

The Bubbling Has Not Yet Subsided: An Introduction to the Diaries of Madeleine ffrench Mullen and The Rising of the People 1916

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Introduction

In the past, people asked me if I was related to Madeleine ffrench Mullen. I am related through marriage, she is a second cousin of my father-in-law. However, it was not until my analyst enquired about her that I found out who she was, an amazing woman actively involved in the 1916 Rising. A summary of her most important life events and the historical context is at the end of this paper. Up until then I knew virtually nothing about her except that some inner city flats had been named after her.¹ At home, she was hardly mentioned. Prior to the Rising, the family was divided in their loyalties. Madeleine was serving soup during the 1913 lockout. My mother-in-law's family business was on the opposing employer side of the lockout. It was in her role in the soup kitchen that she met her lifelong companion, Kathleen Lynn, a medical doctor whose life and career was dedicated to those less well off. They lived together from 1915 till Madeleine's death in 1944. Their names remain inseparably linked to the founding of St Ultan's Children's Hospital in Dublin in 1919, where Madeleine was the administrator. At that time, the socio-medical conditions for children in Dublin were among worst in Europe. Dublin had one of the highest infant mortality rates in Europe and there were high levels of violence and prostitution. In

¹ Madeleine ffrench Mullen House, Charlemont St., Dublin 2. The flats have since been demolished.

1913, a third of Dublin's population was living in city centre tenements slums with little employment and very low wages. Adding to this was overcrowding, squalor, inadequate sanitation and hunger. For some, at the time of the rising, the conditions had been created for the British and Religion to be identified as the obvious culprits of all evil in Ireland.

Born into the establishment class of a civilisation experiencing severe discontent, Madeleine and Kathleen shared the same political outlook. Part of a group of women who were educated and independent, Madeleine and Kathleen lived life completely at odds with the ideals of that time and in particular with what was expected from women. Both were nationalists and suffragettes. Dr. Lynn was the Chief Medical Officer of the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) and Madeleine was a lieutenant. Madeleine French Mullen fought in the 1916 Rising with Michael Mallin on St Stephen's Green and The College of Surgeons' Garrison. Imprisoned together in Kilmainham jail, Madeleine wrote a short diary covering the period between the 5th and 20th of May 1916.

What moved these women to become involved in a battle completely at odds with the ideals of their society? How should we think about this desire psychoanalytically? Were they fuelled by the unquenchable belief in the possibility of "happiness for all," "equality for all" and "social justice" as the new Proclamation of the Irish Republic demanded? Let us recall that the Proclamation is the only proclamation of its era that mentions women equally, beginning with "Irishmen and Irishwomen." Their rising triggered dramatic cultural changes that have defined our social structures for the past one hundred years.

Ethics of Psychoanalysis

Even though it is tempting to present a psychoanalytic psychobiography of Madeleine's life, the diaries do not lend themselves to be analysed as such. We simply do not know what kind of identification with the father nor what kind of love for the father sustained the ideals she stood for or her object choice. Psychoanalysis, in the Lacanian orientation, refrains from any such interpretations. I prefer instead to highlight the structural paradoxical subjective positions inherent in suffering. How to conceptualise social injustice from a position that is *not* of the beautiful soul who in the name of the Law of her Heart rebels against the injustices of the world, while actively participating in their reproduction?

Suffering is Structural

Let's consider some elements from Lacan's thought that advance the formulation of this paradox of suffering. Psychoanalysis is a theory about suffering that is distinct from the pain of breaking a leg. It is however often impossible to separate physical suffering from the psychological suffering of the soul. For psychoanalysis there is conscious suffering and there is unconscious suffering. There is suffering that extends itself in time and space and can therefore be theorised in terms of cause and effect, and then there is the unconscious as defined by Freud which has a timeless dimension. Time and timelessness are fundamental principles of psychoanalysis. It is the timeless dimension of the unconscious that has the power to interrupt the chain, to produce a gap. It has been Lacan's great contribution to formalise this dynamic throughout his teaching by means of the schemas, graphs, the four discourses and the formulae

of sexuation. The terms allow for the conceptualisation of a field of subjectivity outside the binary of the Imaginary I (moi) and the other (a'). The formulae of sexuation introduce the concept of a logical gap and the notion of a subject that is not localisable in time and space. The mathemes thus preserve the enigmas that do not have an answer - the real of "there is no sexual relation" (Lacan, 1999, p. 57).

