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Editors
Mariana Bolfarine
Laura P. Z. Izarra

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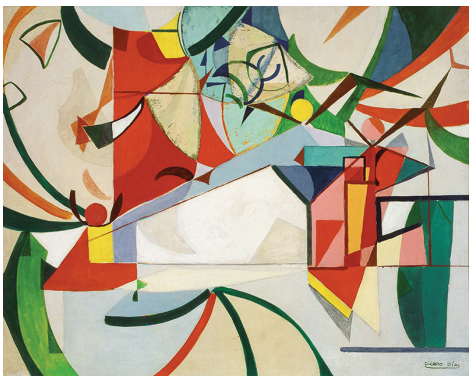
# *Introduction*

The current issue of the *ABEI Journal* is miscellaneous; thus, it includes contributions that tackle a variety of subjects related to Irish studies. We also highlight the international nature of the publication with articles, reviews and translations received from different regions of Brazil and from around the world. In the *Articles* session, Charlie Jorge and Ian Hickey tackle the role played by Catholicism, respectively in Charles Maturin and Seamus Heaney. Gender relations in Emma Donoghue's *Stir Fry* is approached by Esther Gazzola Borges and immigration is the subject of Daniela Nicoletti Favero, in the Irish contemporary short story. Trauma and transculturality is the theme dealt with by Maria do Rosario Casas Coelho in the novel *Let the great World Spin* by Colum McCann. Natalia Bergamin Retamero writes about John Banville's *Birchwood* and *Mefisto* and Sanio Santos focuses the horror film *The Canal*, by Patrick Cavanagh analysing the Irish family in contemporary times. In the *Comparative Studies* session, Michael McAteer discusses Irish critical legacies in Seamus Deane and Terence Brown, and Nigel Hunter pinpoints affinities between Leonard Cohen and James Joyce. Patrick O'Neill weaves a textual web by Homer and Joyce while Rodrigo Moreira Pinto highlights the "Politics of Disillusionment" in Liam O'Flaherty and Frank O'Connor. From Brazil, we hear the voice of ictoria Kennefick in the Brazilian translation of Gisele Giandoni Wolkoff, with the permission of Carcanet Press. Finally, the *Reviews* session underscores Irish Studies in Brazil with reviews by María Amor Barros del Río of Caroline Moreira Eufrausino's latest book on Anne Enright; Mariana Bolfarine of Laura Izarra's critical essay on cultural trauma and Irish Literary resonances; Pedro Sala Vieira of an interview with Caetano Galindo, a renowned James Joyce translator in Brazil, and Stephanie Schwerter of Munira H. Mutran's latest book about the refractions of Russian literature in Ireland. We hope you will enjoy!

*The Editors*



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# Articles

# *Good and Evil Church: The Two Faces of Catholicism in Charles Maturin's* Melmoth the Wanderer

## *A igreja boa e má: As duas faces do catolicismo em* Melmoth, o Andarilho *de Charles Maturin*

Charlie Jorge

**Abstract:** *The Eighteenth Century saw the emergence of Gothic literature, for which the Catholic Church came to represent all the fears English society at large felt towards European continental 'invasion', an enemy at the gates. However, some of these novels, full of evil priests and nuns, also include the other side of the coin: religious characters who exert themselves in a Catholic life to find opportunities for exercising benevolence and charity to those in need.*

**Keywords:** *Gothic; Catholicism; Ireland; Maturin;* Melmoth the Wanderer.

**Resumo:** *O século XVIII viu o surgimento da literatura gótica, para a qual a Igreja Católica passou a representar os medos que a sociedade inglesa em geral sentia em relação à "invasão" continental europeia, um inimigo às portas. No entanto, alguns desses romances, repletos de padres e freiras malvados, incluem também o outro lado da moeda: personagens religiosos que se esforçam na vida católica para encontrar oportunidades de exercer a benevolência e a caridade para com os necessitados.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Gótico; Catolicismo; Irlanda; Maturin;* Melmoth, o Andarilho.

Charles Robert Maturin, an Anglican curate in Catholic Ireland, followed the steps of other Gothic contemporaries when he wrote his masterpiece, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). His attacks on the Inquisition, his Catholic characters, and his "good" priests have divided the academia into two. For some, Maturin's works are full of an anti-Catholicism few others represent; while for others, they are more influenced by Irish nationalism and the historical events that took place in Eighteenth-century Ireland than by a Catholic aversion.

The aim of this paper is to examine the way in which both good and evil religious characters are portrayed in Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*. All along it, we will have a deep insight into the manoeuvres of inquisitors, faith directors and monastery Superiors, and

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compare them to the acts of goodwill carried out by common parish priests and missionaries, themselves outcasts in a highly politicised religion. The final purpose would be to see how Maturin's Gothic masterpiece is more an attack on power wielded through faith than on the Catholic Church.

As Mary Fitzgerald states, "Gothic fiction is concerned with power" (15). Its bracketing of everydayness conjures a shadow world where power is simultaneously veiled and unveiled, where terrible things happen: bodies are found drained of blood, men are "strappadoed", women forced into marriages to demonic villains. Yet, in spite of being a day-to-day – or rather a page-to-page – occurrence, much of the "horror" of these events derives precisely from their inscrutability: power is felt and present, over-controlling, but not seen.

The Irish experience of this ghostly power in the nineteenth century was notoriously problematic. As a colony with a recent history of insurrection – Ireland had recently gone through two traumatic risings in 1798 and 1803 –, the marks of military and political force were visible (Morin and Gillespie 7), yet the institutions that moved the threads of such powers were external and almost unattainable for the common Irishman, who could not fathom the extent of the patronage and bribery present in Irish politics at the time (Foster 140-141). Apart from these forces, the country was subject to intense economic exploitation whose effect upon the Irish was to be brutal, the consequences of which would be evident at the start of the century.

The nineteenth century opened with an Act of Union that placed the decision-making process of Irish affairs outside Ireland and to which writers such as Charles Maturin and Maria Edgeworth were fiercely opposed, as they could sense from the very beginning the devastating results it would have for their beloved land (Hansen 5; Kelly 24). As the Parliament voted itself out of existence, the Act left a power vacuum in the country, a sense of power being elsewhere, in some way ghostly, and particularly inaccessible. This sense of power as being essentially alien and elsewhere, as belonging to an institution, or institutions, unreachable and whose machinery and machinations did not belong to Irish life and understanding any longer, pervaded life in Ireland.[1] As Maturin tells in a devastating description of Dublin after the Act of Union in *Women; or, Pour et Contre* (1818), this power was a political, a social and an economic reality:

> [Dublin's] beauty continues . . . but it's the frightful lifeless beauty of a corpse; and the magnificent architecture of its buildings seems like the skeleton of some gigantic frame, which the inhabiting spirit has deserted; like the vast structure of the bones of the Behemoth, which has ceased to live for ages, and around whose remains modern gazers creep and stare. We can bear the ruins of a city long deserted by human

> inhabitants, but it is awful to observe the inhabitants stealing from a city whose grandeur they can no longer support. . . .
> Opposite to [Trinity College] I behold a building which would have embellished Athens in the purest days of its architectural pride – it was called the Senate-house of Ireland – it is now the bank; and along those steps, worthy of a temple of Minerva or of Jupiter, the inhabitants of this impoverished city, without trade and without wealth, are crawling to pay bills; . . . The mansion of the Powerscourt family has become the station of the stamp office; . . . and the splendid modern house of Lord Aldborough (built within twenty years) is become the seat of the seminary of Professor Feinagle. Woe to the land where the mansions of the nobility have become the recepticles [sic] of office, or the palaces of pedagogues. (295-297)

In this dark and pessimistic description Maturin, quite appropriately, uses the figure of the Behemoth, a beast mentioned in the Bible and used as a metaphor for any extremely large or powerful entity (Cirlot 283). In *Women; or, Pour et Contre*, Maturin portrays this colossal figure as being dead in the middle of Dublin ("the vast structure of the bones of the Behemoth"), as if Dublin itself was already dead, and its carcass rotting under the sun. Yet, this terrible beast is alive somewhere else.

Moreover, Maturin's personal life was to be affected by this ghostly, incorporeal power beyond his understanding of law and justice. Maturin was born into a well-off family, as his father was a civil servant with a relatively good position in the post office and "had raised his children to expect a life of comfort and prosperity" (Lougy 30). However, in 1809, and for reasons still unknown, the government brought forth a charge of malversation against Charles Maturin's father. Maturin and his whole family were at this time residing at his parents' house to ease the financial strain already imposed on him by his position, as they were living on the modest income of a Dublin curate. In a letter addressed to his friend, and fellow novelist, Sir Walter Scott, he explains his family's situation and the unusual procedure his father faced, together with the horrible consequences it had, not only in the family's economy, but also in their honour and reputation:

> In November 1809, my father was dismissed from his situation, at the age of *64* left with my Mother to the horrors of utter indigence, aggravated by the infirmities of age, the impossibility of applying to any other Means of subsistence at such a period of life, and above all by the bitter recollection of former affluence and honour ... he has made numberless applications for Redress, but while the Country is struggling for Existence, she has little leisure to attend to private complaints – in the Battle for life and death we are now fighting, the Cries of the wounded can neither be heard or pitied.
> My father had lived up to his income, and therefore I who was dependent on him, was of course a Sufferer in his Ruin – his interest too was lost with his situation, and their Graces and Lordships the Archbishops and Bishops who had so often feasted at his table, would not now spare him the offals of theirs – in this my extremity, I Betook

> myself to a source of subsistence which unbeneficed Clergymen often Resort to in Dublin. I offered to take as boarders and pupils, the sons of those of fortune, who are students in the College of Dublin.
> . . . it is impossible to describe the "Variety of wretchedness" attendant on this line of life. (Scott and Maturin 9)

Interestingly, Maturin compares his family's situation with the current affairs of his country; the state of wretchedness in which both are, struggling for existence, and the injustice that both are subjected to.

Almost thirty years old, Maturin found himself and his family in a difficult situation as he "had a wife and family, very little money to support them, and not much hope for advancement" (Scott and Maturin 31). It cannot be forgotten either he did not have much hope in the ranks of the Anglican Church (Kramer 11), since his customs and manners, combined with the fact that he wrote fiction and drama containing less than orthodox Christian views, prevented him from gaining any kind of preferment within the Church (Lougy 13). However, it was not only the nature of his writings that prevented his rise within the Church. Probably, the real causes of Maturin's dissatisfaction are to be found in his temperament, as he entered the Church to gain security and prestige, being "unable to assume the mask of conformity and orthodoxy that might have led to advancement" (Lougy 14).

It is not surprising then that one finds clear connections between Maturin's works and the state of affairs both at home and also in his motherland and beloved city. As already seen above in the description of Dublin in the aftermath of the Act of Union in *Women; or, Pour et Contre*, he was totally opposed to this political manoeuvre by which Ireland's autonomy was being stolen (Kramer 47-48), as Robert Miles points out when he talks about Maturin's disaffection with "the Anglo-Irish elite, who, on the whole, supported the Act of Union of 1801, which he strongly opposed" (90). It is Maturin himself who openly tells the Scottish novelist, and friend, Walter Scott that the horrors of his life permeated into the horrors of his work, and in terrible and desperate words added that he "has borrowed the gloomy colouring of his own pages from the shade of obscurity and Misfortune under his existence has been wasted" (Scott and Maturin 7). Maturin's life, and Ireland's destiny alongside it, is poured forth into his works with such an intensity, as if to show his readers the injustice and suffering both are subjugated to and the wretched condition they have been cast to. In accordance with other Irish authors of the period, Maturin seems to tell his friend that his works are part of that socio-political propaganda that flooded the market at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Morin and Gillespie 7), when Gothic is used as an undercover political weapon to show the atrocities committed against Ireland and the Irish (2).

In Maturin's depictions of Catholic institutions, we come across greedy monks, obscure and gloomy monasteries, where all kinds of barbarities are possible to maintain their prestige and influence, inquisitors craving to obtain confessions at any price or even directors who would use their "priestcraft" in their own benefit. All these represent the evil side of the Catholic Church as an omnipresent, incorporeal institution which is rooted into the governing system of a country to such extent that, as one of the heroes in the novel, Alonzo de Monçada, states the whole country becomes a prison: "what chance of liberation for a monk in Spain?" (Maturin, *Melmoth* 180). Maturin seems to represent the Catholic Church as an omnipotent institution able to destroy anything that opposes its plans. Maturin's Catholic Church, as the institution it represents, is a hermeneutical body where plotting and manoeuvring occurs in the dark corridors of its convents and Inquisitorial prisons. It is the exemplar of an obscure and corrupt system that can destroy a family's, nation's, honour.

Alonzo, the main hero in the long narrative "Tale of the Spaniard", is the son of a grandee of Spain, born before both his parents got married. As a sort of penance for his parents' sins, he is sent to a monastery at an early age, where he studies and is subtly lead towards a future life as a monk in this religious institution. The director uses all his manoeuvres to persuade the young boy to accept his destiny as a monk of the ex-Jesuits, which he utterly rejects. However, Alonzo's unwillingness to enter the institution clashes against the overpowering influence the director has on a whole family of Spanish grandees.

After a walk along the Prado with his father, Alonzo clings to fatherly love in a heart-breaking scene and pleads for his release from what he terms as a prison, because the only thing he wants is to enjoy life as a normal citizen. Despite trying hard, his attempts are fruitless, as his father's intentions are unbending:

> Pleasure is very selfish; and when selfishness pleads to selfishness for relief, it is like a bankrupt asking his fellow-prisoner to go bail for him. This was my conviction at the moment, yet still I reflected, . . . that a taste for pleasure, while it renders a man selfish in one sense, renders him generous in another. The real voluptuary, though he would not part with his slightest indulgence to save the world from destruction, would yet wish all the world to be enjoying itself, (provided it was not at his expence [sic]), because his own would be increased by it. To this I clung, and intreated [sic] my father to indulge me with another view of the brilliant scene before us. He complied, and his feelings, softened by this compliance, and exhilarated by the spectacle . . . became more favourable than ever. I availed myself of this, and, while returning to the convent, threw the whole power of my nature and intellect into one (almost) shrieking appeal to his heart. I compared myself to the unhappy Esau, deprived of his birthright by a younger brother, and I exclaimed in his language, "Hast thou no blessing for me! Bless me, even me also, Oh my father!" My father was affected; he promised my entreaty every consideration; but he hinted some difficulty to be encountered on my mother's

> part, much on that of her Director, who (I afterwards found) governed the whole family, and still more remotely hinted at something insurmountable and inexplicable. (Maturin, *Melmoth* 80)

Interestingly, Maturin hints as well at the existence of a third party in this game, as he makes clear comparing Alonzo's destiny with that of the unhappy Esau, who is also victim to the plot of his brother and stepmother. Like the first-born son of Isaac, Alonzo is victim to a ghostly, invisible power beyond his reach and understanding: an influential entity such as the Director and the congregation he represents. Maturin also hints at the powerlessness of Alonzo's father, despite belonging to one of the most powerful and influential families in Spain, and his being trapped in what seems to be the same prison as his son: "it is like a bankrupt asking his fellow-prisoner to go bail for him" (Maturin, *Melmoth* 80). As seen some lines later, all the boy's entreaties are in vain, for the Director "was to be encountered with different arms" (81), manipulating the family "with all the expertness and fertility of manoeuvre which belong to an ecclesiastical tactician" (84). He also uses all kinds of tricks, so "one must have had the treachery of Judas to suspect him of treachery" (81), until he achieves his goal: making the young Alonzo de Monçada become a monk:

> I fell on my knees, resolved to pray in my heart; but in a short time, the fervour of his language, the eloquence and energy of his prayers, dragged me along with him, and I felt myself compelled to pray against every dictate of my own heart. He had reserved this display for the last, and he had judged well. I never heard any thing [sic] so like inspiration; as I listened, and involuntarily, to effusions that seemed to issue from no mortal lips, I began to doubt my own motives, and search my heart. I had disdained his taunts, I had defied and conquered his passion, but as he prayed, I wept . . . we ask with the desponding and restless scepticism of Pilate, "What is truth?" but the oracle that was so eloquent one moment, is dumb the next, or if it answers, it is with an ambiguity that makes us dread we have to consult again – again – and for ever – in vain.
> "I was now in a state quite fit for the Director's purpose; . . . he left me, to urge my parents, with all his influence, to pursue the most rigorous measures to enforce my adoption of the conventual life." (84-85)

With all his eloquence and influence, not only does the Director manage to persuade Alonzo to become a monk, but also to truly believe himself the offspring of sin and to make him regret ever having thought of not taking the vows.

Later in the novel, and after a long period of apathy and ennui, the young Alonzo starts corresponding with his younger brother Juan, on which the rights of the Monçada family rest now. He informs our hero of the situation back at home and all the plotting of the scheming Director, which made him see his older brother under a better light:

> In fact, the efforts of the Director's power in the family would alone be sufficient to precipitate my determinations. He has placed you in a convent, but that not enough for the persevering proselytism of the church. The Palace of the Duke de Monçada is, under his influence, turned into a convent itself. My mother is almost a nun, her whole life is exhausted in imploring forgiveness for a crime for which the Director, to secure his own influence, orders her a new penance every hour. My father rushes from libertinism to austerity, – he vacillates between this world and the next; – in the bitterness of exasperated feeling, sometimes reproaches my mother, and then joins her in the severest penance. Must there not be something wrong in the religion which thus substitutes external severities for internal amendment? I feel I am of an enquiring spirit, and if I could obtain a book they call the Bible, (which, though they say contains the words of Jesus Christ, they never permit us to see) I think — but no matter. The very domestics have assumed the in *ordine ad spiritualia* character already. They converse in whispers – they cross themselves when the clock strikes – they dare to talk, even in my hearing, of the glory which will redound to God and the church, by the sacrifice my father may yet be induced to make of his family to its interests. (Maturin, *Melmoth* 129)

From Juan's words Alonzo can see how a house where a certain degree of law and order resided in the past has been turned upside down by the influence of an external power. After reading these lines, which seem to be taken from the annals of a madhouse, we cannot help calling back to mind the images of a decrepit Dublin after the fatal Union, so well portrayed by Maturin in *Women; or, Pour et Contre*, when a city and a whole country were sentenced to death (Kelly 39); or even the hopeless state and misery Maturin himself would have found in his household after the terrible incident (his father's accusation) that destroyed them all, and that permeated to the core of his works.[2] In his distressing letter, Juan clearly states what Alonzo will hint at later, and we have already seen, that the whole house, and by extension country, has been turned into a convent; being under the overreaching power of the institutionalized evil Church. The Director has established in the House of Monçada a Reign of Terror that would have struck a chord amongst contemporary readers, as William Pitt "was carrying out a reign of terror against the Irish" (Gillespie 59). In *Melmoth the Wanderer* the Gothic Irish landscape has turned into the House of Monçada, and both, in turn, into a prison.

However, the misfortunes of Alonzo do not finish here. As he tries to escape the convent with the help of his brother Juan, they are betrayed by a parricide, a lay brother at the convent who, despite assisting them at first, cares more about his own promotion within the religious ecclesiastical world than faith itself, and whose "prayers sounded so like curses, and his curses were so like prayers to the evil one" (Maturin, *Melmoth* 195). As a consequence of this treason, Juan is murdered and in the middle of desperate cries of agony bordering madness

for his beloved brother, Alonzo loses all kind of reasoning and consciousness (215-216), to come round days later "*in the prison of the Inquisition*" (225).

It is there that the reader will learn from Alonzo's experience about the secrecy and mystery that surrounds this loathed and feared institution, which can even make whole families disappear (Baigent and Leigh 70; Rawlings 35). In his own words, as he relates his terrible story to his host in Ireland, nobody who has ever been inside the walls of the Inquisition will tell anything that happened there; that is, if they ever come out of it: "the prisoners are bound by an oath never to disclose what happens within its walls. . . . I am forbidden, by an oath which I shall never break, to disclose the circumstances of my imprisonment or examination" (Maturin, *Melmoth* 226). Young John Melmoth, the descendant of Melmoth the Wanderer, and Alonzo's host in Wicklow, learns about young Monçada's calmness at the beginning, as he believes himself innocent of any heresy against the Catholic Church, his only punishable crime being that of apostasy. In a mirroring image of Maturin's father's ordeal, dishonour and utter poverty, Monçada is sentenced to a destiny worse than death: an *Auto da Fe*. After countless days of psychological and physical torture, abuse, oppression and falsehood (234), knowing that any attempt at claiming one's innocence or defence was useless, Alonzo hears his terrible sentence as the world seems to reel around him:

> "You, Alonzo de Monçada, monk, professed of the order of —, accused of the crimes of heresy, apostacy [sic], fratricide, ("Oh, no, – no!" I shrieked, but no one heeded me), and conspiracy with the enemy of mankind against the peace of the community in which you professed yourself a votary of God, and against the authority of the holy office, with an infernal messenger of the foe of God, man, and your own apostatized soul; condemned on your own confession of the infernal spirit having an access to your cell, – are hereby by delivered to –"
>
> "I heard no more. I exclaimed, by my voice was drowned in the murmur of the officials. The crucifix suspended behind the chair of the judge, rocked and reeled before my eyes; the lamp that hung from the ceiling, seemed to send forth twenty lights. I held up my hands in abjuration – they were held down by stronger hands. I tried to speak – my mouth was stopped." (238)

Despite all these horrific images, not all is desperation and gloom when surrounded by religious characters in the novel. Scattered amongst its pages and springing from places where they remain "uninstitutionalized" by their circumstances, we find Catholic exemplars of a good Christian life. In the midst of the Wicklow Mountains we found Father Fay, a parish priest in Catholic Ireland, that is described as "a grave and decent priest, well "spoken of by those that were without" the pale of his own communion" (Maturin, *Melmoth* 69). He is a respected member of the community, not for his power (impossible in an Ireland still under the Penal

Laws) but for his Christian values and general goodness. The striking fact, even more when considering the novel as a whole, is that he is called into the house after its inhabitants discover that the man who saved young John Melmoth is a Spaniard and a Catholic. As shown later in the narrative, Alonzo de Monçada would have issues about encountering any member belonging to an ecclesiastical institution, after all the trauma and suffering coming from the hands of Catholic institutions. However, as for Father Fay, it seems the Spaniard feels rather at ease with him, as he "visited the stranger every day" (69).

The case of Father Fay would have passed unnoticed and as incidental if it had not been for another two cases: that of a small Catholic community in India – as we could suppose it to be the Goa area, where a great number of missionaries preached the word of God (Peters 99) – and the confessor in the "Tale of Guzman's Family". In the case of the former, the reader learns about them when Melmoth shows the world to the naïve Immalee using what seems to be a magical telescope of some kind. As she asks him about the concept of religion and the different beliefs there are beyond her little Indian island, Melmoth lectures her on the cruel customs of Hinduism and Islam. However, unexpectedly for Melmoth, and when the young girl thought all hope to find a decent religion had gone, she fixes her attention on a small chapel in the wilderness, noticing "the unobtrusiveness simplicity of its appearance, and the scanty number and peaceable demeanour of the few who were approaching it" (Maturin, *Melmoth* 296). After such a discovery, Melmoth feels obliged to tell his pupil about the customs and rites of Christianity in its pure essence, something that can only be found in a country where no Catholic institutions can wield any power, and where they are reduced to a humbleness worthy of the first martyrs of the Church, turning them into examples of self-sacrifice, love and tolerance:

> However it was, he felt himself compelled to tell her it was a new religion, the religion of Christ, whose rites and worshippers she beheld. "But what are the rites?" asked Immalee. "Do they murder their children, or their parents, to prove their love to God? Do they hang them on baskets to perish, or leave them on the banks of rivers to be devoured by fierce and hideous animals?" – "The religion they profess forbids that," said the stranger, with reluctant truth; "it requires them to honour their parents, and to cherish their children." – "But why do they not spurn from the entrance to their church those who do not think as they do?" – "Because their religion enjoys them to be mild, benevolent, and tolerant; and neither to reject or disdain those who have not attained its purer light." – "But why is there no splendour or magnificence in their worship; nothing grand or attractive?" – "Because they know that God cannot be acceptably worshipped but by pure hearts and crimeless hands; and though their religion gives every hope to the penitent guilty, it flatters none with false promises of external devotion supplying the homage of the heart; or artificial or picturesque religion standing in the place of that single devotion to God, before

> whose throne, though the proudest temples erected to his honour crumble into dust, the heart burns on the altar still, an inextinguishable and acceptable victim." (296-297)

It is precisely these words and genuine description of a missionary community that makes Immalee convert into a Christian, claiming Christ as her God: "Christ shall be my God, I will be a Christian!" (297).

In the case of the "Tale of Guzman's Family", the reader comes across a good confessor who sides by a Protestant family who have been unjustly disinherited by a community of monks driven by greed for Guzman's wealth. In his dying days, Guzman, a rich merchant from Seville, calls his sister back home after years of separation, as she had married Walberg, a German Protestant, against her brother's will. The Walbergs are enjoying happiness once in Seville without the knowledge of the manoeuvres that are taking place around them. The day in which Guzman dies, the priests that surround him in his last hours like vultures forge a testament in which it is stated that everything Guzman had would pass on to the Church, leaving the Walbergs in utter misery, in an example of overpowering "priestcraft". One must bear in mind that, as Lougy says, "this part of *Melmoth* is written with such vividness and force of feeling that Maturin's own life shines forth from every page" (67), as Maturin himself also told his friend Walter Scott. In this story the reader feels all the tension between Walberg/ Maturin and his father, both in fiction and the real world, his love towards him surrounded by layers of reproach and marinated with big amounts of despair and poverty. All of it brought forth by an unfair overpowering entity.

However, in the middle of despair there is always hope, and in the case of the Walbergs this is embodied in Guzman's good confessor who, taking the side of the Protestant family and risking his own position within the Church – and his own life in Inquisition-driven Spain –, does his best to restore their rights back to them:

> On hearing the plans of Walberg and his family, he promised, with a faultering [sic] voice, his ready assistance in promoting them; and, as he rose to depart, observing that he had been entrusted by the faithful with a small sum for the relief of the unfortunate, and knew not where it could be better bestowed, he dropped from the sleeve of his habit a well filled purse on the floor, and hurried away.
> "The family . . . were devoted to applications at every door where encouragement might be expected, or employment obtained, the priest in person aiding every application." (Maturin, *Melmoth* 416)

In the end, and after much struggling, the priest appears as the messenger of heaven one night right in time to stop Walberg from killing his whole family, as he had been driven to madness by despair. The good priest brings with him the good news of the discovery Guzman's real will,

where he stated that his sister and her family should be the inheritors of his fortune, thus ending the story in joy and hope.

Putting it all together, it can be seen that Maturin poses a strong critique on Catholic institutions, full of greedy priests and faith directors who crave for power and turn whole families/countries into monasteries they control at will. Alongside these, one can also find unfair inquisitors who would do anything to extract the confession that would suit their evil purposes. Although these characters populate several pages, and chapters, in Melmoth the Wanderer, the omnipotent institutions these figures represent are only present in contexts where their power can be wielded without limits, where the "horror" that emanates from them is a day-to-day issue. Amid all this madness we still find some beacons of goodwill among the ranks of the Church, who are outcasts in a highly politicised religion. These flagships of Christian values in a world full of corruption are parish priests in remote areas in the Wicklow mountains, providing alms and comfort of spirit under the Penal Laws in Ireland, knowing their destiny could be fatal. They are also small missionary communities in the wilderness of India, where they live in frugality and simplicity, as Immalee remarks when she discovers the monastery from her Indian island. Also, these exemplars of good Christian values are portrayed by a decent, good confessor moved by the misfortunes of a family unjustly treated by the members of an overpowering institution, and who risks his reputation and a destiny worse than death itself under the scrutiny of the Spanish Inquisition. Maturin's narrative should not be read as an attack on Catholic beliefs, as the existence of these characters shows he was conscious of there being a good side to it. Instead, he seems to be denouncing corrupt institutions at large – Catholic or otherwise – which commit injustice for their own profit, and whose aim is to obtain self-advancement through manipulation and by means of wielding a power they can exert on a whole country. In Maturin's Ireland, people could feel that ghostly monster, that Behemoth from Biblical times, who dwelt away from their own shores and controlled their destinies; these overpowering institutions Alonzo de Monçada tells about.

## Notes

1 With the abolition of the parliament in 1800 and the establishment of the Union, 'the idea of British treachery was also enshrined in the memory of 'independence'' (Foster 154). Henry Grattan and the 'Patriot Party', who had opposed the Union, regarded the Act of Union as if it had ended Ireland's national identity (Ranelagh 93). However, as the 19th century progressed, it became clear that the Act of Union had far-reaching repercussions and a cloud of depression hung all over the country, as lords and the Irish political elite would leave Ireland to establish in Westmister, allowing a number of areas in Dublin to degenerate into slums (Boran 69-70).

2 Maturin's works borrow feelings and even scenes from his own life, as he confessed to Walter Scott in one of his numerous letters:

> When I hinted at the gloom of my writings being borrowed from the shades of my own Mind and feelings, it was not that I might vent the murmurings of a querulous Egotist, or the vanity of a dissapointed Author – No Sir – I really believe my own Romances scarce exhibit vicissitudes more extraordinary than my life has furnished. (Scott and Maturin 8-9)

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# Céad Míle Fáilte – *How the Land of a Thousand Welcomes Coped with Mass Immigration*

# Céad Míle Fáilte – *Como a terra das mil boas-vindas lidou com a imigração em massa*

Daniela Nicolleti Favero

**Abstract:** *The Irish short story, highlighted in the national literary production and celebrated for reflecting the social upheavals that Ireland has gone through, is nowadays configured as the genre to echo an environment in metamorphosis. This article, derived from my doctoral research, highlights the relationship between the short story and the representation of identities involved in immigration. In it, I offer an analytical reading of two short stories, "The Summer of birds", by Gerard Donovan, and "Fjords of Killary", by Kevin Barry, selected for their portrayal of the clash between natives and immigrants, vertically analysing the literary pieces seeking to show how Ireland is revealed in literary textuality. It is proposed that immigrants were somewhat relegated to the margins, suffering the consequences of social inequality accentuated by the Celtic Tiger period, bringing the issue of Irish identity to the centre of the discussion.*

**Keywords:** Irish short story; Immigrants; Celtic Tiger; Gerard Donovan; Kevin Barry.

**Resumo:** *O conto irlandês, destaque na produção literária nacional e celebrado por refletir as convulsões sociais pelas quais a Irlanda passou, atualmente se configura como o gênero a ecoar um ambiente em metamorfose. Este artigo, derivado de minha pesquisa de doutorado, destaca a relação entre o conto e a representação das identidades envolvidas na imigração. Nele, apresento uma leitura analítica de dois contos, "O verão dos pássaros", de Gerard Donovan, e "Fiordes de Killary", de Kevin Barry, selecionados por retratarem o confronto entre nativos e imigrantes, analisando verticalmente textos que mostram como a Irlanda se revela na textualidade literária. Propõe-se que os imigrantes foram, de certa forma, relegados às margens, sofrendo as consequências da desigualdade social acentuada pelo período do Tigre Celta, trazendo a questão da identidade irlandesa para o centro da discussão.*

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**Palavras-chave:** *Conto irlandês; Imigrantes; Tigre Celta; Gerard Donovan; Kevin Barry.*

It is practically impossible to stroll around Ireland without coming across, at least once, with a sign bearing the Gaelic saying *Céad mile Fáilte* – a hundred thousand welcomes. This phrase, a component of the state-endorsed Irish identity, gives the idea of a country open to the other, willing to grant everyone that sets foot on the land the benefits of the traditional Irish hospitality. The process of migration is a movement that deals not only with the hopes of finding a welcoming environment, but with the willingness to change oneself in the process, as Pierre Ouellet defines migration in *L'Esprit migrateur, essai sur le non-sens commun*:

> [A] passage to the *other*, a transgressive movement from One *to the* other, which violates the laws of the proper, crosses the borders of property or individuality, to always go beyond the place from which one draws one's identity, to better undo this original link and reconnect it each time in a new destiny, *another* becoming which is also becoming *other*[1] (Ouellet 19, my translation, emphasis by the author).

The need of resorting to someone else's hospitality and be prone to adapt is something that Irish people know of, especially for their history of having to migrate to other places when their land could not offer them the means to survive. In the piece "Céad míle fáilte? The true meaning of hospitality", Gemma Tipton discloses the subtleties that hospitality entails:

> Make yourself at home . . . Does anyone ever really mean that? What if you had guests who took you quite literally . . . On a more serious note, imagine guests from a different culture, quite literally making themselves at home in your home, bringing other customs and ways of behaving to your own cultural space.
> The truth is that it's far easier to welcome guests when subtle power balances are observed between the host and the hosted, and where the host's rules, however unspoken, are understood and adhered to . . .
> That's the challenge facing our Island of the Welcomes, as "welcome" is only truly tested when things get difficult. From *céad míle fáilte* to "no room at the inn", hospitality, or the lack of it, defines our cultural sense of self, as well as the foundation story of this country's dominant religion. (Tipton n.p.)

During the years of the Celtic Tiger period, Ireland experienced such an unprecedent economic growth that the country began to attract the attention and interest of people from all parts of the world. The demand for labour in many areas – such as construction, finances, information technology and healthcare – resulted in the return of a great number of Irish nationals, who left when prosperity was not a synonym of Ireland. The returned Irish

nationals, however, were not the only ones who decided to take advantage of the riches from the Celtic Tiger. In the article "Overview of Mass-Immigration in Ireland: Part I – The Tiger Years", some data is presented on the matter, indicating new peaks of non-EU immigration flows, between 2001 and 2004, and the unprecedented levels of immigrants from new EU states between 2004 and 2007 (The National Party n.p.).

The need for discussion of social politics to cope with the transformations of the country during that period, especially the ones that entail questions about how to deal with the massive cultural changes that the country was subject to due to the arrival of immigrants, left open, to some extent, the road to a crisis in an Ireland experiencing "one of the most extreme demographic transformations in history, transitioning from a 'homogeneous Catholic society to an ethnically, racially and religiously diverse society'" (The National Party n.p.). These fast and drastic changes were, somehow, translated into a surge of racism and xenophobia, especially when Ireland began to experience a downfall in its economy. Contemporary Irish literature was quick enough to become aware of these issues and transpose them to stories, as Roddy Doyle's *The Deportees* (2007), one of the first authors to write about immigration and the contact with the other. In this paper, we look into two short stories who offer a rather different approach by revealing a facet of the migration issue through the eyes of the Irish characters.

The question of sharing the country with immigrants and the xenophobic attitude of some individuals towards them occupies the centre of the plot in "The summer of birds", by Gerard Donovan. The short story revolves around a little girl who narrates the changes she has been experiencing since her mother left the house for an undisclosed reason. The sudden shift in the family routine is witnessed by the young girl, who is aware of the silences that began to occupy the house since her mother left, a silence that is disrupted by the noise of the birds which come to her bedroom window in the morning.

The girl's father, a construction worker, takes a leave in the first days of the child's vacation, a time to settle things up and to arrange someone to take care of her while he is at work. When trying to convince her father that he did not have to worry about her, the girl discloses the changes that Ireland, and families like hers, had been experiencing:

> I knew he had to work a lot because the house was new and we had never had a lot of money, and since my mother would be gone for a few days, it was my turn to do something. I was old enough . . .
> We lived in a suburb east of the city, another development of many that spread white houses over the green hills like spilled milk, where a new road appeared out of trees and grass every few months. Ireland was doing well. My father was busy working

> because it was the same all over the country, he said, new houses going up everywhere, a boom. (Donovan 147-148)

The housing market boom that Ireland went through reshaped its landscape, like the several housing developments spreading like *milk on the green hills* that the girl observes around her. More than that, they significantly altered the lives of people, as it is portrayed when the girl's father picks up a guitar that had been left aside in the laundry room, something that he used to play with when the girl was much younger: "This is hard . . . I used to play when I met your mother. But these hands. He held them up as if they were things he was getting used to." (149). In a relatively small time frame, a workaholic culture became the reality to many people.

Adjusting to the new routine, while waiting for her mother to return, the girl keeps leaving crumbs and water on her windowsill for the birds, because her mother told her that that way, they would sing for her all the summer. One night, before going to sleep, the girl decides to leave her bedroom window open, in case they wanted to come in and fly around. Before drifting into sleep, the girl notices the arrival of new people in her city, and how they were being observed by the locals:

> All those new roads brought more than new houses to where I lived. New people too. They appeared one or two at a time, never in groups. One of them turned up in the schoolyard in the months before the summer break and stayed well away from everyone. Then two older ones were seen in the park near the woods. People said they found bags and a shoe by the river, and that if you saw a few of them, that meant many more were hiding; and sure enough, the single ones turned into groups of them coming out at night more often, that's what I thought, and then we heard news that they had even started to come into the pubs and the restaurants.
>
> By April there were a lot in plain view moving around the town and especially near the supermarket in the car park, and they were groups now, four and five, each day a little closer, until I heard that if you stopped at all outside the supermarket they would gather at the car, and I heard that when people brushed them away they stepped back, all at once like birds, and some people said that soon the town would be full of them because they were bringing up their young. (Donovan 150)

The description of the massive arrival of strangers, and how they were to be found everywhere around the city, reveals the shock experienced by a society that, to some extent, dealt with their arrival as an intrusion and an invasion. The girl shows how impressed she is by the impact on her town of these people going to the same schools, pubs and restaurants, but being so different, so much like the birds that would scatter when confronted by others. The prejudice towards the newcomers is better represented in "The summer of birds" by the character Tommy, who starts coming to the house to look after the girl at her father's request. The girl

recalls her mother's dislike for Tommy, as someone who would never be around when she was still at home.

From the very beginning, Tommy reveals a xenophobic stance, sitting by the window to look for the "new people" in the back of the supermarket, and then shouting, "Let them see we're watching" (Donovan 151). When Tommy moves the girl close to the window to look, the young narrator compares the image that she had seen of two people as shadows, and her reaction, trying to move away from Tommy's grasp, is complemented by his warning:

> Don't be afraid, he said. You're safe in here, they can't touch you here.
> I'm not afraid, I said.
> In the concrete yard two older ones were sitting on a wall. They weren't doing anything. An evening rain shower blew papers across the parking spaces, but the rain didn't seem to matter to them, so I thought a different rain or a worse rain fell where they used to be. I liked the rain too.
> My father walked in with the plate and Tommy let go of me and then nodded to the window. They've moved to the end of the street. Won't be long now. Next thing they'll be moving in next door. (Donovan 151)

Tommy's reaction portrays how people tend to feel threatened by the mere presence of the other and how difference can be a trigger to prejudice and hate. In the case of Ireland, which became a prime destination to immigrants when its economy was a synonym for success, the result was the increase of tension for the arrival of people from different cultural backgrounds, people who brought with them not only their specific physical traits, but their food, music, clothes and religion, forcing, in some ways, the reshaping of an Ireland that had, in its history, relied so much on The Irish Free State's representation of the nation as Celtic, Catholic and republican, following the works of the Gaelic Revival, which was mostly reinforced throughout the twentieth century, to support its identity. The reaction otherness can determine one's exclusion and marginalization. In the PhD thesis *The migrant in contemporary Irish literature and film: representations and perspectives*, Aisling McKeown points out that

> The government's failure to prepare and inform communities about their policies for housing migrants, or to explain the short and long-term effects of their plans, has led to a situation whereby migrants are perceived as an anonymous, collective threat rather than individuals in need of support. (31)

Here, McKewon explains how Donovan's short story reflects the effects of the lack of communication between the government and the communities which were most impacted by the arrival of foreigners, and how this may result in reactions like Tommy's. His insistence in treating them as a threat, in forcing the girl – who expresses empathy for those people, by

relating to their undisturbed posture with the rain – to be prejudiced towards them, results in a conflict experienced by the child, who does not support his attitudes, but seems torn due to her father's apathy in face of Tommy's instructions:

> As he walked into the room I saw a shadow outside because the windows were open with the heat, and they went by, a group of four this time, silent with their heads down, still nothing but fleeting shadows moving along our street and keeping close to the walls. Tommy ran straight to the window and shouted out after them, Go back to your own country . . .
> Tommy turned to me and said, Go on, say it to them, they have to hear it. They've reached your street now, you can't just do nothing. That's how they win.
> My father said nothing, and to keep Tommy quiet I said it, I told them go back home. (Donovan 152)

Even though she feels the need to please Tommy in order to avoid confrontation, the girl cannot help but to take pity on the others, as she observes that "The shadows looked like they didn't want to be in our town either, like they were lost, and I wanted them not to be lost" (152). The constant reference to "these people" as "shadows" discloses a xenophobic attitude towards them, who in this case are destitute of a clear identification as human beings only because they are supposedly in someone else's land, as people who remain in hiding, in the darkness. Tommy symbolizes the irony at the centre of the matter, for despite "going part-time to the university, taking courses in civilization" (Donovan 153), he is the one who expresses the most xenophobic attitude towards immigrants.

Behind his intellectual façade, lies the primal posture of someone feeling threatened, willing to instil into a child "his hatred for the other and his obsession with money and security", (5) as Bertrand Cardin affirms in the article "Country of the Grand by Gerard Donovan, or the Chronicle of a Collapse Foretold". In his piece, Cardin observes how complicated was the question around the economic boom, because, in its core, it was not the same experience to all inhabitants, pointing out that "The country may be grand but the gulfs between its inhabitants seem not only to remain but to be growing wider and wider" (6). This feeling of being left behind, of believing himself to be not only in disadvantage, but prone to a larger competition with the arrival of immigrants, turns into an obsessive posture of repulse and hate which the character Tommy does not hesitate in externalizing. When he overhears the little girl talking on the phone with her mother about the birds on her window, he uses the image to instil another abhorrent remark about the new people:

> That reminds me of a film, he said . . . A famous film, you know, a man called Hitchcock. *The Birds*, there's more and more of them. I walked around him and into the kitchen. Tommy followed me and said that the film was about what happens if you don't keep count of things: the place gets full of them and they attack you. People's faces torn up and bloody. (Donovan 154)

The horrifying image that this reference imprinted in the child, someone impressionable due to the immaturity of her years, led her to believe in Tommy, because, although she disliked him, she tended to believe that things in movies were true. She becomes so terrified by the perspective of a closure similar to that of the movie that she stops feeding the birds in her window, from which she now only sees the shadow, until they finally flew off for good. She feels guilty and worries about the welfare of the birds, finally deciding to feed them again, trying to apologize for her previous attitude prompted by fear. She then describes a sudden interaction with one of the "shadows", when she goes to the supermarket:

> On Monday morning I sneaked out of the house and walked to the supermarket to buy some sweets, and one of the shadows followed me. He smiled at me in his school uniform, the maroon tie looped under his strange face, and said that he was taking extra classes to catch up. I was surprised that I knew exactly what he was saying. His face broke into white smile and he held out his hand, and in it I saw the red spot with yellow stripes. I knew I should have walked away, but I didn't. I looked at it. It was one of the sweets I liked . . . I took the sweet and ran home, and out of my cupboard I took one of my own sweets.
>
> I ran back to where the boy with the maroon tie was standing on the street with his mother. I had asked him to wait for me, and now I went up to them with my hand out. His eyes grew big around the sweet. His mother told him to say thank you. I went home with the red one he gave me, the one with the lemonade taste. (Donovan 156)

Through the innocent sharing of sweets, the narrator in Gerard Donovan's story evokes the willingness much more suited to the children of looking past differences. Although the girl reveals her surprise in how this boy was able to use the same language as her, the remark doesn't carry the same prejudice that comes from considering oneself superior, but symbolizes a child that is learning something new, someone who has the disposition to engage. The harmless exchange, however, becomes a problem when Tommy, who is a part-time worker at the supermarket, confronts the girl about her interaction with the foreign child. While her father was away talking to his estranged wife, Tommy forces the girl to admit what she had done, trying to manipulate her into believing that that simple contact with the foreign kid and his mother was wrong, that it was all part of their plan to make people like them. When he throws the traded candy into the fire and insists that she ought to go back to the supermarket to tell

them to go back to their country, the hesitating child recalls what resulted from her actions some days before: "I thought of the birds at that moment and what I'd done to them, left them without anything when they sang for me" (158).

The fear that Tommy instilled in her about the birds also deprived her from the gift of their singing. All her efforts to make them return – food, a letter – proved to be in vain, which upset her into crying. When her father returned from the meeting with her mother, the girl fights her tears, because she does not want to look like a baby who is sad about something as silly as birds. After he urges her to tell him the matter, she ends up talking about what happened with the boy in the supermarket and later with Tommy. The father's reaction reveals his compassion and understanding. The trade between the two children is welcomed by him, who becomes infuriated with Tommy, throwing him out for good. Once he leaves, father and daughter go on with their lives, freed from the hatred of the one that truly represented an unwelcome and dangerous intrusion (Cardin 5).

