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Irish-American fiction and the ethnic identity of Irish-Americans

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IRISH-AMERICAN FICTION
AND
THE ETHNIC IDENTITY OF IRISH-AMERICANS

MARY JANE CARTY
AMERICAN STUDIES HONORS THESIS
PROFESSOR CHARLES BASSETT
9 MAY 1988
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INTRODUCTION

As the largest immigrant group in the history of the United States, the Irish have had a tremendous impact on American society. Politically, the Irish flooded city government offices, eventually working up to the nation's highest office. Economically, they swelled the ranks of the labor market that was so crucial to America's growing industry. Religiously, they took over the leadership and strengthened the establishment of the Roman Catholic church in America, bringing to it their own parochial brand of Irish Catholicism. The Irish also influenced American culture with their successes in literature and the arts, and with their widespread emphasis on education, manifested in an abundance of parochial schools and Catholic colleges.

The central question to deal with in this paper is the shaping of the ethnic identity of the American-Irish. Why, after nearly a century-long process of acculturation in America, did a body of literature emerge which was still quarreling and reconciling itself with the social status and identity of this immigrant group? It is evident from the Irish-American fiction under consideration that well into the twentieth century, writers of Irish descent had a common experience that needed to be expressed and resolved. What is it that made the individual and collective Irish experience so powerful and problematic that it survived through
generations to be resurrected in the fiction of American-born authors of Irish stock who had not suffered in the way that the earlier immigrant generations had?

The first section of this paper will look at the historical interpretation of the Irish in America. Beginning by examining the Irish in Ireland on the eve of emigration and following the acculturation process in America through the almost total assimilation and elimination of conscious ethnicity in the mid-twentieth century, I hope to create a realistic picture of the Irish-American experience, exploring the origins of commonly accepted stereotypes and, hopefully, deconstructing some of the false interpretations.

To establish the frame of mind and disposition of the nineteenth-century Irish immigrants, I will investigate the conditions in Ireland that both shaped the Irish personality and caused the mass emigration. British colonization and imperialism played a large role in defining Irish character. Domination of their homeland by a foreign power contributed to the psychological oppression of the Irish people. Subjugation strengthened the solidarity of the Roman Catholic church in Ireland and forced the oppressed Catholic majority to funnel its energies into political agitation within the English system, experience which the Irish used as a tool for their advancement in the United States.

The Great Famine of 1845-1849 made emigration an institution in Irish life. It also made Irish immigration an institution in American life. In the early nineteenth century over one million Irish landed on the eastern
shores of the United States. During the famine years alone more than one and a half million people were added to the Irish-American population. The volume slowed down only slightly through the late 1800s and into the twentieth century—until the nativist immigration laws of the 1920s.

Most nineteenth-century Irish immigrants were young and single, with males constituting a slight majority. A rural people in Ireland, they became urban ghetto dwellers in the United States. Lacking the capital and the experience necessary to farm in the American midwest, the Irish became industrial laborers. They filled the mid-nineteenth century gap between the growth of industry and technology and the labor needed to support such expansion. Slowly, as industrialization progressed, the Irish emerged into the middle class, clinging to their traditional Catholicism, to their large families, and to their sense of oppression. Adaptation to American culture was obtained at a high price. The discrimination, exploitation, and social exclusion experienced in the Irish struggle for respectability, social status, and financial security made these goals even more important to protect, fueling Irish politics.

The long history of subjugation and exploitation manifests itself in a pervading sense of martyrdom among the Irish people. This sense of unfair but "holy" persecution is at once mitigated and fostered by the Roman Catholic faith, which allows its believers to find beauty and comfort in suffering. Historian Owen Dudley Edwards uses Margaret Mitchell's extremely popular novel *Gone With The Wind* to illustrate the extent to which this sense of martyrdom is perceived by outsiders: "The
white South, then, chose an Irish identity whence to realize its most popular portrait of its imaginary martyrdom." He prefaces his comparison by noting that the "almost insane worship of land ownership" demonstrated by the O'Haras of *Tara* is a true Irish characteristic, "however much the rest of the book talked nonsense about the white and black south." Edwards makes the point that countless students and historians have given credibility to the notion that the Irish were indifferent toward the land in America, failing to "reckon with the blazing figure of Scarlett O'Hara."(1)

The Irish have been characterized by historian John Henry Raleigh as "excessively familial; non-communal; sexually chaste; turbulent; drunken; alternately and simultaneously sentimental about love; pathologically obsessed with betrayal; religious-blasphemous; loquacious. . ." and prone to marry late in life."(2) From my reading, the most dominant themes in Irish-American life in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the family and the Catholic faith--both of which encompass many of Raleigh's characterizations. These themes appear in both historical and fictional accounts of the Irish experience in America. The second section of this paper will examine a body of literature by Irish-American writers James T. Farrell, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Flannery O'Connor, and Eugene O'Neill, tracing major common themes.

The fiction of Irish-American writers has been called "backward looking" and has been accused of perpetuating myths and stereotypes of the ethnic experience through its characterization of the Irish. The
backward looking nature of some of the fiction can be interpreted as an attempt on the author's part to resolve the problematic heritage he has been left by the immigrant generation.

Historians in the last thirty years have benefitted enormously from the insights and observations of novelists, but they have also reached the point where they must be chary of writers whose artistic perceptions have clouded historical realities. . . . It is time that Irish-American writers of fiction recognize the anachronisms in the literature, time that their literature represent 'what was' and 'what is'. . . . Irish-American writers have propped up tired stereotypes for too long and. . . they have steadfastly refused to confront the cultural issues that have shaped their fiction.(3)

This statement is a rather sweeping accusation that perhaps does not take into account the way in which the "cultural issues" that shaped not only the fiction, but the lives of these writers are dealt with by writers, particularly in their emphasis on religion. Catholicism is a very strong cultural force that each of the writers confront.

I would argue that, although many Irish-American writers do depict stereotypical "Paddys" and "Bridgets," they are not necessarily propping up the stereotypes, and that the best of them are actually setting the stereotypes up and then criticizing and tearing them down. When studied in the matrix of the author's personal background and within the context of
a collective Irish heritage, the works should be illuminated, making biases and distortions easier to recognize and interpret--making stereotypes easier to deconstruct.
Introduction Endnotes

(1) Edwards, in Doyle and Edwards, eds., p. 313.
(2) Raleigh, as cited in Cronin, p. 23.
(3) Conners, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 9.
Part 1:

The Social and Historical Context
I. THE IRISH IN IRELAND

For centuries the Irish struggled for nationhood independent of British imperial rule. This history of subordination was instrumental in the shaping of the Irish national character—the character and orientation of the thousands of Irish who left their homeland in the nineteenth century looking for a better life in the United States.

Subjugation was a daily experience for the Irish. After nearly six centuries of English presence in Ireland, the nation suffered military and economic defeat at the hands of the British in 1590. The conquerors, under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, were guided by a missionary ideal. To the Elizabethans, Ireland was a pagan, tribal culture ripe to be "civilized" by the superior English. With the defeat in 1691 of James II by William of Orange, a Protestant Ascendancy took control of Irish politics. The Protestants who came to power in this period were landowners (mostly owners of confiscated Catholic land), merchants, scholars, and professionals—magistrates, attorneys, and members of the Dublin Parliament.

Early invasions of Ireland were successful because the Irish were not politically unified. Despite their oppression and lack of voice in the affairs of their nation, the majority of the Irish had a strong sense of shared heritage in the Catholic and Gaelic traditions. The Irish version of
Catholicism had always been uniquely Celtic. It became the main feature of the Irish identity and of Ireland's incipient nationalism. The effects of the Reformation were not really felt in Ireland until the Elizabethan invasions. The Anglican break with Rome in 1534, during the reign of Henry VIII, if anything, strengthened the solidarity of the Irish Catholic tradition. Having always been distinct from Rome, the Irish underwent no real change, but when England could afford to turn her attentions to expansion in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Irish, lacking political unity, had to rely on their cultural unity to survive.

The Catholic tradition blended with the Gaelic traditions of language, oral poetry, mythology, and cosmology to shape the Irish cultural heritage. At the parish level this culture flourished and would be effectively used to rally the people of Ireland in the nationalist campaigns of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The long history of invasion and deprivation in Ireland produced a seemingly unbreakable national character.

The stubborn, persevering, and politically conscious Irish immigrant was partly a product of his environment. The most immediate and daily factor shaping the personality of Irish life was the nature of the land itself. The lush green fields cover rocky soil and run to the edge of high, formidable cliffs. Like any agricultural society, the Irish live with and understand the ordered, unchanging rhythms of the land, and as an island society they recognize and respect the power of the sea that surrounds them. (1) Fatalism, patience, and awe breed in this environment.
British colonization and imperialism also played a key role in the shaping of the Irish personality. Domination in their homeland by a foreign power contributed to the psychological depression of the Irish people. This depression combined with the year-round damp chill of the island climate and the poverty of her people increased the importance of kinship and parish ties.

The economy of rural Ireland was a simple one. Its potato crop enabled the farmer to feed several mouths from a small plot of land. This kind of subsistence-farming style of life became widespread when the English initiated an agricultural shift from tilling to grazing. Grazing required larger, consolidated farms, and the Irish peasant farmers were turned out or became tenants of large farm owners. The economy of the port cities was dominated by Protestant merchants, and in colonial fashion, the benefits of maritime trade went to the English colonial power.

Catholics were excluded from most major businesses and from the professions. One of their few options--small business--became deeply rooted in the tradition of Irish Catholics both at home and abroad. The pub became part of Irish life as a gathering place for Catholics--with the comfort of having Catholic publicans. The popularity of these drinking establishments was enhanced by the climate and the Gaelic tradition. Alcohol was deeply rooted in the Gaelic tradition of hospitality and social obligations. The destruction of Gaelic culture under English rule removed the traditional constraints regarding drink. This devastation, combined with the psychological depression caused by the low status, frustrated
hopes, and poverty of Catholics in Ireland produced a "cult of alcoholic indulgence."(2) The pub provided shelter from the elements, good company, and a way to forget social and personal problems temporarily.

Oppression in the form of Penal Laws strengthened the solidarity of the Catholic Church. Enacted under the reigns of William and Mary, Anne, and the first two Georges, these laws disarmed Catholics. Catholics were also denied the franchise and the right to own land, banned from Parliament and the legal profession, and prohibited from establishing Catholic schools.(3) These measures were deemed necessary to protect the Protestant ascendancy from the Catholic majority, but they did not weaken or destroy Irish Catholicism. The fight for Catholic Emancipation in the early 1800s forced the oppressed Catholic majority to funnel its energy into political agitation, working within the English system. The knowledge of the English system gained from this experience, and the psychological boost gained from its success in 1828, shaped the Nationalist movements later in the century and provided a valuable political consciousness for those who emigrated during the famine periods.

The Catholic Association was formed to educate the peasants and fight the Penal Codes. Under the leadership of nationalist hero Daniel O'Connell, the Association used reading rooms (reflecting the Catholic emphasis on education) and rallies to spread its propaganda. O'Connell was not short-sighted; he had great long-term plans for the Irish nationalist movement. He realized that the Union compromises offered by the British
would eventually destroy Irish nationalism.

If the British government established any kind of control over the Catholic church in Ireland, it would destroy O'Connell's long range strategy. He had confidence that the agitation for Catholic emancipation contained the seeds of Irish nationalism. Catholicism was the symbol of an independent Irish identity; it was the only thing that commanded the loyalty of the Irish masses.

The fight for Catholic emancipation provided the Irish Catholics with Parliamentary experience, grass-roots political experience, religious solidarity, a sense of nationalism, and a national hero. All of these achievements were included in the cultural baggage of the Irish emigrants.

