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CONTENTS

OTHER IRELANDS: REVISITED, REINVENTED, REWRITTEN

Juan Ignacio Oliva, guest-editor

INTRODUCTION

This issue of *RCEI* is devoted to the construction of alternative images and non-standard representations of Ireland in literary, historical and cultural studies. It consists of a bunch of fourteen essays that portray an ample scope of the diversity of revisions, reinventions and rewritings that the Emerald Isle has produced and that offer an-"Other" gaze to the seemingly overwhelming monolithic idea of the island as a traditional, catholic, somewhat monotonous and provincial society.

In effect, (M)other Ireland is viewed here as a country of heterodoxy and a rich mosaic for diaspora, reversion, modelling, and, why not, canonical dissent. In the first essay, Leif Søndergaard shows new hypotheses for the travels of Saint Brendan, reversing the myth of the paradise found in the popular medieval genre of the travel accounts and giving a portrait of the construction of alternative realities. The following three essays tackle the relationship existing between Ireland, Spain and the Canaries, and Cuba, in terms of political, religious and cultural encounters and parallelisms. In this sense, Enrique Galván offers an ample revision of the appropriation of the Saint Brendan motif (and the legendary island of "San Borondón") by Canary Islands nationalisms, as a utopian construct, vague and romantic, from the late 19th century to the decade of the 1980s. Next, Ute Mittermaier analyses Aidan Higgins's work *Balcony of Europe* establishing parallelisms between the Ireland and Spain of the 1960s in terms of the writer's personal philias and phobias felt towards his mother country as seen from the distance of his Andalusian residence, to evince a series of historical, aesthetic and cultural similarities between both countries. Finally, using archival records of Irish migration, Margaret Brehony traces the problematic labour relationship of Irish workers in Cuba in mid-19th century under Spanish military rule.

Set during the same historical period, Marta Ramón's essay delves into the rise of Irish nationalism through the figure of James Fintan Lalor, his crusade in favour of Irish tenant farmers and his writings for the construction of a truly tangible nation. In turn, the two essays that follow offer contesting images to the creation of the Irish nation. Alfred Markey deepens into the revisionist reading of Irish nationalism done by the ex-member of the IRA Sean O'Faolain, to deconstruct the troubles and traumas of the period under the light of postcolonial critique and to offer a new interpretation of his ideological concerns. For his part, Juan F. Elices analyses in terms of racial hegemony Peter Dickinson's dystopian novel, *The Green Gene*, as an epitome of the "anomalous state" of Ireland.

Turning into other literary contents, Jochen Achilles's essay revolves around the concept of liminality in modern Irish drama as a stereotyped and globalized genre, mediated by the British and American hegemonic influence, following Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard's theories and using examples taken from plays by

Marie Jones and Martin McDonagh. Also dealing with visual arts, Rosa González Casademont's essay makes a research journey through Irish films ("The Matchmaker," "The Nephew," "Laws of Attraction," "Irish Jam," "Leap Year," etc) to prove that the cinematic representation of the Emerald Isle suffers from the conservative idealisation of natural and rural settings shadowing thus the real image of the nation's diasporic narrativised history. Next essay examines the new representations of female allegories of Ireland in contemporary Irish women's poetry, using Kristeva's theories about traditional maternity. Therefore, Katharina Walter rereads the way in which these authors revise the discourse between feminism and Irish nationalism turning the female tropes into actual living experiences of the awareness of their own liminal position in society. Following, an intercultural and multicultural analysis of Roddy Doyle's short fiction (specifically "The Pram" and "The Slave") is the aim of Pilar Villar's and Burcu Gülüm Tekin's essay, to show not only the gaze of the estranged Irish but also that of the immigrant "Other," inside social and cultural relationships that lead to inevitable tensions and difficulties.

Finally, the last three essays cover several dysfunctional aspects in the representation of Ireland and the Irish. In first place, Marisol Morales Ladrón's study of Colm Tóibín's novel *Brooklyn* offers an analysis of the complex emigration of Irish women to the U.S., focusing on the deconstruction of the female diasporic subject through the subversion of the stereotype of the promised land, the displacement of the foreign other or the dislocation drives at home and abroad, among other postcolonial topics. Secondly, Juan Ignacio Oliva's essay portrays the series of physical and metaphorical disturbances affecting the male protagonists of Jamie O'Neill's novels, *Disturbance, Kilbrack, and At Swim, Two Boys*, delving into the moral and social constraints of Irish normative rules that affect the very concept of orthodox masculinity. Lastly, Asier Altuna uses Claire Keegan's short stories to revisit Edna O'Brien's "(M)Other Ireland" (*Mother Ireland*), and thus compare the traditional depiction of an eternal and monolithic Irish feminine to the new multicultural, rich and fragmented discourse of the postcolonial nation.

Juan Ignacio Oliva

ARTICLES

PARADISE (?) IN VERSIONS OF *SAINT BRENDAN'S TRAVELS*

Leif Søndergaard
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Abstract

Travel accounts were the most popular genre during the Middle Ages. Travelling went in all directions but preferably to the East, where Paradise was believed to be located. Paradise was hidden behind an ocean, a wall of fire or insurmountable mountains and thus inaccessible. Saint Brendan's voyage went west and the vast majority of scholars have claimed that Saint Brendan arrived in Paradise even if the various texts lack evidence for it, and in several ways. I characterize this apparent Paradise in the *Navigatio* version as a "fake Paradise," because it is located to the west in contrast to the long tradition of Paradise descriptions and the *mappae mundi* where Paradise is always situated to the east. I call the Promised Land in the vernacular *Voyage* version a "pseudo-Paradise" despite the Christian elements, primarily because of its location and because Saint Brendan claims that he had been there.

Key words: Travel account, Saint Brendan, Paradise, Promised Land, Garden of Eden, Mappa mundi, *Land of Cockaigne*.

Resumen

Los relatos de viajes fueron el género más popular durante la Edad Media. El viajero partía en todas direcciones, pero preferiblemente hacia el este, donde se creía que se localizaba el Paraíso. Éste se escondía tras un océano, una muralla de fuego o montañas inaccesibles, por lo que era inalcanzable. El viaje de San Brendano se dirigió hacia el oeste, y una amplia mayoría de especialistas ha destacado, aun sin textos que lo evidencien, que el santo llegó al Paraíso. Yo presento este claro Paraíso de la *Navigatio* como un "Paraíso falso," dado que aparece al oeste en contra de la larga tradición de descripciones y de los *mappae mundi* en los que se sitúa al este. Asimismo, me refiero a la Tierra Prometida del *Voyage* vernáculo como "pseudo-Paraíso," a pesar de los elementos cristianos, debido, sobre todo, a la localización y a que San Brendano defiende que ha estado allí.

Palabras clave: relato de viajes, San Brendano, paraíso, tierra prometida, jardín del edén, mappa mundi, *Land of Cockaigne*.

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The quest for knowledge, fascination with unknown marvels and wonders and the search for an ideal world led to factual voyages and imaginary speculations about remote lands and islands, their existence and their location, ever since Plato wrote about Atlantis in *Kritias*. During the Middle Ages accounts of travels, fictitious, real or a mixture of both, were by far the most popular genre in Latin and vernacular literature. *Mandeville's Travels* (from mid-14th century onwards) was the most read book in the later Middle Ages after the Bible, to judge from the excessive number of manuscripts preserved (more than two hundred). This was so-called armchair travel, relying on compiled material but immensely popular. A.W. Pollard published the text after the so-called Cotton version with a few corrections and additions from the Egerton manuscript or the French text (Pollard 1964: VI). In his translation from 1983 C.W.R.D. Mosely relies on another text, now in British Library (MS Harley 4383). The versions differ only in a few minor aspects in the description of Paradise.

Also the *Alexandri Magni iter ad paradisum* (12th century etc., later adapted in the *Alexander Novel*), the accounts on *Priester John's Letter to Emanuel* (12th century etc.), *Marco Polo's Travels* (13th century etc.) and others in several copies and versions contributed to satisfy the enormous demand. The accounts combined experiences from real travels, narrated by the travelers, surviving evidence from authors in Antiquity, patristic literature, and mere rumors, in varying combinations.

The voyages to the East were by far the most common but journies went in all directions. Adam of Bremen's *Descriptio insularum Aquilonis* (Description of the Nordic Isles, 11th century), *Eiriks Saga Rauda* (Eric the Red's Saga, 13th century) on Leif Ericson's voyage to Vinland in North America, focused on the North. Some accounts on voyages to Asia included Ethiopia or Mauretania in the South but moving further south was believed to be impossible on account of the excessive heat.

In contrast to these, *Saint Brendan's Voyage* went westwards and to a certain extent north and maybe even south. It was rooted in old Irish traditions and due to geographical circumstances it is evident that Saint Brendan must have sailed in the Atlantic. Scholars have interpreted the isles he passed as (mythologized versions of) the Shetlands, the Faroe Islands and Iceland. Even the Canaries have been suggested. But despite the possible landmarks, the primary purpose and ultimate end of the voyage was cosmological and theological—or maybe merely entertainment (Sollbach 62-66).

Saint Brendan's Voyage belonged to the most popular travel accounts, with c. 100 manuscripts preserved. The tradition of narratives on Saint Brendan's Voyage had its origins in Ireland, but during the medieval centuries it spread over most of Western Europe in versions in several vernaculars. It is known in three main traditions. The Latin version, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*, from the 10th century onwards, represents the oldest strand in the tradition. Carl Selmer, who edited the text in 1959, was of the opinion that there must have been an original *Urtext*. He endeavored to establish one authoritative text on the basis of no less than 18 manuscripts. His text is used here. The translation into English by J.F. Webb differs from Selmer's text in some aspects.

In the early 12th century a monk named Benedeit developed a text in the vernacular, *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, which created another tradition during the

following centuries. E.G.R. Waters published what is known as the *Anglo-Norman Voyage of Saint Brendan* in 1928. A translation of this text by Jude S. Mackley was published in 2008 together with a comparative study of the Latin and the Anglo-Norman versions.

In Germany a separate tradition was developed on the basis of a (lost) manuscript from the mid-12th century: *Sankt Brandans Reise*. This trend was very popular in the late 15th century. In 1987 Gerhardt E. Sollbach published *St. Brandans wundersame Seefahrt* from the Heidelberg manuscript (1460). Two years earlier Rolf D. Fay had published another version in the same tradition from the first Augsburg print (c. 1476, with several woodcuts).

In this article I focus on the descriptions of the final destination where Saint Brendan and his men arrive at the end of their journey in one selected version within each of the three traditions. I will question the notion common in research until now that Saint Brendan arrives in paradise. I wish to undertake a close reading and interpret the exact content of the descriptions in order to reach a more precise conclusion.

Paradise was only mentioned explicitly three times in the biblical texts: *Luke* 23.43, the *Second Letter to the Corinthians* 12.4, and *Revelations* 2.7. In the exegetic tradition it was discussed whether Paradise was placed on Earth or in Heaven —perhaps even identical with Heaven (Dinzelbacher, *Vision* 105). During the Middle Ages it was normally believed that the Garden of Eden (*Genesis* 2.8-17) was the same as Paradise. In consequence Paradise must be located on Earth. According to the description in *Genesis* the Garden of Eden was situated to the East and all kinds of trees were growing there, among them the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge. In Eden there was a river that gave water to the plants and trees and it divided into four streams: Pishon (Ganges), Gihon (the Nile), Tigris and Euphrates. Ezekiel 28,13 furthermore places Eden on a holy mountain and this idea is reflected on a world map by Andrea Bianco (Delumeau 94).

Jean Delumeau traces the idea of Paradise back in history, even before Christianity. Already at that time Paradise was believed to be located in the East. Titus Flavius Josephus (1st century) took it for granted that the four principal rivers in the world emanate from Paradise. Ephrem the Syrian (4th century) saw Paradise in the shape of a mountain and in Delumeau's word: "*le paradis constitue et le lieu initial de l'historie humaine et aboutissement final de celle-ci*" (Delumeau 61). Cosmas Indicopleustes (6th century), who imagined the world in the shape of the tabernacle, placed Paradise outside the inhabited world (*oekumene*), separated by a huge ocean and thus inaccessible. Honorius of Autun (7th century) was of the opinion that Paradise was surrounded by a desert populated by snakes and cruel animals. John of Damascus (8th century) considered Paradise to be located at the highest place in the world in the Orient so that it was not flooded in the deluge. Gervais of Tilbury (c. 1100) thought that Paradise was protected by a huge wall of fire.

From the 11th century descriptions were multiplied. The rise of the four rivers in various locations far from Paradise was explained on the basis that they run underground to the places where they pop up. In Paradise the light is always clear, the air fresh, the fields fertile, the trees fair with fruit, roses, lilies and other flowers

smell fragrant, and the gems in the four rivers from Paradise have special lustre. There is always light and eternal spring. There can be found fountains, vines, and laurel. The land flows with milk and honey and edible fruits are abundant. There are no wild animals. The only two people in the Earthly Paradise are Enoch and Elijah, the prophets from the Old Testament whom God placed not in Limbo but in the Earthly Paradise where they should await the final judgment.

Characteristic features are the lack of various general human evils and everyday annoyances, enumerated in long lists. There is neither death, nor illness, nor age, nor fear, nor anger, nor treachery in Paradise. There is no cold, no storm, no ice, no snow nor hail, no excessive summer heat and no drought during autumn. Howard Rollin Patch gives a detailed description with exact references to the patristic literature, i.e., Prudentius, Ambrose, Isidore, and many others and he finally sums up: "By the twelfth century, then, the idea of the Earthly Paradise was fairly well established in many respects: it is located in the east, it is cut off from the rest of the world by its high location, or its ocean barrier, or perhaps by a fiery wall, its features are the familiar ones in Genesis described with almost a traditional form and vocabulary" (Patch 148).

According to *Genesis* and later texts Paradise was located in the Far East and accordingly the world maps (*mappae mundi*) located Paradise here, as we can see on Lambert of Saint Omer's and Honorius Augustodunensis' world maps c. 1180 (Edson 108-09 and 114-15). On both maps Paradise is separated from the world by an ocean. On Lambert's map the four rivers that pour from Paradise are indicated. God reigns in Heaven, i.e. above: he first created Paradise and consequently Paradise must be at the top. This means that Asia covers the upper part of the map, Africa the lower part to the right and Europe the lower part to the left. In George Lakoff's and Mark Johnson's metaphor theory "up" contains positive connotations while "down" is negative and this metaphoric is operative on the world maps.

On the extremely small but detailed The *Psalter World Map* (c. 1265) Christ resides over the world with his right hand raised in a gesture of benediction and holds a symbolic globe in his left hand, while a double Leviathan is placed at the bottom under the world, i.e. to the west. The faces of Adam and Eve can be seen on each side of the Tree of Knowledge. The *Hereford Mappa Mundi* (c. 1285) is even more detailed. The Garden of Eden is separated by an ocean but at the same time it is surrounded by a protective wall. The only entrance goes via a gate but it is firmly closed. Eve receives the apple from the serpent in the Tree of Knowledge and Adam at the same time is taking the first bite (simultaneity is commonplace in medieval iconography). The four rivers that emanate from Paradise are indicated with their names (Edson plate VI, VII and X and Harvey 1992: 83, 84, 86, 88 and 92).

Paradise is mentioned explicitly in various travel accounts. Alexander the Great undertook his voyage to the east as an *Iter ad Paradisum*. Joinville mentions that ginger, rhubarb, aloe and cinnamon come from the terrestrial Paradise. *Visio Gunthelmi* relates that the archangel Raphael leads people to Paradise and Saltrey says "*quod paradisus in oriente et in terra sit, narracio ista ostendit*" (Dinzelbacher 107). Saltrey makes certain reservations in so far as he refers to the narration from which he had heard about paradise and he uses the subjunctive mood.

Mandeville in the mid-14th century repeats Saltrey's reservations by referring to other informers: "Of Paradise I cannot speak properly, for I have not been there. But I shall tell you as much as I have heard from wise men and trustworthy authorities in those countries" (Mosely 184). Mandeville in many ways compiles earlier descriptions and his narration is rather detailed. He repeats that Paradise is situated on an elevated place so that Noah's flood could not affect it. A stone wall surrounds it and there is one entrance, guarded by God's flaming sword. In the middle there is a spring from whence the four rivers run underground until they rise to the surface, each at its proper place.

Mandeville underlines that Paradise is not accessible: "You should realize that no living man can go to paradise" (Mosely 185). By land there is a barren landscape, with hills and rocks and wild animals, that no man can cross. Access is likewise prevented by darkness. By sea, the water rages with extreme currents and waves and at the same time the wind blows with such a force that no boat can sail against it. Many people have tried, all of them without success, Mandeville adds.

Patch believes that at least the Garden of Eden was universally believed to exist. The Garden of Eden could be traced back to the Bible whose authority was impossible to question in the Middle Ages (Patch 134). Ranulf Higden (mid-14th century) argued that the terrestrial Paradise must exist for four reasons: 1) historical narratives told about Paradise, 2) reliable people asserted that they had been there and had seen Paradise, 3) the sources of the Nile and the other principal rivers had never been found, because of their origin in Paradise and their subterranean course, 4) the tradition of Paradise had been kept alive during the six thousand years since God created the world (Delumeau 76).

John of Damascus and Mosès Bar Céphas (9th century) ascribed a reality to Paradise but they discussed the possibilities of a double nature, partly physical and partly symbolic (Delumeau 64). Augustine had earlier appreciated there were three possibilities: 1) it is generally acknowledged that Paradise has a physical existence, 2) the evidence of Paradise has to be interpreted in a spiritual and thus symbolic way, 3) both the physical and the spiritual are aspects of Paradise (Patch 143).

The authors of the Brendan texts were well aware of the way Paradise was described at their time. They related in the wake of a long Irish tradition of voyages to the west but they integrated elements from the Paradise descriptions and in the case of the later versions from other-worldly descriptions, among them the Irish narrative *Aislinge Meic Conglinne* (12th century) and the Irish poem *The Land of Cockaygne* (early 14th century).

In *Navigatio sancti Brendani Abbatis* Saint Brendan and his followers need to have a guide (*procurator*) in order to reach the Land of Promise of the Saints. Without him they will not be able to enter the *terram repromissionis sanctorum*. He leads them towards the east for forty days. After that time they encounter a foggy darkness and the guide tells Saint Brendan that the fog and darkness surround the island they have been searching for during seven years.

They leave the vessel to enter the Land of Promise of the Saints, which is described in this way:

> Before them lay open country covered with apple trees laden with fruit. The monks ate as much as they wanted and drank deeply from the springs. The island was so wide that forty days' wandering still did not bring them to the farther shore. One day they came upon a vast river flowing through the middle of the country. "What are we to do?" asked Brendan. "We have no idea of the size of the country and we cannot cross this river" (Webb 67; Latin in Selmer 78).

There are a few features in common between this description in *Navigatio* and the descriptions of voyages to Paradise: there are apple trees, ripe with fruits that can be eaten and there are wells they can drink from. Likewise on his way Saint Brendan encounters a fog and darkness that separate the ordinary world from the land they want to get access to.

But the differences are crucial. First of all it is explicitly stated that Saint Brendan and his men enter the land they arrive at whereas Paradise is inaccessible. Paradise is located far in the east but Saint Brendan sails to the west in the Atlantic and even if he goes eastwards for forty days, as we are told, he has no chance of arriving before the Paradise as it is described in the visions and travel accounts or shown on the *mappae mundi*.

In the *terra repromissionis sanctorum* there is no spring that gets divided into four rivers that run underground but instead a river in the middle of the land that divides the land into two parts where Saint Brendan can only get access to one part. To this may be added that in *Navigatio* God's first priority is not to lead Saint Brendan to the Land of Promise of the Saints (interpreted as Paradise) but to show him the richness of his wonders on various isles underway (Selmer 80; Webb 68).

Various scholars identify Saint Brendan's Land of Promise with Paradise. Patch speaks of: "(...) the land of Promise, which is Paradise" (40). Selmer invokes "(...) the terrestrial paradise, the goal of this voyage" (91). At the beginning of *Navigatio* the monk Barinthus who is a relative of Saint Brendan tells about an earlier journey he made. His description in fact is more elaborate than the later narration about Saint Brendan's own voyage. The description of Paradise is summary and pale in contrast to lively descriptions of other isles and other events during his voyage.

Barinthus tells the monks in the abbey the story of his and his son abbot Mernoc's voyage. He describes how they pass thick clouds and arrive in brilliant light in a spacious land which is exceedingly fruitful. There is no need of sleep as there is always day and never night. This land is the Land of the Promise of the Saints which he identifies with Paradise. He appeals to the monks by asking them if they can smell the fragrance from Paradise in their garments and the monks readily accept that Barinthus and Mernoc had been there (Selmer 4-9).

In contrast to Saint Brendan's later journey the end of the journey is mentioned here with the name of Paradise here but nevertheless there are disturbing elements. Barinthus and Mernoc row westwards in order to arrive at the island, called the Land of Promise of the Saints and by Barinthus identified with Paradise, even if Paradise was always situated to the East. They are also able to enter the land as Saint Brendan is later on, in contrast to the Paradise visions.

It is significant that Saint Brendan's voyage ends in the Land of Promise of the Saints while Paradise is not mentioned, at least not explicitly. The Land of the Promise of the Saints may be interpreted as a metaphorical expression but compared to the texts on visions and voyages to the east it is remarkable that the exact expression is only used in the initial narration on the forerunners of Saint Brendan.

Together with the many features that do not fit in with the descriptions of the many voyages to Paradise in the Far east this leads to the conclusion that Saint Brendan does not arrive in Paradise but at another island which in some aspects is reminiscent of Paradise but where the major part of the evidence points in another direction. Saint Brendan's fantasy isle is a compilation of various elements, some Christian and some of other origins. To sum up it may be called a *fake Paradise*.

In *The Voyage of Saint Brendan* from the 12th century the Christian elements are prevalent. This versified version in Anglo-Norman, i.e. the vernacular, begins with Saint Brendan's prayers to God that he should let him see Paradise before he dies (Mackley vv. 48-52 and 60). Barintus' narrative (vv. 72-102) differs from the narrative in the Latin versions. He relates his god-son Mernoc's voyage to a neighboring island so close to Paradise that he can smell the fragrance from the flowers in Paradise and hear the angels from there.

When Saint Brendan himself with his men undertakes his journey he moves towards the east and arrives before Paradise where the clouds are so thick and foggy that he is unable to see anything. Adam's heirs cannot return there, due to his expulsion from Paradise. Saint Brendan sails on in full speed and on the fourth day they leave the fog behind them. They encounter a wall that reaches to the clouds. It is made in one piece without any work and it is adorned with various sorts of gems. The entrance is guarded by fiery dragons and a hanging sword with the point down is described in a lucid and detailed way. God's messenger, a handsome young man, welcomes them and lets them enter. He guides them through Paradise. There is a marble hill with a golden mountain on the top. Saint Brendan hears angels and their melodies. They see fair meadows with trees and fragrant flowers and ever-ripe fruits but no evil plants like brambles, thistles, or nettles. The rivers run with milk and reeds exude honey. There are gentle birds and fish. It is always summer; the sun is always shining. Unpleasant weather does not exist in Paradise:

> He who will be here will have no suffering there
> Nor will he ever know whence evil comes
> Neither heat, nor cold, nor affliction
> Nor hunger, nor thirst, nor privation
> He will have all his desires in abundance
> No matter how great is his desire. (Mackley vv. 1765-70)

The description in *Voyage* follows a long way the description from *Genesis* and the patristic tradition, but the material needs are added to the list. Other features are absent: the well and the four rivers; Enoch and Elijah as the only two inhabitants. The young guide asks Saint Brendan to take precious stones with him as a token that he has been in Paradise. As a conclusion the poem states that Saint Brendan

has been in Paradise physically and that he will soon return in spirit in order to stay there until the Last Judgment.

The Voyage of Saint Brendan is heavily influenced by the travel accounts and the visions about Alexander's and other travelers' experiences or fantasies about a Paradise in the east. In this vernacular version Saint Brendan moves east. On a geographical level he is not able to reach Paradise but if the account is interpreted in a symbolic way it can be regarded as a Christian pilgrimage at an allegorical level. The Voyage is placed in a Christian framework as if it were *a* (not *the*) Christian Paradise.

Nevertheless the place where Saint Brendan arrives must be characterized as a *Pseudo-Paradise*. Everywhere in the narratives on travels towards Paradise travelers go east whereas Saint Brendan goes west (modified with 40 days sailing towards the east). While Saint Brendan is sailing on the Atlantic Ocean all other travelers move over land in Asia until an obstacle (a stone wall, a desert peopled by ferocious animals, an ocean with extreme torrents, or a fierywall) prevents them from further onward movement.

Medieval chroniclers and mapmakers never doubt that Saint Brendan's islands and among them the *terra repromissionis sanctorum* were located somewhere in the Atlantic. On late medieval maps, for instance the globe of Martin Behaim (1492), the *insula de Sanct Brendan* is located in the middle of the ocean. Before America was discovered it was believed that sailing west would finally lead to India and accordingly the western brim of the map shows India and surrounding islands that were known from earlier travel accounts (Delumeau 97).

By the 15th century the story of Saint Brendan had spread over most of Europe. The German version in *St. Brandans wundersame Seefahrt* (1460) differs remarkably from both the *Navigatio* and the *Voyage* tradition. First of all the description of the *Bona terra*, as the promised land is called, is much longer and more elaborate than in the earlier versions (covering more than three pages).

In *Brandan's Seefahrt* there is neither fog nor darkness that Saint Brendan and his men must pass in order to enter the land, as was the case in the earlier versions. There are plenty of cereals (a new feature), wine and fruits and the sweet fragrance takes away their weariness and weakness. No wolves or other dangerous animals are to be found there.

Most of the text is devoted to a description of a castle they arrive at via a suspended road which is floating in the air. The castle is made of crystal and the walls are covered by gems, gold, copper and bronze. Images of animals like lions, boars, panthers, elephants and snakes, boars, swine, dogs, hares and deer are carved into the stones on one of the walls. On the second wall wild and tame birds are depicted, as if they are flying in the air. The third wall is covered by all sorts of depictions of tournaments and other activities, performed by innumerable men and women, kings, emperors etc. Many sorts of crafts are rendered. Also leisure pursuits such as the playing of lutes and harps can be seen on the wall.

Inside the castle 700 doors and several beautiful halls are decorated with gold. The beds are covered with gold and silk. The floors are made of blue glass and decorated with gems. In the garden there is a cedar in a green and beautiful meadow: *"Und an dem Baum hingen schöne Trinkgeschirre und Schenkgefässe und ein schöner Tisch,*

und auf dem Tisch die beste Speise, die man sich denken kann" (Sollbach 165). Several sorts of birds sing. There is a clear and cold well and a spring. In the rivers which rise there plenty of fish can be found. At the end the narrator lacks sufficient words: "*In dem Haus war jede Art von Wonne, die es auf der Erde geben kann*" (Sollbach 167).

The idea of the castle is common in the literature about Heaven and in the poems and fabliaux on the Land of Cockaigne (Dinzelbacher 108). God presides over the castle and Saint Peter stands at the gate with his key to decide whether the dead souls can be let in or not. The description leads the imagination in the direction of a king's or a duke's castle. The conclusion is remarkable. Saint Brendan admonishes his brothers that they should not steal anything from the castle—not even a stone as a token—and that they must haste back to the ship so that the devil cannot follow them and seduce them.

The most interesting passage in the text is quoted above: the table with all the best plates that anyone can imagine and the casks, probably with wine or beer. The interest in exquisite food and drink is characteristic, not of Paradise but of the Land of Cockaigne. Other features are typical of the Land of Cockaigne: no work and access to meat: *"Da hatte man das Fleisch von Ziegen und allerhand Vieh. Die Fische in dem Wasser gehen selbst an Land zu den Leuten"* (Sollbach 161-63). The last detail is reminiscent of Bruegel's painting of *Schlaraffenland*, where the chicken places itself on the plate ready to be eaten without effort. In the earlier Saint Brendan tradition the only food mentioned was fruits, in accordance with the description in *Genesis*.

An Irish narration from the 12th century, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*, tells about a land which differs substantially from Paradise: In order to arrive there the protagonist has to pass a milk sea before he reaches a castle, built of thick omelets, bridges of butter, the palisades of flesh, the gate of meat, the pillars of cheese. The fountain springs with wine and in the rivers run beer or mead. This is an early vision of the Land of Cockaigne (Patch 51; Dinzelbacher 86-87).

A parodic Irish poem, *On the Land of Cockaigne*, from the early 14th century, compares Paradise with Cockaigne and the comparison does not fall out in favor of Paradise:

> Thus Paradise be mirth and bright
> Cokaigne is of fairer sight
> What is there in Paradise
> But grass and flowers and green twigs
> Thus there be joy and great duty
> There is no meat but only fruit
> There is not hall, table nor bench
> Only water to quench man's thirst
> There are only two men
> Eliah and Enoch also. (Haskell 375)

The rest of the 190-line poem is devoted to a description of the Land of Cockaigne. A survey of the texts on the Land of Cockaigne is given by Dieter Richter and Leif Søndergaard (Richter; Søndergaard). There is no land in the world where there is so much joy and pleasure. The first thing to mention is the meat and drink

at free disposal and it is explicitly stated that the meat is tender. The description to some extent follows the line from the Paradise texts. The enumeration of absent evils is further developed and includes the lack of everyday annoyances. To the well-known features concerning eternal life and no death, perpetual day and never night, the weather conditions, and wild and tame animals are added several others: Nobody is blind. Neither men nor women can be angry. There are neither fleas nor flies nor lice in that land.

The rivers run with milk, honey, olive oil and wine. The water is only used for washing. Fruits are not for eating but only for the digestion. The parody is further developed in a description of an abbey built with provisions as building materials. This is maybe the most typical feature for the ideas of the Land of Cockaigne. Equality and community are emphasized. Everyone can eat as much as he wants; everything belongs to everyone; the weak and the strong can take from the same purse.

This utopian society foreshadows the abbey Thélème in Rabelais' novel *Gargantua* (1534). In the meadow a tree exudes scents of ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, various birds are singing, etc. There are four springs, like the four rivers that emanate from Paradise, and in them gold and many sorts of precious stones flow. The roasted birds fly directly into your mouth. This description and the idea of Cockaigne in general stems from ordinary people's lives in the village under feudal conditions (Graus 7-9). Here the problems with excessive work, lack of food and drink, wild animals, annoying insects, etc. are absent. Hard everyday life is replaced by a pleasant life in perpetual pleasure and joy.

The second half of the poem is devoted to a parody on and inversion of the daily life in an abbey. The young monks are able to fly through the air and when the abbot wants them to land he displays the bare bottom of a young maiden. At a nunnery nearby the young nuns undress and jump into the water. The monks immediately approach and the dance goes up and down, as it says. The most potent monk lies with twelve nuns every year and he is rewarded for it. The laziest monk is appointed abbot.

In this context the most interesting parts of the poem include the description of the Land of Cockaigne where it both resembles and distinguishes itself from the description in the German *Brandans Seefahrt*. In general many features are common to the Paradise tradition and the Cockaigne tradition and can be found in both types of texts. It is characteristic of *Brandans Seefahrt* that food and drink are foregrounded. And this means that Saint Brendan's voyage in the German version does not go to Paradise but rather to the Land of Cockaigne. Juliette De Caluwé-Dor characterizes the Land of Cockaigne as an *anti-Paradise* (Caluwé-Dor 103).

Sollbach, who edited the manuscript, seems to be quite certain that the voyage reaches Paradise. He provides the German translation with the title "*Hierkommen siezudem Paradies*," even if there is no title in the manuscript itself. In the text the land is called *Terra bona* and it is characterized with a comparison: "(...) *alsobsie in dem Paradieswaren*" (161, 163 and Introduction: 41). The "as if" tells clearly about another place but a place which is similar to Paradise, at least in some respects.

In the *Terra bona* the religious elements are counterpoised and overruled by secular materialistic elements in a way that allows us clearly assert: Saint Brendan

does not arrive in Paradise. To this may be added that the same reservations that were taken in relation to the two earlier versions are also operative for the German version. Sailing towards the west in the ocean is contrary to all descriptions in the Bible, among the church fathers, theologians, and narrators who agree that travelers must go east over land to India in their search for Paradise. Paradise in this version is rather a *counter-paradise*.

In another German version (printed in Augsburg c. 1476) which in most aspects is very much like the Heidelberger version the island where Saint Brendan arrives with his men is interpreted in a totally different and opposite way*:* "*Hyekommen syzüdem gütenertrich, das dem Paradeys geleychet, darynnen warenauchteüfel*" (Fay 42). The land is very much *like* Paradise but as there are devils present it is quite clear that the land can under no circumstances be identical with Paradise.

The place with all its gems and precious stones is interpreted by Saint Brendan as the devil's endeavor to tempt and trick his men so he warns them that they should not take anything with them. Instead he hastily leads them back to the ship. On their way back they encounter monsters with swine's heads, hands like human beings, but with dogs' claws, and cranes' necks. They are equipped with bows and arrows but Saint Brendan succeeds in pacifying them when he addresses them in the name of God, and Saint Brendan and his followers can return to their ship unharmed (Fay 48-49). Dinzelbacher talks about a secularized variant of Paradise (84). I prefer to characterize the island as a "false Paradise."

In the two German versions of *Brandan's Seefahrt* access to the hanging castle goes via a road which is floating in the air. *Navigatio* Saint Brendan and his men, after having sailed for forty days, were enveloped in *caligo* (fog) and "darkness, so thick that they could hardly see each other" (Selmer 78; Webb 67). The foggy darkness lasts for an hour and after that they arrive at the island and suddenly they are able to see everything clearly. In the Anglo-Norman *Voyage* the description is enlarged considerably: fog and great clouds that surround Paradise make darkness so thick and impenetrable that the travelers loose their sight completely. In order to pass the foggy belt they have to sail for three days at full speed.

These ways of describing the passage to the Promised Land, either via a floating road or through fog and darkness may be interpreted as "fiction markers." They indicate that Saint Brendan and his men are now passing from the real world into a fantasy world. It may be remarked in passing that some of the other islands that Saint Brendan visits are fictitious too. Mackley interprets the development in the *Navigatio* and the *Voyage* as a movement from the familiar to the fantastic-uncanny and on to the marvelous.

The use of fiction markers parallels the way they are displayed in the beginning of the Irish poem on the *Land of Cockaigne*: "Fur in see bi west Spayngne/ Is a lond ihote Cockaygne" (Haskell 173). When the poem was performed no isles west of Spain were known, and consequently an island located there must necessarily be imaginary. At the end the fictitious mode is made even clearer: those who want to go to the land of Cockaigne must walk seven years through swine dung up to the neck. There are several fiction markers in the narratives about the Land of Cockaigne (Søndergaard 176-80).

The question of to what extent the narratives about Saint Brendan's travels were believed to be real or imaginary is hard to answer. Probably there existed a continuum from substantial belief to total disbelief and skepticism, where some people believed in some things while others doubted more or less, maybe all of it, depending on their credulity and their ability to interpret the fiction markers.

Some scholars have tried to take Saint Brendan's experiences as real and to locate the places he visited geographically: but not very convincingly (Sollbach 77). Some of the related events and places are mythologized versions with a point of departure in real events or geographical locations, but others are sheer imagination in the wake of old authorities or popular belief. Saint Brendan's voyage is rendered in a fictitious mode but a more important conclusion has to be that Saint Brendan *does not go to Paradise in any of the versions* —as Paradise is envisaged in the long historical tradition from the Bible, patristic literature, theologians, chroniclers and popular narrators.

I have characterized Paradise in the *Navigatio* as a "fake Paradise," which is not the ultimate goal for the travelers and at the same time it is located to the west in contrast to the long tradition of Paradise descriptions where Paradise in situated to the east. I call the Promised Land in *Voyage* a "pseudo-Paradise" despite the Christian elements, again because of its location. I see Paradise in *Sankt Brandans Seefahrt* as a "counter-Paradise" with characteristic prevalent elements from the Land of Cockaigne, and Paradise in the Augsburg-version as a "false Paradise," where the devil plays his tricks.

The attentive reader will recognize the fiction markers and read or listen to the narratives as imaginary descriptions of wonders and marvels, especially in respect to Paradise. If we include *Aislinge Meic Conglinne* and *Far West of Spain* we may label the place they describe as an *anti-Paradise* with a polemical and parodic attitude towards the normal, serious Paradise descriptions.

In none of the Brendan narrations does Saint Brendan go to Paradise. They are nonetheless interesting as fictitious literature and they give access to fascinating aspects of medieval mentalities.

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THE HAUNTED ISLAND-NATION: IRISH INTERSECTIONS IN CANARY ISLANDS NARRATIVES

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Abstract

This paper focuses on a relatively recent phenomenon: the appropriation of Saint Brendan's narrative as a tool for utopian Canary Islands nation-building. Being one of the favourite lenses of the Canary Islands imagination it is not surprising that the construction of Canary Islands national consciousness (a highly heterogeneous and, till recently, somewhat marginal, process that stretches from the end of the 19th century up to our days) mines the Irish narrative for its own purposes. Nonetheless what is most interesting is the way in which the Irish narrative haunts representations of (national-ist) Canary Islands utopias. Thus, it is not only that Canary Islands nation-builders appropriate the story of Saint Brendan in order to forge their political horizon, but also that the story infects, in turn, their discourse, rendering their horizon utopian. In this paper I look at how such dynamics are instantiated in a number of sources, stretching from the late 19th Century up to the 1980s.

Key words: Saint Brendan, Canary Islands, utopia, imaginary, nation-building.

Resumen

Este artículo se centra en un fenómeno relativamente reciente: el uso de la narrativa de San Borondón como un instrumento utópico para la construcción nacional canaria (desde finales del diecinueve, continuando de forma fragmentaria y heterogénea hasta nuestros días). Ya que San Borondón es uno de los motivos más populares del imaginario canario no es sorprendente que se haya utilizado para articular una conciencia nacional canaria. Resulta interesante el modo en el que la narrativa irlandesa permea y distorsiona diversas formulaciones de utopías nacionales o nacionalistas canarias. Por un lado los constructores de la nación canaria se apropian de esta historia para formular un horizonte político, pero por otro, la historia infecta este nuevo discurso, haciendo que el horizonte se vuelva inestable y utópico. En este artículo se analizan diversos ejemplos de utopía insular, procedentes de una variedad de fuentes que abarcan desde el final del siglo diecinueve hasta los años ochenta del pasado siglo.

Palabras clave: San Borondón, Canarias, utopía, imaginario, construcción nacional.

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The story of Saint Brendan and his legendary journey is a remarkable example of an Irish narrative that has travelled way beyond its original context. Its connection with the Canary Islands can indeed be traced back to the early European expeditions of the late Middle Ages. However, the story is not only engaged as an exegetical framework (the narrative terms in which the first Europeans who arrived in the Islands interpreted what they see) back then but also through the centuries up to the present days. In fact, the many births, apparitions and uses of the Isle of Saint Brendan (inside and outside the Canaries) as a recurrent narrative metaphor merit a thorough study. Nevertheless, whereas the interrelationship between the legendary islands described in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* (see Gil Chica) and the legends later developed in the Canary Islands about a phantom island are well researched and documented (Galván; Sörgel; Benito, "San Borondón"; Poggio), the way in which the old Irish narrative has penetrated Canary Islands processes of nation-building has so far been overlooked. Over the centuries the Isle of Saint Brendan[1] has stopped being a place some believed to be real, though undiscovered, to become some sort of symbol of the insular condition. In this respect, Sánchez Robayna describes it as the "maximum insular myth" (De Sancho), some sort of mirror-metaphor through which Canary Islands interpret the texture of their own insularity. The unreachability of the haunted island, hardly ever considered an actual place from the 18th century onwards, has also become identified with the Guanche past in many Canary Islands narratives.[2]

Not unlike Saint Brendan, the Canary Islands aborigines (i.e. Guanches) have also been constructed after the Conquest of the islands (15th century) and their later disappearance as a distinct and separate community (late 17th century) as a mysterious and unreachable subject. Furthermore, in the same sense that Saint Brendan has become the most favored island narrative for interpreting insularity, the Guanches are, in Estévez words, "the archetypal image of what is Canary Islands; the remarkable embodiment of our self-portrait." In other words, the Guanches have become, like Saint Brendan, another deceitful mirror, since they are the slippery other onto which Canary Islands subjects project their desired self-images.

Although both narratives have ended up entwined and bearing analogous traits the reasons for their enigmatic qualities are substantially different. Whereas the mysterious and marvelous elements of the narrative of Saint Brendan (i.e. the *Navigatio*), and its Canary Islands sequels, were part and parcel of their literary texture, the mysteriousness surrounding the Guanches has to do with their construction as mute and noble savages, once they were dismantled as a separate, distinct and self-conscious group. Thus, the Guanche ends up becoming a metaphor, a narrative

[1] Whenever I mention in this paper the Isle of Saint Brendan (i.e. San Borondón in Spanish) I am making reference to the mythical eighth Canary island and the stories associated with it in a Canary Islands context and not to the various isles that appear in the *Navigatio*. The isles from the *Navigatio* are referred to by the names given to them in the Latin text (i.e. Jasconius, Isle of the Blessed).

[2] A popular example is the "Romance de San Borondón," set to music as "Leyenda de San Borondón") by Los Sabandeños, see Alonso Quintero.

that provides, in Estévez words, "pre-modern ancestors for the very modern idea of a Canary Islands nation, [articulated] by a Creole elite by means of appropriating European racist and nationalist ideologies" (10).[3] Though in more recent times the issue of whether only Creole or non-indigenous Canary Islands people have claimed the Guanche as an archetypal ancestor is not as straightforward as Estévez presents it, it is certainly true that the origins of the Guanche *qua* myth are to be found mostly among non-indigenous and, certainly, elite writers.[4] Thus, myth making about the Guanches has mostly to do with power dynamics, historical circumstances and competing claims of ancestrality.

On the other hand, the *Navigatio*'s marvelous elements might be seen as part of an "allegorical and metaphorical text" (Galván 697) full of symbolic elements from the Biblical and the Irish traditions or, as Rubio Tovar argues in relationship to Marco Polo's *Il Milione,* as a credential of Medieval texts that dealt with journeys to unknown lands: "Instead of bringing into question the credibility and reliability of the work, it [the marvelous element] made it [the work] seem believable" (xxxi). Consequently, the marvelous is not just part of a Medieval and post-Medieval view of the world, but also an expected component when reading about other lands and peoples. This naturally shows the connection between the Guanches and the isle of Saint Brendan, revealing the exotic eyes through which Canary Islands elites have regarded the aborigines.[5] However it is not my aim to explore how these two exotic others came to be entwined but to look at a rhetorical space where they already appear combined. Such space is Canary Islands nationalism, a heterogeneous set of ideologies that can be said to begin towards the end of 19th century,[6] and which is deeply concerned with issues of ancestrality, insularity and national unity.

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[3] This and all other quotes in the text, except Radhakrishnan's concluding quote (p. xxx), are from Spanish language sources and are my translations.

[4] In Canary Islands contexts it is never too easy to determine whether someone is a Guanche descendant or not, unless in the 16th and 17th centuries, when the aborigines were a clearly separate community. As I argue later on, nowadays almost any Canary Islands people could claim Guanche origins, since they have become a very democratic and rhetorical ancestral referent. However, it must be said that one of the first Canary Islands authors who enshrines the aborigines as a repository of ideal virtues was Cairasco de Figueroa (1538-1610), who despite being part of the early colonial elite was half-Guanche and whose works contain fragments in aboriginal languages. Nevertheless, many other like Antonio de Viana (1578-1650) or José de Viera y Clavijo (1731-1813), to mention but a few, certainly fit in Estévez's category of the"Creole elite."

[5] For a very thorough analysis of the power dynamics involved in the construction of the Guanche, particularly, though not exclusively, in the 20th century see Farrujia's *Arqueología y franquismo en Canarias*.

[6] Although García Ramos, a nationalist politician himself, ambiguously dates the origins of Canary Islands independence movement to the beginning of the 19th century by linking it to the Junta Suprema and the historical events that could have led to independence along the Spanish colonies of America (26), nationalist thinking is not fully articulated before the writings of Secundino Delgado (1871-1912). If by "independentism" (a deliberate calque from the Spanish on my part), García Ramos means merely supporting the idea of independence he is correct, however, if he uses the term implying some kind of ideological / national consciousness, his claim would be inaccurate. The

Not surprisingly, for accomplishing its nation-building project Canary Islands nationalist thinking relies frequently, though not explicitly, on the narratives of Saint Brendan and the Guanches. If we keep in mind that "the nation is not the source of nationalism but instead it is nationalism what creates the nation" (Estévez), to look at the way in which Canary Islands nationalists appropriate the narratives of Saint Brendan and the Guanches is to analyse the very stuff the Canary Islands nation is made of. Although it could be argued that Canary Islands nationalists inherit the lenses of the European colonists who imagined the Canary Islands as an exotic other, it is also worth mentioning that they appropriate and modify that gaze in order to articulate a political claim. Thus, whereas it is true that their gaze is originally based in the way non-Canary Islands regarded the Canaries and their first inhabitants, it also constitutes a contestive re-appropriation of that first gaze, since it subverts the political agenda of the colonial gaze. However, it is also worth noting how the uncertainties and indeterminacies of the *Navigatio* seem to haunt the imaginary island that is the Canary Islands nation. Said haunting has not so much to do with the colonial legacy of the exotic gaze but with the slippery and difficult-to-find islands (e.g. Isle of the Blessed), or found-but-quickly-lost (e.g. Jasconius), that pervade the story of the Irish sailor-monk.

In the same vein Jarazo argues that the *Lebhor Gabála Erenn* becomes a reference point in "the quest for Galician identity and the enriching of Galicia's culture through the initiation journey" (680), I regard Canary Islands nation-building as an analogous process that, sometimes deliberately and sometimes unawares, retraces the steps of Saint Brendan and his legendary journey. In order to discuss these dynamics I have chosen some of the foundational texts of Canary Islands nationalism, namely Secundino Delgado's writings in the newspaper *El Guanche* and his autobiographical novel (published under a pseudonym) *Vacaguaré*, along with more recent excerpts from song lyrics from the 1970s and 1980s (Taburiente's "Navidad Guanche," Pedro Guerra's "Among Clouds" and Taller Canario's "San Borondón"). This choice has to do with the explicitly utopian overtones of the selected texts and their somehow evident reproduction of narrative traits from the *Navigatio,* particularly the stories concerning the Isle of the Blessed (*Terra repromissionis sanctorum*) and the isle-whale of Jasconius. The uncertainty surrounding both islands represents a useful hermeneutical tool for exploring the inquiring and doubtful interstices of Canary Islands nationalist discourses. However, before diving into its liminal spaces let me briefly explain how the Canary Islands nation comes to be a single and mysterious island haunted by the Guanches.

events of the Junta Suprema, as important as they could have been, only reflect the hesitations of the Canary Islands elites as to what was the best way to protect their interests (i.e. joining the Republic of Brazil, the United States of America, declaring independence under British protection or becoming part of the Great Columbia) in the face of the French invasion of the Iberian Peninsula. There is no sense that the possibility of achieving independence from Spain was regarded as an expression of Canary Islands national consciousness, not even on the part of those who played with the idea of independence (see Hernández González, *La Junta* 8-9).

One of the main concerns of Canary Islands nationalism from its beginnings has been to create a sense of national unity. This sense of solidarity among the seven isles that make up the Canary Islands Archipelago needs to be articulated around some common narrative that fulfills both the centripetal and centrifugal aspects of any nationalist project: to differentiate the emerging nation from its others and to present a coherent image of the national subject. Even though the islands' histories run somehow parallel and they have been governed by similar, when not identical, institutions (since they were brought under Castilian/Spanish rule at different junctions during the 15th century), there is a strong sense of rivalry and competition among them. This is particularly strong between the two main islands, Tenerife and Gran Canaria, whose economic elites have perceived each other as natural competitors, at least, from 19th century onwards. Whatever the causes of this rivalry (nationalists often claim that it is fostered by the Spanish government as a way of keeping the islands divided and therefore under control) it remains an important hindrance to a sense of Canary Islands national unity. It is interesting to appreciate how Secundino Delgado in 1897, often and rightly deemed the father of the Canary Islands nation, brings to the fore the fact that the islands' separation, both in terms of geography and consciousness, represents an obstacle to Canary Islands independence:

> If the Canary Islands were a single, big and powerful island, thus making impossible the alienation of its sons, would they still be subjugated, given their independent personality and daring impulse? Certainly not. (qtd. Hernández González, *Secundino* 102)

Delgado writes in the wake of Cuban and Puerto Rican independence (1898), having probably in mind the example of the Caribbean "single, big and powerful island." Nevertheless, this is more than a mere speculation or a lamentation at the geographical dissimilarities between Cuba and the Canaries; it could be regarded as a positive and prescriptive statement. In other words, if the Canaries become unified in consciousness and acted like a metaphorical "single, big and powerful island" they will attain their independence. Furthermore, Delgado's rhetorical question is also more than a call to join efforts and rise, it is probably the first articulation of a (discursively) unified Canary Islands space that is truly political, truly national. However, this single, imaginary and unified island remains to be disproved as a utopia.[7] More than a century after Delgado's formulation of the Canary Islands nation, the unity in consciousness he advocated for still seems underachieved. Suffice to notice the need for various slogans such as "Seven Islands, One People" (see Castellano), "Looking for Seven Islands, Finding One People" (see Gobierno), or

[7] As Sánchez Robayna reminds us, the modern usage of the word utopia is also connected to an insular imagination, that of Thomas More: "Why did Thomas More place his Utopia in an island? Can we see in this decision the imprint of the famous and non-existing island, that is, of the myth of Saint Brendan [...]?" (34).

"Seven Islands, One Nation" (see Nación) to realise that the desired unity has not yet been reached.

However, political union in a single national space is not the only utopian aspect of the imaginary island-nation dreamed by Delgado and later nationalist thinkers. As the overcoming of local (i.e. isle-based) political demands and consciousness fulfills the centripetal aspect of Canary Islands nationalism, there is also a need to account for what is unique about the Canary Islands national space, what makes it different from other nations and, particularly, Spain. This centrifugal aspect is often accomplished by evoking the Guanche past, since the Guanche has not only been constructed as the Canary Islanders' "self-portrait" and the "archetypal image of what is Canary Islands" (Estévez) but also represents a version of Canary Islandsness that precedes the colonial encounter and is therefore untainted by Castile/Spain. In this way, the Guanches become the inhabitants of the utopian island-nation, turning the imaginary island further utopian, since their rhetorical presence is enabled by their physical absence (as a living people). Even if the islands became metaphorically mingled in a single national space, it is certain that the pre-colonial past could not be re-created.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that Delgado and other early nationalists were not particularly naïve or literal about going back to Guanche times. Like his predecessors in the making of the mythical image of the Guanche, Delgado imagines the aborigine as an archetypal and noble warrior, an embodiment of all human virtues. Although Delgado does not belong to the Canary Islands elites (whether he was Creole or not it is difficult to determine by the end of the 19th century), his Guanche imagination borrows substantially from their discourses. The Guanche appears as some sort of symbol rather than as a particular historical subject. However, for Delgado the Guanches are not used to exemplify Christian virtues (Cairasco de Figueroa) or as the symbol of a lost golden age that preceded the vices of civilisation (Viera y Clavijo);[8] they are a historical source of inspiration, an example from the past that can be translated into political action in the present. They could be said to be a timeless instance of Canary Islands resistance that re-manifests in every age upholding the quest for dignity, freedom and independence.

In this sense the Guanche essence of the Canary Islands island-nation has nothing to do with claims of ethnic or cultural continuity, the Guanches are, above all, a symbol; as Garí Hayek puts it "returning to what is Guanche is [...] to re-conquer Canary Islands independence" (59). The Guanche is in this way universalised, turned into an embodiment of values that are not specific to the Canary Islands or their pre-colonial past.[9] Consequently, Delgado does not only proclaim his pride in his

[8] For an account of Viera y Clavijo's construction of the Guanche see Estévez.

