

Splitting out of Class: Family and Social Class as Schizophrenogenic Forces in Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme**

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ABSTRACT

McGuinness's *The Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985) can be considered an exemplary play in which he asserts how historical, political, and social institutions impact individuals, resulting in schizoid states. This study of family and social class as oppressive institutions in Irish society, as reflected in *Sons of Ulster*, examines the split self of the main character, Kenneth Pyper with respect to Deleuze and Guattari's¹ schizoanalysis theory, which considers the idea of split self into social and self-identity as emancipation from social and political pressures. Pyper's split self will be interpreted from a cultural-critical standpoint rather than a "clinical schizophrenic" one. In this way, McGuinness criticizes family and social class institutions as schizophrenogenic forces that constrain the individual by splitting the main character into Elder and Younger Pyper in *Sons of Ulster*.

Keywords: Deleuze and Guattari, Frank McGuinness, Irish Drama, Schizoanalysis, Sons of Ulster

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¹ As the names of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari will be referenced throughout this study, their names will be stated only once and abbreviated (D&G) for the rest of the study. The same rule will be applied to the play, *The Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*.

Introduction

“There are but two families in the world
(...) the Haves and the Havenots”²

In 1985, McGuinness wrote *Sons of Ulster*, a play that helped him establish his reputation and put him at the forefront as a significant Irish playwright alongside Thomas Kilroy, Brian Friel, and Tom Murphy. McGuinness employs the memory play structure in the play, with the story told by an old Ulsterman-Loyalist named Old Pyper. The play is about four pairs of Loyalist Ulstermen who fought at the Somme in 1916 during the First World War. *Sons of Ulster* is the critical site of this study in terms of how the “family” and the “social class” are “territorialities” in the life and psychological condition of the protagonist, Pyper. It can be seen through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari’s (D&G) theory of “schizoanalysis.”

The terms “schizoid” and “schizophrenic” are used not as purely clinical or psychiatric terms but rather as a means of freedom, escape, and breaking free of the oppression people experience in society. Eugene W. Holland, a professor and writer of interdisciplinary and critical theory, comments on the term schizophrenia, indicating its derivation from the clinical term: “For schizoanalysis, schizophrenia is not the disease or mental disturbance characterizing or defining schizophrenics.”³ D&G brought a fresh and broader perspective and gave the term “schizophrenia” a new dimension, including social, historical, and political conditions. For them, the concept of schizophrenia is “often through quite ordinary people, the light began to break through the cracks in our all-too-closed minds. Madness need not be all breakdowns. It may also be breakthrough.”⁴ This idea of breaking through, as put forward by D&G, refers to the revolutionary feature of “the schizo” who attempts to escape from oppressive institutions. In this respect, every society has its own major components of social structures consisting of institutions that are called *the oedipalized territorialities*⁵, such as family, religion, nation, and state. These institutions, called “territorialities” by DG, play an important role in shaping the individuals’ identity and establishing the limits of proper behavior for them. However, although some people can easily adapt to and accommodate the rules and laws of these territorialities and lead their lives accordingly, others become entrapped and suffocated by these rules, resulting in a mental breakdown. Therefore, the play *Sons of Ulster* will have been discussed as a paradigmatic example to which DG’s schizoanalytical method can be applied. The protagonist in the play experiences territorial oppression in his life in one way or another, and as a result, he has difficulty subjecting himself to rules and norms. Kenneth Pyper used Old and Young Pyper to free himself from oppression and live beyond all territorial laws and rules.

The best paradigmatic outcome of McGuinness’s enthusiasm as a playwright and his political sensibility as an Irishman is perhaps *Sons of Ulster*, which was originally performed at the Peacock Stage of the Abbey Theater, Dublin, in 1985. The play was met with a positive response from the audiences, and “[a]fter the closing of Mason’s Abbey production which extensively toured Northern Ireland with great success, it has already had an English production in London, at the Hampstead Theater, directed by Michael Attenborough”⁶ in 1986. This play was named the Evening Standard’s “Most Promising Playwright.” Helen Lojek summarized the play’s success as follows: “The response was overwhelmingly positive, and the play has been revived numerous times. Like *Translations*, it breaks down the grand narratives of the past and deliberately undermines stereotypical understandings of sect and violence – and sex, since the play has gay characters.”⁷ Due to the play’s subject matter, McGuinness portrays a wide range of characters from various backgrounds, sexual orientations, and religions. However, McGuinness not only creates a multifaceted play in terms of theme and subject matter, but also deploys some postmodern elements, occasionally perplexing and even further distressing the audience with tragic scenes. In *Sons of Ulster*, the playwright subverts the chronological order of time, and this nonlinear structure of time is the most significant postmodern technique in the play.

