

Power, Patriarchy and Family: and Analysis of Major Themes in John

McGahern's *Amongst Women*

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McGahern's *Amongst Women*



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Preface

This dissertation aims at the thematic analysis of the novel *Amongst Women* by John McGahern. It can be considered as a social document that is set in Ireland in the period following the war of Independence. Power and patriarchy, family and the role of women are the main themes of the novel. The introductory chapter traces the history of Irish prose fiction, and locates James McGahern as the prominent Irish writer in the twentieth century. The second chapter attempts a detailed study of the major themes in the novel. The concluding chapter presents the findings of the dissertation, and analyses how far the novel is successful in portraying the themes.

Chapter One

Introduction

The rise of Irish prose fiction was in the early seventh century. The early Irish fiction was adaptations and elaborations of earlier oral material, and was the work of a learned class. They dealt with humour, sense of grotesque and fantasy, all of which became characteristic features of later Irish Novel.

Irish prose fiction flourished with the contributions of prominent writers including Jonathan Swift (*Gulliver's Travels, A Tale of a Tub*), Lawrence Sterne (*A Political Romance*) and Oliver Goldsmith (*The Vicar of Wakefield*). The Irish literary revival moment which emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century influence the works of prominent novelists such as Samuel Beckett (*Molloy, Murphy*), James Joyce (*Ulysses, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) etc. During twentieth century, a new nationalist cultural revival stirred in Ireland. John McGahern is one among the most prominent twentieth century Irish writers who is known for his depictions of Irish men and women constricted and damaged by conventions of their native land.

John McGahern is known for the detailed description of Irish life in his works. He is undoubtedly the most important Irish literary figure of the modern period after Samuel Beckett.

Amongst Women is John McGahern's greatest work, published by Faber and Faber.

The novel tells the story of Michael Moran, a bitter, ageing Irish Republican Army veteran and his tyranny over his wife and children who both love and fear him. The title can be interpreted in two ways. At first, the title refers to Moran's largely female household with much of the book focusing on the domineering relationship between the patriarchal Moran and the women surrounding him. The title also refers to the traditional prayer, the Hail Mary which contains the clause 'blessed art thou amongst women'. This prayer is significant as it is a part of the Rosary, which is prayed every day in the Moran household and events in a repeating motif throughout the novel.

In this dissertation, we attempt a thematic analysis of John McGahern's novel *Amongst Women*. The main themes in the novel are power and patriarchy, the family and the role of women. The novel opens with an elderly, weak, and depressed Michael Moran being taken care of by his daughters. Although they have busy lives and families of their own in Dublin and London, they have never really left the family home because they feel more important there. They have decided to recreate "Monaghan Day," an event Moran always seemed to enjoy, hoping that this will somehow reverse his failing health. Monaghan Day was a market day, when Moran's friend McQuaid used to visit and they would reminisce about the war. The family's story is told with flashbacks as the women in Moran's life remember the past.

Moran was once a prominent Republican who fought for Irish Independence in the 1920s. He is now a widower with three daughters and two sons. They live in a house called Great Meadow on a small farm in the west of Ireland. He thinks that his time in the Irish Republican Army was the best of his life, and misses the security provided by the military's structure, rules, and clear demarcation of power. He transfers the violent nature that served him well in battle to his dealings with his family.

Moran marries a local woman called Rose Brady when his children are teenagers. Rose is in middle age when she marries Moran. Despite her mother's warning that he is one sort of person when he's out in the open among people - he can be very sweet – but that he is a different sort of person altogether behind the walls of his own house, she is determined to marry him. She becomes a mother to the children, she is their mainstay.

Moran's personality becomes apparent in his dealings with his family, who all love and respect him despite his violent outbursts and his lack of apologies. He enforces his own view of the world on all those around him. He is a devout Catholic and makes sure that his family upholds all the values he fought for. He recites the Rosary daily, looking for religious help for his inner turmoil and the complications of his daily life. His violent nature stems from traumas he received as a guerrilla fighter in his youth. However, he thinks that the war was the best part of his life, because things were never so simple and clear again.