[9] Another interesting example of how the immortality of the Guanches is asserted by being turned into a universal principle can be found in Gil Roldan's poem "La cantata del Mencey loco": "They can never die / Those who break free from slavery / Releasing themselves from their chains / By means of taking their life" (Gil Roldan qtd. Muñoz- Hidalgo 359). Thus, the "Mad Mencey (i.e. Guanche king)," who chooses death before submitting to the Castilian invaders, becomes a symbol

Guanche origins but also in his Spanish ancestry, "such pride being of no significance to his nationalism since what is meant to be to be received from the Guanches is a political teaching [and not a claim of ethnic continuity]" (Garí Hayek 60). In fact, if we understand the Guanche as a political role model virtually anyone could claim Guanche origins. The universalisation of the Guanches as a symbol democratises ancestry, enabling virtually any Canary Islands person to claim them as her or his (spiritual or political) ancestors. After all, who would not like to be related to such noble and ideal predecessors? Ironically enough, for the actual Guanches their ancestry and heritage was a source of shame and social discrimination that led to their eventual dismantling as a cohesive and recognizable community.

Discussing the Guanches as imaginary inhabitants of a utopian (is-)land does not mean to suggest that they never existed or that they, as individuals, along with some of their cultural practices did not survive and contribute to the melting pot that is Canary Islands culture. However, their idealised and archetypal image, constructed mostly through their absence or muteness is a highly mobile and flexible construct that enables all kinds of imaginative projects. It is this fictional Guanche who resembles strongly the slippery and mysterious isles of the *Navigatio.* Not unlike the Isle of the Blessed, the resting abode for the Celtic heroes and the aim of Saint Brendan's journey, the Guanche seems "wrapped in mists so dense" (Gil 76). In fact these mists do not only cover the island but also prevent the sailors from seeing each other, thus not only preventing the final destination to be reached but also isolating the subject, turning him into an uncertain and invisible island. Analogously, the Guanche might also be compared to Jasconius, the whale-island where the monks celebrate an Easter Vigil before the whale shakes them off its back in the morning (Gil 75). The Guanche is such unstable location, never fully found, despite being often sought.

These slippery dynamics which combine at once the narratives of the *Navigatio*, the story of Saint Brendan in the Canary Islands imagination and the problematics of using the Guanches as a myth, are instantiated in a short story that acts as a prologue to Secundino Delgado's autobiographical novel *¡Vacaguaré...! (Vía-Crucis).* The short story, also entitled "Vacaguaré," was not written by Delgado himself but by Antonio Rodríguez López (1836- 1901), whose name Delgado used as a pseudonym to publish his text after he was imprisoned by the Spanish authorities (1902). The choice is not, of course, accidental, by adopting the name of the poet, playwright and short story writer from La Palma (i.e. Rodríguez López), Secundino Delgado presents his novel and the short story that precedes it as a seamless web written by the same author. The interrelationship between short story and novel is also significant, since Delgado sees his autobiographical narrative in terms of Rodríguez López's tale. The short story acts as a mirror reflection of the autobiographical novel: the short story being about the heroism and misfortune of the Guanches in the 15th century

that lives beyond his own death. In fact, the immortality of the Guanche as the symbol of freedom and resistance is enabled by the death of the Guanche as a subject.

and the novel about a modern Canary Islands hero and his misfortunes. In this way Delgado sees his life-story as a modern manifestation of the timeless paradigm of resistance to Spanish oppression embodied by the Guanches.

It is important to remember that Rodríguez López was not a nationalist and that his celebration of the Guanche past is more a Romantic recreation of a universal principle through a local motif than a reclaiming of the local as such. Even though Rodríguez López belonged to the elites of La Palma and his depiction of the Guanche is highly idealised, and somewhat de-politicised, his story can be easily appropriated by Delgado as a discursive weapon for fostering the double aim of social and national liberation. Rodríguez López's story is a semi-fictional, though not altogether historically inaccurate, account of some significant events from the conquest of La Palma by the Crown of Castile in 1493. It describes how every single Auarita kingdom falls in foreign hands,[10] except Aceró, ruled by the rebel chieftain Tanausú. Since the Castilians cannot defeat Tanausú in the battlefield they kidnap him through deceit and ship him to the Iberian peninsula. Far from accepting defeat, Tanausú refuses to eat during the journey and starves himself to death while shouting "*vacaguaré*," which literally meant 'I want to die' in Auarita language.

However, what is most interesting about "Vacaguaré" is how the narrative is framed, how the island-story that is the Guanche past manifests itself to the narrator (a 19th century local writer). This narrator is sitting by a cliff in the highlands of La Palma, facing West (where the Isle of Saint Brendan was supposed to appear) at dusk, which "is the time of mysteries and visions" (Rodríguez López 9).[11] Then among misty clouds, like the ones surrounding Saint Brendan's sailors, manifests "the genius of Benahoare" (9), ready to tell the narrator about the heroes of yore. Benahore was the aboriginal name of La Palma and therefore this genius is nothing but the embodiment of the island's forgotten or hidden history. In a sense, the genius becomes, through this epiphany, a mirror for the narrator; in it he discovers something about his own history and identity. After all, the genius is a living archive, the repository of La Palma's buried past, as proclaimed by the genius itself: "I keep all stories from your fatherland, which is also mine" and "Here rest all memories

[10] Although all Canary Islands aborigines are generally, though inaccurately, referred to as Guanches, the term Guanche was originally only employed for the aborigines of Tenerife, being the ones from La Palma, Auaritas, La Gomera's Gomeros, El Hierro's Bimbaches, Gran Canaria's Canarios and Fuerteventura's and Lanzarote's Majos. In this respect, Delgado (who was from Tenerife) uses the term Guanche indistinctly for all aborigines, but Rodríguez López makes a distinction by acknowledging the aborigines from his island by their historical name. Throughout this paper I have chosen to refer the more popular term Guanche for referring to all Canary Islands aborigines, although historically inaccurate, since "Guanche" is also the name under which they have been constructed as a semi-legendary and idealized collective.

[11] Although the myth of the Isle of Saint Brendan is well known throughout the Canary Islands, it seems to be particularly alive in the island of La Palma, where the phantom isle was more often claimed to be seen. Poggio's *La isla perdida* is an exhaustive study of how the story of the mythical island has haunted the history of the actual one (La Palma), lending its name to a number of actual place (129-163) and constantly inspiring the island's artists, writers and musicians (165-197).

of Benahoare" (9). This epiphanic being is like the "Isle of the Blessed" which does not only lie towards the West among misty clouds that confound the very identity of Saint Brendan's sailors, but also acts like a compass, imbuing with meaning their journey. As Saint Brendan himself tells them "These mists cover the island you have been searching for seven years" (Gil 76). Thus, both islands are the answer to the travelers' prayers, since the narrator of "Vacaguaré" also begins by invoking "the bards of ancient ages" and the "benahorita race" (9) as he laments their latter muteness.

The genius-island of Benahoare also renders the adventurous life journey of Delgado meaningful. Through the epiphany experienced by Rodríguez López's narrator, Delgado finds a story, a metaphorical space that allows him to make sense of his existence. Seeking refuge in this archival and imaginary island, inhabited by the noble Guanches, is, nevertheless, a risky undertaking. After all, this island is not only the Isle of the Blessed where the heroes of the past dwell but also Jasconius, the ever-unstable whale-island. Once Tanausú's story has been conveyed, the genius of Benahoare disappears as suddenly as it first appeared. All that the wistful narrator is left with are the traces of its absence, which are identified with the sound of a running spring ("that's the genius weeping" (9)) or with the echoes of deep valleys that, in an analogous pathetic fallacy, keep on repeating the genius last words. It is impossible not to make a connection between this genius and the Canary island of Saint Brendan, the slippery island that fades away when approached.[12] However, this slippery island is also the single Canary Islands island-nation, presented here as an archive that encapsulates the Guanche past.

As any other nation, the Canary Islands nation needs an archive full of stories that articulate and interpret its functioning as a discursive organism. Many of these stories belong to the Guanche lore, or to be more precise, to the lore generated about the Guanches (mostly) in their absence. If we consider the fluid and changing nature of the Guanche as a myth it is not difficult to compare it to the slippery island of Jasconius or the Canary island of Saint Brendan. No matter how powerfully they are conjured in various imaginaries, the actual Guanches can never be reached, which is why they can be imagined in so many ways. Therefore, their island, the archival island that contains all their stories cannot be reached either, it is a shifty no-man's land that is alternately seen and not seen. By dancing with this archive, the slipper "genius of Benahoare," the narrator of "Vacaguaré" involves himself in a simultaneous process of self-construction and self-deconstruction. On one hand he is granted an insight into his past, thus forging a sense of identity, and, on the other, he is reminded of the ungraspability of such self-image, of its

[12] In a truly postmodern fashion, Tarek Ode and David Oliveira organised an exhibition in 2004 about a fictional and successful expedition to the Isle of Saint Brendan. The exhibition featured old photographs and objects took from the fictional island at some point in the 19th century. For the exhibition's catalogue see Ode.

ultimate insubstantiality.[13] This elusive quality of Canary Islands nation-building is not exclusive of its early stages but manifests frequently enough through its history.

Similar dynamics can be appreciated, for instance, in song lyrics from the 1970s and 1980s, a time when Canary Islands nation-building and identity-reclaiming came to the fore again as part of the changes experienced in the Spanish state after the death of General Franco (1975). One of the earliest musicians that mined the Guanche imagination as a political weapon was the folk band Taburiente who, like Antonio Rodríguez López, also came from the island of La Palma.[14] Among their earliest song is "Guanche Christmas" (1976) which re-appropriates the single isle of the Canary Islands nation as a locus for Guanche utopia in a highly original fashion. In "Guanche Christmas" it is never clear whether the Christian narrative of Jesus' birth is being adapted to the imaginary landscape of the Guanche past or whether it is being used as a symbol for conveying a nationalist epiphany. However it might be, this celebration returns us to the unstable horizon of a mysterious island.

The mysterious single unified island is thus invoked in the first stanza along the seven Canary islands, which appear in the form of stars, thus linking the Christian narrative to nationalist symbolism[15]: "Seven stars fell from the sky / To kiss the Atlantic they went / And another star descended / Proclaiming to the Guanches their god." This eighth star could be identified both with the isle of Saint Brendan (often called the eighth Canary Island, see Benito Ruano, "La Octava") and with the star of Bethlehem. In fact, as the story unfolds we discover how the eighth star-island manifests qualities from both narratives. The reading of the eighth star as a utopian eighth island is further confirmed when the adoration of the Magi is translated to a Guanche context: "From each island they came/ The Guanche Kings to see him / From Tenerife Tinguaró /From Gran Canaria Doramas/ And from La Palma Tanausú/ All guided by the same light."[16] This imaginary journey

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[13] Even though he probably means it as a fundamental human predicament, Sánchez Robayna's statement about Aprositus (another name for the Isle of Saint Brendan) would also be very valid if applied to Canary Islands identity: "Ah, the island never found, the *non trubada*, Aprositus. In other words, ourselves" (41).

[14] Although he does not mention "Guanche Christmas," Poggio also acknowledges Taburiente's contribution to the lore of Saint Brendan in La Palma (181-182).

[15] The metaphor that identifies the seven islands as seven stars has featured in the various Canary Islands flags created by nationalist movements throughout the 20th century. Thus, the first Canary Islands flag that can be said to be an expression of national consciousness (i.e. the one displayed at El Ateneo in La Laguna in 1907) consisted of seven white stars on a blue background that represented the sea. Analogously, the flag created later by the MPAIAC in 1964 also featured seven green stars upon a blue stripe, which reproduced the metaphor of the seven stars floating upon or "kissing" the ocean. In fact, Taburiente's most famous song, "Ach-Guañac," is a celebration of this more recent flag, explicitly referring to its design as "a blue sea shining with seven green stars." For more information about Canary Islands flags and their relationship to various political projects see Suárez Rosales.

[16] For the sake of historical accuracy it must be pointed out that unlike Tinguaró and Tanausú, who belonged to the aboriginal nobility, Doramas was born a plebeian. Moreover, and unlike Tanausú who was the highest authority in his kingdom, Tinguaró was not a king/ chieftain,

featuring three historical characters begs the question of where are these three Guanche kings going and, therefore, where the newborn baby at the centre of this nationalist epiphany rests.

For a start, the encounter of these three historical characters constitutes a utopian reworking of the past, since they never had a chance to meet. Doramas and Tinguaró died on the battlefield in the islands where they were born (Gran Canaria and Tenerife, respectively) and Tanausú, as discussed above, starved himself to death while being taken away from La Palma as a captive. Thus, presumably none of the three kings ever had a chance to see any Canary island other than their native one.[17] However, in the imaginary and utopian space of "Guanche Christmas" they actually leave their islands and meet in, presumably, another island or insular space. This island could be one of the four remaining and unacknowledged islands (i.e. La Gomera, El Hierro, Fuerteventura or Lanzarote), however the utopian quality of the meeting probably calls for a more utopian and non-geographical space. After all, "Guanche Christmas" is not only preoccupied with celebrating the Guanche past but also with the overcoming of rivalries among the islands, dramatised in the meeting of the three kings who are "all guided by the same light."[18]

This unifying and leading light seems to emanate from the eighth star, which plays the star of Bethlehem's role, guiding the Magi towards the locus of epiphany. In "Guanche Christmas," this eighth star is both a leading agent and a location in

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but king Bencomo's brother or half-brother and so he is sometimes referred to as "prince." Although these are European categories imposed on Guanche society, the story of Doramas, a "shaven" plebeian (aboriginal noblemen did not cut their hair as a sign of status), highlights the inequalities of pre-colonial society. His life-story is a unique instance of resistance both to the European invaders and to the local elites, who in Gran Canaria often followed a policy of appeasement with the colonisers. Doramas proclaimed himself a noble/captain (*gaire*) and the aboriginal nobility (a relatively flexible body not exclusively determined, though heavily influenced, by birth) seems to have finally accepted him because of his remarkable fighting skills, charismatic leadership and large following. He died a noble/warrior (though not a king) in 1481. For more about Doramas and his story see Marín de Cubas. Nonetheless, I refer collectively to Tanausú, Doramas and Tinguaró as "the three kings," since the term conveys their identity with the Three Wise Men or Magi and also highlights their noble status within the aboriginal society.

[17] The issue of whether the Guanches had any navigation skills, visited islands other than their own or were brought to the Canaries from North Africa by a Roman, Greek or Phoenician is still a highly debated one and it escapes the scope of this paper. However, there is no evidence of Tanausú, Tinguaró or Doramas meeting each other or having been on a Canary island other than their native one. Thus, we might apply Occam's razor and assume that their meeting in the utopian space of "Guanche Christmas" is an historical re-imagination of the past.

[18] A structurally analogous narrative can be found in the story of Sor Catalina de San Mateo (1648-1695), a nun from Gran Canaria who claimed to have visited the seven Canary islands along with the Isle of Saint Brendan in her trance-like visions. Even though for Sor Catalina the Isle of Saint Brendan is possibly an actual place and her visionary world is not metaphorical, it seems significant that Saint Brendan already appears as the centre of her pilgrimage. She is, in a sense, like the three Guanche kings, since she travels in a visionary way to the eighth island while her body remains in her convent in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. For a brief account of the nun's story see Benito Ruano, "Sor Catalina."

itself, an eighth island-star which transcends the other seven and facilitates their union. The eighth star bears all the traits of the single island of the Canary Islands nation: it offers transcendence from inter-insular conflicts, it acts as an archive for the Guanche past and it offers a utopian horizon. Furthermore, the mysterious eighth island of "Guanche Christmas" also embodies significant features from Jasconius and the Isle of the Blessed. Like the whale-island, it is not only an unstable location, merely reached through the utopian imagination of the song, but also acts as a guiding and leading agent. Although Jasconius is famous for being a treacherous and unreliable surface, it also acts as a guide for Saint Brendan, as he tells his sailors: "'Do not be afraid. Nothing bad will happen, on the contrary, it [Jasconius] is helping us in our path. Moving in the right direction, the beast led them towards the shore of the Isle of the Birds, where they rested till the Whitsunday octave" (Gil 76).

Analogously, the utopian eighth island is also the Isle of the Blessed, not just because of its epiphanic quality, but also because it is the resting place of ancient heroes. Even though this aspect does not appear in the *Navigatio,* the idea that the great heroes went to rest to Blessed Islands towards the West was not alien to the *Navigatio*'s larger context.[19] In "Guanche Christmas," the heroes of the Guanche past, who all suffered dishonourable deaths[20], re-appear in a new island with their dignity and royalty restored. This utopian and archival space imagines itself as an island that remained undiscovered and unconquered, where the Guanche past was never tainted by Castile/Spain and which can act as a legitimate source for retrieving an allegedly ancestral sense of unity. Nevertheless, not even Saint Brendan and his monks could stay in the Edenic island they finally reached and where "time stands still, without even a shadow of death" (Gil 79). After trying their fruits they have to return to their fatherland and, thus, dive once more into the mists that surround the Isle of the Blessed. Similarly fated are the utopian sailings that aim for the archive where "time stands still," where Guanche resistance has survived time.

Though "Guanche Christmas" does not show the dissolution of the utopian vision, Pedro Guerra's "Among Clouds" (1985) dwells extensively on it. In this case, the aboriginal past appears explicitly framed by the narrative traits of the Isle of Saint Brendan/the Isle of the Blessed. The symbol of Guanche utopia is now the *tagoror* or aboriginal council, which manifests among dystopian clouds: "I dreamed that among cement / Among buildings and roads / Like a sprouting seed / Re-Arose the *tagoror* // Among tar and smog/ Skyscrapers and Malls/ Under the sky's mist/ The *tagoror* was found." Moreover, the *tagoror* does not only stand for the Guanche past but also for relative horizontality and democratic values "The Mencey and the elders/[...] Discussed the treaties,// Discussed progress," which contrasts with the verticality and violent attitude of the "vile tyrants" which disrupt the idyllic scene

[19] As Galván Reula points out the myth of the Western Isles of the Blessed, which seems to originate from Ancient Greece, also appears in the Celtic lore, mingled with local elements (687-690).

[20] Tinguaró was stabbed from behind in the battle of Aguere (1496), Doramas decapitated after being killed and his head exhibited by the Castilians as a means to discourage aboriginal resistance (1481) and Tanausú starved to death while being forcibly taken away from his native island (1493).

"With their horses and swords/ Destroying the *tagoror*." This traumatic re-enacting of the utopian island's fall and the destruction of its ancient culture runs parallel to the singer's awakening: "I woke up also/ Overwhelmed and crying/ And now I tell my dream/ Wherever I go." In this context, the Guanche past is not merely a Jasconius-like creature that is bound to dissolve sooner or later, it is a subject forcibly and violently brought to obliteration. Nonetheless, the dream-like element is still present; both the utopian vision and its dystopian framing are part of the same dream. Thus, the dreamer's awakening does not only signal the end of the utopian vision but also the birth of a political consciousness of resistance: "And even though the vile tyrants/ Destroyed its truth/ I shall never forget/ My risen *tagoror*."

The island-*tagoror* becomes in this way a locus of resistance even though such a space is enveloped in dreams and dystopian clouds. The Guanche dream-like other stands as the negative image of the current Canary Islands self; an image the present self can never become but which acts as a source of guidance and inspiration.[21] In this way, even though the utopian explorers need to eventually exit the island-nation they can take away some symbolic reminders, like Saint Brendan's monks who go back carrying "fruits and gems" along with the promise that "this [is]land will be claimed for your descendants, once the Christians are no longer persecuted" (Gil 78). Both for the monks and for the poetic persona of "Among Clouds" the island lives on in their imagination when no longer on sight.

A few years after "Among Clouds," the band Taller Canario, created by Pedro Guerra and two other songwriters in the mid-1980s, will sing again to this "Island I can't find,/ A place that drifts away./ I'm so close yet I can't reach/ And you get lost in the waters." The song "San Borondón" (1988) is possibly the most explicit celebration of the ambiguities and uncertainties of the single island of the Canary Islands nation. Not only is the island regarded as some sort of *coincidentia opositorum*, as "An island [...]/ That belongs to time and it doesn't/ A shadow that is not a shadow/ Which I could see but now I see no more.// An island [...]/ That is a dream and is not a dream," it is also a space connected to the Guanche past. "San Borondón" is the closing song of the album *Identidad*, which was Taller's painstaking attempt to re(?)-invent a Guanche musical heritage. After adapting various extant fragments from Canary Islands aboriginal languages recorded in historical sources and even trying to re-create the instruments the Guanches might have used, the

[21] Funnily enough, at the time of the conquest of the Canaries (1402-1496), which coincides with the growth and hegemony of the Christian kingdoms in the Iberian peninsula, culminating in the Castilian conquest of Granada in 1492, there was a similar legend about the Isle of the Seven Cities. It was believed that at the time the Muslims took over the Iberian peninsula (711) seven bishops, along with some peasants, exiled themselves to this island, founding each bishop his own city. Consequently, this island had preserved Christian Iberian culture in all its purity, untainted by Muslim influence. Given that the Age of Discoveries coincides with the end of Muslim Iberia, Castilians, Portuguese and Aragonese sailors were very interested in finding this island, since they could have imported "pure" Christian culture "back" to the Peninsula instead of having to purge the (Muslim) other within their self-image. For a brief account of the legend and Ferdinand Columbus' description of the island, see Sörgel 48-52.

songwriters came to realise that this is an island "I thought mine/ And went out to reach/ But you weren't there/ When I looked for you." True to itself, this metaphorical isle of Saint Brendan, the haunted island-Nation, eludes every project that is too solid, stable or literal.

However, the songwriters' realisation is not to be construed as an acceptance of political defeat or a rejection of the island-nation as a mere utopian fantasy. In fact, in a Jasconius-like manner, the instability and unreachability of the Guanche island is not a mere absence but a lead to a new discovery: "Such an island does not exist/ You make it up/ You make it up." This ending perfectly voices the ambiguities of the imaginary island by exposing the parallel process of self-construction and self-deconstruction. The closing refrain could be regarded as a simultaneous wake-up call and an invitation to dream. In other words, recognizing that we make up what we are does not mean that we stop imagining ourselves, but can, on the contrary, be seen as a call for political and representational agency. Consequently, if identity is not regarded as something given that needs to be discovered but as something that is constructed by the subjects it represents, the undecidable nature of the haunted island is not a source of political frustration but a representational opportunity to rethink and build the island-nation.

To sum up, the cycle of Saint Brendan, stretching from the *Navigatio* up to its more recent rebirths in the Canary Islands, has haunted the imagination of Canary Islands nationalism from its very beginnings. The constant presence of the monk's story, along with its Guanche mirror narrative, shows us how an Irish narrative has contributed to simultaneously construct and deconstruct the image of the Canary Islands nation. The seemingly contradictory tendencies at the heart of this interaction, which can be traced back to the paradoxes of the *Navigatio*, do not only turn the Canaries into an-other Ireland but also keep the process of identity open to creativity and contestation. Unlike other attempts that have tried to define Canary Islands identity in too solid or reductionist a way,[22] the haunted island "makes it possible for movements to commit themselves simultaneously to the task of affirming concrete projects of identity on behalf of the dominated and subjugated knowledge and to the utopian or long-term project of interrogating identity as such" (Radhakrishnan xxiii). Above all, the ambivalent interstices of the haunted island allow for the nation to be imagined and counter-imagined in a number of ways, enabling representational agency to be expressed in a pluralistic and democratic fashion.

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[22] An instance of such a project was the MPAIAC's (1964-1980s) articulation of Canary Islands identity, based on the premise of ethnic continuity. For the MPAIAC the foundation of the Canary Islands nation was the claim that Canary Islands people were direct (and somewhat exclusive) descendants of the Guanches and therefore an African people colonised by a European power. An account of the movement's history and ideology can be found in Garí Hayek 113-168.

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"CATHOLIC IRELAND AND CATHOLIC SPAIN. ONE CUT OFF FROM EUROPE BY THE PYRENEES, THE OTHER BY THE IRISH SEA": AIDAN HIGGINS'S DISCOVERY OF 1960S SPAIN AS "ANOTHER IRELAND" IN *BALCONY OF EUROPE*

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Abstract

The Irish novelist Aidan Higgins has received scant critical attention both in Ireland and abroad. This is partly a consequence of the writer's troubled relationship with an Ireland he considered excessively insular and puritanical and the resultant fact that he spent much of his adult life abroad and set many of his writings outside Ireland, which has complicated his straightforward classification as an "Irish writer." This paper analyses how Higgins's love-hatred relationship with Ireland manifests itself in his highly autobiographical novel *Balcony of Europe* (1972), which describes the escapist sojourn of the middle-aged Irish artist Dan Ruttle, Higgins's fictional *alter ego*, in an impoverished Andalusian fishing village amidst a colony of American and European (would-be) artists in the early 1960s.

Key words: Aidan Higgins, representations of Ireland and Spain, autobiographical readings of the nation.

Resumen

El novelista irlandés Aidan Higgins ha recibido escasa atención crítica tanto en Irlanda como en el exterior. Esto se debe en parte a la relación complicada del escritor con una Irlanda que consideraba excesivamente insular y puritana, debido a que el escritor pasó gran parte de su vida adulta en el extranjero y situó muchos de sus escritos fuera de Irlanda, lo que complicó el que se le considerara un "escritor irlandés" *sensu stricto*. Este artículo analiza cómo la relación de amor-odio con Irlanda de Higgins se manifiesta en su muy autobiográfica novela *Balcony of Europe* (1972), que describe una estancia de relax del artista irlandés de mediana edad, Dan Ruttle, el alter ego en la ficción de Higgins, en un pueblo empobrecido de pescadores de Andalucía rodeado de una colonia de (futuros) artistas americanos y europeos, a principios de los sesenta del pasado siglo veinte.

Palabras clave: Aidan Higgins, representaciones de Irlanda y España, lecturas autobiográficas de la nación.

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The Irish novelist, short story and travel writer Aidan Higgins,[1] born in Co. Kildare in 1927, has received scant critical attention both in Ireland and abroad. Apart from other factors, including his exigent style, Higgins's "relative obscurity" can also be attributed to his troubled relationship with an Ireland he considered excessively insular and puritanical and the resultant fact that he spent much of his adult life abroad[2] and set many of his writings outside Ireland (Murphy, "Introduction" 13-14). In this paper I look at how Higgins's love-hatred relationship with Ireland manifests itself in his autobiographical novel *Balcony of Europe*, first published in 1972[3] and set in Ireland and southern Spain in the 1960s. The paper analyses the hetero-image of Spain and the Spaniards conveyed in the novel and draws conclusions about what the first-person narrator's comments on Spain and Ireland and his explicit and implicit comparisons between the two countries reveal about Higgins's auto-image of his native country. I want to show that in *Balcony of Europe* Higgins presented Spain much more as Ireland's *alter ego* than as its exotic 'Other'. The narrator's observations of historical and cultural parallels between his home and host countries alternate with, but eventually outweigh, his descriptions of significant differences, making Spain emerge from the novel as "anOther Ireland," both different and the same, as well as reflective of the author's frustration at Ireland's political and cultural isolation at the time of writing, i.e. in the 1960s and 1970s.

Just like hundreds of other artists and would-be artists from all over Europe and America, Higgins discovered the south of Spain as an ideal refuge for destitute, individualistic, and liberal-minded artists and writers in the 1960s, when Spain was still governed by the dictator General Franco. Most of his successful debut novel *Langrishe Go Down* (1966) was written in the Andalusian village of Nerja, where he and his South-African wife spent some time in the early 1960s (Mayrhuber 7). Higgins's second novel *Balcony of Europe* (1972), written during another stay in

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[1] Higgins's first publication was the short-story collection *Felo de Se* (1960). The author is best known for his debut novel *Langrishe Go Down* (1966), which won him the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. His later works, comprising the travel book *Images of Africa: Diary (1956-60),* five novels, two (travel) story-collections, and an autobiographical trilogy, reissued as *A Bestiary* in 2004, were generally less well-received. Higgins also produced a substantial body of literary criticism and reviews, partly collected in *Windy Arbours* (2005), as well as 'ear plays' for BBC radio networks, published as *Darkling Plain: Texts for the Air* in 2010. In the same year the American imprint "The Dalkey Archive Press" also published *Aidan Higgins: The Fragility of Form*, a kind of *festschrift* (Owens; "Aidan Higgins", *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*; "Aidan Higgins", *PGIL EIRD*ata; Sweetman 445-50; Dukes 191).

[2] Aidan Higgins was born into a Catholic Big House family in Celbridge, Co. Kildare, in 1927. He was educated at the Jesuit Clongowes Wood College. Following their decline in fortunes, the family sold their estate and moved to Co. Dublin. In his twenties Higgins moved to London, where he worked in several factories. From 1958 to 1960 he toured Europe and South Africa with a marionette company. He lived in Spain, Germany, and Britain before returning to Ireland in the mid-1980s.

[3] *Balcony of Europe* was reissued by The Dalkey Archive Press in 2010 in a trimmed version, i.e. "reduced by a fifth" (Mahon 11). The present analysis, however, is based on the original version of 1972.

Spain, this time in the village of Cómpeta (Sweetman 447), is based on the author's personal experiences in Nerja and is thus strongly autobiographical like all of his other novels and short stories (Mayrhuber 9; Murphy, *Irish Fiction* 37).[4]

Although nominated for the Booker Prize (Sweetman 447), *Balcony of Europe* met with a mixed critical reception[5] for its lack of plot and loose narrative structure.[6] Instead of a coherent, chronological story-line, Higgins created a "spatial narrative" foregrounding epistemological issues and (post)modernist concerns such as the writer's inability to represent past and present experiences undistortedly; the result is a thinly veiled autobiography embodying a compromise between "the highly problematic realm of the mimetic novel" and "the excesses of some extreme postmodern novels which deconstruct their universes of dialogue to the point of nihilism" (Murphy, "Aidan Higgins" 66). Considering that Higgins also said in an interview that "you can only write about your own life" and that "[he] [has] no message" (Haverty 14), any attempt to attribute the images of Ireland and Spain surfacing from the pages of *Balcony of Europe* to the author's express intention of conveying a particular (political or other) message seems a futile enterprise. Nevertheless, a close reading of Higgins's comments on Ireland and Spain yields interesting insights into the author's relationship with both countries.

Part I of *Balcony of Europe* is set in Dublin City and Dun Laoghaire in autumn 1961. The first-person narrator Dan Ruttle, a painter by profession, conveys a very bleak, Joycean image of Ireland as a perpetually grey, misty, and rainy country populated by spiritually paralysed people. His sickly parents, who have long drifted apart, live in great poverty in a dark, semi-derelict basement flat in Dun Laoghaire, following the same routine day by day. Sickness and death loom large in this first, Irish part of the novel, with the narrator telling us about the premature decease of his 38-year-old cousin and describing the last agonising days in the life of his mother, who falls into a coma after suffering a stroke. Finding it difficult to come to terms with his mother's death in the oppressive atmosphere of Dublin, Dan decides to

[4] That the first person narrator Dan Ruttle represents Higgins's fictional "alter ego" has been confirmed by the author in an interview (Donnelly 92) as well as in part one of his autobiography: "I have freely pillaged from both [his novels *Balcony of Europe* (1972) and *Scenes from a Receding Past* (1977)] for sections of this present work [...]. The transported elements of these 'liftings' now serve different purposes [...]. They have become my own stories again" (*Donkey's Years* 323-324).

[5] Eamonn Wall recognises echoes of *Ulysses* in *Balcony of Europe* and considers it as "a major novel that deserves serious attention" (81), while Dermot Healy praises the novel as "a masterwork of portraiture" (183); the negative critical reactions, however, seem to outweigh the positive: *Balcony of Europe* has been dismissed as a "a mismanaged novel" (Share 161), "a rather hapless attempt at experimenting with narrative discourse" (Imhof 75), "a distinguished failure" (Garfitt 229), and "an intelligent tourist's notebook jottings" (Lubbers 241).

[6] Higgins declared on various occasions that he was not interested in plots or character development ("Imaginary Meadows" 119; Haverty 14; Donnelly 94) and said in a letter to the critic Morris Beja that in *Balcony of Europe* he "wanted to dispense with plot, do it that way: tenuous associations that would ramify, could be built upon, would stay in the mind better than the plotted thing—all lies anyway" (Beja 172).

move to southern Spain, where his Canadian friend Roger seems to be having the time of his life amidst a colony of Bohemian writers and artists. Parts two to four of the novel are set in the Andalusian village of Nerja, where Dan and his wife Olivia stay from winter 1962 to autumn 1963.

The dreary image of Ireland emerging from the novel's opening section reflects Higgins's own fraught relationship with his home country, which, as has been mentioned, led him to spend much of his adult life in exile and to choose foreign settings for most of his novels and short stories. In an interview of 1983 Higgins complained that "[i]n Ireland, the air is dense and it has, like Catholicism, too many stiffs. Too many dead. [...] I can't work here. I only love Ireland at a distance. When I was young, it took me a long time to escape" (Haverty 14). Similarly, in 1982 Higgins decried that "the Irish have never left [the past]," "can never leave [their] great dead in peace," and were "about to enter the 20th century just as the rest of Europe is preparing to leave it" ("Heroe's" 108-112). Looking back in 2008 the author stated that in the 1960s/70s he "wanted to write books that were as un-Irish as possible"; he made the male protagonist in his debut novel *Langrishe, Go Down* German "in order to bring Europe into the book. To associate what I was writing with greater Europe. That Ireland wouldn't be as isolated as it seemed to me most Irish writing was at that time" (Donnelly 92).

Despite his estrangement from his native country, Higgins admitted in an interview in 1973 with Niall Sheridan for RTÉ that wherever he went, he took Ireland with him: "I'm never absent from Ireland. To be away from Ireland is better than to be in Ireland" (qtd. Mayrhuber 24). While he had originally planned to set *Balcony of Europe* completely outside Ireland because he resented "the Irish itch to describe itself," he soon realised that it was a "mistake" to "turn my back on something that was my feed" and that it was actually "a great privilege to be Irish."

Given the autobiographical nature of *Balcony of Europe*, it is not surprising that Ireland has a similarly strong hold on the narrator Dan Ruttle's mind. His thoughts and dreams take him repeatedly back to his home country, which also serves as a frequent reference point for descriptions of the Spanish countryside. Thus, the terraced fields surrounding Nerja (called "Nerka" in the novel) "were as elongated and stony as the walled plots of Inishere"; a "boulder" at the beach strikes him as "bigger than the Split Rock from the ice age on the roadside near Easkey on Sligo Bay" (357),[7] and he wonders whether the *sierra* visible from his favourite beach was "higher than the Knockmealdown Mountains" (366). Most significantly, the sight of weeds, hens, and staring children in a primitive Andalusian village prompts the narrator to comment: "It was like Ireland, the country I had never left" (340).

The frequent comparisons between Irish and Spanish landscapes and scenes convey the impression that the narrator does not experience southern Spain as all that different from his home country. On the one hand, he certainly leads a more

[7] All quotations from *Balcony of Europe* are taken from the edition listed in the "Works Cited."

carefree existence in Andalusia, where he enjoys a Bohemian lifestyle and indulges in an extra-marital affair; their anonymity and the hot, sunny climate, which provide the lovers with frequent opportunities for amorous encounters in the open air, make Dan conclude, "I had left a damp country where the cold girls said no, and come to the *Tierra Caliente* where the girls were beautiful and hot and said yes" (348). What Dan disregards, however, is that the girls who succumb to his own and his Anglo-American friends' seductive powers are not the Spanish, but the foreign women of "the expatriate slum of the Spanish coast in the sixties" (Liddy 167). There is no indication in the novel that the Spaniards themselves share the expatriates' liberal attitude to extra-marital sex, or that Spanish society in the 1960s was any less morally conservative than the Irish.[8] The only significant contrast between the mentalities of the two peoples Dan identifies is that the Spaniards seem to have a more relaxed attitude to death than the Irish and "behave quite informally" on cemeteries; there is no kneeling or ostentatious prayer [...] or telling of beads, but loud gossiping and emptying out of dead flowers; not the deep infestive gloom of damp cypress ride and Celtic cross and mossy ways, matching the hushed and reverent tones of my fellow countrymen... (210).

Overall, however, Higgins is far from presenting us with an exotic, Orientalised or romanticised image of Spain. Visits to the Alhambra in Granada, a bullfight, and the Holy Week procession draw no particularly enthusiastic response from the narrator and his American friends, and Richard Ford, the famous champion of "Romantic Spain," is only cited for an anti-Semitic comment as well as his statement that Spain was "the region of hot passions," which, however, is immediately refuted by the narrator's remark: "but it was cold enough in the bar" (166). Moreover, the novel does without any sultry, dark-eyed "Carmenesque"—señoritas or fiery "flamenco"—dancers featuring so prominently in most travel accounts of Andalusia. The beaches around Nerja are littered and overgrown with weeds, Spain's rivers resemble "brackish streams" (81), the orange trees are "dusty" (232), and the countryside is strewn with "mouldering" churches (232) and crumbling fishermen's huts. The only Eden-like place exhibiting lush Mediterranean vegetation and overpowering scents is spoiled by the presence of a Spanish watch guard. Still, the narrator's interspersed comments on Andalusia and its native population reveal no deliberate, sustained effort on the part of the author to debunk the myth of "romantic, exotic Spain," or to foreground the appalling poverty and backwardness afflicting Franco's Spain.

Generally, the narrator shows very little interest in his surroundings and "the Spanish natives" are "neatly tucked into the background" of his narrative (McGonigle 178). He briefly notes the inadequate infrastructure, the derelict build-

[8] While Higgins does not address the Franco regime's puritanical character, which led it to ban pornographic material from the country, in *Balcony of Europe*, he points out in *The Whole Hog* (2000), the third and last part of his autobiography, that "Franco's Spain could be puritanical in its own funny Fascist way" (174). However, only "a year after the demise of the prudish or maybe prudent Generalissimo" Spain was flooded with "girlie nudist magazines" (230), and "young *Fräuleins* were diving into the sea in smaller and smaller bikinis" (175).

ings, the Spanish Civil War memorial plaques, and the social disparity manifesting itself, for example, in the division of the local cemetery into one section for "the rich dead" and another for "the common dead" (209). He also relates that the barman Antonio only "took a day off twice a year" and that his middle-aged "spinster sister," who "made fiery 'tapas'" and looked after their ailing parents, "dreamed of love," but was "tied to old stale flesh and bedpans" (163). With a hint of compassion, he describes the hardships of a "rheumy-eyed" woman in her eighties with "semi-paralysed hands" (164), who wakes him every morning with her thin voice offering fresh bread. Likewise, he seems affected by the sight of an "unlettered" Andalusian boy, "born without privileges" and physically deformed by an unknown disease (342). But these symptoms of deplorable working and living conditions in Spain are only mentioned in passing and are not brought into relation with the political regime in place. Indeed, General Franco is only referred to in a few cynical, frivolous comments which tend to make light of the dictator's totalitarian power and reduce him to a comic figure. Take, for example, Dan's observation that the *peseta*-coins were "stamped with the suffused features of the little pop-eyed (mark of intelligence, ambition, vision, will-power) Generalissimo" (165), and his rumination as to whether the idea of a poor old couple to make money from "road-verge weed-cutting" (i.e. from selling herbs) had originated from "a brainwave of the War-on-Poverty Generalissimos" (343).[9]

If Dan generally expresses little sympathy with the plight of the impoverished and politically oppressed Spanish people, he articulates outright contempt for most of the Spanish men crossing his path. He feels disturbed in his sunbathing by the Spanish boys playing football on the beach and "shouting all the time as only Spaniards can" (359). Yet he is even more annoyed and disgusted by the lecherous Spaniards crawling beast-like towards the scantily dressed female tourists on the beaches and masturbating.[10] Every decent-looking Spanish man strikes the narrator as a rival for his mistress's attention and is suspected of having seduction on his mind. Thus, while Higgins does without many clichés typically found in travel books on Andalusia, he confirms the stereotypical image of southern Spaniards as sex-crazed "Don Juans" all the more vehemently.

Higgins's failure in *Balcony of Europe* to engage with the socio-political conditions in Franco's Spain and to bring the Spanish characters to life as well as

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[9] In his autobiography *Dog Days* (1998) Higgins offers another flippant description of General Franco: "The dictator who had made Hitler wait and kick his heels while he took his siesta was a small, portly, choleric man who nursed his phlebitis, took his pills, nursed memories of north Africa and the Rif, the fight for Malaga [sic] and perhaps the names of those executed by his orders. [...] All dictators have this in common: they take little mincing steps, fussy as goats. Perhaps their jackboots are killing them?" (142).

[10] The language used to describe these Spanish "onanists" (334) is quite disturbing in the way in which it relegates them to the status of animality. Thus, one of the Spaniards stands out for his "dark eyes and the slanted nipples of a gorilla"; He walked in a stiff manner, rocking a little on his heels, conscious of his hands, a dog on its hind legs, a little beige-coloured manikin full of lust. [...] He was seeking a foreign bitch on heat" (335-336).

the numerous erroneous Spanish phrases in the novel have been commented on by various critics (Mayrhuber 259; Kerrigan 119; Share 162). The author's friend Bernard Share, for example, found it puzzling that Higgins's Spanish setting "was still, for all his years' residence, an outsider's Spain"; while "the Spanish was wrong" in the book, "the Spanishness was wronger" (162).[11] According to Share, Higgins himself has said that "the Irish episodes [...] are the only ones that are any good."[12]

However lamentable it may be that Higgins's Spain does not really come off the page, the narrator's indifference to Spanish affairs is perfectly in keeping with his obsession with his lover Charlotte and his full integration into the writers' colony. Whereas Dan makes no effort to learn Spanish and mix with the native population, he socialises a lot with American and European expatriates, who are—like himself— "restlessly peripatetic" escapists (Beja 173), would-be-artists and scholars, and individualists in search of self-fulfilment and creative inspiration. They share his political apathy and spend their days and nights languishing on the beach, drinking, partying, love-making, and occasionally dabbling in artistic creation. Their life-stories are marked by frequent moves from one city, country, or continent to another motivated by unhappy love-affairs, criminal records, and/or political persecution. Together with the protagonist's own record of restlessness, they contribute to "the novel's central theme, the transience and flux of all things" (Garfitt 230).

That Higgins's main concern in the novel was not with Spain, but with the world outside it, is already intimated by his choice of the novel's title, *Balcony of Europe*, which is also the name King Victor Emmanuel gave to the "paseo" or promenade of Nerja "because of its view" (68). As O'Neill has noted, "[t]he balcony

[11] The impression that Higgins never got to know his host country intimately is reinforced by his prose pieces about Andalusia of the 1960s and the immediate post-Franco years collected in *Ronda Gorge & Other Precipices* (1989). The latter are made up of reminiscences randomly jumbled together without amounting to a coherent narrative. They again betray the writer's ignorance about Spain and his condescension towards the natives. Take, for example, the following passages from "Autumn in Cómpeta": "Their [the Andalusians'] language well reflects the charming and uncomplicated nature of the people themselves. [...] Abstract thought is unknown to them and when they hear it attempted they become embarrassed. Hence perhaps the need for nights of loud convivial shouting in the bars, with which the village is liberally supplied, after a day spent labouring on the land" (117). These observations are preceded by a section peppered with stereotypes, where the author obviously confuses the Catalans with the Basques: "In the north they speak another language: Catalán. Another race altogether, stolid, unimaginative, hard-working; a people whose chief gifts to España have been bankers and industrialists, latterly terrorists in the cause of independence. Their language is inherited from the Stone Age, now slowly dying out because unsuited to modern times, and so difficult that no one can learn it" (116-117).

[12] Higgins considered *Balcony of Europe* a failure and said in 1995 that it would stay out of print in his lifetime (*Donkey's Years*, 323-24). Still, the book was republished by the American "Dalkey Archive Press" in 2010. He said in 2008 that he had "suffered" in the "eight years" it took him to finish the novel (Donnelly 92). Part of the difficulty seems to have consisted in having to overcome his reluctance to construct a plot in order to please his editors. While he added the Irish sections to the first edition of the novel "at the suggestion of editors to help 'explain' it" (Donnelly 88), he had to cut these and other parts significantly for the second edition to make it "a much more manageable book... that reads more like a novel and less like a demanding literary experience" (Mahon 11).

of the title" suggests a position of "detached observation: a balcony is a privileged location, a border place, neither wholly outside nor wholly inside, from which one can observe the world going by without the inconvenience—or the joy—of becoming involved in it" (102).

This position of the detached observer is taken first of all by the narrator, who—from his elevated "balcony"—level "overlooks," in the sense of "ignores," the socio-political conditions in Franco's Spain as best as he can and remains preoccupied with his own past and that of the other emigrant artists resident in Nerja, most of whom are of European extraction. While the Spanish Civil War and its legacy are never explicitly addressed in the novel, World War II, the Holocaust, and the ensuing Cold War figure prominently in Dan's conversations with an unrepentant Finnish Nazi-Baron, the Jewish dancer Rosa Munsinger and his Jewish lover Charlotte Bayless, whose parents had to escape from the Nazis in Austria and Poland respectively, and a British homosexual writer telling him about his sexual exploits in Soviet Russia.

At the same time, the sense of detachment encapsulated in the title also relates to the narrator's and the other expatriates' conscious aloofness from and condescension towards the native population epitomised in such disrespectful terms as "warty Latins" and "rowdy Spaniards" (198). We are told that one American, who turns out to be a fraud on the run from the FBI, feels like a "King amid loyal subjects" (172) in Spain. Indeed, it is easy for the emigrant artists to imagine themselves as the decadent aristocracy living *la dolce vita* among illiterate peasants in "backward" Andalusia. Whereas in their home countries they could barely survive on their meagre income from writing and painting, they can lead a life in plenty without having to lift a finger for months on end given the low living costs in Franco's Spain. The above-mentioned waiter, by contrast, can only afford to take two days off per year. Their proprietorial attitude to their place of residence manifests itself not least in their resentment of the touristic development on the *Costa del Sol* gathering momentum at the beginning of the 1960s. Exempting themselves from the despised status of "the tourist," they are not prepared to share their Eden with the newly arriving hordes of foreign invaders. Thus, Dan contemptuously refers to Torremolinos and Marbella as "tourist ghettos" (80) and "the Sodom and Gomorrah of the Costa del Sol" (172). Charlotte's husband Bob, after a trip to Catalonia, reports in horror that "[f]rom Benidorm up north it's no longer Spain but hell, especially after Barcelona. I never saw so many accidents, so many road deaths, smashed cars, stout and hot-tempered Northern and Middle Europeans killing each other en route to the overcrowded beaches" (396). Nerja, by contrast, has fortunately not lost its charm of a primitive fishing village, and though there has been "talk of a new luxury hotel to be erected," Dan's Canadian friend Roger is "glad to say" that "nothing much comes of" all this "talk in Spain [...] of improvements, modernization, urbanization, progreso" (68). Obviously, the expatriates would like Spain to remain poor, backward, and isolated so they can resume their easy way of living and turn a blind eye to the troubles of the rest of the world.

The notion that Spain does not really form part of Europe because of its geographical position, its socio-economic backwardness, and its neutrality in World

War II is explicitly stated on three occasions (164, 185, 338), and on the last of them it is also extended to Ireland:

> Six waves of invaders, centuries of occupation, then expulsion, then Civil War, in Catholic Ireland and Catholic Spain. One cut off from Europe by the Pyrenees, the other by the Irish Sea. Both on the outer fringes of Europe, both saved from two world wars by their long-nosed leaders; neither part of Europe. (338)[13]

The eponymous "Balcony of Europe" can therefore also be read as a metaphor for the long-lasting political, economic, and cultural isolation of Spain and Ireland, which was only beginning to be reversed in the early 1960s. With regard to Spain, the backwardness resulting from this isolation seems to be regarded as a virtue rather than a vice, though, for the narrator tells a friend that "[he] like[s] backward countries" (426), and the fact that Spain stayed out of World War II makes the country an ideal refuge for escapists uprooted by that war.

However, any illusions the expatriates may harbour about being sheltered from the horrors of the world outside the Spanish "cordon sanitaire" are belied by the numerous U.S. warplanes and flak-ships crossing the skies and coastal waters of Andalusia, which serve as reminders of Spain's strategic role in the Cold War as the site for several U.S. American military bases. Spain's breakout from its political and economic isolation in the 1960s is likewise exemplified by the change of the name of Dan's favourite bar from "Bar Alhambra" to "Balcony of Europe" and back to "Bar Alhambra," which lends the book's title yet another level of significance in that it alludes to the Franco regime's efforts to sell both a modern, European and an exotic, Orientalist image of Spain to the world to attract international investors and the tourist masses respectively.

Apparently sensing the corruption of their paradise by the massive influx of tourists and the U.S. army,[14] the artists gradually desert the colony and disperse across the globe. The novel's concluding Part V, set in autumn 1963 and after, sees

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[13] Higgins again emphasises Ireland's un-European character in his autobiography *Dog Days*: "Ireland is the most westerly country in Europe. It is twice the size of Switzerland but not itself a part of Europe, geographically or in any other way" (188). In *Donkey's Years* (1995), the prequel to *Dog Days*, the author draws further parallels between Ireland and Spain: "The Spanish and the Irish, with miserable histories not too dissimilar, are much alike in their fervent phobias about open homes and giving hands that must never waver. The fear and uncertainty that underlie such token hospitality is an Irish Catholic neurosis which can be detected behind the wish to please so evident in the works of 'Frank O'Connor' (a Cork civil servant by the name of Michael O'Donovan), the Monaghan bogman Kavanagh and in the broth of a Borstal Boy himself; here again the craven urge to please, to be amusing at all costs" (328).

[14] Higgins's personal antipathy to the two agents of the "corruption" of the Costa del Sol, tourism and the U.S. army, can be glimpsed from his comments in *The Whole Hog*: "Soon the whole eastern coastline from Estepona near Gibraltar to Gerona near the French border will have gone the way of Marbella and Torremolinos, the Sodom and Gomorrah of the Costa del Sol, and it will be left to hardy souls to move on Ponteverde [sic] or La Coruña. American bombing colonels out from the air base at Moron de Frontera quaff Cognac as if it was beer" (259).

Dan and his wife Olivia back in Dublin, which, though apparently as isolated and backward as Spain used to be, does not allow Dan the same freedom to "act out his role as a middle-aged playboy of the west end world of Europe" (Beja 79) as he keeps running into acquaintances in a claustrophobically small city inhabited by "dead citizens" (425). For a truly peaceful sanctuary he needs to go further west. It is only in the "regenerative waters of the Aran Islands" (Liddy 176), his "Tir na nÓg" or, Land of Youth (346), that Dan can overcome his obsession with Charlotte and become reconciled with his wife. As O'Neill points out, the triteness of this happy ending [...] is effectively (and parodically) relativized by the geographical consideration that Ireland too [...] is very much a "balcony of Europe"—and that Aran, "the last landfall before America" (*Balcony of Europe* 429) [...] is by the same token a "balcony of Ireland," a doubled balcony of Europe. (102)

In other words, the fact that the couple's reconciliation takes place in yet another refuge for escapists even more remote from modern European civilisation than southern Spain might indicate that it stands little chance of outlasting their return to everyday life in Dublin for very long.[15]

If Higgins, however haphazardly, does convey a message in *Balcony of Europe* despite all protestations to the contrary, it is that escapism is futile as we take our troubled selves and memories with us wherever we go. Although Franco's Spain forms the setting for the playing out of this theme, its representation in a particularly positive, idiosyncratic or negative, stereotypical way does not seem to have formed a major concern for the author. Higgins's image of Spain in *Balcony of Europe* suggests neither a particularly pronounced "Hispanophilia" nor "Hispanophobia"; what it does show, however, is the author's and his fictional *alter ego*'s evasiveness and disinterest in Spain's political affairs. His auto-image of Ireland as a drab place with an inhospitable climate and a stifling atmosphere, by contrast, clearly reflects his personal alienation from his home country at the time of writing, i.e. in the 1970s. Still, it is paradoxically both because of his discovery of similarities between the landscapes, geographical positions, and recent histories of Ireland and Spain and his apolitical pose that Higgins did not set Spain up as a colourful, vibrant "Other" to dreary, depressing Ireland in his autobiographical novel. Rather, he presented a Spain which ultimately evinces more parallels than contrasts with Ireland.

