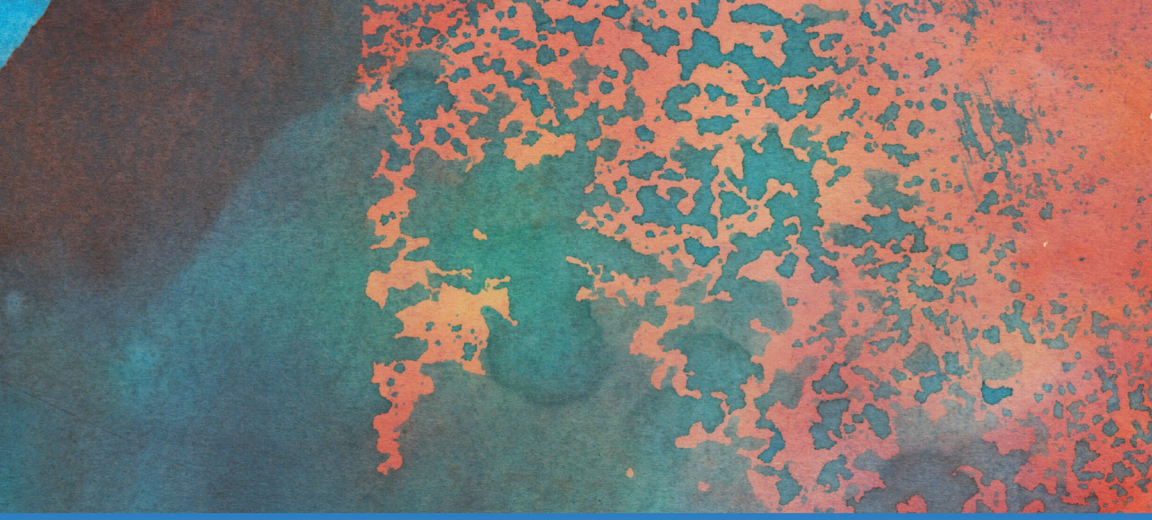
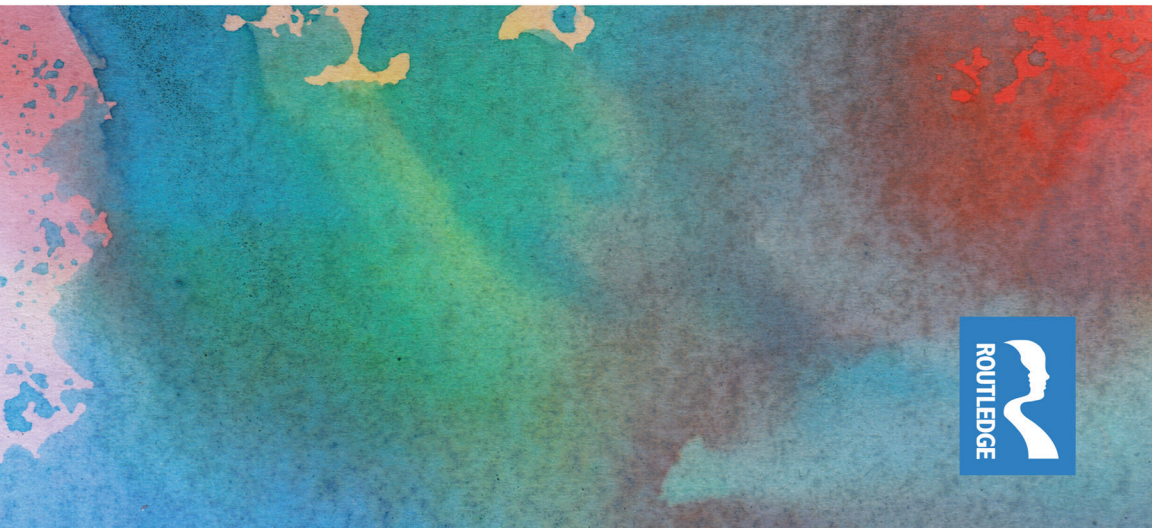


Routledge Studies in Irish Literature

TRANSCULTURAL INSIGHTS INTO CONTEMPORARY IRISH LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

BREAKING NEW GROUND

Edited by
María Amor Barros-del Río



Transcultural Insights into Contemporary Irish Literature and Society

Transcultural Insights into Contemporary Irish Literature and Society examines the transcultural patterns that have been enriching Irish literature since the twentieth century and engages with the ongoing dialogue between contemporary Irish literature and society. Driven by the growing interest in transcultural studies in the humanities, this volume provides an insightful analysis of how Irish literature handles the delicate balance between authenticity and folklore, and uniformisation and diversity in an increasingly globalised world. Following a diachronic approach, the volume includes critical readings of canonical Irish literature as an uncharted exchange of intercultural dialogues. The text also explores the external and internal transcultural traits present in recent Irish literature, and its engagement with social injustice and activism, and discusses location and mobility as vehicles for cultural transfer and the advancement of the women's movement. A final section also includes an examination of literary expressions of hybridisation, diversity and assimilation to scrutinise negotiations of new transcultural identities. In the light of the compiled contributions, the volume ends with a revisitation of Irish studies in a world in which national identity has become increasingly problematic. This volume presents new insights into the fictional engagement of contemporary Irish literature with political, social and economic issues, and its efforts to accommodate the local and the global, resulting in a reshaping of national collective imaginaries.

María Amor Barros-del Río is Senior Lecturer in English Studies at the University of Burgos (Spain), and Secretary of AEDEI (the Spanish Association for Irish Studies). She has published widely on contemporary Irish literature and her work has been recognised by positive reviews in international journals, grants and awards received to date.

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Breaking New Ground

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Contents

Contributors

Asier Altuna-García de Salazar is a Senior Lecturer in English and Irish Literatures at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at the University of Deusto, Spain. He is the former chairperson of AEDEI (Spanish Association for Irish Studies) and was a Basque Government postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Irish Studies NUI Galway, Ireland and Deusto University between 2003–8. He was involved in the European Project SPEAQ on quality assurance and enhancement, and a number of Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad projects on the dysfunctional Irish family and cultural practices of silence and, currently, on vulnerability in contemporary Irish fiction. He is also involved in European Commission TUNING projects on the enhancement of Higher Education in universities internationally. He has published on Spain and the Basque Country in 19th cent. Irish writing, silence, ageing and vulnerability, multicultural and transcultural Ireland. He has edited *Re-Writing Boundaries: Critical Approaches in Irish Studies* (PPU, 2007), *New Perspectives on James Joyce: Ignatius Loyola, make haste to help me!* (Deusto UP, 2009), *Rethinking Citizenship: New Voices in Euroculture* (Groningen UP, 2013) and *Ireland and Dysfunction: Critical Explorations in Literature and Film* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017).

María Amor Barros-del Río is Senior Lecturer in English Studies at the University of Burgos, Spain. She holds degrees in English, Cultural Anthropology and Gender Studies, and her research focuses on Irish literature, gender studies and second language teacher education. She has published extensively on Edna O'Brien, Anne Enright, Emma Donoghue and Sally Rooney, and her work can be found in international journals and edited volumes. She has been involved in several national and international research projects and she was principal investigator of the Erasmus+ project "A VIRtual Solution for a Comprehensive and Coordinated Training for Foreign Language TEACHers in Europe,

VIRTEACH" (2018–2021). She is a member of the Banna/Bond Centre for Irish Studies and she is currently the Secretary of AEDEI (Spanish Association for Irish Studies).

Mariana Bolfarine teaches at the Federal University of Rondonópolis and at the Postgraduate Program at the Federal University of Mato Grosso, Brasil. She holds a PhD from the University of São Paulo and was a research fellow at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. She is a researcher at the WB Yeats Chair of Irish Studies and head of the Brazilian Association of Irish Studies (ABEI). She has translated into Portuguese *Roger Casement in Brazil: Rubber, the Amazon and the Atlantic World 1884–1916* (2010) and the *Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* (2016) and has published the book *Between Angels and Demons: Trauma in Fictional Representations of Roger Casement* (2018).

David M. Clark is Senior Lecturer in English Studies at the University of Coruña in Galicia, Spain. He has held executive positions in both national and international Associations for Irish Studies and has published widely on contemporary Irish and Scottish writing. He is Director of the "Amergin" University Institute for Irish Studies. The aims of the "Amergin" institute are to promote cultural contact between Galicia and Ireland and to foster academic works and cultural production from the Atlantic periphery. Clark's most recent publication is the edited volume (with Eduardo Barros-Grela) *Post-Urban Spaces in Contemporary Irish Fiction: Transcultural Spaces and Places* (TIR, 2023). *Dark Green: Irish Crime Fiction from 1665–2000*, the first in a two-volume study on Irish crime writing, was published by Peter Lang in 2022, to be followed by *Emerald Noir: Irish Crime Fiction since 2000* to be published by the same publisher in 2024.

Margarita Estévez-Saá is Associate Professor of English and American Literature at the University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Her research interests include the work of James Joyce and, more recently, contemporary Irish fiction by women. She has published with Anne MacCarthy the book *A Pilgrimage from Belfast to Santiago de Compostela: The Anatomy of Bernard MacLaverty's Triumph over Frontiers* (2002), and has co-edited, among other volumes, *Silverpowdered Olivetrees: Reading Joyce in Spain* (2003), *"Ireland in the Coming Time": New Insights on Irish Literature* (2007). Estévez-Saá is Secretary of the Spanish James Joyce Society, has been member of the AEDEI Executive Board, former editor of the academic journal *Papers on Joyce* and current editor of *Estudios Irlandeses*. Estévez-Saá has published widely on James Joyce, Eilís Ní Dhuibhne, Elizabeth

Wassell, Mary Rose Callaghan, Anne Haverty, Deirdre Madden, Anne Enright and Sara Baume. More recently, she has co-edited the volume *The Ethics and Aesthetics of Eco-caring: Contemporary Debates on Ecofeminism(s)* (Routledge, 2019), and the special number of the journal *Estudios Irlandeses* 15.2 (2020): "Ecofictions, The Animal Trope and Irish Studies".

Shannon Kuta Kelly is a doctoral researcher and poet at the Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's University Belfast; her research is funded by AHRC-Northern Bridge. She received her bachelor's degree in literature from the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, and her master's degree in creative writing from the University of Galway. Her research revolves around contemporary poetry, translation studies, Eastern European studies, and censorship and conflict studies. Her poetry and translations have been published in various international publications and performed in conjunction with the Romanian Con Tempo String Quartet and the Embassy of Romania in Ireland.

Stephanie Schwerter is professor of Anglophone literature at the Université Polytechnique Hauts-de-France, France. Previously, she taught Comparative Literature and Translation Studies at the École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. Before moving to France, she spent six years in Northern Ireland, working at the University of Ulster and at Queen's University Belfast. Her research interest lies in Northern Irish Film and Fiction as well as in the intertextual links between Irish, French, German and Russian poetry.

Iria Seijas-Pérez is a predoctoral researcher at the University of Vigo, Spain, under a predoctoral grant from the Galician Government (Xunta de Galicia). She holds a BA degree in Foreign Languages and an MA degree in Foreign Language Teaching at Secondary Level from the same university. She is a member of "Feminario: Feminisms and Resistances", within the established Research Group "BiFeGa: Literary and Cultural Studies, Translation and Interpretation" (Ref. ED431C-2020/04), and she is affiliated as a predoctoral researcher to the Interuniversity Research Centre on Atlantic Cultural Landscapes (CISPAC). Her PhD thesis studies the representation of female LGBTQ+ adolescents in young adult literature written in English by Irish women. Recent communications include "A History of Violence within Ireland's Architecture of Containment in Moïra Fowley-Doyle's All the Bad Apples" (21st AEDEI Conference) and "Queering Girlhood: Lesbian and Bisexual Female Protagonists in Contemporary Irish Young Adult Literature in English" (IV AEDEAN Doctoral Seminar), and she has also published several articles and reviews; the most recent is "Irish

Girlhood and Female Sexuality in Claire Hennessy's Like Other Girls", published in the journal Estudios Irlandeses. Her research interests include Irish literature and culture, LGBTQ+ and feminist studies, and young adult literature.

Gerry Smyth is Professor of Irish Cultural History at Liverpool John Moores University. He has published widely on fiction and popular music. His most recent books are *Joyces Noyces: Music and Sound in the Life and Literature of James Joyce* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) and *Serpent, Siren, Maelstrom and Myth: Sea Stories and Folk Tales from Around the World* (British Library, 2023). His new book on environment and national identity in English popular fiction between 1890 and 1940 will be published by Bloomsbury in 2025. He is also an actor, playwright, musician and composer.

Burcu Gülüm Tekin is Lecturer at the Department of English and German Philology of the University of Zaragoza, Spain. She completed her PhD dissertation on the representation of motherhood in Roddy Doyle's work in July 2017 at the University of Granada. Her main research interests include contemporary Irish literature and versatile gender representations in the Irish context. She has presented papers in several international conferences on the aforementioned topics. Her work has appeared in various academic journals, including *Estudios Irlandeses*, *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, *Studi Irlandesi*, and *The European Legacy* as well as in the edited volumes *Words of Crisis, Crisis of Words: Ireland and the Representation of Critical Times* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), *Ireland and Dysfunction: Critical Explorations in Literature and Film* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017) and *Trauma, Memory and Silence of the Irish Woman in Contemporary Literature Wounds of the Body and the Soul* (Routledge, 2023).

Melania Terrazas is Senior Lecturer in English Studies at the University of La Rioja, Spain. She is the author of *Relational Structures in Wyndham Lewis's Fiction: Complexity and Value* (Lincom, 2005). She is Head of the Centre of Irish Studies Banna/Bond (EFACIS). She was editor of *Journal of English Studies*. She also guest edited the special issue *Gender Issues in Contemporary Irish Literature* (vol. 13.2. 2018) of *Estudios Irlandeses*, edited *Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture* (Peter Lang, 2020) and co-authored a Spanish translation of Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (2022). Her recent essays on Irish poetry, fiction, theatre and film have been published in international journals, such as *Irish Studies Review*, *English Studies* and *Life Writing*. Her latest book chapters appear in edited collections by

Cambridge UP, Routledge and Brill, among others. She is a member of the research project: "Posthuman Intersections in Irish and Galician Literatures" (Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation and the ERDF (PID2022-136251NB-I00).

J. Javier Torres-Fernández is currently registered for a PhD and working at the University of Almería, Spain, as a predoctoral researcher funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (FPU21/01232) in the Department of Philology within the Women, Literature and Society (HUM-874) research group and the Communication and Society I+D Research Centre (CySOC). His fields of interest include Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies, Popular Culture, Irish Literature, and North American Literature. His thesis delves into the literary production that emerged from the HIV/AIDS crisis both in Ireland and the United States in a comparative study of the genre tackling stigma, shame, sexuality, identity, trauma, and cultural politics.

Introduction

María Amor Barros-del Río

We live in an age of ever hastier transport and communications and the changes to the world around us are almost happening too quickly to be fully comprehensible. Interconnectedness and transferability, core concepts for business, information, and knowledge, are often too complex for ordinary people to assimilate. All too frequently, we find ourselves reacting late to events whose origins back in the distant past bring consequences that have up until now passed by unnoticed. The ramifications of those events quite often take us by surprise and we are forced to adapt as best and as quickly as we can. The rock of Ireland is a paradigmatic example of an island that has been rapidly changing over the past few decades, experiencing political highs and lows, and economic crises and growth, in equal measure. A relentless tendency towards globalisation has generated incoming and outgoing migratory flows and exchanges of ideas that have rapidly been reconfiguring both industry and society. Ireland's gaze towards both Europe and across the Atlantic to the USA, together with easier interconnectedness beyond its frontiers has added to the increasing diversification of a growing and multifarious population.

Fifty years ago, after Ireland had been welcomed into the European Community, the third largest island of Europe could begin to modernise. Added to expectations of economic prosperity and security, Irish European Union (EU) membership served to counteract Ireland's for their geographical and historical isolation, and to re-affirm a sense of identity, setting its colonial past aside and becoming an active member alongside other European countries. Despite a period of crisis in the 1980s, the 1990s marked a significant change in Ireland, with the proliferation of independent agencies and the implementation of European regulations, including those oriented towards social cohesion in the fields of gender rights, environmental protection, and health and safety. Spurred on by globalisation,[1] towards the end of the twentieth century up until 2008 the country enjoyed some years of economic boom, commonly known as the Celtic Tiger years, in reference to other fast-growing Asian tiger

economies. However, these unprecedented economic, social, and cultural transformations, among which a considerable influx of migration must be counted,[2] were followed by a severe downturn linked to the international financial crisis that affected real estate, banking, and fiscal measures. While the recession hardly affected Ireland alone, the scale of the debacle led international bodies to impose urgent austerity measures and the country, in exchange for a bailout, was forced to cede a major part of its financial and economic sovereignty to the troika of the EU, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund, a *fait accompli* that demonstrated the interconnectedness of contemporary economies and the weight of supranational institutions. The period of austerity that followed plunged the country into recession, leaving a fractured society with severe cuts, high rates of unemployment and emigration, and greater inequality.[3] However, as from 2013 onwards, Ireland was firmly back on the road to economic recovery and prosperity and had even been rebranded as the Celtic Phoenix.[4]

The exit of the UK from the European Union or Brexit, in January 2020,[5] continues to have lasting effects on the United Kingdom and Europe as a whole. It has also had significant repercussions on the Emerald Isle and for the repositioning of the Republic within the EU, the renegotiation of British-Irish and EU relations, and the daily interactions on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The border that divides the island, once a site of conflict where many lives were senselessly lost, has now become an "open border" after the Northern Ireland Protocol of the Brexit withdrawal agreement in 2019, with discussions ongoing at present.[6] In today's interconnected world, every decision a country takes can affect another in a myriad of ways. Nowadays, economic prospects for the country are promising based on strong export turnover and full employment. Two other booming areas are tourism and the English language education sector, whose economic impact can hardly be overlooked, with an estimated net worth of almost €1.2 bn to the Irish economy in 2022.[7]

Together with Ireland's alignment with European interests, which remains unquestioned, the country also maintains close relations with the United States of America. There are several reasons to explain that historical relationship which is essentially based on emigration. Since the late twentieth century, investment from across the Atlantic has been notable, with American structural funds and business profiting from Ireland's low-tax economy and fluency in the English language.[8] Later on, investors have also sought to avoid the turbulence linked to Brexit with Ireland replacing the UK as the natural door to European markets from across the Atlantic. Today, the United States is Ireland's top export destination and Ireland has become a favourite location for American high-tech firms. Indeed, those

trans-Atlantic relations, initially based on the Irish diaspora and its subsequent transnational networks, have become even stronger through intense two-way trading.

Notably, the government's interest in keeping those historical ties alive became evident two decades ago with the publication of the *Ireland and the Irish Abroad Report* (Government of Ireland, 2002). Since then, the Irish have turned what used to be seen as a weakness into a strength, and subsequent reports such as *Global Irish: Ireland's Diaspora Policy* (Government of Ireland, 2015), have proved that the national strategy has been adapting to the realities of the Irish diaspora, especially with the expansion of low-cost airlines and telecommunications technologies. As President Michael D. Higgins affirmed, Irish migrants "have allowed Ireland to have global connections far beyond our size",[9] and in that sense the Irish diaspora was weighed up in a quite unprecedented way in *Global Ireland: Ireland's Diaspora Strategy 2020–2025* (Government of Ireland, 2020). Irish citizens living overseas, born in Ireland or abroad, people of Irish descent, people living, studying or working in Ireland, are all gathered under the umbrella term "reverse diaspora"; and any person holding a deep appreciation for Irish people, places and culture is placed in the "affinity diaspora" group.[10] The broad goal of this national strategy speaks of "embodied, material and politicised mobilities" (Blunt, 685). It refers to a series of implications affecting cultural, economic, and social spheres that are worth exploring. The geographical position and cultural heritage of Ireland have accrued profits and become a distinct advantage over the past few decades, turning the island into a sort of cultural causeway. Furthermore, the identity of Irish people and Irish culture today stretches beyond the boundaries of any geographical territory, reaching out towards limitless abstractions within the collective imagination. That very idea is embedded in the *Diaspora Strategy*, where physical distance from local and national Irish spaces does not necessarily imply detachment from and disidentification with Ireland and belonging to the Irish community. On the contrary, the link between place and belonging is elongated in unprecedented ways, binding people to an emotional construct of the homeland. In addition, such an inclusive policy entails what could be a utilitarian vision of the Irish diaspora in economic terms. Human capital that has emigrated is regarded as an economic and intellectual asset that the small peripheral island is determined to use to its best advantage. However, above all else, the philosophy underlying this policy is a timeless and spaceless comprehension of the Irish community in the broadest sense. This logic, which contests the idea of "culture" as a discursive category and discrete entity historically linked with the modern nation, paradoxically goes hand in hand with romantic and traditional products that identify Ireland as a static and wholesome notion, with Irish pubs, postcards of

a cottage in green fields, and the mythical Riverdance as profitable iconic cultural products. In today's Ireland, uniformity and continuity go hand in hand with diversity and change.

Falci and Reynolds have acknowledged that "Irish culture on both sides of the border has emerged as a global phenomenon" (1), and the vibrant dynamism of Ireland has over recent years not only attracted companies, but also people. According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO), in 2022 the Irish population was slightly over the threshold of five-million for the first time in 171 years. That figure included non-Irish citizens living either temporarily or on a permanent basis in Ireland, Irish citizens who had returned home after some time abroad, and asylum seekers, all pointing to a multidirectional reading of mobility.[11] The cultural encounters on the island resulting from those migratory flows, and stimulated through digital technologies and leisure mobility, have a direct effect on public policies and individual practices.

The numbers of non-Irish citizens currently registered with the CSO in 2022, of unprecedented diversity in terms of origin, race, and faith, were summed up in a figure of 12%.[12] This is hardly devoid of problems and contentious issues:[13] a widening gap between rich and poor, irregular immigration, poor quality of public healthcare and education, and exorbitant property prices, among others, remain problematic destabilising forces upsetting social cohesion.[14]

Currently, the relations that Ireland maintains with Europe and with the USA, together with the demographic transformations within Irish society, are three significant arteries along which the lifeblood of Irish transculturality flows. Unceasingly affected by dynamic internal and external pressures, Irish culture today is relational rather than self-contained. Diverse ideas, and beliefs, foreign practices and unexpected exchanges produce new cultural expressions that give shape to an ever-evolving society. A good example of Ireland's comprehensive assimilation of cultural change can be detected in relation to activism in women's rights. The Marriage Equality referendum in 2015 and the liberalisation of the divorce laws in the 2019 referendum were milestones that affected the family, the most sacred institution in Irish history. The Repeal of the Eighth Amendment in 2018 marked the end of years of social campaigning and numerous legal cases challenging restricted access to abortion.[15] At the same time, Ireland has also become a multi-ethnic and multi-racial country. Added to increasing interracial partnering, the election of Leo Varadkar, an Indian-origin and gay Irish politician, as Taoiseach in 2017, is a paradigmatic sign of a multicultural and secular society. In addition, the crisis within the Catholic Church, the Magdalen "asylum" scandals, and Pope Francis' plea in 2018 for forgiveness for abuses in Ireland, alluding to the clergy who were involved in or who covered up

child abuse, have all contributed to shape a more secular society.[16] The different faiths celebrated by the population of diverse origins, appear to confirm a distancing within Irish society away from the Catholic faith, which not so long ago was one of the distinctive pillars of the nation and had entered into a symbiotic alliance with the Irish political elite, as the Catholic church had done in so many other European nations during the central decades of the twentieth century. Today, the increasing secularisation of Irish society and the diminishing role of the nation state attest to such a paradigmatic shift.

Ireland's embrace of globalisation has situated the country at a moment of "acceleration and flux" (3), to use Paige Reynolds' words, but the complexity of this process and its effects upon the Irish society have made scholars wonder "what makes Ireland Ireland" (O'Loughlin, O'Neill and Owens 306). Already two decades ago, Honor Fagan contended that "[…] Neither Irish culture nor identity can be seen as self-contained, immutable or closed. A new state of flux, typical of postcolonialism and globalisation, opens up a new era of more fluid and uncertain constructions of cultural identity" (117–118). Indeed, Fagan's intuition stemmed from the paradigmatic shift that has shaped modern Western societies and Ireland's in particular, and that has posed some core questions, still unresolved as of today: What is today's "Irish" culture? Is the concept of identity, defined as "a cultural tool-kit that people use to construct an image and understanding of themselves" (Inglis and Donnelly 140), still valid or does it need to be reformulated? How to address new configurations of cultural identity in a society that is changing as rapidly as the Irish one? These and other related questions come to mind as issues of major concern for which there is no simple or single answer except for the acknowledgment that today "[…] multiple, overlapping geographies and peoples constitute Ireland" (Falci and Reynolds 15).

Reputed scholars have pointed to Irish literature as a privileged site where the intricacies of society are mirrored from a variety of angles (Foster; Harte and Parker; Kiberd). In fact, it has been shown in some studies that contemporary authors have actively engaged with the cultural, political and social transformations that have taken place on the globalised island throughout the upheavals of the past two decades, from the Celtic Tiger years (Flannery), to the subsequent years of recession (Jordan; Kelly; Mianowski), and the articulation of contemporary multicultural Ireland (Villar-Argáiz "Literary Visions", and "Irishness on the Margins"; Falci and Reynolds).[17] Frank Schulze-Engler suggested that the relationship between literature and globalisation needs to be reassessed "to cover not only the new dynamics of a global cultural ecumene and its significance for an emerging transnational public sphere, but also the politics of civil society and the micropolitics of modernity" (59). Today, Irish

literature has turned away from tropes typical of the Irish literary canon in anticipation of a certain departure towards what Ralf Haekel has termed "post-national" literature, a statement that Falci and Reynolds also defended, claiming that Irish literature needed to be appraised "outside of the history of colonialism, decolonisation, and nation-making" (15). Evidently, the idea stems from the country's progressive openness and intercultural interactions. In an attempt to shed light on the current momentum that Ireland is experiencing, this volume applies a dialectical approach to interpret the dynamic nature of contemporary Irish society through its literature, and to evince the continual reworking of what it means to be and to feel Irish, through the study of specific literary works. It is my belief that the transcultural approach to literary works provides comprehensive dialogical insights into authors, their choice of topics, and society as a whole.

Transculturality is a relatively new term in literary studies. Broadly developed in the fields of anthropology, sociology and philosophy, in recent years it has received widespread acceptance in other disciplines. It was coined in the 1940s by the Cuban anthropologist, Fernando Ortiz, who studied cultural transformations within colonial settings and considered that the term acculturation was insufficient for all the mutual inter-cultural influences that he had observed. His vision, which detected the emergence of new blended cultural phenomena, challenged colonial theories of domination and racism and entailed a broader and dynamic understanding of cultural encounters. The concept found fertile ground in two seminal works within the field of post-colonial studies: Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) and Mary L. Pratt's *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation* (1992). Bhabha's notion of a "third space" and Pratt's understanding of "contact zone" speak of the complexity of cultural processes. However, it was with the philosopher Wolfgang Welsch that this approach took off in the humanities. Welsch detected that both cultures and the individuals within them are affected by contemporary forms of interconnectedness, mobility, and hybridisation. As a result, he contended that the old concept of culture misrepresents cultures' actual forms, which are characterised by "entanglement, intermixing and commonness" (209). More recent developments have challenged Welsch's approach to cultures as segregated and static, highlighting that cultures are intrinsically entangled, porous and ever-changing entities. Those perspectives incorporate nuanced insights into the complex processes within such encounters, more in accordance with the fluid interactions that take place in contemporary globalised societies.[18] At the same time, this shift has prompted the application of the transcultural lens to an array of research fields, providing new readings and opening up many avenues of inquiry.[19]

Transculturality focuses on "the problematics of contemporary culture […] in terms of relationships, meaning-making, and power formation" (Lewis 24), to illuminate our understanding of societal dynamics.[20] The transcultural lens, essentially dialogical in nature, moves beyond outdated dichotomous relations – local-global, native-non-native, national-international, colonised-coloniser, and many more –, as much as it acknowledges collective and individual experiences of exclusion and resistance, adaptation and belonging, practices of multi-directional mobility, and ongoing debates on borders and boundaries, all of which abound in Irish literary manifestations. It also encompasses the detection and the bringing to light of concealed practices and interactions, connections, and flows, regardless of national borders. Consequently, this lens de-centres the focus of attention from established Western assumptions and illuminates alternative narratives that more often than not pass by unnoticed. But this processual approach is neither steady nor progressive. On the contrary, "instances of intensified transitionality" or "transcultural moments", in Hans Harder's terms, are also significant and worth looking at wherever interconnections can be detected and multiple factors coalesce and flux. Finally, transculturality encourages a "processual and multi-sited perspective" (Abu-Er-Rub, et al. xxvi), because as Monica Juneja and Christian Kravagna have affirmed, "transculturality is about spatial mobility, circulation or flows, an insight drawn from studies of globalisation, but is neither synonymous nor reducible to these" (2013, 25). Hence, the interest in transculturality is its applicability to past and present alike, because transcultural processes of cultural formation can be traced back to past historical events. Another vantage point of transculturality is its flexibility and appropriateness within varied fields of study, two features that speak of interdisciplinarity, pluralism and relatedness and that are very well suited to address globalisation processes.

Admitting that "a neat categorisation of transcultural literature is hardly feasible" (82) as Sissy Helff affirmed, it is worth recalling the many ways that the application of the transcultural paradigm has operated in the field of literary studies and the analytical tools therein designed. The unstoppable diversity and mobility of contemporary societies has prompted the publication of relevant works on the utility of the transcultural lens for fathoming literary works (Nordin, Hansen and Zamorano Llena; Nordin, Edfeldt, Hu, Jonsson and Leblanc), both past and present. More particularly, Arianna Dagnino has focused on the idea of transcultural writers as creators whose personal experiences of mobility lead to what she has called "creative dispatriation" that emerges from biographies "no longer located in relatively stable/fixed cultural frameworks and where individuals find themselves to be negotiating, compromising (or in conflict with) several cultures on a daily basis, affecting their cultural dispositions and

imaginations". Helff has also identified certain features that characterise what she calls the transcultural novel, such as the presence of "more radically individualised realities" (82) and their difficulty to identify with a community. She has contended that it results in narratives that distil a notable degree of uncertainty and high levels of unreliability. This "Narratology of Otherness", to use Ruth Gilligan's term, has been produced by transcultural authors who either write about what they have experienced themselves, or set out to explore new ground and inhabit "subject positions that are not in fact their own" (107). More recently, Jonsson, Berg, Edfeldt, and Jansson have confirmed the need for a cross-disciplinary approach when seeking to compile narratives concerning the crossing of borders. If literary texts are to be understood as (inter)relational and as entities crossing boundaries and borders, a careful examination of how narratives migrate and are translated is also imperative.

This volume, which stems from the complementary perspectives discussed above, is the first collective work entirely devoted to approaching Irish literature through a transcultural lens.[21] Its content provides new insight into the engagement of Irish literature with political, social, and economic issues, and illustrates how literature accommodates the local and the global, resulting in a re-shaping of individual and collective imaginaries. Through the transcultural perspective, which involves "departing from the traditional" (Benessaieh 11), this volume questions the concept of "Irishness" as fixed and immutable and takes into consideration the ability of literature to embed the complexity and multiplicity of Irish society, warning against the dangers of a single story, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie would say. As a result, the way that Irish literature integrates cultural encounters and exchanges and handles the delicate balance between authenticity and folklore, and uniformisation and diversity in an increasingly globalised world, is clearly elucidated in the following chapters. Ultimately, the aim of this collection of essays is to offer tangible proof that literary texts act as vessels of transcultural dialogue and can be instrumental for social change in critical issues such as political violence and imperial practices, feminism, racism, social fragmentation and marginalisation, among others. Bearing that in mind, a diachronic approach is followed in this compilation that is divided into four distinct sections.

Part I. Texts that Blur Frontiers: The Emerald Isle of Ireland and Beyond opens with a section that looks back at twentieth-century literature, both in the Republic and in Northern Ireland, to re-interpret some writers' works through a transcultural lens. Following the perspective of the Heidelberg Cluster "Asia and Europe in a Global Context", "earlier historical forms of mobility and connectedness that have been characteristic of cultures over centuries, pre-dating the advent of modern communication and global capital" (Juneja and Kravagna 24) are explored in

this section. Hence, the contributors unveil the existence of transnational connections embedded in the literary works of James Joyce, Ciaran Carson, and Seán Dunne, suggesting a transcultural intention, despite political, geographical, and linguistic obstacles. In each chapter, the importance of transculturality is demonstrated as an analytical framework to transcend cultural essentialisms. Whenever the ideas of "nation" and "culture" serve to underpin differentiation for nationalistic purposes, it is at times still possible to trace out ideological transactions and transcultural interactions that slip through the net of nationalistic censorship. Spatial and cultural displacements are at the core of the analyses, and intertextuality and translation are highlighted as useful strategies to overcome geographical borders and challenge ideological constraints. In other words, these contributions display unexpected examples of "textual contacts" (Thornber) that have gone unnoticed in the works of the selected writers. Mariana Bolfarine's assessment of James Joyce and Roger Casement as transcultural figures, both born in Ireland but living elsewhere, inaugurates this section. Their encounters with different peoples and cultures, she contends, were key in their attachment to their homeland, with the former writing about Ireland, and the latter becoming an Irish nationalist. But their connection, evidenced in the presence of Casement in the "Cyclops" episode of *Ulysses*, was also ideological. Bolfarine's analysis of 'Cyclops' brings both now distant figures into a sort of dialogue, to stress the underlying affinity between *Ulysses* and Casement's reports as containers of a shared critique of British imperialism, colonial practices, and colonial injustice. It also reveals the inherent fault lines within nationalistic discourses of which both Casement and Joyce were well aware. In short, Joyce's rescue of Casement in *Ulysses* accounts for a transcultural sensibility that defied spatial and time constraints. Another example of transcultural transfer can be found in Shannon Kuta Kelly's study of Ciaran Carson and Marin Sorescu's poetry. Her study shows proof of mutual influence between their poetry, despite the severe isolation enforced through censorship in both countries, and their active and relentless roles as transcultural agents. Amidst the "Troubles" of North Ireland and Ceaușescu's dictatorship in Romania, Carson and Sorescu's respective commitment to writing, publishing, and translating is highlighted as a force of resistance that effectively crosses borders and defies isolation. In particular, for Kelly, their translations are the opportunity to open a "third space" where negotiations and transformations abound. Despite their geographical distance and very different political situations, both authors used defiant language to challenge border controls and to make thematic and symbolic connections that transcended languages and frontiers. So, as Kelly affirms, their poems become sites of encounter, contact zones where two distant and different worlds meet. Likewise, Stephanie Schwerter delves into poet Seán Dunne's intentions

when translating the poems of Anna Akhmatova, a victim of repression under Communist rule. Carried by his interest in Soviet Russian history and culture, Dunne's ignorance of Russian was no obstacle to him translating Akhmatova's poetry in his own versions, departing from D.M. Thomas' English translations. In Akhmatova's poems, Schwerter affirms, Dunne was able to explore his own cultural environment through a transcultural lens. Adhering to clarity and precision, he exerted a sort of "domestication" in his translations, adapting Russian cultural concepts and values to his own culture. To that end, he chose to translate the universal topics contained in Akhmatova's poetry such as life and death. Political violence, which pointed to the trauma of the Gulag and the suffering of the Russians under Stalin, was also a preferential issue for him that he related with the Troubles and the Maze Hunger Strikes. Through the use of the free verse, which added a certain degree of creativity to the resulting texts, his search for social justice found fertile ground in active and politically committed translations of Akhmatova's poetry. As concluded at the end of the chapter, Dunne's translations sought to dissolve cultural differences and national boundaries to make the Soviet literary scene accessible to the Anglophone reader.

In 2004, Zygmunt Bauman explained that borders are the middle element in between different cultures and humanity and that in a fast-globalising world, borders become less and less effective but, at the same time, they paradoxically acquire greater significance. Following the same line of argument, ***Part II: Transcultural Writers and Global Entanglements*** presents reviews of a selection of works that display an uncanny use of location and mobility as vehicles for cultural transfer. It also revolves around their use of external and internal transcultural traits and how blurring physical borders and transnational encounters lead on to diversity and hybridisation. Accordingly, the selected authors are appraised as agents of transculturality who have moved beyond the shores of Ireland and inhabit multiple geographies. Some engagement with social injustice and activism is also shown in the selected texts, whose marginal characters serve to display the underlying conflict between cultural change and the continuation of tradition. For example, Burcu Gülüm Tekin analyses Leland Bardwell's *Different Kinds of Love,* a collection of short stories first published in 1987 and reprinted not before time in 2011. Daringly, Tekin reclaims the proto-transcultural essence of Bardwell, whose life and oeuvre always moved in and out of the margins. In particular, her contribution underlines Bardwell's critique of Irish social order and morality through her portrayal of marginalised individuals at the centre of her plots. Her stories are quick to challenge physical and ideological limitations, and to contest the very nature of social borders and their underlying transgressive intention, calling into question conventions and creating significant uncertainty

with regard to institutions and their normalising roles. Furthermore, her multifarious use of public spaces as sites of both encounter and isolation opens up a world of possibilities and lays bare the intrinsic frictions upon which any social order is supported. An outsider herself, Bardwell brings the outcasts to the forefront, a shift in perspective that anticipates signals of a different emergent cultural mode even if actual transformation fails to occur in her stories. Melania Terrazas and María Amor Barros-del Río approach selected short stories from Evelyn Conlon's latest collection *Moving About the Place* (2021), reconsidering the author's re-appraisal of historical figures and boundary-crossing. Their assessment of Conlon as a transcultural writer and of some of her stories as contesting narratives of physical borders and social limitations provides a multi-sited perspective on women's migration as a key agent of change, both past and present. Their scholarly analysis surpasses the repeatedly underscored and biased historical relation between Irish women and public spaces and delves into the inherent interstices of mobility to highlight elements of connectivity and resistance in the selected stories. Particularly enlightening is their examination of Conlon's use of contact zones as ambiguous sites of realisation and resistance that take place within and beyond the boundaries of the isle, as well as their close attention to letters and personal documents that assume relevant roles as cross-cultural material objects and act as frail and arguable witnesses of their owners' stories. Finally, Terrazas and Barros-del Río's study of the borders described in the selected stories brings to the surface the Irish writer's concern over dismantling single views of domination and separation. Her satirical rhetoric of inquiry, they affirm, avoids closure and shifts attention from unreconciled binaries to discontinuity and resistance, two constitutive aspects of transculturality. Irish crime fiction, a genre that has received increasing interest in the last decades, also shows evident transcultural patterns, as David Clark has demonstrated. In his chapter, Ken Bruen's extensive production is thoroughly scrutinised under the lens of transculturality, and some marginal sectors of society, such as migrants in Ireland, travellers, and other minority groups, are given special relevance in relation to the changing economic context of the island and beyond. Clark makes it clear that both Bruen and his characters' biographies epitomise cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism in a constant and challenging dialogue between differing cultural norms. If the "London" novels are dotted with manifestations of popular culture and individuals striving to come to terms with their own positionality in that cultural melting pot, in the Jack Taylor series, set in Galway, the author excels at depicting Ireland at the height of its economic boom. Here, the plots are often secondary to sharp and critical depictions of the Celtic Tiger boom, which coexist alongside the shadows of the Magdalen "asylums" or laundries, political corruption, and racism, revealing a land in open conflict

with itself. Finally, Bruen's "American" works offer valuable insights into the complex and multi-faceted experience of being Irish and what that means today in the USA. Clark's contribution concludes with an analysis of intertextuality in Bruen's works which, in the form of epigraphs, contain transcultural references and concrete examples of translingualism. In brief, this analysis confirms the writer's ability to enmesh the cosmopolitan and the traditional that generates a radiography of Ireland and the Irish in the first quarter of this century.

Part III: Irish Social Diversity and Contemporary Literature in Dialogue shifts the focus towards Ireland's current ethnic and racial diversification and the way that instances of hybridisation, diversity, and assimilation are depicted in the literature. If the role of Irish scholarship is to "reflect the times, in terms of what it includes, and also what it excludes" (Pine 2), attention to the dynamic and rapidly changing configuration of society on the part of authors and literary criticism accounts for a non-essentialist and self-reflexive perspective. Literary representations that express the intricacies of mobility, diversity, and mutual understanding in multifarious ways account for an amplification of the historical homogeneity that has characterised Irish literary spaces.[22] Hence, the dissenting, alternative, and innovative literary expressions that are studied here pose a challenge to social unity when identifying both the synergies and the resistance that are unleashed when negotiating the identity of the "Other", the identities of individuals inhabiting marginal spaces due to their race, gender, sexual orientation, and class. Iria Seijas-Pérez's close look at teenage pregnancy and abortion in Irish literature for young adults discloses the underlying currents of pro-life ideologies that had until recently frustrated any progress on this issue in contemporary Ireland. Thanks to a thorough analysis of the legal framework that led to the 2018 referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment, Seijas-Pérez is able to situate the reader within the current debate on the matter, only after warning against the unnoticed role of American lobbies and interests. Her review of YA literature reveals not only the good health of the genre, but also the limited number of texts that struggle with what in Ireland have been very controversial issues: teenage pregnancy and abortion. Among the few that may be found, Seijas-Pérez's timely selection of Claire Hennessy's *Like Other Girls* (2017) and Moïra Fowley-Doyle's *All the Bad Apples* (2019) show two novels that portray teenage efforts to access abortion in pre-Repeal Ireland. Her close attention to both texts situates them at the crossroads between resistance to tradition and innovation and she dissects the cultural context in which they were published, revealing significant signs of transcultural activity. At the level of text analysis, Seijas-Pérez underlines the daring and open treatment of the topic, the particular use of foetal iconography, and the modern portrayal of the protagonists. Culturally,

she also highlights how the novels reflect social resistance to change in Ireland, very much supported by tradition and religion, both nationally and from abroad. Seijas-Pérez completes her study, giving consideration to the sociological aspects of the narratives and their circulation, scrutinising the circumstances that surround the publication of the novels, assessing the authors' transcultural traits, and drawing critical attention to the relation between Irish literature and the global marketplace. It all provides a complete approach to Hennessy and Fowley-Doyle's works as cultural products, forming part of an ongoing debate on abortion that is far from closed, as Seijas-Pérez's comments clearly confirm. Next, Margarita Estévez-Saá's insightful contribution is a critical assessment of two recent novels: *Flight*, by Oona Frawley, and *Strange Flowers*, by Donal Ryan. She connects them with two historical landmarks that have deeply affected contemporary Ireland, the 2004 Irish Referendum on Citizenship, and Brexit. In this contribution, Estévez-Saá offers a sharp overview of the reception of Irish literature in the UK and the diverse implications of Brexit for Irish writers, thereby unveiling the ambivalent relation of Irish and British alike towards the other, the dissimilar, the foreigner. With that in mind, the contribution sets out to scrutinise Frawley and Ryan's novels, highlighting spatial mobility in contemporary societies and the subsequent complexities of conviviality, particularly in the Irish and the British contexts. The plots transcend cultural and national borders and negotiations of inclusion and exclusion are highlighted as constituent components of migration and mobility. Nationality, race, class and sexuality are the most evident prejudicial forms of differentiation. In like manner, Asier Altuna-García de Salazar approaches the representation of second-generation Irish communities in literature, an understudied field that opens the door to many avenues of interpretation under a transcultural lens. Negotiations of belonging, social acceptance, and identity are made evident in his analysis of Patrick Kimba, the protagonist of Susan Ryan's *The King of Lavender Square*. It is a thoroughly informed contribution that highlights the increasing multicultural essence of Irish society where varied processes of amalgamation take place. At the core of the novel is the re-definition of Irishness, which entails tensions between the native Irish and the immigrant "other". This analysis, strongly underpinned by notions of diversity, processuality, and re-territorialisation, considers the physical and cultural spaces in *The King of Lavender Square* as contact zones and offers an insightful approach to sports, particularly football, as contemporary sites of transcultural practices. In her debut novel, ambivalence between nationalism and diversity, and the liminal space that second-generation Irish occupy are at the core of Ryan's re-definition of Irishness. Finally, in "Resistance and Activism in Queer and HIV/AIDS Irish Theatre", J. Javier Torres-Fernández offers an analysis of the way that

queerness and HIV/AIDS have been treated in Irish theatre, highlighting the stigmatising cultural narrative that has stained the LGBTIQA+ community and their problematic identification with Irishness. As is related in the chapter, official narratives used to associate HIV-positive people with some form of divine punishment, or illness imported from abroad. Hence, the exploration of queerness in Irish theatre that first emerged quite timidly and only recently more openly cannot be traced back to any earlier than the mid-1990s. Giving an informed account of the social advances, Torres-Fernández opens a dialogue on Irishness and HIV/AIDS, with special attention to the representation of queerness in selected plays by Hughes, Barry, McMahon, and Bliss. First, the study, which covers a span of thirty years, detects a very marginal use of HIV/AIDS in Irish theatre, and the varied and deep inherent resistance within Irish society against foreign influence. At a second stage, a more evident presence of AIDS and queerness is detected. Spatial mobility and exchanges are found essential for this change and the analysis delineates the transcultural traits from the American stage that have shaped the more open and direct treatment in recent plays of AIDS and LGBTIQA+ issues. All in all, the process of transculturation, not without its forces of resistance and inclusion, that Ireland has undergone is revealed in this chapter through the progressive perception and understanding of HIV/AIDS and queerness that has been witnessed in Irish theatre.

Naturally, scholarship and academia are also affected by the process of globalisation that Ireland has been undergoing in the last decades. In the ***Coda***, Gerry Smyth offers a critical and informed approach to the past and the present of Irish Studies and suggests potential modes of reorientation. Under the compelling title "*The Past, the Present and the Wonderful, Worrisome Future: Transculturalism, Memory and Crisis in Irish Studies"*, Smyth gathers personal and collective memories and crises that bring meaning to what we call Irish culture, acknowledges its transcultural strand, and advocates for a renewed interest of Irish Studies in the idea of crisis, the modern configurations of Irish identity, and the environmental challenges ahead in order to display a more impactful and responsible mode of operation.

Finally, the thoroughly informed contributions contained in this edited collection reassess past literary works and cast light on contemporary literature elucidating the fast transformations and undercurrents moulding Irish society. Taking the island of Ireland as a paradigmatic example of a rapidly changed territory, in this volume established and emerging scholars put into question the concept of "Irishness" as something fixed and immutable, and scrutinise the workings of cultural encounters amid forces of cooperation and resistance in Irish literature. Issues of power, identity, and belonging permeate the works that are analysed, which acquire unexpected nuances

under the light of transculturality. While these contributions provide new insights into Irish literature and society, they also raise many questions that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. Despite the limitations on both space and the number of authors and works that have been selected, this volume seeks to spur scholarly work in the field of transculturality and advocates for its utility for the advancement of Irish studies.

Notes

1 This introduction adheres to Michael O'Sullivan's understanding of the term globalisation as "the increasing integration and resulting interdependence of markets, economies, societies and political system" (31).
2 It is interesting to note that not only were Irish emigrants accepted back during that period, but also asylum seekers, particularly from Nigeria and Romania. However, as Elaine Moriarty explained, as from 2003 onwards, asylum applications declined, due to the increasing stringency of EU and Irish state border controls.
3 For a more detailed account of the time of the Celtic Tiger and its notorious crash, see Bufacchi; Donovan and Murphy; Kirby "The Celtic Tiger"; Maher; Murphy.
4 For a historical review of the term "Celtic Phoenix", see Aran Ward Sell's article.
5 As Kevin O'Rourke explained in detail, this historical event did not emerge out of nowhere, but can be traced back to the nineteenth century and the complex relations between Great Britain and Europe. Complementarily, Michael Keating detected the double conflict between the UK's inner tensions with its own secessionist movements and the incompatibility of shared sovereignty between Westminster Parliament and the European Union.
6 The economic consequences of this new configuration are yet to be assessed, but the move has affected the delicate equilibrium in place since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement in terms of politics, peacefulness, and social order, which, according to Colfer and Diamond, embodied such EU values as reconciliation, cross-border cooperation, and the rule of law. Furthermore, it has stimulated the idea of a United Ireland, a possibility of interest to the Irish government in light of the report "Brexit and the future of Ireland: uniting Ireland and its people in peace and prosperity" (2017) commissioned by the Irish Parliament, and the campaign "Shared Island Initiative", with some €500m in funding to be expended between 2021–25. This controversial and very lively debate is already sparking heated discussions and negotiations.
7 The *ELE Student Statistics Report 2022* described an expanding English language market in Ireland with some 44.4% of adult learners from within and the remaining 55.6% from outside the EU. For more details see https://mei.ie/ele-student-statistics-report/
8 Although the Irish corporate tax rate was raised from 2.5% to 15% in 2021 to align it with the minimum European corporate tax rate, Ireland is still an attractive location for American multinational subsidiaries. For a qualitative

study, see Delaney. For a more detailed explanation on the economic relations between Ireland and the USA, see Hayward and O'Donnell, respectively.

9 The government's straightforward campaign to attract interest from abroad reads: "Make 2023 the year you discover Ireland's open community – where you can live, learn, create and innovate at the heart of Europe". This invitation encapsulates a desire for growth and expansion. For more information go to www.ireland.ie and www.dfa.ie/media/globalirish/Diaspora-Strategy-2020-English.pdf

10 As Bryan Fanning accurately contended, the Irish government has actively promoted immigration into Ireland to meet the demands of the labour market. For example, skilled workers were needed at the turn of the century to satisfy the voracious appetite of the Celtic Tiger or The Phoenix. Consequently, notable demographic change ensued that, in Fanning's view, fell short in terms of integration.

11 Irish emigration has been the object of study for decades. For more than two centuries, the Irish have emigrated in unparalleled numbers, with peaks at critical periods, and with the USA and Britain as their preferred destinations though, by the end of the last century, other European locations became attractive too (Miller). As economic prospects improved, the green island became a site of interest and inward migration, especially during the Celtic Tiger and the current times of prosperity. Accordingly, studies on this phenomenon have considered not only the points of departure and arrival, but also its scales and duration, the consequences that these movements have for individuals and societies, and their implications in terms of belonging, identity and successful or failed settlement. For more information see (Gilmartin; Villar-Argáiz "Literary Visions"; Morales-Ladrón and Elices-Agudo).

