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“Twenty or Thirty or Forty Years Ago”: Time,
Posthistory, and the Hyper-Present in
Patrick McCabe’s *The Butcher Boy*

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

“Twenty or Thirty or Forty Years Ago”: Time,
Posthistory, and the Hyper-Present in
Patrick McCabe’s *The Butcher Boy*

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This thesis is a commentary on Patrick McCabe’s novel, *The Butcher Boy*, which was published in 1992. The novel is told through the perspective of the main character, Francie Brady, who through the majority of the narration is depicted as a young boy. Francie’s life is riddled with tragedy with his moving from the loss of one important person in his life to another until the pain of these losses triggers a violent paranoid outburst resulting in the murder of the fixation of an obsession of his, Mrs. Nugent.

This thesis looks at the events of the novel through the perspective and insight provided by Ursula K. Heise’s theories of “posthistory” and the “hyper-present,” as well as Paul Grainge’s concepts of the “Mood” and the “Mode” of nostalgia.

Keywords: *The Butcher Boy*, Patrick McCabe, time, postmodernism, end of history, posthistory, hyper-present, nostalgia, Ursula K. Heise, Paul Grainge

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Even though 1992 seems a mere blink ago, it has been long enough to have sparked thoughtful commentary on many well-written texts from that year. One novel from that year, Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* has been the focus of a variety of intelligent approaches to understanding the text. These various approaches can be put into three fuzzy categories: how the novel reveals the psychology of Francie Brady (the narrator of the novel), its revelatory description of Ireland's industrial schools, and a social commentary on the Republic of Ireland.

Clare Wallace and John Skaggs delve into the psychology of Francie, focusing on, respectively, how Francie's expression of his story is also an expression of how he has created the world for himself. Much like a programmer creates a game-world through a programming language, Francie creates his world with his language (Wallace 157–8, 160). Skaggs' instead focuses on how Francie attempts to control the reader's mind, and force the reader to think in the unusual way he does (54–8).

The second approach most often taken with *The Butcher Boy* revolves around his time in the industrial school. Michael R. Molino places Francie's story in a network of others to examine fictional perspectives towards the collusive relationship between Catholic Church and Irish State (41, 49–50). James M. Smith discusses how *The Butcher Boy* is part of a complex of narratives, fictional and real, that includes the nationally important *States of Fear* documentaries of later years (114–7).

Molino and Smith begin themselves to open up a much larger conversation that is taken up by the remainder of many of the commentators of *The Butcher Boy*: the concept of the novel as a kind of national allegory. From the Virgin Mary and the Catholic Church, to pigs and Ireland's postcolonial relationship to England, the critics who reveal the connections and allusions extant in McCabe's novel show how fertile it is in its commentary on the state of Ireland both at the time of publication and during the epoch in which it is set. Elizabeth Cullingford examines the connection between the use of the Virgin Mary and the saints mentioned in the book, as well as the depiction of

the Virgin Mary by Sinéad O’Conner in the film adaptation of the novel, and Ireland’s relationship with the Catholic Church (192, 202–5). Similar to Cullingford’s claims, James S. Brown’s focus on the abuse of the Irish child—though in Brown’s case the abused is Francie Brady—and how his abuses are the result of poor relations between the Irish state, the Catholic Church, and his own community (43). For Tim Gauthier *The Butcher Boy* is an example of what Ella Shohat has coined “neocolonialism” and he shows this in the way the Nugents and the institutions they support are part of the re-invasion of British, and at times American, social institutions. The institutions meant to colonize the economy, society, and the mind of the Irish, like Francie (196–7, 202–5, 209).

Gauthier also shows something that Donna Potts digs into deeper; the colonizing nature of the pig metaphor used so much through the novel (Gauthier 204, Potts 90). Alison Fanous Cotti-Lowell similarly shows the colonizing effects that foreign, especially American, comics had on Ireland, and how this plays out as mentally stunting for Francie (97–100). And quite recently Laura G. Eldred argues on monster movies and how the state of Ireland during the period of the novel is like the movie-monster Francie watches in Dublin, creating more monsters (like Francie himself) out of the Irish people (64–7).

The points that Eldred, Cotti-Lowell, Potts, Gauthier, Brown, Cullingford, Smith, Molino, Scaggs, and Wallace make are all important aspects of the novel; yet, these mostly Irish national/“Irish Problem”-centric examinations of McCabe’s novel exclude a central aspect of the novel, one that deals with identity as much as any discussion of the “nation” or nationalism does. This aspect has everything to do with time, its perception, and Francie Brady’s relationship with time. What I will therefore examine in this paper is how the changes in the perception of time in the second half of the twentieth century and the way society has come to deal with these perceptual changes, according to Ursula K. Heise’s complementary theories of “posthistory” and of the “hyper-present,” as well as Paul Grainge’s concepts of the “Mood” and “Mode” of nostalgia show

themselves in McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*. Specifically, I will show how these changes in how time is handled postmodernly are essential to what Francie Brady is doing with his story.

