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暴力的藉口：反思伊翁・麥納彌的《盜墓者》與安娜・伯恩斯的《牛奶工》中的宗派暴力

Excuses for Violence: Rethinking Sectarian Perpetration in Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man* and Anna Burns's *Milkman*

翁儷庭

Li-Ting Weng

指導教授：黃山耘　博士

Advisor: Shan-yun Huang, Ph.D.

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中文摘要

本論文以伊翁・麥納彌的《盜墓者》（*Resurrection Man*，1994）與安娜・伯恩斯的《牛奶工》（*Milkman*， 2018）兩本北愛爾蘭小說為基礎探討北愛問題小說中對於加害者與暴力行為的描述。《盜墓者》以對於暴力、謀殺案件的細膩描寫聞名，且針對加害者團體領袖維多（Victor）的內心想像多有著墨。維多受到幼年時觀看的好萊塢警匪片（Hollywood gangster film）影響，衍生出一系列與其武裝分子身份不相符的形象與行為，突顯出他極其暴力（hyper-violent）之作風與宗派主義（sectarianism）的落差。《牛奶工》則以受害者中妹（Middle Sister）的視角出發，回溯性地描述其受到武裝分子牛奶工騷擾時心中的疑惑與困擾。小說中牛奶工對中妹隱晦、意有所指地作出多次威脅，突顯出其以宗派主義為名義，逞一己私慾的行逕。藉由著眼於兩本小說中與宗派主義無關的元素，本論文開展出以加害者與犯罪行為責任為核心的解讀，並嘗試重新理解被宗派主義掩飾的暴力行為。

關鍵字：北愛爾蘭文學、北愛問題小說、《盜墓者》、《牛奶工》、宗派主義、加害者、威嚇

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the description of perpetrators and their perpetrations in two novels from the Troubles fiction genre, Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man* (1994) and Anna Burns's *Milkman* (2018). Known for its depiction of brutal murders, *Resurrection Man* provides insights into the mind of Victor, the leader of the perpetrators. Victor is heavily influenced by Hollywood gangster films he watched as a child and develops behaviours that are incompatible with his identity as a paramilitary. His hyper-violent style underscores the discrepancies between the perpetration and sectarian conflicts. *Milkman*, on the other hand, focuses on the victim's perspective. In the novel, Middle Sister retrospectively recounts the questions and struggles in her mind when she is harassed by the milkman. The milkman's veiled threats against Middle Sister highlight his self-serving behaviours that are carried out under the name of sectarianism. By focusing on the non-sectarian elements, this thesis develops an alternative reading that emphasises the perpetrators' liability for their crimes and reclaim the violence that has been overshadowed by sectarianism.

Keywords: Northern Irish fiction, Troubles fiction, *Milkman*, *Resurrection Man*, sectarianism, perpetrator, intimidation

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Chapter One

Rethinking the Portrayal of Perpetrators and Organisations in Troubles Fiction

Northern Irish literature is deeply intertwined with its long history of sectarian violence. In the summer of 1969, a series of civil rights campaigns and loyalist attacks on the civil rights marchers sent Northern Ireland into riots that led to thirty years of armed struggles. The period between 1969 and the signing of *The Belfast Agreement* in 1998 is later known as "the Troubles." Northern Ireland's experience with sectarian violence has left indelible marks on the region and inspired Northern Irish authors. The fictional works inspired by the era are known as Troubles fiction. A significant proportion of Troubles fiction belong to the Troubles thrillers genre, and some are criticised as "Troubles trash" (Cliff 27). The sub-genre gains its infamy because they often "depict political commitment as inimical to democratic society, that attribute the violence to the incurably atavistic inhabitants of the island, or that show scant regard for local differences and particular histories" (27). Regardless, the genre Troubles fiction both monumentalises the region's history of armed conflicts and reinforces the region's violence-ridden image. As one of the hotspots of sectarian conflicts, the city of Belfast gains the notoriety of being "both an abyss of murderous insanity and the *ne plus ultra* of the Irish city" from its frequent appearances in literary works (Hughes 142). Belfast is a popular backdrop for Troubles fiction and sometimes, on a more sinister note, it can also be portrayed as perpetrators' hunting ground. Belfast and its residents' experience with sectarian violence are conveyed brilliantly in Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man* (1994) and Anna Burns's *Milkman* (2018).[1] These novels examine the violence and oppression related to the sectarianism during the Troubles. By analysing paramilitaries'

[1] Hereafter, *Resurrection Man* and *Milkman* are cited as *RM* and *M* in in-text citations.

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perpetrations in *Resurrection Man* and *Milkman*, I challenge the commonly accepted connections between sectarianism and violence in Northern Ireland. The *perpetrator*, in this thesis, is used as an umbrella term for various kinds of aggressors. Although terms like paramilitary members, freedom fighters, terrorists, criminals, and gangsters specify the conditions under which the individuals operate, these terms cannot convey the overlapping of these identities in Northern Irish perpetrators. In some cases, the distinctions between paramilitaries, freedom fighters, terrorists, and gangsters are blurry. Acknowledging the intersectionality of these categories is important to this thesis because such intersectionality enables the perpetrators to excuse their actions with sectarianism. As Martin Dillon suggests in *The Shankill Butchers: A Case Study of Mass Murder*, "in Northern Ireland the conflict provide[d] the trigger" for the perpetrators' sadist impulses and "allow[ed] misfits to find social acceptance by expressing the prejudice" (62). In other words, sectarianism emboldens some individuals with the desire to hurt by giving them excuses. This could work because sectarianism overshadowed other explanations for crimes and dictated nearly all the important decisions in the lives of Northern Irishmen and -women, including their education, careers, social life, etc. Under such a mindset, any perpetration could—or even should—be understood in sectarian terms.

The reality, however, was more nuanced. Sectarian sentiments were sometimes not the primary motivation, but merely the excuses for the perpetrations. Even when the attacks were fuelled by sectarian grievances, the results did not always match the proclaimed objectives. In a chaotic time like the Troubles, violence came from all directions. Sectarian grievances lent political meaning to the violent actions that were not necessarily political. Personal antagonism can unfold under the pretense of paramilitary activities. Although Northern Irish paramilitary groups had exerted

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considerable control on the region, the term *para*-military implies that the groups are not state forces. They had military-like structures, but were by definition private and fundamentally different from national forces. The private status of the paramilitaries means that they cannot draw legitimacy for their use of violence from national sovereignty and have to secure support from the people to validate their use of force. Such validation can come in the forms of active support like providing shelter or donation, and passive compliance due to intimidation, such as not informing on and testifying against paramilitary activities.

Paramilitary's strategies for securing legitimacy may be explained with Max Weber's "The Three Types of Legitimate Domination." The three types of domination are legal, traditional, and charismatic domination. Respectively, legal domination requires the dominator to win elections, traditional domination draws legitimacy from "the sacredness of the social order and its prerogatives as existing of yore" (111), and charismatic domination wins over "the effectual and personal devotion of the follower[s]" (104). Since paramilitary operations are rebellious against the state and often illegal, paramilitary groups could hardly establish themselves as legal and traditional domination. Hence, the option paramilitaries are left with is charismatic domination. The need for legitimacy drives paramilitary organisations to deploy mechanisms to secure support from the public. Members of organisations carry out operations that would benefit the organisations, and the impacts of the operations would eventually feed back into the organisations' reputation. In other words, the organisations rely on their members to control the communities and provide legitimacy to the organisations' domination. The collaborative relations between organisations and their members allow the members some latitude in their actions. Certain improper actions are overlooked as long as the members are still contributing to the organisations' sectarian

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agenda. Furthermore, understanding the relationship between organizations and their members implies that Northern Irish perpetrators are not merely pawns of the organisations but instead possess some degree of freedom to pursue their personal agenda. Both implications challenge the stereotypical reasoning of the Troubles that prioritises sectarian agenda over all other motivations.

State and non-state actors' compulsion to justify their actions with sectarian grievances continued after the Troubles. Organisations and individuals are reluctant to apologise, and even when they do, their apologies "are embedded in an overarching narrative which seeks to justify the violence undertaken" (Coulter et al. 84). Despite their reluctance, however, challenging the traditionally dichotomous understanding of sectarianism is not a far-fetched idea. For example, the Belfast Agreement identifies the efforts "to develop reconciliation and mutual understanding and respect between and *within* communities and traditions" (United Kingdom 18, emphasis mine). The phrase "within communities and traditions" acknowledges violence done to communities by perpetrators of the same religions or political stance, which fundamentally defies the confrontational understanding of sectarian struggles. The novels examined in this thesis, *Resurrection Man* and *Milkman*, delve into these perpetrations that go beyond the conventional boundaries of sectarian violence during the Troubles. In this introductory chapter, the first section elaborates on the characteristics of Troubles fiction and its potential connections to Northern Ireland's reconciliation process. The second section delves further into the various types of violence during the Troubles. The third section introduces the two novels that will be discussed in the following chapters. Finally, I will lay out the plans for the body chapters of this thesis.

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I. Troubles Fiction as a Genre

The substantial number of fictional works on the Troubles earns them a place in Northern Irish literature as a genre—Troubles fiction. It is closely tied to the public sentiments towards Northern Ireland's violent history and is inseparable from the societal and historical contexts of Northern Ireland. Authors of Troubles fiction, as Michael L. Storey observes, use "a style of stark realism that depicts fictional characters in situations that resemble real-life incidents" and thus "probe the many facets of sectarian violence and terrorism" (150). According to Storey, by "providing a human perspective of the victims, these stories may be said to point the way, not only to civilian disavowal of violence and terrorism, but to the flight from the sectarian and cultural identity that has been at the source of the violence" (178). Following Storey's logic, by delving deep into the repercussions of terrorism, Northern Irish fiction sheds light on a path where people may finally break free from the grip of the sectarian mentality. Resisting sectarianism is necessary in rethinking the representations of terrorism in Northern Irish fiction, since sectarianism can sometimes bring bias and discrimination to the portrayal of characters. Within the tradition of Troubles fiction, Laura Pelaschiar criticised that, freedom fighters and terrorists are often portrayed as "macho-man in love with guns, naturally violent, sexually disturbed and often connoted by visual defects" ("Terrorists" 58). She links this kind of reductive portrayal of morbid and deformed Irish perpetrators back to the degradation against Irish people since the English colonisation. In *Gangsters or Guerrillas*, Patrick Magee also adamantly criticises the reductive portrayal of the perpetrators, especially that of Republicans: "Many examples of the Troubles fiction 'genre' are indeed quite dishearteningly awful, judging them not on their literary merit (or lack) but on the basis of their distorted take on the conflict" (1). Magee concludes that the perpetrators are portrayed as bloodthirsty,

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pathological killers in ways that adhere to the discriminative portrayal of Irishmen and women in British publications and culture since the nineteenth century.

Reductive representation of perpetrators dramatises the use of violence and sometimes romanticises perpetrators' bloodlust. Such representation can be insensitive to the victims and their pain, but it might help reveal the self-serving motivation in paramilitary activities. The more literary representation focuses on the sadist, ultra-violent perpetrators, the less it addresses the sectarian ideologies of the organisations. Perpetrators' inclination to target civilians and to inflict as much pain as possible contradicts the organisations' objectives of pursuing socio-political change. Instead, such tendencies suggest that some paramilitary members prioritise their impulses over organisational agendas. Although they might evoke sectarian grievances to justify their actions, their negligence in consciously contributing to the organisational agenda suggests that sentiments are merely pretence for their own bloodlust. Since the single-minded focus on individual perpetrators in fiction highlights their non-compliance to the organisations, revealing the contradictions between individual and organisational agendas provides the Troubles fiction the nuanced portrayal of perpetrators it was criticised for lacking.

Literary representations of perpetrators and perpetrators themselves work reciprocally. Perpetrators influence how they are represented in literary works, while such representations in turn also influence how perpetrators envision themselves. Not only do historical events inspire creative works, but violent imagination also feeds back into society and arouses public sentiments about shared traumas. As Dermot McCarthy puts it, "violence and the language of violence eventually generate the culture of violence" (140). However, while Troubles fiction reflects the horror of the era, it also holds optimistic prospects for the future of Northern Ireland. Aaron Kelly suggests that

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this genre of literature aspires to a positive vision for the region. He draws on Fredric Jameson's theory of the "political unconscious" to challenge the prevailing notion that fictional works reflect the intractable conflicts in the Northern Irish political and religious landscape. In other words, Kelly argues that writers "[invent] imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradiction" in their fictional works (3). His research suggests reading fiction as a solution to social and political troubles, not as laments for the heavy human cost. Although pessimism still coexist alongside optimism in Troubles fiction, the fictional solutions imagined by writers hint at a hopeful vision for Northern Ireland's reconciliation process.

Although Northern Ireland has been working towards reconciliation with the traumas caused by the Troubles, official investigation and compensation of the atrocities during the Troubles are criticised for being "fragmented, staggered and inept" (Coulter et al. 70). Despite the efforts to move on from past traumas, public figures hesitate to either let go of the sectarian ideologies that lie at the root of the Troubles, nor own up to their involvement in the armed struggles. Peter Shirlow criticises the endless finger pointing among public figures, for it undermines meaningful discussion of past atrocities ("Truth"). The reluctance to publicly revisit past atrocities is also underscored by the controversies surrounding the acquisition of the audio recordings from Boston College's Belfast Project by the Police Service of Northern Ireland. In these recordings, high-profile former paramilitaries discuss their involvement in (sometimes unsolved or unknown) sectarian operations, under the promise of confidentiality. These materials were handed over as evidence of a murder investigation and later became materials for reporting and research, such as in Patrick Radden Keefe's *Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland*. Keefe's book outlines the reasons for Northern Ireland's struggles for reconciliation. Because of the long tradition of

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despising and punishing informers, also known as “touts” (364), Irishmen and -women are deterred from sharing their knowledge about past atrocities. Even if they intend to pursue the truth, public inquiries face obstacles because both the Northern Irish and the British governments are reluctant to dig deeper into past atrocities. Rather than supporting reconciliation efforts, the popular discourse maintains that clinging to the past would hinder the establishment of new political orders. These factors explain why public inquiries into the Troubles are slow in progress. In turn, private, community-led, artistic efforts of reconciliation became the more plausible and common options. For example, attempts of reconciliation can take the form of workshop, installation art, plays, and of course, works of fiction.

