

From Barrytown to Ballymun: The Problematics of Space, Class and Gender in Roddy Doyle's *Family* (1994)

Marcus Free

Introduction

Helena Sheehan's historical analysis of Irish television drama identified three enduring problems in its depiction of the urban working-class.¹ Most problematically, it tended to conflate working class with 'lumpen life', with 'chronic unemployment, criminality and social welfare dependency, [with] people who did not work'.² Secondly, it tended to 'blur and diffuse class tensions',³ reducing material, social class differences to individual conflicts. Thirdly, it typically located social conflict within the family as an inter-generational and/or gendered phenomenon, pitting the individual against the dead weight of cultural tradition. These were 'conflicts easier to comprehend than those involving class forces and social institutions'⁴ in a country governed by Eamonn De Valera's conservative 1937 Constitution, and where the Catholic Church has wielded considerable, if waning, political and social power since the foundation of the Irish Free State (later the Republic of Ireland) in 1921.

Writer Roddy Doyle's Dublin-set BBC/RTE (Raidio Teilifis Eireann) four part co-production *Family*, broadcast in Ireland and Britain in May 1994, might appear to have reproduced these problems. Its opening episode concentrated heavily on lumpen-proletarian petty criminality, and it clearly located its theme of conflict within the nuclear family by focusing on a physically and psychologically abusive father's impact on wife

and children. However, the series proceeded to offer a sensitive, if limited analysis of the constructions and articulations of urban space, class and gender in modern Ireland, offering a rare exception to the historical absence of an urban social realist tradition in Irish film and television drama.

As an urban setting Dublin has variously provided romanticised urban squalor in the adaptation of Doyle's *The Commitments* (Alan Parker, 1991), symbolised the disastrous imprisoning of Celtic spirituality only realised by return to the rural (*Into the West* [Mike Newell, 1992]),⁵ and been a location for the brutal (*The Courier* [Frank Deasy and Joe Lee, 1988]; *The General* [John Boorman, 1998]) or comic criminality (*InterMission* [John Crowley, 2003]; *Headrush* [Shimmy Marcus, 2003]). The social realist depiction of working class characters and settings in Irish television drama has been inconsistent. Highlights included a series of early 1970s experimental productions modelled on the BBC's single play (*A Week in the Life of Martin Cluxton* [Brian MacLochlainn, 1971]; *Hatchet* [Tony Barry, 1973]) and the 1980 historical series *Strumpet City*, all set in Dublin.⁶

Family constituted a self-conscious departure from Roddy Doyle's earlier 'Barrytown' novel trilogy, and especially their film adaptations, which offered a sympathetic but more sentimentalised and romanticised account of working class Dublin life. *The Commitments* invokes the social and cultural marginalisation of the fictional 'Barrytown' suburb, but eclipses them with a conventional Hollywood narrative as a band of self-styled northside working class 'niggers of Dublin' seek their fortune in the musical genre tradition by

forming a soul band. *The Snapper* (Stephen Frears, 1993) problematically depicts a born again ‘new man’ father successfully adjust to his daughter’s pregnancy following rape while she drinks and smokes her way through the gestation. In *The Van* (Stephen Frears, 1996) a perceptive novel about the isolation and alienation of unemployment and the ruining of a masculine friendship through a barely functioning illegal business venture in Ireland’s 1980s economic recession becomes a series of comic episodes.

By providing gestures lacking an analytical frame, these adaptations variously exacerbate the enduring weaknesses of attempted social realism in Irish film and television. They particularly neglect Ireland’s persistent social class and gender inequalities since the State’s foundation, arguably heightened in the recent so-called ‘Celtic Tiger’ economic boom.⁷ These inequalities are made visible through a marked spatialisation, a result of disastrous urban planning, manifest in Dublin’s and other Irish cities’ low-density sprawl, and pronounced social class differentiated suburban boundaries.⁸

Family broke somewhat with this historic absence of social realist drama in several ways. Formally it exploited the potential for textured, complex narrative through its television mini-series multi-episodic and multi-perspectival form. Framing each episode from an individual family member’s perspective, it deconstructed the nuclear family’s established institution as a unit of collective security and vehicle for cultural reproduction.⁹ It highlighted forms of gender inequality, following the character of Paula Spencer (Ger Ryan) from objectified abuse victim in Episode 1 to her emergence as central protagonist by Episode 4. Forms of gendered play – verbal and physical – central to Doyle’s novels

and their adaptations were here subject to analytical scrutiny by showing their direct and indirect impact on Paula and her children (Nicola [Neili Conroy], John Paul [Barry Ward], Leanne [Gemma Butterly] and Jack [Jacob Williams]). The series also focuses progressively on social class, particularly its linkages with gender relations, identities and social and cultural inequalities as materialised in the city's spatial distribution. The theme of the politics of space – domestic and urban – was dramatised by showing how the family home's internal gendered games and hierarchies are co-extensive with games of power and hierarchy within the 'outside' spaces of popular culture, public institutions and gendered formal and informal economies.

This concern with the 'power geometries'¹⁰ of class and the nuclear family's internal 'power geometries' marked a watershed in Irish-set television drama. 'Power-geometry' is Doreen Massey's term for how space, 'created out of social relations [...] is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation'.¹¹ Massey dissolves the supposed hierarchical superiority of time in social theory, arguing for the analysis of specific places as always fluid, rather than static, as dynamic, unbounded processes irreducible to 'single, "unique" identities'.¹²

Doyle's collaboration with director Michael Winterbottom and cinematographer Daf Hobson were crucial in *Family*. The carefully constructed visual compositions and editing which contextualise the characters within textured spatial and temporal dynamics and rhythms contrast markedly with the 'Barrytown' adaptations. A key factor was the

series' location, unmistakable to an Irish audience, the 1960s high-rise towers of Dublin's northside suburb of Ballymun. These towers, unique within the Irish Republic, were a nationally recognisable synecdoche for disastrous post-Independence urban planning and social marginalisation.