He feels that he is losing his position as the centre of attention as he ages, and the children start to escape from Great Meadow. He demands help and attention at inappropriate times as a way of focusing the others on his needs. Although he is mostly calm with his daughters, he is threatened by his sons as they grow up. Luke, the elder son, leaves for London because of his father's overbearing authority and only returns once. Thoughts of Luke are painful to Moran, and the others refrain from mentioning him. Michael, the youngest child, hides behind Rose until he gains the courage to leave. The only way that the children can assert any autonomy is through exile, thus tactically rebuking Moran's ethos of family solidarity.

Moran dominates his daughters' lives and they regularly return to the family home despite their own busy lives. They yearn for his approval yet fear his temper. He tells them that it is important that the family stick together: They find individuality painful compared to the protection of the family identity.

Moran's friendship with McQuaid is also recounted using flashbacks, and there is an account of an attack carried out on the British Army by the Flying Column to which they belonged. There is also a description of the argument between them that ended their friendship and left Moran with no male friends. Moran dies at the end of the novel. He is buried under a yew tree, but his influence does not leave his family.

McGahern's writing, restrained and free from melodrama, depicts Moran as all-too human, someone who is so emotionally starved that you can feel nothing but pity for him. It treads a careful line between cold fury and utter despair. McGahern conceives *Amongst Women* as a character driven story, focusing on the protagonist Michael Moran

Theme is the most important element of the novel which helps the readers to connect themselves with the book. It allows them to connect the actions and events in the fiction with those in their real life. Theme is part of the reason why the author wrote the story. The author has a message he wants to share with readers and he uses different themes as a way to get that message across. Thus thematic analysis of a novel helps us to understand the novel in better way.

Amongst Women is a novel in which the author has used strong themes in order to convey his ideas to the readers. Family, Power and Patriarchy and the Role of Women are the most important themes in the novel. All the themes have their own

importance which helps the readers to understand the deeper layer of meaning running underneath the story's surface. The following chapter aims at the detailed analysis of the themes of family, power and patriarchy and the role of women.

Chapter Two

Power, Patriarchy and Family: and Analysis of Major Themes in John McGahern's *Amongst Women*

Amongst Women is a novel by preeminent Irish author John McGahern was first published by Faber and Faber in 1990. It is set in the years following Ireland's war of independence and the Irish civil war. The novel centers around Michael Moran, a veteran of the Irish Republic Army and his family. Moran terrorizes his wife and children. They exist in an uncomfortable grey area between adoring Michael and being terrified of him as he attempts to make the transition from a guerilla fighter to the head of the family.

In the begin of the novel, Michael is presented as an old man in failing health. His daughters take care of him in the rural country Leitrim farmstead where they grew up. Though they have lives of their own away from the family farm, the daughters feel like their true place is with their father.

As we go through the novel we get a clear picture of Moran's dominating power over the family. At the end of the novel Moran dies. The family buries him under a Yew tree at Great Meadow. But he will live on in the hearts and minds, in the memories and moods of his children. Thus his family will still be under his dominance and they could never free themselves in from it even after his death. In simple words *Amongst Women* is a story of a patriarch and how he wants his family to dance around him on hot coals fearing the wrath and looking lively whenever he bestoweth his glance.

The tensions in *Amongst Women* are written against the backdrop of a small farm in rural Ireland at a time when patriarchy ruled the family unit. Fortunes were only made away from home, and life on the farm was harsh. The home was strict, and religiously observant. Throughout the book, the central character, Michael Moran is primarily referred to as either Moran or Daddy. This shows his formal place in the world at large, and his place as the head of his family. Moran was once an officer and guerilla leader in the battle for Ireland's independence in the 1920s.

Moran has a temper and his voice contains sarcasm, anger, and malice. He tries to explain himself as being misunderstood. He can be physically violent. The children fear his beatings and yet, make much of his niceness when he is in a good mood. Three of his five children leave Ireland for England. The other two find their way in Dublin and visit the family home often. The story starts with an ailing Moran afraid of his daughters, as they make it their mission to keep him alive. They revive a long, ignored, Great Meadow tradition to try to get him to engage in life again. Monaghan Day was the day of a local fair, but in days passed in Moran's house, it was the day McQuaid, an army buddy, would come to have tea, drink whisky, and reminisce about the war. Although McQuaid had long since died, Moran's daughters thought it would lift his spirits and make him like he once was. The story then goes back in time to the last visit of McQuaid and his mention of rumors circulating that the widower Moran would marry Rose Brady. From there, it follows the courtship and marriage of Rose to Moran, the family life that she settles into, and the fortunes of Moran's children as they go out into the world and away from his influence.