12 To understand the extent of Ireland's appeal, it is interesting to note that, in 2022, immigrants from India and Brazil were the largest groups according to the Census of that year. For more detailed data, see www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/keyfindings/

13 Asylum seekers are a poignant case with regards to census population. The controversial implementation of Direct Provision, in 2001, prompted criticism in so far as human rights organisations described the legislation as degrading and some critical voices claimed that the Direct Provision system isolated asylum applicants and left them invisible (Lentin). Another critical issue is the right to Irish citizenship of children born in Ireland to parents with no immigration status. The 2004 referendum sought approval to limit the right to citizenship of the offspring of undocumented migrant parents. A measure that was reformed after some social pressure and the Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrants scheme opened on 31 January 2022, only to close on 31 July 2022. At present, the applications of over 600 young people born in Ireland have been successfully processed.

14 In view of the asymmetries between economic success and social and developmental progress, there is some ongoing controversy surrounding support for the neoliberal regime and the extent to which Ireland has welcomed it. Emeritus Professor Peadar Kirby ("Vulnerability") is one of the leading voices warning against the societal impact of globalisation upon increasingly larger swathes

of the population showing vulnerabilities to neoliberal demands. Other voices (Smyth) have advocated for a moral vision that is not dominated by economics.

15 Regarding social advances, transcultural patterns can inevitably be seen when looking at recent events where restricted access to abortion in Northern Ireland became available, likewise, after public pressure. Although part of the UK, the 1967 Abortion act never included Northern Ireland. It was only in October 2019 that abortion was decriminalized, becoming lawful on 31 March 2020. Similarly, same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland has only been legal since 13 January 2020, following the enactment of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019. Many claim that the Republic's social mobilisation and referenda had much to do with Northern Ireland's process.

16 Although Catholicism remains prevalent among the population, in the 2022 Census, 14% identified as non-denominational. It is indisputable that a growing tendency towards secularisation is spreading among the Irish population, with an increase of 63% of non-denominational subjects since 2016.

17 Irish literature not only stands as a privileged witness to both personal and social transformations within Irish society, but it also contributes significantly to projecting an image of the country overseas. The importance of the arts for Ireland's interests is evidenced in the Culture Ireland scheme, which has been actively promoting the Irish arts scene worldwide since 2005. Its initial budget of €2M rose to €6.6M in 2023, a significant increase that reflects the efficacy of the arts at publicising Ireland internationally.

18 One of the most relevant hubs on transcultural studies in Europe can be found at The Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context", at the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies, Germany, where art historian Monica Juneja is one of its leading scholars. Another leading research group can be found at the English School of Language, Literatures and Learning at Dalarna University where Irene Gilsenan Nordin is a prominent voice.

19 In a very enlightening article, Daniel König and Katja Rakow offered a detailed account of the use of the transcultural approach within an array of disciplines including gender studies, international relations and communication, migration studies, literary studies, visual and media anthropology, art history, urbanism and environmental studies, and political theory. Similarly, Lisa Gaupp provided references on a variety of fields concerning the study of culture into which transculturality has spread. On a cautionary note, and acknowledging the utility of transculturality for our understanding of society and culture, Sissy Helff has detected some limitations to this framework of analysis, especially when dealing with liminal groups for instance, such as gypsy clans and asylum seekers, whose experience with non-places problematizes modern transcultural life.

20 The prefix *trans* refers to fluid border demarcations and porosity. Benessaieh warned against identification with other terms such as "transculturation", "multiculturalism", and "interculturality". Transculturality is a separate concept that designates specific processes that other terms capture inadequately. Its focus on processes, dynamics, change and diversity within societies is what distinguishes it from other approaches.

21 Although transcultural studies have developed and enjoyed a great reception over the past few years, the transcultural approach towards Irish literature has not followed a consistent pattern.
22 Recently, several scholars have raised their voices to reclaim the political purpose of Irish Studies and literary scholarship, especially in relation to diversity and minorities. For a more detailed discussion see Penney and Mulhall, respectively.

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Part I

Texts that Blur Frontiers

The Island of Ireland and Beyond

1 Transculturality and the Ghost of Roger Casement in *Ulysses*, by James Joyce

Mariana Bolfarine

Introduction

Faced with the decade of commemorations of the centenaries of the Great War, of Irish independence, and of artistic and literary movements such as European and Latin American Modernisms, this chapter examines two liminal Irish figures related to this period: the celebrated writer James Joyce and the revolutionary Roger Casement. I argue that there are points of similarity between Casement and Joyce as transcultural figures who have occupied borderline positions: the former as a British Consul/Irish revolutionary, and the latter as having been repositioned as an Irish writer.

I comply with Michael Cronin's statement that Roger Casement belongs Roger Casement belongs to the "global nomads" category, that is, individuals who leave their own cultural environment to find professional opportunities equal to their skills outside their home country. According to Michael Cronin's classification of migrants (Cronin 2006, 45), Roger Casement's writings are transcultural in that he focuses on his spatial dislocations between continents, their peoples and the spaces they inhabit. A transcultural Joyce "means for him to be placed in a context that is, at once, more local and more global, that is more Irish and, thus, more postcolonial" (McCourt 2022, 1). In this regard, Frederic Jameson (1990) conceives of Joyce as coexisting between two incommensurable realities of the metropolis and of the colony simultaneously. Furthermore, whilst both men left Ireland, albeit for different reasons, Casement spent his life embracing and learning the categories of Irish life while Joyce spent his life resisting them.

Taking the notion of transculturality into account, firstly, I will define the concept and reflect upon how it may be used to consider connections between James Joyce and Roger Casement. Then, considering that *Ulysses* is read and reread differently across different cultures, I will argue that there are points of connection between Joyce and Casement as transcultural figures. For this, I will focus on the way in which Casement is included and

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mentioned by the characters J.J. Molloy and the citizen in the "Cyclops" episode of *Ulysses*, hence reflecting the construction of transcultural identities. Finally, I will show that Joyce is obsessed with the haunting voices of the dead in *Ulysses* (Gibbons 2015), and that Casement's is one among these many voices.

Some Thoughts on Transculturality and the Expanding of Cultural Borders

Transculturality is a concept which, despite having existed for a long time, has gained relevance with the advent of globalisation. According to Wolfgang Welsch (2016), it is important to clarify that the concept of multiculturality differs from that of transculturality. While the former is about different cultures living together within one society, but still being conceived as homogeneous and delineated, the latter perceives cultures as interconnected. Transculturality has revealed that cultures, once considered to be inherently different, share similar fundamental problems concerning human rights, feminism, ecological awareness, etc. (Welsch 2016). In citing Edward Said, who claimed that: "All cultures are hybrid; none of them is pure; none of them is identical to a pure folk; none of them consists of a homogeneous fabric" (qtd. in Welsch 2016, 76), Welsch asserts that multiple cultural connections inform our cultural background and that writers, too, claim no longer to be shaped by their homelands, but by different cultures of reference.

It is also worth highlighting that transculturality challenges notions of "container cultures" and argues for a "repositioning of spatial concepts with respect to the overlapping fields of entanglement and/or rationality of cultural practice, and a critical discussion of binary oppositions, such as local and global, or centre and periphery" (Abu-Er-Rub et al. 2019, xxx). Transcultural connectivities bring together not only modern nation-states and other societal institutions, but also past societies, languages, markets, media and much more. These connections promote a repositioning of boundaries from a multi-perspectival and translocal point of view. Transculturality questions nationalisms and the "zoning" of the world into "developed" and "less developed", centre and periphery, universal and anecdotal as key assumptions of area studies (Abu-Er-Rub et al. 2019, xxxi).

Moreover, "a transcultural lens", according to the authors, "focuses on the fact that two sites are connected and on how connections transform what is being connected and who is involved" (Abu-Er-Rub et al. 2019, xxxi), hence calling for a "repositioning of boundaries". In particular, these connections can be seen in *Ulysses* as Joyce repositions the borders of an insular Ireland by extending them into Europe and beyond by tackling issues that are local, such as the Anglo-Irish politics of the time in the

year of 1904, in which *Ulysses* is set, but also global, such as the Congo atrocities[1] and the involvement of Roger Casement. Therefore, bearing in mind these two subjects, a "transcultural vantage point on border-crossing agents brings in new considerations with respect to mobilities, temporalities and space" for "when moving into different social, spatial or temporal contexts, relations between people and places are reconfigured in, and in turn, configure new webs of meaning" (Abu-Er-Rub et al. 2019, xxxi).

From a transcultural perspective, "culture is constantly changing, moving, adapting" (Abu-Er-Rub et al. 2019, xxiii) and it does so by processes of interaction, circulation and reconfiguration. Transcultural identities, such as those of Casement and Joyce, comprehend a cosmopolitan feature, promoted by constant spatial dislocations, but also a component of local affiliation. As one's actual homeland can be far away from the place of origin, people can choose because "homeland is the state of having escaped", Hokerheimer and Adorno affirmed (qtd. in Welsch 2016, 85). Similar to Casement, Joyce "in his self-exile never left Dublin. He read Dublin newspapers, listened constantly to *Radio na Éireann* and would question his visitors closely – after they had presented the ritual gift of Hafner's sausages – as to the changed or changing topography of the city", affirmed Donagh McDonagh (qt. in McCourt 2022, 74). Even when self-exiled in Trieste, Joyce's mind never left his original homeland: "Ireland is all through him and in him and of him; and Dublin, its streets and its buildings and its people, he loves with the wholehearted affection of the artist. […] He may live out of Dublin, but he will never get away from it" (O'Hegarty qtd. in McCourt 2022, 7). To Joyce, Ireland's insularity produced the nets of language,[2] nationality and religion that held him back. In his work, especially in *Ulysses,* Joyce creates Leopold Bloom's one-day "odyssey" in Dublin, where he "re-maps and deconstructs traditional monolithic concepts" (McCourt 2022, xxxvi) of writing. This way, according to McCourt (2022), Joyce and his work are taken from Ireland and into the wider context of European modernism. In fact, according to Ernest Boyd, "with the work of James Joyce and in particular with this *Ulysses* which is soon going to appear in Paris, Ireland is making a sensational re-entrance into high European literature" (qtd. in McCourt 2022, 39). What follows is a discussion on how transcultural connections between Casement and Joyce can not only be established but are also essential to their individual practices.

Roger Casement and James Joyce: Where the Global and the Local Meet

In order to comprehend the selected passages from *Ulysses* which connect Casement to Joyce, it is necessary to briefly touch upon a controversial

chapter of the European colonial enterprise in the early twentieth century: the Congo atrocities. The region that is currently designated as the Democratic Republic of the Congo was first explored in 1867 and the British journalist Henry Morton Stanley took it upon himself to find the famous Dr. David Livingstone, a Scottish missionary who became a legend after having disappeared in the heart of Africa for almost seven years (Gondola 2002). When Stanley returned to Europe in 1878, he had not only found Dr. Livingstone, but also opened the heart of Africa to Europe. Stanley went on to write about the limitless opportunities for England to explore the lands he had discovered, and what called his attention was that: "There are 40,000,000 nude people and the cotton-spinners of Manchester are waiting to clothe them … and the ministers of Christ are zealous to bring them, the poor benighted heathen, into the Christian fold …" (Stanley qtd. in Gondola 2002, 49).

Although England was not initially enthusiastic about investing in Africa, King Leopold II wished to put Belgium on a par with other European powers and hired Stanley. As disputes over colonies escalated, the 1885 Berlin Conference legitimised the partition of Africa and recognised the Congo Free State. Before long, rumours of atrocities committed against native rubber collectors during the height of the rubber boom in Leopold's Free State began to spread across Europe. As a result, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs convened a British commission of inquiry and Roger Casement, born in Dublin in 1864, and then consul in Boma, confirmed administrative irregularities. The case of the Congo Free State is significant as it is an early account of human rights violations which have been confirmed by the British Foreign Office and officially reported.[3] Casement later became British consul in Brazil (1906–1913), and investigated atrocities in the Putumayo, in the Peruvian Amazon, in 1911. In consequence, Casement was acclaimed for the authorship of the *Congo Report* (1904) and the *Amazon Report* (1912), which describe brutal violence committed against men, women and children who were flogged, had their limbs amputated, and who suffered from starvation for not reaching the rubber quotas imposed on them.

After witnessing this policy of terror, Casement joined the cause of Irish independence and sought German support against Britain at the outbreak of World War I. He returned to Ireland on 21 April 1916 where he was arrested and taken to the Tower of London. During Casement's trial for high treason, personal diaries of homosexual content were found by the Home Office in his London lodgings. On 29 June 1916, after being found guilty, he read his "Speech from the Dock" (O'Síocháin, 2008) and was the last of the leaders to be hanged on 3 August 1916.

Casement's life shows the ambivalence of imperial practice, as he was both an agent as a British Consul, and a victim as an Irishman. Although

Casement's trial was to have a propaganda effect, historian Angus Mitchell affirms that "In death Casement proved even more of an irritant to the authorities than he had proved in life" (Mitchell 2011, 48), an idea also captured in the refrain of W.B. Yeats illustrious poem: "The ghost of Roger Casement is beating on the door" (Mitchell 2011, 51). In this study I uphold that Roger Casement, as a British diplomat turned into Irish nationalist, can be considered a transcultural figure, for when he was a colonial agent, he was constantly moving in between borders, across different countries and continents, and having to navigate different customs, languages and cultures.[4] The fact that he witnessed first-hand the injustice by unwatched colonial practice taking place in far-off regions from the metropolis slowly turned him against imperialism, first by embracing the cause against the injustice committed in the Congo and the Amazon, then for his taking part in the cause of the Irish independence. This shows that despite the fact that Casement was away from Ireland for most of his life, his homeland was always at the back of his mind.[5]

Similar to Casement, James Joyce was born in Dublin in 1882 but lived most of his life outside Ireland, between Trieste, Zurich and Paris, where he died in 1941. Joyce's early life is of interest as it elucidates his break with the Catholic Church as a young adult and his criticism of Irish society. In this respect, according to Fintan O'Toole, Joyce used as "weapons" "silence, cunning and exile" (O'Toole 2009, 101) to write about being an Irish writer writing about Ireland. In 1920, Joyce moved to Paris, where he finished *Ulysses*. Considered obscene and nonsensical in Ireland and rejected in England, it finally managed to escape censorship after meeting the bookseller Sylvia Beach, founder of the famous Shakespeare and Co., who published the novel in 1922 (McCourt 2022). To think about Joyce in transcultural terms is, according to Karen Lawrence, "to place him and his afterlife in a context at once more global and more local, presenting him as at once more particularly Irish and more postcolonial" (Lawrence 2009, 1). Still, according to Lawrence, as a cultural icon, Joyce provides an interesting case for investigation since he occupies a borderline position – canonical and modernist, as well as an Irish writer from colonial (British) and postcolonial (Irish) periods. In this regard, Frederic Jameson conceives of Joyce as coexisting between two incommensurable realities, that of the metropolis and that of the colony, simultaneously. Jameson renders *Ulysses* a novel produced in a context "which reproduces the appearance of first world social realities and social relationships… but whose underlying structure is in fact much closer to that of the … colonised daily life" (Jameson 1990, 60). Despite being constantly away from their homelands, it is also common that transcultural migrants increase their connections with their countries of origin whilst away from them. This was the case of Casement and Joyce, since they felt that, in some way, they belonged

to Ireland rather than in their host countries. In fact, moving away from Ireland and becoming acquainted with different countries and cultures was key for Casement's becoming an Irish nationalist and for Joyce's writing about Ireland.

In his essay "Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages", written in Trieste in 1907, Joyce expounds on imperialism and nationalism, as he claims that "Nations have their ego, just like individuals. The case of a people who like to attribute to themselves qualities and glories foreign to other people has not been entirely unknown in history" (Joyce [1907]1989, 154), and that similar to the Aryans or the Greeks, the Irish proudly "love to refer to their country as the island of saints and sages" (Joyce [1907]1989, 154). However, during the eight centuries of British occupation, he also notes that "Ireland ceased to be an intellectual force in Europe" (Joyce [1907]1989, 161), for it was an interval of little cultural production. In terms of national identity, after explaining that far from being monoracial, the Irish are an amalgam of the peoples who enacted the many invasions that marked its foundation, he claims that "to exclude from the present nation all who are descended from foreign families would be impossible" and "to deny the name patriot to all those who are not of Irish stock would be to deny it to almost all the heroes of the modern movement" (Joyce [1907]1989, 162), two remarks that would later be echoed in *Ulysses*. Thus, Joyce deconstructs the idea of a pure Irish identity, for he wonders: "What race, or what language […] can boast of being pure today?" (Joyce [1907]1989, 166). In Joyce's criticism of imperialism, he relates British colonial practice to Leopold II's enterprise in the Congo, which he would also replicate in *Ulysses:* "I find it rather naïve to heap insults on England for her misdeeds in Ireland. A conqueror cannot be casual, and for so many centuries the Englishman has done in Ireland only what the Belgian is doing today in the Congo Free State […]" (Joyce [1907]1989, 166). Hence, written before *Ulysses*, his essay "Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages" shows transcultural connections in his contestation of nationality, imperialism and domination. As Pelillo-Hestermeyer affirms: "the application of a transcultural approach makes it possible to simultaneously recognise the fluidity of cultural entanglements […] and the ways those entanglements become solidified in seemingly fixed categories" (Pelillo-Hestermeyer 2021, 6). As an exile, Joyce tried to "fly by" the "nets" of religion, language, and nationality by creating complex, multi-layered fictions that can be read with close attention to the intricacies of Irish life, such as his brief reference in both texts to the Congo report and particularly in *Ulysses* to Casement, which reveal both resistance and interconnectivities.

That said, I argue that the reference to Casement and the Congo atrocities included in the "Cyclops" episode of *Ulysses* unveils a recognition of

the importance of Casement as a transcultural figure within Irish history. In fact, issues of nation and identity lie at the heart of the "Cyclops", especially when we consider the protagonist, Leopold Bloom, and the fact that he is constantly required to (re)affirm his national identity as an Irishman, since he is also a Jew. Similarly, as a foil narrative, after witnessing the atrocities, Casement, once a believer in the Empire, is also constantly reaffirming his Irishness and loyalty to Ireland rather than to England.

The "Cyclops" Episode: A Transcultural Rendering of Roger Casement

As aforementioned, Casement and Joyce are figures who have occupied ambivalent positions: Casement as a British Consul/Irish revolutionary, and Joyce as having been repositioned as an Irish writer.[6] Furthermore, whilst both had to leave Ireland, albeit for different reasons, Casement spent his life embracing and learning the categories of Irish life while Joyce, according to Eavan Boland, spent his life resisting them (2009, 13). I will show that Casement's disclosure of the Congo atrocities and Joyce's choice to include this chapter of transatlantic history in the "Cyclops" episode of *Ulysses* entail a transcultural essence.

The "Cyclops" is one of the most known and discussed episodes in *Ulysses*. It is highly political and depicts a moment in which tensions escalate in the novel. It describes Leopold Bloom's personal "odyssey" around the city of Dublin on 16 June 1904 while his wife, Molly Bloom, is having an encounter with her lover Blazes Boylan. The "Cyclops" corresponds to Book 9 in the *Odyssey*, the Greek epic poem by Homer (Gifford 1988, 314), in which the hero Odysseus relates his adventures against Polyphemus, the one-eyed monster, who is gigantic in size, but indifferent "to the laws that govern the civilised world" (Gifford 1988, 314). In the *Odyssey,* Odysseus and his men are trapped in a cave and are, one by one, slowly being eaten by Polyphemus. In order to save himself and his surviving men, Odysseus gets the giant drunk and blinds him with a "burning spike of olive wood" (Gifford 1988, 314). The following day, Odysseus makes the mistake of telling him his name and Polyphemus' father, Poseidon, delays his return to Ithaca. In Joyce's *Ulysses*, the "Cyclops" is the twelfth episode, which takes place between 5h00 and 6h00 pm, and it is set in Barney Kiernan's pub, decorated with mementos of crime and punishment (Gifford 1988, 314). The first-person narrator is an ordinary middle-class Dubliner, the fierce nationalist citizen corresponds to Homer's Cyclops, Polyphemus, and Bloom correlates to Odysseus. The episode revolves around issues of antisemitism, Irishness and national identity and it ends with Bloom outsmarting the citizen through his transcultural discourse, which revolves around diversity, inclusion, and love.

In the following paragraphs, I have selected three instances from the "Cyclops" episode that pave the way for the mention of Casement and his Congo investigation. First, the reader encounters a reference to capital punishment after a hangman's letter is read out, which leads to Bloom questioning the deterring effects of hanging, when the topic turns to persecution and national identity:

> — Persecution, says he, all the history of the world is full of it. Perpetuating national hatred among nations.
> — But do you know what a nation means? says John Wyse.
> — Yes, says Bloom.
> — What is it? says John Wyse.
> — A nation? says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place.
>
> […]
>
> — Or also living in different places.
>
> […]
>
> — What is your nation if I may ask, says the citizen.
> — Ireland, says Bloom. I was born here. Ireland. […] And I belong to a race too, says Bloom, that is hated and persecuted. Also now. This very moment. This very instant […] Robbed, says he. Plundered. Insulted. Persecuted. Taking what belongs to us by right. At this very moment, says he, putting up his fist, sold by auction off in Morocco like slaves or cattle.
> — Are you talking about the new Jerusalem? says the citizen
> — I'm talking about injustice, says Bloom.
>
> (Joyce 1922, 432)

This passage reveals Joyce's transcultural sensibility as it echoes the impossibility of a monocultural Ireland, a belief explored in "Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages". To Bloom, the idea of belonging to a nation or to a people is an inclusive category: he is Irish and he is a Jew. In like manner, Casement writes a letter to his friend, the historian Alice Stopford Green, and claims that he is an Irishman:

> […] finally when up in those Congo lonely forests I found myself – the incorrigible Irishman […] I realized then that I was looking at this tragedy with the eyes of another race – of a people once hunted themselves, whose hearts were based on affection as the root principle of

> contact with their fellow men and whose estimate of life was not of something eternally to be appraised at its market "price". And I said to myself, then, far up the Lulogo river, that I would do my part as an Irishman, wherever it might lead me personally.
>
> (20 April 1907, qtd in O'Síocháin 2008, vi)

Here, the idea of nation is expanded as borders are crossed. Once Casement moves away from the imperial centre in Europe, he realises the ills of imperialism in the Congo as he relates it to the "hunting" of his own people. Thus, it was in the Congo that Casement, then a British Consul in Brazil, became aware of his national identity as an Irishman. Similarly, in *Ulysses,* set in Ireland and recognising himself as an Irishman, Bloom also expands the idea of nation to the people who are being "persecuted" elsewhere, referring not only to the persecution of Jews that was taking place in the early twentieth century, but to injustice in general.

In another excerpt from *Ulysses*, the citizen reads aloud a piece of news from the *United Irishman* from the current year of 1904:

> So the citizen takes up one of his paraphernalia papers and he starts reading out:
>
> A delegation of the chief cotton magnates of Manchester was presented yesterday to His Majesty the Alaki of Abeakuta by Gold Stick in Waiting, Lord Walkup of Walkup on Eggs, to tender to His Majesty the heartfelt thanks of British traders for the facilities afforded them in his dominions. The delegation partook of luncheon at the conclusion of which the dusky potentate, in the course of a happy speech, freely translated by the British chaplain, the reverend Ananias Praisegod Barebones, tendered his best thanks to Massa Walkup and emphasised the cordial relations existing between Abeakuta and the British empire […].
>
> (Joyce 1922, 433)

This passage can be read as a satire on imperialism, in which the names of the leaders are parodied, such as the 'Gold Stick in Waiting', or 'Lord Walkup of Walkup on Eggs'.[7] Here, empire and colony are juxtaposed as the British Government ironically "thank" the Nigerian sovereign, the Alaki of Abeakuta, for facilitating access to his dominions. In 1904, the he Alaki did in fact visit the cotton industries in Manchester, which, years before, Stanley claimed could clothe "40,000,000 nude people" from the African continent. By linking the cotton industry in Manchester to the rubber exploitation in the Congo, which caused the death of thousands of African rubber collectors, and which will be mentioned just some paragraphs later, Joyce brings together modern nation-states and other

societal institutions, as well as the reader encountering a reference to past societies, languages, institutions, markets, and so on. These connections promote a repositioning of boundaries that bring together centre and periphery (Abu-Er-Rub et al. 2019, xxxi) and confirm Joyce's transcultural sensibility.

Subsequent to this reading, J.J. O'Molloy brings Roger Casement into the discussion:

> — Well, says J. J., if they're any worse than those Belgians in the Congo Free State they must be bad. Did you read that report by a man what's this his name is?
> — Casement, says the citizen. He's an Irishman.
> — Yes, that's the man, says J. J. Raping the women and girls and flogging the natives on the belly to squeeze all the red rubber they can out of them.
> — I know where he's gone, says Lenehan, cracking his fingers.
> — Who? says I.
> — Bloom, says he. The courthouse is a blind. […].
>
> (Joyce 1922, 435)

In this extract, J.J. O'Molloy and the nationalist citizen draw a clear parallel between the actions of the aforementioned Manchester magnates and those of Leopold II by referring to the exploitation of the natives of the Congo Free State to obtain the "red rubber", red because of the blood of the collectors which was shed at the time of atrocities. O'Molloy also refers specifically to Roger Casement's investigation in 1903, which led to the publication of his report as an official Blue Book in 1904, the year in which the saga of *Ulysses* takes place. Although Casement would have been well known in 1904, by 1922, the year *Ulysses* was published, he was already a long forgotten and silenced figure in England, Ireland and South America: the *Amazon Report* had already been published in 1912, Casement had been arrested, the *Black Diaries* had been found, and he had been hanged in 1916. Also forgotten was the fact that he had fought for the independence of Ireland, along with the sixteen leaders of the Easter Rising, and was buried in Pentonville prison in London, where he lay among convicted murderers and criminals.

Through displacement, both Joyce and Casement experience the land as a "contact zone" where transculturation takes place. To Casement, it was in the Congo, a contact zone at the outskirts of the British Empire, where he 'became' an Irishman after looking at Ireland through the "eyes of another race" (O'Síocháin and Sullivan 2003, vi). Africa and the Amazon were for Casement spaces of encounters in which "peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish

ongoing relations, usually involving coercion, inequality and conflict"' (Pratt qtd in Abu-Er-Rub et al. 2019, xxv). Likewise, Joyce had to move away from Ireland to Trieste and Paris in order to write about his homeland. These connections are particularly evident in 'Saints and Sages':

> A conqueror cannot be casual, and for so many centuries the Englishman has done in Ireland only what the Belgian is doing today in the Congo Free State, and what the Nipponese dwarf will do tomorrow in other lands. She enkindled its factions and took over its treasury. By the introduction of a new system of agriculture, she reduced the power of the native leaders and gave great estates to her soldiers. She persecuted the Roman church when it was rebellious and stopped when it became an effective instrument of subjugation. Her principal preoccupation was to keep the country divided.
>
> (Joyce [1907]1989, 166)

Thus, Joyce's choice to include Casement and the Congo atrocities in *Ulysses*, is a product of his transcultural perspective, that is, his ability to transit between different cultures and see diversity within cultures, the same way he sees "Our civilisation" as "a vast fabric, in which the most diverse elements are mingled" (Joyce [1907]1989). His writing of Casement into his story about Dublin seeks to immortalise him, for Joyce wrote *Ulysses* "to give a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city of Dublin one day suddenly disappeared from the Earth it could be reconstructed out of my book" (qtd. in Budgen 1960, 69). This means that, if Casement is worthy of a mention in his novel, it is because the nation that Joyce imagined had Casement's ghost knocking on its door (Yeats 1936).[8] According to Gibbons, in Joyce's work,

> the ghost appears in moments of crisis, where the past slips through the private nets of memory but has not yet become public history … in a liminal zone between inner and outer life. Contrary to Sigmund Freud's view that the ghost is a projection of inner life, the specter emanates from an incomplete project of self-formation, as in the failure to internalize memory itself in a colonial culture holding on to relational ties from the past, the ghost also holds out for alternative futures: Joyce's work is set in a city on the verge of revolt, emerging from generations of cultural paralysis.
>
> (Gibbons, 2015 xv)

In 1904, Casement was not a ghost; he was still alive in the context of *Ulysses*. Nevertheless, an early 1920s reader would either pass through the reference to Casement, or render it uncanny, as a ghost hovering over

the novel, revealing Joseph Brodsky's claim that "there is always something left over from the past, and that is the future" (qtd. in Gibbons 2015, xv). Joyce's *Ulysses* was a reaction paralysis, an attempt to invent a different Ireland in fiction, one that is superimposed on the original, and which is more tolerant, more open to diversity, more cosmopolitan, more transcultural.

Final Remarks

To conclude, this rendering of the writings of Roger Casement and James Joyce, two celebrated albeit at the time controversial Irish figures, has shown that the spatial dislocations experienced by both men resulted in their being placed in a context that is more local in their constant referring to Ireland and, at the same time, more global as they are in constant spatial dislocation, which makes them also more postcolonial, by leaving the centre and writing from outside the British empire.

This analysis has given light to a transcultural reading of Joyce's celebrated novel, *Ulysses*, at the height of modernism in literature and the arts in general, in connection with the figure of Casement, who had been executed only six years before. I have defined the concept of transculturality and reflected upon how it may be used to consider connections between James Joyce, as an Irish writer, and Roger Casement, as a British Consul. With the support of transcultural theories (Abu-Er-Rub et al. 2019; Pelillo-Hertermeyer 2021; Welsch 2016), this analysis has brought to the fore connections between *Ulysses* and Casement's writings (Lawrence 2009; Bolfarine 2015, 2022; Gibbons 2015; Joyce) which challenge the main motivations of imperial practice in the Congo and in Ireland. These historical events are connected in the "Cyclops" Episode of *Ulysses,* in which Casement is mentioned by the characters J.J. Molloy and the citizen. The Congo atrocities caused by the nineteenth century rubber boom was a traumatic historical event that had a global impact. Its disclosure in Casement's reports ignited a scandal, which also affected James Joyce, as he links it with the visit of the Alaki of Abeakuta to the cotton industries in Manchester, which, many years before explorer Henry Morton Stanley remarked, could be aimed at "clothing" the "40,000,000 nude people" from the African continent.

The fact that the voice of Casement's ghost looms over the episode reveals that Joyce is obsessed with the haunting voices of the dead, and that Casement's is one among these many voices. In a nutshell, the "Cyclops" episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses* functions as a lens through which one is able to better "see" the underlying international connections across time and space and the exposition of gaps within nationalistic discourses regarding the consequences of imperial practice.

Notes

1 The Congo atrocities were perpetrated during the Belgian King Leopold II's reign, from 1885 to 1908. Casement's investigation took place in 1903 and his report was presented to the British Foreign Office and published in 1904 (Ó Síocháin 2008).

2 Several critics refer to the "nets" of language, nationality and religion from which Joyce tried so often to escape. This reference comes from James Joyce's *Küntelsrroman A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* and they are mentioned by the protagonist Stephen Dedalus: "You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets." (Joyce 1977, pp. 58, 50).

3 Casement's report was handed in in 1904 as *Correspondence and Report from His Majesty's Counsul at Boma Respecting the Administration of the Independent State of the Congo* and it is held at the Public records Office in Kew. According to Séamus ÓSiocháin (2008), "His Congo and Putumayo reports are forerunners of similar ones today by such groups as Amnesty International, Anti-Slavery International and Human Rights Watch" (p. ix)

4 One example that shows that Casement was comfortable in the face of other cultures is Polish writer Joseph Conrad's account of how he met Casement in the Congo: "I met Casement for the first time in the Congo in 1890. For some three weeks he lived in the same room in the Matadi Station of the Belgian Societé du Haut Congo. He was rather reticent as to the exact character of his connection with it, but the work he was busy about then was recruiting labour. He knew the coast languages well. I went with him several times on short expeditions to hold 'palavers' with the neighbouring village chiefs" (Letter to John Quinn, 24 May 1916 – The collected letters of Joseph Conrad, vol. 5, Cambridge UP: 596-597, qtd. Bolfarine, 2018 In *Between Angels and Demons*: 36).

5 Proof of this may be found in his dying wish for his remains to be taken from Pentonville prison in London back to Glens of Antrim, in Northern Ireland (Bolfarine 2018, 226).

6 In *Consuming Joyce* (2022), Frank McCourt dedicates a long section to the fact that due to strong censorship, especially because of the Catholic Church, Joyce's work was initially rejected in Ireland and *Ulysses* was first published in France by Shakespeare & Co. It was only after his death that Joyce was slowly reclaimed as an Irish writer.

7 According to Don Gifford, "a gilded baton is the emblem of office of the Captain and Gold Stick of His Majesty's Body Guard pf the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen-at-Arms (the ceremonial guards on state occasions)". Gifford explains that Goldstick was the Right Honourable Baron Belper in 1904. Also, according to Gifford, Ananias Praisegod was a London fanatic preacher and a member of Parliament, called Barebones "in mockery of its alleged unpractical and sanctimonious nature" (Gifford 1988, 365).

8 This is a reference to W. B. Yeats' poem "The ghost of Roger Casement" (1936), which renders Casement as ghost who continues to haunt Anglo-Irish relations (Bolfarine 2015).

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2 Censorship and the Poetry of Ciaran Carson and Marin Sorescu

A Transcultural Reading

Shannon Kuta Kelly

Introduction

In a panel at the 2022 Belfast Book Festival, Romanian poet Maria Stadnicka described Northern Ireland and Romania as existing on the "extreme sides of Europe", in "cultural blind spots", often overlooked or subsumed by the cultures around them, and noted the underexplored relationship between them (Stadnicka et al.). In the same way that past generations of Irish writers have looked to Poland or Russia, many contemporary poets on the island have sought kinship with Romania, especially with the coinciding timelines of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the rise and fall of the Nicolae Ceauşescu regime in Romania. During the Troubles and under Ceauşescu, censorship at both the state and individual level was rampant, yet poetry proved to be a place one could bypass censorship, and therefore a place of intersection where transcultural exchange could occur. By repositioning the work of Northern Irish poet Ciaran Carson (1948–2019) and Romanian poet Marin Sorescu (1936–1996) in this interstitial space, both nations can be viewed not as peripheries or as unlikely counterparts, but as important "contact zones", salient and universal models of poetry as a transcultural agent (Pratt 8).

A Case for Comparison

Postmodern literature, by nature, lends itself to transcultural assessment, with its frequent genre bending and embrace of intertextuality and pastiche; Hans Harder argues that "the mixture of genres and the transgression of the borders between them has become a mark of postmodernity" (186). Further, contemporary writers are influenced by myriad world literatures, and are no longer shaped by a "single homeland, but by differing reference countries" (Welsch 71). The island of Ireland, for instance, has been looking to Eastern Europe literarily throughout much of its history. A paramount example of this lies in Seamus Heaney's affinity

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for Czesław Miłosz, and other recent notable examples include Medbh McGuckian's poems to and about Tolstoy, Lermontov, and Tsvetayeva; McGuckian's and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's particular engagement with the work of Akhmatova and Tsvetayeva; and Sean Dunne's translations of Akhmatova (Sewell 241). Leontia Flynn describes Northern Ireland and its poetries as specifically "tilted" between identities and viewed from the outside in, writing, "Northern Ireland is a place of impermanence and permeable thresholds, always being viewed from or in relation to elsewhere" (147). It is its "permeable threshold" that lends Northern Irish poetry to comparative and transcultural studies.

Sorin Alexandru has described Romania as an "intermediary space that attenuates and absorbs shock-waves coming from neighbouring colossi, Austria, Russia, and Turkey", leading to a similarly "tilted" identity to Flynn's description of Northern Ireland, and making both entities apt for comparison (qtd. in Zirra 122).

Accordingly, Romanian poetry offers a way into Northern Irish poetry, albeit a lesser explored one. John Fairleigh compiled two collections of work by young Romanian poets in 1996 and 1998, pairing the Romanian poets with Irish translators. On this decision, Fairleigh commented:

> it became clear that there were deep affinities between the poets and their themes, and striking parallels between the two countries in the way poets were expected to articulate private thoughts and public conscience.
>
> (12)

Fairleigh furthered the connection, noting that "Poets in Romania and in Ireland have been drawn deeply into the social and political lives of their countries" (back cover). While they did not translate one another, both Carson and Sorescu are present in the 1996 collection, and Fairleigh notes that, despite travel restrictions in Communist Romania, Sorescu visited Belfast on several occasions (12). One such occasion was in 1991, when 10 Irish poets read Sorescu their translations of his work. In return, Sorescu commissioned 10 poets from his native Craiova region to translate those 10 Irish writers (Piette 127). His engagement with Irish writers and his international fame makes Sorescu a particularly important character in the conversation between Northern Irish and Romanian poetry; his presence in Northern Ireland, at a time when travel to the West was uncommon, allowed for rare and valuable cultural exchange. Culture changes through such exchange "beyond real or perceived borders", and in the case of Carson and Sorescu, there is both a physical national border and a perceived border of censorship, both of which were surmounted through their poetry (Abu-Er-Rub et al. xxiii).

Further, Carson and Sorescu were poets who very much wrote about their time and place, yet their work shares remarkable overlap. Labelled "Belfast's unofficial poet laureate", Carson's work was deeply concerned with mapping Belfast, with the Troubles, and with the censorship, violence, and surveillance of the time (McFadden). Sorescu, too, wrote about his life in Romania and its privations, but cleverly so, evading censorship; he enjoyed an unparalleled audience both in Romania and abroad, and managed frequent publication, walking the "difficult line between outright revolt and self-imposed censorship" ("Marin Sorescu"). Both Carson and Sorescu used coded and evasive language, uncertainty and replaceability of self, and deconstruction of language as a stand-in for violence to elude censors.

Censorship and Surveillance in Northern Ireland and Romania

Censorship in Northern Ireland and Romania in the 1980s varied greatly in severity and degree of government intervention. In Northern Ireland, censorship was most manifest in the media – specifically television – with the strictest measures imposed by the British government on broadcasting companies throughout the 1980s, with particular focus on the BBC. In Romania, censorship was wider spread and government sanctioned. This chapter does not make a direct comparison between the censorship present in Northern Ireland and Romania, but rather stresses the importance of censorship in both places from a transcultural perspective. As Wolfgang Welsch affirms, the "same basic problems and states of consciousness today appear in cultures once considered to be fundamentally different" (68). With this in mind, this contribution seeks to assess the presence of censorship and its effects on poetry across borders and languages.

Definitions of censorship generally speak to the strict regulation of speech, writing, and artistic production, controlled by the state, and it is frequently conceptualised as a fixed top-down system, with, as Jan Plamper notes, rigid dichotomies of "writers vs. censors…of state vs. society" (526). However, in practice, censorship takes on a more complex and multi-tiered structure. Arlen Viktorovich Blium proposes a hierarchical model for censorship, with self-censorship – the monitoring of an individual's ideas during production – at its base, followed by editorial censorship, or censorship rooted in government organisations who censor the individual. Finally, at the top of this hierarchy is the individual or group of individuals with ultimate power over the editorial censors (qtd. in Sherry 734). This presence of censorship at various levels contributes to what Marianna Tax Choldin refers to as "omnicensorship". Choldin defines omnicensorship as a system that "permeates every aspect of artistic

and intellectual life and functions with infinite variety" (qtd. in Sherry 734). Samantha Sherry similarly summarises the unilateral and hierarchical nature of censorship as an "all-encompassing system of control of speech or writing: at the root of all censorial action is the malign influence of the state" (733). Thus, while the state, with its ability to enforce regulations, holds obvious authority in matters of censorship, the control takes on a life of its own at all levels, due to its "all-encompassing" nature. Accordingly, while censorship at the highest tier in Northern Ireland and Romania differed in severity, the effects of omnicensorship pervaded all areas of life, including poetry. Sorescu himself explained that "If, for a long time, you see that certain things are not allowed, you form a kind of conditioned reflex and avoid those particular things" (Vianu 86). This subconscious self-censoring was, according to Sorescu, even more dangerous than state-sponsored censorship.

From a transcultural perspective, censorship inhibits exchange and enforces homogeneity; it reinforces borders, binaries, and isolation (Abu-El-Rub et al. xxx-xxxii). Transculturality stands in stark contrast, with its focus on border crossing and its search for connection. Therefore, the very acts of writing, publishing, and translating performed by Carson and Sorescu resisted the enforced borders of censorship and allowed the possibility of transcultural exchange and transformation.

Censorship and the Roles of Carson and Sorescu as Transcultural Agents

While poetry in Northern Ireland was not directly censored by the state, the pressures of surveillance and self-censorship, and the presence of imminent physical threat are evident in Northern Irish poetry throughout the Troubles. Carson's context, upbringing, and education particularly poised his work for intercultural exchange. Raised bilingually in English and Irish, Carson was a scholar of languages, translating from Latin, French, Welsh, Italian, Japanese, and Romanian. Neal Alexander writes that translation abounds in Carson's work "in the form of a concern with the ways in which other words, languages, and cultures imply and project other worlds, alternative ways of saying and seeing that defamiliarise received habits of perception" (175–176). His projection of "other worlds" makes him a powerful transcultural agent; Jonsson et al. describe translation not just as a transference of a text from one language to another, but as an entire transcultural act that brings a source text into "wider encompassing complex dimensions involved in all kinds of mediating processes occurring in cultural encounters" (2). By occupying multiple languages, Carson's work searched for linguistic and cultural connectivities to surpass censorship and the violence and difficulties of his time and place.

Sorescu, similarly, proves an apt case for transcultural exchange, because at a time when Romania was extremely insular, he exercised the rare ability to travel and interact with writers from other countries, crossing both physical and cultural borders. Well known and beloved both in Romania and abroad, Sorescu was a "globetrotter" whose work was widely translated and who enjoyed connections to poets around the world (Leşcu). While he undoubtedly was censored throughout his career, Sorescu's fame also enabled him to publish poems that otherwise would not have been permitted. Sorescu conceded, "At the very beginning, I was not famous. Later, I admit, they rejected only some poems. But when I became fairly well known, they left me alone" (Vianu 89). Again, his unique ability to evade censors allowed him to defy authority and uniformisation, and, like Carson, Sorescu's role as a frequently published writer around the world made him an agent of transcultural exchange. Jonsson et al. describe the way that literary texts, specifically, are "understood as (inter)relational and as entities crossing boundaries and borders" (3). Therefore, Carson and Sorescu can be seen as contemporaries whose poetry was in communication, despite their different nationalities and political situations; their work became a contact zone, a unique space for analysis outside their cultural identities.

As internationally renowned poets and translators, Carson and Sorescu served as cultural mediators, whose role was to "introduce the foreign, explain the different, and negotiate understanding over cultural borders" (Jonsson et al. 22). Their poetry took the highly specific worlds and political climates in which they lived and made them accessible and engaging to readers everywhere, something their vast publication and positive reception confirms they succeeded in. Jerzy Jarniewicz asserts:

> a good poem, in its effects, is always like a translation, a meeting place of the familiar and the unfamiliar, disrupting domestic conventions and received ideas, questioning the very notion of at-homeness. The poet is a foreigner, even in the context of his or her own culture.
>
> (94)

The language of poetry, which disrupts and questions, is thus already primed for transcultural study, and poets like Carson and Sorescu exercise unique transcultural agency.

Translation and Transculturality

Because censorship endeavours to prevent exchange, translation itself becomes a transcultural act. Current translation studies understand the translation of a poem as a distinct creation from the original. That distinct

creation, says Homi Bhabha, exists as a meeting point of two cultures and constitutes a third space, one "distinct from the source as well as from the target culture, a space where cultural difference can be negotiated" (Flüchter 200).

Translation allows for even greater focus on the intersection between cultures and inevitably results in something novel and revolutionised – Abu-Er-Rub et al. note that "A transcultural lens focuses not merely on the fact that two sites are connected, but also on how the connections transform what is being connected" (xxxi). Collections like Fairleigh's translations of Sorescu bring his work to the English-speaking world, and they also reshape and reimagine the work, culminating in a meeting place between Romanian and Northern Irish culture that transcends national identity and political context, and generates something new. Consider the 1987 poetry collection *The Biggest Egg in the World* (Sorescu, 1987), which saw Sorescu's poetry translated into English by Northern Irish poets including Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon, and Michael Longley, using base translations provided by Ioana Russell-Gebbett. By the time the poem went to print, it was no longer a Romanian poem or a Northern Irish one, but an entirely new creation.

Literary Analysis

The following poems – all written in the 1980s – have been selected to demonstrate the ways in which Carson and Sorescu worked around censorship to write about their time and place; and, the poems selected, despite their differing context, share similar themes and images, affirming Welsch's position that differing situations and locations can result in similar work. No longer separated due to the poets' nationalities, these poems can now stand side-by-side for assessment not only of their specific political context, but also of their transgression against censorship.

Carson's 1987 poem "33333" is rife with insider language, and yet it demonstrates remarkable resemblance to Marin Sorescu's 1982 poem "The Sentence". While Carson's poem was written during the Troubles, and Sorescu's under the Ceaușescu regime, both poems court impending violence in a moving vehicle, through a confusing city, utilising themes of displacement, the fragility and interchangeability of self, and evasive language; the intersection between them demonstrates Welsch's theory that the same fundamental issues occur across times and cultures – as do the solutions.

The title "33333" references the fonaCAB taxi company phone number, something easily missed by anyone not intimately acquainted with Belfast, but even Carson's choice to use a string of numbers alone as a title feels ominous and estranging, reading like a code. The narrator speaks to an

"invisible man behind the wire- / grilled / One-way mirror and squawk-box", and what should be an ordinary interaction between a taxi company receptionist and passenger reads more like a scene in an interrogation room (Carson, Lines 1–3). Further, the narrator exercises caution even towards the reader, revealing only that they board the cab "in about *x* amount of minutes, where *x* is a small number" (Lines 7–8). The narrator avoids sharing where they are going ("a number in the Holy Lands, Damascus Street or Cairo?"), and does not specify lengths of time, jumbling the reader's temporal sense (Lines 5–6). And, while the Holy Lands, Damascus Street, and Cairo are all areas or roads in Belfast, their inclusion unmoors the setting further, making oblique reference to tensions further afield; Neal Alexander describes this effect:

> Figurations of the familiar sectarian divisions of the Troubles city, and the conspicuous reshaping of Belfast's post-industrial landscapes by planners and paramilitaries alike, are held in productive tension in [Carson's] work with a range of explorations predicated upon the city's "elsewheres", its unexpected alignments and affinities with other places. (44)

Thus, Carson summons such "elsewheres" to better explain and write about Belfast, at a time when media censorship of any mention of the Troubles was peaking. On 19 October 1988 at Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's behest, Home Secretary Douglas Hurd implemented a new slew of media bans that expanded upon the Broadcasting Act of 1981. The Broadcasting Act of 1981 had originally given the British government the authority to require broadcasters, specifically the BBC and the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), to "refrain from broadcasting any matter or classes of matter specified in the notice" (Broadcasting Act 1981).

The 1988 bans expanded this broad directive and gave the government the right to forbid not only interviews and statements from certain Northern Irish paramilitary groups, but also from anyone who supported these forbidden organisations. Such forbidden organisations included the IRA, the INLA, and Sinn Féin. The broadcasting ban was not limited to journalism, either, as omnicensorship began to take hold. "Broadcasting officials censored themselves to a degree of paranoia", writes Robert Savage, going so far as to cut an episode of *Star Trek* that referenced Irish political violence (262).

Carson uses his signature long line to fracture phrases and enhance the situational unmooring, with breaks like "wire- / grilled" and "Damascus / Street" forcing the reader to pause and return to the preceding line, and to meander the confusing streets along with the narrator. When asked where they are going, the narrator admits, "I didn't know myself", a phrase

which summarises the first stanza with its sense of layered identities, a shifting view of reality, a feeling of being utterly lost (5).

Sorescu's "The Sentence" opens with a tramcar in motion and a disconcerting sense of continuity, as "Each new passenger…is a carbon-copy of the one who occupied the seat before him" (*Biggest Egg,* Lines 1–2). The narrator, in fact, posits that it is possible each new passenger *is* the same person, noting that "Either we're moving too fast / or the world's too small" (Lines 4–5). In doing so, Sorescu creates insecurity and replaceability of the self; the world is a steadily revolving door, and anyone might be someone one has met before. This echoes the unmoored location in Carson's poem, and his narrator's assertion that "I didn't know myself".

Another thread of discomfort woven into "The Sentence" is the importance of blending in. Each passenger looks alike, and sits alike, and reads the newspaper alike, careful to avoid eye contact or cause notice – homogeneity personified. To deviate from this would be a death sentence; the narrator notes in the final lines that "If I turned round right now / I'd be cutting / my own throat" (Lines 8–10). However, in this poem, even maintaining the status quo is dangerous. In Paul Muldoon's English translation, the narrator states that "Everyone's neck is chafed / by the newspaper whoever's behind him's reading", but in the original text, where Muldoon has used "chafed", Sorescu uses *roasă*, which translates more accurately to "worn" or "gnawed". In fact, the verbal form of *roasă* is *a roade,* which means "to devour" or "to munch". This notion that the necks are worn or gnawed at conveys a continuity of the action – the tramcar in perpetual motion, the newspapers wearing away at the necks in front of them. The narrator, then, is ultimately doomed, since even if he remains unmoving, he will eventually be decapitated anyway by the newspaper behind him finally wearing him through. The poem speaks to the dangers of homogeneity enforced by censorship, but also to the perils of pushing against it. Yet through his use of evasive language, uncertainty and replaceability of self, Sorescu writes about what technically should not be said, opening the subject up for discussion, if not in Romania then elsewhere, or in the future.

The narrator of Carson's "33333" has a similar revelation, when he writes "I know this place like the back / of my hand, except / My hand is cut off at the wrist", conveying not only the physical violence of mutilation, but also an admission that they are existentially lost (Lines 15–17). They know this place like the back of a hand that is long gone; Alexander elaborates this association between surveillance and disorientation, noting that "The extent to which Belfast is subject to surveillance and the policing of movements – by representatives of the state and by paramilitary forces – produces a characteristic tension between certainty and uncertainty" (17). Despite the differing political situations in which the

poems were written that same tension is present in "The Sentence", where the narrator questions his own identity and that of the other passengers, as well as his own future.

Those themes of surveillance, uncertainty, and an ever-changing self and location occur throughout much of Carson's and Sorescu's work in the 1980s as a response to their political contexts. In "Barfly", Carson is a "hyphen, flitting here and there: between" (15), and in "Hour-Glass", Sorescu asks "Do I slowly empty / Or fill myself?" concluding that the question is meaningless, since it's "The same flow of sand / Whichever way / You turn it" (Lines 1–2, 3–5). The act of turning appears throughout Carson's work too, especially in "Turn Again", where, like Sorescu's hourglass, turning makes no difference, since the world is unpredictable and ephemeral. Carson writes that "Today's plan is already yesterday's – the streets that were there / are gone" and later, "Someone asks me for directions, and I think again. I turn into / A side street to try to throw off my shadow, and history / is changed" (Lines 7–8, 14–16). Again, completely different political contexts produce markedly similar themes and images.

