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DANIELA NICOLETTI FÁVERO

“WE HAD DREAMS AND SONGS TO SING”: A PORTRAIT OF THE OUTCASTED FROM THE CELTIC TIGER RICHES IN THE IRISH SHORT STORY

Porto Alegre
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Thesis presented as a requirement for obtaining a Doctor of Letters degree by the Graduate Program in Letters from the School of Humanities of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul.

Area of concentration: Literary Theory

Supervisor: Prof. Dra. Maria Tereza Amodeo

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Porto Alegre

2020

To my father – with whom I share my love for Ireland – and my family, for always believing in me.

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Most of us could walk alone through life if that was imposed to us. I can only say that I am glad I never had to. Here I express my gratitude to those who have always been there for me, even if only in the background, and for the people who added immensely so that this journey could lead me here.

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Lastly, I thank Ireland, a country that mesmerizes me, whose culture and people I cherish so much. I hope this thesis will honor your greatness.

Now I could tell my story.
It was different
from the story told about me.
And now also
it was spring.

Eavan Boland

ABSTRACT

Throughout its history, Ireland has used literature to narrate its people and its land. From the earliest days, with oral narratives, to modernity, with the subversion of norms by names that entered the world canon, Irish literary production has been responsible for registering its types, challenges and achievements and, through fictional productions, reflecting the ideal of a nation. The Irish short story, highlighted in the country's literary production, has been privileged for better reflecting all the social upheavals of an Ireland marked by intense transformations and, in contemporary times, once more it is configured as an ideal genre to echo an environment that is found again in metamorphosis. The research carried out for this doctoral thesis highlights the relationship between the short story and the representation of the identities involved in situations of vulnerability such as homelessness, drug consumption and trafficking, and immigration. It is proposed that these types were, in some way, relegated to the margins and suffered the consequences of a social inequality even more accentuated by the Celtic Tiger period, in which Irish identity was especially associated with success and wealth. From the historical review of the Irish short story and the focus on contemporary socio-political criticisms of names like Fintan O'Toole, Brendan Bartley and Rob Kitchin, fifteen short stories are analyzed to portray the multiple traits that contribute to the composition of Irish identity, which it is neither fixed nor uniform, but a living reflection of a country and its people, largely impacted by political and social changes.

Keywords: Marginal identities. Irish literature. Contemporary short story. Celtic Tiger.

RESUMO

Durante sua história, a Irlanda tem recorrido à literatura para narrar seu povo e sua terra. Desde os primórdios, com as narrativas orais, até a modernidade, com a subversão das normas por nomes que se inscreveram no cânone mundial, a produção literária irlandesa tem sido responsável por registrar seus tipos, desafios e conquistas e, através de produções ficcionais, refletir o ideal de uma nação. O conto irlandês, destaque na produção literária do país, tem sido privilegiado por melhor refletir toda a agitação social de uma Irlanda marcada por intensas transformações e, na contemporaneidade, configura-se como forma ideal para ecoar um ambiente que se encontra novamente em metamorfose. A pesquisa realizada para esta tese de doutorado evidencia a relação entre o conto e a representação das identidades envolvidas em situações de vulnerabilidade, como falta de moradia, consumo e tráfico de drogas e imigração. Propõe-se que esses tipos foram, de alguma forma, relegados à margem e sofreram as consequências de uma desigualdade social ainda mais acentuada pelo período do Tigre Celta, no qual a identidade irlandesa ficou especialmente associada a sucesso e riqueza. A partir da revisão histórica do conto irlandês e do enfoque em críticas sociopolíticas contemporâneas de nomes como Fintan O'Toole, Brendan Bartley e Rob Kitchin, quinze contos são analisados para retratar os múltiplos traços que contribuem para a composição da identidade irlandesa, que não é fixa nem uniforme, mas um reflexo vivo de um país e de um povo, amplamente impactados por transformações político-sociais.

Palavras-chave: Identidades marginais. Literatura irlandesa. Conto contemporâneo. Tigre Celta.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis is, first of all, a labor of love. Ireland has been keeping me wrapped around her fingers since I first ever got to know her through the words of Jonathan Swift, Samuel Beckett and James Joyce, the last one more than any other. The pleasure I got from reading Joyce's short stories and witnessing the depiction of Irish lives I found once again in the contemporary literary production of Ireland's writers. My first memory of Ireland, however, comes from the final years of the troubles, in which all the major world news agencies would broadcast the conflicts involving the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the violent struggles for a once again united Ireland. Yet, this first recollection of Ireland is no more than a fog, a faded image of a child's memory too young to understand, or even be interested, in another country's affairs. As I have mentioned, it was the Irish literature that caught my heart, that demanded of me the search for a bigger understanding of what makes Ireland Ireland. Strangely or not, it is this mixture of the real social and political background with the craftsmanship of literary geniuses such as Joyce that brought me here, to this thesis that challenges itself on covering a representation of Ireland – and her real victories and struggles – through the literary prism.

This research aims at the analysis of the contemporary Irish short story production on the basis of how some of the stories that make up this category reveal a construction of Ireland – and of Irish identities – by offering their readers a glimpse of the affairs – social and political – that came to shape the country in the years that followed the emergence of the now famous *Celtic Tiger*. Ireland went from being one of the poorest countries of Europe to become one of the role models for economic development for the whole world.

The definition of the *corpus* studied during this research has revealed itself to be the first – and maybe the biggest – challenge. Ireland is renowned for her prolific literary tradition, having gifted the world with productions in all the major genres of literature – whether one considers the groundbreaking talents in the novel, as can be seen in Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939), or the passion and poetical vision of W. B. Yeats' *The Second Coming* (1919), or even the multi-faceted perspectives possible in drama as in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953). The fact stands that in Ireland – its capital, Dublin, was recently dubbed a *UNESCO's City of Literature*[1] – Literature is a calling, one which the country learnt to cherish throughout its history, even in turbulent times. Although one might consider a good thing having several options for a research, the fact is that this thesis imposed some challenges – mostly logistical, such as time and access to some of the works – which ended up defining the selection of stories that came to be part of the study.

Instead of deciding on a specific book or author, the stories were chosen as I was keeping up with the transformations that were being imposed in Ireland since the fall out of the *Celtic Tiger* period. Through visits to Ireland (in 2009 and 2017), and the constant tracking of the country in the media, some questions regarding the issues that the country was facing came to my attention.

In 2009, I arrived in Dublin to perfect my English skills – I had then just graduated in Letters and hoped to put all the theory to good use. The country was chosen with

[1] The designation of Dublin, in 2010, as the fourth UNESCO City of Literature is part of a broader initiative from the organization (the UNESCO Creative Cities Network). According to its webpage, "The Cities of Literature are a global network of 28 cities who specialise in Literature. The UNESCO designation 'City of Literature' recognises excellence and places an obligation on cities to nurture and support their artform and collaborate internationally. This should be done by sharing best practices, supporting freedom of speech and instigating projects that ensure literature reaches as wide and diverse an audience as possible, locally and internationally."
Dublin Unesco City of Literature. Home. *Dublin Unesco City of Literature*, http://www.dublincityofliterature.ie/about/unesco-creative-cities-network/.

careful consideration, not only for being an English-speaking nation, but especially for its literature, which first caught my attention through a reading of *Araby*, by James Joyce, during one of my undergraduate classes. I remember highlighting the names of the streets and places Joyce brought to life in *Dubliners*, in the hope that one day I would be trailing them myself.

I found Dublin to be a welcoming city which mixed historical landmarks with the edge of new architecture, that seemed to sprout every other way you looked, shaped by a boom of the housing market and the arrival of many companies and people to work and live the "Irish dream". 2009 was already quite different from the years after the economic boom. Still, there were plenty of people from all parts of the world, trying to secure a job. It became clear to me how the city was impacted by the arrival of so many foreign cultures at once: the city was filled by small shops specialized in Brazilian, Pakistani, and Polish products, a symbolic response to the number of people that came to the country to enjoy the fortunes of the *Celtic Tiger*. There were still jobs being offered – even if in a reduced number – and the rent prices were somewhat attainable, even if it were in less prestigious sites of the city and in some of the older buildings.

Yet, one did not have to look longer to know that the riches from the Celtic Tiger period had not been extended to all. A large group of people, pejoratively referred to as *knackers*[2], could be seen daily by the quays, on the sidewalks, shooting drugs, drinking cheap cider and beer in the early hours of the day, looking sickly and disfranchised. Already at that time, many of the foreigners that went to Ireland since the beginning of

[2] *Knacker* is a pejorative term associated with the *Irish Travellers,* an itinerant population of Ireland, supposedly descendant to a community that lived in the land before the Celts, a community made up by itinerant craftsmen. Some other speculation state that they were descended from those Irish who were made homeless during the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland in the 1650s or made homeless in either the 1741 or the 1840s famine due to eviction.
Equality Authority, *The. Traveller Ethnicity: An Equality Authority Report.* 2006. https://www.ihrec.ie/download/pdf/traveller_ethnicity.pdf.

the Celtic Tiger period decided to return to their countries, once the economic recession hit Ireland – and many European countries – in a hard way. I can count myself as one of the lucky ones, since my experience with Ireland was everything I hoped for, leaving me with the clear distinction that my departure at that time would not be the end of my interest for the country.

My second visit to Ireland, in 2017, although shorter (in 2009 I stayed for 1 year, in 2017 for a little less than a month), was enough to reveal the important changes that the country, and especially its capital, Dublin, have been through. Dublin's architecture showed the fast pace in which the housing market kept going, despite the economic crisis. Several parts of the city were reshaped to a more modern and edgy aesthetic, joining the historical landmarks which attract so many tourists. The number of houses and apartments available for rent, on the other hand, contrasted with the number of people living on the streets, a hard proof that the crashing of the economy was devastating for a great deal of people. From the moment I got out of the bus which brought me from the airport to O'Connell Street, it was impossible to ignore the alarming number of people queued for food offered by some charitable organization. In some cases, entire families huddled near the buildings, looking for a shelter. This sighting was a sort of first warning of how the city that had always been so welcoming to me was now in the midst of a housing problem, an issue that was partly prompted by the rise of the rents. Some friends I made back in 2009 opted out for commuting to suburban areas, which offered more affordable housing, even though it forced a longer commute by car or public transport. For the people gathered in queues at O'Connell Street that night it looked as if this solution never became available.

Another noticeable change was in the staff of many shops, restaurants, and pubs. Instead of the prevalence of foreign people occupying jobs in service, this time I

witnessed many posts being held by Irish people of all ages. The job offers seemed to be facing a reduction, as the ads looking for staff, which I recall to be quite commonly displayed back in 2009/2010, were now scarce. In the media, there was no shortage of news on the rise of the violence in the country – most of which propelled by conflicts involving drugs, the alarming numbers of beggars and homeless, and the increase in the cases of intolerance towards the same foreign people which had been so welcomed in the peak of the *Celtic Tiger* period. Ireland was still a place that touched me profoundly, a land that fascinated me for its culture and strength, which only made me more alert to its struggles after a decade of unprecedented social and economic growth, a period when the Irish success gave the rest of the world the impression that Ireland might be the place to mimic.

The experience as a witness, a bystander of these issues – both through my visits to the country, as well as through my readings of Irish news and of the contemporary short story production of Ireland made me aware of how relevant drug usage, homelessness and the attitude towards foreign people living in the country become post Celtic Tiger period. I did not have to look much longer to find the same themes in some of the stories that made up the works *Young Skins*[3]*,* by Colin Barrett, *Young Irelanders*[4]*,* by Gerard Donovan, *Dark lies the Island*[5] and *There are little kingdoms*[6]*,* by Kevin Barry. Not all the stories in these collections dealt with the subjects that I was looking for, but most of them presented an awareness regarding the country and its people, revealing, in their way, the need for a new approach when it comes to the understanding of the Irish identity.

[3] Barrett, Colin. *Young Skins.* Black Cat, 2014.
[4] Donovan, Gerard. *Young Irelanders*. The Overlook, 2008.
[5] Barry, Kevin. *Dark lies the Island*. Graywolf, 2012.
[6] Barry, Kevin. *There are little kingdoms*. The Stinging Fly, 2016.

A little later in the research I decided to include another book, not one by a specific author, but an anthology in aid of the *Dublin Simon Community* named *Looking at the stars*[7]*.* It gathers stories about homelessness – as well as other issues related to it –, a gruesome reality in Ireland, and in most of the world if we care to look, that, in my point of view, deserved to be tackled in this thesis. I will not intend to state that this research examines absolutely every piece of short story writing that deals with the themes selected for this paper. I read about 200 short stories from different Irish authors before I made my final cut to the 15 discussed in this. One of the determiner factors for my choice of them was that they all approached the three main themes that I set myself to analyze but they did that through Irish narrators that are not themselves plagued by the drama of drug/alcohol abuse, immigration or homelessness – the exception being three stories on this later theme in which the narrative is conducted by a character that is at the center of the conflict, not a mere spectator. I humbly hope that the works that I did choose to analyze will be enough to reflect the urgency of these themes in the representation of a more contemporary Ireland, the one that has to deal, once again, with the country's identity in an ever changing world, an identity that is more fragmented than ever.

The option to study the short story rather than the novel was much easier. The short story is approached through the metaphor proposed by Julio Cortázar in *Some aspects of the short story*[8]*,* in which the Argentinean author compares the short story to a photograph and the novel to a movie. With this interpretation in mind, this work begins with a review of theories regarding the short story, looking into the writings of Cortázar,

[7] O'Brien, Kerry; Kinsella, Alice, editors. *Looking at the stars: an anthology of Irish writing in Aid of the Dublin Simon Community.* Munster Literature Centre, 2016.

[8] Cortázar, Julio. "Some aspects of the short story", translated by Aden W. Hayes. *Arizona Quarterly:* a *journal of American Literature, culture and theory*, Feb. 1980, pp. 5-18.

Edgar Allan Poe, James Cooper Lawrence, Nadia Batella Gotlib, Ricardo Piglia, Horacio Quiroga and Frank O'Connor for some general aspects of the genre. Once the review is made, I offer a look into the genre specifically in Ireland, from its first registers – while the country was still part of the United Kingdom and its literature was regarded as British – until its latest occurrences, such as the ones examined in this thesis. Through readings of works like Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland*: *the literature of the modern nation*[9], Heather Ingman's *A history of the Irish short story*[10], David Malcolm and Cheryl Alexander's *A companion to the British and Irish short story*[11] and David Malcolm's *The British and Irish short story handbook*[12], it is possible to pinpoint how the genre in Ireland differs from manifestations in the rest of the world. From early comparisons to the oral storytelling tradition of the country up to a more modern approach to these writings, as Frank O'Connor professes in *The lonely voice*[13], "it [the short story] represents, better than poetry or drama, our own attitude to life" (117-119).

A central part of this research focuses on the impact of the transformations that Ireland went through from the 1990s until the beginning of the 2000s. This is the period in which the country came to be known as the *Celtic Tiger* – for its unprecedented social and economic development – and the aftermath which is still being assessed by scholars and the general public that, after an all time high, now has to deal with the consequences of a grave recession. The reading of works as Fintan O'Toole's *Ship of fools*[14], Louise Hodgson's *New thinking = New Ireland*[15], Sean Kay's *Celtic Revival?*

[9] Kiberd, Declan. *Inventing Ireland: the literature of the modern nation.* Vintage Books, 1996.
[10] Ingman, Heather. *A history of the Irish short story.* Cambridge University Press, 2009.
[11] Malcolm, Cheryl Alexander; Malcolm, David. *A companion to the British and Irish short story.* Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.
[12] Malcolm, David. *The British and Irish short story handbook.* Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.
[13] O'Connor, Frank. *The lonely voice: a study of the short story.* Kindle ed., Melville House, 2004.
[14] O'Toole, Fintan. *Ship of Fools: how stupidity and corruption sank the Celtic Tiger.* e-book, Public Affairs, 2010.
[15] Hodgson, Louise, editor. *New thinking = New Ireland.* Gill and Macmillan, 2013.

The rise, fall and renewal of global Ireland[16], Colin Colter and Steve Coleman's *The end of Irish history? Critical approaches to the Celtic Tiger*[17], Brendan Bartley and Robert Kitchin's *Understanding contemporary Ireland*[18], to name a few, helps to establish a somewhat broader picture of what happened to the country.

From the arrival of several foreign companies (Google, Intel, Dell and Microsoft, and many others) and their huge impact in parts of the country, the surprising wave of immigrants who came to work at these companies, the reshaping of major cities, with the boom of the housing market and the projects for big highways, to cite some of the many transformations that the country went through, Ireland came to be known as a role model for every other country avid for the same skyrocketing economy. But as the old saying goes: "all good things must come to an end", and for Ireland it was not different, since many specialists researched in this thesis point to a downfall of the social and political status of the country. The downfall is especially hard for some specific Irish groups, such as the ones to whom the many blessings of the *Celtic Tiger* period not only never came, but also aggravated their already hard lives, outcasting them even further.

To better understand the whole process of the Celtic Tiger period and the recession which the country faces nowadays, the chapter that presents a background to the country will present some important information regarding the aftermath of the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. The struggles that the country had to endure after its separation from the United Kingdom and some of the choices made by the people in power at that time made it possible for the Celtic Tiger phenomenon to

[16] Kay, Sean. *Celtic Revival? The Rise, Fall and Renewal of Global Ireland.* Rowman & Littlefield, 2011.
[17] Coulter, Colin; Coleman, Steve, editors. *The end of Irish history: critical reflections on the Celtic Tiger.* Manchester University Press, 2003.
[18] Bartley, Brendan; Kitchin, Robert, editors. *Understanding Contemporary Ireland*. Pluto, 2007.

happen; these same choices represented a further exclusion of a significant part of the country – especially of the ones farther from the main urban centers.

As this thesis focuses on events that are still in development, a significant part or the research has to do with the tracking of the media. Reviewing the news, articles of opinion and also artistic productions, like series, movies and music, helps to evaluate if the themes selected in the short stories are actually representative for a broader context of Ireland, or mere isolated cases.

The thesis proposed here regards literature as a record of time, as a sort of archive in charge of registering and preserving the memory that might be relevant to the history and future of the people. It considers how the individual memory of the author infiltrates, in some way, shape or form, the collective memory of the readers, to allude to the terms proposed by Maurice Halbwachs in *On Collective Memory*[19]. This record of time, however, implies the very nature of the literary work, since, according to George Eliot[20] in her essay on German realism,

> The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies... Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. (qtd. in Wood 171)

My thesis is that literature has the sensibility to become aware of the Other much sooner than the rest of us. Most of the studies that are being held at this moment are still trying to grasp what happened to Ireland and how the identity of her people has

[19] Halbwachs, Maurice. *Memória Coletiva.* Centauro, 2009.

[20] Eliot, George. "The natural history of German life". Quoted in James Woods. *How fiction works.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

been affected, how the Irish are learning to cope with some of the difficult tasks that are being imposed on them. Many of these studies point to a reckless attitude by the ones that held the power of the country, people who put their own ambition before the people's needs, governments that neglected those more vulnerable, those who were recognized by the short-story authors and who are forever available in those literary writings.

There can be no doubt about the fast pace of how things have been changing worldwide in the last few years. A new wave of conservatism – and most of its traditional values, once a guideline for many societies – nowadays finds appeal with a considerable number of people around the world. This is probably an immediate response to the rise of another wave, one you might call more embracing, one made up by the appreciation of people traditionally outside the circle of influence, the socially, politically and economically outcast in their homes. There cannot be, therefore, the illusion of a unitary identity, capable of encompassing the values and traces of a community merely because its members share a common space. Such a multifaceted approach for thinking the identity, especially in the context of globalization, takes into consideration Stuart Hall's[21] notion that one's identity[22] is shaped in the interaction of the "I" with his/her "society", and Eric Landowski's ideas on otherness, presented in the

[21] Hall, Stuart. *A identidade cultural na pós-modernidade,* translated by Tomaz Tadeu da Silva and Guacira Lopes Louro. Lamparina, 2015.

[22] For the purpose of this thesis, I consider identity through the post-modern perspective for, as Stuart Hall proposes in many of his works on the matter, there has been extensive studies on identity, yet there still need for more of it, for we have to deconstruct the notions on a fixed identity for the ones that recognize an unstable and non-totalizing one. I base my references on Hall's proposal of an identity that emerges as an articulation between subjects and discourses, as "the suture point between, on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpelate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken' (Hall 19).

book *Présences de l'autre: Essais de socio-sémiotique* (*Presences of the other: Socio-semiotic essays*)[23]. He states that

> In a given spatio-temporal context, just as a reference We can only constitute itself as such by configuring in a specific way the otherness of the third parties in relation to which it claims to stand out, in the same way the Other - the foreigner, the excluded, the marginal -, […] can only (re)know himself and assume his own identity by (re)constructing for his own account the figure of the group which excludes him or the marginalize, or, where appropriate, vis-à-vis which he himself wishes to mark his "difference" and his distances. (48; my trans.)[24]

By bringing together the concepts of literature as an archive and a plural notion of identity – an identity that relies on the idea that the other, the "referencing I" to address Landowski's notion on an alterity based identity –, and contrasting them with the evaluation of the impacts of social and economic transformations of the last decade in the lives of the Irish population, this thesis aims to show how the contemporary short story of Ireland is responsible for bringing light to the struggles and new challenges of the Irishmen. Now more than ever, it is learning to insert itself and the identity of its fellow countrymen in a world that, thanks to the phenomenon of globalization, has its borders blurred and really needs to be sympathetic to the Other.

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[23] Landowski, Eric. *Présences de l'autre: essais de socio-sémiotique II*. Presses universitaires de France, 1997.

[24] *Dans un contexte spatio-temporel donné, de même qu'un Nous de référence ne peut se constituer comme tel qu'en configurant d'une manière spécifique l'altérité des tiers par rapport auxquels il prétend se démarquer, de même l'Autre – l'étranger, l'exclu, le marginal -, […] ne pourra se (re)connaître lui-même et assumer sa propre identité qu'en (re)contruisant pour son propre compte la figure du groupe qui l'exclut ou le marginalize, ou, l ecas échéant, vis-à-vis duquel lui-même tient à marquer sa <<différence>> et ses distances.* (Landowski 48).

This thesis is, undoubtedly, an outsider's reading of Ireland's contemporary affairs and its literature. As a South American researcher, I have no intention of claiming my analysis to be the definite one, being conscious that my social and political point of view of Ireland is contrasted by the social political landscape of my own country and by my own subjective experiences. By focusing on Irish literature this thesis hopes to contribute with the growing interest for Ireland's culture and a more diverse portrait of the nation's history abroad, which is often overshadowed by the reproduction of stereotypes.

2 A PHOTOGRAPH, A KNOCKOUT, A HAND GRENADE: DEFINITIONS ON THE SHORT STORY

2.1 When enough is enough: some notes on the short story

When it comes to defining the short story, there is no way to ignore the amount of work that has been put into deciphering its main aspects. Many celebrated writers, including Edgar Allan Poe, Julio Cortázar and Frank O'Connor, to name a few, have challenged themselves in looking into this genre, proposing some general, but in no way definitive, guidelines. The choice to define the short story as a *genre*[25] poses as a first challenge, as Cheryl Alexander Malcolm and David Malcolm claim in the Introduction for *A companion to the British and Irish short story:*

> . . . there are surprising complexities within studies in short fiction, many to do with the defining features of the short story and its status as a genre. Reid entitles the first chapter of his monograph on the short story "Problems of Definition" (1977: 1), and Valerie Shaw judges that "It seems reasonable to say that a firm definition of the short story is impossible. No single theory can encompass the multifarious nature of a genre in which the only constant feature seems to be the achievement of a narrative purpose in a comparatively short space" (Shaw 1983: 21). A sense that the short story is difficult to define is widespread among its critics, who worry about how long or short a short story can be, whether the story materials of short stories are distinctive in any way, or

[25] For the purpose of this thesis, the short story will be referred to as a genre, understanding that the debate about the multiple facets of a genre will not contribute, or even harm, the development of this particular research.

> whether short stories tend to focus on particular kinds of characters and experiences. (Malcolm 6)

Whether one classifies the short story as a genre or not, there can be no mistake about some of its main traces and how these establish a complex relation with the intentions of the writer. When it comes to the short story definition one of its main questions is that of the length, which, by the way, can be varied. Frank O'Connor, in *The lonely voice: a study of the short story*, argues about the relation between length and information, stating that "Essentially the difference depends upon precisely how much information the writer feels he must give the reader to enable the moral imagination to function." (269-270). O'Connor points out that, in the novel, the power of the novelist to let the reader know the information that he wants him/her to know is never affected by the length. On the other hand, according to the same critic, for the short story writer, the form is the most important attribute of the composition. Summing up, "the form of the novel is given by the length; in the short story the length is given by the form." (288). More important than the size of the short story, therefore, is the necessity of the writer to be aware of giving to the reader exactly what he/she needs, sparing him/her of unnecessary details, as dictates Horacio Quiroga in number 8 of his *Decálogo do perfeito contista*[26] *(Decalogue of the perfect storyteller)*:

> 8. Take your characters by the hand and take them firmly to the end, with no attention except for the path you have traced. Do not distract yourself by seeing what they can not see or what they do not care about. Do not abuse the reader.

[26] Quiroga, Horacio. *Decálogo do perfeito contista*, edited by Sergio Faraco and Vera Monteiro. L&PM, 2009.

> A tale is a novel purged of excesses. Consider this an absolute truth, even if it is not. (Quiroga 16; my trans.)[27]

Both Frank O'Connor and Heather Ingman point out the close association between the short story and modernity. In *A history of the Irish short story*, Ingman brings attention to this fact:

> In general terms, the short story, perhaps more than any other form, has been associated with modernity, both in terms of experimentation and theme . . . Nadine Gordimer argues that the art of the short story, seeing 'by the light of the flash', makes it an art always of the present moment and that its 'fragmented and restless form' renders it ideally suited to the modern age. (2)

This association to modernity and the action of "seeing by the light of the flash", as Ingman puts it, in some way agrees with the association proposed by Julio Cortázar when he talks about the short story. According to Cortázar, in *Some Aspects of the short story*, it is possible to establish a parallel between the novel and the short story, where they "can be compared analogically with the film and the photograph" (7). Cortázar still points out that, contrary to the binomial novel/cinema,

> A high quality photograph or story proceeds inversely; that is, the photographer or the story writer finds himself obliged to choose and delimit an image or an

[27] 8. *Toma teus personagens pela mão e leva-os os firmemente até o final, sem atentar senão para o caminho que traçaste. Não te distrai vendo o que eles não podem ver ou o que não lhes importa. Não abusa do leitor. Um conto é uma novela depurada de excessos. Considera isto uma verdade absoluta, ainda que não seja.* (Quiroga 16).

> event that must be meaningful, which is meaningful not only in itself, but rather is capable of acting on the viewer or the reader as a kind of opening, an impetus which projects the intelligence and the sensibility toward something which goes well beyond the visual or literary anecdote contained in the photograph or the story. (Cortázar 7-8)

According to the scholar, due to the notion of physical limit, the capture of a particular moment would be given, a significant moment that does not only have sense in itself but can act on the reader. And while the performance of the novel wins by points, according to Cortázar, the short story must win by knockout (8).

The choice for this genre, still according to Cortázar, must take into account the significance of the material. Be it real or fictitious, it must be able to awaken something beyond itself, where a trivial domestic episode can become "an implacable summary of a certain human condition, or the burning symbol of a social or historical order" (8). To this aspect of the short story can be added the revelation of something that was hidden, proposed by Ricardo Piglia in *Theses on the short story*[28]:

> The short story is constructed so as to make appear artificially something that had been hidden. It reproduces the constantly renewed search for a unique experience that would allow us to see, beneath the opaque surface of life, a secret truth. 'The instantaneous vision which makes us discover the unknown, not in a faraway *terra incognita*, but rather in the very heart of the immediate', said Rimbaud. This profane illumination has become the form of the short story. (66)

[28] Piglia, Ricardo. "Theses on the Short Story". *New Left Review,* n. 70, July/Aug. 2011, pp. 63-66.

In many cases, this revelation focuses on groups that traditionally have been outcasted in history, the ones with stories that, for those holding power, might be better to conceal. Frank O'Connor is, again, the one who suggests this inclination of the short story writing, by saying that "Always in the short story there is this sense of outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society, superimposed sometimes on symbolic figures whom they caricature and echo — Christ, Socrates, Moses." (O'Connor 186-187). However, this aptitude of the short story to give voice to the marginalized and excluded characters of the world must not be regarded as mere denunciation, as if the short-storyist's intentions were to expose a suppressed reality. As Ricardo Piglia remembers in *Formas breves*[29] "Literature discusses the same problems that society discusses, but in another record. That's what literature does: discuss the same thing differently."[30] (84; my trans.). When studying the short story, one is, indeed, dealing with a piece of fiction. One that represents, to some extent, the writer's perception of the world that surrounds him/her, and how this world is reshaped into his/her fictional creation. Yet, this is not to say that for being fictional the short story (or even the novel and other genres of literature) is not fulfilling an important role in making known the ones at the margin of a collective memory – people who, in other contexts, might never have been presented to these subjects. This has everything to do with the literary experience, as highlighted by Piglia:

> The archaic and solitary practice of literature is the replica (or rather, the parallel universe) that Borges erects to forget the horror of the real. Literature reproduces the forms and dilemmas of the stereotyped world, but in another register, in

[29] Piglia, Ricardo. *Formas Breves.* Temas, 1999.

[30] *La literatura discute los mismos problemas que discute la sociedad, pero en otro registro. Eso es lo que hace la literatura: discute lo mismo de otra manera.* (Piglia 84).

> another dimension, as in a dream . . . Remembering with a memory of others is a variant of the theme of the double, but it is also a perfect metaphor of the literary experience.
>
> Reading is the art of building a personal memory from experiences and memories of others. (Piglia 45-46; my trans.)[31]

Piglia defines the novel as “the story of a complete destiny." (83; my trans.)[32]. In this sense, writing a short story is crafting history as it is still happening, full of doubts and unpredictable circumstances. It is a photograph, as Cortázar characterizes it, complete in itself, despite not being capable of grasping the whole surroundings. Rosemary Jenkinson, in the opinion piece *Short-story writers are infinitely more creative than novelists*[33], published at *The Irish Times*, provokes other allusion when it comes to the genre, stating that “For the people who lightly call it a ‘snapshot’, it’s a scan of the soul. For me, writing a short story is like exposing the human heart with a scalpel, sometimes with deft incisions, sometimes with brutal butchery.” (Jenkinson).

Regardless of the allusion one prefers to favor, in choosing the short story format the writer makes a decision to be incisive and succinct. The limitation, however, does nothing to hinder his purpose. James Cooper Lawrence in *The theory of the short*

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[31] *A prática arcaica e solitária da literatura é a réplica (melhor seria dizer, o universo paralelo) que Borges erige para esquecer o horror do real. A literatura reproduz as formas e os dilemas do mundo estereotipado, mas em outro registro, em outra dimensão, como num sonho . . . Recordar com uma memória alheia é uma variante do tema do duplo, mas é também uma metáfora perfeita da experiência literária.*
A leitura é a arte de construir uma memória pessoal a partir de experiências e lembranças alheias. (Piglia 45-46)

[32] *é a história de um destino completo.* (Piglia 83)

[33] Jenkinson, Rosemary. “Short-story writers are infinitely more creative than novelists”. *The Irish Times*, 15 June 2019, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/short-story-writers-are-infinitely-more-creative-than-novelists-1.3908472.

story[34] quotes Edgar Allan Poe stressing that the good story should be brief and have the necessary coherence, which would give it the effect of wholeness. A short story, therefore, encloses in itself all its purposes, and the good storyteller must complete all his intentions until the end of it, leaving no gaps to be filled. Lawrence still emphasizes the power that is given to the author of a short story. By engaging the reader in his brief plot, the author does as he pleases, without interruptions by external influences. And by holding the reader captive, the author has the opportunity to faithfully record reality, however, from his point of view. Nádia Battela Gotlib in her *Teoria do conto*[35] (*Theory of the short story*), addresses exactly this fact:

> There are texts that intend to register with more fidelity our reality. But the question is not so simple. There is the question to record which reality of ours? our everyday life, from day to day? or our imagined one? Or still: the reality told literarily, precisely because of this, for using literary resources according to the intentions of the author. (12; my trans.)[36]

Again, it is according to the author's point of view that we are given a certain scenario, and the places he/she writes about will most likely be contaminated by his/her personal opinion, resulting in a consensus on which Orhan Pamuk warns in the text *Mr. Pamuk, did all this really happen to you?* [37]: "Readers and authors acknowledge and

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[34] Lawrence, James Cooper. "A theory of the Short Story". v. 205, 1917. *JSTOR,* https://archive.org/metadata/jstor-25121469.

