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Testimony for the Forgotten

Sebastian Barry's *The Pride of Parnell Street* as Celtic Tiger Critique

By Kristi Good

Abstract

Irish playwright Sebastian Barry often writes about members of society who have been marginalized for their failure to fit within the approved narrative of Irish history. In *The Pride of Parnell Street*, Barry investigates Celtic Tiger Ireland at the turn of the century, a time when the country quickly became one of the wealthiest in Europe. Despite the projected guise of growth and prosperity, there were many Irish citizens who did not reap the benefits of this economic boom, people like Barry's characters: Janet, a battered single mother, and Joe, an ex-convict drug addict. Barry positions himself as an advocate, a secondary witness, for people who—like Janet and Joe—suffered through life's traumatic experiences and continued to struggle even in the face of the prosperity around them. His play is an act of testimony that entreats its audience to recognize and remember those who have been pushed to the margins of society. Connecting the psychology of trauma studies with the idea of selective editing in collective memory clarifies both the psychological underpinnings of the act of censure from the historical narrative, and the necessity of recovering that information for the benefit of both the marginalized victim and the current society. The play's relevance continues today, as Ireland faces a crippling recession in the wake of the Celtic Tiger, and many individuals are forced into trying economic situations.

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**Testimony for the Forgotten:
Sebastian Barry's *The Pride of Parnell Street* as Celtic Tiger Critique**

By Kristi Good

Sebastian Barry's 2007 play *The Pride of Parnell Street* focuses on the enduring love of a poor Dublin couple even after a severe bout of domestic violence separates them for nine years. The relationship of the characters dominates the dramatic narrative, but like many of Barry's plays and novels, history is always lurking in the background. The Celtic Tiger period in Ireland marked an economic boom, opening the door for foreign investors and resulting in major improvements in the country's infrastructure and a marked increase in the population's employment rate and disposable income. Emigration rates dropped, educational opportunities rose, and the population increased. While Ireland enjoyed a brief economic resurgence in 2003, the country officially entered a recession in 2008. Although Barry wrote the play at the dying end of the Celtic Tiger in Ireland, the story of the play spans from the late 1980s until 1999, when economic prosperity was at its height.

Barry often writes about members of society who have been marginalized, because they do not fit within the approved narrative of Irish history, and *The Pride of Parnell Street* is no different. Janet is a battered woman who leaves her husband, Joe is an ex-convict drug addict, and neither of them has ever had a well-paying career. Ireland became one of the wealthiest countries in Europe during the Celtic Tiger, but despite the projected guise of growth and prosperity, there were many Irish citizens like Janet and Joe who did not reap the benefits of this economic boom.

Barry's story is, at its core, about the unshakeable power of love between a man and a woman. But it is also a startling commentary about those who were left behind in the cultural and financial upheaval of the late

nineties. Barry positions himself as an advocate, a secondary witness, for people who—like Janet and Joe—suffered through life’s traumatic experiences and continued to struggle even in the face of the prosperity around them. The play’s relevance continues today, as Ireland battles a recession and many individuals are forced into trying economic situations. Barry’s play is an act of testimony that entreats its audience to recognize and remember those who have been pushed to the margins of society.

Lyudmilla Parts writes, “An individual’s memory, however private and unique, exists within and is formed by the surrounding culture.”¹ Individual memory, then, is part and parcel of a larger social construction, a group with identifying characteristics that may or may not be made up of smaller groups with their own identifying characteristics. The group will ultimately adopt the narrative that best supports the image the majority wishes to convey, resulting in a powerful collective myth that acts as a unifying principle, or identity, for the community, regardless of minority opinion. Because, Parts emphasizes, what matters “is not the reality or truth of events, but how they correspond to a collective’s self-perception.”²

As the terms “narrative” and “myth” above might suggest, an important way of communicating collective memory—and thus, social identity—is through storytelling. In her book *Black Sheep & Kissing Cousins: How Our Family Stories Shape Us*, Elizabeth Stone synthesizes an extensive sociological study on the effect of family stories on our identity. Much like Parts, she emphasizes the term “myth” to solidify the notion that family stories are selective and idealized, retaining only the more favorable aspects to ensure the story is acceptable to the group. Stone says bluntly, “Behavior that

¹ Lyudmilla Parts, *The Chekhovian Intertext: Dialogue with a Classic* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), 2.

