sup> Thus Purgatory was one of the main causes of the Reformation, and a new sect of Christianity: Protestantism. The creation of this sect began a new

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<sup>5</sup> Greenblatt, Stephen. *Hamlet in Purgatory*. Princeton University Press, 2002, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>8</sup> Walsh, *The Basics*, 137.

<sup>9</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet*, 60.

era in European and Irish history, as Catholicism and Protestantism rivaled against each other. In Ireland, this would later lead to elitism between the Anglo-Irish Protestants and the poor Irish Catholics.

By the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, images, artifacts, and literature of Purgatory were spread across Europe. Greenblatt explained that depictions of Purgatory were meant to instill fear, as “terror of the purgation that lies ahead is an essential agent of moral restraint as well as an inducement to the pious acceptance of tribulation.”<sup>10</sup> Even the smallest punishment in Purgatory was described as being more terrible and painful than the worst pain experienced in life. As I will explain presently, the pain and punishment Purgatory was said to inflict on souls was often described in very specific ways: Fire, ice, intense smell, nails, being cooked in a frying pan, etc. But as Greenblatt explains, this was merely a rhetorical strategy. The initial conception of Purgatory was where after death, a body experienced “a cleansing period in which it was deprived of the vision of God.”<sup>11</sup> Preachers soon found, though, that this was an intuitively hard concept to grasp. So rather than tell their flock that Purgatory would be more painful than any pain experienced in life — in vague, intangible terms — they began comparing the punishments of Purgatory to real-world pain. As descriptions of Purgatory became more elaborate, punishments of, say, being burned in a cauldron of fire, became the reality of Purgatory, “next to which our actual physical experience of being burned (the most intense pain that most of us endure in the ordinary course of life) is mere representation.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, heretics were often burned to death as an extension of the fire awaiting them in Purgatory.<sup>13</sup> Greenblatt said Protestants attempted to dismantle this fear by physically dismantling aspects of the fables.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>13</sup> Michael D. Barbezat, “Burning Bodies.” *Reading Religion*, American Academy of Religion, 19 July 2019.

And so, “manuscripts were torn up, altarpieces were disassembled and burned, sculpted images of souls praying in the flames were smashed.”<sup>14</sup> But although they were able to demolish physical evidence of Purgatory, Greenblatt explained that they could not destroy the powerful stories about it that had been told around Christendom for centuries.

### **Celtic *imramas* and proto-Purgatory<sup>15</sup>**

Stories of the otherworld and the foundational ideas of Purgatory actually exist before the phrase itself, especially in Ireland. According to Le Goff, the word “*purgatorium*” did not exist until the end of the twelfth century.<sup>16</sup> But prior to that coinage, Celtic *imramas*, such as the “Voyage of Bran” from the eighth century, were being passed down the generations.<sup>17</sup> *Imramas* were common stories among the Celts, where the protagonist took a “voyage to the islands of the blessed.”<sup>18</sup> Much of the imagery used in these stories — such as islands, wells, mountains, and bridges — recurred in later depictions of the afterlife. Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of England*, written in 735, describes the vision of an Irish monk, Saint Fursey. This monk sees the afterlife as four fires<sup>19</sup> — “the fire of lying, the fire of greed, the fire of dissension, and the fire of impiety” — into which demons attempt to drag souls that angels defend.<sup>20</sup> During his vision, he

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<sup>14</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet*, 61.

<sup>15</sup> Proto-Purgatory is a term I will use to describe purgatorial spaces prior to the word *purgatorium*’s creation between 1170 and 1180. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 362.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Not only were ideas of Purgatory being passed down the generations, but they were being spread across Europe. In Gervase of Tilbury’s *Otia Imperialia* (1210), Gervase discusses a proto-Purgatory accessible in Sicily, inhabited by none other than King Arthur himself. Le Goff says, “More than anything else the text is astonishing evidence of the encounter between northern and southern, Celtic and Italian tradition.” *Ibid*, 204.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

<sup>19</sup> Although burning at the stake as punishment for various crimes has been practiced since antiquity, “the use of burning at the stake as a punishment for dualist heresy was a seventh-century innovation” enforced by Justinian II in the Byzantine Empire. This could have influenced the presence of fire in Saint Fursey’s vision. Hamilton, Bernard, et al, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c. 650-c. 1450 Selected Sources*, Manchester University Press, 1998, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 113.

is dragged close enough to the fire to get burned, and the angel “gives a discourse on penitence and salvation.” Although it is a little unclear whether this is truly a depiction of Purgatory, it is certainly a proto-Purgatory, as purgatorial fire — fire that cleanses souls of sins — seems present, even if it is not yet a fully formulated idea. But while these stories laid the foundation for later accounts of Purgatory, the relationship between the living and the dead still needed to change before Purgatory could be made a part of Catholic doctrine in the eleventh century.

In fact, Le Goff is convinced the path for the acceptance of Purgatory as a real place in Catholic imagination began with the evolution of the Books of Life — registers kept by certain monasteries of the living and the dead for “mention during the canon of the mass.”<sup>21</sup> By the seventh century, monastic communities in Ireland had begun writing the names of their dead on “rolls.”<sup>22</sup> Later on still, “obituaries” and “necrologies” began to come into use. Obituaries were “used as reminders of anniversary services provided for by certain persons before their death, requiring certain ‘services of mercy’ (usually distribution of alms).”<sup>23</sup> Whereas necrologies were “lists of the dead kept in the margins of a calendar and read out at the office of prime.” During the Carolingian era of the ninth and tenth centuries, the dead began to be mentioned individually, rather than being grouped together. The Cluniac order — a prestigious monastic order in France — began to immortalize the dead by promising to read out their names indefinitely. Through this mentality, the same order created the “Day of the Dead” — a holiday on Nov. 2, where the dead are commemorated — which spread throughout Christendom between 1024 and 1033. This holiday sparked a “solemn new bond between the living and the dead,” which helped to clear

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 124.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>23</sup> Money and remembrance of the dead would later become linked by the Catholic church, which would lead to corruption and conflict within the Church. A memorable example was how in the fifteenth century, King Henry VII paid for “ten thousand masses” to be said after his death to ensure a shorter stay in Purgatory. Greenblatt, *Hamlet*, 23.



“the ground for the inception of Purgatory,” according to Le Goff. In other words, Purgatory could not exist without the immortalization of the human soul in popular imagination. The idea that the souls of people could be kept alive through remembrance, demanded a space where those souls could exist. And this space could not be the eternal happiness of Heaven or damnation of Hell, it had to be somewhere more uncertain — a between space, where the ultimate destination of the soul could still be affected by outside intervention. Thus, it shouldn’t be surprising that in 1049, still nearly a century before Purgatory was coined, *Life of Odilo* was written by a Cluniac monk named Jotsuald.<sup>24</sup> This account is a clear description of a proto-Purgatory, in line with future accounts, that gives Purgatory a location, “a mountain that spits fire”; establishes “a crucial ritual of commemoration” to shorten the dead’s sentence in Purgatory; and describes the creation of the Day of the Dead.

Of the many Celtic *imramas* reminiscent of Purgatory, *The Voyage of St. Brendan*<sup>25</sup> is one of the earliest oral traditions — stemming from St. Brendan’s journey in the early sixth century. This account is incredibly cyclical, from the route Brendan and his companions — fourteen other monks — are forced to take each year for seven years in their journey for the promised land of the saints, to the odd way the fish look like “a city of circles as they lay, their heads touching their tails.”<sup>26</sup> The idea of cycles or circles, which are by nature a symbol of repetition, would later appear in many accounts of Purgatory.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the monks who survive the journey remain static throughout the voyage, only occasionally suffering from hunger. In fact, the purpose of this seven-year-long trip is not to obtain anything — whether that be knowledge, riches, etc. The monks use the period as a time to fast and pray and return to the

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<sup>24</sup> Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 127.

<sup>25</sup> O’Meara, John J. *The Voyage of St. Brendan*. Colin Smythe Limited, 1991.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>27</sup> Most notably, *Purgatory* by W. B. Yeats and James Joyce’s *Dubliners*, among others.

mortal world in the same state they left it. Most of the account is repetitious, except for a few notable stops along the way. Like in later accounts of journeys into proto-Purgatory and Purgatory, the protagonists reach Hell about halfway through the narrative. Here, Hell is described as “a high mountain in the ocean”<sup>28</sup> run by demons. After one of their own — an impious monk — is taken into the mountain by the demons, the others observe “the mountain was no longer covered with smoke, but was spouting flames from itself up to the ether and then breathing back, as it were, the same flames again upon itself. The whole mountain from the summit right down to the sea looked like one big pyre.”<sup>29</sup> This description of the entrance to Hell as hole, in this case a volcano, which spits out and receives flame or sparks in the manner of a pyre, predates eerily similar descriptions in accounts of Purgatory by close to 700 years. In fact much of this story is similar to later accounts. The specific punishment that Judas — whom they encounter shortly after Hell — faces is one of intense heat and intense cold, another common trope of proto-Purgatory. Judas gets a break from his punishment of being burned to “molten lead in a pot” inside the Hell volcano every Sunday and on religious holidays, where he instead gets to sit on a small rock and be struck by waves all day long.<sup>30</sup> This very individualized form of punishment further reflects the unique punishments seen in *Tundale’s Vision*.<sup>31</sup> Brendan invokes “Jesus” to protect Judas from being punished that night — which is exactly what Owen<sup>32</sup> does in *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the promised land of the saints contains many of the qualities given to Heaven in later accounts of Purgatory. The island is reached at the very end of

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<sup>28</sup> O’Meara, *St. Brendan*, 54.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 57-58.

<sup>31</sup> *Tundale’s Vision* was written by the Irish monk Brother Marcus around 1149. It is one of the accounts of medieval Purgatory that I will discuss in greater detail later on in this paper.

<sup>32</sup> *St. Patrick’s Purgatory* was written by H. of Sawtry in 1180. It is also one of the accounts of medieval Purgatory that I will discuss in greater detail later on in this paper.

<sup>33</sup> O’Meara, *St. Brendan*, 59.