This historical play in four parts is about four pairs of young Ulstermen – Loyalists from Northern Ireland – who volunteer to fight for Great Britain during the First World War. Seven of the eight characters in the play die at the Battle of the Somme, with the exception of Kenneth Pyper, the protagonist and narrator of the play. Since the play does not follow a linear plot structure and is classified as a memory play, the reader is greeted by the feeling of Pyper being haunted by his past and the memory of his friends. Elder Pyper reminisces about his days at war in his old age, recounting his sorrow and burden as the sole survivor. Part One “Remembrance” opens with Elder Pyper waking up

² Cervantes Miguel De, *Don Quixote*, trans. John Ruthford (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 1348.

³ Eugene Holland, *Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1999), 2.

⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: Minnesota U.P., 1983), 131

⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, xvii.

⁶ Michael Etherton, *Contemporary Irish Dramatists* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 47.

⁷ Helen Lojek, “Troubling Perspectives: Northern Ireland, the ‘Troubles’ and Drama”, in *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama 1880-2005*, ed. Mary Luckhurst (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 338.

and refusing to remember the past. It takes the form of a monologue and is set in the present day, with Kenneth Pyper bearing the burden of remembrance and being the only survivor of the eight volunteers. After Pyper's reluctance to recall his war memories, the rest of the play takes place in the past and presents a tripartite dramatization of the period between the enlistment of the seven Ulstermen in the army and the moments preceding their deaths at the Somme.⁸

In Part Two, "Initiation," McGuinness sets the play in the past in a makeshift barracks where he brings the seven dead Ulstermen to life on the stage. The characters appear once again young and alive on the stage, eliminating the somber atmosphere of Part One: Remembrance. This part takes the form of a "reception" where Ulstermen become acquainted with each other. Kenneth Pyper and Craig appear first onstage, where Pyper cuts his thumb and overstates this situation by asking Craig to kiss his bleeding thumb. Through Part Two, Craig and Pyper's conversation and attraction to each other suggest a shared homosexuality. Furthermore, Pyper's constant compliment of Craig's "remarkably fine skin," particularly when he further utters "remarkably fine for a man,"⁹ and Craig's calling Pyper "rare,"¹⁰ provide insight into his sexual orientation. The other members of the group join Pyper and Craig, whereupon the eight Ulstermen not only adjust to army life but also to each other. Here, Pyper differs not only by his sexual orientation, but also by his family background, since he belongs to a higher social class than the rest of the group. Millen, for example, is a baker, Moore is a dyer, Roulston is a preacher, and Craig is a blacksmith. Pyper is a sculptor and artist who does not come from a working-class family like the rest of the group. At the end of Part Two, each of them is preoccupied with different tasks, except for Craig and Pyper, who slits his left hand with his penknife. Craig later bandages Pyper's bleeding hand, referring to their homosexual tendencies. The last scene of the play, evoking the Red Hand emblem used by Protestants in Northern Ireland, indicates the devotion of Ulstermen to their cause, as well as their self-sacrifice, without a second thought about their lives, adding to the possibility of a homosexual attraction between Pyper and Craig.

Part Three, "Pairing," takes place five months after Part Two when the eight volunteers have completed their training and adjusted to army life. However, they become weary of war realizing how futile it is to kill and be killed in it. Therefore, they cannot longer define themselves as patriotic or be regarded as heroes fighting for their country. In this sense, all of them go through a process, developing new identities that differ from the stereotype of a soldier. This section reveals the trauma of the war on the individuals by assigning different locations to each pair. Part Four, "Bonding," shows how the tie between the eight Ulstermen grew stronger in the face of war's brutality and futility. When Part Four begins in a trench near the Somme, the eight volunteer Ulstermen appear on stage together, with McIlwaine, Young Pyper, and Millen awake and the rest sleeping. This time, the eight volunteers are confronted with the meaninglessness of war and death. When they prepare for "the real thing,"¹¹ they cannot help questioning the necessity of war, since they all know what awaits them at the Somme. In the final scene, Anderson offers an orange sash to Pyper as a token of their unity and friendship, while Young Pyper chants "Ulster" before the battle. Elder Pyper appears on stage at this point, seeing his own ghost, Younger Pyper, and is reminded that all are dead.