As a means of artistic deliberation, Troubles fiction provides a platform for reflecting on the liabilities of both individual terrorists and organisations, a sensitive topic in the transitional process of Northern Ireland. Research of the era touches on the potentially collaborative dynamics between paramilitary organisations and individuals. Martin Dillon’s *The Shankill Butchers* elaborates on the obscure boundaries surrounding individual and organisational responsibilities when it comes to sectarian violence. He believes that “in Northern Ireland the conflict provides the trigger for this aggression,” and “allow[s] misfits to find social acceptance” through sectarian violence. Furthermore, the “political and religious background . . . has given [the violence] the status of being part of an ideological struggle” even when it is conducted for self-serving purposes (62). The political and religious divides acted as pretexts for petty and personal crimes, and the widespread violence in turn emboldened the perpetrators to act on their sadistic urges. Dillon’s report on Lenny Murphy, the leader of the Shankill Butchers, as a rogue operative provides invaluable insights into the conflicts between individual and organisational agendas. Although perpetrators might act as operatives of

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paramilitary organisations, their actions do not always align with the objectives of the organisation. Similar debates are also applicable to *Resurrection Man* and *Milkman*. Both novels feature perpetrators who exploit their affiliation with paramilitary organisations to advance their personal agenda. These novels' depictions of the perpetrators' actions provide materials to rethink their roles and responsibilities in sectarian violence.

Rethinking the roles of perpetrators can be helpful in the reconciliation process. While scholars such as Kelly believes that authors of Troubles fiction use their writing to make sense of and sometimes make peace with the past, the process of reconciliation is much more complicated in reality. Societal contexts are complex and messy: petty criminals can act under the pretence of sectarian grievance, people tend to refrain from exposing their friends and neighbours who participate in paramilitary activities, and victims and their families are often reluctant to speak about the incidents that happened decades earlier for fear of retaliation, etc. Fiction provides simplified portrayals of perpetrators that are hyper-violent and psychologically disturbed. But while these figures serve well as terrifying characters, they cannot effectively convey the complexities of reality. Their exaggerated, intimidating images and use of highly sectarian language direct attention to the inter-community confrontations and easily distract from the intra-community intimidation that was also common during the Troubles. The novels this thesis focuses on, *Resurrection Man* and *Milkman*, address the implications of perpetrations *within* communities and provide insights into how sectarian perpetrators intimidate or commit crimes *within* their own communities.

In Troubles fiction, antagonists are often conveniently simplified and flattened into pawns of sectarian organisations. A stereotypical and simplistic way of understanding the sectarian societal structure during the Troubles is that the society is

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divided into confrontational sects, each with its own rigid hierarchy and strict discipline. Namely, sectarian grievances dictate the organisations' operations, and the higher-ranking members issue commands to the lower-ranking members to carry out actions that serve the sectarian objectives. However, upon closer examination, there are discrepancies between the claims made by organisations and their actual operations. These discrepancies suggest that the power dynamics and allegiance within and between the sectarian organisations are more complicated than suggested by the stereotypical hierarchical structure. On the one hand, perpetrators rely on the organisations for resources and protection. On the other hand, the organisations also depend on the actions of their members to assert dominance within the community and garner support. The organisations' dependence on their members allows the members to exploit the organisations' reputation and resources for their own personal purposes. This alternative understanding complicates the relations between organisations and individuals and subsequently attributes more liability to the individual perpetrators than the conventional portrayal that reduces them into mindless pawns. Therefore, the perpetrator characters in Troubles fiction should receive more attention as individuals, rather than solely as minions of paramilitary organisations.

Resurrection Man and *Milkman* are two novels that capture such collaborative relationship. The perpetrator characters in these novels utilise their intimidating images and their occupations as paramilitary members for personal gain. My thesis aims to identify and unpack the relationship between paramilitary members and their organisations in the novels, especially how their agendas overlap and/or conflict. How do the perpetrators exert intimidation over their communities? How do they exploit resources from their organisations? What are the consequences of their divergence from organisational goals? And finally, what might the novels' portrayal of perpetrators

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contribute to Northern Ireland's transition towards peace? By exploring these questions in *Resurrection Man* and *Milkman*, this thesis directs more attention to the non-sectarian motivations of individual perpetrators and by doing so provides a more nuanced understanding of the Troubles.

II. Types of Violence During the Troubles

Sectarian violence in *Resurrection Man* and *Milkman* comes in various forms, including physical, verbal, and systemic. To better understand the complexity of violence, I continue with the analogy where I compare Northern Irish paramilitary to Weber's theory of state authorities. These forms of paramilitary violence share some similarities with Louis Althusser's concept of State Apparatuses in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Althusser calls the traditional Marxist State Apparatus "Repressive State Apparatus" and supplements it with another form of State Apparatus, which he calls "Ideological State Apparatus." Repressive State Apparatus refers to governments' power to repress their people with violence, while Ideological State Apparatus refers to the (usually) private institutions that regulate people by ideologies (243-45). The categories are not mutually exclusive. Instead, Althusser emphasises that Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses reciprocate each other. The states depend on Repressive State Apparatus to secure compliance primarily by violence but they also supplement their use of violence with ideological manipulation, and vice versa. Namely, communities are regulated with a combination of physical violence and ideological manipulation.

Althusser's theory of state apparatuses can be helpful in understanding paramilitary activities in Northern Ireland. The spectrum of Repressive-Ideological apparatuses captures Northern Irish paramilitary's mixed-use of tangible and intangible

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violence. Even though the paramilitary does not exercise in the same capacity as governments do, appropriating the State Apparatuses in the context of paramilitary activities is possible since sectarian paramilitary groups share state actors' need to legitimise their domination over a population. As I discussed above with Weber's three types of domination, Northern Irish paramilitaries need to solicit support from the public to sustain their control, since they are sometimes the *de facto* power holders in communities. Sustaining such control requires active support and passive compliance from the population, which mirrors Althusser's assertion that capitalism relies on a mechanism that "reproduce" the conditions of production in order to maintain the continuation of production (49). Similar to capitalism, sectarianism is also an ideology that dictates all aspects of a society. Therefore, although Althusser's theory focuses on the continuation of capitalism in modern society, his theorisation of state apparatuses can also be applicable in the context of paramilitary activities. Althusser's theorisation of the reproduction of social formation resonates with Northern Irish paramilitaries' efforts to reproduce the societal conditions that allow their sustained control over communities. The reciprocal relations between repressive and ideological apparatuses offer the insights into categorising violent acts in the Troubles and help explain how they have led to the peculiarly lengthy paramilitary control. In the Northern Irish context, Althusser's theory of reproducing the conditions of production can be understood as reproducing the societal conditions of sectarian conflicts. Intimidation works similarly as repressive apparatus to deter communities from acting against paramilitaries and national and religious identities are emphasised to solidify sectarian divides between communities. Namely, repressive and ideological apparatuses work reciprocally to both deter opposition and cultivate support.

John Darby's *Intimidation and the Control of Conflict in Northern Ireland*

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resonates with such theorization. According to Darby, the violence during the Troubles is able to continue for decades because overall it is "tolerable" (viii). The tolerable, low intensity violence sustains intimidation against the people by paramilitaries and undermines Northern Irish communities' resolve to resist paramilitary control (viii). Darby points out that intimidation does not always come from one community to another and does not always involve physical violence. Intimidation happens for various purposes, including retaliation, warning, making a statement, and securing cooperation, and it happens in different forms, including physical harm, personal threats, and perceived threats (53-55). Darby's work supplies a rough framework for understanding the relationship between paramilitary groups and communities. His empirical analysis provides references to identify intimidation mechanisms used by the fictional perpetrators.

Aside from the low-intensity intimation, the Troubles is also filled with hyper-violence. In "Terrorism and Imprisonment in Northern Ireland: A Psychological Perspective," a study on the use of intimidation by paramilitary prisoners against prison guards, Jacqueline Bates-Gaston provides abundant details concerning the precise techniques with which prisoners incited fear, coax cooperation from the guards, and prevent coalition between the guards. Her research indicates the paramilitary members' extensive knowledge about psychological manipulation and their willingness to use their skill set to secure compliance from the prison officials. Liam Kennedy similarly outlines the specific techniques paramilitary groups used to punish and police the communities. The more paramilitary presence pushed out public authority from communities, the more the communities craved the stern hands of paramilitary control. Hence, in Northern Ireland, socio-political instability and paramilitary control reciprocated with each other. The more insecure communities were, the more the

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residents needed enforcers of regulations. In some cases, paramilitary could become popular because people needed policing so much that "some were indifferent as to what the agency was" (Kennedy 143). To understand more about the mindsets of perpetrators, Allen Feldman's *Formation of Violence* provides an analysis of the perpetrators' perception of themselves and each other, including a comparison between local oral history and public political discourse to decipher "the body by violence," "the limits of restricted political codes," and "the routinization of clandestine experience" that shaped the ideological landscape of the Troubles (15). His research connects perpetrators' images to the larger societal and cultural context of Northern Irish experience with paramilitary experience.

Research on violence can be relevant to studies of Troubles fiction. Reading the novels alongside historical studies of the Troubles sheds light on the authors' deliberation on Northern Ireland's past. My thesis builds upon the social and political background of the Troubles and investigates the types of perpetrators and perpetrations in the novels by studying the perpetrator characters in *Resurrection Man* and *Milkman*. In both novels, I analyse the passages that elaborate on the behaviour and decision-making process of the perpetrators and investigate the discrepancies between them and sectarian ideologies. By doing so, I suggest a reading of the novels that separate violence from sectarianism and thus differentiating between the perpetrators' identity as self-serving criminals and paramilitary members.

III. The Novels: *Resurrection Man* and *Milkman*

The two novels discussed in this thesis are published almost twenty years apart, but their shared focus on paramilitary activities during the Troubles makes them intriguing texts to be read in comparison. They capture various forms of violence

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Northern Irish people experienced: *Resurrection Man* centres around the physical violence that leaves the victims dead or seriously injured in its wake, while *Milkman* focuses more on verbal abuse and systemic oppression that control people's lives without leaving visible physical scars. More importantly, both novels feature perpetrators who are paramilitary members but exploit their positions to satisfy their personal desires that are unrelated to the sectarian enterprise. With the careful examination of these perpetrators and their actions, the novels are great texts for rethinking sectarian perpetrations.

Resurrection Man is one of the landmark novels about the Troubles in Belfast. It is closely based on the case of the Shankill Butchers, one of the most violent episodes of paramilitary activity.[2] Scholars are drawn to *Resurrection Man*'s vivid imagery, buoyant language, and personified representation of Belfast. The incorporation of multiple genres contributes to the richness of the novel's language. By incorporating "film noir, crime thrillers and Gothic novels" in his writing, McNamee demonstrates a new way of conveying hyper-violent experience and highlights "the inadequacies of conventional fiction representation of violence" (Gray 60). The incorporation of film imagery and Hollywood stereotypes vividly captures its protagonist Victor Kelly's disturbed and narcissistic personality, while also establishing parallels between Belfast and other crime-ridden cities in films. Despite *Resurrection Man*'s success in illustrating unimaginable atrocities, its graphic description of violence raises concerns over Troubles fiction's responsibilities and purposes. The novel's flourishing language, Richard Haslam criticises, risks glorifying ruthless perpetrations instead of fulfilling the ethical responsibility of "relat[ing] and elucidat[ing] the most abject and abhorrent

[2] The Shankill Butchers are a group of Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) members who active in the area surrounding the Shankill Road between 1975 and 1982. The group was led by Lenny Murphy, an operative of the UVF, and was responsible for at least 23 kidnappings and murders, making it one of the deadliest sectarian gangs in Northern Irish history.

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realms of human experience" (208). McNamee's deep dive into the activities of the Resurrection Men makes their crazed bloodlust the focal point of the novel, and thus pushes the law enforcement efforts and victims to the secondary position.[3] In *Writing the North: The Contemporary Novel in Northern Ireland*, Pelaschiar expresses similar concerns about the troubling attention to the perpetrator's mindset. Writing in 1998, she considers the novel to be "possibly the harshest, cruellest novel dealing with the North" (*Writing* 45). Nevertheless, she believes McNamee consciously rips away the sectarian farce of the Resurrection Men's perpetration. The extremely disturbing aesthetics of *Resurrection Man* "shocks the reader into an awareness of the reality and horror of physical violence and in particular of torture" (*Writing* 45). Her analysis elaborates on not only the portrayal of perpetrators, but also the disconnections between the actions of individual operatives and the agenda of paramilitary organisations, which is central to this thesis.

Resurrection Man exposes the overflowing of sectarian grievance in Belfast, as Gerry Smyth argues, that is merely waiting for "someone like [Victor] Kelly to take violence to its extreme, logical end—the logic of random, brutal, indiscriminate chaos" (122). Although Victor selects his victims based on their religion, he is more of a gangster than a sectarian terrorist. His atrocities feed on and into Belfast's image as "the city of death" (McCarthy 146). The city functions in the novel as more than a backdrop for the crimes, but a character that influences and is influenced by its residents' experience with violence. For McCarthy, McNamee's writing style that personalised Belfast may be innovative, but the sentiments *Resurrection Man* taps into are far from new. The novel exposes sectarianism for what it was—"a convenient handle upon which to hang our need for violence"—through the eyes of its sadistically murderous

[3] Throughout this thesis, the novel is referred to as *Resurrection Man* and the group of perpetrators that are led by Victor is referred to as the Resurrection Men (plural).

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protagonist (McCarthy 122). *Resurrection Man* dissects the complex connections between sectarianism and the atrocities committed in its name. This approach strips away the pretence of the paramilitary agenda and holds the individuals behind the horrific crimes accountable. The novel therefore shifts the focus from sectarian divides to the individuals who carry out these crimes, redirecting the finger of blame towards the individuals by highlighting that "the horror of such violence lay not in the facts alone but equally in the appalling recognition that someone has actually imagined the unimaginable and then acted it" (Tobin 132). The Resurrection Men's tendency to cause considerable harm on individuals underscores their enjoyment in the perpetration and diminishes the connections between perpetration and sectarianism. They use the pretence of sectarian grievances to indulge in the (cruel) enjoyment of inflicting pain.

