

## The Subjective Real in William Trevor's 'Justina's Priest'

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As a genre, the short story is one which can be seen as neither/nor or both/and: it does not have the length and scope of a novel, nor does it have the intense yet disciplined formal structure of a poem, and it is for this reason that it is, perhaps, the most under-examined of all literary genres. Despite the fact that it has been practised by some of the greatest writers in world literature – Chekov, Maupassant, Faulkner, Steinbeck and Hemingway – as well as a significant number of Irish writers – O'Faolain, O'Connor, Joyce, Banville and McGahern – it remains an elusive genre. Studies seldom focus on a single story, as there does not seem to be sufficient material in one story to carry the weight of sustained analysis. In this article, that trend will be reversed, as the focus here is on a single short story by William Trevor, entitled 'Justina's Priest', from his 2005 collection *A Bit on the Side*. The story deals with the relationship between a young Irish woman of limited intellectual development, Justina Casey, 'a girl with learning trouble' (Trevor 50), and a priest, Father Clohessy, 'fifty-four and becoming stout, his red hair cut short around a freckled pate' (Trevor 40), who is silently aware of 'the Church's slow collapse' (Trevor 56) in contemporary Ireland. The story is located in a small town in County Offaly, which has a view of the Comeragh Mountains, and it is set in the context of the fall from Grace of the position of the Catholic Church in Ireland in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century:

Centuries of devotion had created a way of life in which the mystery of the Trinity was taken for granted, the Church's invincible estate a part of every day, humility part of it, too, instead of rights plucked out of nowhere, order abandoned in favour of

confusion. What priests and bishops had been – their strength and their parish people's salvation – was mocked in television farces, deplored, presented as absurdity. That other priests in other towns, in cities, in country parishes, were isolated by their celibacy, by the mourning black of their dress, had been a consolation once, but that source of comfort had long ago dried up. (Trevor 57)

Part of this was due to the clerical abuse and sexual scandals which came to light, such as when a 'well-loved bishop had been exposed as the begetter of a child, nor when there had been other misdemeanours on the part of other clergymen' (Trevor 56).

A significant number of these indiscretions occurred when children were placed in the protection of the clergy in clerically-run, state-sanctioned institutions, and instances of clerical child abuse have been documented in the Murphy and Ryan reports, where tribunals of inquiry made stark findings about the role of the church in the abuse, and systemic denial of responsibility of that abuse, of children, over a sustained period of years. One example of the type of information provided stands in synecdoche for the shame and worry felt by Father Clohessy in this story:

In addition to being hit and beaten witnesses described other forms of abuse such as being flogged, kicked and otherwise physically assaulted, scalded, burned and held under water. Witnesses reported being beaten publicly in front of other staff, residents, patients and pupils as well as in private. Many reports were heard of witnesses being beaten naked and partially clothed, both in private and in front of others. They reported being beaten and physically assaulted with implements that were for the specific purpose of inflicting pain and punishment, such as leather straps, bamboo canes and wooden sticks. (Ryan vol. 3, 393)

This story describes the impact of these findings on the position of the church in Irish society, and the specific effects of this on Father Clohessy, and this creates a context within which expectations arise for the reader. The focus on his relationship with a young woman, whom he has known since she was 'no more than five or six', as he remembers 'Justina's black hair

cut in a fringe and curling in around her face' (Trevor 51), would seem to place this story as a possible specific *parole* in the *langue* of clerical child sexual abuse. There are two direct references to her 'First Communion' dress (Trevor 40; 52), which again point towards the implicit sexual impropriety of the relationship, and there is also some imagery of Justina on her knees, being watched by the priest, as she cleans the church, a scene which has implications of fetishism and voyeurism. His feelings of guilt that only she 'made sense', and yet she 'made no sense at all' (Trevor 39), would seem to imply that he, too, is part of the context of a church where improper relationships have gone unacknowledged, unreported and unpunished: 'the problem wasn't simply that no one told about the abuse, but that no one in the Church was prepared to act. No one in authority did anything even when they did know' (O'Gorman 224-25):

Another consistent pattern has been for Church authorities to close ranks in an attempt to limit the damage done to the institution. denial of guilt, refusal to cooperate with the civil authorities, the victims and their families, abdication of responsibility, failure to recognise the seriousness of the problem, fear of the costs involved in any settlement, arrogant disregard for the truth through the use of 'mental reservation', are just a few of the hallmarks that characterise the Church's management or mismanagement of the abuse scandals. (Littleton and Maher 8-9)