The Irish national character on the eve of its mass emigration to the United States was a strong, stubborn one. It had been subject to defeat in military, economic, religious, and social arenas. It did not emerge unscathed, but it was not broken either. Irish character had become more resilient, politically conscious, and conservative through its experience with liberal democratic politics. Its conservatism stemmed from a desire to preserve an Irish past--including religion, family structure and ties, and traditions. The Irish placed a new emphasis on the value of education and became more protective of their rights.
II.

EMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

Though the Irish were present in the United States before the American Revolution, the majority arrived during the Great Famine of 1845-1849 and the years immediately after. So numerous were the Irish emigrants that, "proportionate to its size and numbers, Ireland contributed more people to the United States [throughout its history] than any other European country."(5)

Pre-famine emigrants were predominantly Ulster Protestants. Catholics did not leave Ireland in any significant numbers until approximately 1815, and those who did were migrant harvesters who traveled to England hoping to earn enough money to return to Ireland and pay their land rents. Because of the high costs of trans-Atlantic emigration, those who left Ireland in these early stages were well-to-do. Many of the Irish Protestants were in fact English and Scottish settlers from the early days of Ireland's colonization by the British. These Protestants were close enough culturally to the native Anglo-Americans to assimilate easily; they seemed not to represent any disruption or threat.

Reasons for leaving eighteenth-century Ireland varied according to one's religion and social class. As large Protestant estates were consolidated by agents of absentee landlords, small tenant farmers were
evicted. Enforcement of the Penal Codes made it illegal for Catholics to own land. Men who had previously owned large amounts of land were forced to lease the same from Protestant landlords. Instead of paying rent, some chose to spend their money on passage to the United States. Catholics without the money required to emigrate signed on as indentured servants, whose passage was paid for by American sponsors, or found themselves on prison ships relieving Britain of her unwanted elements.

The Protestants who left during this period, mostly Ulster Presbyterians, were escaping "religious discrimination and the economic restrictions of British mercantilism."(6) However, these early immigrants were not those who established the American stereotype of the Irish; the most lasting impressions are based on American perceptions of the Catholic famine immigrants.

It was the first wave of famine immigrants that raised questions of adaptability in Anglo-American minds. The Irish Catholics were different from the Anglo-Americans, but this difference was nothing new for the Irish. Years of oppression by the English had fostered a sense of peoplehood. Those who emigrated from Ireland were already well aware of the "hazards of being in the wrong ethnic category."(7)

The popular wisdom which regards nearly all Irish Americans as descended from the Catholic peasants who came at the time of the potato famine may be factually incorrect, but in terms of the emotional bonds that created a sense of Irish American peoplehood it is close to the truth.(8)
The famine emigrants were mostly young, single, Catholic peasants. They traveled with neighbors or fellow parishioners, not family members. Males and females left Ireland in roughly the same proportions.(9) During the early famine years, the United Kingdom was experiencing economic depression as a result of the Napoleonic wars. This economic crisis made the native Irish even less important to the ruling British, who were primarily concerned with their own financial security. No relief was available for the Irish. The British fully expected the Irish to maintain their colonial trade, asking the starving people to export food and raw materials to the mother country.

The obvious initial catalyst for emigration during the Great Famine of 1845-1849 was the threat of starvation, but as sporadic and lesser famine periods occurred later, other factors stimulated emigration. The composition of these post-famine groups was essentially the same--young, single Catholics--but they were not in such severe circumstances as their predecessors. Economically these immigrants had the advantage of kin in the United States to finance passage and provide housing during the initial adjustment period.

Increased affordability made emigration a viable option for young people whose economic future in rural Ireland appeared bleak. Large families and small amounts of land provided meager prospects for economic security. Despite the custom of primogeniture, even eldest sons of Irish families were discouraged by their prospects in Ireland. "The
smaller the farm and the younger the father, the more likely was the eldest son to pack his bags and leave."(10) If it was land a young man was after, and the agricultural existence in Ireland dictated a need for land, primogeniture would be of no benefit to him unless he was: the eldest son, and his father died early. Without wishing death on his father, a son could benefit from primogeniture by means of renunciation of the Catholic Church. "At any time, an eldest son could acquire the family estate by turning Protestant, thus reducing his father to the status of life tenant."(11) The British used land laws under the Penal Codes to control the Catholic majority, and after emancipation, they used the very attractive enticement of land ownership to try to loosen the loyalty of the Irish masses to the Roman Catholic Church.

The Great Famine and years immediately following made emigration an institution in rural Irish life. This flood of immigrants to the United States was among the most homogeneous groups of foreign nationals. The young people driven from Ireland by starvation and economics collectively formed the base for the portrait of an impoverished, unskilled, violent and tolerant of violence, politically conscious, hopelessly Catholic Paddy--the tenacious stereotype of the Irish harbored by other Americans well into the twentieth century.

These Irish have been called the pioneers of the American urban ghetto. Upon arrival in the United States, the Irish tended to remain in their port of entry or migrate to other large cities to find work. They did
not continue to live as agrarian tenants as was the case in Ireland.

Urban concentration was most marked among the Irish. Despite their overwhelmingly rural origin only about 8% settled on the land. Ill-equipped for American farming, lacking capital, and knowing nothing of agriculture except how to grow potatoes, they were repelled by the loneliness of American farm life and were loath to move to regions lacking a Catholic church. For these reasons and because they were often too demoralized to do anything else, the Irish flocked to the cities, often remaining where they happened to land... The famine refugees had a naive faith in America, but became America's first slum-dwellers, crowding into garrets, cellars, tenements, old warehouses, and flimsy one-room shacks in squalid neighborhoods like Boston's North End and New York's Five Points. These areas became notorious for epidemics and high mortality rates.(12)

Patterns of settlement were very much determined by local industry and availability of employment. As unskilled laborers, the Irish tended to land jobs in the steel, chemical, and mining industries, and as reflected in the pattern of their migration west, the Irish were instrumental in the construction of America's railroads. Most of the Irish immigrants had either used their savings to emigrate or had borrowed fare from relatives already in America. Upon arrival they could hardly afford to set out for the west and set up a homestead, but financial considerations do not
completely explain the pattern of Irish immigration and settlement.

If money was all that prevented the Irish from returning to an agrarian way of life, larger numbers would have left the cities once they could afford to. In fact, however, farming in the United States was much different from farming in Ireland. The larger scale and advanced technology discouraged the small Irish tenant farmer. Rural Ireland did not compare to rural America. The amount of land available and the distance between homesteads was incomprehensible to peasants used to another "farm" just acres away. Certain historians also some give support for the idea that the Irish were "burned" too badly by their famine experience to have any strong desire to return to the land.

To compensate for the disruption of families and parishes, the immigrants gravitated toward the familiar. The local Irish pub in the American city made the transition somewhat easier serving as an instrument for male bonding and ethnic solidarity as well as a place for employment referrals. The Irish sought out people and institutions that would make them comfortable--remind them of Ireland--while they carved out a new life in America.

Ireland itself had little industry (mostly in the north) and what it had was controlled by the Protestants. Consequently, the Irish immigrant was at a disadvantage in industrial America; Irish workers were used to fill positions either too unpleasant or too hazardous for skilled Anglo-Americans.
Within the networks of manufacture and transport that made up the new system, there were countless jobs that were too dirty, too onerous, or too dangerous to be popular among skilled workers or those who could avoid them. In the first century of the country's industrial activity, it was most frequently the Irish who wound up with these jobs.(13)

Because of their financial situation and ethnic minority status, the Irish were particularly vulnerable to industrial exploitation. As a social "outgroup" they were regarded as expendable.(14) In addition to the concentration of Irish in industrial regions, historian Dennis Clark cites three other considerations which contributed to their hazardous employ: the Irish immigrants tended to be young, they entered a large society at the very bottom of the free man's social scale, and their self-image emphasized qualities of daring and adventure.

As late as the 1890s, Irishmen were still prominent in dangerous industrial jobs. Their longevity in this position fostered a public opinion which was articulated in an 1895 McClure's magazine article: "They are perfectly happy, these stolid Irishmen who go on year after year, for about the same wages as are paid in less dangerous employment."(15) The perception that the Irish were happy risking their lives helped the American-born population justify discrimination.

Explosions at Du Pont plants in South Philadelphia and Delaware exemplify the Irish industrial accident record. The earliest record of an explosion at Du Pont dates back to 1802. Between then and 1899 over
forty major explosions involved loss of Irish life. Following a particularly bad accident in 1869, sixteen workers quit--the first time anyone walked out to protest conditions at Du Pont. The first Italian name appears on an explosion casualty list in 1904.(16) It wasn't until even less-desirable, mostly Eastern European, immigrants began arriving in volume that the Irish moved out of the industrial "explosion zone."

The early influx of unskilled labor, of which the Irish were a major component, threatened the native-born working class directly by competing for jobs and indirectly by depressing wages.(17) A combination of nativist sentiment and employment needs of the industrial system confined the Irish to the working class. In light of the rapid expansion of industry and of industrial competition for unskilled labor, historians are not convinced that employers could even afford to play discrimination games with labor.(18) However, overt discrimination was indeed manifested in the infamous "No Irish Need Apply" signs posted at personnel offices in many cities. There is no way to overlook the exploitation of unskilled labor in the growth period of American industry.

The social progress made by Irish-Americans should not obscure the fact that the record of exploitation suffered by this group from the 1830s to the 1930s constitutes what is probably the longest record of exploitation against any white immigrant group in America. The Irish were chief victims of the industrialization process, and as workers they had to endure a century-long period of economic and social abuse.
in the mining, railroad, heavy-metal, textile, and port industries. (19)

Though chiefly male immigrants were exploited by the growing industrial system in America, that is not to say that the labor market did not exact a toll from the women and children.

In his study of the Irish in Philadelphia, Dennis Clark refers to the indenture record of Moyamensing District. Between 1836 and 1845 one third of all names in the record book were children with "distinctly Irish names." (20) Not all indentures were harsh, but indenturing produced the strong possibility of psychological damage and identity problems among young children bound to another family. In addition to the disorientation of emigrating from Ireland, Irish children suffered an upending of values and loyalties. Indentured children were primarily responsible to their master, not to their blood father. Bound by the discipline of the family which held his/her contract, the child was forcibly subjected to Anglo-American values and religion. The influences of the child's real family and family of contract at best cancelled each other out and at worst created confusion and identity problems. These circumstances prolonged the absorption process of the children involved.

The exploitation of Irish women parallels the experiences of both their men and their children. Irish women who were not employed at factories were generally domestics. Though their jobs were not as disorienting as the children's, Irish women were often fully immersed in two separate and distinct domestic lives. Yet, the hardwork, disease, and
social disabilities did not break the Irish woman's sense of worth as a supervisor of households or as mother. A strange sort of pride derived from this situation among the Irish. "For girls born in poverty in [Ireland] to preside over a populous and clean American household was a respected accomplishment."(21)

The Irish women who were employed in industry were generally found in the textile mills of New England. Children were also used in the textile industry to climb into the high, small spaces above machinery to untangle spools of thread and oil the machines to keep them running smoothly. The perils of working in a textile mill included respiratory ailments, deafness caused by the loud machinery, and the ever present danger of fire.(22) Working conditions were horrible, and both the women and children worked long hours for low wages. All of the mills lacked proper ventilation, sanitation, and lighting.