² *Ibid.* 4.

threatens family stability . . . has to be censured.”³ Barry uses drama as his method of storytelling in order to restore the parts of the Irish historical narrative that have been censored, personal stories that threaten the narrative of the flourishing Celtic Tiger economy. Connecting the psychology of trauma studies with the idea of selective editing in collective memory clarifies both the psychological underpinnings of that act of censure, and the necessity of recovering that information for the benefit of both the marginalized victim and the current society.

The Pride of Parnell Street began as a monologue commissioned by Fishamble director Jim Culleton for Amnesty International’s Stop Violence Against Women campaign in 2005. The campaign featured a piece called *She Was Wearing*. . . , which was made up of nine interconnected monologues by various artists. Each monologue was inspired by a piece of clothing; Barry’s was entitled “. . . a green jersey.” Barry expanded the play in 2007, maintaining the long monologic structure and adding a second character. Janet and Joe take turns telling the story that brought them to their current circumstances in 1999, but do not interact until the close of the play.

Janet and Joe Brady lived on Parnell Street in the northern part of Dublin. Janet had her first child, Billy, at age sixteen, and then had two more sons in quick succession. Joe, who is six years older than Janet, brought the family a meager income by illicit means.

JANET: He was what was called a Midday Man. A Midday Man did get up at midday and he goes along the cars and looks for open cars and then he goes in and takes what he can find. And then down to Parnell Street to the Afternoon Man, he was a man that sat in the ’98 pub, and he took in the stuff and gave cash on it, in the jacks like.⁴

³ Elizabeth Stone, *Black Sheep & Kissing Cousins: How Our Family Stories Shape Us* (New York: Times Books, 1988), 50.

⁴ Sebastian Barry, *The Pride of Parnell Street* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2007), 8.

Janet engages in the same practice if Joe is “laid up,” but she explains, “that was how it was, in them days.”⁵ Their life together is happy enough, but a tragic accident marks the beginning of a hard decade for the Bradys. While playing in the street outside their home, six-year-old Billy is killed in a lorry accident. The family has no money—“as usual,”⁶ Janet says—so they bury Billy in the Angels’ Acre of Glasnevin with only a wooden cross to mark his grave. Janet and Joe do their best to grieve this loss, but the biggest blow to their marriage will occur only a year later.

The major incident in *The Pride of Parnell Street* is inspired by something from Barry’s past, when he himself lived on Parnell Street in Dublin. He recalled 1990 and the first time Ireland had qualified for the FIFA World Cup. Barry puts his remembrances into the mouth of Janet. She says, “After a victory the whole of O’Connell Street would be like a bleeding party, and lads going crazy, and girls, and fellas falling down drunk and pissing on the statues, and general happy mayhem.”⁷ After a win, Joe brings home a green jersey for Janet, which she wears to bed on days when Ireland plays. But Barry also remembered the violence when Ireland was disqualified in the quarterfinals by Italy. He said, “There was a sea change between elation and when the fellas watching the games got home to their flat. They would attack their wives. The women’s refuges would be full the next day.”⁸

While Barry’s memory is vibrant, the historical record has glossed over the violent aftermath of Ireland’s disqualification in favor of the positive effect of their first-ever inclusion in the World Cup Finals. Irish journalist and historian John Dorney recalls his impressions of Italia 90 while living in Dublin.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. 9.

⁷ Ibid. 11.

⁸ Gwen Orel, “Sebastian Barry Returns with *The Pride of Parnell Street*,” *Village Voice*, August 25, 2009, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2009-08-25/theater/sebastian-barry-returns-with-the-pride-of-parnell-street/>, accessed April 12, 2013.