Lacan formalises suffering in terms of impotence, impossibilities and paradoxes. In "Science and Truth" (1956), he proposes that the subject is responsible for his or her subjective position and at the same time it is undeniable that very serious social injustice exists. Civilisation is the scene or social bond where the compromise between individual madness and cultural madness is played out. The coordinates within which suffering presents itself depend on what unfolds in the Other (Lacan, 2006, p. 458). We experience a need to define ourselves as different from the other as individuals and at the same time our identity is inseparably tied to the clan, the need to belong; the Other as Symbolic order. A lot of our conscious struggling is about relating individual identity to group identity.

Happiness, A Contested Principle in Psychoanalysis

Happiness is a contested principle in psychoanalysis where happiness is at best a momentary experience within an inescapable drive for something else, something that is not good for us. Lacan refers to the etymological origin of the word as chance or the contingent. From the point of view of the drive and the *jouissance* lodged in suffering, the subject is always happy (Brodsky, 2010, p. 215) However, it is clear from Madeleine's life choices that she

believed in this myth of happiness for all and was willing to fight and go to jail for it. From where does someone engage in such action?

Psychoanalysis proposes that there are various positions from where a subject can engage. In Seminar XXIII, Lacan describes life as a series of chance happenings that push us one way and then the other from which we make our destiny. From this series of chance happenings we construct a thread of sense that gives our life meaning. This meaning produces the essential veil over the truth of our existence as a being of waste (Cardenas, 2010). Contingencies trace the paradoxical existence/inexistence of our destiny. Our lives are experiments in uncertainty (Dessal, 2016). In my opinion, Madeleine registered herself within the symbolic in the tension between destiny and chance not because she had any certainty of the fruit of her act. She was guided instead by the mere conviction of whom she was and what she wanted to do.

For psychoanalysis, the only madness that exists is the madness of insisting on finding the culprit who is the cause of our suffering. Psychoanalytically there are no culprits. Our suffering is structural. Psychoanalysis exposes the madness of finding fault with another. It is the theorising of a relation with a structural fault, a structurally lost unity that exposes the forever present threat of the possibility of being reduced to waste. Desire is tied to a hole, ready to swallow up subjectivity.

Suffering as Singular versus Social Injustice

Psychoanalysis exposes the singularity of our suffering. A psychoanalytic treatment identifies the co-ordinates of our singular position in relation to this suffering. At the end of this treatment, the subject consents to a new way of existing in relation to that suffering.

However, how can we think of this in relation to the very obvious conditions of social injustice proper to 1916 and those that exist today? Even though we cannot make the case that the social conditions in Ireland today are anything close to those in 1913, social injustice is alive and well and our treatment of refugees, the homeless and migrants testifies to that. The notion that the social conditions have improved beyond a return to the conditions of 1916 is just an illusion. In the twenty-first century our socio-economic conditions are changing again for the worse. Working families no longer are able to afford rents or to earn enough to get onto the property ladder; the “1%” is rich and getting richer and the middle classes are vanishing; our civil rights and our rights to privacy are diminishing because of the war on terror. Today the strategy of those in power has changed. They no longer repress. They simply do not respond. They wait for those who protest to exhaust themselves (Dessal, 2016). The madness of our civilisation goes unnoticed behind the veil of normality.

Identification

What could be said of the concept of identification with regard to these women who fought so wholeheartedly for their fellow men?