The industrialization of America, the heyday of the American dream, exacted a great toll from the immigrant population. The Irish had their own American dream. Their dreams of social acceptance, financial security and productive lives were pitted against the harsh realities of industrial and economic exploitation, causing the Irish to fight harder for acceptance. The Irish were at the cutting edge of this exploitation, because of to their timely arrival as the largest immigrant group of the nineteenth century. Increasing the disorientation of the Irish who had just been forced by threat of starvation and lack of opportunity to leave their homeland was their shift from rural to urban life. The Irish were
unfamiliar with both rural and urban life as it existed in America, having no model for either in Ireland. The process of assimilation was hindered by prejudice. The Irish were the first immigrant group large enough and alien enough to represent a real threat to the native Anglo-Americans. In their favor, the Irish spoke English and were familiar with English customs and social systems, many of which had evolved and been adapted to American life. To orient themselves in America, the Irish turned toward the familiar. The church and the family were central to the identity of Irish Americans--as were politics and the pub--and these were a source of relief during the discouraging assimilation battle.
III.
SECURING A PLACE IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

The Roman Catholic church was a chief source of continuity with the Irish past, and the Irish were soon to take control of the politics and hierarchy of the Church in America bringing to it characteristics of their own unique Irish Catholicism. In as much as the Irish took control of the Church in America, the Church played a central authoritative role in their lives.

For Catholics, the Church was not a loose brotherhood of people united by the influence of 'saving grace' but a living, eternal body through which God communicated to his children. There was no general 'priesthood of all believers' but a hierarchy of pope, bishops, and parish priests to whom God delegated the 'keys of the kingdom'--the only legitimate earthly authority to act in his name.(23)

The idea that Catholics everywhere are connected through an elaborate hierarchy to the Pope in Rome is itself a means of orientation and connection with the past. The Irish emphasis on solidarity at the parish level--the solidarity exploited by the emancipation and nationalist movements in Ireland--created a refuge for the ghetto neighborhoods in
the urban centers. "Although wearing the Catholic label added to Irish liabilities in the United States, Catholicism provided them with a touch of beauty, spiritual comfort, and psychological security in ugly ghetto situations."(24) Within the parish, Irish immigrants sought consolation and spiritual relief from their economic and social condition.

The suffering and exploitation the Irish immigrants experienced was given meaning within the structure of the Catholic church. Catholics believe strongly in suffering on earth and reward in Heaven and in the biblical tradition of "the last shall be first." The sacraments and rituals of the Catholic faith give order and significance to the trials experienced in daily life. The sacrament of penance reflects the Jansenist belief in the innate depravity of man--it is assumed that the communicant is imperfect and he must have his soul "healed" before truly taking part in the celebration of the Mass. Though there is a strong sense of man's imperfection, Irish Catholicism is not all gloom and doom. Again in the Jansenist tradition, the Irish have a sense of being a chosen people. The idea of penance, which provided unlimited opportunity to be absolved of all venial sins, accommodates the Irish tradition of drink and violence. On a less hypocritical note, the Irish are known for their joyous wakes. When someone of the faith passes away to his or her heavenly reward, Irish Catholics are not known for skimping on the send-off party.

The notion of being a chosen people and of enduring hardships and suffering are reflected in a uniquely Irish characteristic--that of only being happy when there is some cause to be unhappy. An easy life, one free
from suffering and exploitation, would negate the belief in suffering on
earth in exchange for a heavenly reward. If the last shall truly be first,
then the Irish could take consolation in suffering.

The two central features of the Irish American identity, the
Catholic church and the family unit, are very closely connected. In the
most basic of terms, both institutions use the same nomenclature for
members. The head of the Catholic church, the Pope, is referred to as the
Holy Father; heads of convents are addressed as Mother Superior; priests
are addressed as Father; brothers and sisters fill the monastaries and
convents. "We are all God's children" covers the role of lay Catholics. The
central figures of the faith form a quasi-traditional family: God the
father, Jesus Christ the son of God, and Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus.

The Irish American family was dependent on the family of the
Catholic church during the adjustment period of their immigration. In the
face of the disruption of emigrating and the dangerous and low-paying jobs
discussed earlier, the very structured nature of the Catholic church
provided surrogate support for the Irish American family and kept it from
folding. As in the Church, in the Irish American family there was no room
for individualism. An individual's sense of identity was derived from his
role in a functioning family. The excessive familiality of the Irish was
not as structured as the Church family.

The familial tendencies of the Irish Americans extend beyond the
family unit only as far as the Church. With the exception of parish
solidarity, which translates in most cases to neighborhood solidarity, the
Irish were non-communal. This exclusivity manifested itself in the social arena in the form of prejudice, and its conservative, protective nature was demonstrated in the Irish American affinity for politics—the only social arena they had in which to safeguard their interests and beliefs.

The historic disparity between the English and Irish was not resolved in America. The nineteenth-century immigrant Irish found themselves in a cold, sometimes hostile, Anglo-American environment. As ghetto pioneers, the Irish previewed the experience of nearly every ethnic, racial, and religious minority that subsequently arrived in America.

The Irish were the first unwanted aliens in the new republic, the first targets of hate and violence. American nativism, a cultural child of English parents, defined itself in terms of the centuries-old conflict between the Anglo-Saxon Protestants and their Catholic enemies. In the United States the Irish filled the same role as in the United Kingdom: they were hated, papist subversives, the slinky agents of popery. Their obnoxious social behavior—the fruit of an impoverished culture and alienation—only reinforced prejudices that were essentially religious but that also contained the rudiments of racist ideology. (25)

The major threat perceived by the native Protestant population was the control that Rome held over members of the Catholic church. To Americans, the Roman Catholic church was the epitome of idolatry, ignorance, superstition, and tyranny. The religious argument spilled over
into social and political life. The Irish Catholic heritage of Al Smith played a large role in the defeat of his 1928 bid for the presidency. The election of John F. Kennedy in 1960 represented over a century of struggle to overcome nativist Americans' fear of ethnicity and popery.

The prejudices directed at the Irish induced two distinct reactions: the first, an overcompensation for their ethnicity, resulting in what some historians argue to be the over-acculturation of the Irish in America; and the second, the prejudices Irish Americans directed at other ethnic groups, most notably blacks, Jews, and Italians.

Oddly, the latter two groups were disliked by the Irish on religious grounds. As Christians, the Irish Catholics resented the role of the Jews and the Hebrew nation in the crucifixtion of Jesus Christ. The Catholicism of the Italians constituted their principle threat to the Irish. The Irish sought control of church politics and the Catholic hierarchy in America. An immigrant group of Catholics as many in number as the Italians threatened Irish control.

Historian Lawrence J. McCaffrey outlines the three main components of Irish sentiment regarding Black Americans. First, abolitionists were often also "passionate enemies of Irish Catholics," influencing the anti-abolitionist stance of the Irish. Second, the Irish were pressured economically by blacks in the labor market, increasing competition for unskilled jobs. Blacks were also used by employers as scabs to break strikes by Irish workingmen. Third, until the influx of other immigrant groups, blacks were the only group in America lower on the social ladder
than the Irish in the eyes of Anglo-Americans. (26) This concept of position on the social ladder is the driving force behind Irish-American prejudice in most instances. McCaffrey calls this reaction an ego defense. By feeling or acting superior to another persecuted social group, the Irish increased their own sense of self-worth and hoped to achieve general respectability.

A more systematic approach to Irish social respectability was undertaken through the political system. Paddy and friends had an advantage over many other immigrant groups in their command of the English language. They were able to speak for themselves: "the specter of an Irishman not doing his own talking is difficult to conjure up." (27) As I suggested before, familiarity with the English political system benefitted the Irish in America. The context of their emigration and the state of political development in America at the time of their arrival served as a watershed for a long tradition of Irish American politicians.

While in their homeland, the Irish seemed unable to fight British political and economic imperialism with any degree of success. Yet once in America they advanced rapidly in politics and were soon fighting successfully for the welfare of their people. "The aggressiveness, high spirits, and self-confidence that had found so few constructive outlets in Ireland--where political and economic power were monopolies of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy--burst forth in the United States." (28) This triumph is partially due to the good timing of the flood of Irish into America. The "bright, ambitious American Irish had very limited avenues
along which to advance."(29) Lacking a formal education, important family connections and capital required for professional and industrial management ventures, the Irish looked to politics for their opportunity. While the rapid industrial expansion was claiming victims, the political system in urban America was entering its adolescence. City management had just become a full-time position. The malleability of the system and the high concentration of Irish in urban centers gave the Irish politician a strong foothold in politics.

With social betterment the aim of Irish American involvement in politics, came a liberal association:

Irish liberalism is real, but more pragmatic than ideological, geared toward improvement rather than perfection. And because it is more practical in judgements and goals, it has achieved more reform in the United States than the ivory-towered liberalism of Anglo-Americans. As Catholics, the Irish have been more communal minded in their politics than individualistic Anglo-American Protestants.(30)

As an oppressed and persecuted people, Irish politicians had to be out of necessity community-oriented. As was the case in the Irish family, in Irish politics there is little room for individualism (barring the individual who purposely hides his heritage for personal gain). To gain respectability as a person, the Irishman had to fight for the respectability of his ethnic group.
The quest for control of church politics and the rapid advancement in local and state politics are closely related. After all, the politically conscious Irish peasant was inspired at the local level, which in Ireland meant through his parish. The cultural baggage of Irish immigrants contained an equation of religious solidarity with political agitation and gain. The first political victory in the Irish Nationalist struggle was against the Penal Codes. The agents of this victory, O'Connell and the Catholic Association, inspired future political action in Ireland. And America's Irish immigrants carried this tradition with them. That Irish Catholic politics were based on an adaptation of the Roman Catholic church's structure, and that in Ireland politics and religion are so often interchangeable, can be cited as a source of Anglo-America's concern about Irish politicians.

The bursts of nationalist sentiment and the Fenian movement among the Irish in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had the undesirable effect of refreshing the connection between religion and politics and reinforcing Anglo-America's fear of popery. This effect was quite the opposite of what Irish Americans hoped to achieve by their absentee nationalist agitation. It was commonly held that a free and independent homeland, closer to American democratic values, would increase social acceptance and respectability for its sons and daughters in America.
IV.
CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

The early 1900s marked the advancement of Irish American into the middle class. The transition from "shanty" to "lace-curtain" Irish meant not only that Anglo-Americans had come to accept the Irish, but that the Irish were more comfortable with their position and with their ability to improve themselves socially, politically, and economically. In some ways this achievement was marred by the damaging effects it had on the cultural heritage of Irish America: "the so-called Irish success story has meant social and economic progress but cultural retrogression."(31)

The field of politics seems to be a unique exception to the over-acculturation tendency. As the Irish gained more and more political power they were able to command more respect with fewer concessions to Anglo-American strictures. They were able to maintain their Irish identity while becoming thoroughly Americanized politically. Irish historian Owen Dudley Edwards related an amusing anecdote about a politician seeking office in a heavily Irish district of Chicago. Because his ethnic name, Polski, hindered him at the polls, his staff orchestrated a name change which was credited with political success--the victorious candidate was known to his constituents as O'Polski. This tale, and the fact that presidential hopeful Al Smith chose to emphasize his Irish ancestry and suppress his father's Italian roots, lend credence to Edwards'
belief that in the arena of politics, Irish heritage and the gift of blarney were desirable assets. "American assimilation tells us of the Irish who passed for WASPs: but we have much to learn of other ethnic groups who passed for Irish."(32)

Historians still argue over whether Irish American support for the nationalist cause in Ireland fell off because it was no longer necessary for identity and social standing in America, or because of the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1921. McCaffrey argues that "as Irish Americans evolved from unskilled working to affluent middle class, they abandoned their dependence on and interest in Irish nationalism as an identity badge and pathway to respectability."(33) Historian Marjorie Fallows contends that it was the establishment of all but the six counties that constitute Northern Ireland as a free and independent state that allowed the Irish in America to finally accept their Americanization.(34) In light of the political and social progress that Irish Americans had made on their own, it seems logical that they would no longer need the reassurance of a free homeland, and that 1921 was more of a nostalgic, emotional cornerstone than a strategic social victory. The Irish cultural retrogression that occurred in the early part of this century also attests to the credibility of this hypothesis.

