Adab Al-Rafidain

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Gathering the Shattered Self: A Study of Characters to Uncover Personal Trauma in Anne Devlin's After Easter

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Article Information

Article History:
Received August 18, 2024
Revised October 7 .2024
AcceptedOctober 13, 2024
Available Online June1 , 2025

Keywords:
Greta,
Self,
Trauma,
The Troubles,
Women

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Abstract

The Troubles is a period of political and sectarian violence in Northern Ireland and parts of the Republic of Ireland from the late 1960s to the late 1990s. Anne Devlin's significant play After Easter focuses on the lives of three sisters and takes place in the disturbing aftermath of Ireland's Troubles. The study clarifies the echoes of violence that spread across generations as people suffer the psychological scars left by political upheaval in their divided lives .

The study delves into the aftermath of trauma to scrutinize the female perspective, frequently eclipsed by the prevailing male conflict narratives. Devlin's play serves as an effective counterpoint, revealing the fragmentation of identity, the breakdown of personal and familial bonds, and the strength necessary for healing in the aftermath of unspeakable turmoil, as depicted in the character of Greta. The paper provides a critical contribution to the expanding discourse on the gendered aspects of the Troubles by emphasizing the intricate relationship between political unrest and individual psychological well-being through the lens of the characters' journeys. Trauma theory provides a useful framework for analyzing After Easter by Anne Devlin, especially in light of its focus on the mental effects of political violence on both people and communities. Particularly within the framework of collective and historical trauma, this theoretical approach examines the effects of trauma on mental health, relationships, and identity.

DOI: 10.33899/radab.2024.152902.2216,

جمع الذات المحطمة: دراسة الشخصيات لكشف الصدمات الشخصية في مسرحية "بعد عيد الفصح" لآن ديفلين

ضحى حسين علي محمد * مروة غازي محمد **

المستخلص:

المعضلة الإيرلندية هي مرحلة من العنف السياسي والطائفي في أيرلندا الشمالية وأجزاء من جمهورية أيرلندا، استمرت من أواخر الستينيات إلى أواخر التسعينيات. تركز مسرحية آن ديفلين "بعد عيد الفصح" على حياة ثلاث شقيقات، وتدور أحداثها في أعقاب

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الاضطرابات الأيرلندية المروعة. توضح الدراسة أصداء العنف التي انتشرت عبر الأجيال، حيث يعاني الناس من الندوب النفسية التي خلفتها الاضطرابات السياسية في حياتهم المشتتة.

تتعمق الدراسة في أعقاب الصدمة لفحص المنظور الأنثوي، الذي غالبًا ما تطغى عليه روايات الصراع الذكورية السائدة. تعمل مسرحية ديفلين كنقطة مقابلة فعالة، تكشف عن تفتت الهوية، وانهيار الروابط الشخصية والعائلية، والقوة اللازمة للشفاء في أعقاب المعضلة الإيرلندية التي لا توصف، كما هو موضح في شخصية جريتا. تقدم هذه الدراسة مساهمة جادة في الخطاب الموسع في الجوانب الجنسانية للمعضلة الإيرلندية، من خلال التأكيد على العلاقة المعقدة بين الاضطرابات السياسية والرفاهية النفسية الفردية، من خلال عدسة رحلات الشخصيات.

توفر نظرية الصدمة إطارًا مفيدًا لتحليل مسرحية "بعد عيد الفصح" لآن ديفلين، وخاصة في ضوء تركيزها على التأثيرات العقلية للعنف السياسي على كل من الأفراد والمجتمعات. وبشكل خاص في إطار الصدمة الجماعية والتاريخية، يدرس هذا النهج النظري آثار الصدمة على الصحة العقلية والعلاقات والهوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جريتا, الذات, الصدمة,المعضلة الايرلندية, النساء

1. Introduction

In recent decades of the twenty-first century, social and political concerns have been the main focus of literature in general, and drama in particular (Nasser & Khalil, 28). A complex, protracted conflict between unionist and nationalist factions engulfed Northern Ireland during the tumultuous period known as the Troubles, casting a black shadow over the region for decades. Despite the well-documented political machinations and acts of violence that defined this era, people often overlook the personal and psychological toll on everyday citizens, particularly women. In this charged context, the work of playwrights like Anne Devlin arises as a vital counterpoint, illuminating the human aspects of the Troubles.

The ubiquitous violence that envelops the female characters irrevocably transforms their lives in Devlin's play *After Easter*. The work offers a powerful commentary on the ways in which the Troubles disrupted personal and familial bonds, fracturing identities and leaving profound psychological scars by emphasizing the female experience. Psychological consequences, such as dissociation, loss of identity, and intergenerational trauma, provide a framework for unravelling the characters' intricate responses to the upheaval. The study contends that Devlin's play is a critical literary and theatrical intervention, as it provides a platform for the women whose narratives have been historically marginalized within the dominant narratives of the Troubles. This is demonstrated through this analysis. It elucidates the gendered nature of political conflict, and emphasizes the critical role of literature in addressing the enduring effects of trauma. Through the character of Greta, *After Easter* serves as a poignant testament to the human spirit's resilience in the face of unspeakable turmoil by connecting the personal and the political.

