

A German Literary Paradigm of Friendship in the Irish Short Story, “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy Goes Home” (1919)

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Abstract This article highlights features in Daniel Corkery’s short story, “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy Goes Home” (1919) which foreshadow characteristics outlined by Rachel Freudenburg in her argument for the fiction of friendship in 20th century German first-person narratives. In line with Freudenburg’s argument as she applies it to Günter Grass’s *Cat and Mouse* (1961), Corkery’s narrator can ultimately be said to engage in acts of passive aggression toward the Colonel in an attempt to acquire from the site of his friend the desired if ultimately unattainable identity of hero. This discussion raises two questions. Could Corkery’s portrayal of the friend as a site upon which the narrator unsuccessfully attempts to project his idealized identity, have at its root the nature of the Irish War of Independence where the concept of hero was far from clean-cut? If “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...” falls into a paradigm of friendship common in 20th century German narratives, can the story’s facilitation of such an alternative interpretation rescue it from the stigma of didactic propaganda?

Key words Irish; Daniel Corkery; Günter Grass; Friendship; Freudenburg

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Introduction

“The narrator [...] is supposed to be a man of action, but he shows no distinctive personality at all; he is a nullity onto whom the reader is expected to project his own

patriotic emotions.”¹ It is on this banal excuse for a narrator in Daniel Corkery’s “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy Goes Home” (1919)² that the following discussion hinges. The argument raises two questions. Firstly, if the disillusioned climate of the years after World War II made difficult the portrayal of a male friend as hero in German literature,³ could the nature of the Irish War of Independence have made similarly problematic the portrayal of heroic male friend for Corkery?⁴ Secondly, if “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...” falls into a paradigm of friendship common in 20th century German narratives, can the story’s facilitation of such an alternative reading rescue it from the stigma of didactic propaganda?⁵

1 Patrick Maume makes this remark in reference to “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...” (1919) in conjunction with several other stories from *The Hounds of Banba* (1919) (*‘Life that is exile’: Daniel Corkery and the Search for Ireland* 67). Maume also remarks that “some critics denounce *The Hounds of Banba* as a betrayal of art for propaganda”. Maume considers this unjust (68). Seán Ó Tuama considered Corkery “an undeserving casualty of ideological warfare” (“Daniel Corkery, Cultural Philosopher, Literary Critic: A Memoir” 247). Helen Laird agrees with this to some extent (“Preface” in *Daniel Corkery’s Cultural Criticism* ix).

2 The title of the story will hitherto be abbreviated to “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...”.

3 According to Rachel Freudenburg: “Especially after World War II, which ended with Germany’s unconditional surrender and an acknowledgment that the war itself was unjust, the war hero and camaraderie all but disappear from [German] literature ...”. See: Rachel Freudenburg’s *Fictions of Friendship in Twentieth-Century German Literature: Mann’s Doktor Faustus, Grass’s Katz und Maus, Bernhard’s Wittgensteins Neffe and Der Untergeher, and Wolf’s Nachdenken über Christa T.* (Diss. Harvard University, 1995) 109-110, 177.

4 I am speaking of Corkery’s portrayal of the heroic male friend in literature and not of his own relationships. It is clear from the obituary Corkery wrote for Terence MacSwiney, as outlined by Maume (72), along with opinions Corkery expressed in his private correspondence, that one man would stand forever a hero to him: “We know that he [Terence MacSwiney] was almost superhumanly perfect—not only as a patriot, but as a man—and history will never have such a glut of men in its pages as to confuse him with the average hero of whom we must accept both good and bad” (MacSwiney Papers, Corkery to Anne, 11/1/1921, p48c/3/36).

5 George Brandon Saul considered *The Hounds of Banba* to be Corkery’s “most disappointing set of stories.” He did not stop there: “Interesting enough as a memorialization of guerrilla activities by a people pathetically self-sacrificing in their fixed hatred of the English, this book of an almost juvenile patriotism does not wholly escape a suggestion of strain in the writing” (“The Short Stories of Daniel Corkery” 120). Meanwhile, Paul Delaney considers most of the stories in *The Hounds of Banba* to be “propagandist in scope, content, and ambition, and too didactic to work successfully as examples of short fiction” (“Nobody Now Knows Which...”: Transition and Piety in Daniel Corkery’s Short Fiction” 102). Stephen Gwynn suggests that *The Hounds of Banba* portrays an exclusively Sinn Féin perspective (“A Book of the Moment: Gaelic Poetry under the Penal Laws” 183). The discussion is confined to an analysis of the story, “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...” and its literary worth. Has the baby been thrown out with the bath water?

In her dissertation on fictions of friendship in 20th century German literature, Rachel Freudenburg maintains that “friendships are manipulated and exploited to produce a unified and regal self even while the person behind this image is developing a theory of self-fragmentation” (5). She applies her theory on the fiction of friendship to several German narratives including Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*, Grass’s *Katz und Maus*, Bernhard’s *Wittgensteins Neffe*, and Wolf’s *Nachdenken über Christa T*. In order to demonstrate how her theory opens up Corkery’s text, I will draw parallels between elements of her theory as she outlines them in Günter Grass’s *Cat and Mouse* (1961) and similar features evident in “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...”¹

Application of Freudenburg’s theory illustrates how Corkery’s narrator, like Grass’s Pilenz, can be seen to vainly hanker after the impossible, that is, the unattainable identity of hero.² I intend to illustrate how the narrator’s presentation of Colonel Mac Gillicuddy as mad constitutes an act of aggression which culminates in the elimination of the Colonel as the narrator attempts to assume the desired identity for the self. However, as Freudenburg puts it: “Just as Narcissus may never kiss his own reflection without losing it, the narrator, in his attempt to access the mirror, ends up destroying the reflector” (63). The desired identity is ultimately unattainable.

