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Narrative voicings in the novels of Roddy Doyle

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Narrative Voicings in the Novels of Roddy Doyle

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We hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under our supervision by **Larry Poe** entitled **"Narrative Voicings in the Novels of Roddy Doyle"** be accepted in partial fulfillment of the degree of MASTER OF ARTS IN HUMANITIES.

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Table of Contents

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Scholars have generally ignored Irish novelist and playwright Roddy Doyle. Little attention has been paid to his narrative techniques or to his development as a novelist. In the American academy, thus far, only one dissertation concerning Doyle's novels has appeared, written in 1996, by Caramine White, at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. White notes that her dissertation is the first on Doyle and "its basic purpose will be to introduce the novels to the reading public and to convince the reading public that Doyle, although a very popular artist, is also a gifted writer who should be taken seriously" (White 1). White focuses on Doyle's "innovative use of language; his manipulation of his audience's reaction via humor and comedy; the role, however slight, of religion and politics; his overall social vision as projected in the novels both individually and as part of the complete body of work" (White 1). White's dissertation, then, is obviously a broad-based one aimed at establishing an academically oriented credibility for Doyle's novels.

Roddy Doyle's style of narration has evolved significantly from his first novel, The Commitments, 1987, through his fifth novel, The Woman Who Walked into Doors, 1996. Reviewers have noted a shift from exterior dialogue to the depiction of the characters' states of mind in the fourth novel,

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha, and the fifth novel. Noted also has been a darkening of tone. Not explored to any great degree, however, has been the narrative voicing that emerges from the texts of Doyle's novels. Doyle uses hyperrealism to depict episodes of life much as they occur to his characters in an accurate recreation of real time. To enhance this realism, Doyle creates, as major voices in his novels, characters who share at least one common factor with his own life. All of the characters are Dubliners, as is Doyle. Many of the characters are at or near the ages that Doyle was when the stories in the novels took place, most notably Paddy Clarke and Paula Spencer of The Woman Who Walked into Doors.

The purpose of this study is to examine various significant narrative voicings that emerge from Doyle's five novels. The voices to be examined are those from The Barrytown Trilogy of Jimmy Rabbitte Sr. who appears in all three of the novels; Jimmy Rabbitte Jr. who is in The Commitments and, nominally, in The Snapper; and Sharon Rabbitte, who is the central character in The Snapper and appears in all three novels. The voices of ten-year-old Paddy Clarke from the novel of the same name and Paula Spencer from The Woman Who Walked into Doors will be discussed at greater length. The characterizations of Paddy Clarke and Paula Spencer are Doyle's greatest artistic achievements to date. Their voices dominate the novels in which these characters appear and act as filters for the other voices and happenings. Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha is an incredible achievement in which

Doyle has created and sustained, with such consistency, the voice of his child narrator. The characterization of Paula Spencer demonstrates Doyle's ability to construct and maintain the voice of a female narrator. The voicings will be explored within the novels in which they appear as aspects of Doyle's overall catalog of writing. The question of whether Doyle's popularity and populism have created a negative perception of the writer as an artist is also to be considered.

Some noted scholars and social critics have taken up commentary and analysis of Doyle's work. M. Keith Booker in the journal, Ariel, looks at Doyle's use of American popular cultural references and iconography in the novels. Writing from a cultural materialist's stance, Booker states of Doyle's novels:

> All of Doyle's fictions point in one way or another to the importance of American popular culture in modern Dublin. The characters of The Snapper spend a great deal of their leisure time watching television that is dominated by American products like MTV; the major action in The Van involves the efforts of Jimmy, Sr. and his friend Bimbo to start their own fast food business . . . hoping to outstrip McDonald's or Burger King; and the boys of Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha spend much of their time watching American westerns and playing Cowboys and Indians. (Booker 33)

In Doyle's works, Booker sees the globally dominant nature of capitalism,

which is a very real fact of modern life and an aid Doyle uses in the creation of his realistic contemporary novels. Also, the voice of American capitalism (TV programming, popular music and commercials) is in the background of each of the novels.

In general, Doyle is perceived as a popular cultural phenomenon rather than as a serious literary figure. In 1994, after winning the Booker Prize (the first Irish author to do so), Doyle created a BBC docudrama, Family. This screenplay was about Charlo and Paula Spencer and their family. The drama centered on the ugliness of domestic abuse. The story of Paula Spencer was not fully told in Family. Doyle later allows Paula to tell her story as narrator of the novel, The Woman Who Walked into Doors. Both the docudrama and the novel have thrust Doyle into the role of social activist. What Doyle refers to as Ireland's "dirty little secret" (domestic abuse) made the author a central pro-divorce campaigner in the 1996 referendum which produced an extremely narrow vote to allow divorce.

Doyle appears to relish the role of spokesperson on socially relevant topics. Ironically, the publicity which his social activism creates has allowed Doyle's detractors to say that his social activism is a calling more fit than are his literary efforts. For the literary establishment, Doyle is often dismissed as a populist chronicler of the "happy poor" and, now, the "sad poor," as well.

In part to attempt to discover Doyle's artistic centrality, which the media

hyperbole often hides, Charles Foran wrote a very insightful article in 1996 for Saturday Night, a Canadian magazine. The article, "The Troubles of Roddy Doyle," examined Doyle's rapid rise to popularity and the controversy that Family and The Woman Who Walked into Doors had thrust upon him. Foran views Doyle as a protean literary artist and social critic. Much of the article is devoted to Foran's attempt to put Doyle's five novels into some kind of critical context. Of The Barrytown Trilogy, Foran writes:

> Equally, The Barrytown Trilogy is far from inconsequential. A decade ago, the joke around Dublin was that the only thing that kept Ireland out of the Third World was its weather. The literary and social critic, Declan Kiberd, talks of a "failure of nerve" in 1980s Irish political life. The result, besides another immigration hemmorhage, was a nation where First-World and Third-World conditions co-existed . . . "The juxtapositions were everywhere in Ireland," Kiberd says, "But nowhere were they on display with such intimacy as in Roddy Doyle's fictional neighborhood." (Foran 9)

Perhaps, according to Foran, enough time has elapsed from the printing of The Barrytown Trilogy to re-evaluate both the literary and social significance of Doyle's early work.

Peter Conrad is another reviewer who sees Doyle for his literary and social merit. Conrad offers the opinion that Doyle is a return to the type of humanist that the nineteenth century novelist was well before the

modernists burst upon the scene: "Novelists in the nineteenth century were consulted as oracles or agony aunts" (Conrad 1). Further, Conrad states that Doyle "disarmingly returns to the humane outlook of the nineteenth century novelist, and he therefore worries critics as much as he delights his multitude of readers" (1).

In The Atlanta Journal Constitution, Allen Barra also views Doyle as a throwback to writers of times gone by but with a different twist. Barra sees the fact that each novel of The Barrytown Trilogy has also become a movie as a factor which militates against Doyle's acceptance as a writer of the highest artistic merit. Barra writes:

> Doyle gets his good reviews and the odd tribute or profile, but there is often a cautious quality to their tone, as if critics were hesitant to praise a writer who is so successful, one whose work translates so easily into good movies. (1)

Barra also sees a parting of the ways with Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha and The Woman Who Walked into Doors and the ability of these novels to translate into film. Barra states, "At a time when the aim of most serious fiction seems to be a kind of studied shallowness, Doyle goes deeper. My guess is that the movies aren't going to be able to follow him there, and to Doyle it will not matter at all" (2).

With all the controversy over Doyle as a populist chronicler vs. literary artist, one element is evident. Doyle's characters, the Rabbittes, the Clarkes,

the Spencers, and his locale, Barrytown, and epoch, the 1980s, depict a watershed in contemporary Irish culture. The global economy has overrun Ireland and, while bringing prosperity, has blurred traditional identities. Fintan O'Toole deftly examines the problem of identity in Ireland in the 1990s through his collected essays, The Lie of the Land: Irish Identities.

> 'A nation', says Leopold Bloom in James Joyce's Ulysses, 'is the same people living in the same place '. And then, under pressure, he adds 'Or also living in different places'. Ireland invented itself under the auspices of the first of these attempted definitions. The conjunction of 'same people' and 'same place', conveniently reinforced by the partition of the island which created separate Catholic and Protestant domains, made a thing called 'Ireland'. Now as we face the disappearance of that Ireland under the pressures of economics, of geography, of the collapse of the religious monolith which was inseparable from our self-definition, we are left with no option but to add Bloom's contradictory corrective about different places. (xv)

Ireland in the mid to late 1990s is experiencing unrivaled economic growth. Doyle's Barrytown stands to remind the contemporary consciousness of how the 1960s presented in Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha evolved into the 1980s in working class Dublin, as portrayed in The Barrytown Trilogy. Few debate that Doyle has rendered a unique sociological portraiture of Dublin's working class via Barrytown. In fact, it is the single element that has brought him

the most praise.

In Inventing Ireland, Declan Kiberd assesses his contribution:

> [Doyle] was one of the first artists to register the ways in which the relationship between 'First' and 'Third' Worlds was enacted daily upon the streets of the capital city. Even more impressive was his exploration of the inner world of childhood in Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha (1993), a book which evinced a nostalgia for the 1960s in which it was set and at the same time checked that tendency with a portrait of a disintegrating marriage. (Kiberd 611)

Doyle's humane comedy, which has transmuted noticeably in his last two novels, is often said to be his great achievement. Those who give him usually grudging praise as an artist concede that the verisimilitude of the narrators' psychologies of his fourth and fifth novels is quite worthy. However, beyond the portraiture of Barrytown and the worlds of Paddy Clarke and Paula Spencer, there are the distinctive voices of the major characters that ring clearly and memorably in one's mind long after the novels have been read.

To examine the voices which emerge from the texts of Doyle's novels, I will utilize the concept of "heteroglossia" as elaborated by Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin conceived the novel as a "phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice. In it the investigator is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities" (261). Bakhtin felt that the novel was

the truly democratic form of literary art as it evolved from middle class, not elitist, tradition. As well, Bakhtin thought that the prose artist was late in receiving his due as a stylist because novelistic prose was viewed as less artistic than poetics by the traditional critical community. Using Mikhail Bakhtin's frame of reference, it appears that Roddy Doyle's artistry has been subjected to the same neglect that prose artists have traditionally gotten throughout most of the history of the novel.