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[15] The happy ending to this autobiographical novel on the pristine Aran Islands appears particularly ironic given that firstly, Higgins's marriage "never recovered" from "the blow" that his adulterous affair in Spain had dealt it (Sweetman 445) and ended in divorce, and secondly, his description of Connemara in *Dog Days* reveals his impatience with romantic-nationalist representations of the West of Ireland as embodying the spiritual essence of Ireland: "The sun is low there in winter, the days are short and weak daylight fades away in the afternoon, the nights long and black as a skillet. Day breaks reluctantly again, the low clouds dripping rain; high water and floods everywhere... There are signs... and sounds... of human habitation, of the humans themselves there is no visible sight. Is this the essential charm of the West, under the flying clouds? Its emptiness." (188-89).

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MAVERICKS OR MISFITS? IRISH RAILROAD WORKERS IN CUBA—1835-1844

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Abstract

Archival records of Irish migration to Cuba describe a colony of "irlandeses" contracted in New York in 1835 to work for the Cuban Railway Commission. Contract labourers from Ireland and the Canary Islands were forced into a brutal work regime under Spanish military rule where any attempt to abscond was treated as desertion punishable by prison or execution. I argue that social formations and forms of struggle in the creation of a landless proletariat lay the ground in generating the conduct of subaltern resistance in this encounter between 'a roving proletariat' and intersecting British and Iberian systems of colonial labour. Counter modern social formations imported and adapted to the 'new world' are further analysed drawing on postcolonial theories which frame mobile transitory labour as an intrinsic, if recalcitrant, element in the history of capitalist expansion.

Key words: Irish contract labour, Emigration studies, 19th century, relationship with the Canary Islands, capitalist expansion.

Resumen

Los registros archivísticos de la emigración irlandesa a Cuba describen una colonia de *irlandeses* contratados en Nueva York para trabajar para la Comisión del ferrocarril cubano. Los trabajadores contratados de Irlanda y de las Islas Canarias sufrieron unas condiciones de trabajo brutales bajo las reglas militares españolas en las que cualquier tentativa de absentismo era tratada como una deserción y castigada con prisión o ejecución. Sostengo aquí que las formaciones sociales y las formas de lucha en la creación de un proletariado sin tierra sentaron las bases y generaron las conductas de resistencia subalterna en este encuentro entre "un proletariado ambulante," integrando los sistemas británico e ibérico de trabajo colonial. Contra-formaciones modernas sociales importadas y adaptadas al "nuevo mundo" se analizan ulteriormente desde la óptica de las teorías postcoloniales que trazan la mano de obra transitoria y temporal como un elemento intrínseco de la historia de la expansión capitalista.

Palabras clave: contratos de trabajo para irlandeses, estudios sobre la emigración, siglo xix, relación con las Islas Canarias, expansión capitalista.

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Cuban and Spanish scholars make brief reference to a "colony" of Irish workers contracted in New York, in 1835, to work in Cuba on the construction of the first stretch of railroad in Latin America. The Irish and other bonded labourers, particularly Canary Islanders, were forced into a brutal work regime under Spanish military rule where any attempt to abscond was treated as desertion punishable by prison or execution. Submitted to conditions similar to slavery, rebellion and protest by the Irish railroad workers led to their rejection by the authorities within months of their arrival. This essay examines the "recalcitrant potential" of the Irish Diaspora as demonstrated by the reaction of Irish railroad workers to the coercive practices of contract labour under Spanish colonialism. The alliances they made with bonded labourers from the Canary Islanders and African slaves working on the railroad resulted in some of the first strikes recorded on the island. Less than ten years later, Irish immigrants were accused of conspiring with people of colour in the 1844 Escalera slave uprising.

Cuban accounts of "los irlandeses" in the early part of the nineteenth century suggest a divergence from the disassociation with enslaved black workers, based on racial privilege, which took place in North and South America and other parts of the Caribbean. The protests and strikes were far from being merely spasmodic and violent upsurges: I argue that social formations and forms of struggle which emerged from the creation of a landless proletariat underlay the generation of subaltern resistance by Irish migrants in the intersecting British and Iberian systems of colonial labour. Within the broader question of the extent of resonances between Irish oppositional discourse and other non-European subaltern discourse, I will also explore the context in which Irish immigrants were implicated in the transnational movement against slavery and colonial rule in Cuba. My inquiry looks less at distinctive cultural responses to oppressive regimes of slavery and colonisation and concentrates more on the forms of survival, which migrant labourers adopted and adapted to the structural oppressions inherent in the systems of colonial labour they encountered.

ABOLITIONISTS IN CUBA

In October 1844, several Irish newspapers reported on a devastating hurricane which hit Cuba on Oct 5th: [...]"the city [of Havana] presented more the appearance of a town that had just been bombarded and sacked than the proud noble city of Havannah [...]there was nothing but heaps of ruins[...]every street being like a river[...]."[1] Old people could not remember another hurricane like it. In the city of Matanzas in Western Cuba many people mark this day as the patron saint day of Plácido, the free mulatto poet put to death in June of the same year for his part as a leader in the largest conspiracy by people of colour in Cuba's history. They saw the devastation wrought by the hurricane in Matanzas as divine retribu-

[1] *The Nation* (Saturday, November 16th 1844).

tion for the crimes committed by the Spanish colonial authorities against the slave population (Paquette). *The Nation* goes on to describe the damage to ships in the harbour, left "high and dry" at the fish market on the wharf, but "Her Majesty's ship *Romney* escaped injury." This British hulk had been anchored in the harbour at Havana since 1837, to house liberated African slaves ("emancipados") until they were transferred to a nearby British colony (Murray, "Richard"). Dr. Richard Robert Madden, an Irish doctor, appointed by the British Colonial Office as Superintendent of Liberated Africans to Cuba defended the positioning of the vessel as a solution for a temporary depot for freed Africans. Manned by a West Indian regiment of uniformed black soldiers bearing arms, the *Romney* was perceived by the colonial elite in Cuba as a reminder of the spectre of the Haitian revolution and a fearful symbol of abolitionism which served to inflame anti-British sentiment. The emancipation of the slave population in 1833 in neighbouring West Indies sent further waves of panic throughout Cuba. As a measure to protect against the corrupting influence of emancipation or the seductions of "the spirit of liberty," General Tacón in 1837, banned any free blacks from foreign territories entering Cuba (1980). Fear of contagion and fear of abolitionists led to a deep mistrust of the free black population, comprising between fifteen and twenty percent of the overall population.[2] There was a strong belief in Cuba that the British government and its agents were fomenting a foreign abolitionist conspiracy on the island (Murray, "British"). In this climate of fear and hysteria, foreigners and especially British subjects were suspected of being abolitionists (Murray, *Odious*). General Tacón unsuccessfully sought Madden's removal on the grounds that he "is a dangerous man" whose only purpose is to "disseminate seditious ideas directly or indirectly."[3] His presence in Cuba until 1839 was viewed with the greatest suspicion and interpreted as evidence of a British abolitionist conspiracy. The Anglo-Spanish slave trade treaty of 1835, provided for the transfer of slaves freed from illegal slave ships to British colonies, to be overseen by Madden. His dedication to the humanitarian cause of abolition and a "hatred of oppression in whatever clime or on whatever race it might be exercised" was evident from his efforts to change public opinion against slavery in Cuba (see Thomas Madden). During his time as a Special Magistrate in Jamaica in 1834, he viewed the apprenticeship system as slavery which had changed in name only, so long as corporal punishment continued as a means of enforcement of compulsory labour. Madden, however does not comment on the plight of the Irish or other European labourers working on the Cuban railroad, otherwise he might not have been so scathing of all his countrymen and women in his book *The Island of Cuba* "The

[2] This small but significant number of free blacks, predominantly urban dwellers, formed an emerging class of *creolised* artisans and dominated the skilled trades in the port cities of Matanzas and Havana. They owned property which included slaves and formed companies of militia. They formed *cabildos* which provided for the Afro-Cuban population a reservoir of African culture and the resources of benevolent aid in times of difficulty for people of colour both slave and free.

[3] Tacón to Minister of Foreign Affairs, no. 4, reservado, 31 Agosto. 1836 (Pérez de la Riva 252-255).

Irish alas! I have invariably found, who are employed in any shape, are advocates for slavery in all its horrors" (Richard Madden 165).

SLAVERY, FREE LABOUR AND "BLANQUEAMIENTO"

The Nenagh Guardian, June 1844, reported on Cuba's largest anti-slavery conspiracy, known as The Escalera. Quoting from a letter in the Observer, the writer is shocked not by "the butchery in cold blood of seven-hundred or eight-hundred Negroes but on account of the great loss sustained by the proprietors, each slave costing between 400 and 500 dollars," with no compensation from the state. This mercenary, but telling, statement accurately sums up the attitude of the slave-holding elite and the colonial authorities in the early nineteenth-century. After the Haitian Revolution of 1791, Cuba became the world's largest producer of sugar and one of the most important economic centres in the crumbling Spanish Empire. The voracious demand for labour was filled by a hugely profitable Cuban trade in contraband slaves, which lasted well into the nineteenth century. Despite Britain's efforts to end the slave trade, it actually increased in Cuba. Between 1790 and 1820, some 325,000 slaves were imported and as sugar production increased during the 1830s, over 17,000 enslaved Africans a year, were landed at Cuban ports (Bergad). African-born slaves were in the majority in the sugar and coffee plantations of Western Cuba; where the black population was close to double that of whites. Massive expansion of sugar production transformed Cuba into a black-majority island for the first time in its history with 418,000 whites, 153,000 free people of colour and 436,500 slaves. At this time, Cuba had a higher proportion than all the other so-called sugar-islands of free blacks living in cities and practicing trades, which, if united with slaves would make up sixty percent of the island's population (Benítez Rojo). Just as the "ever-faithful" Spanish colony reached its zenith in the Atlantic economy, the undertow of its dissolution was beginning to rise to the surface. Black insurgency was becoming organised and anti-colonial sentiment in Cuba was gathering force. The Spanish crown manipulated the deep racial fears of a black republic amongst the anti-colonial Creole elite, by turning a blind eye to the thriving illegal slave trade, as part of a veiled policy of maintaining a plantation economy based on slave labour. Consequently, Creole slave-holding elites who wanted political independence from Spain began to see slavery and the slave trade as an obstacle to that liberty. Tensions arose between those who saw abolition as the solution and others determined to hold on to their slaves and their prosperity built on slavery, who preferred the idea of the "blanqueamiento" or Europeanisation of Cuba. Cuban colonial society, with its white minority elite and black majority subjects, was moving from a discourse of planter/slave to one which reflected a conflict of race. Some of the earliest discursive formulations of Cuban national identity sought to contain racial anxieties in a troubled colonial context. Antonio Saco, the "apostle" of Cuban nationalism, argued that miscegenation was the only viable means of ensuring that the emerging Cuban nation would become lighter and whiter over

time. Those prepared to consider independence from Spain expressed their desire for a Cuban nation "formed by the white race" (Ferrer, *Insurgent*).

In the search for alternatives to the slave trade, they conceived of "free labour" as a form of indenture, but more crucially, as a means of "mestisaje" to whiten the labouring classes. Slaves would be replaced by white Catholic immigrants from the Canary Islands, Galicia and even Ireland. Irish and other railroad workers of European origin became the vanguard of white immigrant wage labour within the context of Hispano-Cuban "colonisation" policies designed to "whiten" Cuba's majority black population.

WORKER UNREST

High mortality rates among the railroad workers due to the appalling work conditions of sixteen hour days, hunger and accommodation in temporary huts quickly led to desperation. During the first few months of the contract, two outbreaks of cholera caused fear and unrest on the line. Financial misdealing left contractors in debt to the company; they frequently fled the line, leaving their workers with no rations or pay.[4] Within weeks of their arrival, unable to support their families and faced with starvation, the workers downed tools. In April 1836, Miguel Pedroso, a local landowner, made a complaint to the authorities accusing the trackmen, black and white, of robbing food from his property. He made special mention of the Irish who stole his pigs by crippling them before killing them with large sticks. When he looked for compensation for damage to his property by trackmen, the company by way of apology used a familiar trope which described the Irish laboring poor as hardened trouble-makers, well known for their pilfering and drinking habits.[5] In the first five months since construction started with two thousand men, according to the railway commission, this was the first breach of security against any landowner, to whom the company was indebted and most concerned to protect.[6] The labourers, whose complaints went unheard, developed alternative protective networks to provide food for themselves and their families and quite likely averted starvation by trading pork in their encampments. This audacious attempt by hired labour to address breaches of their contracts by un-official routes may well have been inspired by notions of "customary rights" to property which contested, even if temporarily, capitalist property relations in the introduction of new technology to Cuba (see Featherstone).[7]

[4] Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC), Junta de Fomento (JF) Box 8-535. Report on Erasmus Denison, an overseer with an Irish crew, who fled the railroad works without paying his workers.

[5] Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC), Junta de Fomento (JF) Box 8/521.

[6] Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC), Junta de Fomento (JF) Box 8/521.

[7] Coal-heavers on the London docks regarded coal-sweepings as a customary right to left-over coals.

As early as December 16th 1835, striking workers were threatened by the chief engineer with the full force of a military government:

> Todos aquellos que no estén satisfechos con los términos de sus contratas y deseen separarse del servicio del Gobierno, quedan en plena libertad para hacerse que hayan liquidado el importe de sus gastos relativos al pasaje, manutención y alojamiento [...] que les hayan hecho; pero con la expresa condición de que salgan de la isla en termino preciso de tres días [...] Pasados los tres días todo hombre exonerado y despedido de la obra como ha dicho será tratado con todo el rigor de las leyes del país relativo a los vagos [...] Pues por mucho que los ingenieros deseen los servicios de los trabajadores importados del norte, bajo ningún pretexto permitirán que sigan trabajos dados habitualmente a la bebida, insubordinados en su conducta, y desatentos con sobrestantes; ni tampoco se les tolerará el que vuelvan a pedir más salario o sea de los trabajos sin licencia. Si hay hombres disgustados con sus contratas que quieren volver a los Estados Unidos de donde salieron tan poco tiempo hay que hacer lo de su propias cuentas.[8]

The practice of resistance by the railroad workers in Cuba resembled that of Irish canal workers in the United States in equally unfavorable conditions. When employers fell behind in paying wages and workers became indebted to food sellers and grog shops, they downed tools and rioted, "not driven by any sense of ethnic or class grievance" but because their very existence depended on it (Way, "Labour's" 1-2; see also Way, *Common*). Harsh military force in Cuba meant that protesters ended up in prison only to find themselves returned to the railroad work gang in debt-bondage. They were fined twenty-four pesos (two months' earnings) and had to pay the costs of their apprehension. The earnings of those who survived were absorbed in repayments for their passage from New York, contractor's expenses, monthly medical fees and debts incurred as penalties. Having failed to negotiate any improvements in their conditions, many Irish deserted. The American Consul dealt with many desperate pleas from the New York recruits, imprisoned and charged with vagrancy: "Not only men but entire families embracing women and children appear to have been attracted hither by offers of employment on the rail-road [...]." The Consul berated the Royal Development Board for allowing this "class of person" to desert:

> Ya se han presentado a este consulado cierto número de infelices trabajadores, americanos, irlandeses y alemanes [...] si a las personas que tienen la dirección de las obras del camino de hierro se las permite abandonar y desamparar siempre que les convenga a esta clase de hombres, muchos trabajos tendrán que pasar, y muchos serán los que parecerán: se cubrirá el país o le llenaran los cárceles de jornaleros que no habrán incurrido en otra falta, sino de haberse confiado ciegamente de

[8] Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC), Junta de Fomento (JF) 130-6390, Diciembre 1835. Alfred Kruger to el Departamento de camino de hierro.

personas que los han atraído a esta isla con promesas de empleo, sin informarles de las circunstancias en que se hallarían situados en ella.[9]

The Canary Islanders, who also found their conditions unacceptable, rioted armed with knives and sticks. They deserted in huge numbers; as Spanish speakers and with some semblance of family and social networks, they had the risky possibility of escape (Zanetti and García). Notices published in the daily newspapers offered rewards for slaves who had run away from the railroad works; other notices warned that it was strictly forbidden to help or give refuge to the deserters: "[...] pues hay órdenes y penas muy severas para toda persona que ocultare o empleare cualquiera de los peones o artesanos traído de los Estados Unidos para el servicio del gobierno en la construcción del camino de hierro."[10]

Five months later, the Royal Development Board ruefully lamented the doomed upshot of their colonization plans, as the lack of promise shown by the recalcitrant Irish comes to light:

> Los trabajadores contratados para el camino de hierro por el Señor Cónsul de EU en Nueva York encontraron a su llegado a este puerto la esmeradas acogidas que la calidad de extranjeros y la utilidad de los servicios que prometían, nos hicieron ofrecerles en desempeño del deber más importantes de nuestra comisión. Los considerábamos como el primer ensayo del aumento de población blanca, y como los fundadores del sistema de comunicaciones que exclusivamente depender el engrandecimiento de las islas. Aunque es que con mano franca y excediendo siempre a la contratos, se proveyó a su necesidades de alojamientos, manutención, aumento de salario asistencia curación en sus enfermedades; pero la intemperancia increíble de la mayor parte de esos desgraciados y la falta de obreros de la misma destreza con que reemplazarlos hubieron de animarlos a prestar un servicio flojo e imperfecto y a veces en masa a cumplir sus deberes cometiendo excesos de tal naturaleza. [...] Que hubieran justificado a la Junta de Fomento y al Gobierno si los hubiera despedido de la obra desde el principio haciéndolos marchar al lugar de su procedencia. [...] Los que abandonaran la obra, y sin licencia salen a vagar por los campos o los pueblos, son detenidos por la policía y puesto inmediatamente por el gobierno a disposición de la comisión que los dirige otra vez a sus destinos [...] muchos de estos hombres están expuestos a sufrir trabajos y a perecer; mas esto no será efecto del trato que reciben ni del país que habitan; en cualquier otro adonde llevan su intemperancia correrán los mismos riesgos sin hallar igual recompensa de su industria.[11]

Reminiscent of an earlier migration of transient labour to North America in 1767, the governor of Newfoundland observed that a great number of seasonal migrants from Ireland and England did not have the means to go home at the end

[9] Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC), Junta de Fomento (JF) 130-6378, 17th Mayo 1836, US Consul, Nicholas Trist to General Miguel Tacón.

[10] Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC), Junta de Fomento (JF) 130-6383.

[11] Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC), Junta de Fomento (JF) 130-6378, 14th March 1836.

of the season, because "some idle dispossessed men desert from their masters' service before the end of the voyages for which they engage to serve and betake themselves to a loose, idle vagabond life" (Featherstone 392).

Desertion is one of "the key spatial practices" of subaltern resistance widely used by diverse groups of mobile labourers, sailors, soldiers and slaves. The practice of desertion is a "refusal and search for liberation" as argued by Hardt and Negri. Divorced from the means of subsistence, the exercise of mobility generated subaltern power by reconfiguring power relations in different categories of labour whether slave or free. Legal constraints to freedom persisted and workers were "answerable with their bodies for breaching labour agreements" (Drescher 81). Violation of a "voluntary" labour agreement was still punishable by imprisonment and physical coercion in both England and the United States up until the end of the nineteenth century.

SLAVE UNREST AND THE ESCALERA CONSPIRACY

News of the harsh treatment of Irish immigrants in Cuba did not appear in the Irish newspapers of the time. However, concern for emigrants "inveigled under insidious promises" to go to nearby Jamaica received considerable coverage right across the nations' newspapers. In a tone disparaging of native Jamaicans, the *Freeman's Journal,* December 1840, warns against the "suicidal act" of indenture to Irish emigrants who are tempted into slavery and a "pestilential" climate. Unlike the anti-slavery stance of the *Freeman's Journal*, reports of the Escalera slave revolt in 1844 emanating from London and Madrid maintained an imperialist posture, and avoided news of contact and solidarity at the margins of the Black and Green Atlantic worlds. The appointment of the infamous Spanish General Leopoldo O'Donnell, remembered for his brutal repression of slaves in Cuba, is reported in the *Tuam Herald* in August 1843, which carried an announcement of the appointment of the new Governor of Cuba. O'Donnell's arrival coincided with the uncovering of a far-reaching insurrectionary movement by the black population. Known as the Year of the Lash, 1844, in Cuban history is synonymous with O'Donnell and the bloody crackdown which he instigated during a year of martial law. Thousands of confessions were extracted by torture and death threats from those accused. Historians are divided over the existence of such a vast conspiracy, and some believe the colonial authorities fabricated it as a pretext to justify a more brutal repression of the slave population (see Paquette; Sarracino). Most scholars, however, agree on the extent of the violent repression and state-brutality against slaves and free people of colour. Robert L. Paquette's compelling analysis of what he describes as "one of the most controversial episodes in Cuba's colonial history" (4) concludes that while there is still much uncertainty surrounding the conspiracy, it did exist, but more as a convergence of several overlapping conspiracies against colonial rule and slavery by distinct groups of slaves, free people of colour and dissident whites. Control by the colonial authorities and the slave-holding elite was weakening. There were several large revolts throughout 1843, culminating in November in the biggest revolt ever recorded in which hundreds of slaves perished. In the sugar producing district

of Matanzas alone, official figures show that almost a thousand slaves and twice as many free people of colour were killed, imprisoned or deported. Many Creole whites and free people of colour escaped torture and death by fleeing. Foreigners of British, Irish, German and North American origin implicated in the conspiracy were imprisoned. Of the twelve white British subjects who worked as machine operators and engineers on sugar plantations, four of those imprisoned were of Irish origin. Hundreds of black British subjects, who after emancipation in Bahamas and Jamaica were kidnapped and enslaved again in Cuba, were all summarily deported (Curry-Machado).

During a large uprising in 1843, Daniel Goulding, an Irish railroad superintendant on the Júcaro-Cardenas line, was arrested, accused of helping the slaves working on the railroad, to join an uprising, which broke out on the Alcancía sugar estate in Bemba (now Jovellanos).[12] Maurice Hogan, a coffee plantation owner and Patrick O'Rourke, a machinist on a sugar plantation, were implicated in the conspiracy on the evidence of slaves on the estates. Both were arrested in Cardenas, near Matanzas, accused of procuring ammunition to assist a slave insurrection. Patrick O'Rourke, while working as a superintendant on the railroad in June 1837, was charged and fined for allowing his crew of slaves to play their drums at night; he quickly deserted the railroad with the slaves.[13] Daniel Downing, an Irish engineer from Waterford, was imprisoned on the grounds that he was overheard, by two witnesses working on the same estate talking to another "inglés" about killing Spaniards.[14] Downing's own testimony complains of his ill-treatment at the hands of the authorities and asserts his innocence based on his ignorance of the Spanish language, "I can't speak scarcely a word of Spanish except sufficient to get along with the operation of Cain grinding with the Mayoral and Negroes and surely [...] the Negroes could not understand us."[15] Patrick O'Rourke's case never went to trial as he was released only days before he died as a result of ill-treatment and 100 days in stocks.[16] As late as 1851, the British Consul in a dispatch to Lord Palmerston, looked for compensation for "Her Majesty's Subjects who were subjected to great and most unjust and unmerited sufferings during the Government of General O'Donnell [...] when they were falsely accused of combining with, aiding and abetting the Negroes in conspiring for the purposes of insurrection." The Foreign Office decided to "let the matter drop."[17]

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[12] Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC), Commission Militar (CM), 29-5; also see Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC), Junta de Fomento (JF) 130-6390, Passenger list for Brigantine 'Havre' to Havana, 1st November 1835, the first shipment of Irish railroad workers including Daniel Goulding as supervisor.

[13] Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC) Junta de Fomento (JF) 8-572.

[14] Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC), Asuntos Politicos (AP) 140-22, and CM Legajo 50.

[15] The National Archives (NA), Foreign Office (FO) 72/664; Statement by Daniel Downing to British Consul.

[16] NA, FO 97/382.

[17] Joseph Crawford to Lord Palmerston, NA, FO 72/793.

During the Escalera trials, Irish workers earlier known as "irlandeses" were classed as "British," an identity described as "at best ambiguous" by Curry-Machado but more likely synonymous with what it meant to be "white" and "foreign" in Cuba at that time (Curry-Machado, "Running"). Foreign engineers on sugar plantations were in demand and most were from the British Isles; as prescribed by the Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País, "every mill, every steamship, every locomotive on the railway has to have beside it an intelligent foreigner who directs and inspects the machine."[18] Migrant workers' claims to "Britishness," even in cases of possible antipathy to British identity, were reserved for times of crisis when in need of protection or assistance. During the Escalera trials, they were denied this claim, as residency laws held that any foreigner resident in Cuba for more than five years came under Spanish jurisdiction; therefore, they were denied the right to protection or diplomatic assistance. At this time when the transatlantic-abolitionist movement was at its peak, Anglophobia became widespread, particularly among the colonial elite who viewed "every idea contrary to slavery [as] seditious and the word abolitionist the greatest crime" (Paquette 143). Paquette suggests "to be British was to be subversive" and cites the case of Patrick Doherty, a "British" train driver (from the Inishowen peninsula in Donegal) on the Güines line, who was involved in a train crash and spent two years in jail awaiting trial accused of sabotage. David Turnbull, the British consul at the time, protested Doherty's innocence and advocated passionately for a fair trial and his eventual release.[19]

The trajectory of transnational migration generated shifting and fluid identities within the changing socio-political worlds of different regions of the Atlantic; identities such as Irish, "British," White, Spanish, or Abolitionist invariably produced different tensions at different times within the social order of Cuba. At the height of Anglo-Spanish imperial tensions they were no longer identified as "irlandeses," with the promise of inscribing white dominance, they were "British" and accused by the authorities of conspiring with slaves against the white population; they were now seen as a threat to Spanish colonial rule. From the perspective of black insurgents, they were viewed as British and therefore allies in the struggle to overthrow slavery. That they instigated insurgency in Cuba is discounted by Jonathon Curry-Machado, who suggests that they may have been catalysts in a crucial juncture of continuing resistance to slavery throughout the nineteenth century. The evidence is inconclusive as to their participation in the conspiracy; however, the records attest to their position as foreign white labour within the labour practices of the sugar and coffee plantations and the construction of the railroad. Therefore they were in very close proximity to the underground network of insurrection. The fate of O'Rourke, who earlier demonstrated an empathy with his slave crew, was not dissimilar to that of hundreds of slaves who perished in the Escalera. The question of

[18] Sociedad Económica (1819-1844), *Memorias de la Sociedad Económica*. Habana: Sociedad de Amigos del País (qtd Curry-Machado).

[19] NA, FO 72/585, Turnbull to Captain General Tacón, May 1841.

their cooperation with the slave insurgency remains ambiguous, as does their role in the British abolitionist cause.

The transatlantic and imperial dimensions of the Escalera conspiracy have received much scrutiny; particularly the role played by British abolitionists. Raising the question of "alternative ideologies of resistance among slaves," Ada Ferrer notes the absence of focus on the principal participants of this insurgency and the influence of African or Afro-Cuban ideologies of resistance (Ferrer, "Review"). Rather than concentrate on the "meta-narrative of imperial intrigue" Aisha Finch proposes to "re-centre" African slaves and their descendents who built a radical resistance movement based on the political culture of rural Cuban slaves stemming from plantation life and political traditions from the African continent. The ongoing response by Cuban slaves to a system of domination and repression by colonial authorities and slave owners was to "test the limits of the institution of slavery in a wide variety of ways," they "resisted domination in its countless forms by negotiating, by reproducing their cultures, by openly revolting, by running away to the forests and mountains, and by taking their own lives" (Barcia Paz (2)). Like Finch, Barcia Paz's approach to the study of slave resistance in Cuba, based on the records of the Escalera trials, posits that the cultural background of African-born slaves is "integral to story of their resistance" (2). Notwithstanding the problems of linguistic interpretation and the problematic nature of evidence gained through a process of interrogation, both authors have used these "exceptional" documents to extraordinary effect in providing a less-veiled analysis of the "internal world" of the rebels. In order to redefine transatlantic movements for freedom and emancipation, Finch argues, "that any history of anti-slavery struggle is incomplete without black-political struggles and oppositional cultures at it centre" (4). In a similar vein, the question of Irish subaltern solidarity and resistance in Cuba may be illuminated by considering the continuities between oppositional culture in early nineteenth-century Ireland and its circulation within the Atlantic networks of resistance.

CIRCUM-ATLANTIC RESISTANCE

By locating migrants in what Paul Gilroy terms the "mobile Atlantic" and therefore outside the confines of the nation state, Linebaugh and Rediker argue that without studying the common ground and the points of contact between workers "black and white, Irish and English, slave and free," a vital world of cooperation, contact, overlap and exchange is obscured (Linebaugh and Rediker). In their analysis of multi-ethnic struggles during the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, they focus on the transnational "continuities and connections" which, they argue, inform popular working-class struggles. They locate the subversive experience of the mobile Irish in the "Hidden Ireland" of The Whiteboys and other secret societies. The struggle to survive the harsh conditions of colonial labour generated a culture of multi-ethnic co-operation in what Rediker describes as "dialectic of discipline and resistance" in the Atlantic system of labour and capital. The conditions they encountered at the imperial centres of Britain and the United States differed in many

crucial respects from and between conditions in the Iberian and British Caribbean. Kevin Kenny, while looking at nineteenth century labour protest, suggests that the Irish responded to unfavourable circumstances in two distinct ways, depending on the national conditions. In circumstances of hostility to Irish immigrant labour on the construction of public works the United States and Britain, Kenny identifies a "subterranean pattern of Irish collective violence featuring faction fights (gangs based on local or county origin) and secret societies such as The Ribbonmen and The Molly Maguires" (Kenny, *Making* 153). Where hostility lessened the older forms of violent protest adapted from the Irish countryside, forms of protest changed to trade-union participation. (see Kenny, *Making*).

Deteriorating socio-economic conditions in early nineteenth-century Ireland pushed increasing numbers of labourers and small holders to become involved in collective protest. The passing of The Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829, and a growing politicisation of the Irish labour movement saw the formation of the first nationwide trade union in 1832, demonstrating a growing will for collective organisation. One of the main objectives of the agrarian combinations was to protect tenants from rising rents and evictions. Inspired by notions of "moral economy," assaults by gangs on bailiffs, middlemen and magistrates all formed part of a wider strategy of violent resistance. The protocol of violence as argued by James Donnelly, Jr. was founded on a value system based on economic rights of local tenants and farmers and the consequent resistance they met from the legal and political system of the time (Donnelly). Irish historian, John Cunningham's recent analysis of popular urban mobilisations in the form of "food-riots" in Limerick, Ennis and Galway in the decades before the Great Famine argues that E.P. Thompson's concept of the "moral economy" has limited application to the Irish context (Cunningham). He suggests that the notion of "moral economy" does not fit easily with the "agrarian underground" precisely because "their appeal was not to established legality (even if they borrowed some of its ritual), so their objectives were not normally achievable through "bargaining by riot," but rather through terrorizing those who had transgressed their code" (131). Cunningham distinguishes between "market-regulating crowds" and "rural militancy" in terms of their modus operandi and their social base. The activities of "price-regulating crowds" and the observance of some sort of "protocol of riot" which engaged in "limited exemplary violence," according to Cunningham, had a considerable impact on the moral-economic protest of the period. One such protest involved labourers on the Shannon Navigation Works demanding a pay rise. On Monday 1 June 1840, a few hundred protestors marching through the streets of Limerick swelled to three or four thousand, men, women and children who were protesting the rising prices of grain and potatoes.

Kerby Miller attributes most early migration to the New World as "part of a general pattern of resistance by Presbyterians and Catholics to a model of economic development" imposed by an "alien" class. The traditional worldview of farmers at this time resisted its "proletarianizing and pauperizing consequences" (Miller 57). Miller argues that the failure of "illegal combinations" such as trade unions and agrarian secret societies to halt the detrimental "progress" of an alien economic

model prompted surges of emigration which "meant that emigration was at bottom involuntary exile" (62).

In Cuba, the coexistence of free with slave labour, as Cuban historian Julio le Riverand argues, served to harden working conditions for so-called free labourers (Le Riverand). Irish and Canary islands wage-workers as well as convicts and freed slaves involved in the construction of the Cuban railroad, were imprisoned for violations. In the face of intense militarisation in Cuba and harsh political repression, Joan Casanovas posits that the shared socio-economic conditions resulting in co-operation between free and unfree labour "helped urban labourers of different social ranks to build a shared identity and acknowledge their common interests as the basis for developing collective action" (Casanovas 251). The evidence strongly suggests that Irish emigrants from the pre-famine era were seasoned agrarian and labour protestors with experience of collective action which they brought to bear on their encounter with industrial capitalism in Britain, the United States and Cuba. According to postcolonial theory, the apparent unwillingness of a mobile transitory workforce, at the cutting edge of new technologies, to adapt to capitalist discipline arises from counter-modern social formations imported and adapted to the new world and which, as David Lloyd puts it: "is an intrinsic, if recalcitrant, element in the history of capitalism" (Lloyd 123). The Irish railroad workers' experience of articulating grievances, formed within a detrimental system of socio-economic development in pre-famine Ireland, must, I suggest, be seen to have a bearing on their protest and the hidden transcript of resistance to exploitation, which they brought with them to Cuba. Undoubtedly there was "overlap" between labourers from Europe and Africa in terms of their common exploitation, but the extent of co-operation between them within the social and political order of colonial Cuba needs closer scrutiny. This research has raised the question of the influence of the cultural origins of Irish oppositional ideologies on labour relations conditioned as they were within the context of colonial Cuba. Research by different scholars has demonstrated that African oppositional culture is integral to the struggle against slavery: however, greater attention to the convergence of African, Irish and Canary Island oppositional ideologies at this "point of contact" in the Spanish-Caribbean is necessary to gain a fuller understanding of co-operation within networks of resistance in different regions of the Atlantic world—in this case, colonial Cuba.

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WRITS OF EJECTMENT: JAMES FINTAN LALOR AND THE REWRITING OF NATION AS PHYSICAL SPACE, 1847-1848

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Abstract

The rise of Irish nationalism during the nineteenth century cannot be understood without *The Nation* newspaper and its determined crusade to (re)create Ireland as a distinct cultural community during the 1840s. Among its contributors, however, was a writer who set himself apart from his contemporaries, and has always eluded clear-cut ideological ascriptions. James Fintan Lalor (1811-1849), an allegedly 'marginal' figure, but the most brilliant writer of the Young Ireland generation, is perhaps best known for linking the cause of independence with that of the tenant farmers, thus providing an ideological precedent for the Land War of the 1880s. However, Lalor's contribution to Irish nationalist thought goes far beyond mere political strategy. An analysis of Lalor's writings in *The Nation* and the *Irish Felon* reveals that for him, Ireland was not one of Anderson's "imagined communities," artificially bound by mental ties of language, history and tradition, but a physical space, a tangible reality to be reclaimed from the grasp of England's "landlord garrison."

Key words: Nationalism, nineteenth century, Young Ireland, James Fintan Lalor, land issue.

Resumen

El nacimiento del nacionalismo irlandés en el siglo XIX no puede explicarse sin el papel jugado por el periódico *The Nation* durante la década de 1840 para (re)crear Irlanda como una comunidad cultural distintiva. Entre los escritores de *The Nation*, sin embargo, destaca un escritor que se diferenciaba radicalmente de sus contemporáneos, y siempre ha resultado difícil de clasificar en términos ideológicos. James Fintan Lalor (1811-1849), supuestamente una figura 'marginal', pero el escritor más brillante del grupo de Joven Irlanda, es conocido sobre todo por asociar la lucha por la independencia con la lucha agraria, proporcionando así un antecedente ideológico a la Guerra Agraria de la década de 1880. Sin embargo, la aportación de Lalor al pensamiento nacionalista irlandés supera la mera estrategia política. El análisis de sus escritos en *The Nation* y el *Irish Felon* muestran que para Lalor, Irlanda no era una de las "comunidades imaginadas" de Anderson, unidas artificialmente por vínculos mentales de idioma, historia y tradiciones, sino un espacio físico, una realidad tangible que debía ser recuperada de manos de la "guarnición de terratenientes" establecida por Inglaterra.

Palabras clave: nacionalismo, siglo XIX, Joven Irlanda, James Fintan Lalor, cuestión agraria.

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In his emblematic study of nationalism as the construction of "Imagined Communities," Benedict Anderson addresses the role of print in the construction of collective national identity, and focuses his attention on newspapers as the "extreme" form of the book; a "one-day best-seller," around which a mass ceremony takes place:

> The almost precisely simultaneous consumption ("imagining") of the newspaper-as-fiction. [...] Each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. (35)

But beyond their role in establishing a psychological bond between readers in an "imagined community," newspapers are also encoders and disseminators of ideology. The rise of Irish nationalism during the nineteenth century cannot be understood without *The Nation* and its determined crusade to (re)create Ireland as a distinct cultural community during the 1840s. Among the contributors to *The Nation*, however, one particular figure stands out who represented an entirely different approach to nationalism. For James Fintan Lalor (1807-1849), Ireland was not an intellectual construct, a compound of cultural and historical traditions, but a material object to be reclaimed; while the Irish people was an entity he never felt the need to define, except to vindicate the tenant population and exclude the landlord class.

Lalor was one of the most powerful writers of the Young Ireland generation, and one of the very few whose press writings transcended the short life of the weekly journal to be republished as anthologies (e.g. O'Donoghue; Marlowe; Fogarty; Ramón). Lalor's enduring popularity seems all the more remarkable because it actually rests on a very small corpus of about a dozen articles. It becomes easier to understand when we add that these articles were published between 1847 and 1848, at the height of the Famine, and with a degree of literary quality that argues for Lalor's inclusion among the great names of nineteenth-century European journalism.

Although Lalor is best known as an agrarian activist, the prophet of the Land War of the 1880s, his ideological sophistication and his strongly inspirational prose made him a tempting founding father for various other causes at the turn of the twentieth century. Thus for instance, while Patrick Pearse singled him out as one of the four evangelists of Irish Separatism along with Wolfe Tone, Thomas Davis and John Mitchel (240), James Connolly with a little straw-clutching celebrated him as "the Irish apostle of revolutionary Socialism" (121). Lalor's posthumous appeal, on the other hand, is in poignant contrast with his considerable difficulties to make converts during his lifetime. Throughout his short career, Lalor remained a writer at the margins of a movement itself marginal; the visionary whose proposed solution to the Famine crisis was considered too radical even by his supposedly radical coreligionists.

As a thinker on the Famine, Lalor was not original either in his anxiety about the collapse of the small tenant class, his censure of the landlords, or his belief that any solution to the land question must include Irish independence. However, while most contemporary writers focused their attention on short-term relief measures, improvements in land legislation, or the panacea of self-government, Lalor discarded

all such distractions, proclaimed that society was already effectually dissolved, and advocated nothing short of a thorough reorganisation of the social fabric with the tenant class at its core (*The Nation*, 24 April 1847). His approach to the nationalist cause was equally sweeping. Repeal "in its vulgar meaning" he dismissed as a futile and impracticable cause; he aimed for bigger game. As he wrote to John Mitchel in June 1847:

> My object is to repeal the Conquest—not any part or portion but the whole and entire conquest of seven hundred years—a thing much more easily done than to repeal the Union. That the absolute (allodial) ownership of the lands of Ireland is vested of right in the people of Ireland—that they, and none but they, are the first landowners and lords paramount as well as the lawmakers of this island [...] these are my principles. (Fogarty 43-44)

Lalor's determination to "repeal the conquest" was more than a powerful catchphrase; it went hand in hand with a new formulation of Irish nationalist demands not based on ethnic difference or political grievances, but national property rights: the Irish land was the rightful property of the Irish people, and it must be reclaimed from a "robber" landlord class who had usurped it by force. In the context of the Famine, this natural right became reinforced by the laws of survival. The landlords, Lalor denounced, "have served us with a general writ of ejectment. Wherefore I say, let them get a notice to quit at once; or we shall oust possession under the law of nature." (*Irish Felon* (24 June 1848)).

While John Mitchel was famously converted to radicalism under Lalor's influence, most of the Young Ireland leadership was more alarmed than impressed by Lalor's arguments. To middle-class romantic nationalists, singing the praises of revolution in the abstract was one thing; trying to subvert the social order by suppressing landlordism and raising the spectre of land nationalisation was quite another. Although the Young Ireland leaders were quite willing to debate Lalor's ideas in correspondence, they refused to give them public endorsement, and when Lalor died prematurely in December 1849 he remained a minor figure, merely celebrated as yet another 1848 martyr, or wielded as ammunition in the bitter subsequent fallout between John Mitchel and Charles Gavan Duffy (*The Nation* (27 May 1854)). His incorporation to the literary canon of the Land War and early-twentieth-century nationalism has further obscured the full extent of his intellectual originality when his writings were first published. This article wishes particularly to highlight Lalor's pioneering role in rewriting the Irish nation, not as a creature of political imagination to be fashioned into existence—as Benedict Anderson posits—but a real, physical object to regain possession of.

James Fintan Lalor was born at Tennakill, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois, on 10 March 1807, the eldest of twelve children. His father, Patrick Lalor, was a substantial gentleman farmer who gained national renown in 1831 as a leader of the Tithe War, and immediately afterwards as an O'Connellite MP. As the story goes, the young James Fintan was dropped from a servant's arms as a child, and suffered a spinal injury that made him a hunchback. His health was also quite delicate, especially

after he contracted some kind of pulmonary illness, probably tuberculosis, during the mid-1840s. By 1848, every new acquaintance he made was struck by the contrast between his weak, deformed body, and his vigorous and original mind.

Beyond the poetic nature of this story, however, Lalor was indeed profoundly original, even in his choice of political course. While the archetypal Young Irelander would have begun his career within the Repeal Association, and he himself belonged to a family of committed Repealers, Lalor was intensely disgusted by the whole movement. In his view, the Repeal Association was corrupt, ineffectual, and completely mistaken as to objectives and methods (qtd. O'Neill 133-135). For Lalor, the key to national prosperity, and the only goal worth pursuing, was not the trappings of legislative independence, the Repealers' wild-goose chase, but the physical control of the soil. And O'Connell's political programme, besides placing tenant-right firmly in the post-Repeal future, included the repeal of the Corn Laws, the tariff system protecting Irish agriculture from foreign competition. In 1843, at the height of O'Connell's campaign of monster meetings, Lalor wrote a shocking secret letter to Sir Robert Peel, the Conservative prime minister, offering information to help destroy the Repeal Association. There is no evidence that his offer was taken up, but this letter provides an insight into Lalor's political mindset. As he explained to Peel:

> I was, myself, at one time, something *more* than a mere Repealer, in private feeling; but Mr. O'Connell, *his agitators*, and his series of wretched agitations, first *disgusted* me into a conservative in point of *feeling*; and reflection and experience have *converted* me into one in point of *principle*. I have been *driven* into the conviction, [...] that it is only to a Conservative Government, to her landed proprietors, and to *peace*, that this country can look for any improvement in her social condition. (O'Neill 36-38)

Lalor has been described, harshly but not wholly without foundation, by D.N. Buckley as "hawking his ideas about from post to pillar in the (vain) hope that some individual, club, or party would sponsor and help to realise them" (28). When the Conservatives repealed the Corn Laws in 1846, and thus abandoned agrarian protectionism, Lalor swerved course and again turned his attention towards the nationalists. Circumstances were particularly propitious; Young Ireland seceded from the Repeal Association in July 1846, and a few months later announced the foundation of their own organisation, the Irish Confederation. On 11 January 1847, before the principles of this new organisation were officially proclaimed, Lalor wrote to Charles Gavan Duffy in order to offer his own recommendations. Above all, Lalor urged that they should not commit themselves explicitly either to Repeal—a "petty parish question" compared to the real issue at stake—or to the use of "moral force" alone, as was O'Connell's mantra (Fogarty 3-4).

Success, Lalor urged, required the support of the rural masses, but in order to win them over to Repeal, Young Ireland had to offer them some more tangible benefit than legislative independence; they had to become the champions of the right to land, as well as nationality. With the right goal in sight, the tenantry would

provide Young Ireland with the necessary muscle to pressurize the government, and achieve *both* self-government and tenant-right. This combination of agrarian and nationalist demands is of course what Lalor is most famous for, the proverbial image of the land question acting as the railway engine that would carry Repeal through to success. But this was a mere point of strategy; Lalor's intellectual originality went much further, and became spectacularly evident when he accepted Duffy's invitation to publish his ideas in *The Nation*.

In his first public letter on 24 April, and two more which followed on 15 May and 5 June, Lalor described the operating causes of the Famine with masterful clarity, and concluded what modern researchers now take for granted: the Famine was not only a human tragedy; it was a watershed, the collapse of the existing social order and the emergence of a new one. Mass deaths and emigration were draining the country of the small tenant population, and heralding the change from tillage farming to grazing. As Lalor lamented, "The agriculture that employs and maintains millions will leave the land, and an agriculture that employs only thousands will take its place. Ireland will become a pasture ground once again." (*The Nation* (15 May 1847)). Lalor's aim in these early, relatively moderate articles was partly to persuade the landlords, for their own good, to help stop the haemorrhage of depopulation, and give the Irish people a new "social constitution," as he termed it, based on the creation of a strong tenant class.

It should not come as a surprise that the landlords were less than receptive to this proposal, but that was probably no more than Lalor expected. He was far more disappointed in his new nationalist allies. After his first contact with Charles Gavan Duffy, Lalor had received a warm welcome into the Irish Confederation, and had been led to expect support. However, most of the leadership were extremely reluctant to deviate from their old dogmas—Repeal above all else—and remained outwardly sympathetic, but in effect uncooperative. The rare and celebrated exception was John Mitchel, who gradually came to share Lalor's view of the landlords as the "foreign garrison" of republican rhetoric, and the land system as the foundation of British domination (Mitchel 178). But Mitchel's conversion to radicalism was slow, and Lalor spent 1847 in the vain hope of seeing the Confederation adopt his agrarian programme. After a catastrophic attempt to set up a tenant league in September 1847, Lalor gave up political activism in frustration and disgust (O'Neill 69-72).

He only returned to the public forefront in June 1848, when John Martin offered him a place in the editorial staff of the *Irish Felon*, the intended successor to John Mitchel's firebrand *United Irishman*. Between 24 June and 22 July 1848, the final month before the Young Ireland insurrection, Lalor published seven articles in the *Felon*. Free from any further need to conciliate the landlords, Lalor alternated proposals for a new revolutionary organisation with detailed expositions of his ideas on independence and popular sovereignty. The very first issue of the *Irish Felon* on 24 June featured a full-page letter by Lalor to the editor, John Martin, laying out the grounds on which he was ready to offer his cooperation. Not for the first time, the force of Lalor's rhetoric gave later republicans a wealth of warlike quotes:

> Ireland her own—Ireland her own, and all therein, from the sod to the sky. The soil of Ireland for the people of Ireland, to have and to hold from God alone who gave it [...] Not to repeal the Union, then, but to repeal the conquest, [...] not to resume or restore an old constitution, but to found a new nation, and raise up a free people, and strong as well as free, and secure as well as strong, based on a peasantry rooted like rocks in the soil of the land—this is my object, as I hope it is yours.

But besides stirring exhortations, this letter also contained Lalor's first public declaration of his political principles. He began once again by establishing a clean break with the standard nationalist demand: he was emphatically *not* seeking to repeal the Union. Repeal as usually understood was a dead-end cause; neither "moral force" nor revolution could succeed in bringing it about. The British parliament would never be coerced into granting it by mere political agitation, and the Irish people—at least the rural masses—would never be induced to join a physical force movement for such an airy goal; one that, besides, failed to get at the heart of British dominion: the landowning establishment. Success required an alliance of town and country; the nationalist demands of the urban population, and the agrarian demands of the rural population.

But Lalor's principles went beyond a utilitarian alliance of interests. To him, land tenure and nationality were not only complementary banners; they were one and the same cause. Lalor was unique among contemporary nationalists, in that he did not base his demands on cultural distinctiveness, the country's "rights and wrongs," or the legal technicalities that allegedly invalidated the Act of Union, as O'Connell liked to do (e.g. *Freeman's Journal* (28 Oct. 1840)). Lalor approached independence as a matter of national property rights. Using the legal phraseology of land ownership, he declared that the whole of Ireland "up to the sun, and down to the centre," was of right the property of the Irish people who, as sole owners, were also the only ones entitled to make laws for it. And he continued:

> In other, if not plainer, words, I hold and maintain that the entire soil of a country belongs of right to the entire people of that country..., to let to whom they will, on whatever tenures, terms, rents, services, and conditions they will; one condition being, however, unavoidable and essential, ...that the tenant shall bear full, true, and undivided fealty and allegiance to the nation.

Lalor warned his readers not to be distracted by "constitutions, and charters, and articles, and franchises," the trappings of a "mock" freedom. True national independence meant effective, physical possession of the land itself. In Lalor's ideological universe, just as national rights materialised as agrarian rights, national sovereignty materialised as land ownership (Buckley 36). In effect, Lalor enlarged the scope of social contract theory from power relations between individuals, to control over the land itself. The consent of the governed (in his case, significantly *mutual* consent among the people, rather than between themselves and a sovereign ruler) was necessary not only to give legitimacy to the government and its laws, but also to sanction the occupation and use of the soil.

But it was Lalor's fifth article, published on 8 July and solemnly entitled "The Faith of a Felon," that most clearly laid out his theories on the nature of British dominion and the Irish right of resistance. The opening paragraphs explained:

> Years ago I perceived that the English conquest consisted of two parts combined into one whole,—the conquest of our liberties, the conquest of our lands. I saw clearly that the re-conquest of our liberties would be incomplete and worthless without the re-conquest of our lands,—would not, necessarily, involve or produce that of our lands [...]; while the re-conquest of our lands would involve the other—would, at least, be complete in itself, and adequate to its own purposes.

As he explained, he was "biding his time" when the Famine broke out, decimating the smallholders on which he counted for strength, and making re-conquest vitally urgent. When Young Ireland split from O'Connell, Lalor saw his opportunity to change the course of Irish politics, and made his overtures to the Council of the Irish Confederation. Unfortunately the Young Ireland elite were social conservatives who believed in the necessity of a national aristocracy, and dreamed of achieving independence without upsetting the social order. Except for a very small minority, Lalor lamented, "They desired, not a *democratic*, but a merely *national* revolution." Thus they threw away precious months in a futile effort to win over the landlords. Lalor passed over regrets, and again laid out his programme for his new readers, summarised in four points. The first two declared that tenants ought to refuse all payment of rents exceeding their own subsistence needs for the year, and resist ejectment. The last two help to explain why James Connolly felt compelled to claim Lalor for the Socialist pantheon:

> 3. That they [the tenants] ought further, *on principle*, to refuse all rent to the present usurping proprietors, until the people, the true proprietors... have, in national congress or convention, decided *what* rents they are to pay, and *to whom* [...].
> 4. And that the people, ...ought to decide... that those rents shall be paid *to themselves*, the people, for public purposes [...].

In Lalor's case, however, appearances are deceptive. His view of that elusive entity called the Irish people, and of "democracy" as a class, was constrained to the tenant population; would-be small capitalists, rather than exploited workers. There was in Lalor's scheme no master plan including either rural labourers or the working population as a whole. But beyond issues of political affiliation, and more closely within the scope of this article, Lalor's manifesto also included his most detailed analysis of the significance of the British conquest and its implications for the property rights of the landlord class. Lalor did not wish the Irish people to take over the land merely on account of the pressing necessity of the hour; he demanded it as a universal right. And in order to make his case, he set out to prove that the only competing right, that of the landlord, was in effect null and void.

Lalor defined private property categorically as "the right of man to possess, enjoy, and transfer, the substance and use of whatever *he has himself* created." This therefore excluded land, which was conversely "the free and common property of

all mankind, of natural right, and by the grant of God." All men being equal, Lalor continued, no man had the right to appropriate to himself any portion of it except by the common consent and agreement of the community. Against this, British constitutional law upheld "first occupancy" as the basis of land property—in other words, the land belonged to whoever was in occupation, in this case the landlords. Lalor dismissed this as an artificial principle, formulated *ex post facto* in order to justify the British system of settlement. Unless he were thrown on a desert island, Lalor argued, every single individual trying to claim "first occupancy" would have to assert his right against someone else. And then, he concluded, "*what constitutes* occupancy? What length of possession gives 'title by occupancy'?"