1.2. literature review

Many studies addressed Devlin’s works as subject studies and how they explore the intersections of trauma, gender, and identity in the context of the Northern Ireland Troubles, particularly in *After Easter* (1990). Trauma theory highlights the collective psychological impacts of political violence, as emphasized by Cathy Caruth in her seminal work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), which argues that trauma is deeply rooted in cultural memory and affects communities as well as individuals. In the same way, Eileen Kearney in her article "Memory and Trauma in Anne Devlin's *After Easter*" (2011), discusses the play's exploration of personal trauma and its effects on familial relationships. Additionally, John Wilson in "The Female Experience of Conflict: Anne Devlin’s *After Easter*" (2016) analyses how the play portrays the unique challenges faced by women during and after the Troubles. Devlin's depiction of the sisters' journeys illustrates the struggle for identity and resilience, contributing to a broader understanding of recovery in post-conflict settings.

2. Anne Devlin: The Personal and Political Journeys Behind *After Easter*

The Troubles denote the ethno-nationalist conflict that essentially occurred between two primary communities in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s to the late 1990s. The Nationalist/Catholic community advocated for Northern Ireland's independence and reunification with the Republic of Ireland, while the Unionist/Protestant community favored its continued membership in the United Kingdom under British governance. This difficult period of deep conflict came to a formal conclusion with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. The long-term duration of political and sectarian violence had a significant and extensive effect on the people of Northern Ireland, particularly women. (Matgamna).

As Irish nationalists mounted an armed revolt against British rule, the Easter Rising of 1916 became a turning point in modern Ireland's history. Despite the eventual defeat of the uprising, it served as a crucial initial step towards Ireland's ultimate independence in 1922 (National Army Museum). The bravery and sacrifice of the Irish revolutionaries changed the occasion into a symbolic turning point that would motivate the next generation of Irish nationalists (Matgamna).

War is considered a significant cause of distress and psychological stress (Khalil & Sahan, 662). With writers using Easter's imagery to explore themes of sacrifice, forgiveness, and the triumph of light over darkness, the Easter Rising has been a major and sometimes recurring subject in Irish literature and drama (O'Neill). The continuous social divisions, financial difficulties, and long-lasting trauma of the Troubles in the late 1980s and early 1990s greatly shaped the perspectives and experiences of the female characters in Devlin's *After Easter* (Welford). During this period, sectarian conflicts intensified due to negative stereotypes, anti-Irish attitudes, and challenges in navigating the differences in gender regimes between Britain and Ireland. These factors also exacerbated the challenges faced by those who migrated from Northern Ireland, particularly women (Kurdi 60).

Reality dramas try to show what life is really like for middle-class people by focusing on the main problems they face and criticizing the political system that caused these issues (Saeed, 11). Devlin employs realism in writing her significant play *After Easter*, which is based on real political events. By personally participating in the nationalist movement, Devlin offers real, first-hand knowledge of the intricate dynamics of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Devlin provides a noteworthy analysis of the disproportionate influence of political violence and societal change on women's lives during this stormy era through her Belfast Trilogy, which includes *The Long March* (1984), *Ourselves Alone* (1985), and *After Easter* (1994) (Kao 14). In the early 1990s, the Troubles began to fade, but Northern Ireland remained unstable. The ongoing violence showed how the nationalist and unionist parties had become weaker and more split up by the late 1980s (Wilson 167). Devlin sets her play *After Easter* in the aftermath of the 1981 hunger strikes, a pivotal event in the Troubles. Because the *Easter* timeframe is characterized by uncertainty, despondency, and melancholy, the title and timing are significant (Welford). The story focuses on three Belfast Catholic sisters, Greta, Helen, and Aoife, who, while not directly involved in the violence, bear a psychological connection to the Troubles. While her husband tries to gain custody of their children, Greta, the protagonist, has gone through a nervous breakdown and is taken to a psychiatric hospital. Greta's path to regaining her identity involves returning to her Irish home and facing her family. The drama explores personal and family conflict using unusual nonlinear elements, including visions and dreams.

The title of the play refers to Ireland's troubled history, including the 1916 Easter Rising, the spark that inspired the independence movement despite the British government's efforts to control it. For Irish nationalism, the Rising continues to hold significant symbolic value. On a religious note, Easter is a time to celebrate Christ's resurrection an important event in Christianity. The title reflects Greta's quest for renewal by confronting her past, which symbolizes her image of resurrection. Religious elements are still present in her account of a vision she had on Pentecost Sunday, seven weeks after Easter. The Holy Spirit descended on the people at Pentecost, suggesting that Greta's vision gives her a spiritual rebirth. Because

of its religious and historical significance, Easter adds metaphorical depth to the story of life. As Greta endeavours to resurrect her authentic self and establish a new identity, her voyage assumes the characteristics of a spiritual quest. Based on the title, her journey is about breaking free of old limitations and finding her unique voice. Placing Greta and other characters' experiences in their historical and theological contexts makes understanding them better (Welford).