According to Freudenburg, in *Cat and Mouse*, Günter Grass confronts his readers with the death of the hero and national icon.³ However, at the same time, Pilenz, in telling the story of Mahlke, demonstrates a desire or “nostalgia for what has died, for the whole, meaningful, monumental friend” (177); a desire for the

1 Freudenburg’s theory in relation to Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* deals with the idealized identity of a genius and not that of war hero. Application of Nietzschean thought to “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...” in parallel with Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* may open a very different discussion.

2 According to Benedict Kiely, Corkery’s attitude in his stories “is primarily contemplative and his writing has always been happier in dealing not with the aggravations of controversy, but with the cloistral, candle-lit places of the soul” (2). I maintain that Corkery’s rendition of the narrator in “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...” shows him to have been also contemplative in his approach to the portrayal of the “heroic” friend. That said, Patrick Delaney’s analysis of Corkery’s characters still holds true for him; the narrator is neither allowed to “adapt to change or to find immunity in the past” (““Nobody Now Knows Which ...”: Transitions and Piety in Daniel Corkery’s Short Fiction” 110).

3 According to Grass in an interview with John Reddick in 1966: “Mahlkes Fall decouvriert Kirche, Schule, Heldenwesen—die ganze Gesellschaft. Alles schlägt mit ihm fehl” (Alexander Ritter Ed., *Erläuterungen und Dokumente* 88). “Mahlke’s case reveals (the character of) the church, the village council and the approach to heroism—the whole society. Everything he does is destined to fail” (Trans. Kerstin Precht).

unattainable identity of hero.¹ Ireland's protracted history as British colony and the subsequent complications this brought to the Irish War of Independence in which violence was often directed not just against British oppressor but also against local Irish people, may, likewise, have made difficult the literary portrayal of hero for Corkery.² Could this explain why his portrayal of friendship in "Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ..." falls into a paradigm discernible in *Cat and Mouse*?

In line with Freudenburg's argument as she applies it to *Cat and Mouse* (129-178), this discussion emphasizes the following idiosyncrasies in "Colonel Mac Gillicuddy" Firstly, the friendship portrayed is a dyadic one. Secondly, the friend is dead. Thirdly, the narrator praises the absent friend while simultaneously painting the lauded friend in a negative light; this, according to Freudenburg, can be seen as an act of aggression toward the friend (51). Finally, a tell-tale sign of the narrator's attempt to "erase" the friend in an all-be-it impossible effort to assume the desired identity from the mirror of the friend manifests itself in a mixing of the

1 I will quote Freudenburg frequently in discussing *Cat and Mouse*, because it is her argument in relation to the desired identity of war hero projected onto the site of the friend that I am emphasizing. However, James C. Bruce's analysis of Pilenz's narrative in, "The Equivocating Narrator in Günter Grass's "Katz und Maus"" throws useful light on the relationship between Pilenz and Mahlke (139-149).

2 In some cases, fighters in the Irish War of Independence had to execute locals condemned as informers or traitors. The following testimonies offer an insight into the backdrop against which Corkery was writing. The impact of such executions on small communities must have been devastating and made any attempted portrayal of an Irish war hero in literature far from clear-cut. I.R.A. Intelligence Officer, Robert C. Ahern gave the following description of an I.R.A. execution of a local man: "Finbar O'Sullivan ... joined the Black and Tans. When he returned to his home one evening he was taken prisoner there and removed outside the city, where on the instructions of the brigade he was executed by shooting. The date was 21st February, 1921" (Robert C. Ahern "Statement by Witness" 8).

Meanwhile, Sean Scully's comment on the R.I.C. men who raided his house for arms during the War of Independence also throws light on the liminal line between local friend and local foe in the struggle: "Many of them [*R.I.C. men*], driven by circumstances into a situation unforeseen, did not deserve the deaths they got. Neither were we 'hard men' nor 'gun men' nor 'killers', as our reputation built itself up under the circumstances" (8-9).

two identities (Freudenburg 50-51).¹ Freudenburg's theory exposes the friendship between Pilenz and his dead friend, Mahlke in *Cat and Mouse*, as a fiction. I argue that the same fiction of friendship is at play in "Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ..."².

Different Stories, Same Fiction of Friendship

While the ancients may have lauded friendship,³ Nietzsche is thus quoted in many modern discussions: "Friends, there are no friends" (Nietzsche I, 644-645).⁴ Derrida describes the single friend as lack, as that which can never be acquired ("The Politics of Friendship" 636). However, David Webb describes friends as those with whom "we share the practice of becoming who we are" (120). Friedrich Tenbruck maintains that in the modern world friendship can offer the individual stabilization, each friend keeping always before him a reassuring image of the other ("Freundschaft" 441). Freudenburg draws on Tenbruck among others in support of her hypothesis that "friendship is one of our major blind spots precisely because it supplies us with a myth of unified identity which although fictional, offers relief from the fragmentation of modernity"(4). In both "Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ..." and *Cat and Mouse* a narrator tells the story of an absent/deceased friend. On one level the similarities end there.

1 While Freudenburg confines her discussion to German works of the 20th century, stressing how the myth of friendship offers "relief from the fragmentation of modernity"(4), I perceive traces of her friendship paradigm in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Des Vettters Eckfenster* (1822) and Franz Grillparzer's *Der Arme Spielmann* (1847). Her theory on friendship also offers interesting reading of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Alain Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*, Grass's inspirations for *Cat and Mouse*. See: Julian Preece, *The Life and Work of Günter Grass: Literature, History, Politics* (50). See also: Ruth Gross's "The Narrator as Demon in Grass and Alain-Fournier" (625-639). Application of Freudenburg's theory also opens up an interesting interpretation of the relationship between narrator and brother in Korean writer, Yi Chong-jun's "The Wounded"(1984).