Also important to this study will be the concept that point of view involves both the voice and the vision provided to the reader. David H. Richter, in Narrative/Theory, states: "In structural narratology . . . the distinctions included under 'point of view' are split into the separate issues of 'focalisation' and 'voice' roughly locating who sees and who speaks: the perspective from which the action is viewed and the language used to convey the action" (100). It would be very difficult to explain the effects of voice apart from focalization, and this investigation of the aforementioned five characters from Roddy Doyle's novels will, indeed, look at both aspects of point of view. In addition, Doyle's special talent for recreating the dialect of working class Dublin will be examined. Finally, a discussion of Doyle the artist vs. Doyle the popular novelist will be undertaken with an eye toward debunking those who say the two elements are mutually exclusive.

Chapter 2

The Barrytown Trilogy

From the middle 1990s forward, Roddy Doyle's first three novels have been known as The Barrytown Trilogy. In this collection, Roddy Doyle has created a saga of the Rabbitte family. From the novels, The Commitments (1987), The Snapper (1990), and The Van (1991), emerge three very distinct characterizations: Jimmy Rabbitte Sr.; Jimmy Jr.; and Sharon Rabbitte, representing the young man, young woman, and middle-aged man dealing with the pressures and demands of their personal lives and their constantly underfinanced working-class lives in 1980s Dublin. These fictional creations help to bring to Doyle's readership that uniquely representative style of life and language that, from the beginning, has been seen as the author's trademark mixture of comedy, Dublin working-class vernacular, and endearing characterizations. The characters give Roddy Doyle a chance to bring up and comment upon various sociological and life-stage considerations contemporaneous with the 1980s Dublin milieu. The Rabbitte family is as much a part of Doyle's Dublin portraiture as Stephen Dedalus, Molly Bloom and Leopold Bloom are in James Joyce's fiction.

The first novel of the trilogy, The Commitments, concerns Jimmy Rabbitte Jr. and his efforts to form a Motown-style soul band with his friends, who are essentially uninitiated to this type of music. The band has some local success, but it falls apart just as Jimmy has them on the verge of an independent recording contract with "Eejit Records." Other than Jimmy

Jr., not one of the band seems heavily committed to the success of "The Commitments." The band was clearly the vision of Jimmy Jr., and, when the band fails, Jimmy is well ready to start another.

For Doyle's second novel, The Snapper, the main character is Sharon Rabbitte, the family's eldest daughter. The plot of the novel concerns how Sharon and the family deal with Sharon's out-of-wedlock pregnancy. The father of her "snapper" is George Burgess, also the father of one of Sharon's friends, her brother's soccer coach, and a contemporary of her own father. Sharon's characterization, while still having the focalization primarily handled by the exterior agent of the narrative voice, is, in significant ways, a foreshadowing of Doyle's characterization of Paula Spencer. At the very least, the characterization of Sharon Rabbitte demonstrates Doyle's ability to write believably about women.

The Van, Doyle's third novel, is an exploration of mid-life crises of Jimmy Rabbitte Sr. and his closest friend, "Bimbo" Reeves, who have been laid off from their trades prior to when they could have retired. After Bimbo is "made redundant," he uses his severance pay to purchase a dilapidated chipper van, which he and Jimmy restore to somewhat credible working order. Even though the money to start the business comes solely from Bimbo, he and Jimmy share equally in the profits until Bimbo and his wife decide that Jimmy Sr. is an employee and not an investor. The tension builds between the friends after Jimmy joins a union and demands his worker's rights, and a fight ensues. The novel explores the sense that mid-

life crisis brings of having been left out of things.

To understand the characters and the world of The Barrytown Trilogy, it is first important to look at some of the circumstances of composition of the novels in their original printings and, further, to explore some of Doyle's views concerning the process of narration as he applies it to his fiction. According to an interview conducted by Caramine White in March of 1996 and appended to her doctoral dissertation, Doyle reveals the original sequence and duration of the compositional process with regards to the three novels: "I started *The Snapper* immediately after *The Commitments*, which I wrote in '86, so I started *The Snapper* in late '86. . . . I was finished in '89, although it was published in '90 in England and Ireland. . . ." (White 187). The Van was essentially written from late 1989 through 1990. It was a finalist for The Booker Prize in 1991.

Doyle's 1980s version of Dublin is one in which unemployment and excess co-exist. In the eighties, the current "Celtic Tiger" economy had not yet been realized. Ironically, though, the economic resurgence has come at the cost of great unemployment among semi-skilled and unskilled urban workers. According to John Stacks, writing in Time in 1995, "Joblessness in excess of 14% is still the third worst in Europe, ahead of only Spain and Finland, but that figure is down dramatically from the 20% rate posted in the 1980s" (25). There is the opportunity for a life of leisure, but, to Doyle's characters, it is the questionable leisure of youthful unemployment or

middle-aged redundancy.

As always with Doyle, one gets a look at the Dublin idiom. Americans have used the word "downsizing" to name this nebulous process whereby jobs being eliminated subsequently eliminates the need for people in the industrial sense. The phrase in England and Ireland "to be made redundant" refers to being "laid off" as an effect of economic "downsizing" or offshore exporting of work. As in editing, that which is redundant gets either erased or stricken out. Economically, "working-class" people with no salaried work usually are taken note of only as monthly statistics. Doyle's Barrytown novels, however, show the humanity of these people dealing with what poverty does and does not take from them.

In The Commitments, readers first meet the Rabbitte family who reside in Barrytown, a fictional north Dublin suburb. Jimmy Rabbitte Sr. is a plasterer. His eldest son, Jimmy Jr., longs to be a disc jockey. Sharon, the eldest daughter, works in a grocery until her pregnancy forces her out of the workforce. A second son, Leslie, is spoken of as a shadowy character who is always in trouble and never at home. Third son, Darren, and twins, Linda and Tracy, complete the large cast of Rabbitte children. Wife and mother, Veronica, is a calming influence on the family. When Veronica returns to night school in The Van to study for what we would call a high school equivalency certificate, Jimmy Sr. is proud of her, but he also feels a bit jealous and displaced within the family. The family pet is a mutt named Larrygogan after a famous disc jockey and, in part, to "slag" Jimmy Junior's

ambition of becoming a disc jockey himself. It is quite an ensemble that Doyle has created. One reviewer, Bruce Allen, wrote of The Snapper:

> Its saving grace is Jimmy Sr., a wonderful mixture of obscene bluster and boozy sentimentality. He's the sort of doting patriarch who organizes a cycling club for his son Darren and pals, but can't manage to operate a stopwatch. . . . He's intensely real, and the novel comes vividly alive as he begins to understand that he can't control the feisty Sharon, and that "there was more to life than drinking pints with your mates." (3)

In many ways, the character of Jimmy Sr. is the anchor of the entire Barrytown Trilogy, and when Doyle finishes with this character in The Van, he moves away from the entire Rabbitte clan.

The voices of the characters in The Barrytown Trilogy create a hilarious fugue of phonetically spelled, profane, and telling dialogue. There is an authorial narrative voice in the novels, but this narrative intervention operates more on the level of a master of ceremonies and not an intrusive authorial omniscience. The first character to capture our attention is Jimmy Jr. in The Commitments. Jimmy Jr. is seen from the outset as the one who knows popular music and the environment in which it operates:

> --- We'll ask Jimmy, said Outspan. --- Jimmy'll know.
>
> Jimmy Rabbitte knew his music. He knew his stuff alright.
>
> You'd never see Jimmy coming home from town without a new album or a 12-inch or at least a 7-inch single. Jimmy ate Melody Maker and

> the NME every week and Hot Press every two weeks. He listened to Dave Fanning and John Peel. He even read his sisters' Jackie when there was no one looking. So Jimmy knew his stuff. (Trilogy 7)

From the outset of The Commitments, Doyle uses the narrative voice to introduce the reader to Jimmy, much in the same manner and vernacular as one of Jimmy's contemporaries would speak. The entire novel operates in the vernacular and, in the manner of James Joyce, the punctuation of a dash introduces quotations instead of the traditional quotation marks, creating a smooth transition in and out of the dialogue. When Jimmy does speak, it is with a slang-based idiom, laced with profanity which sounds both naive and street-wise at the same time.

> --- I didn't mean it like tha', he said. --- It's not the fact tha' they went to fuckin' art school that's wrong with them. It's --- (Jimmy was struggling.) --- more to do with --- (Now he had something.) ---- the way their stuff, their songs like, are aimed at gits like themselves. Wankers with funny haircuts. An' rich das. --- An' fuck all else to do all day 'cept prickin' around with synths. (10)

It is obvious that the narrative voice directs us to Jimmy who, in turn, directs a great deal of his energy toward explaining the intricacies of popular music to Outspan and Derek, his often less perceptive friends.

Along with another contemporary named Ray, Derek and Outspan are in this musical group which plays 1980s style synthesizer-based pop music.

Jimmy's aesthetic runs against such "shite" because it's not genuine. It has nothing to do with "the people." As Jimmy puts it:

> --- All tha' mushy shite abou' love an' fields an' meetin' mots in the supermarkets an' Mcdonald's is gone, ou' the fuckin' window. It's dishonest, said Jimmy. It's bourgeois. (12)

Jimmy is definitely on a roll. The rhythm and intensity of his profanity-laced vernacular builds in much the same manner as does the music that Jimmy so praises -- Motown soul. Jimmy becomes a pop culture prophet who brings the gospel of soul music to his credulous friends.

> Then Jimmy spoke. ---Rock an' roll is all about ridin'. That's wha' rock an' roll means. Did yis know tha'? (They didn't.)
>
> --- Yeah, that's wha' the blackies in America used to call it. So the time has come to put the ridin' back into rock an' roll.
>
> Tongues, gooters, boxes, the works. The market's huge. (13)

A Dublin slang dictionary would not be a bad addition to the library of one reading The Barrytown Trilogy as a first excursion in Doyle's writing. However, as with most youth-oriented slang, once one figures out that "ridin'" means having sex, the rest falls fairly naturally into place. Jimmy's language in the above passage is quite telling in the sociological sense. While speaking out about the exploitation of the Irish working class, the young man is not above racist epithets, vulgarity, and obvious greed. Such is the stuff of which the dreams of working-class youth are often made.

All in an afternoon of animated conversation, Jimmy validates soul

music as the music of the people and motivates his mates into forsaking "synth" music and agreeing to form a soul band. It is clearly Jimmy's energy and words which drive the action in The Commitments. Of Jimmy Jr., Doyle has said, "With the younger Jimmy, unemployment is just something to get out of the way – he's other things to do – he'll survive. He may be knocked about when he gets older, but he's flooding with self-confidence" (White 190).

