



# THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree (e.g. PhD, MPhil, DClinPsychol) at the University of Edinburgh. Please note the following terms and conditions of use:

This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, which are retained by the thesis author, unless otherwise stated.

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author.

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.

SAVAGE THINGS

&

*She's Leaving Home*: The Role of  
Space in Three Coming-of-Age  
Novels

Daniel Shand

PhD Creative Writing  
The University of Edinburgh  
2016



# DECLARATION

This is to certify that that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Daniel Shand



# CONTENTS

Abstract	7
Savage Things	9
<i>She's Leaving Home</i>	251
Building the <i>Bildungsroman</i>	253
<i>Relative Solidity</i>	259
<i>Really Another Place</i>	275
<i>Run, Run, Run</i>	297
<i>Who I Am or What I Mean</i>	317
Works Cited	327



# ABSTRACT

This thesis comprises two pieces of work – a novel and an accompanying research paper.

The novel, *Savage Things*, is a story of a girl, removed from the home of her vulnerable mother to live with her grandparents for a summer. There, she falls in with various secondary characters: a gang of boys, the college-aged girl who lives upstairs, a housebound neighbour, and her wider family. As these relationships form, the girl feels increasingly conflicted about her own identity and her place in the world. However, the girl's mother is not finished with her and reappears as the girl begins to find her feet in this new environment, taking her on a final trip that forces them to reconsider their relationship with each other and the world around them.

The research paper, '*She's Leaving Home*', is an examination of three coming-of-age texts – Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*, Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar*, and Eugene McCabe's *Death and Nightingales*. The paper analyses all three novels via their relationship to the *Bildungsroman* as a form and questions the role that space plays in each. My discussion defines space in several ways – as a physical, psychological, and social concept. I argue that space is an essential component to the *Bildungsroman* in that it provides the context necessary for a protagonist to define

herself against and within. It considers the prominent role that land plays and how it corresponds to each text's political context – from the Depression-era transients of *Housekeeping* to the bitter land disputes of *Death and Nightingales* – while also arguing that each context assists in its protagonist's coming-of-age.

# SAVAGE THINGS



*SHE'S LEAVING HOME:*  
THE ROLE OF SPACE IN  
THREE COMING-OF-  
AGE NOVELS



# Building the *Bildungsroman*

The coming-of-age novel, or *Bildungsroman*, is a form intimately focused on the psychological development of its protagonist. For a broad definition of the *Bildungsroman* we can turn to Jerome Buckley, who describes it as “the novel of youth, the novel of education, of apprenticeship, of adolescence, of initiation” (viii). The *Bildungsroman*, then, is an attempt to capture in writing the tumultuous evolution from childhood to adulthood and this metamorphosis is the central focus in any coming-of-age novel. Susan Fraiman characterises this transformation as “a site of ideological confusion, struggle, and possibility” (31).

Space is a crucial and often overlooked aspect of the *Bildungsroman*. The protagonist’s relationship with the surrounding environment usually plays a key role in catalysing their interior metamorphosis. Esther Kleinbord Labovitz states that the protagonist in a coming-of-age story may have to “leave home at an early age to make his way independently...his real education begin[ning] in a new setting...the protagonist makes a sort of accommodation to a world he can adapt to, at which time he has left adolescence and entered maturity” (4). Labovitz is referring to the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* here, with its focus on social mobility and class ascendance, but space is still a central concern in the contemporary *Bildungsroman*.

Protagonists in late twentieth and early twenty-first century novels may not need to transplant themselves into a bustling metropolis in order to put away childish things; the spaces that allow them to grow and develop may exist within and around their current geographical locus or may exist within the protagonists themselves.

In leaving behind their physical origins, these protagonists may find themselves drifting and encountering feelings of rootlessness. The experience of transience, like many elements of the *Bildungsroman*, forces the protagonist into uncomfortable situations where they have no choice but to evolve. For example, the protagonist described by Labovitz above, intimidated by the vastness of the city, has few options available other than to change and develop psychologically to fit the new, broader, world being encountered. Protagonists who remain coddled by the familiarity of home are unlikely to engender plots which will satisfy readers used to traditional dramatic arcs.

In this thesis, I will use the term ‘physical space’ to refer to the physical, tangible worlds our protagonists inhabit – the landscapes, towns, and countries that form the homes they must leave behind, the solid ground beneath their feet. Peter Brown writes that “place in literature performs an important function in the exploration of various aspects of identity, whether personal, social, or national. The individual’s process of self-discovery is often enacted in relation to place, and through the attempts of an individual to understand it” (22). While ‘place’ may be too specific a term to describe the physical spaces mentioned above, Brown’s argument speaks to the relationship that can exist between a character’s development and their physical world. Indeed, the geographer Georges Benko argues that “In it’s relationship with space, by the work of present and past generations, humankind

creates places” (23). Furthermore, in his analysis of Irish culture and space, Gerry Smyth writes that the “subject’s sense of self...is produced from a combination of his immediate sensual perceptions and his imaginative reconstruction of a range of spaces and places – a reality” (18). This two-way association between self and physical space, and the way in which adulthood is formed in the crucible of adolescence, will be of prime importance to this thesis. It is in and against physical locations that our protagonists will struggle, adapt, and flourish, before emerging into adulthood. From Irish bogs to sun-drenched Spanish beaches, it is primarily rural landscapes that the novels discussed in this thesis are preoccupied with. At times, these landscapes serve as important metaphors, representing everything from death to freedom, ancestry to awakening, depending on the novel in question.

Political and social contexts, and spaces, also contribute to the development of the *Bildungsroman* protagonist. Kenneth Millard writes that “the contemporary novel of adolescence is often characterised by a concerted attempt to situate the protagonist in relation to historical contexts or points of origin by which individuals come to understand themselves as having been conditioned” (10). So, the *Bildungsroman* is not just a study of character development, but also an attempt to understand the role the protagonist’s social space plays in facilitating and defining that development. A social, rather than purely physical, understanding of space is a concept used by social scientists and human geographers to describe the abstract cultural zones that exist between individuals. Human geography focuses on “social, historical, economic, cultural and political” (Strohmayer & Benko xi) discourses in order to understand why “conditions of human possibility...differ across space” (ibid), and it is these discourses which shape the social spaces our protagonists

inhabit. Martina Löw argues that “space cannot be reduced to place because that would reduce a complex process to one isolated aspect” (231) and that “space is a relational arrangement of living beings and social goods” (232). Gill Valentine writes that “in the past, [space] was conceptualised as an objective physical surface with specific fixed characteristics” (7) but that “understandings of space have now been reassessed” (ibid) and “social identities and relations are recognized as producing material and symbolic or metaphorical spaces” (ibid). It is these metaphorical spaces that this thesis will consider, alongside the more tangible landscapes and communities that our protagonists leave behind. Of specific interest to this thesis will be Natter and Jones III’s argument that “hegemonic cultural practices will always attempt to fix the meaning of space” (150) and that “Space, no less than identity, will always therefore offer the potential for *tactical* refusal and resistance” (150). Therefore, I will look at the ways in which both physical and social environments offer platforms for protagonists to define themselves against.

In choosing texts for this thesis, I wanted to cover a broad range of contexts and treatments of space. I also wanted to focus on novels which would correspond to the fiction component of the thesis. As *Savage Things* is supposed to be read as a coming-of-age story it was important that the novels I researched followed a similar pattern. All three texts feature plots in which a character’s relationship to home is a central component, with their protagonists leaving behind the physical and social spaces that they grew up within.

*Housekeeping*, by Marilynne Robinson, has been studied extensively and has secured a place within the coming-of-age canon. As such, there was a large quantity of research available to me, which helped to further my understanding of the novel

and provided an introduction to the associated criticism. In reading *Housekeeping*, I was struck by Robinson's treatment of themes that had interested me in the writing of *Savage Things* – domesticity, family structures, and transience – as well as how these themes interacted with the novel's depiction of physical space and landscape.

Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar* was an essential text, due to its representation of young, working class Scottish women and the clear correlation with the fiction component of this thesis. It was also useful in that it introduced a more explicit discussion of politics and language than *Housekeeping*, themes that informed and broadened my understanding of space's role in the *Bildungsroman*.

Eugene McCabe's *Death and Nightingales* maintains the international focus of this thesis, while also encouraging an acute analysis of social space in the coming-of-age novel. Its preoccupation with family and inheritance, as well as its ability to link character development with the natural world, spoke directly to the broader plot of *Savage Things*.

This thesis will consider protagonists transplanted from familiar backgrounds and forced to navigate unfamiliar terrain; protagonists whose physical and social spaces are altered, expanded, and upturned. We will examine how the experience of being uprooted shapes these characters' identities and the role that space plays in each transformation, as well as in the *Bildungsroman* itself. How is that these spaces catalyse the protagonists' development? How can these protagonists use the spaces they inhabit to understand themselves?



# *Relative Solidity: Space and Transience in Housekeeping*

Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* concerns the story of two sisters, Ruth and Lucille. Their mother commits suicide in the novel's opening pages and the girls end up in the care of their aunt Sylvie. *Housekeeping's* plot centres on the girls' divergent relationships with their aunt, an itinerant worker; Lucille rejects Sylvie's quirks in favour of the respectable safety of domestic tranquillity, whereas Ruth, *Housekeeping's* protagonist, is fascinated by her aunt's oddness. Sylvie also provides the novel with its social context. Living during the Great Depression, Sylvie is forced to travel in order to find work and she allows her taste for transience to seep into both the family home and Ruth herself. Robinson puts the haunting Idaho landscape of the novel's setting to work in *Housekeeping* and this landscape plays a pivotal role in the novel's plot and Ruth's coming-of-age.

Domesticity – housekeeping itself – is a concept that Ruth and Sylvie continually resist, and it is this rejection that fuels Ruth's development. Labovitz argues that a rejection of the domestic space is one of the most typical and important aspects of the feminine *Bildungsroman*. She writes that the female hero should “recoil from the domestic image of womanhood” (252) and that the feminine *Bildungsroman* itself is defined by “the overt and subtle presence of patriarchy”

(249) and a rejection of it: “a dominant factor, the role of patriarchy and its rejection in the heroines’ quest for self, is decisive” (ibid). In *Housekeeping*, the rejection of traditional feminine domestic roles is bound up with sexual politics and the two are inseparable. For example, the primary setting for most of the novel is the family home, built years ago by Ruth’s grandfather – the absent patriarch – and the expectation is that Sylvie, and to a lesser extent the girls, will work at housekeeping in order to hold back the natural world that threatens to intrude.

Lucille’s burgeoning interest in beauty and fashion is written in direct opposition to Ruth’s attitude. Paula E. Geyh writes that Lucille “is a master of the distinctions of housekeeping” (108), and that “Lucille is painfully conscious of...self-observation and judgement, which she seems to have constructed by internalizing not so much the prohibitions and demands of her parents...but those of her friends and their parents” (ibid). This disparity highlights the girls’ divergent attitudes to domesticity, which comes to fruition in the novel’s ending, where Ruth imagines herself visiting Lucille as a sort of apparition. Ruth pictures herself looking through the window of their childhood home and seeing Lucille “in the kitchen, snuggling pretty daughters in her lap” (218), a vision of perfect domestic contentment, juxtaposed with Sylvie and Ruth, whose “trail was intricate...because we had no particular reason to go to one town rather than another, and no particular reason to stay anywhere, or to leave” (216). Neither lifestyle is painted in a more positive light than the other, which, according to Geyh, “suggest[s] instead...that the feminine subject might be constituted at present, at least in part, by an interaction between the two” (120). Nevertheless, Ruth’s coming-of-age forces her to make a distinct choice and it is the domestic space that she rejects. This choice is

exemplified by the scene where Lucille tries to cajole Ruth into helping her sew a jacket for a new outfit she has planned. The pattern features some unusual vocabulary and Ruth becomes distracted by the pressed flowers she finds inside a dictionary. Ruth's focus on the natural over the domestic causes the pair to come to blows and further drives them apart, leading to Lucille's decision to live with neighbours.

Sylvie is a manifestation of transience and it is her influence that encourages Ruth's rejection of the domestic. Before she came to care for the girls she rode boxcars on the railways, travelling the country in search of work, and she brings the sensibilities she learned in that previous life into the house where Ruth and Lucille live. She enters the story at suppertime: "her hair was wet, her hands were red and withered from the cold, her feet were bare except for loafers. Her raincoat was so shapeless and oversized that she must have found it on a bench" (45). From the moment the reader encounters Sylvie we know she is a woman unaccustomed to the domestic, unsuited to a life spent indoors. As time goes on the girls often see her around Fingerbone, acting strangely: "Once Lucille and I were on our way to the Post Office when we saw, in the fallow little park that memorialized war dead, Sylvie lying on a bench, her ankles and her arms crossed and a newspaper tented over her face" (105). Incidents like this offend Lucille on a fundamental level – she cringes over whether any of Fingerbone's other residents have witnessed Sylvie's behaviour. According to Geyh, "Sylvie's greatest sin is a failure to respect and maintain the intertwined limits of property and propriety...[she] fails to observe the distinctions between public and private" (116). Sylvie fails to observe these

distinctions and, by rejecting them, provides Ruth with a blueprint to do the same, with a blueprint to evolve outside of her prescribed social space.