The use of wooden language in Romania and the silencing of voices and vantage points by the media in Northern Ireland greatly limited language in both countries; Lidia Vianu described how Ceaușescu "flattened our public language itself, requiring everyone to use the stilted phrases of meaningless propaganda" (viii). Taking a challenging stance, both Carson and Sorescu deconstruct language in their poetry as a response to the deconstruction of public language at censorship's hand. Sorescu's "Detour" is a poem of stagnation and disorientation. Under Ceaușescu, everything from mentions of undergarments, to Bible stories, to the words "disaster" and "balcony" could be censored, so Sorescu avoids specificity and instead states that the entire world is in his way: "I went round the world / Because it was in the way" (Vianu 163, 181; Sorescu, *Biggest Egg*, Lines 1–2). To reiterate this, Sorescu repeats himself in the second stanza, slowing the poem down to tedium in a tongue-in-cheek display of how wooden and prosaic language becomes under censorship's heavy thumb. Sorescu writes,

> I told myself:
> We'll have to go round
> The world because it's
> Blocking the way.
> (Lines 3–6)

The repetition within the first and second stanzas also mirrors the poem's subject matter; the poem continues down the page but does not move anywhere thematically. By the end of the poem, the narrator hasn't moved

anywhere either, boxed in by the language itself, leaving him perplexed as to where he is going and whether he is moving at all. Sorescu concludes the poem, writing "Am I walking? Standing still? / Still? Walking?" (Lines 14–15). While this poem could be read as simply the journey of someone walking on a round surface and therefore always ending up where they started, Sorescu's deconstruction of language in the final two lines shows that this truly is a poem about words. His choice to end on two questions conveys ongoing confusion, and the reversal of "still" and "walking" reveals the entrapment of the limitations placed on literature by censorship and on day-to-day life in general. Speech encroaches upon and subsumes itself. Through poetry, then, Sorescu manages to critique the linguistic homogeneity enforced by Ceaușescu's regime.

In "Belfast Confetti", Carson deconstructs elements of language to mirror the violence and confusion of frequent bombings in Belfast during the Troubles without explicitly saying so. When the "riot squad" moves in, it rains "exclamation marks" and a "fount of broken type" (Carson, Lines 1–3). The actual explosion is an "asterisk on the map", and the "alleyways and side streets" are blocked off by "stops and / colons" (Lines 5, 9–10). The narrator is "trying to complete a sentence in his head, but it [keeps] / stuttering" (Lines 7–8). The words describing concrete violence, like "explosion" and "rapid fire", are minimised by being indented in short, often one-word lines, to keep the focus on the bits of language being thrown about (Lines 4, 6).

Like the narrator in "Detour", Carson's narrator is walking but going nowhere, wandering the "labyrinth" of streets he thought he knew well yet finding himself lost (Lines 11). Carson, like Sorescu, pauses to ask, "Why can't I escape?" (Line 13). This question remains unanswered by the end of the poem, and is compounded upon by a series of more questions: "What is / my name? Where am I coming from? Where am I going?" (Lines 16–17). In this poem, language not only folds in on itself, but is actively under attack; the final line of "Belfast Confetti" returns to punctuation, which has been co-opted by the surrounding violence. Carson describes the narrator's questions as a "fusillade of question marks" (Line 18). Just as there is no actual "detour" in Sorescu's poem, there is no way out of the labyrinth in Carson's, as language unravels under the weight of violence and surveillance, leaving the narrator speechless and unable to escape. In neither poem is censorship mentioned, but instead it is written around via the failures and breakdown of language. David Wheatley argues that this is, indeed, in direct response to censorship and the poetry's political context:

> While strategies of evasion, codes, shibboleths, and other language games are now standard postmodern fare, there are obvious reasons

> beyond the literary *Zeitgeist* why these devices come into particularly sharp focus in contemporary writing from Northern Ireland. In the past three decades and more, the Troubles have provided an inevitable and tragic backdrop… from the mid-1960s onwards Northern Irish poets and playwrights have made of language itself a site of contestation.
>
> (3)

Thus, the poems themselves are the response to the political environment; if one cannot say directly what they think, they *can* recreate, via poetry, the oppression they feel, or mock the "flattened" public language around them, so long as they avoid mention of forbidden words. And poetry, according to Donald Davie, occupies a privileged position in its ability to do so:

> So long as the poet, East or West, appears before the public only as a lyrist, banking on the irresponsibilities traditionally associated with that role, he will be tolerated by the governing class and allowed to communicate with his readers.
>
> (28)

Heaney's famous title "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" sums up Sorescu's "Hour-Glass" and "Detour", despite having been written in response to seemingly separate contexts, and it is poetry itself that allows the writers to say nothing and something at once, defying censorship.

Not only do the poems defy censorship in their respective countries, but also, they look outward, connecting to other writers and cultures. The poems constitute a contact zone, a space in which separate cultures, timelines, and individuals meet. With their frequent street names, Belfast history, and Irish language words, Carson's poems are undoubtedly about Northern Ireland. Yet the poems transcend their national borders and converse with one another, a process further aided by the transcultural act of translation. The overlap their poems share points to a break from borders that allows for transferability of themes and images. *The Biggest Egg in the World* was published in 1987, which means Sorescu's work was in bookshops and homes across Northern Ireland alongside Carson's work. If language is a "site of contestation", it is also a place of communion, where linguistic and cultural translation occur and where the human reaction to censorship and violence finds a voice (Wheatley 3).

Historical Transitions: Post-Censorship Poetry

After Northern Ireland's Good Friday Accords and the fall of the Ceaușescu regime, Carson's and Sorescu's work was less inhibited by censorship, and therefore changed in scope. These events, in their respective

countries, were what Pratt refers to as "historical transitions", which, she writes, "alter the way people write, because they alter people's experiences and the way people imagine, feel and think about the world they live in" (4). Despite the differences in their historical transitions, Carson's and Sorescu's work changed post-censorship in comparable ways, and assessing those changes again proves Welsch's theory that the "same basic problems and states of consciousness today appear in cultures once considered to be fundamentally different" (68). Both Carson's and Sorescu's poetry shifted from the use of displacement, the fragility and interchangeability of self, and evasive language, to direct acknowledgement of their political circumstances and an open discussion of it that was not possible under censorship.

In Northern Ireland, the 1994 Provisional IRA Ceasefire, in conjunction with economic improvements in the 1990s and the fall of the USSR, brought about an optimism and openness that is evident in Carson's poems from that era (FitzGerald and Morgenroth 69). In 1997, the ceasefire was renewed, and the Good Friday Agreement was just one year away. Amidst this, in 1996, Carson published the "Letters of the Alphabet" sequence in his collection *Opera Et Cetera*. The "H" poem acknowledges government and media censorship more openly than his earlier work, and it documents a change in the firm that provides sausages to prisoners in the notorious H-shaped Long Kesh prison. But how that change came about, the narrator cannot say. Instead, he writes that the "Powers-that-Be decreed that from the – of – / the sausage rolls… would be contracted to a different firm" (Carson Lines 1–3). Carson adds that "The prisoners complained", and yet as inconsequential as a complaint about sausage purveyors is, the prisoners' voices must not be heard:

> We cannot reproduce his actual
> words here, since their spokesman is alleged
> To be a sub-commander of a movement deemed to be illegal.
> (Lines 5–6)

Here, Carson references a law that forbade paramilitary voices from being aired, as "Under the terms of broadcasting legislation, it is the prisoner's voice that is unacceptable, whether he uses it to talk about politics or the size or prison sausages" (Wheatley 15). The use of dashes and the plainness of phrases like "We cannot reproduce his actual / words here" are a more obvious commentary on censorship than earlier poems, where the language was evasive, unspecific, and coded. Carson's 2003 collection *Breaking News* even physically distinguishes itself from his earlier work, using short, choppy lines and direct, spare language in a way earlier poems could not afford to and speaks frankly about the Troubles. In "Blink",

everyone is
watching everybody
in the grey light
of surveillance
(Lines 1–4)

Gone is the heavy reliance on actual punctuation and punctuation as a stand-in for violence. The language is no longer the place of contestation, but a straightforward memory of violence. Yet this was not an arbitrary phenomenon, nor was it specific to Carson's Northern Ireland; the end of censorship in Romania similarly altered Sorescu's poetry. Where traditionally, literary studies have adhered to a "limiting scope" that conceptualises artistic movements and cultural phenomenon solely in a national context, a transcultural lens allows for the overarching study of poetry during and post-censorship across borders (Jonsson et al. 2).

On 25 December 1989, Nicolae Ceaușescu was sentenced to death by a military tribunal and executed at a military base near Bucharest, thus ending his 42-year rule and its accompanying censorship, surveillance, and violence. Free from his constraints, Sorescu stated, "I have carried the rock of Sisyphus in my pen for so long. Now that it is gone, I might feel a kind of nostalgia, as if I had been deprived of pain. I am like the cured patient who is unhappy because he has lost his pain" (Vianu 88). While Sorescu was widely published under Ceaușescu, plenty of his poems never made it to print. Many were published in the 2001 collection *Censored Poems,* which provides a point of contrast from the work he did manage to publish under censorship. His poem "Impressions", for example, details daily hardships and informants, and does not hurl the accusations elsewhere, but firmly asserts, "Welcome to the witches' brew of Bucharest" (Sorescu, *Censored*, Line 14). The poem follows a butcher with no meat to sell (a concept that censors would not have allowed), who attends a meeting where he admits this and is heard by an informer. It is hard to imagine such a poem would ever have made it to print under censorship, with its critical descriptions of Bucharest and mention of informants. His description of the markets is neither flattering nor evasive; he describes a "pack of rats and a fishwife, who whacks / a broom at them and drives them off with shrieks" (Lines 10–11). In "Ill-fated", Sorescu writes:

I drew the Romanian ticket, Lord.
They put you in jail. They say:
invent your own crime and pay
for it by eating hay.
(Lines 1–4)

In this poem, Sorescu summons his home by name and speaks plainly of the hunger, the surveillance, and his own hopelessness, channelling the same directness and specificity of Carson's Post-Troubles poetry. He was born in Romania and paid for it by writing through years of censorship and the threats that accompanied it, and can finally say so honestly and without evasion in his poetry.

Censorship's hand altered both writers' poetry similarly, but so did its end, with more direct address of history and narrative driving their work. The comparison between poetry from post-conflict Belfast and post-Ceaușescu Romania feels unusual or irrelevant in traditional streams of comparison, but a transcultural perspective allows for a greater comparison of their work beyond their nationalities to appraise censorship's effect on poetry. Where censorship forced Carson and Sorescu to utilise codes and evasive language, the end of censorship allowed them to explore the political tumult through which they'd lived in clear and direct terms. In this way, the two are unlikely counterparts, writing in different places on different themes, and yet their work shares so much, transitions comparably, and can be put into conversation through a transcultural lens.

Conclusion

While comparison of poetry from the vastly different contexts of the Troubles and the Ceaușescu regime is, at first, an unlikely one, this chapter resituates the work of Northern Irish poet Ciaran Carson and Romanian poet Marin Sorescu side-by-side, assessing the effects of censorship on their work through a transcultural lens and tracking for similarities in themes and images both during and after censorship. Carson and Sorescu serve as ideal transcultural agents, due to their multilinguistic abilities, their work with translation, their international acclaim and vast readership, and their dedication to writing about their time and place. Carson's and Sorescu's poems defy the homogeneity of censorship and share remarkable overlap, despite being written under differing political situations. Their use of coded and evasive language, uncertainty and replaceability of self, and deconstruction of language as a stand-in for violence during censorship, and the shared directness of language of their post-censorship poems further affirms Welsch's transcultural notion that distinct events in separate places can have the same effects on writing. Abu-Er-Rub et al. assert that "knowledge production both constitutes and transforms those who are connected"; searching for connections across the physical national border and the metaphorical border of censorship has historically allowed Northern Ireland to look outward to better see within, and the recent turn to Romania has enabled writers on both sides to transform their understanding of their own political context through sharing

and interacting with one another's poetry (xxxii). Further, the presence of translations both to English and Romanian mediates cultural differences and opens the poetry up to new appreciation, understanding, and analysis across borders. The resulting poetry, then, becomes a contact zone, a place where work from disparate places comes into communication. Thus, a transcultural lens aids in unveiling the underlying connections of poetry as a dissident artform that challenges contexts of repression such as the Troubles in Northern Ireland, Ceaușescu's dictatorship in Romania, and elsewhere. This chapter hopes not solely to convince readers of the merit of looking for connectivities between Northern Ireland and Romania – although there are many, and most yet to be thoroughly investigated – but to continue to look beyond borders and languages to see poetry's ability to communicate, connect, transcend, and transform.

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3 Transculturality and Seán Dunne's Translation of Russian Poetry

Stephanie Schwerter

Introduction

Different forms of transculturality can be found in the poetry of Seán Dunne. The Irish writer establishes transcultural links between Ireland and Soviet Russia by either integrating allusions to Russian personalities or historical events into his poetry or by translating the work of Anna Akhmatova, one of the most famous Russian poets. In so doing, he uses Russian literature and culture as a lens through which he attempts to achieve a mental and geographical distance from Ireland in order to reconsider his own cultural environment from a fresh angle. The strong connection Dunne creates between the two cultural spheres demonstrates the central role that transculturality plays in his poetic work. In this article, I shall concentrate on Seán Dunne's translations of Akhmatova's poetry as they clearly reveal his transcultural approach on a "macro-" and "micro-level" (Welsch, "Transculturality – The Changing Form" 68).

Afef Benessaieh observes that the notion of transculturality "offers a conceptual landscape for considering cultures as relational webs and flows of significance in active interaction with one another" (11). In this context, Wolfgang Welsch argues that transculturality becomes increasingly central to our modern world as cultures are "extremely connected and entangled with each other" ("Transculturality – The Changing Form" 68). This does not only apply to the "macro cultural level" of society but also to an individual's cultural "micro-level" (71). Concerning a society's cultural "macro- level", Welsch notes that cultures are characterised by "hybridisation", as a single culture contains numerous characteristics of other cultures ("Transculturality – the Puzzling Form" 5). An individual's cultural "micro-level", on the contrary, is shaped by multiple cultural connections which influence his or her "cultural formation", so that s/he turns into a "cultural hybrid" (5). Benessaieh notes that the notion of transculturality is linked to a "sense of cultural identity that is not

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nationally bounded" but "plural and highly mobile" (21). According to Welsch, "cultural hybridity" can particularly be observed in contemporary writers, whose cultural identity is not only shaped by "a single homeland" but also by different "reference countries". Therefore, their "cultural formation" is to be seen as a "transcultural" one ("Transculturality – the Puzzling Form" 5). In this sense, Seán Dunne could be considered as a "transcultural writer" whose "reference country" is Soviet Russia. Navigating between Russia and Ireland, the Irish poet takes on the form of a "cultural hybrid" (Welsch, "Transculturality – the Puzzling Form" 5) with a "mobile cultural identity" (Benessaieh 21).

In his translation of Akhmatova's poetry, Seán Dunne attempts to use Russia as a prism through which he presents the cultural environment in which he was raised in a new light. The poet was born in Waterford City in 1956 and died untimely at the age of 39 in Cork, leaving three children and his partner Trish Edelstein behind (Fallon 198). Next to his work as a journalist, he dedicated himself to the writing and reediting of prose and poetry. Over the years, he published three collections of poems: *Against the Storm* (1985), *The Sheltered Nest* (1992) and *Time and the Island* (1996). He also wrote two prose books, *The Road to Silence* (1995) and *In My Father's House* (2000), and edited various anthologies, including *Poets of Munster* (1985), *The Cork Anthology* (1993) and *Something Understood* (1995). Growing up in a working-class housing estate, Dunne was traumatised by the death of his mother, whom he lost at the age of four (Fallon 198). In his memoir *In My Father's House*, the poet gives an account of his childhood, which he spent in a poor Catholic-nationalist environment marked by deprivation (49–51). The experience of bereavement and a strong sense of social consciousness can be observed in Dunne's work, as well as the feelings of loss and misery (Mooney 14).

The Irish poet's awareness of social inequalities and political injustice in Irish society might be the reason for his admiration for Anna Akhmatova. For Donald Cuccioletta, the fact of "recognising oneself in the *other*" is central to an individual's transculturalism at the macro-level (9). In this sense, we could argue that Dunne crosses national boundaries and identifies with the Russian poet, whom he considers to be "a symbol of Russian tragedy" (Dunne, "Growing into Poetry" 42). The Irish poet states that a "sense of pressure and terror" dominates Akhmatova's work (42). Dunne was most likely attracted by the Russian poet as she never gave up her poetic voice despite the severe state repressions from which she suffered under the communist rule (Feinstein 95). Trying to ostracise Akhmatova as a writer, the government forbade her poetry for almost 20 years (Struve 9) and supervised her with secret police agents (Thomas, "Introduction"

2). The Russian poet spent most of her life in extreme poverty, fearing that she would be deported or shot at any minute. Despite the relentless pressure from the state, Akhmatova did not agree to put her art at the service of the Soviet regime. She refused to write poems in line with the so-called "Soviet Realism", which promoted communist values. Thus, her poetry can be considered an act of resistance through which she strove to give hope to the people suffering in the same way as herself (Feinstein 189)[1].

Dunne's work echoes Akhmatova's style, whose focus on sense, clarity and the material world springs from her adherence to the Acmeist movement (Struve 12)[2]. Choosing sense over sound, the Acmeists rejected "intimations through symbols" and pleaded for "direct expression through images" (Parker 8). The same emphasis on clarity and precision is a salient feature of Dunne's poetry, which can be interpreted as Akhmatova's influence on his work. Dunne argues that Akhmatova's poems are "filled with strong images" which makes them attractive for translators (Dunne, "Growing into Poetry" 42). In the following analysis of Dunne's translations, I shall refer to Lawrence Venuti's concept of "domestication and foreignisation" (19–20) as well as to the writings of André Lefevere and Clive Scott, who consider translation as "rewriting" (Scott 6) or "acts of experimental writings" (Lefevere vii). I shall argue that in his translation, Dunne follows a "domesticating" approach. According to Venuti, a "domesticating translation" minimises the "foreignness" of the translated text by adapting cultural concepts and values to the target culture. A "foreignising" translating strategy, on the contrary, aims at "estranging" translations which are designed to underline the foreign identity of the source text (15).

The poems by Akhmatova that Dunne chose to translate were written between 1914 and 1961 and thus cover the entire period of the Russian poet's creation. At this point, it is relevant to consider the type of poems Dunne singled out for translation. Several poems are dedicated to Akhmatova's contemporaries, such as Alexander Blok (Dunne, *Collected* 117), Boris Pasternak (123) and Mikhail Bulgakov (124). Choosing works on Russian writers for his translation, Dunne shows his desire to make the Soviet literary scene accessible to the Anglophone reader. In line with Welsch's concept of the dissolution of the distinction between "foreign" and "own" ("Transculturality – The Changing Form" 69), the Irish poet attempts to dissolve the boundaries between national literatures. This goes in line with what Herbert Jonsson *et al.* refer to as a transnational approach in the field of literature, according to which "literary texts are understood as (inter)relational entities crossing boundaries and borders" (3). Dunne also translates Akhmatova's poem

"Muse", which explores the challenges of poetic writing. With this choice of poem, Dunne suggests that the themes of inspiration and creation are themes which are not limited to Russian poetry. In Welsch's words, he implies that the boundaries between "the foreign" and "the own" have become unintelligible (Welsch 'Transculturality' 70). Dunne's desire to put Russian poetry into a transnational context is reflected in his choice of a number of poems focusing on universal themes, such as loss, death and deprivation. Among those count "Separation" (115), "The Graveyard's Dead" (119), "The Last Toast" (122), "Requiem" (131), "The Death of Sophocles" (141) and "There are Four of Us" (142). Other poems, such as "How Can You Look" (118) and "In the Year 1940" (126) engage with political violence and oppression (Dunne, 2005). As our analysis below will show, Dunne uses translation as a means to establish transcultural links between contemporary Ireland and tsarist Russia or the Soviet Union.

Dunne's autobiographical work does not give any information about his command of the Russian language. However, Tom McCarthy, a close friend of Dunne's, states that he did not speak any Russian at all[3]. Dunne does not reveal the sources he used as a basis for his own translations either, but according to McCarthy, the poet based his translations on D.M. Thomas' English translations of Akhmatova's poems, which were published in 1988. Entitled *Anna Akhmatova. Selected Poems*, the poetry collection appeared in the Penguin Classics series and thus became widely available to the Anglophone reader. The fact that every poem chosen by Dunne is contained in Thomas' selection seems to confirm McCarthy's statement. Furthermore, as shown in what follows, a number of similarities between Thomas' and Dunne's translations can be observed.

In order to illustrate the differences between the Russian source text and Dunne's translation, I shall provide my own translation, which remains as close as possible to the source. Thus, I attempt to reveal the content of the poem to a non-Russophone readership without recreating the rhyme scheme. Comparing the Russian originals and my own translations with Thomas' and Dunne's translations, I intend to illustrate the transformations a certain poem underwent at different stages. In this way, I shall engage with the transcultural connections Dunne establishes in his translations between Ireland and Russia.

Translating Russian poetry into English is a challenging enterprise as phonetically, morphologically and syntactically, the two languages are constructed in completely different ways. Speaking in linguistic terms, one of the greatest differences lies in the fact that Russian is a highly inflected language, whereas English moves closer to the isolating languages. In an

inflected language, words change their form according to their grammatical function. This process is called inflection and helps to communicate the sense of a sentence. On the contrary, isolating languages operate with auxiliary words and follow a strict word order to carry the sense of a phrase across. Russian distinguishes between three grammatical genders and distinguishes six cases. Nouns, adjectives, numbers and pronouns are inflected according to their grammatical gender and the case in which they are used, whereas verbs are inflected according to person and number (Tauscher).

Due to the inflection of Russian nouns, adjectives, numbers, pronouns and verbs, a great variety of similar sounding endings occur. This linguistic phenomenon facilitates the creation of internal rhymes and the rhyming of line endings for the poet. As the English language does not have this particular grammatical feature, the number of possible rhymes is smaller than in Russian. Nabokov draws attention to the fact that in contrast to English words, Russian terms never bear more than one accent. Apart from that, polysyllabic words in Russian are more frequent than in English (Nabokov 118). Another difference between the two languages is that in Russian, pronouns can be dropped, which is not possible in English. For the poet writing in Russian, the omission of pronouns leaves room for poetic ambiguity and enables him or her to convey the poem's message in an oblique way. Due to the grammatical structure of the English language, the Anglophone poet is deprived of this poetic choice. The different shape of the two languages renders the translation of Akhmatova's poetry rather difficult, so that in many cases, the translator has to decide whether to render the rhyme pattern and the sound of the original or to concentrate on the content of the poem.

Life, Death and the Subversive Power of Poetry

One of Akhmatova's poems Dunne choses to translate is entitled "Нас четверо" [We are Four] (1961). The Russian original opens up with three quotations: one by Osip Mandelstam, one by Boris Pasternak and one by Marina Tsvetaeva. With the title of the poem and the following quotations, Akhmatova establishes a link between herself and her three fellow writers, who all suffered from the repression of the Soviet regime. By the time of writing, only Akhmatova was still alive: Mandelstam had died in a work camp near Vladivostok in 1939 (Mandelstam 452), Tsvetaeva had committed suicide in 1941 (Schweizer 383) and Pasternak's health had declined rapidly after he was put under sate surveillance so that he died in 1960 (Pasternak 250). The common fate of the four poets is the central theme of Akhmatova's poem.

In his translation, Thomas only maintains the first line of Tsvetaeva's quotation and omits the references to Pasternak and Mandelstam. However, in his endnotes, he explains that the title refers to Akhmatova and her three fellow-writers. Thus, the connection between the three poets is maintained but becomes less obvious than in the original. Dunne, however, chooses to delete the quotations of Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva and Pasternak entirely. Even if Dunne adopts the title proposed by Thomas, "There are Four of Us", the English-speaking reader not aware of the Russian source might not recognise the underlying subtext. In this sense, we could argue that Dunne follows a "domesticating" translation strategy by blurring the historical context of the original (Venuti 15). In so doing, he opens up the poem to a broader range of interpretations without putting the Russian poets into the centre of his lines.

In the second stanza of the poem, Akhmatova dwells on the ephemeral nature of life:

Все мы немного у жизни в гостях, Жить – это только п ривычка. Чудится мне на воздушных путях Двух голосов перекличка.	We are all a little the guests of life, To live – it's a habit. I imagine on the paths of air two voices overlapping.	We are brief guests of the earth, as it were, And life is a habit we put on. On paths of air I seem to overhear Two friendly voices, talking in turn.	Earth briefly takes us as guests whose lives are habits we must break. On paths of air I think I hear two friends' voices, talking in turn.
(Akhmatova, *Sočinenia 1* 248)	(My translation)	(Thomas, *Anna* *Akhmatova* 83)	(Dunne, *Collected* 142)

Through the image of the "guest", Akhmatova highlights the temporary dimension of life. She further describes life as "a habit" and thus suggests that there is nothing joyful about being alive. In this context, the term "life" seems to equal "survival". The "path of air" takes on a metaphysical connotation, hinting at an elevated state of the soul after death. The "voices overlapping" could be interpreted as a hint at poetic voices, which keep on talking even after having left everything

which connects them to earth. In Thomas' and Dunne's translations, the abstract concept of "life" becomes replaced by the more concrete term "earth". The impersonal sentence of the Russian original "To live – it's a habit" is replaced in Thomas' translation by the personalised turn of phrase "and life is a habit we put on". The inserted personal pronoun "we" seems to refer to the four poets mentioned in the title. Dunne highlights the sense of the phrase by transforming it into "whose lives are habits we must break". Through his transformations, he gives Akhmatova's poem a more explicit character. Regarding his working-class background and his social consciousness, "the habits", which have to be broken, might be seen as a further allusion to the social inequalities in Irish society. It could be argued that in his lines, Dunne pleads for the erasure of class differences and advocates material and social equality. His plea is to be interpreted as a transcultural connection between Ireland and Russia, which functions on a societal macro-level (Welsch, "Transculturality – The Changing Form" 68). In this way, the poet wishes to communicate that social inequalities and deprivation are issues which are not limited to Russia but are also central to Irish society.

The "two voices" of Akhmatova's poem are first transformed into "two friendly voices" in Thomas' translation, before becoming "two friends' voices" in Dunne's poem. Considering the Russian original, Dunne's translation seems relatively far away from the source, in which the notion of "friend" and "friendliness" do not appear at all. Whereas in the Russian original the two voices speak on top of each other, in Thomas' and Dunne's translation, they engage in a conversation. In this way, Dunne's poem receives a more optimistic note than the Russian original, suggesting that communication and – in a larger sense – social change are still possible. On a second narrative level, the voices of two friends which occur in Dunne's translation could also be interpreted as a connection between the Irish and the Russian poet. In this way, Dunne implicitly communicates his identification with Anna Akhmatova. Seen in the light of Welsch's definition of "transculturality", the transcultural link between the two writers would be situated on the "micro-level". Dunne's imaginary conversation with Akhmatova sheds light on his "transcultural identity" which is shaped not only by his Irish background but also by his strong intellectual connection with Russia culture (Welsch, "Transculturality – The Changing Form" 71).

Akhmatova closes her poem with a stanza on the subversive potential of poetry:

Двух? А еще у восточной стены, В зарослях крепкой малины, Темная, свежая ветвь бузины… Это – письмо от Марины.	Two? But there is still at the eastern wall in the brushwood of the strong raspberry bush, A fresh, dark elderberry branch… It's a letter from Marina.	Did I say two? … There By the east wall's tangle of raspberry, Is a branch of elder, dark and fresh. Why! it's a letter from Marina.	Was it two, I said? There, by the east wall where brambles twist and trail – look, it's a dark elderberry branch, surely a letter from Marina!
(Akhmatova, *Sočinenia 1* 248)	(my translation)	(Thomas, *Anna Akhmatova* 84)	(Dunne, *Collected* 142)

With the "dark elderberry branch", Akhmatova alludes to the famous poem "Бузина" [Elderberry][4] by Marina Tsvetaeva, written in 1931, when the latter was living in exile in France. In this poem, an elderberry bush becomes the central image of life. The black elderberry branch in Akhmatova's poem, which grows into a bush with red raspberries, reads as an image of subversion. In this way, the poet suggests that, like the branch penetrating a foreign bush, poetic speech is able to undermine the discourse of a totalitarian regime. Described as a "letter from Marina", the branch takes on the form of a secret message. Regarding the fact that at the time when the poem was written, Tsvetaeva had already been dead for 20 years, the image underlines the eternal character of poetry. Akhmatova implies that even after the death of the poet, her writing is still alive and able to send out messages.

In Dunne's translation, the precise term "raspberry bush", used by Akhmatova and Thomas, is replaced by the more general term "brambles", which signifies both "thorn bush" and "blackberry bush". Through his choice of terms, Dunne renounces the play with the colours red and black in order to illustrate different bushes. Without the contrasting colours, the image of intrusion becomes less clear. In this way, the allusion to subversion gets lost. Furthermore, the reference to Marina Tsvetaeva is less obvious in the English translations. Studying the Russian original, the Russophone reader is able to decode the hint at Tsvetaeva thanks

to the reference to her famous lines and her quotation at the beginning of the poem. In Thomas' translation, the link to Tsvetaeva is maintained as he chooses to keep her quotation, while at the same time deleting the ones by Pasternak and Mandelstam. Dunne, however, omits all the three quotations so that the English-speaking audience unfamiliar with Russian poetry is not necessarily able to find the key to the subtext. It is very likely, that Dunne decided to delete the reference to Russian poetry as most of his readers might not have been able to decode it anyway. In the context of Dunne's translation, the elderberry branch can therefore be perceived as a more general image of survival. It could be interpreted as the survival of poetry in dark times, functioning as a subversive means of communication. Considering Dunne's social consciousness and his sympathy with the dispossessed, it would also be possible to point to the "survival" of the working class, which manages to subsist despite its oppression by the wealthier parts of society.

It is striking that Thomas, contrary to Dunne, attempts to render the music of the Russian original. Akhmatova's poem is marked by a strictly followed pattern of end rhymes, which Thomas tries to imitate to a certain degree. Due to the structural differences of the two languages, it is, however, almost impossible to recreate the entire "sound" of Akhmatova's lines. Thomas points out that "the genius" of the Russian language and the English language "sometimes clash" (Thomas, "Introduction" 12). As a result, he is frequently forced to detach himself from the rhythmic form of the original. Contrary to Thomas, Dunne chooses to employ free verse as an alternative. According to Clive Scott, free verse is the "ideal translational medium" as it "activates the page as an expressive arena" (28). He further observes that the use of free verse gives the translator the possibility to integrate material which does not exist in the original (26). This decision not to follow Akhmatova's rhyme scheme could have been motivated by a striving for flexibility and the desire to detach himself from Thomas' translations. Dunne also might have opted for free verse with the intention of inserting his own voice into his translations. Furthermore, the expressive freedom which the use of free verse gives to the poet allows him to add transcultural references to the Russian original.

Exploring Political Violence

A further work translated by Dunne is "Как ты можешь смотреть" [How can you look] (1914). This poem by Akhmatova does not focus on the themes of "poetry" and "life" but evokes political violence:

Как ты можешь смотреть на Неву, Как ты можешь всходить на мосты?… Я недаром печальной слыву С той порой, как привиделся ты. Черных ангелов крылья остры, Скоро будет последний суд, И малиновые костры, Словно розы, в снегу цветут.	How can you look at the Neva How can you go out on the bridge Not without reason I have the reputation to be sad since you appeared. The wings of the black angels are sharp Soon will be the last judgement And purple bonfires, Flower likes roses in the snow.	How can you look at the Neva, Stand on bridges just the same?… No wonder I've borne signs of grieving Since the night your image came. Sharp are the black angels' wings, Soon the judgement of the dead, And street bonfires blazing red Like roses in the snow are flowering.	How can you look at the Neva or stand on bridges still? No wonder they say I grieve Since his image gripped me. The wings of black angels cut. I mark time to Judgement Day. Streets blaze with fires: bonfires of roses in snow.
(Akhmatova *Sočinenia* 2 126)	(my translation)	(Thomas, *Anna* *Akhmatova* 41)	(Dunne, *Collected* 118)

The Russian poem was composed in 1914, during a period of political turmoil. At this time, Russia had entered the First World War by moving into East Prussia. At the Battle of Tannenberg, the Russians were beaten by the Germans, who took 100,000 Russian as prisoners-of-war. This defeat enabled the Germans to advance into Russian-ruled Poland (Service 26). Apart from Russia's implication in the war, the political situation inside the country became very tense. The labour movement had gained considerable importance and strikes were organised in order to protest against the low wages, the bad living conditions and the authoritarian rule of the Romanov dynasty[5]. Nourished by the political unrest of the period, the

feelings of anguish and insecurity are reflected in Akhmatova's poem. The poet uses the term "bonfire" on different narrative levels. On the first one, she alludes to the bonfires which were frequently lit in Leningrad during hard winters in order to melt the snow (Thomas, "Introduction" 135). On a more abstract level, she refers to the violent clashes between the state authorities and the Russian workers as well as the victims of the beginning of the First World War.

The personal pronoun "you" in Akhmatova's poem personifies and embodies the political violence, which "appeared", "saddening" the speaker of the poem. In her first lines, the poet implies that in times of political upheaval, nobody is able to stand in peace and quiet on bridges, while contemplating the Neva. Thus, she creates an atmosphere of impending disaster. The sharp wings of the black angels embody death and destruction as well as revenge. In the context of the poem, "judgement day", becomes semantically linked to the "sharp wings" and alludes to the day when the authoritarian regime of the tsar will be condemned and social equality installed. Akhmatova speaks of "purple bonfires" and "roses" and thus implicitly plays with the colour red, which can be interpreted as a symbol of blood and as a further allusion to the violent demonstrations. At the same time, she seems to predict through her imagery the victory of the Red Army in the Russian Revolution.

Dunne's attraction to Akhmatova's poem seems to lie in his interest in a general quest for social justice. Through his translation, he inscribes the Russian original with additional connotations. It could be argued that Dunne employs Akhmatova's poem in order to speak about the Northern Irish conflict. In his memoir, he explains that the Troubles were of great interest to his family. He was especially fascinated by Bernadette Devlin and her commitment to the civil rights movement (Dunne, *In My Father's House* 105). The opening lines of Dunne's translation read as an address to his southern Irish fellow citizens. Subversively, he seems to ask them how they are able to remain quiet and indifferent, while in the north of the island people die in the streets. In the Russian original and Thomas' translation, the speaker addresses and personifies the political violence by using the personal pronoun "you". Dunne, however, chooses to change the imagery by referring to the conflict in the third person through "his image gripped me". The use of the personal pronoun in its masculine form could be explained by the fact that the Troubles are often seen as a male dominated conflict. The paramilitaries, as well as the British army and the police force, were all groups whose members were almost exclusively male. In Welsch's terms, the transcultural connections Dunne established between Northern

Ireland and tsarist Russia are situated on the macrolevel of society" (Welsch "Transculturality – The Changing Form" 71). Thus, the Irish poet implies that political unrest and violence are problems central to both parts of the world.

In his translation, Dunne seems to render the Russian original more explicitly. Whereas Thomas translates Akhmatova's line "I have the reputation to be sad" as "I've borne signs of grieving", Dunne opts for the shorter and more direct turn of phrase "they say I grieve". Thus, he gives emphasis to the sensations of distress and mourning. The grief mentioned reads as an allusion to Dunne's personal sympathy for the people in the North. In this case, the transcultural references established by the poet can be seen as the result of the dissolution of the distinction of the "foreign" and the "own" (Welsch "Transculturality – The Changing Form" 68). The suffering of the Russian people under the tsarist regime becomes thus compared to the grief cause by political violence in Northern Ireland.

Furthermore, Dunne turns Thomas' translation of "your image came" into "his image gripped me", which evokes a more violent feeling of compassion. In the Russian poem and Thomas' translation, the wings of the black angels are "sharp". Dunne, however, describes them as "cut", which entirely changes the sense of the original line. In a Northern Irish context, the colour black is frequently associated with Protestantism. Therefore, the cut wings of the "black angels" and the mentioned "Judgement Day" read as a hint at the victory of the Catholic community over their Protestant counterpart. Thus, Dunne implies that like the tsarist empire, which was overthrown by the communists, the Catholic community will be freed from the subjugation of the British coloniser. This translation could be seen as a "domesticating translation" (Venuti 19) as through the modification of a single word the sense of the original is altered, and the poem becomes transposed into a Northern Irish context.

It is interesting to notice that Thomas inserts an urban dimension into his translation by turning Akhmatova's "purple bonfires" into "street bonfires blazing red". Yet again, Dunne chooses a shorter and more direct expression and translates the line as "streets blaze with fire". In so doing, he not only evokes the burning streets of Belfast and Derry during the Troubles but also the bonfires, lit by the Protestant community throughout Northern Ireland on the 11th of July, on the night before the climax of the Marching Season. Through the burning of the Irish flag on each bonfire, the Protestant community attempts to demonstrate its supremacy. Rejected by the Catholics, the bonfire tradition has frequently

given rise to violent clashes between the two communities. Through the chosen imagery, Dunne underscores the transcultural link he attempts to establish between political turmoil in tsarist Russia and social unrest in Northern Ireland.

The Second World War and the Troubles

In his translation of Akhmatova's "В сороком году" [In the Year 1940] (1940), Dunne explores the theme of political violence in a larger and more general sense than he did in the previous poem. Akhmatova claims to write about the German invasion in France in the year 1940. Alluding to death and destruction, she evokes images of war:

Когда погребают эпоху, надгробный псалом не звучит, Крапиве, чертополоху Украсить ее престоит. И только могильщики лихо рабтают. Дело не ждет! И тихо, так, Господи, тихо, Что слышно, как время идут. А после она выплывает, Как труп на весенней реке,– Но матери сын не узнает, И внук отвернется в тоске. И колонятся головы ниже,	When an epoch is buried the gravestone does not sound with psalms. Nettles and thistles come to embellish it. Only the gravediggers work quickly. The business does not wait. And silent, so silent my God, that you hear time go by. And later its swims by like a corpse on a river in spring, –	When you bury an epoch You do not sing psalms at the tomb. Soon, nettles and thistles Will be in bloom. And only – bodies won't wait! – The gravediggers' toil; And it's quiet, Lord, so quiet, Time has become audible. And one day the age will rise, Like a corpse in a spring river – But no mother's son will recognise	No psalms are sung at the tomb when an epoch is interred. Nettles and thistles adorn it instead. Only gravediggers are busy, for corpses cannot wait. In such silence, dear God, time can be heard going past. Afterwards it will float like a corpse on a river in Spring, but no son will recognise his

Как маятник, ходит луна. Так вот – над погибшим Парижем Такая теперь тишина.	But the mother does not recognise the son And the grandson turns away in grief. And heads are bent down And the moon moves like a pendulum. Thus, over fallen Paris now settles such a silence.	The body of his mother. Grandsons will bow their heads. The moon like a pendulum swinging. And now – over stricken Paris. Silence is winging.	mother and grand-sons will turn away, heads low in despair as the moon swings like a pendulum. Such a silence settles now over stricken Paris.
(Akhmatova, *Sočinenia 1* 258)	(my translation)	(Thomas, *Anna Akhmatova* 69)	(Dunne, *Collected* 126)

Despite the explicit reference to Paris in the Second World War, it could be argued that Akhmatova is referring to the Stalinist purges in a coded way. Having taken place in 1938 and 1939, Soviet life was still heavily marked by the violent deportation and execution of millions of people. Considering the strict supervision under Stalin, it is very likely that Akhmatova added the two closing lines in order to protect herself from persecution. Her reference to France in the Second World War allows her to describe the effects of political violence in her own country implicitly without putting herself at risk.

The "buried epoch" in the first line of the poem could be read as a hint at the end of the purges, evoking at the same time the millions of people buried after their violent death. Describing the singing of psalms as impossible, Akhmatova points to the trauma suffered by the Russians under Stalin. Through the absence of song and the repeated references to "silence", she paints the image of a silenced people, too disturbed to speak and unable to believe in God. The thistles and nettles, which adorn the gravestones instead of flowers, suggest that any kind of beauty has been destroyed. Through the busy gravediggers and the corpses, Akhmatova reminds us again of the countless victims of the purges. The image of the son, who does not recognise his mother, alludes to those children, who

were unable to identify the corpses of their parents or did not recognise their fathers or mothers, after they had been disfigured by years of forced labour in the camps. The grandson's grief seems to reflect the distress felt by the Russian people, which is bound to affect the following generations so that even the grandchildren will be suffering from it. The moon, which is likened to a pendulum, reads as a symbol for time elapsing as well as a sign of continuity. Through her imagery, Akhmatova hints at the repetition of history and suggests that the violence which happened under Stalin is repeated during the German invasion of France.

The translation of Akhmatova's poem allows Dunne to explore different periods of political violence and tensions simultaneously. Read against an Irish background, the title of the poem could be interpreted as an allusion to the declaration of Irish neutrality in the Second World War. Before the German invasion of Poland, it had been declared that the Irish Free State would remain neutral in the forthcoming war. Trying to win over the Free State as an ally, the British government offered de Valera Irish unity in return for participation in the war (Ross 44). The rejection of this offer could be seen as a sign of Irish emancipation against the British coloniser. In this context, the first line of Dunne's translation "No psalms are sung at the tomb when an epoch is interred" hints at the burial of an epoch of oppression and submission. It is notable that the following line of Dunne's translation is closer to the Akhmatova's poem than Thomas' translation. Thomas translates the Russian original "nettles and thistles come to embellish it" as "soon, nettles and thistles / Will be in bloom". In Dunne's translation, the line reads "nettles and thistles adorn it instead". Replacing the term "bloom" by "adorn", he omits the verb's connotations of "blossom", "flower" and, in a larger sense, "life". Through the image of nettles and thistles which "adorn" the gravestone, he gives the line an ironic undertone, implying that the "buried epoch" only deserves bad weeds as a decoration of its tomb. In the following line, the word "body", which is used in Thomas' translation, is transformed into "corpse", which renders the reference to death more explicit.

Another line which in Dunne's poem seems to be closer to the original than in Thomas' translation reads in the source text "But the mother does not recognise the son". Thomas translates the original sentence with "But no mother's son will recognise / The body of the mother." Yet again, Dunne seems to simplify Thomas' more elaborate translation by opting for "no son will recognise his mother" and thus makes his line more direct. The son's incapacity to identify his mother could be read as an allusion to the hunger strikers of the 1980s, who after weeks of food deprivation were too weak to recognise their mothers. The following line also receives a more dramatic turn in Dunne's poem. Thomas' translation of "grandsons will bow their heads", becomes "grandsons will turn away,

heads low in despair". Thus, Dunne underlines the feeling of hopelessness and desperation and articulates his sympathy for the Catholic community in the North of Ireland. Furthermore, he transforms Thomas' line "and it's quiet, Lord, so quiet" into "in such silence, dear God". Thus, he creates a picture of complete silence and speechlessness. Against the background of the Hunger Strikes, this image could hint at the strikers, who became silenced by the British government, which provoked their death. In the context of Dunne's translation, the moon swinging like a pendulum suggests the repetition of history on different narrative levels. Creating a transcultural link between Ireland, Russia and France, he implies that political violence is repeated over and over again at different times and places in history.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be stated that Dunne's translations of Akhmatova's poems allow the Irish poet to engage with a variety of themes and feelings simultaneously. Employing free verse in his translations, he detaches himself from D.M. Thomas' translations, which imitate the rhyme scheme of the Russian originals. Instead of reproducing the music of Akhmatova's poetry, Dunne choses to focus on the content of the poems in his translation. The use of free verse enables him to inscribe the Russian works with his personal voice and to add transcultural connotations to the originals. His desire to translate Akhmatova's poems despite the already existing translations must have been generated by a striving to bring up additional themes through the lens of Russian poetry. Dunne's ambition reflects his "mobile cultural identity" (Benessaieh 21), which is shaped not only by his Irish background but also by his strong emotional and intellectual link to Russia, his central "reference country" (Welsch "Transculturality – Puzzling Form" 5). Thus, the Irish poet displays his "plural sense of self" (Benessaieh 21).

The coded and subversive nature of Akhmatova's poems gives Dunne the opportunity to explore politically and socially sensitive topics. A close reading of his work reveals that his poems are influenced to a certain degree by his own biography. Having lost his mother at the age of four, his life was marked by the sense of death and bereavement. A childhood in the milieu of Waterford's working class made the poet aware of social difference and disadvantage, which led him sympathise with the dispossessed and persecuted. His personal experience of loss and deprivation could be seen as the reason for his passion for Akhmatova's writing. Dunne argues that when he was translating the Russian poet's work, he did not translate "a series of words" but "a personality and a pain" ("Thoughts on Translation" 42). This statement confirms Dunne's transculturalism on a

micro-level (Welsch "Transculturality – The Changing Form" 5) and his identification with the Russian writer.

His translation of Akhmatova's poem "Нас четверо" [We are Four] enables him to engage with the power of poetry and its role in difficult times. He also uses the poem to give voice to social inequality in the Republic of Ireland in the 60ies and 70ies. Dunne's translation of "Как ты можешь смотреть" How can you look] reads as a subversive reference to the political violence in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. In "В сороком году" [In the year 1940], he alludes to several periods of political upheaval and tension, referring to the declaration of Irish neutrality in the Second World War and the Hunger Strikes in the 1980s. In so doing, he enacts the dissolution of the distinction of the "foreign" and the "own" as a transcultural strategy (Welsch "Transculturality – The Changing Form" 69). Dunne's translations of Akhmatova's poem can be considered as "creative acts" (Scott 13) or a form a "experimental writing" (6) as the target texts receive additional meanings. Through a "domesticating" translation strategy (Venuti 19), the Russian originals become transferred in an Irish context. Establishing a connection between Russia and Ireland, Dunne creates a transcultural link through which he attempts to shed light on the shortcomings of his own cultural environment. It could be argued that the polysemic nature of Akhmatova's work allows the Irish poet to gain an intellectual distance from Ireland and his own biography. It would be interesting to carry out further research on Dunne's Russian inspired poems, which are not translations of lines by Russian masters but works of his own. Analysing poems such as "Marmalade and Mrs Mandelstam" (Dunne, *Collected* 95) or "Russian in Paris" (172), would reveal whether in his own poetry he engages with other themes and aspects of Russian culture, and whether he follows different strategies to establish transcultural connections between Ireland and the Soviet Union.

Notes

1 Akhmatova did not only attempt to support the Russian people with her writing, but also through her personal social activism. When Leningrad found itself under German occupation during the Second World War, she spoke on the radio in order to encourage her fellow citizens not to surrender to the Fascists (Feinstein 189).
2 The Russian Acmeists aimed for poetic accuracy in contrast to the abstraction of the preceding Symbolist movement (Struve 12).
3 This statement was made in a personal email exchange with Clíona Ní Ríordáin on the 30th of June 2010.

4 Tsvetaeva, Marina. "Бузина". www.culture.ru/poems/34695/buzina, accessed 13 January 2023.
5 Strikes and demonstrations were repeatedly disrupted by the police and often turned into bloody confrontations. In 1912, the police fired upon striking miners in Siberia, which gave rise to numerous demonstrations across the Russian Empire. In 1914, a massive upsurge of opposition took place in St. Petersburg, and put the tsarist political order under intense strain (Service 21). The weakening power of the government and the political instability felt by the Russian population paved the way for the Revolution.

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Part II

Transcultural Writers and Global Entanglements

4 Social Borders and Contact Zones in Leland Bardwell's *Different Kinds of Love*

Burcu Gülüm Tekin

Contextualising *Different Kinds of Love* from Leland Bardwell's Proto-transcultural Perspective

The characteristics of transculturality and its literary reflections have been examined by many scholars (Pratt; Welsch; Helff; Abu-Er-Rub et al.; Gaupp and Pelillo-Hestermeyer). Although its broad connotations are challenging to frame, transcultural texts mainly present diasporic voices, the experience of transgressing borders and the problematising of the meaning of home. Arianna Dagnino, for example, clarifies the position of transcultural writers as follows: they "experience cultural dislocation, live transnational experiences, cultivate bilingual/pluri-lingual proficiency, physically immerse themselves in multiple cultures/geographies/territories, expose themselves to diversity and nurture plural, flexible identities" (1). Furthermore, the transcultural perspective has allowed writers "to transcend the received and supposedly determining monocultural standpoints" (Welsch 78). Leland Bardwell (1922-2016) serves as an excellent example of the aforementioned definition of transcultural writers, which the title of her memoir *A Restless Life* (2008) echoes. Bardwell lived a very eventful and unconventional life. Born to Irish Protestant parents in India in 1922, she lived in Paris, London, Castle Douglas (Scotland), Kilkenny, Dublin and Monaghan, before finally settling in Sligo in 1991. While leading a tumultuous personal life, including having seven children by different men, she was able to immerse herself in various literary circles in London and Dublin. Her dynamic life experience in multiple countries equipped her with the transcultural vision to address critically Ireland's insularity and its discontentment in her literary production. According to Richard Pine, "[h]er ramshackle lifestyle outraged many in Catholic Ireland, while she was regarded by her own class as an outsider" (24 July 2016). Not surprisingly, her literary oeuvre reflects "a clear and unsentimental empathy for those marginalised by their gender, poverty, lack of education or emotional injuries, and the work was informed by her life

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without being self-regarding" (Doire Press). At first, Bardwell's writing may differ from that of a typical transcultural writer since it does not necessarily cross Irish borders to be a spokesperson for diasporic voices or present an intercultural dislocation. Yet, following Dagnino's definition: "Transcultural writers seem to be tuned into a different wavelength and thus are able to capture the first still embryonic, still incoherent, still mostly unexpressed or intercepted symptoms (signals) of a different emerging cultural mood/mode" (Dagnino 4), Bardwell's fiction suggests a proto-transcultural approach as she dedicates alternative literary spaces to social frictions and clashes within Ireland, and shows an especial interest in the marginalised victims of the rigid social and institutional borders. Bardwell's proto-transcultural literary stance is detectable in her focus on the outcast in the Irish context, as well as in her use of spaces, borders and the negotiations occurring within.

As a poet and a writer, Bardwell employed a variety of literary genres to present her deep concern for 'the others' in Ireland. Although her main literary focus was poetry, she also experimented with the short story genre in *Different Kinds of Love* (1987; 2011), as the nature of short fiction offers a "symbolic suggestiveness, intensity, and rejection of novelistic premises and structures" (Krueger 3–4). In an interview, Bardwell expressed her marginal position and her sensitivity towards the obstacles that outsiders have to face, which effectively summarises the motive for her writing the collection ("Leland Bardwell", 1999).