[35] Gotlib, Nádia Battela. *Teoria do Conto.* 11. ed. Atica, 2006.

[36] *Há textos que têm intenção de registrar com mais fidelidade a realidade nossa. Mas a questão não é tão simples assim. Trata-se de registrar qual realidade nossa? a nossa cotidiana, do dia-a-dia? ou a nossa fantasiada? Ou ainda: a realidade contada literariamente, justamente por isto, por usar recursos literários segundo as intenções do autor.* (Gotlib 12).

[37] Pamuk, Ohran. "Mr. Pamuk, did all this really happen to you?" Ohram Pamuk. *The naive and the sentimental novelist.* Faber & Faber, 2011, pp. 31-56.

agree on the fact that novels are neither completely imaginary nor completely factual." (Pamuk 35).

In his second review of *Twice told tales* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, published in 1842[38], Edgar Allan Poe shares with the reader his appreciation for the short story, stating that “The tale proper, in our opinion, affords unquestionably the fairest field for the exercise of the loftiest talent, which can be afforded by the wide domains of mere prose.” (Poe 298). The great American author highlights the power of the short story arising from its unity of effect or impression. According to Poe, "All high excitements are necessarily transient." (298). The novel, in this sense, would lose its force by the interruptions of the reading activity derived from its extension, where the reader modifies, nullifies or deflects his/her impressions on the text, that, in some way, lets itself be contaminated by the outside environment. On the other hand, Poe credits the short story with the power to leave the soul of the reader in the hands of the writer in a situation where he states that “There are no external or extrinsic influences — resulting from weariness or interruption." (298).

Still regarding the short story, Poe stresses the importance of the coherence of the whole. According to the American artist, "If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design." (299). Everything in the story therefore collaborates to produce the same effect on the reader. Each of its parts must corroborate for the achievement of a single goal: that intended by the author. According to Lawrence, Dr. William J. Dawson stated that the true short story deals with "one incident and only

[38] Poe, Edgar Allan. “Review of New Books: Twice-Told Tales by Nathaniel Hawthorne”. *Graham’s Magazine*, vol. XX, May 1842, pp. 298-299.

one", while Brander Matthews cites the classic French drama highlighting that the short story fulfills the three false units by showing one action, in one place and in one day (Lawrence 276). Lawrence offers a different view to Matthews' statement, noting that, if arranged in the French model, about ninety percent of the short stories would be framed on another literary genre. In this regard, Lawrence states that "the short story frequently deals with more than one incident, and does not by any means necessarily always produce a single foreseen effect" (277). Lawrence also proposes a division of tales according to two aspects: substance and form. In this sense, the American author argues for a division in *Stories of Fact* and *Stories of Fancy*, as to their substance, and, as to their form, in *Stories told historically*, *Stories told dramatically* and *Stories told didactically*. On this division according to form, Lawrence states:

> The man using the historical narrative method seeks primarily to convey the impression that here is the matter-of-fact story of things just as they happened. The man using the dramatic method seeks a single effect; while the didactic method involves the chief consideration, the effort to teach a lesson. (278)

Regardless of nomenclatures such as those of substance or form, the issue of brevity is present in practically all the texts that theorize about the short story, a trait that consequently deserves attention. Alceu Amoroso de Lima defines that:

> Size, therefore, represents one of the characteristic signs of its differentiation. We may even say that the quantitative element is the most objective of its characters. The novel is a long narrative. The novella is a medium-length narrative. The short story is a short narrative. The criterion may be very

empirical, but it is very true. It is the only really positive one. (qtd. in Gotlib 63; my trans.)[39]

The brevity of the tale would therefore arise as a necessity, as Norman Friedman pointed out in stating that "a short story is short because, even though it has a long action to show, its action is best shown in contracted form or on a contracted scale of proportion" (qtd. in Gotlib 64; my trans.)[40]. In a delimited space, the good storyteller is able to develop his intentions, producing the desired effects and strategically moving the reader as a pawn.

2.2 "Write it, damn you, write it! What else are you good for?"[41] – The case of the Irish short story

However depressing the facts may be,
the story will always be excellent.[42]

Frank O'Connor

When it comes to literature in Ireland, it seems that this country graced the world with major talents in every genre, writers that perfected the tradition or chose to break

[39] *O tamanho, portanto, representa um dos sinais característicos de sua diferenciação. Podemos mesmo dizer que o elemento quantitativo é o mais objetivo dos seus caracteres. O romance é uma narrativa longa. A novela é uma narrativa média. O conto é uma narrativa curta. O critério pode ser muito empírico, mas é muito verdadeiro. É o único realmente positivo.* (Gotlib 63)

[40] […] *um conto é curto porque, mesmo tendo uma ação longa a mostrar, sua ação é melhor mostrada numa forma contraída ou numa escala de proporção contraída.* (Friedman qtd. in Gotlib 64)

[41] Joyce, James. *Giacomo Joyce.* Bestiário, 2012, pp. 40.

[42] O'Connor, Frank. *The Bell*. May 1942.

from it, gifting the future generations with the legacy of their masterpieces. Naturally, the case of the short story in Ireland is no different. This genre has been at the centre of the literary production of the country, whether for logistical reasons – having to do with the publishing market and all it entails – whether for the preference or a so called vocation of the writers from the Emerald Island. In the opinion piece *Short-story writers are infinitely more creative than novelists* (2019), published in *The Irish Times*, Rosemary Jenkinson describes the current state of the genre in Ireland, affirming that

> The short story is on a huge upwards trajectory, yet attitudes persist that collections can't be as successful as novels. To be fair, most of those prehistoric views emanate from London rather than Ireland or the US. After all, it was we Irish who exported the short story to the US in the first place, and it's our biggest cultural legacy – next to the Irish bar, of course. (Jenkinson)

To review the Irish short story and to better understand it at current times is, therefore, to deal with an important piece of the history of the country. Once any respectable scholar cannot ignore that, up to 1922, the year in which the Anglo-Irish Treaty was established, changing, in that way, the relation to the British rule, literature from Ireland could be considered British, as states David Malcolm in *The British and Irish short story handbook*:

> One of the difficulties of talking about the Irish short story, a difficulty acknowledged by many commentators, is that until the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, Irish writers were closely involved in the British literary system, publishing in mainland Britain and writing for British audiences. (21)

This means that, in spite of how it may be identified, to really study the Irish short story, one has to consider, also, the production of Irish born writers whose works ended up being filed under the British category. Nevertheless, this association with Britain, and even this voluntary involvement with British audiences, as remarks Malcolm, do not prevent Ireland's short story history from being studied. It is Malcolm himself who points out some of the differences between the British and Irish short story studies regarding their developments:

> The history and the development of short fiction in Ireland have followed substantially different paths from those of the British short story. First, there is the question of status . . . For most of the twentieth century, the short story was the preferred form for many Irish writers, and those writers have usually had little difficulty in publishing their work. Second, the context of the Irish short story has always been different from that of its British equivalent. Ireland's experience has for centuries been closer to that of a colonized country – with all its complexities of affiliation and rejection – than that of any part of mainland Britain. In addition, while Britain in the twentieth century experienced social, economic, military and political disruptions enough, they were certainly different and perhaps less convulsive than those in Ireland – vigorous nationalist agitation, rebellion, military occupation and guerilla warfare, partition, ethnic cleansing, civil war, the attainment of a difficult independence in the south and the creation of a bitterly divided, neo-colonial society in the north. (21)

Malcolm establishes a relation between Ireland's turbulent history and the tendency to elect the short story as the genre of preference. Among the factors that

determined Ireland's relation of dependency to Britain, one can highlight the scarce number of publishers in Ireland interested in investing in local writers, as well as a significantly small number of readers in the country, which, during most of its history, suffered massive waves of emigration. And, for the ones that could not leave, life was hard enough, without mentioning that there were always the questions surrounding repression – from Britain and from the Church. Heather Ingman, in the book *A history of the Irish short story*, recalls the thesis by Frank O'Connor and Seán O'Faoláin, in which they associate the novel with a stable structured society, while the short story would be better suited to times of social upheaval (5). Having the conducive environment to inspire the short story production, the Irish writers turned to the British publishing market, which seemed rather inviting for them – like the American would sooner become, as indicated by Ingman:

> There were other factors besides the link between the Irish short story and the Irish tradition of storytelling that account for the centrality of the form within the Irish canon. The material conditions in which Irish writers lived and worked influenced the development of the form. Financial necessity, for instance, impelled writers like Wilde and Yeats to make forays into short fiction at the end of the nineteenth century when the demise of the three-volume novel in England and the rise of small literary magazines encouraged writers' work in the genre. In the twentieth century, the lucrative nature of the American magazine market stimulated development of short fiction generally and a large Irish American readership encouraged Irish writers towards the form. (4-5)

This relation between short story writing and the Irish tradition of oral storytelling – which is regarded for its vibrancy – is, still according to Ingman, one of the reasons for the high accolades of the genre that "established itself as a characteristically Irish form, never suffering from the inferiority complex that plagued the Irish novel." (Ingman 2).

There is, nevertheless, an important contrast between the oral and literate cultures. As Heather Ingman remembers by quoting an argument by Walter Ong, both differ, first of all, in their aims. While the oral narrative would give emphasis to the organization and conservation of knowledge, using strategies such as formulas, patterns and repetitions, the written narrative culture was responsible for alterations in the thought processes and in the narrative modes, in which "Writing became analytical, inward-looking, sparsely linear, experimental; it eschewed the heroic and moved into the everyday. All these are characteristics of the modern short story." (qtd in Ingman 3). Nevertheless, the relation between storytelling and short story writing, for Ingman, resides in the fact that, as in the tradition of oral storytelling, the short story production "implies a sense of community" (3), even if the short story is not able to dispose of the dramatic aspects conveyed by gestures, tones and facial expression in which the oral storytellers relied on. As Heather Ingman illustrates,

> Irish authors of short fiction often use the form to convey a message to their community, from Sheridan Le Fanu's submerged warnings to the Anglo-Irish, to Yeats' vision of a new order in *The Secret Rose*, to feminists' exposure of the hidden realities of Irish women's lives in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, sometimes drawing on motifs from Irish folklore. This suggests consciousness of an audience, however distanced it might seem in comparison with the storyteller's circle of listeners. (3)

The modern short story in Ireland poses as a result of the social and political transformations that happened in the country. Some changes in the publishing market, from the end of the 1890s onwards, offered a new outlet for the Irish production. The short story of the time, however, already started to show signs of a significant foreign influence, as remarks Ingman:

> Irish periodicals such as the *Irish Homestead* (1895–1923), *The Irish Review* (1911–14) and, later, *The Irish Statesman* (1919–30) played an influential role in the development of the modern short story, publishing work by writers associated with the Irish Revival and thereby providing a new readership for short fiction. *The Irish Review*, subtitled 'a monthly magazine of Irish politics, literature and art' and edited at various stages by Pádraic Colum and Joseph Plunkett, published, among others, tales by James Stephens and Lord Dunsany. A new type of story was developing, one less concerned with a remarkable incident or a plot recounted by an omniscient narrator but focusing rather on mood and psychological exploration. Writers were influenced by the psychological realism of Flaubert and Maupassant, by Ibsen's naturalism and by the newly translated Russian writers, Tolstoy, Turgenev and Chekhov. (59-60)

Heather Ingman pinpoints this influence from foreign authors, in the particular case of the Irish short story, by alluding to Flaubert's lessons on the importance of attention to style and sentence rhythm, to Maupassant's care for brevity and concentration, particularly relevant due to the requirements of the newspapers, which favored stories focused on a "a single, revelatory, often life-changing moment that breaks up everyday routine" (84). Ingman recollects Edith Wharton's description of the

short stories of the Russians and the French which, according to Wharton, combined "closeness of texture with profundity of the form, acting as a shaft driven straight into the heart of experience" (Ingman 85). More than focusing on single events and making them truly powerful, the foreign influence was noticeable also in what Ingman refers to as "a move away from authorial comment", whether it might be Flaubert's free indirect style and the presentation of events through the consciousness of the character or Checkhov's depiction of an experience as encountered rather than explained, "a change from nineteenth-century Irish short fiction where even a writer as skilled as Le Fanu employed an imaginary editor to pull his tales together." (85)

The Irish Literary Revival is regarded as a movement responsible for the resurgence of the cultural momentum to the country. From the 1850s onwards, for instance, the number of readers available in Ireland increased drastically, as a result of the politics for education sponsored by the movement (55). The Revival characteristically exalts the Celtic tradition and its tales, that were recalled to the shaping of Ireland's future, noticeably in poetry and drama. Nevertheless, it found, in the short story, this cultural momentum embedded by French, Russian and Scandinavian inspiration, both in the matter of technique – which gradually began walking away from the intrusions of an author to give space to his/her character's conscience –, and in the matter of the individuals that were being portrayed in these stories, many of those who showed similarities, despite being from different countries and different cultural backgrounds (158).

Ireland was successful in conquering her independence from British rule – without ignoring, of course, the compromises that the country had to make for it, like the loss of the northern part of its territory. Independence, in some ways, brought up issues which, in turn, impacted the short story of that period:

> In the English language tradition, the establishment of an independent Ireland prompted Irish writers to portray the life of contemporary Irish Catholic society and the emerging Catholic middle class. An uncertain relationship between modernity and tradition, between the international and the local, is evident and these writers' relationship to their country is complex. Since many of them had participated in the nationalist movement they did not want to turn their backs on their country; at the same time, they felt that independence had been only partly achieved and they became disenchanted with the political rhetoric they had imbibed and acted upon. The civil war, censorship, a deep social conservatism, a puritanical religion and the narrowly defined nationalism that marked the newly independent state, were all deeply disillusioning for these writers. As the energies sparked by the Literary Revival and by the 1916 Rising and the war of independence faded in the more repressive and provincial atmosphere of the 1920s and 1930s, the short story in this period often reflected a realistic awareness of the limitations of the Irish nation as embodied in the Irish state. (Ingman 116)

A sudden crisis was prompted by independence and resulted in a Civil War. This put the island in the centre of a new dispute for power and resulted in several conflicts involving the affirmation of identities that ideologically opposed one another – the main one being that which tackles the catholic and protestant identities. The religious matter, in its turn, established new challenges to the population by creating a divide between families and neighbors, resulting in the feeling of loneliness that suited the short story much better than the novel, according to Frank O'Connor, as recalls Ingman:

> In his influential discussion of the short story form, *The Lonely Voice: a Study of the Short Story*, published in 1962 after his return to Ireland, O'Connor identifies loneliness as a central distinguishing theme of the modern short story: 'there is in the short story at its most characteristic something we do not often find in the novel – an intense awareness of human loneliness'. This formulation, too often taken as the definitive description of the Irish short story, arose not only from O'Connor's study and practice of the form, but was also prompted by O'Connor's personal disillusionment with Irish society post-independence. He believed there should be an organic link between the life of the individual and that of the community but that the restrictive social conditions prevailing in Ireland (censorship, the influence of the Catholic church) had increased the number of lonely and alienated individuals. For this reason, he thought the modern short story suited the Ireland of his times better than the novel for, whereas the novel generally deals with entire societies, the short story, he argued, portrays marginal or isolated individuals and what he termed 'submerged population groups': 'always in the short story there is this sense of outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society'. (Ingman 155-156)

If the short story can be used to convey a message to the community (3), this message, in the modern times, tends to focus on the individual rather than on the group that encompasses him/her, by targeting a single incident that has to do with a particular being. Seán O'Faoláin, according to Ingman, argues that while the novel would fit better in a more social environment such as England, the short story is the genre for Ireland, a place "made up of a collection of individuals, each with their own way of looking at life." (162-163). More than trying to depict a number of national stereotypes, the short story

would be responsible for bringing to life the interior life of its protagonists, even if those were not traditionally considered worth exposing. It was the case of the stories that started to bring forward the people who struggled with the hard life in rural Ireland, the ones that had to deal with emigration – or, on the other hand, the impossibility of fleeing to another country in search of a better life –, the material constraints and restrictions of Irish life, the women's predicaments such as educational and employment opportunities, access to contraception (among other feminist causes that were still a mere utopia in Ireland).

During the Second World War, by assuming a position of neutrality, the country found an opportunity to revive its cultural scene, despite isolating itself further from the rest of the world. The tradition of relying on foreign markets – such as the English and American ones – saw some changes once the country started to experience a new era during which

> . . . more favourable economic circumstances in Ireland gave a boost to indigenous publishing. Seán Lemass's election as Taoiseach in 1959 and his implementation of the programme for economic development drafted by T. K. Whitaker to give priority to export industries and open up Ireland to foreign investors, fostered a general air of renewal and self confidence in the country and turned the tide of emigration. New presses started up, among them Poolbeg, founded in 1976. The growth of bookshops, summer schools and a number of often short-lived literary magazines provided Irish writers with an opportunity to showcase their work. A particular impetus for young and emergent short story writers in Ireland came with the decision of the *Irish Press* in 1968 to devote a weekly page to new Irish writing. The literary editor at the time was David

> Marcus, and from this date onwards the promotion of new and high quality short story writing in Ireland owes much to his encouragement. Starting with *New Irish Writing* in 1970, Marcus began issuing an annual series of anthologies featuring the best stories and poems published in *The Irish Press* during the year. His 1970 collection mixed established writers, like Edna O'Brien, John B. Keane and Janet McNeill, with newer writers such as Julia O'Faolain, John Banville and John McGahern. (Ingman 190)

David Malcolm highlights the canonic status that the short story achieved in Ireland. According to the scholar "Declan Kiberd wrote that 'For the past eighty years in Ireland, the short story has been the most popular of all literary forms with readers. It has also been the form most widely exploited by writers'." (qtd. in Malcolm 21). The relevance of the short story is attested by the use that these writers have been making of the genre, which is helping the readers to keep ahead of the themes that have to do with their own realities, once "the short story, on account of its brevity, is able to anticipate themes that take five years or more to make their appearance in other genres." (Ingman 225-226). The currentness of the Irish short story is particularly highlighted by Anne Enright in the *Introduction*[43] to the *The Granta book of Irish short story,* in which she points out that while "Irish novels may often reach into the past" the short stories "show that the form is light and quick enough to be contemporary" (Enright xii).

The history of Ireland and its constant changes demanded from the arts, especially literature, to act as a live record, as an archive capable of registering these

[43] Enright, Anne. "Introduction". *The Granta book of Irish short story,* edited by Anne Enright, Granta Books, 2010, pp. ix-xviii.

changes while they were in progress. More than that, for the particularity of the genre in Ireland, as already stressed by Ingman, it became its mission to predict, as better as it could, some of the themes that would be relevant to the country's identity, not a singular, all encompassing stereotype, but one that better represents the effervescence of Ireland's many characters that suddenly had to tackle the challenge of facing a gradually borderless world. Ingman points out to the suitability of a newfound interest in the genre from the last two decades of the twentieth century onwards, a period in which Ireland underwent an unprecedented growth and change. The author recalls the ability of the genre in encapsulating "fleeting insights" that are more easily reflected in the short story rather than in the novel. The capacity of the short story, according to Ingman, to present brief moments of existence "permitted snapshots of the effects of the Celtic Tiger, immigration, the decline of the Catholic church, changes in the family unit, and other still current Irish issues." (Ingman 10-11).

Once again the short story is the genre that can better capture this *rapid succession of changes*, for having in its nature the capacity to provide better insights from the freedom of a glance, not requiring the panoramic view of the whole that the novel usually does (227). The nature of the short story which, according to Clare Hanson, "has offered itself to losers and loners, exiles, women, blacks – writers who for one reason or another have not been part of the ruling 'narrative' or epistemological/experiential framework of their society" (qtd. in Malcolm 49), is that of a camera, photographing, in real time, the "formerly fixed definitions of Irish identity shifting under the pressure of change." (Ingman 243). In the case of the Irish short story, to focus on more ordinary, marginal identities does nothing to lessen its power, as Anne Enright proposes through a powerful metaphor: "whoever thinks the short story somehow harmless for being close to a 'folk' tradition has not read John McGahern,

whose stories are the literary equivalent of a hand grenade rolled across the kitchen floor" (Enright xii).

This capacity of the short story of reflecting the transformations and the different impacts that those have in the country and its people renews its purpose not only by being the genre that better suits this context, but also by finding an inviting space at the very own core of the literary industry, as points out Joseph O'Connor in the Introduction[44] to the book *New Irish Short Stories*:

> The short story seems to be experiencing something of a renaissance in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. Journals such as *The Stinging Fly*, edited by Declan Meade, have provided a home for dozens of new writers whose exhilarating work, sceptically aware of the pantheon of the past in Irish fiction, has often pushed at boundaries. Brendan Barrington's fine journal *The Dublin Review* has published beautiful short stories and essays. Cooperatives of writers have formed themselves up and down the country; the Internet has proved important as a means of getting work out. Self-publishing is no longer always seen as a poor relation. There are more writers groups and workshops than ever before. (xii)

There seems to be a general consensus that the incentive of short story writing and the promotion of it, perceivable by the number of publishing outlets and awards devoted to the genre, has to do with an awareness of how much the short story represents to Ireland. It has been a protagonist in registering the country's past, but,

[44] O'Connor, Joseph. "Introduction". *New Irish Short Stories*, edited by Joseph O'Connor, Faber and Faber Limited, 2011, pp. ix-xv.

more important than that, it has recorded the present as this is still unfolding and, in many occasions, pointed to the future of Ireland and of the Irish identities.

3 "TIGER, TIGER, BURNING BRIGHT . . . WHAT IMMORTAL HAND OR EYE COULD FRAME THY FEARFUL SYMMETRY?"[45] – A SOCIAL POLITICAL REVIEW OF IRELAND PRE AND POST CELTIC TIGER

It is virtually impossible to talk about Ireland in the last decades and not being confronted with even the slightest reference to the country as the *Celtic Tiger*. This term, that was dubbed to the nation because of the economic growth experienced by the country between 1990 and 2001, is an allusion to the *Four Asian Tigers* (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan), which, before Ireland, have been exalted for their rapid growth. The Celtic Tiger period has, in many ways, shaken the social, political and economic structures of Ireland and, by doing so, reshaped the country's identity drastically. Nevertheless, to better understand this phenomenon and its real impact on the island it is necessary to look back a little at Ireland's history in a period pre-Celtic Tiger, searching for some past actions that brought the country to its period of glory – and latter downfall.

Ireland was, for most of its history, influenced by the British. According to Richard Killeen, in *Ireland: land, people, history*[46], the constant presence of the English Rule can be dated back to 1171, when Henry II landed at Waterford with the largest army ever seen in Ireland (49). That rule was reinforced by the subsequent treaties that were signed in the following centuries, as the Act of Union (1801) – which instituted Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom –, until the independence started to become a reality, with

[45] Blake, William. "The Tyger". *The complete poems.* Kindle Ed. Penguin Classics: 1978.
[46] Killeen, Richard. *Ireland: Land, People, History.* Robinson, 2012.

the signing of the 1922 Anglo-Irish Treaty[47] and finally the proclamation of Ireland as a Republic, in 1949.

Between 1922 and 1949, the tension was high in the country, as a result of the divide that the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty had caused among the ones that, up to that point, were fighting for a free Ireland. Eamon De Valera (who would become the president of Ireland in the following years), believed that the treaty was a betrayal to Ireland. He came to power in the Free State in 1932, with clear political guidelines:

> His Fianna Fáil Party was pledged to fight vigorously against partition and for the reunification of the country; for the revival of the Irish language; for the dismantling of the constitutional arrangements laid down in the treaty; for the break-up of large ranches and the creation of the greatest possible number of small family farms; and for the abandonment of Cumann na nGaedheal's free-trade policies in favour of protection in the development of native industry behind tariff barriers. (Killeen 263)

On the cultural and economic front, the movement made by De Valera and *Fianna Fáil* was a return to the roots of the country, preserving and promoting its memory and culture – for instance, the Irish language revival – and prioritizing the rural economy and the native industry by the imposition of tariff barriers. His government found support in the Catholic Church, which acted as an arbiter of moral value and a

[47] The Anglo-Irish Treaty is an agreement signed between the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and representatives of the Irish Republic. It established, in 1922, the Irish Free State, a self-governing dominion of the British Empire. The signing of this treaty was regarded as a betrayal from the representatives to the Irish Republic and resulted in a civil war and the division of Ireland, since the Northern portion of the island decided to remain a part of the United Kingdom. According to Richard Killeen the treaty "gave southern Ireland effective independence, along the same lines as Canada, but retained the oath of allegiance to the crown and therefore stopped short of a republic." (253)

basic integrating force in the society (Killeen 264). By taking such a stand, the British decided to inflict difficulties on the country, in the hope that these may prevent Ireland from truly becoming independent. As Killeen observes,

> On the economic front, the promise to develop Irish industry behind tariff barriers was redeemed under the direction of the energetic young Minister for industry and commerce, Seán Lemass. The necessary legislation was put in place by the mid 1930s and an experiment in economic self-sufficiency began which would last for a quarter of a century. Fianna Fáil were much more energetic about establishing public enterprises such as the national airline, Aer Lingus, which was founded in 1936. On the social side, the new government displayed considerable energy in slum clearance and the provision of new suburban public housing . . . De Valera promised to withhold the annuities due to the British Treasury in repayment of loans extended to tenants under the various land purchase acts . . . The British retaliated by slapping import duties on Irish produce, of which cattle were the most important. This so-called 'economic war' dragged on until 1938, causing much hardship in an Ireland already feeling the effects of the Depression that followed the Wall Street crash of 1929. (265-266)

The Anglo-Irish agreement, signed in 1938, put an end to this economic war and was another step ahead towards the independence of Ireland, with the recognition of the Constitution enacted by De Valera in 1937. When the Second World War broke out, Ireland chose to remain neutral, demonstrating "its independence in the most emphatic way" (266). This neutrality, nevertheless, would cost the country more than it had

bargained for, since it resulted in the isolation of Ireland, keeping the country from reaping some of the benefits that appeared post war:

> The combination of economic isolation caused by the tariff regime, the inevitable left about shortage caused by the war, Ireland's geographical remoteness and its aloofness from a conflict that was convulsing the world was enervating. The reforming impulse that have made the 1930s exciting weakened and the fizz went out of the government. The war ended. Europe, boosted by Marshall Plan Aid, produced an astonishing economic recovery in the 1950s in which Ireland did not share. The country was still run for the benefit of a deeply conservative farming class. In effect, the land settlement and the absence of heavy industry had ensured that Ireland's political revolution would be socially conservative. (Killeen 267-268)

The result of this political inclination was that the Republic of Ireland, as the country formally became in 1949, was the only country in the capitalist world which contracted economically in the years post war. Furthermore, the isolation was not only economic, but also social and cultural. According to Sean Kay in *Celtic Revival? The rise, fall and renewal of global Ireland*[48], the Church was responsible for keeping Ireland secluded from the rest of the world. The role that the Catholic Church played in Irish politics left the country behind many others, including its lost part – Northern Ireland, when it came to social and health rights, as Kay points out:

[48] Kay, Sean. *Celtic Revival? The rise, fall and renewal of global Ireland.* Rowman & Littlefield, 2011.

> The Catholic Church has long been woven into the essential fabric of Ireland. Traditionally, to be Irish was to be Catholic. The church was initially granted a special place in politics by way of the Constitution, though freedom of religion is now guaranteed. The church also dominated the Irish education system. This relationship between the church and society manifested frequently in public policy, including legal prohibitions on birth control, abortion, homosexuality, and divorce, and even church opposition, at one point in the 1950s, to public provision of health care for children. Over time, Ireland reformed most of these social restrictions. In the 1970s, groups of women traveled on trains to Northern Ireland to purchase condoms. They returned to Dublin and handed them out in public protest of the prohibition against birth control, which is now legal. Abortion, however, is not. Women who seek abortion travel abroad while society looks the other way. Still, there is tension in this policy. (Kay 107-108)

Ireland was, up to this point, apart from the rest of the world. The purity that the Catholic Church fought so hard to maintain in the island was based on a population ruled by minimal chance of social mobility and plagued by the ever-present ghost of emigration. As Richard Killeen puts it, Ireland was, from the economic perspective, “socially immobile, ostentatiously religious and mentally isolated, it was as if the first half of the twentieth century had happened somewhere else.” (277). Furthermore, Killeen argues that harder than turning the economy around from the 1960s onwards, the true battle was that of the culture war, a consequence of the arrival of a new generation – that supplanted the *ageing revolutionaries* and started a movement to re-insert the country into the World, allowing international influences to flourish in an Ireland that up

to that point had been very successful in keeping itself closed to foreign cultures (Killeen 277).

By dismantling the tariff barriers and introducing inducements to draw in foreign capital and investing in education, between 1959 to 1966, Ireland opened itself to the world and started to implement a social and economic policy that would be the basis for the *Celtic Tiger* boom. Added to these initiatives, the arrival of television by the launching of *Telefís Éireann*, the Irish television service (nowadays RTE – *Raidió Telefís Éireann*), opened the country to outside influences. In the article *Irish society and culture in the twenty-first century*[49], Fintan O'Toole tackles the effect of television in the Irish community:

> An Irish politician actually said this in the 1960s, "there was no sex in Ireland before television". So, we got television and we got sex, as a result. This kind of hipper, more cosmopolitan, more deliberately provocative society in terms of its recitation of belonging has a sense of identity which is more angry in some ways, more loose, more oppositional, though it is also rooted. (103)

Ireland was now aware of a world made of more than the country itself and Britain. The foreign influences, as Killeen points out, could be noticed in tourism, for example, with the growing need for better restaurants and more refined food and wine offers and the increasing of air travel. The declining of mass attendance from the 1960s onwards, prompted by the emergence of many sexual scandals involving priests which, up to that point, were being concealed by the Church, prevented the institution from

[49] O'Toole, Fintan. "Irish society and culture in the twenty-first century". *ABEI JOURNAL: The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies.* n. 11, FFLCH/USP, Nov. 2009, pp. 99-110, http://www.abei.org.br/uploads/5/4/1/7/54176641/abei_journal_11.pdf.

bullying the people from striving for a place in the global scene (Killeen 284). These movements made it possible for Ireland to be accepted in the European Union (known as European Economic Community from 1957 to 1993) in 1973, another factor that would entangle a great impact in the country's economic future. In the chapter *Globalised Ireland, or, contemporary transformations of national identity?*[50], G. Honor Fagan observes what the entering in the EU represented to Ireland:

> When Ireland 'joined' Europe in 1973, it was very much as a poor relation and major beneficiary of all the 'structural funds' made available for 'less developed' regions. It seemed that Ireland was exchanging selfreliance for dependency in a wilful shift away from the independence movement ethos. (115)

To become somehow dependent of Europe may have been a compromise on the part of the country. For several movements of its history, Ireland relied on the affirmation of its identity, an identity that sorts it apart from the rest of the world – especially Britain, always related to its urban centered politics and decaying moral values, in opposition to the Irish rural lifestyle and Catholic morals. It was, nevertheless, appealing to the supporters of the free-trade economics, the liberals and the farmers, as Killeen indicates:

> Membership of the EU has hugely enriched the Republic of Ireland. Farmers, most obviously, have profited from the grotesquely wasteful Common Agricultural Policy. EU social funds have been generously disbursed to bring the country's

[50] Fagan, G. Honor. "Globalised Ireland, or, contemporary transformations of national identity?". *The end of Irish history: critical reflections on the Celtic Tiger*, edited by Colin Coulter and Steve Coleman, Manchester University Press, 2003, pp. 110-121.