Ruth manages to quickly discard the trappings of the 'real' world, conspiring with her sister to avoid school, sending away the police officer who comes calling when people begin to worry about Sylvie's influence on her. Soon, due to a combination of Sylvie's lax housekeeping skills and her impulse to hoard, the indoors and the outdoors begin to mix in what was once a safe, insular space – their grandmother's home:

The parlor was full of the newspapers and magazines Sylvie brought home...Then there were the cans stacked along the wall opposite the couch. Like, the newspapers, they were stacked to the ceiling...Who would think of dusting or sweeping the cobwebs down in a room used for the storage of cans and newspapers...she brought home a yellow cat with half an ear and a bulging belly, and it littered twice (180-181).

Again, Sylvie is disrupting the stasis of domesticity and providing Ruth with an alternative pathway to adulthood. The family home represents the absent patriarch, the girls' grandfather. It was he who came west, seeking employment, and claimed the land as his own: "One spring my grandfather quit his subterranean house, walked to the railroad, and took a train west. He told the ticket agent that he wanted to go to the mountains" (4). According to Geyh, "the house in modern society has generally been conceived of as female, domestic space" but goes on to discuss "the contradiction in the gendering of the house as female space...when it has simultaneously been the site for the reproduction of the patriarchal family" (106).

This tension between the masculine and the feminine is present in *Housekeeping*'s home, a space dragged together by a man but populated solely by women. Inside, Sylvie and Ruth use a disregard for housekeeping to subvert the woman's traditional domestic roles and create a space between the indoors and outdoors, where refuse and animals can be found.

In one scene, the local sheriff stops by to make sure all is well. He tries to persuade Ruth to come home with him, telling her "my wife's some cook, I tell you. We got apple pie at our house, Ruthie, the world's finest, believe me!" (206). Needless to say, Ruth rejects his offer and its implicit demand that she settle herself in a more traditional domestic space. Just before Ruth and Sylvie leave Fingerbone to begin their transient lifestyle, they attempt to set fire to their house. Ruth states that "many household things are of purely sentimental value...In the equal light of disinterested scrutiny such things are not themselves. They are transformed into pure object, and are horrible, and must be burned" (209). As she imagines the neighbours pawing over the house's contents in their absence, their foreign gaze robs these items of their importance and their significance. So the departing pair's final act, before leaving the house behind, as Ruth's metamorphosis occurs, is to attempt to obliterate the space their family's patriarch created. This act can be read as dramatising Ruth's utter rejection of a traditional domestic space, but what does their movement from home to transience suggest?

Maggie Galehouse agrees with Geyh that *Housekeeping* does not strive to undermine notions of domesticity in themselves, Ruth's story being more subtle than an outright attack. She argues that Ruth is central to this theme in the novel: "moving in both the centre and the outskirts of the Fingerbone community, Ruth is well-

equipped to outline the transition from domesticity to drifting” (120). She also suggests that the tension between the domestic and the transient is as much about time as it is about space: “Sylvie’s temporal irreverence is the source of one of her deepest conflicts with Lucille, who needs desperately to believe in permanence. While Lucille projects a future onto the present, Sylvie remains oblivious to the future and fixates, instead, on the moment she finds herself inhabiting” (133). Perhaps, then, we should consider Sylvie and Ruth’s rejection of housekeeping to be a rejection of the formality imposed by *time* itself. This rejection provides fertile ground for the coming-of-age narrative to flourish, especially, as Galehouse puts it, “movement...encourages a constant upheaval of the self, eliciting, paradoxically, both reflection and protection” (135). What else should we consider the *Bildungsroman* to be, other than an upheaval of the self, a mixing up and resettling of the childish mind? Transience, in *Housekeeping*, is both physical and psychic forward motion. As Ruth crosses the bridge out of Fingerbone, at night, she is crossing the barrier into the adult world.

Ruth’s development is catalysed by Sylvie’s introduction of transience to her life, but we can also look to Robinson’s repeated use of natural landscapes in *Housekeeping* to assist us in charting her journey. For example, Martha Ravits suggests that nature “to Ruth seems dark and duplicitous: its changing patterns represent the flux of life and the dislocations of female experience...the all-absorbing principle of death that swallows fathers and mothers without explanation or justification” (650). There is certainly some justification for this view in Ruth’s macabre descriptions of Fingerbone: “woods are as dark as stiff and as full of their own odors as the parlor of an old house. We would walk amongst those great legs,

hearing the enthralled and incessant murmurings far above our heads, like children at a funeral” (98). She visits a beach with “stones...as white as bits of tooth” (80), where “the afternoon was loud with the giant miseries of the lake” (63). Nature, in *Housekeeping*, is often depicted as an oppressive, even menacing, force, through the use of images like those quoted above, evoking the discarded pieces of a human body or the ghastly anthropomorphised groanings of the frozen lake. Nature, in *Housekeeping*, may evoke death, yet at the same time Robinson’s literary techniques avoid striking a single note. There are elements of beauty in amongst the darkness and the wet: “the lake at our feet was plain, clear water, bottomed with smooth stones or simple mud...the water touched, and touched, and touched, sifting all the little stones, jet, and white, and hazel” (112). However, with their undertones of death and decay, the physical spaces Ruth inhabits act as reminders of the various tragedies that allowed her to come of age; the tragedies that force her to move from the indoors to the outdoors, to transience.

*Housekeeping* often plays with the interior and the exterior, as seen in the quote above where Ruth compares the woods with an old house. We have already discussed the way in which Sylvie’s inability to keep the two separate marks her out as unacceptable to the inhabitants of the town, but there are other examples in *Housekeeping* of Robinson’s inclination to play with the border between inside and outside. There is a dilapidated shack on the far side of Lake Fingerbone – a building located firmly between *Housekeeping*’s two poles of domesticity and raw nature. Abandoned, decrepit, reclaimed by the land, the shack is a physical reminder of man’s futile struggle to control the wilderness he finds himself in. It is also haunted by the suggestion of children – wraiths or ghosts of some kind, described by Sylvie

and imagined by Ruth. These children act as a contrast to Ruth's own vanishing childhood and the shack is a place where an odd ghostly innocence is allowed to remain but which cannot escape from the shack and its environs.

Ruth goes on to create a direct comparison between the shack and her own home:

The appearance of relative solidity in my grandmother's house was deceptive...For all the appearance these things gave of substance and solidity, they might better be considered a dangerous weight on a frail structure. I could easily imagine the piano crashing to the cellar floor with a thrum of all its strings...A small house was better. It broke gracefully, like some ripe pod or shell (158-159).

Here we have a foreshadowing of the fate that is to befall Ruth and Sylvie's home, where Sylvie's lack of housekeeping abilities and transient nature lets the outside in – in the form of cats, refuse and a steady stream of floodwater. Ruth's fantasy also hints at her final act of destruction: the attempt to set the house on fire. Ruth also references the fact that the only true material separating their house from the shack, and therefore themselves from nature, is a shallow veneer of civility, in the form of material possessions, like a piano or books. Ruth goes to work on the shack itself: "I began pulling loose planks out" (158) because, as she explains it, "it is almost intolerable to be looked at, to be watched, when one is idle" (ibid). Here, as in our discussion of transience, of movement, as a crucial element in coming-of-age novels, Robinson has Ruth voice distaste for stasis. Ruth's destruction of the shack is linked to her destruction of her home, both of which are examples of Sylvie's transience working through her, delivering Ruth into the adult world.

Geyh writes that “the haunted house in the woods represents the future of the house on the edge of town, and so the two houses are in effect coextensive, linked and transposable across time” (114) and that “this spatial mapping of time defies the assumption of the inevitable forward motion of time” (115). Geyh’s argument suggests that the link between the two spaces may be even more complex than a simple nature to domesticity gradient. Perhaps the shack represents the archetype of all houses. Ruth herself suggests that “it might have been this house that peopled all these mountains” (157), due to the sheer volume of stories related to homesteaders in the hills around Fingerbone. This discussion of time and space is essential in understanding Ruth’s journey, for in her current state rests the seeds of adulthood; in Sylvie rests the memory of childhood and all the family’s lore. The two are also coexistent. We can also consider the scenes discussed above, where Ruth imagines visiting an adult Lucille as a ghostly apparition. The sense the reader gets is not one of two contemporary timeframes overlapping, but rather separate worlds folding across time to inhabit the same space, caused by Lucille’s ignorance of Ruth’s current status. For Lucille, Ruth remains a child and so in Ruth’s own imagination she becomes a child when she visits Lucille – her actions are childlike, she “flung the curtains and tipped the bud vase” (218). The spirits of children that inhabit the shack, imagined by Sylvie, also confuse the boundaries of time in Fingerbone. Ravitz writes that “the ghostly presences of these orphaned children supposedly lost in the wreckage are apparitions of Ruth’s prior self, previous stages of need and development now buried” (656).

This scene, then, is a place in *Housekeeping* where the novel’s various themes and plot points begin to coalesce. We have the ghostly remains of Ruth’s

childhood hiding in the shack's pit, Ruth striving to rescue them, fuelled by her dislike of remaining still and static. We have the shack acting as a midpoint between natural spaces and domestic spaces, as well as a locus of chronological confusion – does it represent the future of Ruth's home or its distant past? Perhaps both, but what is essential is that *Housekeeping* allows it to exist at the same time as its current form. It is also the point in the novel where Ruth begins to come of age. Previously she has allowed herself to be swayed by Lucille's embarrassment, almost as ashamed of Sylvie as her sister was. After visiting the shack and their journey back across the lake, Ruth embraces this side of Sylvie and begins to cultivate it in herself. That night, she dreams "that Sylvie was teaching me to walk under water. To move so slowly needed patience and grace, but she pulled me after her in the slowest waltz, and our clothes flew like the robes of painted angels" (175). She is willing to follow Sylvie anywhere, even to the bottom of the lake if needed. Lucille arrives and tells Ruth she can leave Sylvie's care if she wants to, but Ruth "could not hear a word she said" (ibid). She is still in that space beneath the waves, submerged in the water that represents her unrealised potential.

Water – specifically Lake Fingerbone – is in fact a near-constant presence in *Housekeeping*:

It is true that one is always aware of the lake in Fingerbone, or the deeps of the lake, the lightless, airless waters below...which is permeated by sunlight and sustains green life and innumerable fish, and which one can look down in the shadow of a dock and see stony, earthy bottom...above that the water suspended in sunlight, sharp as the breath of an animal (9).

This description highlights water's versatility, its ability to contain many forms and be represented by many forms. In her analysis of water's role in literature, Pamela J. Mittlefehldt compares it to the creative process itself, writing that "it is the multifaceted quality of water that makes it so appropriate as a metaphor...water is both a medium and a metaphor for women's creativity" (139-140). Ruth arrives at Fingerbone a child but with a constant presence surrounding her – that of *potential*. The water's potential for change represents this unreleased energy in Ruth. However, this is only the first of innumerable references to water and the lake in the novel.

Returning to the scene where Ruth and Sylvie steal a boat and find the abandoned shack, Ruth is left ruminating after Sylvie abandons her: "I sat down on the grass...and I put my hands over my face, and I let my skin tighten, and let the chills run in ripples" (159). Here, the movement of her skin itself is compared to water. The hollow is a space where the transformative effects of water are transferred onto dry land: "Sylvie is nowhere, and sometime it will be dark. I thought, Let them come unhouse me of this flesh, and pry this house apart" (ibid). Ruth's desire for physical transformation is plain here. She urges the ghostly children to come and rearrange her body and connects her own metamorphosis to the fate of the building through use of the word 'unhouse'.

Sonia Gernes agrees that this is a pivotal scene for Ruth. In it, Gernes argues, Ruth "proceeds to offer herself totally to the spirit world – her life, her self, her hope of consolation...Ruth's conversion to the metaphysical has taken place" (159). Nearly every adult mentioned in *Housekeeping* is either dead or absent, barring Sylvie – her grandfather is beneath the ghostly waves of Lake Fingerbone, Ruth's last memory of her mother recalls how she was "grave with the peace of the destined,

the summoned, and she seems almost an apparition” (197). Ruth’s casting off of her earthly form symbolises a casting off of her naivety and a movement into the world of adulthood – a space that often seems mysterious and impenetrable when seen through the eyes of a child. John Kirkby describes this scene in *Housekeeping* as “a longing for dissolution, for the boundaries between the human and the natural to dissolve, thus liberating the mind from old patterns and making way for new perceptions and modes of being” (104). This longing is fulfilled in the novel’s closing pages, where Ruth and Sylvie have taken up an itinerant lifestyle and are presumed dead by the people of Fingerbone. Ruth imagines going back to visit Lucille with Sylvie: “if Lucille is there, Sylvie and I have stood outside her window a thousand times, and we have thrown the side door open when she was upstairs changing beds, and we have brought in leaves, and flung the curtains and tipped the budvase...leaving behind us a strong smell of lake water” (218). Here the borders between *Housekeeping*’s twin poles of nature and domesticity, adulthood and childhood, have been worn away; Ruth is little more than a wicked spirit, little more than wind. Ruth’s prayers in the watery space around the shack have been answered and she is unhoused of her flesh.