The relationship between Moran and his children are treated individually, but there is a vast difference between the way he treated his sons, Luke and Michael and his daughters Maggie, Sheila, and Mona. He behaved very violently towards his sons and he has a more subtle, emotional, and mental influence over his daughters Maggie, Sheila, and Mona.

Family is a dominant theme in the novel. It is one of the most important factors which builds up an individual as well as a society. A functional understanding of the family stresses the ways in which the family as a social institution helps make society possible. In the novel family is portrayed as a factor which connects and individual and the society. We could feel the presence of some force which binds the characters together nor matter wherever they are. This is undoubtedly the family bond. At the same time there is a struggle to escape from the family bond in order to gain individuality. The family bond is evident in the following line “After the prayers they went up in turn and kissed Moran and then Rose who returned their kisses warmly”. (P. 48)

In *Amongst Women*, we see the powerful bond of the family and how it withstands so many difficulties. Even though Moran is stubborn and mercurial in temperament, the family remains strongly bound together. Together they feel invincible in the face of the outside world and when they gather together at Great Meadow, each member feels bound by this strong family unit.

The novel pulls us into a tight family circle with its first sentence 'As he weakened, Moran became afraid of his daughters' A 'once powerful man' Michael Moran was an officer in the Irish war of Independence in the 1920's. He was intelligent, fierce

and deadly, but like many soldiers after a war, he felt displaced, unwilling to continue in the military during peace time and unable to make a good living in any other way. The war was the best part of our lives', Moran asserts. 'Things were never so simple and clear again. While the army provided the security of structure, rules and clear lines of power, Moran's life after the war has consisted of raising two sons and three daughters on a farm and scraping out a living with hard manual labour. A widower, Moran confuses his identity with the communal identity of his family in a gesture that divides and conquers. Moran's daughters are 'a completed world' separate from 'the tides of Dublin and London'. No longer powerful, Moran is repeatedly described as withdrawing into himself 'and that larger self of family' in order to channel his aggressions into a shrunken realm he attempts to control. He can be tender with his children but he also berates and beats them. His adjustment from guerrilla fighter to father is never complete, and the question of how to maintain authority over children while allowing them room to grow is central to the novel.

Nowhere is this struggle between dependence and independence more pronounced than in the character of Luke, the oldest son who runs away from Moran's overbearing authority, never to return. Rejecting his father, Ireland and all of the violence and provincialism he associates with both, Luke flees to England. He ignores all but one of Moran's many letters and he doesn't return to Ireland except at the end of the novel when his sister gets married. 'Please don't do anything to upset daddy' one of the sister's pleads, typically trying to placate her father. "Of course not I won't exist today", Luke replies. (P. 152) His best weapon against Moran's control is absence. Whereas the daughters, "like a shoal of fish moving within a net", (P. 79) find individuality painful

compared to the protection of their familial identity, Luke gains strength in departure. “I left Ireland a long time ago” (P. 155) Luke announces gravely. As it does for Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, life in Ireland seems like imprisonment.

“I’m afraid we might all die in Ireland if we don't get out fast” (P. 155- 156) says Moran's younger son, Michael. Like other Irish writers, McGahern asks whether exile offers the only hope for freedom and individuality. How does the political turmoil which has long suffused Irish history affect the smaller unit of the family? How do other elements of Irish life contribute to familial dysfunction? In the claustrophobic world McGahern portrays, escape proves sustaining for a character like Luke, but it is not an unequivocal good. Luke is strong but cruel like his father. His sisters, on the other hand not only fail to break away from the family but by the time of their father's death, “each of them in their different ways had become Daddy”.(P. 183) Their identification with and loyalty to Moran threatens to subsume them, but it also gives them a kind of strength as Michael seems to understand: “In the frail way that people assembled themselves he, liked the girls, looked to Great Meadow for recognition, for a mark of his continuing existence”. (P. 147)

Patriarchy refers to male dominance in a relationship, whereby men control and dominate the relationship. In more recent times there have been positive shifts in attitudes, legally and socially, however patriarchy still lives on, in unequal wages between males and females that stop equal access to opportunities, failure to talk about women’s achievements, unequal distribution of household tasks, and defined gender roles, to name a few.

