CHAPTER 5

'Nobody Kills a Priest': Irish Noir and Pathogenic Vulnerability in Benjamin Black's *Holy Orders*

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5.1 Introduction

The concepts of vulnerability and precariousness have been a major object of interest since Judith Butler approached them in her ground-breaking studies *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) and *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (2009). By and large, the philosopher has defended that our existential exposure to the action of others posits human life as inherently precarious, while also implying that ethical responses are binding to effectively eradicate, or at least curtail, such ingrained vulnerability, which is, nonetheless, more acute for some individuals and groups than others. In recent years, developing further this ontological formulation and capitalising on the relationality of our

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embodied existence, Butler emphasises the dependency of bodies on institutional structures and the material conditions of social orders. For her, since a body "is defined by the relations that make its own life and action possible" (2016, 16), then vulnerability becomes exacerbated "when we are unsupported, when those infrastructural conditions characterizing our social, political, and economic lives start to decompose, or when we find ourselves radically unsupported under conditions of precarity or under explicit conditions of threat" (2016, 19). Drawing on such circumstantial aspects, in *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy* Catriona Mckenzie, Wendy Rogers and Susan Dodds highlight the role of social policies in redressing the disadvantages of individuals and/or communities, and the moral obligations of the states and their apparatuses to guarantee extensive and reliable protection. Within their particular taxonomy of vulnerability, which attends to its various sources and the different states where vulnerable beings may be allocated, they propose, among others, a categorisation that considers the "pathogenic" interpretation of the term. According to Mckenzie, Rogers and Dodds, this type of vulnerability appears in cases of "morally dysfunctional or abusive interpersonal and social relationships and sociopolitical oppression or injustice" or "when a response intended to ameliorate vulnerability has the paradoxical effect of exacerbating existing vulnerabilities or generating new ones" (2014, 9). In this sense, the three critics follow Butler's postulates about the failures of the infrastructural norm just mentioned, as well as the concept of "institutional precariousness" delineated by Brian S. Turner in *Vulnerability and Human Rights*, by which the presupposed protection that states must grant to their citizens is regularly invalidated by the precarity of their own institutional power, thus leading, paradoxically, to subsequent abuses and vulnerabilities (2006, 32).

All these critical stances about the politics and ethics of vulnerability come in useful for the purposes of this chapter, which addresses Ireland's deficient practices of systemic power through the analysis of *Holy Orders* (2013), published by John Banville under the pen name Benjamin Black. This crime novel constitutes the sixth title in the so-called Quirke series, set in 1950s Dublin and featuring a pathologist from the Holy Family Hospital simply known as Quirke. Like the rest, the text under analysis tackles crimes that result from the distortion of the official norms of protection and care that the Catholic Church-Irish State dyad and their social allies carried out in their own benefit and throughout the greater part of the twentieth century. In this thriller, the protagonist and

his only friend, Detective Inspector Hackett, investigate the murder of Jimmy Minor, a young journalist who had been surveying the dealings of Packie Joyce, a tinker[1] clan leader. Their investigation discloses the complicity of some of the agents of official order at the time, like the high Catholic authorities, the press and the police, and they pinpoint, on the one hand, the multi-layered precarity of Ireland's travellers, that appear, I argue, as archives of the failing of infrastructural norms and paradigms of pathogenic vulnerability, as discussed by Butler, McKenzie, Rogers and Dodds. On the other hand, the case captures the effects of a corrupted network of control and influence, and its concomitant rule of silence, whose dysfunctionality generates, as formulaic in some crime fiction narratives, a string of parallel justice that problematises the ethics of the system and shakes its underlying principles.