For psychoanalysis, there is no such thing as sympathy, there is only identification. I would like to propose that there is a difference between the concepts of sympathy and compassion. Sympathy operates on the level of identification; compassion is an experience that partakes in the logic of the “Not-All” and the dimension of the timeless. There is a crucial difference between the concept of identity and the dynamic of identification. Subjectivity is not reducible to identity. Lacan’s conception of the symbolic

demonstrates that there is no identity in the human world. The sliding of the signifiers precludes identity. 'A' does not equal 'A' in the signifying chain. Identity is not something one has. Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis theorises that the subject comes into being via a structural identification dynamic. The symbolic makes identity impossible.

The notion of ideal and the notion of identification go hand in hand. On the one hand, there is the ideal and on the other hand, there is the object *a*. In the last chapter of *Seminar XI*, Lacan elucidates the desire of the analyst as the desire to obtain the maximum possible difference between *I* and *a* (Lacan, 2004, p. 273). At the end of analysis, one's action is no longer sustained in the Other of the Other. An analysis reveals how the subjective relationship to the ideals commands the subject's actions fantasmatically. In the end, a margin of freedom opens up because the subject's actions are no longer unconsciously caught up in a repetition compulsion.

In my understanding, it is precisely the acute experience of the fundamental truth of our being as waste that allowed Madeleine and her people to fight to restore the dignity to those so wasted by their society. This identification exceeds our national boundaries and values. I believe that the values of those fighting in the 1916 rising are being wasted today and whole peoples continue to be pushed towards the abyss. The struggle does not subside.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have highlighted the structural paradoxical positions in suffering. There is social injustice and there is subjective responsibility. There is social injustice with its instigators *and* there

is the madness of finding fault with another. It is this paradox with its enigmatic singular solution that psychoanalysis exposes. The subject is irrevocably alone with its object. The end of an analysis exposes man himself as the object *a* that falls from the signifying chain and in relation to which he is fundamentally helpless but nevertheless obliges him to respond. This is Lacan's conception of the fundamental fantasy. The later Lacan conceptualises the *sinthome* as the possibility of a singular response to structural suffering. The fundamental fantasy and the *sinthome* are two separate ways that Lacan conceptualizes the singular relation to suffering.

I would like to conclude with the words of Gustave Dessal, which in my view evoke the impossible subjective position inherent in suffering. What is expressed is the truth of our existence that can only be written in terms of a paradox:

Psychoanalysis is a body of knowledge that is not measured in intellectual terms, but rather as life lessons. Psychoanalysis takes existence seriously. Taking existence seriously means taking responsibility for what we usually accuse others of, renouncing the shameful pleasure of imagining that we are victims, accepting the consequences of what we have decided and even what we have not decided. Accepting that inaction is a form of action, that crying bad luck is an excuse that does not work for long and that, given how hard and unlikely it is that one will not lie to oneself, we should at least have enough courage to ask ourselves from time to time whether we are abusing that custom. (Dessal, 2016)

Lacan's formalisation of psychoanalysis, and in particular the formulae of sexualisation can be used to write the paradox of inextricable subjective responsibility *vis-a-vis* each one's own real *versus* real (factual) social injustice - not in terms of oppositions, but in terms of a vacillation. Lacan's body of work allows us to show our existence as a vacillation between positions and dimensions where the enigma and mystery of our existence continues to be addressed.

Addenda: A Personal Historical/Political Overview

Madeleine French Mullen, an Irish Catholic, is a second cousin of my father-in-law. Her parents had four children. Madeleine and her brother Douglas fought in the Rising. None of the children left issue. Madeleine's legacy was her act.

Madeleine was introduced to politics by her father St. Laurence French Mullen, a surgeon in the Royal Navy. He was an enthusiastic supporter of Charles Stewart Parnell. There is documented evidence that Madeleine's father contributed financial support to Parnell's funeral, with his name appearing on a receipt from Fanagan's Funeral Establishment.² She remained supportive of international socialist movements particularly in Europe and the Soviet Union.

Whatever one thinks about the Easter Rising, there is no doubt that we are dealing with an exceptional generation of Irish men and women. It is not just that they took on the might of the British Empire; they fought for social justice. Their values and norms differed substantially from the mainstream society of that time. They

² See <http://www.the-saleroom.com/en-gb/auction-catalogues/fonsie-mealy-auctioneers/catalogue-id-srfons10009/lot-26043138-9a62-4f35-86fc-a4430181da74>.

were the instigators of an ethos with ambitions some of us still aspire to today.