Similar to *Resurrection Man*, the plot of *Milkman* is intricately intertwined with the complex sectarian relations in Belfast. While *Resurrection Man* addresses the ultra-violent mentality of perpetrators, *Milkman* is grounded in the victims' perspectives and deals with perpetrations of a different kind. Burns focuses on the intangible perpetrations that would have been too insignificant to be considered a form of violence during the Troubles. Sectarian conflicts placed the region under systemic violence and oppression, which impacts how individuals conduct themselves. The novel follows an eighteen-year-old girl, not named but referred to as Middle Sister, and her experience of being stalked and pursued by a Catholic paramilitary officer known to the community as the milkman. Pursuing a young girl that he is attracted to is by no means a sectarianism-driven mission. However, the milkman is able to take advantage of his status as a paramilitary officer and exploit organisational resources to pursue Middle Sister. The novel thus exposes the overarching sectarian framework that enables the perpetrators and suppresses individuals, demonstrating how perpetrators' actions can be unrelated,

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or even counter-productive, to the sectarian agendas.

Furthermore, *Milkman* redefines violence during the Troubles and incorporates more forms of perpetration into the discussion, because it sets eyes on the codified, veiled, and non-physical violence that was no less common during the Troubles than the brand of violence featured in *Resurrection Man*. The lack of tangible evidence of the violence makes these atrocities uncondemnable and therefore impossible to react upon. *Milkman* is described by the Booker Prize as "the story of inaction with enormous consequences" ("*Milkman*"). Through her unique style, Burns investigates day-to-day harassment and the insufficiency of language for conveying such experiences. A significant part of these experiences is sexual abuse, which is often dismissed or minimised. Alison Garden traces the exploration of sexual harassment in *Milkman* back to the Northern Irish literary traditions that intertwine desire and fear. She argues that the purpose of the romances and sexual relations in fiction is to demonstrate "how people negotiate their everyday existence in an extremely hostile and difficult environment." In *Milkman's* case, since sexual harassment was common during the Troubles, it was normalised and misconstrued as courtship, albeit an extramarital one, instead of being acknowledged as a form of abuse. As a result, victims of such harassment were silenced and ignored.

What Garden calls a "difficult environment" is defined more clearly by Fahriye Selvi Danaci, who proposes that the milkman is "the very embodiment of the horror of the Troubles, power abuse, and patriarchy in the Northern Irish society" (299). She explains that because of the "unremitting monitoring, the community is gradually drawn into paranoia, exercising the same methods of control upon itself" (297). Interactions within communities reflect the unbalanced power dynamics between genders that are deeply embedded in the social structure. The novel is narrated in the voice of a past

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victim who was unable to comprehend or to give name to her abuse. Reclaiming past abuse is thus critical to Middle Sister. She struggles to acknowledge her abuse, despite the twenty years that have passed. The "longevity and the impact of traumatic experiences," according to Marcela Santos Brigida and Davi Pinho, is reaffirmed with the "act of storytelling" (447). They argue that by distancing the narrator from the events she is recalling, Burns breaks through the restrictions of official history and has the narrator reclaim her own experience. The novel reclaims the unvoiced female experience, Clare Hutton argues, with "the emphasis it places on the realities of what it is like to be formed by a place and time in which violence, corruption, and instability are the norm and stalking, coercion, and sexual harassment creep under the radar" (367). *Milkman* retrospectively reflects on the insensitivity surrounding sexual abuse in Northern Ireland and exposes the societal structure that allowed extensive abuse to take place and to be normalised. Furthermore, *Milkman* suggests that by looking at the violence from a different perspective, verbal abuses and threats may be included in the discussion of violence.

Violence during the Troubles is the climax of accumulated sectarian and national grievances between Protestants and Catholics, Loyalists and Republicans, and Irish and British people. The widespread and long-term quality of the violence suggests that the perpetrations have been deeply embedded into the structure of Northern Irish society. Understanding the Troubles and Troubles fiction lays the ground for further analysis because Troubles fiction is so closely connected to the societal background and how literary works contribute to the representation of the Troubles. It is important to know that the paramilitary members during the Troubles were not merely disrupters of orders, but also enforcers of new orders. Paramilitary activities brought both chaos and order into communities. The more disruptions they caused in communities, the more the

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communities depended on them. During the Troubles, perpetrators exploit the ambiguity between criminality and terrorism for their own benefits. Although their actions were conducted under the grand flag of sectarianism, the nature of these acts was criminal. In *Resurrection Man* and *Milkman*, the perpetrators accentuate the diverging agenda between paramilitary organisations and members. The novels' shared attention on the perpetrators makes them rich materials for discussing the perpetrators' efforts to utilise the resources of their organisations and to cultivate their persona as perpetrators.

IV. Chapter Design

In the following chapters I will discuss the violence and perpetrators in *Resurrection Man* and *Milkman* respectively. Chapter Two, titled "Hollywood Gangster or Northern Irish Paramilitary: Perpetrator Image and Violence in *Resurrection Man*," focuses on *Resurrection Man* and its portrayal of perpetrators. This chapter consists of two parts. Section I lays out the characteristics of typical and atypical paramilitaries. Victor's counterpart Darkie Larche embodies the model paramilitary and shows deep concerns over the associations between his perpetration and sectarian grievances, while Victor and the Resurrection Men showcase only their thirst of blood and personal fame. The contrast between them underscores the fact that Victor and the Resurrection Men stray from the behaviours of typical paramilitaries. Victor's role models are often self-centred, risk-seeking gangsters and by imitating the gangsters, Victor's behaviours contradict with the qualities that paramilitary groups need from their members. The second section delves deeper into the possibly collaborative relationship between organisations and individual members. In such a relationship, even the atypical, psychologically unstable members are tolerated and protected. Victor consciously takes

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advantage of such a relationship and proceeds to develop his unique understanding that justifies his use of violence. Victor's justification, ironically, provides an apt vocabulary for understanding the length of the Troubles. As a whole, the chapter compares personal and sectarian violence and directs attention to the non-sectarian elements in hyper-violent perpetrations.

The third chapter, "Scandalous Gossips or Sexual Violence: Reclaiming Systemic and Gendered Violence in *Milkman*," turns to the more subdued, intangible type of violence in Northern Irish society. The first section of the chapter explains the widespread violence in Northern Irish society. Such a background enables perpetrators to pressure members of communities without physical force. Vague and encrypted threats are sufficient for perpetrators to demand cooperation. Women are especially vulnerable under such context, and they are frequently harassed with sexualised comments and threats. Yet, because physical violence is widespread in society, experience like verbal abuse is often not considered violence. Therefore, the second section of the chapter focuses on the novel's efforts to reclaim the protagonist's experience during the Troubles. Written in a unique style, the novel omits terms that tie the story to Northern Ireland as the protagonist remembers her experience from twenty years ago. The temporal and spatial distance created by the style allows violence during the Troubles to be understood from different perspectives. This chapter focuses on the non-sectarian elements in perpetrations that are less physically severe and suggests that the reconciliation process in Northern Ireland may benefit from the incorporation of foreign or more modern concepts and vocabulary.

The conclusion recaps the previous three chapters. Here, I explain how my analysis is also an attempt to incorporate new vocabulary and concepts into an already existing field. Inspired by Weber's and Althusser's theories, I provide these novels with

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alternative interpretations that could lead to a more nuanced understanding of the perpetrators and their responsibilities during the Troubles. This thesis challenges the stigmatization of paramilitaries in Troubles fiction and rejects the sectarian excuses for the perpetration. Furthermore, my approach opens avenues for connecting Troubles fiction to crime fiction, expanding the understanding of sectarian violence.

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Chapter Two

Hollywood Gangster or Northern Irish Paramilitary: Perpetrator Image and Violence in *Resurrection Man*

Violence lies at the core of the Troubles and lends inspiration to countless works of Troubles fiction, which further contributes to Northern Ireland's image as a region marked by violence. As the previous chapter suggests, violence plays a significant role in sustaining paramilitary control. As a version of Louis Althusser's repressive state apparatuses, paramilitary violence cultivates a sense of chaos that requires paramilitary control to maintain the order within the society. Nevertheless, although the Troubles was indeed a violent period, its fictional portrayal is arguably exaggerated. The exaggerated or "distorted take on the conflict," as noted by Patrick Magee, makes Troubles fiction a genre that is perceived as controversial and unpalatable (1). Magee himself dissects the portrayal of republican paramilitaries and criticizes the tendency in fictional works to attribute violence to "an ingrained bloodlust," rather than "the effect or symptom of a deeper political malaise" (2). He argues that Troubles fiction tends to portray paramilitaries unfairly because it downplays the significance of sectarianism in driving violence. Magee's research primarily focuses on the stigmatisation of republican paramilitaries, but its arguments resonate with studies that examine fictional works depicting paramilitaries of other affiliations. For example, Laura Pelaschiar also comments that paramilitary members tend to be simplified into "macho-man in love with guns, naturally violent, sexually disturbed and often connoted by visual defects" ("Terrorists" 58). These commentaries expose that Troubles fiction tends to capitalise on the abnormality of perpetrators and exaggerate the significance of psychopathic killers in sectarian struggles.

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The prevalence of psychopathic killers in Troubles fiction may not accurately reflect their actual presence or significance within Northern Irish paramilitary activities. On the contrary, research on Northern Irish terrorists, such as John Horgan's "The Search for the Terrorist Personality," argues that "there remains little to support the argument that terrorists can or should be necessarily regarded as psychopathic" (6). Therefore, although Troubles fiction often fixates on these extreme perpetrators, they cannot be taken as typical paramilitary members. Furthermore, by juxtaposing psychopathic killers and sectarian discourse, Troubles fiction risks neglecting individual perpetrators' liability for their actions, since these people are depicted as disturbed individuals who are driven to heinous crimes by their extreme reactions to the deep-seated sectarian grievances in society. Nevertheless, as I contend in the previous chapter, apart from reinforcing sectarian discourse, Troubles fiction's hyper-violent portrayal of perpetrators can potentially help refute such a discourse. The extreme brutality in the novels often overshadows the sectarian purposes of violence. In other words, Troubles fiction tends to relegate the significance of sectarianism, which should have been at the core of all violence, to the periphery.

This chapter focuses on the portrayal of hyper-violent incidents in fiction to foreground the non-sectarian aspects of sectarian conflicts. As one of the most violent novels of its kind, Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man* has not escaped criticism for its potentially unethical portrayal of paramilitary activities. The author's lavish style that describes vicious perpetration in detail causes concerns that the novel romanticises the brutality inflicted upon the Northern Irish people. "It can make a reader queasy to sense," as Peggy O'Brien criticises, "the author's romanticism doing a deal with the sick, self-deluded character he has created" (149). However, although *Resurrection Man* risks glorifying violence, it also presents alternative approaches to understanding

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sectarian conflicts. In fact, McNamee himself has acknowledged that, while writing the novel, "there was a very strong artistic impulse to confront it [the violence of the Troubles] head-on and to deal with it and to redefine it" (Goldsmith 18). This comment indicates that *Resurrection Man* comes with a rebellious intention which seeks to defy the conventional comprehension of sectarian violence. Echoing McNamee, Nuala C. Johnson comments that "McNamee seeks to oppose orthodox readings of what have become known as sectarian murders" (735). Johnson's argument indicates that there are "orthodox readings" of the violence during the Troubles, which align with the overarching sectarian framework of Northern Irish society. Subsequently, there would also be unorthodox readings of such violence. *Resurrection Man*, Gerry Smyth argues, is one of the "reactionary" novels of the Troubles, because it responds to sectarianism with "a sort of existential longing for non-being and a postmodern scepticism towards any kind of personal or political identity" (120). In other words, *Resurrection Man* challenges the rigid construct of "personal or political identity" that is deeply contested during the Troubles. Representations of violence in McNamee's novel deviate from, rather than conform to, the conventional violence of the Northern Irish Troubles.

Dubbing his fictional perpetrators the Resurrection Men, McNamee aestheticises the brutal details of torture and murders. The deadly squad of paramilitaries is infamous for torturing their victims for an extended period of time with an excessive number of knife wounds before killing them and discarding them in the streets. The leader of the squad, Victor Kelly, grew up bullied because of his Catholic-sounding last name. He was often brought to a cinema by his father and was inspired by the Hollywood gangster films he watched. As he becomes involved in paramilitary activities, Victor is extremely violent in his perpetration. His imagination of his role as a paramilitary is egotistic and often mimic the gangsters he saw as a child. His obsession with gangster and violence

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worsens after being incarcerated for a murder, and eventually becomes intolerable to his fellow paramilitaries. Focusing heavily on the Resurrection Men, McNamee creates an illusion that such hyper-violent acts are the norm of paramilitary activities. However, Victor's squad is merely one of the many units that belong to a larger sectarian group. Victor should be understood as an atypical paramilitary member, not a literary representation of typical sectarian perpetrators. Victor's disregard for sectarian justice in his perpetration exposes his indifference towards the objectives of the paramilitary organisations, which should have been the guidance of his actions. On the contrary, he is obsessed with cultivating his own image as a perpetrator, particularly in the style of gangster figures in Hollywood films. As a result, he is ultimately incompatible with the goals and values of paramilitary groups.

This chapter challenges the reductive portrayal of perpetrators and investigates the nuances of these characters. The first section of this chapter elaborates on the qualities of typical paramilitary members and draws comparisons with the paramilitary characters in *Resurrection Man*. By comparing the characteristics of typical paramilitaries with the portrayal of Victor and the Resurrection Men, this section lays bare the egotistic imagination of their roles in the armed sectarian struggles. The second section aims to develop a more appropriate approach to understand the relationship between paramilitary organisations and these atypical paramilitaries. Ironically, Victor's reasoning of his perpetration may supplement the potentially insensitive language that is used to explain the length of the Troubles. Overall, this chapter explains how perpetrators use sectarian violence to fulfil their own bloodlust while obscuring the self-serving nature of their actions.

I. "Men in Balaclavas": Typical and Atypical Paramilitaries

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Paramilitaries should not be misconstrued as disorganised groups of killers. The term para-*military* suggests similarities with the military, and Northern Irish paramilitary groups had indeed been structurally modelled on the British military, "with battalions and companies and a clear, legible chain of command" (Keefe 115). For the ease of controlling their members, these organisations prefer loyal and manageable individuals over psychopathic murderers. Psychopathic murderers are drawn to paramilitary activity because of its violent elements, while non-psychopathic individuals invested in ideological causes. Non-psychopathic members are more inclined to stay loyal to the organisations even under the constant pressure of potential exposure and prosecution. Horgan points out that terrorist organisations prefer radicalised individuals over psychopaths, because non-psychopathic individuals are more likely to remain loyal and committed "to the greater ideological cause" (6). Organisations rely heavily on non-psychopathic members to carry out operations. Understanding that the typical paramilitaries tend to be non-psychopathic is critical in recognizing that psychopathic perpetrators like Victor in *Resurrection Man* are not representative of the norm during the Troubles.