> social infrastructure up towards continental standards and to aid hitherto neglected regions. Industrial exports found new markets. Inward investment, especially from the United States, expanded, as Ireland provided an anglophone access to European markets. The country's traditional dependence on Britain lessened to the point that Ireland entered the European Monetary System in 1917 although Britain stayed out. It meant breaking the link with sterling that had existed since 1826 . . . and reinstating an independent Irish currency. It lasted until the launch of the euro in 2002. (Killeen 298)

Ireland was shaped to be the ideal place to foreign investors. It possessed a key geographic location – between North America and continental Europe – and a well-educated population due to the changes in the educational policy from previous years; besides, it was also an English speaking country, and, maybe most important than any other thing, its rate of corporation tax was well below others from Europe and the United States. In *Ship of Fools: how stupidity and corruption sank the Celtic Tiger*, Fintan O'Toole points out the case of information technology industry, which started to see Ireland as the premier location worldwide for US investment. The impressive rise in the numbers of employees of these companies in Ireland, as O'Toole exemplifies stating the five thousand working at Intel or the 4,300 at Dell by 2006, solidified this status, which resulted that "By the mid–2000s, Ireland was the world's leading exporter of computer software and a third of all personal computers sold in Europe were manufactured in the Republic" (O'Toole 86).

After years of hardship, having to live with the anguish of famine and constant waves of massive emigration, Ireland was finally experiencing a new trend of development and confidence, attracting not only foreign investors, but also repatriating

Irish people who had been away for the lack of better opportunities at home and even drawing foreign people to come to live and work in the booming country. Ireland and the Irish people were facing a major redefinition of their identities, as Robert Kitchin and Brendan Bartley describe in the chapter *Ireland in the twenty-first century*[51]: "From the early 1990s through to the time of writing, Ireland has been transformed from the poor, peripheral nation of the 1980s to a largely prosperous, confident, multicultural, globally embedded nation" (4).

This multicultural and globally embedded nation was a direct result from the loosening of the ties to the Catholic Church – which had happened in the previous decades due to the history of sexual scandals and cover-ups of the institution that preached for high moral standards and condemned sex as a sin. The return of Irish people that have gone abroad in the 1980s and the arrival of people from different countries in search of jobs and living opportunities in Ireland also contributed to reshape the country's identity, by provoking the new legislation to cope with diversity, as Bartley and Kitchin state:

> the 1990s saw a secular transformation as people increasingly questioned the role of the Church and abandoned aspects of its social doctrine (although not necessarily their faith). People started to live more secular lives and church attendance rates plummeted from around 90 per cent of people attending Mass at least once a week in 1973 to 48 per cent in 2001. The move to secularisation was given added impetus by scandals concerning child abuse, which rocked the Church as enquiries were set up to investigate such occurrences, e.g., the Ferns

[51] Bartley, Brendan; Kitchin, Robert. "Ireland in the twenty-first century". *Understanding Contemporary Ireland*, edited by Brendan Bartley and Robert Kitchin, Pluto, 2007, pp. 1-26.

> Report (Department of Health and Children, 2005). This was aided by a series of human rights and equality legislation that challenged social attitudes and protected the rights of disadvantaged and discriminated groups (e.g., decriminalisation of homosexuality), employment practices (e.g., job sharing for working mothers), and reforms in attitudes and legislation concerning families (e.g., legalisation on divorce). The latter has led to a growth in non-traditional families (e.g., non-married couples living together, single-parent families (14 per cent of all families in 2002)), reduced family sizes, and dual-income households. Moreover, more women are having children in their 30s rather than 20s, a possible consequence of establishing their careers before starting a family; and 30 per cent of babies in 2000 were born to unmarried mothers (up from 15 per cent in 1991; ESRI, HIPE and NPRS, 2004). As noted below, these changes have been added to by the large number of return migrants importing social and political values from abroad and immigrants bringing their cultures to Ireland. The result has been the development of a more socially plural and liberal society, one almost unrecognisable to immigrants who left in the 1980s. (Bartley and Kitchin 14)

Because Irish people experienced colonialism and forced immigration in a great part of their history, there was a tendency in the country to embrace other cultures with relative ease, especially during the first years of the 1990s, when the economy was booming and nothing seemed like it could go wrong. The somewhat fabricated concept of homogeneous Irish identity which had been disseminated throughout Ireland's history as a way to set the country apart from Britain was now guaranteed by not only its recent

independence, but also by the ever growing feeling that the Irish identity was marked by success.

There was, in general, a sense that the country was thriving after centuries of struggles and this, although not entirely incorrect, did not relate to the entire country and all its people. First of all, the tax relieve politics that has been so welcoming to foreign companies – especially the information technology and pharmaceutical ones – created the illusion that the country was being benefited by the wealth generated by them, when, in reality, there was hardly any return of it to the state, which, as it stood, not only did not profit from their riches, but also had to offer conditions to the maintenance of these companies in its cities, by investing in infrastructure. But this was not the entire problem. There was, as well, the question regarding the ones that were outside the Celtic Tiger bubble, ordinary people whose earnings were the same as before, but who now had to deal with a much higher cost of living. As Colin Coulter describes in the introduction to *The end of Irish history*[52]*,*

> During the boom years the salaries, rents, profits and dividends that accrue to the wealthy have not been restrained and have grown exponentially. Over the same period, however, the wages that are paid to ordinary folk have been subject to strict controls and have grown only marginally. It should scarcely come as a surprise, therefore, to discover that the era of the Celtic Tiger has witnessed an acceleration of the polarisation of wealth. Indeed, international statistics have shown consistently in recent years that the Irish Republic has come to represent the second most unequal society in the western world. The operation of social

[52] Coulter, Colin; Coleman, Steve, editors. *The end of Irish history: critical reflections on the Celtic Tiger*. Manchester University Press, 2003.

> partnership agreements in the context of an economic boom has worked to the considerable disadvantage of the southern Irish working classes. (Coulter 22)

Ireland was a role model for success worldwide, but the Celtic Tiger period proved to be also, in a long turn, a problematic one. The polarization of wealth put Ireland as the second most unequal society in the western world. The country has, in a broader sense, turned its focus to some urban centres – like Dublin and Limerick – with the immediate result of the neglect of the rural area – historically exalted by Irish revolutionaries as a symbol of life that people should aspire to. In the chapter *Farming*[53], Tom Dillon stresses out two main concerns of the sector nowadays:

> However, the Irish farming sector faces many challenges also, both economically and socially. Economically, the cost of food production is rising dramatically, outstripping any food price gain at farm-gate level. Energy prices are approaching unsustainable levels and the effects of climate change are forcing changes in farm management while also generating massive volatility in food markets. Socially, the mean age of rural Irish communities is increasing. Just 7 per cent of Irish farmers are under the age of 35 . . . The issue is not a lack of interest in farming from young people exclusively, but rather a number of problems that plague both young entrepreneurs: access to land, low return on investment in the initial stages and issues with raising finance. (Dillon 102-103)

[53] Dillon, Tom. "Farming". *New thinking = New Ireland,* edited by Louise Hodgson, Gill and Macmillan, 2013, pp. 101-112.

Bartley and Kitchin observe the relation of dependency that the farming business created with subsidies and grants from the State and for the European Union to be able to keep up with the global competition and the pressures of the supermarket chains. For a number of farmers, the solution was being "diversified into other economic sectors such as tourism (e.g., opening bed and breakfasts), moved to employ cheaper immigrant labour, and taken to selling land for sites, in an effort to make ends meet." (21)

In the urban centres and their adjacencies, the boom years represented an unprecedented growth in the construction market. This created a culture that subverted the tradition of having a house as home, by the trend of owning several properties as an investment. This trend, first of all, proved to be a failure in the short run, once the economic crisis of the beginning 2000s confronted the ones who had invested all their money – or even borrowed some from banks to invest – with the bitter reality that they would never see the profit that was promised to them and, worst of all, would have to inject even more money to finish their projects.

The property market issue became a contradiction from which Ireland could not escape. The high prices of housing in the main urban centres during the boom years and the arrival of foreign companies created the need of broadening these areas to their metropolitan regions, which resulted in the demand for huge investment in infrastructure on the part of the State to make these places suitable. On the search for places where the cost of life was relatively cheaper, many adapted themselves to commuting to the suburbs, leaving the renewed urban centres to the elite, resulting in the process of gentrification, as Brendan Bartley describes in the chapter *Planning in Ireland*[54]:

[54] Bartley, Brendan. "Planning in Ireland". *Understanding Contemporary Ireland,* edited by Brendan Brendan and Robert Kitchin, Pluto, 2007, pp. 31-43.

> There is now evidence of a process of reurbanisation (gentrification) taking place alongside the counter-urbanisation (suburbanisation and commuterisation) trends in Dublin and other major urban centres – and this may be attributable to the new entrepreneurial planning policy measures designed to reinvigorate town centre areas. However, the renewed urban centres are increasingly the preserve of immigrant groups and young elites who have helped to gentrify it, while the rest of the spread-out urban area is readily accessible only to those with private transport. The poor who live in rural areas and at the urban edge are increasingly isolated due to inadequate public transport provision. In terms of access to the services and facilities they have a much more limited range of choices available to them than the wealthier car-borne population. They are, in effect, physically and socially marginalised. (Bartley 41)

Fintan O'Toole argues about the social aspect of housing that was regarded more by the social need than as a commodity (65). While regulated by the State, the prices made it possible to most of the citizens to have a roof over their heads, even if it were on social projects. The opening of the housing market to private interests of the wealthy ones, however, led to a catastrophic reality, as indicates O'Toole. He points out what he refers as a grotesque irony which determined that in the period when the main activity of the country seemed to be the building of houses, there was an exponential growth in the number of citizens who did not own or could not afford to buy or even rent a home. The author indicates that, between 1996 and 2008, there was an increase of 105 per cent on the number of people that became "officially recognised as being in unfit or overcrowded accommodation, homeless or unable to afford a house" (66-67). This resulted, according to O'Toole, in the startling data that showed that right when the

country was experiencing “a vast housing boom, there were over 100,000 households or about 236,000 people struggling to keep an adequate roof over their heads” (O’Toole 66-67).

The homelessness problem and gentrification of places in Ireland are, in some way, potentiators of a number of problems that the country has been facing since the beginning of the Celtic Tiger period. The growth of suicides, crime and violence rates is alarming, as Sean Kay presents:

> The Sunday Independent reported that at least twenty-nine suicides could be directly linked to the housing crisis in Ireland. In 2008, Ireland saw a 24 percent rise in the annual rate of suicide. Long a difficult issue for Irish to confront, suicide was a leading cause of death among Irish under age thirty (especially among men) even during the Celtic Tiger, and it increased with the collapse of the economy.
>
> Although, by comparative standards, Ireland is a very safe place, the country witnessed a substantial rise in violent crime both during and after the Celtic Tiger. Organized criminal gangs had become a serious issue in major cities — especially Dublin and Limerick. Between 1998 and 2008, Ireland saw a 32 percent increase in homicides with firearms. The number of gun killings in Ireland is five times higher than in England. At the core of much of this violence was a major spike in illegal drug activity in the country, in terms of both trafficking through Ireland and personal consumption. (41)

According to Robert Nielsen in the chapter *Economics I*[55], the link between a person's identity and unemployment cannot be ignored. He states that "Unemployed people can suffer enormously from the loss of identity. They feel they are a burden and they lose their sense of dignity and self-respect." (87). At the same time, to be employed not necessarily means to be in control, once the market demands can represent a heavy burden capable of affecting one person's life, as Coulter observes "that the pace and length of their working day have increased considerably. The stresses that arise out of these new work cultures have been among the factors that have led to spiralling levels of drug and alcohol abuse in the twenty-six counties." (24).

Even if the Celtic Tiger was a period of great progress to Ireland, one must not ignore that its effects were, in some regards, selective, highlighting, in its turns, problems of every other major capitalist society in the globe. As Steve Loyal puts in the chapter *Welcome to the Celtic Tiger: racism, immigration and the state*[56]*,*

> The 'Celtic Tiger' has come to provide a convenient shorthand for Ireland's prosperous and rapidly growing economy. Like all metaphors, it occludes as much as it includes; as a way of representing, it is just as much a way of misrepresenting. The implication of a prosperity in which 'a rising tide lifts all boats' masks the growth of poverty and inequality and generalises what is, in fact, only a restricted experience of newly found wealth, within a broader context of class and gender stratification and regional underdevelopment. It also masks growing racism within Irish society. (Loyal 74)

[55] Nielsen, Robert. "Economics I". *New thinking = New Ireland*, edited by Louise Hodgson, Gill and Macmillan, 2013, pp. 82-91.

[56] Loyal, Steve. "Welcome to the Celtic Tiger: racism, immigration and the state". *The end of Irish history: critical reflections on the Celtic Tiger,* edited by Colin Coulter and Steve Coleman, Manchester University Press, 2003, pp. 74-94.

Ireland has now, once again, to face the questions surrounding its newfound identity, an identity that is multicultural, plurisocial and still figuring itself out. There is no denying the great achievements that the country has had, whether by opening itself up to the world and other cultural influences, whether by questioning institutions that put themselves at the core of the country's decisions regarding questions like sexual orientation, marriage, child raising and education. Like the Catholic Church, which, on its turn, practices some terrible crimes. Sean Kay points out that "At the core of the transformation in Ireland has been a social revolution. Issues taboo for generations are now spoken of openly and frankly." (2). Among the changes that happened in the country that can be counted as positive, it is worth to highlight the massive influx of women in the work scene from the 1990s up to now, the *same sex marriage referendum*, which was approved by popular vote on February 22nd 2013, and the *repeal of the 8th Amendment to the Constitution*, which treated abortion as illegal, on May 26th 2018. It is Kay, again, the one to point out a perception problem that these changes entail:

> Ireland is often perceived from the outside as a reactionary, conservative, Catholic country. Debates in New York City about whether the organizers of the annual St. Patrick's Day parade had a right to ban gays from marching reflected this view. Just twenty years ago, it was technically illegal to be gay in Ireland. You would not know that from watching the annual Gay Pride Parade that now runs through Dublin. Over five thousand marchers come from all walks of life—gays, straights, teachers, police, you name it. In July 2010, Ireland passed national civil-partnership legislation recognizing the legal rights of gay couples.

> The majority favoring this was so overwhelming that passage did not require a final parliamentary vote. (Kay 10)

For better or for worse, one cannot ignore the fact that the Irish identity that was presented to the world is a product "manufactured by the global cultural industry" (Fagan 114), as G. Honor Fagan declares by referring to the images of the musical dance show Riverdance, the musical group U2 or the nowadays global format of the Irish Pub. And the current Irish identity will encompass the different traits of its multicultural population, this identity will need to distance itself from the notion of a homogeneous character and let the multiple facets that can be found in the country be represented in its official narratives, whether these are fictional or real. In the chapter *Art*[57], Katie Tsouros argues about the role of art as a record of the time:

> Since the beginning of time art has captured the contemporary zeitgeist. It encapsulates a particular moment, a sentiment and feeling that visually represents and reflects the current state of society. Before the camera was invented, this was quite literal. Art, be it ancient cave drawings or Renaissance painting, was used to chronicle events, record happenings, people and experiences, portray places, share memories and observe and remark on the status of culture, civilization and humanity . . . Art has the power to change the way we view the world, the power to make us stop, consider and think about an alternative perspective. It has the power to challenge, investigate and explore another position; to question our perceptions and realities. (24)

[57] Tsouros, Katie. "Art". *New thinking = New Ireland*, edited by Louise Hodgson, Gill and Macmillan, 2013, pp. 23-33.

Art, by its very nature, can not only capture the state of a society, but can also raise important questions about the way different people are being treated in the same community. Éabha Ni Laogharie Nic Guiolla Phádraig stresses, in the chapter *A vision of Ireland*[58], the inclination of Irish Literature that, in some way, sets it apart from the production of other nations:

> Identity is a prominent theme in much of Irish literature and, in experiencing these works, I can understand more clearly the experiences of my ancestors and the essence of the Irish mentality. One of the traits I love about Irish literature generally is that it focuses on the ordinary, everyday people, whose exemplary attitude and mindset can provide valuable lessons for us today. (220)

This focus on the ordinary people is necessary if Ireland expects to maintain the positive gains achieved during the Celtic Tiger period. As Richard Killeen states, "In 2011, Ireland is a richer country than it was in 1990" (303). And despite this being true, it is also true that the country faces some major issues regarding social inequality, violence, racism, alcohol and drug abuse, many of those which are already being portrayed in Irish literature. There is enough evidence to confirm that most of the population is paying the price for the greed of a relatively small number of people, the ones involved in banking, politics and religion, who shamefully profited during the boom years and left the mess to be cleaned up by a broke State. As Robert Kitchin and Brendan Bartley summed up in *Ireland now and in the future*[59],

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[58] Phádraig, Éabha Ni Laogharie Nic Guiolla. "A vision of Ireland". *New thinking = New Ireland*, edited by Louise Hodgson, Gill and Macmillan, 2013, pp. 218-230.

[59] Bartley, Brendan; Kitchin, Robert. "Ireland now and in the future". *Understanding Contemporary Ireland*, edited by Brendan Bartley and Robert Kitchin, Pluto, 2007, pp. 301-307.

> After more than a decade of vigorous economic growth and prosperity, Ireland has been left with some severe problems. So, while much of the transformation has been positive, it has been accompanied by a widening gap between rich and poor; rising crime rates; increased environmental pollution; a large infrastructure deficit; a housing market that excludes many; a huge growth in long-distance commuting; health and welfare systems creaking under pressure; a weakening rural economy with a decline in agricultural incomes; the continued marginalisation of Travellers; and in Northern Ireland sectarianism is still rife. (Bartley and Kitchin 303-304)

The only way out is to face the issues that, at this point, may not be the ones Ireland would rather promote, but which represent that, despite the many accolades achieved by the country since the 1990s, there are some flaws that require adjustment. It is to recognize the ones that were left behind during the social and economic growth of the country and give them voice and space to declare that they too are representative of the Irish identity.

4 "WE HAD DREAMS AND SONGS TO SING"[60] – A PORTRAIT OF THE OUTCASTED FROM THE CELTIC TIGER RICHES IN THE IRISH SHORT STORY

Irish literature seems to have a special sensitivity when it comes to dealing with questions of the country's struggles, achievements, and sorrows. Whether is W.B. Yeats, his return to the Irish legends and his avid promotion of the Celtic Renascence, or James Joyce and his witty criticism of the country's politics and the representation of the paralysis which he sensed in the cities, a reader can almost always find in the literary writings of Ireland a window to its life. In the Introduction to *Looking at the stars: An anthology of Irish writing in aid of the Dublin Simon Community*, Alice Kinsella praises one of the most special abilities of literature: "One of the many wonderful aspects of the literary arts are their ability to place the reader in the shoes of another person, they foster empathy." More than just placing the reader in someone else's shoes, writers are gifted with an awareness of their surroundings, an empathy for people and places, for the so-called ordinary situations that silently make up our daily lives until a piece of art reveals them to us.

In the Irish contemporary literary production, the sense of euphoria resulting from the drastic changes and the development of the country during the Celtic Tiger period can be perceived, perpetuating a historical interest from its people in narrating themselves and the land, as D. Ó Corráin reminds (1989). In the PhD thesis *The contemporary Irish short story: identities in transformation*[61], Patricia de Aquino Prudente depicts the triad which seemed to resume the general feeling of the period:

[60] St John, Pete. Lyrics to "The Fields of Athenry". *Genius*, https://genius.com/The-dubliners-the-fields-of-athenry-lyrics.

[61] Prudente, Patricia de Aquino. *The contemporary Irish short stories: identities in transformation.* 2019. Universidade de São Paulo (USP), PhD thesis. Biblioteca digital

> With the Celtic Tiger, the Irish economy was thriving and generated a new triad: migration, prosperity and conflict. The history of Ireland and its literature have always been marked by the presence of exile, diaspora, emigration, and now it has been reflecting those new elements. However, in this new period, emigration ceases and immigration escalates for the first time in the country's history, causing a major turnaround in culture. (Prudente 16)

The fact that prosperity is one of the most used terms when it comes to describing Ireland during the Celtic Tiger period can hardly be contested. The remarkable rise of the country's GDP, the establishment of Ireland as the European capital of major companies, the housing market boom, all of these is overwhelming evidence that the country was finally thriving after centuries of struggle. But it is also a fact, as it has proven itself in all the great capitalist economies of the world, that such prosperity is not all encompassing, resulting in a deeper disparity between the upper classes and the ones that were not so well equipped to cope with progress. As a result of the gap that this disparity creates, we witness the struggles of marginalized communities, fighting as hard as they can to keep on going in a society that seems to remind them constantly of how displaced they are.

In the short stories selected for this analysis the focus is on the representation of identities involved in backgrounds plagued by violence, social disparity, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse and cultural intolerance, phenomena that were intensified by the Celtic Tiger period and its downfall. These identities are a direct result of what the other imposes to the characters, who are, in the essence, outcasted, put at the margin

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SP, https://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8147/tde-17122019-181625/publico/2019_PatriciaDeAquinoPrudente_VCorr.pdf.

by the “ruling” society. The fifteen stories are grouped by theme, accounted for on each one of them through a vertical analysis made by the analytical reading of the literary texts. In most of them, the characters plagued by drug/alcohol abuse, homelessness and immigration are voiceless, for their images are portrayed through the words of an Irish narrator who does not share the same experiences as them, and, most of the times, acts as a judge of character. In this way, it is expected to present the contemporary fictional short story production as a live record of the marginalized lives in Ireland, without regarding it as an identical copy or replica of reality, as Antoine Compagnon warns about the approach of literature as Aristoteles’ proposition of *mimesis* in *Literature, Theory and Common Sense* (*Le demon de la theorie: litterature et sens commun*)[62] but more of an interpretation of mimesis as “a knowledge proper to man, the way he constructs and inhabits the world” (93).

[62] Compagnon, Antoine. *Literature, Theory and Common Sense,* translated by Carol Cosman. Princeton University Press, 2004.

5 BETWEEN THE BOOM AND THE DESPAIR: THE REPRESENTATION OF HOMELESSNESS IN IRELAND

> *We weave such magical stories we, the Irish, with our talk and all our words. We tell our children lies because the truth is too much.*
>
> *Tara Flynn*[63]

One of the most noticeable marks of the economic boom from the Celtic Tiger period had to do with the housing market. Not only the city of Dublin went through a process of reshaping – with revitalization of areas such as Grand Canal Docks and its cool and modern new buildings; The outskirts of the capital, and various other cities from the countryside, also enjoyed the enthusiasm and demand created for newer, bigger and fancier accommodation to go with the general feeling of success that the country became used to between the beginning of the 1990s up to the early 2000s. Paradoxically, what at the start was considered an exciting boom, rapidly unraveled into a crisis that, up to this day, seems only to be getting worse, so much so that it inspired voluntary sectors to act in aid of the ever growing number of homeless. One organization which stood out during the Irish homeless crisis is the Simon Community Dublin, a 50 years old group that is devoted to help people sleeping rough by offering meals and offering services and support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The book *Looking at the stars: an anthology of Irish writing in aid of the Dublin Simon Community*, from which all of the stories related to the theme of homelessness were select, is a perfect example of the community's works. The

[63] Flynn, Tara. "Castles". *Looking at the stars: an anthology of Irish writing in aid of the Dublin Simon Community*, edited by Kerry O'Brien and Alice Kinsella, Munster Literary Centre, 2016, pp. 24.

selection of poetry, prose and non-fiction pieces by some of the most prominent Irish authors set itself to raise €15.000 for the Dublin Simon Community's Rough Sleeper Team. Literature was their way to shed some light upon the issue and also to act and find solutions, even with only temporary ones.

The feeling of indifference, despair and hopelessness that thousands of people face daily while sleeping in public housings, or worse, sleeping rough, is translated into writings such as *River Thoughts*[64], by Christine Dwyer Hickey, published in 2016 in *Looking at the stars: an anthology of Irish writing in aid of the Dublin Simon Community*.

The short story takes place in the city of Dublin, where the protagonist narrator recalls her own life experiences, which are entangled with the river, its bridges, and its quays. As she looks past some of these memories, the reader is invited to grasp the changes that the city went through along the years and the disturbing continuance of some hard habits. She first presents a memory of her being lifted by her father to see a lady playing the harp outside a pub called "The Irish House", that once belonged to her grandfather, a place decorated with the images of Ireland's historical characters, the national heroes from the past. Under the gaze of these great names, what really impresses the little girl is the familiarity that her father has with all the ones who she refers to as "riverside people". Maids from a hotel, people in the pubs and bookie shops, the man selling newspaper, a poor man playing melodeon for money, all these are common folks whose lives happen by the river.

She recollects how her father knew not only the names of these seemingly ordinary people, but also of the "people who lived closer to the sky" (Hickey 2), such as St Anthony of Lost Things. She remembers being seated on the balustrade of the

[64] Hickey, Christine Dwyer. "River Thoughts". *Looking at the stars: an anthology of Irish writing in aid of the Dublin Simon Community*, edited by Kerry O'Brien and Alice Kinsella, Munster Literary Centre, 2016, pp. 2-4.

bridge, where the stink of the river urged her to hold her nose, when her father showed her “the men in charge of the city”:

> ‘Those fellas up there, see? On top of the Four Courts building.’
>
> ‘What are they doing there?’
>
> ‘They’re minding the river.’
>
> ‘Who are they minding it for?’
>
> ‘For us.’
>
> ‘Us? Do we own it?’
>
> ‘You own it, I own it; the people on that bus own it. All the people in the cars and walking along the street and going by on their bicycles and that woman carrying her messages home and the man with his horse and cart over there. They all own it. Everyone who was born here in Dublin, we own it.’ (Hickey 3)

The idea of belonging to a place, of having ownership as a birth right is synthesized in this extract, which conveys the notion that a city belongs to its citizens and each one of them has their interests guaranteed by law. The images on top of the Four Courts – Moses, Justice, Authority, Wisdom and Mercy – represent the means to safeguard the rights of the people. The remembrance of her father’s words shows the faith which people like him had in the system, in just, wise, and merciful politics to ensure the wellbeing of the population.

The marks of the passing time are registered in the memories of the protagonist, from her first triumphs as a student to her first work experience, from her parents’ divorce to the time and place where she was proposed to. Every quay and bridge on Liffey River are responsible for holding a personal memory for the narrator. At the same

time, these places are a testament for how things changed along the years, how many of these people and places – offices, pubs – now only reside in her memory. This woman discloses an awareness of how fast and how much things have changed, or in some cases did not, in the country. She recalls the decades during which those "quays of Joyce's Ulysses remained largely unchanged" (Hickey 4), a period that her grandfather and her father got to live, as if the register in the lines of Joyce's most famous work were final to the city.

But the unmistakable passing of time comes in the replacement of the "huckster shops, bockety houses and small-profit family business" (4) for the "long stretches of flat-faced apartments at one end, and at the other, gigantic cases where the internet generation can live, work and play" (4). The way she conveys her perception of these changes' reveals, in some way, how this place lost sensitivity, having turned itself into a bigger, cleaner, but somewhat colder city. The riverside, although a different scenery from the one of the woman's childhood, a place that no longer stinks, is the space that continues to attract the poor and marginalized, the ones who she refers to as the "distraught no-hopers", as depicts the narrator:

> At dusk, they come out from the shadows to queue at the refuge on Merchant's quay: homeless old men carrying their blankets like harnesses around their necks; frail young addicts moving like specters. Frightened, wild-eyed women. Adolescents who, even if they live, will never quite become adults.
>
> Across the quay on top of the courts: Moses, Justice, Authority, Wisdom. Mercy.
>
> Like most citizens of Dublin, they avert their eyes. (4)

The heartbreaking image of people trying to survive on the streets, living unnoticed by their fellow citizens and the city's authorities, with no greater hope of a future, reveals the failure of a system that, albeit experiencing a period of great progress, found itself guilt of letting its most vulnerable subjects to fend for themselves. The vision of the statues upon the Four Courts, and the values that they represent, averting their eyes to the situation defines how much of a social problem homelessness has become in Ireland. In *Ship of fools*, Fintan O'Toole highlights the historical role of Ireland's government in controlling houses' prices, in a time when "Housing was understood to be a social need first and a commodity second" (66). The absurd reality that led the country that went through a housing market boom to face an unprecedented problem of homelessness is, as Christine Dwyer Hickey represents in *River Thoughts*, the State's matter, a State that "averted its eyes" to the most vulnerable citizens in the frenzy of the economic boom.

The failure of the "fellas" on top of the Four Courts on minding the river for the people determined the desperate reality for an ever-growing number of men, women and children who live in hiding and fear, absolutely desolated, not rightful owners of the city, as the protagonist's father described, but as refugees, as pariahs in their own country, so much so that they cause people to look away, as if they had become a disturbance. The notion of an "Irish house" can be no more than the name of an old pub for most of these people, whose prospects in life are gruesome. Hickey's narrator illustrates the falling of a society that has forgotten some of its people, creatures that are, in some cases, even deprived of humanity, for they are ignored by so many sectors of society.

The final sentences of the short story disclose the loss of faith in a system that proved to neglect its citizens time and again. The image of St Anthony looking down on

"lost things" (Hickey 4) points out to the scale of the crisis that ignores human beings, regards them as things and makes them rely on a higher power for a chance of salvation, as these human beings were relegated to a different extract, as if homelessness had disposed them of their rights as citizens, so they can only rely on divine intervention, if much. The river thoughts of the main character flow like the Liffey's waters, signaling the passing of time, marking the achievements of the little girl turned into woman, the development of a "dirty old town", known for its small familiar businesses and pubs, into a cosmopolitan high tech capital, running faster and leaving many of its people behind.

The reality of living on the streets of Dublin is portrayed by the protagonist from *Counting Bridges*[65], by Sinéad Gleeson. In this short story, the plot revolves around the main character and his routine living on the streets of Dublin, as he finds ways to cope with cold, hunger, exhaustion and the indifference of others surrounding him. In the opening lines of Gleeson's short story, a list of numbered establishments that the narrator counts around the city gives a sense of what makes up that place:

> 417 post-boxes.
>
> 173 hotels (three-stars and above).
>
> 28 banks.
>
> 16 playgrounds.
>
> 3 cathedrals. (Gleeson 19)

[65] Gleeson, Sinéad. "Counting Bridges". *Looking at the stars: an anthology of Irish writing in aid of the Dublin Simon Community*, edited by Kerry O'Brien and Alice Kinsella, Munster Literary Centre, 2016, pp. 19-22.

