

Secret Trauma in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*:

Dissociation, Art, and Healing

by

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Introduction

Ann-Marie MacDonald opens her debut historical novel, *Fall On Your Knees*, with a key moment in the life of her protagonist, James Piper. The opening, “One morning, the day before his fifteenth birthday, James awoke with the realization that he could hit his father back” (MacDonald 7), announces both the fact that James has been subject to abuse by his father and, more generally, the novel’s central thematic preoccupation with repeating patterns of familial abuse. Throughout the course of the novel, we bear witness as James perpetuates this cycle of violence against his family: he sexually abuses first his child-bride Materia, and then his daughters Kathleen, Mercedes, and Frances. Each of these Piper women either experience sexual abuse firsthand, or as witnesses to the incest, as McDonald explores and traces the long-lasting impacts of familial trauma over five generations during the first half of the twentieth century.

In bringing to life this haunting narrative of familial trauma, *Fall On Your Knees* provides a psychologically profound look into the secrecy, dissociation, and repression that survivors of sexual abuse experience. In her work, “Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma,” Laura S. Brown defines incest as “the secret trauma” (101). Brown writes that secret traumas are “experiences to which women accommodate; potentials for which women make room in their lives and their psyches. They are private events, sometimes only known to the victim and perpetrator” (101). Secrecy exists in the Piper family following the acts of incest which remain unspoken. According to Brown, the secrecy behind incest is attributable to the scrutiny that victims face (106). Fearing to come forward, victims stay silent because prevailing attitudes suggest that they are the ones at fault (106). These attitudes are internalized by the Piper women, as they blame themselves for the acts of abuse. With no cathartic outlets in place for the Piper women, their trauma remains repressed, and over time,

they learn the art of dissociation where, due to prolonged or ongoing trauma, they disconnect from their memories, thoughts, surroundings, and reality. As a result of dissociation, the Piper women end up in a fuzzy place of limbo where they are never fully present in their lives but instead detach from their memories and reality. We can read their dissociation in the artistry they create, from their poetry and their paintings, and most powerfully in their music. Using Sigmund Freud's theories of the return of the repressed, repetition compulsion, and the uncanny, I will illustrate the dissociation that the Piper women experience resulting from secrecy due to sexual abuse in this psychologically astute historical fiction. It is only through the characters' process of coming to understand this phenomenon that healing and redemption can begin, as McDonald suggests by the novel's end.

Return of the Repressed

In his 1939 work, *Moses and Monotheism*, Sigmund Freud defines his concept of the "return of the repressed" as a process by which psychic material that is originally repressed comes to light through a substitutive means:

The ego fends off the danger by the process of repression. The instinctual impulse is in some way inhibited, its precipitating cause, with its attendant perceptions and ideas, is forgotten. This, however, is not the end of the process: the instinct has either retained its forces, or collects them again, or it is reawakened by some new precipitating cause.

Thereupon it renews its demand, and, since the path to normal satisfaction remains closed to it by what we may call the scar of repression, somewhere, at a weak spot, it opens another path for itself to what is known as a substitutive satisfaction, which comes to light as a symptom, without the acquiescence of the ego, but also without its

understanding. All the phenomena of the formation of symptoms may justly be described as the 'return of the repressed.' (Freud 125-126)

Freud's theory of the return of the repressed provides a psychological framework for interpreting the impact of sexual abuse in MacDonald's novel. Following the sexual abuse at the hands of their father, Kathleen and Frances Piper each create powerful works of art that symbolize their trauma. Their repressed memories return, not as direct depictions of the original trauma, but as symbols representing certain facets connected to that trauma. I will examine three compelling examples of the Piper daughters' artwork in this section, where we can read the return of their repressed memories in relation to their abuse: 1) Kathleen's "lost chord" poem written to her father; 2) Frances' drawing called "Daddy and Frances in the Rocking Chair"; and 3) James' imagined painting, "Death and the Young Mother." Since the trauma is too great to access their memories directly, it is their artwork that enables them to begin the process of remembering and healing.

When Kathleen is twelve years old, she sees James fixing the piano. As he is working, Kathleen strikes a piano chord in jest. James' response is utterly inappropriate for this situation: he "springs up and around, though the hammers barely winged him, belts her with an open hand then a closed fist before he realizes who it is and what he's done" (MacDonald 60). Once James realizes he has hurt Kathleen, he apologizes by holding her close to him:

A life and warmth enter his body that he hasn't felt since - that he has rarely felt. She will be safe with him, I'll keep you safe, my darling, oh how he loves this girl. He holds her close, no harm, never any harm. Her hair smells like the raw edge of spring, her skin is the silk of a thousand spinning-wheels, her breath so soft and fragrant, milk and honey

are beneath your tongue...Then he shocks himself. He lets her go and draws back abruptly so she will not notice what has happened to him. Sick. I must be sick. (61)

In this scene, James gets an erection from holding Kathleen. Through his point of view, the young girl is described as follows: “Her hair smells like the raw edge of spring, her skin is the silk of a thousand spinning-wheels, her breath so soft and fragrant, milk and honey are beneath your tongue...” (61). These phrases read as if they might be depicting James’ lover instead of his daughter. James’ thoughts are also reminiscent of the *Song of Solomon* from the Bible, a text with which James would certainly have been familiar in small town Canada at that time. Similar to the “milk and honey” (61) in James’ thoughts about Kathleen, Solomon addresses his bride’s beauty by stating, “Thylips, my Spouse, drop as honeycombs: honey and milk are under thy tongue, and the savor of thy garment is as the savor of Lebanon” (*1599 Geneva Bible*, Song of Solomon 4-11). The *Song of Solomon* is the most erotic part of the bible, and Macdonald alludes to the eroticization by showing us the shift in James’ thoughts, from a father protecting his daughter, to that of Solomon having sexual thoughts about his bride. James’ thoughts towards Kathleen are incestuous following an act of violence, and we see his body reacting to it.