Barrytown to Ballymun

Family's origins lie in the BBC's successful adaptation of *The Snapper* (1993) as a television film, following which Roddy Doyle was invited to write a four part series on any chosen subject. Doyle opted to continue his theme of family crisis and dissolution from his novel *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (1993), rather than endurance and solidarity in *The Snapper*, self-consciously distancing *Family*'s Spencers from the Barrytown Trilogy's Rabbitte family.¹³ This may have partly reflected Doyle's fatigue at being accused of sentimentalising and patronising working class Dubliners,¹⁴ and frustration at reviewers' neglect of his novels' 'darker' aspects, though his own solely or co-written adaptations of those novels clearly failed to realise those features on screen. The Spencers germinated as an antidote to comic expectation.¹⁵

Broadcast in the UK (BBC1) and Ireland (RTE1) in May 1994, *Family* was immediately deemed 'controversial' in reviews. Reasons included unprecedented sex scenes in Irish drama and its foul language and violence¹⁶. Ballymun residents accused the BBC of heightening the setting's existing stigma through its story of a criminal and abusive husband and father, and through its visualisation: the BBC allegedly asked residents to

remove curtains¹⁷ and brought burned out cars, old washing machines and litter to the estate.¹⁸

Doyle and others¹⁹ dismissed these criticisms as reproducing a heightened Irish sensitivity to negative representations, particularly given its broadcast in Britain. But Ballymun tower blocks, unmistakable to an Irish audience, appeared to underpin concerns that the series localised its theme of criminality, violence and abuse in this economically and geographically disadvantaged area of Dublin. The literal concreteness of its Ballymun location upset many. As one resident remarked, while Barrytown is imaginary, Ballymun's uniqueness is instantly recognisable, invariably reduced in filmic (*The Courier*, 1988; *Into the West*, 1992) and now televisual depictions to 'consistently negative' imagery ('Gerry Ryan Show', *2FM* radio, 4 May, 1994). It is also a metonymic symbol in Irish cultural and social imagination, much more so than the 'real' suburb of Barrytown (Doyle's native Kilbarrack), of failure in urban planning and the lower working class's ghettoisation.²⁰

Built in the 1960s as an experimental high rise complex housing 11,000 residents in seven 15-storey flats, Ballymun was to help solve the growing problem of poorly planned low population density estates outside the former city boundaries, which combined poor educational and retail facilities and transport links with increasingly high concentrations of lower income and 'problem' families.²¹ But it simply extended the 'dependence, domination, exclusion and exploitation' of the urban working class since the State's foundation by continuing the policy of relocating inner-city dwellers en masse to such far

flung and poorly accessible estates.²² By the 1980s it was considered a terminal failure, with a majority of unemployed residents and a declining population as a government-backed scheme offered reduced loans to buy elsewhere.²³ Ballymun both symbolised bad urban planning and carried a specific stigma all too familiar to residents.

As for *Family*'s abusive father, one resident angrily complained of the absence of 'analysis', that Charlo (Sean McGinley) was instead reduced to 'just a bastard. There were no questions asked about where he came out of, no questions asked in the political context about who and how this situation came about.'²⁴ It is not clear what 'political' analysis might involve, but it suggests that her inferred meaning was that Charlo's unfettered behaviour was somehow connected to his class/ residential/ geographical context, and if so should be situated within a political history of social marginalisation and exclusion. Alternatively, it might suggest a biographical contextualisation, along the 'therapeutic' lines of inter-generationally reproduced gendered violence, as in Gary Oldman's film *Nil by Mouth* (1997). Neither such 'analysis' appears in the drama. Other reported responses expressed incredulity that Charlo's wife Paula would tolerate such a physically and psychologically abusive relationship.²⁵ It might be inferred that Paula's acceptance reflected generally low expectations of life in such a marginalised situation.

Such complaints cannot simply be deemed 'representative' of audience opinion, and indeed were countered in reviews, audience interviews and radio phone-ins.²⁶ Doyle's comments given in an interview were equivocal with respect to whether or not Charlo's domestic abusive behaviour is somehow a functional correlate of unemployment and

social marginalisation. He resisted the accusation that he *could* objectively ‘represent’ working class life or ‘balance’ his depiction by attempting documentary/ dramatic objectivity.²⁷ However, prior to the broadcast, he described the Barrytown trilogy as ‘a celebration of poor, often inadequate people, about their struggle to keep heads above water [...] This is the flip side, darker, bleak’.²⁸ That would suggest an intentional class, if not geographical specificity.

And indeed Episode 1, which caused the furore in Ireland, exhibits the clichéd spectacular imagery of masculine lumpenprole sub-working class criminality, featuring three of Charlo’s criminal ventures. These are variously amusing (stealing pedigree dogs from a Traveller camp), violent (an armed video shop van heist) and stupid (undisguised while recorded by surveillance camera in an electronic goods theft). Charlo screws his criminal associate’s wife Chrissie (Honor Heffernan) in her kids’ bedroom, empties a bin on another friend and threatens Paula in front of his children for serving dinner in his absence. His punctuating one robbery with a sand dune ‘shite’ continues a running theme, in Doyle’s work, of working class masculine anal eroticism, the physical and verbal pleasure of imaginarily dominating by metaphorically shitting on the outside world.