Black's Quirke novels have been praised for "laying bare the underbelly of the conservative Ireland of half a century previously" (Campbell Ross 2011, 33) and interpreted as "a refashioning of the entire panoply of recently uncovered postindependence state crime" (Dell'Amico 2014, 114). In fact, as a whole the series delves into long silenced secrets of the darkest era of Ireland's recent past, like the illegal trafficking of babies from Mother and Baby Homes to rich American adoptive families, backstreet abortion, incest and paedophilia, among others.[2] As Black has repeatedly admitted, he has always been fascinated by this decade, in which "the Church had a complete stranglehold on the country" (Birbaum 2011), also arguing that "the 1950s is why we are here" (Burke 2011, 224). The author's crime accounts offer, then, a critique of the inadequacy of the policies articulated by the agents of power in the country and, by extension, the moral tenets upon which they were founded. Following Audrey McNamara, I believe that Quirke's growing nosiness and concern with the cases—another convention in detective thrillers—lead him to eventually ascertain, "contrary to the protection for women and children enshrined in the 1937 Constitution, the systematic abuse and suppression of the vulnerable in society and the subsequent support and concealment of these injustices" (2016, 135).

Moreover, my reading of Black's novel is aligned with Butler's most recent approach to the notion of resistance, whereby she claims that "there is plural and performative bodily resistance at work that shows how bodies are being acted on by social and economic policies that are decimating livelihoods" (2016, 15). However, Butler continues, "these bodies, in showing this precarity, are also resisting these very powers;

they enact a form of resistance that presupposes their vulnerability of a specific kind, and opposes precarity" (2016, 15). In this light, I believe that Black masterfully uses the crime fiction genre as a narrative space to portray and denounce the moral corruption of the Catholic Church and its many forms of abuse, which remained concealed and unquestioned up to the last decades of the twentieth century.[3] It is my contention that the "holy orders" in the title suggest not only the mandates of the omnipotent religious figures that inhabit the story, but also a confessional status quo in which, well into the twentieth century and beyond, the Catholic doctrine and many of the civil schemes in the country have been executed in sectarian terms, so that the continuous circle of sacred and untouchable power has thwarted counteractions and, subsequently, proper accountability for the atrocities committed in that confessional ethos. Thus, I will attempt to demonstrate how the systemic precarisation of individuals runs through *Holy Orders,* as the story maps out the many failings of a social milieu where the bodies of subaltern individuals remain under control, and consequently, any form of resistance does not only prolong vulnerability, but it also leads to further victimisation. To this aim, I will first explore how the failure of Ireland's network of infrastructural support has prevailed throughout time, decimating the lives of some of its most vulnerable individuals. Then, I will trace the different forms of vigilantism, a convention in crime fiction, that appear in the novel as products of such deficiency, and the troubling questions that they also typically pose for the contemporary reader.

5.2 Pathogenic Vulnerability

In a synecdochical interpretation of the outreach of the Quirke series, McNamara observes that through the pathologist "Black has taken the corpse of 1950s Ireland and removed the secrecy that surrounded it" (2016, 146). Indeed, in the early pages of *Holy Orders*, as in most of the titles in the series, readers encounter a classic scene in crime fiction: a post-mortem. At the dissecting table of the hospital morgue, Quirke must examine the cadaver of *The Clarion* reporter Jimmy Minor, who had been dumped into a central Dublin canal after being beaten to death. Shortly afterwards, the pathologist becomes progressively obsessed with finding details of this mysterious murder, although this time he has an added interest, as Jimmy was a very good friend of Quirke's daughter, Phoebe. After an interview with the newspaper's editors and a visit to

Jimmy's flat in order to track clues on the case, Quirke and Inspector Hackett learn that the reporter had been enquiring about the contact circles of Father Mick Honan, a social-activist priest in charge of an educational programme whereby he was encouraging the travellers "to settle down and quit stravaiging the country" (2013, 77). This obscure character emerges not only as the central figure in the conundrum, but also as a representative of the corruption of the Church authorities, or "the sky pilots" (2013, 78), as Hackett calls them. Thus, they end up discovering that before dropping out of sight, the priest had been hiding terrible secrets of his repeated sexual molestation of tinker children.