As readers, we have an understanding of James’ thoughts and actions, but we are not privy to the same direct experience as Kathleen. We do not know how she thinks and feels about the act of violence, and then the subsequent inappropriate sexual response from her father. Instead, she represses the act, and later writes about it in a poem, which we never get to read firsthand. We only know the subject of the poem:

Kathleen knew that her father had hit her by mistake, that he was terribly sorry. She knew he’d been working too hard and all for her sake. No harm done, the tooth settled back

into the gum. She made him a card to tell him she loved him. She wrote a funny poem about “the lost chord.” They put it behind them. (62)

In this scenario, when they put the memory “behind them,” this is a way for Kathleen and James to repress the incident. However, through the act of creating a card and a poem, Kathleen finds a way for the repression to return, which according to Freud, serves as a “substitutive satisfaction” (Freud 126). The “lost chord” is illustrative of Kathleen losing her tooth in a shocking experience of physical violence, yet also losing her naive and innocent relationship with her father.

Kathleen’s relationship with James, which she previously thought was normal, becomes violent. In addition to this, James’ erection establishes an incestuous dynamic to the relationship, one that was not present before. This is the only sexualized incident between Kathleen and James, until it is revealed later that he rapes her. The poem “the lost chord” is a substitutive satisfaction, because while Kathleen and James put the event “behind them” (MacDonald 62), Kathleen manifests this incident through the poem. Kathleen’s poem provides an outlet for her repressed memory, but it seems only to scratch the surface.

Following Kathleen’s death, her younger sister Frances is also sexually abused by her father. We witness the sexual abuse through the child eyes of Mercedes, who describes what she sees:

It’s all right, Frances is alive-o. She is in the rocking-chair with Daddy. It’s funny that Frances already seems to have been looking at Mercedes even before Mercedes arrived in the doorway. It’s Daddy making the puppy sound. He is sad because Kathleen died. He needs his other little girls all the more now. Frances is sitting nice and still, not squirming for a change. Mercedes waits until the rocking-chair stops and Frances slides from

Daddy's lap to join her in the doorway. As they walk upstairs hand-in hand Frances says 'It doesn't hurt'. (167)

Mercedes witnesses this incest and sexual abuse firsthand, and her mind cannot cope with what she sees, so she substitutes the rape for a rocking-chair, which is a symbol for parental love, comfort and protection. However, as we subsequently learn, there is no rocking-chair. This moment appears innocent: instead of a rape, we see James as a father sitting with his daughter in a rocking-chair as a comfort, crying over the death of their eldest. It can be argued that Mercedes could not comprehend that her sister was being sexually abused, so this scene reads as innocent. However, there are clues that suggest this scene is insidious and incestuous: after Mercedes goes to bed, she feels "a bit sick to her stomach, although she can't understand why. She rises, goes over to the wash basin and throws up" (168). She also feels "afraid" (168). When Mercedes witnesses the sexual assault, the trauma is too great for her to grasp at a cognitive level. The trauma is then repressed and re-emerges as a physical symptom, which is the nausea and vomiting, and also in the substitution of the rocking chair.

Later in the novel, no longer a child but a young adult, Mercedes discovers the childhood drawing of Frances called "Daddy and Frances in the Rocking Chair." Frances interestingly draws a rocking chair, the very image that Mercedes herself had imagined when she first witnessed the abuse. As Mercedes starts to think about this picture, she feels uncomfortable as she recognizes something odd: "But there never was a rocking-chair, in this room or any other. Just the pale green wingback. Mercedes's white rag goes round and round, bringing up the mahogany sheen on the piano" (374). In this instance, the return of the repressed is evident through Frances' drawing. The "rocking chair" in the drawing stands in as a substitution for the rape, imitating the motions of James raping Frances. Following the rape, we understand that just

as Mercedes internalized the trauma by vomiting, Frances, too, recognizes the trauma on some level when she tells Mercedes “[it] doesn’t hurt” (376). Recognizing that she has undergone trauma, Frances represses the incident, but the drawing of the rocking chair stands in as a substitution for the actual event. Not only does this episode provide us with a clear illustration of Freud’s return of the repressed, but it also demonstrates the enduring power of symbols, in this case of parent-child bonds.

It is through art that healing begins, that what is repressed comes to the surface again. In his work, *Studies On Hysteria*, Freud advocated for catharsis, which we can deem to be one of the goals of his “talking cure,” or talk therapy. Freud claimed that by giving voice to painful memories or emotions stemming from trauma, they will in turn become “abreacted,” or released. Freud states this here:

The injured person’s reaction to the trauma only exercises a completely cathartic effect if it is an adequate reaction - as, for instance, revenge. But language serves as a substitute for action; by its help, an affect can be abreacted almost as effectively. In other cases speaking is itself the adequate reflex, when, for instance, it is a lamentation or giving utterance to a tormenting secret, e.g. a confession (Freud 7).

Speaking about traumatic events is a way for the repressed material to be brought into consciousness, and can be overcome and understood. For the Piper women, their artistry is a way to understand and cope with the trauma.

When Mercedes discovers Frances’s drawing, it jogs her memory, and the repressed memory resurfaces again, but this time with greater understanding, not merely coded through symbols:

She's sitting on daddy's lap, sideways, facing me. Rocking. He's rocking her. But it's not working, she's wide awake. He doesn't see me because he's looking into her hair. His mouth is open a little, an upside-down new moon. He's making the sound. The skin on his face looks pulled back by an undertow, his head is straining forward not to drown. His right hand hovers, barely touching the halo of yellow fuzz Frances gets from turning on her pillow, and his left hand is under and up her nightgown like a puppeteer's...then he shoves her down between his legs and pins one hand across her chest, the other one still operating underneath, they're both facing in the same direction now but Frances turns her face to keep our eyes together. His head snaps back and he jams her up between his legs once, again, three times and a half, until he trembles at the ceiling. (375)

This is a clear incidence of incestuous rape against the young Frances. Not only is Frances' drawing an example of her own and Mercedes' repression coming to light, but it is also the moment when readers begin to understand that James did not, in fact, outsmart his "demon," which is what James' desire for Kathleen is named. We first encounter this term when we read, "If James has forgotten the demon, Materia hasn't" (67), shortly after the act of abuse against Kathleen. James' desire for Kathleen is described as such for the remainder of the novel.

