

Within These Walls

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

The Cork Good Shepherd Magdalen Asylum opened in the summer of 1872, and was abandoned in 1994. The number of women who passed through its walls remains unknown.

Ireland's Magdalen Laundries, a system of religious-run female penitentiaries founded to incarcerate society's so called 'fallen' women, is a part of the country's past traditionally met with reticent silence. For the atonement of their perceived sins, the inmates worked in the Magdalen laundries for no pay. The arduous labour was symbolic; the washing of soiled linen, for the purging of one's soul. The inmates were held under no legal authority, had committed no crime, and were assigned no sentence; many women, unaware of their rights, were held in the laundries until they died. These institutions existed in Ireland over the span of three centuries, the last closing in 1996.

Though a dialogue has begun to surround this chapter of Irish history, the issue remains far from resolved. The government has made no official acknowledgment or apology for their role in perpetuating such a shocking stance on social policy, while the Catholic orders responsible will not recognize the suffering caused at their hands. The Church refuses to release archival records that document the identities and numbers of the Magdalen women who worked in the laundries during the twentieth century. It is estimated that 30 000 'fallen' women were put through this system - women who, with no records of their lives available, remain erased by anonymity. This lack of archival information has rendered the laundries, in Ireland's collective consciousness, more in story than in history.

The architecture that witnessed this past has since fallen victim to time. Whitewashed over with redevelopments, or left to fall into decay, the laundries, and their stories, are disappearing. Their place in the collective memory hangs in the balance, dwindling in the walls of their ruins. The sense of place, or memory, that is recorded in architecture, lingers in the folds of the ruin. Hovering like a ghost over its ashes, it becomes orphaned. As such, the

preservation of place becomes laden with a sense of urgency. It becomes a problem of representation. Taking what remains of the Cork Good Shepherd Magdalen Asylum as a point of entry, I have endeavoured to decipher the fragments of the ruin as a reference to the whole, to, as Victor Hugo writes in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, turn the mountain of architecture into the imperishable flock of birds – the petrified memory into the narrative one.¹ This is done in three parts.

The first introduces the site's historical and social context, composing a portrait of the building through the ephemera of its past. The second addresses the presence of absence in the return to the ruin, focusing its investigation on the imaginary space that stretches out between the shadow of the past-self, embodied in the built world, and the return of the present-self to this embodiment once it has fallen into ruin. This is followed by a series of meditative narratives constructed from the historical, latent, and projected memories contained within the ruin of the Magdalen Asylum in Cork. Part three is a rumination on the ruin, speculating on its role within human consciousness.

The ruin of the Cork Good Shepherd Magdalen Asylum testifies to a dark history – one that remains largely unresolved, one that many would rather forget. This history has yet to find its place in Ireland's collective memory and, with the vestiges of its past rapidly dissolving, it is in danger of erasure.

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To the Magdalen women themselves: please continue to have the courage to tell your stories. Know that it is both your right and your duty to be heard, just as it is our duty to listen.

At last we must speak the truth. Woe to those who speak it not, and woe to you if you dare not hear it.
- Author Unknown
Referenced by the Opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1870

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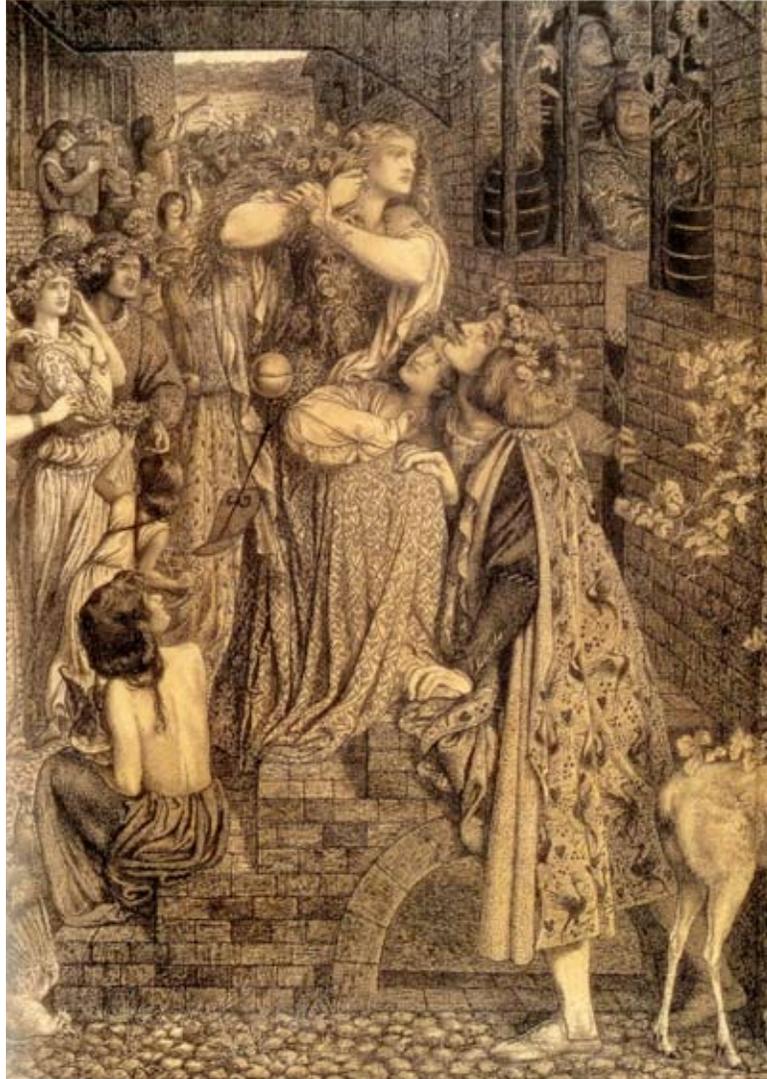
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1 *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee*, c.1859. Dante Gabriel Rossetti

FOREWORD

It is not my wish to engage the question of architectural preservation in this work for, if speaking plainly, I do not view preservation as an infallible barrier against the inevitable, but as an ill-fated and somewhat macabre attempt at stasis, on a timeline that will ultimately and unflinchingly rediscover its destination, plodding defiantly toward its end. Waste and decay are necessary products of progression, essential to the tireless renewal of life. Preservation has, at its core, the noble intent to grab hold of memory. In order to accommodate its continued presence, the place to which it is attached is held back from time – suspended out of temporality's reach, it becomes the embalmed shell of what once was. I'm referring here to the abandoned historical site, or in other terms, the place that is no longer in use for anything other than the commemoration of its past. The fear of time's influence pervades such a place; intricate webs are hurriedly swept from window corners, dust swabbed from floors, new coats of paint soothe chipping walls; the tide of passing is fought tooth and nail to save the artifact of memory. The result of this unnatural preservation is that the memory of the building, or what can be described as its sense of 'place,' takes on an air of artificiality. Place is an instinctual reading of atmosphere, infused with projected and latent memory. It clings to a space – holding the imagination and exciting the emotions. It is through place that we anchor our collective and individual identities and, conversely, it is through this projected meaning that the identity of place is crystallized. Residing at the delicate and obscure intersection between memory and history, place may be described as the soul of a building.

If memory, as Maurice Halbwachs writes, is sustained through the existence of a physical construct, what then is to become of it once a building falls into a state of ruin? Architecture becomes a repository for the lives, cultures, and centuries that have played out within its walls. It is the 'eye of the needle' through which all those who have passed through it are thread. It connects the collective and individual memories of its inhabitants, its visitors, as well as the community that surrounds it – a community that, with growing technologies, may be extensive indeed.¹ When a place is threatened

by the erasure of its physical constructs, it becomes spectral, searching for another stronghold, another medium through which it may speak before it is lost. Its memory teeters on a fearsome precipice, and the community that it once connected goes into crisis.² This is the orphaned place, the condition of the ruin; at one time, if borrowing from the writings of Pierre Nora, its stories would have been kept alive in the innate sensibility of 'real memory' but, with more recent generations and the overwhelming obsession with history's archive, a sense of panic builds as the ruin slips further into the past.³ This is the unwieldy milieu through which this thesis attempts to navigate its course.

Place therein becomes a question of representation; a question of carefully deciphering the fragments of history and memory, of transferring the mountain of architecture into the flock of birds and in so doing discover some, more deeply settled truth - it becomes a question of storytelling.⁴ In the case of Ireland's Magdalen laundries, where in most instances the memories tied to the buildings are traumatic for the individual, the collective, and the nation itself, and where the history that surrounds these institutions lies in obscurity due to the lack of access to archival records, this becomes an immensely daunting but necessary task. The ruin of the Cork Good Shepherd Magdalen asylum testifies to the dark past of Ireland's social policy. It is a remnant that holds the memory of the penitents who suffered in the network of institutions that formed the Magdalen system of Ireland. But within its dwindling presence, the urgency of its testimony becomes ever more poignant. Irish society has begun to accept its culpability in the matter of female penitentiaries by opening a dialogue where there was once only silent acquiescence, but the story of these women has, as of yet, gone unrecognised by its perpetrators, namely the Church and the State. With the physical traces of this part of the Irish cultural memory rapidly depleting, and the final generation of its survivors coming to their twilight years with no official acknowledgment or resolution, the years of suffering and anonymity attested to by the Magdalen women are all but effaced from history's archive.

It is this author's humble intention to contribute to this dialogue with efforts to capture some sense of the orphaned place within the representative mediums of writing and photography. The juxtaposition of history, projected and embedded memory narratives, and the documentation of the ruin of the Magdalen asylum and its supporting buildings, is a fragmented representation that is by no means meant to be inclusive. As Nora writes, of the history of history: "each historian was convinced that his task consisted in

establishing a more positive, all-encompassing, and explicative memory.”⁵ I will, respectfully, leave this seemingly insurmountable work to the true historians; for it is not my intention to provide the reader with a complete portrait of the Magdalen asylum’s history, but instead to begin to paint in fragments an idea of the whole, in the hopes of communicating its essence rather than its entirety. You may well argue that the documentation of the physical construct so as to anchor the ephemeral ‘place’ in the medium of story is not so different from the endeavours of architectural preservation, and perhaps it is not; it seems to me however, that what separates the two is the filtering and mnemonic nature of storytelling, which I believe lends it a truth and authenticity not found in the remains of an artificially preserved building. Memory comes alive in the story, whereas it becomes stagnant in the rigidity of the preserved state. Time’s work may only be stalled by architectural preservation. Stories, conversely, are living changing entities which remain resonant in memory.

Through the retelling of the ruin’s story, the author and the act of recollection becomes yet another layer of meaning on the palimpsest of place. It is true that the transfer of the orphaned place from the built construct to the written word, or the indexical photograph, is fragmented and incomplete, just as written history can never hope to convey the infinite events however big or small of the past. Is it not man’s lot to externalize what would otherwise be swept away by time’s receding tide? We grasp at the ephemeral, at the unknown and the fleeting, as a means to some understanding of our place within the vast and shifting seas that form our world. It is perhaps here that I empathize with architectural preservation – a need to make stillness in the continual flow of passing time, a need to make permanence in the inevitable triumph of impermanence. It would seem that this is the human condition; to be aware of one’s death and yet, to press on.

Part one of this work, entitled *Ethos*, situates the Good Shepherd Magdalen Asylum of Cork within the intersecting streams of memory and history; the first being the ephemera that surround the asylum, and the second being the events through which it found its origins, its function and its closure. The overlapping of the two streams is intended to render a more richly saturated portrait of the building’s past, and to construct a simulacrum of the architecture’s collective memory and therein its affect. While this first part of the thesis embodies the memory of events in progress, a subsequent section focuses on the experience of returning to the ruin.

Part two, entitled *Pathos*, strives to delve further into the overlap

of history and memory through an investigation of the survivor's return to the ruined remains of the place of trauma, and the visitor's sensation upon entering such a place. It is here that the author becomes absorbed in the study of the latent, historical, and projected narratives contained within the ruin. In a series of meditations, which give a detailed description of the exploration of the ruined remains of the Cork Magdalen Asylum, a parallel personal experience is channeled; the latent and historical memory of the explored ruin branches into fragments of projected memories from my own accumulative memory. These memory narratives, gathered from the experience of returning to the ruin of an educational institution in which much of my identity was formed and invested, frame an intimate understanding of the orphaned place, and of the women whose identities are inscribed in the empty walls of the asylum. To be sure, this text places its author within the memory of the ruin just as, in the exploration of the physical ruin, one becomes lost in the depths; this shifting line is a fascinating and dangerous brink. The risk of drowning, of becoming too much a part of one's material is a concern; I believe however that it is a necessary and important risk to take, in order to connect with the ruin's sense of place. For it is through our personal library of memory that we are able to grasp at the meaning of a place and therein find some resonance with it.

The third and final part of the work, entitled *Logos*, pulls back from the tight lens of personal experience to situate the abandoned place within a broader context of architectural discourse. Developing technologies have strengthened the archive at the expense of Nora's 'true memory,' or man's natural ability to absorb his past.⁶ The resultant memory loss has led to an increased interest in the ruin as a vestige of an otherwise lost time. Its buckling walls serve as reminders, points of entry to the unknown, inspiration for mediation on the transitory nature of life. The ruin owns a compelling eeriness; a construct once intended to withstand the ages, now lying still as a moss covered tombstone, marking the brevity of man. This is examined through the theories of place, temporality, the architectural uncanny, and the indexical nature of the building and the photograph.

The ruin represents the in-between state; the dual nature of memory and history, life and death, the familiar and the unfamiliar - all are reflected in its gradual decay. In it time collapses upon itself. Belonging to the shadows of the past, it exists in quiet resignation in the present, while the inevitability of the future looms in its crumbling enclaves. The ruin's liminal state is evidenced in its

limbs, bending, plunging into the earth, it exists between place and site; eventually it will belong to the ground on which it was built, and though its memory will whisper through the trees, and reach upward with each blade of grass, if its stories go untold, it will melt further into the soil until its presence lingers no longer. This is the fearsome nature of the ruin; in its temporality is reflected our own human fragility. It is perhaps for this reason that the memory of place and the sense of absence that pervades the ruin holds such profound power.



2 *Magdalene Praying*, c.1865. Ary Scheffer

INTRODUCTION

A system of residential institutions known as the Magdalen laundries, also referred to as female penitentiaries, refuges, homes, and asylums, existed in Ireland spanning three centuries and only closing in 1996. These institutions derived their name from the repentant prostitute Mary Magdalene, the Christian faith's exemplar of female penitence; just as Mary Magdalene had to reject and suppress her sexuality in order for her soul to be redeemed, so too did the inmates of the Magdalen asylums. These girls were called penitents, and with cropped hair and drab shapeless uniforms, little changed since the Victorian era, their penance was to labour in the laundries for no pay. Their work was symbolic; the cleansing of sin through the washing of society's dirty linen. Many Magdalen asylums were adjoined to industrial schools, originally intended for vagrant or orphaned children. Though these schools were government subsidized, the Magdalen penitents' difficult laundry labour was the main means of financing such large institutions. The Magdalen laundries were society's answer to the distasteful problem of female sexual immorality; they were facilities for the punishment, reformation, and incarceration of so-called 'fallen' women.

There were a number of smaller Protestant-run asylums in Ireland, including the country's first female refuge, however the largest and by far the most controversial asylums were run by orders of the Catholic Church from the mid-1800s onward. The four most recognized of these were the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge, the Irish Sisters of Charity, the Sisters of Mercy, and finally the Order of the Good Shepherds. One such institution was run by the Good Shepherds, at Sunday's Well, Cork. This Magdalen asylum, with its adjoining convent and industrial school, was founded in 1870 as an answer to the city's growing concern over the practice of prostitution and acted as a support system for the recent laws implemented to regulate such practices. Its origins lie firmly rooted in government legislation, and as such, its history provides an exemplary reflection on government involvement in the Magdalen system - a responsibility which goes unacknowledged even now. The Good Shepherd Asylum of Cork stopped admissions in the late 1970s, ultimately closing its doors in 1994 having been sold

to the local university to develop a satellite campus; a plan that was never realised. It suffered extensive damage after a fire broke out in the laundry facilities in 2003. A housing development was later proposed that would occupy much of the convent's extensive land but, with the declining Irish economy, this idea was abandoned and the buildings have since been left to the natural processes of decay.

The early history of the female penitentiaries saw a strong focus on the reclamation and supposed rehabilitation of prostitutes in Victorian Ireland. Indeed, it would seem that the asylums acted as a temporary refuge for many destitute women following the destruction and penury left in the wake of the Great Famine. Over time, however, the nature of the Magdalen asylums changed. The Catholic institutions were largely autonomous facilities, but with the problem of prostitution increasing in post-Famine Ireland, the British government lent their unofficial support to the asylums with the instatement of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and finally 1869. These acts, aimed at regulating the 'cleanliness' of practicing prostitutes in certain naval and military stations so as to protect the health of the British forces, stipulated a mandatory six-month hospitalization for women found to be infected during which time they would be forced to undergo religious and moral instruction. This focus on Christian redemption was instated as a means of appeasing opposition to the inhumane nature of the acts, but it ultimately served as a channel through which the Magdalen asylums could increase their workforce. For a period of over twenty years, women were regularly sent by the Chaplain of government hospitals to labour in penitence at the Catholic Magdalen laundries. The Contagious Diseases Acts were abolished when the Bill for Repeal received the Royal Assent in 1886; this signaled a paradigm shift in the running of the asylums. With the repeal of the acts, the nuns no longer had a firm hold on the reclamation of 'fallen' women. Business dwindled with the laundries' equally dwindling population of inmates. By the turn of the century, focus of religious efforts had begun to shift from the reclamation of prostitutes to the unwed mother. With the years leading up to the founding of the Irish Free State, the ideal of Irish female purity had become entwined in Ireland's new national identity; by the early and mid-twentieth century, the convent laundry system represented the silence and shame that surrounded female sexual 'deviancy'; the asylums were regarded with fear and the women inside them with abhorrence.

By this time, the counties of independent Ireland had ten Magdalen laundries, each one housing one-hundred to two-hundred penitents at one time. Though held solely under the authority of

the Catholic church – the inmates were not free to leave. Young women, sometimes not much more than children, who were viewed as morally deviant, at risk of ‘falling’, or socially objectionable, were brought to the asylum for containment by parish priests, nuns at other affiliated institutions such as industrial schools and orphanages, employers, officials, and by their own family members. In the mid-twentieth century these women were primarily unwed mothers, in addition to girls merely suspected or thought to be in danger of sexual immorality, victims of rape, sexual assault, or incest, women with mild cognitive disabilities, and a decreasing number of women who had been engaged in prostitution. Upon entering the asylum, their names were taken from them, replaced with a plain first name assigned by the Mother Prioress. Any reference to one’s past was forbidden, and was seen as an obstacle to one’s new repentant path; silence was effectively maintained throughout the daily routine with the exception of prayer recitation during meals and laundry work hours. Women were prohibited from forming personal attachments to their fellow inmates, and idle tongues were punished severely. A penitent who had recently given birth to an illegitimate child was not told any details of the welfare of her baby, let alone any knowledge of the child’s whereabouts; unbeknownst to their grieving mothers, some of these children were placed in the Catholic-run industrial schools, in some cases in the same grounds as the Magdalen asylum that held their mothers. This systematic destruction of identity, combined with the poor records kept by the Catholic orders involved, meant that many of the women who served in the Magdalen laundries all their lives were confined to anonymity even in death – for it was general practice to bury the penitents in an unmarked mass grave within the convent walls. The vast majority of these women were incarcerated with no legal sentence, no assigned crime and, with no idea of the duration of their containment, they spent years in arduous, backbreaking unpaid labour, constantly praying for the forgiveness of a sin that many could not remember having committed.

In some cases women who proved to be too ‘difficult’ for the nuns – women who threw tantrums, were adverse to seeking redemption, or were a destructive influence on others in the penitentiary – were expelled from the asylum. Sometimes these women were transferred to the order’s other Magdalen penitentiaries or, in extenuating circumstances, were placed directly into a State mental institution. Others were simply released. Those who were lucky enough to have a sibling or a branch of the family who had learned of their whereabouts and had requested their release, were

reluctantly allowed to leave their work in the laundry, while other less fortunate penitents took their chances at escape, climbing the daunting convent wall or slipping out a gate that had accidentally been left unlocked. If caught, these women faced severe corporal punishment. For those who were released or escaped from the Magdalen penitentiaries, their experiences in the laundry would remain with them for the rest of their lives. During their years of penitence, in which they followed rigorous schedules and practiced austere denial, many women had become so institutionalized that they found themselves unable to function in the 'outside' world. Some, having become so fearful of men, so scarred by the painful loss of a child and the years of isolation that forbade the development of any normal social relationships, led permanently damaged lives and watched society from its margins. Others have reported being assaulted and victimized by men of the cloth while incarcerated in the Magdalen asylums.

In the late decades of the twentieth century a shift in Ireland's societal values as well as a series of technological advancements heralded the impending decline of the Magdalen penitentiary system. With the development and accessibility of the household electric washing machine and the invention of synthetic, easy-care fabrics, the commercial laundry began to lose valuable business. In addition to this decline in business, was a decrease in the number of women admitted to the asylum, which was at this stage being referred to as a 'home'. The reasons for this decline are various and sundry, but its implications are clear – the role of the female penitentiary and, for that matter, the role of the Church in Ireland's social policy had begun to be questioned. Whether because of growing social awareness, or a decrease in profits, one by one the Magdalen laundries closed. In 1993 it was revealed that the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge had exhumed the remains of 133 Magdalen women who had been buried in two mass gravesites within the grounds of the Order's High Park Convent in Dublin – the largest Magdalen laundry in the country. The exhumation had been carried out in order to sell part of the land to a local developer, as the nuns had found themselves in troubling financial uncertainty. During the exhumation, the bodies of 22 further laundry women were found for which the High Park records could not account; poor records and the practice of assigning the inmates with new names had obscured the identities of the 155 women – only one was reclaimed by her family while the 154 others were cremated and reburied together in Dublin's Glasnevin Cemetery. This shocking treatment of the remains of women who had given their

lives to washing away their shame in the laundry facilities produced a public reaction of dismayed revulsion. Soon after this revelation into the inner workings of the long-standing female refuge system, an attempt was made to commemorate the lives of the Magdalen women of Ireland; a plaque dedicated to their memory was installed by the central fountain of St. Stephen's Green in Dublin, unveiled by President Mary Robinson. For many, the plaque, though a start at healing, was a gesture disproportionate to the years of suffering and isolation inflicted on innocents. The Redress Act of 2002 excluded the Magdalen women from any formal government acknowledgment or recompense; efforts at recognition have since gone largely unanswered. Characterized throughout their history by a collective silence until the 1990s, the issue of the Magdalen institutions is complex. Many of the women who passed through the laundries did so having already been abandoned by their families, their lovers, and society at large. To date, historians have been denied access to the Catholic orders' twentieth-century laundry records, leaving the number of women who were contained within the Magdalen institutions unknown; the estimated 30 000 inmates of the asylums remain anonymous in death, as they were in life.

WITHIN THESE WALLS



PLATE 1

PART ONE: *Ethos*

All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

(1958)

The meaning of what actually happens and appears while it is happening is revealed when it has disappeared; remembrance, by which you make present to your mind what actually is absent and past, reveals the meaning in the form of a story.

Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*

(1978)

† EXCERPT FROM THE CORK EXAMINER, APRIL 11, 1870

*Proposed Magdalen Asylum, Industrial
School and Reformatory for Females*
AUTHOR UNKNOWN

This article demonstrates the abject position held by the 'fallen' class of women in Victorian era Ireland and the focus of the rescue workers, nun, and devout laity of the time. Though the account emphasises the idea of Christian redemption, it also confirms society's contempt for what they deemed the lowest depths of depravity.

"Entirely to effect that, they couldn't expect – there must needs be scandals always; but it would be in their power to effect an immensity (hear, hear). The public appearance at night of the city of Cork was positively worse than could be found in the most licentious capitals in Europe [...] the condition of the streets of Cork was very bad, and that state of things must be a sore affliction to all moral minded people (hear, hear). They should grapple with the evil, and in order to that effectually they should not only confront the awful amount of iniquity that stared them in the face but they should look to the source; they should try and cut off the supply to this fearful evil (hear, hear). In order to do so they should begin and take the young girls out of danger (hear). They were to be found prowling about the streets selling ballads and vending small goods; they had no fixed dwelling, they escaped supervision of any kind, and scarcely ever came in contact with a minister of religion. These purely poor animal creatures flung in that depraved position on the bye-ways and high ways of society (hear, hear). [...] It was therefore proposed to build immediately an asylum that would afford accommodation to 130 girls, and it was contemplated to build an addition which would receive 80 more. This would accordingly give them the reclamation of over two hundred girls, and that would be one of the most important steps in accomplishing the great end they desired, namely, the reformation and salvation of the humbler classes of females in the city of Cork (hear, hear). [...] In order to come at the root of that evil, it was proposed to have a Magdalen Asylum [...] The management of the establishment would be taken up by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, and more devoted ladies could not be found in the land (hear, hear). [...] These were the ladies who would take up this institution which it was proposed to build in this city, and with all the appliances they could command in the reformation of the fallen, they could easily see the successful issue that would attend their labours [...] in consequence of the shocking immorality which disturbs and infests our streets – we deem, that in addition to the excellent Asylum already in existence. Another for the protection and reformation of fallen female penitents is absolutely required in this city, in order to lessen, as far as possible this great social and moral evil." [...] These facts [...] were most gratifying, in as much as they proved that Ireland was still – no matter in what position she was placed – she was still Catholic Ireland (hear, hear) and the attachment of the people to their bishops and clergy was as devoted as ever [...]"

O R I G I N S

In the early months of 1870 the Rev. Dr. Delany, Bishop of Cork, met with local officials and members of the public to discuss the building of a vast Magdalen asylum in answer to the city's growing prostitution problem.¹ Among the attendants was the Lord Mayor of Cork, Mr. James Hegarty who, eager to further his public presence and contribute to that of the Church, offered a large plot of land for the project in the outlying area of Sunday's Well, to the north of the river Lee.

Prostitution had been a concern for the city since the early 1840s, and had only continued to grow in the poverty and destitution that the Great Famine had left. Young women, often not more than children, turned to prostitution as a means to claw their way out of penury in an effort to support their families. Others, made orphans by the Hunger, sold their bodies on the streets simply to survive. By the 1850s it had become a central focus for the city and its reputation. An increasing social and cultural recognition of the problem roused politicians to action; the wheels of law were set in motion. British Parliament, alarmed at the spread of venereal disease amidst their naval and military forces, singled out prostitution as the cause for inefficiency within their ranks.² As such, the cities that housed military and naval stations would have to regulate the practice of prostitution. In the summer of 1864 the Act "for the Prevention of Contagious Diseases at certain Naval and Military Stations" was quietly put in place.³ Quietly - because the government knew that the Act, with its controversial stance on prostitution, would unquestionably generate strong opposition. It was the first in a series of ever shifting, inhumane pieces of legislation dealing with the prostitute, and perpetuating the abject condition of the 'fallen' woman in the cultural consciousness of the Irish people.†

Among the Act's stipulations, revised and reissued in 1866, and again in 1869, was a mandate that required prostitutes discovered to be diseased to undergo religious instruction during forced treatment for their illness. Held in Government Lock Hospitals for months against their will, the women formed a captive audience. It was this opportunity that so excited the interest of the Rev. Delany. The reclamation of this particular class of sinners had long alluded the Church's rescue workers. The Lock Hospitals provided the perfect means of access. Faced with illness, fearful, and isolated from friends and family, the women could more easily see the error of their ways and would submit, at the urgings of the priests, to seek penitence for their sins. Thus the priest was able to enter the sinner into the Magdalen asylum with ease. Of course, the clergy

¹ Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish: Magdalen Asylums in Ireland*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 166.

² *Ibid*, 160.

³ Charles Bell Taylor, "The Contagious Diseases Act, Showing Its Cruelty, Injustice, Demoralising Tendency, & Inexpediency in a Sanitary Point of View" (paper read before the Medical Society of London, January 17, 1870) 3, accessed January 6, 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60240140>.

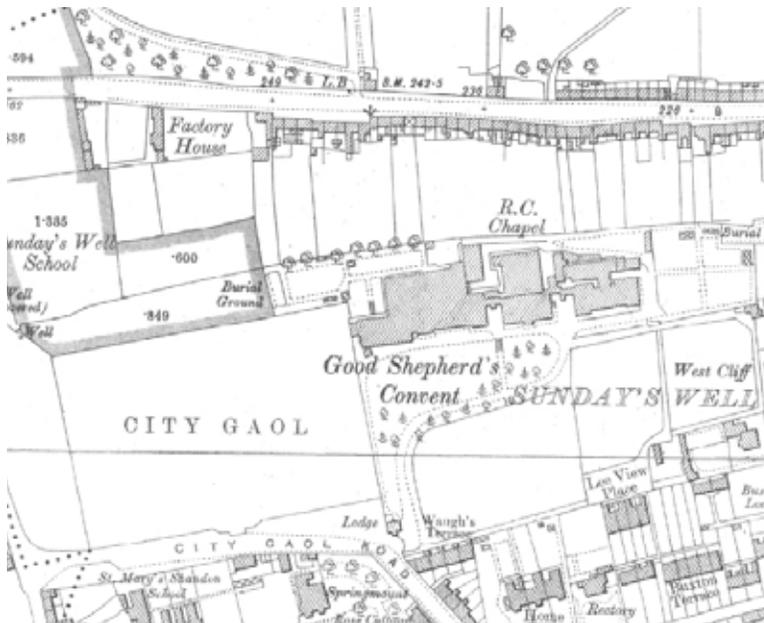
[1.1]

MAP OF CITY OF CORK, 1893
The Good Shepherd Magdalen Asylum and the old City Gaol are just visible to the far left of the map, north of the river.



[1.2]

HISTORIC SURVEY MAP OF 1899
The three main buildings are visible; each with new expansions. The Laundry extended well to the back north wall of the complex and was the largest of the institutions. The twenty foot barrier wall shared a side with the city Gaol.



were very careful to insist that entry into the asylum was completely voluntary. It is only possible now, with the advantage of time's perspective, to see that the nature of this 'voluntary' submission was rather dubious; the aggressive tactics utilized by clergy left little alternative to the laundry in the impressionable minds of the invalid women.⁴ According to the Church, penitent women would find solace in the symbolic act of washing soiled laundry, a parallel for their blackened souls and a reflection of the Biblical prostitute Mary Magdalene.⁵

Reverend Delany initially proposed space for fifty penitents, but eventually the hope was expressed for the asylum to house four times that amount.⁶ It was decided that the Magdalen refuge would contain women for a defined period, namely two years, during which time they would receive spiritual and practical training to equip them for a productive life outside the convent walls. The asylum would rehabilitate the wretched, and produce useful members of society. The people of Cork responded to their Bishop's appeal for funds generously. The Catholic Church took precedence over all else; when money could scarce be found for one's daily needs, it was somehow scraped together for the requests of the clergy.

The Bishop, eager to expand their influence in Ireland, put the new Magdalen asylum under the care of the nuns of the Order of the Good Shepherd.⁷ This group, which found its roots in Angres, France, controlled three other asylums in Ireland, those being the Limerick, New Ross, and Waterford facilities. The nuns, in addition to the three vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty, had taken a fourth vow particular to the Order. This Fourth Vow, established in 1666, required the nuns to care specifically for the fallen class of women so as to secure their repentance.⁸ It was not long after Bishop Delany's meeting that Sister Mary of St. Teresa of Jesus Devereux, who had been sent to the Order's Mother House in Angres, made her way back to her home country, as the newly appointed Mother Prioress of the Order's Magdalen refuge, convent, and school in Cork. Unusually young and inexperienced for the prestigious post, her appointment was no doubt an effect of her prominent family status and the exorbitant sums of money donated to the Order by her dear uncle, Richard Devereux, a life-long benefactor of the Good Shepherds. Mr. Devereux promptly donated £4 000 toward construction expenses for the new Cork refuge.⁹ Bishop Delany wasted no time; the Order in Cork was officially founded in March of 1870, just weeks after the asylum had initially been proposed.¹⁰ There were not, as of yet, any facilities to govern but construction was soon to begin under the supervision of the architect George Coppinger Ashlin, and the foundation stone was laid in October of that year.¹¹ The sisters took up residence in a

⁴ Jesse Herbert, *A review of the reports of the Select Committee appointed in 1879 by the House of Commons to enquire into the operations of the Contagious Diseases Acts*, (Bristol: Bristol Selected Pamphlets, 1880) 19, accessed January 6, 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60248170>. "These police use every endeavour, subtle and open, to compel the girls, whether innocent or guilty, whom they wish to bring under the Acts, to sign the Submissions mis-named Voluntary. Evidence was given of cases wherein the women declared that they did not know the nature of the document they signed; some even denied the signature; some did not realize the obligation they incurred of continued and periodical examinations. They should no longer be called "Voluntary" but "Compelled Submissions.""

⁵ James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and The Nation's Architecture of Containment*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) 127.

⁶ Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 166.

⁷ Untitled. *The Freeman's Journal*, April 13, 1870, 2. —

⁸ Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 21.

⁹ *Ibid*, 197.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 171.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

[1.3]

UNSPECIFIED GOOD SHEPHERD
CONVENT IN IRELAND, CHILDREN
WITH SCEPTRES
c. 1884 -1945
National Library of Ireland



† EXCERPT FROM THE CORK EXAMINER, JULY 17TH, 1872

The Good Shepherd's Asylum, page 2.
AUTHOR UNKNOWN

An article in the local newspaper emphasising the strict separation of the children and the Magdalen class within the Cork institution. This was standard practice in all Magdalen facilities.

"Mr. James Hegarty with characteristic benevolence offered a house and three acres of ground in one of the choicest spots of the city, and he and others gave money in large sums. The nuns of the Good Shepherd who devoted themselves specially to reformatory works, were invited to Cork, and, an industrial school being added to the original project, the house was turned into a temporary Convent and a temporary industrial school, was run up in five weeks.

[...]

This building was originally designed for Magdalens alone, but owing to the want of permanent accommodation for the industrial school children, it has been for the present thought better to divide it, and, with a complete and absolute separation of the classes, to admit both. With this object a complete division wall has been constructed inside the building, and to prevent even the possibility of the children seeing the penitents in the airing ground or elsewhere the glass in the lower part of the windows has been artificially dulled. In the chapel alone will they be present at the same time, but such measures have been taken for isolation that the one class cannot even be aware of the presence of the other."

small cottage that existed on the land that Mr. Hegarty had donated for their use.¹²

The money that had been given by the public would not last through the construction of the building. The £12 600 budget that Bishop Delany had predicted at the outset of project was climbing steadily.¹³ It was therefore decided that a temporary industrial school ought to be constructed as soon as possible. Unlike the Magdalen asylums, the schools were government funded institutions run by religious orders. For each child enrolled in the industrial school, the nuns would receive approximately £20 per child per annum.¹⁴ The alarming speed at which the school was built, in just seven weeks, indicates the pressing need to offset construction costs for the main building.¹⁵ Though technically separate entities, the industrial schools and Magdalen asylums often accompanied one another, run by one religious group. The revenue generated from each would be collected and siphoned off to the various extremities of the convent and its governing Order.

The short-term industrial school, likely built of wood and corrugated iron, could house ninety pupils at once.† Vagrant children were recommended by priests, local officials, and rescue workers. Taken from the streets and the workhouses, these girls were seen as the ranks from which prostitutes were recruited.¹⁶ Thus the industrial school was a preventative measure against sexual deviancy – assuming guilt to be inevitable, even before sin could be committed. Conditions in the facility were poor. The temporary structure did little to keep out the damp cold of the Irish countryside. The overcrowded and unhealthy environment ushered in sickness; almost immediately there was an outbreak of what was likely ophthalmia, a contagion of the eye caused by poor nutrition or bacterial infection.¹⁷ The painful condition passed from child to child and lasted for over five months before clearing up. In 1871 the Mother Prioress, Sister Mary of St. Teresa of Jesus Devereux, suffered a blow to her health, developing a vicious case of rheumatic fever. She recovered slowly, but would not regain her full vitality.

In July of 1872 Cork's Good Shepherd Magdalen Asylum opened its doors.¹⁸ The building was not yet complete, but room was found for the four penitents who filed in from the Government Lock Hospital in town. They were sent by a Father Reed, chaplain to the Government Hospital of Cork and firm supporter of the Magdalen system. The chaplain, being in charge of the fallen women's spiritual guidance during their treatment, had convinced them of the need for penance. In the throws of illness, surrounded by condemnation and kept from their loved ones, the women became convinced of their own guilt and agreed to enter the asylum.¹⁹ All four of these penitents would be confined in the Magdalen system for the

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Untitled. *The Freeman's Journal*, April 13, 1870, 2.

¹⁴ Michael J. F. McCarthy, *Priests and People in Ireland* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902), 432.

¹⁵ Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 171.

¹⁶ Untitled. *The Freeman's Journal*, April 13, 1870, 2.

¹⁷ Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 171.

¹⁸ Ibid, 173.

¹⁹ Bell Taylor, "Contagious Diseases Act," 23-24. "The assertion that clergymen are brought in contact with fallen women by the operation of these laws can be no palliation of their atrocity in face of the facts I have cited above. Moreover, I would ask, is the breast that is burning under a sullen and indignant sense of wrong in a fit state to receive religious truths from chaplain who she must regard as one of her oppressors? [...] A chaplain to a voluntary institution would doubtless have great influence upon the poor creatures who in dire distress sought a welcome shelter in its hospitable walls, but I cannot conceive anything more calculate to destroy such influence for good than that he should be looked upon as an integral part of a system which openly avows that prostitution is a necessity, and which clearly seeks by degrading women to enable men to be vicious with impunity."

[1.4]

THE OUTCAST, 1851

RICHARD REDGRAVE

The painting *The Outcast* depicts a righteous father casting his 'fallen' daughter and her illegitimate child out into the cold winter's night. Other family members despair for her state and plea for her father not to reject her. The image was intended as an example to others of the time.



remainder of their days; Jane Barry, an orphan, was transferred to the Order's Hammersmith Asylum in London where she died in 1892, while the other three – Mary McMahon, Ellen McCarthy, and Nora Denchy – remained at the Cork Asylum until their deaths.²⁰

This life-long atonement is a curious counter point to the supposed emphasis on rehabilitation for reintroduction into society so championed by the Cork asylum's supporters. According to early mission statements delivered by Rev. Maguire to the Royal Commission describing the conditions of the Home, importance was quite deliberately placed on finding the penitent women 'situations' upon quitting the laundry.

The founding of an institution of a totally different character [...] What we contemplate now is, under the care of the Good Shepherd nuns, the individual reform of the women, and then either to send them away to America or otherwise procure situation for them, and that has a much greater chance of being a success, than for the women to come in and then be immured in a convent. Royal Commission, op. cit., 6 May 1871.²¹

It is unclear whether this is an accurate portrayal of the intentions of the new asylum, nor indeed of the Order itself; the end results however, suffer no ambiguity. According to the Limerick Register of Penitents, cited proudly by Rev. Maguire during an enquiry into the penitent success rate of securing future employment, between the years of 1848 and 1877 a mere five percent of the inmates "left for situation".²² Indeed, as stated in Dr. Frances Finnegan's *Do Penance or Perish: Magdalen Asylums in Ireland*, during the initial years of the Cork Good Shepherd Asylum between 1872 and 1890, only five percent found employment through the penitentiary's system.²³ It was acknowledged by the supporters of the laundries that wide-spread stigma surrounded the repentant 'fallen' woman once outside the convent enclosure.²⁴ Society's apprehension no doubt contributed to this low employment rate, a fear that was not altogether dispelled by the clergy;

Amongst the annual appeals for our Charitable Institutions, there is one that speaks of a darker misery, a more terrific evil, than any which falls to the ordinary lot of humanity. The object of that appeal is not to give light to the blinded mind of ignorance, to sooth the pains of the sick bed, or to provide a home and a protector for the orphan – no, it solicits attention to a far sadder and more awful subject. It points to human nature in its last stage of ruin and degradation, crushed, bleeding, and trampled on in the mire of the deepest depravity [...] the pure aspirations of the immortal spirit changed into the outbursts of fiendish passion or blasphemous despair. Stripped of all

²⁰ Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 178.

²¹ *Ibid*, 167.

²² *Ibid*, 74.

²³ *Ibid*, 237.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 167.