For three weeks the nation experienced something close to mass hysteria. I can recall, as a nine-year-old, people literally weeping with emotion after the penalty shootout against Romania. All that night car horns blared out from tricolour-laden cars. Eamon Dunphy, who had dared to criticize the team, was all but burned in effigy. Half a million people came out onto the streets of Dublin to welcome the team home after the defeat against Italy—my main memory of which is actually a drunken brawl between fans on College Green.⁹

Aside from the team's homecoming the day after their disqualification, other events dominated the news: football riots at the site of the World Cup in Italy (particularly involving the English) and Nelson Mandela's acceptance of the Freedom of the City of Dublin award on the same day the team returned home. The lack of documentary evidence surrounding the acts of violence on the preceding night, and the glorification of Ireland's participation in the World Cup as a hallmark of a newly-emerging Irish identity¹⁰ reinforce the need to address these silences in history.

The violence Barry remembers is indeed the event he recreates in the play. When Joe returns home from watching the fateful Italy-Ireland game, he finds Janet half asleep in bed wearing the green jersey. He grabs her by it, and Janet says, "It was like a red rag to a bull."¹¹

JANET: And he pulls me from the bed. It was all so sudden like. I couldn't believe it. I never had nothing from him before that but kindness, he depended on me, you know? For everything. I'd known him since I was four and he was a big fella of ten going round the

⁹ John Dorney, "The Perfect Symbol—Italia 90 and Irish Identity," *The Irish Story*, <http://www.theirishstory.com/2012/06/18/the-perfect-symbol-italia-90-and-irish-identity/#.VKGBYDFAA>, accessed December 1, 2014.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Barry, *The Pride of Parnell Street*, 13.

place. And why it didn't stop him beating the shite out of me, I'll never know, as God is my witness.

I can't tell you all that he did—you wouldn't believe me. Joe!

And when I got away from him and grabbed Jack and Little Macker from the other room, and hurried down the stairs as best I was able, I did, I looked back up and he was on the balcony, roaring and spitting fire like a demented demon, that's what he was like.¹²

Janet flees to the Women's Shelter, and remarks that she was not the only woman arriving. "Like wounded bleeding soldiers we were after a battle," she recalls.¹³ Janet refuses to see Joe ever again and goes to live with her parents.

While it is impossible to diagnose Janet as clinically traumatized by this event, it is possible to frame her experience in terms of the event itself. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR) defines trauma as

direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate (Criterion A1). The person's response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness, or horror (or in children, the response must involve disorganized or agitated behavior) (Criterion A2).¹⁴

Much of what we know today about psychological trauma initiated from studies of Holocaust survivors and combat veterans from World War II and the Vietnam War. While the scope of what occurred between Janet and Joe in

¹² Ibid. 14.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ American Psychological Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th edition, text revision (Washington, DC: Author, 2000), 463.

no way reflects these long-term traumatic situations, most of the psychological studies concerning the aftermath of these historic events is integral to understanding other traumatic events as defined by the DSM-IV-TR: the personal experiencing, witnessing, and/or learning of an actual or threatened death, injury, or violation of physical integrity.

Dominick LaCapra identifies why narratives of traumatic events, such as those found in fiction, should not necessarily be discredited in favor of historiographic accounts. He writes:

One might argue that narratives in fiction may also involve truth claims on a structural or general level by providing insight into phenomena such as slavery or the Holocaust, by offering a reading of a process or period, or by giving at least a plausible ‘feel’ for experience and emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods.¹⁵

Barry’s deeper narrative exploration of what occurred in the home of Janet and Joe after the World Cup loss was not something he witnessed, but it gives what LaCapra identifies as a “plausible ‘feel’” for an historical event that went largely uninvestigated and, in the world of the play, discredited.

Joe’s mother arrives on Janet’s doorstep one afternoon and berates her for not seeing Joe.

JANET: “Oh,” I says, “I have a barring order agin him and that's official,” I says.

She says, “You must be the cruellest girl in Dublin.”

“Oh,” I says, “I don't know, but, he won't be coming anywhere near us—and that's official.”

“You can say official as often as you like,” she says, “but it don't make it right.”

¹⁵ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 13.

“So what is right?” I says. “Beating the living crap outa your wife?”

“He never done that,” she says. “Everyone knows he is innocent, he never touched his wife.”

“Who are you talking to, Mrs Brady? Who's this standing in front of you? Hello? I am his fucking wife.”

