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## **Rebels and Dubliners: motherhood in three 20th-century Irish texts**

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## Abstract

This thesis explores representations of motherhood across several genres in Irish literature. In my essay, I look at two short stories from James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914): "The Boarding House" and "A Mother." I argue the way spatiality functions in "The Boarding House" and "A Mother" reveals Mrs. Mooney's and Mrs. Kearney's overall ability to exercise maternal agency; it shows the extent to which their agency is circumscribed. The spaces themselves act as defining factors contributing to the mothers' abilities to engage with power structures and ultimately fail or succeed in their endeavors. I also examine two autobiographies: *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne: A Servant of the Queen* (1938), and Kathleen Clarke's autobiography *Revolutionary Woman* (1991). In my work I expand upon how Gonne and Clarke were able to engage in "maternalist" actions within the public sphere. The juxtaposition of Joyce, Clarke, and Gonne offers new ways of looking at how motherhood is represented in different social classes, as well as how differing societal and historical circumstances affected mothers and their children.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Rebels and *Dubliners*: Motherhood in Three 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Irish Texts

By

Sara S. Barenfeld

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

May 2024

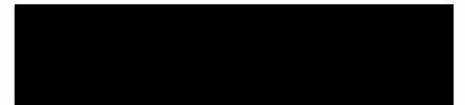
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Department of English

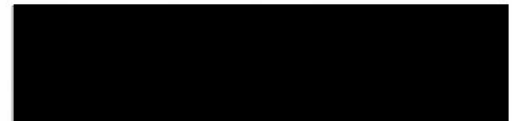
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REBELS AND *DUBLINERS*: MOTHERHOOD IN THREE 20<sup>TH</sup> -CENTURY IRISH TEXTS

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## Introduction

Midway through James Joyce's "The Boarding House," Mrs. Mooney is described as "an outraged mother" (64). Her rage is a reaction to her daughter's situation as someone who has started a relationship with one of the boarders at her boarding house. This "rage" provides an area of interest and exploration. Motherhood studies within Irish studies is growing in importance and emerging as a significant area of study. In this thesis, I examine representations of mothers across several genres in Irish literature. In addition to Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), I also look at the life of Maud Gonne as told through her autobiography *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne: A Servant of the Queen* (1938), as well as the experiences of Kathleen Clarke in her memoir *Revolutionary Woman* (1991). These works complicate a Victorian-era concept known as "the theory of separate spheres," which held that women are confined to the private sphere (Coulter 53). Carol Coulter addresses this notion as it relates to Irish women and nationalism (53). With this concept in mind, I will look at how mothers' agency varies, whether they have more in one "sphere" than another, or whether the concept of "separate spheres" applies to all the mothers in these texts.<sup>1</sup> I use the terms "agency" and "autonomy" to emphasize the specific *behaviors* mothers engaged in. Behaviors such as advocating for their children, speaking out in male-dominated spaces, and breaking free from societal restrictions all fall under the term "agency." If a mother "exercises agency" she acts on her own behalf (sometimes in a maternal sense) and puts her experiences under her own control. Ultimately, a rigid concept of motherhood in Ireland does not exist and I posit the agential actions of mothers as deeply influenced by the spaces and environments they had to navigate.

In these literary and historical works, maternalism emerges as a relevant framework through which to view the experiences of mothers. Maternalism when applied in a political

context directly relates to the actions Gonne and Clarke engaged in. Maternalism puts forth the concept that mothers engaged in political actions relevant to children and families. Politically speaking, maternalism provided an avenue for mothers to become engaged in national interests simply because they were mothers. In their introduction to *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (1993), Seth Koven and Sonya Michel coin the term “maternalist,” and provide a basis for understanding mothers’ roles in the social structures of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century (2). In this thesis I look at specific examples of how Gonne and Clarke aided children and families, which ultimately highlights maternalism. In their works, Gonne and Clarke conform to “maternalist” rules. Koven and Michel, define and examine “maternalist” ideologies and discourses in early 20<sup>th</sup>- century western countries. They write:

Maternalism always operated on two levels: it extolled the virtues of domesticity while simultaneously legitimating women’s public relationships to politics and the state, to community, workplace, and marketplace. Maternalist ideologies, while evoking traditional images of womanliness, implicitly challenged the boundaries between public and private, women and men, state and civil society. (6)

Perceptions of Clarke and Gonne, as mothers and political activists in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century, seem complicated by Koven and Michel’s notions of “maternalist ideologies.” Both women acted as militant nationalists fighting for a free Ireland.<sup>2</sup> Their personal and political lives appear deeply affected by their roles as mothers. However, while Gonne had others care for her children due to her wealth, Clarke at times included her children in her political activities. Nevertheless, they both engaged in “maternalist” actions and venture outside the domestic spheres of their lives. In *Dubliners*, I look more specifically at the *spaces* mothers such as Mrs.



Mooney and Mrs. Kearney had to contend with. Within those spaces, maternal agency remains significantly affected.

The term “maternal agency” varies only slightly from “agency” in that it includes experiences specific to mothers. Moreover, it encapsulates mothers’ needs and internal will. In a recent essay, Lynn O’Brien Hallstein writes on a theory of maternal agency. She explains:

A theory of maternal agency focuses on ... mothering practices that facilitate women’s authority and power and is revealed in mothers’ efforts to challenge and act against aspects of institutionalized motherhood that constrain and limit women’s lives and power as mothers. (610)

O’Brien Hallstein in part speaks to the experiences of Mrs. Mooney and Mrs. Kearney. However, while O’Brien Hallstein’s definition mentions “mothering practices” it does not take into account the specific spaces in which mothers’ can or cannot break free from limitations. In other words, in some ways it lacks specificity. Both Mrs. Mooney and Mrs. Kearney exercise agency on behalf of their daughters under varying circumstances. Through the aforementioned works I will examine how agency is affected by maternalism. Maternal agency relates directly to a mother’s ability to exercise her power as a mother on behalf of her children. The experiences of Mrs. Mooney and Mrs. Kearney in the boarding house or the Antient Concert Rooms reveal how mothers were limited or not based on their environments. Similarly, agency is directly affected by external factors such as political engagement and social class, as evidenced by the experiences of Gonne and Clarke.

