



Universität Stuttgart

Institut für Literaturwissenschaft

Lehrstuhl für Neuere Englische Literatur und Kultur

**Borders Turning into Escapes: A Novel Approach to Borderscapes in Michelle Gallen's
Bildungsromane *Big Girl, Small Town* and *Factory Girls***

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Erstprüfer: Dr. Thomas Wägenbaur

Von

Lisa Rosenberger

Matrikelnummer: 333 51 67

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The protagonists of Michelle Gallen's novels *Big Girl, Small Town* (2020) and *Factory Girls* (2022) both struggle with their coming-of-age process due to the remoteness of their hometowns and the lack of parental support and guidance. Considering the novels' placement near the border of Northern Ireland, the context of border studies opens a wide range for interpreting Gallen's Bildungsromane with a focus on the importance of borders in the life of her protagonists Majella and Maeve, respectively. Especially the area of investigating borderscapes – namely, the borders and their surrounding landscapes – is an effective tool to approach the Bildungsroman's individual coming-of-age stages as the protagonists' thresholds in their psychological, emotional, and moral development.

With a focus on the protagonists' escapist attempts of fleeing their coming-of-age process occasionally, or to be trapped in a prolonged childhood which resembles a space of waiting, the term borderscape requires an extension to its connotation: through the protagonists' evasion of their coming-of-age process, the borders they encounter turn into escapes from this very process. Hence, a borderscape includes the connotation of borders maintaining an escapist potential with regard to the genre of the Bildungsroman. This is why this thesis considers the pairing of the Bildungsroman's coming-of-age stages (loss, journey, conflict and personal growth, and maturity) in combination with Gallen's dominating borders (geographical, social, linguistic, and genealogic) in order to analyse the protagonists' coming-of-age influence on how borders turn into escapes. This thesis advocates for an extension of the borderscape's connotation to include the aspect of escaping due to borders and because of the construction of them, in spite of the predetermined literary sequence of the coming-of-age process.

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1. Introduction: From the Bildungsroman via Thresholds to the Protagonist's Escape

Michelle Gallen's debut novel *Big Girl, Small Town* (2020) as well as her second novel *Factory Girls* (2022) illustrate an individual's struggle to come of age in geographically remote towns near the border of Northern Ireland. The closeness of the narratives to the Irish border and their structure as coming-of-age novels suggests the novels' analysis in the overall research field of border studies. Complementing to this, Gallen makes use of geographical, social, linguistic, and genealogical borders to illustrate her protagonists' coming-of-age progress. Nevertheless, Gallen does not stay true to a linear narration of the psychological and moral development of her protagonists. Moreover, their development structures into four stages – the same as commonly associated with the Bildungsroman's structure – combined with the possibility to opt out of this process. The protagonists do not come of age in a linear manner but escape their development stages by means of structuring their own borders. Hence, this thesis will analyse Gallen's Bildungsromane in depth under the aspect of geographical, social, linguistic, and genealogical borders bearing an escapist potential for the individual coming-of-age protagonist.

Whereas the literary development of the Bildungsroman suggests the structuring of a protagonist's coming-of-age into four stages – namely, loss, journey, conflict and personal growth, and maturity – those stages withhold a connotation of separating demarcation lines, or thresholds. These usually psychological and moral, as well as social thresholds signify the borders the protagonists must overcome, extend, neglect, and reinterpret in their process of development. Hence, this thesis will foreground the interpretation of the Bildungsroman's stages as thresholds in particular as a connection to the escapist connotation borders take along. Since border studies include the idea of reading not only the border itself as the main point of investigation, it is also crucial for the analysed Bildungsromane that this thesis includes the idea of borderscapes, a portmanteau word of the terms border and landscape. Since the studies on borderscapes highlight the possibility of reading a text as landscape as

well, and they withdraw from the idea of borders remaining unchangeable, this thesis will focus on the fluid aspect with regard to the protagonists' development towards maturity. In other words, this thesis advocates for the term borderscape to include the additional connotation of borders becoming an escape in the context of the Bildungsroman.

Through the engagement of geographical, social, linguistic, and genealogical borders, Gallen calls for the necessity to interpret borders as escapes (borderscapes) through the close investigation of the same. Since the development of Gallen's protagonists can be divided into the four stages of the Bildungsroman, the individual border types Gallen uses in *Big Girl*, *Small Town* and *Factory Girls* will accompany each stage respectively. Through this pairing, geographical borders will reveal to mark individual loss and disappointment as the starting point of the protagonists' coming-of-age. Furthermore, the lack of geographical landmarks of loss will point out the protagonists' escape from the initiation of the coming-of-age process, which again explains the protagonists' stagnation in a prolonged childhood. Pairing the second stage of the process with the theme of social borders opens the possibility escapist niches through the reinterpretation of the borders manifesting the protagonists' social environments. Hence, the transitional space of the social border turns into a niche for hiding, transforming, and developing in. Following Gallen's implementation of linguistic borders both in her narratives and for her international audience, the third stage of the protagonists' conflict and personal growth pairs with the linguistic borders they encounter. This pairing will reveal a necessary, self-reflective escape from a self-contained world view and lead to the reinterpretation of in- and exclusion of the Other as well as to the reinterpretation of the protagonists' identification. Since Gallen's coming-of-age protagonists do not develop corresponding to the legal coming-of-age age, the stage of maturity includes the aspect of absolution from genealogical expectations of their development. This is why in the last pairing of maturity and genealogical borders, the reinvention of the connotation of names

provides a self-determined escape for the protagonists to claim closure for their coming-of-age development as well as their independence from their families.

1.1 From the Bildungsroman's Stages to the Protagonist's Thresholds

The terms Bildungsroman and coming-of-age novel are often used interchangeably. Originally, Bildungsroman is a German portmanteau consisting of *Bildung*, meaning education, and *Roman*, meaning novel. Therefore, as a genre the Bildungsroman refers to a “class of novel that depicts and explores the manner in which the protagonist develops morally and psychologically” (“bildungsroman” *Britannica* n.p.). Moreover, the term “coming-of-age” relates or describes “the time when someone changes from a child into an adult” or it relates to the celebration of “the fact that someone is legally an adult” (“coming-of-age” n.p.). This is why the synonymously used term coming-of-age novel precisely signifies the protagonist’s development from an inexperienced child to a self-responsible and independent adult; in Meyer H. Abrams’ words, the genre describes “the development of the protagonist’s mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences – and often through a spiritual crisis – into maturity, which usually involves recognition of one’s identity and role in the world” (193). Both terms, therefore, describe the same procedure of a protagonist’s journey from being a child in a secure surrounding to becoming an adult. However, the protagonist does not necessarily need to be below the age of 18 or 21 years, depending on the legal definition of an adult based on the respective country’s law. Independent from laws, the coming-of-age process depicts the maturation of the protagonist into a self-responsible individual through self-experience and the confrontation with, and the initialisation through, the external world.

Crossing from one stage of the coming-of-age process to another in the personal, social, and psychological development of the protagonist requires decisive a period for the change to happen. In the context of literature, the novel’s author defines this time frame; but

usually every change and transgression from one stadium to the next needs to take place over several years, if not a whole lifetime of the protagonist extending beyond the frame the author provides. Famous examples of Bildungsromane depicting the development within a single lifetime are Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795-96), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861), and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1924). As this selection of Bildungsromane illustrates the temporal rise of the genre locates mainly around the 19th century. Their clustered, dominant presence in the 19th century points out the readers' acceptance of their educational effect.

Nevertheless, around the turn of the millennium scholars discuss whether the Bildungsroman perseveres in today's contemporary literature since "the goals of such a text are naive and, in fact, impossible to achieve in postmodern societies that deny the existence of a unified self and instead affirm 'an era of alienation from the society whose values in former times might have confirmed selfhood'" (Braedlin qtd. in Karafilis 63). As this quote illustrates, Bonnie Hoover Braedlin perceives identity as a 'becoming' process through fragmented stages; in her opinion, the self's identity can only develop partially and contextually in sequences and the Bildungsroman suggests a contrary development, namely a coherent and linear development of the individual at focus. Maria Karafilis opposes this argument by stating that "what we really mean, as critic, when we refuse to abandon the *Bildungsroman*, is that we are interested in *how texts negotiate the development/education of their protagonists* and how these protagonists negotiate themselves in a larger social context" (63; emphasis added). As a result, the literary focus on Bildungsromane centres on the viewpoint that the novels themselves depict the development of the societies in which they were and are published. The texts, following Karafilis's argument, become testament to the coming-of-age of societies.

With negotiation of terms and conditions, as well as rights and allowances, from the protagonist at the centre of Karafilis' argument, the development of the protagonist from childhood into adulthood in the Bildungsroman requires another feature to achieve this goal: liminality. The term liminality itself originates in Latin *limen* and, used as the adjective 'liminal,' commonly associates with "a state, place, or condition of transition" ("Liminal" n.p.). Originally, the word refers "to the point at which a physiological or psychological effect begins to produce," and translates literally to 'threshold' ("Liminal" n.p.). Looking at the protagonist's transition from childhood into the realm of maturity, liminality appears to be the defining element of transgression: maturing through a series of liminal stages includes the overcoming of the border between two, seemingly separate and distinct, realms – be they physically or psychologically. Hence, coming-of-age novels, or Bildungsromane, maintain several limen or thresholds. The transgression from one stage into the other marks the overcoming of (social and emotional) boundaries, as well as it may neglect the idealisation of role models and guardians. The typology of a limen, or threshold, includes the possibility of passing this checkpoint through the protagonist's individual effort. Although a threshold usually signifies the withholding of a person within a set realm, it also gives leeway to surpass it and, thus, go beyond.

Commonly, as well as in this thesis, a Bildungsroman's thresholds are known as stages. In her article "A 'coming of age' for all ages" for *The Stanford Daily* Shana E. Hadi recounts the timeless appliance of the genre to almost every novel on the market, which contains a protagonist maturing from an existence of disappointment or loss into a self-determined person. What becomes apparent in Hadi's argumentation is that all protagonists start at the point of loss. For example, Jane Eyre is a protagonist who loses her family relations and, thus, her financial securities. In either way, this dominance of a loss in the first stage becomes the cataclysmic event through which outer circumstances force the protagonist to make a journey, which is the second stage's focus. This journey does not necessarily

represent a literal journey to another town or country but, moreover, depicts the protagonist's personal attempt of literally or metaphorically learning to understand oneself and the external world better. To stay with the example of Charlotte Brontë's novel, Jane Eyre sets out to become a governess, teaching other children to earn her living, and eventually applies for another employment. Understanding oneself and the external world connects closely with experiencing difficulties, making mistakes, and comprehending conflicts. This third stage marks conflicts in general and a personal development of the protagonist's ability to deal with inconveniences. As Hadi contends: "What counts as a 'successful' outcome for a protagonist does not matter so much as what they learned; the old adage of 'the journey is what matters, not the end result' rings clearly" (n.p.). At last, through severe trials and the sorting of the protagonist's own moralities and social preferences by means of learning to be humble and to fight for what is important to oneself, the protagonist arrives at the last stage of the coming-of-age process: reaching maturity is about overcoming adolescence and to pass on the knowledge¹ gained to the next generation. At this stage rewards all hardships; again, in the case of Jane Eyre, she regains financial prestige and independence and may marry for love and not for economic purposes.

To summarize the different stages of a Bildungsroman, there are the following four in order of chronological appearance: loss or cataclysmic event, journey, conflict and personal development, and maturity or coming-of-age. Nevertheless, it is crucial to stress that those stages are constantly in flux in a protagonist's coming-of-age development. Instead of clearly separating those stages from one another, the protagonist's mind, emotions, and behaviour may shift forwards and backwards in circular motions. Those non-physical characteristics highlight the necessity to look at the protagonist as an evolving character not bound to chronological or linear boundaries.

¹ At this point, gaining knowledge is a process taking place in the liminal space of two interacting generations as well as it is an outcome of this perpetual conversation.

1.2 Thresholds Being Borders

Since this thesis concerns Michelle Gallen's novels in the context of being Bildungsromane, the structure of this thesis' chapters corresponds to the four stages defined above. Furthermore, transgressing from one stage into the other does not merely imply the necessity for the protagonists – namely Majella in *Big Girl, Small Town* and Maeve in *Factory Girls* – to leave their personal comfort zone on a daily basis. Looking closely at the characteristics of thresholds, one is the existence of at least two different realms to touch each other. Literally, a threshold may manifest in the form of a material border. A famous example, with regard to the previously mentioned word's origin of liminality and limen, is the case of the Roman Limes, which signified the border of old between the Roman Empire and their counterforces. As of today, countries are also separated by borders: the US-Mexican border, the 38th latitude as geographical and political separation line between North Korea and the Republic of Korea, the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Specifically, the border on Irish grounds withholds a major significance for Gallen's work: both novels take place on the border between the two states. Although being fictionalized towns, the issues of separation by borders – physical, social, psychological – represent today's Ireland's struggle to imagine a united people.²

Hence, the assumption of a threshold being a border includes the existence of thresholds and borders in a non-physical form. Connected to Gallen's coming-of-age novels, each encounter with a threshold also marks the protagonist's transgression into another stage of their coming-of-age process. Defining the stages of the coming-of-age process and their chronological order is consistent in literary research. However, an undefined aspect of these differentiations remains the boundaries of each stage in comparison to the other. Through this

² This challenge of imagination points towards a creation of identity fragmentation within one country's people. Moreover, issues increase in economic, political, and social aspects as Sylvia de Mars et al. portray in their analysis of the effect of Brexit on the Irish border in their fittingly named book *Bordering Two Nations: Northern Ireland and Brexit*. What de Mars et al. point towards is the fact that borders on the Irish island cannot exist solely physical but transgress into people's minds and actions over time.

lack of connection, the presumed borders between the individual stages of a coming-of-age process blur into one another and do not exist coherently regarding the surrounding environment of growing up. One reason for this research gap is the fluidity of the protagonist's mind, emotion, and behaviour when transgressing the realms of development since these are aspects of non-physical nature. To connect these two poles and define the connecting points between separating borders and conjoined development stages, I will approach the coming-of-age stages from the point of view of borders and borderscapes, where I relate borders to become the protagonist's escapes, geographically as well as socially or linguistically. Since these terms already include hints at and research on the fluidity of the existence of borders, I will summarize the fundamental definitions and the current state of the art regarding, specifically, borderscapes in the following paragraphs.

Looking at the word border first, it defines an outer part or edge, refers to an ornamental design at the edge of a fabric or rug regarding textiles, or refers to being a boundary, which is a synonym for border at the same time ("Border" n.p.). Aside from boundary, synonyms include the words edge, circumference, margin, periphery, frame, frontier³, demarcation, limitation, and borderland among others. Signifying the end and the beginning of two realms in relation to each other, a border may not only connote the physical properties of the word: "Today borders are not merely geographical margins or territorial edges," write Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, "[t]hey are complex social institutions, which are marked by tensions between practices of border reinforcement and border crossing" (3). These terms' properties are a crucial aspect regarding the Bildungsroman since the protagonist's personal development responds to and is influenced by their physical and social environment. The environment for progress and development includes its shaping via the geographical, social, linguistic, and genealogical landmarks of borders and

³ Interestingly, especially the word frontier does not connote a clear-cut differentiation between two regions or the outer definition of a specific region, but the region along the dividing line of two realms itself.

borderscapes in the course of time. The co-existence of various entities results in the creation of borders, frontiers, and limitations and their re-evaluation and calibration throughout the protagonist's moral and psychological development.

A border cannot exist without at least two realms encountering each other, as well as a border only exists as long as negotiations between those realms – usually governments or individual persons – maintain a mutual consensus. Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe depict a border as a “part of b/ordering processes of exclusion and inclusion, becoming fixed as lines of demarcation” (149). They continue to stress that a border may also be “produced through negotiation with border-crossers” and that this “point[s] towards a more deterritorialized and process-oriented concept of bordering, in which borders emerge as more flexible entities, folded and diffuse, played out across zones or borderscapes” (149). To sum up, while borders exist through negotiation of at least two parties maintaining claims over territories or social norms, today's interpretation of borders connotes a wide-ranging application of the term border to a landscape rather than a demarcation line. Hence, a border depicts not solely a physical singular instance of separation, but a wide-ranging field of interpretations concerning fields of sovereignty and identification with the one or the other side. In the context of the coming-of-age novels at the centre of this thesis, this is an important aspect of observing borders since a Bildungsroman's protagonist fluidly progresses from one stage of maturity to another without experiencing clear-cut checkpoints.

1.3 Border Transgression: The Interpretative History of the Term Borderscape

Regarding border transgressions, the coming-of-age process of any protagonist is a journey of moving chronologically forward in time while leaving behind their respective past in a circular motion of revisiting and re-evaluating.⁴ Although the protagonist strives for

⁴ Therefore, the protagonist exists in a constant motion of reflection and progression, while the narrative itself may shift between the protagonist's past and present.

maturity – a state of independence and self-determination –, there are moments of doubt and retreat into childhood behaviour. In the context of a border alluding to an open and wide landscape, the concept of borderscapes allows for an explanation of how these two (geographical) terms connect, including the literary disciplines, where scholars consider texts to be readable landscapes.⁵

The term borderscape itself is a portmanteau “that combines aspects of ‘landscape’ and ‘border’ [and] brings with it all the unresolved ambiguities of the two separate notions and multiplies them” (dell’Agnese and Szary 2). The attempt to find a suitable, even universal definition of the term results in ongoing discussions and adjustments (comp. Schimanski and Wolfe; dell’Agnese and Szary; Mezzadra and Neilson). As for the origin of the term, scholars commonly trace the suffix “-scape” back to Arjun Appadurai’s 1990 notion of them, who refers to them as “a wide view of a place, often one represented in a picture” (qtd. in dell’Agnese and Szary 2). Hence, observing a space or landscape, even deeming a text or picture to be observable like a geopolitical map, allows for borders to emerge, merge, and disappear while analysing. And since borders and landscapes diffuse with time progressing, they also exist in more than one dimension.⁶ Based on the common origin of the borderscape and the various interpretations of the term, the Bildungsroman may be defined as a textual borderscape with a main focus on the existence of borders within a protagonist’s life. Especially Gallen’s novels are a case in point for this approach: her novels focus on towns at the border regions of Ireland and simultaneously explore an individual’s personal transgression of borders during maturation.

Located in the area of border studies, the term borderscape has been developed throughout the past twenty to thirty years. It is “presumed to have been coined by [two]

⁵ Comp. Johannessen and Moi in Schimanski and Wolfe 50-67, and Görling and Schimanski in Schimanski and Wolfe 111-28.