Like Doyle, but regarding his own culture, Hispanic-American author Richard Rodriguez has written of the flamboyance of impoverished youth and how they decorate themselves and their worlds:

> In recent years I have had occasion to lecture in ghetto high schools. There I see students of remarkable style and physical grace. (One can see more dandies in such schools than one ever will find in middle-class high schools.) There is not the look of casual assurance that I saw the students at Stanford display. . . . (Against a powerless future, they engage images of strength.) Bad nutrition does not yet tell. Great disappointment, fatal to youth, awaits them still. (Rodriguez 192)

Jimmy's efforts at entering show business in any way that he can are an extension of his desire for glamour of his own manufacture in a rather dour economic niche in Irish society. A life of adult underemployment might await Jimmy and his friends. The voice of Jimmy Jr. mixes with those of his contemporaries to form a chorus of young, enthusiastic, profane urban poor who fight against the intuition that life will deal them much the same hand as was dealt their parents' generation. They, too, will find themselves

trapped in the unskilled laborers' niche and will deal with it as it happens. For the present, the free time that they have apart from the minor jobs that they have, either inside or outside the home, gets spent putting together the unlikely saga of a youthful Dublin soul band.

Jimmy's voice expresses his directorship of this unlikely crew of disciples of soul. They add three female background singers, chosen because they are good looking, but, being Irish, they just happen also to be able to sing. They add a fifty-something horn player, Joey "the Lips" Fagan, and a keyboardist and saxophone player. Joey "the Lips" becomes the advisor to the group as he has ties, which he most likely overstates, to the American soul scene. He shows the younger bandmates liner credits on a few soul albums that he says that he has played on. During the course of the formation of the band, each of the three female singers has sex with Joey, behavior which obviously causes tensions in the band. Against all odds, however, Jimmy manages to get the band some "gigs" (the first being in a bingo hall) and also some mention in the pop music press. When the band is on the verge of signing with "Eejit Records," an independent label, for no money to record a few tunes, the band breaks up in an enormous fight, which occurs as Jimmy is downstairs in the pub talking to the manager of the record label. The novel ends with Jimmy Jr., Outspan and Derek in Jimmy Jr.'s room where The Commitments were founded discussing their plan to start a Dublin country music group:

--- Dublin country, said Jimmy. --- That's fuckin' perfect.

> The Brassers. --- We're a Dublin country group.
>
> --- That's an excellent name, Derek, said Outspan.
>
> --- Ah --- I just thought of it, yeh know.
>
> Jimmy put the needle back on its stand.
>
> --- Another thing I forgot to tell yis. I was in touch with your man, Dave from Eejit Records, remember? I asked him would be interested in a country-punk version 'o Night Train, an' he said he migh' be. (139-40)

Jimmy's verve and swagger at this point are undaunted. As Doyle stated, Jimmy is "flooding with confidence." M. Keith Booker notes of the plot of The Commitments: "In short the plot is that of almost all of the stories in Joyce's *Dubliners*: dreams of adventure and escape collapse amid the stultifying social and cultural climate of Dublin, where Dubliners fight among themselves and seldom succeed in any sort of collective effort" (29).

One would almost expect, with the wild success of the movie version of The Commitments, that Doyle would continue to follow the adventures of Jimmy Jr. Doyle, however, began writing The Snapper almost immediately after he finished The Commitments. His work on the screenplay of the movie version of The Commitments helped him to finish with the character of Jimmy Jr. In The Snapper, Jimmy Jr. appears as a young man who has basically overstayed his time at home but who is still loved by his family. His dream of becoming a disc jockey endures, and he is often heard as a disembodied voice from the upper rooms announcing an imaginary radio

program. In the second novel, he actually does get on the air via an "independent" radio station which broadcasts from a friend's garage. At this point in his "career," it is obvious that he will not go far in entertainment. He is experimenting with a change in accent. Although it is not quite apparent to which human group his accent might be attributed, its transcription leaves us laughing:

> ---THOT WAS OLEXANDER O'NEAL WITH FAKE. THERE' NOTHIN' FAKE ABOUT THIS ONE. HERE'S THE GODFATHER OF SOUL, --- JAMES BROWN, YIS SIMPLEHEADS YIS. (336).

Jimmy Junior's attempt to fake a British accent while accidentally slipping into street vernacular is comic to read, but, in the context of the one-sided relationship that England has had with Ireland, we see yet another Irish youth trying to gain fame and fortune by Anglicizing, in this case, his speech. Hopefully, in the near future, leaving Ireland, physically or linguistically, will not be a prerequisite for success for Irish youth.

In The Snapper and The Van, Doyle does an interesting bit of subtle character development with Jimmy Jr. As Jimmy Jr. is no longer the main character in either of the latter two novels, it is easy to dismiss the progress of his characterization as minimal. However, two sociological elements emerge in this further characterization. One element demonstrates that the poor youth, as a matter of survival, often must put away his or her dreams at quite an early age. By the time we encounter Jimmy Jr. in The Van, he would still be in his early twenties and already he seems to have given up on

dreams of riches. The second sociological element is the pressure on the elder children in the working-class family to move out of the domicile if they can. Jimmy Sr. is not one to expel children from the household, but it becomes evident, as time moves on, that the Jimmy Jr. of The Van is much less self-absorbed than is the Jimmy Jr. of The Commitments.

One of the most poignant scenes in the entire Barrytown Trilogy occurs in The Van when Jimmy Sr. tries to "slag" Jimmy Jr. about his girlfriend, Aoife, who, being a modern woman, has Jimmy Jr. doing the cooking, cleaning, and washing. Jimmy Jr. solves the laundry problem by bringing the washing home for Veronica to do. In this scene, Jimmy Jr. has forgotten to pick up the laundry from Veronica. Jimmy Sr., at home after being laid off, pokes a good bit of fun at his son for tending to the domestic chores. In a role reversal both realistic and necessary, Jimmy Jr. gives Jimmy Sr. money to go to buy some Guinness at the pub. After the failure of the band in The Commitments, it falls Jimmy Junior's lot to grow up and move out to make room for the other siblings as they grow, and, as well, for Sharon's baby, Gina.

--- She's dead righ', said Jimmy Sr.

--- When was the last time you washed annythin'? Jimmy Jr. asked him.

--- Don't start. I do me fair share.

--- Yeah, yeah, yeah. Course yeh do. --- I'd better go. I've got to make the fuckin' dinner.

--- My Jaysis, tha' young one has you by the bollix alrigh', said Jimmy Sr.

--- He followed Jimmy Jr. to the door.

--- Come here said Jimmy Jr. --- Could yeh use tha'? It was a fiver.

--- Eh ---

--- Go on, said Jimmy Jr.

He put it into his da's cardigan pocket.

--- Thanks.

--- No problem. See yeh.

--- Thanks.

--- Shut up, will yeh. See yeh.

--- Okay. --- Good luck, son. (373)

The comic gruffness with which Jimmy Sr. usually treats his children breaks down in the second and third novels on occasion and we are allowed to see that life is as overwhelming to Jimmy Sr. as it is to Sharon and also Jimmy Jr.

In The Snapper, the story of Sharon's out-of-wedlock pregnancy from a drunken encounter outside a pub with the father of one of her friends presents Doyle the chance to demonstrate that a comic novel can deal with tough situations. In this novel, Doyle has accomplished two noteworthy feats of narration. The first is that he has deepened the authorial narrative voice to be more than a mere "stage director," signaling a character's next move. The narrative/descriptive voice in this novel creates the interior

psychology of the character, an element which Doyle would deepen in The Van and bring to an even higher level of incisiveness in his critically acclaimed fourth and fifth novels. The second element is that Doyle has created a very believable and authentic female character. Doyle's method of working is meticulous and leads to both a much deeper and a more consistent text as he progresses through the various drafts of his novels. Finding a voice for his characters involves a process of nearly constant editing and rewriting. Each novel that Doyle has written has proven to be deeper and more complex than the former ones. As well, Doyle has let his characters express themselves increasingly more openly as if they were telling the story themselves. When I asked Doyle about his method of creating the voices in his novel, he replied:

> As I go deeper into a book, I get to know the characters better; I reach a stage when I know exactly how they would describe a situation, express an opinion – everything. This takes time and can be frustrating. Most of what I write in the first months, sometimes longer, ends up in the bin. I constantly edit – what I wrote the day before, the days before that. I also edit very heavily when I reach the end of a book, to make sure that the voice – often found halfway through the writing – is consistent from beginning to end. (Letter to author 2)

When reviewers and other critics marvel at how Doyle's ability to narrate keeps growing as he invents even more difficult challenges for himself, it is

obvious that his work ethic is as strong as is his genius.

The opening in The Snapper focuses on the Rabbitte family household at the moment when Sharon tells her father that she is pregnant. As with the other two Barrytown novels, the reader is clearly set as a spectator in full view of the scene unfolding. The major scenes are usually the kitchen, living room or a bedroom of the Rabbitte family household, a pub, or some extraneous location which is transitional. A notable exception would be the chipper van which gives the third novel its title. Family members are stationed in various parts of the general vicinity much as actors waiting in the wings. With a minimum of introduction, the scene unfolds:

--- You're wha'? said Jimmy Rabbitte Sr.

He said it loudly.

--- You heard me, said Sharon.

Jimmy Jr was upstairs in the boys' room doing his D. J. practice. Darren was in the front room watching Police Academy II on the video. Les was out. Tracy and Linda, the twins, were in the front room annoying Darren. Veronica, Mrs. Rabbitte, was sitting opposite Jimmy Sr at the kitchen table.

Sharon was pregnant and she'd just told her father that she thought she was. She'd told her mother earlier, before the dinner.

--- Oh --- my Jaysis, said Jimmy Sr.

He looked at Veronica. She looked tired. He looked at Sharon again.

--- That's shockin', he said.

Sharon said nothing.

--- Are yeh sure? said Jimmy Sr.

--- Yeah. Sort of.

--- Wha'?

--- Yeah.

Jimmy Sr wasn't angry. He probably wouldn't be either, but it all seemed very unfair. (145)

From the outset, the reader is aware that the realistic situations here are filtered through the lens of comedy. Although Jimmy Sr. tries to appear in control of the situation, he is obviously no more than the master of very loosely controlled ceremonies. Of The Barrytown Trilogy, Diane Turbide has written: " . . . Doyle has created a literary landmark with his fictional Barrytown, a working-class area of his native Dublin. His first three novels, known as The Barrytown Trilogy, centered on the Rabbittes, a family of eight whose lives are a mixture of high comedy, depressing poverty and domestic chaos" (50). This comedy stems in part from the domestic chaos. Constantly, some element of life in the Rabbitte family household becomes the crisis of the moment and is solved more often through inaction than action. Although he does care for his children, Jimmy's great joy in life is slipping to his favorite pub, The Hikers, to have a few pints with his friends, Bimbo and Bertie.