Moran had absolute control over his family and he had a dominating influence over his family members. The author portrays Moran, the once powerful army veteran as a person who wants everyone to remain under his control. He had an attitude that he is above all and considered individual freedom worthless. We could see Moran abusing Rose verbally and also physically controlling his sons Michael and Luke. It is also an important fact that the theme of power or patriarchy plays a very important role in the novel as it contributes to the progress of the novel. From the beginning till the end of the story we could feel the presence of this theme. The man who controlled the characters dies at the end but still his power remains this show the never-ending superiority of the patriarch Moran over his family members. 'The air of friendliness was the kind that he disliked the most (P. 36) shows how Moran wants other not to escape from his control.

Amongst Women can be seen as a critique of patriarchy. McGahern connects nationalism, Catholicism and patriarchy in an unholy trinity. This unholy trinity manifests in the character Michael Moran. He is an ardent nationalist, a devout catholic and a practitioner of patriarchy. The way he behaves towards his children, to his friends and to the society underline this fact. In this novel McGahern places this unholy trinity in a rural catholic family. In this novel, for the first time in his writing, the subject of patriarchy assumes a central theme. This story of the proud Morans is an excellent partial of the power of the patriarch who, although dysfunctional, manages to exert a strong influence on all of his children (Seirn, 2000).

'Only women could live with Daddy,' Moran's alienated son Luke, comments, and the novel, to some extent, endorses this viewpoint. Moran is first encountered in '*Amongst Women*', an ailing old man fussed over by his wife and three daughters. The

theme of the relationship between power and gender is announced in the opening sentence. Moran's physical weakness has transformed relations between him and his womenfolk to one of fear on his part and dominance on theirs. However, even at his most physically incapacitated time, Moran has still not lost his hold over his daughters: he 'was so implanted in their lives, that they had never left Great Meadow'.

The narrative pulse of *Amongst Women* is one of homecoming and leave-taking: welcomes and farewells at the train station; cars turning in the open gate of Great Meadow under the poisonous yew; children leaving home to embark on their adult lives, all but one drawn back with increasing frequency as the years pass; happy family reunions and the sad final reunion at Moran's funeral. Initially the rhythm is homecoming, and the verb 'come' is repeated seven times on the first page. The reader is being drawn into this world where Moran is at the centre. By the end of the second paragraph we have been introduced to its setting and principal characters: the 'once powerful' Moran, his second wife, Rose, his three daughters, Maggie, Mona, and Sheila, his younger son, Michael, and the eldest, Luke, distinguished from the rest by his refusal to come back to Great Meadow.

Patriarchy in *Amongst Women* can be seen to derive to a great extent from patriotism. Moran is the hero of the War of Independence, who has failed to make a successful career in the Irish army in peacetime, directs his frustrated drive for power into a diminished form of home rule. His status as a former guerrilla fighter is repeatedly emphasised at the outset by the device of juxtaposing two episodes which celebrate his youthful exploits as leader of a flying column, thereby ensuring that all his subsequent conduct is 'placed' in the light of this wartime experience. Monaghan Day, a fair day in

late February when he received an annual visit from McQuaid, his former lieutenant, and the two reminisced over their youthful heroics, is Moran's equivalent of Remembrance Day. The novel opens with his daughters' revival of Monaghan Day when Moran is old and ill. On this occasion he deglamourises his role as freedom fighter and refers to his flying column as 'a bunch of killers'. That he has never lost his own killer instinct is demonstrated next morning when he rises from his sickbed to shoot a jackdaw. His targets may have diminished, but he is still prepared to resort to violence to assert his limited power. The incident rather pathetically demonstrates his present impotence, yet he himself uses it to illustrate his connection between intimacy and mastery:

The closest I ever got to any man was when I had him in the sights of my rifle and I never missed.