⁶ Comp. Schimanski and Wolfe on their rhizomes through which they analyse borderscapes and border aesthetics.

performance artists” as part of their performance title in 1999, but without further elaboration on how to interpret this term generally based on their performance (dell’Agnese and Szary 1). Elena dell’Agnese and Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary continue to list the order of occurrences in literature, commonly works on geopolitical cases and the estrangement or connection of peoples’ minds across border areas (comp. 1-2). Although dell’Agnese and Szary succeed in providing a general overview of the term’s usage, their article “Borderscapes: From Border Landscapes to Border Aesthetics” does not comment on how scholars used this term in their own work. Whereas a common definition of a border presides among scholars, the suffix of borderscapes leaves extensive room for various interpretations and the generation of additional misunderstandings (comp. dell’Agnese and Szary 2). This is why dell’Agnese and Szary also conclude three different, co-existing meanings of borderscapes chronologically in their summary of how borderscapes became a part of border aesthetics. The first interpretation grounds on theatre performances in relation to Appadurai’s work, which deems “the scapes in question are more like circuits of images and ideas than ‘landscapes’ in the proper sense of the word” (dell’Agnese and Szary 2). Rather than defining specific margins of a borderscape, it “is an area, shaped and reshaped by transnational flows, that goes beyond the modernist idea of clear-cut national territories” (dell’Agnese and Szary 3). Moving beyond the imaginary existence of a borderscape implied by Appadurai, dell’Agnese and Szary’s second summary on its meaning relates to Arjan Harbers’ approach in which “a borderscape is understood as a physical landscape marked by the presence of a boundary” while focusing “on the role of the nation-state in shaping and reshaping the area surrounding the boundary” (3). Harbers, therefore, follows a material aspect of the borderscapes. Lastly, the third interpretation refers to Gabi Dolff-Bonekämper and Marieke Kuipers’ idea of a borderscape “simply as a ‘*crasis*’ of the words ‘border’ and ‘landscape,’” all the while focusing on “the role of boundaries in transforming the territorial configuration of adjacent lands” (dell’Agnese and Szary 3). In

opposition to Harbers, Dolff-Bonekämper and Kuipers focus on a metaphorical aspect of borderscapes.

Mezzadra and Neilson, who interpret borders to be a method, relate to the term borderscape based on the work of Suvendrini Perara, who focuses in her work on Australia's territory borders to describe the change in and through "the simultaneous expansion and contradiction of political spaces" (12). Based on their 2013 published work, Mezzadra and Neilson conclude the concept of borderscapes to suggest "the dynamic character of the border, which is now widely understood as a set of 'practices and discourses that 'spread' into the whole of society' (Paasi 1999, 670) [and] registers the necessity to analyze the border not only in its spatial but also in its temporal dimensions" (13). Mezzadra and Neilson continue to state that their research "focus[es] on *border struggles* or those struggles that take shape around the ever more unstable line between the 'inside' and 'outside,' between inclusion and exclusion" which becomes "a way of placing an emphasis on the production of political subjectivity" (13). Their approach to borderscapes in the context of "political subjectivity" reminds of Homi Bhabha's post-colonial approach to discuss the Other in terms of the inside and the outside, deeming a sovereign to determine the subjectivity of another individual. It is crucial to have the existence of a sovereign or a similarly powerful institution in mind: without norms and rituals, the protagonist of the Bildungsroman would not be able to challenge customs, negotiate new territories, and eventually break free from expectations imposed on their way of living.

Schimanski and Wolfe's *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*, on the other hand, extends the idea of borderscapes beyond the mere construction of a clearly defined region with a superior ruler testifying the actions of their subjects. Schimanski and Wolfe also refer to Appadurai's notion of scapes and specifically mention the corresponding usage of borderscapes and scapes "in a more metaphorical way than landscapes," thus emphasising that "the borderscape combines the physical landscape with many other levels" (155). A

metaphorical interpretation of borders and borderscapes also plays into the construction of a Bildungsroman representing a fluid and reflective, ever-changing borderland for the protagonist: while the protagonist matures, the landscape around them changes and as the landscape changes, so does the protagonist. Moreover, Schimanski and Wolfe analyse border aesthetics in the various contexts of time, geography, geo-politics, palimpsests, and waiting, which all work towards the exploration of a borderscape's definition:

... borderscapes bring together representations and practices ... are more extended, flexible, disjunctive amorphous and flowing than border landscapes, peripheries, border zones or borderlands, at least when those are thought of as contiguous areas bordering onto a border. Borderscapes are multileveled, relational networks entangling different objects, imaginaries, border subjects and internalized or externalized borders. They involve everything involved in the processes of bordering and b/ordering. Borderscapes are politically ambivalent ... Borderscaping can potentially be a form of performative resistance.

(Schimanski and Wolfe 155)

Concluding their attempt at the formulation of an extensive definition of borderscapes, Schimanski and Wolfe also argue that it "is possible to conceptualize different levels of borderscapes: audio-visual borderscapes, sonic borderscapes, borderscapes of sovereign power, etc." (155).

1.4 Borders being the Protagonist's Escape: A New Approach to Borderscapes in Coming-of-Age Novels

Transferring the idea of borderscapes describing areas rather than demarcation lines to the stages of the Bildungsroman, there ought to be various areas of borders to cross in the process of maturing. This is why the structure of this thesis corresponds to the chronological order of coming-of-age stages in combination with different types of borders. However,

through the lens of the Bildungsroman the area of borderscapes so far neglects the possibility of a border becoming an escape. Nevertheless, as this thesis will illustrate, each protagonist escapes their current existence through the encounter with a certain border. In this encounter, the protagonist not only progresses on their way to maturity but also sets new borders through negotiation with others or the absolution of their former version of themselves. Therefore, each connection of a coming-of-age stage and a type of border portrays a potential growth or challenge for the protagonists which they will overcome by means of looking for an escape. The idea of a border becoming an escape, and thus adding another layer to the term of borderscapes, is crucial in understanding the perpetual but circular back and forth movement of maturing.

As for this thesis, I define the term borderscape as follows: a borderscape with regard to a coming-of-age novel defines the space the protagonist maintains in their journey from childhood into adulthood or maturity, while the term includes the aspect of escape as a connotation of the suffix scape. In this context, a borderscape defines the possibility of the encounter of a border while maturing to turn into a place of escape and progress for the protagonist. I will verify this definition in the context of contemporary Irish coming-of-age novels by Michelle Gallen, namely *Big Girl*, *Small Town* and *Factory Girls*.

As for the purpose of connecting the stages of maturing to the different realms of borders and borderscapes, each chapter concerns a stage of the coming-of-age process in combination with an aspect and a type of borders. The first stage of the coming-of-age process, namely loss, matches geographical borders due to Ireland's history of a divided country and the impact of geographies of building on Gallen's protagonists (chapter 2). The second stage, making a journey, corresponds with social borders and borders indicating social classes; throughout Gallen's Bildungsromane, the protagonists adapt to and are influenced by social interrelations, which points toward a defining connection between the two aspects (chapter 3). The third stage of conflict and personal growth connects to linguistic borders

since these borders represent the identification with and the exclusion of groups in the protagonists' respective hometowns. This combination also marks the protagonists' personal point of view affirming or opposing their community's customs of treating outsiders (chapter 4). Lastly, the fourth stage of the coming-of-age process, reaching maturity, pairs with the act of overcoming genealogic borders through self-induced redefining and reinventing of the protagonists' identity. Furthermore, the point of transgressing into maturity accompanies the absolution from and final conversation with the protagonists' parents (chapter 5). These combinations will turn out to be the characteristic of a border becoming an escape through which the protagonist comes of age eventually. By means of investigating each stage-border-combination separately, the additional connotation of borderscape as border-escape is of importance: each border reveals the potential to become the protagonists' escape from an unwelcome state of being or an escape from one stage to the next.

2. The Starting Point of Loss: Geographical Borders

Marking the starting point of a novel on self-exploration and personal growth with the theme of loss may appear insensitive to the emphatic observer. However, in the tradition of the Bildungsroman this loss marks the beginning of the protagonist towards the necessity of a journey. As for this first stage within Gallen's coming-of-age novels, I concentrate on geographical and territorial boundaries. Within this chapter I investigate geographical borders marking the protagonists' loss and disappointment, but also how these impressions may become a crucial part of escaping the current lives of the protagonists Majella in *Big Girl*, *Small Town* and Maeve in *Factory Girls*.

2.1 Marking One's Territory: Possessing Land and Imagining a New Life

Geographical divides and territorial rulership are an underlying core element of literature taking place in Ireland: the country itself has a history of separation and violent

fighting of either side against the other. A country divided by different ideas of political affiliations and religious testimonies, the border (and its remains) across Ireland represents the outcome of failed discussions to unify two peoples. As Viscount Brookeborough, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland at the time, states in his 1956 declaration:

The border between Northern Ireland and Lire exists because of the ideological gull which divides the two peoples. Although Ulster and Lire cannot unite, they can be good neighbours – on this condition, that each recognises the right of the other to shape its destiny in its own way without interference. That is true democracy; it is also sound statesmanship.

(The Northern Ireland Government n.p.)

Respecting the other side of the border remains at the core of Brookeborough's statement. It is also crucial to note that Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland both remain affiliated to different sovereigns – Northern Ireland is bound to the United Kingdom while the Republic of Ireland is an independent country. Yet the people living on the Irish island are mostly affected by the geographical border across their land, which is also a significant theme in Gallen's novels.

A geographical loss of autonomy and identification represents the naming of the scene in Gallen's debut novel: Aghybogey is the hometown of Majella and the main setting of *Big Girl, Small Town*. It is a small town as the novel's title suggests, "a fictional village in rural Northern Ireland" (Gallen, "Glossary" n.p.). The town's artificiality plays into the historical perception of Ireland not being united: through this, Gallen implies a geographical distance between the real world of the readers and the fictional world Majella lives in. In addition, the town's name derives from the Irish *Achadh Bogaigh*, which defines a boggy or swampy field (comp. Gallen, "Glossary" n.p.). The Irish origin adds to the remoteness of the town in its linguistic context as well as the translation points out the non-definition of the town's own borders. Gallen further questions the autonomy of the village, presenting it as a secluded

space not only by the distance from other towns by describing its location to be “in rural Northern Ireland;” she also introduces the idea of the fictional external world not to be aware of Aghybogey:

Police in the small village of Ag-gee-Bow-gee...

The reporter’s mispronunciation of her hometown caused a shot of pain to lick down Majella’s back. She didn’t understand why reporters from Belfast couldn’t pronounce Aghybogey. They were as bad as the Brits.

(Gallen, *Big Girl* 8)

Mispronunciation is the way through which Gallen illustrates the world’s neglect of Aghybogey’s autonomy. It represents a secluded existence with only slight recognition and appreciation, occasionally welcoming a reporter “in the centre of Aghybogey to cover [a] *shocking and tragic* story” (Gallen, *Big Girl* 8). Placing the reporter – the very medial connection between different countries and people – in the middle of Aghybogey while mispronouncing the town’s name is an affront against the citizens as Majella’s physical reaction shows. Through the reporter’s loss of respect for Aghybogey, Majella too loses her identification with her hometown.

While the example of mispronouncing Aghybogey by a Belfast reporter manifests the background of a divided Ireland, the geographical location of *Factory Girls* continues to add to the distance between the recognition of an autonomous village by the citizens in opposition to its dependent existence to outsiders. Like in *Big Girl*, *Small Town*, Gallen uses the media to introduce this distance. Maeve’s aspiration to become a journalist bases on the incorrect display of a detonated bomb at her thirteenth birthday:

... A reporter described how cowardly IRA bombers had planted a viable device in a crowded residential area.

“But Linus McMurphy found it up the Killeen Road!” Maeve exclaimed. “It was never planted anywhere near the town!”

Her da'd shushed her with a wave of his hand. A reporter explained that bomb disposal experts had bravely carried out a controlled explosion on the device, saving local houses from massive destruction.

“But it was already defused!” Maeve had whinged, her lesson not yet learned.

“Linus had it in bits!” ...

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 152-3)

The representation of a town needing help and protection indicates the geographical remoteness of Maeve's hometown. Instead of listening to the true order of the event, the reporters from the outside twist the story to suit the media's focus on catastrophes and the stereotyping of the IRA's violent actions. The loss of truth and credibility are two aspects of Maeve's loss in the context of a wholesome and positive childhood: the external world appears to her as mendacious, while her own voice and the story she knows to be true are neglected by the majority of people watching the news.

In every which way the media proposes a sense of loss, inevitability, and hopelessness for a changing and changeable world to Majella and Maeve, so does the media open possibilities for the both of them to reclaim their geographical – sometimes even cultural – identity as citizens of their respective towns. Majella's possibility of escape from the imposing misrecognition of her hometown is her work in the chip shop, where locals come in to eat and chat. Retreat into the chip shop in combination with the covering of her curves below fat and clothing is a relief to the fact “that this ma[kes] her more invisible to most men” with the occasional exclusion of Marty (Gallen, *Big Girl* 27). Even within the heart of the village community, not having to speak anything else than the local dialect, Majella secludes herself from the outside world. Instead of addressing the mispronunciation directly, she steps back from the responsibility of publicly representing her hometown to the outside world. Since Aghybogey is remote and not in the centre of the Irish attention in the media regarding

local customs, this very remoteness becomes an escape for Majella to retreat into herself even further.

Maeve, on the other hand, pursues an active way of escaping the village's remoteness and the thus evolving seclusion within her hometown. Her very wish to become a journalist represents the niche of escape, which the misrepresentation of the bomb incident causes. The original reporter's lack of connectivity to truth and to exaggerate minor, already detonated bomb parts into an attack, increases the cut off existence of Maeve's town. To bridge this gap, Maeve wants to "broadcast the truth, instead of parroting the government's agenda" (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 153). The geographical distance turns into a political agenda of representing the best side of the government as supportive and protective. Simultaneously, the phrasing "parroting" points towards possible corruption in order to achieve this picture presented to and perceived by the majority of citizens. Sylvia de Mars et al. summarize the Northern Irish Government's declaration "Why the Border must be: The Northern Ireland case in brief" regarding the effect of the border on the citizens as follows: "The border had become a mirror, reflecting back the image that ministers North and South wanted their own People to see and distracting them from internal woes" (14). Just as the people around Maeve do not focus anymore on the issues and discrepancies between what the media broadcasts and what actually happens, Maeve sees herself as an advocate of truth to the world. At the same time, Maeve's journalism wish connects with the responsibility to leave her hometown and encounter the world on a mission: the geographical border of remoteness becomes her escape from a secluded, isolated life towards an international job (possibly) abroad.

Aside from the loss of trust in the external world as well as the neglected appreciation of their hometown being valuable on their own, Majella and Maeve also share the loss of a loved person in their lives, both of them having a close connection to geographical borders. The death of Majella's grandmother leaves behind a murder mystery:

The Police Service of Northern Ireland have made it clear that the DNA testing and fingerprinting of males aged between sixteen and sixty will be selective, that samples will only be used in connection with this case, and that all samples will be destroyed once the police have ruled out the suspect. Police have also confirmed that the death early last week of eighty-five-year-old Mrs Margaret O'Neill is being treated as murder...

(Gallen, *Big Girl* 8)

A murder is a sensation in Aghybogey, which is why the Belfast reporter reports about the case in exaggerating terms. But aside from suspicions among the locals on who murdered Majella's grandmother, the talk of the town is the inheritance of her land in Garvaghy. The land is near the border and "[w]ith that border road opened up ah'd say the price of land up Garvaghy's been rising" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 300). The placename denotes yet another fictional townland in rural Northern Ireland; it is worth noting that it originates in the Irish word *Garbhachadh* which means rough field (comp. Gallen, "Glossary" n.p.). A rough unfarmed piece of land may turn into a valuable investment, which is the reason for the land to be a sign of prosperity. Whoever possesses the land will be asked to sell it, as well as it brings an ambiguous responsibility with it: "With a bit of *peace money* ah'd say there could be all sorts of improvements up there" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 300, emphasis added). The geographical location of the land in Garvaghy brings the ambiguous threat of war with it: aside from being economically well-placed near the border – meaning, benefiting from two sides of the border – the border itself represents a looming force eager to occupy the borderland around it.

With Majella's grandmother dead, the borderland is ownerless. At the same time, the borderland with the caravan becomes unprotected with the death of Mrs O'Neill, opening the possibility of renegotiation about the dimensions of the borderland. It is only the moment Gallen reveals the will of the deceased that the readers may grasp the direct connection between Majella, the land, the border, and a possible escape from financial dependency:

It is stated here that Majella O'Neill is the only grandchild of the deceased, and has been bequeathed the lands and properties of the deceased, These include ten acres of farmland, on which stands a house in need of substantial repair and a small caravan, which is in sound condition. A rental income of £1,200 per annum is currently generated by the property.

(Gallen, *Big Girl* 195-6)

Up to this point, the empty land represents the loss of Majella's grandmother. Once the ownership passes on to Majella, the borderland becomes sellable and, therefore, a valuable financial possibility to escape the financial dependencies of mortgage and working at the chip shop. Her grandmother's death makes Majella the owner and sovereign over the land, a position which enables her to decide upon her own destiny and to negotiate with interested buyers, when the opportunity arises. Following Görling and Schimanski's argumentation, the possession of the borderland makes Majella stand "inside and outside of the law" as a sovereign, inside the laws of the country, outside and above the laws applying to non-owners (Schimanski and Wolfe 111). As the sovereign of the borderland, Majella "keeps the border under surveillance," while sovereignty itself "determine[s her] position in relationship to the border ... and ... the position of the border itself" (Schimanski and Wolfe 111, 112). The border of negotiation shifts from her grandmother to Majella, expanding the borderscape and the borderland around the actual border. Through turning the land in Garvaghy into money, Gallen introduces the liberation of financial dependencies as well as it represents the loss of Majella's family member.

In *Factory Girls*, Gallen depicts Maeve's loss as a loss not only personal to the protagonist but also as possible final encouragement for Maeve to leave home. Maeve's older sister Deidre dies after only a short time attending university. The suicide is a long-term death, induced by collapsing for the first time "four days after swallowing every single tablet" of the 200-paracetamol bottle (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 74). Deidre's "last pack of fags [becomes]

Maeve's first" and in this way Maeve follows in her sister's footsteps (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 73). Her environment confronts Maeve repeatedly with Deidre's death, even with the interior the rented flat does not have, namely "her dead sister's empty bed" (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 15). Escaping the image of Deidre lingering in everyday chores becomes Maeve's priority. This is also an argument in favour of viewing the choice of a university abroad as an escape and as a new beginning. Receiving their GCSE results at the end of the summer, "all [Maeve is] thinking [is] *Three As!* She [is] to get the fuck out of the town" (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 237). Going abroad creates geographical as well as emotional distance to Maeve's home and her family history. While Deidre dies at home in the hospital, the external world tempts with the promise of a new beginning for Maeve. Her wish to work as a journalist depicts a connection to her past and motivation, in opposition to the wide world promising a life freed from old burdens and responsibilities to live a life in someone else's shoes.

So far Gallen uses geographical borders in order to represent her protagonist's personal loss of a family member as well as to illustrate the dependency of small villages on their representation through the media. Both Majella and Maeve experience a loss of autonomy and connectivity with the external world through geographical remoteness and through the death of beloved ones. Narrowing down the focus from overall geographical borders connected to the shift in sovereignty and renegotiation of the borderscapes, the following section concerns the effect of buildings regarding social borders.

2.2 Rules of Behaviour Inside and Outside Buildings

Considering geographical borders in the sense of marking territory in the preceding section, this section turns towards the not less fixed but imposed spaces of Majella's and Maeve's workspaces. Aside from borders across the Irish island, Gallen relies on buildings creating borders within the towns' societies. Those physical walls and differing workspaces display a reliance of power relations between the sovereign and the subject – in the novels'

cases, between the employers and the employed. In the context of the Bildungsroman's first stage of loss, these buildings represent the demarcation line between the freedom of self-determination and the subjectification or loss of autonomy. Gallen's choice of display is the behaviour of Majella and Maeve within the places as opposed to how they behave outside them.