2 "... the Irishman who would write of his own people has to begin by trying to forget what he has learnt ..." (Corkery *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, 15). This discussion is not attempting to ironically imply that Corkery, with his guard up against the entrapment of the Irish psyche in English culture, literature, and language, actually fell under German influences. However, the narrator in "Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ..." is reading Mügge's *Life of Nietzsche!* Given Corkery's opinions as expressed in "Russian Models for Irish Litterateurs" one might have expected to find him engaged with Russian thinkers.

3 C.S. Lewis. "Friendship." *The Four Loves*. (London: Geoffrey Gles, 1960), 69.

4 According to Robert C. Miner in "Nietzsche on Friendship", Nietzsche actually took "superior friendship to be possible but rare" (47). Meanwhile, drawing from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and other sources, Anne Marie Dziob draws parallels between Aristotelian and Nietzschean friendship in her PhD dissertation, *The Nature of Friendship: Aristotle and Nietzsche* (iv).

In *Cat and Mouse*, Pilenz, at the suggestion of his confessor, Father Alban, begins to write about his relationship with former school friend, Joachim Mahlke who deserted the army after being awarded the prized Knight's Cross. Pilenz feels haunted by Mahlke who is missing, presumed dead, and undertakes the narrative in an attempt to find healing and closure. However, Pilenz's description of their relationship and the events leading up to Mahlke's disappearance, reveal a sadomasochistic relationship far from friendly (Freudenburg 8,149).¹ Pilenz's writing, instead of bringing him closure, only reimplicates him in the neglect if not murder of his friend.

In "Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ..." a notice in the paper regarding the cancellation of the Colonel's proposed lecture on Oliver Cromwell is the first indication the narrator receives that his long-absent friend has returned to Ireland. He subsequently receives a short note and a postcard from Colonel Mac Gillicuddy saying that he intends to spend three further weeks in Drogheda "studying on the spot the details of Cromwell's massacre in that town ..." (Corkery 111) and asking the narrator if he has seen Tate's book on Kitchener in Africa or Syed Ameer Khaldoun's book on India (111). When Mac Gillicuddy finally visits him, the narrator finds his friend much changed. He is concerned about the Colonel's preoccupation with Cromwell and while wanting to offer his friend support, finds himself instead overwhelmed into inaction. A subsequent message the narrator receives from Mac Gillicuddy in Kerry clearly illustrates that the Colonel is unwell. Out of concern, the narrator rushes to his friend's side. In Ballyferriter, he is woken in the middle of the night by Mac Gillicuddy, trembling at the cries he hears in the distance. However, the narrator realizes that the sounds are only the squall of distant birds. Ultimately, the narrator is unable to rescue Colonel Mac Gillicuddy from, what would seem to be, a path of self-destruction. The British war hero meets his death when he runs in protest at a patrolling vehicle in the town square, leaving the narrator to hope that his own life will "soon again begin to flow into its old channels" (136). At face level, this narrative has little in common with that of Pilenz's in *Cat and Mouse*. However, it is this peculiar introductory comment which opens up the interpretation that, like Pilenz, this narrator too had an investment in the elimination of his friend.²

1 In regard to sado-masochism see also: "Günter Grass: 'Cat and Mouse'" by Robert H. Spaethling (146-147).

2 This discussion maintains that the narrator craves the identity of hero. I would argue that it is coincidental that the mirror onto which he projects his idealized identity, Colonel Mac Gillicuddy, is in the British army.

A Dyadic Friendship

According to Freudenburg, much writing about friendship rotates around a pair (6). In *Cat and Mouse* even when Mahlke is fighting at the front, back at the Labor Service camp as far as Pilenz is concerned, it is still just Mahlke and himself: “For while I relieved myself, you gave me and my eyes no peace: loudly and in breathless repetition, a painstakingly incised text called attention to Mahlke, whatever I might decide to whistle in opposition ...” (Grass 98-99). Meanwhile, both Freudenburg (145) and Rimmon-Kenan (181) refer to the scene in *Cat and Mouse* when Father Gusewski, expressing concern for Mahlke who has deserted the army, is told by Pilenz to keep out of things. “Don’t worry, Father. I’ll take care of him ... you’d better keep out of it, Father” (Grass 114). Two’s company; three’s a crowd. However, Mahlke subsequently dies. As Rimmon-Kenan points out “Pilenz has a strange way of taking care of his friend” (181). In “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...” the narrator, despite not having heard from Mac Gillicuddy in years, seems immediately to be sucked into a mental vacuum in which there is but himself and the Colonel. On receiving Mac Gillicuddy’s note: “Have you seen Tate’s book on “Kitchener in Africa?”” (138) he becomes preoccupied with the horrors his friend must have experienced first-hand:

... Mac himself must have witnessed some terrible slayings in his time, perhaps even taken a hand in them! [...] And yet there was nothing like a definite thought in my mind — nothing, only the sense of a far-off background that I was afraid to examine, a background of outrage and blood and horizon-flames tonguing the distant skies; and against this background I would see, all the time, Mac Gillicuddy’s brooding face, his top-heavy brow, his pursed lips, his gloomy eyes! (138)

The narrator assumes the responsibility of saving Colonel MacGillicuddy (from himself), rushing to Kerry to help his friend whom he perceives to be mentally unsound.

“Every sentence in the letter, all but two, was quite intelligible, but as a whole it was without sequence: it was no more to be understood than the broken phrases a soldier, after a day of battle, flings from him in his restless sleep. It happened that I had just been reading Mügge’s *Life of Nietzsche*, and I recollected how he tells that the incoherency of the philosopher’s letters were

the first hint his friends had of his approaching madness. I grew suddenly afraid. I picked up a timetable, and in less than an hour I was journeying towards Dingle, which is the nearest station to Ballyferriter. (141)

However, as we shall see, although the narrator throws himself into the role of friend to the rescue, like Pilenz, his endeavors prove far from helpful.