Joyce at one point wrote that he wanted to publish his works for the “spiritual liberation of [his] country” (qtd. in Scholes and Litz 270). In this way, Joyce wrote against the Catholic Church and its patriarchal values.<sup>3</sup> He was interested in publishing stories that went against the

norms of the time, perhaps even by portraying mothers who were not typical mothers and represented larger themes. In “The Boarding House” he portrays Mrs. Mooney as someone who “dealt with moral problems as cleaver deals with meat” (63). Mrs. Mooney’s precision and manipulative nature ultimately illustrates what I call “agency.” She has full control over her domestic and business dealings. She lacks passivity or even decorum in some circumstances. A near opposite of this portrayal is Mrs. Kearney in “A Mother,” who struggles to maintain control or agency in the different spaces she encounters. The fathers appear nearly absent or unimportant in “The Boarding House” and “A Mother” because Joyce seems to be writing against the patriarchal “norms” of the time.<sup>4</sup>

Historical circumstances inform this thesis’s understanding of mothers in Ireland. The 1916 Easter Rising acted as a vital point in Irish history and in Kathleen Clarke’s memoir. In her memoir, Clarke details the lengths she and the people surrounding her had to go through to fight for Irish freedom. The Rising marked a significant step towards Ireland’s eventual independence from British rule. It took place in Dublin from April 24 until April 29, 1916, and various Irish nationalist groups organized it with the aim of forcefully establishing an independent Irish republic. Kathleen Clarke married Tom Clarke, a prominent Irish republican and one of the key organizers and leaders of the Rising. He was also one of the seven signatories of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic. However, British forces ultimately suppressed the Rising. They arrested and executed Tom Clarke. Kathleen Clarke provided support for the rebels in various ways including later forming a fund for the families of those who were executed by the British. Clarke’s children and her identity as a mother directly influenced her agential behavior before, during, and after the Rising. British soldiers raided her home countless times and she relied on family members to care for her children while she was in jail. At times, Clarke even

involved her children in her political motivations and activities. Clarke wrote her memoir mostly in the 1940s and aimed to memorialize her husband Tom as a great republican hero (Litton 313). Her grand-niece Helen Litton, editor of Clarke's memoir, writes that Clarke was "less interested in recording her own political life" (313). However, what results through Clarke's narrative is a clear and compelling depiction of both maternity and politics.

### **Maternal Agency and Spatiality in James Joyce's *Dubliners***

In James Joyce's "The Boarding House" and "A Mother," physical spaces define the extent of Mrs. Mooney and Mrs. Kearney's autonomy. Through various rooms, Joyce explores the connection between power structures and maternal autonomy, illuminating how spaces serve as gendered environments that shape the evolving agency of mothers. Maternal agency develops in "The Boarding House" and "A Mother" through the interactions and spaces that each mother must navigate within both the public and domestic spheres. The way maternal agency varies according to each space exposes significant differences between "The Boarding House" and "A Mother." Mrs. Mooney's boarding house exists as a regimented space in which Mrs. Mooney wields her power and exercises her maternal agency on behalf of her daughter. She completely controls her boarding house. By contrast, Mrs. Kearney in "A Mother" must contend with larger, more public spaces such as the concert hall and therefore encounters challenges in exercising her maternal agency. In these spaces, Mrs. Kearney's gender restricts her. The way spatiality functions in "The Boarding House" and "A Mother" reveals Mrs. Mooney's and Mrs. Kearney's overall ability to exercise maternal agency: it shows the extent to which their agency is circumscribed. The spaces themselves act as defining factors contributing to the characters' abilities to engage with power structures and ultimately fail or succeed in advocating for their daughters.

Mrs. Mooney's boarding house serves as both a domestic site and public place in which boarders come through. It is both the home in which she and her family reside and a place of business. Thus, Mrs. Mooney is able to exercise her agency in both the public and domestic spheres. Mrs. Mooney is in control at her boarding house; she cares for boarders but is firm when necessary. Joyce writes:

She [Mrs. Mooney] governed her house cunningly and firmly, knew when to give credit, when to be stern and when to let things pass. All the resident young men spoke of her as *The Madam*. Mrs. Mooney's young men paid fifteen shillings a week for board and lodgings (beer or stout at dinner excluded). (62)

Joyce makes it a point to write "Mrs. Mooney's young men" because the possessive phrasing emphasizes Mrs. Mooney's caring actions. The men rely on Mrs. Mooney; she engages in caretaking actions by providing boarders with a place to eat and sleep. Mrs. Mooney's ability to be caring relates to the fact that her boarding house provides a workable space in which she can take these actions. Mrs. Mooney oversees everything at the boarding house where she acts as its sole proprietor.

Mrs. Mooney most notably exercises agency through her parenting within the boarding house. When it comes to her daughter, Polly, Mrs. Mooney controls and protects her. Although Polly flirts at the boarding house, Joyce writes that Mrs. Mooney was "a shrewd judge" who reasons with herself by coming to the conclusion "that the young men were only passing the time away" (63). However, Mrs. Mooney influences the spheres in which Polly operates. She pulls Polly back into her maternal domestic sphere after Polly's father kept harassing her at her typewriting job (63). Mrs. Mooney maintains awareness of her agency. Things go so well at the

boarding house that Mrs. Mooney considers sending Polly back to typewriting, once again acting as the decision-maker of Polly's life.

A pivotal point occurs when Polly becomes close with one of the young men, Mr. Doran. Mrs. Mooney begins by simply "watching the pair and keeping her own counsel" (63). Joyce writes:

Polly knew that she was being watched, but still her mother's persistent silence could not be misunderstood. There had been no open complicity between mother and daughter, no open understanding but, though people in the house began to talk of the affair, still Mrs. Mooney did not intervene. (63)

It is only once tension arises between Polly and Mr. Doran, when Polly begins to act strangely, and Mr. Doran was "evidently perturbed," that Mrs. Mooney decides she must intervene (63). In this way, Mrs. Mooney protects her daughter and her reputation. Mrs. Mooney's strategizing shows that she does not take her actions lightly. She allows the affair to continue under her watch. Margot Norris points out, "Mrs. Mooney has been moving Polly around like a pawn in a game of chess. Polly is clearly her ante, her stake or investment, in a venture with a possible jackpot" (101). Norris mentions a "possible jackpot," which indicates Mrs. Mooney is plotting that Polly will end up married to Mr. Doran. She calculates her actions all along and tries to "trap" Mr. Doran. Joyce is commenting on the norms of the time and weaving together a narrative which addresses the struggles many mothers and daughters faced. Mrs. Mooney's decision to exercise agency was not involuntary; rather, her agential actions are directly influenced by her desire to take control of her daughter's circumstances. Mrs. Mooney's parental actions as they relate to Mr. Doran and Polly take place entirely within the boarding house. The boarding house acts as a place of overlap between home and business. Mrs. Mooney can wield

power because the boarding house is a domestic space. However, she ultimately applies the logic of a business to domestic and sexual matters, which gestures to her title as “The Madam.”<sup>5</sup>

When Mrs. Mooney confronts Polly, Joyce describes the boarding house as an open and airy place. He writes:

All the windows of the boarding house were open and the lace curtains ballooned gently towards the street beneath the raised sashes ... Breakfast was over in the boarding house and the table of the breakfast-room was covered with plates on which lay yellow streaks of eggs with morsels of bacon-fat and bacon rind. Mrs. Mooney sat in the straw arm-chair and watched the servant Mary remove the breakfast things. She made Mary collect the crusts and pieces of broken bread to help to make Tuesday’s bread pudding. When the table was cleared, the broken bread collected, the sugar and butter safe under lock and key, she began to reconstruct the interview which she had had the night before with Polly. (63-64)

The windows being open and chain of events following breakfast signifies a change. Mrs. Mooney’s agency manifests in her actions. She appears content sitting in her arm-chair directing the actions of Mary. The boarding house acts as her domain, and by not stopping the relationship between Mr. Doran and Polly earlier she has let Mr. Doran fall into a trap. Just as Mrs. Mooney resourcefully orders Mary to collect the pieces of broken bread to make Tuesday’s bread pudding, so must she reel in Mr. Doran. Furthermore, it is only after breakfast when Mrs. Mooney has put “the sugar and butter under safe lock and key” that Joyce introduces Mrs. Mooney’s reflections upon her confrontation between Polly and herself the night before (64). Mrs. Mooney is methodical, and her agency is emphasized in the rooms of her boarding house

where she is able to calculate her actions surrounding Mr. Doran. Ultimately, Mrs. Mooney manipulates Mr. Doran and uses her daughter to elicit a marriage proposal.

Like Mrs. Mooney's, Mrs. Kearney's experiences occur within both the domestic and public sphere. However, unlike Mrs. Mooney, Mrs. Kearney's interactions in The Antient Concert Rooms, which exist in the public sphere, are largely unsuccessful. Moreover, her interactions within the domestic site of her home appear smoother because she maintains control. In the beginning of "A Mother," Mrs. Kearney encounters Mr. Holohan, who proposes that her daughter, Kathleen, play as an accompanist at a series of concerts "which his Society was going to give in the Antient Concert Rooms" (138). Joyce writes:

She [Mrs. Kearney] brought him [Mr. Holohan] into the drawing-room, made him sit down and brought out the decanter and the silver biscuit barrel. She entered heart and soul into the details of the enterprise, advised and dissuaded; and finally a contract was drawn up by which Kathleen was to receive eight guineas for her services as accompanist at the four grand concerts. (138)

In the comfort of her home and drawing-room Mrs. Kearney maintains her maternal agency. She arranges a satisfactory contract for her daughter. In her drawing room, Mrs. Kearney is hospitable and organized. She makes Mr. Holohan sit down, and she feeds him biscuits. Mr. Holohan continues to visit Mrs. Kearney and solicits her help in planning the concerts (138). In the domestic sphere, Mrs. Kearney holds all the power. During their meetings in her home, Mrs. Kearney is described as pushing the decanter towards Mr. Holohan and encouraging him to drink (138). While not culturally unusual, Mrs. Kearney still controls the situation, which appears unlike her experiences in other spaces.

These scenes stand in stark contrast to the tension and conflict that unfolds between Mrs. Kearney and Mr. Holohan within the Antient Concert Rooms, or the public sphere. Things go awry when even on the first night of the concerts, “she [Mrs. Kearney] did not like the look of things” (139). She seems frustrated, and when plans are altered by the Committee, Mrs. Kearney immediately feels she must act on her daughter’s behalf. She decisively steps in, repeating “But, of course, that doesn’t alter the contract...The contract was for four concerts” (140). Like Mrs. Mooney waiting to intervene in her daughter’s relationship, Mrs. Kearney calculates her behavior. After news about the concerts, Joyce writes that Mrs. Kearney “thought her plans over” (141).

Joyce illuminates the struggle for maternal agency at every turn in “A Mother.” Despite struggling within the public sphere, Mrs. Kearney presents as unafraid and unrelenting in her actions to advocate for her daughter. Although a female and an outsider to the Committee, Mrs. Kearney strives for fairness: she argues for the agreed upon contract to be carried out. She presses Mr. Holohan when he claims that Mr. Fitzpatrick manages the contract repeating “she [Kathleen] would have to be paid” and “I mean to see to it” (144). Things escalate when Mrs. Kearney says that Kathleen simply will not play without getting paid, further emphasizing that Mrs. Kearney has lost control within the Antient Concert Rooms. Despite her best efforts, Mrs. Kearney continuously hits roadblocks put up by Mr. Holohan and Mr. Fitzpatrick and becomes more and more enraged. Joyce describes Mrs. Kearney at the end of the story as being someone “haggard with rage” who stood “like an angry stone image” (149). As Jane E. Miller points out, “What finally defeats Mrs. Kearney is neither her romantic disillusionment nor her economic pragmatism, but rather her gender. She is allowed into the public world of men, but she soon discovers she is permitted no volition there: her power disappears when she leaves her home”



(416). Mrs. Kearney's agency remains completely restricted outside her home. Mrs. Kearney maintains her agency only in the comfort of her home when she first arranges the contract with Mr. Holohan and puts out biscuits.

The concert hall exists as a distinctly gendered space in which the men are in charge, and Mrs. Kearney remains a powerless outsider. And yet, despite her best efforts the space itself is constructed to limit her. She runs all over the building with little success. As Miller points out:

In the Antient Concert Rooms, Mrs. Kearney is clearly at a disadvantage. The very structure of the physical layout of the hall denies her power. When she wants to talk with Mr. Holohan or Mr. Fitzpatrick, she goes "all over the building looking" for them, but "She could find neither" (D 141). The men, on the other hand, are familiar with the "tortuous passages" of the hall and have their own "secluded room" (D 145), where they can drink in privacy and escape from such difficulties as Mrs. Kearney. (418)

It is as if the concert rooms themselves have been designed to thwart Mrs. Kearney. The entire experience is foreign to her. As Miller points out, the men are completely at home and have their own secluded club room. Miller's analysis emphasizes the fact that the physical space of the Antient Concert Rooms represents everything Mrs. Kearney experiences. In other words, the gendered space itself restricts Mrs. Kearney and leads her to struggle continuously. Miller argues the design of the concert hall conspires to prevent Mrs. Kearney from finding who she needs.

A gap in Miller's analysis exists in that she does not discuss the impact of each characters' roles specifically as mothers. Motherhood or maternity as a focus seems absent from her analysis but ultimately stands as a commonality between the two stories. Both Mrs. Mooney and Mrs. Kearney try to secure futures for their daughters. A mother's role includes looking out for their child and in these cases, each mother attempts to achieve what they thought best for

their daughters. However, a selfishness exists in Mrs. Mooney's case because she thinks in terms of how Mr. Doran can better her family's future and uses her daughter to achieve that goal. By contrast, Mrs. Kearney thinks only in terms of fairness, equality, and ensuring that her daughter get paid, which in turn affects her daughter's reputation. In "The Boarding House" facets of motherhood overlap with personal ambition. In "A Mother," Mrs. Kearney resembles many selfless but vocal mothers of today.

