

# THE “OTHERS” OF THE CELTIC TIGER: INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN RODDY DOYLE’S SHORT FICTION

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyse how Roddy Doyle’s short fiction reflects Ireland’s multicultural reality in the twenty-first century. This award-winning writer attempts to reflect on the theme of multiculturalism not only from the viewpoint of the Irish, but also from the perspective of the incoming migrant. These two opposing viewpoints are reflected in the two short stories “The Pram” (from the 2008 collection *The Deportees* and “The Slave” (from the 2011 collection *Bullfighting*). While in “The Pram” Doyle privileges the outsider’s perspective by entering the distorted mind of a Polish woman who ends up killing her Irish boss, in “The Slave” he offers the viewpoint of an Irish-born character who feels estranged in the face of the Other. Both stories offer a rather gloomy portrayal of the ‘Ireland of the Welcomes’ by revealing the various tensions which may emerge between the Irish host and the foreign guest. The aim of this chapter is to examine carefully Doyle’s interest in conveying multiculturalism through such different viewpoints and his use of various artistic resources to portray the difficulties involved in the Irish and non-Irish intercultural encounter.

**KEY WORDS:** Roddy Doyle, multiculturalism, interculturalism, Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, immigration, trauma, alterity.

## RESUMEN

El objetivo del presente estudio es el análisis detallado de dos relatos cortos de Roddy Doyle, centrándonos particularmente en el retrato que dicho artista hace del mosaico multicultural de la cultura irlandesa actual. Este escritor irlandés, premiado en numerosas ocasiones, aborda el tema de la multiculturalidad no solamente desde la perspectiva del irlandés natal, sino también desde la perspectiva del inmigrante. Esta riqueza óptica se observa en sus relatos “The Pram” y “The Slave,” pertenecientes a *The Deportees* (2008) y *Bullfighting* (2011) respectivamente. Mientras que en “The Pram” Doyle privilegia la mirada extranjera, al adentrarnos en la mente distorsionada de una mujer polaca que acaba asesinando a su jefa irlandesa, en “The Slave” se ofrece el punto de vista de un personaje irlandés que se siente aturrido y contrariado ante la imagen amenazadora del intruso. Ambas historias ofrecen una visión desalentadora y distópica del reciente paisaje multiétnico del país, y ponen de relieve las numerosas tensiones que pueden surgir en el encuentro intercultural entre nativos y extranjeros.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Roddy Doyle, multiculturalismo, interculturalidad, Celtic Tiger y Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, inmigración, trauma, alteridad.





The Irish nationalist project from the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries was partly founded on the utopia of being a mono-ethnic, mono-cultural country: for many, Irishness was an attribute intrinsically bound with Catholicism and whiteness, obscuring the many differences—whether religious, linguistic, cultural, and even ethnic—which have always existed in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> Such cultural and political construct of the nation seems nowadays atavistic in light of the multiethnic landscape of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, a country dramatically hit by recession, but paradoxically “enriched,” in words of Irish poet Paula Meehan, by the “many traditions” and “the rivers of language” which have “flow[ed] in with the newcomers” (Villar-Argáiz, “Correspondence”). Ireland’s economic prosperity in the late twentieth century led to a demographic boom, as newcomers of all ethnic backgrounds were attracted by the roar of “Celtic Tiger,” a phase which lasted until the first years of the twenty-first century. In the foreword to his short story collection *The Deportees and Other Stories*, Roddy Doyle describes the Celtic Tiger era as follows: “It happened, I think, sometime in the mid-90s. I went to bed in one country and woke up in a different one” (xi).

The country’s transformation was not limited solely to the social sphere, as this vast inward mobility has also had important effects at the cultural level. The emergence of the so-called ‘new Irish’ writers challenged the predominant whiteness of the Irish literary world. The publication in 2001 of Cauvery Madhavan’s first novel *Paddy Indian* was followed by the intercultural narratives and plays of Marsha Mehran, Ursula Rani Sarma and Bisi Adigun, representative writers of what can be considered as the first literary generation of contemporary immigrants in Ireland. The country’s new multiethnic character is also reflected in the work of Irish-born writers. Some iconic examples include in the theatrical arena Dermot Bolger’s *The Ballymun Trilogy* (2010), in the literary field of poetry, Michael O’Loughlin’s *In This Life* (2011), and in fiction Hugo Hamilton’s memoirs *The Speckled People* (2003) and *The Sailor in the Wardrobe* (2006), this latter artist being an interesting case as a writer of hybrid Irish-German identity.