The concept of posthistory that Ursula K. Heise discusses in her *Chronoschisms* text concerns Jean-François Lyotard's "crisis of historicity." The crisis of historicity is the admixture of all the post-modern issues that have arisen because of the diminishment of imperio-nationalistic narratives of history, the ones which have ignored and wiped out micro-narratives of native, colonized, extra-national, or non-local peoples (16–7). This crisis is the follow through on the part of Lyotard and others of Hegel's concept of history and the "end of history" (124–50). What has come from Hegel down through Romanticism, Victorianism, Modernism, and most recently, Postmodernism is indeed a pattern of history marching forward with one movement superseding the next, but many Postmodernist scholars have seen what has come since the end of World War II as the Hegelian posthistory.

Hegelian posthistory, being a time when there is nothing else for society to progress into—to evolve into—has become an embattled concept, specifically in regard to what the details are of what occurs during posthistory. As Hegel considered his own, Napoleonic era, the posthistoric era (19), but eras and empires continued to rise and fall since he wrote, there have been many to refute or modify his idea of posthistory. Though claims of posthistory "finally arriving" have continued since Hegel named the concept of the End of History, postmodernists have been the most successful in their argument for being in a posthistory state. Nonetheless, postmodernists have one major division as to what posthistory is, and how it works.

As Heise puts it, there are two camps into which Postmodernist theorists generally fall regarding posthistory. In Lutz Niethammer and others' camp, posthistory, being the state when the "dialectic interplay of opposing forces has exhausted itself and led society to a stage in which all that can be expected of the future is a continuing replay and spread of already familiar modernizing

processes” (17–8), where all that the progress of time does to society is force it to repeat updating the parts of global society not similar enough to the West. In the West where these updates have happened, nothing really ever seems to change. Examples of this include Dean Spade’s remarks on transgender “rights” versus a complete systematic change in government and society (39–41). What Spade shows in his *Normal Life* is how trans individuals and othered groups experience a process of repeated fights for a specific ability which the oppressor groups in society have, such as the ability to marry, or use the restroom that conforms to their gender identity, or be treated without bias by police agencies, and so forth—a fight for rights which only ever makes the Other like the privileged, not to actually improve society as a whole (79–100). A less political example of Niethammer’s idea is to examine the history of the Chevrolet Corvette. A popular sports car through its history, market forces have encouraged Chevrolet to keep this model in production since 1953. For various reasons, not least of which is to retain market relevance, Chevrolet has updated the Corvette in “generations” where the vehicle is changed, but never is it designed to be on, or break through the bleeding edge of technology or aesthetics. Its style and its features are always the kinds that will match people’s expectations. As of 2016 there have been seven versions of the Corvette that Chevrolet has produced, but the relevant point here is that no matter how many times Chevrolet changes the model, it is still the Corvette. So, in other words, Niethammer and those who view posthistory as he does view it as an infectious ossifying of society.

Heise says that the other “camp” of postmodern theorists is one which sees posthistory as the exhaustion of any modernist ideology which could challenge liberal democracy (most recently the strongest seeming of those challengers having been fascism and communism). This camp of postmodernists, which includes theorists Francis Fukuyama and Alexandre Kojève, is one which views the state of posthistory as a state which has exhausted communism, fascism, feudalism, and other ideologies of governance, and has only liberal democracy left now that the others have fizzled

out. This view of posthistory is one where humanity struggles with and is simultaneously seeking and modifying liberal democracy, with its associated capitalistic inequalities, until—being unsatisfied with the unfulfilled promises of freedom and equality which liberal democracy present—humanity invents new ideologies, at which point Fukuyama claims the Hegelian process of history begins again (Heise 19–20).

Heise does relate something else important that comes from the Fukuyama camp of posthistory. Although Fukuyama and others argue that posthistory will last as long as liberal democracy does, he also states that in some regions of the world re-emerging nationalism and religious fundamentalism may threaten the development of liberal democracy; however, he argues that such movements will not threaten it as an ideology or as an ideal.

A prime example of this happening is actually in the post-revolutionary history of Ireland, most particularly in the southern Republic. After gaining freedom from the UK, Ireland gained a government that did have a two party system, such as that in other democratic republics, but as opposed to a system with two parties, a system that many believe is meant to have a “loyal opposition” relationship between parties in, Ireland, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael had little distinction in policy to offer for voters save that one was once willing to allow themselves to remain part of the UK for a short time before they gained full independence, and the other fought for immediate independence. After that argument became moot when Ireland became an independent state both parties worked toward a backward looking nation-state which created tighter and tighter bonds with the Catholic Church in their country; thus avoiding social and technological progress, as well as embracing nationalism and a semi-theocracy.