The stigma that surrounded these women once they had left the institution is alluded to in Rev. Maguire's when asked whether there was any apprehension to employing the reformed penitents he replied "Unfortunately there is, and any woman who falls in the city of Cork, with few exceptions, has no chance of getting a situation when she is known to come from a house of that kind. Sometimes they do get situations. For instance, I know one who had been for 16 years in an asylum, I sent her there. She has come back, and is now with her family, and they never knew she was there, and now she is the best of women."

[1.5]

THE GOOD SHEPHERD CONVENT
SUNDAY'S WELLS, CORK, IRELAND
c. 1885

National Library of Ireland

The new facilities are pictured here, shortly after construction on the three main buildings had been completed. The Magdalen asylum and laundry are located to the left of the image, with the central convent building separating the asylum from the industrial school on the far right. This photograph emphasises the clear division that kept the three classes isolated from one another.



it treasures of grace and virtue, and bleeding at every pore, it has been flung upon the highway of the world half-dead from the wounds inflicted by the robbers and assassins into whose hands it had fallen. [...] ²⁵

This passage goes on to challenge the people of Cork to see the fallen woman as a depraved soul in which the “pulse of virtue” could “throb again”. Irrespective of her repentance, the Magdalen woman would always be viewed in relation to her sin, never to be fully accepted back into society. In fact, contrary to Rev. Maguire’s statements to the Royal Commission, the convent took pride in the penitents who spent their final days within the walls of the asylum, the nuns being “secure” of their repentance to the end. The Rev. Reed delivered this sentiment with great clarity, saying “Those who are brought to the asylums, and die edifying deaths, are some of my best cases; we are secure of them to the last, as far as we can be, humanly.” ²⁶

Further to this, a lack of education rendered the women illiterate, yet another barrier to a life outside the walls. The census data recorded in 1901 and again in 1911 lists the laundresses under the nuns’ care as unable to read or write, and a government condoned inspection of similar institutions in France indicated that “women frequently left the convents between the ages of twenty and thirty without being able to read or write, and incapable of earning their livelihood.” ²⁷ This practice seems to have extended well into the twentieth century. Maureen Sullivan, who was sent to the Good Shepherd Magdalen Home in New Ross at only twelve years of age in 1960, testifies that she received no education while working in the laundry there. ²⁸

My name was taken from me, and I was given a different name; I was given the name Frances. [...] I found it very frightening, I didn’t know what was happening to me [...] I asked to go back to school. [...] I did have an importance on my education [...] I never went to school, I worked in the laundry. ²⁹

Mary McMahon, Ellen McCarthy, and Nora Denchy, mentioned above, would be some of the Rev. Reed’s “best cases”, leading lives of servitude only to succumb to “edifying deaths” within the asylum’s grounds. By the following year the builders had completed the brunt of the work on the convent building and the nuns were able to move in to their new accommodations. Sister Mary of St. Teresa of Jesus Devereux was in poor health. The stress of her post had weakened the Mother Prioress. She would not live to see the completion of the building, dying just four years into her position, in the waning months of 1874. ³⁰ She was replaced by her sister, Mary of St. Magdalen Devereux, who would serve as the Mother

²⁵ “The Sermon for the Magdalen Asylum,” *Cork Examiner*, March 28th, 1856. In this case the passage refers to the repentant sinners in the care of the Sisters of Charity who ran a Magdalen Asylum in Cork prior to the Good Shepherds.

²⁶ “Report from the Select Committee on the Contagious Diseases Acts; together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix,” (June 1881), quoted in Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 170.

²⁷ The Fabian Society, *Fabian Tract No. 112: Life in the Laundry*, (London: The Fabian Society, 1902), 9-10.

²⁸ RTE Interview conducted by Karen Coleman on “The Wide Angle,” testimony of Maureen Sullivan, Good Shepherd Magdalen Laundry in New Ross

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 173.

[1.6]

CLIFTON HOME FOR GIRLS
(FORMERLY THE YORK
PENITENTIARY) EST. 1822.

An image showing a typical
ironing line in 1934;
conditions in most of the
Magdalen laundries would have
been similar. The little white
caps signified penitence.



Prioress of the Cork Convent until 1912.³¹ Work had commenced on the foundations of the adjacent industrial school in January of that year. The Irish Times sent a correspondent to visit the new building and report on its progress. He found that the “central portion [the Convent] and one of the wings [the Magdalen Asylum] were nearly completed and the ground was being excavated for the corresponding portion [the Industrial School]”.³² The “handsome lodge” was already completed and the grounds “most tastefully laid out and planted”. The correspondent was shown the buildings by Mr. James Hegarty. By this point the construction costs for the facilities had climbed to £23 000, almost twice that of the original budget.³³

The profits from the laundry and the financial support provided by the industrial school were put toward the Cork convent’s staggering debt. Admissions continued to stream in from the city’s Lock Hospital. The Contagious Diseases Acts, as predicted by the Bishop Delany, were working to the Good Shepherds’ advantage. The clergy in charge of the patients’ religious instruction, as stipulated by these acts, were able to supply the laundry with a constant workforce of women who believed they had little alternative. The women, registered under the Acts were marked with their shame permanently, never to be accepted back into society’s fold.

Registration of women as prostitutes (in accordance with the provisions of the Contagious Diseases Acts) means ostensible social degradation; it sets upon them the mark of infamy, it compels them to commit themselves *absolutely to a life of prostitution as a condition of continuing to exist*, whereas before they were but hovering on the brink of it, and still had it in their power to turn back; it means loss of valued acquaintances and of long cherished friends, and worst of all, it means also but too often to be cast off by relatives, to be disowned and repudiated by father and mother, and thus virtually to be forbidden ever again to visit the beloved home of childhood and youth. An unregistered woman who has ‘fallen,’ or who has been tempted by any of the many reasons which impel women to prostitution to prostitute herself temporarily, has it in her power to recover herself, and to resume her ordinary position in the society in which she moves, but the difficulty of recovery after registration is increased a thousand fold. [...] ³⁴

The relationship between the government approved Contagious Diseases Acts and the Magdalen laundries was clear if not official; the Acts would provide the laundries with their work force, while the nuns kept society’s ‘dirty laundry’ hidden from sight.

³¹ Ibid, 173.

In 1912 Mary of St. Magdalen Devereux became head mistress of the Order’s Clifton House in Cork.

³² “The Nuns of the Good Shepherd at Cork,” *The Irish Times*, January 3, 1874, 5.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Bell Taylor, “Contagious Diseases Act,” 2.

† EXCERPT FROM JAMES JOYCE'S ULYSSES

Ulysses, page 464.

JAMES JOYCE

This passage from Joyce's *Ulysses*, which takes place in one day on June 16th 1904, depicts a streetwalker roaming the lanes of Dublin and disturbing the book's main characters. The excerpt makes mention of the Lock Hospitals, some of which would still have been in use at the time, though not under the government of the Contagious Diseases Acts. The passage concludes with an allusion to the previously prevalent nature of the Acts.

"The face of a streetwalker glazed and haggard under a black straw hat peered askew round the door of the shelter palpably reconnoitring on her own with the object of bringing more grist to her mill.

[...]

Round the side of the Evening Telegraph he just caught a fleeting glimpse of her face round the side of the door with a kind of demented glassy grin showing that she was not exactly all there, viewing with evident amusement the group of gazers round skipper Murphy's nautical chest and then there was no more of her.

[...]

--It beats me, Mr Bloom confided to Stephen, medically I am speaking, how a wretched creature like that from the Lock hospital reeking with disease can be barefaced enough to solicit or how any man in his sober sense, if he values his health in the least. Unfortunate creature! Of course I suppose some man is ultimately responsible for her condition. Still no matter what the cause is from ...

Stephen had not noticed her and shrugged his shoulders, merely remarking:

--In this country people sell much more than she ever had and do a roaring trade. Fear not them that sell the body but have not power to buy the soul. She is a bad merchant. She buys dear and sells cheap.

The elder man, though not by any manner of means an old maid or a prude, said it was nothing short of a crying scandal that ought to be put a stop to *instanter* to say that women of that stamp (quite apart from any old-maidish squeamishness on the subject), a necessary evil, were not licensed and medically inspected by the proper authorities, a thing, he could truthfully state, he, as a *paterfamilias*, was a stalwart advocate of from the very first start. Whoever embarked on a policy of the sort, he said, and ventilated the matter thoroughly would confer a lasting boon on everybody concerned."

THE CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ACTS

The Cork Good Shepherd Magdalen Asylum and its supporting facilities were built as a direct result of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and finally 1869. The opportunities that these afforded the Cork institution meant a continually replenished supply of penitent women to staff the convent's main means of revenue, the Magdalen laundry. The provisions of the Acts both demeaned the women in question, condemning them to a permanent state of ill-repute and therein casting them from society's fold, and allowed for religious 'persuasion' while these women, isolated and destitute, found themselves with few other options.

At the conclusion of the Session of 1864, the Act "for the Prevention of Contagious Diseases at certain Naval and Military Stations" was passed by British Parliament. Measures were to be applied to a number of stationed cities in England, and the Irish cities of Queenstown, the Curragh of Kildare, and Cork, as well as their surrounding areas.³⁵ These cities were selected based on the virulence and spread of venereal disease amidst the ranks of the British armed forces stationed in them. The provisions of the new law however, did not apply to the soldiers and naval officers for which it was constructed, but instead focused entirely on unchaste women while their male counterparts escaped all culpability. The Act stipulated that women suspected of prostitution, particularly those thought to be diseased, would be apprehended and incarcerated.† It was a system that could be easily abused. The editor of the *British Medical Journal* at the time characterised it as a law "which sanctioned the grossest violation of the liberty of the subject that had ever been proposed to a British Parliament."³⁶ The women accused of indiscretion were detained for involuntary treatment and entered on a register that recorded prostitutes' information in the affected areas. The details of the Acts were veiled in secrecy and efforts were undertaken to cultivate the ignorance of the public on the matter. 'Special police' were employed. Working in disguise, these men and sometimes women would carry out the provisions of the Act "so secretly that the general public were not alarmed."³⁷ They would infiltrate the city's brothels so as to extract information through covert means. Once satisfied with their findings, they were empowered to arrest their suspect and bring her before a magistrate at which point she would be ordered to undergo a medical examination to determine whether or not she was 'unclean'. The magistrate could then order her containment in a Government Certified Hospital for up to three months.³⁸ If the prostitute refused this treatment she was brought before a court which more than often resulted in the same sentence, and ended, unquestionably, in shame and a total

³⁵ Ibid, 3.

The English cities affected by the Act "for the Prevention of Contagious Diseases at certain Naval and Military Stations" of 1864 were Portsmouth, Plymouth, Devonport, Woolwich, Chatham, Aldershot, Windsor, Sheerness, Colchester, and Shorncliffe. The Act mandated that its effects would also be applied to the surrounding areas of the cities specified, within a radius of five miles.

³⁶ Ibid, 3.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 161.

† EVIDENCE GIVEN BEFORE THE ROYAL COMMISSION OF 1870, TESTIMONY OF J.S. MILL

The evidence of John Stuart Mill, taken before the Royal Commission of 1870, on the Administration and Operation of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1866 and 1869., page 8.

During the investigation into the nature of the Acts, it was found that the medical examinations that women were forced to undergo were both torturous and ineffective; without men also being examined, the Acts could not stop the spread of disease.

It is important to note here that while women were ordered to undergo these inhumane conditions in order to insure 'protected' areas where prostitutes were deemed 'clean', their male counterparts were still left free to spread sexually transmitted diseases, a glaringly obvious flaw in the system of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Opposition to the Acts stated clearly in their address to the Royal Commission of 1870 that these examinations could easily and more comfortably be performed on men as well as, or indeed instead of women:

"I think it is exceedingly degrading to the women subjected to it, not in the same degree to men; therefore there is more reason that if it is applied at all it should be applied to men as well as women, or if not to both, rather to men than to women. Men are not lowered in their own eyes as much by exposure of their persons, besides which it is not a painful operation in the case of a man, which I believe in the case of a woman it often is, and they very much detest it."

destruction of one's reputation - a much feared fate for even the lowest of the classes. The first of these Contagious Diseases Acts provided a new hold over a group of sinners that had previously managed to elude the grasp of the State and, for that matter, the Church; a door was opened for further attacks on the human dignity and cardinal rights of the female sex.

In 1866 additions were made that held particular significance in the history of the Good Shepherd Magdalen Asylum of Cork. A new law entitled the Act "for the better Prevention of Contagious Diseases at certain Naval and Military Stations" was instated, expanding on the measures specified in the earlier act of 1864. The additions required any suspected prostitute practicing in military cities or their outlying areas to submit to mandatory 'periodical medical examinations.'³⁹ This mandate was irrespective of the medical condition of the woman; the act now applied to all prostitutes rather than just those suspected to be suffering from a venereal disease. Proof was no longer necessary. If a policeman had reason to believe that a woman was a common prostitute he could, under the provisions of the Act of 1866, bring the woman before the magistrate. The suspected prostitute could then be forced to undergo a degrading and often painful gynecological examination.† If found to be infected, the woman was detained for a hospital stay of up to six months. This decision was based solely on the authority of the medical professional who had performed the examination and did not require the opinion of a jury; the women were unapologetically deprived of their right to a fair trial, an aspect of the law that outraged free-thinking minds of the time.

What would men say if a Parliament of women were to vote away our right to trial by judge and jury, were to persecute us by spies, and condemn us on the opinion of irresponsible officials low in the service, who report of us from whispers of prostitutes, or from the secret letters of profligates? I repeat that contempt of women's most cardinal rights, women married or unmarried, chaste or unchaste, had been displayed in a manner which had previously seemed impossible. — *Professor Newman*.⁴⁰

The six month sentence was sudden; In most cases women weren't given time to make necessary preparations and arrange their affairs, being sent directly from the medical examination to a contained ward in the Government Certified Hospital (or Lock Hospital) dedicated to the express purposes of the Act. Prostitutes, often single mothers of illegitimate children, were granted no opportunity to make provisions for or even see their children before being incarcerated. The officials who carried out the sentence were under no obligation

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Bell Taylor, "Contagious Diseases Act," 2.

† EXCERPT FROM THE MAGDALENES: PROSTITUTION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century, page 29-30.
LINDA MAHOOD

Although Mahood is writing here of the position of prostitution and the Lock Hospitals in Scotland, her points extend to all of nineteenth century Britain.

"The term 'lock', was derived from 'loke', a house for lepers. According to William Acton the origin of the term 'lock' was in the French word 'loques', meaning rags, bandages, and lints. Lock hospitals acquired the name because the first one was located on the site of the medieval leper house in Southwark. Walkowitz suggests that 'prostitutes' became the social lepers of the industrial revolution as syphilis replaced leprosy as the symbol of social contagion and disease.

The founding of lock hospitals reflected three trends within the late eighteenth-century social reform movement. First, the awakening of philanthropic concern for the problems of illegitimacy, prostitution, and moral and physical contagion. Second, the need to provide medical care for patients rejected by other hospitals. And finally, the larger eighteenth-century medical and moral crusade to improve the condition in prisons, workhouses, and hospitals. Social reformers' concern at the problems of criminality, poverty, and disease was not limited to the exercise of harsh laws; they erected new technologies of power in the form of institutions for disciplining these troublesome populations. The new strategies of incarceration implemented by the social reform movement were simultaneously medical, hygienic, and moral. The new 'structures of confinement' (asylums for the mentally ill, orphanages female penitentiaries, etc.) embodied the principle of the exclusion of 'social deviants'. They did not stop with physical incarceration: reformers were equally concerned with reforming the moral character of inmates. But unlike other forms of 'deviance', the moral regulation of 'sexual deviants' was targeted at women. Similarly, unlike other forms of disease where both sexes were quarantined, with syphilis it was women only who were subjected to segregation from the community in lock hospitals and subsequently in female penitentiaries where they were to be morally reformed."

to inform the prostitute's friends or family of her whereabouts. This resulted in severed families; mothers, detained and forbidden from outside communication, were powerless to provide for their children. These children, effectively made orphans by the Acts, disappeared from the pages of History; placed in industrial schools, or worse – laboured away their short lives in Ireland's workhouses.

⁴¹ Ibid, 39.

⁴² Ibid, 14.

⁴³ Herbert, "Review of Select Committee 1880," 21.

[...] there is no going home to explain to parents, to say farewell to friends, or make arrangements about their little property or business matters; the police say, "Now we have got you, we will keep you;" and the certified hospital may be, and often is, a hundred or more miles away. Women are spirited off, and no one [...] knows there they have gone to.⁴¹

Further;

Children are to be perforce separated from their mothers, and brought up by hand in a workhouse; and as it is well known that only about two in thirty survive under a similar system abroad, we can readily understand that this means wholesale murder.⁴²

Letters were written from the Lock Hospitals, but never sent out. If a family was fortunate enough to learn of the woman's fate, they were barred from visitation and had no means of communicating with the detainee.†

The Hospital was proved to be really a prison, the occupants whereof can have no communication with the outside world without the consent of the officials. The letters sent to them or by them are often opened and read, and may be kept from them by the Chaplain or Matron. Moreover, the only persons to whom complaints can be made are, not independent visitors, for none are admitted, but *the officials themselves*.⁴³

The patients, believing they had been disowned by their loved ones, and saturated in an atmosphere of fear and poor health, were understandably prone to moods of depression and remorse – fertile ground for the seeds of religion.

The Act of 1866 contained a significant addition that was most influential in the development of Bishop Delany's plans for the Good Shepherd Magdalen Asylum in Cork. The law compelled the Lock Hospitals and wards to ensure the moral and religious instruction of the prostitutes detained within them. Chaplains were appointed for this purpose, but rescue workers and members of the clergy were allowed free reign within the hospital walls. It was this control that so piqued the interest of the Church; these women had previously

† LETTERS TO AND FROM THE REV. SAVAGE REGARDING LIZZIE CORKHILL

Quoted in *Do Penance or Perish: Magdalen Asylums in Ireland*, page 137-138

FRANCES FINNEGAN

It was not uncommon to keep Magdalen inmates 'in line' through their fear for their children. The pressure tactic used on Lizzie Corkhill, an inmate at the York Magdalen Refuge, was used by the clergy of the Magdalen Laundries to maintain control and authority.

"Lizzie Corkhill [...] had, in fact, recently borne a child which was to be 'properly provided for' in the Isle of Man:

'[Her] age is the difficulty, so few Homes take them over 25 ... of course, the Committee would send a donation if this poor woman could be admitted. She has worked as a servant, and bears a very good character except in this one respect.'

The Managers of the Cork Refuge decided to accept her, provided she was amenable to discipline, prepared to work, considerate to the younger inmates, not liable to outbursts of temper, really desirous of reform, and undertook to remain in the institution for the full two years demanded by the Rules. A few weeks later a letter from Rev. Savage, Vicar of Douglas, assured the Committee that the woman had promised "unreservedly" all that was required. Within a few months of her arrival, however, she was desperate to leave, and the Ladies reported that her violent temper and bad language were "very injurious to the younger girls". Rev. Savage responded:

'I thank you for writing about Lizzie Corkhill, but I am distressed to find she is behaving so badly. I send a letter to her enclosed in this, which you can read. She is a foolish girl to throw away her chance now, and what she will do with herself I don't know. I think it will be best to use her care for her child as a hold over her for good. I am paying for it at present, but I shall decline to do so if she leaves your institution.'

Subdued by this threat she stayed on in the Refuge, but her health was soon broken, and the doctor advised her immediate return to the Isle of Man. Her parents were too poor to receive her; and Rev. Savage's suggestion that the Douglas House of Industry might admit her, came too late. By the time it arrived she was in the York union hospital, too ill to be moved. For the Rescue Worker gripped in a moral crusade, the anguish and remorse this woman suffered were incomplete. Her humiliation and sacrifice – the loss of the baby she so clearly mourned, her submission to a Magdalen Asylum and even her approaching workhouse death – were not enough. Never doubting that her "fall" rather than her "rescue" had destroyed her, Rev. Savage pursued her to the last:

'Will you kindly remember me to her, and say how I would urge her to repentance for her sin against God; this is, I always think, the point such people miss. They see they have sinned against their own

managed to evade the clergy's attempts at reclamation.

[...] Rev. J. G. Bailey, the Chaplain of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Chatham, who stated his conviction that the Act was the means of bringing under religious and moral instruction many scores of degraded women, who had never been under such influence before; and that, during this Chaplaincy of only ten months, no less than thirty-nine of these unfortunates had been restored to their homes, or induced to enter Reformatory Institutions.⁴⁴

Six months of unceasing condemnation – an exhortation that encompassed all manner of threats, and pleas on the part of the clergy – was enough to break through the defenses of the most hardened of sinners. Convinced of their guilt, many women agreed to enter into the Magdalen penitentiaries and do penance for their transgressions against God.

The 'voluntary' nature of these entries, given the prolonged conditioning that preceded them, is questionable at best. As Finnegan writes, the alternatives that the women faced "must qualify the notion of "free will".⁴⁵ The 'Reformatory Institutions' had no legal authority to hold a penitent against her will and she could therefore, in theory any way, quit the asylum at any time. The reality, however, suggests otherwise. Records show that those in charge of the institutions, in an effort to secure the sinner's redemption which they perceived to be of the utmost importance, employed all forms of pressure to retain the inmate. Women, once detained in asylums, were never made aware of their right to leave. Those who attempted it were met with resolute opposition. Intimidation was expertly applied, threats were made. If the fear of eternal damnation wasn't enough to change the girl's mind, the menace of the 'strap' would be.⁴⁶ In some cases a mother's love and concern for her child was used against her. Lizzie Corkhill was one such case.† A priest had agreed to provide for her illegitimate baby and, upon hearing of her refusal to remain in the Magdalen penitentiary, threatened to forgo his promise. As we know, this would likely mean that the child would be abandoned to the workhouses or the streets where he would surely meet his end.

Public awareness of the Contagious Diseases Acts slowly surfaced after the implementation of the Act of 1866, and opposition began to form. This was due in part to an alarming new interest in extending the measures of the Act to the general population. *The Association for Promoting the Extension of the Contagious Diseases Act, 1866, To the Civil Population of the United Kingdom* published material to this effect, arguing that the Act should no longer be confined to prostitutes alone.⁴⁷ The feelings of the Association were made clear by the somewhat unnerving section titles of their report; *Persons suffering with*

⁴⁴ LSE Selected Pamphlets, *Report on the Extent of Venereal Disease; on the Operation of the Contagious Diseases Act, and the means Of Checking Contagion*, Excerpt from a letter written by the Rector of St. Mary's in Chatham (London: H. Baillière, 1868) 48, accessed January 6, 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60240116>.

⁴⁵ Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 44.

⁴⁶ *Sex in a Cold Climate*, directed and produced by Steve Humphries (Great Britain: Testimony Films for Channel 4, March 16 1998), DVD. Testimony of Phyllis Valentine, Orphanage in County Clare followed by Sisters of Mercy Magdalen Laundry in Galway.

⁴⁷ LSE, *Report on Contagious Diseases Act*, 5.

family, but as to sin against God, there seems to be no idea of it.’

In the following month she died in the workhouse, the York Union Register listing Phthisis as the cause of death. Rev. Savage offered to settle the “full extent” of the funeral costs, but in fact, her burial was paid for by the Vicar and Wardens of Marygold, her homeplace in the Isle of Man. There was no further mention of her baby, and throughout the correspondence not a single reference was made to the father of her child.”

† EVIDENCE GIVEN IN OPPOSITION TO THE ACTS CITING MISTAKEN ARRESTS

The Contagious Diseases Act, Showing Its Cruelty, Injustice, Demoralising Tendency, & Inexperiency in a Sanitary Point of View; Being the Substance of a Paper Read Before the Medical Society of London, January 17, 1870, page 6
CHARLES BELL TAYLOR

Instances of mistaken arrests were numerous within the literature that surrounded the investigations of the Contagious Diseases Acts.

A review of the reports of the Select Committee appointed in 1879 by the House of Commons to enquire into the operations of the Contagious Diseases Acts, page 20.
JESSE HERBERT

This passage speaks of a particularly troubling occurrence in which a young girl was treated in an unforgiveable manner before finally surrendering to the invasive medical examination.

“That the police are totally unfit for the duties which would be thrust upon them by the Act in question is evidenced almost daily. In May last, a policeman named Binstead, being desirous of repressing street solicitation, without the slightest excuse, took into custody a respectable married woman and locked her up all night in, what she termed, a dungeon. Her husband, on applying at the police office was ordered off, and she was charged in the morning with prostitution. It was proved in evidence that she was a most respectable person, the wife of a railway official, and Mr. Burcham dismissed the case, declaring that it was not safe to convict on police evidence in such cases.”

“At Chatham, in the case of C. Wybrow, a series of improper acts were committed by the officials. She was ordered by one of the C. D. Acts police to attend and be examined without having signed a Voluntary Submission, and without having been ordered to do so by a magistrate. She was threatened with “Maidstone gaol” if she did not attend. She attended but refused to be examined, and *thereupon was at once unlawfully sent for detention in the hospital.* There was no evidence nor reasonable ground to believe she was diseased. She still refused to be examined and was punished in the hospital by a low diet. At length she yielded and was examined when it was found she was not diseased, and *the medical officer admitted she might be a virgin.*”

syphilis are dangerous members of society, Venereal Disease is more injurious to the community than any other contagious malady followed closely by Sufferers from this disorder should be secluded and soon after by Boards of Guardians already authorized to retain venereal patients in Workhouses. The aspirations of this association were thankfully never realised. However, the arbitrary nature of arrests made during the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1866 and 1869, did not stray far from the association's intentions; it was a system prone to error, and as a result many innocent civilian women were wrongfully accused of prostitution during its operation.

⁴⁸ Bell Taylor, "Contagious Diseases Act," 6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 22.

By 1869 yet another iteration of this law was released, officially titled the "Contagious Diseases Act". The 'periodical examinations' that prostitutes were required to attend would now be scheduled fortnightly, and would take place at a designated Lock Hospital. In Cork, a new Government Certified Lock hospital had been completed that year. Women had previously received treatment in an isolated Lock ward in the city facilities.

The effects of the new Act extended to a radius of fifteen miles around the city, up ten from the previously allotted five mile radius. In addition, prostitutes found to be infected with a sexually transmitted disease could be sentenced to nine month's confinement in the Lock Hospital. Efforts at religious and moral instruction during this time were redoubled. As with the Act of 1866, evidence of prostitution was not required for an arrest; suspicion was all that was necessary. To assign such power to individual policemen was irresponsible, inevitably leading to an abuse of the system.

It is the strangest law that has ever been made ... it does not attempt to define a prostitute at all; in fact, according to this awfully indefinite piece of legislation, any woman is a prostitute whom a wrong-headed policeman may choose to suspect, designate, or affect to believe to be a prostitute, without proof, without evidence, trial, or conviction.⁴⁸

Mistaken arrests were not infrequent.† Females could be apprehended simply for being out after dusk; a passing fancy for the fresh night air, an evening stroll, could conclude in a city police station. Elderly women, as well as young children, were not exempt - subjected to the same cruel and deplorable treatment as that of the prostitute.

It is stated in Parliamentary evidence that children of eleven and women of seventy are subject to these outrages. One of the witnesses speaks of a child who was brought up by the police, who cried so like a child that he sent for her mother *before examining her*.⁴⁹

Men considered the cities 'protected' under the Act to be safe

† OPPOSITION TO THE CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ACTS CITING UNGROUNDED ARRESTS

The Contagious Diseases Act, page 9.
CHARLES BELL TAYLOR

Abuse of the Acts lead many reputations to be tarnished beyond repair; an accusation was all that was required.

“In the *Medical Times and Gazette* of January 29th it is mentioned that two girls in respectable employment at Plymouth were denounced by two naval officers and ruined in consequence; and a gentleman of position has assured me that the following may be relied upon: Two young ladies (I use my informant’s words), the principal assistants in a first-class establishment at Plymouth became acquainted with two young naval officers belonging to one of the men of war lying in that port, a liaison was established between them, and (whether from these girls or others is not plain) the young gentlemen contracted a slight form of venereal disease. The ship surgeon when asked for a remedy declared he would report them to the captain unless they revealed the source of the infection, whereupon the young gentlemen denounced their sweethearts. Two mouchards, on the strength of this assertion, (which for aught they know might have been utterly false) at once arrested the young ladies, took them to the Lock Hospital, and compelled them to submit to examination. They were confined with women of the lowest description, and of course completely ruined.”

† OPPOSITION TO THE CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ACTS CITING POLICE BULLYING

The Contagious Diseases Act, page 10.
CHARLES BELL TAYLOR

Bullying of some sort was a tactic applied to young women; the ‘voluntary submission’ they signed was often anything but.

It was often the case that women would; “permit themselves to be bullied and cajoled into signing the paper which, with grim irony, has been called the voluntary submission. The alternative, however, is so appalling, the accusation so frightful and so ruinous that we can scarcely wonder that respectable married women, innocent work girls and young ladies who assist in shops have in many instances, to avoid a public accusation, set their names to that fatal document, preferring, as the police mildly suggest, just to speak to the examining surgeon to an appearance before the magistrate.”

environments, areas in which they could take full advantage of what the brothels had to offer without incurring risk. Indeed, men were known to travel far from their own cities in order to experience the 'clean' prostitutes of Cork, Queenstown and the area known as the Curragh.⁵⁰ Others used the Acts in a more unsettling manner; making false accusations of prostitution as a means of dissolving romances that no longer interested them, had become tedious, or threatened the stability of a marriage or vocation.[†]

While in police custody, women were bullied into signing documents that officially registered them as prostitutes in the eyes of the Law.[‡] Once this so-called 'voluntary submission' was complete, the accused was inspected by a doctor. More appalling still was the procedure followed in the event that a woman should be menstruating at the time of the arrest; in this case the Act stipulated immediate imprisonment for up to five days, or until menstruation had ceased, so as to allow for a conclusive medical examination.⁵¹ Respectable women, fearing an all too public appearance in the city court and its resultant social destruction, submitted to police pressure and were therein brought under the measures of the Act.

These police use every endeavour, subtle and open, to compel the girls, whether innocent or guilty, whom they wish to bring under the Acts, to sign the Submissions mis-named Voluntary. Evidence was given of cases wherein the women declared that they did not know the nature of the document they signed; some even denied the signature; some did not realize the obligation they incurred of continued and periodical examinations. They should no longer be called "Voluntary" but "Compelled Submissions."⁵²

This meant that even women innocent of prostitution were required to attend the degrading fortnightly medical examinations. Failure to comply with the provisions of the Act meant a prison sentence of up to three months' hard labour "which may be repeated indefinitely (i.e., for life) on continued refusal."⁵³ Those who were wrongly accused had no means of redress for the actions taken against them, and were often lucky to even have their names removed from the prostitution register.

By this time strong opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts had developed. Criticism circulated that condemned the unjust and discriminatory nature of the Acts. One such critique came in the form of a paper written by the esteemed Doctor Charles Bell Taylor. The essay provided a scathing review of the Act, citing its "cruelty, injustice, demoralizing tendency, and inexpediency in a sanitary point of view."⁵⁴ It was presented before the Medical Society of London on January 17th, 1870.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, 7.

⁵² Herbert, "Review of Select Committee 1880," 19.

⁵³ Bell Taylor, "Contagious Diseases Act," 7.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 1.

[2.1]

REFORMER PREACHING TO PROSTITUTES

It was common for moral reformers to visit brothels in order to preach to the women who were engaged in prostitution there. Pamphlets were readily available giving advice to those who wished to attempt this task; apparently many feared the crafty ways of the brothels.



Moreover, I must remind you that to discriminate between chaste and unchaste women, and between those who through seduction have unhappily lapsed from virtue and those who resign themselves to unchastity as a profession, is a most delicate task for a special jury and a learned judge; and, I contend, to deprive women in so critical a matter of an ordinary legitimate tribunal, and to expose them to frightful outrage through some error of a police officer is so monstrous an injustice that I can only suppose what is really the fact, that the vast majority of members of Parliament who assisted at the passing of this Bill were really in complete ignorance as to its scope and objects. It will be seen that a policeman has only to swear that he has good cause to believe a woman is a prostitute in order to obtain a warrant for her apprehension on a charge which alone is death to all her hopes of respectable position or success in life.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ibid, 8-9.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 1.

⁵⁷ Herbert, "Review of Select Committee 1880," 4.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Rescue Societies too contributed to the discussion. Predictably their approach was less open-minded, focused instead on the effects that the Acts had on the sanctity of marriage and the accessibility of sin, rather than the rights of the 'fallen' woman.

The moral objections to the measure are unanswerable. It will depreciate marriage, debauch youth, stimulate the practice of vice in the proportion that it will diminish the shame attending sin. It will blunt the national conscience, lessen the obligations of private morality, and remove the checks which guard public decency. It will increase the crime of seduction, produce conjugal infidelity, and wring parents' hearts with anguish over the fall and degradation of sons and daughters. It will fill the base spirits of procuresses and brothel-keepers with an infernal joy. It will still further degrade and brutalise a hapless down-trodden class, and render their reformation a more hopeless thing than ever. It *already has had this effect*, and extinguished all remnants of shame in the hearts of the hapless female slaves of the system. — *Extracted from the 16th Annual Report of the "Rescue Society."*⁵⁶

On May 24th, 1870 a Mr. W. Fowler, M.P., presented a Bill to the House of Commons proposing a total repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts.⁵⁷ The Bill was rejected, but as a result, the government appointed a Royal Commission to enquire into the operation and administration of the Acts of 1866 and 1869. The Commission, which sat from the 14th of December of that year to May 13th of the next, conducted an investigation that informed a second Bill for Repeal in 1872; this too met with dismissal.⁵⁸ The Acts continued to be regarded with distrust. Opposition had stemmed from many of its aspects. The public had become increasingly aware of the prostitutes within the protected area; the legislation had contributed to an odd sort of bolstered confidence for women of the trade. Prostitutes, choosing to interpret the regulations

† EXCERPT FROM DO PENANCE OR PERISH CITING USE OF 'THE QUEEN'S WOMEN'

Do Penance or Perish, page 213.
FRANCES FINNEGAN

Frances Finnegan shows that the use of the 'Queen's Women' was indeed in prevalent use on the streets of Cork, as well as in the Magdalen asylum itself.

"Complaints of this behaviour in Ireland had first emerged about nine months after the legislation was fully enforced. A letter from a "Cork Lady", published in *The Shield* in March 1870, alleged:

'My friend, Mrs. ___, of ___, Cork, has an old servant who was walking home lately at about 8 o'clock in the evening, when one of the town prostitutes pushed her off the flags, rudely saying, 'Make way for the Queen's woman'

[...]

At the 1882 Enquiry there was further investigation into what was by now a major concern. In March 1882 Mr John B. Kingston, a local Protestant Rescue worker and gentleman of independent means, testified that since the application of the Acts to the city, prostitutes were inclined to shake off his ministrations, declaring that they were the "Queen's Women" and that the Queen "looked after" them. He stated that the Lock Hospital was commonly called the "Queen's Hospital" by Cork residents, and further remarked that he had actually received a letter from the establishment "dated" in that way."

† EVIDENCE GIVEN CITING THE PERCEIVED SAFETY THAT THE ACTS AFFORDED

The Contagious Diseases Act,
pages 15-16.
CHARLES BELL TAYLOR

In opposition to the Acts, it was confirmed that many men saw the safety that the legislation afforded as a great blessing. There was a strong medical concern among doctors who opposed the Acts, that men would pass on disease to their spouses and, if born while their mothers were infected, to their children.

"As Mr. Acton observes, "they desire to obtain by legal enactments immunity from danger in the gratification of base desires." I have heard married men assert that they considered the Act would be a great boon, since it would enable them to be faithless with impunity. One assured me that he himself and scores of others (whose business necessitated a visit to most towns in England) availed themselves of the so-called protection in garrison towns, when nothing would have tempted them to incur the risk elsewhere."

imposed upon them as government acknowledgement and even approval, had boldly taken to describing themselves as the “Queen’s Women.”† In Cork even the Lock Hospital had been nicknamed the “Queen’s Hospital” by prostitutes, medical professionals, and nuns alike. Though this point was vehemently denied by Rev. O’Reilly, the Chaplain at the Good Shepherd Convent of Cork in 1882, the records of the Magdalen asylum testify to this point.⁵⁹ Women sent to the Cork Asylum throughout the period in which the Acts were in full effect are occasionally listed in the register as having come from the “Queen’s Hospital” in town; No such hospital existed in the city.⁶⁰ Originally prostitutes discharged from their regular examinations with a clean bill of health had been issued official certificates declaring them to be free from disease – a practice that had only served to increase their earning ability and therein their arrogance.⁶¹

Aside from this, more subjective of criticisms, there were troubling statistics that contributed to the anxiety surrounding the controversial legislation. The Acts had been found to have very little medical effect in diminishing the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. In fact, concern had been expressed that healthy women, made to attend the ‘periodical examinations’, incurred a high risk of contamination by way of improperly sanitized medical instruments used during their inspections. Equally distressing were the lack of measures imposed on men who availed of the prostitutes’ services.‡ Young men, feeling free to submit to their base desires in what was condoned a ‘safe zone’, could easily impart disease that they themselves carried to several healthy prostitutes.⁶² Following this logic, the spread of disease could effortlessly increase as the fear of contamination, due to the so-called ‘protection’ the Acts afforded, decreased. The Opposition also disputed the accuracy of statistical information suggesting a diminished number of infected soldiers in the military as a direct effect of the Contagious Diseases Acts. The “official statisticians (Sir W. Muir and Mr. Lawson) gave reasons for great distrust of the official figures.”⁶³ It seems that the Returns during the time that statistics had been gathered, from 1873 to 1878, had been vitiated “by the existence [...] of Lord Cardwell’s order stopping the pay of soldiers in hospital for the disease in question, which induced concealment of it.”⁶⁴ An enquiry into the official figures found that this order had “considerably affected the statistics.”⁶⁵

Where the Government Lock Hospitals were concerned, the statistics were equally unreliable. The Act, which furnished the hospital’s patient count with prostitutes found to be diseased and requiring treatment, was proving not as necessary as perhaps its supporters had hoped. The numbers were poor. According to the

⁵⁹ Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 213.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁶¹ Herbert, “Review of Select Committee 1880,” 18.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

† EXCERPT DESCRIBING THE RESISTANCE THAT MET THE PROPOSED REPEAL OF THE ACTS

The Select Committee 1879,
pages 3-6.
JESSE HERBERT

The process of Repeal was long and arduous. This excerpt from the review of the Select Committee outlines the level to which the proceedings were obscured from public view, a secrecy that seems to have defined the general nature of the Contagious Diseases Acts since their instatement in 1864.

"The system created by the Contagious Diseases Acts (Women) 1866 and 1869, has, during the last three years, been the subject of an Enquiry by a Select Committee of the House of Commons. The Enquiry is now closed, and the conclusions of the Committee have been published in two Reports, one (that is now called "The Report from the Select Committee") which was adopted by nine members of the Committee, the other (called "The Minority Report") which was adopted by six members of the Committee.

Before these Reports were issued for public perusal there appeared in many of the London and provincial papers a disingenuous summary of "The Report from the Select Committee." It contained no reference to the second Report, and a preoccupied, busy, and hurried public were led incorrectly to conclude that this summary was the substance of an impartial Report, in which all the members of the Committee concurred in expressing their solemn judgment upon the system, after a calm, patient, and judicial consideration of all the evidence adduced before them. By this means some persons may have been tricked into a belief that the system has been proved to be successful, just, moral, and even a desirable ally to religion. Such a belief is not supported by the facts.

[...]

The military and official character of those who supported the "Majority Report" is sufficient justification for hereafter referring to it as "The Official Report." [...] One is astonished upon a perusal of the Official Report, at the slight reference made to the evidence against the Acts, and when one comes to these rare references, one finds that they are made chiefly to introduce a sneer at the witnesses. Yet more witnesses were called in opposition to the Acts than in support of them.

[...]

The Official Report is not a serious, well considered judgment upon the evidence given before the Committee, but a wild exultant shout of rapturous approval of everybody and everything connected with the Acts and their administration. It is a partisan statement, injudicious in many ways and chiefly in the obvious extravagance of its praise. It refuses to grant the possibility of any weakness in the system, or any shortcoming amongst its administrators. It makes no reference to the many serious contradictions [...] relying, with some astuteness, upon the inability of the public to ascertain from out of the depths of voluminous Blue Books, the untrustworthiness of the evidence of the value of which it gives a seriously misleading and exaggerated estimate."

