University of Reading

Postcolonial Theory and Literary Practice in Ireland, 1980-2015: Roddy Doyle and Anne Enright

PhD

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'Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.'

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Abstract

This thesis analyses depictions of nationhood and identity in some contemporary Irish fictions through a postcolonial lens. In particular, the thesis focuses on two writers, Roddy Doyle and Anne Enright, and a specific period, namely the beginning of the 1980s, when postcolonial theory first started to develop in Ireland, and 2015, when Enright's novel *The Green Road* was published. Fiction, and literature more in general, is affected by socio-historical events, and in turn effects potential for social change and transformation. This means that revising Irish identity is also, partly, revising the historical, political and social events that contributed to its construction, and now to its re-invention. This history is referred to by my chosen writers, and their novels engage with historical events and what they mean to the present, both national and individual. I have explored the joint phenomenon of changes in Irish society and the rise of postcolonial theory in the Irish academy, focusing on the relationship between narrative and its context, on definitions and perceptions of Irishness, and on disjointed narrative as a projection of displacement and uprootedness as seen against a postcolonial backdrop, both in terms of the colonial past and post-Independence legacies. I have examined the specific 'version' of postcolonial theory which has emerged, partly as a reflection of this inheritance. I have also analysed how the contemporary Irish novel reflects issues of identity that have been characterised through Ireland's colonial legacy and postcolonial situation. The postcolonial approach of the thesis has argued the importance of considering the subaltern narrative. Additionally, it has explored characterisations that link back to ideas of double colonisation. This formed the basis for assessing to what extent and in what form the novels selected for discussion, which all refuse the linear narratives of both colonial and early versions of nationalism, have enabled or foregrounded a space in which to make subaltern and marginalised voices audible; and to explore and challenge subaltern issues of disempowerment and oppression, with specific attention to aspects of class and gender.

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Introduction

'We can take nothing for granted now.
We thought the text of our Irishness
was set in stone. It turned out to be
carved in ice, and it's melting fast'
Joseph O'Connor[1]

My fascination with Irish literature began a couple of decades ago, when I came across some poems by Seamus Heaney. Those poems touched something in my inner core, possibly because of my background. As a Sicilian, I know well the impact of the legacy of multiple cultures. It is often remarked that Sicily was annexed to Piedmont.[2] After annexation, a narrative was started depicting Sicily as the periphery needing to be modernized by a more advanced political and cultural entity. I then felt those poems, in a way, quite close to me and I was left wanting to find out more about the cultural and literary environment that made Heaney's poems possible. I had obviously come across Joyce and Yeats but in my years studying English Literature I had never come across many other Irish writers nor been taught about the unique political, cultural and literary milieu that was characteristic of Ireland. At the same time, through conversations with a friend who lectured and researched literatures in English, I started to get an interest in postcolonial literature. After reading about it and researching it, I was convinced that Irish literature reflects primarily the experiences of a colonised nation and has been shaped by colonial and postcolonial events.

It was so that I started looking into Irish literature and the contemporary literary landscape more in depth. I discovered that Irish literature is not limited to the celebrated writers from the past, but also includes many contemporary voices that have, in recent

[1] Joseph O'Connor, 'Questioning our Self-Congratulations', *Studies*, vol. 87, no. 347, 1998, pp. 245-251, p. 250.
[2] See, for example, Alessandro Barbero, *I prigionieri dei Savoia*, (Laterza, 2012); Lucy Riall, *Sicily and the Unification of Italy: Liberal Policy and Local Power, 1859-1866*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

decades, brought contemporary Irish fiction to the fore of the world literary scene.[3] I am referring to writers such as Sebastian Barry, William Trevor, Eavan Boland, John Banville, Edna O'Brien, Kevin Barry, Colum McCann, Lisa McInerney, to cite but a few. Moreover, in recent years there has been a multitude of works highlighting Ireland's contemporary multicultural reality and the country's changing cultural landscape. Writers such as Roddy Doyle, Dermot Bolger, Patrick McCabe, Joseph O'Connor, Colm Tóibín, Anne Enright, Emma Donoghue have shaped contemporary Irish literature since the late 1980s. More recently, new voices such as Eimear McBride, Sally Rooney, Tana French and Donal Ryan have started to emerge, building on the fertile literary terrain created by the earlier writers. Among the dominant themes that unite these authors are those of belonging, how to process the past, a difficulty in creating meaningful and stable interpersonal relationships and the paradoxes of being Irish in a global context in which all sorts of identities are constantly being questioned and/or challenged. Moreover, some of their work focuses on private experiences and deals with the dysfunctions taking place in domestic spheres and with the overlap between individual and collective.[4]

My thesis will analyse depictions of Irishness and Ireland in some contemporary Irish fiction and how it is influenced by, and influences, its context. In particular, this thesis revolves around two writers, Roddy Doyle and Anne Enright, and a specific period, namely the beginning of the 1980s, when postcolonial theory first started to develop in Ireland, and 2015, when Enright's novel *The Green Road* was written. This decision is motivated by several factors. Revising Irish identity is also, partly, revising the historical, political and social events that contributed to its construction, and now to its re-invention. This history is consistently referred to by my chosen writers, and their novels are engaged with historical events. There is a historiographical approach both in Doyle and Enright – both writers have a sense of history and what it means to the present. They both explore history in their fiction, both national and individual, and often the two are juxtaposed, and mirror one another.

The more recent and accelerated changes in Irish society and culture have also been significant here, in that they have been 'mirrored' by a rise in theoretical interest from the Irish academy. So, I needed writers who were writing between early 1990s and

[3] For a discussion of how Irish literature is now globally recognised see Eric Falci and Paige Reynolds, 'Introduction', Eric Falci and Paige Reynolds (eds.), *Irish Literature in Transition 1980-2020*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 1-24.

[4] Examples of tormented characters in dysfunctional Irish domestic spaces can be found in McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* (1992), O'Brien's *House of Splendid Isolation* (1994), Enright's *The Wig My Father Wore* (1995*), The Gathering* (2007), *The Forgotten Waltz* (2011) and *The Green Road* (2015), Doyle's *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*, *The Woman Who Walked Into Door*s and *Paula Spencer* to cite but a few.

2000s and that provided an established canon for me to review. Both Doyle and Enright provided the width and breadth of fiction production I was looking for. Both belong to a generation of writers that has come to prominence at the same time as Ireland was entering a period of social, cultural and economic change. I believe their fiction reflects this state of transformation and becoming of Irish society. This is particularly true for the novels I have chosen to discuss more centrally: Doyle's *The Last Roundup* trilogy (1999, 2004 and 2010), *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (1996), and *Paula Spencer* (2006); Enright's *The Gathering* (2007), *The Forgotten Waltz* (2011) and *The Green Road* (2015). In my analysis, I have explored that joint phenomenon of changes in Irish society and the rise of postcolonial theory in the Irish academy just mentioned. I have focused on the relationship between narrative and its context, on definitions and perceptions of Irishness, and on disjointed narrative as a projection of displacement and uprootedness as seen against a postcolonial backdrop, both in terms of the colonial past and post-Independence legacies - as well as in terms of the specific 'version' of postcolonial theory which has emerged, partly as a reflection of this inheritance.

Doyle's and Enright's fiction reflects many of the themes mentioned above, and specifically the effort to create a more inclusive sense of Irishness and Irish identity. Their engagement involves them with different strands of Irishness through an effort to create and re-create the past specifically from the perspective of those who have been ignored in more official accounts – those who did not conform, for example, to the idea of Ireland as exclusively rural, Gaelic and Catholic; or the real families that did not reflect the idealised view of the family put forward by State and Church; or women and the working classes. Moreover, in different ways, both authors experiment with form and language as a means to create critical perspectives on these post-Independence 'norms'. The fact that both deal with themes that are pertinent to Irish postcoloniality, makes them pertinent to my intended aim, namely testing literary-critical theories of Irish literature, which have emerged from Ireland itself, against current creative practice. This has involved an extensive review of Irish theory, past Irish literature and history.

My theoretical framework will mainly revolve around cultural historicism/materialism filtered through the lens of Irish postcolonial theory. Cultural historicism/materialism sees the creative and the political as indissolubly linked: inventing Ireland through literature has wide-ranging political repercussions. A seminal text that strives to weave a narrative around Ireland's colonial relation to Britain, and how it affected culture production, is Cairns and Richards's *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, nationalism and culture*, one of the works that contributed to the establishment of

postcolonial studies in Ireland.[5] They term this combination of historical, political and cultural contexts cultural materialism. In the 'Foreword' to the volume, Jonathan Dollimore states that culture, seen as a system through which societies understand themselves and how they relate to the world

> is not simply a reflection of the economic and political system, but nor can it be independent of it. Cultural materialism… sees texts as inseparable from the conditions of their production… and as involved… in the making of cultural meanings which are always, finally, political meanings.[6]

The literary text is not independent of its context. On the contrary, it is firmly rooted in it, both in terms of its production and reception. Cairns and Richards see the relationship between England and Ireland as one between coloniser and colonised; they look at how the 'making and re-making' of the two nations' respective identities has taken place through discourse and how this discourse has been affected by that relationship.[7] Hegemony as well as identities are created through judicial and military systems, but supported by discourse as well, with the coloniser creating narratives about the colonised as second-class citizens and trying to convince them of their innate deficiencies and subordinate status.[8] It is not surprising then that cultural materialism sees culture and politics as intertwined and believes that culture has a role to play in bringing to the surface the plight of those that have been exploited or ignored on the basis of race, gender, sexuality and class. This is an important premise in my own analysis of contemporary fiction in this thesis.

The cultural materialism of which the novels themselves are part is an important framework in my thesis. This is because socio-historical events affect fiction but, in turn fiction, or literature more in general, provides the grounds to effect social change. In this thesis, I have focused on how social and historical events have influenced fictional narratives around Irish identity and the nation, and how, in turn, narratives impact upon and modify views and perceptions of Irishness. I will start off by presenting an overview of Irish postcolonial theory as, in this thesis, I will look at how this theory is reflected in literary practice and at the interplay between critical and creative discourse. It is Irish

[5] David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Culture*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).
[6] Jonathan Dollimore, 'Foreword', David Cairns and Shaun Richards (eds.), *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Culture*, p. vii.
[7] David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland*, p. 1.
[8] Ibid., p. 8.

theorists that I am interested in in this thesis and the Irish perspective on postcolonial concerns that I would like to explore further in order to test it against the versions of creativity of my novelists. The Irish have been spoken about for centuries, their narrative written for them or interpreted through foreign parameters. What I am interested in, in this study, is what they say about themselves, both from a theoretical point of view and a fictional one.

The advent of Irish postcolonial studies

Although the matter was for a while controversial, Ireland has lived a condition of postcoloniality since the British invasion of the island began and Irish writers started to compose texts which aimed at cultural resistance. Indeed, Ireland 'was England's first colony'.[9] Nevertheless, in the past Ireland was generally overlooked by postcolonial theorists. As Declan Kiberd puts it: '*The Empire Writes Back* passes over the Irish case very swiftly', [10] with Luke Gibbons adding that, although Ireland was a colony within Europe

> [it] is conspicuous by its absence (or exclusion) from most theorisations of the postcolonial. In Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's [book] it is even subsumed into an undifferentiated Britishness as part of the expansion of empire.[11]

This is what the critic terms 'colonization of theory'. However, it is precisely the mixed nature of the experience of the Irish – at the same time within and outside Europe, ruled by a foreign power yet also collaborators in the work of Empire in India and other colonies

[9] Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), p. 2.
[10] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland. The Literature of the Modern Nation*, (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 5. Kiberd is here referring to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1989). Taking instigation from Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), this was one of the first major theoretical accounts of a wide range of postcolonial texts and their relation to the larger issues of postcolonial culture, and remains one of the most significant works published in this field. The authors are among the first to acknowledge the interrelationships of postcolonial literatures, investigate the powerful forces acting on language in the postcolonial text, and show how narratives, which were a means of colonisation, constitute a radical critique of Eurocentric notions of literature and language and act as decolonising tools. Indeed, the title is a pun on the film *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, and refers to the ways postcolonial voices respond to the literary canon of the colonial centre. The title also references Salman Rushdie's 1982 article 'The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance'. The authors, however, as we will see later on, do not include Ireland as a colonial/postcolonial nation due to issues of contiguity.
[11] Luke Gibbons, 'Ireland and the Colonisation of Theory', *Interventions*, vol. 1(1), no. 27, 1997, p. 1.

– which makes them representative of the underlying colonial process.[12] I will discuss this missed experience in more detail in subsequent chapters.

From the early to mid-eighties, however, postcolonial discourse began to take roots in Ireland, starting to question and react to this 'colonization of theory'. This reaction started with the publication of the Field Day pamphlets.[13] Published during the 1980s, they are some of the seminal works that are seen as explicitly positioning Ireland in a postcolonial context and thus marking a watershed in postcolonial studies in Ireland.[14] Field Day had two main aims: firstly, they wanted to explicate the underlying mechanisms of British colonial rule; secondly, they tried to expose the homogenising effects of nationalist discourse. However, Field Day also interrogated Ireland's standing in a globalised world, something that is significant in relation to some of the fiction discussed in this thesis.[15] Field Day was not a nationalist movement 'in the sense of being hardline republican' – rather, in insisting on the colonial and postcolonial status of Ireland, as a whole, it initiated a real political and cultural shift.[16] In other words, it started what Claire Connolly terms 'the search… for a critical idiom capable of comprehending and maybe even changing Irish culture'.[17] Indeed, from that moment a number of autochthonous postcolonial theorists and theories began to emerge and develop.

In a 2007 article titled 'Irish Cultural Studies and Postcolonial Theory', Eóin Flannery talks about 'the advent of an Irish franchise of postcolonial studies' which have engendered a focusing of theoretical efforts onto postcolonial discourse within the field of Irish Studies. [18] It is fair to say that the emergence of the defined concept of the

[12] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 5. Both Kiberd and Gibbons are referring, again to the fact that the ambiguity of the Irish situation was reflected, at a cultural level, by the exclusion of Irish authors, together with Welsh and Scottish ones, from the *The Empire Writes Back* on the grounds that 'while it is possible to argue that these societies were the first victims of English expansion, their subsequent complicity in the British imperial enterprise makes it difficult for colonized peoples outside Britain to accept their identity as post-colonial', Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, p. 33.

[13] Some of these pamphlets were Seamus Deane, *Civilians and Barbarians*, (Derry, 1983); Richard Kearney, *Myth and Motherland*, (Derry, 1988), Declan Kiberd, *Anglo-Irish Attitudes* (Derry, 1985), later published in Seamus Deane, Seamus Heaney, Richard Kearney, Declan Kiberd, Tom Paulin, *Ireland's Field Day*, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1985); Terry Eagleton, *Nationalism: Irony and Commitment*, (Derry, 1988), Edward Said, *Yeats and Colonialism*, (Derry, 1988); Fredric Jameson, *Modernism and Imperialism*, (Derry, 1988), later published in Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, with an Introduction by Seamus Deane, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

[14] Ronan McDonald, 'Irish Studies and Its Discontents', Eric Falci and Paige Reynolds (eds.), *Irish Literature in Transition, 1980-2020*, pp. 334-8.

[15] Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies: Theory, Discourse, Utopia*, (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2009), p. 43.

[16] Shaun Richards, 'Field Day's Fifth Province: Avenue or Impasse', *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland, 1960-1990*, Eamonn Hughes (ed.), (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1991), p. 142.

[17] Claire Connolly, 'Theorising Ireland', *Irish Studies Review*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2001, pp. 301-15, p. 312.

[18] Eoin Flannery, 'Irish Cultural Studies and Postcolonial Theory', *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2007, p. 1.

postcolonial in Ireland impacted upon a wide range of disciplines, literature included. It is legitimate, then, to try and trace the development of such 'franchise', to use Flannery's term. As I mentioned, postcolonial theory is the background to my study into how fictions alter our understanding of events and shape our understanding of identity and nationhood. By creating a collective consciousness in which the nation can mirror itself, fiction does change perceptions. I will be looking at the theory running alongside the emergence of the newer fictions I am looking at, as it is offering formulations about how the fiction operates that I am going to test out in the thesis.

For the purposes of the thesis, I am going to adopt a particular understanding of postcolonialism as formulated by Ania Loomba:

> It is… helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism. Such a position would allow us to include people geographically displaced by colonialism such as African-Americans or people of Asian or Caribbean origin in Britain as 'post-colonial' subjects although they live within metropolitan cultures. It also allows us to incorporate the history of anti-colonial resistance with contemporary resistances to imperialism and to dominant Western culture. Jorge de Alva suggests that postcoloniality should 'signify not so much subjectivity "after" the colonial experience as a subjectivity of oppositionality to imperializing/colonizing (read: subordinating/subjectivising) discourses and practices'. He justifies this by arguing that new approaches to history have discredited the idea of a single linear progression, focusing instead on 'a multiplicity of often conflicting and frequently parallel narratives.[19]

Hence, postcolonialism is resistance, at any time either during the colonial period or afterwards. This dismantling also focuses on highlighting the existence of conflicting, fragmented and multi-layered narratives, as opposed to the linearity of colonial narratives. A consequence of this, as Joe Cleary reminds us, is that Postcolonial Studies strives to displace inherited narratives and create new ones around the story of the empire, and resistance to it. It thus offers a different perspective, takes a less Eurocentric, or in this case British imperial-centric, stance, and questions colonial concepts of nation, national

[19] Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 16, quoting J. Jorge Klor de Alva, 'The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of "Colonialism", "Postcolonialism" and "Mestizaje"', Gyan Prakhash (ed.), *After Colonialism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 245.

history and identity.[20] It is important to bear in mind that, in some cases, this emancipatory narrative did not reach or include those who remained invisible within it, a point that is going to be central to my thesis.[21] This created some stifled versions of identity within the nation, something which I will discuss in relation to the fiction I analyse in this thesis.

Going back to the Irish landscape, according to Flannery:

> Postcolonial studies is… concerned with foregrounding exigent historical and contemporary experiences and legacies of all forms of imperialism. By facilitating discussions of imperial and anti-imperial experience across borders and within a protracted historical continuum, theoretical readings… must contribute to… ethical readings of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and postcolonialism.[22]

The study of the colonial experience then, albeit not homogeneous, is facilitated by an international, or lateral, approach, so as to highlight the fundamental similarities of the colonial experience amongst formerly-colonised peoples.

As mentioned, Ireland was generally overlooked in earlier postcolonial studies. Declan Kiberd seemed to address precisely this issue quite resolutely when, in his seminal book *Inventing Ireland* he concludes that Ireland was indeed a colony still in the process of decolonising as it is 'less easy to decolonise the mind than the territory'.[23] This is because political rule also meant psychological self-doubt due not just to the loss of political and economic independence, but also of native culture, literature and language. Efforts to regain a cultural and literary independence that made it possible to express a renewed national identity continued long after the military occupation ended.[24] As we will see, these efforts are made more difficult by the fact that Irish authors have to write in the language of the coloniser. It is precisely what these efforts look like in some contemporary Irish fiction that I am interested in in this thesis.

However, as is to be expected, not everyone agrees that Ireland fits the colonial and postcolonial model. Post-Independence nationalism provoked a vision of Ireland which was increasingly questioned from the 1950s on. One brand of that questioning is revisionism. Although my thesis is looking at how writers from a Catholic background have developed that questioning further to open up class and gender issues, I will give a

[20] Joe Cleary, 'Amongst Empires: A Short History of Ireland and Empire Studies in International Context', *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 42, no. 1-1, 2007, pp. 11-57, p. 41
[21] Robert J. C. Young, 'Postcolonial Remains', *New Literary History,* vol. 43, no. 1, 2012, pp. 19-42, p. 25.
[22] Eoin Flannery, 'Irish Cultural Studies and Postcolonial Theory', p. 1.
[23] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, pp. 5-6.
[24] Ibid.

brief overview of some revisionist perspectives as they might offer useful background to the debate over Irishness and Irish identity my writers are engaging with. In the Republic, proponents of the scholarly critique that has come to be termed 'revisionism', which 'first became an orthodoxy in Irish history writing during the 1970s', started to express concern about the limitations of certain versions of nationalism and, consequently, of a postcolonial perspective founded upon them. [25] Revisionist historians and scholars tried to find the positive impact of the British legacy in Ireland and espoused a policy of non-intervention in Northern affairs.[26] Among them, to name but a few, are Roy Foster, Edna Longley and Stephen Howe.[27] As David Lloyd remarks:

> Within serious historiography, two distinct understandings of violence can be broadly traced … nationalist historiography … and revisionist histories.[28]

Revisionism questions the legitimacy of certain versions of nationalist Irish history and sees 'nationalism, with its spurious emphasis on origins and destiny, as responsible for continuing division in Ireland'.[29]

As Seamus Deane has pointed out, 'The rewriting of modern Irish history is said to have begun, in what is now called its revisionist phase, with the founding by R. Dudley Edwards and T. W. Moody of the journal *Irish Historical Studies* in 1938'.[30] The journal was devoted to archivally-based research, and opposed nationalist myth in the name of scientific objectivity. From the beginning, it involved historians trained in British institutions, in particular the Institute of Historical Research in London, and Cambridge. It is unsurprising, then, that British history was accepted as the norm and the standard of comparison: by situating Irish history within a narrow British comparative frame, revisionism espoused a deeply ideological choice.[31] Although it started developing in the

[25] Joe Cleary, 'Amongst Empires', p. 42.
[26] Heather Laird, 'European Postcolonial Studies and Ireland: Towards a Conversation amongst the Colonized of Europe', *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2015, pp. 384-396.
[27] See, for example, Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*, (London: Penguin, 1989); Edna Longley, 'Introduction: Revising "Irish Literature"', *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1994), pp 9−68. Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), where Howe's central point is that British rule in Ireland was always limited and mediated by heterogeneous interests, rather than an omnipotent coloniser reshaping a helpless Other.
[28] David Lloyd, *Anomalous States. Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment*, (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1993), p. 125.
[29] Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation*, p. 13.
[30] Seamus Deane, *Strange Country. Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 185.
[31] A contrasting example was provided by the Irish historian David. B. Quinn (1909-2002). A pioneer of an Atlantic-oriented history that breached the bounds of national narrative, his Marxist approach to English

late 1930s, revisionism reached its peak during the 'Troubles'. Brandan Bradshaw has called revisionism 'a consensus theory',[32] while Willy Maley deprecates that it is, in his words, 'concerned as much with concealing as with healing the wounds of Irish history'.[33] Other critics such as Seamus Deane and Terry Eagleton have pointed to its ideological complicity with capitalism, which it sees as modernity and progress.[34]

As demonstrated by Stephen Howe's refutation of Ireland's postcolonial (and thus colonial) status in *Ireland and Empire*, the controversy is inextricably entangled in the antagonism between the revisionist and the nationalist camps, with the latter advocating the postcolonial approach that the former disproves.[35] Howe's book employs an empirical basis to forge what, he admits, is a rather 'polemical' argument.[36] In his Introduction to *Irish and Postcolonial Writing*, Glen Hooper discusses how the 'conventional polarities' of methodological approaches within postcolonialism – namely, poststructuralism versus Marxism – have become associated with the two traditions of revisionism and postcolonialism. He suggests that

> from one perspective a postcolonial reading can be identified as a stalking-horse for ultra-nationalism, and … from another it may be seen as an alliance between neo-Unionist revisionism and poststructuralism.[37]

In this respect, Hooper concludes that Howe's rejection of postcolonialism 'derives from an implicit association between support for postcolonial criticism and sympathy for the IRA'.[38]

Unsurprisingly, then, Liam Kennedy suggests that postcolonialism is used by nationalists as an ideological means to 'give a patina of legitimacy' to 'Anglophobia and

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imperial expansion in the Tudor and Stuart period did not appeal to Irish revisionists. See David B. Quinn, *The Elizabethans and the Irish* (Washington: Cornell University Press, 1966).

[32] Tommy Graham, 'A Man with a Mission: Interview with Brandan Bradshaw', *History Ireland*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1993, pp. 52-5, p. 53.

[33] Willy Maley, 'Nationalism and Revisionism. Ambiviolences and Dissensus', Scott Brewster, Virginia Crossman, Fiona Becket and David Alderson (eds.), *Ireland in Proximity: History, Gender, Space*, (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 12-27, p. 18.

[34] Seamus Deane, 'Wherever Green is Read', *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism, 1938-1994*, Ciaran Brady (ed.), (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), pp. 234-245; Terry Eagleton, 'The Ideology of Irish Studies', *Bullán*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1997, pp. 5-14; and 'Revisionism Revisited', in *Crazy John and the Bishop and Other Essays on Irish Culture*, (Cork: Cork University Press/Field Day, 1998), pp. 308-327.

[35] Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture*. For a rigorous critique of Howe's work, see Patrick McGee, 'Humpty Dumpty and the Despotism of Fact' (2003) https://legacy.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v7i2/pmg.htm, last accessed 11 June 2021.

[36] Ibid., p. 5.

[37] Glen Hooper, 'Introduction', Glenn Hooper and Colin Graham (eds.), *Irish and Postcolonial Writing*, (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 3-31, p. 17.

[38] Ibid., p. 16.

anti-Unionism' in its 'traditional preoccupation with "England", as the never failing source of all Irish ills'.[39] If Kennedy's comparison between Ireland and such 'self-evidently' postcolonial nations as India or Ghana fails to consider important differences in social stratification within these national wholes, his conclusion nonetheless reminds us of the uneasy 'fit' that Ireland poses when situating it as a homogeneous entity into 'a simple dichotomy between coloniser and colonised'.[40] It was for this reason that the country was, as we have seen, left out of the postcolonial umbrella in one of the discipline's foundational books, *The Empire Writes Back*. The tendency to assimilate or synchronise, and thus trivialise different forms of disempowerment and oppression throughout the world is apparent in the famous line of Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments* that has been often cited in relation to Irish postcolonialism; namely when Jimmy Rabbitte announces to his band-mates: 'The Irish are the niggers of Europe'.[41] Although we must be careful here not to fall into the danger of annexing race to what is predominantly a class issue, the reverse side of the problem is indicated when Howe's sweeping survey of the means of imperial expansion comes quickly to the conclusion that, compared to the sufferings and death-tolls in 'Britain's more distant possessions', Ireland got off more than lightly.[42]

Similarly to Howe, Edna Longley and Roy Foster disagree with postcolonial representations of Ireland.[43] In particular, Longley questions the whole idea of 'Irishness', and the idea of creating a distinctive Irish national literature.[44] Moreover, she accuses Irish postcolonial theorists of a one-size-fits-all approach that extends 'colonial' status to the whole of the Irish experience whereas, potentially, it might only fit some.[45] Longley is also an advocate of the mutual autonomy of politics and literature and does not see literature as a means of reflecting on political issues or having social and political impact.[46] This is a completely difference stance from that of the writers I focus on, whose fiction openly engages with political, historical and social events.

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[39] Liam Kennedy, 'Modern Ireland: Post-Colonial Society or Post-Colonial Pretensions?', *Irish Review*, vol. 13, 1992-3, pp. 107-121, pp. 118-9.
[40] Ibid., pp. 116-9.
[41] Roddy Doyle, *The Commitments*, in Roddy Doyle, *The Barrytown Trilogy*, (London: Minerva, 1992), p. 13.
[42] Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire*, p. 230.
[43] Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*; *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up*, (London: Penguin, 2001); *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change, 1970-2000*, (London: Allen Lane, 2007). Edna Longley, *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland*, (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1994).
[44] Edna Longley, *The Living Stream. Literature & Revisionism in Ireland*, p. 179.
[45] Ibid., p. 30.
[46] See Edna Longley, 'Poetry and Politics in Northern Ireland', *The Crane Bag*, 1985, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 26-40. See also Conor McCarthy, *Modernisation: Crisis and Culture in Ireland 1969-1992*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press), p. 211.

According to Roy Foster, postcolonial criticism equates to a monolithic form of Irish nationalism. Specifically, he suggests that contemporary Irish nationalist narratives tend to forget a lot and that the

> rigid morality tale which Irish historians have tried to query in recent years… in some quarters has just been replaced by a simplistic application of Frantz Fanon's One Big Idea to an Irish situation sweepingly redefined as 'post-colonial'.[47]

Foster and Longley to an extent are fighting out Yeats's war on Catholic Ireland, which they see as a monolith. In response, Eóin Flannery astutely argues that, by implying that Fanon's work is the only source in Irish postcolonial theory, Foster ignores not only that Fanon's *oeuvre* itself is rather diverse, but that Irish postcolonial criticism is characterised by diversity of influence.[48] Both Longley and Foster oversimplify postcolonial studies and presume that every colonial situation follows the same template. In response to Longley's and Foster's position, David Lloyd observes that postcolonial theories are not directly transferable, and that Ireland can be seen as

> both a template and an anomaly… [the] uneasy contiguity of subalternity with modernity, of the subaltern with the modern, is… an uneradicated phenomenon in Irish society.[49]

Moreover, specifically as concerns the role of literature and Longley's claim that it is a separate space to politics and history, Gibbons, from a typical postcolonial studies perspective, argues that there is a dialogue here in which the past undoubtedly feeds into the present: the analysis of its impact needs to be accepted if one is to move into the future.[50] Post-Independence nationalism provoked a vision of Ireland which was increasingly questioned from the 1950s on, and revisionism is one brand of that questioning. My thesis is looking at how writers have developed that questioning further to open up class and gender issues. This process of examining the past from the point of view of the present in order to move into the future is something that we will see in the novels I examine in this thesis.

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[47] Roy Foster, *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up*, (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 20.
[48] Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 221.
[49] David Lloyd, 'Ireland's Modernities: Introduction', *Interventions*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2003, pp. 317-321, pp. 118-9.
[50] See, for example, Luke Gibbons, 'Towards a Postcolonial Enlightenment: The United Irishmen, Cultural Diversity and the Public Sphere', *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*, Clare Carroll and Patricia King (eds.), (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003); *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics and the Colonial Sublime*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Moreover, when Foster argues that historians need to demythologise nationalist versions of an Irish past which, at least during the nation-building phase, were characterised by a linear development of Irish history, he forgets that Irish writers had already started to question the linear narratives Foster wants historians to break up. [51] Indeed, Irish fiction had started to firmly question narrative coherence and to introduce what Gibbons terms 'the contingency of history' so that gaps and fragmentation become 'the hallmark of the national tale'.[52] As we will see, this is also a hallmark of the fiction I will discuss in later chapters.

By the early 1980s, key figures in Irish Studies openly started to question these revisionist interpretations. These scholars, largely associated with the Field Day project, maintained that Irish culture, politics and economics, both past and present, are most usefully viewed through the lens of colonialism and postcolonialism, which were the cause of civil war, partition, sectarian conflict and slow economic growth. The result of such an intervention

> is an Irish postcolonial studies which, over the past 35 years, has produced an influential body of scholarship premised on the idea that Ireland is a colony/former colony of the British Empire.[53]

Revisionism and postcolonialism diverge on the interpretations of such issues as the nature and legacy of the Ascendancy, the causes and consequences of the Great Famine, partition, the role of Britain in today's Ireland, or the significance of key moments in Irish history such as the Easter Rising. Roy Foster, for instance, questions the iconic nature of the moment albeit, we will see, he does so in different ways to Doyle.[54]

In Irish Postcolonial Studies, scholars have tried to both challenge received ways of conceptualising the nation and to create different modes of analysing ideas of identity, nationhood and national history. Studies on the latter have had a specific focus on how such concepts were constructed and on how narratives were and have been used to reappropriate them, thus striving to create different versions of Irish literary history. These studies see Ireland as a nation fighting to gain its independence and sovereignty

[51] Roy Foster, 'Storylines: Narratives and Nationality in Nineteenth Century Ireland', Geoffrey Cubitt (ed.) *Imagining Nations*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 39.
[52] Luke Gibbons, 'Narratives of the Nation: Fact, Fiction and Irish Cinema', in Claire Connolly (ed.), *Theorizing Ireland*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), p. 73.
[53] Heather Laird, 'European Postcolonial Studies and Ireland: Towards a Conversation amongst the Colonized of Europe', p. 384.
[54] See Roy Foster, *Vivid Faces. The Revolutionary Generation of Ireland 1890-1923*, (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2015).

from Britain as the colonial power, both politically and aesthetically. This colonial perspective is seen by some as an effective means of analysing Irish literature of the twentieth century.[55] It is thus legitimate to conclude that part of Irish Studies' remit

> is to elucidate the rhetorical devices, linguistic conventions, or narrative grammars that govern the various epistemologies of empire and imperialism, to tease out their normative assumptions and blindspots, and to identify the social interests that they have served.[56]

As mentioned, just as for empire and imperialism, resistance has been articulated through narratives: hence through rhetorical devices, linguistic conventions and so on.[57] Moreover, when we read that Gerry Smyth sees the novel and the making of the nation as intimately linked, it is legitimate to examine narratives in contemporary fiction for clues as to where the nation and its conceptions of Irishness and identity are now, in the aftermath of the various theoretical strategies which are now mature with regard to Ireland and the postcolonial.[58]

As Flannery suggests, however, it is not just literature that can be seen as a means of resistance, but theory as well:

> Literatures and writers were, and are, hugely constitutive of cultures of resistance and solidarity in colonial and postcolonial milieus – literary theory does not replace the political, the economic or the historical; it is implicated in all of them. Literature and literary theory are facts of material culture, as Cairns and Richards, and Field Day, argued within an Irish postcolonial context two decades ago.[59]

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[55] Examples of such efforts, which started with Field Day, can be seen in David Lloyd, *Anomalous States. Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* and *Ireland After History*; Luke Gibbons' *Transformations in Irish Culture*; the already mentioned Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* and *After Ireland*; David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland*; Seamus Deane, *Strange Country*; Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation* and *Decolonisation and Criticism: The Construction of Irish Literature* (London: Pluto Press, 1998); Joe Cleary's *Outrageous Fortunes: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland*, (Dublin, Field Day Publications, 2007), and 'Irish Writing and Postcolonialism', Ato Quayson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literatures*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Terry Eagleton, 'Postcolonialism: The Case of Ireland', David Bennett (ed.), *Multicultural States: Rethinking Identity and Difference*, (New York: Routledge, 1998).

[56] Joe Cleary, 'Amongst Empires', p. 41.

[57] On this, see for example Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, and *Postcolonial Poetics: 21st-Century Critical Readings*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*; Edward Said, *Culture And Imperialism*, (London: Vintage, 1994); Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*.

[58] Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and The Nation*, and *Decolonisation and Criticism: The Construction of Irish Literature*.

[59] Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 225.

Smyth goes further when he states that:

> There can be no decolonising literature, no national culture of resistance, before a prefiguring critical discourse creates a series of social and institutional spaces in which a culture and its particular effects can function and have meaning.[60]

This implies that there can be no literature without it being given substance and meaning by a pre-existing critical discourse, the postcolonial one in this case. This statement almost seems to negate literature's autonomy. Is theory first or literature? We might ask as to whether critical discourse really precedes the practice of literature and whether it is really the *sine qua non* when it comes to giving literary outputs meaning and prowess, dictating how we read them. These are precisely some of the questions this thesis is going to explore.

It is important that these recent postcolonial theorists suggest that Ireland needs both – and that they run alongside each other. The question then is, to what extent the theory fits contemporary Irish fiction? We are faced with the challenge of relating theory to practice, a tension integral to the history of postcolonial theory as it relates to Ireland, Irish culture and history today. In light of Smyth's comment, and bearing in mind that '[m]ost authors who have analyzed Ireland from this colonial perspective have done so through an examination of fiction', to what extent do postcolonial theories help us make sense of Ireland's historical past and literary production? [61] These are questions that this thesis will explore and try to give an answer to.

To this end, in Chapter I I will sketch a short history of the development of Irish postcolonial theory. This is because such an overview is needed to build a sense of the issues that I am going to weigh against the novels and to understand how far the fiction both mirrors and diverges from the theory. Additionally, for the purposes of my focus on contemporary Irish fiction, I will briefly look at the legacy of 'postcolonial' Joyce and at postcolonial themes in some representative recent Irish fiction which is not specifically the focus of this thesis.

In Chapter II, I analyse Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* (1999) and *Oh, Play That Thing* (2004), with references to *The Dead Republic* (2010). These three novels, collectively known as *The Last Roundup* trilogy, review the foundational history of the

[60] Gerry Smyth, 'Decolonization and Criticism: Towards a Theory of Irish Critical Discourse', *Ireland and Cultural Theory: The Mechanics of Authenticity*, Colin Graham and Richard Kirkland (eds.) (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 29-49, p. 33.
[61] Timothy J. White, 'Modeling the Origin and Evolution of Postcolonial Politics: The Case of Ireland', *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2007, pp. 1-13, p. 1.

Republic from new and unexpected angles. My analysis foregrounds the notion of a dialogic relationship between subaltern experience and nationalist iconography. This dialogic rather than oppositional relationship between the two is foregrounded in the nature of the trilogy. Fiction, then, becomes a tool to revisit and reimagine the past by undermining historical normality, with the marginalised established as the cultural unifier.

Chapter III looks at Doyle's continued efforts to broaden and re-invent Irishness by giving subaltern actors a voice through explorations of gender in *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (1994) and *Paula Spencer* (2004). The chapter continues the exploration of notions of subalternity and double colonisation. I will argue that, in each novel, questions of nationality, Irishness, the importance of the past, and the role of women within traditionally 'male' discussions, are central to Doyle's main preoccupations – and that, from the perspective of theory, they might now be weighed against, but also resist and adapt to versions of subalternity and double colonisation.

In Chapter IV I will shift the focus of attention to my second chosen writer, Anne Enright. The chapter opens with a section where I argue why Joyce is a valuable model for reading Enright, especially from the point of view of formal innovation. After a brief overview of Enright's earlier fiction, I show that, rather than being 'postnationalist', the novelist is complicating, reworking and reimagining nationalist ideas and ideals. I show how in *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz* Enright reimagines and reworks the history and tradition that have made a subaltern of Irish women whose voices become agents for change from within, rather than outside, that history and tradition.

Chapter V continues the exploration of Enright's foregrounding of female consciousness whilst processing the ongoing impact of history and patriarchy in Celtic Tiger Ireland. Through an analysis of *The Green Road*, I discuss the meaning and relevance of locality in Enright's fiction and how the novel seems to indicate a propensity towards dialogue between local and global. I argue that Enright is not trying to transcend the nation as an idea, rather she wants to reshape and reimagine it in order to understand what it means to be Irish in today's changed and changing situation, at the same time making notions of Irishness more inclusive, without nostalgia for old national tropes.

In Chapter VI, the Conclusion, I draw together the implications of my argument. I outline how, by starting with the fiction to the fore in my argument, I can see that concepts often compartmentalised in the theory are brought together in the fiction: whilst the theory appears to be about watertight compartments, the fiction pushes boundaries by revisiting and reimagining rigid paradigms.