The Best Friends are Dead Ones

The best friends are dead ones. According to Freudenburg, “it is only after the friend — with the power to disrupt the image of unity — is gone that the narrator commences writing” (5). Thus, the death or absence of Mahlke provides Pilenz with an opportunity to finally write his desired identity onto the site of the absent Mahlke (177). However, because Mahlke is dead, “the image of self-unity generated through [*him*] is innately false, it is not the actual identity of a person, but the desired identity projected upon a dead body, by a storyteller — it is a fiction” (5). Thus, on the one hand, Pilenz attempts to portray Mahlke, winner of the Knight’s Cross, as a monumental hero. However, seeping through the narrative, are his attempts to undermine and destroy his friend. Freudenburg emphasizes Rimmon-Kenan’s interpretation (147) that Pilenz not only had a hand in his friend’s death but that his “narration kills Mahlke yet again” (Rimmon-Kenan 179). When Pilenz discovered that Mahlke had missed his train back to the front he advised Mahlke to concoct a story about his ailing mother or aunt. However, Mahlke refused to follow his advice, and Pilenz became frustrated. Pilenz’s “help,” subsequently, took on a more sinister nature. He refused to hide Mahlke in his own house. He suggested instead the “Kahn” and ended up rowing Mahlke to his death. With Mahlke out of the way, Pilenz is free to tell the story of Mahlke. “Pilenz (unwittingly?) tells one story in order to conceal another, and it is the other story that returns in the very act of narration. Rather than confessing the (figurative and probably also literal) killing of Mahlke, Pilenz’s narration kills Mahlke yet again” (Rimmon-Kenan 179).

A similar dynamic is at play in “Captain Mac Gillicuddy ...”. We are likewise presented with a narrator telling the story of a dead friend. In *Cat and Mouse*, Pilenz, undertook writing at the request of Father Alban in an attempt to achieve

some type of healing or closure after the death of Mahlke.¹ However, unlike Pilenz, the narrator in “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...,” from the very outset gives the impression that the friendship and its baggage is already behind him. “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy having been now laid to rest with his Gaelic ancestors in Muckcross Abbey, my life, I trust, will soon again begin to flow into its old channels” (136). From the first sentence, we get the impression that whatever is to follow is already a completed affair, a closed case. However, something does not sit right with this. It is peculiar that the narrator, after the death of his friend, could naively envisage his life soon returning to normal. It was, after all, Ireland of 1919. As the narrator himself points out early on in his narration: “the nerves of all Ireland were strained almost to the breaking point!”(137). Freudenburg stresses Pilenz’s “omission of the end of the war and the holocaust” (172).² She interprets this as Pilenz’s inability or unwillingness to let go of his desired identity of monumental friend/war hero in postfascist times (177). I would argue that like Pilenz, the narrator of “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...” may also be guilty of a certain blinkered view of the struggle for Irish independence going on around him: “The whole country, as everybody knows, was disturbed at the time by groups of armed men raiding in the nights. I grew timid” (145). The turbulent times are an intimidating backdrop to his rendition of the deterioration of his friend’s mental health and subsequent death. However, once his friend the Colonel is laid to rest, they have faded completely into inconsequence and he trusts his own life will soon be back to normal (136). In the middle of a war of independence attempting to end 800 years of British occupation, this would

1 “Who will supply me with an ending?” (Grass 126), Pilenz asks toward the end of his story, but there seems to be no end to Mahlke’s haunting of Pilenz. This point is emphasized by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan in “Narration as Repetition” (185). Rimmon-Kenan while agreeing that narration-as-repetition may lead to a working through and an overcoming of issues, also claims that it can “imprison the narrative in a kind of textual neurosis, an issueless re-enactment of the traumatic events it narrates and conceals” (178). According to Rimmon-Kenan, Pilenz instead of reaching closure through the telling of his story, only becomes entrapped in the story: “In the act of narration Pilenz manages to evade or attenuate his guilt, and the narration consequently becomes a repetition of the same behaviour that made it necessary” (Rimmon-Kenan 179).

2 Freudenburg argues that only Pilenz’s dead brother is discussed, and, like Mahlke, he seems only to have inspired envy in Pilenz (172). “If I today occasionally miss my elder brother Klaus, whom I scarcely knew, what I felt at the time was mostly jealousy on account of that altar ...” (Grass 115).

indicate denial of the highest order.¹ Mahlke's decision to desert the army after winning the Knight's Cross frustrated Pilenz for whom he functioned as a type of mirror onto which Pilenz projected his own idealized identity of hero (Freudenburg 156). However, Mahlke's subsequent death should, at least in principle, have made him a less troublesome mirror for Pilenz's projected identity. In a similar way, in "Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ..." the Colonel, mirror of the narrator's idealized identity of hero, also rocked the boat for the narrator when he attempted to switch sides. The returning British Colonel, wounded at the Somme, had become obsessed with Cromwell's atrocities in Ireland and gone to the Sinn Féin headquarters to lay "certain plans before them for the wrecking of the British Empire" (150). Given the Colonel's Irish ancestry and his first-hand experience of the wider British Empire, this might seem a logical enough sequence of events. However, for the narrator, the Colonel's actions signify, not a belated awakening to the yoke of colonialism, but mental deterioration from which he needs rescuing. "He was whining, squealing like a young puppy in its first illness; but I didn't mind; I could cure him" (144). The narrator thus steps in to "help" his friend but, at every turn, his attempts are thwarted by circumstances. He is ultimately unable to divert the Colonel from his apparent path of self-destruction. Like Pilenz, the narrator is with his friend right up until the end. "There in the middle of the moonlight, lay Mac Gillicuddy, dead, with his secrets" (150). As in the case of Pilenz and Mahlke, the narrator's close proximity to Mac Gillicuddy before his death enables the narrator to lay the Colonel's death at the Colonel's own door; it was a consequence of his own insane actions: "He [*Mac Gillicuddy*] leaped at the car, crying out — I know not what. A succession of revolver shots rang out ..." (150).