So far this thesis has considered Ruth’s journey from childhood to adulthood, from domesticity to freedom, in purely positive terms, but the critical reaction to *Housekeeping* has been far from unanimous regarding the tone of her evolution. Christine Caver wonders “why so many scholars have downplayed the suffocating tone of the novel” (114). This reading is undeniably accurate and it would be incorrect to paint Ruth’s journey as an apotheosis or revelation. As we have seen above, death haunts the novel, from its plot to its descriptions of nature. No character

is rendered as unambiguously happy and one of the few instances of levity occurs when Sylvie and Ruth fail at igniting some curtains: “‘Damn!’ Sylvie said, and we laughed, but as little as we could” (208). Caver supposes that the novel acts as something of a Rorschach test, and that “those who are able to disregard the novel’s excruciatingly painful portrayal of the world of the abandoned child who becomes the teenaged outsider have never experienced what it is like” (114) – a legitimate hypothesis. Geyh agrees, writing that “Robinson does not sentimentalize the bonding between Sylvie and Ruth. It does not represent a utopian vision of possibilities” (665). On the other hand, Galehouse suggests that “transience is presented as a kind of Romantic manifest destiny, a gesture that seeks to encompass the wide-openness of a mind’s-eye Idaho and beyond” (135).

Thus critics disagree over how to read Ruth’s movement towards transience – should it be treated as worthy of celebration or not? Like Caver, I feel it’s crucial to attend to the tone of despair and frustration that runs throughout the entire novel. Ruth feels “jealous to the point of rage” (35) when passing by warm, well-lit homes at night; her description of grief is: “a predatory thing because birds scream at dawn with a marvellous terror, and there is, as I have said before, a deathly bitterness in the smell of ponds and ditches” (198). These ideas confirm that Ruth is not a character at peace with the world. She is a girl who hears sorrow in birdsong and smells decay in ponds. Indeed, Caver reads the character as the manifestation of trauma, due to Ruth’s “discomfort with speaking, her withdrawal from school, her inability to conform to codes of behaviour and discourse” (118). Perhaps, then, we should attend to this darker tone in Ruth’s acceptance of Sylvie’s way of life and question more thoroughly the benefits of transience.

Earlier, we looked at what transience represents in *Housekeeping* – growth, evolution, beneficial movement in space and time, a rejection of stasis. Again, we can turn to Caver for an alternative interpretation of the novel’s treatment of transience. She states that “Sylvie represents all that this family cannot articulate or resolve, Ruth’s complete acceptance of her suggests that she has surrendered her identity to a grief without time, space, or – in the absence of a larger community – the ability to heal” (126). This casts a much more negative light on Ruth’s transformation, especially on scenes depicting rebirth, such as the attempted burning of the house and their moonlit escape from Fingerbone. How much of these scenes should we read as Ruth acting with autonomy and how much as Sylvie acting through her? Thus, Caver’s reading of *Housekeeping* allows a much more nuanced understanding of Ruth’s development. Brown, discussing the relationship between characters and place, writes that “personal individuality may be said to depend upon a sense of difference in relation to place...Also at issue here is the problem of striking a balance between person and place, between having roots, and being rootless” (22). The ambiguity in *Housekeeping*’s ending and Ruth’s acceptance of transience highlight a problem with rootlessness. While transience may suggest movement and evolution, it also fails to provide a context suitable for defining oneself against. Ruth’s development was propelled by her rejection of the physical space she found herself in; in order to come of age, she had to become transient and leave it behind. However, once she has accepted this lifestyle, there is no longer anything to rebel or to define herself against. It is for this reason that Ruth is little more than a ghost at the novel’s end, aligning herself with the memories of her

deceased relatives: “Sylvie and I do not flounce in through the door...My mother, likewise, is not there...We are nowhere in Boston” (218).

*Housekeeping*, I would suggest, takes the themes and formal elements of the traditional *Bildungsroman* and updates them in two key ways. But what do I mean by a ‘traditional *Bildungsroman*’? According to Franco Moretti, “narrative transformations [in any *Bildungsroman*] have meanings insofar as they lead to a particularly marked ending: one that establishes a classification different from the initial one but nonetheless perfectly clear and stable” (557). In short, Moretti argues that the *Bildungsroman* is characterised by a clear transformation, one where the product is concretely different from its ingredients. Labovitz claims that in the traditional *Bildungsroman* “heroines who did attempt an identity of self were generally halted before they could complete the journey to selfhood, thus militating against their designation as *Bildungsroman* heroines” (5). By focusing on these two features of the *Bildungsroman* – the narrative desire for a definitive transformation and the stymying of female heroines – we can understand at once the innovative work that *Housekeeping* does and how it updates the *Bildungsroman*. The novel contains almost no male voices and certainly none capable of hindering Ruth’s progress. While her psychological journey is not necessarily a positive one, there can be little doubt she completes one by the novel’s end. In some ways Moretti’s definition can be successfully applied to *Housekeeping*, as Ruth is very much a different character at the end of the novel. However, there is no rags-to-riches transformation to be found here; in fact, there are no riches whatsoever to be found in this Depression-era world of itinerants riding boxcars, looking for work, and handbuilt homes that can barely keep the elements out. Robinson muddies the waters

of character development and Moretti is unlikely to find his 'perfectly clear and stable' transformation here.

Through Robinson's treatment of time and space, transience and domesticity, *Housekeeping* presents a story of transformation that does not seek to moralise or interpret the metamorphosis of its protagonist in any way at all. Transience, in *Housekeeping*, can be read as a rejection of social mores – for example, Sylvie's refusal to keep an ordered home, or Ruth and Lucille's extended truancy. It can be a liberating refusal to accept stasis. However, it can also be read as a rootlessness that engenders Ruth's ghostly insubstantiality. Are freedom and movement poor substitutes in a life where comfort and stability are no longer options? Robinson's novel does not answer this question, but forces readers to confront it. Natural spaces are full of numinous beauty, but they are also tainted by death. In Fingerbone the ice groans, the trees are limbs and pond water has the sickly aftertaste of decomposition. Likewise, domesticity is the strange tenderness of Ruth's weary aunts and her grandmother's knick-knacks hidden around the house, but domesticity also enmeshes women in a patriarchal system that provides no alternative for those who do not fit the mould. Domesticity is prying neighbours and distant sisters.

By the novel's end, when Ruth and Sylvie are on the road, dreaming their ghostly dreams, we readers are unsure whether what we see is a victory or a defeat. All we know is that a change has certainly come.

## *Really Another Place: The Politics of Space in Morvern Callar*

A similarly ambiguous ending awaits us at the close of Warner's 1995 novel *Morvern Callar*, another *Bildungsroman* with a strong but elusive female protagonist. Set on Scotland's west coast in a town known only as the Port, it tells the story of the eponymous Morvern, whose life is changed after she claims authorship of a novel written by her deceased boyfriend and uses the resulting funds to spend time abroad. Like *Housekeeping*, the world of *Morvern Callar* is rural and, at times, ghostly and surreal. Morvern shares some similarities with Robinson's protagonist, Ruth, in that she rarely communicates verbally and that she has a strong connection to the landscape, which plays a key role in shaping her development.

This reluctance to communicate verbally is reflected in her narration's seemingly affectless response to horrific circumstances. On discovering her boyfriend's body after his suicide, she describes how "he'd near chopped off his hand with the meat cleaver. He couldn't object so I lit a Silk Cut. A sort of wave of something was going across me" (1). This affectless response is typical of the novel's earliest sections, which walks a tightrope between enigmatically reserved and creepily cool. Morvern fails to alert the authorities to her boyfriend's death and

instead hoists his body up to a skylight on a model train set: “You saw the railway line and at the top of the stairs the hotel with the pointing-up tower, the graveyard path above and the tiny Tree Church flowered as per usual cause of the always summerness of the model village” (51). She heaves the body onto the model and “opened both skylights with the hook. Two rectangles of moonlight were on His bare body” (53). Her actions here are about control and the process of its transfer from those who have it to those who do not. As we will see, the novel is about a young woman’s attempts to wrestle a measure of control from a world that seeks to deny her any, starting with this initial interaction with her deceased boyfriend. The novel’s language portrays it as an act of creation, one where the protagonist’s actions give birth to entirely new spaces – in this case the attic being altered into something like a morgue – so that she might escape the social space she has been forced to live within. As her boyfriend writes in his suicide note: “KEEP YOUR CONSCIENCE IMMACULATE AND LIVE THE LIFE PEOPLE LIKE ME HAVE DENIED YOU. YOU ARE BETTER THAN US” (82).

Critics have argued that this attitude to the boyfriend’s death is a result of the social space she inhabits. Sophy Dale suggests that “the most immediate reason behind her coolness when faced with his dead body comes from the fact that her work in the supermarket has brutalized her – she is used to handling carcasses and well used to the sight of blood” (50) and that “this aspect of the novel, the fact that it’s about someone trying to escape from a mind-numbing, desensitizing job, has been ignored” (52). In hiding her boyfriend’s body, Morvern is simply utilising the skills her work has provided her with. This brutality, as Dale notes, is clear from the descriptions of her employment: “I used to work in the meat. You cleaned up each

night. Afterwards you smelled of blood and it was under your nails as you lifted the glass near your nose in the pub. You pulled the bleeding plastic bag of gubbins, cut open by bones, to the service lift. Blood spoiled three pairs of shoes” (11-12). The creation of the macabre space in the attic is therefore an act of rebellion, one she enacts using the tools that her work has forced her to develop – namely her ability to stomach the handling of a carcass, to deal with ‘gubbins’. By refusing to report her boyfriend’s death, she is also rebelling against her social constraints, something she will continue to do throughout the novel.

Morvern also manages to wrestle some freedom back via her love of music. Barely a page goes by without a reference to what she is listening to and in the novel’s closing sections she travels to Spain, attending night-long raves. Critics have argued explicitly feminist readings to the novel’s treatment of music. Carole Jones states that “the rave scene was portrayed in terms of gender equality, represented in the androgynous, baggy clothes, the emphasis on dancing, traditionally a feminised activity” (163). Jones has some issues with this characterisation but it is unarguable that, in *Morvern Callar*, music and female freedom are intrinsically linked. For example, after her creation of the attic-morgue space, Morvern says: “I climbed down leaving the hatch open. I put on some of my own music rather than His: Spiral Tribe Sound System Sirius 23 and tape of some DJs, that bootleg of The Mutoid Waste Company too” (53). Dale argues that this specificity when naming musical artists is also tied into the novel’s treatment of economics: “naming gives power, and implies ownership, which is immensely important to Morvern. Money matters to her in a way which is alien to anyone who has never had to worry about having to stretch a tiny income” (52). The significance of her choice in music here is therefore twofold.

Firstly, it is significant that as soon as the boyfriend is no longer present in the flat she begins to play her own, reclaimed music. She fills this space with the music that represents herself. Secondly, her ability to both own and name the brands and music she has chosen allows her a small measure of autonomy. Her economic situation “is not something Morvern explicitly discusses. It’s too obvious for her to mention” (Dale 49) but it is clear that in many ways her coming-of-age investigates the effects of poverty on an individual’s psyche and how a character’s social space can drive her development. While it’s true that its protagonist does have a job and a place to live, *Morvern Callar* emphasises the psychological effect a lack of money can have. Red Hanna states that the “hidden fact of our world is that there’s no point in having desire unless you’ve money. Every desire is transformed into sour dreams” (45). This quote illustrates that Morvern’s journey will be one where she will need to escape her economic situation by any means necessary. This, then, takes us back to Brown’s claim that “the individual’s process of self-discovery is often enacted in relation to place, and through the attempts of an individual to understand it” (22). Here, social space is as relevant to the individual’s self-discovery as the physical is and, in *Morvern Callar*, the characters’ social space is built upon these ‘sour dreams’.

Some critics, such as Carole Jones, have read Morvern’s rebellion from a feminist, rather than just economic, perspective. For example, the end of the scene where she hoists the boyfriend’s body up into the ceiling:

As I wound the handle, the model on its baseboard rose smoothly up, taking the weight of His body nearer the skylights, then it stopped under the rafter, snow flakes twirling down on the summer land, coating the sides of the pass, layering the village roofs and the

giant man, layering the flowered rood of the Tree Church above  
Him. Some moonlight came through the skylights with the soft fall  
and it shone on the snow (54).

Here, her power of creation is realised, with the introduction of actual weather to the gruesome tableau she has fashioned. Life is breathed into this landscape of death and stasis via the softly falling snow and the moonlight shining on it. However, Jones writes that the co-opting of the boyfriend's landscape is also a subversion of his male "exercise in containment and control" (174), describing the process as a "spectacular act of vandalism, Morvern...destroys the miniature world of the model village using its own creator" (175). The creation of the attic space and her recreation of the model village are merely the beginnings of the coming-of-age process she undergoes in *Morvern Callar*, but in these striking images and scenes we can begin to appreciate both the difficulties she finds herself in and the ways in which she will seek to the escape them. Jones argues that Morvern's "desire is for escape not control" (174) but as we will see more and more, the way she comes of age is via escape *through* control.