On the contrary, paramilitary members are typically highly disciplined and required to comply with certain codes of conduct in their day-to-day operations. They would need to accomplish missions assigned by organisations and adhere to organisational regulations, refraining from any violation They select their targets based on criteria that serve their ideological beliefs, while psychopathic killers tend to choose victims based on criteria that are "fuelled and sustained by elaborate personal fantasies" (Horgan 6). In other words, psychopathic killers' "egocentricities" make them less manageable, and thus less valuable, to the organisations (6). Their actions are also difficult to be justified with sectarian grievances. Justification is important to the

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legitmacy of paramilitary activity. As discussed in chapter one paramilitaries utilise both repressive and ideological apparatus in order to maintain their control over communities. The purpose of ideological apparatus is maintaining the conditions under which paramilitary can righteously exist. Two main justifications for paramilitary, as Maxwell Taylor and Ethel Quayle lay out, are "the sense of legitimacy and appropriateness of violence" and seeing "violence as a *forced* response to circumstances" (29). They argue that being able to justify their use of violence is important to paramilitaries' willingness to participate in attacks. Even though paramilitary actions "may appear immoral or amoral or abnormal to society," to these individuals, their actions are "an appropriate and defensible *moral* act" (30). These studies by Horgan, and Taylor and Quayle indicate that for paramilitaries, it is important that their actions are justifiable within the sectarian context. Their actions have to contribute to the sectarian objectives of the organisations they serve.

In order to ensure most of the members remain devoted to the organisations' goals, disciplinary actions play a significant role in paramilitary activities. In *Resurrection Man*, disciplinary actions often include kneecapping, for example in the punishment of Jimmy Craig, Ian Morris, and Grames McCrea's for robbing an old Protestant woman (*RM* 46-49). Executions are also part of the disciplinary measures, like Victor's shooting of Flaps McArthur, whom Victor believes to be a traitor (*RM* 104-05). These incidents suggest the existence of a hierarchical system and rigid regulations within the organisations. These regulations are sometimes laid out in a straightforward manner in the novel. For example, Victor has explicitly stated that the rule for violence is "Must rid of a Taig" (*RM* 7). Or, these regulations can exist in the form of implicit understandings, as in the case of Craig, Morris, and McCrea, whose actions resulted in their punishment through kneecapping. In the paramilitary system,

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the higher-ranking members have the authority to punish members who have violated organisation regulations, or task other lower members to carry out the punishment. These disciplinary actions ensure the loyalty and compliance of the members, especially the typical members who have more concerns over the consequences of their actions.

In *Resurrection Man*, the typical paramilitary member is represented by Darkie Larche, a mid-rank paramilitary leader like Victor. His attention to news about sectarian violence indicates his awareness of the correlation between victim selection and the broader implications of the attacks:

> Darkie called it [the news] the body count and watched it to check on incidents that his unit had been involved in. He would shake his head in sorrow at inaccurate details . . . . It was somehow vital to him that a *victim's age*, *religion* and the exact *location of the hit* be given precisely. Errors were subversive. They denied sectarian and geographic certainties. (*RM* 17, emphasis mine)

Darkie uses news reports about killings to confirm whether the details of his attacks are reported accurately and thus determines whether the objectives of the attacks are met. Doing so suggests that his motivation for participating in killings is sectarian, not personal. Furthermore, Darkie is described to be "sensitive to the pain his organisation inflicted," while he has "a sense of obligation" regarding his actions (*RM* 19). Words like "sensitive" and "obligation" indicate that he is conscious of the consequences of his actions and is not a callous and cold-blooded psychopath, the way terrorists are often described in Troubles fiction. These descriptions suggest that Darkie considers his actions necessary for a cause, as he deliberately responds to the sectarian situation surrounding him. He carefully weighs the consequences of his actions against the contribution he would make to his organisation and, more importantly, the community

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he belongs to.

Darkie's attitude towards the news reports resonates with what Horgan argues to be the terrorist personality. Darkie's victim selection is "incidental, chosen on symbolic bases," as Horgan claims terrorists should and would (6). Darkie understands that the "victim's age, religion and the exact location of the hit" provide the attacks with "sectarian and geographic certainties." In other words, the details about the victims are necessary for translating their deaths into curated messages that hold *meaning* or carry significance within the sectarian context. Without meeting certain criteria, paramilitary attacks would be no different from non-sectarian killings. Furthermore, Darkie is not immune to the psychological aftermath of his own actions. Darkie is described to be "committed to a wider vocabulary of death which included widows and children" (*RM* 19). This means that his "vocabulary" is reflective of the human cost of the attacks and the killings. He is impacted by them and sometimes appears to be inattentive and absent. He possesses a "kind of sexual absentmindedness" (*RM* 18), as observed by his sexual partner Heather. This absentmindedness hints at emotional detachment caused by paramilitary activities, whereas Heather also sees such mannerisms as Darkie's "in members of various organizations" (*RM* 18), suggesting that they too are affected by their involvement in perpetration.

Darkie's devotion to paramilitary activities stands in stark contrast to his peers' attitudes. As he is more focused on the sectarian goals of his actions and less preoccupied with personal fame, Darkie especially disagrees with his peers' growing fondness for grotesque aesthetics. Some paramilitaries lean into the hyper-violent stereotypes of sectarian conflicts and use them as tools or accessories for paramilitary propaganda: "[p]hotographs of bombs at the moment of detonation, riot scenes, men in balaclavas displaying heavy machine guns, burnt-out vehicles, moments of numbness

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and shock," and "the inevitable photograph of the civilian victim" (*RM* 92). However, Darkie is uncomfortable with being associated with these images. He disapproves of "the emphasis of the visual" that heightens the sensuality and overlooks the societal implications of paramilitary activities. He disagrees with the trend of transforming proof of crimes into validation of the perpetrators' personal accomplishments.

What Darkie finds distasteful about certain paramilitaries foreshadows the trajectory of the Resurrection Men's activity. Like Darkie, the Resurrection Men also pay attention to the news about their attacks. However, while Darkie does so to assess the success of his unit's operation, the Resurrection Men watch the news for reasons completely different. In particular, Willie Lambe, one of Victor's righthand men, feels "uncritical delight" when his unit's actions are featured on television (*RM* 40). His reactions suggest that he is invested in the media's coverage not for the sectarian implications of their actions but for self-aggrandizement. Willie even fantasises about being interviewed for his involvement in paramilitary activities. In his fantasies, Willie does not envision himself as a figure of sectarian justice, but is single-mindedly concerned about discussing his early life and family history. Willie's self-centred fantasy contrasts drastically with the "friendship and comradeship" that are "frequently referred to as critical in developing and sustaining" the paramilitary membership (Taylor and Quayle 40). His fantasy reveals that not all paramilitary members put the organisations' agendas before their own interests and desires. Instead, people can be involved in paramilitary activities for selfish reasons that are totally unrelated to the larger, sectarian agendas that Darkie keeps constantly on his mind.

Victor's attitude towards television exposes the Resurrection Men's disregard for the sectarian significance of their actions. Though he is as egotistic, if not more, as Willie, Victor envisions a more ambitious agenda for the unit's future thanks to his

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understanding of the cultural significance of the news. One of his expectations is to eventually "have a job as first item on the news" (*RM* 141), suggesting that he knows the importance of media coverage and public exposure to paramilitary activities. Victor understands news very differently from Darkie. Instead of details and accuracy, Victor craves the attention that comes with media exposure, which contrasts with Darkie's disapproval of sensual images of paramilitary activities. Victor is obsessed with the sensualised, heightened image of violence. Given his familiarity with Hollywood films, it is implied that Victor sees reports of his crimes as his very own film production. Not only does media exposure means success, but it may also indicate the potential cultural significance and impacts of Resurrection Men's actions, similar to gangster films' influence on Victor.

Although paramilitary members rely on the news to gauge the public's response to their actions, one thing to note about the media discourse is that it is controlled by the British government. In "'There's No Good Riot Footage Any More': Waging Northern Ireland's Media War in Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man*," J. Edward Mallot explains the connection between the Troubles and the mass media. Because news is such an important influence on public opinion, the Government, Loyalists, and Republicans were all in constant attempts to court favourable coverage. As Mallot argues, the paramilitaries in *Resurrection Man* show a "perceived need to court and retain favorable representation" (39), or at the very least, a need to avoid unfavourable representation. The characters' obsession over exposure echoes empirical studies on Northern Irish perpetrators as well. In *Formations of Violence*, Allen Feldman interviews associates of the Shankill Butchers and provides a more concrete example of the role of media in paramilitary activities. His research reveals that although the "lurid and sensational" coverage of the Shankill Butchers brought the organisation "publicity,"

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this “did not help [their] image” (62). Therefore, their efforts brought more trouble than favour to the group.

Media attention is not Victor’s only means of assessing his success in paramilitary activities. There are other ways to gauge the public’s perception of his squad. One of the methods Victor uses is graffiti, which is a significant part of Northern Ireland’s sectarian history. People paint pictures of paramilitaries and sectarian slogans onto walls to show their support or to intimidate. When Victor sees “the first graffiti appearing in the derelict Catholic streets,” he takes it as a sign that he is “on the right track to becoming a *legend*” (*RM* 133-34, emphasis mine). Being turned into graffiti means that the Resurrection Men are etched into the infrastructure of Belfast and elevated to the status of symbolic figures that are “seen as favoured and visionary” (*RM* 145). The term “legend” suggests that Victor is knowingly cultivating the cultural significance of his image. The graffitied images of the Resurrection Men resonate with Victor’s obsession to become a larger-than-life figure. Drawing inspiration from Hollywood gangsters, Victor envisions himself as a determined, charming, risk-taking, and uncontainable persona. As he accumulates infamy as a paramilitary, Victor leans into the mystical image of a visionary. He consciously shields himself in “rumours and speculation” to cultivate a persona that is omnipresent and sinister (*RM* 145). He seeks to obscure his personal identity and transform himself into a legendary figure that haunts the streets of Belfast.

Victor is obsessed with curating a Hollywood gangster-like persona. Imitating the fictional gangsters is critical to the development of his personality and career as a paramilitary. Victor’s appreciation for Hollywood gangsters can be traced back to his childhood. His visits to the Apollo Cinema with his father, argues Caroline Magennis, give him “first glimpses of the power and frailty of the male body” (48). In the novel,

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The Public Enemy (1931) and *Dillinger* (1945) are named as two of the films that inspire young Victor, who studies the highly stylised characters, especially the protagonists of *The Public Enemy* and *Dillinger*, Tom Powers and John Dillinger. Both characters are young men who start from petty criminals and develop into sinister gangsters. They showcase the "archetypes of masculinity" (Magennis 48), including traits like ambition and a willingness to take risks, which Victor later embodies in his paramilitary career.

By imitating Hollywood gangsters, Victor connects himself to the popular culture that romantisies and stylises the image of outlaws. Margaret Scanlan argues that such a connection has the "effect of forcing readers to see Northern Ireland in a context that outsiders at least usually ignore, as vitally connected to London and New York and Hollywood" (54-55). Northern Irish violence, in this sense, is compared to "urban violence in Liverpool or Los Angeles" (55). Such a comparison accentuates the discrepancies between Victor's vision of himself and his surroundings. He imitates individual perpetrators who pursue personal heroism rather than promote ideological agendas, so it is no wonder that Victor's attention is solely on himself. He pays close attention to the movements, expressions, and body language of the gangster characters. He spends time "getting the gangster walk right" and practises "a combination of lethal movement and unexpected half-looks" (*RM* 5). With his imitation of gangsters, he hopes to incite emotional reactions, such as fear and admiration, from his audience. Or, as Richard Haslam claims, in *Resurrection Man*, "Emotions and events are persistently relayed through the distancing aesthetic filter of film noir, detective thriller, horror and gothic generic conventions" (205-06). Interestingly, however, McNamee does not elaborate much on people's reactions to perpetrators' behaviour. His depiction, or rather lack of depiction, of people's reactions to the perpetrators underscores the abnormality

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of these perpetrators. The extent of their violence, in McNamee's writing, is incomprehensible to their peer, civilians or paramilitary.

Heather is one of the few characters who allow readers a glimpse into the non-paramilitary characters' response to Victor's persona building. She is an especially observant character because she is constantly assessing Victor's image. From Heather's perspective, Victor's movements in court resemble a performance: "When they brought Victor in he seemed taller than she remembered. He smiled and waved at his mother, gave Heather a quick grin. He punched the air with his fist when he passed Big Ivan and Willie Lambe" (*RM* 108). Heather sees Victor's mannerism as "gracious," "rehearsed," and "of meticulous perpetration" (*RM* 108). Her observation that Victor's actions are rehearsed and prepared underscores his earlier efforts to mimic the movements of Hollywood gangsters.

Influences from Hollywood films are more evident in passages where Victor's thinking process is laid out. When Victor is captured by the police and asked to take a photograph for documentation, he demonstrates a strong sense of self-importance. He makes efforts to take nice photographs because he knows that these photographs are important: "in the future they could be released to the press" (*RM* 52). His efforts indicate that he intentionally cultivates his image for his future audience. When he is in an identification queue, Victor "turn[s] into the lights and [gives] them a dangerous smile which he ha[s] practised in front of the mirror" (*RM* 53). That particular smile is described as a "Cagney smile" (*RM* 53). Cagney is the actor who played Tom Powers, the protagonist of *The Public Enemy*. In this passage, by pinpointing Cagney, McNamee reveals the exact inspiration for Victor's behaviour and the effects he hopes to achieve.

Apart from evoking certain emotional responses from the onlookers, imitating Hollywood gangsters also helps Victor reassure himself in his actions. When he is in

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internment, Victor sets off to kill Hacksaw, his accomplice in a murder, in order to prevent Hacksaw from snitching on him. On his way, Victor adopts the "Dillinger gait, pacey and dangerous," and imagines himself to be a "sweet-faced character in a double-breasted suit and shoes polished to death" (*RM* 102). By imitating Dillinger, Victor reaffirms his persona as a perpetrator and seeks to embody the brutal, infamous criminal. In other words, Victor understands that by adopting certain gestures and mannerisms, he is not only mimicking the fictional characters but also embodying their mentality. Victor's imagination also indicates that in addition to his movements, surroundings and accessories likewise contribute to his state of mind. For example, even though his wardrobe choices must be limited while he is interned, Victor imagines himself in "a double-breasted suit" and "polished" shoes when on his way to kill Hacksaw. Imitating Hollywood gangsters while carrying out paramilitary missions hints at the discrepancy between Victor's imagination and reality.