While Miller's analysis of spaces in *The Antient Concert Hall* yields a sympathetic reading of Mrs. Kearney, I focus on the way motherhood has specifically impacted the actions of each mother. As a determined mother, Mrs. Kearney attempts to advocate for her daughter. I contend that more than likely, if she had not been a woman, she would be easily permitted in the spaces she seems restricted from. However, her identity as a mother motivates her to take on the maze of spaces. She seems protective and concerned for her daughter's well-being and ultimately represents a caring mother. Mrs. Kearney's depiction as a caring mother stands in contrast to Mrs. Mooney who must deal with Polly's situation as she sees fit.

"A Mother" portrays a mother trying to express agency, which is illustrated by Mrs. Kearney's attempts to ensure that her daughter get paid. She remains keenly aware of her gender and does not let that deter her from defending her daughter. Joyce writes Mrs. Kearney's free indirect discourse:

They thought they had only a girl to deal with and that, therefore, they could ride roughshod over her. But she [Mrs. Kearney] would show them their mistake. They wouldn't dare to have treated her like that if she had been a man. But she would see that her daughter got her rights: she wouldn't be fooled. If they didn't pay her to the last farthing she would make Dublin ring.... But what else could she do? (148)

Mrs. Kearney's awareness of her gender does not prevent her from doing what she feels she is compelled to do. She exercises agency regardless of what circumstances she must endure. Her role as a parent seeking fairness for her daughter motivates her actions. The emphasis on Mrs. Kearney's gender further reveals the overarching theme of maternal agency. The description of Mrs. Kearney's emotional life shows the tension that exists. Her emotional monologue precedes Joyce's mention of Miss Healy who "was a great friend of Kathleen's and the Kearneys had often invited her to their house" (148). This subtle mention of the Kearneys' house is juxtaposed with Mrs. Kearney's inner monologue. This passage reminds the reader of Mrs. Kearney's abilities in the domestic sphere as well as how she struggles in public sphere.

In "The Boarding House" and "A Mother" Joyce depicts two mothers who go beyond the norms for mothers at the time by exercising agency in a patriarchal society. By depicting female characters who exercise agency, Joyce underscores the challenges faced by mothers in a society where their agency is often circumscribed. Nevertheless, the behaviors of Mrs. Mooney and Mrs. Kearney, complicated by spaces within the domestic and public spheres, carry and define each story's conflict.

Several differences exist between Mrs. Mooney and Mrs. Kearney. Most notably, Mrs. Kearney's struggles occur outside the domestic sphere, while Mrs. Mooney owns a boarding house that acts as both a public and domestic space. Miller observes, "There is a sense of amorality and trickery about her [Mrs. Mooney's] dealings that is very different from the socially proper (and transparent) methods by which Mrs. Kearney promotes her daughter" (416). Mrs. Mooney concerns herself with handling Mr. Doran and making it to mass on time. Just before she confronts Mr. Doran, Joyce writes that Mrs. Mooney was dealing playing cards (65). I argue this act of playing cards symbolizes the way Mrs. Mooney "plays" or plots her way into a better

future for her daughter. By contrast, Mrs. Kearney continuously appears at the mercy of The Antient Concert Hall and its members. As a mother interested in her daughter's professional career, any form of plotting remains absent in her case. Moreover, a significant class difference exists between the working-class Mooney and the educated Kearney. Lastly, Mrs. Mooney divorces her husband and Mrs. Kearney is married.

Motherhood often limited Irish working-class mothers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century. An emphasis on family life prevented women from exploring opportunities in the public sphere. Maryann Gialanella Valiulis observes:

Central to the strong family, strong nation argument were women; women as wives; women as mothers; women as guardians of the hearth and home. Women's citizenship—the way in which they participated in, and contributed to, the State—was rooted in the private sphere, in the domestic arena, in the family and directly related to motherhood within marriage. (102-103)

Joyce illustrates the struggles of Irish mothers through the fictional lives of Mrs. Mooney and Mrs. Kearney.<sup>6</sup> Mothers like Mrs. Kearney were fighting to be heard. Koven and Michel explain, “Many late-nineteenth-and early twentieth-century women envisioned a state which not only had the qualities of mothering we associate with welfare, but in which women played active roles as electors, policy makers, bureaucrats, and workers, within and outside the home” (3). The fictional representation of Mrs. Mooney aligns with that vision. She is a business owner of a boarding house where she serves men. She has successfully ventured outside the domestic sphere. Her “trickery” and dealings emphasize how she has circumvented the limitations of her gender. Conversely, Mrs. Kearney is constantly being reminded of it in her encounters with members of the Antient Concert Rooms.

## **Grief, Politics, and Maternity in the Life of Maud Gonne**

Historical representations of motherhood in Ireland exist in the works of Maud Gonne and Kathleen Clarke. Both Gonne and Clarke sought maternalism as the avenue through which their public lives developed. Although mothers in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Ireland were largely confined to traditional gender roles of the time, some mothers were still able to exert more personal agency than others. One example is Maud Gonne (1866-1953), who is famously known as W. B. Yeats's love-interest and muse. However, she was a prominent figure in her own right. She was of English background but became a militant nationalist advocating for a free Ireland. Gonne had three children and suffered the loss of one of those children. Additionally, her emotional life was changed by the loss of that child. Gonne's experiences with motherhood intersect with broader discussions of gender and agency in Irish and feminist history. Her experiences demonstrate the unique struggles and opportunities that mothers faced depending on their social class. Gonne inherited significant family wealth. Her mother, Edith Cook, was an heiress. Gonne's social class enabled her to retain maternal agency and successfully engage in maternalist actions such as caring for others. She advocated for children's welfare and her autobiography illustrates the agency she was able to maintain as a result of her social class.

Gonne had a complicated relationship with motherhood. Her experiences have a close relationship to what O'Reilly has termed "matricentric feminism" (459). O'Reilly writes, "matricentric feminism understands motherhood to be socially and historically constructed, and positions mothering more as a practice than an identity" (459). Despite not being heavily involved in her own children's day-to-day lives, Gonne's identities as a "mother" and maternalist figure are emphasized in her autobiography through her actions to help all children. In her autobiography, Gonne's maternalist actions in Ireland are juxtaposed with her complex

relationship with her own children. Her social class allowed her to take advantage of an au pair for her children and therefore her life was not significantly interrupted by their birth. Gonne's relationship with motherhood differed greatly from her identity as a maternalist figure.

Ultimately, Gonne contended with both the domestic and public spheres of her life in vastly different ways.