The play opens with Greta receiving treatment in a mental health facility, highlighting the futility of her quest for a different kind of belonging. The ward, a small area, serves as a metaphor for Greta's trapped state between the past and present, between sanity and insanity; in other words, she finds herself in a state of cultural in-betweenness, haunted by memories of the fragmented private narrative of her former life in Northern Ireland (Kurdi 60). When her doctor asks her why she refuses to go home, she answers, “It feels very Presbyterian, that house. I have tried. I stripped the door and sanded the floors and painted all the walls green and white —but I look at it and it’s defeated me, I find I can’t change it. It is a Protestant house” (Devlin 8). Greta's depiction of the house implies that it symbolizes a more profound concept beyond its mere physical existence. Greta perceives the house as a representation of the Protestant/unionist cultural and religious identity, which she finds conflicting with her beliefs, despite her attempts to personalize it. This demonstrates Greta's struggle to reconcile her nationalist and Catholic identities with the dominant British and Protestant cultures she has encountered.

The Gaelic poetic tradition personified Ireland as a sorrowful yet prophetic female figure, giving rise to the Mother Ireland archetype. Over time, the legendary feminine embodiment of Ireland became closely connected to the depiction of Virgin Mary, particularly in the mid-19th century following the Great Famine. The combination of the Mother Ireland and Virgin Mary archetypes gave the feminine representation of Ireland a dual meaning, encompassing both spiritual/religious and political/nationalist importance. The symbolic power of the Mother Ireland archetype, representing a grieving and self-sacrificing mother whose sons die in their quest for Irish independence, highlights the gendered characteristics of nationalist movements. People used the word feminine to describe the country as a whole, upholding traditional gender roles and norms (del Pozo).

The themes of Mother Ireland and Greta's character in *After Easter* can be powerfully associated with the historical context of the Troubles. For a long time, people have used Mother Ireland as a powerful symbolic representation of the Irish nationalist struggle and the suffering of the Irish people. Given that the play takes place in the aftermath of the 1981 hunger strikes, the image of Mother Ireland would have been particularly poignant. Greta, the central protagonist, is embodying this maternal, nationalist archetype. Greta's internal turmoil and experiences as a woman navigating the traumatic fallout of the Troubles mirror Ireland's broader fate as a "mother" torn apart by violence and conflict. Economic and social circumstances would have had a significant impact on Greta's life and perspective on the world. She would have personally seen the damage caused by the Troubles, as she grew up in a segregated, economically depressed Northern Ireland. Her personal and political sense of identity would have linked to the fate of her homeland, as she says, “I want to go home to my mother” (Devlin 9). Greta’s role as a mother in the play helps to emphasize the parallel with Mother Ireland. Her struggles to protect and save her family mirror the distress of a nation trying to take care of itself amidst ongoing upheaval. Ultimately, the theme of Mother Ireland and the character of Greta function as effective vehicles for investigating the profound human impact of the Troubles.

Using the Troubles as a potent symbol of male-driven anarchy and devastation in the North, Devlin undermines the idea of patriarchy as a machine of war and power. The Troubles represent the nation's sickness and madness, the disruption of family life, and the troubled spirits of individual family members, such as Greta’s. Greta’s struggle to comprehend and reconcile her spirits, voices, and visions is a reflection of the madness of nations and the conflict. The Troubles are a metaphor for the death of a country, Mother Ireland (Cottreau 205).

3. Gathering the Shattered Self in Anne Devlin's *After Easter*

After deciding to leave Northern Ireland for England, Greta and her sister, Helen, find that their Northern Irish accent is a major obstacle during the Troubles, as many British people look down on anyone with such an accent. Helen can avoid this problem by adopting an American accent. Helen argues that she has used an American accent as a deliberate strategy to avoid prejudice and discrimination. Helen says, “London isn’t a good place to have an Irish accent right now. I find when I’m buying or selling an American accent gets me through the door. Whereas an Irish accent gets me followed round the store by a plainclothes security man” (Devlin 15). Helen's decision to adopt an American accent indicates her stated intention to detach herself from her Irish identity in specific circumstances. This demonstrates the use of linguistic assimilation as a survival strategy. But when Aoife asks her why she does not use an English accent instead, Helen replies that there are "limits to betrayal" (Devlin 15) in adopting a false dialect. This shows how complicated and diverse diasporic identity is. Helen's experiences with security because of her Irish accent reveal the social and institutional discrimination that marginalized groups face, even in major urban centres like London.

Greta’s experience in the Catholic school highlights the matter of belonging, "I hated that school. English Catholics. They used to call me the Irish Art Teacher. And the girls used to say, in front of me, offend me — as if I cared," (Devlin 19). This example highlights how Greta experienced stereotyping and felt alienated, even though they appear to be in similar religious and cultural environments. Greta rejects the notion of sticking to a single, unified identity. She declares, "I am a Catholic, a Protestant, a Hindu, a Moslem, and a Jew," (Devlin 13), demonstrating her aspiration to escape restrictive, dividing definitions of religiosity and affiliation. Greta challenges the constraints of national labels by asserting, "I refuse to identify as Irish. I am of German, French,” (Devlin 18). She desires to establish a multifaceted, flexible sense of identity that spans simplistic national categorizations.