For Lalor, there were only two ways in which land was ever settled: by common agreement, or by force. Common agreement yielded the fairest system of distribution, but even when this was the case, ultimate property rights remained in the hands of the community at large, who retained the right to revise and amend the system at any time. Stability therefore depended on finding a settlement that the majority of the population would be interested to maintain. In Ireland, however, settlement had been founded on conquest, and thus it was that 8,000 individuals had been given full possession of the land against the rights of the remaining eight millions. Conditions for the tenants were better in Ulster, Lalor explained, because it had not been simply conquered, but "colonised"; the native Irish had been expelled, and the "conquering race" had agreed on a system of occupation—the Ulster custom—among themselves.

To voices that might defend the landlords' claim to the soil on the grounds that they, too, were "one class of the Irish people," Lalor responded categorically by excluding them not only from the Irish nation, but any other; in Foucaldian terms, a radical subversion of Othering which made the powerful the intended object of exclusion and enforced alienation:

> Strangers they are in this land they call theirs,—strangers here and strangers everywhere; owning no country and owned by none; rejecting Ireland and rejected by England; tyrants to this island and slaves to another; ...an outcast and ruffianly horde, alone in the world and alone in its history, a class by themselves.

The way to regain control of the soil, of undoing the conquest and turning the tables on the mass eviction process that the landlords were embarked on, was neither political campaigning, as Young Ireland persisted in, nor a hopeless recourse to revolution, as was sometimes threatened, but what Lalor termed "moral insurrection": refusing to acknowledge British authority, taking "quiet and peaceable" possession of government, and defending its exercise by passive resistance or defensive force (*Irish Felon* (1 July 1848)). But he acknowledged that wholesale civil disobedience was impracticable. Instead, he suggested concentrating resistance on one carefully selected law:

> The law you select for assailing must have four requisites:—first, it must form no part of the moral code; second, it must be essential to government... one the

> abrogation of which would be an abrogation of sovereignty; third, it must be one easily disobeyed; and fourth, difficult to enforce; in other words, a law that would *help* to repeal itself.

Although Lalor was ostensibly merely drawing attention to the futility of the Repeal campaign—arguing that there was no such law on which Repealers could take their stand—the implication was strongly in favour of his own agrarian version of national sovereignty: while "unluckily" there was no state tax in Ireland that could be resisted as a matter of principle, there was a landlord system which levied its own equivalent in the form of rent. A general rent strike would bring landlordism to its knees, force Britain to come to the rescue, and lead to a full-blown revolution. (*Irish Felon* (8 July 1848)). If this revolution were successful, it would be the end of both landlordism and British authority in Ireland.

Lalor's theories of popular sovereignty and land ownership were not in themselves original. They owed much to classical political theory, and to the contributions of earlier land activists, including Lalor's own mentor, William Conner (see O'Brien). As early as 1835, in a pamphlet entitled *True Political Economy of Ireland*, Conner had anticipated Lalor by denying the principle of private property in land and upholding the supreme value of the labouring classes as the foundation of the whole economic system (2). Lalor's proposed strategy of "moral insurrection" was closely modelled on the Tithe War of the early 1830s, where as explained, his own father had played a prominent role. But Lalor used all these elements to put forward a new and revolutionary approach to Irish nationalism. Lalor looked beyond both political theory and cultural revivalism to focus on the physical world. Thus the land was not for him an ideological construct, a metonymy for the nation at large, but a material object that had to be recovered from British domination, exercised by proxy through the landowning class.

While Lalor was by no means alone in his denunciation of the "Conquest," and in referring to the historical past as a foundation for political claims in the present, he departed radically from contemporary nationalist discourse in that, at the same time, he denied the value of tradition. He argued his points merely on the grounds of natural law; any concrete settlement had no basis other than mutual consent, and could be subjected to revision at any point. And his explanation, perhaps unintentionally, struck at the very root of ethnic nationalism:

> For no generation of living men can bind a generation that is yet unborn, or can sell or squander the rights of man; and each generation of men has but a life-interest in the world. But no generation continues the same for one hour together. Its identity is in perpetual flux. (*Irish Felon* (8 July 1848))

It may be no wonder that Lalor fit so uneasily within the nationalist generation so recently bewitched by Thomas Davis. His writings refuse to engage with language, culture, religion, history—everything that was important in the romantic nationalist world, so strongly dominated by the educated youth of the cities. In exchange, Lalor offered theoretical sophistication, logical argumentation, and a view of

Ireland that was exclusively rural, and dominated by the contest between landlords and tenants. Thus while his revolutionary rhetoric captivated the radical youth of the Confederate clubs, his deeper message was generally either rejected, unnoticed or misunderstood. In the immediate posterity of the 1850s and 1860s Lalor was not remembered for his political principles, but his connection with Mitchel, his role as a leader of the 1849 conspiracy, and especially his celebrated final call to arms: "Who strikes the first blow for Ireland? Who draws first blood for Ireland? Who wins a wreath that will be green for ever?" (*Irish Felon* (22 July 1848)).

Yet even his claim to nationalist fame has been undermined by modern critics. David N. Buckley denies Lalor's nationalist credentials on the grounds that:

> His own concern was with social and economic collapse, rather than with possible future forms of government... The struggle in which he was engaged... was not concerned with orthodox political parties (such as the Repeal Association), with political panaceas (independence), or with popular political forms (franchises, charters or parliaments). His aim was, quite simply, to overthrow the aristocracy. To describe him as a "nationalist," therefore, effectively leaves his central beliefs untouched. (84-85)

Buckley's assessment, however, merely tries to fit the square peg of Lalor's unorthodox theory into the round hole of canonical, culture-driven definitions of nationalism. Buckley finds in turn that Lalor was neither a nationalist, an anarchist, a socialist, nor a conservative; he finally settles on defining him as a bourgeois radical of the Paine school (87). This is an apt conclusion, but Lalor's originality resides precisely in the fact that ascription to one label does not necessarily exclude others. While socialism and anarchism were certainly not on Lalor's list of sympathies, nationalism—understood as the demand for self-government on behalf of a particular community, howsoever defined—was central to his writings. Buckley is perhaps a little too rash in writing off Lalor's numerous references to independence as the product of revolutionary opportunism. Lalor's ideas on a future political settlement were vague and even impractical. His only concrete suggestion, calling for a federal union between Ireland and Britain (*Irish Felon* (1 July 1848)), was merely a nod to contemporary debates, and lost sight of the fact, as Arthur Griffith pointed out, that a third overruling power was still required (Fogarty viii). But lack of a proper post-independence master plan was not uncommon when revolution had to be disposed of first; the Fenians are a prime example of this. Lalor's rejection of established political institutions was echoed by John Mitchel and likewise inherited by the Fenian movement. If Lalor refused to engage with the concerns of cultural nationalism, this does not negate his belief in the existence of an Irish nation; it merely reveals a different set of priorities in the face of the Famine, and a closer identification with the classical republican tradition than the *volksgeist* rhetoric of his own age.

Lalor remained an obscure figure after the 1850s, mostly remembered in Fenian circles for his role in the 1849 conspiracy, which was once claimed as the model for the IRB itself (*Irishman* (3 November 1877)). But tenant farmers were no longer the paradigm for poverty and oppression in the post-Famine bonanza,

and the IRB addressed its message to rural labourers and the urban working classes instead. Although the Fenian newspaper the *Irish People* made repeated calls to peasant proprietorship, it left the details undefined and never referred to Lalor as an inspiration.

Lalor was rescued from oblivion in the 1880s to serve as the alleged intellectual forerunner of the Land War, but the similarities between Lalor's doctrines and those of the Land League were more superficial than real. The Land War was almost exclusively agrarian in focus, with nationalism as a subtext, and ultimately relying on Parnell's efforts in parliament. Whereas Lalor turned his back very emphatically on the British parliament, and unlike Parnell he did not regard the land question as a bargaining counter in the fight for self-government, but treated both causes as integral to each other. All the while, Lalor's most original contribution to Irish nationalist thought—the immediate correspondence between nation and physical space—went virtually unnoticed, especially after the land question was resolved by the various land acts of the late nineteenth century, and the Gaelic Revival again made cultural distinctiveness the core of nationalist discourse. For the nationalists of the twentieth century, Lalor was mainly a prophet of republicanism, an inspiring writer of revolutionary harangues. His agrarian doctrine was celebrated for its revolutionary potential, but as Arthur Griffith remonstrated, "though it liberated the Irish peasant from his serfdom on the soil it did not [...] free the Irish nation." The key to Irish freedom, Griffith declared, was not in Lalor's vision, but in Thomas Davis's (Fogarty xi). Ironically, the rural Ireland that Lalor was struggling so desperately not only to preserve, but to make hegemonic in 1847, proceeded to be recreated, idealised and enshrined in the post-independence imagination. De Valera's Arcadia of cosy homesteads and frugal comforts contrasts with Lalor's unsentimental view of the rural world, not as the embodiment of the national soul, but as the actual, physical body of the nation, literally dying away in the throes of famine. Lalor's Ireland was not one of Anderson's "imagined communities," artificially bound by mental ties of language, history and custom, but a tangible object: the soil that provided sustenance, and the people who depended on it.

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TROUBLES AND TRAUMAS REVISITED: SEAN O'FAOLAIN, EDWARD SAID AND THE ANTI-COLONIAL TRADITION

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Abstract

Sean O'Faolain, writer, intellectual and prominent public figure throughout the twentieth century in Ireland, is known above all as one of the most influential critics of the Irish nationalism hegemonic in the decades following the declaration of Independence in the 1920s. Nonetheless, in spite of this reputation and the frequent identification of him as a "revisionist," his writings on the Anglo-Irish conflict allow for an interpretation which, far from cementing his reputation as a revisionist, reveals ideological positions more in tune with the postcolonial critique which in recent decades has marked debates on Irish culture. Invoking particularly the critique of Edward Said, this article examines O'Faolain's autobiography, *Vive Moi!*, and attempts to demonstrate how the mature reflections on the anti-colonial movement from this ex-member of the IRA allow us to reinterpret his reputation in a manner which has important consequences for our understanding of the intellectual politics of twentieth century Ireland.

Key words: Sean O'Faolain, Edward Said, postcolonialism, revisionism, Anglo-Irish War.

Resumen

Sean O'Faolain, escritor, intelectual y figura destacada de la vida pública irlandesa a lo largo del siglo xx, es conocido sobre todo como uno de los más influyentes críticos del nacionalismo irlandés hegemónico en las décadas posteriores a la declaración de la independencia en los años veinte del siglo xx. Sin embargo, a pesar de esta reputación y de ser frecuentemente calificado como un "revisionista," sus escritos sobre el conflicto Anglo-Irlandés nos permiten una interpretación que, lejos de cimentar su reputación como revisionista, revela unas posturas ideológicas más afines a la crítica poscolonial que en las últimas décadas ha protagonizado los debates sobre la cultura irlandesa. Invocando sobre todo la crítica de Edward Said, este artículo examina la autobiografía de O'Faolain, *Vive Moi!*, y pretende demostrar cómo las reflexiones maduras sobre el movimiento anticolonial de este ex-miembro del IRA nos permiten una reinterpretación de su reputación que trae importantes consecuencias para nuestro entendimiento de la política intelectual de la Irlanda del siglo xx.

Palabras clave: Sean O'Faolain, Edward Said, postcolonialismo, revisionismo, guerra angloirlandesa.

Edward Said, in his afterword to *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*, the single most important collection of essays on this critical tendency yet published, stated that:

> All over the world, in as many societies as one can think of, there is a struggle over the national narrative, what its components are, who its main constituents are, what its shaping forces are, why some elements have been silenced and why others have triumphed, what lessons about the nation identity -if there is such a single thing- can be learned. This struggle has taken many forms, some academic and discursive, others collective and organized. Often, the intellectual is asked to choose between the blandishments of a synthetic whole and the uncertainties of a discontinuous, fraught contest between the powerful and the powerless. (180)

Such struggles are very apparent in the Irish case and specifically in relation to the legacy of Sean O'Faolain. Take, for example, how, in the same volume, Seamus Deane, perhaps the key pioneer in the use of a broadly postcolonial idiom in the Irish critical context, makes reference to O'Faolain, indicating that from the 1930s some Irish intellectuals concluded that the supposed early failure of the Irish Free State could be attributed to "the cultural regressiveness of a polity that had rephrased spiritual supremacy into Catholic triumphalism and a provincial, censorious and illiberal hatred of modernity. Out of this conjuncture came the new historical revisionism, led by Sean O'Faolain's two books on great Irish leaders of the past, Hugh O'Neill and Daniel O'Connell" (111-112).

More recently, in *The Quest for Modern Ireland: The Battle of Ideas 1912-1986*, a book which attempts to chart the key intellectual strains of 20th-century Ireland, O'Faolain is again awarded a significant protagonism, as the author, Bryan Fanning, a social scientist based at University College Dublin, asserts forcefully that over the period intellectual life in Ireland was characterised by a "post-colonial intellectual schism" manifest as a "sustained conflict between what are commonly described as 'revisionist' and 'anti-revisionist' perspectives" where the former, as well as challenging the official histories of the Irish Free State, and "the fantasy of folk mythologies," attempted to represent "the real Ireland in plain terms" (5). This was particularly achieved by O'Faolain when, during his 1940s period as editor of the influential cultural magazine, *The Bell*, he gave some priority to "non-fiction" and "factual" contributions.

As part of Fanning's schema, O'Faolain is very explicitly fitted into a tradition which also contains the proponents of the "scientific method" of historical enquiry, T.W. Moody and R.D. Edwards as well as their later heir, Roy Foster, with this intellectual genealogy pitted in explicit opposition to the likes of Daniel Corkery and later Richard Kearney or the abovementioned Seamus Deane, all of whom broadly defend an anti-colonial tradition and, to differing degrees, a republican or nationalist ideology. In defence of this position, Fanning briefly makes reference to one quotation from O'Faolain's autobiography *Vive Moi!* and summarily sentences that as a young man he had been caught in a labyrinth of nationalist symbols, but that "O'Faolain's sojourn in this labyrinth was, at best, temporary," emphasising instead that he had grown up in Cork with "no consciousness of Ireland as a separate entity," so allowing Fanning conclude that his subsequent "attachment to

revolutionary republicanism" was short-lived, giving way to a later presentation of himself as "a sort of citizen of the world" (65).

Such an assessment of the ideological parameters of the editor of *The Bell* is largely canonical. Whether coming from a critic in explicit sympathy with the anti-colonial project such as Deane, or from a social scientist like Fanning who is keen to suggest O'Faolain gains "intellectual accountability" through "a homespun empiricism" totally at a remove from the heightened, symbolic discourse of nationalism, there is largely a consensus as to which side, so to speak, O'Faolain is on (45). However, for much that the Corkman is consistently proposed as a key intellectual influence in 20th century Ireland, his work is much neglected, hence the frequent tendency in critics to casually invoke what is, in truth, a much bowdlerised version of a very complex figure. In this paper I propose, by examining a key chapter of his autobiography, *Vive Moi!*, the single text in which the author attempts an explicit self-definition, to show the extent to which such canonical interpretations of O'Faolain's values are skewed, and particularly how they fail to take into consideration his mature attitudes, most especially when the grip of the nationalist hegemony had somewhat loosened and he no longer felt compelled to contest its excesses.

In "College Days," the *Vive Moi!* chapter preceding his descriptions of his time in the IRA, O'Faolain had recalled his experience of drilling with the Irish Volunteers in a deep glen southwest of the city of Cork:

> It was an autumn day of sun and shower, and just as he began to speak to us a faint, gentle sprinkling rain began to fall on us, and then the sun floated out again and sparkled on every leaf and blade of grass as if some invisible presence had passed over us with a lighted taper, binding us together not only in loyalty and in friendship but in something dearer still that I am not ashamed to call love. In that moment life became one with the emotion of Ireland. In that moment I am sure every one of us ceased to be single or individual and became part of one another, in union, almost like coupling lovers. It was a supreme experience to know that you may not only admire your fellow men, or respect them, or even like them, but that you can love them so much that they have no faults, no weaknesses, so that you will never distrust them even for a second [...]. This extraordinarily heart-lifting revelation, this gaiety, this liberation of the spirit, was to stay with us all through the exciting years to come. (135)

However, when we turn to "The Troubles and My Trauma," and his reconsideration of his period as a rebel, we find that here the language takes a marked shift from the romantic depiction of starry-eyed young volunteers at one with nature and Ireland to the "realities" of war. Yet, crucially, O'Faolain's attitude is far from one of rejection of the anti-colonial struggle or of disapproval of the ability of ordinary individuals to embrace a liberationist ideal. It is, one strongly feels, appropriate to quote extensively from O'Faolain's text in order to get a "clear picture"[1] of just how

[1] Fanning suggests, in support of his overall thesis that Ireland was split between two clear bands of antagonists, that the intellectuals in opposition to the anti-colonial tradition sought to use

as a man in his late years he saw and interpreted the formative struggle in which he had taken part and to contrast the evidence from the autobiography with the prevalent view of him as an uncompromising revisionist energetically engaged in a "battle of ideas" conceived on clearly oppositional lines of division against what Fanning calls "the anti-colonial tradition," and with the notion that O'Faolain's attachment to this latter tradition had been merely "temporary." O'Faolain writes:

> There was only one thing that every one of us knew he could do well, and must do well if called on to do it, the least active rank-and-filer, the humblest citizen. If arrested and condemned for any or no reason, each man knew that he could die—'For Ireland!' This is not romanticism; the time for being romantic about those years has long since gone; and any young man of those years, and they were enough, who died facing a firing squad may well have been white and terrified at the end. But it must surely have helped him to know that he was dying for something he believed in as fervently as we believed in Ireland then. I wish to God I could believe in anything as fervently now. (138)

O'Faolain is, then, uncompromising and direct about the "realities" of war:

> I think there was only one thing we really feared in our bones -torture. The Black and Tans in their dark jackets and khaki trousers, and the Auxiliaries, [...] a much finer body of men physically, in their Glengarry caps, tight waists, riding breeches and puttees, their guns strapped to their thighs, could be bastards at this. Nobody wanted to contemplate being stripped, having his testicles rhythmically beaten with a swinging revolver butt, his eyeballs persistently rapped with the ends of fountain pens, bayonets stuck in him, his feet stamped to pulp, his toenails pulled out, and more; all the things that English gentlemen just do not do, nor French, nor Jews, nor Irish, nor Americans, nor anybody, but are done by them all, are being done, one need have no least doubt, somewhere at this moment, and will always go on being done in the time of war. (138)

He thus highlights the particular brutality of the British troops in Ireland but is also anxious to emphasise the disturbing universality of the practice of torture. This widening of the framework to look at the particular happenings of Ireland in global terms allows him then depict the struggle as unequivocally anti-colonial. The prism is not that of an all-encompassing generality suggesting such events are just the common stuff of humanity alone. He draws very clear parallels with other explicitly anti-colonial movements around the world, clarifying that the Irish/British case was not simply a sort of internecine conflict but was the result of native resistance to colonial power, while in a characteristically measured, nuanced manner, serving both to show the particularity of the Irish case and express solidarity with

a language which prioritised clarity. From O'Faolain's *The Bell* he quoted, specifically from a report on teaching standards but in terms which applied to the magazine as a whole, the expressed desire that the aim was "to give the reader a clear picture of what was happening" (46).

other anti-colonial movements, he stresses the structural similarity but divergence in respect of the extent of the oppression suffered:

> The Irish Troubles have been overdramatised, partly because they were the first successful fight against colonialism. In fact we got off lightly by comparison with later anti-imperialists like the Cypriots, Algerians and Africans. What would our lot have been supposing we had been a Mediterranean island fighting France after Europe had become thoroughly inured to the savage techniques of total war? It is true that fighters often had to live under conditions of almost unbearable strain; but for most of the people the Troubled Times [...] bore no comparison to the experiences endured so long and so tenaciously by later revolutionaries elsewhere. Think alone of the mere length of the Algerian struggle against France. In point of time our people did not have to suffer the full voltage of British military oppression for much more than the one year and a half that lay between the spring of 1920 and the truce of 1921. I remember the happy holiday Eileen and I spent in Cape Clear Island even as late as the summer of 1920. We were, indeed, aware, along the way, of the occasional presence of those new strange-looking units, half soldiers, half policemen, in khaki trousers and black police jackets, but we had as yet no suspicion of the brutalities of which this scum of England's earth was capable. (139)

The language here is emotive. It is clearly not the language of a man whose "attachment" to revolutionary republicanism had ended more than 60 years before he rewrote the second version of his autobiography. "A sort of a citizen of the world" was how Fanning saw him from the mid 20s, and while it is true that O'Faolain's whole life was marked by a sustained opening to the world, a curiosity for its variety and a rejection of the exclusively inward turn, this, one must stress, was not an unanchored embrace of an emotionally neutral universal space, but involved an intellectual and real journeying back and forth evident in the comparative optic he here employs. That which allows him make intellectual and emotional connections with, for example, other colonial sites, while offering both similarities and differences before bringing those back to bear on his native place, his own identity, and by extension that of his nation.

O'Faolain's intemperate description of the Black and Tans as "this scum of England's earth" is not rendered in the language of dispassionate, scientifically neutral, clear exposition of the "facts" appropriate to the revisionist tradition. He does, however, look for balance. Turning to relate two key incidents of the war of independence, he recalls the "anger" and "shock" with which he had first read of a report that British troops had burned a village to the ground only to later find that the town's market house alone had burned. But he also records that when things "hotted up," any ambush was routinely followed by "a descent of Tans, Auxies and military on the whole area, and while they were berserk every village cowered, every lonely cottage was sleepless, every horizon glowed with houses burned and looted in reprisal" (139). He records the so-called burning of Cork as follows:

> That night military, Auxiliaries and Tans, infuriated by an earlier IRA attack, decided to inflict their own private reprisal. One lot descended howling and shooting

> like a posse of brigands on the main shopping street of the city [...] set a length [...] of it on fire and looted the shops wholesale; another lot, less interested in looting, burned the city hall. It all made a blaze as comparatively wicked, destructive and terrifying as a bad blitz attack on [...] London. (139-140)

This, however, he explicitly qualifies, pointing to the truth that, horrific and all that it was, there was a degree of poetic licence employed, that Cork had not really been "burned" and that emotions determined both reactions at the time and the manner in which the Troubles were "painted in overdark colours by later writers" (140). O'Faolain is looking for balance as well as emphasising the degree to which the telling of this history is always mediated, always rendered through an interpretation of images and language. By doing so he is sounding a note of caution that the "truth" presented may not be all it seems as the anti-colonial side, for example, represent events in a clearly heightened, subjective manner. He does not, however, redress this situation, or correct it, by the presentation of the objective reality that is definitive. Instead he goes on to tell more "stories" where, far from, in a sense, stopping and projecting a distant, dispassionate optic, with the ability to fix a clear and true picture, we push on to hear of someone else's explicitly emotional involvement in the events, in what amounts to a very human sort of dialogue where each participant does not always agree.

What we find is a simultaneous attachment and detachment. Just as he registers his emotional reaction to the Black and Tans as "scum," he makes a determined intellectual effort to stand back from this reaction, critique it rationally and reveal how the stories, narratives and texts of the struggle emerge from a complex matrix of tensions. Yet, as is evident in the following quotation, having just censured the partisan quality of much nationalist representation, he appears to turn back, to forcefully respond to and critique British colonial action through his appropriation of the language of reprobation habitually employed by the colonial power to disqualify anti-colonial movements: that of "terrorism." This turn we must consider, then, not just with regards to the specific events of the 1920s but also in relation to the interpretations of the decades of conflict that marked the end of the century, and to the reality that as a mature participant in the debates around Ireland's anti-colonial history, and as someone aware of how his personal, political and intellectual trajectory was routinely invoked by defenders of the anti-colonial tradition, his words here expressed serve to disrupt and resist canonical traditions. Indeed, here O'Faolain also graphically shows the extent to which the "attachment" to this formative anti-colonial struggle was anything but short-lived, as it continued to resonate, involuntarily, throughout his life in the form of recurring nightmares, the trauma resulting from colonial terror:

> The truth of it is that they were both wonderful times and nightmare times. Even still, after forty years have blunted my worst memories of them, I still frequently awake sweating from a nightmare that has whirled me back among them again. The worst of it was the war of nerves, for [...] the aim of the British was not only to break the nerve of the fighters but to break a whole people; and before the end came they had, by countless devices, come dangerously close to doing just this.

> They closed life in on us tighter and tighter every month through a varied, incessant and inventive terrorism, constant and often pointless raids and arrests, humiliating and brutal beatings-up in city streets, casual murders on country roads, reprisals both unofficial and official—which usually meant the burning down in public of a sympathiser's home and business—early curfews [...] after which the Tans, who operated outside every known law and war-convention, roved the dark streets in search of victims or loot. (140-141)

We find in O'Faolain's representation of the Anglo-Irish struggle, and in the re-interpretations of his role in this conflict which he appears to encourage in his reader, an illustrative example of a double dynamic similar to that proposed by Said where he indicates as appropriate to a developed critical and literary sensibility a sensitivity in readers as to how language is not fixed or finite but achieves meaning in context. In "The Return to Philology," a key late essay published in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Said encourages what he calls a "philological" or literary style of reading which involves two crucial "motions:" "reception" and "resistance." He first explains "reception" as follows:

> Reception is submitting oneself knowledgeably to texts and treating them provisionally at first as discrete objects (since this is how they are initially encountered); moving then, by dint of expanding and elucidating the often obscure or invisible frameworks in which they exist, to their historical situations and the way [...] certain structures of attitude, feeling, and rhetoric get entangled with some currents, some historical and social formulations of their context. Only by receiving the text in all its complexity and with the critical awareness of change [...] can one move from the specific to the general both integratively and synthetically. (61)

It is not only productive to consider O'Faolain's efforts in, for example, *The Bell* in such terms in order to achieve a nuanced understanding of the magazine's significance, but imperative when considering his work and his personal profile as a whole and crucially his legacy in relation to its appropriation by often very different intellectual traditions. In his autobiography O'Faolain "moves terrorism," as Said recommends, to highlight the extent to which it is employed as part of a wider empowered discourse. If in the historical context of Irish/British relations it is normally, or historically, used to render or classify the anti-colonial movement as outside the limits of acceptable "human" behaviour, often in a taxonomy of bestial disqualification that fitted in with the broader phenomenon of racial stereotyping, we find it here redeployed in a way that "moves" the reader to a wider consideration of the interpretative tensions inherent in any reading, and specifically the broad geo-political and cultural framework, that of colonial power relations, and to an understanding, along the lines of Said's *Orientalism*, of the key role language and discourse have at the heart of the structures that sustain the relationship. And, crucially, such a move is undertaken in clear sympathy with the history of anti-colonialism. In contrast to such a style of "receptive" reading, it would be inaccurate to adduce as indicative of a deep ideological opposition to Irish anti-colonialism in O'Faolain, a series of *Bell* polemics specific to a period of his career without due consideration of how these

relate to or are consistent with his overall career and specifically to his key statement of self-definition, his autobiography. Far more than in his *Bell* polemics, it is in *Vive Moi!* he attempts to move from the specific to the general, and it is consequently incumbent on his readers to afford due attention to such complexity and to faithfully reflect changes resulting from different historical situations.

Also, as we see in the above quotation, against the power of colonial representation O'Faolain looks to the stability of the universal frame of reference of international law and human rights to provide a set of parameters to which to appeal in the name of human solidarity. In this he evidences what Said calls a "resistance" to the empowered discourse of hegemonic formations by widening the horizon beyond the national or British-Irish sphere. This in essence is what he promotes through his idea of "resistance:" the cultivation of the ability to tease out the difference between prevailing shibboleths or consecrated, canonical, institutionally-sanctioned knowledge and alternative more challenging, complex and interacting traditions. Said writes that:

> A reader is in a place, in a school or university, in a work place, or in a specific country at a particular time, situation, and so forth. But these are not passive frameworks. In the process of widening the humanistic horizon, its achievements of insight and understanding, the framework must be actively understood, constructed and interpreted. (*Humanism* 75)

As can be seen elsewhere, such as in *The Bell*, O'Faolain values the possibilities provided by "facts," or by relatively fixed frameworks and vocabularies of universal rights and by the deployment of empirical data and indexes of development and welfare even as he simultaneously "moves" to a secular, or in Said's parlance, "philological" positioning of resistance that critiques this "faith" in the transparency, or objective truth of an empirical idea of reality he, and his peoples, are, paradoxically, often the direct beneficiaries of. This seems to be a key pattern we find, with striking consistency, in the public intellectual participation of O'Faolain. Also, the example we have just looked at, where O'Faolain moves the language of terrorism as a tool against the colonial power in an expression of specific native identity with a will to empowerment, while simultaneously appealing to the power of the perhaps totalising narratives of human rights and development, is strikingly reminiscent of Said's defence of Palestine.

That Said's project, like that of O'Faolain, is much more radical than the sort of anti-colonial struggle that presumes a binary struggle in purely oppositional terms, so largely replicating the existing pattern of power, is often lost on critics who focus exclusively on Said's defence of an oppositional politics. But this, like Fanning's conclusions on O'Faolain's position in Ireland's supposed "Battle of Ideas," drawn from the "non-fiction" or "factual" pieces in *The Bell*, is not the full story. Said is not just an intellectual per se but also a scholar of literature. As we see particularly in "The Return to Philology," he proposes that literature, and the aesthetic in the broadest sense, is key to his world view, to his sense of self and to his belief that a critical understanding of the potential power of literature and art

allows him to go beyond hegemonic frameworks of interpretation, to, in a manner of speaking, go beyond the space of specialism and its tendency to use what he terms a "pre-packaged idiom" (72). Literature he links to the capacity for being critical, for offering a position from which to address or speak to "the world" and, in a word, offer "resistance" to what he calls the "empiricist illusion" around which so much of power and specifically colonial power is arranged.[2] Such a critical perspective, exemplified in the specifically literary trope of paradox that problematises empirical clarity, is at the heart of what Said considers to be a humanistic criticism, and it is its performative praxis that gives it a key democratic function in the negotiation of new relations of power. This takes place through the voiced participation, the dialogue of different stories that do not just demand the abandonment of subjective identity in favour of an objective truth feigning neutrality, but instead proposes subjective identity as process, as a reality in motion that goes back and forth not in a fixed opposition but as a constantly performed and renegotiated articulation of reality and identity. As Said indicates:

> Art is not simply there: it exists intensely in a state of unreconciled opposition to the depredations of daily life, the uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor. One can call this heightened status for art the result of performance, of protracted elaboration (as in the structures of a great novel or poem), of ingenious execution and insight: I myself cannot do without the category of the aesthetic as, in the final analysis, providing resistance not only to my own efforts to understand and clarify and elucidate as reader, but also as escaping the levelling pressures of everyday experience from which, however, art paradoxically derives. (*Humanism* 63)

Literature is thus fundamentally important. That literature could also be of key importance to O'Faolain should come as no surprise. He is of course a prominent writer of fiction as well as a well-known public intellectual. In *Vive Moi!* as a whole we can perceive how in his presentation of his life story he is anxious to present himself as an artist more than as an intellectual, or perhaps more correctly as a plurality of selves who gain expression particularly through the trope of paradox. He seems to seek to introduce to canonical readings of who or what he is an unclassifiable literary note of discord that serves to upset facile classifications and propose new parameters of interpretation, new possibilities of identity in an exchange, a dialogue, that can be interpreted, in line with the example proposed by Said, as fundamentally democratic.

Reading Fanning's study one could be forgiven for forgetting completely that O'Faolain was principally a writer of fiction, but not if one pays due attention to *Vive Moi!* It is, in effect, his life "story" and at no stage does he shy away from this. Rather he seems particularly keen to emphasise the fact, his presumably deliberate virtual elision of his *Bell* years perhaps intended as a signpost in this direction. In his

[2] Ciaran Brady notes that in its less subtle manifestations Irish revisionism tended to produce "a crude, unreflective empiricism" (7).

war years chapter it becomes apparent that, while attempting to present a balanced consideration of some events of the conflict, it is the focus on the power of the possibilities of narrative to bring about reactions, particularly of collective action, and of his capacity to paint his own picture of the war that is central.

First, he recalls the tense atmosphere through which he sought to live a relatively ordinary life, recording that to disobey nightly curfews very likely meant dangerous encounters with the colonial troops. One evening, after leaving his girl home, he was rushing on his way with a few minutes before curfew left when:

> A Lancia truck, wire-netted against bombs, loaded with Tans, drew up behind me; three of them jumped out, revolvers drawn, and grabbed me. Then, while the rest of them leaned over the side of the truck with expectant grins, they searched me and questioned me, told me that all students were fucking Sinn Feiners, laughed at my protests that I was a loyal citizen of the Empire ("Wasn't my own father a Royal Irish Constabulary man?"), threatened to shoot me in the guts, to strip me, to throw me in the river, to kick my balls flat, to throw me into the Lancia as a 'hostage' -a common trick of theirs, meaning that I would be tied with my wrists over my head to the peak of the netting, and that if they were attacked during the night by the IRA I would pay for it- and finally, tiring of their fun, they ordered me to prove my alleged loyalty by singing "God Save the King." I thanked my stars for the days when I used to be a good, pro-British little boy, and used to go with my father on Sundays up to the Victoria Barracks to see the church parade, which always ended with the band blaring out the royal anthem. I threw out my chest, in imitation of those days, and sang it for all my lungs were worth: Send him victorious, Happy and glorious, Long to reign over us, God save the King. "Right," one long black-visaged fellow said. "Now run, you bastard! You've one minute by my watch to get to that corner." (141-142)

And run he did, with the sound of gunfire after him. Mindful that events such as this often ended with a bullet in the back and a press announcement reporting with factual clarity that the victim had been "shot while attempting to escape," O'Faolain turns to reflect that the incident "was not even a story worth telling afterwards, except to raise a laugh. The stories that were worth telling produced grim silence or whispered curses: they had blood on them" (142). He seems to be clearly drawing our attention to the manner in which events such as these can be and are selected by the teller with a view to actively shaping the framework of interpretation, to producing meaning, to provoking a reaction in the reader or listener, whether laughter or grim silence rather than simply communicating a self-evident, neutral reality.

With this, he proceeds to draw a contrast between his own insignificant student escapades, the thuggish, terrorising Tans and the activity of those he terms "our regular fighters or guerrillas" (142). The language in the brief portrait of the latter is intentioned and carefully chosen to give a clearly heroic meaning. They were, for example "few in number," yet they managed to be present both in city streets and open countryside. Not only did they cover all space but also all time: "For these men every day was intense, exhausting and relentless: they could never

slacken" (142). And, we are invited to conclude, never did. If they cover all space and time of what is the nation, in true heroism they take this same nation to its destiny, carrying "the full strain of the fight, day in day out, on their backs" (142). The odds against which they fight were of course great with, for example, Tom Barry's West Cork brigade fighting the might of "some three thousand war-hardened British military and police, Auxiliaries and Black and Tans" with just thirty-five rifles, twenty revolvers and a tiny amount of ammunition (142). Clearly, the selection of language, imagery and data is designed to "move" the reader to an identification with the heroic cause. The Anglo-Irish war section concludes:

> There never was an Irish Republican Army constantly in the field. The fight was carried through by those tremendously gallant few, darting here and there for an ambush, folding back into their 'normal' lives until they could get another crack at the enemy. They could not, it must always be said, have done anything without the silence, patience, and loyal help of the whole people. (142-143)

We have thus the gallant guerrillas and the people/nation effectively carrying each other in perfect harmony and unity against the colonial enemy. Having shown that the choice was available for the teller to pick alternative options, he has chosen and drawn attention to this choice in an explicit act of attachment or affiliation which allows him, now an old man, associate himself both with the "guerrillas" and "the whole people."

When Fanning suggests he belongs to a tradition that is in clear opposition to revolutionary republicanism he is plainly wrong. Towards the end of the chapter "The Troubles and My Trauma," O'Faolain refers to the 1923 elections when de Valera's Sinn Fein won 43 seats to the government's 53 and remarks: "It was an illustration of Republican tenacity that, even to this day, makes my heart leap" (169). And when Fanning confidently asserts that he belongs to a tradition of empiricist positivism he is doubly wrong. In the introduction to the recently published *The Granta Book of the Irish Short Story*, Booker Prize-winning author, Anne Enright, comes much closer to understanding his "belongings" and "affiliations" that, far from "fitting in" with empirical history writing, show him belonging to a very different tribe. She writes:

> There is a lingering unease about how Irish writers negotiate ideas about "Ireland" (the country we talk about, as opposed to the place where we live), for readers both at home and abroad. We move, in decreasing circles, around the problem Seán Ó Faoláin voiced in 1948. 'There was hardly an Irish writer who was not on the side of the movement for Irish political independence,' he writes. 'Immediately it was achieved they became critical of the nation. This is what makes all politicians say that writers are an unreliable tribe. They are. It is their métier.' (xiv)

The issue, then, appears to be not that O'Faolain has somehow grown out of his early infatuation with revolutionary republicanism or its near cousin nationalism to embrace a supposedly more mature, modern, empiricist world view, but that his opposition to this nationalist tradition is as a result of its becoming empowered and

hegemonic with the emergence of the independent Free State.[3] When O'Faolain presents us with a vision of a "whole" people in harmony with its fighters in opposition to or in anti-colonial struggle against the dominant British power, he is in favour of, belongs to and solidifies it by his representation in plainly heroic and romantic terms. But when this entity becomes empowered and the holist nation ideal becomes increasingly totalised, with the potential for totalitarian manifestations that are hostile to his republican ideas, then he becomes disloyal. His position is to dissent.

This dissent may take the outward appearance, and manifest similarities with the ideology of Fanning, but at heart it is radically different. Fanning not only places O'Faolain neatly into the empirical, positivist tradition but makes him its cornerstone while also very explicitly counterpointing it, in a misleading dichotomy expressed as *The Bell* in opposition to the key 1970s magazine, *The Crane Bag*. Here the latter of the two journals is taken to represent, in a worryingly totalising conflation, a single literary, mytho-poetic, metaphysical and post-colonial tradition. Its scholarly touchstones were the philosophical and especially hermeneutical tradition of Richard Kearney and to a lesser extent the literary, and broadly postcolonial, criticism of Deane. Fanning correctly identifies how Deane's literary criticism was "explicitly in solidarity with Northern nationalism" and "Kearney's thesis was that one could engage with the atavisms of violent nationalism only from within. This required sympathy and empathy with the mythic components of national identity" (5). Significantly, in sympathy with *The Crane Bag* "side," Fanning also places the anti-revisionist historian Brendan Bradshaw and his opposition to attempts to promote "value-free history" (6). Fanning's associations and choices of counterparts reveal a very evident determination to create two solid traditions with opposed values in clear opposition.

This he undertakes in a manner which presumes to be able to reveal a clear exposition of objective truth, while again denying, occluding or failing to recognise his own constituting role in partly creating these traditions. As we have just seen, O'Faolain deals with what, in Fanning's language, are the "atavisms of violent nationalism" from within. He does show, as in his heroic depiction of the struggle of Tom Barry and his men, "sympathy and empathy with the mythic components of national identity" (5). He does affiliate with "the people" conceived as a national whole, and does so, not through the representation of them in "plain terms" or after the manner of "explicitly empirical history" (5-6), but in a self-consciously literary manner.

Thus it is difficult to not, at the very least, feel that Fanning's categorisation is highly problematic. It is appropriate to emphasise that Fanning's thesis reflects the current, accepted, canonical interpretation of the role and importance of O'Faolain.

[3] This also in part explains how he could, as a logical consequence of his rejection of the treaty of independence, still feel able to identify with de Valera's Sinn Fein when in opposition but not when it later transformed into Fianna Fail and became the dominant political force in the country, in O'Faolain's view abandoning on the way its roots in a genuinely republican tradition.

This interpretation is key to contemporary understanding of Irish national identity and its relation to modernity, history and crucially the Northern Irish conflict which has dominated and inflected all aspects of life in both Ireland and Britain over the last decades. In "The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals," the final essay in his last book, the stimulating *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Edward Said concludes that one of the more urgent struggles that should engage the scholar is the need to "protect against and forestall the disappearance of the past [...] the reformulation of tradition, and the construction of simplified bowdlerizations of history" (141). Views, one feels, that are relevant to any contemporary assessment of the importance of Sean O'Faolain.

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RACIALISATION AND DYSTOPIANISM IN THE IRISH LITERARY CONTEXT: A CASE-STUDY*

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Abstract

The "anomalous state" of Ireland that David Lloyd (7) referred to in his homonymous volume portrays accurately the in-betweenness in which the Irish have been historically relegated. In this respect, not only critical theory but also a considerable number of literary works have attempted to give voice, respond and, ultimately, challenge the stereotypical imagery associated with the country in the heyday of the Victorian era and afterwards. Peter Dickinson's rather unknown *The Green Gene* (1973) emerges as a noteworthy example of how notions of race in an Irish/Celtic context can be anatomised through traditional dystopian tropes. Thus, the aim in this study is to analyse how this work epitomises a new way of dealing with the very concept of race and how, in this precise case, it is strongly determined by the excesses of science and genetic manipulation, two questions that have been strongly related with dystopian literature.

Key words: Race, dystopia, postcolonialism, *The Green Gene*, satire.

Resumen

El "estado anómalo" al que se refería David Lloyd (7) en su obra homónima describe a la perfección la indefinición sociopolítica, económica e, incluso, geográfica, a la que se ha relegado al pueblo irlandés a lo largo de su historia. En este sentido, tanto la crítica literaria como la comunidad de escritores han intentado dar voz y cuestionar los clichés y estereotipos que se asociaron al país en el periodo de máxima algidez del victorianismo. *The Green Gene* (1973), novela escrita por Peter Dickinson y escasamente conocida, entremezcla cuestiones raciales largamente debatidas con una aproximación distópica a través de la cual el autor disecciona la realidad del pueblo irlandés en una época clave en su desarrollo como país. De esta manera, el objetivo de este estudio es el de analizar cómo esta novela representa una nueva e innovadora vía en el tratamiento del concepto de raza y cómo esta idea viene altamente determinada por los excesos de la ciencia y la manipulación genética, dos cuestiones que siempre han estado íntimamente ligadas con la literatura distópica.

Palabras clave: raza, distopía, postcolonialismo, *The Green Gene*, sátira.

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The "anomalous state" of Ireland that David Lloyd (7) referred to in his homonymous volume portrays accurately the in-betweeness in which the Irish have been historically relegated, in terms and conditions that scholars and academics in the line of Declan Kiberd, Seamus Deane or Clare Carroll have considered rather vague and sometimes untenable. In the postcolonial framework in which the country has been located by critics from Edward Said to Luke Gibbons (*Transformations*; *Gaelic*), Ireland has been entrapped in the ambivalences that underlie its own peculiar characteristics as a country that has undergone a severe though often veiled colonisation. In this respect, not only critical theory but also a considerable number of literary works have attempted to give voice, respond and, ultimately, challenge the stereotypical imagery associated with the country in the heyday of the Victorian era and afterwards. These approaches aimed at substantiating the idea that Irish citizens should be the target of the same process of racialisation as that of other native populations in Nigeria, India or the West Indies. The purpose behind this process was, thus, to objectify the Irish population as though it belonged to a different race, understood not only in terms of the skin colour but also in relation to more sociological, philosophical or anthropological considerations.

As it is widely known, the "perforce" ostracism of Ireland also awoke a profound interest in the context of Irish literature, in which authors like William Molyneux, Jonathan Swift, Maria Edgeworth, W.B. Yeats or George Bernard Shaw, among others, denounced, usually in a satirical way, the unfair treatment received by the country and its *de iure* colonial condition. In this like vein, the list of writings that revolve around this question is long and some of them would arise as good and appropriate exponents of what might be labelled as anti-colonial literature. The most inquisitive works of William Molyneux, Jonathan Swift, Maria Edgeworth, George Bernard Shaw or Brian Friel opened the path to new ways of dealing with the intricacies of colonialism and the effects it produced on the Irish population. The tone that prevails in the approach to Britain's colonial practices in Ireland is sustained upon the suffocating and occasionally revolting atmosphere that is depicted in them, especially noticeable in Swift's cannibalistic proposal of 1729. It goes without saying that Ireland has been extraordinarily prolific in the production of a type of literature that sought to, through the sharp use of irony and satire, uncover the evils of colonialism. However, if we focus more specifically on this paper's main concern, the use of dystopia in inextricable conjunction with satire has not been a recurrent choice among Irish authors, although it is manifestly present in novels such as Eilis Ni Dhuibhne's *The Bray House* (1990) or Catherine Brophy's *Dark Paradise* (1992), in which both writers analyse Ireland from multiple and, occasionally, unexplored perspectives. Peter Dickinson's rather unknown *The Green Gene* (1973) emerges as a noteworthy example of how notions of race in an

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Irish/Celtic context can be anatomised through traditional dystopian tropes. Thus, the aim in this study is to analyse how this work epitomises a new way of dealing with the very concept of race and how, in this precise case, it is strongly determined by the excesses of genetic and scientific manipulation.

The dystopic microcosm Dickinson constructs for *The Green Gene* is founded upon the consequences that derive from the racial situation in Britain at a period of time that is not clearly specified.[1] The story narrates the vicissitudes of a Hindu statistician, P.P. Humayan, who arrives in Britain to investigate the genetic reasons that might have caused the outburst of green-skinned people and the possibilities that this population might eventually outnumber the white, mainstream, Anglo-Saxon citizens. In London, Humayan starts working for the so-called Race Relations Board (RRB), an institution that claims to harmonise all the racial sensibilities that exist in the country and which apparently struggles to meet with all their necessities in the most equalitarian way possible. However, the scientist soon discovers that the living conditions of the green people do not exactly respond to the idealistic scenario designed by the members of the RRB. Humayan's strolls around the area where he lives allow him to realise that, contrary to its claims, the RRB is subliminally implementing a harsh policy of exclusion in which green people are continuously rejected.

It is precisely the marginalised position of the greens what enables Dickinson to enhance the theoretical postulates that defined the Irish, and extensively the Celtic population, as a distinct, and therefore, a minority race. Perhaps echoing the anthropological treatises that legitimated the belief that all those peoples who departed from the officially sanctioned and accepted races were abnormal or deficient creatures, the green characters in the novel are regarded as genetic deviations.[2] To endow this idea with a deeper sense of verisimilitude, Dickinson wisely includes introductory paragraphs in each of the chapters in which he fictionalises the words of the British highest political authorities, actually the ones that maintain the racial barrier as unbridgeable as possible: "And the same thing *mutatis mutandis*, applied to the Celts and the Celtic Law. It was an irrelevance that the majority of Celts, and no Saxons, had green skins. That was a genetic accident" (7). In relation to this last idea, Jim Mac Laughlin argues that the Irish population in Victorian Britain was "forced to define themselves in terms of their 'otherness' and perceived themselves as 'mutant people'" (61). The words uttered by the Home Secretary in the previous quote point to the extended and widely accepted conviction that racial difference

[1] Although the action of the novel is not framed in a clear period of time, it clearly echoes the situation that the Irish emigrants were forced to go through in Victorian Britain. The number of studies, literary, historical and sociological, that gravitate around this question are considerable and reveal the discrimination that Irish experimented in Great Britain (See Hickman and Walter; Paz).

[2] As John Brannigan points out: "The Irish were, thus, an anomaly, an aberration, in an otherwise effective visual schema of racial distinction, and it is this anomalous position —a 'white colony' in an empire premised upon white superiority, or as Gibbons memorably coined , 'a First World country, but with a Third World memory'" (180).

necessarily meant otherness and, similarly to what happened to the African-American population in the United States, segregation.

Apart from suggesting a conspicuous parallelism with the country's colour "par excellence," the utilisation of green-skinned characters in the novel also intends to deepen into the incongruities that lay at the heart of the colonisation of Ireland. The takeover and exploitation of the island never responded to the British imperial architecture, founded on the assumption that the country had a sense of duty and responsibility to indoctrinate and enlighten those populations that were categorised merely as savages. The main criterion to taxonomise these native peoples as inferior was chiefly based on racial considerations, a fact that, in the end, nourished the notion of the "white man's burden." However, Gibbons assuredly argues that these preconceptions could not possibly have an actual realisation in Ireland since British colonisers and Irish people belonged to the same race: "The 'otherness' and alien character of Irish experience was all the more disconcerting precisely because it did not lend itself to visible racial divide" (*Transformations* 149).[3] In *The Green Gene*, Dickinson consciously takes this very conceptualisation to the extreme and builds up a socio-political scenario in which the Celtic sectors are undermined in ways similar to the African, South-American or Asian citizens. Therefore, what the novelist achieves by "colouring" the skin of Irish people is to bring into the forefront a thought that enabled many colonial advocates to endorse the racial distinctiveness of the British with respect to the Irish. According to Joseph Lennon, studies conducted by General Vallancey, Henry O'Brien or Sir William Betham concluded that the "Celtic race" had "Eastern origins, a conclusion based on various readings and misreadings of medieval and classical allusions to the Celt" (130).

Lennon's illuminating analysis on Irish Orientalism leads us to echo Said's foundational study and how his examination of the Oriental as the "other" can be fully applied in *The Green Gene*.[4] Said noted that the biased reconstruction of the Orient as an entity opposed to the Occident was based on the promulgation of a series of stereotypes and clichés that sought both to debase the Oriental subjects and also to define them not as what they were but as what they were not. The foundations of imperialism were, therefore, sustained upon the fabrication of these stereotypes as a way to strengthen the power relationships that were inherent to this process. In his reading of *Orientalism*, John McLeod points out that colonialism drew on five main concepts that should project a completely distorted and partial image of the Orient as a way to justify the atrocities perpetrated in these territories. McLeod refers to backwardness, strangeness, femininity, race and gender as the key assumptions

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[3] In this respect, it is interesting to note what Seamus Taylor suggests about this issue. He refers to Robert Miles's *Racism and the Migrant Labour* to reaffirm the idea that "phenotypical difference in the form of skin colour only takes on significance if a social significance is attached to it" (15).

[4] Clare Carroll's ideas also gravitate around Ireland as an Oriental nation because: "In comparing Ireland in the West to the 'countries of the East,' Gerald [of Wales] places both cultures not only outside European culture but also in an exotic place of the bizarre and unknown, in what could be seen as an early example of English orientalist discourse" (67).

elaborated by the imperial nations in order to enlarge the differences with the native populations (44-46). In *The Green Gene*, Dickinson's description of the greens would adjust to what Said put forward in *Orientalism*, since they are often regarded as brutalised beings only capable of satisfying their most primary instincts. In this respect, women in the colonised lands were usually characterised as naturally-born sexual creatures, source of endless pleasures and always ready to comply with the desires of the coloniser.[5] Women in *The Green Gene* soundly respond to this cliché and are represented as beings whose amatory skills are both glorified and fantasised: "'And of course, my dear fellow,' he added, 'you will not go chasing the green ladies. Oh no. The English are very superstitious about such things. I tell you often I have laughed at their ignorances, and they believe the green ladies have special talents, you know?'" (57). Paradoxically enough, Humayan, himself a member of an ethnic minority, believes that the inferior racial condition of the green women allow him to have free and unrestricted sexual access.

Following with the re-examination of these stereotypes, Dickinson also retakes a question that was significantly empowered by the imperial ideologists and which defended the metropolitan supremacy in terms of progress as opposed to the native backwardness. The Western nations believed that the scientific or technological development was a way to undercut any expression of fantasy, which they associated with the realm of the superstitious. The rush for the discovery of new machinery and equipments at the end of the nineteenth century was not only impelled by the country's own necessities but also and, most importantly, as a display of pragmatism. As was stated above, all that escaped from these criteria was considered pernicious and therefore prone to be cleansed and civilised. While the colonial territories, with an especial emphasis on the African continent, were repeatedly identified with all types of mysterious practices —hoodoo, voodoo, black magic, witchcraft—, the Western countries proclaimed their industriousness and common sense. If we concentrate on the context of the Anglo-Irish relationships, this opposition was made clear from the very moment in which Ireland was defined simply as a rural country anchored to a meaningless folkloric past, with no capacity to partake of the modernising impulse of its British neighbours and thus incapable of turning into a developed country.

