



1. The question of interpretative perspectives ...:

At first reckoning Roseanne (nee Clear) McNulty, the main character of this story appears to be completely the victim of fate, consigned for most of her adult life beginning during WWII in first the Sligo Mental Asylum, and then, for the following 30 years, the Roscommon Mental Hospital, the term of which begins in her early 70s. What propels the unfolding of the story is the pending

demolishment of the Roscommon Mental Hospital requiring moving its patients or inmates who continue to need care to the new replacement facility. So it must be established if Roseanne can or should or must continue in care in the new facility. The answer must come from Dr. Grene, the psychiatrist in charge and thus responsible for assessing Roseanne, which involves learning her history and how she came to be there in the first place. The risk to Roseanne in revealing her history to Dr. Grene is that he will learn that she is in fact ‘sane,’ has always been, and that liberation will turn her out into a world that she fears, given her history in it, and, now, having had little or no sustaining connection with it for over 60 years. But in keeping with her lifelong propensity to also wilfully place herself in harms way, she has taken up writing her story—Rosanne’s Testimony of Herself—in a handwritten manuscript she hides under a loose floorboard in her room.

... in keeping with her lifelong propensity to also wilfully place herself in harms way...

Roseanne’s history reveals that the pivotal moments leading to her life of “incarceration/sectioning” or alternatively and in practical effect ‘solitary confinement’ all involved definitive actions wilfully taken—what I call a ‘wilful placing of herself in harms way’

The mythic interpretation

Roseanne’s seeming fate was to live a thwarted wasted existence—“a sentence of living death”, but in enduring and then endeavouring to ‘tell her story’ to posterity truthfully, she achieves fulfillment of heroic-like proportion, turning her personal tragedy into a kind of triumph. Put another way she was destined to be a scapegoat, a sacrificial lamb but through her quality of spirit and her essential goodness and love for her father, husband, friends (few though they were), and child taken from her at birth both fulfilled and then succeeded in surviving the ‘assignment’ ...

“The mother’s [Mrs. McNulty’s] bungalow was nice enough but it smelt of boiling lamb—in my vivid state of alarm, I might have said sacrificial lamb. ... a lamb, boiling, boiling, spewing its distinctive mild, damp smell into the corridors. That was my impression. I was only near that bungalow twice in my whole life and both times felt like dying just to be near it. ... boiling meat took the biscuit. Why, I don’t know, since my mother relished all forms of meat, even offal and innards that would frighten a surgeon. She would dine quite happily on a lamb’s heart.” P158-9

“They’d rather be maids in America than old maids in bloody Ireland. I suddenly had a strong, a fervent, almost a violent wish to join them. It was the smell of that lamb was in my clothes, and only a sea-voyage across the Atlantic I thought would shift it. Now, but you see, I loved that Tom. God help me.” P162

“You could judge a lot of the effects of Mr de Valera’s famous economic war that time from the window of a train. We had been married in the springtime and because there was no market for lambs now, the farmers had to kill the lambs in the fields. So as the train went through the country every now and then we saw these perishing corpses. Tom was very upset about all this. De Valera’s men were in power and to him that was just the same as gunmen and murderers taking over the country, the very selfsame country they had tried to scupper after the Treaty. ... Anyway it broke the heart of strong farmers to have to be killing lambs, and have nowhere to send the sheep themselves, it was all a strangulation of their dreams. “Like a fucking madhouse,” said Tom...’ The whole of Ireland is just a madhouse now.’ P171

... or the Christian interpretation

Roseanne—she of ‘favour and grace’—while suffering all the torments of a crucifixion, and a resurrection, endures to give life, heal others, remain as ‘a rumour of beauty’ p268 and at the end of the story remain alive and remain forgiving.

“There was a curtain drawn about her bed, although there was no one else in the room. I thought, oh, yes, of course this is the conclusion, she is dead. I looked round the curtain only to see her face quite awake and

alive, turning now a few degrees, quizzically to look at me. ‘Dr Grene,’ she said. ‘Where have you been? I’m back from the dead, apparently.’ P291

“‘Can you step back to the bed?’ she said.