In her autobiography Gonne often excludes the most personal details of her life. These omissions reveal the struggles Gonne faced as a mother and political activist in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Europe amidst judgment and societal expectations. In the introduction to *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne: A Servant of the Queen* (1938), editors A. Norman Jeffares and Anna MacBride White (Gonne's granddaughter) write, "Maud, however, did find that she could not write as freely as she would like; she had to be careful not to include some matters and not name some people, coming under pressure from both her publisher and her family not to do so" (x). The editors go on to note that specifically, Gonne's son, Seán MacBride, who led a political career in socially conservative Ireland during the years 1936-1965, did not want Gonne to discuss her private life, especially her affair with Lucien Millevoye. Jeffares and MacBride note, "So Millevoye appears not as her lover and the father of her son Georges Sylvere, who died in infancy, and her daughter Iseult, but as her political ally in the struggle against the British Empire" (xi). These omissions reveal the difficulties Gonne faced in sharing the details of her life. The relationship between mother and son is complicated by Gonne's desire to share her experiences. Jeffares and MacBride White also explain to "reveal" her relationship with Millevoye "given the social rectitude of the time, would have been injudicious" (xi). Unwed mothers in Ireland were looked down upon, and Gonne abided by norms of the time and left out certain truths in her autobiography. These omissions affect the reader's interpretation of Gonne's

autobiography in the sense that we are permitted to only see what Gonne allows. Gonne suppressed elements of her personal life to conform to acceptable notions of womanhood.

While Gonne writes that she and Lucien Millevoeye agreed to form a political “alliance” (Gonne’s circumlocution), and the reader knows that the two had an affair, she never goes into explicit details about the affair (65). Similarly, Gonne is never truly open about her relation to Iseult. She writes, “My unexpected return caused great excitement and joy to my household, which was now quite large and presided over by an old French widow, Madame de Bourbonne, who took care of a charming girl I had adopted called Iseult” (288). Gonne makes it a point to note that she “adopted” a girl, Iseult. She also emphasizes that her home was in the hands of someone else: Madame de Bourbonne. She was an elderly widow and a friend of the family. Shortly after, Gonne writes that Madame de Bourbonne “carried off the protesting Iseult to bed” (288). Gonne appears not to be involved at all in her daughter’s bedtime routine, which is not surprising for someone of her social class. Instead, Gonne has someone else to tuck her children in. Adrian Frazier points out, “Pregnancy and motherhood certainly imperiled Maud Gonne. What is amazing is how little in the event they impeded her. Her wealth canceled out some of the disabilities of her condition. She could afford the multiple establishments required and the staff for each of them” (82). Motherhood for Gonne was unlike anything like what she had experienced before. Nevertheless, it did not prevent her from continuing with a life completely separate from her children. This pattern of leaving her children began with her first son, Georges. Frazier observes:

By the summer of 1890 she had left her infant son in the care of another and resumed her quest to be the Irish Joan of Arc. It was not the custom even for married women of her class to be the primary caregivers of their children: sometimes, birth was followed by a

sea voyage by mother and father to recover, while the infant remained at home with a wet nurse. (85)

Frazier makes note of customs of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century that significantly influenced Gonne's practices. Not being fully present in her children's lives allowed Gonne to continue her political activities. Therefore, as Frazier suggests, motherhood occurred at the same time as her desire to live a life outside of domestic responsibilities. Moreover, Gonne and Millevoye were both public figures; any scandal would threaten their reputations and prevent them from continuing, perhaps even succeeding, in their political activities (Frazier 81-82).

Gonne's relationship with Georges reveals how complex motherhood was for her. In the summer of 1891, Gonne was with Yeats in Howth, a village east of central Dublin, when she received a telegram about Georges from Millevoye. The message summoned her back to France because Georges was ill. She lied to Yeats about the message and said it had to do with a "secret political society" (Frazier 92). Gonne could not even tell her friend Yeats the truth about what was happening. And yet her role as Georges's mother governed her actions and motivated her to look after her son. She immediately left Howth to be with Georges. When he died of meningitis shortly thereafter, she was overwhelmed by grief. She temporarily forgot how to speak French and became addicted to chloroform to help her sleep (Ward 32). The grief of losing a child forever stayed with Gonne. Margaret Ward explains in her biography that Gonne carried Georges's baby sock booties with her for the remainder of her life. Ward writes, "The little body was embalmed and a memorial chapel built but nothing could assuage either Maud's grief or her feelings of guilt and responsibility. For the rest of her life she was to wear black and on her deathbed she asked a friend to slip Georges's booties into her coffin before it was closed" (32). Frazier also notes that Yeats wrote a poem entitled "The Glove and the Cloak" about Gonne and



the booties, and Gonne did not want the poem published (120). The poem alludes to the fact that Gonne always clutched one of these little sock booties in her hands as she gave lectures. Frazier points out, “It is unknown whether the purpose was to calm her emotions, or raise them to a pitiful pitch” (121). Georges’s booties served as a source of sorrow and comfort to her during her life. They symbolized one mother’s immense heartache and her unwillingness to separate from such a loss. Furthermore, Gonne could not show her grief publicly—her son was illegitimate—and so holding onto the booties acted as her way of mourning privately. For the majority of Georges’s short life, Gonne was away engaging in other endeavors. However, after his death, Georges was always with her since she held onto his booties. Lisa Baraitser’s work on 21<sup>st</sup>-century maternal theory sheds light on Gonne’s experience. Georges’s booties are a “maternal object,” and thus “not arbitrary” (Baraitser 131). The object, in this case the booties, represents Gonne’s maternal grieving process. Baraitser points out “the new kinetic experience that motherhood brings on is one in which the mother reexperiences both her own viscosity (her materiality), and her own internal sentience (both pain and the imagination) through an encounter with objects” (150). These objects represent the normal or “mundane artifacts” of motherhood. I argue Baraitser’s general observations about motherhood can be extrapolated onto Gonne’s experiences. I believe Georges’s booties are an “object of motherhood.” Nevertheless, in this instance motherhood has been stripped from Gonne. However, her need to stay attached to her son remains and manifests itself in her desire to hold onto his booties indefinitely.

Gonne’s experiences as a grieving mother were a driving force in her life. Although she minimizes them in her autobiography, research done by Frazier reveals the strange ways she dealt with grief. Gonne’s despair over losing her son led her to explore all possible options to bring him back. Following Georges’s death, Gonne “ordered the construction of a temple-like

crypt in Samois for her son's burial vault. It still stands large and mysterious at the back of the country cemetery. The child's parents were listed as unknown on the death certificate" (Frazier 92). In her grief, she and Yeats coincidentally became interested in the occult. She then met with poet and mystic, George Russell (Æ), who, after some inquiry by Gonne, told her that a dead child could be reincarnated in the same family. This led Gonne to bring Millevoeye to Georges's memorial chapel in Samois. There she tried to conceive another child in the crypt. Frazier observes, "It is not incredible that a person so theatrical, and a mother so guilt-stricken, would place her hopes in sex magic" (125). This attempt to become impregnated with Georges's spirit was Gonne's last hope. As Frazier says, she was completely "guilt-stricken," but she was also grief-stricken. This was her way of trying to bring Georges back and make up for not being present. Additionally, this action of trying to become pregnant with Georges's spirit was Gonne's way of putting the entire experience under her control. Gonne's experiences provide a lens through which to view motherhood in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Her son's death signified a defining point in her life and political activities. Gonne drew a firm line between her actual status as a mother to Georges and her symbolic status as a mother to others in Ireland's public sphere.