Chapter I

The Postcolonial and Ireland

'In the worst hour of the worst season
of the worst year of a whole people a man set out
from the workhouse with his wife' – Eavan Boland

I.1 The case of Irish Postcolonial Studies

For the purposes of my focus on contemporary Irish fiction, this chapter will introduce the relevant Irish postcolonial theory. It will also look at James Joyce as a postcolonial writer and thinker; and at some of the themes in contemporary Irish fiction not directly explored in this thesis but that are also common to the novels I explore in detail.

Irish postcolonial studies interrogate the political, social, cultural and economic processes and discourses imposed on Ireland by the colonial centre in the name of modernisation and progress. They also interrogate some aspects of the response of the post-independence nation to these paradigms. This is because, 'the synchronicity of modernisation and imperialism is a primary concern of many Irish postcolonial critics and historians'.[1] Together with Cairns and Richards mentioned earlier, Declan Kiberd is among the first scholars who were instrumental in ushering in what Eoin Flannery terms the 'Irish franchise of postcolonial studies'. In the mid-1980s, when he was the director of the Yeats Summer School in Sligo, Kiberd invited Edward W. Said, one of the founding scholars of global postcolonial studies, to deliver what would later be seen as a seminal paper on 'Yeats and Decolonization'.[2] This was one of the first events that marked the introduction of postcolonial theory directly into Irish studies, which were

[1] Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, pp. 57-8.
[2] The paper was later published in Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward W. Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*. Said argues that Yeats has been assimilated into discourses of European modernism ignoring his interaction with Irish historical and political traditions. Hence, Said asserts that Yeats's poetry exemplifies the complex situation of writing in English during the turbulent period of the Irish national struggle. As a consequence, he views Yeats as an important national poet during a period of anti-imperialist resistance who offers a restorative vision for the Irish people. Said firmly positions Yeats's work within a colonial context and 'as an exemplary and early instance of the process of decolonization, the liberation of the poet's community from its inbred and oppressive servility to a new, potentially revolutionary condition', Seamus Deane, 'Introduction', Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward W. Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, p. 5.

consequently developed by Kiberd himself. In his writings, Kiberd is always assuming Ireland's status as the first English-speaking postcolonial society and is a believer in the comparative nature of postcolonial realities. In *Inventing Ireland*, for example, Kiberd clearly shows an inclination towards a comparative perspective in respect of the colonial experience. He maintains that while 'the invention of modern Ireland had far more in common with the state-formation of other European countries such as Italy or France,' in other ways, especially in relation to culture, it has more in common with

> the emerging peoples of the decolonizing world. The debate about language revival, like the arguments about nationality and cosmopolitanism in literature, anticipated those which would later be conducted in Africa and Asia.

In addition, the language question was 'conducted in familiar terms of tradition versus modernity, but this was not quite so: at a deeper, more interesting level, the debate was about how best to modernize.'[3] This transpires, for instance, when he states that there are 'many analogies between the arguments and experiences of the leaders of the Irish Revival and those in other colonies', effectively seeing Ireland as an example followed across the postcolonial world.[4]

Kiberd also shows a firm belief in an unequivocal relationship between the nation as expressed in literature and its actual history: to him, works of art 'do not float free of their enabling conditions', these enabling conditions being historical, social and political.[5] Kiberd's work is focused on the centrality of art, including literature, in forging a unified and recognisable national identity and consciousness. For him, literature bears the marks of contemporary conditions, but also has a prophetic role in creating some ideal version of the future state. This indissoluble link between literature and contemporary and 'future' social and political reality is made even clearer when he observes that:

> The imagination of these art-works has always been notable for its engagement with society and for its prophetic reading of the forces at work in their time. Less often remarked has been the extent to which political leaders from Pearse to Connolly, from de Valera to Collins, drew on the ideas of poets and playwrights. What makes the Irish Renaissance such a fascinating case is the knowledge that the cultural revival preceded and in many ways enabled the political revolution that followed.[6]

[3] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 135, p. 134.
[4] Ibid., p. 251
[5] Ibid., p. 4.
[6] Ibid.

According to Kiberd, then, the making of the Irish nation is rooted in the work of art, and vice versa.

Frantz Fanon's influence is indeed discernible in Kiberd's theoretical approach, which seems to be a response to Foster's stance. For example, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon described how, in postcolonial nations, the middle classes and the intelligentsia attempt to take over the running of the country and to create a national consciousness through recourse to tribalism and to myths of racial and pre-colonial purity. This, at the same time, often resulted in those nations replicating a template established by the colonial power. [7] Moreover, in a lot of cases, the newly independent artists have to navigate the tension between re-appropriating agency, building a national literature and having to express themselves through the language and structures inherited from the colonial power. In *Inventing Ireland*, we see something similar in Kiberd's view of what happened in Ireland, specifically around the efforts by post-independence nationalism to recreate an imagined pre-colonial national purity.

As we have seen, Kiberd's postcolonial perspective focuses on an analysis of literature in terms of its relationship to its context, be it social, political or historical. This explains why he sees literary criticism as being part of a discourse about Irish society. Moreover, similarly to Fanon, Kiberd acknowledges the limitations of those nationalisms that end up replicating colonial monolithic structures and discourse, but at the same time does see their potential when it comes to reimagining the nation. So, Kiberd recognises that the insularity and reliance on the teachings of the Catholic Church in the post-independence state stifled the critical and creative impulse of Irish literature, an impulse he saw in the Irish literary revival, a period he credits with establishing a form of cultural self-confidence in Ireland. However, he never invalidates the value of nationalism in creating the ideal of 'the nation', which he sees as vital in the decolonising effort.[8]

Literature has a key role in inventing the nation. Kiberd terms the intertwining between the political and the aesthetic 'the national longing for form'.[9] So, for example, following in Said's steps, he sees Yeats' and Joyce's works as possessing a strong nationalist dimension that offers alternative versions of the nation to the post-independence ones. This is because, according to Kiberd, the search for a national form

[7] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 1963).
[8] Eoin Flannery, 'Outside in the Theory Machine: Ireland in the World of Post-Colonial Studies', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 92, no. 368, 2003, pp. 359-369, p. 362.
[9] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 115. Kiberd is here referencing the title of a key essay by Timothy Brennan in *Nation and Narration* edited by Homi Bhabha.

can be seen in each individual writer. Since there is an equation between all individuals and the nation of which they are a part

> the project of inventing a unitary Ireland is the attempt to achieve at a political level a reconciliation of opposed qualities which must first be fused in the self. In other words, personal liberation must precede national recovery, being in fact its first condition.[10]

Therefore, individual and national become one: Kiberd's effort to achieve a balance between the aesthetic and the political, literature and socio-political forces, becomes clear.[11]

So, the focus in fiction on the inner consciousness of characters, their complexity and quest for selfhood in a context that is broken, offers the possibility of experiencing that quest at a national scale. In this respect, Declan Kiberd has in mind Joyce, and *A Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man* in particular. This is obviously a very difficult process to accomplish, understand, and explain, perhaps because it involves a certain degree of idealisation, which goes back to at least the Irish Literary Revival – which, in this respect, influenced Joyce and which was drawn upon by the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising. It might be because of this element of idealisation that neither Kiberd, nor Joyce for that matter, explain how exactly this balance between the aesthetic and the political is going to be achieved, beyond hinting at the artist's superior nature in perceiving the essence of the nation.

Kiberd's approach linking literature to its context, as both being influenced by and influencing it, continues in his latest volume, *After Ireland*. In the introduction to the book, Kiberd writes about when, in September 2008, the Irish economy came crashing down and the phenomenon known as the Celtic Tiger came to an abrupt end:

> Most people were astounded by the immensity of the crash when it came. Apart from a few isolated economists, nobody had predicted it or seen any sign of its coming. . . They insisted, in their innocence, that nobody had alerted them to the underlying abuses.

[10] Ibid., p. 124.

[11] Literary form provides a model for national reinvention, a view mirrored, as mentioned, by Gerry Smyth. Among the literary critics who see this search for identity reflected in post-independence Irish fiction is Neil Corcoran who observes that 'Literature in English in Ireland has been, in the period since Yeats and Joyce, a literature in which ideas of Ireland – of people, community and nation – have been both created and reflected, and in which conceptions of a distinctive Irish identity have been articulated, defended, and challenged'. Like Kiberd and Smyth, Corcoran is clearly highlighting the role of literature as an integral part of the nation-building and identity-making processes in Ireland, Neil Corcoran, *After Yeats and Joyce: Reading Modern Irish Literature*, (Oxford: OUP, 1997), p. iv.

> Nobody had warned them that their very country was in danger of disappearance.[12]

However, according to Kiberd, this was not true. Rather:

> In every decade after independence, writers and artists had given warnings about these things. Writers in particular had suggested, even during the birth-pangs of the Free State, that the country might have been stillborn.[13]

Despite the political, economic, and cultural shifts Ireland has experienced in recent years, Kiberd concludes his recent book by expressing much hope in the globalized literature of the new Ireland – literature that makes contemporary writers 'now part of a worldwide conversation about their country's cultural meaning', just like those of the Revival generation who went into exile.[14]

Kiberd's belief in the interconnection between literature and its context, his admiration of the Revival generation as leading to economic, political and military autonomy, and his view of the artist as a leading figure, are all reiterated in *After Ireland*. Kiberd's critical stance, like Luke Gibbons' and David Lloyd's, is rooted in the principle of materialist postcolonial analysis: he sees culture as the active agent in a broader social, political and historical context.[15] However, although he tries to include in his analysis the minority and/or marginalised voices who were elided from mainstream accounts, Kiberd never goes beyond an acknowledgement of these voices, without questioning the mechanisms that led to this elision.[16] In other words, Kiberd does not question the radical potential of the idea of 'the nation', or open the concept to an analysis of how class, gender, race, or ethnicity could have modified the ideal 'form' that Ireland might take. So, although for Kiberd, literature that contributes to a national culture has the power to 'recover many voices drowned out by official regimes,' when thinking of Ireland taking back control over its own narrative the critic mainly thinks of a literature that can create

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[12] Declan Kiberd, *After Ireland. Writing from Beckett to the Present*, (London: Head of Zeus, 2017), p. 3. In my interview with him, Doyle says something very similar, see Genoveffa Giambona, 'The rhythm of the city: Roddy Doyle on Dublin, the past, identity and the healing power of the city', *Irish Studies Review*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2019, pp. 253-264, pp. 258-9.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., p. 496
[15] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 124.
[16] For a discussion of this see Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*; see also Flannery, 'Outside in the Theory Machine: Ireland in the World of Post-Colonial Studies', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 92, No. 368 (Winter, 2003), pp. 359-369; and Susan Shaw Sailer, 'Translating Tradition: An Interview With Declan Kiberd', 6-7 June 1999, https://legacy.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v4i1/kiberd.htm, last accessed 11 June 2021.

an identity, a national consciousness, separate from England and move toward unity and decolonization.[17] Kiberd also points out that:

> The value of nationalism was strategic [as] it helped to break up the self-hatred within an occupied people, which led them to dream of a total seamless assimilation to the colonial culture

- although this also meant that the narratives and voices of those who did not conform to the official representation of Irish identity were ignored, at best, or more often repressed.[18]

Despite acknowledging the lack of representation of certain voices, Kiberd's theoretical approach still keeps the nation at its centre and never really tries to fully analyse different strains of experience in the country, nor, as Kirkland notes, 'question the frame of the relationships between [such voices], institution and nation'.[19] Linda Connolly is also of the view that some voices have been neglected by such strands of theory. She specifically focuses on gender when she observes that:

> Despite its self-styled status as the custodian of Irish studies, postcolonial theory has been applied in a limited mode. In particular, the analysis protests the narrow and problematic space the paradigm allots to 'women' as subjects and demonstrates how a restricting interpretation of subalternity is employed in relation to gender.[20]

This subaltern aspect, seen as the voices ignored by official representations of Irish identity, but also in terms of marginalisation on the basis of class and gender, is an important aspect in the fiction I am going to examine in the later chapters of this thesis.

Another early Irish theorist whose methodology is rooted in cultural historicism is Luke Gibbons, who proposes a framework which rejects a homogenising view of modernity as purported by the coloniser. This modernity saw the colonial power as the civilised centre and the colonised as ignorant and brutish; it embraced commercialism, industrialisation and urbanisation as the goals of modernity. So, Gibbons belongs to that strand of Irish postcolonial studies which sees economic modernisation as the main drive behind colonial expansion and behind Britain's former political and cultural dominance

[17] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 646.
[18] Declan Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 146.
[19] Richard Kirkland, 'Questioning the Frame: Hybridity, Ireland, and the Institution', Colin Graham and Richard Kirkland (eds.), *Ireland and Cultural Theory: The Mechanics of Authenticity*, pp. 210-228, p. 222.
[20] Linda Connolly, 'The Limits of "Irish Studies": Historicism, Culturalism, Paternalism', Eóin Flannery and Angus Mitchell (eds.), *Enemies of Empire: New Perspectives on Literature, Historiography and Imperialism*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), p. 207.

over Ireland. In other words, the colonial power tried to justify its presence in Ireland by pointing out its modernity in contrast to Irish backwardness: in order to modernise, then, Ireland needed to renounce the local history, and take on the cosmopolitan trajectory shown by the colonial centre.

Gibbons is uncomfortable with post-Treaty nationalism, which he sees as monolithic. This notwithstanding, Gibbons is equally critical of Irish revisionist historiography.[21] As we have seen, he also mentions the concept of the 'colonization of theory', whereby Ireland had been excluded from a large part of early global postcolonial theorisations.[22] This colonisation of theory has, however, been questioned in Irish postcolonial criticism as he sees it, since it has demonstrated:

> How Ireland's anomalous position at once within and outside Europe gives issues of race, nation, class and gender a new complexity, derived from an intersection of both metropolis and subaltern histories.[23]

So, according to Gibbons, although technically part of the first-world, Ireland retains a third-world memory. Although its population is largely white, English-speaking and westernised, Ireland's history means that it was in the paradoxical position of being a colony within Europe. Gibbons defends Ireland's colonial and postcolonial condition especially in a collection of essays published by Cork University Press in collaboration with Field Day.[24]

According to Eóin Flannery, Luke Gibbons embraces cultural materialism in his dialectical relation to both modernisation theory and revisionist historiography.[25] From this perspective, culture is never neutral: it becomes, rather, deeply political. Thus, Gibbons maintains that culture, and literature especially, is never totally removed from, nor independent of, everyday life with its social and political events.[26] Moreover, by stating that all culture is political, Gibbons tacitly validates the notion that cultural and

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[21] See 'The Global Cure? History, Therapy, and the Celtic Tiger', Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin (eds.), *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy*, (London: Pluto Press, 2002), pp. 89-106.
[22] Luke Gibbons (1998) 'Ireland and the colonization of theory', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, p.27.
[23] Ibid. It is worth noting that subaltern historiography is different from the 'history from below' mainly in three areas 'Relative separation of the history of power from any universalist histories of capital, critique of the nation form [and] interrogation of the relationship between power and knowledge', Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography', *Nepantla: Views from South*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2000, pp. 9-32, p. 15.
[24] Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, (Cork: Cork University Press, in association with Field Day1996).
[25] Eoin Flannery, 'Outside in the Theory Machine: Ireland in the World of Post-Colonial Studies', p. 359.
[26] Luke Gibbons, *Transformations*, p. 8.

literary representations equate to political representation. It is then up to scholars and critics to highlight marginalised and underrepresented narratives in order to challenge and expand partial representations in an otherwise monotone, and homogenising, official discourse. Consequently:

> Gibbons envisages a materialist contextualisation of literary and historical texts that does not simply represent but is representative; that is not simply formative but formed within and by the material conditions of their provenance.[27]

This suggests that literary texts offer grounding for a context that speaks to the nation, reflecting their context but also influencing it. This is an aspect I am going to focus on in the analysis of my chosen fiction.

Moreover, and linked to this, Gibbons proposes an alternative to the usually accepted 'vertical mobility from periphery to centre'.[28] Postcolonial theory has usually privileged the thinking that, during the colonial period, propagation was always from a Western centre to peripheral contexts. To challenge this assumption, and similarly to Kiberd, Gibbons proposes the possibility of 'lateral mobility', implying cross-exchange and cross-contamination between peripheries, which gave life to cross-periphery solidarity that allowed postcolonial cultures to interact in mutually-beneficial cultural exchanges.[29] These peripheral solidarities extend from his previous counsel on the exigency for laterally mobile postcolonial criticism. Therefore, Ireland's 'Third World memory' should be rooted in a diverse, multivocal cosmopolitan discourse, rather than in monolithic conservative nationalism.[30] It is this kind of exchange in a literary context that will mark my thinking about aspects of Roddy Doyle's and Anne Enright's fiction.

It is in this context that Gibbons reflects on narratives, generic conventions, rhetorical tropes, and in particular on allegory, as a way to

[27] Eóin Flannery, 'Outside in the Theory Machine: Ireland in the World of Post-Colonial Studies', pp. 359-360.
[28] Luke Gibbons, 'Unapproved Roads: Ireland and Post-colonial Identity' in *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, in association with Field Day, 1996), p. 180.
[29] Ibid. In the wider postcolonial context, this is a stance recently reproposed, in a more global colonial context, by Priyamvada Gopal in *Insurgent Empire*. Gopal goes even further by claiming that, at times, it was actually the colonial centre that imported political, social and cultural trends from the periphery, especially when it comes to ideas of freedom and emancipation. Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire. Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent*, (London: Verso, 2019).
[30] Luke Gibbons, 'The Global Cure? History, Therapy, and the Celtic Tiger', p. 100.

> *re-figure* Irish identity, to attend to those recalcitrant areas of experience which simply do not lend themselves to certainty and which impel societies themselves towards indirect and figurative discourse.[31]

This is how Gibbons derives the concept of 'allegories' of identity. In the Irish context, Gibbons sees allegory within the politics of the unverbalised, where it becomes a figural practice that infiltrates everyday experience, creating the 'aesthetics of the actual': it is in this way that the certainty of identity is replaced by figural ambiguity and possibility.[32] The instability of reference and contestation of meaning within this figural practice may lead to uncertainty as to 'where the figural ends and the literal begins'.[33] At the same time, he also seems to say that this happens where areas of experience are hard to express, and that fiction is only an outlet for the colonised/women/working classes to find expression. In other words, literature can be one of the outlets for marginalised and subaltern voices.

Gibbons justifies his politicising of the literary trope by claiming that:

> All culture is, of course, political, but in Ireland historically it acquired a particularly abrasive power, preventing the deflection of creative energies into a rarefied aesthetic or 'imaginary' realm entirely removed from the exigencies of everyday life.[34]

Gibbons attempts to focus on, and recover, cultural, political and social discourses that have been excluded from, or marginalised by, the dominant discourse. So 'what Gibbons canvasses is an attention to the rituals of anti-colonial cultural representation in all its forms'.[35] From this perspective, identity is not 'a conscious, psychic choice, but developed as and through a series of acts [and] an apprenticeship of communal activities'.[36] Allegory, then, is, according to Gibbons, what allows postcolonial writers to recover hidden or ignored socio-cultural formations which depicted the nation as exclusively rural, Gaelic and Catholic, both during anticolonial resistance and in the post-independence nation.[37] This links back to Gibbons' view on traumatic memory, and the

[31] Luke Gibbons, *Transformations*, p. 18.
[32] Ibid., p. 20.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., p. 8.
[35] 'Eoín Flannery, 'Outside in the Theory Machine', p. 368.
[36] Luke Gibbons, 'Therapy on the ropes: The Quiet Man and the Myth of the West', Lecture delivered at 'MA in Culture and Colonialism' seminar, N.U.I. Galway, 25 October 2002, quoted in Eoin Flannery, 'Outside the Theory Machine', p. 361.
[37] Luke Gibbons, *Transformations*, p. 16.

link between history, trauma and telling a story as a cathartic act. Gibbons concludes that it

> is not about recovering or… banishing previous experiences but rather *working through* them… this protracted, often painful process… links the lost voices of the past ineluctably with the present.[38]

So, although not all narrative structures provide consoling fictions, the act of telling itself can provide a means to connect to the past as a process of re-examination and reconnection. Gibbons' remarks on the links between narratives and traumatic memories are relevant to this thesis. As we will see, my chosen fiction, for example Enright's *The Gathering* or *The Forgotten Waltz*, or Doyle's *The Last Roundup Trilogy* or Paula novels, is about processing past experiences, both at an individual and at a collective level, and their impact on the present.

In *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy*, Gibbons' co-edited book published in 2002, he proposes that a public sphere increasingly focused on and shaped by economic issues has thwarted the potential for radical social thought in Ireland.[39] The title of the book, together with its content and conclusions, are a not-so-subtle criticism of Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland*. In particular, Gibbons and his co-editors conclude that the convergence to the point of identity between culture and economic forces has 'diminished the public sphere, and silenced an uncritical Academy'.[40] Nonetheless, precisely this overlapping between culture and economic interests has magnified the critical power of cultural discourses. Indeed, as culture becomes rooted in the fabric of the market economy, it has even more power to destabilise such economic forces. So, Gibbons believes that if 'all culture is… political', whether in the form of literary genres or mass media, it can also act as a transformative power from within through its 'capacity to engage critically with its own past'. He insists that, thanks to this critical engagement, it holds a social power 'to give rise to what was not there before'.[41] Hence, through literature, Ireland can engage with its past, and can further use the past as a resource that will reveal rather than repress history. This process can actually help create a sustainable future by combining the knowledge and experience of the past with the modern changes in Ireland and drive them towards modernity.

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[38] Luke Gibbons, 'The Global Cure? History, Therapy and The Celtic Tiger', p. 97.
[39] Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin (eds.), *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy History, Theory, Practice*.
[40] Ibid., p. 17.
[41] Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, pp. 3-8.

In an effort to accommodate the different legacies of Ireland's past within the narratives of Irish identities, a subsequent strand of postcolonial theory promotes ideas of cultural mixing, hybridity and syncretism as opposed to those of nation, history and indigenous culture. This phase tries to go beyond the national obsession at precisely the point that my key fictions are being created. Richard Kirkland, for example, registers the limitations of both Gibbons' and Kiberd's stance. He believes that, through a methodology grounded in cultural historicism, both Gibbons and Kiberd point to the possibility of creative, and in turn political, liberation above and beyond both the rhetoric of traditional nationalist expression and liberal modernisation. However, as we have seen, by merely noting an elision of voices, or advocating for the literature of the modern nation, neither Gibbons nor Kiberd 'allow the recognition of hybridised identity' or question the mechanisms that regulate the relationship between such non-conforming identities, institutions and the nation'.[42] Moreover, according to both Kirkland and Colin Graham, postcolonial theory's remit is not to ensure that 'its application assumes and underwrites the triumph of the independent post-colonial nation'.[43] Rather, an effective cultural theory has to deeply question and examine the contemporary structures of both nation and state, as well as the mechanics of its liberation and foundation. The roles of political and cultural representation, then, are key within postcolonial analysis.[44]

However, Gibbons has warned of the risks involved in uncritically accepting notions of hybridity as a way to overcome questions of postcolonial identity.[45] In the same vein, and in a wider context, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam contest that:

> A celebration of syncreticism and hybridity per se, if not articulated with questions of historical hegemonies, risks sanctifying the fait accompli of colonial violence. For oppressed people, even artistic syncreticism is not a game but a sublimated form of historical pain… As a descriptive catch-all term, 'hybridity' fails to discriminate between

[42] Richard Kirkland, 'Questioning the Frame: Hybridity, Ireland, and the Institution', *Ireland and Cultural Theory The Mechanics of Authenticity*, Colin Graham and Richard Kirkland (eds.), pp. 210-228, p. 222.
[43] Colin Graham and Richard Kirkland (eds.), *Ireland and Cultural Theory: The Mechanics of Authenticity*, pp. 3-4.
[44] Colin Graham, 'Post-Nationalism/Post-Colonialism: Reading Irish Culture', *Irish Studies Review*, vol. 8, 1994, pp. 35-37; Colin Graham, 'Subalternity and Gender: Problems of Post-colonial Irishness', Claire Connolly (ed.), Theorizing Ireland, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), pp. 150-159; Colin Graham, '"Blame it on Maureen O'Hara": Ireland and the Trope of Authenticity', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2001, pp. 58–75.
[45] Luke Gibbons, *Unapproved Roads: Post-Colonialism and Irish Identity*, online http://v1.zonezero.com/magazine/essays/distant/zrutas2.html, last accessed 11 June 2021.

> the diverse modalities of hybridity: colonial imposition, obligatory assimilation, political co-option, cultural mimicry and so forth.[46]

So, any talk of hybridity, even when expressed within art and literature, cannot happen without an acknowledgement of the different histories of the nation and of oppression within them.

Monotone representations of the nation had been encouraged in literary outputs, so much so that, according to Rose Atfield:

> It is… essential to recognise that when considering postcolonialism in Irish literature, it is not only the historical national colonialism of Ireland by England which is challenged but the 'internal' colonialism created by the patriarchal construct of the Irish social and literary establishment.[47]

Atfield's observation links back to Linda Connolly's, whose comment on the subaltern status of female voices ignored by official representations of Irish identity I quoted earlier, and is also linked to the concept of double colonization. This refers, in particular, to the status of women in the postcolonial world. Postcolonial and feminist theorists state that women were oppressed by both colonial and patriarchal ideologies, with the latter often mirroring the former when it came to women's place in society. This is an ongoing process in many countries even after independence and, as we will see, it is very much the case in Ireland. Irish poet and novelist Mary Dorcey, for example, implies that Irish women are doubly colonized, when she recalls that when she grew up, the vast majority of books available were by men; Irish women writers were rich, Protestant, upper class and living in exile. Dorcey adds that Irish Catholic women were considered incapable of any other vocation than looking after men and children.[48] That is why, in this thesis, I will look at reactions to both pre- and post-independence legacies, especially in connection with gender representation and reactions to it, as these issues are vital to my argument around the fiction by Roddy Doyle and Anne Enright which I examine.

Before Atfield, Colin Graham had also acknowledged the role of nationalism as a neo-imperial and conservative force, by stating that:

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[46] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 42.
[47] Rose Atfield, 'Postcolonialism in the Poetry of Mary Dorcey', *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2007, https://www.postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/707/484, last accessed 11 June 2021, p. 2.
[48] See Ide O'Carroll and Eoin Collins (eds.), *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland: Towards the Twenty-first Century,* (London & New York: Cassell, 1995), pp. 38-39.

> No longer can the postcolonial nation be regarded as a triumph of the labours of oppressed people… [the nation] is itself an over-homogenising, oppressive ideology which elides the multiplicity of subaltern classes and groups… the overarching umbrella of Irish nationalism and its end-product state… is complicit in assuming and enforcing the subaltern status of women and other marginalised groups.[49]

Graham is here recognising not just that the voices ignored by state representations of Irish identity can be seen as having a subaltern status, but also that there were issues of marginalisation and subalternity in terms of class and gender.[50] Graham creates a parallel between the Indian and Irish situation, a lateral connection which, we have seen, Graham is not the first to make. However, the definition of subalternity most appropriate in the context of this thesis is Robert Young's. Young believes that in postcolonial studies generally, the subaltern has become a synonym for any marginalised or disempowered group that has been denied agency.[51] Hence, I understand 'subaltern' as a relational term in a dialectic with 'dominant'. Its use will thus consist in a metaphorical sense to designate unequal and iniquitous power relations between individuals and/or groups, underpinned by the institutional structures of the state. Accordingly, in this thesis, the term will apply to all forms of disempowerment, oppression, marginalisation, exclusion and so on. In the fiction I am going to examine in the later chapters of this thesis, we will see how voice is given to those denied agency either by the colonial power, or post-independence nationalism, or both. It is the subaltern aspect of women and class in Ireland which forms the imaginative *driver* and *energy*, even the anger behind Roddy Doyle's and Anne

[49] Colin Graham, 'Subalternity and Gender: Problems of Postcolonial Irishness', pp. 152-3.
[50] The concept of subalternity was first launched by a group of Indian academics who offered a re-reading of the Indian sub-continent histories and narratives inspired by Gramsci's views. In the first issue of the *Subaltern Studies* journal, which became the outlet of the Subaltern Studies Group's views, Guha defines subalternity as 'the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society, whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or any other way', Ranajit Guha, 'Preface', Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 35. Spivak further extended the concept of subalternity to include women's and gender issues, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988). According to Gyan Prakash 'The term "subaltern", drawn from Antonio Gramsci's writings, refers to subordination in terms of class, caste, gender, race, language, and culture and was used to signify the centrality of dominant/dominated relationships in history', Gyan Prakash, 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 99, no. 5, pp. 1475-1490, 1994, p. 1477. However, according to David Ludden 'The originality of Subaltern Studies came to be its striving to rewrite the nation outside the state-centred national discourse that replicates colonial power/knowledge in a world of globalisation. This new kind of national history consists of dispersed moments and fragments, which subaltern historians seek in the ethnographic present of colonialism', David Ludden, *Reading Subaltern Studies. Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia*, (London: Anthem Press, 2002), p. 20.
[51] Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction*, (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), p. 354.

Enright's fiction. The fiction does, to an extent, takes up the 'idea' of the subaltern, but actually it makes it 'real' in the ways it speaks to Irish audiences, thus establishing that link between literary representation, lived experience, and how the former can help bring out and shape the latter.[52] By doing so, literature also questions pre-existing theoretical paradigms and helps shape new ones.

Some commentators have remarked that, albeit nothing significant happened in the year 1980, it is when critical and creative possibilities started to coalesce, and the past could be retrospectively re-examined through the present.[53] However, in the last forty years or so, the Republic of Ireland has gone through what some scholars have termed a belated modernity, that is to say a period of social and cultural change accompanied by a questioning of old representations of Irishness and an increase in searching for the nation's identity and its place in the world, as the country has become more globalized and wealthier due to the Celtic Tiger.[54] This increased search is reflected in Irish fiction. On this subject, Terence Brown wonders why in a time when Ireland has been improving economically, the national cultural debate is still so fraught. He argues that:

> It was probably that the focus of debate was often the status of the country itself in which much emotion was invested – fragile post-colonial society in a global capitalist world or a confident nation taking its proper place among the richest countries of Europe – that sometimes gave the culture wars the quality of a stentorian dialogue of the deaf.[55]

This kind of fragility about identity has literary effects that are reflected in fragmentation, something that I believe is still present in the fiction I will be discussing later in this thesis.

Now that a unified, linear, prescriptive and monolithic version of Irish identity is being debunked, as far as Irish fiction is concerned part of the process of chiselling this myth away also means creating new identities. This involves, as noted by Gibbons above, fragmented histories and identities rather than unified ones. It also means abandoning chronological linearity in favour of fragmented narratives.[56] As Flannery points out:

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[52] Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, p. 8.
[53] Eric Falci and Paige Reynolds, 'Introduction', Eric Falci and Paige Reynolds (eds.) *Irish Literature in Transition: 1980-2020*, p. 2.
[54] Ibid., pp. 3-8.
[55] Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), p. 418.
[56] The novels analysed in this thesis are characterised by fragmentation, seemingly contradictory behaviours, shifting identities, non-linear narration and will be considered as representative texts that show how contemporary Irish writers try and rework Irish identity by incorporating the voices and narratives of those previously on the margins.

> In wrestling the past from the petrifaction of linear narrative, subaltern historiography liberates subsumed, fragmentary histories… the past possesses a vigorous valence in the present… reclamation of the past… politicises the representation of the past.[57]

This absence of linearity, and re-examination of the past are indeed a characteristic trait of the novels of this study.

Though nationalism is at first a valid tool of decolonisation, as mentioned, it might have, in the long run, negative aspects that must be re-examined, more so when they reproduce some colonial views. This is because, like colonialism, early nationalism strove to present a coherent, linear representation of national identity and history which ended up being unidimensional and monophonic. Indeed:

> The extent to which *some* versions of anti-colonial nationalism… assimilate and replicate elements of the racist and imperialist mentalities they set out to oppose is a well-developed theme in postcolonial studies, and Irish nationalism in this and other respects thus shows the conventional limits of nationalism as an oppositional discourse.[58]

However, it is also true that, although

> the prevailing consensus among many recent critics (postcolonial and otherwise) is that the 'nation' is an exhausted form… to wish away the historical achievements, legacies and solidarities of nationalism(s) is… both unwise and premature. Unburdening ourselves of the nation… exhibits a profound ignorance of the past; it relinquishes the… nationalist movements that combated and… ousted long-standing colonial regimes. If we are really to imagine more egalitarian utopian futures, it will not be by jettisoning the past yields of nationalism, but by opening ourselves to its historical variety and its particular revolutionary potentialities.[59]

There is a delicate balance then to be kept. It is true that some forms of nationalism can become rather prescriptive, but it is also true that nationalism was the sine qua non to oust the coloniser. Moreover, as we will see in the fiction I will explore in this thesis, looking to redefine and broaden the boundaries of the nation does not automatically mean doing away with the whole idea of the nation.

However, Eagleton is right when pointing out that:

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[57] Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 88.
[58] Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune*, p. 27.
[59] Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 202.

> Nationalism (a thoroughly modern phenomenon) has much in common with some currents of modernism. Both seek to move forward into the future with their eyes fixed on the past… If Ireland was in some ways a traditionalist society, its traditions were peculiarly fractured and disrupted by a history of colonial intervention; and this meant that it was no stranger to the estranged, fragmented, unstable self, all of which played a role in the flowering of a distinctively Irish modernism.[60]

Eagleton is making a cultural nationalist point, namely that the Irish are more modernist than others thanks to, or because of, the disruption of the nation caused by colonial experience. Flannery, Gibbons, Kiberd, together with Seamus Deane, and David Lloyd are linked by a sense that 'narrative discontinuity is a fundamental, if not the fundamental, Irish condition'.[61]

The issue of modernity and modernism raised by Gibbons and then taken further by Eagleton is a fraught one for postcoloniality generally. In wider postcolonial discourse, Helen Tiffin, for instance, analyses the relationship between modernism/postmodernism and postcolonialism. Talking about the concept of 'literary universality', or centrality of the hegemonic discourse, Tiffin points out that in order to avoid being labelled provincial and to be part of the dominant literary discourse, colonial and postcolonial writers needed to transcend the local. Nonetheless, the European colonial centre appropriated postcolonial practice and theory that challenged this notion, and labelled them postmodern or poststructuralist, not giving them the recognition as subversive discourse. She sees this as a further attempt by the colonial centre to exercise its hegemony even in the postcolonial period.[62] Although an Irish 'franchise' that feeds upon local history and traditions can be seen as exclusive, in order to resonate, it also needs to place itself in the context of wider literary movements. At times, as this thesis will argue, this has led to conflating postcolonial tropes with others, such as post-modern ones.

Tiffin makes an excellent distinction between postcolonialism and postmodernism when she argues that:

> A number of strategies, such as the move away from realist representation, the refusal of closure, the exposure of the politics of metaphor, the interrogation of forms, the

[60] Terry Eagleton, 'Introduction', Pascale Casanova, *Samuel Beckett: Anatomy of a Literary Revolu*tion, (London: Verso, 2006), p. 7.
[61] Eóin Flannery, 'Outside in The Theory Machine: Ireland in the World of Post-Colonial Studies', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 92, no. 368, 2003, pp. 359-369, p. 361.
[62] Helen Tiffin, 'Postcolonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse', *Kunapipi*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1987, pp. 15-34.

> rehabilitation of allegory and the attack on binary structuration of concept and language, are characteristics of both the generally postcolonial and the European postmodern, but they are energised by different theoretical assumptions and by vastly different political motivations. [63]

So, for example, while postmodernism might focus on aesthetics, or authority in general, postcolonialism explores the political and cultural implications of the colonial authority. This makes postcolonialism more of a political movement when compared to postmodernism, in the sense of its greater focus on navigating a country's history and legacy. Elleke Boehmer further explains that:

> Postcolonial criticism uses post-structuralist concepts of language (indeterminate, multilayered, historically contingent) to show how anti-colonial resistance worked in texts. Meanings remain partial, susceptible to permutation and translation.[64]

It becomes clear that literary culture and national development are connected. Of course, all this links Irish literature to Ireland's history and politics.

Above, we have seen the presumptions about postcolonialism in Ireland as developed by Irish theorists. The aim of this thesis is to test how far the novels which are the objects of study can be read through a postcolonial lens, to see how far the theory enables a better understanding of the fiction that has been written in Ireland in the last thirty years or so, and *also* to try and flesh out the limitations of the theoretical perspective. In this way, we can see what has become of the discursive 'space', to paraphrase Smyth, in the literary outputs examined. What this thesis is going to examine is how much of this postcolonial theory still pertains to the novels that are being written. As contemporary fiction has become more flexible, starting with its literary techniques, should the paradigms of the postcolonial discourse follow suit? Should the theory become more flexible as well? These theories are now ingrained but this thesis will challenge how adequate they are to our understanding and reading of contemporary Irish fiction. How much is the theory able to articulate what is happening in the fiction?

I will now interrogate the historical integration of theory, novel and nation in Ireland by looking back to the precursor figure of James Joyce. This is pertinent because

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[63] See Helen Tiffin, 'Post-Colonialism, Postmodernism and the Rehabilitation of Post-Colonial History', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 23, 1, 1988, 169-181, (p. 172). Tiffin challenges the notion of literary universality stating that the European colonial centre in fact appropriated post-colonial practice and theory and labelled them postmodern or poststructuralist. She sees this as a further attempt by the colonial centre to exercise its hegemony even in the postcolonial period.

[64] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 127.

Joyce plays a decisive role in the combination between theory, nation and novel. It is no secret that critics such as Kiberd, who advocate the centrality of literature in forging a national consciousness, look at Joyce as a postcolonial modernist who, especially in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, tries to create a new national literature for the new nation.[65] Moreover, according to Neil Corcoran, Joyce's *oeuvre* is a prime example of how

> ideas of Ireland – people, community, nation – have been both created and reflected, and in which conceptions of a distinctively Irish identity have been articulated, defended and challenged.[66]

The critical process that sees fiction as an alternative way 'of thinking about the relationship between Irish history and the Irish present' and the impact of the former on the latter starts with the publication of Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) and develops in his subsequent works starting with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), which interrogated the state whose foundations were beginning to be laid down.[67]

A significant number of contemporary novels are set in, and re-examine, the recent past, something that is also true for the novels which are object of this study. These stories fictionalise and overlay personal and collective memory, individual and national past and, just like in Joyce, (to whom they often implicitly or explicitly, and inevitably, refer), they 'stage the impact of past histories on the present'.[68] That is why it is pertinent to briefly look at Joyce as reimagined by the theorists, and at the key themes and ideas that emerge from that analysis.