The lack of socio-normative protection experienced at many levels by the Irish-travelling community certainly occupies a central position in the novel, and it is introduced when Quirke and Hackett visit the tinkers' camp-site in Tallaght, a south Dublin district near the countryside, in search for its chief trader. It is the picturesqueness but also the desolation of the place what strikes the two men, although the inspector, more the countryman type than the pathologist, admits to being actually jealous of the travellers for having "the life [...] out in the good air, under God's clear sky" (2013, 217). In response to this comment, and with an acerbic tone, Quirke rebukes that "The average tinker's life expectancy is twenty-nine years [...] and the death rate among their new-born is one in three" (2013, 217). The clash between these two viewpoints illustrates Jose Lanters's observations in *The "Tinkers" in Irish Literature,* when claiming that stereotypes as well as literary or popular constructs have been for long the sources of information for most settled Irish people. For her, it is remarkable how they are more familiar with those images rather than "with the real circumstances of the lives of their fellow citizens in the Traveller community" (2008, 6). Indeed, what Lanters calls "the trope of tinkerness" seems to be at stake in the conversation between Hackett and Quirke, where the former's view is more socially biased, while the latter's accent on the precarity of the tinkers is informed by a data-based and more scientific outlook. Thus, through Quirke Black voices some of the major problems that the inefficient social policies as well as the racist and exclusionary practices prevalent in Ireland since that period continue to weigh upon the travelling community. This consistent precarisation is explored in *Irish Travellers: Racism and The Politics of Culture*, where Jane Helleiner calls attention to how in contemporary Ireland "[t]he effects of such practices are evident in the disproportionate levels of poverty, low life expectancy, and high neonatal and child mortality within

the Traveller population" (2000, 5). Nonetheless, accepting the fact that our object of study is a literary construct too, we must pose the added insight that in order to counteract the tropes mentioned by Lanters, and offering instead a critical vision of the tinkers' vulnerability, Black makes a fine use of the realist discourse that characterises crime fiction. As such, the novel minutely depicts the camp-site atmosphere and its inhabitants' lifestyle,[4] particularly evident during the first direct appearance of Packie, a well-known name in the scrap metal business in town. Quite evocatively, the narrator recounts that the tinker's field of operations seemed like "a battlefield" (2013, 219), adverting that with the big fire in the middle of the place, the smoke of burning tyres, the gang of children running wild and Packie's tough guy looks, "[t]he scene was archaic and thrilling, and dismaying, too, in its violence and volatility" (2013, 220).

Yet, the core element in Black's articulation of vulnerability can be found in Packie's intellectually impaired daughter, Lily, a teenager born to one of his former lovers that is minded by his current partner, Molly. The fact that the girl got pregnant after Father Honan's repeated sexual assaults renders her as one of the epitomes of injurability, in the most etymological sense of the vulnerability terminology. Indeed, the multiple dimension of her plight calls to mind Butler's observation that "women and minorities […] are, as a community, subjected to violence, exposed to its possibility, if not its realization", resulting from how "each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies" (2004, 20). When first presented to the reader, Lily's physical frailty and intellectual disability, aggravated by the hard-living conditions in the caravan site, pave the way for the pathogenic vulnerability that later in the story she is confirmed to encapsulate. Thus, when Quirke meets the girl, and as a kind of premonition, he feels that her eyes had seen "things a child should not see" (2013, 224). Afterwards, having made further enquiries in the Rectory of the Trinitarian Brothers, and on account of Father Honan's sudden transfer to the African missions, the priest's depredation begins to dawn upon the pathologist, so he resolves to visit Tallaght again. There, Packie's partner—Molly—tells Quirke the particulars of the events prior to Jimmy's murder, in what constitutes, to my mind, an excessively informational revelation at the story's denouement. Thus, the bluntness of her delivery about the crimes behind the priest's educational programme destabilises the interrogation and inspection rituals as well as the suspenseful pace of the detecting process narrated in the novel so far. Without reservations, Molly promptly informs

Quirke that through several interviews, the reporter had found out the sexual violence inflicted upon Lily and other children in the tinkers' site. It is then suggested that this discovery would eventually turn Jimmy into a scapegoat, as the collateral victim of the institutional precarisation of the travellers, and also another exponent of pathogenic vulnerability, as will be analysed below.