The Friend as Opposite

Many unreliable narrators "construct their tales around opposites: one friend is spectacular, the other normal, one is dead, the other alive; one is a failure, the other a success" (Freudenburg 50). Why does the narrator portray the friend as the opposite of the self? This binary structure is actually the narrator's attempt to

1 "We should not assume that works which deal with the fantasy of a single friend are necessarily proposing, without any reflection or irony whatsoever, a self-unified identity. Much more, twentieth-century texts show a very strong ambivalence toward this model of identity" (Freudenburg 7). The narrator in "Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ..." tells us his friend's death is behind him. However, in telling his friend's story he murders him again in a way similar to Pilenz's murder of Mahlke as outlined by Rimmon-Kenan (176-185).

eliminate the friend by imagining the friend as the self (Freudenburg 50).¹ In *Cat and Mouse*, Mahlke is the eventual earner of the Ritterkreuz medal for his deeds at the front. However, even as a schoolboy he set himself apart from others. When the lieutenant commander visited the school, Mahlke was one of the few who could keep up with him on the gymnasium swing, as Pilenz grudgingly admits: “Apart from Hotten Sonntag only Mahlke could compete, but so execrable were his swing and split—his knees were bent and he was all tensed up—that none of us could bear to watch him” (Grass 64). Freudenburg highlights how Pilenz presents Mahlke as a larger than life character in this way (148). In “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...” the narrator follows a similar pattern in the portrayal of his friend. At the beginning of the story his reference to the Colonel’s burial place establishes that the Colonel had been a man of standing: “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy having been now laid to rest with his Gaelic ancestors in Muckcross Abbey ...” (p. 136). Meanwhile, although deafeningly silent on his own background and political leaning, the narrator is quick to establish the Colonel’s heroic war record. “He had been wounded at the battle of the Somme, and these wounds, I knew, had unfitted him for further active service; I also knew that he had since then been put in charge of some commissariat department in India, and that he had had to make frequent journeys into the very heart of that vast land, as well as into Mesopotamia; but beyond this I knew nothing” (136).

Thus, like Pilenz, on one level the narrator appears to be presenting us with a hero.

The Object of the Narrator’s Aggression

For Freudenburg, rare are the narrators who in some way support the friend or try to avert their death. Thus the Other, and opposite, is eliminated during the process in which the story of the self is being written (51). In turn, the site of the dead friend becomes the narrator’s new mirror for his desired identity. While friends can be seen as an “autonomous version of identity which is admired, they also represent the objects of the narrators’ aggression,” some narrators even participating in the

1 Drawing on Weber (*Return to Freud ...* 14), Freudenburg maintains that the friendships portrayed in certain 20th century German first-person narratives represent “heteroreflective relationship(s) turned into [...] auto-reflective one(s)”. Although the friendship novels may appear “to be bipolar because there are two main characters, from a hermeneutic standpoint, they are monopolar” (Freudenburg 76). “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...” is all about the narrator.

murder of their friend (Freudenburg 51).¹ To support this point, Freudenburg refers to Rimmon-Kenan's interpretation of *Cat and Mouse*. Pilenz, having rejected Father Gusewski's offer of help for Mahlke, steps into the role of Mahlke's sole rescuer and lifeline. However, as Rimmon-Kenan outlines:

Pilenz has a strange way of taking care of his friend, rejecting every escape possibility Mahlke suggests, including the cellar at Pilenz's house, deceitfully insisting that the military police have already come looking for him, and suggesting that Mahlke hide in the ruined ship ... Mahlke dives with his food cans, but the opener, we learn to our shock, has remained with Pilenz, and only when it is too late does Pilenz shout to the vanished Mahlke to come up and retrieve the opener. (181)

The narrator in "Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ..." is also, I would argue, guilty of passive-aggressive behavior toward Colonel Mac Gillicuddy if not a hand in the Colonel's death. Like Pilenz, without hesitation, he steps up to the role of protector/rescuer of the Colonel, but in a questionable manner. His frantic rush to Kerry with the intention of aiding his friend whom he believes mentally unstable, culminates, on his arrival, in an anti-climatic scene: "While eating the plain fare, the homemade bread, that had been put before me, I noticed that his face was becoming more and more haggard: the invisible fingers of a fixed idea were dragging at his cheeks" (141). The narrator does little more than look helplessly at the Colonel across the table. His rush to Kerry has culminated in inaction. Later that night when Colonel Mac Gillicuddy, alarmed at the cries he hears in the distance, enters the narrator's room, the narrator's response is peculiar:

But he was trying to speak, and I thought it was the word 'cries' I again heard.

'Rather inadequate,' I flung out peevishly, thinking, perhaps, to break the spell that was on him; the cries of the sea-birds just then were very far away, and indeed, not unpleasant in the still night. How could anyone mix them up with the wild screaming of a massacre? (143)

1 "So hat man denn den Schlüssel des Krankheitsbildes in der Hand, indem man die Selbstvorwürfe als Vorwürfe gegen ein Liebesobjekt erkennt, die von diesem Weg auf das eigene Ich gewälzt sind" (Freud "Trauer" 202). Freud interpreted many self-reproaches as allegations against a love object, which ended up directed against the own ego. Using Freud to support her argument, Freudenburg maintains that self-derogatory acts on the part of the narrator are in fact "accusations against the lost love object"(65).