The oddness of such a list in the very beginning of the short story is justified as a system to which the man resorts “When the nights are too cold to close his eyes” (Gleeson 19). What they reveal, however, is a city where the sheer number of hotels and banks, especially when compared to the number of cathedrals, determine the prerogatives of a new age, where priorities are centered in the businesses that make money and faith is losing ground. The skills one has to develop when sleeping rough are described in the routine of the protagonist:

> Sleep is elusive, almost impossible, but all energy is needed for the days. Pinballing around the city, waiting to be moved on. The sheer brain-numbing fucksakeness of it.
>
> In the mornings, he people-watches. Swarms of corpses types bound for glass-glinted buildings. (19)

The change of pace in the city from its modernization and the impact on the daily lives of so many is reflected in the description of its workers as a “swarm of corpses types”. While watching people go by their businesses, lead their routines of work and parties, this man recalls when he was one of them, working on a cubicle, surrounded by a “sea of desks”, reminding himself that he used to be attracted to one of his colleagues. To become aware that this person’s reality was different in the past, offers the reader a new perspective on homelessness. Usually thought as being a result of drug abuse or alcoholism, mental illness, or maybe an escape from a violent environment, homelessness can be a result of motives which most people seem to

ignore. In the non-fiction piece *A walk through sing-along-smelly Ireland*[66], Mary O'Donnell points out how multifarious are the identities from the ones living on the streets, and in what degree many of them are victims of a failed system:

> Multifarious, because the shapes have real lives and experiences behind them. They are not stupid; they are not ignorant; they are not different from us. Except, of course, they have no home. It wasn't always so. Many have wives and husbands, lived with children, led the luxury of ordinary days. Then something went wrong. A job lost. A breakdown. Depression. There are multiple mechanisms to undo the ordinary rituals that half fold us together.
>
> We live in a country where the government in power sanctions ongoing homelessness by ignoring it or, at best, offering half-hearted solutions. (134)

By reminding himself of the life he used to live, of a time where some of his worries surrounded the idea of fancying someone whom he worked with, the main character of *Counting Bridges* discloses the wants and needs of a human being in his situation. Not only does he wishes for safety and a place to call home, he lets show the importance of being wanted, of being subject to love and care by someone else. This need unveils the harsh reality of people living in the street, most times made invisible by the rest of society, as an inconvenience, as devoid of any worth. The narrator in Gleeson's short story depicts the drama of a human being reduced to a disturbance, as he is urged by a street sweeper to move: "'C'mon, I tell you about this many times'. The

[66] O'Donnell, Mary. "A walk through sing-along-smelly Ireland". *Looking at the stars: an anthology of Irish writing in aid of the Dublin Simon Community*, edited by Kerry O'Brien and Alice Kinsella, Munster Literary Centre, 2016, pp. 133-136.

noise is of bristles, not some avionic mechanical beast. Lukas' banter is usually firm, but not aggressive . . . 'Please. You have to move now, yes?'" (Gleeson 20). In one of the rare occasions in which this man is referred to by others is to ask him to move so the spot where he has been lying down can be cleaned. The narrator's remark on the way Lukas addresses the man – "firm but not aggressive" – attests the appreciation for any sort of human interaction, something that was probably lost to him since becoming a homeless person. By turning homeless, not only he was deposed of a home, but he was displaced in society, and started to be considered as an inconvenience for the dynamics of the city. In another part of the text, a similar situation results in a troubling comparison: "One week it wasn't Lukas, but another man in his place. No words were said and the man swept around him. His body was an outline, chalked like a crime scene corpse" (21).

The effect of becoming a social burden, of being treated as a corpse, of being made invisible in society is aggravated by the memories from the protagonist's previous life, a life from which he bears evidence in the shape of a tattoo of a lover's name on his foot. The memory is followed by the indication that he has not taken his boots off for a week. The description of the life on the streets and its effect on his body is gruesome:

> It's December and Dublin's weather is two-faced. Some days the sun streaks along the ground, giving the promise of faint heat. On others, his balls are frozen to the path, his bladder swelling like a growth. The sleeping bag offers little protection against the piss-stained concrete. Bone tired, he wakes in the same position he lay down in and now a pain winds its way from his lower back to the shell of his knees. Toe wiggle to check.
>
> Back, forth.

Up, down.

Moving the ice in his veins. (Gleeson 20)

The idea of a mild weather during spring, and the promise of washing his feet in the Garden of Remembrance is somewhat reassuring, a feeling that is reinforced by the cruciform shape of the pool, “even though he is no longer religious” (20). Once again, religion is represented as a fading institution, still there in shape, but no longer serving its traditional functions.

The toll that becoming a homeless person has taken on his body seems, somehow, less significant than the loss of visibility in the social sphere, especially from the ones that used to be in his life before everything changed. The notion that he might get ignored by the ones that he used to love, the ones whose lives kept improving while his became completely shattered, is portrayed as one of the hardest, and more common, consequences of homelessness:

He saw her recently, as daylight undercoated the plum evening sky. A taxi pulled on George’s Street, and it was her hair he saw first. Longer, but the colour unmistakable . . . Clothes more expensive now. Taking cabs and not buses to meetings.

If he saw her now, would she speak? Would he?

People have a way of not looking. All day bodies and legs and arms pulse like the river, snaking around him. (21-22)

While wandering through the city, naming bridges – noticing the contradiction between the more traditionally named ones, like O’Connell Bridge, and the newer ones,

such as Millennium –, counting suburbs, car parks and barracks, before there is nothing left to do but to lie down and sleep, the man contemplates all that has been lost to him, all that architecture, all those people. In *Counting Bridges*, Sinéad Gleeson shows the reader that the lack of affection, the loss of visibility in society that results from becoming homeless is, to some extent, as difficult to cope with as the loss of a place where one can feel safe and sound. While he is trying to survive on the streets, the man is constantly confronted not only by the things that he lost, a home, a relationship, his faith, but by the changes of the city that drastically reshaped itself during the Celtic Tiger years, turning into the dreamy modern city where many found unheard success, but also into the merciless place where many lives fell apart.

The drama of being evicted from one's own house as a result of bad economical politics is the center plot of *Detached*[67], by Donal Ryan. This first-person narrative revolves around a man and his family, forced to relocate into a hotel room after their home is taken over by a bank. In the opening lines of the short story, the narrator reminisces the time he had his retina detached, an injury which he contracted while suffering a tackle while playing sports. The flashes turned into "pinheads of light that got brighter" (Ryan 46) seemed as if they had relapsed, this time propelled not by a sports tackle, but by the disturbing news of his mortgage being acquired by another bank for an absurd amount of forty percent its original worth. The shock of witnessing the devaluation of one of his most important assets, and the unforeseen consequences of such a loss for his family, resembles an injury which resulted from a vile and forbidden sport's fault.

[67] Ryan, Donal. "Detached". *Looking at the stars: an anthology of Irish writing in aid of the Dublin Simon Community*, edited by Kerry O'Brien and Alice Kinsella, Munster Literary Centre, 2016, pp. 46-49.

The reader is offered a glimpse of the tension of the protagonist, after finding himself with no way out, trying to face a system that knowingly carries on businesses to exempt itself from any responsibility, under the prerogative that "Business in business and there was no law broken." (Ryan 46). In the speech entitled *The Banking Crisis – A Decade On*[68], Ed Sibley points out some of the actions that were taken when the property market collapsed, in 2008, and how they affected the Irish citizens:

> The effects of plummeting property prices quickly spilled over to the rest of the economy, caused distress and difficulties for borrowers, hurt savers . . . and severely weakened the country's fiscal position.
>
> In response, a process of fiscal adjustment and banking sector support began in 2008. This included a guarantee of liabilities in the banking sector; a series of pro-cyclical, contractionary budgets; and capital injections into the domestic banks. By late 2010, Ireland's fiscal position was unsustainable. The government agreed to enter an EU IMF support programme . . . The resulting adjustment programme brought additional contractionary budgets, . . . public sector pay cuts, further banking stress tests, and more capital injections.
>
> The associated human cost of this was immense. The effects are still being felt today by too many – such as those still directly affected by high levels of personal debt and indirectly by, for example, the dysfunction that still exists in the housing market. (Sibley)

[68] Sibley, Ed. "The Banking Crisis – A decade on". *Central Bank of Ireland*, 12 Sept. 2018, https://www.centralbank.ie/news/article/the-banking-crisis-a-decade-on-ES12Sept2018.

The absurd contradiction that marks the Celtic Tiger downfall is the alarming numbers from the housing sector: the same boom that propelled a never before seen growth, and valorization, in the building market, was responsible for the growth in the number of families that lost their homes and had to resort to public politics in the hopes of avoiding having to live on the streets. In the case of the family portrayed in *Detached*, the temporary solution came in the form of a room in a hotel through a social program. The resignification of the purpose of a house, less of a home and more of an economic asset, is summarized by the difficulty of the protagonist's sons of grasping the situation:

> There's no explaining it. Daddy, is there someone living in our house? No. So why can't we live there. We don't own it anymore. Who does? The bank. Is the bank people living there? No. Why aren't they? The bank is in America. How have they our house? And then I stop answering and start to feel myself getting wicked and Angela opens the double doors to the lawn and shoos them out and thank God the hotel gave us this family room at the back with French doors that open onto grass. (Ryan 46)

The idea of the idle ownership of a house by a foreign bank is too absurd to most adults to understand, let alone a child. The frail state in which this man and his family were put to is enhanced by the unpredictability of their current situation. While praising the kindness and compassion of the hotel manager and being glad that they got to stay in the same area where they used to live – so the children can keep walking to school and going to their swimming lessons –, he reveals the uncertainty of not knowing how long they will be able to stay in that place, if the prices for the room will go up or not, if the family will have to be relocated, if the government will keep giving them any sort of

help. When he and his younger son go to the old neighborhood so the child can ride his bicycle, the sense of displacement is enhanced by the kid looking at the empty house, searching for his friends – who are away on camps or holidays – just to finally find himself upset enough to the point where he "asked could we go home, and that was the first time he ever called a hotel room home" (Ryan 46). The powerlessness of a father witnessing his younger child recognize the current situation as permanent is translated into the feeling of having a marble stuck in his throat, something that he tries to mitigate by giving the child soccer cards bought at a supermarket.

Donal Ryan's short story recreates the tragedy of finding oneself backed into a corner, of feeling betrayed and alone. The protagonist's attempt to remain calm with a lawyer who shows only disdain for his current situation is frustrated when he remembers how different her attitude was at the time he was buying the house:

> . . . for a finish I let rip and told her she was only a gowel, she was worse than any of them, and it was half her fault in the first place, she should have told me the house was a ridiculous price and it was madness to take a mortgage for the whole price plus twenty percent for furniture and a car and the American fridge and all the fandangly bits . . . (Ryan 48)

The description of the business deal reveals a practice that became quite common during the boom years. According to Fintan O'Toole in *Ship of Fools – How stupidity and corruption sank the Celtic Tiger*, the country's prosperity, the rising levels of unemployment and its high wages made possible for the Celtic Tiger to feed "the Irish obsession with having a secure home (rooted in a history of eviction and displacement)" (61), not only by making it possible for people to own a house, but for them to indulge

themselves with all sorts of expendable amenities. However, these things that seemed possible and reasonable at the time, became a real problem once the economy started to collapse. The results were devastating, especially on the families that found themselves evicted from their homes when the government implemented actions to help save the banks. For many of them there was no comfort in looking back and finding themselves victims of business counselling that appeared convenient only to prove themselves catastrophic in a short period of time.

The increase in the number of homeless families – some where granted aid in the form of a B&B/hotel room, as it is the case in Donal's story – attests to the failure of the country to safeguard its citizens when it decided to side with the banking industry once the economy went sideways. According to the *Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government Homelessness Report November 2019*[69], there were 1685 families and 3572 dependents living in homelessness, and many of them must resort to State-funded emergency accommodation to try to ease the situation.

In *Detached*, the closing lines describe the outburst of the older child who is being brought back to the hotel in a police car after a guard had "come across him kicking the metal sign outside the bank that said their name and THE FAMILY BANK underneath it . . ." (Ryan 48-49). The wide open irony that the bank slogan brings forth is more than enough to justify the violent reaction from the young boy, old enough to see in that institution not a "family bank", but the responsible for his family loss of home, for their new and hard place in the society, for forever changing their lives in the name of profit, which, tragically, does not reside only in the fictional lines of *Detached*, but has become the reality of so many in the last few years, proving right the idea stated by Nell

[69] *Homelessness Report November 2019*. Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. Dublin, 2019, https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/homeless_report_-_november_2019.pdf.

Regan in the non-fiction piece *Decant*[70] that "the language of property is not a language of home" (43) and, for better or for worse, it looks like the first one is currently prevailing in society.

Homelessness can often be a result of someone all alone who has no place to feel safe in. Martin, the main character and first-person narrator in *Census*[71], by Madeleine D'Arcy, is a 17-year-old boy who runs away from home where he used to live with his mother and his abusive stepfather. After the death of his mother, he makes the choice to leave, after the situation with his stepfather turned unbearable:

> See, my stepfather is an abusive fucker, always telling me I'm a useless thick. After Mam died he got worse. Martin, you're named after a black saint. D'you know why? Because your whore of a mother didn't know at the time whether she was having a black baby or a white one. So I hit him. I'd have had no bother shooting him dead right then, like Mike Hammer in the Mickey Spillane books, only I promised poor Mam I'd always try to keep out of trouble. Anyway, I didn't have a gun. (D'Arcy 75)

With a small amount of money that his mother kept hidden in the freezer, Martin takes a bus to Cork where he tries to secure help from the Social Welfare. The system's bureaucracy, however, fails to provide him with any aid, since he was under eighteen and had forgotten to get his birth certificate before leaving home. Finding himself alone,

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[70] Regan, Nell. "Decant". *Looking at the stars: an anthology of Irish writing in aid of the Dublin Simon Community*, edited by Kerry O'Brien and Alice Kinsella, Munster Literary Centre, 2016, pp. 42-44.

[71] D'Arcy, Madeleine. "Census". *Looking at the stars: an anthology of Irish writing in aid of the Dublin Simon Community*, edited by Kerry O'Brien and Alice Kinsella, Munster Literary Centre, 2016, pp. 73-77.

with no money or a place to go, and having to wait eight weeks before he would finally be eighteen and could apply for dole again, Martin has no other option than to sleep on the streets or to squat in abandoned places, while trying to keep safe:

> I slept in Penney's entrance - there's a security camera above it so if someone pisses or pukes on you or beats you up, at least it'll be on film. Then I was in a squat near the Mercy Hospital, but there was a fight between some foreign fellas so the police came and kicked us out. Next day the place was boarded up. (D'Arcy 75)

The daunting image of having to resort to a store entrance for protection from the possible assaults that one is exposed to when sleeping rough is enhanced by the inability of the State to protect its citizens due to arbitrary regulations. The social politics not only failed Martin when forced him to leave his home to stop the cycle of abuse from his stepfather, but again left him to fend for himself when made impossible for him to secure any kind of social aid. In *Walk through sing-along-smelly Ireland,* Mary O'Donnell sums up how the issue of homelessness has been precariously dealt with by the government, as she reminisces their actions on a famous case: "When Jonathan Corrie died within view of Leinster House, government embarrassment forced the provision of emergency accommodation during Christmas 2014. But as a scheme, it wasn't enough. It was a cosmetics job . . ." (134).

O'Donnell points out, in her piece, the failure of the political system on assessing the homeless situation before it turned into tragedy. On the morning of December 1st 2014, the death of Jonathan Corie, a homeless man who was found a few feet from the *Dáil*, triggered an angered public reaction. He died a few weeks after a census that

revealed a record number of people sleeping on the streets. In an attempt to mitigate the problem, government, charity heads and other officials proposed a number of short-term and long-term commitments to solve it, such as making additional beds for homeless rough sleepers, allocating 50% of all future social housing to long-term homeless, among other actions. In an article published on September 8th 2017 at the news site *The Journal IE*[72]*,* Cormac Fitzgerald indicates the failure of such actions in face of the ever-growing problem:

> . . . the government reaffirmed its commitment to ending long-term homelessness by the end of 2016 . . . Almost three years later, four homeless people have died in the past 10 days and there are more homeless people than ever before in the state's recent history. (Fitzgerald)

Despite having to wait before securing any aid from the government, the main character in *Census* finds himself a solution, even though it might be an unpredictable one. After he overheard two ladies talking, outside a department store, about the death of an old man, a hermit who died all alone, Martin decides to take advantage of what he referred to as a "stroke of luck" (D'Arcy 75) and goes to the old man's house to see if he could squat over there. The narrative describes how Martin carefully accessed the place, securing it was actually empty before making the move to finally enter the house through a window in the kitchen, located in the back. He recalls the greatest joy in finding two fridge freezers in the kitchen, one of which contained "heaps of ready meals in the freezer part" (D'Arcy 76). The sudden relief that the boy found in the place

[72] Fitzgerald, Cormac. "Three years on from the death of Jonathan Corrie, another homeless summit takes place today". *The Journal IE*, 8 Sept. 2017, https://www.thejournal.ie/housing-summit-3582856-Sep2017/.

resulted in an action that had become strange for the boy after a long period of hardships:

> I was starving and drenched so I put a curry into the old microwave before I checked out the second fridge. A handwritten sign 'PHARMACY' was sellotaped on it, but all there was inside was bottles of whiskey, cans of coke, a box of mixed biscuits, four packets of Scots Clan, cod liver oil and a packet of paracetamol. When I burst out laughing it sounded strange because I hadn't laughed in ages. (D'Arcy 76)

The relief of finding himself safe and somewhat happy again suddenly is put in danger with a visit from a census' worker. After some time squatting in the old man's house without being noticed, the comfort that Martin was experiencing made him momentarily forget his situation and open the door. He is, then, greeted by a lady who describes to him the count of everyone in Ireland that will take place at *Census Night*. Suspecting some of the neighbors might see what was happening in the front of the house, Martin invites her in, trying to avoid being discovered by other people that might tell on him. The boy's worries become bigger once he found himself with no way out, after introducing himself to the census's lady as William Dearborne's grandson – he remembered the name written in the detective books he have been reading –, and trying to avoid having to fill up any form, which the census' woman affirmed to be the law, he accepts her instructions, promising to explain all the form details to his grandfather and having it ready by the time she came back: "After that, I was in bits. The census woman seemed nice enough, but if she guessed I was squatting she'd

probably put the law on me. She'd be back next week and the thought of sleeping rough again made me feel sick." (D'Arcy 75)

With the dreadful prospects of having to go back to the streets, of having to worry about where to find a safe place to sleep, of having no food or shelter and being at the mercy of violence and abuse, Martin decides to try to fill the form as William Dearborne, looking through his things for information, getting to know the person whose death has turned into a glimmer of hope for him. By registering himself as Dearborne's grandson, he thinks about his own history, how people many years later would think of Martin as a part of William's family, not as a boy named after St Martin De Porres – an illegitimate son, saint patron of the mixed-raced –, with no granddad of his own, orphan and homeless.

The connection that Martin establishes with the deceased old man reflects the want for affection and love, symptoms that are very common among homeless people. More than being destitute of a home, of a place to feel safe, usually homelessness becomes translated into invisibility, into indifference. When Martin finishes filling the form, he regrets not having enough space in it to register all the things that he had learned about William, like his beloved dog Rusty whose collar he kept, his work on the oil rigs, his wife who died young. In the end, William Dearborne, his house and his things unknowingly offered the young boy a sense of belonging, a chance to endure the hardest time of his life: "I liked old William; he wasn't just some sad old fuck. I never had no Grandad and I wished I had." (77).

The action of having to resort to the uncertainty and to the dangers of squatting in an abandoned house enhanced the failure of society, a structure which, more than just a few times, rewards the entrepreneurship prowess of some few and relegates its less able citizens alone facing up the challenges and rules of the capitalist system. The

closing lines of *Census* present Martin feeling confident in his future, having been able to return to his former house to pick up his birth certificate, an 18-year-old allowed to apply for social security aid. The hope in his future, now that he sees himself as a man, free from the abuse, filling forms and owning his life is a silver lining for someone forced to leave his home, despite the pivotal significance of such a space in one's life, as T.S. Eliot expresses in the verses of part V in *East Coker*[73]: "Home is where one starts from. As we grow older / The world becomes more stranger, the pattern more complicated / Of dead and living."

Homelessness can often be translated into a feeling of despair, a sense of incapacity of turning things around, of finding oneself alone, stuck in a terrible situation while many others in the world thrive and simply forget that you existed. In *Dragonfly*[74]*,* a short story by Jaki McCarrick, the plot revolves around Daniel Bishop, a construction worker who is known for his volunteer work as a coast guard in East Ireland – "A coast guard on a coast full of people in peril from their own woeful problems" (McCarrick 106) –, someone used to be called out during work hours to deal with victims of accidents or maybe jumpers whose bodies ended up on the shore.

Bishop is someone who has learned how to cope with the suicide cases which he tended to, especially because of the frequency of such acts on a place as prone to them as the cliffs. Yet, there is something in the latest case he had to deal with that has proven to be different, a detail in the way the person committed suicide:

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[73] Eliot, T.S. "East Coker – V". *Four quartets,* Kindle ed. Farber & Farber, 2009.

[74] McCarrick, Jaki. "Dragonfly". *Looking at the stars: an anthology of Irish writing in aid of the Dublin Simon Community*, edited by Kerry O'Brien and Alice Kinsella, Munster Literary Centre, 2016, pp. 106-109.

> The man had left a note – which I had found. Though it wasn't the note that had disturbed me as much as the almost ceremonious way in which he had chosen to leap from the cliff-top, in that he had tied a clean white shirt around his face, still firmly around it when I found him. (McCarrick 76)

The inability to share with his wife the details about the case, something that he normally had no problem with, reveals the angst that this case has produced on him. While trying to sleep, he starts to reminisce on that particular day, looking for some understanding of what lead this man to commit this drastic action:

> It had been a beautiful warm day, sultry almost. Who could possibly have been suicidal on a day like that, I thought, let alone this man, who, I learned later, was around sixty years old, healthy, fit; he'd had a wife, grandchildren, formerly a successful business. No one was sick in his life; not he, nor his wife. Though, according to the female policewoman I had spoken to, he and his and his wife had split up in the past year - and he'd left the family home. He'd been seen in recent weeks, sleeping on a park bench close to the local Police Station. (107)

Bishop's difficulty in grasping the man's motivation is relatable. This person had enjoyed, up to some point at least, a seemingly normal life, he was a family man, healthy, successful, only to find himself homeless after a divorce. When Daniel's wife pushes him to share his sorrows, she ends up offering him a somehow better grasp on the situation:

‘He was someone from up by the border. A Mr. A. Martin. Homeless he was,’ I said.

‘He might have been a bit mad, you never know.’

‘That’s just it, Shirley,’ I said to my wife, ‘he’d run into difficulty but there was nothing wrong with him. He was well-liked and had been well off, too.’

‘Well then that’s probably it. As he saw it, his world has fallen apart, the wife, the house.’ (McCarrick 107)

To commit suicide was, to this man, the final act to escape the unbearable pain and suffering that he was experiencing. In the introduction to the report *Opening the Door to Hope: Implementing the Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality Approach within Homeless Services*[75], Sam McGuinness points out the despair which leads so many homeless people to resort to suicide:

Hopelessness and shame go hand in hand with the despair that comes from homelessness. This is the hardest for people to overcome. There is no door to close, no escape from fear or judgment. You feel alone, isolated and worthless. These feelings often become so intense, so overwhelming, you lose any sense of yourself...and start to disappear. (6)

The same report quotes the considerable number of homeless people who were diagnosed with depression, especially related to the loss of a significant other or

[75] McGuinness, Sam. “Opening the door to hope”. *Opening the Door to Hope Implementing the Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality Approach within Homeless Services*. Dublin Simon Community, 2018, pp. 6, https://www.dubsimon.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/OnlineOpeningtheDoortoHope.pdf.

unemployment and financial issues. In the article *Suicide and employment status during Ireland's Celtic Tiger economy*[76], Paul Corcoran and Ella Arensman detail the link between unemployment and suicidal rates, and how both improved during the Celtic Tiger period in Ireland, revealing that in the 11 year period of the economic boom, the rates of unemployment fell from 12%, in 1996, to 4%, in 2000, a period in which the rates of suicide also subsided and remained stable. For Anthony Martin, the suicidal man in *Dragonfly*, a well-known person in his community, the hopelessness and shame that he had been experiencing since his life turned completely around led only to a desperate path. However, to cope with what looked like a senseless death, considering the life that Martin had enjoyed up to that point – apart from his latest hardships –, was something that Daniel Bishop really struggled with. Bishop observes how the other suicidal cases on which he had worked attracted less interest in the community. He notes that people tend to be more attracted to the cases of "the odd fool or drunk people who wander out too far along the sandbar and find themselves in trouble . . ." (McCarrick 108), and how little problem he and the others had in passing judgment on those cases: "Stupid bastards is what I usually got from the lads whit whom I worked on properties and sites in town, and mostly if I were honest, that is what I though myself." (108).

The circumstances of Martin's act, however, his life, the way and day he chose to finish with all, kept Bishop so troubled that led him to the place where everything happened, retracing his steps trying to make some sense of that man's decision: "I walked on the grass and looked out to the sea. Again, the day was fine. I began to imagine the homeless man walking along the soft camomile grass on his way to the

[76] Corcoran, Paul; Arensman, Ella. "Suicide and employment status during Ireland's Celtic Tiger economy". *European Journal of Public Health*, vol. 21, issue 2, April 2011, pp. 209-2014, https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckp236.

edge." (McCarrick 108). McCarrick's setting reminisces Stephen Dedalus' reasoning in Joyce's *A portrait of the artist as a young man*[77]: "You could die just the same on a sunny day." (16). He begins to imagine Martin's difficulty in walking such a distance; wonders if that man had anything to eat, if he had had the chance to sleep, what were his previous moments, that would finish as an irreversible tragedy. Finally, Bishop reckons that "It had been a purposeful walk . . . no one walks this far up for no reason" (McCarrick 108). While sitting near the place where Martin decided to end his life, a dragonfly flies by, reminding Bishop about the animal's short lifespan, something that he learned when he was only a child:

> A day they lived, I thought to myself . . . It was so beautiful, I thought, the hum of the dragonfly, the sea beneath me, the scent of the grass – but there was something else too, something I could not quite explain or articulate, something I'd sensed my whole life, but felt palpably then; that life is not something we are in easy harmony with at all. And if any of us were to come away from the sometimes thin ties that bind – via homelessness or depression – or any of those things that disconnect us even further from each other, then this sensation of life being weirdly 'alien' must worsen, deepen. (109)

Surrounded by all that beauty, Daniel Bishop is able to put himself in the place of what must have been a desperate man, someone feeling so hopeless and ashamed, so displaced in what previously has been his own community, that his only way out of such suffering was giving up on his own life: "He had felt utterly alone, separated from the beauty that he could plainly see was all around him. Hence the white shirt: it was the

[77] Joyce, James. *A portrait of the artist as a young man.* Wordsworth editions, 2001.

final act of turning away, of embracing the dark." (McCarrick 109). The suffocating reality of a person whose life suddenly fell apart, while apparently everyone and everything in the country were experiencing unprecedented success, the feeling of been left behind, in *Dragonfly*, portrays the drama of so many homeless people in Ireland, individuals who for different reasons were not able to enjoy the progress and riches that the Celtic Tiger period brought, people that thought impossible to continue existing among all that beauty.

Homelessness is a world problem that has become more visible in recent times, due to the rising concentration of people in urban centres. As Joseph Chamie proposes in his article *As Cities Grow, So Do the Numbers of Homeless*[78]*,* it might be difficult to get an accurate picture of global homelessness, the first reason being the variations on definition: "Homelessness can vary from simply the absence of adequate living quarters or rough sleeping to include the lack of a permanent residence that provides roots, security, identity and emotional wellbeing." (Chamie). In the short stories selected for the theme of homelessness, the issue of identity is certainly at the center of the matter. The characters from these stories went from being lawful Irish citizens, entitled to the benefits which that identity granted them, to social pariahs, a burden to society that might be better off without having to deal with people scattered in *their* streets.

The fact that these characters are Irish nationals whose identities suddenly became defined by homelessness brings forth the issue alluded by Homi Bhabha in *The location of culture*[79] that states that *"*The problem is not simply the 'selfhood' of the nation as opposed to the otherness of other nations. We are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population." (Bhabha 212). This

[78] Chamie, Joseph. "As Cities Grow, So Do the Numbers of Homeless." *YaleGlobal Online*, 13 jul. 2017, https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/cities-grow-so-do-numbers-homeless. Accessed 20 oct. 2020.
[79] Bhabha, Homi. *The location of culture.* Routledge, 2012.

split more often than not results in the denial of fellow countrymen in the streets, people who no longer represent the desirable traits of one's identity and for that are doomed to become "invisible".

6 *CÉAD MÍLE FÁILTE* – HOW THE LAND OF A THOUSAND WELCOMES COPED WITH MASS IMMIGRATION

It is practically impossible to stroll around Ireland without crossing at least once with a sign bearing the Gaelic saying *Céad mile Fáilte* – a hundred thousand welcomes. This phrase, which is embedded in the very identity of the Irish, gives the idea of a country open to the other, willing to grant everyone that sets foot on the land the benefits of the traditional Irish hospitality. The process of migration is, in itself, a movement that deals not only with the hopes of finding a welcoming environment, but in the willingness to change oneself in the process, as Pierre Ouellet defines migration in *L'Esprit migrateur, essai sur le non-sens commun* (*The Migratory Spirit, an essay on common nonsense*) [80]:

> [A] passage to the *other*, a transgressive movement from One *to the* other, which violates the laws of the proper, crosses the borders of property or individuality, to always go beyond the place from which one draws one's identity, to better undo this original link and reconnect it each time in a new destiny, *another* becoming which is also becoming *other* (Ouellet 19, my trans.).[81]

[80] Ouellet, Pierre. *L'Esprit migrateur, essai sur le non-sens commun.* VLB Éditeur et Le soi et l'autre, 2005.

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

The need of resorting to someone else's hospitality and be prone to adapt is something that Irish people know of, especially for their history of having to migrate to other places when their land could not offer them the means to survive. In the piece *Céad míle fáilte? The true meaning of hospitality*[82], Gemma Tipton discloses the subtleties that hospitality entails:

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

During the years that marked the Celtic Tiger period, Ireland experienced such an economic growth that the country began to attract the attention and interest of people from all parts of the world. The demand for labor in many areas – such as construction, finances, information technology and healthcare – resulted in the return of

[82] Tipton, Gemma. "Céad míle fáilte? The true meaning of hospitality". *The Irish Times*, 30 April 2018, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/visual-art/c%C3%A9ad-m%C3%ADle-f%C3%A1ilte-the-true-meaning-of-hospitality-1.3474075.

a great number of Irish nationals, who left when prosperity was not a synonym of Ireland. The returned Irish nationals, however, were not the only ones who decided to take advantage of the riches from the Celtic Tiger. In the *Overview of Mass-Immigration in Ireland: Part I – The Tiger Years*[83], some data is presented on the matter, indicating new peaks of non-EU immigration flows, between 2001 and 2004, and the unprecedented levels of immigrants from new EU states between 2004 and 2007 (The National Party).

The lack of any further discussion of social politics to cope with the transformations of the country during that period, especially the ones that entail questions about how to deal with the massive cultural changes that the country was subject to due to the arrival of immigrants, left open, to some extent, the road to a crisis in an Ireland experiencing "one of the most extreme demographic transformations in history, transitioning from a 'homogeneous Catholic society to an ethnically, racially and religiously diverse society'" (The National Party). These fast and drastic changes were, somehow, translated into a surge of racism and xenophobia, especially when Ireland began to experience a downfall in its economy.

The question of sharing the country with immigrants and the xenophobic attitude of some individuals towards them occupies the center of the plot in *The summer of birds*[84], by Gerard Donovan. The short story revolves around a little girl who narrates the changes she has been experiencing in her life since her mother left the house for an undisclosed reason. The sudden shift in the family routine is witnessed by the young girl, who is aware of the silences that began to occupy the house since her mother left,

[83] National Party, The. *Overview of Mass-Immigration in Ireland: Part I – The Tiger Years*, 29 Sept. 2018, https://nationalparty.ie/mass-immigration-in-ireland-part-i-the-tiger-years/#.

[84] Donovan, Gerard. "The summer of birds". *Young Irelanders: stories.* The Overlook Press, 2008, pp. 146-161.

a silence that is disrupted by the noise of the birds which come to her bedroom window in the morning.