I.2 James Joyce as postcolonial writer and thinker

It has been pointed out that, when critiquing Irish novels, there has been a tendency in Irish literary history to judge Irish fiction through parameters devised for English novels as a normative model.[69] Rather, attention should shift 'from asking why there was no Irish *Middlemarch* to an examination of the conditions that did produce an Irish *Ulysses*'.[70]

[65] See Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*.
[66] Neil Corcoran, *After Yeats and Joyce*, p. vi.
[67] Clair Wills, 'Culture and globalization: contemporary storytelling and the legacies of 1916', in Tom Boylan, Nicholas Canny &, and Mary Harris (eds.), *Ireland, 1916–2016. The Promise and Challenge of National Sovereignty (Dóchas Agus Dúshlán Na Ceannasachta Náisiúnta)* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2018), pp. 41-55, p. 43.
[68] Ibid., p. 46.
[69] See Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune*, pp. 48-9.
[70] Ibid., p. 49.

Joyce is seen by international critics and, crucially, from within Ireland itself, as a writer who takes a truly postcolonial stance. Among many examples, books such as *Joyce, Race and Empire* by Vincent Cheng or *James Joyce and Nationalism* by Emer Nolan have stressed the 'postcolonial preoccupation' in Joyce's works.[71] Enda Duffy sees *Ulysses* as the beginning of 'postcolonial modernism' and 'the text of Ireland's independence'; its formal innovations are part of 'shock tactics' designed 'to force into conflict some of the discourses invented by the colonists to characterize the natives'.[72]

In 'James Joyce and Mythic Realism', Declan Kiberd observes that the modernism we see in Joyce was less like that of Mann, Proust or Eliot, and more similar to that of postcolonial writers such as Salman Rushdie and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Kiberd strongly believes that Joyce attempted to imagine a meaningful modernity which was more open than any nationalism which founded itself on the restrictive apparatus of the colonial state.[73] Moreover, in *Inventing Ireland* Kiberd calls Joyce one of 'the great post-colonial writers' and *Ulysses* 'a supreme instance of the post-colonial text'.[74] The value of Joyce's works as postcolonial texts is also seen in the fact that they strive to give both the community and the individual expression, writing 'from the inside' in opposition to the colonial outsider's dismissal of either cultural value or individual subjectivity within that community.[75] Racial identity, xenophobia, nationalism and anti-colonialism are seen as some of the main concerns in *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, making of Joyce the figure in Irish postcolonial theory whose influence on subsequent generations of Irish writers cannot be ignored.

The story of twentieth-century Anglophone literature is the decentering of literary authority, a process that in Ireland started with the Irish Revivalists and found full expression in Joyce's works, and his efforts to establish a new national literature in a language that he feels is alien to him.[76] Indeed, 'Joyce… believes that art can eventually act to invigorate the torpid national conscience'.[77] Joyce wanted to debunk the widespread assumption that Ireland, and Dublin, had to look elsewhere for examples of cultural and literary norms. Rather, according to Kiberd 'Joyce did not become modern to the extent

[71] Vincent J. Cheng, *Joyce, Race and Empire (Cultural Margins)*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Emer Nolan, *James Joyce and Nationalism*, (New York: Routledge, 1995).
[72] Enda Duffy, *The Subaltern Ulysses*, (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 1-3.
[73] Declan Kiberd, 'James Joyce and Mythical Realism', K. D. M. Snell (ed.), *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland: 1800–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 136-163.
[74] See Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, pp. 327-9.
[75] C. L. Innes, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 60.
[76] Declan Kiberd, 'James Joyce and Mythical Realism'.
[77] Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune*, p. 128.

that he ceased to be Irish; rather he began from the premise that to be Irish was to be modern anyway'.[78] In this context, his choice of the lower middle-classes as narrative material is not casual: this was the class that injected impetus to political change at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. It was the class to which the leaders of the War of Independence belonged and which marked the new nation's political and cultural course.[79] As I will discuss in the next chapter, Doyle takes on some of the ambition of James Joyce but alters the class that is the focus of his fiction.
In this sense, Joyce exemplifies the colonial writer as described by Flannery:

> For the colonial writer, neither the present reality of occupation or oppression, nor the linguistic mechanisms of imperialism, are adequate for the cohesion of a viable national identity – therefore new forms, or radically reimagined forms, are necessitated.[80]

Joyce wants to build the role of the Irish bard for himself, the founder of an independent and modern national literature. All this firmly places his work and personal artistic journey in Ireland's social, cultural and political situation of the time. Besides, if we accept that his experimentation with form and language are evidence of his effort to build a national identity, we can similarly conclude that the linguistic and formal experimentation and reappropriation seen in the contemporary novels we will be discussing in this thesis are part of a similar identity-building exercise.

To add to the link between Joyce's work and his nation-building efforts, when looking at *A Portrait*, Seamus Deane observes that its protagonist, Stephen Dedalus

> recognizes himself to be a member of a community; it is in relation to the collective… that he formulates his individual aspiration… his voice is not the voicing of a private or personal condition only. It is the voicing of the hitherto unrealised and unexamined condition of a race, the Irish. *Portrait*… is the first to examine the distorted relationship between the Irish community and oppression.[81]

Hence, although an individual who never sees those around him as his equals, Stephen becomes the link between subjectivism and collectivism, the private and the political, a

[78] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 267.
[79] For a discussion on this, see Richard Breen, Damian F. Hannan, D.B. Rottman, and Christopher T. Whelan, *Understanding Contemporary Ireland: State, Class and Development in the Republic of Ireland* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990); see also, Eugenio F. Biagini &, and Mary E. Daly (eds.), *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland*; Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*.
[80] Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 79.
[81] Seamus Deane, 'Introduction', James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. vii.

spokesperson for a community and a country which he wants to flee but that, at the same time, he never ceases to try and create a consciousness for through his art. In a way, this recalls the position of commentators such as Kiberd who, as I noted, sees literature and the writer as central in forming a national consciousness.

The view that Joyce inextricably links the personal, the national and the role of literature in creating a national consciousness is confirmed by Flannery who states that:

> Much of Joyce's writing… expresses a profound dissatisfaction with his contemporary Ireland, and… with proposed measures to redress its oppressed and oppressive condition.[82]

An example of the link between political and personal, individual and collective in Irish literature, and in Joyce, is that of the fall of Charles Stuart Parnell, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) and the impact this event had on Irish literature of the time. Indeed it is this link which preoccupies the opening chapters of *A Portrait*. The year of his death, 1891, marks an important moment in both Irish history and literature. From that moment on, several important writers commemorated one particular moment in Parnell's life, namely his fall from the Irish political scene. It was his love affair with Katie/Kitty O'Shea, married to one of his followers, which was exposed and exploited by his enemies to rule him out of the country's political life. The Irish Catholic Church, which by now was one of the identifying elements for Irish nationalists, had always been 'suspicious of Home Rule's Protestant origins' and so accused him of immorality and so being unfit for leadership.[83] Parnell's party split and the man himself lost his leadership.

Nonetheless 'the myth of Parnell [had] a widespread influence in the decades after his death' in Irish history, politics and literature.[84] From a political point of view, the fall of Parnell provoked a sort of vacuum in Irish politics as well as internal divisions in the IPP. But this political event – which at first seems to have nothing to do with literature and culture – caused, according to Yeats:

> All that stir of thought which prepared for the Anglo-Irish war … a disillusioned and embittered Ireland turned from parliamentary politics to culture.[85]

[82] Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 78.
[83] R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1872*, p. 418.
[84] Cairns and Richards, *Writing Ireland*, p. 106.
[85] W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, (London: Bracken Books, 1995), p. 559.

It is as if, disappointed by politics, after Parnell's death writers and intellectuals turned to culture and literature to try and establish an independent Irish identity. The Irish Literary Revival might almost be seen as stemming out of this political failure: despite espousing the nationalist cause, through Parnell Anglo-Irish writers expressed feelings of 'fall, betrayal, and an uncertain future'.[86]

As mentioned, after Parnell's death a sort of mythology came into existence regarding this character, and this mythology can be found in literary works as well. Parnell became an important figure for the writers of the Second Celtic Revival at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth – the first having taken place in the last three decades of the eighteenth century – especially for Yeats, Lady Gregory, George Moore, AE or George William Russell. But the Parnell figure was extremely important for Joyce as well, and as David Pierce puts it:

> While for Yeats the fall of Parnell cut a space for literature to develop free from politics, for Joyce it meant that the context for his work was inevitably both historical and political… … to Joyce, Parnell brought dignity to Irish politics and he was forced from office by lesser mortals.[87]

Yeats gives us an important and meaningful portrait of Charles Stewart Parnell in 'To a Shade', where he is seen as a man of a 'passionate serving kind' and 'gentle blood', a victim of jealousy and ignorance, of 'insult heaped upon him'.[88] According to Yeats, Parnell's disgrace is due to 'his open-handedness': an aristocratic, a generous victim of barbarian behaviour, a noble individual against a savage mass.[89] This is consistent with the idea Yeats and the other members of the Irish Literary Revival had of the Celtic past and Celtic culture, that is to say that it idealised the aristocratic and the individualistic.

The revivalist movement has its roots in other factors as well. It is probably not by chance that the most influential of the Revivalists had Protestant origins and were indeed part of the Protestant Ascendancy. This is connected to the fact that the Anglo-Irish felt that their status and role in Ireland were threatened by the latest political developments; they sensed a sort of decline coming, of their class, of their ideals. All this

[86] Cairns and Richards, *Writing Ireland*, p. 106.
[87] David Pierce, *James Joyce's Ireland*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 13. The fall of Parnell, or his role in Irish history, is still significant when we consider that in Roddy Doyle's *The Last Roundup Trilogy*, the female protagonist's name is Miss O'Shea, a surname which recalls the apparent cause of the beginning of Parnell's political trouble.
[88] W. B. Yeats, 'To a Shade', in *Selected Poetry*, A. Norman Jeffares (ed.), (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 57, ll. 11-16.
[89] Ibid., l. 17.

would eventually give life to what Neil Corcoran calls 'the novel of the Big House'.[90] Yeats, in Corcoran's words, is one of the main supporters of this kind of literature because:

> The history of modern Ireland is the turning away from the gracious civilisation represented by houses such as Coole [Lady Gregory's estate] towards that despised and feared *petit-bourgeois* culture he hated so much.[91]

According to Corcoran the appearance of ghosts is one of the characteristics of the 'Big House' novels: these ghosts are a symbol for what was and is no more.[92] The fall of Parnell, to which the attacks by the Catholic Church made a major contribution, can also be seen as representing the decline, the feeling of crisis that the Anglo-Irish were experiencing by means of what they could perceive as the Catholic side of the nation. This view is reinforced by an antagonistic Declan Kiberd when he says that, according to Joyce, 'what the revivalists sought to rediscover was merely a projection of imperial fantasy'.[93] So, the past that the Irish Literary Revival wanted to recapture was actually based on colonial representations of Irish culture and identity; it repeated colonial understandings of Ireland and the Irish – a trend inherited by post-independence nationalism. Joyce, like the authors I will be discussing in this thesis, tried to create a national literature by insisting on a more realistic representation of the Irish that did not replicate views originated during the colonial period.[94] To do so, as we shall see, both Doyle and Enright re-engage and reinvent some of the tropes such as family history and the 'Big House' for ends other than those inherited from Revivalism.

Joyce realised 'that it [Ireland] was a country intent on using all the old imperialist mechanisms in the name of a national revival'.[95] Joyce was so deeply shocked by what happened to Parnell as to lose faith in politics and leave the country. He also tried to fill the void left by politics in creating a national identity through the crafting of what he saw

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[90] Neil Corcoran, *After Yeats and Joyce*, pp. 32-56.
[91] Ibid., p. 33.
[92] Ibid., p. 37.
[93] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 335.
[94] See James Joyce, *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann (eds), (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). Joseph Valente points out that 'even as the early revivalists identified themselves with the Irish people-nation, their struggles, their forms of life, and their political aspirations, they continued to regard their aboriginal brethren with a settler's gaze… which bore a predictably colonial impress'. So, being part of the Ascendancy, most Revivalists had a certain imprinting when it came to perceptions of Ireland and Irishness, Joseph Valente, 'Nation for Art's Sake: Aestheticist Afterwords in Yeats's Irish Revival', Marjorie Howes and Joseph Valente (eds.), *Yeats and Afterwords*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), p. 106.
[95] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 333.

as a distinctive national literature. In this as well, Joyce seems to be a model; the displacement of politics by literature is something that we are also going to see in the contemporary fiction which I will discuss later.

As suggested, Joyce's works are punctuated by the memory of Parnell from the beginning: *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of The Artist As A Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*, all recall the sense of paralysis and emptiness which overtook Irish politics after his fall. A key episode in *A Portrait* which points in this direction is when Stephen recalls a Christmas dinner argument, where Dante, a family friend, vehemently defended the Roman Catholic Church's role and position in Parnell's case by stating 'We won! We crashed him to death' to counter Stephen's father's cry that 'We have had too much God in Ireland. Away with God!'.[96] Dante comes to symbolise, in the novel, the Ireland that is shamefully serving two powers, namely Rome and the British Empire, a trait of Irish nationalism which Joyce firmly rejects as, in his opinion, this is what is holding Ireland back rather than nationalism itself.[97] This view that Ireland needs to shake off the stifling grip of local politics and state-sponsored religion is something that we can see in contemporary Irish fiction, and in the two writers I have chosen to focus on in my thesis, Roddy Doyle in particular.

Moreover, by going over the fall of Parnell and its implications again and again, Joyce seems to imply that the artist can fill the void in consciousness that politics had left vacant. This seems to be clear when, in *Ulysses*, Joyce has Parnell's brother address Leopold Bloom as 'Illustrious Bloom! Successor to my famous brother'.[98] This role of art as a locus to re-examine history and reimagine the nation is central both to postcolonial theory and also to the novels I have chosen to analyse. So, the memory of Parnell, or the memory that writers built of him, and especially the event of his fall, with its implications around unreliability of politics and the role of the artist, influenced generations of Irish writers. Perhaps the most important consequence of all this was the increase in the importance of literature in Ireland. The link between politics, history and literature in Ireland could not be better exemplified than by Joyce's words:

> In spite of everything Ireland remains the brain of the United Kingdom … The English … furnish the over-stuffed stomach of humanity with a perfect gadget … The Irish,

[96] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 39.
[97] Joyce was convinced that the Church played a key role in Parnell's fall and subsequent death. In 'Home Rule Comes of Age', an article written for *Il Piccolo della Sera* in 1907, Joyce described the affair as 'the moral assassination of Parnell with the help of the Irish bishops', see *Critical* Writings, p. 193.
[98] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2010), p. 428.

> condemned to express themselves in a language not their own, have stamped on it the mark of their own genius. … The result is then called English literature.[99]

In this thesis, I argue that this link, together with formal experimentations, some of which might be acknowledged as Joycean, and which try to inject new and distinctive life to language, are still vitally alive in contemporary Irish fiction.

I.3 The postcolonial in some representative recent Irish fiction

Joyce's legacy can be seen as both enabling and restrictive at the same time: he provided a model for future generations of Irish writers, although this model has, at times, been seen as somewhat suffocating.[100] However, the problem of identity and national consciousness, which began during the colonial time and was central to Joyce's work, lasted well into the post-independence period, making the Irish feel that they 'came from nowhere and … belonged nowhere else' - and that Joyce remained and remains a crucial predecessor.[101] If, as Terence Brown suggests, there has been a creative struggle in the Republic of Ireland over the issue of Irishness since the 1980s, it is interesting to see how this is reflected in new appreciations of Irish literature under the postcolonial theoretical heading as:

[99] Quoted by Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, (Oxford: OUP, 1959), p. 226, in Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 35.

[100] A measure of how much Joyce's influence is still felt today is what a young and very contemporary novelist such as Eimear McBride has written in *The Guardian*: 'Joyce really set my universe on its end. Reading *Ulysses* changed everything I thought about language, and everything I understood about what a book could do. I was on a train on the way to a boring temp job when I was about 25; I got on at Tottenham, north London, and opened the first page of *Ulysses*. When I got off at Liverpool Street in central London, I don't think it is an exaggeration to say the entire course of my life had changed.' Eimear McBride, My Hero: Eimear McBride on James Joyce, *The Guardian*, 6 June 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jun/06/my-hero-eimear-mcbride-james-joyce, last accessed on 11 June 2021. John Banville also wrote about the Joycean influence, when he addressed the two-fold legacy he feels, as a writer, Joyce has left: 'The figure of Joyce towers behind us, a great looming Easter Island effigy of the Father. In the old days it was considered fitting that children should honour the parent… but when I think of Joyce I am split in two. To one side there falls the reader, kneeling speechless in filial admiration, and love; to the other side, however, the writer stands, gnawing his knuckles, not a son, but a survivor', John Banville, 'Survivors of Joyce', A. Martin (ed.) *James Joyce: the Artist and the Labyrinth*, (London: Ryan Publishing, 1990), p. 73-4, quoted in Derek Attridge, 'Foreword', Martha C. Carpentier (ed.), *Joycean Legacies*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. i.

[101] Dermot Bolger, *The Journey Home*, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 7.

> The very idea of a *bona fide* postcolonial society, whatever that means, residing within the borders of a modernised continent is abhorrent and/or nonsensical to many revisionist critics.[102]

As we have mentioned, it will be useful to see to what extent postcolonial theories help us make sense of Ireland's historical past and literary works and how they link to the actual literary production since most theorists 'who have analyzed Ireland from this colonial perspective have done so through an examination of fiction'.[103]

Despite Brown's statement, the struggle over the issue of Irishness in literature started well before the 1980s: as we have seen, the Revivalists and Joyce are a meaningful example of the efforts to define Irishness in either poetry or fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. De Valera's conservative view around the definition of Irishness did not eradicate other critical perspectives. Fiction became an outlet for domestic dissent and social critique directed against the idealization of some aspects of what was considered as constituting Irishness such as the idyllic life in the countryside, or Catholicism, or sexual repression, especially for women, or families. Novels such as Brian Moore's *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1956), Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls* trilogy (1960-3), or John McGahern's *The Barracks* (1963) and *The Dark* (1965) are a sort of 'middle generation', stepping stones that make the more recent fiction possible. The Ireland presented in these novels is a far cry from de Valera's Ireland – the countryside is not idyllic, families are dysfunctional, Catholic schools punitive, the bliss of marriage demystified. In other words, these novels show 'the repressive reality of "real" Ireland… in order to show the hollowness of the national romances of the Irish Revival' and, consequently, they try and counter the image of Ireland, and Irishness, associated with them.[104] However, to go back to Brown's comments, it is also true that the turbulent political events of the 1970s and 1980s, which saw the height of the Troubles in the North, did bring urgency to the immediate questions about the nation and national identity.

After an illusion of stability and rediscovered Irishness during the immediate post-revolutionary period, the post-independence nationalist ideology collapsed, giving way to a new feeling of displacement and non-belonging, especially in fiction. In the 1990s, when Ireland was re-inventing itself from a social and economic point of view thanks to

[102] Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002*, p. 398, emphasis in original.
[103] Timothy J. White, 'Modeling the Origin and Evolution of Postcolonial Politics: The Case of Ireland', *Postcolonial Text*, p. 1.
[104] Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune*, p. 173.

the Celtic Tiger, fiction remained somewhat focused on the Irish past and a quest for the self. In this respect, Cathy Caruth argues that history is 'reclaimed and generated not in reliving unconsciously the death of the past but by an act that bears witness by parting from it'.[105] David Lloyd observes that the fixation on the past exposes that the 'relation to the past is strictly not a relation to one's own past but to a social history and its material and institutional effects'.[106] This seems to be especially true in Ireland, where history, particularly that of the last one hundred years, is still actively influencing the present. To demonstrate fiction's link to history and its ability to approach universal traumatic experiences through individual ones, Denell Downum comments that Roddy Doyle's *Paula Spencer*, one of the novels central to this study, 'figures the cultural experience of trauma and recovery in the person of one very idiosyncratic woman', thus explicating the link between fiction, history and nation.[107]

From this perspective, the fiction of the 1990s can be seen as an attempt to re-discover and re-invent what Ireland and Irishness meant by processing the traumas of the past. In contemporary Irish literature, the wish to 'bear witness' to the past and acknowledge its influence on present struggles is part of the process of working through long-hidden events of that past, while embracing modernity and the separation from those past events. It is not surprising then that most of the successful fiction produced in that decade is set in mid-twentieth century rural Ireland and deals with growing up in de Valera's Ireland – it was as if, after allowing for time to digest and process what had happened in the previous few decades, these novels were trying to dissect and process a turning point in Irish history which, in itself, had been influenced by centuries of colonial domination. It is as if novels such as Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* (1992), Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* (1992), or memoirs like Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* (1996) or Nuala O'Faolain's *Are you Somebody?* (1996) were trying to bridge a gap between old Ireland and new Ireland, the past and the present.

These issues have notably characterised more recent writing too. A younger novelist who can be seen as trying to fill in the gap between old and new Ireland and capture a moment of transition in what being Irish means is Colum McCann. A case in point is his work, *Everything in this Country Must* (2000). The novella which gives the title to the whole book is about the conflict between new and old in Ireland: the

[105] Cathy Caruth, *Literature in the Ashes of History*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), p. 9.
[106] David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity*, (Dublin: Field Day Publications in Association with the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, 2008), p. 25.
[107] Denell Downum, 'Learning to Live: Memory and the Celtic Tiger in Novels by Roddy Doyle, Anne Enright, and Tana French', *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2015, pp. 76-92, p. 79.

protagonist – a teenage girl who is very clearly representative of 'new' Ireland - does not have any preconceptions about British soldiers. They symbolise the past; she even likes one of them and does not feel they are 'different' or to be avoided. On the other hand, her father – who can be seen as a symbol of 'old' Ireland – does not even want to talk to them; he is even willing to let his beloved horse die rather than accept their help, and in the end, he kills the horse himself because the soldiers had saved it. But the soldiers as well have the unconscious belief that they are of a different sort. This is quite clear in what one of the soldiers says to the old man after a moment of tension between the two, that is 'fat lot of fucken thanks we get from your sort Mister'.[108] Although there is an attempt to look forward rather than backwards, old Ireland is still alive. It is so in beliefs of past wrongs and impossible reconciliation, making the story ambiguous and to an extent itself unconscious in the tropes that it uses, as reflected by McCann's seemingly repeating old tropes through his use of a young girl as symbolising Ireland.

As already mentioned, quite a few Irish writers have tried to counter-balance stereotypes which characterised Irish identity either in the colonial or in the post-independence period. One of these stereotypes is that of Ireland seen as a fairyland, an unspoilt, dream-country. This image of Ireland was characteristic of the colonial period but it was also mirrored by the ideal of 'rural Ireland is the real Ireland' in post-independence nationalism and in de Valera's vision of the country.[109] One of these writers is Dermot Bolger whose *Father's Music* (1997) depicts 'gangs of Dublin youths fighting for the possession of a canal lock where they could swim among reeds and a rusted pram'.[110] *The Journey Home* (1991), by the same author, is part of a strand of Irish fiction that mirrors deep disillusionment with the nation. It is then not surprising that there is a search for 'home' throughout the novel, which is a search for the self, for identity, for a place where you know who you are. However, this search is not a lucky one: Hano, one of the two male protagonists, at the end of the novel realises that 'home' has not been

[108] Colum McCann, *Everything in this Country Must*, (London: Phoenix House, 2000), p. 13.
[109] According to Hana Khasawneh, the cultural significance of the oppressed category of rural Ireland and the peasant, which started with the Irish Literary Revival, is to be found in what they signify as a concept through their language. They break social, political and cultural norms: peasants are not idealized figures, but people who symbolise not just Ireland's victimization and poverty but also its nobility and solemnity. It is meaningful that no portrayal of the Irish peasant was ever free of the presence of the English coloniser. Thus, the close link between Irish peasantry and nationalism has a valid *raison d'etre* in the immediate aftermath on 1922: by referring to a pastoral vision of a pre-industrial, rural life, Irish nationalists could imagine the Irish peasants as an authentic and original, natural and romantic group, representing Irish values as opposed to English concepts and culture. For a thorough discussion of the links between rural Ireland, peasants and nationalism see Hana Khasawneh, 'An Aestheticising of Irish Peasantry' (2013), *Journal of Franco-Irish Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, Article 12.
[110] Dermot Bolger, *Father's Music*, (London: Flamingo, 1998), p. 5.

found. However, he is also described as 'Never wishing the journey to end'.[111] He does not surrender, but actively wants to go on 'leaving that country from the history books, starting afresh with nothing; building a world not out of some half-imagined ideal but from people's real lives and longings'.[112] At the end of the novel there is perhaps a hope: in the future, in getting rid of a past that is 'what can never be reclaimed'. As the female protagonist puts it, 'When you leave something Hano you leave it, you go on'.[113] These are themes that are developed and re-worked in the novels which are going to be the focus of this thesis.

The past must be left behind as much as possible to develop the future, despite the weariness of living with that past, with that history.[114] In a manner that is reminiscent of Joyce's criticism of the Revivalists' efforts, being bound to or by the past is no good: Ireland must start a new, really post-colonial phase, without always having the presence of the past haunting her. But the past still has its importance in the Irish mind and imagination, it is still part of the Irish inheritance like the fear of new, foreign 'plantations' that will bring the new generations to act 'like parents a century and a half before ashamed of their Gaelic tongue'.[115] And, in the end, it is the image of the 'old' Ireland that in Bolger's novel wins, the countryside of the nation is what has 'sheltered us for centuries. After each plantation this is where we came, watching the invader renaming our lands, ma[king] raids in the night on what had once been our home'.[116] The traditional Ireland seems to be the only sure and safe thing, and 'blokes who were half-animal in Dublin would talk to you about things they'd normally be ashamed of' when away from the city.[117] In *The Journey Home* some characters in particular who are charged with traditional references are the Plunketts. The surname recalls one of the

[111] Dermot Bolger, *The Journey Home*, p. 69. In 1977 Bolger also founded Raven Arts Press with the explicit aim of publishing works that explored the lives of city-dwellers who had been consistently marginalised and ignored by the modern state. In 1992 Raven Arts closed and was re-founded as New Island Books by Bolger, Edwin Higel and Fergal Stanley. For more detail on the aims of Raven Arts, see Dermot Bolger (ed.), *Invisible Cities: The New Dubliners. A Journey Through Unofficial Dublin* (Finglas, Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1988). According to Gerry Smyth, *The Journey Home* gives way to a whole series of sub-genres in Irish fiction during the 1990s 'all more or less related to the notion of Dublin as a city of "mean streets"' where, however, characters do belong; see Gerry Smyth, 'The Right to the City: Re-presentations of Dublin in Contemporary Irish Fiction', in Liam Harte and Michael Parker (eds.) *Contemporary Irish Fiction. Themes, Tropes, Theories* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000), p. 25.
[112] Dermot Bolger, *The Journey Home*, p. 124.
[113] Ibid., p. 20.
[114] This is also Jimmy Sr's point of view in *The Van*, when the character tells us that 'He didn't care what had happened any more. It was over and done with. He'd no time any more for that What Happened shite', Roddy Doyle, *The Van* in *The Barrytown Trilogy*, (London: Minerva, 1992), p. 628.
[115] Dermot Bolger, *The Journey Home*, p. 293.
[116] Ibid., p. 293.
[117] Ibid., p. 41.

heroes of Easter Rising, Joseph Plunkett.[118] In the novel they stand for the past, the tradition; but they are also the degenerate, corrupted part of Irish society who have the power because of their 'ability to exploit a false past and a corrupted present' a past created *ad hoc* to impose an identity on the Irish which is not their own.[119] So, in the end, as Gerry Smyth puts it 'neither the old nor the new Ireland offers any consolation … the new Ireland, like the old Ireland, means dispossession and displacement for the majority of the population' because a lot of people feel 'cut off from that past' without having a more satisfactory present.[120]

'Home', a symbol for repossession and real identity in postcolonial writing, is still uncertain, not found. In *The Journey Home* there is the constant obsession with finding a place the characters can call their own, a constant seeking for 'home' which in the end is an interior journey towards identity and self-definition because 'home was not the place where you were born but the place you created for yourself, where you did not need to explain, where you finally became what you were'.[121] This challenge is evident also in the characters' constant preoccupation with being part of a community, of being accepted, of being part of something: 'I felt enclosed in the company of friends, finally seeming to belong somewhere' says Hano in *The Journey Home*.[122] We can find the same preoccupation in Doyle's *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*, when Paddy for example says that they [the boys] 'liked the gangs, the numbers, the rush, being in'.[123] As there is not a definite identity, all that is left for the characters is to find roles for themselves.

Bolger's novel also tries to give voice to those elided in state-building post-independence representations of the nation and Irishness. To show that nations are not made up of identical people, in much of recent Irish fiction meanings remain partial, open, provisional. This is the case when Hano talks about his first outing in Dublin with Shay: education and the Church has led him to expect one set image of the country, but the urban reality is different:

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[118] Plunkett was one of the original members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood Military Committee that planned the Easter Rising. A few days before the rising, Plunkett, who had contracted TB when young, had an operation on his neck glands and had to struggle out of bed to take part in what was to follow. He was still bandaged and frail when he joined the other insurgents at the General Post Office. It is this image of a frail and failing Plunkett that Roddy Doyle chooses to include in *A Star Called Henry*, a novel we are going to discuss in more detail later in the thesis.
[119] Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation*, p. 78.
[120] Ibid., p. 78.
[121] Dermot Bolger*, The Journey Home*, p. 264.
[122] Ibid., p. 8.
[123] Roddy Doyle, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*, (London: Minerva, 1993), p. 251.

> That evening was my first glimpse of Shay's Dublin. It was like an invisible world existing parallel to the official one I had known, a grey underworld of nixers and dole.[124]

Ireland is also made up of outsiders like Shay – who can be seen as a symbol for all those aspects not recognised as being part of true Irishness – who are ignored and neglected by state-sponsored versions of what Ireland is; the nation is not simply 'One party, one voice, one nation', a place where the voices not contemplated by rigid nationalist depictions of Irishness cannot express themselves. So, this novel explores a world hidden in mainstream post-independence representations, providing a vehicle for marginalised and subaltern voices to find expression; this is something relevant to the fiction I am going to analyse later.

In these novels set in contemporary Ireland, whose protagonists are contemporaries, it is evident that ideals of Irishness have not managed to build a strong, true sense of identity. As Hano feels in *The Journey Home* 'As long as I remained among the hens and barking dogs I too could belong'.[125] Bolger makes this point when he asks 'How can you learn self-respect if you're taught that where you live is not your real home?'.[126] This is maybe the main point with recent Irish fiction: the search for self-definition. However, where in Bolger neither past nor present offer hope, through an exploration of an incomplete past and of memory, my writers in this thesis aim to expand the Ireland of the history books and rely on that reimagined past to envisage a better, brighter future for the nation.

Another topic which emerges in recent Irish fiction, and in the novels which I am going to examine in later chapters, is that of the family, especially dysfunctional families. As we mentioned, post-independence, the nucleus of Irish society had been represented as the family. That is presumably why identifying with the family became of such paramount importance in defining Irishness in the Free State. The family rather than the individual was the basic unit of society, something that was enshrined in the Constitution and promoted as a fundamental part of Irish identity. As Kiberd puts it, 'Nationalism … learns how to mythologise the values it tries to destroy: it was 1930s Ireland which insisted on defining the family as the basic unity of society'.[127] So, in the Free State, the identification of the family

[124] Ibid., p. 28.
[125] Ibid., p. 3.
[126] Ibid., p. 8.
[127] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 295.

> as the locus for all Irish destinies had become extreme. The family was the very basis of the nation as defined in the 1937 Constitution, passed into law under the guiding hand of Éamon de Valera. This was… an inevitable after-effect of the colonial period, during which the family had become the largest social institution with which many people could identify. Yet the fetishizing of the family, even after independence, meant that it became an alternative to the very idea of the social… under pressure of such absolute, idealizing expectations… many families cracked and many childhoods were disrupted.[128]

The obsession with the family is hence a colonial legacy – as the Irish could not identify with any of the social and political institutions which they felt they did not own and did not represent them, identification with the family was all they had left. However, the enormous pressure of fulfilling the expected ideal often had the opposite effect.

The family units we see in the fiction I discuss in this thesis are far from being the strong building blocks of society. As Smyth says when talking about *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*:

> The family is the focus of attention … here we see it cracking and falling apart. The dysfunctional family is a symptom of an increasingly disjointed society.[129]

Examples of dysfunctional families abound in recent Irish fiction and examples are present in Bolger's *The Journey Home* and *Father's Music*; in Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* and *Paula Spencer*; in McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*, in Enright's *The Wig My Father Wore*, *The Gathering*, or *The Green Road*, in McBride's *A Girl Is A Half-Formed Thing*, and the list could go on. These can be understood both as an attack on colonial and nationalistic ideals, as an attempt to get free of the impositions of the imperial 'family' and from the impositions of the national one.

The disintegration of the family, which in contemporary writers becomes a metaphor for the nation, goes hand in hand with a sense of insecurity and a quest for real self on the characters' part.[130] In light of what we have discussed above, this search for the individual self overlaps with a search for a collective identity. Perhaps this accounts for the multi-layered narrative structure in *The Journey Home*; for the several truths about Luke's real and changing 'identity' in *Father's Music*; and perhaps it is also the reason why in *The Barrytown Trilogy* Doyle leaves an open ending to all three of the novels.

[128] Declan Kiberd, *After Ireland*, p. 64.
[129] Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation*, p. 79.
[130] Clair Wills, 'Culture and globalization: contemporary storytelling and the legacies of 1916', p. 47.

There is not a fixed, single set of truths available. This is the reason why, I think, the concept of centrality itself is questioned by Irish writers today and, in their works, what was officially considered as 'peripheral', or subaltern, has taken on a central role. Consequently, fragmentation rather than linearity of narrative becomes a common narrative technique, as in the case of Doyle's *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*, a book

> filled with such fragmentary moments, not generating a clear interpretative line – as if all the characters, old and young, are at the mercy of experience rather than in control of it.[131]

Fragmentation and a sense that characters are not in control of events but, rather, led by them, is something we also see in the novels we are going to discuss in more detail in this thesis.

When looking at inclusion in terms of national identity, it is not just a matter of looking at included and excluded voices, but also at the mechanisms that made that possible: in tackling these mechanisms, dismantling and reimagining them in fiction, novels hope to have an impact on the social context around them. The writers and novels I discuss in the later chapters of this thesis are part of this effort. Roddy Doyle and Anne Enright belong to a 'mid-generation' of Irish writers and work to extend ideas of Irishness and the nation in new ways that reflect some of the recent social change, running alongside a newer generation of theoretical ideas.

[131] Declan Kiberd, *After Ireland*, p. 386.

Chapter II

Roddy Doyle's *The Last Roundup* Trilogy

'But it is not like1916.
It wasn't like 1916 in 1916'
Bernard MacLaverty – Cal

II.1 Introduction

Roddy Doyle is one of the most prolific and multifaceted writers in contemporary Ireland. Doyle has now published 12 novels; he has written plays, and is the author of children's books, short stories, essays, theatre, cinema- and TV-screenplays. It is as if he is experimenting with different genres to try and reach with his social message as wide an audience as possible – not just novel readers. Doyle himself explicitly reflects on the challenges of reaching audiences who have grown up watching films and turning his material into something that is more accessible to them.[1] This multi-medial approach from Doyle has had marked effects upon his literary technique which opens possibilities for critical and theoretical debate which this chapter in the thesis will consider.

Despite the eclectic literary outputs and the disparate techniques he uses – including first person narration, third person narration with free indirect speech, fragmentation, gaps, flashbacks – since the publication of *The Commitments* (1987), *The Snapper* (1990), and *The Van* (1991), Doyle has generally been labelled, almost pigeon-holed, as the writer of the working class who avoids 'narrative investment in Irish identity'.[2] There are other examples of how extant criticism of Roddy Doyle sees him as a mainly working-class writer. According to Brian Donnelly, Doyle's main achievement 'has been to keep the focus and terms of reference of his stories within the day-to-day

[1] Genoveffa Giambona, 'The rhythm of the city', p. 262. The adaptations for the big screen, for the TV and for the stage of his fiction have amplified Doyle's success and his outreach.
[2] Lorraine Piroux, '"I'm Black an' I'm Proud": Re-Inventing Irishness in Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments*', *College Literature*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1998, pp. 45-57. On Roddy Doyle as a specifically working-class writer see also Michael Pierse, 'The Shadow of Seán: O'Casey, commitment and writing Dublin's working class', *Saothar*, vol. 35, 2010, pp. 69-85; Michael Pierse, 'Ireland's Working-Class Literature: Neglected Themes, Amphibian Academics, and the Challenges Ahead', *Irish University Review*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2020, pp. 67–81. Some observers have seen these novels not just as empowering but as patronizing the Irish working class; see Eamon Dunphy, 'Alas poor Roderick, we knew him well', May 8, 1994, and 'The mediocre joker', May 15,1994, both in the *Sunday Independent*. These novels were later published as *The Barrytown Trilogy* (1992) because of their setting, a fictional working-class suburb in North Dublin.

concerns and awareness of his characters'.[3] Doyle's apparent disengagement from questions of nationhood and identity is further remarked upon by Donnelly, in a paper that covers Doyle's novelistic production from 1987 to 2000:

> From the start Roddy Doyle's career as a novelist has run counter to the prevailing preoccupations and conventions of Irish writing. The historic concerns of nationality, language and religion that had engaged Irish writers since the days of Thomas Davis and *The Nation* are remarkable by their absence.[4]

It is true that Doyle's novels have a working-class setting and explore the lives and daily challenges of working-class characters. As Donnelly sees it, then, as a writer who was born and raised within the working-class environment of Dublin, Doyle uses fiction to portray aspects of the Ireland he lived through in his own youth and that were absent elsewhere in Irish writing.[5] Even though Donnelly's view is on the surface accurate, however, there is more to Doyle's writing than capturing and documenting the particular spirit or mood of a specific class. As I will discuss, this portrayal is not an end in itself but in fact harbours a strong link to those concepts of nationality and identity that the critic considers absent from Doyle's work.

Donnelly is not alone in his interpretation of Doyle's writing as exclusively focused on class. In *Writing Roddy Doyle*, Caramine White discusses Doyle's novels in terms of his social vision, but does not link them to a wider historical and literary heritage, avoiding discussion of the political, ideological and literary issues they engender. So, for example, when talking about Doyle's innovative use of language, she mainly sees it as a tool to exactly reproduce the idiom of working-class Dubliners, without pausing to discuss why Doyle chooses to do this.[6] Doyle's narrative language has indeed mainly

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[3] Brian Donnelly, 'Roddy Doyle: From Barrytown to the GPO', *Irish University Review*, *Special Issue: Contemporary Irish Fiction*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2000, pp. 17-31, p. 19.