Returning to the questioning of Charlo’s behaviour, neither form of potential ‘analysis’ is offered, directly or implied. He clearly belongs to a sub-working class lumpenprole fraction, but is not situated there in terms of determining conditions of existence as the wider economic, social and political context is absent. Indeed, although Charlo is unemployed (when Ireland’s unemployment rate was 15.5%²⁹) and the drama’s multi-

episodic form echoes Alan Bleasdale's *Boys from the Blackstuff* (BBC, 1982), Doyle distanced *Family* from the latter's explanatory linkage of economic decline, unemployment and psychic dysfunction.³⁰ Charlo's wild behaviour is seemingly uncontained by family, community, police or civil society. Contrastingly, Paula is trapped by the chaos, unable to challenge, eject him or leave. And indeed, Doyle's rehearsal script directions clearly suggest a correlation between chaotic lives, poverty and criminality ('the poverty is immediately apparent. The furniture includes a deck chair. There are rolls of stolen carpet piled in the hall, and other goods in boxes'),³¹ as do his post-production comments on 'the deliberately 'amateurish', jumpy photography [which] gets across the feel of these disorganised lives'.³² Given Ballymun's concreteness and easy recognition, we might accept residents' grievances that an internally heterogeneous 'community' was 'humiliated'³³ by a skewed 'representation'. Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin observed that *Family* had indeed extended Irish television drama's inadequacies, like others such as John McGahern's rurally set *Amongst Women* (BBC, 1998) transposing a problematic of social class inequality and conflict into the 'struggles of family and community against patriarchy, privilege and the impersonal forces of the state'.³⁴

Significantly, though, while Episode 1, 'Charlo', attracted much of the negative reaction, the series progressively offered an increasingly analytical exploration of Charlo's psychological and physical impact on the family, and their efforts to transcend his abusive legacy. The focus shifted from Charlo's criminality to his son John Paul's difficulties at school (Episode 2 – 'John Paul'); his daughter Nicola's entry to the

industrial workforce and efforts at independence despite Charlo's jealousy of her burgeoning sexuality (Episode 3 - 'Nicola'); and Paula's alcoholism and commencement of work as a cleaner following her eventual expulsion of her husband (Episode 4 - 'Paula'), elevating her to principal protagonist. In the shifting emphasis, *Family* increasingly highlights the subjectively experienced linkage of gender, class and social space in modern Ireland, culminating in Paula's entering the (literally) outside world on conditional terms through typically gendered and class-specific work. In Doyle's suggestive, non-didactic way, the series here maps the power-geometries of class and gender, articulating Paula's 'external' economic plight with the enduring economic and psychic legacy of an 'internal' familial power-geometry. Ballymun's visual shorthand for class prejudices in modern Ireland gives contemporary immediacy and resonance to a series that broke new ground in Irish drama through its female, working-class protagonist.

Thus, while a contrast can be drawn with the British social realist tradition in terms of delaying and only partially socially and materially contextualising its characters, *Family* manages both to extend and break with Irish television drama's tendency to displace social conflict onto internal familial conflict, problematising a working-class family and its interrelationships with Irish social structures, class hierarchy and institutions.

Although lacking contextual 'analysis' of Charlo's behaviour, Doyle may have faced a double bind: extended 'social contextualisation' might suggest a causal chain, reducing a social reality of non-class specific gendered violence to mitigation by impoverishment. As Rosie Meade argues, and the most recent study of domestic violence in Ireland³⁵

confirms, such violence is ‘neither class nor place-specific’.³⁶ But without such contextualisation, Charlo appears to be ‘just a bastard’.

And there are additional strengths and weaknesses. *Family* is suggestive and partial, rather than comprehensive in depicting an incorrigibly adolescent, irresponsible and abusive masculinity, but was an important intervention with no sequel in Irish television drama. The series maps the interplay between class and internal, familial hierarchies, leading to the ultimate theme, the hidden or unacknowledged working-class female labour that binds and enables familial households to survive. In that respect, *Family* marks Doyle’s maturation as a writer and the maturation of Irish television drama, a reflection of RTE’s creative collaboration with the BBC.

Space, Play and Gender in *Family*

Family’s intended setting was Darndale, Dublin’s low-rise high density 1970s equivalent to Ballymun’s high-rise low density 1960s planning disaster. A cheaper alternative to earlier low density housing projects, Darndale quickly became known as a criminally infested ‘warren’ of cul-de-sacs and alleyways lacking gardens and open communal spaces whose design reproduced the earlier tendency to make servicing by public transport difficult and consequently inadequate.³⁷ Resistance to *Family*’s setting there from residents upset at its depiction in *The Commitments*’ screen adaptation led to *Family*’s almost exclusive Ballymun location.³⁸ Both location choices were clearly premised on their visual encapsulation of marginality to, and virtual isolation from, the

city and their connotation of the American term ‘underclass’, increasingly used to describe the marginalisation of working class Dubliners.³⁹

Director Michael Winterbottom’s opening title sequence emphasises the tower blocks as a powerful symbol within the series. Visually framing a sense of isolation as a montage with direct overhead aerial shots of suburban Dublin, he highlights the chaotic dispersal of suburban housing estates. The camera’s horizontal levelling as it approaches Ballymun simultaneously emphasises its height and distance from the city, especially the centre. High-rise towers, international visual shorthand for poverty, deprivation and hopelessness, are particularly so with the Ballymun towers. The concrete abject of post-Independence Irish cultural nationalism, the towers epitomised its inability to address the demands of progressive urban planning, and they were eventually completely demolished in 2005. The paradox was encapsulated in seven of the towers being named after the leaders of the 1916 Rising. As Henri Lefebvre argues, the visual representation of space acts metonymically, the part (quintessentially, the fixing process of two-dimensional photography) standing for the whole, while in the textualisation of space in words, ‘living bodies [...] are transported out of themselves, transferred and emptied out’.⁴⁰ Thus, commencing with a visual cliché instantly connoting a corresponding verbal cliché, *Family* sets the scene for its progressive exploration and unpicking of both.

Episode 1 extends the clichés connoted above, especially through its focus on Charlo’s criminal activities. Rapid editing and sometimes dizzy quick panning and tilting camera movements reinforce the impression of the chaos encircling Charlo’s life: his collisions

with the outside world as well as ‘internal’ clashes with friends and family are emphasised through cutting on impact, a pattern commencing with a tackle on Charlo in the post-titles Sunday football sequence. But by Episode 4, the emphasis shifts to Paula’s experiences as a cleaner of city centre offices and middle-class suburban homes, and to her slow recovery from Charlo’s abuse. The interlocked themes of the ‘power-geometry’ of class and the internal gendered ‘power-geometry’ of the family have now displaced lumpenprole criminality.