I did so. I didn’t know what she intended. But she just lifted my hand, and shook it.

‘I wonder will you allow me to forgive you?’ she said.

‘My God, yes,’ I said.

There was a short silence then, just enough of a silence for the breath of a dozen thoughts to blow through my brain.

‘Well, I do,’ she said. P292

... or the ‘modern’ interpretation

Roseanne’s life is a testament to the validity of Viktor Frankl’s theory—derived from his own experience as a concentration camp survivor— that even in the face of the most dire circumstances “man does have a choice of action” that will enable him to preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom and independence of mind... to choose one’s own way...to decide “whether or not to submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you would become the plaything of circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity to become molded into the form of the typical inmate.”

Parallels between Roseanne’s and Viktor Frankl’s ‘imprisonments’: Passage from the **Afterword to *Man’s Search for Meaning*** written by William J, Winslade in 2006

“Before his deportation, [Frankl] had already begun to formulate an argument that the quest for meaning is the key to mental health and human flourishing. As a prisoner, he was suddenly forced to assess whether his own life still had any meaning. His survival was a combined result of his will to live, his instinct for self-preservation, some generous acts of human decency, and shrewdness; of course, it also depended on blind luck, such as where he happened to be imprisoned, the whims of the guards, and arbitrary decisions about where to line up and who to trust or believe. However, something more was needed to overcome the deprivations and degradations of the camps. Frankl drew constantly upon uniquely human capacities such as inborn optimism, humour, psychological detachment, brief moments of solitude, inner freedom, and a steely resolve not to give up or commit suicide. He realized that he must try to live for the future, and he drew strength from loving thoughts of his wife and his deep desire to finish his book on logotherapy. He also found meaning in glimpses of beauty in nature and art. Most important, he realized that, no matter what happened, he retained the freedom to choose how to respond to his suffering. He saw this not merely as an option but as his and every person’s responsibility to choose “the way in which he bears his burden.” P214

[Dr. Grene at the end of the book visiting Percy:]“I wanted to tell him that I thought it wasn’t so much a question of whether she had written the truth about herself, or told the truth, or believed what she wrote and said was true or even whether they were true things in themselves. The important thing seemed to me that the person who wrote and spoke was admirable, living, and complete. I wanted to tell him, to confess in a way, that from a psychiatric point of view I had totally failed to ‘help’ her, to prise open the locked lids of the past. ...All the time I might have helped her, all those years she was here, I had more or less left her alone. I wanted to tell him, she has helped herself, she has spoken to, listened to, herself. It is a victory. ...Roseanne had instructed me in the mystery of human silence and the efficacy of a withdrawal from the task of questioning...” p298

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Examples of the pivotal moments in which Roseanne wilfully places herself in harm's way