Doyle has been criticized for limiting the authorial voice in his narration in favor of long conversations among his characters, exchanges

which often center on little of substance. Doyle, at the same time, has been praised and damned for the dialogue which he creates for his characters. Some reviewers pan Doyle's transliteration of the dialect, while others see it as a largely successful attempt to get authentic speech upon the page. When Caramine White asked Doyle why his characters are portrayed as living meaningless lives, the author seemed to bristle:

> CW. Do you like your characters? Do you think they live meaningless lives? They get drunk, aren't educated, have meaningless sex, watch too much TV . . .
>
> RD. What's meaningless about that? That's not meaningless. So why don't they talk about politics? Talking about politics is about as meaningless as talking about sex or talking about football. . . . It's just conversation. It's filling the gaps. So their lives are not meaningless but are filled with meaning. . . . That's what I wanted to record. In a lot of conversations, it's what they don't say that is more interesting than what they do say. . . . (212-13)

As one reads interviews of Doyle concerning the characters he creates, one sees that Doyle is very protective of his characters. He disclaims ever basing character on anyone in particular but he values his characters as representations of a world in which he has lived all his life. As an agnostic and a humanist, Doyle makes it very clear that he is quite interested in how humans spend their time on the planet and how they deal with what befalls them in life. Hence the long conversations in which the characters engage

present an aspect of each character for other characters to see. A screen writer and playwright as well, Doyle is aware that not all aspects of a character are played or acted out. In The Snapper, Doyle uses a good balance of description of what Sharon is thinking along with what she says to give a much deeper portraiture of her than is seen in her brief appearance in The Commitments or her more extensive appearances in The Van. On the night of her encounter with George Burgess, Sharon had drunk a great deal and had gone outside to get a charge of cold air on a February night. She was leaning against a car in the parking lot when Burgess, the father of her friend Yvonne, made advances toward her in the guise of caring about her welfare. They had sex standing in the parking lot, and Sharon recalls feeling cold and wet, being without her knickers, and going home without her coat and purse, which were later brought to her by her friend. A controversy arose among the readers of The Snapper as to whether or not Sharon had been raped. Doyle, considering the fact that he is a liberal thinker and a humanist, wanted to leave the question open to his readers:

> Legally, in Ireland it is not a rape, although I believe that in some states in the States it is a rape. I wouldn't personally consider it a rape. I do believe that he behaved very wrongly in taking advantage of a drunk woman. But, again, does that make it illegal? Where do you step from immorality to illegality? I wanted the circumstances from her memory to be really seedy and awful with this yawning big hole of embarrassment, as much as anything else, with this awful hole and

> the knowledge inside that must be kept secret. The awfulness is as much the fact that the man is so inelegant. . . . (White 185)

Notwithstanding the inelegance of George Burgess, Sharon does spend a great deal of time trying to remember as much of the evening as she can. The memory finally comes to her, and it is as Doyle has planned it, a gaping hole to fill and not a pleasant memory:

> . . . She knew that they'd done it---or just he'd done it---because that was the way she was in the next bit she remembered; leaning back against the car, staring at the car beside it, her back and arse wet through from the wet on the door and the window and she was wet from him too. She was very cold. The wet was colder. He was gone. It was like waking up. She didn't know if it had happened. (185)

Sharon's character is much more deeply developed than any character in The Commitments. Some of the best passages are, as the one above, narration which describes her feelings and thoughts. Still, Sharon Rabbitte would not be a character created by Roddy Doyle if she could not turn a phrase in conversation with the best of them. She has some fine exchanges with George Burgess, the father of her child whom she refuses to acknowledge for obvious reasons:

> --- Is it because I'm older than yeh?
>
> --- It's because I can't stand the fuckin' sight of yeh.
>
> --- Oh. ------- You're not just sayin' tha'?
>
> --- No. I hate yeh. Will I sing it for yeh?

--- What about the little baby?

--- Look; forget about the little baby, righ'. If yeh must know, you were off target tha' time annyway. (262)

The Snapper progresses through the stages of Sharon's pregnancy. In fact, one of the linear markings of time is that, at certain breaks in the narrative, Doyle tells the reader how far the pregnancy has advanced. (In this novel, standard chapters are abandoned in favor of asterisks placed at point to indicate a scene shift.) Finally, the day comes when Sharon has the baby. She chooses to name it Georgina as a "slag" to those who think it is (which it is) George Burgess's child. Sharon has made up a story that the baby was fathered by a Spanish sailor. The reader feels Sharon's victory as she lies in the maternity ward, having just given birth to "Gina":

She didn't care.

She was gorgeous. And hers.

She was fuckin' gorgeous.

Georgina; that was what she was going to call her.

They'd all call her Gina, but Sharon would call her George. And they'd have to call her George as well. She'd make them.

--- Are yeh alrigh', love?

It was the woman in the bed beside Sharon.

--- Yeah, said Sharon. --- Thanks; I'm grand.

She lifted her hand -- it weighed a ton -- and wiped her eyes.

--- Ah, said the woman. --- Were yeh cryin'?

--- No, said Sharon. --- I was laughin'. (340)

This life affirmation may not be quite as famous as Molly Bloom's "yes," but it has a strong comedic power in it to perform that affirmative function.

A funny thing happened on the way to the maternity ward. Jimmy Sr. began to read "bukes" about the pregnancy and to ask Sharon more questions than she was easily happy to answer. Doyle puts it best:

> As I said, when I was writing *The Snapper*, I was depicting a reality and I wrote *The Van* because the father was taking over *The Snapper* and would have given birth to the baby if at all humanly possible—there's another book in him. It's a darker type of book--the storyline parallels *The Commitments*--instead of a band it's a small business enterprise which falls apart at the end. (White 189)

Jimmy Sr. is the most fully developed character in The Barrytown Trilogy. That was probably not Doyle's original plan. Doyle has often stated that he feels the need to write a "story," and it is while he is writing that certain characters gain greater depth. Above, he states that Jimmy Sr. grew so much in the text of The Snapper that there was "another book in him." And so the reader sees Jimmy Sr.'s characterization progress from the smart-mouthed father who likes to "slag" his kids, especially Jimmy Jr. in The Commitments and The Snapper, to a man who is awakening to life as more than "drinking a few pints with me mates." In The Van, Jimmy has been laid off from his job as a plasterer. He is experiencing life where he

cannot reach into his pockets and go to the pub for the few pints. He has Tracy, Linda, Sharon (and Gina), and Darren, as well as himself and his wife, Veronica, to support. It is lucky that Ireland has a well-developed welfare system.

In part, characters are created by repeated words and actions. At one point in The Van, Darren is gruffly asked by Jimmy who is providing the meal the family is eating. This has been one of Jimmy's often-used ways of bringing his kids into line temporarily when the bantering has gotten a little too uncomfortable for him. When Darren answers "the dole," Jimmy has to leave the room. This is not the Jimmy Sr. we are used to seeing, a man who has a witty comeback or a profane exclamation for just about every situation. Jimmy is not only dealing with being "made redundant" from his job as a plasterer; he is also feeling locked out of much in life. Doyle shows us that Jimmy is indeed changing in both his actions and his feelings. In another instance in the novel, Jimmy fantasizes about having an extramarital affair, and we are not wholly sure if never having had an affair is as central to the fantasy as is never having been in a hotel room.

Critics have said that Doyle has created the "happy poor." These critics have not done a close reading of The Van. In an early part of the novel, Jimmy and Veronica are talking about cutting their Christmas list to the bare minimum because Jimmy has been laid off. These exchanges are some of the most moving in The Barrytown Trilogy:

--- We were always broke at Christmas.

--- After it though, said Veronica.

--- Ah ------ ! said Jimmy Sr.

It wasn't fuckin' fair.

--- Ah sorry, said Veronica.

She turned to look at him properly.

--- I didn't mean anything. (360)

The conversation concludes with Jimmy vowing that he will win the Christmas turkey at the local pitch 'n' putt tournament, which he usually does. He also says that he might win a ham. Poverty is ugly and sad.

When Jimmy's friend Bimbo also gets laid off, they eventually rehabilitate a "chipper van" and sell sandwiches and chips outside pubs and sporting events. The enterprise returns Jimmy's household to the level at which it formerly was funded and all seems well until Bimbo and his wife Maggie decide to change the playing field. Since it was Bimbo's redundancy money that bought the van, the Reeves decide that Jimmy Sr. should be an employee. Jimmy even joins a union and toward the end of the novel. When the health authority shuts down the rather sloven operation, Bimbo decides that Jimmy has been the one who turned him in to the authorities. A fight ensues and it marks the end to Bimbo and Jimmy's friendship:

. . . Jimmy Sr. gave up on the fist and opened his hand; he got his thumb to Bimbo's face somewhere and pressed. Bimbo whined. He found a wad of Jimmy Sr's fat over his trousers and he squeezed, dug his nails into it. Jesus, it was agony -- Jimmy Sr let go of him and got

back. (627)

Doyle has a knack for portraying the way that real people fight, argue and come to truce. After this fight, Bimbo is trying to reconcile with Jimmy and they drink a few pints. In a last desperate attempt to salvage their relationship, Bimbo drives the van into the ocean. The evening ends with Jimmy Sr. walking home alone and asking Veronica for a hug as he climbs into bed. This is especially interesting in that Jimmy Sr. has not too long before tried to cheat on Veronica with a school teacher in a pub in the city proper. In the typical fashion of the comic hero, Jimmy fails, yet survives and so does the community (family) that he heads.

With The Van, Doyle ends The Barrytown Trilogy on a less than happy, yet comedically secure, note. Sharon is getting on well and Gina has ample, willing babysitters. Veronica is studying for her equivalency exams ("Leaving Certs") and seems to have shepherded Jimmy through his late mid-life crisis. Jimmy Jr is about to marry, Darren looks as if he will attend college and Tracy and Linda just might not be quite the holy terrors that they appear to be. Leslie is in England and we hope for him. The voices that have echoed in our minds and brought to us the lively world of Barrytown have come and gone, yet exist to be returned to time and again if we wish a world accessible, comedic and realistic.