“Rather inadequate,” would seem, by any standards, a strange choice of words to offer someone in the delusional throws of post-traumatic stress. Unsurprisingly, they further unhinge the Colonel:

‘Inadequate! inadequate! That’s just it.’ He spoke as if the problem of his life had been solved.

‘Inadequate! Laughable! Laughable, when you think of the horror of it! It is that that makes one reckless in such businesses. Wild, inhuman’ (how he was glaring at me!) –delighted to give the edge of the sword on a grey pate, or a soft breast, or a child!— “I will make them squeal,” you say, you can’t help saying it when the passion of slaughter is upon you, but you... you can’t make them squeal – loud enough! And then, and then... my God! My God! Shut it! shut it! The curtains. Those also– Oh! my God! my God!’ (143)

Next day when they are on the road from Ballyferriter to Dingle, the narrator grips the Colonel’s arm to stop him jumping out of the car and talking to the dark figures passing by that the Colonel believes to be Sinn Féiners. “‘Halt awhile, driver,’ he [*Mac Gillicuddy*] said, ‘I want to see these men; I won’t be long.’ He was just leaping from the car, when the driver, with some magic word he had, set the horse prancing. I caught the Colonel’s arm”(145). Thus, the narrator yet again presents himself in the role of Colonel Mac Gillicuddy’s protector. He catches the Colonel’s arm and prevents him from descending among fellows who would, as the driver put it, “destroy you, and the likes of them clothes on your back!” (145). However, in fact, it was actually the driver’s quick thinking and not the narrator’s intervention that delivered the Colonel from the perceived harm. Meanwhile, the narrator has resolved to cure the Colonel’s madness by reminding him of the glory as well as the shame of the British Empire. “Since he was haunted by the vision of the reverse of the British Empire I would speak of its obverse. After all, one could make out a case for it. Had it not spread Christianity, I would say, into those wild lands, throwing some certain share of its wealth and its choicest children into the work?” (145). However, even this pathetic excuse for a remedy circumstances conveniently prevent him from administering to the patient:

Soon afterwards a crowd of English soldiers, very tired-looking, armed to the teeth, got into our carriage, and I thought I saw the Colonel shudder. To start with a Colonel a discussion on the two sides, the glory and the shame

of the British Empire in a carriage full of soldiers might lead to the most unimaginable results as things were just then, so I was forced to hold my peace. (146)

It is dark when they finally arrive back at the city. However, after looking at the evening paper the Colonel excuses himself: “‘Pardon’, he said carelessly, and went out, the paper still in his hand” (147). He spoke so calmly that the narrator thought it peculiar and meant to question him as soon as he returned. However, the Colonel did not return. “For three hours I [*narrator*] dived hither and thither through wide and narrow streets — through squares lit by arc-lamps and through filthy passages where there were no lamps of any kind” (147). The narrator spends a frantic three hours searching unsuccessfully for his friend. Here again, however, his failed rescue culminates at the table:

‘My friend has not returned?’

‘No, sir; there is no trace of him. Johnny, here, saw him going out.’

‘Well, send in whatever you have; I’m fainting.’

‘Yes, sir; and there’s the paper.’

I had little mind for it, but as it lay there on the table, I saw in scare headlines:

MASSACRE AT AMRITSAR!

2,000 INDIANS SHOT DOWN BY THE ENGLISH

500 KILLED OUTRIGHT. (148)

On seeing the headlines, the narrator realizes what has triggered his friend to make such a hasty exit:

... the shock those three lines of print had given me had called out those reserves of spirit that in such moments so dominate the mere body.

‘I must find him,’ I said. I swallowed some cups of tea, one after another, and rose up to make again for the streets. (148)

The shock of the headlines has called out the narrator’s reserves of spirit, and he is determined to find his friend, ... but he still dallies drinking tea. Later after Mac Gillicuddy’s return, both he and the narrator stand side by side at the window watching the antics of the armored car tearing around the square (149).

“We saw two young heads rise above it. They laughed. They spoke. If Mac

Gillicuddy caught the words, I did not; but he raced from the room as if struck by a whip. I leaped after him. I flew down the stairs. He banged through the glass doors. I opened them. I saw him making headlong for the car. The two heads turned towards him. Then down they went. He leaped at the car, crying out — I know not what. A succession of revolver shots rang out, seemed to fly everywhere. Then the car blew a cloud of smoke and moved. He was all limbs, right in front of it. I could see nothing for a moment only a lifting cloud. Then in, beneath, that little cloud I saw a figure crawling slowly on all fours, like a beast, stupidly, heavily — a most ridiculous posture. It only went a little way, when down it flopped, kissing the ground. And all the time the car circled the square. It swerved to escape the bundle that now lay in its path, and then shot swiftly out of sight by the side street it had entered from. There, in the middle of the moonlight, lay Mac Gillicuddy, dead, with his secrets. (149-150)

While the narrator flew down the stairs in what would prove to be yet another vain attempt to save Mac Gillicuddy, he seems to have stopped flying, if not come to a complete halt, by the time he gets to the glass doors. Was he afraid of the revolver shots ringing out from everywhere? Yet, he did not duck his head. He is able to give us a detailed account of his friend's assault on the armored car and subsequent degeneration from a human to a beastlike creature to a pathetic dead bundle (150). "No, you were just beyond help," Pilenz says to the absent Mahlke (Grass 69). However, these words might just as easily be addressed retrospectively by Corkery's narrator to the deceased Colonel Mac Gillicuddy. His lame efforts to "rescue" the Colonel seem more an excuse to say as much than a genuine effort to help his friend.