In a quasi-monologue with Joycean echoes and a bitter tone, Molly explains that Father Honan had persuaded Packie to approach Lily in order to teach her "book-learning and the like" (2013, 281). However, the woman had quickly realised his true intentions: "The like that you wouldn't find in any decent reading-book. Had them all at it, at the learning, so-called, all the lads and the girleens in the camp. Himself (Packie) was delighted. *Oh, they'll all be great scholars, he'd say, they'll get grand jobs and keep me when I'm old. The* mugathawn"[5] (2013, 283, original emphasis). Through the complexity of such criminal behaviour, with a predator priest, a concurrent but equally vulnerable woman guardian[6] and a negligent father, the author seems to recognise and certainly draws attention to the social policies that the newly formed Irish State had been trying to set up for the tinkers at that time. With an emphasis on what Helleiner calls a "child saving" discourse, focalised on an allegedly higher exposure to criminality linked to lack of schooling and low levels of literacy, official care-related programmes directed to the travelling community in the 1940s and 1950s were based on an attribution of their vulnerability to a presumed incompetence of the parents due to the distinctive living habits of the travellers. As she puts it, "while Traveller children were constructed as dangerous to the wider community, they were also described more sympathetically as the endangered 'victims' of an adult Traveller lifestyle of mobility and camping" (2000, 69). However, Helleiner also demonstrates that the state's public expression of official concern for the traveller children proved insufficient, as the parliamentary acts and social measures in this regard were vague and inconclusive in those years.

A recurrent infantilising discourse, also modelled on vulnerability terms, can be found in the articulation of the character that had triggered the case of *Holy Orders*, Jimmy Minor, although through him Black simultaneously explores the extent to which Ireland's hegemonic structures may be effectively defied or not. Interestingly, the novel relies on the indirect narrative of Jimmy's actions and personality via other characters, such as Harry Clancy, the editor of *The Clarion*, whose reflections

reveal significant aspects of the professional practices and the personal attitudes of his employee: "There had always been something of the victim about Jimmy Minor", who "had taken everything too seriously" (2013, 45–46). As the events unfold, the naivety and delusion of the reporter are revisited through his twin sister, Sally, who travels from London to Dublin to investigate the death of her brother, and she admits to Quirke and Phoebe that he always gave the impression of being "a little boy who loved the movies" (2013, 195). Such comment not only echoes Clancy's view, but it also confirms the idealistic and unrelenting personality of the young dead man, whose affects are regularly brought into the open in the novel and seem to have transcended death. Thus, the mystery around his research, but most importantly, his determination to outstrip the authority of the Church are also highlighted when Clancy introduces another outlook to the notions of vulnerability and protection, by admitting there was some kind of "inevitability" in the death of Jimmy, who "had seen himself as a crusader, a Clark Kent who one day soon would turn into Superman" (2013, 45–46). The strong commitment of the reporter, which had compromised his physical integrity but had also led him to eventually unmask Father Honan, can be read through the lens of Butler's appreciation that resistance and vulnerability should not be considered as mutually exclusive. If we accept the philosopher's view that "vulnerability, understood as a deliberate exposure to power, is part of the very meaning of political resistance as an embodied enactment" (2016, 22), then it can be easily argued that by daring to confront the representatives of official power, Jimmy had enacted his resistance and challenged the pathogenic vulnerability that prevailed in Ireland at that time, with the ultimate effect of his own death.