Different Kinds of Love allows for numerous readings regarding the marginal gap between social expectations and the experience of victimised individuals in Ireland.[1] As an acknowledged Irish poet and the editor of Dedalus Press, which republished the collection in 2011, Pat Boran explained the motive behind the second edition in an email conversation.[2] Boran states that he never considered the second edition "as purely a historical anniversary but rather a new spotlight onto an ongoing narrative" in the Irish context. In his opinion, both Bardwell's prose and verse are highly relevant for exploring "the new margins of Irish experience" (Boran). The collection reflects the unchanged social and cultural phenomena of an Irish setting that marginalises outcasts. Furthermore, Bardwell's short stories demonstrate the transgressive nature of her writing, which presents an unfulfilled expectation of escape from social boundaries and institutionalised border and focuses on the impossibility of liberation from social taboos in a culturally isolated country during the 1960s and 1980s.

This study examines *Different Kinds of Love* through a transcultural lens and pays special attention to Bardwell as a literary mediator who focuses on connections, frictions and transgressions in her society. For these purposes, this chapter aims to provide informed answers to the following research questions: how does Bardwell use location to challenge

social borders? and, how does Bardwell contest the role of institutions to transcend boundaries? In answering these questions, this study also deals with social limits as they give rise to the marginalisation of individuals who are segregated and classified as misfits, forced to spend their lives in asylums or convents.[3] As the subsequent analysis will demonstrate, Bardwell's characters oscillate between nationally and religiously constructed identities, and in-between and liminal beings. They exemplify the inherent and unacknowledged cultural and societal asymmetry within the Irish context that Bardwell is drawn to.

On Public Spheres, Contact Zones and the Margins of Home

"Euston" and "Out-patients" are two short stories that examine the liminal position of women in a range of public and domestic settings by problematising the hegemonic ideologies that pervade Irish society. The challenging social encounters in the public and domestic realms of these stories situate marginalised women in the centre, suggesting Bardwell's aim is to give them visibility. Both set in public places (a train station and a hospital), "Euston" and "Out-patients" share various narrative features. In both stories, the namesake protagonists (Nina) are narrated from a third-person singular point of view, and both are subjected to their husbands' physical and verbal abuse. Besides, both protagonists find themselves entrapped within dysfunctional marriages and unable to liberate themselves due to economic and social constraints. As will be explored, the aforementioned public settings offer two opposing contact zones: the train station highlights movement and dynamism, providing the protagonist with a positive contact zone to escape to, even if emotionally, while the hospital symbolises a negative one where her domestic suffering continues unmitigated.

In "Euston", Nina pays regular visits to Euston station with an unfulfilled hope of an encounter with Clive (the biological father of her children). As the title suggests, the plot is set in one of the main train stations in London, a metaphor that reinforces the vast and uncontrollable in-between space where Nina questions her "control over judgement" (Bardwell 28). Bardwell's choice of a transitional setting serves as "the beneficial use of metaphorical representations of the liminal" (Theinová 164). In light of the transcultural premise, a train station also allows for conflicting expectations. For instance, Nina's existence there leads to her discomfort and alienation as "people streamed in all directions" (Bardwell 28) while she waits in a still position.

Euston's atmosphere offers an in-between space for Nina. As the narrator describes "there was no current to ride on, no pointer to choice or oblivion, destruction or rebirth" (Bardwell 28). It offers omnidirectional

and endless possibilities, so Nina's visit to the station encompasses a rebellion against her domestic constraints. Bardwell observes the "ruined lives of young women by moral things that they have to go through" ("Leland Bardwell"), and this perspective is reflected in Nina's marginalised position at home. In a similar vein, Clara Fisher (822) observes the stereotypical assumptions surrounding womanhood in Ireland and how Irish nationhood was built upon the chaste Irish woman-mother image, which epitomises the vicious circle of Nina's domestic life: "[…] women's occupation of public space came to be seen as a dereliction of their domestic duty and potentially subversive of their symbolic caché as virtuous and pure bearers of the nation […]". In this context, Nina's brief escape to a liminal place symbolises a subversion and refusal to fulfil the social expectations of the stereotypical Irish woman-mother image.

Euston is also a "contact zone" (Pratt 7), a sphere that enables "exploring border-crossing by a special emphasis on human agency and the significance of the subaltern" (Abu-Er-Rub et al. xxxvi). By the same token, the train station provides a positive contact zone for offering an alternative space for Nina's hopeful waiting to meet Clive. What this suggests is that despite Nina's passive position and lack of agency, the vibrant atmosphere of the terminal affords her a temporal emotional detachment from her domestic ordeal. The contrast between the kinetic nature of the station and the paralysed status of Nina echoes the tensions present in the Irish setting, as well as Bardwell's aim to underline the obstacles of crossing moral and social borders in her society.

To emphasise the rigid boundaries of Nina's domestic setting, her home is depicted as a claustrophobic place: "[a]s though she, Nina, were under water and she couldn't breathe or break the seal of her silence" (Bardwell 38). Nina's home and family life reverberate as a metaphorical prison, reinforced by the depiction of her mothering duties which, in Fisher's words, "was [regarded as] the utmost and, where possible, sole achievement of Irish womanhood" (822). Likewise, Nina's mothering and household chores are presented as restrictive: "[a] mother should be allowed a holiday. […] She had managed well enough without one for ten years!" (Bardwell 35). Here, the improbability of the idea of a holiday is expressed in the passive voice, suggesting the impossibility of a momentary pause through the use of the past participle.

The train station is not only a significant escape point from the suffocating everyday existence of Nina's home life, but also the setting where she has the urge to confess to everyone about the spousal abuse she is exposed to. Again, her inability to articulate her calvary is evident in the following inner monologue as the question mark at the end of the first sentence suggests her hesitancy to speak up:

> Supposedly she had told [the Indian woman] the truth? That she lived with a bastard who beat her every day, who often left her for weeks at a time without money he floosied around with other women.
>
> (Bardwell 36)

Here, Nina's liminal position is highlighted through her silence. Bjørn Thomassen defines liminality as "the experience of finding oneself at a boundary or in an in-between position, either spatially or temporally" (40). Regardless of Nina's urge to speak up about her suffering within the limits of the home, she cannot figure out people's reactions or whether they would empathise with her. This in-between position, somewhere between silence and the urge to articulate her ordeal at home, is presented in the form of a rhetorical question: "[w]ould she simply have shrugged her shoulders saying 'you brought it on yourself', or would she have offered sympathy, advice?" (Bardwell 37), which is followed by the narrator's asserting that: "Nina didn't care anymore. She got up realising the futility of it all" (Bardwell 37). In an in-between position where "diversity and otherness are negotiated" (Pelillo-Hestermeyer 2), Nina's silence can be interpreted as a passive response to her liminal position and a truncated attempt at border-crossing. The binary opposition between Nina's silence and the clamorous transitional setting at Euston station reverberates in the narrator's perception that: "[e]verything in her was insipid since she had married Pascal. Her music forgotten" (Bardwell 37). In the end, the home prevails as a place of entrapment: "[s]he put the baby on the floor and went to the sink and began to wash the dishes that were piled up in cold greasy water" (Bardwell 39), with the "cold greasy water" and the piled dishes as metaphors of the burdensome responsibilities that she cannot escape.

"Out-patients" can be read as a follow-up story to "Euston", as it portrays another housewife, also named Nina, who suffers from both psychological and physical abuse but who cannot share her horrific experience with anyone, not even with medical personnel when questioned about the causes of her wounds. In using the name Nina again, Bardwell reiterates her sharp critique of gender violence in Ireland.

"Out-patients" takes place in a hospital and deals with spousal abuse within a dysfunctional marriage. Setting the plot in a hospital run by nuns, Bardwell projects "the asymmetrical tensions and hierarchies" (Abu-Er-Rub et al. xxix) inherent in Irish institutions and so the hospital becomes a liminal space in this story. In contrast to the positive contact zone that the train station embodies in "Euston", the hospital in "Out-patients" functions as a negative contact zone since it is a place where medical care fails to lessen the wounds of domestic suffering. Although a hospital is

supposed to offer support for people in need of care, in Nina's case it signifies indifference to the vulnerable. For instance, Nina suffers neglect as she has to wait for extended periods of time whenever she needs urgent aid for the wounds caused by her husband's abuse. Also, Nina must wait silently behind a sheer glass partition that separates her from the nuns (Bardwell 78). Here, the image of the glass anticipates the symbolic distance between the institution and Nina.

Furthermore, in practice no proper care is provided when she is finally attended to. When she is asked whether it is her "first visit" to the hospital, she informs them that "[s]he was there three months ago with a broken nose. [B]ut the nun looked away" (Bardwell 81). Nina seeks empathy and yet she encounters hostile authority. To the radiographer's inquiry about spousal abuse, she replies "[n]ot once, but many times", which results in "[n]o trace of disapproval on the radiographer's face" (Bardwell 84). Likewise, the radiographer's final comment: "[i]t's the old formula. Take away people's self-reliance. Tell them nothing. Then we give them the soft sell" (Bardwell 84), epitomises the reluctance of society to acknowledge the inherent relation between gender violence and women's institutionalised disempowerment. The charity hospital's failure to provide sufficient medical care and protection symbolises Nina's neglect by society at large and reinforces the invisible barrier that situates her as an outsider. In this regard, the story's title signals the marginalised position of certain individuals in need of social recognition, their rejection, and utter neglect by public institutions.

The train station in "Euston" and the hospital in "Out-patients" represent two opposite contact zones: the former enables movement and dynamism and offers Nina a positive contact zone to which to escape, even if only emotionally, whereas the latter presents a negative contact zone, a dysfunctional space that turns a blind eye to her domestic suffering. This ambivalent portrayal of public spaces illustrates the tensions inherent in Irish society and highlights Bardwell's intention to point out the complexity of escaping social and moral boundaries. "Euston" and "Out-patients" illustrate the marginalisation of women within the familial sphere and portray various public spheres that present a significant challenge for individuals, specifically women. As Bardwell questions embedded hegemonic ideologies in the Irish context, she brings the plight of the marginalised woman into the spotlight.

On Institutionalised Social Borders and Non-places

In *Different Kinds of Love*, Bardwell highlights how particular public institutions play a significant part in creating boundaries and in marginalising socially dissociated individuals. The transcultural essence of

the collection lies in the fact that it opposes the monolithic social structure of the Irish culture and "challenge[s] the collective identity of a particular community" (Helff 83), the Irish.

The mental asylum in "The Dove of Peace" and convent in "The Night Rider" are portrayed as dehumanising places that recall the dysfunctionality of those institutions in Ireland, and they illustrate the tragic social threshold between the marginalised and the conventional. Bardwell's transcultural literary position against those institutions reveals the importance of addressing the liminal and placing the marginalised at the centre. As Lisa Gaupp affirms, liminality is inherent to transculturality: "As the prefix trans- suggests, what is at stake is a matter of a metaphorical approach to transitions, interlinking, in-between spaces and going beyond" (47). In "The Dove of Peace", the mental asylum symbolises the state-established non-place and mirrors Bardwell's sharp critique of the consequences of this liminality upon the individual. The story concerns two sisters, Jessica and Columbine, who are subjected to their father's abuse, which leads to their mother ending up in a mental asylum. Columbine is impregnated by her father and dies at 16 years old while giving birth to her baby. Jessica ends up in the same mental asylum where her mother was placed and then died. Interestingly, the plot begins and concludes in a mental asylum, suggesting a cyclical reference to a liminal place and with Jessica sharing her mother's fate.

As the trauma of incest is told with a multi-perspective narrative with various ellipses and first-person to third-person narrator shifts, Jessica's self-distancing from her past and her marginalised position can be interpreted with reference to Thomassen, who offers alternative definitions of liminality. For Thomassen, apart from suggesting the state of being in-between, liminality embodies the occurrence of a particular experience as well as its construction. It also entails "mov[ing] through the in-between, try[ing] to overcome it, and leav[ing] it behind" (Thomassen 40). Here, the mental asylum reflects "copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt 7), and Jessica's liminal transition within this institution is signalled by the shift of the narrative point of view and the dissolution of the dominant force (her father) in her life. In other words, the horrific memories shift from being narrated through the lens of a third-person narrator to a first-person voice where "I" is introduced after Jessica's rejection of her biological bond with her parents. As she learns that they are both dead, she realises that they cannot intrude into her life anymore: "I had no father or mother. I had nobody belonging to me" (Bardwell 8). Significantly, this narrative shift to first person singular marks the asylum as a positive contact zone where Jessica (re)possesses her sense of self. It also exemplifies a non-place that functions "like palimpsests on which the scrambled game

of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten" (Augé 79) by temporarily enabling a feeling of self-fulfilment for Jessica. It is noteworthy that the asylum also allows Jessica to process tragic memories such as Columbine's unwanted pregnancy and birth due to her father's sexual abuse.[4] With this ambiguous narrative configuration that sets a failed transgressive attempt of self-fulfilment of the marginalised, Bardwell subverts the secluding function of the asylum.

The aforementioned multi-narrational shift echoes Bardwell's literary play between positive and negative contact zones. While Jessica sometimes regains her voice by narrating the story in the first person in the mental asylum, she cannot escape its boundaries. With its unsettling atmosphere, the asylum marks the boundary between the socially accepted and the outcast in the Irish setting. For instance, the father refers to the asylum as "a mad house" (Bardwell 12) and to the mother as "mad" or "stone mad" (11). Here, heteronormative social perspective labels unconventional characters with madness and segregates them as outcasts. Furthermore, the asylum symbolises being subject to isolation and tragic death for both Jessica and her mother. Bardwell's transcultural approach reflects the asylum image as a literary response to the "asymmetrical tensions, hierarchies and contestations" (Abu-Er-Rub et. al. xxix) against the marginalising stance of the patriarchal forces ranged against women in Ireland in the early 1950s.

Like mental asylums, convents were institutionalised borders that may have suggested a form of liberation from oppressive societal norms, in the Irish setting, but nevertheless only served to reinforce them. Convents did not allow a relational or historical bonding or an identity formation for their unconventional residents. They exemplify the non-places defined by Augé (78). Besides, any attempt to evade its institutionalised boundaries might result in dramatic consequences, as is the case in the story "Night Rider" studied below.

The story is about the life experience of a dysfunctional protagonist, Patrick Galleger. He spends most of his life in a convent but sneaks onto the farm of a nearby family, the Cathcarts, to ride their horse at night. He is subjected to social discrimination due to his animalistic appearance and mental problems. His last attempt to take a night ride results in his being caught and taken to court. Finally, he dies in the convent. The story is divided into two sections, "The Nights" and "The Trial", both of which are told by a third person narrator. The first section suggests an imaginary realm where various links are established between the complex inner world of the protagonist and nature. The latter section presents the legal consequences of Patrick's actions due to his night rides on the Cathcart's horse. This two-fold structure presents Bardwell's textual boundary-defining to reinforce the contrast between the richness of the protagonist's

inner realm against the discrimination he faces in the outer world. By creating an unconventional protagonist who breaks social norms, Bardwell undermines the function of the convent.

Bardwell's transcultural stance extends the potential to transgress boundaries and thereby highlight the prevalence of marginalisation in Ireland. In "Night Rider", she often employs descriptions of nature and animalistic attributes to subvert the boundaries between what is socially determined as "human" and the other. Indeed, as an uninhabited and solitary realm, nature subversively offers the means by which boundaries can be transgressed by the deviant protagonist. Whereas Patrick feels a sense of belonging in nature, society's discriminatory stance towards him, represents rejection by way of a fear of the other. Bernhard Giesen (64) notes the inability of humans to acknowledge the irregularities or abnormalities of the other, and as a result, they perceive in-betweenness and ambivalence as monstrous. Additionally, Giesen states (64), "[t]his encounter is threatening and dangerous because it disrupts the fragile reality of our social order. We feel compelled to reconstruct the boundary behind which we could ban the monstrous phenomena". Similarly, the distance between society and the non-conforming individual is exemplified in Patrick's case, as in alignment with Giesen's terms (64) when he states, "[p]hysical distance was maintained between irregular or disfigured persons and the community of normal to prevent contagion and contamination". At first, Patrick's desolation is illustrated as follows:

> Nobody had cared. They presumed that his catatonic condition was the outcome of some brain damage or congenial illness. For many years he had inhabited that old barracks of a mill, had made his bed in one of the empty rooms and distressing evidence of this animal lair had kept most people as far as possible. As time went on, however, the village had developed a certain guilt about him, and in particular the nuns, who had decided to take him in.
>
> (Bardwell 54)

In Bardwell's universe, convents serve to isolate individuals who invoke "guilt" (Bardwell 54). In a similar fashion, the marginalised individual is always reminded of their deprivation to mark the necessity of the institutionalised boundary the convent represents in the guise of a superficial care. For instance, "there were others in the convent worse than [Patrick] was; others that couldn't lift the hands to the face that had to be fed; who grunted and ran with rivulets of water all day while the nuns wiped them down" (Bardwell 41). While the convent establishes the boundary between society and individuals like Patrick, in Abu-Er-Rub et al.'s terms, "borders create border-crossing, in dividing they simultaneously connect" (xxvi).

As the convent is employed for border-making, border-crossing is enabled through the employment of nature in the story. Every time Patrick has the opportunity to go out, his border crossing offers positive connotations and is often narrated with pastoral images. For example, he passes "the chestnut trees" (Bardwell 40); crosses "the pools of mud" (Bardwell 40) or witnesses "[…] the moonlight pierc[ing] its way between the bare branches […]" (Bardwell 40). Furthermore, this border-crossing provides him with an emotional bond between him and the Cathcart's horse, and enables him to feel a belonging that soothes his longing for human connection:

> Excited by the warmth of the silken neck, Patrick ran his cheek along it as he led the animal into the yard. There the horse stood high above him, no trace of fear, no ripples of apprehension ran over his body; no harm between them; Patrick's innocence established unbreakable trust between man and beast.
>
> (Bardwell 44)

As Patrick's border-crossing provides him with a sense of safety, his geographical transgression interrupts the socially configured margins. According to Mireille Rosello and Timothy Saunders (28), "natural borders" (i.e. the Cathcart's garden) function to "interrupt or stop the flow of circulations of humans, goods and ideas" and as a result they define "a line of demarcation that encodes 'inside' as I, us, mine and ours, and 'outside' as they or what is theirs". Patrick's entry into the garden, a space that is geographically separated, not only symbolises the resistance against "coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (Pratt 7) but also echoes Bardwell's critique of the limitations imposed by hegemonic forces. She obscures the negative consequences of crossing borders within the monolithic structures of Irish society by depicting Patrick's transgression as an enchanting and enjoyable experience:

> Patrick had never known anything before, he felt, compared with what he knew now. That he could feel secure so high above the ground […] He knew that he could be the same each night he came here while the moon was asserting her powers over him. In some strange way he was conscious of this.
>
> (Bardwell 45)

The pacifying effect of nature, therefore, provides him a peculiar sense of self and freedom. At the same time, his ventures away from the convent dismantle the static social boundaries that keep him apart.

Bardwell's transcultural approach undermines marginalisation in the second part of the story, "The Trial" by challenging the boundaries

of an inward-looking society by means of unconventional individuals attempting to detach themselves from social limits. In fact, the particular familiarity that Patrick develops with nature clashes with the rigid boundaries of society. The narrator describes the social threshold that Patrick encounters in his incomprehension as follows: "[w]hat harm was [riding the horse], anyway? Yet Patrick believed now, because the nuns told him, that he shouldn't have done it, but he didn't know why" (Bardwell 48). Bardwell stresses the lack of interconnectedness between the marginalised individual and an authoritative society. The thoughts of the judge and the prosecutors show their patronising attitude towards Patrick: "[p]oor retarded creature" (Bardwell 51); "[h]alf-crazed idiot" (Bardwell 54). In other words, this language reinforces the asymmetrical power relation between society and Patrick.

The transcultural repercussions in Bardwell's short fiction aim to demonstrate the unbreakable limits of institutionalised borders as well as implying that those realms never offer an opportunity for escape for the socially outcast by unceasingly confining them. Therefore, failed attempts at transgression end in the death of the protagonist in "Night Rider" as it does in "The Dove of Peace". Invoking Pratt's transcultural perspective on contact zones that signify "encounter, interaction, and conflict in an on-going power-charged set of exchanges" (7), institutionalised social borders operate as negative contact zones or non-places in the Irish case. Ultimately, death becomes the only grey area that cannot be determined by hegemonic powers. Hence, Patrick's tragic death in the convent is depicted as a form of salvation from his limited status:

> Where am I? he wanted to say. *[…] I'm an old fool. I never rise beyond the level of certain impressions, not even in my dreams. I am simply waiting for the brain haemorrhage to come at me and carry me away. […] I will die in those nauseous waters between waking and dreaming.*
> (Bardwell 50; italics in the original)

Significantly, "the nauseous waters" (Bardwell 50) of the in-between state of living and dying parallels Patrick's ambiguous existence within and outside of society and death serves as the ultimate relief from his torturous fate eventually.

As this section discusses, in "The Dove of Peace" and "Night Rider", Bardwell objects to the normative structure of Irish society which disregards 'the other'. Furthermore, the main settings of these stories can be read as "non-places", a term which Marc Augé defines as spaces that do not "contain any organic society" (112) and cannot offer a natural social life.[5] The institutionalised non-places in these short stories present negative "contact zones" (Pratt 7), where "ignored or supressed" (7) individuals are

grouped "by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination" (7). They also function to establish barriers between the members of the society, and through the transcultural lens, they "create difference, but also tend to magnify this difference and blank out similarity and connection" (Abu-Er-Rub et al., xxvi). Furthermore, Bardwell portrays the impossibility of self-liberation from these institutionalised boundaries (as in a mental asylum) and the harsh punishment that subjects face if they attempt it (as in a convent). Within the insular reality of the Ireland of her time (even at the time of the collection's second edition in 2011), Bardwell subverts the exclusionary function of these institutionalised borders by making her unconventional and deviant characters transgress social norms and thereby challenges the normative understanding of Irish society.

In "The Dove of Peace" and "Night Rider" mental hospitals and convents are presented as two institutionalised boundary-setting means that both epitomise non-places and function as negative contact zones. Although Bardwell portrays alternative realms that briefly fulfil her protagonists (i.e. first-person narration in "The Dove of Peace" or nature as an alternative to institutionalised borders), she also brings up the futility of these endeavours in a singular culture that was yet to acknowledge the dysfunctionality of its institutionalised borders.

Concluding Remarks

Leland Bardwell is an insufficiently acknowledged writer whose contestation of Irish social borders and use of public and institutional places as spaces of friction, exchange and possibility showed a proto-transcultural sensibility at a time when the country was a stage of social and cultural insularity. Her extraordinary life provided her with an empathy towards the 'othered' segments of Irish society. Her life experience, which played out in various locations and finally ended in Ireland, equipped her with a transcultural vision and she projected this awareness onto the margins of her society at the time. Her versatile literary oeuvre, still relatively unexplored in the academic arena, shows preference for neglected individuals and their in-between status in the Irish context, and her short fiction, therefore, transgresses the spatial and ideological boundaries of the nation-state by troubling it from within. Furthermore, it offers "an alternative cultural discourse" (Dagnino 3) and challenges the "singular culture" of the Irish society at the time to give voice to those that lived at the margins.

In *Different Kinds of Love*, Bardwell's transcultural intuition is expressed in her ambiguous representations of spaces and contexts. She leaves open the possibility of crossing borders in liminal spaces (i.e. train station, hospital), as well as domestic and enclosed settings (i.e. home, mental asylum, convent) despite the fact that they are not always crossed.

As the second section discusses, "Euston" and "Out-patients" focus on the borders of home and specifically on dysfunctional marriages and domestic abuse. Both stories probe into the social disregard of abused women in order to criticise the perceived status quo. The train station in "Euston" and the hospital in "Out-patients" stage two opposing contact zones and this contrasting depiction of public areas demonstrates the contradictions inherent in Irish society and Bardwell's attempt to underline the complexities of escaping social and moral boundaries. As Bardwell problematises hegemonic notions rooted in the Irish context, she draws attention to the status of marginalised individuals.

Bardwell's scrutiny of institutions, epitomised by a mental asylum and a convent, also highlights the asymmetrical social and ideological powers that are exerted upon neglected individuals. These non-places operate as negative contact zones and depict the inability of individuals to break away from these institutionalised boundaries and the punitive measures that they face upon their attempts to do so. In sum, her unconventional characters challenge the function of these institutionalised boundaries by transgressing the social conventions and accepted norms of Irish society.

In conclusion, the selected short stories probe into social entanglements and transgressions, provide remarkable portrayals of individuals on the margins of Irish society, and stand out as viable attempts to situate liminal identities at the centre. The originality of Bardwell's short fiction partially stems from its vivid representations of the gap between rigid societal expectation and the experience of its victims. Bardwell's short fiction operates as a transcultural mediator and reflects the problematic heteronormative power within public spheres and institutions.

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Notes

1 My recent study "*Different Kinds of Love*: Silenced Women in Leland Bardwell's Short Fiction" (2023) particularly examines the marginalised women characters in the same collection in the light of trauma theory. It is also crucial to note that Bardwell's most recent short story collection *The Heart and The Arrow* (2022), which was published to mark her centenary year, also allows versatile literary

analysis. The collection includes seven short stories and a novella, and it covers intriguing themes such as youth, the dystopian future of humanity, and mental instabilities of humans.

2 I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Pat Boran for sharing his generous insights with me on *Different Kinds of Love* and Bardwell's writing in general for the present study. For Boran, the republication of the collection after 25 years holds particular value as it was his idea to revive Bardwell's work which was virtually disappearing from the public scene in the beginning of 2000s.

3 These socially deviant characters can be interpreted as, in Kristevan terms, "abjects" of Irish society at the time. That is, they do not necessarily lack common human qualities, such as being healthy, but they "[disturb] identity, system, order" (Kristeva 4). As in the case of Bardwell's characters, the victims of abuse and neglect are regarded as a social threat for the main national and religious pillars of society. Therefore, they are deprived of social approval and labelled as they "[do not] respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 4), which classifies them as in-between subjects.

4 It is worth noting here that Bardwell probably commemorates Ann Lovett's tragic death that took place in Ireland in 1984 through Columbine's short and sorrowful life. Ann Lovett was a 15-year-old girl that died when giving birth alone under the Grotto of Our Lady in a town close to Granard, Co. Longford in 1984. Supposedly no one was aware of her pregnancy and this tragedy generated extensive debate regarding child abuse and sexual repression in Ireland (Beale 57). Echoing Lovett's silence, as she could not ask for help, Columbine "wouldn't or couldn't utter a word" (Bardwell 18) and dies alone while giving birth to her baby.

5 Augé (77-78) mainly uses the term non-places for those that "cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity". Additionally, he also associates non-places with "ordeals of solitude" (93) as they "create solitary contractuality" (94).

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5 Contested Boundaries and Uncharted Entanglements in Evelyn Conlon's *Moving About the Place*

Melania Terrazas and
María Amor Barros-del Río

Evelyn Conlon, a Transcultural Writer

Evelyn Conlon went to Australia in 1972 by ship and stayed there for three years. She did a lot of travelling around the country and all sorts of jobs, experiencing what Arianna Dagnino calls a "cultural dislocation" (1). In an interview conducted with Melania Terrazas ("I Have Always"), Conlon talks about the impact of that time on her life and career:

> When I came back to Ireland I had my first child, at twenty-three […]. I went back to Maynooth College, which was also the place where priests were trained […] It seemed an impossible task but I got a crèche going there […] I had my second child in the second year and separated from my ex-husband in the third year. Pretty hectic arts degree […] such enormous turmoil in my personal life affected what I wrote about […] it gave me an opportunity to see a world that I would never have seen otherwise, to understand what hypocrisy means.
>
> (208–209)

Like other Irish transcultural writers, such as Roddy Doyle, Margaret McCarthy, Hugo Hamilton and Colum McCann, Conlon also questions the ways the limits of the local and the global affect her and her creative practice. As she explains in an interview conducted with Paige Reynolds ("The Lookout"):

> It could be said that the global is always local somewhere. The other question could be: Where am I from? I mean, *where am I really from?* Of course I'm from Ireland, as in that I was born there, but I don't spend my days thinking that I'm Irish. I don't feel Irish, except in certain situations – usually when I'm away … One of the joys of literature is that it allows us to be somewhere else, fills in the gaps in our experience, lets us know the thoughts of a woman in Iran or a man in

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> the proverbial Timbuktu, or indeed the Monaghan woman with the handbag in America.
>
> (171)

Conlon is interested in travel and in how new, foreign settings have an impact on one's perspectives ambivalently as she affirms that "travel can broaden the mind, but it can also narrow it" (E. Conlon, personal communication, July 31, 2023). Undoubtedly, she is well aware of the effect of travelling and experiencing dislocation to "embrace the opportunities and the freedom that diversity and mobility bestow" (Dagnino, 2), and her literary production bears witness of her concern with this topic.

Her first short-story collection, *My Head Is Opening* (1987), includes stories set in Italy and Australia, as well as others where mobility in and out of Ireland is a feature. In her novels *Stars in the Daytime* (1989), *A Glassful of Letters* (1998) and *Skin of Dreams* (2003) Conlon places her characters in Italy, Ireland and the United States. After her fourth novel, *Not the Same Sky* (2013), where she tells the story of 4,414 Irish girls orphaned by famine and shipped to Australia between 1848 and 1850 to satisfy the colony's demand for domestic servants, Conlon returns to the short story genre in *Moving About the Place* (2021), which also features characters living and establishing relationships in countries in which she has a long-standing interest: Australia, Japan, Italy, Indonesia, Monaco and South Africa.

This collection of eleven stories distils a transcultural turn, not only because its shifting viewpoints address "experiences associated with the fashioning of a new self as the result of travelling to far-flung places" as Teresa Caneda-Cabrera ("Women's Mobility", 54) puts it, but also because it shows how people's movement – or, more concretely, women's movement – can lead to progressive material and emotional transformations. Underlying this idea is Conlon's determination to challenge binary oppositions so that "centre" and "periphery" become recurrent sites of contestation and their interstices emerge as the object of attention.

Moving About the Place is anchored in female agency, as is Conlon's feminist stance since her involvement in the radical end of the Irish Women's Liberation Movement – with Irish Women United – in the 1970s.[1] Since then, Conlon has continually refused the place intended for her and, thankfully, for the reader. Her feminist engagement is evident in her construction of female characters "with multiple affiliations and multi-located identifications" (Caneda-Cabrera, "Women on the Move" 27). In *Moving About the Place*, she draws attention to both underacknowledged female historical figures and ordinary women whose active commitment contributes one way or another to combating inequalities and transcending boundaries. She relishes in the unexpected and a careful reading of her

work reveals that her characters dodge fixed categorisations and are "never solely one [seeker] or the other [sought] because the world does not stay fixed" (Dolan).

Her ongoing questioning and challenging have translated into her creative work as a satirical rhetoric of inquiry, and are the foundation of her extremely observant, succinct and witty narrative voice. Her style transgresses boundaries in order to render visible the dynamics of cultural entanglement, and her frequent use of open endings alludes to alternative scenarios that conjure up unforeseen futures. Similarly, her use of rhetorical strategies of the satirical apparatus, namely, irony and wit, stands out as a strategy to contest ideologically marked categorisations and offer alternatives.[2] Besides satire, Conlon's conceptual creativity is deployed through experimental writing, illuminating various transcultural insights into the ethics and activism of the eclectic women who inhabit her stories, and the social justice they seek. As she has argued, "fiction gives you a different lookout point. It's a lookout point from where to feel what's happening in the world" (Reynolds, "The Lookout" 181). Accordingly, her female characters often embody strong assertive activism, whether loud or silent, because their practice of addressing particular social and political issues is a way of challenging those in power. As a result, Conlon's characters are complex and diverse individuals who have much to offer and bring about meaningful change in their societies. Social justice, women's lives and history are recurrent elements in Conlon's production and her work frequently encourages critical thinking about the complex experiences, life narratives and transformations witnessed in Ireland's modern history. As she comments in an interview, her work facilitates new truths because her witty female characters are allowed to think in crooked lines and to be perceived differently from the norm (Terrazas, "Gender Issues" 143). Her protagonists always have a purpose, which confirms Conlon as a strongly engaged writer whose stories are also narrative accounts of dissent and calls for change.

Considering transculturality a method that addresses culture as a dynamic category and debunks ideological dichotomies (Pelillo-Hestermeyer), Conlon's transcultural lens is a natural methodological companion to the restless feminist and activist that she is, always yearning for mobility, always reaching beyond her place and beyond the accepted canon. *Moving About the Place* points out the rise of a global mode of thinking and presents culture as "constantly changing, moving, adapting … through contact and exchange beyond real or perceived borders" (Abu-Er-Rub et al., xxiii). Following these criteria, the collection questions a hermetic view of culture identified with the geographical limits of a nation, Ireland, calls for epistemological openness and challenges well-established

knowledge, in such a way that its transcultural traits not only affect the individual but also history.

The aim of this discussion is to show Conlon's ability to express a newly emergent transcultural sensibility in four selected stories included in *Moving About the Place*, particularly constructed on the understanding that "entanglement, exchange, porosity and hybridisation have always been an instrumental part of the ongoing definition and development of cultures" (Abu-Er-Rub et al., xxvi). These four stories involve Irish women who behave unconventionally, move abroad or return to the island, always bringing some kind of change with them. Conlon's art thus calls into question social and geographical borders and overturns ideological and physical limitations. The stories, deeply filtered through her personal experiences, offer re-readings and reappropriations of Irish history and culture from a transcultural lens, examine spatial and time limitations on people, detect uncharted connectivities, and present new and broader understandings of transcultural social practices.

Moving About the Place: On Contested Boundaries and Uncharted Entanglements

"Imagine Them", "Dear You", "The Lie of the Land" and "Disturbing Words" are stories that present networks of power and identity formation created by people, material objects, media and ideas on the move. They revolve around imperialism, colonial encounters, border-crossing and contestation, and cultural transformations by means of exchange and negotiation. In these four stories, "place" is "the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (Pratt 6). Conlon challenges asymmetries and promotes new modes of perception and new practices so that transculturation happens in those particular places of contact.

"Imagine Them" is the story of Mary Lee, the Irish woman at the forefront of securing the vote for women in South Australia in 1894, while "Dear You" fictionalises the life of Violet Gibson, the Irish woman who almost succeeded in assassinating Mussolini in 1926. These two stories inspired by real historical figures pay tribute to all the suffragists and feminist activists with a focus on their letters (a constant trope in Conlon's fiction), and other personal objects and documents such as birth and marriage certificates, photographs, etc., through a transcultural lens.[3] Conlon's interest in reclaiming a broader knowledge of Irish history and its global connectivities is anchored to her focus on women's agency for transformation.

The other two stories under analysis here are non-historical but also involve the crossing of boundaries and mobility. "The Lie of the Land" tells the story of Dervla and Hugh, who lie out of shame to friends and family when they move to South Africa during the Irish boycott of the 1980s.[4] Instead, they say that they are moving to Australia. In "Disturbing Words",[5] a woman living in Abu Dhabi returns to her border county in the North of Ireland for her parents' funerals and becomes entangled with their response to the Border. The story presents the concepts of nations and frontiers as dynamically changing cultural and political formations subject to resistance and contestation.

In what follows, we scrutinise Conlon's retrieval and rereading of historical figures as active transcultural agents in "Imagine Them" and "Dear You". Then, a careful examination of "The Lie of the Land" and "Disturbing Words" will concentrate on Conlon's approach to borders and how they are performed, acted upon and discussed, as well as their direct effect upon people.

In "Imagine Them", Conlon uses the narrative voice of a historical figure, Mary Lee, an Irish woman born in Monaghan in 1821, who decides to emigrate to Australia with her daughter Evelyn because her son Ben, who lives there, is ill. After a year Ben dies and instead of returning, Mary stays, committed to improving Australian women's rights as an active member of the Social Purity Society committee. At the end of the story, Mary is presented as a suffragette, the co-honorary secretary of the South Australian Women's Suffrage League, who fought non-stop for the women's vote from 1888 to December 1894, when the Australian colony granted this right. Mary "needed to move and do" (59), just as much as Conlon did when she moved to Australia in the 1970s. That response to turmoil had a very positive effect on the suffragette's vision of the world and activism, and on Conlon's transcultural drive to write about Irish women, to imagine a different Ireland for them and to become involved in the Irish "sexual revolution" through Irish Women United, a radical activist group with a charter of demands.[6]

"Imagine Them" is also a very intimate exercise in experimentation with the formal and aesthetic possibilities for rendering female subjects' lives in new ways. The short story is intended to both pay tribute to the South Australian suffragettes who, like Mary Lee, came from very different backgrounds, with unique personal and social circumstances and needs, and to show the reader how they mobilised a huge petition that culminated in the Adult Suffrage Bill (1894), an important historical moment referred to in very evocative terms:

> The petition grew in length, the pages began to stack up. Not one signature looked like another. Mary wrote pamphlets as well as letters […]

> Unlike others, she could sign her own name, no fears. There had to be some advantages to being a widow she thought.
>
> (62)

"Imagine Them" brings these events into the present as Mary Lee, depicted as "a great woman" (65), epitomises many other uncharted Irish feminists whose advocacy has been described by Ailbhe Smyth as follows:

> What Irish women can and do bring to the movement globally is freshness and practicality, a politics grounded in lived experience, a tolerance stemming from the fraught circumstances of our complex history, which enables us to both embrace and be embraced by difference and diversity.
>
> (275)

Considering that "both ideas and practices migrate not only spatially, but also over time" (Abu-Er-Rub et al., xxxii), "Imagine Them" is a clever and engaging story that leads readers to confront migrant and feminist women's memories, journeys, activism and ethics, as well as their legacy today. This story also unveils hidden tensions and developments that complicate mobility and women emigrants' legacy through a transcultural lens. Mary, an Irish immigrant in England and a recent widow, decides to move to Australia to care for her ill son, a "good excuse" (58), she thinks, to tell her neighbours. Her need to find a reason to move and the neighbours' disbelief at her audacity indicate an underlying social restriction to which Conlon immediately responds with a positive impact on the faraway land: "At the other end of the world, they were waiting for her to match her history with theirs" (58). In this story, the author not only neutralises social boundaries in terms of female agency, but also shows that cultural practices are multi-sited so that their enactment, depending on the site, can entail either inaction and stagnation or agency and actual change. In other words, Conlon's transcultural shift acknowledges dynamics of enclosure as much as of connectivities in the life and testimony of Mary Lee.

Another element disclosed by the transcultural approach to this story is its appraisal of multiple mobilities and their effect upon the individual. Born Irish, Mary lived in England, and then in Australia, thus embodying multiple emigration to the point that, all in all, she "had spent almost the same number of years in Monaghan as here [Australia]" (65). In her pursuit of social justice, the protagonist was also a frequent traveller within Australia, where memories of her homeland never left her:

> Sometimes on her journeys she would see a turn in the road that looked like home, a dead ringer for the road to Ballybay, and she would shake

> her head and wonder where she was and what she was doing shouting from the back of trailers … and she would see a bleached shade and perhaps an extravagant bird, things that could only be in her new place. (61–62)

As this extract suggests, the emotional connectivities experienced by the protagonist show that places are not just physical phenomena bound to the limits of nation states, but also experienced spaces. The story thus presents a migrant whose homeland remains ingrained in her heart.

At the same time, "Imagine Them" is also a story of progressive distancing mediated by travel objects such as letters and documents. The story begins with Mary folding her documents before she leaves for Australia with her daughter Evelyn. Birth, marriage and death certificates bear witness of their owner's past and travel with her as if to confirm that "human and object histories inform each other" (Gosden and Marshall, 169). Yet, in this story certificates are treated as objects that simplify categorisations and determine social positionalities in an unpersonal and artificial way. Mary reflects: "It was hard to believe that such a short glance, such a minor intake and almost unnoticeable holding of breath, could cover all of a lifetime so far" (56). In a similar vein, letters are presented as ineffective means to transmit the magnitude of Mary's engagement: "She [Evelyn] tried once to write what Mary had become […] but it looked flat on the page, it couldn't lift into what it was, it couldn't paint the fight" (60). By this, Conlon seems to imply that lack of effective communication or transnational networks meant that "neither place knew what she did in the other" (65) to the detriment of Irish and Australian history. The story ends with Mary's daughter Evelyn posting a letter to her family to inform about her mother's death. Again, this cross-cultural object poses questions about its efficacy to properly express Mary's life and meaning, as Evelyn muses: "When the letter dropped into the box, she wondered about writing the last sentence – maybe she should have left it out" (65). In highlighting the limitations of cross-cultural objects as reliable bearers of someone's identity, Conlon suggests that human experience is too much for cross-cultural objects such as documents and letters to bear. At the same time, she also brings attention to the interstices where full transcultural transfer fails to take place, resulting in lacunae in women's history. All in all, a transcultural reading of "Imagine Them" allows a multi-scalar approach to the contradictory nature of migration, where mobility is intimately entangled with the personal, the social and the political contexts of female agency.

"Dear You" is told entirely through a letter by Violet Gibson, daughter of the Lord Chancellor of Ireland, addressed to an anonymous reader. It begins addressing this reader, "Dear You" (36), and is improbably sent

in a bottle flung into the sea in the early 1950s by George, a compassionate gardener working at the asylum in Northampton, where Violet has been forcibly lodged for thirty years, after her failed assassination attempt on Mussolini in Italy in 1926. In the missive, Violet recounts her life experiences in several countries before and after her attempt on Mussolini's life, and she considers the letter "a small part of the wreckage of my life and a small part of goods thrown overboard to lighten the mind in distress" (36). Through this letter Conlon gives voice to Violet, otherwise silenced and secluded, and so it becomes a cross-cultural object with a life of its own. As Caneda-Cabrera has detected, the letter is "a text in transit" ("Women on the Move", 33) which has undertaken a journey much as Violet in order to reach its anonymous addressee, "you". Hence, its own mobile biography contains a transcultural essence, too, becoming an "objectscape" (Troelenberg, Schankweiler and Messner, 7). Letters, like other subsidiary travel objects, have been recognised by scholarship as "carriers of knowledge, experience, and affect" (Messner, 23) and in this story, Conlon uses the letter as the only means available for Violet to express her true voice, an umbilical cord to her true story.

As is customary in Conlon's works, "Dear You" is anchored to activism and social justice. Like Mary Lee in "Imagine Them", who helps the vulnerable in Australia, Violet's biography encompasses a desire to help others, an inclination only possible after she has distanced herself from her homeland:

> In Chelsea I learned about freedom and about love … When you have learned those two things, freedom and love, you see things in a different way. The constraints that your family have tried to put on you become clear for what they are, frantic fears they will not be able to control what you think or read or how you see the world and what colours you decide to see it through. It was a lovely time there, keeping up with news of suffrage things. And art. And talk of those Pankhursts. They had nerve. I admired that and always remembered what it took.
>
> (42–43)

It is evident from these words that it is the journey that allows Violet to see things and act differently. In Chelsea, she welcomes love and freedom, and admires the bond of those feminists and their interdisciplinary thinking, ideological openness, elevated sense of otherness and discord, and lack of fear of power structures. It is in that world that she develops an initial consciousness, engages in politics and pursues her desire to make a change, even though she ultimately fails in her endeavour: "I finally set out for Rome in 1924, to watch a new tyrant [Mussolini] growing. I had read

about and followed carefully his insidious gathering of control. I went to stop him. It seemed a wise thing to do. And it was" (44).

Conlon utilises contact zones like the suffragists' campaigns and Violet's failed attempt on Mussolini to explore social border-crossing, and she does so through a special emphasis on these women's agency and the significance of the subaltern:

> I want to bring your attention to me and to the others, to let you know that … despite the door having been slammed, despite all that was dear to me having been stolen from me, despite the fact that the only way I can speak to you is through this perhaps unreliable bottle.
>
> (55)

Here, the letter in the bottle acts as "a fulcrum between material migrations and social relations" (Troelenberg, Schankweiler and Messner, 7) as it is the only means in Violet's hands to vindicate her acts and her peers'. At the same time, it is Violet's only means to denounce the different forms of violence exerted upon her:[7]

> In Mantellate jail … they said that my lack of desire to have children was a sign that I was mad.[8] And how they rushed to do their gynaecological examination. I looked at the ceiling and prayed to any god I could get to come into my head … One of the jailers got me Professor Gianelli's report. She smuggled it in to me. I have always been able to get on well with staff, yes, it was best to think of my jailers as that. Still is. The fine professor, a snake of a man … went on to say that the hymen was not intact, he said that it permitted with ease the introduction of two exploratory fingers, that's his two fingers … The hymen is not intact. Indeed. I could have told him that. And made it sound a good and joyful thing.
>
> (49–50)

This violent physical assault was an attack on Violet's integrity. The passage, which is very ironic, draws the reader's attention to her imprisonment, to other women being accomplices, to the doctors who were men and to the violent sexual practices exerted upon them, with her gynaecological examination as yet another metaphor for border crossing.[9] Hence, the letter acts as an "objectscape" that discloses and denounces all these gender-based forms of violence, otherwise shrouded in a culture of silence. In "Dear You", writer and object merge to the extent that the one cannot exist without the other. Despite its fragility and improbable reading, the letter is the prime evidence of a transcultural encounter which bears witness to Violet's transcultural life story.

"The Lie of the Land" revolves around two office workers, Hugh and Dervla, who move to South Africa during the Apartheid era. To avoid criticism, they tell friends and relatives that they are moving to Australia, but once they are gone the truth emerges and the couple stays away for years for fear of contempt and shame. In time, this situation becomes exhausting and as the story unfolds the reader senses the weight of their lie and its damaging effect upon their marriage, "like an iceberg, pulling chunks out of them" (26). At the same time, "The Lie of the Land" explores the tensions caused both by displacement and conflict, and situates that distant land as a contact zone where natural connectivities fail to occur on the surface. Hugh and Dervla must live in a protected environment, mainly inhabited by other white foreigners with whom they rarely socialise. Also, their staff are usually kept apart from their house and their interactions are strictly limited to chores. Notwithstanding, a close reading of this story reveals underlying transcultural practices that develop in cross-cultural environments. For instance, it is Rhami, their driver, not Dervla, who delivers the bad news to Hugh: " 'I am afraid that your father had died,' Rhami said, slowly, mixing his tenses as usual" (24). By stressing the separate environments reserved to each group and yet replicating forms of hybridity at the linguistic surface such as Rhami's, Conlon underscores the connectivities that emerge despite imposed borders. Furthermore, the author is skilful in picturing the thin lines separating two worlds that exist side by side, as the following lines illustrate: "It was at moments like this that Dervla hated having a maid, a cook and a cleaner. They had more English than you'd imagine, making free conversation difficult" (25). In "The Lie of the Land", Conlon's sharp eye not only unveils the subtle tensions and hierarchies that sustain difference and inequality in colonial contexts, but also detects overlapping fields of entanglement and relationality that occur in transcultural contexts despite normative ideologies of separation and opposition. Furthermore, Conlon denounces the negative effects of colonialism both upon the local populations and the colonisers. When the death of Hugh's father offers a chance to go home and start anew, he wonders whether the price paid was worth it:

> Is this what "denouement" means? Is this what all these years of wandering have come to, all that moving from one country to the other, starting a new life every few years as if the next one could be better? Is this the inevitable result – … a man … waiting to hear who was dead? (24)

But, in the end, Conlon's wit surprises the reader: Hugh does not go back to Ireland, and the story does not make clear whether Dervla eventually returns. Conlon avoids closure, keeping the journey in a potential

future: "Maybe. She would take that top and those skirts. And that jewellery box. She loved packing. It was the only time that she could see, properly, the bits and pieces that she had accumulated in all their wanderings" (35). This strategy, frequently used in her works, deploys irony and wit. For Dustin Griffin, "the satirist's instinct is not to close off an argument but to think of another example, or a qualification, or a digression. The point is to keep moving, and the satirist is supple enough to do so" (1994: 113). Hence, despite the evident deterioration of Hugh and Dervla's marriage and the downsides of life in exile, the story's ambiguous title and Conlon's ironic ending leave the reader restless and facing the potentials of liminality and uncertainty. "The Lie of the Land", as the title hints, is a satiric approach to nationalism and colonialism, and a bold portrait of the interstices that exist in-between.

Unlike the characters of "The Lie of the Land", the protagonist of "Disturbing Words" does return to her family home on the Border for the funeral of both her parents, who passed away within a day of each other. The first-person narrator is an Irish woman who has emigrated to a faraway desert country, "so foreign that you don't even know the name of it" (75), who amidst the ceremonial of their funerals discovers that her parents' lives have been hugely affected by the partition of Ireland with the border running through their property.

Since her childhood, Conlon has perceived emigration as "a perfectly ordinary choice" (Reynolds, "The Lookout" 173) and "Disturbing Words" seems to illustrate her personal experience of growing up in Monaghan, her relationship to the North and her understanding of borders. As she explains in an interview with Reynolds ("The Lookout"):

> Naturally I was conscious of the border growing up: it came up in conversation regularly. It wasn't a fixed thing in our minds, after all my parents were born pre-partition. They spoke about an Ireland before there was a border. We had one aunt and one uncle who went to Belfast rather than to America, England or Canada, and in many ways their summer holiday stories were more fascinating than the others.
>
> (174)

Accordingly, Conlon begins "Disturbing Words" with the narrator approaching her own migratory experience, an old pattern all too familiar to the Irish: "Around here they were all good at going away. The town down the road was so dead it didn't even know it" (79–80). As many others had done for centuries, she had moved first to Dublin and then further away to finally settle in Abu Dhabi. From the beginning, the reader suspects that the narrator's detachment from her birthplace entails not only physical distance but also emotional aloofness. Her adaptability

to new contexts, evident in her confession, "I say home when I'm here because it's easier" (76), insinuates a transcultural identity at the individual micro-level.

Slowly but surely, in this story Conlon reveals that the protagonist's sense of belonging and attachment to her place of birth are strongly affected by her family's identification with the border and the consequences of partition, as her mother's warning suggests: "Before I left for the faraway place my mother had said, always live away from the border" (80). But here, Conlon's borders come in many shades. For the narrator, they represent encounter, diversity and exchange. Moreover, at the end of the story, they are presented as a subject of friendly discussion and encounter: "And we went back to the desert where we had a party and discussed borders we had crossed" (83). Also, borders enable iterative change and revision, because they can be crossed, "Back and forth, back and forth" (84). This movement offers second chances and allows recollection of past experiences when "the people forced to move often take excursions to look back" (84). The infinite possibilities herein contained indicate that borders can become contact zones, or places that allow transitions. For Conlon, borders will always exist, but they are also subject to free experimentation.