In my opinion, these men and women first and foremost fought a social revolution. They were looking for Social Justice for all Irish citizens. Their aim was to improve the quality of life and the living conditions of the poor in the centre of Dublin. Madeleine was one of them. She actively campaigned to provide school dinners for poor children and worked in the soup kitchens during the 1913 lockout. She joined the labour movement to give assistance distributing food in Connolly's Free Food Organisation set up for unemployed workers and their families. Her vision was to make life better for the ordinary working classes and their families.

The Rising began when members of the IRB, Irish Volunteer Force and Irish Citizen Army successfully took over preselected buildings around Dublin with little resistance. The Irish Citizen Army (ICA) was formed in November 1913 for the protection of workers, following incidents of brutality suffered by workers at the hands of the police force. James Connolly, one of the founders of the ICA, saw to it that women were treated equally in the movement, and women's equality was an integral part of its philosophy. This is reflected in the use of the gender-neutral term "citizen." Over two hundred members of Cumann na mBan, the women's auxiliary branch of the Irish Volunteers actively fought in the Rising. During the Rising, Madeleine served as a lieutenant in the Irish Citizen Army. She fought with Michael Mallin on St Stephen's Green and the College of Surgeons Garrison. She commanded fifteen women. Her duties included commandeering vehicles, removing civilians from the area, guarding entries to the Green and tending the wounded. Her brother Douglas fought with Éamonn Ceannt at the South

Dublin Union which is now part of James' Hospital. The garrison held out for six days and was not captured. The diaries testify how they reluctantly surrendered their position under Pearse's surrender order:

I shall never forget the breaking of that awful news.... And it was a heart-breaking scene when the news was told and they all crowded round the Commandant and Countess Markievicz to shake their hand for the last time... We left a garrison of 117 men and 12 women. (30th April)

Madeleine was arrested when the Garrison surrendered on 30th April. She and Kathleen Lynn were initially held in the same cell in Kilmainham Goal and afterwards in separate cells in Mountjoy Gaol. On her day of arrest, she was the witness to the Will and Testament of Countess Markievicz who feared she would be executed. Madeleine was released from Mountjoy on the 5th June.

After the Rising she worked for the Connolly Co-Operative Society, seeking to find work for unemployed activists. She was a prime mover in setting up a shirt factory in Liberty Hall. Together with Kathleen Lynn, she founded St Ultan's children's hospital for infants in 1919. In 1920, at a time when women held very little political power, Madeleine and Dr. Kathleen Lynn were elected members to the Rathmines and Rathgar Urban District Council. Rathmines at that time was a bastion of Unionist sentiment and had until 1922 a Unionist majority. Under de Valera's leadership after 1916, women's roles were reduced to support positions rather than the active ones they had under James Connolly. Many refused to accept this edict and continued to be involved in wearing arms and

intelligence work (McKenna, 2011, p. 114). On the 4th of October 1920, a little article appears in the Catholic Press in Sydney, NSW stating “Miss Madeleine French Mullen, UCD, Rathmines, was arrested and charged with obstructing the military by cycling after them” (Catholic Press (Sydney, NSW) Oct 14, 1920) We can assume that she was gathering intelligence about the military patrols and was still active despite the restrictions.

The Diaries finish with the words of Michael O’Rahilly song, “Thou Art Not Conquered Yet, Dear Land.” Those songs were instrumental in inspiring the London-Irish to join the Rising.

This is a generation that I have no difficulty identifying with. I share with Madeleine the rejection of the established institutions which benefit only the few, oppose eco-friendly solutions or let go of the control of Ireland’s natural resources for short term financial gain. It is therefore impossible for me to consider the revolution irrelevant. These men and women started a struggle that continues to be fought today. It seems to me that the citizens of today no longer live under the British crown but under corporations.

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