Family and Social Class as the Cause of Schizophrenic Split of the Self

What is so striking throughout the play is Kenneth Pyper's difference from the rest of the group with his sexual orientation, family background, and "anarchic nature"¹² as Pine, a writer and a lecturer on modern drama, notes. Cregan, a scholar in Irish Studies, further observes that Pyper's character is "hostile and brave, deviant and confrontational."¹³ *Sons of Ulster* exemplifies the concept of the split self by dividing Kenneth Pyper's self into Old and Young Pyper on the stage. Kenneth Pyper's divided self is more of a transformation of his character from youth to old age, as well as an overt manifestation of the territorialities of family and social class as authorities wielding power over the individual and denying him the freedom to be true to himself. Dean also makes the following observations about Pyper's split self: "Kenneth Pyper appears in two incarnations—old and young. That the roles are played by two different actors underscores how profoundly unlike the young man the Elder Pyper is."¹⁴ Moreover, Pyper's divided self acutely indicates his internal change as the sole survivor among the eight comrades rather than an external split.

Importantly, as the driving forces behind Pyper's split self, social class and family become more prominent. What is significant in the play about social class and the oppression exerted on Kenneth Pyper is that Northern Ireland is part

⁸ Nally Kenneth, *Celebrating Confusion: The Theatre of Frank McGuinness*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 79.

⁹ Frank McGuinness, *Plays: The Factory Girls; Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme; Innocence; Carthaginians; Baglady* (Faber, 1996), 100.

¹⁰ McGuinness, *Plays: The Factory Girls; Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme; Innocence; Carthaginians; Baglady* 106.

¹¹ McGuinness, *Plays: The Factory Girls; Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme; Innocence; Carthaginians; Baglady* 184.

¹² Emilie Pine, "The Tyranny of Memory: Remembering the Great War in Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*", *Irish University Review* 40, no. 1 (2010): 60.

¹³ Cregan, *Frank McGuinness's Dramaturgy of Difference and the Irish Theatre* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 62.

¹⁴ Joan FitzPatrick Dean, "Self-Dramatization in the Plays of Frank McGuinness", *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua*, JSTOR, 3, no. 1 (1999): 102.

of the United Kingdom of Great Britain. This belonging necessitates or naturally leads to Northern Ireland adopting the English social class system, in its most basic form, consisting of three basic categories: the upper class, the middle class, and the working class, resulting in social stratification.

Focusing on the relationship between McGuinness and Northern Ireland, he was compared with other Irish playwrights such as O'Casey and Shaw who "convey the differing perspectives of the Irelands: South and Abroad,"¹⁵ Schrank observes that McGuinness is devoted to the North. When McGuinness's *Sons of Ulster* was first staged, it caused a stir because it was a Catholic playwright's play set in Northern Ireland and centered on Northern Irish Protestants rather than the Irish Republic and Catholics. Inasmuch as McGuinness's sympathetic treatment sparked debate of Northern Unionists, Eamonn Jordan unveils McGuinness's real purpose behind this concern to be "McGuinness' theatrical search for the existence of many voices."¹⁶ His interest in pluralities having been reflected just before writing *Sons of Ulster*, McGuinness, in an interview in 1985, draws attention to "[t]he neglect of diversities other than the Catholic-Protestant/Nationalist-Unionist ones in Field Day"¹⁷: the diversities between the needs of men and the needs of women, between the needs not simply of rich and poor, but within the middle class, and of the homosexual and the heterosexual."¹⁸ McGuinness emphasizes the pluralities that pervade every establishment in Ireland, from religious institution to social class, and previously, *Sons of Ulster* provides a variety of classes and professions, reflecting McGuinness' keen interest in pluralities, and "the men, including Young Pyper, come from different walks of Ulster life, and they pair off according to class, politics, and sexual orientation."¹⁹ In this regard, Kenneth Pyper appears to be the most distinctive and remarkable character on the stage. His infuriating attitude toward the others, his break with the soldier stereotype, and his social class set him apart from the other soldiers in *Sons of Ulster*. Although this distinction may be interpreted as a competitive advantage, Pyper eventually comes to a dead end, causing him to be "divided." Regrettably, Pyper can only resent his social standing rather than reap its benefits.