The burial of the boyfriend's remains in the wild spaces outside of the Port can also be read as a subversion of the masculine – or at least an anti-authoritarian response – in that she operates outside the usual social constraints and does not report her boyfriend's death. In Warner's novel, something new is created out of these wild spaces by the alteration of its contents. Pieces of human body are deposited across the hillside, changing it from something cold and remote into something that is both close and ghastly. With its phallic connotations, its savage appearance, and its association with conquest, the mountain can read as a masculine

image, but one that Morvern is subverting. Its appearance is intimidating: “Dont you get scared here? says Lanna looking up Beinn Mheadhonach” (98). Morvern’s stoic response: “Nut” (ibid). As in the attic, her work has trained her and her attitude is utilitarian; the numinous beauty of the highlands is less important than how she can put it to use. This is not always the case with *Housekeeping*, where the land and the water have an independence, a superiority perhaps, to the characters of the novel.

A strong connection is formed between the gigantic man atop the miniature landscape – the boyfriend on the train set – and the dissected man inside the giant landscape. Both of these are entirely new spaces; both feature a subversion of the masculine at the expense of the increasingly powerful feminine; both feature experiments with scale and are examples of the protagonist exhibiting an independence from authority. Dale argues that the world of *Morvern Callar* is “a culture which is full of brutality, which Warner characterizes as male brutality against women” (54). Dale investigates numerous examples of male brutality in the novel, but what interests me more is the way in which Morvern reacts against this brutality with her own form of quiet violence and the repeated subversion and perversion of this masculine power. This is a power rooted in creation rather than in destruction – creation carried out away from the social space she had been provided with and beyond the rules of law, official institutions and procedures. She refuses to be constrained by her social space, rebelling against it and facilitating her own development.

Despite containing some of the novel’s most upsetting imagery, the tone in the wilderness scene is extremely upbeat: “the land was flattening out I was getting so high up and a hot haze had appeared in the clear bright light of morning (89),

“You could smell the night leaving the earth and everything waking. An ancient-looking sun was drumming up the loch off of the water. Another scorcher starting. I climbed out the tent and stretched my hands-to-the-high-sky” (95-96). These descriptions are a marked contrast to the urban spaces that have been depicted previously and the tone is more positive than ever: “To the happy sound of Salif Keita doing Nyanafin I rounded the great bank of Beinn Mheadhonach, pushing down on my tanned legs. The sun was hot on my hair as His chopped-off head bumped away against my back” (88). Even this most grizzly of activities is undercut by her narration, which repeats the description of the boyfriend’s head in mentioning “chopped-off jeans” (88) – meaning shorts trimmed from longer-legged denims. She proceeds to bury the boyfriend’s dissected body parts until “two arms and a leg were buried on the cliff above the sycamore tree and higher up the torso and leg would be helping flower the sheets of bluebells below the dripping rocks. All across the land bits of Him were buried” (90-91). Again, this section is remarkable for the lack of apparent emotion. Once her work is over she says: “I dozed in the heat then sat up on my elbows and set the Walkman going, leaning and just looking straight ahead at nothing special” (93).

This rural space is the first where she is not defined in relationship to anyone but herself, until her friend Lanna shows up, prompting Morvern to “sigh” (97) and shake her head, asking, “How did you find me?” (ibid). She does not appear to be relieved to see her companion and remarks, “It’s weird hearing my voice out loud” (99). It is only now that the reader appreciates what a solitary creature Morvern is, how happy she was digging graves in the preceding pages. Like in *Housekeeping*, a special relationship is shown to exist between the characters and the wildest of

wildernesses. Dale argues that this connection to the spaces around the Port serves to remove Morvern from her social space further, writing that “this sense of a timeless landscape, along with Morvern’s quality of being outside the law, and thus in some ways not constrained by the normal “rules” of human social behaviour, may tie in with Warner’s desire to make her in some ways a mythical figure” (66). This resonates with Robinson’s characterisation of Ruth, and could be a description of that character as well. Robinson and Warner have both utilised unrefined natural spaces to serve as something of a springboard for their characters’ transformations. In *Morvern Callar*, they act as an alternative to the social space of poverty and menial employment – a world that Morvern must be left behind.

As such, nearly the entire second half of the novel is given over to her travels away from the Port and, as she travels, her narrative voice flourishes. However, her reaction to the first trip is somewhat bittersweet. The final straw seems to be a poolside entertainment where men and women are tied together in a large sack and required to swap swimming costumes – something she calls “a living hell on earth” (142). When ice is produced as a tool for use in the “NIPPLE ERECTION CONTEST” (144), she makes her escape: “I started running up the crazy paving and took the lift to the tenth floor” (ibid). Rachel Carroll argues that part of Morvern’s reaction to this component of the holiday is that it is too much like work. She writes that “the disciplinary regimes of work also extend to the recreational games organised by the Youth Med couriers...the youngsters are as regimented in their leisure as they presumably are in their working lives” (98). If we view her journey through the lens of space, control, and creation, this activity represents both a vaguely unappealing sex game as well as an extension of the dreary conformity that

characterises the social spaces Morvern has been trying to escape from. To find a freer space, she must leave the resort behind.

It is only once she is alone and able to commune more naturally with the world around her that her narrative voice begins to change. It would not be correct to describe this change as an improvement, but a careful reading shows a definite increase in the prose's sensuality. Morvern makes it clear that something has changed in her perception between the Port and this anonymous Spanish town:

where you would expect a jumble of hills and a circular folly above a port: none. Where you would expect piers with a seawall between and an esplanade of hotels beyond: none. Where you would expect stone houses hunched round a horseshoe of bay with The Complex tucked away round a back: none. The resort I was looking at was really another place (151).

The beauty and the loneliness of this land make it the ideal space for her to grow within, as the economic pressures of the Port are no longer an issue. We can feel her appreciation in the detail she gives. The sunlight on her ceiling: "it wasn't scales of silver vibrating on it: it was glow from a sunset" (152). On lying on her bedsheets nude: "you could hear the cutlery below the shutters and also the waves lushing up on the sand" (153). Word choices like these, such as 'glow' and 'lushing' contribute to this feeling of peaceful sensuality. Critics such as Dale have read *Morvern Callar*'s emphasis on the senses as something of a replacement for the novel's concealed emotions. She writes that Morvern "is habitually silent in company, and withholds her emotions even in the text... what she writes about instead of emotion is sensation... water, and swimming in particular, brings out Morvern's most sensuous

prose” (40). At this point, the end of the novel’s initial foreign trip, we can start to feel our protagonist relax, to open up and to grow. We feel her pleasure in the lack of work and the distance from her cold homeland, that restrictive social space. We can also compare her activities in this landscape with one back home. Her relationship with the wilderness around the Port was extremely utilitarian – influenced by a ruthlessness her poverty forced her to learn, she uses the mountainside as a hiding place for her boyfriend’s remains. In rural Spain, her reaction is different. Here, the land need have no utility.

Language, and its relationship to the novel’s spaces, is a key element in the novel’s narrative voice. Dale describes Warner adhering to “standard orthography – he rarely alters the standard spelling of a word in order to indicate a precise pronunciation, instead using standard orthography to represent those occasions when Morvern uses a slightly different word from the norm” (22). Examples of this are the use of the –ish or –ness suffixes, or the description of a bright afternoon as “open-skylights-day” (78). This also carries over to the rhythm of the text, the use of contractions, such as: “So much sweat was pouring down the dead décolleté top I’d on you’d have been as well taking it off” (144). In this unremarkable sentence, there is no language explicitly rendered into Scots. However, the awkward repetition of the contracted ‘had’ on ‘I’d’ and ‘you’d’, in addition to the extended use of the ‘d’ sound – five times within eight words – provides the prose with a rhythm and pace evocative of a real, spoken language. Morvern is always quick to note divisions in what she sees as *her* language, the language transcribed on the page, and those belonging to others – her supervisor at work has a “south” (6) accent, a customer has a “well-to-do south voice” (10), and boys in the pub have “Central Belt accents” (17).

By the text's end we understand that the novel itself is a quasi-epistolary document, composed by its protagonist, and that its treatment of Scots is simply her interpretation of the language that she owns.

During Morvern's first trip to Spain she describes her interactions with Spanish speakers, and in doing so reveals more of her own attitude to language and space: "One beer and...? I goes. The taxi driver says something in his words" (122), "Slainte, I goes and he says his word" (ibid), and "When I paid the taxi driver she kissed me each cheek and goes, Bye bye, in my words" (150). Here, we can discern something of her attitude to language. In ascribing ownership to the words and phrases used, she implies a personal, direct, intimate relationship between speech and speaker. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, it corresponds to the political dimension in texts such as Warner's that seek to elevate non-dominant languages like Scots. Warner himself has described 'correct' English as "an enshrined language that represents the values of an elite status quo, which is always in opposition to the dialects, and spoken languages of the masses or/and of linguistic minorities" (Dale 27). In addition, this connection between language and person emphasises that by considering one we are also considering the other. A person's speech, the words that they own, are their representative, and vice-versa.

Jeremy Scott describes Morvern's muted reactions as "highly idiosyncractic and individualised...attempting to represent the ipseity of a particular character" (ibid). While it is true that her voice is an accurate rendition of a certain kind of Scottish voice and character – though Warner's attention tends to land on rhythm and tone, rather than vernacular transcription – it is essential in understanding the other functions her lack of emotion performs. Scott goes on:

the most engaging (and paradoxical) use of Morvern's voice comes in the highly descriptive passages of the novel. Morvern's rendering of the environs of the port is notable in this respect, making use of evocative and resonant place names and vivid descriptions of colour, sounds and smells – in part as a screen which hides any deeper engagement with 'real' emotions (135).

It is true that the reader comes across Morvern in the moments immediately following what must be the biggest shock of her life. Perhaps, like Robinson's Ruth, her voice represents a consciousness ringing with unresolved trauma, unable to summon the strength to examine closely any emotion that rises to the surface; a mind hopping from one concrete, corporeal image or idea to the next, never stopping to penetrate Scott's 'screen', much as she hops "from stone to stone across the river not getting the boots wet" (Warner 88), creating an interesting visual representation of this reading of her voice.

Scott goes on to argue "that Warner never allows his characters to feel in any 'authentic' manner" (135), but Morvern does feel – explicitly so. Among the tics of her narrative voice is the refrain of "the wave of something" (1, 26) going across her or simply: "the feeling was going across me" (105). This is her method for describing powerful yet unnameable emotions. It is therefore inaccurate to describe her emotions as inauthentic or absent. The feelings are so big, so overwhelming that Morvern sees little point in trying to articulate such vast concepts. It is similar to the way she doesn't make reference to or complain about her economic circumstances. What would the point be in talking about something so obvious, so huge and so overwhelming?

Between her two trips away, she makes a brief visit to London in order to finalise the publishing deal she has signed for her boyfriend's novel. There she meets with two publishing executives, Tom and Susan. In this transitory space language is once again brought to the fore. Morvern describes the hollowness of the executives' dialogue: "Tom or Susan would ask a question looking at you, you would shrug your shoulders with a bottle of beer in the mouth and they would answer the question themselves then argue about it. They didn't tell stories they just discussed" (164). This sits in stark contrast to her life in the Port, where the majority of conversation is based on the sharing of anecdotes and the recollection of past events, both humorous and melancholic. Dale reads this as connecting to the political dimension of the novel's representation of language, writing that "Morvern finds a different – and impoverished – oral culture when she goes down to London" (30). Dale notes the irony of "two publishers, who make their living from the dissemination of *written* culture" (ibid) being described as people who don't tell stories. This final depiction of 'correct' language usage, represented by the publishers, being somewhat bereft of sentimental legitimacy further consolidates Morvern's own relationship with language as one that is intrinsically connected to her ipseity.

Couris Jean, Lanna's grandmother, is a character who exemplifies the novel's connection between language and space. She says that, "I never spoke for four year, till I was your age. When I married my husband he'd never heard my voice" (39), and goes on to explain why:

The sea was smooth right out. I was in my birthday suit and no person was going to be around at that unearthly hour...I was getting a real feeling in my tummy, all awful alive, but the dogs

started to howl up behind the gate, then out the water in front of me in that bluey light, up rose the great white horse moving its head from side to side as it came over the sand towards me and more horses came bursting out the water, rearing up onto the beach, a dozen horses, two dozen horses, horses running in front of me and splashing drops of salty water on my face while two score more horses came out the sea, running in front of me and running behind me (40).

This causes her to lose the power of speech for, as she says, four years. She explains that the fright of seeing the ghostly horses caused it. Later, when Morvern is home during her two trips abroad, she learns that Couris Jean has died. Her last words were unrecorded because, according to Lanna, “Couris Jean’s last words were in Gaelic and my Mum doesn’t know any Gaelic” (183). Couris Jean’s story emphasises the importance of language in *Morvern Callar*, forging an important connection between speech, expression, and an emergence into adulthood. It was not until Couris Jean was Morvern’s age that she spoke again and Morvern, as she moves through the novel’s spaces, will soon undergo a similar change. Her trips to Spain and away from the Port will result in her eventual ability to give voice to her emotions.