Census of 1871 the hospital in Cork, which had space for forty-six patients, was only at 54% of its capacity.⁶⁶ This had not improved by 1881, at which point only seventeen of the hospital beds were occupied.⁶⁷ This weakness worried the Mother Prioress at the Good Shepherd Convent. The decline of the Contagious Diseases Acts and subsequent closure of the Government Lock Hospital would cut off the refuge's valuable access to the destitute women of the city. As such, the convent, in an attempt to bolster the Cork Lock Hospital's patient count, sent their ill penitents to the government facility. Although it remains unclear whether both parties had come to a deliberate understanding with one another, it can be said that their relationship, very clearly, was a mutually beneficial one. The hospital supplied penitents to staff the Magdalen laundry, while the convent provided it with patients to fill beds when necessary.

Although the Cork Good Shepherd Convent never openly supported, or for that matter rejected, the Contagious Diseases Acts, they stood to lose a great deal if a Repeal was approved. A letter was written to this effect during the discussions for the Repeal of the Acts by an appointed Select Committee in 1882 by the First Mistress of Penitents, Sister Mary Coppinger, stating that the Lock Hospital,

[...] has been the primary means of reforming a great number of girls, and has been productive thereby of much moral good. We have often sent girls from this asylum to that hospital, and have uniformly found the officials most obliging, coming for patients when requested to do so, and using their utmost endeavours to induce them to return to us as soon as they are discharged.⁶⁸

The letter, meant to support the work of the Lock Hospital, unfortunately brought to light the illegality of the above mentioned exchange. The Opposition to the Acts took issue with this. Addressing Rev. O'Reilly, the Cork Asylum's Chaplain who had presented Sister Coppinger's letter in support of the Acts, the Opposition asked "Do you know that at the Lock Hospital the Government have no power to take in, and would refuse to take in, a person who was respectable?" to which the Reverend answered no.⁶⁹

Following the rejected Bill for Repeal of the Acts in 1872, a Sir Harcourt Johnstone presented yet another unsuccessful Bill to the House of Commons in 1875.⁷⁰ The next four years saw several further attempts, but it was not until June 11th of 1879 that Sir H. Johnstone was finally granted a Select Committee to enquire into the Acts once more.† In 1880, a Dissolution of Parliament caused changes to the members of the Committee, and a resultant delay in their work.⁷¹ Enquiries continued into 1882, with a decision being reached in 1883 for the total Repeal of the Contagious

⁶⁶ Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 184.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ "Report from the Select Committee on the Contagious Diseases Acts; together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix," (June 1881), quoted in Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 210.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Herbert, "Review of Select Committee 1880," 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

† EXCERPT FROM THE CORK GOOD SHEPHERD ANNALS OF 1889

Quoted in *Do Penance or Perish: Magdalen Asylums in Ireland*, page 217.

FRANCES FINNEGAN

The Probationary Unit was intended to isolate the new inmates further, thereby stifling any early defiance; to prevent the 'wolf in sheep's clothing' from entering the vulnerable fold.

"We have long felt the want of a separate house to receive our penitents on their entrance, and as our holy rule expressly desires it we were most anxious for it. From circumstances that occurred in the City, our [new] Bishop was deeply interested in having some place provided where penitents on their entrance could be cut off from communication with those within, knowing that means would be taken to procure the departure of some among them at the time. Having no place of this kind, we were obliged to refuse applicants for admission, and this made our dear Mother more and more anxious to provide for the future."

Diseases Acts.⁷² The issue however was not completely put to rest until the Bill for Repeal received the Royal Assent in 1886.⁷³ The Repeal was much publicised. After more than two decades, the Contagious Diseases Acts were recognized as “unworkable, immoral and unjust.”⁷⁴

The Cork Good Shepherd Annals make no mention of this most significant event; though the convent’s origin was so deeply embedded in the Contagious Diseases Acts, its pages remain oddly silent on the subject. Finnegan points out that the only indication of this time of undoubted turmoil, while the future of the Asylum hung in the balance, came in 1888.

[...] some local disturbance so alarmed the Bishop and Reverend Mother that all new applicants to the penitentiary were refused admission. This extraordinary measure was possibly related to the recent closure of the “Certified” Hospital in the city, following the Contagious Diseases Acts’ suspension and repeal. For an Asylum opened specifically for women recruited from this source, and set up in direct response to the new legislation, the situation was awkward.⁷⁵

The Repeal of the Acts spurred change at the convent. The strength of the Abolitionists gave rise to a somewhat irrational fear that the refuge would be infiltrated by false applicants - ‘penitents’ that wished to enter the asylum only to rally rebellion and persuade others to escape or abscond. As a result of this suspicion, a new probationary ward was proposed.[†] The new unit, “a chilling dormitory containing washing facilities, a nun’s cell and what appears to be a “solitary” room” was built to the north of the Magdalen asylum, separated by a covered bridge.⁷⁶ Apart from this, the Good Shepherd Magdalen Penitentiary betrayed no signs that anything was amiss. The laundry work carried on as usual, but with the abolition of the Act and the closure of the hospital that had supported its work force, admissions sharply declined, and profits followed soon after. The prostitutes were no longer an easy target. If the Magdalen laundry system were to survive in Ireland, it would need to shift its focus to other classes of ‘fallen’ women; “unmarried mothers, women of doubtful chastity and bold, “simple” or abused girls” became increasingly singled out for reform.⁷⁷ This marked a paradigm shift in the history of the Good Shepherd Magdalen Asylum of Cork, and other such facilities in the country; a shift that would resonate far into the future, claiming the lives of many young women well into the twentieth century and significantly informing the cultural identity of the Irish female.

⁷² Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 164.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

† EXCERPT FROM JAMES F. CASSIDY'S THE WOMEN OF THE GAEL

The Women of the Gael,

pages 56, 206.

JAMES FRANCES CASSIDY

The Women of the Gael embodies the national identity and pride that was rooted in the idealised Irish Catholic female. It speaks, with an almost triumphant air, of the stigma that plagued the 'fallen' woman in what was considered 'good' Irish society.

"Though countless numbers of Irish maidens are to be met with in the early days of the church's history who showed in their lives a sublimity worth recording we must content ourselves with presenting the few whose careers are in a marked degree representative of those of the many. To begin with Patrician times we find that some of the most attractive episodes in the life of the national apostle were based on the guileless character and lofty ideals of women. In these first fruits reaped by the great reaper there was, as it were, a symbolic guarantee of the elevating influence which the Christian daughters to come would wield within the land of Erin. In the western part of the country two maiden figures, fresh as the flowers of the field and taintless as unstained rivulets, were wafted in upon the pathway of the missionary as if to refresh his weary soul and give him the strength of a magnificent hope in the Christian future of the nation that could present such early flowers to the garden of the Lord.

[...]

The young women of Ireland can perhaps carry off the premier prize of the world for maidenly modesty and purity. They are as bountifully dowered as the daughters of any land with those natural gifts which, if not properly used, prove seriously detrimental to morality. They are as attractive, physically, as any that breathe, for the Divine Artist has endowed their forms with a beauty that cannot be surpassed anywhere. They have as keen a sense of the *joie de vivre*, and as generous a fund of the sunniness of life as can be claimed by the girlhood of any nation. Yet, they know where to set up the barriers between true and false pleasure, and rarely seek enjoyment at the expense of morality. There is a lower percentage of illegitimate births in Ireland than in any other country in the world. Whenever a child is born outside wedlock, so shocked is the public sense by the very unusual occurrence, that it brands with an irreparable stigma, and, to a large extent, excommunicates the woman guilty of the crime."

PURITY & THE IRISH WOMAN

Though encompassing the stigma of sexual immorality so associated with the Victorian era, the Magdalen asylums of Ireland occupied more of the twentieth century than they had of the past. With the fall of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886, the Cork Refuge was forced to revise its approach, turning the nuns' pious devotion toward the reclamation of another class of 'fallen' women; unwed mothers, females whose chastity had been questioned (regardless of the circumstances surrounding their doubted purity) and what were termed preventative cases – those the nuns felt would tempt the opposite sex into sin. The Magdalen system had long functioned off a continued fear of female sexual impropriety, a fear that had become ever more present with the founding of the new Free State on January 7th, 1922, and the struggle to establish an independent national identity rooted in Catholic values.

The appalling demoralization of our times is evidenced mostly in the decline of that virtue amongst woman-kind which is her chief glory and title to our esteem. To-day in ever increasing numbers "Magdalen" has imitators in her sin. But few will share her penance.⁷⁸

In an effort to counter this "appalling demoralization" of women, the female ideal became ever more embodied in the perfect chastity of the nun. The work of the Good Shepherd Sisters was seen as a contribution to the new national image, an identity steeped in strong Catholic purity and, as such, it was considered patriotic.† The nun represented motherhood in its most sacred form, untainted by sex or childbirth.⁷⁹ This was a theme perpetuated by the atmosphere of the Magdalen asylums.

In the Home of the Good Shepherd the one [the nun] is ever the "Mother", while the other [the penitent] is always the "Child" and no mother and child on earth are bound together by so pure and holy an affection. Can anywhere on earth be found so touching a relationship [...] At times indeed there will be tense moments of suspense when it would seem that the Evil One is going to recapture the soul it had lost. At times these poor victims of impurity can realize [...] Then will the anxious care and the patient sweetness of the daughter of the Good Shepherd be re-doubled [...] to that Motherly care and attentive guardianship do not multitudes today owe their salvation? Surely there is no grander work for God and soul and the spiritual uplifting of this nation.⁸⁰

The nun and the penitent represented the two extremes of female morality. Virtue tending depravity, "In these refuges the "purest"

⁷⁸ Rev. Father Kerr, "The Good Shepherd Nuns at Home", *The Fold of the Good Shepherd Limerick, 1848-1931* (Limerick: 1931) 10, quoted in Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 18.

⁷⁹ Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 19.

⁸⁰ Rev. Father Kerr, "The Good Shepherd Nuns at Home", 19.

[3.1]

JOHN BULL BEHOLDS A VISION OF
THE NEAR FUTURE, 1884

J. F. O'HEA

National Library of Ireland

This image appeared in
the *Freeman's Weekly Journal* on
December 20th, 1884.

Here Ireland, depicted as
Erin, is shown to defeat the
dominance of the British.
The tombstone in the back
reads, 'Ireland Buried Here
1171'; a reference to the year
that King Henry II of England
declared himself 'Lord of
Ireland' thereby founding
a British rule over Ireland
that would follow for nearly
eight-hundred years. John
Bull, a popular representation
of Great Britain, may be seen
in the bottom right, fearfully
fleeing Erin. She holds the
crucifix aloft in her right
hand, symbolising Ireland's
Catholic identity, while in her
left she holds the crown of
Sovereignty, the words 'Home
Rule' emblazened on its
surface; thus, the three images
of Ireland in one - Erin,
the Cross, and the Crown;
fighting for a new Free State.



women looked after the most “impure”, the one rising ever higher in cultural esteem whilst the other, by contrast, sank further into the depths of abjection. It was a juxtaposition that reflected the beliefs of the time.

Innocence and guilt face to face! The bright cheerfulness of unsullied virtue so near to the most abject wretchedness of multiplied sinfulness! The spotless lily side by side with the rank, noxious, foul-smelling weed that grew up in the dark shadows of the crumbling tomb! The consecrated nun speaking to the polluted outcast!⁸¹

This contrast only served to reinforce society’s abhorrence and repulsion of the ‘fallen’ woman, and widened the expansive separation of the two groups of women. In the penitents the nuns saw only sin that required repentance. These female religious had long since renounced any common ground they once shared with womankind.

Irish identity became ever more firmly entrenched in Catholic morality, an identity strengthened by the “spiritual uplifting of the nation” supplied by the nun’s tireless work to abolish sin and restore the purity of the female sex.

Catholic morality became at once hallmark of Irish identity, differentiating the national community from its near neighbors, and an emblem of the uncontested political territory, enabling politicians to eschew party affiliation and seek uncontested political territory.⁸²

Of course this image of the strong, pure female had long been sewn into the fabric of the Irish cultural narrative, dotting the pages of its folklore, and dating back to the island’s mythological origins. Irish legend tells of the goddess, queen Ériu who, at the time of the Milesian invasion, offered her name to her homeland and became widely regarded as the matriarch of the Irish people. The name has many manifestations, the most recognized of these being Éire, the Gaelic name for Ireland in the Republic, and Erin, the female personification of the country. This was a heritage that came to the forefront of Ireland’s consciousness in her struggle to establish political autonomy. Rooted in the cultural memory, Erin resurfaced in the late Victorian era as the champion of Ireland’s petition for freedom from British Rule. A domineering embodiment of strength, piety, and morality, she secured the idealized picture of the Irish Catholic female built into the new Free State; religion became the defining separation between the nation and her former British rulers.

⁸¹ “The Magdalens of High Park: Our Dublin Charities. –IV,” *The Irish Rosary: A Monthly Magazine Conducted by the Dominican Fathers* (Dublin: St. Saviour’s Priory, 1897) 179, quoted in James M. Smith, *Ireland’s Magdalen Laundries and The Nation’s Architecture of Containment*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) 35.

⁸² Smith, *Magdalen Laundries*, 3.

† TESTIMONY OF MAGDALEN SURVIVOR

From the documentary film:
Sex in a Cold Climate, 1998
Produced by STEVE HUMPHRIES

Christina Mulcahy, born in 1918 in county Galway, had been brought to a Mother and Baby Home to give birth to her illegitimate son. After ten months her baby was taken from her, against her will.

When she tried to return home she was cast out by her father, who sent her to the Magdalen asylum in Galway run by the Sisters of Mercy, where she remained for three years before escaping.

Christina –

“I didn’t know anything about the facts of life, and I didn’t know that I would conceive or...so I stayed with him and, he said he loved me, and I thought to myself well if he loves me, why would he persuade me to em, do this, have sex with him. And he said that this was the only, em, true way to show that you love somebody. And I met him again then, and he said ‘well you did it before why can’t you do it again now?’ And that was the time I got pregnant.

[...]

I was writing, from the home, I was writing letters to him, but he came to see me when the baby first born, and and um whis- but the nuns sat at the other end within ear of what we were saying, and he said that I could put his name down for the baby’s name, and I discussed that with the matron but then [pause] then, he he was gone, and he wasn’t getting the letters that I was writing out, they weren’t sending them to him at all, he never got the letters that I wrote out, and I never got any letters from him, so I lost out on him [pause]..... I would have married him, I loved him.

[...]

He was only ten months old when she said to me one day ‘As soon as you’re finished in the nursery come to my office’ and em ‘you’re going home today.’ And I was breast-feeding the baby at the time [pause], and she, I said ‘can I go back [pause] and say goodbye to the baby?’, ‘what does he know about anything? Go back and upset him? You’re not going back - there’s a car waiting’, and I said ‘no time to say goodbye?’, ‘No time to say goodbye.’

[...]

My father came to the gate, and two little brothers and little sister and [pause] they stopped, and he said to me ‘what do you think you want?’, ‘I want to come home’, ‘you’re not coming into this house, you’re not coming into this house you’ve disgraced us. You’re not right in the head, you can’t be right in the head to bring a child into this world and you deserve [pause] punishment.’”

Irish society in the Republic lay in the overlap between Church and State, a partnership which the new government relied on heavily. The Catholic hierarchy took every opportunity to reinforce its position as the nation's highest moral authority. To this effect the Church was entrusted with the task of educating the country's youth. The Catholic teaching cultivated an ignorance of sexuality in an effort to protect young women's purity; "its teachings on sexual behaviour were simple and strict. Sex, outside marriage, was not only objectionable but like murder, a mortal sin, and women who fell under suspicion were condemned by both community and Church as 'fallen' women."⁸³ Unfortunately what was intended as protection only served to make women easy prey for designing men who, perhaps, had an equally poor grasp of the subject. With contraception illegal, and no sexual education, "religious dogma alone failed to prevent many thousands of single young women from becoming pregnant."⁸⁴ The environment that had failed these women also fueled their condemnation.† The stigma that so engulfed the unwed mother, did not spare her family. The shame of raising a morally wayward daughter was far too great for an Irish Catholic family to bear. The fear of social disgrace led parents to cast their child out in disgust. By the 1940s the Magdalen homes were largely refuges for young women abandoned there by family, deposited by the local priest, or transferred from the Order's other institutions such as the industrial schools and orphanages. Others, rejected by their parents, came of their own accord, finding very little alternative.

And in some cases they were more obviously innocent women, women perceived to be wayward, deemed simple or in the way, women who might go awry at home. In a society where even the faintest whiff of scandal threatened the respectability of the normative Irish family, the Magdalen asylum existed as a place to contain and/or punish the threatening embodiment of instability.⁸⁵

At the time, female impropriety was so feared in the community that the source of it, a victim of imposed ignorance or in some cases sexual assault, was treated as though they themselves were criminals.

Because Ireland criminalized "sexual immorality," it criminalized single mothers and their children as well as the victims of rape, incest, and pedophilia; they were indiscriminately marked as aberrant and were all deemed deserving of scorn and punishment. Irish society continued to stigmatize single mothers and their "illegitimate" offspring for much of the twentieth century.⁸⁶

⁸³ *Sex in a Cold Climate*, narrator

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Smith, *Magdalen Laundries*, xvii-xviii.

⁸⁶ James Smith, "The Politics of Sexual Knowledge: The Origins of Ireland's Containment Culture and the Carrigan Report (1931)," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (April 2004) 228-229, accessed January 6, 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3704856>.

† TESTIMONY OF MAGDALEN SURVIVORS

From the documentary film:
Sex in a Cold Climate, 1998
Produced by STEVE HUMPHRIES

Martha Cooney was sexually assaulted by her cousin at the age of 14. She was sent to the Magdalen asylum in Dublin in 1941, where she spent four years labouring in the laundry before being rescued by another cousin.

Phyllis Valentine was born in a Catholic orphanage in county Clare in 1940. At 15 she was transferred directly into a Magdalen laundry in Galway where she spent eight years. After beginning to resist authority and causing trouble for the nuns, she was released in 1964, having spent twenty-four years of her life in Catholic institutions.

For Christina Mulcahy's story, please see page 42.

Mary Norris quoted in *Suffer the Little Children*, page 38.

MARY RAFTERY, EOIN O'SULLIVAN

Mary Norris was taken from her mother at the age of twelve. She grew up in a Catholic orphanage in Killarney. In 1949, at sixteen, she was sent out to a work placement where she ran into trouble when she went to the cinema without permission. She was returned to the orphanage, inspected by a doctor to determine whether she had been sexually active (she was found to be a virgin) and was subsequently placed in the Good Shepherd Asylum in Cork where she spent three years of hard labour before being rescued by an aunt.

Martha –

"They took away my clothes and they gave, gave, me this horrible ugly drab [pause] I suppose it was a uniform. They were shapeless and they were meant to make you as ugly as they possibly could."

Phyllis –

"I went, with the nuns and the priest and we went to Galway and I shall never forget the day as long as I live these big big gates opened all you could see was these bars on the windows, big high walls and I went in through this gravel path and two or three nuns came out, and a priest came out, well he was a Bishop I think, he had a red robe on, and he came out to meet me and I was brought in this long long corridor

[...]

she told me I'd have to have my hair cut because my hair was long and she said that they didn't allow long hair, that my hair'd have to be cut but I had it nicely tied up in a pony tail and I wanted my hair long and I think I started crying like, but my hair was cut, it was cut right up to about my ears."

Christina –

"I felt like I think I'd gone crazy. I was [pause] full of breast milk. [pause] I didn't know, I didn't know, how I would explain to the nuns how I felt, and I could feel a fever in all in me, and I was, I was sick - I think I went to their sick bay for about a week and when I, when I came out of there my clothes were confiscated and I was put into this brown all brown coarse material."

Mary –

"The first thing I was asked when I arrived at the Good Shepherd was my name. I said Mary Cronin. 'We'll have to give you another name,' the nun said. I objected, but she said I'd be called Maire from then on, and that I wasn't to tell anyone why I was there. 'Well, I don't know why I'm here,' I said. 'All I did was go to the pictures. I've done nothing wrong.'

When I went in there my dignity, who I was, my name, everything was taken. I was a nonentity, nothing, nobody. I had a white collar, starched, and a white little cap – the cap represented penitents."

This was a system that thrived on fear. These institutions were ones supported by the stigma generated by the Church and State, and advanced by society itself. The boundaries of the Magdalen asylum extended far beyond the solid stone walls that enclosed its penitents; they were a system sustained, condoned, and financed by the very society from whence they emerged, sacrificing individual identities in the name of religious moral authority. In a culture that has long valued the power of storytelling, theirs are the stories that remain unwritten – trapped in silence, they were erased from memory just as they were concealed from sight in a past saturated by fear.

I D E N T I T Y

In the Good Shepherd Magdalen Asylum individual identity was deliberately and systematically suppressed. It was thought that true penitence could only be achieved if the sinner relinquished all vestiges of their past so as to attain a state of complete humility before God. Thus each inmate, directly upon their arrival at the refuge, was given a new name. The assigned names were often strange or masculine in an attempt to subdue the women's sexuality. The penitents were forbidden the use of their birth names, unable to share their former identity with another soul, nun or fellow inmate alike. For those who resided in the Magdalen home for the remainder of their lives this would become a permanent condition. As the years passed, their own name would fall away; slowly it would fade into the distant recesses of memory, carrying with it so much of one's identity. The practice of renaming was typical to the Good Shepherd Order, and was employed throughout its institutions including the industrial schools, sometimes referred to as orphanages although this has proven to be a misinformed understanding. It was a practice thought to inspire the Order's charges to repent; in the schools many children were preventative cases, considered likely to follow in their mothers' sinful ways. The taking of names was but the first in a series of steps designed to purge individual identity thereby clearing the way for repentance.

Once entered into the Magdalen asylum personal clothing was stripped and disposed of, replaced with a drab uniform sewn from coarse brown material.† These frocks were intended to obscure any hint of the female form and in so doing eliminate the threat of vanity that obstructed the life of penance. Hair was cropped short. In particularly troubling circumstances, where further punishment was deemed a necessary remedy for those straying dangerously far from the repentant path, the head was completely shaved. It was, by all accounts, a sin to be beautiful. This was a sin made all the greater if one took pride in one's appearance; it was seen as a luring threat

[4.1]

THE GOOD SHEPHERD MAGDALEN
ASYLUM, STRASBOURG, 1932.

Here penitents may be seen
working in the Sewing Room.
Images within the Good
Shepherd asylums were rare.
A nun oversees the work at the
back of the room. Talking
was forbidden; the penitents
recited prayers or sang hymns
while they worked.



to the morality of otherwise righteous men. After all, it was fickle Eve who had eaten of the fruit and in so doing had caused Adam's fall. Where clothing had been discarded so too, presumably, had any personal belongings the inmates had brought with them. Possessions were prohibited; they were remnants of one's old life. As was any contact with the outside world. "Silence reigned everywhere".⁸⁷ Engulfing, suffocating, oppressive; it surrounded the institution both inside and out. A numbing anonymity consumed the penitents within, while for the society beyond the convent walls, these women had nearly ceased to exist.

Strict rules forbade any reference to one's past. A Magdalen's 'reason for entry' into the institution was a subject denied to both penitents and the majority of the nuns. Many women, still mourning the loss of a baby they would likely never again see, had no means of expressing their anguish. They could not share their stories, and therein their soul, with another human being. Many slipped into a sort of emptiness. Their identities were shed, and surrendered to the very walls that confined them. The Irish playwright Patricia Burke Brogan touches on this in her work *Stained Glass at Samhain*.

No birds sing here. Stones and bricks twitch, try to release their trapped horrors. The pain held in the earth.⁸⁸

Burke Brogan's writing is inspired by her experience as a young novice. Upon witnessing for herself the horrendous treatment of women contained within the Magdalen laundries, Burke Brogan withdrew from the novitiate, focusing her efforts instead on bringing awareness to the plight of the Magdalen women. Contrary to the impression that many Catholic supporters have of the writer, she did not intend her works to be considered anti-Church, but instead hoped to highlight the fact that the State had done nothing to intervene, and had not made an effort to protect the women incarcerated in the Magdalen penitentiaries.

Behind the bolted doors and high walls, the penitent women scrubbed away the stains from society's dirty laundry. Confined to a life of abjection, these women were to be constantly reminded of their sin and made to feel the weight of their inferiority. Even in old age, inmates were referred to as "children", and nuns as their "mothers", irrespective of vast age differences. This was a practice that survived at least into the 1970s. As a final insult to their human dignity, the Magdalen women were buried in the same soil of anonymity so imposed on them in life. On dying one of those most "edifying deaths" of which the nuns and the clergy were so proud, the penitents were once again robbed of identity, interred in unmarked mass plots. Isolated and condemned, the

⁸⁷ Margaret Matley, *Camera Always in the Convent Shadow*, (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1991) 27.

⁸⁸ Patricia Burke Brogan, *Stained Glass At Samhain*, (Co. Clare: Salmon Publishing, 2003) 1.1.3.

† TESTIMONY OF MAGDALEN SURVIVORS

Mary Norris quoted in *Suffer the Little Children*, pages 38-39.

MARY RAFTERY, EOIN O'SULLIVAN

Mary Norris attests to the difficult work that the Magdalen women faced in the laundries. For Mary's story see page 44.

From CBS News 60 Minutes:

The Magdalen Laundries, 1999

Produced by L. FRANKLIN DEVINE

Narrated by STEVE KROFT

Josephine McCarthy spent three years in the Good Shepherd Magdalen asylum in Cork. She had spent time in a Catholic orphanage, and, as was typical, had been sent out to work for a Catholic household at sixteen. There she had been accused of sexual immorality and was sent back to the nuns. She was placed in the Cork asylum to work in the laundry. She worked for three years, labouring without pay, until she was rescued by a brother in London.

Mary –

“The work was very hard. It was a commercial laundry, a huge place, with about a hundred women and girls working there. The stuff could come in from all the hospitals, the hotels. You started at about eight o'clock in the morning. I was in the washing room, and you'd get all the sheets from the hospitals with all the blood on them. No such thing as rubber gloves or anything.”

Josephine –

“We got up about five o'clock in the morning, went to mass, had breakfast, started work. Went to bed about seven o'clock at night. That was it, that was our life and we daren't ask questions.

[...]

“Very hard. You'd have to hand-wash, scrub - you'd have no knuckles left. Ironing; you'd be burned. It was just [pause] hard work [pause] very hard work.”

women paid dearly for their so-called sins leading a life of humility and repentance until their remains were consigned to the nameless graves of untold history.⁸⁹

LIFE IN THE LAUNDRY

“Unless Ye Do Penance, Ye Shall All Perish”; these words struck fear into the hearts of the countless ‘fallen’ women who had passed through the walls of the Good Shepherd Magdalen Asylum of Cork. The phrase, carved into the stone of the Penitents’ cloister, served as a daily reminder of one’s mortal sin against God. Their penance was to labour, unpaid, in the Magdalen laundry.† The symbolic parallels, quite plainly intentional, remain unnerving even now; the cleansing of dirty linen for the purging of one’s sin. A lifetime of servitude in the mortal realm, it was hoped, would be enough to spare punishment in the next. Society, both literally and figuratively, sent their soiled laundry to the Magdalen asylums to be cleaned.

The work was hard, and the hours merciless.⁹⁰ The penitent’s day was rigorously scheduled, and typically began with rising at 5:00 am, and tending to chores in the dormitory. The inmates were given half an hour to arrange themselves, tidy the beds, and clean the large open dormitories according to their assigned tasks. All this was done in an orderly fashion while adhering to the strict rule of complete silence. Once finished, the girls lined up at the dormitory door which would be unlocked by the supervising nun. Morning Prayer followed promptly at 5:30, and by twenty to six all penitents were at work in the laundry for at least an hour before the morning’s Mass in the chapel. The chapel was accessed through the aforementioned cloister, designed to hide the ‘fallen’ women from view. The Penitent Aisle, located to the left of the altar, was isolated and obscured by way of an ornate wooden screen. The nuns were seated in the centre aisle, which divided the church. On the right side of the altar was the Children’s Aisle where the students from the industrial school had their pews. This aisle too was concealed by another of the ornate wooden screens designed by the architect. The chapel, and the buildings of the institutions themselves for that matter, had been carefully planned to avoid any point of contact visual or otherwise between the Magdalens and the school children. It was feared that the ‘fallen’ women would entice and corrupt the children. Conversely it was thought that the sight of these children, to a heartbroken mother whose child had been torn from her arms, would only cause her thoughts to stray from the steady course of work and repentance. The architecture served its purpose well. The children, for the most part, remained unaware of the laundry women, and those who did not, were made to feel the wrath of the

⁸⁹ McCarthy, *Priests and People in Ireland*, 419.

⁹⁰ The following times that I give for structuring the penitents day was taken from a typical schedule cited in; Peter E. Hughes, “Cleanliness and Godliness,” *A sociological study of the Good Shepherd convent refuges for the social reformation and Christian conversion of prostitutes and convicted women in nineteenth century Britain*, (Brunel University: Unpublished doctoral thesis, 1985) 471, quoted in Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 196.

† TESTIMONY OF MAGDALEN SURVIVORS

From the documentary film:
Sex in a Cold Climate, 1998
Produced by STEVE HUMPHRIES

Martha's experiences of varicose veins seem to have been commonplace in the Magdalen laundries. For Martha's story see page 44.

Martha –

"We worked all the time, and the work was very hard because we had to bend over the big sinks – washing, scrubbing you know, collars, cuffs. And we also ironed very, very heavy starched altar linen and surplices that the priest wore and I got varicose veins from the ironing at fifteen. And I was told that that was a very privileged job [pause] to do.

[...]

we were told that em 'special friendships' wasn't allowed in there, and that the only thing that made you happy was the love of God and to be detached from all things and people was a truly spiritual way."

From CBS News 60 Minutes:
The Magdalen Laundries, 1999
Produced by L. FRANKLIN DEVINE
Narrated by STEVE KROFT

A dialogue between Mary Norris and the film's narrator, Steve Kroft. Prayer recitation was often employed during meal and work times in Catholic institutions. For Mary's story see page 44.

Mary –

"And all the ti-, all the time you were washing, you were praying. You couldn't talk. And there was a nun sitting, she used to sit over there."

You were praying to yourself, or you were praying out loud?

"You were praying out loud. Every one of you – for your sins of course."

Is that what you were praying for?

"Yes. But I never prayed. I said the words [pause] but that's all."

Why didn't you pray?

"Maybe I felt God let me down."

Mother Prioress.

After the morning Mass the penitents, or “children” as they were called, filed into the refectory for their breakfast. The meal was humble. The rule of silence was observed even here. The nuns kept a close eye over the women; idle talk was seen as a distraction from God. While the women ate in silence, one of the inmates read Biblical passages aloud. Breakfast lasted for thirty minutes, and the laundry work was resumed at a quarter past eight. The penitents worked for three and a half hours, scrubbing heavy altar linens, hotel bed sheets and towels, and laundry from the community that surrounded the convent. It was back-breaking work, completed with primitive equipment. Many women sustained injury, damage to their health, and painful burns from steaming and pressing the clean linen.†

Nearly the whole of the work of a laundry is done standing, and the long hours spent in this position, often in surroundings the reverse of sanitary, amidst a heated and damp atmosphere, render the laundress especially liable to pulmonary complaints, varicose veins and ulcerated legs. Uterine displacement, a terrible affection, which embitters the lives of far more women than is generally known, is particularly prevalent amongst laundresses.⁹¹

Dinner followed the morning’s work at 11:45 am. At 12:15 the penitents were led in organised recreation time. If weather permitted the hour of exercise would be overseen outdoors, otherwise the inmates were engaged in quiet chores or other activities indoors. The terraces to the front of the Convent’s buildings were off limits to the laundry women, and recreation took place in a designated area to the rear of the Magdalen building. Silence presided over this hour, for the nuns had a concern that recreation time provided an opportune environment for penitents to conspire; this fear is attested to in the Rules for the Direction of the Classes, regulations written by the Mother Foundress of the Order in 1898 and strictly adhered to throughout the history of the Magdalen asylums.

The hours of recreation are those which require most watchfulness on the part of the Mistresses. It is generally during recreation that evil projects are formed, bad friendships commenced, that the children lead each other astray by conversations contrary to morals and against authority, by words equally fatal to those who pronounce them and those who hear them. Who can tell the ravages produced in souls by bad conversations? The worst is that these disorders are sometimes caused by those we watch least, because they have gained our confidence.⁹²

⁹¹ Fabian, *Life in the Laundry*, 7.

⁹² *Practical Rules for the Use of the Religious of the Good Shepherd for the Direction of the Classes*, (Angeles: n.p., 1898) 132, quoted in Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 231.

[5.1]

BALTIMORE SCHOOL DORMITORY,
Co. CORK, c. 1880-1914

National Library of Ireland

This dormitory for the
Baltimore Fishing School for
boys would have been very
similar in structure and layout
to the ones found in the Good
Shepherd Magdalen asylum
and industrial school at Cork.
The beds were packed tightly
into four rows with one main
aisle down the centre.



The practice of strict observation was also employed during the industrial school's recreation time. It was made certain that the goings-on could always be viewed both by the nun on duty, and from the convent windows by the Mother Prioress. After the penitents' recreation time it was back to the laundry. The work continued for just over five hours, interrupted once for a brief tea break. Supper was taken at 6:30 pm, followed by another hour of recreation; this time the penitents were likely occupied in chores and general cleaning of the Magdalen building. Upon completing their chores, the girls were escorted to the dormitory by their supervising nun. The door to the dormitory was kept locked during the day and night. The penitents prepared for the night. Changing into one's nightclothes was a difficult task; it had to be done beneath the laundry uniform, without exposing one's skin. It seems that on occasion, the dormitory nun would allot time for a story book reading before bed. Night prayers were said uniformly, at each bedside, followed by lights out no later than 8:30 pm. No talking or moving about was tolerated.

The following are the principles on which the rules for the supervision of the dormitories are based: silence to maintain order, and silence to prepare the girls for a good sleep. While in the dormitory, the Group Mother should stand where she can observe everything. She waits until all are asleep before she retires. Her room is off the dormitory and is locked. However, she has a slide in her door allowing her to observe the dormitory during the night. Now mechanical devices are also used, magnifying even the slightest noise [...] In extremely difficult classes the Group Mothers train themselves to awaken two or three times during a night to check the dormitories [...] A dim light must be kept burning at all times and it must always be possible to observe the washroom facilities [...] During the day the dormitories are locked and no one may go to them without special permission [...] because of certain types of disturbances, this area is one of the gravest concern.⁹³

The "gravest concern" of which these rules speak is no doubt due to the nuns' fear of what they termed 'particular friendships', thought now to be a reference to developing lesbian relationships.⁹⁴ There is no means to be certain of this speculation however, but it is known that personal attachments were forbidden to penitents, as the nuns feared they were a distraction from one's remorse and servitude. This was a typical day for the 'fallen' women contained in the Magdalen laundry. It was a schedule little changed over the generations of women who had followed it obediently, some of whom would follow it to the grave.

⁹³ Dorothy J. Thompson, *The Psychology of the Good Shepherd Nuns in the Re-Education of the Emotionally Disturbed*, (Halifax: University of St. Mary's, 1961) 44-45, quoted in Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 234.

⁹⁴ Maria Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 131.

† TESTIMONY OF MAGDALEN SURVIVORS

From the documentary film:
Sex in a Cold Climate, 1998
Produced by STEVE HUMPHRIES

Christina Mulcahy wed a man once she had escaped from the institution, and had many children. She never told them about her time in the laundry. Christina finally revealed her secret over fifty years later. Her children located her lost son in 1997, and they were reunited just months before she died. For more of Christina's story see page 42.

Christina –

“The nuns would say, ‘oh you’ve, your life isn’t worth living now, you’ve fell from grace, and you’ve fell, your respectability is gone, and, and, you’d better make your mind up to stay here for your life’, and, I well, I said I, ‘I’ve got a baby and I’m going to go out. I’m going to get out of here and I don’t care how I get out of here, but I’m going out of here. I will not stay in this place forever.”

Phyllis –

“The nuns told you if a girl was nice looking, or she had nice hair, the hair was cut you know. And then when you started developing, and well girls you know how they look down at their bodies when they’re young, the nun would notice or one of the monitors would notice and tell, and you’d be brought into the big office and you be sat down and told that it was a sin to be vain, it was a sin to go ‘round swinging your hair, it was a sin to be looking at your body – you were told that by the nuns.”

From CBS News 60 Minutes:
The Magdalen Laundries, 1999
Produced by L. FRANKLIN DEVINE
Narrated by STEVE KROFT

This testimony outlines the lasting effects of the Magdalen institutions. For Josephine's story see page 48.

Josephine –

“It’s made me feel a horrible, dirty person all my life.”

Fifty years of penance may seem harsh [...] but remember that we do not look on a residence here as you do; to a great many of these poor souls, [...] it is not a penitentiary, but a home in which all their interests are centred [...] The poor thing whose story you have been told has had a peaceful, fruitful, and not unhappy life here. A beautiful life - yes, a consecrated penitent, she has been the means of helping many souls to heaven. Had she returned to the world - ah! do you think her fate would have been as happy? Do you think that serene light would be in her eyes?⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Mary Costello, "The Sisterhood of Sorrow, No. I. - The Magdalens," *Lady of the House*, (N.p.: n.p., 1897) 8, quoted in James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and The Nation's Architecture of Containment*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) 42.

The women worked away their lives, endeavouring to wash away the stain that society and religion had cast upon their character. For those who managed to return once again to the outside world, it was a stain that remained with them and could not be lifted.† The more fortunate ones were taken out of the institution by members of the family who had learned of their whereabouts. Others had been released or expelled for defiant and troubling behaviour while some, taking matters into their own hands, had escaped 'over the wall'. They would all share a common guilt, forced upon them by their oppressors. A stigma surrounded the Magdalen women. Whether real or imagined, it was a fear that saturated their lives and plagued their personal relationships. While in the laundries, these women were conditioned to believe the very worst of themselves. Their own identity had been removed and replaced with a single word; 'fallen'.

⁹⁶ McCarthy, *Priests and People in Ireland*, 437-438.

THE FACTORY & WORKSHOP ACT

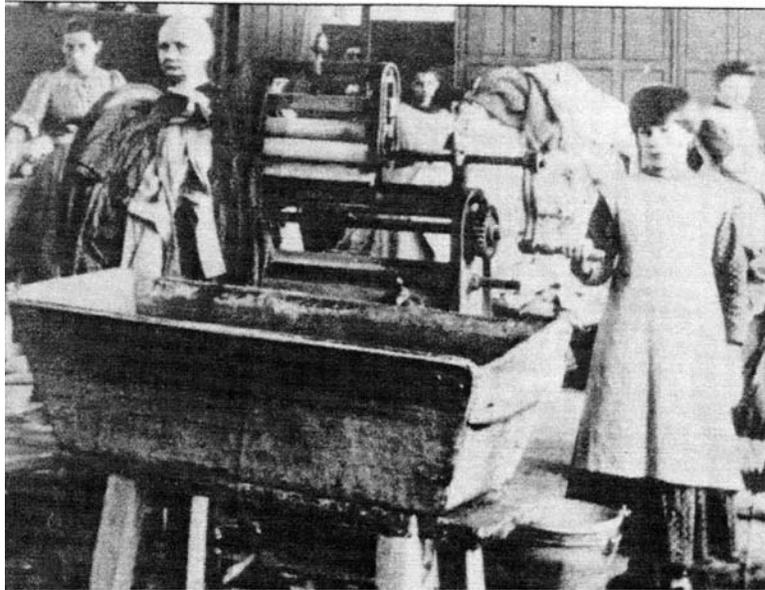
The penitents who had left the asylum laundries were replaced quickly so as to maintain productivity. Criticism of this practice was voiced early at the turn of the century, suggesting that the Magdalen system was not in the best interests of its inmates. Unfortunately the insight fell on deaf ears; the Church in Ireland remained beyond reproach. One such outspoken critic was Irish author Michael J. F. McCarthy, who published works that openly denigrated the nation's Catholic female penitentiary system, stating that they were machines devised to produce profits, rather than refuges for female reclamation.

If we follow the nun into her hospitals and Magdalen Asylums, we shall find that it would be better for the public if she were dispensed with. [...] The Nuns' Magdalen Asylums do not decrease female immorality. They are devoted to lucrative laundry work, which must enhance the wealth of the religious. And they appear to draw only a sufficient supply of recruits from the immoral reservations to maintain their staffs!⁹⁶

[6.1]

UNIDENTIFIED MAGDALEN
LAUNDRY IN IRELAND

The poor conditions and primitive equipment shown in the image are the elements that the Factory & Workshop Act might have prevented. The young girl in the front is still just a child. The elderly woman in the background has had her head shaved, likely as a form of punishment.