In their efforts to assimilate into mainstream Anglo-American life, the Irish deemed it necessary to hide aspects of their ethnicity. Ethnic groups who arrived after the Irish were more culturally distinct from Anglo-Americans than the Irish, but this difference lent legitimacy to
their ethnicity. The Irish had been different enough to represent a threat, but not so different that they could not conform. Other immigrants, notably Eastern Europeans, were markedly different in physical appearance, dress, and language. Though the Irish had tremendous advantages in speaking the language of the host country and in being familiar with its political systems, they also found that a sacrifice had to be made by rapid and complete assimilation. Andrew Greeley laments that the "legitimization of ethnicity came too late for the American Irish. They are the only European immigrant group to have over-acculturated."

(35) By the time America and her new residents discovered there was room for real ethnic diversity, the Irish had hidden most of their ethnic heritage in successful conformity.

There are two sides to this issue. One can concentrate on the damaging effects of the cultural retrogression or on its positive accomplishments. Once the Irish were secure in their Americanization, they could afford to luxuriate in and cultivate their Irishness. This point allows for the transition to the body of Irish-American literature that will be assessed in the second part of this paper.

By the time the Irish were accepted and comfortable with their acceptance, they had also "gained enough detachment from the miseries of the early years to display a real interest in the culture they had 'lost.'" (36) The writers of these later generations helped the revival of Irish-American culture and, perhaps more importantly, used their medium to work out a problematic past on both personal and cultural levels. The
environment had become more suited for cultural literature, neither mainstream America nor Irish America were threatened by an emphasis on heritage and ethnicity. This process continued throughout the middle of this century, culminating with John F. Kennedy's election to the presidency. "Most of [the Irish] have become so successful in the United States that they no longer pose a social problem or a political crisis. As a part of suburban rather than urban America, they seem physically, linguistically, economically, and culturally indistinguishable from Anglo-Americans."(37)
Part 1: Endnotes

Chapter I: The Irish in Ireland

(1) Shannon, p. 7.
(2) Clark, p. 61-62.
(3) McCaffrey, Ireland from Colony to Nation State, p. 43.
(4) McCaffrey, Ireland from Colony to Nation State, p. 13.

Chapter II: Emigration to the United States

(5) McCaffrey, in Doyle and Edwards, eds., p. 81.
(6) McCaffrey, Ireland from Colony to Nation State, p. 87.
(7) Fallows, p. 4-5.
(8) Fallows, p. 2.
(9) O Grada, in Doyle and Edwards, eds., p. 94.
(10) O Grada, in Doyle and Edwards, eds., p. 96.
(12) Jones, p. 131.
(13) Clark, p. 46.
(14) Clark, p. 47.
(15) Clark, p. 47-50.
(16) Clark, p. 49.
(17) Bayor, p. 2.
(18) O Grada, in Doyle and Edwards, eds., p. 98.
(19) Clark, p. 17.
(20) Clark, p. 25.
(21) Clark, p. 43.
(22) Clark, p. 52-53.
(23) Olson, p. 2-3.

Chapter III: Securing a Place in American Society

(24) McCaffrey, in Doyle and Edwards, eds., p. 82.
Chapter IV: Cultural Assimilation

(31) McCaffrey, in Doyle and Edwards, eds., p. 89.
(33) McCaffrey, in Doyle and Edwards, eds., p. 87.
(34) Fallows, p. 45-46.
(35) Fallows, p. 9.
(36) Fallows, p. 53.
Part 2:

The Fiction
INTRODUCTION TO IRISH-AMERICAN FICTION

A significant body of Irish-American literature emerged only with the generations of American-born Irish—from writers two or three generations removed from the harsh experiences of the immigrants. Economic necessity and levels of education explain part of this pattern. As William Shannon points out, the members of the potato famine generation were too restricted by economic necessity to have the leisure for writing fiction. In general, those who could write and had the opportunity to exercise this ability used it for political and nationalist agitation and for journalistic careers. Not until they were assimilated into American culture were the American Irish able to write about and resolve the experiences of their particular ethnic immigrant group. Once this assimilation was achieved, Shannon writes that Irish-American writers "produced a large body of coherent work, coherent because it deals in different ways [and with varying degrees of success] with recurring themes in the Irish experience in this country. Out of the quarrel with themselves and their past, the best of these writers have created enduring literature." It is ironic that to produce a body of ethnically cohesive literature, the ethnic group in question had to have already successfully blended with
the native culture. The first Irish-American to become a major American novelist, F. Scott Fitzgerald, had rejected his Celtic origins to cultivate an upper-middle-class standing and was so thoroughly integrated into mainstream culture that he was hardly considered Irish. He never really felt comfortable with his integration. His background haunted him all his life and rejecting it was a continual process.

In their effort to resolve the "quarrels with themselves and their past," Irish-American writers contributed to the stereotyping of their own people. According to Margaret Conners, "an analysis of the stereotypes of the American-Irish reveals that, over half a century, literature has shared the responsibility with history for distorting the images of the Irish in the United States. Distinguished Irish-American novelists have frequently caricatured their forebears..." (3) Conners also points out the tendency in the literature of second and third generation Irish-American writers to be subjective and to recreate stereotypes "in a way that the immigrant press had done for the first generation. The scholars recognized that there were dangers in relying too heavily upon fiction for historical data." (4)

If one were to accept fictional and journalistic stereotypes as fact, then Irishmen would have to be construed as necessarily mirroring these images:

The Irish husband was considered a poor risk by the natives. The hard-drinking wife beater, a regular feature in the newspapers, was particularly repugnant... The Irishman had his good side, too, but that was less broadcast--he
was cheerful when sober, and willing to offer hospitality to relatives and friends. His notion of kinship was, in fact, a great source of amusement, since it extended to a 'cousin by reason of his mother's grandfather being a half brother to a maternal aunt.(5)

And his partner could come across like this:

The Irish wife and mother was frequently drawn as unsociable, even quarrelsome, though such visions were often tempered in literature by her concern for her children and her determined effort to hold the family together. . . Of course, the stereotype of the Irish domestic varied—to some, Irish servants were careless and promiscuous; to others the same servants were industrious and religious.(6)

Scholars are certainly aware of the dangers of relying solely on fictional accounts to put together a composite of an ethnic group's history, but if the subjectivity of the literature is understood for what it is, the fiction can provide a valuable supplement to historical data. A writer's work is a personal expression and taken in the context of his or her experiences can give a different perspective to a social history of the same time period.

Each of the writers I am examining crafted fiction from his or her personal experience. Farrell wrote about young men in the Irish neighborhood on Chicago's south side where he spent his own boyhood. Fitzgerald writes about mid-western Irish Catholics who have lost their
faith, opting instead for a materialistic pursuit of pleasure. Such is the case with each of the writers, and I will go into more of the semi-autobiographic and wish-fulfillment detail with specific reference to the central themes being explored in the fiction: the role and influence of the Roman Catholic church and the family unit in Irish-American life.
F. Scott Fitzgerald is regarded as the most eloquent and insightful spokesman for what he termed the Jazz Age. Appropriate to this era of supposed narcissism, superficiality, and shallow materialism, Fitzgerald himself was not really what his public image would suggest. In addition to being the first Irish-Catholic to become a major American novelist, Fitzgerald was also one of the early writers to really make a good living at his craft. His business-sense regarding popular appeal and salability of his material (as well as his image) fits the ethics and characteristics that ascribed to the age. He was conscious of exactly who he was, who he wanted to be, and how to go about appealing to those with whom he wished to be associated.

Born in 1896 in St. Paul, Fitzgerald was baptized in the Catholic church. His midwestern Irish-Catholic upbringing never entirely left him. From his earliest rejection of the faith to his later reintroduction to and reconsideration of it, Fitzgerald wrestled internally with the duality of his life, a fact evident in his writings.


The appearances of his life and work, the lights of the carnival which attracted and destroyed
him and his fictional brothers, the apparently glamorous life, is one component of it. But that masks his profound moralism, the realization of sin and destructiveness which underlie and permeate the temporal world. The carnival lights outshone the candles, but the candles had indelibly touched him, and some of the language, characterization, and moral concerns in his work are evidence of this.(7)

It was the first influence on Fitzgerald's life, and it never let him go. As the Catholic educators have been fondly saying for years: give me a child until he is seven and he will be mine forever. Fitzgerald was subject to this kind of philosophy at home by his parents and his devoutly Catholic aunts and through his parochial school education.

This experience was intensified by the rigid social order that existed in St. Paul. Allen relates that, although St. Paul was a Catholic city, Fitzgerald was acutely aware that the "best people" in town were not the Irish, reinforcing his enduring social self-consciousness.

It is questionable whether Fitzgerald ever made a satisfactory accommodation to his Irish Catholicism. . . . As a boy in St. Paul, at Newman, and at Princeton, a stronghold of the eastern Protestant upper class, his Catholic background was a large part of his sense of exclusion, and he fought hard to hide and forget it when he went east.(8)

With the physical move away from his Irish Catholic roots came an
increasingly problematical mental separation of self and heritage. The means Fitzgerald used to achieve his desired image are paradoxical. Evident in his fiction is a strain of Catholicism (some times more overt than others), and his fiction was the vehicle Fitzgerald used to launch his own financial success and wish-fulfillment. Yet to secure a place for himself in his desired social strata, he believed that he could not carry his Catholicism into his public life. Fitzgerald "Never allowed his religion and ancestry to become part of his public image; consequently they have not often been considered essential parts of his nature and work." (9)

In the sequence of his novels, Fitzgerald almost maps out his journey from his near complete disdain for the Catholic church and his Irish heritage to a point where he is no longer entirely motivated by the shallow pursuits of status and pleasure.

From something close to unquestioning adulation of wealth in *This Side of Paradise* to vaguely ambivalent feelings in *The Beautiful and Damned* to fairly strong condemnation in *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald moved to severe criticism in *Tender is the Night*. This movement is paralleled by that from Fitzgerald's rejection of the Irish, to their moderate acceptability, to Irish Dick Diver's victimization by power and wealth. (10)

The novel Rhodes identifies here as exhibiting the strongest affinity for social and material pursuits is also, interestingly, the most overtly Catholic of Fitzgerald's novels.
Allen identifies the importance of *Paradise* in its sociological content and in what it lends to the study of Fitzgerald's artistic development--rather than in its "dubious literary value." In this, his first novel (a great popular success), Fitzgerald is certainly the prototype of the protagonist, Amory Blaine. Fitzgerald uses *Paradise* to explicate his Irish-American problem; it is a rewrite of his personal, problematic past.

Yet even in this close account of the problem, Fitzgerald employs artistic license in romanticizing his parents and taking the edge off some of their traits. The troubled relationship between parent and child is as central to Amory Blaine's life as it was to Fitzgerald's.