I asked Doyle if he would ever again write about the Rabbittes and if he preferred his first three books to be thought of as a trilogy or as individual novels:

> I don't think I will ever return to the Rabbittes. I felt, when I was finishing the book in late 1990, that THE VAN was a much better book if left alone, if there were no further installments of the Rabbitte family adventures. I've changed my mind before about other things, so I might change it again about the Rabbittes, but I don't think so. . . . I didn't set out to write a trilogy when I started THE COMMITMENTS, and I didn't stop at THE VAN because it made a trilogy. The books have a lot in common but I never saw them as a trilogy. (Letter to author 1,2)

Doyle's vision, then, runs toward the individuality of each of his novels in much the same way as it does toward the individuality of each of his characters.

Chapter 3

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha

For his critically acclaimed fourth novel, Roddy Doyle remained in Barrytown, but switched locale at the semi-detached, lower-middle-class house of the Clarkes long enough to write what many will say is his masterpiece to date, Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha. Doyle's strength in The Barrytown Trilogy was certainly his ability to recreate the wit, verve, and the vital, working-class idiom of the Dubliners of his fictional suburb in such a devastatingly humorous way. Even without the characterizations, one would have stayed around for the jokes, the accents, the turns of phrases. The idea of heteroglossia embodies what emerges when various levels of speech, grammar, or usage compete within a narrative. Doyle's twist is to allow the conversation-laden texts of The Barrytown Trilogy to roil along with what Mary Flanagan calls "the amiable anarchic babble of Dublin voices" (1). The world of The Barrytown Trilogy was peopled with many memorable characters who conveyed the unique voices which emanated from the Rabbitte family, their friends, neighbors and associates. Doyle was so lovingly humane in his portrayals of the world and its people that Barrytown has become a very prominent mark on the map of modern Irish fiction. In each of the first three novels, there would have to be at least one character with whom one could identify or for whom one could cheer. However, experiencing The Barrytown Trilogy is, essentially, a spectator sport. What

one might think to be undeveloped in the novels (especially in The Commitments) could essentially be reworked by Doyle in the filmed versions. Even though the narration and the voicings would deepen as the trilogy progressed, Doyle was thought of as a screenwriter as often as he was as a novelist. This actuality and perception was to change drastically with the publication of Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha.

Doyle's fourth novel has added the element of focalization to the voicing in a way that has greatly enhanced and deepened over its previous light usage in the Barrytown Trilogy. Retained was the unique and witty exterior dialogue (refashioned, of course, to the mind of a ten-year-old). Added, however, was an interiority which transformed the reader from a mere spectator to one who experiences the events in the character's life in a much more real and centralized fashion. Also not to be overlooked is that this novel is a *bildungsroman* or coming-of-age novel. The challenge of this type of novel is to convey the maturation of the focal character in a believable way while advancing the novel in increments that seem congruent to the rate of maturation of the character. Doyle chooses a ten-year-old character, albeit a very precocious one, and avoids the pressure to "grow the boy up" too rapidly. The action in this novel takes place mostly in 1968, the same year that Doyle would have been ten years old. Paddy's coming of age involves two crises, his expulsion from his group of school friends because of an altercation with his former friend, Kevin; and the novel's central crisis, the

looming separation of his parents.

Praise has been greatest for Doyle's accomplishment in Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha, and the praise is deserved. Joseph J. Feeney refers to the character, Paddy Clarke, as resembling "an Irish, urban Huckleberry Finn" (Feeney 2). In World Literature Today, William Hutchings praises the construction of the voice in Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha:

> Unlike the decidedly adult narrative voice . . . in James Joyce's "Araby," for example, Paddy Clarke's is distinctly that of a child-naive in many ways, direct and idiomatic in its simple-sentence style (similar to the first chapter of Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man), and without precise indicators of the passage of time. (Hutchings 1)

Peter Doyle (who notes in text that he is not related to the author) calls Roddy Doyle's "feel for the consciousness and language of a 10-year-old boy nearly faultless" (1,2). Further, Peter Doyle notes that "the book lacks the humorous thread of its predecessors, but it makes up for that through a technically more mature and creatively more imaginative treatment of his subject. It is a welcome addition to Doyle's oeuvre" (2).

When Roddy Doyle invites his readers into the mind of Paddy Clarke, it is an invitation into the consciousness of a bright, inquisitive boy who is dimly aware, due to both naiveté and suppression, of the breakup of his parents' marriage. In fact, the driving force of the novel is Paddy's growing awareness of the magnitude and consequences of his parents' breakup and separation.

Roddy Doyle does a superb job of creating the Dublin milieu while he portrays the interior psychology of this Dublin boy of the late 1960s. Not only does the reader get a mind's eye view of how Paddy Clarke thinks and feels, but the rapidly urbanizing Dublin which surrounds Paddy serves to intensify his feelings of claustrophobia. The collapsing green space wherein construction sites and sewer pipes become playgrounds creates an external feeling of claustrophobia that parallels the collapse of the Clarke household. James S. Brown of Charleston Southern University sees the collapsing structures with which Paddy Clarke has to deal in a much wider context, relating it to Irish political and social history:

> . . . Doyle leads the reader to the insight that the Clarkes' problems are—literally and allegorically—Ireland's problems in microcosm, and the collapse of social structures from the Clarke marriage to the town itself (threatened by a new low-cost housing development) to even the schoolboy pecking order makes *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* a significantly political novel. The socioeconomic condition of this working-class Dublin suburb, and in a sense the history of Ireland itself, is largely responsible for these collapses. His mother, toward whom Paddy manifests both pity and resentment, is presented as a compliant victim, and at the end of the novel, as Paddy formally shakes hands with his father, he finds himself an outcast, an

exile, from the more innocent Ireland of his parents' youth. (40)

It is Brown's view that Doyle strengthens his portrayal of the breakup of the Clarke's marriage by not stating directly a central problem: "What is most remarkable about the collapse of the Clarke marriage, however, is that no reason is offered: it just happens" (40). Brown sees this as a reinforcement of his theory that great historical and social forces are at work here. A casual observer might not be aware that divorce was not legalized in Ireland until 1996 and that there is a seven-year waiting period even at that. No divorce is available in 1968 for the Clarkes, and Patrick Sr. will continue to be tenuously attached to the household as a sort of distant relative.

There are further deft sociological touches in this novel. In contrast to the Rabbittes' worries over employment in their sphere of Barrytown, there are Christmas bundles galore and even an automobile in the Clarke household. When Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha was first gaining popularity, some reviewers were saying that part of the remarkability of the novel was that Doyle had abandoned the sociological view in favor of a psychological approach. While the creating of interior psychology is a strong aspect of this novel, it is evident that Doyle has layered the sociological commentary more deeply rather than having abandoned it.

For most of the novel, Doyle has the reader in mid-stream of Paddy's consciousness, breaking out occasionally into dialogue. Although we are aware of Paddy's mischievous boyishness, Doyle also shows us the lad's

attempts at grasping the significance of the adult world. Primarily this is done through an element of free association, a major force in the narrative. An instance of this free association occurs in the classroom while Paddy's teacher is lecturing on Irish patriotism during the Easter Rising. Word is passed to the teacher that Paddy claims the Irish patriot, Thomas Clarke, pictured on a tea-towel in the classroom, is his grandfather. Miss Watkins makes Paddy read what is written on the tea-towel under Thomas Clarke's picture -- "executed by the British 3 May 1916" (22). Asked a second time if Thomas Clarke is his grandfather, Paddy says he is and then pretends to look at the tea-towel more closely. The next time Miss Watkins asks the question, Paddy corrects himself. Young Mr. Clarke's assessment: "She gave me three on each hand" (23).

Next, Paddy associates with the images of his real grandparents and he remembers Granddas Clarke and Finnegan and Grandma Clarke. He remembers that Grandma Clarke is dead and that Granda Clarke told him she was in heaven. Later, Paddy is bored and decides to rummage through some drawers in search of photographs. Finding a photo of his paternal grandparents causes Paddy to ask his father why they haven't visited Granda Clarke in so long. Doyle conveys the scene and the sentiment incredibly well and believably in dialogue and thought:

--- Dad?

--- Yes, Son?

--- When are we going to Granda Clarke's?

My da looked like he'd lost something, then found it, but it wasn't what he wanted.

He sat up. He looked at me for a while.

--- Granda Clarke's dead, he said. -- Do you not remember?

--- No.

I couldn't.

He picked me up. (24)

Paddy then peruses his father's hands with almost microscopic intensity. Next Paddy notices his father is reading The Naked and the Dead and an American soldier is pictured on the cover. Paddy asks about the soldier, but his father tells him to ask later because he hasn't read to that part yet.

The headline, "World War Three Looms Near," next appears in Paddy's mind's eye with the reference being to the 1967 Yom Kippur War in the Middle East. When Paddy questions his mother about the headline, she tells him to ask his father. Paddy hopes his father will "lean over" and answer the question as he always does when he likes what Paddy has asked. Paddy and his father's ensuing discussion touches on a variety of topics, and Paddy impresses his father (and most readers) with his growing knowledge of world geography, among other topics.

Caramine White asked Doyle about the passage of time in Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha. It was White's original idea that the passage of time in this novel

could perhaps have been based upon the "Benjy" section of Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury. Doyle's answer demonstrates his technical assessment of the situation of creating the interior psychology of a ten-year-old. As usual, his answer is dead on and adorned only with insight and the ironic humor exhibited by the characters which people his work, especially The Barrytown Trilogy. It so happens that Doyle had not read The Sound and the Fury:

> You can continue on with your thesis if you wish and just cut out this answer, but, basically, I just though it'd be the way a kid's mind would work. . . . I've tried to make links, but indirectly. It may be a question, color or light and something sparks off another memory, and so he goes on to that. I wanted it, particularly the first half, to seem haphazard -- winding memories, and, by degrees, the winding memories become straighter and straighter as the parents' marriage becomes worse and worse. . . . Also I wanted to get away from the linear time I used in the previous books and it just fit the story better. The inspiration would be cinematic. As I was writing, I was remembering films—like *Amarcord,* Fellini's film—my favorite film. . . . It was seemingly haphazard—it goes from clip to clip with no seeming unity. But the unity is there when you see it a second time and you wonder, "Why did I like it so much the first time?" and you see the unity there underneath the surface. (White 200)

As the reader travels along with Paddy Clarke's consciousness, he is taken into a world of wonder, fear, amazement, vulgarity, and cruelty, as well as one of pettiness and naivete. So many episodes in the novel illustrate Paddy coming to grips with the world both inside and outside the Clarke household. A fight with his former friend, Kevin, causes his other friends to shun him just at the time when the final disintegration of his beloved parents' marriage is occurring. Kevin has beaten Paddy in all their previous fights, but not this time: "This was the most important thing that had ever happened to me; I knew it" (273). What Paddy doesn't quite know, but the reader does, is that it will become very important for Paddy literally and figuratively to fight his own battles as his household becomes fatherless.