This multicultural strand in Irish culture has led to a heightened academic interest in the study of how immigration has affected contemporary Irish literature. Some of these pioneering studies include King’s groundbreaking essays on Irish multiculturalism and drama (“Interculturalism;” “Porous”), Reddy’s incisive examination of Roddy Doyle’s short fiction, Salis’s illustrative analysis of Irish theatrical representations of the migrant Other, González Arias, Morales Ladrón, and Altuna García de Salazar’s eloquent discussions of the multicultural agenda of contemporary Irish novelists and poets, and the recent compilation of essays *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland: The Immigrant in Contemporary Irish Literature*, edited by

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<sup>1</sup> This communitarian dream has been conspicuously dismantled by critics who have revealed the various ways in which Ireland has always been multicultural. See, for instance, Ronit Lentin (227) and Ronit Lentin and Robbie McVeigh (21).

Villar-Argáiz.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Moynihan's work *Other People's Diasporas: Negotiating Race in Contemporary Irish and American Culture* constitutes an important contribution, in its examination of the contemporary interethnic landscape of Ireland from the artistic and literary perspectives. Our study follows the lead set by these pioneering studies, in our interest in analyzing how Roddy Doyle's work reflects Ireland's multicultural reality in the twenty-first century.

Doyle's interest in the rich ethnographic landscape of the country is observed ever since he started publishing short stories in the early 2000s for *Metro Éireann*, an online newspaper appealing to the immigrant community in Ireland. As Doyle puts it in an interview, "[t]he whole idea was to embrace the new changes in Ireland creatively, rather than see them as statistics" (Randolph 147). Interestingly enough, in some of these stories—later compiled in his collection *The Deportees* (2008)—Doyle attempts to reflect on the theme of multiculturalism not only from the viewpoint of the Irish, but also from the perspective of the incoming migrant. These two opposing viewpoints are reflected in the two short stories "The Pram" and "The Slave." While in "The Pram" Doyle privileges the outsider's perspective by entering the distorted mind of a Polish woman who ends up killing her Irish boss, in "The Slave" (from Doyle's *Bullfighting*), he offers the viewpoint of an Irish-born character who feels estranged in the face of the Other. Both stories offer a rather gloomy portrayal of the "Ireland of the Welcomes" by revealing the various tensions which may emerge between the Irish host and the foreign guest. The aim of this chapter is to examine carefully Doyle's interest in conveying multiculturalism through such different viewpoints and his use of various artistic resources to portray the difficulties involved in the Irish and non-Irish intercultural encounter.

"The Pram" is included in *The Deportees*, a volume chiefly dominated by the theme of Irish multiculturalism, as observed in eight stories of the collection. The first story "Guess Who is Coming for the Dinner" is about an Irish father's prejudiced attitude against his daughter's male Nigerian friend. In the title story "The Deportees," we are introduced to Jimmy Rabitte, who was a teenager in Doyle's first novel *The Commitments* (1987), and who has since formed a multicultural band. "New Boy" is a story of an African boy who is having adaptation problems at his new school in Dublin. The stories "57% Irish" and "Home to Harlem" are humorous tales of graduate researchers: in the former an Irish doctorate student tries to conduct an "Irishness" test on immigrants, while in the latter a black student from Ireland analyses the influence of the Harlem Renaissance movement on Irish literature. "Black Hoodie" focuses on a Nigerian woman accused of shoplifting and the last story in the collection, "I Understand," tells of an illegal immigrant who is

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<sup>2</sup> With respect to immigrant writing in Ireland, some iconic academic contributions include Faragó's study on immigrant female poets (2008), Altuna García de Salazar's article on Marsha Mehran, McIvor's analysis of minority-ethnic playwrights, and Feldman and Mulhall's incisive exploration of the work produced by The Women Writers in the New Ireland Network.



fleeing the threats of drug dealers. In contrast, “The Pram,” which this paper takes its cue from, is the only horror story of the collection.

Doyle’s stories have been criticised for being unreal in their highly optimistic portrayal of the multicultural phenomenon in Ireland. Amanda Tucker argues that Doyle’s popularity stems from the fact that his stories “ease cultural anxieties surrounding recent inward migration” (55). However, “The Pram” challenges this fact as Doyle puts forward a rather different setting when compared to the other peacefully resolved stories in *The Deportees*. Unlike most of these stories, “The Pram” offers a gloomy portrayal of Irish interculturalism. Between the two main characters in the story, the Irish host Mrs. O’Reilly and the immigrant Alina, there is an evident estrangement and a lack of successful communication, due to different factors such as cultural background, class and social status, gender rivalry and above all, ethnic prejudice.