In addition to this, and standing out as a one of the elements that distinguish *Holy Orders* from the other titles in the series, the author elaborates on the ongoing effects of vulnerability by projecting Lily's victimisation directly unto Quirke, and vice versa. Such reverberation constitutes an effective technique for the characterisation of the pathologist, which reaches a climactic moment in this text. His troubled life as an orphan boy consigned to Carricklea Industrial School, but later adopted by an influential Dublin judge continually involved in murky affairs, can be grasped by the consistent narrative focus on the existential consequences of such past experiences, which lead to the pathologist's alienation, misanthropy and intermittent alcoholism, among other weaknesses. The complexity of his personality, along with the fact that, conventionally, he remains

the moral axis in this crime fiction story, allow the author to examine the continuum of abuse and victimisation that characterised the Irish confessional order, which is portrayed as chronic not only during Quirke's childhood years, but also during the time frame of the action of this novel. Like Lily, but several decades before, Quirke "had been abused, body and soul, by priests and brothers" (2013, 90) in Carricklea and the other institutions he had been consigned to. And like all the traveller children molested by Father Honan, the pathologist had been unable to share or publicly express the details of such violent maltreatment, attesting to the prevalence of child abuse and the grip of the country's rule of silence. Thus, in an incisive elaboration of that continuum of verbal repression, Quirke's question to Molly about the abused children in the camp—"Why hadn't they told what was happening?" (2013, 283)—quickly acquires a rhetorical dimension when the narrator annotates: "To whom would he have spoken, when he was a child at Carricklea? Who would have believed him?" (2013, 283). Moreover, this intergenerational physical and psychological violence stretches even further to the momentous time of the publication of the novel so that, using John Murphy's words, "it's very difficult to shake the sensation that this novel is not happening over a half-century later, amidst continued revelations of clerical abuse and conspiracy" (2013). Accordingly, the life-long trauma that Quirke experiences, with constant flashbacks to his life in the Industrial School, that in this novel grow into long, vivid hallucinations, functions as another exponent of the failing of the infrastructural, or strictly speaking institutional, norms of the Irish State. These lasting effects constitute the predication of Quirke's pathogenic vulnerability, and they are forcefully portrayed through his own daughter, who pictures him as a manifest victim of his past. As Phoebe admits, it seems "as if there's a little boy hiding inside him and looking out through adult eyes at the world, trying to understand it, and failing" (2013: 205).

Therefore, stemming from these different layers of vulnerability endured by all the victimised subjects in the novel, we find that their fragile status is commonly set against the figure of Father Honan, who embodies the faults of the most precarising community in the novel: the Irish Catholic Church. Reviewers of *Holy Orders* have distinguished its portrayal of "a monolithic Church unassailable in its claim to Godliness" (Gaines 2013), punctuating how "the obnoxious collusions between church and State, the golden circles of power and influence at their nefarious backstairs work, the sycophants, hypocrites, bishops and bounders

are all pitilessly exposed to the reader's gaze" (Dukes 2013). Indeed, the double morality of the priest is signalled in his categorical explanation about the type of Catholicism he professes: "My Church is the Mater Misericordiae, the mother of sorrows and forgiveness [...] My work is carried on in the streets, in the tenements, in the camp sites of the travelling people" (2013, 155). If this excerpt calls to mind the meanings of pathogenic vulnerability, presenting as it does an official agent of guardianship, guidance and charity belying the precepts and creed he represents, and hence aggravating the vulnerability of the victims through his perpetration of sexual crimes, it must also be noted how the author spotlights the inherent precarity of this type of institutional power, following the terms discussed by Turner. Likewise, this representation of the failure of the Church in its moral obligation to protect the vulnerable reinforces Leticia Sabsay's postulates about the intersection of vulnerability, permeability and the affects. In her own words, permeability operates "as a transindividual way of being in the world [...] permeability becomes a marker through which to highlight the idea that the subject is always decentred by the primacy of the other in its own being" (2016, 286). Following this argument, a compelling paradox results when the religious principles of pastoral care on the island were endemically reinterpreted in self-indulgent terms, thereby demonstrating the extent to which permeability locates the individual in a constantly decentred condition, recurrently at the mercy of the clergy's actions and decisions.