Moran is at pains to tell his wife and daughters that his flying column did not shoot women or children, treating both categories as minors or inferiors.

In the beginning we are given another flashback to the last Monaghan Day. In this episode Moran's bullying of his teenage daughters is contrasted with his inability to gain power over McQuaid. He terrorises his daughters, so that in his presence they 'sink into a beseeching drabness, cower as close to being invisible' as possible, but it is obvious now that his power does not extend outside his own family. McQuaid, who has long outstripped Moran in terms of worldly achievement, is happy to indulge in war memories for an evening, but he is unwilling to perpetuate his former role of junior officer. His visit brings something of the secular, commercial outlook of modern Ireland into the pious, traditional world of Great Meadow. Here again the rhythms of arrival and

departure are evident as the annual ritual of Monaghan Day is brought to an end with McQuaid's abrupt exit. Henceforth, the cars that turn 'into the open gate under the yew tree' will convey returning Morans. From here on Great Meadow becomes a house hospitable only to its own family.

Amongst Women offers a penetrating critique of patriarchy. McGahern goes even further and shows that patriarchy is a refuge of the socially ill-adjusted and emotionally immature man and asks questions about the cult of family. Moran has transformed his inadequacies into a show of strength by making his home his castle. Denied a role as founding father in the Irish state he sets up his own dominion.

Infact, Great Meadow, bought with his redundancy pay from the army, should be a monument to Moran's failure to live up to his youthful promise. Though it is not an ancestral home it becomes, under his regime, a family seat, more cut off from the life of the surrounding village than any Big House. Because of an inability to relate to his fellow-villagers, Moran turns his family into a closed community and the absence of any outside contacts further strengthens his own paternal supremacy. He successfully indoctrinates his children with the idea that such reclusiveness denotes exclusiveness, that to be 'proud' and 'separate' is a mark of distinction, to be friendly and extroverted a sign of commonness. House and family are connected in exhortations to his daughters: 'Be careful never to do anything to let yourselves or the house down.' He thus forges an association between family and farmstead, roots his children in a 'perpetual place'. As the founder of a new dynasty Moran acts as if he were self-propagated and never refers to his own parents. His cult of family does not include any filial loyalties which might

conflict with the prior claim of being a Moran of Great Meadow, so he actively discourages his wife's visits to her family home.

In view of the novel's critique of patriarchy it is interesting to note the effect this has on his daughters at the end of the novel. Turning the page at the end of the novel, we are given a glimpse of what 'becoming Daddy' means. A reversal of gender roles takes place as brother and husbands, seen from a patriarchal perspective, are transformed into wives. It is obvious that Moran's honorary male daughters have inherited his contempt for the feminine, which they associate with levity and amusement:

'Will you look at the men. They're more like a crowd of women,' Sheila said, remarking on the slow frivolity of their pace. 'The way Michael, the skit, is getting Sean and Mark to laugh you'd think they were coming from a dance'.

Their exclusiveness as Morans of Great Meadow is such that it does not even embrace their own husbands and children.

It is also worthwhile to consider here the links between Catholicism and patriarchy. These links are forged in the novel by its most repetitive narrative ritual and the family prayer from which it derives its title. Moran's devotion to the rosary is explained on familial and patriarchal grounds. 'The family that prays together stays together,' he observes, quoting the Rosary-crusader priest, Father Peyton. As in many Irish homes, the rosary in the Moran household is a public prayer that reinforces a hierarchical social structure: it is presided over by the head of the family and the five decades are allocated from eldest to youngest in descending order of importance. Though the rosary repeatedly pronounces Mary as 'Blessed amongst women', because she was

chosen to be the mother of Christ, in the Moran household, the character, blessed amongst women, is Moran himself. He even manages to die 'amongst women', since his son Michael is temporarily absent! The Rosary is peculiarly identified with Moran and it is a very clever device used by McGahern to emphasise the narrative repetitiveness, which is a feature of this novel. Over and over again the newspapers are spread on the floor, Moran spills his beads from his little black purse, and all kneel in prayer. The stability conferred by ritual and repeated phraseology underscores the disruptions and changes that the passage of time brings to Great Meadow.