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

> I knew he had to work a lot because the house was new and we had never had a lot of money, and since my mother would be gone for a few days, it was my turn to do something. I was old enough . . .
>
> We lived in a suburb east of the city, another development of many that spread white houses over the green hills like spilled milk, where a new road appeared out of trees and grass every few months. Ireland was doing well. My father was busy working because it was the same all over the country, he said, new houses going up everywhere, a boom. (Donovan 147-148)

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

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

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

The description of the massive arrival of strangers, and how they were to be found everywhere around the city, reveals the shock caused in a society that, to some extent, dealt with their arrival as an intrusion, as an invasion. The girl reveals how impressed she is by the impact on her town of these people going to the same schools, pubs and restaurants, but being so different, so much like the birds that would scatter when confronted by others. The prejudicial attitude towards the newcomers is better represented, in *The summer of birds*, by Tommy, a man that starts coming to the house to watch out for the girl at her father's request. The girl recalls her mother's dislike for Tommy, someone who would never be around when she was still at home.

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

> Don't be afraid, he said. You're safe in here, they can't touch you here.
>
> I'm not afraid, I said.
>
> In the concrete yard two older ones were sitting on a wall. They weren't doing anything. An evening rain shower blew papers across the parking spaces, but the rain didn't seem to matter to them, so I thought a different rain or a worse rain fell where they used to be. I liked the rain too.

> My father walked in with the plate and Tommy let go of me and then nodded to the window. They've moved to the end of the street. Won't be long now. Next thing they'll be moving in next door. (Donovan 151)

Tommy's reaction portrays how people tend to feel threatened by the mere presence of the other, how difference can be a trigger to a behavior of prejudice and hate. In the case of Ireland, which became a prime destination to immigrants when its economy became a synonym for success, the result was the increase of tension for the arrival of people from different cultural backgrounds, people who brought with them not only their specific racial traces, but their food, music, clothes and religion, forcing, in some ways, the reshaping of an Ireland that had, in its history, relied so much in its Celtic roots to support its identity. The reaction to the otherness can be, in that sense, the one that determines one's exclusion and marginalization. In the PhD thesis *The migrant in contemporary Irish literature and film: representations and perspectives*[85], Aisling McKeown points out that

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

[85] McKeown, Aisling. *The migrant in contemporary Irish literature and film: representations and perspectives.* 2013. University of Westminster, PhD thesis. Westminster Research, https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk/item/8z0x4/the-migrant-in-contemporary-irish-literature-and-film-representations-and-perspectives.

In her thesis, she states how Donovan's short story reflects the effects of the lack of communication between government and the communities which were most impacted by the arrival of foreigners, how this void enables reactions like Tommy's. His insistence in treating them as a threat, in forcing the little girl – who shows some sort of empathy for those people, by relating to their undisturbed posture with the rain – to reproduce a prejudicial behavior towards them, results in conflict for the child, who doesn't support his attitude towards these people, but seems torn due to her father's apathy in face of Tommy's instructions:

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

Even though she feels the need to please Tommy in order to avoid any confrontation with him, the girl cannot help but to feel for the others, as she observes that "The shadows looked like they didn't want to be in our town either, like they were lost, and I wanted them not to be lost" (152). The constant reference, throughout the short story, to these people as shadows, in an impersonal manner, discloses the

xenophobic perspective towards them, who are destitute from a clear identification as human beings only because they are supposedly in someone else's land. Tommy symbolizes the irony at the center of the matter. He, who in *The summer of birds* takes on the most xenophobic attitude towards immigrants, is someone who "was going part-time to the university, taking courses in civilization" (Donovan 153). Behind his intellectual façade lies the primal posture of someone feeling threatened, willing to instill into a child "his hatred for the other and his obsession with money and security", (5) as analyses Bertrand Cardin in the article *Country of the Grand by Gerard Donovan, or the Chronicle of a Collapse Foretold*[86].

In his piece, Cardin observes how complicated was the question around the economic boom, because, in its core, it was not fairly shared among the inhabitants, pointing out that "The country may be grand but the gulfs between its inhabitants seem not only to remain but to be growing wider and wider" (6). This feeling of being left behind, of believing himself to be not only in disadvantage, but prone to a larger competition with the arrival of immigrants, turns into an obsessive posture of repulse and hate which the character Tommy does not hesitate in externalizing. When he overhears the little girl talking on the phone with her mother about the birds on her window, he uses the image to instill another abhorrent remark about the new people:

> That reminds me of a film, he said . . . A famous film, you know, a man called Hitchcock. *The Birds*, there's more and more of them. I walked around him and into the kitchen. Tommy followed me and said that the film was about what

[86] Cardin, Bertrand. "Country of the Grand by Gerard Donovan, or the Chronicle of a Collapse Foretold". *Journal of the Short Story in English Les Cahiers de la nouvelle 63* – Special Issue: *The 21st Century Irish Short Story*, 2014, pp. 1-10.

> happens if you don't keep count of things: the place gets full of them and they attack you. People's faces torn up and bloody. (Donovan 154)

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

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

you. I went home with the red one he gave me, the one with the lemonade taste. (Donovan 156)

Through the innocent sharing of sweets, the narrator in Gerard Donovan's story evokes the willingness much more suited to the children of looking past the differences. Although the little girl reveals her surprise in how this foreign boy was able to use the same language as her, the remark doesn't carry the same prejudice that comes from considering oneself superior, but truly symbolizes a child that is learning something new about the world, someone who has the disposition to engage. The harmless exchange, however, becomes a problem when Tommy, who is a part-time worker at the supermarket, confronts the girl about her interaction with the foreign child. While her father was away talking to his estranged wife, Tommy forces the girl to admit what she had done, trying to manipulate her into believing that that simple contact with the foreign kid and his mother was wrong, that it was all part of their plan to make people like them. When he throws the traded candy into the fire and insists that she ought to go back to the supermarket and tell them to go back to their country, the hesitating child recalls what resulted from her actions some days before: "I thought of the birds at that moment and what I'd done to them, left them without anything when they sang for me" (158).

The fear that Tommy instilled in her about the birds deprived her from then on from the gift of their music. All her efforts to make them return – food, a letter – proved to be in vain, which upset her into crying. When her father returned from the meeting with her mother, the girl fights her tears, because she does not want to look like a baby who is sad about something as silly as birds. After he urges her to tell him the matter, she ends up talking about what happened with the boy in the supermarket and later with Tommy. The father's reaction reveals his compassion and understanding. The trade

between the two children is welcome by him, who becomes infuriated with Tommy, throwing him out for good. Once he leaves, father and daughter go on with their lives, freed from the hatred of the one that truly represented an unwelcome and dangerous intrusion (Cardin 5).

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

The feeling of discomfort resulted by the mere presence of the other occupies the center of the narrative of *The receptionist*[87], by Gerard Donovan. In the short story, the reader follows the first-person narrator, a married man from Galway, who describes the image of his wife leaving their home in another man's car in the afternoon. Being left behind, he waits for her return, walking around the house, looking for her in their bedroom, until he resolves to leave because "She was mistaken if she thought I was going to stand around an empty house and wait for her" (Donovan 162).

In this supposed power struggle with his wife, he decides to leave the house to temporarily stay in a hotel, wondering if this would produce some sort of impact on her when she returned home. Upon his arrival at the hotel, from the very beginning, the receptionist's attitude seems to strike a chord with him, who observes that "The receptionist didn't look at me once during the registration. He managed to hand me the key and direct me to the room, all while looking at a button on my shirt." (163). The

[87] Donovan, Gerard. "The receptionist". *Young Irelanders: stories.* The Overlook Press, 2008, pp. 162-167.

scorned man describes how unbothered by his presence this person was: he “turned and put his feet up in front of the portable television” (Donovan 163) while the main character was trying to engage in even the slightest of social contacts, addressing him, feeling the need to explain how the situation would be temporary and finally thanking the receptionist for the service.

While walking towards his room, observing how shabby looking everything was, the man takes comfort in the fact that at least in that place he would have company. Laid on the bed, he feels his heart beating faster, placing his hand onto his chest, waiting to feel anger prompted by the image of his wife kissing and caressing another man. This somewhat expected reaction, somehow, finds competition in his feelings towards the hotel’s receptionist, as the husband recognizes that “If I really loved her I would feel more emotion for her than I did for a rude and sullen hotel desk clerk, a complete stranger who maddened me just now with his indifference” (164). The vision of yellow and red circling when he closes his eyes represents the impact of the anger on his body, a feeling that is projected upon the hotel worker for his cold and distant attitude towards a man that reckoned himself deserving of more.

The disdain posture of the receptionist forces a reactive demeanor from the already scorned husband. Once in his room, hearing a couple next door and wondering if they might be his wife and the man, the main character ponders about his alternatives to find out if his suspicions were right, excluding the option of going down “to that receptionist and give him the satisfaction of watching my shirt button as he sits grinning and shaking his head, saying that this is a hotel.” (164). His refusal to submit his pride to another awkward encounter with the receptionist reaches such an extreme that it leads him to walk on the ledge of the hotel, trying to see if he could recognize his wife inside the next room.

The oddness of the whole situation runs throughout the entire narrative. The image of someone's wife going away in another man's car while her husband observes her from inside the house, the expectation upon her return, occasion in which he acknowledges that he would not ask her where she had been, these are all incoherent scenarios when one thinks about the basis of such a traditional institution like marriage. In Ireland, a country where the Catholic values prevailed for so long in laying down the rules on the behavior of the society, where not until 1995 divorce became legal, the main character in *The receptionist* shows signs of confusion about his conduct. Having left his house, a place where he would remain alone during his wife's adventures and probably forever, he looked in the hotel for the chance to interact with others, proving, in some way, that he remained her equal, not someone that passively stood at the house waiting for her unlikely return. His expectations, however, were frustrated from the very beginning, when he found himself ignored by the person whose job is to provide a warm welcome.

When he wakes up, on Sunday morning, he starts imagining his return home, hoping for the restoration of his marriage, when he would "shortly be going home to my wife, steering up the drive to the front porch and revving the engine so that she could hear me, and then to the living room. Some sort of passion would save us." (Donovan 165). After having his breakfast, he decides to ask the receptionist for information from the people in the room next to his. Once again, he is received with disdain by the worker, from whom he observes that "The English was foreign English, those words weren't the ones he grew up talking" (165). A few moments later, the man fails to subject the foreign receptionist to an error, while asking for change:

> Downstairs I slapped a note in front of the man at the desk and asked for change. He did not take his eye off the television as he opened the till, put my note in, and placed five euro on the counter.
>
> Five euro? I said.
>
> Five in every five-euro note. No more, no less.
>
> I gave you a ten.
>
> He turned in his seat and smiled at my stomach with two bad teeth riddled with plaque. He laughed and scratched the hair under his white cap, pulled the till entirely out of its drawer and placed it on the table. A single note lay by the silver and brass piles.
>
> You gave me this. No more, no less. (Donovan 166)

The main character's attitude discloses a common xenophobic idea about immigrants, who are regarded as inferior, less intelligent, prone to any kind of mistake because they are dealing with social and economic systems that are not their native's. The immigrant receptionist is some sort of scapegoat elected by the man in which to project the frustration of his failed marriage. The foreigner is a better suited target to put the blame on than the "unfaithful" wife. This disruption in the family unit that the first-person narrator lives, the presence of non-Irish nationals in many places around the country are impacts intensified by the economic boom in what has remained, for so long, a homogenous society, as Steve Loyal reflects in *Welcome to the Celtic Tiger: racism, immigration and the state*[88]:

[88] Loyal, Steve. "Welcome to the Celtic Tiger: racism, immigration and the state". *The end of Irish history: critical reflections on the Celtic Tiger*, edited by Colin Coulter and Steve Coleman, Manchester University Press, 2003, pp. 74-94.

> The hegemonic sense of Irish identity established during the 1920s and 1930s has been severely challenged by the rise of the Celtic Tiger. The two main pillars and regulators of Irish identity and conservatism since the foundation of the state – the Catholic Church and *Fianna Fáil* – have both been partly undermined by economic growth and various media discourses referring to clerical and political scandal. In addition, the assumption of shared values and experience so central to the Celtic imaginary has been challenged by the recent increase in foreign immigration. Migrants often expose the social and political fault lines of religion, ethnicity, class, gender and culture, which lie beneath the veneer of any 'imagined community', and Ireland is no exception. (Loyal 83)

Not only the main character in *The receptionist* finds himself coping with the aftermath of a failed marriage, but he is confronted by a harsh example of how society has changed. The expectation that he, for being a customer, would deserve the sole attention and flatteries from the receptionist, a person whose job is centered in the notion of serving someone, is frustrated from the very beginning. In Donovan's narrative, the main character not only loses his ground in the house, after being left by his wife, but also needs to deal with the lack of interest from a foreign receptionist of a trashy hotel. The fact that the latter is not an Irish national only aggravates the situation, if one ponders the preconceived notion that many cultures have that foreign people are inferior. In just a few pages, Donovan tackles the significant changes that Irish society went through, whether they might be related to marriage – which, in the case of the narrative, ended mainly for the actions of the wife, trumping the husband from the place of chief of the household, due to the several references, throughout *The receptionist*, of his hopes for the rekindling of their love –, or to the stance of someone's place in the

social scale based solely on one's national identity, which more often than not ends up provoking xenophobic reactions from those who cannot cope with the idea of sharing the same space.

The noticeable changes in the shape and culture of even the most remote places in Ireland post Celtic Tiger is the setting upon which Kevin Barry builds his narrative in *Ideal homes*[89]. In this short story, Barry depicts the shift in the scenery in a small Irish village, describing a place where "It was among the last bucolic fantasies of the village that Mr Delahunty, the blind shopkeeper, was secure against chancers and thieves." (Barry 62). The narrator's characterization of the place as "an unimpressive tangle of a dozen streets" (62), where a blind shop owner would be the biggest attraction is the setting where the sixteen year-old twins Dee and Donna run around, looking for something exciting to do.

Their search leads them to the *Yangtzee River*, a Chinese takeout where Lawrence Wang works with his father. In Barry's narrative, this is the first evidence of a switch in the landscape of what was an unremarkable village, so much like many others in the country. The presence of a foreign restaurant in such a small place reveals the extent to which Ireland has changed, opening itself to globalization, embracing and adopting new cultures in its daily routine, and forcing people to try their fortune in remote sites. In a country which fought so hard for so long to keep foreign influences outside, that dedicated so many political, social, cultural and artistic efforts to create a homogenous Irish identity, it became impossible to stop the arrival of cultures from different places of the world, even in the most remote Irish villages. Although it might seem like an overstretch to exemplify a cultural change through the presence, in a

[89] Barry, Kevin. "Ideal Homes". *There are little kingdoms.* The Stinging Fly, 2016, pp. 62-71.

village, of a Chinese takeout, the fact is that this is, to some extent, valuable evidence of how things are shifting, if one considers the intrinsic power of food consumption in transmitting cultural values and maintaining the connection to a place and its identity, as Denis Linehan discusses in *'For the Way We Live Today': Consumption, Lifestyle and Place*[90] (295).

In the passage centered inside the Chinese takeout, Donna and Dee's carefree and reckless attitude makes Lawrence worry about their presence and his father's predictable reaction to it. The young man, whose very name – Lawrence Wang – represents the blend between his current country and his home country, is someone acclimated with life in Ireland, by the description of his clothes, his car and the proficient use of the English language. Nevertheless, he is aware of how dangerous it could be to hang with the likes of Donna and Dee:

> He gazed with great adolescent suffering into the cold eight o'clock street, to the dwindling terraces across the way, the voodoo hills beyond. The village so quickly ran out of itself: it turned into rough ground, rose to the hills and dark sky . . . He didn't need to see Donna and Dee this evening. He had notions himself and they'd only give a charge and impetus to them. He had great self-awareness for a young fella. He knew full well that he was after falling in with a dab crowd – sometimes two is plenty enough to be a crowd. (Barry 65)

[90] Linehan, Denis. "'For the Way We Live Today': Consumption, Lifestyle and Place". *Understanding Contemporary Ireland*, edited by Brendan Bartley and Robert Kitchin, Pluto, 2007, pp. 289-300.

A great part of his worries on the matter derives from his father. Mr Wang's conservative posture and discomfort with more occidental ways is revealed through his reaction to the girls' messing around in his establishment, even after Lawrence pleads them to stop:

> 'Jesus, can't ye keep quiet? He'll be out!'
>
> But it was already too late. The swing door from the kitchen creaked an entrance: Mr Wang appeared. He hissed a string of dangerous Cantonese at his son, who nodded apology and compliance.
>
> 'Howya this weather, Mr Wang? Called Dee. 'Shockin' draw in the evenings.'
>
> 'Why she on floor?' Mr Wang furiously observed her sister . . .
>
> Such cheek was beyond Mr Wang. He could but glare at them and, more meaningfully, at his son. There would be hysterical words later on, inside the flypaper and the heat of the fryers. He withdrew. (Barry 66)

Mr Wang represents not only the clash between different cultures – Chinese and Irish – but also the struggles that many immigrants face to adapt to a foreign country. Barry illustrates this in Mr Wang's poor English – the only instance from the character in the entire narrative –; the barrier that language can represent to people, which may lead to prejudice and social exclusion. His son, apparently much more adapted to the local, still finds himself between two forces, one represented by his father and their Chinese tradition, the other represented by his age and the influences of his adolescent worldly friends.

The small village portrayed in Barry's short story is an example of the changes brought with time. What used to be a locality made up by few streets where the community spirit used to be a symbol of its society and a blind man could trust in his clients, suddenly faces the fact that this idyllic kind of life started to lose its ground:

> Among the fantasies of the village already fallen was that its terrace doors might be left unlocked. That one hadn't survived the night poor Annie Quinlan came down to her kitchen for a sup of water only to find a hardchaw from Ennis on the floor in front of her, with a tyre iron in his hand. The village by quiet consent then entered the age of security, and its citizens were particularly pleased with their dead bolts, their strobe alarms and their attack dogs when they twitched the curtains of an evening and saw Donna and Dee approaching, with that evil, vivacious, whistling air. (Barry 67)

The village from *Ideal homes* is becoming far from the hopes and dreams of the Republic's founding fathers. In the chapter *A Tiger's Broken Dreams*[91], Sean Kay remembers De Valera's plans for Ireland and the Irish, striving for a place where good community values would always surmount the material things:

> De Valera said, "The ideal Ireland that we would have, the Ireland that we dreamed of, would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, devoted their

[91] Kay, Sean. "A Tiger's Broken Dreams". *Celtic Revival? The Rise, Fall and Renewal of Global Ireland.* Rowman & Littlefield, 2011, pp. 25-48.

> leisure to the things of the spirit—a land whose countryside would be bright with cozy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the laughter of happy maidens, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age." To De Valera, Ireland should aspire to be "home, in short, of the people living the life that God desires that men should live". (Kay 26)

To some extent, Kevin Barry describes in *Ideal homes* a decaying society coping with the rise in violence, the loss of trust among its inhabitants and the corruption in relationships. The former perfectly safe and familiar place, like the one De Valera once envisioned, but never trully came to be, finds itself suddenly disrupted by effects of globalization that were enhanced by the Celtic Tiger age. Instead of describing part of its narrative in a pub or another traditional Irish establishment, Barry presents, even if briefly, a foreign restaurant, establishment that has become one of the symbols of the reach of the changes produced during the Celtic Tiger period. The fact that the takeout is in what used to be such a remote and stoic place makes possible a prejudicial reading on the presence of foreign influences as yet another agent of the disruption of a nationalistic ideal.

The *ideal homes* that gave name to Barry's short story went through a drastic transformation, as the narrator describes in the closing lines of the narrative, the reshaping of Ireland during and post Celtic Tiger which, in many occasions, was the agent that prompted the reassessing of the countries identity, of the lifestyle that sadly failed to improve for everyone in the same way:

> The change that had come was mostly unseen. It took place behind closed doors, in front rooms and back kitchens, in bedrooms, in the heart. But if it was unseen, it was not unheard. Mr Delahunty, as he pulled the shutters and felt for the padlock, oh Delahunty could hear it well enough. It was a gear change, a low rumbling, a faint groaning beneath the skin of the earth. The ground was readying itself for new life. (Barry 71)

The restlessness prompted by a changing country is yet the theme for *Fjord of Killary*[92], another short story by Kevin Barry. In this story, first published in the *New Yorker* (2010), the narrative is developed around Caoimhin, a forty year old man – the first person narrator – who tells the story of how he bought an old hotel on the fjord of Killary, on the west coast of Ireland, in the hopes of escaping the urban centers. In the beginning of the narrative, he discloses the motivation that lead him to this drastic shift in life:

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

The effect that the fast-paced city produced in him, a noticeable trait of the Celtic Tiger years in Ireland, pulling a great number of young people to the main city centers,

[92] Barry, Kevin. "Fjord of Killary". *Dark lies the island.* Graywolf, 2012, pp. 27-45.

proved, in the case of the character, to be a real hazard for his health, prompting Caoimhin to look for a different kind of life in the countryside. The promise of managing a hotel, keeping himself busy with its small errands, and devoting himself to writing in the nights seemed like the perfect solution for him. This idyllic expectation, however, is frustrated in the opening lines of the short story, as made clear by the description of the landscape, its “disgracefully grey skies above” (Barry 27) and constant rain proved in the period of eight months that the place “would be the death of me” (27).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The construction of the Belarusians characters in the narrative, although vague, is enough to instill a prejudicial tone to them. Every mention of the young foreigners made by Caoimhin comes with some judgment, whether it might be for their scolding attitude towards him – the penny-pincher employer –, or his references to their sexual liberties – probably putting himself on a higher ground for the Irish approach to sex forged by the Catholic doctrine – or finally for the author's record of Nadia's usage of the

English language, a brief example in the narrative that denotes the real struggle that many immigrants face on adapting to a new language:

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

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

Kevin Barry’s midlife crisis story – which one might suspect to be autobiographical, since Caoimhin, the forty-year old main character’s name, is Irish for Kevin – reveals, even if by accident, a portrait of Ireland post Celtic Tiger, setting in a hotel established in 1648 some of the struggles of the contemporary Ireland. *Fjord of Killary* contrasts the urban with the countryside, the notion of a sensible, restrained and learned man – Caoimhin – trapped with his simpleton countrymen – habitual drinkers

that have the ability to keep talking regardless of what is happening around them or who can listen to them – and the Belarusians – whose bigger fault, as far as the main character is concerned, seems to reside in their youth more than in their nationality. Their presence and the reaction of the Irish towards them is, anyway, a reliable reference to the real effort that the country found itself obliged to make to avoid conflicts based on the fear of losing ground, money and ultimately a sense of the Irish identity.

The practice of looking at contemporary society as in decay is the background on which Kevin Barry sets his short story *Ernestine and Kit*[93]. In the narrative – which was made into a short film[94] by Simon Bird in 2016 – the reader follows two ladies in their sixties, driving on a perfect summer day through the Irish countryside in their Japanese car, excited for the options that the day holds. Right from the beginning, while they drive around, praising Ireland as a powerful country when the weather is good, deciding what their destination is going to be, the narrator discloses the friends' habit of passing judgment on others:

> 'Would they be hair extensions?' she wondered, as they passed a young blonde pushing a pram along the roadside verge.
>
> 'You can bet on it,' Ernestine said. 'The way they're streaked with that silvery-looking, kind of . . .'
>
> 'Cheap-looking,' Kit said. . . .
>
> 'A young mother,' Ernestine said.
>
> 'Got up like a tuppenny whore,' Kit said. . . .

[93] Barry, Kevin. "Ernestine and Kit". *Dark lies the island.* Graywolf Press, 2012, pp. 77-89.

[94] *Ernestine and Kit.* Directed by Simon Bird, performance by Pauline Collins and Rosaleen Linehan, 12 Mar. 2016. *Vimeo, https://vimeo.com/342752739*.

‘ . . . Her ladyship is headed into a pub, no doubt.’

‘Drinking cider with fellas with earings and tattoos,’ Ernestine said. ‘In by a pool table. . . .

‘You can only imagine,’ said Kit, and she made the sign of the cross. ‘A jukebox and beer barrels and cocaine in the toilets. The misfortune infant left to its own devices.’ (Barry 78)

The dialogue between the two old mates reveals all the prejudice of what supposedly could be taken for as two good old Catholic ladies, whose sole worry was about the well being of the society and its more vulnerable members, the children. Their assessment of the mother’s capabilities based solely on her physical appearance, which they associate to a reproachable lifestyle involving drugs and all sorts of activities not suitable for a child, displays the cultural shock that profoundly marked Ireland, from the 1980s and maybe to a bigger extent from the 1990s onwards with the reshaping of Ireland prompted by the Celtic Tiger, opposing itself to the traditional national imaginary as Fintan O’Toole points out in *Irish Society and Culture in the Twenty-First Century*:

This kind of hipper, more cosmopolitan, more deliberately provocative society in terms of its recitation of belonging has a sense of identity which is more angry in some ways, more loose, more oppositional, though it is also rooted. Ironically it is antagonistic to the official culture; . . . (O’Toole 103)

After considering staying a little longer in the same place as that “unsuitable” mother and her innocent child, Kit decides that they should keep driving to the castle

where there would be “a nice crowd there for sure” (Barry 79). The mild pace that they assume while going to their chosen destination would suggest that they were, in fact, just enjoying a good sunny day, killing time, with no major agendas. When Ernestine suggests that they could eat some ice-cream, however, the narrator’ remarks – “They turned to smile to each other. They hoped to have the need to buy ice creams soon enough, and more than two.” (79) – suggests that they might be up to something more.

When they arrive at the castle, crowded with entire families enjoying the nice day outing, they go to the cafeteria, where they carefully look around until they finally spot a little girl, an “angel” that instantly incites their action. The girl was distantly accompanied by her mother, “. . . as pale and fair-haired, a weary prettiness persisting into her late thirties.” (80), her older brother, absorbed by his hand-held video game, and her “sallow and dark-haired” father. After observing the whole family together, Ernestine and Kit do not take long before passing their judgement:

> ‘Daddy’s a greasy-looking Herbert,’ Ernestine said.
>
> ‘Would he be foreign?’
>
> ‘Is the child nearly his at all, you’d wonder?’
>
> ‘If ‘tis, his blood is weak.’
>
> ‘Might have a manner of a . . . Portuguese, have we?
>
> ‘And as sour-looking as it’s greasy.’
>
> Quiet outrage bubbled in their insides. Oh, the underserving bastards who were blessed with the presence of angels. (81)

Their repulsiveness towards the man, their comments on his appearance, for which they choose abhorring adjectives, are based solely on their assumption that he might be a foreign, revealing a xenophobic practice that can be quite commonly perceived in cultures that are undergoing drastic changings, where the foreign influence is an important component. This sense of entitlement, of regarding others inferior solely based on these assumptions on their nationality is, to some extent, a result of how identities are politically conceived and dealt with, as observes Ronit Lentin in *From racial state to racist state: Ireland on the eve of the citizenship referendum*[95]*:*

> While the Irish were naturalised by the British, the Irish state, constitutionally conceived as the space of white, settled men of property, historicizes its own racial inferiors. This is achieved firstly (though not exclusively: see for example the racialisation of Irish Travellers, conceived as 'Irish national' yet not always as 'white') through governmental technologies of asylum and immigration control, aiming to restore modernity's order just as all certainties - economic, civil, cultural, sexual - collapse; and secondly through biopolitical governmental technologies including regulations governing the lives of migrants, but also equality mechanisms, which reproduce racialized populations as ultimately unequal, since the promise of equality is always conditional. (Lentin 7)

Ernestine and Kit are, therefore, acting as real patriots, safeguarding innocent and pure angels from the filthy and corrupted. Their carefully thought out plan involved

[95] Lentin, Ronit. "From racial state to racist state: Ireland on the eve of the citizenship referendum". *Variant.* vol. 2, no. 20, Summer 2004, pp. 7-8, http://www.variant.org.uk/pdfs/issue20/Variant20.pdf.

distancing the child from her family, luring her in with candy and finally taking her away from them by escaping in their car. The narrator's description of the effect provoked on their bodies by the mere anticipation of the dreadful act – "Ernestine felt a slow hot flush creep her shoulders and ascend her neck. Kit tinily in the dry pit of her throat made a cage bird's excited trilling" (Barry 81) – exposes the primal urges that Ernestine and Kit are, in fact, satisfying on their enterprise. They are as much selfish and hedonistic women as they are old Irish Catholic ladies. Their observations on the little girl's childish body can, in some way, be perceived as primitive, as on the verge of cannibalism:

> 'Are you looking at the back of her knees?' Ernestine whispered.
>
> 'How so?'
>
> 'I mean the little folds of flesh there, look? There's still pup fat on her!'
>
> 'Ah there is. Ah sweetness!' (82)

Their choice of words cannot help but to recall, even if in the slightest manner, the ironic and scandalous *A modest proposal* by Jonathan Swift in 1729, who mockingly suggested that people should eat their tender-fleshed infants during the Famine crisis to ease the problem of hunger in the country. The old ladies took upon themselves to solve another type of crisis that they detected in Ireland, the moral crisis that they see threatened by the sorts of people that they condemn, by raising innocent children. Ernestine and Kit's mission of protecting little angels from their devious families is, somehow, as much outrageous as, and certainly more dubious, for they are actually implementing their agenda on *Ernestine and Kit*. After Ernestine manages to distract the child with candies and laughter while their parents are busy scolding her older brother,

Kit grabs the child into her arms, making sure the child's mouth is covered, and they run to the castle's exit. The girl's brother, however, sees everything and alerts his parents. At this moment, the narrative shows how the duo was ready for such circumstances, with Kit pinching the girl's leg, prompting her to cry and then selling to the family the story of how they have found her in distress, lost from her family and, in an act of kindness, decided to bring her up to security.

As they leave in their car, having managed to escape without any major problem – they use fake license plates and drive to Northern Ireland until things cool off, for they "planned for failure as much as success, failure being the commonplace" (Barry 85) – they see other families on the street and, once again, find other traits to condemn on the parents' appearances and what their imagined lifestyle was. Their next stop is at a supermarket, where they filled their trolley with wine to compensate for the day's failure. There, they suddenly listen to an announcement indicating that a toddler had been found and was waiting in the customer's desk for her parents. Leaving everything behind, they rush to the customer's desk, take the child and leave, hoping that she would be just like the one that they had lost in the castle. But on their way home they take a better look at the abducted child closer and start to find flaws in her appearance, who looks "wall-eyed . . . and a jaundice class of a look to it" (88), and once again, they start to blame the child's parents:

> 'Sure what kind of parents?
>
> Can you imagine, Ernie?
>
> What kind of parents would lose a child in an Asda?'
>
> 'Drunk and drug addicts and prostitutes,' Ernestine said.

‘With tattoos on their backsides,’ Kit said. . . .

‘Could it be an itinerant we have on our hands?’

‘Oh Jesus Christ, a tinker child! . . .

‘. . . The likes of this . . . *thing* isn’t worth the effort nor the risk.’ (Barry 88-89)

Frustrated by the loss of an angelical baby and then the discovery that their new child is not up to their standards, they quickly decide to stop the car and leave the defenseless child at the side of the road, with bugs and crows waiting for her final weakness. Ernestine and Kit were relieved they were heading home, surprisingly unapologetic for their belief in their mission. Barry’s dark and at times funny short story reveals, somehow, a culture of self-entitlement and of cultural and social exclusion that always existed and fatally has been escalating in the contemporary society, which is as much open to multiculturalism, as it is worried for the vanishing of a supposedly traditional culture and identity. The feeling of superiority that Ernestine and Kit have over the ones that they judge – young tattooed people, foreigners, travelers, among others – is, in many ways, supported by political agendas of control and exclusion, like the referendum to change Article 9 of the Irish Constitution, according to which persons born on the island of Ireland who did not have at least one parent who is an Irish citizen, would not be entitled to Irish citizenship. The real villains, carefully crafted by Kevin’s Barry dark humor in *Ernestine and Kit,* are the title characters, two old ladies in their sixties who may look like perfect examples of Irish citizens on the outside, but are more rotten and cruel than any other person that they judged on a daily basis.