Brendan's journey, just before he must return to the mortal plane — which will mark the end of most medieval accounts of Purgatory. And as Heaven is full of plenty and light in those later accounts, the island is always in daylight because it is filled with the “light of Christ,” and is also full of abundant fruit and precious stones.<sup>34</sup> These many similarities cannot be a coincidence and thus show the relation between this *imrama* and Purgatory.

The eighth century *imrama*, *The Voyage of Bran*,<sup>35</sup> further reflects later accounts of Purgatory. With “three companies of nine”<sup>36</sup> Bran set out for the island of Emain — an island which appears to be similar to Heaven, without “grief, without sorrow, without death, / Without any sickness, without debility.”<sup>37</sup> Like in *The Voyage of St. Brendan*, this mythical island — and potential proto-Purgatory — is described as a real island off the coast of Ireland. In fact, it was located in this very location on some maps of the period and after. Thus, it ties Purgatory to the Irish landscape in a way similar to later accounts. This can be seen in how the entrance to St. Patrick's Purgatory is located on the island of Lough Derg, and in *Tundale's Vision*, demons gather around Tundale in the middle of Cork.<sup>38</sup> Once Bran arrives at Emain, also known as the Land of Women, all of his men were able to couple up with one of the local women and “the food that was put on every dish vanished not from them.”<sup>39</sup> As was promised, the men were never sick or unhappy on this island, nor did they age. Although it felt as if they had only been there for one year, “it chanced to be many years.” Unfortunately, one of Bran's companions grows homesick and goes back to Ireland with Bran. There, Bran attempts to tell the people who meet him by the shore his story but they don't believe him — that is until the homesick man

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>35</sup> Kuno Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran*, Publications Medieval Irish Series (Cambridge, Ontario), 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Both points of which I will explore more fully later on in this paper.

<sup>39</sup> Kuno, *The Voyage of Bran*, 10.

jumps on shore and turns to ash, as the years catch up with him.<sup>40</sup> As it turns out, according to one of the locals they meet, Bran and his crew had been gone so long, “the Voyage of Bran is in our ancient stories.”<sup>41</sup> Bran and his men were emotionally and physically static on Emain. They did not progress, but remained in happy, healthy states until they got back to Ireland centuries later. This lack of progress is a sure marker of Purgatory, especially since the world continued to progress normally around them.

### Medieval accounts of Purgatory

*St. Patrick's Purgatory* was written by an Anglo-Norman monk<sup>42</sup> in the 1180s, named H. of Sawtry,<sup>43</sup> and was one of the first texts to call Purgatory by name since its coinage earlier in the century.<sup>44</sup> Greenblatt said that the use of a chain of narrators in this story — “H. of Sawtry, the abbot Sartis, the monk Gilbert, Abbot Gervase,” and the hero Owen, himself — is used to “authenticate the eyewitness account and set it in the context of a larger community among whom the narrative has been circulating.” This interpretation by Greenblatt is telling, since many aspects of the story — such as the various punishments I listed earlier, as well as the geographical imagery used in the Celtic *imramas* — are rehashed here, indicating a tradition of the once unnamed Purgatory that had been passed down. It is also notable that the entrance to Purgatory is rooted in Ireland, indicating Ireland's strong association with this other world. After realizing how sinful his life thus far had been, “which from his cradle had been spent in plunder

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>42</sup> The very fact that an Anglo-Norman monk is describing a link between Ireland and Purgatory, shows how this link has circulated beyond Ireland and to the rest of Christendom.

<sup>43</sup> The actual site of St. Patrick's Purgatory, or the Lough Derg pilgrimage, dates back to the fifth century during St. Patrick's lifetime. But while it had been popular in Ireland, H. of Sawtry brought the pilgrimage site to European fame after writing *St. Patrick's Purgatory*. “St. Patrick's Purgatory” entry in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, online.

<sup>44</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet*, 74.

and violence,” especially toward ecclesiastical property, the knight Owen decides to enter St. Patrick’s Purgatory to repent his sins.<sup>45</sup> According to the account, “Whoever in true repentance and constancy of faith enters this cave for one day and night will be purified there from all the sins they have committed against God during all their lives.”<sup>46</sup> Both before and after entering the entrance to Purgatory, Owen has to fast and pray at the church on the island of Lough Derg. He is then brought in a procession to the cave, with the gate to the entrance locked behind him. Once there, demons surround him and bring him around Purgatory, constantly threatening to punish him along with the souls suffering around him. By invoking the name of Jesus, Owen is able to keep himself safe, but what he sees terrifies him, nevertheless.

Among the horrors Owen witnesses, he sees “total darkness”; “iron hooks” that dragged him “backwards and forwards through the fire”; “fiery dragons” and other beasts that eat people; an iron wheel souls are fixed to via “red-hot nails” that rolls through “brimstone-fire”; people “baked in ovens and fried in frying pans”;<sup>47</sup> and people blown off a mountain into a “cold and stinking river.” Evidently, these punishments are those of Purgatory rather than of Hell, meaning these souls are in the process of being purged of their venial sins. The imagery used to describe Hell in this story is reused in most accounts of Purgatory,<sup>48</sup> with its entrance being “a well, over which there were naked men and women, apparently red-hot, who were shot into the air like sparks and again, fell into the pit beneath when the flame subsided.” The imagery of bridges is also used here, as it was in the *imramas*, in which Owen has to cross an impossibly thin bridge as

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<sup>45</sup> Gilbert, *St. Patrick's Purgatory, Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante*, by Eileen Gardiner, Italica Press, 2019, 135.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 136.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 137; 139; 140; 141.

<sup>48</sup> It is interesting to note that Purgatory became more Hell-like, as in more of an extension of Hell with no chance of progress, over time. For instance, in *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, the souls Owen observes are being purged of their sins to prepare them for Heaven. But as the world became more secular, such as in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* — a book I will discuss later on in this paper — Purgatory became more of a final destination where souls would languish indefinitely.

the demons attempt to drag him down into the pit of Hell. By invoking Jesus again, the bridge becomes wide enough for Owen to cross and he soon finds himself in a much better part of Purgatory.<sup>49</sup> This new region seems to be a comfort to all of the senses after the rest of Purgatory and Hell. Here, “choir followed choir,” “darkness is never felt,” “no one felt heat or cold,” and Owen felt he could live “forever on their sweet odors.”<sup>50</sup> A holy pontiff who had been showing him around, comments that everyone residing there had been purged of all their venial sins and the paradise they live in is actually “the terrestrial paradise from which humanity was first expelled for its sins.” And yet, they are still being purged of their sins through waiting and eating heavenly food, until God allows them to finally ascend from there to Heaven. Owen is then warned that if he falls into sin again, he will have to go through all of the punishments he had witnessed, even though he is now cleared of any sin he had committed previously. After waking up again in Lough Derg, he decides to spend the rest of his life as a servant to a monk, so as to avoid sinning any further. And so, his story became a cautionary tale among Irish monks.

In addition to this account, there were many visions that followed a similar vein.<sup>51</sup> And with every retelling, the aspects of the former version were kept while other parts were lost. According to Greenblatt, the author of *Tundale’s Vision* (1149), Brother Marcus, had never heard of the term Purgatory, but the version he wrote of was “closely related to that formalized shortly afterward in church doctrine<sup>52</sup> and repeatedly explored in narrative.”<sup>53</sup> Tundale’s vision of the afterlife involves a series of places of punishment based on category of sin — “murderers,

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<sup>49</sup> Gilbert, *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*, 142.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

<sup>51</sup> Examples include *The Revelation to the Monk of Evesham* (England, 1196) and “The Vision of Thurkill” (England, 1206). Greenblatt, *Hamlet*, 276.

<sup>52</sup> As I said earlier, proto-Purgatory entered church doctrine prior to 1072 by Peter Damian, but the word *purgatorium* was not created until the twelfth century. Thus, Purgatory existed conceptually in church doctrine before it was actually named. Le Goff, *Birth*, 362; 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

traitors, misers, thieves, abductors, gluttons, and fornicators”<sup>54</sup> — nearly all of which he qualifies for. In this way, Tundale’s journey is very similar to Owen, except he lacks the safe word Owen had to escape punishment. Furthermore, an angel leads Tundale, who appears to hate him. Immediately after Tundale falls dead and meets the angel, the latter complains, “I followed you ever since your birth, wherever you went, and you never wished to obey my counsels.”<sup>55</sup> He then goes on to repeatedly and vindictively abandon Tundale to various tortures. While this definitely strays from former accounts, there are many similarities in the narrative. Le Goff lists familiar geography of “deep valleys, a very high mountain, an enormous lake, a huge house”; familiar punishments of “extremes of heat and cold,” “darkness and stench,” and people baked in an oven; and a familiar entrance to hell, where “souls that resemble sparks, rising for a time, vanishing into nothingness, and falling back into the depths” of a trench.<sup>56</sup> Tundale’s Purgatory is also made bleaker during his journey into Hell — a journey Owen is able to avoid. In Hell, the angel points to those being tortured by Lucifer, several of which are Tundale’s friends, and says, “they suffer first that lesser punishment that you saw before, and now they are led to this punishment from which no one who enters it once is able to exit again.”<sup>57</sup> This implies that those suffering in Purgatory aren’t necessarily being purged of their sins to get ready for Heaven. Depending on if they committed mortal sins — as it seems Tundale’s friends had — they may just be eased into eternal damnation by spending time in Purgatory. This distinction is important as it sets up the purpose of Purgatory to be less benevolent, and more akin to the static, eternal punishment featured in the secular versions of Purgatory I will discuss later on.

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<sup>54</sup> Le Goff, *Birth*, 190.

<sup>55</sup> Gilbert, *Tundale’s Vision, Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante*, by Eileen Gardiner, Italica Press, 2019, pp. 154.

<sup>56</sup> Le Goff, *Birth*, 190.

<sup>57</sup> Gilbert, *Tundale’s Vision*, 179.