Creating a place where the bad never gets better—and where the bad is what most people face—is an astounding feat. It often requires physical, psychological, verbal, sexual, and economic punishment to create what Ireland has been in the twentieth century. But, to maintain such a

punishing environment, the people must have a powerful distraction from their pain so they will not rebel. And, causing so much pain for so many people without their rebellion requires a complex set of distractions. Such a distraction, as Marx puts it in his *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, can be religion, "the *opium* of the people" (129–30). Marx was quite explicit in his meaning in this statement; i.e., that for so long ruling classes had kept those they ruled in place by having the clergy teach that deity put them their according to plan. But mentioning opium here is also important considering the time frame. During the turn of the nineteenth century opium was completely legal and was one of the major trades Europe made with China (Simpson 74–6, 97–8). For writers/artists such as Thomas De Quincey, who wrote *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, opium was a completely acceptable past time, something he claimed helped his creativity, but for someone like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, it was an addictive substance that caused him to withdraw from the world. While middle and upper class people in England used opium to dull the pain of the every-day boredom, the working class of the eighteenth century, and throughout most of history, usually got their numbing from the pain of toil as their ancestors had: through alcohol. However, as time has passed since the nineteenth century, people with power in the UK and elsewhere grew a distaste for opium, and even of alcohol, taking various legal actions to ban opium and force all to be teetotalers. All of this was part of the lead up to posthistory as we know it. So, to what have the masses turned for their distraction from their own oppression since posthistory has arrived? Oddly enough, Ursula K. Heise suggests it has become the perception of time.

Since the popularization of railroads and the subsequent timetables and clocks needed for them to appease and please their passengers, as well as prevent accidents, time has become a central force to culture. Humans have observed it, learned how to measure its vastness and minuteness, and as humans have arrived into posthistory, they become haunted by it. Ursula K. Heise shows in *Chronoschisms* how our understanding of time since the late nineteenth century has turned time into a

terrifying obsession. This obsession results in a perception of time Heise refers to as the “hyper-present” (26). The hyper-present is best understood as how society’s use of time, time keeping, and recent discoveries about both how old the universe and world really are, especially in comparison to the relative shortness of human history, and how quickly things at the smallest scales move (i.e. the use of Nano or Planck seconds needed to measure the movements of our fastest machines, or to “clock” the atomic and subatomic particles scientists observe) creates a neurosis for humanity, where past and future are cast aside to obsess over the present. Heise’s concept of the hyper-present describes a state where humanity is caught such that monumental change for humanity or the world is essentially non-existent even though distracting micro-change does happen (26–33).

This hyper-present may seem as though it is a set of artificial, socio-cultural blinders for humanity to the actual passage of time, but in reality it is humanity’s reaction to its better understanding of how meaningless its measurements of time are compared to the universe’s motions through an unknown number of dimensions, one of which *is* time. The hyper-present becomes a distraction, therefore, because it allows looking away from the horror of insignificance caused by understanding how short life (particularly human history) is compared to the age of the universe and the terror of viewing individual life in comparison to the fleeting of subatomic motions through time (39–46).

An added horror that triggers hyper-present mentality is the result of humanity’s growing understanding that the nature of history has changed from a precise and accurate record of the past into an understanding that history is mutable. Humans have also learned that just as much as how records from even a century ago that were “history” are now seen as fictions, which means that what humanity currently teaches as history is merely the present interpretation of various records of what supposedly happened (48–9, 68–74). Hyper-present mentality is also a result of the realization that the grandiose dreams of what the future can be and how far distant into the future humanity can

effectively predict must be restrained even from a few years into the future, lest dreams of shaping the future turn into plans where the ends justify the means. For humanity has seen how imagining the future becomes crafting the future with plans, such as eugenics or Hitlerian/Stalinist “final solution”s. The posthistoric focus on the hyper-present is therefore the result of the relationship humanity finds itself in with its understanding of time, especially since the end of World War II (Heise 26–32, 38–45).

Living inside the hyper-present does not remove understanding of the existence of future and past, however. But, in order to remain in the distraction that is the hyper-present, the future and the past must be modified in order to fit appropriately within the hyper-present focus. The way this is done is by commodifying and packaging the future and past so they can be experienced as present. The way this is done with the future is to ignore the possibilities of human insignificance and its statistically random chances of being wiped-out any moment by any number of means, and turn the future into mythology through the speculative/science fiction genre. Instead of confronting the horror of entropy and the slow or rapid death of the human race without its leaving the planet, the reaction is for artists to step forward and create versions of the future where humanity nobly explores the vastness of space, such as with the *Star Trek* franchise. Or, instead of confronting the possibility of a universe wherein humanity’s first extra-terrestrial contact is with a race that finds humanity insignificant and only worth said race’s effortless exertion to wipe humanity out of its way, the artist creates a future where humanity is equal to the challenges it finds on the other edge of the Milky Way, as can be found in *Blizzard Entertainment’s* franchise of *StarCraft* games.

The fictions of J.R.R. Tolkien and others, which feel similar and parallel to those of *Star Trek* and *StarCraft*, are part of hyper-present distraction, however, the preferred means chosen by which to look at the past is to make nostalgia out of history and memory.

