

Secrets and Grace in Sebastian Barry's *The Secret Scripture*

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Abstract: This article examines the initially opposed forms of documentation used to relay the narrative of Sebastian Barry's 2008 novel, *The Secret Scripture*. Roseanne McNulty, an elderly woman now facing an obscure death in a mental asylum to which she was unjustly committed, writes a 'secret' testimony, or alternative history to the more official version of events that record her sectioning and its justifications. The document penned simultaneously by her psychiatrist, Dr Grene, attempts a formal, and indeed official and public assessment of his patient, but ultimately discovers the testimony she has kept from everyone, believes it, and houses it in his own account. My contention is that Barry's novel has co-opted the concept of grace, which is imbued with religious significance, but has refashioned it as the means of preservation and accommodation of lost narratives. Thus, the novelist's concept of grace will be shown to resonate with Derrida's thought on forgiveness and on the singularity of testimony.

Keywords: Sebastian Barry, *The Secret Scripture*, testimony, Derrida, forgiveness, grace