Amory is introduced as the "Son of Beatrice" just as Fitzgerald had been known as "Mollie McQuillan's boy." There are some striking similarities and contrasts between the background of Beatrice O'Hara Blaine and Mollie McQuillan Fitzgerald, their Irishness being the first and most apparent characteristic.(11)

To the fictional incarnation of his own mother, Fitzgerald gave a wealthier father, an extensive background in European travel, and acquaintance with important figures in the religious hierarchy. Fitzgerald also "enhances" his mother's conservative and sincere devotion by rendering her more urbane, enjoying the attention she receives from the clergy for her wavering faith. "In *This Side of Paradise* Fitzgerald worked out his own family romance by creating for his fictional counterpart a mother who is
in many respects a wish fulfillment."(12) The basic familial discord in *Paradise* is a result of Amory's quest for social status: "the simple, inescapable identification of the Irish with the middle-class is more than Amory can bear, and Fitzgerald shared his pain."(13)

Amory's closest and most supportive relationship in *Paradise* is with Monsignor D'Arcy, a tribute to Fitzgerald's beloved real life friend, Monsignor Fay. It is not merely the central role of this relationship that makes *Paradise* a Catholic novel, but what Allen calls "Amory's profound sense of evil." This acute awareness of evil is part of the confusion Amory feels about Catholicism. When he voices his doubt in the faith he illustrates quite clearly the bind that a Catholic upbringing presents.

And Monsignor, upon whom a cardinal rested, had moments of strange and horrific insecurity-- inexplicable in a religion that explained even disbelief in terms of its own faith: if you doubted the devil it was the devil that made you doubt him.(14)

This kind of indoctrination strengthens the institutional attractiveness of the Church. By removing some of the blame from the disbelieving individual and offering "the devil made you do it" as an explanation, the disbeliever's awareness of evil is increased. At the same time, the indoctrinated disbeliever begins to doubt himself and his ability to judge evil--and doubting his disbelief, he is directed back to the Church.

Amory confronts what he interprets to be the Devil himself on more
than one occasion. The most vivid depiction of his (and Fitzgerald's) awareness of evil and his unreconciled struggle with his duality—the conflict between the candles and the carnival lights—is the sequence titled "In The Alley." In this episode Amory is drunk and wandering in the streets of New York City. He is nagged by the feeling that he is being followed and soon begins hearing footsteps. Convinced these footsteps are those of pursuers, Amory runs, only to realize that he has actually been chasing the footsteps all along. Knowing this presence to be Evil, and at the same time knowing the whole thing to be a construction of his imagination, Amory stops and waits for the Evil to materialize. It does so in the personage of Dick Humbird, a dead schoolmate from Princeton, who symbolizes the end of Amory's pursuit—the personification of Amory's material and social goals has appeared in the form of the Devil.

This image is such a strong anchor for Amory, scaring the knowledge of evil into him, that even though he does not immediately and radically change his ways, he can hardly be classified as bestowing "unquestioning adulation [upon] wealth." The whole issue is Amory's lack of certainty about his life—the tug of war between Catholic and carnival sensibilities that is going on in his mind.

*The Great Gatsby*, generally regarded as Fitzgerald's finest novel and one of the masterpieces of twentieth-century American literature, is not nearly as overtly Catholic in nature as *Paradise*. Allen calls it an obvious "product of Fitzgerald's Catholic consciousness, however, insofar as its original prologue establishes Gatsby's background is a midwestern
Carty

Catholic boyhood." (15) Gatsby has rejected his upbringing, as Fitzgerald did, and Fitzgerald is saddened by the result. The novel resounds with the hollowness of Gatsby's whole existence. With the arrival of Gatsby's father to attend to the body, the tragedy is increased by knowledge of what Gatsby's materialist creed replaced.

It is very easy to find Fitzgerald in his own fiction, supporting the notion that he did indeed have personal conflicts to work out there. His unfinished novel, *The Last Tycoon*, began to subdivide the issue of heritage even further. Fitzgerald used a character, Stahr, representing integrity and power, as a pawn to play of the Irish innocent of Kathleen Moore and the Irish scoundrel of Pat Brady. Rhodes, who argues that Fitzgerald tends to be anti-materialistic in his fiction, also speculates about what might have been made of this rejection had Fitzgerald written more. He concludes:

While it would perhaps be satisfying to discover that Fitzgerald came full circle and ended by embracing his Irishness, that symmetry is not to be, but it may be satisfying to think that at the last his experience allowed him to accept and to depict a larger range of humanity than his earlier work did. (16)

It is also satisfying to think of him following Amory's exercise and charting his reactions to changes in environment and new experiences, from the "fundamental Amory," through any number of changes always with
the goal of getting back to the fundamental Amory. Maybe Fitzgerald was heading toward some fundamental self. That provides a way to read the last line of *Gatsby*: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." (17)
Long Day's Journey Into Night is Eugene O'Neill's crowning achievement. Written in 1940 and released posthumously in 1956, this play "is the Irish Catholic culture in America expressing itself." (18) Selectively autobiographical, O'Neill called it a play of "old sorrow." The dedication, to his wife Carlotta on their twelfth wedding anniversary, reads:

I give you the original script of this play of old sorrow, written in tears and blood. A sadly inappropriate gift, it would seem, for a day celebrating happiness. But you will understand. I mean it as a tribute to your love and tenderness which gave me the faith in love that enabled me to face my dead at last and write this play--write it with deep pity and understanding and forgiveness for all the four haunted Tyrones. (19)

The play is a chilling examination of the decay of an Irish-Catholic American family. It is about love and hatred and how the emotions fit into the family structure. It also depicts the mutually supportive strength of the family and the Church, and the immutable connection between them.

Long Day's Journey confronts issues that O'Neill had evaded in his life and in his earlier plays. Here we encounter a very strong sense of
need to reconcile something from the past--to work it out on paper--so that it will stop haunting the writer. As is the case with so much of Irish-American literature, O'Neill was haunted by his heritage, and there is something uniquely Irish-American about this wrestling long and hard with identity.

O'Neill was an apostate Catholic, meaning in the Church's vocabulary that he had "fallen away." Fitzgerald cultivated a new image to cover up the old while he learned how to deal with his heritage; O'Neill took what would seem to be an opposite road to the same place: mental anguish manifested in drinking and illness. Conversely, however, O'Neill dealt with his past by refusing to embrace his Catholicism or his Irishness, yet making no attempts to cover them up. In writing his play of old sorrow, he is in a sense, making a concession to his Catholic heritage. The exercise of writing it is a sort of cathartic absolution for sorrow caused and a way of satisfying the Catholic need to forgive and to be forgiven. In this play, O'Neill is not seeking to absolve just himself, the four Tyrones each have a modified monologue in which to make their final confessions.(20)

*Long Day's Journey* touches on almost every theme of the Irish experience in America--immigration, assimilation, economics, social status, prejudice, familial relations, and religion. In the fourth act, Tyrone relates the circumstances of his own childhood to Edmund--an experience that parallels the life of O'Neill's father.

When I was ten my father deserted my mother and went back to Ireland to die. Which he did
soon enough, and deserved to, and I hope he's roasting in hell. He mistook rat poison for flour, or sugar, or something. There was gossip it wasn't by mistake but that's a lie. No one in my family ever--... But never mind. My mother was left, a stranger in a strange land, with four small children [two older sons had left to make their own way]. ... There was no damned romance in our poverty. Twice we were evicted from the miserable hovel we called a home. ... I was the man of the family. At ten years old! There was no more school for me. I worked ten hours a day in a machine shop, learning to make files. (21)

What Tyrone experienced was the harsh reality of life for nineteenth-century Irish immigrants--the strangeness, the poverty, the large family, and the child-labor. There is even an allusion to religion in the comment about his father's possible suicide; suicide is the ultimate sin against God in the Catholic faith. O'Neill is certainly sensitive to the plight of his forebears, but he does not romanticize or idealize them. (22) Almost every character is stripped bare and his faults enumerated.

The Anglo-Irish conflict is localized into a conflict between the Irish and the New England Yanks. Tyrone has bitter memories of his "fine, brave, sweet" mother scrubbing and washing for the Yanks, earning a pitiful wage, insufficient to feed and clothe her family. Tyrone's desire to conquer the Yanks, as they conquered his family, is tempered by his desire to be accepted by them. In the first scene we are presented with O'Neill's vision of the Irish overcoming the Yanks in a small way. The scene, which
involves the pigs of a crude Irishman, Shaughnessy, getting into the ice pond of a Standard Oil millionaire, is a taken from an earlier play, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. It takes on greater symbolic meaning in *Long Day's Journey*. It is dramatically, "the only moment in the play when the characters are all united, happy, and laughing, mutually enjoying a vicarious victory over 'the stranger.'"(23)

The unity is shattered by Tyrone's fear of being associated with lowly, peasant Irish. The Irishman insults the millionaire, and Edmund revels in it; Tyrone is threatened.

TYRONE

admiringly before he thinks.

The damned old scoundrel! By God, you can't beat him!

_He laughs—then stops abruptly and scowls._

The dirty blackguard! He'll get me in serious trouble yet. I hope you told him I'd be mad as hell—

EDMUND

I told him you'd be tickled to death over the great Irish victory, and so you are. Stop faking, Papa.

TYRONE

Well, I'm not tickled to death.(24)

Tyrone has spent his life trying to gain acceptance and resents the lowly Irish, believing the fault that he has not succeeded to be partially theirs. In their climb up the social ladder, "the discriminated-against Irish were
as racially intolerant, sometimes more so, than their oppressors."(25)

The degree of success and the consequences of Irish assimilation into American culture are represented in at least four distinct ways: occupation of the characters, speech patterns, the use of "masks," and Mary Tyrone's lament for her lack of home and religion. *Long Day's Journey* "shows degrees of assimilation of the Irish--from the crude peasant Shaughnessy up through the sensitive educated 'poet,' Edmund Tyrone."(26) It also demonstrates that not all integration and assimilation is the result of deliberate effort: Edmund is more assimilated than his father, who fights hard to win over the Anglo-Americans approval, in a way simply because he was born another generation removed from the immigration experience.

Degree of assimilation is mirrored in the characters' accents.

By and large the dialogue of the main characters in *Long Day's Journey into Night* is plain, unadorned middle-class American speech, leavened by early twentieth-century slang in the utterances of the sons and the Irish 'lilt' in those of the parents.(27)

By this standard, Edmund, the most eloquent, would be the most assimilated. This is apparently what O'Neill intended for his counterpart. The other three central characters wear "masks" which are shattered in the course of the play.
As a self-portrait, Edmund wears no mask, presumably because the author sees himself as a fully integrated person, more acted upon than acting. He provides precious few insights into his own nature. He alone is not stripped naked to the core of his soul.(28)

The insights into his nature are defined by the confessions of the others. Even as an integrated person, Edmund is defined by his past. As O'Neill said: "The one thing that explains more than anything about me is the fact that I'm Irish."(29) With Long Day's Journey as the vehicle, both author and character are confronting their heritage, a process that comes necessarily with assimilation.

Mary Tyrone's "constant lamentation for a home and social acceptance demonstrates the essential rootlessness of the Irish." It is also a product of the assimilation process. She is the most effective portrayal in the canon of the "cruel consequences of the migration of the Irish to America and the price they often paid for assimilation."(30) Key to understanding the painfulness of the integration process is the role played by Catholicism. In their centuries of struggle with the British, the Irish people were forced to relinquish everything they had. Everything, that is, except their religion. The conquerers managed to persuade very few Irish to give up their faith in the Catholic Church. In her assimilation, Mary Tyrone has lost even her faith.

