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The Blackwater Lightship: Modernity and the Idealism of Family Bond in the Era of the Celtic Tiger

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I. Introduction

Colm Tóibín's 1999 novel, *The Blackwater Lightship*, is named after a bygone lightship which, from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1960s, floated in the sea around Blackwater Bank 10 km from Ballyconnigar Beach in Wexford County. In the novel, as portrayed as an Irish career woman in the 1990s, the middle-aged woman Lily makes recollections of the lightship in her childhood, which was perished long ago, taking into her heart the absence of her deceased husband. She remembers that she used to imagine the Blackwater Lightship as a woman and the Tuskar, another light southward of where the Blackwater Lightship was placed, as a man. In her childhood fantasy, as she recalls, she thought "they were calling to each other; it was very satisfying,

him being strong and her being faithful" (192). Now she knows that there is a discrepancy between her imagination and reality: unlike the long-lasting Tuskar Lighthouse "built on a rock to last" (191) as compared to a man, her husband turned out to be short-lived.

In the nineteenth century, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels used the imagery of something solid like a "rock" to mean the thing to end up being dissolved in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (*Communist Manifesto*): "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned" and by "constant revolutionising of production, [there are] uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation" (Marx 476). In a Marxian context, the memorable statement signifies the process of modernity, or modernization, in which social relationships are made to be never fixed as they are subject to endless reorganizing of the means of production and ceaseless changing of production of relations in capitalism. In a narrative context going through *The Blackwater Lightship*, markedly, the absence of Michael Breen, Lily's husband, causes "everlasting uncertainty and agitation" in the relationship between Lily and her children, Helen and Declan, as amplified by Lily's lack of maternal care for them. Lily's professionalism as a commercial teacher and business woman clearly reflects a flood of Irish women into the workforce: it is indeed a social milieu of the 1990s, which is the era of the Celtic Tiger, so to speak, that saw an unprecedented economic growth in Irish history. Hence, in Lily's reminiscence, the Tuskar can be taken as the trope for an imaginary man/father whose cultural ground is symbolically "solid" but whose ontological ground is drifting away in the process of modernization.

For this reason, a primary issue in critical readings of *The Blackwater Lightship* has been about Declan's pseudo-family in which his gay friends play a maternal role for him as he is ill from AIDS. For example, José Carregal-Romero argues that Tóibín's fiction shows "traditional families tend

to be dysfunctional and the relations between their members too often become strained" (4) and *The Blackwater Lightship* "refuses to conform to traditional convention and arbitrary judgments and offers instead the opposite; a homosexual couple which does fulfil the moral and spiritual values often attached specifically to heterosexual marriage and parenthood" (6).

However, a close reading of *The Blackwater Lightship* shows the opposite of what Carregal-Romero argues: Lily's daughter, Helen Breen's attempt to reconstruct an Irish model family in her marriage in which a traditional role of motherhood is retrieved; Helen's affection, homage for her deceased father; Lily and Helen's increasing development into their mutual acceptance of each other's difference as a possibility to dissolve their long-standing feud. Considering these things, this paper explores the significance of motherhood expressed in the 1937 Constitution whose main drafter was Eamon de Valera as implied in Helen's loyalty to Fianna Fáil. And then, it will be discussed the way in which the tradition of family unity, as a means to cope with the side-effects of individualism produced by modernity, is conjured up. The family unity clearly includes a symbolic father figure whose cultural implication forms an Irish identity such as Hugh, Helen's husband, embodies as a Gaelic language teacher.

II. Lily as a Phallic Woman and a Narcissistic Culture

The Blackwater Lightship opens with Helen's accounts of her two sons, Cathal and Manus. Two years older than Manus, Cathal is shown to "play the part of the grown-up big brother" (4). Helen knows that, unlike Manus who importunes her to meet his emotional needs, Cathal is an adult-like boy and, therefore, she speaks to Cathal as if her relationship with him is "like a

married couple" (5). Helen's reason for treating Cathal as an adult is his natural disposition for being independent: "Cathal hated instructions or orders or being spoken to like a child" (6). Despite Cathal's more independent bent, Helen notices that both Cathal and Manus are more attached to a mother, rather than a father: "Hugh was in charge and both Cathal and Manus, but especially Manus, did everything to be allowed to stay up, such as clinging to their mother and refusing to do anything their father said" (8-9). Cathal and Manus's demand for maternal care reminds Helen about the Oedipus complex brought to the mind of her brother Declan when he visited her a couple of years ago and witnessed her two children's attachment to her: "Declan said it was proof, if they needed proof, that boys wanted to sleep with their mother and kill their father" (9). In Helen's recollection, Declan's provocative response is still lingering in her mind when she asked Declan about whether he "want[ed] to sleep with [his] mother and kill [his] father" (9): "'No, no,' he laughed, 'gay boys want the opposite, or at least eventually they do'." She also remembers she herself challenged the Oedipus complex in her own way in response to Declan's gest about the Freudian family assumption: "'I still want to kill my mother,' Helen said. 'Not every day, but most days. I cannot imagine anyone wanting to sleep with her'" (9).