People often view migration and diaspora negatively due to social and psychological issues. They may cause identity loss, cultural hybridity, mental health concerns, and social instability (Al-Hilo & Marandi 11). Greta tries to comprehend her challenging past and struggles with expressing herself. She has lived in England for fifteen years and experienced postnatal depression after birthing her third child. Greta married George, a Marxist, and gave birth to twins who are now eleven years old. In a conversation with her doctor when she is in the mental hospital, Greta asserts, "I left Ireland in 1979, but I never arrived in England. I don’t know where I went" (Devlin 22), which generates a sense of temporal and spatial ambiguity. The specific location and time of her arrival are unknown. Greta's statement implies a significant separation from a sense of belonging or home. Greta's inability to pinpoint the location she went to after leaving Ireland could suggest a deeper sense of displacement, a sense of being adrift from a clear sense of identity and belonging.

Many readers find *After Easter* challenging to understand, but Greta's strange visions are the key to understanding the story as a whole. There are three types of important dreams that Greta has; these dreams provide a clear outline of the play's plot and provide a more comprehensive explanation of her mental state and the reasons behind her family's behavior towards her. Greta's first vision is a dream in which a divine figure delivers a message whom she describes as “Long black hair, pale, very gaunt. Long white robe” (Devlin 16). The banshee-like figure wearing white, a colour that stands for faith and purity, is another sign that it represents a higher power. The creature's sharp scream addressing Greta as an individual, not as a symbol of death.

The figure that Greta calls "Mother" appears to represent Ireland as a home for her lost daughter. Greta seems to get the message that her real home and sense of belonging lie in getting back in touch with Ireland after feeling unwanted, alone, and like she would rather die in England. The figure's skinny appearance reflects a struggling Ireland that is nonetheless open to welcoming Greta back to her homeland. The fact that the vision occurs at the moment, when Greta is most estranged from her origins

suggests that it is a critical factor in her eventual return to seek closure and identity. The vision seems to push Greta to heal and figure out who she is, by going back to the past and figuring out the unresolved conflict in her home, Ireland (“Ivory Research”).

Greta's second dream predicts her path to rebirth as she tries to rediscover her Irish heritage. When the dream happens in England, Greta is deeply broken and detached, “Roses everywhere. On the curtains, on the carpets, the bedspreads” (Devlin 20). The roses that surround her symbolize rebirth and a new beginning. As she raises her eyes to the sky, she sees the Pleiades constellation. When Greta is upset, she lets out a big, heartfelt cry, " I was in such despair that I opened my mouth and let out a huge cry until my voice filled the whole sky" (Devlin 20).

Having a star constellation in her dream gives the impression that it is mystical and transcendental. For many, dreams and visions involving the sky hold symbolic meaning, alluding to inner psychological or spiritual realities. Aoife's claim that Greta has seen "The Plough", (a group of seven stars in the northern sky that form a shape that is interpreted as an old-fashioned farmer's plow: big dipper) ("The Plough”, Merriam-Webster Dictionary), is all the more intriguing because it is a prominent constellation. The plough is one of the most recognisable symbols of the Irish Citizen Army, a paramilitary socialist organisation that played a significant role in the Irish Revolution. (Townshend 66). According to this reading, Irish nationalism is a theme in Greta's dream. The mythological and archetypal connections that Helen suggests Greta would have seen in the Pleiades, the star cluster known as the "seven sisters" (“Pleiades”, Merriam-Webster Dictionary), indicate a distinct set of connections. The Pleiades are typically associated with sisterhood, femininity, spirituality, and natural cyclical patterns (Walters). It became evident that part of the idea of narrativeizing has been to comprehend the desire to produce, receive, interpret, and distribute cultural products (Faraj & Mustafa, 50). This interpretation is more in line with how Greta and her sisters really interact with each other. These two versions view Greta's dream from two entirely different perspectives: one focuses on Ireland's turbulent political position, while the other explores mythological symbols and the complex dynamics of sisterly relationships.
In her third vision, Greta chooses to confide in her nun friend, Elish. The vision of her sleeping bag as a womb from which she can be birthed symbolizes Greta's deep yearning for transformation and independence from her troubled past. She needs spiritual guidance because her disturbing dream, in which the priest tries to suffocate her, is an expression of her regret about her life. Her rescue by floating towards light indicates that she realises that she needs profound assistance to overcome her problems.

Greta's third vision ends with a voice recounting Pentecost Sunday, the seventh Sunday following Easter. This day is a critical moment in the Christian liturgical calendar, as it signifies the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and the origin of the early Christian church and community. Typically, it is a memorial to the revival of spirituality, divine inspiration, and the release of transformative, even apocalyptic, powers. Alternatively, Pentecost Sunday is also associated with the symbols of fire and flames (Gallo). Nevertheless, Devlin uses this symbolism to represent the harsh realities of conflict, violence, and bloodshed that have torn Ireland apart. The fire and flame Greta saw in her vision evoke the flammable nature of the conflict and the burning costs it has taken on the land and its people, serving as strong metaphors for the tumult and conflict of the Troubles.