- Following the loss of her father and the madness of her mother, she defies Fr Gaunt's 'rescue' plan involving her marrying Joe Brady and converting to Catholicism
- To commune with her father she visits the cemetery where he once worked only to be attacked by Joe Brady ... but then rescued by John Lavalley who has come to visit his brother Willie's grave
- She helps John locate Willie's grave by finding the record of it in the cemetery's record book
- She rescues two-year-old Winnie Prunty at the beach which leads to her obtaining a waitressing job at the Café Cairo courtesy of Mrs. Prunty
- She swims into a riptide ... but is rescued by Tom McNulty
- She marries Tom
- ...but then meets up with John Lavalley, only to be seen doing so by Fr. Gaunt.
[Why she does this is unclear. "To this day I don't really understand it." "All right, so why did I go up to Maeve's cairn that very Sunday following? I don't know. Because John Lavalley asked me? No. I know it was a wretched thing to do, a mistake. Why does the salmon go home to the Garravoge, when it has all the sea to roam over? P176] [This questioning follows, however, her description of a married woman's life as being like the life of Muslims... "the men wanted to hide us away, except on occasions like that, when there was a good film to be seen' ... whereas she always felt the equal of her husband..." me and him, like Bonnie and Clyde, who just that time in America were going round killing people and generally what, expressing their love in curious ways." Plus, John Lavalley, as a result of her history with him and her father, "loomed in my dreams. In my dreams he was always being shot and dying, like his brother had in real waking life. I often saw him dying in dreams. Held his hand and the like. Sisterly." P175]
- When Tom doesn't come home she goes to the Plaza to find him, but is blocked by Jack. She tries to surge forward past Jack 'by mere force of will' but he put his arms around her as she tried to break away down the hall, and "I was screaming, screaming for Tom, for mercy, for God. ... Myself roaring and caterwauling. That's how much I loved Tom and my life with Tom. That's how much I balked at and hated the future." P210
- She suffers then "a pain that removes all other things except itself, so that the young woman lying there in her marriage bed was just all pain, all suffering, ... drenched in a strange sweat. The chief part of the pain was caused by the enormous panic that nothing would ever arrive, no circus, Yankee cavalry, human agency, to relieve it. That I would always be sweltering in it." P211
- She is banished for years of solitude in the tin hut that was her home with Tom and eventually she is informed by Fr. Gaunt that her marriage to Tom has been annulled
- When she helps Eneas McNulty who in fleeing the German bombing raid on Belfast passes by her hut, she has an 'affair' with him that results in her pregnancy.

Wikipedia: The **Belfast Blitz** was four attacks of high-casualty German air raids on strategic targets in the city of Belfast in Northern Ireland, in **April and May 1941** during World War II. The first was on the night of 7–8 April 1941, a small attack which probably took place only to test Belfast's defences. The next took place on Easter Tuesday, 15 April 1941. Two hundred bombers of the *Luftwaffe* attacked military and manufacturing targets in the city of Belfast. Some 900 people died as a result of the bombing and 1,500 were injured. High explosive bombs predominated in this raid. Apart from those on London, this was the greatest loss of life in any

night raid during the Blitz. The third raid on Belfast took place over the evening and morning of 4–5 May 1941; 150 were killed. Incendiary bombs predominated in this raid. The fourth and final Belfast raid took place on the following night, 5–6 May. In total, more than half the city's housing stock was rendered uninhabitable by the bombings.¹³

- She pleads for help from Mrs. McNulty and Old Tom when she is about to birth her son but they turn her out so that...
- Her son is born on the beach, and when she awakes the infant that she remembers sheltering alive is gone...
- She is then hospitalized and incarcerated as mentally insane. [“She killed her child” wrote Fr. Gaunt thereby sealing her fate.]

BUT despite her panic that no help would ever arrive, Roseanne has a human ‘guardian angel’ — John Kane, John LaValle’s injured son (“He’s not just right in the head, you know, after his fall.”) who promised his beloved father that he would look out for Roseanne. (Why would you tell him to do that, John Lavalle? I said. I don’t know. Only that...I never saw anyone as lovely as you only except Kitty....What do people say when they feel like I do? *I love you*, they say, I suppose.) and in fulfillment John Kane plays a significant role in many of her pivotal moments:

- He rescues her baby from the beach and brings him to a doctor
- He persuades Dr. Amurdat Singh to offer Dr. Grene (her son) a junior post at Roscommon Mental Hospital
- He works at the hospital and cleans Roseanne’s room, rescues her one night when there is a fire, brings her meals and brings her news of the gardens and their blooming.
- Of John Kane Dr. Grene writes: “How old though, I could not find out. By his own admission, he has no birth certificate, having been brought up somewhere by adoptive parents. Well, we have that in common, and hopefully little else. [Irony: Both he and Dr. Grene are in effect and in actuality, respectively, Roseanne’s ‘offspring’] The reason he is still working seems to be that no one has thought to retire him, since his age has never registered. Furthermore his job is so menial it would be almost impossible to fill, as it is doubtful even a willing person from China or Bosnia or Russia would take it. John Kane himself shows no desire to lay down his brush of his own free will. And he insists on climbing he stairs to Roseanne’s room, though the climb knocks the wind out of him and he was told he could leave it to someone else. Oh no, he want into a muttering ‘thunderousnes’ about that.” P164