For the Irish, the Catholic Church is the inner core of not only the individual, but the family (and the community which traditionally extended
The traditional Irish commitment to Roman Catholicism added further weight to the predominance of the family. In the eyes of the Catholic Church, the union between man and woman was a sacrament. Hence the family that emanated from that union was sacred. It became the center of not only familial duty, but of religious obligation as well. When a man betrayed his family, he also betrayed his faith. Parents stood in the place of God. If a child disobeyed his father, he was guilty of a sin against God.(31)

This dynamic is reflected in the family structure of *Long Day's Journey*. Because it is a sacred unit, the family takes on an existence that is difficult to define. Harry Cronin, biographer of O'Neill, describes it as a unit bound together by no rules. "The members of the family may love or hate one another as they wish. . . . They may say horrendous things to one another or betray one another. But the family is always there with its pervading influence: its awful power of destructive hate or saving love."(32)

Since it is the Catholic faith that gives the family its ambiguous quality, it is appropriate that the Tyrone family members each have their own view of and problems with their religion. Tyrone believes in God as a stabilizing force—a traditional, conventional God who "helps those who help themselves."(33) He believes that the root of the other family
members' problems is their loss of faith.

Tyrone chastises his sons for their cynical behavior, attributing it to their loss of faith in Catholicism. Reminded of his own indifference to the Mass, the father replies, 'It's true I'm a bad Catholic in the observance, God forgive me. But I believe!' According to him, his wife has lost her faith, and 'there's no strength of the spirit left in her to fight against her curse.'(34)

In Tyrone's eyes, to maintain the grace of God, one must believe in himself. And he believes that if Mary Tyrone would believe in herself, that strength would be complemented by God, and she could thus overcome her addiction.

Mary Tyrone has just the opposite view of the situation. She believes that the religious faith is a prerequisite to the belief in herself. "She knows instinctively that she must believe in herself before anyone else can do so, but it is impossible for her to do so when she lacks religious faith."(35) Religion is truly the inner core of her existence.

The difference in their concepts of God is also reflected in their disagreement over whether or not what they have is a real home. For both the requirement for having a home, like the basis of the family, is faith. Tyrone contends that their house is a home because he believes it is and that is sufficient, the required faith will then follow. Mary wistfully disagrees with him. It never was, and never will be, a home without first having faith.

The sons, of course, have no God, but He nonetheless has a lasting
effect on their lives through His presence in the family and the effect
religion has had on their parents as individuals. Cronin addressed the
mysterious strength of the faith that enables it to maintain such an
enduring influence, lasting long after an individual leaves the Church. Like
the Catholic axiom referred to in Fitzgerald's chapter, there is something
about catechism: as a "child grows up he may no longer believe in these
truths, but he will never forget them."(36)

_Long Day's Journey into Night_ is such a powerful play, and such a
popular success, because it transcends individual experience to address
the universal themes of loneliness, identity, and faith. It is an "Everyman
play. Each person can make a similar journey into the night of his past to
determine the facts that shaped his individual destiny."(37)

O'Neill effectively portrays the crippling aspects of Irish-American
family life and the suffering that results when an oppressed people
relinquish the one thing that was the core of their existence in the name
of assimilation, especially when that core is as omnipotent as the
Catholic faith to the Irish people. Reading the play is not nearly as
powerful as seeing a good production of it--after all, it is a play, and
therefore it was meant to be performed and observed. "The last glimpse of
the four shattered Tyrones in the catastrophic final scene of the play is
probably the most memorable moment in American theater. Reliving the
tragedy left O'Neill 'in tears'; living it left him a lifelong casualty, a
figure forever obsessed by 'all the four haunted' O'Neill's."(38)
When women writers take up fictional studies of the Irish experience in America, they treat the immigrant's dream of education, wealth, and higher social stature. But by choosing the critical perspective of the young woman—an outsider in sex as well as ethnic group—and by insisting on daily details and commonplace crises of individual characters, they suggest other goals as well. In 'figuring out people,' they detect patterns of personally and socially induced frustration. They represent and implicitly question self-sacrifice, bitterness, anger, and defiance as the coping mechanisms for various forms of failure at every economic level.

This quotation is from Bonnie Kime Scott's "Women's Perspectives in Irish-American Fiction from Betty Smith to Mary McCarthy." It is not surprising that Flannery O'Connor is not included in Scott's study despite how aptly this description fits her work. Because her subjects are not stock Irish-Catholics and her fiction doesn't "treat the immigrant's dream," O'Connor is often neglected as an Irish-American writer and studied instead as a Southern regionalist. She disdained this label: "The woods are full of regional writers and it is the great horror of every
serious Southern writer that he will become one of them."(40) As an Irish-Catholic woman in the male-dominated, Protestant culture of the South she gives a different perspective to the minority experience which parallels that of other Irish-Americans.

O'Connor did not have to cope with life in an Irish ghetto, or with a haunting Irish past which she felt compelled either to confront or to hide. She did not experience overt prejudice on the basis of her ethnic background, but that is not to say she did not discern oppression in other aspects of American culture.

To see Georgia, or any part of the South, through Flannery O'Connor's eyes is to be reminded that any segment of human experience--described by words such as race, sex, class, or regional affiliation--ought in some way to be given its place in a larger scheme of things.(41)

The oppression that O'Connor illuminates in her writing seems far removed from the experience of Irish immigrants, but what she is in fact doing is writing about the results of oppression and alienation and how they manifest themselves in individuals and in the community. Both the Irish and the Southerners are conquered peoples.

This is a key element of the Irish-American identity which is also used by other more conventional Irish-American writers to resolve problems with their ethnic background. So too is their tendency to over-assimilate.
The anguish that most of us have observed for some time now has been caused not by the fact that the South is alienated from the rest of the country, but by the fact that it is not alienated enough, that everyday we are getting more and more like the rest of the country. (42)

O'Connor's starting point in unraveling ethnic identity problems would seemingly be at the point of over-assimilation, the point at which a group loses its distinctiveness to such a degree that its members can comfortably turn around and examine the process. In the young Irish community, this point was generally reached with the loss of their traditional Catholic religion.

O'Connor scholar Robert Coles contends that "above all [Flannery O'Connor] was a theologically sophisticated Roman Catholic." (43) Other scholars, however, discount her Catholicism as an important element in her writing. In response to a critic's suggestion that she is not a Catholic novelist because she does not write on Catholic subjects, O'Connor explained that, given restricting circumstances, a writer has to find the themes and subjects he or she needs in unlikely places.

The Catholic novelist in the South is forced to follow the spirit into strange places and to recognize it in many forms not totally congenial to him. But the fact that the South is the Bible Belt increases rather than decreases his sympathy for what he sees. His interest in all
likelihood go immediately to those aspects of Southern life where the religious feeling is most tense and where its outward forms are farthest from the Catholic.(44)

O'Connor's subjects—generally rural, poor, intensely religious Protestants—are quite removed from her own experience.

Born in 1925 in Savannah to an established, affluent family, Flannery O'Connor was intimate with two entirely different Georgias: the one she was born into and the one she wrote about. The bleak and often bitter landscapes she paints her characters against stands in stark contrast to the ante-bellum house, situated on the outskirts of "a small town that is fiercely proud of its old houses and old families," where she spent her adult years.(45)

Why did O'Connor, an educated and devout Roman Catholic, choose to write fiction about the Protestant South when she certainly had a sure enough command of her own religion to have incorporated it into her work? The answer seems to be in the way in which religious intensity is expressed. In explaining to a nun friend why she writes of Protestant religious fervor rather than Catholic, O'Connor offered this explanation:

...if you are Catholic and have this intensity of belief you join the convent and are heard from no more; whereas if you are a Protestant and you have it, there is no convent for you to join and you go about in the world getting into all sorts of trouble and bringing the wrath of people who don't believe anything much at all down on your
head. This is one reason why I can write about Protestant believers better than Catholic believers--because they express their belief in diverse kinds of dramatic action which is obvious enough for me to catch.(46)

Though a very accurate observation, O'Connor sells herself short in the last statement. As an outsider she was able to effectively understand the Protestant experience and interpret it in her writing. As a "theologically sophisticated" insider, she might well have been as effective with Catholic subjects. But as nearly every O'Connor scholar agrees, what she might have done is not the issue; what she did is.

O'Connor observed that any fiction "that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic."(47) She herself felt it was necessary to use a blend of the comic and the shocking to communicate her belief in the pervasiveness of evil. She also believed that, in the narrow view of most religions, readers would have to be "forced or shocked and/or amused into accepting the validity of [other] religious states."(48) Underneath the grotesque characterization, O'Connor is writing about the human experience. At a basic level her characters, and her neighbors in Georgia, face the same problems and struggles as "those who live in New York's Manhattan or California's Marin County, not to mention Cambridge, Massachusetts: how ought one live this particular life we happen to have, and what does it mean... if anything."(49)

O'Connor believed that it did mean something, "the secular
messianic mentality was not hers."(50) For her, the meaning of life was rooted in orthodox Christian values and in the struggle that exists in all humans between the inate evil and the desire for goodness. Evil is necessary to validate goodness and O'Connor's vision of evil included the failure or resistance to acknowledge the pervasiveness of evil.

Her bitterly vivid portrayals of the evil creature in us are meant to shake from us a bit of the vanity and conceit that are, of course, inevitable companions of each human being--no matter the person's skin color, occupation, sex, [or] religious creed.(51)

The vanity and conceit she is trying to undermine is, of course, the notion that we are somehow exempt from evil--from original sin.

The grandmother in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" is an illustration of what happens when good is embraced to the exclusion of evil. Refusing to acknowledge evil in herself, she is forced to confront it from without, in the form of escaped convict, The Misfit. Her mistake, which she is too embarrased to admit, causes the auto accident that brings her, and her son's family, together with The Misfit. Even The Misfit gets the benefit of O'Connor's faith that Christ's redemption is available to everyone. He is called The Misfit, and not something stronger like the Evil, because of his confusion about Christ.

'Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead,' The Misfit continued, 'and he shouldn't have
done it. He thrown everything off balance. If He did what He said, then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best you can—by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him.' (52)

The Misfit is so-named because he is caught between the two extremes of goodness, faith in Jesus, and evil, which is stronger but has not completely won out (demonstrated by the fact that he does none of the killing himself).

Without acknowledging her imperfections, the grandmother cannot really know herself. She does not have any sense of identity that comes from within. O'Connor mocks this nebulousness in her description of the grandmother.

... the grandmother had on a navy blue straw sailor hat with a bunch of white violets on the brim and a navy blue dress with a small white dot in the print. Her collars and cuffs were white organdy trimmed with lace and at her neckline she had pinned a purple spray of cloth violets containing a sachet. In case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady. (53)

Her vanity is grotesque, but what it symbolizes is tragic—a lack of any inner light, of any identity beyond social convention.
This hollow, empty identity connects with the Irish-American struggle to resolve their ethnic identity. In The Misfit's words, "sooner or later you're going to forget what it was you done and just be punished for it." (54) Throughout Irish-American fiction there is a strong sense of being imprisoned by the past, long after the reality of the situation is past. The kind of psychological punishment that Fitzgerald, O'Neill, and Farrell experienced is favorable in O'Connor's eyes to the pathetic attempts American culture makes to preserve the past.

This theme is acted out in the story "A Late Encounter with the Enemy." O'Connor presents the grotesque figure of a sixty-two-year-old woman soon to graduate from college, who will feel cheated if her hundred-and-four-year-old grandfather dies before the ceremony. Not because of the family pride that will come from her degree--she admits that getting it was just an exercise to conform to new board of education laws--but because she will be distinguished by his presence on stage in his Civil War uniform. The ancient Confederate general is a symbol of the hollow, meaningless ritual we use to validate ourselves. Instead of romanticizing and idolizing a past that we do not fully understand, it is better to go through the pain and emotion of confronting heritage. To really drive her point home, O'Connor allows the General to die on stage even as the ceremony goes on. This story illustrates, in O'Connor's bitter, ironic way, her feeling that although one has no control over the past, one has a decisive voice in how that past is preserved.