Gonne's experiences with maternity and maternalism dominated her life. Nationalism and patriotism allowed women, in this case Gonne, to become engaged in the public sphere.

"Maternalism" within these movements was a gateway to the public sphere (Koven and Michel 2). Coulter points out:

The activities of nationalist movements have often provided an opportunity for women to enter this public space previously occupied not simply by men, but by those men representing the interests of a minority occupying power. And they have seized this opportunity in the thousands, in Ireland as elsewhere. (54)

Gonne was particularly influenced by the evictions of families in Ireland and these evictions motivated her maternalist actions. Her autobiography reveals how she encountered the actions of the British, or minority occupying power, in Ireland. She describes an incident in her autobiography involving a child who was badly burnt as a result of “Lord de Freyne’s men, protected by police,” setting the family’s home on fire (302). After seeing the child Gonne insists on getting a doctor and having the child’s legs bandaged (302). This incident inspires Gonne to take political action. She later speaks at a meeting and calls for the arrest of the men.

Additionally, she starts a collection for the homeless families. Similarly, in her witness statement to the Bureau of Military History in Dublin, Gonne describes an experience in 1912 when she was with her son Sean who was feeding pieces of food to ducks when “some ragged children snatched the food that was thrown to the ducks” (Gonne “Statement”). Gonne was motivated to first feed them with buns, and then, along with other members of the nationalist organization *Inghinidhe na hÉireann* (Daughters of Ireland), she organized school meals of hot Irish stew for the children. These actions further emphasize Gonne’s involvement in the lives of Irish children and families.

Gonne embodied a maternalist approach to social activism. In 1900, Gonne hosted a “Patriotic Children’s Treat.” This “treat” involved a gathering of thousands of school children who received “treats” from Gonne and was organized by her and other members of *Inghinidhe na hÉireann*. The children also took part in a procession. Similar to a picnic, this event responded to Queen Victoria’s “treat.” Gonne explains:

At the Vice-Regal Lodge in Phoenix Park, Victoria the Famine Queen gave a treat to 15,000 school-children. Convent schools vied with the Protestant ascendancy in sending the largest contingents of children, shepherded by holy nuns. Obviously we could not

interfere with nuns and children, and the Unionist papers revelled in picture and print descriptions of this spontaneous display of loyalty. *Inghinidhe na Eireann* got out posters announcing a Patriotic children's treat to all children who had not participated in Queen Victoria's treat; and some twenty-thousand responded. (269)

Although Maud Gonne was not very involved in her own children's lives early on, she was extremely concerned with the children of Ireland. In this instance, children also came to see Gonne and hear her speak. Frazier's research reveals:

According to the *Freeman's Journal* 30,000 children paraded from Beresford Place to Clontarf Park, where they were addressed by Maud Gonne. Three tons of sweets and 50,000 buns were consumed. According to a surprisingly witty police report, "the young people were treated to moderate refreshments and unlimited treason in the shape of disloyal emblems and speeches." Some of those who would be "out" in 1916 reported in old age that their political lives began on this day. (199)

Gonne was concerned with instilling a sense of patriotism and pride in young children, especially those that had been left out of Queen Victoria's treat. Her "treat" was one way she sought to achieve this goal. She felt a deep sense of hatred towards Queen Victoria, whom she called "The Famine Queen," and the "treat" was clearly a strong reaction to Queen Victoria's "treat." Nevertheless, Gonne's main concern was for Irish children. She aimed to educate children about their history and the importance of fighting for Irish freedom. The "Treat" was a maternalist action. Koven and Michel observe the origins of maternalism, which later influenced Gonne's work. They write, "The roots of maternalist movements lie in the early nineteenth century when women in many Western countries began to organize in the name of social reform, reclamation, and moral purity" (10). Koven and Michel continue, "Women's moral vision, compassion, and

capacity to nurture came increasingly to be linked to motherliness” (10). Gonne’s desire to organize this “treat” emphasizes her involvement in the lives of Irish children and families as a maternal figure. She was influenced by a desire for “morality” or fairness in the sense that all children should be fed and no child should be excluded from Queen Victoria’s treat.

The Patriotic Children’s Treat fostered a sense of unity and solidarity among the younger generation. And as Frazier notes, Gonne is credited with the political awakening of the Irish children who attended her “treat.” In the end, Gonne observes:

When every last child had left the Park I drove round to all the city hospitals. “We have never had a Sunday so free from child accidents,” was the reply everywhere, and one enthusiastic young doctor said: “You should organize a children’s treat every week.” The Patriotic Childrens’ treat became legendary in Dublin and, even now, middle-aged men and women come up to me in the streets and say: “I was one of the patriotic children at your party when Queen Victoria was over.” Queen Victoria’s children’s Treat had been eclipsed. (270)

Gonne places herself as a more prominent maternal figure than Queen Victoria. Her rivalry with Queen Victoria is also evidenced in the ironic title of her autobiography, *A Servant of the Queen*. Gonne was a maternal figure in the community, and she influenced and played a role in the lives of Irish children. The mention of middle-aged men and women recalling the event underscores its lasting impact on the community. The Patriotic Children’s Treat became a “legendary” event, which indicates its significance on the collective memory of the city.

### **Kathleen Clarke and Maternal Theory**

Throughout Kathleen Clarke’s (1878-1972) memoir, *Revolutionary Woman* (1991), domestic sites often become political spaces. One such domestic site was Clarke’s home. In this

case, the home in which she raised her three boys became a site of intense political turmoil. Their home was often raided by British soldiers, and politics was constantly being discussed. The upbringing of Clarke's three children was inundated with political activity. In her memoir, Clarke's maternal identity overlaps with her role as a political activist. She often had to contend with both of these roles and balance her duties. Moreover, Clarke's interactions with her children often become political, and 21st-century maternal theory—put forth by Andrea O'Reilly and Emily Jeremiah—is useful in understanding the way Clarke talks about her personal and political lives. For example, through concepts such as “maternal writing,” “intensive mothering,” and “matrifocal narrative,” the reader can further understand the complexity of motherhood in the public and domestic spheres. Clarke's children sometimes became involved in Clarke's activism. Unlike Gonne, she did not keep the two spheres of her life separated. She often relied on the participation of her children to fulfill her political activities. Clarke combined her identities as a mother and political activist. The way Clarke presents personal and political aspects of her life in her memoir demonstrates her ability to merge the separate spheres of her life. Like Gonne's, her relationship with motherhood was complicated. However, Clarke embodied the sacrifices republican women had to make. The participation of Clarke's children in her endeavors allowed her to maintain political agency, complicating the aforementioned concepts of maternal theory.