This story is also unique in its privileging of the disempowered migrant’s standpoint.<sup>3</sup> Although “The Pram” is narrated in the third person, the predominant point of view throughout most of the story is that of the Polish childminder Alina. Set in the context of twenty-first century Dublin, the plot revolves around Alina’s gradual decline into madness, as she loses her mind and kills her boss (Mrs. O’Reilly) due to the scornful treatment she receives from her employers. The story opens with a sympathetic approach of the migrant. By means of free indirect discourse, we learn about her affection towards the baby boy (Cillian) she is minding (“Alina loved the baby. She loved everything about the baby,” 154), and we also gain insight into some of her family memories back in her homeland (“Alina remembered visiting her grandmother when she was a little girl. She had not met her grandmother before,” *ibid*). In contrast to this, we are rarely given access to the perspective of the Irish-born characters. O’Reilly’s thoughts, for instance, are only made accessible through direct speech, in the conversations she has with Alina. By exploring multiethnicity from the perspective of the incoming migrant, Doyle switches the centre’s perspective for that of the periphery and consequently challenges what Kuhling and Keohane call “the monovocality of Irish society” (84). Nevertheless, as we will see, the predominant view of the migrant is not maintained throughout the story. As the plot unfolds, events are described in a more detached way and the narrator becomes a more distant observer describing events as seen objectively from the outside.

In “The Pram,” Doyle creates a modern pessimistic fairy tale of twenty-first century Dublin. Mrs. O’Reilly is a dark representative of what the writer identifies as “a Tiger phenomenon” (Tekin). She is presented as a dominant businesswoman who has no time to spend with her children, and is thus compelled to bring up her spoiled daughters with the help of her maid. As the narrator points out, “everyone

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<sup>3</sup> Such attempt to sympathize with the migrant is observed more explicitly in another short story from *The Deportees*, “I Understand,” where Doyle adopts the voice of the migrant. This fictional ventriloquism is highly subversive as it “decentralizes white Irish perspectives” (Villar-Argáiz 71) and asks Irish readers “to look at the Irish context differently, to move outside their comfort zone to a place where whiteness and Irishness are neither central nor normative” (Reddy 23).



called her by her surname. She insisted upon this practice. It terrifies her clients, she told Alina. It was intriguing; it was sexy” (Doyle, *Deportees* 158). Although Alina is attentive to the tasks she is given, Mrs. O’Reilly never misses the opportunity to reproach her. For instance, she constantly warns her not to “scrape the sides” (Doyle, *Deportees* 155) of the baby’s pram. Furthermore, Alina is not allowed to take the initiative: “She had walked for two hours, every morning. She had been ordered to do this. She had been told which route to take” (Doyle, *Deportees* 155). She is even not allowed to talk Polish with the baby because Mrs. O’Reilly doesn’t “want Cillian confused” (Doyle, *Deportees* 157). As Ferguson indicates, “Cillian’s hypothetical confusion might not only be linguistic, but perhaps he might also be confused about who his mother is if he hears Alina speak more often than her” (56). Ferguson also points out that “as a white female immigrant, Alina looks enough like her employers to not immediately *appear* foreign, yet that characteristic also makes her a disturbing double figure for the actual mother in the house” (56). Indeed, the story is symbolically entitled “The Pram” as this object is highly significant in itself. Towards the end of the story, the pram becomes an object of dispute between the two women, in their desire to enact their roles as mothers. This dichotomy between Mrs. O’Reilly and Alina has been explained deftly in a review of “The Pram”:

What makes O’Reilly a monster? In Doyle shorthand: she has a profession, a husband and children to neglect, and an immigrant nanny to abuse. Perhaps Doyle intended his juxtaposition of grotesqueries—O’Reilly, with her womanhood denatured by economic power, and the nanny Alina, the long-suffering erasure—to recall to readers’ minds fairy tales of wicked witches and kind-hearted maidens. (Spillane 150)

Although Alina fills in for the absence of the mother figure at home, she cannot ingratiate herself with Mrs. O’Reilly. On top of this, she is exposed to the racist discourse of her boss and often called a “Polish peasant,” “Polish cailín,” or a “fucking nightmare” (Doyle, *Deportees* 176; 169 176). As Jarmila Mildorf notes, “insults confer a certain identity on the person insulted and thus ultimately contribute to the construction of social group” (109). Alina’s enforced displacement and her work as a nanny automatically define her inferior status in Ireland.