Nostalgia has been a common byproduct of the uncertainty that comes with progress for much of human history, as can be seen when examining the legends of England's King Arthur, or Virgil's *Aeneid*, but it has become especially significant with posthistory as a way to assure a pleasant hyper-present. The reason for this seems to be that if a people is no longer allowed (whether it admits so or not) to hold the distant past or even the near future in an idealistic way, then in order to cope with that lack of control over time, the society attempts to hold onto or restore the version of the recent past that has existed during their lifetime, though in a significantly simplified way. The cyclical procedure of society to attempt to repeat history on its own terms without admitting or studying the problems in that history—i.e. nostalgia—is a common pitfall. In order to be clear, however, I will agree with David Lowenthal in saying that “Nostalgia is apt to be confused with *any* perspective on the past and every historical enterprise mistaken as nostalgic” (29). In other words, calling something “nostalgic” can often be interpreted as a slur towards the piece of work rather than an effectual critical commentary on that work. Paul Grainge makes a special distinction between nostalgia which is the “Mood,” i.e., much more in line with the feeling of loss and sorrow described by the word “nostalgia”'s creator, Johannes Hofer (Grainge 22–3), and nostalgia as a “Mode” of thinking. Nostalgia as a “Mode” is a way to look at the system of the past that is like Judith Butler's description of gender dynamics in *Gender Trouble*. Nostalgia, like gender dynamics, is a process of construction, patch-up maintenance, and reconstructing the constellation of a past that never really existed the way memory has it (Butler 713, Grainge 24). The Mode of nostalgia is a symptom of posthistory according to theorists from Jean Baudrillard (1956–65), to Derrida (1972), through Grainge (29), and Ursula K. Heise (11–3). Yet, important to remember when discussing the Mood of nostalgia, even considering its morphed definition since Hofer, is that the Mode might be best understood as a way to avoid the Mood; that is, the sorrow for a loss. It is this Mode of nostalgia that Francie Brady uses throughout *The Butcher Boy* to attempt avoiding the Mood of

nostalgia. He uses the Mode to avoid his sorrow at the loss of those he considers closest to him, a loss which ruins the peace and happiness he attempts to describe at the beginning of the novel. This he does in order to create a hyper-present that allows him to avoid the truths of his posthistoric state and to avoid the horrors of time.

To hide in the hyper-present Mode of nostalgia Francie attempts to begin his narration with tales that come before his mother's first attempt at suicide, with a story that shows how close he and his mother "are:" (as opposed to the *non*-hyper-present "were"). However, even this attempt at making hyper-present the past and turning it into something pleasantly nostalgic for Francie Brady is thwarted by the very same events that make up the story. Nonetheless, Francie attempts to start into his nostalgia, and does so by telling about when he and Joe Purcell swindled Philip Nugent's comic books from him. Such a story would seem to be the stuff of almost any boy's uncomplicated, happy memories, but before he can even begin, he sidetracks his own narration with the consequences of his swindling. He narrates how Philip's mother, Mrs. Nugent, comes to confront Francie's mother about the misdeed, yet oddly seeming enough, before he gets to telling that, he has already alluded to his murdering Mrs. Nugent (*Butcher Boy* 2–3). This allusion, which disturbs Francie's nostalgia, and therefore his hyper-present too, is further sidelined by how he begins the entire story, giving the reader the time frame reference for when all of this happened: "twenty or thirty or forty years ago." And as soon as he shakily establishes his chronology, Francie then reports that this non-absolute, relative timeframe was when the people from town were chasing after him "on account of what I done on Mrs Nugent" (1). With these revelations Francie seemingly rambles a bit, but once Francie is able to get on track and begin telling about how his life was when his mother and father were still alive, when his Uncle Alo still came to visit, and when he was best friends with Joe Purcell, the narration progresses steadily for the most part; however, that he has murdered Mrs. Nugent and that this is a story from the narrator Francie's past are things he cannot circumvent (being part of the

Mood of his nostalgia), no matter how much he wishes to return to and maintain his desired Mode of nostalgia.

For unfathomable reasons, even after opening with the allusion to the murder, Francie pushes forward, trying to have nostalgia for the comic books incident. But, as seen above, even to begin, Francie cannot avoid marring his nostalgia as evinced by the fact that the first “sequence” of the story he tells is the confrontation Mrs. Nugent has with his mother. When she goes around to Francie’s house to talk with his mother, Francie details how Mrs. Nugent derides Benny Brady’s alcoholism and unemployment, and proclaims that Francie’s could dress better—heedless of such a comment’s relation to the Bradys’ poverty (4). All of which are painful comments that are connected to Francie’s eventually murdering Mrs. Nugent. However, in attempting to maintain the distracting hyper-present Mode of nostalgia of the Francie who is telling this story (as opposed to the Francie from “twenty or thirty or forty years ago” in the story), he moves on, but he has nothing to move on to but the town winning some cup for winning at a sport, or who knows what, but that too is tainted by his parents arguing and his mother’s first attempt at suicide and her subsequent leaving for the local mental institution (6–9). At this point in Francie’s narration, a moment of non-nostalgic peace seems to come to the younger Francie through Joe in his helping Francie cope with his mother’s institutionalization by joking about it with him, calling the institution the “garage” and joking that Francie’s mom is just going in for a “tune up” (9). Now, it is important to remember what Arthur Schopenhauer said about laughter/jokes in order to understand how this moment was *not* part of Francie distracting himself from the horrors of time with the hyper-present. Joe is suggesting to Francie that his mother’s mental condition is much like a broken part on an automobile, and that, as opposed to the shame Benny Brady and other townsfolk feel over this, even though there might be some unholy curse behind needing to go to a mental healthcare facility, her going is just a fact of life, one that is as silly as comparing Francie’s mother to a car (Schopenhauer 95–6).