From ‘Charlo’ to ‘Paula’, *Family* visually explores the gendered power-geometrical interlocking of domestic and urban space, three-dimensionalising the flattening visual shorthand of the tower blocks’ imagery and transcending Charlo’s chaos to explore the power dynamics concealed by it. The family’s internal power-geometry is signalled in the first title sequence, which begins the drama by invoking Doyle’s *Commitments* theme of working-class suburban Dublin as an anomalous ‘other’ spatial zone in modern Ireland through the band’s turning to African-American soul music. The titles and aerial shots are inter-cut with visuals of Charlo’s public bar karaoke rendition (heard throughout the sequence) of the Ray Charles/ Joe Cocker soul classic ‘Unchain my Heart’. But the music is not straightforwardly expressive. Rather, it foreshadows (with considerable irony) Charlo’s colonisation of his family’s emotional life. The song’s lyrical expression of romantic entrapment and suspected infidelity (‘Every time I call you on the phone/ some fella tells me that you're not alone’) actually corresponds to *Paula’s* predicament with Charlo’s infidelity, establishing the theme of masculine performance as, simultaneously,

a colonisation of the pub and, by ironic appropriation, the private space of Paula's ambivalence towards him by mimicking *her* plight.

The term 'colonisation' signifies how controlling space in this relationship forces Paula as his subordinate to see herself in terms of her relationship with Charlo. He plays a psychological game, infusing the entire space of the episode – public and private – with his controlling presence. But in a master-slave dialectic Paula's submission to subordination enables and justifies both the continued performance and its efficacy. Thus Charlo follows his karaoke performance with open flirtation with Chrissie in the same pub. And this 'colonisation' extends to the private. While, in subsequent episodes, the bedrooms are Goffmanesque performative 'backstages'⁴¹ to which the children can privately retreat, Charlo humiliates Paula in their bedroom by directly threatening to 'break two bones in your face' and engaging in mock bedroom masturbation fantasies about Chrissie. The shot focuses on Paula's expression of fear and disgust as she lies back to back with Charlo. He likewise colonises the 'maternal' preserve, the kitchen. Here, paternal play, a source of laughs in the Barrytown trilogy, is more consequential in disrupting domestic routine and spatial order. Charlo presides over a chaos of thrown food at mealtimes, entertains the kids by exploding apples in a stolen microwave and forms an anti-maternal alliance with the barely teenage John Paul, offering him beer while they eat separately and watch televised football. In each case, Paula vainly attempts to maintain order amid chaos.

The concentration on embedded forms of power in masculine humour and play within the intra-familial dynamics of the sealed family is elaborated through the course of Episode 1. Doyle conceptualised *Family* as a more critical perspective on the extended, seemingly permanent adolescence of many of the men he knew.⁴² While, in the Barrytown trilogy, masculine banter and play reproduce a homosocial, exclusively masculine camaraderie, *Family* demonstrates their direct and indirect impact on those outside these homosocial networks, mainly but not exclusively female. Underlying these is a ‘deep structure’ game that variously reiterates a sense of masculine positional superiority, the specific ‘content’ secondary in significance to ‘form’. As Judith Butler argues, gender is inevitably ‘performative [...] constitut[ing] the identity it is purported to be’⁴³, and given its fragility and contingency, requires constant performative renewal.

Charlo is the central orchestrator of these gendered ‘games’, the others revolving around his. These can be seen as constructive of gender identities and relations in a discursive, Foucauldian sense. But here play is also a dynamic, dialogical process where the characters are not merely reproduced by discursive constructions but creative in their ‘rule’ interpretations and manipulations. In Roger Caillois’ game classification,⁴⁴ two are foremost in human societies: *agon* – contests between antagonists – and *mimicry* – imaginary adoption of temporary identities. In *Family*, Charlo oscillates between these in a series of unpredictable moves. Episode 1 actually lacks scenes of overt antagonistic violence. For Paula, the combination of verbally threatened, or corporeally mimetic threatened violence (in clenched fists etc.) ensures her policing of her own behaviour by retreating from confrontation. Charlo also freely engages in sexual fantasies, absolving

himself of guilt and responsibility by playfully imaginarily projecting these outwards. Thus his infidelity with Chrissie is transformed into her seducing *him*. His mock masturbation fantasy begins ‘Chrissie, no, no’, concluding ‘OK, fair enough’, a conscious mind-game by which guilt is projected onto Chrissie and through which Paula’s helplessness under physical threat is heightened and mocked.

Paula censors herself, enacting that which is ‘projected’, the disowned, weak part of Charlo’s psyche that is necessary to sustain Charlo’s own masculine performance. But the play is paradoxical. In a pivotal kitchen scene, Charlo irons while Paula sits in the foreground drinking vodka. Her pleas with him to ‘tell me things’ are met with a series of disconnected facts. But when she calls him a ‘bastard’, he feigns emotional hurt (‘Sorry? I beg your pardon?’) and slides her bottle until it falls from the table. Here, forms of mimesis (*performing* the ironing, suggesting that she is too drunk to do this quintessentially ‘feminine’ task; feigning hurt; and imitating the clumsy outcome of alcoholism) conjoin with the outward projection of aggression, so that *Paula* becomes the aggressor. Thus Paula is cast as both weak ‘other’ and psychic ‘container’ for his paradoxical projections, as containing, holding *mother*. In other scenes, Paula is the domestic maternal disciplinarian, while he extends a permanent adolescence of play and laughter without ‘owning’ the physical and psychological consequences, thus paradoxically isolating her within the family as *weak* disciplinarian. Episode 1 concludes with Charlo, locked out of the house and begging forgiveness. Doyle’s rehearsal script directions are clear: ‘he’s shattered, lost, he doesn’t know what to do’; ‘Charlo is scared’.⁴⁵ Whether Sean McGinley’s performance successfully conveys this realisation

and panic is debatable. But the scene's visual ambiguity preserves the sense of contradictory projections.