The debate that Dickinson proposes in *The Green Gene* is particularly relevant as he centres on the way the British authorities sanctioned their own socio-cultural and historical background and downgraded the Irish, which they perceive as a mere compilation of myths and legends. The words that follow are pronounced by the Minister of Education in an official statement on the question of which textbooks are the most appropriate for British school children: "But I am sorry to have to tell the House that many scholars have refused to abandon the myths —often patently

[5] In relation to this idea, Ania Loomba points out that: "The long pictorial tradition in which the four continents were represented as women now generated images of America or Africa that positioned these continents as available for plunder, possession, discovery and conquest" (151).

absurd and even wicked myths— on which their reputation is founded. It has been a matter of discovering scientists of real calibre who are prepared to take a more realistic view of the social function of history" (24).[6] Apart from discarding Irish history as a source of "absurd" and "wicked" myths, the attitude shown by this representative evinces the same patronising tone as, for instance, when Captain Lancey addresses the "childish" Irish characters in Friel's *Translations*:

> Lancey: I see [*He clears his throat. He speaks as if he were addressing children —a shade too loudly and enunciating excessively.*] You may have seen me—seen me—working in this section—section?—working. We are here—here—in this place—you understand?—to make a map—a map—a map and— [Act I, sc. I, 30]

In Dickinson's novel, it is not a question of which historical or cultural tradition is better, which is obviously taken for granted by the speaker. It also points to the necessity of the imperial nation to substitute or erase these local or native expressions to impose their own, much in the line of what Friel describes with the Anglicisation of Irish place-names in his play.

Whenever stereotyping is dealt with, drinking and violence must be necessarily touched upon as they have been historically conjoined with the personality and psychological profile of the Irish people. In his thought-provoking study *Racism in the Irish Experience* (2004), Steven Gardner argues that the Irish immigrant in Victorian Britain was discriminated in a three-fold way: religion, class and race. The reasons to justify their socio-economic exclusion were mainly related to their natural tendency towards violence and drunkenness, which Gardner also connects with their religious background: "The Irish were thus racialised as one section of a more widely racialised working class, but also with an extra dimension. In the logic of this view, their natural propensity for fighting, drinking and low morals, present to a certain extent among English Protestant workers, was exacerbated by their popish religion and inferior cultural background" (123). *The Green Gene* is quite prolific in the description of situations in which the green population is accused, often without any clear evidence, of causing riots and disturbances in London. In

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[6] Also exhibiting a similar paternalistic position, the Minister for Arts argues that the budget destined to the expansion of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic art cannot be the same: "I cannot assert too strongly that the Arts Council Grants are distributed with absolute impartiality between the Celtic and Saxon sections of our community, bearing in mind the differing financial demands of different arts. The last clause is the vital one. It so happens that the Saxon culture covers a wider range of artistic endeavour than the Celtic culture. Painting, sculpture and all the visual arts have become increasingly expensive in our day, while the verbal and musical arts in which the Celts traditionally excel have remained comparatively cheap" (66). The Minister's words simply evidence the generalised assumption that Irish people were only good at partying around, cracking jokes and playing jigs and reels, being the latter completely disregarded by the Minister as music is a minor, cheaper artistic manifestation. Related to this idea, Hickman and Walter argue that the Irish population living in Victorian Britain was seen as "artistic, impractical and unreliable in contrast to rational, thrusting Anglo-Saxons" (13).

the novel, drinking and violence seem to be deeply rooted in the green citizens, who are made responsible for several explosions that take place in the city. One of these assaults has a more than obvious symbolical implication for it is Harrod's, one of the most recognisable icons of British culture –in spite of its Arabian ownership– the target of the bombing.

In this like vein, many sociologists and anthropologists believed that these outbursts of violence were mostly the result of the binge drinking propensity that Irish people had and which, as Gardner points out, led many municipal and police forces to develop "patterns of policing that prioritised visible street crime, which meant, *de facto*, a focus on, and large presence in, areas where Irish people congregated" (122). In the novel, Anglo-Saxon citizens share the idea that massive drinking is part of the Irish idiosyncrasy, a fact that explains why they behave in the way they do and also why they are displaced and dislocated in the British social spectrum. As in many colonialist discourses, this kind of simplistic generalisations led to distortion and to present an image of the native populations that did not correspond with their own reality.[7] Consequently, generalisation inevitably results in caricature, as the following quotation demonstrates: "'Checking for empty bottles,' she said. 'Moirag's half-drunk in the mornings and fully drink in the evenings—they all are. Luckily she's got a head like an iron, but she does hide her empties in funny places'" (27). The use of the very recurrent Gaelic name Moirag already hints at the greenness of this character and, subsequently, at her inevitable relation with alcohol. Also, her job in the domestic service determines the social stratum she belongs to and exemplifies once again that Irish immigrants in Britain were doomed to occupy those jobs that were discarded by "mainstream citizens." Echoing the policies of exclusion of the African-Americans in the public services, Moirag is not allowed to interact with the Anglo-Saxon members of the household and is consequently located in separate areas: "Greens in domestic service had to be separately accommodated, which meant having their own plumbing and cooking, in London, anyway" (27).[8]

As was stated in the introduction, the racialisation of the green characters in the novel ends up generating an atmosphere of distrust, hatred, racial compartmentalisation, control and surveillance that constitutes the perfect arena for the establishment of a dystopian society. From the beginning of the novel, Dickinson stresses the clear divisions that exist in the country and explores the causes and

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[7] Homi K. Bhabha argues that this is precisely one of the aims of the colonialist discourse: "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (43).

[8] The parallelisms between the racism suffered by the Irish and African-American have been many times paralleled. In *The Green Gene*, Dickinson seems to have this connection in mind from the moment in which he colours the skin of the green citizens in order to make their "racial condition" more explicit. Noel Ignatiev elaborates further on this question and claims that: "In the early years Irish were frequently referred to as 'Niggers turned inside out'; the Negroes, for their part, were sometimes called 'smoked Irish,' an appellation they must have found no more flattering than it was intended to be" (41).

consequences of this situation. The story is prolific in allusions to zoning laws and to areas that cannot be trespassed by green people, bringing about their complete ghettoisation and a subsequent impossibility to achieve full integration. Dystopian novels are characterised by the suffocating environment in which they are set, usually as a result of the excesses of science and technology, as in Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) or of a dictatorship, as in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Dystopian literature aimed at denouncing the nightmarish consequences that this kind of regimes could bring about and how the social well-being could be demolished if any of these leaders could take over power. As is widely known, Orwell's novel dissects not only the dangers of a dictatorship but also and, perhaps more significantly, the mechanisms such as propaganda, media manipulation or historical distortion that contribute to legitimise it.

The Green Gene exhibits some of the traits that are recognisable in any dystopia, although most of them are directly related to the racial issues that have been discussed so far. Dickinson draws our attention to the patent compartmentalisation of the green population in both the professional and personal realms, which pushes them into a ghettoisised labyrinth from which it is difficult to escape.[9] The parallelisms that could be drawn are multiple and all of them reasonable in historical terms. Bearing in mind the novel's date of publication, it seems that the presence of the Northern Irish Troubles is an unavoidable source of veiled allusions, especially when characters refer to the zoning laws or to green-only/Anglo-Saxon-only areas. The underlying references to religious sectarianism, to the Peace Lines as horrendous symbols of the most discarnate separatism and to the riots caused by either of these factions are recurrent throughout the narrative, as this dialogue between Humayan and her landlady evinces:

> 'How does one distinguish the border of a zone' said Humayan. 'You don't,' she said. 'You're supposed to know. But when you have been here a couple of weeks you'll find you can smell it. Get to a Green Zone, though, and you'll see the riot barriers stacked up. You're not allowed in there. Right, let's cross'.... 'I have read about the zoning laws,' he said stiffly. 'I was not aware that persons of different races were forbidden to walk together in a Saxon Zone' (14).

This sectarian apartheid Dickinson examines in *The Green Gene* is, therefore, the element that more clearly triggers its dystopian atmosphere. It was argued above that the distortion of truth and the forgery of history were two fundamental strategies for the indoctrination of the citizenship and the creation of brainwashed, robotic beings with no capacity for dissent or criticism. In this respect, Krishan Kumar points out that: "From the totalitarian point of view history is something to be created rather than learned. A totalitarian state is in effect a theocracy, and its ruling caste, in order to keep its position, had to be thought of as infallible...

[9] For a series of illuminating studies on the exclusion of the Irish population in Britain and its subsequent ghettoisation, see Swift and Gilley.

Totalitarianism demands, in fact, the continuous alteration of the past, and in the long run, probably disbelief in the very existence of objective truth" (306-307). Celtic history in the novel is not only repeatedly mocked for being merely a succession of tales and legends, it is also object of subliminal attempts to make it disappear in favour of the more canonical and respect-worthy British history.[10] The Irish, and generally speaking, the Celtic world, are conscientiously forced to accept that its national and international role must be relocated in a secondary position and subdued to the demands of the empire. Therefore, Ireland is pushed to rewrite its own past to become solely an appendix of the metropolis, a de-historicised land where the colonial powers can re-introduce their own history.[11] As the Minister for Internal Defence patronisingly suggests in *The Green Gene*, "the whole Celtic Nation is an irresponsible minority" (89), reinforcing once more the dependent condition of the colonised nations.

The falsification of history finds in mechanisms like control and surveillance two powerful allies in any dystopian society. One of the bases of a totalitarian state is to maintain the population under strict vigilance so that any outburst of rebellion or resistance can be instantly suffocated and eliminated. The Orwellian imagery of the telescreens, the Though Police or Big Brother's staring look form part of a graphic imagery that mirrored quite accurately the political functioning of Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia. As a matter of fact, the performance of racial groups has always been severely scrutinised by the authorities, being systematically targeted as the prime suspects for any riot within the community. This condition of escape-goats motivated many countries, especially those with a higher rate of immigration, to keep these groups under constant observation, a fact that, directly or indirectly, leads to a *Nineteen Eighty-Four*-like scenario. The events depicted by Dickinson in *The Green Gene* are tinged by a clear and present sense of proximity since they are still sadly present in our day-today reality. In spite of the apparent social stability the authorities seek to transmit, the world Dickinson creates in the novel is prevail-ingly dominated by curfews and warnings, by police officers watching over every street and by dubious arresting procedures in which the *habeas corpus* rights of green citizens are rarely taken into consideration. The ideal of freedom is deterred by this inescapable reality, which Humayan's landlady depicts quite accurately: "'Ten minute warning for curfew. There's another in five minutes, and then the real thing. After

[10] Very closely related to this idea, Dipesh Chakrabarty reinforces the inferiority of what he calls "subaltern histories": "There are at least two everyday symptoms of the subalternity of non-Western, third world histories. Third-World historians feel a need to refer to works in European history; historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate" (224).

[11] Albert Memmi polemicizes about this vision of history and supports the idea that the colonial subject must be necessarily de-historicised to go through the colonisation process: "The most serious bluff suffered by the colonized is being removed from history and from the community... He is in no way subject of history any more. Of course, he carries its burden, often more cruelly than others, but always as an object" (91-92).

that, if you meet a cop whop feels like target practice... oh, you'd be alright, with your pass, provided he gave you time to show it" (80).

The underlying *martial law* that reigns in London contrasts with the hypocritical approach to racism evinced by the Race Relations Board. It is very paradoxical to read how the incitement to racial hatred is severely penalized by the police forces when strict zoning laws and apartheid mechanisms are continuously implemented. Racial difference is clearly penalized, as Humayan suffers in his peaceful walks around London, although the authorities want to disguise this policy behind a veil of faked tolerance and respect for the minorities. Humayan's first encounter with two officers is marked by a tense exchange in which the statistician is "kindly" suggested to keep away from that area: "'I see, sir. Well, the road here is a Zone border. I'm afraid I have to ask you to go back the way you came, sir.' 'Of course, of course,' said Humayan, determined to show himself a good Saxon citizen. 'Can you tell me please what that mark means?'... 'But whatever it means it's IRH.' 'Incitement to Racial Hatred, sir,' translated the first policeman. 'Good day, sir'" (54). The clash that is produced between the claims to racial respect and integration with the implementation of mechanisms that legitimise the creation of Zone borders gives a clear idea that the immigration laws and anti-racist policies usually stand upon a very subtle master/servant relationship, in which the former has traditionally attempted to outwit the latter with multiple discursive understatements.

The paradoxes that lie beneath the racial divide presented in *The Green Gene* also allow Dickinson to hypothesise about the possibility of breeding a purely, non-mixed Anglo-Saxon race in which the gene that provoked this mutation could be discovered and erased. At a certain stage, Humayan eventually finds out the real objectives of the Race Relations Board, based primarily on the belief of a superior race over the others. This goal, which echoes not only Darwin's theories but also Hitler's paranoid search of the Aryan racial purity, strengthens once more the dystopian atmosphere of the novel and, as Mac Laughling suggests, traces back to a shared presumption in Victorian Britain: "The conservative political outlook of this Victorian Britain gave rise to a xenophobic opposition to Irishness based upon a purified national sense of identity, and a sense of themselves as an 'Elect People'" (54). The British self-categorisation as the "Elect People" points straightforwardly to the pseudo-scientific conjectures that insisted upon the existence of a racial hierarchy in which only a few were on top while others were forced to adopt a subservient role.

In a conversation with the Head of the Race Relations Board, this is what Humayan is recommended to do: "'What I really want from you, or from you and a few other guys, is a way of reaching accurate criteria of who is or isn't a Celt, regardless of the colour of their skins [...]. Because it means that we have a lot of crypto-Celts walking around in white skins' [...]. 'If this was a fascist like Frank and the Doc make out, we could simply say it was a problem of racial purity, and start breeding back to pure strains'" (71-72). Mr. Mann's attempts to sound racially tolerant clash with his real intention of filtering those who are not purely Saxons as a way to create a strictly departmentalised society. This obsessive desire to preserve the Anglo-Saxon racial uniqueness finds a notable satiric response from some of the characters that intervene in the last section of novel. The hysteric attitude shown

by the RRB is contested by a humorous satiric counterfactual posed by some social underdogs, who imagine what would happen if the Royal family had any trace of Celtic ancestry in its blood. One of them even assures that it existed and that it could be easily demonstrated:

> 'Stuart is maybe no verra gude. But there's been green bairns born in plenty behind palace walls. Mr. Zass, only the English bishops have smuggled them awe and brocht in some bonny Saxon bairn. Generation after generation it has happened, so in what manner can her present Majesty be callit wull-brred? For a' anybody kens her true name is Ruth Potts, and the richtful king o' Scotland is lockit in a tower.' (124)

The utilisation of one of the most iconic symbols of the British culture to exemplify the most likely possibility that green people might have been clandestinely hidden in order to maintain the image of racial integrity that must characterise the Royal family.

The ending of the novel, in which Humayan presents the final conclusions of the research conducted in London, comes to support the abovementioned hypothesis. His presentation of these results confirm that the green population might eventually outnumber the Saxon, provoking thus an overturn of the racial hierarchy and creating a situation that could also be analysed in terms unknown so far. However, the most significant idea that derives from Humayan's study is that this unstoppable re-emergence of green people would be, in the statistician's words, "proportional to the severity of the... er, discipline... or restriction what they would call repression experienced by the Celts... There is going to be a surge in any case, but if you do not want to see, in one generation, a minority of Saxons living among a majority of green Celts, then you must either wipe the Celts out or you must dramatically relax the restrictions that now exist" (182-83). Humayan's courage in the exposition of these details opens a new debate that points directly at the ideological apparatus that supports the colonial project and which is openly dismantled in the previous quotation.

Humayan's idealistic proposal favours a vision that pursues the integration of all racial minorities rather than their exclusion from the socio-political and economic panorama of any country.[12] In other words, by denying the essential component of repression and segregation, Humayan's study challenges the foundations of both the Race Relations Board and of the colonial essence proper. Nonetheless, what seems to be an open gate to a better understanding of the racial dynamics ends up in a clearly dystopian *finale* in which Humayan has to leave the country almost as a fugitive, heading for a secret destination as a hideout. In the end, his truthful argu-

[12] As Benita Parry rightly asserts: "The statements of the theoretical paradigms, where it can appear that the efficacy of colonialism's apparatus of social control in effecting strategies of disempowerment is totalised, are liable to be (mis)read as producing the colonised as a stable category fixed in a position of subjugation, hence foreclosing on the possibility of theorising resistance" (84-85).

mentation, based on a solid research, necessarily collides with the interests of those who instigate the existence of a racialised world in which inequality and prejudice are the dominant forces at work.

To conclude, the contention of this paper has been to demonstrate that all process that involve any kind of oppression or exclusion can eventually result in the emergence of a dystopian society in the line of what Zamyatin, Orwell, Huxley or Bradbury depicted in their works. The racialisation of the Irish has been the object of an incessant and, sometimes passionate, critical debate that has sought to reveal the ambivalences that have historically surrounded the colonisation of the island. *The Green Gene* emerges as a more than appropriate instance to exemplify how the Irish also underwent a severe process of segregation, especially in Victorian times, and how they were systematically objectified by means of orientalising the population through a series of stereotypes and clichés that had been largely applied to other minority races. Therefore, the novel's dystopian tone is largely founded upon all those mechanisms employed in order to maintain the racial barrier as unbridgeable as possible and also to reinforce the power relations that relegated the Irish into an extremely marginal and voiceless position.

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LIMINAL IDENTITIES IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH DRAMA

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Abstract

Since the period of the Celtic Renaissance and plays such as William Butler Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), the debate of authentic and de-anglicized versus colonized and outer-directed Irish identities in Irish drama has long developed in new and different directions. In this process, the colonizing and alienating influence of Britain has been replaced by the United States as the dominant Other. Against this background, my paper will more specifically explore the portrayal, as well as the distortion, of Ireland and the Irish in film in two contemporary plays, Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets* (1999) and Martin McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1998). Both plays focus on the intercultural representation of Ireland and the Irish in Hollywood movies. Both plays are intermedial or metadramas in the sense that they take film productions as their subject matter. Both plays will be analyzed against the background of Fredric Jameson's theory of global commodification and Jean Baudrillard's arguments on simulated realities.

Key words: Contemporary Irish drama, authenticity, Irishness, Fredric Jameson's global commodification, liminality.

Resumen

Desde el período del renacimiento celta y obras teatrales como *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), de William Butler Yeats, el debate de las identidades irlandesas auténticas y des-anglicanizadas frente a las colonizadas y dirigidas por normas externas, en el teatro irlandés, se ha desarrollado largo y tendido con nuevas y diferentes direcciones. En este proceso, la influencia colonizadora y alienante de Gran Bretaña se ha reemplazado por la de los EEUU como el Otro dominante. Teniendo en cuenta este panorama, mi ensayo explora más específicamente el retrato, así como la distorsión, de Irlanda y de lo irlandés en el cine, en dos obras teatrales contemporáneas: *Stones in His Pockets* (1999), de Marie Jones, y *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1998), de Martin McDonagh. Ambas se centran en la representación intercultural de Irlanda y de lo irlandés en las películas de Hollywood. Ambas son metadramas intermediales en el sentido en el que tratan de las producciones cinematográficas como argumento principal. Ambas se analizan usando la teoría de la mercantilización global de Fredric Jameson así como los presupuestos de Jean Baudrillard sobre las realidades simuladas.

Palabras clave: teatro irlandés contemporáneo, autenticidad, identidad irlandesa, la "mercantilización" global de Fredric Jameson, lo liminar.

I

Identities are inextricably tied to realities. Answers to the both ontological and existential question of what is real have become increasingly opaque, however. In *Postmodernism; or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), his seminal study of the postmodern era, Fredric Jameson argues that the paramount influence of media, electronic and otherwise, cause a collapse of the distinction between high culture and popular art forms as well as an erosion of the depth dimension of reality (see Jameson, *Postmodernism* 17, 2). This fundamentally affects individual identities. What Jameson calls the "centered subject" disappears. It is replaced by an ensemble of self-fragments marked by emotional numbness (see Jameson, *Postmodernism* 15, 16). The postmodern coalescence of subject and object, the imaginary quality of reality, and the itness of the individual change artistic expression. The imitation, reiteration, and reproduction of older styles become its dominant mode (see Jameson, *Postmodernism* 17). In both Fredric Jameson's and Jean Baudrillard's diagnosis, collapsing the distinctions between medium and message, reality and construct, self and other, pastiche and original expression, leads to a culture of the simulacrum, realizing Plato's conception of "the identical copy, for which no original has ever existed" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 17, 18). In Baudrillard's view, postmodern culture thus turns into "a gigantic simulacrum: [...] exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference" (Baudrillard 152).

Jameson's and Baudrillard's diagnosis of the postmodern age leads to the discouraging assumption that art seems to lose its critical potential. In "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue" (1998), Jameson suggests that American cultural hegemony, the dominance of Hollywood films and American television programs in global mass culture, amounts to "an allegory of the end of the possibility of imagining radically different social alternatives" (Jameson, "Notes" 62; see 63). Despite such pessimism, art and, notably, drama, have not lost their critical impulse. While it is impossible to evade the influences of globalization and commodification, contemporary drama, and specifically Irish drama, pit an existential world of highly individual human suffering, humor, and joy against them. This existential dimension reasserts the inescapable importance of home, love, and death vis-à-vis global consumerism. Contemporary drama thus projects liminal identities, mediating between anthropological necessities on the one hand and societies built on commodification on the other. Like persons involved in rites of passage and processes of initiation, contemporary plays, sandwiched between commodification and emancipation, may be said to be "no longer classified and not yet classified" (Turner 96) with regard to the transitional identities they suggest and develop. If liminality can be considered "as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (Turner 97), as the ethnologist Victor Turner has suggested, the identities in contemporary drama may with some justification be called liminal, oscillating between adaptations to global capitalism and emotional gestures of subversion.

The theatrical treatment of the impact of mass media on social realities is, of course, neither limited to Irish drama nor to the postmodern period. In the Irish context, both Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets* (1999) and Martin McDonagh's

The Cripple of Inishmaan (1998) focus on the intercultural representation of Ireland and the Irish in Hollywood movies. Both plays are intermedial or metadramas in the sense that they take film productions as their subject matter. Both plays also share a concern with the representation of Ireland on screen. In this context, I will not discuss both plays but concentrate on McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan* exclusively.

II

Martin McDonagh's play *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1996/1998) is not as directly concerned with film representation as Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets*.[1] It is set in 1934 when Robert Flaherty's semi-documentary *Man of Aran* was filmed on Inishmore (Huber, "Contemporary" 14; "(De-)Mythologising" 353-354; Lonergan 162; see also McMahon and Mullen). While the play's locale remains Inishmaan, a group of young people, including Cripple Billy Claven, the title figure, goes to Inishmore, the neighbouring and largest Aran Island, by boat, to watch the filming and, possibly, to become part of it (McDonagh 49). This misfires, as they arrive when the shooting is done and the film crew packs up to leave. Yet unexpectedly, Billy receives an invitation to go to Hollywood: "for a screen test for a film they're making about a cripple fella" (McDonagh 61).

Both geographically and chronologically McDonagh's Inishmaan adopts a strangely shifty quality. It is a virtual island shot through with different traditions and problematics, both Irish and non-Irish, "pre-modern and post-modern at the same time" (O'Toole xi). In McDonagh's drama, "the allegedly postmodern Ireland of Tayto crisps, Kimberley biscuits and Australian soap operas" is fused with "one drawn from theatre mysticism, nostalgia" (Waters 34). Therefore, his plays read like Synge "rewritten by an Irish Joe Orton" (John Peter cit. Lanters 212) or "with a postmodern nod in the direction of Sam Shepard" (Waters 50) and "have the qualities of fairytales, of cartoons, but also of TV sit-com" (Waters 50). They have "as much in common with films like Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* as they do with Synge's *Playboy"* (Lanters 213). McDonagh's Ireland has, therefore, the compounded quality of collage or pastiche, reflecting a simulacral world of representational crisis in which the image often "*precedes* the reality it is supposed to represent" (Kearney qtd. Lanters 214-215).

All of the characters in *The Cripple of Inishmaan* are branded by their tics and antics as near-caricatures. Among these eccentricities are Billy Claven's inclination to spend hours cow-watching (McDonagh 7, 33, 55), and his aunt Kate Osbourne's habit of talking to stones (McDonagh 55, 67-68, 79, 86, 89). The compulsions of

[1] My discussion of McDonagh is based on my previous essay, "Staging." The most sustained assessment of McDonagh's drama to date can be found in Chambers/Jordan and in Russell; see especially Christopher Murray, and Mária Kurdi.

other characters are less quaint and more violent. By these mannerisms McDonagh's characters become so highly individualized that they are immune to Hollywood-style stereotyping. In the last analysis, many of these habits reveal themselves as a second skin which hides these characters' vulnerability and masks their weakness and compassion; in short, their humanity. In their own individual ways, these compulsive characters are psychologically as crippled as Billy is physically. Billy himself says at one point: "Well, there are plenty round here just as crippled as me, only it isn't on the outside it shows" (McDonagh 92).

These compulsions and idiosyncrasies nevertheless contribute in unexpected ways to the simulacral shiftiness of Irish as well as American realities. McDonagh exemplifies the problem of the semiotic relationship between realities and their representations—also at the heart of the debate over movies about Ireland made by Hollywood—by the difficulty of finding American candy in an Irish sweets shop, for example. By his aunt, candy lover Bartley has been sent American candy from Boston, Massachusetts. The aunt in America has sent him a package of Mintios, which he has tasted, but only a photograph of Yalla-mallows, whose taste he can therefore only imagine. "Although the photograph of the Yalla-mallows did raise me curiosity about them" (McDonagh 18), as he says, he deplores the shortcomings of the sign vis-à-vis what it denotes. Viewed from a semiotic angle, the signified is tangibly present in the case of the Mintios, whereas the American Yalla-mallows' Irish existence seems limited to a pictorial signifier, which points in their direction but precludes their actual consumption. Bartley enters Eileen and Kate Osbourne's Inishmaan country shop in the hope of buying more Mintios and of finally getting a taste of the promising Yalla-mallows. To Bartley's stubbornly repeated inquiries whether Eileen has the real Mintios and also the as yet only signified Yalla-mallows in store, Eileen's equally monotonous answer is: "We have only what you see" (McDonagh 17-19)—a reply more than vaguely reminiscent of the what-you-see-is-what-you-get quality of computer technology. Although he looks as hard as he can, disappointed Bartley sees neither Mintios nor Yalla-mallows. Eileen demonstrates an Irish sense of the real which seems impervious to both the lure of exotic America and the taste of the imaginary. Much later in the play it transpires that there is more than meets the eye even to the seemingly adamantine empirical realities on Inishmaan. It turns out that there were Yalla-mallows in the shop after all, that Ireland did provide the signified to the American signifier. But, as Eileen is as compulsively addicted to sweets as Bartley, she ate them all (McDonagh 56). Her stoic empiricism—"We have only what you see" —turns out to screen what you do not see—her obsession with sweets or, in poststructuralist parlance, her desire.

The negotiations between Irish realities and their American representations in the shape of Hollywood movies are similarly ambiguous. Billy's dying scene in a squalid Hollywood hotel room (Scene 7) plays with both the suspicions of ill health surrounding him and the Hollywood conventions of an appropriately stereotypical Irish death, including invocations to the Irishman's decent heart, head, and spirit "not broken by a century's hunger and a lifetime's oppression" (McDonagh 74). As in the case of the American Yalla-mallows in the Irish country shop, the reality status of this deathbed scene remains dubious:

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> However realistic Billy's dying may appear to the audience initially, it is only from the following scene that one is made fully aware that he has only been rehearsing a part and that his dying speech is a fabricated stage-Irish lamentation interspersed with snatches of the ballad of 'The Croppy'. (Huber, "Contemporary" 15; see Lonergan 165)

In Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets*, it is Sean Harkin's irrevocable death which stays the slippage of both reproducible images and commodified narratives and triggers Charlie's and Jake's cinematic countervision. In *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, it is Billy's parentage and traumatic family history which, on the one hand, shares the arbitrariness of Hollywood film scripts but, on the other hand, reveals Billy's unquestionably real, existential suffering. By the same token, but on a bizarre rather than tragic plane, the simulacral irreality of the Yalla-mallows finally exposes Eileen's very tangible addiction to sweets, which in turn may function as a modest compensation for an otherwise joyless life. In both cases the simulacrum camouflages existential need. It remains unclear whether Billy's parents drowned themselves to save him, or because they were so appalled by his deficiencies, or whether they died trying to kill their son (McDonagh 23-25, 28, 96, 102-103). What Billy suffers from most is the coexistence of several versions of his life history whose veracity remains as undecidable as his self undefined.

The multiple versions of Billy's parents' death and their relationship to their son, which fundamentally affect him, as well as the unexpected ambivalences of several other characters, who all seem to hide a golden heart underneath their surface indifference, aggressiveness, and eccentricity, serve to demonstrate that the Lacanian sliding of the signified under the signifier may be built into the remote cosmos of the Aran Islands as well as into Planet Hollywood (see Lacan 87). Whereas Hollywood's fabrications are never a serious threat in the universe of *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, the outer-direction by one's own compulsions, psychic as well as physical deformations which render individuals even more indeterminable than celluloid realities, are of much greater import. These uncertainties may be overcome, however, by the genuinely human impulses which they sometimes hide. Eileen's compulsive eating of the sweets Bartley craves can be considered an expression of her worries about Billy. Her sister Kate's communication with stones is a compensation for the impossibility to talk to Billy, while he is absent in Hollywood (see McDonagh 56, 63, 67). Bobby hits everybody and everything that antagonizes him mercilessly and compulsively, including Billy. But he also earnestly tries to convince Billy that being "around your family and your friends is more important" than going to Hollywood (McDonagh 61). Some tics may be expressions of endearment camouflaged by their seeming absurdity. With some conviction, Billy can therefore maintain at the end of the play: "I know now it isn't Hollywood that's the place for me. It's here on Inishmaan, with the people who love me, and the people I love back" (McDonagh 88). As also in Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets*, a fundamental existentialism shines through McDonagh's concern with constructs of the real. When all these constructs are being deconstructed, only a sense of home, love, and death seems to resist such relativization.

III

The disconcerting convergence of the simulacral and the authentic in McDonagh's drama triggers the critical debate surrounding it, which is essentially a debate about the viability of concepts of national and ethnic identity as counterforces to colonization and globalization. In this respect a postcolonial paradigm, based on authentic ethnic identities, and a postmodern paradigm, based on transnational constructed identities, seem to vie with each other. These conflicting views are perhaps best illustrated by Victor Merriman's essay "Decolonization Postponed: The Theatre of Tiger Trash," originally published in 1999, and Sara Keating's 2006 response "Is Martin McDonagh an Irish Playwright?" Merriman challenges the view that McDonagh's plays derive their power from the fact that they are collages of literary, theatrical, filmic, and popular traditions. He implicitly measures McDonagh's characters and his world against recognizable political and economic Irish realities. From this angle, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and McDonagh's other plays appear as "a sustained dystopic vision of a land of gratuitous violence, craven money-grubbing and crass amorality" (Merriman 273). Ridiculing a cheap travesty of rural small town Ireland, they pander to the tastes of the new urban elite of Celtic Tiger-Ireland, a "neo-colonial society in the throes of globalization" which is only too glad that the universe of McDonagh's drama is a thing of the past, that Romantic Ireland's dead and gone and with O'Leary in the grave (Merriman 277; see 273). Thus, in Merriman's view, McDonagh betrays to the adherents of global capitalism any serious attempt to resurrect a viable national and cultural identity.

By contrast, Sarah Keating considers Merriman's postcolonial perspective to be essentialist and outdated. Keating embraces what Merriman loathes, the idea of a culture that "is not an essentialized strategy for the representation of an authentic national self, but a commodity of negotiation and exchange" (Keating 292; see 286). In his perceptive essay "'Never mind the shamrocks'—Globalizing Martin McDonagh," Patrick Lonergan tries to reconcile Merriman's plea for cultural specificity with Keating's transnational postmodernism by suggesting an intermediate position of understanding McDonagh's plays "in relation to a globalized framework, grounded in Ireland but engaged with ideas from other cultures" (Lonergan 155). For McDonaghs's drama, Lonergan claims a postmodern, as well as late capitalist, form of nationalism which defines Irish specificity in the way crocodile logos define polo shirts: "McDonagh's construction of Irishness operates as a commodified abstraction—or a brand—that can operate globally, being received reflexively, and selectively, by localized cultures" (Lonergan 170). Lonergan chooses not to consider this precarious regionalism as simulacral and deceptive but rather as surrounded by what he considers as its post-Benjaminian conceptual aura: "a brand may be controlled centrally and reproduced infinitely without a loss of authenticity" (Lonergan 171). Contrary to Lonergan one might think that brands cannot lose their authenticity because they have none in the first place and that the conceptual aura amounts to a sell-out of critical theory.

These conflicts and convolutions of critical discourse may remain as hard to disentangle as the amalgamation of representation, reality, and simulation in

McDonagh's drama by which they are provoked. The simulacral distortions of these plays may render them apt illustrations of the postmodern condition diagnosed by Jameson, Baudrillard and others. If the identities projected by these plays are liminal, however, and belong to Turner's "realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise," there is one possibility that remains strangely muted and repressed in the considerations of Merriman, Keating, and Lonergan. This is the recognizable existential dimension of these plays. McDonagh's characters often border on being grotesque caricatures. But Billy Claven's uncertainty about his parents' love or hatred of their son, his physical handicap and self-loathing, his life-threatening tuberculosis also render him a seriously and understandingly troubled character beyond being a cipher of victimization by larger forces such as global capital and cultural colonization. At least in *The Cripple of Inishmaan* McDonagh seems to suggest that a basic humanity, comprising a sense of home, friendship, love, and death, cannot be totally absorbed by the world of simulacral commodification. This may not solve collective problems of national and cultural identity, but it may map out a liminal space for the development of viable selves.

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FROM THE OLD TO THE NEW WORLD: CINEMATIC OFFERS OF SPIRITUALLY RECUPERATIVE TRIPS TO THE EMERALD ISLE*

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Abstract

The recuperative retreat undertaken by Yeats in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (*The Rose*, 1893) from the drab reality of London's "pavements grey" to an Irish scenery of solitude and natural harmony where he would find "some peace," has being persistently rehearsed by Irish expatriates. However, it is in the cinematic portrayals of Ireland, often made by outsiders, where, notwithstanding the changed economic, political and social circumstances experienced by the Republic, the idealisation of rural Ireland and the healing powers of the island's supposedly primitive lifestyle and values that people escaping from the stresses of urban life and competitive environments have endured longer. By considering the presence, and frequently random use, of anachronistic and clichéd cinematic signifiers of Irishness, the paper highlights both the recent proliferation of offerings of an Emerald Isle that does not exist beyond the screen and a regret concerning the films' missed opportunity of interrogating and building on the vast corpus of the Irish diaspora's narrativised history.

Key words: Cinematic Irish clichés, Ireland as an Arcadia, exogenous expectations of Ireland, Celtic spirituality, romcoms, travel cinema.

Resumen

La restauradora escapada que Yeats hiciera en "La isla del lago de Innisfree" (*The Rose*, 1893) desde la realidad monótona de las "aceras grises" de Londres a un paisaje irlandés de soledad y armonía natural donde encontrar "un poco de paz," ha sido persistentemente emprendida por generaciones de expatriados irlandeses. No obstante, es en las representaciones cinematográficas de Irlanda, realizadas a menudo por extranjeros, donde han perdurado por más tiempo la idealización de la Irlanda rural y de los poderes curativos que los supuestamente arcaicos valores y estilo de vida de la isla aportan a las personas que huyen de entornos competitivos y del estrés de la vida urbana. El análisis de la presencia y el uso, frecuentemente aleatorio, de anacrónicos y estereotipados indicadores cinematográficos de lo irlandés evidencia la reciente proliferación de imágenes de la Isla Esmeralda inexistentes más allá de la pantalla, al tiempo que lamenta que dichas películas desperdicien la oportunidad de interrogar y matizar la vasta historia narrativizada de la diáspora irlandesa.

Palabras clave: estereotipos cinematográficos sobre Irlanda, Irlanda como arcadia rural, imágenes exógenas de Irlanda, espiritualidad celta, comedias románticas, cine de viajes.

In 2009, the news that the TV series *The Simpsons* had set its 434th episode, entitled "In the Name of the Grandfather" (S20E14), was received in Ireland with mixed feelings: pride at being featured in the influential animated cartoon and at having the episode broadcast in Ireland on March 17th, prior to its airing in the U.S., but also concern when anticipating that the show would indulge in "paddy-whackery." An article on the front page of *The Irish Times* three weeks before the airing of the programme warned Irish people to "[e]xpect half an hour of begorrahs, leprechauns battling over pots of gold and fat, drunk men in scanty emerald-green pants painting the town yellow when the hapless Homer drags his family across the pond for an Irish-set episode" (Doyle 1). However, apprehensive comments like this proved unfounded for the episode seems more bent on redressing than on propagating such clichés. Built around Homer's realisation, and regret, that "the Irish have become hard working and sober," the Simpsons' Irish-set episode hinges on the Republic's spectacular economic advancement, liberalisation and grasp of material goals, and portrays pubs that are empty because Irish people are too busy working in high-tech firms named Hewlett FitzPackard and Mick-Rosoft, exercising outdoors or displaying their homosexual gay affections in public.

Notwithstanding the changed economic, political and social circumstances experienced by the Republic, a remarkable number of recent films, many of them coming from Hollywood—or at least featuring American protagonists—cast an amused and condescending look at an Ireland invariably depicted as rural, quaintly traditional, and imbued with a redemptive quality for protagonists who are usually female and come from an urban and competitive environment. The films that specifically fit this description are *Laws of Attraction* (Peter Howitt 2004 UK/IR), *Irish Jam* (John Eyres 2006 USA/UK), *P.S. I Love You* (Richard LaGravanese 2007 USA) and *Leap Year* (Anand Tucker 2009 USA/IR). However, several related films concurrently released over the last decade will also be briefly considered, for their plots are also built around the arrival of urban visitors to the west of Ireland and they offer unrealistic representations of contemporary Ireland and the Irish. These include the romantic comedies *The Matchmaker* (Mark Joffe 1997 USA/UK/IR), *The Nephew* (Eugene Brady 1998 IR), and *Dead Long Enough* (Tom Collins 2005 IR/UK), the arthouse movie *Nothing Personal* (Urszula Antoniak 2009 IR/HOL), and the ghost and horror films *High Spirits* (Neil Jordan 1988 USA), *Escape to Nowhere* (Scott P. Levy 1996 USA), *Trance* (Michael Almereyda 1998 USA), *Puffball* (Nicolas Roeg 2007 CAN/UK/IR), *The Daisy Chain* (Aisling Walsh 2009 UK/IR), *Yesterday's Children* (Marcus Cole 2000 USA), *The Legend of Samhain* (Christian Viel 2003 CAN), *Shrooms* (Paddy Breathnach 2007 IR/UK/DK), *Ghostwood* (Justin O'Brien 2008 IR) and *Wake Wood* (David Keating 2011 IR/UK).

My aim in analysing these cinematic (mis)representations of contemporary Ireland is not to apply criteria of authenticity with a view to spotting unrealistic screen images and setting them against a 'real' Ireland, but rather to consider the ways in which the island has become inflected with a number of reductive signifiers and to what effect. To this end, I will briefly consider a number of factors that, to my mind, may well have contributed to this apparently anachronistic, and much

maligned, cinematic trend.[1] These factors range from the close, and at the same time evolving, ties between Ireland and America as reflected in the long-standing representation of such relationship on screen, the idealisation of rural Ireland and its western seaboard, and the generic filmic conventions of both romantic comedies and travel romances in which a protagonist travels to another country, usually with little, or misconceived, knowledge about it.

Scholarship on early American cinema (Joseph Curran 1989, Kevin Rockett 1997, Barton 2009) corroborates that the Irish made up a substantial part of the cinema audience of the time and that Irish characters featured in films more prominently than other ethnic minorities. Since the period of silent American cinema coincided with mass scale Irish migration, not surprisingly one of the most popular themes in early films is the progress of the Irish from the rural homeland to urban America. The films stress the "potential for material and social advancement in the USA, but there is also a warning of the potential loss of 'Irish' values there" (Rockett 1997: 171), in particular the centrality of the family and the positively-inflected figures of the mother and the priest. As a result of the reduction of Irish immigration since the 1920s, sound cinema "was to become almost exclusively concerned with second and third-generation Irish-Americans, or, in its reflections backwards, constructing an imagined history of the Irish in America" (Rockett 1997: 178).[2]

On the other hand, by the mid twentieth century, partly because of Ireland's low position in the political affections of the United States resulting from its neutrality during WWII and the growing partnership between the US and Britain in the Cold War period, Ireland hardly featured at all in Hollywood films. Apart from semi-fictional swashbuckling movies set in the past, which exploit the always productive theme of the weak outwitting the powerful (e.g. *Captain Lightfoot* (1955), featuring Rock Hudson as an eighteenth-century Robin Hood type of Irish rebel, or *The Fighting Prince of Donegal* (1966), based on the exploits of the legendary

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[1] Audiences and critics have often deplored Hollywood's crudely clichéd depictions of Ireland in films such as *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* (1959), *Waking Ned Devine* (1998) or *The Closer You* Get (1999) as well as the weird Irish accents on screen of non-native film stars Mickey O'Rourke in *A Prayer for the Dying* (1988) or Brad Pitt in *The Devil's Own* (1997), but the film that has generated more hostility in recent times is *Leap Year*, which can be said to encapsulate the worse features of the strand of films analysed here. After describing it as "offensive, reactionary, patronising filth" *Irish Times* film reviewer Donald Clarke (2010) suggested "that every reader buy [] a DVD of *Leprechaun: Back 2 tha Hood* and fling [] it at the head of any punter seen entering a screening of this upcoming atrocity."

[2] Given that the experience of Irish immigrants in the new world has been for the most part urban, they have been mostly portrayed as urbanites. As Glazer and Moynihan point out in their book on New York's racial minorities *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963): "When it came to portraying the tough American, up from the streets, the image was repeatedly that of an Irishman. James Cagney (a New Yorker) was the quintaessential figure: fists cocked, chin out, back straight, bouncing along on his heels" (Cited in Curran, 1989: 47).

sixteenth-century Gaelic leader Red Hugh), it was not until the outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and key events such as Bloody Sunday (30 January 1972), the Hunger Strikes of 1981 and crucial US involvement in the Peace Process, when interest in Ireland was rekindled in the United States and a prolific vein of Irish-themed action movies began to flow from Hollywood. When not related to the Troubles, the most successful films of the period—*Far and Away* (Ron Howard 1992), *Angela's Ashes* (Alan Parker 1999) and *In America* (Jim Sheridan 2003)[3]—portray America as the place where the alienated protagonists can recover from the traumatic social and psychological experiences they suffered in Ireland.[4]

Still, the advent of mass tourism in the 1950s and the reawakening of the idea of ethnicity among minority groups in the wake of the Civil Rights Campaign of the 1960s prompted a re-examination among Irish Americans of their heritage which materialized with the setting up of Irish Studies programmes, a spectacular increase in tourism and root-searching in Ireland and the rise of a brand of sentimental and iconic Celtophilia that figures Ireland as the last enclave of simple, primitive lifestyle and values in Western culture and a redoubt of Celtic spirituality (often coexisting with a whimsical belief in fairies and magic legends).

This is the case in *The Luck of the Irish* (Henry Koster 1948) and *Top o' the Morning* (David Miller 1949), the first two cinematic examples, both dating from the late 40s, about the transformative powers that a trip to the island may effect on outsiders. Tyrone Power (in the role of a newspaper reporter struggling between seeking wealth and staying true to himself in the first film) and Bing Crosby (as an insurance detective in charge of investigating the theft of the Blarney Stone in the second) travel from America to Ireland and, after sorting out various encounters with leprechauns, legends and magic spells, they find love in rural Ireland, a place where, according to a local leprechaun in *The Luck of the Irish*, words like "hurry" and "important" are no use.

The recuperative visit to Ireland, enacted through a romantic relationship, would be repeated a few years later in John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952), the amusing account of an Irish-American's arrival in Ireland in search of a simple life he could not find in the competitive and industrialised USA. This is not only the most widely-known film about Ireland but it has also been repeatedly accused of being the main purveyor of popular (and mostly fake) images about Ireland and the Irish. However, *The Quiet Man* contains a self-aware reflectiveness of its own myth-making that, with a few exceptions such as *High Spirits* and *The Matchmaker*, is absent from most American films set in Ireland, and certainly from those which are the object of this study.

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[3] Though written and directed by Jim Sheridan, *In America* was produced by Fox Searchlight Pictures (US), with Irish (Hell's Kitchen Films) and British (East of Harlem-UK) input.

[4] Even though two low-budget films, *Gold in the Streets* (Elizabeth Gill 1996 IR) and *2by4* (Jimmy Smallhorne 1998 USA), depict the predicament of present-day Irish migrants working in building sites in the Bronx, given their limited international distribution, they have hardly undermined the deeply engrained cinematic myth of the Irish emigrant's success in the USA.

Even so, *The Quiet Man's* portrayal of Ireland as a place of bucolic ease where, despite the constant fighting, nobody ever gets hurt (as opposed to America where Sean killed his ring opponent) and where the traces of social, political and religious conflict as well as the high levels of unemployment and emigration experienced by the Irish population in the decade of the 1950s have been erased, is informed by an idealisation of rural Ireland that links and intersects with the myth of the peasant and the perception of the West of Ireland by writers of the Literary Revival and by the Irish-Ireland movement as a site of cultural purity and Arcadian innocence that offered the possibility of national renewal and personal regeneration.[5]

Irish writers have repeatedly engaged with, and challenged, such formulations. However, apart from isolated instances such as Neil Jordan's *The Butcher Boy* (1997IR/USA) and Kevin Liddy's *Country* (2000 IR) there is no equivalent on the screen to the relentlessly bleak vision of Irish rural life one finds in Patrick Kavanagh's "The Great Hunger" (1942), in Martin McDonagh's *The Leenane Trilogy* (1996-97) or in stories of returned emigrants.[6] The recent release of a substantial number of ghost and horror films in which the scenic west of Ireland becomes the locus of fearsome experiences could have provided a salutary balancing out of the mythopoeic construction of Ireland as a pastoral Arcadia. However, as it will be argued later on, these films' escapist vein is as strong as in the most clichéd romantic comedies.

This does not mean that recent Irish cinema has not shown a commitment to accommodating new realities such as shifts in gender relations and in attitudes to sex, as well as the mounting secularism and loss of confidence in the Church and the State. A number of Irish films have also portrayed urban Ireland,[7] often in a way that is "both celebratory and mildly utopian" (McLoone 2008: 93), the city being represented as "either a threatening site of crime and disarray, or a site of

[5] The othering of Ireland, the notion of its unique character was mainly prompted by the island's colonial experience but it was shaped by a large number of factors and ideological trends. The rural trope, articulated as a mark of lowliness by the patronising and often disabling imperial discourse, would not only be imbued with the positive implications of its regenerating potential upon being appropriated and reformulated by the suburban pastoralism of Irish cultural nationalism, but would also become informed by wider discourses ranging from the Romantic extolling of primitivism and exoticising of the Celt, and concerns over the disruptive effects of industrialisation and dehumanisation consequent on urban growth, to the mythopoeic impulse of Ireland's diaspora to construct the ancestral homeland as a pastoral Arcadia of the mind, or the current commodification of traditional landscapes and lifestyles for the sake of disenchanted urbanites.

[6] Despite having transformed the island into a haven of peace and beauty during their absence, the emigrants' visit home very rarely has a happy ending. Sometimes, as happens to William Dee in John B. Keane's *The Field* (1965) and to Frank Hardy in Brian Friel's *The Faith Healer* (1979), the visit home proves fatal: William's intention to industrialise the land precipitates the drama and his own death, whereas Frank, who returns home guided by "some sense that Ireland might somehow recharge him, maybe even restore him" after the loss of his healing powers, is clubbed to death by drunken, vengeful countrymen.

[7] The 2010 Spring/Summer issue of Éire-Ireland (Vol 45: 1 & 2), devoted to urban Ireland, includes several articles discussing the city in contemporary Irish film.

hedonism and liberation from societal and sexual strictures" (Holohan 2010: 112). Indigenous cinema, though, has been less prone than other artistic expressions to interrogate or discard long and deeply ingrained myths, as reflected in the fact that several of the unrealistic films analysed here have been produced in Ireland or have some Irish input.[8] This is probably because market imperatives impel filmmakers to align themselves to the populist aesthetic of mainstream cinema and to reach a compromise between their personal interests and exogenous expectations of Ireland. Obliterating the country's oppressed and poverty-stricken past, and the tensions deriving from the current economic downturn, the island's scenic attributes and its otherness are still the main magnet luring people to Ireland on the screen. The recuperative imaginary trip undertaken by Yeats in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (*The Rose*, 1893) from the drab reality of London's "pavements grey" to a scenery of solitude and natural harmony where he would find "some peace," is being persistently rehearsed by Irish expatriates and by people who seek a consoling escape from the stresses of modern life.[9]

As argued by Diane Negra's recent work on contemporary American popular culture (particularly ads, TV series and celebrity news), the turning-point in the perception and appeal of Ireland came in the wake of the tensions triggered by the events of September 11. Awareness of the disintegration of the nuclear family structure and a discourse of millennial nostalgic lifestyling, coinciding with Ireland's increasing disassociation from the violence of the Troubles, conferred a marked therapeutic component on the island—positively figured as an economically rejuvenated, yet somehow still natural place—and on Irishness—constructed as an 'innocent' and idealized ethnic category (Negra, "New"; "Romance"). Moreover, the travel to Ireland of celebrities such as Marlon Brando, Elizabeth Hurley, Julia Roberts or Mia Farrow, all of them in the process of negotiating transitional moments in their careers, positions Ireland "as an antidote to professional difficulties and family or couple dysfunction" and corroborates its position as a "national site in which one can re-make or fortify one's 'family values'" (Negra, "Fantasy" 141).

The proliferation of films in which a visit to Ireland becomes a transformative and positive experience may also be considered a latter-day form of colonial narratives, for they display some of the conventions embedded in that genre. Having an outsider acting as spectator and mediator of the peculiarities of the visited country for a mainstream audience is a device productively used by colonial narratives and by films built around a visitor who initially casts a patronising look on the little-known and backward society, but who ends up undergoing a transformative experience. As Glenn Hopper notes, irrespective of the motives for travelling, the

[8] Such is the case of *The Nephew*, *Laws of Attraction, Leap Year*, *The Matchmaker*, *Dead Long Enough*, *Nothing Personal, Puffball*, *The Daisy Chain*, *Shrooms*, *Ghostwood* and *Wake Wood*.

[9] As documented by Maxine Feifer (163-200), the notion that travel from an urban to a rural setting is a form of improvement dates back to the Victorian period.

differences concerning the actual place of destination, the period and the material conditions of the journey, at the centre of travel there is always the opportunity to develop and/or reinvent oneself (xiii). But whereas fiction and cinema have tended to portray Western travellers being overwhelmed by the mystery of the ancient cultures of India and Africa and hardly embarking on any successful relationships across the race divide[10] [Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Rain* (1992) and Gurinder Chadha's film *Bride and Prejudice* (2005) being notable exceptions], for American tourists the transformative process of journeying has often involved, or even has just been reduced to, falling in love: these range from classic films in which a number of female protagonists travel to Rome or Venice (*September Affair,* William Dieterle 1950; *Three Coins in the Fountain*, Jean Negulesco 1954; *Rome Adventure,* Delmer Daves 1962)[11] to recent instances such as *Only You* (Norman Jewison 1994), *Under the Tuscan Sun* (Audrey Wells 2003), *Villa Amalia* (Benoît Jacquot 2009) and *Eat Pray Love* (Ryan Murphy 2010). The latter, in which 32-year old Liz (played by Julia Roberts) feels entrapped in her easy bourgeois married life and sets out to find independence and spiritual fulfilment by spending some months in Italy, India and Bali, is a particularly trite illustration of the notion of travel as a form of improvement. Despite Liz saying at the end, that

> If you are brave enough to leave behind everything familiar and comforting (which can be anything from your house to bitter old resentments), and set out on a truth seeking journey, either externally or internally, and if you are truly willing to regard everything that happens to you in that trip enlighten you and everyone you encounter along the way to teach you something. And if you are prepared most of all to face and forgive some very difficult realities about yourself, then the truth will not be withheld from you.