Donovan's metaphor of the birds reveals the value that difference can bring when people are willing to respect their differences and try to live together without feeling threatened, something that, in the story, is much better done by the children, whose innocence shows that solidarity is a far better option than hate.

The restlessness prompted by a changing country is yet the theme for "Fjord of Killary", a short story by Kevin Barry. In this story, first published in the *New Yorker* (2010), the narrative is developed around Caoimhin, a forty-year-old man, the first-person narrator who tells the story of how he bought an old hotel on the fjord of Killary, on the west coast of Ireland, hoping to escape the urban centers. In the beginning of the narrative, he discloses the motivation that led him to this drastic shift in life:

> I had made – despite it all – a mild success of myself in life. But on turning forty, the previous year, I had sensed exhaustion rising up in me, like rot. I found that to be alone with the work all day was increasingly difficult. And the city had become a jag on my nerves – there was too much young flesh around. (Barry 29)

The effect that the fast-paced city produced in him, a noticeable trait of the Celtic Tiger years in Ireland, pulling a great number of young people to the main city centers, proved to be a real hazard for the character's health, prompting Caoimhin to look for a different kind of life in the countryside. The promise of managing a hotel, keeping himself busy with its small errands, and devoting himself to writing in the nights seemed like the perfect solution for him. This idyllic expectation, however, is frustrated in the opening lines of the short story, as made clear

by the description of the landscape, its "disgracefully grey skies above" (27) and constant rain proved in the period of eight months that the place "would be the death of me" (27).

In the night in which the narrative is set, a violent storm is approaching the location as Caoimhin tends to a group of people in the hotel bar, locals that seem little distressed by the worrisome escalation of the rain. While they drink, they go about trivial topics, such as the time that would take to go from one place to another, which only helps to aggravate the hotel owner's discomfort, for he found it hard to live among this kind of people, and whose prospects of happiness in that place gradually became farther away. Caoimhin remembers his and his friends' expectations on his moving to the west, so he considers the unexpected impact of another group of people in his life:

> All my friends, every last one of them, said, '*The Shining*'.
> But I was thinking, the west of Ireland . . . the murmurous ocean . . . the rocky hills hard-founded in a greenish light . . . the cleansing air . . . the stoats peeping shyly from little gaps in the drystone walls . . .
> Yes. It would all do to make a new man of me. Of course, I hadn't counted on having to listen to my summer staff, a pack of energetic young Belarusians, fucking each other at all angles of the clock. (Barry 30)

The first remark on his foreign staff marked the annoyance that they represented in Caoimhin's project. Their description as "energetic young" discloses frustration on employing the very type of people that made him leave the city. The fact that he has no other option than to turn to them to keep the hotel and that his most regular customers are "nutjobs" who talk nonsense and pay him little attention when he expresses concern on the possibility of the hotel flooding, only contributes to his anguish. However, when these folks engage in some sort of conversation with him, he makes sure to prove himself above them all. While Mick Harty, a distributor of bull semen for the vicinity, and his wife, Vivien, tell him about how much they had spent and what they have ordered in the Dutch couple's restaurant – which Mick remarks as "Dutch faggots" –, Caoimhin's response puts them further apart, evoking in him his sense of superiority and making them responsible for his failure:

> 'Cappuccino is a breakfast drink,' I said. 'You're not supposed to drink it after a meal.'
> I was not well liked out in Killary. I was considered 'superior'. Of course I was fucking superior. I ate at least five portions of fruit and veg daily. I had Omega 3 from oily fish coming out my ears. I limited myself to twenty-one units of alcohol a week. I hadn't written two consecutive lines of a poem in eight months. I was becoming versed, instead, in the strange, illicit practices of the hill country. (Barry 31)

The main character tries, throughout the narrative, to find scapegoats for his midlife crisis. When interacting with the Belarusians, the tension becomes clear:

> Nadia, one of my Belarusians, came through from the supper room and sullenly collected some glasses . . .
> I believe all nine of my staff to be in varying degrees of sexual contact with one another. I housed them in the dreary, viewless rooms at the back of the hotel, where I myself lived during what I will laughably describe as high season (the innocence), and my sleepless nights were filled with the sound of their rotating passions.
> 'Thank you, Nadia,' I said.
> She scowled at me as she placed the glasses in the dishwasher. I was never allowed to forget that I was paying minimum wage. (32-33)

The social practices that became common during and after the Celtic Tiger period reveal the deep changes that the country underwent. These changes, however, entail a great deal of adaptation, especially from the part of the Irish, who, on many occasions, took advantage of the economic prosperity that attracted so many immigrants to Ireland, leaving to them the jobs considered less desirable, rewarding them with the bare minimum – something that Caoimhin recognizes, even if only by accident, as a trigger to conflict. The narrative reveals also, from the narrator's part, a sense of possession, as can be observed using the expression "one of my Belarusians". In a short and fast period, Irish people were defied to cope with what Fintan O'Toole describes, in *Ship of fools: how stupidity and corruption sank the Celtic Tiger*, as an unimaginable phenomenon:

> Mass emigration, with all of its debilitating economic, social and psychological effects, ended and was gradually replaced by large-scale immigration - a phenomenon that had been utterly unimaginable to generations of Irish people. Coming to Ireland to look for work would have been, at the start of the 1990s, like going to the Sahara for the skiing. By the time of the 2006 census, one in ten of those living in Ireland were born elsewhere. (O'Toole ch. 1)

The thrill of the first years of the Celtic Tiger, when the entire world looked up to the country, envied its people and ran to Ireland in the hopes of enjoying some of its riches as well, gradually gave space to prejudice and, in the worst cases, to xenophobia, of some people's desperate efforts to avoid sharing Ireland's wealth claiming a fear of losing the cultural identity which the country had built through the ages. This reaction, which is noticeable in places coping with a massive shift in its demographics, is exteriorized by the judgment of the other and of his right to enjoy what natives tend to consider as the rewards of their efforts. In "Fjords of Killary", this discriminatory perspective is exteriorized in the words of Vivien Harty:

> 'When you think,' Vivien Harty said, 'of what this country went through for the sake of Europe, when we went on our hands and fuckin' knees before Brussels, to be given the lick of a fuckin' butter voucher, and as soon as we have ourselves even halfway right, these bastards from the back end of nowhere decide they can move in wherever they like and take our fuckin' jobs?' (Barry 38)

The somehow appalling remark, nevertheless, reveals the disparity that is frequently ignored when it comes to the Celtic Tiger riches. The much-celebrated increase in wealth that became associated with Irish people since the beginning of the economic boom was not, in any extent, homogenous. It really made rich people richer, but also helped to create an even deeper gap between wealthy and poor people. When it comes to thinking about how the Celtic Tiger reshaped the cities, this was also variable. Big urban centres such as Dublin, Cork and Limerick were favoured for their location, pre-existing infrastructure – enhanced by the arrival of new companies – and good demographic indexes as prime spots for investments. The rural areas and smaller cities, on the other hand, remained pretty much the same economically, relying on the agricultural production and on tourism as their main source of revenue. At the same time, they became the destination for people like Caoimhin, who became disgruntled with the city, and the Belarusians, who probably came to Ireland looking forward to a glamorous and profitable life at the capital but had to settle for a minimum wage job at a hotel in Killary. Their move, however, was to a place that had remained unchanged through the years and suffered to accommodate new arrivals. These facts make it almost easy to understand why Vivien Harty felt entitled to voice her distaste for the foreigner's presence in the "district of three-hundred-odd souls" (Barry 34).

The construction of the foreigner's characters in the narrative, although vague, is enough to instil a prejudicial tone to them. Every mention of the young foreigners made by Caoimhin comes with judgment, whether it might be for their scolding attitude towards him – the penny-pincher employer –, or his references to their sexual liberties – probably putting himself on a higher ground for the Irish approach to sex forged by the Catholic doctrine – or finally for the author's record of Nadia's use of the English language, a brief example in the narrative that denotes the real struggle that many immigrants face on adapting to a new language:

> Nadia came running from the kitchen. She was as white as the fallen dead.
> 'Is otter!' she said.
> 'What?'
> 'Is otter in kitchen!' she said. (36)

As the bizarre day turns into night, Caoimhin's fears of the hotel flooding turn into reality and he has no other alternative than to bring his customers and employees to the function room on the second floor, where they decide to keep drinking and dancing until the worst has passed. The *townie* who judged himself superior from the rest of those people finds himself stranded in the place where not even one of his plans is fulfilled. After he finds the six Belarusians sitting on the top step of the stairs watching the water rise, the footstools, toilet rolls, place mats and every other kind of object floating on the ground floor, Caoimhin realizes how powerless he truly is in the face of life, offering the reader his epiphany: " . . . I realised, at forty, one must learn the rigours of acceptance. Capitalise it: Acceptance" (Barry 44).

Kevin Barry's midlife crisis story – which one might suspect to flirt with an autobiography, for he shares the same age and name with its main character, Caoimhin (Irish for Kevin) – reveals, even if by accident, a portrait of Ireland post Celtic Tiger, setting in a hotel established in 1648 some of the struggles of contemporary Ireland. "Fjord of Killary" contrasts the urban with the countryside, the notion of a sensible, restrained and learned man – Caoimhin – trapped with his simpleton countrymen – habitual drinkers that keep talking regardless of what is happening around them or who can listen to them – and the Belarusians – whose bigger fault, as far as the main character is concerned, seems to reside in their youth more than in their nationality. Their presence and the reaction of the Irish towards them is a reliable reference to the effort that the country found itself obliged to make to avoid conflicts based on the fear of losing ground, money and ultimately a sense of the Irish identity.

Although there are some differences as to the way the immigrants are treated by the other Irish characters in the short stories presented here, they bare a significant resemblance as far as foreign people are perceived in general by society. The same group of people that once found a welcoming land, where their diversity was celebrated and they could be of service and even profit from the common bounty in times of plenty, suddenly began to witness the decay of their social stance when the national economy became an issue, experiencing a different attitude from the so called natives, whether in the scolding words of Tommy in "Summer of birds", or in Vivien Harty's comments on them in "Fjords of Killary". As Homi Bhabha pointed out as a keynote speaker in *Boundaries, Differences, Passages*, "The 'secular' liberalisation of the markets has seen, side by side, the rise of xenophobia and religious fundamentalisms" (3).

In Ireland's case, migration could be taken as some sort of social practice to which a great number of Irish people were submitted throughout the country's history for several reasons. Theirs, many times, was the place of the foreign. Now, on the other side of the spectrum, Irish people got to experience the role of the dominant group that holds the power,

as Eric Landowski suggests, of imposing upon the other the speech of exclusion, of regarding her/him immediately disqualified as subjects (Landowski 7, my trans.), a notion that is based solely on superficial traits such as appearance, language, food and cultural habits.

As mentioned in the beginning of this article, Roddy Doyle was one of the firsts Irish writers to tackle the matter of immigrants in the short story. The texts presented here follow this trend but bare an important distinction from Doyle's works: in them there is hardly any meaningful exchange between the native character and the foreigners, but this does not prevent the making of derogative statements by those who are themselves reacting to the changes of time and of society, people who might be finding it difficult to cope with such drastic transformations and, as a desperate attempt to lessen the damages that might result from it, resort to the imposition of cultural boundaries and discrimination.

## Notes

1 [U]n passage à l'autre, un mouvement transgressif de l'Un vers l'Autre, qui enfreint les lois du propre, franchit les frontières de la propriété ou de l'individualité, pour aller au-delà, toujours, du lieu d'où l'on tire son identité, pour mieux défaire ce lien originaire et le renouer chaque fois en un nouveau destin, un autre devenir qui est aussi un devenir autre.

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# *Different Cultures, Different Identity Constructions: An analysis of the impacts of a conservative upbringing in the novel* Stir-Fry

# *Culturas diferentes, construções identitárias diferentes: Uma análise dos impactos de uma educação conservadora no romance* Stir-Fry

Esther Gazzola Borges

**Abstract:** *This paper aims at analysing the possible impacts of religion and conservative cultural standards in the novel* Stir-fry *(1994), written by Emma Donoghue. The story is set in rural Ireland in the early 1990s, and this study centres on how Maria Murphy, the main character, perceives her own Self as well as the society surrounding her. The analysis will focus on the different excerpts from the first two chapters of the book, in which Maria has first moved to Dublin and interacts not only with the different characters but also with a different, more modern, and fast-paced society. The goal is to examine how the strong religious background that was perpetuated in rural Ireland affects Maria's sense of identity and what she constructs as the "Self" and the "Other". By means of the analysis, it was possible to understand the way in which she deals with the cultural differences of a big city, in opposition to the traditional society she was raised in, and how she expresses this conservative upbringing in the face of what is "different", more specifically by way of stereotypes as well as repression.*

**Keywords:** *Identity; Stereotypes; Irish Literature; LGBTQ+.*

**Resumo:** *Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar os possíveis impactos da religião e dos padrões culturais conservadores no romance* Stir-fry *(1994) escrito por Emma Donoghue. A história se passa na Irlanda rural no início da década de 1990, e o estudo se concentra em como a protagonista Maria Murphy percebe seu próprio "Eu", bem como a sociedade ao seu redor. O objetivo é examinar como a forte configuração religiosa que foi perpetuada na Irlanda rural afeta o senso de identidade de Maria e o que ela constrói como sendo o "Eu" e o "Outro". Por meio da análise, foi possível compreender como ela lida com as diferenças culturais de uma cidade grande em contraposição à sociedade tradicional na qual foi criada, e como expressa essa formação conservadora diante do "diferente", mais especificamente por meio do uso de estereótipos e da repressão.*

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**Palavras-Chave:** *Identidade; Estereótipo; Literatura Irlandesa; LGBTQ+.*

*Stir-Fry* was published in 1994 and the story is set in the time frame of the early 1990s. The novel begins with Maria finding an ad on her university board from two women searching for a roommate, with the warning of "No bigots!" and the symbol of the feminist movement drawn on it. The main character has just started college in Dublin and is living with her aunt, but wishes to move out to somewhere else, so she can be more independent. Although she lives comfortably, Maria seeks change. She says that "If Dublin was going to feel so odd . . . then the odder the better" (5). Although slightly apprehensive with the unknown, Maria decides to call and, after meeting the writers of the ad, Ruth and Jael, at a dinner party, the young woman moves into the apartment. Extremely lonely in the new city, Maria's social life practically revolves around her new roommates, except for a few college colleagues. Maria is characterized by being very young and naive, almost innocent in some respects. The character is 17 years old at the beginning of the novel, and in her interaction with other characters, she constantly scolds herself, thinking that she sounds too young and inexperienced when expressing her thoughts and feelings. One day, when arriving from work, Maria is faced with an unexpected scene: Ruth and Jael kissing, with a level of intimacy and affection that makes it clear that this is not the first time that such an event has occurred. After reflecting on the last few weeks of living together, Maria scolds herself for not having noticed before, since it now seems obvious that the two are a couple. At the same time, she is irritated and resents her roommates for not having openly told her, asking herself "how the hell was she meant to know?" (69)

A great part of her naivety can be credited to her lack of social awareness regarding marginalized identities (such as LGBTQ+ people or other social movements) as a direct result of her cultural background growing up. Her upbringing in rural Ireland did not guarantee her a keen eye for diversity and non-normative existences, and this becomes very clear on her first interactions with her roommates and university peers. Despite initial anger and resistance, driven by prejudice based on stereotypes, Maria slowly begins to overcome the barriers of internalized aversions and gets closer and closer to Ruth and Jael, finally realizing that their sexuality is not something harmful. The relationship between the three becomes increasingly closer and intimate, until, at the end of the year, Maria is forced to face the feelings she has been harbouring towards her roommates. It comes to a point where Maria has no other choice but to confront her desire, the intricate intimacy she has created with these people and how it has affected her, and the grant possibility that her love for them is one that goes beyond friendship.

Through the course of just a few months, the main character experiences a series of essential changes and achievements. Throughout the novel, Maria undergoes an intense process of metamorphosis and growth, leaving the end of her childhood years behind, together with her very closed off vision of what constitutes as "normal" and her "Self", and becoming an adult that is self-assured in her newly formed identity. The story follows the character's process of maturing and transformation as she left her hometown in rural Ireland to attend university in Dublin. This change marks the beginning of Maria's self-awareness regarding how fragmented her identity is. The character must come to terms with the fact that the image she has constructed of herself is made under the historical-social influences of her hometown. By changing the environment in which she lives, Maria establishes a relationship with a variety of people who come from different backgrounds, putting her face to face with those she classifies as the "Other". By the terms of Jean François Staszak (2009), the creation of the "Other" is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ("Us," the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups ("Them," Other) through the stigmatization of an either real or imagined difference, that is presented as a negation of identity and therefore can be considered a possible motive for discrimination. When it comes to rural Ireland, where Maria is raised and therefore creates her cultural expectations of Self and Other, that means being white, catholic, male, and heterosexual. After moving, Maria is forced to not only to face a reality and the existence of people who are not acknowledged by the environment in which she is raised but also make her deal with the possibility that what she believes that constitutes the Other is not what she expected. In addition, and as a result of this contact with the "different", the main character begins to recognize herself as those she had initially classified as the Other. Thus, the identity perspective of the constructed "I" is destabilized.

In Dublin, not only in the new apartment but also in Ruth and Jael themselves, Maria finds a new home. According to Avtar Brah (1996), the issue of home is intrinsically linked to how processes of inclusion and exclusion operate and are experienced by the subject in certain circumstances. Maria's rural hometown is immersed in a traditionalist heteronormative culture. It defines the way she sees the world, and in consequence, her way of categorizing it, including its reaction with groups with which she does not identify. The experiences she undergoes in the new home she finds in Dublin modify this previously created vision, not only about the Other but about herself. Stuart Hall (1990) states that, when evaluating a subject's speech, it is necessary to keep in mind the traditions and inheritances of expression and cultural creativity present in the context of their raising. In this sense, the past is not only the position we are talking about but also a necessary resource about which one must talk about. Although Maria tries to step back from her cultural background, it has an

enormous influence on the way she perceives society, from the use of stereotypes and concepts of right and wrong to the invisibility of certain communities. Maria cannot even consider the possibility of her roommates being lesbians and the concept of being a lesbian herself even less, as her upbringing does not allow her to consider the existence of lesbians in the first place. Her local and social environment change affects her present, and the experiences she goes through become part of a new stage in her life. Consequently, there is a change in her self-identification.

**Ireland And Sexuality in *Stir Fry***

One of the biggest plot points in *Stir-Fry* is Maria's difficulty in accepting the Other and behaviours or identities that she had considered, until then, to be "wrong" in some sort of way, or even simply imagining that some people are different from her idea of what "normal" is. As previously mentioned, Maria's general social perception of society are shaped by the rural environment in which she was raised. According to Luke Gibbons (1991), rural Ireland persisted with an ideology of traditional values in the face of modernization, collectively refusing to abandon the normative and outdated beliefs held until then. At the beginning of the book, the main character states the need to leave the rural environment and change certain aspects of her life. This need reflects the final argument of the character's internal discussion about whether to move into an apartment with feminist roommates or not, and her decision to keep living there after finding out about their sexuality, and in many other situations where her traditional values are brought to light. Her past and upbringing, in addition to her age and lack of life experience, lead Maria to have a traditional and closed view at first, even if not consciously or purposefully. Her education guaranteed her a limited vision that renders the couple invisible, because how can they be together if both are women?

During Maria's first dinner with her future roommates, as she listens to Ruth and Jael talking about their lives and relationship with Dublin, the character thinks to herself "How many years before she would become a foreigner like them?" (13). It is interesting that she categorizes as foreigners not people who are not from Ireland, but simply those who are raised in a different city, with a different cultural setting and lifestyle. The character labels them as "Other", as they have lived through different experiences and social expectations than the ones she was raised with. It shows from the very beginning how much of her thought process relies on establishing difference and how strongly she positions herself separated from it, though not necessarily in a negative sense. Soon after, in contrast to her new roommates, Maria talks about her own life back at home while growing up:

> Maria was reminded that she still had to prove herself. "About what you were asking—I can't really say what I like to do. . . . t's just that I've never lived away before, so I don't know what I'll be like. At home, I draw and watch wildlife documentaries and stuff. I sit around nattering to Mam while she cooks, and keep my brothers away from breakable objects." (20)

This excerpt exposes how Maria's upbringing was, and how much it affected the understatement of her own identity. The character lived a very tame life, without hobbies that diverged from her expected future, as a calm, domestic wife and mother. Her life revolved around taking care of her brothers and helping her mum at home, with no mentions of going out, except for church and family or religious events. In truth, this shows how much Maria does not know about herself, how much of her identity she ties to her home and how hard it is for her to separate herself from it to try and think about what she likes. The experience of leaving the place in which she grew up into a completely different environment is her first chance to grow and find out more about herself, all the parts that are hidden and unseen and buried down after 17 years of a social life that does not allow for these parts to emerge and exist freely. As mentioned before, the character eventually discovers more about her Self and her likes, although certainly more than she had expected to.

When dealing with remnants of her upbringing that are ingrained in her values and routines, she also initially plans to continue attending Mass, but increasingly seems to be sabotaging herself, so she does not have to, forgetting to set the alarm to wake up, etc. An example of this can be seen right at the beginning of the second chapter, in the excerpt below:

> "Christian duty," Yvonne told her with a theatrical sigh. "But listen, about mass. Do you still go?"
> "Of course. I mean, yes," she went on more warily. She dipped to pick up a squashed can.
> "No, I just wondered, because so many people seem to stop as soon as they get to college." . . .
> "I sort of like it, especially if there's a good folk choir. It's peaceful."
> "Yeah, but are you very into the religious part of it? Do you actually believe?"
> "I suppose I do." Maria's voice was suddenly uncertain." (41-42)

In this interaction, Maria confirms she still goes to church but is uncertain when it comes to talking about her actual faith. When explaining why she still goes, she mentions the music and how peaceful it is. It seems to be something she does out of habit because she was raised going to church weekly and so "of course" she still goes to mass. It is, as Yvonne states, her duty as a Christian. This is also a habit that, as foreshadowed by Yvonne, slowly begins to die as Maria's

life in the city begins to pick up and get busier, and as she gets closer to her roommates. The longer she stays away from the conservative society in which she was raised and finds out more about herself and who she is away from it, attending such religious events stops being a priority.

We can see that although she maintains her positioning as regards her religious beliefs and church habits, she does so with hesitancy. It marks a contrast with the second excerpt analysed, in which she affirms not being able to say what she likes or not to do, as everything she had ever done until then was strongly based on her family. This marks a point of contingency, in which the character's resolution falters and aspects of her own undiscovered personality seep through. She has not changed completely to the point of simply abandoning everything she had done until then, or strongly affirming not to believe in God anymore, but she seems less certain, and more questioning of her likes and beliefs. A short number of months in the new city were not enough for her to abandon completely the faith and practices she had been carrying out her whole life, but it was enough for her to see that maybe they are no absolute truths and that perhaps they do not properly align with who she is or wants to be. The image she has built of her Self until that very moment is not a true reflection of her identity, as one is much more fragmented than the solid Christian, "good girl" identity, Maria had strived, deliberately or unconsciously, to represent to the ones around her, thus cementing a solidity to how she could understand herself. One's identity goes beyond one single image, and it can be much more than what her conservative upbringing had deemed to be possible.

Additionally, according to Robert Merton (1968), institutional norms are defined, regulated, and controlled by culturally defined goals, which leads to historical taboos such as the perceiving of homosexuality. All of this operates together to shape one's social practice and are not always constantly related: cultural emphasis on some goals varies independently of emphasis upon institutionalized means. There is a social structure that must be followed, and the proper adaptation to it works as a permit – if one achieves the aspirations determined by this structure, then they have a positive value or worth. This can be seen in terms of Maria's thoughts on marriage and heterosexuality, her need to get in relationships with men regardless of her stating a lack of attraction to them, all due to her trying to manage her family's expectations and values. Her family is responsible for the diffusion of cultural standards. Her parents expect her to follow this specific lifestyle, they teach her this is the correct and the expected and so, this is what she tries to achieve. The setting of these social expectations creates a false idea that by getting married and having children, as it is socially expected, one will be happy. The production and perpetuation of this social discourse leads to an established social conformity, and those who deviate from it can be seen as individual problems and not social. They are anomalies that, through seeking different ways of personal fulfilment, become

excluded. This can be seen as Maria tries to think of unmarried women and all she comes up with are either lonely or socially inept women, as it will be shown in the analysis section.

Little by little, the traditional values generated by her environment and culture in her upbringing, to which she clings while at the same time displays a deep will to withdraw, are dissolved in the creation of a new Maria. These changes are even verbally acknowledged by other characters. At the end of the book, in a discussion in which Maria finds it difficult to accept her desire and the profound change that this would cause in how she sees her Self, Jael tells Maria: "You don't know who you are . . . I've watched you for three months, you changed under my eyes, you've come so far." (228). According to Said (1994), people exist between the "old" and the "new", the contexts in which they are present, articulating the tensions, irresolutions and contradictions in the territories on which their cultural maps are positioned. Maria exists between her "I" created in the rural area of Ireland, and therefore reproducing the traditions and values of this original culture, and her "I" who resides in a busy and diverse urban environment. In this place, she lives with queer people, but only identifies herself as such for the first time when facing her own desire.

Maria seems to reproduce a line of thought that reinforces the concept of compulsory heterosexuality, which would be a direct result of her upbringing. This process is described by Gaytri Spivak (2010) when analysing the formation of the subaltern subject and his/her voice asks: how could the subordinate subject manage his/her speech? How could they articulate power, desire and interest? The traditional normative culture in the context of Maria's upbringing reproduces epistemic violence that uses the tactic of neutralizing the Other, making it unfeasible and expropriating it from any possibility of representation, and therefore silencing it. Consequently, Maria, being a product of this culture, reproduces the same structures of power and oppression. The Other is mute because the Other does not exist. Until the final moments of the novel, Maria is unable to conceive of the possibility of being anything other than heterosexual, since her background does not allow her to see and understand the Other, even less to become this Other. Still citing Spivak, the author argues that the path of sexual difference is doubly obliterated, since the very "ideological construction of gender maintains male domination" (287), an easy statement to note in the novel. The sexist culture is strongly reproduced in *Stir-fry*, although two of the main characters are feminist activists. Men tend to be the focus of Maria for a long time since she is constantly seeking attraction to them because she thinks this is the rule to be followed, the pattern to be reproduced.

Following Spivak's theory, the subaltern has no form of agency, as it is a necessarily heterogeneous subject that lacks both representation and voice – and therefore it cannot, in fact, speak. More specifically, because they are not heard, they cannot even represent themselves

(293). Maria is doubly subordinate due to her sexuality, although this second one is not recognized until the last moments. Due to being a woman and to having been born in a cultural context that does not allow the existence of lesbians, the character is doubly silenced in her society and can neither speak nor recognize her own need for speaking. She is not only oppressed for being a woman to the point of initially reproducing strong sexist comments towards a few university colleagues, but also so sexually silenced that she cannot even imagine that she is not heterosexual.

Going beyond her image, this cultural environment leads to a very specific set of constructions when it comes to who counts as the Other, which leads to the use and creation of social stereotypes. According to Walter Lippman (1922), subtle, but omnipresent influence, are those that feed and maintain stereotypes. These previous conceptions orient one's social perceptions. It is exactly through this subtleness of stereotypes, that we construct the concepts of "Us vs Them" (Breslin, 1991) that are the starting point for extreme negative reactions and bigotry. Although Maria does not express disgust towards her roommates or hatred per se, she feels anger and a certain level of discomfort when she finds out about their sexuality. Although she eventually overcomes these feelings and comprehends that lesbians are humans, just like her, and not any sort of monster or evil sinners, it is clear that there is an internalization of ideas and social roles that are spread, therefore being incorporated and believed by most of the society, and not singularly, affecting people from different social groups (Klinkenberg, 2008).

Similarly, Elizabeth Harkot-De-La-Taille (2016) exposes that when it comes to life in smaller, rural areas, the community consists of the sense of belonging and recognition for the individual, meaning that there is a tendency to preserve social behaviour that is acceptable. As larger cities tend to be more individualistic, and less community based, there is less pressure to fit into a certain expected lifestyle or identity group; there is more freedom to be oneself, although still dealing with some sort of social pressure. Furthermore, the collectivity in which one has been raised under is always a parameter, regardless of the person's wishes to step away from it, as it happens to Maria by going to Dublin. Although she is situated in a much larger city for a few months when she finds out about Jael and Ruth's relationship, her reaction is still mostly based on prejudice and stereotypes ingrained in her brain by the conservative culture she was raised in. She carries the beliefs of her origin, even if it does not take long for her to understand that they are not true. These constructs and the need for the establishment of social cohesion and tension, operating without generating any sort of antagonism, work as an internal regulation that is stimulated by fear or shame, which are sentiments motivated by values that are considered either positive or negative, based on how one sees themselves and how they are embraced by their communities. Maria holds deeply to the concept of her

sexuality more than anything else for a deep shame of being different, in a way that would be considered immoral and would eventually lead to her possible exclusion from society, as it's what has been culturally taught and shown to her. The idea of being part of such a marginalized group runs so deep inside her, that she cannot even understand, let alone recognize and accept, her own desire. It is only in the very last pages that she is able to face her own feelings and accept them, as she rejects a romantic proposal from one of her roommates by realizing that she is in love with the other one.

Furthermore, Harkot-De-La-Taille (2016) exposes that although many social movements, such as feminism, make an effort to change social and cultural values, such as how people of a specific gender are perceived by society, they have not yet achieved enough impact to completely erase these expectations. The notion of gender is created and regulated by their social treatment, through the process of validation that is based on social stereotypes. It is through these stereotypes that one has access and learns about the different cultural means of how to perform the Self. According to the author, in our daily lives, we are seldom invited to consider our relationships with the Other in a way that goes beyond presupposition but also constitutes (confirms, reformulates, questions) our ideas of Self and Other, based on our own actions. A universe that presents a relatively narrowed value system limits the characters that need to either contain or abandon their own desires to be accepted. They are obliged to act according to the existing value system with extremely limited possibility of freedom to expand such a system. They must contain themselves, and fit in, in order to belong, otherwise they will be ostracized and abandoned.

We can see examples of how these social treatments and roles, and the use of negative stereotypes to regulate other behaviours are used by Maria in different points at the start of the book. On her first week of classes, Maria witnesses another female student going through a school ritual called "the witch dunking", in which young women are submerged in the school fountain to perform an integration ritual and welcome the freshmen:

> Maria could see the woman now; she bucked and shoved, making vain attempts with one free hand to keep her billowing peachy skirt between her knees while a dozen boys towed her, head first, down the steps. . . . With a shriek and a violent kick one leg leaped free, but the sandal dropped off, and four hands caught the ankle again. "Heave! Heave!" They swung her twice over the water, their chant drowning her out. And then the body dropped with a splash. . . . Almost at once, a sleek black head emerged over the lip of concrete, dripping and laughing, calling for a helping hand. . . .
> "Were you watching the ritual witch-dunking?" Galway jerked his eye toward the lake.
> "She's no witch, she's a bimbo," retorted Maria, more viciously than she meant . . . She was laughing, for God's sake. How could she let them toss her into all that oil and sludge, and then laugh . . . I think it's sick." (25-26)

Maria's comment presents a sexist image of women, with clear expectations of how one should act, and a very harsh reaction if one acts differently. She calls the other student a bimbo based on her alleged sex life and stereotypes her considering what a "decent" girl should act like. Although the character has been presented as very sweet until this moment, when facing this reaction that deviates from what she considers to be the correct, expected behaviour, Maria grows angry and aggressive in her comments. It becomes evident that, although she moved to a different city seeking what's new and diverse, she has yet to learn how to deal with those who act differently from her own cultural standards. Further along the chapter, we have access to the "images" and "roles" of women that Maria had access to while growing up, and how that has affected her:

> Counting the lights of the small town nestling around her house, she realized that all the women she knew were wives and mothers. Except for the young ones heading for the uni, and that librarian with the hay fever, and a couple of teachers. And of course, Nelly the Nutter, who sat on the steps of the town hall, scratching her ankles. That night Maria slid down and tucked the quilt over her head and could not sleep for worrying what she would turn out to be. (27).

Maria's view on marriage and on the lifestyle she is expected to have is brought into focus. All women she knew were married and had children, and the few of them who broke this rule were either too young to be married, like herself, or had some sort of "quirkiness" that deemed them socially excluded and, therefore, unsuitable for marriage, such as having hay fever or being considered crazy. This lays the foundations for other regulating behaviour such as calling a woman a bimbo for laughing in an uncomfortable situation, when that would be considered an inappropriate reaction. Even if Maria's direct family is not the strictest or the most conservative, this paragraph says much about the society in which she grew up and the expectations and social pressures that are inserted and easily internalized by her and other young women. She must marry and have children, otherwise, something must be wrong with her. It is a lifestyle that she feels obliged to pursue, even if she does not want to. The same sort of reluctant relationship can be seen when it comes to religion and religious habits and beliefs, as per the excerpts analysed previously in this article.

Through excerpts from the first two chapters of the novel that show it is possible to understand more about how the character understands her identity, as well as what she perceives to be the Other when in contact with people who had a different upbringing than hers. By analysing Maria's first interactions in Dublin, it is possible to see not only the conservative values that the character has brought with her from a rural, conservative Ireland to the modern city but also the vague idea she has of herself. She is unable to tell her future

roommates her likes and dislikes, her hobbies or anything else about her personality, for until then her life had been focused on her family, by helping at home and taking care of her brothers. When in the first excerpt Maria calls her roommates and the rest of Dubliners "foreigners", she establishes the stark limits between Self and Other; hence, she is also a stranger, even to herself. Through subsequent excerpts we can see how the cultural values and expectations that were established during her childhood affect the way she perceives her own gender and what is expected of herself and other women.

There are very specific roles and actions that one can and should play, and breaking these rules cause strong, negative reactions and social exclusion, as it has been established that social coercion and pressure play a big role in the establishment of one's participation in society. Even Maria herself, who does not manifest excitement at the idea of following the traditional expected role of wife and mother, is quick to judge and use negative words against another young woman who behaves in a way she considers morally wrong, claiming it makes her "sick". Although the character is unwilling to commit to new experiences as she has been taught to live the "correct" way, this rejection seems to happen only on a superficial level. The shame and possibility of social rejection and exclusion are so ingrained that she also applies the same negative reaction and rejection to those who diverge from these conservative patterns, even though she herself feels restricted by them and does not completely agree or want to apply them in her life.

## Conclusion

By analysing different excerpts from the novel, paired with different theorists approaching concepts of identity, cultural impacts and the use of stereotypes, one can infer that the character's upbringing has a strong influence on her sense of "Self" and how she perceives the "Other". Furthermore, it is possible to understand how she deals with the "different", and how that helps her to understand those aspects of herself in a new light and to try and understand the parts of her character she had never had the possibility of acknowledging before.

In these first chapters of *Stir-Fry*, Maria gives the first steps to separate herself from the strict concept of identity and narrow understatement of Self she had construed until then, based on her very conservative upbringing, to see that maybe these beliefs are not so true and standard, and the world is not as concrete and black and white as she had previously believed. These first contacts and questionings of the Self are the first to a long list of realizations until her final discovery of the most diverse aspects of herself that she had until then suppressed and categorized as belonging exclusively to what she called the "Other". Throughout the rest of the novel, by facing the "different" from up close, daily and inside her own home, Maria slowly

learns that one's identity is more than the eye can see and that her own identity is composed by more parts and fragments that she had noticed before. She is composed of the values and morals she was taught during her upbringing, and cannot separate herself from them completely, even if she no longer believes them to be true. Slowly, the group to which she thought to belong no longer fits her, and thus she starts to identify herself more and more with those she had considered being so different. Thus, the place of the "Self" and the place she had previously categorized as the "Other" intersect in some respects and become not so different from each other. The "Other" is part of the "Self" and vice versa, and they complement and carry each other throughout life even if there is a social tendency to establish them as total opposites with no similarities or contact. Regardless of these popular beliefs, our identities are formed by different aspects and fragments of our experiences and encounters. Therefore, like Maria, we too grow learning to cultivate an understanding of both our taboos and customs, as well as what lies beyond our own world view.

In conclusion, narratives carry the power to lead societies in the process of understanding and normalizing issues considered as impasses and inconsistencies related to the way in which the concept of identity is understood. This power, then, becomes even more relevant when we question identity representation and the fragility of these identities and their constructions in the post-modern world. Furthermore, it is necessary to take into account the growing waves of intolerance and the intense insertion of the social logic of "us" versus "them", implying a distant "I" and "Other" and in opposite states, in the current world. Especially those who are part of marginalized groups, and it must be reinforced as something positive in order to lead to the eventual normalization of the existence of these groups. Taking up Said (1994) again, it is the duty of the person who performs the intellectual work of analysis not to accept the given identity policies, but to show how all representations are constructed, why, who and with what components. *Stir-Fry* depicts Maria's story, but one can always blurry enough the details to see how the structure and conflicts of the novel can be applied to other experiences of conservative and restrictive ideology when facing differences, and the effects that leads to society.

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# *Heaney, Catholicism and the Hauntological: The Later Poetry*

## *Heaney, o catolicismo e a espectrologia: A poesia tardia*

Ian Hickey

**Abstract:** *This article looks at Catholicism in Seamus Heaney's later poetry through the philosophical lens of Jacques Derrida's work. The theoretical focus of the article is allied to Derrida's notion of hauntology from* Spectres of Marx. *During his youth Heaney was a firm believer in Catholicism but as he grew older his faith began to diminish. However, even though he moved to a more secular mode of belief the presence of Catholicism constantly returns to haunt Heaney's poetry up until his final collection* Human Chain. *This repetition and return of Catholicism hints at the hauntological as the past sutures itself within Heaney's thinking and poetic output.*

**Keywords:** *Hauntology; Heaney; Virgil; Catholicism; Spectrality.*

**Resumo:** *Este artigo analisa o catolicismo na poesia mais recente de Seamus Heaney através das lentes filosóficas da obra de Jacques Derrida. O embasamento teórico do artigo alia-se à noção de espectrologia de Derrida presente em* Espectros de Marx. *Durante sua juventude, Heaney acreditava firmemente no catolicismo, mas à medida que envelhecia, sua fé começava a diminuir. No entanto, embora tenha assumido uma crença mais secular, a presença do catolicismo retorna constantemente para assombrar a poesia de Heaney até sua coleção final* Human Chain. *Essa repetição e retorno do catolicismo sugerem a espectrologia à medida que o passado se sutura no pensamento e na produção poética de Heaney.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Espectrologia; Heaney; Virgil; Catolicismo; Espectralidade*.

This article will look at the extent to which Catholicism haunts Heaney's poetry and thinking, with a particular focus on his later poetry. My approach to reading his poetry is allied to Jacques Derrida's thinking on spectrality, specifically his notion of hauntology in *Specters of Marx*. Firstly, I will outline the philosophical and theoretical standpoint that will inform my reading of Seamus Heaney's poetry and then move towards a discussion of Catholicism in his

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later poetry. Catholicism is a constant feature of Heaney's work from as early as his first collection *Death of a Naturalist*, published in 1966. Throughout the decades that followed and right up until his final collection of poetry, *Human Chain* in 2010, Catholicism is an ever-haunting presence in his poetic output. Andrew Auge has commented that "no Irish writer since James Joyce has more openly acknowledged the influence of Catholicism upon his work than Seamus Heaney. Raised in a devout Catholic family in rural County Derry, Heaney grew up in an atmosphere thoroughly steeped in religion" (108). In his recent study of Heaney's poetry entitled *Seamus Heaney and the End of Catholic Ireland*, Kieran Quinlan outlines that Heaney's loss of faith and move towards a more secular mode of belief as he grew older was one that was without bitterness.

Quinlan comments that from the 1960s onwards, the power of the Catholic Church in Ireland was beginning to wane, growing in pace over the last two decades. He suggests that Heaney's dealings with religious loss

> . . . are without bitterness and even reproach, more an acknowledgment of the evolving human journey than a condemnation of earlier obscurantism. If James Joyce's rejection of the faith was once a template for Heaney's own choices – and it was never quite such – then Heaney's later visions have more of a Yeatsian eclecticism about them (3).

Catholicism holds a major place in Heaney's poetry and is something that he never casts away. In an interview with Frank Kinihan, he speaks of the almost haunting presence that Catholic symbols and imagery hold over him. He comments that "the specifically Irish Catholic blueprint that was laid down when I was growing up has been laid there forever" (408), so despite his move towards secularism, the haunting aura of his Catholic upbringing and education is formative of his thinking throughout his life.

Jacques Derrida's notion of hauntology is an ideal way to approach the presence of Catholicism in Heaney's work. The etymology of the word hauntology can be traced to ontology as in French phonology the words *ontologie* and *hauntologie* sound strikingly similar as the French pronunciation of the 'h' in *hauntologie* is silent and therefore sounds like *ontologie*. In this linguistic slippage, Derrida noticed that ways in which notions of being and presence are haunted by notions of absence and non-presence as both words begin to intersect (haunt) each other in terms of pronunciation and meaning. Ontology is related to concepts and notions surrounding being and existence, and when Derrida probes such notions, he determines that existence is merely a trace of hauntings from the past that influence the present moment. He argues that "*to be* . . . means, for the same reason, to inherit" (Derrida 67) and so when we inherit from the past in all its varied shapes and forms, we become haunted by it.

Existence is a trace of hauntings and literary texts are no different. In *Specters of Marx Derrida* discusses hauntology using the spectral figure of the ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to suggest that the past can intrude upon the present and shape the future. For Derrida, the spectre leaves and returns bearing information from the past to haunt and influence the present and future.

However, the spectre is not a physical being, it has a non-present presence. Instead, it can be recognised by the traces that it leaves on the present rather than in any physical form. He suggests that "a ghost never dies, it always remains to come and to come-back" (Derrida 123) and in this sense the contemporary moment is never stable as it is always given to the past: "a spectre is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back" (11). Inheritance is a key feature of hauntology in Derrida's thinking in that "we inherit the very thing that allows us to bear witness to it" (68) and, in his line of thought, we inherit from spectres of the past. Once we are exposed to any given line of thought or idea then it remains within our unconscious with the ability to return at any undetermined point in the future. When this information returns – the voice of a ghost as ontological certainty is removed in favour of the hauntological with this destabilisation allowing for the past to suture itself within the present – we are given to anachronism. Peter Buse and Andrew Stott accurately suggest that

> . . . what Derrida's use of spectrality indicates is the idea that history *in general* is produced and made manifest only through the spectral iteration of those texts. Texts break with their context as soon as they leave their author to be grafted into other chains of signification quite happily without ever losing the ability to signify. (15)

This is especially relevant to the haunting place of Catholicism within Heaney's poetics and thinking. Heaney inherited his Catholic sensibility during his childhood at St. Columb's College and at home, and later on at Queen's University, Belfast, and these past inheritances never lose their ability to signify his Catholic heritage even if in his later poetry he turns towards Virgil and Ancient Greece in order to understand the contemporary moment. Catholicism is a constant touchstone for Heaney in terms of word choices and imagery throughout the collections and conforms to Derrida's thinking on the hauntological – it was inherited in the past and now returns to reanimate itself within the present of Heaney's poetry and our reading of it, albeit in a new form that signals something new without breaking from the past.

Heaney's upbringing as a Catholic as well as receiving a Catholic education at boarding school has a deep influence upon his poetry. In his book of interviews with Dennis O'Driscoll, he speaks at length about the formative influence that Catholicism had on his life as

a young boy at St. Columb's College in terms of the rituals, traditions, and practices associated with the faith:

> For five years we had an annual religious knowledge exam, and at the same time we were living the liturgical year in a very intense way: a Latin Mass every morning; aware, from the missal, of the feast day and the order of the feast; going to confession and communion; alert to the economy of indulgences; offering up little penitential operations for the release of the suffering souls in purgatory (Heaney & O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones* 38).

When he went on to attend Queen's University Belfast, he still adhered to and practiced his faith. He has commented that he attended mass and visited the chaplaincy while at university, and that his religious faith acted as a way of meeting others: "the Catholic chaplaincy existed first and foremost in order to keep the students in touch with their religious practice" and that "the chaplain held these weekly 'sodality meetings', as they were called – homily, prayers and benediction" (44).