Labelled as a “bloody childminder,” Alina is forced to be an outcast ((Doyle, *Deportees* 167). She suffers not only the verbal abuse inflicted on her by Mrs. O’Reilly but also the sexual harassment of Mr. O’Reilly. As a displaced, migrant subject surrounded by cruel host figures, Alina’s individuality is also entrapped and diminished. Her “bedroom in the attic” (Doyle, *Deportees* 156) recalls the imprisonment of deviant women in classic literary works. While in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Mr. Rochester confines his mad wife to live in the attic, in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) a depressed woman is doomed by her husband to spend her days upstairs. Alina is not only physically presented as an outcast; she is also deprived of personal privacy as her bedroom door has no lock (Doyle, *Deportees* 160), and when she asserts her right to have “[a] private affair” with a Lithuanian biochemist, Mrs. O’Reilly strictly states that “Nothing can be [her] private affair [while she’s] working [there]” (Doyle, *Deportees* 160).



Through Alina's predominant perspective, Doyle recounts this migrant's eventual liberation from her seclusion. In an illuminating analysis of "The Pram," Molly Ferguson employs Freud's theory of the "Uncanny" in order to explain how Alina takes revenge by frightening O'Reilly's daughters through her poignant articulation of a horror story. As Ferguson notes, ghost stories "give voice to people at the bottom of the social hierarchy, disrupting the continuity of the powerful" (54). Indeed, Alina's transformation from an ineffectual maid to an empowered woman is envisioned through her articulation of a ghost story about the Polish mythological figure 'Boginka'. According to Micheal Ostling the 'Boginka' is a figure who avenges herself "on the living by stealing any infant children not yet protected by baptism" (203). This "kidnapper nymph," as Nunal defines her, is reawakened in Alina's retelling of the story (263). As Alina informs O'Reilly's daughters, this "old and wicked lady" from her country "lived in a dark forest," and every night she "pushed the pram to the village" and "chose a baby" to steal it (Doyle, *Deportees* 161). The villagers decided to cut down the trees of the dark forest in order to chase her and rescue their daughters. Thus, this kidnapper nymph had to "[move] to another place" where to find "new babies and new little girls" (Doyle, *Deportees* 165). The parallelism between the migrant protagonist and the Polish mythological figure is glaringly apparent. Through Alina, Doyle creates a modern Boginka who is far away from her native land and has the urge to be a mother but is only able to push the prams of others. Like Boginka, Alina takes the pram of Cillian every day, and nurses a baby which is not hers. She sees various "mothers and other young women like herself" who push modern prams and "she envies them" (Doyle, *Deportees* 157). Her first opportunity to be a real mother is hindered by the O'Reilly family because they do not approve of her relationship.

This reference to this Polish myth takes on a mystical meaning as gothic elements gradually gain predominance in the narrative. As Alina tells her terrifying story to the girls, we learn that it is "dark outside," that "a crow perched on the chimneypot cawed down the chimney; its sharp beak seemed very close" and that the "wind continued to shriek and groan" (Doyle, *Deportees* 164-165). Such mysterious, creepy atmosphere adds to the drama of the story, to the extent that the pram appears "haunted" not only for the girls, but also for Alina herself: "The little girls screamed. And so did Alina. She had not touched the wheel. The pram had moved before her foot had reached it" (Doyle, *Deportees* 166). Alina eventually believes the folklore tale that she is telling and the narrative records her gradual descent into madness in her blind belief that the pram is really haunted. Influenced by this myth of Boginka, Alina confuses the boundaries of reality and fiction, and becomes a neurotic self who, in Freud's words, "turns away from reality because he finds it unbearable" (Freud 301).

Thus, Doyle skilfully amalgamates the legend of Boginka and Alina's progression into madness, allowing "The Pram" to maintain its creepy tone and concluding the story with sinister consequences. Mrs. O'Reilly fires Alina because of her "hardcore" storytelling (Doyle, *Deportees* 170) which even causes her daughters to pee themselves. While she is on the phone cancelling the following day's meeting, Alina unexpectedly appears and kills her:



O'Reilly brought the phone down from her ear at the same time that Alina brought the poker down on O'Reilly's head. The poker was decorative, and heavy. It had never been used, until now. The first blow was sufficient. O'Reilly collapsed with not much noise, and her blood joined the urine on the rug. (Doyle, *Deportees* 176)

The poker acquires significant value here. As we learn, this object had not been "used before," suggesting that it had been waiting for Alina's ponderous act of vengeance. On the other hand, Mrs. O'Reilly's fall does not make much of a sound; that is to say, overthrowing her employer is not an action that provokes a significant (auditory) effect in the narrative, implying at the symbolic level that her power was superficial, inefficient and thus easily overthrown.