MacDonald uses conventions of the gothic genre in order to withhold information from readers, in order to reveal it later with dramatic potency. The traumatic events of sexual abuse are long-standing, and we are slowly revealed new elements of trauma as the tale progresses. In Rebecca Munford, Melanie Waters, and Imelda Whelehan's work, "The Return of the Repressed: Feminism Fear and the Postfeminist Gothic," they claim that in the gothic, the dysfunction in the home that comes to be repressed will always return, because it cannot truly remain repressed. They write,

Like Derrida's 'revenant', then, the Gothic 'begins by coming back' (11; emphasis in original). Providing a (dysfunctional) home for what has been cast out of mainstream discourses, it offers the expression par excellence of the 'return of the repressed', marking the moment at which knowledge – in this case feminist knowledge – that 'ought to have remained hidden' revisits itself upon those who tried to deny its existence (Freud, 1997: 207). (Munford, Waters, & Whelehan 134)

The way that violence and trauma is foreshadowed by using symbol and imagery mimics the symptomatic return of the repressed which we can see is experienced by the characters. James' dysfunctional "demon," which he tries so hard to repress, consistently revisits itself upon him. We as readers can view the return of the repressed through James' imagined painting, *Death and the Young Mother*. At the outset of the novel, James tries to repress or conquer the "demon that leapt up in him" (62) in the form of erotic attraction toward his young daughter. When World War I starts, we learn that "[t]he next day, James outsmarts the demon for the second time. He enlists" (78). This is the last we hear from him on the subject of his unnatural, incestual attraction towards Kathleen, or any of his daughters for that matter, until we are provided with Mercedes' testimony of the night when James rapes Frances. As we do not know that James raped and impregnated Kathleen at this point, it is as if we, as readers, are experiencing the return of the repressed. While we might think that James has conquered the demon, there is symbolism to suggest that he has not. Like Frances' drawing and Kathleen's poem, James' imagined painting uses symbolism to return that which was repressed. In this case, he envisions a demon, his demon, lurking below the bed, a symbol of his repressed incestuous desires. After Kathleen dies giving birth to the twins that James fathered, the scene is viewed by James as though it is a painting:

On the bed lies the Young Mother. Her eyes are closed. Her blonde-red hair is damp and ratty on the pillow. The centre of her body is ravaged. A plump dark woman who looks much older than thirty-three stands over her. This is the Grandmother. She holds two dripping infants trussed by the ankles, one in each hand, like a canny shopper guesstimating the weight of a brace of chickens. The Grandmother's face looks straight out from the picture at the viewer: 'If this were really a painting, there would also be a demon peering out from under the lid of the hope chest at the foot of the bed, hoping to steal the Young Mother's soul. But he'd be pre-empted by her Guardian Angel waiting in the wings to guide her already departing Soul up to God.'" (143)

In this "painting," we view a "demon" that is peering out from under the lid of the hope chest at the foot of the bed. James believes that the demon desires to steal Kathleen's soul. This demon foreshadows to us as readers that James is the man who impregnated Kathleen. James describes his own erotic desire to Kathleen as a "demon" (62), and it is no coincidence that a demon is pictured here.

If we read the demon wishing to steal Kathleen's soul as James, then the guardian angel who counters his efforts is her mother, Materia. Materia reveals that she suspected Kathleen did not wish to live, so she is the "Guardian Angel" (143) that takes her away; an act of mercy killing. We are exposed to Materia's point of view just after Kathleen dies, where she thinks, "the real reason I let my daughter die is because I knew she was better off that way. I didn't know her well, but I knew she didn't want to live any more. She preferred to die and I allowed her to do so" (138). Materia's point of view regarding her daughter's death creates foreshadowing, partially revealing to readers that an abysmal occurrence must have taken place for Kathleen to cease wishing to live.

As readers, we encounter James' imagined painting without the full knowledge of what caused Kathleen's pregnancy. We are forced to consider the painting as depicting a timeless, tragic scene. Only later do we come to the startling realization that James is actually the father of Kathleen's children:

“-falling, fists against his back, enmeshed between his weight, the mushy bed, struggling only shakes the web, the sheet, and all its threads conspire, she can no longer find her feet-

The iron taste of her mouth where he has made it bleed, dreadful sorry, I'll take you home again- “Be still,” he pleads.

“Stop it.”

“I'll never let anyone hurt you again

“No!”

never let anyone touch you

“NO!”

No one No one No. One. Will ever ever

She has stopped screaming.

Hurt you Ever

she is lying perfectly still now

Again!

He shudders. “Shshshsh. It's all right now. Hush my darling. It's all right”. (550)

We can determine in this scene that Kathleen has been raped by James, and this follows Mercedes' account that reveals the sexual abuse James committed against Frances. The order of

events in the narrative demonstrate MacDonald's choice to delay and reveal knowledge of the trauma, where the readers experience a partial knowing similar to the characters' return of the repressed. The elements of incest are revealed, layer by layer, allowing the reader to experience traumatic shocks upon discovery.

The Piper women experience the return of the repressed due to incestuous trauma that runs amok in this family. The trauma can be described in layers, leaving us as readers to piece them together. The novel builds up in narrative tension to the climactic scene where we learn that Kathleen was raped by James. The slow, suspenseful reveal achieves an intense experience of narrative engagement for readers, but it also offers an accurate depiction of how survivors of sexual abuse process trauma. Healing from sexual trauma is layered, requiring the peeling away of defense and denial on the process to recovery. We see the defense and denial in Mercedes and Frances' inability to cope with the trauma, through partly-repressed memories. We can also see the defense and denial in James, primarily, as he consistently denies his "demon," or his role to play in his sexual assault against his daughters. Brown writes that trauma that is incestual, or sexual in nature, is layered:

In understanding post-traumatic symptomatology, a feminist analysis leads us to factor in the effects of long-standing insidious trauma. Rather than looking to biological vulnerability, or to the presence of previous pathology to explain severity and intensity of symptoms (van der Kolk, 1987), we might begin instead to ask how many layers of trauma are being peeled off by what appears initially to be one traumatic event or process. (110)

Using Brown's theory, we can read the return of the repressed in the Piper family. The traumatic events of sexual abuse are long-standing, and the foreshadowing that readers receive is revealed through layers and layers of trauma, demonstrating that which is repressed, but comes to light. In

this case, the return of the repressed is evident because James consistently tries to deny the existence of his “demon” (MacDonald 67). He enlists in the Great War, and he tries to deny his incestuous desire when he first gets an erection by thinking: “Hanged men get hard ons, for heaven’s sake” (65). He also denies his role to play in Lily’s tragic conception. Lily is James and Kathleen’s biological daughter, whom James fathered from raping Kathleen. When James reminisces about Kathleen years after she dies from childbirth, he thinks, “If only he hadn’t let her go so far from home. If only he had gone with her to New York. None of it would have happened. She never would have gotten pregnant” (260). This makes it look to readers as though James is not Lily’s father, suggesting that Kathleen got pregnant in New York City from a more consensual sexual encounter. Munford, Waters, and Whelehan claim that “what ought to have remained hidden revisits itself on those who deny its existence” (134), and this can be applied to James. James tries to outsmart the “demon,” however it revisits when he rapes Kathleen and Frances.