The spectres that influence Heaney's works are not solely Catholic, Northern Irish inheritances, but instead are of many traditions. Heaney has often spoken and written of being in-between the two traditions in Northern Ireland, Catholic and Protestant, Irish and British, nationalist and unionist, as is demonstrated in "Terminus" in *The Haw Lantern*, for example. He has also suggested in "The Sense of Place" from *Preoccupations* that his inheritances are "half-pagan, half-Christian" (*Preoccupations* 133) and I would argue that the sense of Christianity here acts as a way of pluralising notions of identity, as is such a key component of so much of his work. Identity in his poetry is often blurred and heterogeneous and so when he mentions that his influences are half-Christian, he incorporates both Catholicism and Protestantism into his sense of self, into the heritage of Northern Ireland. These religious and cultural spectres that Heaney encountered during his youth in rural County Derry return to haunt and complicate his process of thinking on notions of place, identity and faith. He is also indebted to the spectral inheritance of pagan (pre-Christian), Norse cultures that haunt his local area as "on Aughrim Hill, between the school and the lough, somebody had found an old sword, deemed to be a Viking sword, since we knew those almost legendary people had sailed the Bann a thousand years before" (133).

These hauntings are not only important in the context of his upbringing in Derry but also in his turning towards wider, older European cultures and texts such as those of Virgil in the later works which again sees an imbrication of the pre-Christian and the Christian, a rhyming of the past with the contemporary. Derrida would suggest of these spectral inheritances that existence is a trace of hauntings and that "one never inherits without coming

to terms with [*s'expliquer avec*][1] some spectre, and therefore with more than one spectre" (Derrida 24). In this sense, Heaney's inheritance of the multiple identities to which he was exposed during his youth come to be manifested in the present of his writing – there is a sense of plurality constantly at play especially in terms of his blending of classical allusions and Catholic imagery in the later poetry. When these inheritances do return then it is the voice of a ghost that we encounter, the spectral is at work as the present of Heaney's writing is given to anachronism as we read the contemporary moment in terms of both Catholic and pre-Christian signifiers.

Throughout Heaney's writing career there are ample examples of his engagement with Catholicism from as early on as "Blackberry Picking" in *Death of a Naturalist* as Gail McConnell so aptly draws our attention towards. McConnell suggests that "if 'Digging' is Heaney's manifesto, 'Blackberry-Picking' is his article of faith" (McConnell 80) because "the blackberry has both flesh and blood: these are the gifts of the sacrament of the Mass. Picking and eating the blackberries, then, describes not only a moment of childhood pleasure or sexual revelation, but a sacred act – potentially, an act of devotion. The blackberry is the sign of grace" (82). We also see the strong Christian associations with Dante's *Inferno* in *Field Work* and especially through possibly Heaney's most sustained dealing with Catholicism in the "Station Island" sequence. *Field Work* was published in 1979 and *Station Island* in 1984 and what is most interesting about these dates is that, according to Gail McConnell, when Heaney took up a position in Carysfort College in 1975 he was in "transition" (62) from being deeply devotional towards a more secular mode of belief:

> Mass, Confession and the doctrines of the Faith were 'part of the texture of growing up'. Indeed, these remained part of the texture of his adult life through his teaching career in the Catholic education system north and south of the border, particularly at Carysfort where, though undergoing transition, 'The wimple and the veil were much in evidence' (*SS* 229).
>
> Admiring and absorbing Ted Hughes's mythopoetic method, Heaney has never sought to distance himself from the Catholic theology in which he was immersed from an early age, seeing in its structures mythological potential. This is, of course, quite different from writing 'devotional' poetry. (McConnell 62)

In the context of the later poetry, it is rooted in Catholicism and classical literature's mythological and mythopoetic potential and the imbrication and intermingling of these myths creates a simulacrum of ghosts that are both familiar and Northern Irish, but very much rooted in the pre-Christian.

There is a constant repetition and return at work within Heaney's poetry as he circles back on old images, memories, and events of his life and the same can be said for the place of

Catholicism. This sustained return of Catholicism again finds a place in the later poetry even though in *Seeing Things* the poet moves towards a world-based viewing of the world instead of one that is purely religious. However, he still structures the "Squarings" sequence in his own variation of *terza rima*, which Dante used in his *The Divine Comedy* – a text of deeply visual and thematic Christianity. Bernard O'Donoghue has commented that "Heaney uses Dante as a Classical Christianity, employable as an expressive myth in the same way that the modernists had used Arthurian legend or Homer" (O'Donoghue 250). This has much to do with Heaney pluralising notions of identity within his poetry as it does with his engagement with the spectral, it offers a renewed version of the present moment. From the outset of the "Squarings" section, we see Heaney begin to question the sense of a Catholic afterlife deeply and openly, especially in the final two tercets of "Lightenings", Section I:

> And after the commanded journey, what?
> Nothing magnificent, nothing unknown.
> A gazing out from far away, alone.
>
> And it is not particular at all,
> Just old truth dawning: there is no next-time-round.
> Unroofed scope. Knowledge-freshening wind. (*Seeing Things* 55)

The beginning of the "Squarings" sequence opens this renewed vision of the world and the eschatological ponderings that are redolent of so much of the later poetry. Eugene O'Brien aptly suggests that "in 'Squarings', the focus is more on the utterance as something which is material, in the letters and words of language, but which is also numinous in terms of concepts, ideas and imaginings" (O'Brien 132). Much of the later poetry, especially that of *Human Chain*, mediates on the death of friends and family but also death in a personal sense. Heaney's reference of a "particular judgement" (*Seeing Things* 55) refers to the Christian belief of The Last Judgement, but the poet himself relinquishes his belief in Catholic resurrection when he notes that "there is no next-time-round" (55).

That being said, Heaney is extremely aware of other traditions and cultures in his work and a large portion of the later poetry is spent dwelling on the possibility of an afterlife, not in a Catholic, Christian sense of entering the gates of Heaven but rather by crossing the river Styx with Charon through the prism of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Book VI. This is not to say that Heaney believed that he would encounter an underworld journey in the afterlife but rather that he begins probing other possibilities in a poetic sense in the later works, as seen in his passage down to the Virgilian underworld at the start of *Seeing Things* in "The Golden Bough" and through a Dantean crossing in the final poem of the collection, "The Crossing". Part I of

*Seeing Things* ends with the poem "Fosterling", a sonnet that ends with Heaney acknowledging that he must follow the light:

> So long for air to brighten,
> Time to be dazzled and the heart to lighten. (50)

In John's Gospel the light is what God embodies:

> When all things began, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God, and what God was, the Word was. The Word, then, was with God at the beginning, and through him all things came to be; no single thing was created without him. All that came to be was alive with his life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never mastered it' (*Bible* 110).

The light that ends "Fosterling" connects with the "winter light" (*Seeing Things* 55) of the opening line of "Lightenings I" in Part II and the unroofing of the thatched cottage lets in the light in both a physical and Catholic sense, but also connects the light of Catholicism with the dark earthiness of Heaney's upbringing with this new light also hinting at new beginnings, new visions of the world and his place in it. Light also plays a role in terms of the political landscape of Northern Ireland as Stephen Regan so aptly draws our attention towards:

> In the later poems, especially those written after *Electric Light* (2001), light is cast on a host of theological and eschatological mysteries, and inspires the poet's visionary apprehension of final things. All of these processes of light, from the glimmerings of poetic imagination in the moment of composition to the equation of light with political freedom and philosophical understanding. (Regan 323)

The imagery that was prevalent throughout the earlier works return to haunt the later works even as Heaney himself acknowledges that this awakening to the light is not singularly a Catholic one through the conviction that there is no afterlife – it signifies much more as Regan keenly draws us towards in his study of the poetry (323). In *Stepping Stones*, Dennis O'Driscoll poses the question to Heaney if there is a connection between his Catholic beliefs and his non-belief in an afterlife at the start of "Squarings". His response is telling of the way in which these Catholic beliefs and imagery, or spectres, consistently return to haunt his writing: "but it's also firmly grounded in a sensation of 'scope', of a human relation to the shifting brilliances' and the roaming 'cloud-life'. It's still susceptible to the numinous" (*Stepping Stones* 319). Essentially, in the later poetry Heaney is scoping classical literature and older European cultures in order to understand the present moment though very often these explorations are tinged

with Catholic symbols and images. He universalises images and language from all of the different traditions and cultures that he has been exposed to and chooses which ones suit his own personal and poetic needs. In this sense, even as he underwent the process of secularisation, the ghosts of the past still haunt his imaginative output as these hauntings are but "the structure of inheritance" (Derrida 68).

In the later poetry, Heaney widens the scope of his mythical undertakings. Up until this point while he had looked towards Scandinavia, Sweeney, Ancient Greece and Dante to understand his time and place, he begins to move towards Virgil. In *The Spirit Level*, he looks towards Greek mythology in "Mycenae Lookout", but Virgil holds a significant place in the later poems. Virgil's writings are pre-Christian, but Heaney was introduced to them in school by a Catholic priest Father Michael McGlinchey – once again a mingling of pre-Christian and Christian inheritances. Kieran Quinlan comments on this sense of Heaney probing other possibilities, of mining other truths and suggests that Heaney wanted to show from as early as his bog poems "that there had been people in Ulster six thousand years ago – that it was limiting to see everything simply in terms of the Orange vs Green of the last few hundred years; in other words, Heaney sees himself as the inheritor of past faiths and a portal to future ones" (Quinlan 172). This is an important point that is being set out by Quinlan. Heaney's inheritance of older cultures and traditions is a key component of the poet's work and his thinking on identity, place and faith. His sense of faith is not limiting, instead faith and culture are plural and open to reworking. By drawing on older cultures and myths Heaney is enabled to view the present from many different angles instead of a singular, trenchant vision of that moment. Heaney notes of coming to *Aeneid*, Book Six, the schematics for so much of his mediations on life, death and the afterlife in the later poetry that:

> I was lucky too in the teacher I had during my senior years: Father Michael McGlinchey, who loved the language and had a feel for the literary qualities of the texts especially Virgil. One of our set books was Book Nine of the *Aeneid*, but I always remember him repeating at different times, 'Och, boys, I wish it were Book Six' – which gave me an interest in that book long before I ever read it. (*Stepping Stones* 296)

In "Bann Valley Eclogue", from *Electric Light*, Heaney is again haunted by Catholicism, as he offers a variation on Virgil's fourth eclogue. He first appeals to the Muses, a classical practice, but the Catholic element is fused with this in the phrases "*And it came to pass*" and "I*n the beginning*" (*Electric Light* 11), drawn from the New and Old Testaments respectively. "*And it came to pass*" draws us towards the New Testament and specifically Luke's Gospel, Chapter Two, where we see the birth of Jesus. Heaney also mentions an "infant birth / And the flooding away of the old miasma" (*Electric Light* 11) in the poem which hints at the birth of Christ but

also the sense that the sins of old will be washed away through the baptism that takes place within the poem:

> the old markings
> Will avail no more to keep east bank from west.
> The valley will be washed like the new baby (11)

If in the context of Virgil's poem, the presence of the baby does not symbolise Catholicism, how could it be given that it was written before Christ? Heaney is aware of this, but by inhabiting and translating Virgil's work he is engaging with the spectres of Virgil's text and time, and also his own. Derrida has commented on the nature of translations in the context of their hauntedness and suggests that "translations themselves are put 'out of joint.' However correct and legitimate they may be, and whatever right one may acknowledge them to have, they are all disadjusted" (21). Through the act of translation, the contemporary poem that Heaney creates is one that destabilises the present moment as we shift between the past and present – we find ourselves in the haunted present as we encounter ghosts of the classical and Catholic past in the present moment. In reading the poem, the multiplicity of interpretations that exude from it bear witness to the hauntological as ontological certainty is thrown off kilter as the spectres of Heaney's time and place meld and combine with those of Virgil's.

There is the sense in the poem that Heaney is referencing a hope that in the wake of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement a new future of peace is now possible between the two sides of the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland which are themselves divided by the Bann river in a geographical sense. The "east bank from west" does not only conjure the image of division and fighting in Northern Ireland but also the disagreement between Israel and Palestine relating to ownership of the West Bank and their separation by the river Jordan. It is in this river where Christ was baptised, and this strengthens the Catholic hauntings that reside within the poem, as in a contemporary reading of it we may interpret the birth of the child in terms of Christ who would rid the sins of the past. Instead of a singular, concrete meaning Heaney's work offers pluralised notions of identity and faith and the birth of a child in both poems is an interesting facet of this pluralisation. In Virgil's original it is understood that the child that was hoped for was the offspring of Marc Anthony and Octavia and this is a safe assumption considering the time in which Virgil was writing and the pre-Christian elements to it. However, Christians have reread this birth in Virgil's poem with Dante, whose poetry Heaney is also deeply drawn towards, believing that Virgil had prophesised the birth of Christ. The binding together of both interpretations is possible in this work and the connection between the pre-Christian and Christian references hints at the fluidity of belief and myths that embodies much

of the later poetry. Michael C.J. Putman also reinforces this Catholic dimension in his reading of the "noon-eclipse" (*Electric Light* 12):

> Heaney mentions an eclipse which took place on August 11, 1999, and which obviously made a profound impression. But its citation, especially because the poem is so full of classical allusions, also brings to mind the eclipse that took place in May, 44 BCE, after the murder of Julius Caesar. Since we find much language from the Old and New Testaments in this poem as well, Heaney would no doubt have us also recollect the eclipse, described so powerfully in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, at the death of Christ when darkness descends at noon over the earth (Putman 12).

Here Putman acknowledges the Irish, classical, and Catholic elements that reside within the poem. The eclipse, for Heaney, not only links the classical poetry of Virgil with his own version of Eclogue IV but also, once again, pre-Christian / classical and Catholic worlds together. When writing of Simon Armitage's poetry Katy Shaw has commented that it "is haunted by an ontological dualism in which the past regularly intrudes on the present" (26) and I would argue that the same applies to Heaney's work. By dealing with Virgil's Eclogue IV, the contemporary moment is being read in the context of the past and in turn destabilises the present as we read the poem in terms of both time frames – we are, as Derrida notes quoting Shakespeare, "out of joint" (Derrida 21). This is further reinforced by Heaney mentioning Romulus in the poem. Romulus, after whom Rome is named, killed his brother Remus with this brotherly killing obviously being deeply symbolic for Heaney in relation to the sectarian violence enacted in Northern Ireland.

However, the hauntological illusions and allusions multiply here as this presence of Romulus has a dual meaning. It can easily be interpreted as the pre-Christian founder of Rome or to Saint Romulus – that second century Christian martyr, also Roman, who publicly defended Christians who were being persecuted and tortured. So, in the same place, Rome, and the same name, Romulus, Heaney intertwines pre-Christian and Christian symbols into the poetry which pluralises notions of identity and faith within the poem. The poem does not have one singular influence behind it, but instead is haunted by the various spectres and influences that haunt Heaney himself. Even though Heaney moves towards the classical work of Virgil in the later poetry to understand the present, he is still haunted by his Catholic imagination.

While Heaney moved towards a more secular mode of belief, the presence of Catholicism in his writing and psyche is a haunting presence. In "Out of this World" from his 2006 collection *District and Circle*, a poem in memory of his friend and fellow poet Czeslaw Milosz, he writes:

> Like everybody else, I bowed my head
> during the consecration of the bread and wine,
> lifted my eyes to the raised host and raised chalice,
> believed (whatever it means) that a change occurred. (*District and Circle* 47)

Heaney had attended the funeral of his friend in Poland and partook in the ceremony of the event. He similarly writes of a trip to Lourdes where, as a young man, he brought back "one plastic canteen litre / On a shoulder strap (*très chic*) of the Lourdes water" (49) in the second part of "Out of this World", "Brancardier". So, while Heaney had obviously moved to a more secular mode of belief by this time, he still does not renounce Catholicism especially in terms of its rituals and symbols. He still adheres to the rituals and traditions of Catholicism without steeping himself in the teachings of the faith. Gail McConnell comments that "Catholicism presents Heaney with a means of representing poetry as both a labour *and* a gift: personally crafted and divinely given; simultaneously made and found" (72) and the act of writing, and the place of Catholicism in it, gives him the paraphernalia to craft his work.

When we get to the final collection of poetry, *Human Chain*, we see Heaney in old age contemplate the afterlife and death. These contemplations are addressed in many poems in the collection such as "A Kite for Aibhín", "Had I not been awake", "Chanson d'Aventure", and "The Riverbank Field" for example. However, for the purpose of this article I will focus on "Loughanure" and the "Route 110" sequence. Section I of "Loughanure" is dedicated to the memory of Heaney's friend, the painter Colin Middleton, who died in 1983. The memory and return of his dead friend in the poem conjure thoughts of the afterlife in terms of classical mythology in Section II and what Catholicism might tell him about death and the afterlife in Section III. Section II brings about a questioning of the afterlife and draws us towards the sense of revival where, after death in battle, Er was revived nine days later and told tales of his afterlife journey. Er tells of meeting immortal judges who decide on the fate of the dead, whether they go to the sky (the good) or into the earth (the bad), depending on the life that they led on earth. The section ending with Heaney musing on Orpheus choosing "rebirth as a swan" (*Human Chain* 62) brings about the sense that an afterlife can be achieved, it can be attained even if only in an imaginative sense in the present. Heaney is searching the myths of the past for some sort of solace and consolation as he enters old age here through the lens of classical myth and in Section III we are led to the poet searching more contemporary beliefs through what Catholicism can offer in terms of an afterlife and renewal. The opening line of Section III of "Loughanure" poses an important question and one that is carefully considered by the poet:

> And did I seek the Kingdom? Will the Kingdom
> Come? The idea of it there,
> Behind its scrim since font and fontanel,
> Breaks light or water. (*Human Chain* 63)

In this section of the poem, we find strong Catholic hauntings with the presence of light and water being important factors to consider here. Obviously, the reference to a Kingdom refers to the Kingdom of Heaven but the idea of it being blurred by the scrim since baptism, "font and fontanel" (*Human Chain* 63), suggests that there has always been an uncertainty or unknowing in terms of his own beliefs. The idea of an afterlife being behind a scrim, a light translucent type of gauze often used to hide actors on stage in theatre as they wait to be revealed, is an evoking image. It is suggestive of a shaded view of the afterlife in a Catholic sense, that it has been distorted in some ways since baptism and especially since Heaney turns to wider, older European examples of afterlives in his work. There is no certainty to an afterlife as it remains hidden behind the scrim with the possibility that it may appear, or may not. By placing a discussion of Catholicism alongside classical myth in the sequence, Heaney is probing the historical and cultural foundations of how humans deal with death; he is searching for solace as he enters old age and after having suffered a stroke in 2006 and by probing these other cultures and texts it opens a plurality of possibilities that may shed some light on the afterlife.

The solace that he seeks is not purely Catholic but one that is heterogeneous and fluid as both older and more contemporary modes of belief offer him ways in which to consider his time on earth and what is to come to us all, death. The light and water that we see at the beginning of the poem reflect the imagery that is deeply important to his later poetry. Light is ever present from *Seeing Things* onwards in terms of eschatology and the brighter future in store for Northern Irish politics after the IRA ceasefire of 1994, addressed in "Tollund" in *The Spirit Level*, and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. It can also be looked upon as the light of God in a Catholic sense. The presence of water in the later poetry often sees mediations on life and death for the poet; it is reflected as something that must be traversed in order to cross over into the underworld or into an afterlife of some sort as we see in "The Riverbank Field", for example. It is also something that signals rebirth as we see in "Crossings' XXV" in *Seeing Things*: "Let rebirth come through water'" (*Seeing Things* 83). For Heaney, Catholic symbols, language and imagery also conjure notions of the afterlife and renewal in the context of classical myth, both are intertwined and connected in his synthetic imagination. He chooses elements from each that offer some form of consolation and reassurance as he considers death and we are again given to anachronism as the past intrudes upon the present yet again.

Jodey Castricano, drawing on Derrida's work, comments that "a text, Derrida would say, 'lives on'. It also means that when it is signed by the other, or 'translated', a text 'comes back' in a certain way" (16). The place of myth in the poetry demonstrates this sense of coming back, as does the infusion of Catholicism in the later poetry. The last two stanza's then draw us back towards Catholicism as Jesus Christ is conjured in the context of Michelangelo's "The Last Judgement' where we see 'his inverted face contorting / Like an arse-kisser's' in some vision of the damned" (*Human Chain* 63). What is interesting here is that this image of Christ and notions of The Last Judgement are reflected on through the prism of art and not through biblical references. This allows for a further connection between Section II and III in the sequence as Heaney considers notions of judgement, passage and renewal in terms of classical literature in Section II and through Catholic art in Section III – art is the prism through which an afterlife can possibly be attained.

When we move to a discussion of Heaney's seminal "Route 110" sequence, placed as the centre poem in *Human Chain*, we see the comingling of Catholicism with classical mythology in the form of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Book VI. In "Route 110", Heaney traces important events and moments throughout his life, which in turn mirror Aeneas' journey through the underworld in search of his father Anchises in Book VI. In this sense, time becomes unhinged and given to the hauntological as we read the poem in terms of Heaney's life, but we are ever aware of the classical journey that he is undertaking: translations and the spectres that we encounter through them bring about a "disadjustment of the contemporary" (Derrida 123). These spectres of Heaney's life culminate in, and return to haunt, his final collection of poetry and he notes that "there's one Virgilian journey that has indeed been a constant presence and that is Aeneas's venture into the underworld. The motifs of Book VI have been in my head for years – the golden bough, Charon's barge, the quest to meet the shade of the father" (Heaney and O'Driscoll 389).

What is important to recognise in this sequence is that it is haunted by many elements of Heaney's past in terms of memory and the return of the dead but also by the end of the sequence a movement towards an afterlife. As has been the case with much of Heaney's poetry, especially in the later works, the unsteadiness of his allusions offers multiple interpretations and so when we reach "Route 110", the central poem to *Human Chain*, we again see a shading of fixed meaning in favour of the heterogeneous. In the sequence Heaney is transported, in a metaphorical sense, by Charon the ferryman to the land of the dead in this instance and not by Saint Peter. While Heaney does find comfort in his "used copy of Aeneid VI" (*Human Chain* 48), purchased in Section I and which ultimately gives birth to his procession through

memory, in Section IV he visits Italy, the home of Virgil but also the Roman Catholic Church and it is interesting to note that it is in a chapel that he finds comfort:

> Hotfooting it with tanned expats
> Up their Etruscan slopes to a small brick chapel
> To find myself the one there most at home. (51)

Etruria, the ancient civilisation in Southern Italy that was later conquered by the Romans, is a place where Heaney is most comfortable in and one that is deeply classical. The sense that he is "most at home" here is telling of his comfort in the classical world and his fondness for it but the presence of the chapel does conjure notions of a more contemporary deity. This may not be the case as this place of worship may relate to more classical, elemental gods but the fact that Heaney is going to a wedding there is all the more telling of the contemporary context of the place. The hauntedness that this place embodies again destabilises the present moment as we read it in terms of the classical and the contemporary – Heaney's fusion of place and time desynchronises any fixed present in favour of absent presences as the ghostly, haunting classical allusions lurk in the shadows of this twenty-first century poem.

Once we move towards Section V we see a haunting of the earlier poetry in the later works. The Catholic imagery and language in "Blackberry Picking" returns in this section in the scene of the McNicholls' kitchen where we find "a votive jam pot on the dresser shelf" (52). Despite pots of jam residing on the windowsill being a predominant practice in many Irish countryside houses, for Heaney's synthetic imagination these pots exemplify a Roman practice. An Irish scene borrows from past Roman examples, which indicates that the Italian spectres of the past still reside within Section V and that these are reinforced by a Catholic hauntology of ritual and devotion to deities both local and universal. We also see the oat stalks being wrapped in tinfoil "to give the wee altar a bit of shine" (52).

In the earlier poem "At a Potato Digging", also from *Death of a Naturalist*, we see Heaney mention an "altar of sod" (*Death of a Naturalist* 18) in a mingling of the natural world with the religious and this occurs again in "Route 110" through the mingling of oats on the "wee altar" (Human Chain 52). It is fitting that the imagery we see in the first collection returns to haunt what would be Heaney's final collection of poetry, though the poet would obviously have been unaware of this at the time.

This speaks to an overall sense of cohesion within his poetry, but also reinforces the hauntedness of it. His work is not only haunted by spectres of the past in terms of inheritance from outside the self, it is also very much haunted by itself as themes, issues and images return throughout the many collections. The sequence's indebtedness to Catholicism returns in

Section VII when we see Heaney asking to be absolved of sins in the form of trespassing on his neighbour's land, "and absolve me thus formally of trespass" (54) and by Section X the realisation of impending death is signalled by the "final whistle" (57), in relation to both the football match and life itself. For Heaney, death will not result in resurrection as in Virgil's text where those who spent one thousand years in the underworld were granted new bodies to return to the surface. Instead, in the final section of the sequence Heaney arrives with his "thank-offering" (59), in the form of a "bunch of stalks and silvered heads" (59) with the silvered nature of the stalks resembling the "elysian silvered" (46) willows that we see in "The Riverbank Field". There are allusions here of an afterlife not in the context of Catholicism but in terms of classical myth and ultimately this afterlife will be achieved in the form of a grandchild. Dennis O'Driscoll questioned Heaney on whether he feared death or not, and Heaney's response is extremely telling in the manner of which the binding force of his early Catholic learnings would have shaped his belief:

> Certainly not in the way I'd have feared it sixty years ago, fearful of dying in the state of mortal sin and suffering the consequences for all eternity. It's more grief than fear, grief at having to leave "what thou lovest well" and whom thou lovest well. (*Stepping Stones* 472)

His resurrection within the poem will not be a Catholic one either in the sense of gaining an afterlife in heaven, but instead is through the birth his grandchild, Anna Rose, at the end of the sequence. He describes her as "earthlight" (*Human Chain* 59), which is symbolic of the darkness and earthiness of the earlier poetry and the light and airiness signalled by much of the later works. It can also be looked upon as a turn to the spectral in that the spectres of Heaney's life, and his absence, will now continue to exist in the most beautiful way in his grandchild's presence upon this earth. Overall, "Route 110" does go a long way in steeping the final collection in Catholic hauntings and rituals while Heaney at this stage of his life had settled into a secular mode of belief. However, Derrida notes that

> . . . it is a proper characteristic of the spectre, if there is any, that no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or to a living future, for the revenant may already mark the promised return of the spectre of living being. Once again, untimeliness and disadjustment of the contemporary (Specters of Marx 123).

What can be certain is that the living past of Heaney's Catholic upbringing and beliefs live on throughout his poetry through the act of spectrality.

In conclusion, Heaney's later poetry demonstrates the haunted and anachronistic nature of his writing. The poet's constant reading of the contemporary moment through the

lens of wider, older European cultures and texts, especially in terms of classical literature such as Virgil's, showcases a transmission of ghosts into the present moment of Heaney's writing and our reading of the poetry. Indeed, when we consider Heaney's turn towards Virgil and his mixing of Catholicism with these older, more elemental beliefs and literature in terms of contemporary violence in Northern Ireland, in the context of old age, and in the larger context of impending death and the possibility of an afterlife, we can see that his Catholic sensibility and his appreciation of classical literature offer him the paraphernalia to address and find some sort of solace in terms of the future. When Heaney turns to these inheritances, when he turns to the past in order to understand the present and future, the poetry is given to the hauntological as time is in flux because we know that he is referring to the present moment, he is talking about his own life and circumstances but through the slanted, hauntological lens of ghosts of the past that reanimate this act of spectrality each time that we, as readers, turn to Heaney's work.

## Notes

1 Explaining onself to.

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# *The Kaleidoscopic Perspective in Colum McCann's* Let the Great World Spin *(2009): Trauma and Transculturality*

# *A perspectiva caleidoscópica em* Let the Great World Spin *(2009) de Colum McCann: trauma e transculturalidade*

Maria do Rosario Casas Coelho

**Abstract:** *This article argues that Colum McCann's novel* Let the Great World Spin *(2009) epitomizes the Irish transcultural novel. It portrays transculturality through a considerable diversity of damaged characters who bond to overcome a common trauma. By engaging with transcultural, transnational, and post-multicultural theories, this article analyses some of the literary features of McCann's formal experimentation that eventually alleviate pain and foster tolerance and empathy among people with different backgrounds. Then, it explores the universalisation of trauma, where the local is made global and the characters deploy similar responses when exposed to traumatic situations. The novel, an attempt to find grace after the trauma of 9/11, presents many characters who advocate for plural perspectives and, as a kaleidoscope, it brings to the centre of the narrative the differences among people and opens possibilities for beautiful and new configurations.*

**Keywords:** Let the Great World Spin; *transculturality; transnationalism; trauma healing; bonding.*

**Resumo:** *Este artigo explica por que o romance* Let the Great World Spin (2009) *de Colum McCann exemplifica de maneira inequívoca o romance transcultural irlandês. A transculturalidade é mostrada no romance por meio de personagens muito diversos que se unem para superar um trauma. Fazendo uma conexão entre as teorias transcultural, transnational e pós-multicultural, este artigo analisa algumas das características literárias da experimentação formal de McCann que objetiva aliviar a dor e promover a tolerância e a empatia entre pessoas diferentes. O romance explora a universalização do trauma, onde o local é transformado em global e os personagens apresentam reações semelhantes quando expostos a situações traumáticas. Como uma tentativa de McCann de encontrar beleza após o trauma dos ataques de 11 de setembro, o romance apresenta vários personagens que advogam em prol de perspectivas plurais e, como um*

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*caleidoscópio, traz para o centro da narrativa as diferenças entre pessoas e abre possibilidades para novas e belas configurações.*

**Palavras-chave:** Let the Great World Spin; *transculturalidade; transnacionalismo; recuperação pós-trauma; estabelecer vínculos.*

## Introduction

Societal changes, migratory flows in particular, affect culture, understood as the space where differences and similarities among people from various places are visible and enable transformations (Anderson; Dagnino, 2015; Gunew). As a result, experiences of dislocation and adaptation have become customary (Dagnino, 2015; Gunew). In Ireland, migration has been a constant feature even before the Great Famine leaving a visible imprint in terms of demography, economy, and culture (Fitzgerald and Lambkin, Barros-del Río). In the last two decades the country has seen a change in the trends of migration, and most particularly during the Celtic Tiger period, altering the ethnic composition of Irish society and their traditional forms of identity construction (Loyal, Morales-Ladrón and Elices Agudo, Villar-Argáiz).

To better understand the impact on societies caused by migration, theories of transculturality, transnationalism, and post-multiculturalism have been proliferating in the last decades. Transculturality has been defined as "a perspective in which all cultures look decentered in relation to all other cultures" (Dagnino, 2015: 2). Transnationalism is a phenomenon that happens within and outside the academia and that has provoked changes in literary and cultural studies such as the "shift in our attention from sameness to difference" (Jay 17). Post-multiculturalism brings "to the centre of our cultural criticism many groups, histories and geopolitical areas that were overlooked in the past" (Gunew, 3) and it engages ethically and sustainably with global cultures and languages. Concerns on migration and transculturality are mirrored in the recent literature produced by Irish writers – living or not in Ireland – as well as by immigrant authors (Fogarty, Villar-Argáiz). The new Irish – the term that addresses immigrants living in Ireland – have been producing literature and being protagonists in Irish born authors' fiction which reflects the cultural diversity present in the country. (Villar-Argáiz).

Displacement, loss, and migration are contemplated in Colum McCann's work since the very beginning of his literary career in 1994. He epitomizes the Irish transcultural writer which, according to Arianna Dagnino, a Lecturer of Italian Studies at the University of British Columbia, are the ones who by choice or necessity "experience cultural dislocation, follow transnational life patterns . . . physically immerse themselves in multiple cultures, geographies,

or territories, expose themselves to diversity, and nurture plural, flexible identities" (2015: 1). Particularly relevant to this study is the awarded novel *Let the Great World Spin* (2009) where McCann uses the French artist Philippe Petit's performance on the top of the World Trade Centre, in 1974, as an allegory to talk about the tragic events at the Twin Towers on September 11. There is an implicit parallel between the uncertainties people face being high in the sky, as Petit, and down on the ground, as the other characters. Here, transculturality is represented by the mix of people originally coming from different cultural and social backgrounds, who are not necessarily immigrants. Hence, McCann creates communities of heterogeneous groups with no hierarchy of any sort. They are people with common sufferings who bond to seek healing.

*Let the Great World Spin* is a complex and challenging novel that has been the focus of attention of academic work. For example, Ruth Gilligan (2016) focuses on linguistic aspects of McCann's work in the context of exile literature; Sheila Hones (2014) focuses on his use of space, whether it is geographical or literary; Laura Izarra (2012) explores the poetics of the novel connecting suspended narratives to various types of human experience; Eóin Flannery (2011) engages with the different ways in which McCann gives voice to underprivileged and discriminated individuals; John Cusatis (2011) explores how McCann's work redefines the Irish novel by transcending geographical, social, cultural, aesthetic, and ethnic boundaries; Cécile Maudet (2010) engages with the concept of memory and recollection as presented in McCann's writing. All these approaches are complementary to McCann's works and offer invaluable insights. However, those critics have not engaged with the transcultural essence of McCann's oeuvre. McCann's work cannot be related to one single literary space, either Irish or American, as he has repeatedly claimed in his interviews.[1] On the contrary, McCann aligns with transcultural principles because his stories are far from geographically or culturally circumscribed, and his main goal as a writer is to trespass boundaries in order to "inspire the creation of imaginary homelands or re-imagine the world at large" (Dagnino, 2013: 8).

In the light of these ideas, this study seeks to analyse *Let the Great World Spin* under a transcultural perspective to prove that McCann not only entertains, but also defends bonding as a strategy to overcome traumatic experiences, and at the same time, encourages tolerance and empathy, regardless of people's cultural, racial, social, and religious differences. To this end, he shows the relevance of the universalisation of trauma, creates communities, and proposes bonding as a form of trauma recovery and healing. As a result, the novel fosters a sense of belonging, kinship, and mutual trust.

## Colum McCann: A Transcultural Writer

McCann, a widely acclaimed contemporary Irish writer, is the author of seven novels, three short story collections, and one book written as a lesson to young writers. Although McCann acknowledges that he talks about Ireland in his literary production, the setting of his work varies geographically from Mexico, Russia, New York, Czechoslovakia, Palestine, Israel, and to Ireland, denoting his transnational mindset. Regarding this issue, Amanda Tucker, Professor of English at University of Wisconsin – Platteville, explains that "he loosens the constraints of both national affiliations and geographical ties" (110).

According to Dagnino (2015), there is an interest to know and take part in other cultures that permeate the transcultural perspective. This idea is particularly evident in McCann's biography for his behaviour and involvement in organisations and with people who believe that embracing diversity can make a difference in our society.[2] Before becoming a writer, he worked as a journalist and travelled extensively. Interestingly, his fiction includes some of the topics that have always been present in Irish literature, such as emigration (Flannery) and violence towards immigrants living on the island (Villar-Argáiz), as a reflection of what has been happening in Ireland mainly from the Celtic Tiger period onwards. Migration, displacement, loss, and death are frequent themes in his work, as well as empowered women. Minorities also have a voice of their own and find a relevant place in his work. *Let the Great World Spin* is a novel that fosters inclusion. It epitomises what Flannery has named the "Aesthetics of Redemption", because under this lens, books become "educational spaces in which the author and reader convene in differential imaginative solidarities" (13). The redemptive aspect of McCann's literature has gained salience and it certainly is present in the novel where prostitutes, hackers, graffiti artists, are part of the story told in *Let the Great World Spin*.

## *Let The Great World Spin*, A Kaleidoscopic Novel of Trauma and Bonding

In *Let the Great World Spin*, bonding is presented as comprehensive and equitable, emphasising commonalities rather than differences. It works as a kaleidoscope, where ordinary elements such as mirrors and coloured materials are put together in a tube, and by moving the pieces, repeated and beautiful images are produced. Similarly, *Let the Great World Spin* picks fragments from the lives of ordinary people and produces a colourful narrative with different people behaving similarly.

Distinctive literary techniques displayed in the novel include, among others, the use of nonlinear narratives, subtle changes of narrator, and broken narrative lines. According to Anne Whitehead, professor of Modern and Contemporary Literature at Newcastle University,

"Trauma fiction relies on . . . a number of key stylistic features" as modes of reflection or critique which "mirror at a formal level the effects of trauma" (84). McCann's literary representation of bonding as a strategy to overcome trauma, and his use of geographical and literary space are important elements to not only assess *Let the Great World Spin* as a unique work, but as representative of McCann's transcultural oeuvre. This polyphonic – meaning multiple voices as in Bakhtin's concept – novel gives way to other imbricated stories. The personal dramas of the characters, how they deal with trauma, and how the unexpected may result in positive outcome are at the core of McCann's ultimate message. The novel ends in an optimistic tone suggesting a better way of coexistence for communities rather polarized.

The story of two African American little girls, descendants of a matrilineal lineage of prostitutes in the Bronx, is at the core of the novel. Adopted after their mother's death, the girls lived ordinary lives under the care of Gloria to become: Jaslyn, a social worker, and Janice, a soldier. Gloria, one of the five mothers who mourn their sons killed in Vietnam, lives in the same building of the prostitute and her two little girls. The prostitutes know the Irish priest, Corrigan, who died with Jazzlyn in the car accident. The lives of the characters are put together as in a kaleidoscope producing various encounters.

Structurally, the novel is divided in thirteen sections and each one is narrated by a different character. The sections are organised in four books that could be read as short stories, as they are independent and complete narratives. This unconventional format stresses fragmentation and stands out as a key literary element that illustrates decenteredness, a main feature of transculturality. The first section is about Petit's performance at the World Trade Centre on August 7, 1974. This is the setting where most of the narratives take place. The last section, Book Four, is devoted to Jaslyn's narration – one of the orphan girls adopted by Gloria – and serves as a closure of the apparently previous loose strands. McCann places interaction as a centripetal force that soothes pain and trauma, and the structure of the novel presents features such as fragmentation and non-linear narration that serve to convey the message.

Transnationalism is evident in the novel's geographical space and broken timeline. It starts with Petit's performance, high in the air, to an astonished audience, down on the ground, in New York, in 1974. While the first chapter of Book One is set in Dublin, in the 1950s, the subsequent chapters are set again in New York, 1974, to finally shift to Dublin and New York in 2006 in the last Book. Fragmentation and diversity are also characteristics of post-multiculturalism, and McCann displays an array of literary strategies that underline this idea.
Trauma is particularly rendered in the gatherings of the mourning mothers whose sons died in the Vietnam war. As Kristiaan Versluys, Professor of American Literature at Ghent University, claims, traumatized people must tell to alleviate anxiety, and it works both ways: "a feeling on

the part of the victims that they have the duty to testify and the desire on the part of the listener to learn more about trauma in order to reintroduce it into a network of signification" (4). To reflect the nature of these women's suffering, McCann discards linearity. On the contrary, their account of events keeps moving back and forth in a non-logical and non-chronological sequence. Voids and silences are also present in the novel, and these go hand in hand with fragmented narratives, leaving gaps for the readers to fill in the story of the characters.

At Claire's – one of the mourning mothers – it is evident they are unable to talk about some facts or describe some moments. The author masterfully digs into the unknown of trauma and suffering in the passage where the mothers discuss their reactions to the sergeant's visit when giving the official news about their sons' deaths. For some of them, a smile was their first reaction to the news, suggesting not only disbelief but also the unexplored implications to their emotional state. In the following excerpt, McCann plays with the verbs "to pass" and "to pass away" to alleviate the tension of receiving the feared news, and at the same time emphasises the traumatic aspect of the situation. Claire reports to the other women her reaction and shock when she realised her behaviour during the sergeant's visit.

> —And I opened the door. It was a sergeant. He was very deferent. I mean, nice to me. I knew right away, just from the look on his face . . . I said, Come in. And he took off his hat . . .
> —And then he just said, Your son is passed, ma'am. And I was thinking, Passed? Passed where? What do you mean, Sergeant, he's passed? He didn't tell me of any exam . . .
> —I was smiling at him. I couldn't make my face do anything else . . . (McCann, 2009:110).

Claire recalls a traumatic event and, at the same time, critically describes her own response to the incident. Additionally, the account of the event is expressed in a free indirect style, which allows the reader to have more information about the character's mind.

In the novel, trauma and bonding go hand in glove, and the positive effect of human relationships is especially evident in three characters: two of the mourning mothers' group – Claire, Gloria and Lara, the wife of the driver who caused a fatal car accident that killed the Irish priest and the mother of Jaslyn and Janice, for we claim that they are the ones who lean on bonding to heal. The author stresses the diverse nature of the five mourning mothers in the group through Claire's perspective: "They are all so different, so little in common. But, still, she liked them all, she really did" (McCann, 2009: 78). The comment engages with the idea of a transcultural writer as someone who emphasises "interactions rather than polarities"

connecting "with a wider global literary perspective and, possibly, a new way of imagining and living identity" (Dagnino, 2015: 1).

The informal group of mothers gathers regularly to talk about their sons, their lives, and losses. Claire joins the group after having experienced a long depressive period in bed. In this group, Claire meets Gloria, and their life-long friendship starts. Of course, there are misunderstandings at the beginning of their friendship, especially because of their different social backgrounds. Gloria, an African American granddaughter of a former slave, lives in the Bronx. Claire, married to a Jewish judge, had been raised a Protestant by a racist father, is the granddaughter of a slave owner and now lives in the Upper-East Side. The author skilfully presents the peaks and troughs of their relationship, especially at the beginning, as a result of their conflicting upbringing and circumstances. Claire is hosting a gathering feeling quite uncomfortable by her own wealthy lifestyle. When all the ladies are about to leave, she asks Gloria to stay a little longer, but in a clear misuse of the word Claire offers to pay her for her time, resulting in Gloria getting very offended and leaving in rage. McCann effectively highlights the differences between the two women.

> Sure, I didn't want to leave Claire there with all those leftover crumbs on the carpet, and the crushed-out cigarettes in the ashtrays and I suppose I could've easily stayed, rolled up sleeves, and started washing the dishes and cleaning the floor and tucking the lemons away in the Tupper-ware, but the thing is, I had the thought that we didn't go freedom-riding years ago to clean apartments on Park Avenue, no matter how nice she was, no matter how much she smiled (McCann, 2009: 297).

After a while, Gloria reflects on the episode and focuses on the bigger picture, deploying empathy for Claire's behaviour and concluding: "I had liked her when she was fussing all over us, and she didn't mean harm, maybe she was just nervous. People are good or half good or a quarter good, and it changes all the time – but even on the best day nobody's perfect" (McCann, 2009: 301). Gloria reconsiders Claire's attitude and feels empathy as she puts herself in the same condition as Claire. McCann echoes theories of transculturalism (Dagnino, 2015) as he juxtaposes the two characters in a decentred position, sharing common feelings and attitudes.

Bonding is also explored through a transnational approach (Jay, 2010) in the different ways the mothers do their mourning for their sons. They are able to connect with each other despite their various backgrounds, as the following scene explains:

> They even walked up to the rooftop without asking. Maybe that's just the way they do it, or maybe they're blinded by the paintings, the silverware, the carpets. Surely there were other well-heeled boys packed off to war. Not all of them had flat feet.

> Maybe she should meet other women, more of her own. But more of her own what? Death, the greatest democracy of them all. The world's oldest complaint. Happens to us all. Rich and poor. Fat and thin. Fathers and daughters. Mothers and sons (McCann, 2009: 107).

Claire, who judges the other ladies' behaviour in her house and looks down on them, reconsiders and concludes that in the face of death and the universality of mourning, social differences are not that important. Similarly, the complex construction of characters, who are not reduced to their roles of mothers and wives, unveils unexpected commonalities. As the novel unfolds, the reader learns that Claire had sent money to a campaign to free Martin Luther King when she was a student. On her part, Gloria had been involved in student movements to improve black people's lives. Despite their present differences, both characters bring the black movement to the centre, each their own way.

In Lara's case, bonding takes a slightly different turn. Divorcing, remarrying, and leaving the country is her path to deal with remorse after the car accident. She told her husband, Blaine, to run away before the arrival of the police, a decision she would regret ever since. On Book Four, at the end of the novel, and thanks to Jaslyn's words, we learn that Lara and Ciaran, the Irish priest's brother, eventually get married and go back to Ireland where she becomes a successful artist. Particular attention deserves Lara's narration of the accident, once more a fragmented account of events that takes the form of short sentences. The nonlinear narrative emulates her dissociation from the tragic scene. Her recount of events shifts from the moment of the accident to the description of the cars involved in the accident. Sequentially, her narration is directed at the paintings, on the back of their car, that they were trying to sell, and then to the faces of the injured, Corrigan, the Irish priest, and Jazzlyn, one of the prostitutes. She starts,

> Being inside the car, when it clipped the back of the van, was like being in a body we didn't know. The picture we refuse to see of ourselves. That is not me, that must be somebody else. . . . There is something that happens to the mind in moments of terror. Perhaps we figure it's the last we'll ever have and we record it for the rest of our long journey. We take perfect snapshots, an album to despair over. We trim the edges and place them in plastic. We tuck the scrapbook away to take out in our ruined times (McCann, 2009: 115-116).