And these games are such that there is no simple gender dichotomy. Paula herself paradoxically plays the otherwise masculine games of bullying, particularly with teenage son John Paul, whom she identifies as a chip off the paternal block, so that she extends a cycle of abuse. In Episode 4, Paula catches him truanting and sends him to school with a note he cannot show, calling him a 'proper little prick': whether John Paul shows the note at school or not he will be punished, and if he truants again he will also be punished! Rather than addressing his antipathy towards school, Paula's game results in John Paul dealing with his antipathy and anxiety alone. She is complicit in reproducing an internal familial power dynamic, making John Paul a symbolic manifestation of the materially absent Charlo: in a line in the rehearsal script, but deleted from the broadcast episode, Paula concludes the school note with: 'he terrifies me'.⁴⁶

Paula's bullying is one of several variations on the theme of Charlo's enduring quasi-presence in the house and neighbourhood, even after Paula has expelled him by resorting to direct violence (Episode 3), so that these spaces are still infused with the gendered power dialectic of Episode 1. Thus that episode's combination of gender segregation and linkage in the pub, conveyed through a long pan across the separate groups of men and female partners contrasts directly with Episode 4's wide-shot of Paula traversing the same pub, lasciviously pursued by Chrissie's husband Ray Harris (Des McAleer). Provoking the viewer's memory of the earlier episode, the wide-shot highlights her

contrasting isolation and her vulnerability, both to Charlo's potential return and as a newly 'available' single woman.

These examples illustrate *Family*'s play on the tension between spatial and gendered symmetry and asymmetry, as overtly signalled by the episode sequence from father, then son, to daughter and mother. *Family* was particularly innovative in highlighting the spatialised gender politics of domestic and public space. Rituals of eating, banal details in other dramas, acquire special significance in this respect. Thus, despite being physically abused by Charlo, John Paul, idealising him in his absence, apes his behaviour. In Episode 4 he verbally threatens Paula, and in Episode 3 disrupts Paula's extended family's attempt to restore order and afford protection from the expelled Charlo (staying and sharing a meal) by regurgitating his food onto his plate, so extending the theme of eating as signifying familial communion or division. Episode 1 shows father and son 'bonding' over a burger by 'playfully slagging' the women present, while at home they eat separately from the others, watching televised football. Paula's instruction to 'say grace' at the series' conclusion suggests an attempt (of questionable promise) to restore order, rather than a religious conversion.

Family shows the varied impact of Charlo's 'game-playing' by focusing on the irony of outward appearances on, for example, his son's behaviour. Like Paula's alcoholism, John Paul's disruptiveness is clearly presented as a form of what Pierre Bourdieu calls 'symbolic violence';⁴⁷ that is the acceptance of violence as inevitable or the actual infliction of violence on the self as emblematic of an underlying 'structural violence' that

is either inexpressible, or over which its victim has no control. Outwardly imitating Charlo's disruptive 'playing', John Paul is increasingly depicted as his helpless victim. In the most obvious instance, in Episode 2 his self-mutilation in school with a compass in an attempt to tattoo his arm is read by a sympathetic teacher as a 'cry for help', but he runs away, presumably in fear of attracting attention. The teacher's hopeless cliché (which Doyle noted in interview)⁴⁸ and the evasive response collude in their incapacity to address the structural root of the problem. More subtly, John Paul's attempts to emulate Charlo's earlier collisions with all around him lead to punishment for his institutional transgressions, while their cocky, 'playful' performance contrasts with his repeatedly anxious recourse to his asthma inhaler and retreat to the recurrent 'backstage' of the bedroom. As John Paul pretends to direct traffic into school, the controlled and controlling space is momentarily transformed into a Foucauldian 'heterotopia'⁴⁹ in which an imaginarily inverted hierarchy vies with the 'real' at the point of contact between school and the outer world, the gates. This is a liminal point of vulnerability and penetrability that John Paul can exploit. But while this game is a joke whose form and location make it of little potential consequence, his other encounters are direct collisions that elicit varyingly punitive responses. Thus his literal creation of a heterotopia – crawling through the space between floors before collapsing a classroom ceiling – provokes direct punishment from his teachers. And when he attempts to 'wind up' his woodwork teacher – 'did you buy your wig or is it rented?' – his domestic bullying is compounded by a complicit institutional one. Noticing a facial bruise his teacher thumps him in the stomach. Establishing that Charlo inflicted the bruise, he subsequently warns John Paul that further wind-ups will be punished with a blow to the face, his alerting the

police to Charlo's physical abuse and his father's resulting appearance in court. Thus John Paul will discipline his own behaviour for fear of both he and his abusive father being punished. His friends are also complicit. Clearly sensing that he is 'on the edge', they actively encourage him to 'do something ridiculously stupid in class' (Doyle's rehearsal script directions).⁵⁰ He will 'act out' their fantasies of resistance and bear the brunt of the corresponding punishment.

This episode poignantly highlights the more general complicity of abused family members and State institutions in privatising abuse, while at the same time reproducing the sanctity of the nuclear family as the enduring principal unit of social and cultural organisation in Ireland. It is not simply that Ballymun is a working class housing estate isolated from the rest of the city. The family, enshrined in the Irish Constitution, is a self-contained unit charged with the unbearable stress of ensuring the physical safety, integration and ontological security of its members, and as such is inconsistently connected to the institutions of the State. The self-containment of the family, in which its members are complicit, is the problem in this case, and so the implication is that it is incapable of simultaneously being the solution.