Alina's unexpected poker blow metaphorically stage her eventual transformation and liberation in her struggle to overcome the obstacles she encounters as a female outsider in Ireland. As Ferguson notes, this character "regains control only as a monster, and Doyle's metatextual ghost story is implied as a cautionary tale for readers who may underestimate the effects of alienation on the migrant worker" (58).<sup>4</sup> Unappreciated for who she is, Alina takes sanctuary in her folklore take, transforming herself into a modern Boginka in her escape with the pram where the baby is sleeping inside. As the narrator states "[t]hey found her in the sludge. She was standing up to her thighs in the ooze and seaweed. She was trying to push the pram still deeper into the mud" (Doyle, *Deportees* 178). In the end, the pram can be read as a symbol of Alina's vain efforts to bury the horrible memories she has been through in Ireland. The sludge or the bog (which means 'soft' in Gaelic) serves a traditional meaning. It is a decomposed ground in contrast to solid land. As a result of its slippery and absorbent nature, the sludge suggests instability. In Alina's case, it represents her failure as an immigrant to establish for herself a secure environment in Ireland.

In this sense, the last image we get of Alina is of a woman whose mind has gone completely astray. At this stage in the narrative we, as readers, have lost all sense of sympathetic identification with her. The use of indirect speech at the beginning gradually disappears throughout the story as we stop having access to Alina's mind. The narrative progressively becomes more mysterious, to the extent that, at the moment of O'Reilly's murder, we are not allowed to hear the Polish migrant's thoughts. This fact increases the suspense, as we do not know what to expect, and thus the murder takes us by surprise. It further diminishes the sympathetic identification that Doyle initially fostered between the reader and Alina. Alina's criminal act is not easily justified on moral grounds, and thus Doyle does not even try to reflect her thoughts on the matter.

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<sup>4</sup> The effects of this alienation become all the more obvious in the new multicultural face of Ireland when contrasted with the way such workers were treated in the past. In Roddy Doyle's autobiographical book *Rory & Ita*, where he records the words of his parents, we learn that they used to perceive their maids not as servants but rather as friends. As Doyle's mother puts it, "[w]e were conscious of who they were, not *what* they were" (Doyle, *Rory* 37).



While “The Pram” is predominantly written from the viewpoint of a migrant in a foreign country, the story “The Slave” is narrated from the point of view of an Irish-born character: Terrence (Terry), a middle-class working man whose job is not specified. Unlike the previous short story, this piece does not deal explicitly with the theme of immigration in Ireland. Nevertheless, it is plausible to read this story from the multicultural perspective, given Doyle’s concern in his writings with the multiethnic character of Irish society and the themes of insularity and threatening alterity referred to in the story.

“The Slave” first appeared in the short story collection *Speaking with the Angel* (2001, edited by Nick Hornby), and it was later published in Doyle’s collection *Bullfighting*. As Doyle recently claims in an interview, this story was conceived in the first days of the year 2000, and it draws from the author’s personal shock “when [he] found a dead rat in [his] kitchen” (Tekin). Doyle uses this anecdote as “as an inspiration” and further adds that the story “is not about me but the rat” (Tekin). In *Bullfighting*, Doyle touches upon many themes such as mid-life crisis, aging, marriage, friendship, loss and Ireland’s new multicultural condition. In a review published in *The Globe and the Mail*, John Doyle underlines that *Bullfighting* is successful in terms of “capturing the rhythms of ordinary life and speech.” Furthermore, the short stories in the collection prove Frank O’Connor’s theory about the most characteristic feature of the short story, as compared to the novel: “an intense awareness of human loneliness” (19). Indeed, it is possible to encounter lonely characters in the stories of *Bullfighting*. The first short story in the collection, “Recuperation,” introduces us to a middle aged Irish man that never feels fulfilled in his life and is wandering aimlessly in the suburbs of Dublin. In “The Photograph,” we witness a man’s suffering after his best friend’s tragic death from cancer. “The Joke,” “Ash” and “The Dog” are about the problems of couples, their aching relationships on the verge of divorce. “Teaching” is a story of an alcoholic teacher, who similarly to the protagonist of “Recuperation,” goes through a spiritual stagnation. This feeling of physical or spiritual isolation is also at the centre of “The Slave.”