Sadly though, the distraction from the pain of mockery, of feeling alone without his mother, and so forth, is quickly taken up again both for the Francie in the story and the Francie narrating it. Nonetheless, the narrating Francie cannot hide that something seemingly innocuous as the malfunction of a TV forces both Francies out from the protection of their respective distractions into the pains and fears of existence. The family TV breaks, and it is at this point, without the numbing, without the distracting Francie gets from reruns of John Wayne movies, when he begins to wander the streets with a rage Francie doesn't know how to confront or control. Thus he begins the narration of what is meant to be a nostalgic scene that instead turns into foreshadow. As he wanders the streets he serendipitously, or by design, crosses paths with Philip and Mrs. Nugent and he invents the "Pig Toll Tax."

Again, this seems to be an innocently nostalgic action; an incidence of a "boy being a boy," when in actuality it is an example of how Francie cannot act in the idyllic, good-natured way he is attempting to convince the reader he had in mind. Francie has lost his John Wayne reruns; he can no longer have his mind deadened and ignore what's happened to his mother or how Mrs. Nugent embarrassed Annie Brady. He has no other means for catharsis or for working out his bereavement and embarrassment over his family's poverty and his mother's hospitalization. So he acts out against the Nugents. He blocks them in the street and demands a ransom, a "Pig Toll Tax." A tax; a toll that must be paid to pigs like the Bradys; a tax that must be paid to him. Francie makes his demands and proceeds to frighten and intimidate Philip and Mrs. Nugent. He keeps at this until he suddenly decides they are scared enough and then lets them go (*Butcher Boy* 12–14). Superficially, this is all a "goof" of a young boy, but it is clear to the reader that Francie loses control of himself when he accosts the Nugents. The Francie in the narration has lost his opiate, the one that was preventing him from going over in his mind how cruel those around him have, and are, being about his mother and her time in the mental healthcare facility. He's lost the TV that distracted him enough so he

wouldn't consider whether someone might be at fault for her condition and for his own feelings of embarrassment from Mrs. Nugent tattling on him and slandering his family to his mother's face.

And simultaneously as the reader is shown this Mood of nostalgia, the reader is also shown that the Francie who narrates cannot seem to avoid those parts of the story he is telling which ruin the hyper-present catharsis of nostalgia gained if he could see himself as a child "goofing off."

The narrative of *The Butcher Boy* that Francie Brady presents is a sequence that repeats many of the same themes of the "Pig Toll Tax" incident. However, it is the next repetition of this pattern that is the most damaging to Francie: the visit from Uncle Alo. Francie's uncle Alo Brady comes to town, which seems to start as a sweet piece of nostalgia the narrating Francie is experiencing in his hyper-present; distracting him from the fears conjured by understanding how merciless time is. Alo has been in London twenty years and is the pride of the Brady family because he has "ten men under him" where he works. He and his life seem a point of pride for Francie and the whole family (28–9). The pride, the stories, the camaraderie; they are all part of what is probably the happiest part of Francie's story. It is a masterpiece of Francie's hyper-present nostalgia. The party for Alo, in fact, is such a powerfully happy memory that the Francie being narrated uses it as nostalgia later (151–2). However, though Francie narrates the story of a beautiful joyous occasion, it is marred even before the party can fully end. The exposure and mockery Benny makes of his brother tears away the happy façade that was being held in front of the Brady family. Benny Brady embarrasses Alo so badly that his brother leaves and thereafter never comes back. Thus suddenly the happiest occasion Francie can remember, the occasion that could hold him in the hyper-present version of the past, is one that causes him to lose his beloved uncle. However, that is not the worst result of the evening. Francie flees that night for Dublin because of the damage that will come out of his father's hateful rant at Alo. This action seems, even to the reader, less directly harmful than his accosting of the Nugents, and is a healthier working out of his sadness and frustration. In fact, Francie has a truly blissful

experience in Dublin. But, when Francie returns the full weight of consequences from the flights of that night hit him. It seems that somewhere between being faced with never seeing Alo again and Francie being missing, or most likely, the combination of the two, Annie Brady is convinced to kill herself (34–46).