What's incredibly interesting about this account — despite being much worse for the protagonist than others of its kind — is its connection to Ireland itself. The geographical features of Purgatory seem rooted in the Irish landscape with its mountains, valleys, and lakes. This could be because when Tundale has a stroke, his soul is left outside of his body, but still in Cork. The text said the demons “filled not only the whole house and courtyard in which the dead man had died, but actually there was no place that was apparent in all the streets and ways of the city that was not full of them.”<sup>58</sup> From there, the angel and Tundale just seem to walk “to a very terrible and shadowy valley covered by the fog of death.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, Purgatory is quite literally a part of the Irish landscape. Greenblatt jokes that one punishment, that of the “Not-Very-Bad,”<sup>60</sup> is “the equivalent of a blustery season in Dublin,”<sup>61</sup> but maybe he's right. Maybe in this grand tour of Ireland/Purgatory, Dublin is thought to be a “Not-Very-Bad” spot.<sup>62</sup> To further support this interpretation, Tundale's Purgatory seems to be populated mainly by the Irish. He even sees three Irish kings that he knows by name,<sup>63</sup> as well as his own friends being tortured in Hell. Where *St. Patrick's Purgatory* is physically rooted in Lough Derg by the very real cave entrance,<sup>64</sup> *Tundale's Vision* is tied to Ireland's landscape and history through words alone. And yet, both work to imagine a Purgatory that is very real and accessible from the world of the living. At this

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 180.

<sup>61</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet*, 62.

<sup>62</sup> Although I do not discuss Martin McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1996) later on, it is important to note that it uses very similar phrasing as “Not-Very-Bad” throughout the play. Many characters — all of which live static, paralyzed lives in Ireland — say the phrase, “Ireland mustn't be such a bad place, so, if \_\_\_\_.” This blank could consist of anything, from “if French fellas want to live in Ireland” to “if cripple fellas turn down Hollywood to come to Ireland.” But no matter what the blank is, the implication is that Ireland may not seem great to the characters, but there appears to be evidence that it's not so bad after all. This similar phrasing further shows the way in which Irish writers mimic one another, keeping the Purgatory trope alive across the generations. Examples of this phrase can be found in: Martin McDonagh, *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1999, 16; 39; 64.

<sup>63</sup> Gilbert, *Tundale's Vision*, 183.

<sup>64</sup> Le Goff, *Birth*, 201.



time,<sup>65</sup> Purgatory is by no means a metaphor, but a real and terrifying place meant to keep people in line.

In 1517, Martin Luther wrote his 95 Theses, which would lead to the Reformation and thus the creation of Protestantism. One of the major issues Luther had with the Catholic church was the corrupt way in which they had people pay for indulgences to lessen their time in Purgatory. Until 1530, Luther still clung to the idea that Purgatory could exist, saying, “I still hold that it exists ... though I have found no way of proving it incontrovertibly from Scripture or reason.”<sup>66</sup> But later on, he and other Protestants would come to reject the idea of Purgatory completely. William Tyndale, who translated the Bible based on Luther’s teachings in the 1520s,<sup>67</sup> labeled Purgatory a fictitious “poet’s fable.”<sup>68</sup> But according to Greenblatt, although Purgatory was rejected by Protestants, it was a constant topic of Protestant conversation “throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”<sup>69</sup> In 1626, John Donne stated in a sermon that humans were enamored with Purgatory, saying, “Men that make God himself of a piece of bread, may easily make Purgatory of a Dream, and of Apparitions, and imaginary visions of sick or melancholic men.”<sup>70</sup> Donne continued on to say that Purgatory was a concept perpetuated by poets.<sup>71</sup> Thus, by the time the very Protestant Victorian England came to be, Purgatory remained — existing on the poetry and folk Catholicism of pre-Reformation England. And although Ireland was a part of the United Kingdom until 1922, the Reformation did not take hold in Ireland. While England embraced Protestantism, Ireland remained strictly Catholic. This allowed England to use the difference between their religions as a justification for “civilizing” Ireland.

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<sup>65</sup> The twelfth century.

<sup>66</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet*, 33.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

And so, by the time Emily Brontë wrote *Wuthering Heights*, Protestantism was associated with the colonizers of Ireland and Catholicism with the oppressed.

### ***Wuthering Heights*: A return to the Catholic past**

Emily Brontë published *Wuthering Heights* in England during December of 1847, in the height of the Victorian era. During this time period, England was a very Protestant society, with a strong sense of moral obligation and a fear of committing sins.<sup>72</sup> This was a period when people treated the concepts of Heaven and Hell as real locations where the soul goes once someone dies. As stated earlier, around this period, every aspect of Christian society promoted the idea that “the border between this world and the afterlife was not firmly and irrevocably closed.”<sup>73</sup> But at the same time, in this Protestant society, the transition to metaphor had already begun. Brontë exemplifies this by creating a story that localizes the afterlife in the moors, but whose metaphorical use of Purgatory — which lingered in England through Catholic folklore and poetry — begs the question of Protestant morals, classism, and sexism within Victorian society. Her critique of English society, especially regarding its more Protestant elements, sparked several negative reviews following the release of her book. Since it did not conform to the expectations of a Victorian novel, Brontë’s work was described as, “Hysterical, delirious, nightmarish, primeval, and elemental.”<sup>74</sup> Sydney Dobell considered it, “the unformed writing of a giant’s hand: the ‘large utterance’ of a baby god.”<sup>75</sup> People found the characters to be depraved and unnatural. A reviewer in October of 1848, concluded that, “Nightmares and dreams, through

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<sup>72</sup> Richard Evans, “The Victorians: Religion and Science,” *Gresham College*, 14 Mar. 2011.

<sup>73</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet*, 18.

<sup>74</sup> Melvin R. Watson, “‘Wuthering Heights’ and the Critics,” *The Trollopian*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1949, pp. 243.

<sup>75</sup> Watson, “the Critics,” 246.

which devils dance and wolves howl, make bad novels.”<sup>76</sup> Another said, “Read *Jane Eyre* is our advice, but burn *Wuthering Heights*.”<sup>77</sup> This pushback against a novel that has since been considered “one of the greatest English novels”<sup>78</sup> is more indicative of the Protestant state of the literary community that reviewed it, rather than the quality of the novel itself. Brontë angered the critics because she actively questioned and played with Protestantism in her novel — uncovering the badness in good people, the goodness in villains, and the hypocrisy of labelling people as one or another according to Christian values. Furthermore, she undermined orthodox Protestantism by showing it as associated with the hypocritical or conventional characters,<sup>79</sup> whereas she associated the folk Catholic belief of Purgatory with the more interesting and multifaceted characters.<sup>80</sup> In essence, she used elements of Victorian era Christianity to achieve a more secular critique on society.

Although Brontë grew up in England, she was raised by her father Patrick Brontë, who was born and raised in Emdale, Drumballyrone, County Down, Ireland.<sup>81</sup> Coming from a laboring class farm family, Patrick would have been familiar with the Catholic poor, despite the fact that he was Protestant, and thus familiar with rural Irish folk Catholic beliefs such as Purgatory and the closeness of otherworlds.. The elder Brontë moved to England when he was 25 to attend St John's College Cambridge, and later was ordained in the Church of England in 1807. Thus, it can be assumed that with her very religious, Irish parentage, Emily Brontë may have been influenced by Irish ideas of Purgatory — especially in terms of the Irish literary tradition. Furthermore, William Wright’s 1893 book, *The Brontës in Ireland*, traced the

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<sup>76</sup> Edwin P. Whipple, *North American Review*, October 1948.

<sup>77</sup> *Paterson Magazine*, March 1848.

<sup>78</sup> Watson, “the Critics,” 243.

<sup>79</sup> Examples of hypocritical or conventional characters include Joseph, Edgar, and Nelly.

<sup>80</sup> Examples of interesting and multifaceted characters include Heathcliff, Catherine, and Hindley.

<sup>81</sup> “Patrick Brontë Biography,” *Haworth Village*.

“inspiration for *Wuthering Heights* back to Irish experiences of Patrick Brontë’s pseudo-forebears.”<sup>82</sup> And so, while written in England, *Wuthering Heights* can be seen as influenced thematically by its Irish background and as a return of the English, Catholic past.

Protestantism and Protestant terms and phrases are seen throughout *Wuthering Heights*, often in a hypocritical or humorous way. Lockwood has a dream early on in the book about Jabez Branderham preaching from the text “Seventy Times Seven,” where “either Joseph, the preacher, or I had committed the ‘First of the Seventy-First,’ and were to be publicly exposed and excommunicated.”<sup>83</sup> This dream is incredibly humorous, with Lockwood being subjected to a 490 part sermon, which culminates in the entire assembly attacking him. At one point, when a 491st part is about to be read, Lockwood states, “Seventy times seven times have I plucked up my hat and been about to depart — Seventy times seven times have you preposterously forced me to resume my seat. The four hundred and ninety first is too much.”<sup>84</sup> The exasperation of Lockwood and extreme reaction of the congregation to his blasphemy, show that Brontë questions the actions of the Protestant church at times, and may be more secular than her father. The most religious figure in the text is Joseph, who instills a disdain for religion into the young inmates of *Wuthering Heights* with his strict and harsh Protestant instruction. Catherine wrote in her diary, “Heathcliff, myself, and the unhappy plough-boy, were commanded to take our prayer-books, and mount: were ranged in a row, on a sack of corn, groaning and shivering, and hoping that Joseph would shiver too.”<sup>85</sup> Joseph’s cruelty indicates that a deeply Protestant person is not necessarily a moral or good one, and thus his insistence on religion is hypocritical. But

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<sup>82</sup> Watson, “the Critics,” 251.

<sup>83</sup> When citing Brontë, I will be using Loc, as in location, rather than page numbers, since the Kindle version of this book-marked pages by location number. By typing in the designated Loc number into the Kindle version of this book, the correct page can be accessed. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, New York, Penguin Classics, 2008 [Kindle Version], Loc 472.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, Loc 489.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, Loc 437.

despite Catherine and Heathcliff's disdain for religion at a young age, most of the characters attend church regularly and incorporate Protestant words into their vocabulary. Nelly, as the main narrator of the story, is the most notorious for religious phrases. When Heathcliff isn't allowed to celebrate Christmas with the other children, Nelly describes Catherine as being "in purgatory throughout the day."<sup>86</sup> Being that Nelly is Protestant, and Protestants did not believe in Purgatory, her mention of it here is indicative of a folk Catholic presence in her vocabulary. Nelly also says phrases such as, "Poor soul!"<sup>87</sup> "I put her through the following catechism,"<sup>88</sup> and "Have mercy on your own soul!"<sup>89</sup> Thus Brontë is able to establish the presence of Protestantism in Victorian society, while also critiquing its hypocrisy and implying a folk Catholic presence in the culture.