Helen and Declan's "unspoken conspiracies" (9) against family bond, or their disintegration from parents, is a most striking motif in *The Blackwater Lightship*. In the novel, death of Michael Breen, the head of the Breen family, generates feud and division among the bereaved－Helen, Declan, and Lily. Helen has harbored her deep-seated antagonism towards Lily since her father's death. Around her father's death, when she was "not even twelve," Helen was left behind together with Declan under the care of her grandmother when their mother was away from home for assisting her ailing husband in hospital at Dublin. During this time, no contact from her mother made Helen feel

deserted in the same way as Declan felt himself like any orphan trapped in "an orphanage" after "the father and mother left their children behind" (71). An appalling image of her mother for Helen was her impersonality when she returned home "from Dublin with her husband's body" (214), the image of her mother which has haunted her mind since then:

> Helen met her in the foreground of the cathedral for the first time in months, her mother had seemed regal, remote, the last person a little girl would want to hug or seek comfort from. She watched her mother that evening as much as she watched the congregation or the coffin. She seemed totally transformed. Helen knew as she knelt there why Declan had been kept away; her mother could not have maintained this stance, this proud, public bearing, with a small boy clinging to her. (214)

The non-comforting mother has imprinted on Helen's mind the internal sense of herself weaned from motherly love. The state of privation from maternal care in Helen's mind causes her to adhere to nostalgia for the family bond before her father's death: "she would have given anything then to go back to the years before their father died, when they were children" (46).

In Lily's detached relationship to Helen, Lily clearly parallels the perfunctory mother Christopher Lasch examines in *The Culture of Narcissism*. Lasch takes stock of the decline of parental authority "under the direction of modern science and technology" (154). His assessment is that in modern life family transfers increasingly its childrearing functions to outside agents such as "welfare services" and schools—"the socialization of reproduction itself" (154), which means that children are more exposed to the care of social institutions other than the family. He discerns the breakdown of family tie triggered by capitalism, which brings about the rise of "managerial and professional classes who operate the corporate system, and the corporate state"

(218). "[A]dministrators, bureaucrats, technicians, and experts" (218) are a new ruling class Lasch exemplifies as the ruling elites under modern capitalism, which replaced the old ruling class, the landed classes, in the pre-modern system. According to Lasch, narcissism is the most prominent culture generated by business corporation capitalism. He remarks, "Narcissism appears realistically to represent the best way of coping with the tensions and anxieties of modern life" (50), the modern life that characterizes as its dominant tendency man's blinded drive for their self-love, i.e. their own interest. Individualism is a major social value the narcissistic culture is instilling in the minds, the individualism which is translated into nothing less than solipsism. This prevalence of individualism has wreaked havoc on the traditional family bond in which, as Lasch implies, the virtues of cooperation, altruism, and sympathy are nurtured through religious teachings made by priests in the church. Lasch states, in the milieu of the narcissism "[even] the family promoted a narrow, parochial, selfish, and individualistic mentality and thus impeded the development of sociability and cooperation" (156). Further, social agencies—such as schools and social welfare institutions—taking the place of the family in educating and training children only promote "the personal point of view, inculcated now by modern conditions of strife for money" (156).

Strikingly, Lasch notices the appearance of perfunctory mothers lacking in their maternal care under the narcissistic culture. The genesis of the perfunctory mother (parents) is made by the insecurity of modern life caused by social conditions such as fierce competition for jobs. A home has been supposed as a shelter to counterbalance the emotional insecurity in consequence of coping with rapidly changing social conditions. In the supposed domestic life, the family is ideally imagined to realize emotional intimacy to make up for internal stresses from external pressures. As Lasch says, "Yet the picture of harmonious domestic life, on which the family