[4] Ibid., p. 18. To add to the argument that Doyle is immediately characterised as a non-nationalist writer who in his fiction eschews concerns of nationhood and identity-making, his work is significantly absent from *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* published in 1991. The *Anthology*, one of the main works seen as setting the agenda for rethinking literary history in Irish cultural studies, tried to solidify a national literature which, from a postcolonial perspective, wove together questions about the nature of Irish identity, Irish writing and the relationship between the two in terms of national identity, its creation and construction; see Joe Cleary, 'Amongst Empires', p. 47; Éoin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 33.

[5] Ibid., p. 25.

[6] Caramine White, *Reading Roddy Doyle*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001), p. 8. Irish working-class history, culture, and literature have gained increasing traction and are attracting more academic interest. The class divide in Dublin was even more exacerbated by the colonial experience, see Terence Brown, 'Introduction', James Joyce, *Dubliners*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), pp. xviii-xxii. The recent publication of *A History of Irish Working-Class Writing* is evidence of a growing interest in the working class in literature. In his 'Foreword' to the volume, Declan Kiberd writes that its focus on 'an astonishing range of writing… by or about working people [would] set many of the terms of cultural debate in the decade to come', thus acknowledging that the working class is rightly becoming an important aspect

been studied as a way of representing the social background of his characters.[7] Although this is undoubtedly true, it is important to remember that, as mentioned in the Introduction, in nations that have experienced colonialism writers have to find new linguistic and technical possibilities to create new narratives for the nation, and literature thus becomes a tool in the re-making of the nation. This is something that seems to apply to Doyle who feels that, through his fiction, he has contributed to the creation of a re-imagined national literature that is bringing to the surface previously hidden histories.[8] Doyle's use of working-class idiolect can be seen as the equivalent of using local languages as a means of reappropriation, a way to literally give voice to the subaltern in their own language, of mapping their voice within the nation.

Doyle is obviously not the first to write about the Irish working class. Writers such as Séan O'Casey and Brendan Behan had already explored the Dublin working classes, for instance. However, according to Doyle himself:

> My urban working-class men aren't like O'Casey's versions in moleskin trousers who get involved. My characters don't give a toss about politics.[9]

This statement appears to give strength to the argument that the concerns of politics are apparently absent in Doyle's treatment. However, as we will see in this chapter, this absence is only superficial. Despite his characters not having deeply ideological or political ideals, his treatment of their histories, his giving them agency to tell their story, are deeply political nonetheless. As Doyle himself also suggests:

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of the critical debate. Kiberd also noted that the focus on the working class was engendered by Ireland's experience of the post-Celtic Tiger crash, when the inequalities inherent in the financial system and the policies of austerity in Irish society became more immediately apparent, see Declan Kiberd, 'Foreword', *A History of Irish Working-Class Writing*, Michael Pierse (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. xiii–xviii, p. xviii.

[7] Mary McGlynn, 'Why Jimmy wears a suit: White, black and working class in *The Commitments'*, *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2004, pp. 232-250; Matt McGuire, 'Dialect(ic) nationalism? The fiction of James Kelman and Roddy Doyle', *Scottish Studies Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, online at https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?v=2.1&it=r&sw=w&id=GALE%7CA164221744&prodId=AONE&sid=googleScholarFullText&userGroupName=rdg, last accessed 11 June 2021; Michael Pierse, 'The Shadow of Seán: O'Casey, commitment and writing Dublin's working class', *Saothar* , 2010, vol. 35, pp. 69-85.

[8] In my interview with Roddy Doyle, the writer states that he believes *The Commitments* put Dublin 'on the map' so to speak: 'I'm thinking that Dublin stopped being off the beaten tourist track twenty years ago, somehow or other. I think *The Commitments* had something to do with it', Genoveffa Giambona, 'The rhythm of the city', p. 258.

[9] Penny Perrick, 'A star called Roddy', *The Times 'Metro'*, 4 September 1999, p. 16, quoted in Brian Donnelly, 'Roddy Doyle: From Barrytown to the GPO', p. 18.

> I've always considered myself a political writer. I don't look around for issues. I create characters and the characters bring issues with them.[10]

Therefore, a literary text can be politically charged when it allows the characters in the margins of mainstream culture, and outside the sphere of national influence, such as Henry in *The Last Roundup* is, to challenge established myths and ideologies and create new ones.[11] As we have seen in the Introduction, since Said and Kiberd, the nuancing of postcolonial theory in Ireland has been constantly evolving and adapting. The postcolonial has opened up many conversations, not least around identity. There is more and more interlinking of history, theory, and novelists that are interrogating that history. In turn, these novelists are under the scrutiny of the theory that studies the making of the nation in literature. The postcolonial debate opens up a lot of possibilities in the fiction – literature is seen as a form of reappropriation and these novelists, also thanks to the postcolonial paradigms discussed in the Introduction, experiment with form in order to create a 'new' literature for the nation: one characterised by dialogue, fragmentation, gaps, open and fluid meaning.[12]

I will show how a postcolonial reading of Doyle's novels can bring out the nuances of his career-long preoccupation with the nature of Irishness and identity. So, starting with the *Barrytown Trilogy*, Doyle gives voice

> to a section of society rendered silent by a post-independent ideology which presented Ireland solely as a rural and agricultural country, seeing the urban part of the country as an alien subculture that wasn't part of the national imagination and identity.[13]

Such thinking did not include the urban as part of 'authentic' constructions of Irishness.

More specifically, the particular aspect of the postcolonial that enables a movement beyond constructions of Doyle exclusively via class is the subaltern, which is a postcolonial concept absent from criticism of Doyle focusing exclusively on working class. It is worth remembering that, as discussed in a footnote in the Introduction, when Antonio Gramsci first developed the concept of the subaltern he mainly referred to class

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[10] Interview with Terry Jamieson, *The Herald*, 29 February 2020, https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/18259434.always-considered-political-writer-roddy-doyle-time-mortality-dublin-pubs/, last accessed 11 June 2021.
[11] Åke Persson, 'Between Displacement and Renewal: The Third Space in Roddy Doyle´s Novels', *Nordic Irish Studies*, vol. 5, 2006, pp.59-71, p. 62.
[12] Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 79; Luke Gibbons, 'Narratives of the Nation: Fact, Fiction and Irish Cinema', p. 73.
[13] Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation*, p. 76.

formations sanctioned by the state or by the dominant classes. Subsequently postcolonial critics, starting with the Indian historians who coalesced around the journal *Subaltern Studies*, appropriated the word to describe any oppressed group in a nation that has experienced colonialism.[14] As discussed in the Introduction, scholars such as Colin Graham and Robert Young recognise that the voices ignored by state representations of identity can be seen as having a subaltern status, as well as presenting issues of marginalisation and subalternity in terms of class and gender.[15]

Those who read Doyle as exclusively a working-class realist appear to ignore some of Doyle's own statements about what he has achieved. Moreover, in the case of *The Last Roundup* trilogy specifically, they also seem to ignore Doyle's ambition to trace the development of the nation during the course of almost a century, and re-read seminal events and characters through a subaltern history. Therefore, we need an approach which does include the working-class perspective, which is undeniably present in everything Doyle writes, but which, at the same time, goes beyond merely registering it, and which does not make this perspective limiting in terms of thinking about the wider context within which Roddy Doyle works. Hence the usefulness of the subaltern concept, and of the history of its involvement through postcolonial theory. I will discuss how, in Doyle's *Last Roundup* trilogy, and also in the Paula novels discussed in the next chapter, this definition might be extended to apply to those whose histories and voices are elided in certain previous monochromatic and prescriptive representations of the Irish nation.

Doyle is not normally read through Irish postcolonialist thought, and Irish postcolonial treatment of the subaltern has not really taken Doyle's works into account. Thinking about Roddy Doyle in relation to postcolonial theory and subalternity, offers a useful different perspective to unpack his themes, such as the quest for identity, and also his narrative techniques, such as the fragmented nature of his narrative. In this respect, it is important to remember that Edward Said saw a reaction to petrified linear narratives through fragmentation as typical of subaltern narratives: such narratives were a metaphor for a fragmented, rather than linear past, which included suppressed histories. [16] So, fragmentation was also a way of reclaiming the past by those who were ignored in mainstream accounts. This shows how through such a postcolonial framework Doyle's different characters and techniques can be more meaningfully explained, as an extensive

[14] Claire Connolly (ed.), *Theorizing Ireland*, p. 204.
[15] Colin Graham, 'Subalternity and Gender: Problems of Postcolonial Irishness', p. 153; Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction*, p. 354.
[16] Edward Said, 'Foreword', Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. vii.

effort to bring to the fore the subaltern(s) in Irish society – working class, poor, women, disempowered children who have no control over what happens to them. The subaltern in postcolonial theory allows us, for example, to see his return to such pillars of nationalist faith as the War of Independence in the first novel of this trilogy, *A Star Called Henry* not just as a regressive return to what Moody and Edwards denounced as the 'obsession with myths' in Irish culture, but as a contribution to the debate about narratives of myth-making - who owns them, and those who have been elided, marginalised and forgotten within them.[17] We then realise that questions of nationality, the role of women and religion are very much a major preoccupation in Doyle's novels, as they are of subaltern postcolonial thought. In fact, the writer joins the debate not with the intent of ignoring or quashing the importance of those questions underlying the nation, but with a view to breaking down monolithic representations of nationality, in order to make Irishness more inclusive: to make it positively descriptive rather than prescriptive.

In Henry, the protagonist of the trilogy, Doyle creates a marginalised character who, just like Joyce's Leopold Bloom, calls Ireland home and no matter how much he tries, or in Bloom's case how much others try, cannot undo his Irishness.[18] Unsurprisingly, as if to reinforce this parallel, like Bloom, Henry walks the length and breadth of Dublin. The trilogy then is not just a mere examination of the working class – it is about issues of identity and belonging as experienced by the working class through the past hundred years, and shows how it actively contributed to the making of the postcolonial nation, how it is part of its fabric. Through Henry, Doyle is mindful that, as clearly shown in the novel, early nationalist leaders acted whilst ignoring the interests of the urban working class, ethnic minorities, and women. [19] As I will discuss in this chapter, through Henry Doyle shows that the complexities underlying national history, as well as the mechanisms of nationalist narrative and iconography that mediate the construction of memory and identity, cannot be easily ignored or elided. Certainly, Henry cannot escape it. So, when in the concluding pages of *A Star Called Henry* British Auxiliary forces kick the protagonist through his Granny Nash's piles of books and capture him when they fall on him, one book in particular catches Henry's attention: *Castle Rackrent*, the one text that unequivocally brings to mind Anglo-Irish history with all its complexities (p. 330).

[17] Quoted in John Strachan and Alison O'Malley-Younger*, Ireland. Revolution and Evolution*, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 187. T.W. Moody and Robin Dudley Edwards founded the journal *Irish Historical Studies* in 1938 with the aim of professionalising Irish historiography; for a more comprehensive discussion see John M. Regan, *Myth and the Irish State*, (Sallins: Irish Academic Press, 2013).
[18] Kristina Deffenbacher, 'Revisioning of Cultural Memory and Identity through Dialogic Mythmaking in Roddy Doyle's *The Last Roundup* Trilogy', *Nordic Irish Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2014, pp. 149-168, p. 165.
[19] Roddy Doyle, *A Star Called Henry*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), p. 381. All further references to this text are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the text.

I will consequently argue that Doyle's fiction is very much an effort to enter the conversation about nation-making and identity-making. These efforts to give a voice to those who do not have one run through novels across the career: from *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (1993), where a child from a working family owns the narrative and tells his own story; to *Smile* (2017), about a victim of clerical abuse; and obviously through the novels I will be discussing in more detail in this chapter, namely *A Star Called Henry* (1999) and *Oh, Play That Thing* (2004), with references to *The Dead Republic* (2010). These three novels, collectively known as *The Last Roundup* trilogy, form Doyle's texts published around and across the millennium which review the foundational history of the Republic from new and unexpected angles. The efforts to broaden and re-invent Irishness and give marginalised actors a voice continue through Doyle's explorations of gender in the novels I discuss in the next chapter, which will focus on *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (1994) and *Paula Spencer* (2004). I will argue that, in each of these novels, questions of nationality, Irishness, the importance of the past, and the role of women within these traditionally 'male' discussions, are central to Doyle's main preoccupations – and that, from the perspective of theory, they might now be weighed against (but also taken to resist and adapt) what the academy might perceive as now-familiar versions of subalternity, which I discussed above. It is this adoption and adaptation of a reading not hitherto applied to Doyle's work that perceives the opportunities within it to engage larger questions about nationhood and the role of literature in discovering its past and future paradigms. It is also this adoption and adaptation that I will explore in more detail in this thesis.

The Last Roundup develops Doyle's themes and techniques in an historical context that is both meaningful and symbolic. The novels revisit key figures and events in the founding and first 70 years of the Irish Republic, alongside recognisable famous figures such as revolutionaries, actors and musicians. In the trilogy, Paddy Clarke, the disempowered modern boy, becomes Henry in an historical context where the past becomes the present, and vice versa. Henry is a Dubliner from the slums born at the very beginning of the twentieth century. He does not seem to have any firm ideology, does not want to be a martyr, and, by his very existence, points out elisions in idealised accounts of Irish history, especially around those events that contributed to the birth of the nation. In this as well, he seems to relate to how Said sees the history of the subaltern: contestatory, rather than ideological.[20] Henry constantly tries to reimagine his identity in

[20] Edward Said, 'Foreword', Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, pp. vi-vii.

response to these and later events, to tell his story on his own terms, as if to appropriate his own voice and shine a light on his role in the making of the nation.

The choice of these specific novels to develop my argument is linked to my theoretical approach, which I feel offers the opportunity to move forward debates about the nature of Doyle's writing beyond concerns relating only to class. Indeed, as mine is a cultural and historical materialist approach, I feel that these particular novels explore history by often juxtaposing the national and the personal or individual. I argued in the Introduction that revising Irish identity is also, partly, revising the historical, political, and social events that contributed to its construction, and now to its re-invention. Consequently, these novels, and particularly those in the trilogy which embed historical and social events in the fabric of the narrative, are a great example, for my purposes, of how a process of individual self-examination goes hand in hand with re-examinations of Irish history and society. It is specifically postcolonial theory that opens up this reconsideration of Doyle's work and that integrates all aspects of his writing, not just the class one. As the focus of my analysis is identity and Irishness, I will focus on the first two novels of the trilogy, namely *A Star Called Henry* and *Oh, Play That Thing*, with references to *The Dead Republic* where appropriate. This is because the latter novel is more about the writing up of the historical moment that it covers and does not add much to the development of the key concept of identity.

I will start with a focus on Henry and issues of identity and fragmentation in *A Star Called Henry*, which is arguably, according to Doyle himself, the 'most Irish' of his books.[21] I will then mainly focus on issues of migration and race in *Oh, Play That Thing*. These themes emerge in the trilogy as, through it, Doyle tracks the evolution of the Republic: they become more and more prominent through the novelist's re-reading of history. On the other hand, as the aim of my thesis is to see how far theory and practice connect, it is legitimate to see what Doyle can show postcolonial theory and what the theory can learn from his writing. We have, for example, seen in the Introduction to this thesis that some strands of Irish postcolonial theory have replicated the elision of marginalised voices. So, in the Conclusion to this chapter, I am going to look at how relevant postcolonial theory can be read through Doyle, and how it could be reshaped by considering his work, examining how literary theory and literary practice might be seen to feed into and from each other.

[21] Charles Taylor, *The Salon Interview: Roddy Doyle*, 28 October 1999, https://www.salon.com/1999/10/28/doyle_2/, last accessed 11 June 2021.

II.2 *A Star Called Henry*

A Star Called Henry is the first of three novels that would eventually constitute the historical trilogy *The Last Roundup*, despite the novels never having been published in a single volume. The novel narrates the story of Henry Smart from his birth in 1901, to a poor Dublin family, to when he leaves Ireland after the Civil War and the inception of the Free State. The story is told in the first-person by Henry who is an omniscient narrator and knows what happened even before his own birth: he chooses which events he wants to share with the reader and which ones to leave out. Henry's teenage mother, Melody, is sinking into drink and madness after the death of her first son, whom she had named Henry as well. His one-legged father, Henry Sr., a brothel-bouncer and commercial hitman for Dolly Oblong and Alfie Gandon, is very often absent and ends up disappearing for good to avoid being killed by his former associates. Henry and his younger brother, Victor, are forced to search for a life begging on the streets. Victor cannot cope with this rough life and dies of tuberculosis. In 1916, Henry enlists in the Irish Citizen Army and actively takes part in the Easter Rising. He meets iconic figures such as Michael Collins, Patrick Pearse, Joseph Plunkett and James Connolly.

During the rebellion, he also reunites with his primary school teacher Miss O'Shea, who later becomes his wife and the mother of his daughter, Saoirse. Henry manages to escape from the shootings of the General Post Office and later begins to work for Michael Collins, who ends up using him for killing people and sorting out troublesome tasks during the War of Independence, but disregards him as part of his inner circle, which means that Henry is denied any decisional power. As Doyle himself has clarified, Henry's exclusion from Collins' inner group stems from the former's insufficiency on various fronts: he lacks a suitable personal background (for the cause), education, wealth, and family ties.[22] Henry subsequently realises that killing innocent people is not connected to his idea of an independent Ireland and, threatened by his former comrades, decides to flee the country leaving his wife and daughter behind: just like his father, he abandons his family to avoid being killed.

A Star Called Henry is an historical novel in so far as some real and defining historical events are seen through the eyes of a fictional character, Henry Smart. The primary historical event around which the novel is centred is the Easter Rising (24 April 1916), of which many works offer different versions and which has been so 'remorselessly textualized' in stories of martyrdom that literature and myth have become

[22] Eleanor Watchel, 'An Interview with Roddy Doyle', *Brick: A Literary Journal*, 2000, vol. 64, pp. 52-59.

inextricable from the historical events.[23] For example, Seán O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* (1926); Elizabeth Bowen's *Last September* (1929); Iris Murdoch's *The Red and the Green* (1965); Julia O'Faolain's *No Country for Young Men* (1980); and Jamie O'Neill's *At Swim Two Boys* (2001) propose diverse readings of this episode. Doyle, in *A Star Called Henry*, in turn pokes fun at some key events and figures of Republican activism who took part in the Rising and who had been seen, in turn, as martyrs, saints and heroes.[24]

II.2.i Doyle, Bakhtin and the subaltern

A Star Called Henry does not have a linear development. Rather, it is punctuated by flashbacks, gaps and fragmentation: for instance, at different stages Henry goes back to events that happened even before he was born; we never know who Henry's father was before meeting Melody nor where he came from; we are not told much about the years between the wedding of Henry's parents and his birth; Henry's mother disappears, and we are never sure of what happened to her; some of the characters, such as Piano Annie or Dolly Oblong, are woven in and out of the narrative, and the reader is never told what happens to them in between. Moreover, there are lengthy temporal gaps between one part of the novel and the following. The most considerable of these gaps is between Part I and II of the book. The first part of the novel ends with Henry, aged eight, going to look for his mother after the death of his younger brother, Victor. When the action resumes, we find Henry years later, in the General Post Office on Easter Monday, wearing a uniform he has paid for himself by stealing and begging, without being told what he has been up to in the intervening years. He is now a soldier in James Connolly's Irish Citizen Army and the birth of the Irish Republic will, at least in part, be witnessed by him. After the Rising, Henry becomes one of Michael Collins' boys during the War of Independence, a commander of men years before he could vote. He tears through the hosts of Irish women that plead for his attention, well-aware of his attractiveness and proud of his sexual prowess. Eventually, he marries a woman he calls Miss O'Shea – Henry never wants to know her first name – who had been his and Victor's teacher during the only two days they had been allowed to attend school and who took part in the Rising as well. The suggestively named Miss O'Shea becomes a celebrated killer of British soldiers and Irish

[23] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 213; José Lanters, 'Demythicizing/Remythicizing The Rising: Roddy Doyle's A Star Called Henry', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 245-258, p. 245.
[24] Genoveffa Giambona, 'The rhythm of the city', p. 257.

traitors, continuing long after Henry has seemingly given her up and has left Ireland abandoning his wife and child.[25]

As mentioned, this is an historical novel where facts and fiction blend, and where facts are filtered through Henry's perceptions of them. However, this is no history, and we should not forget that Doyle is no historian but a novelist who, through fiction and the specific themes he chooses in order to develop his narrative, tries to experiment with mixing fact and fantasy in a bid to allow his readers to experience history from a different perspective. His approach is experimental rather than factual. Doyle himself has said that:

> Any history can be [a trap]. [In *A Star Called Henry*] I was going to play with it. Not necessarily in the sense of fun, but I was going to mix fact and fiction just to see how far I could go.[26]

So, by mixing fact and fiction Doyle's narrative becomes an experimental ground in which he re-reads and reimagines several elements of the Irish past that have defined the nation's development and are still felt in the present, or at least in the present during which the novels were written.

Linked to this concept of narrative as a space to re-invent and re-imagine, in the novel there also appears to be a metanarrative reflection on the power of fiction to create and give agency. For example, we read that, like Henry, Henry Sr. liked to tell stories about himself and who he was. 'Was he just a liar?' Henry wonders, and the answer is 'I don't think so. He was a survivor' (p. 7). Storytelling becomes an enabler for those subalterns who need to reinvent themselves constantly in order to survive. Part of this effort to create new stories, which then become the new myths of the forgotten and the dispossessed, is Henry's account of his own birth.[27] This account is surrounded by a mythical halo: Henry is born 'glowing' and bigger than any other baby; stories start circulating about him as soon as he is born about how his mother needs to use a blanket

[25] It is beyond the scope of this Chapter to discuss the symbolic value of Miss O'Shea. However, it must be noted that her surname inevitably recalls the apparent cause of Charles Stewart Parnell's political downfall: his affair with Catherine/Kitty O'Shea. So, Doyle probably chose the name as a sort of ironic rewriting of Kitty.

[26] Charles Taylor, *The Salon Interview*, https://www.salon.com/1999/10/28/doyle_2/, last accessed 11 June 2021.

[27] The need to create new myths is also reflected in the circular structure of the trilogy where, as Doyle himself points out, patterns are repeated, Genoveffa Giambona, 'The rhythm of the city', p. 13. According to Northrop Frye, circular elements are essential in order to ground a novel and its stories in mythology and to create a grounding myth for an uncertain culture, Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

as a nappy; or about Lady Gregory asking for what is in his nappies to spread over her flowerbeds so they would bring blossom (pp. 22-3).

The reference to Lady Gregory, one of the most prominent figures of the Irish Literary Revival and promoter of retellings of Irish myths and folklore, who had written about Cuchulain, a prodigious figure of Irish myth, reinforces this sense of legend-making.[28] Like Cuchulain, who aged seven fought against and defeated hundreds of warriors, at around the same age, or even younger, Henry fights off the dangers of the Dublin streets in order to survive. Later on, just like Cuchulain, Henry fights to own his land: as Cuchulain sought to keep Queen Maeve's army out of Ulster, Henry tries to drive the British out of Ireland. Henry's mock semi-legendary status is further consolidated when, we are told, he even becomes the subject of oral ballads and of popular stories.[29] The character's association with folk tales and popular ballads is not a coincidence. According to E.P. Thompson, for example:

> Oral evidence, by transforming the 'objects' of study into 'subjects', makes for history, which is not just richer… but truer. [30]

This reconnects to the reinstating of lost histories which, I argue, is part of Doyle's aim. Moreover, closer to home, some Irish postcolonial theories see Irish ballads and folk songs as vital representations of hybridity in a colonial culture, as sites of resistance and a means of popular instruction, a view that probably goes back to the Celtic Revival. David Lloyd, for example, recommends that critics revalue the marginal elements of Irish culture and reinsert them into the dynamic of identity formation. In order to recover marginalised practices which have been read as incoherent or pre-modern, he calls for an analysis of 'cultural practices which have appeared discontinuous, submerged' and of

> the developing state apparatus in Ireland which is at one and the same time the analysis of the hegemonic role of culture in the formation of citizen-subjects.[31]

So, the association between Henry and the oral is a stratagem to recover hidden identities, and in this case, we can argue, the 'submerged' identity of the subaltern marginalised by

[28] For a discussion of how Henry might be representative of the mythical figure of Cuchulain see Janis Dawson, 'Aspects of the Fantastic in Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry*: Deconstructing Romantic Nationalism', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2001, pp. 168-85.
[29] The same happens in *Oh, Play That Thing* when Miss O'Shea and Saoirse become the subject of numerous folk stories.
[30] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 90.
[31] David Lloyd, *Anomalous States. Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment*, p. 7.

hegemonic cultural practices. As we will see, the oral and the musical are also explored in *Oh, Play That Thing*. It is interesting to see how Irish myths of sovereignty and liberation, such as those represented by Cuchulain, are interwoven into a narrative that, as mentioned in the introductory remarks to this chapter, tries to redefine and demystify mainstream and accepted accounts of Irish history. It appears that Doyle is stretching the relation between the literary and the oral so that his re-reading of history is rooted in the fabric of Irish tradition, which he tries to reimagine and make new. An even more important point for the purposes of this thesis is that oral, non-linear histories are characteristic of the attempt to bring to the surface hidden subaltern voices.[32] So, the association between Henry and popular folk tales is further confirmation of Doyle's attempt to bring to the surface his character's subaltern voice.

Besides, Henry's physical attributes as gigantic, the use of his dad's wooden leg as a deadly weapon, bring to mind Bakhtin's book *Rabelais and His World*.[33] In this book, Bakhtin examines popular humour and folk culture during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. He identifies François Rabelais as a writer who creates, through the grotesque, a second world where language, literature, and political life combine in a carnival spirit or carnivalesque sense of the world; where the human body is the eccentric body, the grotesque body which is constantly in flux. In this counterculture, the grotesque is seen as primordial energy, its inhabitants are not so much fully developed characters as carnivalistic, comical or grotesques, each one having his or her own distinctive voice. The spirit of the carnival thus creates a 'third space' where voices normally excluded from dialogue with authority are permitted to be heard.[34] Another writer who is seen as making use of the grotesque, in Bakhtinian terms, is Charles Dickens.[35] Not surprisingly, *A Star Called Henry* has been called one 'of the bleakest and most vivid portraits of poverty since Dickens', with Doyle himself confessing that, when writing his novel, he was trying to see whether he could copy Dickens in writing a story like *David Copperfield*.[36] Doyle then transposes Bakhtin's ideas of the grotesque, and the

[32] David Ludden, *Reading Subaltern Studies. Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia*, pp. 11-12.
[33] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolski, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
[34] Catherine MacMillan, 'Welcome to the Carnival? Podemos, Populism and Bakhtin's Carnivalesque', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies,* vol. 25, no. 2, 2017, pp.258-273.
[35] Kay Hetherly Wright, 'The Grotesque and Urban Chaos in "Bleak House"', *Dickens Studies Annual*, vol. 21, 1992, pp. 97-112; Keith Easley, 'Dickens and Bakhtin: Authoring in 'Bleak House"',
Dickens Studies Annual, vol. 34, 2004, pp. 185-232; Michael Hollington, *Dickens and the Grotesque*, (London: Routledge Revivals, 2016).
[36] Charles Taylor, *The Salon Interview*, https://www.salon.com/1999/10/28/doyle_2/, last accessed 11 June 2021.

Dickensian, to twentieth-century Dublin, where he tries to create a space for the subaltern to be heard.

The fragmentation in the narrative also takes the form of different narrative tones. There are, for instance, iconic episodes followed by very prosaic ones, as if one scene is undermined by another. An example of this is when Henry describes the moment the British troops start bombarding Liberty Hall:

> What did I say? … Nothing at all. Too scared? Too busy? No. I just wasn't there… I was downstairs, in the basement… did I hear the shell hitting the Loop Line? Did I hear the clang? I did but I thought the noise was coming from me… I was stuck there with my britches nuzzling my ankles as Miss O'Shea grabbed me. (p. 119)

Henry seems to give us more details about his sexual encounter with Miss O'Shea than about the shelling of the Hall and the fight that ensued – intimate personal history supplants revered national accounts. Another such example is when Henry remembers the day some of the leaders of the Rising are executed:

> On Wednesday morning, the 3rd of May, in Kilmainham Gaol, Pearse, Clarke and MacDonagh were taken out… and shot. At dawn. And across the city, in Summerhill, Henry Smart couldn't get out of his britches. (p. 141)

It seems that the day, for Henry, rather than being memorable for the executions, is stuck in his mind because his britches were welded to him! On one level, this technique highlights the fact that Henry wrestles the rhetoric, the dogmatic iconography that came to surround the cause of freedom, treating it as if it was religion with all the images attached to it.[37] The episode might also be a parody of the whole Parnell/Kitty story alluded to before, as well as of the confusion between personal desire and historical forces, of the interaction of public event and private experience in Yeats' poem 'Easter

[37] This impression is confirmed in *The Dead Republic*: 'I knew. I'd learnt it years ago. It was religion and, so, it was madness. It was the sanctity of the words… choose the wrong one and you were damned. Choose the right one and you were dead', all quotes from Roddy Doyle, *The Dead Republic*, (London, Vintage, 2010), p. 186. To Henry, it is all about improving the lives of real men, women and children who had found themselves dispossessed under a 'conqueror'. Perhaps that is why, although disagreeing with the tactic because 'I knew hunger all my life… and it was never a fuckin' strike. Only the middle class could come up with starvation as a form of protest' (p. 242), he admires the quiet determination of the hunger strikers who 'were young men. They weren't tired of life, or beaten by it. They were giving it up. Refusing to exist. And their silence impressed me more than anything I'd met since Citizen Army men run out the side door of the G.P.O. and took the bullets for the men who were right behind them. Now, again, I felt it; men I admired were dying for me. Men and a woman' (p. 257). Henry thinks that 'refusing to speak was resistance' (p. 245). The concept of silence is one that we find in subaltern and postcolonial studies.

1916' a fusion that 'Yeats very nearly invented'.[38] However, as I said, this is part of a narrative strategy: with one scene undermining the previous one, Doyle wants to represent how one narrative can be undermined by another. Moreover, the fragmentation that ensues aims at undermining the petrification of linear narratives, something that, as we have seen, is a hallmark of subaltern histories. Doyle tries to present events from a different perspective while, at the same time, wrestling them free of pre-imposed representational meaning.

So, the fragmented historical fiction, as we have defined it, of this novel, and of *The Last Roundup* trilogy in general, uses real events, mythologisations of them - and deconstructions – to challenge any simplistic notions of identity and Irishness. Part of this fragmentation are the temporal gaps in the novel, and in the trilogy as a whole. These gaps are not just between one novel and the other, but within each novel. It is as if, somehow, the events as seen through Henry's eyes are not linked. This choice is in itself a narrative strategy to offer a different perspective on events, and on the past. As we have seen some ossified state-formation narratives, just like the colonial ones, usually try to establish continuity, whilst the novel seems to nurture discontinuity. To this extent, it is useful to read the novel as a national foundation narrative such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.[39] Gaps become part of the narrative strategy itself: national identity is not just made of continuities but of discontinuities as well. As we have seen, these concepts of discontinuity and fragmentation are relevant in subaltern studies.[40] Thus, the adoption of a narrative which does not shy away from gaps, the insistence that national identity is not fixed and defined, the shifting of focus from the 'official' version of Irishness to a new one as embodied by a Dubliner from the slums, are all elements that build a new narrative for those who were dispossessed and marginalized not just by the colonisers but also by official definitions of what Irishness, after 1916, is.

Linked to the fragmented nature of the narrative are the dichotomies around which *A Star Called Henry* seems to be built: rich vs poor, city vs countryside, men vs women, them vs us. These dichotomies are quite fluid themselves and not as clear-cut as one might think. When it comes to the fight for freedom, for example, they also extend to the fighters themselves. Although, technically, they are all fighting to achieve the same goal, the Irish rebels end up fighting against each other, and the first period of so-called independence

[38] Marjorie Perloff, 'Yeats and the Occasional Poem: "Easter 1916"', *Papers on Language & Literature*, vol. 50, no. 3-4, 2014, pp. 326-351, p. 328.
[39] For an exhaustive discussion on *Midnight's Children* as a national narrative, see Neil Ten Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children'*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).
[40] For example, Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 88.

from the colonial power ends up being scarred by civil war. Allegiances become very fluid, identities and identification with a given group are subject to sudden changes. So, for example, Henry, who during the Easter Rising is a member of the Irish Citizens Army who 'hated the Volunteers' (p. 103), later on becomes a member of the latter organisation; or the Dubliners who go about their usual business when:

> King Edward died and I didn't see anyone weeping as the news got carried around Dublin. They'd wanted to kill me when I'd insulted the King but, now that he was dead, they just shrugged and kept walking. (p. 70)

Or the crowds who first jeer the rebels on their way to the GPO but, not long after, cheer them on when they raise the Irish flag (p. 95). In this sense, at times, the novel might seem to be a study in human fickleness: nothing seems to be fixed – names, allegiances, versions of Ireland. Hence, although we have a single narrator, there are several, never straightforward, layers in the narrative which seem to challenge a fixed, linear perspective. When seen in this light, the fratricidal fight that ensued after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921, in the novel, might be a metaphor for Ireland itself, torn between aspirations for a better future while, at the same time, clinging to the past. In a novel where the protagonist's life seems to be marked by accidental events that change its course, it would not be too wide of the mark to assume that the narrative seems to espouse the belief that 'identity… is no more than a product of historical accident'.[41] In fact, the novel might seem, in this historical context, to foreground the accidental elements of identity-building.

II.2.ii Identity and the picaresque

Ambiguity, duplicity and shifting identities in the novel start with the title itself: at a first glance, we assume that the 'Star' of the title is the protagonist of the novel. However, as soon as we start reading, we realise that in fact the 'Star' is not the protagonist but his dead infant brother. Melody's little Henry is someone else, her dead child. The 'other' Henry is perfection, an ideal that can never be matched. Henry Sr. forces his wife to name the new child with the same name: Melody never forgives her husband, and their relationship is forever compromised. She sees the boy, whom she never calls by name, as a usurper of her firstborn's identity:

[41] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 220.

> My mother looked up at the stars. There were plenty of them up there. She lifted her hand. It swayed as she chose one. Her finger pointed. 'There's my little Henry up there. Look it.'… I looked, her other little Henry sitting beside her on the step. I looked up and hated him. (p. 1)

Henry's feeling of being an impostor, his search for his true self, starts in this moment. They recall the feeling of displacement felt by colonised people, but also the same feeling of dispossession felt by those subaltern voices left out of the national narrative. The issue of representation and identity, or lack of it, are present from the start of the novel. So, we can say that, unsurprisingly, the very first page of the novel introduces the issue of Henry's quest for his own identity: Right from the beginning Henry is somebody else, he's a usurper. The word 'beginning', in this case, doubles up as the beginning of his life and the beginning of the novel which, in fictional terms, are one and the same. Again, we see narrative as creator and enabler, giving life and a voice, in this instance, to someone who would otherwise be unheard. Unsurprisingly then, the novel is punctuated with the cry 'I am Henry Smart'. Henry is not alone in chasing who he is: as mentioned, his father before him was someone who had 'invented and reinvented himself' and (sinisterly and ambiguously) 'gave himself a life. He filled the hole with many lives' (p. 7).

This lack of identity is not an isolated episode, something that can be associated only with Henry's situation - his father as well, the previous generation, suffered from a similar lack of definition. This seems to be the fate of those who are born in the slums as, according to Henry

> the family trees of the poor don't grow to any height. I know nothing real about my father; I don't even know if his name was real. (p. 7)[42]

Family history and family trees are a privilege of the rich. Those outside history tend to leave few traces behind them. It is worth noting that, in literature, the constant reinvention of the self, and of the nation, is a marker of the colonised subject.[43] In Irish postcolonial

[42] Naming is an important concept in postcolonialism, including Irish postcolonial studies. The naming or renaming of a place, the naming or renaming of a race, a region, a person, is like an act of possession. This act was carried out by the coloniser in the colonies as an act of re-mapping and appropriation. This could explain, for example, the Field Day's preoccupation with naming, or the same preoccupation in Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980) as an act of re-appropriation and decolonisation through literature, Seamus Deane, 'Introduction', Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, pp. 17-19. In *A Star Called Henry* there are several references to names and naming (for instance, p. 4; p. 33-35; p. 37), besides all the instances when Henry reaffirms that his name is Henry Smart.
[43] Patrick Crowley and Jane Hiddlestone, *Postcolonial Poetics. Genre and Form*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), p. 2.

studies, this is a concept taken up by most of the theory discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, and a concept very much present already in Yeats' use of Celtic myths and imagery in his poetry.[44] The words 'invent, invention, reinvent, reinvented, reinventing' often associated with Ireland in critical discourse are used with reference to quite a few characters in the novel, especially Henry.[45] For example, Dolly Oblong, or Henry Sr., or Henry and Victor who, in order to survive in the Dublin slums, had to take on several different roles:

> We blew the ice-cream seller's bugle after his own lips rotted on him… we caught rats for the dog fighters. We sold bones to Keefe's, the knackers. I was a beggar's assistant and Victor was my own assistant… we sold newspapers we'd stolen. We stole back flowers we'd sold. (p. 64-5)

Henry and Victor constantly change roles, and personas. However, amidst all this constant change, the only certainty Henry seems to find to begin with is that he

> was born into that alley, that city, that small corner of the Empire. I'm looking for the door, trying to find my way in. It's dark, but I am nearly there (p. 3).

Interestingly, Henry still has not found his place in that small corner although he is trying: he is shut out of his own city, he feels he does not belong. He has no voice, no agency. It is also interesting to see that Dublin is firmly identified as a 'small corner of the Empire' and that Henry goes on to acknowledge that:

> We were never going to prosper. We were allowed the freedom of the streets… but we'd never, ever be allowed up the bright steps and into the comfort and warmth behind the doors and windows. I knew that. (p. 66)

Through Henry, Doyle has unearthed a subaltern reality on the margins of Irish society, someone who, as I suggest in the Introduction, is a symbol of those who are doubly

[44] For a discussion of the use of myth in Yeats' poetry, see Neil Corcoran, *After Yeats And Joyce*.
[45] The titles of some theory publications themselves suggest the link of these concepts with Ireland and Irishness: for example, Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland*; Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin's *Re-Inventing Ireland*; Caitriona Moloney, 'Re-Imagining Women's History in the Fiction of Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Anne Enright, and Kate O'Riordan', Eamon Maher (ed.), *The Reimagining Ireland Reader. Examining Our Past, Shaping Our Future*, (Dublin: Peter Lang, 2018). In the past decade Eamon Maher, as general editor, and the publishing house Peter Lang have produced over eighty books in the Reimagining Ireland series; or in the case of Doyle himself, Lorraine Piroux, "'I'm Black an' I'm Proud": Re-Inventing Irishness in Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments*'.

colonised in Irish society. There is a barrier that Henry is not allowed to cross: he belongs to the streets and those who live a comfortable life will not let him in, both literally and metaphorically.