“You are,” she says, “and God help him.”¹⁶

Mrs. Brady denies the act of domestic violence, preferring to believe that it never happened despite Janet’s bravery in openly admitting that it occurred.

Mrs. Brady’s denial is a typical psychological response to a traumatic occurrence. Judith Lewis Herman’s book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* significantly changed the way the healthcare industry treats victims of traumatic events. Herman writes, “The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*.”¹⁷

Barry firmly believes that silences such as these need to be recovered. He believes it is a mistake to gloss over the disreputable parts of one’s history, because it can erase people, parts of families, and even parts of the nation. He says, “A real nation has to acknowledge also the section of itself that is murderous and dangerous and deeply uncivil, for completeness if for nothing else.”¹⁸ Barry’s impulse is supported by psychological studies, specifically those related to victims of traumatic events. Herman’s comprehensive study of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the stages of recovery for survivors include the detailed narrativization of the traumatic event, so that it

¹⁶ Barry, *The Pride of Parnell Street*, 28-29.

¹⁷ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 1. Italics in original.

¹⁸ “A Penguin Readers Guide to The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty,” in *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* by Sebastian Barry (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 9.

can be integrated into the victim's life story. This indicates that bringing Barry's narratives of historically-based characters to the public consciousness is integral to healing the rifts in Irish society. Herman elaborates:

The response of the community has a powerful influence on the ultimate resolution of the trauma. Restoration of the breach between the traumatized person and the community depends, first, upon public acknowledgment of the traumatic event and, second, upon some form of community action. Once it is publicly recognized that a person has been harmed, the community must take action to assign responsibility for the harm and to repair the injury. These two responses—recognition and restitution—are necessary to rebuild the survivor's sense of order and justice.¹⁹

Although the law granted Janet a restraining order against Joe, her immediate family denied the act of domestic violence. Without that recognition from the closest members in her community, restitution and repair are not able to follow.

Barry takes on the role of a secondary witness in order to call attention to silenced individuals such as Janet and Joe who have been lost in the narrative of a very successful period in Irish history. A secondary witness is not a victim of a traumatic event but does become inextricably linked to the traumatic event in complex ways. Dori Laub, a trauma psychoanalyst and psychiatric educator at Yale, explains that when a secondary witness becomes aware of the traumatic experience of a victim, the secondary witness becomes "a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event" and "comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dreams and conflicts that the trauma victim feels."²⁰ These feelings of empathy with the victim are at the

¹⁹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 70.

²⁰ Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening" in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 57-58.

root of a secondary witness's impulse to give testimony for a traumatic event he or she did not experience, in order to personally grapple with the material.

Barry, of course, is a writer of fiction, but this does not undermine the efficacy of his testimony about historical events, as LaCapra asserted, because Barry's fiction itself can be considered a truth claim if it provides insight into a traumatic event that has not been well-documented. *The Pride of Parnell Street* is a testimony to the historical event that Barry witnessed after the 1990 World Cup defeat, but he has created the characters of Janet and Joe in order to wrestle with the historical event that had such an impact on him.

Secondary witnessing in the form of art is not a rare occurrence. Dora Apel, an art historian and professor of visual culture, studies the usefulness of secondary witnessing in the arts.

Artists as secondary witnesses, then, are those who confront the horror of the Nazi genocide and the suffering of its victims, and who continue to bear witness through reconfigured forms of contemporary testimony to events they have never seen or experienced. Because of their distance from the events, however, secondary witnesses do not deal with the Holocaust directly but in ways that bring to the surface the tensions and discontinuities between the past and the present, ambiguities, impasses and lacunas that are part of the 'memory effects' of the Shoah.²¹

Barry, likewise, is attempting to bring into consciousness the difficult living conditions of ordinary citizens who could not reap the benefits that the Celtic Tiger provided to so many others. Domestic violence, while by no means limited to underprivileged people like Janet and Joe, was only the beginning of the Bradys' problems.