Victor's attention to his appearance starts off as quite superficial but ends up being influential in shaping his personality and behaviour. For example, Victor associates leather jackets with paramilitary perpetrators early on, when he visits court trials on sectarian killings to learn about the killers and the killings. He sees "a Taig brought into the box, a man's thin figure wearing a cheap leather jacket and a V-neck jumper" (*RM* 11). Later, he further connects the scent of leather with paramilitary activities. In a tense moment where Victor anticipates a conflict between his unit and Darkie's, the surrounding is defined by the "smell of leather, gun oil and sweat" (*RM* 42). Furthermore, Victor's obsession with leather reflects his prejudice against Catholics. He prizes himself for dressing more expensively than his counterparts, unlike the Catholic perpetrators in "cheap" jackets that he had seen in court. The difference is highlighted when he is put in an identification line at the police station with the other

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candidates, who are also in leather jackets but theirs are "cheaper than the one Victor had" (*RM* 53). Such a comparison suggests that expensive clothing is key to Victor's self-image as a perpetrator, because they make him feel superior to others.

Victor also relies on cars to cultivate his perpetrator image. In his childhood, Victor sits "behind the wheel of an Old Ford Zephyr" with "dangerous-looking fins on the back and the chrome bumpers" (*RM* 5), and "think[s] about John Dillinger's face seen through a windscreen at night" (*RM* 6). The vehicle's dangerous look lends a menacing edge to a child who has been more of a victim than a perpetrator in sectarian violence, and it also connects him to the fictional figure that he admires. As a perpetrator, the grown-up Victor makes good use of vehicles. He acquires a black Ford Capri because it sounds like "a 007 for Victor . . . a fucking Bondmobile" (*RM* 27). The comparison to 007 once again connects Victor to another movie character and further demonstrates how a vehicle can serve as a means to conceal personal identity, allowing its owner to assume a mysterious persona. His interest in turning himself into a mysterious character further deepens after he establishes himself as a fearsome figure in his community. After he returns from internment, Victor orders Big Ivan and Willie Lambe to drive him

> around the same streets for hours. . . . They always drove slowly with the engine idling in third gear. He wanted passersby to think of curbed forces. Victor would stare straight ahead, his expression stern and commanding. He wanted to give the impression of someone contemplating harsh but necessary measures, a general with braid on his shoulders and dark glasses. (*RM* 162)

Victor's expectations for these trips indicate that he understands the suggestive effect of vehicles. Looming the streets of Belfast, he projects the image of an important and

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powerful individual and achieves the highly stylised figure that he aspires to.

So far, I have discussed Darkie as an exemplary paramilitary and Victor as an atypical one. Through this comparison, it is clear that Victor's obsession with Hollywood gangsters is fundamentally incompatible with paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland. His obsession with highly stylised violence connects him to Hollywood's foreign and fictional violence, and his alignment with the Hollywood notion of violence ultimately makes him incompatible with the local, Northern Irish brand of violence. Regardless, Victor and his unit are allowed in their paramilitary organisation for a period of time. The organisations' acceptance, or at the very least tolerance, of these perpetrators suggests some form of mutually beneficial relationship between the organisations and perpetrators. Such a suggestion invites the questions of why and how: why do organisations tolerate these perpetrators and why do these individuals operate under the organisations? How do organisations and perpetrators leverage each other's resources and capability?

II. "Ulster Needs Men Like You": From the Organisation's Perspective

While the previous section focuses on the characteristics of individual perpetrators, this section elaborates on the relationship between paramilitary organisations and members in *Resurrection Man*. Furthermore, understanding such a dynamic helps expose the lack of sectarian elements in these hyper-violent perpetrations. In *Resurrection Man*, McNamee depicts a collaborative dynamic between paramilitary organisations and members, through which the organisations provide protections to their members even when they are conducting crimes that are non-sectarian in nature. Such protection is extended to perpetrators because the perpetrators are beneficial to the organisations. They help carry out missions assigned by the

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organisations and contribute to the reputation of the organisations. Hence, paramilitary organisations are sometimes willing to tolerate perpetrators like Victor. When some of the Resurrection Men are arrested by the police, Billy McClure, who is a higher-ranking member in the paramilitary group than Victor, tries to convince him to go into hiding. McClure says, "The way I see it is that you are a *resource*. Ulster needs men like you" (*RM* 204, emphasis mine). Here McClure explicitly claims that since Victor is needed by the sectarian organisation, which he refers to as "Ulster," he is trying "to get [Victor] out of harm's way for a while" (*RM* 204). From McClure's perspective, protecting a killer like Victor is beneficial to the organisation. Such protection provided by organisations is also evident from an external viewpoint. The journalist Coppinger, who is investigating the crimes of the Resurrection Men, criticises the boldness in the perpetrators' negligence of wearing face masks. He believes such behaviour suggests that the perpetrators "don't give a shit if they get caught" or "they're protected somehow" (*RM* 59). McClure's and Coppinger's comments show that perpetrators can be protected by organisations if they are considered contributing to the sectarian agenda. What is missing here is how perpetrators can contribute to organisations' sectarian agenda.

To understand how individual perpetrators can serve organisations in sectarian conflicts, Victor's reasoning for his own actions provides a better explanation for the protection he received. Victor has established an intimidating presence in the community and harvested goods and money as a result. Soon after he begins his paramilitary career, Victor discovers that

> he didn't have to threaten. Shopkeepers were glad to hand over goods. He was relieving them of hidden fears, split-second images of wives and children being confronted by masked men. Then he started going on to

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> building sites and offering protection. He believed they would sleep better by paying him. No-warning bombs were frequent. People were being gunned down in the street. He was offering them a place in *random events* and always made a point of calling at the same time every week. He was the means by which they could align themselves to *unpredictable violence*. (*RM* 27, emphasis mine)

Victor's justification differentiates two types of violence: the first is the *unpredictable violence* inherent in Northern Irish society, and the second is the *predictable violence* administered by paramilitaries like himself. To be fair, it should be noted that the first type of violence is also largely caused by paramilitary activities. The "masked men," "No-warning bombs," and people being "gunned down"—that is, all the unpredictable elements Victor refers to—are part and parcel of the rampant sectarian conflict in Belfast. The victims simply do not know when they are going to fall prey to the masked men and their bombs and guns. On the contrary, the shopkeepers who pay Victor for protection are interacting with a threat that is known and predictable, since Victor calls and visits "at the same time every week." In Victor's mind, he is providing *stability* for the community. Against the backdrop of common and random violence in society, Victor sees his unlawful actions as a stabilising force. Furthermore, he believes people who submit to his violence do so in the hope of avoiding falling prey to unpredictable and, for that matter, worse misfortune.

Victor's self-justifying reasoning is undoubtedly problematic, especially when considering the sadist torture he inflicted upon his victims. The extreme and cruel nature of his actions makes them very difficult to justify. However, Victor's problematic understanding of violence hints at a criterion for distinguishing between different kinds of violence: predictability. For Victor, as long as the occurrence of

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violence is predictable, it can be accepted or tolerated by his victims. Victor's emphasis on predictability suggests that, in a society filled with unpredictable violence, it is acceptable or even necessary to shield civilians from harm even if it means resorting to another form of violence. His approach to understanding paramilitary violence interestingly resonates with other attempts to explain the continuation of violence during the Troubles, like John Darby's *Intimidation and the Control of Conflict in Northern Ireland*. Darby's book delves into the potential reasons that contribute to the prolonged duration of the Troubles. He concludes that the Troubles had neither escalated into "genocidal slaughter" nor de-escalated into "an internal accommodation," because the violence of the Troubles had not been "intolerable" (viii). Darby claims that, regardless of how severe the Troubles is portrayed to be, "[b]y whatever calculus communities compute their interests, the price of compromise is still thought to be greater than the cost of violence" (viii). In light of Darby's argument, the persistence of the Troubles indicates that, rather than seeking compromise, the people of Northern Ireland may have found it more acceptable to tolerate and endure the presence of violence.

Darby's concept of tolerable and intolerable violence resonates with Coppinger's comment in the novel that there are "acceptable levels of violence" (*RM* 156). As Coppinger observes, "There's a new vocabulary. Acceptable levels of violence, seven-day detention orders, the men of violence. It's like the whole thing's under control now. More than that, it's being ordered, contrived even" (*RM* 156). Here Coppinger links acceptable/tolerable violence with control and order. He also believes that news reporting is using a limited set of vocabulary, which creates the illusion that the ongoing violence is "under control." In other words, the reports of the Troubles are sanitised to preserve a facade of control. Arguably, both Darby's and Coppinger's

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conceptions of violence, be it tolerable or acceptable, run the risk of being insensitive towards the suffering caused by the Troubles. Since the Troubles is undoubtedly one of the darkest moments in Northern Irish history, suggesting that the level of bloodshed has not been bloody enough would be downplaying the human cost of the troubles, which is both ignorant and offensive. However, this unsavoury conceptualisation of the Troubles cannot be fully discredited, for it might help explain the continuation of violence during the Troubles, if elaborated with vocabulary that is more suitable and sensitive towards the violent nature of the Troubles.

Juxtaposing Darby's research and McNamee's *Resurrection Man* might potentially lead to insightful conclusions, because it is intriguing to note how Victor's vocabulary provides a more comprehensive way of understanding the nature of violence. To Victor, it does not matter whether violence is tolerable or acceptable, as Darby and Coppinger respectively suggests. The objective severity of violence is irrelevant. Instead, what matters is whether the civilians can, in Victor's language, "align themselves to unpredictable violence" (*RM* 27). As long as people find a pattern or regularity of violence, they are more willing not only to tolerate but also comply with it, according to Victor. This claim is supported by C. J. M. Drake's "The Role of Ideology in Terrorists' Target Selection," where he claims that "both sides of the Northern Ireland conflict portray these attacks as a means of preventing lawlessness within their communities" (69). In other words, paramilitary violence serves not only as acts of perpetration but also as disciplinary measures imposed on the Northern Irish communities.

Disciplinary actions tie back to the nature of paramilitary activities, for it is an important aspect of paramilitary operations. Organisations put disciplinary actions in place to respond to violations of organisations' rules and further intimidate others from

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doing the same. Although violence is a straightforward means of intimidation, intimidation does not always happen in the form of violence. It can include physical attacks on individuals or private property, threats against individuals via phone calls, mails, or visits from paramilitary members, as well as perceived environmental threats such as ongoing attacks and the presence of sectarian slogans (Darby 53-57). In fact, as Liam Kennedy points out, paramilitary disciplinary actions are "dignified with labels such as 'informal policing' and 'informal justice'" (4). Apart from civilian communities, paramilitaries themselves can also be the victims of intimidation. In *Resurrection Man*, there are several instances where disciplinary actions take place between paramilitaries. Early on in the novel, "Victor was asked to carry out a kneecap job on three members of the organization who had burgled an elderly woman's house" (*RM* 40). The purpose of the *job* is explicitly identified as "discipline and maintaining the image of the organization" (*RM* 40). This claim indicates that organisations care about their image and task individual perpetrators with certain *jobs* to maintain such an image. In this kneecapping job, Victor is conducting disciplinary actions *on behalf of* the organisation. Yet, as he becomes more prominent in the paramilitary circle, he becomes a source of intimidation himself. For example, he assassinates Hacksaw, who might testify against him. Later in the novel, he executes Flaps McArthur, whom he suspects to be an informer though without any substantial evidence. Both killings consolidate his image as someone who will always retaliate whoever stand against him.

The examples of kneecapping and execution demonstrate the mechanisms of disciplinary actions withing an organization, but disciplining is also key to intimidating the community within which paramilitaries operate. Besides protection from the organisation, Resurrection Men also manage to operate for an extended period of time because they have successfully intimidated the community and prevented it from

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providing information about them. Victor's infamous brutality amplifies the existing historical hostility towards informers, thus effectively shutting down any attempt to report on the Resurrection Men. People's reluctance to speak about the Resurrection Men is evident in Coppinger's struggles to acquire information. He observes people's guarded reactions when he asks around for the knife killings: "there'll be a massive silence. Like nobody talking. Looking over their shoulders" (*RM* 61). The gesture of looking over one's shoulder indicates that people stay silent due to the fear of surveillance and the danger of possible retaliation, not out of genuine support for paramilitary activities.[4]

Civilians refrain from revealing information about Victor as the surveillance network in Northern Ireland effectively imposes self-censorship on the community. Therefore, intimidation manages to persist even when the perpetrators are not in proximity to the people. In *Resurrection Man*, Coppinger still faces difficulties acquiring information about the Resurrection Men even after Victor is interned. Coppinger observes that people are "not looking over their shoulder as much, but it's a temporary thing" (*RM* 82). People's reticence with touting is the key factor of the Resurrection Men's continued existence and survival. In other words, although perpetrators may engage in paramilitary activities for egotistical reasons, their actions effectually launch a campaign of intimidation that not only shields them from touting, but also help paramilitary organisations to keep the communities under control.

Following this logic, Victor serves as the whip for his organisation. With his perpetration, he establishes rules for the community, both civilians and paramilitaries, amidst the *unpredictable* violence in society. Victor's justification for his perpetration

[4] Support for paramilitary activities is also one of the reasons for civilians to refrain from giving up information about paramilitaries (see Ferguson et al.). In some instances, civilians even provided shelters and resources for paramilitaries, especially when they are on the run. See Keefe's passages on Branden Hughes' escape (65-68) and the IRA prisoners' escape from Her Majesty's Prison Maidstone (91-92).

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suggests that he is conscious of the significance of discipline in paramilitary activities. At the beginning of his career, he consciously abides by sectarian codes in his target selection even if his other actions show little concern for sectarian grievances. However, since Victor's paramilitary persona is modelled on gangster figures from Hollywood films, his aspiration for himself is ultimately incompatible with the expectations paramilitary organisations have for their members. Depicting Victor as such, McNamee gives little attention to the sectarian elements of Victor's actions but solely focuses on the gangster-related qualities. Such a strategy, while it risks further exaggerating the violence of the Troubles, exposes the discrepancies between the actions of sectarian perpetrators and their supposed sectarian objectives.