Mezzadra and Neilson summarize the importance of borders concerning the relation between a sovereign and a subject suitable: "Insofar as [the border] serves at once to make divisions and establish connections, the border is an epistemological device, which is at work whenever a distinction between subject [the sovereign] and object [the sovereign's subject] is established" (16). What Mezzadra and Neilson describe here relates to Étienne Balibar's hint at the effect of borders on the cognitive identification with and through a border; the difficulty in relating these two aspects lies in the very definition of a border:

The idea of a simple definition of what constitutes a borders is, by definition, absurd: to mark out a border is precisely, to define a territory, to delimit it, and so to register the identity of that territory, or confer one upon it. Conversely, however, to define or identify in general is nothing other than to trace a border, to assign boundaries or borders...

(Balibar 76; qtd. in Mezzadra and Neilson 16)

The effect of these statements is that an individual can define a border by means of cognitive, behavioural methods, which again imprint on the behaviour and mindset of other individuals. Therefore, the construction of a border is an interrelated, social experiment of continuing negotiation and practicing.

In the case of Majella's workplace in *Big Girl, Small Town* the chip shop A Salt and Battered! represents this very imprinting. Working in the chip shop brings along a number of rules based on the expectation of customers to be served in the order they line up, for example:

Majella knew that because there was a queue, everyone expected her to take their orders in order, a practice that did not always make sense. Later in the night, when people were more drunk she'd be able to give Sean McCormick the eye, and say 'the usual?' and he'd nod back and she'd slip his order in before Fidelma. But if she tried that now there'd be murder.

(Gallen, *Big Girl* 213)

Majella and Marty as the employees are sovereign over the order of food orderings; customers come into the shop and subject themselves wait patiently. Any deviation from this norm would be considered treason and Majella knows that she is not in the position to do so on her own. In this way, both employees discard a part of their autonomy by subjecting to the rules of expected customer service. Being subject to rules of behaviour brings along the submission to a sovereign, in this case the customers, while serving them from the higher-ranking position of being their spokesperson.

However, Majella and Marty are also subject to the owner of the shop, Mrs Hunter, who wields her power whenever there is a work-related action and wherever Majella and Marty move on work-related ground. Taking a break from work represents one of the instances of a work-related action. Whenever Marty or Majella take a break, they enter the alley behind the chip shop; the crux of the matter is that being allowed to take a break relates to the action of smoking a fag, "because it [is] the only way of getting a break" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 20). Before Majella started smoking, "she'd just nip outside for five minutes here and there, to knock back a Coke and pace up and down ... But one evening Mrs Hunter had burst into the yard, wanting to know what the fuck did Majella think she was doing ... wasting the time she was paid to be working" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 20-1). Although the alley does not definitely belong to the shop, the sovereign Mrs Hunter observes her employees every action out there. The alley represents as an external defined workspace, which is why Mrs Hunter does not allow for work-unrelated actions there.

But even the owner of the chip shop does not ultimately hold everlasting control over the behaviour of her employees: inside, Majella subjects to the rules of expectations and customer service; outside, Majella starts smoking, which opens a leeway for interpreting the sovereign's benevolence. Hence, escaping the defining existence of the pre-set borders of the shop includes the interpretation of behaviour on both sides: Mrs Hunter interprets pacing along the alley as a waste of time that should be avoided, while the smoking of a fag is an action that requires the time of a break and cannot be substituted by taking a breather next to "the heat and fryers and the stream of faces" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 20). By allowing a smoking break, Mrs Hunter maintains the order of a clean space dealing with food products. Simultaneously, Majella escapes the necessity to subject herself and her physical well-being to the chip shop's rules all the time during her shift, even though the smoke break itself also belongs to the behavioural rules of working at the chipper.

Similar to Majella's work at A Salt and Battered!, Maeve's work at the shirt factory requires a high level of obedience. In opposition to the representation of Majella's workplace, Gallen focuses more on the introduction of Maeve and her friends to the work at the factory. Starting their work includes a form of questions, a short introduction by Mary, as well as "review[ing] where the first aid boxes and emergency exits [are], learn[ing] which extinguisher work[s] for what fire, and identif[ying] who [is] trained in emergency aid," among clocking in and out at specific times and rules of where food is allowed or prohibited (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 42). The factory represents a hierarchy of chronological actions as well as it includes the hierarchy of work order passing a shirt through various stations in a predetermined order. Within the factory, the work of pressing shirts orients at a set goal: "My sticker says two and a half p per shirt,' Maeve said, trying to do the sums in her head ... 'So we've to iron seventy shirts an hour to hit our basic?'" (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 49). The currency of effective subordination measures in the objective number of shirts and payment; every worker is equal to the other bound only by the necessity to hit their basic number.

The factory being a secluded space points towards the necessity of surveillance with respect to maintaining these behavioural expectations. The co-existence of an inside and an outside of the factory calls for a sovereign institutionalizing the rules in both spaces. Hence, surveillance closely relates to monitoring. As a means of monitoring the profitable work, work measures in money and a basic number. However, personal surveillance requires the active presence of the factory owner: “As Marry was showing them how to use the stain removal gun, the hairs on Maeve’s neck prickled. She looked up and saw Andy standing on the mezzanine above them. He raised his eyebrow and grinned at her. She dipped her burning face back into the mist of cleaning chemicals, her head spinning” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 42).

Schimanski and Wolfe summarize the power and position of the sovereign as follows: “The sovereign keeps the border under surveillance, the border of the state as well as the border of the house. He decides who pertains to the community and who is alien; he identifies the subjects and the objects, gives names to subjects and objects” (111). Situating Andy above the workers in the factory, Gallen’s scenery establishes the sense of aloofness a sovereign has above his subjects. Gallen even allows Andy to ‘name’ his workers, assigning them their respective work posts: “Miss [Caroline] Jackson, Andy wants you on the machines. ... You two [Maeve and Aoife], Andy wants youse on pressing” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 39).

Following the argument of Görling and Schimanski, “[t]he magical power to name has its origin in the power to decide over whether someone is to be included in or excluded from the circle of those who concern us; ultimately, it is the power to decide over the life or death of the Other” (Schimanski and Wolfe 116). Using the act of assigning workstations equals the act of naming and incorporating the individual into the factory’s machinery. Furthermore, passing on directions and orders through Mary, a third instance, creates increasing distance between the girls and their boss. Even so, the girls lose their autonomy, their names, and their individual work progress once they enter the factory; they become part of the factory.

Although not starting to smoke because of work, smoking a fag enables Maeve to occasionally escape the routine and prescriptions inside the factory. The place for smoking is right outside the factory and only when Maeve sees “nothing coming her way” in terms of work, does she go out to sit “down beside Fidelma Hegarty,” joining the talk that may only take place outside the factory (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 71). The factory’s inside represents a neutral ground regarding religious affiliations, including excluding topics of talk that might not be perceived well by the other side: “‘Sure we aren’t allowed to talk about the World Cup in there,’ Mickey said, nodding at the factory. ‘The Prods are all sour grapes because neither England nor the Northern Irish team made the tournament’” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 71). Leaving the factory to join the religiously segregated talk is an act of joining the group of co-workers and colleagues on the one hand. But through joining them and smoking a fag, Maeve also abandons her childish innocence: “Fidelma ground her fag out with the heel of her shoe, then eyed Maeve. ‘You’re very young to have such a filthy habit, Maeve. When’d you start smoking?’ ... ‘Young enough, I suppose. Sixteen?’ ... ‘Sixteen’s too young,’ Fidelma said clicking her tongue. ‘Ye’ll do yer lungs no good’” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 73). The physical impact of smoking cannot be undone, neither can the joining the factory. What Maeve loses by the physical walls of the factory are the possibilities for a self-determined and unprecedented life ahead of her.

So far, the social behaviour of Majella in *Big Girl, Small Town* and Maeve in *Factory Girls* in- and outside their workspaces considers the hierarchy of a sovereign, their subordinates, and the people surrounding their secluded space of interaction. Subordination within the chip shop and the factory opposes the self-determination of the protagonists outside these buildings. Even so, Gallen displays her protagonists’ free-willed loss of autonomy as a sign of escape from the defining necessity of self-responsibility. The escape from said subordination exists in form of border landscapes attached to the workspaces, places in which the sovereign does not maintain ultimate control over their subjects. Moving on from the

physical borders of buildings and social behaviour, the last section of this chapter focuses on the geographical distance between family members.

2.3 Separation From Father Figures

For the last section on loss in coming-of-age novels in combination with geographical borders, I have a close look at the loss of Gallen's representation of father figures as missing role models. Likewise losing their grandmother or older sister as female role models, the male role model continues to have a consistent, rather than a cataclysmic perpetuating influence on the protagonists' coming-of-age progress. The absence of them manipulates the progressing development of Majella and Maeve from childhood into adulthood, thus prohibiting them from claiming their own self-determination and independence from their parents. Gallen illustrates this prohibition through the lack of geographical landmarks of closure and communication.

Majella's dependence on her father comes not only from their familiar bond, but also stems from the imbalanced care she receives from her mother:

For a long time Majella had believed what she'd been told and had seen herself as a spoilt brat ... When she was old enough to understand some of what was going on in other people's houses, she realised that she wasn't spoilt. *There'd never been room for a spoilt child in their family with her ma sucking up all the air in every room.*

(Gallen, *Big Girl* 230, emphasis added)

Even though the family of three lives together, her mother demands most of the care a child would need for their development. This shift in caretaking causes Majella to cling to her father even more, on the one side, and to rely on his guidance growing up, on the other side. With this precondition in mind, when her father disappears, Majella's mother does not follow in his footsteps; on the contrary, Majella takes over her father's role, takes care of her mother, but is also responsible for herself: "She gave her ma nothing in the form of housekeeping or

rent, for the wee mortgage on the house had been paid off before her da left, and Majella knew if she handed her ma anything it would end up in the till down in the off-license” (Gallen, *Big Girl* 100). Her mother behaves like the spoilt child of the family and the house remains without the necessity to pay off a mortgage, which binds Majella between the necessity to care for her mother and the freedom to leave home. Their house represents a place of stillstand, in which her father had “plans for the kitchen” that did not come true (Gallen, *Big Girl* 100).

Losing her father manifests in the lack of a geographical end point or resting place: there is no tombstone testifying his death. Elisabetta Viggiani comments on the physical representation of memory and mourning in the Irish tradition as follows:

As physical structures, memorial plaques and remembrance gardens are built to endure. They concretize history and project it forwards in perpetuity, enabling possible future evocations of the events they embody. They both stand for history and stand against it, in the sense that while they represent the past they also resist the forgetting that the passing of time may bring about. Long after those with the direct experience of these events have gone, the monuments are likely to remain, perhaps ‘invisible’ to some of those who follow and who simply pass them by, but also open to activation by others who in future find in them the potential to express new forms of grievance and hurt. Exactly how and for what purposes events and individuals marked by memorials are remembered are *open to change and to being reimagined and reinvented...*

(xiv, emphasis added)

Concluding from this, the existence of a tombstone opens up the possibility of closure for family members, allowing them to continue with their lives and interpret the loss as an instance of the past.

However, the O’Neill family neglects this physical mark of closure. Instead of declaring the death officially, Gallen merely uses the word ‘disappearance’ as a reference to

the death of Majella's father. Jessica Bundschuh comments on this instance that "in the parlance of the time, 'disappearance' was a euphemism for having been murdered, in this case, shortly after the death of Majella's Uncle Bobby, who died for the 'Cause' while building a bomb" (240). The word itself causes especially Majella's mother to attach to the hope of a re-appearance until her mother-in-law "bequeath[s] the sum of £500 [to her] to erect a handsome headstone in the memory of her husband" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 194). In the tradition of Viggiani's analysis of how to mourn, the setting of a tombstone may "provide a first step on the path from contested past to common future" (xv). Moreover, the installation of a tombstone may reflect the internal end of a time of grief and loss, thus, enabling Majella to move on in order to come of age. As this is not the case, the geographically missing landmark of the tombstone serves Gallen to represent her protagonist's stagnant existence in the first place.

As opposed to Majella's father, Maeve's is still alive in *Factory Girls*. This dichotomy points towards Gallen's intention of representing the loss through death compared to the loss of a role model through geographical distance. In a time of only few jobs available in Maeve's hometown, her father is "[o]n his way tae Belfast" as "[d]oing the drug testing [is] easy money" (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 113). Moving out from home, Maeve already creates a geographical distance between herself and her parents. However, she does not cut the connection to her parents since she visits them regularly. The geographical distance because of her father's temporal occupation in Belfast is one that Maeve cannot bridge on her own, but she must rely on her mother's accounts, which again rely on the report of her father's friend's wife:

... "When's Daddy back?"

"The morrah, ah believe."

"Have ye heard from him?"

"Naw, but Toot's wife said she was chatting to him on the phone. ..."

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 145)

Not being able to contact her father becomes a sign for Maeve to be on her own and to have to take responsibility for herself: instead of being reassured in her decisions by her father's presence, she needs to overcome her doubts about living alone without guidance or support.

The necessity to move across the Irish country for work is Gallen's representation of the shift in occupational possibilities in the 1990s. Ian N. Gregory et al. investigate the economic and social changes in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in their book *Troubled Geographies: A Spatial History of Religion and Society in Ireland*. Focusing on the period between 1971 and 2001, Gregory et al. trace the significant shift from manufacturing-related work to service employment:

The decline of heavy industry took Northern Ireland through a transition from the traditional manufacturing-based economy to what might be termed the 'new economy.' This is reflected in the decline in both agriculture and manufacturing since 1971 and the growth of service-sector employment... Traditional occupations (e.g., manufacturing-related manual work) have declined at the expense of growth in 'new jobs' in service employment. In some ways these trends have been similar to those in the Republic, but their impact has been different. The previous importance of manufacturing in Northern Ireland meant that its loss was traumatic, while the increase in service-sector jobs has been less dramatic and far more based around the public sector than south the border.

(170-1)

Factory Girls, therefore, illustrates two important ideas about Irish society: first, Maeve's occupation in the factory is a rare possibility since it is an occupation in her hometown. This image is one of the symbols of manual work being still available. Second, Maeve's father belongs to the older generation whose specialisation on manual work cannot be performed in

his hometown anymore. To earn money, the geographically distant work of drug testing as a means of service-related work is necessary to take care of his family.

Subjecting to the occupational changes in Ireland goes along with moving from one place to the other temporarily to earn “[t]housands . . . for a couple of weeks of lying in bed, popping pills, pissing into test tubes and letting nurses drain [] blood and monitoring [the] heart rate” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 113). The geographical change concerning the availability of work increases the geographical distance between Maeve and her father. Maeve is not able to contact him and, thus, loses their emotional connection. Gallen enforces Maeve’s inability to reach out to her father by technical hinderances and only entangles these issues when Maeve’s father invests in a home-installed telephone as “a home improvement” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 239). Technology becomes a means of connection despite geographical distance as well as it becomes a symbol for progress and re-claiming of what is lost: only when Maeve’s father returns from his medical trial does Gallen admit her protagonist the chance to acknowledge the loss of a father figure in her life. The term “home improvement” points towards an improvement of the family relations and a redemption of continuing absence of the father in the life of his remaining daughter. The temporary loss of her father signifies Maeve’s escape into the necessity of adulthood and self-responsibility. At the same time, Maeve emotionally remains a child waiting for her father to support and reach out to her in order for her to grow up protected.

As far as the absence of father figures concerns Gallen’s coming-of-age novels, both protagonists encounter the necessity of geographical landmarks to signify their loss. In Majella’s case the absence of said geographical landmark pinpoints her escape from having to promote her own personal development. As far as it concerns Maeve, the temporary geographical distance to her father illustrates the temporary escape into adulthood including the crucial reconnecting to her father and a protected existence as his daughter. Gallen incorporates the Irish tradition of taking leave from socio-cultural habits into her coming-of-

age novels by means of allowing Majella and Maeve to escape this reality by ignoring it or at least pushing geographical distance between them and the issues.

So far, the geographical borders of *Big Girl, Small Town* and *Factory Girls* depict the Bildungsroman's stage of loss as a separation of territory belonging to a sovereign, social behaviour in- and outside a sovereign's property, and the separation from father figures. Each geographical border comes along with a means of border escape for the protagonists, be it the temporary escape into adulthood or childhood, or the neglect of accepting facts instead of hoping for the irrational. Just as geographical borders signify separation and negotiation potential of newly to establish borders, the following chapter focuses on the second stage of the Bildungsroman, namely the protagonists' need to make a journey. Similar to the connection of the escape from the sovereign's rule, this chapter points out that social borders and interactions signify the protagonists' starting development preceding and following the experienced loss.

3. Making a Journey: Social Borders and Borders of Class

In the tradition of the Bildungsroman, the initial stage of loss continues with the stage of the protagonist making a journey. Since this journey's character is not required to be a literal journey across countries, the protagonist may also undertake a journey through means of exploring the determining circumstances of their surrounding society. As for the journeys of Majella in *Big Girl, Small Town* and Maeve in *Factory Girls*, I respectively pair them with the aspects and impacts of social borders and the borders of class. In the following chapter's sections I point out how Majella and Maeve experience and adapt to the social borders and expectations imposed on them. Furthermore, each encounter with a social border introduces a niche for Gallen's coming-of-age protagonists to hide, transform, and develop in. Through this pairing of stage, border, and social aspect, the borderscape signifies an ongoing and fluid process of developing into self-respecting and self-determined individuals. Furthermore, the

interpretation of a border in the sense of being an escape includes an aspect of interpretational freedom up to the individual who is coming of age.

3.1 Education Marks Social Classes: Segregation Into Groups

The most significant and prominent social border in the context of borderscapes concerns the segregation into groups. Considering the emergence of borders of any kind, they come into existence “through processes of prefiguration within the three dimensions constituted by institution, tradition and the imaginary” according to Schimanski and Wolfe’s introduction on the imaginary aspect of *Border Aesthetics* (16). Transferring this idea of a complementary existence to the protagonist’s journey in the Bildungsroman, the social borders of interactions represent a testing for the predetermined and the newly constructed borders at the same time. Hence, following Lene M. Johannessen and Ruben Moi’s argument, “borders are consequently at the same time confirmations and interrogations of the very construct that they are: constructs which simultaneously include and exclude, echoing spatially the double movement of ‘deviation from and toward’” (Schimanski and Wolfe 51). Transferring from this, in the context of the Bildungsroman the protagonist’s journey consists of the testing and probing of existing borders as well as of their own borders. Through this testing, the protagonist may reach a new state of enlightenment and every failure on testing signifies a dead end of their personal development, which has to be avoided.

In the manner of following the set-up of Gallen’s coming-of-age novels, she chooses the theme of education to mark social classes and differences. Consequently, Gallen also indicates through the theme of education that her protagonists may experience stagnation, which again might turn into an intended escape from borderscapes unsuitable for their preferred development. Dependent on the system of school,

Majella thought it was weird how everyone went to the same primary schools, but after the Eleven-plus exam they were all divided up. The ones who didn’t pass had to

stay in the town and go to Saint Christopher's, and the ones who passed chose to buy an expensive uniform, get up for school nearly two hours earlier than everyone else, and then spend over an hour sitting on a rattling bus with a shower of other teenagers to reach whatever grammar school their mas and das wanted them to attend.

(Gallen, *Big Girl* 203)

In this reflection, Majella maintains the position of an external, but biased observer. The choice of further education in Aghybovey depends on the final exams and, thus, segregates Aghybovey's society into the ones capable of leaving the town and the ones who are not. Majella's description continues that she had "got her way and went to Saint Christopher's. She thought it was strange the way a uniform turned people's heads" and "[e]ven their accents changed, from plain old Aghybovey to poshy-woshy Omagh" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 203). The active rejection of a further education outside of Aghybovey illustrates Majella's preferred comfort state of staying in the realm she knows best. Instead of accepting the chance to endeavour the world around Aghybovey, Majella's choice highlights her personal journey to take place within the geographical borders of Aghybovey.