The author creates a dissociative effect in Lara's narrative to explain the character's disturbance and, ultimately, her impossibility of letting it go. She is traumatized by her own attitude, lacking solidarity towards the victims, and her telling Blaine to run away. Despite all her compassion and empathy for the victims, she puts herself first and runs. McCann makes use of

some lexicon related to art such as "snapshot", "album", "scrapbook", leading the reader closer to Lara's profession, a painter.

Empathy lies at the core of the novel, as McCann himself states in many interviews. It also aligns with theories of transculturality and post-multiculturalism, inasmuch as the plot decentres mainstream communities and voices, giving space to bonding, empathy and solidarity, ultimately aiming to overcome trauma.

## The Local Made Global: Universalisation of Irish Trauma

In a multicultural environment, globalisation represents the risk of homogenisation as the boundaries between the local and the global blur. As Paul Jay, Professor of English at Loyola University Chicago, alerts homogenisation is supposedly understood as a villain when the discussion is about globalisation in the sense of local identity's fading away process which is considered to be one of the nefarious effects of globalisation. The same happens to "agency", as it is seen linked to the idea of "cultural autonomy" and to "a society's ability to protect its cultural identity from being watered down or erased by alien cultural forms" (Jay 4). But cultures are shaped by other cultures and agency is much more related to the negotiations resulting from the contact among them. As Marisol Morales Ladrón and Juan F. Elices Agudo, both Professors of English at University of Alcalá, Spain, argue the local and the global are the two extremes of a "continuum of interaction" and, therefore, should not be seen as "opposed concepts" (2).

The recent history of Ireland exemplifies the changes caused by a reverse trend on migration, and modernity demands which affect the way people live, work, amuse themselves, produce and consume arts. All these modifications affect, above all, the Irish identity itself. In the island, the artistic production has been changing from its past "topical insularity" to "more transnational and universal objects", yet it also has been trying to keep its own values and identity (Morales and Elices, 2011). As Tucker argues, Irish culture has been at the centre of much debate caused by the demographic changes occurred in Ireland and the immigrant community has been successful in "widening the parameters of the Irish tradition" (2010: 109). According to Stephanie Schwerter, Professor of English Literature at Université Polytechnique Hauts-de-France, this conflict is present in Irish literature with many Irish writers expressing their will to transit from the local to the global.[3] In an analogous way, McCann stated that it was impossible to determine whether the events of 9/11 had more influence on the arts than the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland or "any sort of spectacular sadness or spectacular incident in history". [4]

Interpreting events through other's lens is what McCann does in *Let the Great World* Spin making use of a myriad of characters and different narrative voices. The multicultural aspect is represented not only by immigrants in the United States, such as the Irish brothers, a Guatemalan nurse, and a Japanese girl, but also by compatriots from various backgrounds who eventually bond seeking healing. Consequently, looking at the other not as a threat, but as an opportunity for self-improvement is a pivotal issue in McCann's work.

According to Jay, the transnational turn in literary studies is seen as problematic due to its "focus on pluralities, differences, hybrid identities" (4). The critic also argues that the field of literary studies relies on "the strength of new critical approaches and paradigm shifts" (Ibid.). Naturally, McCann's style goes hand in hand with this transnational approach, as he brings foreigners and people from the margins of society to the centre of the action. Equally, he uses frequent and subtle changes of the narrative voice, making it hard to identify who is speaking. In *Let the Great World Spin*, these changes demand close attention on the part of the reader due to unexpected switches between the characters' and the third person narrator's voice. In addition, identifying the narrative voice is needed to fill in the empty spaces left out on purpose by the author. Using this postmodernist literary technique, McCann opens space for multiple interpretations – the readers' – avoiding giving his own. The following excerpt is emblematic of this device. Claire goes up to the roof to smoke and observes the movement of the street, feeling the heat of the summer, when all of a sudden there is a change in the narrator's voice:

> She pulls again on the cigarette and looks over the wall. A momentary vertigo. The creek of yellow taxis along the street, the crawl of green in median of avenue, the saplings just planted.
> Nothing much happening on Park. Everyone gone to their summer homes. Solomon, dead against. City boy. Likes his late hours. Even in summertime. His kiss this morning made me feel good (McCann, 2009: 81).

The sudden switch of perspectives from an omniscient narrator to free indirect speech close to stream of consciousness, and then, to first person narrator, serves a double purpose; to build the character's relationship with her husband, and to depict the couple's connection through Claire's perspective. It represents McCann's advocacy for plurality and, according to Sneja Gunew, Professor of English and Women Studies at the University of British Columbia, acknowledges the existence of more than one way of interacting or communicating, which questions "entities" that generalise "civilizations", and countries, as well as the relations among family and community members. Post-multiculturalism is also detectable in the complex construction of characters, who, in the novel, are not simply reduced to their roles of mothers and wives.

Another literary technique employed by McCann to approach violence is to disclose it when describing something ordinary. This scheme favours attenuation of violence. No opinion from the narrator or the characters involved is revealed. No emotion is depicted in the narration of the facts. Particularly in the case of domestic abuse, facts are silenced as if they had never happened. The passage below belongs to Book One, at the beginning of the novel. It is set in Dublin in the 1950s. The family consists of a mother and two young sons. The boys never knew about the physical violence suffered by their mother. The only news they have is that their father had left them "years before", and that every month there was a check sent by him, in the mailbox. Ciaran, one of the boys, describes a happy childhood and with no judgement mentions his mother's many times fractured a wrist. An abusive relationship is shrouded in secrecy and shame:

> One of the many things my brother, Corrigan, and I loved about our mother was that she was a fine musician. . . . Our mother played with a natural touch, even though she suffered from a hand which she had broken many times. We never knew the origin of the break: it was something left in silence. When she finished playing she would lightly rub the back of her wrist (McCann, 2009: 11).

The character is addressed to as "our mother", her name was never revealed. Working this way McCann creates a global[5] woman with whom any other can relate. Her trauma is not dated or local; domestic abuse is still a global phenomenon.

It is in the second chapter, Book Three, that there is an explicit reference to an abusive husband. Adelita, a Guatemalan widow and mother of two little children who emigrated to the United States, is the one who brings to light unspoken stories of male abuse. In the excerpt that follows, she speaks about her late husband when her lover – the Irish priest – is having breakfast with her and her children:

> My heart shudders every time he sits near the portrait of my dead husband. He has never asked me to move the photo. He never will. He knows the reason it is there. No matter that my husband was a brute who died in the war in the mountains near Quezaltenango – it makes no difference – all children need a father (McCann, 2009: 280).

The universal connection is made clear: both women, the Irish mother and Adelita, have experienced some sort of violence from their husbands and reacted the same, despite their geographical, cultural and time differences. None had ever said a word about it to their children. For the Irish mother, the reasons are not explicit, the reader can only imagine them bearing in mind the social position of women in the context of Ireland, in the 1950s. In the case of Adelita it is explicitly mentioned that it was done to preserve the father's image to her

children. Although what is made explicit in the Guatemalan's case remains a hypothesis in the case of the Irish mother, McCann's interest lies in linking two women from different places and times to a universal and current phenomenon such as domestic abuse. Despite their different geographical locations and the two decades that separate them, they behave the same, suggesting a common gendered pattern. All in all, McCann underlines the power of silence in the domestic realm, and at the same time favours motherhood as an instrument for bonding amid difference.

In *Let the Great World Spin*, the humanity underlying interpersonal relations is revealed as universal. The particular stories merge into each other and blur the limits between the local and the global.

## Conclusion

*Let the Great World Spin*, one of Colum McCann's most acclaimed novels, epitomizes transculturality and transnationalism in its kaleidoscopic presentation of characters, places and time. It masterly bridges the gap between Ireland and the rest of the world and draws on universal dramas that affect people equally, independently of their culture, ethnicity, political beliefs, and religion. In consonance with theories of transnationalism, transculturality and post-multiculturalism, the novel presents bonding as a means to seek healing and alleviate pain by using universal trauma at the centre of the plot.

Formal experimentation takes the form of fragmentation with thirteen independent and complete narratives that intersect briefly. Subtle changes of point of view alternate from the first to the third person omniscient narrator. Added to the broken narrative, voids and silences are also frequent devices that shape the effects of trauma. With these features, McCann not only enriches the plot, but also advocates for tolerance and empathy towards diversity and fosters bonding despite disparity.

These stylistic features accommodate with the polyphonic tone of the novel, whose numerous characters display different forms of loss and trauma. The transcultural and transnational foundations of the novel connect people through times and places, and so the novel moves back and forth from New York to Dublin, from memories to the present, in order to rescue the invisible and true driving forces of the human heart. Underlying it all, the novel speaks up for a universal connection of human beings by focusing upon commonalities and what lies at the bottom of the human soul. As in a kaleidoscope, *Let the Great World Spin* portrays human life in its richness and creates an ever-changing beautiful view of humanity.

## Notes

1 *Let the Great World Spin* Interview 'Engaging Colum McCann' by Theo Dorgan. 15/10/2009. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAd7Uy0DD1M – Accessed 29/06/2020.

2 As the author stated, "The one true democracy we have is storytelling. It goes across borders, boundaries, genders, wealth, race – everyone has a story to tell" (https://narrative4.com/about). This vision may explain why he is the co-founder of Narrative4, a "global educational organisation that seeks to foster a next generation of empathetic leaders and citizens" (http://www.narrative4.com/who-we-are/history/) by fostering empathy through storytelling.

3 According to Schwerter, poets such as Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin and Medbh McGuckian "are among the most influential authors from the North who have attempted to reconsider the Northern Irish conflict through the lens of otherness" (2011: 139).

4 *Let the Great World Spin* Interview 'Artists Reflect on September 11: Colum McCann' by Julie Bloom, The New York Times. 09/09/2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VC-9HZbn5XU&index=2&list=PL310786C5CAEA667E – Accessed 09/07/2020.

5 This idea was presented by José Saramago in an interview to the Brazilian newspaper *A Folha de São Paulo* in 1997. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/1997/10/17/ilustrada/1.html>. Accessed 30/12/2020.

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# *"Necessary fantasy": The Presence of Fantastic in John Banville's* Birchwood *and* Mefisto

# *"Fantasia necessária": A presença do fantástico em* Birchwood *e* Mefisto *de John Banville*

Natalia Bergamin Retamero

**Abstract:** *Among the many aspects of John Banville's writing, the fantastic is underscored. In this respect, two of his novels reveal significant material for analysis:* Birchwood *(1973) and* Mefisto *(1986). Besides the repetition of themes such as the double and the search for an organizing force in the world, the presence of twin siblings is another interesting similarity of the novels. In addition, theories of the fantastic will certainly enrich the interpretation of these novels and contribute to a different perspective of the fantastic in Ireland. As Banville's home country, Ireland has influenced his writing and because of this nation's long practice of fantastic and gothic literature,* Birchwood *and* Mefisto *can be considered a contemporary expression of these traditions. The notions of the fantastic added to the Irish context provide a valuable analysis of John Banville's novels and a greater understanding of Irish literature.*

**Keywords:** *Fantastic; John Banville; Contemporary Irish Literature.*

**Resumo:** *Entre os muitos aspectos presentes na escrita de John Banville, o fantástico se destaca. A esse respeito, dois de seus romances, demonstram ter material significativo para análise:* Birchwood *(1973) e* Mefisto *(1986). Além da repetição de temas como o duplo e a busca por uma força organizadora no mundo, a presença de irmãos gêmeos é outra semelhança relevante nos romances. Além disso, as teorias do fantástico certamente enriquecem a interpretação desses romances e contribuem para uma perspectiva diferente a respeito do fantástico na Irlanda. Como país natal de Banville, a Irlanda influenciou sua escrita, e por causa da prática de longa data dessa nação com a literatura fantástica e gótica,* Birchwood *e* Mefisto *podem ser considerados uma expressão contemporânea dessas tradições. As noções de fantástico quando inseridas no contexto irlandês fornecem uma análise valiosa dos romances de John Banville e uma maior compreensão da literatura irlandesa.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Fantástico; John Banville; Literatura Irlandesa Contemporânea.*

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The tradition of Irish literature is extensive and meaningful, touching on various themes and genres throughout the last centuries and it can be said that the fantastic is, to a great extent, part of this tradition. Bruce Stewart, for example, claims in his introduction to the collection *That Other World* (1998) that the fantastic in Irish studies has been treated "as an intrinsic property of the national literature" (1). Ib Johansen agrees, adding that "the fantastic certainly plays an immensely important role in Irish literature" (51), with the issues surrounding national identity as a probable stimulus for the development of this literary trait. Therefore, the reason for such a close relationship between Irish letters and fantastic writing may be justified by the country's close relationship with Celtic folklore or even with its troubled history; nevertheless, it remains that the fantastic should be considered as fully belonging to Irish literature.

Among the great writers Ireland has produced, John Banville is an important contemporary presence with a career that is impressive both in length and quality. While it is challenging to choose from such a vast body of work, it is necessary to focus on a few aspects of Banville's writing so that one can aspire to develop an analysis that is worthy of this author's brilliance. Therefore, considering the place the fantastic has in Banville's homeland it seems valuable to search for uses and expressions of this literary expression in his fiction. In other words, this paper aims to understanding how John Banville utilizes the fantastic in his narratives. Besides, Banville's position as a contemporary Irish writer also contributes to this discussion since it allows for the question of whether or not there is a place for the fantastic in the contemporary context.

Using two of Banville's novels, *Birchwood* (1973) and *Mefisto* (1986), and a variety of bibliographical sources, such as Derek Hand's *John Banville – Exploring Fictions* (2002) and Rüdiger Imhof's John *Banville – A Critical Introduction* (1997), this article aims at becoming a valuable, even though brief, addition to the contemporary studies on John Banville's work.

As regards the novels, it is fundamental to present an outline of their plots. Birchwood, for starters, narrates the story of Gabriel Godkin, his family, and the estate he is destined to inherit. Like many Big House novels, it portrays the complicated relationship between the Irish Catholics and the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy in terms of the conflicts of the country and the ruin of the house, both physical and ideological. However, it does that in an interesting way, using not only by the use of common themes belonging to the gothic tradition but also adding elements from other genres.

Besides presenting the characters of the Godkin family, the first part of the novel sets the scene for Gabriel's adventure, which takes place in the second part. He believes he has a sister and joins the circus so that he can travel the country and find her. However, the social

and political instability of Ireland makes this a difficult and brutal experience. Eventually, he comes back to Birchwood, amid a conflict between the Big House and the Irish rebels, ready to face the truth about his family. Even though this is a painful process, in the end, Gabriel completes the process of acceptance regarding his origin.

On the other hand, *Mefisto* is very clear about the main character's origin. The novel starts with the birth of Gabriel Swan and his deceased twin brother, a character that becomes present in his absence throughout the narrative. Later, the novel follows Swan's development, his connection with mathematical practices and his relationship with the people that currently live in the Big House nearby. In fact, it is in the Ashburn house that Gabriel meets Felix, the devilish character, and where he is later injured in a fire.

Then, the novel deals with Gabriel's recovery and his latter struggle with disfigurement. New characters enter Swan's life, once again with the assistance of Felix, and Gabriel finds work with a mathematician, analysing data. This occupation allows him to develop his abilities with numbers and deepens his reflections about the possible guiding order of the world.

Before diving into the examination of the literary material, it is necessary to discuss what constitutes the fantastic for the present analysis and after some research into this area of literary criticism, it has become apparent that Tzvetan Todorov's work is still relevant. Even in 2014, more than forty years after the original publication of Todorov's *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique* (1970), Eugenio Bolongaro claims that "Todorov's contribution, while certainly subject to criticism, remains pivotal to the discussion" of the fantastic (62). In his article, Bolongaro discusses in more depth the criticism that has emerged against Todorov's work; however, it seems more productive to focus on Todorov's writings while keeping in mind that his words are not meant to be read here as universal truths.

For this text the fantastic, then, is to be seen concerning the marvellous and the uncanny; it is the moment when the reader is not sure if the action he or she is witnessing is a product of the supernatural or an odd, but explainable, event. Although Todorov's explanation was "conceptually clear, rigorous, elegant and systematic" (Bolongaro 61) it still leaves a lot open for interpretation when applied to actual texts. Nevertheless, it can be understood that such fluidity in the theoretical definition indicates the instability of the concept itself, perhaps because the fantastic deals with uncertainty, its definition cannot be strict. Or, as Bolongaro puts it: "The fantastic, the uncanny and the marvellous are not airtight categories" and their "heuristic and explicatory value can be increased rather than lessened precisely for being porous" (75).

This ambivalence resonates with the Irish context, where the ideas of Irishness and Britishness have long been intertwining, so it makes sense that artists immersed in this reality

would use the fantastic in their writings. The idea that the fantastic also works to reinvigorate "established conventions of mimetic fiction" (Lelen 11) again makes sense for an Irish author because it allows for the questioning of patterns and conventions, something that Irish literature is known for, especially considering its most notable modernist writers, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. Also, accepting that the fantastic can be responsible for a renewal of conventions and established stories, makes it possible for a different reading of John Banville's texts, for example.

In both *Birchwood* and *Mefisto*, Banville uses known stories and genres, but he adds elements, among them the fantastic, which result in a fresh perspective and original novels. With this juxtaposition of genres, Banville appears to highlight that "one form, or genre or discourse, can never fully encompass Ireland as an idea or a story" (Hand 31). Besides, the transgression of generic boundaries results in the "ironic playfulness that is the hallmark of post-modern literature" (Bolongaro 63).

In fact, Birchwood takes advantage of the Big House genre to explore the life of Gabriel Godkin among his family, however, the novel is not limited by the grounds of this Ascendancy estate. Narrated by Gabriel himself, the story of Birchwood is an attempt to comprehend the past and so it tells the story of the Godkins from before Gabriel's birth until he is the only one left. The first half of the book is concerned with Gabriel's family, his grandparents, parents, and later his aunt and cousin, and ends with him leaving in search for answers regarding his lost twin sister. In the second part, Gabriel joins Prospero's circus and travels the country, being a small part of their act, which allows him to see the Irish countryside beyond his Ascendancy property. When the social agitation of the country meets him, Gabriel returns home where he can finally admit his true family story, that there is no lost twin sister, that his cousin Michael is actually his brother, and that they come from an incestuous relationship between his father and his aunt Martha.

While the house of *Birchwood* is central to the narrative's development, it is also significant that Gabriel spends half of the book wandering through Ireland with the circus, allowing the novel to approach different themes than the ones usually present in Big House novels. The famine, for instance, so pivotal to Irish history and culture, is depicted in Birchwood under a different perspective than most Big House novels, with Gabriel seeing it first-hand and living the adversities of a shortage of food in the countryside. Additionally, Gabriel's quest for his lost sister, which results in his acceptance of his true family situation, can also place the novel in the *Bildungsroman* tradition.

From the title, it is clear that *Mefisto* is also set against an established tradition, in this case, the Faustian tale, but Banville adds other elements to enrich the story. The main character

of this narrative is also called Gabriel and his life, alongside his family, is once more the focus of the narrative. Although Big House of Ashburn is not part of the Irish Ascendancy, it deeply affects Gabriel Swan's life since that is the place where he spends a great part of his young life and where he contracts the injuries that will influence his adult life. Ireland in this novel becomes more urban, with Gabriel Swan living in a city that resembles Dublin, in the second half of the book. However, this does not restrain the possibilities for the novel to meet with the fantastic, as it will be discussed shortly.

As *Birchwood*, *Mefisto* is filled with references to other texts, and it promotes discussions that go beyond subjects related to the lives of the characters, since both novels have an underlying concern with what organizes the world. While Gabriel Godkin focuses on the difficulties of narrating in the contemporary world, Gabriel Swan's aptitude lies with numbers, yet they are both seeking an explanation that will give a greater meaning to their lives. In fact, they are searching for direction, "for the whatness of things" (Imhof 59), or, as Mark O'Connell (2010) would say, "both Gabriels are fundamentally preoccupied with the notion of harmony, of finding some kind of unity of self and experience" (131).

So, it seems natural to observe these two novels in proximity due to their similarities, the most evident one being the name of the main character, and this structure allows for a better understanding of Banville's use of the fantastic in a wider sense. The issue of the narrator in these novels, for example, can be seen through the lenses of the fantastic if one considers the fantastic as moments of uncertainty. The fact that first-person narrators are unreliable is well established throughout literary criticism, and once the reader is aware of that fact, the narrative becomes a sequence of dubious scenes where there is no way of knowing with certainty what is in fact true. Besides, Banville's narrators are telling their story from memory, another element that is known to be unreliable and easily influenced.

Even though most of the situations presented in *Birchwood* and *Mefisto* are consistent with realism, because of the way they are told, the sense of mystery remains. When the narrator makes himself present in the middle of the action, he reminds the reader that this is fiction, and Gabriel Godkin's interferences have a way of doing that in a casual but compelling manner. While this may not be what Todorov had in mind, it is interesting to think that moments such as these are glimpses into the fantastic world:

> Such scenes as this I see, or imagine I see, no difference, through a glass sharply . . . Indeed, now that I think of it, I feel it is not a glass through which I see, but rather a gathering of perfect prisms . . . Outside my memories, this silence and harmony, this brilliance, I find again in that second silent world which exists, independent, ordered by unknown laws, in the depths of mirrors. This is how I remember such scenes. If I provide something otherwise than this, be assured that I am inventing (13).

Here Godkin not only admits that he is an unreliable narrator, but he also opens the possibility for a reality that is beyond rational thought, which even if just for a second, leads the reader to believe that there is more in this story than previously expected. Gabriel Swan also makes himself present in his narrative which brings attention to the deceptive nature of fiction, and in certain moments of the novel this creates instances of uncertainty, for the reader is not sure where to place his or her trust. For example, Swan questions himself amidst a recollection whether it is possible that the scene he is remembering actually happened, to which he answers, "it's what I remember, what does it matter whether it's possible or not" (39). Following the tone of uncertainty, this passage ends with a question mark, leaving the reader in an endless state of doubt, prolonging the moment of the fantastic.

Of *Mefisto*, Derek Hand affirms that there is "the sense, for the reader at least, of a murky, uncertain place where nothing is fully comprehensible" (121), and while Birchwood creates the feeling of confusion with the disruption of the narrative, in Mefisto Banville is no longer constrained by facts or the necessity of a coherent narrative. His novel offers "unlikely juxtapositions and fantastic connections where anything is possible and anything can happen" (Hand 121). Banville appears to use the fantastic as a different way to tackle the issue of unreliable narrators, blended with the uncertainty of the fantastic, fittingly to contemporary times where realism cannot be fully trusted to portray the individual.

The characters that surround the narrators in these novels also bring the sense that anything can happen, Mr Kasperl and Professor Kosov, although fundamental to Gabriel Swan's search for meaning are not approached in-depth and their academic activities are not clearly defined. Professor Kosov is searching for the meaning of life (170) but what that entails exactly is not explicitly discussed. And while Mr Kasperl was strange, "not like the rest of us" (96), Felix is by far the most intriguing character in Swan's narrative, something that his aunt "might have invented" (40). His presence in Ashburn and his relation to Mr Kasperl remains surrounded by a mysterious quality; nevertheless, it is in the second half of the book that he becomes a truly enigmatic figure.

Everything changes for Gabriel Swan after the burning of Ashburn, even his relationship with his own body, so the fact that Felix continues to exist around Gabriel throughout the novel brings up the question: "What does Felix really want from him?" Meaningfully, Derek Hand describes Felix as a character that "seems to be in control of events and lives, pulling invisible strings and forever making things happen" (121). Felix's existence, then, adds the sense that something bigger is about to be revealed at all times, that the order and harmony Gabriel is searching for exists in his narrative at least. Although by the end of the novel such revelation is still expected, looking at Felix inside the Faustian tradition shows that

he is the devilish character, his role in the novel takes the form and aura of the uncertainty that surrounds him which is, if not explained, at least justified.

Gabriel Swan does not fully understand Felix because he is meant to be an incomprehensible character, a representation of the complexities of the world that the narrator cannot explain. This way, John Banville seems to use the fantastic to add meaning to the character of Felix, putting him on the long list of references present in *Mefisto*, while at the same time constructing a character that speaks to the central argument of the novel: whether the world is governed by chance or by order.

Perhaps there is not a character like Felix in *Birchwood*. Nevertheless, the Godkin family is capable of creating a similar sense of mystery, with madness being associated with them more than once. Gabriel's mother, for example, is said to wander through the corridors "a bit mad" (7) and the Godkins are described as "stalked by an insatiable and glittering madness born" (8). While the veracity of this madness is not fully discussed in the novel, by presenting these characters as mad, Banville puts them in the realm of things that cannot be completely understood. The uncertainty that exists around the Godkins is used as a way of differentiating them from others, as indicative that there is something yet to be explained about them, which happens near the end of the story.

The deaths in *Birchwood* add to this sense of the fantastic and inexplicable. Because their circumstances are unusual, Gabriel's account of Grandad Godkin's last moments, for example, appear to be between dream and reality. He talks of a "shimmering pale figure" (53) and sleepiness (54) so it is not clear if Gabriel actually saw his grandfather leave for the woods or if he imagined that scene after they found him there. And in fact, the scene with Grandpa Godkin "curled like a stillborn in the grass" and "his false teeth sunk to the gums" (54) into the nearest tree speaks, once again, to the oddness of this family.

Granny Godkin's departure is equally strange, with a "rendered purplish mass in the chair" and her two feet in their "scorched button boots" (72) as the only things that remained from her corpse. Upon meeting such a scene, the narrator, and his family, are unable to talk about it and until the doctor arrives and provides an explanation, they appear to be stuck in a moment of the fantastic, unsure of how to explain their relative's end. However, Gabriel seems to prolong that feeling of uncertainty even after the doctor's reasoning that Granny Godkin was a rare case of spontaneous combustion; he has a notion that "the house itself had something to do with it", and perhaps because "Birchwood had grown weary of her" he questions if it assassinated her (75).

While it does not matter how she died, it is interesting that a narrative that is supposed to help Gabriel understand his past leans towards the less logical explanation and

personifies the house of Birchwood. In a text so influenced by the Big House genre, it is expected that the estate would acquire such great importance, but in this particular novel, it also enlarges the idea that Gabriel does not understand his family completely and therefore has to grab onto unlikely ideas to explain them. Fire, another common theme in Big House stories, is here connected with the difficulty of organizing thoughts into a narrative, of talking about the "unmentionable horror" (74), which, in a way, repeats itself in *Mefisto*.

Similar to Gabriel Godkin's story, it is because of a house on fire that Gabriel Swan was forced to change his life, but in the most recent novel, the fire affects the narrator physically as well. The pages following the burning of Ashburn bring forth the complexity that it is to narrate pain and the effects of medicine on human consciousness. Gabriel's use of language in this part of the novel indicates that he is in a state only comprehensible through metaphors and references to other texts. He says, for example, that "pain was the beast my angels kept at bay" (124), comparing drugs to the agents of the Christin God, and that he was Marsyas "lashed to my tree, the god busy about me with his knife" (124), indicating that his suffering was similar to a punishment from a Greek god.

And while there is an explanation for his state of mind, the medicine in his system, the sense that something of his experience is still missing from his narrative remains, that even though this is an explainable event, it leads Gabriel to a world he cannot fully comprehend: "I had never known, never dreamed. Never. The loneliness. The being-beyond. Indescribable. Where I went, no one could follow" (125). This moment in Gabriel's life works as a form of transition into the second part of the novel that is, in a way, a mirrored reflection of the first part. Following Derek Hand's argument (127), the painkillers work to keep Gabriel inside the endless reflection that this duplication of the plot provides and because the narrator steps into the mirror (132) it is fitting that he does so in a state of confusion.

The circularity of *Mefisto* lies in Gabriel's continuous pursuit for order in the world around him, and his relentless concern with the unity and its functions is possibly connected with his absent twin brother. Even though Gabriel never meets his deceased sibling, this is part of his identity as seen from the beginning of the narrative where he mentions Castor, the famous twin brother of Polydeuces in Greek mythology. It fascinates the narrator that there is no logic in the event of his brother dying and not him, his existence is completely due to chance. Because Gabriel is constantly looking for something hard to define and perhaps beyond the laws of logic, he built a narrative that follows these definitions. The mystery of the double, of two individuals that look identical but are different people, runs through *Mefisto* because Gabriel Swan is, and is not, the part of a duo. Swan's quest appears to be,

subconsciously, for his identity and his place in the world, and the structure of the novel indicates that this search is circular and, at times, meets with the unexplainable.

While Banville seems to point to the futility of Swan's inquiries since the character does not achieve his goals by the end of the novel, the presence of the fantastic may indicate that in explorations such as this, things are not always clear and logical. Although Gabriel may be stuck in the constant reflection of the two parts of his story, with no apparent exit, the reader goes through that same journey and gets to ponder on it. Considering that the fantastic is an effect that depends a great deal on the reader's reaction to the text, it is appropriate to use it in a narrative that wants to include him or her in the novel.

Likewise, the issue of the twin affects *Birchwood*, first in Gabriel's relentless search for his lost twin sister, and finally in the revelation that his cousin Michael is his brother. Most interestingly, in this case, it is not the existence of Michael, despite the unconventionality of the incestuous relationship that originated him and Gabriel, it is the state of denial in which the narrator lives. It would be expected that upon meeting Michael the similarities in their appearance would give away their secret kinship, but the novel keeps it covert until the end, hiding it with Gabriel's conviction that he has a twin sister instead.

His conviction is upheld after a feverish dream (78) and, as in *Mefisto*, this search is related to the narrator's identity: "A part of me stolen, yes, that was a thrilling notion. I was incomplete, and would remain so until I found her" (79). However, because the novel reveals that Gabriel's ideas were not completely unreasonable, his quest goes beyond the necessity of self-definition into the process of acceptance. The fictitious twin sister Rose, then, becomes the artefact the narrator uses to deal with the fact that his family lied to him, and his origin is highly complicated. Apart from dealing himself with this, Gabriel also uses it as a way to intrigue the reader, maintaining the notion that there is a secret regarding the Godkins, even if it is not Rose.

The manner in which the narrator uses language assists in building the sense that there is something unresolved, even though he claims to be secure of his beliefs: "my thoughts turned again and again to my lost sister, of whose existence I was now *convinced*, but in a detached, *unreal* way, I cannot explain" (84-5, emphasis added). The choice of words in this passage, for example, leaves the reader unsure if Gabriel's certainty is trustworthy, but as the novel unfolds, he is able to accept that Rose is not real. Nevertheless, this uncertainty is an important part of Gabriel's journey into acceptance. His lost twin sister is a "necessary fantasy" because according to Gabriel "if [he] had not a solid reason to be here, travelling the roads with this preposterous band, then [his] world threatened to collapse" (132).

John Banville uses the fantastic in this narrative connected with the questions of the double and all its mysteries to build the argument that in the process of understanding and accepting one's origin, it is necessary to live a situation of unpredictability and uneasiness. While the usage Banville makes of the fantastic is certainly different from what one expects when first approaching fantastic narratives, it has become apparent that John Banville indeed takes advantage of the fantastic as an element to enrich his texts in a unique way. Hedwig Schwall comments on Banville's ability to switch "effortlessly between the commonsensical and the fantastic, between the nuanced subjectivity and wild objectification" (97) in the novel T*he Infinities* (2009), and it seems that he was already doing that in his earlier novels.

The various ways *Birchwood* and *Mefisto* express uncertainty, from the unreliability of their narrators to the issues of twins and doubles, are a confirmation that Banville's writing was influenced by the Irish literature's leaning towards the fantastic. Although many critics have discussed whether or not John Banville's work is part of the Irish literary tradition, the present analysis shows that even though the influence Ireland had on his work is different, and perhaps discreet, it exists. With Derek Hand calling the Irish post-colonial context an "unconscious influence" (10), then this unique representation of Irishness is, arguably, what makes John Banville an essential part of the contemporary Irish canon.

In the broader context of contemporary literature, Banville's novels also help build the case that there is a place for the fantastic in the current world, especially considering that uncertainty and apprehension are common themes of contemporaneity. Both Gabriels can, therefore, be seen as representations of the contemporary subject, endlessly searching for order, harmony, and the meaning of life in a world that appears to exist circularly and repetitively.

Although Banville's texts do not provide a simple answer for the afflictions of the current world, they allow for a reflection on them that may prove fruitful depending on the reader. Besides, the inclusion of the fantastic in these narratives seems like an urge to accept that some things are unexplainable and that does not diminish their importance.

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# *Weaving a Textual Web: Homer, Joyce, and Molly Calypso Penelope Bloom*

## *Tecendo uma rede textual: Homero, Joyce e Molly Calypso Penelope Bloom*

Patrick O'Neill

**Abstract:** *In James Joyce's* Ulysses*, numerous playful allusions to Homer's* Odyssey *are combined with a variety of onomastic and etymological games that invite consideration especially of the portrayal of Molly Bloom and her husband Leopold Bloom.*

**Keywords:** *James Joyce's* Ulysses*; textual games; Homeric allusions; literary onomastics; literary etymology.*

**Resumo:** *Em* Ulisses*, de James Joyce, numerosas alusões lúdicas à* Odisseia *de Homero são combinadas com uma variedade de jogos onomásticos e etimológicos que convidam à consideração, especialmente, do retrato de Molly Bloom e seu marido Leopold Bloom.*

**Palavras-chave:** Ulisses *de James Joyce; jogos textuais; alusões homéricas; onomástica literária; etimologia literária.*

The most famous chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses* is undoubtedly the final one, consisting of the uninterrupted late-night bedroom reverie of Molly Bloom, presented in the form of a 36-page-long monologue, largely unpunctuated, largely unworried by grammatical niceties, and startlingly forthright about matters digestive and sexual. Joyce once notoriously asserted that he had included so many enigmas and puzzles in *Ulysses* that it would keep the professors busy for centuries. Published in 1922, the novel has certainly kept the professors (among many others) busy for very close to a first century by this point, and its multileveled fascination shows no signs at all of diminishing. The title *Ulysses* immediately evokes the hero of Homer's *Odyssey*, known as Odysseus in Greek and later as Ulysses in Latin, and one iconic episode among many in the *Odyssey* has the hero's faithful wife Penelope, thinking her husband surely dead after

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twenty years away from home, reluctantly agreeing to marry one of many suitors when she has finished a particular task of weaving, but postponing that day by unweaving by night what she has woven by day. One notable element among many in Joyce's intricately structured novel is that it famously weaves a textual web of literary references to and resonances of the *Odyssey*, and the present paper examines some of the multiple interwoven threads in that web as they relate, essentially playfully, to the narrative presentation of Joyce's Penelope, namely Molly Bloom.

Homer's *Odyssey*, composed about 700 BC, and Joyce's *Ulysses*, composed more than two-and-a-half millennia later, both centre on the protracted wanderings of a central protagonist. The ten-year maritime wanderings of Homer's protagonist, Odysseus, king of Ithaca, following on ten years already as a participant in the Trojan War, are reflected in the eighteen-hour Dublin wanderings of Joyce's protagonist, the mild-mannered Leopold Bloom, a not very successful canvasser for newspaper advertisements, a Jew regarded with quite considerable hostility by some of his fellow Dubliners. Since Joyce's own day, readers of Ulysses have agreed by common consensus to refer to the eighteen numbered chapters of the novel by titles that allude to Homer's *Odyssey*. Six of the eighteen chapters, for example, are named for male figures from the *Odyssey* ("Telemachus", "Nestor", "Proteus", "Aeolus", "Cyclops", and "Eumaeus"), and six are named for female figures ("Calypso", "Scylla and Charybdis", "Sirens", "Nausicaa", "Circe", and "Penelope").

Joyce used these titles when the chapters were first published individually in *The Little Review*; he omitted them and used numbers instead when the novel appeared in book form in 1922. He teasingly made sure, however, that they would become part of readers' responses to the text by providing each of two friends, Carlo Linati and Stuart Gilbert, with a set of detailed Homeric correspondences (Levine 132-33) – though the two were not insignificantly different in a number of details, very possibly as part of his avowed strategy to keep the professors busy for generations. Some editions of *Ulysses* resurrect the Homeric titles in a table of contents, but whether they are actually present on a contents page or not, they constitute overt invitations to detect playful resonances of the world of the *Odyssey*.

Throughout *Ulysses*, as in his other works, Joyce indulges in etymological and onomastic play on his characters' names. The etymologies of the Homeric names involved, though in many cases vigorously disputed by scholars, also more than occasionally suggest playfully interesting onomastic linkages to Joyce's characters. The title itself, *Ulysses*, overtly casts Bloom in the role of Odysseus. The "Cyclops" chapter, for example, has Bloom, as a very reasonable man, attempting to defuse the rabidly one-sided anti-English bigotry of a loud-mouthed Guinness-drinker in a Dublin pub, thus playfully echoing Odysseus's blinding of the monstrous, murderous, and one-eyed Cyclops in the *Odyssey*.

But there are other characters who are briefly and likewise playfully also cast in the role of *Ulysses*. One of them is an anonymous chimney sweep, for example, who with his long brushes carried carelessly over his shoulder nearly blinds the acerbic narrator of "Cyclops" (*U* 12.2-3), thus teasingly casting the sweep (who is never heard of again) very momentarily in the role of *Ulysses* and the rancorous narrator in that of another Cyclops. Another quasi-*Ulysses* is the yarn-spinning sailor D.B. Murphy in the "Eumaeus" chapter, whose tall tales playfully reflect the tall tales Homer's Odysseus sometimes finds it necessary to tell. Murphy's tall tales urgently invite disbelief – possibly even including his claim that his "little woman", another Penelope, is still faithfully waiting for him at home after his seven years sailing the seven seas (*Ulysses* 16.419-20).

Several characters in *Ulysses*, that is to say (Bloom, the sweep, Murphy), may be cast as parodic transfigurations of a single character in Homer (namely Odysseus). Conversely, and this brings us to Molly Bloom, a single character in *Ulysses* (namely Molly) may be cast as playfully reflecting qualities of several characters in Homer – and in Molly's case these include *all* of the several female figures identified by the chapter names "Calypso", "Scylla and Charybdis", "Sirens", "Nausicaa", "Circe", and "Penelope". Almost all these Homeric characters are beautiful, like Molly – and several of them are downright monsters. The aspects of Molly's character that are playfully suggested by the text may be regarded as *hypothetically* seen through her husband's eyes, the central reason for whose protracted absence from his home, trudging the streets of Dublin, is his painful awareness of Molly's plan to receive an afternoon admirer, the notorious womanizer Blazes Boylan, in the Blooms' own family bed.

Molly shares something else with various mythological figures. Mysterious origins are a common feature of the protagonists of many myths and legends, and Molly's origins are interestingly veiled on both sides of her family. Leopold Bloom, of mixed Hungarian, Irish, and Jewish origins, grew up in Dublin; Molly Bloom, of mixed Spanish, Irish, and Jewish origins, grew up in the much more exotic location of Gibraltar, a British outpost at the southernmost tip of Europe, only a dozen or so miles from the nearest point of Africa, and particularly noted for its gigantic Rock. Molly Bloom was born Marion Tweedy, daughter of the Irish soldier Brian Tweedy, who served in the British Army at Gibraltar in the mid-1880s (*Ulysses* 15.784). Tweedy's military rank is mentioned several times – and is presented as a matter of considerable doubt. Bloom remembers meeting "the old major" (*Ulysses* 12.1108) after Tweedy leaves the army and returns to Dublin, and he relates in conversation that Molly was the daughter of "Major Brian Tweedy" (*Ulysses* 16.1441-42); the unnamed narrator of the "Ithaca" chapter likewise refers with ever increasing deference to "major Brian Tweedy" (*Ulysses* 17.55-56), "major Brian Cooper Tweedy" (*Ulysses* 17.1420), and "the late Major Brian Cooper Tweedy,

Royal Dublin Fusiliers, of Gibraltar" (*Ulysses* 17.2082-83). Bloom promotes him to an even higher rank in the "Circe" chapter as "Majorgeneral Brian Tweedy" (*Ulysses* 15.778-79). Molly's late-night memory of her father's duties as including the drilling of troops (*Ulysses* 18.766-67), however, and another character's memory of him as "the old drummajor" (*Ulysses* 11.508) make it much more than likely that he was in fact merely a sergeant-major, not of officer rank at all, a likelihood supported by his daughter Molly's relatively uneducated use of English.

It is typical of the games played in *Ulysses* that Tweedy's middle name, Cooper, suggests a punning reference to his time in Gibraltar, for the Greek name of Gibraltar, *Calpe*, has been said to derive from the noun *kalpê*, meaning a "cup" and referring to the cup-shaped Bay of Gibraltar as seen from the sea – and the Greek noun is etymologically related to the Low German *kup*, a wooden "tankard", and the occupational name *Kuper*, a maker of such vessels (Buck 348-49; Hanks 140). The name Tweedy, finally, which punningly suggests the weaving of cloth, may also be read as parodically suggesting the mingled strands of Molly's birth, since tweed is "a wool-and-cotton fabric usually with two colours combined in the yarn" (Gilbert 142-43). Molly's mixed origins even on her father's side might also be inferred from the onomastic fact that the name *Brian* is Irish, *Cooper* is English, and *Tweedy* suggests Scottish ancestry.

As for her mother, Molly seems to know little more about "my mother whoever she was" than that she had a "lovely name" (*Ulysses* 18.846), the exotically alliterative "Lunita Laredo" (*Ulysses* 18.848), and she later suggests that Lunita was of Spanish and Jewish origins (*Ulysses* 18.1184). Bloom's assumption that Molly owes her southern looks to a Moorish strain in her ancestry – "It's the blood of the south. Moorish" (*Ulysses* 13.968-69) – contributes a further layer of uncertain relevance to Lunita's origins – and thus also to Molly's.

*Lunita* ("little moon") is a given name used in Spain by both Christians and Jews, and it has been proposed that the Spanish novelist Vicente Blasco Ibáñez's novella *Luna Benamor* (1909) may have suggested the name Lunita. That story relates the ill-starred love affair of Luna, a beautiful Sephardic Jew, known as Lunita, "the Belle of Gibraltar", and a young Spanish diplomat posted to Gibraltar (Herring 126-40). At least one prominent Jewish family in turn-of-the-century Gibraltar, meanwhile, was called Laredo (Laredo 1978). That family name derives from the place name Laredo, which derives in turn from a Late Latin *glaretum* ("rocky beach") – and the Spanish town of Laredo in question is a popular bathing place on the Bay of Biscay best known for its annual Battle of Flowers carnival (Zubillaga Gutiérrez). Molly's mother's family name thus very economically manages to produce no fewer than five playful resonances: first, to suggest Lunita's Spanish, Jewish, and possibly Moorish origins; second, to serve as an onomastic anticipation of Molly's flower-named husband,

Bloom, who also uses the alias Henry Flower; third, given the quasi-musical composition of the name (*la, re, do*), to anticipate Molly's career as a professional singer; fourth, to evoke the Rock of Gibraltar, surrounded by its beach; and fifth, to anticipate, as we shall see, Bloom's self-satisfying pleasures focused on a particular rock on the beach of the "Nausicaa" chapter.

Lunita's own true origins, however, and her history, remain entirely veiled. Critics have concluded that she is in all likelihood a prostitute – and have suggested that in consequence even Tweedy's paternity is less than certain (Raleigh 18, 20). Whether Molly's parents were ever legally married, a highly unlikely possibility; whether her mother simply abandoned her; how likely it was in British army circles in the 1870s and eighties that a serving soldier not of officer rank would or could single-handedly raise a daughter of the regiment: these are all questions whose answers are likewise veiled in darkness. Molly and her mother, indeed, are both, in one sense or another, ladies of the night: Molly's bedroom reverie takes place in the middle of the night, Lunita's name and very likely her profession associate her with the darkness of the night.

We first encounter Molly herself in humorously presented mythological guise in the fourth chapter of *Ulysses*, the chapter known as "Calypso", which also imparts the information that Bloom and his wife reside at number 7 Eccles Street in Dublin. Joyce undoubtedly chose the particular street address because his university friend John Francis Byrne once lived at that address, where Joyce himself had been a visitor. But he also seized on the particular street number, seven, because Homer's Odysseus is held captive for seven years on the mythical island of the beautiful and amorous nymph Calypso. While Homer's Calypso is eventually ordered by the gods to release Odysseus, pining for home, and let him proceed on his troubled voyage towards his native Ithaca, Bloom has been kept in more or less happy thrall by his own domestic Calypso, the beautiful Molly, since their marriage almost sixteen years ago.