It is during the final trip to Spain, funded by her boyfriend’s father’s inheritance, that her transformation becomes truly apparent and the reader begins to appreciate the change that has taken place in her. For example, her description of the food she eats: “I sighed and scraped the remainder lettuce onto my plate, then, using the fork I held the tomato and capsicum on the dish, letting the dressing run out: peacocks’ eyes of olive oil skimming atop the vinegar, dapples of black pepper and

tawny streaks of mustard popped onto the biggest leaf of lettuce” (200). She goes into extreme detail, focusing on tiny pieces of beauty in places as humdrum as a plate of salad or glass of cola: “The ice in the drink was silvery at the top; where the ice cubes were thickest it lightened the brown and bronzey colours of the drink” (197). The reader is left with the impression that she is so relaxed, so happy, that beauty appears to her wherever she looks. Or perhaps, because she is able to stop and notice these things, happiness is the natural outcome. Morvern herself notes that “Time was the only thing [she] had been able to buy” (188), and this is reflected in the sensuality of the language. It is only when she escapes her restrictive social space back home and moves into a space of freedom that these linguistic choices come to the fore.

Away from the social constraints of the Port, nearly every paragraph is preoccupied with the sensuality of the landscape: “I looked beyond the beach, staring at the sea and perfect horizon. The loveliness of that blue blemishless sky like a smooth fabric; the sharp blades of faraway yacht sails seemed to be drawing across and trying to slice into that fabric” (191). Here, the word and sound choice is worth considering. There is alliteration of the *b* sound in ‘blue’, ‘blemishless’ and ‘blades’, as well as repeated use of the *s* sound in ‘loveliness’, ‘blemishless’, ‘sky’, ‘smooth’, ‘blades’, ‘sails’, ‘seemed’, ‘across’ and ‘slice’. The effect is one of extreme peace, with those endless *ss* almost like the tide on shingle, while the *bs* give the sensation of parting lips. These literary tools, as well as Morvern’s use of the yacht/blade and sky/fabric metaphors, are rarely found in the novel’s earlier sections and serve here to emphasise her relaxed, reflective state of mind.

As mentioned previously, a large portion of the novel's closing chapters are given over to describing Morvern's experiences at raves – another space where the lack of economic and social restriction allows Morvern to develop. This is revealed in much the same manner as previous examples and with similar results – confirmation through use of language that the protagonist has experienced a profound change: “A dreamy repeating pulse began. Immersed in the darkness...Sometimes torso and arms were everything else: the bleepers or synth patterns; sometimes I stretched up fingers – my keys banging, banging against collarbone. My hair was slapping about, it got so sodden with sweatness and the mineral water I'd tip over it” (203) and “In the curved corridor you saw sweat all up my legs. My tummy that showed under the rave top was shiny and violent-looking with sweat” (204). Once again her voice is imbued with an essential sensuality, emphasised with the still-numerous *s* sounds (e.g. slapping, sodden, sweatness) and the use of watery metaphor in words like ‘immersed’. For Jones, this emergent personality is firmly tied to the rave and its music. She writes that “music provides a simulation of a simple, personal and unmediated experience and transports her to a realm of emotion. Her aim is to prolong these moments and this becomes possible through the rave scene” (176). Whatever has been said about Morvern's relationship with her own emotions, there is no denying that it is a complex one. Music makes it less so. It brings her closer to herself and it is in these closing sections that we begin to see her experience emotion – or to describe it anyway – in such bald terms.

This is especially true of one of the last sections set in Spain. In it, she goes swimming during the early morning in a scene reminiscent of Couris Jean's description of horses emerging from the ocean in the dead of night. As she climbs the

hill away from the beach she provides the most unguarded glimpse into her inner self as she spots a drive-in cinema screen in the distance:

The massive pale lips of a girl seemed to turn up to the night sky ready for kissing and you could see the light from the screen flicker on the leaves. I turned facing the sea. You heard a drip come off of my hair. I closed my eyes there in the quietness just breathing in and breathing in. I hadn't slept for three days so I could know every minute of that happiness that I never even dared dream I had the right (210).

It is not clear if this is the first of the reader being allowed access to this side of Morvern, or even if this is the first of her allowing herself said access. However, what is clear is that this is an unprecedented acknowledgment of her emotions. In this paragraph, and in this new, economically free space, her emergent use of language collides with her admission to create the most significant piece of prose in the text. We have images of lips, signifying both speech and beauty, combined with the water that drips from her head and swells in the ocean. The focus on small details is so concentrated that even her breath becomes something of note. All of this culminates in a moment of apotheosis, in a space where she is most herself and most able to express herself.

Not all critics would agree with this reading. Some feel that the language used is somehow beyond Morvern and represents Warner fumbling in his attempt to capture the essence of a working class voice. Scott, for example, calls this the Morvern Paradox and writes that "as the 'authentic voice' (such as it can be discerned at all) runs out of lexical space (or range of expression), so the writerly

sensibility of Warner takes over. The moments of beauty are explicitly ‘stage-managed’, imposed by an author rather than emanating from an intricately defined and rendered character” (137-138). In her monograph on the novel, Dale quotes the reviewer William Fiennes: “Morvern’s voice has been praised for its originality, but being original is not the same as being true. Her prose is a trick, an artful ventriloquism” (32). Both critics take issue with the range of Morvern’s language and, by extension, the depth of her feeling. However, their arguments fall flat due to a lack of evidence from the text. What is it about her voice that is incongruous? Fiennes points to the use of the word ‘tousled’, deeming it to be inappropriately artful; Dale sardonically responds that this “reveals an ignorance of the language of women’s magazines and their features on hairstyles” (32). Morvern rarely, if ever, uses individual words that do not resonate with what the reader knows of her background and character. Instead, she uses seemingly simplistic language to describe large, universal concepts – happiness, poverty, death. For example, she recalls the day of her foster mother’s funeral, when she “asked for tea and was given it with no milk or sugar then was too upset to say about its bitter taste” (29), before visiting the grave itself, where her foster father “took [her] by the shoulders when [she] wouldn’t leave” (30). These are the only hints towards her emotions on that unhappy occasion, yet the reader is left in little doubt as to the depth of her grief. This is in keeping with her standard treatment of these universal concepts – concepts that some may feel she is not educated enough to articulate. Ironically, this plays directly into her pivotal moment of transcendental realisation: she has a right to the same happiness as anyone else, and the right to express it too.

*Morvern Callar* ends back in the countryside outside of the Port, with Morvern trekking through the wintery snow on her way back to town. This section is extremely reminiscent of *Housekeeping*, especially the moment when she crosses a viaduct: “I gave a big shiver then crossed the rest of the viaduct, lay my hands down on the dark wood platform to bunk myself onto it and swung my legs round mankying the jeans up even more” (218). The protagonist crossing a structure at night reminds the reader of Ruth’s flight from Fingerbone over the bridge. Both scenes have an air of the subversive as neither route is designed for foot traffic and both serve to emphasise their characters’ distance from standard society. The difference here is that Morvern is coming back into civilisation rather than away from it. On the novel’s final page we also find out that she has conceived a baby while in Spain:

Down in the darkened village, lights went on behind some windows and the streetlamps juddered out pink haloes as they came to life. You saw the lights of the next village do the same, far across the concession lands.

I placed both hands on my tummy at the life there, the life growing right in there. The child of the raves. (229).

The reader is immediately struck by her resilience in this final chapter as she crosses the barren, freezing land despite her fragile condition. This is a different character to the one we were introduced to earlier in the novel – hardier, more mature, and articulate. The word choice that surrounds this revelation is also telling. Reference to ‘haloes’ colour Morvern in a beatific light, with the image of streetlamps springing to life as she enters the landscape contributing to an idea of her being otherworldly, as

though the life she contains within her is also bringing life to the dead space she walks across.

Morvern has moved into a new phase of life – motherhood – and has unarguably come of age. Some critics have read a political element into this ending. Carroll, for example, describes the theft of the boyfriend’s novel as an unauthorised reproduction, writing that “Morvern violates the legitimising name of her unnamed boyfriend, appropriating his intellectual property and the capital which it accrues” (91). She goes on to draw a direct link between this act and her pregnancy, describing the latter as “illustrating the issues at stake in the regulation of female reproductive sexuality and the uneven distribution of heterosexual privilege” (105). This reading therefore defines Morvern’s pregnancy, like nearly every aspect of her character and actions, as rebellious – acting in defiance of preordained modes of feminine behaviour. Because she does not deign to name or recognise a father, or author, she is imbued with a sense of power and complete independence as a character.

At the novel’s end, as we leave Morvern “walking forwards into that night” (229), she finds herself in the village her boyfriend’s model was based on: “I quickly crossed the snowy road. It didnt have one set of vehicle tracks in it. From the model I remembered the route across the graveyards but there’d been changes. Through the snow I felt the rise and fall of new graves under my feet” (227). She is a native of this space, having studied and shaped its simulacrum, and can tell the terrain has been altered, even through a heavy snowfall. This space reaches out to her too, offering shelter, succour – she finds the church open and sleeps inside; after she vomits, “the snow was thawing and drops of melty water were falling through the

thatched roof making me better” (228). She has come of age whilst abroad and the dark landscape reflects this. In the novel’s opening, the employment Morvern’s social space allowed her was both gruesome and menial; the spaces she created for herself were negligible. Now they have become gigantic and she has the means to articulate how this makes her feel: “I lit the lighter and lifted up the big notebook. I had to grip the pen good and tight while writing a few sentences” (228). Morvern has made for herself a space big enough to live within, big enough to create within.



## *Run, Run, Run: Owning Space in Death and Nightingales*

Eugene McCabe's *Death and Nightingales* also places a great importance on physical and social space in depicting its young female protagonist. Despite its truncated coverage of Elizabeth Winters' life – a single day – *Death and Nightingales* can certainly be considered as a *Bildungsroman*, due to the severity of change that she experiences in this short window of time. Its setting is an Irish farm in the late nineteenth century, where Elizabeth (usually referred to as Beth) lives and works with her stepfather Billy Winters and a host of servants and tenant farmers. In his analysis of bogland in the work of Bram Stoker, Derek Gladwin argues that in Irish gothic writing, landscapes “are central settings...and provide an exclusive look at many intersecting tensions and fears involving land ownership and political control that reach an apex at the end of the nineteenth century” (40). This background allows the novel to investigate themes of inheritance and deception – set against, and informed by, the macabre landscape of rural Ireland, especially the bogs and lakes that surround the family home. Beth's mother died when she was a child and it is the late Cathy Winters whose legacy provides the novel's central tension and the source of its drama. Beth is not Billy's legitimate daughter; Cathy, a Catholic,

became pregnant by a Catholic man before her marriage to Billy, a Protestant landowner. Thus Beth's status as Billy's heir is precarious and their relationship is defined by partisanship and politics. In *Death and Nightingales*, the land corresponds with all of Beth's desires, acting as a catalyst for her eventual transformation, and is a preoccupation for its author – critics have described space “as a fundamental dimension in Eugene McCabe's writings” (D 28), noting that “the Fermanagh/Monaghan border...has etched itself into the land and the minds of its inhabitants...both graphically and unforgivably portrayed in McCabe's writings” (Ciardha 74).

The novel opens in a dream, one where Beth fantasises about poisoning and murdering her stepfather. From the first page Beth's desires are linked with elements of the natural world. The dream is introduced as “a lack of bird-call, a sense of encroaching light and then far away the awful dawn bawling of a beast in great pain” (1). The beast is in fact a reverberation from the real world – out in the farm a cow is suffering from bloat, a complaint which Beth will soon resolve with a cannula. This bleeding of that physical space into Beth's dream foregrounds Beth's dilemma: she is trapped in a life that she wishes to escape from, one which will hold onto her as much as it can. In the dream, Beth uses oil of bitter almonds, a poison derived from a natural source, rather than any of the potentially deadly tools or weaponry that the farm is filled with. In her subconscious Beth reaches out to natural ammunition and this connection between the land and death will continue throughout the novel.

Beth's plans for escape are in fact literal. Despite being unmarried she has conceived a child with a man named Liam Ward and plans to abscond from the farm that very evening. Together with Ward, a Catholic linked to the Invincibles and the

Phoenix Park Murders, she has planned to drug Billy and make off with his fortune. However, before she can follow through with this plan, she learns that Ward and an accomplice are planning to murder her and keep the riches for themselves. Not only does Beth's treatment of the cow introduce the link between the natural and the deadly, it also "foreshadows the aborted murder scene towards the end of the novel, in which Beth herself is intended to be a dumb, helpless animal subject to the penetrative violence of Liam Ward" (Smyth *Judas* 167). In her grief, Beth sinks their boat and swims away, leaving Liam to drown. This occurs just off one of the novel's most prominent locations – a small island on Billy's land, called Corvey. It came to him as part of Beth's mother's dowry and represents a link to Beth's Catholic family as well as an unobtainable route of escape. It is introduced in a memory Beth has of discussing the island with her mother and stepfather, asking them, "Is it true Mama? can I live there by myself?" (5) and telling them, "no fighting on my island or crying or shouting at night" (ibid), this latter comment refers to the quarrelling Beth has overheard between them concerning her parentage. From her earliest memories Corvey Island acts as a space where Beth's desires are allowed to coalesce into a physical location, an idealised location without conflict, a personal Avalon. Rod Edmond writes that "islands had always been imagined as places of refuge or quest for those wishing to escape the diseased world of the mainland" (201) and this is true of Beth's Corvey. She describes it as "beautiful" (5), "the nicest place in the whole world" (ibid), and we are told that "a map of Corvey Island...had fascinated her" (92). It is this island which Beth seeks to lodge in her memory as she prepares to abscond: "I must fix it now in my memory she thought because not for years, probably never again would she see what one day she imagined could be paradise"

(6). The island is to be the connection between Beth and the home she will leave behind.