Although there are some differences as to the way the immigrants are treated by the other characters in the five short stories presented here, they all bare a significant resemblance as far as foreign people are perceived in general by society. The same

group of people that once found a welcoming land, where their diversity was celebrated and they could be of service and even profit of the common bounty in times of plenty, suddenly began to witness the decay of their social stance when the national economy became an issue. As Homi Bhabha pointed out as a keynote speaker in *Boundaries, Differences, Passages*[96], a Volkswagen Foundation event, “The 'secular' liberalisation of the markets has seen, side by side, the rise of xenophobia and religious fundamentalisms” (3).

In Ireland’s case, migration could be taken as some sort of social practice to which a great number of Irish people were submitted throughout the country’s history for several reasons. Theirs, many times, was the place of the foreign. Now, on the other side of the spectrum, Irish people got to experience the role of the dominant group that has the power, as Eric Landowski suggests, of imposing upon the other the speech of exclusion, of regarding her/him immediately disqualified as subjects (Landowski 7, my trans.)[97], a notion that is based solely on superficial traits such as appearance, language, food and cultural habits.

The impact of migration in Ireland is undeniable and one of its first records in literature is the work *The Deportees* (2007) by Roddy Doyle, one of the first author to write about immigration and the contact with the other. The stories presented here follow this trend but bare an important distinction from Doyle’s works: in them there is hardly any meaningful exchange between the native character and the immigrants in the stories that were analyzed, but this does not prevent the making of derogative statements by those who are themselves reacting to the changes of time and of society,

[96] Bhabha, Homi. “Boundaries, Differences, Passages” [transcript]. *Spannungsfelder inter- und transkultureller Kommunikation*, edited by A. Gunsenheimer. Bielefeld, 2007.

[97] Landowski, Eric. *Presenças do outro,* translated by Mary Amazonas Leite de Barros. Perspectiva, 2012.

people who might be finding it difficult to cope with such drastic transformations and, as a desperate attempt to lessen the damages that might result from it, resort to the imposition of cultural boundaries and discrimination.

7 "LOOK AT ALL OUR OLD MEN IN THE PUBS, LOOK AT ALL OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ON DRUGS"[98]: DRUGS IN THE POST CELTIC TIGER IRELAND'S LITERATURE

Ireland's relationship with drugs and addiction can be considered relatively recent. The country's restrictive Catholic tradition and the national politics that in many aspects closed the country to the rest of the world for many years played an important role in delaying this kind of problem in the island. According to Shane Butler and Ann Hope, in their article *Ireland's financial crisis and its influence on alcohol and drug issues*[99], "Irish concerns with illicit drug problems date from the late-1960s" (625). In the text, they also indicate that the first anti-drug legislation was enacted in 1977 and that it was not until the early-eighties that the country faced its first experience of injecting heroin use, which was followed, almost immediately, by the advent of HIV/AIDS, "prompting health authorities to introduce harm reduction measures (such as indefinite methadone maintenance and needle and syringe exchange schemes)" (625).

Fast forwarding to the 1990s onwards, when the economic boom drastically reshaped Ireland, cocaine usage reached an all-time high, being labelled as the socialite party drug of the Celtic Tiger era, especially in the cities and large towns with its average consumer being the financial worker and members of the middle class. The drug problem in Ireland, however, cannot be restricted to the upper social classes, as studies such as *Social issues and public attitudes associated with drug misuse*[100], by

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[98] O'Connor, Sinead. Lyrics to "Famine", *Genius,* 2020, https://genius.com/Sinead-oconnor-famine-lyrics.

[99] Butler, Shane; Hope, Ann. "Ireland's financial crisis and its influence on alcohol and drug issues". *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs,* vol. 32, no. 6, 08 Apr. 2011, pp. 623-628, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1515/nsad-2015-0058.

[100] Mayock, P. and Moran R. "Social Issues and Public Attitudes Associated with Drug Misuse". *Overview of Drug Issues in Ireland - Resource Document.* Health Research Board (HRB), 2000, pp. 79-94.

Paula Mayock and Rosalyn Moran, indicate a "link between concentrations of drug use and various indicators of poverty and social exclusion, including unemployment, poor housing, one-parent families and low educational attainment" (80). These issues, that play such a relevant role in the usage of drugs, were significantly increased during and after the Celtic Tiger period. Although Ireland became known, worldwide, for its remarkable economic success from the 1990s up to the first years of the 2000s, its benefits were not extended to the entire society.

In many cases, what it did was to place, further apart, the higher and the lower social classes, and by deepening this gap, contributed to the elevation of the drug consumption in the country not only in the big cities, but in the countryside, especially among the lower classes. As Róisín Ní Mháille Battel points out in *Ireland's "Celtic Tiger" Economy*[101],

> Inequality in the sharing of the benefits of the economic miracle is undeniable. There are pockets of poverty, particularly in the cities, in which people are excluded from economic success by a combination of disadvantages – class, education, location and so forth – . . . One of the shifts in Irish society has been that poverty is now overwhelmingly a feature of urban rather than rural life. . . . It is no surprise, therefore, that it is in the area of greatest unemployment that one of the worst features of modern Irish society has appeared, for example, a vicious and violent drug culture . . . (106-107)

[101] Battel, Róisín Ní Mháille. "Ireland's "Celtic Tiger" Economy". *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, vol. 28, no. 1, Winter 2003, pp. 93-111. *JSTOR*, doi: 10.1177/0162243902238497.

The drastic consequences of social exclusion and drug/alcohol addiction are portrayed in *Eulogy*[102], a short story by Nuala O'Connor. The narrative develops, as its title suggests, during a funeral, in which the first-person narrator is giving a eulogy for Tara, her deceased sister. While choosing the words, trying to find a gaze to hook, she considers the present congregation made up by people she hardly knows, people that might resemble a small part of her sister: "Their eyes look through and beyond me, Are they all like Tara, some version of her, I wonder? The stray, the vagabond, the one whose contrariness and actions sent her careening out of doors, the one who couldn't be contained by any walls" (O'Connor 117). The idea that her late sister bore such traits as the ones the narrator recognizes in the audience is the first clue to Tara's living situation. They were both sisters, but the narrator understands that this means little when it comes to knowing a person. Their drastically different paths in life led them ultimately to become strangers.

While remembering her sister and her hatred towards homeless people during their childhood – "We went to school in the city centre and we passed beggars every day. She would lash out at them" (117) – she reminisces Tara's fierce determination and all her plans, that involved moving abroad, marrying and having kids. The prospect of a full happy life, all of which never came to be true, but instead gave space to a desperate and ultimately tragic life on the streets, troubled the main character:

> 'Tara was a fierce kid. Fierce and kind and ambitious. So how is it she ended up living in an exposed basement bellow Power's Hotel with only a sleeping bag to

[102] O'Connor, Nuala. "Eulogy". *Looking at the stars: an anthology of Irish writing in aid of the Dublin Simon Community, edited by Kerry O'Brien and Alice Kinsella, Munster Literary Centre, 2016, pp. 117-119.*

her name? How come she died there of cold and malnutrition and who knows what else?' . . . Tara's cardboard and bedding in the under-the-stairs nook was her skipper. . . . But in her skipper she was exposed – a small, brittle woman, daily fending off rape, knife attacks and poor weather, while trying to warm herself with cider. 'Clonmel Chardonnay' she called her flagon and we'd both laugh. I lift my head. 'She wasn't a junkie,' I say, and scan the faces for a contradiction. She might have been a junkie in the end for all I know, but I want to believe that heroin didn't claim her. (O'Connor 118)

The brutal notion that her sister perished for drugs in the streets seems too hard to bear, albeit the great probability of its occurrence. Tara represents, in *Eulogy*, the thousands of people who are plagued by substance addiction, people whose lives are drastically disrupted and usually shortened by the inability of rehabilitation. In the case of Ireland, where the story is settled, issues related to drugs and alcohol abuse reached an all-time high during the Celtic Tiger period, demanding social policies to deal with the problem. Some of these policies, however, instead of helping those in need, worsened the scene for many battling against addiction, as Mayock and Moran remember:

Kelly (1997) expressed concern about the legislation [the Housing Act] before it was passed, warning that it was likely to increase homelessness, and was particularly critical of the 'loose' definition of 'anti-social behaviour'. . . . However, it was equally strongly supported and welcomed by certain community activists. According to the Merchant's Quay Project, . . . the Housing Act, 1997, has contributed to an increase in the number of homeless drug users in Dublin

> (Memery et al., 2000). In its recently-published annual report, the Merchant's Quay Project has recorded an increase in the number of young drug users sleeping rough and has claimed that 'both homelessness and lack of experience of drug use make these drug users a particularly vulnerable group in terms of risk of infection and general health and well being' (Merchant's Quay Project, 2000: 1). A recent analysis of Dublin Simon's outreach contacts has similarly highlighted drug use as a major difficulty among the total contact group presenting to the Simon Community. (Mayock and Moran 81)

The Housing Act which they mention deemed anti-social "any behaviour which causes or is likely to cause any significant or persistent danger, injury, damage, loss or fear to any person living, working or otherwise lawfully in or in the vicinity of a house provided by a housing authority under the Housing Act" (81). Instead of tackling the issue, what it made, in many cases, was to push already vulnerable enough people to unbearable situations. In the case of O'Connor's short story, Tara's fate was, in many aspects, determined by the lack of support from social services when she was young.

While giving her eulogy, Tara's sister mentions the time Tara burned down their house after their mother's death. The narrator remembers how Tara liked the Travelers' tradition of setting fire to the caravan, with all the deceased's belongings, after someone died. Tara's words in the corner shop where she took her younger sister for ice-cream while the place was burning imply the drama from which she was freeing both of them: "'Now, we won't be able to live with him anymore,' . . . 'They'll have to take us away.'" (O'Connor 118). The narrative does not disclose any more information on what had happened to the girls, but Tara's words and her drastic action surely are enough to

imagine that they had been through some horrible situation inside their own house, the place where they were supposed to feel the safest. When their family failed to provide them with this bare minimum, it became a matter to the State to guarantee the wellbeing of the children, a task on which, unfortunately, the State proved to be a failure: “They did take us away. From our burnt-out house, from our father. I was sent to my auntie in Wicklow, Tara to Oberstown with all the other bad girls and boys” (O’Connor 119).

While the narrator got a second chance in life, in a familiar home, Tara’s punishment was to go to Oberstown, a children’s detention campus from which an article by Paul Reynolds on RTE’s website[103] details that among its occupants were children who have “. . . had substance misuse problems with drugs and or alcohol prior to their detention. . . . [and] had lost one or both of their parents either through death, imprisonment or the absence of long-term contact . . .”. It would not be a far cry to say that Tara’s time over there proved decisive on how she lived the remainder of her life and how she died.

The scars that life imprinted in Tara, the absence of any significant help from the State, incapable of assessing properly the children in their time of need, combined with politics of exclusion of some of its most vulnerable citizens – homeless people and drug users – makes of *Eulogy* a trustworthy record of the issue of drugs in Ireland, which became even worse as a result of the further gap between the most wealthy and the most vulnerable. Tara’s response to her sister when the narrator recalls trying to help her by placing her at a hostel or a half-way house is a subtle nod to the inefficiency of the State in the matter of the disfranchised: “She preferred it there to anywhere, she’d say. ‘Just me and the TDs,’ she’d say.” (O’Connor 119). The TDs being the *Teachtaí*

[103] Reynolds, Paul. “Majority of Oberstown children had drug and alcohol issues”. *RTE.ie*, 2 Oct. 2019, https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2019/1002/1080707-oberstown-substance/.

Dala, members of *Dáil Éireann*, the lower house of the *Oireachtas* (the Irish Parliament), whose official house is located 180 meters from Powers Hotel – the place near where Tara used to sleep rough. Close enough on the geographic perspective, but still too far away in their actions to acknowledge people dying out there.

The invisibility that the drug problems, and the ones most affected by it, assume in our daily lives is tackled in *There are little kingdoms*[104], by Kevin Barry. In this short story, Fitz, the first-person narrator, describes his cheerful mood as he walks on the streets of Dublin in what was ". . . a deadening winter, one of those feeble afternoons with coal smoke for light, . . ." (Barry 119), watching as people go by their businesses, in a sort of way that vaguely recalls James Joyce's Leopold Bloom roaming through Dublin on that 16th of June. As he wanders through the city, he discloses a habit of his of looking into launderettes, observing the people working there, in a rhythm that reminds him of the workers in a Soviet movie. This strange custom of his reveals his awareness on how different the lives of those less fortunate than him are, as Fitz imagines their living situation:

> I find it quite comical, and also heartbreaking. Have the misfortunes no washing machines themselves, I worry? Living in old flats, I suppose, with shared hoovers beneath the stairs, and the smell of fried onions in the hallway, and the awful things you'd rather not hear late at night . . . turn up the television, will you, for Jesus' sake, is that a shriek or a creaking door? (119)

[104] Barry, Kevin. "There are little kingdoms". *There are little kingdoms.* The Stinging Fly, 2016, pp. 119-129.

His fascination with their struggles and what he assumes to be their greatest worries reveals the reproduction of a stereotypical point of view on the lives of people that he recognizes as different from him. Those are worth, at the same time, of laughter and pity, although the problems presented by the narrator (shared hoover, the smell of onions, . . .) look quite superficial. Fitz' digression is, then, interrupted by the image of an old acquaintance outside the launderette. His full description of this old friend's image, however, leads him to an unexpected reaction prompted by a frightful situation:

> I walked on, and I felt the cold rise into myself from the deep stone centre of the town. I quickened my pace. I was too scared to look back. I knew that he would flee, that he would have no choice but to flee. He was one of my oldest and most argued with friends. He had been dead for six years. (Barry 120)

The disturbing vision of a dead old friend smoking a cigarette outside such a trivial place as a launderette that caused him to leave the scene in such a hurry leads him to walk frantically until he reaches the river, a place attended by a particular group of people:

> The banks of the river were peopled with the foul and forgotten of the town, skin-poppers and jaw-chewers, hanging onto their ratty dogs for dear life, eating sausage rolls out of the Centra, wearing thin nylon clothes against the seep of the evil-smelling air. The river light was jaunty, blue-green, it softened and prettified as best as it could. (120)

The description of those addicted people, the “foul and forgotten of the town”, whose sight was somehow softened by the river light brings forth the extent which this kind of health matter achieved in recent years. The notion of a group of people shooting drugs, all poorly dressed, in broad daylight Dublin, made invisible by the capital’s postcard river is the fictionalization, in Barry’s short story, of an awful scene that can be found in the real Dublin and in many places around the country. They are, indeed, foul and forgotten by society, by politics, ghosts who are only noticed by the few that cannot avert their eyes from them, despite the rush of their daily lives; an inconvenience too hard to deal with as the country went through its most favorable economic phase in centuries and now they are just left there, overlooked among the bright lights, the magnificent river and all the other people, a part of the landscape better left ignored.

When he finally is able to recover his breath, still impacted by the vision of his dead friend, Fitz decides to walk in the direction of the bus station because he realizes that “. . . there was nothing for it but to take a bus to the hills and to hide out for a while there, with the gentle people.” (Barry 120-121). His plan, however, proves a failure when he finds a barrier placed across the river’s walkway prohibiting pedestrians to cross. He soon discovers that there was, in fact, no way of crossing to get to *Bus Áras*, finally finding a man in a State’s uniform that told him that “There are no buses from here today. There are no buses in or out.” (121). The fact that he is trapped in the city suddenly becomes less significant when he identified the State’s man as “. . . the bread-and-fancies man of my childhood . . .” who “. . . had dropped down dead in his shoes . . .” (121) in 1983.

The absurd encounters to which Fitz had been submitted on that day, however, seemed to have little – or rather no – impact on the city and other people’s business, as he stopped for a moment to reflect on the insanity of his experience: “Now the faces of

the streets seemed no different. It was the same bleary democracy as before. Some of us mad, some in love, some very tired, and all of us, it seemed, resigned to out humdrum affairs." (Barry 121). The pace of normality in which everything continued around him led him to try to find some comfort in a bowl of soup in a small and odd-looking café. After having found a seat, still fighting to compose himself, and observing the menu, which looked as if it was written in another language, he called the waiter to ask about the soup of the day. The waiter was, in fact, Thomas Cremins, another acquaintance from his childhood, whose brother, Alan, had tragically died in a thunderstorm while fishing. As Fitz started talking about Alan, reminiscing old memories, Thomas called for his brother, who supposedly was the chef in the place. When Alan appeared and called Fitz by his name, the main character left in a hurry into the winter streets, once again shocked by the image of another deceased person.

As Fitz wanders through the streets, contemplating the possibility of he being dead as well, something that he quickly discarded as he "was in far too much pain not to be alive" (124), he is given a handbill that announced a public meeting on the coming Saturday, in which Larkin – the famous Irish republican and trade union leader who died in 1947 – would be giving a speech. Having had his share of weird encounters for the day, and afraid of being put into a hospice, Fitz walks towards his quiet residential suburb where he rented the ground floor of an ageing semi.

Once inside his home, Fitz walked into the kitchen and opened the French doors that gave access to a small oblong garden to find, yet, another surprising scene. His private garden was rather different from the wintery city where he had just recently walked through: "I stepped into glorious summer. The fruits were full in bloom, and it was the dense languor of July heat, unmistakable, and I unfolded my striped deckchair and sat back in it." (125). Sitting there, enjoying the comfort of the heat that came from

the stone under his bare feet, listening to the children playing outside, he remembers their mischief as they would play tricks on him when he walked home from the off-license. As he describes his living arrangements, however, the more suspicious he reveals his life to be:

> Drinks were all I required to provide for myself. Since I had begun this lease, I found that the shelves daily replenished themselves. Nothing fancy, but sufficient: fresh fruit and veg, wholemeal breads, small rations of lean meat and tinned fish, rice and pasta, tubs of stir-in sauce, leaf tea, occasionally some chocolate for a treat. I had a small money tin in the kitchen, and each time I opened it, it contained precisely eight euro and ninety-nine cent, which was the cost of a drinkable rioja at the nearby branch of Bargain Booze. Utilities didn't seem to be an issue – no bills arrived. In fact, there was no mail from anywhere, ever. (Barry 126)

Fitz' revelation, combined with the fact that practically all his interactions on that day were held with dead people, are surely cause for concern. Suddenly, in the narrative, he is not a spectator experiencing an unlikely day, but he discloses his life to be something out of the ordinary. The idle life that he describes is only disturbed by the phone, which never stops ringing, and through which he receives senseless calls in foreign languages – as Zulu, Polish – and also in Irish, always in a pattern of three at a time, a nuisance which he had complained several times to the Exchange, a ". . . part of the apparatus of the State that seemed to be a law onto itself" (Barry 127) but proved, time and time again, to be useless.

Again, in his garden, Fitz climbs a ladder through the thick foliage, viewing his suburb and its rooftops; climbing further on into the white clouds and even higher until he reaches a “salty, springy turf” (Barry 128). Suddenly finding himself on the seaside, which he recognized as what might have been Howth or Bray, he walked and concentrated in cleaning his mind, when he found a telescope, locked in a place, revealing “that it was a cold and damp day down there. It was winter by the tide-line, it was springtime on the cliffs.” (129). Fitz suddenly sees a woman, who he refers to as “she”, whose description reveals that she belongs to his past:

> It wasn’t a close-up view but even so, I could see that age had gone on her. I could see the slump of adult weariness. The view was in black and white, flickering, it was old footage, a silent movie, and I knew that the moment down there had passed, too, and that she herself was long gone now. (129)

The vision of a woman in a narrative naturally entails a singular perspective when it comes to Irish literature, as Patricia de Aquino Prudente points out in her thesis *The contemporary Irish short story: identities in transformation:*

> In the traditional Irish culture, the appearance of a woman in a vision is called *aisling*. The word *aisling* in its origin in the Irish language means vision and dream. According to Koch, *aisling* is, originally, a type of poem in the Irish language of the eighteenth century in which the visit of a woman from another world to the narrator or author of the poem occurs. This woman performs three different types of apparition: . . .; 3) as an allegory of Ireland in which the woman

> represents the nation and visits the poet to comfort him. In addition, the *aisling* story type usually follows a similar pattern: 1) the action of the poem takes place in a room or near a river; 2) there is a formal description of the woman; . . .; 5) a message of hope and deliverance from Ireland. (Prudente 29)

Barry seems to regard this Irish tradition by portraying the appearance of a woman in the final part of his short story. His rupture with tradition, however, can be seen in Fitz' hopelessness. As the telescope blackened and he lost her sight, he reckons that even if he got the chance to find her again, he would not be able to explain to her "why it had happened the way that it did" (Barry 129), leaving the reader completely in the dark. On the closing lines of the short story, Barry describes Fitz on his way down to his garden, where he goes to find out that the season has changed, from summer to autumn, which is his "favourite time, the season of loss and devotion". The choice of words – loss and devotion – are ideal to summarize, to some extent, the spirit of a country that has changed so much in the recent years.

Kevin Barry's *There are little kingdoms* can be interpreted as a faithful allegory of Ireland, a land in which the past and its memories coexist with the changes that the present brought. The main character's name, *Fitz*, although shortened, discloses his ancestry, of someone that is a "son of" that land that has been through drastic transformations. The dead appearances – from friends of Fitz' childhood and adulthood (children fishing, the "bread-and-fancies" man), to historical figures from Ireland – are all restricted to a much more romantic past, destined to be haunting images of what they used to be. Nowadays Ireland is a gathering of many kingdoms – the wealthy, the misfortunes, the drug addicts, the foreign, the living and their hectic lives – all of which

are trapped in the same space and add to the country's identity, an identity that was, for so long, built upon its historical past idealization. The present reality is much like the rose that grows through the concrete in the city, always shaded from the sun in Ben E. King's song *Spanish Harlem* – alluded twice during the narrative, once played by a busker in the street and later as the hold-on music while he was waiting by the Exchange on the phone –; every single life in Dublin, and Ireland who has to struggle to thrive in spite of the adversity, redefining their identities while being confronted with the ever present past.

The shift from an idyllic notion of a unified Ireland – that for centuries focused its energy in promoting a single national identity, freeing itself from the British influence and proclaiming Irish sovereignty – to a multicultural Ireland which completely changed from the 1980s onwards – and more drastically during the peak of the Celtic Tiger period – is a fact that cannot be ignored. The impact of the politics that opened Ireland to the world, especially once the country joined the EU, making it harder for institutions like the Catholic Church to maintain their rigid control over the social practices, could be witnessed in the change of people's lifestyles, from the alteration in the family institution – an increase in worker women, who could choose to get married and have children, or not, for example –, to the fast pace that suddenly dictated the routine of the cities with the influx of people – foreign and returning Irish – and the arrival of international companies. One of the side effects of such a transformation that Ireland went through has to do with drug problems and the increase of violence in practically every part of the country. This is the background to the short story *The girls and the dogs*[105], by Kevin Barry.

[105] Barry, Kevin. "The girls and the dogs". *Dark lies the island.* Graywolf Press, 2012, pp. 131-143.

Barry's narrative takes place a few miles outside Gort, a small town in the south of County Galway, west of Ireland, where the main character lived for a while in a caravan in the yard of an old farmhouse having escaped from Cork after he got into trouble:

> I was keeping myself well hidden. Things had gone wrong in Cork and then they went wronger again. I had been involved with bringing some of the brown crack in that was said to be causing people to have strokes and was said to have caused the end altogether of a prostitute lad on Douglas Street. Everybody was waiting for me. There was no option for a finish only to hop on a bus and then it was all black skies and bogger towns and Gort, . . . (Barry 131)

Since he left Cork, and his daughter May-Ann – whose picture he dotes over at nights – he found refuge with Evan the Head, Suze and Elsie, sisters with whom Evan had six and two children respectively, in quite an unorthodox family arrangement. The main-character instantly recognizes how peculiar all the situation was, pointing out that "These were open-minded people I was dealing with. At least with regard to that end of things." (Barry 132). The farmhouse, which was paid with rent allowance on account of the children, was in a precarious state, filled with damp marks, broken furniture, and the shaven-headed (because of lice) children running everywhere, which only added to the narrator's discomfort with the whole situation. The caravan, which Evan had bought from someone that worked with horses, was as trashy as the house, with a broken heat system that fumigated the entire place and surrounded by the big nervous dogs that

howled at night, yet was preferred by the main character for it gave him the chance to be by himself for a while.

Although very different people, Evan and the narrator share a bond through the world of the dealings, having met five years before in Cork:

> I had met him first in a pub on Barrack Street in Cork called Three Ones. It wasn't a pub that had the best of names for itself. It was a rough crowd that drank there and there was an amount of dealing. There had been shootings the odd time. I was nervous there always but Evan was calm and smiling at the barside and one night I went back to the flat he had in Togher and I bought three sheets of acid off him at a good price - White Lightnings, ferocious visuals – and he showed me passports for himself that were held under three different names. I was young enough to be impressed by that though I have seen quarer sights since, believe me. (Barry 134)

The extent of his problems in the south left the narrator with no choice but to gather his little possessions – the few clothes that he managed to get at a department store after his ex, Fiona Condon, threw him out and prohibited him from seeing their child – and resort to Evan the Head and his family, with whom he managed to establish, even if grudgingly, some sort of a routine. Both he and Evan represent, in Barry's narrative, an unfortunate reality that Ireland began to face during and after the Celtic Tiger, as Sean Kay indicates in *Celtic Revival? The Rise, Fall, and Renewal of Global Ireland* as he presents some facts on the rise of violent crimes in the country:

> Between 1998 and 2008, Ireland saw a 32 percent increase in homicides with firearms. The number of gun killings in Ireland is five times higher than in England. At the core of much of this violence was a major spike in illegal drug activity in the country, in terms of both trafficking through Ireland and personal consumption. (Kay 41)

The girls and the dogs fictionally shows the extent which the drug problem achieved in Ireland in recent years, portraying, in its male characters, two different profiles brought together by the world of drugs. The main character and narrator of the short story deems himself a very handsome young Irishman, someone who could be called a loving father – although he did not see his daughter for eight months due to his problems with the law and also for the bad terms in which his relationship with the girl's mother ended, he spends practically all his nights staring at her picture – and an educated man, an assumption that can be made by the contrast between his, Evan's, Suze's and Elsie's usage of the English language in the text. Evan the Head, on the other hand, is a charmer Welsh who is into magic and the occult, someone who proudly boasts his sexual prowess with multiple partners, whose kids are poorly taken care of – although they are the reason why the trio gets to secure the payment of the house – and someone that displays a much bigger inclination to addictiveness.

Suzie and Elsie's origin helps, in some way, to understand their actions. The girls from Leeds, who moved in with some cousins in Galway after their father went to jail for assaulting their mother, soon were turned away by them, for "Their eyes were two dark and their mouths were too beautiful." (Barry 136). The lack of family support prompted them to resort to a questionable lifestyle, circumstances in which they met Evan:

> They were at a loose end arsing around Galway then, fucking Australians out of youth hostels and robbing them, and they met Evan the Head in the Harbour Bar, was the story, when there still was a Harbour Bar, before the Galway docks was all cunts in pink shirts drinking wine. Evan was loaded at that time having brought in a trawler full of grade-two resin from Morocco – he came into Doolin with it, bold as brass, stoned as a coot in the yellow of his oilskins – and that was ten years back and if one the sisters wasn't up the spout off him since, the other was. (Barry 136)

More than to present some facts on Suze, Elsie and Evan, Barry's narrative depicts the sudden transformations that Ireland went through in recent years. The narrator's comments on the kind of crowd that started to gather at the docks in Galway, as well as their choice of clothing and drinks, reveal the impact of the Celtic Tiger on society, increasing the stratification of the classes further on and provoking the identities to clash for every other duality. The main character's attitude towards Evan, the girls and their children is judgmental from the very beginning, and even though he depends on their mercy to keep in hiding, he still sees himself as different from them:

> So it was – so simple – that we became a kind of family that January in the old farmhouse outside Gort. But of course I could not say I was ever entirely comfortable with the situation. I kept going out to the caravan at night, to be alone for those cold hours, for my own space to think of May-Ann, to look at her photograph, and to listen to the dogs, the strange comfort of them. Elsie thought this was snobbish of me. She wanted me to stay with her on the mattress. And

> Evan the Head said he agreed with her, and Suze agreed, and that was the start of the trouble. (Barry 137)

Although he and Evan are involved in the same kind of business, he still finds a way to set himself apart, for he considered himself fundamentally different from Evan and his lifestyle regarding his relationships. When the narrator discloses the nature of his involvement with Elsie, who allowed him to dry-hump her, but did not allow him to penetrate her because she did not want any more children after she went through some complications during her last pregnancy, his agreement with the situation was not a result of his compassion for her, but, once again, for his judgmental view on these other people:

> I have never been comfortable with being a father. I love May-Ann – my dotey pet, I always call her – but it makes me frightened just to think of her walking around in the world with the people that are out there. See some of the fuckers you'd have muttering at the walls down around the bus station in Parnell Place, Cork. You'd want a daughter breathing the same air as those animals? (137)

Even though he is in hiding for his involvement with drugs, having been forced to desert his child, he still fancies himself different from the people that he refers to as "animals". His choice of words can be analyzed in the context of the title, where "dogs" might be a reference to Evan and the likes of him. His attitude finally results in conflict when his host orders him to sleep with Suze and Elsie. When he refuses to comply to this, Evan locked him in the caravan at night, leaving him there for days in a row,

without any food or water, being taunted by Evan and the girls every day, listening to the hauling of the dogs, which he interpreted as compassioned by his perishing. When he had practically lost all his strength, lying on the floor, he spotted two cans of soup probably left there by the caravan's previous owner. His despair had reached such an extreme, however, that he did not hesitate and drank them ferociously, only to vomit all immediately. This, however, turns into his opportunity to regain his freedom, since he notices that the floor in the bathroom, which up to that point he avoided using, is giving in, and through there he manages to escape during the night, protected by the dogs' compassionate silence, stealing Evan's car.

Barry's narrative portrays the violent environment that became more apparent in the country, especially in recent years. With the fast pace in which Ireland changed from the 1980s onwards, and to a higher extent between the 1990s and the 2000s, the country found itself not only open to economic success but also to drastic transformations in its lifestyle. In the case of the drugs, they became a resource to the both ends of the social strata – whether be the hype cocaine usage by the wealthy banker trying to keep up with the booming business, or be the heroin usage by the misfortuned gathered by the bus stations' walls or at the quays watching the country thrive as they are left behind. The rise on the demand, and the promise of a quick and high return from the drug business, combined with the preexisting social disparity that prevented some sort of people to profit from the so called legitimate business during the boom, created the perfect environment for the notorious risk business, bringing together "animals" such as Barry's characters, people from different backgrounds and lifestyles who found their ways to adapt in a changing country.

The risky business' centered life of two brothers in the western region of Ireland is the center of the plot in *White Hitachi*[106], by Kevin Barry. The narrative follows Patrick and Thomas John Mullaney, 36 and 17 years-old respectively, as they have to rely on a series of misdemeanors to go by their lives.

Barry's short story begins with Patrick Mullaney dealing with a couple of problems. First, he must get his van back after it was towed, so he can pick his brother, Tee-J, up from the juvenile detention unit. While he is dealing with that situation, he needs to be careful not to cross with Enya's father after this swore to kill Patrick for sleeping with his 15 year-old daughter – a fact that Patrick claimed to ignore at the time of their encounter that revolved around pizza and then sex inside the handicap toilet at a petrol station. The brothers' complicated lifestyle and their brushings with the law are presented in from the beginning of the narrative:

> Tee-J was officially due for release – he had served the full six months. . . . Teedge, Patrick usually called him, to the boy's annoyance. Teedge had done the six months after robbing an Isuzu Trooper that belonged to a guard's wife and driving it through three counties. He was followed all the while by the same guard until the guard hit a ditch. Was said that coming out of Elphin the Isuzu had clocked the third highest speed ever recorded in County Roscommon. Fucking legend, Tee-J, in Patrick's book, and barely seventeen. But there had to be an end to it.
>
> Patrick was himself thirty-six, if it's ages we're on about. Which should be enough to know better and which did not make him feel good about the fact that after

[106] Barry, Kevin. "White Hitachi". *Dark lies the island.* Greywolf Press, 2012, pp. 144-158.