Earlier Paddy has made a last-ditch attempt to "save" his parents' marriage. In reasoning that only childhood could support, Paddy figures that if he can stay up all night and outlast his parents' arguments that he will have "won":

> . . . all I had to do was to stay awake. Like St Peter when Jesus was in the Garden. St. Peter kept falling asleep but I didn't, not even once. . . . There was no more fighting. I went up to my parents' door and listened without breathing . . . I got away and took a deep breath, and then I started crying.
>
> Mission accomplished. (232)

When Paddy's father actually does leave the household, Paddy sobs once but

doesn't cry. His war had been fought earlier with silence and sleep deprivation. The novel culminates with Paddy's father returning to bring in Christmas gifts and we see, in the true manner of the *bildungsroman*, that Paddy has made his passage. Prior to the culminating scene the reader is let in on the secret of the title of the novel. Read by itself, the title seems to connote merriment. The secret is that the words of the title begin a taunt:

> --- Paddy Clarke --
>
> Paddy Clarke --
>
> Has no da.
>
> Ha ha ha!
>
> I didn't listen to them. They were only kids. (281)

By the time Paddy's father does bring the gifts in the immediate and final scene we know that Paddy has become the man of the house.

> He saw me.
>
> --- Patrick, he said.
>
> He moved the parcels he had with him under one arm and put his hand out.
>
> --- How are you? he said.
>
> He put his hand out for me to shake it.
>
> --- How are you?
>
> His hand felt cold and big, dry and hard.
>
> --- Very well, thank you. (282)

Any child will tell you that part of what is wrong with the world is that it is "too cold and big, dry and hard." Paddy can now accept these heartless qualities as adult realities and we see how all of the events of the novel have prepared him for it.

Another stunning aspect of this novel is how Doyle builds Paddy's characterization through many fine examples of language acquisition, and the evolving patterns of language usage that occur as a child's awareness of the world grows. The novel opens with a passage that has been compared to the opening of Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Doyle, however, is much less self-conscious in his language construction for Paddy Clarke than Joyce is for Stephen Dedalus. Readers can easily enter the world of Paddy Clarke from the very first passage and perceive that they are dealing with a very forthrightly drawn character:

> We were coming down our road. Kevin stopped at a gate and bashed it with his stick. It was Missis Quigley's gate; she was always looking out the window but she never did anything.
>
> --- Quigley!
>
> --- Quigley!
>
> --- Quigley Quigley Quigley!
>
> Liam and Aidan turned down their cul-de-sac. We said nothing; they said nothing. Liam and Aidan had a dead

mother. Missis O'Connell was her name.

--- It'd be brilliant, wouldn't it? I said.

--- Yeah, said Kevin. --- Cool.

We were talking about having a dead ma. . . (1)

From the outset, the world of the novel seems to be quite authentic. Paddy and Kevin are boys full of all the charm and malevolence which is manifest in childhood. Our perception of this world is filtered through Paddy and we become aware that Paddy is quite the junior wordsmith himself. The old admonition of looking up in the dictionary words that one might not readily know has not been lost on Paddy. At least he has done his "eccers" (homework exercises) which seem to be of the rote nature.

> I was quick in class; I knew more about some things than Henno did. Henno was a bastard. A bastard was someone whose parents weren't married, or a child of illegitimate birth. Henno wasn't a child anymore but he was still a bastard. He couldn't just give me my medal, he had to make a laugh out of it. Illegitimate wasn't in my dictionary but Legitimate meant In accordance with the laws or rules so Illegitimate meant the complete opposite of that. Hirsute meant hairy. (204)

Paddy still uses free association, even when he is perusing the dictionary and his language sensitivity seems phenomenal until one remembers what a

high percentage of one's adult vocabulary is attained early in life.

By placing the narrative focalization inside the consciousness of Paddy, Doyle also places the narration in a zone that is naturally subject to the effects of heteroglossia. What more fertile ground could there be for multiple voicing than the mentality of a child who literally takes it all in and spends so much of his time being forced to listen to adults and also compelling himself to observe them so closely. Paddy's descriptions of his parents' fights show us the registry of adult speech in the child's mind in quite an authentic way:

> She listened to him much more than he listened to her. Her answers were much longer than his. She did two-thirds of the talking, easily that much. She wasn't a bigmouth though, not nearly; she was she was just more interested than he was even though he was the one that read the paper and watched The News and made us stay quiet when it was on, even when we weren't making any noise. I knew she was better at talking than him; I'd always know that . . . He didn't like being distracted; he said that word a lot, but I knew what it meant, Distracted, and I didn't know how he was being distracted because he wasn't doing anything anyway. (202-203)

Aside from being an excellent representation of how Paddy is using his

growing awareness of language in combination with his growing awareness of the adult world, this passage also gives, perhaps, a hint that Mr. Clarke might be uncomfortable around his wife and Paddy because he has a communication or reading disability or some form of attention disorder. Paddy mentions that his father has not finished The Naked and the Dead, and the man never seems to pay deep attention to anything that involves listening or reading.

Another level of language acquisition is the specialized use that children make of slang, chants, and rhyme. Perhaps one of the most inventive, as well as most authentic scenes in the novel is the one where Kevin presides as a tribal chieftain over a naming ritual, during which the other boys are given an obscene name of their own choosing. Kevin hits the boys on the back to start the process. If the chosen name isn't foul enough, Kevin will hit the individual boy even harder. The ritual ends for each individual boy when Kevin states, "The word made flesh!" (129-132). Paddy is near the end of the process so it would be more difficult to avoid the worst of the expressions, even if he wanted to. The young Mr. Clarke wades in and chooses "Fuck." He follows with an explanation of the effects of the word which reminds us of his treatise on the word "bastard":

> Fuck was always too loud, too late to stop it, it burst in the air above you and fell slowly right over your head. There was total silence, nothing but Fuck floating down. . . . It was the word you

couldn't say anywhere. . . . We didn't waste it. (132)

Doyle makes us privy to Paddy's innermost perceptions and feelings and sustains the child's point of view with remarkable consistency and vitality. The author combines the various aspects of characterization to present his readers with a highly original and genuine portraiture. Essentially, this is a novel about fathers and sons, growing and acquiring a world view, having and losing friends, and dealing with the duties that befall a person in life no matter how tender in years that person might be when he acquires the responsibilities. The voice and the consciousness of Paddy Clarke are shared with readers in such a way that we feel we have relearned the lessons of life again -- this time with Paddy Clarke as our familiar.

Chapter 4

The Woman Who Walked into Doors

The creative journey which would lead to the publishing of Roddy Doyle's fifth novel, The Woman Who Walked into Doors, began when the BBC gave Doyle carte blanche to write whatever type of screenplay he wished for a television special. The offer was given in the warm glow of Doyle's having won The Booker Prize for his previous novel, Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha, which had become the best selling Booker Prize winner ever. Doyle took the BBC up on its offer and what eventuated was the four-part docudrama, Family. The ensuing furor that the television miniseries caused catapulted Doyle into the forefront of the pro-divorce campaign, which won narrow approval in 1996. Family aired in 1994 and still ranks as one of the programs which caused the greatest number of calls to local affiliates when it aired in Dublin.

Essentially, each of the four shows focuses on a member of the Spencer family which lived in a tenement, easily discerned by Dubliners to be Ballymun Towers. As has been the case with most such housing projects, Ballymun (scheduled for almost total demolition) became a slum in the worst way. Family's post-airing controversy which pressured Doyle the most involved the accusations that he had deliberately made the Ballymun-dwelling impoverished class of Irish look bad while making the Rabbittes and Clarkes, who inhabited the immediately higher social classes closer to Doyle's own roots, look better. In fact, when Doyle did a reading at

Ballymun, the reading went "brilliantly" according to the author, even though he had a police escort (Letter to author 1).

Charlo Spencer was a wife-battering petty thief whose alcoholism and temper set the tone for the household. Paula was the wife-turned-victim and the only family member (other than the younger son, Jack) not to have an episode of the series devoted to him or her. The high point in the drama occurs when Paula sees Charlo eyeing their daughter, Nicola, lustfully. Paula knocks Charlo nearly unconscious with a frying pan, and she and Nicola throw him out. Doyle felt that there was more to Paula's story than was conveyed in the television screenplay and this was the genesis for the novel.

The title of the novel is a euphemism for wife battering. Doyle considers spousal abuse a "dirty little secret" that Ireland needs to air and legalized divorce might help to ameliorate. As The Woman Who Walked into Doors opens, Paula Spencer is being informed that Charlo has been shot by police as he and an accomplice botched a robbery-kidnap style crime. As with Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha, Doyle again uses first person narration and portrays the interior psychology of the narrative voice. As with his previous novel, the combination of voice and focalization is very powerful. The information that Charlo, whom Paula has not seen in the year since she threw him out, is dead, combined with the knowledge that her estranged husband is also evil enough to have committed murder, shocks and stuns

Paula at first. The driving force of the narrative is Paula's attempts to conquer her own alcoholism and recover from the faults in her memory. In a 1995 interview, while this novel was still a work in progress, Doyle spoke of its structure and narration:

> ". . . It goes backwards and forwards. It goes back to her childhood, right to her first memories. One of the problems she has is sorting out memories . . . The novel is about the nature of memory in many ways." (qtd. in McCardle 114)

Clearly, Doyle planned to deepen the portraiture of interior psychology in this novel. The depiction of Paula's mental and emotional state also brought along with it a darkening of tone. Paula's memory is one that trauma and alcohol have riddled with gaps of unconsciousness and confusion. The loops and returns within her memory create a discursive nature to the narrative which proves to be starkly realistic. Unlike Paddy Clarke, Paula is not a bright-eyed and inquisitive child who takes everything in. Denial and guilt are very much a part of her thoughts and feelings. The life that Paula has led during her seventeen years with Charlo has been a dark one. This darkening of tone is one that reviewers, readers and critics alike have taken note of. Even though the separation of Paddy Clarke's parents did happen in the fourth novel, overall Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha is not a "dark" work. Most would agree that The Woman Who Walked into Doors is. Doyle himself might not be so easy to convince of this, however. When asked by an

interviewer from The Boston Irish Reporter in early 1997 how his fifth novel fit in with the rest of his work, Doyle stated:

> It's a continuation of it, in some ways. I wrote three books about the Rabbitte family . . . The Rabbittes were definitely not thriving, but they were surviving in a very warm household with plenty of love. For example, the baby in The Snapper was very lucky to be born in that home. But the Spencers are not coping as well and, in some ways, are the flip-side of the Rabbittes. There is humor in The Woman who Walked into Doors, but it's often bitter and angry. (qtd. in BIR 2)

For Doyle, then, the darkening of tone is simply the fact of telling a different story that takes some different turns. For most of his readership, the dark aspect of the novel has either proven to be an element they admire or one they choose to criticize.