[6.2]

THE GOOD SHEPHERD MAGDALEN
LAUNDRY, STRASBOURG, 1932

In contrast to the image above, showing poor conditions in Ireland's Magdalen laundries, the facilities in Strasbourg seem to have been clean and well ordered.



The Good Shepherds of Cork were no strangers to the financial practicalities of running an institution and, although they often relied on 'Divine Providence' to fund their endeavours, the nuns themselves took steps to ensure the future of the Magdalen asylum. They were adept at courting daughters of the wealthy whose dowries, upon entering the novitiate, were entrusted to the convent to be used posthumously. In the mean time the convent was given access to the sum's interest. Appeals to the parish community and campaigns in local newspapers were other means to subsidize the refuge; these emphasised the repentance of the 'fallen' women, encouraging both commercial business and charitable donations toward the asylum's cause. Maintaining a good rapport with affluent local patrons and of course the running of the laundry itself were priorities for the financial well-being of the Order and its convent facilities. Their actions are evidence enough that the nuns of the Good Shepherd understood the worldly realities of running an institution. In order to persist and survive the test of time, the asylum could not function solely as a home for 'fallen' women, but must also find success as a profitable business establishment. Nuns, though highly esteemed culturally, remained at the bottom rung of the religious ladder. As such, in order to maintain control and therein provide spiritual aid for the souls of lost women, they had to prove their ability to effectively and autonomously run the Magdalen institutions; this financial security was imperative.

⁹⁷ Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 222.

To this effect, following the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts and the subsequent closure of the Government Lock Hospital, the nuns of the Good Shepherd in Cork threw renewed effort into fundraising, appealing to the public to ensure the future of the asylum. Advertisements for the laundry appeared in the local papers, citing its charitable qualities and the good work of the nuns. Dutiful citizens answered the call. Fairly soon "an increasing volume of work was overwhelming even those penitents most anxious to atone."⁹⁷ In 1889 Mother Devereux invested in new equipment to improve the capacity of the laundry, and enhance the quality of the work. Pleased with the profits, the Mother Prioress continued to expand and develop the Magdalen facilities to accommodate further demands. By 1892 an extension was added which would act as a large packing room; clean laundry was carefully folded, wrapped in thick brown parcel paper tied with string, and stacked ready for delivery. The ironing room was also renovated and expanded in order to house industrial sized machinery for pressing and steaming. The Magdalen laundry was now functioning as a full-blown commercial establishment. But the improvements had come at great expense and it is probable that the penitents' already long working hours were extended in an effort to cover the mounting construction

✠ EXCERPTS DESCRIBING THE ASYLUMS' RESISTANCE TO THE FACTORY & WORKSHOP ACTS

Life in the Laundry, 1902, page 13
THE FABIAN SOCIETY

Supporters of the Factory and Workshop Act endeavoured to accommodate the needs of the Catholic institutional laundries but their suggestions were met with disdain.

"Lastly, the provisions of the Factory Act should be made applicable to all laundries carried on for purposes of gain. In the case of the institution laundries this should be done with all due regard to their special conditions. For instance, inspections should only be made by women inspectors. But no laundry should remain exempt from the legislative regulations which experience has shown to be necessary to protect the health and well-being of the laundry workers."

Do Penance or Perish, page 224.
FRANCES FINNEGAN

Frances Finnegan demonstrates the resistance of the catholic institutions with regards to the new regulations and their possible interference in the Magdalen laundry system.

To make the idea of government inspection more accommodating to the circumstances of the nuns' institution, a suggestion was made "that the investigations might be more acceptable, if carried out by a Committee of Ladies, appointed by the Government. Far from mollifying the Acts' opponents, this proposal increased their dismay, with one Bishop declaring – and being quoted with approval in the *Annals* – that it would be bad enough to subject the nuns to the investigations of Government Officials, but not so evil as sending a "bevy of women to pry into their affairs" Such a comment reveals how removed from their own sex the nuns were – particularly in the eyes of the Church."

costs.

How appropriate then that, having just overcome the effects of the repealed Contagious Diseases Acts, yet another change of legislation threatened the existence of the Magdalen asylum system. In 1895 Mr. Asquith, the Home Secretary at the time, introduced a bill that proposed the inclusion of convent laundries within the regulatory provisions mandated by the recent Factory and Workshop Act, sometimes referred to only as the Factory Act. The Act, intended for any laundries that turned a profit, allowed for periodical Government inspections.[†] These were to establish that a facility maintained sanitary conditions, ensured the safety of its workers with regards to laundry machinery, fire precautions, and health concerns, and did not exceed a regulated maximum of workers' hours. In addition the Act would standardize recreation and meal times. More troublesome still, workers were to be provided with adequate wages and one personal day per week, during which time the girls could leave the convent grounds and, as was the concern, fall back into the snares of sin from whence they came. If this was not enough to cause alarm in the convent, the Factory Act also specified that an inspector could interview the inmates about the quality of their working conditions without a nun present. Mother Devereux was appalled.

Whether it was out of concern for the fragile state and spiritual safe-keeping of the penitents, the fear that government regulations would render the laundry unprofitable, or the worry that the Magdalen facilities would fail to meet the mandated standards, whatever the case, the Mother Prioress vehemently opposed the legislation's proposed authority over the convent laundry. Writing to the Irish officials to inform them of her dismay, Mother Devereux stressed her anxiety that the regulations would cause unnecessary disruption and upset to the troubled women in her possession. This was a battle the Mother Prioress won.

Mr. Asquith's proposed regulations "met with the keenest opposition from the Irish members on whose vote [he] was dependent, and had to be dropped."⁹⁸ The Factory Act was later passed in July of that year, exempting "inmates of an institution conducted in good faith for religious or charitable purposes."⁹⁹ The nuns' resistance to inspection had sparked discontent amidst their commercial competitors who had themselves been placed under the provisions of the Act. Questions surfaced regarding the nuns' reticence.

Why do the proprietors of those penitentiaries fear inspection if all is right within their walls? Should they not rather court it? I visited one of those penitentiaries, and saw the poor Magdalenes in chapel; and a more distressing

⁹⁸ Fabian, *Life in the Laundry*, 9.

⁹⁹ The Factory and Workshop Act, quoted in The Fabian Society, *Fabian Tract No. 112: Life in the Laundry*, (London: The Fabian Society, 1902), 9.

[6.3]

INTERIOR OF MAGDALEN LAUNDRY
IN DUBLIN, 1897



sight I never saw. They were dressed as outcasts, and *they looked outcasts*. And a more melancholy existence I could not imagine than theirs; changing from the soapsuds in the steam laundry to the confession-box, or the chapel, which is the only recreation they get. Far, indeed, would it seem to have been from His thoughts to have condemned the original Magdalene to such a life as the poor galley-slaves in these penitentiaries lead.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ McCarthy, *Priests and People in Ireland*, 421.

¹⁰¹ Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 225.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

The conversation surrounding the unregulated Good Shepherd Laundry had not died down in Cork. As a precaution against possible Government inspection Mother Devereux approved several long overdue safety additions. Fire hoses and escapes were installed early in 1896 following two potentially disastrous fire scares.¹⁰¹ Shortly after this both the ironing room and washhouse were refurbished and enlarged, and a wing was built to separately house the boilers and the new gas engine. The Mother Prioress also fitted the drying room with equipment designed to disperse steam and cool the sweltering conditions in the laundry.

¹⁰³ Fabian, *Life in the Laundry*, 9.

These improvements, belatedly carried out, were designed not so much to enhance penitents' lives (as the Bill itself would clearly have done); but to ward off Government intervention, and to cope with increasing flows of work.¹⁰²

The precautions anticipated a further attempt at forcing the religious run laundries under the regulations of the Factory Act. The Mother Prioress had predicted correctly. Another effort was made in 1901, requesting that Government inspection come to bear on institutional laundries, but it too met with renewed resistance and was unsuccessful. The bill was rejected by those who opposed it on the grounds that the charitable institutions did not operate for profit but for the reclamation of 'fallen' women. This argument was criticized intently but to no end.

It is difficult to see by what arguments the exemption of the institution laundries can be justified. Many of these laundries are practically business establishments competing freely in the open market, and though it has been urged in Parliament and elsewhere they do not work for profit, it cannot be denied that many of them make large sums of money, as is shown by the following figures taken from the Annual Charities' Register for 1901:¹⁰³

Name of House	Income from Laundry £	Income from other sources £
Magdalen Home, Edgbaston	631	237
Home of Good Shepherd, Malvern	703	287
Asylum for Penitent Females, Dublin	1,046	225
Edgar Home, Belfast	1,132	144

[6.4]

INTERIOR OF MAGDALEN
LAUNDRY, DUBLIN, 1897

A supervising nun governs the
laundry work while a statue of
Mary looks on.



Edinboro' Industrial Home for Fallen Women	1,649	158
Magdalen Asylum, Edinburgh	5,847	493

The Magdalen asylums, as these numbers clearly testify, were undeniable competitors in the commercial laundry industry and with nothing in place to regulate their working conditions they could, both in theory and in actuality, extend working hours to any length necessary. They also had the advantage of public charity; the community gladly brought their business to the nuns, sure that this good work would not go unnoticed. The Good Shepherd Laundries were undoubtedly profitable; simply put, penitents could work long hours and did not require pay. Unsurprisingly the Chief Inspector of Factories at the time voiced his frustration;

That there is need for inspection, in some cases, I have no doubt. Great complaint was made to me of a religious community, where workers were kept for 19 hours at work at times, but, of course, I had no power of entry, and could do nothing in the matter. The competition of such places, where even the laundry hours are exceeded, is a source of complaint to the law-abiding proprietors of laundries.¹⁰⁴

Further support for the new Factory Bill came from a somewhat unexpected source. Reverend Arthur Brinkman, a man who had for three decades been deeply involved in similar institutions in Edinburgh, added his voice to the fray.¹⁰⁵

[...] irregular and long, especially in the laundry. I have known girls far advanced in consumption in the laundry working long after they ought to have been elsewhere, or in hospital. Self-supporting homes need extra inspection, the temptation being to overwork the girls. [...] After more than 30 years' close connection with hospitals, sisterhoods, homes and refuges, I feel the need of inspection most strongly. . . . One objection that has been raised against inspection is that the girls would be unsettled for a day or two. It is made in all seriousness, but I think it is not worth considering.¹⁰⁶

The decision to exempt the convent Magdalen asylums from the Factory Act meant that conditions in the institutions were allowed to extend well into the twentieth century. In opposing the bill, Irish officials washed their hands of the Magdalen laundries, choosing instead to entrust the welfare of thousands of Ireland's women to the uncontested authority of the Church. Their inaction signals a shameful consent; an endorsement of the systematic psychological,

¹⁰⁴ Annual Report of Chief Inspector of Factories, (London: n.p., 1898), quoted in The Fabian Society, *Fabian Tract No. 112: Life in the Laundry*, (London: The Fabian Society, 1902), 9.

¹⁰⁵ Reverend Brinkman had been Assistant Chaplain at St. Andrew's Home, Edinburgh, Chaplain at St. Agnes Hospital for the Fallen, and Chairman of the Church Mission to the Fallen.

¹⁰⁶ Fabian, *Life in the Laundry*, 10.

[7.1]

UNSPECIFIED GOOD SHEPHERD
CONVENT IN IRELAND, GROUP
CHILDREN'S DRILL

c. 1884 -1945

National Library of Ireland



physical, and sometimes sexual abuse suffered by women and children while wrongfully incarcerated in the laundries. The Factory Act would have gone some way to help the inmates of the convent laundries if Irish officials had given it their support. The Irish Government, once independent, made no further attempt to regulate the Magdalen asylums, leaving their conditions unchecked, and the penitent women incarcerated within them unprotected, for the better part of the following century.

¹⁰⁷ Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 230.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Mary Raftery, and Eoin O'Sullivan, *Suffer the Little Children: The Inside Story of Ireland's Industrial Schools*, (New York: Continuum Publishing Inc, 2001) 12-13.

ST. FINBARR'S INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL

The years that followed the Factory and Workshop Act were difficult for the Cork Refuge. The costly improvements spurred by the fear of government intervention had built up substantial fees. By 1911 the Cork Convent was at least £10 000 in debt, with interest mounting.¹⁰⁷ Penitent numbers, not much improved since the final repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, continued to dwindle. With competition from local establishments increasing, the laundry was want for business. The convent's main source of income at this time, apart perhaps from private contributions, was the government subsidized industrial school, though it too suffered from a lack of enrollment, containing only half its capacity.¹⁰⁸

By this time the children retained in the industrial school, known as St. Finbarr's, were no longer predominantly street 'vagrants', as had been the case at the time of its founding in 1872, but were increasingly enrolled on the recommendations of the local parish priests. The widespread misconception that these schools were in fact orphanages, and the children in them orphans, was a belief only very recently dispelled.

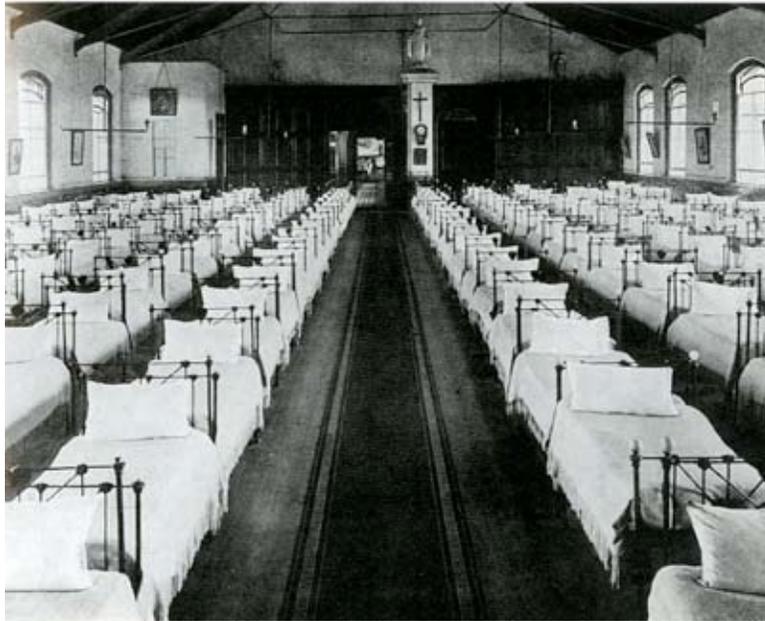
Most of the children within the system had either one or both parents still living, and so could not in any sense be described as orphans. [...] Had there been a proper understanding of the true nature of the system, it is likely that I would not have survived for so long. Public concern would most probably have been voiced at a much earlier stage (as in Britain) about the inappropriate nature of such institutions for child care. In Ireland, the State's policy of removing children from their families and funding religious orders to care for them remained unchanged until 1970. The 'orphan' myth essentially meant that the obviously preferable option of giving that same funding to families to allow them to keep their children at home was never publicly debated.¹⁰⁹

More unforgivable are reports that a number of the children, taught to label themselves as 'orphans', did not realize their parents were alive or, in some cases, were falsely informed of their deaths. Many of the children who ended up in the industrial schools had

[7.2]

ARTANE INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL
DORMITORY, 1905.

This massive boy's school
dormitory shows how densely
packed the aisles of the
dormitories could be.



been transferred there from religious-run orphanages; these housed the illegitimate offspring of 'fallen' women, taken from their mothers at or shortly after birth. The families of these women often rejected the baby as proof of their daughter's shame. Other children, thought to be 'in danger' or under the influence of sin, were forcibly removed from their homes by the priest, local officials, and in some cases the court, to be placed in the nuns' care. Such was the case for Mary Norris, the eldest daughter in a family of eight in the 1940s. After her father died when she was just twelve, her mother struck up a relationship with a local man. Their priest, finding their behaviour nothing short of deplorable, demanded that they marry or put an end to the courtship. When the couple did not respond with the expediency requested, the priest had the children seized and they soon became wards of the court. Norris was sent to a Sisters of Mercy Industrial School for four years before being sent out to a 'situation', working as a servant in Tralee. On one occasion she managed to slip out of the house to go to the cinema in town. Her absence was soon noticed, and she was sent straight back to the school. A physical examination determined that the girl's virtue remained intact, but the nuns evidently felt that it would not remain so for long. Norris was quickly entrusted to the Good Shepherd Magdalen Asylum in Cork. She would labour in the laundry for two years, only to be released after an aunt began making enquiries. Similar practices saw children deposited directly into the Magdalen asylums. Mary Connolly, also thought to be in a 'danger' somewhat akin to that of Mary Norris, was sent to the Good Shepherd Asylum in New Ross in 1871 at the age of twelve.¹¹⁰ This was done for her own "protection" on the recommendation of the local priest. She did not leave the confines of the laundry for sixty-one years; in 1932 Connolly, seventy-three years of age, departed the convent grounds to work as a housekeeper for her niece. But, conditioned as she was to a life of institutionalization, the placement was short-lived and she returned of her own accord after only one year. She died in the refuge in 1941 having spent sixty-nine years there. Other students from the industrial schools were garnered from homes that could not cope or care for them; in some instances financial strain or poor health prevented parents from being able to properly provide for their children. They were sent to the nuns to be taught the skills necessary to earn an honest living usually as scullery maids, and house servants.

A typical day began early, in the bleak hours of the morning. The girls scattered about the large dormitory room, scrambling to dress and wash themselves in preparation for the day. In 1939 there were approximately eighty children in the school, divided between two dormitories – during the years of the war this number climbed

¹¹⁰ Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, 40.

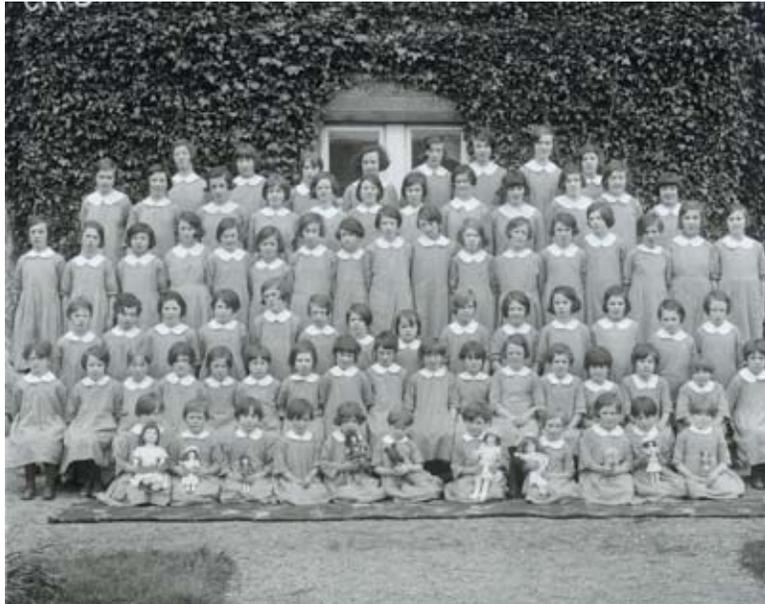
[7.3]

UNSPECIFIED GOOD SHEPHERD
CONVENT IN IRELAND, GROUP OF
CHILDREN

c. 1884 -1945

National Library of Ireland

As seen in this image, the
Industrial school children
ranged dramatically in age
from small children to sixteen
or seventeen year olds.



to roughly one-hundred and twenty.¹¹¹ Each dormitory floor had a small bathroom with two lavatories and a number of wash basins; sixty girls had twenty minutes to ready themselves for inspection. A bell tolled and the children were handed small white veils. These were placed on each head and fastened beneath the hair in preparation for church. Another bell, and children “darted from all directions of the dormitory, washroom and lavatories to line up by the exit.”¹¹² The dormitory door was unlocked by the nun in charge and students filed out silently in twos. The younger children had their dormitory on the top floor of the four storey building, while upper year students resided on the third. The dormitory doors opened on to a small stair case that led down past the second floor classrooms to the ground floor hall. From here the children, still maintaining complete silence and order, were led through a long cloister that connected to the chapel. The Church was completed in 1881 by the same architect responsible for the original three buildings on the site, George Coppinger Ashlin.¹¹³ Adjustments were still being made to the chapel interior in the late 1880s. The children’s aisle, situated to the right of the main altar, had its own Communion rail. The youngest girls were seated closest to the altar. To the left of the children, behind an ornate wooden partition, sat the nuns in their centre aisle, with an unobstructed view of the main altar. Behind yet another partition, to the left of the nuns, the penitent laundry women attended Mass. When the service concluded the children, always in silence, filed down the aisle in their pairs. Breakfast followed Mass. The students formed a line and waited for the First Mistress to unlock the large door. The Refectory housed rows of long wooden benches and tables covered with oil cloth. Each child took up their place and a small bell signaled grace. Once the prayer had been said, the First Mistress gave permission to sit and food was served by a senior student. The Refectory was governed by silence; although on some occasions, the supervising nun would allow the children to speak briefly. Breakfast lasted no more than thirty minutes. The children climbed the set of stairs termed the Visitors Stairs, a secondary route to the dormitories that was dedicated to the nuns’ more esteemed patrons. “It was a magnificent oak stairway, very wide, and wound about, and up, reaching four floors.”¹¹⁴ The door from the staircase opened on to the centre of the dormitory. By quarter to eight the children were hard at work; beds were made, floors swept, lavatories and sinks cleaned and polished. Hair was tidied, and hands washed in time for the school bell, at which point the children would make their way down the regular staircase in their usual twos.

Classrooms were located on the second floor. The first year classroom, containing the youngest children, was a small room which

¹¹¹ Matley, *Always in the Convent Shadow*, 28-29.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 27.

¹¹³ Sister Mary Joseph, *The Annals of the Good Shepherd Convent, Sundays Well*, (1881), quoted in O’Donnell and Tuomey Architects, *Framework Development Plan: Good Shepherd Convent Premises and Land Unit, For University College Cork* (Cork: n.p., 1996) 6.

¹¹⁴ Matley, *Always in the Convent Shadow*, 30.

† EXCERPT FROM ALWAYS IN THE CONVENT SHADOW

Always in the Convent Shadow,
pages 123-127.
MARGARET MATLEY

Margaret Matley grew up in the Good Shepherd Industrial School in Cork, Sunday's Well during WWII. Her charming memoirs describe her life in the institution with a sometimes alarming naivety. She worked in the institution's Bakehouse in her final year and was sent out to a placement in a Catholic home where she was overwhelmed by life outside the convent walls. She ran away from the household where she had been placed and subsequently found training as a nurse in England.

Day by day the flour situation worsened, until the girls reached the final bag on the wooden pallet. [...]

"Look," [Frances] said to Mary and Bunny, "under the pallet, all the flour." Flour had fallen between the stacked bags over the months, especially as the girls scooped out the extra half bag every morning for the dough [...] Mary swept the stale flour into a heap. [...]

"Little Nellie will do a miracle when it's turning in the machine," said Bunny. Scooping up the stale flour with all its foreign bodies, the girls loaded the machine. [...] In due time the dough was ready to be removed from the mixing machine. It looked OK, while soggy. The girls removed the odd hair grip that showed on the surface! They covered the miracle dough with empty flour sacks, to keep it warm. Mother Coregia returned in the early afternoon. Mary rushed to tell the news.

"Mother, we found that we still had flour, we can make today's bread," Mary's eyes were wise and excited. The incredulous expression on the nun's face turned to a broad smile as she beheld the bin, full of dough. It had risen too! [...] While moving the dough onto the table, the dirt, and the debris became visible. Pieces of hairy string from the old sacks, wet fluff, and worst of all, tiny maggots! Frances called the nun's attention. [...]

"Glory be to God, what are we to do, we'll poison everyone, get it back into the trolley. We'll dig a hole in the garden, and bury it," said a shocked nun. [...] The nun led the way to the back of the bakery, and the girls pulled the trolley of rotten dough to its burial place. Suddenly, as they were halfway there, Frances saw Mother Euphrasia and her girls from the kitchen returning with milk from "The Hill". "Here come the kitchen girls," said Frances in panic.

"Take it back, take it back," whispered Mother Coregia, "we'll be the talk of the Convent!" The heavy load was dragged back to the starting post, until the coast was clear. Then with aching arms and shoulders, the procession continued on to its resting place.

"Dig here," said a disappointed nun.

"Dig a long trench." The dough was shared out along the channel grave and covered with earth and flattened down. Filled with relief, they returned to the bakehouse. [...]

Early next morning [...] They rushed around to check, and there, the dough had risen again, clear through the soil!

had direct access to the student's staircase. From here one could enter the adjacent middle year classrooms; a vast space with lofty Victorian ceilings that housed three of the six classes that attended the school. The room was punctuated by long windows that lined the entire front façade of the building, overlooking the terraced gardens that led up to the domineering convent. Enormous half glazed partition doors could be slid into place to divide the long room into three sections; these were the second to fourth year classrooms. At the far end of the room was the door to the fifth classroom, which opened up to windows on both the north and south walls. A corridor to the north of the classrooms ran the length of the second floor. It provided access to small supplementary rooms, perhaps used for offices or supply storage. Pupils sat at strong oak desks and chairs. Cupboards lined the wall, equipped with "text books, pens, ink, pencils, rubbers, rulers, writing exercise books, maps and globes."¹¹⁵ A school day consisted of subjects such as History, English, Art, Maths, and of course, Religion. Children took recreation daily. In neat rows they were led in exercise activities in the school grounds, a small field designated for the students to the south east of the building. Noon was bath time. Children were divided into days of the week. By Friday, each student had been bathed. Lunch followed at 12:30pm in the Refectory, and classes resumed by 1:00 pm. Chores made up a great deal of a typical day. Domestic Science and Senior Arts and Crafts were taught at 3:30pm beginning in fourth year. In these classes students were taught knitting, sewing, embroidery, laundering, ironing, and cooking. By 5:30pm lessons were over for the day, and the evenings after the supper meal were devoted to various chores, studies, and preparations for the following day.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 34.

In the sixth year of their schooling, pupils were taught skills intended to prepare them for their transition into the world outside the convent walls. One such assignment found the students working at the convent's bakery ovens which supplied bread to the entire complex.† This small red brick building, situated at the back of the industrial school grounds, was built during a time of financial uncertainty. In the fall of 1911, as was stated above, the Cork Convent had fallen into what seemed an insurmountable debt. No longer supported with the workforce that the Contagious Diseases Acts had supplied, and not yet having the full strength of its influence in the Catholic family home with regards to the unwed mother, the profits from the laundry had gradually dropped. This year had also seen a drastically low enrollment of children in the industrial school, with a student population of approximately half capacity. Since government financial support was doled out according to each individual child, this meant a huge drop in revenue for the convent.

† TESTIMONY OF AN INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL CHILD

From the documentary film:
Sex in a Cold Climate, 1998
Produced by STEVE HUMPHRIES

Brigid Young grew up in an orphanage connected to the Magdalen asylum in Limerick. Her testimony reveals vicious treatment in the Industrial schools, and highlights the severity with which the Magdalen women were kept apart from the children. She recalled having been made to strip naked for the nuns to criticise. She also remembers having been sexually assaulted several times by a visiting priest. She was unable to confide in the nuns for fear that she would be sent to the Magdalen asylum. She was later released from the Industrial school.

Brigid –

“We were not allowed to talk to the Magdalens; we weren’t allowed to look at them, em, no contact with them whatsoever, because, we were made to believe that they were very, very, very bad children, they were people who were devils, they were sinners. Whenever the beds were changed down in the orphanage, we took all the heavy linen up to the Magdalens, to the laundry, but the back gate was always locked, and when they would hear the trolley coming, one of them would actually come out, and take the linen in. Well this particular day there was two of us and we wheeled up the linen as usual and there was a Magdalen standing at the back gate when we got there. She said to me ‘Do you have a child down there by the name of Margaret Moore?’ and I said ‘yes we do’, she said ‘that’s my child, and I don’t know what she looks like, but I haven’t seen her since she was a year old.’ So she was trying to make arrangements with me to bring this child up on top of the flat roof over the infirmary, and she would come out of the back gate if I would bring the child to the railings and I agreed I would, but I got caught that same day – one of the nuns was coming out of the chapel. She started clapping her hands and you know, running, just flew over to the back gate of the Magdalen laundry, just grabbed the two of us by the ears, run us right down, the hill, brought us in to the Reverend Mother, and the Reverend Mother took it from there. She asked us to wait in the back shed, and she would be in to deal with us, you know, after that. So we went in to the back shed, and she came in, with a great big long rubber [pause] black rubber, [pause] it wasn’t a bill, but it was something that she had specially made for the children, to beat the children with, and a scissors, and an open razer and she shaved both our heads, and gave us a severe beating [pause] and after she did that, she grabbed the two of us again, and she made us look in the mirror, to see what we had looked like after she had finished with us. [pause] And that’s what happened. [pause] And I’ll never forget [pause], what looked back at me [pause] totally devastating, your forehead all swelled up, under my chin all bleeding where she had stuck the scissors, wide open, em, the blood running into my eyes, my eyes totally closed, and she was making us open them eyes, and look in that mirror and ‘You’re not so pretty now are you?’, I’ll never forget that day, and this was just because talking to Magdalens, I was getting too friendly with the Magdalens.”

In response to this time of need and in an effort to offset operation costs, the Countess Murphy, a local patron of the Order, donated funds for the building of a new bakehouse that would provide bread for the convent community. It employed students in their final year of schooling, who would produce hundreds of loaves daily. The building was located adjacent to the nuns' cemetery, at the north wall of the convent. The Mother Prioress, quite rightly, had plans set in motion to make the institution self-sufficient.

¹¹⁶ Sister Mary Joseph, *The Annals of the Good Shepherd* (1909).

With a view to lessen the very heavy expenses and also to enable us [to] supply community and classes with fresh eggs etc., with our usual trust in providence, we turned the "Castle Field" into a fowl run and invested in an incubator.¹¹⁶

A greenhouse next door to the bakery grew vegetables year round, and the convent kept a small farm for horses and other animals. Children of all ages were taught the importance of good housekeeping. Saturday evenings the large wooden floors of the playrooms and classrooms were swept, mopped, and polished to a shine - an arduous task even for an adult. The staircases were cleaned as well, scuff marks painstakingly scrubbed from baseboards, and balustrades dusted one at a time. The beds in the dormitories were stripped often, and the linen delivered to the laundry. This was the only point of contact between the penitents and the children of the industrial school, and it was to be done quickly, and in complete silence. Most would not dare to disobey this rule, for if caught, punishments were severe.†

When students had completed their sixth year of training they were usually placed in a 'situation' orchestrated by the nuns, working as a governess or scullery maid for wealthy Catholic families. No warning was given, and no time was allowed for the student to say their goodbyes. Their identities had been taken from them upon entering the school facilities, and now, once again, they were kept from cementing the ones they had formed while institutionalized. Without knowing fellow inmates' real names, and with no time to make arrangements, the girls who departed for 'situations' in the outside world would never again see the friends they had grown up with. This transition was a difficult one and could not in all cases be considered successful. The extreme naivety cultivated in the industrial school did not serve the girls well. The pupils, though perhaps well versed in the dogmatic beliefs of the Catholic Church and equipped with an overly sufficient knowledge of good housekeeping, remained entirely ignorant of the ways of the world. Upon their release they knew nothing of such mundane things as money, riding a city bus, talking to a stranger, clothing themselves, or even speaking on a telephone. More dangerous still, they knew

† MAGDALEN SURVIVOR TESTIMONY

From CBS News 60 Minutes:
The Magdalen Laundries, 1999
Produced by L. FRANKLIN DEVINE
Narrated by STEVE KROFT

Josephine McCarthy remembers the circumstances of her placement in the Magdalen laundry in Cork.

"It was here that Mary Norris and Josephine McCarthy each spent three years of hard labour in forced silence and prayer, after it was decided that they were in moral danger and unfit to live in Irish society. Both had come from troubled homes, spent time in Catholic orphanages, and were sent out as servant girls where they ran into trouble with their employers for staying out late. They were turned over to the nuns because it was suspected they either were, or were about to become sexually active. Josephine says she was accused of having sex in the back seat of a car;

Josephine –

"And then the next thing I knew, I was with this woman, on train to Cork, and I was just [pause] brought up here. I was just told my name was 'Phyllis,' and I'd work in the laundry."

Mary Norris quoted in *Suffer the Little Children*, pages 37-38.
MARY RAFTERY, EOIN O'SULLIVAN

Mary Norris remembers the circumstances of her placement in the Magdalen laundry in Cork.

Mary –

"One particular week, I asked the woman of the house could I go out a second night, and she said no, that I'd been to the pictures already this week. I was desperate to go. I'd been working like a slave that day to make up the work. She still said no. But I said, 'I'm going.' And I went. I came back that night straight after the pictures. The woman was sitting in the study with cups of tea ready, she was falling all over me. God, I thought, maybe I'd get out two nights a week. Next day, up comes the same man who four years previously had taken me to the orphanage. The Cruelty Man.

'Get your stuff together, you've been a very bold girl, I'm taking you back, the nuns want you back in Killarney,' he said. So he took me back, and the nuns locked me in a room there.

The next day, I was taken down to a doctor, and he examined me, gave me an internal examination. And I remember him saying to the matron who had brought me down, 'What in the name of God is wrong with them up there, this girl is intact.' But I had no idea what intact meant. The next day I was sent to the Good Shepherd convent. I wasn't even allowed to say goodbye to my sisters, to anybody.

The Good Shepherds was what they used to threaten us with if we were bold. It was the Magdalen laundry in Cork. I was sent there to work, to slave in that laundry. The nuns in Killarney had no right to do this – I had turned sixteen and was out from their power. But I didn't know that at the time, I thought I had to do what I was told, as always. The way I see it now is that it was one load of nuns giving servants, skivvies, to another lot of nuns to run their laundry, their workroom."

nothing of sexuality. The deliberate and constructed innocence imposed on the students by the nuns, whose noble yet ill-advised goal was to ward off any threat to the girls' moral purity, left them utterly defenseless against unwanted advances. The extent of their sexual education had been that it was sinful to even consider one's body. Girls who thought of their appearance were sinful. It is all but certain that this ignorance landed a significant number of the industrial school girls back in the convents; this time, they were placed on the other side of the wall, in the Magdalen laundries.

¹¹⁷ Fiachra Gibbons, "In God's Name," *The Guardian*, February 7, 2003.

Other girls, as we have since learned, had not the luck to even leave the institution, having simply been passed directly from the school to the laundry because of presumed waywardness, or for being thought attractive to men. It was a heartbreaking cycle. The illegitimate babies of 'fallen' women, taken from their mothers to be raised in Catholic institutions, only to end up where their mothers had before them – confined within the Magdalen laundries. It was not uncommon for the industrial school girls, upon being released into employment, to be accused of immoral acts, and sent back to the nuns.[†] This was perhaps due to the stigma that surrounded their past. More deplorable still is the fact that, given the identity stifling nature of the laundry institutions, it was possible, probable even, that mothers and daughters could work alongside one another in the heat and steam, without ever being told of their relationship. Dr. Frances Finnegan illuminated this, most dehumanizing of treatments.

I met a woman who had been brought up in an orphanage and then later stuck into the laundry. One day she was taken into the parlour of the convent and told by a nun that her mother was dead. It turned out that she had worked alongside her mother for more than 20 years in the laundry and the nuns had kept it from them, knowing that her mother had been pining all that time for her child. Generation after generation was condemned in this way. You just cannot imagine how miserable and inhuman these places were.¹¹⁷

It is really only with recent years that the severity of the Magdalen laundries has come to light, thanks predominantly to survivor testimony. Undoubtedly, stories about the asylums had also circulated previously, told by those women who had been released or managed to escape from the religious run institutions, but these had gone unheeded. Society had not been ready to accept their accounts. To question the Catholic Church was a great sin.

In Ireland especially in them days the church ruled the roost, the church was always right, you never criticized the priest you never criticized them holy

† THE WELL BELOW THE VALLEY

TRADITIONAL IRISH SONG

The Well Below The Valley sings eerily of instances of rape and incest in Ireland, as well as the resultant rates of infanticide that occurred so as to hide such shame. It is a true embodiment of many of the moral and social implications involved in this dark part of the country's history.

A gentleman was passing by
He asked for a drink as he was dry
At the well below the valley-o
Green grows the lily-o
Right among the bushes-o

My cup is full up to the brim
And if I were to stoop I might fall in
At the well below the valley-o
Green grows the lily-o
Right among the bushes-o

If your true love was passing by
You'd fill him a drink if he was dry
At the well below the valley-o
Green grows the lily-o
Right among the bushes-o

She swore by grass, she swore by corn
Her true love had never been born
At the well below the valley-o
Green grows the lily-o
Right among the bushes-o

He said to her you're swearing wrong
Six fine children you've had born
At the well below the valley-o
Green grows the lily-o
Right among the bushes-o

If you be a man of noble fame
You'll tell to me the father of them
At the well below the valley-o
Green grows the lily-o
Right among the bushes-o

There's one of them by your brother John
At the well below the valley-o
One of them by your Uncle Don
At the well below the valley-o
Two of them by your father dear
At the well below the valley-o
Green grows the lily-o
Right among the bushes-o

If you be a man of noble fame
You'll tell to me what did happen to them
At the well below the valley-o
Green grows the lily-o
Right among the bushes-o
There's one of them buried beneath the tree
At the well below the valley-o
Another two buried beneath the stone
At the well below the valley-o
Two of them outside the graveyard wall
At the well below the valley-o
Green grows the lily-o
Right among the bushes-o

If you be a man of noble fame
You'll tell to me what will happen myself
At the well below the valley-o
Green grows the lily-o
Right among the bushes-o

You'll be seven years a-ringing a bell
At the well below the valley-o
And seven years a-burning in hell
At the well below the valley-o

I'll be seven years a-ringing a bell
But the Lord above may save my soul
From burning in hell at the well below the valley-o
Green grows the lily-o
Right among the bushes-o
Green grows the lily-o
Right among the bushes-o

nuns. You did what they said, without questioning the reason why.¹¹⁸

The Church cast doubt on the testimony of the women who had left the confines of the laundry, and emphasized the sinful nature of their 'fall', a sentiment that caught on; the women were thought to have prevaricated stories and "blackened the homes to whiten themselves."¹¹⁹ Irish society was so imbued with Catholicism that it was never even a thought to question the Church or its methods. The Magdalen laundries formed an infallible system in which idle 'talk' was not tolerated, identities were suppressed and, in a society that ordinarily so prized the power of storytelling, personal narratives were effectively effaced and survivor accounts were disregarded entirely.

¹¹⁸ *Sex in a Cold Climate*, Testimony of Martha Cooney, Sisters of Our Lady of Charity Magdalen Laundry, High Park, Dublin.

¹¹⁹ A. J. S. Maddison, *Hints on Rescue Work, A Handbook for Missionaries, Superintendents of Homes, Committees, Clergy, and Others*, (London: n.p., 1898) 104-105, quoted in Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 228-229.

THE DUTY TO REMEMBER, THE DUTY TO TELL
The Irish Government has not yet acknowledged its culpability in remanding women, and in some cases children, to the Magdalen laundries stating that such facilities were autonomous religious institutions that bore no connection to the State and its affairs. While it is true that the many violations of human rights associated with the Contagious Diseases Acts took place under British rule and therefore pertains to its government it cannot be denied that, once established, independent Ireland turned a blind eye to the treatment of 'fallen' women within its religious-run institutions. The defense that the majority of women entered the asylums of their own accord is insubstantial for, it has long been known that the nature of such 'voluntary submissions' were in most cases questionable at best. This indifference begs the question, what are the boundaries of Government involvement? It would be false to believe that those in power were unaware of the implications of allowing the Catholic Church to incarcerate women, often against their will, for an unknown length of time without any government inspection.

The Carrigan Committee, which reviewed and reported on the Criminal Law Amendment Acts in 1931, presented the Irish government with yet another opportunity to further clarify and define State policy on the subject of sexual immorality and in so doing either reject or, conversely, accept and formalize the prevailing system of religious institutional incarceration. In its report the Carrigan Committee discovered alarming instances of incest and rape as well as widespread sexual ignorance, no doubt contributing factors to the population of unwed mothers.† Unwilling to challenge the methods already in place for dealing with matters of sexuality, namely secrecy and incarceration, the Committee approved several legislative changes that failed to address the significance of their

† TESTIMONY OF MAGDALEN SURVIVOR

From the documentary film:
Sex in a Cold Climate, 1998
Produced by STEVE HUMPHRIES

The culture of silence that surrounded issues of rape, incest, and sexual immorality meant that in many cases those who were victims of crimes were treated as criminals – sent away so as not to cause the family disgrace. Martha Cooney was one such case, for more of her story please see page 44.