In its mode of presentation and narrative technique, this short story bears remarkable resemblance to Virginia Woolf’s modernist story “The Mark on the Wall.” To start with, both pieces start with a nameless first person narrator (in Doyle’s “The Slave” we do not learn the name of the narrator until almost the very end), in the middle of a profound intellectual process of musing and meditation. Both stories are also similar in their use of the stream of consciousness technique. Like Woolf, Doyle is interested in portraying how the subjective mind works, in its fluid jumping from one idea to the next one. While in Woolf’s story it is a simple mark on the wall what motivates the narrator to engage in a complex reflection about life in general, in Doyle’s story it is the presence of a dead rat in Terry’s kitchen what provokes him to start reflecting on a variety of issues ranging from age, midlife crisis and lifestyle, to parenthood and marriage life. Furthermore, in both stories the narrator’s ideas start to flow first with the sight of an animal (a snail in Woolf’s story) which is not commonly found in a domestic setting. Such intrusive presence can be defined as an “abject,” a term that Julia Kristeva defines as “an imaginary uncanniness and a real threat” which “beckons to us and ends up engulfing us” (Kristeva 4). The





disorienting and unwanted animals in both stories trigger the narrators' various intricate thoughts. As in Woolf's modernist tale, there is an intense feeling of expectation throughout "The Slave," as we wait for some final resolution once Terry manages to overcome his inaction and take the rat out of his kitchen. Nevertheless, this resolution never happens, and the overarching emphasis we are left with is of Terry as a character who is trapped and blocked by his own obsessions and musings.

The images of Terry's 'home' and the intrusive 'rat' may be read respectively from a multicultural perspective as metaphors for the country of Ireland and the disruptive 'invasion' of an outsider who arrives unexpectedly. The protagonist's language and obsession with getting rid of a rat reflect the dilemma he experiences as a middle-aged, working-class Irish man. From this perspective, the story not only portrays this working-class man's life, but also his conservative attitude towards newcomers. "The Slave" opens with a mnemonic that is stuck in the head of the protagonist: "My very educated mother just showed us nine planets. My very educated mother just showed us nine planets. My, Mercury. Very, Venus. Educated, Earth. Mother, Mars. Just, Jupiter. Showed, Saturn. Us, Uranus. Nine, Neptune. Planets, Pluto" (Doyle, *Bullfighting* 43). Although at first these words seem to spring simply from some random childhood memory, as we continue reading, they become more significant as Terry obsessively repeats this planetary mnemonic: "Mind you, that bit is good. Because there *are* nine of them. So it fits and helps you remember" (Doyle, *Bullfighting* 43); "I remember it every day. It's not a memory, no more than the names of my children are... The names are always there. And it's the same with my very educated mother" (Doyle, *Bullfighting* 46-47). Terry's fixation with the mnemonic is more than reminiscence in itself, as they suddenly reveal a more obscure past which lurks behind as an unassimilated trauma. Through the speaker's scattered childhood memories, we learn of his secondary school, an oppressing setting based on rote learning and harsh educational methods. Furthermore, we learn that Terry, like some of his school mates, suffered sexual abuse by the Christian Brothers but intimidation and humiliation prevented them from denouncing the situation. Nevertheless, all these facts appear blurred in his memories, as compared to the one thing he still remembers: the planetary system. When trying to recall the bits and pieces of the things he has learnt in his old school days, some "tiny bits" of history also spring to his mind: "1916. 1798. Black '47" (Doyle, *Bullfighting* 46). These dates which only appear as flashbacks signal the three main historical events in the Irish past: the Easter Rising, the Irish Rebellion and the Great Famine, iconic landmarks in Ireland's past as a (post)colonial country.

In psychoanalytical terms, it could be claimed that Terry repeats the mnemonic so as to repress the trauma of his past. Freud clarifies the compulsion to repeat as follows: "The study of the repetition—compulsion suggests that repression generates historical time by generating an instinct—determined fixation to the repressed past, and thus setting in motion a forward moving dialectic which is at the same time an effort to recover the past" (Freud, *Beyond* 191). Terry's attempt to both repress and recover his past can also be interpreted from the sociological perspective. As sociologist Ronit Lentin claims in the Irish context, for some Irish people, the arrival of new migrants provokes the resurgence of Ireland's traumatic



past. Lentin claims that Ireland's background as a colonial country, a memory which is usually hidden and repressed, is reawakened in the everyday encounters between the Irish host and the incoming migrant (233). This traumatic past which comes to haunt the host, in a process Lentin describes as the "return of the repressed," must be fully acknowledged in order to achieve a healthy relationship with external Others. Indeed, the trauma of Ireland's past as a colonial country emerges as a hidden subtext in Terry's obsessive musings as he encounters unexpectedly a rat in his kitchen, a symbol of uncomfortable alterity and difference:

A rat. A dead fuckin' rat. A huge fucker.

Lying there.