Her own quest does not lead her to any ground-breaking experience or revelation for, after indulging herself by travelling comfortably and without ties for over one year, as soon as she meets a handsome divorcee, she promptly forfeits her newfound independence.

On the other hand, the movies' affiliation to the romantic comedy (or "chick-flick" genre, as the female-targeted romcoms where the characters' efforts are mostly invested in the pursuit of love are often labelled) determines some of the

[10] For instance, in *Heart of Darkness* (Joseph Conrad 1898 / Nicolas Roeg 1993), *A Passage to India* (E. M. Forster 1924 / David Lean 1985), *Out of Africa* (Isak Dinesen 1937 / Sydney Pollack 1985), *The Sheltering Sky* (Paul Bowles 1949 / Bernardo Bertolucci 1990) or *Heat and Dust* (Ruth Prawer Jhabvala 1975 / James Ivory 1983).

[11] David Lean's *Summertime* (1955 UK/USA) constitutes an interesting departure from the hackneyed Italian-set love story for it features Katharine Hepburn as a middle-aged secretary who finally makes it to Venice on holiday but whose dream of romance becomes a bittersweet reality when she starts a relationship with a handsome but married Italian man. The film also ridicules American tourists like the McIlhennys, who tour round Europe on a fixed and tight itinerary that only allows them two hours of IA (Independent Activity) every day.

films' predictable features. Thus, their light-hearted plotlines trace the progress of the (usually female) protagonists' search for Mr. Right and achieve narrative closure after the potential lovers overcome the initial hurdles that had kept them apart, and which are typically presented within the parameters of a 'battle of the sexes' confrontation.[12] Nonetheless, whereas classical Hollywood comedy was often structured by a temporary gender inversion of the social hierarchy of male over female through what might be called "the *topos* of the unruly woman" (Rowe 41)—a disruption which was eventually set right when the rebellious woman was brought back into line through marriage (Mortimer 12), since the 1990s comedies tend to depict gender roles that are much more traditional than those prevailing in contemporary society (Rubinfel). The Irish-set comedies under analysis are certainly underpinned by extremely traditionalist codes of "feminine" and "masculine" behaviour[13] and, after a short period in Ireland, their protagonists morph from emancipated career women to giving up everything for a romance with a cute country Irishman.[14] Another distinctive trait is that the difficulties faced by the protagonists, who arrive in Ireland as short-term visitors or accidental tourists with little knowledge about the country, tend to involve cultural clashes as well as social mishaps derived from an urbanite's ignorance of rural ways. Occasionally the clashes are plausible, particularly those arising from linguistic differences or idiosyncratic indigenous customs,[15] but most of the times they hinge on bizarre and old-fashioned clichés such as the encounters with colourful local eccentrics who seem to spend all their lives in the pub drinking, fighting, matchmaking or bantering.[16]

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[12] In her recent monograph *Romantic Comedy* Claire Mortimer lists 'battle of the sexes' as "the dominant theme [...] which provides the central dynamic of the genre" 4).

[13] *Leap Year* stands up as being particularly reactionary since it is based on the premise that women have to wait for a marriage proposal. Despite being a spirited career woman, Anna can only take the initiative thanks to a tradition, supposedly still current in Ireland, that allows women to propose on Leap Day. Furthermore, the uppity young woman must be brought down to earth and wised up by the rather brutish rogue of a man she's destined to marry: she is ridiculed and variously subjected to mud, rain, hail, cow manure and vomit.

[14] Mary Kenny, a relationship counsellor who also runs a dating website, stated in an *Irish Times* report that her service had noticed a large increase in overseas women seeking Irish men for relationships, to the extend that a quarter of all their females clients are now non-Irish (O'Connell). Whether the films analysed here reflect the attraction Irish men exert among foreign women or whether they contribute to promoting the trend is open to conjecture.

[15] For instance *play hooky* and *mitching* in *The Nephew*; *have a bit of crack* (i.e. fun vs. cocaine) in *The Matchmaker*.

[16] The following exchange prompted by seeing the protagonist couple kiss at the end of *Leap Year,* is typical of the silly banter that locals often engage in:

"It is good luck to get engaged on a Sunday"
"And end a journey"
"And dig a well."
"You eejit, do they look like they are digging a well"
"Ah, you know what I'm talking about."
"I never know what you are talking about."

Though viewers might not expect romantic comedies set in foreign places to provide ethnographic details, presumably they value a certain degree of coherence and factual accuracy. Watching the films *The Nephew, Laws of Attraction, Irish Jam, P.S. I Love You,* and *Leap Year*, though, one is frequently required to suspend one's disbelief due to the repeated presence of unlikely images and situations. Some of these are reported in the synopses of the films in Appendix 1. Here, rather than dwell on factual errors, I shall turn to the narrative structure of the films. It soon becomes apparent that the parallel stories of the films rely on hackneyed signifiers of Irishness, and are told within the parameters of a remarkably similar and highly codified plotline based, more or less closely, on the following formula:

– Brief introductory shots to establish the far from cheerful situation of the protagonist in her/his original milieu in America.
– The protagonist arrives in (rural) Ireland.
– According to the conventions of the romcom genre, following initial difficulties or misunderstandings, the potential lovers realise that they are meant for each other. What distinguishes these Irish-set films, though, is that the romance is invariably ignited by intense drinking, often accompanied by hectic dancing to Irish traditional music, at the local pub.
– The love relationship is then further cemented with romantic walks in the beautiful countryside, which is often dotted with picturesque castles and ruins.

Since characters embark on a life-changing journey from urban New York/Boston/L.A. to the open fields of Ireland, the films show hardly any shot of urban Ireland, while all traces of modern lifestyles are expunged from the films' imagery. At the time when Derek Mahon characterises Irish society through the image of "computer talk[ing] to computer, machine to answering machine" (15), the films depict an extremely unspoilt countryside, with a third world infrastructure. For instance, in *Leap Year* the protagonist's attempt to recharge the battery of her mobile takes down the power supply of a whole village, and it takes her more than two days and innumerable vicissitudes that strain the credulity of even the most naïve viewer, to get from Dingle to Dublin (there are no taxis, trains don't run on Sundays, she is stuck behind cows, then robbed, gets pelted by hail, rolls down a grassy hill, etc.). As illustrated in the stills of Appendix 2, from the moment the protagonists arrive, they find themselves right in the middle of the countryside, which in the case of *Irish Jam* is not even Ireland but Cornwall.

Whereas Irish locals live at ease with the natural environment, the visitors prove to be totally inept, providing funny situations in which they are stranded by cattle on the road (*The Matchmaker*, *Leap Year*, *High Spirits*), paralysed with fear in front of apparently tame dogs (*P.S. I Love You, Leap Year*), etc. Still, although the simplicity of life in rural Ireland and the intrusion of nosey and often malicious locals, cause minor problems to the more modern and sophisticated visitors, the trip to Ireland eventually leads to their spiritual renewal. Despite knowing that at the basis of cinema is make-believe, not prosaic realism, one cannot fail to see certain irony in the fact that while the shooting of *The Quiet Man*, the film that

established Ireland as a prelapsarian paradise, required bringing power generators and other technology to the unspoilt area of 1950s Co Mayo, five decades later a technologically modern Ireland built the economic feat of the Celtic Tiger "partially on a successful tourist [and film] industry selling Ireland's traditional landscapes to the troubled urban dwellers of global capitalism" (McLoone 94).

Insofar as Ireland's natural beauty is a potential asset for the films' international distribution, couples always take scenic walks together (see Appendix 2), with the natives often contributing to the budding romance—the communal values of the close-knit village thus offering a sharp contrast to the individualistic and competitive spirit that prevails in the modern capitalist societies from where the protagonists hail. The films, though, clearly disregard the fact that it is becoming rare to encounter representatives of the native population serving in public spaces like bars, hotels and shops as these establishments increasingly tend to be staffed by migrant workers who have themselves come from abroad.

In the fantasy Ireland of the romcoms, where people are never seen working, unless pouring drinks at the pub, the visitors will soon discard professional ambitions and economic concerns for the sake of romance and a quiet life in the West of Ireland. The discerning viewer, though, is left to puzzle what exactly are the regenerative qualities Ireland offers the visitors as an antidote to the stresses of modern life. Given the arbitrary signifiers for Irishness and Irish culture used by the films, the motivations seem quite trite and unpersuasive. Indeed, in the majority of cases, the turning point in the romance, and therefore in the life, of the protagonists, comes in a rather banal way when they loose all their inhibitions under the influence of alcohol and/or a wild Irish dance. Notwithstanding the profuse literature available on alcohol consumption and drinking habits in Irish culture proving that in this area Ireland is a society characterised by an attitude veering between excess drinking and abstinence, insofar as the drink industry is a vital and lucrative sector of the Irish economy and tourism, it has been marketed abroad as a representational convention of Irishness.[17] The films draw on this dubious imaginary, relocating to the Irish pub the intimate tête-a-têtes over a meal that Claire Mortimer (5) highlights as a staple fixture of the courtship ritual in the contemporary romantic comedy.

Another reductive cinematic signifier concerns the visual tropes of rural Ireland for, apart from featuring beautiful natural spots (whether Glendalough in Co Wicklow, the lakes of Killarney, the Giant's Causeway, the Burren, or spectacular cliffs) castles and ruins have also become a staple image in most of the films (see Appendix 2). These buildings are invariably presented for the pleasure of the tourist gaze as a picturesque setting for the romantic tryst of the protagonists, disregarding the fact that in Ireland castles and Big Houses bear witness to the island's troubled

[17] Not surprisingly, then, the latest edition of *Lonely Planet Ireland* affirms that "Ireland's social heart beats loudest in the pub... the broadest window through which you can examine and experience the very essence of the nation's culture, in all its myriad forms" (Davenport et al. 80).

colonial past,[18] and that images of empty, half-derelict houses are the visible scars left by the wounds of famine, poverty and emigration.[19]

Castles and Big Houses are also staple features of a large number of ghost and horror films where visitors to Ireland experience terrifying incidents rather than romance in a convivial site. Insofar as these films have been released concurrently with the romantic comedies, it is tempting to read them as an attempt to demystify the construction of Ireland as a pastoral Arcadia, as Neil Jordan had done in 1988 with his first big-budget Hollywood film *High Spirits*[20] and as a few other titles partly do as well.[21] Ultimately though, the horror films prove to be as escapist as the romantic comedies analysed above; indeed, despite avoiding the quaint picturesqueness of the latter, the Ireland they depict is still that of a primitive, but spiritually richer, and hence supposedly superior, other.

Early examples such as *Escape to Nowhere* (also entitled *House of the Damned*), and *Trance* (alternative title *The Eternal*) feature American families travelling to Ireland in search of healing: in the first case a couple with a young daughter wish to get their marriage back on track and in the second a couple with a young son expect to give up their hard-drinking lifestyle in their Irish ancestral home. Three recent films, *Puffball*, *The Daisy Chain* and *Wake Wood* also deal with couples who,

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[18] Indeed, for centuries, castles and Big Houses in Ireland stood as physical emblems of the political, social and economic status of the ruling class. The first castles were fortifications built in the twelve century by the Anglo-Normans in order to defend their recently conquered land, whereas Big Houses were commissioned by the prosperous landowning Anglo-Irish Ascendancy during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—a time when the Catholic native population were utterly disenfranchised by the Penal Laws and could hardly survive as tenant farmers. Despite the picturesque appeal of ruins, the crumbling state of so many Irish castles and Big Houses is the result of their having been attacked or set on fire during periods of unrest, from the Land Wars to the War of Independence and the Civil War.

[19] According to some U.S. journalists invited by Fáilte Ireland to a week 'press trip' of Ireland, castles, green fields, sheep, music, roots, and a friendly welcome are what the typical mature American tourist seeks from Ireland: "Castles are legendary, story-book like... The castles are what everyone wants to see. It's a dream to see a castle, and the biggest dream of all is to stay in one" (Boland).

[20] *High Spirits* is a humorous take on American expectations of Ireland. The owners of a dilapidated Irish castle advertise ghost-tours to attract gullible American tourists, only to find out their castle really is haunted. According to Maria Pramaggiore (52) "In many ways, Jordan's film presages the commodification of Irish ethnicity that took place in the 1990s [...] Made in 1988, the film is surprisingly prescient in its treatment of real estate, tourism and entertainment as the growth industries of post-industrial global capitalism."

[21] These are the comedies *The Matchmaker* and *Dead Long Enough,* and the arthouse movie *Nothing Personal.* The comedies contain humorous touches that add a refreshingly mocking twist to the otherwise formulaic plotline and characters (see synopses in Appendix 1). *Nothing Personal* also resorts to the much used formula of the trip of a young woman to the west of Ireland but it differs from the American romcoms: moving to the austere landscapes of Connemara will be beneficial for the Dutch protagonist who is coming out of a distressful (though unexplained) situation, but not by means of the usual romance. Another original aspect of the film is that it portrays rural Ireland as beautiful but unusually austere and without whimsical locals in sight, but then, quite unimaginatively, it makes the young woman's stubborn aloofness begin to thaw with the customary visit to the local pub and a wild Irish dance (see stills in Appendix 2).

escaping from the London grind in one case, and the tragic experience of losing a baby in the others, plan on starting anew in a remote Irish village. *Yesterday's Children* offers a variant of the healing trip pattern for the rural Irish west facilitates the protagonist's unearthing of her hidden traumas through a symbolic encounter with the past. The film portrays a married pregnant American woman, Jenny Cole, who travels to Ireland after her apparent happiness is disturbed by recurring dreams about an unfortunate Irish woman who had died in the 1930s at the age of 37 and who, as Jenny eventually finds out, happened to be herself in a previous incarnation. Given the chance to recover her past, Jenny will take on the mission of reuniting the scattered children she lost in her former existence.

A feature common to all these films is that rural Ireland is portrayed as being saturated in Celtic beliefs about druids, changelings and fertility rites and, as a result, the protagonists have to overcome frightening ordeals posed by otherworldly forces. The Irish cottages and mansions they buy or inherit (since many of the protagonists are of Irish extraction) and their surroundings are invariably haunted by tricky creatures from Celtic mythology or by the ghosts of their ancestors. Eventually, though, the taxing move of sophisticated and troubled urbanites to rural Ireland becomes a rewarding journey. Indeed, it is probably the case that in cinematic terms Ireland has become the main signifier of Old World's uplifting values vis-à-vis the trivial shallowness of capitalist modern society. Significantly, *Puffball* and *Yesterday's Children* add an Irish or Irish/American dimension which was absent in the books of the same title by Fay Weldon (1980) and Jenny Cockell (1993) on which they are respectively based: the screen adaptation of the first relocates Weldon's fictional story from Somerset to Ireland and the second turns the autobiographical account of a woman from the English East Midlands into the story of an American woman.

Despite Ireland's prominent output of ghost and horror literature and the presence of Irish motifs such as the leprechaun and the banshee as figures of fear in American cinema, it is only in the last decade that there has been an explosion of Irish-set horror films. They all follow a similar plot: foreigners or urbanites visiting rural Ireland have their positive expectations of the country dashed when, instead of coming across whimsical characters and fiery *colleens*, they find the place inhabited by disturbed people and nasty spirits stalking and serially decimating them. The fact that in most of the cases the visitors are American[22] offers the films the opportunity of engaging, or even challenging, the romanticised vision of picturesque Ireland and of its potential therapeutic effects.

[22] In *The Legend of Samhain*, a group of American university students interested in the rituals of the ancient Druids and other Celtic legends come across the ancestors of an incestuous clan of cannibals; in *Shrooms* a gang of American teenagers arrives in Ireland to pick magic mushrooms but the experience leads to chaos and carnage: at the end of the film both the spectator and the sole survivor, young Tara, realize that a hallucinogenic mushroom has caused her to murder all of her pals; in *Ghostwood* a New York psychologist travels to a remote village in the west of Ireland where his father disappeared while searching for the spirits of a mother and child who were buried alive in the nearby forest over 1000 years ago.

However, the filmmakers' agendas seem to be totally alien to such revisionist concerns. Indeed, being rather light instances of the horror and supernatural thriller genre, the films' main efforts seem to be geared at building up a creepy atmosphere and the frisson elicited by the unexpected irruption of horrific events affecting characters who may be said to be ill-fated, short-term tourists rather than travellers in search of romance and life-changing experiences.

To conclude my rather critical survey of recent films set in rural Ireland, I would like to clarify that my reservations about the popular strand of travel-based romcoms do not originate from a film studies approach but in terms of cultural and national representations. In this sense, I do not consider the simplicity and predictability of the films' plots as a shortcoming for "[t]he formulaic nature of the genre is often at the heart of the pleasures experienced by the audience" (Mortimer 5). Moreover, as some recent literature on this dynamic genre has pointed out, the romcom at the end of the twentieth century is markedly conservative, embracing romantic love and traditional family structures against the backdrop of the AIDS crisis, soaring rates of divorce and single parenting (Mortimer 18). Tamar Jeffers McDonald calls these new comedies "neo-traditional" because they represent a return to a notional form of romantic comedy; she characterises these as paying lip service to such ideas as big-city alienation, the prevalence of divorce or the actual problems of forming a lasting relationship in contemporary society, "only to confound [viewers] with the perfect romance [they] then produce[ ] for [the] protagonists" (85), a love relationship characterised by a marked de-emphasizing of sexuality (97). Although McDonald does not explicitly refer to the Irish-set comedies but to those which repeatedly use New York as "*the* location for romance" (88), many of these features apply to them as well.

As I hope to have proved by highlighting the films' reliance on anachronistic and clichéd signifiers of Irishness, my objections would be for actions omitted rather than committed. Above all I regret their having missed the opportunity to function as a space for cultural negotiation, in particular a re-examination of the diasporic construction of Ireland as a pastoral Arcadia and reservoir of spirituality. According to a perceptive point raised by Stephanie Rains in her book *The Irish-American in Popular Culture 1945-2000* (2007), whereas before the advent of mass tourism "the diaspora's understanding of their cultural relationship to the 'old country' had been predominantly constructed through the use of narratives (fictional or historical) [...] [the new possibility of travelling] provided the opportunity for those narratives to be experienced within the context of contemporary Ireland" (139). Consequently, the recurrent cinematic trips of Irish Americans to Ireland could have fruitfully functioned as a "self-interrogating framework through which the diaspora negotiates a reconciliation between its narrativised collective history and its engagement with [the realities of] contemporary Ireland" (138).[23] Sadly, this opportunity has

[23] This happens in *This is My Father* (Paul Quinn 1998), not analysed here because it is not a romantic comedy. Through the story of an elderly history teacher from Illinois who travels

been missed by the films I have analysed, where Ireland is used as an emblem of the old world, a mere commodity to satisfy people's craving for anti-modern nostalgia.

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in search of his mother's past, the film offers a much more original and profound approach to the trip to Ireland of an Irish-American than the films object of the present study. Although in Ireland the teacher learns the tragic circumstances of his mother's emigration in the 1930s as an unmarried pregnant young woman, following her lover's suicide, precipitated by the constrictive ethos of rural Ireland, finding about his ancestry allows the character to return to his life in America with a strengthened sense of personal identity.

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APPENDIX 1
(Synopses of the films in alphabetical order)

Dead Long Enough (Tom Collins 2005 IR/UK)

A film backed by the Irish/Northern Irish and Welsh national film agencies about two Welsh brothers—womanising successful archaeologist turned TV celebrity Harry and bored solicitor Ben—going for the latter's stag night to a Donegal seaside town where they had had a great time in their youth. Once in Ireland, they find that Ben's former girlfriend Sinead is now living with someone who runs a funeral parlour-cum-pub which in fact is a cover-up for smuggling booze and guns in a hearse from over the border. Eventually, Ben and Sinead rekindle their romance and he calls off his imminent wedding. At a visual level, the film offers amusing distortions of John Hinde's postcards, but instead of developing the parody to revise other clichéd representations of Irishness, it just repeats them in a totally banal way, with a loose plot and the antics of a string of eccentric types (e.g. a silly couple of gardaí, a gay soldier on border patrol).

Irish Jam (John Eyres 2006 USA/UK)

A farce about the people of Ballywood (a supposedly Irish coast town) which holds a poetry contest hoping to raise money to prevent English Lord Hailstock's plans to turn it into a Japanese-sponsored amusement park called 'Leprechaun Land'. They offer Finnegan's, their beloved pub, as the grand prize. Broke African-American swindler Jimmy Jam, who wants to get away from the bustle and squalor of his life in Los Angeles, as well as from his psychotic girlfriend, enters and wins the competition with a poem ending with the fiery line: "If it's freedom you want, then you gotta fight fight fight" which elicits from the local priest the approving comment that the author "must be Irish". But, in fact, Jimmy has cribbed the whole text from a rap CD, and in the town of Ballywood the fighting Irish spirit has degenerated into the brawling of drunken simpletons. The film is full of cartoonish characters and the arrival of the African-American provides little cultural clashes since more than a representative from another country and ethnicity he seems an alien from another planet. Still, he falls in love with the town's only colleen and learns about friendship, community, and trust.

Laws of Attraction (Peter Howitt 2004 UK/IR)

Rival New York lawyers Daniel Rafferty and Audrey Woods find themselves on opposite sides of a divorce case involving a celebrity American couple who own a castle in Ireland, the one piece of property each wants to keep from the marriage for its is "the most magical place on earth ... a fairytale castle". Eventually, the couple reconcile at the castle, and the lawyers, who have also travelled to Ireland to assess the value of the property of their divorcing clients, find themselves in a local festival in which fake weddings are performed. Audrey, a lonely and neurotic career woman goes on a drinking binge and wakes up the next morning married to Daniel.

Leap Year (Anand Tucker 2009 USA/IR)

A smart and over-organized young Bostonian named Anna intents to marry her long-time boyfriend, a successful heart surgeon, but he still hasn't proposed to her after

four years of courtship. As he is in Dublin attending a cardiologists' convention, Anna, who has been told that in Ireland on Leap Day every four years a woman can ask a man to marry her, decides to turn up in Dublin unexpectedly. Due to bad weather conditions she is diverted to Cardiff and from there she is stranded in Dingle (!). She hires a handsome and rough Irish pub owner to take her to Dublin, and this proves to be a three-day obstacle race in the course of which she has to endure humiliating tests to adapt to the slow and old-fashioned pace of life in rural Ireland, but in the process she learns about herself. In the end, she renounces her luxury apartment and fiancé and returns to Dingle saying: "I realised I had everything I ever wanted but nothing I really needed... and I think that what I need is here."

Nothing Personal (Urszula Antoniak 2009 IR)

Directed by a Polish-born filmmaker, the film presents a young Dutch divorcee who after throwing away all her possessions chooses to lead a wandering existence in the austere landscapes of Connemara and in a house by a lake occupied by a solitary widower. Both being extremely zealous of their independence and solitude, they make a deal: she will work for food, lodging and company but there will be no personal contact, no questions. After the sudden death of the man sees her as the heiress of his property and money, she makes another move, this time to Andalusia.

P.S. I Love You (Richard LaGravenese 2007 USA)

American estate agent broker Holly visits Ireland and falls in love at first sight with charming Gerry Kennedy. They marry and move to New York, but their happy marriage is cut short by his sudden death of a brain tumour. Before dying, though he had organised an elaborate series of posthumously delivered messages with directives for dressing up, party-going, karaoke singing, throwing out his stuff and a trip to Ireland, to help Holly cope with bereavement and start over without him. Quite predictably, in rural Ireland Holly finds a new love interest, re-establishes links with family and tradition and re-bonds with her embittered mother, who also finds love in Ireland.

The Matchmaker (Mark Joffe 1997 USA/UK/IR)

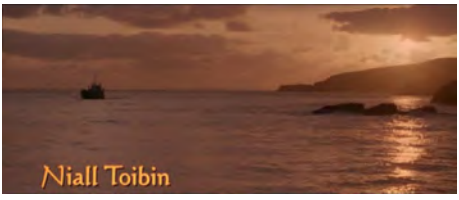
Directed by an Australian, this co-production is in part a parody of how the Irish perform Irishness for Irish-American consumption. A guide-cum-hotel proprietor describes Ireland to the newly arrived visitors as the "land of mystery, land of stones, land of tears, land of fish, land of shops and places to go, land where the voices of the dead whistle through the trees and the streets, and the past reaches out and touches your very soul", but upon arrival in the small seatown, a dog pisses on the American protagonist's luggage and the place is inhabited by roguish locals and ineffective gardaí. The plot is built around Massachusetts senator John McGlory who, despite coming from Hungary, in order to boost his declining popularity in the forthcoming elections, decides to play the Irish card by dispatching his assistant Marcy to the west of Ireland in order to trace his Irish roots. Notwithstanding the amusing satirical take on Irish-American expectations of Ireland, the young woman's trip conforms to the formula of spiritually recuperative trips to the Emerald Isle for Marcy, a workaholic whose energies had been fruitlessly used in the services of a corrupt American politician, will learn to value 'authenticity' from Irishman Sean, who has abandoned the city

and a career in public relations (that he sees as morally bankrupt), to retreat to his family and a simple lifestyle in the west of Ireland.

The Nephew (Eugene Brady 1998 IR)

Chad, a young Afro-American-Irish orphan boy travels from New York to the island of Inis Dora after the death of his mother, who had emigrated to America twenty years before, running away from the conservative ethos of the island community and of her brother Tony, who is now the boy's only remaining relative. After introducing the disruptive premise of making the Irish-American visitor a young black man, the film does not address the issue. The possible conflict arising from the clash of cultural differences between the young visitor and the local population is simply reduced to an old family feud which is happily resolved: thematically, through his romance with a local girl and, at the visual and aural levels, with picturesque shots of verdant and spiritually-enhancing natural scenery (dotted with prehistoric remnants rather than the ubiquitous castle of the other films, and eccentric characters like two nuns fly-fishing in a stream in hip boots) and a soundtrack that includes Celtic music, 70s rock standards and rap.

APPENDIX 2
(Stills)

Arrival in (rural) Ireland	
The Matchmaker	*The Matchmaker*
	
The Matchmaker	*High Spirits*
	
The Nephew	*The Nephew*
	
Laws of Attraction	*Laws of Attraction*
	
Irish Jam	*Irish Jam*
	

P.S. I Love You

P.S. I Love You

Leap Year

Leap Year

Leap Year

Dead Long Enough

Dead Long Enough

Nothing Personal

Drinking and Dancing at the Pub

Laws of Attraction

Laws of Attraction

P.S. I Love You

The Matchmaker

Leap Year

Nothing Personal

Romantic Walks in the Countryside

The Matchmaker

Irish Jam

The Nephew

Leap Year

Castles and Ruins	
Leap Year	*Laws of Attraction*
	
Dead Long Enough	*High Spirits*
	

UNMOTHERLY NATIONS, UNPATRIOTIC MOTHERS: OTHER IRELANDS IN CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S POETRY

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Abstract

This paper examines the ways in which contemporary Irish women's poetry revises conventional representations of female allegories of the nation. The analysis will show that traditionally female tropes of Irish nationalism inhabit the same cultural location that characterizes the societal position of motherhood according to Julia Kristeva, who argues that mothers assume an important function in regulating the drives and preparing children for entrance into the symbolic order of society, in relation to which they themselves remain structurally liminal. This paper will show that contemporary Irish women poets use these female tropes as a potent site for revising the discourses of femininity and Irish nationalism, either through aligning these abstract, stereotyped female figures with women's lived experience, or by reevaluating them from within their liminal positions.

Key words: Irish women's poetry, Kristeva, female representations and the Irish nation, rereading Irish traditions.

Resumen

Este ensayo examina las formas en las que la poesía contemporánea de mujeres irlandesas reformula las representaciones convencionales de las alegorías femeninas de la nación. El análisis demostrará que los tropos femeninos del nacionalismo irlandés habitan tradicionalmente la misma localización cultural que caracteriza la posición en la sociedad de la maternidad según Julia Kristeva, que considera que las madres asumen una función importante para regular las pulsiones y preparar a los niños para su ingreso en el orden simbólico de la sociedad, en relación a lo cual, éstos permanecen liminares estructuralmente. Este ensayo revelará que las poetas irlandesas contemporáneas utilizan estos tropos femeninos como un poderoso sitio donde revisar los discursos sobre feminidad y nacionalismo irlandés, bien alineando estas figuras femeninas abstractas y estereotipadas con la experiencia vivida por mujeres, bien reevaluándolas desde los entresijos de sus posiciones liminares.

Palabras clave: poesía de mujeres irlandesas, Kristeva, representaciones femeninas y la nación irlandesa, relecturas de la tradición irlandesa.

Contemporary women poets in Ireland have unanimously criticized maternal allegories of Irish nationalism for offering oversimplified conceptions of motherhood, of gender, and of the nation. In voicing this criticism, these poets have followed two fundamentally different, yet complementary paths. Along with Declan Kiberd's emphasis in *Inventing Ireland* on the vast and continuous impact of the simplification and victimization of "woman" in the discourses of cultural nationalism, women poets in Ireland have either *re-inscribed* these iconic figures with new meanings or, alternatively, *re-evaluated* the silence and passivity that characterizes their conventional portrayal:

> The fetishizing, once permitted, affects everything— even the landscape is treated like a reified woman's body— so that, after independence, the actual landscape is slowly transformed by the touristic industries until it conforms to the outlines of the original fantasy. In other words, the Cathleen ní Houlihan of real flesh and blood must impersonate for her lovers the sort of woman they want her to be, and she must leave her own desires unimplemented. In such a nationalism, the "lyric stage" completely overrides the historic concreteness of the revolution. It is made possible by an endless harping on an idealized past, which is used as a distraction from the mediocrity of the present. (Kiberd 294)

In many of her poems, Eavan Boland bestows agency on this icon and makes her tell stories of quotidian existence, hence contesting the inherent abstraction and passivity, which, as Kiberd explains above, impacts on the images of both "woman" and "nation" long after Irish independence. Other poets in Ireland have challenged these allegories while leaving their original qualities unaltered, either through stylistic experimentation or ironic distance. This essay seeks to account for the different positions in Irish women's poetry from the past three decades.

When the discourses of nationalism are amalgamated with those of femininity, motherhood is only one target for simplification. Mother Ireland, Dark Rosaleen, Cathleen Ní Houlihan, and the beautiful young maiden/ old hag of *aisling* poetry come in many variants. Together, these figures present generic and simplified images of women, who can be oversexed or desexualized, and whose motherhood, where applicable, is depersonalized and politicized. Sons are to be produced for the purpose of restoring or consolidating national independence and identity, and daughters to be moulded into the sacrificial maternal roles presented by their mothers, who form an important part of the disciplining body within the system that subdues them. A reading of "Mac an Cheannaí," translated into English by Michael Hartnett as "The Merchant's Son" (15-16), one of 17th-century poet Aodhagán Ó Rathaille's famous vision poems, demonstrates this simplification.

The maiden in Ó Rathaille's poem, Éire, has no autonomy from her lover Mac an Cheannaí, the rightful sovereign of Ireland, whom she believes to be held captive overseas. When she learns of his death, she is also instantly bereft of the purpose of her existence. Following a pattern that is common in the "aisling" form, the poem, which Sean Ó Tuama describes as capturing a mood of "unredeemable despair" (113), records a conversation between a male speaker/ poet and Éire. The maiden tells the stranger that she will be denied the pleasures of love until her suitor

comes back from his travels. In fact, her very womanhood is suspended until his return: "she'll barren become and lie with none till back comes Mac an Cheannaí" (Harnett 15). In the last stanza, however, the poet imparts to Éire the disillusioning news that her love was killed in Spain, which prolongs her plight into an indefinite future and, as the closing lines show, deprives her not only of her slender hopes of happy love, but of her very identity:

> Her freckled kin, they're overseas, the crowds who loved this woman;
> no favour, feast, can be had by them, no fondness, love, I witness;
> her face is wet, no sleep she gets— black with gloom her aspect—
> there's no relief to come near her till back comes Mac an Cheannaí.
>
> I said to her when I heard her words, 'The love you knew was mortal,
> beyond in Spain his body's laid and none will heed your heartache.'
> When she heard my voice so close beside, her body shook with screaming,
> Her soul escaped in one quick flash: my woe, this girl, exhausted. (Hartnett 16)

Even though the maiden's incapacitation in the poem is not intended as a comment on women's powerlessness in comparison to men, but is rendered as a consequence of the overall disempowerment of Ireland under colonial rule, as Ó Tuama's analysis of the poem demonstrates (113-115), the fact that Éire's fate is so very intricately connected to Mac an Cheannaí's is nevertheless of core significance not only to this particular poem, but the entire tradition it emerged from. The maiden in "The Merchant's Son" does not exist in her own right, but is entirely a function of the rightful king of Ireland, the most esteemed of "[h]er freckled kin" overseas. To this man she has surrendered her body, which will remain infertile until he takes possession of it, and her soul, which dematerializes when she learns of her lover's death. While in this particular rendering of the *aisling* Éire is not conceptualized as a mother, maternity is addressed in the poem, as a function that is entirely contingent on the male to whom the woman is espoused.

For the analysis in this essay, the concept of maternity is relevant in two ways: as an effectuated, if abstract, maternity, when the woman-as-nation trope portrays a maternal figure, but also more generally as a site of origin that is mythologized and obfuscated, echoing Kristeva's association of the Platonic "chora" with maternity in "Women's Time" as "matrix space, nourishing, unnameable, anterior to the One, to God and, consequently, defying metaphysics" (191). As a potential provider of offspring ("matrix space," "nourishing") for Mac an Cheannaí with no independent existence or identity ("anterior to the One"), the maiden in Ó Rathaille's poem mirrors important traits of the Platonic receptacle, showing that the "chora" is illuminating with regard to the discourses of maternity both in individualized and generic representations. In accordance with this understanding, Eugene O'Brien's *Examining Irish Nationalism in the Context of Literature, Culture and Religion* describes nationalistic identification in a way that has strong repercussions with the Kristevan semiotic or Lacanian mirror stage: "in the nationalist imaginaire, a fixed, hypostasized image of the self, be that individual or societal, is held out both as a "terminus ad quem" towards which all identificatory processes should be

progressing, and conversely as a "terminus a quo" from which all deviation should be prevented" (53). This interplay of myth of origin and utopian destiny, according to O'Brien, sets up a performative dialogue out of which national identity is constituted. Consequently, the "nation," like the pre-Oedipal maternal, defies logical argumentation and linear time:

> Nationalistic selfhood creates a people, a Volk, which transcends time and death. The religious overtones of this message, allied to strong unconscious influences, combine to create a linguistic and suasive dimension to the epistemology of nationalism which can never be fully examined in any analysis which is not grounded in literary, linguistic, and psychoanalytic techniques. (20)

Like the Kristevan "chora" of "Women's Time," nationalistic selfhood in O'Brien pertains to the realm of cyclical or "monumental" time, as well as defying representation through language. It is mostly in light of this second, more abstract understanding of maternity as a cultural location that "aisling" poems like Ó Rathaille's, which also often harness the maternal function for political purposes, and their contemporary contestations are relevant in this dissertation.

Eavan Boland counters this expropriation and simplification of the discourses of femininity in much of her poetry, advocating the need to record the particularities of women's lives.[1] Ironically, her first major poetic response to the appropriation of the discourses of femininity in Irish nationalism, "Mise Éire," a poem originally published in Boland's 1987 collection *The Journey*, has by now itself gained iconic status. The speaker in this text, Boland's revision of Pádraig Pearse's poem of the same name, as Gerardine Meaney explains (199), is a woman poet who seeks to depart from the literary convention that sees "[her] nation displaced / into old dactyls" (Boland 128). Instead, the speaker envisages "a new language" for its representation (Boland 129). Boland emphasizes the importance of replacing "the songs / that bandage up the history, / the words / that make a rhythm of the crime" (Boland 128) with the lived experience of "real" women, including the silenced lives of prostitutes and emigrants:

> I am the woman—
> a sloven's mix
> of silk at the wrists,
> a sort of dove-strut
> in the precincts of the garrison—
>
> who practices
> the quick frictions,
> the rictus of delight

[1] This theme is covered in numerous poems especially in *The Journey*, *Outside History*, *In a Time of Violence*, and *The Lost Land*.

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and gets cambric for it,
rice-coloured silks.

I am the woman
in the gansy-coat
on board the Mary Belle,
in the huddling cold,

holding her half-dead baby to her
as the wind shifts east
and north over the dirty
water of the wharf

mingling the immigrant
guttural with the vowels
of homesickness who neither
knows nor cares that

a new language
is a kind of scar
and heals after a while
into a passable imitation
of what went before. (*NCP* 128-9)

In accordance with Hélène Cixous's and Luce Irigaray's theorizing of the "feminine Imaginary" or virtual feminine as an alternative epistemological paradigm that represents the discourses of gender as designating two autonomous entities,[2] the remaking of Irish poetry Boland envisages in order to record the hidden lives of Irish women past and present is a long and unsettling process, which will eventually yield a "passable imitation of what went before." However, critics' views on the value of Boland's "Mise Éire" for revising female allegories of the nation have been divided.

Given her choice of words in phrases like "a kind of scar" and "passable imitation" in "Mise Éire," it is not surprising that Boland has been criticized for denying herself the realization of her full creative potential by remaining captive to the old forms and conventions she contests. In "From Cathleen to Anorexia: The Breakdown of Irelands," for instance, Edna Longley argues that the poem "destabilizes Mise but not Éire" (163), suggesting that the poet questions the role of the woman poet, but not the discourses of nationalism or their gendering in cultural representation. Longley's statement is an obvious reaction to the conceptualization of "the woman poet's" (a concept which is itself charged and often used reductively) renovation of

[2] See Hélène Cixous's and Catherine Clement's *The Newly Born Woman*; Hélène Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa"; Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex which Is Not One*; and Alice Jardine's "Gynesis."

the discourses of nationalism in terms of injury and damage, thus implicitly portraying her own project as a diminishment of the established codes. In "Boland, McGuckian, Ní Chuilleanáin and the Body of the Nation," Guinn Batten discusses Boland's work in similar terms to Longley, highlighting the limitations that the poet's recurrent contestation of the inherited structures not only of cultural nationalism, but also more generally of language and poetics entails. Batten explains that by giving a voice to the woman-as-object of the Irish poetic tradition in "Mise Éire," as well as her 1998 collection *The Lost Land*, Boland "turns frequently to that fixed poetic part as it assumes personhood, a process whereby Mother Ireland becomes and ordinary (but therefore exemplary) Irish woman" (178). The critic compares this approach to other poets' deconstruction of that "fixed part" as a strategy that offers more possibilities for renewal.

More appreciative readings of "Mise Éire" see the juxtaposition of the inherited image of Hibernia with its hidden Other as setting up a performative dynamics that paves the way for the development of an alternative cultural paradigm. In "Irish Women Poets and the Republic of Ireland: Formalism as Form," Catriona Clutterbuck remarks that "the speaker as female is simultaneously both the icon of Ireland (Mise Éire) that elides the suppressed elements of the country's history (such as the lives of the whores and emigrants), and herself what is elided (Mise Éire). Therefore the speaker at once models the mask demanded by nation, and the emptiness beneath it," thus "enacting the very tension between false and true representation which is endemic in the foundations of modern Irish culture" (31).[3] Indeed, Boland's poem is precisely the product of the encounter of the generic image of "the woman" and its Other, the emigrant mother suffering in abysmal poverty or the woman who sells her body to escape the former's destitution.

Whether one chooses to see the poem as reproducing and perpetuating the traditions it contests or as a successful attempt at revising them, arguably a predominantly oppositional stance as often present especially in Boland's early work constitutes a necessary and important stage in the process of renovating the discourses of femininity. As Rosi Braidotti suggests in *Metamorphoses*, this revisionist project requires "*working through* the stock of cumulated images, concepts and representations of women, of female identity, such as they have been codified by the culture we are in" (41). And indeed, Boland recurrently revisits the "cumulated images" of women in Irish poetry of nationalism, as well as representing what they exclude. "Mise Éire" is the most widely known, if not necessarily the most effective, example. The poet's more recent writing deconstructs the concept of "nation" to a larger degree than her work from the 1980s and early 1990s, whereby, according to

[3] For similar perspectives, see Gerardine Meaney's discussion of the poem in "Sex and Nation: Women in Irish Culture and Politics"; Kim McMullen's " 'That the Science of Cartography Is Limited': Historiography, Gender, and Nationality in Eavan Boland's 'Writing in a Time of Violence' "; Jahan Ramazani's "A Transnational Poetics"; and Deborah Sarbin's " 'Out of Myth into History': The Poetry of Eavan Boland and Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin."

Michael Böss, Boland's 1998 collection *The Lost Land* marks an important transitional moment ("The Naming of Loss and Love: Eavan Boland's "Lost Land" " 127).

While the speaking voice in Boland's work often seems constrained by the dilemma of at once seeking to identify with the Irish poetic tradition and at the same time also renouncing substantial aspects of it, Medbh McGuckian's and Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's more oblique writings review the Irish literary conventions from a less oppositional viewpoint and more implicitly. In "Boland, McGuckian, Ní Chuilleanáin and the Body of the Nation," Guinn Batten describes their different approaches to the woman-as-nation trope:

> To Boland's argument that women writers become political when they eschew victimhood while representing those women who remain victims, McGuckian and Ní Chuilleanáin often present speakers or historical figures who acquire agency through bodily surrender. To Boland's anger that women in Ireland have been historically silenced or absent they offer a poetry that figures silence and absence as replete with strategies for rethinking the course of narrative and of history. (173)

The analysis of the following poems by McGuckian and Ní Chuilleanáin will show that their writings indeed offer alternative solutions for the emancipation of Irish poetry from the traditions the early Boland contests, based on a revision that occurs predominantly at a stylistic, rather than a conceptual level. However, the strategies employed by McGuckian and Ní Chuilleanáin in order to achieve this are fundamentally different. While McGuckian's introspective poetry often blurs the boundaries between self and other, inside and outside, as well as other conventional binaries, Ní Chuilleanáin's poems tend to offer complex, multilayered, often prismatic, yet precisely drawn, images of external objects.

Medbh McGuckian's "The Colony Room" (*Drawing Ballerinas* 48) features a speaker who re-inscribes the convention that analogizes the female body to the land as s/he describes the act of love-making between two partners of unspecified sexual identity. The implicit reference in the title of the poem to a private members drinking club in Soho, London, which was established in the aftermath of the Second World War, of which the painter Francis Bacon was one of the founding members, and which was run by Muriel Belcher, creates an ambience that echoes this post-war focus for excentricity, artistic exchange, and gay culture. Overall, the poem questions the conventions of art as well as of sexuality and is representative of the ways in which, as Moynagh Sullivan suggests in "Dreamin' My Dreams with You: Medbh McGuckian and the Theatre of Dreams," McGuckian challenges "Irish literary cultures and traditions, which are fixed in subject-object positions which designate the woman primarily as an iconic mother and as an unchanging structure from which a historical body of male poets may negotiate their relationship to the nation, or the island" (109). The encounter portrayed in "The Colony Room" radically undermines notions of fixed "subject-object positions" and of iconic representations of maternity, as well as questioning, among other binaries, the simplified dichotomy of colonial victim versus aggressor.

McGuckian's poem portrays two mutually desiring lovers during an encounter in the "colony room," defying the formulaic patterns of male-female relationships

in *aisling* poetry, where a passive woman is the object of the, often unconsummated, desire of a male as described by Richard Kearney in *Postnationalist Ireland*:

> After the plantations of the seventeenth century, Ireland became more frequently identified with a vulnerable virgin ravished by the aggressive masculine invader from England: the *Sasannach*. In the *Aisling* poems of the eighteenth century, the 'hidden' Ireland was thus personified as a visionary daughter or *spéirbhean* threatened by the alien marauder (or inversely, following the same logic, as a shameless hag— *meirdreach*— who lifted her skirts for the invader's pleasure). (119-120)[4]

Evoking religious reverence as well as love-making, McGuckian's poem deconstructs the binary image of "spéirbhean" versus "meirdreach":

> If you are touching, you are also being touched:
> if I place my hands in prayer, palm to palm,
> I give your hands new meaning, your left hand calm.
>
> You define my body with the centre of your hand;
> I hear through the shingled roof of your skin
> your ear-shaped body enter the curved floor-line
> of my skin. My hands just skim the cushioned opening,
> the glitter of your mouth; all woods, roots and flowers
> scent and stretch the map that covers your body.
>
> Less touchable than the birth or continuation
> of Ireland, in its railed enclosure, your root-note,
> in its sexual climate, your kingdom-come eyes,
> year-long, inactive lover, durable as paradise.
>
> Like small shocks in the winter, neck to neck,
> the mirrors reflected the coloured ray
> the evenings needed most, when the day...
> asked for night in that mistletoe way. (48)

Both partners' touch actively bestows meaning, thereby challenging the "male subject" versus "female object" dichotomy that characterizes the formulaic poetry of Irish nationalism as described by Kearney. In addition, the speaker's hands are alternately cast "in prayer, palm to palm" and then in a sensual exploration of the other, gliding over "the cushioned opening, / the glitter of your mouth" while the addressee of the speaker's words and caresses is described in terms of both

[4] Declan Kiberd also emphasizes the passivity of the woman in "aisling" poetry: "The 'aisling' poets of the eighteenth century had always imagined woman not as an autonomous person but as a site of contest: the wilting 'spéirbhean' or skywoman lay back and languished until deliverance came from abroad in the person of a gallant national saviour" (362).

religious ("your kingdom-come eyes") and sexual ("your root-note, / in its sexual climate") nuances.

In addition to the strong sensual connotations of these lines, the title of the poem and numerous other references also invite political associations. The reference to "the map that covers your body," for instance, evokes the 19th century anglicization of Irish place names in order to map out Irish territory as part of the British Empire, which in the 1980s elicited various artistic responses, such as Brian Friel's *Translations* and visual artist Kathy Prendergast's Body Map series. In the latter, which the poem may draw on for inspiration, fragmented and therefore alienating images of female body parts are blended in with map sections, rendering the conventional association of "woman" with "land" in the Irish cultural tradition as a colonial imposition. In McGuckian's poem, the representation of the body/map composite is also defamiliarized, as the speaker is "scent[ing] and stretch[ing]" the map that is alternatively constructing, containing, concealing or shielding the lover's body, hence pointing to the complex dynamics of identity formation, both personal and collective. Because it is "[l]ess touchable than the birth or continuation / of Ireland," acknowledging the contingencies involved in national identification as well as the representation of national identity, the image of the encounter between self and other McGuckian offers is "durable as paradise," thus advocating a language of fluidity and transience to overcome the unhelpful fixations of the past, as well as positioning the encounter between the two lovers in a realm apart from concrete material existence, an effect which the image of the lover's "kingdom-come eyes" further enhances.

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's "The Last Glimpse of Erin" (*The Rose Geranium* 24), shows that the objectification of women in Irish poetry of nationalism is a collective undertaking by offering glimpses of the perspectives of poet and an unspecified addressee as well as that of a man holding his baby while his wife is mending his clothes. This merging of different perspectives at a conceptual level is mirrored in the aesthetic dimension in the way in which the island and the swimmer in the poem gradually fuse into one another while the unspecified "you" the speaking voice recurrently addresses is drifting off to sleep. "At the same time as the space between them grows," Irene Gilsenan-Nordin suggests in *Reading Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, a Contemporary Poet*, "the distance paradoxically diminishes, as the island slowly dissolves into the sea" (77):

> The coastline, a swimmer's polished shoulder heaving
> On the edge of sky: our eyes make it grow:
> The last glimpse, low and smooth in the sea.
>
> We face the air, all surfaces become
> Sheer, one long line is growing
> Like a spider's navel cord: the distance
>
> From your low shoulder lost in the quilt,
> An arm thrown forward: a swimmer: your head
> Buried in a pillow like a wave.

The white light skirting the cloud pierces
Glass riddled with small scratches and crates
The depths and cadences of a spider's web.

A man is holding his baby and laughing,
He strokes her cheek with a brownstained finger
While his wife sews a wristbutton on his other hand.

The island trimmed with waves is lost in the sea,
The swimmer lost in his dream. (*Ní Chuilleanáin* 24)

As the dynamic, male swimmer in Ní Chuilleanáin's poem is moving away from the land, an image of a submissive maternal figure emerges at the centre of the poem, highlighting the aesthetic process that has reified women in the poetic traditions of nationalism in Ireland. Both land and swimmer are gradually submerged in the man's gaze, moulding the original dynamic image of an athlete receding from the mainland into a passive, dream-like vision, echoing the aesthetics of the "aisling" convention, which tends to simplify and hypostasize, as the example of Ó Rathaille's "The Merchant's Son" demonstrates.

The recurrent reference to spiders in "The Last Glimpse of Erin," which takes its title from one of 19th-century Irish poet and singer Thomas Moore's melodies, "The Coolin," enhances the alienating effect the manipulation of spaces and angles creates. The spider's web, which appears twice in Ní Chuilleanáin's poem, is a reminder of the fact that the picture it presents is constructed and contingent like the precarious product of the spider's subtle craft. The simulacrum of the "*spider's* navel cord" (my emphasis), furthermore, draws attention to the mythic dimensions inherent in notions of "origin." This is so with regard to individualized, personalized aspects of "origin," in relation to the maternal body, but also concerning collective dimensions of the concept, which are manifest, for example, in the foundation myths upon which the discourses of nationalism are based.

To confirm Batten's aforementioned observation, both McGuckian's and Ní Chuilleanáin's poems implicitly challenge the objectification of women, rather than bestowing agency or a critical voice on the female tropes of nationalism in the Irish cultural tradition, as Boland's work often does (Batten 173). McGuckian's "The Colony Room" sensualizes the simplified and hypostasized images of *aisling* poetry. Like in many of McGuckian's poems, descriptions of external objects in "The Colony Room" blend with references to the speaker's corporeal sensations, thus questioning the delimitation between self and other that conventionally designates a core function of language as a tool for mimetic representation. Ní Chuilleanáin's "The Last Glimpse of Erin" also draws attention to the contingencies in literary representation in her revision of the aesthetics of "aisling" poetry. While drawing images that pertain to the realm of the object world, rather than foregrounding bodily sensations, as McGuckian does, Ní Chuilleanáin's poems are similarly detached from mimesis. "The Last Glimpse of Erin" offers multi-layered, complex and fragmented images that echo and distort familiar aspects from "aisling" poetry. Elements of a dream vision, as well as the juxtaposition of images of woman and land are merged

with other, less conventional motifs, such as the spider's web and navel cord. The mother in Ní Chuilleanáin's poem retains the silence and passivity that characterizes, for instance, the maiden in Ó Rathaille's "The Merchant's Son." However, as Ní Chuilleanáin visualizes those who are implicated in the process of the making of this image of womanhood she also draws attention to its artificiality and thus paves the way for envisaging alternative possibilities. In the following poems, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Rita Ann Higgins also alienate the reader from the Irish cultural tradition of allegorizing the nation through an image of femininity. These poets do so by assuming an ironic distance from the convention they represent.

The woman portrayed in Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's "Caitlín"/"Cathleen" (*Astrakhan* 38-42), shares her first name with the main protagonist in William Butler Yeats's and Lady Gregory's 1902 play *Cathleen Ní Houlihan*, which features a *Sean Bhean Bhocht* or Poor Old Woman, one of the literary manifestations of Ireland as a woman. In the play, this figure of Irish cultural nationalism intrudes upon the lives of an Irish family, luring one of their sons away from his prospective marriage and into martyrdom for Irish independence. While she is in the Gillanes's family home, where the wedding preparations are in full swing, the Poor Old Woman recurrently refers to her many lovers from the distant and recent past. At the end of the play, when Cathleen has succeeded in convincing bridegroom-to-be Michael Gillane to join the 1798 rebellion, the Poor Old Woman disappears, and instead Michael's younger brother Patrick sees "a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen" (Yeats and Gregory 431).