According to D&G's definition of "schizo," the protagonist of *Sons of Ulster* is the "schizo" who considers territorialities that wield power over the individual as the cause of schizophrenic split of the self. According to Fakhkonandeh and Sümbül, the term schizophrenia has been used to expose the historically-ideologically conditioned limits of political, cultural, and therapeutic discourses, as well as social morality.²⁰ Therefore, Pyper, who appears on stage as a divided self, brings his unconscious to the surface to be cured, freeing himself from the constraints of his family and the expectations of his social class. In other words, Pyper's divided self can be explained in terms of D&G's theory of schizoanalysis, as it occurs as a result of the desire to escape what keeps him from manifesting his true identity and suppresses his individuality. Consequently, this person is considered a "schizo revolutionary type":

schizo revolutionary type that follows the lines of escape of desire; breaches the wall and causes flows to move. The revolutionary knows that escape is revolutionary- withdrawal, freaks— provided one sweeps away the social cover on leaving, or causes a piece of the system to get lost in the shuffle. What matters is to break through the wall.²¹

What is striking here is the driving force(s) of this revolutionary type: the oppression of the territorialities of the family and the social class. Unlike the aristocracy, who mostly benefit from their social standing, Pyper openly suffers from and becomes a victim of his social standing. Although McGuinness or Pyper himself does not explicitly reflect Pyper's social status, his comrades persistently emphasize his distinctiveness, that is, his being an aristocrat. Throughout the play, Pyper remains reticent about his social status, yet insinuates it through his words. For example, in his dialogue with Millen and Moore, Pyper states: "I've never done a day's work in my life."²² In addition, he unconsciously reveals his family history during his conversation with Craig.

Pyper: Greyhounds?

Craig: You know about dogs?

*Pyper: We bred, the family bred greyhounds.*²³

¹⁵ Bernice Schrank, "World War One in Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme", in *The Theatre of Frank McGuinness: Stages of Mutability*, ed. Helen Lojek, Dublin (Ireland: Carysfort Press: 2002), 23.

¹⁶ Eamonn Jordan, *The Feast of Famine: The Plays of Frank McGuinness* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), 122.

¹⁷ Outdoor music festival that is annually held in London

¹⁸ Jennifer Fitzgerald et al., "The Arts and Ideology: Jennifer Fitzgerald Talks to Seamus Deane, Joan Fowler and Frank McGuinness", *The Crane Bag*, 9, no. 2 (1985): 65.

¹⁹ Sanford Sternlicht, *A Reader's Guide to Modern Irish Drama* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 140.

²⁰ Alireza Fakhkonandeh, and Yiğit Sümbül. 'Art as Symptom or Symptomatology? Performative Subjects, Capitalist Performativity, and Performance-Based Therapy in Duncan Macmillan's *People, Places and Things*'. *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, 23, no. 4 (2021): 503.

²¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, xvii.

²² McGuinness, *Plays: The Factory Girls; Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme; Innocence; Carthaginians; Baglady*, 109.

²³ McGuinness, *Plays: The Factory Girls; Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme; Innocence; Carthaginians; Baglady*, 116.