McCabe carries this link between Beth and the space she inhabits until the novel's end, especially when detailing her relationship with Ward. On the day they meet she helps him to pull his cow out of the bog. As they walk together, the land is described: "hungry scutch-grass spined the lane, tentacles of briar reaching from the verges" (69). Later, when she decides to meet with Ward again, her progress is hindered by the natural world: "twice branches caught at her dress, the second time unstitching the front seam. When her foot caught in the bare forked roots of ash, they grazed her ankle. It became darker as she went lower, fern fronds growing evilly from the mossy branches of elongated oak" (82) and again reference is made to "tentacles of briar" (83). The imagery employed here serves two purposes. Firstly, it suggests a darkness to her growing infatuation with Ward, as the wicked plantlife around the cabin (tainted by his murderous intentions) catches and ensnares her. In addition to this, reference is made to biological decay in the use of the word 'spined' to describe the grass running down the centre of the pathway. Secondly, the land itself is trying to hold Beth back, either as a foreshadowing of Ward's plot or perhaps as a reference to this place's stifling hold on her, the same hold that she seeks to shrug off.

In this section of the novel, Beth's physical space is anthropomorphised further by the sounds it produces. As she walks, Beth hears a noise: "At first she thought it was the cry of a vixen calling her cubs...a creature in distress...The squealing seemed alongside her" (83). The source of the noise is revealed to be a baby rabbit being carried off by an owl. However, the cries are described as "so

human” (ibid) that Beth becomes startled and falls, “her voice blend[ing] with the rabbit squeals” (ibid). In addition to more imagery of entrapment – the rabbit trapped by the owl – this description of her voice merging with the rabbit’s blurs the boundary between Beth and the land and introduces the idea of a prey-predator dynamic. Earlier, Ward speaking to a friend is described as “a black fox-snout talking into a blonde mule’s ear” (64). This suggests an animalistic aspect to Ward’s actions, the desire to cheat and kill as biological in him as the owl’s hunt for sustenance.

If there is a single moment in the novel that represents Beth’s transformation it is when she realises what Ward’s plans for her are. She is shown a grave by a wandering mute called Dummy and his mime reveals to Beth what Ward intends to do. From this point onwards there is a marked difference in her characterisation and in her relationship to the space she inhabits. This change is documented when “she reached for her pocket handkerchief [and] she became aware of a sudden change of light, of a consciousness of something. Outside in the half-light, there was a sudden thrum of pigeon wings” (184). The repetition of the word ‘sudden’ combined with images of oncoming light, dawning realisation, suggests a specific moment of revelation, rather than the more protracted changes described in *Housekeeping* and *Morvern Callar* – though the use of ‘something’ does remind the reader of Morvern’s ‘waves’ and suggests a similar vastness of emotion. The pigeon’s flapping is also less malevolent than, for example, the ‘evilly’ growing ferns of her earlier experience, with ‘thrum’ having a somewhat gentle energy.

As the novel carries on, it is through her physical space that Beth’s transformation is articulated. Beth meets up with Ward again and convinces him to

help her get to Corvey Island: “suddenly, from the greenness of the rivulet, the openness of water, the immense sky and islands beckoning through a low mist. Like birth she thought...or death?” (223). Again the land here is suffused with human intention. The sky and islands beckon Beth forward, allowing her to enact the plan she is calculating. But the closeness of earlier sections is gone and Beth’s perspective is larger. The prose no longer focuses in on minute detail – patches of grass and malicious roots – but is able to encompass the entire landscape in its scope. This is a direct representation of a new, deadly, understanding of humanity. In realising Ward’s plot she has glimpsed a darker, more selfish, world, but in doing so her worldview has increased dramatically. The reader does not get the sense that this space can capture and harness her in the same way as it did half a novel previously.

Indeed, it is this same land that she utilises to enact her revenge on Ward, tipping him out of the boat with the knowledge that he cannot swim. She awakens after Ward’s death and “opened her eyes, rolled over from floating to swimming and looked about. The mist had cleared. Silence. Nothing to see but swallows skimming over the calm surface of the lake. Above, a vast empty sky” (227). As before, the imagery used here suggests transformation. Beth’s literal and metaphorical awakening has overtones of rebirth and recalls her thought a few pages earlier that the opening-up of the land reminded her of birth and death. The phrase ‘the mist had cleared’ has obvious connotations with increased mental awareness, akin to the sudden consciousness of ‘something’ she experienced previously. Once again the key to appreciating Beth’s state is contained in the space around her. The sky is empty, the lake’s surface is calm, and there is nothing to see – an increase of the effect generated in the last section from the open water and immense sky. This effect

is emphasised by the repetition of the *s* and soft *c* sounds in ‘silence’, ‘see’, ‘swallows’, ‘skimming’ and ‘surface’, all within ten words of each other, creating a tone of peace and evoking the water’s calm movement. All of these elements working in tandem describe Beth’s transformation while consistently linking it with the land.

The deep connection between Beth and space, and McCabe’s use of anthropomorphism to render this space, are the first, most clear-cut methods by which *Death and Nightingales* seeks to describe Beth’s coming-of-age. These methods are used to emphasise Beth’s desire to leave her space behind, but they also draw the reader’s attention to the importance of land and space in other aspects of the novel, both above and below the ground.

The book is riddled with references to the earth and what is stored or hidden beneath it, though Beth’s connection to these spaces is less strong and used more as a tool to describe the situation she reacts against, especially in relation to her stepfather Billy. Eóin Flannery argues that “McCabe gestures towards ideas concerning the secretion of memory, myth, and history into the preservative moisture of bogland” (100). The novel contains numerous scenes where the ground beneath characters’ feet is rich with symbolism and is politically resonant.

There is much discussion in *Death and Nightingales* about land and the validity of its ownership. Flannery writes that “the contested nature of the Irish geographical and cultural landscape...[is] haunted by the disinherited revenants of colonial misappropriation” (92). Billy is resented by some of his Catholic neighbours due to his Anglo-Irish status and colonial ancestry. Flannery goes on to argue that “histories imprinted onto that landscape – manifested in ruined castles, impoverished

native dwellings, and demesned properties – were a source of individual and communal suspicion and fear within the landed Anglo-Irish populace” (94). In one early chapter Billy is travelling to his quarry with his employee, Mickey Dolphin:

They stood listening at a point where the farm-pass to the quarry fell away two graves deep to an acre of cut-over bog, a wilderness of birch, alder and sycamore where the refuse from Clonoula had been tipped and buried, topped up and overgrown, time out of mind, pram-wheels and cart-wheels, hoops, rotten barrels and bins, shards of vessels and crockery, rusting storm-lamps all mixed up with builders’ debris, lath and plaster, discarded invoices and ledgers and, grotesquely, a blind doll grinning sideways from a recent heap (45).

Here, in the very grounds of Billy’s property, we have several metaphors that introduce the way that McCabe utilises space in describing the politics of his characters. Billy’s empire is literally built upon the goods and cast-offs of the locals, driven into the dirt and beneath the earth. McCabe emphasises the age of these items, that they have been layered and layered, to make the reader appreciate the length of this time this arrangement has been in place. The choice of items described in the pit is also revealing – there seems to be an emphasis on childhood in the pit’s contents, prams and toys and the ghastly smiling doll. By concentrating on the local children’s cast-offs, McCabe is suggesting the way that the landlord-tenant relationship has the potential to infantilise the tenant and bestow undue power upon the landowner. Parallels are also drawn between Billy’s tenants and Beth, the genuine child of the story.

It is not just refuse that inhabits the spaces below Billy's farm. As they work, some of his employees find something unusual buried underground:

With both hands, he was taking out fistfuls of blackish debris clinging to the back, top and sides of the buried bulk. He then put both arms around his find, removed it and walked towards the steps. All followed. The wrapping leather was removed revealing butter which looked white as lard, mottled with tiny black and green choppings of herb (116).

The find is bog-butter – stores of butter found below ground after having been stored there to preserve or perhaps process in years gone by. Again, the imagery here is used to emphasise the link between the Irish locals and the space owned by Billy Winters. The bog-butter harks back to a time before the British colonisation of Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and suggests a somewhat quaint yet holistic relationship between the population and their physical space. The fact that the bog-butter and the refuse lies beneath Billy's property suggests a sense of illegitimacy in his ownership – there are literal holes in his foundations where the locals' presence can make itself felt. It could be argued that rather than trying to make an explicitly political point one way or the other, McCabe is characterising Billy's own feelings of suspicion and insecurity. Flannery argues that the butter "is symbolic of the secreted traces of past lives that farmed, lived on and, crucially, claimed the land...Despite efforts to entomb the past and to enshrine traditions...recalcitrant deposits of individual and communal memory [are] exhumed" (100-101). As Billy's anxiety grows, perhaps enhanced by a feeling that his own claim is less authentic, Flannery points out that "creed, race and national character

dictate that Billy Winters cannot escape the invisible threat of indigent ‘sly sedition’” (98). While it is true that there are dangerous individuals in the environs of Billy’s farm – Ward is accused of supplying the knives used in the Phoenix Park Murders – the novel is less concerned with painting either side of the discourse in a positive or negative light, than it is with displaying how even the supposed victor in the colonial struggle is tainted by the struggle itself. The bog-butter, hidden beneath him, is emblematic of this on-going battle and also serves to remind the reader of the importance of the subterranean in *Death and Nightingales* and, by extension, to Beth’s coming-of-age.

The subterranean spaces below Billy’s land also refer to the darker, hidden side of his attitude toward his stepdaughter – part of the atmosphere that catalyses her development. Aside from the resentment and fear he displays towards her, a result of her Catholic parentage, Beth describes how Billy behaves in an unfatherly way towards her when drunk. Billy is blackmailed by a man named Fairbrother, who is seeking information on Ward’s crimes. As a bargaining chip, Fairbrother reads Billy a report he has on the family, which “says your daughter twice sought refuge this past year in a maidservant’s bed, Miss Mercy Boyle, to avoid...and again the word used in the report is ‘molestation’” (104). Earlier, she refused an invitation to a concert, looking to avoid “the probability of drunken groping on the way back” (40). These are among the few scant references in the text to the quasi-incestuous interest Billy has in Beth. It appears that neither character is unduly distressed by the dynamic and Beth’s reaction is closer to irritation than anything stronger, until the novel’s closing pages. Nevertheless, this dark side to their relationship is another

example of what is hidden beneath the surface and a factor that catalyses Beth's development.

It is another subterranean space on Billy's farm that sets her transformation into motion. As mentioned previously, her coming-of-age is catalysed by the discovery of the grave that has been dug for her by Ward and his accomplice. Dummy, unable to voice the horror he has witnessed, draws it:

The Dummy...drew a rectangular box on a separate sheet. On the box he put a cross. Underneath the box he drew another rectangle, pointed at it. When she said the word 'grave' he nodded...As he began to sketch on a fresh piece of paper, he knew what she would see before it was drawn, Ward's profile, a foxy effect, stressing the nose (181).

Again, we have a reference to Ward as fox-like, a relatively simple metaphor but one that connects his republicanism with a legitimate, natural claim to the land, as an animal may have, while also emphasising his cruelty. Shortly afterwards, Beth is caught rifling through her stepfather's safe; he beats her and banishes her from the family home. She wanders the countryside and stumbles across the grave that Dummy drew, the one made for her by the man she loved:

She moved to the edge of the grave and stood looking down into it, remembering her mother's burial. This, a much nicer place to lie...peace and quiet under the sun and moon, rain, wind and stars, what more could any girl want? She looked around the tree and up at the sky. Far below in the quarter-light, a scattering of small lakes

in a haze of quilted fields and to her right, a necklace of green islands (187).

In comparison to later pieces of prose, it is clear here that Beth is only just beginning to come of age. Nearly every description of land – which in *Death and Nightingales* is used to indicate her mindset – is restricted in some way, but with hints of more to come. In comparison to the ‘vast’ and ‘immense’ skies of later chapters, here the light is only a quarter full; the atmosphere is cloudy, yet to be cleared. After she murders Ward, the water is called ‘open’, in comparison to the little puddles of water that flank her grave. The fields are quilted, suggesting a closeness, perhaps with some smothering quality. The use of the jewellery metaphor in relation to the islands is a beautiful one but one which makes the land appear intimate, close to the body like a necklace would be – nothing at all like the greenness, the openness, present in the post-drowning prose.

As she looks down into the grave, Beth is reminded of her mother’s funeral. Beth’s mother died when she was a child, killed by the bull that made up part of her dowry. Beth’s thoughts returning to her mother connects thematically with her development. Beth’s mother, with her Catholic lineage, is emblematic of Billy’s distrust of the land he governs over, due to Cathy having already conceived Beth before they married. Flannery writes that Beth “symbolises the omnipresent threat of indigent contamination...her true inheritance is that bequeathed by her deceased mother, an inheritance that by its very existence compromises the political and tenorial authority of Billy Winters and his class” (99). Beth’s relationship with her mother is an inherently rebellious one and Cathy is one of the first characters, both in the novel and Beth’s life, to voice antagonism toward Billy and all landlords. The

subterranean grave-space is therefore representative of Beth's rebellion and desire to escape, to come of age.