Despite her upper-middle-class perspective, O'Connor's treatment of
her subjects is not condescending. She observed irony everywhere and felt that in order to illustrate it to a large audience, she would have to use a method that would appeal to people on a human level; she chose the shocking and the humorous. She felt a kinship with all people whose lives were centered on Christ and redemption.

As she repeatedly pointed out, her fiction was peopled by the hard-pressed poor, to whom she felt Christ's kind of kinship—even as she remembered one of his loyal disciples, of all people, would deny him three times; and upon that follower, the Church of Rome would be built. Such built-in historical ironies never receded from her mind's range of vision.(55)

Despite the kinship, she did have difficulty accepting the practical aspects of many of the Protestant sects of the South.

The religion of the South is a do-it-yourself religion, something which I as a Catholic find painful and touching and grimly comic. It's full of unconscious pride that lands [the people of the region] in all sorts of ridiculous predicaments. They have nothing to correct their practical heresies and so they work them out dramatically. If this were merely comic to me, it would be no good, but I accept the same fundamental doctrines of sin and redemption and judgement that they do.(56)
Her mixed emotions do not decrease her sympathy for the situation.

There is, however, in her use of the grotesque, an element of judgment. In the recurrent theme of the lasting influence of a Catholic upbringing, O'Connor can't help being a judge of sorts in the tradition of the Church. "Judge not, lest ye be judged" never seems to apply to self in the Roman Catholic Church; rather it is directed at others.

O'Connor's involvement in the Catholic Church was not a blind faith. She was able to distance herself from it and to intelligently assess its structure and shortcomings. She firmly believed that its hierarchical structure was a fault and that the Church had "all too many categories, rules, regulations, prescriptions and proscriptions." What she referred to as a "vapid-Catholic distrust of finding God in action of any range and depth," is a manifestation of the Church's narrowing influence. The institutionalization of the Church made it vulnerable in O'Connor's eyes. Its international nature and conventional worship, leaving no outlet for dramatic expression of belief, tamed the religious fervor of its members.

The injustice she saw in human existence transcends labels of religion, sex, race, and ethnic background, and she provides the reader with a strong sense of the ironies--and grotesques--built into everyday life. Her solution is to endure the pain of confronting them. And in her personal vision, that confrontation is necessarily filtered through her religion. "I see from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and that what I see in the world I see in its relation to that."
IX.

JAMES T. FARRELL: A CHRONICLE OF LIFE IN THE IRISH GHETTO

Reading the fiction of James T. Farrell is like reading the diary of a young man troubled by his lower middle-class surroundings, only it was written by a grown man trying to exorcise the memories of his adolescence. His novels and short stories are full of descriptive detail and are very explicit, telling the reader everything he needs to know about what happened, where it happened, and when. This specificity allows for passive reading of the text as Farrell's characters are incapable of any real soul searching. There is as much to be learned from an examination of Farrell's background and motivation as there is to be gained from a close reading of the text. Dismissing Farrell as a failure, however, is a mistake because, though he may be considered something less than a brilliant novelist, his work is interesting in light of the themes of this study. Farrell's work, particularly the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, provides a sociological survey of the South Side of Chicago in the early twentieth century, one that illustrates the historical accounts of the Irish-American experience.

As a boy, Farrell, was an ardent Catholic, but as he entered young adulthood, he felt stifled and sought education and economic betterment outside of his poor neighborhood. Like O'Neill and Fitzgerald, he did not readily accept the Catholicism of his youth, and he was consequently
banished from the Irish Catholic community in which he was raised. His decision to leave affected the rest of his life and permeates his writing. "The very prolificacy of Farrell's output suggests a man whose only way of resolving the past is an obsessive recounting of every detail of it."(60) In light of his past, Farrell's stories become a justification to himself and to the reader for his decision to leave the community.

Farrell's stories and novels are the most extensive documentary in American literature of the process of separation from an ethnic culture. No one else tells us so well about the damages suffered by those who first make available in literature the experiences of an excluded minority. The world left behind is irretrievable yet inescapable. The cost of leaving, the death of remaining, the anger and defensiveness about one's group--themes common to most ethnic writing--are unforgettably captured in Farrell's best work.(61)

Farrell's work is a summary of what he was leaving behind and why leaving was such a hard thing to do.

To young Farrell, the Irish Catholic community on the South Side of Chicago was feeding on itself. The "finely elaborated hierarchies" which demanded absolute conformity stifled growth within the community. Among the Irish, deviance from the norms of behavior, appearance, and aspirations was condemned and exploited to maintain the cohesiveness of the community. Their security as a group depended upon "the enforcement of mediocrity on each other."(62) With holding one another back as the
basic principle of interpersonal relationships, it is not surprising that the Irish felt their community endangered. The only real unity they achieved was forced conformity as a defense against outsiders. This insight concurs with Raleigh's characterization of the Irish as non-communal. The relationships within the community were tenuous, and any group whose internal structure is weak had an increased need for communal defense.

This kind of community is impoverishing to the growth and social development of its members, adding to the sense of oppression created by economic factors and by the prejudices of Anglo-American Protestants. The young who want to escape these surroundings are faced with a difficult process. They want to get out, but they also want to make some kind of accommodation to family and friends. (63) This is nearly impossible because the community offers no middle ground. "Any hint of deviance brings immediate attack from fathers and siblings, and prayers from the mothers."

(64) The choice seems to be either to reject one's family and one's past or to remain and destroy oneself.

Farrell chose the former path, and this decision accounts for his truncated view of his past in his fiction. His inability to achieve an adult perspective in writings about his childhood parallels the intense displacement he felt because of his real-life separation from that world. He perceives the Irish-American community as forcing upon its children at a crucial point near adulthood an absolute submission to its assumptions about the world. Refusal to submit brings summary banishment from community life. (65) In "The Lost World of James T. Farrell's Short
Stories," Barry O'Connell points out that Farrell's own failures as a writer illustrate the documentation of the Chicago Irish Catholic community as an oppressive environment.(66) Farrell asserts that as a result of their ethnic experience, Irish-Americans have impoverished senses and so he himself writes stories with no ornamentation. O'Connell also applies this explanation to the other obvious shortcomings in Farrell's writing: he creates no memorable landscapes; he cannot make characters physically distinguishable; and he does not know how to explore feelings.

Even in his later writing, Farrell is preoccupied with and most sensitive to adolescents. Appropriately he creates adult characters as they would be perceived by an adolescent; they are rendered flatly and are open to mockery.(67) The following passage taken from *Young Lonigan* is an example of Farrell failing to create the illusion of dimension in adult characters.

Then the parents joined in a general denunciation of Orpet, adding that no Catholic would ever commit such a foul deed.

'Sure, that's so, Lonigan orated profoundly as if he were shedding the fruit of long and consistent thought.

'And isn't the Catholic Church the grand thing?' Mrs. Reilley said lyrically.

'And just think how awful the world would be without the Church,' said Mrs. Lonigan.

'There's nothin' like the Church to keep one straight,' said Lonigan.

'It keeps you toeing the mark. That's one thing to say for it,' Mrs. Reilley said.
Reilley agreed with a feeble nod of his sleepy head.

'That is the reason we gave our children a Catholic education,' Mrs. Lonigan said.

'And isn't it the truth that a mother never need worry when she sends her boys and girls to the good sisters, the holy virgins!' Mrs. Reilley said.

There was a nodding of heads.

The conversation drifted and dribbled on amidst increasing barrages of yawns. (68)

The description of this conversation is an example of the opportunities Farrell missed in his own writing. The trilogy that this novel belongs to deals with a young man bursting with the desire to escape the oppression of the Irish ghetto, and this particular passage is loaded with reasons to justify his desire. But the narrator makes no comment about the rut that this conversation is in and its parallels to the rut that the protagonist, Studs, exists in.

Farrell meticulously details conversations and then does not use them to his advantage. Because his point of view is adolescent and only adolescent, Studs is not developed enough to interpret such conversation and express his feelings. From the above conversation alone Farrell could have allowed Studs to elaborate on the sleepiness that pervades adult existence in this neighborhood; the overwhelming influence of the Church in the speakers' lives; the lack of any real communication between the adults; and the probability that this conversation has taken place in similar form many times before. The last sentence can be interpreted as
the writer’s commentary on the oppressiveness of the situation, but otherwise there is no exploration of what it reveals about Studs’ desire to escape.

Farrell’s own escape was fueled by Marxist conviction. (69) He was a defender of literary Marxism and his Studs Lonigan novels received praise from Communist literary critics as “powerful portrayals of the decay of capitalist society.” (70) Even before his secular education and subsequent formal adoption of Marxist principles, Farrell saw the working proletariat--his family and his neighbors--as the backbone of America. His maternal grandparents came to America during the Civil War, and they refused to give up their simple, Irish peasant ways--never really understanding America and its capitalist values. Farrell’s father was “proud, independent, [and] hot-tempered” and became a symbol to young Farrell “of the striving and sorrows of working people.” (71)

Marxism and Catholicism are mutually exclusive, requiring Farrell to choose one or the other. In the Marxist tradition, Farrell views the church as oppressive, superstitious nonsense--the opiate of the masses. But, considering the staunch 1930’s Marxist that Farrell was, he misses an opportunity to employ Studs as a didactic tool. The sense that religion is oppressive is certainly present in the exchange between neighborhood parents. But it is only there for the reader to interpret; Farrell fails to create a character who can express it.

He still manages, in spite of this lack of character development, to carefully set up Studs’ predicament--as if to justify Farrell’s own desire
to leave the community. But even this portrait simply, even oversimply, portrays the community as stupid and prejudiced.(72)

His banishment from the community handicaps Farrell's writing. He is unable to understand and interpret that world from an adult point of view. Thus, everything he writes of his childhood experience is written from the unsophisticated perspective of being on the border of leaving the community. "As a result, his writing often verges on being a transcription of actual life. [Farrell] attempts as nearly literal a translation as possible of life into fiction."(73) O'Connell suggests that this practice often results in Farrell's stories seeming too long, as if the material had not been edited by its author.

On the other hand, critics and social historians can find a great deal of value in his detailed transcriptions. They provide the reader with a comprehensive survey of the social structure of the South Side of Chicago as it existed in the early decades of the twentieth century. Sexual mores, patterns of courtship and marriage, work habits, modes of child-rearing, education, deviance, religion and its role, the nature of status distinctions, and the nature of leadership--all the threads that make up the social fabric are treated in Farrell's fiction(74).