It is in this environment that the story is set, and even the title suggests an inappropriate level of connection between the two characters through the use of the possessive: 'Justina's priest'. It suggests a level of ownership or mutual belonging – he is her priest, or she is his 'Justina'. In the context of the clerical abuse scandals in Ireland, one would expect there to be some form of asymmetrical and abusive relationship between the young girl and the priest; one might expect the priest to ponder on the structural role of the church in terms of occluding

responsibility for such abuse, but these issues are never formally addressed in the story; they are only addressed in the inward musings of Father Clohessy.

In a time when the power of the church is on the wane, both nationally and in the world of this story, Father Clohessy nevertheless manages to exert some control over the movements and freedoms of Justina Casey, as he tells her family of the dangers on her leaving for Dublin to visit Breda Maguire, a long-time friend of hers who had 'gone off the rails' (Trevor 47), and who is remembered by Father Clohessy as wearing a T-shirt which had a slogan on it: 'bold yellow letters on black, simple and straightforward: *Fuck Me*' (Trevor 55). Breda is seen by other characters in a predatory sexual light. Maeve, Justina's sister, who is a surrogate mother to the orphaned girl, refers to her as 'a hooer' [*whore*] (Trevor 50), and her father-in-law has a similar opinion: 'Breda Maguire was on the streets, Mr Gilfoyle said to himself' (Trevor 49). Indeed the attitudes to women in the story reflect a patriarchal habitus within the church which can be seen to be a partial causal factor in the issues of abuse and the suppression of details of that abuse.

Using the Lacanian notion of the 'real', which lurks beneath and around the symbolic order of language, this article will probe the real of the relationship between Justina and 'her' priest. For Jacques Lacan, the real 'is the mystery of the speaking body, the mystery of the unconscious' (Lacan *Seminar 20: On Feminine Sexuality* 131). The multi-perspectival narrative position of the story recreates and transforms our knowledge of subject positions within it, and I will use a theoretical matrix derived from the works of Jacques Lacan and Jacques Rancière to analyse these aspects of 'Justina's Priest'. Writing about such notions of decision, Jacques Derrida has examined the relationship between both/and choices, and those can be more accurately categorised as neither/nor. Speaking about knowledge and how it is accessed and created through language, he notes that it is 'neither *this* nor *that*; but rather *this and that*' (Derrida 161), and in this story, this is the kind of epistemological position adopted.

Writing about what he terms the 'aesthetic unconscious', Jacques Rancière conflates the development of aesthetics with notions of 'confused knowledge'. He sees the aesthetic as a place where the relationship between rationality and emotion, consciousness and the unconscious is played out in a different manner:

This new and paradoxical idea makes art the territory of a thought that is present outside itself and identical with non-thought. It unites Baumgarten's definition of the sensible as 'confused' idea with Kant's contrary definition of the sensible as heterogeneous to the idea. Henceforth confused knowledge is no longer a lesser form of knowledge but properly the thought of that which does not think. (Rancière *The Aesthetic Unconscious* 6)

This relationship between the symbolic rational order of thought and language, and the underlying unconscious aspects of knowledge, has a strong bearing on Lacan's notion of the real, as it suggests the confused knowledge that is unable to be rationally expressed, but which is nevertheless a motive factor in so much of our lives. It is almost impossible to express this in ordinary language – indeed it is often that which remains unsaid in ordinary language. The type of knowledge that is revealed in literature in general, and in this short story in particular, is one which mirrors that of contemporary socio-cultural sphere. Normally the response to trauma is either to repress it or to displace it, and in contemporary Ireland, despite the plethora of evidence, there has been little enough ongoing discussion of the continued role of the church in education and health matters, given the church's egregious record in dealing with the abusers of children in both areas.