Ní Dhomhnaill's poem, translated by Paul Muldoon, mockingly debases the Yeatsian figure, casting a widowed old woman, who in her vanity and self-deceit nevertheless believes herself to be a beautiful young maiden and only takes notice of what confirms her idealized self-image. In this respect Ní Dhomhnaill's "Cathleen" echoes a central dynamics Eugene O'Brien identifies at the heart of the constitution of national identity, the mechanisms of which "serve to create this mirror, this delusory dyad in which nothing else exists except this specular definition of selfhood" (*Examining Irish Nationalism* 55). This effect is enhanced by the colloquialisms and sarcasms in the description of the Poor Old Woman, a tone which the title of the poem echoes as it casually calls this once-revered figure of Irish nationalism by her first name:

> even if every slubberdegullion once had a dream-vision
> in which she appeared as his own true lover,
> those days are just as truly over.
> And I bet Old Gummy Granny
> has taken none of this on board because of her uncanny
> knack of hearing only what confirms
> her own sense of herself, her honey-nubile form
> and the red rose, proud rose or canker
> tucked behind her ear, in the head-band of her blinkers. (*Astrakhan* 38-42)[5]

[5] In the Irish original: "is fiú dá mba dhóigh le gach spreasán an uair úd / go mba leannáin aige féin í, go bhfuil na laethanta san thart. / Cuirfidh mé geall síos leat nár chuala sí leis / mar tá sé

Ní Dhomhnaill's Poor Old Woman is an image of mutton dressed as lamb. Unlike the woman-as-nation trope in Boland's writings, the "Old Gummy Granny" of Ní Dhomhnaill's poem neither acquires agency nor self-awareness. Rather, it is through the sarcasm inherent in a description that distortingly embraces many of the values that characterize the Poor Old Woman of Yeats's and Gregory's play and the many songs of Irish cultural nationalism preceding it that the reader's attention is drawn to the detrimental impact of the literary trope on the negotiation of female as well as Irish cultural identity.

Like Ní Dhomhnaill's "Cathleen," Rita Ann Higgins's "Remapping the Borders," published in 1996 in *Higher Purchase*, also portrays a debased version of Cathleen Ní Houlihan, who, as Catriona Clutterbuck observes in "Irish Women's Poetry and the Republic of Ireland: Formalism and Form," "enters a Texas Irish Writing conference ceilí as a woman dancing the Siege of Ennis" (34). Like Ní Dhomhnaill's Cathleen, the woman in Higgins's poem stretches the boundaries of the codes of representation for conventional images of the woman-as-nation trope and of propriety as set up, for instance, within Catholicism, for which Ennis was a stronghold during the colonization of Ireland. Accordingly, the "borders" the poem examines are those of the nation and of the woman's suspender stockings, which the overly moralizing speaking voice emphatically denies to have seen during the dance:

> In Texas
> after a conference
> they put on a céilí,
> nearly everyone danced,
> a few of us Margarita'd.
>
> In jig time
> everyone knew everyone.
> After the Siege of Ennis
> a woman asked me,
> 'Could you see my stocking belt
> as I did the swing?'
>
> I was taken aback.
>
> Me, thigh, knee, no,
> I saw nothing.
> I saw no knee
> no luscious thigh
> no slither belt,
> with lace embroidered border
> that was hardly a border at all.

---

de mhórbhua aici agus de dheis / gan aon ní a chloisint ach an rud a' riúníonn í féin. / Tá mil ar an ógbhean aici, dar léi, agus rós breá / ina héadan. Is í an sampla í is fearr ar m'aithne / de bhodhaire Uí Laoghaire" (*Astrakhan* 38-40).

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I swear to you
I saw nothing,
not even the worm
lying on his back
waiting to penetrate my tongue. (*Higgins* 38-39)

Highlighting the tension between the reality of the Texas céilí event and the speaker's biased and limited perception, Higgins's poem, like Ní Dhomhnaill's "Cathleen," points to the contingencies of nationalist discourses. This effect that is enhanced by the speaker's recurrent emphasis on the permeability of the "border" of the woman's stocking belt, thus portraying Cathleen Ní Houlihan as a woman who is sexually available and therefore defies the codes of behaviour for women set up in poems like Ó Rathaille's "The Merchant's Son," which views Éire's sexuality as a mere function of Mac an Cheannaí's. The juxtaposition in "Remapping the Borders" of two diametrically opposed female figures, that of the sexually permissive dancing woman and the prudish speaker, both mirrors and defies the binary categorization of women into *meirdreach* versus *spéirbhean* that Richard Kearney's analysis of the discourses of nationalism in *Postnationalist Ireland* addresses (119-120). While the speaker emphatically dissociates herself from the licentious céilí dancer, the ambivalent reference in the closing lines to the luscious pleasure of tequila drinking blurs the boundaries between the two images, thus echoing the recurrent reference to contingent borders in the poem.

The poems discussed in this essay form part of a considerable body of writing by contemporary Irish women poets that takes issue with the woman-as-nation trope for reifying female corporeality and silencing women's voices. Especially in the poetry of Eavan Boland, female allegories of the nation are a recurrent theme. Poets like Medbh McGuckian and Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, while only occasionally addressing the female allegories of Irish cultural nationalism explicitly, offer interesting new perspectives through questioning at a more fundamental level the aesthetic and stylistic conventions of portraying women in their poems. Apart from "The Colony Room," "The Soil-Map" (published in 1984 in *The Flower Master*) and "The Aisling Hat" (from McGuckian's 1994 collection *Captain Lavender*) are among the foremost examples of poems in McGuckian's oeuvre that address the woman-as-nation trope explicitly.[6] Some of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's work shares with Boland's a concern with representing the silenced lives of women of the Irish past, which can also be seen as a reaction to the stereotyped, generic images of women in the Irish cultural traditions.[7] Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill often revisits the pre-colonial, Celtic war-and-fertility goddesses, such as the Morrígan, in her work, thus exploring an alternative

[6] For a further discussion of this poem, see Moynagh O'Sullivan's " 'Dreamin' My Dreams with You': Medbh McGuckian and the Theatre of Dreams."

[7] This is particularly true of *The Magdalene Sermon*, an entire collection dedicated to religious institutions in Ireland to which unmarried mothers were confined from the mid-19th century until the last Magdalene Laundry closed in 1996.

strand of images of women, which are less desexualized and more ambivalent than the representations of women in Irish cultural nationalism.

Contemporary Irish women poets' responses to the woman-as-nation trope may take the form of a protest that remains closely attached to that which it seeks to change as in Boland's early work. Alternatively, poems may offer a more implicit exploration of the possibilities and limitations of this image at an aesthetic level as in McGuckian's and Ní Chuilleanáin's writings, or they may be tinged with irony and sarcasm as is the case in Ní Dhomhnaill's and Higgins's texts. Given that the cultural history these contemporary versions of Hibernia object to is characterized by a hegemonic and prescriptive attitude concerning both content and mode of representation, the plurality of voices and styles in these contemporary renditions of the woman-as-nation trope can be regarded as their foremost strength.

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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 asesinado a su jefa irlandesa, en "The Slave" se ofrece el punto de vista de un personaje irlandés que se siente aturdido 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.[1] 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 predominantly 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

[1] 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).

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Villar-Argáiz.[2] 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

[2] 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.[3] Although "The Pram" is narrated in the third person, the predominant point of view throughout most of the story is that 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

[3] 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 if 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:

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> 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).[4] 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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[4] 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 expandind 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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DEMYSTIFYING STEREOTYPES OF THE IRISH MIGRANT YOUNG WOMAN IN COLM TÓIBÍN'S *BROOKLYN**

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Abstract

Colm Tóibín's novel, *Brooklyn* (2009), recounts the story of a young woman who emigrates from Ireland to the United States in the early 1950s. Although reluctant and discouraged by received idealized notions of "the promise land" and of a hopeful future, Eilis nevertheless pursues her desire to fulfil a career of her own and to achieve some kind of independence: two unusual aspirations for a woman of her time. In the author's attempt at reversing traditional stereotypes associated to the Irish emigrant, Tóibín explores such themes as the displacement of the foreign other, the cultural divide, the dislocation of the subject at home and abroad, and the alienating experience of growth and awakening. Caught in between two worlds, the apparent liberal values projected by North America are finally engulfed by the moral duties that an extremely patriarchal Irish society has imposed on the protagonist. Therefore, bearing all these questions in mind, the purpose of the present discussion is to bring to the fore matters related to Tóibín's deconstruction of the Irish diasporic subject, its subversion and its process of demythologization in contemporary Irish narrative.

Key words: Colm Tóibín, *Brooklyn*, diaspora, emigration, dislocation, Ireland, migrant subject.

Resumen

La novela de Colm Tóibín, *Brooklyn* (2009), traza la historia de una joven emigrante irlandesa a Estados Unidos en la década de los 50. Aunque reacia y poco confiante de versiones idealizadas sobre "la tierra prometida" y su esperanzador futuro, Eilis se marcha persiguiendo el deseo de terminar su carrera y ser independiente, dos aspiraciones poco comunes para una mujer de su tiempo. En un claro intento de transgredir y cuestionar estereotipos tradicionales sobre la figura del/la inmigrante Irlandés/a, Tóibín explora temas como el desplazamiento del otro/extranjero, el choque cultural, la dislocación del sujeto tanto en su propio país como fuera, la alienación y la experiencia del despertar como proceso de maduración. Atrapada ente dos mundos, los valores liberales que aparentemente definen a Norteamérica quedarán finalmente absorbidos por las obligaciones morales que la sociedad patriarcal irlandesa impone en la protagonista. Partiendo de estas premisas, el objetivo del presente artículo es ahondar en cuestiones relacionadas con la deconstrucción del sujeto diaspórico, la subversión y el proceso de desmitologización que lleva a cabo Tóibín en esta novela.

Palabras clave: Colm Tóibín, *Brooklyn*, diáspora, emigración, dislocación, Irlanda, sujeto migratorio.

When Colm Tóibín was only twelve, he lost his father after suffering from a long illness. At one of the social gatherings during which people went to his house to pay their respects to his mother, he heard a curious story of a young woman who had emigrated to the United States in pursuit of a better life and whose return to her beloved Ireland had only served to force her back by marriage and the keeping of appearances (Witchel 33; Tóibín, "Writing"). For many decades amazing and dreadful stories of returned immigrants had fueled the imagination of Irish people all over the country (Murphy 87; Travers 188), but this poignant account remained in Tóibín's mind for almost forty years, before he decided to rework it into a fictional fabrication that could also accommodate a hard social criticism on the Ireland of his youth.[1] The result was *Brooklyn*, a novel that explored the rights and wrongs, as much as the truths and the myths that lay behind female Irish diaspora.[2] Although some years before he had written the short story "House for Sale," which dealt with the account he had heard as much as with life at home after his father's dead, he did not include it in his collection *Mothers and Sons* (2006) as he had already planned to write a second part that would make it "fit in seamlessly" (Tóibín, "Writing"). Therefore, *Brooklyn* was the result of a need to return to his origins while at the same time he would reflect on his own exile in such diverse places as Barcelona, Argentina or the United States. Regarded as a thriving and realistic account of post-famine emigration, *Brooklyn* has been praised internationally both by critics and the general public, was nominated for the 2009 Booker Prize for literature, won the prestigious Costa Novel Award in 2010,[3] and was shortlisted in 2011 for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award.

In tone with Tóibín's own assertion that he is "writing a lot about Irish people being away from home because it is one of the great subjects that governs Irish history" (Wiesenfarth 26), *Brooklyn* deals with Eilis Lacey's reluctant migration from the small village of Enniscorthy in Co. Wexford—where the author himself lived much of his childhood—to the United States in the early 1950s. Although unwilling to take at first value either received idealized notions of the promised land, or exaggerations on the dangers and evils of such modern world, Eilis dutifully accepts the decisions made by

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[1] Colm Tóibín, who was a prominent journalist before he became an internationally acclaimed author, has been regarded as one of the brightest voices in Irish literature. He has written seven novels—*The South* (1990), *The Heather Blazing* (1992), *The Story of the Night* (1996), *The Blackwater Lightship* (1999), *The Master* (2004) *Brooklyn* (2009) and *The Testament of Mary* (2012)—some of which have been awarded with long-established literary prizes, two collection of short stories—*Mothers and Sons* (2006) and *The Empty Family* (2010)—plays, essays, journalist articles, travel books and some literary criticism.

[2] As much as his own desire to return to his origins (Fernández 84), the author has explained that: "I never stopped thinking how strange it was that a stray anecdote told almost a half century earlier could stay in my mind that long, linger there and grow. If those two women had known I was listening so intently, I am sure my mother would have decided that the story shouldn't be told until her 12-year-old had left the room. I was lucky that she didn't" (Tóibín, "Writing").

[3] This is the previous Whitbread Book Award, which changed its denomination in 2006.

her mother and older sister, and is sent to a voyage across the Atlantic in search for a hopeful future. With unusual aspirations for a woman of her time —these being, to resume her bookkeeping studies, to find a job and to attain some kind of independence—she manages to fulfill her wishes until dramatic news call her back home. In the author's attempt to revise traditional stereotypes associated to the female Irish emigrant, Tóibín explores such themes as the displacement of the foreign woman-as-other, the cultural divide, the dislocation of the subject at home and abroad, and the alienating experience of growth and awakening. Caught in between two worlds, Eilis will finally end up engulfed by both the apparent liberal values of the American culture and by the moral obligations of a narrow-minded Irish society. Therefore, in light of all these issues, my intention with the present discussion is to bring to the fore Tóibín's concerns with the demystification of the Irish diasporic female subject and with the deconstruction of the notion of home for the emigrant imaginary.

For centuries history has placed Ireland as the epitome of the emigrant land whose peoples had to flee to different parts of the world in pursuit of better conditions of living. The Irish diaspora, however, is a too broad and multifarious subject to be simplified in such terms (Arrowsmith; Wondrich; Ward; Mulligan). Roberta Wondrich, for instance, claims that: "The issue of the Irish myth of exile, along with the many facets of the so called Irish diaspora, both in sociological terms of mass-emigration since the latter half of the nineteenth century and as an artistic phenomenon often inappropriately labeled as such, are too complex and controversial to be briefly and superficially resumed" (1). To start with, distinctions would need to be made between emigration before and after the famine, between Britain, America—including Canada—and other destinations, and between male and female emigrants. As Maureen Murphy has explained, critics have adopted two positions to explain the possible reasons that lie behind post-famine emigration. On the one hand, there are those who blamed British repression and a strong policy on Ireland for the exile of so many thousands of people. An on the other, there are the ones who argue that emigration was the result of a choice that gave people further opportunities to improve their lives, economically, socially or even in terms of marriage (85). For Pauric Travers, the nationalist view of emigration as a consequence of British colonialism was maintained since an alternative interpretation of the reasons to emigrate "was a difficult and traumatic one, not least because it involved confronting deep-rooted forces in Irish society" (188). Be it either one or the other, or more probably, a mixture of both, what remains at stake here is that Irish migration to the United States became a prominent issue in the fiction produced at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, contributing in many ways to export oversimplified clichés of the two nations.

A large amount of novels dealing with the famine published after the 1840s dwelled on images of poverty and stagnation, and explored the struggles that the Irish people had to face in America.[4] In fact, Melissa Fegan demonstrates that,

[4] Examples abound, among which we could list the following: Charles Cannon's *Bickerton; or, The Immigrant's Daughter* (1855), Mary Anne Sadlier's *Elinor Preston; or, the Scenes at Home and*

> as the century progressed, the Famine as literary subject became loaded with political issues. There was always an agenda at stake: emigration, conversion, the Irish language, the Land League—the Famine was a political tool, a complex metaphor which became a shorthand for violence and oppression. Several evangelical Protestant texts even sought to claim the Famine for Protestant converts, arguing that they suffered most during Famine. Ironically, as the novels became more critically acclaimed, the material stopped being controversial: in 1910 the *Times Literary Supplement* praised Mildred Darby's *The Hunger* without even seeking to challenge its claim that two million people died of starvation and disease during the Famine due to government incompetence. The Famine ceased to be historical, and begun to be literature. (9)

Most of the novels published after 1850 showed how, in order to preserve Irish traditional values, communities were built around a parish where immigrants could practice their religion and distinguish themselves from the Protestant Americans. The equation Irish-Catholic became then interchangeable, and idealized images of the homeland based on piety, nature, family and community were exported in influential novels, such as Mary Anne Sadlier's *Willy Burke; or, The Irish Orphan in America* (1850), and *Bessy Conway; or, The Irish Girl in America* (1861).[5] In these, as much as in other narratives of the time, the host land emerged as an imagined site that represented either a promising future or a degraded world, while Ireland stood as the pastoral ideal, the Motherland that could embrace all her people on their due return. The Preface to Sadlier's *Bessy Conway* should not, in this regard, pass unnoticed:

> The object of the book is plain; so plain, indeed, that there is no possibility of any one mistaking it for a better or a worse. It is simply an attempt to point out to Irish girls in America — specially that numerous class whose lot is to hire themselves out for work, the true and never — failing path to success in this world, and happiness in the next. Perhaps in the vast extent of the civilized world, there is no class more exposed to evil influences that the Irish Catholic girls who earn a precarious living at service in America... I have written this book from a *sincere* and heartfelt desire to benefit these young country-women of mine, by showing them how to win respect and inspire confidence on the part of their employers, and at the same time, to avoid the nares and pitfalls which have been the ruin of so many of their own class. Let them be assured that it rests with themselves whether they do well

Abroad (1861), David Power Conyngham's *Frank O'Donnell* (1861), Julia and Edmund O'Ryan's *In re Garland* (1870), John McElgun's *Annie Reilly* (1873) or Margaret Brew's *The Chronicles of Castle Cloyne* (1885). One should also add here that the third generation of Irish Americans tried to abandon this untruthful recreation of their imagined homeland as set in opposition to their actual American home.

[5] Sadlier (1820-1903) had emigrated to Canada in 1844 and her purposely didactic works aimed at alerting readers of the dangers of the new world, encouraging them to remain faithful to their original Irish identity mainly through the practice of religion and customs (Colman 153).

> or ill in America, whether they do honor to their country and their faith, or bring shame and reproach to both. (5)

Contrarily, emigration to Britain was of a different nature. It was more seasonal, it did not include the "element of romance" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 32)[6] that involved crossing the Atlantic—as *Brooklyn* clearly shows—and since immigrants were less prepared to stay there was no need to "transplant" a replica of the Irish community making them, in turn, less influenced by the host land. Not surprisingly, in one of the gatherings organized by Father Flood in Brooklyn, Eilis notices "as she sat down with a glass of sherry in her hand, that it could have been a parish hall anywhere in Ireland on the night of a concert or a wedding" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 89). Besides, Travers explains that up until the late 1920s, Irish emigrants preferred to go to America, but that after this date Britain became the first choice, to which America, Canada and Australia followed (190). This opinion is also shared by Aidan Arrowsmith, who maintains that silence has defined "the Irish emigrant experience," turning particularly applicable to women: "Despite consistently outnumbering male emigrants from Ireland to England, women's voices are absent from the texts and debates surrounding the issue" (129). In the novel under discussion, Eilis wonders why she is being encouraged to go to America while her three brothers have emigrated to Britain in pursuit of better job opportunities. On comparing both destinies, she reflects on the validity of the unquestioned appropriation of a myth, since

> while the boys and girls from the town who had gone to England did ordinary work for ordinary money, people who went to America could become rich. She tried to work out how she had come to believe also that, while people from the town who lived in England missed Enniscorthy, no one who went to America missed home. Instead, they were happy there and proud. She wondered if that could be true. (Tóibín, Brooklyn: 24)

In spite of her young age, her lack of agency and the patronizing attitudes of her mother and sister, Eilis is able to see the bigger commitment that moving to America entails, leaving the family behind in a very likely one-way journey. Besides, she comes to think that the lack of frequent news of the emigrant's doings there did not necessarily mean that a more fortunate future awaited them.[7] Toíbín's masterful use of a narrative voice that constantly guides the reader into unexpected outcomes will, therefore, constitute a basic resource in the story as I hope to have the opportunity to demonstrate along the following pages.

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[6] It is Eilis who reflects on the fact that differences between America and England cannot be reduced to distance and foreignness, since "going to work in a shop in Brooklyn with lodgings a few streets away, all organized by a priest, had an element of romance that she and Rose were fully alert to... Going to work in a shop in Birmingham or Liverpool or Coventry or even London was sheer dullness compared to this" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 32).

[7] While 52,000 women emigrated to the United States, 180,000 chose Britain. This figure applies to the decades between the mid-twenties to the early fifties (Ingman 15).

According to the history of Irish diaspora, female emigration also differed from male in a good variety of types and degrees. Travers maintains that between 1871 and 1971 the numbers of immigrant women surpassed those of men but that the figures have been overlooked by historians and would need to be analyzed paying a closer attention to "a gendered understanding of the emigration process" (187). In effect, during the 1940s and 1950s emigration of single women was significant inasmuch as it was not caused mainly by a shortage of jobs or a lack of means but, as Heather Ingman explains, by "women's real dissatisfaction with their life and status in Ireland" (15).[8] In the case of *Brooklyn*, Eilis' sister, Rose, already thirty and single, is well aware of the limitations that being a woman in Ireland with a menial job and no marriage prospects entail.[9] Too late to start her own family, Rose is expected to remain at home and take the responsibility of minding her mother and providing for her family. This apparent sacrifice of her future in favour of her younger sister was part of a duty that she could willingly take (30).[10]

Nevertheless, with superb ironic subtlety, Tóibín's novel misguidedly leads the reader into the belief that Eilis's journey to the unknown land will prefigure that "the rest of her life would be a struggle with the unfamiliar" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 30). First of all, during her voyage and even before she steps on American soil, she is alerted by her English travel mate, Georgina, that her suitcase looks "too Irish" and that Irish are suspicious there (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 49). However, as the narrative develops, misleading happenings are set to contrast received expectations with the reality she encounters, turning into efficient devices to do away with received myths that have been constructed around emigration. Travers has remarked that there existed a contradiction between the large numbers of immigrants that left Ireland and "the official state ethos" that "saw emigration as evil, dangerous, even antisocial" (190). In the novel, Father Flood, whose "accent was a mixture of Irish and American" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 22), best illustrates this ambivalence, assuring Eilis' mother and sister that: "Parts of Brooklyn [...] are just like Ireland. They're full of Irish" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 23). The role that this acculturate priest[11] plays in the narrative is an interesting case in point since emigration was not generally supported by the Catholic church, which "highlighted the moral danger posed to young women who

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[8] For a comparative discussion between Edna O'Brien's *The Light of Evening* and Tóibín's *Brooklyn*, in light of a similar treatment of the female diasporic subject, although in different decades of Irish history, see my own article, "(M)Others."

[9] No matter how unusual this may sound for a woman of her time, Rose's assertiveness seems to have led her to make this choice her own. Eilis, in fact, feels proud of the decisions of her elder sister regarding her status: "Rose, at thirty, Eilis thought, was more glamorous every year, and, while she had had several boyfriends, she remained single; she often remarked that she had a much better life than many of her former schoolmates who were to be seen pushing prams through the streets" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 11).

[10] As Eilis recognizes, "in making it easy for her to go, [Rose] was giving up any real prospect of leaving this house herself and having her own house, with her own family" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 30).

[11] I am using here a concept of acculturation defined in terms of the "changes in an individual or in a group as a result of contact with another cultural group" (Berry 475).

preferred the 'kitchens, factories and dancehalls of other lands' and fled from 'the green fields of Ireland to the grey streets of an alien underworld'" (Travers 190).[12] Contrarily, but in tone with the function of Irish parishes in America, Father Flood sponsors Eilis' journey, finds her a decent job, a good place to live and even arranges her tuition in bookkeeping and accountancy in Brooklyn College where she is, in fact, the first Irish girl to attend it (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 77). He assures her family that, "were Eilis to prove satisfactory in her first job, there would be plenty of opportunity for promotion and very good prospects" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 25), and he lives up to his promise. However, growing wary of his intentions, she directly interrogates him: "Did Rose ask you to do this? Is that why you are doing it? I'm doing it for the Lord, he said. Tell me really why you are doing it" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 77). For Claire Bracken, Father Flood's intentions should be interpreted as a medium through which Eilis can position herself "as an object of exchange between cultures," assisting the priest to construct an Irish community in America: "Just like her letters, she crosses and re-crosses the Atlantic. The tragedy of her story lies in her positioning by others as an object with no power" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 167). Interestingly, Father Flood's truly genuine intentions also contrast with Tóibín's habitual negative attitude towards the Catholic Church in Ireland (Böss 24; Delaney 33; Wiesenfarth 18) and ultimately serve to emphasize the clash that exists between the uncommon opportunities Eilis finds in America and her sad ending, trapped in between two incompatible worlds.

In addition to Father Flood's disinterested help, she is privileged by her lodger, Mrs Kehoe, who offers her the best room in the house, so that she can have more space, more freedom and the quietness she needs for her study. However, she suspects that there must be a deceitful reason behind: "It was unlikely, she thought, that Mrs Kehoe had genuinely given her the room out of pure generosity" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 103). Furthermore, she meets and falls in love with the Italian Tony, whose respectful nature, honesty and truthfulness appear so unreal in such harsh reality that the reader as much as Eilis once again become wary of him. When he finally seduces her, knowing that making a dishonest woman of Eilis will only force them together, he proposes. Apparently, he is the perfect match, except for the fact that his expectations of having kids who would become Dodgers fans freeze her: "His saying that he loved her and his expecting a reply frightened her, made her feel that she would have to accept that this was the only life she was going to have, a life spent away from home" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 143). These instances exemplify the kind of life Eilis encounters in America and serve Tóibín to deconstruct a received notion of the United States as a dangerous Other and as an evil place, which formed part of the imaginary of so many Irish people of the time. In light of this, *Brooklyn* should be interpreted as a novel that bluntly exposes the limitations encountered by a young migrant woman, who is given all possible options to escape from her past, but who

[12] Travers explains that these statements were pronounced by Bishop Lucey of Cork. In fact, they appeared in the *Irish Press* (23 April 1948) three years before Eilis actually moved to America in Tóibín's novel (190).

cannot take any advantage of them. As a passive executer of the wishes of others, and either for duty or for her need to belong to her community, she ends up fulfilling their expectations, until she is eventually engulfed both by her lack of agency and the limited concerns of a narrow-minded society. Forcing herself to leave the house "smiling," when she accepts her destiny, she decides to make them believe "that she was looking forward to America [...]. She promised herself that not for one moment would she give them the smallest hint of how she felt, and she would keep it from herself if she had to until she was away from them" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 31).

Eventually, her dishonest behavior in the eyes of her Irish community and her condition of foreigner in America place her as a dislocated subject, at home and abroad, neither a member of the American community nor of her own family in Ireland. Discussing Tóibín's *The Heather Blazing*, Matthew Ryan comments precisely on this point making it perfectly applicable to *Brooklyn*:

> Tóibín's writing manifests a tension between location and dislocation... While his novels are clearly critical of the nationalist past and its legacies, they also evince a reticence to dismiss the "need for roots." The image of erosion captures, at once, a sense of the inevitability of losing the past, of the liberation of the present and of trepidation about a future in which, following Nietzsche's metaphor, "there is no longer any land." (24)

Along the novel, the only connection between the two lands, Ireland and America, is provided by the letters Eilis receives from her mother and sister, which are of a different kind. Her mother's detached writing not only "told Eilis little; there was hardly anything personal in them and nothing that sounded like anyone's own voice" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 66), they also made her feel that: "She was nobody here... Nothing meant anything... Nothing here was part of her. It was false, empty [...]. There was nothing she could do. It was as if she had been locked away" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 67). And "locked away" is precisely the metaphor that best describes her alienation from both her mother and her motherland.

One should comment in this regard that detached, cold, abject or even monstrous mothers abound in Tóibín's production influenced, as the author has recognized, by the image of his own mother, whose emotional distance left a profound mark in his childhood (Witchel 32; Wiesenfarth 8-10). Eilis' return to her mother and motherland at the end of her novel will only serve to enhance her dislocation, as she is unable to reconcile the duties she has committed to in America with her need for freedom in Ireland. Caught in between two culturally different communities, whose values and loyalties do not cohere, she realizes that she cannot belong entirely to any of them and fells utterly divided, "as though she were two people, one who had battled against two cold winters and many hard days in Brooklyn and fallen in love there, and the other who was her mother's daughter, the Eilis whom everyone, knew, or thought they knew" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 218). At the end of the novel, both her real mother and her allegorical mother(land) will callously dispatch Eilis, incapable as they are to accommodate the uncertainties and ambiguities that have molded her. Therefore, Tóibín's alluring final twist highlights Eilis' return to

Ireland, to her homeland, as her real journey to the unknown, to a place where the loyalties to duties and strong traditions have not evolved along time and cannot welcome her new construction of womanhood, married to a man whom she has just discovered she does not love.

The means through which the author challenges established notions about the diasporic subject and about the fluid concept of home, so present in all Tóibín's writings, is embodied in the protagonist herself.[13] As Alex Witchel has explained, "the longing for home, coupled with the knowledge that as an ideal, it can never exist. His characters are often far from where they grew up, or far from Ireland, and once they return, they remain ambivalent" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 32). In the novel, Eilis is neither an Irish citizen displaced by diaspora, nor an assimilated Irish-American, but an Irish living abroad and about to sharing her life with an American-Italian. As she recognizes: "It made her almost smile at the idea that no one in Ireland knew that America was the coldest place on earth and its people on a cold morning like this the most deeply miserable" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 97). Therefore, tracing the story of Eilis in America, a non-typical Irish female emigrant, Tóibín is challenging stereotypical images of the migrant young woman in a number of different ways. First, the protagonist is reluctant to emigrate. Secondly, in America she cannot identify with her fellow Irish lodgers, who are more typical diasporic subjects in their constant re-creation of an idealized version of their own land. Thirdly, the nostalgic myth of return is reversed when she is called back to Ireland after the dramatic death of her sister and by her brother's insistent plea to making her assume the responsibility of caring for her mother now that there is no other woman in the house.[14] And fourthly, she agrees on a secret marriage knowing that, as an only daughter now, she will be expected to remain in Ireland. On top of this, one should not underestimate the fact that in America she is given plenty of opportunities to fulfill the independent life she has always dreamed of although, at some point, she even wonders whether people are conspiring against her or whether "she herself were the problem, reading malice into motives when there was none intended" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 103). However, in the end, either due to her own lack of experience or to a strong desire to lead her own life, it seems that she makes the wrong options. Having concealed her own true status as a married woman, she is finally punished with the denial of her longed freedom and the building of a career of her own. The place she will finally occupy, as a physical and emotionally divided woman, will be molded by a torn in-betweenness defined by ambivalence and ambiguity. And one should note

[13] Costello-Sullivan in fact reads the novel as a type of "diasporic *Bildungsroman*" since her journey will trigger her "personal growth and cultural negotiation in relation to the competing locales in the novel" (190).

[14] In a society of such strong traditional customs, her brother Jack does not hesitate to make her feel guilty through emotional blackmail: "The thing is that we have to go back to work and I don't think Mammy knows that yet. She thinks one of us might be able to stay but we can't... I think she wants you to come home. She's never slept a night on her own in the house and she keeps saying that she won't be able to. But we have to go back" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 181).

here that this stretched concept of home nicely echoes Dermot Bolger's novel *The Journey Home* (1990), when at the end the reader learns that: "Home is not the place where you were born but the place you created for yourself, where you did not need to explain, where you finally became what you were" (264).

As Michael Böss has explained, Tóibín has often been labeled as a revisionist intellectual, while he in fact stands in an in-between position making "a virtue of his own ambivalences towards notions of tradition, community and nationhood" (23). The way Ireland is portrayed in *Brooklyn* shares more with the Joycean trope of "the old sow that eats her farrow" (*Portrait* 203) than with the Mother Ireland of much previous fiction written about the Irish diaspora. Eilis is eventually forced to go back to America for good because there is no place in Ireland for a woman who has defied duty and who has transgressed the values of the community. Like Tóibín, who once claimed that he did not think he had an identity (Boss 23), Eilis will have to construct her own outside the confines of Ireland: "She would face into a life that seemed now an ordeal, with strange people, strange accents, strange streets" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 232). And it is precisely at the end of the novel, after America has been seen from the outside, from within and in comparison with Ireland, when we can take Georgina's description of this nation as "the land of the free and the brave" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 49) at face value. Once seen as the Other, America is now the welcoming site for an Irish woman who has married an Italian man and will resume her job in a departmental store where her boss, Miss Bartocy, admits that they do not discriminate people by their nationality: "Brooklyn changes every day... New people arrive and they could be Jewish or Irish or Polish or even coloured [...]. We treat everyone the same. We welcome every single person who comes into this store. They all have money to spend. We keep our prices low and our manners high. If people like it here, they'll come back" (Tóibín, *Brooklyn* 59). This rather moralistic ending presages that her journey back will indeed be an enforced journey of self-awareness. In the United States, her new homeland, she will free herself from family duties and communal expectations and, at the same time, she will have the opportunity of reinventing herself so as to fit in a new site of hybrid identities. The ending of the novel speaks for itself:

> "She has gone back to Brooklyn," her mother would say. And, as the train rolled past Macmine Bridge on its way towards Wexford, Eilis imagined the years ahead, when these words would come to mean less and less to the man who heard them and would come to mean more and more to herself. She almost smiled at the thought of it, then closed her eyes and tried to imagine nothing more. (Tóibín, Brooklyn 252)

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OVERTONES AND DISTURBANCES IN JAMIE O'NEILL'S DISSIDENCE NOVELS*

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Abstract

Jamie O'Neill's novels, *Disturbance* (1989), *Kilbrack* (1990) and, especially, *At Swim, Two Boys* (2001), portray Ireland as an attractive but complex nation that needs to be deconstructed and reconstructed to acquire new values and meanings. Thus, the main purpose of the novelist transforms into a heroic act to demystify (through the reuse of classic narrative style) both the moral and social constraints of normative rules and to show that "Other" readings and judgments can be made possible. Through a gender/class twofold perspective, this paper aims at distinguishing, following O'Neill's path, the echoes and overtones that prevent Irish citizens from communicating among them (both individually and collectively). Also, it attempts as well to analyze the series of disturbances that affect the representation of Ireland as an *alma mater* land but rather transforms it into a saturnine stepmother.

Key words: Jamie O'Neill, dysfunctionality, contemporary Irish narrative, disturbance metaphors.

Resumen

Las novelas de Jamie O'Neill: *Disturbance* (1989), *Kilbrack* (1990) y, especialmente, *At Swim, Two Boys* (2001), retratan Irlanda como una nación atractiva pero compleja que necesita ser deconstruida y reconstruida para dotarla de nuevos valores y significaciones. De este modo, el propósito principal del novelista es transformar un acto heroico para así desmitificar (a través de la reutilización del estilo narrativo clásico) tanto las restricciones morales como las sociales de la normativización y mostrar que "Otras" lecturas y juicios pueden ser posibles. Siguiendo una perspectiva doble de intersección de género y clase, este ensayo trata de distinguir, siguiendo la trayectoria de O'Neill, los ecos e insinuaciones que impiden que los ciudadanos irlandeses se comuniquen entre ellos (tanto individualmente como colectivamente). Asimismo, se intentan analizar las series de perturbaciones que afectan la representación de Irlanda como *alma mater* y en cambio la transforman en una madrastra saturniana.

Palabras clave: Jamie O'Neill, disfuncionalidad, narrativa irlandesa contemporánea, metáforas disruptivas.

> [...] The entire world grows up on those stories. Only difference is, I told him the truth, that they were lovers, humping physical fellows." Yes, and Jim had grasped instinctively that significance: that more than stories, they were patterns of the possible. And I think, how happier my boyhood should have been, had somebody —Listen, boy, listen to my tale— thought to tell me the truth. Listen while I tell you, boy, these men loved and yet were noble. You too shall love, body and soul, as they; and there shall be a place for you, boy, noble and magnificent as any. Hold true to your love: these things shall be (O'Neill, *At Swim* 608)

Jamie O'Neill (Dun Laoghaire, 1962-) is best known by his third novel, *At Swim, Two Boys*, winner of the Ferro-Grumley Award for Fiction and the Lambda Literary Award in Gay Men's Fiction. He superbly describes, not only in this one but also in the other two, *Disturbance* and *Kilbrack*, the tormented relationship existing between male selves and the hostile environments that surround their quest for true identities. Imbued by Wilde, Joyce or Beckett and gifted with a unique prose style that imitates nineteenth-century realism with contemporary wisdom, O'Neill's attitude is that of a questioning citizen in front of the moral absolutes of his culture, to regain independence from the familiarized eye of mainstream Ireland. Playing wittily and ironically with syntactical and idiomatic expressions, and using an ample and subtle vocabulary, the writer shows a different interpretation of the issue of Irish identity, by creating characters full of irony and nuance. His is a prose that echoes back some of the strength of the Dickensian rascals (such as Fagin in *Oliver Twist,* for instance, mirrored in some of the father figures in his novels), joining together comicity and pathos in the turmoil of socially deprived contexts. Rather loosely, but underlining the ongoing pace of his narrative, intertextual allusions to the Irish tradition, in general, and to the Irish literary revival, in particular, appear in a series of episodes of a modern, postcolonial, innovative and daring prose. It is precisely through the intermingling of both antagonistic attitudes that O'Neill's unique style is shaped, carrying with it, therefore, a longlasting criticism and a new gaze about the Irish dilemma. Such intertextual intention is deliberate, as the very title of *At Swim, Two Boys* allude to Flann O'Brien's famous work, *At Swim-Two Birds*, thus showing how the rewriting of Ireland both diachronically and ethically work as a supra-text in these stories.[1]

The mental struggle of a young half-orphan Irish boy in a house that is tumbling down is the main motif of his short and surprising *opera prima*. In effect, *Disturbance* brilliantly describes how young Nilus Moore tries to evade from chaos and disorder, both physical and mental, by obsessively making and remaking an absurd jigsaw puzzle and by compulsively ordering once and again some of the ele-

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[1] Regarding this, see all the intertextual references studied in Bertrand Cardin's "Intertextual Re-creation in Jamie O'Neill's *At Swim, Two Boys*" (23-31).

ments in his room, like the folds of his bedroom sheets. Symbolically depicting his room as a spatial refuge and a place for daydreaming, Nilus meditates and creates a whole universe of reveries and fixations, there.[2] Surrounded by an atmosphere of decadence (a wrecked house, the absence of a passed-away mother and an alcoholic and broke father) Nilus feels himself aloof, almost on the verge of splitting up. This schizophrenic condition appears as well in the character of MacMurrough (the third out of three in a love triangle, in *at Swim*...), who bears within his mind four distinct and controversial *personae*, which can be read under psychoanalytic parameters, as we will discuss further on. Also parallel to some of the elements that appear in *At Swim*..., the paternal characters become quintessential of the "disturbances" that split the personality of each of the young protagonists apart. Both Nilus' and Jim Mack's fathers share most of the characteristics that portray them: both are mean, tough and insensitive good-for-nothings, but at the same time both show their human weaknesses, due to several social and vital wounds, something which provoke certain tenderness in the reader. The pathetic condition that both epitomise makes them a point of reference to ascertain their offspring' reactions afterwards. But what clearly differentiates both stories is the setting. The lugubrious, tumbling down paying guesthouse of *Disturbance* provides an environment adequate for dark humour and melodrama, on the basis of an individual portrait of social injustice. On the contrary, the historical truthful facts concerning the Easter Dublin Rising of 1916 offer a specific panorama in which the homosexual relationship of three young men and the activist urban guerrilla war of the Irish dissidence do melt in a neo-romantic epic. *At Swim, Two Boys* is a lengthy "opus" (almost 650 pages), whose main attractive lies in the complex deconstruction of the Irish process to independence, which works as perfect milieu for the fight for sexual emancipation and idealist rebelliousness under the form of "Bildungsroman."[3] This is roughly the story of two Dublin boys, Jim Mack and "Doyler" Doyle, who set as objective to reach Muglins Rock by swimming. Taking into account that Jim has never swum before and that Doyler should teach him quickly, in a year's time, this goal becomes a real *tour de force*, and almost a Herculean task. Meanwhile, Ireland is approaching one of his most significant fights for independence: the Easter Rising becomes, then, a perfect parallel for an epic tone narration. Let us not forget about the third protagonist: their mentor, MacMurrough; a dandy aristocrat and ex-convict, who is not only a character but also an observer of the whole plot, following the example of Wilde, whom he quotes assiduously. Through the multiple personalities he embodies, he struggles between antagonistic ideas in a trial in which he becomes both the defence and the prosecution. His mind is inhabited by four *personae*: his friend Scrotes, the

[2] Concomitances with Virginia Woolf's metaphorical use of a "room of one's own" could be traced.

[3] An analysis of the "Bildung" elements in this novel can be found in González Acosta and Oliva.

only real character, Nanny Tremble, and old granny matchmaker, The Chaplain, his religious consciousness, and Dick, the personification of his sexual desire.

His second work, however, will be discarded in this analysis because it is the least Wildean of all in argument and intention, although it shares most of the dark comic effects and stylistic devices of the other two, and especially his main concern in describing new versions of the Irish landscape. *Kilbrack* plays with a quite diverse trio: 25-year-old O'Leary Montagu, a patient suffering from amnesia, taken care of by nurse Mary, and obsessed by the description of the rural village of Kilbrack offered by writer Nancy Valentine in her novel *Ill Fares the Land*. The main knot of the plot develops through the parallel structures between reality and fiction, and the play between neurotic identities. Both, O'Leary and Nancy are as mysterious and cryptic as the actual Kilbrack shows in the diverse narrators' eyes. In this sense, the creation of alternative realities becomes recurrent in O'Neill's novels and approaches him even more to O'Brien's, as we shall see later on. Alcoholism (suffered by Mary after coping with Montagu's traumas for more than a decade), poverty and ill-omen, cynicism and peasantry are also present in this story, which tries to rewrite biography but invents it instead.

Returning to our point, in both, *Disturbance* and *At Swim, Two Boys* homoeroticism and dissidence underlie in latent form in each of the protagonists' stories, being the first of them probably a seed of the latter evolution of the male portraits. For instance, Nilus' "disturbance" in the first novel becomes a voluntary role to fight against hostile environments. Nilus shows himself as an orphan boy in urgent need of affection, thus he desperately tries to find an adequate interlocutor who could answer his existentialist doubts regarding the meaning of life and death. His father being no good example at all, he deviates to self-aloofness and is haunted by his dead mother in a series of repetitive remembrances. From the very beginning of the story (as it also happens in *At Swim, Two Boys*) the clash between the ideal and the real world works as an instrument of "disturbance" (one more meaning to be added to this polysemy) and provokes feelings of mental dislocation and personal rebelliousness in equal parts. The Irish society that is depicted here cracks under the force of three potent, though crooked pillars, if we make use of the metaphor of the ruinous building that is his house: the repressive Catholic church with its taboos, the time of social depression in which they happen to live and, of course, as a consequence of the previous two, the lack of personal ambition and strength, which leads to paralyzing immobility.[4] Nothing is straightforward in the novel, neither physically or spiritually: wall-cracks and mind-fissures, chaos outside and mental disorder inside, economic failure and family meanness, bad habits in society and in the paternal figure, and so on. Even nudity becomes a problem, in the very

[4] All of them are recurrent to Irish literature. See i.e., to name such a few, Frank McCourt's recent bestseller, *Angela's Ashes* (1996), or even Joyce's *Dubliners* ("The Dead," for instance) for a portrait of well-off, provincial and sterile lives, dancing in the void like moths around an electric bulb. (This image is analysed in my essay, "James Joyce").

beginning of the book, when his father says that "there is nothing to be ashamed of," and "men don't need to hide themselves. We've all got the same mechanics. No need for locked doors" (1). This little lesson contrasts with the sexual constraint and abomination traditionally felt for the naked body and its fluids—which has religious origin in the expulsion from paradise and moral leaf-covering of Adam and Eve in the Catholic doctrine. It turns the natural into something lascivious and sinful. Thus, Nilus becomes a little exhibitionist in front of his father, using his voyeurism as another "disturbing" weapon:

> I stripped off, splashed some soapy water round my groin, and lathered away, making cooing noises about the lovely cold sensation. My father turned up the volume on the radio. I started towelling myself with the small hand towel, slowly and ever so thoroughly, with my bum stuck almost point-blank in my father's face. (2)

The result of this engaged posture is twofold: "I had no more lectures about nudity" and "we were back to normal," consequently transforming spontaneous action into something artificial and imposed by norm. In this sense, the whole plot underdevelops situations that were primarily and spontaneously naïve, but which get rotten by the socially malevolent human judgment. Accordingly, Nilus keeps recurrently saying that he lives in a "queer" world, full of "queer" deeds and "queer" reactions. The ambiguity in the terminology employed proves the gender interest of the story and its implicit meaning: "'there's more to life than politics' He gave me that queer look again. 'Well, yes,' he said. 'Of course there's more to life than politics.'" (127). These words, uttered by Joe in a conversation held with Nilus at school, surrounded by work outside and the shrieking sound of bulldozers, seem to superbly exemplify an epiphany process of rising conscience not only to young Irish schoolboys but also to Ireland as a collective self:

> I felt depressed, then. It was never easy reading how my father had planned my destruction. How fragile was life. It was only an accident that I had been born at all. Only an accident.
> Anyway, the bulldozers outside were finishing work for the day. It was five-thirty, time for Disturbance. (126)

The final "disturbance" in the story takes place at the very end of it. Using a description of physical decay, it seems to summarize all the desolation, paralysis, unfulfilment and sorrow felt by this puzzled boy and occurs precisely after his father's "grand," albeit tender, monologue:

> The banging was on my father's bedroom door now. Cracks were splintering in the mouldings. It was interesting to note which mouldings gave way first. Such a disturbance. Over the banging and the thin strains of 'Nobody's Child' that I fumbled on my mother's piano accordion, somewhere inside or outside my brain, and the chill of my brain, I heard a baby's tiny disturbed voice—so tiny a listening ear might crush it... crying. (191)

Nilus' inner universe, in *Disturbance,* stays at a pre-emancipation level at all senses. Either because he is still too young to take part in activism, or because of his own personal frailty, the fact is that he has not yet been able to make his own decisions; in fact, his only resistance fight occurs in the mental turmoil of his daydreams. Hypersensitive as he actually is, he has not truly overcome the lethargy of his environment. Quite on the contrary, the Dublin boys, Jim Mack and Doyler, together with the complex figure of Anthony MacMurrough (in *At Swim...*) will perform a romantic, heroic fight for utopianism.

At Swim, Two Boys uses the water element as the perfect matter for hobby-horses and idealism. The aforementioned reference to O'Brien's *At Swim, Two Birds* is not at all irrelevant, for this title alludes to a specific place full of literary echoes on the river Shannon, called "swim-two-birds" or Snámh-dá-éin. Also, O'Brien uses the Chinese box technique —in which a story refers to a story, which refers to another story, which refers to another, and so on, in a sort of mirror effect.[5] This process of introspection is narrated by a college student of Gaelic —himself possibly an *alter ego* of O'Brien, whose name is indeed no more than one out of many pen-names used by Brian Nuall'in[6]— a compulsory smoker who does not usually attend to class. He begins writing a novel about another novelist who only writes Westerns, but who suffers from the same loneliness and lack of interest than the student. What makes it a more difficult reading is that the narrative levels are many times interconnected and characters merge between them. Like in Luigi Pirandello's plays[7], fictional characters appear personalized and even dare judge the novelist's dubious narrative talent. Many secondary plots work at very complex and metafictional levels, like the student's translations of legendary characters such as King Sweeney, or Finn MacCool, which satirize Lady Gregory's translations, and so on so forth. This peculiar novel includes three beginnings and three endings, told by three different characters, and it has been compared to other experimentalist works, starting with Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and finishing with James Joyce's last works, especially *Finnegans Wake*. Being aware of the tremendous distance that exists among them, O'Brien's shows a primary interest for ironic metafictive discourse, which is at the same time appropriated by O'Neill in the colonial setting of 1916's Ireland.

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[5] It is curious to notice how Jamie O'Neill's production can be easily compared to Cornwall writer Donald Michael Thomas, shortlisted for the Booker Prize for his novel *The White Hotel*, in 1981. Specially the cycle of *The Russian Quintet* (*Ararat, Swallow, Sphinx, Summit* and *Lying Together*) published from 1983 to 1990, uses the same Matrioshki technique in which improvisation of stories within stories is the main motif; but also, in relation to schizophrenia and splitting-up personalities, see his second book, *Birthstone* (1980).

[6] Born in Strabane, Tyrone, in 1911 and died in Dublin, 1966. He studied Celtic literature at Dublin University and used several pen-names in newspapers and other publications, like Brian O'Nolan, Myles Na Gopaleen, George Knowall, or Count O'Blather. *At Swim-Two Birds* appears in 1939, published in Longman, due to the war all the copies were destroyed by a blast. It was later re-edited by MacGibbon and Kee in 1959.

[7] Of which *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921) stands as the most appropriate example.

At Swim, Two Boys also shares with O'Brien's masterpiece the complexity of the multiple voices that interact inside MacMurrough's head, together with a taste for the deconstruction of actual identity stereotypes that affect a social reading of Ireland. If we take this into account, a correlate of Oscar Wilde's attitude can be easily traced. In the use of fine subversive humour, full of irony and subtlety, and in the aristocratic, defiant view of the protagonists of the novel, O'Neill clearly states a deliberate political engagement and therefore proclaims him to be one of Wilde's coreligionists in this long-lasting moral fight that still affects the image of Ireland. Also, in the portrayal of MacMurrough and of his *alter ego* Scrotes (the most important *persona* that comes out of his four mental splits, as we have mentioned afore) as human beings who skeptically and ironically question their own process of doubting, producing as a result a critical way of thinking, once again one tends to find Wilde's shadow. In this sense, MacMurrough can be defined (using John Fowles' classic definition of the *Aristos*) as one of the "few", and Doyler (Jim's lover) one of the "many."[8] Regarding morality and dissidence, Doyler becomes more and more of an extremist, which makes him follow his truth blindly; MacMurrough, instead, questions about his convictions every time, and chooses many times to disagree. The following paragraph is key to understand how Wilde becomes an absent parallel of MacMurrough throughout the novel. It is the moment in which MacMurrough confesses his homosexuality to a former classmate to whom he had felt certain physical admiration:

> "I was thinking: Parnell and Wilde, the two great scandals of the age: both Irish. It's good to know Ireland can lead the world in something."
> Something less charming he found behind his ear this time. "Morbid thing to say."
> "You know, what my aunt said —about the charges being trumped up against me."
> "Water under the bridge."
> "Not exactly." MacMurrough wondered was he going to say what was on his mind, and after a while discovered that he very possibly was. "When we were at school together that year, I quite admired you." (.../...)
> "It's quite true. I was guilty as charged." (.../...)
> "You are telling me that there is a flaw in your character?"
> "I am telling you that I do not think it is a flaw."
> The empty glass went down on the table. "There's nothing more to be said." (...)
> "Damn it all, MacMurrough, are you telling me you are an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort?" MacMurrough answers: "If you mean am I Irish, the answer is yes" (308-309)

Notice how both sexual defiance and the statement of the sexual condition of the individual go inseparably together with the cause for the independence of Ireland and romantic national ideals. This chiasmic symbiosis converts the heroic

[8] Also, we could follow Michael Walzer's division between the "best" and the "worst" citizens, according to free thought and sensitivity, on the one side, and irrational passion and stubbornness, on the other.

deed into a question of honour and the sexual plea into a social fight; it makes the issue of the masculinity of Ireland a core process of patriotism, subverting thereby the orthodox, canonical reading of Irish history. The introduction of eroticism inside a national struggle gives a step further into the Wildean trial, that has affected Ireland ever since. Let us not forget that homosexuality did not cease to be a crime until as recently as 1993, the year in which the 1861 law that served to morally judge Wilde's episode was derogated. It can be connected to the sub-plot of the Sacred Band of Thebes (or the "Sacred Band of Lovers" as Jim would say), the famous 300 brave men who went to fight in pairs, something which provided them with a special powerful courage in this life without women, because "it would be awful hard to do anything dishonourable with your friend by your side" (584). A little later, it can be read that "the sergeants had only sergeants for their friend," showing in this way the moral sameness that intimate friendship was supposed to create; once again, another romantic concept merged in the heroic discourse.[9]

O'Neill's novel can be, thus, read as an epic story in which the romantic idealism that these three symbolic heroes (who come from different origin, social class and ethical behaviour) incarnate turns into a sacred quest for the "holy grail," to soothe the waste land of Eire. And, at the same time, this heroic ordeal becomes, so to say, a long day's journey into spiritual freedom, for the paladins who dare undertake it.