attempts to model itself, derives not from spontaneous feeling . . . and the effort to conform to it therefore implicates the family in a charade of togetherness or 'pseudo-mutuality'" (172). In modern life, hence, mothers merely play the role of the mother, lacking in affect in relationship with their children, or devoid of emotional attachment to them. It is capitalist industrialism that deprives children of their reception of maternal affection and nullifies mothers' devotion to childcare in the way of making them play a functional role as a mother. The pathology of narcissism creates "the self-centered, impulse-dominated, detached, confused actions" (178) of parents only in the way of making them seek after "the values of self-indulgence" (177) in "the fascination with fame and celebrity" (176). In modern life, as Lasch examines, the pathology of narcissistic personality makes the appearance of a "gamesman" who "wants to be known as a winner," and whose "deepest fear is to be labeled a loser" (44). Lasch notes that in American business, as synonymous with modern business, executives in major companies are found to be a gamesman who "has little capacity for personal intimacy and social commitment" (44). "In all his personal relations," Lasch remarks, "the gamesman depends on the admiration or fear he inspires in others to certify his credentials as a winner" (45). Lasch maintains that the gamesman is nothing less than a narcissist who "has many traits that make for success in bureaucratic institutions, which . . . discourage the formation of deep personal attachments, and at the same time provide the narcissist with the approval he needs in order to validate his self-esteem" (43-44).

The Blackwater Lightship is a three-generation chronicle of emotional transactions transpiring in the parent-offspring conflicts among Dora Devereux, her daughter Lily, and her granddaughter Helen. Lily is the object of the grudge borne against her by both her mother and her daughter. Dora is disgruntled at Lily's ingratitude for her devoted care for her since Michael

Breen, Lily's husband, passed away at his young age. Dora's rancor over Lily's aloofness displays its acuteness:

> Helen had asked her grandmother if she was not getting on with her mother. Instead of replying, the old woman had gone on to remind Helen of how good she had been to Helen's mother in the time after her father died, how she had comforted her and consoled her, had sat up with her at night, slept in the room with her. How little she had got in return, her grandmother had said. (45)

Dora has entertained her scorn for Lily in the way of never turning on "the mobile phone" she bought for her mother in provision for her medical emergency. Dora also shows her emotional withdrawal from Lily by refusing to move to her new home at Wexford. She humiliates Lily as she brands her as a child seeing her mother only when she finds her own benefit: "you [Lily]'ve started to call when you know I [Dora] have money" (49) "now that I sold the sites; that old field that was full of ragwort" (48).

Lily is, Dora recalls, a "very independent-minded" (149) person for whom anyone needs to "never tell her what to do" (149-150). Lily "had to be the best and the most enthusiastic" (151) in all of her occupations from school studies to women's activities during her growth. However, her predisposition towards her own occupations costs her her emotional resources to be invested in meeting her mother's or her children's internal needs. Lily made a teaching career in the "local vocational school" (92) with giving "commercial courses" and eventually "setting up of her own computer business, where she taught basic skills and later began to sell machines to businesses and individuals" (92). Lily is a perfectionist who feels even a shame on herself bereaved of her husband at her young age:

> Coming home like that from Dublin and your father so young [when he was dead], and everybody looking and watching, there was a sort of shame about it. It sounds mad, doesn't it? I know it does, but that's what it felt like, so exposed, or maybe that isn't the word. But it felt like shame, those days after he died when we came home. (244)

The shame Lily feels is a tell-tale sign showing her impatience with a disturbed state of her self-esteem, while she feels herself humiliated even by her status as a widow. Lily's self-centered willfulness also engenders the impression of her waywardness on the side of both Dora and Helen: "That Lily is a law on to herself" (136).

Lily is starkly a narcissistic mother as transformed into a phallic businesswoman. Like the spoils a winning "gamesman" collects in fierce business competition, the picture of her in advertisement is vaunted in the media: "her grandmother had shown Helen a full-page advertisement in the *Wexford People*" "with quotes from clients [in Lily's business] . . . who said that they came all the way to Wexford" (92-93) for Lily's courses about how to use computers. Lily's conceited ego is materialized by her new home in Wexford, one of whose rooms in which Helen is overwhelmed by its enormous space of "more than thirty feet long, like an art gallery rather than a living-room" (112). However, the extravagantly large room in the "amazing house" only impresses its "emptiness" (112) on Helen's mind. Lily's monstrous room tells her megalomanic drive for social fame and achievement, which reinforces the extent of her self-absorption. Lily's indulgence in her own internal impulse is testified by Helen's repugnance against her mother's emotional distance: "My mother taught me never to trust anyone's love because she was always on the verge of withdrawing her own" (188). Lily's emotional veneer for her public self comes from a process of maneuvering her own feelings concocted for public relationships: "All those early raw emotions

which Helen had watched her mother direct at everyone but her, emotions which were flaunted in public and hardly used in private, these were now back at the kitchen table in Cush" (218). For Helen, the view of Lily now in Cush is an invocation of the old relationship between a child "looking for sympathy and demanding attention" and a mother who displays "the ability to turn hot and cold, swamp [the child] with affection and then turn her back because she was busy" (217-18).