Furthermore, Majella's choice represents the greater picture of being one coming-of-age protagonist among many others in her hometown and, ultimately, in the Irish context. Reminiscing on the occupational possibilities in Aghybovey, Gallen's narration captures the limitations of working in a remote village:

[Majella had] learned in geography class at school that their local district had the highest unemployment rate in the Industrial World. When the teacher had them break down the figures inside their district, it turned out Aghybovey was the worst of the worst. ... Everyone wanted to escape the chicken-rendering factory in Strabane. Majella didn't know what she wanted to be, so she'd clung on to A levels as a way to stave off a career for few more years. Most of the A level students were like Majella –

just treading water. And most of them – like Majella – dropped out before their final exams.

(Gallen, *Big Girl* 72-3)

Again, Gallen emphasises the geographical dominance of remoteness in Aghybogey which denies Majella several occupational possibilities. But more significantly, Majella's failure to pass her A levels causes her to stay in Aghybogey instead of leaving the town: Instead of recuperating this possibility by a second attempt at her A levels, she voluntarily accepts her state of being trapped. Escaping the town's unemployment rate through scholastic success would mean for Majella to subject to becoming a different person, illustrated by Gallen through the change of accents. Here, Gallen represents the escape from conformity and the refuge in staying true to oneself through the process of coming-of-age.

In opposition to Majella in *Big Girl*, *Small Town*, Maeve in *Factory Girls* actively seeks to prevail scholastically so that she may escape the narrow-mindedness of her hometown. A case in point for this town's defining narrowmindedness is Maeve's comment on the expectations for her sister's career in contrast to her chosen study subject:

Brainy children from families like the Murrays were supposed to aim for steady careers that'd raise the stock of the whole family: medicine, law, dentistry, accountancy or teaching. Careers that'd land a mortgage and husband, boosting them a rung up or two up the ladder. Nobody knew where in hell you'd end up after doing media studies.

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 213)

Describing the academic and occupational career as a matter of climbing a ladder illustrates the single-mindedness of a purposeful life in opposition to the deviation from this path as Deidre planned. The citizens of Maeve's hometown experience any deviation from their approved path as an affront against their world view and as living outside the box. Hence,

Gallen points out the inevitability of progress taking place outside the secluded town and, thus, through detachment from familiar norms and expectations.

Maeve's attempt to break the boundaries of these paths and stereotypes is especially significant in comparison to her friend Aoife's perception of a successful career: "Actually, Maeve, there's a chance I won't get my grades. And things aren't the same for me as they are for you. Our families are different. ... It's perfect As I need. In my world, two As and a B is failing" (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 209). Aoife's key to freedom and a fulfilled life differs from Maeve's in a mirroring way: she craves to fulfil her family's expectation of prevailing scholastically; in her view, Maeve cannot break the boundaries through failing her GCSE levels, there is only one way up the ladder for Maeve by receiving outstanding results. The GCSE results are a test of boundaries concerning friendship, family expectations, and social norms. While Aoife does not receive the grades expected and perceives "learn[ing] Irish" as a punishment, Maeve exceeds expectations by receiving three As (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 243; comp. *Factory Girls* 237). Both characters probe their newly set expectations for themselves against their families', who either neglect it as failure concerning their expectations or as exceptional success exceeding their expectations. In both cases, Gallen presents the readers with a coming-of-age girl-woman who claims her right for self-determination through scholastic results.

Relating back to Johannessen and Ruben's argument that borders echo a double movement of exclusion and inclusion, Gallen focus on scholastic education is a case in point for this double movement: in both, *Big Girl, Small Town* and *Factory Girls* Gallen's insistence of perpetuating back to education is a way to uncover the mechanisms of social expectations and norms. While *Big Girl, Small Town* contains a generalization of people through school education, so does *Factory Girls* point towards an individualisation by means of scholastic success. The dual movement of the social border of education exists through the combination of personal stagnation by leaving Aghybovey in *Big Girl, Small Town* and through the parallel

of personal development and gain of independence by leaving Maeve's hometown in *Factory Girls*. Although set in a similar geographical context, the protagonists experience the opportunity to leave their hometowns divertingly: either it represents a dead-end or a progress to their coming-of-age process.

Considering that the segregation into groups of differing educational prestige is only one traceable and objectively numerical criterium of measuring personal development over time and in comparison to other individuals, Gallen induces the existence of a scholastic escape from social stereotyping for her protagonists in general. However, education through scholastic success does not help Gallen's protagonists to understand the world they grow into, nor does it prepare them for the challenges to face in business and work-related activities. The border Gallen's protagonists encounter here is the border of social stagnation and regression. Furthermore, their escapes lie within self-education and self-information. The following section focuses on the media Majella and Maeve consult for their personal improvement and the understanding of the external world aside from their families and workplaces.

3.2 The Media of Escape: Trying to Understand the World

As covered in the preceding chapter on the first stage of the Bildungsroman with focus on Gallen's novels, both Majella and Maeve lack a father figure and role model. Also, their mothers care more about themselves instead of guiding their daughters through their psychological and moral development. Yet, Gallen points out that Majella and Maeve seek for guidance elsewhere: through media. Each chosen media represents a possibility for them to understand the world around them in more detail and those media assist them in decision-making processes. At the same time, the chosen media reflect another approach on claiming agency and escaping the definition of imposed ideas of class identification, as the previous section of this chapter illustrates.

Majella's choice of watching TV as means to understand the external world connects closely to memories of her father. It connotes a childhood memory where the "only other thing they'd watched as a family was *Dallas*" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 28). The connection of watching the series and the experience of being a family signifies an image of a happy family with Majella not having to bear responsibility for her mother. *Dallas* even maintains a separate entry on Majella's list of things she likes, which again points towards the need for recreating this feeling of security through watching *Dallas* repeatedly (comp. Gallen, *Big Girl* 2, where Majella ranks *Dallas* second on her list). At the same time Majella's recreation of this feeling highlights her lack of experienced security in her everyday life. Focusing on Majella's creation of a cocoon in her bedroom – "Majella locked her bedroom door, plugged in the fan heater, and then climbed into bed" – Bundschuh states that this behaviour points towards a perpetual state of waiting (Gallen, *Big Girl* 30): "Majella's preference for containment ensures that she remain[s] in a perpetual state of waiting," before Bundschuh draws a parallel to "Northern Ireland itself in the immediate years following the Good Friday Agreement" (236).

Hence, Majella's repeated watching of the TV series represents a state of stagnation, which might also be called a state of hibernation in the context of Gallen's coming-of-age novel. Between Majella and her memories of her father exists a border of time. But still, *Dallas* enables her to relive moments of peace and security. Following Henk van Houtum and Stephen F. Wolfe in their argument about a border representing a waiting act, each border causes a standstill, a distance and difference in time and space. As any border is a Janus face (Van Houtum 2010) consisting of two mutually reinforcing faces of inclusion and exclusion and of openness and closure, so too the waiting consists of two categories which are mutually reinforcing. Waiting is both an inclusion and an exclusion at the same time.

(Schimanski and Wolfe 129)

Waiting for the ultimate escape from social expectations, Majella bridges the time by means of internalizing *Dallas*'s story, so that the characters on the screen become her friends and persons of advice, who explain the world to her. This is why, when questioning what to do with her inherited land, she "picture[s] sly old J.R. Ewing smiling at her from under his Stetson" and she "consider[s] what J.R. would do [and] th[inks] of all the things he had taught her over the years" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 309). Gallen's use of *Dallas* as a repetitious pastime, and an escape for Majella from the inexplicable external world, turns into the continuous stimulation of Majella's decision-making abilities in the end, guiding her towards the decision of selling the land and moving on.

Interestingly, Gallen does not diverge far from external instructions for her protagonists, neither in *Big Girl*, *Small Town* nor in *Factory Girls*: in both novels Gallen chooses American-based, business oriented, capitalist, and flat media for her protagonists to learn from. While Gallen chooses the TV series *Dallas* for Majella, Maeve receives the guidance from Dale Carnegie's book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. This parallel across the novels points out the coming-of-age protagonists' need for guidance in growing into the world's expectations. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the orientation of the chosen media represents a close connection to the protagonists' longing for cognitive stimulation beyond what their hometowns can offer in terms of role models and guidance: "Maeve realized later that evening she was bored of everything and everyone – herself included. And being bored of herself felt much worse than being broke, or feeling trapped, or having your whole heart blister over with grief" (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 173). Concluding from the description of Maeve's boredom being the worst thing imaginable, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* occurs as a guidebook out of this boredom.

Moreover, Carnegie's book on the power of influencing people functions less as a book on gaining friends in *Factory Girls* and occurs more of a guide for Maeve to challenge and improve herself. Confronting her boss Andy, Maeve does not only engage in a fiery

discussion about how to earn the respect of the English, but she also receives the book along with some advice:

Maeve's forehead trembled as Andy grinned at her and picked up a book. "I think you ought to read this," he said.

"*How to Win Friends and Influence People*. How'll that help me?"

"It'll teach you a thing or two about people skills."

"And that'll set me up for London, will it?"

"No. But it's a start. And to be frank, Ms. Murray," Andy said, looking at her with amusement, "the race you think you've entered started generations ago. You need all the help you can get."

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 78)

The business classic is a way of passing on knowledge to the next generation with a focus on financial success. Although this is the predominant theme of the book's description, the book itself teaches Maeve "people skills" through which she becomes capable of interacting with people purposefully. This is why, as a niche of escaping the repetitious every-day life, reading the book promotes and accelerates Maeve's psychological and social coming-of-age.

Concluding from this perspective, Gallen's representation of Carnegie's book illustrates the existence of advice in an impersonal manner, detached from the interaction with people, and free to apply to social interactions upon the protagonist's wish.

Through the course of *Factory Girls*, Maeve repeatedly refers to *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Like Majella in *Big Girl, Small Town*, Maeve starts to incorporate the book's messages in the private space of her room: "That night she went to bed early and slid *How to Win Friends and Influence People* out from under her pillow" (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 85). Carnegie's book, just as Andy's encouragement to read it, becomes a reason for Maeve to "believe that success [is] possible if only nobody kn[ows] who she [is] and what she c[omes] from" (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 85). Slowly, Maeve's personal development changes due to what

she reads and the “sort of notion [take her] that only entered her head after reading *How to Win Friends and Influence People*” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 141). At the same time as Maeve attempts an application of the lessons learned, she must admit that there are either “tactic[s] that [are] sadly absent from” the guidebook or “that nothing she’d read in *How to Win Friends and Influence People* w[ill] ever make conversing with Mrs. O’Neill bearable” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 142, 245). Those instances prove Maeve’s social development in terms of applying the book’s guidelines, but also her self-imposed learning of how the world works; Gallen contrasts the theoretical implication of the world’s existence with the practical experiences Maeve gathers as the coming-of-age protagonist. Although Andy proposes Carnegie’s book as a valuable assistance to Maeve in understanding the world, her escape from the regulations is her escape from a possible dead-end of not improving her own “people skills.”

Considering van Houtum and Wolfe’s notion of a border signifying a space of waiting once more, Gallen’s protagonists experience themselves in such a place of patient waiting before and while encountering their media of escape. While *Big Girl, Small Town* depicts *Dallas* to be a medium of pastime, it also functions as a space for Majella’s waiting; she lives partially inside the world of *Dallas* without taking agency herself. At the same time, the hours spent watching the TV series fill Majella’s subconscious with ideas about the world surrounding her, which assist her eventually as a case study for negotiation regarding the farmland. On the contrary, *Factory Girls* introduces Maeve to Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People* for the purpose of accelerating her psychological and social development: The book becomes a catalyst by which Gallen overtly initiates Maeve’s journey towards self-determined agency and self-responsibility.

Although Gallen uses external media as a substitution for her protagonists’ enhanced psychological and social development, there still remains the question of how their environment influences their change in behaviour and development. The following section

concerns the challenges of the protagonists encountering close relatives representing stagnation while coming of age themselves in Gallen's Bildungsromane.

3.3 Prohibiting Progress: Destructive and Growth-Enhancing Self-Sabotage

Whenever a protagonist in the coming-of-age genre undergoes a journey from being a child to becoming an adult, there remains the question of when to call the development a successful one and when to call it a failed one. As covered in the preceding section, one way of terming a branch of the coming-of-age process as successful is to look for dead-ends the protagonist might run into: Majella experiences her loss of individuality as a dead-end and prefers to stay in her familiar hometown and visit school there; Maeve experiences boredom in her hometown through knowing it inside out and perceives this as a dead-end to her social progress. So far, these dead ends focus on the protagonists' personal interpretation of their accepted and neglected criteria for a successful development.

However, the journey of Gallen's protagonists – as well as the protagonist of any Bildungsroman – requires the testing of newly set boundaries in opposition to the surrounding social environment. Both of Gallen's novels depict external factors to oppose and challenge the protagonists in their progress of psychological growth. Those opposing positions occur not always in direct connection to the protagonists themselves, but they do affect their actions and world view. Hence, this section regarding the protagonists' journey from childhood to maturity focuses on self-sabotage and, thus, on the prohibition of progress. Often these instances do not focus specifically on the protagonists themselves, but another character displays the inhibitions of accepting the journey as a way towards self-responsibility and independence. These characters display often self-destructive, self-sabotaging behaviour which the protagonists copy and, in the process of their coming-of-age, overcome and discard for good.

According to *Psychology Today*, an internationally acknowledged information platform focusing on human behaviour and mental health, self-sabotage alludes to a certain manner of behaving when “it creates problems in daily life and interferes with long-standing goals” (“Self-Sabotage” n.p.). Among the most common behaviours of self-sabotaging, *Psychology Today* lists “procrastination, self-medication with drugs or alcohol, comfort eating, and forms of self-injury such as cutting” (n.p.). The research-based article states further that not every affected person is automatically aware of self-sabotaging behaviour and often only a behavioural therapy may uncover such self-inflicting gestures (comp. “Self-Sabotage”). In relation to the Bildungsroman, any such self-sabotaging indicates the prohibition of personal growth and progress. Often protagonists encounter their own self-sabotaging behaviours through other characters, installed by the author to mirror the protagonist. Ideally, the self-destructive behaviour of the protagonist’s counterpart repels them and causes them to go out of their own way to change themselves. Compared to the overarching research-based evidence on the effect of behavioural therapies, the protagonists in coming-of-age novels do not undertake an active therapy, just as Gallen’s protagonists do not visit a psychologist. Rather than that they repulse the idea of becoming as backward-looking as their mirroring counterparts that they change themselves out of free will.

So far, the readers of *Big Girl, Small Town* experience Majella as the caretaker of her mother. This caretaking includes a withdrawal from the possibility of living an independent life outside her parental home. Looking at this example under the aspect of self-sabotaging, Majella’s staying at home and caring for her mother represents an intrinsic and conditional behaviour of filial commitment. However, Majella’s mother sabotages herself by means of alcohol in combination with occasional medications, all the while denying her addiction: When Majella and her mother return home from an AA meeting, her mother “lay down on the settee and started gurning on about how she wasn’t like that – she wasn’t an alkie like those men. ... She was just sociable. She just liked a drink. ... Everyone knew she was lying.

Nobody, at least of all Majella, could do a thing about it” (Gallen, *Big Girl* 253). The final escape into alcohol and the denial of the arising issues are a coping strategy of hers in response to her husband’s disappearance. In the same way, the denial of her alcoholism parallels her denial of accepting the irreversible death of her husband and her insistence on his return.

Although not as excessively, Majella partially mirrors her mother’s handling with anaesthetic substances: “She lifted a blister of co-codamol, pushed out four tablets and popped them in her mouth, one by one, before swallowing them down with Coke. ... The pills weren’t working yet, but she knew in twenty minutes they’d hit and she’d be wrapped up in a blanket of codeine” (Gallen, *Big Girl* 254-5). In view of the circumstances of period cramps taking pain killers might not appear to be a self-sabotaging behaviour at first sight. However, Gallen labels the narration of the effect of the pills as “*Good list Item 7: Painkillers*” and uses the phrase “a blanket of codeine” (Gallen, *Big Girl* 255). Those instances point towards a possibly addictive tendency of Majella’s use of the painkillers as opposed to an occasional use due to the avoidance of period cramps.

Especially when looking at Gallen’s representation of Majella under the influence of alcohol does her self-sabotaging tendency become more significant: “Majella had been horsing the pints back and now she reckoned she was well oiled. She couldn’t feel her feet, but she could still see the bar, which was a good enough state of drunkenness. ... while she liked the feeling of being drunk, she didn’t like looking or sounding drunk” (Gallen, *Big Girl* 296). Judging from this passage, Gallen intentionally points out Majella’s awareness of a possibly addictive behaviour turning into self-sabotage. In turn, this description illustrates the necessity for Majella to evaluate her situation and her similarity to her mother once more; although she does not like to talk to anyone while drinking alcohol, unlike her mother, she nevertheless takes a liking to the effects of alcohol. The danger of self-sabotage culminates in Majella’s realization that “she’d lost count of how many she’d had now. That wasn’t good.

She was too pushed for eleven o'clock. This was her one-in-the-morning feeling. Her I'm-ready-for-a-taxi feeling" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 297). Instead of numbing the realization with an ongoing, continuous flow of alcohol, Majella sobers up with the help of her friend Terry and eventually experiences the breakthrough of her suppressed emotions leading to clarity in decision-making:

Tears burst out from her burning eyes, scalding her cheeks. Majella sqatted [in the kitchen], crippled, gulping in one ragged breath after another, letting the tears pour out of her, gasping for air. ... She felt her eyes closing as a weight lifted off her chest. She needed a good sleep. For she'd a solicitor to talk to in the morning about the price of land.

(Gallen, *Big Girl* 308-9)

Escaping the mirroring of her mother's sedating behaviour of drinking alcohol marks Majella's own escape from the vicious circle of evading her grief emotions. Accepting those emotions as well as sobering up represents a cleansing from inherited burdens, as Gallen depicts in Majella's mother who is not able to let go; it becomes an escape from denial and the illusion of a different reality than there actually is, while moving towards the overt facing of the reality ahead.

Whereas Majella mirrors her mother initially regarding the suppression of emotions, in *Factory Girls* Deidre's death by means of an overdose of paracetamol functions as Maeve's counterexample. The subtle effects of self-sabotage do not always follow immediately the behaviour, a circumstance which makes it even harder to identify self-sabotaging behaviour (comp. "Self-Sabotage" n.p.). In relation to Deidre's death, it appears to be an obvious self-destructive behaviour of "swallowing every single tablet" of paracetamol, thus inflicting irreversible damage to her inner organs (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 74). Yet, Maeve does not obtain the chance to identify Deidre's motive for inflicting this much damage to herself but can only assume that it has to do with an incident in Belfast (comp. Gallen, *Factory Girls* 75).

Based on this assumption the readers also receive the impression that Deidre's self-infliction is an attempt to escape an uncomfortable memory. Gallen does not explicitly mention Deidre's long-term goals and aspirations; however, based on her dropping out of university, it appears reasonable to assume that her failing vital functions interfere with them.

Gallen does not focus on Maeve's use of medicine mainly, but she does illustrate the necessity of medicine in daily life to move past inconvenient situations: "Maeve swallowed a few Syndol with a mouthful of tea. It was a trick her ma'd taught her after Deidre's funeral, to get her through the last of her GCSEs" (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 123). At this point of Gallen's coming-of-age novel, Maeve does not yet know whether she passes the exams. Considering the floating effect the pills will have on her, Maeve might very well fail her exams due to emotional stress in combination with medicine (comp. Gallen, *Factory Girls* 123). However, as the readers discover later, Maeve passes her exams with excellent achievements, which causes the incident to be classified as only possible self-sabotage (comp. Gallen, *Factory Girls* 235-7).