Martha –

“When I was fourteen I was sent to a cousin to help on the farm and he took me to em [pause] a farm fair and he [pause] had a lot to drink, and on the way home he indecently assaulted me. And I told a cousin what happened, and the cousin reported the matter and [pause] they got rid of me very quickly. The biggest sin in Ireland, well apart from having a baby in them days without being married was to talk. You never let the neighbours know, and to get rid o’ you – there was no talk, there’s no scandal, and they weren’t sure so that was the safest bet, away to Dublin you see.”

original report. The age of consent was raised from sixteen to seventeen, penalties for brothel owners were increased, and finally, with strong persuasion from the clergy, methods of contraception were banned from both sale and advertisement. In effect, the government response to the findings of the Carrigan report only reinforced Catholicism's already powerful grip on social policy, and endorsed the Church's dogmatic view that the cultivation of silence and ignorance with respect to sexuality were the sole means of suppressing deviant behaviour.

It remained accepted policy, then, to contain the problem of sexual immorality behind institutional walls. As such, victims were criminalized and punished out of fear. Nowhere was the disciplinary nature of this policy more prevalent than in the Magdalen asylums. Though the circumstances surrounding a penitent's entry into a refuge varied greatly, there were those who spent their lives within religious institutions, transferred from State subsidized orphanages and industrial schools directly into the Magdalen laundries. This practice has been evidenced by the testimony of former inmates who had eventually managed to escape the institutions; many did not have such luck. Surely the State was not blind to these seemingly arbitrary reassignments? The children of the industrial schools were after all supposedly under government care. Preemptive measures against immorality were common. Young women who were attractive, or deemed to be in peril of losing their virtue were placed in the Magdalen institutions before they had even sinned.† Others, women and girls who had been victims of assault or incest, who represented a distasteful problem and threat to societal values, were disposed of through the Magdalen laundries. The Catholic Church was the sole authority with which the penitent women were held. The women were kept in the dark regarding their rights.

I would have rather been down in the women's jail. At least I would have got a sentence and I would know when I was leaving.¹²⁰

Inmates of the Magdalen asylums had no judicial process, were assigned no crime, and were given no fixed sentence. The Kennedy Commission of 1970, appointed to report on the industrial and reform school systems, made brief mention of the disturbing lack of 'legal validity' in Magdalen incarceration.

[...] a haphazard system, its legal validity is doubtful and the girls admitted in this irregular way and not being aware of their rights, may remain for long periods and become, in the process, unfit for re-emergence into society. In the past, many girls have been taken into these convents and remained there all their lives.¹²¹

¹²⁰ *The Magdalen Laundries*, narrated by Steve Kroft, produced by L. Franklin Devine (New York: 60 Minutes CBS News, September 15 1999), DVD.

¹²¹ Eileen Kennedy, District Justice. "Reformatory and Industrial Schools Systems Report 1970 Chaired by District Justice Eileen Kennedy." (Dublin: The Stationary Office, 1970) 39. <http://www.lenus.ie/hse/handle/10147/77793>

† EXCERPT FROM 'IRELAND: 1966-82' IN THE COURSE OF IRISH HISTORY

"Ireland: 1966-82" in *The Course of Irish History*, pages 298-299.

J. H. WHYTE

Edited by T.W. MOODY & F. X. MARTIN

This passage explains the conditions of the time in Ireland, outlining the shaky position of the Catholic Church and the role of the media in propagating change.

"The Republic in the mid-sixties seemed a country where traditional Catholic mores were still deeply entrenched. Books were banned for being indecent or obscene, the sale and import of contraceptives was illegal, divorce was unconstitutional, and abortion almost unheard-of. In subsequent years, this changed fast. The book censorship was eased as early as 1966, when thousands of titles were released from the list of banned books. The laws against contraceptives came under increasing attack, and in 1979 a measure was carried out permitting their import and sale under certain restrictions. By the early eighties, pressure was beginning for a repeal of the constitutional ban on divorce. Abortion remained illegal, but thousands of Irish women went annually to England for abortions. The extent of marital breakdown was causing concern, and numbers of couples were living together without marrying. Homosexuals, who once did their best to avoid drawing public attention, formed a pressure group devoted to securing the repeal of their legal disabilities. To be sure, old customs did not collapse. The great majority of the population still went to church on Sundays, and the strength of long-established loyalties was shown by the enormous welcome given to Pope John Paul II when he visited Ireland in 1979. But the Irish value-system was becoming fragmented: part remaining traditionally Catholic, part influenced by ideas coming in from Britain, America, and the Continent.

[...]

Discussion of such issues was facilitated by developments in the mass media. Irish television had begun as recently as the end of 1961 but soon showed a willingness to tackle controversial questions. Irish newspapers became increasingly ready to publish investigative journalism, and Irish publishers offered a market for the findings of the first generation of Irish social scientists."

Despite this damning commentary, the State's persistent deference to the Catholic Church continued, and Magdalen asylums were sustained as a punitive means to control female sexual activity. Ireland was not yet ready to challenge or question the strong presence of religious moral authority on such matters. But a hairline crack had formed in the wall that had for so long fortified the involvement of the Church in State affairs. The decades that ensued witnessed the slow dissolve of Ireland's longstanding deference to the clergy. With the emergence of campaigns to legalise contraceptives and civil divorce, coupled with a substantial decline of religious vocations, it was clear that the Irish people were no longer subservient to religion. The Catholic Church, whose authority had largely gone unquestioned, found itself vulnerable.

By the early 1970s the tide was shifting, marking the slow decline of the Magdalen laundry system. Firstly, the laundry business model began to suffer. The accessibility and convenience afforded by the household washing machine had a significant impact on the commercial success of both secular and religious-run laundries. Fabrics too were changing; the invention of man made easy-care materials that did not require arduous pressing and starching meant that women no longer needed to send their more unwieldy washing to the laundries for proper care. With the loss of the individual consumer, the convent laundry came to rely ever more on the business of other institutions, namely prisons, hospitals, and hotels. Added to this decline in business was a decline in the Magdalen asylum's workforce. It is difficult to pinpoint one specific cause for this. By the 1970s women began to have an increased control over fertility. Though the sale of contraceptives was banned in the Republic of Ireland until the mid eighties, the pill was available through gynecologists and family doctors ostensibly as a cyclic regulator. Women who feigned menstrual irregularities therein had access to birth control. Other means of contraceptives were freely available in Northern Ireland and neighbouring Britain, and were regularly smuggled into the country. It would seem though, that the decrease of refuge applicants was a reflection of an overarching shift in Ireland's societal values and ideals. A shiver coursed through the previously unshakeable foundations of the Church; the question of its place and authority within the nation, though still a subject much scorned and regarded with trepidation, became possible.† There was a developing belief that religion and government ought to be separate entities, an idea that culminated with the Fifth Amendment to the Irish Constitution on January 5th, 1973. This removed what had hitherto been the 'special position' of the Catholic Church within the Free State, putting an end to the dominance of the

[8.1]

CHRIST IN THE HOUSE OF THE PHARISEE (DETAIL), 1460.
DIERIC BOUTS THE ELDER
Mary Magdalene may be seen here in her repentance, washing the feet of Jesus with her tears and drying them with her hair, while the dinner guests look on with disdain.



Church over social policy in Ireland.

To be sure the State had long relied on the Catholic Church for support of this manner – a somewhat unfair responsibility to outsource. In the nuns, the government had self-directed workers who required no compensation, and were devoted to the rescue of society's outcasts.

The nuns, like mothers of families and other unpaid domestic workers, were working for no personal gain and were working until they dropped. The flexibility demanded of them and the amazing adaptability which they displayed meant that convents came under constant pressure to take on new areas of responsibility. [...] "You can switch a Sister of Charity on to anything" a Fr Vaughan commented in 1899. The more a nun "switched on to" (or was switched on to, Vaughan's comment suggests that it is somebody else who is working the controls) the more she was expected to do in the long run, and the less time and energy she had for switching off the day-to-day practicalities and onto the larger context of her work.¹²²

The Government, knowing the Church would continue to care for these women, failed to provide them with a suitable alternative, using the Catholic Orders as a substitution for proper social policy. There is no doubt that for those more disturbed cases, suffering from insanity or instability, the refuge provided a safe environment of constancy and routine. Many 'fallen' women, cast off by their families and openly shunned by society, had nowhere to turn. The Good Shepherd nuns took these women in, providing them with food, shelter, and work when nobody else would; without this help, their future was grim. Many young women would surely have been forced to descend further into destitution, resorting to the streets and likely coming to a deplorable end. The nuns' contribution in this way can not go unacknowledged. It must also be taken into consideration that their efforts were born out of a sincere desire to help society's abandoned class and, in reclaiming their souls, save them from what they felt was the very real threat of eternal damnation. The Good Shepherds earnestly believed that the institutionalization of 'fallen' women was a good and moral endeavour, an altruistic approach to social policy. Unfortunately, as is often the case with dogmatic and unbridled sanctimony, this system, amplified by autonomous isolation, also gave rise to an environment in which exploitation and mistreatment were prevalent. Survivor accounts testify to this fact. Though the cruelty shown to the inmates of the Magdalen laundries was perhaps due to the conduct of individual religious behind closed doors, it must still be recognised as a systematic abuse. The collective acquiescence, by all members of

¹²² Caitriona Clear, "The Limits of Female Autonomy: Nuns in Nineteenth-Century Ireland," in *Women Surviving: Studies in Irish Women's History in the 19th & 20th centuries*, eds. Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy (Swords Co. Dublin: Poolbeg Press Ltd., 1989) 42-43.

[8.2]

AERIAL OF GOOD SHEPHERD
CONVENT IN CORK, 2005.

This image shows the extensive
fire damage done to the north
side of the building. The floor
treatments still outline the
laundry floor.



the Orders, to ignore the human suffering of the penitents within was entirely reprehensible.

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Admissions to the Cork Good Shepherd Magdalen Asylum officially ceased in 1977 though on occasion women found to be in need were accepted on a case by case basis. In the years that followed, the Magdalen laundries remained a dormant topic - cast, along with their inmates, to the periphery of Ireland's social consciousness. Scandal would soon bring them to the forefront. In 1993 the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the High Park Convent in Drumcondra, north Dublin, sold a portion of land containing the unmarked graves of the penitents who had worked there over a period of one hundred years, the most recent burial having been in 1987. An exhumation order was issued for the remains of 133 women. During the work a further 22 bodies were discovered for which the penitent register could not account. Failure to report a death is against the law and yet, only 75 of the women had been issued with death certificates. The nuns had kept poor records, and the practice of assigning inmates new names upon entrance to the asylum had further concealed the identities of the bodies; only one of the 155 women was reclaimed by her family. The other 154 penitents were cremated and re-interred in a mass plot in Dublin's Glasnevin Cemetery, their stories lost from the annals of history. The collective indignation caused by the 1993 High Park scandal marked the last 'nail in the coffin' for the Magdalen system. The Good Shepherd Cork Convent was sold in 1994 to University College Cork to develop a satellite campus, a plan that was never realised. The laundry building itself was subsequently destroyed in a fire that damaged all but the original three Coppinger Ashlin buildings; the Magdalen asylum, the convent, and the industrial school. A housing development was proposed in 2005 but, with a sharp and lasting decline in the Irish economy, was cancelled soon after. This place of suffering now sits empty, its gaunt windows peering out from the hills of the Cork landscape. The last Magdalen asylum closed its doors in 1996.

The asylums were brought to an end not by any government legislation, nor by a shift in the Church itself. In the end the call for justice came from the survivors themselves, with the support of their families and the public. However their efforts, as of yet, have borne no fruit. The vast majority of the estimated 30 000 women who passed through Ireland's Magdalen system over the span of two centuries will remain anonymous. The Catholic Orders involved, being under no legal obligation, have refused to release archival

† STORY OF REV. SHINKWIN'S MASS CONVERSION, THE GOOD SHEPHERD CORK ANNALS, 1876

Quoted in *Do Penance or Perish: Magdalen Asylums in Ireland*, pages 180-182
FRANCES FINNEGAN

A young Catherine Ahern, or as she was named in the Cork Asylum Mary of the Dolours, was among the group that Rev. Shinkwin 'converted' that day. She remained in the asylum until her death, over fifty years later.

““For more than a year, one of the curates, R. M. Shinkwin, had in contemplation the breaking up of 20 bad houses where a great many Penitents [prostitutes], now inmates of our Asylum congregated. So one day in the month of June, as he was hearing confessions in the Church, he left the confessional suddenly and went to this ill-famed street draped in his soutane, birettea, and no weapon save his rosary and breviary. It was toward twilight. There the saintly priest knelt and in a loud voice commenced the rosary. All who passed, joined, and for the entire night never ceased praying. The poor penitents inside and their windows barricaded and doors locked. They made all the noise and clamour possible inside to try and drown the priest's voice, but as morning dawned grace touched their hearts. Our Blessed Lady triumphed over the Evil one. The poor creatures flung open their doors, joined in the rosary and told Rev. Shinkwin they would do as he pleased. After a little time he procured covered cars and had them sent up to us; that day we received 20. Nothing could equal the joy that rang through the Convent and Asylum ...”

A quarter of a century later the incident, much embellished, was included in A. M. Clarke's biography of Mother Euphrasia. One "poor sinner" who Rev. Shinkwin was striving to save:

"more hardened than the rest, openly mocked at them. She leaned out of the window, and taking a bottle of wine, said she would drink their health. The bottle broke between her fingers and seriously injured her hand. She regarded the accident as a judgement of God, and at once joined her companions in prayer and in expressions of earnest repentance. A procession of penitents was thus formed. They all declared that they would not leave the priest, to whom they owed so much, until he had placed them in safety within the walls of the Good Shepherd ... He took 20 to the Mother Superior of the Convent ... Day after day fresh penitents presented themselves, begging for admission. When four days had elapsed, their number amounted to fifty. The older penitents gladly gave up their own beds and best clothes to them ... The occurrence made quite a stir in the town, as it found its way into the newspapers, and was alluded to in the most flattering terms. The parish priests presented their indefatigable fellow-labourer with a handsome chalice, as an expression of their admiration for his heroic devotion.”"

records of inmates post 1901, and it is therefore impossible to ascertain the full count of victims. As a result of the silence that surrounds these places, the laundries exist in the Irish collective consciousness more in story than in history. Paul Ricoeur, in *Imagination, Testimony and Trust*, states that “the duty to remember consists not only in having a deep concern for the past, but in transmitting the meaning of past events to the next generation. The duty, therefore, is one which concerns the future. [...] It is a duty, thus, to tell.”¹²³ Though the stories of the Magdalen women and their children may be painful for Ireland to recall, it is in active recollection and commemoration that such sorrows may be borne; storytelling at once fulfills the ‘duty to remember’ and the ‘duty to tell.’

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In 1922 two of the oldest penitents at the Cork Refuge were given permission to step outside the enclosure for a single day in celebration of fifty years spent in penance. The two women were among the first to enter the Asylum in 1872.

On 29th July two of our oldest consecrated penitents – Magdalen and Mary of the Dolours had the happiness of celebrating the Golden Jubilee of their entrance to our House just 50 years ago, having come to us July 29th, 1872. They were allowed the privilege of a visit to our House in Clifton Cork, having been invited by the Mother Prioress, and returned that evening laden with presents and greatly refreshed and gratified with their visit.¹²⁴

Mary of the Dolours had been admitted by Rev. Reed from the Government Lock Hospital on the day the Magdalen refuge had opened. She was then just nineteen years of age and her name, if after half a century she remembered it, was Mary McMahan. The aptly named Magdalen of the Dolours, originally Catherine Ahern, age 27, had been brought to the laundry three weeks later by the Rev. Shinkwin during one of his zealous reclamation campaigns in the early years of the refuge, which had since garnered an air of mythology in the Cork Good Shepherd Annals.† Both women spent fifty-six years confined to a life of servitude and atonement, having been granted just one day outside the convent walls. They died within days of each other in 1928, the nuns secure of their penitence to the last. It is difficult to imagine the feelings of apprehension they must have experienced crossing the threshold from the stone and brick that had contained their lives, to the seemingly yawning divide between the past and the present. The Ireland they had left had ceased to exist in the instant they had set foot inside the convent walls; it had melted as the snow in the first morning of spring.

¹²³ Paul Ricoeur, “Imagination, Testimony and Trust: A Dialogue with Paul Ricoeur” in *Questioning Ethics: Debates in Contemporary Philosophy*, eds. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (London: Routledge, 1999) 9-10.

¹²⁴ “Annals of the Monastery of the Good Shepherd, Sunday’s Well, Cork” (1922), quoted in Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 241.

† TESTIMONY OF MAGDALEN SURVIVORS

From the documentary film:
Sex in a Cold Climate, 1998
Produced by STEVE HUMPHRIES

Christina Mulcahy, Martha Cooney and Phyllis Valentine felt the lasting effects of institutionalisation, as undoubtedly did all the women who passed through the Magdalen asylums and attached Industrial schools. For more of Christina Mulcahy's story, see page 42. For Martha and Phyllis' stories see page 44.

Christina –

"I'd lost shame, and respect, and pride, and everything that went with it. Any, any girl who has a baby out of wedlock is a, is a fallen person, and they have no luck, they lose their respect. I didn't tell my family, I didn't tell anybody until I told them six months ago, and that was it. [pause] But I, suffered badly through it all."

Martha –

"On the day of my release, [pause] it 'twas a wonderful exhilaratin' feeling I s'ppose you'd call it, and in the afternoon Jim came for me, and took me out, and I was free.

[...]

I was wondern' if I'd be able to make it on my own, and you see not havn' seen many people, only the usual, not havn' seen people dressed up I mean, the clothes and, everyth-everything, everything different, the spaces'm, the come and go as you please and, whatever [pause] it was wonderful.

[...]

All I wanted to do was do a job and be independent. But I never wanted to marry [pause], or make a commitment to anybody, [pause] because I never wanted anybody to have power over me, or chain me ever again."

Phyllis –

"When I left the Magdalen Laundry I went to Dublin, and I felt very self-conscious. I thought people knew who I was and, what I'd done – I was supposed to be a real bad person in this Magdalen Laundry and I was frightened to talk to anyone. I was forever lookn' over my shoulder, and if somebody looked at you in the street, you yourself felt that they were lookn' at you 'cause you were bad. They didn't know who you were, they didn't know anything about you, but this was how you felt inside."

The physical boundary line of the Good Shepherd Convent grounds is imposing against the small streets of Sunday's Well. It stands twenty feet in height, topped with shards of broken glass and coils of rusting barbed wire. It was this wall that contained and oppressed society's abject for well over a century. For some it represented safety. For most it was a physical manifestation of captivity, of hopelessness – the consequence and reminder of their sin. Its shadow stretched far across the convent grounds, reaching beyond the physical; the wall came to define the Magdalen system, embodying its way of life. It was an isolation facilitated by the architecture itself. The segregation of the three classes is most clearly seen in the construction of the three main buildings, the School and Asylum being divided by the convent; children and mothers separated by the nuns. No point of contact was allowed between the students of the industrial school and the penitents who worked in the laundry. On occasion the voices of children outdoors during playtime echoed from the boundary wall, reaching the ears of heartbroken mothers in the asylum. The building itself became the wall between mother and daughter, designed specifically to prevent any physical or visual connection between the two institutions. A series of separate corridors led to the Church where solid wood partitions hid each aisle from view. The windows at the ground level of the Magdalen asylum were obscured, so as to prevent a direct view to the outside; this would encourage the penitents to dwell no longer on the world they had left, to renounce their earthly desires in favour of an introspective cleansing of the soul. It also screened any view of the children's playground. Schedules too were planned in such a way so as to avoid all contact between the Magdalen women and the school children. By these means the Good Shepherds carefully constructed the wall that forever estranged mother and child.

It was an alienation from human relationships felt by all penitents alike, a product of institutionalization and the systematic destruction of individual identity.† The strict rules of the asylum forbade the development of any friendships. The inmates were not allowed any conversation nor, more specifically, any reference to their past lives, their reason for entry, or their birth name. To see to this, women were made to continuously recite prayers aloud during work hours while outside the laundry activities were presided over with a strict rule of silence. It was an anonymity that pervaded the asylum, as though one's story was entrusted to the very walls that confined it; for the inmates had no other confidant. Their identity was taken from them and replaced with their 'fallen' state. A penitent's sin was never far from her mind even after leaving the Magdalen home – it had so governed daily life while institutionalized

✠ EXCERPT FROM MARY ROBINSON'S SPEECH 'COME DANCE WITH ME IN IRELAND,' 1990

'Come Dance with Me in Ireland' in *Great Irish Speeches*, page 170.

MARY ROBINSON

"As the person chosen by you to symbolize this Republic and to project our self-image to others, I will seek to encourage mutual understanding and tolerance between all the different communities sharking this island. In seeking to do this I shall rely on symbols. But symbols are what unite and divide people. Symbols give us our identity, our self-image, our way of explaining ourselves to ourselves and to others. Symbols in turn determine the kinds of stories we tell; and the stories we tell determine the kind of history we came and remake. I want Áras an Uachtaráin to be a place where people can tell diverse stories – in the knowledge that there is someone there to listen.

I want this presidency to promote the telling of stories – stories of celebration through the arts and stories of conscience and of social justice. As a woman, I want women who have felt themselves outside history to be written back into history, in the words of Eavan Boland, 'finding a voice where they found a vision'."

✠ LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF THE IRISH TIMES, FEBRUARY 23, 2011

Letter to the Editor in The Irish Times
February 23, 2011, page 19.

JAMES SMITH, CLAIRE
MCGETTRICK, PADDY DOYLE,
MAEVE O'ROURKE

Despite the ongoing efforts of the many supporters of Magdalen survivors, the Government has yet to take a stance in repairing the damage that has been done to the Magdalen women, and the wounds left in Ireland itself.

"Will our political leaders have the courage finally to hold the Catholic Church accountable for past abuses, and in doing so prioritise the rights of survivors? In November 2010, the Irish Human Rights Commission found sufficient evidence of significant human rights violations in the nation's Magdalene laundries to recommend that the Government institute a statutory inquiry. The outgoing Government refused to act, referring the assessment document to the Attorney General's office for review. No action was taken. Again, our political leaders failed the most vulnerable of our citizens. In the final days of this campaign, we ask for whom does the political system work in this country?"

that it became central to one's identity. In this way the inmates were never able to fully leave the asylum, they carried their sin around with them, along with the memory of their punishment. As such, it was next to impossible for a former inmate to establish strong personal relationships, feeling estranged from and rejected by society regardless of whether or not this was in fact the case. It was common too for marriages to disintegrate; the fear of sexuality and shame that had been instilled by the nuns meant that any attempt at intimacy was ill-fated. While in the Magdalen asylum, women were conditioned to believe that their sin was all that defined them. In this condemned state, where identity was suffocated and humanity suppressed, there was a great divide between the individual and the society that had rejected them.

There exists yet another wall barring survivors from acknowledgment and resolution. The Catholic Orders that controlled the Magdalen asylums of Ireland have refused any formal declaration of apology, and also to release archival information of penitents who entered the Homes any time after 1901. Their instinct has been to deny and ignore survivor testimony. This lack of acknowledgement only adds further insult to injury for the years of hurt imposed on thousands of Irish women over the last two centuries. In April 1996, President Mary Robinson lent her support to the Magdalen women in the unveiling of a memorial plaque located on a bench in Dublin's St. Stephen's Green.† The plaque read 'To the women who worked in the Magdalen laundry institutions and to the children born to some members of those communities – reflect here upon their lives'. The memorial bench remains one of the sole gestures in recognition of this chapter in Irish history.‡ On November 9th 2010, a group of survivors and supporters under the name *Justice for Magdalenes* made a formal request to the Irish Human Rights Commission for an inquiry into the Magdalen system, seeking State recognition, apology, and redress for the women and girls who had been held in the Magdalen laundries. The Commission stated it was unable to provide any form of apology or redress but instead called "on the State to establish a statutory inquiry" into the issue.¹²⁶ This was followed with further silence on the part of the State. Although the walls around these women began for them in a physical sense, there are also the psychological walls which alienated them from human relationships, and continue to cause emotional barriers, marginalizing them from society. The refusal of the Church to accept responsibility in this travesty, and the role of the State in what can only be described as a failure to institute proper statutory inquiries, are the final barriers which must fall so that Irish society can finally, with a clear conscience, know that the unfinished business of the nation's dark past has been addressed, and that the remaining survivors of the Magdalen asylums have been justly treated.

¹²⁶ "Address by IHRC Chief Executive Éamonn Mac Aodha", <http://www.ihrc.ie/publications/list/eamonn-mac-aodha-speech-magdalen-laundries/>



PLATE 2

PART TWO: *Pathos*

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow out of this stony rubbish? Son of man, you cannot say, or guess, for you know only a heap of broken images, where the sun beats, and the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, and the dry stone no sound of water. Only there is shadow under this red rock (come in under the shadow of this red rock), and I will show you something different from either your shadow at morning striding behind you or your shadow at evening rising to meet you; I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922)

THE RETURN

'I can see it in my mind' – the words breathlessly and defiantly voiced by Josephine McCarthy, a Magdalen survivor who had been held in the Good Shepherd Convent in Cork for three years during the 1960s. These were the words she spoke upon returning to the ruined remains of the walls that once confined her thirty years before; 'I can see it in my mind,' the words uttered in response to Steve Kroft, the presenter of a 60 Minutes program, when asked if she wanted to descend a steep embankment to get a closer look at the laundry.

The small group have been surveying the architecture from a distance, but as they approach the rusting roof of the old laundry building, a distinct air of apprehension pervades the film. Mary Norris, another survivor who was held in the refuge during the 1950s, guides Kroft along the north wall of the complex and down the bermed earth to peer through the shattered glass of a window to the desolate laundry floor below. Debris and dirt scatter across the otherwise stark floor, while tree branches force their way through the ventilation windows in the ceiling. Remnants of old laundry equipment, the splintered remains of folding tables and linen cupboards litter the space. Josephine lingers behind. It is at this point that Kroft asks her if she would like to see the laundry, to which she replies with her eerie and telling words.

It is a poignant reminder of the trauma endured in the survivor's youth, but it also captures the dual nature of the memory of place; the three years spent in the institution is sufficient to construct the likeness of the built environment in her memory, while the concept of facing her past embedded in the ruin gives way to an apprehension that borders on revulsion. 'I can see it my mind;' I believe this means that as much as we invest our identities and ourselves in the built world, the architecture is equally invested and stored in us; Thirty years have not erased the experience of this place, it is embedded in her memory, as she is embedded in that of the architecture.

This may be understood, in the work of Neal Leach, as a sort of camouflage; a need to absorb and become absorbed in the other as a means to familiarize the unfamiliar, which, it may be argued, is a compulsion that becomes ever more prevalent in the place of trauma. In this way, the inmate of the asylum becomes so attuned and incorporated into their environment it is as though "their identity is somehow constituted by it."¹ Leach references the testimony of Leon "Whitey" Thompson, a former prisoner at Alcatraz, regarding his intimate and detailed memory of his prison cell.

¹ Neil Leach, *Camouflage* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), 5.

² Ibid.

I knew every mark, every thing in that cell. And pretty soon that cell became like part of me or I became a part of the cell. I couldn't visualize living anywhere else in the prison than in my cell. It was like coming back and greeting an old friend really, because it was part of me.²

³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2004), 11.

⁴ Ibid, 330.

The architecture becomes a reflection of one's identity. Having assimilated himself, the prisoner begins to see his identity inscribed in the physical environment that surrounds him. This form of familiarization is instinctual, bordering on a means of survival through establishing stability; humanity seems to be dominated by a need to return to the site of familiarity, and, when faced with an environment that appears wholly other, we are governed by a need to accommodate and therein familiarize the unfamiliar. Another way perhaps to describe this is to turn to the discursive works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in which they reflect on such acts of camouflage in the concept of 'becoming'. In the introductory writings of *A Thousand Plateaus*, the authors describe the relationship between the wasp and the orchid. Their interaction is so intimate, that the one seems to adapt to and characterize the other; a negotiation occurs between deterritorialization and subsequent reterritorialization. That is to say, the orchid, in the part of its identity that is dependent on the wasp deterritorializes in the wasp's image, the wasp then, in the part of its identity that is rooted in the gathering of pollen from the orchid, reterritorializes in its relationship to the orchid and vice versa. This, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, is not a simple matter of mimicry, but an actual state of becoming-other, a blurring of one's boundaries; "the becoming-wasp of the orchid and becoming-orchid of the wasp."³ It is the arrangement of an environment's affects that can create a space of comfort amidst the unknown. Taking another example from Deleuze and Guattari, we may further this concept; a child is described, alone in the dark and fearful of the fog that pervades the unknown, he begins to sing a small refrain that builds an imaginary surrounding, an embracing space of comfort.⁴ The song breeds familiarity and a sense of territory or home. In this way the child comes to embrace his environment, just as the environment takes on the aspect of his song.

The phrase 'I can see it in my mind' signifies the intimate relationship and knowledge that the survivor has of the architecture of the laundry, while her return to the physical construct of her memory reignites her own identity that is embedded in the brick and stone of the decrepit building. What is it, then, to return to a place that was once so familiar, now in a state of decay? To find the physical memory - weather-beaten and desolate? To witness the encroachment of dusty vines that pry each stone from its

mortar? The asylum, once the oppressive site of unfamiliarity that, through the inmate's camouflage was made familiar, is now once again pulled into the clutches of the unfamiliar in its skeletal decay; the alluvium of time has deterritorialized the building. There is, perhaps, a sublayer of memory that speaks of familiarity even here. The body memory lies vaulted in the hidden enclaves of the soul, trapped in each ligament, moving through each limb. This is a visceral identification with place that is honed through ritual. It is this memory that finds particular poignancy in the institution, where one's actions are often rigorously scheduled and repetitious. Leach writes of the bodily memory stating that in ritual "these spaces are 're-membered,' such that those participating reinscribe themselves into the space, revoking corporeal memories of previous enactments."⁵ The space becomes shaped by the projections of body-memory, as the material form reflects the rituals that are performed within it. The body, itself, then becomes a site of introjection, as it registers and absorbs previous spatial experiences. The resonance of the two aspects of projection and introjection reinforce the embedded identities of both subject and environment.⁶ The return to a place of resonance will inevitably resuscitate the body's ability to remember; this is a more immediate form of memory. Not clouded or altered by the imagination, it is able to traverse time and revive the life of the architecture even once it has fallen into ruin. This is a somewhat astonishing sensation, that collapses the years that separate the present-self from the past-self; a figment of the imagination, a memory that hides beneath the rubble, watching from the shadows.

This is perhaps why the body-memory, when experienced in the return, is so fascinating and somewhat disorienting in its familiarity. For, it is not that the body retains this past memory in a dormant manner, no, it is far more unsettling than a sleepy awareness. When the body acts out familiar memories, the past does not merely flicker in the subconscious, it seems to materialize; the body remembers as though no time has passed, and therein confers a "sense of spatial and temporal unity" in which the past and the present meet.⁷ The self, then, leaves fragments of identity in the places that contribute to its memory; a residuum of sorts, in which the shade of the past-self lingers. Body memory dissolves the barrier that divides them. Though this may be said of all places of memory, it applies to the site of trauma in a manner more jarring. As Dylan Trigg states; to return to the site of trauma is to unite the two selves which had been torn asunder by experience.

The result of this action is the creation of a space between other identities, a space that only opens up as the conscious and unconscious selves stand in

⁵ Leach, *Camouflage*, 182.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Dylan Trigg, "The Place of Trauma: Memory, Hauntings, and the Temporality of Ruins," *Memory Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, (2009): 90, doi: 10.1177/1750698008097397.

⁸ Ibid, 92.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, 88.

¹¹ Donlyn Lyndon, "The Place of Memory," in *Spatial Recall: Memory in Architecture and Landscape*, ed. Marc Treib (New York: Routledge, 2009) 63.

tense proximity to one another.⁸

At its centre, the space harbours a fleeting moment of "recognition in the nightmare," whereby the survivor sees their other self.⁹ Yet the two selves do not simply remain at a slight temporal distance, as with the fine film that separates a mirror's reflection from its subject. Instead they exist in a shifting intersection, a fusion, an overlap in which pieces of the self both belong and don't belong; where the memory reconstitutes itself from fragments of the past, breathing life in the present; a fearsome construct, somewhat akin to that of Frankenstein's monster. With its fresh reincarnation the memory becomes something of terror – weighted with a significance that it did not carry when it was first formed.

It is this world of shadows, this 'spectrality of place,' that pulls at the anchors of the soul, even upon visiting the site of trauma, much less returning to it as a survivor.¹⁰ This is the function of place; the affect of atmosphere; the memory retained in the palimpsest – made all the more poignant through the frame of the ruin. In abandoned spaces, the experience and emotional understanding of place is intensified, and a world is constructed in one's imaginary space. This construction allows us to connect with the lives of those who have passed before us, their stories imprinted on the architecture. The fragmentation of the ruin excites fascination, conjuring up the experience of the whole. When confronted with this emptiness, a sort of spatial recall takes place in which narratives of the past emerge, held lightly within the framework of temporality. These constructions, both real and imagined, are the effect of the projection of accumulative memory – the work of each individual's personal history. Donlyn Lyndon's article in Marc Treib's *Spatial Recall* describes this:

"Place," as I understand it, refers to spaces that can be remembered, that we can imagine, hold in the mind, and consider. They are territories that can be lived in with special satisfaction because they resonate with associations that engage our interest. Places bring things to mind. [...] The experience of place is infused with memory; echoes of previous visits, expectations, and recollections invoked by similar places, as well as images, and descriptions in advertisements and books, and on the internet. All of these have prepared us (or enticed us) to visit; all present themselves for comparison in our minds.¹¹

It is this to which our understanding of place owes its existence; there is something that compels us, that lifts our attention with the sensory perception and subsequent cataloguing of our environments. We seem to live in mental constructs in which experience, memory, and imagination bleed into one another. Juhani Pallasmaa, in

the same collection of articles as Lyndon, writes that this lived “existential space is structured on the basis of meanings, intentions, and values reflected upon it by an individual, either consciously or unconsciously; existential space is a unique quality interpreted through the memory and experience of the individual. Every lived experience takes place at the interface of recollection and intention, perception and fantasy, memory and desire.”¹²

It is through this sort of catalogue of lived experience that we are able to understand and interpret other places. As such, my own accumulative memory of coming of age in a religious-run boarding school – a highly structured institution – has informed my own mnemonic understanding of the Magdalen asylum. Through this experience, I am able to form a tangible connection, a resonance, through which I may frame my own sensory perception of the site of memory. This is how spatial memory works, but another parallel experience exists that brings me closer to the survivor as she breathes ‘I can see it in my mind,’ scarcely allowing her eyes to rest on the now buckling remains of the building she once knew. I too have returned, I too have come to feel the impossible closeness of the past-self, as the institution through which I channeled so much of my own identity has since closed its doors, left to decay. I myself have felt the body memory, climbing up the wide stair in preparation for study, only to find myself atop a thread-bare carpet, in the cold, desolate, clutches of the ruin, as though awakening from a dream. It is this that allows me to project myself deeper into the affect of the ruined Magdalen institution, and in so doing, risk drowning in the sway of collapsed time, and although mine is not a story of trauma, it serves to complete an otherwise fragmented portrait of the whole.

I wish to make it clear to the reader that in no way am I attempting to equate my own institutional experience with that of the Magdalen survivors. My own experience in a boarding school, although admittedly not without its faults, was in many ways the fertile ground from which my own fragile identity was allowed to strengthen and grow. Its was a rigorously structured institution in which rules were stern, and generally adhered to without question by those who governed. I spent five years of my adolescence, conditioned to the routine and daily life set down for me by others, and for the most part I was a shy and withdrawn student. If I questioned the environment in which I was raised, it could be seen to be a quiet search that took place in my own heart rather than in the front trenches of challenging authority. My rebellions perhaps were small but, I think now, of no lesser significance than those of raucous protestation. It was upon leaving this place that I came to understand the effects of institutionalization; the residue of my conditioned

¹² Juhani Pallasmaa, “Space, Place, Memory, and Imagination: The Temporal Dimension of Existential Space,” in *Spatial Recall: Memory in Architecture and Landscape*, ed. Marc Treib (New York: Routledge, 2009) 26.

state informed a somewhat fearful impression of the world outside. This was not in the form of thoughts but rather, it came disguised in instinct. The ringing of keys, a common occurrence in post-secondary dormitories, gave way to nauseous urgency. In the past this sound had signaled a brief and unintentional warning that the dorm supervisor was nigh at hand. Pupils scrambled to hide away any forbidden possessions such as magazines or music. This is a body memory that has since faded, but the recognition of it as a conditioned reaction remains a strange and haunting experience still.

It is my hope that the reader can therein allow that it is through personal memory that I am able, as an author, to resurrect the mountainous ruin in these humble pages of ink. For after all, in some way, we all 'return' to the ruin. This is to say that regardless of whether or not we have had, in the past, any connection with a place of decay, we possess the instinctual ability to reanimate the ruin in our imaginations based on each individual's spatial memory. An abandoned café at once becomes vibrant in the mind, filled with the hubbub and splendor of choked espresso steam pooling out of glossy metal nozzles, lazy Sunday afternoon chatter, and the delicate clinking of porcelain dishware. This is an atmosphere readily held in the mind's eye and projected onto the empty space; we have seen this ruin before, and we are returning to it now.

The experience of walking through the ruined asylum is one in which time collapses its boundaries and all is painted in a delirious stream of latent, historical, and finally personal memory. The story that is created therein becomes its own site, its own index. It is my intention with the following series of meditations, to identify and procure the experience of the Magdalen ruin, as it is framed through my own accumulative projections, with the hope that through my fragmentation, the reader may come to find their own interpretation of the memory of place – so that they may, perhaps, come to see the experience of this architecture in their own mind.

ACCUMULATION, PROJECTION, PARALLEL

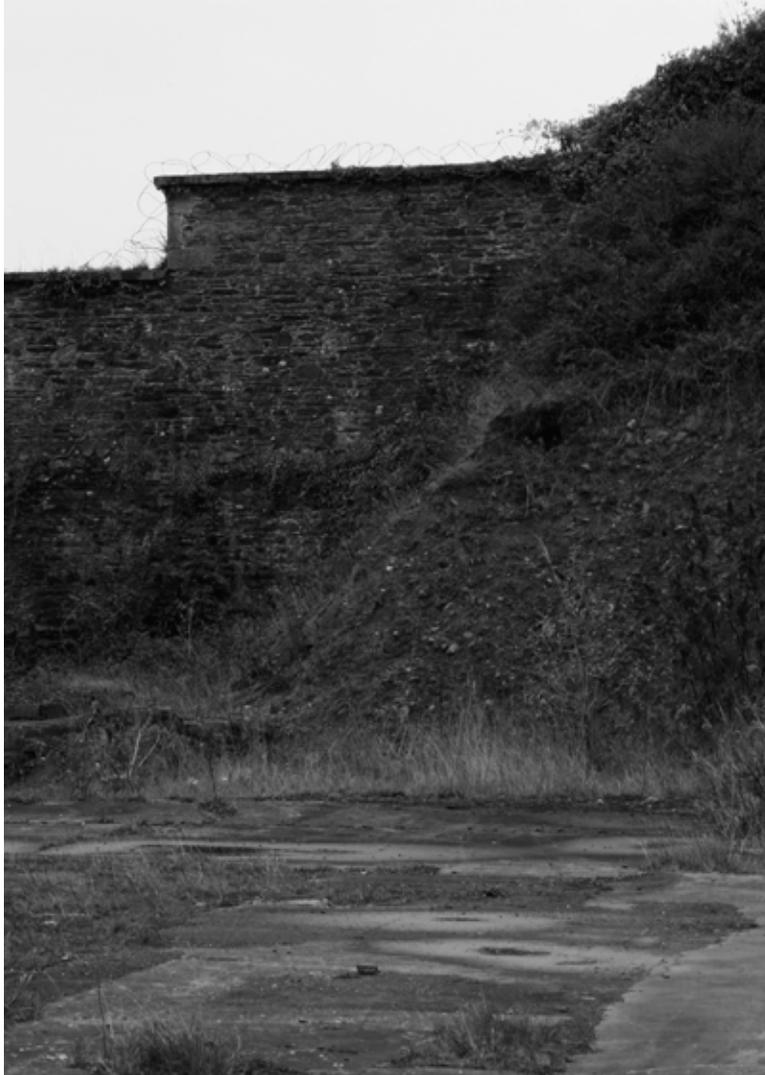


PLATE 3

THE WALL

I

This, then, is the wall; the rake of isolation, the seam of troubles, the keeper of stories. Each stone aches with the impatience of time. Secrets, their weary souls blinking back the silt of ages, crawl through its pores jealously guarding an undisturbed silence. In the distance, far in mind but not quite so in measure, an imposing giant sleeps – a figure that divides earth from sky, peering out through empty sockets, stretching its limbs to puncture the swallowing brush. Fingers, my own, curl 'round the dew-wet bars of a wrought iron gate and trace the waves of stone upon stone. I search; I strain to see beyond; Mine are not the first eyes to fix themselves against this barrier. The corner beckons, giving way to a quiet fold of white-washed houses that look on with curiosity. Here, the wall bows slightly where the road lifts toward it. But still the menacing height sits well above the horizon. Rust worn coils of barbed wire snake along the top of the wall, biting at skin. Amid the glass shards, worn down by the winds and rain, I perch. Looking down - I fall.