5.3 Counteracting Vulnerability: The Vigilante

The fact that the confrontation to the representatives of hegemonic power in the novel is rather unfeasible can be further grasped as the plot ushers in another crucial element for the noir genre, and that also builds up on the vulnerability/resistance dichotomy. Thus, Black incorporates the theme of vigilantism in the latter part of the narrative arc, particularly through Packie and Sally, who despite coming from very different backgrounds, share an agentive extra-legal reaction against the vulnerability of their loved ones, and subsequently, against their own victimisation. The vigilante, as described by Les Johnson, is an agent that following his/her perceived transgressions of institutional regulations and devising a calculated plan, intends to control crime and guarantee security by enacting or threatening to enact violence. However, the most important aspect of Johnson's definition lies in the fact that vigilantism is carried

out "without the state's authority and support" (1996, 226), rather than focussing on the distinction between the illegality or extra-legality of vigilante actions. This private/public dichotomy implied by vigilantism can be brought to bear on Black's articulation of the systematic failure of state action, whose corruption, stagnation and inefficiency are catalysts for individual, albeit obnoxious, responses to it. In the case of Packie, during Molly's conversation with Quirke, it is made clear to readers that, out of anger and paternal offence, the dealer had actually sent his older sons to kill Jimmy in order to avenge his daughter. Thus, Molly explains that when hearing about Lily's pregnancy, he "wouldn't have it that it was the priest" (2013, 283), while her ensuing interpretation that "Somebody had to pay the price [...] Sure, you couldn't touch the priest, you'd have no luck after that" (2013, 283) illustrates both Packie's setting up for the family vendetta and the latent uneasiness to the immense power of the Church that induced his criminal behaviour. As for Sally, her self-attribution of authority and punishment is even more noteworthy since, contrary to Packie, who remains sidelined from then on, she grows in relevance in the story and dominates its climax, which suggests that gender plays a significant role in the configuration of the two vigilantes.

Quite interestingly, Sally is initially presented as a desperate young woman looking for clues that might lead her to her brother's murderer, and there are indications of her inceptive impotence and loss. Hence, when first meeting Phoebe, she looked "young and vulnerable" (2013, 131), while as the two women forge a closer friendship, the narrator insists on her mourning and anguish through Phoebe's thoughts like "What must it be like for her, coming to consciousness each morning and remembering yet again her brother's death and the cruel circumstances in which he had died?" (2013, 182). As it happened to Packie, grief for the damage done to a close relative is presented as an important affect and a determining factor for vigilantism, which echoes as well the relational dimension of vulnerability mentioned above. However, there is an interesting asymmetry between the two vigilantes, as Sally reconducts such affect and vulnerability in a fully agentic way,[7] whereby her reaction, also much more premeditated than Packie's, does not require the intervention of other people rather than herself. In this sense, with the course of events, there is an important twist in her characterisation that involves not only an intimate encounter with Phoebe that empowers both women, but most noticeably, a gradually stronger conviction to fight for her dead brother, whatever costs this may bring for her. Thus, her determination

illustrates Butler's idea that "political resistance relies fundamentally on the mobilization of vulnerability, which means that vulnerability can be a way of being exposed and agentic at the same time" (2016, 24). As Sally informs Phoebe, "I've no intention of ending up dead in the canal, like poor James did" (2013, 187), while shortly afterwards we hear that "The light in her eyes had turned cold [...] '*I*'ll find out,' she said. 'I won't rest until I do'" (2013, 195, original emphasis).