Death is a constant presence in *Wuthering Heights*, and I would argue that its closeness to the living characters is indicative of an overlap, where the afterlife finds a physical location: Heaven in Thrushcross Grange, Hell in Wuthering Heights, and Purgatory in the moors. This overlap can first be seen in how many of the characters seem eerily aware of their deaths before they happen. Hindley's wife, Frances — a young woman with tuberculosis — tells Nelly she is "so afraid of dying!" long before her illness kills her. After starving herself for most of a week, Catherine becomes manic and is convinced her reflection in the mirror is someone haunting her. She also tells Edgar and Nelly she would soon be dead, saying, "they can't keep me from my narrow home out yonder: my resting-place, where I'm bound before spring is over!"<sup>90</sup> But what's most eerie about this scene is that her mind seems to slip into the child ghost Lockwood

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, Loc 1018.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, Loc 1098.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, Loc 1314.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, Loc 1276.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, Loc 2118.

sees outside of her bedroom twenty years later.<sup>91</sup> And upon her death, Edgar and Heathcliff begin counting down to their own demise — deaths of which they would seem similarly aware of before their time. This collapse of boundaries between worlds is far more similar to Irish or Catholic folklore than it is to Protestantism. In fact, it is reminiscent of the way in which Saint Brendan foresaw his death prior to leaving the promised land of the saints.

Evidence that Heaven is in the Grange and Hell is in the Heights mainly consists of the character development and descriptions of the people who inhabit either location. Any character who spends time in Wuthering Heights seems to grow morally worse. Hindley's abuse of Heathcliff and tyrannical hold over the house causes Heathcliff to become manipulative, cunning, and vengeful as he gets older. Catherine and Heathcliff both grow up "as rude as savages"<sup>92</sup> due to negligence, with Catherine becoming violent and devious enough for Nelly to "not love her."<sup>93</sup> Isabella learns to hate people in Wuthering Heights, and Linton grows up to become a cowardly and disloyal teenager while staying there. The devious nature of Wuthering Heights is best described in Isabella's letter to Nelly, where she first asks, "How did you contrive to preserve the common sympathies of human nature when you resided here? I cannot recognise any sentiment which those around share with me." This question stems from the cruel personalities of everyone she meets in the household: Hindley, Joseph, and Hareton. Her second question pertains the most to Hell: "Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?"<sup>94</sup> It would make sense for a demonic character like Heathcliff to be the master over Hell. This, paired with the moral degradation of its inhabitants, is clear evidence that Wuthering Heights is Hell compared to the Grange.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, Loc 2064.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, Loc 811.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, Loc 1195.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, Loc 2249.

Thrushcross Grange is Heaven in that it is a much happier place, with more refined and delicate inhabitants. In comparing Heathcliff — a representative of Wuthering Heights — and Edgar — a representative of Thrushcross Grange, Catherine noted, “The contrast resembled what you see in exchanging a bleak, hilly, coal country for a beautiful fertile valley.”<sup>95</sup> In fact, even Edgar’s voice was “less gruff than we talk here, and softer.” Heathcliff is described as rough, dirty, and darker<sup>96</sup> in appearance than the Lintons, who are all pristine, kind, and pale. But to confirm these locations are more than speculation, Catherine and Nelly have a conversation after her engagement to Edgar in which they place the labels themselves. Catherine says, “If I were in heaven, Nelly, I should be extremely miserable.” To which Nelly responds, “Because you are not fit to go there ... All sinners would be miserable in heaven.”<sup>97</sup> Catherine shortly after says, “I’ve no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven.”<sup>98</sup> And of course this conversation comes true, with a married Catherine moving to Thrushcross Grange only to lose her mind shortly thereafter, wish desperately to be home, and then die young. As Nelly said, sinners like the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights have no place in a heavenly place like Thrushcross Grange.

Thus, if Wuthering Heights is Hell and Thrushcross Grange is Heaven, then it would make sense — within the folkloric Catholic mindset present in the novel — if the space between them is Purgatory: the moors. The moors is a four mile space the characters must cross in order to reach one house or the other. It is also the location of Catherine, Edgar, and Heathcliff’s burial sites, as well as where all of the ghosts of the story reside. The ghost of Catherine that Lockwood

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, Loc 1186.

<sup>96</sup> In fact, when he first arrives at Wuthering Heights as a child, Heathcliff is subjected to racist treatment by its inhabitants for his dark complexion. The fact that Heathcliff continues to be negatively judged for his complexion, as compared to the pale Lintons, is due to the racist views of the characters.

<sup>97</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, Loc 1356.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, Loc 1365.

sees says, “I’m come home: I’d lost my way on the moor!”<sup>99</sup> But she cannot find her way inside. Nelly runs across an apparition of Hindley as a young boy prior to his death, at the guidepost on the moors. She says, “I beheld my early playmate seated on withered turf: his dark, square head bent forward, and his little hands scooping out the earth with a piece of slate.”<sup>100</sup> Like Catherine, Hindley is preserved in Purgatory as a ghost of himself as a child, and remains a ghost only on the moors. The final ghosts of the novel are that of the adult Heathcliff and Catherine, reunited in the afterlife as they had always hoped. A little boy on the moors cries to Nelly, “There’s Heathcliff and a woman, yonder, under t’ nab.”<sup>101</sup> Once the characters of this story die, they linger behind, wandering the purgatorial moors, unable to achieve the Heaven or Hell they left behind. And to further subvert the orthodox Protestant beliefs of the time, Brontë has her characters prefer this Purgatory and even wish for it, rather than desire to progress forward to Heaven as society mandates.

There are two additional aspects of *Wuthering Heights* that clearly reflect the Purgatory trope: generational stasis and cold or bad weather. This book follows two generations of characters, with the actions and grudges of the former affecting the lives of the latter. Hindley’s son, Hareton, is denied his right to inherit Wuthering Heights, is prevented from having an education, and is kept lower and more debased by Heathcliff, than Hindley was ever able to keep Heathcliff when he was a child. Heathcliff treats his and Isabella’s son, Linton, as a pawn to gain control of both the Heights and the Grange. Linton’s resemblance to his old rival, Edgar, along with Linton’s pathetic nature, causes Heathcliff to hate him, despite being his father. Edgar and Catherine’s daughter, Cathy, is also used as a pawn by Heathcliff, who nearly prevents her from

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, Loc 506.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, Loc 1815.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, Loc 5379.



saying goodbye to her father when he dies. At the height of Heathcliff's abuse of the younger generation, Hareton is illiterate and loves him like a father, Cathy is a prisoner, and Linton dies because Heathcliff can't be bothered to call a doctor. This treatment of the second generation is Heathcliff's way to exact revenge for the actions of the first, and thus results in generational stasis.

As was seen in *Tundale's Vision*, cold and bad weather often go hand in hand with punishment in Purgatory. It is important to note that much of *Wuthering Heights* takes place in winter. Lockwood's stay at the Grange is entirely during winter, as his dislike of Heathcliff causes him to leave before spring arrives. In fact, Lockwood becomes bedridden because of a snowstorm. Catherine befriends the Lintons just before Christmas. While it wasn't yet winter, Heathcliff runs away during a rainstorm — i.e. cold, damp weather — which leads to Catherine growing very sick for the first time. Catherine loses her mind and grows sickly for the second time during the winter. Isabella runs away from Wuthering Heights in the snow. And Cathy reunites with Linton and courts him during the winter. Nelly and Edgar become sick during this same winter. It seems that most of the book revolves around the characters waiting for warmer weather to arrive. Writers who subsequently represented Purgatory, such as James Joyce, would attribute snow to paralysis — an inability to progress. If the stasis of this book is the inability for the first generation to move past their former grudges, then it is interesting to note that the hottest weather of the book happens during the lifetime of the second generation. Culminating, in fact, with Heathcliff's death and Hareton and Cathy's romance during the height of summer.

Being that Brontë wrote Purgatory as a location that seems real to her characters, incorporated some of Purgatory's tropes into the plot, and used the afterlife to critique Protestant, Victorian society, *Wuthering Heights* acts as a great bridge between early, strictly religious texts

and more modern, secular novels. Her book stands on the halfway point between genuinely religious themes and characters, and pure metaphor and critique. Furthermore, it is halfway between Protestant England and its suppressed Catholic past.

Ireland changed greatly between when Patrick Brontë left in the early nineteenth century and Joyce was born in 1882. Ireland officially united with Great Britain under the name the United Kingdom in 1801 through the Act of Union, where it would then function as a colony until the early twentieth century.<sup>102</sup> From there, Irish Catholics struggled for their rights, rebelling when they could against their Anglo-Irish oppressors. In 1845, the Irish Potato Famine began, and would continue ravaging the Irish countryside until 1852. During this time, most native Irish speakers — often poor Catholics living in the west of Ireland — either starved or emigrated away. Thus, in a matter of a decade, the Irish language was put on the brink of extinction.<sup>103</sup> In terms of literature, this would lead to the Gaelic Revival — a resurgence of Irish language, literature, and folklore — at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>104</sup> Being that the Purgatory trope was being kept alive through Catholicism and folklore, this would lead to a resurgence of the trope during Joyce's time. After the famine, Ireland continued its efforts toward regaining independence, but with little luck by the beginning of the twentieth century.

### ***Dubliners*: Purgatory and political and social inertia**

According to Florence Walzl, when Joyce was in medical school, he grew tired “of the restrictions of life in Dublin,” and in Ireland as a whole, and decided to diagnose the country with “hemiplegia, a partial, unilateral paralysis.”<sup>105</sup> Joyce believed Dublin was the epicenter of

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<sup>102</sup> “Act of Union,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 20 July 1998.

<sup>103</sup> History.com Editors, “Irish Potato Famine,” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 17 Oct. 2017.

<sup>104</sup> “Gaelic Revival,” *Encyclopedia of Irish History and Culture*. Encyclopedia.com. 17 Apr. 2021.