Another instance of James’ denial occurs when he looks at Frances after she cuts off her hair: “The insolent face, the freshly hacked curls. Lost. And gone forever. What happened to her? My little Frances. James sighs. He can’t think about all that right now. There’s too much of it. It’s too dark in there, and he doesn’t have the energy” (MacDonald 291). Here, James starts to think about the time he raped Frances, but the thoughts are too “dark” (291) so he erases them from his mind. No matter how often he tries to repress his demon, it always resurfaces, and this is evident when he finally confesses the truth of Lily’s parentage to Frances near the end of the novel.

The following passage illustrates that which has been repressed, being unearthed through the layers of trauma:

Advancing steadily towards the front of her mind is the memory of what she and Frances can't know together out loud. She has kept this memory on top of a pile of things at the back of her mind. Not buried. Right there where she can see it every time she passes the open door. But as long as she keeps it in the back room, she can believe that it belongs with the rest of the old junk. As long as she doesn't talk about it, it can remain overlooked by amateurs and experts alike: the gilt frame covered with dust, the painting gummed over with neglect-who would guess what a piece of work lies dormant here. But it has stirred. Torn itself from its frame and now it's coming closer and closer-stop. That's far enough. (374)

In this scene, Mercedes is finally in a position where she can acknowledge the traumatic rape that she witnessed. Mercedes' memory of the incident is "Not buried" (374), demonstrating that the event is not fully repressed. Mercedes keeps the memory "in the back room" (374), where the truth about the memory is buried. The "gilt frame covered with dust" (374) symbolizes the layers of trauma that Mercedes has been subjected to, that which she tries to keep from coming to light. When the memory tears "itself from its frame" (374), this alludes to the layer of trauma that is revealed. This is an example of MacDonald unearthing and revealing, layer by layer, sexual trauma.

Repetition Compulsion

Freud's "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through" discusses patients that he treated in his psychoanalytic practice, particularly how they would repress material, and then act it out in waking life without recognizing their motivations for doing so (150). Freud writes how the patients reproduce material: "not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it" (150). Freud also introduces the "compulsion to repeat,"

in which those who have repressed an event are compelled to perform actions that mimic the event, over and over:

We have learnt that the patient repeats instead of remembering, and repeats under the conditions of resistance. We may now ask what it is that he in fact repeats or acts out.

The answer is that he repeats everything that has already made its way from the sources of the repressed into his manifest personality-his inhibitions and unserviceable attitudes and his pathological character-traits. (150)

In *Fall On Your Knees*, repetition compulsion is evident in the parallel musical inclinations of Materia, Kathleen, and Frances. These three women are all sexually abused by James, and music plays a role in shaping their traumatic experiences. Materia is sexually abused by James when she is a thirteen year old, through the practice of grooming, while we learn that Kathleen and Frances are raped by James. These three Piper women each gravitate towards musical artistry as a way of repeating the trauma. It begins with Materia, who is the first to develop musical talent. Her source of trauma, namely her abusive relationship with James, also originates from a musical encounter. Materia first meets James as a twelve year old, when she notices him tuning the piano at her household. In a ploy to get James' attention, she walks over to the piano and hits the C sharp note. James' right eye gets hit by the piano key, and startled by the intrusion, he looks up and notices Materia in her elementary school uniform. Entranced by her girlish appearance, his "right eye wept while his left eye rejoiced" (12). Materia tells James, "I'm going to marry a dentist" (12), and he responds by saying "I'm not a dentist" (12). From this statement, it is obvious that James demonstrates physical attraction to Materia, thus setting the stage for their secret meetings to begin. James is an eighteen year old man, and his attraction to a child wearing her school uniform is pedophilic in nature. Ominously foreshadowed, the reader gets the sense

that trauma is to occur, as the next paragraph starts with “Had she hit E flat things never would have progressed so far, but she hit C sharp and neither of them had any reason to suspect misfortune” (12). This foreshadows to us that something traumatic will take place, yet also demonstrates that music will play a role in shaping the trauma. After their initial meeting, James practices with Materia what sexual abuse specialists call “grooming,” behaviours, whereby an adult will gain the trust and adoration of a child, before enacting sexual misconduct against them. James perpetuates this behaviour, which results in trauma for Materia.

Following their first encounter, James meets Materia at the Holy Angels Convent School. He treats her like the child that she is, and this signifies to readers Materia’s youth and naivete. After Materia sees James waiting for her outside her school, she runs to him and he swings her around, “like a little kid” (13). This demonstrates Materia’s innocence in matters of sex. Though Materia is not a *little* kid, she is too young to have a relationship with an eighteen year old man. We do not know if Materia feels erotic desire for James, however, it is obvious that he does for her: “It was when she said his name in her soft buzzy way that his desire first became positively carnal-he blushed, convinced everyone could tell” (13). After Materia and James have met in secret a few times following their first encounter where James meets her at Holy Angels, they elope shortly after, and by midsummer, she is pregnant. Materia’s parents do not retrieve her once they find out about the elopement, and instead they claim that she is “dead to them” (18). Her parents do not protect her from James’ “carnal” desire, or attempt to get the elopement annulled. This poses as an explanation for why Materia does not intervene and protect her daughters from James’ abuse, because the trauma is intergenerational. Her parents allowed James to sexually abuse a child, and Materia does not protect her children because she was not taught to do so.

During her pregnancy, Materia constantly cries, and James cannot abide it. This is also when Materia begins to experiment with the piano, which annoys James: “lately she’d begun playing whatever came into her head whether it made sense or not-mixing up fragments of different pieces in bizarre ways, playing a hymn at top speed, making a B-minor dirge out of ‘Pop Goes the Weasel’, and all with a heavy hand of barrelhouse hack” (24). Materia’s pregnancy obviously means that she and James had sexual relations, despite the fact that she is only twelve. It makes sense that she experiences crying spells: not only has she become pregnant, but she is also undergoing puberty. Materia begins to experiment on the piano because she has been traumatized, recognizing that she has been a victim of sexual abuse.