Beth recalls an argument she overheard as a child, where her mother states that, "When there were no fields here, before the Greenes and the Brownes, the Winters and the Somers, the rat-poor robbers with nothing names came here to rob us of what was ours, Maguire was a proud name and still is" (8). When Billy informs her that, "That child's not kin to me and won't inherit...she nor her kind will ever cut my trees, burn my turf, pluck my apples" (9), Cathy responds, "Jesus! You're like a craw-sick parrot! ... my, my, my, my, my. You stole it from us and you know you stole it" (ibid). Cathy, like the spaces Beth inhabits, acts as a link between Beth and her ancestry. Any connection to her mother is viewed with suspicion by Billy and when he catches Beth in the safe, he admonishes her, "Run, run, run, thief to thief, run to Ward, Rome's mug of fenian poison; help him blow our world to bits ... I married a viper that hatched a viper ... Run, run, run and keep running, you'll never get my fields, my gold!" (184). He misunderstands what Beth is doing in the safe – she's actually returning Billy's fortune – but his outburst makes his feelings clear and creates a three-fold connection between Beth's development, the land he feels he owns, and her mother. Being alike or akin to Cathy is, in Billy's eyes, as much of an act of disloyalty as stealing the gold. As we have seen in *Housekeeping* and *Morvern Callar*, rebellion can be a significant component in the coming-of-age story. Ruth refuses to attend school and drops out of society; Morvern does not cooperate with the authorities when she finds her boyfriend's body, going against his wishes by substituting her name on his novel; Beth is drawn to a world that undermines her stepfather's ideological mores.

Perhaps the most acute representation of Beth's rebelliousness in *Death and Nightingales* is the fact that she has begun a sexual relationship with Ward. Having premarital sex with Ward and becoming pregnant has greater consequences for Beth than it would for any other teenage character in a nineteenth century religious society – she is repeating the same act of silent rebellion as her mother did before her. Flannery argues that the “possibility, and indeed in Billy Winters’ mind the likelihood, of [Beth] bearing Catholic offspring, threatens to unravel the seams of the Winters’ planter lineage” (103). Beth, by her mere existence, is a representation of “a degenerate sexuality, a barbarous race and recusant creed” (Flannery 101), but by continuing in her mother's footsteps she is confirming each of Billy's most frenzied and perverse paranoias. This is not to say that there is any explicit or conscious maliciousness in Beth's behaviour, but rather that she is attracted to everything that her stepfather is not. In *Morvern Callar*, Morvern's pregnancy represented her rejection of the social space she was allocated, her choice of sensuality and creation over menial employment and unspoken poverty. In *Death and Nightingales*, Beth's pregnancy expresses a similar kind of rejection, a rejection of the political and physical space created by her stepfather. Kathryn Kirkpatrick, writing about nineteenth-century depictions of marriage, notes that writers of the time “represent a domestic sphere wherein the oppressive power relations of marriage mirror colonial relations between Ireland and England” (8). Marriage is even looked down on by her servant, Mercy, who says, “Half the girls of the country were looking down wells last week to see the face of the man they'd marry...Eejits!” (110). In having her abscond with Ward, in having her conceive a child outside of marriage, *Death and Nightingales* pits Beth against the very political system she lives within.

Ward's attitude to Billy is key in fostering Beth's attraction. He seems to echo Cathy's words when he tells Beth that, "I said [Billy] was of the hated class...landlords...and they're all alike...criminals" (88). He is also tied to the land in a way that Billy is not, with his vulpine features and agrarian lifestyle. Beth constantly emphasises how much she appreciates the land around the farm – she calls it "strange and beautiful. A kind of paradise" (75), marvels at "how beautiful the world could be" (186) and remarks that "paradise must have been something like this" (87). It therefore makes psychological sense that her attention should be caught by an individual who is characterised by his own lethal connection to the beautiful but harsh landscape. Like Beth, he has an intimate relationship with his physical space. Like Beth, he has a claim for ownership. Beth, as a young woman, is as much a second-class citizen as Ward is, and is therefore drawn to his plight. Barbara White writes that in the novel of adolescence, "female adolescence is not simply a temporary period of low standing. Unlike male adolescence, it portends a future of continued secondary status" (19). By comparing Beth's struggle as a woman with Ward's as an indigenous Irish man, McCabe equates the two and creates a context for Beth's attraction.

After she leaves the graveside, Beth runs through the options available to her. She knows she cannot return to Clonoula and has no funds or friends to assist her in fleeing. The only plan she has is to return to Ward's home and feign ignorance of his plot. As she approaches Ward's door she has a moment of realisation:

And of a sudden it seemed obvious to her that it must be natural for men to sit down together and plan the killing and burying of other men, women or children. She tried to imagine herself in the kitchen

or the boiler-house at Clonoula talking with Mercy Boyle in such a way and the idea was so unthinkable, so ludicrous even to imagine that it must, she felt, be deeply unnatural. Now, for the first time, she became conscious of what was growing in her womb with a repulsion she would not have thought possible. She put the image forcibly from her mind and walked on up the lane (189).

This is perhaps the most acute description of the exact nature of Beth's realisation in *Death and Nightingales*. In her close brush with death at the grave-space, in her encounter with the potential darkness present in humanity, Beth's worldview is blasted open and she has a deeper and more mature understanding of the world around her. According to Moretti, any coming-of-age story involves the protagonist working out how her individuality can co-exist with society at large: "It is also necessary that...one perceives the social norms as *one's own*. One must *internalize* them and fuse external compulsion and internal impulses into a new unity until the former is no longer distinguishable from the latter" (562). Thus, defining oneself against others and against certain spaces is an integral part of the coming-of-age process. By considering herself in opposition to men like Ward and his accomplice, Beth now knows more about who she is by understanding who she is not. Later, when she is in Ward's home, another space that feeds her development she stares "at the two blue-banded mugs, stained inside, at the plates smeared with egg and stringy chewed lumps of rasher rinds, the empty bottle of whiskey and the two glasses...With hand and forearm, she pushed them all over the edge of the table" (192). Here Beth is rejecting completely the life and world represented by Ward and

moving on to the section of the book where she murders him, the space where her new worldview is articulated by the water and the sky.

The subterranean spaces – or indeed all land – in *Death and Nightingales* are crucial in illustrating the journey that Beth undertakes in the short timeframe the novel covers. They represent a multitude of different aspects of Beth's character and history as well as illustrating the political context in which her development is rooted. As her story moves forward, Beth is continually being drawn towards the earth and the land, the space taken from her ancestors, a space that contains the very remains of her mother and the refuse of her countrymen. Like those subterranean spaces, most of what has been discussed is rarely mentioned explicitly by the novel's characters and Beth's coming-of-age involves bringing these secrets to the fore. As Billy himself remarks ominously when interrogates Mercy Boyle, "most buried secrets are dug up in the end" (131).

The secret buried deepest in *Death and Nightingales* is the true nature of Beth and Billy's relationship. As mentioned previously, there are hints scattered throughout the text, like items buried underground, that Billy has a sexual interest in his stepdaughter. Flannery provides a political reading to this interest when he suggests we might "read such desires as counter-desires to the perceived treason of Elizabeth's female sexuality? Does Billy Winters attempt to inoculate his landed inheritance against the...contagion of Catholic usurpation?" (103). In Flannery's interpretation of their relationship, Billy's sexual interest in Beth is the presumably subconscious manifestation of his desire to prevent her from conceiving a Catholic child and repeating her mother's early life. As we have seen, Billy is certainly preoccupied with the possibility of Beth doing so and is obsessed with her potential

betrayal. The reader is left somewhat perplexed by this facet of the novel as there is no firm resolution to Billy's incestuous desires and there is little to be gleaned from the text as to whether a political reading is appropriate or truthful. Perhaps it is merely present to emphasise Billy's impotent rage and to expand on the presentation of power as corrosive.

The final page of *Death and Nightingales* has Billy find Beth in a bothy on Corvey Island, immediately after she has drowned Ward. He is haunted by contrition whereas Beth is characterised as withdrawn, deadened by the hopelessness of her predicament. Again, images of land are used to describe Beth's condition. She is called a "broken tree" (230); one that will remain broken whether or not it forgives the storm (Billy) that caused its failure. Billy looks out over the water and remembers drinking from it with Beth's mother a few weeks before she died. Ideas of irreparable damage are present – the damage that Billy has wrought upon Beth, upon her mother, upon the land his family seized. Beth is present as a physical reminder of all this damage, yet Billy sees only the similarities between them and not the space that he has driven about himself. Smyth writes that "part of Billy's culpability lies in the fact that he's unable or unwilling to acknowledge the extent to which his own condition – his own identity – is the result of treacherous acts perpetrated in the past in his name" (*Judas* 179). Unlike Beth, he is unable to define himself against anything, so preoccupied is he with concepts of ownership and "Your legacy girl, your inheritance" (McCabe 33) – an inheritance that Beth does her best to avoid. However, we are left with the impression that she is the true inheritor of the Winters' estate, for it is her transformation which is articulated in this land. Beth's space bends to her in way it does not for Billy, who is left feeling "suddenly alien,

angry and alone” (McCabe 161). He goes on to tell Beth that “We’re a pair, we two: cangled both to treachery. Maybe we should marry, go elsewhere?” (230). She does not respond directly to this, and answers that she is indeed sick, sick “unto death” (ibid). This haunting coda is the terminus of Beth’s journey into adulthood and the reader is left certain that only bad things remain for her.

The transformation of Elizabeth Winters from child to adult is a brief yet severe one, enhanced, as in *Housekeeping* and *Morvern Callar*, by the spaces she finds herself within. Whether this is the land itself, which reflects her emotions, or the secrets buried beneath it, Beth is always present, always trapped, by her surroundings. The novel presents moments where Beth’s realisations and understandings coincide with brief glimpses of a freer land but by the novel’s end it is clear that an escape for Beth is improbable. What began as a pure, free space – her own personal Avalon – no longer represents paradise by the novel’s end. Tainted by murder and betrayal, Corvey Island now corresponds to Beth’s own hopelessness; like all other physical spaces in *Death and Nightingales* it is bound to her coming-of-age. Unlike Morvern and Ruth, there is no way out for Beth here. Her story is a religious and political one; one that allows the reader to develop an understanding of the pressures these forces can enact upon an individual and a community, and how we can think about the ownership of land. This comes at a price though, and it is Beth who must pay it.



## *Who I am or What I Mean*

This research paper was completed during the writing of *Savage Things*, in the middle of its various drafts. As such, I already had a firm idea of the kinds of novel I would like to investigate. I knew I would focus on stories of young women who yearned to leave home – girls who, for whatever reason, found themselves unsatisfied with the circumstances provided to them and who struck out for greener pastures. I hoped to illuminate the choices I had made in my own work by having it sit alongside discussions of other writers who had made similar decisions, and this proved to be an extremely beneficial exercise. In carrying it out, I was struck by certain similarities in the concerns of these novels and my own, and considering the texts in this way allowed me to understand more fully the context of the novel I had begun to write. However, the exercise also caused me to appreciate the ways in which *Savage Things* was different and, in doing so, to understand what its primary concerns were.

The characters featured in this thesis all seek to move from stability to instability – according to Barbara White, “in the traditional *Bildungsroman* the hero rejects the constraints of home, sets out on a journey through the world” (3) and “the typical pattern of the novel of adolescence is said to be estrangement from the social environment, conflict with parents...departure from home” (ibid). Ruth, Morvern,

and Beth all conform to this pattern – each of their plots involves leaving behind the safety of their home lives. It struck me that, for the most part, the protagonist of *Savage Things* was doing the very opposite of this. She was leaving behind the chaos of her upbringing in order to find a space that offered safety and comfort. She was actively searching for the ‘constraints’ that White, and numerous others, describe as a hindrance to a coming-of-age story. This, then, was *Savage Things*’ primary concern – the way in which its protagonist could develop outside of the traditional *Bildungsroman* configuration.

This is not to say that all the protagonists featured in this thesis have gone about their development in identical ways. Ruth, in *Housekeeping*, had to make a sacrifice. In order to grow, she was forced to renounce the trappings of the domestic space she inhabited, the trappings of traditional time itself. She went out into the world and never came home again. Morvern, in *Morvern Callar*, does come home again, after a spell away. With her unexpected windfall, she leaves behind the restrictive social space that was her inheritance and experiences a life free of the pressure of employment and authority. This releases her and she returns home, irreversibly altered. Beth, in *Death and Nightingales*, never truly leaves home, at least not in a physical sense, despite yearning to more than anything else. Her escape is denied and the farthest she gets is a tainted Corvey Island, part of the very space she wished to flee from. The failure of her plan, her inability to escape, provides her with the insight that catalyses her development. These are three very different plots, but with three protagonists that enter the adult world in relation to their social and physical spaces. Understanding the role that these ideas have in a coming-of-age story encouraged me to bring them to the fore in further drafts of *Savage Things*.