From this point on, Black's novel offers a thought-provoking commentary on the possibilities of resistance, along with the intersectional forms of conspiracy and unobjective justice that despite being present in other titles in the series too, are not presented with the acute critique to the misdeeds of the Church that characterises *Holy Orders*. As Murphy states, in the novel, there is a looming "connivance of a compliant, cowed government with the lordly Church in the oppressive era of postwar Irish history" (2013). Such ethos and its lingering effects are actually acknowledged by Sally when she admits to Phoebe: "I know what this place is like, the secretiveness, the hidden things" (2013, 203). However, it is when her own affects are stirred and she confirms the inefficiency and limited scope of action of the official forces of the law that she decides to resist vulnerability and find her own way to justice. Her indignation is evidenced in questions like "But they wouldn't –Dr Quirke, the guards– [...] they wouldn't let his death go unsolved, would they?" (2013, 204). This cross-examination illustrates Christiana Gregoriou's words in *Deviance in Contemporary Crime Fiction*: "The existence of this genre, perhaps more than any other, depends on the knowledge that everything will be 'made right in the end', and this necessity for narrative closure is identified with the existence of the Law. Such narratives adopt an ideological division between the legal and the illegal that at close inspection appears to be paradoxical" (2007, 54). Yet, as Black himself has claimed, "in these books nothing is ever resolved" and "the baddies are not put away" (Inskeep 2011). Such noir practice of non-conclusive cases is also articulated in the novel through Phoebe, the eternal sceptic about the mechanisms used in the city to deal with criminality, who also regularly reproaches her father for his unwillingness to fight harder against the establishment: "Nothing ever happens [...] People commit murder and get away with it. [...] You let them get away with it" (2013, 291). To this complaint, Quirke responds with the sententious phrase that inspires the title of this chapter: "Nobody kills a priest. [...] Not even the likes of Packie Joyce will kill a priest" (2013, 291). The disparate position of

father and daughter, by which Phoebe appears much more indignant and combative than an inured, pragmatic Quirke, enables the author to introduce what I believe is one of the most figurative and scathing utterances in the whole series, and which arguably summarises the organisation of the plot of this particular novel.

Drawing on this complex representation of Ireland's executive dysfunctionality, Sally's vigilantism seems then expected, but her revengeful murder of Father Honan simply confirms the circularity of such deficit, as she justifies the killing on the inaction of those at the service of the law and on the same conspiracy politics she had previously denounced. Thus, in a symbolical scene where, disguised as a pregnant woman, Sally approaches the priest at the confessionary, she shoots him dead on the spot, with the certainty that the murder would be infallibly hidden from the media and public knowledge by order of the Church high ranks:

> This was, she knew, the only way. Phoebe's father would not do anything; neither would the police. It was up to her to make sure justice was done, and now she was going to do it […] They would cover it up, she supposed, as they covered up everything, every scandal. No she did not care. Yet it came to her that of all the things she had done in her life, most of them could have been undone. But not this. […] She had got justice for her brother. She had done what was needed. (2013, 297–299)

This passage is worth quoting at length as it conveys many of the elements of pathogenic vulnerability discussed above. Sally's careless ruminations underscore the orbit of dominance of the Church in its orchestration of schemes that, with the complicity of the press, would guarantee its infallibility, while having largely failed in its integrity and its duty of care for the vulnerable. Besides, through this criminal machination, Black illustrates what Quirke calls "the belt of the crozier" (2013, 304), opening up debates around the dialectics of blame and responsibility that lay at the heart of Ireland's confessional state. In *Detecting the Social*, Mary Evans, Sarah Moor and Hazel Johnstone establish a distinction between these two terms, whereby the former alludes to "something that a person or group allocates to another" and the latter "refers to someone being answerable for a deed. Responsibility is something that is allocated on the basis of a forensic examination of someone's role in an event or act, and that's because it infers causation. To accept responsibility means acknowledging that something you did caused something

to happen (or, that something you *didn't* do was instrumental in an event)" (2019, 64–65, original emphasis). With this distinction in mind, we can hence consider that the flow of blame can be immediately allocated to Sally, whereas the complot politics of the Church and its inherent corruption ultimately appear as responsible for the crime. Indeed, as Evans, Moore and Johnstone further observe, in contemporary crime fiction, quite often "those who do bad things are rarely presented to us as *agents*, but rather *products* of abusive relationships and cultures of corruption" and the onus resides in "identifying the underlying structures that gave rise to these specific bad episodes" (2019, 80–81, original emphasis). In this case, Father Honan's murder, and Jimmy's, figure as indirect offshoots to the institutional precariousness of the Church and as paradigms of the pathogenic vulnerability that can occur if, as the novel suggests, the omnipotent and omnipresent hegemony of the Church hierarchy remains impenetrable.