The name Calypso is derived from the Greek verb *kalyptô* ("I hide, I veil"), and scholars consider her to be so called because, true to her name, she hid (*ekalypse*) Odysseus on her mythical island. Hiding neither her charms nor her amorous intentions, she also provides a humorous parallel reference to Molly, who has a framed illustration entitled *The Bath of the Nymph* hanging over her bed (*Ulysses* 4.369), and who is planning an amorous encounter that same afternoon. The mythological Calypso, moreover, as daughter of the Titan Atlas, is associated (like Molly) with both rocks and Gibraltar, for the Atlas Mountains on the African side of the Straits of Gibraltar are named for the mythological Atlas, condemned by an angry Zeus to spend an eternity holding up the sky on his shoulders.

Molly in suggested guise as Calypso, daughter of Atlas, provides a parodic link between Atlas and her soldier father, Brian Tweedy, constrained by military duty to keep earth

and sky asunder in Victorian Gibraltar on behalf of the British empire. There also sixteen-year-old Molly plays the role of Calypso to young Lieutenant Harry Mulvey (*Ulysses* 18.779) – another quasi-Ulysses figure – entertaining him with alfresco erotic pleasures on the Rock of Gibraltar before allowing him to proceed on his maritime way, in a ship appropriately called the H.M.S. Calypso (*Ulysses* 18.837). If Greek *kalpê* means "cup", meanwhile, it is playfully appropriate that Joyce's "Calypso" opens with Molly still in bed, hiding a letter from her lover under her pillow, while Bloom prepares her morning cup of tea (*Ulysses* 4.14).

Homer's Odysseus encounters in passing two other females who use their beauty to more immediately threatening ends than Calypso. Homer's Sirens are beautiful but dangerously seductive creatures in female form who employ their musical rather than their physical charms for the destruction of passing sailors, leading them to founder on maritime rocks by the distracting beauty of the songs they hauntingly sing. The Sirens of the *Odyssey* are associated both with rocks and with the power of song – as is Molly Bloom, born on the Rock of Gibraltar and now a well-known professional singer.

The two Dublin barmaids of the chapter "Sirens" in *Ulysses*, Miss Lydia Douce and Miss Mina Kennedy, who as barmaids in a notoriously bibulous Dublin practice their own arts of encouraging pleasurable self-destruction, are Joyce's humorous versions of these dangerous divas. Stuart Gilbert observes that the name sirens derives from two Semitic roots signifying "the song of enthralment" (250), and the chapter "Sirens" is intricately constructed on musical principles. Gilbert also noted the musical connotations, appropriate for the chapter, of the names Lydia (as in the Lydian mode) and Mina (as in a minor key) (254n).

The name Lydia Douce combines exoticism and sweetness. The given name Lydia, of Greek origin, originally meant a woman from Lydia, once a kingdom in far-off Asia Minor (Hanks 814), while the family name Douce was originally a nickname deriving from the Latin *dulcis*, meaning "sweet" (Hanks 182). Appropriately for the mythological context of the sweetly singing but ultimately murderous sirens of the Odyssey, however, etymology suggests that Joyce's pair combine sweetness with more ominous characteristics. For the name Kennedy derives from the Irish *Ó Cinnéidigh*, "descendant of Cinnéidigh", where the personal name refers either to someone whose head (Irish ceann) is, martially, "armoured, helmeted" or – like Medusa, perhaps – to someone whose head is strikingly "ugly, horrible" (MacLysaght 176; Hanks 339).

While Molly appears in "Calypso", she is not present in "Sirens", nor is she present in the chapter "Scylla and Charybdis", featuring a free-flowing literary debate in the National Library. The debate and the chapter both take place under the ominous sponsorship of two mythological monsters. Frank Budgen reports Joyce's comment that "the Aristotelean and

Platonic philosophies are the monsters that lie in wait in the narrows for the thinker" (109), and here the rock that is Aristotle and the whirlpool that is Plato are represented respectively by the twin monsters Scylla and Charybdis.

Beauty and mortal danger are once again linked, even if only parodically. Scylla, once a beautiful maiden in one version of the legend, was transformed into a six-headed monster who barked like a dog, inhabited a cavern on the side of a massive rock on the Italian side of the Straits of Messina, and preyed on unwary passing mariners, seizing one in each of her six mouths and devouring them, her rocky position linking her to the Sirens. Her name, Greek *Skylla*, derives, according to some authorities, from a Semitic root, *skoula*, meaning "rock" (Gilbert 81), while for others it derives from the Greek verb *skyllô* ("I rend, I mangle") (Graves 408). While it would be excessively unfair to characterize Molly Bloom as a render of men, she is certainly associated with rocks, more specifically with both the Rock of Gibraltar and Dublin's Howth Head – while one of her favourite exclamations is "O, rocks!" (*Ulysses* 4.343).

Sailors through the Straits of Messina were faced with the life-threatening dilemma of navigating between two monstrous dangers, avoiding both Scylla on the Italian shore and Charybdis on the Sicilian shore. The alternative to Scylla, Charybdis was a monster who lived not on but under a rock on the coast of Sicily, later rationalized as a dangerous whirlpool, opposite the mainland Italian rock of Scylla. While the derivation of the name Charybdis is unknown, Graves suggests the meaning "sucker down" (386), appropriately for a whirlpool – and the similarity to the Greek adjective *charôpos* ("bright-eyed") suggests an onomastic link to the Sirens, beautiful but bad. The association of both monsters with rocky locations is once again readable as suggesting a playful link to Molly Bloom.

Leopold and Molly Bloom have not had full sexual relations since the early death ten years ago of their infant son Rudy, who lived for only eleven days (*Ulysses* 17.2280-81). At least partly in response to this situation, Bloom, under the assumed name Henry Flower, is carrying on a half-heartedly flirtatious correspondence with a lady who claims to be called Martha Clifford, though that name may also be a pseudonym. The anticipated dangers of navigating a safe course between Molly and Martha are humorously reflected in the challenges of a voyage between Scylla and Charybdis – a choice that is also obliquely hinted at in the case of the two musical Sirens Lydia Douce and Mina Kennedy, the former onomastically sweet and the latter onomastically dangerous.

The role of Homer's Nausicaa, beautiful daughter of the king of Phaeacia, is played in Joyce's chapter "Nausicaa" by the winsome damsel Gerty MacDowell, who lives in a dreamy world of cheap romantic fiction in which she herself is the heroine, awaiting the longed-for arrival of her hero in shining armour. "Like the nude nymph on the Blooms' bedroom wall", as

David Hayman felicitously puts it, "Gerty is a figment of the male imagination even in her own eyes" (84). Homer's Nausicaa is a nobly-born young lady of exemplary virtue who discovers a storm-tossed, exhausted Odysseus washed up naked on a beach – and rather than abandoning him to his own devices she immediately takes him to her father and mother for their help. Her name, however, Greek *Nausikâa*, is generally construed as meaning "burner of ships" (Graves 401), from *vaus* ("ship") and *kaiô* ("I set on fire"). Onomastically, at least, that is to say, Homer's Nausicaa is thus not only a virtuous and charitable beauty but also potentially a destroyer, like the beautiful Helen of Troy, whose face notoriously launched a thousand ships – and sank many of them.

Homer's Nausicaa is exemplarily modest; Joyce's is a flirtatious temptress. Homer's Odysseus, stripped naked by the power of the waves, modestly conceals his private parts when addressing Nausicaa; Joyce's Nausicaa, perched on a rock by the seashore and leaning over further and further backwards ostensibly to watch a nearby fireworks display, is at considerable pains to expose her girlish underwear for her Ulysses, her hero at last arrived – namely, at some distance in the gathering dusk, a surreptitiously masturbating Bloom. Gerty's name, as it happens, is a pet form of "Gertrude", a name that combines the elements *gēr* ("spear") and *þrūþ* ("strength") (Hanks 768). Gerty, that is to say, for all her maidenly winsomeness, is onomastically cast as a spear-wielding warrior, a render of men. Seductively perched on her rock, she evokes not only Homer's Nausicaa, but also, though certainly humorously, the man-eating Scylla. Sentimentally casting the self-satisfying Bloom in the role of dark romantic hero, and failing to notice what he is actually doing, she provides a distorted reflection of Molly Bloom's much more earthy anticipation of the afternoon arrival of the notoriously manful Boylan.

By far the longest chapter in Ulysses, almost one hundred and fifty pages long, is the nightmarish "Circe". Homer's Circe, who like his Calypso inhabits a mythical far-away island, is a beauty and a weaver, just as Homer's Penelope is a beauty and a weaver. She is also a witch-goddess, whose Greek name, *Kirke*, more obviously than its anglicized version, is from a feminine form of the Greek *kirkos* ("hawk"), appropriately in view of her rapacious relations with men, whom she uses her magical powers to seduce and turn into swine. The role of Circe is played in *Ulysses* by Bella Cohen, a brothel keeper in Dublin's Nighttown, briefly visited by Bloom before returning to his home. In the course of the weary Bloom's ensuing nightmare, Bella (whose name means "beautiful") metamorphoses into a vicious male sadist, Bello, who humiliates Bloom sexually and otherwise, transforming him momentarily into a squealing self-disgusted pig.

The "Circe" chapter in *Ulysses* actually conflates elements of two episodes in the *Odyssey*. In one episode, Homer's Odysseus manages to outwit Circe's attempt to turn him

into an animal, subsequently lives with her in sexual harmony on her magic island for a year, and even has two sons with her before pursuing his interrupted journey homewards. In another episode, he visits the Greek Underworld, the sad grey realm of Hades where the spirits of the dead disconsolately remember and unendingly regret the former days of their life on earth. Bloom correspondingly journeys in the "Circe" chapter into the sad grey depths of his own subconscious mind, reliving or anticipating all the actual and possible sadnesses, failures, and humiliations of his life. One of these griefs is of course the sexual encounter of Molly and Boylan, graphically representing for the humiliated Bloom his enduring marital failure. His own timid infidelities with Martha (if only by letter) and with Gerty (if only at arm's length) also have their Homeric antecedents, namely Odysseus's lengthy dalliance first with the beautiful Calypso and later with the beautiful Circe, each on her magical island.

As one element of Joyce's onomastic game-playing throughout *Ulysses*, Bella Cohen's name provides distinctly interesting resonances other than Homeric. First of all, the name Cohen links to Bloom himself, who is Jewish, since it is frequently a Jewish name, deriving from Hebrew *kohen* ("priest"). Second, it links extratextually, and humorously, to Joyce's own wife Nora Barnacle, since, oddly enough, both the names "Cohen" and "Barnacle" are used in Ireland as anglicized versions of the Irish name *Ó Cadhain*, meaning "descendant of Cadhan". The personal name Cadhan, meanwhile, is from the Irish noun *cadhan*, meaning a "wild goose" or a "barnacle goose", an appropriately avian link to the hawkish Circe. Other than this onomastic game, Molly Bloom's character, moreover, is clearly based largely on that of the redoubtable Nora Barnacle, who came from the city of Galway in the west of Ireland, and Galway, with its various Spanish associations as a seaport, "is Gibraltar without the sun" (Maddox 166, 275).

Molly herself, who gets the last word – more than 20,000 words, indeed – in the final chapter, "Penelope", is of course cast as a parodic version of Homer's Penelope, the unswervingly steadfast wife who patiently waits for her wandering hero husband, absent for twenty years, to return from the wars. The origins of the name Penelope (Greek *Pênelópê*) appear to be pre-Greek, and an ancient tradition already suggested an association with a pre-Greek noun *penelôps*, the name of an unspecified kind of bird, possibly predatory, and thus providing an avian link to Circe – as well as, entirely serendipitously for Joyce's humorously teasing purposes, to Nora Barnacle.

A well-known later folk etymology for the name Penelope proposes a combination of Greek *pênê* ("web") and *ôps* ("face"), construed as meaning "with a web (*pênê*) over her face (*ôps*)" (Graves 404), thus "the veiled one", implying one whose true purposes are hard to decipher – and thus providing a link also to Calypso. Not only is Molly's maiden name Tweedy

entirely appropriate for Penelope's role as a weaver (Gilbert 142-43), Andreas Palme notes that even Molly's married name, Bloom, just as appropriate for a weaver, contains the noun *loom* (221). The name of the magical herb *moly* that Odysseus gives to his men to protect them from the wiles of the spell-weaving Circe also punningly resonates, as many critics have noted.

Listening in the small hours of the morning to the finally returned Bloom's carefully edited account of his day, Molly lies "in the attitude of Gea-Tellus, fulfilled, recumbent, big with seed" (*Ulysses* 17.2313), though not Bloom's, after her encounter with Boylan. As Stuart Gilbert put it in his pioneering 1930 study of *Ulysses*, Molly, regarded under her symbolic aspects, is "a trinity of personages: Penelope, Calypso and the Earth herself, Gaea-Tellus" (95). She is both the Calypso from whom Bloom as Odysseus departs in the morning and the Penelope to whom he returns at night. It is indicative of the intricacy of Joyce's web-weaving, meanwhile, that if Molly is evocative of Greek *Gea* or Latin *Tellus*, the earth goddess, her mother Lunita's name evokes the moon goddess, Greek *Selene* or Latin *Luna*.

Homer's Penelope is celebrated above all for her marital steadfastness. In her husband's twenty-year absence, she is besieged by no fewer than 108 increasingly aggressive suitors noisily clamouring for her hand – not to mention for possession of her husband's rich estates as king of the island of Ithaca. Penelope holds them at bay by finally agreeing to choose one of them to wed when her weaving of a particular funeral shroud is finished – but famously outwits them all by unweaving by night what she has woven during the day. Homer's Odysseus arrives home, even after twenty years, to a completely faithful wife. Early readers of Joyce's novel saw Molly Bloom, on the other hand, as a very far from faithful wife – one who seemed on the evidence of her own late-night monologue to have in fact slept with an indefinitely large number of men over the years. This opinion seemed to be supported particularly by a list of no fewer than twenty-five assumed lovers compiled by Bloom himself (*Ulysses* 17.2133-42). Only gradually did readers come to realize that Bloom's lengthy list – some of the inclusions in which are "quite ludicrous" (Kiberd 249) – merely reflects various painfully experienced "twinges of Bloomian jealousy" (Kenner 142) over the years. Molly certainly sleeps with Boylan, but whether she ever slept with anybody else other than Bloom remains entirely uncertain. Bloom's exaggerated and masochistic list, as it happens, also has its own quasi-Homeric source, for Penelope's vaunted steadfastness in the Odyssey is radically questioned in a comic ancient countertradition that Penelope, far from steadfast, in fact slept not just with one or two of the suitors but with all 108 of them.

Homer's Penelope is a weaver, Homer's Circe is a weaver, James Joyce is a weaver who weaves a textual web of Homeric allusions, and Joyce's reader is likewise encouraged to be a weaver who weaves an interpretive web around available textual facts. Molly Bloom is of course

not really a monster, and Bloom of course does not really think of her at any point as being a monster – but Joyce's reader is encouraged to see the recurrent appearance of female monsters in Homer's *Odyssey*, onomastically recalled in Joyce's *Ulysses*, as parodically relevant to a beleaguered Bloom's hypothetical reflections on his marital situation. In the "Circe chapter we see a Bloom not actually experiencing but portrayed as if experiencing, as if in a nightmare, soul-shaking visions of self-doubt and self-humiliation. Joyce's weaving of the particular Homeric threads we have been considering here encourages his weaver readers to weave a Bloom as if still in thrall to the witch-goddess Circe, as if continuing to experience such nightmarish Circean possibilities. Given his calmly undramatic nature, Bloom will undoubtedly recover eventually, and perhaps even relatively soon, from the passing trauma of this particular day. Bloom's Bloomsday, after all, ends with him climbing gratefully, without recriminations or histrionics, into his wife's warm bed once again, a latter-day *Ulysses* returned without drama to Ithaca, his odyssey over, and, for the moment at least, all well with the world.

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# Cinema

# *The Evil is Inside the House and There is Nowhere to Run – Analysing the Representation of The Irish Family in* The Canal *(2014), By Ivan Kavanagh*

# *O mal está dentro de casa e não há para onde fugir – Analisando a representação da família irlandesa em* The Canal *(2014) de Ivan Kavanagh*

Sanio Santos da Silva[1]

**Abstract:** The Canal *(2014) is an Irish horror film written and directed by Ivan Kavanagh. The story is about David, an archivist who believes a spirit murdered his wife, Alice. David's mental condition is highly questionable, as for the police he is the main suspect of the investigation. In this film, Kavanagh portrays the domestic environment as unstable and violent. The narrative contrasts with Ireland's familist ideology and perception of the family as a harmonious haven. According to Isabel Pinedo (1997), postmodern horror films explore the terrors of everyday life and blur the limits between good and evil. Places and individuals, previously considered safe and caring, can be associated with horrifying events. These contradictions raise the question of how Kavanagh portrayed the family in the postmodern horror paradigm. This study aims at analysing the representation of the Irish family in* The Canal *taking into account studies about the Irish family and cinema. The research method is content analysis, which is a technique to describe and examine the communicative material, in this case, a movie. Furthermore, the results of this study may contribute to the development of further research related to Ireland's contemporary films and society.*

**Keywords:** The Canal*; Postmodern Horror; Family; Irish Horror Cinema*.

**Resumo:** The Canal (2014) *é um filme de terror irlandês, escrito e dirigido por Ivan Kavanagh, sobre David, um arquivista que acredita que um espírito assassinou sua esposa, Alice. O estado mental de David é altamente questionável, visto que para a polícia ele é o principal suspeito da investigação. Neste filme, Kavanagh retrata o ambiente doméstico como instável e violento. A narrativa contrasta com a ideologia familista da Irlanda e a percepção da família como um refúgio harmonioso. Segundo Isabel Pinedo (1997), os filmes de terror pós-modernos exploram os terrores da vida cotidiana e confundem os*

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*limites entre o bem e o mal. Lugares e indivíduos, antes considerados como fonte de cuidado e segurança, podem estar associados a eventos horripilantes. Essas contradições suscitam a questão de como Kavanagh retratou a família no paradigma do terror pós-moderno. Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar a representação da família irlandesa em* The Canal *a partir de estudos sobre a família irlandesa e o cinema. O método de pesquisa é a análise de conteúdo, uma técnica utilizada para descrever e examinar o material comunicativo, nesse caso, um filme. Além disso, os resultados deste estudo podem contribuir para o desenvolvimento de pesquisas futuras relacionadas aos filmes e à sociedade contemporânea da Irlanda.*

**Palavras-chave:** The Canal; *Horror pós-moderno; Família; Cinema de Horror Irlandês*.

## Introduction

*The Canal* (2014) is a horror film written and directed by Ivan Kavanagh. It is a story about the film archivist David and the heinous murder of his wife Alice. The narrative induces the audience to question reality and fantasy. David seems to be haunted by the ghost of William Jackson, a man who killed his family in 1902 while living in the same residence where David and his wife now live. Jackson is never punished for his crimes, as he drowns himself with his children in the canal near the house. In the end, it is revealed that David murdered Alice, who was having an affair. Their son, Billy, also dies in the last sequence. These events expose the consequences of dysfunctional families and raise questions about the stability of the domestic environments in Ireland.

Ciara Barrett (2015) describes *The Canal* as a psychological thriller with a poltergeist-horror premise. She also states that the film avoids identifiable Dublin landmarks, and the setting could have been anywhere. However, that does not mean the film does not follow the patterns of Irish national cinema. The characteristics of the feature might reflect the contemporary Irish multi-cultural demography, which has drastically changed during the last decades, as a result of the Celtic Tiger (1994-2008), the iconic Irish economic boom. Thus, if a filmmaker decides not to explore national elements, it "does not mean it cannot be reclaimed, (re) appropriated and/or analysed by cultural theorists as retaining implicit national/cultural signification and import" (Barrett 284). As such, although the narrative is not inspired by Ireland's historical background and does not use the country's famous settings, Kavanagh could be taking a peculiar path to portray the Irish society through the postmodern horror, a genre that violates assumptions of a predictable world, and puts violence as a feature of normality (Pinedo, 1997).

Therefore, *The Canal* may explore multicultural elements and still be an Irish film. One can analyse its content in order to understand the current characteristics of Irish society. The fact that, in the film, two fathers viciously murdered their family members exposes a dangerous domestic environment. These events contrast with the central role of the family in Ireland. According to Ciaran Mc Cullagh (1991), in the first decades of independence, there was an interest to preserve the family as an institution, giving it the responsibility to solve tensions in the community. However, during the Celtic Tiger era, the familist ideology started to be questioned after numerous reports of child abuse by family members. Considering the role of the family in Ireland, Sinéad Kennedy (2003) believes it is not surprising that the country's rate of child sexual abuse is higher than in Europe or North America. For decades, tensions were ignored to keep the image of the home as a peaceful environment.

Although this subject can be quite disturbing for a certain portion of society, Irish filmmakers have been interested in exploring dysfunctional families through different genres. For instance, *Snap* (2010), by Carmel Winters, is a drama about Sandra and her son Stephen, who are both sexually abused by Sandra's father. In the comedy *The Young Offenders* (2016), by Peter Foott, Jock is a teenager living with his alcoholic father. Kavanagh also explores family dysfunction in *The Canal* through postmodern horror and, by doing so, he demonstrates that evil may come from places that were previously considered safe, such as one's own house.

So far, this study has introduced how a horror narrative in a domestic environment contrasts with Ireland's familist ideology as a way of setting the basis for the question it aims to explore: How does Ivan Kavanagh portray the Irish family in his postmodern horror film *The Canal*? Thus, the main objective of this article is to analyse *The Canal* in light of studies about the Irish family and cinema, in order to understand the representation of the family in Irish horror cinema. It should be noted that it does not aim to offer a fixed definition of the representation of families in Irish horror cinema. Currently, there is limited research on this topic, and it may be difficult to identify how Irish filmmakers explore fear. Therefore, the results presented in this article can be a starting point for future studies on Ireland's national horror cinema.

Content analysis was adopted as a methodology, which is widely used by human sciences to investigate images, films, texts, and a variety of media productions. In order to analyse the content of *The Canal*, it is necessary to discuss theories associated with horror cinema and the history of the Irish family. The process must explore elements of the film, and present dialogues and images representing the Irish family identity. The data will be analysed based on the theories discussed in the first two sessions of this article.

## The Irish Family – Cursed Heirs and Children Without Future

A family is a group commonly converted into an institution, and its concepts may change due to a variety of social and political phenomena. In Ireland, the family holds an important role in the nation's ideology. Mc Cullagh calls attention to Article 41 of the Irish Constitution, which "recognizes the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society". The author also stresses that, according to the same article, the family possesses "inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law". These statements become controversial if one tries to question the actual rights of a family. What can a family in Ireland decide, mainly concerning the lives of its members? It might be a confusing question to answer, considering each family has its own rules.

Although families are different, there are grounding aspects of the Irish family linked to the 19th Century and the Great Famine (1845-1849).[2] In this context, Mc Cullagh states that the massive starvation in the country was related to the response of farmers to an increasing population. In rural Ireland, the heritage pattern was strongly centred on male family members, as mothers and daughters had almost no say in decisions. The arrangement was quite beneficial for men, as the father led the process and, in the end, every son would inherit a portion of the land:

> When a male family member got married, the father sub-divided his holding and gave a certain portion to the married son. As families were large and holdings generally small, this led to the fragmentation of holdings. . . . Such holdings could only sustain the growth of a basic crop like the potato and, as the potato could not be efficiently stored, the rural population was vulnerable to crop failure. . . . The result was widespread hunger and death (Mc Cullagh 205).

Even if some could have considered the process fair, as every son would inherit a portion of the father's holding, it did not fit Ireland's cultural and geographical setting. At the time, Irish people were facing the vicious British colonisation and were eager for freedom. They simply could not endure another massive population decline. Therefore, farmers understood the flaws of this family tradition and developed a new form of heritage management. In this respect, the sub-division system was abandoned and "replaced by an inheritance system around the stem family" (Mc Cullagh 205).

The new tradition meant that a single son would inherit the family farm, and his siblings would need to seek alternative forms of income. The stem family system was a successful solution since it avoided the fragmentation of the properties. However, "while it solves this problem it appears to open new lines of tension in society through those whom it

marginalizes" (Mc Cullagh 206). It should be stressed that those chosen as heirs were not in a comfortable situation. According to Michelle Norris (2016), sons designated as heirs worked unpaid on the family farm, and they were unable to marry until the farm had a large enough income to support an additional family. Furthermore, the family patriarch needed to believe he would not be disrespected or abandoned by the new generation. The father was the one to decide his children's fate, and concentrating the family power led to unwanted consequences. This family system was centred on a small portion of the adult males, while the rest of the people had no fixed role in society. As a matter of fact, the cruellest layer of the stem family model was the fact that non-inheriting sons and daughters were not only unwanted, but there was a serious attempt to push them into oblivion.

Most of the time, marginalized family members were forced to make troubling decisions on their own. The effects of the high costs of their life choices are reflected in the statistics of mental health. At the beginning of the twentieth century, "the populations of workhouses and of prisons had fallen. By contrast, those of the mental asylums was (sic) increasing rapidly" (Mc Cullagh 208). Asylums were seen as suitable spaces to dispose of the "unnecessary" portion of the family, thus becoming a useful tool for the preservation of the stem family system. Considering how recent the Great Famine was, Irish farmers could not risk a second massive disaster, and sacrificing their own children was a cruel necessity. Consequently, in these circumstances, the commitment to mental hospitals might have seemed an attractive and effective solution.

Tensions within the family were ignored in order to support economic interests. The events mentioned in the previous paragraphs justify the relevance of the family cell in Ireland, but they also expose "a very different situation from the one implied by an official ideology which gives a central role to the ideal of the united and happy family" (Mc Cullagh 209). The familiar institution was overprotected, mostly shielded by Catholicism, and not many dared to challenge this tradition. Standing against a father's wish could have been the deadliest sin. However, these events took place before the establishment of the Republic of Ireland in 1922. After the independence, there were considerable socio-political changes, and many moved from rural areas to Dublin. The community, however, remained involved with the moral values of rural familism, which raises the question: how was this ideology taken and set in a more urban-centred society?

Mc Cullagh states that the family as a social symbol is linked to a set of values called "rural fundamentalism". Even after independence, this ideology remained dominant, and people expressed a desire to preserve a highly idealized past in the countryside:

> In post-Independence Ireland this ideology, which had its roots in rural Ireland, was carried to the political centre by the rural élites who "colonised" the capital city of Dublin and who steadily took over many of the key positions in the civil service and in state bodies. . . . Through this an ideology which emerged to deny family-centered (sic) conflicts and inequalities became part of the official ideology of the new nation (Mc Cullagh 209).

The author calls attention to the fact that a certain portion of the rural society led transformations that took place in the country, and they simply could not abandon previous traditions. The Irish social setting was different from that of the late 19th century, but the community was still impregnated with the idea of familiar obedience. Furthermore, the Church managed to build a strong bond with the State. In this context, many governmental policies were grounded in the idea of protecting the family institution. As an example, Mc Cullagh points out the introduction of censorship in the 1930s. The proponents voiced that it would be a way to secure "national virtues", but analysing it closely, the author underlines that the project was mainly a strategy to promote an idealised version of family life.

The stem family tradition and the population of the psychiatric hospital slowly shrunk in the country in the first decades of independence, but that did not mean the familist ideology disappeared. It became part of Irish nationalism, influencing the actions of public institutions. As an example, Mc Cullagh mentions a document written in 1982 by the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors (AGSI). The text was an answer to the rising crime in the country. It recalls a conflict-free past, when communities enjoyed harmony, "which, if it could only be recaptured, would solve major social problems" (Mc Cullagh 201). Clearly, the peaceful past was strongly related to the family structure, which would offer solutions for the tensions in the country. The erosion of the domestic environment was considered the main cause of the crisis, while other aspects, like the growth of the urban areas, were not blamed.

The international winds of change were one of the forces behind the weakening of familism. During the Celtic Tiger period, Dublin became a more cosmopolitan place. Hunger for modernization and development led to an intimate involvement with capitalism. The economy influenced major social changes in Ireland throughout this period. In this context, the familiar institution would not remain untouched. Although the family does not have an obvious economic role, Sinéad Kennedy (2003) states that while a conventional couple might be bonded with the idea of romantic love, one should not overshadow the family's economic function. It is a source of care for the future workforce in a profit-oriented system. It means that the arrival of the Celtic Tiger did not erase familism but gave the familiar institution a

different role. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that this socioeconomic setting allowed the exposure of shocking contradictions of the domestic environment in Ireland, as Kennedy further states:

> The family can operate a contradictory role: as well as being a place of comfort, it can also be the source of horrendous violence . . . If one considers the central role that the family has played in Irish society, it is no surprise that Ireland has one of the highest rates of child sexual abuse, higher than in either Europe as a whole or North America (Kennedy 106).

Kennedy indicates that the position of the family in Irish society basically authorises different forms of violence. Besides involuntary incarceration, those that remained in the household were also potential victims. These tensions have been obscured for decades to preserve the image of the family as a harmonic moral haven. Kennedy states that Ireland has unusual statistical figures for child sexual abuse and relates the high number of cases with the familist ideology. The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre commissioned *The Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland Report*, in which it can be read that forty-two percent of women and twenty-eight percent of men had been sexually abused in their lifetime. "The majority of abuse occurs within the family or by an individual close to the family, such as a teacher or a priest" (Kennedy 106). These numbers become even more alarming when compared to surveys in Europe showing "that seventeen percent of European women have experienced sexual abuse as children. In Ireland, that figure is thirty percent" (Kennedy 106). The author also calls attention to the fact that the reports found that almost half of those interviewed said they had never told anyone about the abuse.

The fact that so many abuses were hidden contributes to the understanding of the Irish family as an overprotected flawed institution. The Celtic Tiger period did not make familism vanish from the national identity but encouraged people to report its tensions. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, as well as the first years of the twentieth century, Irish authors were inclined to write fictional narratives featuring rural family conflicts. In W.B. Yeats's short story "Red Hanrahan" (1907), for instance, Mary Lavelle's mother dies and if she does not have a man inside her house within a month, the land would be given to someone else. She calls Hanrahan, but he fails to meet her on time. Thus, she is put out of her house, marries a labouring man, and goes to England to look for work.

Filmmaking in Ireland became more common during the Celtic Tiger, especially due to the investments of the Irish Film Board.[3] It can be seen as a contemporary form of storytelling, reflecting social patterns and human behaviour. Thus, writers have also started

using the screen to tell stories about family conflicts. These new storytellers have explored different genres to portray this specific theme. It is particularly interesting how some tend to associate the family environment with horror, which contrasts with the traditional position of the family in Irish society. In present times, can the Irish family structure be a source of fear?

## Irish Contemporary Horror – The Evil Lies Within

Irish national cinema underwent a major transformation during the 1990s – a phenomenon mainly associated with the reopening of the *Irish Film Board* and the Celtic Tiger economy. According to Díóg O'Connell (2010), between 1994 and 2008, the *Irish Film Board/Bord Scannán na hÉireann – IFB/BSÉ*[4] supported the production of over one hundred and forty projects. These films "can be arranged generically with a handful of genres appearing more frequently: thriller; gangster; horror; romantic comedy, for example" (O'Connell 45).

Although horror is mentioned as a frequent genre among the productions funded by the IFB, Kim Newman (2006) argues that horror is far from being considered a tradition in Irish Cinema. Nonetheless, the author claims that, historically, one can notice the potential of the Irish to explore fear in films. For instance, "J. Sheridan LeFanu's (sic) vampire tale 'Carmilla' and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and 'The Canterville Ghost' have inspired multiple film and television adaptations" (Newman 3). Likewise, Irish writers and directors such as Neil Jordan, who was responsible for *The Company of Wolves* (1984) and *Interview with the Vampire* (1992), have done significant works of horror in foreign lands.

The bond between Ireland and horror is noticeable, "yet, there's a distinct shortage of Irish horror films, and little which might be counted as an Irish horror – or even fantastical – tradition in the cinema" (Newman 3). The small number of Irish horror features in the Celtic Tiger period does not mean that these stories are irrelevant or should be taken for granted by scholars and researchers. On the contrary, they are a relevant source of research, as they provide meaningful information to understand Irishness. According to Séan Crosson (2012), between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s, Irish filmmakers used the horror genre as a medium to represent aspects of Irish society, culture, and history. Still, the author draws attention to the fact that Irish filmmakers have generally been less inclined to horror, even though it is one of the most overused and international cinematic forms.

During the Celtic Tiger period, Irish horror films were often placed in rural Ireland. Crosson points out Paddy Breatnach's *Shrooms* (2007) and Aisling Walsh's *The Daisy Chain* (2008) as good examples of stories set in the Irish countryside. Kennedy (2012) believes that there are not enough horror films to edify a tradition, but he recognizes the astonishing

number of rural tragedies in contrast with urban-set monster outbreaks. One can surely recognize the rural setting as a strong characteristic of the Irish horror cinema of the Celtic Tiger period. Still, we aim at analysing a film released during the so-called Celtic Phoenix era (2014-).[5] The ideologies and goals of the filmmakers are probably not the same, especially considering that Ireland went through significant economic and demographic changes in recent decades. Therefore, in order to understand the characteristics of a recent Irish horror movie, one must analyse the general features of contemporary horror cinema.

Contemporary horror films have been strongly related to a closer evil, instead of monsters from distant lands or another planet. Isabel Pinedo (1997) states that horror violates the assumption that we live in a predictable world. These narratives also elucidate the perception that taken-for-granted normality can become a minefield because in horror irrationality challenges the universal social order. She also makes a distinction between two periods of the horror genre: "in the classical paradigm, the violent disruption is often located in or originates from a remote, exotic location. In contrast, the postmodern paradigm treats violence as constituent element of everyday life" (Pinedo 18).

Postmodern horror presents disturbing events as a feature of the society. Authorities might fail to control violence, and a close friend can be a vicious killer. This aspect leads viewers to the perception that danger can become a fixed element of their lives. Take for example the following films: In *Dead Meat* (2003) and *Shroons*. The protagonists are tourists looking for exotic experiences in Ireland, which slightly associates these films to the classical paradigm. However, both features can also be placed in the postmodern spectrum. Classical and postmodern paradigms do share characteristics, but they are different in the nature of their moral universe. Pinedo argues that the classical paradigm draws relatively clear limits between contending camps, such as good and evil or normal and abnormal. The monsters are usually destroyed in the end and routine goes back to normal. In contrast, the postmodern paradigm "blurs the boundary between good and evil, normal and abnormal, and the outcome of the struggle is at best ambiguous" (Pinedo 22).

Postmodern cinema frames society in a path of inevitable despair. It shows that it might be impossible to find a suitable solution for what threatens normality. Therefore, restlessness becomes part of the routine, and it can be seen as a new version of the social order. In *Dead Meat*, by Conor McMahon, Helena escapes from zombies, but she ends up locked in a truck by authorities that were supposed to rescue her. In *Shrooms*, Tara, an apparently harmless American student, murdered all her friends. The most unsettling part of the story is the very last sequence, when she kills a paramedic and runs into the woods. Thus, the narrative remains open, and Tara is free to keep committing dreadful acts.

Tania Modleski (1986) mentions that characters in postmodern horror films are relatively unsympathetic. Nobody is usually a charming hero, they are far from being moral role models, and one might even find it hard to grieve their eventual deaths. According to Modleski, these films commonly dispense or drastically minimize the development of the characters and the plot, which influence the audience's reception and judgment. It can be hard to feel sorry for a character that lacks the expected moral values. In *Shrooms*, Bluto is the first one to die, but he is also willing to cheat on his girlfriend. From the start, he shows a very aggressive personality, punches one of his college friends, and violently kills an animal.

Pinedo argues that postmodern horror, just like its classical predecessors, exposes the monster's graphical violence over ordinary people, and their flawed attempts to survive. It might be difficult to imagine a horror film without any variety of violence. The monster's rampage and the other characters' struggle are the backbone of the narrative. Thus, filmmakers do not randomly place violence in horror films, "but it is rather a constituent element of the genre" (Pinedo 17). In this sense, violence is the element used to throw into question the everyday life security, and the integrity of everything surrounding us.

Although there are different forms of violence, the physical one is probably the most frequent in horror films. As such, special effects tend to play an important role in the narrative. Irish filmmakers usually lack access to human or technical resources to compete with Hollywoodian standards and viewers might even find the violent scenes in Irish films unreal or unprofessional. For example, in 2007, Derek Elley wrote a review of *Shrooms*. He was clearly not fond of the movie, stating that the scenes were not scary, and the story was far from original. He also points out that Paddy Breathnach's feature "shows just how difficult it is to do effective, modestly budgeted horror" (Elley n.p.). Elley exposes his opinions about the film and underlines an important aspect to be understood in terms of horror cinema in Ireland: local filmmakers face a severe lack of financial support.

The Irish Film Board's funding is the main ground of contemporary Irish cinema. Many successful films, like the Oscar-winner *Once* (2007), by John Carney, might have never been recorded without IFB's support. Back in 2008, due to a severe economic crisis, the abolishment of the board was recommended, but this proposal would "have catastrophic consequences for the Irish film industry if implemented given its dependence on the board for financing and support" (Crosson 1). Irish filmmakers do not usually rely on private companies and the domestic studios cannot match the Hollywoodian technologies. The budget offered by the IFB might not be enough to make a box office successful horror movie, and that can be one of the main reasons for the short number of productions in this genre during the Celtic Tiger period.

In spite of this, it is worth mentioning that, in the last decades, we have seen an increasing number of Irish horror films, "thanks to digital film and the possibilities it presents for rapid and cheap filmmaking with relatively sophisticated special effects offerings in post-production" (Barret 282). These resources were important to encourage Irish filmmakers to produce horror during the 2000s, but, just like *Shrooms*, they still failed to receive positive criticism. Bill Gibron (2007) wrote a slightly negative review about Stephen Bradley's *Boy Eats Girl* (2005), stating that the film was overly similar to *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), by Edgar Wright: "Unless you can equal . . . the project you're pilfering, do something original and inventive instead" (Gilbron n. p.). However, during the 2010s, the reception of Irish horror films became more positive. The budgets were still low, but Irish horror filmmakers learned to make the best out of it. Brad Miska (2012) states that *Stitches* (2012), by Conor McMahon, was destined to be a cult classic. Although he did not ignore the flaws in the production, he saw potential in the film: "*Stitches* is an incredibly low budget production – the film looks cheap, and the acting is suspect – but it delivers on so many other levels. Its biggest accomplishment is that it's never boring, and carries heavy replay value" (Miska n. p.). This review indicates that Irish horror cinema might be creating its own identity by overcoming limits imposed by the lack of financial support. Therefore, filmmakers are possibly developing engaging narratives that can horrify audiences, without the need to rely on high-priced special effects.

One may still claim that horror cinema is experimental on Irish soil. The rising Irish horror cinema can go through different paths while building its own traditions. One of the filmmakers offering expressive contributions to Irish horror cinema is Ivan Kavanagh. Although he is not fully dedicated to the horror genre as demonstrated by his most recent Revisionist Western *Never Grow Old* (2019), he was responsible for films that are very meaningful to the contemporary Irish horror scenario. His low-budget *Tin Can Man* (2007) was not funded by the IFB, but it was highly appreciated and won the "Boundary Breaking Best Feature" at the Sydney Underground Film Festival 2007. In a review for the website Pophorror.com, Evan Romero says *Tin Can Man* "is an experience the viewer won't soon forget, nor will they want to". Later, Kavanagh was able to receive financial support from the Irish Film Board to produce his second horror feature: *The Canal*.

The discussions of this section emphasize that the Irish horror cinema is still building a tradition. Thus, it can be quite meaningful to develop an analysis of this film. By examining its implicit and explicit aspects, one can contribute to understanding the particularities of Irish horror. As it was mentioned, filmmakers in Ireland are unable to reproduce the level of violence present in Hollywoodian horror narratives. However, the lack of resources might lead writers, directors, and producers to take unique paths to explore fear.

## The Canal – The Father Still Decides the Fate of The Family

*The Canal* was written and directed by Ivan Kavanagh, and the production company in charge was the Dublin-based Park Films. The Irish Film Board financially supported the project. The story is about David, a film archivist, who moves with his pregnant wife, Alice, to a new house. The film starts with a sequence in daylight, and they are paying a last visit to the place before closing the deal. The colours are very bright and they both look optimistic and excited about their new home (Figure 1).

Five years later, they are living with their only son, Billy. However, the harmony is gone, and the couple is facing marital issues as David suspects that Alice is cheating on him. After the first sequence, the couple wakes up in a plain-coloured room (Figure 2), which contrasts with the brightness of the first shots. At this point, this choice of shot exposes the unrest in their domestic environment. Alice is clearly uninterested in having sex with David, who does not seem to know much about her thoughts. There is a feeling of solitude in their bedroom, and Kavanagh seems to use colours to expose the changes in their relationship (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1 and 2 – In these shots, Kavanagh uses colours to present the changes in David and Alice's relationship.
Source: *The Canal*.

Although David and Alice live an unhappy marriage, they are clearly loving parents. As a father, David is not fully following the patterns of the stem family. Actually, during the Celtic Tiger period, Irish filmmakers were engaged in representing non-traditional families. Liz Gill's *Goldfish Memory* (2003) presents two same-sex couples building a family with a child. In *Once* (2007) by John Carney, "Guy's father is, in many ways, feminised, depicting the hybridity of his role through his positive and caring relationship with his son" (Ryan 9). In *The Canal*, David seems to be responsible for Billy's routine. He puts Billy in bed and takes him to school. On a certain morning, before leaving, David asks Alice to be at home early this time, implying that she tends to work late. When she gets home, Billy is usually already asleep.

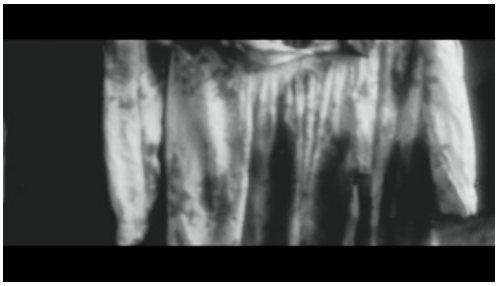
Soon, David discovers his wife's infidelity, which is the reason why she arrives late at home. This is not the only issue that troubles his mind. At work, he watches a reel of footage that shows his house being the scene of a vicious murder. William Jackson, a previous owner, killed his wife and drowned his kids and himself in the canal. The footage is in black and white, but as David watches the scenes some shots rapidly show images in colours, which seems to be Kavanagh's attempt to connect the film with David's reality. According to Andrew Tudor (1989), traditional contrasts between life/death or normal/abnormal are not clearly marked in "paranoid horror"[6] and, therefore, human beings might not be able to draw a defence line against the unknown. A variety of threats can quietly sneak into one's routine, without causing any warning until it is too late.

Isabel Pinedo states that nothing is what it seems in postmodern horror. Characters might find themselves locked in a nightmare and die in their sleep. Reality is severely fragilized both in terms of narrative and at the cinematographic level. The author underlines that horror tends to violate cinematic codes that distinguish the subjective and the objective, leading the viewer to wonder what is going to happen. In order to create the perception of a film blending with reality, Kavanagh makes a very complex sequence: the use of shots in black and white and in colours makes one wonder if David is watching the film or the murder scene in real life. Kavanagh also uses subjective shots in the sequence, which is a strategy to place the audience in the film by seeing the events through David's eyes.

In figures 3 and 4, one can notice shots of the same moment with different colours. David is watching a film recorded during the police investigation, showing police officers arresting William Jackson, collecting evidence, and taking a corpse out of the canal. Then, this sequence cuts to a close-up of David's face. He watches Alice and Billy holding each other and singing together. As he enters his room, he sees William Jackson violently stabbing his wife. Here Kavanagh creates a sequence of rapidly changing shots of Alice and Billy and the vicious murder as if the massacre and violence were happening to David's family. The wall slowly opens exposing Jackson and three masked individuals. Finally, David wakes up, but he does not believe those disturbing events were a dream. He gets up and puts his ear on the wall, trying to check if there is someone behind it. This sequence is a landmark in the film, as it puts reality into question, and also induces the audience to raise questions about David's sanity.

Pinedo compares the appreciation of a horror narrative to a roller coaster ride, arguing that both people are confined and kept off-balance through suspense and surprises. There is an element of control, which is the conviction that the danger is not real. The viewer is aware that there is nothing to be afraid of, and stress becomes a pleasant sensation: "Fear and pleasure commingle" (Pinedo 39). However, in postmodern horror, danger gets close to

familiar places, and horrifying events can take place in our own houses. It can weaken the viewer's feeling of control and redefine the experience, as the narrative gets closer to real life and the audience may wonder if it can ever happen with themselves.