As the protagonist's and her parents' stories unfold and intertwine, the reader enjoys a complex narrative defined by movement and separation. In fact, the complexity of "Disturbing Words" lies in the multiplicity of perceptions contained therein. The narrator's positive appraisal of borders is radically different from her parents' experience. The partition of Ireland had marked their lives in opposite ways: long ago they had met right on the border filling in the roads blown up by the British army during the Troubles, but they had also been hurt by the border, whose line ran "on top of their ditch" (78). As the text reads, "His mother had mourned the loss of her friends, from both sides of the house […] So, if you were born in the six counties before now, where will they say you are from?" (78). Depersonalisation and estrangement are pointed to as the real damage behind borders.

But, scouring through their belongings, the narrator learns that her parents had taken action against the imposed partition. For one, they had planted a tree on the very border "to make sure that its roots, and now its branches, would spread across the line" (82). By means of this symbol, Conlon advocates for normal people taking simple actions that have the power to challenge imposed divisions. Also, her wit and satirical rhetoric are displayed in the protagonist's reaction to the threatened cutting down of the tree, where she perches for days, only coming down when the tree is secured. Taking the tree as a symbol, Conlon derides artificial borders and advocates for peaceful coexistence. Similarly, the protagonist learns that her parents had secretly begun to dig a basement in their barn to cross

the border from below so that "they would live in two places" (81). This unrealistic project symbolises both agency and contestation, and correlates with Conlon's transcultural approach wherein interstices, discontinuities and frictions gain relevance. In the end, all the characters in this story take control of boundaries one way or the other. Although "Disturbing Words" does not focus on border-crossing cultural encounters and transcultural exchanges, it does discuss "spatiality and processes of reconfiguration" (Abu-Er-Rub et al., xxiii), and shows the nuances of the relationships between emigration and belonging, separation and identity, as well as the various forms of accommodation, resistance and challenge displayed by individuals and societies.

Conclusions

In 2020, Reynolds called for an examination of the rapid changes that have taken place in the island of Ireland during the early decades of the twenty-first century and stated the need to keep an eye "on mobility patterns that undermine any neat suturing of physical space and cultural experience" ("Coda", 277). This investigation has attempted to show that *Moving About the Place* not only responds to this demand but also poses challenges ahead for scholars, readers and writers alike.

The stories contained in *Moving About the Place* address the complex and dynamic relations between people, especially women, and space, and offer innovative readings of the significance of nations, limits and connections. In particular, the female characters in the four short stories under discussion recall Conlon's metaphor about migratory birds used at the end of her latest novel, *Not the Same Sky* (2013).

> They go from where they breed to where they winter. They may travel over the open seas or close to the coasts … They go to where the food is, a lot like us … And there are regional variations in some birdsong. They get their accents and put them in their mouths so no matter where they are we should know from where they came.
>
> (251)

Like these birds, the women experience displacement, they are diasporic and dispersed among Irish communities elsewhere. Conlon's feminist stance confirms her commitment to social justice and pays homage to all the altruists who helped these women reach their destinations and adapt.

The transcultural lens that illuminates this analysis allows for a shift of perspective and highlights entanglements and connectivities as much as practices of contestation and resistance. Transcultural perceptiveness also reconsiders the canon and incorporates hidden and silenced voices from

the past in order to provide a more inclusive reading of history. Conlon's stories show that destinations affect people physically and emotionally. They look at the local and the global with a broad perspective and in doing so, they contest the very notion of borders.

In *Moving About the Place*, Ireland expands beyond its physical limits inasmuch as it is present in faraway countries, challenging binary oppositions and fixed categories, and "underlining entanglement and relationality while also acknowledging dynamics of enclosure, friction and dissonance" (Abu-Er-Rub et al., xxxi). Conlon's narrative is "vivid, subtle, restrained" (Dunne) with shifting viewpoints that provide multiple perspectives, open endings that hint at further changes to come and a satirical rhetoric that contests the rigidity of outdated concepts.

In "Imagine Them" and "Dear You", Conlon pays tribute to Mary Lee and Violet Gibson by telling how they lived, rebelled, marched, fought and died. The story of Mary Lee is presented in "Imagine Them" as a multi-sited migratory process where connectivities and disconnection march hand in hand. Here, Conlon shows that material cross-cultural objects are inadequate to establish networks and contain estrangement, resulting in an insufficient historical appraisal of Irish historical female figures. In "Dear You" Conlon recuperates the figure of Violet Gibson, an Irish woman with a transcultural and feminist life experience whose testimony reaches the reader by means of a letter. Here, the author resorts to this "objectscape" to record Violet's biography and deliver her call for justice with a personal touch.

But Conlon does not avoid the inner frictions that exist in contact zones. In "The Lie of the Land", she exposes inequality and segregation as characteristic of colonial contexts, while simultaneously disclosing spaces for entanglement and relationality both within and among segregated communities. In this way, she dismantles single views of domination and separation based on unreconciled binaries and shifts the focus onto the discontinuities and resistances underlying oppressive systems. Similarly, "Disturbing Words" calls into question the very notion of the border, which Conlon identifies with separation as much as connection. She masterfully intertwines the life stories of the narrator and her parents to provide a multi-sited perspective of boundary-drawing, and successfully conveys its diverse effects upon people. In challenging the rigidity of borderlands, the story unfolds practices of resistance and vindicates re-territorialisation of spaces.

As discussed earlier, Conlon is a transcultural writer whose stories provide the reader with a sharp and flexible apprehension of agency and its limits. Her plots retell forgotten stories of women, both historical and ordinary, and unsettle conventions every time; these are stories that "reimagine, engage with, and embrace the 'new' while avoiding the

regurgitation of the tried and the trusted" (Maher, 392). In *Moving About the Place*, Conlon offers multi-sited readings of Irish history and borders and, at the same time, reshapes and challenges the social reality of Ireland as a cultural entity.

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Notes

1 For more on Conlon's advocacy for women's rights and feminism, see Barros-del Río ("Power, Gender") and Terrazas ("The Rhetoric").
2 For an in-depth analysis of Conlon's satirical rhetoric throughout her work, see Terrazas ("The Rhetoric" and "Questioning Women's Lives").
3 For a deeper understanding of the "objectscape" from a transcultural perspective, see Troelenberg, Schankweiler, and Sophia Messner's work.
4 At the time, in Ireland there was strong social rejection of South Africa for its anti-apartheid policies in the form of *boycott and strike action*. For instance, Mary Manning, a shop worker in an outlet of Dunne Stores in Dublin, refused to handle the sale of grapefruit from South Africa on 19 July 1984. A few days later, other shop stewards supported Manning's refusal to handle South African produce. Conlon used to go to the shop every Saturday to give them support (personal correspondence with the author).
5 This story was first published in Sineád Gleeson's collection *The Glass Shore: Short Stories by Women Writers from The North of Ireland* (2016).
6 For a further study of the life-writing aspects in this short story, see Terrazas ("An Experiment").
7 This story refers to "hair-taking", a form of gender-based violence executed by crowds at demonstrations, policemen during interviews, army officers on the battlefield and male doctors in jails. To this day, this has remained a 'dark secret' in Ireland. For more on these matters, see Linda Connolly's study of gender-based violence.
8 Violet Gibson was buried in Northampton, near where Lucia Joyce, James Joyce's daughter, was later interred. The latter makes an appearance at the end of "Dear You".
9 According to Baratieri el al., Violet Gibson was "shifted to and from between Le Mantellate prison, Sant'Onofrio, and Santa Maria della Pietà lunatic

asylums, subjected to police interrogations and an extensive somatic and psychiatric examination, which included a gynecological test to determine whether she was a virgin. The decisions regarding Violet's sanity came from the top; for diplomatic reasons it was deemed to be more convenient that Violet should be returned to England on grounds of mental infirmity rather than punished for her crime in Italy" (146).

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6 Transculturality and Ken Bruen's Crime Fiction

David M. Clark

Introduction

As early as 1999, Wolfgang Welsch noted that contemporary writers are shaped not by a single homeland but rather "by differing reference countries" (198). To this may be added, and stressed, that such "reference countries" consist not only of solely physical geographical entities but also constructs of the mind, imagined spaces in which "differing cultural interests" converge in what can be seen as a transcultural process which permeates and penetrates all fictional worlds (Welsch, 198). Irish crime writing has – arguably since its first tender steps in the mid seventeenth century – reflected the pained and difficult relationship which has historically existed between the Irish writer, their country and their art. Although, as Catherine Bublatzky states, transculturality is first and foremost a consequence of "the inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures", this modernity, thanks largely to the unusual political and cultural situation which Ireland, as a colony has faced, was remarkably early in making its appearance (318). Throughout the history of the Irish crime novel or story, transcultural characteristics have been a norm, and the hybridity of the contemporary work of Irish crime fiction has as much to do with the history and development of the genre on the island of Ireland as with the interchange of ideas, concepts and sub-genres with international models. Thus, in the nineteenth century, writers such as Sheridan Le Fanu, L.T. Meade and Richard Dowling were in constant literary dialogue with writers from France, the USA and the UK, providing innovative plot devices, character types and generic novelties which belied their Irish origin and went a long way to creating what would be the fundamental concepts which would be applied to the genre in the future.[1] The contribution of Irish crime writers to the development of the genre was constant throughout the twentieth century, and since the "boom" in Irish crime fiction of the 1990s Irish crime writers have stretched the boundaries of the format in ways which reflect the exchange of ideas through

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which the crime tale becomes a transcultural paradigm. Recent attempts to breach the larger international markets have seen a number of Irish writers using hybrid fictional models – John Connolly's successful blending of the classic P.I. novel with neo-Gothic elements is a good case in point – but, and not always on a positive level, has also seen a growing internationalisation of Irish crime writing, where even the cover art copies American prototypes.[2]

The works of Ken Bruen reflect the new impetus which has been found in Irish crime writing since the last decade of the twentieth century and which has seen an amazing rise in the popularity of crime narratives from both the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland. Irish crime fiction from the end of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first, provides a magnificent guide to the political, social, economic and cultural status of the island of Ireland, in the years which saw an unprecedented economic boom, the subsequent collapse and its effects, but also a number of issues which polarised Irish society. Writers such as Declan Hughes, Gene Kerrigan, Tana French and many others have documented within their crime fiction the situation in Ireland over these years, but it is, perhaps, in the works of Ken Bruen where social, political and cultural comment takes on the greatest importance. Like other writers, he uses the economic anomalies of the period in his works, but his criticism, at times oblique, at times virulently open, becomes central to his novels. Hence the importance for Bruen of the situation of migrants in Ireland, of travellers, and of other minority groupings: of people of gender fluidity, of the different positions of the Irish with regard to the referendums on abortion and single sex marriage; of the Irish positions on global events, such as the war in Iraq, the presidencies of Bush, Obama and Trump, of the Irish position within Europe, with the Nice Treaty and with Brexit.

Although there are a large number of writers who have skilfully reflected the situation of Ireland in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, no one, perhaps, has done so in such a consistently maverick and iconoclastic fashion as Ken Bruen.[3] For Paula Murphy, Bruen is a postmodern writer whose "writing constantly strains at the edges of detective narration" (5). As for so many Irish authors engaged in the publication of works within the crime mode, Bruen's narratives stretch far beyond the confines of the genre. His work from the early 1990s reveals many of the techniques and concerns which would continue to appear throughout his career, and one of the most important aspects of his writing is the depiction of a changing world in which characters participate in a constant dialogue between differing cultural norms, past and present, the known and the unknown, the self and the other, the understood and the misunderstood. His writing embraces what Irene Gilsenan Nordin *et al* describe

as the central concepts of the transcultural, that is "migration, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and translingualism" (xii).

Born in Galway in 1951, Bruen studied philosophy at Trinity College Dublin before working, among other things, as an English teacher in Africa, South East Asia and South America, famously spending some days in prison in Brazil in 1979 following a barroom brawl. He also worked as a security guard at the World Trade Center. Such a diversity of place and experience must place Bruen among the "new generation of culturally mobile writers" whom Arianna Dagnino calls "transcultural writers" (1). He can be seen as an author "at the forefront in capturing and expressing an emerging transcultural sensitivity" as one of a number of writers who "find themselves less and less trapped in the traditional migrant/exile syndrome", one who uses his transcultural experience as a means of understanding an often incomprehensible reality through the focus of crime fiction (Dagnino, 2). His first published works were written after the author's fortieth birthday. These short stories and novellas, produced in small quantities by smaller publishing houses, received scarce critical attention and were collected under the title *A Fifth of Bruen* (2006). In these early works, Bruen begins to explore some of the themes and stylistic devices omnipresent in his later oeuvre, among which an extensive use of listing is first experimented with, as is the ubiquitous references to numerous manifestations of popular culture. They also contain the presence of victims of Down Syndrome, unloved and unlovable mothers, deviant priests and the displaced individual trying to make sense of a cruel, alien world.

The Early Phase: London

These themes reappear in the author's first full length novels, set in a London in which diverse cultural models, languages and rootless characters converge. In *Rilke on Black* (1996), Nick, a bouncer of Irish ancestry, with the help of his psychopathic friend, Dex and the drug addict Lisa, kidnaps Ronald Baldwin, a successful black businessman who is obsessed with the works of the Austro-Hungarian poet Rainer Maria Rilke. The crime is investigated by Metropolitan Police Detective Brant, a character who would reappear in later Bruen novels in which it would be revealed that Brant, like the kidnapper, is of Irish descent. Alienated characters from distinct cultural backgrounds populate the pages of *Rilke on Black* and those of the successive novels from the late 1990s, which are also set in London. *The Hackman Blues* (1997), for example, features the criminal duo of Tony Brady, a gay mobster, and Elias Rasheed (Reed) Mohammed, his former cell-mate and now partner, with whom Brady runs a repossession business which effectively steals the items it later relocates. Brady,

unsurprisingly, is Irish, and is approached by another London Irishman, the rich and ruthless builder, Jack Dunphy, to locate his daughter, Roz, who has eloped with a black London gangster. The climatic cultural clashes are repeated in *Her Last Call to Louis MacNeice* (1998), which features another two Irish migrants in London. Dave Cooper, a seasoned bank robber, and his sidekick Doc, like Brady and Reed, run a repossession business, but here, while Doc is portrayed as an intelligent Irish immigrant, Cooper is a disturbed character, heavily marked by his Presbyterian background. His mother was from Belfast, his father from Glasgow, and they are described as "hard-line Presbyterian" who "wouldn't make love standing up lest people thought they were dancing" (Bruen, *Her Last Call to Louis MacNeice* 3). Cooper seems to reject the Irish part of his upbringing and refers to his own status as being British and, at times, English. When Doc complains that the English "don't trust an educated Irishman, it's like an uppity nigger", Cooper justifies the attitudes of the English, among whom he includes himself, "[c]os we have to deal with you flamin' paddies is why" (Bruen, *Her Last Call to Louis MacNeice* 16). Ironically, Cooper's girlfriend, the small-time shoplifter Cassie, is infatuated with the Northern Irish poet Louis MacNeice, a literary figure about whom Cooper knows nothing. As in *Rilke on Black*, where the eponymous Austrian poet is a key reference, literature is seen as an escape valve for the more perspicacious of the characters, echoing Bruen's own fascination for the naming and listing of diverse literary figures.

London Boulevard (2001) was filmed in 2010 by William Monahan starring Irish actor Colin Farrell as Harry Mitchel. On his release from prison, Mitchel is approached by his Irish friend Norton who offers him a job as a loan enforcer working for gangster Tommy Logan, who also appears in *The McDead* (2000). Mitchel, however, wishes to put his criminal life behind him, and gladly accepts work as a general handyman for rich, aging actress Lillian Palmer. Although deliberately recalling Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*, Bruen's novel contains the mixture of humour and violence so typical of the author's work, and a number of memorable characters including Jordan, Lillian's mysterious butler, Briony, Mitchell's sister and Aisling, the Irish girl with whom he falls in love. In *Dispatching Baudelaire* (2004), Mike Shaw, a quiet and responsible accountant meets Laura, the dangerous and depraved daughter of rich and powerful Harold Benton, a debonair epicurean fan of Baudelaire. Laura and her mother persuade Mike to help them kill Benton and the accountant, by the end of the novel, is proud of his body count and looking forward to being known as a serial killer.

The two police officers charged with the arrest of Cooper, Noble and Quinn, are perhaps best seen as early models for Roberts and Brant who would feature in later novels. Quinn is, like Brant, from a London Irish

background, and is described by Noble as a "plastic Paddy" (Bruen, *Dispatching Baudelaire* 36). Bruen's "London" novels, then, reveal the city as an amorphous entity, a cultural melting pot in which the displaced Irish struggle against prejudice and mistrust to survive, at once disclaiming and rejoicing in their fragmented identity. The Roberts and Brant novels, beginning with *A White Arrest* (1998), continue the dynamics of the London works, while also revealing how the serial format is aptly suited to the author's particular skills. Originally projected as "The White Trilogy", the series lasted for seven novels, allowing Bruen not only to delve into the twisted psyches of his protagonists, Chief Inspector James Roberts and Detective Sergeant Tom Brant, but also to further explore the multicultural mesh of late twentieth-century London. The metropolis, in Bruen's London novels, can be seen to exemplify Mary Louise Pratt's definition of a "contact zone", that is, "the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect" (7). The "contact perspective", for Pratt, "emphasises how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other" (7). Bruen's Irish characters mix and enter into a persistent dialogue not only with the "native" citizens of England's capital, but also with members of the numerous ethnic and social groups which constitute the city's vast and varied population.

The author's love for multifarious references to diverse aspects of popular culture is given room to grow within the series format, and if nothing else the Brant and Roberts novels provide Bruen with the confidence and aplomb to embark on his later exploration of boom-time Ireland in his Jack Taylor novels. *A White Arrest* shows the two corrupt but lovable police officers investigating a serial killer who, obsessed with cricket, is routinely murdering members of the England cricket team. The novel shines, however, for its portrayal of the two detectives and the strained relationship between them and, once again the description of post-Thatcher London. Two drug addicts, for example, are described as "like Micks, you know, Oirish, but they've been here a bit so they speak a mix of Dublin and London" (Bruen, *A White Arrest* 74). Brant's own Irish background is referred to only in passing, although his interest in hurling – or more specifically, the role of the hurling stick as an offensive weapon – is made clear, in a fixation which would later be more clearly manifested in the Jack Taylor novels.

In *Taming the Alien* (1999) Brant is attacked in his home by Roy Fenton, known as the "Alien", a hitman so called because he had murdered someone during the projection of the Ridley Scott film of that name. Following Fenton to Galway and then to the USA, Brant and another of the characters surviving from the previous novel, the now pregnant black WPC Falls, are also trying to track down the Irish members of the Band-Aid

couple Josie and Mick Belton who Brant believes had been responsible for the murder of their colleague PC Cone. Meanwhile Roberts, is diagnosed with skin cancer, while WPC Falls loses her child. *The McDead* finds Brant and Roberts facing the false Irish gangster Tommy Logan who uses a hurling stick, a hurley, on his victims, while WPC Falls is used as bait in an attempt to trap the Clapham Rapist, a serial sexual predator who preys on Afro-Caribbean victims.

The black comedy of the Brant and Roberts novels returned in *Blitz* (2002), successfully adapted for film by director Elliott Lester with Jason Statham in the role of Brant. In *Blitz*, the eponymous villain is a murderer who is systematically killing police officers in south-east London, and who boasts a list of seven potential victims, with Brant as the last on the list. Roberts, who has recently lost his wife, is given even less prominence in a series which is now dominated by Brant and Falls. Brant's Irishness also seems to be given progressively more importance as the series progresses, and the new characters add life to the novel, especially the gay Sergeant Nash who Bruen pairs with the homophobic Brant, and the disastrous Scottish PC McDonald. *Vixen* (2005) finds Roberts delegating much of his work to Nash, McDonald, Falls and new addition WPC Andrews as a female bomber manipulates two incompetent brothers to help carry out a series of bomb attacks in south London. In *Calibre* (2006) Brant, now writing his own crime novel, faces the "Manners Killer", a psychopath who murders people who show bad manners in public while in *Ammunition* (2007) Brant, "feared by cops and villains alike", is the intended victim of a hired gunman who leaves the sociopathic sergeant fighting for his life (1). *Ammunition* reintroduces Falls, now a sergeant, and Angie, the stalker from Vixen, while MacDonald is helping a group of pensioner vigilantes.

Bruen's London novels clearly reflect the four central concepts of the transcultural as defined by Gilsenan Nordin. The Irish migrants in Bruen's metropolis clash with their new surroundings and with their "host" population, but also with other migrants from other parts of the globe and, importantly, with other Irish immigrants. The cosmopolitan nature of London society forces them to come to terms with their own status as "foreigners" in a land with which they share a language, a history and numerous cultural markers, but which they view with a mutual, lasting suspicion. The translingual factor in these London novels is usually relegated to that of accents. Migrants of colour, from Africa, the West Indies, or the Indian subcontinent, are immediately identified as foreign by their skin colour. Although traditional racist jibes at the Irish immigrants in the United Kingdom have generally made comparisons between these and people of colour, the main differentiating factor is generally regarded as being the Irish accent, unhappily long a target for discrimination. In his London works, Bruen's encyclopaedic knowledge of popular culture is

usually directed towards films, music and popular fiction. Abu-Er-Rub et al claim that the transcultural "means to substitute the container concept of culture with one that considers relational cultural processes of interaction, interstices and disjunction" (xxvi). If this is indeed the case, such processes are apparent throughout Bruen's fiction, and would assume fundamental importance in the Galway author's return to his native Ireland and the publication of his Jack Taylor series.

Dissecting Celtic Tiger Ireland

At the beginning of the new millennium, Ken Bruen returned to Ireland, in a way both personal and literary. Living once again in his native Galway, he started to use his homeland as the scene for his novels, with the economic boom of the late 1990s and subsequent recession in the early twenty-first century providing a feast of material and ideas. In the first decade of the century, Bruen would also continue to write narratives set in London and would also initiate his productive relationship with American crime fiction, but the most memorable of the works produced in this period would be those set in Galway and featuring a renegade former guard. With the publication of *The Guards* (2001) Bruen initiated his novels featuring Jack Taylor, arguably Ireland's most successful detective series. Taylor, in *The Guards*, is still a member of the An Garda Siochana, the police service in the Republic of Ireland. Cynical and world-weary, he is relieved of his post for his excessive drinking and his lack of respect for authority – he has called a TD the "gobshite who screwed the nurses" to his face (Bruen, *The Guards* 3). Taylor does not understand how his chronic alcoholism is a problem, after all, he ponders, "the gardaí and drink have a long, almost loving relationship" (Bruen, *The Guards* 1). Stubbornly keeping his guard greatcoat, he sets up as a private investigator in a country where there were no private eyes as the concept "brushes perilously close to the hated 'informer'" (Bruen, *The Guards* 5).[4] Using a Galway pub as his *ad hoc* office, Jack's first client is Ann Henderson who wants him to find out the truth behind her daughter's death, believed by the police to be suicide but which she suspects is murder. The simple plot, owing much to classic American hard-boiled fiction, is secondary, perhaps, to the magnificent picture of Ireland at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The economic boom is at its height, and in Galway everyone "is quasi-American in the worst way" (Bruen, *The Guards* 15). The city is filling with the new Irish, like the Romanian woman who plays the Irish tin whistle outside Eason's bookshop in Shop Street, or the Glaswegian beggar asking for the price of a cup of tea. The novel ends with Jack, sworn to sobriety, heading for London to start a new life. *The Guards* is one of the first Irish crime novels to depict the changing circumstances in the country after the boom

of the Celtic Tiger. Like the London of his earlier novels, Bruen's Galway has become a multi-racial, multi-linguistic contact zone which the author dissects with a characteristic mixture of glee and cynicism. His Galwegians often share the racism, misogyny and petty-mindedness of the Londoners, but the author successfully transmits the sensation of what Dagnino terms a "relaxed, neonomadic attitude when facing issues linked to displacement, rootlessness, nationality, cultural allegiance, and identity" (9). Bruen's own "neonomadic" past has provided him with the analytical tools and the specific sensitivity required to foster "fruitful encounters and mutual respect; dismantling boundaries instead of erecting new barriers, encouraging a sense of communality" (Dagnino, 14).

In *The Killing of the Tinkers* (2002) Jack returns from London with "a leather coat and a coke habit" and is approached by a man named Sweeper who asks him to investigate the death of four travellers (Bruen, *The Killing of the Tinkers* 9). Sweeper is upset by the unwillingness of the police to spend time on the case, summarised in the words of Guard Clancy who says: "[f]ecking tinkers, they're always killing each other" (Bruen, *The Killing of the Tinkers* 37). The novel highlights the contrast between the "tinkers", an itinerant reminder of Ireland's traditional outcasts, and the new Celtic Tiger Ireland with its new outcasts, like the black African and Romanian immigrants which populate its pages. Taylor, who believes that he "is outlaw enough to be accepted" into the traveller community is soon corrected by Sweeper who reminds him that he is still part of the settled community despite his deviance (Bruen, *The Killing of the Tinkers* 60). There is casual racism found under the "mercenary yahooism" (Bruen, *The Killing of the Tinkers* 196) of Tiger Ireland and the travellers are compared to the Native Americans "like Soldier Blue" (Bruen, *The Killing of the Tinkers* 151) as neither police nor politicians do anything to quell its virulence. In *The Magdalen Martyrs* (2003) Taylor is sought out by Galway gangster Bill Cassell who asks him to find Rita Monroe, a former worker at one of the infamous Magdalen laundries who had reputedly helped the gangster's mother to escape from the institution. While working on this case, he is also employed by yuppie businessman Terry Boyle, a "representative of the first Irish generation to grow up without the spectre of unemployment and immigration" (Bruen, *The Magdalen Martyrs* 39) who wants him to seek out the truth behind his father's apparent death by heart attack, believing his stepmother to have been involved. Again, the main protagonists are the city of Galway and the dark inside of Jack's head. The city continues to be buoyed by the Celtic Tiger but, despite or because of the new-found affluence, is, like Boyle, "smug, greedy, knowing" (Bruen, *The Magdalen Martyrs* 170). The question of the Magdalen laundries is given prominence through inserted narratives, which interrupt Taylor's habitual first-person narrative in this

dark thriller which, despite murder, suicide, and despair is still able to convey the author's wry humour.

The Dramatist (2004) is set with the background of the ratification of the Nice treaty and the preliminaries to war in Iraq, while in *Priest* (2006) Taylor discovers secrets of child abuse in the past of the priest of the title, and Bruen reflects on the "scandal enveloping the Church" which had "caused the people to lose faith in the one institution that had seemed invulnerable" (Bruen, *Priest* 13). In *Cross* (2007) Bruen again criticises the corruption endemic in boomtime Ireland. Once again, the plot is secondary to the depiction of contemporary Ireland where the expression "heads would roll" could be translated as "scapegoats would be found" (Bruen, *Cross* 15). The "Celtic Tiger had roared out loud for nigh on eight years" but after they had "wallowed in its trough" the Irish were faced with the "downside, we didn't feed the goddamn animal and the whore died" (Bruen, *Cross* 28).

In *Sanctuary* (2008) Jack receives a letter with a list of potential victims of a new psychopath calling him/herself Benedict. Despite the murder of a guard and a judge, he refuses to get involved, but when a child is killed and Benedict puts the blame on the detective, Taylor decides to investigate. Topical allusions include the problems with asbestos in Galway and the growing racism in Ireland, where a hundred immigrants camping on the M1 motorway are deported, and in Galway itself, where one inhabitant claims that "niggers" are "stealing our country from under us" (Bruen, *Sanctuary* 64). Despite the multicultural reality of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, traces of an old racism resist. The novel ends with Jack determined to leave for America to start life afresh, but he is turned back by the US immigration authorities at the beginning of the next novel in the series, *The Devil* (2010). *Headstone* (2011) finds Taylor back in familiar territory, faced with another vigilante group, the Headstone, which is targeting what it considers to be weaker members of the community, such as gays, like Jack's friends Ridge and Stewart, a youth with Downs Syndrome or an alcoholic like Taylor himself. In *Purgatory* (2013) Jack is again hunting down a vigilante killer calling him or herself "C33" who has been killing drug addicts and other "lowlifes" and who contacts both Jack and Stewart, the drug dealer who has now returned to Galway after his release from prison.

Green Hell (2015) differs from the other works in the Jack Taylor series, at least stylistically, in that it foregoes Taylor's wry first-person narration for a third-person "biography" allegedly written by his new sidekick, Boru Kennedy, an American Rhodes scholar who gives up his research on Samuel Beckett after he is saved from being mugged by the detective. Boru's ironic narration recaps the events of the previous Taylor novels in a different voice, while Jack investigates a series of rapes for which

he suspects a charismatic university professor. The academic theme continues in *The Emerald Lie* (2016), where Jack confronts a serial killer nicknamed "the Grammarian", with the help of Emily "Emerald" who had first appeared in *Green Hell*. In these, and in the later Jack Taylor novels, the myriad of references to popular culture are still present, as is the author's obsession with lists and listing. In novels such as *The Ghosts of Galway* (2017), *In the Galway Silence* (2018), *Galway Girl* (2019) and *A Galway Epiphany* (2020), the musical references are largely replaced by references to writers, mainly of crime fiction, but also of other literary modes and genres.

It is clear that Bruen, in his Jack Taylor novels, attempts to provide a critical interpretation of the social realities of Ireland in the years of the recession which followed those of economic bonanza. Dagnino believes that transcultural writers "seem to be tuned into a different wavelength" and as such are capable of noting "the first still embryonic, still incoherent, still mostly unexpressed or intercepted symptoms (signals) of a different emerging cultural mood/mode" (4). As such, these writers develop "an alternative discourse" which is "perceived by both mainstream parts" – that is those who champion the assimilationist stance and those in favour of a multiculturalist position – "as destabilising the perceived status quo" (Dagnino, 4). Bruen presents an Ireland in open conflict with itself, in which themes of sexuality, race, and economic position are brought into the open in a way hitherto unknown. Bruen perceives an Ireland on the cusp of change, an Ireland still reeling from centuries of misrule but uncertain of its future as it attempts to enter modernity while still shackled by the intransigence of Church, State and social structure.

The American Works

Bruen's Galway works are obviously based on the American hard-boiled private detective tradition, a tradition with which Bruen is most familiar. As in classic American noir, the plot – often convoluted, always complex – is complemented by a profound level of social analysis. Dashiell Hammett, whom Bruen admires and frequently quotes, was renowned for his social commentary, and his works, as well as popular entertainment, form a lasting and succinct critique of different aspects of American society. In the Jack Taylor novels, it is easy to perceive an increased relegation of the subject matter of the plot to an inferior status with regard to the style, humour and, above all, social commentary the works contain. It must, therefore, come as no surprise that, after London and Galway, Bruen should also use the United States as a setting for his fiction. Concurrently with the Jack Taylor novels, he participated in five collaborative novels; four black comedies written together with Jason Starr and a noir thriller with Reed Farrel

Coleman. *Bust* (2006), the first collaboration with Starr, introduces Angela Petrakos, a young woman of Greek-Irish descent and Max Fisher, middle-aged CEO of internet company NetWorld. When Angela is hired by Max to work as his secretary, he confides to her about the troubles he is undergoing in his marriage. After turning down the idea of divorce, Angela suggests he hire a hitman to kill his wife. The hitman she suggests is, unknown to Max, Thomas "Popeye" Dillon, a feckless, psychopathic Irishman who Angela had met in a pub in Ireland shortly after his release from prison. Angela's plan is to have Popeye murder Max's wife, after which she intends to marry Max, who would also be killed by the Irishman, leaving Angela free to marry Popeye. Her plan is thwarted by the actions of Bobby Rossa, a paraplegic Latino photographer who blackmails Max when he finds him with Angela after the murder of his wife. The novel is further complicated by Popeye's inefficiency – he manages to kill Max's beloved niece while murdering his wife – and Angela's double-crossing and machinations. The language is witty and the dialogues sharp, and despite the collaborative nature of the work, numerous of Bruen's recurring themes, like hurling as murder, Downs Syndrome and awe towards "tinkers", appear throughout. Importantly, *Bust* and the other collaborations with Starr, *Slide* (2007), *The Max* (2008) and *Pimp* (2016) show the USA as a large "contact zone" in which Greeks, Latinos, Afro-Americans and, of course, Irish groups and individuals interact and interdepend. Bruen's depiction of the Irish in America is, of course, highly satirical, but behind the satire it is not difficult to discern the author's concern for the nature and status of these people. He carefully examines the differences between longstanding Irish-Americans, including those from a mixed cultural background like Angela, whose father was Greek, and the "new" Irish like Slide in the eponymous novel, an Irish psychopath from the "new, comfortable Irish middle class" with a passion for "all things American", including serial killing (*Slide*, 19).

In *American Skin* (2008) Bruen further investigates the Irish obsession with the American dream. The Galwegian Stephen Blake, former soldier in the British army, together with his best friend Tommy, helps Northern Irish republican hitman John A. Stapleton to carry out a bank robbery. After the robbery is completed, Stapleton kills Tommy in cold blood and Blake, fearing for his life, leaves for the USA, leaving the spoils of the heist in the hands of his girlfriend Siobhan, who will launder the money before joining him in America. There, in locations ranging from New York City, Tucson and Las Vegas, Stephen is faced with Dade, a serial killer and Tammy Wynette fanatic, and the psychopathic gang moll Sherry, as well as Stapleton who has come looking for the money from the robbery. When Dade kills Stapleton, mistaking him for Blake, Stephen is able to complete his dream of acquiring an American accent and is hoping to gain

an "American skin", although the death of Siobhan provides Bruen's characteristic unhappy ending.

Once Were Cops (2008) is narrated by Michael Patrick 'Shea' O'Shea, son of a Galway guard, who moves to New York City on an exchange programme to work with the NYPD. Teamed with the violent and unstable NY officer Kurt Browski, the two engage on a war against crime which is hampered by the fact that Browski is really in the pay of the New York mafia and Shea is in fact a psychopath who, when off duty, is strangling women with a set of rosary beads. *Tower* (2008), Bruen's collaboration with Reed Farrell Coleman, is a dark and menacing work which, despite traces of the Galway writer's black humour, is very different from the farces the Galway writer published with Starr. Tower is divided into two parts, one written by each of the contributors and attributed to each of the two main characters. In such a way, the reader is conscious of the interaction between the two writers, one Irish and one American, a fine example of the "writerly contact" proposed by Karen Thornber (2). *Tower* is the story of two childhood friends from Brooklyn and their experiences in the world of crime. Nick, from an Irish background, and Todd, whose family is Jewish, each tell the story, wrapped in violence, of their involvement with New York gangster Boyle, one of Bruen's standard "plastic paddies" and his evil enforcer, the Northern Irish Griffin, suspected of being a former member of the IRA, who use the cargo area at the JFK airport as the starting point for their crime empire. The story of Nick and Todd is one of friendship, broken loyalties and much violence, and ends with the imminent destruction of the Tower which gives its title to the novel, the North Tower of the World Trade Center, where, it must be remembered, Bruen had worked as a security guard.

These American novels obviously reveal Bruen's interest in and knowledge of American culture, while also making use of his experience as a transcultural observer of American society. His status as a much-travelled Irish person allows him to use his experiences in what Dagnino calls the "dispatriation process", that is, "the transcultural process that may be triggered by moving – physically, virtually, and imaginatively – outside one's own cultural and homeland borders" (2). Bruen examines a culture with which he shares a language but in which the status of being Irish is complex and multi-faceted. On one hand, American's flaunt their Irish identity as a perversely enigmatic status symbol. Since Kennedy, American presidents and presidential candidates have attempted to highlight their alleged Irish heritage.[5] But the Irish had also traditionally been feared and hated within areas of American society. The Anglo-American ruling class held long standing suspicions against the Irish, largely on account of their Catholicism, but also because of their alleged violence, indolence and alcoholism, traits linked, of course, both to extreme poverty and to

stereotypes brought over from the British Isles. In the American novels Bruen carries out a dialogue between his Irish characters and others from diverse backgrounds and how these are developed and defined by their relationships with each other. Bruen uses Pratt's "contact perspective" but he uses it "not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt, 7). And he does so with an impeccable sense of humour.

Textual Contacts

While the early Jack Taylor novels are informed by the dialectics and dynamics of his London novels and the anomalous situation of Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, the later works rely heavily on the influence of Bruen's American novels and collaborations, presenting an Ireland which has become estranged from even the "New Ireland" of the first years of the twentieth century. As Welsch stated, "in a country's internal relationships – among its different ways of life – there exists as much foreignness as in its relationships with other cultures" (198). In *The Magdalen Martyrs* or *Cross*, for example, we see recognisably Irish characters revealing recognisably Irish situations, adapting to the changing circumstances in the country where migrants from all parts of the world have settled to drink from the heady Celtic Tiger nectar. The former also shows the avarice and selfishness provoked by the new condition "rampant with the New Ireland, smug, greedy, knowing" (Bruen, *The Magdalen Martyrs* 70).

By *Galway Girl*, however, the Irish characters are far more cosmopolitan, far more worldly-wise, and far more receptors as well as purveyors of transcultural tendencies. "Jericho", one of the trio of would-be assassins who seek to kill Taylor in the novel, is, like so many of Bruen's later characters, greatly influenced by American popular culture: "I'm Trish, but you can call me Jericho. I've formed a crew" (Bruen, *Galway Girl* 62). The narrator sardonically comments on the "American hard ass inflection" the character uses, but Jericho is hardly alone, as North American clones abound in these works (62).

In the London novels and the early books in the Jack Taylor series, the multiple references to popular culture are mostly related to popular songs, while films and books are also notable by their presence. In *The Killing of the Tinkers*, for example, there are more than forty references to different musical artists, from the Irish singers Johnny Duhan or Van Morrison, through British pop, The Bay City Rollers and Duran Duran, to American neo-country, ostensibly Jack's favourite genre, with Kris Kristofferson and Emmylou Harris. By *Galway Girl*, however, few musical references exist, with only the quotation from alternative country songwriter Tom

Russell's "Touch of Evil" of any real relevance to the plot. References to writers and their works, however, abound. If the earlier novels made reference to George Pelecanos or Dashiell Hammett, the later Galway novels contain almost as many literary references as the musical allusions in the earlier work. Crime fiction, of course, is well represented. Taylor himself is reading works by Keith Dixon, an English writer, Ger Brennan from Northern Ireland, and the Canadian Hilary Davidson. In the novel, Bruen mentions or quotes from a variety of crime writers from different cultural backgrounds, including the Americans Derek B. Miller, Rene Denfeld, Becky Masterman and William Giraldi, the Irishman John Connolly, or the Englishman Aidan Truhen, a.k.a. Nicholas Cornwell/Nick Harkaway, son of John Le Carré. Sometimes these quotations or citations contain little esoteric jokes, where Bruen, perhaps, expects the reader to know that one of the novels in the Canadian Sam Wiebe's "Wakeland" series is called *Sunset and Jericho*, thus echoing the name of the novel's main antagonist. Taylor is also, however, reading the great nineteenth century Irish gothic classic, *Melmoth the Wanderer* by Charles Maturin. In *Galway Girl*, Bruen also quotes from poets Gerard Manley Hopkins and Frances Thompson, and from non-fiction works such as *H is for Hawk* by Helen MacDonald, or Max Porter's *Grief is the Thing with Feathers*.

Many of these quotations appear in the author's epigraphs, which grace the beginning of each chapter of his works. These epigraphs, along with the original and ground-breaking use of lists, have been present in Bruen's fiction from his earliest works and represent perhaps the most stylistically innovative features of his work. While the lists are often strangely poetic, the epigraphs serve a number of purposes. These may represent an ironic commentary on the text, a transcultural example which reflects on the plot or on the characters or serve as an enlightening counterpoint to the narrative. *Galway Girl*, for example, contains a total of forty-one epigrams. Of these, thirteen contain quotations from crime writers, mostly American but also Irish, British and Canadian. There are, furthermore, two quotations from works of mainstream, that is, in this case, non-crime, fiction, two from non-fiction volumes, two from nineteenth century poets, and one from a contemporary Irish language activist. The remaining twenty epigraphs are from Bruen himself, but in a number of different styles. His habitual use of listing finds its way into his epigraphs, as does his frequent practice of "quoting" and commenting on topical news items. The intertextual symphony of these epigraphs also includes statements purportedly made by his characters. Many of these epigraphs are witty, he often uses unconventional line spacing, and can encompass such diverse subjects as the sincerity or otherwise of different buskers' renditions of Steve Earle's song "Galway Girl", to the presumed racism of Roseanne's Barr's tweets regarding the Iranian-born presidential aid to Obama, Valerie Jarret.

Among the most interesting of the epigraphs attributed to Bruen himself are those relating to the Irish language. If in the London novels Irish is present mostly through its absence, a half-remembered reminder of rural childhoods, of grandparents and of random words locked within a recollection of a distant, misty past, in the Jack Taylor novels, from his comments, we assume that Taylor is, like Bruen, familiar with Irish, but in Galway, an Anglophone city surrounded by the Gaeltacht, Irish is a useful, if at times disturbing, linguistic reminder of Ireland's past. We see how African and Romanian migrants learn the language, and how Taylor and his fellow Galwegians use this tongue to express thoughts or feelings for which they consider English to be inadequate. In Galway Girl, for example, Taylor resorts to Irish to describe the immensely profound feeling of despair he feels. With his characteristically cavalier utilisation of prose lines, he states that:

> I was beyond
> *Briste*
> Broken, in Irish,
> But it means oh so much more
> An utter annihilation of every ounce of your breaking heart.
> (Bruen, *Galway Girl* pp. 54–55)

Some of the epigraphs are translations of Irish words and phrases, in which Bruen again uses a translingual tool in order to express something which the author feels that in English is inadequately transmissible. Thus, we have "*Deargar*: a carnival of bloodshed" (Bruen, Galway Girl 114). At times, the Irish word is used to provide a humorous commentary on the Irish, and so, again flaunting linear convention, Bruen explains that:

> *Aibhealai* is the Irish word
> For an exaggerator
> It's not used much as Irish people
> Never exaggerate.
> (Bruen *Galway Girl*, 18)

Another epigraph begins with the Irish statement *Deoch an Doras*, which Bruen translates literally as "The Parting Gift" before going on to comment that "[f]ew sayings in Irish have been interpreted in so many different ways" (Bruen, Galway Girl 185–6). He notes that, while some see the expression as referring to a simple farewell gift, there are others, "the optimists probably, who believe it's a blessing; and those of us from the dark who know it to be the ultimate curse" (Bruen, *Galway Girl* 186).

Conclusions

Bruen is, despite – or perhaps because of – his commitment to genre fiction, one of the greatest chroniclers of the predicaments of the Irish in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. From the early works which show the Irish as migrants in a hostile, multicultural London, through the Jack Taylor novels which focus on the years of change of the last twenty-five years and the American works which trace the cultural interaction between American and Irish culture, Bruen's fictional output provides a fine example of a new literature made possible by the conditions which have created the transcultural playground – or battleground – which is modern-day Ireland.

His novels reflect a society in which the comfortable truths of the essentialist lies fed by politicians like De Valera, by the Church and, unfortunately, by some of the Republic's most respected literary figures, can no longer be used to disguise a reality in which earlier "monological identifications of a single culture with a specific nation-state have been overridden by enmeshed webs of intercultural relations, developing both within and beyond the borders of the nation-state" (Gilsenan Nordin *et al*., x). Bruen's Galway is a city of migrants and interchanging cultural patterns, a linguistic interface in which English, Irish and the mother tongues of the New Irish coexist and co-contribute to a cultural wealth hitherto unimaginable. The cosmopolitan and the traditional feed off each other, just as Bruen feeds off the American hard-boiled crime tradition, to which he also contributes. Crime fiction has been at the forefront of transcultural ideas in the Irish narrative, and Bruen, with his open and gregarious approach to the concept has created a series of works which provide a startling radiograph of the Irish in the first quarter of this century.

Notes

1 Le Fanu, for example, has been credited with introducing the figure of the "occult detective" and being among the first purveyors of the "locked room" mystery. His influence on later crime writes such as Conan Doyle and Simenon has been noted (Clark, 9), and his later woks which blend sensation fiction with the gothic took the crime novel into the drawing rooms of the bourgeoisie. This, as well as the Irish Big House novel, were fundamental influences on the Golden Age detective mystery as made famous by writers such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers. L.T. Meade was the first writer to use a doctor as a detective, the first to feature a female murderer and a pioneer in the development of the "impossible" crime.

2 The detective is usually an amateur, and in most cases self-employed. The character – exclusively male in the early hard-boiled narratives – is tough, but often

reveals a startling degree of sensitivity, is intelligent, but not usually intellectual, is not averse to the use of physical violence if he considers it to be necessary, and generally enjoys a relationship of mutual hostility with the law enforcement agencies with whom he ostensibly collaborates.

3 In fact, it can be said that crime fiction has been one of the media which has most lucidly reflected the changes apparent in Irish society since the mid 1990s. Irish crime writers can be seen as observers of the changes in Irish society and have consistently reflected these in their works.

4 The role of the informer has been of enormous importance in Irish history. The most hated figure for centuries, the informer is seen as the quintessential traitor figure in Irish history. Ron Dudai examines the different interpretations of the role of the informer; "the informer as folk devil, the informer as rumour, the informer as political manipulator, and the informer as celebrity" (32). In Irish crime fiction, informers are frequently used as criminals, or as suspects, and one of the most celebrated Irish crime novels of the twentieth century is Liam O'Flaherty's *The Informer* (1925).

5 Reagan, Obama and Biden all made high profile visits to the hometowns of long-dead Irish ancestors.

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Part III

Irish Social Diversity and Contemporary Literature in Dialogue

7 Transcultural Practices, Teenage Pregnancy and Abortion in Irish Young Adult Literature

Iria Seijas-Pérez

Transcultural Dialogues on Abortion in the Republic of Ireland

When Michele Dillon (1996) examined the different approaches to abortion of the Catholic Church in Ireland, England and Wales, Poland, and the United States, she concluded that mainly cultural sources from law and morality, science, national identity, and women's situation had been considered. Such research serves to illustrate that transcultural dialogues are inherently embedded in anti-abortion discourses across the nations, as they share common elements that prompt cultural practices that influence one another. In order to understand the transcultural dialogues underlying the anti-abortion discourse in Ireland and its representation in selected Young Adult novels, the following lines introduce the legal framework that led to the 2018 referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment with an eye on the role of American lobbies and interests.

Under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act – this is, a piece of British legislation that had been adopted by the Irish Free State after independence in 1922 – abortion had been criminalised in Ireland (Barry 1988, 58). However, changes happening during the 1970s not only in Ireland but also in the United States triggered a series of events that would result in the Eighth Amendment – which prohibited abortion. The legalisation of abortion following *Roe v. Wade* in the United States in 1973 prompted fears that something similar would happen in Ireland. According to Siobhan Mullaly, *Roe v. Wade* had been preceded by *Griswold v. Connecticut*, a similar case to that of *McGee v. Attorney General* in Ireland, which had led to the access to contraceptives under the right to marital privacy in 1974 (2005, 89). Anti-abortion activists became concerned that a broad interpretation of the right to privacy would lead Irish courts to revoke the criminalisation of abortion (Mullaly 2005, 89), and thus in 1983 the Eighth Amendment was included into the Constitution "by a bitterly divisive referendum" (A. Smyth 1993, 163). Described by Fiona de Londras as "a legal artefact of the misogynistic, proto-nationalist merging

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of church and state authority" (2020, 126), Ursula Barry has pointed to the drastic consequences that this amendment had for Irish women, who were "recategorised to be equal to that which is *not yet born*" (1988, 59; author's emphasis). Furthermore, in the same way that the constitutional ban on abortion had been fuelled by fears of the foreign influence of the United States, Ireland also guarded itself from European policymakers. When signing the Maastricht Treaty (1992), Ireland had previously added a protocol which sought to ensure that "no act or amendment at European level could supersede the 1983 Amendment to the Irish Constitution" (Murphy-Lawless 1993, 57). These and other measures to prevent the legalisation of abortion stemmed from a fear of losing what was perceived as a defining mark of Irish Catholic identity.[1]

In 1992, the "X" Case – where a fourteen-year-old pregnant girl victim from rape had been initially prevented from travelling to the UK to get an abortion (L. Smyth 1998, 61) – led to a referendum which resulted in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments being added to the Constitution. These Amendments granted the right to travel abroad to get an abortion, and the right to provide and obtain information about abortion, respectively (Mullaly 2005, 95). As a reaction to the X Case, the anti-abortion group Youth Defence, which had been founded in 1986, re-emerged and campaigned against abortion. Interestingly, their operations were modelled on direct action groups from the United States (Oaks 2002, 317–8), whose members were critical of the American abortion policy (Oaks 2002, 325). While the legalisation of abortion in the United States prompted more drastic measures regarding the access to this procedure in Ireland, it was also American pro-life discourses that were influencing Irish society to keep abortion illegal.[2]

Ideological encounters on the abortion issue did not cease, and in May 2018, a referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment took place.[3] During the campaign, foreign anti-abortion activists – notably from the United States – tried to influence the Irish vote (see Fox 2018; Jones 2018; C. Mason 2019).[4] Americans from anti-abortion groups based in the United States recruited students to travel to Ireland in an effort to sway voters to a pro-life vote. At the same time, US-based anti-abortion organisations tried to influence Irish voters through online platforms such as Facebook. In the light of these actions, Carol Mason observes that the effort to preserve the Eighth Amendment in Ireland determines "the transnational work by anti-abortion women" given that "[a]nti-abortion travel to Ireland from the United States had its beginnings in the 1990s" (2019, 686). Hence, the essence of the anti-abortion discourse in Ireland, understood as "a 'natural' and constant process between cultures that goes on with fluctuating degrees of intensity and asymmetry" (Wagner 2019, 24), can only be understood from a transcultural approach. Furthermore, it is significant to observe that

the interaction between Ireland and America regarding abortion matters is asymmetrical, with ideas from the United States affecting Ireland rather than the other way around. Thus, Irish anti-abortion discourse has been heavily affected by American pro-life narratives "in a space of relationality and contingency" (Abu-Er-Rub et al. 2019, xxxi).

With 66.9 percent of voters in favour of removing the Eighth Amendment, the referendum succeeded, and thus abortion became legally accessible in Ireland from January 2019 – under the circumstances outlined by the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 (Side 2020, 16–17). However, anti-abortionist international discourses prevail in the country with tactics commonly found in the US, such as messages discouraging abortion at crisis pregnancy centres and pro-life protests (Ziegler 2020). These practices shape the existence of cultural relations and connectivities between both societies and confirm the influence of external currents that fuel today's ongoing debate on Irish women and girls' access to a safe termination of pregnancy.