Although this detail may appear insignificant, it effectively reveals Pyper's background, with his family having bred greyhounds, the only breed of dog mentioned in the Bible and one of the most popular dogs with the British aristocracy as an indication of power and wealth. In particular, greyhounds became much more differentiated from Queen Victoria's husband, Albert, "gifting a white greyhound, called Eos, to the Queen"²⁴; and this led to the association of this type of dog with royalty and nobility and became the representation of the aristocratic way of life. By this example, Pyper cannot leave his past behind, but rather that it comes back to haunt him. Because Young Pyper is dissatisfied with the oppression of his social class, McGuinness frames Pyper's tragic story in this play and demonstrates his oppression within the aforementioned territoriality. In Part Two: "Initiation," Pyper himself informs us that he is "a sculptor" and "works with stone."²⁵ In this respect, as an artist, Pyper unearths his identity as a member of the aristocracy. The rest of the group's members are identified and categorized as workers' by their jobs; these seven Ulstermen acknowledge their low position in society and are aware of the expectations society places on them, such as work and quality of work life. Conversely, Pyper recognizes the constraints and expectations placed on him and is thus trapped by the rules of his class as an artist. His speech deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

Pyper: ... I thought I was doing the same when I cleared out of this country and went to do something with my heart and my eyes and my hands and my brains. Something I could not do here as the eldest son of a respectable family whose greatest boast is that in their house Sir Edward Carson, savior of their tribe danced in the finest gathering Armagh had ever seen. I escaped Carson's dance. While you were running with your precious motors to bring in his guns, I escaped Carson's dance, David. I got out to create, not destroy. But the gods wouldn't allow that. I could not create. That's the real horror of what I found in Paris, not the corpse of a dead whore. I couldn't look at my life's work, for when I saw my hands working they were not mine but the hands of my ancestors, interfering, and I could not be rid of that interference. I could not create. I could only preserve. Preserve my flesh and blood, what I'd seen, what I'd learned. It wasn't enough. I was contaminated. I smashed my sculpture and I rejected any woman who would continue my breed. I destroyed one to make that certain. And I would destroy my own life. I would take up arms at the call of my Protestant fathers. I would kill in their name and I would die in their name. To win their respect would be my sole act of revenge, revenge for the bad joke they had played on me in making me sufficiently different to believe I was unique, when my true uniqueness lay only in how alike them I really was. And then the unseen obstacle in my fate. I met you.²⁶

This statement shows that Pyper is not content with his social status or family. No matter how hard Pyper tries to distance himself from his family's lavish lifestyle, he cannot separate himself from his family and their fancy life. Unlike most people who can enjoy the benefits of belonging to a "swanky" group, Pyper carries his family history like a burden of the rules and laws of his class.²⁷ He suffers, in consequence, from not being able to act out his true self, and thus challenging the privileges or, in other words, "obstacles" of that society through "split self." In this sense, the "schizoanalysis" of D&G will help us establish the connection between Pyper's class background and his divided self.

Pyper is not allowed to behave like the rest of the society, but rather under the rules and laws of his family and his social class. Thus, Elder Pyper regards his younger self as an attempt to escape from the boundaries he encountered in his past. He acknowledges that should he be persistent in acting out his true personality, he will have to bear the consequences of being excommunicated from his own family. Therefore, through his younger self, he has found a way to achieve his emancipation:

Mcllwaine: Pyper? You come from a swanky family, don't you?

Pyper: Why ask that now?

Mcllwaine: I'm just beginning to wonder what you're doing down with us instead of being with them.

Pyper: And who are they?

Mcllwaine: Top brass.

Pyper: I'm not top brass, Mcllwaine. Maybe once. Not now. I blotted my copy book.

Mcllwaine: How?

[...]

Pyper: Just being the black sheep.²⁸

The above scene indeed depicts how much Pyper yearns to pull himself away from his roots and thus attempts to break with the past as well as the awareness of others of his social status. Although Pyper does not explicitly tell why he refers to himself as "black sheep," the conversation between Mcllwaine and Anderson reveals that the group is aware of Pyper's same-gender relationships and of his being the "black sheep" in his family and community:

²⁴ A Dog's Life: Eos! Prince Albert's Loyal Greyhound', *The Esoteric Curiosa* (blog), 16 November 2010, <http://theesotericcuriosa.blogspot.com/2010/11/dogs-life-eos-prince-alberts-loyal.html>.

²⁵ McGuinness, 118.

²⁶ McGuinness, Plays: *The Factory Girls; Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme; Innocence; Carthaginians; Baglady*, 163–64.