As mentioned, in the novel the fixed identities encountered in homogenising representations such as the colonial and post-independence ones are counterbalanced by the presence of multiple ones, each depending on who is looking at the different characters. So, to the women in the neighbourhood that went to see Henry when he was born, the protagonist was 'a healthy, good-sized baby. The women had never seen one before' (p. 23); to his mother he 'was the other Henry. The shadow. The impostor' (p. 33); while his father 'looked at me and saw a different child. He began to see the baby who was eating his wife away… [so] they called me nothing' (p. 33). This multiplicity of identities, this fragmentation, at the same time means that Henry is nothing, has no essence, a bit like water that takes the shape of its container. Henry's main attribute is his lack of attributes, his lack of definition beyond his outsize body, his lack of identity. Or, perhaps, he is defined by being someone else, his dead brother, 'a shocking substitute for the little Henry who'd been too good for this world' (p. 1). By implication, this might make him feel that he is not that good or deserving to stay in this world, that he is one of 'the ugly ones, the noisy ones, the ones He [God] didn't want – the ones that would never stay fed' (p. 1).

Another recurrent theme in *A Star Called Henry* is water, which continues to be present in its sequel, *Oh, Play That Thing*. Water, and in particular underground water, is for example associated with the memory of Henry Sr. in both positive and negative ways. Henry's father, a contract killer, 'dropped parcels into water all over Dublin' (p. 50), the parcels in question being body parts. He knows the waterways under Dublin like the back of his hand and feels at home there. No wonder that when Henry and Victor are threatened by the police for insulting Edward VII during his parade in town, their father, whom they have not seen in years, takes them to safety through Dublin's subterranean rivers. Although, on their way, they are 'hit by the whiff of the rubbish that had come from the west with the river' (p. 57), Henry is happy to be with his dad, he feels safe tucked under his coat, he likes the smell of it and does not realise he is 'inhaling years of violence and murder' (p. 56). And for the first and possibly the last time in the novel, we see Henry laugh (p. 58). But this sense of contentment and safety is short lived. Henry Sr. disappears in the belly of the city, never to be seen again. It is after this episode that Henry realises that his father is 'a gobshite' and he goes 'home to the stinking, smoke-choked hollow and the wet basement and our share of our poor mother's lap' (p. 60). Interestingly, it is

to the slums and to his mother that Henry goes back in order to find comfort after he feels let down by his father: this is what he calls home.

Water is an escape route again for Henry when he runs away from the British troops after being arrested for his part in the Easter Rising. We are made well aware that water brings back memories of his father, and of Victor:

> Just before I hit the water, in the second it took to fall, I caught the sweet smell of my father's coat and I could feel his neck against my face as he held me to him, and I could hear Victor's excited and terrified breath from the other side of my father. (p. 140)

Henry forgets that his father's coat probably smells of blood and murder, he just remembers it as 'sweet', and water to him becomes synonymous with feeling safe and secure.[46] Like his father, Henry can map the city from the underground water, even if he cannot see anything. Henry has an almost magical feel for water – he can feel it 'under me. Running under the barracks. And it was dragging me. Every bone I owned was bending towards it' (p. 139). Like in *Finnegans Wake*, water almost symbolises a sense of destiny, with the difference that in *A Star Called Henry* this water is underground. Henry's symbiotic relationship with underground water is a relationship with the world from below: below official Dublin there is a place to hide out, a 'submerged' place that hosts a 'submerged' reality, to use Lloyd's word I referred to in the opening sections of this chapter.

The magical power of water can also be seen as a metaphor for transformation and purification. Hence, after running away from the British troops, Henry runs

> across to Liffey Street and went looking for Piano Annie. The river had dyed me. I took off the jacket and dropped it as I went. There was no uniform now. I was just a big wet boy in a pair of brown britches. (p. 141)

We can almost see Henry here shedding his skin and becoming someone else, someone new. Why this recurrence of water as a magical, healing, safe locum? It might be that Henry can associate water with both his father and his mother, find unity in this element. Or it might be that water, which is often present in his descriptions of the various decrepit, rat-infested dwellings variously described as humid, damp, wet, that his mother moved into is seen as a constant feature of 'home'. Water becomes a metaphor for the ultimate

[46] The theme of water is not confined to *A Star Called Henry* but is carried on, as we will see, in *Oh, Play That Thing*.

home, the maternal womb. This impression seems to be reinforced when we read that 'Henry came charging into the world on a river of water and blood that washed the news off the papers' his mother was lying on when she gave birth to him (p. 21). Water and blood are what accompanies Henry when he comes into the world, together with the whitewash of printed news, of the accepted accounts of events. Water and blood are also what characterises Henry's brief reunion with his father in a Dublin underground river which, at the same time, also foretells his own future of violence and murder (p. 56).

The 'fluidity' as represented by water is almost a technical aspect of the novel – the way it shifts and moves – and symbolises the characters' shifting identities. This fluidity reflects Henry's identity being in a flux, as we see in the following passage, where Henry follows the familiar underground waters to go and say goodbye to his wife at Kilmainham Gaol, at the same time releasing his father's wooden leg:

> I'd left the leg in the water, I'd climbed into the Camac from the Liffey. It was well away by now, out in the bay. And I'd be following it soon (p. 340).

The change of rivers symbolises a change in the course of Henry's life, or at least the promise of it. Abandoning the wooden leg is part of this change. Water, a symbol of baptism and purification, is then associated with becoming new.

Water is more than a straightforward metaphor in the book; it seems to be the element that the narrative, like the city, moves upon. When I asked him about the significance of underground water in the novel, Doyle remarked that it represented

> the layers of history underneath what we are standing on at the moment, and all the places built on what is now an underground river. And the history of the city is shaped by a river that can no longer be seen.[47]

It is significant that the water Henry feels at home in is underground water: like that water, he cannot be seen; like that water, he has shaped the history of the city, and the nation, but his contribution is hidden. Indeed, despite having fought throughout from the Easter Rising through to the War of Independence, Henry is consistently denied a place in the inner circles of decisional power. That water, then, becomes a metaphor of Henry's 'underground', subaltern status. His life and the life of those like him, are hidden, ignored,

[47] Genoveffa Giambona, 'The rhythm of the city', p. 263.

submerged. Nonetheless, they exist underground, and play a significant but mostly unacknowledged role.

As I mentioned in the introductory paragraphs to the chapter, it is undeniable that Doyle purposely chooses a working-class character as his protagonist. However, as noted, this choice is not made simply in terms of working-class realist writing: it is far more layered. Henry, an individual from the Dublin slums, becomes the mouthpiece of this fiction of an iconic nationalist event, namely the Rising. Through Henry we see how the success of the nationalist narrative relies, in part, on the false assumptions of which he himself is a victim, namely that the experience of the working class can be inscribed into, or rather merged with a larger nationalist narrative, that the two somewhat coincide. The narrative strategies of nationalists such as Jack Dalton, the Republican propagandist, completely bypass the histories of the urban working-class, women, and minorities.[48] Thus, Henry's memories and experience, his story and identity, are most at risk of being overwritten by a homogenising, conservative nationalist narrative. Henry is most complicit in this process of erasure when he fails to recognise the cultural power of such narrative, and when he believes that he can simply escape Irish history and identity, as set by those cultural representations, by leaving the country. Consequently, in order to truly shape one's own identity and story, the subaltern needs to challenge that narrative, integrate it with the missing stories, so that it can be more exhaustively re-written. So, in the novel, the choice of a working-class 'hero' is one of the main stratagems used to rewrite and integrate 'history', to make it truer. I put the word hero in inverted commas because the novel also subverts the figure of the hero. This undermining is part of Doyle's strategy to undermine the glory and mythical status of the immediate post-independence mainstream nationalist accounts of the period in Irish history the novel covers.

The traditional hero of the historical novel is here transformed into a comic, picaresque one. Like this novel, the picaresque narrative is usually a first-person autobiographical account. The main characters often belong to the lower social classes and they tell their story as a series of loosely connected adventures or episodes, with little character development, giving it a sort of circular structure.[49] However, the picaresque structure itself, which challenges linearity, becomes part of Doyle's efforts to rework the

[48] Kristina Deffenbacher, 'Revisioning of Cultural Memory and Identity through Dialogic Mythmaking in Roddy Doyle's *The Last Roundup* Trilogy', pp. 149-168.
[49] S. Ortiz Taylor, 'Episodic Structure and the Picaresque Novel', *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1977, pp. 218-225, p. 218.

narrative and to open a different perspective, linking it to those non-linear subaltern narratives as conceptualised by the academy.[50]

In *A Star Called Henry* Dublin, and not the countryside, takes centre stage, especially the squalor and poor life chances that the people who were born in the slums had. The slums are ever present in the novel, and in Henry's life. They seem to have the most powerful influence on his fate, on the thousands that live like him, and on his mother:

> Behind her, the damp, scabbed walls, the rotten wood, the wet air, the leaking, bursting, ceilings. Decomposing wallpaper, pools of stagnant water, rats on the scent of baby milk. Colonies of flies in the wet, crumbling walls. Typhoid and other death in every breath, on every surface… shouts and fights, rage and coughing, coughing – death creeping nearer. (p. 8) [51]

This powerful description introduces the omnipresent slums as almost another character in the novel, as Henry never forgets where he came from and the effects the slums had on his life. As a consequence, the simple fact that Henry is a healthy baby seems a miracle in a place where everybody is starving and where 'God waited for no baby… He took them as soon as He'd given them' (p. 28). Children seem to lack any real chance of having a proper childhood in Dublin, an impression which is reinforced when Henry says of his mother 'Like me, she was never a child. There were no children in Dublin.' (p. 3).

As mentioned, Henry becomes a central figure in the nationalist fight for independence, starting with his involvement in the Easter Rising. In the GPO, he rubs shoulders with the main figures of the Rising. Doyle's re-reading, through Henry, a child of the slums, of this most significant event in Irish history is part of the demythologising efforts discussed earlier. Of all the nationalist leaders, the only figure that seems to have positive connotations is that of James Connolly. Henry clearly admires Connolly above all others. This might be because, unlike Pearse or Plunkett, who were members of the Catholic middle class, poets who had wealth behind them, Connolly, a renowned Socialist, was born in an Irish immigrant slum in Edinburgh: Henry, born and raised in

[50] See the mentioned Edward Said, 'Foreword', Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, p. vii; David Ludden, *Reading Subaltern Studies. Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia*, pp. 11-12.

[51] The living conditions in the slums were horrendous. A 1913 report by the Committee of Inquiry into Dublin Housing concluded that 'houses that were initially intended for occupation by one family were sub-divided… with the result that, in most extreme cases, houses were occupied by nearly 100 persons… in 1911… infant mortality [was] higher than that of Calcutta in the same period', David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland*, p. 129.

the slums himself, feels a natural affinity. Besides being a socialist and an advocate for the working class, who grasped how the historical processes of colonialism preserved and exacerbated antagonistic cultural and class differences, according to Lloyd, Connolly is an historian of Irish subalternity *ante-litteram*. Lloyd goes on to say that:

> Connolly… anticipates many of the ways in which subaltern historiographers and postcolonial theorists have critiqued the developmental progressivism that informs not only imperial ideology but also nationalist movements.[52]

Lloyd's reflections appear to link the history Doyle is writing about and his literary rendition of that history.

Going back to the temporal hiatus between Part I and II, we can infer that Henry had spent part of this time being looked after by James Connolly. Henry tells us that:

> He [Connolly] had fed me, given me clothes, he let me sleep in the Hall… he let me know that he liked me. He explained why we were poor and why we didn't have to be. He told me that I was right to be angry. (p. 127)

Henry had also previously informed us that:

> It was Connolly who'd finally taught me how to read. He'd slapped me, three years before… when he'd heard me telling the women in the soup kitchen that I'd no use for reading or writing. He'd pushed me into a room and forced my face down to the pages of a book. (p. 96)

At some point, we are also told that Henry took part in the Lockout when, using his father's wooden leg, he 'had broken legs and rozzers' fingers' (p. 133). Connolly, the proto-subalternist, is credited with giving new awareness to Henry that his voice actually mattered and that things could change (p. 127). It is Connolly who listens to Henry's suggestions that there should be something about the rights of children in The Proclamation of Independence ('My part. My contribution. My present to Victor' p. 96): 'He looked at me. He saw my pain, and the pain of millions of others. And his own' (p. 97). So, Henry's admiration for Connolly is clear and might be due to the fact that, like Connolly, Henry is fighting to put on the map those like himself who 'weren't in the same

[52] David Lloyd, 'Why Read Connolly', *Interventions*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2008, pp. 116-23, p. 121.

battle at all as the rest of the rebels' (p. 107). This is possibly due to Henry's lack of a shared background with the leaders of the Rising, as noted in Doyle's remarks I quoted in the opening paragraphs. Henry's perspective, his contribution to the making of the nation, is different to theirs, but this perspective and contribution has been eclipsed, as represented by the lack of acknowledgment to the wording in the Proclamation. Only the battle fought by 'the rest of the rebels' has been passed down through the generations: Henry is standing for all those whose contribution to the nation has been obliterated and who have had their histories denied.[53]

Although *A Star Called Henry* is set right at the beginning of the twentieth century, it came out when the economic benefits of the initial phase of what has been termed the Celtic Tiger were beginning to be felt. In fact, the novel was published in the same year as a strategy document published by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), which stated that 'Ireland reinvented itself during the 1990s'. [54] So it is interesting that a story about re-imaging the past comes out in a period when the entire nation is re-imagining itself: it is as if the conditions created by the changed economic and cultural environment in the present have also created an environment – and at the millennial moment - conducive to a re-examination of the past. As Henry fought for the nationalist cause, his efforts to repeatedly reinvent himself would, at a first glance, appear to mirror the nationalists' efforts to redefine Irishness and reframe Irish history. However, as we have seen, Henry is also critical of, and debunks, nationalist myths. In fact, as a retrospective narrator, Henry charts the all-pervasive power of the nationalist narrative of Irish history and identity across the twentieth century. At the same time, he tries to mediate memory and experience, both collective and individual, including his own.

This notwithstanding, it would be a mistake to think that Doyle underplays the status of Ireland as a colony. Markers of Dublin and Ireland as part of the British Empire are interspersed throughout the novel. For example: 'Dublin was suddenly full of one-legged men, their limbs left behind on the Empire's battlefields' (p. 46-7); 'It [making money] is good for the city, the country and the Empire' (p. 2). It would appear that the narrative tries to establish the setting as colonial right from the start. The image of the

[53] Between 1916 and 1923, workers played an important part in the struggle for independence, both through active participation in the IRA and through strike action. However, whilst farmers and the middle classes got recognition, the urban working classes got forgotten. For more see, Michael Pierse, *Writing Ireland's Working Class: Dublin After O'Casey*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), pp. 12-4; Emmet O'Connor, 'Labour and Politics, 1830–1945: Colonisation and Mental Colonisation', in F. Lane and D.Ó. Drisceoil (eds.) *Politics and the Irish Working Class, 1830–1945*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 27-43, p. 33.

[54] Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin, *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy History, Theory, Practice*, p. 1.

'one-legged men' reminds us of Henry's father. However, the latter was far from being a war hero/martyr. We are not told how Henry's father lost his leg; it could have been 'war, an infection, the fairies, a train' which is also a reminder of other gaps that characterise the narrative. (p. 7).

However, homogenising definitions of Irishness in post-Independence Ireland, which I discussed in the Introduction, and which saw the nation as rural, Gaelic and Catholic, is what Henry is hinting at this when, talking about those fighting in the War of Independence, he remarks that:

> They hated anyone or anything from Dublin. Dublin was too close to England… Ireland was everywhere west of Dublin, the real people were west, west, west… they spoke English but they knew that they were more Irish than I was; they were nearer to being the pure thing. (p. 212)

This resonates with similar tensions in both 'The Dead' and *A Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man* around the West as the true repository of Irish identity.[55] Moreover, besides revealing a further layer in Henry's search for identity, this excerpt seems a clear reference to the 'the West is the real Ireland' mantra which was an integral part of the new identity the new-born Free State was trying to construct.

According to Kiberd, Michael Collins himself had no doubts as to its intellectual sources:

> We only succeeded after we had begun to get back our Irish ways; after we had made a serious effort to speak our own language.[56]

However, as noted in the Introduction, there is a risk that, if they become totalising, nationalist harmonising efforts risk reproducing the same stereotypes they are trying to dismantle. The novel appears to reflect this danger with the realisation that 'Just when we're rid of the English we'll have new masters' (p. 325). The 'new masters' here refers to the conservative nationalists who came to power after the war of Independence and who, as we have seen, promoted an idea of Ireland and Irishness which left out large

[55] James Joyce, 'The Dead', James Joyce, *Dubliners*, see in particular pp. 187-9.
[56] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 154

swathes of the country who did not fit the ideal. This is different from the optimism shown earlier in the novel:

> When the country was free, when the last Englishman was on a boat or in a box, then he'd start designing houses that were fit for people … Dublin would be a jewel again. We'd go at every reminder of the Empire with a wrecking ball made from all the balls and chains that had fettered the people for centuries. There'd be no evidence left of England. (p. 170)

By the end of the novel though, an entirely new country means that power had just changed hands. The only difference between the old and new masters is that 'they are our own, aren't they?' (p. 326).

As indicated, the core re-reading in the novel, and its central historical event, is the Easter Rising, widely seen as a fundamental step in the making of the Irish nation and the myths surrounding it, with its leaders going down in history as martyrs who died for the motherland.[57] However, the fathers of the Proclamation, as seen through Henry's eyes, and apart from Connolly, are hardly mythical. They are very real and human. The scenes in the GPO are far from any glorious depiction of the Easter Rising. Confusion seems to reign supreme. The event is introduced as lacking meaningful or remarkable features at the outset: 'Only the shock and curses of people dodging the falling glass outside stamped significance in the morning' (p. 87). There is a cacophony of sounds – voices talking over each other; glass breaking; people running. Still, Henry seems to focus on the fact that he is 'the best-looking man in the GPO' who had nothing to fear because he had 'nothing to go home to' (p. 89).[58] He still depicts himself as big and strong while the

[57] For more see Richard Kearney, 'Myth and Motherland', Seamus Deane, Seamus Heaney, Richard Kearney, Declan Kiberd, Tom Paulin, *Ireland's Field Day*, pp. 61-82. Doyle revisits this iconic moment again in *The Dead Republic*, although this time the perspective is more on the event in relation to the North, where the Troubles are figured as the ultimate consequence of a process that started with the Easter Rising. The explicit link between the two, the vector along which the story moves backwards and forward is Henry. He becomes the mythical past on which the present is founded: 'They [the IRA] were going to show me off. The ancient activist, the man from the song. I'd make sense of the young men starving themselves, racing to become as old and as noble as me… I'd been a veteran before, even when I was still a kid. In the years after 1916, before the war became the War. I was the man who had been in the G.P.O. As the story grew and the Easter days became glorious… I wondered what was going to happen this time, when I walked into a packed room or climbed onto the back of a lorry. Who would they see this time?' (p. 250)

[58] This is probably in relation to an episode Doyle recalls in an interview with the *Irish Times* which happened while he was researching the book: 'What really brought it [Easter 1916] home as serious and tragic was going to Kilmainham Jail with my kids and I bought a few books. One was full of letters from the men just before they were executed… these were men with young families. They left their families high and dry. The responsible middle-class father in me wondered what would have driven them', Roisin Ingle, 'Revel Rebel', *The Irish Times*, 28 August 1999, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/revel-rebel-1.221558, last accessed 11 June 2021.

fathers of the Rising are described in less than flattering terms: Pearse, the 'Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Irish Republic and President-Elect' arrives 'in full uniform, pistol, provisions, sword' but 'cycling over Butt Bridge… struggling to get across the bridge and sweating like a bastard' (p. 91). A woman, his sister, runs to him to scold him and to tell him to go home, making him blush. Also:

> Clarke was there, as old and as frail as Ireland; MacDiarmada, left lopsided by polio, was leaning on his stick; Plunkett had his neck wrapped in bandages and looked like death congealing. (p. 93)

The de-mythicising physical descriptions do not stop at this. When the rebels finally get into the GPO, Henry

> ran past Plunkett who was being held up by Collins and another officer… for a second, I thought he'd been shot – there was blood seeping through his bandage on his neck… but I looked back and I saw the signs; I'd seen Victor and thousands of others: the man had T.B. (p. 95)

Tuberculosis seems to be a unifying element here – Plunkett belongs to a different social world, but like the slummers, and Victor, he is dying of TB. This is the trait that makes Henry feel closer to him. [59]

Michael Collins does not seem to leave any lasting impression either. The picture does not change much once inside the GPO, when the Volunteers get out their rosaries and kneel down to pray: 'Plunkett was in there with them. He could hardly stand; he spent most of his time on a mattress. The man was dying, a waste of a bullet, but he had the energy to beat his breast and drive his knees into the tiles' (p. 111). This description of Plunkett makes him, at the same time, less of a mythical figure and more of an admirable human being fighting for what he believes in until the end. The rebels themselves do not

[59] James Connolly is still a fascinating figure for writers, as is the connection between those fundamental events in Irish history and literature. In a recent interview, Donal Ryan muses over what 'Ireland we might have had if men like James Connolly had survived to lead us. Greed for power and wealth and control mightn't have proliferated so readily and choked the potential for true greatness from our young country. I love the way Roddy Doyle confronted this in *The Last Roundup* trilogy: the church and the landowners closing ranks on the poor and sliding comfortably into the seat vacated by the empire. Henry Smart, the young rebel, is thanked for his service by a member of the new elite and told to basically f**k off back to the slum.' Clearly, Ryan refers to how literature gives depth and layers to homogenising versions of the nation, helping re-invent it by exploring different voices. It is interesting that both Ryan and Doyle choose Connolly as a symbol of a different voice that has not been fairly represented in the making of the nation, of what could have been but was not. Martin Doyle, 'Donal Ryan: 'I've got one or two sneering reviews from fellow writers'", *The Irish Times*, 16 August 2020, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/donal-ryan-i-ve-got-one-or-two-sneering-reviews-from-fellow-writers-1.4326709, last accessed 11 June 2021.

look at them as if they possessed some sort of iconic authority; even 'the crowd cheered and jeered as [they] went past' (p. 93).

As mentioned, part of Doyle's efforts to tease out plurality where, in his eyes, there had been none, is his highlighting that there is a difference of motives and beliefs among the rebels themselves. They are not a united front with identical views. The members of the Citizen Army, of whom Henry is part, do not particularly like the Volunteers whom Connolly himself refers to as 'gobshites… Catholic and capitalists, Henry. It's an appalling combination' (p. 115). Yet, despite this less than iconic description of the Easter Rising and some of its leaders, and although there is some more 'jeering and laughter' at first, when Pearse reads out the Proclamation:

> There wasn't a noise. And his voice was soft; it drifted in the heat, barely there. The men with me were hearing the Proclamation for the first time. I watched their faces as the words rolled up to them. I watched the pride and excitement. I saw eyes shine and moisten. (p. 96)

There seems to be a mixture of derision and pride in Henry's account of what happened at the GPO. Thus, while describing the rebels as a 'sorry-looking gang' (p. 92) at the same time Henry admits that the crowd was cheering when 'watching the green, white and orange flag of the Republic being hoisted to the top of the flagpole… I cheered too; I couldn't help it' (p. 95) and that 'I'd never been so close to people before. There'd only been Victor. I was sharing the world with these men. I trusted them; their nearness lit me' (p. 106). Again, Henry seems to find reassurance and contentment in a sense of belonging.

However, in true Henry style and following the picaresque structure of the narrative, this poetic moment is soon counterbalanced by a much more prosaic one. So, although they had fended off an assault by the British forces, he does not join in the victory celebrations as he has some money he has stolen from the GPO tills in his pockets and the noise it might make if he jumps around might give him away (p. 106)! Doyle is trying to demythicise the whole Easter Rising event without denying its fundamental importance. He might just want to take it back to a real historical event, rather than myth.[60] Like Henry, and through Henry, he is trying to break the myths. Pearse's voice is

[60] There have been other re-readings of the Rising that have tried to demythicise it and have focused on the disillusionment of its legacy. Among them, the already mentioned Roy Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland 1890–1923*; Conor Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*, (London: Hutchinson, 1972); Colm Tóibín, 'After I Am Hanged My Portrait Will be Interesting', *London Review of Book*, vo. 38, no. 7, 2016, https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v38/n07/colm-toibin/after-i-am-hanged-my-portrait-will-be-interesting, last accessed 11 June 2021.

'soft' when he reads out the Proclamation, there is no military attitude or pomp – he just gets up, goes out and reads it. This is a humanising act to possibly counter all the pomp and rhetoric associated with the Proclamation.[61] Moreover, this extract also conveys the idea that Henry sees these historical events as being the outcome of collective effort rather than of specific, individual figures – it is all the people at the GPO that feel the Proclamation as theirs and fight for it, not just Pearse.

It can be inferred that Henry, who is brought up on myths and stories, starting from his infancy is trying to give life to a more inclusive, less mythical account of the Easter Rising by creating new stories and perspectives. Once again, then, there is an association between Henry and oral folk tales: something that, as we have seen, by transforming the objects of study into subjects, makes for truer history by giving voice to those at the margins of written history books.[62] Consequently, we have again confirmation that, through Henry, the novel seems to enact, and derive its energy from what Prakash, in his study on subaltern studies and postcolonialism, calls an 'effort to rethink history from the perspective of the subaltern'.[63]

The fallaciousness of mainstream accounts explains passages that question the accuracy of history books, like the following one:

> I'd played *The Last Post* at the grave of O'Donovan Rossa the year before. The history books will tell you it was William Oman but don't believe them: he was tucked up at home with the flu. (p. 90)

Or the memorable passage about the famous picture where de Valera is seen as the last man to surrender and taken prisoner by the British. Henry was there, next to de Valera, but the photographer cuts him out because, Henry tells us:

> I wasn't important. The first time I saw the photo, my elbow was in it, but even that went in later versions. No room for Henry… just… de Valera and his guards. If [the photographer] had moved his camera just a bit to the right… you'd know my face, you'd know who I was. (p. 138-9)

[61] There is a similar attempt to divest the Proclamation of its religious aura in *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*. At one stage, Paddy tells us that 'The teacher we had before Henno, Miss Watkins, brought in a tea-towel with the Proclamation of Independence on it because it was fifty years after 1916. It had the writing part in the middle and the seven men who'd signed it around the sides… some of the boys blessed themselves in front of it', Roddy Doyle, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*, p. 20. In this passage we have a clear juxtaposition of what is seen in religious terms, (the boys even bless themselves), surrounded by a halo of heroic mysticism, with the everyday: the Proclamation is on a tea-towel.
[62] See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*.
[63] Gyan Prakash, 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism', p. 1478.

In the history books he remains anonymous, forgotten, voiceless, with no representation. His contribution to the making of postcolonial Ireland and his claim to Irishness are ignored. History books are inaccurate, official accounts often created by those in power, by the victors who elide subaltern voices. Henry only lives on in popular ballads.

Doyle's narrative seems to register its own disillusionment with the nation-state formula whilst, at the same time, embodying the desire to develop a new, more inclusive and diverse form of Irishness. Doyle embodies the desire to develop a new national consciousness to counter conservative forms of nationalism. In Doyle, what was the 'periphery' in both colonial and de Valera's vision of Ireland becomes the 'centre'. Unlike the bourgeois Gandon and the rural Ivan, working-class revolutionaries such as Henry are left with 'no stake in the country… never had, never will (p. 327). Henry and 'none of the other men of the slums and hovels ever made it on to the [election] list' (p. 327).

The ambiguity of the novel comes full circle when Henry seems to turn into someone he despises. Although Henry comes to the conclusion that his father is nothing more than contemptible, he seems to follow in his father's steps in a number of ways. Like his father, Henry becomes a hitman. Like his father he becomes famous for being a killer and for using a wooden leg as a weapon; he kills people whose names are scribbled on a piece of paper; he has to run away from those he used to kill for. More importantly, like his father he abandons his wife and child. Like his father, Henry is a victim of the world he has created for himself and that he has brought about. Could this be seen as a metaphor for history repeating itself? Or is this an example of the doomed people of Dublin not having a real chance to change their lives for the better? When I asked Doyle about these patterns repeating themselves his comment was that:

> These patterns are often repeated from generation to generation… also Henry in a way running away from his family. It takes worth and awareness to avoid them all [these patterns]. But very often these traits are repeated.[64]

I suspect that the repetition of these patterns, the failure to escape them, might reflect the lack of a sense of historical change in Ireland, that sense of stasis and paralysis so masterfully explored by Joyce. This notwithstanding, this repetition might also reflect the inevitability of roots and tradition, their inescapability.

[64] Genoveffa Giambona, 'The rhythm of the city', p. 264.

In the end, although they 'carry their cross for Ireland', to quote a frequent refrain from the novel's sequel *Oh! Play That Thing*, Henry and those like him become 'nameless and expendable' and are erased from the Irish political landscape (p. 208). The elision of their histories, of their voices, is the central question of the novel and its motivation for postcolonialist revision. In the next section I will explore the second novel in the trilogy, *Oh, Play That Thing*. Specifically, I will discuss how, by moving the action across the Atlantic, Doyle focuses on issues of Irish identity, migration, subalternity and race – but now in the US.

II.3 *Oh, Play That Thing*[65]

Oh, Play That Thing, the second instalment in Doyle's historical trilogy *The Last Roundup*, was published in 2004. The book continues to detail the adventures, and misadventures, of the narrator, Henry Smart. Whilst *A Star Called Henry*, the first volume of the trilogy, was set against the backdrop of iconic moments in the struggle for independence in Ireland, starting with the Easter Rising of 1916 through to the War of Independence, *Oh, Play That Thing* moves the action, and Henry, to the US. This move allows Doyle to explore other issues both of modern, and of what we have come to recognise as postcolonial, identity, such as those relating to race and Irish migration. I am going to use my discussion of this book to focus on this latter aspect more specifically.

Like the first novel, *Oh, Play That Thing* is narrated from the point of view of Henry Smart himself. It gives the reader an account of Henry's hiding from the IRA in America, where he is forced to flee in order to avoid being killed by his former associates, leaving his wife and infant daughter in Ireland. Henry arrives in New York on 16 March 1924, the day before St Patrick's Day, when he is only twenty-three years old. He makes his living by carrying sandwich boards and selling bootleg alcohol in the Lower East Side in prohibition-era USA. The people he meets in New York live at the margins and are mostly immigrants and gangsters. But Henry has to run away again when he crosses a local gangster, Johnny No. After a while, he temporarily settles in Chicago, where he

[65] 'Oh, Play that Thing' is a song by jazz artist Joe 'King' Oliver. Oliver had a profound influence on Louis Armstrong's music. Armstrong was his protegee and played in Oliver's band in Chicago. For more information see https://www.naxos.com/mainsite/blurbs_reviews.asp?item_code=8.120666&catNum=120666&filetype=About%20this%20Recording&language=English last accessed on 27 November 2020. Oliver and the song are briefly mentioned in the novel (p. 146; p. 173). It is interesting that, in the novel, it is Lil Armstrong, Louis' wife, who is credited with having made Louis into the 'World's Greatest Trumpet Player' when otherwise 'He used to hide himself behind Joe Oliver… but then he met me… he was just Joe Oliver's boy… I made Lou-is Armstrong out of him' (p. 173). Another example of a strong woman who defines her husband, just like Miss O'Shea does with Henry.

enters the fringe world of jazz and its black community, and where he also meets Louis Armstrong. In an extremely discriminating and segregating society, Armstrong needs a white man as a 'passport' to the whites-only parts of the city, so he chooses Henry as his 'manager'.

All the while then, and just as he had done to survive in the streets of Dublin, Henry does anything he needs to in order to survive: sandwich-board man, bootlegger, blacksmith, street hawker, improvised dentist, diviner, porn actor, and burglar when needed. It is during one of his burglaries that, by what can only be described as a Dickensian coincidence, Henry reunites with his wife and daughter.[66] After a brief period of stability, Henry's past, in the guise of his former IRA associates, catches up with him. This is because, back in Ireland 'the diehards are getting very respectable… ready for power', and Henry remains 'a loose end', so the IRA are still after him (p. 329).[67] Henry is forced to start running again, accompanied by his wife and his now two children with whom, though, he loses touch once more. At the end of the novel, Henry is on his way back to Ireland to be a consultant to the famed director John Ford, who has decided to make a film about Henry's life, *The Quiet Man*.

In *Oh, Play That Thing* Doyle takes Henry out of de Valera's Ireland where, as we have seen, there is no place for discordant voices such as Henry's. In the US Henry tries to shake off his subaltern status, a status that comes to be symbolised by his Irishness itself. Henry sees the US as modern, 'new' just like what he aspires to be; but he ends up realising that America is just as discriminating as Ireland. It is worth noting that, historically, Irish immigrants to the US lived in crowded accommodation meant for single occupation, took on menial and dangerous jobs that no one else wanted to do, and were the target of anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic discrimination.[68] It is not surprising, then, that when in the US Doyle has Henry mix with other marginalised groups – this culminates with him feeling at home within the black Chicago community. Henry ultimately does not manage to escape his subaltern status – just being Irish seems to place him at the margins of US society. He also realises that he cannot shake off his subaltern identity whose construction was mediated, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter,

[66] On Dickens and coincidence see Maurice S. Lee, 'Evidence, Coincidence, and Superabundant Information, *Victorian Studies*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2011, pp. 87-94; Rebecca Lane, '"The sin, most gross, most palpable, which Dickens everywhere commits. . .": In Defence of Dickens's Use of Coincidence', *The Dickensian*, vol. 106, no. 481, 2010, pp. 123-138.

[67] Roddy Doyle, *Oh, Play that Thing*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004). All further references to this text are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the text.

[68] For more information on how the Irish were treated in the US see The Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/irish/adaptation-and-assimilation/, last accessed 11 June 2021.

by nationalist narrative and iconography. On the contrary, as discussed in the section on *A Star Called Henry*, such identification needs to be dismantled through the affirmation of one's own voice. Consequently, in order to truly shape one's own identity and story, the subaltern needs to challenge all grand narratives, integrate them with missing stories, exhaustively re-write them. So, when offered the opportunity to tell his story through a film, Henry goes back to Ireland with the belief that he will be able to add his voice to the making of the nation thanks to John Ford's promise at the end of the novel. However, we infer that this will not somehow happen: Ford will, using the modern medium of film, also deny Henry his voice and will try instead to tell his own interpretation of Henry's story, and of Ireland.[69] So, whilst in *A Star Called Henry* I discussed the protagonist's subaltern status within his own nation, in *Oh, Play That Thing* I will look at how Henry's bid to escape his status and assert his own voice unfolds in the US, and why Doyle moves the action to the States. I will also discuss how, in order to do this in what appears to be his most formally experimental book, Doyle reconnects with James Joyce stylistically, redirecting Joyce's modernist flare towards the subaltern consciousness and identity.

Oh, Play That Thing starts with a nod to the Irish diaspora and historical Irish migration to the United States. The protagonist himself roots his experience within the more collective one when, on his arrival to New York, he reflects that, unlike other people 'the Irish travelled alone' (p. 1). Although Irish migration started long before, the Great Famine of mid-nineteenth century marked a turning point in Irish economic and demographic history; it is estimated that approximately one million people died, while another million left Ireland, mostly for the United States.[70] It was at that point that the Irish started emigrating so consistently that 'the tradition had become self-sustaining'.[71] In the immediate aftermath of the creation of the Free State, and around the time Henry himself is placed in the US, emigration rates remained high: this was largely due to the state not showing any real desire to change Irish society by creating employment opportunities, welfare policies or house-building programmes.[72] Hence, the reasons behind migration were more often than not economic. Paradoxically, migration most

[69] The whole John Ford film storyline is developed in *The Dead Republic*. At the start of the novel, Henry returns to Ireland to be a consultant to Ford, who is planning to film *The Quiet Man*, based on Henry's life: Henry is Ford's 'I.R.A. consultant, come home to watch the filming of my life' (p. 5). However, Henry soon realises that although 'He [Ford] knew that… [through the film] I was reclaiming my life… I knew… He was making me up. There were two stories being dragged out of me' (p. 30). So, Henry realises that this act of reappropriation is doomed to failure since Ford wants to tell his own interpretation of Henry's story, of Ireland.

[70] Cormac Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 41.

[71] Declan Kiberd, *After Ireland*, p. 103.

[72] Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History*, p. 140.

often affected those who lived in the rural farming West idolised in conservative nationalist discourse, which refused to acknowledge the bleak reality in which those communities lived. But it also involved those who, like Henry in the novels, lived in urban areas.[73] So, mostly, Irish migrants were people whose histories had remained hidden and embedded in narratives woven by others.[74]

The novel, at times, gives the impression of being told rather than being written by Henry, as if to reinforce the link between Henry and the oral which I discussed in the section on *A Star Called Henry*. As mentioned, oral, non-linear histories are characteristic of literary efforts to bring to the surface submerged subaltern voices. Hand in hand with orality, fragmentation is a hallmark of this novel as well.[75] As in the first volume of the trilogy, there are temporal and narrative gaps: we are not really told, for example, what happened to Henry in the years that elapse between the end of *A Star Called Henry*, when Henry is about to leave for Liverpool, and the start of *Oh, Play That Thing*, when he has just arrived in New York, 'two years since [he'd] sailed out of Dublin' (p. 5).[76] The narration is interspersed with flashbacks and quotations from the previous novel, and it contains a number of Joycean examples of free indirect speech without quotation marks or reporting clauses, which can lead to some confusion about who said what, or what is a quotation and what is the narrator's commentary, again giving an impression of an oral mixture or cacophony. [77] This results in an ambiguous and more experimental narrative than *A Star*. Take, for example, the following passage:

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[73] Ibid., also Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 35-36.

[74] At the time the novel was written, Ireland had been through a new economic prosperity that followed the Celtic Tiger boom in the late twentieth century, which also meant that the island changed from a place of immigrants to a place that attracted economic migrants. This meant a change to the fabric of Irish society, something that can be statistically demonstrated. Between 2002 and 2006 the Irish population increased by 322,645 and non-Irish work permits grew 'from fewer than 6,000 in 1999 to about 50,000 in 2003'. See Jennifer M. Jeffers "'What's it like being Irish?" The Return of the Repressed in Roddy Doyle's *Paula Spencer*', Scott Brewster and Michael Parker (eds.). *Irish Literature since 1990: Diverse Voices*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 258- 271, p. 259.

[75] It is important to reiterate that orality and fragmentation of the self, in this case reflected in the non-linear narrative form, are associated with the subaltern and can be seen as a sign of resistance to and contestation of homogenising state-formation narratives, David Lloyd, *Ireland After History*, p. 26.