Trauma as an element continues to be an inspiring topic within the context of trauma and conflict (Jaber, 3). Devlin enhances Greta's sense of alienation from the homeland and traditions that would have offered her solace and sustenance by establishing this vision in the acknowledged religious and cultural symbols of Pentecost. This only adds to the anguish and confusion she endures. The influence of Ireland and its volatile history on Greta's psyche is underscored by her recurrent dreams of this Pentecost vision. She is imprisoned in an invisible space, her spirit and identity bound to a homeland that has been transformed into an area of trauma and upheaval rather than a source of comfort and belonging.

Regardless of their diverse backgrounds, almost everyone is captivated by narrative. The Personal narrative closely mirrors real life by covering both positive and negative aspects of literature. (Hassoon 3021). Greta's confession “I am not a religious person. My father is an atheist and my husband is a Marxist. And I had ceased to be a Catholic so long ago that I had no idea when Pentecost was— I still don’t” (Devlin 29), offers valuable insight into her intricate relationship with religion and the manner in which it intersects with her identity and connections. The fact that Greta calls herself "not a religious person" implies that she is almost discontented with religious institutions.

Relationships with others, particularly those in their community, firmly establish people's identities. These connections assist in self-recognition and identity creation, giving life meaning and purpose (Mohammed & Sharif 63). Greta’s inner struggles and fractured relationships connect to the broader societal and national fractures caused by the Troubles. The dynamic between Greta's self-proclaimed lack of religiosity and her decision to seek out her nun friend indicates that she is indeed involved in a deeper quest for her sense of belonging and self-worth. Greta's family members' different religious and ideological backgrounds—her atheist father, Marxist husband, and Catholic mother—mirror wider challenges and differences within the concept of "Mother Ireland" and Irish national identity. Mother Ireland is often portrayed as embodying the diverse and, at times, contradictory viewpoints and identities of the Irish people, just like Greta is surrounded by these various influences and loyalties within her family. Greta's life is diverse, reflecting the complexity of the Irish national identity as a whole. Greta's familial dynamic implies that she herself embodies a microcosm of the diverse and occasionally stated elements forming the Irish experience, just as Mother Ireland symbolizes the collective experience and aspirations of the Irish people. In multiple ways, Ireland's struggles to reconcile its complicated past, religious affiliations, and political loyalties mirror Greta's personal voyage of self-discovery and identity construction, as this parallel makes clear. Her journey of self-discovery and Irish identity exploration mirrors the country's quest for a unified, accepting national identity.

Before the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland was still dealing with many hardships, economic problems, and social divides. Realities became hazy and surreal, and Gothic-tinged aspects of Devlin's work definitely emerged from this setting of unresolved conflicts and unhealed wounds. The Troubles have caused continuous instability, which can be processed and dealt with by turning to fiction and imagination (Matgamna).

Amid of such widespread pain and change, Greta and other characters have turned to dreams, visions, and a feeling of the supernatural to make sense of their experiences. The Gothic, with its themes of the horrific, supernatural, and darkness, have been in accordance with the pervasive sense of foreboding and unease that was common in Northern Irish society at the time (Welford). The Gothic style has been in line with Northern Ireland's overall sense of unease and anxiety. It implies that Devlin's use of the Gothic style is more than just a stylistic choice but an intelligent artistic strategy for dealing with the region's significant traumas to its social structure and cultural identity.

Gothic imagery and fantastical elements could portray Greta's journey as she navigates the aftermath of the hunger strikes and the nationalist conflict. Illogical dreamlike sequences or the introduction of the supernatural into the narrative may demonstrate her personal distress and her identification with the Mother Ireland archetype (Welford). Furthermore, the play's use of ambiguous spaces, disconcerting settings, and the disappearance of boundaries between the real and the imagined may reflect the segregation and division in Northern Ireland's outline. The characters' reactions to these otherworldly occurrences reflect the deep-seated suspicion and confusion that dominated Northern Ireland's social and political landscape. Greta's personal concerns “I was afraid to be on my own . . . I never go to bed without double bolting my door . . . I don’ t like sleeping in the dark” (Devlin 66), are particularly powerful in this context. These personal phobias and coping mechanisms can be taken as a reflection of the widespread

feeling of tension and the ever-present threat of violence that influenced the lived experiences of individuals such as Greta.

When Helen claims that Greta is haunted and Aoife gives the ghost a nationality, "It's probably an English ghost" (Devlin 17). These Gothic motifs function as metaphors for the region's broken social and political landscape. Ultimately, *After Easter'*s combination of Gothic motifs, fantasy, and imagination is an effective artistic response to the complexity and traumas of the Troubles. Because of these elements, Devlin is able to delve into the more profound psychological and emotional aspects of the conflict, which provide a form of creative expression in connection with the worrying realities of life in Northern Ireland during this critical period.