Clarke's memoir resembles what Jeremiah calls “maternal writing.” I apply Jeremiah's term to Clarke's memoir. Jeremiah describes “maternal writing” as “a publicizing of maternal experience, and it subverts the traditional notion of mother as an instinctual, purely corporeal being” (qtd. in O'Reilly “Matricentric Feminism” 17). Maternal writing exposes the experiences of mothers. Clarke's experiences written in her memoir are an early form of maternal writing, in that she is unafraid to truthfully share her thoughts and feelings in her role as a mother. Through

maternal writing, Clarke provides a complex view of motherhood that goes against a one-dimensional portrayal of maternity. By contrast, Gonne's autobiography would not be called maternal writing as Gonne refrains from sharing her experiences as a mother and even goes as far as to conceal them.

Clarke's life differed greatly from Gonne's in terms of how she raised her children, activism, and marriage. She came from a different social class than Gonne. In her memoir, Clarke details one night in the fall of 1914 when she had to leave her children alone. Clarke writes:

Another evening there was to be a lecture at Central Branch, and I was in a great rush to be on time. As I had no maid at the time, I had to get the children to bed before leaving. I was very nervous about leaving them alone, as the youngest, Emmet, had a passion for fire and was rather wild. Whenever I had to leave them I was gripped with fear that he would start a fire and burn himself or the house. I had to be at the lecture, as it was I who had arranged it, and I was torn between the two things. With a quaking heart I decided to trust in God and leave them. (72)

Clarke said to her children, "My duty to Ireland tonight is to go and make this lecture a success, and your duty to Ireland is to stay in bed until I return" (72). This is significant because in that moment the home became a political space. Clarke balanced her responsibilities as a mother with her desire to fight for a free Ireland. She describes herself as being "very nervous," "gripped with fear," and having a "quaking heart." In this instance, Clarke goes against the concept of "intensive mothering" by leaving her children at home. O'Reilly points out:

The discourse of intensive mothering is oppressive not because children have needs, but

because we, as a culture, dictate that only the biological mother is capable of fulfilling them, that children's needs must always come before those of the mother, and that children's needs must be responded to around the clock and with extensive time, money, and energy. (489)

This concept of "intensive mothering" is one that has been written about in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century but nevertheless is addressed in Clarke's retrospective account. Clarke is torn between her children and a more urgent obligation but is ultimately able to separate her fears from her duties as a political activist.

In her memoir, Clarke reflects on how her political activities affected her children. Clarke's depictions of her experiences with her children make her memoir a work in which the highs and lows of motherhood appear foregrounded. She notes, "I often look back and think what a very hard life my children had after the Rising...I think we had more raids than other people, but those lads never showed the slightest sign of fear, though naturally they must have felt the strain of it" (223). These statements precede a description of Clarke's children's beds being searched in the middle of the night. Later on, Clarke describes an incident when Emmet became directly involved in her political activities. Harry Boland, a fellow Irish republican activist, was at Clarke's home and in possession of incriminating papers when her home was about to be raided. Clarke writes:

He handed me a bunch of papers and told me to hide them until he came back...I could not think of any place to hide them that the military would not think of also, and in a distracted way I kept say, 'Where will I hide them?' The military were almost at the door when my youngest son, Emmet, said, 'Put them here, Mama.' 'Here' was under his pullover. I said, 'It won't do, they would see the bulk and perhaps ill-treat you.' He said,



‘They won’t if I keep my arms like this on the table’, and there he sat all through the raid at the kitchen table...They searched the kitchen, but took no notice of the little boy sitting at the table. (273)

In Clarke’s work of “maternal writing,” she reflects poignantly on how her actions affected her children. I contend Clarke’s memoir is a “matrifocal narrative.” O’Reilly defines a “matrifocal narrative” as “one in which a mother plays a role of cultural and social significance and in which motherhood is thematically elaborated and valued; it is structurally central to the plot” (460). Clarke’s memoir is one in which her narrative as a mother, and thus her experiences with motherhood, are interwoven with her stories of political activism. Motherhood is not hidden from the view in Clarke’s memoir. Her role as a mother is ingrained in who she is as a person.

Clarke’s role as a mother is also further complicated by her political actions. Following her husband’s execution, Clarke formed the “Irish Republican Prisoners Dependents Fund” (153). Clarke’s decision to form the fund is an example of a maternalism. The majority of people who came to Clarke for help were women whose husbands had been executed. Through her fund, Clarke directly influenced the lives of mothers and children in Ireland. Koven and Michel note that political engagement was expanded through maternalism. They explain, “During periods when state and welfare structures and bureaucracies were still rudimentary and fluid, female reformers, individually and through organizations, exerted a powerful influence in defining the needs of mothers and children and designing institutions and programs to address them” (2). During a time of immense change in Ireland’s history, Clarke engaged in “maternalist” actions. After the Rising of 1916, Clarke became even more politically active. In this instance it was communally. However, through her individual work she created a crucial

fund for mothers and children, which speaks directly to Koven and Michel's contention. Clarke fundamentally worked at a grassroots level to aid families at a time when structures were "fluid."

In 1918 because of Clarke's continued political engagement and the belief by the British that she was involved in a so-called "German Plot," she was on the brink of being arrested yet again when Mick Collins advised her to "go on the run" (Clarke 195). She writes "but I doubted I was [going to be arrested], and would find it difficult to go on the run with three young children" (195). Nevertheless, Clarke was arrested shortly thereafter. She told the two British soldiers who came to arrest her that "if they took me away immediately then there would be no one to look after the children" (196). In that moment, Clarke used her identity as a mother to try to prevent herself from being arrested. However, her immediate concern was for the safety of her children. She elaborates in her memoir on how she dealt with the consequences of being arrested and how they affected her family. Clarke writes, "I told the children that I was being arrested by the British who had murdered their father and uncle, and that I did not expect to be back with them until the end of the war" (196). She goes on to instruct her children not to cry in the presence of the British soldiers, which underscores her memoir as a "matrifocal" narrative in that her experiences as a mother take precedence. She says, "Remember, these men are our country's enemy, and you are the sons of a patriot and martyr" (196). Clarke indicates that she was "heartbroken at having to leave them" (197). In this instance, Clarke's identity as a mother and political activist come together. The British soldiers have raided her home and shown no sympathy for the fact that she is a mother. Her home has become a political environment and at young ages her children are exposed to the harsh realities of war. Their father has been murdered and their mother is arrested. Clarke leaves matters in the hands of her eldest, Daly, whom she instructs to contact relatives. She says that, "He was a frail, delicate boy, and I felt heartbroken

leaving him, he needed such care” (196). Nevertheless, Clarke’s political activities have significantly affected the “home life” of her children. She has no choice but to be honest with her children about the nature of the situation.