Victor is the focal point of *Resurrection Man*, but he is not the only perpetrator who appears to disregard the sectarian implications of their actions. The other members of the Resurrection Men and even the higher-ranking McClure also show little concern over the sectarian motivations of their actions. One of the indicators of the non-sectarian motivations of perpetration is the "Romper Room" (*RM* 28), where paramilitaries torture their victims before disposing of them in the streets or abandoned areas. McClure designs it to have a "big group of participants. Twenty or thirty was good, particularly if they were close-knit. *That way you could involve whole communities. You implicated wives and children*" (*RM* 28, emphasis mine). The large crowd ensures silence from all participants. Apart from loyalty, the Romper Room also obscures the significance of sectarian beliefs and the potential titillation in perpetrations. In the novel, the name Romper Room is described to be "taken from a children's television programme where the presenter looked through a magic mirror and saw children sitting at home" (*RM* 28). This passage resembles Martin Dillon's elaboration of the Romper Room in *The Shankill Butchers*: "The word 'romper' was derived from an Ulster

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Television series which involved children talking and playing with a television presenter" (23). Dillon further argues that using the term "rompering" emphasises the pleasurable chasing and spectacle-like qualities of the activity. The connection between children's television and a torture chamber highlights the problematic nature of this kind of paramilitary activity. It hints at the *entertaining* qualities of perpetration for some perpetrators. Dillon believes that it is important to emphasise the term *romper* since it exposes the perpetrators' disregard for the sectarian objectives of their crimes. Besides, the Romper Room is also designed in this particular way to ensure the compliance and complicity of all participants.

R. B. Tobin argues that rompering is McClure's scheme of taking "the basic desire for social cohesion and pervert[ing] it to his own end" (138). Therefore, McClure's "sectarianism is more an opportunity to exercise sadism than to advance the cause of Protestant solidarity" (138). McClure's methods suggest that violence is sanctioned under certain circumstances for the benefit of paramilitary groups, whether it be fostering cooperative communities or ensuring the loyalty of paramilitary members. Tobin also argues that McClure and Victor are distinctively different in their understanding of such a mechanism. Although Victor wins the favour of McClure, and therefore of the organisation, he is rejected later on because of his pathological need to "fulfil the image he has created" (Tobin 137). In Tobin's argument, it does not matter what kind of image Victor wants or possesses. Instead, because the obscurity of perpetrator personas is the most valuable quality, as long as Victor solidifies his image, he would be excluded from the range of violence deemed acceptable in the context of paramilitary activities.

However, regardless of the fluidity of Victor's image, he is fundamentally incompatible with paramilitary groups because his aspiration comes from a different

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context. This chapter has discussed two traditions of violence—the Hollywood gangster films and the Northern Irish paramilitary—that juxtapose in Victor. Hollywood gangster films highlight charming, egotistical, and risk-seeking protagonists, especially *Dillinger* and *The Public Enemy* that Victor imitates since childhood. The highly stylised film genre aestheticises violence and glorifies individual perpetrators who are decisively not obedient foot soldiers that paramilitary groups need for carrying out their schemes. Nevertheless, Victor demonstrates a sufficient understanding of the paramilitary groups' expectations of their members. He is tasked to carry out disciplinary actions on other paramilitary members and enact violence onto the communities in the belief that doing so is sparing them from the *unpredictable* violence in society. As Victor exerts his dominance through intimidation and killings, he is also taming the population for the paramilitaries.

Unfortunately, as his dominance grows, Victor becomes increasingly obsessive over cultivating a mysterious and sinister persona, like the iconic film characters from his childhood. In Victor's mind, his ultimate goal remains those fictional male figures that he aspires to as a child. As a result, even though Victor's actions contribute to the group's goals for a period of time, he is fundamentally unable to assimilate into the group. As Coppinger points out, Victor becomes "too unpredictable" as he becomes less controlled by the organisation (*RM* 156). His actions, although highly intimidating, have also attracted too much negative attention from the paramilitary group. Thus, Victor becomes unacceptable and is rejected by the organisation. His protection from the organisation is retracted, leading to the arrest of several members of the Resurrection Men, and Victor is eventually assassinated at his parents' house. Before his cooperative relationship with the organisation falls apart, Victor knowingly complies with the codes of conduct of paramilitary activities. Up to a certain point, Victor is able to maintain

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both his paramilitary and gangster identity. He takes advantage of the organisation's tolerance of his actions and uses the organisation's resources to grow his own intimidatory persona. However, as his gangster persona prosper, it clashes with his identity as a paramilitary.

Expanding from Victor's concept of predictability, this chapter incorporates *Resurrection Man*'s vocabulary of violence into the research on violence during the Troubles. Victor believes that predictability drives the community to tolerate his violence. I connect the concept of predictable violence and the organisational protection of perpetrators to the larger context of the Troubles. These concepts can easily be neglected in favour of a more sectarian-focused interpretation of the novel. Nevertheless, they could potentially be very helpful in rethinking individual perpetrators and their responsibilities. Instead of thinking of them as puppets of sectarian grievances, my reading argues that individual perpetrators take advantage of sectarian sentiments to fulfil their personal desires for violence. Potentially, this chapter also bears the implication that not only are the organisations complicit in enabling atypical paramilitaries, but the members are also willingly taking advantage of the organisations. Perpetrators' desire for violence contradictorily exposes their divergence from sectarian objectives. Therefore, although the novel may be closely connected to Northern Ireland's sectarian background, its plot ironically provides a great example to observe the non-sectarian nature of sectarian violence.

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Chapter Three

Scandalous Gossips or Sexual Violence: Reclaiming Systemic and Gendered Violence in *Milkman*

During the Troubles in Northern Ireland, sectarian violence had a profound impact on people's lives in many ways. Even if people escaped killing and maiming, they could hardly survive the period without any mental scar. Everyday life was restricted by social codes and sectarian ideologies. The function of these regulations is similar to Louis Althusser's ideological state apparatuses. They reproduce the social conditions that would prolong their existence. These codes and ideologies lead to the establishment of rigid boundaries, visible and invisible, between different communities. The concept of such boundaries is brought to the forefront in Anna Burns's *Milkman*. The novel is narrated by its 18-year-old narrator, who is usually referred to as Middle Sister in scholarly works, from a retrospective perspective of twenty years later.[5] The story unfolds in a conflict-infested community inspired by Belfast during the Troubles. As she walks around the community, Middle Sister would read nineteenth-century novels to avoid acknowledging the political violence that surrounds her. However, such a practice is deemed unacceptable by her community, which marks Middle Sister as an eccentric, "beyond-the-pale" character in the community (*M* 59). She is courted by the milkman, a high-ranking Republican paramilitary. As the milkman pursues and stalks Middle Sister, he tries to force her into complying with his courtship with threats against her and her "maybe-boyfriend" (*M* 8).[6] In the course of the novel, Middle Sister

[5] The protagonist of *Milkman* is most commonly referred to in scholarly articles as "Middle Sister," but in the novel she is also referred to as "daughter" (*M* 50), "sister-in-law" (*M* 14), "maybe-girlfriend" (*M* 19), etc., depending on her relationship with the speaking character.

[6] Maybe-boyfriend is referred to as such because Middle Sister chooses not to establish a stable relationship with him.

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remembers the abuse and oppression she was subjected to in her teenage years, both by the milkman and by her own community. Since these events leave no physical scars on her, they do not initially qualify as violence in her community. Nevertheless, although she has no way of comprehending these experiences as abuses when they happen, her retrospective perspective allows her to incorporate new concepts that she learns about later in life and reclaim her past experiences as violence in an era of sectarian conflicts.

Middle Sister does not directly participate in sectarian conflicts, but she is still affected by the impacts of the conflicts. Primarily, she is troubled by the codified language and social practices, both of which are derived from the day-to-day confrontations in Northern Irish society. Details of daily life are impregnated by sectarian implications. As Middle Sister points out, people have to comply with the "rule of allegiance, of tribal identification" (*M* 24) for every mundane thing, including the cars people drive, the routes they take, the names they give to their children, etc. Northern Irish people are constrained by a rigid set of regulations that would confine them to their sectarian identities. They are not allowed to stray away from the norms, which are enforced by the paramilitaries and the community members themselves, sometimes with violence. This form of violence refers to the effects social institutions have on individuals, which are systemic and ever-present. With the help of social institutions such as families, the church, educational institutions, and so on, perpetrators can control their victims without resorting to physical harm. Instead, they can manipulate and intimidate their victims through words or their mere presence. Furthermore, in such circumstances, manipulation and intimidation can happen without specific perpetrators. Members in communities suffering from systemic violence and oppression tend to develop self-censorship, which reinforces oppression even in the absence of perpetrators. To some extent, the community members become the

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regulators of one another, and this self-regulation magnify the oppression they already suffer, as will be discussed below.

Unlike the murderous and brutal aggression in *Resurrection Man*, in *Milkman* Burns focuses on the systemic violence and oppression, which has been central to women's experience during the Troubles. Women were less likely to have been directly involved in sectarian conflicts, but were inevitably subjected to violence and oppression in their day-to-day interactions with authorities and paramilitaries. Systemic violence and oppression in Northern Ireland stem from the sectarianism deeply embedded in society. Interestingly, even though the content of *Milkman* is so closely connected to Northern Ireland, its narrative style invites readers to decontextualise the novel from Northern Ireland. The text of *Milkman* omits Northern Irish terminologies altogether and thus creates a spatial distance between Northern Ireland and the society it depicts. By doing so, *Milkman* showcases how violence and oppression, seemingly always already connected with sectarian strife, can exist independently from sectarianism. According to Burns, the novel does not have to be read as a rendition of the Troubles. Instead, she "would like to think it could be seen as any sort of totalitarian, closed society existing in similarly oppressive conditions . . . [or] under extreme pressure, with long-term violence seen as the norm" (Allardice). Thus, by removing the Northern Irish labels from the novel, Burns opens up the possibility for concepts from foreign cultures or the future to be introduced into the discussion of the Troubles.

Set to explore this possibility, this chapter first outlines the systemic and gendered violence that Northern Irish women like Middle Sister were subjected to. Such violence and oppression are not necessarily physical and can exist in the form of social codes and veiled threats. An understanding of the Northern Irish society helps identify and decipher the codified language perpetrators use in *Milkman*, which aims to

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demonstrate their ability to inflict harm on individuals and control them effectively. The second section delves into Burns's unique style that omits the identifying details of the settings and characters. Such a style obscures the Northern Irish elements of *Milkman* and allows the novel to be associated with oppressive societies other than Northern Ireland. Along with the retrospective narrative style of Middle Sister, the novel is distanced both spatially and temporally from the Troubles. By doing so, Burns defies the iron-clad hold that sectarianism had on the people during the Troubles and thus introduces concepts that are developed later than the Troubles or outside of the region into the exclusive and oppressive society. As a whole, this chapter suggests a potential approach to acknowledging and reclaiming experiences with violence during the era.

I. "He's Not Being Rude": Gossips and Verbal Violence in the Troubles

Sectarian ideologies dictate various aspects of Northern Irish lives. People have to carefully conduct themselves according to their sectarian identity, in order to avoid being punished for violating the rules of conduct. They are expected to know the rules by instinct based on their identity, and there is no need for the rules to be laid out explicitly. As depicted in *Milkman*, these restrictions reach far and wide. Community members are expected to comply with unsaid but understood rules on issues like names parents give to their children and places people can and cannot enter. Such regulations perpetuate the boundaries between segregated communities. Segregation, Peter Shirlow points out, "is the basis upon which loyalty and devotion remain committed to forms of identity that are reproduced through remaining disparate from oppositional places" ("Ethno-sectarianism" 195). In each segregated community, the collective identity is reinforced through the borders of each residential cluster and reaffirmed with daily language. In other words, these boundaries exist physically as well as verbally. In a

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divided society like Northern Ireland, identity is closely associated with the issues of language and labels. As Middle Sister repeatedly states, the city is divided into "our side" and "their side" (*M* 22), based on criteria like religion, political affiliation, and gender. These divisions do not always exist in isolation but intersect and add on to one another to form a web of control. This web ensures that individuals adhere to the boundaries set by the communities they belong to, which in turn further reinforces its control.

Language is crucial to maintaining such control. Middle Sister illustrates how language is used to that purpose when she elaborates on the ongoing political violence in her area:

> ordinary people said "their side did it" or "our side did it," or "their religion did it" or "our religion did it" or "they did it" or "we did it," when what was really meant was "defenders-of-the-state did it" or "renouncers-of-the-state did it" or "the state did it." Now and then we might make an effort and say "defender" or "renouncer," though only when attempting to enlighten outsiders, for mostly we didn't bother when it was only ourselves. "Us" and "them" was *second nature*. (*M* 22, emphasis mine)

Demonstrative words like "this" and "that" and possessive pronouns such as "our" and "their" outline the sectarian geography of the city and indicate which side people belong to. Thus, language is, as Orlaith Darling argues, fundamental in "maintaining [the] rigorously policed boundaries of identity" (9). In Middle Sister's case, since "our side," "our religions," "we," and "renouncers-of-the-state" are nearly interchangeable, these terms tie together political, religious, and communal identities. Furthermore, these identities are supposed to be instinctive. The term "second nature" underscores the

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spontaneous connections between sectarianism and people's identity. The sectarian sentiments are internalised into each individual and reinforced within communities.

Middle Sister explains how sectarian language becomes "second nature" to the members of the community with the example of the allowed and banned names:

> The banned names were understood to have become infused with the energy, the power of history, the age-old conflict, enjoinments and resisted impositions as laid down long ago in this country by that country, with the original nationality of the name now not in the running at all. . . . But *there was no list of the names that were allowed*. *Every resident was supposed to know* what was permitted based on what was not permitted. (*M* 23-24, emphasis mine)

Things as simple as one's name could have significant sectarian implications because the origins of names are associated with the history of two conflicting nations. Furthermore, "every resident" is expected to understand such implications and name their children appropriately. In other words, historical and sectarian knowledge is basic to the members of the Northern Irish community. All residents of the region are "supposed to" understand the implications of their words and actions, in the context of the historical, "age-old conflict." This example accentuates Shirlow's argument that sectarian identity is reproduced through the reinforcement of physical and verbal interactions between one community and another.

As to the verbal interactions, Natalie Wall's reading of *Milkman* helps elaborate the verbal aspect of sectarianism in Northern Irish society by dividing the confrontations into those that happen in public and those that happen in domestic spheres. Wall argues that in a society where members surveil one another, gossip can be weaponised "against a member of that community to police them back into normative

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behaviour" (71). By gossiping about one another, community members identify rule-violating behaviour and pressure individuals into complying with the rules. The boundaries between the public and private spheres are hence obscured. Therefore, even though the discussion of sectarian violence often focuses on the events that unfold in the public sphere, events that take place in the private sphere should also be included in the discussion.