The phallic businesswoman, Lilly is a reminder of masculine women Joan Riviere illustrated in psychoanalytical terms. Riviere saw that in pursuing professional careers some intellectual "women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men" (70). Riviere remarks:

> In University life, in scientific professions and in business, one constantly meets women who seem to fulfil every criterion of complete feminine development. They are excellent wives and mothers, capable housewives . . . At the same time they fulfill the duties of their profession at least as well as the average man. It is really a puzzle to know how to classify this type psychologically. (70-71)

Riviere's psychoanalytical scope is to present these professional women as the cases of having never resolved the Oedipus complex, the outcome of which is their making rivalry with the mother and at the same time castrating the father. In a case study of one professional woman, who was employed "in work of a propagandist nature . . . in speaking and writing" (71), Riviere further recognized this professional woman's intellectual work as reflecting her "conscious revolt against" her father, "with rivalry and contempt of him" (72). Riviere also put into attention this woman's making herself sexually appealed to her male colleagues to psychoanalytically translate it into "an unconscious

attempt to ward off the anxiety which would ensue on account of the reprisals she anticipated from the father-figures after her intellectual performance" (72). In *The Blackwater Lightship*, unlike the professional woman masquerading herself as feminine to conceal her masculinity by way of making her sexually attractive, Lily is never flirtatious or coquettish. However, Riviere's view of woman's bisexuality holds good when taking into consideration Lily's (un)feminine aspects.

It is significant that Lily got a teaching position at the local vocational school two years after Michael's death "with the help of Fianna Fáil" (*Blackwater Lightship* 92). It is unclear how Lily is politically involved in Irish national politics. If it is considered that the late Michael is known as an old acquaintance to the Minister of Education at present (41), both of whom might have been members of Fianna Fáil, perhaps Lily would be affiliated with the political party via her husband's political legacy. Fianna Fáil is the political party founded by Eamon de Valera in 1926. De Valera was the chief drafter of a new Constitution to take the place of "the Constitution of 1922, which showed many traces of the pressure exercised by the British Government at the time of its preparation" (De Valera 302). The 1937 Constitution was designed to erase a British influence on the Irish Constitution. In the speech to Dáil Éireann (the Irish Lower House of Parliament), 11 May 1937, de Valera made his own commentary on Article 41 of the new constitution stipulating the role of Irish mother and woman:

> We state here [Article 41.2] that mothers in their homes give to the State a support which is essential. . . . Is it not a tribute to the work that is done by women in the homes as mothers? . . . our aim ought to be . . . that the breadwinner, who is normally and naturally in these cases, when he is alive, the father of the family, should be able by his work to bring in enough to maintain the whole household and that women ought not to

> be forced by economic necessity to go out and either supplement his wages or become the breadwinners themselves. (De Valera 324)

About Irish woman's role, Article 41.2 of the Constitution says "In particular, the State recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved" (*Bunreacht na hÉireann* 164). Clearly, Lily is a post-national Irish woman divergent from a patriarchal (masculine) view of woman confining women's role within home and family, which underlies the Constitution. However, Lily is still trapped in Irish patriarchal heterosexualism because she is intolerable about her son's gay friends, as shown in Lily's way of openly being "rude to Paul and Larry" (*Blackwater Lightship* 217). Lily's moral rigidity might have been cultivated in her Catholic asceticism acquired as a cultural legacy through Irish Catholic education. Even Helen, who is objectionable to Declan's gay friends, craves to oblige Lily "to be polite to Paul and Larry [and] treat them like friends of Declan's who had been there for him when no one else was" (217), and yet she knows that "nothing now would change her or improve her. It was too late."

III. Modernity and Irish Women in the Era of the Celtic Tiger

Transforming herself into the gender-breaking power of masculine femininity but making trapped in the patriarchal dichotomy of masculinity and femininity, Lily is a symptom of the discrepancy between Irish Catholic/patriarchal nationalism and Irish post-national life. Her educational background in having attended "FCJ [Faithful Companions of Jesus] in Bunclody" (*Blackwater Lightship* 150) is traced back to Irish practices of

Catholic education, which exhibits the patriarchal idealism of Catholicism adopted for Irish education and life in the Constitution. The most glaring part insinuating an Irish Catholic influence on the Constitution is the Preamble: "In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority and to Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and States must be referred, We, the People of *Éire*, Humbly acknowledging all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, Who sustained our fathers through centuries of trial . . . Do hereby adopt, enact, and give to ourselves this Constitution" (*Bunreacht na hÉireann* 2). It is, moreover, notable that de Valera himself takes the Church as the backbone of national primary education:

> You [teachers] are, of course, not the sole trustees of the education of the people. The earliest stages and the most fundamental stages of that education are not in your hands. They belong to those other great societies into which man is born, the family and the Church. Of the influence of religion in the education of the child, it is not necessary for me to speak. It is the heart of all real education, the centre from which the life-force of education must come. . . . (De Velara 430)

In his proposition on education of children, de Valera envisages as the moral guidance of Irish manners "the ideals that shape [Irish] everyday life" (432), "the standards of honesty, truth, thoroughness," and "the capacity for mutual tolerance, co-operation, obedience to authority." De Valera in particular punctuates the validity of "the unity which exists between the individual and the society of which he or she is a part," whereas he invalidates "individualism and self-interest" as "a broken reed" (432).