The aftermath of the reports on abuse has seen a general fall in respect for the church on one side, and an entrenched siege-mentality on the other, with little real discussion as to how a revised role for the church could be set out. 'Justina's Priest' attempts to examine this phenomenon through a different paradigm of knowledge, what could be seen as Rancière's

confused knowledge. I would argue that the knowledge that we gain through this story about the role of the church in contemporary Irish society is of equal value to that gained in reports, interviews and other discourses in the Irish public sphere. This type of knowledge is based on Freud's discovery of the unconscious, which marks a decisive break with the Cartesian tradition which saw the human being as 'essentially a unified, autonomous subject, fully present to its own consciousness—indeed, essentially identical with this consciousness'; and which held the belief that 'all human knowledge can be grounded in the clear self-knowledge of this unified subject'; and which felt that the 'the moral assessment of human actions is grounded in the human being's autonomy as a thinking, knowing subject' (Lee 22). Lacan offers a useful definition of the type of knowledge which Rancière sees as operative in literature, speaking of it 'as caught up in an ever-changing dialectic between the data derived from a subject's experience and that subject's complexly mediated identity that shapes the very nature of the data' (Lee 23). For Lacan, it is:

a kind of [experiential] knowledge [*connaissance*] we admire because it cannot become [articulated] knowledge [*un savoir*]. But in Freud's work something quite different is at stake, which is a *savoir* certainly, but one that doesn't involve the slightest *connaissance*, in that it is inscribed in a discourse of which the subject—who, like the messenger-slave of Antiquity, carries under his hair the codicil that condemns him to death—knows neither the meaning nor the text, nor in what language [*langue*] it is written, nor even that it was tattooed on his shaven scalp while he was sleeping. (Lacan *Écrits* 680)

The image of something tattooed on a scalp is a good one, as such knowledge is signified on, and through, the body of the subject, but the subject is unable to access it, and this is precisely what we see in 'Justina's Priest'. The meaning is there but it requires a hermeneutic and heuristic reading practice uncover the hair which is obscuring this tattoo, and to understand its meaning in terms of the two forms of knowledge *connaissance* and *savoir*.

Interestingly, Calum Neil suggests that it 'is in this gap between knowing and not knowing, between known and unknown, between knowledge and the impossibility of knowledge, that the possibility of the ethical emerges' (Neill 237).

The narrative mode of the story is one which allows us glimpses of the subjective real of Father Clohessy. The method used is analogous to the one which allows us to date the story precisely. Justina's priest takes place in the week of May 24<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> 2001. We know this because part of the story takes place on Bob Dylan's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday (Trevor 46), so the week of the story can be pinpointed. This is the way that Trevor's poetics of knowledge works: the information is there, but is not overt; it requires careful reading to unearth it.

It is in the ethical that this story makes tangential comments on the current state of the church. One of the main complaints about the abuse issue is that the church as structure closed ranks and protected its own people at the expense of the victims. This can be seen to be a systemic norm in large corporations, businesses and civil organisations, where the good of the institution prevails over individual unethical behaviour. Ethical issues are at the core of this story, as a number of decisions need to be taken, none of which can be verified by a predefined rule. Father Clohessy has to decide whether to try and block Justina's planned visit to see Breda in Dublin: "'Come up for the two days, what harm would it do anyone? I'll show you the whole works," Breda said' (Trevor 51). He also ponders as to whether he should break the confidentiality of the confessional, as it is through this that he knows that Justina is planning to visit Breda in Dublin: 'all that Justina put into her confessional' (Trevor 51). Similarly Maeve, Justina's sister, has an ethical decision to make – does she allow her sister to go to Dublin, or does she stop her. Jacques Derrida uses the term 'ethics' in a singular way. Like Lyotard here, he argues that following rules is not an ethical process, noting in an interview that: 'ethics start when you don't know what to do, when there is this

gap between knowledge and action, and you have to take responsibility for inventing this new rule which doesn't exist'(Payne 31-32).

As ever, in Trevor, the motives for decisions are very mixed. Since the death of their mother, the care of Justina has fallen to Maeve, who 'considered that she'd been caught: when their mother had died, there had been only she to look after Justina, their mother being widowed for as long as either of them could remember' (Trevor 41). When Father Clohessy tells her of the Justina's plan to leave on the bus, there is a flicker of hope that flashes across Maeve's face as the possibility of not having to look after Justina is briefly raised:

'She never would,' Maeve said at last.