Not long after Janet leaves, Joe turns to drugs to salve his devastation

²¹ Dora Apel, *Memory Effects: The Holocaust and the Art of Secondary Witnessing* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 21.

and quickly becomes addicted to heroin. He says, "I took me first hit with a good mate a' mine in this fucking awful hole of a kip in Cabra. It was only six months after Janet fucked off. He said it would cheer me up."²² Predictably, addiction brings Joe lower than he was before; he and his friend Jack take syringes full of blood and use them as a scare tactic to rob tourists and shopkeepers. During one ill-fated robbery, Jack stabs and kills a tourist, and both men are sent to prison where Joe serves five and a half years.

Janet does her best to get her life together after leaving Joe, but she is not exempt from the violence in the neighborhood despite her courage. Not long after Joe is sent to prison, Janet's father comes across some young men who want to throw a bag of kittens into a bonfire. Janet's father reprimands them, and goes into a nearby bar to approach one young man's father: Joe's former partner, the Afternoon Man. Joe remembers hearing about it when he was released from prison.

JOE: And so because the kid's da was a bit of gangster, well, he didn't like Janet's da coming in like that.

And because it was them days and them days maybe are gone I don't know, but he draws out a knife and stabs Janet's da through the chest.

There was this other fella there, a little skinny cunt from Cumberland Street, and he says:

"Stab him again, Dickie."

Dickie was the Afternoon Man's name.

So he did.

That's how those things happen.

It was, like, done in a jiffy.²³

Joe's matter-of-fact tone about such a violent act is chilling, but the event

²² Barry, *The Pride of Parnell Street*, 35.

²³ *Ibid.* 22.

was far from unique in that neighborhood in the mid-nineties, when drug use and associated crime was at its peak in the working-class areas of Dublin.²⁴

JOE: And Jesus, it was the talk of the street for a day, but you know, there was always another stabbing or whatever to take its place, we was as busy as Limerick sometimes with the murders.

And even the Gardai [sic] were afraid sometimes to come into the yards behind the flats, we had that bad a name, but you know, they shouldn't a' worried, we were civilized—we only stabbed each other, we wouldn't a' stabbed a stranger.²⁵

As the economy began to rapidly improve in the mid-nineties, Joe quietly served his time and Janet tried to get a job, but they both refer to the past in a way that indicates it was a better time for them. Both consistently refer to things that happened “before the Africans came to Parnell Street,”²⁶ indicating the immigration surge and diversity of multiculturalism that accompanied the rise of the Celtic Tiger. In 1999, the immigration rate was close to 50,000, up 25% from 1996. Immigration numbers peaked in 2002 at 66,900, with 45% of individuals originating in countries outside of the United States and the European Union.²⁷ Joe remembers an old waste ground in the neighborhood, “before the yuppy flats got built,”²⁸ and Janet recollects their trips to the beach at the Shelly Banks, saying, “Everyone from the city went out there in them days, and they wouldn't be seen dead there now, they're

²⁴ One of the most notable figures from this time period was Veronica Guerin, a journalist who sought to expose drug crimes and was assassinated for her attempts. Descriptions of the Dublin atmosphere can be seen here in her obituary: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/7733654/Veronica-Guerin.html>, accessed December 1, 2014.

²⁵ Barry, *The Pride of Parnell Street*, 22-23.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 9, 12, 21, 26, 27, 28.

²⁷ “Population and Migration Estimates April 2003,” Central Statistics Office (December 10, 2003), http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/population/2003/popmig_2003.pdf, accessed December 1, 2014.

²⁸ Barry, *The Pride of Parnell Street*, 21.

flying out to Marbella [Spain] and all them places. But we didn't even know Marbella existed, and couldn't a' cared less."²⁹

Joe gets out of prison, and his first order of business is to confront his heroin addiction. This is easier said than done, and Joe scathingly reports on the fact of the matter.

JOE: In Dublin, which I am told is now one of the richest cities in Europe, you don't just decide one day to get into a fucking programme and get yourself cleaned up. No, you have to fucking wait months and months to get into a fucking programme, so in the meantime you're still obliged to be on the ould heroin like.³⁰

But Joe is fortunate and eventually cleans up. He then attempts to execute his grand plan to apologize to Janet, by way of erecting a tombstone for their son, Billy. In his eagerness to get the site ready for Janet's arrival, however, Joe disturbs a nearby grave. He is arrested before she arrives and sent back to prison for defacing a memorial. Janet is enormously pleased by the gesture and, ironically, by Joe's seemingly selfless decision to not make an appearance.