A significant self-sabotaging behaviour in relation to her health is smoking, which is a symbolic, if not ritualistic act: "Deidre's last pack of fags had been Maeve's first" (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 73). It is an act of passing on, of implementing a generational obligation to carry a specific behaviour forward as well as Maeve's taking over is an act of acceptance and connection to her older sister. Nevertheless, Maeve can differentiate between a behaviour inflicting damage to herself and a self-sabotaging behaviour blocking her from her future in the context of medical substances and the infliction on her body. The fact that Deidre returns home for dying depicts a wake-up call for Maeve to leave her home eventually for good, so that she is not tempted to sabotage herself into staying, and dying, in her hometown.

In both Bildungsromane, Gallen opposes her protagonists with close relatives to clarify the difference between destructive self-sabotaging and growth-enhancing sabotage.

The counterparts of Majella and Maeve display destructive self-sabotage⁷: their misuse of alcohol and medicine leads to addiction (in the case of Majella's mother) as well as health issues and, eventually, death (in the case of Deidre). Both counterparts could have taken measures against their personal decay in addressing their emotional issues early on, but they do not. This is why their self-sabotage through misuse of said substances becomes their personal escape, a flight from having to deal with their troubles. Moreover, one might say that the border between a healthy and a destructive self-sabotage blurs the more a person relies on their chosen substances: Majella's physical reaction to increased alcohol consume and Maeve's preferred floating effect of Syndol are cases in point for the sedative effect of the substances. In contrast to their counterparts, both Majella and Maeve use their self-sabotaging substances only temporary, thus marking them as growth-enhancing and non-addictive. Through this temporary self-sabotage Gallen enables her protagonists to temporarily escape their emotional issues as well as she provides them with the chance of self-testing. Gallen structures her protagonists' counterparts in the manner of worst-case scenarios and in their irreversibility they repel the protagonists from ignoring and denying the border of an occasional behaviour towards a destructive one, interfering with their long-term goals. Concluding from this, the act of self-sabotage is an encounter of the protagonist with their inner moral compass and becomes a testament of Majella's and Maeve's ability to decide in their own favour.

⁷ Especially in the case of *Big Girl, Small Town* it is interesting to note that Gallen dedicates her debut novel to the journalist Lyra McKee, not by naming her directly but by implementing a quote from Anna Burns' *Milkman*. This quote points out the importance of the radiant existence of people with a bright light as well as the impact of their sudden disappearance (through death), as Bundschuh shortly discusses in her article (comp. 233-4; comp. Susan McKay n.p., on the impact of McKee's death). The reference to *Milkman* is important in the context of self-sabotaging as tablets girl actively poisons people, including her own sister and *Milkman*'s unnamed protagonist, to prohibit the change of the collective mindset about social norms. In addition, it is only possible for tablets girl to poison *Milkman*'s protagonist due to her self-sabotaging habit of drinking alcohol and not paying attention to her glass, which opens the opportunity for the poisoning (comp. Burns 259-65). Hence, Gallen points out novel-crossing dependencies and similarities in coming-of-age processes – as she illustrates in *Big Girl, Small Town* and *Factory Girls* –, which allude to the denial of social progress and change of mindset.

Considering the protagonists' acceptance of their strength to overcome self-sabotaging behaviour suggests a high level of achieved autonomy and self-responsibility. It is also an instance of detachment from repeating mistakes close relatives suggest as an escape. This is why in the following section the protagonists' attempts at autonomy highlight Gallen's focus on detachment and self-responsibility.

3.4 Playing Grown-Ups: Attempts of Detachment

Along the coming-of-age of the protagonist in a Bildungsroman, the personal journey and the associated change with it regards the personal involvement of various people. As discussed in the preceding sections on social borders, the journey of Gallen's protagonists, and the escape from social expectations the protagonists encounter a variety of conditions to neglect or accept. Testing pre-given borders is part of Majella and Maeve's development into self-responsible, independent adults. Throughout the process of adolescence Gallen pushes her protagonists into situations of trying out their independent adulthood within the social and financial possibilities of a coming-of-age person. This is why this section focuses on those scenes in combination with the protagonists' relationship to their mothers, since they stand for the stability of family framing Majella and Maeve's personal development. Those scenes serve Gallen as a counterweight to the scenes interpreted in the preceding section: while the preceding section investigates the notion of the protagonists craving the protection of ignorance about the world through means of self-sabotage, the scenes in this section illustrate their active strive for independence and spirit of experimentation.

Making a journey alludes to the transitional phase of the Bildungsroman's protagonist from being a child to becoming an adult. Especially in the context of social interactions does the protagonist encounter a variety of invisible, mostly emotional, and non-physical borders, such as the level of education and knowledge about the world which becomes useful in their ongoing lives. Hence, the encountered space is part of the borderscape in the original sense:

there is a landscape around the border defining this very border. However, this borderscape does not have a clear beginning and ending, there are no defined edges where the protagonist may enter and leave the interaction with the border. The space connotated here is a transitional space, serving the protagonist as a fluid, undefined space of development and experimentation. Reinhold Görling and Johan Schimanski comment on this transitional space as follows:

The transitional or third space is also called the space of cultural or aesthetic experience, because it is the space in which new things can emerge. The third space has no borders; it is a relational space, not a container. It is a space that cannot be seen; it cannot itself be determined, but gives space to what emerges. It is a space that makes it possible for something to appear without being determined by it.

(Schimanski and Wolfe 117)

Since the transitional space is “a relational space, not a container” the space the coming-of-age protagonist encounters on their journey does not contain, prohibit, or enhance their personal growth actively. The spaces they use for their journey contain merely the aspect of relating their actions to their development without creating a new environment based on their actions.

Looking at Majella’s journey with regard to a transitional space, the purchase of a new duvet comes into focus. Just as Majella’s physical appearance, the shop selling duvets underwent a visual change, the “shop front was given a lick of fresh paint, but didn’t look that different by the end of the whole business” and although this is Majella’s first impression the inside looks quite different than compared to her memory (Gallen, *Big Girl* 101). In Majella’s mind, time stands still and she needs a moment to realize that she is no longer the little girl she was years ago: “Majella wished she could flick her fingers and rock right in the centre of the shop” (Gallen, *Big Girl* 103). Her emotional and preferred physical reactions are a protection mechanism basing on her childhood customs. According to Gallen’s own

experiences regarding reviews of her debut novel a lot of readers approached her with the notion of Majella being autistic, because of her socially distant reactions and her repeatedly physical flicking of her fingers among other indicators. In her book *Autistic Disturbances*, Julia Miele Rodas identifies some behavioural traits to be significant in literary figures as well as in real-life persons; the represented selection of this list bases on Gallen's construction of narrative space and description of Majella:

abrupt · absence of 'I' · absent · abstruse ... circularity · creativity · despair ...
 ejaculatory · empty space · erratic · evasive ... fragmented ... hiding · idiosyncratic ·
 inflexible · irrelevant ... linguistic zero · listing ... mechanical · metaphorical ·
 mimicry ... monologism ... narrational gaps · no inferential communication ·
 noncommunicative · nonconversational · nondialogic ... nonsocial · private ... puns ·
 repetitions · returning to the same topic ... self-sufficient ... systemizing · telegraphic
 ... unnatural · valueless ... without context · without intention · wittiness"

(Rodas 4)

However, Gallen states in an interview with Tom Beer from *Kirkus* that although Majella is "quite a difficult protagonist," she did not intend to create an autistic woman. Moreover, Gallen points out that Majella is merely "an undiagnosed autistic woman" and Gallen only considers this trait retrospectively after reading up on autism due to repeated questioning about Majella's behaviour (n.p.). Gallen's reason for creating an undiagnosed autistic character is "because these types of behaviors were incredibly familiar" to her due to a belatedly diagnosed family member (n.p.). Having in mind that Gallen did not intend to provide her readers explicitly with an autistic character allows for the interpretation of Majella simply being caught between childhood and adulthood, relying occasionally on childhood habits in adult situations. The autistic character traits are not specifically pointed out by Gallen, which allows for the readers to perceive Majella clearly as a coming-of-age protagonist without additional deficiencies or psychological impairments. Picking up on a

possible approach to *Big Girl, Small Town* as part of autism-centred literature, Bundschuh supports Gallen's notion of not pointing out Majella as an autistic character in the literary context: "[A]lthough it is difficult to develop a theoretical approach to autistic practice without pointing out and naming in a manner that might objectify Majella's refreshing ability to act as a perceptive guide to her own border experience, this investigation intends to recognize Majella's strengths as broadly as possible, just as Gallen herself has done" (234-5).⁸

With the purchase of a new duvet, Majella experiences the esteem of being considered "a full-grown woman," which makes "her size sound comfortable rather than cumbersome" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 103). Even though Majella enjoys the encounter and counselling with the seller, this does not mean she is comfortable in her own skin all the time. When the seller offers condolences on her grandmother's death, Majella "pull[s] back" and in an act of seeking for physical protection she "pull[s] the bag to her chest and stumbl[es] towards the door" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 105). By describing Majella's physical reaction to the unexpected condolences Gallen represents Majella's disturbed inner balance: not a child anymore but not an adult yet the protagonist struggles to maintain balance between the two defined states. Outsiders, like the seller, signify a disruptive factor to the protagonist's balancing act. Even Majella's mother does not entirely approve of her growing up and fitting in with the world of adulthood: "She'd [Majella] managed to sneak her new stuff upstairs without her ma seeing and hoped she could get the old stuff down the stairs and out the back in the same way" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 106). Secrecy is a means of ignoring a parental system of rules without breaking them, and Majella tests in this way her own abilities to insist on her own decisions.

⁸ In addition, Bundschuh elaborates on the connection of the novel's structure in a listicle and the enhanced capability of autistic persons to grasp their surrounding through fixed boundaries: "In *Big Girl, Small Town*, Gallen enlists the grounding device of the listicle, above all, as a coping strategy for a protagonist to better meet challenges she faces on a daily basis. With great precision, Gallen's schema of time and date-stamped episodic vignettes demarcates, values, and protects Majella" (231). Hence, Gallen breaks down the external world for Majella and her readers to gain an episodic insight into the capabilities and boundaries of her coming-of-age protagonist as well as this illustrates the development of behaviour in individual scenes.

Nevertheless, her mother does not approve of “dumpin any a my property” and, thus, accuses Majella of not respecting their (presumably) common system of rules (Gallen, *Big Girl* 109).

In both environments – the duvet shop and her home – Majella is the only instance that changes to a certain degree: she adapts to the customs of behaviour as a customer and to the insistence of a young adult on her own decisions. In neither case does the environment change, which is a case in point for a transitional, in this case even physical, space that “makes it possible for something to appear without being determined by it” (Schimanski and Wolfe 117). The duvet shop does not alter its function only because Majella visits.

Another instance for a transitional space in the context of coming-of-age and growing into the state of adulthood occurs in Maeve’s flat renting in *Factory Girls*. Subsequent to signing the contract for her factory work, Maeve discovers a sign advertising an available flat for rent including two bedrooms. Instead of relying on the secure availability of living near her workplace Maeve explains to her friends why she wants to rent:

“It’s about time I got a place of my own,” Maeve replied, stubbing her fag out.

“Can you afford it?”

“Not on my own. But *we* could afford it.” Maeve linked arms with Caroline.

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 11)

Maeve takes over the responsibility of contacting JP Devlin’s office and arranges a flat inspection. The flat itself does not consist of many rooms: “‘Bedroom one,’ JP said, pointing. ‘Kitchen. Bathroom. Bedroom two. And your living room’” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 14). The narrowness of the flat shows in the used interior design despite the smell “of fresh paint[, the flat is] carpeted with what look[s] like grey pubic hair glued onto a bed of thick black mold” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 14). Previous tenants wore down the place which makes it a temporary and transitional place to live in for Maeve and Caroline. Both of them expect to move out of town once they receive their exam results.

Gallen constructs the renting of the flat as a chance for Maeve to escape the rules and expectations of living at home. Especially the need to take responsibility for herself in both scenarios becomes a driving force for Maeve to explore living on her own:

“We can save up out of the factory,” Maeve pleaded. “And ah’ll get the deposit back when we go to uni.”

“But if we lived at home we’d save even more!” [replied Caroline]

... “Mam’s gonna charge me housekeeping when I start in the factory. Sure. I might as well have my own place!”

Caroline hung her head, defeated. ...

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 17)

Maeve does not leave home out of necessity, but out of curiosity of living alone and for the wish to fledge her mother’s unfiltered influence at home: “Sometimes she [Maeve] felt like she was a female version of Icarus, spending hours collecting feathers, sticking them into wedges of hot wax to make the wings she needed to escape. Only instead of helping her, like Icarus’s da did, her mam kept picking at the wings, plucking the feathers out the way healthy hens peck at a sick bird” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 20-1). This mythological metaphor symbolises Maeve’s craving for the support of her mother in growing into an adult, but also the disappointment in the lack of it. At this point, it is worth noting on this symbolism that the behaviour of Maeve’s mother might as well be interpreted as protective: if Icarus’s dad had not helped Icarus would not have escaped their prison as in the original myth; yet, Icarus also would not have flown too near the sun, melting the wax, and crashing into the ocean to die. The pecking of Maeve’s mother might point towards the safe-keeping of Maeve, of her mother’s wish not to be injured or to experience the loss of a daughter a second time.

Either way, Maeve and Caroline’s shared apartment becomes a case in point for the necessity of developing a sense of agency and self-responsibility. While Caroline eventually

thinks about moving in permanently, Maeve develops an even stronger desire to leave her hometown:

Maeve remembered what her mam'd said at the start of the summer: "She's [Caroline] a Jackson, and Jacksons sit tight."

No France for Maeve. No university for Caroline. Still, there was an upside.

"That spare room's mine come Christmas."

"Ah'll put a wee stocking out for you," Caroline said, with a smile.

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 265)

Instead of returning to their family homes when their factory work comes to an end in August, both Caroline and Maeve progress on their way outside of their original homes: their experiment of living on their own is a successful one. In Maeve's case, the rented flat functions as a transitional space which she leaves after her experiment is over; for Caroline it becomes a permanent location for living, thus, altering the transitional space eventually after Maeve's goodbye.

A prominent transitional space in Gallen's coming-of-age novels is the space of home: Majella alters her bedroom by visiting a duvet shop without moving out of her house; Maeve changes her own space of living by moving out. The space of home signifies a space of childhood and restrained coming-of-age attempts. Instead of neglecting this space altogether, Gallen allows her protagonists to adapt to their psychological transitional phase, while the space of home around them alters according to their changes; the acceleration of the coming-of-age processes manifest in physical changes in their respective homes, signifying a chance for escape from childhood. In either case, Majella and Maeve encounter their transitional spaces only for a limited period of time before outgrowing them. Gallen indicates the psychological growth of both protagonists by means of their straightforwardness of their decisions despite their mothers' reluctance. The figure of the mother becomes for Gallen the symbol of a check point for the protagonists' development: the mother is in either case to

convince of the protagonist's capability to make decisions on their own, independent from them.

Considering Gallen's use of social borders to stress the importance and progression of her protagonists' coming-of-age journey, the transitional space of home and identification with this place is significant in the protagonists' interaction with internal conflicts. Moreover, the social borders become a space of escape to the protagonists through their varying borderless construction. Through holes in the system the protagonists claim this niche for their self-education and self-exploration. Nevertheless, the interaction with other people on a social level includes the use of language and linguistics: the borders illustrated by them hold the potential for re-negotiation of borders through conflicts and the overcoming of the same.

4. Conflict and Personal Growth: Linguistic Borders

As can be seen in part already in the previous chapters, the stages of the Bildungsroman sometimes blur into one another: while the first stage of loss is a continuous process of losing and claiming agency in relation to other people, the second stage of making a journey tends to overlap with the conflicts and implications of personal growth significant for the third stage. Thus, the stages of the Bildungsroman are by no means all-encompassing and stringent. The protagonist's personal psychological and moral growth occurs in perpetuating circles, which include an occasional backward step and the encounter of a dead end.

Nevertheless, considering that geographical borders associated with loss become a matter of escape from financial dependencies and the protagonist may neglect social borders of expectations in the context of renunciation from their parents, the stage of conflict and personal growth depicts an escape from a self-contained world view. For outlining the significance of inner and outer changes in the borderscapes' reception, this chapter combines the Bildungsroman's aspect of a protagonist's conflict and personal growth with the linguistic

borders Gallen illustrates in both novels *Big Girl, Small Town* and *Factory Girls*. Starting with Gallen's personal, literary approach to tearing down the international linguistic borders between her Irish readers and her international readers, I will further focus Majella and Maeve's self-reflection in opposition to people not born in their respective hometowns. Finally, my analysis will focus on how Majella and Maeve both use language in order to escape their daily routine and how their approach fits into their environment.

4.1 Welcoming the World Inside: A Guideline For an International Audience

Language, and hence linguistics, are an important aspect of Gallen's coming-of-age novels: her readers perceive her characters' direct speech in the way Gallen writes how Irish people speak – it is a mix of standardised English grammar and spelling and the Irish dialect. In every which way this circumstance irritates her readers, Gallen offers a solution to the understanding of her works, specifically to reading *Big Girl, Small Town*: Gallen makes an online glossary available.

Considering English to be today's lingua franca, it is important to note the necessity of translation and interpretation within Gallen's coming-of-age novels for her readers. Daniele Monticelli recapitulates Juri Lotman's approach to the interdependency of language and its in- and excluding aspects in her article "Borders and Translation: Revisiting Juri Lotman's Semiosphere." Monticelli concludes that to

the interdisciplinary area of border studies and its application to the investigation of different objects and case studies, Lotman's semiospheric understanding of borders and translation offers the theoretical framework to conceptualize the different functions of the border not as excluding alternatives, but as the interacting forces of a complex process bordering and translation.

Language, thus, functions as a connective tool among different cultures and within cultures; instead of marking the differences between two peoples with differing language usage, language connects the two and breaks down the cultural borders surrounding them. The translation from one entity to the other Lotman refers to calls for understanding and empathy. In relation to the Bildungsroman, the protagonist encountering various entities of language may encounter conflicts due to misunderstandings and growth in terms of acquiring the ability to translate between those entities.

Gallen's debut novel *Big Girl, Small Town* introduces the readers to specifically this notion of understanding the other entity within the realms of the own language usage. The intention of Gallen's available glossary becomes clear in the introductory statement to it: "Finding yourself a little lost in the local dialect in *Big Girl, Small Town*? Can't tell your tae from your tae? Here's a glossary of the Aghybogeyisms for international audiences" (Gallen, "Glossary" n.p.). Aside from explanatory notes on "Alkie" being slang for an alcoholic or binge drinker, or "ah'm" meaning "I'm" and "g'wan" standing in for "go on," it is crucial to have in mind that the introductory statement states the intended accessibility of language for an international audience (comp. Gallen, "Glossary" n.p.). Following Monticelli's recollection of Lotman's functions of the borders with an impact on translation, the initial statement is that "the border [functions] as an instrument of separation, internalization and closure" (Monticelli 393). Without Gallen's glossary, separation and internalization would be the aspects *Big Girl, Small Town* overtly displays: readers unfamiliar with the (local) Irish dialect as portrayed in the novel would experience an exclusion from Aghybogey and from the events in Majella's coming-of-age. Hence, the glossary opens the possibility to access the linguistic understanding of Gallen's novel for the international readers.