[76] It must be noted here that Eagleton saw narrative gaps as the silences of a text, Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, (London: Routledge Classics, 1976), p. 35. So, it is interesting how for Flannery silences are a postcolonial and subaltern form of resistance and reappropriation: 'Neither postcolonial studies nor subaltern studies… are simply projects concerned with representation in language. It is the capacity and willingness of postcolonial communities to recognise and appreciate their mutual silences as forms of resistant articulation. Postcolonial… [textual] resistance and subversive representation (or the subversion of representation) inhabit the cacophonous silences that accentuate the register of the instituted text/voice', Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 128.

[77] Such as the repetition of *'My name is Henry Smart'* and *'What about meeee'* that we see in all three novels in the trilogy, but also, for example, flashbacks taking the reader back to his birth (p. 110); or the *'Alfie Gandon says hello'* (p. 157), '*Welcome to the Swan river boys*' (p. 221) quotes from the first novel, that are repeated here without giving any context and that only those who have read *A Star Called Henry* can understand.

> *The skin you love to touch*. She didn't look at me. *So now's the time*. She didn't have to look… nowhere else I could go. in [sic] eve-ery way let me carry your cross I don't see you again you hearing that so now's the time… her heels tapped then time beats. (p. 79)

The words in italics are Henry's own thoughts, while the action happens through a recollection of a conversation he had had with a woman while selling soap, one of the first jobs he did in New York (pp. 28-32).[78] Short and unconnected words follow each other. This gives a staccato effect which, besides adding to the sense of fragmentation, also links back to the overall musical theme of the novel, especially as we see the words 'tapped', 'time' and 'beats' that link back both to the title and the musicality of oral ballads – a linkage I will discuss later. It is worth noting that the quote is in some ways reminiscent of the 'Sirens' chapter in Joyce's *Ulysses*: for example, 'One rapped, one tapped with a carra' or the recurring tap, tap tap, leitmotif in the chapter.[79] That chapter opens with a jumbled prelude of fragments of the text to come and with sections of text that describe events that have happened somewhere else and which interrupt the narrative. Musicality is characteristic of the 'Sirens' episode which has a structure that Joyce himself defined as 'fugal'.[80] Critics such as Kiberd, Corcoran or Smyth, who advocate the centrality of literature in forging a national consciousness, see such technical innovation from Joyce as integral to his work as a postcolonial modernist who tries to create a new literature for the new nation; Doyle is similarly trying to integrate contemporary thought, technical experiment, nation, and novel in the attempt to create an updated narrative national consciousness.[81]

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[78] The words recall an advertising campaign in the US for Woodbury's Facial Soap, see http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/ads/model.html. Interestingly, during the exchange mentioned, Henry manages to convince the woman that the soap he is selling will bring back the feeling she used to have when she was younger and touched her skin, which we must suppose was fresher and more supple. It is at the end of this exchange that Henry observes 'It was the words I'd sold them… the words, not the product' (p. 32), highlighting the power of words in bringing back memories and the power of memories themselves in conditioning people's decisions. This passage also seems to suggest a sort of synesthetic effect, with sight, touch and hearing coming together. This reconnects back to what some describe as the 'modernist appeal to the senses', Pat O'Brien, '"Sonatina": Manifesto of Modernism', *The South Central Bulletin*, vol. 42, no. 4, 1982, pp. 134-6, p. 134. However, the focus on multiple senses perhaps mirrors the wish to have a more comprehensive approach to the narrative – it is as if multiple senses reflect multiple voices, giving a more chaotic, less linear but nonetheless fuller account.

[79] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 258.

[80] Nadya Zimmerman, 'Musical Form as Narrator: The Fugue of the Sirens in James Joyce's *Ulysses'*, *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2002, pp. 108–118, p. 108, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3831654, last accessed 11 June 2021; see also Arthur Nestrovski, 'Blindness and Inwit: James Joyce and the Sirens, A Reading of Chapter 11 of *Ulysses*', *The Iowa Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1988, pp. 18–26, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20156479, last accessed 11 June 2021.

[81] See Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*; Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and The Nation*. Moreover, as we have seen Neil Corcoran believes that Joyce's *oeuvre* is a prime example of how ideas of Ireland – people,

However, in a reinvention of the Joycean literary tenor, Doyle focuses on the much less talked-about experience of those at the margins, whether it is the Dublin of the tenements in *A Star*, or the black communities Henry gels with in *Oh, Play That Thing*.[82] So, by making Henry the owner of the story, its narrator, just like Joyce, Doyle establishes a clear connection between literature and creation of national identity. However, unlike Joyce, whose literary Dublin has been celebrated, Doyle's focus is on creating an emerging narrative for those who have been marginalised. Besides, while Stephen Dedalus wants to escape history, Doyle wants to add layers to it by including the voices of those who have been left out.[83]

Going back to ambiguity and fragmentation, they are not just a formal feature of the narrative. They are also a feature of Henry himself. He is searching for a new identity and new possibilities in the US whilst, at the same time, constantly reminding himself who he is, and at the same time and contradictorily being associated by those around him with Ireland and Irishness. Right at the start, when Henry goes through border control in New York, he hands in a fake passport according to which he is an Englishman called Henry Drake, presumably because he would be more 'acceptable' as English. This is an important point: it is as if Doyle implicitly suggests that in the US Irishness is seen as a less-acceptable identifier. Irishness becomes a signifier for an identity that is not as worthy, and that needs to be hidden. So, we can immediately see Henry's Irishness becoming a metaphor for his marginalised status, and his efforts to shed it as efforts to become more accepted in society.

However, despite pretending he believes the document is real, the guard's comic parting remark is 'Welcome to America … But you'd want to work on your accent sir. *Slán leat*' (p. 4). So, there Henry is, an Irishman in America right from the welcome he receives, as if to foreground that the status he wanted to leave behind when he left Ireland is very much still with him. The ambiguous relationship Henry himself has with his past and his Irishness starts at the beginning of the novel as well, when the reader witnesses an episode whereby Henry tries to change his identity and become a new person, with no past. As soon as he gets to the US, he tells us that:

community, nation – have been both created and reflected, and how conceptions of a distinctively Irish identity have been articulated, defended and challenged, Neil Corcoran, *After Yeats And Joyce*, p. vi.

[82] According to Kevin Kearns, there is no first-hand accounts of life as experienced by those who were born in the tenements, Kevin C. Kearns, *Dublin Tenement Life: An Oral History of the Dublin Slums*, (Dublin: Gill Books, 2006), p. 4.

[83] I am referring to the famous sentence, 'History… is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake', James Joyce, *Ulysses,* p. 32.

> I waved, turned and skimmed the passport onto the river. I watched it gather water and sink. I was a clean sheet. (p. 5)

Just like when he emerged from the Liffey after escaping the guards in *A Star Called Henry*, he is ready to become someone else and, again, water becomes a symbol of Henry being washed clean: he sheds one identity to take on another.[84] It is then rather interesting that the passport Henry throws into the river Hudson is the one that defines him as the Englishman Henry Drake. Additionally, despite the effort to become someone new and shed his past, a few pages later, the protagonist firmly states, once again, 'My name is Henry Smart' (p. 8).

There are several instances in the novel when the protagonist reminds the reader, and himself, who he is by repeating his name, right through to the end. This tension between trying to reinvent himself, specifically as non-Irish, and the roots and past he carries with him, runs throughout.[85] A vivid metaphorical image of these roots is given when, on arrival, he is asked to do a literacy test:

> As I strolled through the literacy test, I could feel Victor, my brother, beside me, his leg pressed against mine in the school desk, and Miss O'Shea at my shoulder, my teacher and wife, the mother of the daughter I suddenly missed. (p. 4)

So, although Henry flees to the US to start anew, he carries his history of marginalisation with him, and the mention of Victor recalls Henry's and Victor's life on the streets of Dublin, and Victor's death. Henry's fragmented self, his wish to shed his past and Irishness whilst at the same time re-affirming it, adds to the overall fragmented nature of the novel and, as we have seen, fragmentation and non-linearity are characteristic of the subaltern identity and consciousness. As already discussed, the non-linearity of the narrative which reflects the fragmentation of the self is a sign of intrinsic resistance to, and contestation of, homogenising colonial and post-independence narratives.[86] To this degree, Henry's fragmented self can be seen as part of his contestatory stance against the

[84] Roddy Doyle, *A Star Called Henry*, p. 141.
[85] The protagonist's repetition of his own name, as if to remind himself of who he is, and this tension in his identity, carry echoes of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*. He muses over the mystery of his identity, wondering 'Who is Kim' (p. 193), 'Who is Kim – Kim – Kim' (p. 304), and 'what is Kim' (p. 462). He agonises: 'Once a Sahib, always a Sahib' he is told by Mahbub Ali (p. 175). But Kim himself resists such identification and will not take simple Englishness as an answer: 'I am not a Sahib' he tells Mahbub Ali (p. 221); 'I am not a Sahib' he repeats to the lama (p. 443). It is interesting to note that the name Kim means 'who' in Turkish.
[86] See footnote 76 on p. 82, David Lloyd, *Ireland After History*, p. 26.

contemporary version of state nationalism back at home – his non-linearity implicitly exposes the forced linearity of homogenising versions of the latter.[87]

The people Henry meets in the US, and that form his social milieu, are labourers, immigrants, gangsters who, like him, live at the margins:

> Like the men I walked beside… I was there… like these men and women… I was Henry Smart. I was back again. (p. 130)

Consequently, the people Henry associates with put him firmly in a subaltern group in the US as well since, as remarked in the Introduction, in postcolonial studies generally, the subaltern has become a synonym for marginalised or disempowered groups that have been denied agency.[88] Besides, the reiteration of 'I was Henry Smart… again' at the end of his train of thoughts seems to suggest that he has gone back to the state he was previously in, and is doomed to repeat.

Even the first thing he experiences on arrival to the US reminds him of his experiences in the streets in Dublin:

> To my left, another inspector drew a large L on a shoulder with a brand new piece of chalk. L was for lung. I knew the signs; I'd seen them all my life… an E on the shoulder meant bad eyes, another L meant lameness… H was for heart, SC was for scalp, X was for mental. (pp. 2-3)

Henry says he has seen it all before, referring to the illness that affects lungs, a reference to the spread of tuberculosis he had seen in the Dublin slums. However, his statement is ambiguous, and the reader could be led to think that Henry might also be comparing these degrading practices to which immigrants are subjected to the life he and those like him experienced on the streets of Dublin. Henry's perceptions are shaped by his past experiences in Ireland. His displacement to the US in this novel enables a review of the national and identity issues from the first novel in the trilogy 'from the outside', as a way of interlinking Ireland's situation to global patterns of suppression and relegation.

Yet Henry hopes that living in the US will enable him to live in a self-consciously modern present, and so find his own voice and self:

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[87] See the already mentioned Edward Said, 'Foreword', Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, p. vii.
[88] See footnote 15 on p. 55, Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction*, p. 354.

> It was a new world, and newer the further uptown we went… there was room here for ambitious elbows. I could hear… accents that were American and nothing else, hiding no old geography or muck. (p. 56)

So, in Henry's eyes, this is a new world that is not anchored to the past but exists in the present and is projected towards the future, and one which in theory can help him rid himself of any past baggage:

> I felt the freedom I'd really never known before. Because there was no past… at last. I wasn't Irish anymore. (p. 133)

Henry sees the US as iconically representing modernity, a new place that could make him new, where he can shed his past. This modernity is reflected by Doyle's modernist writing in this book, which, as we have seen, in some respects reconnects back to Joyce.

However, it is not that simple. In fact, past and present merge in the book not just in terms of flashbacks and intertextuality, but also because Henry still lives his present experiences through the filter of his past. For instance, when he starts looking for work, Henry reflects that:

> I'd seen it before, although the clock boss here was two feet taller than the dwarf with the eyes who'd ruled the Custom House dock, in Dublin… the familiarity of that routine – acceptance, rejection, daily pay and kickback – the Irish accents all around me. (p. 12)

Even when Henry finally thinks that 'I was a Yank. At last' (p. 134) people close to him, such as the fictional Louis Armstrong, remind him that there is 'Too much of the Irish in you' (p. 217). Armstrong shows him that even his view of the world is affected by his roots:

> That the Irish in you, Henry. Always the bad news… we are not heading into a whupping. We just got away from one. (p. 223)

seemingly referring to a tendency the Irish have to see things in a pessimistic way. So, although from the start Henry's aim is to shed his Irishness, we see that wherever he goes he is identified on the basis of his Irishness, and thus of his past, perhaps Doyle's more personal re-echoing of the Joycean 'nightmare' for the Irish.

Although the novel is set in the US, Ireland and the Irish are never far away, as if to suggest that it is mainly the representation of the nation from this different perspective that interests Doyle. A whole section is in fact devoted to representations of Ireland in written form, perhaps a reflection on Doyle's own act of representation. This is the episode where Henry visits Brotman, a publisher, and all around him he sees:

> A room full of books… *Ulysses*. James Joyce – Are you familiar with the work? – No. – There are those who are determined to copper-fasten that situation. They do not want that book read. By anyone. Except, perhaps, themselves. You *are* Irish… Freedom of expression, he said. – I am not a Bolshevik but I think I am entitled to know what its greatest exponent has to say. That is my fight… *Ireland and the Irish Question… Ireland and the Irish Question… Ireland and the Irish Question…* at the North-Western corner of Europe lies the land whose history will occupy us. (pp. 84-5)

There is a clear reference here to books about Ireland and the Irish, to Irish history and to the socialist ideas Henry seemed to favour above anything else, in the guise of his admiration and respect for James Connolly that we discussed in the previous section. There is also a clear effort in this passage, as in many others in the novel, to mimic the polyvalent voices and interrupted style of Joyce's masterpiece and of his later work. Most pertinently here, however, there is a link between the reception of radically modern literature in the US, and that back in Ireland.[89] There is, in other words, clear reference to censorship, suggesting that, at least in terms of 'morality', the US is as benighted as de Valera's Ireland, where censorship of literary works was part of an effort to preserve

[89] Although never officially banned in Ireland by the Censorship of Publications Board, the government used a customs loophole which prevented *Ulysses* from being allowed into Ireland. It was first openly available in Ireland in the 1960s. *Ulysses* went through a very public censorship controversy in the US. Prior to being published as a book, Joyce's novel was serialised between 1918 and 1920 in the Chicago-based *Little Review* whose foreign editor was Ezra Pound. Due to the offensive nature of the novel, the US Post Office refused to handle three numbers of the *Little Review* – the January 1919 issue; the May 1919 number (which included the second half of episode nine, 'Scylla and Charybdis'); and the January 1920 issue. It all came to a head, however, when Margaret Anderson distributed some copies of the July-August 1920 number (which included the thirteenth episode of *Ulysses*, 'Nausicaa', in which Leopold Bloom masturbates as Gerty MacDowell shows off her leg) and one of the copies fell into the hands of a New York lawyer's daughter. The lawyer brought it to the attention of both the New York County District Attorney and John S. Sumner, the secretary of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. A trial took place and in February 1921 the serial publication of *Ulysses* in America came to an end. Ten years after its first appearance, the American publisher Random House challenged the ban on *Ulysses* by openly importing a copy. The publishing company was taken to court and the outcome was that the book was not deemed obscene. In 1936 *Ulysses* was also published in the United Kingdom for the first time in its entirety. The US therefore became the first English-speaking country to both ban the book and publicly reinstate it. For an in-depth account of censorship and *Ulysses* see Paul Vanderham, *James Joyce and Censorship* (New York: NYU Press, 1998); Kevin Birmingham, *The Most Dangerous Book: The Battle for James Joyce's 'Ulysses'*, (London: Head of Zeus, 2014).

Gaelic, rural and Catholic Ireland, and became formally a law in 1929 with the enactment of the Censorship Bill.[90]

It is interesting, although not surprising, that Doyle chooses to mention *Ulysses* and James Joyce first of all amongst his catalogue of books in this American room. For all of its self-proclaimed modernity and Henry's expectations, the US is as conservative as Ireland. The specific choice of *Ulysses* is significant for another reason as well. In *Oh, Play*, his most experimental novel, Doyle specifically chooses to mention Joyce's 'narrative of memory and modernity'.[91] It is as if, in a novel where he talks about modernity and with a character chasing the 'new' – both in terms of geographical location and self – Doyle tries to write as a kind of modernist himself.

The modernity, or presumed modernity, of America, the newness of Henry, the musicality of the narrative appears to be where Doyle's style reconnects with Joyce's, although Doyle redirects Joyce's efforts towards the subaltern. The banning of books, as represented by *Ulysses*, then becomes an implicit acknowledgement of the power of challenging and experimental literary and cultural representation. It also becomes an acknowledgement of the power of literature to free up narratives: books become associated with the 'freedom… to drink and to read… to think different' (p. 86). In this stylistic regard, the novel becomes central to the making of the nation, or in this case, to adding voices to the nation. However, as this is Henry's story as told by Henry, this is also a reflection on the power of narrative as a means of discovering previously-submerged histories. The shift to America, a place that '[is] not Irish… it's not anything… it's just itself. New' (p. 230), and where people from different places feel they are Americans, wants to cement a version of nationhood which echoes the openness that Joyce suggests via Bloom. Joyce's version is epitomised in the latter's definition of a nation as 'the same people living in the same place… Or also living in different places.'[92] However, this openness and modernity hide a darker side of marginalisation and discrimination, and in this respect the US is similar to Ireland.

Linked to the power of narrative, is a reflection on the power of words. Henry, for instance, considers how some things are called different names in England, Ireland and the US. He silently corrects himself when, instinctively, he uses British English words: 'We waited for the lift – the *elevator*' (p. 165) 'The gramophone – the *phonograph*' (p.

[90] Terence Brown, *Ireland, A Social and Cultural History*, p. 57.
[91] Astrid Erll, 'Homer, Turko, Little Harry: Cultural Memory and the Ethics of Premeditation in James Joyce's *Ulysses*', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2019, pp. 227-253, p. 227, doi:10.1353/pan.2019.0016, last accessed 11 June 2021.
[92] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 299.

214). This reminds the reader of the famous scene in Joyce's *A Portrait of The Artist* with the Dean of Studies' disquisition over the words 'tundish' and 'funnel'. But whilst Stephen believes that Ireland retains the history of English through its common usage of 'past' words, Doyle is inverting that here: 'modern' things are taking even newer coinages in the US compared to the UK and Ireland. Henry is aware of the power of words as he himself has used this power:

> I knew how to unsettle and soothe with words… I'd been inspiring and provoking with words and more than words long before most of the New York ad men knew what they were for. It was soap now instead of freedom, cash… instead of votes and safe houses. (p. 33)

Henry seems to acknowledge the power of discourse, both in his current situation and during his past life as an IRA hitman.[93] He also seems to be referring to the commodification of words, even of 'freedom' which he appears to trivialise and demythologise, equating it to selling soap.[94] It is possible that this demythologising of the word he once fought for is a consequence of being in the US, a country where there seemingly is no past and where, as we have seen previously, freedom means being different and new. Finally, by stating later on that 'Talk was all I had' (p. 328), Henry once and for all acknowledges the importance of spoken discourse in reclaiming agency and telling his own story. Moreover, by highlighting that spoken words are all Henry has, Doyle once again establishes a link between his character and orality.

As discussed in the section about *A Star Called Henry*, the protagonist is surrounded by a mythical halo. This is confirmed when, towards the end of the novel, we are told that he has even become the subject of an oral ballad and of popular stories. That important link between Henry, orality and musicality continues in *Oh, Play That Thing*. The form of the novel itself links back to the musicality of ballads, besides linking, obviously, to the structure of jazz which is at the core of the book. The self-referential narrative recalls orally transmitted ballads and stories.[95] The novel actually opens with the pronoun 'I' and Henry keeps referring to himself in the first person, something that,

[93] The power of words seems to be a preoccupation of Doyle's. As we will see, it is something which Paula Spencer starts reflecting on in *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), p. 18.
[94] The approach to the fight for freedom in Ireland is openly treated as something that can be marketed in exchange for money in a later exchange between Henry and Ned Kellet, one of his former IRA associates: Kellet tells Henry that he and others like him were never ideologically involved but fought because of self-interest, not least economic (see pp. 323-9).
[95] Elizabetta Cecconi, 'Ye Tories Round the Nation: An Analysis of Markers of Interactive-Involved Discourse in Seventeenth Century Political Broadside Ballads', *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2009, pp. 59-84.

as mentioned in the previous section, is typical of the picaresque. This is something that, as we have seen, is typically evident in Joyce's work, and is also significant in Doyle in terms of discovering subaltern realities and allowing for 'other' histories.

The 'musicality' of the novel can be seen in the sentences which keep being repeated throughout, without any obvious context: for example, '*Get out when you smell the cordite*' (p. 88; p. 95) or a refrain from Thomas Ashe's poem '*Let me carry your cross for Ireland, Lord*' (p. 33; p. 79) or the narrator's cry that his name is Henry Smart. As with 'Sirens', these repetitions can be seen as the repetition of musical phrases which help unify the fabric of a musical composition. Moreover, the author uses a lot of colloquialisms, slang, vulgarisms and American and African American English. Irish English is used in the speech of Henry's wife, Miss O'Shea, and an IRA hitman. Again, the use of this type of language is something of a nod to the origins of jazz music as well as part of Doyle's efforts to give his protagonists their own voices.[96] Jazz originated in the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century mainly in New Orleans, incorporating African and slave folk songs and the influences of West African culture, with improvisation being one of its main features.[97] So, when looking at its origins, jazz can be seen as the 'folk ballad' of the African-American community, an expression of black history. This linguistic tenor is a further way of drawing a parallel between Henry and the African-American community. Not surprisingly, then, it is jazz that Henry falls immediately in love with, even before knowing who Louis Armstrong is:

> This was free and wordless and the man with the trumpet [Louis Armstrong] was driving it forward without ever looking back. It was furious, happy and lethal; it killed all other music. It was new, like me. (p. 134)

Henry establishes this connection between jazz, which he sees as free and new, and himself. The modernity of jazz, in Henry's opinion, reflects his own aspirations. We can then infer that, just like the marginalised African-American community, Henry finds an outlet for his aspirations of freedom and newness in jazz. Yet, as with jazz, the 'modern'

[96] According to David Lloyd, non-canonical narrative forms are valuable sites of resistance and vital moments of hybridity in Ireland in that they 'refuse the homogeneity of "style" required for national citizenship'. Lloyd argues that this is 'effectively a matter of verisimilitude: which narrative of "Irishness" comes to seem self-evident, normative, truthful' because control of narrative is vital for the state's legitimate frameworks; David Lloyd, *Anomalous States. Irish Writing and the Postcolonial Moment*, pp. 5-6.

[97] For more on the origins of jazz, see Lawrence Gushee, 'The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Jazz', *Black Music Research Journal*, *Supplement: Best of BMRJ*, vol. 22, 2002, pp. 151-174; Thomas Fiehrer, 'From quadrille to stomp: The Creole origins of jazz', *Popular Music,* vol. 10, no. 1, 1991, pp. 21-38.

freedom is inflected via history; what the present celebrates through the music is anchored in a much more traumatic past; Doyle reflects Henry's continuing entrapment, in other words, through the stylistic choices the novel makes, even despite its hero's frequent feelings of liberation.

Indeed, a central point in the novel is that, while in the US, Henry seems to naturally gel with the Chicago black music scene. As mentioned, he ends up getting close to Louis Armstrong and becoming Armstrong's passport into the places where black people were not allowed. At the same time, though, Armstrong is Henry's passport within the black community:

> I was tolerated because I was with the black man… I could have told them: I'm Irish, lads, one of the Empire's niggers, and I *know*. But … no one was going to ask about my fight for Irish freedom. (p. 252)

There is a sense of crossing racial divides here, and some deeper empathic relationship ('I *know.')*. As Doyle himself noted after reading a biography of Armstrong, there are 'parallels between him [Armstrong] and Henry'.[98] It is interesting that Doyle firmly places Henry within a black community where, for the first time since arriving in the US, he finds a temporary respite from running, and a sense of belonging.

In this respect too, Doyle is over-turning previous (specifically-negative) connotations of perceived resemblances between the Irish and other historically prejudicially conceived ethnicities. There is reference here to stereotyping and racist representations of the Irish in nineteenth century and pre-war cartoons which were similar to racist representations of African-Americans and other colonised and diasporic peoples. There is a hint that, to an extent, there is shared experience between Henry and the black African-American because of his Irish history.[99] The parallel between the Irish and black

[98] Emily Firetog and Roddy Doyle, 'Roddy Doyle Interview', *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, no. 50, 2021, pp. 64-80, p. 71.

[99] It is not the first time that Doyle draws comparisons between the Irish and black communities. In *The Commitments*, for example, 'The Irish are niggers of Europe, lads.' They nearly gasped: it was true. 'An' Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland. The culchies have fuckin' everythin'. An' the northside Dubliners are the niggers o' Dublin. – say it loud, I'm black an' I'm proud', Roddy Doyle, *The Commitments,* p. 13. Doyle has stated that, had he been writing that book twenty years later, he would not have written that sentence, mainly because Ireland had become one of the wealthiest countries in Europe so that line would make little sense (see 'Foreword' to Roddy Doyle, *The Deportees and Other Stories*, Penguin Books, 2006, pp. xi-xiii) . However, in 1987, Jimmy Rabbitte's statement had a particular resonance. It captured the complex ethnic identity of the Irish throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as framed their contemporary underprivileged status in a metaphor that was immediately understandable to both the characters in the book and its readership. Doyle is not the only writer to record the ways in which the association between 'First' and 'Third' Worlds was enacted daily in the streets of Dublin, or in Ireland more in general: Joseph O'Connor's *Desperadoes* (1994), for example, is set between Ireland of the 1950s and Nicaragua of the 1980s.

history, Ireland and the Third World, has historical as well as theoretical basis: for example, Declan Kiberd reminds us that both Said and Jameson wrote pamphlets that drew cultural parallels between Ireland and other colonies.[100]

But in making this equation between Henry as Irishman and Armstrong, Doyle seems to be directly taking on a whole history of representation in the UK and US. In some *Punch* cartoons that appeared around mid-nineteenth century, the Irish were depicted as apes, for instance. This reflected the Victorian view of the Irish and aligned it with representations of other colonised peoples.[101] In their introduction to *Drawing Conclusions: A Cartoon History of Anglo-Irish Relations 1798-1998,* Roy Douglas, Liam Harte and Jim O'Hara note that images of Irish people in nineteenth-century British political cartoons tended to oscillate between representing them as homicidal apes or as loyal, simple subjects of Queen Victoria. The Irish were seen as emotional and prone to fancy, rather than rational; they were easy victims of agitators and demagogues such as the Pope and the Fenians. Representations of the Irish as bloodthirsty savages or sub-human beasts became increasingly widespread in comic journals in Britain and the United States from the middle of the nineteenth century.[102] The Irish Celts were, as outlined by Curtis' *Apes and Angels*, among the favourite objects of satire and parody.[103] Therefore, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the dominant stereotype of 'the Irish Paddy' had to a very large degree moved away from that of the amusingly idiotic peasant and become increasingly menacing and bestialized creatures.

The Irish were also variously portrayed as monkeys, Celtic Calibans,[104] Frankenstein monsters, Yahoos: figures that were always more frightening than merely humorous.[105] Racial slurs such as 'Black Irish', 'Simians', 'Paddies', or 'niggers of Europe' recall a colonial history of violence that positioned the Irish as an inferior race vis-à-vis the British.[106] In this regard too, Doyle seems in the Henry/Armstrong

[100] Declan Kiberd, *After Ireland*, p. 380.
[101] See Seamas O'Reilly, 'Apes, psychos, alcos: How British cartoonists depict the Irish', *The Irish Times*, 11 July 2017, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/apes-psychos-alcos-how-british-cartoonists-depict-the-irish-1.3149409, last accessed 11 June 2021; Lisa Wade, *Irish Apes: Tactics of De-Humanisation*, https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2011/01/28/irish-apes-tactics-of-de-humanization/, last accessed 11 June 2021. See also Michael de Nie, *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798-1882* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).
[102] Roy Douglas, Liam Harte and Jim O'Hara, *Drawing Conclusions: A Cartoon History of Anglo-Irish Relations 1798-1998,* (London: Blackstaff, 1998).
[103] Lewis P. Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1971), p. 29.
[104] Ibid., pp. 30-31.
[105] Ibid., pp. 21-22.
[106] British perceptions and stereotypes of the Irish as savages had a history stretching back to the initial Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland in the twelfth century, Lewis P. Curtis, *Apes and Angels*, p. 29. By the eighteenth century, the drunken, simple-minded Paddy was a stock figure in popular British and American theatre, Noel Ignatief, *How the Irish Became White*, (London: Routledge, 1995).

association to be reflecting as much on trends at the time of his novel's creation as of the time actually contained by the narrative. The cartoonists' representation was a matter of contemporary historical debate towards the millennium. According to Roy Foster, for instance, attitudes in *Punch* to Irish issues did vary considerably throughout the nineteenth century, ranging from hostility, in the case of armed nationalism, to sympathy, in the case of certain moderate reforms.[107] By the 1850s, the magazine had already acquired a reputation for being anti-Irish.[108] A more shockingly sub-human, monstrous Irish ape-man then began to appear in the 1860s especially in the cuts of *Punch's* senior cartoonist John Tenniel, whose 1870 cartoon 'The Irish Tempest' is a striking example of this new trend.[109] Other cartoonists in Britain and the US soon followed suit. By the early 1870s in the American journal *Harpers Weekly,* Thomas Nast could, in a cartoon criticizing concessions to Catholic demands in New York, draw a gorilla in a crumpled suit and hat on the understanding, without any supporting text, that this was an Irish Catholic.[110] This type of representation notably, in other words, appeared in both British (*Punch*) and US (*Harpers Weekly*) magazines.[111]

Stereotypical representations of the Irish were nonetheless always basically human and rarely as terrifying in appearance as some of the Irish ape-men would be. However, as mentioned, it was not until the nineteenth centuries that Irishmen in British, and later American, political cartoons began to appear more beast-like. In 1845, in the popular illustrations for W.H. Maxwell's *History of the Rebellion in Ireland in 1798* the influential illustrator George Cruikshank (1792-1878) portrayed bloodthirsty, spear-wielding Irish rebels as looking more sub-human than ever before and stereotypical representations of the Irish were nonetheless always basically human and rarely as terrifying in appearance as some of the Irish ape-men would be. However, as mentioned, it was not until the nineteenth centuries that Irishmen in British, and later American, political cartoons began to appear more beast-like. In 1845, in the popular illustrations for W.H. Maxwell's *History of the Rebellion in Ireland in 1798* the influential illustrator George Cruikshank (1792-1878) portrayed bloodthirsty, spear-wielding Irish rebels as looking more sub-human than ever before, Lewis P. Curtis, *Apes and Angels*, p. 34. It was at this stage that the British comic weekly *Punch* had begun to appear. From its inception in 1841 *Punch*, despite often claiming to hold radical ideals of social justice, was extremely consistent in portraying Irishmen as savages, Helen Walasek, *The Best Of Punch Cartoon*, (London: Prion, 2013), p. 13; Lewis P. Curtis, *Apes and Angels*, p. 31.

[107] Roy Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English History*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 174-5

[108] Lewis P. Curtis, *Apes and Angels*, p. 31.

[109] Ibid., pp. x-xi.

[110] Thomas Nast was one of the key political cartoonist of the nineteenth century creating, among other iconic figures, characters such as Santa Claus, Uncle Sam and the Donkey and the Elephant of the US political parties.

[111] The Irish were not alone in often being perceived as savages who needed to be subdued. Other colonial peoples such as the Indians were widely viewed similarly. The representations of the Irish as monkeys, the same as other colonised people, was not limited to cartoons. English novelist Charles Kingsley's white-apartheid account in a letter to his wife, while travelling into Sligo in 1861, is worth noting here: 'I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don't believe that they are our fault. I believe that there are not only more of them than of old, but that they are happier, better, more comfortably fed and lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours', C. L. Innes, 'Postcolonial Studies and Ireland', Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray (eds.), *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures: Dislocations*, (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000), p. 27.

Doyle is acutely aware of such stereotypical representations of the Irish when he pairs Henry with Louis Armstrong, who had been subject to similar racist representations and even worse segregation, in what is one of the novel's more meaningful relationships. *Harpers Weekly* magazine, for instance, started publishing the Johnson family cartoon series during the World's Columbian Exposition which, coincidentally, was held in Chicago in 1893. Among other things, 'Mr Johnson's facial structure, hair colour and ear shape are made to appear like an ape's'.[112] So, whilst Doyle takes Henry to America obviously to mirror the Irish diaspora and to expose him to a paradoxical 'modernity', a more pressing reason might have been because of this link with the black community. In the US, Henry's questions about identity can come to the surface as, historically, could not have happened in Ireland, or in Britain. But there is also another aspect to this encounter. It makes the reader realise that, although the novel takes Henry to a 'modern world' that represents possibilities for him to shed his past, the US is not so modern after all: it is the place of prohibitionism, it has a history of slavery and marginalisation of the black community, and, as we saw earlier, a history of censorship exactly the same as in Ireland.

In the episode where Henry recalls the first time he saw Louis Armstrong:

> I turned and saw him. Louis Armstrong. His mother had died… he put the trumpet to his mouth; the crowd went wild… it was the blues, his grief crying out of the bell… it was the cry of a terrified child, left all alone, forever… - *What about meee!* - … his mother, mine – *she skips and she laughs, her black eyes shine happy*. (p. 155).

The words in italics recall Henry's silent cry, in *A Star*, when his mother was too lost in her grief for the other Henry, her dead child, to look after the live Henry. They also recall Henry's imagined memories of his mother the first time she went out with his father, also in *A Star*. The association of Louis' grief and Henry's own is made clear by the

[112] Bridget R. Cocks, 'Fixing race: visual representations of African Americans at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 41, issue 5, 2007, pp. 435-465, p. 453. The author highlights how 'During the World's Columbian Exposition… *Harper's Weekly*'s presentation of the Johnson family cartoons functioned in three key ways. First, the cartoons were part of a larger national effort to "fix" unstable categories of race as the potential for black economic opportunities and social equity increased. As illustrations of the inappropriate presence and ridiculous behaviour of African Americans, the series instructed white readers on how to be white Americans and how easily to identify behaviour that was different and essentially "black". The… establishment of these racial categories was… crucial to the formalization of segregation in the 1890s', ibid., pp. 436-7. The two communities were clearly linked in the way they were openly discriminated against in Britain. Mahesh Upadhyaya, the first person in the UK to start a legal fight against discrimination under the newly introduced Race Relations Act of 1968, recalls that, when he arrived in the UK in the 1960s and was looking for accommodation, 'It was standard to see signs saying, "No Blacks, No Dogs, No Irish", see https://rightsinfo.org/racism-1960s-britain/, last accessed 02 September 2020.

intersection of Henry's own cry and his memories of his mother. Louis's cry for his mother becomes Henry's to symbolise the need for a shared cry to be heard.

This shared experience between the two communities is, however, also evoked when Henry tells Dora, a mixed-race woman he meets in Chicago, about Ireland's experiences at the hands of the British government. Upon hearing of the Black and Tans' actions in Ireland, Dora compares them to the Ku Klux Klan, thus establishing a degree of shared experiences (p. 148). However, we are reminded that this shared experience has its limits when Dora tells Henry that:

> You Irish and you are telling me you don't know the difference between black and white? You don't know the rules? You people wrote most of the goddamn rules. (p. 140)

Henry is here made to realise that his people's experience of colonialism does not put him on the same level as the experience suffered by African-American people; he is still white. This might be a nod to the complex status the Irish found themselves in during the colonial period: ruled by a foreign power yet also collaborators in the work of Empire in India and other colonies. Interestingly, Dora seems to enclose within herself hybrid status. Another of the strong women who populate the trilogy, Dora had been torn between her two identities, and finally decides that she

> ain't interested in being a white woman no more… it ain't because I can never be one… I spent all my life… thinking I was better than most because I had some white man's blood… get my hair straightened, put bleach on my face [but] I was still… not white enough, not black enough… took a long time to get out of that white man's trap. (pp. 140-1)[113]

It was Armstrong, she says, who got her out of the trap that being white was better, a narrative built by the white man himself. When Henry suggests that Armstrong has cured him of being Irish, Dora's reply is 'No brother… ain't that easy' (p. 141). This exchange seems to suggest there is a similar construct created by the dominant powers in relation

[113] Dora's mention of her past attempts to try and 'pass' for a white woman recalls Nella Larsen's novel *Passing*. In the novel, Clare Kendry attempts to pass as white for her husband, John (Jack) Bellew. Moreover, like *Oh, Play That Thing*, Larsen's novel is set in Chicago and New York. According to Mae G. Henderson, 'the narrative of passing 'traces its lineage back to the nineteenth-century African American slave narrative' and thus to a subaltern narrative, Mae G. Henderson, 'Critical Foreword', Nella Larsen, *Passing*, (New York: The Modern Library Classics, 2002), p. xxiii.

to coloniser/colonised: the colonised are prisoners of the categories, and stereotypes, the coloniser has created as a means of representation. These constructs themselves become a powerful tool of control. As a subaltern, Henry is a prisoner of narratives that have been built for him. Like Dora, Henry has to recognise the power of such narratives in order to dismantle them and replace them with his own.

Henry and Armstrong's strong connection is highlighted when, whilst running away from some gangsters who are after them, they find an escape route in the river:

> I didn't know the place but I felt it. The water. Under us. [Louis Armstrong] felt it too… the sudden pain and pull… it had grabbed us. – That's water, I told him… The river… took us off the street, through weeds across a vacant lot… it was black down there, but I could hear and feel it. Chicago water. And he could feel it too; it was in his face and his eyes when I looked up… I let go and dropped. I fell through black, and hit the water, tucked in my legs until I knew my depth… the water lifted me… I was home here. I was home. *Welcome to the Swan River, boys*. (p. 220-1)

A river is an escape route again, as it was in *A Star Called Henry* when Henry ran away from the British guards to Piano Annie after the Rising; or when his dad had led him and Victor to safety when they'd been chased by the police, in a scene that was the only example of a moment of tenderness between Henry, Victor and a father they never really knew. The memories of his father are clear as Henry remembers his words '*Welcome to the Swan River, boys*'. So, the theme of water seems to be present is this novel as well, to symbolise the unstoppable flow of events by which Henry is led. But it also signifies flux, the change of identity. This time water hides from sight both Henry and Louis Armstrong, as if to unite them in a submerged and hidden status.

At the end of the novel, after having lost touch with his wife and daughter once again, Henry meets John Ford. The film maker promises Henry to make a film that tells

> your story. How'd an Irish rebel end up here? That's the real Irish story… and that's the story we are going to tell. (p. 374)

We infer that, despite making Henry believe that he was going to tell his story, it is Ford's version of that story: he has decided what aspects were important. As in colonial times, in modern times and through modern media as well the stories of the Irish are

appropriated, and Ireland becomes someone else's invention.[114] Just like the set of the film he is currently shooting, where 'The desert was real, but the town was cut out' (p. 372), it appears that the story he wants to tell is partly illusory.