Successful in controlling her irritation, she failed to keep an errant note of hope out of her tone. It flickered in her eyes and she shook her head, as if to deny that it was there. (Trevor 53-54)

All of these characters have choices to make, and all choices are, to some degree, shaped by the church. There are times when it seems the characters themselves do not know why they choose a particular course of action, and this is an example of the tattooed knowledge of which Lacan has spoken, and it gestures towards the modes of knowledge that is embodied in this story: 'speech introduces the hollow of being into the texture of the real, the one and the other holding on to and balancing each other' (Lacan *Seminar I Freud's Papers on Technique* 229).

Literature can provide mediation between these two different types of knowledge, in the hollow of being, a point made by Rancière when he speaks about what he terms a 'poetics of knowledge', which he defines as 'a study of the set of literary procedures by which a discourse escapes literature, gives itself the status of a science, and signifies this status. The poetics of knowledge has an interest in the rules according to which knowledge is written and read, is constituted as a specific genre of discourse'. He traces the conflicts between

scientific knowledge and the knowledge of the social sciences, and stresses that his view is different as he thinks that such debates 'forget this too easily-the age of science is also that of literature' a genre which he distinguishes from 'belles lettres' and the 'simple enchantments of fiction' through 'the rigor of its own action' (Rancière *The Names of History* 8). This perspective offers a broad view of the epistemic value of literature:

A poetics of knowledge can be viewed as a kind of 'deconstructive practice' to the extent that it tries to trace back an established knowledge – history, political science, sociology, and so on – to the poetic operations – description, narration, metaphorization, symbolization, and so on – that make its objects appear and give sense and relevance to its propositions. What is important to me is that this 'reduction' of scientific discourse to the poetical moment means its reduction to the equality of speaking beings. (Rancière "The Thinking of Dissensus" 14)

This type of knowledge is located in the gap between *connaissance* and *savoir*, between the conscious and unconscious, and it allows the unspoken aspects of knowledge, which are in the subject, but hitherto inaccessible to that subject, to be articulated in the language of the text. In gaining knowledge of the motivations of Father Clohessy, we gain some knowledge, some 'confused idea' about the motivations of those in the church. Interestingly, the knowledge we gain is from Father Clohessy's speech and thought, but it may not be fully understood or recognised by the priest himself – he is not able to see that tattoo on his scalp. This stands, I would argue, in synecdoche, for a similar attitude in the structural church which is unable to come to a full, subjective knowledge of why it has fallen so far in the regard of its people. There is a parallel here with the work of the psychoanalyst as the aim of such analysis is to listen to the speech of the analysand and to 'what is left out of the analysand's discourse' and to 'what he claims not to know', in order to discern what is 'known in the

unconscious' of the subject, but 'unbeknown to him. Interpretation aims to hit that gap in his knowledge' (Fink 77).

Thus, when Father Clohessy is relaxing on a Saturday evening in The Emmet Bar, as he 'talked to two men with whom he had attended the Christian Brothers' forty years ago' (Trevor 55), certain topics are not mentioned:

They, not he, did the talking in the Emmet Bar, always sensitive to the cloth he wore. They neither of them had mentioned it when a few years ago a well-loved bishop had been exposed as the begetter of a child, nor when there had been other misdemeanours on the part of other clergymen .... There would be embarrassment if he mentioned the Church's slow collapse. There would be an awkwardness; best not said, his friends' opinion would be. Sometimes you had to close your mind down. (Trevor 56)

In these non-conversations, the Lacanian real is very much present, through its absence, and in a manner that parallel's Rancière's idea of a thought that is present outside itself and identical with a non-thought. For Lacan, the real 'is always and in every case in its place; it carries its place stuck to the sole of its shoe, there being nothing that can exile it from it' (Lacan *Écrits* 17); it is '*what did not come to light in the symbolic appears in the real [italics original]*' (Lacan *Écrits* 324).

The very fact of the silence of these men is indicative of their awareness of the huge problem facing the church, and the silence of Father Clohessy, who we remember, does not speak much himself, is a further indication that there are thoughts to which he cannot give voice – he has repressed them, as indeed has the institutional church in Ireland:

That he considered it necessary to keep private his concern about the plight of his Church did nothing to lighten the burden of his mood, any more than the temporary absence from the parish of Father Finaghy did. At present undergoing a period of treatment after a car accident, Father Finaghy was extrovert and gregarious, a priest

who carried his faith on to the golf-course, where it was never a hindrance. 'Arrah, sure we do our best,' Father Finaghy was given to remarking. (Trevor 45)

Like Father Clohessy, Father Finaghy is not open to discussion about the problems of the church, or about its decline in influence. Later in the story, as the priest's views on loud music in the town square are politely listened to, but discounted, Father Finaghy again falls back on phatic utterance to disguise his own feelings or reactions: 'that a priest's protest had been so summarily dismissed was par for the course, an expression often used by Father Finaghy in his own un-protesting acceptance of the decline of clerical influence' (Trevor 46).