Ireland possesses a coastline measuring 1,448 km, making it one of the largest member states of the European Union in terms of sea area. It is also home to significant fishing ports. The waters surrounding Ireland are truly productive, and fishing has always been one of the predominant fields in the region ("European Maritime and Fisheries Fund"). For an extended period, the fisherman has been symbolically associated with Irish identity and the Irish relationship to the land and sea. In coastal communities, fishing has historically been an essential component of the Irish economy and way of life. This makes the fisherman a symbol of the unique heritage and bond between Ireland and its natural surroundings (Donkersloot and Menzies 2). Because Greta's father is a fisherman, she has a strong connection to this Irish custom. It gives her a deep, natural knowledge of the land, the sea, and the everyday patterns that are essential to being Irish. Her sense of self and her sense of belonging to a certain culture are based on her connection to the natural world and traditional ways of life.

Aoife advises Greta to take her children home to their grandparents in Ireland, Greta tells her, "They'd be like fish out of water" (Devlin 13). The image of the fish out of water effectively conveys the idea of a creature completely cut off from its natural habitat, struggling to survive in a radically unfamiliar and hostile environment. This allegory in the context of the play illustrates Greta's profound fears regarding subjecting her children to the same level of uprooting and dislocation that she herself has experienced. Greta, who is the daughter of a fisherman, would be acutely aware of the fragility of existence outside of her native environment. She is acutely aware that being out of water is a death sentence for a fish, a fate she is determined to protect her children from.

Greta repeatedly states that she is dead, "I died" (Devlin 19,20,23) and that the core of her has been left in Ireland, indicating an overwhelming feeling of marginalization and disconnection that transcends the confines of exile or outsider status. This idea of being an outsider is taken a step further in *After Easter*, which looks at the double invisibility that women face when they choose to self-exile or leave their communities. This extra layer of marginalization and loneliness shows how challenging it is for women to make their way, often because they are unable to utilize the same social networks and support systems that men can.

It is very upsetting that her husband chose to use his power in a way that makes Greta feel even more isolated and limited, instead of supporting and helping her through her struggles. By revealing his affair, his betrayal of Greta worsens her inner instability, causing her relationship and self-esteem to collapse. The betrayal by her husband and the inability to see her children have been devastating blows, leaving Greta feeling completely powerless and isolated. The double trauma that Greta goes through, which consists of her family relationships being broken and her mental and emotional well-being being abused, highlights the huge nature of her pain. In addition to the psychological cost of displacement and exile, she faces a serious risk of losing everything that remains of her individuality. Greta describes this as "It was the third strange experience of my life" (Devlin 29).

The second strange experience that Greta had was on February 2, the day of purification in Christianity, which refers to the process of bringing something back to a state of purity or cleanliness

(Ministries). Purification also refers to an escape from specific impurities, as well as from the inherent state of human corruption and imprisonment within the physical form (Parker). Greta tells Elish:

> We had some people in to dinner and I was relighting the candles on the table, which had burnt down and gone out. As I moved the candle to the fireplace and reached into the fire and then transferred the lit candles to the stand — the
>
> flame leapt. It lit up my hair, which at the time was long and I suddenly found myself surrounded by a curtain of flame.
>
> Elish. Who put the flames out?
>
> Greta. What— oh, my husband.
>
> Elish. How?
>
> Greta. He took my hair in his hands and beat it. (She claps.)
>
> Like that. A strange cry came out of my mouth — when the
>
> fire caught — it was almost as startling as the fire itself (Devlin 30).

The timing of the incident is a significant date. Purification is a Christian holy day that celebrates the presence of light, renewal, and purity. The sudden explosion of flames that envelop Greta's long hair has a powerful, almost mystical aspect. The flames appear to establish a connection between Greta and a primitive, elemental force. The strange cry she produces suggests that she is merging with the fire. This moment of transcendent, almost spiritual connection suddenly ends when Greta's husband hurries in and violently extinguishes the flames with her hair. His agitated response implies that he perceives the flames as a threat that requires extinguishment. In this scene, the flames symbolize an awakening that's fundamental and transformative within Greta—a connection to sacred, feminine energies. However, her husband's violent suppression of this awakening is indicative of the social and domestic pressures that aim to contain and govern such untamed, visionary impulses. The clash between the holy and the common, the visionary and the ordinary, is a strong metaphor for Greta's inner and outer struggles: her desire to transcend and the harsh realities of her life. The fire, with its dual symbolism of purification and destruction, captures the complexity of Greta's voyage.

In November 1981, Greta experienced insomnia in the days preceding her birthday. This resulted in her experiencing severe fatigue and hallucinations. Greta started to believe that she had returned to her womb-like sleeping bag on the floor to undergo a rebirth. This is what Greta considered her first strange experience. Despite Greta's assertion that she is not religious, this was a significant one. It appeared to be a profound, visionary experience for her. Having this happen around Greta's birthday makes it seem like an even bigger turning point in her life. Birthdays frequently serve as inspirations for self-analysis and change. Greta endures a sense of guilt or discomfort when discussing these types of visions.

This first encounter was a critical moment of psychological and spiritual awakening for Greta, which initiated her transformative voyage. The physical symptoms frequently associated with generalized anxiety disorder are in line with the description of Greta's insomnia, fatigue, and feelings of being "delirious" (Devlin 30) in the days preceding her birthday. The fact that Greta describes herself as becoming "delirious" also implies a level of mental distress and loss of cognitive clarity that is typical of the anxiety and overthinking that characterize generalized anxiety disorder.