Furthermore, Gallen's glossary also points out the differentiation between the local and the global and allows to draw conclusions on how Majella's encounters with international linguistic conflicts enhance her personal psychological growth. The point of view concerning

the linguistic conflicts connect to the “imposition of a national language, which results from the standardization of a given dialect and its transformation into a ‘universal grammar’ for the internal (national) space, which distinguishes the latter from external (foreign) spaces with different languages” (Monticelli 394). In opposition to the Polish chip shop worker Johann-Paul, who had “studied English at school, Majella doubted that the English he’d learned in the classroom was anything like the speech he was trying to understand now” in *Aghybogey* (Gallen, *Big Girl* 179). This scene illustrates the problematics of the standardized scholastic grammar of English and the Irish dialect encountering each other: for an insider in Gallen’s *Aghybogey* communication is by no means troublesome; for an outsider with the background of a standardization of English language oral interaction becomes a challenge of reinterpreting their own language. Although both use the same linguistic entities of words, the pronunciation separates the people regarding their origin. This is why, once Majella may leave *Aghybogey* she might encounter personal conflicts in communication: either she does not understand the other or the other does not understand her. Observing Johann-Paul using his standardized English enables Majella to adapt her own linguistic entities without interacting with others necessarily; here, Gallen points out a passive adaptation of the linguistic borders surrounding her protagonist as well as she marks the development of Majella’s linguistic understanding so far.

Instead of continuing explicitly with the instance of a reader-supporting glossary in *Factory Girls*, Gallen transplants the action of translation from herself – the author and world-creator – to her characters, specifically her protagonist Maeve. As opposed to Majella, Maeve’s overarching goal is to leave her hometown as soon as possible and start a new life abroad, preferably in London. However, Maeve’s smart-mouthed attitude using her defining Irish dialect does not always work to her advantage. Her self-proclaimed mentor and boss Andy Strawbridge suggests that the best way to earn the respect of the English is to “learn[] how to speak English properly” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 78). Again, Gallen draws a line

between what is considered a universal standardized language and what is deemed not to belong to this category. Her protagonist Maeve lives within an “internal (national) space” as opposed to the English in their “external (foreign) spaces with different languages” accumulating and intersecting with one another (Monticelli 394). Learning a specific style of speaking and adapting one’s vocabulary towards a standardized version are Gallen’s means of manifesting Maeve’s personal conflict and growth. Again, the refusal of adaptation would point out stagnation of her personal development as well as it signifies yet again a self-sabotaging behaviour. Moreover, Maeve’s adaptation of her style of speech points towards an active breaking down of the separating borders between the two linguistic realms: Maeve maintains the potential to become a person capable of understanding both entities without restriction of herself to only one realm.

Functioning as an interpreter of the linguistic entities for the people surrounding her implements Gallen’s intention for Maeve as well as for her readers. Maeve becomes Gallen’s stand-in considering the translation of words and phrases from one linguistic entity to the other:

... “You have a gift for translating the Queen’s English into your Northern Irish vernacular.”

Maeve nodded, thinking *Fucken right I do*.

“But if you don’t mind me saying, Ms. Murray, that particular skill won’t be of much use to you over in London.”

Maeve’s minge shrank like a snail retracting into its shell.

“Looking and speaking as you so will win you plenty of attention over in London,” [Andy] continued. “But I’m not so sure about respect.” ...

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 77)

The linguistic border of translating the “Queen’s English into [] Northern Irish vernacular” is an instance of what Lotman points out as a self-descriptive process, according to Monticelli:

“Self-descriptive centralization is the semiotic mechanism that articulates the separating/defensive and the constitutive functions of the border. The conception of translation issuing from that draws a clear line of separation between internal, exhaustive translatability and the external untranslatable” (394). Gallen’s characters define themselves by means of language and dialect: these instances are cases in point for the belonging and identification with a certain group of people as opposed to their counterparts. Through Maeve’s innate ability to bridge the gap of translation between both sides, she grows personally into an experienced and sophisticated personality.

To conclude on the subject of linguistic borders, these borders represent an instrument of exclusion and inclusion. Furthermore, the Irish dialect Gallen uses in both her Bildungsromane is a marker of identification: Majella and Maeve’s origin is in their hometown and their personalities root in the similarities they share with their surrounding villagers. Even so, the active engaging with another linguistic entity symbolizes the crossing and breaking of a border between the outside and the inside: while Majella starts to reflect upon her own knowledge about Aghybogey when observing Johann-Paul’s learning Irish dialect words, Maeve actively perceives the standardized English as a possible way of escaping her hometown. At the same time, Johann-Paul is an instance of linguistic adaptation for Gallen’s readers: he perceives English, and in *Big Girl, Small Town*’s case Irish, as an escape from his home country towards improved working conditions and, ultimately, a better life. Hence, Johann-Paul is a representative for Gallen’s international audience. For each protagonist, Gallen constructs language and the engagement with linguistic borders as a means of escaping their current state of mind regarding their self-perception; through reflection they grow beyond their personal doubts and possible conflicts into world-open characters. Surpassing the separation of linguistic entities, Gallen’s glossary invites her international readers to trace Majella and Maeve’s personal development themselves; all of

them cross the borders between two (linguistic) entities and become border-crossers, which will be the focus in the following section.

4.2 The Other: Self-Reflection in Comparison to Outsiders

While the preceding section concerns the connection of two sides of linguistic borders – standardized English and Irish dialect – by means of a glossary and a fictional interpreter, this section illustrates the necessity of the existence of border-crossers for a border to exist. Throughout the analysis of border-crossers in Gallen’s coming-of-age novels the protagonists not only observe border-crossers in the context of language, but they also develop their own existence as one of those border-crossers. Particularly in the context of the Bildungsroman, the crossing of imposed borders and the overcoming of conflicts are cases in point of progress in the protagonist’s personal, moral and psychological development.

In their conclusion of *Border Aesthetics*, Schimanski and Wolfe point out that the border-crosser rhizome comes in various sub-categories of border beings. All of them share the aspect of bare life, which “results in a lack of subjectivity stripped of rights by law within a b/ordering process of in/visibility and exclusion” (153). The overarching and general category of existences in relation with a border is the category of border beings, who “may include nonhuman actors, ghosts and the monstrous” (153). Border subjects belong to a sub-category of border beings; they “both relate[] to the border and make[] it tangible” and they “can have the potential to enact new strategies of in/visibility” (Görling and Schimanski in Schimanski and Wolfe 118; Schimanski and Wolfe 153). Hence, Görling and Schimanski summarize, do “[b]orders only exist inasmuch as they can be sensed, made the objects of aesthetics” (Schimanski and Wolfe 118). Lastly, the sub-category of border-crossers belongs to the category of border subjects “who alter the borderscape by entering border zones and crossing borders” (Schimanski and Wolfe 153). Furthermore, acts like migration and othering

have an impact on a subject's existences in relation to a border and their existence within any of the aforementioned three categories of border beings (comp. Schimanski and Wolfe 153-4).

Considering the interdependency of subjects becoming border-crossers with the existence of a border and its alterations, the border and its surrounding borderscape exists only as a multidimensional, co-dependent barrier and landmark. Indicated in the previous section on the interrelation of standardized English and Irish dialect, the concept of border-crossers also applies to people speaking different versions of one language, referring to different entities of the same word. Hence, especially relating to Lotman's semiotic approach, as represented by Monticelli, and Gallen's insistence on the importance of language in her novels' towns, "the border as bilingual mechanism *connects* different semiotic systems and opens them to an inexhaustible interplay across borders" rather than separating them (Monticelli 396). As Monticelli continues with the second function of Lotman's borders, the "border as bilingual mechanism connects heterogenous systems and triggers between them an interplay bringing into dialogue precisely those spaces which the external border of the 'homogenous structural whole' was intended to separate" (396). Bilingualism, thus, is an escape from linguistic exclusion and othering, it becomes a feature in the process of integrating and accepting the Other into an enclosed space.

Majella's interaction with and observation of her Polish colleague Johann-Paul illustrates the acceptance of the Other in a remarkable way in *Big Girl, Small Town*. Within the town of Aghybogey, there exists the prejudiced image of foreign workers and foreign people in general. Over the years, "Majella had seen [the public opinion] evolve ... since the Poles had landed. People weren't sure of them at first, and feared they were after their jobs. But before long they'd won local respect for not being choosy about what work they'd take on" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 173). Here, acceptance of the Polish people is a passive instance from the villagers' point of view. On the other hand, Johann-Paul displays an active commitment to

integration: he engages actively with the villagers when taking orders in the chip shop and “love[s] learning new words,” which are actually only Irish dialect (Gallen, *Big Girl* 180):

– Blue-toured? What is this word blue-toured?

– Blootered! Y’know, like plastered?

– Plastered? Like a wall?

There were laughs at the counter.

Marty stepped in. – Means drunk. Like this lot. Lamped. Mowldy. Ossified.

Johann-Paul had turned to Marty, smiling, with his head cocked on the side like one of the smarter breeds of dog. – All these words for drunk?

(Gallen, *Big Girl* 180)

Instead of bursting into spiteful, degrading laughter, Johann-Paul’s unknowingness causes the customers inside A Salt and Battered! to laugh and reflect about their own dialect’s diversity. Through noticing the variety of the Irish dialect in describing a circumstance, the customers and villagers integrate Johann-Paul into their community; they share their knowledge with him.

Particularly Majella experiences a clash of interculturalism and self-perception when interacting with Johann-Paul and his curiosity regarding Irish language and tradition. When observing a traditional “doing” to a soon-to-be groom, Majella cannot explain the tradition to Johann-Paul properly and notes that she is not “the best at this inter-cultural stuff” (Gallen, *Big Girl* 202). However, the reflection on her meagre capabilities of explaining Irish traditions to outsiders of Aghybogey is not the only fact Majella learns from Johann-Paul’s questions: “...she herself had learned a lot about the world of Aghybogey since Johann-Paul had started in the chipper. He asked all the questions a wean would ask” (Gallen, *Big Girl* 202). Without active engagement on her own account, Majella reflects on her knowledge concerning her hometown and her way of living. Although she does not voice her insights openly, Majella engages with her own point of view and Johann-Paul’s point of view contrasting each other.

A case in point for Majella's personal growth in connection to an altered view on Aghybogey' outside is the selling of the land: One advice from her late father about farming "she'd never forgotten was that in bargaining she should never name her price first. First person to name their price has already lost the battle" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 300). Majella's usage of language to win this "battle" implies an authority she only gains through reflection on herself through the eyes of an outsider. Her self-questioning about the way how people interact with each other in Aghybogey tunnels in a newly established assertiveness demanding respect as the woman she comes-of-age of.

Tracing Majella's overcoming of internal conflicts signifies Gallen's protagonist to claim subjectivity as an aspect of personal growth. Schimanski and Wolfe define subjectivity as "the agency to interpret for oneself and more generally to have some agency or autonomy as a discursive or psychoanalytical subject, rather than being the object of representation" (154). This claimed subjectivity is a key marker of border-crossers such as Majella: each border-crosser maintains the agency to alter their surrounding borderscape by crossing borders and entering border zones (comp. Schimanski and Wolfe 153). In the case of Majella, Gallen allows *Big Girl, Small Town's* protagonist to participate in the alteration of borders concerning the exclusion of foreign workers. In assisting Johann-Paul in understanding the traditions and dialect of Aghybogey, Majella enters the border zone between their respective linguistic entities. Furthermore, she crosses the border labelling her as a mere citizen of Aghybogey and enters the outsider's point of view of life in Aghybogey. Whereas the chip shop itself may function as a neutral ground for encounters, Majella's linguistic and cultural borderscape adapts accordingly to her insights and changing views. Observing this development from the point of view of Gallen's readers, Johann-Paul represents her international audience: English is not his mother tongue, but it still is the lingua franca he learns to use in order to adapt to living in a foreign country. Instead of a glossary or dictionary

as Gallen offers to her readers, Majella, Marty, and Aghybogey's citizens function as interpreters for Johann-Paul.

Parallel to Majella's personal development regarding her self-perception, Maeve in *Factory Girls* enforces self-reflection through a daily encounter with the Other, namely the English. As her direct superior, Andy Strawbridge represents the overlooking instance of a border controller: he oversees who works at the factory or not. In Andy's presence, Maeve experiences herself to be the Other: "Well, Maeve Murray. What can I do for you?" The snotty English accent woke Maeve up. *Fuck you*, she thought" (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 2). Maeve's aversion against Andy – and the English in general – are her personal drawback in the context of wanting to leave for London. Her overtly displayed disapproval is an issue of respect: either she respects her familiar way of upbringing, or she neglects it and accepts the English to be a decent group of people to work with (comp. Gallen, *Factory Girls* 77-8 "You have a ... you can get.")). Maeve's dilemma revolves around the decision of what is more important to her: staying true to the social norms and opinions she grew up in or adapting to the world around her and outside the comfort zone of her hometown.

Maeve's dilemma is especially clear when it comes to sexual harassment at work:

Andy moved closer behind Maeve. ... Then he slipped two fingers under her arms and made a gentle circular motion that tickled her ribs. Maeve's nipples hardened and she whirled around to face him. Then she realized that her bra was undone. And Andy was looking.

Everyone except Aoife had seen what'd happened, but nobody said a word.

Maeve crossed her arms over her chest and walked to the toilets, her face blazing.

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 58)

The collective silence highlights Maeve's subordination as an outsider to the side of power and agency even more: in addition to Andy's exercise of arbitrary power as her superior, his

actions challenge Maeve's will to survive and to claim agency. Silence and acceptance – in other words, remaining with the way she lives her life until now – will not change her subordinate state of being. Instead, she must adapt to her surrounding in order to make herself seen and heard among those who neglect her up to this point in her coming-of-age. In other words, adaptation will allow her to claim subjectivity as Schimanski and Wolfe attribute any border-crosser with (comp. 153-4).

And area that traces Maeve's attempts in adapting to the outside English world is her friendship with Aoife. Aoife is not a local, but a newcomer to Maeve's hometown, and this fact comes to the surface in her inability to understand the local dialect extensively:

“What's cow's splash?” Aoife whispered.

Maeve sighed. Aoife often needed country talk translated. “Cow's pish.”

Aoife still looked at Maeve blankly.

“He's saying your tea should be the same temperature as bovine urine.”

Maeve took a moment to savour the look on Aoife's face before heading towards the canteen doors, where Mary and Marilyn stood chatting.

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 44)

Maeve delights in Aoife's inability to understand the meaning of the word, while she induces herself as saviour at the same time. Parallel to this experience of superiority, Maeve reflects on the benefits of being friends with Aoife, whom she is friends with partially out of selfishness: “She often had to remind herself that one of the main benefits of being friends with Aoife was that it allowed her to practice speaking with a fancy accent, eating posh stuff and tolerating gamminess—all skills she hoped would come in handy for living in England” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 25). As these reflections on friendship and translation illustrate, Maeve and Aoife lead a co-dependent relationship: Aoife may not be able to communicate properly in the town of *Factory Girls* while Maeve perceives adaptation of mannerism and language

usage to be her escape from this very space. The border of mannerism and language become their escape plan from being outsider to their places of wished-for belonging.

Lastly, Gallen also highlights the fact that her own protagonist recognizes the change in mannerism and development: “Maeve found herself speaking broad dialect when she was talking with Fidelma, the opposite of the way she tried to speak fancier when she was chatting with Aoife or Andy” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 193). Here again, language marks the social bundling into groups of insiders and outsiders. However, Maeve claims agency and crosses this border deliberately: linguistic adaptation makes her a border-crosser. As Görling and Schimanski note, “[b]orders only exist inasmuch as they can be sensed, made the objects of aesthetics” and as Schimanski and Wolfe summarize, they “are also produced through negotiation with border-crossers” (Schimanski and Wolfe 118, 149). Hence, as Maeve transgresses the border between two territorializing linguistic entities, Gallen’s protagonist redefines the border separating them as an instance of common contact of two seemingly opposing sides. Gallen points out an individual’s capability of moving and redefining separating borders not only as markers of affiliation with either side or nationality, but also as the possibility to dissolve those boundaries. In connection to dissolving boundaries, Gallen’s protagonist also maintains the agency to mark her own affiliation with either side, just as much as she may neglect them as the last scene of *Factory Girls* illustrates pointedly:

... Maeve accepted a tin, which hissed in relief when she cracked it open. She held it towards Fidelma and said, “Sláinte.”

“Ach. Fuck that oul shite, Maeve. It’s cheers from here on in.”

They clashed tins, then guzzled the warm cider as the bus carried the pair of them closer and closer to the grimy pavements of London.

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 291)

The neglect of Irish dialect and the acceptance of standardized English marks Maeve’s active transgression into accepting a new life in a new country; she leaves her former life behind.

To summarize the objective of border-crossers, in both of Gallen's coming-of-age novels the protagonists only start observing and testing their ability to cross borders before actually doing so. Both Majella and Maeve's development towards claiming subjectivity and agency over their own decisions include a look at the Other, in their case Polish guest workers and the English. Intercultural conversations and interactions foster Majella and Maeve's sense for their personal borders of tolerance and comfort. Both display awareness for their impressions in opposition to society's approach to issues of integration or power abuse. Their observations slowly transform into actions, which again displays their dealing with personal and societal conflicts, and their growth into subjects claiming subjectivity. Nevertheless, this largely observant and passive formation of agency is countered by the active engagement with conflicts through humour and word games, as the following section illustrates.

4.3 Active Engagement with Conflicts: Humour and Word Games

So far, Majella and Maeve inhabit the position of border-crossers most of the time from an observant point of view. However, as border-crossers negotiating their interpretation of geographical, social, and linguistic borders, Gallen's protagonists induce an active change in their self-perception and self-representation as independent coming-of-age characters. While linguistic borders illustrate potentials for conflicts and misunderstandings primarily, the usage of humour on the protagonists' initiative introduces Gallen's readers to the possibility of a playful dealing with those conflicts. This playing with language and social interaction in combination with one another mirrors Majella and Maeve's personal growth by means of their interaction with the people surrounding them.

According to Monticelli's recollection, Lotman's approach to the borders of language refers to three main functions of borders. While the first function is to describe the self within and in relation to a border in terms of language usage, the second function points out the connectivity of languages in the context of their bilingual mechanism. As for this section on

humour in *Big Girl*, *Small Town* and *Factory Girls*, the third function of Lotman's semiotic theory is of importance. Monticelli summarizes this third function under the term 'periphery,' which "emerges instead when we consider the internal relation between the border-zone itself and the center of the semiotic space" (398). Monticelli continues to summarize Lotman's approach in explaining that the "border-zone as periphery is out-of-joint or disarticulated because it belongs at the same time to the internal and to the external space or (it is the same) it belongs neither to the internal nor external space. An indeterminating so/as or neither/nor logic thus replaces the exclusive either/or logic of the binary oppositions" (399). What Monticelli here summarizes is a case in point for Lotman's approach to the periphery, the border-zone, being a neutral space for development and application of language. This space is crucial in the development of a coming-of-age protagonist: within this space the protagonist is capable of experimenting with language and identification with either side without the necessity to make their affiliation public or set in stone. The protagonist belongs to both sides and to neither at the same time, which also rises issues of conflict in their development.

For Majella, the interaction with customers – and people in general – is a demanding challenge: according to her list of things she does not like, she rejects "small talk, bullshit and gossip" as well as "jokes," respectively positioned on the first and eighth position of her list (Gallen, *Big Girl* 1). However, Majella puts up with repeated jokes nevertheless:

... Majella snapped the till shut, which was *the trigger for Jimmy's joke*.