Prejudice exhibited against Irish Catholic Americans not only by the Anglo-Americans, but by other ethnic minorities, is part of the Irish ghetto experience. When Studs makes a remark about a pretty Negress, he is rebuffed with "Never mind, punk! . . . And listen, the niggers ain't as bad as the Irish."(75) There is another incident where it is asserted that the
“Irish oughtn't kick [up a fuss about the 'frisky shines' moving into their neighborhood, because the Irish] and the niggers can both look up to a snake.”(76) Anti-papist sentiment is illustrated in the young French boy's reply in the following exchange: "'Andy, are the Irish hundred-per-cent Americans?' asked Connell. 'No, because they believe in the Pope,' Le Gare answered."(77)

In order to portray Irish-Americans accurately, Farrell could not overlook the prejudice they exhibited against other minorities. "Old Man O'Brien" covers most of the standard complaints in this particularly vicious oration against Jews:

‘Baseball's the only clean game we got left. The Jews killed all the other games. The kikes dirty up everything. I say the kikes ain't square. There never was a white Jew, or a Jew that wasn't yellow. And there'll never be one. Why they even killed their own God. . . . And now I'll be damned if they ain't comin' in spoiling our neighborhood. It used to be a good Irish neighborhood, but pretty soon a man will be afraid to wear a shamrock on St. Patrick's day, because there are so many noodle-soup drinkers around. We got them on our block. I even got one next door to me. I'd never have bought my property if I knew I'd have to live next door to that Jew, Glass's his name. But I don't speak to him anyway. And he's tryin' to make a gentleman of that four-eyed kid of his . . . as if a Jew could be a gentleman.'(78)

There is a lot of laughter, discussion and consensus among the young Irish
boys gathered around the old man. Before long an unwitting black man walks by to make a coal delivery and prompts an equally vicious attack on the undesirable blacks in the neighborhood:

'You got to put pepper on the tails of these eight-balls. They're lazy as you make 'em. A Jew and a nigger. Never trust 'em farther than you can see 'em. But some niggers are all right. These southern ones that know their place are all right. But these northern bucks are dangerous. They are getting too spry here in Chicago, and one of these days we're gonna have a race riot, and then all the Irish from back of the yards will go into the black belt, and there'll be a lot of niggers strung up on lampposts with their gizzards cut out. . . . You got to keep these smokes in their place and not let 'em get gay.'(79)

After this racist diatribe, Mr. O'Brien stopped to buy the kids sodas, and over their treat he regales them with tales of yesteryear.

The role of religion in Irish-American life is effectively chronicled in Farrell's trilogy. Studs' parents are very devout Catholics. The reader is constantly witnessing Mrs. Lonigan praying for her son or Mr. Lonigan admonishing him for causing his mother such pain. The conversation quoted earlier with regard to Farrell's failure to make effective use of his material also illustrates the religious fervor of the adults in the neighborhood. It is the responsibility of the parents to nurture such devotion in their children by sending them to parochial schools and by
making God a welcome presence in the home. Mr. Lonigan sees things this way: "I say this: if you keep God in the home, active and real, you'll have a happier home and can get along better in all you do."(80)

The Lonigans', and the good sisters', success is illustrated in the scene in which Studs, heading for a gang fight and pretending it is really war, invokes the name of the Blessed Virgin for protection. He has faith that he will "get along better" in the fight if he says his prayers. Studs also experiences classic Catholic feelings of guilt associated with misbehavior, exemplified in the narration of his thoughts during Mass.

Studs Lanigan knelt crushed in a pew towards the rear on the Blessed Virgin's side of the church. He was aware of the perfume scent and presence of a girl beside him, and her squirrel coat was brushed tantalizingly against his knee. He bowed his head to pray, and thought that the Mass was sacred, the unbloody sacrifice of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, Our Lord, the symbolic repetition of His Holy and inspiring life, and he would have to hear Mass in the right and proper spirit.(81)

Once he resolves his guilt about thinking of the girl beside him, his attention focuses on and off the Mass, his mind drifting from boredom, to women, to his behavior of the night before, to what an inattentive Catholic he is. He is periodically jolted back to the reality of the Mass and always mumbles a prayer in repentence. This pattern of misbehavior followed by a conscience-absolving prayer or good thought is an illustration of the
control of the Church as an institution in the lives of young Irish-Americans. It is an example of not only the deep-seated need to be forgiven, but it hints at the abuse of such a practice--the idea that one can get away with being a bastard as long as one goes to Mass (or confession) the next day.

In his detailed observations, Farrell captures elements of the Irish-American drive towards assimilation and the quest for social status that it inevitably accompanies. Even in this community which is trying to maintain its cohesiveness by "enforcing mediocrity on each other," there are concessions to the existence of a local social hierarchy. Farrell makes reference through the character of an old woman to the proverb: "tell me your friends, and I'll tell you who you are."(82)

The theme of assimilation into American mainstream culture runs throughout the books. After all, the protagonist is trying to leave his ethnic group behind in favor of the larger community. The only resolutions the characters could offer themselves were in the realm of fantasy. Studs' major internal coping mechanism while he exists within the stifling structure of the community is to escape in his mind--"all of living itself is subordinated to [creating fantasies]."(83)

James T. Farrell defended his work and the autobiographical quality of his characters by insisting that his kind of background and ethnic experience was so powerful that it was all he had to write about. Farrell and his major characters all "bear the psychological scars often found on the sons and grandsons of immigrants."(84) He recognized that the bulk of
his fiction was "the story of [his] own life, . . . of [his] own feelings, emotions, of [his] own unconscious, of [himself] in terms of development, integration."(85) Although much of the emotion and development gets lost in the underdeveloped treatment of experiences in his fiction, Farrell still presents a valuable chronicle of the urban Irish-American experience. "As he grows older the hold of his past weakens," unfortunately for Farrell, "so too does his ability to create fiction worth reading."(86) He could never remove himself and view the experiences objectively, and in the end succeeded only in being spiteful.
Part 2: Endnotes

Chapter V: Introduction to Irish-American Fiction

(2) Shannon, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., introduction.
(3) Conners, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 1.
(4) Conners, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 7.

Chapter VI: F. Scott Fitzgerald: Cultivating an Image

(7) Allen, p. xiii.
(8) Allen, p. 21.
(9) Allen, p. 22.
(10) Rhodes, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 45.
(11) Allen, p. 66.
(12) Allen, p. 67.
(13) Rhodes, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 38.
(15) Allen, p. 102.
(16) Allen, p. 102.

Chapter VII: Eugene O'Neill: Facing the Dead

(18) Cronin, p. 18.
(20) Tiusanen, p. 297-298.
(22) Raleigh, p. 105.
(23) Raleigh, p. 103.
(24) O'Neill, p. 25.
Chapter VII: Flannery O'Connor: Redemption and Catholicism from a Southern Point of View

(40) McKenzie, p. xi.
(41) Coles, p. xii.
(42) Coles, p. 64.
(43) Coles, p. 64.
(44) Flannery O'Connor as quoted in Hoffman, in Friedman and Lawson, eds., p. 32.
(45) McKenzie, p. xiii.
(48) Hoffman, in Friedman and Lawson, eds., p. 34.
(49) McKenzie, p. vii-viii.
(50) Coles, p. xxvi.
(51) Coles, p. xiv.
(52) O'Connor, A Good Man is Hard to Find, p. 28.
(53) O'Connor, A Good Man is Hard to Find, p. 11.
(55) Coles, p. xxvi.
(56) Coles, p. 59.
(57) Coles, p. 72.
(58) Coles, p. 94-95.
(59) Hoffman, in Friedman and Lawson, eds., p. 46.

Chapter IX: James T. Farrell: A Chronicle of Life in the Irish Ghetto

(60) O'Connell, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 65.
(61) O'Connell, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 70.
(63) O'Connell, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 64.
(64) O'Connell, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 63.
(65) O'Connell, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 54.
(66) O'Connell, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 64.
(67) O'Connell, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 53.
(68) Farrell, *Young Lonigan*, p. 49.
(69) O'Connell, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 67.
(70) A conversation with Charles Bassett got me started on this thread.
(71) Branch, p. 28.
(72) Branch, p. 17-19.
(73) O'Connell, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 54-55.
(74) O'Connell, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 56.
(80) Farrell, *Young Lonigan*, p. 159.
(82) Farrell, *Young Lonigan*, p. 162.
(83) O'Connell, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 57.
(84) Branch, p. 50.
(85) Branch, p. 35.
(86) O'Connell, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 68.
CONCLUSION

In light of their oppressive historical experience, I am not surprised that the ethnic identity of Irish-Americans is so problematic. The centuries of struggle with the British in Ireland, and the years of acculturation in Anglo-America, left the Irish alienated and defensive. As Catholics they turned to the Church for strength and consolation in their suffering.

As a cultural force, Catholicism was the only thing that the Irish did not surrender to the conquering British, making it the focus of their heritage and identity. Catholicism held that the family was a sacred unit, and young people, second generation Irish-Americans, raised in secular, capitalistic American society found it increasingly difficult to preserve this sanctity. The intensity of belief of earlier generations made it traumatic not only for the individual to denounce the Church, but for his family, too.

In partial answer to the question of why a significant body of Irish-American literature emerged only with second and third generation Irish-Americans, I would offer that assimilation into American culture threatened the only heritage that remained intact--Catholicism. When younger generations confronted this, they felt the need, and had the leisure, of writing fiction to resolve their problems. This accounts for the emergence of Irish-American literature coinciding with the period of
greatest and most successful assimilation efforts.

Of the four writers examined, Flannery O'Connor is an exception in that she alone did not lose her faith and leave the Roman Catholic Church. She was aware of its faults, and criticized its oppressive nature openly. But as Robert Coles noted, "above all she was a theologically sophisticated Roman Catholic." (1) She encouraged all people to confront their past--race, ethnicity, gender, creed--and bear in mind their own experience when confronting the oppression of other minority groups. True to her faith, O'Connor believed that any resolution of identity would have to come from within under the guidance of Christ. Fitzgerald, O'Neill, and Farrell all left the Church, but each had a different way of dealing with his ethnic identity. For Fitzgerald it was denial. By constructing a new identity, he hoped to erase his Irish-Catholic heritage, but he found it was not so simple. His struggle with identity and conscience manifested itself in his literature and in his alcoholism. The strength of his Catholic indoctrination is revealed in This Side of Paradise. Speculation about what Fitzgerald might have done with The Last Tycoon in terms of embracing his Irishness is inconclusive, but Fitzgerald seemed to be coming to terms with his heritage. Much of his writing was a sad condemnation of empty, hollow existence in the Jazz Age.

Farrell represents a less sophisticated examination of hollow lives, and a more complete and painful separation from his heritage. He was more harsh in his opinions about the oppressiveness of the Irish-Catholic
community in America, but that can be accounted for in part by his working class perspective. As a marxist, the oppression he was likely to sense in the economic and political aspects of the South Side of Chicago was intensified by its religious nature and the communal defense of holding one another back.

O'Neill deals most eloquently with the issue of religious oppression. He clearly points out the connections between the Church and the family unit, and he also works in the immigrant experience. His Irish-Catholicism tormented O'Neill as it did Fitzgerald, but O'Neill kept it out in the open, avoiding the additional stress that comes from internalizing the problems. O'Neill was very successful in making the orientation of his work personal, focused on the individual and the family unit. His themes transcend the medium and scenario in which he presents them, but are made more powerful by the intense, narrow focus.

In exploring his or her own problematic heritage through literature, the writers not only worked out resolutions for themselves, but they provide a way for others with similar ethnic and minority experiences to do so.

The novels and stories of the best ethnic and black writers reflect the world of our experience and characterize our situations in ways not to be found elsewhere in American literature--at least not until the Farrells, [Fitzgeralds, O'Connors, and O'Neills] free us to make connections between our experience and that of others of different backgrounds. These books create an
imaginative space within which we can see our ethnic pasts less grievously than their authors must. Rightly read they can free us from the burden of isolation. Because of them we may imagine a less drastic passage from our past to our present. And we may, then, escape the doom of being forever fixed in a lost world.(2)

Now that the Irish have assimilated as an ethnic group, it is easier for individuals to explore their ethnic identity with the help of writings about the assimilation experience--from those who left the Church and from those who remained faithful. Irish-American literature is useful in exploring the identity of the Irish in America. It is valuable not only for its literary value, but for its support and contradiction of stereotypes, and the insight it provides as illustration of the historical accounts.
Conclusion Endnotes

(1) Coles, p. 64.
(2) O'Connell, in Casey and Rhodes, eds., p. 70.
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