The progressively elaborated theme of the symbolism of space and the inequalities contained therein is developed in Episode 4 as Paula's attempts to reclaim the domestic space from Charlo and survive as a single woman in the neighbourhood's public spaces connect with her efforts to survive as a working woman and mother. Once again, the shot compositions and editing are crucial, particularly in the contrasts between Episodes 1 and

4. Episode 1's aerial shots and rapidly cut opening sequence are succeeded by Charlo's dazzling ability to traverse the city in successive scenes and shots, colliding with all around him. The rapidity and extensive use of ellipsis here contrast with closer fidelity to 'real' time in Episode 4. A key effect of this is to show the physical distance Paula travels to her two cleaning jobs, one in the elite suburb of Howth, the other in an office block. We see Paula leave her youngest child with a neighbour and walk to the suburban rail station. Shot on the train from a distance and from a low angle emphasises the frame-within-frame horizontal and vertical hand rails; dozing and missing her stop to the amusement of beer drinking lads; climbing the hill to the suburban house; and framed through a window in an exterior night-time shot of the offices. This is a distinctly gendered journey highlighting Paula's spatial marginalisation as working-class *woman* and *mother*. As Susan Hanson and Geraldine Pratt argue, the romantic concept of *flâneur* is decidedly gender specific⁵¹. For working-class women especially, geographical movement is constrained and channelled by the gendering of the economy across both 'private' and 'public' spheres. Charlo is afforded considerably more freedom of movement within the city than his wife, albeit through his criminal activities and the masculine spaces of working class popular culture.

Paula's is a physical and 'class' journey entailing conditional and temporary acceptance in middle-class environments, the key being invisibility in both: a night cleaner and a daytime house cleaner who only meets her employer because of the supposed inadequacy of her first efforts. But Episode 4 also highlights how internal class differences cut across lowly night cleaning workers, who are shown variously connected to the imagined spaces

of the ‘outside’ world. As one of Paula’s colleagues ponders about whether to holiday in Ireland or Miami, we sense that her job funds family holidays and is not about financial necessity as in Paula’s case.

Doyle and Winterbottom depict Paula juggling domestic maternal ‘duties’ with both formal and informal economies of work, tapping into a chain of feminine labour from her babysitting neighbour to her snooty female employer and give some dramatic and visual form to the feminist dissolution of the ‘dubious distinction between economic and non-economic activity and active and inactive labour’.⁵² As Kathleen Lynch and Eithne McLaughlin argue, maternal ‘duties’ alone entail various forms of generally unacknowledged ‘emotional work’⁵³ and ‘love labour’, whose ‘principal goal [is] the development of solidary bonds in and of themselves’.⁵⁴ *Family* made a significant dramatic intervention in a country whose Constitution still refers to maternal ‘duties in the home’ (Article 41.2.2).

Paula’s physical and class journeys are also clearly psychological, visibly slow and painful, the turning point being her leaving her house cleaning job and rejecting the unnamed employer who reserves the unreciprocated privilege of addressing Paula by her first name. In a subsequent night-time shot of the suburban DART train, it is reflected in office building windows, as though the train were diagonally dissecting its distorted image, a spatialised visual metaphor for Paula’s incipient recovery, succeeding her expulsion of Charlo by rejecting her patronising, middle-class – female – employer. As this example also indicates, *Family*’s compositional aesthetic is unusually filmic for a

television series, showing the influence of director Winterbottom whose subsequent directorial career in film (*Jude*, 1996; *The Claim*, 2000, etc.) would show a consistent sensitivity to the symbolic richness of material textures and social spaces.

The expressivity of the visual compositions in *Family* is further accentuated by the use of music to highlight the internal spatialised fragmentation and hierarchisation of the characters' world and their struggles to survive, working annotatively to emphasise the 'power geometries' in the characters' lives in ways which differ from, and arguably exceed, a straightforwardly 'realist' televisual aesthetic. Music is used both expressively and ironically throughout the series to extend *Family*'s deconstruction of the myth of the integral nuclear family through its multi-episodic, multi-perspectival form. It works with the series' visual compositions and editing to create distinctive, textured power geometrical 'soundscapes'.

The combination of expression and irony is especially effective in highlighting Paula's difficulties in battling with the legacy of domestic abuse and enduring class and gendered subordination. Thus, having aggressively refused the school principal's request to remove John Paul's tattoo (Paula's reluctant birthday present and means of buying his submission), she departs to the tune of Gloria Gaynor's 'I Will Survive', but is seen from a high angle through the principal's window (Episode 4). The image/music combination unmistakably signifies conflicting meanings: assertion of independence, which justifies her *reluctant* birthday present, conflicting with a visually and spatially stressed continued class subordination. In the same episode Joe Cocker's 'I Shall Be Released' extends

diegetic music into a non-diegetic ironic musical commentary as we hear it first on a background radio when Paula leaves her suburban cleaning job and it then continues over a sequence showing her cleaning offices and sleeping on the train home. Here the music is doubly textured, contrasting with Charlo's (Episode 1) Cocker impersonation and ironically related to images of sustained class and gender subordination, despite (and maybe because of) her resignation.

Music also highlights the family's internal spatial fragmentation. John Paul's intra-familial isolation and distress are signified in Episode 2's opening where we hear EMF's 'Unbelievable', his alienation conveyed both by the lyrics and the suggestion that he is hearing this in isolation on his headphones. The use of music to signify varying, mutually exclusive and conflicting gendered, generational and class habituses extends to Episode 3, commencing with a performance of The Chiffons' 'Sweet Talking Guy' by daughter Nicola and her workmates on the bus to her first day's work in a sewing factory. The scene reproduces an aspect of working class feminine culture (collective singing in public), the lyrics' warning, 'don't give him love today, tomorrow he's on his way', foreshadowing her emerging ability to see through and resist Charlo. But the women are also performing a gendered, cultural ritual which again breaks the diegetic boundary to offer a commentary on the drama: summoning the demon, incarnated by Charlo, who will later make sexual passes at Nicola, and warning against him.

Because Nicola has broken the familial cycle of psychic projections by going to work, albeit as a teenager in a manual labouring job, she has access to a collective feminine

work culture. This is denied to Paula in her more atomised work context as a cleaner as well as John Paul who is trapped by the institutions of family and school. But her workmates' relentless sexual banter contrasts markedly with her difficulties in resisting Charlo's increased discomfort at her burgeoning sexuality. A reversal of the Oedipal game varies between the agonistic – mock accusations of prostitution and throwing cash at her – and the mimetic – 'accidental' touching and staring in a possibly sexualised but ambiguous way. In a paradoxical game, she borrows her friend's high leather boots, and wearing a tight mini-skirt and heavy make-up, displays herself to Charlo as the incarnation of his projected fantasy. But this is a tactic from a position of weakness. The episode's musical score (unique to this episode), dominated by strings and low key woodwind, contrasts with the opening song and stresses her anxiety and loneliness, particularly in her occasional retreats to the 'safe' space of the bedroom where she wears her clothes to bed, suggesting both a fear of paternal intrusion and induced discomfort at her own sexuality. John Paul's episode likewise has its own musical score to convey his isolation, in this case a bluesy combination of electric guitar and whining harmonica.