The silences of Father Clohessy, and the phatic displacements of Father Finaghy, are examples of Rancière's unconscious knowledge, as both men are aware of the problems of the church, but displace their fears and worries onto different activities. Father Finaghy, 'companionable and easy', plays golf, drives cars (possibly recklessly given his car accident), socialises by leading the 'singsongs in the Emmet Bar on a Saturday evening, a little tipsy and none the worse for that' (Trevor 58). Part of the narrative economy that is at the core of Trevor's sculpted style of writing is that Father Finaghy is only mentioned ten times in the story, and yet we can piece together quite a nuanced view of his character, even though his structural function is to provide a point of contrast and comparison to Father Clohessy, the focal point of the story. His evasion of responsibility for his own role in the decline of the church in Ireland is an example of the subjective real – he is hardly in the story, only utters six words directly, and three in reported speech and yet he is crucial to our understanding of the evasions and silence of Father Clohessy. His overt displacements of worry and anxiety in social practices is the reflected real of Father Clohessy's more covert displacements, part of the value of the poetics of knowledge, as this paradigm acknowledge the value and significance of what is not spoken: 'in the symbolic order, the empty spaces are as signifying as the full ones' (Lacan *Écrits* 327).

This emptiness is signified through Father Clohessy's silence, and through his sense of the loss of respect for the church, as well as through his own lack of professed belief in God or in religion. His relationship to the church is implied through various glimpses into his inner consciousness as the omniscient narrator lays bare his views on the church. In a story primarily about relationships, the real is that father Clohessy is alienated from the two main relational aspects of his social position – his church as structural institution, and his people in the parish. In terms of the church, he feels guilty and embarrassed at all of the scandals and it remains the great unsaid in his life:

Father Clohessy walked in the opposite direction from the one taken by Justina. The sense of loss that had possessed him when she left the church had given way to a more general feeling of deprivation that, these days, he was not often without. The grandeur of his Church had gone, leaving his priesthood within it bleak, the vocation that had beckoned him less insistent than it had been. He had seen his congregations fall off and struggled against the feeling that he'd been deserted. Confusion spread from the mores of the times into the Church itself; in combating it, he prayed for guidance but was not heard. (Trevor 44-45)

Here is a man whose relationship with his vocation and the institution of the church has been gradually eroded until the fullness of a spiritual life has been replaced by the sense of deprivation of which he speaks. He is a good, decent man, who has given over the old presbytery building to the town to be 'become the youth centre the town had long been in need of' (Trevor 47), and who does not grudge the increased prosperity of his parishioners: 'there was money where there'd been poverty, ambition where there'd been humility. These were liberated people who stood about in ways that generations before them had not' (Trevor 55). He is aware that a sense of liberation from a church which imposed strictures on them is not necessarily a bad thing for his parishioners, and as is so often the case in Trevor's writing, there is a nuanced and complex sense of knowledge at play in his thinking – and the word

'thinking' is important here, as none of these comments are ever voiced by him in the story; the reader is given access to his thoughts, which generally show him as a decent man.

This ambiguity is part of the poetics of knowledge; it is a knowledge that eschews the stark binary oppositions that are often seen as paradigmatic of the scientific method, a method which is often blind to the nuance and ambiguity of the Lacanian real. Father Clohessy remembers how he had approached the owner of Mulvany's Electrical and TV shop about his practice of celebrating the 'birthdays of popular entertainers by playing a tribute' of one particular song. Father Clohessy felt this practice was 'a disturbance in a quiet town and had once approached Mulvany about it' (Trevor 45); however, Mulvany had argued that it was nostalgic for the older citizens to hear the likes of Perry Como or Dolly Parton coming out of the blue at them, and exciting for the youngsters to have the new arrivals on the music scene honoured. That a priest's protest had been so summarily dismissed was 'par for the course', as Father Finaghy put it; what it signified to Father Clohessy was his own 'un-protesting acceptance of the decline of clerical influence. The times they were a-changing, Bob Dylan's reminder was repeated yet again before there was silence from Mulvany's loudspeakers' (Trevor 46).