In *The Blackwater Lightship*, Lily is a modernized case under pre-modern pressures into Catholic patriarchal idealism. In this novel, a remark on Mary Robinson is significant in that the first female president of Ireland represents

the spearhead of cultural and social liberalization into which Irish society evolves. It was a historical occasion that as president of Ireland Mary Robinson invited members of the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) to Áras an Uachtaráin in 1992 at a time when homosexuals were still penalized in Ireland. In *The Blackwater Lightship*, the phenomenal event is reproduced in the voice of a fictional character, Larry, one of the gay men fictionally imagined as invited to the presidential residence: "I was involved in a gay group in Dublin . . . Mary Robinson invited gay men and lesbians to Áras an Uachtaráin, [and] I was on the list" (144) of the guests. The time span of the 1990s including the year 1992, which *The Blackwater Lightship* is set in, represents the period of the Celtic Tiger, the booming period of Ireland's economy. An Irish miracle in economic growth in this period has accelerated modernization of the traditional mode of Irish life. As Sinéad Kennedy states, "the shift towards a more liberal and secular Ireland is the inevitable result of the process of modernization or a result of the liberalization inspired by the European Union (EU)" (95). Ireland's entry in 1973 into the economic territory of the EU is generally considered as the cornerstone for an Irish economic expansion independent of British influence. The Celtic Tiger era in Irish history saw the most remarkable pressure on Irish living conditions into change. Kennedy says:

> Changes in capitalism have resulted in a transformation of family structure, sex and sexuality and, ultimately, the lives of Irish women. One of the defining features of the Celtic Tiger era has been the sheer number of women with children who are returning to the workforce. Since the early 1990s, women have been entering the workforce in large numbers. (95)

More of Irish women's influx in job market means more of their economic independence. As the subsequential change due to a more modernizing process

of Irish life, hence, "women no longer saw marriage or having children as a reason to leave the workforce" (Kennedy 96). In *The Blackwater Lightship*, Lily's economic independence as a working woman is at the cost of her motherhood in caring of her children. It shows that an impetus to modernity in social life signifies an increasing process of "individualism" and "self-interest," which is in general a parallel to personal independence.

Modernity implies timeless changes in social and cultural structures. As Colin Coulter remarks, "The drive to modernity would require not only systematic structural reform but radical cultural change as well" (5). The "drive to modernity" is, to borrow Marshall Berman's terms, making unbound "the human capacity and drive for development: for permanent change, for perpetual upheaval and renewal in every mode of personal and social life" as "embedded in the everyday workings and needs of the bourgeois [capitalist] economy" (94). Berman takes note of Marx's utilization of liquidity as a trope to signify capitalism's ever transformation of social life: "All that is solid melts into air" as pronounced in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. In an extended rendition of Marx's fluidity metaphor for life in change, Berman characterizes any human's social place in modern relationships as ever moving:

> Modern men and women must learn to yearn for change. . . . They must learn not to long nostalgically for the 'fixed, fast-frozen relationships' of the real or fantasized past, but to delight in mobility, to thrive on renewal, to look forward to future developments in their conditions of life and their relationship with their fellow men. (95-96)

In *The Blackwater Lightship*, the seawater encroaching on the cliffs along the coast in Cush clearly resonates with the fluidity trope for modernity. As Helen walks on the strand down her grandmother's house when she has come

back to Cush since the last time she saw her some years ago, she sees that the cliff perpendicular to the strand is still under erosion: she listens to "the waves hitting the loose stones, unsettling them, knocking them against each other and then withdrawing" (51). Afterwards, she sees that, "as she walk[s] towards Keatings'," "some of the red galvanized iron from a shed at the side had fallen now, and raw walls with strips of the old wallpaper were open to the wind" (51). She feels that "only a few people would remember" that there had once been Keatings' house there. The Keatings' half-destroyed house as the result of geographical erosion is a sign of the ephemerality of modern life. And Helen's wonder at the dissolving power of the seawater is an indication of the modernizing process making modern life under constant change: "She imagined the sea, angry and inexorable, moving slowly towards the town, everything dissolving, slowly disappearing, the dead being washed out of their graves, houses crumbling and falling, cars being dragged out into the unruly ocean until there was nothing any more but this vast chaos" (216).