The message in Man’s Search for Meaning

1. **‘Man’s Search’ is the ‘green shoot’ rooted in Judeo-Christian principles and in modern psychotherapeutic constructs and given the many parallels between it and The Secret Scripture, SS is also a ‘green shoot’ novel.**
2. **Finding meaning is possible because even in such dire circumstances man can choose his course of action (exercise his free will) and thereby retain the power to exercise his inner freedom**

“...do the prisoners’ reactions to the singular world of the concentration camp prove that man cannot escape the influences of his surroundings? Does man have no choice of action in the face of such circumstances?”

We can answer these questions from experience as well as on principles. The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action. There were enough examples, often of a heroic nature, which proved that apathy could be overcome, irritability suppressed. Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress. ...

... There were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you would become the plaything of circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity to become molded into the form of the typical inmate....

Fundamentally, therefore, any man can, even under such circumstances, decide what shall become of him—mentally and spiritually. He may retain his human dignity even in a concentration camp. Dostoevski said once, “There is only one thing that I dread: not to be worthy of my sufferings.” These words frequently came to my mind after I became acquainted with those martyrs whose behaviour in camp, whose suffering and death, bore witness to the fact that the last inner freedom cannot be lost. It can be said that they were worthy of their sufferings, the way they bore their suffering was a genuine inner achievement. It is this spiritual freedom—which cannot be taken away—that makes life meaningful and purposeful.

3. Purpose in life must also be found in suffering which is an ineradicable part of life without which life “cannot be complete.” (Judeo-Christian concept of finding God through suffering.)

An active life serves the purpose of giving man the opportunity to realize values in creative work, while a passive life of enjoyments affords him the opportunity to obtain fulfillment in experiencing beauty, art, or nature. But there is also purpose in that life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behaviour: namely, in man’s attitude to his existence, an existence restricted by external forces. A creative life and a life of enjoyment are banned to him. But not only creativeness and enjoyment are meaningful. If there is meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete.

Remaining true to moral values is the key to being worthy of your suffering and therefore finding meaning in your suffering

The way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity—even under the most difficult circumstances—to add a deeper meaning to his life. It may remain brave, dignified and unselfish. Or in the bitter fight for self-preservation he may forget his human dignity and become no more than an animal. Here lies the chance for a man either to make use of or to forgo the opportunities of attaining the moral values that a difficult situation may afford him. And this decides whether he is worthy of his sufferings or not.”

3. Finding meaning comes from having a why to live for and this is essential to survival

“...any attempt to restore a man’s inner strength in the camp had first to succeed in showing him some future goal. Nietzsche’s words, “He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how,” could be the guiding motto for all psychotherapeutic and psychohygienic efforts regarding prisoners. Whenever there was an opportunity for it, one had to give them a why—an aim—for their lives, in order to strengthen them to bear the terrible how of their existence. Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on. He was soon lost. “

4. Meaning is unique to each individual. There is no one “meaning of life.”

“These tasks, and therefore the meaning of life, differ from man to man, and from moment to moment. Thus it is impossible to define the meaning of life in a general way. Questions about the meaning of life can never be answered by sweeping statements. “Life” does not mean something vague, but something very real and concrete, just as life’s tasks are also very real and concrete. They form man’s destiny, which is different and unique for each individual. No man and no destiny can be compared with any other man or any other destiny. No situation repeats itself, and each situation calls for a different response. Sometimes the situation in which a man finds himself may require him to shape his own fate by action. At other times it is more advantageous for him to make use of an opportunity for contemplation and to realize assets in this way. Sometimes man may be required simply to accept fate, to bear his cross. Every situation is distinguished by its uniqueness, and there is always only one right answer to the problem posed by the situation at hand.