It is in this context that we must analyse his relationship with Justina – she is the paradoxical real in his life, and this is set out very evidently in the opening of the story where her significance to a man whose power, influence and contextual structure are falling apart, is stated as clearly as Trevor ever states anything:

Only Justina Casey made sense, Father Clohessy reflected yet again, shaking his head over the recurrence of the thought, for truth to tell the girl made no sense at all. The contradiction nagged a little in a familiar way, as it did whenever Justina Casey, sinless as ever, made her confession. It caused Father Clohessy to feel inadequate,

foolish even, that he failed to understand something that as a priest he should have.  
(Trevor 39)

To describe someone as the only thing that made sense, and then to say that she made no sense at all would seem to be a logical non-sequitur, and the levels of knowledge that could be gained from such a statement would seem to be negligible. However, in the light of the Lacanian difference between *connaissance* and *savoir*, and Rancière's notion of the confused ideas, both of which are part of a poetics of knowledge, I think we can gain access to the subjective real of Father Clohessy through this statement. In this story, no-one listens to Father Clohessy: His parishioners seem to go their own way, Maeve, Justina's sister, has taken little notice of his previous comments about Justina – 'once or twice before, she had been abrupt to the point of rudeness when he'd been concerned about her sister' (Trevor 53) – and we have already seen the lack of response to his strictures about the playing of loud music in the square. The second reason they do not listen to him is that he says very little: the majority of the story relays his thoughts and not his actual words. He has 13 sentences of direct speech, and 3 sentences of reported speech in a story of 4,766 words, and the reason for this relative silence on his part is because 'when he preached he was angry because he didn't know what to say to them, that he searched for ways to disguise his distress, stumbling about from word to word' (Trevor 40). There is a truth to his silence, as he has no insight into his own motivations, and has no solutions or answers to people's problems, and so remains silent: 'I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there's no way, to say it all. Saying it all is literally impossible: words fail. Yet it's through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real' (Lacan *Television* 3). For him, words definitely do fail and the impossibility is that he must give a sermon every Sunday and yet 'he didn't know what to say to them anymore' (Trevor 55). The subjective real of Father Clohessy is his doubt, his uncertainty, his sense that he should, perhaps apologize for the behaviour of his church, but is

unwilling to take that step because the church, as a structure and system, had its own corporate policy on that: 'He should apologize, yet knew he must not' (Trevor 55).

Much of his musing takes place after a mass on Saturday night, or after hearing confession, and we can now see that the cause of his reflections is his inability to lead his flock with any sense of certainty. We know that in his own mind he is aware that the 'grandeur of his Church had gone, leaving his priesthood within it bleak, the vocation that had beckoned him less insistent than it had been' (Trevor 44). He is unsure of his vocation; he is unsure of the role of the church; at no stage do we hear him speak of any great sense of faith in God, in fact his experience would seem to indicate quite the opposite: 'he prayed for guidance but was not heard' (Trevor 45). It is in this overall context of confused ideas that we come close to a poetics of knowledge of Father Clohessy, of his relationship with this young girl, and of the subjective centrality of that relationship to him, a centrality which makes him go to the house in Diamond Street, break the sanctity of the confidentiality of the confessional, and warn Maeve and Mr Gilfoyle that Justina may want to go to Dublin to visit Breda. In an uncertain world, Justina Casey, and her old-fashioned, simplistic devotion to the church, to his authority as a priest, and to the sacrament of confession, is the only thing that is keeping Father Clohessy's melancholy form lapsing into a deep despair.