Moran exhibit some inherent attractive qualities. Indeed his portrait is the most imaginatively generous picture of a father in McGahern's many novels and short stories. He radiates enormous energy and this surely can be seen as a redeeming feature. He also shows great anguish for the son who is lost to him and he also shows a certain bafflement and frustration in the face of oncoming death. In particular he is associated with the annual haymaking, an activity shared by the whole family.

Irish people everywhere seem to have an often inexplicable affection for their country, whether they be urban, suburban, rural or living in Boston. This love for 'the ould sod' is turned on its head here in this novel in McGahern's examination of home, farm and fatherland. Idyllic though Great Meadow often appears, access to it involves passing under 'the poisonous yew.'

Women are treated as subordinates in the novel who are given less freedom and therefore are portrayed as mere puppets who act according to the wish of Moran. Although Moran controlled everyone in his family, the boys escaped from his superiority,

though not completely. But it was the women who remain attached to Moran and his ways. Though they also could have followed Luke and Michael, they did not do so. This is because of their intense attachment and love towards Moran. Moran had complete control over their lives and this is evident from the incident in which one of his daughters drops out her plan to pursue a University scholarship as Moran discouraged her. The character Rose also have high importance as it was she who adopts herself with the situation of the family and the character of Moran. She becomes an integral part of the family and the children's mainstay. Rose changes everything (P. 48) describes her inevitable role in the novel. Besides Rose, Maggie, Mona and Sheila have their own parts to play in the novel. The way each one of them try to stay loyal towards Moran and their struggles tells us how much importance they hold in the novel. Thus Role of Women is an important factor in the novel which could be treated as theme.

When Moran marries Rose it is obvious that he never intended a marriage of equals. She is to serve as a loyal and devoted second in command and at some future date, when his children have departed, to become his sole subordinate. Rose, a woman in her late thirties at the time of her marriage, is ideally suited to the role of compliant wife and surrogate mother. Her previous profession has been that of valued servant: a children's nursemaid, and the valet her former master would have chosen had his wife permitted it. She has acquired the social skills that please employers, learned to indulge their whims. That she is good at ironing takes on a metaphorical significance, since she has spent much of her married life 'smoothing' out household difficulties. She is attracted by Moran's aloofness and, ironically, she sees marriage as an opportunity to become mistress of her own establishment. For all his local notoriety as a strategist in the

war, Moran doesn't seem to be able to exercise much control in the matter of his marriage. He is continually out-manuevered by Rose, who mounts a shrewd, tactical campaign together way when he would prefer to retreat or delay.

Once married, Rose proves to be an angel of the house: a kind, caring, capable homemaker, whose warmth and good humour contrast sharply with Moran's sudden rages and unpredictable mood swings. Her genuine interest in each child's welfare contrasts with Moran's inability to value his children's individual identity and autonomy. However, it must be said that Rose colludes in perpetuating Moran's patriarchal regime. She is unfailingly loyal to him and she refuses to entertain his children's criticism of his petulant behaviour. In his children's presence she always refers to Moran as 'Daddy', the title by which he himself insists that they address him.

The power struggle between Rose and her husband centers on two episodes. In the first he is compelled to apologise and she is rewarded with a mini-honeymoon, but she has been made aware of his 'darkness' and decides to concentrate her strategy on diverting his attacks – cutting him off at the pass, so to speak. In the second episode he embarks on a prolonged campaign to crush her and she attempts to conciliate and pacify him, until she discovers that she can 'give up no more ground and live'. Her tactic now is to threaten to leave him, a shrewd stroke; since she knows that Moran is already obsessed with Luke's departure. This power struggle between the two is several times alluded to in military terms. It is a 'hidden battle' from which she, apparently, emerges victorious, her objective having been to ensure her 'place in the house could never be attacked or threatened again'. What she has settled for, however, is

the limited right to be treated like a member of Moran's family, to swim like a fish in his net.