Figures 3 and 4: Images of the film David is watching in black white and in colours.
Source: *The Canal*

The family holds a central role in Irish society, and the negative representation of families in contemporary horror films contrasts with the "privileged status which it is given in the Irish Constitution as in the controversies which so often resolve around the need to 'preserve the family'" (Mc Cullagh 205). In *The Canal*, the danger appears from within the house in such a destructive way that every family member dies. It means that preserving the family can be an unsuitable option. Alice was having an affair, and it was later revealed she was planning on leaving David. If she had been quicker, she could have saved her life. David tracks his wife to the house of her lover and faces the confirmation that his marriage is falling apart. He walks back home and, as he passes the canal, he feels sick and goes to a filthy public bathroom. He listens to someone else entering. Then, a ghostly William Jackson whispers to him: "the master wants you" (*The Canal*, 2014, 23 min 45 sec). The statement comes as an invitation, leading David to have Jackson's same dreadful destiny.

William killed his family in 1902 when the family institution was supposedly stable and harmonious. With this, Kavanagh might be trying to imply that disturbing events were happening in domestic environments long before the recent decades. William transfers to David a duty, and he has no choice but to accept it. It is worth mentioning that David's last name is Williams. According to Leslie Dunkling (2014), Williams is a surname that means descendant of William. We do not know much about their family background, but the names chosen by Kavanagh could emulate a certain genealogical relationship. They are establishing a tradition in which the acts of violence keep repeating themselves without any chance for change. One can associate their connection to the period of the stem family when the father

had the power to decide his children's destiny. William seemingly obligates David to receive an inheritance of violence, which led his family to demise.

Considering there was a certain paternal relationship between David and William, it is possible to point out this bond as a source of mental unrest. It is almost like a father deciding a child's future, but the latter refuses this inescapable reality. The only way out was to compromise his own conscience and create a new narrative for himself. Furthermore, David was shaken by the suspicion of his wife's infidelity, something that could drastically affect his routine. His current situation was unbearable. Sanity became his curse. David's reality led him to develop a mental disorder, as the risks threatening his house were too much to bear.

While he is still in the bathroom, David listens to Alice's voice crying for help. He seems very weak and crawls. Then, he witnesses someone attacking Alice. He passes out and wakes up in the morning in the same spot. He goes home and decides to report Alice is missing. In *The Canal*, human actions fail to interrupt the monster's rampage of violence, which is an element that connects the narrative to the postmodern horror genre. According to Pinedo (1997), contemporary horror films present violence as a constituent feature of people's routines. Thus, the monster does not appear to disrupt normality, as he looks like a regular resident of the everyday world. His actions are not that different from what one usually sees on the news. Furthermore, human regulations are not effective against the spread of violence; characters are unable to find a definitive solution at the conclusion of the film, and that "produces an unstable, paranoid universe in which familiar categories collapse" (Pinedo 65).

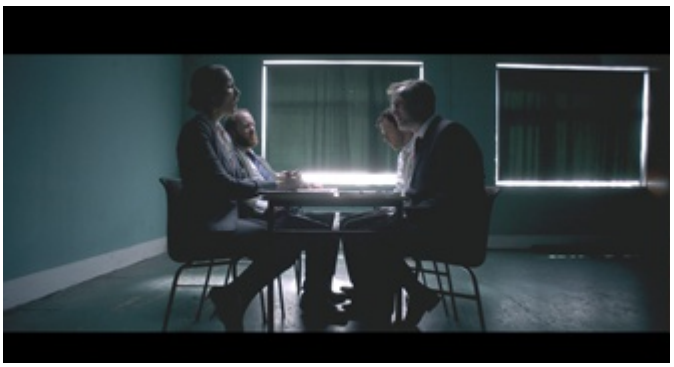
The failure of human responses against the tensions caused by the monster is probably related to the function of the authorities in the country. As previously discussed, Mc Cullagh points out a document produced in 1982 by The Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors (AGSI) stating that a unified family would be the solution to the rising crime in the country. This exposes a belief that the familiar institution is responsible to regulate social behaviour. The familist ideology diluted part of the State's responsibility for security. Therefore, in Irish horror film narratives, people requesting protection can be frustrated by the infective action of authorities. Detective Mc Namara is responsible for Alice's case, but he looks clumsy in every single scene, and one cannot say he conveys confidence. He does think David killed his wife, but his attempts to arrest David and protect Billy failed.

Consequently, in *The Canal* Kavanagh seems to aim to expose the powerless police force and justice system. When they find Alice's body in the canal and David becomes the main suspect, Detective Mc Namara and the senior welfare officer believe that Billy should be taken into care by the social service. This sequence takes place in a very dark interrogation room, and a lawyer accompanies David. As the senior welfare officer proposes to take Billy into social care,

David's lawyer argues that the decision is too drastic and suggests a psychiatric evaluation. David tells Mc Namara that he believes a ghost murdered Alice, and that gives the detective enough reasons to question his sanity. However, the lawyer easily convinces the senior welfare officer to wait for the report back from the psychiatrist.

It is worth mentioning how Kavanagh explores the lighting in this sequence. In the shot of figure 5, it is possible to notice the room itself is very dark, but there is light coming out of the window. David and Mc Namara are closer to the window, which is partly illuminated, while the lawyer and the senior welfare officer are almost entirely in the shadows. The sequence features close-up shots of both David and Mc Namara, and the viewer can see their faces are entirely illuminated, suggesting that they are the ones closer to the truth about what happened to Alice. The light can be associated with the truth, as neither lawyer nor the senior welfare officer would have allowed Billy to stay with his father knowing how he was mentally ill. Still, the decision was irresponsible, considering Mc Namara had reported David's delusional thought and David was the main suspect of the murder.

The decision to wait for a psychiatric report exposed David, Billy, and everyone around them to an unspeakable risk. These two individuals, associated with law and social assistance, were partly responsible for the culminating disturbing events of the film. Even if it was not explicit, they followed Article 41 of the Irish Constitution and respected the inalienable rights of the family. They understood David had just lost his wife, and it would have been too harsh for him to lose his child. In fact, it would have meant the demise of their entire family institution. The shot of figure 4 and this whole situation implies the failure of authorities in their duty to protect society.



Figures 5: David is facing the authorities in an interrogation room.
Source: *The Canal*

Kavanagh explores the contradictions of the family values during the whole narrative. At Alice's funeral, David has an extremely uncomfortable conversation with his mother-in-law. She is aware of the affair and even asks David if he knows something about Alice's boyfriend.

Apparently, the man is going through a hard-grieving process. Alice's mother also wants to take Billy with her, but the proposal is quickly refused. The dialogue between the two feels like a confrontation. She does not even ask how David is doing, and clearly does not recognize him as the central figure of the family, implying that he is not important for the child at the moment: "Maybe I should take him for a while... He should be around another woman. A mother figure" (*The Canal*, 2004, 37 min 35 sec). Her attempt fails, exposing that, even if it is flawed and unstable, the father is responsible for making decisions about his children's lives. She even argued that Alice would want her to take Billy, but her insistence would not be enough to change the patriarchal decision.

In *The Canal*, the monster seems to target women that could threaten the stability of the household. Infidelity can put an end to a marriage, and lead to the shattering of the family. William kills his wife after discovering her affair. As a ghost, he instructs David to do the same, as if it is a tradition to be passed down. One can understand that the film aims at portraying these men as monsters that willingly obliterate their families when their authority is challenged. Kavanagh's film offers the female viewers a truly fearsome experience, as women and children are at risk throughout the narrative, but no adult man is murdered or even attacked. In 1902, after killing his wife, William also decapitates the nanny of his children with an axe. David does not hurt Billy's nanny. She probably survives because she quits the job as soon as she notices David is mentally unstable.

According to Modleski, horror films enable the male audience to keep a certain distance from the terror. The genre offers viewers a pleasurable encounter with violence, as they are aware that there is nothing to be afraid of. Nevertheless, Modleski argues that contemporary horror projects the experience of submission and defencelessness onto female characters and deprives the female spectator of recreational experience. In the film, women are scapegoated by the failure of their marriage. They are not just blamed, but also viciously punished by their partners. The men seem to exempt themselves from any guilt as if their wives ought to obey and stand by their side forever. David and William drown themselves in the canal, but their death can hardly give the women viewers any consolation. These men decided to murder their wives and kids, but they never face the consequences of their actions. The authorities fail to take them to justice, and their deaths do not look as painful as the terrors their wives had to face.

Before dying in the canal, David believes he was able to record a ghost on tape. He is at home with his co-worker Clare and insists on watching the film that is supposed to show a dead woman near the canal. While they are watching the film, a creature comes out of a hole in the wall and drags Clare inside. Mc Namara and the police have been watching the house, and

they hear a woman screaming. When they confront David, he runs and enters a manhole holding Billy. Inside the tunnel, he seems to recall what really happened the night Alice died and moments ago in his house with Clare. A flashback shows that David killed them both, and he looks astonished by the revelations of his own memory. Thus, the film presents two different and conflictive versions of reality:

> David's experience of reality, which is dreamlike and non-linear, alternating always between past, present, and the in-between, and the objective story's world's, which operates according to rational and linear principles of causation. (David is a jealous husband, ergo he kills his wife; David feels guilt, ergo he constructs an alternate reality that shifts the blame away from him: ghosts killed his wife) (Barrett 283).

As far, *The Canal* is a film strongly associated with the postmodern horror paradigm. Hence, it is expected to have an open-ended conclusion. Kavanagh not only presents a narrative without a clear conclusion, but he also offers the audience the option of deciding what was real throughout the story. One may believe there was a ghost influencing David's actions, but he can also be a jealous and violent man who refuses to face his own horrifying actions. Furthermore, the obliteration of a family cannot be entirely part of the reality of a community that has been cherishing this institution for so long. Placing the destruction of the family institution between reality and delirium might expose that the Irish society still struggles to recognize the contradictions of the domestic environment. Even years after numerous reports of violence and abuse, the community can find it hard to believe that a father dared kill his whole family.

In *The Canal*, the family is represented as a flawed institution that does not provide the expected security to its members. While he is being chased by the police in the tunnel, David sees a monstrous zombie-figure of Alice giving birth to a child. This is related to the fact that she was pregnant when she died. She chases him (Figure 6), and he has no exit thus falling into the canal with Billy. Her appearance can be associated with the belief that the family, as an institution, is dying. Familism has proven to be ineffective and harmful to the Irish community. It can be seen as a dead and meaningless ideology that struggles to stay alive. It should be stressed that the first target of the assassin fathers, William and David, were the mothers. That is quite representative, considering women are usually the ones who beget the children and must take care of the household. By murdering the mothers, these men erased a fundamental pillar of the Irish family structure.

Figures 6: A monstrous figure of Alice chases David in the tunnel to the canal.
Source: *The Canal*

Mc Namara manages to save Billy, but David drowns in the canal. At this point, the audience might believe the story is coming to a sort of positive end, in which the child would finally be free from his father's disturbing actions. Nonetheless, Kavanagh builds a narrative that does not allow the viewer to easily separate David's delusions from reality. There is no certainty about the actual source of the violence, as the film "provides purposely unconvincing retreat from David's dream/ghost-world" (Barrett 283). The story emulates a parental connection between William Jackson and David Williams through their names, and this can also be connected to David's son. Billy is a common nickname for William. In this regard, one could predict that the heritage of death would be passed on to the next generation.

Although David is supposedly dead, Billy listens to him through the wall: "It's Daddy, I'm here with your mother. Do you miss us? Do you want to stay here with us? Do you want to stay here with us forever? I love you, Billy" (*The Canal*, 2014, 1h 28min 24sec). Billy gets into the car with his grandmother, but he suddenly opens the door and jumps from the moving vehicle. "The film's last shot is of Billy, back in the house – either having survived the jump or having now become a ghost – closing the door on the audience and engulfing them in literal and metaphorical darkness" (Barrett 283). The conclusion of the film is strongly associated with the postmodern horror paradigm, as there is no clear idea about Billy's fate. It is very unlikely that he survived, but the audience does not witness what happened after he jumps from the car.

The conclusion the filmmaker gives to the film is the triumph of the monster, who seems to be an invisible force that induces fathers to kill unfaithful wives. The children are also sacrificed to obliterate a flawed family as if they just could not live outside their household. Although David died, normality was not restored, and his child became the very last victim. Kavanagh possibly aimed to expose a contradictory ideology with roots in the stem family tradition. Irish society propagated familism and ignored the negative effects for as long as they

could. They establish a way of living that sacrificed a whole generation. It was a tradition that charged the community, and the "price, quite literally, was madness" (Mc Cullagh 208). Thus, William and David, just like the fathers of the stem family system, decided the fate of the other family members. The unfaithful wives were serious threats to their position, as they could leave with the children and form a family with a new partner. These women challenged the traditions by taking control of their own lives, and that was unacceptable. William and David were not able to handle their failure to maintain the tradition, and their roles in the household. Thus, their flawed families had to disappear.

## Conclusion

As previously mentioned, this study can be considered a starting point to develop theories to understand the aspects of contemporary Irish horror cinema. This research is still in its first stages, but one can point out that Irish filmmakers have repeatedly staged horrifying events inside households. Furthermore, a family member tends to play the role of the monsters, which creates a troubling contrast with the traditional representation of the family in the Irish society.

Therefore, *The Canal* is a movie that reports contradictions of the family institution. In Ireland, the family has held a central role in the community for quite a long time. However, it has been noticed that parents have failed to regulate social behaviour, and they can even threaten the security of their children. In this regard, Irish horror filmmakers explore the family as a source of fear, especially considering that the postmodern horror paradigm tends to portray the terror of everyday life. Kavanagh presents a story of a monstrous entity that crosses generations spreading violence. He seems to imply that Irish household terror has roots in the past, but the contemporary family still struggles to avoid its vile influence. In the film, David's whole family died just like the previous residents of his house, implying that it can be hard to avoid the horrifying heritage.

In this sense, the film exposes some of the worst aspects of the family institution. One can notice that the actions of the father, who was supposed to be the head of the household, led the whole family to its demise. Thus, the narrative can be associated with the consequences of the stem family tradition. The father in a family had full control of his children's fate, and his decisions had horrifying effects on non-inheriting sons and daughters. In *The Canal*, the fathers struggle to keep control of their families. As soon as they notice their own failure, they engage in a self-destruction process, as if their wives and children simply do not have the right to leave or form a new family.

Just like his previous micro-budget horror film *Tin Can Man*, Kavanagh explores psychological horror and connects the viewer with a troubled mind. By using sequences with

rapidly changing shots, face close-ups, and a sound design, he provides a frightening experience to the audience. Consequently, through films like The Canal, Irish filmmakers prove that they can induce fear without relying on costly special effects. As such, this film can be considered a turning point in the development of a horror cinema tradition in Ireland, departing from the influence of Hollywoodian patterns and producing creative, unique, and horrifying narratives.

## Notes

1 The author of this article receives a monthly grant from FAPESB – Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado da Bahia. He was also selected by the ABEI committee to receive the ABEI / ESP Grant to a Junior Researcher 2020.

2 The Great Famine was a period of great starvation in Ireland, when potato crops were infected with a fungus, leaving peasant families with little or no food options. During this period, the Irish population fell drastically, as a result of the large number of deaths and immigration.

3 The Irish Film Board, now known as Screen Ireland, is a public organization that supports and promotes the development of film, television, and animation in the country. They usually offer financial support to projects by Irish writers, directors and producer. They also fund filmmakers interested in recording movies in Ireland. Source: www.screenireland.ie. Access: August 01, 2020.

4 The Irish Film Board was founded in the early 1980's and, although it existed for less than a decade, it can be seen as the starting point of Ireland's modern national cinema. In 1993, then Minister for the Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, Michael D. Higgins, re-established the Board.

5 The Celtic Phoenix is a name given to Ireland's economic recovery. According to Aidan Regan and Samuel Brazys (2017), Irish economy started to grow again with the investment of multinational corporations, such as the global tech giant Apple.

6 Aiming to discuss contemporary horror cinema, Andrew Tudor (1989) uses the term paranoid horror, while Isabel Pinedo (1997) introduces "postmodern horror".

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# Comparative Studies

# *Irish Critical Legacies: Seamus Deane and Terence Brown*

## *Legados críticos irlandeses: Seamus Deane e Terence Brown*

Michael McAteer

**Abstract:** *Seamus Deane and Terence Brown have been two of the most significant voices in Irish literary criticism and culture over the past forty years. This article discusses two highly influential studies of theirs, Deane's* Celtic Revivals *and Brown's* Ireland: A Social and Cultural History. *I read both works as part of an important phase in the development of Irish literary criticism during the 1980s. I compare three aspects of both studies: the role of politics in the critical approaches taken in both works; the different ways in which they tackle the problem of essentialism in Irish culture; their manner of addressing the question of language, in terms of literary language in the case of Deane and the Irish language in the case of Brown. The article highlights some problems that arise in these aspects of the two studies, while also emphasizing their importance for Irish criticism.*

**Keywords:** *Irish Criticism; Modernization; Irish Literature and Politics; Language; Essentialism.*

**Abstract:** *Seamus Deane e Terence Brown foram duas das vozes mais significativas na crítica literária e na cultura irlandesa nos últimos quarenta anos. Este artigo discute dois de seus estudos altamente influentes,* Celtic Revivals*, de Deane, e* Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, de Brown. Li as duas obras como parte de uma fase importante no desenvolvimento da crítica literária irlandesa durante os anos 1980. Eu comparo três aspectos de ambos os estudos: o papel da política nas abordagens críticas feitas em ambos os trabalhos; as diferentes maneiras em que abordam o problema do essencialismo na cultura irlandesa; sua maneira de abordar a questão da linguagem, em termos de linguagem literária no caso de Deane e da língua irlandesa no caso de Brown. O artigo destaca alguns problemas que surgem nesses aspectos dos dois estudos, ao mesmo tempo em que enfatiza sua importância para a crítica irlandesa.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Irish Criticism; Modernização; Literatura e política irlandesa; Língua; Essencialismo.*

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The work of Seamus Deane and Terence Brown was pivotal to Irish literary criticism during the 1980s and 1990s, when assessments of Irish literature were marked in diverse ways by the impact of political violence in Northern Ireland and the culture wars in the Republic of Ireland over the influence of the Catholic Church on state legislation. This essay examines two major books from that period: Deane's *Celtic Revival*s and Brown's *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* (hereafter *Celtic Revivals* and *Ireland*). These studies are forerunners in the Irish Literary Critical Revival of the 1980s and 1990s, which in certain respects, mirrors features of the Irish Literary Revival that had emerged one hundred years previously, while also shaping the development of Irish literary and cultural criticism/scholarship in subsequent decades. That Irish Critical Revival includes influential studies such as Denis Donoghue's *We Irish* (1988), David Lloyd's *Anomalous States* (1993), W. J. McCormack's *From Burke to Beckett* (1994), Edna Longley's *The Living Stream* (1994) and Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland* (1995). Pioneering works for this movement as they are, *Celtic Revivals* and *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* are very distinct in style and content. Deane's is in some ways more of a polemic than a critique, offering suggestive readings of key Irish authors that function as a call for a new critical approach to Irish literature, involving a new conception of the political meanings we might attach to it. The work is historically situated in relation to the *Field Day* project that emerged in the early 1980s, producing the multivolume *Field Day Anthology of Irish Literature*, the first three volumes under Deane's general editorship, and the *Field Day* monograph series. This enterprise represents a pioneering and disruptive moment in the history of modern Irish literary criticism, creating the impetus for works of similar comprehensiveness in subsequent decades: *The Encyclopedia of Ireland*, *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, the nine-volume *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. In contrast to *Celtic Revivals*, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* draws upon empirical historical and economic data to outline discernible patterns in the development of those social contexts from which literature in Ireland emerged between the 1920s and the 1980s. In this essay, I present some reflections upon the insights and anomalies in Deane and Brown's treatment of politics, essentialism and language as they have borne upon Irish literature and society in the first half of the twentieth century.

## Politics

Comparing the two studies, a simple paradox is immediately apparent. Deane is explicit in calling for a political form of evaluating Irish literary works, at odds with the formalist approaches that dominated English literary criticism in Britain, Ireland and North America

for most of the twentieth century. No such call is made in *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, yet the attention that Brown gives to such obviously political matters as state policy, demographic and economic patterns in Irish society since independence is entirely absent in *Celtic Revivals*. This absence raises important questions about the political nature of the critique that Deane envisaged in his study. It implies a suspicion of empirical data as complicit with pre-existent institutional authorities, designed in the Irish case to validate the constitutionalist delimitation – both nationalist and unionist – of revolutionary discourse. Such a critical perspective of empirical research as self-ratifying points to the influence of *Of Grammatology*, where Derrida identifies the centrality to the empirical method of an explicit opposition or indifference to philosophy: "The thought of this historical opposition between philosophy and empiricism is not simply empirical and it cannot be thus qualified without abuse and misunderstanding" (*Of Grammatology* 162). Although he retained the concept of social totality that Derrida abandons, Theodor Adorno objected to data-based analysis in the social sciences on similar grounds in 1969. Essentially an attack on behaviourism and structural functionalism, Adorno identified stand-alone empirical data as conceptually redundant (and complicit with the orders of power) (*Sociology* 176-77). When considered in light of these major interventions in philosophy and social science, the different approaches adopted by Deane and Brown become far more than matters of style.

Deane identifies a strategy in the literature of James Joyce, whereby colonialist, nationalist and religious frames of reference in Ireland are re-worked through a creatively self-conscious use of language. He observes in Joyce the transformation of diverse Irish historical narratives into a meta-narrative process of perpetual fictive reinvention. Deane considers this to be the most impressive precedent in literary imagination for a politics of radical emancipation in Ireland because of how explicitly it shows the fictive nature of political rhetoric: "In revealing the essentially fictive nature of political imagining, Joyce did not repudiate Irish nationalism. Instead he understood it as a potent example of a rhetoric which imagined as true structures that did not and were never to exist outside language" (*Celtic Revivals* 107).

In the decades between the first publication of Celtic Revivals and the present time, a lot of important criticism has emerged in which Joyce's treatment of nationalism and the colonial situation in nineteenth-century Ireland is reassessed.[1] There is a strong sense that Deane brings his awareness of life in Derry city during the worst phase of the Northern Irish conflict in the early 1970s to his reading of Joyce, Ulster being a terrain in which the linguistic essence of political experience is immediately apparent in the perpetual naming contest: Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland/the North of Ireland and Ulster/the Six Counties.

Taking as its point of the departure the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922 rather than the period of the Irish Literary Revival, Terence Brown's study lays its emphasis upon state policy and the features of Irish social life conveyed through historical and economic historical studies that offer a backdrop against which intellectual and literary reflections in the independent state are set over the course of sixty years. Like Deane, Brown identifies the conservative nature of Irish society as the key challenge for the intellectual life of the nation over this period. Whereas Deane locates this in the mentalities inherited from the system of British economic and juridical power in Ireland – culturally enshrined in the aesthetic of the Big House – Brown situates it in relation to a Catholic middle-class, an agrarian social formation characterised by religious devotion and economic pragmatism.

Invoking Joyce as cultural exemplar, Deane also follows Joyce's rejection of the Irish Literary Revival, which first offered Joyce a forum as a writer with the publication in 1904 of "The Sisters", "Eveline", and "After the Race" in *The Irish Homestead*, which he later termed "the pig's paper" in the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode of *Ulysses* (Joyce 246). In contrast to Joyce's stance, however, the issue for Deane has not been the stultifying presence of what Heaney – ventriloquizing Joyce – calls "your peasant pilgrimage" in *Station Island* (Heaney 93). On the contrary, it has been the way in which the Irish Literary Revival shaped culture in Ireland according to an aesthetic originally founded upon a memory of Protestant aristocratic pre-eminence in a pre-democratic age reshaped to channel forces for social change through the cultural medium of romantic traditionalism. Deane interprets this memory as a Yeatsian gentrification of an eighteenth century bourgeois social formation. Hence, he gives emphasis to Edmund Burke's description of the Irish Protestant landowning classes as "a plebeian oligarchy" (*Celtic Revivals* 28-37). For Brown, by contrast, Irish farmers and tradesmen were the key constituents in accounting for the conservative profile of Irish society as it emerged from rebellion, guerrilla war and civil war in the 1918-1923 period (*Ireland* 23). While both Deane and Brown align ideology with social and economic circumstances in a largely deterministic manner, they are distinguished by emphasis. *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* constantly moves back to social and economic circumstances for its understanding of the political and literary cultural dynamics at work in the Irish Free State since its inception. Tracing pervasive forms of self-perception and self-understanding in twentieth century Irish society back to the legacies of those political and social formations from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, *Celtic Revivals* is more interested in the power of those forms themselves as shaping influences on the present.

*Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* is a remarkably dexterous work of scholarship, moving from discussion of government policy to statistics on schooling, Church building,

emigration, and industry. The range of writers and intellectuals addressed in relation to these considerations is wide: Patrick Pearse, W.B. Yeats, Æ, Douglas Hyde, Horace Plunkett, Patrick Kavanagh, Frank O'Connor, Sean O'Faolain and Brian O'Nolan (Flann O'Brien). Brown's book is an exemplary work of interdisciplinarity for it addresses language policy, the influence of the Catholic Church, and economic change over the course of a fifty-year period. That said, there are noticeable tensions within the study, the elaboration of which is important to evaluate its political and cultural critique. Most immediate and pervasive in this regard is that tension between Brown's sense of inevitability about the way Irish political, social and cultural affairs developed in the early twentieth century and his sense of disappointment with the course of these developments. Brown makes a compelling case that Irish society in the decades after independence failed to create artistic freedom and economic opportunity. Rather than inaugurate a programme of economic, social and cultural renewal, Government policy in the first decades was largely cautious, seeking to conserve and consolidate rather than expand and experiment.

Brown identifies three sources for the political character of the new Irish state: 1) the conservative nature of the most powerful groups in Irish society that emerged in the decades after the Famine: farmers, shopkeepers/publicans and traders; 2) the pressing need for the new Irish Government to stabilise politics after the ravages of guerrilla war and civil war in the 1918-1923 period; 3) the influence of the "Irish Ireland" philosophy that emerged during the period of the Irish Literary Revival. This assessment raises some challenging questions. If the traditional character of Irish society in the latter half of the nineteenth-century rendered inevitable the conservatism of the new Irish government after 1922, is it not pointless to lament the failure of a radicalised polity to emerge after Ireland became an independent Free State? Furthermore, if this conservativism of the Irish Free State was an inevitable consequence of the conservative nature of Irish society, how can it also be regarded as a necessary response to the radically unstable nature of the Irish political situation out of which independence and partition emerged? On several occasions in his book, Brown sees the policies of the Irish Free State during the 1920s in such a light. It is possible to explain this anomaly in terms of that historical combination of Catholic conservatism and political subversion within the militant Irish Republican tradition.

The devout Catholicism of IRA activists like Dan Breen in 1920s Tipperary or Billy McKee in 1970s Belfast are two striking examples of this combination.[2] Even taking these examples into consideration, it is still a shortcoming of *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* that Brown does not fully conceptualize the paradox of deeply conservative social formations in Ireland in the 1918-1923 period generating revolutionary political conditions. By situating

the Irish experience within the general framework of modernity, Joe Cleary regards "modernisation via colonization" as preceding "modernisation via industrialization", the former being "as destructive to any idea of an organic stable community" as the latter would be ("Ireland and Modernity" 7). This idea can account for the confluence of traditional attitudes and social practices in early twentieth-century Ireland with revolutionary transformations of the constitutional situation in the country.

## Essentialism

By evaluating the criticism of Irish life by intellectuals and artists in the generation after Yeats against the political character of the Irish Free State, Brown brings out the extent to which the frustrations of that period were rooted in a sense of political failure. Indeed, at one point he even expresses some sympathy for "diehard Republicans" who thought the settlement of 1921 and subsequent administration was a caricature of the freedom for which they had fought (*Ireland* 38). Attending to the ideological forms he identifies in canonical Irish writing of the twentieth century, Deane traces the influence of a romantic aesthetic of heroism as a depoliticising form of literary representation. However divergent their studies are in critical approach, both identify an essentialist habit of thought as one of the most persistent features of Irish culture and the greatest obstacle to emancipatory politics on the island. Brown is quite direct on the matter, identifying the 'Irish Ireland' philosophy that emerged during the course of the Irish Literary Revival (particularly in the writing of Denis Patrick Moran), as one of the great distortions in Irish life from the foundation of the state to the beginning of the sixties. For the most part, Deane objects to the aestheticization of heroism in the literature of the Irish Revival in Celtic Revivals on the basis that this heroism is essentialist in nature.

One of the most thought-provoking features of both studies is the identification of essentialist propensities even in the most politically radical writers of the 1920s and 1930s in Ireland. Brown, for example, draws attention to the idealisation of the west of Ireland in the work of Communist Internationalist Peadar O'Donnell (*Ireland* 73). Deane saves some of his most biting criticism for Sean O'Casey, Ireland's Marxist playwright of the later Revival period. He accuses O'Casey of substituting for political critique a sentimentalised humanism against which revolutionary nationalism is contrasted purely and simply as a force of oppression (*Celtic Revivals* 108-12). At first it seems odd that Deane favours Yeats's esoteric drama *The Resurrection* over O'Casey's play on the First World War, *The Silver Tassie*, when complaining of O'Casey's literary posturing (*Celtic Revivals* 113). It makes sense however if we see that the estranging power of language and imagery, which Yeats employs in *The Resurrection*, produces distancing effects that allow one to trace an ideological construction of

reality. Deane is correct in regarding a later Yeats play like *The Resurrection* in this way, but misleading in distinguishing him so drastically from O'Casey on the basis of such a play. *The Silver Tassie*, after all, is the first play in which O'Casey ventures beyond the predominant realism of the so-called Dublin trilogy of his plays from the mid-1920s.

Brown draws explicitly on Clifford Geertz's notions of national essentialism when reflecting upon the patterns of Irish social and cultural life from the period of independence to the Second World War. He praises the contributions that Ireland made during this period in the field of international relations, looking at its role in forums like the League of Nations in the pursuit of national rights, the maintenance of international peace, and the resistance of small states to puppet-like treatment from larger powers (*Ireland* 140-41). The predominant impression of Ireland during this period that the study conveys, however, is one of a society dominated by the pastoral ideal of traditional Catholic Ireland. Examining this circumstance in relation to Irish language policy, censorship, and the influence of the Catholic Church, Brown's study demonstrates the essentialist form of this ideal when pointing to discrepancies with Irish social realities. It amounts to a critical assessment of the "Irish Ireland" ideal that received its most well-known expression in De Valera's St. Patrick's Day broadcast of March 1943, with its "cosy homesteads" and "the laughter of happy maidens" ("The Ireland That").

The criticism that Brown directs at the notion of Irish authenticity – to which Irish Governments gave sanction in policies on language, education, censorship and Church influence on the state – is as balanced as it is cogent. As with the tension between lament and inevitability in his reading of political culture after independence, however, there is again a disparity here that might prompt a reconsideration of the question of essentialism. On the one hand, Brown presents a picture of Irish life up to the Second World War as deeply conservative; on the other, he argues that anglicising and modernising processes were rendering Irish pastoral ideals obsolete, both in terms of state cultural policy and of the work of individual artists. Brown argues that "Irish Ireland" values became increasingly difficult to sustain as daily life in the country became more anglicised with the extension of new communication technologies like the radio. During these decades however, bastions of Irish tradition like the Roman Catholic Church and the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) grew in strength and influence. Brown observes that the GAA organisation structure brought "the rural world increasingly into contact with large-scale national organization and political movements" (*Ireland* 68). Modernisation in this instance, it might well be argued, assisted rather than diminished the influence of "Irish Ireland" ideas up to the 1960s.[3]

Whereas Brown focuses on the dynamics between traditional values and social change in his critique of Irish essentialism, Deane concentrates upon the influence of "heroic styles"

on modern Irish literature. The heroic ideal is where the political and the aesthetic meet most persistently from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth century period, which encompass the Literary Revival and its aftermath in the Irish Free State. Deane's critical readings of seminal Irish authors centre on how romantic heroism has caused artistic treatments of Irish political and historical experience to afford little opportunity for understanding the power mechanisms through which its social life has been shaped. Deane's problem with this development is that political and historical considerations have become subsumed under a more fundamental consideration of Irish "character" or "essence". In the process, the complex dynamics of social life are fictively transformed into the figure of a single protagonist, a distinct couple, or an elect "band of brothers" who embody the destiny of the people. Deane's point is that if literature endorses or belittles these prototypes of national character, it denies the opportunity for new artistic forms prompting new kinds of political understanding on the island so long as literature remains organised around this preoccupation. It seems therefore bizarre that Deane saves some of his most damning judgement for O'Casey, the dramatist who attacked most emphatically the heroic cult in *Juno and the Paycock* and *The Plough and the Stars*. As to the early Abbey Theatre play that sets the tone for so much in subsequent decades, *The Playboy of the Western World*, we can dispute the extent to which Synge was indicting or celebrating the cult of hero worship in Ireland. We cannot, however, deny that his representation of Irish life in the play is structured around that matter.

While Deane takes the Irish Literary Revival's aesthetic of heroism to task for its distortion of political and social realities, in relation to the 1916 Rising itself the dimension of death gives him pause for a reconsideration of its political meaning. Discussing the philosophy of history that Yeats developed in his mystical work, *A Vision* (1926), Deane observes how the struggle opened up by the meaninglessness that death confers upon human existence is transformed in the work of art. In Yeats's aesthetic, Deane sees death instigate both content and form; the confrontation with mortality as the proper subject of poetry, image and rhythm as enactments of its tension (*Celtic Revivals* 42-44). Deane introduces two political contexts within which this aesthetic of death was aligned in the early twentieth century; the Irish rebellion against British rule in 1916, and continental European Fascism. Recognising an intellectual affinity with the philosophy of Martin Heidegger in Yeats's poetic engagements with the theme of death, Deane attends to the inclination towards "a savage politics" as part of this identification (*Celtic Revivals* 43). Ultimately, however, he ascribes the political content of Yeats's later aesthetic to "an almost pure specimen of the colonialist mentality" (*Celtic Revivals* 49). For this to be the case, the distance between Yeatsian philosophy and the 1916

revolutionary moment needs to be demonstrated and sustained, a challenge that proves insurmountable in Deane's analysis.

Deane's reading becomes fascinating and strained in equal measure as it confronts the task. There is recognition that the intervention of the 1916 Rising and its leader Patrick Pearse represented something completely new at the level of heroism: "What stalked through the Post Office was a new and specifically Irish version of modern, existential heroism" (*Celtic Revivals* 46). Yet this recognition is beset with uncertainty about how Yeats should respond to it: Deane assesses this as Yeats's need to convert a bourgeois revolution into the aristocratic-heroic terms of his aesthetic philosophy; hence the vacillation of "Easter 1916", Yeats's celebrated poem on the Rising. However, the ethos of chivalry and romantic heroism upon which Patrick Pearse drew aligns him with Yeats at the level of political ideology far more closely that Deane allows. To characterise the Rising as bourgeois is too simplistic – Pearse himself had the Geraldines, the Wild Geese or Robert Emmet to draw upon as historical examples of the Irish aristocrat revolutionary.[4] Irish Republicanism through the course of the twentieth century might be characterised not as a conflict between militancy and constitutionalism, but between the two concerns to distinguish the focus of Deane's analysis from that of Brown's most emphatically – hero-worship and pragmatism. Michael Collins, for example, embodies this conflict through the contrasting ways in which he is seen in modern Irish history. He has been regarded as a pragmatist who, in signing the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, accepted that the ideal of a full independent Irish Republic could not be achieved in his lifetime. Yet he is also seen as a hero, a man who became a sacrificial victim during the Irish Civil War when he was assassinated. Beyond this issue of pragmatism and heroism, we can ask whether the predicaments that Deane identifies are not simply the working out of those dialectical polarities of transience and the eternal through which Yeats presents his artistic and mystical conceptions of history. Characterising the "sacrifice" of 1916 as approximating to a species of existential heroism makes it more difficult to dismiss as archaic Yeats's manner of representing the rebellion, given the existentialist aspect to radical and reactionary political movements in twentieth-century Europe.

The source of tension in Deane's reading of Yeats's later politics lies in the conflicting significations that he attributes to death. Although he judges Pearse's poems as anachronistic in style, they are nonetheless impressive "in light of the fact that he knew he would die" (*Celtic Revivals* 74). By contrast, he implicates Synge in historical colonialism in Ireland to the extent that he considers his plays as essentially a wake for an Irish nation that has died (*Celtic Revivals* 62). Yet what lends Yeats's later poetry its power in Deane's eyes and its quite radical challenge to modern middle-class civilisation is its fearless determination to confront death. Deane regards Yeats's traditionalism as revolutionary in its time when set against "the history of the

disappearance from the Western mind of the sense of eternity and of the consciousness of death" (*Celtic Revivals* 49). Deane's interpretations of death in the Irish literary context cast light on a particular aspect of the many critiques of essentialism in poststructuralist thought or, more broadly, that of postmodernism.

These critiques offer relativism and difference as alternatives to the certain foundation that essentialism gives to experience and understanding. Deane, however, recognizes that relativism has its own foundation in death: death is a form of ultimate experience that poststructuralism or postmodernism cannot relativize. His reflections on death are the point at which the modern idea of freedom – political, artistic and sexual – shows its complicity with essentialism. That idea receives its most extensive articulation in Heidegger's ontology of *Dasein* but it persists in the nihilistic dimension to Badiou's set theory interpretation of the Platonic essence.[5] The implications for the Irish case are too varied to address here, suffice to say that it bears upon the tensions between the appeal in secular culture to the relativism of human value that death confers, and death as a historical absolute in the field of perpetual political struggle.

## Language

The issue of language is addressed in different ways in *Celtic Revivals* and *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*. Deane's concern is with the political dimensions to the aesthetics of linguistic self-consciousness in modern Irish literature. Brown considers state policy on the Irish language as it developed since Irish independence. These are widely divergent objects of critical attention, yet both studies converge in bringing into focus the ideological dimensions attached to particular stances towards language as the instrument for social representation and in itself. Extending their critical probing of essentialism into Irish cultural imagining and political experience, both Deane and Brown examine the ways in which language (and language policy) developed through the course of the twentieth century in the practices of Irish writers and those of the Irish state. Deane is more interested in style than content: the configurations of language itself prove more telling than the material represented when it comes to assessing the politics of modern Irish literature. Brown presents the issue of the Irish language in terms of state power in the field of education, the character of the political change that accompanied the transition from British rule to independence, and the legacy of an "Irish Ireland" philosophy that developed in the decades preceding this transition.

One of the most interesting aspects of Deane's treatment of language in *Celtic Revivals* is the contrast between his sympathy for Joyce and his criticism of Synge in their experiments with language as a medium. Deane identifies the failure of a series of political

narratives in Ireland as the point of departure for the revolutions in narrative form we encounter in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* (*Celtic Revivals* 106). He also identifies fantasy as the central element in the drama of Synge: Maura's fantasy of a surviving son in *Rider's to the Sea*; Christy's fantasy of having killed his father in *The Playboy of the Western World*, Mary Dhoul and Martin Dhoul's fantasy that they were both beautiful in *The Well of the Saints*. Each is confronted with unpalatable realities: Mary has no surviving son, Christy did not kill his father, Mary and Martin see their real decrepitude. In these plays of Synge, characters eventually move beyond these realities into the realm of artistic freedom. Deane argues that Synge's vitalizing language is the key to realising this freedom. The problem as he sees it is that it leaves in their state of destitution the communities from which these characters depart: "People talk themselves into freedom. No longer imprisoned by sea or cottage, by age or politics, the Synge heroes and heroines chat themselves off stage, out of history, into legend. Yet they leave behind them a community more hopelessly imprisoned than ever" (*Celtic Revivals* 58).

While Synge's composition of speech for performance is governed by a completely different set of conditions to those of Joyce's prose, it is still curious that Deane takes Synge to task for presenting liberation exclusively in linguistic terms while praising Joyce's narratives for that very reason. Indeed, the pattern that Deane attributes to Synge's work could well apply to Joyce himself: freedom achieved at the level of language as Joyce leaves behind an Ireland "more hopelessly imprisoned than ever." This seeming inconsistency might be explained in terms of Deane's aversion to an old stereotype of Irish verbosity that lingers in Synge's drama, one at variance with the strident cosmopolitanism of Joyce. This position is more difficult to sustain in the present than in the 1980s, given the critical attention that Synge has received over the past thirty years. Declan Kiberd, for example, observes the extent to which the power of Synge's language in performance was attributable in part to his knowledge of Irish syntax; as Irish appeared to be dying, its syntactic energies were passing into a new form of Hiberno-English, arguably a new form of language (*Inventing* 174). Adrian Frazier describes *The Playboy of the Western World* as "an astonishing work of genius" in which almost every sentence is worthy of in-depth analysis "of its elegant power to perturb" ("The Irish", 195). Ben Levitas draws attention to Daniel Casey and Nicholas Grene's application of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival to *The Playboy of the Western World* (*The Theatre* 126). Mary Burke draws interesting connections between the controversy provoked at first performances of *The Playboy of the Western World* in Dublin in 1907 and the scandal provoked by the first performance of Igor Stravinksy's, *The Rite of Spring*, in Paris just six years later, in May 1913 ("The Riot" 87-102). Upon observing the connections between the impact of Synge's greatest work and Stravinsky's revolutionary avant-garde opera, Burke identifies a context that brings Synge's experiments

close to those of Joyce, a context also explored in the connections that Shaun Richards makes between *The Playboy* and the most explosive play of the 1890s, Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* ("Synge" 21-30).

The question of language was manifested socially in Ireland in state policy on the Irish language after the country achieved its independence. Brown examines the circumstances around which the teaching of Irish in primary schools became mandatory in the early 1920s. He notes how small the opposition was to the policy on the grounds of practicality, and the influence of Fr. Thomas Corcoran, S.J., Professor of Education at University College Dublin, in support of a policy of teaching subjects through the medium of Irish in the national schools. Instigated by Douglas Hyde in 1893 through the medium of *Conradh na Gaeilge* (Gaelic League) and taken on by figures like D.P. Moran in later decades, Brown assesses the project of reviving Irish as a living vernacular in terms of a struggle between humanistic, educationalist tendencies on the one hand, and conservative, authoritarian tendencies on the other (*Ireland* 41-46). Looking at census figures for Irish-speaking areas in the west in the period between 1911 and 1926, he identifies a pattern of decline in the numbers of Irish speakers that went against the aspirations of language revivalists. Confronted with this social reality, Brown observes that the attitudes of language revivalists become increasingly authoritarian (*Ireland* 50). Later he considers changing attitudes to the teaching of Irish within the Irish National Teacher's Organisation in the forties, with criticism of the nationalistic educational policy on the language becoming more pronounced. In Flann O'Brien (himself a fluent Irish speaker), Brown finds one of the most intelligent and acerbic critics of the "Irish Ireland" philosophy to underpin official language policy in Ireland from 1922, particularly through his novel *An Béal Bocht* (*Ireland* 148-50).

Brown's assessment of the teaching of Irish up to the fifties is well observed. Rooted in the rural life of the west, the language became more than a medium of communication. It was a symbol of tradition that became associated with the Irish Celtic Romanticism of such mythological sagas as *Tóraíocht Diarmuid agus Gráinne* (*The Voyage of Diarmuid and Grainne*), or stoic Irish durability in the face of hardship, as in *Peig*, the biographical narrative of a Blasket Islander that had long been required reading for Irish language studies in Ireland's education system. This tradition was rich and worth preserving, but it presented the difficulty of how the language was to adapt to the educational imperatives of modern society, particularly in the fields of science, economics, and mathematics. To render Irish a workable vernacular throughout the country, the language itself was in need of thorough reform. Brown argues that the absence of a wider set of radical policies in Ireland following independence meant that the objective of making Irish the working language of the population was bound to

fail. Such reform might have provided the institutional framework wherein the modernisation of the language could have been enacted. It might well be argued, however, that the problem pre-dated Hyde himself and all "Irish Ireland" movements to emerge later. Gearóid Denvir, for example, notes that the main interest in Irish in the nineteenth-century was scholarly and antiquarian, and the dominant sentiment was that of "a romantic, backward-looking attachment to the language" and regret at its decline ("Literature in Irish" 564). The more intractable problem concerned the internal struggle between progressivist and nativist ideologues of language revival among Irish speakers themselves during the first decades of the twentieth century. Addressing this issue, Philip O'Leary also brings to the fore a huge difficulty for any project of systematic language reform – the contest for predominance between differing provincial dialects of Irish, functioning not only with certain differences in vocabulary and pronunciation, but, more dauntingly, differences in grammatical structure ("The Irish Renaissance" 226-69).