When a man finds that it is his destiny to suffer, he will have to accept his suffering as his task; his single and unique task. He will have to acknowledge the fact that even in suffering he is unique and alone in the universe. No one can relieve him of his suffering or suffer in his place. His unique opportunity lies in the way in which he bears his burden.”

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2. This book illustrates the power of salvation through and by scripture, how the study of great personal memoirs and the act of writing one’s own makes life meaningful, and restores and redeems one’s soul. Roseanne’s ‘Testimony of Herself’ and Dr. Grene’s *Commonplace Book* are both records of their ‘secrets’ and hence likely more truthful albeit less definitive than official historical record. In other words it is a novel that explains and defends its own purpose for being. And this self-referential quality, I think, makes it oh so modern despite it’s oh so classical and romantic subject and themes.

...”that love of truth, which in some minds is innate and immutable, necessarily leads to a love of secret memoirs and private anecdotes.’ (Maria Edgeworth, *Preface to Castle Rackrent* from foreword to the novel)

3. This book extensively uses symbolism and metaphoric language to gather in the plenitude of the physical/material/real/in the here-and-now world and to intertwine this with the abstract/existential/spiritual world of angels, fairies, ghosts, wishes and dreams, fears and nightmares. But from this mass of narrative poetry the symbols introduced at the very beginning that I find serve most effectively as the framework for the coherency of its themes and insights is ‘the hammers’ and ‘the feathers’

1) [LEM] Life is hammers and feathers and only in the perfect world of the bell jar do “all things fall at the same rate” p19. And while Cissy Clear’s observation that while all may fall at the same rate, “it’s the rare thing rises” this story’s overall revelation of the intertwinement of Roseanne’s and Dr. Grene’s lives—the revelation of Dr. Grene’s origins and the revelation of Roseanne’s abiding belief that her son is alive— is ultimately just that “rare thing.”

Other meanings for these symbols?

2) The beauty of the Irish countryside, beaches, flora, and fauna are the “feathers” to the “hammers” of its history of intense internal strife over political vision and empowerment fuelled by the deep divide between the majority’s Catholicism and minority’s Protestantism, and the economic divide inversely echoing this division in many parts of the country.

In *A Portrait of an Artist as an Old Man* James Joyce wrote:

“Do you know what Ireland is? asked Stephen with cold violence. Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow.”

—expressing his belief that Ireland destroyed its writers, its admirable political figures, and indeed everything that should be saved and nurtured.

3) Hammers and feathers both: The comparison of 19th Century institutional care by the church, its nuns and priests with ‘modern’ institutional care by the state and doctors: the theories of care and what constitutes treatment or whether treatment is even possible, the physical facilities, the manners of the overseers towards their charges, and the vulnerabilities of the inmates of orphanages, and ‘lunatic asylums.’

Both involving care without love or knowledge of the hearts of the inmates vs the everlasting power of familial love and love blessed by sacrament.

4. Meaningful and engaging and indeed ‘thrilling’ details

Names of the Characters

Roseanne

The name Roseanne is an English baby name. In English the meaning of the name Roseanne is: Compound of Rose and Anne (favour; grace).

Grene a form of the English Green—meaning the colour green.

Places

Knocknarea

The 327 metre high mountain known as Knocknarea (Irish: Cnoc na Rí) totally dominates the Cuil Irra peninsula. Sitting proudly on top is Queen Maeve's Cairn (Miosgán Meadhbha), a neolithic passage tomb. The cairn is 55 metres wide by 10 metres high and has never been excavated.

Ben Bulbin

Benbulbin, sometimes spelled Ben Bulben or Benbulben (from the Irish: Binn Ghulbain), is a large rock formation in County Sligo, Ireland. It is part of the Dartry Mountains, in an area sometimes called "Yeats Country".

Maeve's Cairn

Queen Maeve – Is Roseanne the modern Queen Maeve?