This novel marks the first one in which Doyle actually numbers the chapters. The irony of this is that this is the novel whose narration is the least linear. The opening of the novel sets the tone for its discursive and looping nature, beginning with a narrative in the first person as Paula learns that Charlo has been shot by the police. The two-page first chapter digresses almost immediately to the story of the outrageously loud doorbell and how a drunken Paula had slapped her Nicola for incessant ringing of the doorbell. Paula expresses shame at having slapped her daughter in a state of drunkenness, but Paula still felt that Nicola "deserved it," even though

the daughter was twelve or thirteen at the time. The chapter ends with Paula observing that the guards have sent in the youngest among the number to break the news. She thinks of the other guards who remain in the car as "wasters."

Chapter 2 is a brief vignette about the meeting of Charlo and Paula. Paula remembers the songs that were playing and the event in much clearer detail than she remembers much of her abused tenure as Charlo Spencer's wife. Chapter 3 is barely a paragraph and is written in italics. It describes Paula's return to consciousness after having been knocked out by Charlo.

> *I knew nothing for a while, where I was, how come I was on the floor. Then I saw Charlo's feet, then his legs, making a triangle with the floor. He seemed way up over me. Miles up. I had to bend back to see him. Then he came down to meet me. His face, his eyes went all over my face, looking, searching. Looking for marks, looking for blood. He was worried. He turned my head and looked. His face was full of worry and love. He skipped my eyes.*
>
> *--- You fell, he said. (5)*

This third chapter, above in its entirety, demonstrates Doyle's mastery of voice of his character and also the survivalist mentality which he has given to Paula Spencer. Doyle envisions Paula as a strong character, at the least as a survivor. This might surprise some readers and critics who would interpret Paula's still-professed love for the dead Charlo as a weakness. The

fact of the matter is, however, that Paula's will to survive, to beat the alcoholism, and to raise her children are ambitions that such a horrendous marriage as was hers would have eradicated in most people.

In 1994, after he had finished the screenplay for Family, Doyle was in the initial stages of planning the novel. In an interview, he spoke of his early conception of Paula Spencer: "'I'm not sure that there is a novel there, but I'm trying to work up something about a 39-year-old woman looking back on her life . . . She's had a rough time as an alcoholic, but she's a very strong woman'" (Lacey 4). In late 1997, Doyle had occasion to answer an interviewers questions about characterization and voicing of Paula. The occasion was the launch of the French version of The Woman Who Walked into Doors. Doyle was asked if it was difficult to write about Paula Spencer in the first person:

> I try to set myself a new challenge with each book. This time it was writing from the point of view of a woman. With Paddy Clarke, was that of a ten-year-old boy. I was once a ten-year-old boy but I was never a woman! There was a lot of observation. I grew up listening to women talking. Women in a gang talk more about themselves and are much more supportive of each other than men. I also read a lot of books about women and violence and women and alcoholism and so on. Alcoholism is much less accepted socially in women. (O'Sullivan 21)

To construct the narrative voice of Paula Spencer, Doyle envisioned a woman at the end of seventeen years of domestic abuse and alcoholism. This stint followed a childhood of progressively diminishing expectations as well. To survive, Paula must evaluate and stabilize herself and her life. She even has the outside hope of putting an end to cycle of poverty and defeatism which has moved from her and Charlo's lives into the lives of her children. In order to recenter her life, Paula has to get things "straight" and come to grips with her past and the continuing alcoholism. She has to achieve an authoritative "voice" of her own to compete with the negative dictates and abuses of Charlo and other "authorities" in her life. In the two-paragraph Chapter 10, Paula takes stock of her life concisely and dramatically:

> Me then.
>
> The girl who wanked Martin Kavanaugh was five foot three inches tall. . . . She had good skin. . . . She had woman's legs. . . . She knew she was stupid but she didn't mind that much. . . . She hated her school but she was happy. . . . She was leaving school in a few months, after her Group Cert. She was going to stroll through it. She had her whole life ahead of her.
>
> Me now.
>
> The woman who masturbated Charlo Spencer is five feet four inches tall but she's been stooping a bit lately. . . . She looks

> good if she remembers to stand up straight and you don't look at her too closely. Her arse is sagging a bit but she is the only one alive who knows. . . . She'll be thirty-nine in two months' time. . . . She isn't too fond of herself but she isn't so certain that she's stupid any more. She manages; she's a survivor. (42-43)

Later in the novel (Chapter 18), Paula speaks out in a more public voice at the outset than she spoke with in Chapter 10. Two months have elapsed and Paula is in the week after her thirty-ninth birthday. In the chapter's twenty pages, Paula's voice goes from formality to fragility as she fights the memories which haunt her as well as her alcohol dependency. Counselors call this form of speech self-dialogue and see it as representing the way a person tries to come to grips with situations he or she might have trouble handling. As the chapter ends, Paula has given in to taking a few drinks for the evening, and she is passing into drunken sleep in front of the television as she sings or imagines the chorus to "When You Wish upon a Star" (116). Doyle delivers a finely wrought and feeling representation of what it must be like for this middle-aged victim of abuse and alcoholism to be struggling to regain some control in her life. Paula's struggle to find stability in her life is largely, after Charlo's death, a quest to focus her mind, articulate her thoughts, and regain some healthy emotionality.

One of the tests of validity that Doyle gave to the voice of Paula Spencer

was that he read portions of the novel to a gathering of battered women at a shelter. Their approval made him feel as if he had passed a final examination. This approval of Paula's character and voice gave Doyle approbation that his leap of faith had been justified. In an earlier interview Doyle stated: "'The empathy is there . . . But the problem is choosing the words. I felt that particularly with all matters sexual: That's where no amount of research, no amount of quizzing people was ever going to get me close. You just have to take the jump and choose the words'" (Messud 2).

There are several other chapters that parallel or mirror others in Doyle's depiction of Paula's mind. Chapter 7 is the companion to Chapter 4. It is the completion of outrage at the abuse that Paula has endured during the seventeen years of marriage to Charlo. Chapters 4 and 7 are the only ones in italics and are the briefest.

> *The doctor never looked at me. He studied parts of me but he never saw all of me. He never looked at my eyes. Drink, he said to himself. I could see his nose moving, taking in the smell, deciding. (23)*

There are also longer chapters in this discursive novel which concern Paula's childhood and life before she met Charlo, Paula's wedding and honeymoon with Charlo, and Paula's coming to grips with her abuse. At the end of Chapter 25, Paula gives the most complete account of the first incident of abuse in her marriage to Charlo. Charlo knocked Paula unconscious for

refusing to make tea for him while they were in the midst of an argument. When Paula regained consciousness, she perceived Charlo's concern as more than guilt or fear of punishment: "I was to blame. I should have made his dinner. I was my own fault; there was a pair of us in it. What happened? I don't know. He held my chin and looked at every square inch of my face. He loved me again" (175).

This portraiture of victim's psychology from Paula's point of view is one of Doyle's greatest achievements in the novel. Countless times Paula is watching someone (Charlo, doctors, people) watching or examining her. The shame and paranoia are immense, but so is the outrage at how this could be happening to her. In fact, the way Doyle chooses to end the novel is of particular significance. The thirtieth chapter is little more than half a page. It has Paula viewing the crime scene where Charlo had been shot exiting an automobile while trying to escape after killing a woman that he had been holding hostage. Paula thinks of Charlo as an "eejit" because he was trying to escape in the car and he could not drive. The final chapter is a repeat of the ending of the scene where Paula throws out Charlo and bets Nicola a "tenner" that he won't be let back in: "It was a great feeling. I'd done something good" (226). For future survival Paula will have to face the fact that Charlo was incapable of love and that she did little or nothing to provoke the abuse. The novel's end seems to indicate that Paula is on the verge of doing just that.

Doyle stated that this novel was in many ways about the nature of memory. Paula definitely has a disordered mind from the alcoholism and the abuse, among other things. To a disordered mentality, putting things in order is of the utmost importance, no matter how the order is achieved. Much of the rambling nature of Paula's discourse is brought on by her returning to an event or occurrence, each time with greater detail or order. One of Doyle's early visions of Paula, which led to the novel, was that, at some point, Paula would be sitting at her kitchen table, notebook in hand, and would choose to write to gain order and control of her life. The nature of this novel bases itself on that informing idea. In this light, Doyle has Paula begin to realize that putting past events into words establishes a narrative order which involves choices of phrasing that can be distortive. Paula is not sure that she wants this to happen:

> ". . . why don't I just say He pulled my hair? *Someone is vomiting.* I cried, I fuckin' well vomited. I choose one word and end up telling a different story. I end up making it up instead of just telling it. *The sting and the shock, the noise, the smack.* I don't want to make it up, I don't want to add to it. I don't want to lie. I don't have to; there's no need. (184, 185)

Indeed, there is "no need" for Paula to embellish or to suppress her memories. Paula is a veteran of the domestic wars, and, like veteran of foreign wars, she finds it hard to put into words all she has seen and known

which came to her through the trauma and turmoil. As with global wars, as well, Paula's domestic war did not come without its political aspect, which began even before she met Charlo. There were rules to follow to walk the line between being called a "slut" or a "tight bitch." In the boredom of her late years in school, Paula masturbates a boy during Religion class.

> My first Wank. I was proud. I was a woman.
>
> --- What was it like?
>
> --- Lovely.
>
> I'd survived. I was someone. I went with him for two weeks. I had to. You couldn't just wank a fella for the sake of it; you had to love him. I didn't do it again.
>
> He didn't ask me. (41)

Anyone who might feel that Doyle has abandoned social commentary as it relates to class in favor of its relationship to gender is overlooking the dual implications of this incident and several others in Paula's secondary schooling. Paula's ever-diminishing expectations for herself begin in adolescence when she becomes one of the "thicks." Homeroom sections in her secondary school were numbered from 1.1 on down per grade level, and, of course, everyone knew who the people in each section were. On her first day of secondary school, Paula's section was the next to last called, and she had to wait in the rain until all but the last section was called. Paula is obviously marked by that incident because from that date she thinks of

herself as "stupid." When the adult Paula recalls her incident of masturbating Martin Kavanaugh in Religion class, she is sure it had to do with how the "thicks" were treated.