²⁷ As Karl Marx argues "the class in its turn achieves an independent existence over against the individuals, so that the latter find their conditions of existence predestined, and hence have their position in life and their personal development assigned to them by their class, become subsumed under it." (Marx, "The German Ideology," 20.)

²⁸ McGuinness, Plays: *The Factory Girls; Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme; Innocence; Carthaginians; Baglady*, 172.

Mcllwaine: *He's some fighter though. Pyper. Who would have thought it?*

Anderson: *Who indeed?*

Mcllwaine: *You said he was a milksop.*

Anderson: *There's still something rotten there. That time Craig threw himself on him to save him.*

Mcllwaine: *What about them?*

Anderson: *The look on their faces. Something rotten.²⁹*

In this regard, due to his sexual orientation, Pyper is forced out of not only his family but also the society in which he lives. Although heterosexuality is regarded as normal sexual orientation in patriarchal societies, Pyper is an outcast because of his sexuality. The British aristocracy, with its strict heteronormative and patriarchal codes, has no tolerance for people like Pyper. For example, the reason behind the ostracization of homosexuals, especially in the upper classes, can be explained as follows.

homosexuality would completely disrupt the established codes of masculinity, class position, capitalism, and patriarchy because it did not fit into the boundaries of the established social ideology. If homosexuality could not be suppressed and controlled, like other deviant behaviors, it could disrupt the ideology of the entire British Empire.³⁰

In this sense, aristocracy and upper-class men are expected to “create a heteronormative public identity that supports the traditional view of the family as a place of stability, conforms to England’s capitalist social ideology.”³¹ Therefore, Pyper conceives that his so-called “rareness” dishonors his family name as it does not fit traditional family life and therefore is ostracized by his own community. Since aristocracy “was an institution—a set of constraints ... that were devised to control the behavior of a group of individuals,”³² Pyper is forced by his family and social class to follow their rules and laws. However, when his family is unable to control Pyper and tolerate his unique sexual orientation, he is banished to France, where such deviations from social norms and values may be more tolerable than in Northern Ireland. Pyper is not only banished to France to keep him out of the public eye, but he is also completely cut off from his family by their decision to disinherit him:

Pyper: *I remember that time in France.*

Craig: *What?*

Pyper: *In France. I nearly starved there.*

Craig: *You've been there?*

Moore: *When were you there?*

Millen: *What's it like?*

[...]

Pyper: *That time I thought my end had come. Well-deserved bad end. Absolutely friendless. ...*

Moore: *You had no money at all or people to pull you through?*

Pyper: *None.³³*

In this scene, it is clear that Pyper, by embracing his homosexuality and rejecting the heteronormative codes that dominate his family and society, is permanently observed from his community and has no one to lean on. Despite how Pyper’s homosexuality is interpreted “as a quality that excludes him from the constraints of social class. Or perhaps it is rather that, as a single gay man ... he has removed himself from the heteronormative social paradigm,”³⁴ Pyper’s homosexuality seems to have caused his family to exert power over him to lead to psychological breakdown.

Furthermore, the moment he realizes “exit from the aristocratic group was easy, quick, and often permanent”³⁵ upon a small infraction, Pyper attempts to abdicate his responsibilities and thus overcome repression over himself by recoding the system according to his own desire: he enlists in the army stating “I enlisted in the hope of death.”³⁶ Notwithstanding, in bewilderment, Mcllwaine foregrounds the social status of Pyper and cannot help questioning why he fights with them at the Somme since only the working-class members can be “mere pawns in an aristocratic game,”³⁷ whereas upper-class people, in comparison to the working class, “enjoy better health; live longer; live in superior homes; with more amenities, have more money to spend; work shorter hours; receive different and longer education; and are

²⁹ McGuinness, *Plays: The Factory Girls; Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme; Innocence; Carthaginians; Baglady*, 147.

³⁰ Jeffrey Bukowski, “Unseen Identity” (M.A. thesis, University of Vermont, 2008), 5.

³¹ Bukowski, 8.

³² Douglas W. Allen, ‘A Theory of the Pre-modern British Aristocracy’, *Explorations in Economic History* 46, no. 3 (2009): 299.

³³ McGuinness, *Plays: The Factory Girls; Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme; Innocence; Carthaginians; Baglady*, 110.