From Episodes 1 to 4 *Family* unpicks its opening visual clichés by progressively shifting emphasis from masculine to feminine, petty criminality to *working* class women and mothers, exploring the 'power geometries' of its characters' lives. The creation of complex soundscapes through the expressive and ironic uses of music works with the series' visualisation to texture these power geometries, inviting the audience to engage creatively and imaginatively in interpreting the complexities and contradictions of those lives.

Conclusions

Watched by 1.1 million people,⁵⁵ a third of the population of the Republic of Ireland, *Family* was a national event in Ireland. Its provocative power partly stemmed from its self-conscious inter-textual distancing from the Barrytown novels and adaptations. Inspiring contradictory responses, among them newspaper articles highlighting the plight of abused women and radically increased calls to the Women's Aid helpline,⁵⁶ it illustrates television drama's particularity as a shared event. But it was unique, with no sequel in Irish television drama. The weaknesses of subsequent Irish-set drama are illustrated by the BBC/RTE co-productions *Ballykissangel* (1996-2001) and *The Ambassador* (1998-1999). Both depicted English protagonists negotiating unfamiliar Irish surroundings, tending to resolve 'social issues' rather less provocatively and, framed by British sensitivity to potential Irish responses, with 'complacency about centrist ambiguity'.⁵⁷

Rather, its successor was Doyle's novel, *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1996), written as an inter-textual critique of incredulous audience responses to Paula's predicament and behaviour in *Family* by turning her into the book's imaginary author. The novel recounts Paula's subjective experience of abuse, but extends in novelistic form the series' dramatisation of her fragmented consciousness and vacillation between realisation and denial, refusing any coherent, conclusively insightful subjectivity through which its narrative might be resolved. While *Family* is often mentioned as a mere precursor to this novel in discussions of Doyle, it was a significant television drama with

the status of a national event in Irish society, not least because of the absence of a social realist tradition in Irish television drama comparable to that in Britain.

Its social realist and filmic imagination may be seen as a fusion of Roddy Doyle's critique of the politics of everyday family life and class habitus in modern Ireland and a British tradition of television social realism which situates the drama within the power-geometry of social class in the city: a peculiarly Irish power-geometry conveyed through the metonymic specificity of Ballymun; the series' continuation of Doyle's non-specific but metaphorical Irish suburb of 'Barrytown'; and a more general power-geometrical articulation of gender and class which exceeds the confines of the Dublin and Irish setting. While its audience figures indicate a clear 'market' for such drama in Irish public service television, its uneven history, particularly RTE's unconvincing efforts to dramatise the lives of the new middle-classes in such serial productions as *Fergus' Wedding* (2001) and *The Big Bow Wow* (2004), is lamentable, especially given the substantial evidence of exacerbated class and gender inequalities in the 'Celtic Tiger' years.

¹ Helena Sheehan, *Irish Television Drama: A Society and Its Stories*, RTE, 1987.

² *Ibid.*, p.297.

³ *Ibid.*, p.305.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.306.

⁵ Lance Pettitt, *Screening Ireland: Film and Television Representation*, Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 128.

⁶ Martin McLoone, 'Strumpet City: the Urban Working Class on Irish Television,' in Martin McLoone, ed, *Television and Irish Society: 21 Years of Irish Television*, RTE-IFI, 1984, pp.53-88; Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, Cork University Press, 1996, pp.44-69. In contrast to the South, Northern Ireland set films have repeatedly depicted the city as a hopelessly dystopian nightmare marred by the 'Troubles,' sucking working class characters into doomed, self-destructively atavistic violence; see, Martin McLoone, 'Topographies of Terror and Taste: the Re-imagining of Belfast in Recent Cinema,' in Ruth Barton and Harvey O' Brien, eds, *Keeping it Real: Irish Film and Television*, Wallflower, 2004, pp.134-146; John Hill, 'Images of Violence,' in Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons and John Hill, eds, *Cinema and Ireland*, Routledge, 1988, pp.147-193.