> One thing for certain: I wouldn't have done it if I'd gone to Holy Rosary. And I don't think I'd have done it if I'd been in 1.1. But my name was called out just when it started to rain and I ended up wanking a good-looking thick in the back of the classroom. That was how you made a name for yourself in 1.6. (41)

Doyle does quite a job of showing how low self-esteem stalks Paula throughout childhood and adulthood. This serves to make her partial, ongoing recovery from alcohol abuse all the more heroic.

One of Doyle's own constant concerns is getting the words right. He is indeed a wordsmith. In this fifth novel, Doyle has got the words right but at some degree of cost to his popularity. When asked about this loss of popularity or "fans" as the interviewer put it, Doyle replied, "It's hard to measure. Fans are conservative by nature, and tend to want more of the same. Some have said they miss the humour. But there's no room for punchlines in the story of this woman" (O'Sullivan 20). The fact remains that the initial reception of The Woman Who Walked into Doors has not been as intense as it was for Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha in either the popular or critical arenas. While both novels are intense nonlinear, first-person narratives sustained by unique voices, it may well be that the nature of the

bildungsroman is that it has an appeal to our nurturing sentiments. Less easy to get close to is the recovering alcoholic, as is Paula Spencer, a middle-aged woman who still has fantasies of her homicidal dead husband. This does not make the story less important, and, in a sociological sense, might even make it more so.

This novel is, indeed, a discursive event. It shows heteroglossia as Paula strives to explain herself to herself and the world at large. Doyle has labored long and hard to create the voice of Paula Spencer and considers the novel his masterpiece to date:

> The last book, THE WOMAN WHO WALKED INTO DOORS, is, I, think, my best. It was the hardest to write; so much of her life – her sex, poverty, experiences of violence, etc – were foreign to me. It took a long time to get right. (Letter to author 2)

Applying the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin can be an insightful way to analyze narrative voicing in novels. To a limited degree this study has employed Bakhtin's theory, but it would be difficult to leave an analysis of Doyle's greatest achievement to date and not note his reply when I asked him if he were directly influenced by Bakhtin: "I've never heard of Mikhail Bakhtin and his theories. (Good name for a rock band there.) As for 'heteroglossia', I'm sure there's a homeopathic cure" (Letter to author 1).

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Roddy Doyle might be a victim of his own iconoclasm when it comes to recognition by the academic community. The fact that Doyle's first profession was teaching in Ireland's public education system seems to be a mark against his acceptance as a literary figure. More than one commentator has referred to Doyle as Ireland's most famous geography teacher turned writer, as if to admonish Doyle for his success. Doyle is certainly not one to take any entity more seriously than it might be said to take him. The following exchange is very typical of what one hears from Doyle when he is asked about the confrontation of his work and academia:

> Jean O'Sullivan: Is your work studied a lot?
>
> Doyle: There are about 40 students doing M.A.s on my work, often in relation to other writers. I see about one a week. There are a lot of Italians for some reason, some Germans and the odd American. One M.A. thesis was hilarious: it was about language -- a ponderous analysis of the different uses of the word "fuck".
>
> (qtd. in O'Sullivan 20)

On another occasion Doyle acknowledged that a thesis done in Ireland was "pretty good" but he didn't learn anything from it except that the body of his work was the good basis for a thesis. The clear attitude from Doyle is that of the iconoclastic populist. One of the shortcomings of academia for Doyle is

its elitism. With elitism being the antithesis of populism, it is easy to see why popularity of an author works against his acceptance in the academy. Doyle is not an easy person to hang the tag of intellectual or artist upon. One of his favorite stances is to resort to colloquial (often scatological) language when speaking of what he perceives to be the shortcoming of academia. Caramine White asked Doyle about references to Joyce in his work and what influence Joyce might have been to him. The answer does not in the least flatter scholarship:

> White: Okay, now I have to ask the typical question. How much Joyce have you read? I know you said you don't like writers like him because he writes to show off his brain.
>
> Doyle: Yes particularly the later Joyce. But I've read everything else, except for *Finnegan's Wake*, which I read the first few pages. . . . I thought *Ulysses* was exhilarating. But what's the point of *Finnegan's Wake*? There are so many full-time academics that I don't want to hurt their economy, but I feel like it's a complete waste of time. It's a great pity, because he spent so much time writing that shit that he could have spent writing real books. I've no problem with the intellectual muscle men, but I just think now and again it becomes gratuitous and you go beyond any sort of reality and you are just wasting your time. And there's a certain snobbery that goes

> along with it -- the inner circle who has read the book and can talk about it while the rest of us are embarrassed to admit we've never read it, or are happy to admit that we've better things to do. (qtd. in White 201, 202)

This is typical of Doyle's attitude toward the scholarly community although he continues to grant far more interviews to people working on scholarly writing than he does to journalists, while admitting that he enjoyed reading the reviews of The Woman Who Walked into Doors. This latest published novel has marked a turning point in the ten-year career of the author. The Woman Who Walked into Doors was more of a critical success than it was a popular or commercial success. Along with the television drama Family, the saga of the Spencers has thrust Doyle to the fore as a spokesman on topical issues. In the November 1995 referendum to legalize divorce, Doyle told a crowd at a rally: "I want to live in the society that produced Joyce, not the society that banned him'" (Boyd 2). I, personally, found Doyle to be one of the most gracious people that I have ever worked with. In the correspondence that has passed between us, he has been incredibly willing to share insights into his own novels, as well as into the creative process in general. One of his comments that Doyle wrote me that I felt was highly indicative of his desire to help me in any way possible occurred when I asked about his method of work:

> I write on a word-processor, an Apple Duo Dock that I bought

> five years ago. I wrote THE COMMITMENTS by hand, then typed it on a borrowed type-writer. The other books were all written on a word-processor. The big advantage of the word-processor comes in the editing. I print out the pages and go at them with a red biro, then attack on the screen. (Letter to author 2)

It is hard to imagine any person more willing to answer questions about his work than I have found Doyle to be. This sense of humanity is rare in anyone, and it can be read in any of Doyle's novels.

Charles Foran observes that Doyle is a writer about whom Ireland and the world at large are in a time of reassessment. Further, Foran sees Doyle as a writer emerging as an important social critic: "Though he denies it, Doyle has the air of an artist aware that he now has the podium -- the guarantee of widespread attention and a large audience -- who is using that power to challenge and confront" (38). Behind the humor in The Barrytown Trilogy is Doyle's consciousness of social class, especially in The Snapper and The Van. The humor, dialect, and picaresque characterization in Doyle's first three novels overshadowed the social class commentary for many readers, but the commentary underlies the action in each of the novels. In Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha, the humor was subdued, and, in The Woman Who Walked into Doors, Doyle has brought the social consciousness much more obviously to the front. Many would still say that Doyle stifles his

own genius when he muffles his comedic ability. Others would say that the accomplishments of his fourth and fifth novels prove that Doyle is a deft and talented writer. I do not foresee any more immediate acceptance of Doyle within the academy. Brian Moore, a very different writer, but one who also experiments with the type of stories he writes, still has not won overall acceptance in his many years and through his several novels. It is a sad commentary that one often has to be a difficult-to-acquire taste to be deemed intellectually valuable in the eyes of some pundits.

Although it is not a difficult task to perceive the voices that mingle in The Barrytown Trilogy, their authenticity is unmistakable. The multi-vocal nature of Doyle's first three novels is comprised of a chorus of major and minor characters playing out the scenes of their lives, in animated (often comically profane) banter. Often there is barely breathing space between the elements of dialogue, and several characters seem to be talking at once. Communion and counterpoint of voices create the effect of heteroglossia, but not until Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha does Doyle sufficiently develop the aspect of interior monologue necessary to filter exterior voicings and to create the true dual discourse of which Bakhtin spoke. This heteroglossia was not only reprised in The Woman Who Walked into Doors, but it was also applied to a mature character and allowed a deeper layering in the adult psyche. Doyle's artistry grows, but his stories remain underpinned by his genuine knowledge of middle and working-class life in North Dublin.

This study on the works of Doyle has shown the evolution of Doyle's narration from the dialogue-dominated The Commitments through the more critically acclaimed interior portraitures written in first person of his last two novels. As a writer, Doyle is changing in whatever way he intends to change. Each new novel answers a challenge that the author sets for himself. At this writing, Doyle is in his second year on a long novel about an old man who lies about having been at all the significant events in twentieth century Irish history. Doyle hopes that it will be comedic and entertaining.

> Jean O'Sullivan: By all accounts, you're working on a historical novel. How's it going?
>
> Doyle: It's early days yet. I'm about a quarter way through it. Again, I have to read a lot. It'll take at least another couple of years. . . . The hero lives to a ripe old age. He's larger than life: a great survivor but also a monumental liar.
>
> Jean O'Sullivan: Is it funny?
>
> Doyle: I hope it's funny. It's a big book. Big in the sense of being long, not necessarily in the sense of good. The readers will be the best judge of that. (21)

As always, Doyle is easiest with the opinions of his general readership even when these judgments might go against him. Doyle has even commented on occasion that he is happy when he finds his books on sale in supermarkets.

The constant with Doyle is that he is in control of his artistry and

craftsmanship, and he remains authentically a product of North Dublin. With the eyes of an insider, he has seen the social and economic evolution which has happened in Ireland. He is one of the first generations of artists to have the economic freedom to remain to live and to work in Ireland. In his artistic wake, he has left comic chronicles and psychological portraitures which are authentic and important. Where the current economic boom will take Ireland is questionable. While the new prosperity appears to be an object that inspires optimism, not all social commentators are sure that this optimism will last. Mary Kinney, author of the recent work, Goodbye to Catholic Ireland, thinks that the current period is one of optimism because "[t]he most optimistic period in which to live is when a conservative society is becoming liberal. At this moment, it still has its moorings and its self-confidence. . . . For a short time it is possible to imagine that the security and self-assurance of tradition can be maintained alongside the brightest and best of innovation" (qtd. in Caldwell 9). Roddy Doyle has set his first five novels in the calm before the boom in Ireland. Reading these novels can help us not only to understand the times, but also the sense of humanity that the author sees in his homeland and its people.

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