Despite their political and religious differences, Greta's parents—Catholic Rose and her communist father—are able to enjoy a successful marriage. This points to the fact that their partnership goes beyond

differences and is based on profound love and understanding. On the other hand, Greta's marriage has been a disaster from the start. This is apparent in the three alarming incidents, Greta was first hiding in her sleep bag out of fear, but her husband showed no concern for her emotional state. In the second instance, he violently struck her hair while it was burning, without engaging in any dialogue or attempt to provide her with assistance. Thirdly, he revealed his affair to Greta, took the kids, and committed her to a mental institution in response to her confessions about visions. These situations show that the marital bond is missed in the kindness, consideration, and cooperation that Greta's parents appear to possess. Greta does not grow up in a nurturing setting because her husband is rude, aggressive, and unsupportive. It would appear that love, empathy, and a readiness to bridge differences are essential to a successful, long-lasting marriage—qualities that Greta's marriage seems to be lacking, given the noticeable gap between her parents' marriage and her own.

The three sisters managed to get back together after learning that their father is dying in the hospital, which is an indication that this is a time for the family to get back home and have a reunion. When Aoife and Helen were home with their mother, Rose, Helen answered the phone. She shocked her mother and sister by saying,

> sometime this afternoon, Greta went to Clonard Monastery and took a chalice from a side altar during a Low Mass, and walked out with it, before anybody realized what happening. Then she took a bus to the city centre still holding the chalice. It was full of communion wafers which she began distributing to the people in the bus queues (Devlin 51).

Helen informs the police that Greta has been in a mental institution in England and is currently on a one-week visit to her sick father, prompting them to release her from prison. The main idea seems to be that Greta is facing a deep conflict of meaning in her faith. The churches in Ireland claim they are against violence, but they also keep schools separate and keep people from getting along. This encounter with hypocrisy and contradictory meanings seems to motivate Greta to take action. Her "secular mission of harvesting souls" (Devlin 34) is a phrase that evokes the idea that she is attempting to unite individuals across religious boundaries in a manner that is almost quasi-religious. Greta's specific acts include giving out communion wafers from a stolen chalice in public as a way to bring peace to people of different religious affiliations. This rebellious act draws attention to the churches' hypocrisy.

Greta seems to see herself as a way for a larger voice to speak through her. This voice could be a spiritual or moral force that is pushing her to change things. The reference to the banshee's explosive cry enhances the urgency and raw force of her actions. The local newspaper summarizes Greta's mission by calling it a "Woman protest at Catholic Church's refusal to ordain women priests!" (Devlin 62). This indicates a misinterpretation of her more complex and diverse goals. However, Greta seems to understand that these subversive acts have the power to wake people up and force them to face the hypocrisies and negative acts that institutions that claim to be morally superior have been up to (Kurdi 64). This emphasizes Devlin's examination of the Troubles, which is characterized by its religious facade but rooted in political complexities.

During their visit to their sick father in the hospital, an explosion occurs, resulting in the deaths of nine people. The explosion is intended to assassinate a political figure; however, all the victims are women and children. This incident serves as a testament to the violent nature of the troubles and their impact on women and children. The explosion that claimed the lives of women and children exemplifies the devastating impact of violence during the Troubles, regardless of the individuals it impacted. Attacks that kill such helpless, non-combatants show how deadly this long-running conflict really is. The fact that this bombing is intended to kill a political figure but instead has killed many civilians shows how the Troubles often affect ordinary citizens who are stuck in the middle. Women and children are the most common victims of this unnecessary killing. Because her father is very ill, Greta's family is already going

through a lot. This event makes things even worse. Instead of being a place of healing, the hospital becomes a place of grief and death. This combination of personal and social problems must be particularly distressing. It is a stark reminder of how the Troubles have torn communities and families apart, having catastrophic effects on people's minds and feelings.

The family travels to Northern Ireland to attend their father's burial after receiving news of his passing. Greta experiences a hallucination in which her dead father is alive and engages in conversation with her. She expresses her anger during their talk, citing her father's communist affiliation as the reason for her expulsion from school. In response, her father denies this association, asserting his belief in democracy and rejection of hierarchical systems. To illustrate his point, he uses symbolism, "You see — there are salmon in the rivers and there are minnows. And we say the salmon is king but sometimes it's better to be a minnow than a salmon When you don't want to get caught If there's a big net across the river, it's easier for a minnow to get through" (Devlin 64). The father, as a fisherman, uses symbolic explanation to tie Greta's struggles together. The metaphor of the minnow being able to easily escape the large net, as used by the father, suggests the value of being small, humble, and able to avoid notice when confronted with oppressive conditions. This is reminiscent of Greta's necessity to adjust and cope within the political and religious framework. Greta has been compelled to hide or reduce certain aspects of her identity and beliefs in order to prevent oppression, much like the minnow concealing itself.

Greta's conversation with her father over the nun's claim that Greta "had a devil" (Devlin 64) is a strong criticism of the tyrannical character of both political and religious authorities. It is evident that the nun was trying to stigmatize and condemn her normal emotional and psychological reactions when she labelled her anger as coming from the devil. This illustrates how religious organizations try to restrict and control personal expression, particularly in the case of young women. The nun's criticism of Greta stems from her father's political and ideological views, which she has internalized. People in positions of authority use the strategy of combining an individual's ideas with their true worth or character to marginalize and devalue those who disagree.