The transcultural approach, intrinsic to the Irish debate on abortion, is relevant to understand the depiction of teenage pregnancy and abortion in Young Adult – hereinafter YA – literature, particularly in Claire Hennessy's *Like Other Girls* (2017) and Moïra Fowley-Doyle's *All the Bad Apples* (2019). These novels are representative of the topic as they portray two teenage girls who seek a termination of their unwanted pregnancies at different time periods – mid-2010s and mid-1990s, respectively – in a country where abortion was not legally available yet. In what follows, an overview of Irish YA literature is provided to contextualise the analysis of the two selected novels and its implications under the transcultural lens.

Teenage Pregnancy and Abortion in Irish Young Adult Literature: A Review

As Pádraic Whyte explains, Irish YA literature's lack of tradition is due to several factors that include economic issues, the limited publishing industry for children, and the impact of the conservative ideologies of the Catholic Church still present in Irish society (2011, 71). Although YA publishing in Ireland dates back to the 1990s (Kennon 2020, 134), it is in the last decade that the genre has experienced a notable boost partly due to the significant cultural change that the country has experienced (Mooney 2023, 33). Proof of its healthy condition is the emergence and accomplishments of a number of successful authors, such as Sarah Bannan, Sarah Crossan, Sarah Maria Griffin, Claire Hennessy, Deirdre Sullivan, and Sheena Wilkinson among others (Cahill 2017, 161).[5] At present, many YA writers, including Hennessy and Fowley-Doyle, are writing texts that are "committed to tackling issues contentious to Ireland's past

and present and dealing with topics that are meaningful to the lived experiences of Irish teenagers today" (Mooney 2023, 33). In particular, YA women authors have "pose[d] uncomfortable, important questions around power, abuse, trauma, misogyny, and historic as well as contemporary discriminations and violence against teenage girls and women in Ireland" through their works (Kennon 2020, 135). Deirdre Sullivan has addressed the theme of violence against women and girls in Ireland; Moïra Fowley-Doyle has tackled the institutional abuse of children and women in Ireland's industrial schools, Magdalene laundries, and mother and baby homes; and Louise O'Neill has explored rape culture and revenge porn. However, a very limited number of texts depict adolescent protagonists or minor characters who become pregnant. Among those, Siobhan Dowd's *A Swift Pure Cry* (2006) deserves a special attention. The novel is set in the 1980s and draws from the Ann Lovett tragedy and the Kerry babies. Already in the early 2000s, this novel was exploring issues pertaining the lives of Irish young adults – notably girls – that were considered controversial and thus "made events of the past relevant to women's reproductive rights and issues still being contested at the time and today" (Mooney 2023, 117). Similarly, Fowley-Doyle's novel *All the Bad Apples*, looks into the past in order to depict five different teenage pregnancies through the centuries – 1880s, 1930s, and 1990s – although most are briefly dealt with. Only one of those pregnancies is terminated, and the experience of getting an abortion is given particular attention over two chapters. Teenage pregnancy is also explored by Sarah Maria Griffin's *Other Words for Smoke* (2019) through the experiences of minor characters. Regarding pregnancy termination, at the time of writing Hennessy's *Like Other Girls* is the only Irish YA novel to my knowledge whose main character has an abortion.

At this point, it is worth noting that all these works have been published by either British or American publishing houses, including Hennessy's and Fowley-Doyle's novels. This fact reveals publishing practices that differ significantly from country to country and proves that women's reproductive rights, teenage pregnancy, and abortion continue to be contested themes in the literature for Irish young adults today, as books that deal with these topics seem to be mainly published by foreign publishers.[6] Also, the publication of Irish YA novels by foreign publishing houses indicates transcultural connectivities that "transcend our received and supposedly determining monocultural standpoints" (Welsch 2001, 78). I argue that, given the transcultural dimension of YA literature, Irish monocultural limitations are thus challenged every time an Irish piece is published elsewhere. Furthermore, its readership expands beyond Irish borders and, at the same time, Irish readership is influenced by their easy access to other YA literatures, particularly those from the US and the UK. This illustrates how contemporary Irish YA authors have become transcultural agents, as

they both resist and challenge Irish society and culture. In doing so, they destabilise "the perceived status quo", using Arianna Dagnino's words, and contribute to the "changing dynamics of cultural production and identity building" (2015, 102–3). According to Dagnino, transcultural literature "tends to cross cultures and acknowledges the mutually transforming power of cultures" (2013, 3). Thus, Irish YA literature is certainly marked by a transcultural trend that has become characteristic of current editorial and publishing practices, resulting in the production of a literature that is transcultural itself.

It can be observed that current trends from American YA literature are being reproduced in the Irish YA market, which demonstrates how the influence of foreign literatures marks the transculturality that characterises this literary genre. For instance, some of the most recent trends in American YA literature include, among others, the writing of sagas and trilogies, mystery novels, novels that address mental health, and co-writing of novels (Fitzgerald 2022). Irish YA literature has been quick to follow these tendencies: Caroline O'Donoghue has recently published *All Our Hidden Gifts* (2021), *The Gifts that Bind Us* (2022), and *Every Gift a Curse* (2023), which form the Gifts trilogy; Alexia Mason's *Rock Paper Killers* (2022) is a mystery novel set at a summer course in the Gaeltacht; Helena Close approaches the theme of mental health in her recently published novel *Things I Know* (2022); and Irish author Catherine Doyle has joined forces with American author Katherine Webber to co-write *Twin Crowns* (2022) and *Cursed Crowns* (2023), a saga that is awaiting its third book. Therefore, even though Irish YA literature, whether it is published in Ireland or elsewhere, has its own unique Irish elements, these recent trends from the US literary landscape that are now common to Irish YA suggest an ongoing transcultural dialogue across cultures.

The following section examines Claire Hennessy's *Like Other Girls* and Moïra Fowley-Doyle's *All the Bad Apples*, two recent novels that portray teenage efforts to access abortion in pre-Repeal Ireland. Hennessy and Fowley-Doyle have published extensively in the YA format and have been nominated for several literary awards nationally and internationally. They have not only been pointed as two of Ireland's contemporary emerging writers of YA literature but also acknowledged for the current boom of this literary category in the country. Their works have also been recognised as significant in their approach to themes controversial but relevant to the Irish youth of today, such as eating disorders, sexuality, violence, teenage pregnancy, abortion, abuse, and transgenerational trauma, among others (Kennon 2020; Mooney 2023; Seijas-Pérez 2022). Despite the different time setting of the selected novels – the former portrays Lauren in the mid-2010s, and the latter presents Rachel in the mid-1990s – both pieces show many similarities regarding the characters' experiences of unwanted

pregnancies. This analysis sets out to explore, on the one hand, how both adolescents navigate the termination of their pregnancies and how these novels challenge the stereotypical representations of teenage pregnancy and abortion that were frequently found in earlier YA works. On the other hand, given the influence of American discourses on Irish abortion politics in the twentieth century, and that the earliest YA narratives were published in the United States, how the depiction of this topic has evolved from earlier YA narratives, mainly from the US, and its cultural implications in terms of transculturality.

Anti-abortion Strategies in Pre-Repeal Ireland: *Like Other Girls* and *All the Bad Apples*

In Claire Hennessy's *Like Other Girls,* Lauren Carroll is sixteen years old when she gets pregnant. Already confronting a variety of situations – she is falling out with her best friend, questioning her relationship with her boyfriend, and struggling with her mother's new job as the principal of her school – she decides to have an abortion. In Moïra Fowley-Doyle's *All the Bad Apples,* Rachel Rys is seventeen years old when she gets pregnant. She already has her life all planned out for the future, and getting pregnant at seventeen is not part of this plan, so Rachel decides to have an abortion. These two characters stand two decades apart, the former set in mid-2010s and the latter in 1995, yet they must confront a similar situation: they need to go abroad to terminate their pregnancies. Rachel knows that "[t]erminating a pregnancy [is] illegal in Ireland. Even taking pills [is] punishable by up to fourteen years in prison", so "[t]he only way to end a pregnancy legally [is] to get out of Ireland. To travel to a clinic in the UK" (Fowley-Doyle 2019, 271–2). Though Lauren is also aware of these restrictions, she wonders why she had never searched for this information before: "Legal to travel. Not legal to have here. Fourteen years in prison. Can they lock you up here if they find out, even if it happens abroad? I should know this and don't. Didn't even occur to me to search for it" (Hennessy 2017, 141). Both girls also know that they can get information about having an abortion abroad, thanks to the Fourteenth Amendment added to the Constitution after the 1992 Referendum, and thus they decide to visit what they believe to be a crisis pregnancy clinic that can provide them with the facts to travel to England. In *All the Bad Apples*, this place is referred to as "[o]ne of the crisis pregnancy call centres advertised on the back of every public toilet door" (Fowley-Doyle 2019, 271), and similarly Lauren in *Like Other Girls* describes it as "one of those crisis-pregnancy places, the kind that get advertised on the backs of bathroom doors in shopping centres and at the side of your screen as soon as you start searching for pregnancy-themed topics" (Hennessy 2017, 129–30).

Aside from the difference on the ready access to information through the internet that Lauren has, the enduring advertisement of these clinics in public toilets illustrates that little had changed regarding women's reproductive rights in the twenty years that separate both stories. At the same time, it also reveals the existing "contact zones and cultural transfers" (Abu-Er-Rub, et al. 2019, xxxi) within Irish society and how social practices challenge the norm by reappropriation of spaces for alternative purposes, i.e., the use of women's toilets to disseminate information about female sexual health. The commonalities between both narratives become emphasised through Rachel and Lauren's experiences in their visits to such clinics, as these follow quite similar approaches. In both places brochures and leaflets advertising adoption and other alternatives are available, and in the waiting room of the clinic that Rachel goes to there are "adoption services leaflets with smiling, dimpled babies on the front" (Fowley-Doyle 2019, 273). Similarly, Lauren is handed a selection of brochures during her appointment depicting "[g]orgeous bouncing babies. One is about the extended family and the support they can offer young mothers. The other is about adoption services and good families who will provide a home for your child" (Hennessy 2017, 131). Rachel is shown another leaflet with "a picture of a tiny palm-sized baby with its thumb in its mouth" claiming that this is the foetus at nine weeks (Fowley-Doyle 2019, 275), and Lauren is also given a leaflet with "a foetus on the front cover. Like, recognisably one. Almost a baby. You can make out fingers and toes. A large-headed creature curled up in the womb" (Hennessy 2017, 131), an image she would later find out depicts a foetus at twenty-four weeks (Hennessy 2017, 139). Foetal iconography is thus used to support the clinics' anti-abortion discourses, as this "legitimises an anti-abortion moral equivalence between women and foetuses" (L. Smyth 2016, 28).

The clinics also inform the girls of the possible risks of the procedure. Rachel is given yet another leaflet that claims that abortion increases the risk of breast cancer, future miscarriage, and sterility, and that "*women who have terminated pregnancies are five times more likely to show abusive behaviour towards children, including their own future children*" (Fowley-Doyle 2019, 275; author's emphasis). Lauren is told that "women who've had this procedure, they're still carrying a lot of guilt around. So they're sometimes over-protective of their other children, or they can neglect them … We see a lot of abuse with these women" as well as that surgery can increase her chances of breast cancer and that "sometimes they miss and end up perforating the bowel and then you're carrying around a colostomy bag for the rest of your life" (Hennessy 2017, 132). Added to that, Rachel is also shown a video of "a woman in a hospital-issue paper gown scream[ing] in pain", allegedly having an abortion, that is "[t]errifying" (Fowley-Doyle 2019, 277). No videos are shown to Lauren

on her visit to the clinic, though this could be because soon after having a look at some of the brochures she realises that she is being lied to, and thus leaves the place in a hurry (Hennessy 2017, 133). As McIntire (2015) has detected, these anti-abortion practices are also a common feature of the American pro-life movement, which evidences a transcultural exchange in the abortion issue.

Despite their disheartening and unsettling visits to these crisis pregnancy agencies, both Rachel and Lauren book round-trips to England. Fowley-Doyle concentrates Rachel's experience in two chapters. However, Hennessy provides a more detailed account of the effect that the pregnancy has had on Lauren. Her condition had led her to binge-drinking as a coping mechanism and to obsessively search on the internet about other women's experiences of abortion. She watches videos about "[a] blond American woman sobbing hysterically about God not forgiving her for her abortion because she can't have any kids now. Another blonde talking about how she was in the clinic and then heard the Lord speak to her and she walked out of there and now her son is the greatest blessing of her life" (Hennessy 2017, 187). Both videos emphasise the weight given to religion in anti-abortion discourses. According to Sidney Calkin and Monika E. Kaminska, the Catholic Church played a significant role in Irish national identity, as this "was seen as a 'protector' of Irishness under British colonial rule" (2020, 89). The preoccupation with preserving this Irish national identity, which was marked by Catholic morals and positioned women as repositories of the national values, led church and state to obtain full control over women's sexuality. Additionally, the first video shows the influence of American pro-life discourse. The underlying presence of this discourse evinces that "there is no longer anything absolutely foreign" (Welsch 2001, 69) since "the global networking of communications technology makes all kinds of information identically available from every point in space" (Welsch 2001, 68). The transcultural dimension of the anti-abortion discourse in Ireland becomes evident in *Like Other Girls* as Lauren's ready access to American media content influences her perceptions of her own pregnancy.

Challenging Stereotypical Representations of Teenage Pregnancy and Abortion

Early YA novels published in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have been the object of several studies. Beth Younger (2009) and Louisa-Jane Smith (2019) have analysed the American tradition and Lydia Kokkola (2013) has also considered YA novels from Ireland, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and South Africa. She notes that most novels addressing teenage pregnancy were pro-life (Kokkola

2013 80), a trend that remains present in American novels published in the early 2010s, Smith confirms (2019, 392). Both Hennessy's *Like Other Girls* and Fowley-Doyle's *All the Bad Apples* evidence a pro-choice support with significant nuances in the depiction of teenage pregnancy and abortion. Lauren's reference to Ireland as a "wretched country" (Hennessy 2017 134) and a "medieval backwater" (Hennessy 2017 180) are a clear critique of the country's outrageous lack of legislation on reproductive rights as late as 2017. In *All the Bad Apples*, protagonist Deena – Rachel's niece – speaks of the curse that is "on every woman in this country" present, among other circumstances, in "[f]orced pregnancies and back-street abortions, eleven a day on the boat to England only to come home to rejection and stigma" (Fowley-Doyle 2019 328–9). Furthermore, Hennessy contends that, when she started writing the novel, her hope had been that by the time of its publication it would be "historical fiction" already (2017, 281). Unfortunately, she laments that "[a]s of spring 2017, […] it is still illegal to obtain an abortion in Ireland unless you are literally dying on a hospital bed, in which case a panel of doctors might agree to provide the procedure. If you're lucky" (Hennessy 2017, 281). In like vein, Fowley-Doyle, who sets most of her novel in 2012, speaks on an 'Author's Note' of the Eighth Amendment and the restrictions of Irish law on abortion, and provides a list of pro-choice organisations in Ireland and the UK among other resources (2019, 342–5). She emphasises that the Ireland in which she writes "is a different Ireland [to the one depicted in the novel] but the past is still so close" and urges her readers to "[c]ry. Rage. Speak out. Break the stigma. Break the curse" (Fowley-Doyle 2019, 343). As these statements suggest, both authors and their works show resistance to "appropriations by one single national canon or cultural tradition" (Dagnino 2013, 4) and at the same time look at "connections and relations, discontinuities and frictions, not only among nation-states and their predecessors (kingdoms, empires) but also among stateless societies, transnational organizations, institutions, languages and media" (Laila Abu-Er-Rub et al., 2019, xxxi). Added to this, Hennessy and Fowley-Doyle's transcultural effect is evident in their authorial practices too. They publish their novels abroad and their personal explanations are intended both for a non-Irish audience and for Irish readers who are unfamiliar with the debate. Thus, they act as transcultural agents as their works aim to reach different nations and audiences, demonstrating how the element of transculturality operates within literature. In particular, Hennessy's criticism to American influences and the pro-life discourse Irish adolescents have access to through the media opens a dialogue about the transcultural dimensions of the abortion debate in Irish society and how foreign discourses participate in it. For more information on the concept of transcultural writers see Dagnino (2013 and 2015).

Early YA novels of teenage pregnancy were also characterised by ignorance about contraception and conception (Kokkola 2013, 57), and their depiction of "sexually naive young wom[en]" (Younger 2009, 28). However, neither Rachel nor Lauren fulfil this stereotype. Both are well informed, use contraceptives when engaging in sexual relations and thus are not ignorant of the risk of pregnancy. Another novelty is that these characters enjoy their sexuality. In earlier works of YA literature, it was not uncommon to see "[m]ale sexual desire […] presented as normal and natural, if often out of control" and "female sexual desire […] more frequently portrayed as abnormal or dangerous" (Younger 2009, 23). Through these depictions, YA literature was reproducing what Stevi Jackson refers to as "socio-sexual scripts that govern adult sexual behaviour" (1996, 70). Jackson contends that the learning of these scripts "is profoundly affected by the gender-role learning of childhood, so that girls and boys learn to be sexual in different ways" (1996, 70), and concludes that most girls "enter into adult sexual careers governed by scripts which deny them the possibility of a self-defined sexuality" (1996, 72). But in *Like Other Girls*, Lauren enjoys intercourse, speaks about sex and pleasure unapologetically, and does not care whether talking about "womanly things" makes her "unladylike" (Hennessy 2017, 188). Also Rachel, who might be more similar to past characters of YA literature in that she finds her first sexual encounter "entirely underwhelming" (Fowley-Doyle 2019, 269), plans to spend her first year of college "having sexual adventures with exciting undergrads" (Fowley-Doyle 2019, 268) and shows a more open-minded approach to sexuality than previous works did. In this sense, both characters' sexual agency transcends the Catholic constraints that are imposed on them through their families, school, and society at large – even if briefly.

Another matter of dissent is that in early YA novels, teenage pregnancy frequently appears as a form of punishment for the characters who have engaged in sex, particularly in the case of female characters, says Younger (2009, 23). Likewise, Smith notes that when confronted with an unwanted pregnancy, those characters also "face the prospect of a lifetime of regret no matter what decision they make" (2019, 384) and detects that pregnancy acts as a punitive measure for the rebellious and foolish protagonists that leads them to "mak[e] life-altering choices" (Smith 2019, 396). The connection between active sex and punishment can be traced back in early YA novels where sex is sinful. According to Kokkola, novels that depict teenage pregnancy and its different consequences "tend to promote the view that sexual activity during one's teenage years is abnormal, inappropriate and sinful" (2013, 61). Certainly, in the Irish context, the figure of the unmarried mother "had become, by the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922, a symbol of unacceptable sexual activity and a problem that

had the potential to blight the reputation not only of the family but of the nation", affirms Maria Luddy (2011, 110). Nevertheless, while the Irish Catholic context where Lauren and Rachel have been reared is marked by this negative connotation, in the case of *Like Other Girls* it is possible to observe how the novel diverges from this message. Lauren concludes that the decision to have an abortion had been "a really easy choice to make" that she does not regret at all (Hennessy 2017, 275). Moreover, once she begins counselling and is able to talk about her abortion, she can fix her relationship with her mother and make up with her friends. In sum, the novel conveys the idea that the abortion contributes to solving Lauren's troubles, and thus is not perceived in a necessarily negative light.

All the Bad Apples contests another common stereotype, that is, the belief that only 'bad girls' get pregnant (Kokkola 2013, 57). Interestingly, Rachel uses this perception to her own advantage. Her image as "studious, hard-working Rachel" is what helps to convince her boyfriend's mother and the school that she had never been pregnant because "[g]ood girls didn't get abortions after all" (Fowley-Doyle 2019, 283). In challenging this and the previously mentioned stereotypes, Hennessy's and Fowley-Doyle's novels contest tradition, break away from prior influences, and assert their own narratives.

Conclusions

Hennessy's *Like Other Girls* and Fowley-Doyle's *All the Bad Apples* address the controversy surrounding reproductive rights in Ireland and in their pro-abortion stance offer an alternative approach to teenage pregnancy and abortion to the one found in prior YA novels of the Anglophone world. The debate on abortion and reproductive rights in the Republic of Ireland has been strongly influenced by foreign discourses, mainly from the US, where American pro-life narratives promoting the illegalisation of abortion in the island have made their voice heard. Consequently, the Irish debate on abortion is affected by transcultural dialogues, which become relevant in the analysis of Hennessy's and Fowley-Doyle's novels. Their depictions of adolescent girls who must travel abroad to terminate their unwanted pregnancies contest Irish – as well as foreign – discourses that deny women's autonomy over their bodies. Lauren's and Rachel's experiences of abortion appear to be marked by the foreign practices used in the clinics they visit, and in the case of Lauren also by the foreign media content that she has access to, demonstrating how these experiences are besieged by transcultural currents.

Additionally, a close examination of these two novels reveals that they challenge stereotypes and engage in transcultural connections and relations. Both novels break away from earlier depictions of teenage pregnancy found

in other Anglophone YA literatures, which were often pro-life, depicted pregnancy as a form of punishment, and portrayed the pregnant adolescent girl as ignorant and a 'bad girl'; alternatively, Hennessy's and Fowley-Doyle's novels offer a pro-choice stance on reproductive rights, and Lauren and Rachel do not fulfil the stereotype of the 'bad girl' whose pregnancy becomes a form of punishment against her bad behaviour or ignorance. Thus, these texts unveil the foreign influences underlying the Irish debate on abortion, disclose the effects of such external discourses through their characters' experiences, and challenge international influences in their depiction of the abortion narrative for young adult readers. Furthermore, this analysis has also acknowledged how Hennessy and Fowley-Doyle become transcultural agents in their authorial practice, as they publish their works abroad while engaging with teenage pregnancy and the abortion debate within the Irish context. Through these transcultural practices, they challenge tradition and stereotypes that appear in earlier YA publications from the broader Anglophone world.

In short, Hennessy and Fowley-Doyle resist tradition and display transcultural traits to bring to the fore an issue that has long been considered controversial and thus is worth addressing in current Irish YA literature. Moreover, this article opens the door to further research on how Irish literature for young adults has been influenced by foreign publishing practices and literary trends, and how these have affected the portrayal of certain topics that could be considered controversial in Irish and foreign contexts alike.

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Notes

1 At the onset of its independence from Britain, the country had strived to define itself as a separate entity, and Mullaly contends that "the definition of Ireland in exclusively 'pro-life' terms served as [a] distinguishing mark of Irish identity" (2005, 82–83). Hence, the church and state's control over women's bodily autonomy equated an attempt to 'protect' this so-called Irish identity from external forces.

2 Many other events have had a direct impact on the history of the battle for women and girls' reproductive autonomy in the Republic of Ireland, such as the death of 15-year-old Ann Lovett in 1984; the Kerry babies scandal that same year; the C Case in 1997; the 2002 referendum; the death of Savita Halappanavar in 2012; A, B and C v Ireland, to name a few, as well as several cases regarding fatal foetal abnormality.
3 Maeve Taylor, Alison Spillane and Sir Sabaratnam Arulkumaran contend that this event "marked a complete break with the foetocentric state discourse on abortion since 1983" (2020, 43).
4 Carol Mason describes how advertisers from the United States focused on opposition to abortion in an attempt "to protect women and mothers" and contends that the "level of influence by US anti-abortionists deploying pro-woman rhetoric in Ireland was a digitalized acceleration of decades of importing American anti-abortion personnel who increasingly played the woman card" (2019, 670).
5 Regarding topics depicted in Irish YA literature, Patricia Kennon notes that a "sanitising approach and the adult desire to protect young people's 'innocence' from dark and disturbing topics and truths" had dominated Irish youth literature of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and it "was slow to recognise or address subjects such as teenage pregnancy, the realities of female embodiment, [and] reproductive freedoms" among others (2020, 134-5). However, the first decade of the twenty-first century had already seen the publication of a limited number of YA novels that approached certain aspects of the youth experience that had often been considered taboo, including abortion and teen pregnancy, and other themes such as sexuality, child abuse, homelessness, rebellion, drug abuse, and violence (Whyte 2011, 72).
6 Teenage pregnancy and abortion remain problematic topics in Irish YA literature. For instance, in the Children's Books Ireland database, no results can be found for the terms 'abortion' and 'unwanted pregnancy'. And even though both Hennessy's and Fowley-Doyle's novels are recorded, they cannot be found under these headings. Alternatively, some results are available for the words 'pregnant', 'pregnancy', and 'teenage pregnancy' although all the sources found are written by non-Irish authors. Furthermore, in Orla Bourke's review on Hennessy's work, also available on this website, the words 'abortion' and 'pregnancy' are not included despite them being major themes addressed in the text.

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8 Migrations in Times of Referendums. Transcultural Negotiations in Donal Ryan's *Strange Flowers* and Oona Frawley's *Flight*

"Why Ireland?… Don't Go to England"

Margarita Estévez-Saá

Ireland and the Irish had been particularly attentive to the Brexit campaign and are now seriously concerned, even preoccupied with the aftermath of the British leaving the EU. By the Irish, we refer here not only to the Northern Irish but also to the inhabitants of the Republic, since, as Patricia Burke Wood and Mary Gilmartin argue in "Irish enough: changing narratives of citizenship and national identity in the context of the Brexit", "The 'Irish nation' is, geographically speaking, several things: the Republic of Ireland, the island of Ireland, and the Irish diaspora, particularly its most recent emigrants. The Republic is the Irish nation-state, but Northern Ireland is often included in 'Ireland.'" (225)

After Brexit, future political and economic relations, free movement of people and even national identity are being revised, and there is fear that the privileged status quo historically maintained between the two communities could be threatened. British-Irish relationships since the 1949 Act, that implied the formal withdrawal of the Republic from the Commonwealth, had been that of tolerant and well-matched cooperative neighbours. Ireland has not been treated as a "foreign country" and the Irish citizens have maintained similar rights to those from Commonwealth countries, including the right to move freely and even to emigrate to England. Wood and Gilmartin also specify that "Ireland's immigration laws have similarly privileged British nationals to provide them rights to entry and residence". Furthermore, "the UK's 1983 Representation of the People's Act gave Irish residents in the UK the right to vote, a practice that was reciprocated by Ireland in 1985." (226)

This status quo is now being redressed by Brexit and there are already studies, such as the one carried out by Wood and Gilmartin that are

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documenting a noticeable rise in applications for EU citizenship, specifically citizenship in Ireland. Their study traces the increasing number of applications for Irish passports from Britain and Northern Ireland. This reaction can be grounded on practical reasons (to maintain the benefits of EU mobility) meanwhile there are also cases of Brexiles leaving Britain appealing to Irish ancestry and ethnic pride, or merely as a rejection of English attitudes that became evident in the context of Brexit, such as racism, ethnocentrism and intolerance.

It is my intention to transfer these debates to literature, to be more precise, to Irish literature in the context of the Brexit campaign and also to works published in its immediate aftermath, focusing on Oona Frawley's novel, *Flight* – published before Brexit, in 2014, although a narrative significantly set at the time of the 2004 Irish Referendum on Citizenship – and on Donal Ryan's *Strange Flowers*, published after Brexit (2020). Both novels feature immigrants in the Republic of Ireland, both authors have opted for deploying the variety of causes and circumstances that force human beings to emigrate, and, more interestingly, the protagonists in both narratives address, from what I contend is a transcultural perspective, the complexity of the phenomenon of contemporary migrations and cultural relationships, both on English and on Irish soil.

It is well-known that Irish writers have manifested, as it would be expected, their rejection of Brexit. I say, as it would be expected, since it is also notorious that many Irish artists live in the United Kingdom, and that plenty of them work with British publishing houses, where they are particularly popular. Some years ago, Kate O'Riordan referred in an interview to the popularity of the Irish, in particular within the British publishing industry: "In some respects I'd rather not have it. I prefer 'writer'. But having said that, I know my publisher looks at me as a commercial proposition, and they want to sell books, so I get bracketed as *Irish female writer*. And I live with that – it's fine" (Moloney 208, emphasis mine). This popularity, according to O'Riordan, transcends the book marketplace, and is shared by the average British:

> It is almost cool to be Irish. British society is a very class-ridden society, but people are comfortable with the Irish accent, because it's not making judgements on them; whereas if someone comes out with a very defined, upper-middle English class accent, you can see hackles raising straight away. Irish are very successful in broadcasting here.
>
> (Moloney 210)

Therefore, British disregard or even any sort of contempt for the Irish, could be considered as mostly a thing of the past. They are no longer regarded as others by the English.[1] And we should not ignore that one of

the main concerns of Brexit was precisely a new way of handling the other in its most ample sense.

Irish writers have officially reacted against Brexit in different ways. The Society of Authors (SoA) and the Irish Writers' Union released a joint statement warning of the impact of a no-Brexit deal on publishing and literature in the two countries, since it would inevitably affect the convenient and fruitful book trading relationship between the two countries and the cultural industry in general. *The Irish Times* has also carried out surveys and interviews among leading Irish writers, some of them residing in the UK, and their anti-Brexit and critical attitudes were generally and overtly deployed. It is in this context that I have been tracking Irish writers' fictional response to Brexit, since their personal rejection has been publicly expressed (Martin Doyle).

Apart from the publication of a series of novels that revive the delicate question of the frontier between Northern Ireland and the Republic, and the distance that separates Catholics and Protestants,[2] my provisional conclusion is that they are maintaining a conspicuously overall silence in relation to the fear and rejection of the other as one of the most obvious reasons behind Brexit. Furthermore, this significant silence could and should be contextualised in the Irish own reluctance towards others, that was already materialised in the 2004 Citizenship Referendum and, more recently, in the inhuman System of Direct Provision.[3]

I have studied elsewhere how Irish fiction has recorded since the 1990s, and in the context of the years of economic welfare, the changing sociocultural landscape of an island that became the recipient of massive visitors and tourists but also economic and political immigrants. Similarly, how "the land of a hundred thousand welcomes" began to progressively deploy racist attitudes and to adopt restrictive policies towards immigration. In this sense I have detected an evolution that goes from a naïve even frivolous stance in the treatment of the arrival of massive tourists, foreigners and immigrants in novels published during the early years of economic welfare, till the moment when Irish writers began to represent the failure of intercultural and multicultural policies in Ireland, that became more evident with the economic collapse of the island and the subsequent period of recession. Thus, racism, xenophobia, and the condition of duress of the immigrant on Irish soil began to be illustrated in Irish literature both by Irish writers and by migrant writers residing in Ireland.[4]

It seems that, for the time being, Irish authors, rather than directly focusing on Brexit, are intent on representing the failures of multicultural and intercultural policies and attitudes, as well as projecting a transcultural alternative stance that would favour conviviality among locals and foreigners. Donal Ryan's *Strange Flowers* (2020) and Oona Frawley's *Flight* (2014) are two novels focused on contemporary spatial

movements and displacements, and more particularly on topics such as identity, the condition of otherness and the complexities of conviviality in contemporary culturally diverse societies such as the Irish and the British ones. The protagonists in both novels move recurrently from one place to another and they are constantly renegotiating their identity in relation to the others that surround them. They are two brilliant instances of what Arianna Dagnino identifies as "transcultural fiction" since they transcend "the borders of a single culture or nation in choice of topic, scope, location, language, and characters" (Dagnino *Transcultural Writers* 178). Furthermore, both narratives deploy the limitations of multiculturality and interculturality in the attention they pay both to commonality and difference (Epstein; McLeod; Dagnino), emphasising the importance of communication and silence, commonness and difference, conviviality and animosity, and understanding and confusion, as inherent traits of coexistence in contemporary diverse societies and communities.

Donal Ryan has reflected in *Strange Flowers* on the figure of the "Other",[5] and on how this condition can be experienced by the most diverse characters on the basis of class, sexual orientation, or skin colour. We analyse it before Oona Frawley's *Flight* since, despite its posterior publication, Ryan's novel begins in the 1970s and covers till approximately the 1990s while Frawley's novel time frame is the early twenty-first century. *Strange Flowers* begins with the mysterious disappearance of the only daughter of an aging couple formed by Paddy and Kit Gladney, living in the Irish parish of Knockagowny, Tipperary, in the 1970s. Moll Gladney, twenty years old, abandoned family and home, and we later discover that she moved to London where for five years she worked as a barmaid, and became friend of a black Englishman, Alexander Elmwood, with whom she had a white skinned son, Joshua. Similarly to her flight from her parents, Moll will again abandon London, leaving husband and son there, and go back to her native Irish village. This time, however, she will be followed by her English family which includes husband, son and parents-in-law. Finally, Moll and Alexander will settle in Ireland and raise their son with the aid of Moll's parents.

The narrative, as we are going to see, includes occasional instances of intercultural and multicultural failure both on Irish and on English soil, and more ostensibly deploys episodes of transcultural negotiations that, in John McLeod's view, comprehend both communication and silence, understanding and ignorance, conviviality and incommunicability, and engagement and displacement; becoming thus *Strange Flowers,* a brilliant illustration, for both the characters in the novel and its readers, of the fact "that yearning to engage hospitably with others is inflected with a consciousness of the limits of one's standpoint, of the incommensurability of those who exist like us." (11)

Readers of *Strange Flowers* discover towards the end of the novel that the cause that propelled Moll Gladney's flight from her village was not only her being raped by her father's landlord and employer, Lucas Jackman, but rather or mostly due to her love towards this man's wife, Ellen Jackman. It was this sexual orientation that had always made Moll feel inadequate, ill-adapted, that is, an other in her own home, as she vaguely explains to her mother:

> I never felt right inside, Mam. From when I was about ten or eleven. There was something wrong with me. Something I couldn't put a name on. Miss Fahy said something one time in religion class about something that came a bit close to describing what I felt, and she said that it was natural and unnatural all at once, that because we were formed from the same stuff as animals that we were beholden to our animal natures and that we should pray whenever we felt any strange urges and ask God for strength and they would go away. But mine never went away. I was so ashamed of myself. It was this monstrous thing inside me, and it came in upon me every now and then, […] and I never had a choice but give myself to it, and I was always ashamed. I did things.
>
> (56–57)

This otherness that propelled Moll's flight from her conservative Irish native community had also been experienced in England and for different causes, by her husband, Alexander Elmwood, since childhood and despite his British citizenship. Already at school, he was a victim of scorn in allegedly intercultural London:

> He'd had a teacher in school who'd called him and Syd his pair of piccaninnies. Whites and Pakistanis and Nigerians and Jamaicans all had names for each other. He'd been called a coon once by a chef in the hotel. A man he didn't know, who'd just started. Where's that fucking coon gone? He'd heard the man say.
>
> (96)

Later on, he would suffer racist attitudes in several jobs, and he would also discover the failures of interculturalism once living in Ireland with his wife and child. Furthermore, the narrative also illustrates the shortcomings and even mean stances involved in multicultural ghettoes such as Notting Hill in London where, despite his having been raised there with his family, his white son, Joshua, becomes the object of xenophobic discrimination: "a black family in Notting Hill cannot raise a white boy, it will be too hard for him, he will not be accepted" (69). Joshua's situation in Notting Hill illustrates, precisely, one of the shortcomings of multicultural policies,

since critics of multiculturalism object to its emphasis on the preservation of socio-cultural difference that certainly favours respect and promotion of minority identities but could make difficult the accommodation and integration of otherness within the culturally ghettoised community. As Bhikhu Parekh argues "multiculturalism is said to encourage segregation and social fragmentation." (271)

Once in Ireland, Alexander will be similarly the target of despising attitudes and deprecatory expressions. Thus, he is said to come from the land of the old enemy – that is, England –, suspected of being a British informer, referred to as Kunta Kinte, and his skin colour will be the object of much gossiping and prejudice in the small village. Albeit, with the passing of time, the arrival of other foreigners, and Alexander's active participation in the community, he and the Irish villagers will progressively attempt to negotiate intercultural conviviality. In this sense, it is particularly significant that, due to his ability to run very fast as well as his big size, he is invited to become a member of the local hurling team. Notwithstanding, Alexander's difficult integration in the team illustrates the possibilities as well as the limitations of the young man's intercultural insertion in the community. On the one hand, he will be regarded as a rarity by the villagers, unused to receive and coexist with outsiders:

> And night after night this went on and dozens of people came across the fields and up from the village most evenings to Kilcolman to stand on the side-line and watch Paddy Gladney's black son-in-law be savaged like a Spartan recruit, like a prisoner of war, like a condemned man in an amphitheatre, tormented by lions and wolves. Lord, the spectacle of it. Who'd believe it? It was the kind of thing that would do a heart good.
>
> (100)

On the other hand, Alexander, on his part, will also have to assume his own limitations as a player as well as his reluctance to accept the violence implied in the game, symbolising thus his unstable and uneasy position as a member of the community of adoption: "He was no hindrance and he was sometimes, even often, a help. His speed was unmatched. He could make his body go anywhere but not the ball. […] he couldn't pass accurately and he couldn't score from outfield: the ball would not lift itself for him or travel in the direction of his eye" (101). It is in this sense that the intercultural emphasis on dialogue at the level of local encounters reveals as too naively optimistic.[6] At a given point, Alexander will acknowledge, resignedly, that "His blackness here was as remarkable as his son's whiteness had been in Notting Hill, and all the pain of difference now was his and this was how it had to be" (97). The novel is displaying the

complexity of coexistence both in already culturally diverse societies such as England's, as well as showing signs of racism in the premodern Ireland of the 1970s. Furthermore, even in Ireland and among whites, Joshua will experience a troublesome adolescence, social class being a further parameter that the novel illustrates as favouring otherness.

Strange Flowers illustrates how efforts at transcultural conviviality do not only apply to the relationship between the native and the foreigner – the Irish villagers and the English Alexander Elmwood – but also involve class relationships and sexual orientation within a given community as factors that could lead a person to feel marginalised or, in Mikhail Epstein's words, "to live on the border of one's 'inborn' culture or beyond it" (334). In this regard, much more difficult, time consuming, and limited will be Moll's reinsertion within her own village, to the extent that towards the end of the novel we discover that she is finally having an affective relationship with Ellen Jackman, although their encounters are alluded to as private and discreet, so that the villagers will not have to confront the sexual other that these women represent for the conservative values of the rural community.

The sociocultural tensions illustrated by the cases of Alexander and Moll, both in England and in Ireland, will be also exemplified with their son, Joshua, since the young man will feel ill at ease in the racist and class ridden Irish town. Josh is accosted and abused by Andrew Jackman for the simple reason of being the descendant of a biracial couple (155), and he reproaches his parents for their having kept him ignorant of the family socioeconomic status:

> The shame he'd felt at finding out, at thirteen years old, that Andrew Jackman's father owned the cottage and the orchard and the lane and the stile and the alder tree and all the oaks and the hillside and the stream and the bed he slept in. That his father, for all his work and all his goodness and all his plans, had died poor, owning nothing. The shame he felt for feeling such shame.
>
> (172)

Therefore, the young man decides to abandon the village and go to London, reversing thus his father's steps albeit emulating his mother's vital trajectory, while he will eventually come back home to Ireland at the end of the novel. The movements of both parents and their son illustrate the transcultural dimension of Ryan's novel since, as Monica Juneja explains, "transculturality is about spatial mobility, circulation or flows" (25). Furthermore, these circuits favour contacts and encounters, and transculturalism differs from multiculturalism and from interculturalism precisely in its "emphasis on the problematics of contemporary culture,

most particularly in terms of relationships, meaning-making, and power formation" (Lewis 24), being "as interested in dissonance, tension, and instability as it is with the stabilising effects of social conjunction, communalism and organisation" (24).

The interpretation of Ryan's novel through a transcultural lens explains in a different light what some reviewers have read as a shortcoming in the author's narrative. Beejay Silcox, in a review of *Strange Flowers* for *The Guardian*, considers that "Ryan's inhabitation of Alexander and his son, Joshua, is disappointing". From a transcultural perspective the undecipherable and mysterious dimension of Ryan's representation of Alexander and of his son Joshua is precisely inherent to, or an illustration of the inevitability of "the incommensurability of those who exist like us" (McLeod 11). Therefore, Ryan's characterisation of the protagonists forces the reader to accept that it is impossible to fully understand Alexander and Joshua in a similar way in which their own families and friends yielded to their unaccounted for decisions. In other words, that we must accept that there is always a degree of uncertainty, even incomprehensiveness in our relationship with the other. At the end of the novel, Joshua comes back to Ireland in the same mysterious and unexplained way in which he had previously abandoned it.

The strange flowers of the title do not simply allude to white-skinned Joshua –"the child, the perfect, unblemished whiteness of this strange flower" (69) – but could certainly refer metaphorically to all the others in a novel that features characters moving freely from England to Ireland and feeling excluded in both places, where they similarly have to negotiate their difference, their otherness. Ryan has devoted his already brilliant and consolidated literary career to reflecting on this condition, deploying the difficulties of conviviality in contemporary diverse societies both transnationally and within nation states. In his oeuvre, he has included sound reflections on immigration in Ireland during the Celtic Tiger years and its aftermath (*The Thing about December* and *The Spinning Heart*), focused on the figure of the political immigrant (*From a Low and Quiet Sea*), and also deployed the hardships of the Travelling community in Ireland (*All We Shall Know*), as well as considered women's otherness (with the exception of the first novel) recurrently in his narratives (including his last novel *The Queen of Dirt Island*).

If we take into account that *Strange Flowers* was published after Brexit, I would contend that we should interpret Ryan's message as a sound reflection on the problems of conviviality, prejudice, fear of the other and racism that take place both in England and in Ireland, and that the only way of overcoming them is by means of negotiations that involve the assumption of commonality as well as difference, organisation and disintegration, stability and instability.

Another novel that features a transcultural view of coexistence in contemporary Ireland is Oona Frawley's *Flight* (2014). Oona Frawley, American born of Irish parents, has been living in Ireland for more than a couple of decades; she is a specialist in Irish literature working at Maynooth University and *Flight* is her first novel. Frawley can be considered, in Arianna Dagnino's terms, a transcultural writer, that she describes as follows:

> [I]maginative writers who, by choice or because of life circumstances, experience cultural dislocation, follow transnational life patterns, cultivate bilingual or plurilingual proficiency, physically immerse themselves in multiple cultures, geographies, or territories, expose themselves to diversity, and nurture plural, flexible identities. (Dagnino *Transcultural Writers* 1)

This status, according to Dagnino, favours some writers' expression of a transcultural sensibility that, as we are going to see, becomes evident in Frawley's debut narrative. The novel is set in 2004, the year in which the Irish voted in the Citizenship Referendum that would deny constitutional birthright citizenship for anyone born on the island of Ireland, prioritising ancestry over residence. In other words, that a person born in Ireland needs to have an Irish citizen parent or ancestor to qualify for Irish citizenship.

We have seen in Ryan's novel how the characters negotiate their difference, their otherness, assuming the limitations, as well as the difficulties of conviviality both in England and in Ireland in the last decades of the twentieth century. Oona Frawley's *Flight*, set in the twenty-first century, also features a series of characters constantly moving from one place to another. The main protagonists are an Irish middle-aged woman, Elizabeth, and her parents, who have lived in Ireland, America and Vietnam till they settle definitively in Dalkey. The other main protagonist is Sandrine, an immigrant from Zimbabwe, who comes to Ireland on a student visa, flying from economic and political instability, pregnant, and leaving husband and son at home.[7] Sandrine, a teacher in her native village, enrols on a course that she does not attend and that, in any case, turns out to be a fraud. In order to earn money to send back to her Zimbabwean family, she beings to work as live-in carer for Elizabeth's aging parents, Tom and Clare, who suffer from Alzheimer.

This novel evinces even more explicitly than Ryan's *Strange Flowers*, a transcultural view of contemporary diverse societies and human encounters both in Eastern and Western contexts. Through the migratory routes of the main protagonists, the reader discovers the inevitability of their negotiations in their different abodes and how these arrangements conveyed

the acknowledgement of common ground as well as the acceptance of difference.

The first allusion to Ireland in contrast with England in the novel comes from Sandrine, who has been advised by her husband to emigrate to Ireland rather than to England:

> Don't go to England, George had urged. I know that it would be better than here, but they did take over ours and many other countries. The Irish priests are so nice, gentle. Go to Ireland. They too have been conquered; they will be kinder. And everyone says the economy is doing so well. There is work.
>
> (101–11)

This is an uncomfortable novel for the Irish, published precisely when the English were already expressing their uneasiness with Europe and with European policies on migration[8] since, once in Ireland, Sandrine will have to face not only Ireland's anti-immigration strategies – "the country is increasingly angry about *non-nationals* and there is a referendum coming up that scares the life out of her" (144)– but also recurrent displays of racism and xenophobia every time she wanders through the streets of Dublin and its surrounding areas:

> One of the men spat on the ground as he strode past and said something to his friend that Sandrine did not catch immediately but heard in afterthought: *fucking asylum-seeking nigger.* The shock of it. Tears started to her eyes in an instant. It turned her stomach and left her unable to speak.
>
> (124)

Finally, the results of the 2004 Citizenship referendum force her to take the decision of abandoning Ireland and going back to Zimbabwe.

The rejection that Sandrine suffers in the Irish streets contrasts with the warm welcome and easy acceptance of cosmopolitan Tom, Clare and Elizabeth wherever they went. The narrative interweaves the stories of the Irish and the Zimbawbean protagonists who, despite their different provenance, have emigrated for economic reasons, shared the experience of being and feeling as foreigners, undergone the hardships involved in trying to fit in the community of adoption, and also suffered nostalgia for the native country. Elizabeth's difficult experience both in Vietnam and in North America, even during her occasional visits to Ireland while she was young, offers the reader of *Flight* a sound reflection on the idea of belonging and on the feeling of otherness. While in Vietnam, as an adolescent, she was forced to remain isolated from the Vietnamese community in a hotel,

and she could only see the new social and cultural reality surrounding her from the distance of the hotel's veranda. Her parents were thus preventing their daughter from negotiating her insertion there, and the girl ardently desired to go back to North America, where she had spent the best years of her life, rather than to an unknown Ireland that her parents nostalgically evoked and recalled, since "for her Ireland was not a home or even a real place merely unfamiliar to her, it was the imaginary geography of her parents' delusions" (92–93). But once in America, she realised that she didn't belong there either: "the realisation had broken that she was not American, would never be, didn't wish to be – that it was a failed experiment. She knew more of Vietnam now than Connecticut, more of Ireland than Vietnam" (139). Definitively settled in Ireland, we are told, "Elizabeth became Irish slowly, without noticing" (139). Elizabeth became Irish since, although late in life, she was given the opportunity to settle in a certain place, to adapt herself to Ireland and the Irish, the landscape, the customs, and even the language:

> For suddenly, without being aware of it, she had shortened the vowel, softened it. Other words followed: *basil, garage* – vowels swelling and accents shifting. And then there was the gradual accumulation over a period of months of new words. I'm grand, she heard herself saying to Ciaran's mother's offer of more tea. The word 'sure' began to creep into the starts of some of her sentences; she bought a *biscuit* tin and stopped buying cookies; she started calling Swiss cheese Emmental. And with the new vocabulary came a new life of petrol and shops and PRSI numbers and gardaí. And the old life, of subways and markets and social security numbers and cops gradually faded from her life.
>
> (139)

This opportunity is not allowed to Sandrine due to her origins and her skin colour. And the novel contrasts the rejection that Sandrine suffers every time she wanders through the streets in Dublin with the easiness with which she becomes part of cosmopolitan Tom, Clare and Elizabeth's household. Nonetheless, the narrative emphasises that the relationship that they establish is not idealised but rather transculturally negotiated, based on tolerance, and respectful of the distance that separates them due to their different cultural extraction. Thus, Sandrine tries earnestly to adapt herself to the unstable Irish weather, she is marvelled at seeing for the first time people so old as Tom and Clare and notices even the lines on their skins that she describes as "beautiful" (29), and the colour of their hair, "Their hair she was fascinated by, the wispy softness of it. How fine it seemed, thread-like, and how odd that what had evidently been blond hair on Clare's head had become like glowing platinum, while Tom's had

drifted towards a sullen, stern grey. There was no one so old as this at home" (30). Tom and Clare Hughes's colourful house similarly attracts Sandrine's attention:

> This house, with its chaos of colour and strange objects, with its excess of light from the sky and noise from the sea and its enormous kitchen that ended in a wall and ceiling of glass that sheltered orchids and lilies, was for her like entering a museum, like sleeping in a gigantic shop that sold everything.
>
> (31)

The Hughes's house – decorated with carpets, tapestries and Buddhas, including the jars of species carefully arranged by Tom (ginger, coriander, vanilla, lemongrass, saffron, cardamon, pepper, cinnamon, cassia, chilly, anise, etc.) – is a symbolic material memento of their travelling around the world and an illustration of the couple's ability to negotiate among the different cultures that have become part of their vital trajectory. Notwithstanding, the description of the experience of conviviality between the Hughes and Sandrine includes points of discordance, distances that are insurmountable but that they learn to assume and accept, like their different culinary tastes illustrate:

> Sandrine had not yet discovered that Clare, with her decades of absence from Ireland, did not care for the food Sandrine assumed she desired. So, they both reluctantly ate boiled potatoes and overcooked vegetables and various meats boiled or fried, when what Clare would have loved was a bowl of noodles doused with fish sauce and sprinkled with chopped peanuts and fresh coriander brightened to a vivid green by the soup's heat, and what Sandrine craved was a plain bowl of sadze to settle her soon-to-be girl child.
>
> (56)

Sandrine would also drink the green tea that she does not particularly like (49) and, privately and respectfully, object to the western custom of interning aging or infirm old parents in nursing homes. This attitude would enable her to establish a very close relationship with childless Elizabeth to the point that the latter offers to adopt her child, something that Sandrine finally does not contemplate. Sandrine shrewdly realises that her transcultural coexistence with the Hughes implies considering "the verb 'to be' differently" (117), "thinking constantly of gaps" (118), and she also acknowledges the limitations of any successful narrative about her experience in Ireland since "Her story depends on collaboration,

something that she, on her own, cannot supply. She is dependent on some level of acceptance and that is not forthcoming" (118).

The novel includes uncomfortable comparisons between Ireland and England:

> she wonders about Irish people's reputation as friendly and welcoming and holy. It is true that for all Clare's eccentricities, she does not bat an eyelid at Sandrine's foreignness. But the rest of the country seems to, in radio debates and newspaper columns. Sometimes Sandrine wonders if another country, even England, might have been better, since in England there was, at least, a sizable population from Zim already.
>
> (119)

This passage illustrates the failure of intercultural coexistence in Ireland and ponders at the possible alternative of a multicultural England, that Ryan had also deployed as a failure with the experience of Alexander and his son Joshua in Notting Hill. In this line of thought, even cosmopolitan and educated Elizabeth, desperate with the fate of her new friend, would expect something more from countries such as England with a colonial past: "But you're not from Nigeria, Elizabeth said. Because it's Zimbabwe, she said slowly, and because it was a British colony and because Britain's part of the EU, you must be entitled to stay some way. It's different. There must be some way" (190). Regretfully, Elizabeth's words resonate as shallow in a work published after the British Prime Minister had promised a referendum for the exit of Britain from the EU due to, among other reasons, Britain's rejection of EU migratory policies.