The desertion of his uncle and the suicide of his mother push Francie to the extreme, such that it is almost unsurprising that he attempts to kill Philip Nugent, and even less strange when he frightens Mrs. Nugent at her door and then later breaks into the Nugents' home, eating their food, watching their TV, and vandalizing their walls (51–2, 56–9, 60–5). With his father being useless in helping Francie through his grief and having no form of psychotherapy, seemingly, to turn to, Francie's manner of acting out the dread, the sadness, and the anger he feels is understandable to the reader. In fact, it is also understandable to the reader that the Francie in the story, as well as the narrator begin to accept hallucinations as methods of coping. It is unsurprising that Francie's hallucinations begin as picturesque family life, a life that, as we have seen despite his attempts to fool the reader otherwise, he has never experienced with his own family. Therefore, in order to get to a point where he can imagine such a life with his own family, he must start by hallucinating a seemingly functional family. For Francie there is only one such family that has been imprinted on his mind: the Nugents. So, Francie hallucinates an imaginary version of Nugent family life which he is allowed to participate in (63–4). However, it is clear from his hallucinations of Philip and Mrs. Nugent turning on him, accusing him of really wanting to be a Nugent, and therefore a traitor to his own family, to his own mother, that Francie cannot let go of his animosity towards the Nugents, even long enough to morph into a hallucination without the Nugents (64). So, instead he turns to cruelty toward them, forcing his hallucination Nugents into an equally stereotypical version of his own family, forcing them to become what they despise: pigs like him. He forces them to go to his "School for Pigs" (65–7).

It is important to remember here that these hallucinations are a means of escape, a way for Francie to distract himself. For the Francie inside the story, the hallucinations are a coping mechanism, a way to avoid the pain time causes any time he remembers his chronology-contingent promise to his mother that he would *never* let her down (5). For the Francie narrating, the hallucinations he is describing are also a coping mechanism; they are maintaining his hyper-present by remembering events that never actually happened, so Francie can look back on them happily because they were as perfect as any Mode of nostalgia.

Returning to Francie's narrative, things for both the Francie in the Nugents' house and the Francie narrating are fine until the non-hallucination Nugents return. For them Francie's coping methods are unacceptable. So Mr. Nugent calls "Sgt. Sausage," and Francie is taken where children who come from broken households and who were a nuisance to "important" members of the community were handled for most of the twentieth century in Ireland: an industrial school.

The fictional horrors that confront Francie in the industrial school are only slightly differing from the accounts of real people who experienced emotional, physical, spiritual, and sexual abuse in the many industrial schools across Ireland during this time. Francie's experiences in *The Butcher Boy* are most similar to those reported by residents of the Artane Industrial School for Senior Boys, but also could have been any one of several schools where sexual abuse was rampant (Raftery and O'Sullivan 254). With all that goes on for Francie in the school, the reader might come to the conclusion that the Francie experiencing the events in the school would have no way to ignore the horrors of his experiences with Fr. Sullivan ("Father Tiddly"), yet it is a return to the means most people use to cope that the Francie in the narrative is able to survive: through hope. Joe sends him a letter while at the school detailing how Francie should stop being an "eejit" and essentially encourages him to get out of the school as fast as he can by following the rules there (*Butcher Boy* 76). Francie therefore decides that he will toe the line so that he can earn his "*Francie Brady Not a Bad*

Bastard Any More Diploma” to go back to being friends with Joe and get back to doing all the things that they used to do. To be best friends with Joe again he willingly goes through toil, then thinking he’s found a way around the hard work, begins invoking visions/hallucinations and starts working in the sacristy only to be confronted with Father Sullivan and his sexual abuse (79–85). Although there is good reason to believe that Francie, at the beginning, was willing to put up with Sullivan/Tiddly’s abuse in order to “graduate” and get back to Joe, as Francie narrates his experiences with the priest it becomes obvious that Francie cannot do these things only out of devotion to his cause, but instead he does them as a victim of a system that Eldred, mentioned above, refers to: the monster which creates monsters (64–7). Although the dynamic has significantly changed, Francie is still in pursuit of his nostalgic hyper-present, and the abuse he suffers in the industrial school is best understood as a fire that burns off the “dross” of reasonability from his resolve, a fire that burns away the capability to give up on impossible hopes. He holds onto the dream of having a never-ending friendship with Joe Purcell like they had long before, but also, when his father visits, in spite of the venom Francie unleashes on Benny Brady, Francie grasps hold of another piece of nostalgia: the story of his parents’ honeymoon—a story which allows Francie to relive and reconstruct a past that never really existed.

But as should be expected from a character like Francie, there are only so many of Tiddly’s abuses he can take. In fact, it seems the sexual favors and fantasy fulfillment are not nearly as capable of breaking Francie’s resolve as a foolish route of questioning Sullivan pursues one too many times. This set of questions is about Francie’s past, about “the worst thing [he has] ever done” (87–8, 96–7). Again, what agitates the Francie of the story so is that these questions break his barrier of distraction. Being around Sullivan he has been able to flex his hallucinogenic muscles, and is capable of choosing to see the Virgin Mary and other saints (82–4)—characters that, because of their sanctified state can and do only treat Francie well—and perhaps this happy relationship allows him

to maintain his focus on leaving to go back to Joe by adopting the written and unwritten code of the school (95). But, when Sullivan's sexual fetish for hearing the worst thing ever done by a person comes out in the form of a question, a question which likely has but one answer to Francie's point of view: that he caused his mother's suicide; Francie's overpowering need to avoid breaking through his distractions from the pain of this answer, whether his answer is true or not, forces him to lash out at Sullivan (96-7).