Moran's daughters adapt to life by avoiding confrontation. Indeed, there seem to be very limited options in counteracting Moran's dominance. Compliance, continual confrontation, or departures are the three choices facing Moran's household. The strategy of the womenfolk, at least, is to 'slip away' or try to appear invisible. Such evasion is a tactical manoeuvre, a recognition of their own defenselessness. Beneath their cringing exterior, Mona and Sheila each conceals a forceful character. Mona is 'unnaturally acquiescent', 'full of hidden violence'; Sheila, even as a young child, knows better than 'to challenge authority on poor ground'. They bide their time until their jobs in the Civil Service set them free from Moran's daily oppression, though Sheila comes near to confrontation before surrendering her opportunity to attend university. They show their attitude to parental domination in their advice to Michael, to make the best of it until he has finished school and is in a position to choose a career of his own.

A large part of the fascination the handsome Moran holds for Rose and for his daughters is sexual. Rose loves him; his daughters also experience an 'oedipal' attachment. He is their 'first man'. He looks on their husbands and male friends as rivals and is content when these prove 'no threat' to his primal place in their affections. Neither Maggie nor Sheila marry dominant men, and Mona resists marriage altogether. Sheila is the only one to violate this 'incestuous' relationship with her father when she leaves him in the hayfield to go indoors and makes love to Sean.

As the novel ends the reader's sympathies are drawn towards the ailing and dying Moran, so that we share the family's grief at his death. His corpse is taken to the church on a 'heartbreakingly lovely May evening' and buried on a morning when the 'Plains were bathed in sunshine' and 'the unhoused cattle were grazing greedily on the early grass'. The sadness of this final parting from the fertile spring world is rendered all the more poignant by the baffled love Moran experiences for his own land in old age. He is shown walking it, 'field by blind field', 'like a blind man trying to see'. In his last month he repeatedly escapes from his sickbed to stare at the beauty of his meadow. At the end of his life Moran eventually arrives at a deep appreciation of the 'amazing glory he is part of'. Maybe this final epiphany is the blessing he always craved for and was unable to receive, a blessing hinted at in the name *Roses*.

The implication at the conclusion is that Moran's family is stronger than ever in their love and allegiance to one another. They truly recognize that Moran played a central part in all their lives. Their attendance at the funeral strengthens this bond between them even more. They realize that each one of them, in different ways has truly imbibed Moran's beliefs and values. They remain loyal to his personal beliefs in spite of everything only Luke remains obstinate in his decision not to return home a remainder that even he has inherited a great deal of stubbornness and tried from his father.

Although McGahern had published novels and three collections of short stories before *Amongst Women*, it was this novel that brought his first abundance of critical acclaim. The Irish public had a negative point of view due to his novel *The Dark* (1965), which was banned. But with the approval that *Amongst Women* got the Irish public's reception of his work shifted completely.

Chapter Three

Conclusion

Amongst Women is written in the third person with the focus on events affecting Moran and his family. The scope is tight, ignoring everything that had no direct bearing on Moran's interaction with the family. Their world was insular and inward looking, keeping a restraining tightness on the narrative.

McGahern unveils the unholy trinity of nationalism, Catholicism and patriarchy and it gets manifested in the main themes of the Power, Patriarchy and family. Even after his retirement Moran wants to be in power and hence he considers his family members inferior to him and establishes his authority over them. Family for Moran is his own extended version. Though he always seem to stand for family's welfare, he is actually aware about his own welfare. Moran always considers himself superior to all the women in his family and expects them to obey him without questioning

The narrator is both honest and balanced in his portrayal of the characters. He is at times, sympathetic to Moran. He shows both his black and his light hearted moods. Moran's inner fears are revealed, as are his harsh exterior. The other characters are shown mostly in their relationship to Moran and the affect that he has on them.

The novel explores the mindset of post-colonial, traditional, Catholic, rural Ireland. It shows where feelings as well as their strengths Michael says I'm afraid we might all die in Ireland if we don't get out fast. McGahern asks whether exile offers the only hope for freedom and individuality in this society.

There is the difficulty of communication between father and his children, which questions Ireland's conceit of itself as a healthy family-centred society. It particularly exposes the insecurities and inexpressiveness of Irish masculinity. McGahern said of the novel: The whole country is made up of families, each family a kind of independent republic. In *Amongst Women*, the family is a kind of half-way house between the individual and society. Moran is a man capable of heroic action in a time of revolution, but he is incapable of meeting the demands of domestic and personal intimacy in his fraught and sometimes violent relationships with his wife and children. The question of how to maintain authority over children while still allowing them room to grow is central to the novel.