Jimmy shifted his weight, then leaned in closer to the counter. – D'ye want a bit of my sausage?

He wheezed a bit, slapping his hand on the counter. Majella waited for the *usual five seconds* before replying with the line Marty'd given her *six years ago*.

– I'll batter yer sausage if you're not careful, now.

Then Marty joined in with the laughter for boysadear it was some joke now.

(Gallen, *Big Girl* 19-20; emphasis added)

Majella does not come up with the joke originally, nor is her reply intended to be a joke.

However, their repeated exchange – every evening the chip shop is open for the past six years

– becomes a joke over time. The exchange itself remains in a periphery, using Lotman's third

function of borders: it neither defines as an original joke nor as a genuine verbal exchange.

The exchange between Majella and Jimmy resembles a theatre play, both know the habitus

operandi for conversation.

Although Majella is not an ambitious speaker and dislikes repeated jokes, she accepts this conversation every day anew. This repetition points towards her preferred state of normalcy and her aversion of change. In reference to the Bildungsroman's main recollection of a protagonist's personal growth towards maturity, this aspect is a case in point for Majella's dilemma. Over the years of living in a state of stagnation and without progress, Gallen's protagonist accustoms to ritualistic repetitions in her daily lives. It does not matter whether Majella likes or dislikes the interaction, but the actual interaction matters as much as a disruption of the system. On Friday night of Gallen's novel, the interaction between Majella and Jimmy does not take place:

Majella watched the clock. It was after ten and yet Jimmy Nine Pints had not been in to lay his five pound note on the counter for his sausage supper.

Majella turned to Marty. – No sign of Jimmy Nine Pints the night.

Marty shifted on his feet and kept his eyes on the fryers. – Naw no sign.

The chipper was crowded and it was hard to follow the conversation with Marty, but Majella tried. – Not like him to miss his supper.

Marty snatched another order off the board and read it closely. – Naw. Must be something up.

Marty worked on. Majella was sure she could hear the ghost of Jimmy and Marty's laughter over the spit and froth of chip fat.

(Gallen, *Big Girl* 216)

The absence of their familiar conversation haunts Majella's feeling of security as well as it triggers her to ignore her dislike for conversation. Instead of ignoring the absence and drawing an advantage out of the additional free time, Majella is curious and anxious about what might cause this disruption in routine. The missing interaction in her system causes a personal conflict for Gallen's protagonist as well as the interrogation of Marty signifies Majella's developing agency of coming to terms with unexpected alterations.

Ultimately, Majella herself voices her curiosity which is a case in point for her desire for stability and her inability to accept unexplained changes. When Jimmy does not come in Saturday night and thus misses his second sausage supper in a row, Majella repeats almost the same, close to unchanged conversation with Marty. Nevertheless, Marty's reaction triggers Majella's scepticism:

Marty glanced at her and coloured up. Then he scrutinised the last order Majella had pinned to the board. – Naw. Must be something up.

Majella frowned. There was something up, all right. And she needed to know what.

(Gallen, *Big Girl* 254)

Similar to Majella and Jimmy's exchanged joke, Majella does not want to be the butt of this instance either. Her curiosity comes to an end when finding out Jimmy is arrested on suspicion of murder. As Bundschuh comments on the importance of the repeated joke:

This tired joke is performatively acted out multiple times over the course of the novel ... in each occasion, it acts as stinging reminder of Majella's precarity in a landscape of sublimated violence. Yet it shows us, too, that Majella's seemingly rote response has become the *real* punchline for which everyone waits ... and Majella herself is definitely not the butt of this joke.

Instead of waiting for the moment of her repeated punchline, Majella surpasses the state of curiosity, uncertainty, and waiting in order to move on and explore other interactions. The previous six years of interacting with Jimmy in a given pattern represents Gallen's interpretation of Majella's choosing, but not choosing: she goes along with the ritualistic manners without questioning or rejecting them until external circumstances disrupt her pattern. Those circumstances pose a conflict for Majella for now she must decide about the importance of repetition. In the end, Majella experiences personal growth through the omission of her interlocutor: there is no one there to hold her accountable to routines.

In the case of *Big Girl, Small Town* Gallen introduces humour for illustration of ritualistic repetition and of the protagonist's dilemma to change upon external influences. In Majella's case humour is an escape to hide unspoken affiliations as well as aversions, simply because she wants to avoid conflict and hurting her own and others' feelings. In comparison, Gallen uses humour in *Factory Girls* quite differently: here Gallen's protagonist uses humour in order to connect with people and to pass time. Humour in Maeve's case compiles a method of testing the limits of social interactions and, to some extent, even reveals allies in her personal development.

Similar to Majella and Jimmy's playful interaction, Maeve establishes a sense of humour through playing with words. But instead of a real-life situation – like Gallen chooses for Majella's humour in *Big Girl, Small Town* – Maeve considers fictional spaces for elaborating her humorous experiments:

... Scott suggested they play "Truth or Dare," at which point Maeve made a gun of her hand, pulled the trigger against her temple and collapsed on the sofa.

"You could just say 'No, thanks,' Maeve?" Scott said, sheathing himself in his armchair.

Maeve pulled herself upright and took a gulp of vodka. Then she asked, "What about we play a game of 'If I was...'? ... Someone says something like 'If I was

ice...’ and then the person they choose has to finish the sentence with what they’d be, like – ‘I’d be in a Diet Coke,’ or something like that.”

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 174)

Maeve’s counterproposal to Scott’s neglects the boundaries of reality, she strives to engage with fictional imaginings rather being rooted in reality. This neglect is a case in point for Maeve’s inability to grow personally and psychologically at this point of her coming-of-age. Moreover, Maeve’s focus on the fictional realm for playing with words signifies her escape from the sublimated expectation of her growing up and leaving home. Playing with words holds open all her possibilities of development: she does not yet have to decide upon one option and neglect the others.

Through clinging to this state of indecision, Maeve encounters conflicts with Scott, who is a friend of Aoife and James and who acts grown-up as his remark “‘You could just say ‘No, thanks,’ Maeve?’” illustrates as well as their continuing discussion on how to play the game:

“So I understand the concept,” Scott said, preening. “But isn’t the grammar off?”

“What do you mean?” Maeve asked, giving Scott the rope he needed to hang himself.

“I mean, we ought to be saying ‘If I were’ not ‘was.’ ‘Was is poor grammar. An aspiring journalist ought to know better.”

It was clear to Maeve that although Scott knew the grammar was wrong, he hadn’t a good enough grasp of it to explain why. She was about to eviscerate him when Aoife jumped in.

“Maeve’s well aware of how to use the subjunctive mood, Scott. She’s asserting her right to use Hiberno-English in our private domestic setting.”

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 174)

Especially the place of their conversation is an instance of Maeve's self-chosen in-between state of existence: as the current supervisor of their family's house, Aoife gives Maeve official permission to do as she pleases despite grammatical errors. Instead of constricting Maeve's agency in this space – both physical and metaphorical – Aoife's defence in Maeve's favour allows for the protagonist to forget about her conflicting explanations of grammar usage. Instead, *Factory Girls*' protagonist establishes her own personal growth with the support of her friend.

With the help of Maeve and Scott's conversation, Gallen introduces the periphery or border-zone not as "excluding alternatives, but as the interacting forces of a complex process of bordering and translation," as Monticelli connotes Lotman's understanding of borders (404). Whereas Maeve encounters possibilities of conflict on her own and the necessity to explain herself and her choice of words, she uses those word games to grow. Maeve's ability to adapt to the external environment emerges already in her school days when reflecting on how she should write the ending of a novelistic story:

Strong ending, he'd [her teacher] written in red ink. *Shame it's not a happy ending*.

Maeve sat on the toilet seat for a while, wondering what he meant. Did he want her to rewrite the stoning bit? Was a happy ending better than a strong ending? For weeks afterwards she tried to come up with a happy ending she could believe in. Or at least a not-incredibly-violent-and-tragic ending. But—not for the first time in her life—her imagination failed her.

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 227)

Adaptation is Maeve's key characteristic when it comes to her use of words. Word games and playing with words are not merely an escape from the pending decisions of who she wants to become. They are an escape towards growing up securely and in an experimental way. Words,

and translation in Lotman's phrasing, contain the protagonist's ability to form her own point of view on the world she comes-of-age into.

Throughout *Big Girl*, *Small Town* and *Factory Girls* Gallen uses humour in almost invisible scenes to illustrate Majella and Maeve's coping methods in interacting with other people. Those people do not merely present a potential conflict to the protagonists respectively, but they urge Majella and Maeve to act in a way they are not comfortable with. Using humour Gallen allows her protagonists to engage with the people while at the same time pointing out their in-between state of existence: they neither belong to childhood nor to adulthood yet. Nevertheless, humorous experiments allow Majella and Maeve to test the limits of social interactions while remaining in their state of piecewise experiencing personal growth. The humour and the word games establish an escape from fixed rules and a space for the protagonists' progression in repeated interactions. By means of repetition Majella and Maeve discover their own strength and subjectivity as well as they claim agency once they detect the reasons for their internal conflicts. Lastly, the only restriction of Majella and Maeve to reach maturity lies within their self-perception as fragmented, unformed, immature individuals. Hence, the last chapter concerns the importance and strength of Gallen's protagonists to interpret themselves as mature persons with the help and in spite of their parental guardians, who function as their sovereigns by the right of predicting and influencing their coming-of-age process.

5. Reaching Maturity: Overcoming Genealogic Borders and Moving Beyond

The last stage of any Bildungsroman themes the protagonist's arrival at a stage of psychological and moral maturity. Tracking the development of Gallen's protagonists reveals an intricate reliance between the single stages of their development and their associated escapes from the predicted and even socially predetermined changes they undergo. While the stages of loss, journeying, and conflict and personal growth intertwine the necessities for

Majella and Maeve to overcome their secluded ways of living, Gallen also highlights the necessity for an escape from the coming-of-age process throughout her novels. In either novel, Gallen points out that both Majella and Maeve may opt out of the coming-of-age process on their own: at first, external factors inhibit their psychological development, like the absence of father figures or the linguistic exclusion of speaking a dialect of the English language. However, self-sabotage and reduced social interaction point towards self-chosen inhibitions of the protagonists' development, since they serve to be incarnations of their inability to overcome borders between the individual stages of the coming-of-age process.

Nevertheless, the last stage of the coming-of-age process focuses on the reaching of maturity. In neither case of Gallen's protagonists does maturity correlate with the legal age of becoming an adult: Majella turns 27 during *Big Girl, Small Town* while Maeve experiences an independent, self-determined lifestyle living on her own before *Factory Girls* ends. As the maturing process cannot happen parallel to Gallen's narrations, the following sections investigate borders and borderscapes of absolution, conflict resolutions, and redemption from imposed behaviour in this chapter. In other words, the focus of the last chapter is on how Majella and Maeve reinvent themselves and come to terms with the pre-given meaning of their Irish names, and on how their parents absolve them from having to lead a life according to their expectations. In addition to absolution from parental figures, Gallen's textual construction of *Big Girl, Small Town* and *Factory Girls* displays instances of closure for both the fictional world of the novels and for Gallen's readers. Hence, the borderscape here includes the aspect of the border of parents' sovereignty through naming their children to become the protagonists' self-induced escape into maturity.

5.1 Re-Inventing Oneself: Coming to Terms with Connotations of Names

Considering Gallen's fictional worlds taking place in Ireland, it is not surprising that both her protagonists carry names of Irish origin. The origin of a name marks the border

between different temporal realms: a name originates in one temporal frame and receives its connotation in its context, while passing on the name carries on this meaning as well as new connotations arise due to the person carrying the name and their actions. Through naming her protagonists, Gallen induces them with the responsibility to live up to the connotations of the name. Eventually, this act of living up resembles Majella and Maeve's final coming-of-age stage of reaching maturity.

Furthermore, the act of naming a person extends beyond the temporal framing and the responsibility of the bearer to live up to the name's original or altered meaning. As Görling and Schimanski elaborate: "Naming a child is a task, a right, a *Sorge* of its parents, in patriarchal traditions a *Sorge* of the father. The name is both an expression of a genealogy and an expression of sovereign power" (Schimanski and Wolfe 113). They further comment on a name being the marker of the child, an imprint of its parents since "[m]arks are inscriptions of something into something different" (Schimanski and Wolfe 114). Even so, the naming of a child inscribes "a strong relation between the proper name and the border. ... Both borders and proper names belong to what they mark, but at the same time escape it" (Schimanski and Wolfe 114). The name of a border – or a person, in the case of Gallen's Bildungsromane – extends its association with the object or subject it names towards its surrounding, which is what Görling and Schimanski call an "escape." The escape presents itself through means of representing the named object or subject in relation to the external world. Without a name, the title itself, no border would come into existence: "The proper name functions as a border surrounding its bearer. ... The name marks out a sovereign territory of meaning, but it functions as a mask to a meaning – a meaning that might not even be there without this performative act of marking" (Schimanski and Wolfe 114).

What Görling and Schimanski's analysis illustrate is the tight-knit relation between the entities of naming, marking, and territorialising. In the process of naming a child, the child itself does not have a choice to disagree with its parents: they mark the child as their own and,

thus, make the child subject to them. This is the state Majella remains in throughout most of Gallen's *Big Girl, Small Town*: she cannot detach herself from her parents, be they present like her mother or absent like her father. A poignant scene of this subordinate relationship is the following memory of Majella exploring her name's origin:

– Da? Why was ah called Majella Priscilla O'Neill?

Her ma had snorted at that. – Jesus. Here it comes Gerard, here it comes.

– Why ye asking, Jelly tot?

He was playing for time. She'd seen him do that with her ma often enough to know what it meant. It meant Majella wasn't going to like the answer.

– It's for homework. The teacher says we have tae find out for Confirmation.

Ah have tae pick ma Confirmation name.

He da had taken a big gulp of tea and shifted in his armchair.

– Ah didn't think ye picked yer Confirmation name. In our day ye had til take the name of yer godparent in respect a them.

(Gallen, *Big Girl* 275-6)

The reluctance to answer Majella's question directly points out the sovereign power of her parents over her: refusal is an act of power as well as explaining one's decision neglects this power due to acknowledged doubts regarding the sovereignty. The scene also highlights the tradition of naming children within the family by patriarchal customs: Majella turns to her father for an explanation, not to her mother. Further, Majella's father refers to the custom of naming he experienced in his own childhood days and implies a reluctance concerning his child choosing her own name for Confirmation. Interestingly, Gallen uses the term "Confirmation" in a double-layered meaning: although the capitalization indicates the connection to the Roman-Catholic tradition of renewing, confirming one's belief in God at around the beginning of puberty, in the context of naming the term also connotes the act of Majella formally accepting the name her parents chose for her.

Instead of rejecting the name and choosing a new one as an escape from parental sovereignty, Gallen traces Majella's development into a down-to-earth and independent woman as Majella's reflection on fairy tales illustrates:

Fairytales had always fascinated Majella. Transformation. Frogs into princes, beggars into queens, straw into gold. One tale might be about a talking cat, another about magic beams and the next about a man on a horse skewering a dragon, but they were all really about the same thing: about whatever you had in the start not being good enough and someone waving a wand or performing a trick do that everything turns out all tight in the end. ... Majella had yet to see the magic in the human journey. Mini-adults were born red and squashed. A few turned out cute, but most stayed ugly. Shit happens. Nobody seems happy. Everyone gets wrinkly and bits stop working. In the end, everyone dies. ...

(Gallen, *Big Girl* 255-6)

Instead of escaping into the fictional realm of alternative worlds and fairy tales, Majella awaits her transformation in a worldly context. While the beloved fairy tales belong to an age of childish innocence, Majella's current focus shifts towards a transformation by means of her own autonomy, wit, and power. Her transformation into an independent woman accompanies her name's patron, "an Irish saint. Patron saint of childbirth and pregnancy" (Gallen, *Big Girl* 279). Coming to terms with her imprinted name also implies acceptance of the possibility of transforming herself into another person within the boundaries of the name's implications. Moreover, her name's patron "Saint Majella is believed to have had the ability to bilocate, namely, to be in *two* places at the same time" (Bundschuh 240). Concluding from this characteristic, Majella takes on the responsibility of growing up on her own and, metaphorically speaking, gives birth to her own adult self, who sells her grandmother's borderland for financial freedom. As Bundschuh comments on the impact of selling the land, "[i]n her willingness to give up the strip of border land, [Majella] gains a sudden sense of

freedom *in it*” which corresponds with her claim of maturity (241). Maturity, in Majella and *Big Girl, Small Town*’s case, is a matter of interpreting the pre-given requirements in a new way that ultimately suits the protagonist and not the story primarily.⁹

Whereas Majella’s name patron symbolizes a new beginning – the birth of a new person as well as the transformation of one person transgressing from one coming-of-age stage to the next – Maeve’s name connotes a reversed meaning. In *Factory Girls*, Gallen makes use of opposing connotations in the case of Maeve and Aoife: “They’d learned in Irish class that ‘Aoife’ meant ‘pleasant radiance’ while ‘Maeve’ meant ‘she who intoxicates’” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 4). Similar to the comparison of GCSE results, Gallen parallels Maeve and Aoife with one another: they are two sides of the same medal, neither of them aware that they are bound to compare each other with the other but trying to live their own independent life. In either case, their parents mark them and their possible character traits from the start: Aoife’s parents allow for nothing else but brilliant grades, while Maeve’s parents only hope for decent grades to improve the family’s esteem in their town (comp. Gallen, *Factory Girls* 209 on Aoife, 213 on Maeve). Just like their parents’ imposed sovereignty over their lives, Gallen introduces her readers to the possibility that the two girls live a predetermined life based on their names’ connotations: Aoife will shine and fulfil her dreams, Maeve will not see her dreams come true.

Yet, both girls do not live up to their names’ implication of success and failure. Especially Maeve rebels against her parents’ choice of name: she studies hard and receives “*Three As! She was going to get the fuck out of town*” (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 237). In this case, Maeve’s name functions as a threshold which in turn alludes to the original meaning of something being liminal (comp. “Liminal” n.p.). Instead of meaning to live up to and to fulfil

⁹ One might also draw biographical connections considering Gallen’s personal growing up in the 70s during the Troubles near the border crossing Ireland (comp. Gallen, “About Me” n.p.). The parallelism points out Gallen’s personal involvement in depicting Majella as a character familiar to her real-life family members just as she depicts Majella to bear autistic traits in behaviour (comp. chapter 3.4 on growing up).

pregiven expectations, Maeve's name is a restriction imposed on her by her parents and a challenge to overcome in her coming-of-age process. Instead of the name defining her, Maeve strives to define her own name's connotation. As *Factory Girls* progresses, Gallen includes a poignant interaction of Maeve with Aoife's mother, Mrs. O'Neill:

“So what's the other black?”

Mrs. O'Neill gazed at Maeve, suddenly seeming tired. “It's the flat, dull black of soot. Of outer space.”

“Or depression,” Maeve said, suddenly seeing herself as Mrs. O'Neill saw her. A black hole at the heart of her family, sucking in all the light and love, always needing more.

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 246)

The realization of her own impact on others when living up to her name's implications is a repellent scenario, which is why Maeve leaves Aoife's home immediately. Furthermore, this realization functions as a wake-up call for Maeve to construct her own conditions for a fertile environment. Eventually, Gallen's protagonist leaves her hometown for a new life in England, thus neglecting the name's proposed destructive connotation and starting a new life.