Janet must leave Dublin after this in order to find work. She finds employment "cleaning up after the loonies"³¹ at St. Ita's Hospital in Portrane. She misses Dublin, but it isn't long before she must return, as she says bleakly, "Lost me job in the loony bin, but, it's the new Ireland, isn't it? God help us. Jobs galore."³² When she returns to Dublin, she finds that Joe is in Bon Secours Hospital. After going to the hospital to get treatment for a rash, Joe finds that he has contracted HIV. He assumes that he contracted it during the

²⁹ Ibid. 46.

³⁰ Ibid. 44.

³¹ Ibid. 35.

³² Ibid. 60.

time he was “obliged to be using”³³ while on the wait-list for the methadone clinic.

Barry’s treatment of the unfortunate circumstances of Janet’s and Joe’s lives is more than a testimony of two individuals who might otherwise be forgotten in the larger story of Celtic Tiger Ireland. The implications of secondary witness testimony reach beyond the personal sphere of the witness, Roger Simon explains, and can have a significant impact on larger communities. The act of remembering is a pedagogical one, he writes, and occurs in two dominant modes: history and memorialization. History refers to the detailed documentation and interpretation of available sources, while memorialization seeks to recover what has been lost, or “has previously been known, but now must be told again.”³⁴ By incorporating historical sources and narratives with emotional and symbolic practices of memorialization, a pedagogical structure emerges which can “reinforce the significance of specific memories for the identities and commitments of specific groups, be they families, communities, or nations.”³⁵ Barry is accomplishing this by incorporating the aftermath of the 1990 World Cup, which he witnessed, with an emotional narrative about two people who could have been involved in that historical event.

But this in itself is not enough, Simon asserts, and the pedagogy of remembrance should cause us not only to learn something about our history, but also to question our understanding of ourselves. He writes:

Much, then, depends upon the substance of our practices of remembrance, practices that constitute which traces of the past are possible for us to encounter, how these traces are inscribed and

³³ Ibid. 45.

³⁴ Roger I. Simon, Claudia Eppert, Mark Clamen, and Laura Beres, “Witness as Study: The Difficult Inheritance of Testimony” in *The Touch of the Past: Remembrance, Learning, and Ethics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 105.

³⁵ Ibid. 106.

reproduced for presentation, and with what interest, epistemological frame, and structure of reflexivity we might engage these inscriptions—remnants in the guise of stories, songs, images, and objects. [...] More importantly, practices of remembrance are questions of and for history as a force of inhabitation, as the way we live with images and stories that intertwine with our sense of limits and possibilities, hopes and fears, identities and distinctions.³⁶

Memorializations often seek to adhere to historical narratives and uphold social norms that point toward the practices of civility and justice within a society. This legitimation does not serve the true purpose of testimony, and Roger states that we “have to consider a form of public history that opens one to both the demand of, and responsibility to, the alterity of the historical experience of others—an alterity that disrupts the presumption of the ‘self-same.’”³⁷ In order to move forward as a society, to imagine a future that is democratic, we must engage with the historical experience of the other.

It is a moment in which learning is not simply the acquisition of new information, but an acceptance of another’s testamentary address as a possible inheritance, a difficult “gift” that in its demand for a non-indifference, may open questions, interrupt conventions, and set thought to work through the inadequate character of the terms on which I grasp myself and the world. This is thought that needs the other, thought that lives through the life of another with the implication that we are dependent on an other for what is ours.³⁸

Barry is offering his work as that “inheritance, or difficult ‘gift,’” as Simon called testimony, to address not only the poor and violent lives that the

³⁶ Roger I. Simon, “Remembering Otherwise: Civic Life and the Pedagogical Promise of Historical Memory,” in *The Touch of the Past: Remembrance, Learning, and Ethics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 7-8.