In her home, Clarke’s children were directly involved in her political dilemmas. Her sons had to go through incidents that most children do not have to go through. Since their father, Tom Clarke, was executed by the British after the Rising, their mother had to become the primary caregiver for them. However, Clarke’s duty to Ireland often reigned over everything. Abigail Palko points out that Irish society frequently limited mothers in a way often expressed in literature. Palko writes:

motherhood has tended to dramatically circumscribe women’s existence, while simultaneously serving as the only form of consecration of a woman’s worth, reflecting and reinforcing an “enduring anti-maternal bias of Irish society” that plays out in Irish literature as a continuing cultural disempowerment of Irish mothers. (44)

Clarke is one of the few Irish women who has unapologetically written about her experiences with motherhood, but she has not allowed that identity to define her. While many mothers suffered living under the conservative Irish government of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century,<sup>7</sup> Clarke publicized her experiences. Clarke and Gonne were not always confined to the domestic sphere. However, their avenue to the public sphere was often through maternalism and nationalism.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis began with an interest in Joyce’s description of Mrs. Mooney in “The Boarding House” as “an outraged mother” (64). It later evolved with an aim of understanding and comparing the experiences of politically active Irish mothers Kathleen Clarke and Maud Gonne and how those experiences are represented in their own texts. In a 21<sup>st</sup>-century context,

“rage,” similar to Mrs. Mooney’s “outrage,” comes up in Minna Dubin’s book: *Mom Rage: The Everyday Crisis of Modern Motherhood* (2023). Dubin’s book is one of a plethora of books that have been published in the last year on motherhood both in Ireland and the U.S., which further shows the popularity and importance of motherhood studies.<sup>8</sup> Dubin’s book illustrates an honest exploration of the author’s experiences with the often taboo emotion of maternal anger. Dubin writes about the conflicting emotions that arise from the demands of motherhood. She also discusses how anger can be both isolating and empowering. Dubin challenges the notion that mothers should suppress their rage, instead advocating for embracing and channeling it constructively to effect change. I often wonder what the mothers in this thesis would say about Dubin’s book and the literature being published today on motherhood. What Dubin calls “mom rage” can be applied to any mother’s experience.

Following the 1916 Rising and the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, Ireland saw several legal developments that affected the role of mothers. In 1924, the Irish State in one of its first acts enacted a “marriage bar,” which banned married women from working in public service and remained in place until the 1970s (Mosca and Wright 1). Furthermore, a new constitution known as the Constitution of Ireland or Bunreacht na hÉireann (Borach-na-hEhrin) was issued in 1937 by Eamon de Valera. While the 1937 Constitution represented an important milestone in Ireland's history, it also included language that restricted women in various aspects of life. One of the key features of the 1937 Constitution was its recognition surrounding the role of women and mothers within the family and society. This recognition entrenched traditional gender roles and reinforced patriarchal values. Specifically, Articles 41.2. and 41.2.1 of the Constitution stated:

The State recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labor to the neglect of their duties in the home. (qtd. in McGreevy)

This provision underscored the State's view regarding the importance of women's roles as homemakers and caretakers, effectively relegating them to the domestic sphere and reinforcing the notion that their primary duty was within the home. On March 8, 2024, International Women's Day, Ireland's government sought to rectify this injustice to women and mothers with a referendum that would explicitly change the language of the notorious "women in the home" Articles from the 1937 Constitution. However, the referendum did not pass, and the language remains in the constitution to this day.

Many voters were confused about the language of the referendum, which ultimately led to its downfall. *Irish Times* opinion columnist Justine McCarthy observes, "Had voters been asked if we wished to simply repeal article 41.2.1 – woman's "life within the home" – instead of only being given the option of amending it, the outcome could have been different" (1). Ireland legalized divorce, gay marriage, and overturned its abortion ban. Nevertheless, Ireland failed to pass the "women in the home" referendum and the future of this issue remains unclear.

Ultimately, all the mothers addressed in this thesis embodied the ways mothers had to contend with various spaces. Such spaces, which existed within both the domestic and public spheres, heavily influenced the actions of each mother. Irish mothers of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century were also deeply influenced by the political backdrop of the time, which included the pivotal 1916 Rising. At times, they were fighting for a better life for themselves, their families, and in *Gonne* and *Clarke's* cases: the families of others. And nowadays, though mothers are still fighting for

equal rights and opportunities, motherhood studies provides a platform for the exploration of the experiences of mothers.

## Notes

1. Coulter argues in her article “Ireland’s Metropolitan Feminists” that, “All patriarchal societies share the tendency to confine women within the domestic, private sphere, there to be subject to the male members of the family” (53). The Irish context is different from the original Victorian-era English concept in that Coulter applies it to the political activism of Irish women who were fighting for a free Ireland.
2. See Coulter’s book *The Hidden Tradition: Feminism, Women, and Nationalism in Ireland* (1993) for a more detailed and specific account of how other nationalist women in Ireland were politically active among men (22).
3. This thesis’ main focus is motherhood and includes no significant discussion of the Catholic Church because it is not discussed remarkably in any of the texts analyzed. For more on the Catholic Church and women in Ireland see the book chapter “Women and the Church Since the Famine” by Joseph J. Lee in *Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension* (1979) edited by Margaret MacCurtain and Donncha Ó Corráin.
4. See Suzette A. Henke’s reading of *Dubliners* in “Feminist Perspectives on James Joyce” (14-5).
5. I thank Dr. Greenberg for bringing this to my attention and pointing out Mrs. Mooney’s name sounds like “money,” which relates directly to her character.
6. For more on the impact of gender in Ireland see *The Making of Inequality in the Irish Free State, 1922-37: Women, Power and Gender Ideology* (2019) by Maryann Gialanella Valiulis

7. The “suffering” I am thinking of spans across several issues including: the Magdalene Laundries and is seen in Catriona Crowe’s work “The Commission and The Survivors,” *The Dublin Review*, 2021.
8. See several examples of recent works just in last few years alone from Irish, British, Canadian, and American authors include: *Milk: On Motherhood and Madness* (2023) by Alice Kinsella, *Confinement: The Hidden History of Maternal Bodies in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2023) by Jessica Cox, *(M)otherhood: On the Choices of Being a Woman* by Pragya Agarwal (2021), *In (M)other Words: Writings on Mothering and Motherhood, 2009-2024* (2024) by Andrea O’Reilly and *Breastfeeding and the Pursuit of Happiness* (2021) by Phyllis L.F. Rippey. Also academic initiatives happening in the U.S. and Ireland include “The Motherhood Project” at the Maynooth University Arts and Humanities Institute in Ireland and The Institute for the Study of Motherhood Scholarship (ISMS) at Boston University.



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