- ⁷ Sinead Kennedy, 'Irish Women and the Celtic Tiger Economy,' in Colin Coulter and Steve Coleman, eds, *The End of Irish History: Critical Reflections on the Celtic Tiger*, Manchester University Press, 2003, pp.96-99.
- ⁸ Brendan Bartley and Shelagh Waddington, 'The Emergence and Evolution of Urban Planning in Ireland,' *Geographical Viewpoint*, 29, 2001, 11-12.
- ⁹ Pat O'Connor, *Emerging Voices: Women in Contemporary Irish Society*, Institute of Public Administration, 1998, pp.89-90.
- ¹⁰ Doreen Massey, 'Politics and Space/Time,' in Michael Keith and Steve Pile, eds, *Place and the Politics of Identity*, Routledge, 1993, p.156.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.156.
- ¹² Doreen Massey, 'Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place,' in Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, George Robertson and Lisa Tickner, eds, *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, Routledge, 1993, pp.66-67.
- ¹³ Fintan O' Toole, 'Life After Charlo,' *Irish Times* (Weekend), 28 May 1994, 12.
- ¹⁴ Ulrike Paschel, *No Mean City? The Image of Dublin in the Novels of Dermot Bolger, Roddy Doyle and Val Mulherns*, Peter Lang, 1998, pp.68-69.
- ¹⁵ Brian James, 'Doyle's Dubliners,' *Radio Times*, 7-13 May 1994, 36-37.
- ¹⁶ For a summary see, Andrew Culf, 'Bleak Dublin Drama Takes Ha, Ha, Ha Out of Roddy Doyle,' *Guardian*, 5 May 1994, 26.
- ¹⁷ Joe Joyce, 'Dublin Estate Angered by TV Portrayal,' *Guardian*, 9 May 1994, 8.
- ¹⁸ Marianne Heron, 'A Towering Injustice?' *Irish Independent* (Weekender), 7 May 1994, 1.
- ¹⁹ Culf, 'Bleak Dublin Drama,' 26; Mary Holland, 'Irish Eyes are Smarting as TV Shows the Harsh Reality,' *Observer*, 8 May 1994, 6; Liam Fay, 'Doyle on Troubled Waters,' *Hot Press*, 18: 15, 10 August 1994, 18-19.
- ²⁰ Frank McDonald, 'The Writing Was on the Wall for Ballymun's Towers for 25 Years,' *Construct Ireland*, 9 July 2004: http://www.constructireland.ie/news.php?pageNum_rsNewsHeadline=168&artID=1699&totalRows_rsNewsHeadline=1682
- ²¹ Joyce, 'Dublin Estate Angered,' 8; Maggie O' Kane, 'When Irish Eyes Aren't Smiling,' *Guardian*, 28 May 1994, 25.
- ²² Gerry Smyth, 'The Right to the City: Re-Presentations of Dublin in Contemporary Irish Fiction,' in Liam Harte and Michael Parker, eds, *Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories*, Macmillan, 2000, p.22.
- ²³ Joyce, 'Dublin Estate Angered,' 8.
- ²⁴ Cited in O' Kane, 'When Irish Eyes Aren't Smiling,' 25.
- ²⁵ Justine McCarthy, 'Roddy Doyle's Family Values,' *Irish Independent* (Weekender), 7 May 1994, 1.
- ²⁶ For example, Eddie Holt, 'Taking the Ha, Ha, Ha Out of Roddy Doyle,' *Irish Independent*, 4 May 1994, 10; Brenda Power, 'Families At War: "I'm Sorry For Making You Break My Nose",' *Sunday Tribune*, 8 May 1994, 8.
- ²⁷ Fay, 'Doyle on Troubled Waters,' 18.
- ²⁸ James, 'Doyle's Dubliners,' 36.
- ²⁹ Sheelagh Drudy, 'Class Society, Inequality and the "Declassed",' in Patrick Clancy, Sheelagh Drudy, Kathleen Lynch and Liam O' Dowd, eds, *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives*, Institute of Public Administration, 1995, p.309.
- ³⁰ Jamie Saynor, 'Focus On a Family at War and In Pieces,' *Observer*, 1 May 1994, 13.
- ³¹ Roddy Doyle, Unpublished Rehearsal Scripts for *Family*, Episode 1, 6 September 1993, p.8.
- ³² James, 'Doyle's Dubliners,' 37.
- ³³ O' Kane, 'When Irish Eyes Aren't Smiling,' 25.
- ³⁴ Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin, 'Introduction: The Reinvention of Ireland: A Critical Perspective,' in Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin, eds, *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy*, Pluto Press, 2002, p.11.
- ³⁵ Dorothy Watson and Sara Parsons, *Domestic Abuse of Women in Ireland*, National Crime Council/ ESRI, 2005, p.24.

-
- ³⁶ Rosie R. Meade, 'Domestic Violence: An Analysis and Response From Community Activists,' in Anne Byrne and Madeline Leonard, eds, *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*, Beyond the Pale Publications, 1997, p.347.
- ³⁷ Frank McDonald, *Saving the City: How to Halt the Destruction of Dublin*, Tomar, 1989, p.75.
- ³⁸ Anon, 'Interview: Michael Winterbottom,' *The Big Ticket*, October 1995, 22.
- ³⁹ A. Jamie Saris, Brenda Bartley, Ciara Kierans, Colm Walsh and Philip McCormack, 'Culture and the State: Institutionalizing "The Underclass" in the New Ireland,' *City*, 6: 2, 2002, 185-186.
- ⁴⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Blackwell, 1991, p.98
- ⁴¹ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Penguin, 1971, pp.109-40.
- ⁴² O'Toole, 'Life After Charlo,' 12.
- ⁴³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, 1999, p.25.
- ⁴⁴ Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, University of Illinois Press, 2001, pp.3-36.
- ⁴⁵ Roddy Doyle, Unpublished Rehearsal Scripts for *Family*, Episode 1, pp.156-159.
- ⁴⁶ Roddy Doyle, Unpublished rehearsal scripts for *Family*, Episode 4, 6 September 1993, p.53.
- ⁴⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, Stanford University Press, 2001, p.37.
- ⁴⁸ Liam Fay, 'What's the Story?' *Hot Press*, 20: 6, 3 April 1996, 19.
- ⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces,' *Diacritics*, 16: 1, 1986, 22-27.
- ⁵⁰ Roddy Doyle, Unpublished Rehearsal Scripts for *Family*, Episode 2, 6 September 1993, p.122.
- ⁵¹ Susan Hanson and Geraldine Pratt, *Gender, Work and Space*, Routledge, 1995, pp.22-23.
- ⁵² Madeline Leonard, 'Women and Informal Economic Activity in Belfast,' in Clancy, Drudy, Lynch and O'Dowd, eds, *Irish Society*, p.237.
- ⁵³ Cited in, Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard, *Familiar Exploitation: a New Analysis of Marriage in Contemporary Western Societies*, Polity, 1992, p.21.
- ⁵⁴ Kathleen Lynch and Eithne McLaughlin, 'Caring Labour and Love Labour' in Clancy, Drudy, Lynch and O'Dowd, eds, *Irish Society*, p.258.
- ⁵⁵ Culf, 'Bleak Dublin Drama,' 26.
- ⁵⁶ Power, 'Families At War,' 8.
- ⁵⁷ Helena Sheehan, *The Continuing Story of Irish Television Drama: Tracking the Tiger*, Four Courts Press, 2004, p.99.