IV. An Irish Double Bind Between Tradition and Modernity

It is Declan's AIDS contraction that initiates Helen's retracing of her long-standing estrangement with her mother and her reluctant involvement in letting her mother and her grandmother know about his dire condition in the critical period of his life. Dublin, where Helen has been living since she moved from Enniscorthy for her undergraduate study at UCD, is the place to make her breathe easy after her thorny days with her mother in her hometown. Helen has never seen her mother for ten years since the last time she saw her at the "Shelbourne Hotel" in Dublin, who at that time camp up there to take her down to Enniscorthy for the teaching job at a convent school. Helen

snubbed her, saying "Everyone is to stop bossing me around" (182) as a way of showing her inner refusal to "skivvy for [her] mother" (181). During this time, Helen didn't invite her mother and grandmother to her wedding, which happened seven years ago. Declan "organized a big reconciliation" (183) between Helen and her mother "last summer," but Lily didn't turn up.

The schism between Helen and Lily brings to the fore again the Oedipal complex adumbrated by Declan's challenge for the Oedipal view of a nuclear family relationship. As amplified by the troubled relationship with her mother, Helen's nostalgia for her untroubled childhood increases her sense of loss, her absent father. Strangely, Helen's missing of her father carries political implications. As the Minister of Education invites Helen to his office for recognizing her credits in making her school have "the lowest absentee rate or sick-leave rate for pupils or teachers" (41), he identifies her as the daughter of Michael Breen and remembers that her father and he were "on the committee . . . of the Irish Branch of the Association of European Teachers" (42). He also says, Helen's father "was brilliant and dedicated, one of the very best" and he would "be very proud of" (42) her, if he is living, as a youngest "school principal" in the country. Her homage for her father is intertwined with his political legacy as a member of Fianna Fáil. Helen's pro-Fianna Fáil is suggested by Dora's memory of young Helen's unusual boldness in standing for Fianna Fáil in her childhood against her grandfather, "a member of Fine Gael" (62):

> 'Jack Lynch is not a gangster or a gun-runner,' Helen said.
> 'The rest of them, then,' her grandfather said. 'And I'd string Charlie Haughey up. He's a feckin' gangster.'
> 'Oh, language now,' her grandmother said.
> 'But Jack Lynch is the leader,' Helen said.
> 'Oh, I know who you've been listening to,' her grandfather said. 'Did we

> ever think that Lily would have a little Fianna Fáiler for a daughter?' (62-63)

Since Helen is drawn to her father through the political ideology of Fianna Fáil as materialized in the Constitution, it can be said that her nostalgia for her dead father implies de Valera's Irish idealism of family, which reproduces the masculine-patriarchal structure of heterosexuality.

Helen's anecdote of her attempt to relive her father when her father was found dead attests the immanence of the paternal superego internalized in Irish minds. In reminiscence of the occasion of her father's death, Helen's most poignant memory is her attempt to make her father reincarnated in the form of an imaginary father dressed up:

> She laid the suit full-length on the bed. She put the shirt inside the jacket and stuffed the sleeves of the shirt into its arms, and opened the buttons of the shirt and put the vest inside, and then closed up the buttons. She put the tie around her own neck, as if it were her school tie, and tied a knot in it and placed it inside the collar of her father's shirt and tightened it. Then she put the underpants inside the trousers and laid the trousers out . . . She found the socks and put one inside each shoe and placed the shoes at the bottom of the trouser legs . . . (81)

The dead father living in Helen's mind reifies the value of Irish national unity whose ground is the family bond declared in the Constitution. Also, the dead father embodies the cultural loss of the primordial/traditional communal warmth Irish minds ideally long for regaining against individual isolations that the modernization of Irish life entails. Helen is a professional career woman, just like her mother, who lives a life of economic independence and individual freedom the modernization and internationalism have brought into Irish social conditions in the era of the Celtic Tiger. At the same time, she is the case

of a retrospective desire for the imaginary father as a metonymy for the pre-modern values of solidarity, which she identifies as "parts of [herself] that were damaged" and "half [her] world collapsed" (187). Hence, Helen exhibits, to borrow Frank Barry's words, "a double-bind－the emergence of mutually-inconsistent desires" in which Irish "socio-psychological make-up [is] conditioned simultaneously as it is both by tradition and by an unprecedented exposure to certain aspects of the ethic of modernity" (20).