The following passage shows that James somewhat recognizes his complicity in the role of sexually abusing, or grooming, a child:

But deep down, he winced at the thought of showing Materia to anyone. He was grateful they lived in the middle of nowhere. It wasn’t that he didn’t love her anymore, he did. It was just that, recently, it had struck him that other people might think there was something strange. They might think that he had married a child. (24)

James’ decision to hide Materia away demonstrates his guilt. He groomed a child into becoming his bride. Another incident where James realizes that Materia is a child occurs after she gives birth, where James teaches twelve and thirteen year old children to play piano. Realizing that his wife was the same age as these children when they got married, he begins to blame Materia for “seducing” him when she was a child:

It was when he sat next to twelve-and thirteen-year-olds on the piano bench and watched their eyes glaze over at the mention of the middle C that it hit him in the stomach that his wife had been no older than they.

How had he been ensnared by a child? There was something not right about Materia. Normal children didn't run away with men. He knew from his reading that clinical simpletons necessarily had an overdeveloped animal nature. She had seduced him. That was why he hadn't noticed she was a child. (34)

James blames Materia for his role in grooming her into a relationship with him, claiming that she "seduced" him, and that it was "sick" (34). By doing this, he absolves himself of blame in his role of perpetuating grooming behaviour and sexual abuse against a child.

Music acts as a form of repetition compulsion for Materia, but we can read it as a sublimation as well. The term "sublimation" originates in Freud's work *Three Essays on Sexuality*. Freud claims that sublimation is the process by which unacceptable sexual impulses become diverted to socially acceptable forms (178). This can include art, science, philosophy, and religion. In relation to trauma, one can interpret the "sexual impulses" that Freud discusses to be equated with traumatic impulses that spring from sexual abuse. This means that trauma is redirected into healing aims. Materia, Kathleen, and Frances create musical artistry as a way to escape James, but it also provides a measure of healing. The musical art the Piper women create can be interpreted through Freud's theory of repetition-compulsion; however, we can also read it in terms of sublimation, because though their trauma does involve music, they also create new meaning out of it.

At the start of their marriage, James initially teaches Materia how to play piano, providing her with acceptable songs to play, as they use the *Let Us Have Music for Piano* book. In the following passage, we see James teaching Materia the "correct" songs to play:

James bought an old upright piano at auction. In the early days Materia would play and they'd sing their way through the latest *Let Us Have Music for Piano*. Sometimes she'd

slide down the bench and insist he play, and he would, with gusto, the first few bars of some romantic piece, and then stop short, just as he did when he tuned pianos. Materia would laugh and beg him something to play right through and he would reply, “I’m no musician, dear, I’d rather listen to you.” (20)

Materia is a quick learner. Experimenting with music is a way of making art. It is a form of repetition compulsion because it originates from the source of her trauma, which is James, but it also works as sublimation since she is able to redirect James’ list of acceptable songs into her own creations. By creating new musical compositions, Materia is able to find healing. When she gets a job at the Empire Theatre, she also has a chance to continue her unique work of experimenting with compositions:

Percussive shoes, flashing feet that chatted, clattered, took flight and girdled the globe without ever leaving center stage at the Empire Theatre. Materia just watched their feet and let her hands go, chunks of *Rigoletto* colliding with “Coal Black Rose”, “Una Voce Poco Fa”, on a see-saw with “Jimmy Crack Corn”, all slapped up against her spontaneous compositions. (52)

Music is therapeutic to Materia; it is the one true place where she is allowed to express herself. However, when James is in Mr. McIsaac’s store, Mr. McIsaac compliments Kathleen’s singing voice and says “She’s got a gift that one...Gets it from her mother, no doubt” (55). Enraged, James forces Materia to quit her job. Materia then suppresses her gift, which is illustrated in this passage: “How unhappy they are who has a gift that’s left to germinate in darkness. The pale plant will sink invisible roots and live whitely off their blood” (55). Materia feeds vampirically off the energies around her, hence the term “live whitely off their blood,” and with James abruptly permitting Materia to continue playing, she has nothing to live off of, or offer. Another

example of how James' controls Materia's musical talent is when Kathleen is born, and he makes Materia quit her compositions. Materia is only "permitted to play piano again, this time exactly what was in front of her" (36). Music is healing for Materia, but when James permits her to play her composition creations, she becomes lifeless again.

Similar to Materia, Kathleen enacts repetition compulsion because she gravitates towards music as well. It is as if she is repeating her mother's experience of childhood sexual abuse. The scene in which James first abuses Kathleen even mimics James' and Materia's initial meeting. Kathleen is twelve years old, the same age as Materia was when she first met James. She also strikes a chord on piano while James is working, which is what Materia did to capture James' attention. As we know, James sexually abuses Kathleen. He is also the one who teaches her music, like he taught Materia. Kathleen has a natural talent, as demonstrated by: "Kathleen sang before she talked. Perfect pitch. James was a piano-tuner-he knew, his eighteen-month-old daughter could carry "All These Young Charms" flawlessly, if wordlessly, after hearing him play it once" (36). Although Kathleen is shown to have a close relationship with her father, she is quiet and withdrawn from other students at her school, signifying that she has undergone something traumatic. One teacher even thinks that Kathleen gives her the "creeps....The child seemed to be in disguise. Staring up at the corner of the ceiling or out the window, waiting for something, a sign, what?...It wasn't right in a child. Perhaps she wasn't a child at all" (41). Although we find out that Kathleen was not sexually abused by her father until later in her life, his abusive relationship with Materia is traumatizing enough for a child to witness, which can explain why Kathleen was a silent child. In addition to this, James exerts control over Kathleen as well, by dictating who speaks to her behind her back. James tells Leo Taylor, who drives Kathleen to school every day, "I don't want you talking to her" (58), and "from now on, Taylor,

any male passengers ride up front with you" (79). James is hell-bent on keeping Kathleen from having any real friends.