I left part of myself on that wall where time was torn asunder. If I were to ask you, 'What, do you suppose, makes a wall?' – should I hear your words return to me, 'But a wall, surely, is built of the stones that are taken from the earth?' Indeed, it is built from its parts, each brick – a story, a time, a love, a battle. Can it not be all things? Can it not be both the fearsome prison guard cloaked in the gauze of lost hopes, and the noble soldier that stays the storms of icy winter? Is it not the scene of unburdened childhood recollection, and the tear drenched backdrop of a merciless execution? 'It defines boundaries between inside and out,' you say, but with whom does this responsibility lie? What decides the separation between in and out, and which side would you wish for yourself? From the asylum to the safehold – walls are the repositories of memory, witnessing the fleeting moments of life and death.



PLATE 4

THE VISITOR'S STAIR

It is the stillness that marks a shift in atmosphere. The kind of solitude you become aware of in the thickness of a crowd, as though the wind dies suddenly, pulling the breath from your lungs. Motionless amidst frenzy; the deeply rooted rock that stands immovable and serene, parting the surging waters of a hurried stream - unhindered. The ruin is made of time; it is the trace of its passing but somehow, in this stillness, it is also plucked from time's current - the past melts the present like rain into the earth. It is as though it resides in the margin line, in the twilight, in the in-between. Silence reigns here. In the ruin, silence is not an absence of sound, but a profound presence in and of itself - permeating, soaking into the air, varnishing the damp halls, twisting through broken doorways and vacant windows. It fills. Wearied of itself it steals away into the depths, grasping each footfall from underfoot, clanging them through the emptiness. They ricochet and shatter into pieces in some corner of the soul. Forward, cautiously. There is a wall that doesn't quite meet the ceiling, its surface washed with the grey sky. On it is a mural, obscured by the elements; musical notes, the figure of a man in a top hat, barely discernable beneath the leaves of peeling paint. The beginnings of a staircase, etched against the glaring light that shapes a caved in cloister ahead. This is the power of light; to carve away at the darkness, to rough out a shape, to reveal what escapes into the shadows. The banister touches the light gently, receding, recoiling as if fearful of the sun's reach. Scattered on the floor lie bits and pieces of plaster, glass, rags, beneath the coatings of thick dust and pigeon dirt. The staircase balustrade winds round four storeys, though the old wooden stairs do not always have the strength to follow. I know now that this was the Visitor's Staircase, its walls bathed in poppy patterned paper little dulled by the years. I dared not touch the smooth banister, coated with heavy white paint - the kind that never quite seems to dry, always retaining some measure of its thick sticky texture, leaving no trace of the wood contained within. The school children once climbed these stairs in obedient silence - though young minds are difficult to quiet while tongues are still. They filed out of the refectory under a watchful eye, orders given in sparing words - 'posture', 'fix that hair', 'silence'; always silence. The staircase, like all things at the school, was kept immaculate.

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... I climbed the stairs, each limb strained with the strange comfort of remembrance; tense, slur of nerves that transported me back as though time was no longer the guardian of the past and in this slip-between lived the memories of all things ...

I remember the waxy scent of the polish. The jar might have been white plastic, or tin? – the paste within well used, a valley of cloth strokes gouged into its centre. Each week I slowly inched my way up the steps, patiently scrubbing away the inky black scuffs of so many school shoes. My work was inspected; anything less than perfect and I'd be sent back, to the bottom of the four storey staircase, to begin my work anew. Crouched low, knees bent awkwardly, squinting my eyes to discern even the faintest mark; this was how I spent one morning each week. I didn't mind this work. I enjoyed the quiet, the solitude of the large staircase, deserted while studies progressed in the large, window lined classrooms above. I was left alone with my thoughts; a rare occurrence in a boarding school where moments of private reflection were few and far between. When, after much work, I had arrived at the top floor, the real work began. Equipped with a heavy vacuum cleaner, strapped to my back, I made my way, painstakingly, down the steps. The main carpeted surfaces were, themselves, simple enough to clean, but the dust and debris that collected in the folded corner of each stair was stubborn, and did not surrender to the vacuum easily. To add to this, the cleaner built in heat; the work being hard, a thin film gathered on my temples and curled through the strands of hair that had loosed themselves from the rest. I stepped backward down the stairs, so as to have a better view of my work. Others, who walked straight down the stairs, risked having to redo their work on account of missing an occasional corner. Vacuuming the stairs was miserable, and no amount of imagination could make it easier. But at last, at the bottom of the staircase again, having conquered the worst of it, I took hold of a spray bottle and cloth and then I was running; most students on stair duty did the last polishing of the balustrade from bottom to top, but in my small way, I made it my own. I had to be careful not to make noise, so as not to invite discipline. I ran to the top, cloth running along the wooden balustrade beside me. Once there I caught my breath, leaning over the railing to see the full length of the old stairwell, steps tripping over themselves, dissolving into the deep blue of the carpet, coming to an end, suddenly snapped shut like the folds of a paper fan. The trip to the top of the stairs was arduous, weighing down my lungs and burdening each step – but the run down was glorious. The wind sailed through my hair, and the steps seemed to take hold of my legs, which could not have stopped if I had commanded them to. And for a moment, my limbs were not my own; caught in the descent.

... as though losing saturation, my own haunting was taken away from clawing, desperate fingers, and I was alone once more – amid the whistling winter winds, and the low, dry scuttle of famished autumn leaves ...

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PLATE 5



PLATE 6

PLATE 7: 116 - 117

THE REFECTORY

The refectory stretches out, each side flanked by large windows. The ones that once opened to the convent terraces are now sutured shut with crude wooden boards. At the far end, those that face the defeated cloister pour their light upon the floor, strengthened by the contrasting shadow. Paint lifts from the ceiling like the scales from a fish; a pattern of its petals settle in the folds of dark and light. Wooden side paneling has long disappeared from the walls, leaving the earth-stained rock beneath. A few small items are strewn along the length of the room; the metal bones of a table, a tangle of fractured pipes, chair legs, windows frames, and a set of forgotten keys. The tinny clatter of dishes, the murmur of controlled voices stifled at the sound of the nuns' bell, the frothy skin floating atop warm milk, buttered toast and the glue of porridge – the space seems to come alive at the crease of my eye. At the far end of the room a door opens into the kitchen. White ceramic bricks gleam, pushing back the darkness – niches, set into the walls, housing sinks. The brown clay tile of the floor is damp, reflecting the little light that still clings to the room. Bricks, shed their paint, dappling the walls, dissolving into ebony.





... the warm humdrum of slow baritone vowels, the quick snap and hiss of consonant t's and s's, – the telltale chorus of none-too delicate clatter, the sharp protests of heavy dishware and the thin notes of drinking glasses, the awful scraping gnaw of fork tines and knife blades. The room lapped against the walls, and came to settle on the lustrous polish of dark wooden chairs and tables ...

The ice cube had fallen down the back of her dress. I was sure I had seen it as it disappeared between layers of skin and black velvet. My face betrayed insurmountable horror. But the woman didn't flinch! How could she not notice? Regaining composure, I hurried on to the next guest at the table. I was the head server at the banquet, and these were the guests of honour; the board members, and 'friends' of the school sat in a long row at the hearth, presiding over the busy expanse of the dining room.

I wrote my exams in that dining room. We would wait outside the doors, anxiously scanning every last scrap of notes we could before reluctantly filing in to the vast grid of round wooden tables, one student to each. The room seemed to adopt a distinct chill during examination time. Those who had not thought to bring a cardigan during that morning's panicked preparations were to be pitied. If a question eluded my penetrating stare, I would turn my gaze on the dining room carpet that I had cleaned so meticulously during my chores, time and time again.

Through the double doors at the far end of the hall was the kitchen. Its massive industrial dishwasher belching billows of steam with the smell of yesterday's dinner. Twice a week we donned the long plastic blue aprons and thick rubber gloves for dishcrew. The sticky air clung to my uniform, curling the wisps of hair at my brow, and coming to settle against my skin in a clammy residue. I would take up my position at the far end of the machine; the large scratchy dish towel in hand, pouncing on any of the smaller dishes that came my way. Nobody wanted to have to dry the oversized pots that came hurtling along the track. To avoid this you had to keep your hands busy with spatulas, stirring spoons, skillets, and water pitchers.

This evening it was the weekly formal dinner; we were required to wear our blazers, and number one uniform inspection was carried out at the table by the family-heads, staff members who were assigned to oversee the behaviour of students at the dinner table.

I was on serving duty this evening. I poured a glass of ice water for the next guest at the table, while still nervously eyeing the woman in black velvet. Suddenly she straightened her back and sat bolt upright, I felt sure she had finally realized what had happened. She turned to look at me, and I felt myself dissolve. To my shock, the old woman's face relaxed into a smile and she simply asked me what the menu was for the evening. I stammered an answer and hurried off to fetch the plates, not believing my luck.

...It is quiet now. The life has receded into the corners, and beneath the floor. The carpet, greyed, tattered fray. Dust-soaked ground. The tables are gone, some still toppled on their sides. What chairs are left are stacked beside an aching wall...



PLATE 8



PLATE 9

PLATE 10: 124 - 125

THE CLASSROOMS

Out again, into the cloister, flooded with the colourless light of its broken windows. The floor is littered with loose clay tiles, pried up by the seasons, keeping company with shattered glass. Even with the most delicate step, their protests echo through the halls; sliding against one another. The debris cracks like seashells abandoned on the shore. And there, receding into the hideous mass of dripping wall, a small staircase, tiny in fact, stumbles down to meet the cloister. It is burdened by the plywood boards meant for an unseen window. The crumbling evidence clutters the passageway. These stairs burrow through – dark, constricting, closing tighter with each trying step, until finally opening again to a shadowy expanse.

The classrooms are filled with the deepest grove of black. The floorboards are dry as sun-scorched earth. Here and there, a rent in the veil of silence as wings flutter toward invisible corners. Further now, into the open jaws of the unknown. Two columns, their backs arched in anticipation, stand sentinel. The air is damp with the sweet, cloying smell of decay. Pressing against the terrible darkness. Needles of light emerge from the cracks that line the shuttered windows. Their jagged fingers trace along the twisted floor. Paint creeps along the wall like ivy, feathering to the floor

These walls are worn where partitions once met them, dividing the large central space into three, bridging the divide between the first and fifth classrooms. A haze of smoke lingered in the air here. Once the frightened girls were brought back to their studies, the older ones leading the younger children by the hands, their faces still stained with the salty tracks of tears. A fuse box outside the senior classroom had sparked and crackled, falling into flame. Panic had ensued. The rush to reach the staircase in the first classroom toppled desks and chairs, spilling ink and notebooks in the frenzy. A fire stair was later installed. It now clings to the side of the building like the rigging of a drowned ship.





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... Quiet heads bent over polished wooden desks. The slight scratch of pencil against the dry, crisp sound of paper. The resilient, powder of chalk, a board speaks of yesterdays lessons atop today's...

This room, the same one I had been in so many times before, with its familiar smell of lemon-scented cleaner and pencil shavings, this was the stuff of imagination. It was small, it was quite small indeed, but here, within the confines of four walls, was access to the greatest of expanses. We were young, barely out of childhood, learning the basics of the written word. Assigned the previously untouched requirement of writing what was termed a narrative paragraph; we were asked to tell a story, a story of meaning, of some consequence. I set to work, writing of my grandfather — a man who had been besotted with the sea, the quiet air of morning, the sky as it broke from the night, breathing its light upon the dew-damp earth, the hills and valleys that sigh within the countryside, the bending branches of the willow tree, the rain — I told this story of a man I had never known, a man who had died before my father was much more than a baby. I wrote from the threads of memory that are woven through our history. It was then that I realised the power of words.

...The windows are empty now, frosted over with the bite of winter. Their sills twist in the cold, shedding paint like an old skin. An old pencil sharpener, its metal dim, its joints arthritic with rust, its ringing warble like the rubbing of two stones — silent...

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PLATE 11



PLATE 12

THE WINDOW

Back now, into the deep creases of rooms that line the north wall. A noise reaches forth from the silence, flickering to life in a song that ebbs and flows with my own breath. It does not pierce the space, but instead seems to entwine it, build on it, become it. Are these the voices of the shades that haunt this decrepit home? I cannot move, my heart strung tight as the sinews of a violin. Yet somehow I drift toward the sound. A room, hidden in the gut of the wall; A solitary window yawns – a vacant eye surveying the surrounding landscape. The faint voices of children playing reach from the neighbouring houses toward the Convent's high walls. Heady desperation drips from the air – were these the voices of the lost children? Those taken, torn, from the breast? The long dispelled hearts of mothers, gutted and hollow, yearned to pin their hopes on those voices. Those thin, distant notes, their song bare upon the window sill, so easily dispersed, but not so easily erased. Mothers threw their voices against that wall, that twenty foot guard of jagged stone – they thrashed against it with the last shreds of the past, calling out unknown names to unknown children. To the left, taking refuge in a wall clothed in white and dotted with the blue paint of spring buds, dew curled leaves, and tangled vines, an empty doorway frames the bright poppies of the Visitor's Staircase beyond. Its steps have disintegrated, collecting on the floors below. With them they take the sound of so many footsteps, that drummed against the weathered wood in days that now do not belong.



PLATE 13



PLATE 14



PLATE 15

PLATE 16: 136 - 137

THE FIRST CHILDREN'S DORMITORY

A small room at the front of the large expanse retreats into wallpaper of the deepest blue. From this sea emerge the traces of an English garden; roses flourish in the dim light, their blushing petals tipped with careful brushstrokes of pure white. A vaulted window scatters my shadow across a floor of fractured porcelain. A door beckons. Its hinges are stiff and immovable, the rust that coats them too dense to relinquish its grasp. Where once there were inset panels, now spiders spin their webs. The opening is just enough to crawl through. The dry scrape of wood protests my entry, while silken threads noiselessly surrender to my touch.

Up the stairs now, wading through the wreckage. The first dormitory unfolds. Light streams in where rebellious youths knocked the plywood shutters from tired windows. A wall, its only opening an empty doorway, stands alone in a wash of mottled clay. Layers of wallpaper slump defeatedly to the once highly polished floor; pattern upon pattern, each one plastered over the other, reading time - the alluvium of years melting from the walls. Pipes grow from the floor. Fragments of the building bleed from deep gashes in the ceiling. An otis dumbwaiter surveys the scene. Against the long wall, in the middle of the desolate space, an overturned bathtub, its belly speckled in a rich umber. The wind sweeps the dust and whistles through the corners. How many girls slept here, their beds lined up against each wall? Did they gaze out over the folding hills and church spires and wish for their families? The breeze outside picks up again. Dried leaves sift across the floorboards like paper. A chair, a wooden chair alone in the back recesses by a bricked in fireplace. The staircase, this time not tunneled through the wall but free-standing, and narrow. The balustrade coils round a well, where tired feet lumbered up to beds, and sleepy eyes squinted against the waning light.







PLATE 17



PLATE 18

PLATE 19: 140 - 141





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... The white window frame cuts a picture of water and sky, painted between this grey stone wall and the green fields that stretch out at its feet ...

I remember the ships, carving their way through the St. Lawrence, easily slivering the deep slate water in two. They passed from window to window, and for those brief moments, divided between each opening like the images of a film strip, they seemed to enter the building, casting their shadows on the clean white of each wall. When the sun hung low in the sky, lighting the waters with the same flame that burns in any fire, the great beasts pressed on, erasing the small trees and houses that lined the river's far shore. Thrust into the haze of horizon, this world dissolved into the mass of thick black metal, its thin veins of white, worn from years of battle. From this window, I can see it all again.

... The threads of its screen flicker in the hollow wind - a wind that picks up the chill of the half-frozen river, blocks of ice creaking and knocking in its current like the low moans of a sunken boat ...

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PLATE 20



PLATE 21

THE SECOND CHILDREN'S DORMITORY

The air has been sucked from the room, replaced with a dank smell, a pungent rot. The smell forces a recoil – it is invasive, aggressive, pushing backward. Beams, just discernable beneath the thick carpet of dust and pigeon droppings, rise from the floor like the dead from their graves. The room stands, defiant. It is filled with light from a buckling ceiling. Old heating registers, torn from the walls lie toppled on their sides, while yawning holes in the ceiling grin like missing teeth. The rafters are there, like skin peeled back from bones.

This was the room from which the dormitory nun, no doubt, kept vigil during the night. The crumbling stone and plaster twists into marble, while scraps of wall paper lean from the walls like curtains. It is a small room with two doors, and stone that falls like soil. The floor boards shift and torque, under a damp film of dust and grime, creaking under my touch. The walls have been painted with so many colours, all vying to be seen under the dim light of the empty window. A chair waits for me in the corner there – there where the walls reach out their curling fingers, clinging to the light and air from a single window. The chair, facing the door where I have entered seems so harmless, so mundane, so simple – it's wooden back, the polish still winks slightly in the light from a grey sky. But there is something eerie about its placement – here amid the ruins, it sits as though calmly anticipating my arrival, but I cannot sit in it – I have the feeling that somehow that would disturb time, would disrupt my ghostlike presence here.

My eyes comb the room and come to rest on an odd sort of shadow that is embedded in the wall. It outlines two metal brackets, still hanging loosely from their nails. It is the outline of a bed that had pressed its image against the wall – it is its index. I cannot seem to explain the fear and awe that was stricken into the very core of my being. It is an index of passing that I have seen before, the signature of the past that says, 'I was here, I am no longer.' In Hiroshima, there is a stone, a step to be more accurate. There is nothing unusual about the stone itself nor, indeed, the step – but on it is a shadow, a shadow with no subject. It is the shadow of a person who had been sitting on the step. It is said that this shadow, this trace, was burnt into the stone when the bomb dropped. This image is one that has stayed with me. I think, perhaps, it is the use of the word shadow;



PLATE 22

PLATE 23: 150 - 151

PLATE 24: 152 - 153

PLATE 25: 154 - 155

PLATE 26: 156 - 157

PLATE 27: 158 - 159

something that seems so fleeting, and yet is so present, such a part of its owner that they were never apart. One does not exist without the other; the two cannot be severed. To see the shadow divided from its subject, unnaturally amputated – the shadow that was once so fluid, now fixed on the stone. It is the trace of its owner, left behind in the rush of death, it is an uncanny testimony. This is the power of the index, it is the presence of absence; both terrible and somehow terribly beautiful.

Through the hall, framed by trusses that interlace across the pitched roof, a small door leads on. Down a step or two, a little attic room – barren, if only for a few oddities. A scrub bucket lies in the light of a fractured window; the absent glass, painted with the roofs of the neighbouring houses that exist beyond the boundary wall. A parched cloth, as though wrung dry not hours ago, awaits the instruction of busy hands. To the side – quite close to the entrance, a small box, made of card, houses a wooden handle for the head of a hammer or, perhaps, it is a chair leg – it protrudes from a stronghold of sun-baked bricks. In the darker recesses of the room, a bath tub leans crookedly against the umber wall. Its skin is aged, corroded, speckled with rust and adorned with cobwebs. A tattered, yellowed, newspaper drapes across the tub's down-turned lip, hung as a sheet on the line to dry. Its companion pages, their edges catching the weak light in the far reaches of the room, cover the floor like so many leaves that come to rest on a pond's surface in fall. Here they lie, fixed where they fell so long ago, prisoners of an unending winter.

Back now, into the main hall. Two time-worn sentinels stubbornly stand guard; rust bathed columns from which the rafters throw their husky, jagged branches, stretching, scrambling for the air that pierces through their missing limbs. The walls bend from the darkness. A bricked-in fireplace anchors an otherwise frenzied far wall, awash with crippled plaster and blistered paint. Somber notes of cold grey stone keep themselves half-hidden, cloaked beneath the languishing sheets of paper gardens. Here the light pools, leaking from every fold, from every chink, falling from the great cuts of sky that have here become the roof. A convoy of bathtubs spill out in the corner, jostling like stalls in a marketplace, against a backdrop of mismatched tile. The room now, hollow as the reeds that line the water of my childhood home, whistling in the wind, both empty and somehow full – alive in the song of an immutable silence.

At the staircase again, following the rhythm of so many before, leaning over its parapet to blink back the soot black coils below. Other eyes have looked upon the very same, parallel, part of this drowned air. Leaning now, with me, into me, their eyes peeling back time, seeing the dotted white train of veils as they move toward the Chapel for morning prayer.





















... The dormitory, its glossy halls dotted with little wooden doors. Inside each, the chattering of voices discussing the events of the day before, and the quick snap of cabinets and drawers as each student made ready for the coming one...

I lay perfectly still. The incessant drip of water from our leaking tap was the only sound in the room. Time stretched on. My side began to hurt from the strain of waiting. Then I heard them: the house mother's keys dancing in her hand as she strode down the hallway. We suppressed a nervous giggle just in time. The door swung open.

I couldn't see her, but I could hear that odd sort of silence that happens. The already quiet room became quieter still, as though in anticipation of the visitor. It held its breath along with ours. She walked softly around the room, pausing here and there to mark something on her paper. I heard the sharp objection of cotton sheets being tugged at; no doubt my neatly made bed was not quite pristine enough. This warranted a short scribble on her paper. Each morning the house mother inspected our dormitory rooms to ensure that mirrors had been cleaned, carpets vacuumed, garbage bags changed, beds made, and surfaces dusted. I could hear the cupboard doors being opened and closed, a sigh as she surveyed the dripping tap, and finally the triumphant click of the door latch closing behind her. We dared not move a hair on our heads. The wheeze of the far door resounded in the hallway, and the house mother had gone. 'Why aren't you moving?' hissed my roommate — a pause, 'What if she comes back?'; 'Oh she won't, she's halfway to Chapel now, she's got to give it a rest sometime doesn't she?' she answered me. The mattress across the room from mine heaved upward, disheveling the carefully smoothed bedclothes.

It was incredible what we would do to get out of going to morning prayers. Girls had found all sorts of inventive ways to outsmart the house mothers; some would hide in utility closets, while others stood atop one of the toilets in a bathroom stall. Standing was imperative in this scenario, otherwise the house mother would be able to spot your feet under the stall door. If you were lucky enough to have a storage cabinet above your closet door, a rope ladder could be fashioned for easy access. In my second year I was given quite a large storage cabinet, that I'd been able to convert into a small but comfortable hiding place complete with provisionary books, a little reading lamp and an invaluable tin of biscuits. It would not do of course to simply hide in your clothes closet below, for this was a place that was checked regularly during the morning rounds. The new and less imaginative students were weeded out quickly this way.

When faced with deprivation, one becomes resourceful. Magazines, music, and cigarettes were among the items forbidden on campus, and regular room inspections



PLATE 28

were carried out to this effect. Popular methods of preserving such contraband were to tape them to the underside of desks, bury them within your laundry hamper, or for practical reasons as well as deviant ones, pop up the suspended ceiling tiles from atop your bunk and slot magazines and cds into the ceiling cavity – this made them easily accessible from your bed while still concealing them from view. Soon after I had left the school, the house mothers caught wind of this tactic and, deciding to put a stop to it, uncovered a treasure of long lost oddities, bits and pieces that had been hidden above the ceiling and abandoned.

Hiding from Chapel was a delicious challenge. It's not as though the fifteen minutes of freedom it afforded was really used for anything in particular, in fact most of this time was spent curled up in some terribly awkward position in a cabinet, or standing on a toilet seat for fear of being caught. It was utterly ridiculous the lengths that we went to in order to avoid attending morning prayers; for surely wooden pews would have been more comfortable than anything we thought up to elude them. This of course had never occurred to us, for I suppose we considered this rebellion our one small grasp at independence.

When we became senior students, we were required to attend Compline – an evening prayer service. This was a service I did not wish to elude. It was lovely. I imagined we were deep in the secret catacombs of Rome; everything was done in hushed tones. The lights were dimmed, the singing beautiful. Nothing can compare to singing, quite alone, in a quiet chapel. The space becomes part of you, and you a part of it. Catching your voice, it plays it back at you until you feel as though it is no longer yours, and that you are in fact the space itself to which the voice is singing. You sing until your energy is extinguished, you surrender to the echoes.

I looked forward to Compline each week, but never to Morning Prayer. My roommate and I had discovered a new way to conceal ourselves. Our beds were top bunks with shelving and a desk unit built in below. The mattress was about a foot too small for the width of its frame, and if pushed to one side, a gap opened up between the mattress and the wall that was just big enough. We would hide in this space, covering ourselves up with the bed comforter – shielding us completely from view. In this way we would pass the time before morning classes.

...The figure of the empty halls cut into the barren landscape. It is condemned, caught in the last days of its long life. It will be demolished tomorrow, its bricks crushed to make gravel, its bones torn for scrap. In the cold grip of winter, what was once austere, now seems forlorn, feeble, lost...

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PLATE 29



PLATE 30

THE UNDERGROUND PASSAGE

The dormitory hall dissolves behind, a dim and overcast hue, its memory retracting into the dark corners of the mind, quiet. In that vague impression, that haunting echo with no origin, the descent is lost somewhere in the fog of memory; lost with the final resolute step of the school's little winding stairwell. I know not how, all at once it seems now, I was faced with some venomous serpentine passageway. A cave, it stretches this way and that, cutting ever deeper into the earth, too narrow for more than one to pass. Earth runs down the molding walls, that twist and bend until I am alone with the present; nothing beyond, and nothing behind. No light but for the gun-hole windows that punctuate the ground above, their shattered bottle-glass bricks collecting rain, dragging 'cross the dirt, grabbing at each step. At last the channel dissolves into stairs; a lone door, leans heavily against ancient hinges, propped up by a barricade of broken building. Resigned door. Its veins just visible beneath greying paint, beneath the pale skin of the ages. Its handle, encrusted jewel of glinting rust, dips down like the spout of a milk jar. The key that turns toward a jagged sky, held in teeth of wet ash. Burnt-out core, a silent church of absence from which my lungs thirstily grasp at the welcome scent of rain-washed air. Here, the sky stands firm – the bleak, chill day holds aloft the peat fires and the rich damp soil, bringing them down once more with its rain.



PLATE 31

THE CONVENT

Where death lurked comfortably, in the shadows of the school building's corpse, here life teems, growing as though from a forest floor. Life, that grows in the buckling columns of antiquity, down through the doorway that holds back the sinister darkness. These are the foundations of the rooms above, some exist no longer, having crumpled to the ground, letting in the swallowing firmament. A room above cuts sharply into the sky's drapery; its clean white mouldings preserved, suspended in space as well as time, lodged in the breath that is held in this place. It is a parlour of sorts; the black grate of its fireplace where flames once teemed, licking the coals, the peat briquettes, the lion footed chairs that curl round their claws in wait, the sunlight, flooding in from regal windows, catching the oily dust in its path, turning it upon itself over and over again – all are hidden in its memory. Beneath, shipwrecked lowly vantage, the heavy room above, trussed mid-air, seems proud – presiding over the charred remnants, the last standing, the last to fall to its grave.

A window, its spindles brittle as old bones, peers into the courtyard beyond. The colour of oxidized copper with hues of warm sun-drenched apricots, dusty rose dancing, beyond its missing panes. Three, or four steps, collapsed together, come to form a singular mound that bends from walls and teeters like the dying moments of a spinning top. This way and that, the bric-a-brac of yesteryear, tossed to each wall, a doomed vessel pitched on the surging waves. An open cupboard, a worktable, laid neatly with towers of square tile and lined with metal pails, their heights diminished into rust-toothed rings. Here hands moved gracefully, skillfully seeking out the tools for this or that, wiping the workbench surface to a gleam. It throws its despairing shadow now, its former candor gone, come to naught – a sheeting of bloodless pallor.

The scaly writhings of a sea, tossing its head amidst the trembling



PLATE 32

PLATE 33: 174 - 175

PLATE 34: 176 - 177

skeleton. Pitching, pining for the heavens, before sinking to the cavernous depths, defeated. Here, the shackled beast lies pinned beneath the rubble. Crackling vines twist their roots, tightening 'round bricks; the scaffold's noose, in toppling curtains of masonry. The cold creeps into every part of the body, encroaches on the soul, there is little escape. Few spaces are discernable. Here, the saltwhite tiled rooms, humble tombs. Great black soot-stained limbs crash through to floors below. The boiler room, its walls fallen away, its blistered furnace silent in the corner – no longer releasing its tired steam. It once heated the community bathhouse above. Little hooks for hanging the old drab uniforms, a long clean wooden table on which the carefully folded clothes were lain. The smell of powdered soap, the clean stringent smell permeating the walls and floor. The children marched in one end and out the other.

A fusebox, its eggcrate porcelain nobs still smooth, nestles amidst the green brush. Ashen beams hide mangled nails, their bent frames still carrying the last scraps of life. Sky above, earth below.











PLATE 35

THE SPIRAL STAIR

Another stair slinks up from the undergrowth to the unsteady beams of the floor above. A plywood canopy sags and drowns the steps below. A handrail, carved of handsome red wood, warm and smooth, bears down on a wall the colour of boiled sweets. At its summit, the smooth ivory of another rail sails forward from a backdrop of magnificent iridescence; bottle-green seethes beneath its blistered cream robes, dripping like jewels around shallow gashes of rust purple and great washes of shy lilac. It is this stunning bark, seared by the heat of fire, freckled and pock marked, glorious in its livid beauty – a beleaguered tapestry that, at first, steals one's eyes from the scene beyond. A delicate spiral staircase, looping tightly in the corner, rises up into the billowing sky, growing like ivy against a wall of honeyed brown. Delicate intricacies. Vines of lead bend upon themselves, ribboning into careful lacework from which the proud balusters grow. Its brittle, wasting frame stands eerily still. A touch would send it into the dust. Indeed it is, it seems, made of dust – as though it keeps hidden from view, alone in this desolation and, but for the rain that catches each grain of its existence and paints it against the walls of cracked clay, it would dissolve into the fog of the past. Dematerialize. What dream is this, that haunts thoughts, snarls in the pooled shadows, lurking, flitting by, within this duskward monument? Its knuckles wrap steadily, quietly, at the corners of the mind.

An opening in the solid cliff breathes new life. The lush green of feathering leaves seems strange – misplaced, among the cockled walls and arches. They spring fresh from charred limbs, from the sickly crumbling edifice. The stillness here is eclipsed only by the cold; a cold that lurks at the root of things, that, in finding its way past all barriers, seems then to come from inside. Above, the rain dampens the earth through the arabesques of pipes, wrenched from walls in the flames that leapt from floor to floor. They slice the



PLATE 36

PLATE 37: 182 - 183

PLATE 38: 184 - 185

heavens into fragments. Cast-iron fireplaces still dot the walls of the nuns' cells above, once providing heat on the damp bone-cold days of winter and the seeping chill of moonlit nights. The scars of absent walls, the windows that stare out over field-green terraces, the scraps of cloth that hang limply from old battered nails where curtains once shut out the sun – all are visible for their missing pieces, for their broken whole. Below, so faint in the tangle of sinuous growth, the outline of a cross; a rust worn emblem – it once stood abreast the tallest of the convent's spires, watching the far-reaching horizon. Now it lies swallowed by the surging brush. Time cuts down the ruin. It is here, in this world between worlds, that the nature of this place comes into being. From the splintered wood of missing floors, the earth swells upward as the sky rests its heavy drapes on the piercing peaks of roofless walls. The slate grey sky, the firmament to which all things are built, stands framed above the encroaching moss into which all things, eventually, sink.









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...The glass doors, closely watched by the house mother's office, stand at the exterior entrance to the girl's dormitory, their eyes peering out at the landscape beyond. Though forbidding, there were times that their security was compromised ...

It was a rain drenched twilight in spring, when we traversed the forbidden threshold. The kind of rain that drips straight and slinks from the branches of melting trees in the grey grasp of evening. When the earth rises up to meet the shadow of the sky and weeps for the forgotten touch of sun. This is the decisive rain that drills down to beat like a drum on the hearts of man. It is not the weak willed sleet that hovers over the morning fields, nor the stray tears of the shifting heavens, but the hammer of clouds, that subdues the world, forcing eyes toward the sky and men toward the hearth. It rings true to the core of things. The hollow croon of the birds flitting through the wet thicket call out their guttural cry, at once both sorrowful and pure. These are the silvery drapes that churn out their wrung clouds and rattle through the drain pipes 'til the last scraps of light are dispelled, and the ground is bathed, painted with a deepened shade of itself. We raced the rain - along the deep folds of the land, beneath the billows of sky, sagging with its weight. Laughing, running with the excitement of freedom and the electric fear of being caught, our clothes heavy with water, the scent of damp wool lingering in the air. We watched the lightning sail above. We held the droplets it tore from the grey clouds in our fingertips, in each strand of hair, on our skin, and dissolved right there, into the rain.

... The door is boarded up. It seems diminished, no longer quite so threatening - the strong stature of its youth, once so dominant, having given way to the hollow, bent posture of its age. It was larger in my memory, now I see it is so small ...

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PLATE 39



PLATE 40

SYBIL'S CORRIDOR

A bend in the fabric of a shadow-washed wall leads into the stillness of a collapsing corridor. A sheet of cream-coloured paint buckles to the floor, its surface swelling with pockets of rain. The same wall meanders forward into the asylum, into the dark; a small window, its glass panes dimmed with oily dust, looks on to the cluttered beginnings of a passageway - the entrance is blocked. The simple frame of a wooden stool sits against whitewashed walls, made stark by the light from an open door. Further now, the wall folds back as though introducing its origin with a flourish of suspense; a long, inky-black corridor. It is grander and more domineering than the others. The gleam of clinical ceramic-tile catches the weak light from two empty skylights while the bands of shadow that spill across the scattered floor conjure the vague hauntings of Sybil's cave. The ribs of flaking arches disappear into the black. At the mouth of this corridor, a staircase, much plainer than that of the school, drops down from a dripping ceiling. The stairs peel from their structure, lost to the dust before they are able to reach the floor. The balustrade is missing - its remains lie striated across a collection of broken radiators and bedposts. The gauze of a white curtain floats along a landing window; its indifferent air strengthened by the undiminished vibrancy of its ember-orange marigold pattern.

It is the light from this window that comes to rest on the unassuming figure of an open door. A room, the asylum's refectory, bounds into the dim light. The floor is cold, and mostly bare, but for the residue of broken tile and old table legs. Its windows are boarded up; not, perhaps, much different than how they might have been in life - obscured, blinded to retain the blind, they had been made opaque to keep the industrial school children from sight. The gaunt mouth of a fireplace, having blackened the height of the room in a snarl of angry soot, mourns its long extinguished flame. Rugged, grey stone rises up from the floor, coming to meet



PLATE 41

the loose folds of cream paint that hang from the ceiling. Against the far wall leans a wooden door, adorned with a signature of black spray paint. The doorway, from which it must have been torn, cuts into the centre of the wall; beyond is a little kitchen, lit only by one window. Earthen tiles, arranged at an angle, expand into patches of scuffed grey, and dampened brown. A large black stove stands proudly, its overhanging hood still mounted to the wall. A sink - the same white tiles that echo through the building, wink like the teeth of a Cheshire cat, carved into the wall in a long, eerie grin. The light from the arched corridor, leaks in through an open door; beckoning.



PLATE 42

PLATE 43: 196 - 197

PLATE 44: 198 - 199

THE WORK ROOM

Pressing on into the looming arches, into the congealed darkness – a room, a curiously large room, gapes from a wrent in Sybil's corridor. It is a room of no particular distinction; its walls are dim and lifeless, but there is something in their countenance that could go quite unnoticed. Here, in steam-drenched walls, and blistering heat, the laundry work was first done. It was not until later, that an extension was built to the back of the asylum building, to house the larger machines and boiling furnaces. These walls still hold the memory of that work. The gentle recitation of prayer, nearly swallowed whole by the sighs of hot water and the vigorous bristle of scrubbed linens. No talk. There was no talk; none before the asylum, none in it, and none, if one was so lucky, after it. As the laundry increased, and the sprawl of industry seeped into smokestacks of billowing black and yawning workhouses, so too did the bellow of the machines; with this swaddling, noise came resigned numbness and deafening silence.

The workroom subsides, resisting to a large oak door. Another staircase, shattered, and gutted at its base, but just enough to clamber up, scales upward against ravaged walls. A tangled mess of glass shards and furniture lies strewn across the sagging floor. A curtain coils, twisted like rope. There is no corridor here, it has fallen away, boarded up by crude plywood barriers – just a series of small adjoining rooms, with deep, low gashes where the drywall has been knocked out between wooden studs. These were, perhaps, the infirmary rooms – sterile in atmosphere. Beyond the third wall is a larger room; a partition wall of textured glass and green-painted metal divides the pharmacy from the patient area. On the floor – a set of old keys, coated with rust, no doubt a match for the rusted lock of the swinging cabinet doors that lie past the glass. A broken bottle of antiseptic, its green label still sharp though hindered at times by slight ridges and wrinkles. A door at the back of the infirmary leads into the dark once more.









BY APPOINTMENT TO HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH THE SECOND
MANUFACTURERS OF ANTISEPTICS
ROBERT & COLMAN PHARMACEUTICAL DIVISION HULL

Detto

ANTISEPTIC DISINFECTANT



∞

...The infirmary; its sterile sheets crisp against the tired light from the nurse's office adjacent. The scent of cough syrup and rubbing alcohol hanging faintly in the air ...

I lay in the stillness, drifting in and out of a feverish sleep. The narrow opening beneath the hallway door was the only light in the room – whispered voices creeping in with it. I had always been susceptible to fevers. As a child these deliriums coincided with sleep-walking, often spatial nightmares in which the scale of rooms would shift, or the bones of buildings would come to life.

Once, during one of these terrors, I crept down the stairs of my family home and walked slowly through our wood-floored corridor. At the end of this passage I could see my parents framed perfectly in front of a roaring fire. They turned to me and smiled, signaling for me to join them. But a sound, a slight needle in the air, broke me from my fevered dream, and I was cast into the swallowing darkness; I had set off our security alarm. I stood, quite alone, right where I had been only moments before, but now the corridor was saturated in shadows and the life that had painted its walls was dulled and silenced. I had moved through our house at night, my fever moving with me, colouring the space with light, corresponding to my surroundings.

Now, I could feel the damp cold against my skin, I could sense the distance that isolated me – the muffled sounds beneath a calm glass surface, the silence of separation. I do not remember much from the infirmary, only a feeling of its atmosphere; the dim, hushed notes of vague conversations, the cold porcelain of the round bathroom sink, and the dry starched sheets that scratched against my skin.

... The ceiling has crumpled to the floor. In the black, the debris is edged with the weak light that seeps in through a collapsed skylight. The sheets are still tightly tucked in to the strict hospital beds, their white cotton tinged a dust-grey. Metal bed frames glint in the black. The once spotless tile floor, now riddled with the soil of time ...