Even before the narrator rushes to Kerry, his support of his friend is suspiciously minimal: "I was really glad when, at two in the morning, he rose to go. I felt I should accompany him, for his ardour of mind was such that he might easily go astray or walk into the river, yet this I could not bring myself to do: he had exhausted my powers" (139). The narrator subsequently, rushes to Kerry out of worry for his friend, yet on this particular night, assessing the Colonel to be capable of walking into a river, he is too exhausted to accompany him home. Thus, it is my contention that while the narrator may appear to esteem Colonel Mac Gillicuddy by highlighting his heroic war record, by obsessing about his welfare, and by considering his story worth telling, in a similar vein to Pilenz in *Cat and Mouse*, the narrator also engages in acts of neglect and passive aggression towards his friend. In keeping with Freudenburg's argument, while the Colonel does represent an

autonomous version of hero which is admired, he is also an object of aggression (50).

A Mixing of Identities

Although the narrator at times appears to be taking pains to highlight the differences between himself and the friend, the process of the elimination of the other may also manifest itself in a mixing of the roles of esteemed friend and humble narrator (Freudenburg 51). Freudenburg draws on Rimmon-Kenan's analysis of *Cat and Mouse* to demonstrate how Pilenz and Mahlke's identities seem at times to be interchangeable: "... cat-and mouse can be understood as an emblem for each of them, for they both seem to thrive on pursuit and on playing the role of the victimized victimizer" (149).¹ Meanwhile, Freudenburg emphasizes how, paradoxically, Pilenz seems empowered when war hero, Mahlke deserts and has hit rock bottom: "Let us all three celebrate the sacrament, once more and forever: You kneel, I [*Pilenz*] stand behind dry skin. Sweat distends your pores" (Grass 114). She expands as follows:

During the communion scene, Mahlke is at his lowest point, and Pilenz is quite aware of the fact that he somehow thrives on the warrior's defeats because these offer him a chance to "help," or simply feel superior. ... In other words, Pilenz thrives on knowing his friend's guilt, his weakness, because this gives him power over the friend. (Freudenburg 145)

Like Pilenz, the narrator in "Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ..." also seems peculiarly assertive and self-assured when Colonel Mac Gillicuddy, hero of the Somme, is at his most vulnerable:

With confidence I bent my eyes on the bed. He was whining, squealing like a young puppy in its first illness; but I didn't mind; I could cure him! Now he was still, quite still, seeming as if he were listening to things far away—that sense of strain, I noticed, never once went from him, asleep or awake. (144)

However, in "Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ..." a similar mixing of identities is also at play when it comes to the issue of mental health. The narrator while concerned with his friend's mental stability often seems barely mentally sound himself. Take for example his initial reunion with the war-weathered Colonel:

I could feel that he had somehow come on new standards and that he was now

1 Ruth V. Gross stresses Pilenz more than Mahlke in the role of cat and stalker (637).

judging the world by them; at such times I would halt midway in a sentence, hoping he would not guess the conclusion I had intended! And often, until his whole face looked distorted, his right eyebrow would climb up his forehead, slowly, slowly; and the eye itself, so exposed, would then glare mercilessly into one's very brain! His very appearance disturbed me deeply. (139)

The narrator's reaction to the changed Colonel would seem more becoming an E.T.A. Hoffmann horror story.¹ One could be forgiven for wondering whether the narrator might not be the one becoming mentally unhinged. When the Colonel leaves at two in the morning, the narrator seems barely in control of his own mental stability: "... I kept my eyes in the clutch of my left hand... After a long spell of this artificially nurtured coma, as it were, I sprang up suddenly, caught up Tate's book on Kitchener and hurled it into the fire, for an insidious, morbid craving to dip again into its horrors had begun to form itself in my quietening spirit" (140).² Understandably, the Colonel may have been mentally unhinged by his war experiences at the Somme, etc. However, the narrator while repelled by his own desire to continue reading Tate's book, would seem mentally unfit to cope with even looking at the battle-seasoned Colonel. His description of the sea-fowl crying in the distance on the night Colonel Mac Gillicuddy enters his room in Kerry is also peculiar. At first he says: "Yet the only sounds to be heard from outside were some sea-fowl quarrelling above a school of sprats (as I took it) in the mouth of the bay—sharp cries or melancholy, long-drawn and wailing. Was it these cries that were playing havoc with him [*the Colonel*]?" (143). He appears to be questioning whether mere sea-fowl quarrelling could have triggered the Colonel's unstable mental state. However, in the same breath, he betrays the susceptibility of his own peace of mind to the same bird sounds: "I felt my own ears greedily gathering them in, I felt myself yielding to them, I found them taking on some strange hurry and wildness. Bah! I shook myself" (143). Thus, a subtle mixing of the identities of narrator and Colonel is detectible. The narrator, while concerned for his friend's mental health, seems, at times, barely in command of his own.

Madness

1 See: Maria M. Tatar's "Mesmerism, Madness, and Death in E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Der goldne Topf"" in *Studies in Romanticism* 14.4 (Boston: Boston University, Fall 1975), 365-389.

2 The identities of both narrator and Colonel Mac Gillicuddy are also similar in so far as both seem to be academics of a sort; in his initial short note to the author, the Colonel mentions that he will spend three more weeks in Drogheda "studying on the spot the details of Cromwell's massacre in that town!"(111). Meanwhile, the narrator has been reading Mügge's *Life of Nietzsche* and wastes no time on starting Tate's book on Kitchener in Africa at the Colonel's recommendation (111).