## Conclusion

*Celtic Revivals* and *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* were vital contributions to Irish literary criticism during the delightfully dreary 1980s. The polarisation of the conflict in the North following the 1981 Hunger Strikes prompted the Irish Government under Taoiseach Garrett Fitzgerald to establish the New Ireland Forum in order that some political initiative might develop on the basis of a tacit recognition of the legitimacy of political difference. The fifteen-year recession into which the Irish economy sunk at the end of the 1970s prompted a whole series of strike actions, a renewed pattern of emigration, and a culture war over the influence of the Catholic Church on Irish law. Anne-Marie Hourihane, who campaigned against the Pro-Life amendment to the Irish Constitution in 1983, described the Ireland of that time for a young feminist as "like living in Franco's Spain" (Ferriter 19). The critical scrutiny to which Irish tradition is subject in both Deane and Brown reflects the political antagonisms of that time in both jurisdictions. Calling for an abandonment of "the literary myths of the Revival" Deane identified habits of thought deeply engrained in Irish life that were derived from a colonial legacy, the violence and bitter hatred in the North bearing testimony to their endurance. Brown's attention to the religious and economic dimensions of Irish cultural life bears direct relation to the upswing in Irish economic fortunes from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies, consequent upon a sustained period of foreign direct investment, accompanied by growing dissatisfaction with the bans on divorce and contraception, intensified with Ireland's accession to the European Community in 1973. The monumental transformations of the past twenty-five years within Irish society re-configure the significance

of the assessments that Deane and Brown offer in the books discussed here. The critical scrutiny to which they subject old colonialist and nationalist habits of thought was a necessary moment in an Irish society seeking to overcome the political and religious polarisation in the 1970s and 1980s. Within the context of a globalized Irish society that is subject to the recurrent calamities of a crisis-prone world financial system, and in the face of severe economic, epidemological and ecological challenges worldwide, notions that Deane and Brown target from different angles may now be important contributions to new kinds of politically-conscious artistic perspectives, including eco-critically transformed concepts of romanticism, reconsiderations of heroic virtue in post-human times and reconceptualizations of essentialism in situationalist terms.

## Notes

1 See Emer Nolan, *James Joyce and Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994); *Semicolonial Joyce*, ed. Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Leonard Orr, *Joyce, Imperialism, and Postcolonialism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

2 On Breen's Catholicism, see his account of his wedding in a republican safe-house in Tipperary during the war of independence. *My Fight for Irish Freedom* (Dublin: Anvil Books, 1981), p. 164. For discussion of McKee's devout Catholicism, see Richard English, *Armed Struggle: A History of the IRA* (London: Macmillan, 2003), p. 112, 135.

3 For a discussion of the GAA as a force of modernization, see Richard Holt, 'Ireland and the Birth of Modern Sport', The Gaelic Athletic Association, 1884-2009, ed. Mike Cronin, William Murphy and Paul Rouse (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), pp. 33-46. See also, Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan and Paul Rouse, *The GAA: A People's History* (Cork: The Collins Press, 2014).

4 David Dwan notes how Yeats co-opted John O'Leary for an aristocratic Irish ideal. How far this distorted O'Leary's political philosophy is a matter of debate, but O'Leary would certainly have been included in Pearse's spiritual cabal. *The Great Community: Culture and Nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008), pp. 118-19.

5 See Heidegger's discussion of 'Being-towards-death' in his account of the ontological structure of *Dasein*. *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p. 299-311. Badiou's dense discussion of Plato's Parmenides places 'the name of the void' at the centre of his numeric reading of Platonic essence. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 35.

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# *Two Artists, Two Portraits: Cohen/Joyce – A Study in Affinity*

## *Dois artistas, dois retratos: Cohen/Joyce – Um estudo de afinidade*

Nigel Hunter

**Abstract:** *Canadian singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen (1934-2016) was a poet and novelist before becoming world-famous as part of the 1960s and '70s counterculture. His two novels,* The Favourite Game *(1963) and* Beautiful Losers *(1966), are significant contributions to Canadian literature and to postmodern fiction in general. Cohen himself, and more than one contemporary commentator, claimed for them certain affinities with the work of James Joyce, and the present account reflects on this claim. What in the progress of Cohen's protagonist Lawrence Breavman, of* The Favourite Game*, echoes the education in consciousness of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus? Religion, politics, and sexuality are emphatic presences in both narratives; art too, clearly. But, is Joyce's* A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man *(1916) simply a template for later autobiographical* Künstlerromane*, or is it Joyce's example as an original master of the form that may be more pertinent here? Where are the main points of convergence and divergence between these two artists and their fictions? An attempt to elucidate some answers may contribute to the construction of an early consensus regarding Cohen's literary status – and to the question of Joyce's ongoing importance to later generations and later phases of artistic and cultural production.*

**Keywords:** *Leonard Cohen; James Joyce; artistic affinity;* Künstlerroman*; autobiographical fiction.*

**Resumo:** *O cantor e compositor canadense Leonard Cohen (1934-2016) foi poeta e romancista antes de se tornar mundialmente famoso e parte da contracultura dos anos 1960 e 1970. Seus dois romances,* The Favorite Game *(1963) e* Beautiful Losers *(1966), são contribuições significativas para a literatura canadense e para a ficção pós-moderna em geral. O próprio Cohen e alguns comentaristas contemporâneos reivindicaram para esses romances afinidades com a obra de James Joyce, e o presente relato reflete acerca dessa afirmação. O que no progresso do protagonista de Cohen, Lawrence Breavman, de* The Favorite Game*, ecoa a educação na consciência de Stephen Dedalus de Joyce? Religião, política e sexualidade são presenças enfáticas em ambas as*

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*narrativas; arte também, claramente. Mas, seria* Um retrato do artista quando jovem *de Joyce (1916) simplesmente um modelo para um* Künstlerromane *autobiográfico posterior, ou seria mais pertinente aqui o exemplo de Joyce como um mestre original da forma? Onde estão os principais pontos de convergência e divergência entre esses dois artistas e suas ficções? Uma tentativa de elucidar algumas respostas pode contribuir para a construção de um consenso inicial sobre o status literário de Cohen – e para a questão da importância contínua de Joyce para as gerações e fases posteriores da produção artística e cultural.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Leonard Cohen; James Joyce; afinidade artística;* Künstlerroman*; ficção autobiográfica.*

"James Joyce is not dead," claimed *The Boston Globe* in 1966. "He lives in Montreal under the name of Cohen."[1] The reference was to Leonard Cohen, known principally at that time as a poet; the occasion being a review of his second novel, *Beautiful Losers* (1966). This – to clarify – was some years before the start of Cohen's career as a singer-songwriter that was to bring him international fame. What then, specifically, led the reviewer to make such an extravagant claim, so strongly worded? Certain kinds of popular Joycean associations – formal experimentation, verbal inventiveness, obscurity, even "obscenity" – may surely be assumed to be in play, as even a cursory examination of the text may confirm. However, it is not the remarkable *Beautiful Losers* that I wish to prioritize here, but Cohen's first novel, *The Favourite Game*, published a few years earlier, in 1963.

In Canadian Broadcasting Company footage from the time, Cohen firmly but humorously denies what, to most readers of *The Favourite Game* (especially to those – probably not a few – who knew anything of the author previously), would have looked obvious: "It is NOT autobiographical," he says to the interviewer. "I made it up, out of my little head."[2] He was being disingenuous – there are many details in the narrative, and in the circumstances of its protagonist Lawrence Breavman, that derive directly from Cohen's early life.[3] But Cohen's reluctance to confirm publicly the strength of the connection is understandable; he was projecting himself in this interview as an artist of integrity, while defending the novel against an introductory characterization from the interviewer that claimed for it merely "the flaws and virtues of a diary, shuffled, selected and re-arranged". Cohen insisted that, on the contrary, the work was "very highly crafted and very highly disciplined".

Cohen's sense of his achievement in *The Favourite Game* is attested to in a letter that he wrote to his sister in 1962 as the novel was approaching publication; at the same time he anticipates with accuracy the kind of reception he was to encounter in the studios of CBC.[4]

He described the work, with no false modesty, as "an extremely subtly balanced description of a sensibility, the best of its kind since James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* [sic]." He feared, however, that it would be "misunderstood as a self-indulgent childish autobiography, disordered and overlong."[5] So, twice James Joyce is invoked: once by a reviewer, attempting to capture the essence of Leonard Cohen's second work of fiction; once by Cohen himself, attempting to capture the essence of his first. How far – one might reasonably ask, in this particular period when Cohen's posthumous reputation has yet to settle – might the comparison be justified? Might Cohen rightly be viewed as an heir of James Joyce? Or, to shoot a little lower, might we at least be permitted to speak of them in the same breath?

*The Favourite Game* is a Canadian *Bildungsroman*, or to be more precise, a *Künstlerroman*: a novel that depicts the formation of an individual – in the second case, specifically an artist – from infancy to maturity. It is a portrait of the artist as a young man (through time) in other words; and therefore, very likely to be comparable, at least at the most basic level, to Joyce's masterpiece. But Cohen himself suggests substantially more – that his novel is "the best of its kind" since Joyce's *Portrait*. We may no longer be very interested in the ranking game, but there is still a challenge for cultural commentary worth taking up here: what are the points of comparison between Cohen's novel and Joyce's, and where do the divergences lie? And if we are interested in this, isn't it also a legitimate question as to how these two artists – and *men* – compare, going beyond these two works into the further reaches of expression, and achievement, that in each case followed?

To begin with, we might note that both *The Favourite Game* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* locate their protagonists firstly, within a somewhat complicated family circle, and secondly, within a city identified with a particularly complex colonial history – Cohen's novel being set primarily in Montreal, Canada, as Joyce's is set in Dublin. Just as Stephen Dedalus moves within a politically charged background, with the Irish independence debate an increasingly significant source of narrative tension, so Lawrence Breavman grows to maturity within politically urgent times: his boyhood is passed through the years of the Second World War, his adolescence and early manhood within the context of Cold War and the period of nascent French separatism in Quebec, his native province.

Growing up amongst Montreal's Jewish elite, Breavman views the war at first largely through the lens of popular juvenile narratives – comic-books and films wherein the Germans and Japanese are caricatured as cardboard cut-out villains. He comes to understand the nature of the Holocaust soon enough, but in conversations with his best friend Krantz[6] distances the horrors through ironic detachment. The strategy is consistent with the character's later political positionings, and may perhaps seem an uneasy straddling of the line between freedom

and irresponsibility (lack of seriousness, to the more committed); but it aligns him, at least arguably, with such a precursor as Joyce's Dedalus. There is little commitment, for example, attached to Breavman's attendance at meetings of the local branch of the Canadian Communist Party: he and Krantz are configured as jokers and disrupters in these scenes, more interested in the young women present than in questions of policy. Rivalry between the Anglophone and Francophone communities is also reduced to something more personal than political, with once again – in a dancehall setting this time – girls being the principal object of interest for the two Jewish boys. (The crude anti-Semitism of the French-speaking youths is at least as notable in this scene as any sense of Francophone resentment against the English-speaking community.)

As for "family" – at a certain point, Breavmen takes a position in the tailoring firm run by his uncles, but there is no long-term commitment. Later on, as his poetic ambitions become more serious, alongside one particular love-affair, his mother – always portrayed as neurotic, now confined to a psychiatric ward – condemns his "betrayal" of family tradition, of herself, and of his cultural identity as she sees it (172). His bohemian social connections threaten her more traditional bourgeois values; his affective involvement with an American girl from the elite "WASP" (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) classes (his *shiksa*, as she puts it, disparagingly), is, for her, a final index of this treachery.

There is a family dynamic and a wider socio-political dynamic in both texts, then. And as is well-known, Joyce's Dedalus determines to "fly by those nets" – the constricting pressures of Family and Politics – towards his artistic vocation; as just indicated, the same might be said for Breavman. The other main trap is also in evidence: religion pervades Cohen's novel as it does Joyce's. Both Breavman and Dedalus are forcefully made to be profoundly aware of their religious inheritance: Dedalus principally through his Jesuitical Catholic education, Breavman through his family's distinction as rabbinical leaders of the Jewish community in Montreal. And both come to a point of radical denial: "I will not serve" (the famous *non serviam*) in the case of Dedalus, and less formally in the case of Breavman (albeit only at this point a boy responding, with increasing vehemence, to a dare): '"Fug God." . . . "Fuck God!" . . . "FUCK GOD!"' (13)[7] For Cohen's protagonist however, the rebellion is transitory – an underlying sensitivity to manifestations of "the divine" abide. . .

Lawrence Breavman's vocation, like Stephen Dedalus's, is art – poetry, specifically. But their times are different, and what for Stephen was the source of much adolescent anxiety and in Joyce's novel became a suggestive lacuna in the narrative – the nature of Stephen's first sexual experiences, barely hinted at – is for Breavman (and Cohen) a source of artistic inspiration explored at some length. More than this – sex drives the narrative, in Cohen; here,

and in his second novel, *Beautiful Losers*, even more clearly. To an extent, modernists like Joyce made this possible, pushing at the boundaries of what might be said in fiction; Cohen is a beneficiary of his times in this (and of such landmark legal cases as the *Howl* and L*ady Chatterley* trials, conducted a few short years before his novel came out).[8] But sex in *The Favourite Game* – as in all of Leonard Cohen's output, as is well known to followers of his later career – is always infused with a sense of the sacramental; beauty and "grace" (in its full-blown religious sense) are aligned; from the beginning, desire and ritual, pleasure and discipline (including self-denial), are inter-dependent.[9]

As a young man, Joyce perhaps (Stephen Dedalus certainly) contemplated a life in the Catholic Church; the nature of his subsequent commitment to writing has about it the quality of a sublimation of this original impulse. Cohen, scion of rabbinical authorities, though doubtful of orthodoxy, by the time of his death had written himself into the tradition[10] – and became too an ordained (Zen) Buddhist monk. Both writers, one could say, combine something of the heterodox and the priestly – albeit, perhaps of the defrocked variety, in Joyce's case. . .

All of the foregoing may be offered to back up the case that there are valid points of comparison between these two artists, as young men, and between the fictions that they wrote. But it may be true that any such works as these two (autobiographical novels) will touch on the same subjects – family, politics, religion, and the artist's rebel heart. Is Cohen consciously following Joyce, then? His easy acknowledgement, in a private letter to his sister, of a debt to the earlier writer – or at least, his competitive posture – has been noted. But although a number of writers are referenced at various points in *The Favourite Game* (Keats, Whitman, Hopkins, Kafka, Dylan Thomas, Ivy Compton Burnett[11]) Joyce's name is absent – evidence, if one wished to take it as such, for Harold Bloom's "anxiety" complex operating at a more subterranean level. The debt in question – if such it be – may reside less in the *matter* of Cohen's narrative, as explored up to now (young man in the toils of everyday life comes to the verge of his artistic destiny), than in its formal organization and inventiveness, its confidence and poetic energy; that is, in Joyce's example as an original – even daring – innovator.

Structurally, *The Favourite Game* is a work of some complexity. Its four parts (denominated "Books") progress chronologically through the protagonist's childhood, adolescence and young-manhood, but each is composed of a large number of sections – from fifteen to thirty – some of which advance the narrative in a conventional way, some of which effect an observational or reflective pause, some of which anticipate, proleptically, moments in Breavman's life that still lie in the future (in some of which, he narrates to a lover in that future episodes from this earlier period of his life).

Time, indeed, is a recurring focus. While the past tense is predominant, the present tense intervenes at intervals, whether for the length of a whole (short) section, or just a line or two, lending immediacy to certain moments, and timelessness, or an aphoristic quality, to certain phrases, or authorial propositions. (There is complicity between the authorial voice and protagonist, throughout.) The passing and preservation of time becomes a significant theme: photography that freezes a moment forever; films (home movies) that capture a few minutes of people's lives; the paintings of Henri (*Le Douanier*) Rousseau – "the way he stops time" (55) All are evoked, and celebrated, and all imbued with an ineffable sense of loss.

The paragraphs and pages that make up each of the novel's ninety-one separate sections are also, in many cases, "snapshots" of moments in Breavman's life – episodes that accumulate to define a sensibility, a "consciousness" (the word is Cohen's[12]) in formation. If some of these episodes resemble Joycean "epiphanies", only worked-up and elaborated, they testify to the connection between the two writers;[13] as fragments, cumulatively collage, they position Cohen in *The Favourite Game* as an heir to Modernist poetics (as does the emphasis on time, simply). More particularly, in relation to Joyce, there is the inclusion (Book III, section 12) of a poem ("Beneath my Hands") from the author's past,[14] attributed here to his protagonist. Like Joyce's "Villanelle of the Temptress" in Part 5 of *A Portrait* (attributed to Stephen, written by Joyce around 1900), the lines are distributed – in the correct order – through a narrative episode in which the female object of the poem's interest is also within the frame. But whereas in *A Portrait* Stephen recalls this figure at a distance, and the principal focus of the text is the process of composition, in Cohen, she is present in the moment, and at a certain point Breavman reads the work to her (although we only have the poem in fragmented form, inter-cut with lines of narrative – unlike Stephen's "Villanelle", which we are given in its entirety at the conclusion of that episode). In both cases it is effective confirmation of the novel's autobiographical status; whether Cohen was conscious of the close parallel at this point between his text and Joyce's is impossible to know.

A somewhat comparable passage, involving a previous girlfriend, occurs earlier on in *The Favourite Game*, beginning as follows (85):

> Breavman let Tamara see some notes of a long story he was writing. The characters were named Lawrence and Tamara and it took place in a room.
> 'How ardent you are,' Tamara said theatrically. 'Tonight you are my ardent lover . . .'

The transition from text a), the principal narrative to text b), Breavman's manuscript, is not immediately obvious – Tamara's speech here, which continues for several lines, comes from the latter. But b), which finally stretches across three-and-a-half pages of the novel, is a first-person

narrative, its rhetoric and abrupt tonal changes awkward (so there are clues). It reads like an earlier version – a draft version – of an episode in the novel itself; perhaps this very episode in which it appears. This may be more of a postmodern than modernist gesture, but as an illustration of Breavman's evolution as an artist, a writer (here, in prose), it is original, and effective; as though Joyce had incorporated something of *Stephen Hero* into *A Portrait*, word for word, to the same end: Cohen in this particular instance even outdoing the master, one could suggest.

In the list of his achievements, Cohen's novels may appear apprentice works; *The Favourite Game* – conforming to common expectations of a first novel that it be, obviously or not, autobiographical – especially. But the writer, at twenty-nine years old in 1963, was already the author of two critically well-regarded volumes of poetry, and very committed to his art; hardly an apprentice then. A third volume of poetry preceded his next novel, *Beautiful Losers* (1966) and then came the move into music, and all that followed (another story, in the current context).

*Beautiful Losers*, like *Ulysses* (1922), is a work in three parts, with three principal characters. Like *Ulysses*, it was condemned as pornographic; like *Ulysses*, it is formally "open" to a multiplicity of rhetorical registers – in this case, sacred and profane, personal, and political. Historiography – the story of a real-life indigenous saint, as recorded by Jesuit priests – combines with (or collides with) the story of an unnamed narrator, his lover-inspiration-guide, F., and his lost (by suicide) indigenous wife, Edith . . . It is a long way from Dublin, right enough; but Cohen's ambition as a writer reflecting on national identity, sexuality, politics and literature, among other things, is no less serious than Joyce's, arguably – and possibly, not much less original or impressive in expression.

Both of Cohen's novels deserve much more extensive commentary; up to the present, critical attention to his work has concentrated far more on his subsequent musical/lyrical production; articles on the fiction (and poetry, when considered distinct from the lyrics) are relatively rare. Joycean resonances appear, at least, to be present – and enable discussion of Cohen the novelist within a certain strand of twentieth-century prose-writing. Such resonances alone do not "validate" the novels, clearly, but they can be taken, I would suggest, as an index of their interest.

These works are not anomalies, finally, but (arguably) major achievements within a rich and surprising career. One of the more surprising aspects of that career, unfortunately, is the fact that Cohen never wrote a third (or fourth, or fifth) work of fiction. But Joyce, after *Ulysses*, could only write *Finnegans Wake* (this isn't disparagement – he was surely driven to it); isn't it equally extraordinary to master a whole other genre, and help to define its possibilities, as Cohen did in the songs he recorded and released up to a month before his death, fifty years

later? Joyce himself – he of the "sweet tenor voice",[15] whose own guitar is displayed in the Martello Tower at Sandycove – might even have agreed.

## Notes

1 Words cited subsequently on the cover of various editions of the novel, and by many commentators (e.g., Simmons, 2012, p.135). The name of the Boston Globe reviewer has not been ascertained.

2 https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/playing-the-favourite-game

3 See the two main biographies by Nadel (1996) and Simmons (2012)

4 Canadian Broadcast Corporation.

5 Nadel, p.177.

6 The proximity of *Krantz* and *Cranly* (the names of Breavman's and Dedalus's best friends, respectively) is worth mentioning, perhaps – a subliminal echo?

7 It should be noted that Breavman's friend Bertha falls from the tree at this moment and suffers a serious injury; blasphemy may have consequences then? The text leaves it open.

8 Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* was tried for obscenity in the USA in 1957; D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was tried in the USA in 1959, and in the UK in 1960. The prosecution in all cases failed.

9 Rather than *A Portrait*, it may be that the phantasmagoric 'Circe' chapter of *Ulysses* best connects this aspect of Joyce's and Cohen's art.

10 See, for example, the prayer-like texts of *The Book of Mercy* (1984) and *The Book of Longing* (2006); see the commentary on 'You want it Darker' by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2s3kQSZ_Qxk

11 There are also three iterations in the text of the adjective 'Laurentian', deriving from D.H. Lawrence of course - with resonances vis-à-vis the name of Cohen's protagonist.

12 'I wrote the sexual episodes to indicate the development in the consciousness of the main character' - https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/leonard-cohen-prolific-in-swinging-sixties

13 To illustrate, Book I, section 19 (complete):

> Fur gloves in the sunroom.
>
> Certain years the sunroom, which was no more than an enclosed balcony attached to the back of the house, was used to store some of the winter clothes.
>
> Breavman. Krantz and Philip came into this room for no particular reason. They looked out of the windows at the park and the tennis players.
>
> There was the regular sound of balls hit back and forth and the hysterical sound of a house fly battering a window pane.
>
> Breavman's father was dead, Krantz's was away most of the time, but Philip's was strict. He did not let Philip wear his hair with a big pompadour in front. He had to slick it down to his scalp with some nineteenth-century hair tonic.
>
> That historic afternoon Philip looked around and what did he spy but a pair of fur gloves.
>
> He pulled on one of them, sat himself down on a pile of blankets.
>
> Breavman and Krantz, who were perceptive children, understood that the fur glove was not an integral part of the practice.
>
> They all agreed it smelt like Javal water. Philip washed it down the sink.
>
> "Catholics think it's a sin," he instructed. (31-2)

14 *The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961).

15 Opinion of the *Freeman's Journal* (1904). See Ellmann, p.168.

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# *Politics of Disillusionment: Violence and Idealism in Liam O'Flaherty's "Civil War" and Frank O'Connor's "Guests of the Nation"*

# *Políticas da desilusão: Violência e idealismo em "Civil War" de Liam O'Flaherty e "Guests of the Nation" de Frank O'Connor*

Rodrigo Moreira Pinto

**Abstract:** *Having their formative years in the period right before the Irish revolution, Liam O'Flaherty and Frank O'Connor were deeply influenced by nationalistic propaganda. Inspired by Republican ideals, both writers-to-be took an active, though modest, role in the War of Independence and in the ensuing Civil War. The literature they produced when the conflicts had ceased, however, displays a very critical and contrasting perspective to the one that had driven them to support the revolution. Analysing the short stories "Civil War" (1924), by Liam O'Flaherty, and "Guests of the Nation" (1932), by Frank O'Connor, this essay explores why and how both authors resorted to stark, gruesome, and nihilistic approaches to the Irish revolutionary period instead of adhering to more romantic and idealistic perspectives.*

**Keywords:** *Irish War of Independence; Easter Rising; martyrdom; idealism; disillusionment.*

**Resumo:** *Vivendo os seus anos de formação no período imediatamente anterior à revolução irlandesa, Liam O'Flaherty e Frank O'Connor foram profundamente influenciados pela propaganda nacionalista. Inspirados por ideais republicanos, ambos os escritores assumiram um papel ativo, apesar de modesto, tanto na Guerra da Independência quanto na subsequente Guerra Civil. A literatura que produziram quando os conflitos cessaram, no entanto, apresenta uma perspectiva crítica e contrastante com os ideais que os tinham levado a apoiar a revolução. Analisando os contos "Civil War" (1924), de Liam O'Flaherty, e "Guests of the Nation" (1932), de Frank O'Connor, este artigo explora porquê e como ambos os autores recorreram a abordagens brutais e niilistas para retratar o período revolucionário irlandês em vez de aderirem a perspectivas mais românticas e idealistas.*

**Palavras-chaves:** *Guerra de Independência Irlandesa; Levante da Páscoa, martírio; idealismo; desilusão.*

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Liam O'Flaherty and Frank O'Connor, born in 1896 and 1903 respectively, grew up in an increasingly vibrant atmosphere of idealism and nationalistic fervor (Averil 107) that engendered a series of armed insurrections in the 1910s which, in turn, culminated in the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922. Both writers, in spite of some minor political differences, were equally idealistic and took an active though modest role in this moment of radical change in Ireland's history. From such fervent revolutionaries one would have expected a celebration for achieving the long-desired freedom after seven hundred years of enforced subservience first to Anglo-Norman rule and later to British Imperialism. What we find in their literature, however, is far from the effusive and laudatory spirit of Patrick Pearse's discourses. O'Flaherty and O'Connor's tone also differs from the Celtic Revival poets' and dramatists', favouring stark realism over romantic symbolism based on aristocratic tradition and folklore (Averil 15). O'Flaherty and O'Connor could have sought the representation of experiences in the likeness of the martyrdom of the Easter Rising, depicting the steadfast manner in which the Irish withstood insurmountable odds in their struggle for independence and underscoring Irish values and virtues advocated by nationalist propaganda. In their narratives, however, heroism is but an unattainable idea and noble deeds are never the outcome of the extreme and violent predicaments their characters undergo.

This article will demonstrate how the violence O'Flaherty and O'Connor faced, especially in the last stage of the Irish revolutionary period, far from an opportunity for symbolic transcendence through heroic feats as the Celtic Revivalists and the nationalist revolutionaries painted with romantic contours, had a deep psychological effect, challenging the ideals and Irish values that O'Flaherty and O'Connor had once championed. The gruesome, almost nihilistic tone that predominates in the short stories analysed in this essay, I will argue, is a response to the tragic fratricidal denouement of the successful revival of violence as a viable political means to enforce the Republican agenda (McGarry 121). The cultural and political context of these revolutionary years will be aproached, highlighting the original ideological formation of both writers in order to contrast it with the prevailing values in the short stories "Civil War" (1924) by O'Flaherty and "Guests of the Nation" (1932) by O'Connor.

In "Civil War," this article will examine how violence pushed the limits of idealism and civility, leading brother-in-arms to fight each other and how it interacts not only with the Civil War itself, but also with the Easter Rising. In "Guests of the Nation," this essay will investigate how the meditations on the fratricidal struggle in the Civil War extended to the preceding War of Independence, blurring the boundaries of national identities at the same time as it deconstructs the infamous image of the Black and Tans, resulting in the psychological dilemma of killing an enemy turned friend in cold blood.

O'Flaherty's "Civil War," published just one year after the ceasefire of the conflict that gives the short story its title, provides a visceral and insightful depiction of the last stage of the revolutionary period. The literary value of this narrative is not restricted to its faithfulness to the actuality of the events to which it alludes nor to its acute representation of the mindset of the belligerents, i.e., the Republicans and the Free Staters. "Civil War," despite being essentially an allegory for the fratricidal aftermath of the War of Independence, stands above the recentness of the denouement of the Irish Revolution and creates a keen and thoughtful symbolic image that comprises the entire period, directing its main criticism, as I will argue, specifically at the event that triggered the armed fight against Britain, that is, the Easter Rising.

The Alamo-like predicament narrated in this short story was not uncommon either in the Civil War or in the War of Independence, yet it consists of one of the most distinctive and iconic characteristics that, at a tactical level, defined and came always to be associated with the Easter Rising. In "Civil War," the occupation does not last six days, as in the Rising, but only four and the story begins at the moment right before the last and decisive attack. The whole throng of Republicans were scattered, killed, wounded or hiding in the hills, and only two of them resisted in a public house taken as their headquarters: Lieutenant Jim Dolan and Quartermaster Tim Murphy. They crouched on the roof, with their pistols in their hands waiting for the soldiers to come. They knew everything was lost, but they would not surrender. This quagmire provides an ideal condition for making heroes out of mere soldiers, either by overcoming the enemy, or by dying valiantly. The romanticization of violence, either inflicted or suffered, constituted the main legacy of the Easter Rising and O'Flaherty's critical take on the Irish Revolution is expressed through the uncivil, brutalized, and devoid of symbolical transcendence manner that Jim Dolan and Tim Murphy are portrayed in the extreme and violent predicament they undergo.

"The Irish Revolution," writes Thomas Flanagan (154), "was probably the last rebellion to be fought along old-fashioned, romantic lines, with ample room for personal enterprise and with aspirations drawn from the rich nineteenth-century storehouse of liberal belief." Of the leaders of the Easter Rising, Patrick Pearse, who drafted much of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, was the most aware that the Rising's importance would lie in its symbolic rather than military impact (McGarry 176). Ferghal McGarry in his book *The Rising – Ireland: Easter 1916* states that "for the military council, the Rising was – above all else – an act of propaganda, intended to inspire the Irish people and win international support for their cause" (176). In order to achieve this goal, a "clean fight" was imperative. The Proclamation urged rebels not to dishonour their cause "by cowardice, inhumanity or rapine" (Pearse, 1916 *Rebellion Handbook* 10) For Pearse, the behaviour of the rebels was as

important as their achievements (McGarry 176). "The valour, self-sacrifice, and discipline of Irish men and women," Pearse believed, would "win for our country a glorious place among the nations" (15). During Easter Week April 1916, around 1,600 rebels occupied a ring of prominent buildings including the General Post Office, fortified them, and awaited the arrival of the British soldiers whose superior numbers and firepower crushed their resistance after 6 days. It stands as the most significant uprising in Ireland since the rebellion of 1798[1] and the first armed conflict of the Irish revolutionary period. Sixteen of the leaders were executed in May 1916, but the insurrection, the nature of the executions, and subsequent political developments, as Pearse envisioned, ultimately contributed to an increase in popular support for Irish independence. The Rising was seen as a heroic fight by selfless patriots who had recklessly taken on the might of the British empire (McGarry 121) and the popular support it obtained led to the rise of Sinn Féin, the war against Britain, and ultimately, the independence of Ireland.

Seán Farrell Moran, in his article "Patrick Pearse and Patriotic Soteriology," states that "Pearse promulgated an archetype of Irish republican martyrdom in which the Irish patriot re-enacts redemptive myth sanctifying not only the infliction of death and violence upon others but also the suffering of it by faithful nationalists" (9). Moran states that "Pearse's language, in both writings and his speeches, couches violent romantic nationalist ideology in theological language that emphasizes martyrdom as a means of bringing about a new age" (17). It was Pearse's ability, concludes Moran, to describe this conflict and its violence in theological terms that made them historically understandable and appealing to the Irish nationalistic culture (17):

> we must accustom ourselves to the thought of arms, to the sight of arms, to the use of arms. We may make mistakes in the beginning and shoot the wrong people; but bloodshed is a *cleansing* and *sanctifying* thing, and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood. (Pearse, "The Coming Revolution" 99)

This excerpt from Pearse's "The Coming Revolution," published three years before the Rising, is a clear example of the use of theological terminology to inspire revolutionary violence. In Irish history, religious martyrdom has always been a feature of the struggle against England. Irish martyrs did not die solely because they were Roman Catholic but because they were Gaelic Catholic witnesses of a free and unconquered Ireland (Moran 18). In the Cromwellian era, for example, 258 Irish who died as martyrs defending the Catholic faith as a means to resist English Protestant rule were later beatified (Moran 17). Martyrdom, as a Republican revolutionary strategy, was first adopted by the Irish Republican Brotherhood in the nineteenth century. The Fenians, also known as the IRB, were founded in 1858 and had as its core belief the use of violence as the only effective means of ending British rule in Ireland.

Different from its early twentieth century counterpart, however, the Fenian Rising in 1867 had very little impact and obtained an almost irrelevant public support. Yet, the Fenian adoption of violence and martyrdom as a tool for achieving independence consisted of an essential contribution to the Republican cause, blazing a trail that the Easter Rising leaders followed and improved successfully towards their ultimate goal. From 1916 on, Irish Republicanism has consistently reaffirmed the Easter Rising's modality of self-sacrifice; choosing death over life rather than surrender or compromise one's faith in the Republican vision of a free and united Ireland (Moran 10). This ideology permeated with theological significance whose foundations could be traced back to religious martyrdom, has glorified self-immolation in the belief that it is a redemptive act that helps to bring about a new age of righteousness (Moran 10).

In "Civil War," Tim Murphy, driven by the revolutionary spirit enkindled by the Easter Rising, is determined to sacrifice himself in a desperate fight against his former brother-in-arms, the Free Staters: "Thirty rounds left. Then death. All was lost now. There was no further need to live. Death . . ." (184). Jim Dolan, on the other hand, who like Tim Murphy resisted for four consecutive days while his Republican companions were either killed or surrendered, now before an inevitable death, exhausted and deprived of sleep, is unable to muster enough mental strength to carry out his ideals to the very end: "He, too, wanted to surrender" (184). Different from the fighting conditions promulgated by Pearse, which exhorted noble conduct from the rebels, aiming at a symbolic transcendence, O'Flaherty's "Civil War" portrays a reality that is not fit for propaganda. The first approach to the collapse of the Easter Rising's fighting principles we read in the story is through Jim Dolan's experience which essentially consists of the moral and mental breakdown of a former zealous Republican whose ideals are sublimated in the face of an extreme physical predicament: "He only thought of her [his wife], because she represented the world as compared to this wilderness, where he was cut off completely from life" (185).

The pressure the situation exerts on him undermines his sense of identity and allegiance. He stops seeing the Free Staters as the enemy and gives up the cause he has been championing, not considering himself a revolutionary anymore (186). Not fearing the Free Staters and willing to surrender, Jim Dolan has in his remaining brother-in-arms his main antagonist: "Murphy had turned on him, stuck his pistol into his chest and roared, frothing, into his face: 'You bloody well stay with me. D'ye hear, you bastard?'" (184). The extreme predicament these Republicans find themselves in overturns the army hierarchy. Lieutenant Jim Dolan, who is officially in charge, is to all intents and purposes paralyzed and thus incapable of exerting his authority on Murphy. The Quartermaster, in turn, is effectively in command and decides to die taking Jim Dolan with him. This configuration leads to the

second and more profound level of the collapse of the use of violence as promulgated by the Easter Rising propaganda. If on the one hand The Proclamation urged the rebels not to dishonour their cause "by cowardice, inhumanity or rapine," in "Civil War," Dolan not only lose heart before the Free Staters' last attack but is also unable to face Murphy and considers betraying him: "Why could he not turn his loaded revolver on the broad back of Murphy lying prone beside him and fire, fire, fire with clenched teeth and staring eyes ferociously, until six bullets had entered the devilish body?" (185). Extenuated, and afraid of facing his dead companions on the stairway on his way out of the building, Jim Dolan, again, is unable to muster enough strength to act and ends up effectively paralyzed in his position. Tim Murphy, on the other hand, who Jim Dolan considers a devil, is in turn enraged by the lieutenant's inactivity, and after being shot twice and seeing that Dolan has not moved since the battle started, deems his lieutenant a traitor and a coward and decides to kill him.

The ultimate civil war in this short story is not the fight between Republicans and Free Staters, but the one fought between Lieutenant Jim Dolan and Quartermaster Tim Murphy. The tragedy, which none of the leaders of the Rising could foresee, was that the zealous revolutionary predisposition to inflict and endure a self-righteous violence enkindled by their heroic sacrifice would ultimately turn former brothers-in-arms against each other and that the casualties smitten by Irish hands would surpass the sheer number of lives taken by the British in the War of Independence (Cottrell 10). After the promulgation of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which determined the newly formed Irish Free State as a self-governing dominion under the British Crown constituted of 26 of its original 32 counties, the Irish Revolution degenerated into a fratricidal cycle of terror and counter-terror as Irish combatants on both sides carried out illegal killings (Cottrell 19). One incident above all others evinces the hatred that prevailed amongst the rebels. At Ballyseedy Cross in Kerry a group of Free Staters tied nine Republicans to a landmine and set it off. Eight were blown to smithereens and it was said that for days afterwards the birds were eating flesh off the branches of the trees (Mckeon 43). These were boys who only a couple of months before had stood side by side against the might of the British empire. The Easter Rising's modality of self-sacrifice; choosing death over life rather than surrender or compromise one's faith in the Republican vision of a free and united Ireland had fallen short from bringing about the envisioned new age of righteousness. The fratricidal conflict that ensued the Anglo-Irish Treaty was fought with bitterness, filled with retaliation and inhumanity, and was one of the darkest periods in Irish history.

It is the hatred of those who did not support their self-righteous vision and not the love for Ireland that drives O'Flaherty's characters in "Civil War." Even Jim Dolan, who comes across as a rather moderate Republican after his mental breakdown, vents his hatred which also

encompasses the civilians indifferent to their cause: "The same hatred throbbed in his brain; hatred of the people who slept; hatred of the soldiers who were setting the distant street on fire and would come creeping through the houses towards him when the daylight spread. But he didn't want to die." (184). Tim Murphy, who Jim Dolan often refers as a devil, realizing that he is weakened by his wounds and that the enemy outgunned them by bringing to the fray a Lewis gun, redirects his hatred towards his lieutenant wishing to kill him before he died: "He would finish him off now, the traitor. He felt himself getting very weak. Only one side of him was alive. Death was coming rapidly. He would get that bastard though." (187).

The prominence of hatred amongst the rebels is an unwanted collateral effect and, to a certain extent, a distortion of the values propagated by the Easter Rising's discourse. Tim Murphy's unbending willingness to fight to the end could be taken, at first, as driven by a fervent, chivalrous, and selfless idealism – as the martyrdom of the Easter Rising leaders was seen by their contemporaries – but in fact his motivation is destitute of virtue, egocentric, brutalized, and ultimately, fratricidal. Tim Murphy does not die the death of a martyr. Driven by his uncontrollable hatred, he is shot dead by the Free Staters when he attempts to assassinate his brother-in-arms. Bloodshed in "Civil War" is not the *cleansing* and *sanctifying* thing through which a new age of righteousness would dawn in Ireland. Tim Murphy's ordeal is not rewarded with any sort of heroic transcendence nor any other form of meaningful significance. Equally nor is Jim Dolan's. After having got rid of the devil, he tries to negotiate his surrender, announcing that he is innocent and that he has not fired a single bullet. His attempt to appeal for diplomacy is of no avail. The same hatred that consumed the Republicans also throbbed in the Free Staters' hearts: "Two cruel, cold faces, staring coldly at him. Gradually he saw the faces growing colder and more cruel, the lips curling into a snarl and the eyes narrowing. Then one man said: "Let's give it to the bastard." They both fired point-blank into his head." (188). O'Flaherty's depiction of the Irish Revolution depletes it of its most idealistic and heroic features and reduces the experience to an uncivil, brutalized, and rather nihilistic senseless butchery. "Civil War" expands the fratricidal dramatic core the author explored in his first prominent story "The Sniper" (1923) in which a Republican sniper, unknowingly, shot dead his own brother, a Free Stater sniper. In the following short stories and novels O'Flaherty furthered his perspective on the revolutionary period.

To Jennifer Malia, the representations of political violence in novels as *The Informer* (1923) and *The Assassin* (1928) reveal O'Flaherty's disillusionment with political violence as a means to further a revolutionary cause (193). Malia argues that his lack of support for this cause is shown particularly by his grotesque depictions of terrorists who make a spectacle of blood violence and by his critical treatment of the public's desire for sensational stories of

martyrdom." (193). This demand for stories of martyrdom was, evidently, a collateral effect of the kind of ideological campaign waged by the Easter Rising leaders. It is in O'Flaherty's refusal to supply this demand that lies his pungent criticism to the heroic romantism incited by the Easter Rising leaders showing how such lofty ideas can decline into barbarism. McGarry states that "the difficulty of disentangling [the Rising's] violence from that which followed, not only during the War of Independence but also the Civil War and the more recent Northern Irish Troubles can all be seen as consequences of the military council's successful revival of the physical-force tradition." (121). Seeing these events in hindsight, O'Flaherty overlaps the Easter Rising and the Civil War suggesting that what began with the intention of uniting the whole nation against a domineering enemy, ended up dividing the Irish in a conflict even more brutal and less virtuous than the one waged against Britain.

It is important to note that this criticism is not being made by a resentful Unionist nor by a pacifist who opposed the violence-driven Republican agenda. O'Flaherty, like O'Connor, was raised in an atmosphere of an increasingly effervescent idealism and nationalistic zeal enticed by political discourses such as Pearse's and his predecessors. Like his father, who was an incurable rebel, a Fenian, a Land Leaguer and the first Sinn Feiner on the Aran islands (O'Brien 16), O'Flaherty became an ardent political revolutionary, organizing a corps of Republican Volunteers at school in 1913. In January 1922, just a month after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, O'Flaherty seized the Rotunda on O'Connell Street in Dublin with a group of one hundred and twenty unemployed workers, raised a red flag, and declared an Irish Soviet Republic (Doyle 21). The occupation, nonetheless, was short-lived and there was no bloodshed. After four days, besieged by Free State forces, this Communist branch of the Republican rebels surrendered. Later O'Flaherty took part in the Four Courts Rebellion, which marked the beginning of the Civil War, but again, his participation was short-lived. As a result of his involvement in these revolutionary activities, O'Flaherty developed an almost-entirely undeserved reputation as a violent revolutionary (Malia 191).

In his autobiography *Shame the Devil* (1934), O'Flaherty attempts to dispel his fame as a violent revolutionary. In spite of his effort in this book, any attentive reader minimally familiar with his fiction would perceive that O'Flaherty's approach to violence as a political means is never idealized, being always portrayed as a gruesome endeavor deprived of any form of humanism whose outcome never transcends senseless butchery. This attitude certainly reflects the position O'Flaherty adopted towards the Revolution as soon as he perceived its inevitable conclusion. In the early stages of the Civil War, not only the tides of the political turmoil indicated that a socialist State – the only kind of Ireland he considered worth fighting for (Donnelly 72) – was an impossibility, but also the free and united one which the Easter Rising

leaders envisioned and inspired self-immolation as a means to achieve it. As a result, O'Flaherty quit and departed to England where he concentrated his efforts on his literature (Doyle 23).

If on the one hand the dramatic question in "Civil War" revolves around killing your own kind, in Frank O'Connor's "Guests of The Nation" it springs from a hesitancy to execute the enemy. Out of the heat of the fighting, in contrast with the setting of "Civil War," Frank O'Connor sets his characters in a farmhouse turned into a prison-of-war camp, and while the characters pass the time playing cards, a friendly relationship between English soldiers and Irish rebels emerges. Night after night, they talk about subjects other than the war itself, creating a suspension of the belligerent atmosphere that results in mitigation of their sense of Otherness. Frank O'Connor's portrayal of the Black and Tans and their relationship with their Irish guards is very unlikely, though possible, and contrasts with the common view of this British paramilitary force that became infamous on account of the atrocities perpetrated against the Irish people in their attempt to suppress the Republicans' insurgent activities. O'Connor's humanization of the Black and Tans does not arise from a Unionist nor a pacifist leaning but rather, like O'Flaherty, from his own disillusionment with the revival of violence as a viable political means of enforcing the Republican agenda (Tomory 24).