When Kathleen is twelve years old, James says to her, "When Malibran's father told her she must go on for Giuditta Pasta, as Desdemona to his Otello, he looked her in the eye and swore that if she did not sing perfectly, when it came to the scene where Otello murders Desdemona, he really would kill her" (59). This takes place just before the scene where James hits Kathleen, and he gets an erection. James' discussion of Malibran and her father, foreshadows the incestuous dynamic that is to occur in Kathleen and James' relationship. This is because the opera singer Malibran, who plays Desdemona to her father's Otello, represents the incestuous desire that James has for Kathleen. James discussing this story also foreshadows that he will enact a terrible act of violence against her. Although James does not murder Kathleen like Malibran's father threatens to do to Giuditta Pasta, we learn at the novel's conclusion that he rapes Kathleen and removes her from her lover, Rose, after he encounters the two of them having sex together while Kathleen is living in New York City, studying vocal lessons. When James discovers Rose and Kathleen together, he assaults Rose, forcing her to flee, and then rapes Kathleen. After the incestuous act, he forces Kathleen to move back to New Waterford with him, and consequently, away from Rose. By raping Kathleen, and breaking up her relationship with Rose, James essentially "murders" Kathleen's spirit, and in consequence, she wishes to die when giving birth to the twins that James fathered. Another example of opera mirroring James and Kathleen's relationship can be determined prior to this incident, when Kathleen sings from the opera, *Rigoletto*, for the Orpheus Society of Sydney. The following passage from Kathleen's performance of *Rigoletto* is reminiscent of her relationship with James:

Rigoletto cries “*Figlia!*” She flies into his arms; “*Mio Padre!*” Father and daughter embrace. They weep, pledge their love, she asks what his real name is- “I am your father, let that suffice.”

She asks who her mother was and what became of her.

(*Con effusione*) “She died.”

“Oh Father, what great sorrow-*quanto dolor*-can cause such bitter tears?” But he can’t tell her anything, he loves her too much. So much that he keeps her locked up here-

“You must never go out.”

“I go out only to church.”

“Good.”

-so much that he’ll put her in a bag and stab her by mistake (*Orror!*) but that comes later”

(74)

This scene is in tandem with Kathleen’s life. The line “she asks who her mother was and what became of her” (74) represents her poor relationship with Matera. Although Matera has not died at this point in the novel, Kathleen dislikes her. The line “he loves her too much. So much that he keeps her locked up here-” (74) is similar to the way that James keeps Kathleen “locked up”, and so she does not have any friends her own age. The sentence “--so much that he’ll put her in a bag and stab her by mistake” (74) foreshadows the rape that James will commit against Kathleen. Music works as a form of repetition compulsion, here, because opera is in parallel with her life, and she keeps gravitating towards what is unconsciously familiar.

Lyrics from the opera *Rigoletto* are also used in the scene where Kathleen has her first nightmare about Pete, the scarecrow. After Kathleen dreams that Pete is grinning at her, James

takes her out to where the scarecrow is located, and Kathleen whacks it. She then sings these lyrics from *Rigoletto*:

What great love! What care!

What do you fear, my father?

In heaven above, with God,

I have a guardian angel.

We are protected by misfortune by the holy prayers of my mother. (44)

Once again, *Rigoletto* is in parallel with Kathleen's life. The lines "I have a guardian angel/We are protected by misfortune by the holy prayers of my mother" (44) are suggestive of Matera, who constantly prays and turns to religion as salvation. Matera is Kathleen's "guardian angel" because it is her prayers that "shield, a little longer, the body and soul of Kathleen Piper" (106), from James. Through Matera's prayers, Our Lady sends The Great War, which keeps James away from Kathleen until the day the war ends in New York City. Music acts as repetition-compulsion, because Kathleen gravitates towards this opera, as it mirrors the trauma in her life.

It is only when Kathleen is sent to New York in order to train as an opera singer that she is free of James' oppressive influence, and this is where sublimation can be interpreted. Kathleen falls in love with a young Black woman who is her piano accompanist named Rose, and experiments with opera. When she is allowed to choose her own song to sing for an audition, she picks "Cherubino's love poem from *Le Nozze*" (490). Like her decision to sing from *Rigoletto*, Kathleen's song choice mirrors her life, because she is healing from being "locked up", and she is also falling in love. Prior to her training in New York City, Kathleen only sings from *Rigoletto*. When she moves to New York, her opera choices do not involve an oppressive father, and this is because she is away from her father's possessive influence. She also experiments with

music with Rose, both in practice, and outside of it. The following passage is told from Kathleen's point of view, demonstrating their creativity and originality, and it is from her diary:

[Rose] just went wild, bar after bar of variations, crazier and crazier till the only thing I could think of doing was dancing, because how could I possibly sing to that? Look out Isadora, we were groovin. I whirled like a dervish around the whole room, following the music, just doing what it made me do, I jerked like a catfish, my shoulders had two different lives of their own, my feet went crazy, zigzaggy, I waggled my pointing fingers like I'd seen all the hip cats do, I brought Mecca into the classroom!" (492)

Kathleen also decides to pick the opera *Carmen* for her audition. She also finds out from Rose that she is a Mezzo, instead of a Soprano like everyone thought, and plans to experiment:

But first things first: I'm working up *Carmen*. The Kaiser "objected strenuously" but gave in, for what choice does he have after all? ...Thinks the idea that I'm a Mezzo is professional suicide, "witches and bitches, dahling" he says, but I refuse to get stuck anywhere. I don't intend to be Gilda forever. Not when I'm a wisened thirty-two, and I certainly don't intend to take my final curtain a moment before I absolutely have to. Mezzos live longer. (501)

Kathleen becomes more assertive in New York, away from James' influence. When Kathleen is in New York without James, she is able to become her own person, musically and romantically. Sublimation is evident when Kathleen does not live with James, because through her experimentation with music, she becomes more powerful and lively. This also leads to her relationship with Rose.

With Frances, repetition-compulsion can be read through her art. Similar to Matria, Frances is able to take basic and "acceptable" songs on piano and transform them into something

that is shocking and provoking. Sublimation is evident here as well, because her composition creations, as well as her performances at Jameel's speakeasy, allow her to defy James. When Frances works at the speakeasy as a performer, she takes "acceptable" songs that she was originally taught, and turns them into unique performance art, in an environment full of sex, and illegal booze. It is interesting that Frances' art is alike with Materia's. One of Frances' performance at Jameel's speakeasy is an example of this:

Frances is a bizarre delta diva one night, warbling in her thin soprano, "Moonshine Blues" and "Shave Em Dry". Declaring an octave above the norm, "I can strut my pudding, spread my grease with ease, 'cause I know my onions, that's why I always please." The following Saturday will have her stripped from the waist up, wearing James' old horsehair war sporran as a wig, singing "I'm Just Wild About Harry" in pidgin Arabic. She turns the freckle on her nose to an exclamation mark with a stroke of eyeliner, rouges her cheeks, paints on a cupid's bow mouth and dances naked behind a home-made fan of seagull feathers, "I wish I could shimmy like my sister, Kate." (292)

Frances' performance art is daring and provocative, something of which James would not approve of, had he been in attendance. The art itself can be read as an act of sublimation, as well as the act of making money, which is empowering for Frances.