Greta's aspiration to unveil the nun's veil, "So I tried to pull off her veil" (Devlin 64), symbolizes a profound yearning to unveil the power and control structures employed against her. It is a protest against the institutionalized prejudices and covert strategies that maintain their superiority in morality and spirituality. When Greta turns to her father for insight and proof, it indicates a generational difference, where the knowledge and experience of the elder generation are required to challenge the dominant narratives of the current generation. This generational dialogue is essential for Greta's critical consciousness development.

Greta defends her emotional and intellectual integrity in this situation against political and religious forces that want to define, control, and minimize her. Her urge to "pull off the veil" and her hallucination of her father are acts of disobedience against the very institutions that contributed to the ongoing Troubles in her community. Greta fights memories of her challenging past in Northern Ireland and, more recently, in England, as well as expressing herself. The Easter journey paves the way for her journey of self-discovery (Kurdi 64).

Following their father's funeral, Greta and her sisters carried his ashes to separate places on Westminster Bridge. Greta ascends onto the seat, then onto the wall. Considering her condition, Aoife and Helen interpret Greta's actions as a possible suicide attempt and ask her to descend. Greta answered, "No, it's better from here, the wind will carry them far" (Devlin 75). Greta wants to scatter her father's ashes in the wind throughout Ireland, rather than burying them in a single location. This tells a lot about whom he was and what he left behind as a real Irishman, regardless of religion.

As a nonbeliever, her father did not simply slip into the division of Catholic or Protestant, which has historically dominated and divided Irish society. He was not a part of either of these official faiths, which

shows that he had a more complete and real Irish identity that went beyond dogmatic religious membership. Her wish for the wind to carry her father's ashes to every spot in Ireland demonstrates her desire to respect the independence of his Irish heritage from any particular religion or community. This is a protest against the systems that have tried to split and define the Irish people based on their religion. By spreading the ashes across the land instead of burying them in a holy ground, Greta is claiming her father's rightful place as a true son of Ireland, not limited by the lines set up by religious and government leaders. This action makes a strong statement of togetherness and acceptance, embracing the distinctiveness and connection of the Irish experience.

Greta and Helen are about to leave the bridge when Greta suddenly hears a baby's laughter, "Listen on, can you hear— that baby? Listen! Where could a baby at this time of the morning? And so near? … It's just a baby — laughing." (Devlin 78). This is a prediction made by the author, expressing a desire for a more positive future. By incorporating this final image, it appears that the author is conveying a desire for Greta to experience a greater sense of security, rootedness, and fulfilment in her life as a migrant. Shifts and difficulties have complicated Greta's journey, but the baby's joyful laughter and the opportunity to form meaningful connections suggest that Greta has the potential to rediscover a sense of home.

Finally, Greta is at home, rocking the baby and telling it a story in her English house that represents her changed outlook on location and connections. This last monologue improves Greta's development of a proud female migrant subjectivity and provides a positive counterpoint to her fragmented one at the beginning of the play about disturbance and lack of love (Kurdi 66).

Greta's last speech is a marked improvement over her first confused, anxious story. Greta changes and interprets her migration experiences through this private, consistent narrative she tells her child. Her final story is uncopied, which is an original manifestation of her evolving viewpoint and identity. Greta may have discovered something of profound cultural and personal importance, given the legendary and lyrical aspects. Greta has emerged as a powerful, self-sufficient migrant figure because she has taken control of her journey. The difference between Greta's first, fragmented story and her final, coherent one demonstrates her growth towards a more stable migrant subjectivity. The narrative line serves as a powerful reminder of how migratory experience can bring about transformation.

4 Conclusion

Devlin's *After Easter* powerfully captures the multifaceted ways in which the Troubles shattered the lives of women both inside and outside of Northern Ireland through the complex narratives of characters such as Helen, Greta, and Aoife. Whether they were directly involved in the nationalist struggle or trying to establish a life in exile, the women in Devlin's work experienced profound trauma, marginalization, and a loss of personal identity. The male-centric accounts of the conflict frequently reduced the vital roles of those women who were fully involved. Those women who sought refuge elsewhere faced double invisibility due to their isolation from both familial and community support systems. Greta ultimately represents Ireland itself, powerfully and symbolically, broken and scarred by the terrible upheaval of the Troubles. The pain Greta has endured has shattered her psyche, just as sectarian violence has torn the country apart. Like the Irish people driven from their country, she is detached from her roots and unable to establish a steady sense of home or belonging. In snatching her children away, Greta's English husband reflects the way the Troubles denied Ireland her sons, the people were forced to flee their beloved country. The Irish people's displacement snatched away their future, just as it snatched away Greta's maternal function from her and the next generation. Devlin's skillful use of Greta as a symbolic stand-in for a nation in crisis highlights the extreme psychological and emotional toll the Troubles inflicted on not only people but also the fundamental fabric of Irish identity and community.

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