> getting the van out of the clampers and avoiding Enya's father and springing (so to speak) Tee-J from the juvenile detention unit, he was going to have to call around to Doggie Mannion's place and offload three hundred and fifty-nine DVDs and a wire cutters. (Barry 145)

While walking to the car depot, trying to figure out how he was going to recover his van – being at least thirty euros short of the fee – Patrick tries to avoid the eyes of those in traffic, made up by "fuckers in pink shirts with big pink heads in their Saabs" (146) throwing coffee cups and chicken boxes out. His annoyance by this kind of people, their dress style, cars and consume habits represents, in some way, the cultural clash that arose during and after the Celtic Tiger period, in which the cities underwent noticeable changes in their paces and a more cosmopolitan lifestyle began to find its way even in traditionally secluded areas. They reveal, also, the social gap that was widened once the Celtic Tiger economy came into the scene. In *White Hitachi*, Patrick's attitude towards those people is an example of the social contrast between the wealthy, throwing disposable cups through the windows of their fancy cars, and people like the Mullaney brothers, living by one mischief after the other, with not enough money to get their van back. Patrick, however, knows that the Mullaney's lifestyle must come to an end:

> There were going to be some changes. He was determined that Patrick and Tee-J were on the straight and narrow from this day forward. Yes sir. There should be no more ferreting DVDs out of Enniskillen warehouses, no more county records in Isuzu Troopers, no more messing around in handicapped toilets with Enyas

> out of transition years. They had been through enough of the rough times. (Barry 146)

Patrick and Tee-J are the last few of the Mullaneys still around – parents, sisters, brother and other relatives already dead, and some of the others that remain living in prison or at an asylum. The brothers duo, at least apparently, were good at avoiding the same family fate, managing to get by on a series of contraventions, as the narrator describes the time when Patrick and Tee-J stayed at an executive apartment overlooking the River Shannon. Their period in that place, however, was a result of their unique survival skills:

> It was a golden period in their lives even if it wasn't their own apartment, technically speaking. He had gained access to it by the balcony. . . . All of the apartments at the complex were empty that season and they had a prize November there. . . . Of course it couldn't last and the Ukrainians had shown up with tyre irons soon enough. (147)

The idea that people could squat for a month at someone else's apartment without being caught is a by-product of the housing market boom that marked Ireland during and after the Celtic Tiger period, when the practice of owning multiple properties – some for vacation, some for pure investment – reignited a past phenomenon of having empty houses around the country. The motives that led these places to be unoccupied, however, could not be more different. In the past, an empty house would represent a family that had exhausted their chances of surviving in the country and was forced to

leave Ireland. In the present, the growing number of luxury properties spread around the island was the proof of ". . . an increase in materialism, individualism and selfishness in regard to people excluded from the general rise in standards of living . . ." (244) observed by Heather Ingman in *A history of the Irish short story*. In Barry's narrative, Patrick and Tee-J, excluded from the Celtic Tiger riches, have to resort, once again, to live out of the white Hitachi van when their time in the apartment was cut short by the security company that employed Ukrainians.

During winter, the pair drove around in search of places relatively safe where they could park their car to sleep. The narrative describes their route through some historic sites, where they found information on the hunter-gatherers that once occupied caves for shelter, but admitting that the notion of staying in caves was crazy, they resorted to a crustie[107] camp outside Manorhamilton, where they enjoyed the locals hospitality, sharing dried mushrooms with them, until things got "hairy" when Tee-J started to hallucinate with their dead mother's image in the back of the van and Patrick "took a wrong signal off one of the crustie women and dropped a hand that shouldn't have been dropped." (Barry 148). Fleeing from the confusion, they then headed east, where they did some work for a farmer that suffered from a shaking disease. That also did not last long, in part for Tee-J's reaction to their arrangement: "'What are we, blacks?'" (149). The young brother's remark unveils the racism that permeates the society, that came to see labor such as hammering fence posts as an inferior task, reserved to those people ranked lower in the social sphere. Patrick and Tee-J, however, are themselves members of an Irish class that is at the bottom of the social extract.

[107] According to *The New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English: A-I* (2006), crusty is a noun referring to a "young person who many years later embraces the counter-culture values of the late 1960s" (523).

Their car was truly their last resort, since the system bureaucracy worked, to some extent, to further exclude them, as exemplified by the narrator's reference to a governmental aid: "There was no rent allowance being given if you hadn't an address to claim it out of. The woman at the social said there was a caravan park in Sligo was taking temporaries all the year round if they were stuck." (Barry 149). Patrick's answer to that – "Do we look like tinkers to you?" – much like Tee-J's saying, quoted before, reinforced a culture of exclusion to which many social groups were exposed during Ireland's history.

Patrick's hopes to turn his and his brother's lives for the better, while he picks his brother up from the detention center in which he had spent the last six months after Patrick himself turned Tee-J in, fearing that the boy's recklessness would cause him to be killed in the end. Although their relationship was shaken up by this betrayal, it did not take long before Patrick and Tee-J were on speaking terms once again, driving towards Doggie Mannion's house to deal with the DVDs business for good and be free to start a clean life. Even though the brothers were used to rough dealings, the prospect of visiting Doggie "The Dog" Mannion made them sweat, as this one "was a large, half-bald, buttery kind of man with terrible nerves" (Barry 154). But, as Mannion was the only one reliable in the cash flow in the vicinity, Patrick and Tee-J find themselves with no other option than to deal with him, for what they were hoping to be the last time.

Yet, their expectations are frustrated right at the beginning of the meeting. Doggie is not interested in the DVD business anymore and insists the brothers hung out with him for a while. When they refuse, as politely as they could, it does not take long until Doggie's temper revealed itself. After his sudden outburst, which was followed by an apology, Patrick and Tee-J found themselves blindsided by Doggie's real plan:

‘We’ve a rush on, Dog.’

‘Ah I know’, said The Dog. ‘’Course my problem is I have no off-button. Are ye smellin’ that by the way?’

True enough there was the queerest smell in the place. To Patrick, it was like you’d get in a welder’s yard. Or maybe like a quick-dry foam-filler if you got it on your hands.

‘What’s it, Dog?’

Doggie winked.

‘I’m cookin’,’ he said.

‘Hah?’

‘Ye’re lookin’ at the cunt,’ he said, ‘who’s going to bring crystal methamphetamine to the Country Leitrim. And ye’re the boys’ll help me.’ (Barry 155-156)

Just like that, Patrick’s dream of a less complicated life is gone. He and an excited Tee-J boarded the van with the money that Doggie paid them for the DVDs plus seventy-seven rocks of meth to offload in a car park. Patrick suddenly could see his and Tee-J’s futures – once they got into the car, the boy instantly tried one of the rocks:

There was nothing good coming. . . . The guards would take badly to word about the crystal meth that was putting the hearts skaw-ways in the crowd bellow in Roxy’s. . . . His teeth were falling out. It was greyer he was after getting. There was the situation with the lack of a roof over their heads and the situation with all the chest pains and all the stress. Tee-J’s odds on staying out of scraps were

long. There was only the half-chance ever of finding some peace and rest. (Barry 158)

Barry's closing lines carry a terrifying reality that became more common to many people in Ireland in the recent decades. For people like the Mullaney brothers, used to some shady business to get by, there was no way out, only the furthering down of their involvement in the world of violence and law breaking. Much of it was a direct result of the inability of the State in securing an even distribution of the wealth that became the symbol of the Celtic Tiger era, or, at least, to tackle the growing problem of the drug dealing and consumption that became an unofficial mark that the times had changed and that Ireland is, for better or worse, just like any other place in the world.

In the opening lines of the analysis *Post-Celtic Tiger rural Ireland, internal exile and male identity in the fiction of Colin Barrett and Donal Ryan*[108]**,** Maeve Mulrennan refers to how rural Ireland became a subject of matter to writers such as Colin Barrett after the economic crash of 2008. For Mulrennan "the changing world has problematised the political, social and cultural bonds to the land" reflecting directly into the male identity represented through the characters that convey "an accurate reflection of the collective trauma and fallout of the 2008 economic crash". From Barrett's collection of short stories, *Young Skins*, published in 2013, *Calm with horses*[109] – a novella-length story in the middle of the collection – is the one that better portrays the single life experience drastically altered by violence.

[108] Mulrennan, Maeve. "Post-Celtic Tiger rural Ireland, internal exile and male identity in the fiction of Colin Barrett and Donal Ryan". *The Honest Ulsterman*, Feb. 2016, http://humag.co/features/post-celtic-tiger-rural-ireland-internal-exile-and-male-identity-in-the-fiction-of-colin-barrett-and-donal-ryan.

[109] Barrett, Colin. "Calm with horses". *Young Skins*. Black Cat, 2014, pp. 79-167.

The stereotypical vision of rural Ireland probably entails the image of vast green lands cut by narrow roads delimited by rock walls, an old man sporting a wool cap made famous by John Wayne in the 1952's movie *The quiet man*, leading some sheep back to a farm where a charming white cottage would sum up the perfect notion of an idyllic life. The thing with these constructions of a nation's identity is that they often proved to last only in the museums and gift shops. Much of the practices that were once solid had to reshape themselves in order to survive, but in doing so, they also open space to some unexpected consequences.

Particularly in the case of Ireland, once the country started to attract a massive number of foreign people – or even returning Irelanders that had gone abroad years before – and the cities became too crowded or too expensive to accommodate everyone, the countryside became the prime destination to the ones that were left behind on the split of the wealth or simply decided to skip the city hustle. Suddenly rural Ireland – which was left to fend for itself for so many years in terms of investment – had to cope with drastic changes in its shape and routine, with the clash between the past and the present often resulting in trouble.

Calm with horses portrays, from the very beginning, the violent scene that became the reality for many rural towns in Ireland. The story, set in the fictional Mayo town of Glanbeigh, starts with the narration of Arm, the main character of the narrative, waiting inside the "shitbox", a battered cranberry Corolla, while Dympna pays a visit to Fannigan to set some matters straight. While he sits inside the car with his earphones on, Arm observes two teen girls sitting on the wall, sharing a cigarette, probably skipping class without anyone to bother them. His attention is then disrupted when Dympna returns and orders:

‘Arm, get in there and beat the fuck out of that daft man.’

‘What about the mother? . . .

‘I put her in the bathroom. Fannigan agreed that was best, gave me a hand getting her in there. He’s waiting for you in the sitting room.’

‘Is he going to make it awkward, you reckon?’ . . .

‘You never know, but I don’t think so. He knows it’ll go easier if he just takes it.’

‘How easy should it go?’ Arm asked.

Dympna smiled wanly, ‘Well, don’t kill him.’ (Barrett 80-81)

The ease with which Dympna and Arm deal with the whole situation that implies a deliberate act of violence against Fannigan – who is himself in agreement with the arrangement – reveals how such brutal acts are engendered in the social practices. Barrett’s characters represent people who have learned to answer naturally to the sorting of quarrels with physical aggression.

The event that urged Fannigan’s penalty was that he had gotten completely drunk at one of Dympna’s house parties and “attempted to stick several parts of himself in” (82) Dympna’s fourteen year-old sister Charlie. The narrator describes how the Devers – Dympna, his mother and his seven sisters – were a “social breed” (82). They were known for hosting parties – to which he usually invited his crew – that easily lasted until the morning and often ended up with the guests sleeping on the couch or the floor “if they had drank, snorted or smoked away the wherewithal to get home in one piece.” (82). Blaming himself for what has happened to Charlie – “It’s myself I blame, . . . Letting uncivilized fucking animals like Fannigan past my front door.” (81) – Dympna felt the need to rectify his stance in the community and the honor of his younger sister, which ended leading him and Arm to Fannigan’s house the next morning to apply his

punishment. The people to which Dympna referred to as “fucking animals” were part of his crew in charge of selling drugs in the region:

> Dympna Devers was twenty-five, a year older than Arm. Dympna sold marijuana, fat green ziplocked bags of the stuff, all over the town. The town was small, and Dympna held a monopoly on such business. Fannigan was the eldest of the crew of five dealers currently in Dympna’s employ. Fannigan sold out of the industrial estate, where he worked evenings as a production-line stiff in the Allgen medical prosthetics plant. (Barrett 81)

Dympna’s line of work fictionalizes the actual demand for drugs that increased in Ireland during and after the Celtic Tiger period, as multiple analyses on the matter show. The euphoria that became a trademark of the economic boom era was translated in the increase of wealth for a good part of the population, but, at the same time, represented a drastic change in the pace and in the quality of people’s lives, as point out Colin Coulter and Steve Coleman in *The end of Irish history? Critical reflections on the Celtic Tiger*:

> In the last decade or so, the culture of work in a range of occupations has changed dramatically. It is the experience of many professionals that the pace and length of their working day have increased considerably. The stresses that arise out of these new work cultures have been among the factors that have led to spiralling levels of drug and alcohol abuse in the twenty-six counties. (68)

In *Calm with horses*, Barrett's narrator explicitly indicates the target audience of Dympna's operation: exhausted factory workers and school kids (Barrett 95), the first of the groups that became more prominent during the Irish economic boom, one of the reasons of the Dympna's success. His stance as the head of operations in the small town combined with his position as the man of his household forced him to make Fannigan an example of what could happen to someone who crossed him or his family. And Arm, as part of the business, was the person in charge of inflicting the "lesson damage" on those who wronged his friend and boss, since the law was naturally something that they would keep themselves outside of, due to the very nature of their dealings.

Arm and Dympna's relationship started ten years before, as the narrator reminisces the events that brought the boys together. Although enrolled in the same school, they belonged to different social circles and got to know each other at Saint Ignatius Athletic, a local boxing club where Arm fought. While Arm achieved, at least for a while, provincial distinction for his prowess in the sport, Dympna was "a porky, eager boy back then, keen to transmute his flab to muscle and learn how to throw a punch" (84). But Dympna was, at that age, clever enough to get by Arm's side, sparing with the best around, reviewing with him every combination of moves that Arm would inflict on him which lead Arm to conclude that Dympna was preparing himself for a violent future:

> Dympna viewed the beatings as instructional in nature, a mapping out, bruise by bruise, of the vulnerable regions of the body. Arm intuited that even at sixteen Dympna had plans, and that Dympna would need to understand the dynamics of pain, its infliction and its absorption, in order to effect those plans. What Dympna couldn't give a fuck for were the organized formalities and quaint codes of

> conduct that governed in-the-ring competition, and after he secured what he wanted – Arm, Arm's friendship – he persuaded Arm that he shouldn't either. (Barrett 85)

Through his relationship with Dympna, Arm's path suffered a drastic shift. Arm went from a prominent local figure in a very popular sports modality in Ireland to some sort of overseer in Dympna's organization. Arm was still valued for his physical aptitudes, but these were no longer applied to an established and celebrated sport and its rules, but to the inferior tasks of an executioner. By becoming Dympna's sidekick, Arm's identity was permanently altered, as the narrator describes:

> Dympna and Arm started smoking dope, lots and lots of dope, and Dympna, who had a connection through the uncles, started selling it. Arm lost his virginity to Lisa and additionally got his dick into Fatima and Christina, the twins. Dympna, who always deferred to the coven wisdom of his sisters, took their plural interest in Arm as a sign of clinching approbation, and brought Arm in permanently as his muscle. Arm's name was Douglas Armstrong, but every creature around knew him as Arm ever since Dympna christened him such. Arm was what Dympna threatened to sic on you if you dared cross him. *Don't make me put the Arm on you*, Dympna would say, though most of the time Arm was required to do little more than hover stone-faced behind Dympna's right shoulder. (86)

Barrett's narrative implies Douglas Armstrong's loss of identity as a person and his transformation into someone else's limb, as himself – and his family name – easily allowed Dympna's to take over his life. His willingness to be constantly at Dympna's

disposure was only interrupted by his role as a father to Jack, his five years-old son with Ursula Dory, a relationship determined by its own challenges as the narrative reveals:

> Arm had put the boy in Ursula's belly when she was just gone eighteen, and Jack and Ursula had lived here, with Ursula's ma and da, since he was born. Arm came round perhaps less than he should, but he found it wearying to be in a place where he would only ever be tolerated. Ursula's folks, entirely reasonably, Arm thought, hated him. They hated what he and Ursula's recklessness had thwarted, though they were helpless to do anything other than love the little boy. (Barrett 90-100)

The complicated nature of Arm's relationship with Jack, Ursula and her parents was not restricted solely to the fact that he got her pregnant at a young age or that they were no longer together. It was aggravated by Jack's special needs that presented themselves suddenly when the boy, at the age of two, stopped talking, something whose reason not even his doctors could diagnose or even know how long it would last. Jack lost his words, and his noises became the only outlets through which Arm and Ursula could read their son. Tantrums, even though rare, "came on abruptly and often without identifiable cause" and resulted in him becoming "violent, usually to himself, knocking his head against a wall, trying to kick through glass frames or wooden doors, mauling his own fingers until they bled" (92).

By recommendation of the county hospital psychiatrist, Jack went to therapy with horses in a small farm that received a state grant for allowing people – usually mentally or physically infirm – to interact with animals. In that place, the calm and composure that the boy showed in his interactions with those big animals amazed Ursula and Arm, used

to their son's fright of cats, dogs and every other creature "smaller and quicker and noisier than him" (Barrett 93). Jack's sort of indecipherable nature kept some resemblances to that of his father's. The young boy's oscillation between a hectic demeanor and at the same time his calm with horses could be compared to Arm's ability as a boxer, who became known for burying himself in the moment of fight and at the same time remaining clear-headed and relentless in the face of adversity.

Arm's strength and calm during stressful situations were the perfect mix that Dympna needed to succeed in his line of business, especially since he had to deal with his uncles, Hector and Paudi Devers, who were known for their explosive and suspicious personality, as the narrator portrays them:

> Hector and Paudi Devers were the younger brothers of Dympna's deceased father. They lived ten miles outside the town, on a secluded farm . . . where, in conjunction with their regular farmerly duties, they cultivated an especially fragrant and potent strain of marijuana. They grew hydroponically, in the permanent twilight of a temperature-controlled, UV-lit nursery built into the storage basement of a cattle shed. The operation was small but professionally appointed in scale, and the uncles produced enough weed to enable Dympna to service the appetite of every burned-out factory worker and delinquent school-kid within the town limits. Arm was cool to them. The uncles were necessary to Dympna's operation, but they were mercurial birds, easy to spook. Arm knew of at least two occasions inside the last couple of years where they had abruptly claimed they were going to give up growing, and Dympna had to beg and plead with them, and each time offer a bigger cut, to change their minds. (95)

Hector and Paudi's constant threat of interrupting their production – a clear strategy to bargain for a bigger cut of the business – was not the only problem that Dympna and Arm had. The young lads, who usually went once a month to the uncles' farm to load a fresh supply and pay their cut, found themselves unexpectedly summed by Hector, who they suspected would demand explanations on the attempted assault of Charlie, his young niece. Hector's mood on the phone – "Hector was awful itchy . . . Short and itchy, . . ." (Barrett 94) –, according to Dympna, was enough to put him and Arm on alert for the prospect of their meeting at the shady pool arcade Lally's. Once Arm and Dympna arrived at the agreed upon time, it did not take long until their suspicions were confirmed:

> 'I heard –' Hector began, . . . 'about this fella. What's his name?'
>
> 'Fannigan,' Dympna said.
>
> 'Fannigan. What he did to the young one.' . . .
>
> 'You heard about what he tried to do. She's okay. We're taking care of it. We have taken care of it, as a matter of fact.'
>
> 'Have you now?' Hector said.
>
> 'Yes,' Dympna said.
>
> 'I care about my family. About my brother's family. Me and Paudi both,' Hector raised an inclusive palm towards Dympna, then put out the other hand, like Paudi was right there, sitting beside him. . . .
>
> 'She's a child,' Hector said,' a child. What have you done about it?' . . .
>
> 'It's. Fucking. Handled,' Dympna said.
>
> 'Is it now?' A derisive whicker escaped Hector's nose. 'I don't know about that at all, and Paudi doesn't know about that. And your father, God bless him, would

never leave it end there, either. Retribution wouldn't have even begun, as far as he'd be concerned.' (Barrett 100-101)

The mood of the meeting escalated almost to the point of a confrontation of drastic proportions between uncle and nephew, with Hector implying part of the guilt of the entire episode on Dympna's failure on acting as a man should. After that, Dympna and Arm parted ways, and Arm decided to go to the horses' farm to check on his son. Once there, Rebecca, an American rider who worked at the premises, noticed Arm looking at the kids with different sorts of disability and approached him. Arm introduced himself as Jack's father, but their conversation was cut short when the whole scene of kids in wheelchairs, some drooling, others laughing, and the carers "frantically corralling the rest of the kids" (Barrett 104) led him to make a remark that immediately forced a harsh response from the American: "'This is some fucking zoo,' Arm said. 'You shouldn't be here,' the rider said to Arm, her smile fading,' these kids have a schedule.'" (105).

Trying to restore some kind of normality, later at night, Arm arrived at Quillinan's, a pub where Dympna's cousin Brandon's band was scheduled as the night's main event. There, Arm divides his attention between Dympna, clearly distressed after their meeting with Hector and determined to drink away his present frustrations, and the American rider, who Arm approached while her friends went to get more drinks. Once they started talking, it became clear how different they were. While Arm was a local, known to everybody, she had not a single relation in that town, having ended up there after she went to college in Dublin and then applied for the job at the farm. Arm seemed puzzled by her life choices and, as he tries to figure her out, he ended up being confronted by his own decisions:

‘How’s the money?’ Arm asked.

‘I do it for the love,’ she said.

‘And what do you do if the money’s cut?’

‘What will your boy do, is the question I’d ask if I were you,’ she said. ‘Me. I’ll be fine.’ . . . ‘The world’s a big place and you can go anywhere. And actually’ . . . ‘so could you. You were born and bred right here, am I right? What’s a guy in his prime do around here?’

‘I’m retired,’ Arm said. . . .

‘I used to box.’ . . .

‘There was a lot of conditioning, a routine you couldn’t skimp on. I lost my spring.’ . . .

‘You have to want to hurt people. That’s what the spring is. You have to keep wanting to hurt people.’ (Barrett 109-110)

Arm’s unexpected confession that he had lost the urge to hurt others is, in *Calm with horses*, the very contradiction in the character’s identity. When he was a boxer, a component of his craft was based on inflicting injuries on his opponents, not for the sake of violence itself, but as a part of the sport’s routine and always inside a sportsmanship’s conduct. His current occupation, however, imposes the constant threat of needing to be violent and the promise of hurting people. By admitting the loss of his spring, the loss of the desire to inflict pain on others, Arm is confronted by the harsh reality that his association with Dympna demands a struggle from the former boxer, and that is a matter on which Douglas Armstrong, much like his little boy, seems to suffer from an inexplicable loss for words.

The threat of an escalation of violence was palpable since Hector and Paudi displayed their discontent with how Dympna had dealt with his associate Fannigan. Later that night, a visibly inebriated Dympna interrupted the conversation between Arm and Rebecca, once again to discuss their situation with the uncles, occasion when Arm remembered how they were an essential part of the entire operation – "They supply, . . . if we don't have them we don't have nothing" – and Dympna concluded that they have no other way out, especially considering his uncles' temper:

> 'They won't let this Fannigan thing drop.'
>
> 'You think they'll carry through on it?' Arm said.
>
> 'I think they will. I think they'll lift him from the street and take him out there and feed him to their dogs. I think they don't give a fuck about anything after that, the shit storm that'll follow. They don't believe in the guards, jail, not really. Fuck, they barely believe in this town. They live out in the fucking wilds with the stones and the dogs and their guns and they think that's all there really is.' (Barrett 110-111)

The lack of respect or even some kind of faith in the law that is mentioned by Dympna implies the idea of a disconnection between that small rural Ireland and the rest of the country, a place where the old ways of defending a relative's honor is the task for the men of the family and failing to do so is to ultimately expose one's weakness. It reveals, to some extent, that this disdain for the socially agreed upon law and the country's official institutions is a payback for the State's failure in providing wealth equally among its citizens. As towns like the one in *Calm with horses* were left

behind during the economic boom, they owe the country nothing in the matter of complying with its laws, not even to benefit from bringing Charlie's case to the police.

In Barrett's narrative, fate determines that, in the end, Arm would be the one in charge of rectifying matters with Fannigan. After he left the pub, he decided to take a less conventional path, by the riverside, to go home and in it he unexpectedly bumped into an inebriated Fannigan, who clearly was caught by surprise. There and then, backed-up by Dympna's suspicions that the uncles would not give up in having things sorted out their way, Arm decided to take matters into his own hand, forcing himself to go against his nature and resorting to extreme violence in the hopes of avoiding everything to escalate to even worst heights. Quickly, he considered his options and started to make a move, hitting Fannigan and then asking him to undress. Although extreme, Arm understood his action as the most merciful one even to Fannigan, all things considered:

> He was beginning to get a grasp of the situation. Arm had invoked the uncles; Fannigan knew what that meant. The uncles, Dympna was right, Arm knew, they'd butcher Fannigan. They'd use him for sport, and take their time doing so. They'd feed his bones to their curs, and sooner or later decide that Dympna's show of leniency had demonstrated a dangerous weakness at this end of the operation. (Barrett 114)

Between Fannigan's pleas, Arm hit the man's head with a rock and after his frail naked body went to the ground, the former boxer pushed it into the water, later on arranging the deceased man's clothes on a rock so people would think the entire thing was a foolish accident caused by a drunk man's unfortunate decision to take a dive at

night that ended in him drowning. Arm's coldness while arranging all the details of his impromptu brutal act reveals his familiarity with violence, once an aspect of the sport in which he excelled, currently a side effect of his occupation related to the world of drugs. Having dealt with that, Arm calmly resumed his walk towards home, carrying the rock he used to hit Fannigan in his pocket to avoid leaving any possible evidence to the case.

The morning after Fannigan's incident, Arm woke up with the sound of his parents making breakfast in the kitchen. The narrative describes Maye and Trevor Armstrong, a schoolteacher and a delivery truck driver for a local bun factory, as singular people by the usual social standards. Arm was their only child, something unusual in an Irish catholic family, who was born later in his parents' lives, when they were forty-two and fifty years old. The relationship between parents and son, based on civility and mellowness and their refraining on prying on the life aspects that Arm kept from them is pointed out, in the narrative, as one of the reasons why Arm got to live his sort of life: "They saw Arm with Dympna and said nothing at all. It was their only real fault, this enduring inability to ever think the worst of their son." (Barrett 120). The sound of that domestic routine prompted Arm to think about Fannigan's old and frail mother, who did not know, yet, that she was alone in the world. The gloominess of such thought urged him to drink ". . . looking to snap himself out of such useless, malign sentiments." (120).

Arm's attempt to avoid thinking of Fannigan's mother reveals someone in distress with his life choices. Even though he is famous for threatening others by his mere physical presence, this is something which he struggles with. To further push down his feelings on the matter, Arm went to Ursula and Jack's house, but as they were not there, Arm went to the horse farm to meet with them. Once there, he was convinced by Rebecca to ride one of the horses, which ended up with the animal unexpectedly

galloping and almost dropping Arm to the ground. Shaken up by the whole experience, but still trying to get his mind off of the events from the middle of the night, he talked Ursula into letting him take Jack back home because he wanted to take the boy to eat a hamburger first. His plans to forget, however, are briefly disrupted by Dympna's call while Arm and Jack were walking towards the fast-food place. Dympna wanted to know when he could pick Arm up to solve some things, but Arm's silence on the phone quickly made him change his mind. Dympna's words on the phone were, however, enough to cause a major distress in Arm:

> 'You have grades of brooding silence, Arm,' Dympna said, 'I can tell I pissed you off, or else you already were. Either way I'm not adding to it. We both have enough shite on our plates.'
>
> 'And sometimes you have to eat it up,' Arm said.
>
> 'Exactly,' Dympna said. 'And speaking of which. Fannigan. Don't sweat on that.'
>
> 'I wasn't,' Arm said.
>
> 'The uncles we can bring round. We can get them to see what's best in the long run.'
>
> 'You didn't think so last night.'
>
> 'Ah, I was drunk. Letting fretfulness get the better of me,' Dympna said, like it was all nothing. (Barrett 127)

Dympna's call only generated more conflict to Arm, since his actions against Fannigan, which resulted from Dympna's vocalization of his worries about the uncles, were permanent, after all, Arm had dealt with the problem as he judged better suited to appease Hector and Paudi and to free Fannigan from a much worse punishment from

the uncles. After he dropped Jack back to Ursula's house, Arm was picked up by a clearly hungover Dympna, who had been summoned to the farm by Paudi, the scariest of the uncles, who was there alone while Hector was spending some time over his girlfriend's home. During the ride, Dympna revealed his suspicions that the uncles were making a big deal about Charlie's case not because their zeal for the family, but because they were looking for a way to bargain for more money on the operation, and he finally asked Arm for something unusual: the boxer was to go inside the house with him, to ". . . sit there and be . . . intimidating." (Barrett 131). The request caused surprise in Arm, who normally remained seated inside the car while Dympna dealt with the uncles.

Arm escorting Dympna inside the house caused even bigger surprise in Paudi, who from the very beginning externalized his suspicions on the former boxer's presence being there as a threat. Quickly enough, Paudi started to ask questions about Fannigan, trying to imply weakness from Dympna in solving the whole case. In an attempt to mitigate the situation and put an end to the entire matter, Arm revealed that he had, in fact, killed Fannigan, handing Paudi the stone which he used to hit him in the head. It took some time until Paudi and a much surprised Dympna – who up to that point had no knowledge of Arm's actions the night before – reacted, but finally Dympna and Arm were confronted when Paudi answered what he understood as a threat by suddenly throwing the rock right at Arm's face.

Paudi's temper was impossible to appease and led him to point a gun at Dympna and Arm to get them out of the house. Outside the house, Dympna tried to reason with his delusional uncle while Arm assessed the situation. They were both too far from the car to escape unharmed, Dympna being at an arm's length from his uncle with the gun. The three of them remained silent until Dympna decided to call Paudi's bluff by putting

his hand over the barrel. At that moment, with blood dripping from his face, Arm heard the thunderous sound of the gun being fired, Dympna on his knees with part of his arm gone, and recognized that the only thing he could do was to make a move towards the car and try to flee the deranged uncle. Badly hurt himself, Arm decided to be sure that he had managed to leave Paudi behind, but soon enough he began to review the whole chaotic scene:

> Arm tried to assess the situation, but what was there to assess? Things had got fucked, precipitously and in multiple ways, and for little reason. Arm had come to this place with Dympna. Arm and Dympna had entered Paudi's house. Arm had informed Paudi he had done away with someone Paudi and his brother asserted they wanted done away with, and Paudi had interpreted this as what? A dry-run for what he thought Arm and Dympna were about to do to him? The paranoid fucks. It was always going to come asunder like this. (Barrett 142)

The way that the events escalated made Arm look for refuge at the horse farm, which he knew would be empty at that hour so he could tend to his injuries and think about his next steps without raising any suspicion. Once there, he found his way inside the staff room, where he got some food, a small amount of money that Rebecca left on her table and an army coat which he used to cover himself. Arm inspected his back, which was drenched in blood and perforated by a scatter of small holes, decided to close his eyes for a few minutes and, before he was out, went to the horse's stables. As he could not shake off the guilt for leaving Dympna behind and started to be haunted by him, his seven sisters and his mother, who were used to see their men going away, he

decided to go after Hector who would be at his girlfriend's house in Ballintober, in the hopes of rectifying at least a little bit of the situation.