prosperity of the Celtic Tiger masked, but also the darker moments in Irish history that, regardless of how improper they may be considered, are part and parcel of what make the country what it is today. Most of Barry's other plays and novels directly engage with facets of Irish history that many would rather forget: political unrest, war, famine, and the treatment of unwed mothers, to name a few. Barry subtly layers in allusions to some of these events in *The Pride of Parnell Street* to create a dialogue between the negligence of the Celtic Tiger period and other more infamous periods in Irish history. Joe references the Great Famine when he talks about the sorrow it brought him to not be able to properly bury his son. He likens it to survivors of the Holocaust who could not bury relatives murdered by the Nazis. Joe says, "Shoved into pits, mass graves they called them, I read all about it in the prison library one time, like the graves they had in Ireland during the fucking famine, pushing girls and boys and ma's and da's into them holes, and then backfilling them."³⁹ Janet invokes the War of Independence when she recalls one of her father's favorite songs. "He used ta be singing 'Kevin Barry'⁴⁰ and he never tired of that song and he used a be singing that, dawn to dusk, and when I was about three or four, he put me up on a table, and learned it to me, so I could be singing it to him. (*Singing.*) 'Kevin Barry was a young lad, of the age of seventeen. . .'"⁴¹

One of the more significant historical events that is part of *The Pride of Parnell Street* concerns the bombings in Dublin during the Troubles, which Barry himself witnessed. He said:

³⁹ Barry, *The Pride of Parnell Street*, 42.

⁴⁰ Kevin Barry was a member of the Irish Republican Army and executed in 1920 for his refusal to give information to British forces. His death (the first execution of an Irish republican since the leaders of the Easter Rising in 1916) followed on the coattails of Terence MacSwiney's fatal hunger strike. The two events fueled public outrage and escalated the Irish War of Independence. The popular ballad, penned anonymously shortly after Kevin Barry's death, has heavy political implications and has been censored at various times throughout Irish history.

⁴¹ Barry, *The Pride of Parnell Street*, 31-32.

The first time I understood something about the North of Ireland was that incredible day in Dublin in 1974. People say it has been forgotten about—believe me, it hasn't. I was in Trinity and everyone heard it. It sounded like the world was blowing up. [...] I was completely confused, and in a way that confusion has never left me. There were people in the distance, standing beside what looked like bloody joints of meat—and they were steaming. It was the remnants of shoppers who had been blown up by the Dublin bombs, down near Lincoln Gate.⁴²

Barry allows Janet to describe in more detail what he experienced that day. She initially denies that she was old enough to remember the event, but then offers her testimony for the first time about what she witnessed.

JANET: You heard this huge bang. Everyone heard it. Even the boys and girls in the School for the Deaf heard it. I tell you. [...] There was a parcel of something on the road in front of me. That's what I seen anyway. It looked like a parcel, with the wrappers blown off, meat or something, I thought it must a' been taken out a' a butcher's shop and dropped by someone, I mean, I was only a child that time, I didn't know. It was square, like the butcher cut it for someone, you know. But of course it wasn't out a' a butcher's. No, no, it was a bit of someone.⁴³

By allowing the character of Janet to speak of the horror that Barry himself experienced during the bombings, and allowing Joe to speak of the atrocities of the famine, and to nod to the War of Independence, he creates smaller narratives and moments of witnessing to grapple with traumatic events and ensure that these other historical moments are not forgotten.

⁴² Ciara Dwyer, "To the Sweetest Girl I Know" (*The Independent*, 1 May 2005), <http://www.independent.ie/woman/celeb-news/to-the-sweetest-girl-i-know-26207764.html>, Accessed 12 May 2013.

⁴³ Barry, *The Pride of Parnell Street*, 58.

Despite the atrocities that Barry compels us to remember, his agenda is one of healing and not vindictiveness. Joe offers his testimony as a perpetrator, just as Janet offers hers as a victim. Joe acknowledges his part in the violence, beginning the acts of recognition and restitution that Herman identifies as necessary for healing. Simultaneously, Barry is offering his own testimony, a narrative for Ireland to integrate into its history, to heal the gaps that are left when society deems that these people are not fit to be part of the greater historical narrative and to prevent such erasures from happening again, as the recession brings more of this marginalized population to light. Barry imbues these violent lives with humanness and suggests, hopefully, as Janet says, “We didn't have much of a life maybe but it was a Dublin life, and every Dublin life is a life worth living, let me tell you.”⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ Ibid. 53.

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