After Francie lashes out at Sullivan loudly enough to draw Father "Bubble," Sullivan's abuse is discovered, and Francie is allowed to, and decides to, leave the school of his own accord (97-102). He gets home to discover his father drinking himself to death (121, 126-7). Again, Francie narrates a story as best he can that, though truthful about the bad things that happen around him, strives to show his life as one that is happy and the same as it has always been; one that is as joyful as an idyllic childhood. It is at this point, when Francie returns from the school, when the Francie in the narrative joins with the narrating Francie in their search for peace through nostalgia. This is the reason playing Indians is so important to Francie: it allows him to live his nostalgia. However time keeps moving forward, continuing to disrupt Francie's attempts at ignoring the horrors of not having the control over time to set things right in the past or warp to a future where everything has worked out.

To have his Mode of nostalgia, Francie narrates how he attempts to track down Joe as soon as he comes home (102-3). However, more to the point, tracking down Joe is mostly an attempt to repeat their old adventures and live nostalgically. He attempts to make it seem as though he was trying to rekindle their friendship with his stories about looking for Joe. Instead, what Francie narrates to the reader, without admitting it, is that he is narrating the dissolution of his and Joe's friendship. He does find Joe and they talk, though as they've aged to some indeterminate degree, Joe is less inclined to join in Francie's games. So, Francie and Joe go on a walk, during which, Joe

persistently asks about what happened during Francie's time in the school. Francie, acting in accordance with his drive for nostalgic hyper-presence answers as he would have were he and Joe at the beginning of the novel—or at least as Francie wishes they would have spoken about such things before. However, when Francie finally answers Joe's question, Francie and the reader, receive a surprising response from Joe. Instead of shock and anger, or even a feigned ignorance followed by an increase in loyalty on Joe's part, as it seems Francie hopes for when he sees Joe's reaction, Joe meets Francie's revelation with cognitive dissonance. He runs away with fear, never to acknowledge that a priest or associate of GOD's could do such a thing, never to show true concern for Francie again (103–5).

But, for Francie time continues to move forward uncontrollably and the horrors keep coming. This time it is when his father finally dies. But yet again, Francie attempts to give the reader a narrative that replaces sadness and horror with a repeat of the past that is actually better than the original. When he finds his father dead, Francie immediately begins pretending and/or hallucinating a renewed, better-than-it-ever-was, relationship with his father. In his hallucination, he promises to care for Benny Brady, so Francie goes to work for Leddy the butcher (126–30, 138–40). Francie's narration creates a post-mortem relationship with his father that goes around in a hyper-present that is a saccharin circle of nostalgia (127–8). It is to this nostalgic hyper-present Francie is able to cling until the police and Doctor Roche discover his father's rotting corpse in his house (153).

When the police and Dr. Roche discover Benny Brady's dead body, Francie is sent to a mental healthcare facility where he is drugged up or is arguing at every turn. He has drug-induced hallucinations of the past and of strange things that never were, and most of what Francie narrates about the place is strange and unruly (153–66). Sometimes it seems as though what happens there might help Francie, but for the most part Francie endures a system that is little more than a pipeline, the end of which is well-wishes from the doctor and a bottle of pills (166). As is too often the case,

the mental healthcare system, though it strives to do best by those who come into contact with it, is only as good as the patient allows, and in the case of Francie Brady, all he wants is for things to return to the way they were and for them to never change.

When Francie leaves the hospital, he is left with a longing for at least one, final, dip into his hyper-present, with nostalgia about his family and his friend, but as has happened with most of his hyper-present nostalgia, that longing about friend and family is frustrated. Indeed, it is the destruction of those last nostalgic illusions he had that leads to Francie's murder of Mrs. Nugent. The first of these last few steps to the murder come as Francie is attempting to retain the idyllic history of his parents' honeymoon and his being best friends with Joe Purcell. Without anything to mar it for now, Francie is able to think about and replay in his mind his parents' happiness on their honeymoon, like he was imagining them before he was sent to the mental healthcare facility (141). However, things are much different regarding his ability to regain his friendship with Joe. When Francie is discharged from the mental healthcare facility, he gets home and retakes much of his old life, including going back to work for Leddy. Francie then begins again his attempts to reconnect with Joe. His hyper-present does prevent him from fully seeing the ramifications of the fact that he hasn't been able to spend time with Joe since the fight with Buttsy and Devlin. In fact he doesn't seem to be able to remember fully the pain of hearing Joe say he "*used*" to hang out with Francie (117-9). He doesn't seem to remember several other things about Joe becoming further distant from him, or when Joe or his family turned Francie away either (122-3, 137-8, 144-5, 171). So, without accepting these memories which would take him out of the hyper-present where he and Joe continued to play at Indians and go hiking in the mountains, Francie decides to go to the Purcells', to pick up their friendship where he remembers/wishes it left off. However, when he talks with Mr. Purcell he is reminded that Joe is at boarding school in Bundoran, the same town where his parents

honeymooned (173, 141). With a few more nudges here and there from events in the story, Francie decides with all of this that he needs to go to Bundoran to reconnect with Joe.