Although women are traditionally constrained to the private sphere, with gossip they cross the boundary and participate in the controlling and disciplining of community members. Such a method is especially effective when the members to be disciplined are female, since women's roles and images are highly restricted in a society that is patriarchal and denominational like Northern Ireland. Social institutions such as family, religious institutions, educational systems, and mass media reinforce women's social roles, according to the analysis by Margaret Ward and Marie-Thérése McGivern in "Images of Women in Northern Ireland." Ward and McGivern argue that the first three of these social institutions reinforce the women's ideal images throughout their upbringing, and that the fourth—mass media—does so in the form of public pressure. In the representations of mass media, women who fulfil the "traditional caring role" are lauded, women "who choose other ways are accused of being abnormal," and those who do not fit into either category are ignored (70). By praising the traditional values and condemning the non-traditional ones, mass media identify role models and wrongdoers for women, who are pressured to emulate the role models.

In *Milkman*, gossip works in a similar fashion. It singles out the "beyond-the-pale" individuals who do not obey the social codes and ostracized them for their abnormal behaviour (*M* 59). For example, Middle Sister for her "reading-while-walking" (*M* 3), and "tablets girl" for slipping poisonous pills into people's drinks at

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bars (*M* 90). Another example is the seven "issue women" (*M* 142). They are not included in the list of beyond-the-pale individuals, but the public's reaction to their protest illustrates how women who step out of traditional social roles are criticised. Most women in Middle Sister's community refuse to participate in the issue women's protest about the sexual violence that happen as part of the sectarian conflicts, and "everyone was laughing at them" (*M* 162).[7] Through gossiping, the community members remind one another that they had better obey the social codes and isolate the individuals who fail to do so. These individuals are faced with circumstances similar to the women who are blacklisted in the mass media for defying their traditional social roles. By criticizing behaviour that strays from the norm, gossip serves as a mechanism that encourages and reinforces compliance with the social code.

Apart from civilians, paramilitaries are invested in keeping women in their places as well. The paramilitaries, Alper Tulgar argues, "make it their duty to shape the community and make [the community members] comply with their unreal rules" (1042). Tulgar reads *Milkman* as an honest account of the oppression that Northern Irish women endured during the Troubles, as they are forced to submit to the religious and cultural roles that are expected of them. Nevertheless, while such an interpretation is valid, it fails to recognize the lack of connection between paramilitary policing and sectarian ideologies. Northern Irish women are expected to fulfil certain expectations, such as marrying within their own community and providing reliable support for their family, but these expectations are not necessarily related to advancing the paramilitaries' sectarian goals. Instead, such expectations are deeply rooted in women's

[7] Although my analysis focuses on women, gossip is not only spread by women in *Milkman*. Men engage in and are affected by gossiping as well. For example, Middle Sister's first brother-in-law also participates in gossiping about her alleged affair with the milkman (*M* 297), and "nuclear boy" is also considered a beyond-the-pale individual for his obsession with the tension between the United States and Russia during the Cold War (*M* 61).

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domestic roles within the patriarchal social structure, in which a conservative religion collude with patriarchy to impose systemic oppression on women. In other words, although paramilitaries partake in oppressing women, their actions may be as patriarchal as they are sectarian.

The juxtaposition of sectarianism and patriarchy in Northern Ireland exacerbates the systemic gendered violence, which as Darling argues is reflected in the "linguistic non-specificity" of the novel (13). Violence is depicted "not only as an embodied fact of female experience but also as a state of choicelessness and voicelessness stemming from the epistemic boundaries imposed on women in patriarchal system of power" (4). The "choicelessness" and "voicelessness," reflected in the language that is used on women, are highlighted in *Milkman* when Middle Sister is subjected to verbal harassment but has no way to respond. This predicament, mentioned very early on in the novel, defines the struggles of Middle Sister and her female contemporaries, as she recounts how her first brother-in-law "made lewd remarks about me to me from the first moment he met me . . . . he used words, words sexual, I did not understand. He knew I didn't understand them but that I knew enough to grasp they were sexual" (*M* 1-2). Such an instance suggests that women are subjected to sexualised harassment, from which they have no means of self-protection. It is also worth noting that this episode effectively sets the tone of the novel as the readers first encounter Middle Sister and her society, where men freely wield their social superiority over women with mere words and where women struggle to even acknowledge such treatments as verbal abuse.

Women are especially vulnerable in their interactions with male authority figures, be they state officials or paramilitaries. Because of their occupation, these people have plenty of opportunities to abuse women with sexualised comments. Women's plight with male authority figures and their sexualised comments are

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elaborated in Theresa O'Keefe's *Feminist Identity Development and Activism in Revolutionary Movements*. During the Troubles, women were forced to interact with state personnel frequently, because men were often at work or in prison. Women are subjected to sexualised comments, when their homes were being raided, when they encountered the soldiers on the street, and when they visited their male family members in the prisons (30-31). The harassment signifies the power men have over women, including their ability to shame and, more importantly, to inflict harm on both the women and their families. Thus, even without explicit violence being wielded against them, women are severely oppressed in the Troubles. Furthermore, even though such oppressions are common and frequent, women do not always have the vocabulary to process their experiences and instead grow used to ignoring their traumatic experiences.

Sexualised comments are a common type of harassment Northern Irish women face, but *Milkman* meticulously illustrates how the oppression of women can come from ostensibly off-handed comments by the perpetrators. One more example of men oppressing women with words happens when Somebody McSomebody, another unwanted suitor of Middle Sister, tries to threaten her into a relationship. When he fails to impress Middle Sister with his self-endowed significance in paramilitary organisations, Somebody McSomebody threatens her by speaking her name, as Middle Sister emphasises, "here he said my name, my first name, forename" (*M* 131). Speaking out her name indicates familiarity, and familiarity between Somebody McSomebody and Middle Sister means that he can track her down and possibly her other family members to punish her non-reciprocal attitude towards his courtship. Such a *naming* practice is worth noting because it was one of the common ways in which paramilitaries, soldiers, and police officers threatened Northern Irish women. Calling women by their first names shows a "lack of anonymity," which "served to remind

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republican women that these soldiers knew where they lived and that they could be subjected to their violence at any time" (O'Keefe, "Policing" 71). Middle Sister faces a similar conundrum when she first encounters the milkman as well. When the milkman asks her to get into his car, she does not feel comfortable refusing him for this exact reason: "he knew my family for he'd named the credentials, the male people of my family" (*M* 3). Here Middle Sister succinctly explains how showing familiarity can be a veiled threat to Northern Irish women.

Oftentimes, veiled threats are made effortlessly by the perpetrators. Because of the power of paramilitaries, threats do not have to be specific. Even something as grave as death threats can be delivered in the form of casual small talks. The long passages where Middle Sister deciphers the milkman's threats towards maybe-boyfriend perfectly capture this point. The milkman first brings up the death of her sister's late ex-boyfriend, who has been killed by a car bomb, saying "I'm surprised your sister's ex, given his *profession*, didn't discover something so obviously to be found by a motor mechanic as that" (*M* 110). Although this sentence alone does not sound like a threat against Middle Sister or maybe-boyfriend, she understands the message behind the veiled threat easily. As Middle Sister elaborates, "Sister's dead ex . . . had been a plumber not a motor mechanic. Maybe-boyfriend was the motor mechanic. . . . Seamlessly he slipped back and forth, from sister's dead ex and the defender bomb that had killed him to . . . maybe-boyfriend" (*M* 110). Although the milkman does not make direct threats about harming Middle Sister and her maybe-boyfriend, in the oppressive society where people are constantly surveilled and controlled by paramilitaries, his perplexing remarks are more than enough to incite fear. Another significant implication of the milkman's comment is that it would be more than easy to make maybe-boyfriend's death appear like a sectarian attack. Middle Sister's concern makes this

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clear: “Maybe-boyfriend was to be killed under the catch-all of the political problems even if, in reality, the milkman was going to kill him out of disguised sexual jealousy over me” (*M* 115). The milkman’s position as a paramilitary intelligence officer allows him the means to carry out his threats off-handedly and make it appear as if it is fuelled by sectarian reasons.

The effectiveness of the milkman’s codified language highlights the omnipresence of sectarianism in Northern Irish society. Such language also serves as a cover for violent acts that are non-sectarian in nature. Similar to how the depiction of extreme violence obscures the personal desire for violence in *Resurrection Man*, the codified language also eclipses the self-serving agenda of the paramilitaries in *Milkman*. Middle Sister believes that people’s tendency to understand everything in sectarian terms emboldens the milkman’s harassment of her, because “the Hollywood phenomenon of sexual prowling would have been overshadowed, as everything here was overshadowed, by the main topic of conversation in this place” (*M* 183). The “main topic” is no doubt sectarian conflicts and paramilitary activities that are common in her community. Since everything and anything can and will be politicised, it is no wonder that an individual’s criminal actions can be easily disguised as political activities.

It should be noted, however, that individual paramilitaries work in tandem with the organization, and the paramilitary groups’ protection for their members is one of the reasons that milkman is able to freely harass and threaten Middle Sister. As I argued in the previous chapter, as much as paramilitary members take advantage of the organisations, the organisations also provide protection in exchange for the members’ service. Such mutualism is evident in *Milkman* as well. After Middle Sister is poisoned by tablets girl, the latter is killed, allegedly by the milkman. Tablets girl’s death is initially investigated by the paramilitary group, but the investigation is never finished,

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which leads to the community's suspicion that the milkman is involved in her death. As Middle Sister deduces,

> these people never backed off. That was their reputation, their hallmark, their stock-in-trade unstoppability. Because of this, the community came to the conclusion that it must have been one of them who'd killed her after all. Not politically, of course, because with the renouncers' sudden silence, with their quiet withdrawal. The abrupt end to their fierce, minute perquisition and especially without their usual admittance to deeds done when they had been done, tablets girl could not have been killed politically. (*M* 240)

Because the protection that organisations offer to their members is so widely acknowledged, the community easily and rightly interpret the organisation's unwillingness to continue investigating as an indicator that the milkman kills tablets girl out of personal spite.

In the above case, the milkman apparently abuses his station in the paramilitary group for personal gain. Middle Sister criticizes that, compared with the previous generations, her contemporary paramilitaries are not as dedicated to the cause of the sectarian struggle. They use paramilitary groups' resources to support a luxurious lifestyle that involves "nice clothes, nice jewellery, nice shopping, nice dinners, nice parties or lump sums in cash in secret strongboxes," as well as "groupies," meaning women who are interested in such a lifestyle (*M* 121). Middle Sister's contemporary paramilitaries clearly stray away from sectarian objectives and adopt a more luscious and hedonist lifestyle, while the earlier generations she describes are closer to the ideal paramilitary represented by Darkie Larche in *Resurrection Men*. As Middle Sister comments, "in the old days, the days of the dedicated, intractable, ruthless old-time

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renouncer, there wasn't money to spare for personal aggrandisement because all monies garnered . . . really had to be spent on the cause" (*M* 121). With this contrast, Middle Sister criticizes contemporary paramilitaries as corrupted, self-serving individuals like Somebody McSomebody and the milkman. It is clear that the milkman has no sectarian agendas in mind when he issues death threats against Middle Sister's maybe-boyfriend or when he kills tablets girl. *Milkman* lays bare the unfortunate fact that some of the atrocities of the era, although conducted in the name of sectarianism, are personal in nature, and only masqueraded as coming out of the rampant sectarianism.

II. "Psychological Enlightenment": Reclaiming Unacknowledged Violence and Traumas

My discussion of *Milkman* so far is based on the assumption that the novel is set in Northern Ireland, whereas it is written in a style that renders the assumption somewhat questionable. Throughout the text, Burns omits apparent signifiers that would tie the novel to Northern Ireland definitively. While Middle Sister's retrospective perspective sets up a temporal distance between the event of her teenage years and the present, the particular narrative of the novel creates a spatial distance between her unnamed society and Northern Ireland. In fact, Burns herself suggests that the society in *Milkman* can be read as an oppressive society other than Northern Ireland (Allardice). Both her comment and the form of the novel obscure the setting from Northern Ireland and open up space for concepts from other backgrounds to be introduced to understand Middle Sister's experience with threats and social pressure. These experiences did not qualify as violence in her youth, but with the temporal and spatial distances provided by the narrative style, they can be reconceptualized and understood differently. *Milkman* provides a new framework that acknowledges more forms of violence than the social

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standard during the Troubles would allow, thereby reclaiming women's experience.

The form of *Milkman* is one of the most common themes of scholarly research on the novel. The "lack of referentiality," Felicity Smith argues, indicates that the novel "may not be exclusively directed towards the facticity of the violence during the Troubles" (133). Instead, it targets the social and cultural factors that enabled such violence and blurs the "boundaries between external and internal threat" (133). Thus, the form of the novel challenges the conventional belief that the region's violence comes from Catholic to Protestant, or vice versa. Rather, it suggests that perpetration happens frequently within communities as well. Sharing this attention to the lack of referentiality, Patricia Malone argues that such a style name people and events "as they are, without the baggage of cultural signification" (1151). By removing the cultural signifiers, Middle Sister invalidates the sectarian explanation both for the general violence in her community and for the gendered violence that is imposed on her as an individual. Claire Kilroy goes a step further and lists all the potential "targets" of the novel. She argues that instead of explicitly calling out "paramilitary or state violence," "Burns's targets are more insidious forces: the oppressiveness of tribalism, of conformism, of religion, of patriarchy, of living with widespread distrust and permanent fear." Her comment identifies an array of oppressive factors that can exist independently from the influences of Republican-Loyalist sectarian conflict.

Reading *Milkman* in the context of Northern Ireland's sectarian past can be informative about women's experience during the Troubles, but such an approach diminishes the unique allusiveness of its language and ignores Burns's statement that *Milkman* may be read as an analogy to other "totalitarian, closed societ[ies] existing in similarly oppressive conditions" where violence is common and normalised (Allardice). On the other hand, any interpretation that focuses singularly on its style would sacrifice

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the cultural connections to Northern Ireland. To unpack the complexity of the novel requires attention to both components, style and societal background. Doing so opens the door to a more radical reading that separates the perpetrations in *Milkman* from the sectarianism in the Troubles. Such a reading is radical because it acknowledges experiences that did not qualify as violence and oppression. Ultimately, it challenges the default explanation of violence in the Troubles: sectarian grievances.