The novel shows that Moran's contradictory behaviour is a personification of the contradictions of postcolonial society. He typifies the disappointment awaiting the revolutionary who aids the replacement of one power with another without reflecting on the process of domination itself. He vents his sense of betrayal on his family, allowing McGahern to explore how political turmoil can affect families

The story of the family is an allegory for that of independent Ireland – without the father the family would not exist, but until Moran is dead, the family cannot become itself. The parallel is clearly with Éamon de Valera, though Moran is an Irish Republican legitimist, believing that the only legal government of Ireland was the First Dáil, and is deeply alienated from the Ireland of de Valera.

Moran lives in a world where Ireland has both achieved nationhood and retreated from the world. Emigration is tolerated as a necessary evil, as it was in Ireland

in the 1950s, but the economic failures that drove the mass exodus are never challenged. Moran's death is a moment of liberation for the family

Amongst Women is a spare, scaled down novel, concentrating on one family and farm house in a remote Irish village, the Moran's of Great Meadow. All the daughters and Sons of the family migrate to Dublin or London , yet the action, instead of radiating out words, is centripetal, focusing on the metropolitans magnetic attraction towards childhood country, the exile's attachment to the fatherland. McGahern is deliberately turning away from the Big House novel, that had played such a prominent part in earlier Irish fiction to what might be termed a small house novel , portraying rural Catholic family life. *Amongst Women*, whose time span ranges from the War of Independence to an unspecific date in the recent past, reveals some of the forces that have shaped modern Ireland. In its characterization of the ex- guerilla hero, Moran, it shows the destructive legacy of political evolution: the channeling of frustrated energies and ambitions into petty authoritarianism and violence, the invocation of Catholicism to support a domestic reign of terror, the maiming a succeeding generation through denial of individuality and insistence of conformity. However, because it concentrates on one family and implicates the rest of Ireland only incidentally, *Amongst Women* also succeeded in transcending local and national circumstance. It offers an astute analysis of power relations in a closed community, it asks disturbing questions about the mystique home and family and in particular , it subjects the Institution of patriarchy to remorseless scrutiny.

This is a realistic novel, which traces the history of an Irish rural family in the early twentieth century. McGahern focuses on one family and one house and we follow the subtle changes that take place in the comings and goings of various members of the

family. He has created a microcosm in Great Meadow from which to view and comment on the changes which have come about after the War of Independence. Even though there is a timeless quality to the novel and no dates are mentioned we are being asked to pass judgement on the new State that has emerged and was beginning to find its feet under the influence of the 1937 Constitution. De Valera's vision of this New Ireland eulogised the role of women as mothers and home-makers and he painted an idealised picture of life in the Irish countryside:

A land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of serene old age.

McGahern in Leitrim and Kavanagh in Monaghan both knew that the realities of life for poor, farm families were radically different from this version offered by de Valera.

At the heart of the book is a brilliant and subversive idea that Ireland, rather than being a nation or a community, was a place of isolated families, bitter individuals and gnarled relationships. But McGahern is too subtle a novelist to ever mention this idea in the book. Instead he allows it to emerge subtly, slowly and organically, from the deadened rituals in which the characters indulge.

The pacing of the novel is masterly; its rhythms are filled with hidden emotion. The writing is plain, un-showy, the pauses like pauses in a prayer or a ballad. It became, on publication in 1990, the novel by which Irish people measured their world, and then it

became famous in England and in France for its beauty, wisdom and calm perfection. It is the sort of book which you can give anyone of any age and know that they will be changed by it. It took 10 years to write; its power will last for many centuries.

The core of the novel consists of both the representation of Moran's formidable power and of the inevitability of resistance to it. In this dissertation we analysed the major theme of the novel and their importance. The themes of family, Power or Patriarchy and the Role of Women play a very important role and the writer has successfully established them as the major themes. All the above mentioned themes have their own contribution to the progress of the novel.

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