<sup>105</sup> Florence L. Walzl, “Pattern of Paralysis in Joyce's *Dubliners*: A Study of the Original

the country's paralysis, and published *Dubliners*<sup>106</sup> in 1914 — right when the country was on the brink of breaking into a civil war over Home Rule<sup>107</sup> — as a response. *Dubliners* is a collection of short stories with characters ranging from young children to middle-aged adults. Each story emphasizes an aspect of Ireland's paralysis — stagnant economy, low social mobility, emotional poverty, and generational stasis — and represents these factors through a lack of progress, repetitive action, and forgetfulness among Joyce's characters. This paralysis Joyce describes is just a more secular iteration of Purgatory, which can be clearly seen in the ways in which his stories reflect various themes and punishments from early accounts of Purgatory. Although Joyce claims to be reflecting “the moral history”<sup>108</sup> of Dublin, I argue that his use of Purgatory is far more metaphorical than earlier accounts — including *Wuthering Heights* — at least until the last two pages. In fact, *Dubliners* sets a precedent for later representations of Purgatory in Emergency<sup>109</sup> writing and more contemporary stories. Being that *Dubliners* features about 15 short stories, I will be limiting my focus to just two — “Eveline” and “The Dead” — in order to better analyze the ways in which Joyce depicts Purgatory.

The purgatorial effects of a stagnant economy are expressed throughout “Eveline.” In this story, Eveline gets ready to run away from home with a sailor she has been courting for a short period of time. As she sits in her home for the last time, she reflects on her life there and how her poverty both literally pushes her out of her home, and also somehow keeps her trapped in place. She thinks about a field near her house “in which they used to play,”<sup>110</sup> which a man from

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Framework,” *College English*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1961, pp. 221.

<sup>106</sup> James Joyce, *Dubliners*, London, Penguin Books, 2000.

<sup>107</sup> Richard S. Grayson, “Ireland,” 1914-1918-Online, 8 Oct. 2014, encyclopedia.

<sup>108</sup> Walzl, “Paralysis,” 221.

<sup>109</sup> During World War II, Éamon de Valera declared Ireland neutral and called the war an Emergency, rather than a war. This lack of acknowledgement and participation in the war, as well as the widespread government censorship, sparked a wave of Irish literature called Emergency writing, where Irish writers could protest the Emergency.

<sup>110</sup> James Joyce, *Dubliners*, Penguin Books, 1993, 29.

Belfast had bought and gentrified. The fact that the source of gentrification was from Belfast implies an Anglo-Irish or English force behind the loss of the field. Furthermore, the kids who played there — “the Devines, the Waters, the Dunns”<sup>111</sup> — all have traditional Irish names. Thus this is a case of the Irish being marginalized by the wealthier English. Eveline also has a violent alcoholic father, who she is forced to give “her entire wages — seven shillings”<sup>112</sup> to, with little hope of getting any back. With her neighborhood being bought out by the wealthy English and her father preventing her from saving up for herself, Eveline’s attraction to a well-traveled man who lives in faraway Buenos Ayres is not a surprise. She even says she associates her marriage to him with “Escape!”<sup>113</sup> And yet, her mother had her swear on her deathbed to “keep the home together as long as she could,”<sup>114</sup> and watch over her younger siblings. If she were to leave, she would be abandoning them to a violent father, without her additional income to support them. In the end, she cannot make her escape from the financial pressure she faces in Ireland.

The way Joyce presents a lack of social mobility is through a general lack of physical mobility. No one can leave Dublin or get what they really want in *Dubliners*, even if they desperately want to. Eveline finds herself unable to get on the boat with her boyfriend. She clutches “with both hands at the iron railing” and gives her boyfriend “no sign of love or farewell or recognition,” as the boat pulls away from the dock with him on it.<sup>115</sup> This is a shocking turn of events, after she had thought her boyfriend “would save her” by getting her out of Ireland on the previous page.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, the fact that she doesn’t seem to recognize him makes this scene supernatural and eerie — or purgatorial, if you will. This theme continues in “The Dead.”

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 33.

Gabriel recounts the story of how his grandfather's horse, Johnny, got confused and walked around "King Billy's statue"<sup>117</sup> in endless circles, ignoring his grandfather's commands to "Go on, sir!" Not only is this story of the horse cyclical in a very purgatorial way, but the cause appears to be William of Orange — an English king. As King Billy's victory at the Battle of the Boyne ensured the consolidation of the Protestant Ascendancy, further preventing Irish social mobility, the statue prevented Gabriel's grandfather from physically moving forward. Both Eveline and Gabriel's grandfather are unable to progress physically either out of or through Dublin, just as they cannot progress socially due to obstacles such as marital status and the historical oppression of the Irish by the Anglo-Irish. It is interesting to note that the characters in these secular stories arrive at Purgatory through stasis, rather than through movement as in the earlier, more religious stories such as St. Brendan's voyage or Owen's descent into St. Patrick's Purgatory.

In "The Dead," Gabriel struggles with emotional poverty, mainly manifesting through spirals of self-pity. After every action he takes or word he speaks, he reflects on a few paragraphs or pages later in a negative light. This is seen as soon as he arrives at the party, when he asks Lily whether she will be getting married anytime soon and she responds bitterly. As he prepares for his speech at dinner, he thinks, "He would fail with them just as he had failed with the girl in the pantry [Lily]. He had taken up a wrong tone. His whole speech was a mistake from first to last, an utter failure."<sup>118</sup> And even when his speech turns out to be a great success at the party, he can't help but regret it. He pictures himself as, "a ludicrous figure, acting as a pennyboy for his aunts, a nervous well-meaning sentimentalist."<sup>119</sup> But most striking of all is his reaction to

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 179.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 221.

the news that his wife had been in love with another boy as a teenager, and that this boy had died after trying to see her one last time. Not only is he openly jealous of this boy to his crying wife, but he seems to fall out of love with her. He reflects, “It hardly pained him now to think how poor a part he, her husband, had played in her life.”<sup>120</sup> These increasingly more problematic spirals of self-pity lead to Gabriel’s realization that he is just one generation in a long line of generations that have lived and died, and that one day he will die as well. He thinks, “One by one they were all becoming shades.”<sup>121</sup> And so, for him, emotional poverty plays an incredible role in his plight into Purgatory.

And yet, while Joyce’s stories demonstrate the purgatorial effects of Dublin’s stagnant economy, low social mobility, and emotional poverty, he was obsessed with a concept that caused all three. Joyce firmly believed that the root of paralysis in Ireland was generational stasis, where people cannot progress due to the actions of the previous generation.<sup>122</sup> In “Eveline,” Eveline’s deceased mother haunts her with her last words, “Derevaun Seraun! Derevaun Seraun!”<sup>123</sup> These words seem to spur Eveline into a panic in the next paragraph, causing her to resolve to escape with her boyfriend. And yet, she ultimately cannot leave. Wim Tigges attempts to decipher “Derevaun Seraun” in their article, “‘Derevaun Seraun!’: Resignation or Escape?”<sup>124</sup> Tigges asked an Irish-speaker what they thought the phrase meant, without giving them context, and the speaker translated it as, “I have been there; you should go there!”<sup>125</sup> Tigges said that, while this translation is based on phonetics and not actual Irish words,

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 223.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 224.

<sup>122</sup> This is a concept I mentioned earlier when discussing *Wuthering Heights*.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>124</sup> Wim Tigges, “‘Derevaun Seraun!’: Resignation or Escape?” *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 1, 1994, pp. 102–104, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/25473617](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25473617), Accessed 15 Dec. 2020.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 102.

it “retains its ambiguity as a call for escape as well as a recognition of its impossibility.”<sup>126</sup>

Eveline’s mother had a poor reputation and was trapped in a home with an abusive spouse, and although she may have wanted to leave — just like Eveline — she ended up dying before she could. Her last words are a reminder of this need to escape for Eveline, but she knows she cannot leave her younger siblings in the care of her violent father. She must bear the same burden as her mother and is thus trapped by generational stasis and gender. Gabriel is paralyzed by the same problem in “The Dead.” His realization, as I said in the last paragraph, that he is just one generation in a long line of generations to live and die, causes him to panic about his own mortality. This is best captured in the final paragraph of the short story, as Gabriel watches the snow fall outside his hotel window and dies. Snow, with its ability to suppress the world in a frozen blanket, represents paralysis throughout the story. And in this paragraph, as Joyce says “snow was general all over Ireland,” snow indicates paralysis across the entire country “upon all the living and the dead.”<sup>127</sup> In this paragraph, Joyce ties the landscape of Purgatory back to Ireland — just as Brother Marcus had in *Tundale’s Vision*. Gabriel’s death is an acceptance of his mortality, and the snow falling down on him and the rest of the living and dead of Irish history is recognition of the fact that Ireland is Purgatory. In dying, he embraces his role as another generation in a long, static line of generations.

The last two pages of “The Dead” are strikingly different from the rest of *Dubliners*. From the moment Gabriel acknowledges that “one by one they were all becoming shades,”<sup>128</sup> the story enters “time eternal.” This moment marks a shift in *Dubliners*. Before this point, these stories can be classified completely as secular. But the word “shades” is indicative of another

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>127</sup> Joyce, *Dubliners*, 225.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 224.

world. It emerges from the classical world, when Ulysses enters the afterlife and sees his comrades as shades.<sup>129</sup> Thus, the remaining pages of “The Dead” become more religious in tone. “Time eternal” is a state where you are no longer tied to the earthly realm anymore. This is evident in how Gabriel’s “identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling.”<sup>130</sup> As the world fades away for Gabriel, the reader realizes they are no longer in Dublin or even in the 1900s. Something has happened, and now the story exists outside the realm of the real world, and instead falls into a more religious type of Purgatory.

It is also important to note the ways in which Joyce reiterates physical aspects of Purgatory in his stories. Snow in “The Dead” is reminiscent of the use of extreme cold in *Tundale’s Vision* and *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*, among other accounts. Gabriel’s wife, Gretta, also listens to Mr. D’Arcy sing “The Lass of Aughrim,” which causes her to fall into an emotional spiral over her deceased ex-boyfriend. “The Lass of Aughrim” centers around a young woman separated from her landlord — Lord Gregory, who sexually exploited and impregnated her — by his mother. As the woman pleads to be let inside, she is forced to stand in the pouring rain with her baby, saying, “The rain falls on my yellow locks / And the dew it wets my skin; / My babe lies cold within my arms.”<sup>131</sup> This woman, unable to progress because of her landlord’s mother — as well as Gretta, who is unable to move past the death of her old boyfriend — are trapped in this moment in the rain, just as The Not-Very-Bad of *Tundale’s Vision* are forced to stand in the rain.<sup>132</sup> But Joyce invokes more than just purgatorial weather patterns. Gabriel also crosses

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<sup>129</sup> Homer, *Homer's Odyssey. Book XI. Literally Translated*, T. Stevenson, 1834.