³⁴ Joseph Corr, ‘Queer Identities During the Troubles in Northern Ireland: The Birth of Queer Theatre in Northern Ireland.’ (PhD Thesis, University of East Anglia, 2020), 59.

³⁵ Allen, ‘A Theory of the Pre-modern British Aristocracy’, *Explorations in Economic History*, 46, no. 3 (2009): 299

³⁶ McGuinness, *Plays: The Factory Girls; Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme; Innocence; Carthaginians; Baglady*, 98.

³⁷ Declan Kiberd, ‘Frank McGuinness and the Sons of Ulster’, *The Yearbook of English Studies* 35, no. 1 (2005): 282.

educationally more successful... and have different tastes in the mass media, and the arts”.³⁸ McIlwaine is aware of this social structure and, as a result, the social stratification that places him beneath Pyper as a working-class member. McIlwaine realizes that life can provide Pyper with every opportunity, whereas he and his kind cannot enjoy life’s simple pleasures due to their social status. McIlwaine behaves properly according to his social status, whereas Pyper perplexes his group with his unconventional attitude. In this regard, his questions allow him to comprehend the depths of Pyper’s motivation for joining the army and even agreeing to be cannon fodder like ordinary people. Not only McIlwaine, but also Craig, highlight Pyper’s distinction in terms of social standing in the play:

Pyper: *Why are you changing?*

Craig: *Because you’re going back. You’ll go back to your proud family. The brave eldest son. Made a man of himself in Flanders. Damn you, after listening to that bit of rabble-rousing, I saw through you. You’re wasted here with us. You’re not of us, man. You’re a leader. You got what you wanted. You always have, you always will. You’ll come through today because you learned to want it.*³⁹

Scott, a sociologist, whose research focuses on political sociology and social stratification, also expresses the possible life chances and the distinction between the working class and the upper class as follows: “A status situation is a causal component in life chances, and a sophisticated sociological analysis must recognize that inequalities in life chances are the effects of both class and status situations, which operate conjointly to determine life chances.”⁴⁰ However, what McIlwaine and Craig lack is Pyper’s dissatisfaction and discordance with aristocratic society. In this sense, Pyper’s situation could aptly be summarized: emotionally and mentally at a dead end due to his background and personal history.⁴¹ Ostensibly, Pyper refuses to be subjected to the aristocracy’s economic and cultural discrimination and denies his “top brass” background as McIlwaine perceives it. Thus, Elder Pyper, reminiscing about his youth and bringing his shadow, Younger Pyper, onto the stage, tries to overcome the constraints that bind him: D&G’s remarks could be illuminating in this regard.

The schizo has his own system of co-ordinates for situating himself at his disposal, because, first of all, he has at his disposal his very own recording code, which does not coincide with the social code, or coincides with it only in order to parody it. The code of delirium or of desire proves to have an extraordinary fluidity.⁴²

According to this statement, it is fair to say that the schizo does not want to conform to the constraints of social codes; even if he does, the schizo’s only goal is to mock them. Similarly, Pyper rejects the social code of his social class and family. Throughout the play, he is filled with doubt and ambiguity about his class’s traditions and religious and political affiliations. Instead of taking a stand on any issue, he avoids any certainty in his search for his true identity.

Furthermore, working-class people are expected to work in manual labor to serve the aristocracy’s needs, whereas the upper classes enjoy their full privileges, with no regard for money or occupation. They work in the arts, the media, and politics. At its most basic, they recreate themselves doing nothing while reaping the benefits of their social standing. In this regard, Kozyr-Kowalski divides society’s social stratification into two groups by emphasizing the sense of alienation between these groups: one merely occupies himself/herself with productive work. At the same time, the other appears to enjoy social activities, having shifted the burden of productive work onto the first group’s shoulders.⁴³

Nonetheless, these living standards do not satisfy Pyper; rather, they lead him to an existential crisis in which he is expected not to work but only to maintain his life as well as to live up to the rules and laws of his social class by preserving its traditions. Upon the question of Craig, “Why did you enlist, Pyper?,” he responds: “I enlisted, before I was conscripted, because I’d nothing better to do. No, that’s wrong. I’d nothing else to do. I enlisted because I’m dying anyway. I want it over quickly.”⁴⁴ Craig and the rest of Ulstermen cannot hide their astonishment at Pyper’s joining the army. Furthermore, Pyper abandons his aristocratic title and becomes one of the ordinary soldiers with no rank who fight in the trenches until they die:

Craig: *Who the hell are you?*

Pyper: *Pyper, sir, Kenneth Pyper.*

Craig: *Are you sure, Pyper –*

Pyper: *Call me Kenneth.*

[...]