Separating violence from sectarianism foregrounds the disconnections between sectarian ideologies and perpetrations that unfold in their names. Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh argues that doing so "subverts socially imposed signifiers of identity by refusing to use the accepted terminology, choosing instead to undermine and mock the dubious political rationale used to justify the paramilitary violence by forcing words to reveal themselves truthfully" (43). The novel's omission of "signifiers of identity" allows the violence to be taken out of the context of Northern Ireland and examined without the cover of sectarianism that, as Middle Sister states, "overshadowed" everything (*M* 183). Therefore, *Milkman*'s style alleviates the influence of sectarianism and allows concepts that are foreign to Northern Irish society to be applied to Middle Sister's case. By taking her experience out of the context of Northern Ireland, Middle Sister's style of narration opens the possibility of approaching her experience, and subsequently the Troubles, from a different perspective. Her experience may not have qualified as violence during the Troubles, but it can be reclaimed as such under social standards that are more inclusive towards the definition of violence. Therefore, the approach that separates the sectarian contexts of *Milkman* from its violence adds more complexity to the interpretation of the sectarian and non-sectarian violence during the Troubles.

The definition of violence that Middle Sister understands in her teenage years is

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vastly different from her later understanding as she recounts her teenage experience. In a "hair-trigger society" like the one Middle Sister lives in her teenage years (*M* 6), perpetrations are so common that there is a hierarchy for people to gauge different forms of perpetration and decide which actions can qualify as acts of violence. As Middle Sister explains, only blatant aggressions count: "if no physically violent touch was being laid upon you, and no outright verbal insults were being levelled at you, and no taunting looks in the vicinity either, then nothing was happening" (*M* 6). With such a high bar that recognises only "physically violent touch" and "outright verbal insults," actions such as making veiled threats and stalking are marked as not serious enough and cannot be considered violence. In turn, such a strict definition makes it difficult for victims to acknowledge their experiences and related traumas. However, even without proper concepts to acknowledge them, Middle Sister is significantly influenced by her experiences with violence, through unfortunately these experiences are often dismissed as feelings, intuitions, and moods. Her grappling with the concept of shame perfectly illustrates such a struggle: "[Shame] hadn't yet entered the communal vocabulary. Certainly I knew the *feeling* of shame and I knew everybody around me knew that feeling as well. . . . At that time there was no way to grapple with or transcend it" (*M* 53). Here, Middle Sister highlights the necessity for the appropriate and sufficient vocabulary to process experiences. Her struggle indicates that even if a feeling or experience—in this case the feeling of shame—is shared by multiple or even most members of a community, they have "no way to grapple with or transcend it" because of the lack of expression. This difficulty with language, i.e., developing a sufficient vocabulary for violence and traumas, is closely connected to the systemic and gendered violence that is created by sectarianism in Middle Sister's society. Under the pretence of sectarian conflicts, perpetrators can easily oppress people without taking any actions

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that would qualify as violent acts.

Even when some experience is potentially traumatic, its impact on people can easily be overlooked because it is *not violent enough* to be acknowledged and subsequently processed. For people who are traumatised by experiences that they do not have names for, recovering can be extremely difficult, if not just impossible. Processing these nameless experiences would require a redefinition that is only possible with new perspectives and concepts. In *Milkman*, the key example of acknowledging previously unacknowledged experience is Middle Sister's efforts to reclaim her experience of being harassed by the milkman. As she is being pursued by the milkman, she cannot understand his attention to her for what it is: a form of violence. She struggles because his actions are not aggressive enough to be considered violent by the social standards, and she thus has no reason to respond aggressively to him: "he wasn't being rude . . . and I couldn't be rude because he wasn't being rude" (*M* 3). Apart from the degree of aggressiveness, Middle Sister also struggles to process the milkman's advances on her because it does not fit into the existing categories of violence. Since sexual harassment does not belong to either "physical violent touch" or "outright verbal insults" (*M* 6), Middle Sister and her contemporaries do not possess the necessary vocabulary to comprehend it.

Middle Sister may struggle with identifying the milkman's harassment as violence, but she intuitively understands that such actions are wrong. When Middle Sister reflects on the milkman's stalking of her, she raises several questions about its confusing and unreasonable nature:

> why was he acting as if he knew me, as if we knew each other, when we did not know each other? Why was he presuming I didn't mind him beside me when I did mind him beside me? Why could I just not stop

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> this running and tell this man to leave me alone? Apart from "where did he come from?" I didn't have those other thoughts until later, and I don't mean an hour later. I mean twenty years later. (*M* 5-6)

She confesses that although she initially feels as if something is wrong, these questions do not occur to her until twenty years later. As she experience the harassment, she "did not know intuition and repugnance counted, did not know [she] had a right not to like, not to have to put up with, anybody and everybody coming near" (*M* 6). The twenty-year gap underscores the struggles of processing experience that people do not have names for. Women like her do not even contemplate the possibility of objecting to abusive treatment. Since they do not have words for the discomfort engendered by their experience, the only reasonable response, also the only response available, is to accept whatever treatment they are subjected to.

The struggles with acknowledging traumatic experiences can be associated with sectarian paramilitary activities, like Middle Sister's encounters with the milkman, but the struggles can also be non-sectarian. Examples can be found in Middle Sister's comments on her father's likely depression and maybe-boyfriend's undiagnosed hoarding. Without appropriate vocabulary, traumas are easily dismissed. The lack of vocabulary for traumas not only allows them to be dismissed, but also risks stigmatisation of the victims. Middle Sister illustrates such difficulty with her father's undiagnosed depression. Throughout her life, she remembers her father as a quiet, withdrawn, and distant man. While she believes it is a symptom caused by being raped in his childhood, which he confesses on his deathbed, her father was never diagnosed by medical professionals nor understood by his own family. Her mother specifically expresses contempt towards his melancholia. Middle Sister tries to comprehend her mother's non-understanding: "Ma herself didn't get depressions, didn't either, tolerate

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depressions" (*M* 85). Even the term depression wasn't used in the old days. Instead, depression was called "moods" or being "psychological" (*M* 85). The lack of a proper term implies that such a symptom is misunderstood and neglected. The stigmatisation of topics such as depression and violence prevents victims and patients from seeking help or merely understanding themselves.

Given her retrospective perspective, Middle Sister also benefits from the content she consumes in the past twenty years. Her discussion on maybe-boyfriend's hoarding perfectly illustrates the influence of the newer vocabulary she later has access to:

> I saw a programme on TV years after I had been split from maybe-boyfriend about people who hoard things but didn't consider they hoarded things, and although nobody was hoarding car, I couldn't help noticing a similarity between what these individuals were doing all these years forward during what is now the era of psychological enlightenment, and what maybe-boyfriend was doing, way back when enlightenment didn't yet exist. (*M* 37)

This passage indicates that although maybe-boyfriend's behaviour does not fit into the stereotypes of hoarders, acquiring the knowledge of hoarding helps Middle Sister better understand the individual she used to have trouble understanding. The similarities between maybe-boyfriend and other hoarders nudge her to deduce that he also faces similar mental struggles as they do. Her deduction is verified by the later reveal of maybe-boyfriend's gay relationship with his friend, chef (*M* 292-93). Learning about hoarding is the most explicit Middle Sister is about using her vocabulary acquired later to comprehend her earlier experience. Even though people might not have understood these struggles, their lives are influenced by these experiences all the same.

Middle Sister describes the acquisition of new concepts and vocabulary about

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past traumas as “psychological enlightenment” (*M* 37). Although *Milkman* does not provide an account as to how psychological enlightenment comes about, the above example of hoarding implies that it may happen when individuals gain access to information that is not originally available to them. Developing a new understanding of past experiences, as Middle Sister does, requires an individual to be exposed to new ideas and re-think his or her previous experience. The sources of such information may be a foreign society that has different social standards and culture, or a later era where the opinions on issues have changed. Based on the discussion above, new vocabulary engenders not only the accurate portrayal of past events but also the mere acknowledgement of the events themselves. Without proper terms for the experiences, they do not exist in the public sphere and cannot be properly dealt with. People who are troubled by certain mental diseases and traumas face great hindrances when seeking help. Thus, recovery is more difficult than it needs to be. These non-sectarian traumas underscore the fact that sectarianism is not the only source of oppression and perpetration. By discussing the unacknowledged traumas, Middle Sister upends the hierarchy of violence that values physical violence over other forms of violence. Her narrative encourages a more inclusive understanding of violent traumas, and such a new understanding would enable people to finally begin to comprehend and deal with experiences that previously didn’t qualify as violence and traumas. Retrospectively recounting her teenage experiences, Middle Sister allows new vocabulary and mindsets entry into her past, where many of these concepts did not exist. In other words, the introduction of newer concepts and vocabulary unsettles the conventional portrayal and allows more traumas to be identified and, perhaps, healed.

Milkman is a novel that introduces new perspectives on the Troubles. The temporal and spatial gaps that are created by the style of *Milkman* welcome newer

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vocabulary and concepts that are not initially available to Middle Sister. Her retrospective narrative allows her to incorporate her later acquired knowledge into the recounting of her experience. The lack of cultural signifiers has a similar effect on the reading experience. By removing cultural and historical terms that tie the plot to Northern Ireland, *Milkman* invites concepts from different places and eras to be applied in the discussion of the Troubles. Burns's ambition transgresses the Northern Irish boundary and connects with other regions which suffer from oppressive regimes and political violence, regardless of the time and space they belong to. Burns's writing opens up the space for the necessary concepts and vocabulary to be developed, so that nameless experiences and emotions cab be discussed and processed.

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Conclusion

This thesis proposes an alternative approach to violence in Troubles fiction, focusing on the non-sectarian elements of the perpetrations. By shifting the emphasis to these elements, a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding violence during this period can be achieved. The second and third chapters of the take this approach to examine two contrasting portrayals of violence in *Resurrection Man* and *Milkman* respectively. Chapter two centres around the portrayal of physical violence in *Resurrection Man*. Victor and the Resurrection Men's brutal perpetrations invalidate their sectarian justification and associate their motivations with psychopathic urges and personal vanity. Although Victor shows acute understanding on the protection he receives from the organisations, his obsession with Hollywood gangster image makes him ultimately incompatible with Northern Irish paramilitary. Chapter Three, on the other hand, builds on the basis of deeply rooted sectarian violence in Northern Irish communities. Middle Sister illustrates a divided society that is oppressed by the paramilitary and self-censoring. Her narration explores the possibility of reclaiming the non-physical violence that were not always accepted as a form of violence, and the novel's style creates temporal and geographical distance from the Northern Ireland Troubles that would open up more room for discussion. These analyses outline a collaborative framework that allows perpetrators to take advantage of sectarian sentiments to commit crimes that benefit themselves.

In addition, this thesis also responds to the criticism that Troubles fiction often stigmatises paramilitaries. By reading into the complexity of perpetrations, I challenge the stereotypical portrayal of paramilitary activities. In line with sentiments in the *Belfast Agreement*, I emphasise that the perpetrations in these novels are both "between" and "within" communities (United Kingdom 18). Such an emphasis means

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that the violence during the Troubles is not always confrontational in the sectarian sense, but can sometimes happen between people with similar political and religious affiliations. Such an understanding is significant because it further suggests that violence is not always implemented to destroy the opposite forces, but also to maintain control over the civilian base that supports the paramilitaries. Instead of a simplistic "macho-man" (Pelaschiar, "Terrorists" 58), these men are capable of exploiting their stations as paramilitaries to satisfy their pathological (blood)lust. Understanding the extent of their ability not only contests the stereotypes in Troubles fiction but also invalidates the sectarian excuses for their violence.

Studying the Troubles from when and where I am means significant spatial and temporal distance between me and my subject. Such distance inevitably brings challenges, but as *Milkman* demonstrates, it can also encourage different perspectives to be incorporated into the discussion of the Troubles. I attempted to do so in chapter one by introducing Max Weber's three types of domination and Louis Althusser's Repressive and Ideological Apparatuses. These theories then are adapted to explain the collaborative relationship between paramilitary organisations and members which I elaborate in chapter two and three. *Resurrection Man* and *Milkman* both portrayed paramilitaries who know exactly how to exploit the protection and resources of their organisations. Although Victor and the milkman belong to different sects in sectarian conflicts, their perpetration similarly highlights that they act accordingly to their desires instead of organisations' agenda. Acknowledging their personal desires, I argue that these perpetrators should take on more liability for their actions, and should not be allowed to obscure their self-serving intention with sectarian grievances.

Admittedly, various types of perpetrators are simplified into one umbrella term for the sake of consistency throughout the thesis. Doing so emphasises the motivations

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of the individuals and the criminal nature of these their actions, but sacrifices the complexities between different types of perpetrators. These categories often overlap in Northern Ireland. The categorisation of a perpetrator depends on the context in which he or she is mentioned. Communities may praise paramilitary of their affiliation to be freedom fighters, but these individuals are terrorists to the government. In other words, a perpetrator can be a terrorist to some and a freedom fighter to others, and vice versa. By calling them collectively as perpetrators, this thesis may have sacrificed complexity for the sake of consistency. However, my approach also opens up the possibility of connecting Troubles fiction to the genre of crime fiction, exceeding the boundaries of Northern Ireland.

Troubles fiction refers to novels that are set in Northern Ireland and around the time of 1970s, or centres around the aftermath of the specific turbulent era. However, this genre sometimes overlaps with crime fiction, because its plot usually shares some elements of crime fiction. Despite possible sectarian motivations, perpetrations depicted in these novels are criminal in their nature. Such a connection opens up room to fold in research that is done on texts that are not Irish. Instead, these perpetrations and perpetrators in Troubles fiction may be compared to other types of perpetrators, such as gangsters, psychopathic murderers, and sexual predators. Take *Resurrection Man* and *Milkman* as examples, the perpetrations in the novels are not necessarily relevant to the perpetrators' ideological beliefs, but self-serving in their nature. As this thesis argues, reading into these criminal elements help unfold the complexities of sectarian violence.

Connecting Troubles fiction to crimes fiction may also be beneficial to the research of Troubles fiction, especially to the novels that are denounced to be "Troubles trash." Criticised for their exaggerated depiction of violence, these novels are sometimes dismissed to be second-tiered literary works. However, these texts may

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provide new insights into understanding the violence during the Troubles. Although neither *Resurrection Man* nor *Milkman* is usually associated with the label of Troubles trash, this thesis's attempt of focusing on their depiction of violence demonstrate an approach to identifying and examining the non-sectarian elements of the novels. This approach is also plausible with other Troubles fiction, and may help discover more complexities in Troubles trash, a genre that is often dismissed for its lack of complexity. Furthermore, this approach may contribute to a more complex understanding of sectarian violence during the Troubles.

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