∞

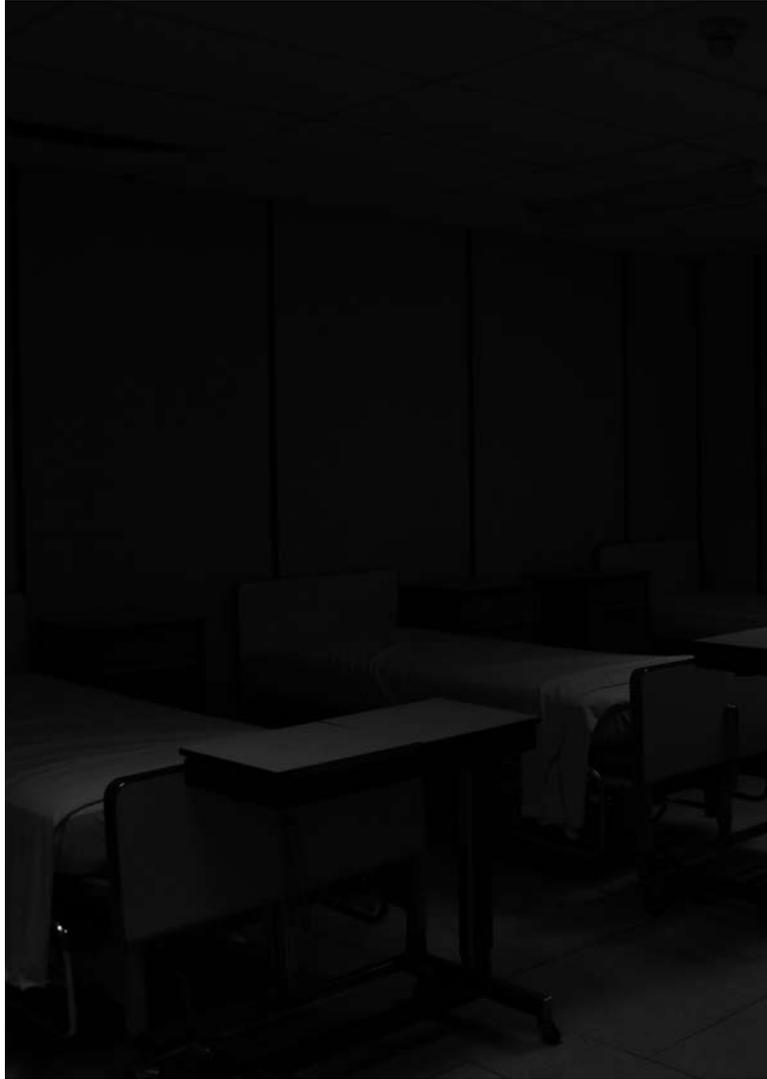


PLATE 45



PLATE 46

THE FIRST MAGDALEN DORMITORY

An immovable, wooden door – on it, a sign still reads ‘keep this door closed at all times,’ in its lock, a broken key. Behind it, presumably another workroom; broken possibilities of drought-torn wood and crumbling rock. A metal handle – substantial curl of daring cheek – taunts, though stubbornly fixed. The sticky sheen of the large oak boards, standing tightly shoulder to shoulder like a barrage of toy-soldiers, snakes its way through the soot-stained air. Its speaking of the corner there, where fragments of light cautiously peer in through jagged peaks and valleys, of shattered glass.

Pushing past the moaning barrier, the sky, the trees, the wall outside, come into view – framed perfectly, as though hanging in a museum, by a gutted fire-stair doorway. It drops off – a cliff – with a pure picture of freedom in its grasp, punctuated by the absent floor. As the light from this image materializes the surrounding space like a dark-room photograph, a stair well, its balustrade forgotten, slowly emerges; its brittle back aching under its own weight. The walls seem to ignite. Angry, sweltering scars, seethe under clawed skin; strange, deep gouges line the place where paint melted and bubbled from these walls. Past the debris; hand brushes, cotton cloth, flower splattered curtain rods, bricks of ash, and wood of charcoal. Up, away from the light – a new door. A room of layered wallpaper, like the rings of a tree; orange pinstripe beneath blue vine, turned grey, green pinstripe atop beige floral, a butcher-paper red under orange spring buds – the history of this place may be read in its wall treatments, which cling to life though surrounded by decay. This is the entrance to the dormitory. The supervising nun slept here, perhaps it was she who decided the décor. The floor is carpeted with a thick dust, like the first snow of winter. Shadows flit across the great barrel of the room. Three windows, their openings paneled shut like pennies on a dead man’s eyes, as though ushering this world into the next. What little light filters in, gives the room a



PLATE 47

PLATE 48: 208 - 209

PLATE 49: 210 - 211

PLATE 50: 212 - 213

hue of grey. To the right of the entrance, a niche where the Virgin Mary must have once stood, watching the women as they passed to and from their work.

A great arch, carved into the papered wall; an ominous threshold to the dark dormitory beyond. A room, quite simple, quite empty, quite long, lined with tattered brick and faint strings of light. From a conspicuous cut in the solid black wall, bleeds the light from a barred-in window. This is the window of the lavatory. A small mirror flashes familiar eyes. The sink has been wrenched from the plaster wall. A partition wall of bathroom stalls is encrusted with the lacework of the elements – deep jade simmers beneath a fog of off-white, like the threads of foam that trace their delicate lines across the wind-swept sea. Outside, the rain is lifting; it has drawn from the clouds a calm translucency, like the thin white of a bloodless cheek. Next to the lavatory is another door, another staircase. It leads up with faltering limbs, past vast paneless windows and swinging curtains – but, unsteady with its years, it ends in nothing, only a bending stair that drops off to its brothers below. At the far wall of the dormitory the darkness drops deeper, like the bottom of a lake; murky waters reach from a caving archway. The sharp corners of a fireplace retreat into this veil. From here, the entrance door to the room seems so distant – a lost memory.















PLATE 51

PLATE 52: 216 - 217

PLATE 53: 218 - 219

THE SECOND MAGDALEN DORMITORY

The second of the dormitories rises up into the light. Though its windows are capped with rough plywood, the sky manages to outwit their blockade, leaking in through gaps and holes. It washes its air through musty corners, over dust caked floor. The room at the head of the stairs, the antechamber, is a grand and domineering sight. Its ceiling arches high, making space for two great windows, their peaks centred with small rose windows. The floor boards, claimed by the cold, are scattered in disarray or rotting where they lie. Further, through the commanding doorway that leads into the main room; the ceiling vaults up, bending round heavy wooden trusses, falling into the walls of aging paint. Metal ties cling to each wall, holding them together as through straining to keep the building from disintegrating around them. Hanging lamps still drop down from the backbone of the roof, their bulbs broken. Empty brackets hang forlornly from the walls, where beds were once secured; tightly they would line these walls, with hardly a space between them, while others formed rigid rows down the centre of the expansive room. At the centre of the space, a door leads out to the broken stairway that climbs up from the floor below. The far room, unlike its counterpart below, is filled with light. Its floor tosses and ripples like the tide. Wallpaper, here too, hangs on with its last remaining strength. A chair; no other furniture but this chair.









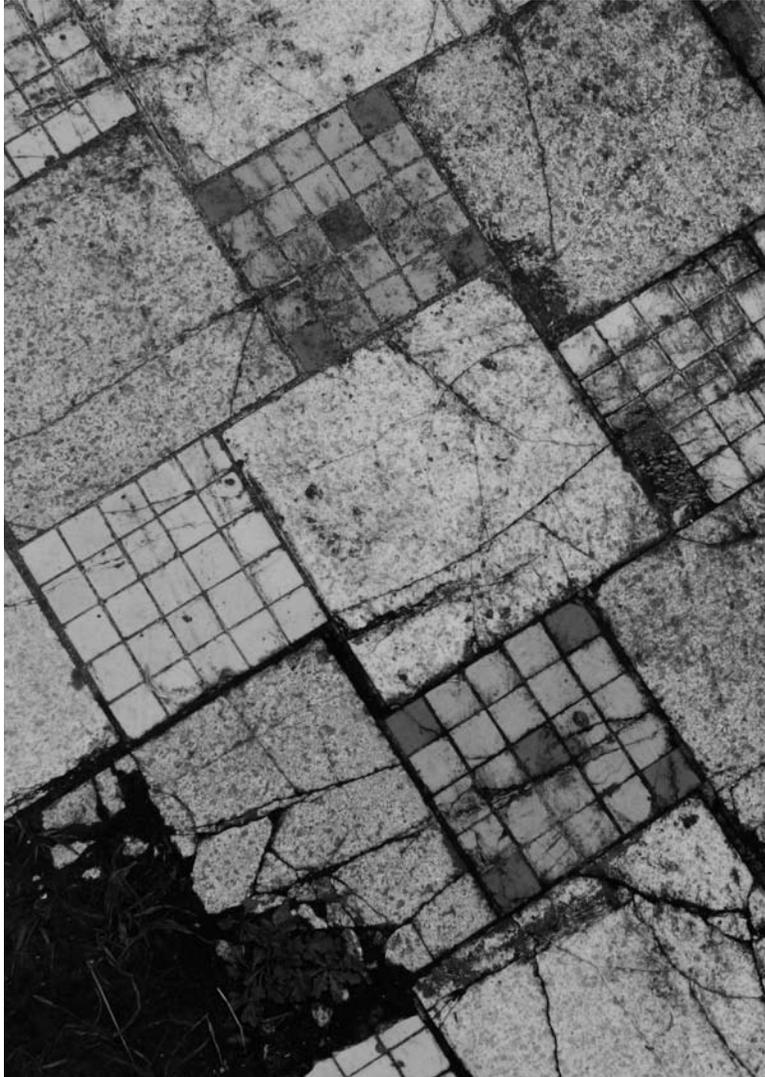


PLATE 54

PLATE 55: 222 - 223

PLATE 56: 224 - 225

PLATE 57: 226 - 227

PLATE 58: 228 - 229

THE WALL

II

Outside this tumbling wreck, this worn edifice, the rain has relented. Its drops still fall from time to time and, like ink, they colour the ground with dots of a darker shade. The earth bears the etchings of the past. The concrete contours still remain where the laundry building once stood; the rain water gathers in drainage grooves, that were filled not so long ago. It is this floor that holds a sadness. A feeling that something has passed; that something has been pulled from the memory of this place and now whispers of its emptiness. Patches of the cracked tile floor, crumble into faint pieces amidst the damp grass, their missing lines build imaginary walls – walls that now belong to days gone. To walk on these floors is to walk among ghosts. Openings in the bramble of leaves and brush reveal the stumps of tile walls that rise only feet from their tombs, buried in the wet and grieving sod. They lean against the high stone barrier wall, its surface laden with vines and rusting hooks from which laundry lines were strung. It reaches toward the sky, remaining strong; a dominant emblem of permanence amidst the dust of passing time. Behind the great figure of earth, hidden from view, the mass plot where the Magdalen stories sleep – their bodies, consigned to the nameless ground, taken from memory. Shards of tile floor, from the place they worked their lives away, manifest themselves throughout this landscape. They persist, buried beneath the grass like bones beneath a battlefield. By the bakehouse, the wall bends back to meet a toppled wrought iron gate – the entrance to the nun’s cemetery. A crease in the massive wall where a bench once stood; where the nuns passed some quiet moment reading in contemplation. Stone crosses dot the manicured gravesite, watching over the hulking form of the asylum even now. Its figure cuts an impressive form along the horizon, slouching toward the hills of the city; unmistakable and solid – a fact. The laneway, now covered over with eager growth, is hidden in the tangle. It leads up, from the one break in the massive stone wall. The front gate, through which so many entered, the forbidden terraced gardens, ending in a roofed threshold – the convent door. Up the stone steps, now swallowed by branches, they walked in fear, brought by a priest or a father – to be hidden, to be lost within these walls. The machines don’t sound now. The black smoke has ceased. There is only silence.









THIS
CEMETERY
WAS CONSECRATED
JUNE 20 1863









A DELIRIOUS INTERLUDE ON MEMORY

So much of what forms the story is dependent on imagination, and therein memory. To remember is to actively recall and, since we do not have the ability to recreate perfectly in all its aspects the exact memory itself, we employ imagination to move laterally through an otherwise fragmented whole. Memory is the means through which we perceive and understand our surroundings; a delicate web of layered and interlaced experiences. The red breast of the spring robin may call to mind imagery of iron rich roads, or the paint of a room that blooms in one's childhood recollection. This is the way in which we begin to tell stories. This is the memory that is held within the human mind, but there is another understanding of memory that becomes a part of story. This is the memory of objects, the memory embedded in places and things.

Memory; delirium beneath a calm, unmoving surface. The latent sense of fearsome and beautiful passing, a collection of infinite histories that fold one upon the other, contorting impossibly to contain themselves within one finite vessel; moments seized by time and held as shadows – left to dart across the mind, replaying continuously, leaping from the embers of a dying light. This is our lot. Ceaselessly searching toward an ever-shifting end. Memory is a distant dream, to be chased through the act of remembering, but never to be quite found. It is as quiet as it is elusive. When we are not looking, it collects within us. It coats the soul as a film of dust; though you may resolve to unsettle it at times, it never quite goes far. Memory curls up in the mind, a contented cat in a pool of afternoon sun. It forms the roots of one's identity, and communicates and intersects with an infinite number of other entities.

Consider the touch of stone; an unfathomable cold that seems to plunge deep into the past – there is a sting in the chill, as the charge of years of witness give way to an overwhelming sense of grandeur, the crushing weight of days gone by. A comforting stoic kind of cold that comes with a sort of certainty. Its stories are held in that cold. To touch the smooth surface, worn with countless decades, is to grasp at the immensity of time, to connect with the viscous current of all that has been and all that has yet to come. You are a part of that thickness, that palimpsest of time. Your touch links you with the history of the stone, just as the stone fits seamlessly into your own individual history. To contemplate the stone is to contemplate its formation, from the earth that made it, that turned it from liquid fire into a cool, placid surface, to the quarry chisel that broke it from its mould.

I once read a Buddhist story, a parable really, that ruminated on the eating of an orange. It wrote that, in meditating on the

origins of the fruit, one may become one with its history.¹ The story talked of seeing, in the orange, the tree from which it was born, and the blossom that formed on its branch. It wrote of the seasons of rain, and the warmth of the sun that gave strength to the flower. Meditating further, the story painted each petal, watching them fall slowly from their perch, and, from the spot where they fell, a small green fruit appear. The sun and rain continued, and the orange grew. Hands touched it, plucking it from its tree, and it now rests in the palm, all its history there with it. What is true for the above examples is true for the memory of architecture.

Each brick and stone that builds its walls has its own individual history, one that extends into the time of the building, and the lives that play out, projected against its surface. The building becomes a part of these lives, just as the lives become a part of the building. Architecture is a construct of time; its parts generate more than their sum, contributing to an atmosphere in which a composite history resides, a latent presence, a memory that embodies the fluid nature of time.

¹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* ed. Arnold Kotler (New York: Bantam Books, 1991) 21.

PHOTOGRAPHY & THE INDEX

The photograph strives to preserve memory. Man struggles to perpetuate life in defiance of the amnesia caused by nature, at whose hand all things find their end. Death, as Roland Barthes wrote, is an 'intractable reality' which spares nothing and as such, must inevitably find its place within society – if not by religion, Barthes argued, then by photography. The photographic image is the closest imitation of reality and it is precisely its facticity which lends it an air of uncanniness. For once the event to which it testifies has been recorded, the subject no longer exists; the fluidity of time carries it away. The image captures the subject as it was, referencing its future deterioration. Therein lies the picture of mortality "which produces Death while trying to preserve life."¹

Photography, like the ruin, stands at a fulcrum point, upon which the workings of time hinge. It is difficult to imagine another medium that so effectively combines the three tenses. During the taking of a photograph, the subject has an acute awareness of the likeness' future value as a relic of the past. This future is one of death; the impermeability of the photograph forbids entrance to the observer and as such "to the calm statement "*this has been*" must be added another, more lacerating report, reading, "*this is going to die*"."²

Photography can be used as a trace of reality but it remains just that, a mere shadow of a past condition. No matter the desire, the past and therein the photograph, are both impenetrable - mortality is their medium. The honesty of the candid photograph engages the viewer, particularly when the subject stares into the camera, seeming to pierce the platitude of death in their gaze.³ The image becomes raw, charged with the essence of what it captures. There, something profoundly human takes hold; "seeing a bottle, an iris stalk, a chicken, a palace photographed involves only reality. But a body, a face, and what is more, frequently, the body and face of a beloved person?" is an altogether more personal experience.⁴

Barthes differentiates between what is human and what is simply a portrayal of reality, but what of 'the real' steeped in the essence of humanity? What of the context that Maurice Halbwachs refers to in his discussion of collective memory? Objects, imbued with the past, trigger a memory construct in the mind, a narrative that evokes the lives they once served. Similarly, experiences and events are recalled only in the meditation of a place. For the collective identity of a group to remain intact, the place to which its memory is anchored must not change. If the place of memory begins to decay, or is erased completely, Halbwachs writes that the society it connects goes into crisis. Collective recollection cannot exist without a

¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1981) 92.

² Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997) 192.

³ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 93.

⁴ *Ibid*, 107.

⁵ Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America" in *October*, v.3 (Spring 1977) 75.

shared context; this would constitute a disconnect from the past, leading to a breakdown of memory and a fundamental rupture in the continuity of time.

Potent events produce potent objects of human memory. Like photographs, some of these objects, or places, speak more directly of their connection to humanity than others. The ones that do, seem to take on the essence of the person they represent, or, in photographic terms – the likenesses of their owners. When abandoned, places succumb to the deterioration of age; the statement "*this is going to die*" applies to architecture as it does to the subject of a photograph. The viewer is made profoundly aware of death in the ruin; the lives of those who have passed before seem embedded in each stone. Here, one can penetrate the darkness of the unknown, and feel the grasp of temporality. In photographing the ruin, the site of memory, one captures the context of time – reflecting the place in one moment, separating it in an image from the steady course on which its subject mechanically plods toward its own demise. This frozen memory is a shadow of reality; plucked away from time's current, it is the index of a unique event, one that has disappeared, never again to exist in the manner that it once did.

I refer here to the index as termed by Rosalind Krauss in her articles *Notes on the Index*. The index, as Krauss writes, is distinct from the symbol in that its meaning is read through a physical relationship to its referent. It is the mark of a particular cause to which it refers, the trace of the object it signifies. Photography fits most comfortably into this category. Krauss cites Man Ray's Rayographs as an example;

Rayographs (or as they are more generically termed, photograms) are produced by placing objects on top of light-sensitive paper, exposing the ensemble to light, and then developing the result. The image created in this way is of the ghostly traces of departed objects; they look like footprints in sand, or marks that have been left by dust.

But the photogram only forces, or makes explicit, what is the case of all photography. Every photograph is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface. The photograph is thus a type of icon, or visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object.⁵

It is this likeness that lends the photograph a certain physicality, or, as we have stated before, its facticity. André Bazin writes of the

profundity of the indexical character of photography in his book *What is Cinema?* He believes that the photographic image is the sole means through which man can satisfy his deep-seated need to represent the world with "something more than a mere approximation."⁶ In the photograph, Bazin continues, we find the object itself, unconstrained by the temporal and spatial dimensions that govern it: "no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model."⁷

Barthes also speaks of this transposition in photography. For Barthes, the object and the photograph are "glued together, limb by limb."⁸ The photograph is not merely a reflection of its image, but a physical trace of light, that bounces off its subject's contours, impressing itself upon the film. Thus, it takes on a deeper sense of reality, as it is the witness to the event it captures. The photograph is given to a sort of firmness, a bodily identity. Barthes writes: "What matters to me is not the photograph's "life" (a purely ideological notion) but the certainty that the photographed body touches me with its own rays and not with a superadded light."⁹ The photographic index becomes an artifact of memory, touched, quite literally, by its subject. In its preservation, it is a signifier of death; it cannot help this, it is both its burden and its purpose. Like the index under which it may be classified, the photograph's first message is that of the presence of its subject, a statement that is promptly and inevitably followed by the awareness of the subject's absence. For, even if the object to which the photograph refers still exists, it will never again be as it was in the moment that the shutter closed; "*Life / Death*: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final point."¹⁰

It is the bodily identity of the photograph that creates an atmosphere of the uncanny. There is an eerie recognition of time in the image, of a reality from which we cannot escape. It is a reality that "addresses us with the news of our own death about which there is nothing to say."¹¹ It is at once familiar in the duality of life, and foreign in the intractability of what it denotes. It is in this recognition, the familiarity of the figures and objects depicted in the photographic image, that one gives way to a swelling fear - a realization that the temporality of the subject speaks to the temporality of all. The uncanny always marries the two sides of familiarity and unfamiliarity, a fear that manifests within each soul, projecting itself outward. Rainer Maria Rilke captures this sense poignantly;

I have learned to be afraid with a genuine fear, which grows only as the force that engenders it grows. Of that force we have no conception, except in our

⁶ André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* trans. Hugh Gray (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) 14.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6.

⁹ Ibid, 81.

¹⁰ Ibid, 92.

¹¹ Bois, *Formless*, 193.

¹² Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, ed. trans. Michael Hulse (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2009) 107.

¹³ Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America, Part 2" in *October*, v.4 (Autumn 1977) 65.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 65 -66.

¹⁵ Mark Cousins, "Introduction" in *Time and the Image*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 4.

fear. For it is so utterly inconceivable, so entirely opposed to us, that our brain fails us precisely when we strain to think upon it. Nonetheless, for some time now I have believed that that force is ours, it is all our own, and still it is too powerful for us. It is true that we do not know it; but do we not know the least about what is most our own?¹²

The photographic index has what Krauss describes as an 'undeniable veracity,' a truth that is both made from the material of time, and somehow resides outside of time as an artifact of the past.

In part two of her *Notes on the Index*, Krauss refers to an exhibition entitled "Rooms," in which artists captured elements of a derelict building in their work. The resultant work inevitably dealt with absence, a sense of loss of the past in the building – in a word, the index. The art had the ambition to portray the very presence of the building, "to find strategies to force its surface into the field of the work. Yet even as that presence surfaces, it fills the work with an extraordinary sense of time-past."¹³ This is the quiet power of the photographic image. It lulls its viewer into a sense of preserved time, a feeling that in the photograph there lies something of presence, that the moment is alive in the immediacy of its index; but, this concept of 'reality' that is created in such an image is soon brought into a realm of unreality, as the viewer realizes that it in fact is impenetrable.

Photography produces an illogical conjunction of the *here* and the *formerly*. It is thus at the level of the denotated message or message without code that one can plainly understand the real unreality of the photograph. Its unreality is that of the *here*, since the photograph is never experienced as an illusion; it is nothing but a presence (one must continually keep in mind the magical character of the photographic image). Its reality is that of a *having-been-there*, because in all photographs there is the constantly amazing evidence: *this took place in this way*. We possess, then, as a kind of precious miracle, a reality from which we are ourselves sheltered.¹⁴

Simultaneously, the subject, photographer, and viewer of the photographic image becomes aware that the presence preserved in the photograph itself is one that will outlast their own.

In the introduction to *Time and the Image*, Mark Cousins writes that the photograph sets up two circuits of time: for the *then* of the photograph "can outlast me in *now* when I am no longer. At a collective level, this contrast between then and now embodied in the photograph established itself as a popular reflection upon the passage of time. The indexicality, as it is called, of the image bequeathed internal life with a new, I readily understood, medium of loss."¹⁵ It is the dual nature of the photograph that lends itself

so well to documenting the ruins of the Magdalen laundry. In the decrepit remains of buckling architecture, time has come to settle in a stillness – one that is akin to the stillness of the photograph;

¹⁶ Ibid, 4-5.

[...] photography must exhibit a fundamental stillness – a stillness which evacuates time from the internal relations of the photograph. What does that mean? Of course photography involves the exposure of film to light for a precise period. But this duration belongs to the order of technique rather than to the order of the experience of photography. [...] We experience it not as time but as the 'click' of the camera, a vanishing point of duration, an event which occurs in time but is not represented in time. Rather the stillness of the photographic image to which I am referring is related to the draining away of time from the image in order that the image be exclusively the representation. What we call the 'moment' which the photograph captures is space, and it captures it in a piercing way, a way which the harassed business of visual perception can rarely do. The stillness of the image is an effect of a particular distribution of space and time.¹⁶

The ruin lies waiting. It does not call out, it does not pull itself from the trenches of time in which it is buried. The past has collected as a residue within these walls. Abandonment has left the halls silent. Lives touched this place. Photography preserves their memory, while also projecting their deaths, as it does the building; it states firmly and unflinchingly, we must not forget.



PLATE 59

PART THREE: *Logos*

The pressure of darkness acts in inverse proportion upon different natures. In the presence of night man feels his own incompleteness. He perceives the dark void, and realizes his frailty. The sky is black, the man blind. Face to face with night, man bends, kneels, prostrates himself, crouches on the earth, crawls towards a cave, or seeks for wings. Almost always he shrinks from that vague presence of the Unknown. He asks himself what it is; he trembles and bows the head. Sometimes he desires to go to it.

Victor Hugo, *The Toilers of the Sea* (1898)

R U I N S

To say that architecture is a construct merely of necessity is to admire a fine violin without allowing it to sing. The sweet, strained chords of a quiet refrain, the rough, guttural notes of an anguished battle song; this is the soul of the instrument, transporting its listener from the wretched sighs of a lover scorned, to the great turmoil of the blood-stained battle field. Architecture is not solely a construct of physical stone and brick, but an ephemeral framework of memory in which the lives of its users are recorded. It is the atmosphere created therein that may be termed architectural place. I refer here to the writing of Marc Augé, in which he speaks of place as “relational, historical and concerned with identity.”¹ It is a reference point in history charged with human memory and emotion, and as such place may be considered “anthropological”.² It captures the intersection between history and narrative. There is something elusive in the meaning of place, an aspect which is arguably its very charm. It resides in instinct and therein escapes strict definition. Place is a sense – a blind venture into one’s almost visceral perception of the past. It is a mysterious echo; a compilation of time which collects in unseen corners and gathers on surfaces as silt comes to rest on the river’s bed. There, beneath the rusted coatings of time, submerged in the shifting seas of all that has passed and all that has yet to come – place whispers from the shadows. In this way the building becomes a palimpsest; a repository of memory, a registration of temporality reflecting the lives of its inhabitants even as their presence flickers and fades from its walls.

Place is a presence, as though architecture lives and breathes with its inhabitants; it may, then, be understood as the soul of the building – the ghost in the machine. But what of the dark underbelly of life? What of the presence of absence? That is to say, a place that is no longer a site of human occupation and, as such, has been left to the natural processes of decay, or what I shall hereafter refer to as the ruin. There are few less potent grounds in which to experience human temporality than in the place of absence, uncanny in its stillness. Here, the fog of human presence still lingers in the heavy air. These spaces bear the traces of inhabitation, a residue of objects imbued with the life they once served. This atmosphere is not one easily rendered with words. It is as though, in visiting such a place, a narrative emerges within the mind; we find ourselves saturated by our surroundings, the sense of which becomes impressed upon the soul. There emerges a profound awareness of past life; the shades of which, remain.

The desolate spaces evoke the lives that once filled them, so that, in our

¹ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995), 77.

² *Ibid.*, 81.

³ Christopher Payne, *Asylum: Inside the Closed World of State Mental Hospitals* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 5.

⁴ Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* ed. trans John Sturrock (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1997), 24-25.

imaginings, the empty dining rooms are once more thronged with people, and the spacious dayrooms with their high windows again contain, as they once did, patients quietly reading or sleeping on sofas ³

The past, contained in the architecture and memory of the place, can be breathed into life once more in one's imagination.

T R A C E S

Let us turn our thoughts to the aforementioned traces that litter the place of absence. It is important to note that I am speaking here of the involuntary trace that human life impresses upon a space; the accumulative remnants of every day moments. The voluntary trace is, as the name suggests, a deliberate act of signature – an attempt to defy the whitewash of time. This is, of course, a fascinating characteristic of humanity's struggle to stay the effects of temporality however, it requires its own work in order to do it adequate justice and though it is undoubtedly an admirable subject on which to construct a tangent, it is not the focus of this thesis and, as such, is best saved for a future endeavour. I should like to speak instead of the involuntary trace under which name I have discerned three terms; the index, the residue, and the patina.

The first of these speaks of loss; it may be understood as an imprint or inscription of passing, a memory of a physical condition or object that 'has been' and is now gone. As discussed earlier through the work of Rosalind Krauss, the index is the shadow of the absent; footsteps that indicate a visitor who is no longer there. The residue conversely deals with presence. It is a film, an actual physical trail of objects sloughed off from the mundane activities of everyday life. When left in a state of abandonment this residue becomes an uncanny portrayal of its owner. As Georges Perec writes;

The passage of time (my History) leaves behind a residue that accumulates: photographs, drawings, the corpses of long since dried-up felt pens, shirts, non-returnable glasses and returnable glasses, cigar wrappers, tins, erasers, postcards, books, dust and knickknacks: this is what I call my fortune.⁴

These objects are not necessarily imbued with any particular value or significance but, as such, often provide the most intimate portrait of their past user; because of the raw nature of their honesty, to encounter this residue feels as though to trespass upon a naked life. The third aspect of the involuntary trace, which I have termed patina, is the physical erosion of time. The patina is a tarnish, a corrosion, a coating of age and use that engulfs its subject; rust, mold, and sun-fading are examples of the patina, which, in its presence speaks

of the time that has passed. It stretches across the abandoned space and provides the visitor with an eerie and acute sense of temporality. The patina encroaches on both index and residue and it is in this intersection that the narrative life of the ruin surfaces in the mind of the onlooker. In this overlap is born an odd sense of simultaneous recognition and subsequent rejection. These traces, which, in a different context may go unnoticed in their mundanity, become foreign in their overlap. Viewed anachronistically, they become caught between an intimate familiarity and an abhorrent unfamiliarity; where life once thrived, now hang the scraps of its last clutches. The overall effect of this is described most eloquently in Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*.

[...] it is that wall that is in my thoughts. It was not, as it were, the first wall [...] but the last of those that were no longer there. You could see the inner side. You could see the walls of rooms on the various floors, with wallpaper still adhering, and here and there a fragment of the floor or ceiling. Next to the walls of the rooms, a dirty-white space ran down the entire wall, and through it, describing an inexpressibly disgusting, worm-like twist like that of the digestive tract, crept the wide-open, rust-speckled channel of the toilet plumbing. The course of the gas pipes for the lighting was visible in grey, dusty traces along the edge of the ceiling, and in places they had unexpectedly doubled round and run down the colourful walls and into some black hole that had been gashed uncaringly. Most unforgettable of all, though, were the walls themselves. The stubborn life of those rooms had refused to be stamped out. It was still there, it clung to the nails that were left, it stood on the remaining hand's-breadths of floor, it had crept under the corner joists where there was still a little of the interior. You could see it was in the paint, which it had gradually changed, from year to year: blue into mouldy green, green into grey, and grey into an old, stale, putrescent white. But it was also in the fresher spots that had survived behind mirrors, pictures and wardrobes; for it had traced the outlines of these things, over and over, and had been with its spiders and dust even in these hidden-away places, now exposed to view. It was in every flayed strip, it was in the damp blisters at the lower edges of wallpaper, it flapped in the torn-off shreds, and it sweated out of nasty stains made long ago. And from these walls that had once been blue, green or yellow, walls framed by the lines that showed where partition walls had now been demolished, there issued the air of those lives, a stale, idle, fuggy air, not yet dispersed by any breeze. There they all hung, the midday mealtimes and the illnesses and the breath exhaled and the smoke of years and the sweat from armpits that makes clothing heavy and flat reek of mouths and the clammy odour of perspiring feet. There they hung, the acrid tang of urine and the smell of burning soot and the steamy greyness of potatoes and the slick, heavy stink of old lard. The sweet, lingering smell of neglected infants hung there, and the whiff of children frightened of going to school, and the stuffiness of

⁵ Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, ed. trans. Michael Hulse (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2009), 30-31.

⁶ Riegl, Alois, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin [1903]," trans. Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo, *Oppositions*, no. 25, (Fall 1982), 33.

⁷ Dylan Trigg, "The Place of Trauma: Memory, Hauntings, and the Temporality of Ruins," *Memory Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, (2009): 96, doi: 10.1177/1750698008097397.

pubescent boys' beds. And a good deal more was admixed – vapours from down below in the street or trickles brought from above by the rain, which is not clean over cities. And still more had been wafted in by the weak, tame, domesticated breezes that always stay in the same street. And there was a lot more besides of unknown origin. I did say, did I not, that all the walls had been demolished but for the last –? It is that last wall that I have been talking of all along. You might assume I stood looking at it for a long time, but I swear I broke into a run the moment I recognized that wall. For that is the terrible thing: I recognized it. I recognize everything here, and that is why it enters into me so readily: it is at home in me.⁵

The dying light of past life still clings to the building long after it is absented. There is a force behind the ruin that channels memory, and in its presence a story is lifted from decaying floors boards and peeling walls. The narrative that emerges, regardless of whether it is historical or fictional, informs one's emotional understanding of place; it is as though the real and the imagined, braid together to become a singular construct and identity, allowing one to intimately connect with the lives of those who have passed through the architecture. In this way the place of absence witnesses and accumulates human temporality, lying in an elusive and fragmented in-between state at the intersection of index, residue, and patina. It is in its liminal nature, that the ruin comes to be defined.

THE IN - BETWEEN

The ruin embodies the slow workings of time. It is subject to nature's decay, and therein differs from what has been destroyed by unnatural means. The ruin steadfastly holds a resemblance to what once was. Hinged on a strange fulcrum point in time, the ruin is claimed by the past, but continues to age within the present, steadily progressing on a timeline that recedes into the distant reaches of the future. It is a dislocation of time, managing to remain in a permanent state of transience until it finally ceases to exist, becoming a site. According to Alois Riegl's theory of age-value, the value of temporal architecture is somewhat self-destructive; eventually the built form that is left to the processes of decay will no longer convey the traces of its original form or purpose, or indeed any indication of man's imprint or presence at all.⁶ Therefore its age-value decreases as its state of deterioration increases. Or, as Dylan Trigg writes in his *The Place of Trauma: Memory, Hauntings, and the Temporality of Ruins*;

The structural property of site as a 'residuum' verifies the ambiguous temporal past it shares with place. As such, the emergence of site coincides with the disappearance of place.⁷

It may be said, then, that the ruin exists solely in the in-between, in the transition from place to site.⁸ The abandoned place “hovers between the realms of the real and the imaginary, between the finite and the infinite, between the knowable and the impermeable.”⁹ The ruin is liminal; all time stretches out before and beyond it and, reflected in the slow erosion of its walls, the fleeting nature of human life reaffirms itself. The inevitability of fatality is woven into the fabric of all creation. All things crumble and fall with passing time, returning to the dust from whence they came. As stated above, abandoned architecture and its residues reflect the fates of those who belonged to it, a mimesis of the conditions in which it resides. In this way, the built world takes on human characteristics. Victor Hugo in his *Toilers of the Sea* writes that “the house, like man, can become a skeleton. A superstition is enough to kill it. Then it is terrible.”¹⁰ The etchings of life can be read within the ruin, creating an atmospheric human narrative that is as valuable to the way we experience space as the architecture’s factual history.

ARCHITECTURE & THE BODY

Indeed, the notion of anthropomorphic space is certainly not new. Architects have long relied on the human body as a “proportional and figurative authority” in design, a tradition that dates back to Vitruvius.¹¹ It is a field of thought with a great many facets; the threads followed in my examination of the ruin are three in number. The first of these concerns the direct impact that our uses, and therein our bodies, have on the construction and maintenance of a building. A manifestation of this may be understood in the modernist creed ‘form follows function,’ though this does not quite capture my meaning as it speaks of deliberate and orchestrated design rather than an almost latent result of life in architectural space. I prefer, instead, to think of the body as the tool with which we carve out architecture.

The proportions of buildings are derived in relation to the human body and its sensations; the warm introspective intimacy of a quiet study contrasted with the scale of a lofty cathedral in which man congers the sheer immensity of the Divine – these are both atmospheres understood through their relation to the human body. An analogy that clarifies this point may be found in the work of historian Jules Michelet, in which he writes of the building of a bird’s nest; this home is formed so intimately by and for the body that it becomes, not simply a dwelling place, but an extension of the bird itself.

[...] the bird’s tool is its own body [...] the house is a bird’s very person; it is

⁸ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 11.

“In both cases, of course, the “uncanny” is not a property of the space itself nor can it be provoked by any particular spatial conformation; it is, in its aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming.”

⁹ David Maisel, *Library of Dust* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2008), n.p.

¹⁰ Victor Hugo, *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, in *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1985), 50-51.

¹¹ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 69.

¹² Michelet, Jules. *L'Oiseau*, 4th Edition. (Paris: Hachette, 1858) 208.

¹³ Spatial methods have long been employed in the art of memory. To aid the act of remembering, one may visualize an imaginary space, either schematic or architectural, in which various memories may be spatially arranged. Each general memory may be imagined as a 'room' and the subsets of this memory can be thought of as further 'niches' within the room, and so on. In Frances Yates' *The Art of Memory*, this is discussed in relation to Giulio Camillo's sixteenth-century Memory Theatre, a space that was designed as a large architectural mnemonic device; "They say that this man has constructed a certain amphitheatre, a work of wonderful skill, into which whoever is admitted as a spectator will be able to discourse on any subject no less fluently than Cicero."

Viglius Zuichemus, writing to Erasmus [1532], quoted in Frances Yates. *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966) 135.

¹⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1856) 323-325.

¹⁵ Trigg, *The Place of Trauma*, 90.

¹⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 162.

its form and its most immediate effort.¹²

The body shapes the building; in this scenario the body is the tool through which we interpret architecture, but just so, the building may in turn act as a tool through which one may understand and read the body. This is the second aspect of body and architecture; the building becomes a lens through which we perceive corporality. Our lives play out within or between spaces. Our memories and identities are often tied intrinsically to a spatial understanding.¹³ Of course, architecture is a sanctum, a protector against the elements, a hard shell of armour that separates the fragile body from the more destructive forces of nature – architectural environments foster life. It is no wonder, then, that our bodily identities become entwined with that of the architecture. Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* expresses this.

My body is everywhere: the bomb which destroys my house also damages my body insofar as the house was already an indication of my body. This is why my body always extends across the tool which it utilizes: it is at the end of the cane on which I lean against the earth; it is at the end of the telescope which shows me the stars; it is on the chair, in the whole house; for it is my adaptation of these tools.¹⁴

Merleau-Ponty takes this a step further, stating in his *Phenomenology of Perception* that the body, and the nature of spatial experience, generates meaning, conferring a significance onto one's environment to a point that it seems the two entities become one. It is this dynamic, or what is termed the 'absolute here', that elevates "the body to a spatial and temporal locus, absorbing the world from inside out" through a synthesis of temporality, space, and the body's motor memory.¹⁵

In so far as I have a body through which I act in the world, space and time are not, for me, a collection of adjacent points, nor are they a limitless number of relations synthesized by my consciousness, and in which it draws my body. I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them.¹⁶

Paul Ricoeur speaks of the 'absolute here' in relation to corporality and place as a sort of spatial reference point in his *Memory, History, Forgetting*; the intrinsic ties between body and environment become the anchor that holds one at bay, upon the terrible edge between the known and the unknown.¹⁷ In fact, Ricoeur demonstrates that the feeling of the Uncanny, or *Unheimlichkeit*, is one that shares chords with being displaced.

To be sure, my place is there where my body is. But placing and displacing oneself are primordial activities that make place something to be sought out. And it would be frightening not ever to find it. We ourselves would be devastated. The feeling of uneasiness – *Unheimlichkeit* – joined to the feeling of not being in one's place, of not feeling at home, haunts us and this would be the realm of emptiness...In truth, it is always possible, often urgent, to displace oneself, with the risk of becoming that passerby, that wanderer, that flâneur, that vagabond, stray dog that our fragmented contemporary culture both sets in motion and paralyzes.¹⁸

The body and the architecture, then, may be said to correspond intimately with one another – their respective identities and fates delicately, but directly interlaced.

This anthropomorphic parallel is, somewhat, a construction of the mind, though it is a relationship that can equally extend into the physical realm. In the ruin, or indeed in any well lived place, the body may be read as a physical trace, as the index of time. Take, for example, a staircase; stairs bow, becoming scuffed and smoothed by years of treading feet, and handrails become smoother, polished even, where countless hands paused or grabbed hold. It is as though a part of us dissolves in the architecture, becoming absorbed into its very walls – it therein becomes the framework through which we read human identity. This brings about the third aspect of anthropomorphic space, that is, the projected body. It has been a common occurrence in human history to find meaning through assigning a human identity to Nature, and to those objects that stand against its tide; the ship, and the sea it sails against, have been understood to be female and therein take on human characteristics. It stands to reason, then, that architecture too should reflect the identity and states of the body. Heinrich Wölfflin, the art historian, wrote of this mirroring in detail, stating that we “project a corporeal state conforming to our own; we interpret the whole outside world according to the expressive system with which we have become familiar through our own bodies.”¹⁹ This may be mere projection, but it is born in the powerful workings of the imagination – the building takes on the lives it serves. It is at the junction of anthropomorphic architecture, and the decay of the ruin, that the built world parallels human fatality. In a state of disuse it may, as Victor Hugo says, be killed with superstition, and therein take on a mask of death.²⁰

¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) 149–150.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁹ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, trans. K. Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966) 77.