Like Liam O' Flaherty, Frank O'Connor also grew up in a vibrant atmosphere of nationalistic fervor but instead of his own father, who was not drawn to politics, it was another father figure who instilled in him the seeds of his political formation. In 1912, when O'Connor was only ten, he met at school Daniel Corkery, a sympathetic and approachable teacher who really cared about his students and happened to be a passionate nationalist and a competent novelist, poet and painter. Corkery taught the core tenets of the Republican cause as well as the importance of the political connotation of the use of the Irish language on a daily basis (Matthews 20). When O'Connor left school at fourteen, he continued to learn Irish and to believe in Corkery's noble cause. With the same naïve fervour with which O'Connor plunged into languages and literature, he also took to revolution, and like his mother Minnie, he believed that he could make the world more palatable. When he was only sixteen, in 1919, he was a fully-fledged volunteer. O'Connor was impatient for action but was allowed only to linger on the fringes of rebel activity. Most young men who joined the Irish Volunteers were constantly involved in minor skirmishes with the RIC, popularly known as the Black and Tans, or engaged in other strategic hands-on activities such as chopping down trees and blocking roads, digging trenches, delivering dispatches, and spying on the enemy (Mckeon 34). Frank O'Connor, however, in spite of his enthusiasm, was assigned only to safe jobs like reconnoitering the enemy and carrying messages (McKeon 36). His mother, who had a bigger impact in his life than his father, also played a minor role in the Revolution, carrying messages

and, eventually, guns in her shopping bag (McKeon 34). O'Connor's idealism and romanticism went untested for several months because he was not much involved in the actual fighting (Tomory 23), however, as the War of Independence gradually evolved into the Civil War, he began to lose gradually his idealistic and romantic view of the conflict. Once, O'Connor and other rebels were given orders to shoot unarmed Free State soldiers with their girls. Deeming the order as senseless and unfair, O'Connor sought an IRA official of a higher rank who interdicted the orders. The order was cancelled but it did not mitigate O'Connor's perception that excesses were being committed in the name of the ideals he proudly championed. Later, O'Connor was imprisoned by Free Staters and saw a fellow Republican beaten nearly faceless and bayoneted in the legs and buttocks. The next morning, the boy was taken out and shot. After this episode, O'Connor was transferred to another POW camp and there, seeing the treatment given to the prisoners, he completely lost his idealism and romantism. Ten years later, these experiences served as the basis for "Guests of the Nation" in which O'Connor expanded the fratricidal character that defined the Civil War to encompass the preceding Anglo-Irish War, humanizing the hateful Black and Tans and showing that, even against a despicable foe, atrocities had been perpetrated in the name of lofty ideals.

In order to achieve this effect, O'Connor subverts the image of the Black and Tans by creating likeable characters and setting them in unfair circumstances. The Royal Irish Constabulary, as this British paramilitary force was officially called, was assigned to counter the rebel activities, retaliating against the insurgents' actions with disproportionate and quite often uncontrollable violence in order to guarantee the local social order. The RIC, or the Black and Tans, was almost totally composed of brutalized English and Irish WWI veterans who had a hard time reintegrating into the society and who had little or no training in policing (Bennett 38). Vicious, brutal ex-convicts and down-and-outs who carried bull-whips and frequently lashed, terrorized and robbed innocent people also integrated the ranks of the Black and Tans (McKeon 36). Richard Bennett, in his book *The Black and Tans*, reported a remark by a Unionist Limerick landowner on the RIC: "These blackguards should never have been let loose in this country. They are not gentlemen." "They were not," reaffirms Bennett, "and by their ungentlemanly behaviour over a few short months made it very difficult for any Irishman to remain neutral in the struggle against England." (38). At the peak of their activities, in 1920, hardly a day went by when a village wasn't burned down (McKeon 38), and in November of the same year, in just one week, twenty-four towns were badly damaged, looted and burned in response to the dramatic escalation of violence that ensued after the imprisonment and death of Cork mayor, Terence MacSwiney, a Republican and a playwright whom Frank O'Connor knew personally and admired (McKeon 39). Yet, in "Guests of the

Nation" Frank O'Connor does not emphasize these Black and Tans' deeds that make them a sort of Cromwellian scourge. Frank O'Connor, instead, breaks with the Irish nationalistic common view and takes a step forward by making them sympathetic victims in Irish hands. To achieve such effect, O'Connor fashioned Belcher and Hawkins as sympathetic towards the Irish.

Bonaparte, the narrator and a soldier of the IRA, tells us that "you could have planted that pair [Hawkins and Belcher] down, anywhere from this to Claregalway and they'd have taken root there like a native weed." Bonaparte compliments: "I never in my short experience saw two men take to the country as they did." (5) Hawkins affinity to Ireland is also evident in the fact that he knows the country better than the Irish rebels (6) and also because he has a particular interest in Irish dances which he can perform as well as any native (6). More important than the fondness for the country and culture, however, are the relationships developed with the Irish. Both Hawkins and Belcher get along with the old woman – maybe a faint allusion to the personification of the country – that works in the house. Belcher, especially, develops a distinct affection towards the old woman, deeming her as "his friend for life" (6). The heart of the story, evidently, lies in the unexpected camaraderie between Irish rebels and Black and Tans. If, on the one hand, the Englishmen display interest in Ireland, learning about its geography and customs, and getting along with the natives, the Irish in turn learn from them a simple but meaningful word that stands for "mates": "chums". All these elements combined create a friendly environment in which the word "guests" – instead of "prisoners" – is more appropriate to describe the kind of relationship and atmosphere that emerged among them.

In this context, not only the national differences, but also the power relations, are softened: Hawkins has too much liberty to speak up for a prisoner, and Belcher, who is characterized by his massive body, can freely use a hatchet to help the old woman in the house (6). Eliciting sympathy towards these characters, who belonged to an infamous class of people, is a result of underscoring their very humanity; their very capability to empathize with the Other. Fear and hatred of the Other, remarks Benedict Anderson, is one of the roots of nationalism (141), and in a war excited by a fervent nationalistic discourse, the situation portrayed in O'Connor's short story renders a special characteristic to the camaraderie evolved in this unlikely situation: the idealistic boundaries that define identity and alterity are blurred, and the very humanity that makes all of us equal arises.

The limits of the dissolution of these boundaries, however, are tested in the climax of the story. In retaliation to the execution of four Irish hostages, the IRA commands Donovan to be in charge of the execution of the two English prisoners. He in turn orders Bonaparte and Noble to take part in the preparation of the place and then in the execution. Having to perform his duties as an IRA soldier, Bonaparte faces a dilemma that its morality becomes ever more

estranged from the propaganda promulgated by Pearse and approximates to the atrocities that made Black and Tans infamous over Ireland. Escorting the Englishmen to the bog where they are to be shot and buried, Bonaparte hopes that the prisoners will escape: "If they did run for it, that I'd never fire on them" (13). However, the Englishmen neither fight nor attempt to escape. Instead, Belcher silently acquiesces in his fate, while Hawkins maintains a steady barrage of questions and arguments that intensify Bonaparte's awareness of his moral dilemma. "Weren't we all chums? Didn't we understand him and didn't he understand us?" (13). Ultimately, Hawkins appeals to the boundaries they dissolved, and in spite of their former allegiance to their own countries, he proposes to become one of them: "You can't come over to my side, so I'll come over to your side. That shows you I mean what I say? Give me a rifle and I'll go along with you and the other lads . . . I'm a deserter or anything else you like. I don't believe in your stuff, but it's no worse than mine." (14-15).

The bonds they created, however, were not strong enough utterly to eliminate the boundaries that separate them. Despite the fact that Hawkins's characterization foregrounds his fondness for Ireland and for his 'chums', it would be very unlikely that a Black and Tan deserter would be accepted into the ranks of the IRA. Bonaparte desperately wishes to be relieved of his moral burden, hoping that something could happen, like a flight of the Englishmen or that someone else takes the responsibility from him (13), but in the end he must choose between the moral heroism of going against Donovan's orders or the betrayal of the cause he champions. O'Connor creates a predicament that tells us that even decent people like Bonaparte and Noble, in spite of the noblesse of their ideals, sooner or later would be dragged to commit a heinous act occasioned by the very nature of war. The irony of it is that this is not the gallant sacrifice of a life on the battlefield that leaders have inculcated since hosts began ravaging their neighbours' lands, but a hideous execution of two English hostages in retaliation for the British Army's equally, or rather doubly, execrable execution of four Irish hostages (Atanasov 75). On top of that, these characters became intimate, making it not an execution of an enemy, which is still inglorious, but a cold-blooded murder of a friend. Ultimately, the dissolution of the boundaries that defined identity and alterity far from transcending the differences aggressively accentuated by the war, emphasizes the immorality of taking someone's life, suggesting that, ultimately, all wars are fratricidal.

The horror of the execution in "Guests of the Nation" is foregrounded by the fact that this story is narrated in the first person. Bonaparte's rendition of the event is like a confession conscious of the impossibility of absolution: "and anything that happened to me afterwards, I never felt the same about again." (18). This technique renders a rather personal trait to the account, which is particularly effective for deepening the emotional liaisons and

potentializing the stakes of his moral dilemma. If the psychological effects of the violence in "Guests of the Nation" are emphasized by the humanization of the enemy, in "Civil War," it is brought about by their very dehumanization: The Free Staters do not interact with the Republicans, their position is often unknown, and their whole action gives the impression of being an impersonal and deadly force of nature. As a result, it creates an atmosphere that sublimates ideals and morals reducing it to a primordial question of survival, which, in turn, engulfs Jim Dolan and Tim Murphy and leads them to their ultimate moral dilemma.

O'Flaherty emphasizes hatred as the main driving force of his characters which, in turn, is presented as a misguided and corrupted form of the lofty values and principles advocated by the Easter Rising propaganda. O'Connor, on the other hand, tackles the same object but through the opposite point of view. Instead of focusing on the hatred that divided the Irish, he concentrates his attention on the bonding of very unlikely friends. Both authors, through different approaches, depict the most gruesome, inhumane, and nihilistic aspects of the Irish revolutionary period in place of its most romantic, idealistic, and heroic characteristics.

Liam O'Flaherty and Frank O'Connor could have remained as fervent idealists, as many Republicans did. They could have sought the portrayal of experiences of symbolic transcendence through heroic feats. Their most lofty ideals, however, vanished before the atrocities – especially those conducted by the Irish against themselves – resulted from the successful revival of violence as a means to enforce the Republican agenda. The bloodshed both writers witnessed and chose to portray in their literature, in disagreement with the Rising propaganda, was not a *cleansing* and a *sanctifying* deed. Jim Dolan and Tim Murphy's deaths, in spite of their beliefs, are not those of martyrs, and likewise the execution of the English soldiers Hawkins and Belcher is far from a purifying rite that would bring about a new age of righteousness. Liam O'Flaherty and Frank O'Connor's disillusionment with the Irish Revolution not only marked their personal life but is also reflected in their fiction. Their disillusionment is a result of the tragical and unpredictable *denouement* of the Revolution: what began intended to unite and incite Ireland to fight and conquer her place among the nations of the world ended up violently dividing the Irish.

## Notes

1 Peter Cottrell observes that "the 1798 Rebellion was the first Irish insurrection that aimed to break with the British Crown and create a secular republic along Franco-American lines. Rather than severing the link, the failure of the United Irishmen drew Ireland formally into the United Kingdom [through the Act of Union 1801]." In: *The Irish Civil War 1922-23*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2008, P.15.

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# Voices from Brazil

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# *Three Poems by Victoria Kennefick*

Translated by Gisele Giandoni Wolkoff

## Selfie

Sitting alone in the house eating
my fingernails/watching the sky
move away. The room is full/versions of me
crouching on the floor/balancing on the windowsill/
reclining on the pout of my lower lip/
asleep in the crease of my eyelid.

Not alone/with myself/A snare /
I have been running from  I do not live
the way humans are supposed to,
compare my face to others you know.
I fall short/an embarrassing fringe/
No matter what face I try on  it's exhausting.
All versions shake our heads.

*There is much to do/until we think we are not*
*What We Are: Victoria(s)*. I see
those letters written on envelopes I know
are for me  because of the shape of that word/that greedy V –
its two arms open wide/ready to accept anything.

Taken from the book *Eat or We Both Starve* published by Carcanet Press:
https://www.carcanet.co.uk/cgi-bin/indexer?product=2363

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# *Três poemas de Victoria Kennefick*

Traduzido por Gisele Giandoni Wolkoff

## Auto-retrato

Enquanto me sento sozinha em casa
roendo as unhas/vou observando o céu
se retirar. A sala está cheia – são versões de mim

que se agacham no chão/equilibrando-se no peitoril da janela
deixando-se estar no beiço que faço com o lábio inferior
dormente-mente dobram-se na pálpebra
Não só/comigo mesma/Uma armadilha/de que
tenho escapado Não vivo
da forma como os humanos devem viver,

basta comparar o meu rosto com o de outros que você conhece.

Fico aquém/ uma fronteira constrangedora/ Não importa
que rosto eu experimente é desgastante.
Todas as versões se recusam.

*Há muito a fazer/até que pensamos não ser*
*O que somos: Victoria(s)*. Entendi
aquelas cartas escritas em envelopes sei

que são para mim por causa da
forma da palavra/do ávido V-
os seus dois braços bem abertos/prontos
pr´aceitar tudo.

## Smell Dating

They came in ten tiny transparent plastic bags,

the torn armpits of strangers' T-shirts still humming
with their owners' un-deodorised sweat. *Trust*
*yourself* the website said, *your nose knows*.
In the kitchen I take each sample out,
unfurl it like a napkin at a fancy restaurant,
hold each swatch to my nose, huff deeply.
This one smells of bubble gum, another of the sea,
still another of rotting wood. The white-T they sent
me hung from my body for three days, grew slack like
old skin. I tried to embrace my natural scent but was
careful where I went, didn't exercise. Leaving the
samples
to pine on the table I go to the bedroom, pull back the covers,
press the pillow to my face. *Surrender yourself to the poignant*
*experience of body odour*, the website said. It smells like me.

## Cheira a
## encontro

Vieram em dez pequenas sacolas plásticas
e as camisetas com os dejetos das axilas de estranhos
cantarolando o suor sem o desodante de seus proprietários.
*Confie*
*em si mesmo*, dizia o portal, *o seu nariz conhece*.
Na cozinha, apanho cada amostra,
e a desdobro feito guardanapo de restaurante chique,
seguro cada exemplar junto ao nariz, e dou profundas
baforadas. Este aqui cheira a goma de mascare, o outro, a
mar,
e, ainda, este outro, a madeira podre. A camiseta branca que me
mandaram permaneceu em meu corpo por três dias, ficou folgada
feito pele velha. Tentei abraçar o meu cheiro natural mas fui
cautelosa
no rumo, nem me exercitei. Ao deixar as amostras
definhando na mesa, fui ao quarto, puxei as
cobertas, apertei o travesseiro ao rosto. *Renda-se*
*à excruciante*
*experiência dos odores corpóreos*, dizia o portal. Isso tem o meu cheiro.

## Hunger Strikes Victoria Kennefick

She punches her stomach loose, blind-
naked like a baby mole.
In the shower she cannot wash herself clean
the way she'd like. Rid herself
of useless molecules. Would that she
could strip her bones,
be something
neat,
complete.
Useful.

To eat or not to eat,
switch table sides.
Stuff cheese sandwiches

and chocolate blocks into a wide
moist orifice. Or, alternatively
zip that mouth
closed like a jacket,
a body already
contained within.
It doesn't need
to feed.

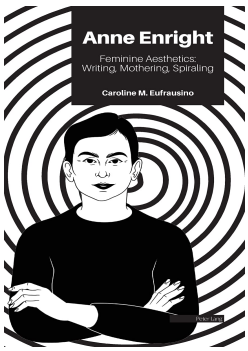
*But I have set a table for us all.*
*For us all, a feast!*
*On a vast, smooth cloth, already soiled.*
*Let's take a seat, eat our fill.*
*You know you want to,*
*dig in.*

## A greve de fome de Victoria Kennefick

Ela soca o próprio estomago vazio,
numa verdade nua-e-crua feito filhote de topeira.
No banho, não consegue se lavar
limpinha como gostaria. Desfazer-se
das moléculas inúteis. Se pudesse,
ela se desfazia dos ossos,
e se deixaria tornar algo puro,
completo
. Útil.
Comer ou não
comer, virar os lados
da mesa.
Meter sanduíches de queijo
e barras de chocolate num
amplo orifício úmido. Ou,
então,
fechar a boca
como se fecha uma
jaqueta, um corpo já
encerrado em si mesmo.
Não precisa
De alimento.

Mas pus a mesa para todos nós.
Para todos nós, uma festa!
Numa toalha grande, lisa e já suja.
Vamos nos sentar e comer ao nosso contentamento.
Eu sei que você quer,
vai fundo.

# Book Reviews




## Caroline Moreira Eufrausino's *Anne Enright. Feminine Aesthetics: Writing, Mothering, Spiraling*

Anne Enright is not only one of the most gifted writers in the contemporary Irish literary arena, but she is also a key author among a generation whose work has become essential to understanding more fully the past and present of Irish womanhood. Since her début in 1989,[1] Enright has demonstrated her art in a diversity of genres that include short fiction, plays and scripts, novels and an autobiography. Consistent with her genuine interest in voicing "the real lives of women" (qtd. in Lavan), both her particular use of humour and her inclination for journalism and history are added values that enrich and set apart her work. Her production, duly noticed by critics, has received many awards, increasing attention and praise,[2] and today, she is acknowledged as "a feminine voice that epitomises the current concerns of Irish and western literature and culture" (Schneider vii).

In the light of Enright's achievements and the vast amount of academic work inspired by her production, one might be tempted to think that there is nothing left to be said. Far from that, Caroline Eufrausino's volume, *Anne Enright. Feminine Aesthetics: Writing, Mothering, Spiraling*, offers a brave and valuable contribution, which has both broadened and enrichened the ongoing academic debate on Enright's oeuvre. Divided into three distinctive but complementary sections, this volume analyses in depth selected pieces that include an autobiography, two short stories and five novels. This selection is not only representative of Enright's production, but also covers a timespan of almost 30 years – from "The house of the architect's love story", published in *The Portable Virgin* (1991), to Enright's most recent novel, *Actress* (2020), an apt decision on Eufrausino's behalf, giving rise to a dynamic appraisal of Enright's evolution as a writer as well as a feminist.

The volume is organised in three main parts that progressively develop Eufrausino's arguments. Part one focuses on real and fictional experiences of pregnancy and the incoherences that surround female corporeality in the frame of the story of the Irish nation and its foundational myths. For this, Eufrausino selects Enright's autobiography *Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood* (2005) and two short stories, "The House of the Architect's Love Story" and "Shaft", from *The Portable Virgin* (1991) and *Taking Pictures* (2008) respectively.

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Particularly acute is her analysis of pregnancy in "Shaft", where subtle forms of social appropriation of the pregnant body at the expense of the woman's dignity are exposed.

At this point, first-person narrators stand out as characteristic of Enright's works, voicing the female character's deep yet unborn thoughts, as the author explains: "they're their inner voices, they're their voices in their head, they're on the brink of articulation . . . It is their most intimate voice" (qtd. in Beale). Eufrausino notes that this strategy seeks to denounce both the subtle and obvious social forms of castration and marginalisation that women are forced to endure because of their biological makeup, different from men's. The affirmation that the female body –the pregnant body, its materiality, even its problematic relation with technology- is exposed as the ultimate site of patriarchal oppression allows her to rest on Luce Irigaray's configuration of an alternative feminine discourse, evidently present in Enright's works.

This illuminating approach to Enright's treatment of the female body is enriched in part two with a detailed study of her narrative style in three selected novels, *What Are You Like?* (2000), *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2002) and *The Green Road* (2015). Here, Eufrausino contends that Enright's narratives are permeated by Butler's and Irigaray's theories, which serve as a foundation to her dissection of identity construction processes under a gender lens. It is not a coincidence that the metaphor of the spiral takes form in this section, as both the structural analysis of the novels and Enright's ability "to turn spaces inside out" (Schwall 22) intertwine with the topic of the female body as a site of patriarchal oppression.

In her pursuit to reveal the spiral as a characteristic style of Enright's, Eufrausino devotes part three to the use of memory and first-person narratives, with a focus on *The Gathering* (2007) and *Actress* (2020). This section successfully explores past and silenced events that the protagonists revisit and finally come to terms with. Suicide, sexual abuse and motherhood, among other sensitive issues, are reformulated from an intimate perspective. In doing so, Eufrausino affirms, Enright's female narrators recover the past and give it a new and more complete meaning while undergoing an emancipatory process themselves at the same time. Her stories, not plots, as Enright clarified in an interview (Putnam), are usually set in the present but look back to familial relationships rooted in the past. Consequently, Enright deploys a magnificent use of memory so that her narratives ultimately "fill in the gaps" (Eufrausino 136). But memory tends to be tricky, and progression and linearity are rare in Enright's narratives. Moreover, this evidence gives way to a thorough analysis of Enright's innovative reworkings of generic conventions in form and style, which are in Eufrausino's words "neither fragmented nor discontinued but, rather, . . . a different system" (18). For her, Enright's unique style is reflected in her challenging prose, filled with unexpected metaphors and skillful reconfigurations of time and space.

On the whole, Eufrausino's contribution succeeds in giving form and reason to what she names "Feminine Aesthetics", a particularity of Enright's writing that rests upon context and style alike. This volume carefully discloses Enright's strenuous and continuous efforts to give voice to the diversity of female experiences in Irish history, connecting past and present, private and public, personal and political. But Eufrausino's work takes a step further and concludes that Enright's compelling and challenging style eventually results in a particular and unique form of writing that she labels "Spiraling Aesthetics". In her work, she defines Enright's originality as "a circular-upward movement, which shakes the conventional male-gendered line of discourse and guides the reader towards social self-awareness" (12). This insightful reading of Enright's production endows it with a transformative power that eventually results in the reader's engagement. We could affirm that this volume offers an innovative reading of Enright's mastery in renewing literary conventions and motivating the reader to strive for a superior level of social self-awareness through a feminine/feminist perspective. Eufrausino's brave and ceaseless defense of Enright's "Spiraling Aesthetics" gives rise to further exploration of the political, ethical and emancipatory qualities of Enright's oeuvre.

*María Amor Barros del Río*

## Notes

1 Anne Enright published four short stories in a compilation entitled *First Fictions*, but it was not until 1991 that her writing received critical attention with the publication of her first short story collection, The Portable Virgin, for which she won the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature.

2 In 2007, she won the Booker Prize for her novel *The Gathering*, in 2015, she was appointed the Nation's Inaugural Laureate for Fiction, and in 2018, she received the prestigious Irish PEN Award for Outstanding Contribution to Irish Literature.

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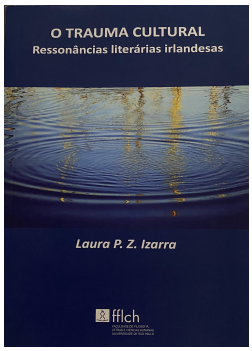


**Laura Izarra. *O Trauma Cultural: Ressonâncias literárias Irlandesas/ Cultural Trauma: Irish Literary Resonances*. São Paulo: FFLCH/USP, 2020, pp. 108, ISBN 978-65-87621-42-5.**

Since its outset, the English imperial enterprise not only has changed the social, economic, and natural landscape of the western world, but has become an indominable source of creation and, at the same time, of destruction. According to Hannah Arendt,

> Not that anybody began to doubt the irresistibility of the process itself, but many people began to see what had frightened Cecil Rhodes: that the human condition and the limitations of the globe were a serious obstacle to a process that was unable to stop and to stabilize, and could therefore only begin a series of destructive catastrophes once it had reached these limits. (144)

Although imperialism became an unstoppable and, as Arendt pointed out, an irresistible force, by the early twentieth century its harmful and traumatic effects were gradually brought to light. Laura P. Z. de Izarra writes about the impacts of the specific case of the aftermath of British imperialism in Ireland and South America in the critical essay *Cultural Trauma: Irish Literary Resonances*, which offers the results of her full professorship, obtained in 2018, as the outcome of different research projects on trauma and imperialism undertaken at the University of São Paulo.

The forerunner of Irish Studies in Brazil, Munira H. Mutran, writes in the "Preface" that Izarra broke new ground by introducing the Irish diaspora in South America, chiefly in Argentina and Brazil, to the international academic milieu. Mutran also underscores the connections Izarra makes between colonial oppression and the experience of collective trauma as her principal contribution to Irish Studies.

In the main essay, "Cultural Trauma and Literary Resonances in the Irish Diaspora and Contemporary Ireland", Izarra sustains that since the twentieth century was the age of traumatic events, it must be viewed through the lens of cultural trauma. In this regard, Izarra examines three different narratives that are "stories of oppression, violence, discrimination, and emigration, which reveal the vestiges and effects of over seven hundred years of subjugation by the British Empire" (64), namely, the Great Famine, the Rubber Cycle in South America and the 1916 Easter Rising.

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Apart from providing an outline of trauma theory and some of its most influential exponents, e.g., Cathy Caruth, Piotr Stompka, Shoshana Felman, Dominick La Capra and Ron Eyerman, one of the strongholds of Izarra's essay is the way in which she intertwines postcolonialism and trauma studies. This argument can be supported by the way Izarra sees at the heart of the traumas that have affected the western world "The suffering caused by colonial oppression", which she examines from the perspective of cultural trauma. To Izarra, postcolonialism is reconceived as a "post-traumatic cultural construct" (68) which enables the understanding of "themes of colonial trauma, such as dispossession, forced migration, diaspora, expropriation, racism, segregation, political violence, slavery and genocide" (68). In this respect, Izarra questions the role of collective memory and its relationship with cultural trauma. The answer lies in the events themselves, which are carefully dealt with in this publication.

After an assessment of the first traumatic event, the Great Famine and the Diaspora, Izarra postulates that a traumatic event is transformed into cultural trauma when a particular incident eventually becomes a symbolic text that transcends temporality (69). This can be perceived, according to Izarra, in monuments, such as Rowan Gillespie's "Famine", located on Custom House Quay in Dublin from where hundreds of immigrants left to the USA. Izarra affirms that these sites, which Pierre Nora has termed lieux de memoire, reveal a "freezing of time", with a materialization of memory.

At the end of the nineteenth century, memories of the past haunted the early immigrants that arrived in South America as the circumstances they found did not meet with the expectations they had prior to immigrating. In this regard, Izarra examines the Dresden Affair in Argentina and the establishment of the first British colony near Bahia Blanca, Buenos Aires, in 1889, with the arrival of 1.800 Irish immigrants. This incident, which resulted in the death of men, women and children due to disease, cold and lack of food, is narrated more than a century later by Santiago Boland, of Irish descent, in the poem "Los niños mártires de la Vitícola"[1] [The Child Martyrs of La Vitícola]. Apart from this, on the St. Patrick's Day celebrations of 2005, Boland placed a commemorative plaque beneath the Irish and the Argentinian flag by way of remembering this first colony. Izarra concludes that his act transformed La Vitícola into a *lieu de memoire*, which brings to the fore the reconstruction of the collective memory of a group that otherwise would have remained obliterated from the history of immigration.

The pain of the Great Famine and migration as a result of colonialism can be linked to the second example, the Rubber Cycle and its effects on the Amazonian indigenous peoples. As a result of official investigations undertaken in the Belgian Congo and in the South American Putumayo, the Irish revolutionary Roger Casement recognized that the violence

enacted by empires is part of a global cultural trauma. While analysing Roger Casement's *Amazon Journal*, Izarra first draws attention to his poetic style, his use of terms in Irish as well as his aesthetic descriptions of nature. After that, Izarra draws from the Colombian anthropologist Juan Alvaro Echeverri's metaphor of the "basket of darkness", where the trauma is held, being transformed into a "Basket of life", which contains the seeds of hope as a way of curing future generations, which have transformed the Casa Arana into a secondary school. Moreover, Izarra writes about what she calls a "multidirectional form of memory" with Casement's linking the suffering of the Amazon indigenous peoples to that of the neglected Irish in Connemara suffering from a typhoid epidemic. This illustrates, according to Izarra, a multidirectional perception of traumatic incidents as a way of making sense of the transformations in collective identity that engender new forms of solidarity and justice in the present.

The ultimate hanging of Roger Casement for High Treason by the British Crown is connected to the third example, which is the cultural trauma of the 1916 Easter Rising and the collaborative project *Signatories*, commissioned by UCD, to commemorate its centenary. The project conjoined eight contemporary writers along with the director Patrick Mason, and premièred in Kilmainham Gaol, the site of the imprisonment and execution of the 1916 rebels. This last example reveals an important stage when coping with a collective traumatic incident, for, as Izarra highlights, when in face of a traumatic event, representation is crucial for it to be comprehended and given meaning.

Patrick Mason described the *Signatories* project as an artistic response written as a monologue by different dramatists, from the rebels' surrender to the final moments preceding their executions. It opens with a monologue by Emma Donoghue as Elizabeth O'Farrell, which is followed by the monologues representing the seven signatories of the proclamation of the provisional government. According to Izarra, the *Signatories* project generates a spiral of new meanings, for memory not only preserves, but recreates past events. Mason organized the sequence of the monologues that recall historical elements of the past permeated by a strong sense of nationalism: ballads, poems, etc., by Frank MacGinness as Éammon Ceant, Marina Carr as Thomas McDonagh, Hugo Hamilton representing James Connolly. Izarra ends this last section by referring to Rowan Gillespie's sculpture, "Proclamation", created as a *lieu de mémoire*, which stands before the court of justice and Kilmainham Gaol and that epitomizes the execution that transformed rebels into martyrs.

The traumatic events scrutinized by Izarra have proved Hannah Arendt's argument that the United Kingdom was incapable of building "an imperial structure in which many different people could live contentedly together" (127). However, the great leap given by Izarra is the way she proves that despite the deleterious aftermath of British imperialism, there is a message of

hope put forward either by those who have experienced these traumas, as is the case of Roger Casement, or by the future generations, as Santiago Boland and the *Signatories* project.

Thus, *Cultural Trauma: Irish Literary Resonances* has come to fill an important gap in Irish Studies in South America, and it is written in a bilingual format, in English and in Portuguese in order to reach a wider audience. Also object of attention, are the illustrations which were carefully selected and epitomize that Pierre Nora's idea of the *lieux de mémoire* employed by Izarra in her analyses. To conclude, I recall the image of Gillespies's sculpture "Looking for Orion", which Izarra explains, reminds us that that constellation can be seen by both hemispheres, implying that collective memory is transnational and open to possibilities of healing and resistance.

*Mariana Bolfarine*

## Notes

1 The poem "Los niños martires de la Vitícola", by Santiago Boland, is included in the Appendix.

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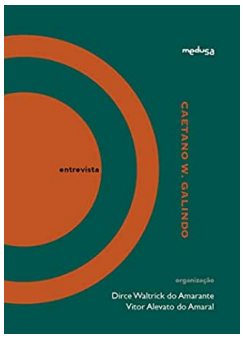


**Dirce Waltrick do Amarante. Vitor Alevato do Amaral (Orgs.). *Caetano W. Galindo: Entrevista*. Curitiba: Medusa, 2020, ISBN: 978-65-86276-10-7.**

In Andrew Chesterman's article about the emergence of Translator Studies as a new trend within the field of Translation Studies, he underlines the fact that little research on human translation takes the "people behind the texts" as the central issues of the research questions. Translations are primarily studied without considering the translator's experience, ideology and discourse as meaningful aspects that influence the text that enters the new culture. In most cases, it includes merely looking at the translator's procedures, considerations of some facts of his/her biography and comparison with other translators/translations. Invisible for too long, the translator's discourse usually shows up in paratexts to shortly talk about their decisions in the process.

The book *Caetano W. Galindo: Entrevista/ Caetano W. Galindo: Interview*, organized by Dirce Waltrick do Amarante and Vitor Alevato do Amaral, is an indisputable contribution in making the translator visible and explicit, and as a relevant agent of literary production. Both renowned researchers and specialists on James Joyce's translations, they interview Caetano Galindo, one of the most prominent translators in Brazil, largely known for his awarded translation of *Ulysses*, Joyce's masterpiece. As pointed out by the organizers in the introduction, this publication is an invitation to access Galindo's thoughts about translation and literature as well as his reflections about his own work as a literary translator of challenging works of fiction, which include not only James Joyce but a diversity of authors, such as T. S. Eliot, Christopher Marlowe, Tom Stoppard and David Foster Wallace. The interview is followed by an essay of Galindo's authorship concerning the relation between the original and the translation. At the end of the book, the chronology of his life and the list of publications exhibits his vast repertoire not only as a distinguished literary translator but also as an awarded writer.

As mentioned before, Galindo is primarily remembered for his translation of Joyce's *Ulysses*, which granted him two awards of best translation by the prestigious Jabuti and Brazilian Academy of Letters prizes. Joyce is the author that undeniably best represents

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Galindo's trajectory not only as a translator, but also as a researcher and professor. He acknowledges that Joyce had a major impact on his life and even states that the Irish writer invented him as a translator: "He in fact made me, if not a better person (failure is still on me), at least into someone longing for becoming a better person, and who knows in a certain level what could be done to achieve this goal"[1] (64).

Galindo is asked about several topics that involve the translation process. He talks about his background as professor and researcher and how it influences his work as a translator; the relation between translation and other fields of knowledge; his relationship with publishing houses and other agents of the process; the relevance of theories of translation in his practice; the existence of a translator's identity; the relevant role that the translator performs nowadays; the issue of untranslatability; the impact of his activity as a translator in his literary production; and how events of his private life influenced his career. He says, for example, that after giving up a scholarship in Germany to stay close to his newborn daughter, he went through "a few months of crisis and sitting in fetal position on my living room floor"[2] (23) before making the decision of translating *Ulysses* – just because it was something that he wanted to do and nothing else.

Throughout the interview, Galindo emphasizes the relevance of experience in the task of the translator. From time to time, he recalls that the stock of knowledge he gathered along many years of practice was crucial to improve his practice. The background knowledge of literary theory and linguistics, for instance, contributed to refine his interpretation, although he does not view them as mandatory to translators in general. As a musician, Galindo makes a sharp connection between both activities: the interpreter of classical music also must convert an original production – the score – into a new version addressed to a specific target audience which is in general unable to understand the original code.

As researcher and professor, this interview also provides an opportunity to think about the actual relevance of theory in the translation practice. Galindo does not view these theories as really useful for translators in general, although he argues that reading about translation improves the translator's reflection and may enhance his/her practice. In effect, he even questions the very existence of translation theories at all and would rather call this reflection that arises from practice "essayistic of translation", considering that "We do not explain translation, we talk about it, think about it, argue and hypothesize about it"[3] (37). The proper designation for the field of study is a broader discussion, but Galindo's position certainly reinforces how much theoretical studies contribute to the background of a translator.

As for the question about translator's identity, he argues that his translations will always contain his "signature" in bakhtinian terms, i.e., the translation as a "reported speech" of the discourse of the original text and translator a voice that conveys the author's words in

another place and time without obliterating the author's voice. He mentions his meeting with the Scottish writer Ali Smith, of whom he translated several books into Portuguese, as an example to state that he considers himself her "visible face" in Brazil and the "voice" that echoes her texts in our country. This assumes that the main role of translation is to enable and expand give the writers' voices in other cultures. In his view, translators must not seek their invisibility to evidence the author's work, but take over the role of interpreters and mediators of the original text.

In the essay that follows the interview, entitled *Dire la Stessa Cosa: Ecos de Eco*,[4] an allusion to Eco's theoretical work about translation, Galindo contends that the relation between the original and the translation is primarily founded on the concepts of anteriority and convention. He brings up as the main illustration of his argument the *Ise Grand Shrine*, a Shinto temple in a Japanese city called Uji-tachi that is torn down and rebuilt right away every twenty years in the very same spot: "The same sign alludes every twenty years to two different referents that are conventionally considered not only 'equivalent', but actually the very same one"[5] (104).

In other words, the construction of a new temple does not replace the previous one; it is the same temple but restored in a different time and context. It represents a concept of tradition as a continuing, historical restoration, and this is what translation means after all: the constant updating of texts and authors through time. Galindo deconstructs a general myth that the journey across translation is filled with loss along the way: translation is about restoring and adding new and different elements in another context and time.

Translation is not a reproduction or an imitation, but actually a new *instantiation* of the "same thing". It is a game that contains rules and conventions shared by a certain community. As an example, Galindo states that every Brazilian reader in contact with a translation of *Hamlet* into Portuguese is fully aware that he/she is reading the Shakespearean tragedy and not some derivation of the original text. He quotes Paulo Henriques Britto to state that "a good translation is one that produces, in a language other than the original, a new text which allows the reader to state without lying that he/she has actually read the original"[6] (2), which is an assertion that brings together different points of view as it highlights the authorial voice of the translator in the target text without denying the importance of the original text in the process – and the combination of these apparently opposing ideas permeates his answers in the whole interview.

Learning the translator's thought certainly contributes to better understand the translated text and the elements that surround its production and reception. It allows the readers from the target culture to realize how internal and external processes influence the

practice and how translators deal with the limitations and challenges imposed by this work. As a source of valuable information about the translator's way of thinking, this book also provides essential clues for future translators who will face the challenges posed by any literary text. Enterprises like these are paramount to deconstruct persistent myths about the task of the translator and make the ideas, thoughts and discourse of these mediators more and more known to researchers and readers of translations.

*Pedro Luís Sala Vieira*

## Notes

1 "Ele de fato me transformou, se não numa pessoa melhor (a falha continua sendo minha) ao menos numa pessoa com algum desejo maior de se tornar uma pessoa melhor" (p. 64).
2 "alguns meses de crise e posição fetal no chão da sala" (p. 23).
3 "Nós não explicamos a tradução, mas nós falamos sobre ela, pensamentos sobre ela, argumentamos, hipotetizamos" (p. 37).
4 *Saying almost the same thing: Eco's Echoes* in English.
5 "Um mesmo 'signo' aponta a cada vinte anos para dois referentes diversos que, contudo, são convencionalmente considerados não apenas 'equivalentes', mas, de fato, 'o mesmo' referente" (p. 104).
6 "a boa tradução é o processo que gera, numa língua diferente da língua do texto original, um novo texto que permita que um leitor, ao ler o texto traduzido, diga sem mentir que leu o texto original" (p. 42).

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**Munira H. Mutran. *A Cor e a Forma da Literatura Russa na Irlanda: Refrações*. São Paulo: FFLCH/USP/CNPq, 2020, pp. 389. ISBN: 978-658762140-1**

Munira H. Mutran's book *A Cor e a Forma da Literatura Russa na Irlanda: Refrações* [*The Colour and Form of Russian Literature in Ireland: Refractions*] appeared in 2020. This highly innovative study concentrates on unexpected intertextual links between Russian and Irish prose and theatre. The book, written in a clear and accessible style, is of relevance for students and scholars of Irish and Slavonic Studies but also addressed to the general reader interested in the interconnections of the literary output of the two cultural spheres. The book falls into three main parts, entitled "A Presença do Conto Russo na Irlanda" ["The presence of the Russian Short Story in Ireland"], "Romances Russos no Palco Irlandês" [The Russian novel on the Irish stage] and "Do Teatro Para o Teatro [From Theatre to Theatre"] and it terminates on reflections on the different ways in which Anton Chekov and his work receive "a new life" in the plays of Brian Friel and Marina Carr, for example.

The study opens with an illuminating foreword written by the Russian scholar Elena Vássina, setting the book into its historical and geographical context. With great literary sensitivity, Mutran draws the reader into two very different literary universes, which at first glance seem historically, culturally and geographically entirely remote from each other. She artfully shows how these contrasting worlds interrelate and communicate with each other. The author explains her choice of title by arguing that the term "refraction" refers to the deviation that rays of light, heat or sound undergo when passing from one medium to another. In this way, she refers to the different types of deviations and trajectories texts undergo when they move from one place to another. Before starting the analysis of her corpus, Mutran engages in a thorough discussion on the notion of "intertextuality", referring to key critical texts written by Julia Kristeva, Laurent Jenny, Michael Rifaterre, Harold Bloom, Julie Sanders and others. In Mutran's book, intertextuality can be understood as a meeting of different "voices" and semantic positions, in the sense of a dialogue in which not only authors but also readers participate. Throughout her study, she convincingly shows how classical Russian literature becomes one of the main axes in the Irish literary universe, entering it by means of various intertextual methods: allusions, reminiscences, quotations, adaptations, and versions.

The centre of the book forms the intertextual analysis of famous works by Russian masters of the nineteenth century. Among them count *The Overcoat* (1842) by Nikolai Gogol,

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*Fathers and Sons* (1862) and *A Month in the Country* (1872) by Ivan Turgenev, *The Golovlyov Family* (1880) by Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) by Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Anna Karenina* (1877) and *The Power of Darkness* (1886) by Leo Tolstoy, "The Lady with the Little Dog" (1899) as well as Chekhov's main theatre plays. The literary works analysed by Mutran in her book cover more than two centuries, ranging from the dialogue which Ivan Turgenev initiated as early as 1903 by George Moore in his short story collection *The Untilled Field* to a new adaptation of Chekhov's play *Uncle Vania* staged by the well-known Irish playwright Conor McPherson in 2020. In her comprehensive study, Mutran dedicates herself not only to the close reading of a vast selection of novels, short stories and plays, but she also provides important information about their political, historical and cultural background to make them accessible to a readership which might not necessarily be familiar with both cultural spheres.

The first part of the volume focuses on the emergence of the modern Irish short story and its debts to Chekhov, Turgenev and Gogol. At the beginning of the chapter Mutran analyses the influence of Turgenev's short story collection *A Sportsman's Sketches* on Georges Moore's collection *The Untilled Field*, in which Russian scenery becomes transplanted to the outskirts of Dublin. In this context, she extensively explores the different narrative elements, which the Irish short story writer integrates into his short stories. Subsequently, she concentrates on Sean O'Faolain and Frank O'Connor and skilfully demonstrates how a particular Chekhovian kind of humour shines through their prose. Mutran observes that the two Irish writers saw in the work of the Russian authors a number of similarities with Irish reality, such as the presence of isolated houses, monotonous towns, indecisive men and women as well as the impossibility of any social or political change. She further draws attention to Brian Friel's short play entitled the *Yalta Game* (2001), which is inspired by Chekhov's famous short story "The Lady with the Little Dog". Mutran suggests that Friel must have been impressed by Chekhov's poetic use of language and inspired by the unfathomable mystery of human suffering, a reoccurring theme in the Russian author's work.

In the second part of her book, Mutran discusses a number of Russian novels, which have served as sources of inspiration for Irish writers. The best-known example is O'Faolain's *A Nest of Simple Folk* (1933), which is based on Turgenev's novel *A Nest of Gentle Folk* (1858). Mutran carefully explains how O'Faolain explores the themes of religion, poverty and the relationship between peasants and landowners in nineteenth century Ireland through the lens of tsarist Russia. Concentrating on a further Russian writer, she points out how *The Golovlyov Family* (1889) by Saltykov-Shchedrin has served as a basis for Thomas Murphy's play *The Last Days of a Reluctant Tyrant* (2009). Particularly interesting are Mutran's contemplations about

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's novel *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow* (2007) which is based on Leo Tolstoy's masterpiece *Anna Karenina* (1899). Demonstrating a number of parallels between the characters of the two novels, Mutran convincingly shows the different ways in which a literary work set in nineteenth century St. Petersburg becomes transposed into Celtic Tiger Dublin.

The third part of the volume begins with critical reflections on Brian Friel's adaptation of Turgenev's play *A Month in the Country* (1855) and John McGahern's rewriting of Tolstoi's *The Power of Darkness* (1886). M. Mutran points out Friel's special interest in Chekhov's plays, noting that the Irish dramatist produced his own adaptations of *The Three Sisters* (1901) and *Uncle Vania* (1898). She explains that Friel decided to create his own version of Chekhov's plays as the Irish dramatist was dissatisfied with the British English used in earlier translation. In order to reach a specifically Irish audience, he decided to write his adaptation in Hiberno English, the variation of the English language spoken in Ireland. At the end of her book, Mutran illustrates how two Chekhovian characters receive "a new life" in Friel's one-act play *Afterplay* (2002), an original and provocative sequel to two of Chekhov's dramas – *Uncle Vania* and *Three Sisters*. The Irish playwright imagines a possible meeting of Sonia (*Uncle Vania*) with Andrei (*Three Sisters*) in a seedy café near the railway station in Soviet Moscow in the early 1920s. Both characters meet twenty years after their last appearance in Chekhov's plays. Only over a glass of vodka, but not without a specific kind of dark Chekhovian humour, they are able to share their miserable lives with each other. Mutran informs her readers that Afterplay is the result of the long process of reworking *The Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vania*. She argues that the affinities between the Russian and the Irish writer were so intense that, by resuscitating the two characters, Friel – in a metaphysical sense – manages to make Chekhov his co-author. In the final pages of her book, Mutran opens up new perspectives on the key figure of Russian theatre. She draws attention to Marina Carr's play *16 Possible Glimpses* (2011) in which Chekhov appears as the fictional protagonist. Mutran considers Carr's play as homage to an exceptional writer. Through her discussion of Friel's and Carr's recent plays, she highlights the enduring interest Irish authors show in the work and life of Russian masters.

In her study, Mutran does not only show a profound knowledge of Irish and Russian literature, she also refers to French authors such as Maupassant and Flaubert to set the works analysed into a global context. Through the impressive amount of well-presented material, she makes her readers curious to discover the Irish and Russian originals themselves. As a very valuable contribution to the field of Irish and Slavonic Studies, it can only be hoped that the book will be translated into English and Russian to make it accessible to a broad readership.

*Stephanie Schwerter*

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