And I still couldn't accept it. I couldn't—comprehend it. I was staring at the fuckin' thing. There was nothing else, in my head, in the world, just that thing lying there, under my pull-out larder, that I installed myself—that was my own fuckin' idea—and I couldn't get to the grips with the situation. I couldn't just say to myself, –That's a rat there, Terry, and you'd want to think about getting rid of it. No, I couldn't organise myself. I couldn't *think*. I walked out and shut the door again. I was going to go back in and go through it all over again. (Doyle 2011: 48)

Terry's uneasiness with the rat epitomizes the fear of the Other and indeed his discourse replicates the imperialist, colonial discourse. In an attempt to gain back the control of his house, Terry wants to take the rat out immediately, stating "[l]et's get rid of the cunt" (Doyle, *Bullfighting* 49). He perceives the rat's existence as an attack on his house and by extension, on his family: "My home, my pull-out, my family, my little son next door in the sitting room, this bastard had come into my home—*how* is another story—and I couldn't just bend down, pick the cunt up and throw him in a bag" (Doyle, *Bullfighting* 51). Terry's overreaction illustrates the irrational fear that assails intransigent, close-minded people when faced with strangers and foreigners. The threatening presence of such an outsider prompts him to feel insecure in his private sphere and he cannot help thinking about the probability of coming across a rat again in the house: "[i]t doesn't bear thinking about. But I've thought nothing else. And it goes way beyond that. Everything. Fuckin' everything is *polluted* by it" (Doyle, *Bullfighting* 58). Even the idea of walking through the corridors of 'the house' becomes a stressful issue for Terry as he feels uncomfortable in 'his territory'. Far from regarding the rat's entrance in his house as a mere coincidence, the protagonist exaggerates the situation as if his house is haunted by all sorts of rodents. Likewise, unable to accept the fact that it is only a harmless animal, Terry's nervousness rises to the extent of fear: the fear of losing the control of his house to a stranger.

Some theorists in Irish academia have defended the need to look back at Irish historical memory in order to foster an integrated Ireland, a country genuinely welcoming to new influences. Luke Gibbons claims that "[t]he ability to look outward, and particularly to identify with the plight of refugees and asylum-seekers, may be best served by reclaiming those lost narratives of the past which generate new solidarities in the present" (105). Similarly, Declan Kiberd, in his now iconic essay "Strangers in Their Own Country," defends the need for a sophisticated knowledge



of history in order to be open to the presence of Others: “those who lack a sophisticated sense of their own origins are more likely to seek a simplified version of the past, in whose name to lash out at the ‘foreign’” (314).

Indeed, Terry lacks this form of “sophisticated knowledge” of his origins (both personal and historical). The past only emerges in his mind in the form of mnemonics, phrases repeated obsessively and unreasonably. The fact that the trauma of his past (both individually as a child, and more historically as a postcolonial citizen) emerges in his encounter with the rat is highly symbolic. Terry needs to find a compromise between the past and the present: he is stuck in a past that has not been properly assimilated and thus unable to come to terms with a present defined by alterity and difference. Doyle portrays a character who is ultimately incapable of overcoming the trauma of his childhood and more generally, of carefully examining his roots, a prerequisite for any act of welcoming other cultural influences and establish a truthful relationship with the Other.

This conservative approach to the ‘outsider’ is also signalled by the title of the story. As we learn towards the end, Terry named one of his children after a character in his favourite novel, *The Slave* (1962) by Isaac Bashevis Singer (Doyle, *Bullfighting* 60). He admires the novel’s protagonist because he struggles to preserve his identity intact until the end of the plot. The following lines not only reveal Terry’s admiration for the protagonist. They can also be read as the first glimpse of his resistance to the ethnographic change that has taken place in Ireland: “*The Slave*, by Isaac Bashevis Singer. What a book that was. I’d never read anything like it before. Or since. It made me regret that I wasn’t a Jew, because of the way the main lad, Jacob, struggled to hold on to his Jewishness all through the book” (Doyle, *Bullfighting* 60). The title of the book is significant in itself. Jacob is a slave and tries to cling on to his identity despite the oppression he undergoes. Similarly, Terry is “a slave” of his past and his obsessions, and he is utterly unable to adjust to change, as an unexpected visitor arrives at his house. His overreaction to the rat signals his narrow-minded attitude and it becomes even more ironic as we learn that the rat is dead and is “not particularly interested in biting [Terry’s] toe or having a look under [his] dressing gown” (Doyle, *Bullfighting* 51). Consequently, the threat that the rat poses is only illusory, and Terry is furious with the presence of a harmless stranger.