<sup>130</sup> Joyce, *Dubliners*, 225.

<sup>131</sup> This song is actually based on a true story. Lord Gregory was a predecessor of Lady Gregory — a prominent figure of the Gaelic Revival and an acquaintance of Joyce. Francis James Child, “Traditional Irish Folk – The Lass of Aughrim,” *Genius*, Genius Media Group Inc.

<sup>132</sup> Gilbert, *Tundale’s Vision*, 180-181.



O'Connell Bridge with his wife — a bridge known for supernatural properties within the realm of the story. Miss O'Callaghan tells Gabriel, "They say you never cross O'Connell Bridge without seeing a white horse."<sup>133</sup> In a way, this bridge acts as a major turning point in the story, reflective of this supernatural quality. Once Gabriel and his wife cross, they separate from the other guests of the dinner party. It also marks a change in Gabriel's character, from self-conscious host to lascivious and almost uncaring husband. Both Owen and Tundale are forced to cross bridges during their journeys. Owen's bridge is made safe by the invocation of Jesus, whereas Tundale's was as "wide as the palm of the hand," "its surface was also pierced with very sharp iron nails," and Tundale was forced to carry a heavy load of grain he had stolen as he crossed it.<sup>134</sup> The purpose of both bridges was to act as both a punishment and a barrier before a much more lenient area of Purgatory. In both Tundale and Owen's case, falling off the bridge would mean falling into a far worse part of Purgatory, or even Hell. Considering the sharp divide between the two halves of "The Dead," with the second half concluding in the possible dissolution of a marriage and Gabriel's possible death, it would seem Gabriel had fallen off the metaphorical bridge. Being that Joyce's paralyzed Dublin society consists of the same features and punishments of earlier accounts of Purgatory, his Dublin could just as easily be considered stuck in Purgatory, as paralyzed.

By reimagining Dublin, and Ireland in general, as a more secular and metaphorical, rather than strictly religious, Purgatory to comment on Irish society, Joyce clears the way for Irish writers to use Purgatory as a biting commentary on Ireland. The most abundant period of time where this metaphor was used, in recent years that is, was during the Emergency in World War II. As a newly independent Ireland cut itself off from a warring world, Irish authors took up

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<sup>133</sup> Joyce, *Dubliners*, 216.

<sup>134</sup> Gilbert, *Tundale's Vision*, 162.

Purgatory as a way to clearly demonstrate the lack of progress, repetitive action, and forgetfulness Ireland had fallen into. That being said, while Joyce used Purgatory as a metaphor for most of *Dubliners*, his return to the more medieval, Brontë-style Purgatory in the last two pages of “The Dead” shows a degree of hesitation in his innovation of the trope. Thus, the Emergency writers would be some of the first Irish authors to write completely secular Purgatories.

### **Purgatory and the writing of the Emergency period**

What Joyce didn't know when he wrote *Dubliners*, was that Ireland's Purgatory was about to blow up. Joyce left Dublin in 1904, moving first to Austria-Hungary and then to Italy in 1905.<sup>135</sup> While there, he began writing “The Dead” in a bout of homesickness. Although *Dubliners* was ready for publication in 1909, delays prevented its release until 1914. By this point, his stories were about Dublin from a decade before — and it was that Dublin that he was diagnosing as paralyzed. He didn't know about the political tension that would lead to the Easter Rising in 1916, nor the way in which this event would act as a domino effect toward Ireland gaining independence.<sup>136</sup> The reason in which Ireland — finally gaining self-government in 1922 and a Constitution in 1937, thus becoming the independent, sovereign, democratic state everyone had been fighting for — turned back to Purgatory as a metaphor, was because upon becoming independent, the new government did not make immediate change. When Ireland's former colonizer, Britain, entered WWII, Ireland refused to take part. In fact, rather than declare war,

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<sup>135</sup>James Stephen Atherton, "James Joyce," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 29 Jan. 2021.

<sup>136</sup>“Ireland Profile - Timeline,” *BBC News*, BBC, 30 June 2020.

they declared a state of Emergency, which amounted to a neutrality enforced through “censorship, propaganda, and espionage”<sup>137</sup> by the government.

By ignoring reality — that the world was at war — the Emergency led many writers of the period to seize upon the metaphorical possibilities of Purgatory. This is strikingly different from the former more believable — believable for those living in those specific, religious time periods — versions of Purgatory. In medieval times, when Owen and Tundale entered Purgatory, they did so in a way considered real to the audience of their stories. At the time, Purgatory was considered a place people could go, firmly rooted in the real world. Even *Wuthering Heights* contained a more grounded approach to Purgatory from former representations of Purgatory as a real site, locatable in County Donegal. Since it still based its purgatorial themes in religion, the fact that Catherine was a ghost or Heathcliff was a demon was still a distinct possibility in the world. And while Joyce’s *Dubliners* had lost most of its religious ties to Purgatory, and dealt more in metaphor, his Dublin was based on his own experiences in that city. Any of the stories he wrote about could have happened. Although the end of “The Dead” enters time eternal, Gabriel’s emotion-packed and static dinner party or Eveline’s traumatic experience at the boat launch were both believable events that could have occurred in Dublin in the 1900s. This is not the case in the writing that came out of the Emergency, such as the following three texts that I will explore further later on in this paper. Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1949)<sup>138</sup> revolves around the manner in which Estragon and Vladimir unknowingly do the same thing every day, whilst waiting for an acquaintance who never comes. The fact that they forget everything that happens to them — or really what doesn’t happen to them — is unbelievable. It is silly, existing fully in a

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<sup>137</sup> Anna Teekell, *Emergency Writing: Irish Literature, Neutrality, and the Second World War* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2018), 6.

<sup>138</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, New York, Grove Press, 1954.

world of non-reality. Máirtín Ó Cadhain's *The Dirty Dust* (1949)<sup>139</sup> — or *Cré na Cille* in the original Irish language version — takes place underground in a graveyard. All of his characters are dead and petty, and many of their lines are completely ridiculous. Again, reading this book, people would not consider the plot rooted in the real world. And finally, least believable of all, Flann O'Brien's<sup>140</sup> *The Third Policeman* (1944)<sup>141</sup> takes place in a version of non-reality where people become part-bicycle, the fictional de Selby is as famous as William Shakespeare, and people wear layers of little gowns to find out when they will die. This shift to non-reality causes post-independence writers to create very distinct versions of Purgatory from their predecessors.

### ***Waiting for Godot: Purgatory in the Theatre of the Absurd***

*Waiting for Godot* exists in a world of cycles and forgetfulness. Not only are the days cyclical, marked by a mysterious night offstage, and a fuzzy memory of the day before, but the individual actions and dialogue of the characters are repetitive. Toward the beginning of the play, Vladimir “takes off his hat, peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, puts it on again”<sup>142</sup> and then repeats this action several times throughout the rest of the play. Both Estragon and Vladimir do the same with Estragon's boot, as well. The reason they do this is unclear. The characters Pozzo and Lucky also repeat their actions. One of Pozzo's lines is broken up over the course of three pages by stage directions having him jerk a rope and direct Lucky to go forward, backward, put down his bag, etc. Very little is accomplished through these directions, of which the last direction is: “Lucky sags slowly, until bag and basket touch the ground, then straightens up with

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<sup>139</sup> Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *The Dirty Dust*, Translated by Alan Titley, Yale University Press, 2016.

<sup>140</sup> Flann O'Brien is the pen name for Brian O'Nolan.

<sup>141</sup> Brian O'Nolan, *The Third Policeman*, London, Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1967.

<sup>142</sup> Beckett, *Godot*, 4.

a start and begins to sag again. Rhythm of one sleeping on his feet.”<sup>143</sup> This direction places Lucky in his own cycle of sagging and straightening, which he will be trapped in until his next stage direction.

Their conversations are also cyclical, with both Vladimir and Estragon getting confused or trailing off every other line. During one exchange, Estragon asks “What did we do yesterday?” to which Vladimir repeats his question and Estragon replies “Yes.”<sup>144</sup> This exchange is meaningless, and emphasizes the pair’s muddled memory, with Estragon clearly forgetting he had asked a question in the first place. Pozzo also confuses conversation further by pointedly ignoring any question asked of him. Vladimir and Estragon ask Pozzo “You want to get rid of him?” six times before he finally responds.<sup>145</sup> But quite possibly the most remarkable cyclical dialogue in this play comes from Lucky’s tirade in Act One. In this, Lucky repeats words and ideas with very little connection to one another, in one long run-on sentence. A portion of this is even purgatorial in nature: “...the skull the skull the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the labors abandoned left unfinished...”<sup>146</sup> Oddly enough, sometimes the characters also appear to forget basic facts of their non-reality. Although the play relies on the humor of their inability to remember that they’re waiting for Godot, they forget far more than that. At one point Estragon asks Vladimir “His name is Godot?” after having called him Godot in previous scenes.<sup>147</sup> There is also a point where Pozzo guesses Vladimir’s age to be 60 or 70, and Estragon guesses that he is actually 11.<sup>148</sup> In a way, this loss of touch with their own non-reality causes the plot to sink into a deeper rejection of reality than it would have otherwise.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 29-30.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 44-47.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 26.

The characters' inability to progress, like in *Dubliners*, is marked by an inability to physically progress. All of the characters discuss hopes of parting from one another. When explaining why Lucky never puts down his bags, Pozzo says, "He wants to mollify me, so that I'll give up the idea of parting with him."<sup>149</sup> When Pozzo decides to leave Estragon and Vladimir, he seems trapped in a cycle of goodbyes. Estragon says "Then adieu," Pozzo says "Adieu," Vladimir says "Adieu," Pozzo says "Adieu" again, and the stage direction dictates, "Silence. No one moves."<sup>150</sup> After further adieus and thank yous, Pozzo says, "I don't seem to be able ... (*long hesitation*) ... to depart."<sup>151</sup> As Act One winds down, after Pozzo finally leaves, Vladimir and Estragon decide to depart as well. Estragon says, "I sometimes wonder if we wouldn't have been better off alone, each one for himself."<sup>152</sup> But despite saying they should separate, the last stage direction of the scene is "They do not move."<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, by sending a boy each night to tell the duo he will meet them tomorrow, Godot forces Vladimir and Estragon to wait the entire day for him before letting them know they will actually meet him the next day. By doing so, the pair becomes obligated to remain in place, unable to move on.