Sublimation is also evident in the actions of Materia and Mercedes, in the form of religious fervor. Like art, sublimation can also occur through religion. It is interesting to note that both Mercedes and Materia are powerless witnesses to Kathleen and Frances's abuse. Both also act as mother figures, as Mercedes takes care of Frances and Lily once Materia dies. Though Mercedes is not personally physically or sexually abused by James, she consistently witnesses his physical and sexual abuse against Frances. Due to being witnesses, Materia and Mercedes

turn to religion as a way of redirecting the shame and guilt that they feel, about not being able to better protect Kathleen and Frances. When James first gets an erection after holding Kathleen, Materia immediately notices. She thinks about ways to protect Kathleen, envisioning “a whiff of salt air, a chill laps her cheek, she feels movement beneath her feet, the bed pitches, and she is on a liner bound for New York City, the girl with the heart-of-flame hair at her side clinging to the rail. But the moment flees before Materia can get ahold of it, a message telegraphed weakly over a sagging distance of time and space, every second word missing” (61). Materia wants to protect Kathleen, but in this moment, she knows that she is powerless to do so. She has no relatives to depend on, only James. After this encounter, Materia frantically turns to religion:

If James has forgotten the demon, Materia hasn't. She saw it. It looked at her. She knows it's coming back. Materia has two real daughters now, she loves them, so it's all very clear. One novena gives way to another, she logs miles along the Stations of the Cross, mediates upon the Mysteries-Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious-of the rosary. Gains partial indulgences, does not hope to gain a plenary indulgence, being never free from attachment to sin despite frequent confessions...In the cool darkness, sweet chafing incense faint upon the air, Materia kneels at Our Lady's feet and prays that James be kept free of his demon for as long as possible. She prays to the demon. And lights another candle for it (67).

Materia watches as Kathleen and James grow closer, and she becomes increasingly more devout as a result of this. She studies the way that James interacts with Kathleen, and thinks, “What has she left to sacrifice? She offered up her music long ago. She would mortify her flesh, but that might harm her unborn child. She has no vanity left to mortify, so she offers up her fat, her shabby shafts, her curls gone thin. But the demon isn't satisfied” (68). It is when Materia is in

church, that she strikes a bargain with the demon, “Materia fixes on the serpent’s red eyes and bargains: if the demon will limit itself to one daughter, Materia will allow it to have Kathleen when the time comes. The demon grins. Agrees” (69). When James signs up for World War I, Materia “prostrates herself as best as she can, what with her unborn cargo, and gives thanks for the Great War” (78). Materia “prays so hard that her head really does seem to get a little wobbly. She prays he’ll be killed quickly and painlessly in Flanders” (85). Sublimation takes the form of religion for Materia, because it is the only measure of power that she has against the trauma. Through sublimation, Materia redirects the shame of being a witness onto something useful, such as prayer.

Similarly, Mercedes becomes obsessed with religion. Even from age seven, on the night that Mercedes witnesses Frances being raped by James, she “said the rosary, even though she was too scared to turn and reach for the beads where they lay under her pillow. It was after this night that Mercedes started actually to wear a rosary on her person, because sometimes under the pillow is too far away when it comes to the rosary” (153). Like Materia witnessing James’ incestuous desire for Kathleen, Mercedes is also a witness to James’ sexual and physical abuse against Frances throughout the novel. After the night in which James rapes Frances and Materia commits suicide, Mercedes takes on the mother-figure role, telling Frances “It’s all right baby, Mumma’s here...I’m your Mumma now...Mumma’s here” (174). She acts as though she is a mother to Frances, and she ends up cleaning her up, and sleeping with her after every occasion of physical violence that James perpetuates. An example of this is when James hits Frances for playing a prank on Mercedes, and Mercedes thinks that she “can’t stand it when Frances grins with a bloody lip” (212). Later that night, she crawls into bed beside Frances, and thinks, “a net of prayers over France’s sleeping form, lighter than air, the gossamer wings, finer than the finest

silk to keep my little sister safe. Hush baby, sleep, the mother tends the sheep” (212).

Sublimation can be read in this passage, because though Mercedes is passive in protecting Frances against James, her prayers allow her to do something useful, no matter how futile, in this situation. For Mercedes and Materia, prayer works as a form of power, as a way of protecting their “children,” when they exist in a world where they do not have power against the patriarch, James. When Materia prays that James will be killed “quickly and painlessly in Flanders” (85), it is revealed later that the third secret sent to her by Our Lady was that “I sent the Great War in order to shield, a little longer, the body and soul of Kathleen Piper” (106). In this case, the act of prayer is powerful enough to shield Kathleen a “little longer” (106) from being abused by James. Regarding Mercedes, prayer works as a measure of empowerment for her, because she is only a child watching after her sister, and religion is a comfort, something which allows her to cease thinking about the incestual trauma that she witnesses. Both Materia and Mercedes play the role of the mother who witnessed the abuse, and so religion acts as sublimation for both of them, as it provides a measure of power, something to reach for when they have little else to provide safety.

The Uncanny

Published in 1919, Freud’s work “The Uncanny” describes the sensation of the uncanny as “the class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (218). Freud claims that inanimate objects such as dolls or wax figures can instill in us uncanny feelings. Freud writes “a particularly favourable condition for awakening uncanny sensations is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one” (225). In *Fall On Your Knees*, we can read the uncanny in Kathleen’s experience with Pete, the scarecrow. Pete was Kathleen’s childhood fear, and he also makes an appearance during Kathleen’s teenage years and her short

adult life. The scarecrow is a case where the unfamiliar is equal to the familiar, or an inanimate object being equitable to an animate one. This is because Pete represents Kathleen's repressed fear of James. When Kathleen is a young child, she has her first nightmare about Pete:

Kathleen woke up screaming. She was still screaming when her daddy picked her up, and she clung to him as he walked her up and down the hallway, trying to make out what she was saying.

"Who's coming to get you?" he asked.

And when he had deciphered some more, "Who's Pete?"