Once in there, outside the house whose address he found out after asking at a local pub, Arm takes a moment to call Ursula before he goes to confront Hector. Ursula shows her surprise with Arm's unusual behavior, which he justified as a result of the frightened situation with the horse that she witnessed earlier on. It did not take long for the reader to assume that Arm is saying his goodbyes, because he is preparing himself to go on a path from where there would be no way back:

> 'Look,' Arm said, 'I'm sorry I haven't been around.'
>
> 'You're never out of my hair,' Ursula singsonged.
>
> 'In a useful way,' Arm said. 'You deserved better.'
>
> 'Everyone deserves better, Douglas,' Ursula snapped, her voice tuned to a clear low. . . .
>
> 'Maybe it'd be better the other way altogether, so.'
>
> Arm heard her sigh. 'What's that mean?' she said.
>
> 'Nothing. Look. I'll leave you to it,' Arm said in a thick, drowned voice. He sounded faraway, even to himself. (Barrett 150)

The final call to his son's mother was the confirmation that Douglas Armstrong knew that his destiny was sealed. Soon after that, Arm grabbed a hammer that he and Dympna carried in a toolbox and knocked at the door, which was answered by Hector. A puzzled Hector tried to reason with Arm, urging him to go to another place not to disturb Maire, his girlfriend, but was forced to deal with the young man's presence inside the house. While a completely oblivious Maire Mirkin was fixing the three of them

a drink, Arm disclosed Paudi's reaction to their visit, which probably resulted in Dympna's being dead and Paudi fleeing the scene or killing himself to avoid justice. When Hector tried to confront the injured man, he gave up pretending and demanded Maire to show him her money – Arm and Dympna had always suspected that was the only reason why Hector would be with someone. Hector tried to jump on him, which led Arm to drop him on the floor and hammer the back of his hand, leaving him there screaming while he and Maire went after the money. Even though Arm arrived that night and was responsible for causing distress, Maire could see through him, trying to reason with the strange, injured boy who had suddenly appeared at her home:

> 'And this money,' she said. 'If I give it to you it will make something right? It will stop all this?'
>
> Arm thought again of the moment to come, standing in the Devers' house, facing the scrutiny of June and Lisa and Charlie and the others, admitting to Dympna's fate and his abandonment of him. Something had to be done, one way or the other; something had to be done that Arm could stand to call reparation.
>
> 'It will help,' he said. . . .
>
> 'This isn't you,' she said. 'It's a path you've ended up on, but it's not you.' (Barrett 160-161)

Arm's identity was determined, even if by a series of unfortunate events, by violence, which, as the character Maire points out, did not determine who a person is, but ended up sealing his fate and favoring the emergence of an unwelcome brutality in his life. Even though Douglas Armstrong is responsible for a murder in *Calm with horses*, this event is not the most important aspect in the narrative, as Mulrennan

identifies in her analysis of Barrett's short-story highlighting that "what is most striking is not the murder in this story, but how the author utilises this plot point to unpeel and develop the main character Arm." (Mulrennan 2016). Maire Mirkin, Arm's parents, as well as the American rider Rebecca, recognized Arm as a good person, a victim of the circumstances, of the paralysis that life in such places can be known for. He might have had a different fate had he chosen to keep on boxing, or just leaving that place to experience the world, but by remaining over there, in his inner exile, he made himself voiceless and subjected himself to a problematic life around drugs and violence. Finally, when he got hold of Maire's money, which were useless Irish pound notes that her late mother kept in a tin – a nod to the exclusion of the rural Ireland from the transformations that marked the rest of the country –, he was confronted by the harsh reality that in fact nothing good would come from the situation.

After trying to convince Arm that he should lie and rest for a while, Maire is forced to drive him back to his town. Seeing that his health is deteriorating faster, she urges him to let her bring him to a hospital, which he refuses. This reminded her of her late brother who used to tame wild horses and unnecessarily died after one of them had fallen on top of him but was too stubborn to ask for help. The image of Arm's dead body inside the car in the last line of the narrative forces the reader's reflection on Arm's life and how it was lived, as Maeve Mulrennan suggests (2016). Barrett's narrative, still according to Mulrennan, brings forth the drama of the ones who decided to stay, to live in a small rural town and to deny what the author himself describes as a vital part of the Irish psyche that is to emigrate.

The fictional Glanbeigh is an example of the hardships of a life in the countryside, a place that once was idealized by Irish national heroes as the place that would better represent the country's identity, but was left behind when politics and economics turned

themselves solely to urban centers and their power to attract international companies. The paralysis that Joyce once sought to portray in *Dubliners* is hanging, again, in the air as a facet of a small rural town who got used to accept some problems that have always been there, like shortage of work (or new work) opportunities or the exhausting working hours that provided an open field to the drugs business and the violence that came with it, matters that became even more apparent during the economic boom and the widening of the social gap, and them again with the crisis of the Celtic Tiger.

There is a debatable yet valuable relation between drugs and one's identity. Generally, people involved with drugs – whether they be dealers or users – are labelled for the criminal behaviour that they might reproduce. Usually, to be in the drug business is to have his/her identity limited to that single aspect. Suddenly, all the other traits that compose a person's self are simply put aside.

There is no doubt that drugs are a growing problem in the society, especially because of the role that they have been playing in the economy, generating huge amounts of money, albeit illegal. For those who are put at the fringes of society, the dealing of drugs can be a profitable market; for those who are plagued by their own demons, the usage of drugs can be a scape. The short stories selected for this chapter share this common thread, for they tackle the issue of drugs in the Irish society by involving character from different backgrounds trying to get by through and despite the drug business.

In those stories, violence is not always the second nature of the characters, although they might share an unstable and violence prone environment. They offer the reader the pictures of the identities defined by drugs: brothers trying to get a fresh start while aware of their few options, fathers facing the hardships distance from their children, people in the streets running away from abusive homes and failed institutions,

young people in the countryside supplying the needs of burned out factory workers, while tending for their families and their special needs. Through these characters, a clearer landscape of the post Celtic Tiger period is offered, a scenery that shows how the country adapted itself for a fast pace lifestyle, but yet struggled to guarantee any sort of fair division among its people (which, of course, is a trend of liberal economies). There is a clear resentment, in some of the stories, for the others, people that benefited from the economy boom, driving their fancy cars and dressing in a different fashion, while the situation for many others remained the same – or became even worst.

The question revolving around drugs, in the stories here presented, is an important aspect of people's life, but, as important as it is, it is not the only thing that matter, for the character involved in the world of drugs are, themselves, Irish people, coping with their private issues and with the imposition of the changing times.

8 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In many cultures, literature succeeded in contributing to the shaping of the country's identity. It is easy to find evidences of this affirmation, for instance, in the works of José de Alencar and the representation of Brazil's indigenous people through Iracema and Peri, or at the Lady Augusta Gregory's collection and translation of *Cu Chullainn* myths – a character who, in various occasions, "provided a symbol of masculinity for Celts, who had been written off as feminine by their master" (25), as Declan Kiberd remembers in *Inventing Ireland: the literature of the modern nation*. Alencar and Lady Gregory's works have in common the return to bygone times[110] in search of symbols that can translate the circumstances in which an identity was forged and, at the same time, represent the ideals chosen to portray the people from their present. Even though fictional, literature is frequently taken as a source of information, as the basis for the understanding of someone else's culture and the official outlet for the promotion of the sanctioned national type.

The Irish people's efforts to establish themselves as a sole entity, politically and ideologically separated from the domaining order that was the British empire for so long, is well recorded in their national literature. During a considerable period, literature was the only possible channel through which the values and ideals of free Ireland, at that time a colony, could be embodied. The responsibility of the writer in this context is quite different from the one that is delegated to the same class in a free state, where literature is one of the social institutions, the others being the law, the government, the army and

[110] José de Alencar's *O Guarani* was first published in 1857. Its narrative is set in 1604. The narrative of *Iracema*, first published in 1865, is set between 1603 and 1611). Lady Augusta Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne: The Story of the Men of the Red Branch of Ulster*, first published in 1902, presents legends from the *Ulster Cycle* (around or before the 1st century AD) based on previous oral and written versions.

more, on which to project the values the nation admires, as recalls Kiberd (118). One can only imagine that, in some ways, the contemporary Irish writer might have it easier when it comes to his/her role in the social and political scene if there is a consensus on what makes the national identity; the author may be freer to exploit different agendas in his/her writings, the sense of duty to the country might be lessened by the very condition of freedom. Instead of focusing on the establishment of a national identity, literature can exploit the many senses of self that end up, knowingly or not, recording the world around the writer. It is not as if suddenly the national issues simply stopped to matter, but it is more of a question of having other issues to deal with.

Historically, a great deal of the Irish literary production was in charge of assuring a clear separation between its national culture and the British one, which, in many occasions, could be difficult. In *Guests of the Nation*[111] by Frank O'Connor, for instance, the questions that revolve around the "we – Irish" and "they – British" result in an internal crisis by an Irish soldier, who got used to the presence of two Englishmen whom he was supposed to guard, and suddenly is caught by surprise when a superior officer reminds him that the pair was taken as hostages, and that they were to be executed if the Irishmen that were being held by the British troops were harmed. O'Connor masterfully creates this sense of troubling by the Irish soldier who observes with some oddness 'Awkins and Belcher's sense of familiarity in Irish lands:

> 'Awkins told me he learned to dance "The Walls of Limerick" and "The Siege of Ennis" and "The Waves of Tory" in a night or two, though naturally he could not

[111] O'Connor, Frank. "Guests of the Nation". *Collected Stories*. Kindle ed., Open Road, 2014, pp. 3-12.

return the compliment, because our lads at that time did not dance foreign dances on principle.

So whatever privileges and favors Belcher and 'Awkins had with the Second they duly took with us, and after the first evening we gave up all pretense of keeping a close eye on their behavior. Not that they could have got far, for they had a notable accent and wore khaki tunics and overcoats with civilian pants and boots. But it's my belief they never had an idea of escaping and were quite contented with their lot. (O'Connor 3-4)

The accent and the clothing being the more pronounced differentiation between the Englishmen and the rest of the Irish people is, somehow, Frank O'Connor's node to the fragility of the elements upon which an identity is, so many times, forged. The fact that 'Awkins learned to dance traditional Irish songs but the Irish lads refused to learn his "foreign" dances on principle reveal the different perspectives from the point of view of the domineering and the dominated. When Jeremiah Donovan comes with the news that the English pair is to be executed as an answer to the shooting of four Irish prisoners by the British troops, it gets more difficult to the main character to justify the need of such doing, even though he is willing to follow his orders:

Why should we want to shoot him? What had he done to us? Weren't we chums (the word lingers painfully in my memory)? Weren't we? Didn't we understand him and didn't he understand us? Did either of us imagine for an instant that he'd shoot us for all the so-and-so brigadiers in the so-and-so British Army? By this time I began to perceive in the dusk the desolate edges of the bog that was to be

> their last earthly bed, and, so great a sadness overtook my mind, I could not answer him. (O'Connor 9)

Guests of the Nation depicts the frailty of some of the components that make up one's identity, especially when this is instituted as an exercise of otherness. While the main character in the narrative sees the Englishmen pair as "guests' who have been enjoying the Irish hospitality and being themselves friendly and open to the local culture, characters like Donovan reflect the resistance to the idea of considering such a position for 'Awkins and Belcher for, even though they shared a language, they would always represent the invasion and oppression to which Ireland was subjected for many years.

Frank O'Connor's short story is a sound example of how the Irish literature dealt with the issues revolving around the statement of a single Irish identity to set them apart from the British at its core. Such a task, however, often reflects the real struggle that is to claim national identities based on fixed formations, when real life confronts us with the impossibility of such a clear differentiation between people, specially when the other that one wants to set oneself apart from is embedded in the local culture, as history shows it was the case with the British, the Irish and the Anglo-Irish. Having past this matter and entering an age of unexpected prosperity, the contemporary short story of Ireland still offers an insight on identity, but, this time, the elements that are considered in it are not the historical dispute with the English, but, as Heather Ingman remembers, "the huge changes brought about in Irish society by the Celtic Tiger, such as the breakdown of the family unit, the questioning of traditional forms of Irish nationalism and the declining influence of the Catholic church" (Ingman 227).

Once again, in its contemporary production, literature takes upon itself to tackle the question of identity, this time not dealing with the setting of a national definition, but

depicting the multiple identities that coexist in the land and that so drastically reshaped Ireland. This thesis focused especially in the so-called marginalized identities, the outcast from the Celtic Tiger riches who, despite the euphoric rise of the country's wealth, were set aside or left behind, losing their homes, sometimes recurring to addiction or violence as a way to survive, or, even though they were essential to the structure of development, – as the immigrants – their stance in society was based on the premise that they were replaceable, inferior, and more often than not a threat to the native when things got sour in the economy.

The works analyzed in this research were selected for their capacity of reflecting their present environment, as Ingman pointed out, that characteristic of the short-stories of keeping themselves abreast of current social trends and anticipating themes that would take five years or more to make an appearance in other genres (225-226). Again, it is important to establish that the basis for the understanding of mimesis derives from what Antoine Compagnon describes as the "cognitive active taking form from the experience of time, configuration, synthesis, dynamic praxis, which, instead of imitating, produces what it represents, augments common meaning and issues in recognition" (96). The French scholar states that the mimetic learning is linked to the recognition of what is built in the work and experienced by the reader highlighting Paul Ricoeur's definition of the narrative as our way of living in the world, which "represents our practical knowledge of the world and involves the communal work of construction of an intelligible world." (96). The issues observed in the literature were a reflection of my own experience with Ireland, a country that at the same time offered me exceptional conditions both times I was there, but could not hide the battles it was facing on a daily basis. The rise of violence and the escalade of drug problems in the country could be witnessed on every other newspaper, or on the streets, at the quays by the Liffey, as

well as the conflicts with the presence of immigrants and non-nationals who were supposedly guilty of stealing jobs from the Irish and of forcing their own culture in the country. And maybe the most scandalous of all the effects of the Celtic Tiger period was the rise of homelessness in the country. It was, for me, personally, a perplexing evidence that the decade that had the house market boom as one of its biggest marks, failed in providing a minimum of parity to all the citizens.

Ireland cannot be found solely guilty of those problems, as they are a cruel reflection of neoliberal agendas that are trending in a globalized world that is often facing downfalls in the economy. Few places can take pride, nowadays, of offering all their citizens the social conditions to thrive. In Ireland's case, however, the fact that the country experienced such drastic economic and social transformations in the last decade makes even more visible the disparity between the wealthy and the disfranchised.

This thesis is a result of the crossing between the social crises that currently are trending in Ireland and the practically immediate answer to them in the form of the country's literary production, with the problems of the real world being transposed to the fictional scene as a reflection of the urgency of these matters in society. As György Lukács points out, in *Marxismo e teoria da literatura*[112] (Marxism and Literary Theory), literature has an immense power for, in it, a man appears without mediation, in the entire glory of his interior and exterior lives, and because of that literature can represent the contrasts, struggles and conflicts of the social life (80). My personal experiences in the country helped me be aware of the importance of matters such as homelessness, drug/violence, and immigrants/xenophobia once I began to find them registered in the

[112] Lukács, György. *Marxismo e teoria da literatura*, translated by Carlos Nelson Coutinho. Expressão Popular, 2010.

country's contemporary short story production, as a live record of Ireland's transformation.

One of the themes chosen in this thesis is prompted by the duality that resides in the core of the Celtic Tiger's transformations: the house market boom and the homelessness crisis. A quick stroll through every major city in the country is enough to reveal the impact of this duality in the shape of modern and bigger constructions – many of which are being offered for rent/sale – and the absurd number of people crouching by the sidewalks with the few possessions they have left and cardboards pleading for help. If these evidences are not enough, it will be hardly impossible to ignore the matter in the newspaper who presented headlines such as *The Irish Times*' "Dublin house prices more than nine times the average salary - Capital's housing market may have reached 'peak affordability' as median prices rise to €370,000", on April 13th 2019, *The Irish Post*'s "Homeless figures hit record high of more than 10,305 – with almost 4,000 children now destitute in Ireland" on May 1st 2019, or the *Irish Mirror*'s "One-third of people have 'nothing left' after paying rent, Cork homelessness charity warns" on July 4th 2019. What all these pieces have in common, aside from the obvious theme of homelessness, is that they all point out to the lack of public policies to deal with the escalating problem and the action of charity organizations as the last and most of the times only resort.

Looking at the stars – an anthology in aid of the Dublin Simon Community was vital to this thesis, for it gave the chance to explore how the theme of homelessness is impacting the Irish scene. The book, which presented fictional and non-fictional pieces, clearly intended to tackle the homelessness crisis at its core, in the attempt to gather funds to help those in need. More than that, as this thesis expects to have revealed, it offered a different perspective of the identities that make up this growing class of

people, usually thought out to be addicts and lowlifes who are morally unsuitable for society. This premise is contested in stories such as *Counting Bridges*, when the reader is offered a glimpse into the routine of a man living on the streets, wanting for any sort of human interaction, witnessing the world around him growing colder and more ruthless, where faith and other values are quickly being replaced with banks, hotels and the worship of money. While wandering on the streets, counting bridges and places to pass the time, the narrative discloses the daunting reality of this man's past as a so called normal person who owned a job, had relationships and was a valued part in the fabric of society. The events that led to this radical change in life are not presented, but they are of minimum importance when one considers, among the possible scenarios that prompted him to homelessness, that he had found himself victim of the economic crash, as it is the reality for so many people.

In *Dragonfly*, for instance, the impact of the change in his life is so absurd that led a man to suicide, for it became impossible for him to continue living surrounded by success as he became an example of failure. The notion of an older man, who used to be a valuable component in his community, who went from being happily married and well employed to sleeping on park benches, puzzles the main character in the narrative, who tries to make sense of what could have urged such a person to commit such an extreme act on a beautiful day. The suicidal man in *Dragonfly* represents the reality of so many that found themselves destitute of home and self-worth, as the report from the Simon Community Dublin's *Opening the Door to Hope* reveals. In it, the organization presents the startling data of almost 65% of homeless attempted suicide and, as far as the clinical symptoms reported by those people, shame (100%), feeling a burden to others (76,92%) and interpersonal relations (100%) all were indicated as determinant facts (23). Jaki McCarrick puts at the center of her narrative a man that was led himself

to the edge, whose suffering was too much to handle when contrasted against the world around him, even if his predicaments might be taken into consideration by an outsider. The author collaborates to undo the stereotype of the vagabond homeless who may have contributed to their fate by casting a little light upon a different identity that, in many points, can resonate with anyone who have loved, lost and ultimately found it difficult coping with all these feelings.

Literary works are able to echo the real challenges of a society, even when they only tackle them as a way of composing the background. Lukács highlights the capacity of the representation of real men in real social conflicts to constitute a spark of rebellion against the dominant system (86). In the case of contemporary short story production this perspective can be observed in practically every piece of writing analyzed it this thesis. Even when the narrative does not revolve exactly around such social conflicts, there is no doubt, yet, that it cannot ignore how urgent they are in society, how they affect the country's culture. Stories such as *Detached*, by Donal Ryan, echo the drama of many Irish families that saw the loss of their homes as the result of economic policies that were put in place during the boom years and went to the rescue of the banking system once the economy crashed.

The crisis of a family that has to resort to social housing at a hotel because their home was repossessed by an American bank whose slogan is "the family bank" is the ironic literary nod to politicians who failed to protect the country's biggest asset, its people, in favor of a neoliberal agenda that proved to be as fickle as it was unreliable. The main character's fear, in the narrative, is of losing yet the government aid that is temporarily granting his family a roof over their heads – although not a house, the hotel room is still a far better option than the streets. Nevertheless, his suspicion is well justified, as the government made clear through its actions how unreliable it could be,

as it is referenced also in *Census*, by Madeleine D'Arcy, when the government seems to work against its citizens, by forcing a young boy to sleep rough and squat in an empty house when bureaucracy prevents him from securing social aid for being under 18.

Literature compels the reader to look pass preconceived notions on homelessness by revealing unexpected identities that are, in many aspects, a lot like us, to not avert our eyes as the people and politics in *River thoughts* do when it comes to the people struggling to survive on the margins of the Liffey, completely at the mercy of God and the saints. Reading can be, in this sense, an exercise of empathy that can urge us, if not to act, at least to recognize the problems in our society, even when they do not relate directly to us.

All the stories regarding homelessness analyzed in this thesis present Irish citizens at the center of the plot, people who came from different paths of life, even when some of the preconceived notions about homeless people are about the idea of lowlifes and non-nationals who beg on the streets, who have fled their countries of origin and are probably too unqualified for work or only suitable for undesirable positions. In the case of immigrants in Ireland, they can be considered an important aspect on how profound the demographic transformation prompted by the Celtic Tiger was.

This thesis repeatedly mentioned the impact that the growing economy from that period had in the return of Irish nationals, who had emigrated from the country years before for the lack of opportunities. However, as the demand for workforce of the economic boom was not fulfilled yet, the country saw its businesses attracting large numbers of foreign people, who rejoiced at the idea of profiting from the Irish wealth. Those people found open policies to settle in Ireland, and that they did, in great

numbers, bringing with them their native cultures that began to change the landscape in every part of the country. In a short span of time, however, the general mood on immigration suffered a drastic shift, backed by governmental policies – for instance, while in 1998 a motion stating that *Sinn Fein* would work for the achievement of the optimum position of no restriction on immigration into Ireland passed unanimously, in 2004 a referendum was held to amend the constitution in relation to birth-right citizenship, according to the report *Overview of Mass-Immigration in Ireland: Part I – The Tiger Years* from The National Party. What both maneuvers reflect is the view towards immigration. The welcoming attitude of the first years, when economy was thriving suddenly was replaced with a more exclusionary stance by some of the nationals, that began to reveal their worries on sharing their wealth, especially when the crisis hit the country, and on the impact of the integration of foreign cultures in the Irish identity, for a long time summed up by the notion of a white Catholic profile.

The clash heightened by the multiple identities that were suddenly shaping Ireland is portrayed in the contemporary short story production of the country, either by the actions of characters such as Tommy, in *The summer of birds*, who vocalizes his hatred and discontentment towards foreign people and pressures a child into reproducing the same attitude. Gerard Donovan's narrative leaves it up to the young girl to reveal the discomfort and displacement that another child and his people are feeling, offering the reader a perspective that is frequently ignored. Donovan's short story is the only one that reflects, even if just a little, the suffering of the immigrants on Irish soil, their desire of being somewhere else.

In stories like *Ernestine and Kit*, *The receptionist* and *Fjord of Killary* it is up to some of the characters to voice out the xenophobic remarks that unfortunately are not confined to the fictional sphere. The old lady duo, Ernestine and Kit, are quick to offer

their remarks on the disgust that the foreign appearance provokes in them and how the miscegenation of the Irish with them is responsible for weakening the race. The presumption of a so-called superiority of the Irish race can also be identified in the acts of the main character in *The receptionist*, a man coping with his failed marriage who unburdens his irritation in the form of hatred for the foreign receptionist of a shabby hotel. In *Fjord of Killary* the Belarusian employees of a frustrated hotel owner are the target of Vivien Harty's foul comment on how they are wrongly benefiting from Ireland's efforts, stealing jobs and aggravating the country's crisis, even though they were filling positions that the locals hardly wanted and getting paid minimum wage for them.

Whether they are welcomed with open arms or treated as a threat to the culture and economy of the country, there is no denying that immigrants are an important group who is forcing the redefinition of governmental policies and changing the landscape of what was thought before as a homogeneous society. The reference of a Chinese owned take out in a small country village in *Ideal homes* is evidence of the extent to which the matter has achieved, and how foreign habits, foods and languages are intermingling with the Irish ones, in a true exercise of hybridism, even when places like these lacked the minimum preparation from their authorities to deal with such drastic alterations.

The Celtic Tiger era has become known for breaking historical cycles of mass emigration, unemployment, and poverty in Ireland, making success a synonym of the country. All of these, however, happened in such a short period and at such a high speed that they inevitably ended up leaving some people behind or failing to prepare its citizens to cope with the transformations that the country went through. In this thesis, it was presented how the lack of any major governmental support or legislation relegated many to homelessness and discrimination, and how these were transposed to Irish short stories. Another theme that was selected for this analysis, for its recurrence in the

contemporary literary production, has to do with the deteriorating quality of life related to trade in drugs and the rise of violence in the Celtic Tiger Ireland.

The historically closed country, which was accustomed to a strict control of the Catholic Church, saw the vanishing of its borders and an instant connection to the rest of the world, especially once the country joined the EU. In the chapter *Best of times?*, from the thesis *Celtic Tiger in Collapse: Explaining the Weaknesses of the Irish Model*[113], Peadar Kirby argues on how Ireland embraced one of the darkest sides of globalization by its greater integration into global flows of illegal trades of drugs and firearms (67). This phenomenon can be clearly observed in the writings presented in this thesis, which portray the drama of people from different backgrounds and their relations to a world of drugs and violence which has spread even to remote areas of the country.

The reality of drug users by the quays of Dublin – which unfortunately has become a common sight for a while – is depicted in *There are little kingdoms*, where the frailty of this group of people is revealed as most of the people pass them by and the only person who seems to perceive them is the main character who, throughout the narrative, deals with the apparitions of dead acquaintances. Kevin Barry's description of their clothes, unsuitable for the harsh weather, and the reference to that kind of people as the "foul and forgotten" seems to set the tone of how society deals with the problem, turning a blind eye to the matter as long as it does not disturb them on a personal level.

In *The girls and the dogs* a tense and violent atmosphere sets the tone for the entire narrative that revolves around a young man running after his involvement with

[113] Kirby, Peadar. "Best of times?". *Celtic Tiger in Collapse: Explaining the Weaknesses of the Irish Model.* 2nd ed., Palgrave MacMillan, 2010, pp. 50-68.

drugs forced him to run from the police. As he seeks refuge with Evan the Head – a violent drug dealer –, two girls, their children and some dogs in a decaying farmhouse, Barry portrays the rupture with the idyllic notion of the countryside and the harsh reality of a space that has been left behind while the country went modern and global. The sort of forgotten and secluded place is ideal for Evan's lifestyle, his unconventional relationship with both sisters Elsie and Suze, and his profitable dealings with drugs brought from overseas, for the abandoned site offers them with the perfect location to act as they want, free to satisfy their wants and to disregard any law.

The vicious circle that is a life outside the law, where the person is trapped and subjected to shady business as the world around him thrives is disclosed in *White Hitachi* through Patrick and Tee-J Mullaney's efforts to get by selling counterfeit DVDs, breaking in empty summer flats to sleep or sleeping in the car, making an effort to further themselves apart from an outlaw world, only to find out that there will be no escape once they are forced by Doggie Manion to sell the meth that he has been cooking on his recently built house. Kevin Barry's story opposes the brothers' harsh reality of living off their car with the changes brought by the Celtic Tiger in the form of entire buildings that are empty for they are only used for vacation, people driving fancy cars and drinking coffee without a care in the world.

Some narratives exploited in this thesis reflect how entire places were left behind from all economic changes that marked the Celtic Tiger period but were, at the same time, impacted by the transformations that were triggered by the massive shift that Ireland went through. As it was mentioned before, Ireland has had, in its history, a special look over its countryside, being this place idealized by political figures as the representative of the ideal and conducts that Ireland should aspire for. Most of these ideals were centered at the notion of the family as the basis of society, the agricultural

production at the center of the Irish economy and having the Church and the Law as the two pillars to sustain the community. In the analysis of *Calm with horses* this rural idyllic scenery is contested to give space to the violent practices of a society that is reflecting the lack of support from its government to deal with the transformations that affect the place, where violence is the norm, the proper law is disregarded by the people and in which drugs met an avid target audience made up by burned-out factory workers. Arm, the main character of Colin Barrett's narrative, leads the reader into finding out the multi-layered rural Ireland, post Celtic Tiger, by being trapped in a place plagued by some sort of Joycean paralysis. The value of Arm, father to a young autistic boy, a former boxer who enjoyed good prospects of a career in the sport, until he started to get involved with Dympna and, indirectly, with Dympna's uncles who grew the marijuana that Dympna sells, reveals to be nothing, when his own slow death at the end of the narrative seems to be for nothing. Barrett's story plays with the notion of an old Ireland that is gone – much as the Irish pound notes that the main character finds when he goes in search for some compensation for Dympna's family –, a place where Arm is trapped, renouncing the urge to emigrate that many times is associated to the Irish identity.

While in *Calm with horses*, the issue around drugs is derived from the lack of opportunities to the forgotten rural Ireland and its people, in *Eulogy*, drugs and alcohol are the escape for a girl who chose to live on the streets after she suffered the consequences of the actions from the State. While giving the eulogy at her older sister's wake, the main character reveals how different were the paths to both girls, when they were separated after Tara, the older sister burned their family home to free her and her sister from an abusive father. While the narrator goes to live with an aunt, Tara was sent to a reformatory, a place where she was introduced to the cold shoulder of a system

that alienated her and made her prefer the cold and lonely streets than any alternative of governmental aid. The placing of Tara's death 200 meters from the *Dáil Éireann* can be seen as Nuala O'Connor's denunciation of the government's failure on its people.

The common thread in the 15 stories analyzed in this thesis can be found in the idea that all of them verse about the lack of public policies to allow the minimum conditions of success to the different identities that emerged during the Celtic Tiger period. There is hardly any debate when it comes to affirm that Ireland's economic boom instantly lent a new facet to the Irish identity, which was the one related to wealth. What the official narrative failed to access was the emergence of other important traits, the ones of those that were set aside, at the margin, and struggled even more to live in a society where the social gap was so greatly widened.

Most of the narratives selected for this thesis present their plots through a first-person narrator or a third-person narrator who is the spectator of someone else's drama. Hardly any of the stories develop the themes exploited by this thesis – homelessness, drugs and xenophobia – at the center of the storyline – much like the stance of the people that make these groups up in society. Most of the time, the low lives and the marginal identities are on the background, as part of the landscape, usually treated as a disturbance, as a genuine representation of the treatment that these issues get in real life. One important aspect that needs to be highlighted is that their condition as outcasts is not a result of a Dandi or a bear movement of someone that wants to separate from all the rest – to recall Eric Landowski's categorization in *Présences de l'autre: essais de socio-sémiotique II* (39) -, but more as an inability of fighting the ones that are in power, people whose disregard for the other outcasted many identities. All the narratives, in their own way, have in common a superbly objective description of this Ireland that did not fit the models that were firstly associated

with the Celtic Tiger. The stories are not about drugs, homelessness and prejudice against immigrants per say, but they all depict the different realities of life and, in doing this, they disclose the actual cracks in society.

This analysis does not intend to support a thesis that the issues observed in the post Celtic Tiger Ireland grew as the result of being innate to the Irish identity, or that they might be an exclusive problem of the country. If anything, drugs, homelessness and xenophobia are all growing issues of the globalized world. The readings of the rise of these problems and their presence in the country's literature reflect, at the core of this analysis, that they have become a national issue because they are a direct reflex of the social unbalance prompted by the unequal distribution of the wealth generated during the boom years and the furthering of the gap between social structures that is common in neoliberal economies. They reveal how fragmented the identities can become, as Homi Bhabha proposes in the introduction to *The location of culture* that “The study of the world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of ‘otherness’.” (17).

One of the biggest triumphs of the contemporary Irish short story production is that it casts visibility to a wider range of identities and that it discloses stories upon urgent themes of society, themes that might not figure in the analysis devoted to exploiting how the economy crashed when politicians devoted their efforts to save the banking system. The fictional portrayal of marginalized identities, of people who were hit the hardest even when the economy was booming, is literature’s affirmation on its awareness of the reality, as an archive of the present time as it is being experienced by writers, translated into characters and places, and offers readers from years to come a singular perspective in the form of a record of this time.

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