He rides to Bundoran on a bicycle to see Joe, but as it is the place where his parents honeymooned he decides to find and visit the boarding house they stayed in while they were there (175–82). When he finds out from the woman who runs the boarding house that the story he knows of his parents' honeymoon only ever was nostalgia; that his father behaved reprehensibly, attacking a fellow-lodger—which might have been because said fellow-lodger, Fr. McGivney, was one of his torturers from the place he and Alo had been left in as children. After the altercation with McGivney Benny Brady apparently wasn't sober a single day he and Francie's mother were there (193–4). After all the nostalgic happy-dreaming Francie has done with the story of his parents' honeymoon, Francie finds out that the same system that he suffered in under Father Bubbles and Father Tiddy is the same one that turned what was Francie's final illusion of his parents ever having been happy together into yet another scene of his father being drunk and abusive and his mother being unhappy.

After this disillusionment, Francie returns to the final thing he holds nostalgia over, the reason he originally travelled to Bundoran: his friendship with Joe. So, he rides his bike to the boarding school, arriving after lights-out with a present in hand, hoping it will win Joe back as his best friend, but it is too late, Joe has lost all patience with Francie. With anger Joe asks the disturber what he wants and Francie is left dumbfounded by Joe's tone. Then finally one of the priests who run the school asks Joe if Francie is his friend to which Joe coldly replies, "No" (198–203). With his last illusion, his last analgesic against the pain of his life gone, Francie returns home and gives in fully to the conclusions forced by his paranoia and murders Mrs. Nugent, after which he is quickly caught and institutionalized in a mental healthcare facility permanently.

Considering all the effort that Francie puts into creating or maintaining a nostalgic hyper-present out of his life, it becomes rather ironic that it isn't until he's lost every possibility to have

everything he nostalgically dreamed of that he obtains a truly unchanging life by being locked in a solitary ward for “twenty or thirty or forty years” (230). It is only there that he is allowed to create a perfect world for himself out of the materials at hand: a solitary room, *Beano*, and a window looking out on a grass lawn (230). If this story were a bit less tragic it might end here, and if the reader ignores it, the story does end here; but actually it continues to the point where Francie is discharged from his perfect little world into the moment of time where he has been narrating from. It almost seems a happy ending anyway with his gaining trust from the staff, being allowed a coat and a trumpet like his father’s, more *Beano*, and access to a puddle like the one he remembers from home. He even makes a friend, it would seem. However, it is essential to realize that being taken out of the solitary ward has marred the perfect hyper-present that only solitary, *Beano*, and a view of a lawn can guarantee. So, for Francie, there is a very strong probability that he wants nothing to do with an existence that isn’t so perfectly repetitive. To Francie, this looks more and more like the life of horrors he was leading before he was put into solitary confinement. When it is clear that Francie would never want to leave solitary confinement, and most especially would never want to repeat anything from life that doesn’t allow him to remain completely in the hyper-present, it suddenly becomes discernable why he would want to tell this story from “twenty or thirty or forty years ago.”

The truth is that *The Butcher Boy* is a narration given by Francie Brady that shows both Francie’s past and present attempts to live a happy life. In it he unabashedly tells how every attempt in his past to live happily, or to ignore the pain of the life that came and went with time was ruined while simultaneously telling how he cannot cover up the truth of that pain from the present with nostalgia. He simply does not have enough material—enough happiness—from his life to cover over all the tragedy, making nostalgia a useless tool to distract him from the horrors time has shown him. And so, the whole reason for telling this story and showing how nostalgia cannot protect him has everything to do with the third area of time, the one Francie dares not mention: the future. For

now that the reader is caught up to Francie's present, and is told how Francie has met someone who has warned him how none in the facility are trustworthy, how they will all *let him down*, it is clear to Francie that he must take action so that he may return to the hyper-present and never have to worry or think about the past or future again (231).

So, Francie takes preventative measures so that what the people did to him "on account of what [he] done on Mrs Nugent" (1) before, happens again. Therefore, he takes his new "friend" into the mountains. They leave the institution, headed for the mountains to "track and count their tracks in the snow" with Francie's eyes welling with tears, much like they did when he attempted to kill himself by burning his house down (230-1). Francie goes with the hope that the pains of reality, the pains of living in a posthistory time scale where the good can pass so fast it is gone before Francie can see it, and the bad can last longer than "hundreds of weeks" (155) will one way or the other be over, whether they send him back to solitary confinement or somehow death finally comes to Francie.

I said to Sausage: Will they hang me? I hope they hang me.

He looked at me and says: I'm sorry Francie but there's no more hanging. No more hanging? I says. For fuck's sake! What's the country coming to! (229)

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