Gerry Smyth argues that the violence of colonialism and decolonization is one of the major reasons for the reoccurrence of madness as a theme in Irish fiction. According to Smyth, the decolonizing subject, should he attempt to resist the colonial logic of the Manichean allegory¹ or mimesis, becomes in danger of alienation and may slip into a madness which only cements the opposition between (rational) colonizer and (irrational) colonized. Smyth calls on both the arguments of Ashis Nandy² and Franz Fanon to emphasize how the decolonizing subject's resistance to colonization from within the psychological rules set by the rulers, means that the subject remains a victim of alien modes of thought, trapped within a colonialist logic of Self and Other.³ While Smyth's thesis may offer an interesting interpretation of the narrator's mentally unstable portrayal of Colonel Mac Gillicuddy, it is my contention that the Colonel is not as mentally unhinged as the narrator might wish. It is the narrator, quaking at the sight of both British troops and Sinn Féiners alike (145-146), with the more complex psychological baggage to sort. On the stage of Ireland, 1919, both the narrator and Colonel Mac Gillicuddy are subjects in the process of decolonizing. In light of his Irish Mac Gillicuddy ancestors, the Colonel could be interpreted as having been playing a mimetic role; he has served as loyal mimic-man supporter of the Empire, perhaps in the wake of generations of his ancestors. However, now as the colonial stability of Empire quakes beneath him, his colonial blinkers come off and he is awake to the horrors the colonizer has and is visiting on others along with his own people. Consequently, he attempts to join Sinn Féin. This would seem a logical enough development, given his experiences in the wider Empire. Such logic, however, escapes the narrator. He interprets the Colonel's attempts to contact Sinn Féin not as bravery or heroism but lunacy. The Colonel's running at the armored

1 Abdul R. JanMohamed argues that the dominant model of power relations in colonial communities is the Manichean opposition between the superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native. See: "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature." *Race, Writing and Difference*. Ed. Louis Young Gates (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986), 84.

2 In *The Intimate Enemy* Ashis Nandy describes colonialism as a psychological state rooted in earlier forms of social consciousness in both colonized and colonizer. He maintains that in the colonial culture, "identification with the aggressor bound the rulers along with the ruled in an unbreakable binary relationship" (7).

3 Gerry Smyth. *The Novel and the Nation* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 48-50.

vehicle is not an act of heroism but madness.¹ Where another might have seen a hero sacrificing himself in a final act of resistance against the oppressor, the narrator sees “a figure crawling slowly on all fours, like a beast” (149). In line with Smyth, it is my contention that the narrator’s own entrapment within the colonialist logic of self and Other causes him to interpret as lunacy the Colonel’s attempt to throw his lot in with Sinn Féin. This entrapment likewise explains his delusional opinion that on the death of his friend his own life will soon flow into its usual channels (136).

Conclusion

According to Freudenburg, the central textual ambiguity in *Cat and Mouse* not only deconstructs the myth of the singular hero but also generates interpretations which replicate it (130). Can the same be said of Corkery’s “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...”? Like other narrators of Post World War II German friendship literature, Pilenz, in telling the story of Mahlke, is really demonstrating “nostalgia for what has died, for the whole, meaningful, monumental friend” (Freudenburg 177). Unable to make the transition to a postfascist mentality, right up to the end, Pilenz is still trying “to find and present to the reader his monumental friend” (177). The textual ambiguity in “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...” follows a similar, if more subtle, vein to that of the ambiguity in *Cat and Mouse*. Julia Eichenberg in her article “Paramilitary Violence in Ireland and Poland after the First World War” emphasizes how the War of Independence in Ireland was fought “not only against the officials, but also against anyone connected to them; wives and families became the objects of threats and attacks. People were often suspected of treason, of passing on information, of betraying their home country just as it was finally about to become independent” (237). Could such a background have instigated Corkery to deconstruct the myth

1 According to Foucault, the production of discourse in every society is controlled, selected, organized, and circulated according to procedures whose function it is to avert the powers and dangers of discourse. That is to say, societal structures tend to nurture a discourse which maintains the status quo while curbing any discourse that threatens it. Consequently, the dominant discourses in society may fringe discourses which they cannot assimilate into the category of madness (51-53). In light of this theory, the narrator’s interpretation of Mac Gillicuddy’s interest in supporting Sinn Féin as madness could be read as a sign that within the dominating societal discourse of the time, it was inconceivable that a Colonel in the British army (even one with Irish ancestors) would do so. Foucault also points out that the madman’s speech may have the power of uttering a hidden truth, or of perceiving in naivety, what another in wisdom cannot see (51-53). Mac Gillicuddy throwing his lot in behind Sinn Féin on his arrival home into a revolutionary climate is far from illogical or indeed unprecedented. The narrator’s description of the Colonel as mentally unsound could thus be seen as an attempt to corral an unpopular discourse into the category of madness.

of heroic friend in “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...”?¹ The parallels here outlined between “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...” and *Cat and Mouse* indicate a literary argument for such a possibility. While I agree with George Brandon Saul that there is “a suggestion of strain in the writing” (120), to say the story might be “too didactic to work successfully” (Delaney 102) is to deny the possibility of an ironic interpretation. Freudenburg describes a post-Freudian text as one that forces us “to look skeptically at the trust placed in interpretation” (75). “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...” certainly requires this of us. “Readers tend to bring their areas of expertise to the text without seeing the limitations these expectations place upon the narrative” (Freudenburg 74). Thus, while for George Brandon Saul “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...” might be “interesting enough as a memorialization of guerilla activities” (120), for me the story is one example in Irish literature of friendship portrayed as the doomed battleground upon which the struggle for the desired identity of hero is lost.

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1 In speaking of *The Hounds of Banba* in which “Colonel Mac Gillicuddy ...” first appeared, Patricia Hutchins notes: “Throughout these stories there runs the pity of the man who can understand the motives behind violence but can never be wholly with it” (“Daniel Corkery, Poet of Weather and Place” 44).

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