Flight is a novel that offers a sound and serious reflection on contemporary diverse western societies that, despite their past as imperial colonising powers such as England, a long history of emigration in the case of Ireland, or the benefits reaped by western countries through economic exploits (illustrated by Tom's trading with species in Asia), seem to be suffering, like Tom and Clare's Alzheimer disease, from a generalised state of oblivion that prevents them not only from having a sane relationship with other human beings but also from recognising their own past. At the same time that this obliviousness is recalled, the novel does not fail to project, as we have seen, an alternative for transcultural cohabitation and conviviality, illustrated with Sandrine's relationship with the Hughes's.

Studied together, *Strange Flowers* and *Flight*, offer two fictional instances of contemporary spatial mobility and of the culturally diverse societies resulting from the circulation of people. They are examples of what Arianna Dagnino refers to as "literature of mobility" (Dagnino "*Transcultural Writers*" 6). Moreover, rather than projecting the image

of a multicultural or intercultural Ireland, both narratives illustrate transcultural processes of negotiation as the best option to favour coexistence and conviviality within the nation state, in which both nationals and foreigners should actively participate. These negotiations include communication and silence, understanding and ignorance, commonality and difference.

Once Brexit has become real, it is more than probable that the Irish will manage to circumvent mobility limitations, as well as economic restrictions and barriers between the island of Ireland and England. Even considering that favourable panorama, Irish literature is, as we have seen, intent on vindicating the need for a transcultural coexistence that involves negotiating both belonging and otherness, and that the complexities of these negotiations are evinced everywhere in the world, in Ireland and in England as Ryan illustrates, but also in Vietnam and North America, as Frawley's protagonists exemplify. Furthermore, they demonstrate how, depending on nationality, skin colour, social class, and sexual orientation, some people fare better than others.

Ireland, a land of emigrants in the past, has seen how the Irish continued to move freely around the world in the twentieth and in the twenty-first centuries, and to receive foreigners, as both *Strange Flowers* and *Flight* envision. These two narratives evince how Irish writers such as Ryan and Frawley are intent on representing in fiction that, despite the Irish European membership, their attitude towards the other is not that different from the one that fuelled the British to leave the EU, and that a transcultural view of coexistence seems to be the most viable alternative in times of referendums.

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Notes

1 Bozena Kucala has analysed the volume *Changing Skies* (2014), an anthology of stories by writers of Irish descent, which addresses the experiences of Irish migrants to Britain, that increased significantly after Post-WWII, reaching the conclusion that the portraits offered by the authors deploy how "the status of the Irish immigrant gradually rises – from starving workers in the slums of Victorian Manchester, to Irish men and women setting up their own businesses

in England and even owning and managing properties, instead of just building them" (97)

2 Novels about the Northern Irish border had been published well before Brexit such as Deirdre Madden's *Time Present and Time Past* (2013), and Mary O'Donnell's *Where They Lie* (2014) and continued to be published after the British left the EU, such as the acclaimed *Milkman* (2018) by Anna Burns, or the popular *Trespassers* (2022) by Louise Kennedy.

3 Nigerian writer settled in Ireland Melatu Uche Okorie denounced the system in *This Hostel Life*, a collection of stories published in 2018 by Skein Press.

4 For a more elaborated study on the topic see Margarita Estévez-Saá, "Immigration in Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger Novels", in *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland. The Immigrant in Contemporary Irish Literature*, edited by Pilar Villar-Argáiz. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014): 79-92.

5 The capitalized "Other" is understood here, following Bernhard Leistle's proposal, as "designating everything that is non-self, but stands in relation to the self." (viii)

6 Bhikhu Parekh explains that "Nationalist interculturalism insists that social unity or cohesion is one of the most important objectives of any society, and that it can only be achieved by encouraging interaction and co-operation between the various communities at all levels, pursuing common purposes, stressing and developing commonalities rather than just the differences, and evolving a shared identity based on shared experiences, struggles, memories and loyalty to common institutions and values". (277)

7 It must be explained that Frawley had many problems in publishing this novel precisely on the grounds of its black protagonist, as Ruth Gilligan (2014) informs us in her review of the novel for *The Guardian*. It was finally the independent publishing house Tramp Press, that was the one that would dare to publish it. It is also significant that the owners were the same that had accepted Donal Ryan's *The Spinning Heart*, a text that had been similarly rejected by several publishers.

8 David Cameron announced in 2013 that if he was elected as Prime Minister, he would call a referendum.

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9 Negotiating Second-Generation Transcultural Irishness

Susan Ryan's *The King of Lavender Square*

Asier Altuna-García de Salazar

Introduction: Representing Transculturality in Ireland

This chapter analyses Susan Ryan's debut novel,[1] *The King of Lavender Square* (2017), in order to show how her representation of the discourse of second-generation immigrant Irish adds to the negotiation of transcultural identities in contemporary Ireland. To do so, it draws on theoretical approaches to the transcultural by Wolfgang Welsch, Mary Louise Pratt's core concept of the "contact zones", Monica Juneja's more recent understanding of transculturality, as an analytical model that addresses dynamic "issues of processuality" (Juneja and Kravagna 24) and theoretical frameworks focused on Irish transculturality by Gavan Titley, Gerard Delanty, Michael Cronin and Anne Mulhall, among others. Ryan's novel revolves around the character of young Patrick Kimba, born in Ireland to an immigrant Congolese mother. Escaping persecution and death in her native Congo, the asylum seeker and refugee Tessa Kimba, moves into Ireland still pregnant with Patrick, who will be born in Dublin and become native Irish by birth. Ryan sets her novel in Lavender Square, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of the capital, which reproduces as a microcosm the many social interactions of those living in it and how these affect the micro and macro levels of Irish society when scrutinised under a transcultural lens. Ryan centres the development of her novel in Patrick's growing process, his self-identification as Irish and his coming to terms with his native/host country. As a black Irish, he negotiates his transcultural identity as opposed to what has been the traditionally constructed identity regarded as "Irish/White only". His negotiation with identity transcends colour and Patrick engages with the diverse performative practices of religion, language, tradition, belonging and other everyday interactions with his classmates, neighbours and the rest of today's Irish society.

This chapter proves that Susan Ryan's novel represents the transcultural essence of Irishness as a dynamic synergy, an interaction and an evolutionary and transformative process within the social, the political, the

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cultural and the identitarian micro and macro discourses of contemporary Ireland. Her take on second-generation immigrant Irishness questions the ideology of the Irish nation-state and advocates the reformulation of identity, culture and a new social order through the transcultural paradigm. In literary terms, Ryan's writing stretches the intercultural and multicultural representations of much Irish fiction that has dealt with the interaction between the native Irish and the immigrant "other" over the last two decades.[2] Rather, she introduces into the debate the realities of second-generation immigrant Irish within Irish society so that her piece points to a transcultural perspective. This chapter shows that *The King of Lavender Square* opens a space for imagining cross-cultural identity formations through second-generation immigrant Irish experiences of re-possession. Ultimately, this chapter contributes to the enrichment of the hermeneutical critical and literary debates around the concept of transculturality and its representation in contemporary Ireland.

Transcultural Approaches to Second-generation Immigrants in Ireland

The research on the transcultural in Ireland has naturally evolved from approaches to intercultural and multicultural Irelands carried out over the last two decades (Banks; Cronin "*Small Worlds*"; Inglis; Longley and Kiberd; Titley). This period has seen the main outcomes of globalisation in Ireland in "the exceptionality of the reversal of the stigmatising Irish emigration pattern into net immigration [and] the miraculous economic boom of the Irish Celtic Tiger" (Altuna-García de Salazar 185). As is known, the case of migration into Ireland is not unique and shares much with those dynamically changing experiences with regard to nation and identity developing in other parts of Europe, which compels us "to rethink the meaning and value of cultural identity and cultural diversity in the European space" (Robins 246). The consideration of migration and second-generation immigrants has triggered new approaches to identity reconstruction, which, in turn, helps in the understanding of this European space as truly transcultural (Galent 207). For Galent,

> Studying migrants' lives leads us to understanding a crucial aspect of the current condition of the world where the intermingling, "transculturality" and overlapping of different groups in a multicultural society shows us the fact that cultures mutually, yet unequally, influence each other, continuously evolving and reconfiguring themselves. (208)

In the case of Ireland, and as a result of these two main social and economic unprecedented processes (migration and the Celtic Tiger), scholars have questioned the validity of the traditional landmarks – such as identity,

religion, nationality and language – that had characterised a monocultural Ireland until the 21st century (O'Toole; Cronin "*Small Worlds*"; Delanty; Banks; Titley; Longley and Kiberd). Identity politics in Ireland had never "experienced such a rapid and large-scale transformation as occurred during the Celtic Tiger" (Fox et al., "Identities" 199). Hence, over the last three decades, research has shown that new terms and theoretical frameworks are needed to provide valid answers to the new realities[3] that emerged from the tenets of cross-culture, interculturalism and multiculturalism (Friberg-Harnesk et al.; Villar-Argáiz; Falci & Reynolds; Mulhall; Reynolds; Fox et al., "*Handbook of Irish Studies*"). As Mulhall contends, there exists an "amplified focus on 'diversity and inclusion' in literary, cultural and academic institutions in Ireland" (96). However, as she adds, there are limits to the way in which multiculturalism and interculturalism are providing valid responses to the realities of the integration of the migrant and the host community in Ireland, much less so to the experiences of second-generation migrants.

The case of Ireland shows a progressive detachment from the tenets of a hyphenated (Irish-English) identity, the static signifiers traditionally maintained by a staunch monoculturalism and the conception of a "National Ireland". This results in "the evolving category of Irishness [being] stripped of its monocultural associations" (Townsend 221) and the recent categorisation of the country as "Global Ireland" (Delanty 13). As an example of this one finds the Irish government's launch in 2018 of *Global Ireland: Ireland's Global Footprint to 2025* (Government of Ireland), whose aim is to establish Irish institutional positioning in the world as a result of globalisation. Much of this report deals with the importance of the Irish diaspora, the still strong competitiveness of the Irish economy and the place of Ireland within world diplomacy. However, this advocacy for Ireland internationally, fails to tackle the realities of Global Ireland inside. Certainly, Ireland is not indifferent to these globalising processes which result in inner realities of multiculturalism and transculturality. For Stevenson, the development of the concept of the global village[4] has conditioned the way in which non-fluid old national hierarchies "sought to bind time and space through literature, history, heritage, ceremony, and myth" (41). Instead, Stevenson contends that "vertical national traditions have become floating signifiers in a mediated horizontal global culture" (41). In Ireland, these new realities entail "the dissolving of old loyalties, moving beyond nationalism towards the culturally diverse, and beyond a bilingual Ireland to a polyvocal one" (Friberg-Harnesk et al. 1), making us think "beyond the national frame" (Robins 248) of former times. As Irish poet Celeste Augé claims,

> Can a cultural hegemony such as Ireland – with its post-colonial history of forcefully and rigidly declaring parameters of its cultural and geographical identity, to the point where a proportion of its full-blooded

> Irish citizens consider themselves outside this boundary – make space for those who don't even have an Irish name, or accent, or even freckles to fall back on?
>
> (2010)

This chapter draws on theoretical approaches which defend the "processuality and dynamics of transculturality" (Flüchter and Schöttli 2) as opposed to more static and essentialist understandings of the concept.[5] Following Juneja, Flüchter and Schöttli's study follows the more current use of the term, which is "built upon a processual understanding of culture and thus challenges the traditional idea that cultures are internally cohesive, homogeneous, self-contained, or hermetically sealed against external influences" (2).[6] Their conception criticises Welsch's understanding of cultures as segregate entities. For many, Welsch retains "the essentialisation of bounded cultural entities, only partly relativising their homogeneity by pointing towards processes of multi- and interculturality" (Abu-Er-Rub et al. xxvi). Unlike Welsch, Juneja believes that transculturality analyses these flows and processes examining "the dialectic between the dissolution of certain boundaries and the reaffirmation of other kinds of difference, of how de-territorialisation is invariably followed by re-territorialisation" (26). For her, transculturality "highlights the procedural character of a broad variety of phenomena" (29). Identities and cultures – seen from a transcultural perspective – are "in a condition of being made and remade" (28) and are not taken as givens. This chapter also follows König's and Rakow's transcultural paradigm which insists on "the multipolarity, multiple perspectives, and transformative dynamics inherent to" (95) societies and cultures, which helps decipher transcultural identity formation in second-generation migrants within Irish society. The processuality of transculturality represented in Ryan's novel also revolves around Pratt's concept of the "contact zones". For Pratt, these are "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (7). Ryan's novel depicts physical and socio-cultural spaces which address core elements of diversity in contemporary Ireland. The concept of diversity, followed here, "expresses itself as a continuous process of mediation and translation whereby power relations and modes of social action construct potential differences into socially effective markers within specific socially, culturally, and politically constructed physical and symbolic spaces" (Lehmkuhl et al. 10).

The body of research which analyses the experiences of second-generation migrants in Ireland is still limited, albeit growing.[7] Many of these studies examine the realities of migrant families and first or second-generation children. This chapter adopts Darmody et al.'s 2022

definition of second-generation migrants included in *Children of Migrants in Ireland: How Are They Faring?*, which follows results from the comprehensive *Growing Up in Ireland* survey[8] and approaches the realities of these children analysed through different variables.[9] Their definition refers to "those born in Ireland where at least one parent was born abroad" (8).[10] This chapter also relies on Machowska-Kosiack and Barry's further indication that the concept applies to "descendants of persons who migrated, but do not themselves have a migration experience" (7).

Over the last three decades, Irish literature has also become a vehicle to represent interculturality, multiculturality and transculturality within the Irish discourse (Faragó and Sullivan; Bourke and Faragó; King and O'Toole; Mac Éinrí and O'Toole; González-Arias et al.; Altuna-García de Salazar; Villar-Argáiz; Schrage-Früh; Estévez-Saá; Gilligan). All these works have addressed the emergence of what Kiberd believes are "new and complex forms of narrative [that] capture these hybridities and complications" (xiv). In her approach to the multicultural visions of Irish literature, Villar-Argáiz wonders whether "when talking about the Other, can the Irish writer avoid the reinforcement of binaries? […] Can the voice of the subaltern truly emerge in this kind of literature?" ("Introduction" 15). It is here that one should address not only the themes and topics about the "other" that have appeared but also whether these representations about the dynamics of diversity in Ireland have been the product of native Irish writers, as is the case with Susan Ryan, or also by Irish BAME[11] authors, thus "mixing the natives' and immigrants' perspectives" (Villar-Argáiz, "Introduction" 15). The representations of the "new Irish" under intercultural, multicultural or even transcultural lenses which originated as a result of the boom years of the Celtic Tiger, have proved a lingering reality. But one should question "what congratulatory narratives [the Celtic Tiger] enabled (like inclusivity and economic progress) and what forms of social erasure it concealed" (Townsend 220). Behind this controversy lies the idea that there exists what Gilligan defines as the "narratology of otherness" in transcultural Ireland (107). Indeed, much Irish fiction has narrated the encounters with the other, the migrant, the interracial, the refugee and the foreigner in Ireland over the last three decades, which can be approached through the intercultural, multicultural or transcultural prisms. However, the representation of the discourse of second-generation migrants within Irish society is still limited.

Most probably, the standard representation of second-generation Irish migrants is Hugo Hamilton's memoirs *The Speckled People* (2003) and *The Sailor in the Wardrobe* (2006). Both narrate the construction of identity of children born to an Irish father and a German mother before the Celtic Tiger. Approaches to hyphenated second-generation migrants have also been illustrated in Margaret McCarthy's 2001 collection of Irish people

of mixed-race parentage accounts, *My Eyes Only Look Out*. However, representations of second-generation migrants, where both parents (or lone parent) were born abroad, are still few. Emer Martin represents the realities of second-generation Chinese in her 1999 short story "The Pooka at Five Happiness".[12] Back in 2005 Sarah Webb's short story collection *Travelling Light*,[13] included Nena Bhandari's "Enduring India", which recounts her story as a second-generation migrant child born in Ireland to two Indian parents who is given a "root-finding" trip to India for her twenty-first birthday and comes to understand her transcultural identity. Other instances fall under the genre of the memoir. Among them we can find Úna-Minh Kavanagh's *Anseo* (2019), which recalls the author's story as a Vietnamese who was adopted at just three days old by a single woman from Kerry. She is raised in an Irish-speaking home by her mother and grandfather and has to deal with racism, language and identity in contemporary Ireland. Also, Kathleen, Dominque and Jade Jordan's *Nanny, Ma & Me* (2021) approaches second- and third-generation Irish. Jade, a Black Irish woman, a Dubliner through and through, pieces together the lives of her white Irish grandmother, Kathleen, who married a Jamaican man in London, and her mixed-raced parentage daughter, Dominique, who has to deal with identity on their return to Dublin in the 1980s. In twenty-first-century Ireland, Jade compares her life with those of her mother and grandmother.

Analysis: Transculturality in *The King of Lavender Square*

The King of Lavender Square begins with the approach by one of the main characters, Saskia Heffernan, to the main setting where the action takes place: Lavender Square in Dublin. When she moves in, Saskia finds out about the origins of the square. Designed and built as "Victoria Square", "the intention was a modest development of terraced houses […] and a salute to the then queen" (Ryan 2). The English queen's name had been forgotten and changed for "Lavender" because of the abundance of that shrub and the legend that a young woman used to pace the square with lavender in her hands after losing her lover in the Crimean War. Ryan's references to a past colonial history and the hyphenated Anglo-Irish heritage of a former Dublin already point to exchange and transformation embedded in Irish identity and society over time. From those former Anglo-Irish Dubliners, the new Celtic and post-Celtic Tiger neighbours of Lavender Square include Saskia, a café waitress; Tom Winters, a dashing businessman; Fiona and Emma Fox, a high-flyer woman and her daughter; Nuala Murphy, a female teacher; Joe Delaney, a reclusive old man and the Congolese Kimbas, among other Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian newcomers. Lavender Square becomes a physical "contact zone" that

exemplifies the transcultural essence of contemporary Ireland. The Square represents, at a micro level, a place which, albeit asymmetrical, is a potentially reciprocal space of encounter, negotiation and also conflict (Pratt, "Contact Zone" 33–40), within a wider discourse that is the product of globalisation at the macro level. Ryan highlights this idea of the "contact zone" through the description of Saskia's ground floor which "awarded her a view of Lavender square and amphitheatre acoustics that made it impossible not to spy on the neighbours" (Ryan 2). Lavender Square becomes the stage where society's comings and goings are performed. Accordingly, Ryan depicts the reality of a modern Dublin, which encompasses diversity and themes that "are achingly relevant to modern Ireland's increasing social issues; loneliness, fractured communities and neighbours who don't talk to each other. [However], one quickly grows invested in an unlikely tribe, unified by Patrick Kimba, an African-Irish boy who dreams of playing football for Ireland" (Grenham).

The novel revolves around the lives of the Congolese Tessa Kimba, who moves into Ireland still pregnant, and her son Patrick, born in Ireland on St. Patrick's Day. Tessa works cleaning houses and dedicates the rest of her day to teach her son, as she was a former primary school teacher in Congo. As an Irish citizen,[14] young Patrick Kimba learns Irish too when he starts his compulsory education within the Irish system. The provision of education and religious services help the Kimba family accommodate to their new life in Ireland. The Parish priest visits Tessa Kimba and offers help with Patrick's uniform and other expenses in preparation for Patrick's first school days. He also invites Tessa to meet other African women in the community. However, she refuses his help as she rejects any contact with other African people because she has no intention of making her family more separate than they are and wishes better prospects for Patrick in a "white middle-class suburb" (Ryan 21). Tessa avoids ghettofication and wants integration in the host community. She follows what many migrants seek, i.e., to "build and maintain networks of social relations with members of the host society [as] this has a great influence on the strategy of their adaptation, the process of acculturation and the trajectory of reconstruction social identity" (Galent 209). Tessa knows about her situation with regard to identity as a refugee and asylum seeker but wants better prospects for Patrick in their "new/host" society when she reminds Nuala: "I knew I would never be Irish, but I wanted my child to be" (Ryan 136). Though Irish by birth, Patrick suffers his mother's reality as a refugee in Ireland and in "the ways in which migrant young people's socio-spatial practices are shaped by political decisions manifested in the immigration procedures they are subjected to" (Bushin and White 170) directly or indirectly.

The first part of the novel approaches the exoticism of the Kimbas, mainly because of skin colour, as opposed to the rest of the white/Irish

of the square. But Ryan's representation of a multicultural Dublin also includes Tessa and Patrick's visits to their dentist, Mr. Singh, a native from India, the new smell of "overcooked cabbage" (Ryan 21) coming from their Polish neighbours and the reference to streets in Dublin, such as Clanbrassil Street full of "halal stores, markets and kebab houses: all colours and spice and chatter, dark eyes and gestures […] Arabic soaps and Al Jazeera […] women [wearing] hijabs" (Ryan 116–7). However, racist notes also appear in Lavender Square, originating from neighbours complaining about the front door being left open, as "MUD HUTS MIGHT NOT HAVE FRONT DOORS" (Ryan 21; capitals in original). Tessa and Patrick feel they are "like two black pebbles on a beach of white stones" (Ryan 36). The whole situation of the Kimbas and their neighbours changes dramatically when Tessa is taken to hospital seriously ill and eight-year-old Patrick has to be taken care of by the rest of the neighbours. In doing so, Ryan forces a process of cultural amalgamation that also encompasses social and economic responses. As Helff has noted, processes of amalgamation are multifaceted (limitless, different, homogenous, subversive or not) and "simply exist and need to be reckoned with. Conceptualising transcultural life in a globalised modern world, therefore, challenges postcolonial concepts such as hybridity" (78). The new situation of the Kimbas causes the community to negotiate the realities of migrants in Ireland, at the macro level, within the contact zone of the Square. Neighbours face the difficulties in finding help from social services for Tessa, although she is entitled to it and have to live with Patrick during his first days at school as the "other", who is bullied by classmates. Many in the Square still feel uncomfortable with having to share their "middle-class space with immigrants" (Ryan 129). Ryan's narration unfolds transculturality in Patrick's growing process and in the transformative process the people in Lavender Square undergo.

To all this, Ryan adds a vector of change with the introduction of the football team Lavender Square FC. Patrick Kimba's dream is to play for the Premier League team, Innskeep, and also for the Republic of Ireland national football team. He plays football at all times in the Square. Old Joe, a former football coach, will train the boys of the Lavender Football Club and parts of the square will be adapted to let the children train regularly. Patrick Kimba's struggle for recognition in his community represents a social reality among children with a migrant background, whose participation in sport, social and cultural activities helps in their inclusiveness. Besides, as Cronin et al. argue, sport in the public space offers "itself as a social movement for the promotion of pluralism" (Cronin " Foreign" 1022). Studies reveal, however, that "participation in team sports is significantly lower among children with a migrant background compared to children with Irish parents" (Darmody et al. 74) although "participation in team sport has a significant positive association with child self-concept"

(Darmody et al. 77). In the novel, Patrick plays in a team that is mainly made up of children with a mixed background: "there were six children: one Polish, one American, one Ukrainian and three Irish [one of them Patrick], all from the square" (Ryan 159). Ryan represents the presence of sport not only as a lessening vector in the understanding of racism but, rather, as a strong factor in favour of inclusion and acceptance in Ireland. In *The King of Lavender Square* football becomes "a fertile site for socialisation and "multicultural" dialogue" (Mauro 884). Sport and inclusion purport a wider effect as "the increasing presence and roles of foreign athletes and coaches in Irish sport are indicative of the growing impact that the globalisation of sport has had on local practices and institutions" (Carter 191)[15]. For Carter, "areas previously unaffected by athletic immigration began to be affected. Ireland is no exception" (193).

That the Irish Patrick Kimba plays football as opposed to any of the Gaelic sports also points to a re-definition of Irishness, where Gaelic sports have traditionally accounted for a specific national identity in Ireland based on ethnicity and for a strong link to Irish nationalism.[16] Although football belongs to the category of "British/English games", it is gaining importance in Ireland and produces passionate support. Accordingly, in her novel, Ryan approaches the internationally shared but contested belief in football's inclusive power. As Mauro states, there have been many initiatives at European level to promote the potential of sport, football especially, in allowing for intercultural dialogue, particularly in Ireland, "whose demographic and social landscapes, over the last decades, have been redefined by immigration and questions of 'inclusion' and senses of belonging of youth of immigrant background are debated" (883). In his examination of the power of football as a global game, Mauro adopts the term transcultural "to account for the recognition of some shared cultural codes that bridge and challenge different social, ethnic and national background" (884). This brings to the debate "the issues of "foreigners" in Irish teams and who is or is not qualified to play for the respective states on the island will continue as long as there are debates over what it means to be Irish" (Carter 205). Non-fictional examples of mixed-raced sport players in Ireland include the Gaelic footballer and hurling star, Seán Óg Ó hAilpín, born to an Irish father and a Fijian mother, and the footballers, Curtis Fleming,[17] born to a Jamaican father and an Irish mother, and Paul McGrath, born to an Irish mother and a Nigerian father,[18] among others.

As constituents of his Irishness, Patrick's examples of attachment and belonging are carried out at the micro level of his community and neighbourhood, and these are later played out in relation to macro level social realities in Ireland. His participation in socio-spatial practices such as football within the community helps us consider the different social scales of inclusion and negotiation of diversity. The first part of the novel continues

with a positive take on transculturality showing Patrick's growing identity process as a black Irish and the transformative process of his immediate neighbourhood at Lavender Square. These transformations illustrate how cultural encounters blur the borders of fixed binaries (native vs. non-native, Irish vs. non-Irish and local vs. global) and promote new networks of interactions. Tessa starts to recover, and Patrick's family consists now of most of his neighbours, who partake of his celebrations, such as his Holy Communion, accompany him on his first trip to England to watch an Innskeep match or enjoy the multiculturality of Saint Patrick's Day parade in Dublin. Watching the parade makes him recognise the different peoples in Ireland and on admiring the Colombian majorettes, he feels part of this new reality and is intent on playing football for Ireland in the next World Cup in Colombia. But first, he decides to start writing almost weekly to the Innskeep manager, Jacques Biet, also a migrant in a football team in the UK, to tell him about his dreams and Irish identity.

However, football plays a dual role in the novel and it becomes an object of concern for Patrick and his neighbours. Patrick's mastery at football spreads and is even named "'AG IMIRT PELÉ' […] a clever pun on the name of the football legend, the Gaelic for 'playing football' being '*ag imirt peile*'" (Ryan 189). The audience at these football matches consists of Africans too, who had remained in Ireland after the recession and needed to be regarded as part of Irish society. Ryan shows they had nowhere else to go and "football, which was free to watch and played well by one of their own […] added a bit of colour to their lives. If the boy was accepted, then there was a chance they might be too" (191). In Ryan's novel, football becomes a second "contact zone" which offers a transcultural reading. It is a socio-cultural sport space where connections and relations, discontinuities and frictions take place and, hence, diversity is addressed. This is clear when the euphoria caused by Patrick's football mastery turns into instances of xenophobia and rejection, as suffered by second-generation transcultural immigrants, which are also represented in the novel. Patrick is repeatedly insulted by those attending the football matches: "Monkey boy" (Ryan 193), "Dirty nigger!" … "Go home!" (Ryan 212). In a conversation with Emma, Patrick cannot understand the reason behind those insults as he is Irish by birth:

> "There will be lots more where that came from", she said.
> "Why?"
> "That's the why. That's the way the world seems to work now."
> "Great answer."
> "There is no answer. These people don't care about you. If you were fat, they'd call you fatso. You're black, so they call you nigger."

> He shrugged. "Nigger, go home. That's what they were shouting. But I am home. This is my home", he said angrily. "I was born here. I want to play for Ireland, for fuck's sake"
>
> (Ryan 212–3)

Patrick's remarks can be explained through the process of transculturation he is undergoing. Pratt considers that transculturation is a "phenomenon of the contact zone" (Pratt "*Imperial* Eyes" 7) and has been used to determine the way in which selection, invention, transmission and absorption exchanges occur between dominant and subjected cultures (Pratt "*Imperial* Eyes" 7). This is notable in the case of Tessa, whose native culture becomes directly exposed to the dominant culture of her host country now. However, the situation turns problematic when dealing with second-generation migrants, such as Patrick, because these migrants are also clear representatives of the dominant culture they now belong to by right. In this way, Patrick is a clear exemplar of transcultural processual realities in Ireland when it comes to identity.

The rise in racist responses to immigrants in Ireland referred to above has been explained by "the shattering of national identities, which in turn increases the level of anxiety and cultural instability" (Villar-Argáiz, "Introduction" 7). In the case of Patrick, he stands for the stereotypical opposition to immigrants based on skin-colour. However, he is Irish by birth and this fact poses difficulties to any definition of Irishness that lacks inclusiveness of new social realities in Ireland. Patrick's experience is shared by many African immigrants in Ireland, which reveals "a peripheral people groping for admission into the hub of society" (Ejorh 50). Ejorh advocates active citizenship as an answer for the integration of African immigrants in Ireland. It is a condition that "transcends nationalistic, ethnic, racial and ideological chauvinism" (51). The case of Patrick is indicative of how he needs to be considered only Irish. His efforts for self-definition claim for a transformative definition of what Irish society is and how it deals with intrinsic diversity at micro and macro levels. His mother rejects all racist comments towards her son as she knows he is only Irish and wonders: "what do you have to do to fit in? In this bloody country?" to which Nuala replies, "playing football well is a good start" (Ryan 242). Ryan represents the potential for football to become a positive space of inclusion of diversity in Ireland within this contact zone of transculturation. But the novel presents harsher instances of violence. In one of the games, Patrick makes a lucky escape when a bottle is thrown at him. However, the worst is yet to come when he is threatened if he does not make Lavender Square FC lose the final game of the season. Patrick does not agree to it and in return his knee is shattered in an ambush attack by other youngsters.

Once football is out for Patrick, the community rejects this attack. The reaction, however, is not representative of the rise of racism as a vector of contemporary Irish society. The climate of welcoming has changed over time now that the times of net migration to Ireland have been reversed because of the crisis. The novel approaches overall difference as features of this new society. As one of Patrick's classmates, Siobhán, also rejected by the rest because of a speech impediment, believes,

> "They think that because I don't pronounce my words properly I'm retarded. With you, on the other hand, it's a number of things. You're African and everyone knows Africans would rob your kidneys clean out of your body if you turned your back. At the same time, you've taken all our jobs and our school places and you're all on welfare, and to add insult to injury, you're probably a terrorist to boot – sure don't you all look the same, you Muslims?"
>
> (Ryan 282)

Ryan narrates how identity is seen from different referential perspectives in such a way that categorisation of us/them also varies, losing, thus, their more static pre-supposition. After becoming aware of Patrick's incident, Jacques Biet visits him and invites him to move to England to train in the Innskeep Youth Academy. Once there, he is surrounded by other football promises from different backgrounds, some of them, black lads too. Interestingly, Patrick becomes "Paddy" for the other boys. The racist opposition he had suffered back in Dublin turns into a stereotyping of his provenance in a different context now, in the UK. As Ryan demonstrates, identity becomes a "free-floating signifier" which questions "belonging, legitimacy and entitlement" (Titley 14). Patrick sees that the racist responses he was receiving in Ireland do not occur in the UK: "I love it here, Mam […] They don't care what colour I am as long as I can kick a ball." (Ryan 303) As Juneja contends, "the transcultural – equated automatically with the cosmopolitan or the syncretic – is seen as political and ethical corrective to ethnocentrism and xenophobia" (24). Through football, Patrick feels liberated from his position of "otherness". From then on, his career is successful and eventually the manager of the Republic of Ireland national football team asks him to play for Ireland. When Patrick moves back to Ireland and meets his neighbours, he feels at home and lucky to have had such an extended family. Old Joe replies with that transformative vector that characterises intrinsic transculturality in Ireland today: "so [lucky] were we, son. So were we. Didn't you save all of us from ourselves, lead us to redemption?" "Like a saviour, a messiah or a king even?" Patrick suggested with a smile. "Well, there you have it now", Joe said. "A king. Indeed. The King of Lavender Square" (Ryan 384). Susan

Ryan's writing fosters a genuine acceptance of "Otherness" and alterity as intrinsic constituents of Irish identity.

Concluding Remarks

Patrick Kimba's story in *The King of Lavender Square* embodies what Delanty argues constitutes the transcultural paradigm as "one can simultaneously be Irish, European and member of an ethnic community" if one's identity is "articulated through discursively mediated identities and critical dialogue" (21). In her novel, Susan Ryan narrates the "contact zones", i.e. those physical and cultural spaces between today's cultures and languages, but also those spaces between the past and the future in contemporary Ireland. Both Lavender Square and football become powerful contact zones that become a vehicle for representing transculturation in today's Ireland. Patrick's childhood in Lavender Square, at first, represents the perfect setting for developing one's own identity while negotiating with many other social, economic, political and identitarian situations at a micro level. His story engages in the re-definition of what "Irishness" entails. Patrick's case addresses the inappropriate conceptions arising from terms such as fully Irish or Irish-Congolese to define identity. The Irish identity Patrick represents is characterised by hybridisation and heterogeneity. His story as a second-generation Irish individual allows for the recognition of new realities and the exploration of a transcultural Ireland today. Patrick's case follows Yau's idea that "self-identification among the second generation […] will assist in understanding the wide variety of experiences making up the current ethnic diversity of the country" (2007: 49). Back in 2007 Hugo Hamilton reflected on the consistency and validity of fixed identities as referents in today's world. For Hamilton, this is an old concept as there appear "different versions of home and belonging" that become fitting in the "more mobile, more 'liquid' world" ("The island" 23–4) we live in. Hamilton points to an identity construction process that undergoes deconstruction to start anew. As with the case of Patrick Kimba, Hamilton's second-generation migrant characters *un*become their "only guest" identity to become fully transcultural in their Irish identity. Accordingly, Hamilton represents transculturality as a process that entails a partial deculturation to pave the way to new cultural phenomena (Onghena 182).

Playing football opens Patrick's first contact zone at the micro level, as represented by the Square, into a wider discourse of exchange in contemporary Irish society at the macro level. The cultural space that this sport offers allows Patrick to find his self-identification as Irish within Ireland and also outside when exposed to his nationality in the UK. In the novel, Ryan provides football with importance as a place where negotiations

of Patrick's identity occur. Patrick's accommodation with his identity embodies what Pratt defends as the "contact" perspective when dealing with transculturation as it "emphasises how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other" (Pratt "*Imperial* Eyes" 8).

Accordingly, *The King of Lavender Square* represents not only processes of self-identification for Patrick; but, also, transcultural inner transformation at the micro and macro levels of Irish society, which entail a redefinition of Irishness. For Yau, "the experiences of the second generation suggest that unless attitudes change towards definitions of "Irishness", the ethnic and racial origins of other more recent and future second-generation groups will play a significant role in their self-identification" (65). Ryan depicts, if we follow Juneja, "the transcultural in its present usage [which] has become a concept and perspective that is multidirectional and multivalent" (Juneja 23). In *The King of Lavender Square*, Ryan represents transculturality in Ireland as exemplified by the realities of second-generation Irish people and, also, as the constituents of ongoing transformative processes for those around them.

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Notes

1 Susan Ryan's literary career starts with *The King of Lavender Square* as her first novel. Before its completion she writes *Restaurant Patrick Guildbaud: The First thirty Years*, a chronological account of the history of Ireland's two-star Michelin restaurant.

2 Declan Kiberd sets a starting date for a multicultural and global Ireland when he states that: "the Ireland that emerged in the later 1990s was in many ways a multicultural place" (xiv).

3 Townsend questions the validity of the terms "new" and "newness" to these peoples in Ireland: "hailed when convenient as emblems of a more prosperous, worldly, and enlightened Ireland, more often the newcomers were systematically neglected and/or scapegoated for the inequalities generated by the economic bubble" (220). The same feeling was shared in 2010 by Irish poet Celeste Augé, who also questioned this welcoming and advocated the conscious incorporation of "these 'blow-ins' into the national literature, not simply shunting them into the literary landscape as a bit of background colour" (2010).

4 See Tom Inglis, *Global Ireland: Same Difference* for an approach to the concept within the Irish discourse.

5 For Flüchter and Schöttli, the static categorisation of transculturality derives from Welsch's conceptualisation of the term and they propose the idea of

processes in cultures (2). See also König and Rakow for a chronology of the use of the term transcultural over the last nine decades.

6 The Heidelberg Cluster of excellence has based its research on this approach to transculturality as opposed to that of Welsch.

7 For Darmody et al., this is due to the "low levels of inward migration to Ireland up to the 2000s [and the] lack of data regarding parents' country of birth in available datasets" (8). See also Darmody et al. for a comprehensive analysis of research into second-generation migrants in Ireland.

8 For further details see www.growingup.ie.

9 See also the 2014 Trinity College Dublin study, *New Irish Families: A Profile of Second-Generation Children and Their Families*, which provides a snapshot of new social realities in contemporary Ireland, paying special attention to new Irish families – their composition, living and work conditions, religious and linguistic diversity and education – and the emergence of second-generation migrants. The study advances the belief that "very little is known about children born and raised in Ireland, whose families will face different challenges to those that moved here [Ireland] with their foreign-born children" (Röder et al. 1). One reason for this is that the numbers of second-generation children in Ireland were small until recently. The study reports that the largest numbers of recent migrant groups to Ireland are Poles and Lithuanians. Interestingly, the number of Congolese migrants – the group to which the Kimba family in Ryan's novel belong – is not reported. With a main framework that concludes that these new second generations "will have an important impact on the development of Irish society in the future" (Röder et al. 1), the study offers a valid approach to the term "second generation" in Ireland. Its classic definition refers to "offspring born in the host country to first generation immigrant parents" (Röder et al. 4) and presents exceptions/extensions if the children considered were brought to the host country at a young age (how young?), whether both parents were migrant, one parent migrant and one native born or when only one single parent migrates into Ireland, as is the case with Tessa Kimba in the novel.

10 Their definition includes other combinations too: both parents (or lone parent) born abroad; one (of the two parents) born abroad; both parents (or lone parent) born in Ireland. They also classify according to parental country or region of birth, the child's linguistic background and whether both parents are from an ethnic minority group, both parents are of White ethnicity, or the child is from a mixed-ethnic background (Darmody et al. 8-9).

11 Black, Asian and minority ethnic.

12 Martin's short story recounts the story of a young second-generation Chinese-Irish who considers herself a "culchie Chinese Irish" (88) and deciphers her identity relating her experiences with regard to language and identity with other white Irish and tourists to Ireland.

13 Webb's collection includes stories by immigrant female writers in Ireland, such as Morag Prunty, Cauvery Madhavan, Olutoyin Pamela Akinjobi, Ho Wei Sim and Nena Bhandari. Some of these stories recount experiences of migrants to Ireland but only Bhandari's deals with second-generation migrants.

14 Albeit of interest for the novel, Ryan makes no reference to the 2004 Citizenship Referendum, which stated that children who are born to non-Irish parents do not have the same rights as those born to Irish parents. The ideology and politics of the Irish nation-state had a say on this event, but Ryan prefers to present the acculturation of the Kimbas in Ireland. They share the Catholic religion and speak English, although French is also common in the interaction between mother and son.
15 See Carter for an examination of first-generation sport migrants to Ireland.
16 See Cronin et al. for their examination of how the GAA, Gaelic Athletic Association, has adapted to the new challenges resulting from immigration after The Celtic Tiger. For Cronin et al., "models of sporting assimilation rather than the preservation of the indigenous games of 'home' – wherever that may be – have underpinned the Irish encounter with moving across national boundaries and receiving new citizens into their home" (1011).
17 See McCarthy's *My Eyes Only Look Out* for an account of Óg's and Flemming's life experiences.
18 See McGrath's 2007 *Back from the Brink* for his memories in Dublin as a teenager attracted by football.

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10 Resistance and Activism in Queer and HIV/AIDS Irish Theatre

J. Javier Torres-Fernández

Deconstructing Queer and HIV/AIDS Cultural Narratives in Contemporary Irish Theatre

Governments and individuals have shown a tendency to avoid addressing the AIDS crisis due to the systematic stigmatisation and marginalisation of those affected by the disease. This illness, also referred to as a plague (Sontag 44) and a divine punishment (Sontag 55), has historically "been associated with socially marginalised groups such as gay men, sex workers and drug users" (Pellowski et al. 197). The widespread silence around HIV/AIDS aided political institutions internationally, where the responsibility for social support, research, and care was laid, in their position of ignoring the epidemic. As Dennis Altman argues, these factors contributed to the further dissemination of the disease and stronger systematic discrimination of people with HIV/AIDS, who were then ostracised from their communities and frequently denied access to healthcare, housing, and employment (61–63).

Under these circumstances, art became a way for activists to advocate for breaking the silence surrounding the AIDS crisis, fight for social change, and demand political intervention.[1] This chapter addresses four Irish theatre productions through a transcultural lens in a diachronic way: first, Declan Hughes's *Digging for Fire* (1991); second, Sebastian Barry's *The Pride of Parnell Street* (2007); third, Philip McMahon's *Once Before I Go* (2021); and fourth, Panti Bliss's *If These Wigs Could Talk* (2022). The purpose of this analysis is to elucidate how theatre has addressed Irishness and queerness over time with special attention to HIV/AIDS representation, and how transcultural traits from the American stage have shaped this evolution. Key aspects of transculturality that are found in the four plays are spatial mobility, cultural encounters, and border-crossing. Before delving into the selected works and their authors, contextualisation of the HIV/AIDS cultural narrative in Ireland, and how stigma has been presented historically and traditionally through literature alongside this illness need to be addressed.

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Fiona Smyth examines the Irish context in terms of the pre-existing conditions which had an influence in the development of AIDS services, and she contends that: "throughout the 1980s, homosexuality remained illegal and, therefore, health officials did not respond to the early cases of AIDS amongst gay men. Similarly, until 1993, condoms were only legally available under restricted conditions to married couples" (662). Homosexuality was only decriminalised in 1993 with same-sex marriage following the success of the Irish referendum on May 22, 2015. Cormac O'Brien argues that, despite these two major changes in LGBTIQA+ rights, HIV-positive people have been "ushered out of public sight" (O'Brien "HIV and AIDS" 125). In Ireland, even though HIV/AIDS emerged in a modern era of scientific and technological advancements, the associated symbols and representations evoke narratives and metaphors rooted in medieval notions of disease as a form of punishment in line with Catholicism. In fact, the Church bears great responsibility for the widely spread homophobia enforced by its political and moral authorities for most of the twentieth century (Carregal-Romero "The Cultural Narratives" 354). Queerness was something that needed to be cured.[2] This way, it is natural that the exploration of queerness in Irish theatre can only be traced since the mid-1990s.

In the Irish theatrical tradition and culture, "there exists but a tiny handful of plays that concern themselves with AIDS" (O'Brien "HIV and AIDS" 127). O'Brien (2013; 2020) documents the Irish canon of HIV/AIDS theatre for the first time and asserts that "all plays considered address the AIDS as punishment metaphor, either to reinforce it or challenge it" (O'Brien "HIV and AIDS" 127). He further differentiates two categories: AIDS-death dramas, which present a tragic death from AIDS as a punishment; and queer-made pieces that step outside linear storytelling and convey stories rooted in an Irish context while interrogating the challenges faced by people with HIV in Ireland (ibid)[3]. Both categories are chronologically separated by the ART[4] "treatment threshold" (Pearl "*AIDS Literature and Gay Identity*" 36), which allowed the narrative to shift from people dying from AIDS to people living with HIV. Furthermore, O'Brien observes how "the national epistemology underwriting AIDS as an Irish cultural narrative is steeped in contagion paranoia and tainted by deeply embedded institutional stigma towards HIV-positive citizens" (O'Brien "*Performing POZ*" 75). Similarly, Niklass Larson and Mike Berry report that "stigma is one of the biggest issues facing people with HIV" and emphasise "the impact that stigma has on self-esteem [and] on the everyday choices made by individuals living with HIV in Ireland" (in O'Brien "*Performing POZ*" 76 76). Hence, O'Brien further addresses queerness, HIV-positivity and Irishness as three different things that need to be reconciled (O'Brien 2013, 81).

This stigmatising cultural narrative around HIV/AIDS has accompanied the LGBTIQA+ community worldwide since the 1980s and is embodied in Irish theatre "which itself falls in line with a historical trope of the queer body being performed as a site of cultural contagion" (O'Brien 2013, 76). Queer and HIV/AIDS Irish theatre can arguably be understood as a community narrative, a story that is common to a group of people, and which may be shared through social interactions, performances, texts, etc., while telling the members of such group important things about themselves (Rappaport 4). A cultural narrative can be understood as the representation of experiences, emotions and events within a story that a society or group of people use to define their identity, values, beliefs, and even history, and so, the HIV/AIDS cultural narrative represents a shared interpretation of this disease and the response to it at both the political and personal levels. Arguably, cultural narratives play a fundamental role in shaping the way individuals and communities perceive themselves and their place in the world, and they provide a sense of continuity and connection to the past. They not only help people make sense of the present but also foster a sense of belonging and understanding among the members of the group because "the right to tell one's own story is an index of power and of psychological empowerment" (Rappaport 7).

Deconstructing the narratives of HIV and AIDS produced by institutions and reinforced through power discourses becomes fundamental in reconfiguring these narratives into viable means to reclaim the disease and its history without its stigmatising component. Following Monica B. Pearl's work, AIDS did not only cause grief, loss, and mass death, it also "disrupted identity, the ways people could think about themselves" (Pearl "AIDS and New Queer Cinema" 24). Moreover, the erasure of HIV/AIDS from the public sphere after treatment halted the virus and the reduction or absence of its cultural representations may result in further stigmatisation of the disease, inducing a "kind of cultural forgetfulness" (Decoteau 240) while also sustaining the historical stigmatising cultural narrative around the disease. Claire Laurie Decoteau further claims that the lack of attention towards HIV/AIDS history is absolving "those responsible for the unjust treatment of people living with HIV/AIDS" (240). When wondering who bears primary responsibility for the response to the AIDS crisis and the ongoing stigma around the illness and HIV-positive people, Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers and Susan Dodds argue that those in power are deemed responsible for the vulnerable and precarious conditions of others (14). When the system fails to represent its diversity, those who have no chance to represent themselves are inevitably found at a higher risk of being othered (Butler 147). The narratives that tackle HIV/AIDS following the contagion paranoia in one way or another, both those set before and after the development of ART, continue to present people affected by HIV/

AIDS as less human, whose deaths and loss do not deserve any grief or attention, even as a waste to society. Such is the case for Declan Hughes's *Digging for Fire* (1991) and Sebastian Barry's *The Pride of Parnell Street* (2007). Against this national dramaturgy of stigma and cultural amnesia, plays such as Philip McMahon's *Once Before I Go* (2021) and Panti Bliss's *If These Wigs Could Talk* (2022), which bear a strong influence from the canonical American two-part play *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (1995), written by Tony Kushner, deconstruct and reclaim the cultural narrative of HIV/AIDS in Ireland and expose the hidden and silenced history of the illness through fictional and personal experiences, respectively.

Contextualising Selected Authors and Works

Declan Hughes's *Digging for Fire* (1991) tells the story of seven college friends who reunite in Dublin for one night. Hughes captures the mood of a generation in the wake of the Celtic Tiger and presents American and English popular culture looming in the imaginations of the characters. Out of the seven friends, Danny and Emily are key for a transcultural analysis given that both are coming back from New York and suffer cultural dislocation. Danny has just published a story in the *New Yorker*, and Emily is a painter who has just had a successful exhibition. Additionally, Rory is the only gay character, a lawyer who prefers to stay on the sidelines. Even though the premise of *Digging for Fire* may be a reunion of seven old friends, in fact, it is a debate over which direction Ireland should take at a time impacted by popular culture, fast communication and alcohol. When it comes to representing HIV/AIDS, the play features an onstage yet dramatically uninvolved HIV-positive female body, Emily, who does nothing but facing a lost future prematurely terminated by young death.

Sebastian Barry's *The Pride of Parnell Street* (2007) examines the once-happy marriage of Joe and Janet as it crumbles. The marriage is scarred by the death of one of their sons and an act of domestic violence provoked by Ireland's loss in the quarter-final of the 1990 World Cup. Joe loses wife and children as they seek refuge, and he is imprisoned, eventually spiralling down into drugs and AIDS. Barry presents the HIV-positive body onstage, however, as dying, therefore situating the performance within an anachronistic discourse of medical crisis. Even though the play is set in 1999, after the ART threshold, Joe narrates his life history from his hospital bed as a heroin addict with no possible salvation. *The Pride of Parnell Street* also addresses the issues of Irishness and feeling connected to the nation, immigrants taking the best jobs off the Irish, and Dublin being considered one of the richest cities in Europe.

Philip McMahon's *Once Before I Go* (2021) follows the close friendship of Lynn, Daithí, Jase and Bernard from the 1980s and 1990s to the contemporary LGBTIQA+ community of today. The characters watch the AIDS crisis expand at home and abroad. McMahon explores the bonds of Irish queer lives across four decades in Dublin, London, and Paris. In this way, *Once Before I Go* steps between the early days of the AIDS crisis and the present, where marriage equality, gender self-determination, and untransmissible HIV are possible. The play pays homage to the bravery of queer activists who fought for equality while honouring those lost along the way. Ultimately, McMahon's work presents contrasts between now and then, here and there, and questions today's biggest challenges for society and the LGBTIQA+ community while presenting AIDS deaths without falling into the contagion paranoia, or dramaturgy of stigma, as it is the case for the two previous works.

Panti Bliss, also known as Rory O'Neill, has become a cultural icon in Ireland over the past ten years ever since her speech on the Abbey stage in 2014. Her latest work, *If These Wigs Could Talk* (2022), is a confessional autobiography which takes us on her personal life journey in a country long hostile to difference. Bliss shares tales of her life with the audience while she focuses on what it means to be a drag queen, something that was a radical act when she started. Her decades-long journey, from rejecting to embracing her Irishness, is brought feelingly to life without losing sight of the most recent reactionary temper of our times, which proves the necessity of activism, memory, and representation. Bliss tells several stories engaging with queerness, Irishness and transculturality: how her kind-hearted mother received moving letters from gay Irish men from all over the world who had fled their hostile home; and how her encounter with a young lesbian in Sarajevo reminded her of international battles not yet won in contrast with the Irish advances on gay rights in a relatively short time. This piece does not deal with AIDS or HIV, and the only time she mentions HIV/AIDS is as: "a big disease with a little name" (61). However, through transnational encounters and crossing boundaries, Bliss embodies the transcultural traits that disrupt the traditional cultural narrative which has long kept queerness ostracised from Irishness.