...was **the warrior queen of Connacht, the western province of Ireland. It is said that her father was king of Connacht before becoming High King of Ireland and she became ruler of Connacht after him. She had five recognised husbands, and ruled for over 60 years.**

In Irish folklore, the last High Queen of the Daoine Sidhe - and wife of the High King Finvarra - was named Una (or Oonagh, or Oona, or Uonaidh etc.). In the ballad tradition of Northern England and Lowland Scotland, she was called the Queen of Elphame.

The character is also associated with the name Morgan (as with the Arthurian character of Morgan Le Fey, or Morgan of the Fairies), **Maeve**, and Leanansidhe (pronounced "L'annawnshee"--literally, Underworld Fairy). In the Child Ballads Tam Lin (Child 39) and Thomas the Rhymer (Child 37), she is represented as both **beautiful and seductive, and also as terrible and deadly**. The Fairy Queen is said to pay a tithe to Hell every seven years, and her mortal lovers often provide this sacrifice.

Maeve... is the anglicized form of the Gaelic name Medb meaning "intoxicating". In Irish legend this was the name of a warrior queen of Connacht. Her fight against Ulster and the hero Cúchulainn is told in the Irish epic 'The Cattle Raid of Cooley'.

Misgaun Medb/Maeve's Cairn in Co. Sligo, is the best known burial site of Queen Maeve, but it is one of three possible sites. According to some legends, she is indeed buried in the 40ft (12m) high stone cairn on the summit of Knocknarea (Cnoc na Rí in Irish, Hill of the King) in County Sligo.

Things

Metal Man (St. Peter?)

Wikipedia: Rosses Point (Irish: Ros Cheide, meaning "promontary of the hill/assembly (trans. Cheide uncertain)"^[2] or Irish: An Ros^[3]) is a village in County Sligo, Ireland and also the name of the surrounding peninsula. Rosses Point is at the entrance to Sligo Harbour from Sligo Bay with Oyster island being the long thin landmass notable when entering the village from Sligo town and Inishmulclohy (or Coney Island) being the second and larger island that is encountered. The Metal Man lighthouse, a 3.7 metre (12 ft) high guardian statue placed offshore at the point by local seafarers in 1821 is maintained by the Commissioners of Irish Lights.

The **Metal Man** guarding the entrance to **Sligo Harbour** is a 3.7 metre / 13 ft tall, 7.5 ton statue dressed in the uniform of an early C19th petty naval officer, placed on the offshore Perch Rock by local seafarers in 1822 and maintained by the Commissioners of Irish Lights. The side his arm points to signals the safe side of navigation, and when his light is lined up with the light on **Oyster Island lighthouse** this is called the “leading lights” or safe deepwater channel for shipping using Sligo port.

Maritime bollard (from Wikipedia)

In the maritime contexts in which the term originates, a bollard is either a wooden or iron post found as a deck-fitting on a ship or boat, and used to secure ropes for towing, mooring and other purposes; or its counterpart on land, a short wooden, iron or stone post on a quayside to which craft can be moored. The Sailor's Word-Book of 1867 defines a bollard in a more specific context as "a thick piece of wood on the head of a whale-boat, round which the harpooner gives the line a turn, in order to veer it steadily, and check the animal's velocity. Mooring bollards are seldom exactly cylindrical, but typically have a larger diameter near the top to discourage mooring warps (docklines) from coming loose. Single bollards sometimes include a cross rod to allow the mooring lines to be bent into a figure eight. Small mushroom-bollards are found on lock approaches for advancing boats waiting for lock access. A conventional measure of the pulling or towing power of a watercraft is known as bollard pull, and is defined as the force exerted by a vessel under full power on a shore-mounted bollard through a tow-line.

Ansonia Clock

Ansonia Clocks were made by a clock manufacturing business which started in Ansonia, Connecticut, in 1851 and which moved to Brooklyn, New York, in 1878. An enormously successful business, it turned out thousands of clocks in a large number of styles. ... By 1920 the number of models was down to 136 models, and 47 by 1927. In 1926 the company sold its Brooklyn warehouse, but this could not stem the inevitable. In 1929 the majority of the timekeeping machinery and tooling were sold to the Soviet government's US trading company Amtorg, just before the stock market crash.