The novel ends with Henry having no more certainties than at the beginning:

> My name's Henry Smart… I was going. Home? I doubted that. But I was ready to get right up and go there… Back I was going to tell my story… I was alive. I was forty-five. I was Henry Smart. (p. 374)

Henry leaves to go back 'home', whatever that might be. He realises that he had been fooling himself all along when thinking that he had started a new life in the US. His observation that he would tell his story when back in Ireland suggests that he has not done so yet, that he needs to be back in order to break the boundaries of Irishness in which he has been trapped: there is a realisation that by escaping he is not challenging the mechanisms of nationalist narrative and iconography that mediate the construction of memory and identity.

By giving agency to a character that represents largely elided and subaltern voices in official accounts of Irish historical events, Doyle continues in this novel as later in his career with his efforts to broaden the perspective on Irish history and Irishness in an effort to rethink history from the perspective of the subaltern. Just like Dora, Henry realises that 'I'd come out of hiding. And there was a woman who'd got there before me; she'd stopped hiding too.' (p. 147). Dora, like Louis Armstrong, is Henry's alter-ego: as Dora tries to pass herself as white, Henry tries to pass himself as English. Doyle explores issues of how we are perceived and how we perceive ourselves. It is not the running away that makes Henry reimagine who he is: rather than escaping the homogenising narratives that bypass his own story and experience, Henry needs to acknowledge them in order to overcome them. Like Dora, Henry has to recognise the power of such narratives in order to dismantle them and replace them with his own. When seen in this light, the reckoning with the IRA hitman that finds him becomes a way to confront and reject the past narratives that imprisoned him, and this is what makes the possibility of him going back to Ireland, to find his place in the national narrative, a reality.

[114] Referring to colonial appropriation of the history of the colonised, in the opening page of his seminal book *Inventing Ireland*, Kiberd states that 'the English helped to invent Ireland' (p. 1), referring to how, through narrative, the colonisers constructed an image of the colony to suit their interests. Elsewhere, Ashworth, Griffith and Tiffin observe that colonies lacked power because they lacked power of representation, and the decolonising effort involves reappropriating this representational power, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, p. 90.

II.4 Conclusion

In *The Last Roundup* trilogy Doyle is preoccupied with creating a history of the birth of the nation from a different perspective, one that gives a voice to those who are missing from the dominant discourses. I started this chapter by discussing issues of identity, subalternity and fragmentation in *A Star Called Henry*. I then focused on the subaltern, migration and race in *Oh, Play That Thing*. As mentioned, I have chosen not to discuss *The Dead Republic* in detail as this novel does not substantially add to the development of the concept of identity as discussed in the first two instalments of the trilogy. I will, however, highlight here some of the most interesting aspects of the novel.

The third instalment in Doyle's *The Last Roundup* trilogy was published in 2010 and tells the story of Henry's return to Ireland from the US in 1951 and his life on the island until the year of its publication. *The Dead Republic* is again a novel about myth and mythmaking in relation to the nation and Irishness, but also touches upon British representations of the Irish; how the Republic Henry fought for is dead and, actually never existed, it was a myth; how, through Henry, the Troubles in the North from the late-1960s are represented by the IRA as a repeat of the 'glorious' Easter Rising; and how Henry's being invented and reinvented continues to mirror the invention and reinvention of Ireland.

The first part of the novel is mostly devoted to how Henry's story is no longer his: it becomes as told by someone else, a tale of dispossession and reappropriation, as represented by the storyline around John Ford's film. The novel starts from where the previous instalment had left off. Henry returns to Ireland with the acclaimed director John Ford, who is planning to film *The Quiet Man*, based on Henry's life: in fact, Henry is Ford's IRA consultant (p. 5).[115] However, Henry realises that Ford's movie is not going to tell his 'real' story but a reimagined version of it. Ford's film is then going to depict a mythical, pure Ireland, and still leave out the subaltern experience. As an act of rebellion against this misrepresentation, Henry leaves the film crew and goes back to Dublin, in an attempt to go back to his roots, and reappropriate his life.

As I have argued in both *A Star Called Henry* and *Oh, Play That Thing* Henry is the conduit, the lens, through whom the nation's history is retold. Henry explicitly

[115] In an interview with Mary McWay Seaman, Doyle explained that the idea of making Henry the IRA consultant for Ford's film came to him after reading Ernie O'Malley's biography. O'Malley was an IRA officer during the War of Independence and an exponent of the anti-Treaty faction during the Irish Civil War. In the biography, he was credited as the IRA consultant to *The Quiet Man*. Incidentally, O'Malley is mentioned in the novel, p. 260. Mary McWay Seaman, 'Interview with Roddy Doyle', *The Celtic Connection*, 24 April 2010, https://celticevents.com/2010/04/27/interview-with-roody-doyle/, last accessed 11 June 2021.

remains such in *The Dead Republic* as well. Moreover, there is now a stronger identification between him and the nation. As soon as he is back, he feels his country enter his lungs first – 'an Irish cough, the big hack, the rattle' (p. 4) – and then seep into his bones, both real and acquired:

> The wooden leg creaked and whispered… I pulled up my trouser leg and looked. It was fatter, expanding – I could see the wood grow as I watched. The wet air was seeping into it. The varnish was already giving up. It was peeling away and the shin was getting pale and blotched. (p. 4)

Henry is Ireland and Ireland is Henry; Henry is also his own father. It is, therefore, legitimate to extend to the nation what applies to him: Henry's history becomes Ireland's history, a history that is thus implicitly integrated with those who had previously been left out of it. Nonetheless, the impression that the 'death' of his past coincides with the 'death' of the Republic he fought for is confirmed a couple of pages later:

> On the drive from Limerick I'd passed dozens of abandoned farmhouses, falling in on themselves, left standing beside the newer, brighter houses… I was the old man… I looked at my hand, at yellow, knuckled bone. The hand had once held guns and women… I used to be heard. My eyes used to kill… I was once a man called Henry Smart. I was born in Dublin, in 1901, and I fought for the freedom of Ireland. I married a beautiful woman and we tried to save Ireland together. (p. 7)

The images of the past (farmhouses) appear to be associated with dereliction and decay. They are juxtaposed with a different present (newer houses) which is taking hold. The countryside is not depicted in a lyrical way, perhaps a hint at the 'death' of rural Ireland, or rather the denial of the illusory idea that only rural Ireland is the real Ireland, as promoted by post-independence nationalism.[116] Alongside the images of decay that characterise the older nation, we have images of an aging Henry: he is old, the things he used to do are in the past. This might imply that the things he used to fight for are, or should be, in the past as well, that what he used to be is totally different to what he is

[116] This reconnects to Doyle's belief that in the 1960s, 1970s and into the 1980s 'those of us who were interested had to fight. Not in a guns-blazing sort of way but in one's everyday life. To fight that notion that Ireland was a rural country, that there was no alternative. That's what the fight was. The knowledge that Henry, coming from the slums of Dublin, the ghetto, him and his type were detested by the middle-class people who were the great drivers of the 1916 Rising because he represented everything that was wrong. Dublin was West Britain', Genoveffa Giambona, 'The rhythm of the city', p. 257.

now. It also symbolises how Henry, and by extension Ireland, are in danger of crumbling under the weight of the past.

By the end of the last instalment, however, Henry seems much more comfortable with his own story. He is more direct about who he is, much more assertive about his Irish identity. Although his body is cracking and crumbling, as if under the stress of too much experience and history, and although he knows that he is going to die that night, he is upbeat when he declares that 'I've lived a life. I'm a hundred and eight. I'm Henry Smart' (p. 329). His bowing out is not apologetic, which implies Ireland's past does not need to be apologised for, nor forgotten: it just needs to be analysed, processed and possibly used as a platform to move forward towards the future as a more open and inclusive possibility, with a redefined sense of national identity. Doyle is deconstructing the idea of a grand narrative around the making of the nation: his tale has at its centre a boy from the slums and is shaped by his perspective and motivations. By the end of the trilogy, Doyle, through Henry, seems to accept this connection with the past through a more relaxed acceptance, perhaps reflecting Doyle's own sense of being more comfortable with what Irish society has become.[117]

As we have seen, in the first two novels Henry himself becomes a myth, the subject of folk ballads, and the same happens in *The Dead Republic*. However, despite exposing the construction of myths for partisan reasons, *The Dead Republic* appears to conclude that myths are not all negative: it is through the mythical status invented around Henry as hero of the Rising and one of the two surviving members of the First Dáil that an act of reconciliation takes place: Sinn Féin's vote 'to run candidates in the south – to recognise the southern state' (p. 329). Henry learns first-hand what Declan Kiberd called 'Inventing Ireland', as Henry himself is constantly being invented by others throughout the book. There is then a clear link to a concept dear to much postcolonial literature: that of an identity reimagined and 'invented' by looking back to a more 'authentic', mythical past.[118]

Whilst some, such as Michael Hartnett, see Doyle's work, and especially *A Star*, as an attempt to break Ireland's obsession and connection with the past, as I have discussed the trilogy is more an attempt to reconfigure and process that past by including,

[117] Ibid., p. 253.
[118] See Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*; or Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991,* (London: Granta Books, 1991); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*; Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and postcolonial literature*; Seamus Deane, 'Heroic Styles: The Tradition of An Idea', *Ireland's Field Day*, pp. 45-58; Richard Kearney, 'Myth and Motherland'; Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*.

in ways recognised by postcolonial criticism, those voices that had been left out. [119] In *The Last Roundup* trilogy the 'facts' of Henry's 'history' are provisional and slippery. This is because the trilogy is not just about the revolutionary period, the War of Independence and the Irish past: it is also about a present in which the authority of history, and the history of authority, has become increasingly destabilised. Henry's name is 'Not a name from the history books, but spoken of in the right, tight circles' (*TDR*, p. 187), implying that history books do not tell the whole story, that they have left out those like Henry who nonetheless are part of the nation. Doyle has a 'revisionist' attitude, but is notably not revisionist about how the Rising was considered, its importance.[120] Rather, he wanted to dismantle the myth of martyrdom, the quasi-saintly status given to the Fathers of the Rising: he sees them as human in their imperfections. He wants to give a voice to those neglected by the dominant discourse around the Rising, those who, like Henry, were living in dire poverty, who contributed to the making of the nation but who never got a voice, neglected both by the British and by post-independence Ireland. Or the women like Miss O'Shea, who fought in the Rising and the War of Independence and were first expunged from the records, then relegated to domesticity and became victims of a patriarchal society. These issues around gender and recent Irish history and identity will be developed in the next chapter of the thesis.

In other words, Doyle's revisionism is not, say, Roy Foster's revisionism, which I discussed more fully in the Introduction to this thesis – Doyle is doing something different. In academic terms, and in keeping with my remarks in the introductory paragraphs as to the impossibility to firmly label him, across the three novels Doyle is neither nationalist nor revisionist in his approach to the well-mythologized history of twentieth-century Ireland. For example, by the end of the trilogy, Henry realises that in order to tell his story he cannot just reject or ignore the nationalist narrative; rather, he can transform and expand that narrative by placing his excised subaltern experience in dialogue with it. So, the writer suggests that Irish identity must encompass, and at the same time extend beyond, the terms of the tension between nationalist and revisionist. This dialogic rather than oppositional relationship between the two is foregrounded in the dialogic nature of the trilogy. Rather than opposing the official nationalist narrative with the alternative, 'true' story, Doyle adapts and performs nationalist iconography, popular songs, and iconic films in ways that revisit, open up and reimagine the tenets upon which

[119] Quoted in Patricia Craig's review of 'Michael Hartnett's *Collected Poems*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 May 2002.
[120] In my interview with him, for instance, Doyle talks about the Rising as a 'pivotal' moment for the nation, Genoveffa Giambona, 'The rhythm of the city', p. 256.

the nation-building narrative had been built; he thereby imagines a more inclusive mythology of Irish history and identity. Fiction, then, becomes a tool to revisit and reimagine the past by undermining historical normality; the marginalised is established as the cultural unifier. Doyle provides complicated versions of what in the academy is named subalternity, without of course explicitly mentioning it. One implication for the authority of history being destabilised through a fictional character might work to signpost to postcolonial theory, especially the cultural historicists and materialists, the need to take into account more complex and broader versions and perspectives of that history - versions that do not merely register the lack of some voices but actively work towards including such voices in a meaningful and experiential way. Fiction animates and brings together what would otherwise be discrete threads of theoretical practice, whilst also proving that its terminology is often simplifying of the complex and changing lives lived in multiple times and contexts which are both pressured and liberated by 'the postcolonial.'

Chapter III

Gender and the postcolonial nation: Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* and *Paula Spencer*

'The literature of a nation…
Is spun out of its heart. If you
Would know Ireland – body and soul –
You must read its poems and stories.
They came into existence to please nobody
But the people of Ireland.
They are Ireland talking to herself'
W. B. Yeats

III.1 Introduction

In an interview with *The Guardian* on 2 February 2019, talking about Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* as an example of female characters devised by men, Zadie Smith mentioned that 'Women have felt very close to these fake, pretend women invented by men. It makes us feel uncomfortable in real life. This is not real life. It's perverse.'[1] The two novels discussed in this chapter, Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (1996) and *Paula Spencer* (2006), are an example of a female lead character, Paula Spencer (an abused working-class housewife), devised by a male writer, in this case Roddy Doyle. The novels are also a denunciation of patriarchal constructions of womanhood in Ireland. Whatever the discomforts I feel myself as a woman writer on Doyle's fiction, this chapter will consider the motivations for his deployment of a lead female character when seeking to imagine the evolution of a (largely male-authored) national experience from the 1970s onwards.[2]

Domestic violence, the issue at the centre of the first novel and which shapes Paula's life in the second, was a complex issue in Ireland at the time during which these

[1] Claire Armitstead, '"Identity is a pain in the arse": Zadie Smith on political correctness', *The Guardian*, 2 February 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/feb/02/zadie-smith-political-correctness-hay-cartagena, last accessed 11 June 2021.
[2] For more on gender representation in Irish literary publishing landscape see Anne Enright, *No Authority*, (Dublin: UCD Press, 2019), pp. 69-88.

novels are set; or, rather than just complex, it was largely ignored. This was mainly due to the legacy of an idealised view of the family, seen as the basic unit of society and a fundamental part of Irish identity, promulgated in de Valera's Ireland by both politicians and the Catholic Church. It was a direct consequence of the colonial period during which the family became the social institution most people would identify with, given they were precluded from many others.[3] Linked to this particular view of the family, the construction of womanhood has been a controversial issue within the Irish context, particularly through the association between gender and nationalism, which has been sharply problematized by feminist critics from the 1960s onwards.[4] It is this problematic view that Doyle appears to address and challenge in the novels I will discuss in this chapter. In order to analyse the female figures in Doyle's novels, I will briefly focus on how womanhood has been conceptualized both culturally and politically in Ireland, and on representations of Irish femininity as transmitted by the Church and nationalism. I refer to these representations to contextualise Doyle's work in this chapter. However, this historical description will also serve as a useful background when it comes to discussing Anne Enright's fiction in chapters IV and V.

As mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, de Valera's vision of Ireland and Irish identity was set in stone in the 1937 Constitution which established the family as the basis of the new-born state. The Constitution also maintained that the role of women was indissolubly linked to motherhood and was sited within the home.[5] Even before the 1937

[3] Declan Kiberd, *After Ireland*, p. 64.

[4] See, for example, Maryann Valiulis, 'Neither Feminist Nor Flapper: the Ecclesiastical Construction of the Ideal Irish Woman', in Mary O'Dowd & Sabine Wichert (eds.), *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and Society*, (Belfast: Queen's University of Belfast, Institute of Irish Studies,1995) pp. 168-178; Pat O'Connor, *Emerging Voices: Women in Contemporary Irish Society*, (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1998); Anne Fogarty, 'Mother-Daughter Relationships in Contemporary Irish Women's Fiction', Adalgisa Giorgio (ed.), *Writing Mothers and Daughters: Renegotiating the Mother in Western European Narratives by Women*, (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 85-118; Clare O'Hagan, 'Ideologies of Motherhood and Single Mother, María de la Cinta Ramblado-Minero & Auxiliadora Perez-Vides (eds.), *Single Motherhood in 20th Century Ireland: Cultural, Historical and Social Essays*, (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), pp. 65-82; Gerardine Meaney, *Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change Race, Sex and Nation*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2010); Gerardine Meaney, *Sex and Nation Women in Irish Culture and Politics*, (Dublin: Attic Press, 1991).

[5] Ronit Lentin, '"Irishness", the 1937 Constitution, and Citizenship: A Gender and Ethnicity View", *Irish Journal of Sociology*, vol. 8, 1998, pp. 5-24, p. 9. The 1937 Constitution can be seen as the culmination of some discriminating legislation against women. In 1925 married women were barred from public service and, in 1935, this was extended to employment in the industrial sector. In 1927 a bill proposed to exempt women from jury service. The 1929 Irish Censorship Act can be seen as an ulterior effort to link women's role to motherhood as it barred the publication and purchase of any material containing information about contraception and abortion. In addition, the Criminal Law Amendment Act passed in 1934 raised the age of consent, in cases of indecent assault, from 13 to 15. Divorce was prohibited by the 1937 Constitution with Article 41.3.2 stating that "No law shall be enacted providing for the grant of a dissolution of marriage". Since the new divorce law of 1997, spouses can divorce without any restrictions. The reference to the role of women being within the home (Article 41.2) is still present in the Irish Constitution, albeit no one would dream of enforcing this constitutional clause. For some time now, there have been calls, for a referendum in order to remove Article 41.2, https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/reference-to-woman-s-

Constitution, nationalism and the Church were responsible for recurrent representations of Irish femininity as transmitted from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, shaping perceptions of womanhood in Ireland. Throughout the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church promoted an image of women as submissive, with no sexuality, moulded on the idealized image of the Virgin Mary, representing obedient womanhood and pious chastity. This was imposed as the ideal which women had to aspire to. This female behaviour was assumed to act as guarantee of 'the purity and alterity of the Irish nation'.[6] In this respect, Irish women were expected to be detached from their own individuality and sexuality, while those natural characteristics were 'replaced by attributes of fecundity'.[7] This idealisation of femininity would, however, plague the lives of real women, with some critics pointing out that the image of the Virgin Mary is both enigmatic and unattainable.[8]

The image of Irish women was then modelled on the nationalist narrative that saw Ireland as mother and the nation as family. As a consequence, according to Clair Wills:

> In Ireland, to some extent, [the] private sphere became associated with the nation-as-family in opposition to the alienated and bullish British state. This process was clearly determined to some extent by the role of Catholicism (and religious discourse on the Virgin Mary) in creating a public sphere outside of British jurisdiction. And indeed this family complex throws further light on the representation within nationalist discourse of the Irish nation as a (forlorn and abandoned) mother, suggesting that, for all its stereotypical qualities, the figure of Mother Ireland is a sign a complex over- lapping of public and private spheres.[9]

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place-in-home-must-be-removed-from-constitution-1.3650608, last accessed 24 January 2021. On 24 April 2021, the 99 members of Irish Citizens' Assembly overwhelmingly voted in favour of replacing the Article, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/citizens-assembly-votes-to-delete-and-replace-constitution-s-women-in-home-clause-1.4546882, last accessed 03 May 2021. For more information on the status of women in the Free State and in post-independence Ireland, see Clair Wills, 'Women, Domesticity and the Family', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2001, pp. 33-57. For more on working class and gender see Michael Pierse, *Writing Ireland's Working Class*.

[6] Heather Ingman, *Twentieth-century Fiction by Irish Women: Nation and Gender*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 7.

[7] Pilar Villar-Argáiz, 'Subversive Idealization of Motherhood in Contemporary Irish Women's Poetry', in Pilar Villar-Argáiz, Regine Rosenthal and David Kranes (eds.), *Literature and Theatre in Crosscultural Encounters: A Festschrift for ISCLT at Thirty*, (Lebanon: Lebanon College Press, 2006), pp. 153-163, p. 155.

[8] According to Julia Kristeva the image of Mary combined 'the qualities of the desired woman and the holy mother in a totality as perfect as it was inaccessible. Enough to make any woman suffer and any man dream', Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', *Poetics Today*, vol. 6, no. 1/2, 1985, pp. 133-153, pp. 140-1.

[9] Clair Wills, 'Women, Domesticity and the Family', p. 38.

This was the definition of womanhood both the new Irish state and the Catholic Church promoted which juxtaposed the nation and the individual. Additionally, in her pamphlet *Sex and Nation*, Gerardine Meaney argues that:

> In post-colonial southern Ireland a particular construction of sexual and familial roles became the very substance of what it means to be Irish.[10]

As a consequence, both nationalism and Catholicism constructed an idealised image of Irish femininity which did not reflect the complications of ordinary women.

So, nationalists represented women as fragile, either as a waiting-to-be-saved 'Mother Ireland' or as one of the mythological figures emerging from the Celtic legends, establishing an overlap between womanhood and the image of the nation as a suffering and self-sacrificing figure.[11] More than that, women were subordinate to their husbands, inferior to men: the proper function of women was motherhood; their place was in the home, tending to the needs of their husband and children.[12] The exclusion from civic service and the limitations on paid employment, especially after marriage, sent out a strong message about what women's role in society was.[13] The Irish Constitution, which weaves the narrative about the nation by the nation, became the place where the real experience of women was specifically excluded from Irish national identity.[14] Those who did not correspond to this image were ignored and left out of official representations of Irishness and Irish identity. Such constructions of womanhood still affect the construction of femininity in contemporary Ireland and Irish fiction.[15] In *The Woman Who Walked*

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[10] Gerardine Meaney, *Sex and Nation Women in Irish Culture and Politics*, (Dublin: Attic Press, 1991), p. 6.

[11] Karen M. Steele, *Women, Press and Politics During the Irish Revival*, (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007), p. 188. See also Richard Kearney, 'Myth and Motherland'.

[12] Maryann Valiulis, 'Neither Feminist Nor Flapper: the Ecclesiastical Construction of the Ideal Irish Woman', p. 169. Rigidly gendered roles, seen often in postcolonial nations, can also be seen in Ireland, with some scholars identifying the oppression of women as part of a typical postcolonial gender ideology. The gendering of Irish history, for example, saw the male England committing an act of violence and desecrating the female Ireland. Under these conditions, women's 'weakness' becomes a way to amplify men's dominant and authoritative status. Besides being symbols of the nation, then, women become the territory where male power can be showcased and exercised; the obsession to control women has its roots in such complex postcolonial anxieties. Doyle seems to hint at the fact that these stereotypes have been internalised. For more see Maryann Valiulis, 'Power, Gender and Identity in the Irish Free State', *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 6, no. 7, Winter/Spring 1994-5, pp. 117-136. For a discussion on postcolonial gender ideology see Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*; Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*; Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and The Nation*; Michael Pierse, *Writing Ireland's Working Class*; Gerardine Meaney, *Sex and Nation*; Heather Ingman, *Twentieth-century Fiction by Irish Women: Nation and Gender*; Auxiliadora Pérez Vides, 'Literary Insights into Contemporary Ireland: An Interview with Catherine Dunne', *Atlantis*, vol. XXIV, no. 2, 2002, pp. 231-243.

[13] Myrtle Hill, *Women in Ireland: A Century of Change*, (Newtownards: Blackstaff Press, 2003), p. 100.

[14] Gerardine Meaney, *Sex and Nation*, p. 7.

[15] Anne Fogarty, 'Mother-Daughter Relationships in Contemporary Irish Women's Fiction', p. 87.

Into Doors and *Paula Spencer*, Doyle's choice to write out of gender complications does not just have a social connotation: it takes on political significance because it addresses iconic configurations constructed by State and Church. So, Paula enables Doyle once more to confront key symbolic issues in the national tale from a postcolonial subaltern perspective. In both these and the 'Henry novels', Doyle is using his fiction to rethink iconic aspects, moments, and events of the nation.

As in the case of Henry in *The Last Roundup* novels discussed in the previous chapter, in the Paula novels Doyle gives the alternative perspective by re-reading key aspects of Irish nationalist discourse through Paula, an abused housewife. However, whilst in the trilogy, as we have seen, the focus was on historical events such as the Rising or migration as filtered through Henry, in the novels I am going to discuss in this chapter the interest switches onto the symbolic representation of women in Ireland, with Doyle dissecting what happens to women as a result of idealisation. As we will see, and linked to what we mentioned in the Introduction about novels being in a sense the product of their socio-historical context, Doyle's novels reflect (after a long and traumatic phase) the gradual socio-political improvement of the situation of Irish women from the second half of the twentieth century onwards. For instance, in *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, which is set in the mid-1990s, Paula does not work and is expected to take care of the family. Doyle's later novel, however, depicts Paula as more independent and empowered, a change which mirrors the social, political and economic transfiguration Ireland experiences at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, the period when the novel is set.

In an interview with Gerry Smyth, talking about the genesis of *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, Doyle states that after 'having written about a ten-year-old-boy, I wanted the challenge of getting in the head of the woman, something I felt would be more difficult'.[16] The character of Paula was originally scripted for a TV series. In 1994 RTÉ televised a drama called *Family* that Doyle had written for them. The drama was set on a rundown Dublin housing estate, with each episode focusing on one family member. It begins with the violent, alcoholic patriarch Charlo Spencer (Sean McGinley), who constantly abuses his wife Paula (Ger Ryan) while their four children look on. As a controversial series dealing with the issue of domestic violence against the backdrop of extreme poverty, the backlash against the author was immediate and from all corners of society. The left accused Doyle of depicting all working-class Irish families as violent

[16] Gerry Smyth, 'Interview with Roddy Doyle', *The Novel and The Nation*, p. 105. Doyle is here referring to the ten-year-old protagonist of *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*.

and abusive, while right-wing politicians and the Church claimed he was undermining the traditional Irish family unit. Doyle recollects that:

> I remember turning on the news the day after, getting ready to go to work. It was the main headline. There were national politicians talking about it. The lunchtime news was about domestic violence. *Family* was the story. I was very proud that a piece of writing had an impact like that – though it was very unsettling at the same time.

After that first episode, Women's Aid started receiving huge numbers of calls from women in similar circumstances to Paula, of whom Doyle says he has met 'hundreds' over the years. It was enough to inspire him to write two novels – *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* and *Paula Spencer* – continuing Paula's troubled life on the page.[17] A gendered view of Irishness is reflected, and challenged, in both of Doyle's novels, and in the first in particular. However, the overall picture that transpires is not the one of idyllic family life enshrined in the Constitution. In Doyle's novels it is domestic abuse, violence, economic dependency and child neglect within the family that are explored, something that was alive in Irish society but often ignored in official accounts. Doyle's fiction is highly critical of these representations and constructions of womanhood, and the fact that womanhood had been part of 'normative' constructions of national imagination and identity.

There is, however, an extra layer to Paula's marginalisation. Women belonging to the lower classes had been badly disadvantaged in terms of family laws and their place in society. Jennifer M. Jeffers argues that Paula is trapped by her working-class upbringing as well as by very rigid patriarchal structures since 'Charlo's behaviour is sanctioned by the authorities and by Irish culture'.[18] The consequence is that 'Paula is trapped in this subaltern position of utter powerlessness that robs her of all agency'.[19] Therefore, to add to what Eavan Boland termed the 'disproportionate silence of women' in Ireland and in Irish literature, the silence is even more deafening when we turn to working-class women who were marginalised by the state and whose plight was hardly

[17] James Mottram, 'Family Matters and Old Soul Classic', *The Independent*, Wednesday 29 June 2011, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/roddy-doyle-family-matters-ndash-and-an-old-soul-classic-2303951.html, last accessed on 11 June 2021.
[18] Jennifer M. Jeffers, "'What's it like being Irish?" The return of the repressed in Roddy Doyle's *Paula Spencer*, p. 263.
[19] Stefanie Lehner, *Subaltern Ethics in Contemporary Scottish and Irish Literature: Tracing Counter-Histories*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 135.

discussed in critical inquiry.[20] It is in this sense that working-class women can be seen as marginalised both in terms of their gender and in terms of their class.[21]

In the two novels I am going to discuss in this chapter, Doyle reinstates the real experience of women that, as noted above, had been specifically elided and silenced from the Constitution's version of Irish national identity. Doyle's Paula can be seen in established postcolonial terminology as subaltern, but a victim indeed of what in the Introduction we termed a double colonisation process, both in terms of gender and class, thus invoking a serious re-examination of how gender and womanhood relate to Irish identity.[22] *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* and *Paula Spencer* show the same efforts to widen definitions of Irishness by presenting different images of the nation that we discussed in relation to *The Last Roundup* trilogy. Just like Henry, Paula represents what, in the Introduction, we have seen through postcolonial thinking, as marginalised voices, but ones that also, in this instance, directly confront a blindness about gender identified within native theoretical discourse.[23] The subaltern aspect is important in the fiction I am going to examine in this chapter, looking in particular at both pre- and post-independence legacies in relation to gender representation and reaction to it. In this respect, Gerry Smyth is right to point out that, in *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, Doyle delves into the

> nature of Irish identity and the changes affecting Irish society… Paula Spencer's story reveals itself not as an addendum to the national story but as one of its central voices… a reconsideration of the history of 'Irishness', 'woman' and the relation between these categories.[24]

In the novel, then, Doyle is linking Paula to the nation, and her story becomes a wider story of national identity – one which challenges iconic representations which have informed that identity for centuries. This more comprehensive story of national identity

[20] Myrtle Hill, *Women in Ireland: A Century of Change*, p. 8.
[21] Michael Pierse, *Writing Ireland's Working Class*, p. 115.
[22] The concept of double colonization refers to the status of women in the postcolonial world. Postcolonial and feminist theorists state that women ended up being oppressed by both colonial and patriarchal ideologies, with the latter often mirroring the former when it came to women's place in society. Irish poet and novelist Mary Dorcey implies that Irish women are thus doubly colonised when she recalls that when she grew up, 'women writers, so far as I knew, if Irish, were rich, Protestant, upper class and living in exile. It was considered that Irish Catholic women were incapable of any other vocation other than the care of men and children . . . 80 per cent of the books I read were by men'; see Ide O'Carroll and Eoin Collins (eds.), *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland: Towards the Twenty-first Century*, pp. 38-39. For exhaustive discussions of the concept of double colonisation, see Kirsteen Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford (eds.), *A Double Colonization. Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing*, (Dangaroo Press, 1986).
[23] Linda Connolly, 'The Limits of "Irish Studies": Historicism, Culturalism, Paternalism', p. 207. See also, Colin Graham, 'Subalternity and Gender: Problems of Postcolonial Irishness'; Gyan Prakash, 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism'.
[24] Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation*, p. 88.

is forged through female consciousness to rebalance a national history that has made subalterns of its women. So, more than a reconsideration, this is a rebalancing act in the remaking of Irishness. The link between individual and national, personal and collective is not limited to the first novel but is present again in *Paula Spencer* which, according to Anne Devlin, is 'A brilliant condition-of-Ireland novel… concerned with the need of the Irish nation to grow up.'[25]

In this chapter I will examine in particular how, through Paula, Doyle wants to dismantle inherited ideas, and ideals, of womanhood in Ireland, in ways that might be illuminated by some postcolonial ideas which reveal the kind of critique from *inside* the country that Doyle makes, whilst also, as indicated, pushing back against others. I will discuss how through Paula, and her vicissitudes, Doyle actually wants to make the reader feel uncomfortable by representing this particular kind of voice that has been silenced in Irish society. This is a precise strategy to achieve precise goals: to create a more inclusive notion of Irishness and dispel previous definitions of Irish identity by immediately presenting the elided lived experience and human suffering caused by the political and religious idealisation of women.[26] By focusing on female subjection to social conservatism and male aggression in both novels, Doyle criticises the construction of womanhood in Irish society in its inheritance from the colonial past.[27] As I will discuss, Doyle goes even further and makes us see the nation and its making, something that it is usually a male domain, through Paula's eyes and perspective. This yields important considerations from a theoretical point of view in terms of the understanding of subalternity itself in this context.

III.2 *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*

The Woman Who Walked Into Doors is told by its protagonist, Paula Spencer. When we first meet her, Paula is 37 years old. She looks much older, although she might have been good-looking once. She has four children, one of whom is an addict, and she is an 'alco'. Paula is a survivor of domestic abuse, with the novel's title referring both to an episode where Spencer's husband, Charlo, asks her where a bruise came from, and to the excuse women give to doctors, nurses and the outside world to justify their bruises: 'I walked into a door'. The book is a mixture of flashbacks, with Paula recounting her childhood,

[25] Anne Devlin, 'Roddy Doyle's Paula Spencer is a brilliant condition-of-Ireland novel', *The Guardian*, 9 September 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/sep/09/shopping.fiction, last accessed 11 June 2021.
[26] Eavan Boland, *Object Lessons*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), p. 137.
[27] Michael Pierse, *Writing Ireland's Working Class*, p. 110.

her dating life with her future husband, and her wedding day, and later accounts of her present life and battles. As Paula jumps back and forth through time, she weaves a rich account of the patterns both of abuse and love that characterise her troubled life and family.

The book begins in the early 1990s Ireland, when a guard knocks on Paula's door to notify her that her husband is dead, killed by the police during a robbery. Paula feels a mixture of grief and relief at the news, explaining that she and her husband had been separated.[28] This episode opens up flashbacks into Paula's memories of being raped, beaten, and sometimes left on the verge of death by Charlo. Although Paula had tried her best to protect her children, Nicola, John Paul, Leanne, and Jack, she also neglects them due to her alcoholism. John Paul goes off to live on his own at a young age and becomes a heroin addict. Paula goes to her doctor many times with different complaints, but she notes that he only thinks of her as an alcoholic who is abusing the healthcare system. Even on the multiple occasions she ends up in A&E due to the beatings, the doctors refuse to see her as a person, hear her or acknowledge the violence she is being subjected to. Coupled with the silencing of Paula's voice is the indifference of the people who are supposed to be a source of help: her family, the healthcare practitioners, the Church.

The narrative is in the first person, as if the writer wants us to explore the mind of the character, in all its complexity, and wants us to 'live' the mental state of someone physically abused. The first-person narration also functions as a means of reappropriation of one's story. There is very little dialogue in this novel and no real physical descriptions. When Paula is thinking, analysing, the prose goes slowly: whole complex sentences, medium-length paragraphs. But when she is drunk or remembering being beaten, the pace becomes frantic and this is indicated by short, broken sentences and lack of punctuation – the kind of literary experimentation also featured in *Oh, Play That Thing*. There is no distance between Paula and the reader and, as readers, we are caught in this change of the narrative pace. By allowing the reader to 'live' inside Paula's mind and discover first-hand its vicissitudes, Paula, an undeniably imperfect character, becomes likeable to the reader, and to associate and empathise with her. This switch to first person narration can also be seen as a technique to challenge the objectifying iconographies of colonialism and earlier versions of nationalism. Therefore, unlike postcolonial theories which, as

[28] As briefly mentioned, divorce was introduced in Ireland in 1997, a year after the novel was published, after a heated and divisive campaign. Prior to that, couples could agree to separate, and divorce could be obtained as a private bill at Westminster. This was, however, a very expensive and gendered issue, and it was much easier for husbands to petition for divorce. The Free State made it impossible to divorce in 1925 as it went against the idea of the family as protected by the Catholic Church, Eugenio F. Biagini and Mary E. Daly, *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland*, pp. 349-50.

mentioned in the Introduction, merely register the absence of elided histories in Irish critical discourse, or abstractly discuss gendered subalternity as a homogenising postcolonial category ideologically inscribed within the nationalist discourse, the fiction shows the complex, traumatic, and often divergent results of these histories.[29] Fiction adds an experiential basis to 'the subaltern' as a form of resistance or counter-experience.[30]

As we have said, the story is set in Paula's present, but interspersed with paragraphs in italics – they are flashbacks giving us glimpses of the abuse bit by bit, little pieces of the puzzle, one by one. The first flashback is just a few pages into the novel:

> *I knew nothing for a while, where I was, how come I was on the floor. Then I saw Charlo's feet, then his legs, making a triangle with the floor. He seemed way up over me. Miles up… then he came down to meet me. His face, his eyes went all over my face… looking for marks, looking for blood. He was worried… his face was full of worry and love… - You fell, he said.*[31]

To the reader who does not know the story, this first flashback might really mean that she drunkenly fell over. The first-person narrator is not revealing the truth of the violence to the reader just yet, perhaps mirroring the fact that Paula was partly-unconscious, but also trying to hide it to herself as well, trying to believe she had just fallen, or that, somehow, it had just been an accident. Charlo denies Paula's experience of the violence, renaming

[29] In 'Nationalisms Against the State: Towards a critique of the anti-nationalist prejudice' David Lloyd, for example, sees nationalism itself as subaltern and as providing the ideological glue to all marginalised groups, women included. From this follows that subalternity becomes a collective which subsumes action and experience. In her characterisation specifically as double-colonised in terms of gender and class, Paula challenges this homogenising view. Carol Coulter goes even further by seeing tradition as a conceptual and historical link between women and nation. Again, as we have seen, Doyle debunks this view by showing Paula as a victim of traditional representations and constructions of womanhood in Ireland. David Lloyd, 'Nationalisms Against the State: Towards a critique of the anti-nationalist prejudice', T. P. Foley, L. Pilkington, S. Ryder and E. Tilley (eds.), *Gender and Colonisation*, (Galway: Galway University Press, 1995); Carol Coulter, *The Hidden Tradition: Feminism, Women and Nationalism in Ireland*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993).

[30] In an interview with *The Herald* Doyle remarks that he does not theorise about issues; rather, he creates 'characters and the characters bring issues with them. I've written about characters who were unemployed, characters who were pregnant outside marriage at a time when that was very significant, characters who have been victims of violence in the home.' It is, therefore, fitting that Paula directly relates her own experiences rather than having a third party, a narrator, filtering them through to the reader, Teddy Jamieson, "'I've always considered myself a political writer." Roddy Doyle on time, mortality and Dublin pubs', *The Herald*, 29 February 2020, https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/18259434.always-considered-political-writer-roddy-doyle-time-mortality-dublin-pubs/, last accessed 11 June 2021.

[31] Roddy Doyle, *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), p. 5. Italics in the original. All further references to this text are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the text.

it 'falling' instead. This is something that Paula seems to accept, focusing instead on Charlo's 'worry and love'.

In this respect, it is interesting to read what Jarmila Mildorf observes in relation to renaming as a form of minimising violence:

> Charlo renames the violent incident as 'falling' and thus precludes any possibility for Paula to establish her husband's deliberate violence as a fact… Paula is ultimately deprived of her right to define her own reality… the strategies of minimizing and annihilating the experience of violence [is] first used by Charlo to excuse or justify his deeds and then by Paula to cope with her situation.[32]

This minimizing as a coping strategy also makes Paula an unreliable narrator. Paula, for example, associates Charlo's behaviour with 'worry and love'. Nonetheless, as readers, we realise that Charlo's behaviour is not dictated by love but by his worry that the violence might be detectable. Readers are warned that her interpretations, memories and accounts might, at times, be misleading.