At this point, a brief reference to the American play *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* may provide a more comprehensive understanding of McMahon and Bliss' works. *Angels in America* presented the coming of the millennium as an opportunity to pause and critically analyse the epidemic, what had come before, and how to move forward. Kushner's style allows for a relatively thin gap between the onstage character and the actor making it hard for the audience to not become involved, even invested, in the story they are

witnessing. Cultural manifestations of queerness, including HIV/AIDS representation, have been more openly present in the last fifteen years in the Irish scene and evolved towards a more political, testimonial, and disrupting mode. *Angels* ultimately calls for political intervention and social progress, a feature later present in *Once Before I Go* and *If These Wigs Could Talk* too. But at the time when *Angels* debuted in the United States, 1991 for *Part 1: Millennium Approaches* and 1992 for *Part 2: Perestroika*, such a cultural product was still unthinkable in the Irish context. Although the Irish premiere of the first part of the production came to the Abbey Theatre in June 1995 and ran for thirty-seven performances, it does not seem to have influenced Declan Hughes and Sebastian Barry's plays, which present HIV/AIDS as a fatal disease without engaging with queerness or social change. Interestingly, it did leave an imprint in McMahon and Bliss' plays, where clear traces of intertextuality can be identified.[5] Added to its topical subject and its straightforward approach, the influence of the canonical American play in contemporary Irish productions also stems from the adaptation of Kushner's work into an HBO miniseries that reached Irish television in 2004 through Channel 4 (Kilroy).

Weakening Shame and Stigma from a Transcultural Lens

When Fiona Smyth studies the constraints on HIV/AIDS prevention in Ireland, she concludes that "the government's failure to respond to the initial cases of AIDS in the gay community, for example, was attributed to an institutional homophobia which succeeded in presenting these events as an external threat that did not affect the 'general population'" (671) and claims that "in many other countries, the experience of AIDS has encountered an equivalent initial official lethargy fuelled by similar disregards for the interests of minorities" (671). Finally, she argues that the 1990s saw a change away from Ireland's fixation with its history, an acknowledgement of many of its contemporary difficulties, and a questioning of the authority of the Catholic hierarchy due to an increasing openness surrounding sex and sexuality (671). Although these changes may have come to Ireland around the late 1990s, together with the development of ART in 1996 and the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993, cultural representations of HIV/AIDS during that time were still entrenched in the national dramaturgy of stigma. Such is the case with the first two works selected, *Digging for Fire* and *The Pride of Parnell Street*. It was only in the last fifteen years that new narratives have had a voice in the mainstream stage trying to reshape the contagion paranoia of the early days of the crisis and the persistent stigma around the disease. This is the case for *Once Before I Go* and *If These Wigs Could Talk*.

The diachronic analysis below tries to show, through a transcultural lens, how the cultural narrative has shifted from silence, stigma and death to memory, activism and testimony, and how it has fought for an Irishness that includes queerness in the equation.

The reasons behind such a change in Irish culture can only explained considering that the traditional concept of culture "cannot cope with the inner complexity of modern cultures" (Welsch 62) and that, ultimately, we are cultural hybrids, as Wolfgang Welsh contends: "for most of us, multiple cultural connections are decisive in terms of our cultural formation" (71). *Digging for Fire*, *Once Before I Go*, and *If These Wigs Could Talk* tell stories whose characters cross borders and, eventually, come back after experiencing contact with other cultures, which in turn, redefine their own. Transcultural studies argue that a culture "is constituted by processes of interaction, circulation and reconfiguration [...] constantly changing, moving, adapting" (Abu-Er-Rub et. al. xxiii). Turning back to Smyth's account for the reaction of Ireland to the HIV/AIDS crisis in contrast with the most recent narratives of Bliss and McMahon, it becomes clear that Ireland has gone through a process of transculturation, "a fundamental social and societal process that permeates not only large socio-political entities, but any kind of socio-cultural group culture" (Abu-Er-Rub et. al. xxvii). Given that, historically and traditionally, HIV/AIDS has been associated with gay men, revisitation of the epidemic through a transcultural lens allows a recontextualisation of the traditional monolithic approaches that have hidden the complexity of the crisis and undermined the marginal life experiences of those affected by the disease. So, to convey a structured analysis and a coherent identification of transcultural traits, the selected plays will be approached in pairs: first the earlier works, *Digging for Fire* and *The Pride of Parnell Street*; and then the more recent ones, *Once Before I Go* and *If These Wigs Could Talk*.

I contend that the older plays cannot be considered queer theatre because none of them presents queer characters with central roles nor poses queer struggles to the audience. On the one hand, in *Digging for Fire*, Rory, a gay lawyer, mainly keeps silent throughout the reunion, and it is Emily, a painter who just came back from the United States, who is the character that has AIDS. On the other hand, in *The Pride of Parnell Street,* Joe is a straight Irish man and a heroin addict dying from AIDS. In both examples, the HIV-positive character is never a gay man. Nevertheless, Hughes's play is essential in the transcultural approach that this chapter conveys. Although we do not get the details on how and when Emily got infected, the audience arguably senses that it happened while she was away in the States. This, drawing back from Smyth's study, goes in line with the Irish government's discourse that followed the AIDS

crisis trying "to attribute blame for this disease to other nations" (670). Consistently, in this play the disease is seen as a foreign, external threat to Ireland. Furthermore, the characters seem to be at odds with the changes that Ireland is going through at the time and confused by the media, all of which makes them question their identity and cultural borders. Breda claims, "[n]ext ten years is gonna see some serious social change in this country, and broadcasting like ours is gonna be the single most important cause of it. Just wait and see" (Hughes 10). And although Breda points out that media will have a huge impact on society, mentioning that the Irish enjoy a "*greater*" (Hughes 35, emphasis on the original) sense of community than in other countries, the play shows that "what once were the main checklist features of Irish nationality do not seem to stand the test any longer" (Altuna-García de Salazar 187). This can clearly be observed in Danny's answer to Breda's claim:

> **Danny** But I don't know what that's supposed to mean, it's just… all right, look at it this way. I grew up with the TV on (and I'm not unique in this), with England and America beaming into my brain; I never had a single moment of, I don't know, 'cultural purity'. I didn't know where I was from.
>
> (Hughes 35)

Danny's confession mirrors Edward Said's claim that "all cultures are hybrid; none of them is pure; none of them is identical to a 'pure' folk; none of them consists of a homogeneous fabric" (in Welsch 76). Danny is no longer sure of the meaning behind the sense of community that Breda is referring to and, furthermore, he asserts that there is no such thing as a unique sense of community nor is Ireland "some special little enclave" (Hughes 37). Furthermore, Danny, who exiled himself to Manhattan following his dream of becoming a successful writer has now come back to Ireland with a more daring and free perspective on change and social progress. In fact, he claims that "the chaos *is* here" (Hughes 37, emphasis in the original), meaning that change is inevitable and already happening in Ireland "as fast here as anywhere else" (Hughes 37). Like numerous other regions across the globe, Ireland encountered a process of globalisation from the 1990s onwards. This phenomenon posed a challenge to the prevailing notion that Ireland was distinct when compared to other regions worldwide. Moreover, in the specific context of Ireland, aspects such as identity, culture, and community have been inclined to recognise the impact of migration to and emigration from its shores. The influence of both challenged the established notions that have historically defined the concept of Irishness. So, when asked by his friends, Danny goes on to explain his sense of displacement and how his process of interaction,

reconfiguration and adaptation has affected his concept of Ireland and Irishness:

> **Danny** [Manhattan] felt like I was coming home. The landscape was alive in my dreams, the streets were memories from a thousand movies, the city was mine.
>
> **Steve** Well you have a sense of place, Danny. It just happens to be somebody else's place.
>
> **Danny** No it doesn't, it's as much Ireland as Dublin is; millions of Irish went out and invented it, invented it as much, probably more than any ever invented this poxy post-colonial backwater.
>
> **Breda** […] What's the big deal?
>
> **Danny** The big deal, the big deal is that *there* is as much *here* as *here* is… and I don't believe the *here* you're describing exists here. To me, *here* is more like… *there*.
>
> (Hughes 37–38)

Echoing Welsch's claim, "[y]our actual homeland can be far away from your original homeland, which was perhaps just constriction, prison, and anguish" (85), Danny redefines the concept of home as "not an outshoot of nature, but a cultural and human category" (Welsch 85) and questions the concept of borders. Now that he is back, he senses that *here* and *there* blur and mingle, and that his (and many others') invented Ireland was a chimera, a false construct. Hughes concentrates a transcultural approach in this character who experiences border and cultural-crossing at the same time.

Having observed this, I turn to the only direct reference to HIV/AIDS in the play, embodied in the limited role of Emily, who claims: "every time I tell someone I don't have time or I'm feeling tired, they're booking the plot and buying the flowers before I can blink. It's a disease, not a metaphor. It doesn't *mean* anything, it's just bad luck" (Hughes 72). At this point, *Digging for Fire* fails at delivering any representation of the disease that faithfully accounts for the situation at the time. Even if Emily herself claims that it is not a metaphor, we can clearly observe how AIDS remains a death sentence for her and those around her. Additionally, the fact that her situation is relegated to the margins might speak for the taboo and stigma that the disease carried along.

Turning to *The Pride of Parnell Street*, Joe's words resonate with the plague rhetoric of 1980s panic and with the Catholic element embedded in Irish society:

> I'm lying there, feeling like shite, like maggots was in me brain, and no doubt, friends, looking like the plague, with rats in me skull and the

> long dreepy shite coming out me nostrils, a holy show if ever there was one. Fucking hell. Like the last fucking sinner in the deep part of hell maybe.
>
> (Barry 56)

Here, poverty, heroin abuse, and HIV intertwine, making *The Pride of Parnell Street* a play with great sociopolitical significance. However, it still casts the HIV-positive body as a site of contagion and death. Joe's decease represents the socially conservative metaphor of HIV/AIDS as punishment, which, arguably is a shaming theatrical discourse that goes in line with the dramaturgy of stigma.

At the same time, the play deals with the struggle of facing migration in Ireland, always through the differentiation between the Irish and the other, and coming to terms with finding a sense of community and defining one's own identity. Here, the transcultural lens unveils the frictions and contradictions embedded within the migratory phenomenon. Recalling when "the Africans came to Parnell Street" (Barry 14), Janet wonders: "[m]aybe that was the trouble, the great yawning gap between – the fact that in the upshot, he wasn't a 'we', he wasn't winning nothing, he wasn't really *connected*, he was just fucking Joe, Joe Brady whose mother was from North Summer Street" (Barry 14). Later, Janet recalls how Joe's mother blamed migration for the precarious conditions of her son: "It wasn't just the Jews she didn't care for, it was the Africans, and the Chinese, and the Romanians, and what have you. [She said] 'They've tooken the best jobs off of the Irish and are only sponging off of the state.'" (Barry 25). Even though the protagonists of *The Pride of Parnell Street* do not cross any borders, the swift changes in Ireland and the consequences of mass migration can be observed through Joe's mother's xenophobia and the failure of the Irish state to connect with minorities, who felt displaced in their own home. This results in a double exclusion, that of the emigrant and that of the sick.

The transcultural lens in the play discloses "how the connections transform what is being connected, and who is involved (and who excluded)" (Abu-Er-Rub et. al. xxxi). Accordingly, when diagnosed with AIDS, Joe wonders why, if Dublin is now one of the richest cities in Europe, he cannot get into a programme to recover: "No, you have to fucking wait months and months to get into a fucking programme, so in the meantime you're still obliged to be on the ould heroin like, and do all the things you have to do to get it" (Barry 40). Despite being set after the treatment threshold, the play narrates the report of Joe's death from AIDS suggesting to the audience that people contract HIV because of the type of person they are, following the punishment paradox, and placing HIV-positive bodies outside of Irish society and culture. In fact, in *The Pride of Parnell Street* we

observe the failure of the governmental institutions in understanding and accepting the diverse reality of the new Irish nation. While the context is one that advocates for the reformulation of identity and a new social order under a transcultural lens, Joe and his mom represent fixation on the traditional nationalist Irish discourse.

Another work that voices the failure of the Irish to accept their diversity is *Once Before I Go*, where multiple sites and geographical connections are featured. This is characteristic of transcultural writers or "culturally mobile writers" (Dagnino "Transcultural Writers" 1) in Dagnino's words. Arguably, McMahon could be labelled as a transcultural writer in that his work shows his disposition to reclaim an inclusive vision of culture stressing the power of confluences, overlappings, and interactions rather than polarities (Dagnino "Transcultural Writers" 1). London and Paris add to Dublin a cosmopolitan perspective in favour of interconnectivity fostering interactions and exchanges. The plot is set in different places at different times: Dublin (1987), Paris (1991), and London (2019). Lynn and Bernard are siblings, and Daithí dates Bernard until he dies in Paris of AIDS. Lynn decides to move to London "as soon as humanly possible" (McMahon 44) because "[she] just can't… lesbian [in Ireland]" (McMahon 44). There, she will be able to marry Debbie, something impossible back in Dublin at the time. There seems to be no sense of belonging to the Irish society or culture in the characters of the play.

In the play, institutional neglect and social spite are claimed as excluding forces for the LGBTIQA+ community. During the first part of the play, set in Dublin in 1987, the characters tell that they suffer attacks on the streets almost daily and they conclude that they are not being treated as citizens of Ireland and claim that the only solution is to leave the country (McMahon 38)[6]. Drawing back to the relationship between Irishness and queerness, Daithí and Lynn speak of a country that does not conceive a definition of Irishness that includes queerness, so social resistance to inclusion is here represented by scolding and abuse.

Daithí and Lynn will meet again in London twenty-five years after Bernard's death. There, Daithí recalls Bernard's diagnosis and troubled death[7] and how they had to exile themselves from Dublin to Paris, where Bernard was able to receive medical attention that would have been denied in Ireland. This opens the discussion for questioning a sense of belonging or not to the nation. McMahon puts forward a set of characters that are forced to make a voyage out of their national, linguistic, and cultural boundaries and negotiate new border-crossing imaginaries. Towards the end of the play, Bernard has some sort of epiphany: "we're in that awful in-between where everything hurts, but it's because everything is growing and stretching and moving" (McMahon 73), and Daithí replies,

"no progress without pain" (McMahon 73)[8]. Here, Bernard epitomises the problematic articulation of cultural encounters that collide unveiling the conflicting forces that deny a sense of belonging to marginalised collectivities, and acknowledges the dynamics of enclosure, friction and dissonance that affect individuals painfully. In particular, *Once Before I Go* discloses resisting forces and closes with an activist tone from Bernard, who claims that AIDS has been so undignified and that he wants agency, self-determination and bodily integrity:

> […] all those things women and queers have been banging on about forever […] I know we have had to fight to justify the space we take up in the world, but in the tussle I found great meaning, and on the collective march towards [progress], I found my tribe, and in that tribe I found great love.
>
> (McMahon 86)

Like Prior in *Angels in America*, who blesses the audience with "more life" in the epilogue, Bernard blesses the audience with "more dancing"[9], referring to the safe spaces shared by the queer community in pubs where they could gather and be themselves without it posing a threat to their wellbeing. To complete the cycle, as Danny did in *Digging for Fire*, Lynn and Daithí decide to go back to Ireland taking Jase with them, who claims "why *not* Ireland? I'm open to adventure. And Google tells me it's very green" (McMahon 34, emphasis in the original). In the end, the play suggests that resistance to marginalisation is possible in 2019 Ireland and the plot ends on a positive note.

McMahon's play and Panti Bliss's *If These Wigs Could Talk* have some aspects in common. Although HIV/AIDS plays a more central role in *Once Before I Go,* it is still present in *If These Wigs Could Talk*. Bliss refers to it as "a big disease with a little name" (61) and emphasises the Irish society's inaction and the political and social stigma attached to the disease. For Bliss, drag was a "career for people who lived in the moment because they couldn't even picture a future" (Bliss 42). This statement echoes Lynn's need to flee the nation in search of the freedom and acceptance that was impossible to achieve in Ireland at the time. When turning to the struggle of being queer and Irish, she tells the audience about the letters that her mother started receiving after *The Queen of Ireland* (2015) aired, an Irish documentary film focusing on her that led to the historic referendum on marriage equality:

> The letters were all from older Irish men who had left Ireland in the 60s/70s/80s – men who had run out of Ireland – driven out – by a country

> that didn't want them. Men who had escaped. Men who wanted their story to be happier and more honest than it ever could have been had they stayed.
>
> (Bliss 59)

The conflict between Irishness and queerness is at the centre of Bliss' life and work: she exiled herself from Ireland to Japan where she "renounced [her] Irishness in favour of drag" because "drag queens weren't from Ireland" (Bliss 64). Bliss contests the limitations of identifying as "Irish" and the exclusive nation framework it entails and it is precisely her living abroad that empowers her to identify as "drag", a category that eludes geographical limitations. If McMahon can be labelled as a transcultural writer because his work transcends the borders of a single culture and his vision and scope promote a wider perspective, then Bliss can also be deemed as a transcultural creator in Dagnino's terms. In other words, given that she has experienced cultural dislocation, lived transnational experiences and exposed herself to diversity nurturing plural and flexible identities (Dagnino "Transcultural Writers" 1), Bliss stands as a culturally mobile writer.

But, just like Danny in *Digging for Fire*, and Daithí and Lynn in *Once Before I Go*, Bliss returns to Ireland where she notices the recent transformations taking place in her homeland:

> I love being Irish now. I love being in Ireland. But not because I changed. I didn't. Because Ireland changed. I was still the same queen who'd been pushed out […]. I had left because I felt excluded – not just from the country, but from Irishness *itself*. The country I left had a very rigid definition of Irishness, a whole list of boxes you had to tick and I didn't tick most of them. There was no box for queerness. I had left because there was no room for me here.
>
> (Bliss 65)

These lines open a variety of paths for exploration that ultimately lead to the transformations undertaken by the country in recent years, a country that once tried to disown her and that now collectively embraces her and her community. Towards the end of *If These Wigs Could Talk*, it becomes evident that the play speaks of cultural encounters and crossing boundaries. She recalls doing a show at a small theatre in Sarajevo, where even attending was "a small act of defiance – even bravery" (69). After the show, a seventeen-year-old lesbian approached her and thanked her for going to Sarajevo. For this young woman, listening to Bliss' Irish experience and the recent social changes in Ireland proves that "deep and dramatic social change *is* possible, and it's possible in a relatively short

period of time. Ireland's story is a story of possibility and hope. And to a seventeen-year-old lesbian in Sarajevo, it's a lifeline" (Bliss 69–70, emphasis in the original). Transculturality detects, analyses and assesses "asymmetrical tensions, hierarchies and contestations", and how they impact connectivities and disconnectivities (Abu-Er-Rub et. al. xxix). In *If These Wigs Could Talk*, the tensions between Dublin and Sarajevo resemble the tensions once existing between Dublin and London or Paris, as presented in *Once Before I Go*. Placing diversity at the centre of societal, political and cultural change is achieved through "processes such as globalisation, decolonisation, migration, and mediatisation" (Pelillo-Hestermeyer 2). This is key since Bliss acts as a mediator in Sarajevo. In fact, and in line with McMahon's work, *If These Wigs Could Talk* exhibits a transcultural essence given that it presents a physical and conceptual journey that transgresses the boundaries of Irish society and culture and inspires new imaginaries. The play shows that "while transcultural connectivities can potentially affect any member of a given society, there are groups – or types – of agents which merit special attention, because they may play a central role in the circulation of an idea, or a matter" (Abu-Er-Rub et. al. xxxii). And such is the case of Bliss, today a cultural icon of Ireland.

Conclusion

This diachronic analysis of the selected plays has paid special attention to the notions of queerness, Irishness, and the representation of HIV/AIDS. While the earlier works deal with the disease by presenting it as a death sentence or under the punishment metaphor, the more recent works show how the understanding of the disease and the identities of Irish queer people have been shaped by issues of border-crossing, cultural encounters, and mobility.

Although *Digging for Fire* and *The Pride of Parnell Street* cannot be considered queer theatre, nor are they strictly HIV/AIDS pieces, both plays pose struggles related to identity and Irishness. Hughes's work addresses cultural purity and dislocation, two topics common to many Irish narratives of migration. The play, premiered in 1991, acknowledges that through Irish migration cultural encounters and border-crossing remain at the core of Irishness and the country's history. In a similar vein, Barry's work recognises the diversity embedded in the Irish nation and its people, but in this case, diversity is rejected. In these two plays, Irish culture redefinition draws upon migration and xenophobia as means of exclusion and queerness and activism seem to remain out of the social change that Ireland is undergoing at the time the plays are set.

Against this tradition, *Once Before I Go* and *If These Wigs Could Talk* put forward questions of institutional responsibility in the AIDS crisis, find refuge in exile, and criticise the fact that queerness has been historically

omitted from traditional definitions of Irishness. This way, both plays engage with crossing national and cultural borders, something inherent in transcultural literature.

This scrutiny of the selected plays accounts for a redefinition of Irishness that includes queerness, HIV/AIDS and the LGBTIQA+ community. The nature and style of McMahon and Bliss's works differ from Hughes and Barry's in their direct address of the previously silenced experiences of the LGBTIQA+ community, and in the way of approaching and representing HIV/AIDS onstage. Considering the key transcultural traits weaved into the fabric of *Once Before I Go* and *If These Wigs Could Talk*, we can conclude that McMahon and Bliss can be deemed transcultural writers who reclaim acknowledgement of the intergenerational trauma of AIDS and its narrative in Ireland and fight to awaken society from what seems to be a state of cultural amnesia. In sum, the process that the Irish queer theatre landscape is undergoing fares towards a more political, testimonial, disrupting and transcultural one.

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Notes

1 Deepening into these art manifestations dealing with HIV/AIDS, Richard Canning claims that the cultural representation of HIV/AIDS has diminished sharply even though the number of HIV-positive diagnoses in most Western populations has increased dramatically. Additionally, when tackling the production and expression of creative responses to HIV/AIDS, he identifies shame as a universal factor in these narratives (134).
2 On a cautionary note, it must be said that suppression of queer lives and experiences, as well of HIV/AIDS narratives, is not exclusive to Ireland nor only perpetuated by the Church, social hostility to the LGBTIQA+ community and their exclusion reached medical discourse in the early 1990s, when the World Health Organization ceased to list homosexuality as a mental disorder.
3 This phenomenon has also been registered beyond the Irish borders. According to David Román, the HIV/AIDS discourse changed from crisis and death to survival and living as people learned to live with HIV rather than die from AIDS (374).
4 The treatment for HIV is called antiretroviral therapy (ART), which involves taking a combination of medicines every day. Despite not being able to cure it,

the treatment helps people with HIV live longer and healthier lives while reducing the risk of transmission. The aim is to lower the viral load to an undetectable level so that it is untransmissible to others through sex.

5 In this vein, McMahon confirms that there is no *Once Before I Go* without *Angels in America*, referring to the latter as a benchmark (in Torres-Fernández). A different case is Colm Tóibín's fiction from the late 1990s, for example, which was influenced by earlier Irish works that included queerness and HIV/AIDS representations.

6 Lynn's statement about queer people not being citizens of Ireland is one of the clear traces of intertextuality between *Once Before I Go* and *Angels in America*, when the protagonist claims the following in the epilogue: "We won't die secret deaths anymore. The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. Time has come" (Kushner 290).

7 Although not a play, for the purpose of context in relation to the Irish queer literary landscape, Colm Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship* (1999), set in 1993 rural Ireland, represents the first sympathetic AIDS narrative telling the story of Declan, who comes back home to die after being sick with AIDS (see Carregal-Romero 2016; Yebra 2015). Colm Tóibín's work was avant-garde in 1999 and, as Carregal-Romero claims, *The Blackwater Lightship* promotes recognition and inclusivity in a society that had just recently decriminalized homosexuality (2023: 72). However, this cultural representation of HIV/AIDS differs from McMahon's and Kushner's, who address the struggle and experience of HIV and AIDS in a more direct and activist way. Thus, the style in Kushner's and McMahon's work separates them from the silence and secrecy characteristic of Tóibín's fiction. This way, arguably, McMahon's play would be influenced by Kushner's rather than Tóibín's.

8 Similar to Danny's feeling of imminent change in *Digging for Fire*, Bernard's last sentences in *Once Before I Go* clearly resonate again with *Angels in America*: "Nothing's lost forever. In this world, there is a kind of painful progress. Longing for what we've left behind and dreaming ahead" (Kushner 285).

9 Bernard's blessing constitutes another clear trace of intertextuality between McMahon's and Kushner's works. I argue that Bernard is indeed blessing the audience with more life, just as Prior does in *Angels*, if we understand pubs as the safe and hidden spaces where the queer community was able to truly live and express their queerness or identities. Bearing in mind that the transcultural lens pays attention to "connections and relations, discontinuities and frictions, not only among nation-states and their predecessors (kingdom, empires) but also among stateless societies, transnational organisations, institutions, languages and media" (Abu-Er-Rub et al., xxxi), the influence of *Angels* demonstrates the cultural tensions and international transfers that occur in the Irish scene. Contrary to the current situation in the United States, where representation of HIV and AIDS in theatre is marginal, the work of Bliss and McMahon represent a great part of an Irish resistance to the wider cultural amnesia in Western countries around the disease, its history, and present-day situation.

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Coda

11 The Past, the Present and the Wonderful, Worrisome Future

Transculturalism, Memory and Crisis in Irish Studies

Gerry Smyth

I

In 2003 the Translation Studies expert Professor Michael Cronin published an unusual little book called *Time Tracks: Scenes from the Irish Everyday*. The blurb reads:

> Did you ever watch the butter in your Marietta sandwich ooze through the pinpricks on the surface like inquisitive earthworms? Do you remember the hum and song of the extinct bus conductor, his fingers raking through the change? Did you ever toast bread on a one-bar electric fire or doze in the glow of a Super Ser? Or did you ever panic on the telephone as a distant voice shouted 'Press button A! Press button A!'

Like most people who grew up in Ireland in the latter decades of the twentieth century, I can answer "Yes" to most of these questions. Michael Cronin and I attended the same primary school – Firhouse National, seven miles or so south of Dublin city centre – where he was one year ahead of me. We grew up at the same time in more or less the same place, so it's no wonder that the "Irish everyday" of our childhood was substantially the same.

The world described in *Time Tracks* has almost completely disappeared, cut away across the intervening years by a range of economic, technological and cultural developments. That's as it must be, and as it should be. Twenty-first-century Ireland is quite clearly a more cosmopolitan, more connected, more complicated prospect than that insular land of living memory. In ways too plentiful and too obvious to enumerate, we are all conspicuously "transcultural" now.

But could it be that the Ireland of our childhood was actually a more complex place than memory might allow? The opening chapter of *Time Tracks* (on the subject of biscuits) would seem to suggest so. Partly this is to do with Professor Cronin's reframing of his own memories – from the

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perspective of an adult looking back on his own childhood, certainly, but also from the perspective of an academic well read in theories of translation and postcolonialism. His training will have primed him to appreciate that the journey from one language to another parallels the journey from the past to the future, and that the relationship between each element is volatile and fraught. The simplicity of the remembered world is belied by the complexities which, unrealised by the youthful protagonist, overlay and thoroughly inform it. For it turns out that Ireland was already a deeply unstable world – a "transcultural" world, in fact, in which "elsewhere" had crept, much of the time unnoticed and unremarked, into the corners of everyday life.

As a specialist in French literature, it's no surprise that Marcel Proust's colossal act of literary remembering (sparked by a similarly innocuous confection) is invoked immediately in Professor Cronin's discourse. After that, the nationalities proliferate: besides France, in the first chapter alone we discern the presence of the United States, England, Belgium, Italy, South Africa, Japan, Russia and Spain. Sometimes this presence may be no more than the name of a biscuit: "Kimberly", for example – its frankly disappointing reality mitigated by the association with an exotic elsewhere. "Ireland" remains the organising idea, the centripetal force, as it were, but the experience of "Irishness" is fundamentally displaced – the texture of its lived reality threaded through with strands of experience (sounds and smells, colours and tastes, images and attitudes) derived from many different times and places. "Ireland", as Fintan O'Toole once remarked, "is something that often happens elsewhere" (O'Toole "*We Don't Know* Ourselves" 27).

In the years after the revolution, Ireland's postcolonial condition had launched the island on a programme of strict, almost pathological, identity formation, and this condition was still very much in the ascendancy in the 1960s and 1970s. The nation state was the "natural" unit of geopolitical organisation; that's what Irish men and women had fought so hard over so long a period to establish. But Professor Cronin's book describes a world that is at the very least aspirationally transcultural – a world opening up to "the other", whenever, wherever and however encountered.

Time Tracks speaks to the central issue I wish to address in this chapter: the confluence of memory, crisis and identity in modern Irish life, and the various ways in which that nexus has been played out in a range of professional (such as academia) and personal (such as popular music) discourses. I begin by turning to two acts of remembering by high-profile modern Irish figures.

II

In 2021 the *Irish Times* journalist Fintan O'Toole published *We Don't Know Ourselves: A Personal History of Ireland Since 1958*. It's a long

(over 600 pages), idiosyncratic overview of the country across six decades, commencing with the author's birth and finishing with the devastating economic crash of 2008 and its protracted aftermath. O'Toole's subject is the recent past; but he's not an historian, and this is certainly not "standard" historiography. The method, rather, is to analyse a particular event or trend from each consecutive year with a view to understanding Ireland's tortuous career through the late twentieth century, as the island struggled to come to terms with its independent status. So, we have chapters on the IRA's "Border Campaign" of the late 1950s; the O'Toole family's move to the working-class southside district of Crumlin; the Irish Army's peace-keeping experiences in the Congo; the advent of Irish television and the extended influence of legendary broadcaster Gay Byrne; J.F.K's state visit; the influence of the Christian Brothers order on Irish education; the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Rising; the growing influence of popular culture, and especially popular music; the "contraceptive trains" and the ongoing moral panic relating to sex in Irish life; the commencement of "the Troubles"; and so on.

As someone of a similar age to O'Toole (he is three years older) and from a similar working-class southside background, I read this material with a frisson of recognition: in fact I'm deeply familiar (as with *Time Tracks*) with the general milieu described in his book. I too was obsessed with English football and English popular music; I lived in almost constant fear of random violence on the streets and in the schools; I served mass for a number of years and nervously shared the sacristy with a variety of priests; and from the small south Dublin village of Firhouse I witnessed the commencement of the city's metamorphosis from minor provincial town to sprawling post-industrial metropolis.

O'Toole also writes forcefully about the sexual exploitation that was both open and endemic in Irish life right up until the 1990s. Describing his encounter with Archbishop John Charles McQuaid while serving as an altar boy at Saint Bernadette's Church on Clogher Road in Crumlin, he remarks that even as the cleric was stroking the heads and faces of altar boys (including the author), he was fully apprised of a nationwide network of paedophile clergy operating under his jurisdiction. One such priest was Father Paul McGennis, chaplain of the nearby Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin; another was Father Ivan Payne, McQuade's own choice (in February 1968) as McGennis's replacement. "Over the next six years", O'Toole writes, "Payne abused at least sixteen children there, almost all of them boys" (O'Toole "*We Don't Know Ourselves*" 166).

Over three days in July 1971, I developed a condition called osteomyelitis, a bone infection caused by bacteria or fungi which in children usually affects the arms or legs. One Saturday night I was admitted to Our Lady's Children's Hospital with a temperature of 104°; the following morning

I underwent an operation which saved (certainly) my leg and (possibly) my life. I spent the next eight weeks (practically the entire summer holiday period) recuperating on a four-bed ward that I shared with a constantly changing roster of ill boys of a similar age.

Although I had many visitors during my convalescence – neighbours, schoolfriends and extended family – what I chiefly remember is that my father visited the ward every single night of my stay. I checked this subsequently with my mother, and she assured me such indeed was the case: he *was* there every single evening after work. Over the years since, this fact has always perplexed me. Not untypically of working-class Dublin fathers, mine was a fairly remote figure during early childhood. I recall he encouraged my interest in football, but apart from that he was by and large absent from the day-to-day life of the home which, as in so many twentieth-century Irish households, was predominantly a female domain. I was devastated when my father died in a car crash in October 1974, but only learned later, from my mother and siblings, of his profile as a functioning alcoholic, and his generally poor reputation in the wider family circle.

But how to reconcile this with his appearance at my bedside in that dreary hospital ward every evening over the summer of 1971? My surmise is that he and his drinking buddies were aware of the reputation of the hospital as a centre for clerical criminality, and that his presence was intended as a means to let hospital staff (both medical and clerical) know that I wasn't unprotected. I've since discovered that a strong anti-clerical strain ran through my father's working-class background; that he was a Dublin Labour man who had spent time in Birmingham during the 1930s and the early years of the Second World War; and that he disdained the influence of Fine Gael "fascists" on the one hand and Fianna Fáil "culchies" on the other. Although only a "Corpo" (Dublin Corporation) bin-man, he was not (so I imagine) going to leave any son of his to be preyed on by the likes of Father Ivan Payne.

I don't know if this account is true; and I don't know if my father's actions at that time saved me from a fate suffered by a distressingly large number of my contemporaries. I don't know how many, or if any, of the boys with whom I shared a ward in the summer of 1971 may have been abused. But I do know that to be thrust retrospectively into Irish history in this manner has been unsettling. It has brought history home, so to speak, in a way that even a long career spent reading and writing about modern Irish history cannot and could never. History is one thing when you read about it, entirely another when you live it. It's also sensitised me to what might be described as "the aesthetics of permanent crisis" – by which I mean the relentless insinuation of moral and emotional insecurity into the lived reality of everyday experience.

III

Losing a parent at an impressionable age is an experience I share with fellow Dubliner Paul Hewson, also known as Bono, lead singer with the rock group U2. Hewson was fourteen when his mother died of a cerebral aneurysm on 10 September 1974; I was thirteen when, just under a month later, my father died along with two other men in a car whose driver was inebriated. Like O'Toole, Bono has recently published a memoir which includes extensive material on the experience of growing up as a working-class boy in Dublin in the 1960s and 1970s. (These books may have been long in the planning, incidentally, but it's interesting to note that they were both published in the shadow of COVID-19.) And as with *We Don't Know Ourselves*, I found myself reading *Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story* (at least, the opening ten chapters or so) in a mood of wistful and slightly uncanny recognition, as that hazy half-forgotten world of a half-century ago began to come into focus once more before my eyes.

This was a world of *Top of the Pops* and *Kojak* and *The Man from Atlantis*; of Charlie George and Malcolm Macdonald and George Best; of Cadbury's *Smash* and cornflakes and *Jamaica Ginger Cake* (best consumed with a pint of cold full-fat milk). It was a world of the Friday night Youth Club and the boot boy threat on the way home; of Ian Paisley and Bernadette Devlin and Gerry Fitt; of the chess club and the parka and *Major* cigarettes. Differences, too: unlike the Hewson household there was for us no colour television, no telephone, no stereo – we need always remind ourselves that "working class" refers not to a definition as such but to a spectrum of experience. As a teenager Hewson attended the progressive Mount Temple Comprehensive School in Clontarf on the northside, which was co-ed and non-denominational; I attended another product of the educational reforms of the 1960s: Tallaght Community School in southside Balrothery where (unlike Mount Temple) there *was* a uniform policy and there *were* priests and Christian Brothers roaming the corridors.

Every moment in history is "modern" to itself (this is what makes the ideas of late nineteenth-century "modernity" and twentieth-century "modernism" so strange in some respects); and every moment may be regarded as being in transition to a greater or lesser degree – transition between what was, what is, and what is in the process of becoming. Or rather: what seems to have been, what seems to be, and what seems to be emerging. Dublin in the 1960s and '70s was "modern" to itself, no doubt; but it was a world in which the bones of the past were clearly visible beneath the skin of the present, discernible in the architecture, the culture, the politics, the language, and the attitudes of everyday life. But how did these trajectories

align? How far were the future and the present determined by a past over which there was such contention?

And it was a world of music, of so many different styles and genres of music, about which everyone had the inalienable right to an opinion: throw-away pop blaring from the radio and the television; elder sibling records left over from rock's first glorious decade (even some "78s" from goodness knows where); ballads and traditional "ceilidh" music from Ireland's take on the international post-war folk revival; local heroes like Horslips and Lizzy and Rory and Van; a huge catalogue of easy-listening songs which our parents (including my father) would "croon" at parties when they had taken a few. And there was "serious" music which indicated that you were ready to take it to the next level: Bowie, Roxy, Sabbath, Purple, Floyd, with jazz, sucking on a foul-smelling Gitanes cigarette in the corner. Like Hewson's brother Norman, at some point I acquired a copy of a Beatles song book which besides lyrics and guitar chords included some surreal accompanying images; and with a guitar acquired for £15.00 for my fifteenth birthday from the record store in Rathfarnham Shopping Centre I learned every song in that book.

Music mattered deeply and desperately. It was a badge of identity, certainly; in the unforgiving world of teenage status, possessing a record by Yes or Jethro Tull said something vital about you as a person, as indeed did ownership of one by the Bay City Rollers. It had consequences. More than that, however, music pointed up the limitations of the "real world" – the grey, damaged city whose streets we walked and whose buildings we occupied. It offered an escape from the dysfunctional version of "modernity" into which Irish history seemed to be locked; and it operated as a series of portals to imagined worlds – extraordinary, colourful worlds where everything worked differently, and where every emotion, every relationship was supercharged with significance. I could not have articulated it at the time, but the truth is now clear: because of its unruliness, its wanton disrespect for "official" borders and boundaries, its viral defiance of any form of containment, music is the transcultural cultural practice *par excellence*.

This was the world in which, in the *annus mirabilis* of 1977, punk rock exploded. There followed an extraordinary five years of "New Wave" in which popular music was re-imagined for a generation stranded (had they known it) between world views and cultural moments. Punk was not a music of contemplation or reflection: it was a music of the streets and the pub and the barricades, a music of crisis. My Hallelujah moment was hearing "White Riot" by the Clash, dropped by an overly-ambitious amateur DJ at the Christmas School Party in December 1977, much to the alarm and annoyance of the supervising staff. What was this? What were these maniacs singing about, how did they make that wall of noise, and why had I never heard it on mainstream radio? Like teenage boys the

world over, suddenly it seemed vitally important that I join a band in order to immerse myself in this world as quickly and as fully as possible.

And that's where Mr Hewson and I part ways.

There's a theory (with cultural, philosophical and neurological dimensions to it) that the music one encounters during the later teenage years comes to represent the normality against which all other musical experiences are measured (Jakubowski *et al*; Loveday, Woy and Conway). I hear this: the music comes and goes, but somehow in my head it's always December 1977 and the song is always "White Riot". At some level, I still want a riot of my own.

IV

From the personal to the professional.

Nearly thirty years ago I was engaged in the research that would form the basis of my PhD thesis. The project was eventually titled *Decolonisation and Criticism: The Construction of Irish Literature*, a monograph version of which was published by Pluto Press in 1998. The research was an attempt to bring some of the ideas emerging from contemporary postcolonial and poststructuralist theory to bear on the field of Irish Studies. It was a heady time for the field, when the confluence of "Derry and Derrida" (in the words of the late Seamus Deane) infused the study of Irish cultural history with tremendous energy and vitality. In the twin shadows of the Celtic Tiger and the Peace Process, there was a sense that criticism *mattered* – that the debates relating to Irish cultural history were locked into real-time events and real-life experience.

The informing method of *Decolonisation and Criticism* was to consider the relationship between literary discourse (sometimes regarded or referred to as the "primary" text) and the great variety and extraordinary amount of secondary critical discourses that the *idea* of literature has generated throughout the modern era. This covered practices such as formal literary criticism of the kind with which most readers will be familiar – writing articles and chapters and books and so on. I'm referring here to a kind of discourse that takes place under the auspices of institutions such as universities and academic publishing houses. And then of course there's all the other practices – all the other ways in which judgements of value and worth and functionality are generated in relation to literary discourse: book festivals and book clubs, literary prizes, public reviews, bookshop provision, curriculum design, public media, alternative media adaptations (television, film, radio, audiobooks), and so on.

My point at the time was that the relationship between literary and critical discourses was in some important senses an echo of the relationship that postcolonial theory postulated between colonial power and

those decolonising agents and practices which opposed colonialism. In poststructuralist mode I pointed out that, because it shares its mode of expression – written text, textuality – with its object, literary criticism offers a particular instance of the "dangerous supplementarity" that Derrida discovered operating at large throughout western history (141–64). Criticism, in short, was, and always has been, a discourse in crisis (the words are etymologically linked). One of the source thinkers for poststructuralism explained: "the notion of crisis and that of criticism are very closely linked, so much so that one could state that all true criticism occurs in the mode of crisis". The person who wrote these words was Paul de Man (8), whose own deeply problematic profile as a Nazi collaborator seems to exemplify the idea that all critical discourse is always conceptualised and formalised under the sign of crisis.

If criticism is haunted by crisis, then Irish criticism is doubly so – or so my research of three decades ago led me to conclude. In *Decolonisation and Criticism* I argued that, comprised of a dispersed array of influences (including eighteenth-century Celticism, nineteen-century romanticism, and early twentieth-century modernism), Irish Studies emerged during the political crisis of the 1920s; and, typically, of all cultural practices conceived under the influence of colonialism, it had continued to bear the imprint of that political and cultural crisis into the present (that being the 1990s). There was nothing particularly novel about this point: everyone knew that Ireland had produced an unrivalled collection of literary figures during the modern era – that pantheon of dead white guys whose names were reverently recited whenever two or three students of Irish cultural history were gathered together. What it had *not* been able to produce was a cultural critical tradition worthy of those figures. Irish cultural criticism tended to be conflicted about its object and anxious about its methods; conflicted about the language in which it operated (English) and highly anxious about the geopolitical entity (Ireland) in whose name and under whose auspices it carried out its work. The typical gestures of the critical mind – describing and defining and evaluating and so forth – were always particularly fraught in Ireland, weighed down by the baggage of previous descriptions and definitions and evaluations. Irish literary criticism was assailed on the one hand by the genius of its object, and on the other by the brittleness of its own identity.

V

I've suggested that all critical discourse operates under the sign of crisis; at this point I would like to suggest that the Irish engagement with revisionism and postcolonialism since the 1970s has consolidated and foregrounded that sense of crisis. An intellectual crisis occurs when antagonistic agents

struggle to find common terms of reference with which to conduct their debates. And this is precisely what happened in Ireland during the period of the so-called Celtic Tiger, when scholars battled over the very terms in which any exchange relating to Irish identity and Irish history could be sensibly articulated. Of course, in some ways this is not at all uncommon: once upon a time, when critical theory was all the rage in the humanities, people were very fond of quoting Michel Foucault's dictum from his essay "The Order of Discourse" that "discourse is the power which is to be seized" (53). What else are the contentions between revisionists and anti-revisionists, and post-colonialists and neo-nationalists, but an attempt to seize the terms of discourse?

It's a truism to observe that the metaphorical "battles" for Irish identity waged during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were shockingly concretised by the events of 1916, the War of Independence, and the Civil War. It seems to me that the decades since the Irish culture wars of the late twentieth century have witnessed a similar pattern, in which the metaphor of "crisis" has been rendered shockingly real and immediate. Again, I allude to a series of developments with which the reader will be no doubt familiar. The financial crash of 2008 led to the demise of the Celtic Tiger, the normalisation of austerity, and the corrosive loss of faith in Irish public life. The ongoing scandal (or series of scandals) relating to pastoral care – in particular, the series of appalling revelations relating to the historical mission of the Catholic Church in Ireland – has been traumatic, to say the least. Very few people of that pre-Tiger generation (myself included) have not been touched in some measure or degree by that scandal.

It was in the face of these brutal realities that the theory wars of the 1990s and 2000s began to seem to me inadequate in a number of respects. Certainly, it was possible to diagnose Ireland's parlous economic record, as well as its egregious social care record, as, in some senses, symptoms of the traumatic process of decolonisation. History shows us that Britain always regarded Ireland as being unable to keep its house in order – either economically or morally – and now here was proof: the children of the revolution repeating the sins of their parents. By the same token, revisionism could invoke the unhealthy state-church liaison that filled the power vacuum after the Treaty, while also pointing out that any self-regulating institution (such as the Catholic Church) arrogating so much social influence to itself was bound to be corrupt.

Such interpretations are certainly valid. Being "valid", however, seems a little beside the point in the face of crises of the kind and magnitude that I alluded to earlier. It's as if we were attempting to complete a complicated theory puzzle while the object itself – Ireland – was disintegrating all around us.

VI

I'm reaching here for a discourse in which the previous sections might somehow be linked: a position in which personal memory and professional analysis may be brought together under the sign of crisis. I do so because it seems to me that "crisis" has become the defining characteristic of "the new normal" within which we all find ourselves operating all the time. This "new normal" describes a difference in *kind* rather than of *size* or *amount* or *degree*; and it has been generated by a series of events and practices that have accumulated in the half century since my childhood, and the quarter century since the publication of *Decolonisation and Criticism*. Any list would have to include the crash of 2008 and the demise of the Celtic Tiger; Brexit, which, as an Irishman living in Britain, I regard (along with over half of the voting population of the UK) as an unmitigated economic and political disaster; the rise of political populism, embodied in two of the most inept and self-serving leaders the world has probably ever known; the advent of Artificial Intelligence, which to my understanding represents the single most potent threat to the humanities (perhaps to human civilisation) in history; the emergence of COVID-19 and the devastating impact that the pandemic continues to have on the economic and political stability of the world; and the ongoing (as I write in 2023) wars in Ukraine and Palestine, which seem to have plunged us back into an age of Cold War politics which most decent people hoped had disappeared for ever.

Most of all, however, I think of environmental crisis, and of our extraordinary ability to carry on as if this were simply an old-style isolated, containable "issue" – that, with a bit of tweaking here, and a little adjustment there, everything, in the words of the poet Derek Mahon, is going to be all right. The fact is that scientists from many different disciplines continue to assure us that such is not the case: that without pro-active intervention, everything is most definitely *not* going to be all right. The kind of doublethink that enables us to ignore, even to extend, environmental damage seems to me to represent a kind of collective psychosis and reminds me of a proverb I encountered when living in Spain many years ago: take what you want, and pay for it.

The first clause registers an opportunity, the second an obligation and a debt.

So, my question becomes: how do these issues fit together? Firstly, that early lost world I share with Michael Cronin, Fintan O'Toole and Paul Hewson, a damaged world reaching desperately for a cogent temporality but hindered at every turn by its own past; a world in which danger lurked below every surface, and where music came to function as both consolation and escape route. Secondly, the mid-life honing of a professional

critical reflex, the identification of "crisis" as the animating ethos of criticism, and the search (increasingly forlorn as the years pass) for both a form and a language within which to explicate the textual records of the past. And finally, this current sense that insidious "crisis" is in fact "the new normal", as pervasive as the air we breathe.

Other questions follow: how does an academic practice born of and fully attuned to a discourse of crisis engage with this new moment of permanent (perhaps terminal) crisis into which we seem to have entered? Can the Irish critical tradition speak to our present moment in any way that's meaningful; can any national cultural project remain feasible – politically or ethically – at a time when the global agenda is so pressing? We took what we wanted, now the time to pay looms menacingly. Is it time for a rethink, or more radically a re-orientation of intellectual energy away from the crisis of the past to the crises – multiple and varied – of the present and the future? Memory, criticism, crisis: it sounds like the title of a research project. Or perhaps an epitaph.

VII

I'm not sure how this leaves me besides possessed of a vague anxiety with the way in which Irish Studies has developed as an institutional field or as an intellectual discipline. I accept that this is partly (perhaps predominantly) an effect of age and status and experience; I realise that having less of an investment in the field means that I am more amenable to the prospect of an end to business as usual. But for someone who has been working at somewhat of a tangent to the field for a number of years now, I observe its ongoing operation with a degree of frustration which at times tips over into alarm.

I don't have the space to undertake the kind of root and branch revision towards which I am vaguely gesturing in this short chapter. In very general terms I suspect it may involve acknowledgement of that transcultural strand which has always shadowed modern Ireland's obsession with its own identity. More urgently, it may also involve some kind of rapprochement between complementary "green" narratives: on the one hand the "emerald green" associated with one predominant strand of Irish cultural history, on the other, the "ecological green" which is addressed to the planet's distressingly fragile condition – a condition which only the most mendacious and myopic can continue to disavow.

Twenty-two years ago, three years after the publication of *Decolonisation and Criticism*, I suggested in a book called *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* that because of their shared concern with a wide range of issues, Irish Studies and the then still-developing field of ecocriticism would probably have a lot to say to each other. That conversation has been

enjoined in some measure; in particular, some of the work emerging from the Irish take on postcolonialism (especially in regard of its concern with issues of discursive space and environmental justice) has been instructive (Cusick; Potts; Wall; Wenzel). And it's true to say that there have been other impressive initiatives and interventions; the work of the late Tim Robinson, for example, offers a platform from which a truly transformative critical practice might spring. But with the enemy at the gates, so to speak, it's been disappointing to observe the relative failure of a widespread, deep-diving Irish ecocriticism to emerge.

This is all the more surprising when we consider the degree to which the idea of crisis is already embedded within the Irish critical imagination. Among other things, *Decolonisation and Criticism* offered an account of the way in which each generation of Irish critics was obliged to renegotiate the prospect of crisis in its own way, with reference to different theoretical models, employing a range of different languages and concepts. In the light of this, I believe that there are three potential modes in which a re-imagined Irish Studies could begin to re-orient itself more impactfully – towards its own past, certainly, but more pressingly towards a present moment in which it risks a kind of culpable redundancy.

Firstly, Irish cultural criticism should seek out and highlight the historical manifestation of transcultural "otherness" within the body of the Irish "real" – which is to say: those "processual" instances when the borders of national reality are transgressed or exposed in some way, and the social reality of Irish identity is (as a consequence) materially and ideologically reshaped. I'm convinced that the study of popular music could lead the way on this project.

Secondly, Irish cultural criticism should foreground its traditional engagement with a range of themes which resonate within an environmentalist context – themes such as environmental justice, the imagined spaces of the nation, and the historical idea of Ireland as possessed of a special relationship with nature. To do so would require: a) refocusing the country's geopolitical status; b) renegotiating the network of relationships within which it currently operates; and c) imagining a different future. In other words: a lot of work.

And finally, Irish criticism can seek ways to deploy its deep familiarity with the idea of crisis, born of long experience and extensive experimentation. This may not amount to a riot, but it would constitute a start.

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Index