She is effortlessly devout and crucially she never expects him to say anything to her – unlike his flock, she is not looking for answers from him (answers which he no longer has) because for Justina, ritual, devotion and the sacrament of confession are all she needs to give her peace and happiness. Unlike the liberated, secularised flock in which he now resides, she is racked with catholic guilt and feels the constant need to confess and then to do penance for her 'sins':

'Father, I'm bad,' she had insisted and, allotting her her penance, he had been again aware that she didn't even know what badness was. But without the telling of her beads, without the few Hail Marys he had prescribed, she would have gone away unhappy. Of her own volition, every few days she polished the brass of the altar vases and the altar cross. She would be there on Saturday evening, a bucket of scalding water carried through the streets, the floor mop lifted down from its hook in the vestry cupboard. On Fridays she scraped away the week's accumulation of candle grease and arranged to her satisfaction the out-of-date missionary leaflets. (Trevor 39)

In this respect, she is a throwback, temporally and experientially, to a time when the church was hegemonic in Irish society. In terms of gender, in a world full of women like Maeve, who are in charge of the men in their lives, and Breda, who is sexually liberated, Justina still looks to the patriarchal church for all her validation: Father Clohessy is the man in her life, he is her 'father' in a spiritual and in a validatory sense. Unlike women who are looking for equal treatment in the church, and who question attitudes handed down by tradition as sexist, Justina is happy to embrace traditional role of women in a patriarchal structure, cleaning, polishing, dusting and scraping away candle grease. She is not asking questions, she is not looking for answers, it is she who speaks in confession and all Father Clohessy has to do is respond to her. Indeed, ironically, for a man who has embraces silence, he actually interrupts Justina during her confessions, so she is the one person who is able to make him speak and this is because, while he does not know what to say to his flock, he knows exactly what to say to Justina because her faith in him makes his vocation and his own sense of his priesthood all the stronger. She accepts the power and truth of the church and she defers to Father Clohessy as the symbolic representative of the church. It is as if he sees a better reflection of himself reflected back from her certainty about him and about the church. The thought of her leaving is shattering to his sense of self. Though he never enunciates this doubt, it is clear in the

narrative gaps between *connaissance* and *savoir* that this is the case: 'it frightened him that she might visit her friend, that she might forget what he had said, that somehow she might acquire the bus fare, that she'd go, not telling anyone' (Trevor 52).

His silence, his melancholy, his negative musings can all be traced back to this fear, because even if he does not realise it, he is only still a priest because of the faith, the blind faith, of Justina Casey. At a time when 'what priests and bishops had been – their strength and their parish people's salvation – was mocked in television farces, deplored, presented as absurdity' (Trevor 57), she is his still point in a turning word. As he returns from another empty night, still not talking with his two classmates about the elephant of clerical abuse in the room, what keeps him sane is the thought of 'the careful hands of Justina Casey', lifting down 'the altar ornaments, her polishing rags and Brasso pads tidily laid out' (Trevor 58), as she removes faded petals from the altar, and scrapes grease from the candle-holders. There is no moment of revelation, no sense of redemption, just the ordinary rituals that have endured since before Father Clohessy was ordained, and which are carried on by Justina. She provides the sacerdotal certainty that was so lacking in the rest of his life:

It was what there was; it was what he had, whether he understood it or not. Justina Casey would stay in the town because Mr Gilfoyle would make sure she didn't get on the Dublin bus; Maeve would keep an eye on her; after a time Breda Maguire would forget about her. In the confined space of the confessional there would again be the unnecessary confessions, again the granting of absolution. Then happiness would break in the face that saw God in his own. (Trevor 58)

This is the knowledge that is tattooed on his head; this is the poetics of knowledge that is embodied in this story; this is the way in which *connaissance* and *savoir* interact as 'the real supports the phantasy, the phantasy protects the real' (Lacan *Four Fundamental Concepts* 41).

In this story, the subjective real is that Father Clohessy needs Justina's simple faith and her pietistic actions as a fixed point in a world that is turning all too quickly for him. He may be unaware that this is his motivating factor, but through the narrative style, and through an analysis based on the poetics of knowledge, we can see that this is the case. He needs Justina's confessions and her faith in the church, and in him in order to validate what is left of his vocation: 'here it is the real which creates desire by reproducing in it the relationship between the subject and the lost object' (Lacan *Écrits* 724). For Father Clohessy, Justina Casey, or more particularly, the blind, obedient and completely certain faith of Justina Casey, is his lost object – she is the last remaining foundation point of his subjective real. So while on the surface, it may seem that she is reliant on his interference in her life to keep her safe in her home village, in fact it is she who is the guarantor of Father Clohessy's priesthood, sanity and selfhood: ultimately he is, indeed, Justina's priest.

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