Not only are the characters merely wrapped up in cyclical action and conversation, but their Purgatory also physically punishes them. From the very beginning of the play, Estragon talks about being beat up during his time off stage. After a night of separation, Vladimir asks "And they didn't beat you?" to which Estragon responds "Beat me? Certainly they beat me." To this Vladimir asks, "The same lot as usual?" but Estragon can't remember.<sup>154</sup> This exchange implies two things: that Estragon is getting beat up regularly and that they have had this

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 49-50.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 2.

conversation before. In Act Two, Estragon and Vladimir discuss the beatings further. Estragon says it was 10 people that beat him up and that he didn't do anything to provoke them. Vladimir questions this, saying, "Perhaps you weren't. But it's the way of doing it that counts, the way of doing it, if you want to go on living."<sup>155</sup> This exchange raises yet another point: Estragon must have done something to warrant the beatings. The compartmentalized schedule of Estragon's beatings is reminiscent of Judas' punishment in *The Voyage of St. Brendan*. Like Judas, Estragon is given periods of relief from his punishment, the beatings, with a lesser punishment, being forced to wait around.

Since the plot of the play revolves around waiting for someone who never shows up, the main goal of Estragon, Vladimir, and even Pozzo is to pass the time. When Pozzo and Lucky depart, Vladimir even says, "That passed the time."<sup>156</sup> In the context of the Emergency, as explained by Anna Teekell in *Emergency Writing*,<sup>157</sup> this is exactly what Ireland was doing — waiting out the war. In a sense, the act of writing the play was Beckett's way of passing the time before the end of censorship in literature and the media. Thus Beckett, like Estragon and Vladimir, is trapped in a Purgatory of sorts. His Purgatory just happens to be rooted in the real world, whereas his characters' Purgatory rests in the absurd.

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>157</sup> Anna Teekell, *Emergency Writing: Irish Literature, Neutrality, and the Second World War*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2018).

### ***The Dirty Dust: Connemara as Purgatory***

*The Dirty Dust* was written by Ó Cadhain during the Emergency while he was incarcerated without trial for the war's duration in the Curragh internment camp for his membership in the IRA.<sup>158</sup> His characters, like himself, are interred for the course of the war — albeit in their graves in Connemara, rather than in a camp — and are subjected to news of the war second-hand, through the newly dead who may have read or heard about the war through censored news sources. That being said, although the characters are deceased throughout the Emergency and although they live in neutral Ireland, that is not the primary aspect of Ireland Ó Cadhain attempts to dismantle through the Purgatory trope in this book. At the time, Irish was no longer the dying language of Joyce's period. In *Dubliners*, Eveline was unable to understand her mother's cry of "Derevaun Seraun!"<sup>159</sup> and Miss Ivors only knew Irish as a sort of nationalist fad.<sup>160</sup> However, the post-independence nationalist regime standardized Irish and made it a requirement for certain government positions, causing the language to be used as a stepping stone for the Irish elite. The post-independence government held the west of Ireland as the ideal for the nation to strive for, considering its inhabitants to be pure-minded Catholics who spoke perfect Irish. In *The Dirty Dust*, Ó Cadhain works to puncture the idealized view of the west perpetuated by Miss Ivors in *Dubliners* and the post-independence government, to show that Connemara is a normal part of Irish society, rather than a kind of cultural reservation for the Irish elite. His characters aren't pure-minded, are not orthodox Catholics, and are not as unaware of the war as government propagandists at the time would have wished them to be. And in making them this way, Ó Cadhain also punctures previously held ideas of Purgatory. In this graveyard,

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<sup>158</sup> Teekell, *Emergency Writing*, 164.

<sup>159</sup> Joyce, *Dubliners*, 33.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, 189.



the characters don't suffer from any form of punishment and there doesn't appear to be any trace of God or the Catholic afterlife to be seen. What's exceptional about this text, is that it escaped the Censorship Board completely since it was written in Irish, despite the fact that it undermines the standardization of Irish through its use of vulgarity and loan words.<sup>161</sup> Thus, *The Dirty Dust's* use of Purgatory as a tool to satirize the Emergency and the standardization of the Irish language is left uncensored.

While God and church is mentioned, and religious words are used in the dialogue, none of the characters seem all that concerned that they had not ended up in a Catholic version of the afterlife. In fact, the way they use the word "God" almost implies that they are still alive and thus susceptible to God's intervention. For instance, on page 280 alone, "God" is used in four phrases: "God be good to you, and take it easy Master"; "God help us, she said"; "Give me a break for God's sake, Master!"; and "God help us all, and fuck you too!"<sup>162</sup> The way in which "God" is used in these instances is colloquial rather than pious. In fact, the latter two examples are practically sacrilegious. In terms of adjusting to death, none of the characters seem phased by their new state of existence. Instead, they immediately jump into the same arguments, gripes, and vulgar language they had whilst alive.

And while the characters cannot leave their graveyard, they are by no means secluded from the outside world. The war mainly enters their deaths through the Frenchman — a wartime fighter pilot who went down in the local bay. While this character initially only knows French, he picks up Irish as the book goes on, and discusses the war. He speaks often of French liberation, saying things such as, "*C'est la liberation [sic] qu'on a promise. La liberation! Les*

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 280.

*Gaullistes et Monsieur Churchill avaient raison...*<sup>163</sup> In addition to the French airman, the newly dead bring news of the war. At the end of the book, Billy the Postman explains the outcome of D-Day, albeit “months” after the fact.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, many of the characters have children or relatives in other countries, such as England and America. Caitriona’s sister Baba lives in America, whereas another character has a son in London who “was knocking around or knocking up this black yoke for a while, and then she asked him to marry her.”<sup>165</sup> This development in particular is interesting because it goes against the idea that those in the west of Ireland are so secluded that they have become racially homogenous. This union later results in two Black grandchildren who move to Connemara, where their white grandmother “brings them to Mass every Sunday.”<sup>166</sup> Although their deceased grandparent is admittedly racist, their acceptance into the community suggests a move toward a more diverse Connemara. Thus, the dead in *The Dirty Dust* are constantly influenced by and in touch with the outside world.

As was discussed in regard to *Waiting for Godot*, *The Dirty Dust* is a more non-naturalistic representation of Purgatory. The souls here are stagnant, stuck in the same conversations and conflicts they faced during life, without any hope of progressing either to a new topic or to Heaven. That being said, Ó Cadhain’s approach to Purgatory is vastly different from previous versions. There is no real presence of God or the Catholic afterlife here, despite the fact that the cast of characters are in a Catholic graveyard, with crosses marking their resting place. Instead, each character is concerned with troubles from their lives. The Frenchman talks of the war. The Gambler constantly brings up a time where he drank 42 pints. Kitty continuously gripes about the pound Caitriona owes her. And Caitriona won’t stop complaining about her

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 291.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 291.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 224.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 294.

sister Nell. In the context of the Emergency, this is a commentary on the focus of the Irish on personal and petty problems, rather than on the world war raging just across the English Channel. It also completely undermines the idea of those in Connemara being pure-minded, as the Gambler's drinking problem, Kitty's greed, and Caitriona's grudge help illustrate.

That being said, although both *The Dirty Dust* and "The Dead" are metaphorical uses of Purgatory, there is one noticeable difference between the two: suffering. Gabriel suffers considerably in "The Dead." He loses his sense of self and his love for his wife, and constantly second-guesses how others perceive him. If early versions of Purgatory featured physical punishment, "The Dead" used psychological punishment to wash Gabriel of his sins. And yet, neither form of suffering nor punishment occurs in *The Dirty Dust*. Instead, the characters relish in their pettiness, enjoying free reign to complain and bully one another. Being that their Purgatory is without progress, it makes sense that none of the characters are being cleansed of their sins. The lack of plot and character progression is honestly frustrating to read. In this sense, instead of punishing the characters, Ó Cadhain is punishing the reader, forcing them into a frustrating Purgatory of their own as they work through over 300 pages of moaning and groaning. In doing so, he is able to highlight the bickering, pettiness, and normalcy of the inhabitants of the west of Ireland, and challenge the state's idealization of that region.<sup>167</sup> His Connemara is not as rooted in the past as the Irish government would hope, and neither is his use of the Irish language.

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<sup>167</sup> With the Gaelic Revival, the west of Ireland became an idealized area of Irish language and culture. In a way, this caused the west of Ireland to be trapped in the past — as it was relished for its heritage rather than its ability to become a more modern society, as the rest of Ireland was becoming.

***The Third Policeman: “A failed Purgatory”***

O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman* — written in 1944, five years before *Waiting for Godot* and *The Dirty Dust* — was at such a level of ridiculousness, that it was deemed “unreadable,” rejected by his publisher, and thus was not published until 1967, after O’Brien died.<sup>168</sup> His Purgatory is considered a “*failed purgatory*,”<sup>169</sup> according to Teekell, since his character’s failure to understand the world he is in prevents him from finding the means for purgation and healing. Thus, rather than purging himself of his sins, the character falls into an unending cycle of punishment and forgetfulness with no hope of progressing forward. The incomprehensibility of *The Third Policeman* is a response to the language of neutrality and censorship, such as Éamon de Valera’s refusal to call WWII a war.<sup>170</sup> This failed Purgatory is promoted through the made up literature and rules of the world, the character’s struggle with memory, and the actual repetition of parts of the text.

The rules of this Purgatory are hilarious in their ridiculousness. The main character is obsessed by a fictional genius named de Selby, and the existence of de Selby as historical figure and perpetuator of certain theories is promoted beyond the actual body of the text. The very first page of the book contains only two quotes. The first is by de Selby. The second is by Shakespeare. The fact that the de Selby quote both proceeds and is longer than that of Shakespeare, suggests his ideas are more important in this world than Shakespeare’s. Furthermore, it places him in league with a real-world literary genius, which may confuse some readers on whether or not he is a real figure. De Selby’s quote is as follows:

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<sup>168</sup> Teekell, *Emergency Writing*, 161.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, 161.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, 161-162.