5.4 Conclusions

All in all, a thorough analysis of *Holy Orders* reveals the systematic precarisation of individuals in contemporary Ireland and its extensive effects. With this literary representation of the different forms of vulnerability that the dysfunctionally moral practices of the Catholic Church and its allies effected upon subjects from different social, age and gender groups, we can recognise how the failure of the infrastructural norms of the country has been endemic and, in turn, paradoxically pathogenic. The noir context of systemic crime constructed by Black denotes the interconnection of the state artefacts as well as their biased interpretations of the official rules so as to secure their power and the impunity of the clerical figures, gravely ignoring the subsequent reproduction of vulnerability that such malpractices entail. Thus, this Quirke novel reinforces the idea that "badly designed social policy responses to vulnerability can also cause or compound major capability failure, thereby entrenching social inequality and injustice" (McKenzie 2014, 54). The author's treatment of trauma and vigilantism as products of that major precarisation demonstrates that resisting the grip of the authorities is unequivocally arduous and a challenge that may generate further complications. This position certainly permeates his noir account of a state of diffuse justice and incomplete responsibility that linger up to the present, as many of its effects are still visible and its agents have not been fully made accountable. The novel

then, asks readers to think about the steps that need to be taken in Ireland so as to reach a social order in which, echoing Butler and Sabsay's arguments, the recurrent decentredness of vulnerable subjects is surmounted and the infrastructural conditions to which they are inexorably attached make lives fully livable.

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Notes

1. The terms used throughout time in reference to this community include "tinker", "gypsy", "vagrant", "tramp" and "traveller", although in recent decades, "traveller" and "travelling people" are most consistently preferred. In this chapter, and following Black, I will use "tinker" and "traveller" interchangeably.
2. Black has provided quite significant insights into these social controversies in other titles of the series, like *Christine Falls* (2006) and *Even the Dead* (2015), *Elegy for April* (2010) and *A Death in Summer* (2011), respectively.
3. Since the 1990s, a large number of Church-related scandals have been aired with a great deal of shock and pain for the Irish population and the international community. The testimonies of survivors, as well as the campaigns of different advocacy groups and the attention from scholars, artists and cultural commentators have been crucial for the public rendering of criminal acts and procedures that had remained secluded and socio-politically untreated on a wide scale. Among such pervasive wrongdoing, the most prominent cases were the sexual abuses of children by the Catholic clergy in so-called Industrial Schools, the psychological and physical maltreatment of women in Magdalene Laundries, which were managed by religious orders, and the illegal adoption of babies born to women incarcerated in Mother and Baby Homes, that were state-funded but also run by the Church. For a detailed description of these controversies, see Raftery and O'Sullivan (1999), Smith (2007) and Milotte (2012), and for the latest analysis of their literary representations, see Valente and Gayle Backus (2020). Besides, the Irish cases obviously resonate with similar atrocities committed

in other European countries, like the sexual molestation of children by the clergy in Spain, Poland and Italy, to name but a few, and the Spanish unsolved scandal of "bebés robados" (stolen children from single mothers and "unsuitable families" during Franco's regime).

4. While falling out of the scope of this chapter, the discussion about the Irish travellers' distinctive "way of life" has centred a wide number of approaches to the discrimination that they have experienced for centuries. This approach has actually displaced more common notions of race and othering, so that the differentiation of this community has led to the construction of concepts such as "neo-racism" or "culturalist racism" (Helleiner, 7–9).
5. A quite useful glossary of words in Cant, the language of the Irish travellers, is included in the author's note at the end of the novel. According to it, the word *mugathawn* means "fool".
6. For a gendered approach to anti-Travellers racism after the foundation of the Irish State, see Helleiner 67–68, and for the representation of traveller women in contemporary literature and cinema, see Terrazas-Gallego (2019).
7. With Sally's final retaliation, Black provides an invigorating gendered perspective of vigilantism that dismantles the masculinist connotations traditionally associated with the term. A similar rendering of the lone avenger through a gender-related prism and its subversion of the conventions of sovereign subjectivity is analysed in Guillermo Iglesias Diaz's chapter included in this collection.

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