By staging so dramatically Terry’s fear of contamination, Doyle suggests that contagion from others is inevitable, and therefore, there is nothing like an enclosed, unpolluted “community.” Terry is inevitably “exposed” (Doyle, *Bullfighting* 51) to the contagion of the dead rat, and by extension to the contagion of Others, and thus the purity and indemnity of his own insulated house is lacerated. As anthropologist Mary Douglas points out, the search for purity is crucial in every society. The symbolic-boundary maintenance of the community depends on excluding any threat to good order, and dangerous dirt or pollution is one of these threats. Similarly, in his essay “Faith and Knowledge,” Derrida claims that all communities earnestly struggle to preserve themselves uncontaminated and pure. In spite of this desire for self-enclosure, the community is however inevitably open to some contaminated space outside which he explains as “the other, the future, death, freedom, the coming or love of the other, the space and time of a spectralizing messianicity beyond all



messianism” (87). This threatening presence outside is, in Doyle’s story, visualized by means of the rat, which in turns represents a more uncontrollable nature expanding outside of Terry’s house: “I am guarding the house. [...] I’m guarding it against nature. The only reason life can go on in this house is because we managed to keep nature out. [...] Life is a fight between us—the humans, like—and nature. [...] We need the walls and the foundations to keep them out, to let them know—because they’re not thick—we’re brighter than them and we’re stronger than them” (Doyle, *Bullfighting* 64).

Such defensive attitude against any form of polluted alterity recalls the immunitarian projects behind imperialist and nationalist discourses to preserve intact the purity of the ‘self’ from the contamination of external Others. Indeed, Terry’s discourse is loaded with military connotations: “I didn’t feel ready for battle. Even if the enemy was dead and stiff” (Doyle, *Bullfighting* 51); “Here it is. Here’s why I’m here. I’m taking the house back. I’m repossessing it. I’m staying here like this until it becomes natural again. Until I’m actually reading, and not listening out for noise or remembering our dead pal on the floor every time I go over to the kettle” (Doyle, *Bullfighting* 64). Seeing himself as the guardian of the house, the protagonist feels obliged to defend his private enclave from threatening invaders. Once again, the flash of historical events (i.e. the Easter Rising, the Irish Rebellion and the Great Famine) gains significance here. Terry’s language reawakens the colonial discourse in his use of militant language, while suggesting the existence of suppressed cultural memories that have not been fully acknowledged in the present. As Doyle puts it in an interview, “[the Irish] had the comfort twenty-three years ago of being able to blame the Brits for [their] problems. [They] could blame the Brits because [they] were an old colony” (Randolph 152). However, he adds, “[they] can’t do that anymore” (Randolph 152). In “The Slave,” Doyle skilfully portrays the remains of colonial fear to the extent of parody, as the threat the dead rat poses in the present is non-existent and utterly illusory.

As Caramine White claims, “the characters in [the collection *Bullfighting*] handle their periods of transition differently, sometimes gracefully, sometimes fearfully” (198). White’s statement applies to the stories in *The Deportees* as well. While in “The Pram” Alina earnestly attempts to be perceived as an individual in a foreign country, in “The Slave” Terry tries to adapt himself to an unexpected situation in his house. In the latter case, Doyle tells the story from the point of view of an Irish-born character. The historical events of his country flare as he is obsessed with his past and consequently recalls it. Such colonial discourse is in turn blended with the ‘rat’ and the ‘home’ metaphors, which stand respectively for notions of alterity and insularity. Terry epitomises a conservative Irish middle class attitude resistant to social changes and transformations. On the other hand, Doyle presents in “The Pram” Irish interculturalism from the subjective perspective of the disempowered newcomer, disrupting the boundaries of hegemonic whiteness that defines Irish discourse. Internalising the hatred that she experiences in Ireland, Alina takes refuge in her native folklore and, losing her mind, ends up killing her Irish boss. Thus, both stories offer a rather gloomy, even dystopian, portrayal of multicultural



Ireland, by revealing the existence of conservative attitudes, and racist and xenophobic behaviours.

As extensively theorized by sociologists and cultural critics in Ireland, the first basis for the existence of true multiculturalism lies in the ability to acquire a complete knowledge of the roots of one's historical and personal identities. Alina's and Terry's imaginative journeys into the mythological and historical pasts of their own countries—Poland and Ireland—emerge as an imperative enterprise for both of them, in their encounters with otherness and alterity. But it is their inability to interrogate this past what prevents them to move forward. While Alina is eventually caught up in the very racist, hatred discourse which oppressed her in the first place, Terry is ultimately a slave of his obsessions and unconsciously externalizes the trauma of his childhood in his overreaction to a harmless animal. By portraying the estrangement, traumas, difficulties and tensions that assail Irish and non-Irish characters alike, Doyle presents Irish multiculturalism as a complex phenomenon. Declan Kiberd's statement offers a resolution to the complexity of Ireland's multicultural reality, which both Alina and Terry fail to realize: "if everyone recognizes her or his own strangeness, the very notion of the *foreign* dissolves, to be replaced by the *strange*" (317).

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