In both Bildungsromane, Gallen imposes a predetermined path upon her protagonists through naming them. While the act of naming alone implies the act of sovereignty and dependency of the subject on the sovereign, each protagonist encounters the limitations and the overcoming, or escape, of the pre-given names. In *Big Girl, Small Town*, Majella redefines her name to become her redemption from a contained and limited existence subjected to her parents' governance. Reinterpretation equals transformation in Majella's case. In *Factory Girls*, Maeve actively neglects the imprinted connotation of her name once she sees the impact on her character through an outsider's eyes. Instead of sticking with her contrasting counterpart, she detaches herself from the complimentary side for comparison, namely Aoife and the family O'Neill. Both protagonists incorporate the active choice to overcome the

border between the coming-of-age stages of conflict and personal growth, and of maturity: neither Majella nor Maeve press themselves into maturity by force, but it is their own free will to accept and define or neglect and reinvent themselves based on their names' connotations.

Nevertheless, as the protagonists' parents participate in the initial choice of their names, they also participate in the final stage of reaching maturity in the coming-of-age process. While claiming maturity for themselves, both Majella and Maeve neglect their parents' guardianship at the same time. On the other side, their parents also must accept their daughters' independence in opposition to their continuous guidance of their lives. Hence, the following section focuses on the final conversations Gallen allows her protagonists with their parents for them to receive absolution to officially claim maturity.

5.2 Final Conversations with Parental Guardians: Finding Closure

The right to give names rests with the parents, while a child in the coming-of-age process maintains the right to accept and live up to it or to reject it. Although the coming-of-age process revolves mainly around the protagonists and their journey from being a child towards reaching maturity, becoming an independent and autonomous adult, parents play a role in the protagonist's moment of claiming full maturity in Gallen's Bildungsromane. Eventually, they are the instances providing their daughters with absolution on the end of childhood.

It is interesting to note that the guardian Majella receives absolution from is not her physically present mother, but her father, who disappeared when Majella was a child. The interaction she has with him takes place through memory alone, there is no final conversation she agrees to per se, but only the conversation she can replay in her mind. Moreover, Majella's conversation with her father about the origin of her name includes a search for her genealogical belonging:

– You’re an O’Neill. Part of the noblest clan in Ireland. We were once the kings
ann queens a Ulster. Ann Ulster was the best province in Ireland.

Her father seemed bigger when he spoke like this, frowning and serious.

– Ah thought we didn’t like the Queen?

– Ach, thou oul English bitch is a different story. Ah’m talking about Irish
royalty. That spoke til their people ann looked out fer them. That looked after our
language ann our land ann our poets ann the animals. ...

– What happened to them Daddy? ...

– They left. The English drove them out of it. They flew away til Spain. ...

– Now we’re known as the Foxy O’Neills.

(Gallen, *Big Girl* 276-7)

Majella’s personal genealogical identification connects with the cultural and collective
genealogy as well as memory.

As Graham Dawson claims, memory dissects into collective, personal, and cultural
memory while neither can exist without the other:

... Thus, *personal* memory always involves something more than an individual’s
psychological procession of personal experience, but is bound up in a reciprocal
relation with these social and collective representations of the past, which both draw
on the personal memories f individuals and are incorporated back within them. The
theory of *cultural* memory also points to a two-way interaction at work between past
and present. The legacy of the past imposes itself on and could even be said to
structure how we experience ourselves and our lives. ...

(13)

The interrelation between personal and collective memory is a case in point for an
individual’s obligation to interact with their family history: the history shapes the individual
family member and vice versa. This is why, in Gallen’s *Big Girl, Small Town*, Majella shapes

her own future self through re-visiting the memories with her late father. Furthermore, through the recollection of the memory Majella finds closure to a prolonged childhood. The absolution of her father does not primarily relate to stating her official existence as adult. Subtly, the development of the O'Neill clan narrated by her father allows Majella to gain confidence in an ongoing existence of the family through change. Change is not a state to be feared but to welcome: through the remembered conversation, Majella receives permission to sell the border land she inherits and to change it into a financial escape.

Further, Gallen's formal devices stress Majella's self-chosen state of maturity through the possible ongoing of the episodic daily structure. Throughout the novel, Majella encompasses her daily life through listicles, a portmanteau word composed of the words list and article (comp. "Listicle" n.p.). Gallen displays the lists of things Majella likes and dislikes in the very beginning before her actual narration begins (comp. Gallen, *Big Girl* 1-2).

According to Umberto Eco in an interview on lists, the "list is the origin of culture. It's part of the history of art and literature" through which we "attempt to grasp the incomprehensible[:]" Through lists, through catalogs, through collections in museum and through encyclopedias and dictionaries" (Beyer and Gorris n.p.). Thus, lists are an attempt to compromise the external world in favour of the individual using them as well as they are world-constructing and the basis of every existence. Gallen's narration mirrors Majella's minute attention to details – a vast number of sensory impressions – and her categorizing of them to make sense of the comfortable and the uncomfortable impressions. Following Rodas on reading literature in an autistic context, lists represent an infinite expansion of themselves, an ongoing process: "Though lists are frequently understood as mechanical productions, thoroughly predictable, they are also capable of drawing in unexpected content, thereby forming startling associations, a tendency toward what Umberto Eco calls 'infinite,' an endless capacity for addition and accumulation that gestures toward the endlessly inclusive" (64). By no means does Gallen imply in *Big Girl, Small Town* that Majella uses the listicle form due to an

external suggestion; moreover, it is her own choice to take control over her life. Although the last episode of the novel reads an unfavourable item on Majella's list, "4.44 a.m. Item 16.11: *Booze: The truth coming out,*" Majella turns out to be content with her decision to sell the border land – "She felt her eyes closing as a weight lifted off her chest" – despite the frightening revelation of being on her own in the adult world (Gallen, *Big Girl* 307, 309).

In *Big Girl, Small Town* Gallen complements Majella's coming-of-age progress with a final conversation with her late father through memory, the only way to access the absolution for her family's history to continue. Further, the formal device of the listicle supports Majella's self-chosen and ongoing development into a mature woman, who comes of age through the possibility of an ongoing structure in her life. Instead of the separating presumption of categorizing items into lists, the listicle becomes Majella's escape from a prolonged childhood; the lists are a preparation for adulthood and maturity.

Yet in *Factory Girls*, Gallen does not include a remembered conversation between Maeve and her father, but an active encouragement of Maeve's mother to leave the familiar hometown. Her mother's encouragement relies not solely on sympathy for her daughter or the realisation of Maeve being a completely grown-up person. Maeve's civil courage and urge to call out Andy Strawbridge's scheming through registering more workers than he has causes her trouble (comp. Gallen, *Factory Girls* 230-4): "Look. Ah'll cut a long story short. He [Ciarán Friel] says you're not welcome here, not now, not never. You've got twenty-four hours tae get out. After that there'll be *consequences*" (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 286). Maeve's mother delivers these news to Maeve, stating clearly that Maeve is responsible for this outcome upon her own conscience and despite better knowledge:

"Do you understand what's going on, Maeve Murray?" her mam growled. "Do you get what's happening?"

Maeve nodded. She knew what being run out of town meant. ... No paying her respects at the wakes or funerals, unless she crawled over broken glass on her hands and knees to beg Ciarán Friel's forgiveness.

“And d’ye know how lucky ye are? Tae get the chance tae walk away? Manys another didn’t get away so lightly for getting up to less.”

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 286-7)

Maeve inevitably must leave her hometown – but not as intended as an escape from a prescribed life, but as an escape from possible social harm toward her and her family. As a person coming of age, Maeve needs to accept the consequences of her own actions; in this case, her actions cut her off from her family and require her to go into exile.

Nevertheless, Maeve's mother does not attempt to make amends in Maeve's name for the sake of the family; she acknowledges and accepts Maeve's self-responsibility.

Furthermore, she points out the origin of Maeve's name, setting the theme for a well-meaning and encouraging farewell between mother and daughter. The day after breaking the news, Maeve's mother confesses,

... “Just so ye know,” she [Maeve's mother] said in her ear, “ah went in tae Ciarán Friel this morning. Ah went in and ah said to him you're going and ye'll not be back. Ah said ye'll never be back to thon shithole. That's what ah said to him. As if you'd be bothered with the place.”

... “You're not named after yer grandmother, ye know. ... I named you for Queen Maeve. Warrior Queen of Connacht. You look her up. She gave Ulster hell in her time. They buried her standing up, on a hill, facing her enemies.”

(Gallen, *Factory Girls* 289-90)

The revelation of her name's origin implies Maeve's final claim of maturity: with this information her development process completes – her mother's sovereignty ends through this

sharing of information.¹⁰ The conversation with her mother opens for Maeve the possibility of absolution in an attempted reconciliation: despite her mother's initial disinterest in Maeve's choices¹¹, they end on the same level, acknowledging the other's independent existence. The information about the Irish origin and connotation of Maeve's name is an encouragement of her mother's to face difficulties, thresholds, and limitations with perseverance and unwavering self-confidence. Specifically the fact that Maeve's mother "turn[s] on her heel and walk[s] away" without further goodbye is a case in point for her acceptance of Maeve's maturity and adolescence; she does not try to prolong sovereignty over her daughter's life (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 290).

Similar to *Big Girl, Small Town*, Gallen sets *Factory Girls*' narrative form to suit Maeve's development. The chapters resemble a countdown towards the defining days in Maeve's life. While the first chapter title reads "*Thursday, 2 June 1994 74 days until results*," the chapter after the revelation of the girls' GCSE results reads "*Monday, 22 August 1994 9 days before the flight of the girls*" (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 1, 266). The structure of the novel in two separate countdowns highlights Gallen's intention of separating Maeve's work-related progress into two sections: the section concerning her GCSE results sets the requirements for the section of escaping her hometown. Moreover, in Maeve's coming-of-age process the two sections indicate thresholds again: until "*Results day*," Maeve's life revolves mainly around the coming-of-age stages of loss and journey (Gallen, *Factory Girls* 235). After this day, Maeve increasingly interacts with her psychological and social conflicts and her personal growth.¹² Nevertheless, Gallen's choice of a countdown to define Maeve's daily life includes an allusion to Maeve's development process to be limited by time and to be influenced – both in the sense of driving and blocking – by external circumstances. On the other hand, Gallen's

¹⁰ In Irish mythology, Queen Maeve is believed to be the goddess of sovereignty. This points towards Maeve living up to her name's patron as she claims her own sovereignty, instead of claiming sovereignty through neglecting her name's literal connotation (comp. chapter 5.1).

¹¹ Comp. chapter 3.4 on Gallen's use of the Greek mythology of Icarus.

¹² Comp. chapters 2 on loss and 3 on conflict and personal growth throughout *Factory Girls*.

countdown structure includes the insistence on listing, similar to *Big Girl, Small Town*: as Rodas and Eco point out, lists make the infinite accessibility of information comprehensible to the individual (comp. Rodas 64, Beyer and Gorris n.p.). In this sense, Gallen points out the importance of these steps in Maeve's life as being thresholds in her maturing development. Especially, as Gallen uses the term "*flight*" repeatedly in her second countdown, she points out the escapist possibility of the limitation of the countdown: the countdown expires eventually, freeing Maeve from her bonds to her hometown and family.

In either of Gallen's Bildungsromane, the novels' structure points out a tendency towards the non-existence of closure and, therefore, the continuing coming-of-age process of the protagonists. Both the listicle form and the countdown structure are inexhaustible: Gallen might extend Majella's daily vignettes to the actions of meeting the solicitor or moving out of her home; Gallen might also add a new countdown to Maeve's life, for example, her progressing academic studies. Either way, both Bildungsromane display a rejection of closure through the infinitude of extensions. Lyn Hejinian writes in her article "The Rejection of Closure" – mainly referring to poetry – about the narrative form's incapacity to be closed in itself:

... Form is not a fixture but an activity. ... Yet the incapacity of language to match the world permits us to distinguish our ideas and ourselves from the world and things in it from each other. The undifferentiated is one mass, the differentiated is multiple. *The (unimaginable) complete text, the text that contains everything, would in fact be a closed text. ...*

(n.p.; emphasis added)

Concluding from Hejinian's implication of no existing text to be complete and the necessity of intertextuality, Gallen's novels do not lead their protagonists towards the final destination of maturity in the tradition of the Bildungsroman, but towards yet another checkpoint within their overarching maturation. Gallen intends to narrate Majella and Maeve's first but not last

coming-of-age process: within *Big Girl*, *Small Town* and *Factory Girls* her protagonists encounter the stages and borders of the overarching coming-of-age process. But since Gallen constructs both novels through forms rejecting closure, the protagonists' absolution of their parents turns into the border of the next coming-of-age process, namely, their ongoing lives. Through the permeable and extending structure, the novels' ends become an escape for Gallen's protagonist into a new coming-of-age process, or cycle.

As the analysis of the final conversations between the protagonists and their parental guardians reveals, the possibility of absolution through interpretation or memory and through encouragement exists. In both Majella and Maeve's cases, Gallen includes an absolution through their interaction with family history as well as the passed-on knowledge about a name's original connotation. In either case, the protagonists are free to decide whether to accept or reject their name's meaning imposed on them, whether to define their own connotation or take on the pre-given one. While Majella needs to decode her father's absolution through memory alone, Maeve receives support from her mother. Either absolution to be a fully accepted adult bundles the protagonists' own experiences in the context of their own decisions and the resulting consequences. In Majella's case, her memory turns into an escape from waiting for her mother's absolution: visiting the memory equals her self-acclaimed maturity. In Maeve's case, her mother only testifies and supports her decision to come of age on her own conditions: their final conversation is a testament for her escape.

6. Conclusion and Further Research Questions

Throughout the development of the term borderscape, the area of border studies focuses on the interrelation of borders and their surrounding landscapes. By means of the open, interpretative nature of the term landscape, the portmanteau word revolves mainly around the insistence of reading literature as landscapes as a part of borders, be it geographical, historical, or linguistical. Yet despite the inclusion of thresholds, frontiers, and

peripheries, borderscape studies do not include a focus on the effect on protagonists in literary studies. Moreover, when considering the genre of the Bildungsroman, border studies are a crucial approach to investigate literary borderscapes with a focus on the protagonists and the construction of borders by the author. This approach bases on the Bildungsroman's structure into four stages of the coming-of-age development – loss, journey, conflict and personal growth, and maturity. Considering each Bildungsroman stage to represent a threshold – a border, in the more general connotation – for the protagonist to overcome, it is crucial to note the protagonist's interaction, negotiation, and reinterpretation of the same.

However, Gallen's use of borders for her protagonists' coming-of-age process allude to borders not being imposed, external instances of existence in their development: Gallen illustrates the Bildungsroman stages to be separated from each other but also to mark an escapist possibility for her protagonists to opt out of their coming-of-age process on their own decision. Moreover, this points out two interpretative results of this thesis: first, the term borderscape includes the possibility of borders becoming an escape; second, the transformation of a border into an escape correlates with the Bildungsroman's protagonist's decision. In order to successfully trace the protagonist's coming-of-age, Gallen uses four types of borders in combination with the Bildungsroman stages: geography links to loss, social borders correlate with making a journey, linguistics point out conflict and personal growth, and genealogy highlights the stage of maturity.

Concluding from Gallen's use of geographical, social, linguistic, and genealogic borders in both her Bildungsromane *Big Girl, Small Town* and *Factory Girls*, they impact and influence the protagonists' coming-of-age process significantly. Whereas geographical landmarks signify the differentiation of the starting point of loss and the denial of absent father figures, they also imply the psychological retreat of the protagonists Majella and Maeve into themselves. Furthermore, Gallen uses geography for the illustration of marking territory and identification as much as she points out a self-chosen subjectification and dependence to

sovereigns in the workplaces of Majella and Maeve. Instead of tracing the coming-of-age process of her protagonists through the illustration of change in their surrounding environment, Gallen depicts geographical borders to be a consistent, rather than a cataclysmic indicator of her protagonists' prolonged childhood and the space of waiting for change. Nevertheless, the consistent, sometimes even self-imposed, loss of autonomy causes the protagonists to search for possible escapes from their stagnant misery by means of undertaking a journey in the realm of social borders: Gallen describes social borders to be in constant flux in relation to the protagonists, rather than focusing on the overarching checkpoints of education and representation of the external world through media. Especially, Gallen's adoption of the media of escape and self-education points out Majella and Maeve's self-responsible urge for a better understanding of the external world as well as this highlights the protagonists' growing capability of detaching themselves from superordinate norms. By means of connecting linguistic borders to the coming-of-age stage of conflict and personal growth, Gallen links the preceding self-education to a re-assessment of the protagonists' world view. Through linguistic borders and barriers Majella and Maeve incorporate the existence of border-crossers, without whose negotiation a border cannot exist. Moreover, as border-crossers Gallen's protagonists reflect the possibility of reinterpreting their self-perception in relation to their town's outsiders, while actively confronting their personal conflicts in the process of becoming border-crossers. Lastly, Gallen includes genealogical borders in order to highlight her protagonists' self-claimed maturity despite and due to their Irish name's connotation. Through this, they also reinvent their own future self, thus reaching maturity, as well as they receive absolution from their parental guardians, which equals the parents' end of sovereignty over their daughters.

Eventually, the term borderscape connotes the successful coming-of-age process through borders turning into and being interpreted as escapes by means of the protagonists' agency and interpretative creativity. The protagonists create spaces within and outside of

borderlands which represent their own space of freedom of choice in their coming-of-age process. Hence, in the context of the Bildungsroman, the term borderscape receives the additional definition of reading borders and their surrounding landscapes as escapes from the coming-of-age process of the protagonist. This additional definition includes the predominance of the interaction of geographical, social, linguistic, and genealogic borders in correlation with the four stages of the Bildungsroman. As this thesis' analysis of Gallen's coming-of-age novels illustrates, the reading of borders as escapes cannot investigate this combination separately, since the borders of a protagonist's coming-of-age are constantly in flux and cross-connected, and not separate and linear.

Since Gallen's Bildungsromane illustrate the successful transformation of borders into coming-of-age escapes, a further research field would be to investigate unsuccessful claiming of autonomy, such as in Anna Burns' *Milkman* (2018): here the themes of exile, self-sabotage, and imposed subjectification in the context of psychological borders are prominent. Furthermore, the temporal border between the protagonist's present and their memories may be extended in comparing Majella's dependency on the memories of her late father in *Big Girl, Small Town* to the intersections of dreams with the protagonist Fergus' discovery of a body hidden in the bog in Siobhan Dowd's *Bog Child* (2008). Since both Gallen's novels as well as Dowd's *Bog Child* concern protagonists in relation to the Troubles and the post-Agreement era, a historical approach to borders as escapes in the Irish Bildungsroman would also hold significant research potential. Due to the fact that Gallen chooses the media of a TV series and a book as media of self-education and explanation of the external world, the inter-medial approach to investigate the influence of media like television and the radio – with regard to the Irish population's perception of them due to the Troubles and the post-Agreement period – would include a promising comparison with the Irish TV series *Derry Girls*, with which Gallen's *Big Girl, Small Town* is already associated. Except for Dowd's *Bog Child* protagonist, the named novels and TV series' protagonists are female: having in mind

arising gender studies, an interdisciplinary approach to investigate borderscapes and their interpretation as escapes with regard to male or diverse protagonists appears to be a comparative approach. Moreover, a feminist approach to the Bildungsromane would be able to stress the question how to define femininity in relation to (coming-of-age) growth both physical and psychological as well as the concept of toxic masculinity with regard to destructive or prohibiting structures in the coming-of-age process.

30,882 words

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