And she told him through her sobs. (43)

At first, Pete appears to us as readers as an innocuous childhood nightmare. However, as the novel progresses and Pete makes more occurrences, we can read that Kathleen's fear of Pete represents her fear of James. This is evident during the night where Kathleen sings from the opera, *Rigoletto*, for the Orpheus Society of Sydney. Following the performance, she sits in front of her mirror and stares at herself:

She smiles at herself. And gets stuck. Can't move. Can't look away or break the smile tightening into a grin on her face until she seems to be mocking herself. That's when she sees him. Pete. In the shadows behind her. His smooth stuffed head. His hat. His no ears. His no face. She whimpers. Pete watches, *Hello there*. She can't find her voice, is this a dream? In a wistful tone, *Hello little girl*. His no mouth, *Hello*. (77)

It is worth noting that this scene takes place after James gets an erection from holding Kathleen, so the abusive act has already occurred. The mirror in this passage represents the fact that James is always watching Kathleen. When Kathleen whirls around and "flies blindly through the room, through Pete for all she knows" (77) this is symbolic of the fact that though Kathleen loves her

father with all her heart at this point, she knows that something is wrong with their relationship. When Kathleen looks behind her, Pete is invisible, similar to her being unaware of James' desire for her.

After Kathleen sees Pete, she runs straight to James, where he takes her back to her own room and sits with her, and he "watches her till she falls asleep" (78). There is a parallel between Pete and James; Pete watches Kathleen in the mirror, and James watches Kathleen in her sleep.

The next scene in which Pete makes an appearance is particularly telling. Kathleen has just given birth to the twins, and she lies dying. Right before she passes away, she sees Pete once again:

Here's what Kathleen saw just before the moment of respite. Between agony and release, she saw-framed by the door which is thumping like a heart attack-Pete. With his head off *Hello little girl*. This time he's not behind her in the mirror. He is out in the open. It is safe for him now. And after all, he just wants to get a look at her, just one good look *Hello there*. His no face tucked beneath his arms *Hello*. (137)

Kathleen's vision of Pete takes place after James has just busted through the door: "James has supposedly seen worse. He was in the war after all. Now he finally sees something from which he will not recover. Beyond shell-shock. Beyond No-Man's Land" (137). Pete is now "out in the open," and this demonstrates that he is actually James. During the final moment of the twins birth, Kathleen recognizes that her fear of Pete is actually of her father.

Freud also discusses the concept of the "double" (233) which can instill in us uncanny feelings. The concept of "doubling" is a "dividing and interchanging of the self" (233), and this can represent "similar situations, a same face, or character-trait, or twist of fortune, or a same crime, or even a same name recurring throughout several consecutive generations" (233). Freud

claims that the double provides insurance against the destruction of the ego (233). In *Fall On Your Knees*, doubling is evident because the name of one dead child is reused, while another infant is born in order to take the place of the dead one. Having the living infants take the place of the dead is a way to keep the dead infants alive, thus providing “insurance against the destruction of the ego” (233), or immortality. The name of Lily is bestowed onto two infants in this novel, one living, and one dead. The dead Lily is the first to have been given the name:

“Materia had called it Lily but it can’t have said to have been truly named; it was unbaptized and therefore no one, and therefore incinerated” (82). Kathleen’s daughter, the girl in the set of twins, is re-named Lily. The living Lily being bestowed the same name as the dead one is a way for the dead Lily to survive; however, it is important to note that the living Lily, Kathleen’s daughter, is passed off as Materia’s child, in order to hide Kathleen’s pregnancy. It is as if the dead Lily is resurrected, in order to hide the secret.

Doubling is also evident in Ambrose and Anthony. Ambrose is the boy out of the set of twins fathered by Kathleen and James. Ambrose dies, because Frances decides to baptize Ambrose and Lily in the creek when she is six, not understanding the risks. When James notices Frances in the creek with Ambrose, she drops him when he shouts at her to come inside. James does not see that she is there with the babies, and he forces her to get out of the water. Ambrose dies, and Frances represses the memory. However, though she does not remember her role to play in Ambrose’s death, she attempts to get pregnant in order to gift Lily with a sibling. Believing that Leo Taylor is the father of Lily, Frances sets out to have a baby by him. Through the act of creating a child, it is as if Frances is trying to make her son, Anthony, and Ambrose interchangeable, as a way for Ambrose to live on. This is because she cannot come to grips with the fact that she killed Ambrose. In his work, “Tales from the Canadian Crypt: Canadian Ghosts,

the Cultural Uncanny, and the Necessity of Haunting in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall On Your Knees*," Jeff Baetz writes, "The paradoxical formulation — "familiar awash with the foreign" — reminds us that this family tree is truly uncanny. Its buried secrets burst forth as a reminder that past events, connections, and people will not stay hidden or ignored forever" (19). Using this theory, in *Fall On Your Knees*, we can apply the uncanny to this family tree. Though the interchangeable, doubling of the babies is meant to suppress the incest that has tainted the family tree, at the end, we witness Anthony meeting Lily, and all is revealed. This ending scene "reminds" us that what is kept secret in families will never truly stay buried.

Conclusion

Fall On Your Knees explores the trauma of bloodlines, and the repression surrounding family stories. Analyzing this novel under a Freudian scope allows us to develop a rich interpretation regarding female trauma, repression, incestuous bloodlines, and dissociation. *Fall On Your Knees*, while stemming from wartime Canada, teaches us that trauma is not only combative, it can exist at the familial level. Although secrecy exists among the Piper women due to sexual abuse, art works as a redemptive act in order to provide healing.

Readers of *Fall On Your Knees* are provided with "uncanny" returns and familiarity. Readers experience the uncanny, as we are continuously revealed each layer of trauma; demonstrating that the unfamiliar *is* that which is familiar. As each new layer of incest is unraveled, readers think about interactions in the novel that they are forced to consider in a new light, such as Pete the scarecrow and who he might represent, or James' "demon," and how he did not outrun it. The foreshadowing that leads up to the climax of the novel, where we learn that James is the father of Kathleen's children, leaves us no choice but to think back and process what we have read, before recognizing that there are events in the novel that demonstrate that patterns

of incest and secrecy exist in this family. MacDonald creates a narrative experience in order to dramatize the suffering, but also to create empathy in readers for the Piper women's legacy. At the end of the novel, Lily tells Anthony about his family history, and this act of telling is a way of overcoming secrecy and helping to heal, on the process to recovering from a legacy of sexual trauma, that is broken and amended by herself.

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