²⁰ Vidler, *The Architectural*

Uncanny, 71.

“[...] Filarete compared the building's cavities and functions to those of the body, its eyes, ears, nose, mouth, veins, and viscera. Indeed, like a body, buildings and cities may fall ill: a building may, he hazarded, become sick and die”

²¹ Victor Hugo, "Voyage de Nuit" in *Les Contemplations* (Paris: Nelson, 1856) 408-409.

²² Victor Hugo, *The Toilers of the Sea*, trans. James Hogarth (New York: Random House Inc., 2002) 61.

²³ "For Freud 'unhomeliness' was more than a simple sense of not belonging; it was the fundamental propensity of the familiar to turn on its owners, suddenly to become defamiliarized, rerealized, as if in a dream. On the surface an innocuous inquiry into the psychological dimensions of the literary uncanny, his essay in fact precipitated the uncanny into the more disturbing territory of the death drive [...] 'The Uncanny' seems to incorporate, albeit in an unstated form [...] Themes of anxiety and dread, provoked by a real or imagined sense of 'unhomeliness'"

Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*,

7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

THE ARCHITECTURAL UNCANNY

Mortality is the equalizing agent of humanity; all eventually succumb to the awesome shudder of *la cloche éternelle*.²¹ The ruin exists as a reflection of this human fragility. Within its dwindling presence, one is able to intimately connect with the other; that which eludes the grasp of our understanding, that which strikes fear into the cavernous depths of the human heart – in a word, the unknown. Superstition therein surrounds the abandoned place, transforming it into something sinister. Hugo, whose works frequently deal with themes of erasure and decay, writes of this phenomenon in *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*.

Sometimes [...] you will come across a house whose entrance is barricaded. The doorway is blocked by a holly bush, and the ground-floor windows are closed by unsightly structures of planks nailed together; while the windows on the upper floors are both closed and open: they are bolted shut, but all the panes are broken. If there is an inner courtyard, it is overgrown by grass and the enclosing wall is crumbling. If there is a garden it is a wilderness of nettles, brambles, and hemlock, home to rare insects. The chimneys are cracked and the roof is falling in. Inside, so far as can be seen, the rooms are dismantled; the woodwork is rotten, the stonework is covered in mold. The wallpaper is peeling off the walls...The dense growth of spiders' webs full of trapped flies point to the deep peace enjoyed by the spiders. Sometimes you will see a broken jar left on a shelf. This is a haunted house – a house to which the Devil comes at night.²²

In its state of abandonment the architecture becomes abhorrent. It grows hollow; gutted by the terrible silence of human absence, Hugo's haunted house dissolves into obscurity. The unknown circumstances of its emptiness leaves only one certainty; herein resides the uncanny, the place of the other. I am referring here to the uncanny as it is described by Anthony Vidler in his book *The Architectural Uncanny*. Vidler references Freud's theory of the *unheimlich* (or *unhomely*) in his description of the abandoned space or, the familiar becoming unfamiliar.²³ An experience of this may be found in the sensation of entering a house that is thought to be haunted. Such a place can be said to harbour a "sense of lurking unease, rather than from any clearly defined source of fear – an uncomfortable sense of haunting rather than a present apparition."²⁴ The root of this fear, this revulsion, is that the haunted house is still recognizable as something intimately familiar – the home. This is the truly intriguing nature of the uncanny, that something so foreign can simultaneously be so familiar, so much a part of oneself. This is the fear that Rilke writes of in the aforementioned passage of *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* in which the protagonist recognizes

himself in the otherness of the open wall; “[...] I swear I broke into a run the moment I recognized that wall. For that is the terrible thing: I recognized it. I recognized everything here, and that is why it enters into me so readily: it is at home in me.”²⁵

The abandoned building, killed by superstition, becomes a soulless corpse. This death is uncanny. The building’s remains exist in a state of abjection, its body propped up by a deteriorating structure; a child of absence, no heart beating in its skeletal chest. It stares out through gaping black windows, its lifeless limbs crumpling into the damp earth. The awesome void of mortality that gapes within its folds both repels and seduces.

[...] in that thing that no longer matches and therefore no longer signifies anything, I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away. The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.²⁶

Death encroaches upon life. It looms on the horizon, a solid, definite mass of inevitability of which all souls are intimately aware. Religion, mythology, and culture have long been touted as the answer to the question posed by fatality; a question that has never really been punctuated with anything more than a full stop. Architecture was thought an embodiment of man’s permanence, a petrified memory that defied the erasure of time. Man has naturally become obsessed with death and its defeat. He seeks to preserve life through architecture, but it too gives way to the sway of temporality; revolutions have scarred it, religions have mutilated it, and nature has encrusted it with the wrinkles and warts of time; architecture crumbles at the feet of what is to come. It is man’s lot to build tirelessly, to produce evidence of his passing, to set down foundations in the face of impermanence. Death must be both remembered, and subsequently “thrust aside in order to live.”²⁷

Thus the place of abandonment summons the darkest shades of the soul from their depths – those that, although are always present within the caverns of the mind, are kept locked away so as to find the strength to continue. The abject is immaterial, it is a condition, an atmosphere. It is not the physical objects themselves that produce repulsion, but the state of their decay, which reminds one so faintly of human fragility and mortality. It is the gaunt, spiritless figure of the building’s *‘forfeited existence’* that gives stalk to the serpentine growth of alienation.²⁸

²⁵ Rilke, *Notebooks*, 30-31.

²⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 4.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 3.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 9.

²⁹ Ibid, 1-2.

³⁰ Ibid, 2-4.

³¹ Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997) 192.

³² Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 1st edition (New York: Harber & Row, 1987).

³³ Maisel, *Library of Dust*, n.p.

It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced [...] just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned [...] a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself [...] A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me.²⁹

It is the intractable reality of the abandoned place that plucks at the strings of fate; the ruin stirs a consciousness of death. The struggle to separate life from death is an ongoing battle, which finds its roots deep in each soul. As Julia Kristeva notes in her *Powers of Horror*, we strive to live isolated from reality, keeping ourselves clean, sanitary, and ridding ourselves of the abject.³⁰ To be sure, those who surrender themselves entirely to abjection, cannot return intact. This oscillation between that which nourishes and that which decays outlines the human condition; it is our will, our import, our struggle, to exist between the boundaries of the penetrable and the impenetrable, the known and the unknown, between 'that-has-been' and 'this is going to die'.³¹

V E R T I G O

What would possess a person to enter such a place? To cross its threshold would be to stare brazenly into the stirring darkness of the unknown – human fatality. The draw is magnetic, and curiosity prevails. The fear that saturates the ruin also produces a kind of vertigo; a delicious edge condition that seduces its subject.

What is vertigo? Fear of falling? Then why do we feel it even when the observation tower comes equipped with a sturdy handrail? No, vertigo is something other than the fear of falling. It is the voice of emptiness below us which tempts and lures us, it is the desire to fall, against which, terrified, we defend ourselves.³²

Decay "shares concerns with a kind of beauty tinged with terror – an awful beauty, one that acts not as a salve but as a weapon."³³ The unknown, shrouded in protective coatings of fear and suspicion, entices as much as it repels. The irresistible urge to run through its hollow shadows; to tear back dust laden curtains; to burst open doors, their hinges shrieking with the protest of age-old rust; to

pierce through the stagnant air, and cast light on every fold of its surface – this has been a part of man since time began.³⁴ Therein lies the majesty of the ruin. It captures an eerie tranquility belonging to death but there is something of seduction in its darkness; a kind of pull toward the abject condition, toward the fearsome inevitability of passing time.

These are enigmas. There is a sacred horror in these stones. The darkness of these forbidden rooms is more than darkness: it is the unknown [...] The house is now open to dreams; [...] The boys' first thought had been to flee; the second was to go closer [...] There is such a thing as the desire to experience fear.³⁵

In youth, this fear manifests itself in panic, an anxious attempt to stay the ticking clock. In other cases it takes on a form of arrogance, a willed naivety, a notion of immortality that leads the young to ignorantly challenge the blade of fate. With age this fear becomes but a dull pang. It is appropriated, held delicately within the soul; a grain of sand, once so troubling, gives way to a smooth surface of pearl. Drawn into the shroud of the unknown, we may conceive that there is something to be learned from the edge condition, an awakening to the unanchorable qualities of time. The forces of fatality are both destructive and regenerative, capable of detriment, but necessary to the renewal of life. The recondite awareness of the inevitability of death is a knowledge specific to man. It is this awareness that has led man to build artifacts of memory.

[...] from man we expect accomplished artifacts as symbols of a necessary process of human production; on the other hand, from nature acting over time, we expect their disintegration as the symbol of an equally necessary passing.³⁶

In the act of creation humanity searches for the comfort of stability, an ill-fated endeavour in a world where all things change in the relentless fluidity of time. Therein lies fatality. To create, to build in the face of destruction is man's lot; it is profoundly human.

If I think of home, where there is no one any more, I have a feeling that at one time it must have been different. In the old days, people knew (or perhaps had an intuition) that they bore their death within them like the stone within a fruit. Children had a small one within and adults a large one. Women bore theirs in the womb and men theirs in their breast. It was something people quite simply had, and the possession conferred a peculiar dignity, and tranquil pride.³⁷

³⁴ I am referring here to the Original Sin; Adam and Eve taking the forbidden fruit.

³⁵ Hugo, *The Toilers of the Sea*, 149-155.

³⁶ Riegl, *Modern Cult of Monuments*, 32.

³⁷ Rilke, *Notebooks*, 7.

³⁸ Ricoeur, *Memory*, 358.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

To tirelessly progress, to perpetuate the expression of an idea from the built to the written word, to overthrow the regimes of the past generation for the benefit of the next, to watch as the monuments of yesterday succumb to brittle decay – to carry death in life, such is the dual burden and poignant dignity of man.

It is not that this knowledge of death is one that is easily accepted. Humanity exists in an infinite flux between life and death; an inextinguishable struggle, as Ricoeur writes, between 'having to die' and 'wanting to live.' It is this sorrowful conflict that, in much the same vein as Rilke's writing, man may take ownership of – that man may accept as the medium through which he functions.

[...] death is capable of being inscribed within self-understanding as one's own death, as the mortal condition. But at what price? Biology teaches only a general, generic "it must be so": because we are this sort of living being, we must die, there is for us a "having to die." But, even internalized, appropriated, this knowledge remains heterogeneous to the desire to live, to want to live, this carnal figure of care, of the "potentiality of being-a-whole." It is only at the end of a long work on oneself that the entirely factual necessity of dying can be converted, not to be sure into the potentiality-of-dying but into the acceptance of having to die. This is a question of a unique kind of "anticipation," the fruit of wisdom. At the limit, at the horizon, loving death like a sister, after the manner of the *poverello* of Assisi, remains a gift that depends on an economy inaccessible even to the existentiell experience as singular as the apparent stoicism of a Heidegger, the economy placed by the New Testament under the term *agape*. If one persists in distinguishing the primordial existential from the variety of existentiell positions stemming from different cultural traditions or personal experiences, the gap remains at this primordial level between wanting to live and having to die: the latter makes death an interruption, at once ineluctable and random, of the most primordial potentiality of being. Bridging this gap through acceptance remains a task we must all engage in, and one that we face up to more or less successfully.³⁸

But, Ricoeur continues, even once the temporality of human life is acknowledged, appropriated even, death remains fearsome and anguishing, precisely because it is so radically foreign and opposite to our deep desire to live, "and because of the cost that its reception represents."³⁹ The ruin is a manifestation of this temporality, of the inevitability of passing; to become absorbed in it is to embrace death, to become part of the 'abyss.'

Wrought from the same temporal clay, architecture shares the fate of man. In the ruin, the fleeting nature of time is embodied; stripped of its former vitality, the place of decay is an atmosphere haunted by the specters of its past. In its folds the visitor becomes overwhelmed and simultaneously exhilarated by its transitory nature – a nature that so parallels our own. To stare deep into

the darkness of the unknown, into the clutches of mortality, is to witness a terrifying beauty, not to abolish humanity's struggle but simply to experience it.

Nothing beyond; here we are stopped. The darkness reveals not the secret. We are in the train of a complicated mechanism, an integral part of an unknown Whole, and feel the Unknown within us fraternize mysteriously with an Unknown without us. [...] It is this which tells us that death is inevitable. What anguish, and at the same time what rapture! To be absorbed in the Infinite, and thereby brought to attribute to one's self a necessary immortality, or – who knows? – a possible eternity! To feel in the immense flood of the deluge of universal life the insubmersible will of the I! To look on the stars and say, "I am a soul like you;" to look into the darkness and say, "I am an abyss like you!"⁴⁰

Man resides on this precipice. At home in the edge condition, man plunges on toward the horizon line, forging into the future, even as time encroaches on the constructs of his past. The ruin embodies one such precipice; its form is such that it cannot exist solely in the present, but instead occupies a space and time of ambiguity, whereby what remains of its past is defined in relation to what is absent. In short, time itself is intangible but its effects are the evidence of its passing. The ruin is caught between place and site, between figure and ground, and as such, as we have discussed before, "the emergence of site coincides with the disappearance of place."⁴¹

EDIFICE

All things begin and end with dust, the result of nature's tireless progression. Matter is eternal, but its aspect is not. Man is fleeting and his architecture yields to death in his absence, nature always the victor. The encroachment of moss on stone, the scars torn into walls by the wind, the listless boundless black of gaping windows; in the face of death man, the creator, builds to preserve memory, and to perpetuate life.⁴² It is his struggle with the fundamental questions of humanity that sustains him; man's purpose is to create not *despite*, but indeed precisely *because* of his understanding that nothing can withstand time's tide.

Man, a short-lived being who is perpetually dying, takes on the infinite. Against all the ebb and flow of nature [...] against the vast navigation of forces in the depths of man declares the blockade. He, too, can say: "Thus far and no further." [...] The world, which is God's work, is man's canvas.⁴³

Architecture embodies this struggle. It is man's expression of

⁴⁰ Hugo, *The Toilers of the Sea*, 88–89.

⁴¹ Trigg, *The Place of Trauma*, 95.

⁴² Riegl, *Modern Cult of Monuments*, 32.

"An aesthetic axiom of our time based on age-value may be formulated as follows: from man we expect accomplished artifacts as symbols of a necessary process of human production; on the other hand, from nature acting over time, we expect their disintegration as the symbol of an equally necessary passing... Nature's reign even in its destructive aspects – which also brings about the incessant renewal of life – claims equal right with man's creative power."

⁴³ Hugo, *The Toilers of the Sea*, 50.

⁴⁴ Trigg, *The Place of Trauma*, 96.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists*, trans. Alastair McEwen (New York: Rizzoli, 2009).

permanence; when it decays, the people who are recorded within it are wiped from the collective memory unless their memory is transferred elsewhere. Maurice Halbwachs in *On Collective Memory* writes of the localization of memory, stating that we must 'place' our memories within the spatial, temporal, and social framework of a group. Within these contexts, the memory of the collective is created anew each time it is revisited. Connected through place, the group attaches its memory to a spatial construct, which must remain stable, retaining its permanence in order to preserve its past. If the place through which the group is joined becomes threatened by change or destruction, the memory of the community is jeopardized. The architecture, being the embodiment of their presence within such a framework, represents identity much in the same way a grave marker takes on the meaning of the individual to which it is dedicated; it is a trace that announces one's mark upon the ever-changing world. Decay of the spatial framework of memory, brings with it a legitimate fear of complete erasure.

As the state of the ruin advances in decay, the site into which it sinks absorbs the memory of the place; "a reversal of presence to absence occurs."⁴⁴ This process gives way to a phenomenology of void space, a location characterised not solely by what existed in the past, but also, by what can no longer be accommodated spatially. The result of this detached memory is, as Dylan Trigg writes, the somewhat tense relationship between the emergence of site, and the desubjectification of place.⁴⁵ The ruin is pervaded by a sense of displacement, of having arrived too late – it is as though the stillness that so governs this place represses the movement of its phantoms, placing a yawning, impenetrable divide between the presence of the viewer and the inaccessible past, a past which is so fused with its environment. It is this haunted sense of passing that so permeates the ruin, and therein the souls of men. To deny this transience is to deny one's human fatality. There are few things in life of which we enjoy the unwavering confidence of absolute certainty; the inevitability of impermanence is one such truth or, to put it in other terms – the inevitability of dust.

So what then is the role of the ruin, as it falls into this dust? There is a tendency, a human need even, to preserve and protect the past. This thesis does not dispute this need directly, recognizing that there is value in passing on the life of the past to future generations; museums are dedicated to this purpose. A shrine to disappearing time, the museum, obsessed with death and therein a contemplation on life, becomes a house for the infinite – the archive, the collection, and as Umberto Eco writes, the list.⁴⁶ But there exists no museum for the collection of ruins. They stand alone, either within the urban fabric as with the ruins of Rome,

or isolated and introspective in fields of obscurity. As such, they resist the curator, and refuse to be catalogued within man's panic-stricken archive. This instinct, this magpie need to preserve, to stay the sway of crippling time, is not a misplaced endeavour. It is the understanding of this author, however, that the fluidity of time is something that may be only temporarily dammed. Eventually the power of nature reclaims the mortar and stone it lent to the architect. Any attempt at preservation is just another singular event in the life cycle of a building, a mark on a timeline that ultimately retreats into the earth.

⁴⁷ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 200.

THE STORYTELLER

In understanding and accepting this temporality, we may begin to look at the building in terms of its essence, or, its effect. For, if we ask the critical question of what is at stake within the ruin, it is my belief that the answer will resound back firmly and assuredly – it is story that gives place its meaning. The value of preserving the skeleton of a place is just that; the residual meaning that may be found in something that no longer exists within its context and extends beyond its allotted time. This, perhaps, is a question to be put to the community that supports the preserved structure, for, it is they who will ultimately take up the role of caretaker. Architecture is the loom upon which human narrative is woven. It is this relationship that lends both place, and the people connected by it, their value. Therefore, the built construct may communicate its truth through its stories.

The ruin is a storyteller of particular potency, a sentinel that watches and records the ever shifting lives of the people that have lived within it. This is where we may once again return to the idea of place. Just as the architecture absorbs the impact of life, the building in turn becomes dissolved into the memory of the individuals to which it is bound. Anthony Vidler describes this reciprocal relationship in his discussion of Halbwachs;

In Halbwach's words, 'spatial images play such a role in the collective memory. The place occupied by a group is not like a chalkboard on which one writes, and then erases, numbers and figures.' The blackboard, afterall, remains profoundly indifferent to the figures inscribed on its surface, while a place receives the imprint of a group, and vice versa [...]⁴⁷

In place, time has a thickness. It is a density in which, layered one atop the other, are the memory of those whose stories have crossed paths with that of the architecture. This vicissitude of memory, this sense of place, is by nature inclusive and unbiased. "Inscribed on

⁴⁸ Ricoeur, *Memory*, 415.

its surface” are all those who have inhabited or visited the building, as well as, and perhaps most significantly for the case of this thesis, those who have gained its impression through myth or story. Though the place itself may carry different value among the various groups stored within its walls, its own memory flows effortlessly from inhabitant to visitor; each story therein exists simultaneously.

In the Magdalen ruin these stories lie hidden. Though a gulf of time separates my own visitation from the lives of the penitents who lived, worked, and in some cases died within its walls, we are connected seamlessly in the memory of place. I have come to be a part of the building’s identity just as it has been absorbed into my own. Taking Maurice Halbwachs’ theory to a larger scale, the reciprocal relationship between place and group may be said to apply to the Magdalen system as a whole, in relation to Irish cultural memory. Its desolate remains hold an untold narrative, one that encompasses a past of secrecy and communal acquiescence. The Magdalen asylums defined Irish society not only by their presence in the lives of those who were directly affected, but also by their notable absence from the collective consciousness of the Irish people. It was a purposeful silence, perpetuated by the system itself and by what could be termed as a willed ignorance on the part of the broader public. The women who were held in the laundries were society’s ghosts, their existence relegated to obscurity in order to maintain the virtuous image of Catholic Ireland. As such, the Irish people are embedded in the Magdalen ruin’s sense of place, just as the laundries themselves have contributed to the nation’s unofficial cultural narrative.

The women of the Magdalen laundries are Ireland’s disappeared, abandoned in the present as they were in the past. The remnants of architecture that still testify to this piece of the nation’s history are gradually waning, their stories fading with them. The ruin of the Magdalen laundry therein presents us with an eerie question, namely: Can we allow ourselves to forget? Paul Ricoeur speaks concisely of this choice in the title of his work, *Memory, History, Forgetting*. With the archive established as the tool with which we combat the threat of time’s effacement, it seems that we must decide between what we collectively forget and what we actively remember.⁴⁸ More specifically, without anchoring the stories of the Magdalen asylums to the nation’s memory, they will quickly vanish, cast into the emptiness of communal amnesia. But why, if forgetting means we are able to let go of the trauma of the past, is it important to remember? Andreas Huyssen, in his *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, writes that in this age of preservation, heavy reliance upon the digitalized archive has lulled society into a false sense of mnemonic security. Citing the panic caused by Y2K as an

example of the flaws inherent in computerized data (a system, he reminds us, that has existed for barely fifty years) Huyssen warns of the instability of this type of memory.

Reflecting on such phenomena, a senior manager charged with information technology at the Canadian archives was recently quoted as saying: "It's one of the great ironies of the information age. If we don't find methods for enduring preservation of electronic records, this may be the era without a memory." The threat of oblivion emerges from the very technology to which we entrust the vast body of contemporary records and data, that most significant part of the cultural memory of our time.⁴⁹

Thus, by externalizing in technology what previously would have been embedded in the cultural memory, we run the risk of complete erasure. According to author Pierre Nora's ideal, true memory cannot be preserved as an appendage but rather, it must become a latent force that lives within the people of whose origins it speaks.⁵⁰ In Nora's traditional society, memory was largely an oral discipline and, therein, was carried through story and the ephemerality of ideas. This is, perhaps, a practice to which we can never return, and it would seem that we must work within the milieu we have created. Recognizing the fallibility of computerized archives, we must forge a new approach to recording our history, merging the strings of traditional memory with the automated recollections of the digital era.

To return, then, to the aforementioned question as to the value of remembering, I believe the answer lies with Nora; he writes that society no longer speaks "of origins, but of births."⁵¹ This is taken to mean that what we once understood as a continuum, a tree of stories generated from one root, has become fractured into a series of separate historical events, or 'births'. The past, once so much a part of the present, has come to fall away into a distant and unreachable obscurity. We have come "from a history sought in the continuity of memory to a memory cast in the discontinuity of history."⁵² Without understanding that all is connected through the fluidity of time and residue of memory, how can we begin to once again see our future, Nora argues, as "a well-marked extension of the present"? Therefore the present exists only as a fleeting fulcrum point between the mass of the past, stitched from the threads of cultural memory, and the immeasurable length of time to come, shaped by this memory; we cannot see ourselves without first reflecting on our origins and our destination.⁵³ The Magdalen laundries are one such thread in the fabric of Ireland's cultural narrative. The question of remembering the Magdalen laundries is herein answered; to selectively forget these institutions would be a

⁴⁹ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, eds. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) 26.

⁵⁰ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations*, no. 26 (Spring 1989) 7-24.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Walter Benjamin writes of this in *Thesis on the Philosophy of History*;

"A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress." 257-258

Walter Benjamin, "Thesis on the Philosophy of History" ed. Hannah Arendt, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 257-258.

⁵⁴ Victor Hugo, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, trans. ed. John Sturrock (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1978) 196.

great loss both to the inmates of the asylums and to the Irish nation itself. In the past, the women of the laundries were relegated to anonymity and robbed of their human dignity; to lose their stories would be to knowingly inflict this suffering and injustice once again. Here lies the irony; the traumatic past, from which we wish to divorce ourselves through active forgetting, is made ever more present in its repetition. In failing to acknowledge what was hoped to have vanished into collective amnesia, we only serve to perpetuate the suffering. The trauma of the past is a matter of cultural consciousness and national memory; Ireland must remember, for, if it chooses to forget it becomes complicit in furthering the offense. The flux between history and memory is one that trades in the currency of ideas – the archive stores them, and the story communicates them. In the transmission of ideas, it is this author's hope, through the rendering of the Magdalen ruins, that the reader may come to find themselves as yet another inscription on the palimpsest of place; a participant in the memory of the laundries, so that the fluidity of ideas presented may be preserved in the fluidity of time.

As it disintegrates into the ground, the ruin becomes a threshold, a place of liminality, of transition. To walk upon the dust of inscriptions, indecipherable beneath the rust of time, we must face the ruin as its true figure, as the petrification of a memory that is not long for this world. Time, though slow, is limited; it is a sinking ship. A sense of urgency arises; at first subtle, but then growing in fervour. We are confronted with a need to preserve, to claw back from time what it wishes to carry away in its receding tide. We must make the tangible intangible so that it might, therein, become boundless. As Victor Hugo so famously wrote in *Notre-Dame de Paris*;

In its printed form, thought is more imperishable than ever; it is volatile, elusive, indestructible. It mingles with the air. In the days of architecture, thought had turned into a mountain and taken powerful hold of a century and of a place. Now it turned into a flock of birds and was scattered on the four winds, occupying every point of air and space simultaneously.⁵⁴

In the ruin, the sense of place becomes fragmented into the disappearing physical embodiment of brick and stone, and an atmospheric ethos, or what we have termed the 'orphaned place,' which can no longer stay attached to the building. The ruin is the in-between; Once place succumbs to site, its memory subsides. The site of memory retains some of its essence, as a battlefield holds its bones beneath a calm swathe of green grass, but it no longer has a voice through which to tell its story. We must, through representation and storytelling, allow the transmission of ideas to breathe life back

into the memory of the ruin. Though the 'mountain' crumbles, the 'birds' may lift its story to the air, so that its memory might continue. I do not mean to imply that the written and built words are interchangeable, but instead, that through their dialogue, they may inform and contribute to each other's identity and in so doing propagate memory. The afterlife of the building may generate new life in representation, the product of which becomes an object of memory in and of itself. There is something beautiful in this transition. It is a beauty I have endeavoured to embed in the spirit of this work. Just as birth gives way to death, and dust returns to the silt from whence it came, so too with the building. The built environment, which is conceived and first communicated through representation, may return to the form of its birth once it has met with its invariable end; its stories remain, a lasting epitaph, a tribute to the delicate and profoundly human nature of architecture.





AFTERWORD

The Greek concepts of *mneme* and *anamnesis* discussed by Ricoeur in his *Memory, History, Forgetting* define two dimensions of memory. The first, designates memory as a cognitive latency, a sort of affection or knowledge that rests over the mind, while the second may be characterised as an active recollection, a pragmatic search through elusive fragments of the past. Architecture can be understood as an external embodiment of human memory and, in making manifest the stability of one constructed point in an otherwise vast sea of infinite space, it becomes man's defence against the strange terror of passing time.¹ The ruin, having succumbed to decay, has a presence defined by absence; a fragment, alluding to a greater entity which had, at one time, been whole. It entices the imagination, provoking memory and reflection. The ruin seeps slowly into the heart, coaxing a reconsideration of the past through an acknowledgment of its temporality. It is a reconsideration that must be sought. The ruin, then, may be considered a metaphor for the flux between *mneme* and *anamnesis*; it is both a home for latent memory, and a fragmented body through which we may seek its whole.

Pierre Nora writes that the past, once so indistinguishable from man's present, has become severed from the temporal context of the now, the archive having set it as a separate entity to be actively preserved. Thus it stretches out, as invisible as the future that yawns ahead of it. According to Nora, memory, once so alive in the present through the telling and retelling of stories, has become a stagnant prisoner of the need to archive – a captive of history. We have shifted, as he writes, from *milieux de mémoire* to *lieux de mémoire*.

The remnants of experience still lived in the warmth of tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral, have been displaced under the pressure of a fundamentally historical sensibility. Self-consciousness emerges under the sign of that which has already happened, as the fulfillment of something always already begun. We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left.

Our interest in *lieux de mémoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that

memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory.²

It seems that this is a contradiction we cannot escape, a culture in which we are firmly embedded. It is through this medium that we must carve our identities, buttressed on the bastions that are Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, but, "if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need to build them. Conversely, if the memories that they enclosed were to be set free they would be useless; if history did not besiege memory, deforming and transforming it, penetrating and petrifying it, there would be no *lieux de mémoire* – moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded."³ In this spirit of flux it is perhaps possible to imagine that our established *lieux de mémoire* may inform strains of a *milieu de mémoire*, or, that through retelling history, an environment of memory may grow; this is the aspiration of *Within These Walls*.

The Magdalen laundries once represented a sense of national pride, albeit indirectly; they had come to embody the strong Catholic values that presided over the new Ireland. The strength with which the country dealt with vice, signified a nation of upstanding morality. It somehow did this not in presence but through a sort of absence; the laundries effaced sin from the streets, hiding it from sight and working behind the scenes, unbeknownst to many in the general public. Thus it was not a pride rooted in the collective consciousness of female penitentiaries, so swathed in secrecy, but in the resultant 'purity' of the streets – it was a place defined by silence. Now, with survivor testimony finally unearthed and Irish society slowly coming to accept and acknowledge their suffering, the laundries have become a new source of shame. They have made these changes from the margin line. They have not done so in the public consciousness in the way that Nora intimates of his *lieux de mémoire*.⁴

The Magdalen laundries have a meaning that is deeply entrenched in a sense not of presence, but indeed of absence. The Church and the Government have relegated the Magdalen women to the periphery once again – only heeding their voices from a safe distance, and displaying no real effort to acknowledge the inmates' suffering. It is a pain that extends past the boundaries of the Magdalen asylum's walls; Ireland herself is still nursing this wound, grieving for her mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives. It is imperative, then, to cast off the willed blindness that has surrounded

the Magdalen laundries even to this day, and introduce the stories of these women into Ireland's collective memory.

With their ruins being swept further out on time's receding tide, and silence surrounding their stories, the Magdalen laundries and the women who passed through them, run the risk of being forgotten both by history and memory. Is it my intention then, as Nora may see it in the light of his *lieux de mémoire*, to attempt to stop time, to halt the pressing wave of progress? – perhaps. It is difficult to deny that it is a story told as much through the eyes of history as through those of memory. But consider; the Magdalen ruin, the remains which cannot truly find peace within the definition of a *lieu de mémoire*, for, it is a place that has only known isolation, has been transcribed in these pages. I do not wish to stop time, as it is manifest in the decay of the physical construct, but instead to preserve in story what has largely been ignored by history. To perhaps, stay time long enough to open the Magdalen laundries to memory; to allow them to be absorbed and appropriated into the Irish collective narrative; to commit to words what is swiftly falling away from the present, and in so doing, revive something of Nora's *milieux de mémoire*; to place the memory of the Magdalen women through the stories embedded in the architecture that contained them.

It is of course, an impossible task, to bring into words the infinite meaning inherent in a place, to record the essence of its atmosphere and the detail of its spatial experience. It was, perhaps, this impossibility that drove the work from the outset. It sprang from a need to understand, a search for a lost memory that had been suffocated in silence, a desire to root out the truth buried beneath the collapse of time. But it is a truth that lies in *anamnesis*, in the active chase of memory and the effort to defeat what we cannot; it is the will to remember. A process of *anamnesis*, drowning in the shards of the past, *Within These Walls* endeavours to anchor this memory. It is a maddening scramble to cast wide the net over an elusive being that slips from each grasp, and in this manner it was ill-fated from the start, humbly presenting itself, fragmented and incomplete as the ruin of which it speaks. For myself I have found, as so many others have before, that it is through the search for memory that we are able to find meaning; it is the struggle toward the truth that holds the truth.

A P P E N D I X



PLATE 1



PLATE 2



PLATE 3



PLATE 4



PLATE 5

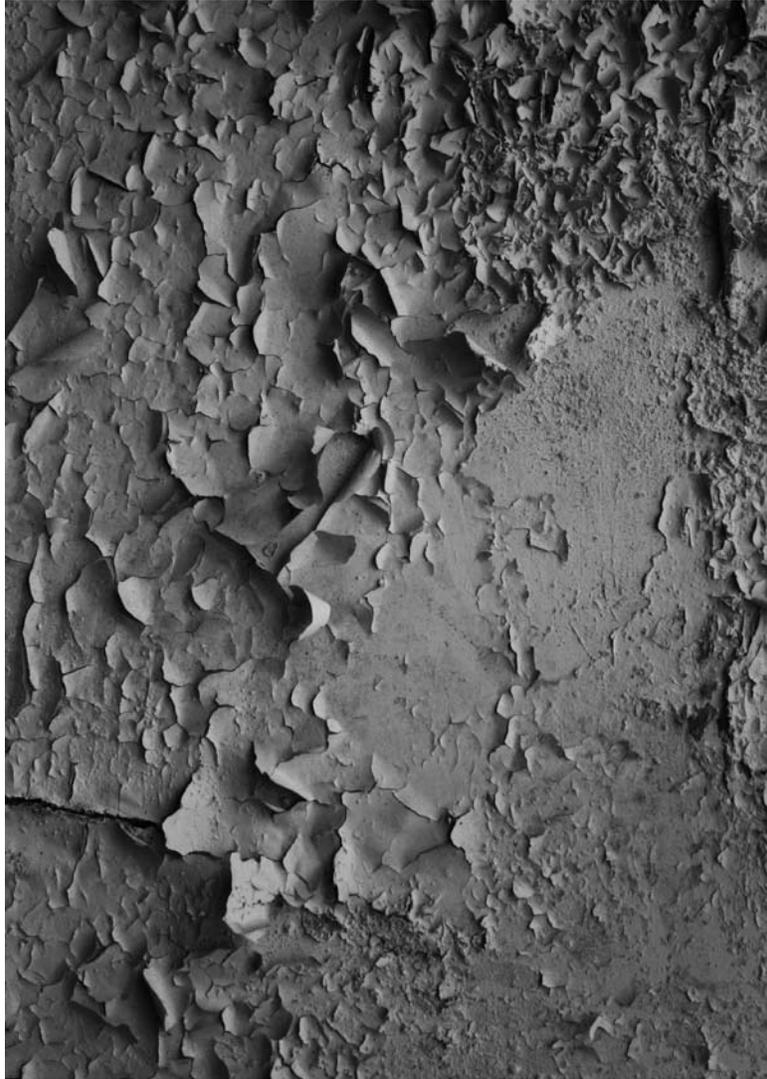


PLATE 6



PLATE 7



PLATE 8



PLATE 9



PLATE 10



PLATE 11



PLATE 12

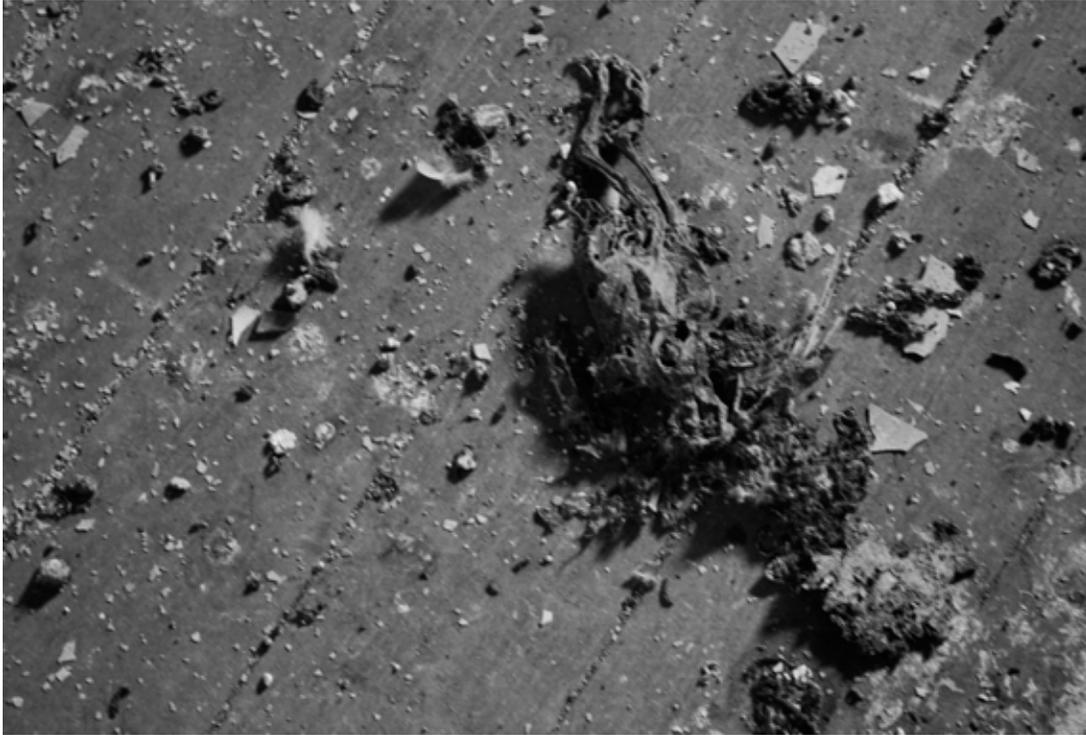


PLATE 13



PLATE 14



PLATE 15



PLATE 16



PLATE 17



PLATE 18



PLATE 19



PLATE 20



PLATE 21



PLATE 22



PLATE 23



PLATE 24



PLATE 25



PLATE 26



PLATE 27



PLATE 28



PLATE 29



PLATE 30



PLATE 31



PLATE 32



PLATE 33



PLATE 34



PLATE 35



PLATE 36



PLATE 37



PLATE 38



PLATE 39



PLATE 40



PLATE 41



PLATE 42



PLATE 43



PLATE 44



PLATE 45



PLATE 46



PLATE 47



PLATE 48



PLATE 49



PLATE 50



PLATE 51



PLATE 52



PLATE 53



PLATE 54



PLATE 55



PLATE 56



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PLATE 82



PLATE 83



PLATE 84



PLATE 85



PLATE 86



PLATE 87



PLATE 88



PLATE 89



PLATE 90



PLATE 91



PLATE 92



PLATE 93

NOTES

ABSTRACT

¹ Victor Hugo, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, trans. ed. John Sturrock (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1978) 196.

FOREWORD

¹ Donlyn Lyndon. "The Place of Memory." In *Spatial Recall: Memory in Architecture and Landscape*, ed. Marc Treib (New York: Routledge, 2009) 63.

² Maurice Halbwahcs. *On Collective Memory*, ed. trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

³ Pierre Nora. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." In *Representations*, no. 26, trans. Marc Roudebush (Spring 1989) 8.

"The "acceleration of history," then, confronts us with the brutal realization of the difference between real memory – social and unviolated, exemplified in but also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies – and history, which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past. On the one hand, we find an integrated, dictatorial memory – unself-conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actualizing, a memory without a past that ceaselessly reinvents tradition, linking the history of its ancestors to the undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth – and on the other hand, our memory, nothing more in fact than sifted and sorted historical traces. The gulf between the two has deepened in modern times with the growing belief in a right, a capacity, and even a duty to change. Today, this distance has been stretched to its convulsive limit."

⁴ Victor Hugo, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, trans. ed. John Sturrock (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1978) 196. "In its printed form, thought is more imperishable than ever; it is volatile, elusive, indestructible. It mingles with the air. In the days of architecture, thought had turned into a mountain and taken powerful hold of a century and of a place. Now it turned into a flock of birds and was scattered on the four winds, occupying every point of air and space simultaneously."

⁵ Nora, "Between Memory and History", 9.

⁶ *Ibid*, 12.

AFTERWORD

¹ Pallasmaa, Juhani Pallasmaa. "Space, Place, Memory, and Imagination: The Temporal Dimension of Existential Space," in *Spatial Recall: Memory in Architecture and Landscape*, ed. Marc Treib. (New York: Routledge, 2009) 17.

Architecture turns "anonymous, uniform, and limitless space into distinct places of human significance" making "endless time tolerable by giving duration its human measure."

² Nora, "Between Memory and History," 7.

³ *Ibid*, 12.

⁴ *Ibid*.

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