Pyper: *Yes, sir, I wish to serve, sir.*⁴⁵

³⁸ Ivan Reid, *Social Class Differences in Britain: A Sourcebook* (London: Open Books, 1977), 234.

³⁹ McGuinness, *Plays: The Factory Girls; Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme; Innocence; Carthaginians; Baglady*, 192.

⁴⁰ Scott, ‘Social Class and Stratification in Late Modernity’, *Acta Sociologica*, 45, no. 1 (2002): 23.

⁴¹ Etherton, *Contemporary Irish Dramatists*, 48.

⁴² Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 15.

⁴³ Stanislaw Kozyr-Kowalski, ‘Marx’s Theory of Classes and Social Strata and “Capital”’, *Polish Sociological Bulletin*, 18, no. 21 (1970): 18.

⁴⁴ McGuinness, *Plays: The Factory Girls; Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme; Innocence; Carthaginians; Baglady*, 111.

⁴⁵ McGuinness, *Plays: The Factory Girls; Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme; Innocence; Carthaginians; Baglady*, 104.

Craig: I'm not sir. I'm the same rank as you. I'm Craig. David Craig.

As can be observed, Pyper distances himself from the potential benefits of his aristocratic title, opting instead for a simple life in which he can live outside the expectations of his social class and truly express his own identity. Pyper realizes that his life has reached a point where he can no longer find meaning in life but instead lives according to the expectations of the aristocracy. R.D. Laing highlights the meaninglessness of life both as a cause and as an effect of a schizoid breakdown in individuals. According to Laing, everyone experiences such moods of futility, meaninglessness, and purposelessness in life and questions his being occasionally; however, such moods are more frequent in schizoid individuals. These moods arise because the faculties of perception and/or channels of action are not under the individual's control but are influenced by the split identity.⁴⁶

At this point, Pyper's constant attempt to find a purpose in his life and yet his failure in this are lent countenance by the theories of D&G and Laing. Pyper, the "schizo" in retrospect, projects his dual personality in Young Pyper who attempts to recreate the past and eliminate the repression of the territorialities: the family and the social class. In this way, he intends to liberate himself and cure himself from repression.

Conclusion

Ultimately, McGuinness has chosen "war" as his setting for *Sons of Ulster*, as one in which he could embrace diversity in terms of social class and occupation; therefore, McGuinness's play allows him to explore various issues ranging from homosexuality to social class in society. This four-part memory play in which the protagonist, Pyper, confronts the painful and tragic memories of the Battle of the Somme lays bare McGuinness's effort to reveal the etiology and symptomatology of the self-split and the resulting "schizophrenia." McGuinness presents the splitting of his protagonist Kenneth Pyper in *Sons of Ulster* due to the oppression of social class and the family. Kenneth Pyper, who appears on stage as Young Pyper and Old Pyper, fits D&G's definition of the schizo. From the beginning of the play to the end, Pyper recalls his past days under the oppression of the institutions of power, which caused him to split his self and "not experience himself as a complete person but rather as 'split' in various ways."⁴⁷ Kenneth Pyper is oppressed as a member of the Ulster aristocracy, whose expectations burden him. As an aristocrat and homosexual, he is aware that his peculiarity and sexual orientation will be frowned upon by his conservative and rule-based class, and he eventually finds himself cast out of his family and the public eye. At this point, Pyper recognizes the two paths awaiting him: to conform to these institutions' rules and constraints and lose his identity or diverge from these rules and emancipate himself. At the risk of being shunned by his community and stripped of his social class privileges, he enlists in the army and severs all ties with his family and the aristocracy to preserve his true self. Therefore, Pyper's split self is not an alterego, but occurs as an evolution of his self from youth to old age.

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⁴⁶ Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*, 80–82.

⁴⁷ Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*, 17

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