Declan is a cosmopolitan unoedipalized example challenging the national morality of patriarchal heterosexuality. Declan's homosexual body is, to put it in Judith Butler's terms, the site of "a prediscursive multiplicity of bodily forces that break through the surface of the body to disrupt the regulating practices of cultural coherence imposed upon that body by a power regime, understood as a vicissitude of history (178)." That is to say, his body is never an oedipalized case in which social practices of gender distinction posit a cultural difference between masculine nature and feminine nature as Freud theorized by the assumption of the Oedipus complex. Paul recognizes sexual body as "something in the genes" (*Blackwater Lightship* 147), effecting gender discontinuities, as exemplified in gays, lesbians, and transgenders, which subvert gender identity based upon inborn male/female genitalia, the gender identity which creates, in terms of Butler, "an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (Butler 186). Declan and Paul's Irish life with their Brussels background illustrates a cosmopolitanism because in the novel Brussels is set as the place where Paul and his boyfriend François are married and Declan is drawn to the couple via his gay friends there. Declan and Paul's cosmopolitan homosexuality is pitted against Irish Catholic morality assuming a distinction between woman's role and man's role according to heterosexual gender identity. The cosmopolitanism is an effect of modernity introducing a

new form of family, not organized in the way of traditional gender identity.

In *The Blackwater Lightship*, Declan, Paul, and Larry take the form of family. In Cush, where Declan is dying, Paul and Larry turn themselves into practicing of maternity in place of Lily when meticulously nursing Declan by meeting his medical and physiological needs. It is conspicuous that, considered as a dirty and abominable thing, Declan's spew is more and more familiarized by Lily, Helen, and Dora, all of whom more or less carry homophobia in their own way. Culturally, as Julia Kristeva notes, filthiness and immoral behaviors cause the feeling of repulsion on the same visceral level because some social or cultural cognitive-emotive system directs internal instincts into operating in judgments of moral values. Hence, filth giving rise to the instinctive feeling of disgust is socio-culturally made to be associated with moral depravity in the cognitive direction of an emotional response. In 1990, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Dublin, Desmond O'Connell's denigration of homosexuality as an "objective disorder" (quoted in Chrystel Hug 22) conveys a sense of disease associated with foulness, to use Hug's words, as "anything that corrupts moral order" (22). Homosexuality is, in an Irish cultural context, a moral disorder which "undermine[s] the family, the basic unit of society whose main function is to maintain both economic and ideological order" (Hug 22). In the era of the Celtic Tiger, Lily, Helen, and Dora's increasing familiarity with Declan's spew means that "Irish society no longer [speaks] the same moral language [as an "objective disorder"], and no longer recognize[s] the normative morality that [has] been . . . imposed by the institutional Catholic church" (22). Declan, Paul, and Larry's homosexuality all represent individualism as condemned by Irish Catholic/national morality.

The gay couple, Paul and François, blessed by a Catholic priest in Brussels is a showcase of the interactive compromise between law and morality. The married couple is an impact of the more tolerant attitude towards homosexuals

in the European Parliament in 1994 which adopted a resolution for giving homosexual couples "the right to marry and to adopt children" (Hug 32). Before 1994, Ireland had been pressured to redress the illegitimacy of homosexuality insofar as an Irish legal judgment had followed the Catholic morality stating that "given the Christian nature of the Irish state, the fact that the practice of homosexuality is morally wrong and harms both public health and the institution of marriage, a law criminalizing it could not offend the Irish Constitution" (Hug 33). In 1988, the European Court of Human Rights found that the criminalization of homosexuality in Ireland is opposed to Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights saying that "everyone has the right respect for his private life" (quoted in Hug 34) and, hence, that a sexual activity is part of individual privacy, which should not be violated by the State or religion. The 1988 European Court judgment led the Irish government to take action for legalizing homosexual activities in 1993.

Declan's homosexual privacy certainly indicates the rise of individualism spawned by modernity and Europeanism. In *The Blackwater Lightship*, yet, the individualism is oddly reconciliated with the spirit of the family bonds, which is idealized in the Constitution as actualizing the Irish unity whose moral base is Irish Catholicism. It is significant that Cush is the place where three mothers in three different generations are made to be reconnected some years after their disintegration. It is Declan's deliberate attempt to make the urgency of his illness an opportunity for rendering reconciled the three women in feud. Despite internal objections to her mother, Helen knows that she has been led by a fantasy that "she would some day or night appear at her mother's door asking to be taken in and forgiven and her mother would tell her that her room was always there for her" (120). A comfort by maternal care is still sought by both Helen and Declan in the face of their emotional detachment from Lily: "He had come back asking for comfort and forgiveness, as she had

felt she would" (121). Helen realizes that she is "caught between wanting to make up with [Lily and Dora] and wanting to get away from them" (188). Lily also reveals her abiding wish for Helen's visit to her new house in Wexford in spite of Helen's remonstrance against her mother's expectations for her, which she considers as absurd: "I'd love if you were the sort of daughter who'd come down and see me and take an interest in my house and my garden and my clothes" (205). The "unresolved connection" between Lily and Helen reinforces Helen's resolution to make Cathal and Manus never inherit her sense of deprivation of maternal comfort:

> She resolved to think harder and pay more attention so that Cathal and Manus could feel secure in the world and feel none of the currents which went through her grandmother's house now every moment of the day. As she turned and tried to sleep, however, she knew that anyone who was close to her must have learned long ago to live with and manage this web of unresolved connections. She clenched her fists and swore that she would do her best to protect them. (232)

Helen's motherhood for the sake of her family suggests an ironical reversion to the communalism grounded in the togetherness of family as a minimal social unit materializing the Irish ethos of national unity. Helen's appeal to a traditional motherhood and her respect for Hugh's involvement in Celtic revival activities, as he is one of Gaelic language teachers, invoke de Valera's promotion of the Irish communal identity against the individualism taken to be vulnerable to social maladies produced by modernity: "The events of the present century in many lands have shown that, whilst a society of which the activities are founded on a mere individualist basis may prosper for a time, it will not, even in the world of materialist progress, stand the stresses and storms of the modern age as will a society which is based on community

effort and Christian principles" (de Valera 432).

V. Conclusion

The Blackwater Lightship is a reinstation of the family unity and, as its further implication, the cultural identity of Irish Catholicism pronounced in the 1937 Constitution. At the same time, the novel is an affirmation of modernity, which breaks down the Irish convention of family bond as illustrated by Declan's unconventional family based upon his homosexual relationships. It is so oedipal that Helen keeps rivalry with her mother, remains attached to her father, and, ultimately, strengthens her own motherhood. It is so unoedipal that Declan repudiates the norm of the heterosexual family. As Anne Fogarty says, these "adults . . . assent to facets of the Oedipus complex while also questioning its operations" (173). Helen's dead father to whom she is loyal, as she makes herself part of the Oedipal scheme, is associated with the Tuskar Lighthouse as the transubstantiation of a man/husband in Lily's childhood fantasy. The solidness of the Tuskar arguably represents a tangibility of the Irish identity experienced in history, which is challenged and questioned by the iconoclastic power of modernity and the process of Irish cultural modernization by Europeanism.

In "New Ways of Killing Your Father," the 1993 review of R. F. Foster's *Paddy and Mr Punch*, Tóibín disclosed his difficulty with scanty sources when having attempted a new history on "the Irish side" of the 1798 Rising, an Irish rebellion against the British rule that took place around his native home, Wexford: "The rebels left no documents, then, only songs and stories, and the victors [British government] got to write history, until Irish nationalists like my father and his friend became the victors in their own [S]tate, to find that

there were no reliable papers written by the rebels, no letters, few memoirs." Facing the want of written materials needed to represent an Irish history on the Irish side, Tóibín conceded that his further embarrassment might have been the eclectic attitude of the revisionism in Irish historiography in such a way of retelling the "British rule of Ireland" as "a mixture of necessity, good intentions and bungling." He pointed out the politics of this revisionism: "This revisionism is precisely what our [S]tate needed once the North blew up and we joined the EC, in order to isolate Northern Ireland from us and our history, in order to improve relations with Britain, in order to make us concentrate on a European future." Mirroring the Irish experience existing in collective memory, Helen's father, who she is attached to, perhaps evokes the solidness of the voiceless Irishmen who have not been represented in history, and are now further made vulnerable to the erosion of its justification by modernization and Europeanism.

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Abstract

The Blackwater Lightship: Modernity and the Idealism of Family Bond in the Era of the Celtic Tiger

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This paper illustrates the post-national aspects in *The Blackwater Lightship* of the Irish life trapped in the double bind of the ethos of collectivity in tradition and the emerging individualism in the process of modernization. The 1999 novel by Tóibín has been regarded in general as an acclamation of the personhood liberated from the idealism of the Irish solidarity based upon family bond. It is, yet, shown that *The Blackwater Lightship* makes its appeal to the tradition of the patriarchal heterosexuality Irish Catholicism generates. In the novel, Helen's attachment to her father is evidently traced back to Eamon de Valera's Catholic politics and the heterosexual idealism of family bond, which is detailed in the 1937 Irish Constitution. The double bind in the condition of the Irish modern life is a cultural direction for the family bond contradicting the desire for individual freedom arising from modernization and Europeanism in the era of the Celtic Tiger.

■ Key words : modernity, *The Blackwater Lightship*, Celtic Tiger, communalism, de Valera
(근대성, 블랙워터 등대선, 켈트의 호랑이, 공동체주의, 드 발레라)

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