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[9] The Sacred Band of Thebes became popular in the U.K. after the publication of John Potter's *Antiquities of Greece*, in the 18th century. Lord Byron, for instance, refers to them and he even visited some of the battle scenarios of the band during his journeys to Greece, as Crompton points out in *Byron and Greek Love* (1998).

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EDNA O'BRIEN'S *MOTHER IRELAND* REVISITED: CLAIRE KEEGAN'S "(M)OTHER IRELAND"*

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Abstract

Back in 1976 Edna O'Brien published a series of essays entitled *Mother Ireland* in which her aim was to portray an eternal and contemporary Ireland that seemed to be anchored in a line of ancestry and remembrance, legend and truth. This paper revisits that Mother Ireland of O'Brien's fiction that has transformed herself into a (M)other Ireland best expressed through a new contemporary portrayal of her plights and predicaments. In *Antarctica* (1999) and *Walking the Blue Fields* (2007), short story writer Claire Keegan's compelling fictional skills do not only offer a re-visioning of those eternal ideals of Ireland's past. Among many other issues, Claire Keegan's short fiction revisits O'Brien's "Mother Ireland" and questions traditional and hegemonic approaches to this eternal Irish feminine within a new discourse of Ireland. Her fiction does not represent a commemoration of loss nor a return to nostalgia; but, rather, a celebration of a twofold newness in Irish society as a whole and in the role of the Irish woman in particular. Keegan delves into a sociological depiction of this new Ireland. Her short stories approach the Irish identity from within, narrating the present from a close distance.

Key words: Irish feminine, "Mother Ireland," re-visiting Ireland, nostalgia, Irish short stories.

Resumen

En 1976 Edna O'Brien publica una colección de ensayos titulada *Mother Ireland* con la intención de acercarse a una Irlanda contemporánea y, a su vez eterna, que parecía estar anclada en un pasado de recuerdos, leyendas y tradiciones. El presente artículo reconsidera la Irlanda pasada descrita por O'Brien y cómo la transformación de la misma se expresa de una nueva forma. Así, la estrategia de ficción de la escritora de relatos Claire Keegan (*Antarctica* [1999] y *Walking the Blue Fields* [2007] no ofrece únicamente una reconsideración del pasado. Keegan cuestiona el "eterno femenino" irlandés dentro de un nuevo momento discursivo en Irlanda. Su ficción no representa una mera conmemoración de la pérdida de valores pasados, ni una vuelta a la nostalgia como estrategia estética, sino la celebración de una nueva Irlanda y de la mujer en la Irlanda del siglo veintiuno, ahondando en una representación sociológica de este nuevo país.

Palabras clave: lo femenino irlandés, "Mother Ireland," re-escribir Irlanda, nostalgia, relato corto irlandés.

> I live out of Ireland because something in me warns me that I might stop if I lived there, that I might cease to feel what it has meant to have such a heritage, might grow placid when in fact I want yet again and for indefinable reasons to trace that same route, that trenchant childhood route, in the hope of finding some clue that will, or would, or could, make possible the leap that would restore one to one's original place and state of consciousness, to the radical innocence of the moment just before birth. (O'Brien 144)

Back in 1976 Edna O'Brien finished with these lines a volume which has been considered an "iconoclastic commentary and travelogue" (Welch 401), a series of memoir-essays entitled *Mother Ireland* in which O'Brien's aim was to portray—always with a female voice—both an eternal and contemporary Ireland that seemed to be anchored in continuous and never-ending lines of ancestry and heritage, legend and truth, landscape and society. Very much following the narrative of her already acclaimed *The Country Girls Trilogy* of the 1960s to a great extent (Burke 224) and peppered with illuminating photographs by Fergus Bourke, O'Brien's detailed account of her remembrances, childhood experiences and everyday life in Ireland was published at a time when Ireland was undergoing crucial changes that would utterly transform what Ireland had stood for forever. O'Brien's volume was published just a few years after the main atrocious events in the North. It was a time when the Republic of Ireland started its process of profound europeanisation as the country joined the European Common Market together with Great Britain and was about to experience a development in economic and social terms that was to bring about a decisive cleavage between the isolationist post De Valeran decades and the highly influential and globalising Celtic Tiger phenomenon at the end of the twentieth century. But, more than thirty years after O'Brien's publication of the volume a new Ireland, rather a "(M)other Ireland," can be reflected upon with a new light. One could argue that this newly envisaged and represented "(M)other Ireland" is emerging as a result of the revisiting and rewriting of a variety of issues previously dealt with in O'Brien's memoir-essays, producing an alternative say on these.

The aim of this paper will be to approach how the representation of that "Mother Ireland" envisaged in 1976 has transformed itself into a "(M)other Ireland" with a new contemporary portrayal of the country's plights and predicaments. Today's "(M)other Ireland" faces the advent of rapid economic development and its subsequent crisis, the increase in immigration as opposed to former continuous emigration, the establishment of a multi-cultural and multi-religious society, and the questioning of social inequalities that were entrenched in that eternal Ireland O'Brien portrayed back in 1976. Indeed, not only the Irish landscape, but, also, social mores in Ireland and the new conception of the Irish woman have undergone

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a substantial and inevitable evolution, as this paper will show. For R.F. Foster, feminism and secularism[1] constitute the two main forces that paved the way to this profound transformation of the role of the Irish woman; and, to a greater extent, these two forces were also the basis of the "rejection of old authoritarian formations: patriarchy and the Catholic Church" since the 1970s which O'Brien describes up to the present day (37). Accordingly, a new commemoration which negotiates the Irish future ahead can also be envisaged in this revisited "(M)other Ireland," in which the role of the Irish woman has found a new place of representation in literature; a place that, as this paper will try to demonstrate, will not need its writers to "live out of Ireland" as O'Brien concludes in order to advocate the centrality of the Irish woman and the female voice in the Ireland of the twenty-first century.

For many, Edna O'Brien's *Mother Ireland* represents the product of a dislocated but already well-known author living in London, who urgently needs to be an outsider not to lose her actual identity at times of change at many different levels. O'Brien's memoir exudes what has essentially been regarded as Ireland and to be Irish; conceptions she cannot be separated from in any case. As Edna O'Brien herself states, "Irish? In truth I would not want to be anything else. It is a state of mind as well as an actual country" (144). But, O'Brien's volume stands for much more than a fiction-memory approach to Ireland and Irishness in the mid 1970s. Indeed, *Mother Ireland* can be analysed under a twofold prism. Firstly, O'Brien has recourse to Irish history and story—past and present—at once. The contents of the memoir include vivid outlines and descriptions of the Irish land and landscape, the home town, the events in socially suffocating close-knit villages, instances of the strict education of the 1950s and 1960s, the representation of an overpowering Catholic religion and religious institutions, the centrality of authoritarian patriarchy, the overall influence of Dublin as the beacon-capital of the country and the ultimate—and much needed—escape to a neighbouring England. This latter aspect—recurrent in O'Brien's fiction up to that point in time—already highlights deeper social issues in which forms of the exile and migration of large cohorts of Irish men—and especially Irish women—to Britain were the norm. These forms of exile were principally caused by dissatisfaction with a suffocating Irish society for these women in terms of economy, work and morality. (Barros del Río 112) Consequently, Edna O'Brien uses her mastery in combining myth, history and story so as to present not only a "state of mind" but also an "actual country" in her fictional description of Ireland. In essence, the Ireland of the 1970s portrayed by O'Brien encompasses what is past and present in such a way that what has been regarded as the "eternal Ireland" is shown in a snapshot.

But, secondly, and more importantly, the trope of Ireland O'Brien has recourse to is also that of the "eternal feminine" which is at odds with a new Irish female that strives to find her place in a new Ireland in social and economic change

[1] For a detailed account of how feminism and secularism developed in the Republic of Ireland see Chapter 2 "How the Catholic became Protestants" in R.F. Foster.

and turmoil in the 1970s. This referential trope of Ireland as the "eternal feminine" has often offered a variety of readings and analyses that include colonial, postcolonial, post-imperial, feminist, nationalist and revisionist perspectives to name but a few. These symbols, images and myths of an eternal "mother Ireland" have traditionally formed a crucial part of a variety of discourses which were part and parcel of the cultural iconography of Ireland up to the time of O'Brien's volume in 1976. For O'Brien, any country—but Ireland in particular—has been emotionally engendered from its very inception. In the case of Ireland, it has "always been a woman, a womb, a cave, a cow, a Rosaleen, a sow, a bride, a harlot, and, of course, the gaunt Hag of Beare." (11) Edna O'Brien analyses once again not only an alienation from her actual country in geographical terms as a writer in exile and an Irish migrant in London; hers is a "desire for belonging, [which] characteristically revolves around the writing of this "home" in terms of the female body" (Arrowsmith 130). As a result, O'Brien's examination of her "home" metaphored in the female body encompasses both colonial and nationalist discourses—among many others—in her attempt to break free from the overall relegation of Irish women behind these tropes and metaphors. In essence, O'Brien exposes what González Arias describes as the asymmetries of gender that very much inform patriarchal societies and that are highly accentuated in countries such as Ireland both in theory and social praxis (68). Even if to some extent, O'Brien's memoir-essays still seemed to retain what was widely and very much regarded as the eternal Ireland in the mid 1970s, O'Brien, however, aims at distancing her voice and her conception of what could be regarded as a "female Ireland of nostalgia" and timidly advances her comprehension and approach to the rise of a new woman in Ireland.

All in all, voicing childhood and youth memories and associating Ireland with the feminine, as the very title explicitly states, Edna O'Brien's *Mother Ireland* represents that umbilical cord that closely mantained, as Mary Burke states, "a prelapsarian womb that cannot be returned to" (237); but, likewise, a cord that somehow cannot be broken nor cut off from entirely, I would add. In 1976 O'Brien set out to encapsulate in her writing what could be termed as a distinct portrayal of an Irish pastoral nostalgia. (Frawley 2005) It is writing that engages at once with land and landscape, history and myth, tradition and the longing for modernity. But, more importantly, O'Brien's *Mother Ireland* heightened a sense of nostalgic social mores that were intrinsically part and parcel of what Ireland had staunchly meant to be in the eyes of her inhabitants inside and outside her shores up to the 1970s. In this sense, as was the case with a long tradition of Irish writers over the twentieth century, O'Brien's writing can be categorised in that group of "Irish migrants and their cultural expressions [which] are conventionally characterised in terms of nostalgia and sentimentality" (Arrowsmith 130). In her study on the connection between Irish pastoral and nostalgia in Irish literature Oona Frawley has argued that it is possible "to examine cultural and historical developments," (1) and social ones too I would add, through the study of how the Irish landscape and nature has been traditionally represented in the arts, especially literature. Frawley goes on to state that eventually such a study may allow us "to ascertain how cultural changes might be represented" (1).

Frawley's analysis raises an array of question as to whether such a nostalgic conceptualised representation of landscape and nature varies when the Irish nation ages, when expansive modes of urbanisation appear and, more significantly, when Ireland's entry in a globalising and europeanising new environment is currently taking place. For Frawley, this representation of landscape and nature in Irish literature "can be read as a verbal charting of not only the physical but also the social landscape." (2) All these concepts and preoccupations make her come to the conclusion that former ideas and portrayals of that nostalgic pastoral Ireland had inevitably turned into "ghostly fossils" that have haunted contemporary representations of what Ireland and to be Irish stand for. (2) Edna O'Brien's volume engages in the exposition of the fossil and stagnant traditional Ireland in a nostalgic way but also advances, albeit timidly, the much needed revision and revisit of the female and eternal feminine encompassed in what was regarded as "Mother Ireland" until then.

Hence, a new approach to "Mother Ireland" has become a peremptory challenge in a twenty-first-century Ireland which, as a country, has experienced an overall and comprehensive transformation at many different levels from Frawley's "ghostly fossil" nostalgic idea. In R.F. Foster's detailed account of change in Ireland between 1970 and 2000 Foster states that even if "much of the Irish stereotype (and the tourist brand-image) conjures up an unchanging land where time stands still, the Irish faculty for changing practices or expectations with bewildering rapidity has been underestimated" (3). Therefore, today's Ireland, I argue, has been widely and fiercely contested, revisioned and revisited since 1976 from outside and inside the island. As was stated above, Edna O'Brien's memoir represents a commemoration of the social, traditional and somewhat eternal Ireland and its traditions and mores; but, "such a commemoration also memorializes loss—whether loss of the person for whom a place is named, or of the social system that witnessed the landscape described—and invokes nostalgia." (Foster 2) Contemporary approaches to Ireland, however, are not exclusively imbued with this memorialisation of loss, nor the invocation of nostalgia; rather, these approaches are open to the negotiation and contestation of what Ireland and Irish identity stand for; and more importantly, they engage in the examination, the revisit and the rewrire of the portrayals of Ireland as an eternal feminine and the rise of the new Irish woman in today's world.

Short story writer Claire Keegan has published two volumes, *Antarctica* (1999), *Walking the Blue Fields* (2007) and two separate short stories: *Salt: The second chapter* (2002) and *Foster* (2009) in which a distinctly contemporary approach to the Ireland of the twenty-first century as a whole is presented, paying special attention to the role of the Irish woman in this new society. Awarded The Macaulay Fellowship, The Rooney Prize for Irish literature, The William Trevor Prize and The Davy Byrnes award among many other prizes Claire Keegan's "voice is already unique" (Mahony) in Irish literature, especially in short fiction. For many, Keegan's prose exudes suggestions of Seamus Heaney, William Trevor, Sebastian Barry, Marina Carr, Patrick McCabe, John McGahern and even James Joyce. (Hunt Mahony, Enright) Keegan's compelling fictional skills offer not only a re-visioning and re-visiting of those eternal ideals of "Mother Ireland"'s past, I argue. She delves into a thorough sociological depiction of both new Ireland and the new Irish woman of

the last decades. Her short stories approach Irish identity, social landscape and the role of the Irish woman from within, narrating the present from a close distance; but, offering a fresh new account of "(M)other Ireland"—a new state of mind as well as an actual country in what could be regarded as a questioning and a revisit of that concept of "Mother Ireland" approached by Edna O'Brien back in 1976.

Antarctica was Keegan's short story collection phenomenal debut according to critics and readers. The volume contains fifteen stories which range from Irish-set narratives to England and North America based accounts. As Cristina Hunt Mahony states with regard to Claire Keegan, "on the whole the Wicklow or Irish-based stories conunand more pure admiration, although the atmosphere apprehension figures transatlantically." Those stories whose setting finds place out of Ireland approach issues such as a middle-class married woman's need to sleep with another man before it is too late. Although this short-story, "Antarctica," which gives title to the whole first collection, ends with the swap from the chains of domestic chores and marriage to those of a sinister stranger, Keegan already advances ideas that can be translatable into the Irish socioscape she is approaching and contesting. In a clear reversal of the recurrent metaphor of colonial penetration, the married woman says "'Pretend you're America' [...] 'I'll be Colombus'" (Keegan 9) as she climbs on top, affirming thus the necessity of re-visiting and re-visioning the asymmetry and gendering of colonial vocabulary at the end of the twentieth century. This starting fictional statement by Keegan already reverses O'Brien's starting paragraphs when she reflects upon the Irish land itself. For O'Brien as we stated above, "Ireland has always been a woman, a womb, a cave, a cow, a Rosaleen, a sow, a bride, a harlot, and, of course the gaunt Hag of Beare." (O'Brien 11) O'Brien goes on to recount all the ages of invasion Ireland has suffered, how it was always subdued, almost taken, conquered and "most thoroughly dispossessed." (12) As González Arias states all these personifications of Ireland imbued with colonial and then nationalist impetuses represent the feminization of a land that awaits passively her destiny but demonstrates, also, her lack of power and accentuates the agentive capacity of the male. (68) Ultimately, Keegan's women in her short fiction challenge and question these former suffocating constructs imposed upon them and have a new say.

In Keegan's short fiction it is the role of the female characters that stands out in a successful way. It could be argued that her fiction represents a study on the change of the female in Ireland in the last decade as opposed to Edna Obrien's traditional and submissive approach to women in Ireland up to 1976. In this vein, there is one aspect that both share and which is directly approached by O'Brien's *Mother Ireland*, "countries are either mothers or fathers, and engender the emotional bristle secretly reserved for either sire." (O'Brien 11) In Keegan's fiction the voice of the Irish female is revisited through the exposition of ordeals experienced by women of all ages well after O'Brien's memoir. Thus, Keegan enters the psyche of a lonely woman who awaits a married local doctor's divorce to turn their affair into an open relationship in her short story "Love in the Tall Grass." Although this lonely woman is certain of her love for him and has awaited his decisive step for more than nine years, she still needs to approach a confession box and state: "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned." (Keegan 25) Keegan reflects, thus, on the pace and time needed for social change

in Ireland. In Keegan's story, a mixture of social conventions and religion attended by the doctor's refusal to break up his marriage leaves resolution at the hands of the two women: the doctor's wife and Cordelia, his lover. Unlike the world of hypocrisy and overpowering silence present in O'Brien's memoir, which, in general, tends to offer Irish women the escape from their own village or even suicide, Keegan makes her female characters break away from this former traditional Irish socioscape and demand resolution. Eventually, on a rainy night, the three characters stand facing one another not knowing what to do but realising a solution is imperious. Keegan ends the short story reversing Beckett with "Cordelia, the doctor and his wife, all three mortals waiting, waiting for somebody to leave." (38)

Sexuality is a bone of contention both in Claire Keegan's approach to the "(M)other Ireland" of her first collection *Antarctica* as it is in Edna O'Brien's *Mother Ireland*. In O'Brien's memoir priests going to bed with village girls and censoring books, films and papers circulating in Ireland at the time (O'Brien 34), village men with "hidden desires" who "used to hide behind hedges lying in wait for girls [and] dragging some unfortunate girl in there" (73), the idea of sin which "got committed by the hour" (100), courting, unwanted pregnancy (124) and sexual repression are clear exemplars of a conscience-ridden eternal—motherly for O'Brien—Ireland subjugated by fierce and fearsome domineering religion and religious institutions after De Valera. In Keegan's *Antarctica* there is a disconcerting voicing of the outcome of this repression in today's Ireland. In "The Ginger Rogers Sermon" Keegan overtly exposes a young farmer's suicide after child molestation in a claustrophobic Irish community in which traditional social mores are recalled in a setting that questions the pastoral and eternal Ireland we referred to at the beginning of this paper in terms of nostalgia. In "Quare name for a boy" Claire Keegan presents a revision and a rewrite of the topic of a young girl's acceptance of her unwanted pregnancy. The young girl well knows that tradition has it that, "Irish girls should dislike England; they should stay home and raise their sons up right, stuff the chicken, snip the parsley, tolerate the blare of the Sunday game." (98) But, England was the place where unwanted pregnancy could be dealt with. In 1976 Edna O'Brien recalls the story of a friend of hers who "lost her job, and was living in digs with a devout woman who upbraided and re-judged her all the time and she was not allowed out" (124) when she found out that she was pregnant and not married. Likewise, Keegan makes the female character in her short story recall how a girl had been secluded by her own father in a "one-roomed place without a chimney" (98) in a wood nearby so that no neighbour could know of her unfortunate condition. However, Keegan's pregnant character has a final say on her condition and realises she knows a lot about herself now and has the right to choose. She senses that everything that kept her united to her fling has no longer significance. Instead, she breaks away from her chains and realises as a new and free woman who has the choice to decide:

> [...] pride is something I know about. Suddenly I don't want you, won't keep you away from the boys and your smoky snooker nights. I'll drink this parting glass, but at the end of the night I'll shake your hand. I'll be damned if I'll snare you like a fox, live with you that way, look into your eyes some night years from now

and discover a man whose worst regret is six furtive nights spent in his mother's bed with a woman from a Christmas do. (102)

A social portrayal of a different "(M)other Ireland" has special significance in Keegan's debut collection too, especially in rural Ireland, that eternal landscape and nature O'Brien constantly referred to, many times in terms of pastoral nostalgia. Among other issues Keegan tackles family life in a farm in rural Ireland, the different life-experiences of two sisters, one who stays in rural Ireland and one who emigrates to England in search of a better economic and social future, and how urban and road planning tramples over a traveller's family traditional life. In *Mother Ireland* O'Brien already envisaged the change about to be experienced by Ireland, although no explicit approach to the social response to this change is advanced. O'Brien states that "the country is breathlessly beautiful but there is too an undeniable sadness, the sadness of being cut off, the sadness of rabid materialism, jerry building, visual barbarities and a cultural atrophy that goes all the way to the brain" (33). In Keegan's "Men and Women" the picturesque countryside of Ireland wraps the sadness of an empty marital life through a young girl's eyes. "My parents do not kiss [...] I have never seen them touch" (129) remembers the young girl after separating her dad from a younger girl he was dancing with at a ball in the village before her very wife's crying eyes. Keegan remarkably depicts an Ireland in which the price of sheep is a scandal, money has to be given to starving African children, the boy of the family has to study while the young girls have to help in the chores of the farm, men smelling of Jeyes Fluid dance, drink and look for a perfect match at a village ball and women are relegated to their role as childbearers and farmkeepers. Nothing that far from O'Brien's "Mother Ireland" except for the wife's resolution when the family car gets stuck and she refuses to get out and open the gate at her husband's command. Once her husband is out she grips the wheel and, "Mammy is taking us forward" (Keegan 134), exclaims the young girl, invoking, thus, the realisation of a resolute new Irish woman who takes control of her life in a new Ireland.

In "Sisters" Keegan touches on a "(M)other Ireland" as the reuniting place for Louisa, who had to emigrate to a seemingly successful life in England, and her sister, Betty, who after their mother's death had to "step into her mother's shoes and mind her father" (138-139). Owner of a section of a former Protestant "Big House" and repository of the connection to land and traditional life in Ireland, Betty had to put up with her sister's progress in England and her overall patronising air. Her sister's annual visit turns to a moment of truth when Betty finds out about Louisa's failing marriage and how the invention of her life of luxuries had come to an end. As she had always done, Louisa's return to her sister and Ireland was designed to keep on treating Betty as her slave. But, Betty does not feel as the poor sister anymore. Her life has been based on hard work and truth and is proud and resolute enough to look forward to a future alone, not having to be looked down on by her "almost English" sister. Keegan revisits a former diminishing feeling of inferiority on Irish identity, always coming to terms with an overpowering England, and what's more, a sense of achieving self-realisation out of Ireland exclusively. After 1976 "(M)other Ireland" finds a new place of her own, devoid of an economic and social inferiority

complex. Keegan reverses the traditional colonial symbol of Ireland as the poor sister needing help from her colossal and always patronising English counterpart. Keegan does away with a feminisation of the Irish land that was at the hands of England; a trope formerly used in colonial and postcolonial discourses.

The last story with Irish referent in *Antarctica* is "The Burning Palms": a cathartic story of a young boy and his grandmother who have to overcome past remorse. The grandmother, a stubborn former traveller who settled down in a small derelict cottage, rejects any offers from the Council who wants to knock her house down and build a new road. As a result, a tall wall is erected between the new road and the cottage, blocking any physical contact with progress but also enabling Keegan to denounce the persistent "ghettoization" of the Irish traveller community in twenty-first-century Ireland. Unlike in O'Brien's pastoral and nostalgic references to tinkers as the old tribes of Ireland with lives of their own, Keegan's traveller grandmother decides to burn her cottage after her daughter dies in a tragic accident which involved a lorry that skidded off the road and crashed into her cottage, a night in which her grandson repeatedly refused to go back to a drunk, gambling and vociferous father. Through the grandmother and the mother of the short story Keegan also denounces the reality of these women at the hands of their husbands and the much needed extension of the achievements of feminism and secularisation in Ireland in the twentieth century to all the Irish society, as for Keegan this extension was still pending for the traveller community in Ireland. Ultimately, Keegan reflects upon the predicament of the traveller community in Ireland as a whole, separated from the progress and development that have been extended to everybody in Ireland except them. Today's travellers are only participant to a certain extent of government or council plans to integrate them into the common strain of Irishness without coming to understand their economic or social needs or problems.

I will briefly sketch some issues touched on in some stories in Keegan's more recent *Walk the Blue Fields* as many of the topics dealt with in her second collection of short stories are an extension of her first approach to a new Irish society that cannot be comprehended through the lens of the stereotype of "Mother Ireland" any more. Among others, Keegan tackles issues such as a young girl's escaping her farm in the country and breaking free from a suffocating life of sexual abuse by her father in "The Parting Gift," a woman's realisation of the futily of her marital life in "The Forester's Daughter," a priest's insecurity about his vocation and how women picture in his life in a newly affluent Ireland in "Walk the Blue Fields" and the approach to married women and men in rural Ireland as tending the land does not offer a life of fulfilment in "Dark Horses" and "Night of the Quicken Trees." These stories in *Walk the Blue Fields* are an exemplar of Claire Keegan's voicing of how Ireland should be read in the twenty-first century. If Edna O'Brien finishes *Mother Ireland* escaping to England and remembering, as she walks on the deck about to board her boat, how other writers before such as "Mr Thackeray and Mr Heinrich Böll had come in by boat to write leisurely about it" (142), Keegan's prophetic opening story in *Walk the Blue Fields*, "The Long and Painful Death," can be read not only as a revisioning of those writers' visit to Ireland but as the Irish writer's need to negotiate today's Ireland and Irish identity. Set in Heinrich Böll's house in Achill, "The

Long and Painful Death" is the story of an Irish female artist-in-residence seeking inspiration, who is visited by a German Professor of literature. The story is Keegan's "(M)other Ireland." It is a reflection on today's Ireland. Keegan establishes a contrast between that Ireland Böll came to portray and Ireland nowadays. An approach to a theme-park touristy Irish landscape and people offered by the German professor, the resident Irish writer's uncertainty about her religion, her decision not to marry and remain alone and the German's statement that a former poor Ireland was more content eventually end with the female writer-in-residence finding her inspiration and writing with a new voice. It is Keegan's contribution to a new reading of what Ireland stands for that moves forward with a new voice from within. It is a revisit to that umbilical cord the Irish writer cannot cut off but will not escape from to comprehend Ireland and Irishness. It is a productive reimagining and revisit of that nostalgia in a positive sense always through a female voice.

Edna O'Brien's *Mother Ireland* had been neglected as it somehow disguised a clear stance on answers to social issues about Ireland and Irishness (Lindahl-Raittila 74-75) and failed to act as a counter-narrative. O'Brien's references to divorce, sexuality, unwanted pregnancy threatened the moral integrity of an Ireland that "would become no better than other nations" (81). O'Brien stated in a 1995 interview that "Literature, if it's any good, is archetypal" (Pearce 5) and follows the hegemonic discursive practices of conservative discourses on sex, divorce, contraception. Her *Mother Ireland* is very much the "oppressed and victimized nation" "breeder of sons (rather daughters in the case of O'Brien) for sacrifice" (Peelan 126,129) be this sacrifice social, religious or economic in exile or in Ireland. O'Brien commemorates a past in 1976 which, as she stated, she "returned inwardly" (126). She delivers a pastoral social nostalgia that cannot be returned to as it will eventually imply suffering and female victimization.

Claire Keegan's short fiction, however, revisits O'Brien's "Mother Ireland" and questions traditional and hegemonic approaches to this eternal Irish feminine within new discourses of Ireland. The Ireland in which Keegan's fiction finds expression is an Ireland which has experienced "the strange death of Romantic Ireland" as Foster argues as it has been "transformed, modernized and globalized; in matters such as fertility and marriage patterns, sexual attitudes, the tabloidization of the newspapers and fast-food culture." (185) Keegan negotiates and advances a new "(M) other Ireland." She follows O'Brien's choice for the centrality of female characters and voices which enable her to debunk and challenge the way in which "Mother Ireland" was regarded as a national myth (Peelan 127). Keegan's Irish women face social, religious, sexual and economic issues from within without the urgent need to "live out of Ireland" as O'Brien felt peremptory. They advocate the centrality of their voice and decisions in today's Ireland negotiating, hence, the concepts of "Irishness," "identity" and "woman" in twenty-first-century Ireland. As Rebecca Pelan states:

> Contemporary Irish women writers need to use neither codes nor exile, but are instead involved in radical, subversive cultural practice which allows them to confront issues of gender and nationality/ethnicity from within the country itself. Women writers from the Republic primarily are involved in demythologizing

what are inherited, entrenched and essentialized notions of what it means to be "Irish" and "woman" and they do so by re/imagining the inherited images of both concepts. (143-4)

Claire Keegan's fiction does not represent a commemoration of loss nor a return to nostalgia; but, rather, a celebration of a distinct "newness" both in Irish society as a whole and in the role of the Irish woman in particular. Ultimately, Claire Keegan's short-fiction is a re/imagining and revisit of Edna O'Brien's 1976 memoir. Keegan advances her proposal for a new twenty-first-century "(M)other Ireland."

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MISCELLANY

ALLEGORIZING AND MORALIZING ZOOLOGY IN ALDHELM'S *ENIGMATA*

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Abstract

The collection of riddles composed by Aldhelm constitutes an important source of traditional zoological lore. This paper intends to look at a selection of these Enigmata in order to provide an insight into the ways zoology was grasped by this author and his medieval audience. The analysis will show that these riddles transcend the limits of simple zoological description, since they establish subtle allegorical layers of meaning that were surely perceived and much appreciated by readers. From Aldhelm's perspective, animals could illustrate positive or negative examples of conduct for human beings, thus opening a wide range of possibilities for moral instruction. This paper therefore intends to focus on the engaging allegorical components of some of Aldhelm's zoological riddles.

Key words: Aldhelm, riddles, enigmata, riddle pairs, medieval zoology, Christian allegory, moralization.

Resumen

La colección de adivinanzas compuesta por Aldhelm constituye una fuente importante de conocimiento zoológico tradicional. Este artículo va a tener en cuenta una selección de dichas adivinanzas con objeto de aportar una visión sobre el modo en que la zoología era entendida por este autor y su público. El análisis mostrará que estas adivinanzas van más allá de los límites de la descripción zoológica, puesto que establecen estratos alegóricos de sutil significado que seguramente eran percibidos y muy apreciados por los lectores. Desde la perspectiva de Aldhelm, los animales podían ilustrar ejemplos positivos o negativos de conducta para los seres humanos, abriendo un gran abanico de posibilidades para la instrucción moral. Este trabajo, por tanto, pretende centrarse en estos interesantes componentes alegóricos de algunas de las adivinanzas zoológicas de Aldhelm.

Palabras clave: Aldhelm, adivinanzas, enigmata, pares de adivinanzas, zoología medieval, alegoría cristiana, moralización.

The natural world and zoology, in particular, have always exerted a great deal of attraction on human beings. Proof of this is the great number of literary works that deal with this subject from antiquity. The persistence of fables over

time is a good illustration of this endless fascination.[1] A further outstanding literary phenomenon related to this interest in zoology is the *Physiologus*,[2] from which many translations into different languages were issued. In turn, Isidore's Book XII (*De animalibus*) from the *Etymologiae* became an extremely influential treatise and was considered an authority on zoology even well after the Middle Ages. Book XII was also a determining factor in the emergence of the *Bestiary*,[3] which proved to be extremely successful with numerous versions.

All these texts bear witness to the relevance that zoology had throughout the medieval period. But early medieval riddle collections constitute a source of zoological description to which scholars have not so often turned their attention to.[4] Aldhelm's Enigmata (composed c. 685),[5] constitutes the first illustration of this literary genre produced in England that has survived to our days.[6] Many of the riddles of this collection offer descriptions of animals. This paper intends to look at a selection of Aldhelm's Enigmata in order to provide an insight into the ways zoology was understood in these literary texts. The analysis will show that these riddles go beyond a mere reflection on the characteristics of some animals, since they establish subtle layers of allegorical knowledge that were surely perceived and much appreciated by medieval readers. From Aldhelm's perspective, animals could illustrate positive or negative examples of conduct for human beings, thus opening a wide range of possibilities for moral instruction. This paper therefore intends to pay attention to the engaging allegorical components of riddles dealing with zoological subjects, as well as the subtle interconnections that can be observed in them. This study will reveal that Aldhelm's skilful handling of the zoological material, which usually occurs in riddle pairs and in combination with Christian allegory, is precisely

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[1] A comprehensive study of zoological lore and its use in fables and other literary formats is Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals*.

[2] Originally in Greek, the *Physiologus* was probably produced in Alexandria in the second century A.D. It was translated into Latin in the late fourth century. See the introduction to this work in *Physiologus* ix-xxxiii.

[3] Baxter notes that the Bestiary has its origin in the Latin versions of the *Physiologus*, to which textual modifications—such as the incorporation of excerpts from the *Etymologiae*—were made. See his entry "Bestiaries" (125). Also, see his comments in *Bestiaries (*83-85).

[4] An exception to this is Cameron. Also see Neville.

[5] The riddles of Aldhelm (c. 639-709) were initially part of the *Epistola ad Acircium*, a dense work addressed to some Acircius, who has been convincingly identified with King Aldfrith of Northumbria, a learned man and a personal acquaintance of Aldhelm's. This fact has served to infer the approximate date of composition of the *Epistola* and, hence, of the Enigmata as well, since the letter was probably sent by Aldhelm soon after Aldfrith acceded to the throne in 685. Also, see Lapidge and Rosier (11-12) and Lapidge (24-25).

[6] Aldhelm's *Enigmata*proved to be very influential, as two other writers—Tatwine (d. 734) and Eusebius (d. 747)—took up the composition of a riddle collection each. Actually two or more generations of writers followed Aldhelm's style, among others, Boniface (672/75?-754) and his circle of correspondents. For this, see Fell, "Some Implications of the Boniface Correspondence" and Yorke, "The Bonifacian Mission."

one of the key factors of this collection's literary success and probably the reason why it crossed to the continent and became part of the Carolingian school curriculum.[7]

Zoological description has traditionally been one of the most effective ways for writers to convey allegorical meaning and moralization, as the edifying stories offered by fables for instance evince. It is therefore no surprise to see that a great amount of riddles in Aldhelm's collection, notably thirty-four,[8] deal with zoological topics. The presentation of animals ranges from the simplest pattern with isolated riddles to pairs and series.[9] But zoological pieces in Aldhelm's collection typically appear in pairs, a format which clearly offered many opportunities for the use of allegory for instructional purposes. This is the case of Enigmata 63 (raven) and 64 (dove), which occur in a chronological order paralleling the episode of the Flood in Genesis.[10] As other scholars have already argued,[11] the pairing also evokes the antagonistic roles of the raven and the dove. The clues of Riddle 63 thus focus on the raven's disobedience to God: "Primus uiuentum perdebam foedera iuris / imperio patris contemnens subdere colla" (4-5) [I was the first of living creatures to break the covenant of the law by refusing to bow my head (lit. to bend my neck) to the patriarch's command].[12] The dove's compliance with Noah's orders and God's will is expressed in Riddle 64 in a similar way: "Prima praecepti compleui iussa parentis / portendens fructu terris uenisse salutem" (3-4) [I was the first to obey the patriarch's orders, foretelling with the fruit (i.e., the olive branch) that salvation had come to earth].Aldhelm's parallel reference to the raven as the first to break the pact and the dove as the first to keep it would no doubt help readers notice that the two riddles should be understood as a duo.

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[7] In the continent, probably introduced by Boniface and his circle, Aldhelm's *Enigmata* were eventually "absorbed into the Carolingian school curriculum to judge by the number of extant later eighth- and ninth-century Carolingian copies of that work." Story, "Aldhelm and Old St Peter's, Rome," (13). For the presence of Aldhelm's Enigmata in the Carolingian school context, see Irvine (356-357).

[8] Dog (no. 10), silkworm (12), peacock (14), salamander (15), squid (16), pinna (17), ant-lion (18), bee (20), nightingale (22), cock (26), minotaur (28), stork (31), locust (34), screech-owl (35), midge (36), crab (37), pond-skater (38), lion (39), ostrich (42), leech (43), swallow (47), beaver (56), eagle (57), unicorn (60), raven (63), dove (64), cat (65), fish (71), hornet (75), weasel (82), bullock (83), serpent (88), elephant (96), and camel (99). I am excluding Riddles 84 (sow pregnant with five piglets) and 86 (ram) from this list because the former constitutes an arithmetical puzzle and the latter concerns grammar, as it deals with the multiple meanings of the Latin word "aries."

[9] For an analysis of riddle series in Aldhelm's collection, see Salvador-Bello's "Patterns" and *Isidorean*. For larger zoological strings in Eusebius's Enigmata, see Salvador-Bello's "Clean."

[10] The raven was first released by Noah (Genesis 8: 7) and then the dove (8: 8).

[11] Erhardt-Siebold, for example, considered the two riddles as opposite pieces on account of the roles played by the two riddles in Genesis. Erhardt-Siebold (185). Lapidge and Rosier support this idea (62-64). I have also briefly dealt with the meaningful juxtaposition of these two riddles in "The Oyster" (415).

[12] The edition of Aldhelm's Riddles in this paper is from *Aenigmata Aldhelmi*. The translation of the selected passages from Aldhelm's Riddles for this paper is mine.

Apart from epitomizing Christian steadfastness and obedience, the dove was the long-established symbol of the Holy Ghost. Conversely, as indicated by Rowland, patristic authors considered the raven to be an allegorical representation of "the sinner expelled from the church" (Rowland 146). This oppositional relationship is also illustrated in a substantial passage from *Genesis A* (1438-82). In this work, the raven's behaviour is presented in utterly negative terms: "se feond gespearn fleotende hreaw; / salwig-feðera secan nolde" (1447-1448) ["the enemy perched on a floating corpse; the dark-feathered one did not wish to seek further"]. By contrast, the dove's strenous efforts and diligence when seeking land are described as follows: "Gewat se wilda fugel / on æfenne earce secan / ofer wonne wæg, werig sigan, / hungri to handa halgum rince" (1460b-63) ["In the evening, the wild bird went seeking the ark across the gloomy wave, sinking weary and hungry into the holy man's hands"].[13] The moralizing tinge detected in the treatment of the dove and the raven in these excerpts from *Genesis A*evinces that the allegorical antagonism of the two birds was well-known to the Anglo-Saxon adaptator and, we may infer, the audience. Accordingly, there is little room for doubt that the reading of Aldhelm's Riddles 63 and 64 would entail the discussion of theallegorical rolesof these two birds, respectively conveying positive and negative models of behaviour for human beings.

A further interesting example of zoological pairing, which has been less studied by scholars, is that formed by Aldhelm's Enigmata 14 (peacock) and 15 (salamander). Riddle 14 presents the peacock as an incredibly beautiful bird, whose flesh does not decay after its death: "et moriens mea numquam pulpa putrescit" (4). From an allegorical point of view, the peacock's main feature brings up a suggestive topic,[14] which also finds an echo in many hagiographies, in which incorruptibility after death is usually the definite proof confirming a saintly status.[15] Interestingly, in Aldhelm's poetic *De virginitate* (235) the image of the peacock symbolizes virginity's rejection of the putrefaction of the flesh ("putridine carnis"),[16] whereas in the homonymous treatise in prose (ch. IX) the bird illustrates the vain trappings of beauty that virginity wisely dismisses. On the other hand, the clues of Enigma 15 describe the salamander's remarkable capacity to live unscathed in the middle of flames ("Ignibus in mediis uiuens non sentio flammas" 1). Also in the verse *De virginitate*, the twin saints Cosmas and Damian are compared to the salamander as they are said to be thrust into a fiery furnace: "ceu salamandra focos solet insultare

[13] The edition and translation of these two passages from *Genesis A* are from Anlezark.

[14] St Augustine marveled himself at the incorruptible nature of this bird: "Quis enim nisi Deus creator omnium dedit carni pavonis mortui ne putesceret?"(XXVI.4) ["For who if not God, the creator of all things, has granted to the flesh of the dead peacock immunity from decay?"] (14-15). Aldhelm explicitly refers to this source when alluding to the peacock in the prose *De virginitate* (ch. IX).

[15] This is for example the case of St Æthelthryth, whose corpse was found undecayed after she had been buried for sixteen years, as narrated in Bede's Historia ecclesiastica (IV.xxi). For this passage, see Miller 320-321.

[16] The edition of the passages from Adhelm's *De virginitate*, both in its verse and prose versions, is from Ehwald, (Aldhelm, *Aldhelmi*).

pyrarum, / quamvis congerie glomeretur forte rogorum" (1115-1116) ["(the twins were) as salamanders which, by nature, burning lumps of coal are unable to scorch or consume"].[17] The juxtaposition of Aldhelm's two riddles would therefore urge readers to reflect on the allegorical significance of the peacock and the salamander, since the former evoked virginity, a virtue which would be much appreciated in the monastic environment, whereas the latter exemplified a strong capacity to resist physical torture, a quality that would be suggestive of the heroic behaviour of saints.[18]

As with the preceding two riddle motifs, some of the zoological subjects offered in Aldhelm's collection display special figurative connotations that may have been inspired by the corresponding chapters of the *Physiologus*, in which explicit allegorical explanations for each topic are provided. For example, the final lines of Aldhelm's Enigma 57 allude to the way the eagle renews its youth: "Corpora dum senio corrumpit fessa uetustas, / fontibus in liquidis mergentis membra madescunt; / Post haec restauror praeclaro lumine Phoebi" (6-9) [When old age has corrupted my exhausted body with senile condition, my limbs get wet by plunging into clear water; after this, I am restored in the bright light of Phoebus (i.e., the sun)]. The *Physiologus* (ch. VIII) offers a similar description and adds the following allegorical explanation: "Ergo et tu, si uestitum habes ueterem, et caliginant oculi cordis tui, quere spiritalem fontem dominum" ["Therefore, you also, if you have the old clothing and the eyes of your heart have grown dim, seek out the spiritual fountain who is the Lord"].[19] The bird was accordingly considered to be a symbol of spiritual regeneration[20] and, apart from that, it was traditionally associated with St John. The motif, for example, occurs in a passage from Byrhtferth's *Vita sancti Oswaldi*, where Oswald is described as "Being renewed daily 'like an eagle'"—"cotidie renouatus 'more aquilino.'"[21] The comparison with the eagle is here used to express the renovation of the faith that was constantly sought by this saint.

The fact that the eagle enigmais preceded by that on the beaver (no. 56) in Aldhelm's collection is also noteworthy. The clues of Riddle 56 offer the following piece of information about this animal: "Humidus in fundo, tranat qua piscis, aquoso / saepe caput proprium tingens in gurgite mergo" (5-6) [I often dive, making my own head go wet in the surging flood, in the deep watery bottom where the fish swims]. Accordingly, the juxtaposition of the two riddles may simply stem from

[17] All the translations of excerpts from the verse *De virginitate* in this paper are from Lapidge and Rosier. Also, see a similar reference to the salamander in the corresponding episode in the prose *De virginitate* (ch. XXXIV).

[18] For a similar moralizing reading in the case of the cauldron (Enigma 49), which endures the flames and boiling water, and the two millstones (no. 66), which stoically accept their unequal lot, see Pavloskis 237, 240.

[19] The edition of all excerpts from the *Physiologus* in this article is from Carmody. The translation of all passages from this work is by Curley in *Physiologus*.

[20] The idea is based on Psalm 103:5, which is cited at the beginning of the entry on the eagle in the *Physiologus*: "your youth is renewed like the eagle's."All references to the Bible in this essay are from May and Metzger.

[21] The edition and translation of this passage is from Lapidge 48-49.

the analogical association of one of their clues: like the eagle, the beaver plunges into the water. However, there seems to be a more subtle link that could explain the presence of this riddle pair in the collection. Although Aldhelm's Enigma 56 does not offer any reference to the allegorical role of the beaver, this animal (Latin *castor*) was traditionally thought to be an emblem of chastity (*castitas*). This was supported by the belief that the beaver castrated himself when being chased by hunters, as explained in the *Etymologiae* (XII.ii.21)[22]: "Castores a castrando dicti sunt. Nam testiculi eorum apti sunt medicaminibus, propter quos cum praesenserint venatorem, ipsi se castrant et morsibus vires suas amputant" ["Beavers (*castor*) are so called from 'castrating' (*castrare*). Their testicles are useful for medicines, on account of which, when they anticipate a hunter, they castrate themselves and amputate their own genitals with their teeth"].[23] Even if this idea is not present in Aldhelm's riddle, readers were probably expected to know about the beaver's connection with chastity, as inferred from the occurrence of a gloss from Isidore's entry on the beaver next to Enigma 56 in London, British Library, Royal 12.C.xxiii.[24] *Enigmata* 56 and 57 are therefore linked by theallegorical roles of the two animals, which would undoubtedly evoke spiritual renewal and chastity, two qualities that could have been particularly valued by monastic readers.

As the case of the beaver and the eagle enigmata illustrate, some of the riddle pairs from Aldhelm's collection could be based on the allegorical significance of the animals in question as established by the *Physiologus* tradition or the authority of Isidore's Book XII. However, in some cases the connection seems to be grounded on an allegorical basis of some other sort. For instance, Aldhelm's Riddle 38 describes the pond-skater's extraordinary capacity to walk on water, as offered in the following clues: "Pergo super latices plantis suffulta quaternis" (1) [I walk on the waters sustained by my four soles (feet)][25] and "pedibus gradior super aequora siccis" (6) [with my dry feet I step on the surface of the water]. This phrasing, as pointed out by Scott, parallels that found in the poetic *De virginitate*: "Ut populus domini liquit Memphitica sceptra / umida cum siccis pervadens caerula plantis / et quater annorum complevit tempora dena, / hoc est octeni spatiosa volumina lustri, / usquequo promissae telluris regna capessit" (2477-2481) ["just as the Lord's people left behind the Egyptian rule, walking through the wet sea with dry feet, and completed a period of forty years—that is to say, a long revolution of eight *lustra*—until they gained the kingdom of the Promised Land"] Scott 139 (n. 21). The

[22] For a similar reference to the beaver's self-castration in the *Physiologus*, see Carmody 128-129.

[23] The edition of all the extracts from Isidore's *Etymologiae* in this essay is from Oroz and Marcos. The translation of all the passages from this work is from Barney, Lewis, Beach, and Berghof.

[24] For the exact text of the gloss, occurring on the bottom margin of fol. 92r of this manuscript, see Stork 170. For information on this codex from the early eleventh century, see Aldhelm, *Aldhelmi* 50-52, and O'Keeffe 64-66.

[25] As explained by Scott, "One can by poetic licence call the water-spiders 'four-footed,' since the two front feet are inconspicuous" (139 n. 21).

description of the pond-skater in Riddle 38 thus calls to mind this biblical allusion, which incidentally is also present in Aldhelm's verse preface to the Enigmata: "Siccis nam laticum duxisti cautibus amnes. / Olim, cum cuneus transgresso marmore rubro / desertum penetrat, cecinit quod carmine Dauid" (32-34) [For you (God) once led water currents from the dry rocks, a long time ago when the crowd (of the Israelites) had crossed the Red Sea and entered the desert, as David narrated in a poem (i.e., in Psalm 78:13-16)].[26] In this excerpt, the writer compares his own literary endeavour with the Israelites' feat. Aldhelm's special interest in conveying this idea may conveniently explain the inclusion of the pond-skater as a riddle motif in the collection, since no encyclopedic source has been found for it.[27]

Apart from evoking the crossing of the Red Sea, the pond-skater could similarly conjure up the image of Christ walking on the water.[28] This assumption gains support if we consider that the pond-skater riddle is juxtaposed to Enigma 39, whose solution "lion" would prompt the allegory of Christ to learned readers. Like Christ, the lion is thus said to be invested with royal status: "horridus haud uereor regali culmine fretus" (5) [Supported by my royal head (i.e., crowned by the mane), I am most awe-inspiring][29]. The fact that Aldhelm was thinking of the lion as the traditional allegory of Christ is also clear from the last clue offered by Enigma 39: "Dormio nam patulis, non claudens lumina, gemmis" (6) [For I sleep with my eyes wide open, never closing these gem-like lights]. This line alludes to what was habitually referred to as the lion's "second nature," a characteristic that is similarly expounded in the *Physiologus* (ch. I): "Secunda natura leonis est: cum dormierit, uigilant ei oculi, aperti enim sunt ei" ["The second nature of the lion is that, although he has fallen asleep, his eyes keep watch for him, for they remain open"].[30] Accordingly, it was assumed that, when Christ died on the cross and was buried, his body was asleep but his spirit was always awake thanks to his divine nature, as the *Physiologus* further explains: "Etenim corporaliter dominus meus dormiuit in cruce, deitas uero eius semper in dextera patris uigilat" ["And indeed, my Lord physically slept on the cross, but his divine nature always keeps watch in the right hand of the Father"]. The fact that readers were expected to acknowledge the al-

[26] My translation. Cf. Psalm 78: 13-16: "He divided the sea and let them pass through it, and made the waters stand like a heap. In the daytime he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a fiery light. He cleft rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep. He made streams come out of the rock, and caused waters to flow down like rivers."

[27] According to Cameron, the clues of this riddle must have been based on direct observation" (121-122).

[28] Cf. Matthew 14: 25-26, Mark 6: 48-49 and John 6: 19-20. As Scott has pointed out, the presence of the pond-skater in Aldhelm's collection is grounded on "the figural analogy with the Biblical pictures of Christ walking on the sea of Galilee (Matt. xiv.25) or the Jews in the Red Sea" (125).

[29] As Isidore explains in Book XII (ii.3), the Greek term λέων "is translated as 'king' in Latin, because he is the ruler of all the beasts" ("Latine rex interpretatur, eo quod princeps sit omnium bestiarum"). Moreover, Isidore includes *leo* among the terms employed to refer to Christ:"et Leo pro regno et fortitudine"(VII.ii.43) ["Lion (*Leo*) for his kingdom and strength"].

[30] For a further account of the lion's second nature in Isidore's *Etymologiae*, see XII.ii.5.

allegorical significance of this clue is also supported by the presence of a long excerpt from the *Physiologus*, which explains the three natures of the lion and accompanies Riddle 39 in London, Royal 12.C.xxiii.[31] With this gloss at hand, a reader could not miss the relationship between the information given by line 6 of Enigma 39 and its underlying allegorical meaning. Seen in this light, Riddles 38 (pond-skater) and 39 (lion) conform a pair, whose association is once more based on analogical allegory. The linking of the two riddles therefore responds to the fact that the two animals likewise evoke Christ, with the allegorical role of the lion being rooted on traditional zoological lore, as observed in the *Physiologus*, and the pond-skater as an *ad hoc*allegory, we may infer, envisaged by Aldhelm himself.

The study of this selection of riddles from Aldhelm's collection has showed that these texts could well function as an effective vehicle for teaching zoology. Aldhelm probably realized that riddles could be as useful as other works in which medieval "scientific" lore was traditionally transmitted, as is the case of the *Physiologus* or Isidore's Book XII from the *Etymologiae*. As this paper has demonstrated, Aldhelm's description of animal motifs in his Enigmata has proved to be highly prone to the employment of allegory with moralizing aims. Indeed, the riddle pairs that have been analyzed constitute a helpful method that Aldhelm consciously used with the purpose of establishing edifying examples for his readership. The analysis of the allegorical interconnections found in these riddles suggests that they were first-rate pedagogical tools that were used in Anglo-Saxon monastic schools. It was probably the collection's success in England that motivated its transfer to the continent as part of the literary materials that Anglo-Saxon missionaries took for their evangelizing purposes.

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[31] Notably, on the right margin of fol. 89r. For this excerpt as it appears in this manuscript, see Stork 148. The lion also figures prominently in the Bible, particularly in Job 4: 10-11.

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