Each character's physical space is the easiest to define. All three novels place an importance on rural landscapes, which facilitate their protagonists' development. Ruth leaves behind the structures of civilisation in favour of transience, riding railways through the countryside to find work. She shirks her responsibilities at school in order to play on the shores of Lake Fingerbone. She comes face to face with a metaphysical realisation in the woods, alone, the water below her busy with potential. It is these physical spaces that offer an alternative to the stifling domesticity of the normal world and which therefore assist in Ruth's coming-of-age.

Morvern visits the small villages up the coast from her Spanish resort. It is in these rural, foreign spaces that she feels free enough, feels relaxed enough, to allow her mind to expand and gain the ability and the vocabulary to articulate this transformation. As with Ruth, it is water that catalyses this transformation. In the wilderness surrounding the Port, when burying her boyfriend's body, we see a Morvern carefree and powerful despite the horrific work she is tasked with. By the novel's end she inhabits a physical space that was once miniature, her creative powers fully realised.

Beth's story, of the three, is the most concerned with land, the text most preoccupied with tying her coming-of-age to a tangible, physical space. Beth's moods are reflected in the spaces around her and the land opens up once she experiences her moment of realisation. Despite this, the physical spaces of *Death and Nightingales* also represent aspects of the plot that are in opposition to Beth. The farmland belongs to her stepfather, the novel's principal antagonist. Liam Ward, the character most heavily characterised as being connected to the land, apart from Beth,

plans to murder her and bury her beneath this same land. It is against these aspects of the novel's physical space that Beth defines herself, and in doing so enters adulthood.

In *Savage Things*, the land is equally essential in illuminating and catalysing the protagonist's development. Water appears at decisive moments – Ally's near-drowning, the discovery of her father's letter amongst a flood – in order to highlight the fluidity of her character. Locations such as the woods and beach exist outside of the adult world and serve as settings for her to experiment with her own boundaries – will she be drawn towards the world of instability, represented by her mother and the rowdier instincts of the boys, or the world of comfort, the world of her grandparents?

The land also provides Marilynne Robinson's Ruth with something to react against, something to define herself as not, something to catalyse her development. Towards the end of her story, she draws comparisons between her family and their physical space: "I recall that the eye of the lake is my grandfather's, and that the lake's heavy, blind, encumbering waters composed my mother's limbs and weighed her garments and stopped her breath and stopped her sight" (193-194). A direct connection is made between the water's ability to carry Ruth's potential and the role it played in her family's deaths. She goes on to fantasise about what her life would have been like if her mother had not committed suicide: "We would never have known that her calm was as slight as the skin on water, and that her calm sustained her as a coin can float on still water. We would have known nothing of the nature and reach of her sorrow if she had come back" (198). Again, Ruth's mother is characterised by her relationship to the landscape – if she had lived, her happiness would have been as precarious as the surface tension on the lake she drowned in. Ruth's fantasy is not for her mother not to have died, it is in fact a kind of relief that

she did, that she saved Ruth and Lucille from a life of not understanding the depths their mother hid. In this realisation, Ruth is showing a huge degree of maturity – she has in fact come of age. She recalls being a child, her grandmother telling her to close her eyes when frightened of the dark. Doing so, she “noticed the correspondence between the space within the circle of my skull and the space around me” (ibid). As was the case in *Death and Nightingales*, Ruth draws an explicit link between her psychology and the land around her, acknowledging the correspondence between the two. However, unlike Beth, Ruth manages to escape the trappings of her physical space and its association with her deceased relatives.

Morvern, too, is forced to define herself against a physical space in order to articulate her coming-of-age. The Port, her hometown, is written as a drab, uninspiring location. Despite the vitality of the locals’ storytelling, in her final description of the town Morvern references the “sheeting rain and deserted streets” (186) as she “looked round the deserted port with waves still whamming against the seawall” (ibid), before noting that “You still couldn’t see towards the pass where His village lay through the clouds” (187). This is the final description we have of the Port, just before she leaves it for the second time. She is torn between two recent revelations: that her foster father is sleeping with her best friend and that she inherited nearly fifty thousand pounds from her boyfriend’s estate. She describes her physical space at the end of this chapter in restrictive terms: there is a wall separating her from water, which later will prove to be a potent catalyst for her development; the clouds obscure her view of higher land, of the village she will enter at the novel’s end. This is the physical space that is rejected, that she defines herself against. It will

be the freedom of Spain that will allow her to come of age and understand herself more fully.

Implicit in this rejection of physical space is a rejection of social space. She is not just saying goodbye to the physicality of the Port but also to the economy that forces her into menial work. From beyond the grave, her boyfriend requests she “LIVE THE LIFE PEOPLE LIKE ME HAVE DENIED YOU” (82). By rejecting the world she was born into and by defining herself against it, Morvern is able to do just that, able to “know every minute of that happiness that [she] ever dared dream [she] had the right” (210). Likewise, *Savage Things*’ protagonist rejects her mother and, by extension, the way of life her mother represents. The girl’s upbringing was so intertwined with her mother’s psychological makeup that she struggles to separate the two. Hence, we have her referring to her mother’s scent as ‘the language all words come from’ – her senses are bamboozled, her reference-points mixed up and resettled. Lonely and isolated, her mother is a society of one, a community that the protagonist can kick against and ultimately deny.

Beth and Ruth also define themselves against the social spaces of their childhood and in each story this disconnect is used to characterise each character’s coming-of-age. For *Housekeeping*’s Ruth, this manifests in the novel’s treatment of transience and Ruth’s acceptance of it as a way of life. She rejects the offer of stability from the police officer and rejects the way of life espoused by her sister, Lucille. In her final dream of Lucille, Ruth describes her as “tastefully dressed” (218), compared to herself and Sylvie in “oversized coats and combing our hair back with our fingers” (ibid). This simple distinction between herself and her idea of her sister makes Ruth’s transformation clear: she shows the reader what she is not and, in

doing so, is forced to show what she is. *Death and Nightingales*' Beth also rejects the social space she was brought up in – the world of protestant, Anglicised landowners and Catholic, Irish tenants. Beth straddles these two spaces, being Irish, with Catholic ancestry, whilst ostensibly coming from an English family and living on that family's estate. She wishes to flee the farm and its social structures entirely: "Do I want any of this? The heartbreak of this place? Love it and hate it like no place else on earth, tomorrow I leave it forever" (2). Unlike Morvern and Ruth, she is unsuccessful in her attempts and by the novel's end has not left behind the social space she began the novel within and is still beholden to its pressures. Nevertheless, she has had her moment of realisation – "And of a sudden it seemed obvious to her that it must be natural for men to sit down together and plan the killing and burying of other men" (189). Because this is a social space rather than a physical one, it is not necessary for Beth to leave it behind entirely in order to define herself against it.

This is the nature of Beth's coming-of-age. She is now able to understand the true, heartless nature of the world she lives in. At the beginning of *Death and Nightingales*, she thought she could throw off her physical trappings with ease and begin a new life entirely. She believed she had the power to subvert an entire system of political and religious control. By the novel's end she can see her world, and its limits, as clearly as the vast skies that surround her. For *Housekeeping*'s Ruth, this psychological movement is represented by an increased understanding of repercussions of her mother's suicide – she appreciates that in some ways her mother's decision was positive. It is also the feelings of tenderness she shows towards her sister in the novel's closing passages, the few lines that transmit the wistful longing she carries for Lucille, despite the gulf between them. Morvern's

psychological development is less externally focused than Beth or Ruth's. She moves inwards, despite travelling the furthest physically, and gains the confidence to voice emotions she previously could not articulate or believe she had the privilege to express. All three psychological journeys are typical of the *Bildungsroman*; each protagonist is moving from innocence and naivety to maturity. In addition, all three psychological journeys are manifestations of their corresponding physical journeys – that of leaving home, leaving behind old ways of thought and old spaces.

Millard writes that “the form and structure of [coming-of-age] novels is often strongly expressive of a desire to create a myth of origins by which their protagonist can come to understand themselves, and this knowledge...is a central component of coming of age” (9). Each of our texts ends with the protagonist looking back over the preceding spaces: Ruth ruminates on Lucille and their mother, the burning of the house at Fingerbone; Morvern writes in her notebook, jotting down, we suspect, the story we have just read; Beth fills in the blanks of a story she thought she knew, that her lover wanted her dead. Each young woman is looking backwards to see where she has come from, where she is now – what she was not, what she is now. In these novels, this is what it means to have come of age – to gain the ability to articulate the nature of your relationship with the spaces of your past and define yourself against them. *Savage Things* ends on a similar note, with its protagonist looking back to the imagined day of her birth and trying to discern some meaning there. For her own peace of mind, she must find some tenderness in the image of her mother, an indication that their relationship was not always so negative. While her ultimate trajectory may differ from that of Ruth, Morvern, or Beth, her psychological journey is in fact similar. She too must look back to her origin to see how far she has come,

to understand her own 'myth'. Even though she is moving in the opposite direction to these protagonists, what is important is that she is moving, finding new physical and social spaces in which to grow.

The idea of space in the *Bildungsroman* acts as the metric by which we can chart a character's development. It is the world they live in and rebel against, the society they use as a springboard to new lives and identities. It is the space inside their very minds, the one that ferments and evolves as it interacts with the world beyond. That is not to say these characters are given easy answers to easy questions. As we have seen, their transformations are not always clear-cut or indeed beneficial, but it is always through the prism of space that they have come about.



# Works Cited

Benko, Georges. "Introduction." *Space and Social Theory: Interpreting Modernity and Postmodernity*. ed. Georges Benko and Ulf Strohmayer. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.

Brown, Peter, and Michael Irwin, ed. *Literature & Place: 1800-2000*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2008.

Buckley, Jerome Hamilton. *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.

Carroll, Rachel. *Rereading Heterosexuality*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

Caver, Christine. "Nothing Left to Lose: Housekeeping's Strange Freedoms." *American Literature* 68.1 (1996). 111-137.

Ciardha, Éamonn Ó. "Border Gothic – History, Violence and 'The Border' in the writing of Eugene McCabe." *Acta Neophilologica* 49.1-2 (2016). 63-73.

D, Simion. "'This Place Owns Me': Eugene McCabe in Conversation with Simion D." *Irish Studies Review* 2.7 (1994). 28-30.

Dale, Sophy. *Alan Warner's Morvern Callar*. London: Continuum, 2002.

Edmond, Rod. "Writing Islands." *Literature & Place: 1800-2000*, edited by Peter Brown and Michael Irwin. Bern: Peter Lang, 2008.

Flannery, Eóin. "A Land Poisoned: Eugene McCabe and Irish Postcolonial Gothic." *Literature & History* 22.2 (2013). 91-112.

Fraiman, Susan. *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and The Novel of Development*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Galehouse, Maggie. "Their Own Private Idaho: Transience in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Contemporary Literature* 41.1 (2000). 117-137.

Gernes, Sonia. "Transcendent Women: Uses of the Mystical in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Religion and Literature* 23.3 (1991). 143-165.

Geyh, Paula E. "Burning Down the House? Domestic Space and Feminine Subjectivity in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Contemporary Literature* 34.1 (1993). 103-122.

Gladwin, Derek. "The Bog Gothic: Bram Stoker's 'Carpet of Death' and Ireland's Horrible Beauty." *Gothic Studies* 16.1 (2014). 39-54.

Jones, Carole. *Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979-1999*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009.

Kirkby, John. "Is There Life After Art? The Metaphysics of Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 5.1 (1986). 91-109.

Kirkpatrick, Kathryn, ed. *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000.

Labovitz, Esther Kleinbord. *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Peter Lang, 1988.

Löw, Martina. *The Sociology of Space Materiality, Social Structures, and Action*. E-book ed., Palgrave MacMillan Us, 2016.

McCabe, Eugene. *Death and Nightingales*. London: Vintage, 1998.

Millard, Kenneth. *Coming of Age in Contemporary American Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Mittlefehldt, Pamela J. "Writing the Waves, Sounding the Depths: Water as Metaphor and Muse." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature & Environment* 10.1 (2003). 137-142.

Moretti, Franco. "The Way of the World: The *Bildungsroman* in European Culture." *The Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach* ed. Michael McKeon. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000). 554-565.

Natter, Wolfgang, and John Paul Jones III. "Identity, Space, and other Uncertainties." *Space and Social Theory: Interpreting Modernity and Postmodernity*. ed. Georges Benko and Ulf Strohmayer. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.

Ravits, Martha. "Extending the American Range: Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *American Literature* 61.4 (1989). 644-666.

- Robinson, Marilynne, *Housekeeping*. London: Faber and Faber, 2005.
- Saxton, Ruth O., ed. *The Girl: Constructions of the Girl in Contemporary Fiction by Women*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- Scott, Jeremy. *The Demotic Voice in Contemporary British Fiction*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009.
- Siddall, Stephen. *Landscape and Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Strohmayer, Ulf, and Georges Benko, editors. *Human Geography: A History for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. London: Arnold, 2004.
- Smyth, Gerry. *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001.
- Smyth, Gerry. *The Judas Kiss: Treason and Betrayal in Six Modern Irish Novels*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016.
- Valentine, Gill. *Social Geographies: Space and Society*. Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001.
- Warner, Alan. *Morvern Callar*. London: Vintage, 1997.
- White, Barbara A. *Growing Up Female: Adolescent Girlhood in American Fiction*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985.