“Human existence being an hallucination containing in itself the secondary hallucinations of day and night (the latter an insanitary condition of the atmosphere due to accretions of black air) it ill becomes any man of sense to be concerned at the illusory approach of the supreme hallucination known as death.”<sup>171</sup>

As can be seen from this quote, everything de Selby theorizes is utter nonsense. And yet, his theories are discussed throughout both the body of the text and within several-page-long footnotes. Looking at the lengthy footnote on “accretions of black air” in particular,<sup>172</sup> you can see the detail O’Brien put in the fictional reality of this world. Not only does de Selby have detailed theories and books (such as *Golden Hours*), but he also has critics with names, biographies, books of their own, page numbers listed within those books, quotes, and books comparing those critics. Furthermore, the incomprehensible language of this initial quote helps to hide the fact that the quote is a theory about death. This reflects the way in which the main character gets distracted by the odd world around him, and thus doesn’t realize he is dead.

Like the way in which de Valera refused to acknowledge the war, the main character of *The Third Policeman* is unable to acknowledge his own death. When Divney kills him, the act is not named because it is not understood. The main character says “something happened,” and that “I cannot hope to describe what it was but it had frightened me very much long before I had understood it even slightly.”<sup>173</sup> In this moment, the world around him alters into the Purgatory he would remain in for the remainder of the story. And yet, it is not until he finally reaches his home at the end of the book and is deemed a ghost by a much older Divney, that the reader is clued into what happened to him in this moment. From here on out, the main character struggles

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<sup>171</sup> O’Nolan, *The Third Policeman*, 1.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

with forgetfulness. When old Mathers, a man he had killed the chapter before, asks him what his name is, the main character is surprised to find he doesn't know it. He finds, "I was sure of nothing save my search for the black box. But I knew that the other man's name was Mathers, and that he had been killed by a pump and spade. I had no name."<sup>174</sup> And although he remembers the black box and the fact that Mathers had been killed, he doesn't remember what the black box is (a money box) or the fact that he was the one who killed Mathers. Although he is able to retain facts of this world as he progresses through it, his understanding of who he is or how he ended up there does not return until Divney lays it out for him. And as soon as Divney tells him he "was dead for sixteen years,"<sup>175</sup> all progress since his death is washed away. He thinks to himself, "My mind became quite empty, light, and felt as if it were very white in colour."<sup>176</sup> This failed Purgatory does not allow him comprehension of his world, and thus erases his memory to maintain his lack of understanding.

This forgetfulness leads to repetitive actions — as often marks purgatorial texts. But what's interesting about *The Third Policeman* is that some of the text is repeated word for word. When approaching the police barracks, both at the beginning of the book and after Divney dies from fright upon seeing the main character's ghost, the description of the building's appearance is repeated almost exactly. The main character's odd reaction to the building is as well. He thinks to himself, "What bewildered me was the sure knowledge deeply-rooted in my mind, that this was the house I was searching for and that there were people inside it."<sup>177</sup> Being that the Purgatory prevents him from truly knowing anything, it's odd that he has this "deeply-rooted" knowledge. In relation to the Emergency, it is akin to the way in which those living in Ireland

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 202.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 202.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 54.

knew something was wrong outside of the country, even though the Irish government refused to acknowledge it. The first words of the policeman are also the same on both occasions. First he complains about his teeth, and then he asks the main character (and later both the main character and Divney), “Is it about a bicycle?”<sup>178</sup> As both these statements are meant to spark the curiosity of the main character about the nature of the odd world he finds himself in, it can be assumed that conversation between him and the policeman will follow the same pattern. In fact, beyond the presence of Divney at the end of the book, there is no evidence that the next chapter of the main character’s journey will be any different from the previous.

Being that one of the first moves of the newly independent Ireland was inaction, many writers felt nothing had changed within the country despite the change in government. The combination of absurdity, forgetfulness, and repetition within the structure of *The Third Policeman*, as well as within the plot, satirizes the way in which Ireland mishandled the war and will continue to mishandle political matters.

### **Conclusion: Purgatories to come**

It’s interesting to note the longevity of the Purgatory trope in Irish literature. Being that the first text I explore in this paper is an oral tradition from the sixth century, and new renditions of the trope are published every year, it would seem Ireland is stuck on the idea that people are stuck in Ireland. In a manner of speaking, Irish literature is purgatorial in itself in its constant theme and return to Purgatory. Sometimes this occurs blatantly such as the way in which Martin McDonagh’s play, *A Skull in Connemara* (1997), takes its title directly out of Lucky’s rant of, “the skull the skull the skull the skull in Connemara.”<sup>179</sup> Other times it is through certain features

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 204.

<sup>179</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 47.

or markers. I said earlier that repetition, forgetfulness, generational stasis, and a lack of progress are markers of Purgatory in literature. But those are also markers of Irish literature conceptually. Writers during the Emergency took ideas of Purgatory as purely metaphorical from Joyce, who wrote a handful of decades before. Joyce took his ideas from writers like Brontë who bridged the gap between religious and secular metaphor — half a century before — as well as aspects of physical Purgatory that had been mentioned in *Tundale's Vision* — from the 12th century. And even *Tundale's Vision* took its ideas of purgatorial punishment from earlier accounts, such as the Celtic *imramas*. It's almost as if Irish or diasporic Irish writers can't escape from their own Irishness. Their awareness of the Irish writers who came before them inspires them to write from similar themes, styles, and approaches — all of which perpetuate the Purgatory trope through the generations. This Purgatory of Irish literature can even be seen in works from the past decade. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Ireland was a globalized, first world, secularized country — unrecognizable from Joyce's time. But Purgatory is still being used.

In 2011, Kevin Barry published his book, *City of Bohane*.<sup>180</sup> Bohane is a fictional city in the west of Ireland. The book takes place in the year 2053, after a calamitous event — which remains unnamed and unmentioned throughout the book, but which divides this world from “the lost time.” Due to this event, Bohane remains secluded from the rest of the world, with only the vague implication of civilization outside the bounds of the Bohane creation through the mentions of certain commodities from other countries and from the Gant's twenty-five years abroad. Bohane is inhabited by the most sinful of humanity — gangs, prostitutes, opioid addicts, inebriates — who commit the worst sins — murder, reefering, public fornication, betrayal, adultery, etc. In fact, there are no sin-free characters, including those who work outside of the

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<sup>180</sup> Kevin Barry, *City of Bohane*, Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 2012.



crime industry. The news reporter can't stop indulging in his kinks with young prostitutes. The little runner boy refuses to tell news of the feud until he is given alcohol. The butcher gives Logan permission to kill the man sleeping with his wife. And every year, the city enters a new cycle of violence: a violent August Fair, a peaceful fall, a bloody winter; a feud, a new person trying to take over the Fancy, a runaway wife; or just a desperate attempt to return in some way to the lost time.

But while this book is unique in its use of dialect and exploration of genre, much of it is oddly familiar. "The Murk of Bohane" — a "greyish, impenetrable mist" which "settles each year on the creation and just about smothers us alive"<sup>181</sup> — is reminiscent of the "great fog" which encircles the promised land of the saints and obscures it from St. Brendan's view for seven years.<sup>182</sup> The way in which the year cycles through certain events in Bohane is also reminiscent of the cyclical order of events St. Brendan goes through annually during his seven year journey. The Gant's observation that the "midget" running the joe wagon was familiar, and that, "Same midget's father, the Gant would have sworn, had the license on that chrome wagon before him,"<sup>183</sup> reflects a blurring of generations. This idea of generational stasis was seen in Gabriel's realization that he is just one generation in a long line of generations that have lived and died, in "The Dead." Like in the way the past affects the future in *Wuthering Heights*, "In the Bohane creation, time comes loose, there is a curious fluidity, the past seeps into the future, and the moment itself as it passes is the hardest to grasp."<sup>184</sup> The hypocritical religious fervor featured in the chapter "Baba-Love,"<sup>185</sup> is reminiscent of the way in which the deceased in *The*

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 241.

<sup>182</sup> O'Meara, *St. Brendan*, 67.

<sup>183</sup> Barry, *Bohane*, 16.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 223.

*Dirty Dust* speak in terms of religion while actually remaining fairly secular and sinful. And, like at the end of *The Third Policeman*, the end of *City of Bohane* implies that the characters had been dead the whole time.<sup>186</sup> In a way, *City of Bohane* is a patchwork of references and nods to earlier Irish texts. And it is through these similarities that it is able to express its purgatorial nature to readers.

Whether Purgatory will be used to comment on the lack of the kind of governmental intervention necessary to help the world or as a way of describing how people have lived in quarantine for the past year, it may be a trope that resurges in the upcoming years. Furthermore, as Purgatory was used in *City of Bohane* — a dystopian novel of societal collapse set in the upcoming decades — I foresee Purgatory being used to continue to critique the path society is heading toward, rather than satirizing the state of society in the present, as it was used throughout the twentieth century. Purgatory persists in Irish literature, but that literature, like twenty-first-century Irish society itself, has now been emptied of the underpinning of religious belief. Barry's use of the old Purgatory narrative to probe our emerging future of climate change, pandemic, and societal implosion suggests that it will remain useful. Although Irish literature may be stuck in Purgatory — with authors reading, writing, and thinking in terms of a space where nothing changes — it is an ever-evolving trope that is certain to have a long future to match its extensive history.

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<sup>186</sup> After the riot ends toward the close of the action, several of the characters are injured or dead, but still seem aware of the world around them. Prince Tubby “sailed over the clouds and across his dune-side terrain and the great spectacle *once more* was enacted for him” (emphasis added). Wolfie heard the Bohane river “as it called to him.” And for the nameless characters, “Their lips made words — promises, devotions — and the words carried on the river’s air and mingled with the words of its murmurous dead.” The fact that these dead are still aware, still talking, and going on their “death journey” *once more*, implies an undead state, and begs the question of whether they had ever been alive in this book to begin with. *Ibid*, 273-275.

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