This is the case when we read about the initial stages of Paula and Charlo's relationship. From some of the things she says, we guess early on that, when she first met him, Paula might have built an image of Charlo for herself that did not match reality. We see this, for instance, when she is thinking about the first time she danced with him:

> The music. I remember it. Women always do… it was the perfect song, sweet and fast, corny but mean, high-pitched but definitely masculine. Charlo's theme song and he didn't know it. He had nothing to do with it. (p. 4)

She is clearly building a story in her head that has nothing to do with him. This passage, however, also reaffirms that this is Paula's narrative. Paula herself tells us this is the case when, remembering her first walk with Charlo on a peaceful and warm evening, she adds:

> I remember it well and I don't care if anyone can prove that it was raining… that it was too cloudy for the moon to be out. (p. 53)

[32] Jarmila Mildorf, 'Words that Strike and Words that Comfort: Discursive Dynamics of Verbal Abuse in Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*', *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2005, pp. 107-122, p. 115.

This is one of Paula's many assertions and confirmations that this is her story in her own words, and she will not let anyone appropriate it.

As Paula notes, society around her is willing to accept her made-up explanations for her injuries knowing well that they are lies. In another one of her flashbacks, we start to see how those who should take care of her do not even see her as a person:

> *The doctor never looked at me. He studied parts of me but he never saw all of me. He never looked at my eyes. Drink, he said to himself. I could see his nose moving, taking in the smell, deciding.* (p. 23, italics in the original)

Paula is just a sum of body parts that need to be treated, not a person to be looked in the eyes to see the pain transpiring from them. There is no interest in her as a victim, just some prejudice towards her as a drunk. So, she does not tell, and the medical staff, or anyone else, do not ask, although she prays that they will:

> Ask me. In the hospital. Please, ask me. In the clinic. In the church. Ask me ask me ask me. Broken nose, loose teeth, cracked ribs. Ask me. (p. 164)

It is interesting here that Paula mentions the Church, hinting that she was invisible to it as well. So, in the novel, Paula is invisible to both of the powers that, as mentioned in the introductory paragraphs to this chapter, have defined her as a woman.

The Church especially, rather than being seen as charitable, is seen as predatory and absent. This is quite evident when a priest goes to offer his support soon after Charlo is killed:

> The looks [the priest] gave me when he was talking about faith and the Blessed Virgin, it wasn't my tea he was after, or my biscuits. It isn't only the bishops who like to get their exercise. (p. 90)

Besides showing the predatory, rather than protective role, of the priest who goes to visit Paula, the above also gives a broader picture of the Church as being corrupt to its higher levels.[33] Religion, or in this case, its representatives, are not seen as a positive force but

[33] It is interesting to see how, in *Paula Spencer*, Catholicism and violence are juxtaposed. This is the case, for example, in the passages where Robert McCartney's sisters are represented describing sectarian violence: 'The McCartney murder won't go away… A Padre Pio is a bullet through the hand. Or the knee. She's not sure' (pp. 162-4). Besides the association between religion and social violence, there also seems to be a juxtaposition with domestic violence as, in the same pages, Paula hints to the persisting physical

rather as a false promise. This is the case again when, reflecting on her harrowing experience and the lack of support and protection, Paula thinks back to what the priest had said the day of her wedding:

> The priest said something about the family rosary… something about if we were ever in trouble we should get down on our knees and say the rosary, it would sort out our problems. (I tried it; it didn't). (p. 138)

Like every other institution – family, school, hospitals, police – the Church has failed her, and others like her. Bit by bit, Doyle is chiselling away the pillars of Irish society as constructed in its early iconography.

So, no one asks. Paula does not tell because she cannot tell - Charlo, her husband, takes her to the hospital, not out of concern for her, but to always remain a threatening figure and to make sure she does not tell anyone (pp. 199-202). Paula herself, and the abuse she is subjected to, are invisible:

> I could see all these people but they couldn't see me… the woman who wasn't there. The woman who had nothing wrong with her. The woman who was fine. The woman who walked into doors… my mother looked and saw nothing. My father saw nothing, and he loved what he didn't see. My brothers saw nothing. His mother saw nothing… ask me. (p. 187)[34]

The denial of what is happening to Paula by those who live around her can be seen as a metaphor for the Irish nation as a whole, knowing but ignoring what is happening within the idealised institution of the family – an institutional, large-scale cover up that allowed women to be abused by husbands, children to be abused by the clergy and single mothers to be mistreated by the Church. Paula knows that 'It was my little secret and they all helped me keep it' (p. 188), thus implicitly blaming the whole system for the continued violence. It can also be seen as a metaphor for a nation who had institutionalised the role of women as second-class citizens, *de facto* silencing them.

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consequences of the violence perpetrated on her. For more information about Robert McCartney's murder see https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2018/10/31/news/nobody-was-protected-in-the-probe-into-the-killing-of-robert-mccartney-says-police-ombudsman-michael-maguire-1473305/, last accessed 13 January 2021.

[34] In *Paula Spencer*, it is made perfectly clear that these people knew in the following conversation between Paula and her mother, now suffering from Alzheimer: '"Her husband beat her." It's like a slap. When Paula arrived with black eyes or splinted fingers, her mother never commented. You… oul' cow, says Paula', Roddy Doyle, *Paula Spencer*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006), p. 188. All further references to this text are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the text.

The intrinsic hypocrisy of the institutions and the inherent complicity between Charlo and the system is made explicit in the following exchange between a doctor in A&E and her husband:

> Put this woman to bed the minute you get home, Mr Spencer, and bring her a cup of tea. – Yes doctor. The two of them looking after me. Laughing at me… they didn't wink at each other because they didn't need to. (p. 190)

Here, there are two types of complicity exposed which act to the detriment of women: that between two men and that between the official institutions and the male side of society. But Paula would like to believe, and would like us to believe, that things were not always this complicit in her life. She remembers a loving father, something that is however contested by her sister Carmel and somewhat disproved by some of Paula's memories, as we will see later. She remembers being a pretty girl, but her puberty was the start of her problems. She saw that her mother looked angry at her first glimpse of Paula's developing breasts, making her feel that she had done something wrong:

> She'd been robbed – that was what she'd thought when she saw my breasts starting; her little girl had been taken from her. (p. 18)

Her feelings of guilt at being a woman might as well have started at this point. She grows up being shown at every opportunity that being a woman is a lose-lose situation:

> There was no escape; that was you. Before I was a proper teenager, before I knew anything about sex, before I'd even left primary school – I was a slut. My daddy said it, fellas said it, other girls said it, men in vans and lorries said it. (p. 47)

The above passage is about who owns definitions of identity. In this respect, it is worth remembering that, in my interview with him, Roddy Doyle remarks that the history of his part of Ireland revolves around who owns definitions of identity and Irishness, in whose hands that definition is.[35] In this case it is women's identity which is in someone else's hands, mainly men. This seems a direct reference to what, in the introductory paragraphs, we have seen as the androcentric norms by which womanhood was defined in Ireland, norms that denied women the right to self-definition and affirmation, depriving them of

[35] Genoveffa Giambona, 'The rhythm of the city', p. 256.

a voice and effectively making 'the subaltern a marker of gender in Irish culture'.[36] Doyle extends these ideas to include class, so that Paula is double-colonised in terms of her gender and social status. It is worth noting, for instance, Doyle's attempt to reproduce the spoken language in the quote above. Specifically, we see 'fella', mimicking working class idiolect, which brings class as an integral element and appears to confirm that a discussion of female experiences of marginalisation cannot stand apart or above other factors.[37] It therefore circles back to the concept explored in the introductory paragraphs of working-class women seen as marginalised and subaltern both in terms of their gender and of their class.[38]

However, her being the first in her school-class to get her period gives Paula the power of knowledge. She shows this power through language:

> I said the word Penis like I'd said Desk or Road. Erect. Menstruation. Vagina. Tampon. Headache. Great words; I frightened… them. (p. 18)[39]

It is words that give Paula power, specifically words directly linked to her being a woman, and it is through words, through the narrative, that Paula is reclaiming the power of telling her own story. It is clear then that the basic institutions present in a child's life, namely family and school, failed Paula and instilled into her a long-lasting sense of guilt and worthlessness. If her father called her a slut, if her mother made her feel guilty for starting to develop into a woman, school was not much better and 'made me rough. I wasn't like that before I started there' (p. 35). When she starts her secondary school, the system itself of allocating kids to classes implies that the children in Paula's class were 'the dopes, the thicks', making her realise that 'it was a fright finding out that I was stupid. Before I even got in the door' (pp. 27-8). Again, the issue of class is the strongest factor present here: as she is from a particular background, Paula must be 'thick'.

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[36] Colin Graham, 'Subalternity and Gender: Problems of Postcolonial Irishness', p. 151.
[37] Philippa Levine, 'Introduction: Why Gender and Empire?', Philippa Levine (ed.) Gender and Empire, (Oxford: OUP, 2004), pp. 1-13.
[38] Michael Pierse, *Writing Ireland's Working Class*, p. 115.
[39] The frightening power of words Paula refers to in this passage reminds us of the narrator of 'The Sisters' in Joyce's *Dubliners*: 'Every night as I gazed up at the window I said softly to myself the word paralysis… It filled me with fear, and yet I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work' James Joyce, 'The Sisters', *Dubliners*, p. 1. Although the two stories are worlds apart, the power of language to terrify, and thus have a certain power on people, is the same. This passage, however, is also remindful of the exchange between Stephen Dedalus and the Dean of Studies in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: 'the language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home*, *Christ*, *ale*, *master*, on his lips and mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit', James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 205. The litany of words and the awe they inspire share similarities with the passage quoted from Doyle's novel.

Despite feeling that it is an injustice, Paula has no choice but to learn and conform:

> I began to learn. It was alright to sit… on the wall during the day… sitting on a wall in the dark would get you a name for yourself. You were looking for trouble, parading yourself… Everything made you one thing or the other. It tired you out sometimes… if you smiled at more than one you were a slut; if you didn't smile at all you were a tight bitch. (p. 48)

The social rules are arbitrary, random and inescapable and they remind us of Charlo's random and arbitrary excuses for beating her up, the inescapable violence she found herself in. This draws a parallel between forms of violence, undoubtedly different but nonetheless violence all the same. Women are prisoners of social constraints created by a male-dominated society where male violence on women is one extreme manifestation of the status quo.[40] It is easy to understand how, in a working-class context already socially-marginalised; where women do not appear to have the right to speak for themselves and have their identities constructed by someone else.

The Woman Who Walked Into Doors, then, gives us a glimpse into what it meant for women to grow up in Ireland in that period, namely the 1960s and 1970s. The period between the 1950s and the 1970s is generally held as an era of profound change in Irish society. Gibbons asserts that the year 1959, in which Seán F. Lemass was appointed Taoiseach, is

> taken as the *annus mirabili*s of modern Ireland … dispelling the mists of traditionalism which had obscured the path to progress and industrialisation … [and breaking] with the protectionist policies of the previous generation [in order to extend] an open welcome to foreign investment and multinational capital.[41]

The Republic's entry into the European Union (then EEC) in 1973 consolidated these developments, exposing its society to what Gibbons tellingly describes as 'the ways of the world'.[42] There is, then, a distinct turning point or rupture considered to have occurred during this period, which is based on what Jameson describes as 'a powerful act of

[40] Pat O'Connor underlines how domestic violence and rape have been perceived as devices to restrict women's lives, Pat O'Connor, *Emerging Voices: Women in Contemporary Irish Society*, p. 19. Gerardine Meaney, *Gender, Ireland and Cultural Change*, p. 10.
[41] Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, p. 82.
[42] Ibid.

dissociation whereby the present seals off its past from itself and expels and ejects it'.[43] This change in political leadership initiated an 'intellectual revolution as well'.[44] However, despite some changes on national level, in terms of gender balance nothing changes, as is possibly reflected by the dissociations in an individual consciousness, that of the suffering Paula, in the book. It is in *Paula Spencer* that we will see more of a reflection of this 'transformative' national shift, as envisaged in postcolonial theoretical discussion.

Notwithstanding these political and social changes, the 1970s were blighted by the Troubles in the North, with their overspill in the South, and by poor economic performance in the Republic until, at least, the mid-1980s.[45] So, despite the positive step changes Paula's story is much more aligned with the violence and the hardship in Irish society in that period, but as seen from the standpoint of the 1990s, when the novel was written and when those issues appeared to be 'resolved'. Indeed, Paula is a product of that society and she is very clear about it:

> Where I grew up – and probably everywhere else – you were a slut or a tight bitch, one or the other, if you were a girl – and usually before you were thirteen … but it stopped when I started going with Charlo… I was Charlo's girl now and that made me respectable. (p. 45-9)

Being a woman is being made to believe you are what they define you as. Since everyone calls her a slut instilling a sense of worthlessness and objectification in her, Paula has started to believe she is indeed worthless. Being with Charlo, however, gives her a new identity. Thus, women are rendered subaltern, prisoners of social constraints created by a male-dominated society, conventions that end up being accepted by women themselves. This new identity becomes even more real when Paula and Charlo get married, with Paula thinking 'I couldn't wait to stop being Paula O'Leary, to become Paula Spencer' (p. 134). Naming is clearly linked with identity and becoming someone else. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Paula sheds a man's name, her father's, the patriarch of the household she wants to escape, to take on another's – her identity in both cases linked to men.

[43] Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essays on the Ontology of the Present*, (London: Verso, 2002), p. 25.
[44] Richard Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland*, p. 139.
[45] Kevin Hjortshøj O'Rourke, 'Independent Ireland in comparative perspective', Tom Boylan, Nicholas Canny and Mary Harris (eds.) *Ireland 1916-2016. The Promise and Challenge of National Sovereignty*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2018), pp. 56-83.

Paula is troubled by the idea of memories, the reliability of them, and reflects upon their power. This tension between real and imagined is picked up by Anne Devlin when she comments that:

> *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* deals with the vicissitudes of mind, fantasy and delusion that allowed her to remain in a violent relationship.[46]

The dichotomy of real vs imagined memories appears early on in the novel, as Paula muses over the fallibility and subjectivity of memories when she is talking about her first memory of happiness in the family home:

> It was a happy home. That's the way I remember it. Carmel doesn't remember it like that and Denise won't talk about it at all because, I think, it would mean that she'd have to take a side, mine or Carmel's' I remember lying in my cot just below the bedroom curtain that was blowing in and out over me; the curtain had flowers on it. The sun was on the wall… there were noises from downstairs, the radio and my mammy humming and putting things on the table. I was warm… That's the first thing I can remember… I think it's true. I'm not sure. (p. 6)

Paula does realise that this might be a memory she has created for herself - she later has confirmation that that first memory, that visual image that is for her the symbol of happiness, is not real, when her mother tells her that there were never flowered curtains in the house, only striped ones. In his comparative study of three contemporary novels, Linden Peach asserts that the intermittent recollections of Paula's life create 'a level of false consciousness where the reality becomes a ghost presence that haunts the text'.[47] This issue of real vs imagined memory is, as we shall see, something that is also prominent in the novels by Anne Enright which I will be discussing in later chapters – and is a direct result of those traumas enacted by personal, and by extension, national consciousness, by the past or history. Still, Paula does not want her sister Carmel to destroy her nice childhood memories, possibly because they are the only good thing she has left in her life, or perhaps because she needs a past as a platform to build her future

[46] Anne Devlin, 'Roddy Doyle's Paula Spencer is a brilliant condition-of-Ireland novel', *The Guardian*, 9 September 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/sep/09/shopping.fiction, last accessed 15 February 2021.
[47] Linden Peach, 'Limit and Transgression: Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (1996), Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* (1992) and William Trevor's *Felicia's Journey* (1994)', *The Contemporary Irish Novel: Critical Readings*, (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 169-197, p. 171.

on. Both this, and the italicised flashback sections I have been quoting from the novel, point to how Doyle is, as with Henry, reflecting on how the past is constantly re-writable and rewritten from the present, whether that be the situation contemporary to the novels' time of writing, or the kinds of history being reflected in the books. Eavan Boland has described the role of narrative as part of 'the most painful, important process' of representing Ireland's history:

> The relation between past and history - that awkward, charged, and sometimes mysterious distance - should be a crucial care of postcolonial studies. In that distance so much happens. Within that space, the ideas of shame and power and reinterpretation, which are at the heart of the postcolonial discourse, can be recovered as raw data.[48]

This is what Doyle is doing. In particular, through the association between Charlo and the political violence in the North, the domestic violence at the centre of the novel relates in lots of different ways to violent history on the island of Ireland.

The need for a past to rely on, and the role memories have in creating one, appears clear in the passage where Paula and Carmel disagree on how they remember their father, showing that they have completely different memories and perceptions of family life. So when Carmel accuses Paula of wanting to rewrite the past, as if to confirm the above observation about Doyle reflecting on the re-writability of the past, Paula's aside is that 'I'm not… rewriting history. I'm doing the opposite. I want to know the truth, not make it up.' (p. 57). So, when her sister Denise seems to agree with her that their father was, at times, nice when they were young, Paula feels a sort of validation of herself:

> I felt solid. I felt right. I'd got something right. I could trust my memory. My father was my father; my past was my past. I could start again. I could believe myself. The things that came into my head were true…Charlo had been a loving husband. I had been a good-looking woman. It hadn't always been like this… I could start again. (p. 59)

The endorsement, even partial, of one of her memories provided by her sister, shows Paula that she has not lived a whole life made up of lies and delusions, that she can rely on what she remembers, on who she is. She needs a past in order to move on into the future, as foundation for the future. She also needs to believe that she had been right about

[48] Eavan Boland, 'Daughters of Colony', *Eire-Ireland*, vol. 32, nos. 2&3, 1997, pp. 9-20, p. 13.

something, that she was not as unreliable and worthless as those around her had made herself believe to be (school, father, husband).

As mentioned, thanks to the use of first-person narration, we feel we are experiencing directly Paula's experience, something particularly chilling when it comes to the description of the violence:

> Shoulders, elbows, knees, wrists. Stitches in my mouth. Stitches on my chin. A ruptured eardrum. Burns. Cigarettes on my arms and legs. Thumped me, kicked me, pushed me, burned me… raped me. Seventeen years. He threw me into the garden. He threw me out of the attic. Fists, boots, knee, head. Bread knife, saucepan, brush. He tore out clumps of my hair. Cigarettes, lighter, ashtray. He set fire to my clothes. He locked me out and he locked me in. He hurt me and hurt me and hurt me. He killed parts of me. He killed most of me. He killed all of me. Bruised, burnt and broken. Bewitched, bothered and bewildered… There wasn't one minute when I wasn't afraid, when I wasn't waiting… He gave me a choice, left or right; I chose left and he broke the little finger on my left hand. Because I scorched one of his shirts. Because his egg was too hard. Because the toilet seat was wet… He demolished me. He destroyed me. (p. 176)

This powerful passage tells of the horror of this abusive relationship. The style in which it is written creates this horror for anyone: the fragmented account reflects Paula's physical and psychological fractures. Besides, the fragmented narrative circles back to both the non-linear nature of postcolonial writing and of subaltern histories as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis.[49] This fragmentation, however, can also be seen in terms of counterbalancing what has become a kind of petrification within Irish postcolonial theory. As we have seen in the Introduction, theorists such as Kiberd and Gibbons, or even those associated with Field Day, do not engage with issues of gender and class, beyond mentioning them in passing. They talk about the nation as a single entity. In this respect, despite concepts such as disjunction, hybridity and diversity being seen as markers of the postcolonial condition as tools of resistance, some of the theory presents a homogeneous view of the nation and Irishness – it is as if the Irish nation and its subjects, including women, were describable in a linear way.[50] The fiction, on the other

[49] Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation*, p. 23; Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 3. For more about the non-linear nature of subaltern histories see David Ludden, *Reading Subaltern Histories*; pp. 1-39; Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography'; Gyan Prakash, 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism'; Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, pp. 126-133.

[50] On hybridity, diversity and disjunction as decolonising tools, especially in an Irish context, see Gerry Smyth, *Decolonisation and Criticism. The Construction of Irish Literature*, pp. 10-34.

hand, by the very nature of its structure, dramatizes the actual, much more fragmented and heterogeneous picture.

There is a sort of paralysis enveloping Paula, something that reminds us of Joyce – the paralysis, the violence, the stifling social conventions. For example, Paula standing

> at the front door so many times. I opened the door. I stepped out, into the garden… never further. I changed my mind (p. 206)

reminds us of Eveline's inability to escape her suffocating life in the eponymous story in *Dubliners*. There is the same sort of domestic boundary, represented in this case by the 'Door', the image which is present throughout the novel as the threshold between the hidden domestic life and outside perceptions of it, the domestic space which traps both Paula and Eveline. The sense is of not being able to bring oneself to escape, the I want to/but don't want to, the sense of guilt. It is not even that Paula has not got the courage as such – she is 'so depressed that… [she] didn't even realise there was a door there' (p. 212). The sense of paralysis is absolute.

Only, unlike Eveline, in *The Woman Who Walks Into Doors* Paula finds such transitions literally and physically impossible; she marries Charlo and we suspect she does it, partly, to escape the stigma of social conventions and a less than perfect parental home. When talking about getting engaged to Charlo, Paula recollects:

> I wasn't pregnant… it was love. Love and my father. He didn't want us to go with each other… so we got engaged. To spite him. (p. 129)

The impression that marriage was an escape is confirmed a few pages later:

> I was happy. We were both happy. Both of us dying to get out of our houses and into our own. (p. 132)

The wish to escape the parental house through marriage might explain why Paula sees in Charlo exactly what she wants to see:

> He wasn't gorgeous. There was never anything gorgeous about him… [but] I had my identikit of him before I ever saw him; a brown-eyed ride with scars and a record and his mickey thrown over his shoulder. That was how I saw him and that was exactly what I got. (pp. 21-3)

It is true that she realises all this in hindsight, after her experience of his violence makes her re-examine some details and see them in a new light. However, she admits that she saw him according to an image she had built in her head. She saw what she wanted to see – to escape a life she did not like, a home she did not want to be in, to find 'respectability' through being someone's girl. We also get a feeling Paula might have unconsciously pressed a self-destruct button as a consequence of a lack of self-esteem instilled into her since childhood. Besides another glimpse of the typical Joycean paralysis, there is also a hint here that Paula's mother is a victim of violence as well, perhaps not physical but nonetheless violence. We see patterns repeating themselves generation after generation, especially when it comes to gender divisions. There is a clear visual image in the novel of such divisions when, talking about watching the Spencer family at her wedding, Paula says that she could see two distinct groups: 'the women with the women and the men with the men' (p. 139). The repetition of patterns is the same we saw in the trilogy and will see again in Anne Enright. These patterns might mirror the monochrome and inflexible colonial patterns of linear narratives replicated by newly independent nations.[51]

There are patterns repeating themselves in the male world as well:

> It wasn't just [her mother]. He [her father] was different too. He'd become a bitter little pill and a bully. He made rules now just to make us obey them, just to catch us out… I didn't fully realise then that Charlo… and my father were very alike. (pp. 120-1)

The realisation that both men liked to see things done their way dawns on Paula early on, although, at the time, she prefers to see it in a positive light:

> Daddy made sure that we divided them fairly… that was the type of thing Charlo loved doing as well, playing with the kids like that. (p. 12).

Rather than playing with the kids, this seems to convey the impression that both men liked to impose some sort of order from above. There is, however, hope for change: in *Paula Spencer*, Nicola, Paula's eldest, unlike Paula herself, 'is in control. Nicola can manage. Nicola is much, much more than she's supposed to be' (p. 131). This change and

[51] On how state-formation nationalisms run the risk of replicating the colonial-type narratives, also in relation to early Irish post-independence nationalism, see Edward W. Said, *Culture And Imperialism*, (London: Vintage, 1994), p. xix, p. 276, p. 330, p. 401.

sense of hope at the individual level are a reflection of the socio-political changes which take place between Doyle's two Paula novels.

The Woman Who Walked Into Doors is a journey into Paula's mind, a journey of self-discovery post-Charlo but still in the middle of her alcohol dependency. Her trajectory is punctuated by constant self-analysing, self-doubting, trying to remember and, sometimes, acknowledging that 'I believe everything I remember' (p. 195); or 'I wish I could remember it all; it doesn't matter. I could make it up and it would still be true' (p. 179). While reflecting on her thoughts, analysing and questioning them, Paula's non-linear text might be confusing at times. As Doyle claims, 'One of the problems [Paula] has is sorting out memories, deciding what are real and what are fiction'[52]. The lines between what is real and what is imagined might be blurred due to the drink, or the violence, or linked to a state of denial of the horrendous situation she's in. We do not know for sure.[53]

According to Conor Carville 'the concepts of trauma and the wound have emerged in recent years as a means of providing identity and community'.[54] As extensively discussed in Trauma theory, such experiences sometimes appear in the form of flashbacks, through the recurrence of disrupted memories.[55] The close reading of these flashbacks to Paula's childhood and youth disclose how her problematic life does not exclusively derive from her marriage with Charlo but started in childhood. Carville again stresses, in respect of Ireland and other formerly-colonised spaces, the 'significance of childhood ordeal in the formation of adult identity'.[56] So, if we accept that, as argued earlier, the individual and the collective overlap, individual childhood trauma becomes a metaphor for the nation's traumatic past which still has a bearing on its present identity.

Paula switches between 'I' and 'she' when talking about herself in the novel: it is as if she is dissociating from her own self to study herself more objectively. Her perceptions switch constantly 'I do… I don't…' as if fogged by alcohol and violence, but

[52] Niam McArdle, 'An Interview with Roddy Doyle', *New Orleans Review*, vol. 21, no. 3-4, 1995, pp. 112-7, p. 114.
[53] There are loose ends in Enright as well. There is also a parallel with some of Enright's characters, especially Veronica in *The Gathering*, in that what characterizes Paula's story is her trauma. Paula's non-linear, fragmentary narrative reflects the impact of her traumatic experience. Reflections such as 'I wish I could remember it all; it doesn't matter. I could make it up and it would still be true' (p. 179) or: 'It's all a mess – there's no order or sequence. I have dates, a beginning and an end, but the years in between won't fall into place' (p. 203) join Paula's experience and consciousness to that of Veronica in *The Gathering* or Gina in *The Forgotten Waltz*, for example.
[54] Conor Carville, *The Ends of Ireland*, p. 30.
[55] For more details on trauma theory and art, see for example, Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995); Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question,* (London, New York: Routledge; 2008); Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).
[56] Conor Carville, *The Ends of Ireland*, p. 24.

it is also as if she is constantly interpreting herself, reading herself, analysing. To add an extra layer, Paula's questioning herself has also the purpose to warn the reader that this is her testimony and that, possibly, words and the written medium are not enough to represent the complexity of her experience:

> Do I actually remember that? Is that exactly how it happened? Did my hair *rip*? Did my back *scream*?... which time was that anyway? I don't know. How can I separate one time from the lot and describe it? I want to be honest. How can I be sure?... seventeen years of being hit and kicked. How can I tell?... How can I remember one time? When did it happen? What date?... I'm messing around here. Making things up; a story. I'm beginning to enjoy it. Hair *rips*. Why don't I just say he pulled my hair? (pp. 184-5)

Storytelling is seen as a way of putting a distance between her and the violence, of cushioning it. The interplay between 'I' and 'she' might be a sign of this attempt to put a distance between herself now and herself back then. However, storytelling is also a way of establishing herself, gaining visibility and an identity. The writing is making her visible. Gerry Smyth reflects that 'In all these ways, the text draws attention to itself, to its textuality, to its status as a written document' concluding that:

> Doyle's introduction of a metadiscursive aspect here is a way of defamiliarizing the narrative… to highlight the issues of authority and responsibility which are the actual themes of the novel.[57]

It is true that the text draws attention to itself: the splitting of the I/she, the use of italics, the broken sentences make it a text that is both what feels like an outpouring of unmediated confession but also a literary construct. However, part of the reason why it draws attention to itself is to draw attention to Paula's voice and story, a voice and story that have possibly been missing from previous (non-fictional) records. Rather than issues of authority and responsibility, the metanarrative aspect seems to be drawing attention to Paula's rising to the role of literal maker of her own story – the narrative is her way of becoming visible. It also draws attention to the potential limitation of narrative and fiction, which makes us wonder whether Doyle is questioning his own narrative and the ability of fiction of telling the whole 'story'. However, it is as if Doyle is trying to create

[57] Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and The Nation*, p. 87.

an exciting, surprising narrative and uses different perspectives within the same person to this effect.[58]

The Woman Who Walked Into Doors is not about an abstract female experience, but it is the experience of one woman, Paula Spencer: she is a victim without being flawless; she inhabits the complexity of her mind and history; she acts, in the end, to ensure a better future for her children, and for herself. In this novel Doyle – without any hints of moral judgement or otherwise – shows the inner life of this abused cleaner to be cut from the same cloth as that of the heroes of great novels. Themes familiar from the perspective of postcolonial theory, such as memory, language, the struggle to understand and name oneself, to separate the true history from the false one: these are the tasks that fall on Paula's shoulders and, in the end, 'she manages; she's a survivor.' (p. 43). But Doyle's writing here challenges some of the constraints around that theory as regards class and gender, to offer a very different reading of former iconographies, in which Ireland is figured as female, 'pure', ideal. Paula literally suffers the marks of the brutal historical inheritance from which Ireland, across the time of this fiction and of its writing, was only beginning to emerge.

III.3 *Paula Spencer*

Paula Spencer, the sequel to *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, was published ten years after that first novel. The time lapse is reflected in the story: Paula is forty-seven, nearly forty-eight, so ten years older than the first instalment. Incidentally, Paula's given age mirrors Doyle's age in both cases at the time when both novels were published, making the reader wonder whether Paula is, in a way, Doyle's alter ego, growing up during the same period as he did, but representing much more than he does the violence the country was going through. This second novel details a year in Paula's life, but still goes back to her recovery process after she has thrown Charlo, her husband, out of the house and his death. Unlike the more generic title of *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, which can be seen as a clue that the female protagonist in that novel lacks a self-defined identity, the title of its sequel tells the reader that this second book is firmly centred around Paula's journey to find herself and indeed become Paula Spencer. This is

[58] See Beckett's dramatic monologue *Not I* which explores a crisis by a female narrator who constantly weighs up the 'Not I' of the title and speaks in the third person. Like in the case of Paula, the narrator has suffered a traumatic experience, indeed so traumatic 'that she cannot accept it; she must insist that it has happened to somebody else. Hence the title, *Not I*', Alec Reid, 'Beckett at Eighty: A Trinity Tribute', *Hermathena*, vol. 141, 1986, pp. 12-21, p. 16. We can infer that the switch in pronouns Paula uses to refer to herself serve a similar purpose. However, while in *Not I* 'The only dramatic development is a shift from movement to immobility, reaction to impassivity', Alec Reid, 'Beckett at Eighty', p. 14, Paula's trajectory goes the opposite way.

highlighted at the outset of the novel when the narrator remarks: 'Paula Spencer. That's who she is' (p. 2).[59] The book is a chronicle of Paula's recovery from abused wife and alcoholic housewife to independent woman, both financially and from addiction, during the first few years of the Celtic Tiger. The fact that the story develops over a year in Paula's life has inevitably prompted some critics to draw a parallel with (single-day) Joyce's *Ulysses*.[60]

As the quotation from the start of the book indicates, unlike the first-person narration of *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, in *Paula Spencer* Doyle switches to third-person narration, as though placing his character in history now – although he retains some instances of free indirect speech, which make readers feel again as if they were witnessing Paula's thoughts. This is the case, for example, with Paula's train of thoughts triggered by some finger-food at her sister's Carmel's:

> She loads her plate… she loves this stuff. She can taste it. She promises herself – she did before but she forgot – she'll get some of this for a Friday night, herself and Jack. Leanne. And a video. Jack says that videos are on their way out. There'll soon be none to rent or buy. So that's another thing on her list, between Coat and Year off… A DVD player. (pp. 149-50)

The complex shifts of perspective then act as a kind of exterior/interior history in which Paula's inner reality is pitched against the reality of her situation across this year in Ireland.

Doyle explains his shift from first to third person by saying that he wanted to 'distance [himself] from the first book… [and] write alongside it.'[61] However, this switch in narrative perspective can also be seen as a symptom of what we mentioned in the Introduction, namely the flexibility of fiction and narrative techniques to adapt to specific subject matter, content or historical and social changes. In the first novel, Doyle uses the first person to drop us deep into Paula's mind, to make us live Paula's fantasies and delusions. It is the only way to make us witness how and why she remains in such a horrific relationship for seventeen years and to make the reader empathise with a

[59] Stating her name as a form of identity definition reminds the reader of *A Star Called Henry*, or indeed the whole *The Last Roundup* trilogy, where the protagonist often repeated to himself 'My name is Henry Smart', as if by repeating his name he is stressing his identity. Naming, or re-naming, and identity go hand in hand.

[60] Jennifer Jeffers notes that Doyle 'maps a year in the life of twenty-first century Paula' just like Joyce mapped a day in Leopold Bloom's life at the beginning of the twentieth-century, Jennifer Jeffers, "'What's it like being Irish?" The Return of the Repressed in Roddy Doyle's *Paula Spencer*', p. 264.

[61] Caramine White, *Reading More of Roddy Doyle*, (Dublin: Glasnevin, 2012), p. 246.

character who is not flawless. In the second novel the third-person narration, interspersed with free indirect speech, serves the purpose of analysing her recovery, from alcohol and from abuse, 'from the outside', whilst still giving us access to what it means being Paula. The narrator is putting on paper, in a more orderly way, Paula's feelings and perceptions to reflect her quest for more order in her life and ultimate success in this regard.

The third-person narrative also serves to allow for the historical aspect of Doyle's approach here. As mentioned, the Celtic Tiger is seen in the book through Paula's eyes and through its representative impact on Paula's life, in that it allows her to become financially independent. During the course of the novel we see Paula going from barely managing, financially, to having more money and being able to afford food regularly and other 'luxuries' such as a stereo and a computer for her son. Towards the end of the novel, her income is steadier and she does not worry as much about running out of money or not being able to afford food. This new-found financial security goes hand in hand with a development in Paula – from someone who could not pluck the courage to go into a coffee shop, to someone who starts dating again; from someone paralysed by guilt, that key aspect of trauma acknowledged at the national level by Boland, to someone who starts living again despite the sense of guilt. She manages – finances, guilt, the past – and she moves on. She also manages her loneliness: the story is resolving, both for herself and for the nation.

As we have seen, already in *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* Paula was a lonely character who, after separating from Charlo, starts her journey to 'belong' again. She is terrified and hiding from the outside world, all her energies spent trying to survive: 'I hid. I hid the pain, the bruises and the poverty. The front door stayed shut… a knock on the door terrified me' (p. 205). The door which symbolises the violence she is a victim of, and the lie and isolation she lives in, is also a symbol of the barrier between herself and the society to which she is invisible. This sense of loneliness is persistent but not as pervasive as in the first novel. In *Paula Spencer*, when we first see her, Paula 'sometimes… wakes up, knowing the one thing. She's alone' (p. 1). It is interesting to see the use of the word 'sometimes' – it means that Paula has developed a deeper sense of belonging and connection than she had before. That this sense of belonging, of being part of something gives her pleasure is clear in Paula's account of her journey into work with her colleagues:

> There's a gang of us; we take up half a carriage. We make more noise than the kids coming home from school… I nearly cried I was so happy. I felt close and even wanted. Just for as long as the trip into town. (pp. 104-5)

Paula is now seeing her sisters regularly for catch-ups, going for coffees with her son and chatting up a man at the bottle bank. It looks like, albeit slowly, Paula is building a network around her.[62] Although she does not know what the future has in store for her, she is nonetheless ready to face it. Having her own money means more than financial independence to Paula:

> She'd like that. A bank account. She never had one… she'll never get over the terror of having no money, the prison of having nothing… going five days before the next hope of a hand-out from Charlo. A present… that's what the fucker had called it. (p. 52)

Her own money means independence as a human being. This is because not having financial independence was a huge contributor to her having to stay in an abusive relationship.[63] The passage where Paula is about to play a CD she has just bought on her brand new hi-fi system shows what the ability to buy her own things means to her:

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[62] The themes of loneliness, of belonging, of the 'gang' and 'being in', of companionship, feeling you are part of something are recurrent in Roddy Doyle. For example, Jimmy Rabbitte Jr in *The Commitments*, who strives to find a sense of belonging and companionship by forming a band; or Jimmy Rabbitte Sr. in *The Van*; or Paddy Clarke who recollects 'we liked gangs, the numbers… being in', Roddy Doyle, *Paddy Clarke* p. 251. Even the action of the protagonist of Doyle's latest novel, *Smile*, are partly motivated, as Doyle himself remarks, by his 'wish to have friends… *The Commitments* is a group psychology, again the "gang" thing, and it's in *Paddy Clarke* as well, and of course it's in *A Star Called Henry*, the GPO and that sort of thing, how people react in a group and how people find their place in a group, if they are lucky', Genoveffa Giambona, 'The rhythm of the city', p. 261. It is interesting that, when he was younger, Doyle used to think 'that men coped better than women as they got older, that women had to sacrifice their pasts much more readily… But as I get older and the country changes, I don't think that's the case anymore. I think women are much better [than men] at creating opportunities to meet', 'The Rhythm of the City', p. 261. Doyle appears to make the specific equation that I was talking about on p. 25 of a juxtaposition between himself as a male and Paula as female. Unlike men, it appears that, as woman, Paula embodies this idea of successfully re-imagining her life, or on the way to successfully doing so despite her daily struggles and her past.

[63] For a discussion of gender poverty in Ireland see Michael Pierse, *Writing Ireland's Working Class*, pp. 115-6. One of the causes that led to women's financial dependence on men was the introduction in 1936 of the Conditions of Employment Act whose most controversial clauses related to women. Specifically, it limited women's access to factory work. These clauses were created in response to criticism that women were getting the majority of the new jobs that had been created in manufacturing, which was contrary to the idea of the male as the primary breadwinner - a view widely endorsed by government ministers, trade unions, and the Catholic Church, then crystallised in the 1937 Constitution. The Act, de facto, excluded married women from public and teaching jobs. In addition, women were not protected by family law and this turned to be a particular disadvantage for those on low or no income such as working-class women. The consequence was that marriage became the only way to survive and, at the same time, a trap. Moreover, women's subaltern status in both society and the home, was made worse by the state tolerance of domestic violence. This is quite clear when we see that the victims of domestic violence had very few rights until, at least, the mid-1970s, see Joan McKiernan and Monica McWilliams, 'Women, Religion and Violence in the

> It's not the first time she's handled a CD. But it feels that way. Maybe it's just ownership. She bought this disc. She bought the player. She worked for these things. For herself. (p. 191)

The need for such self-reassurance echoes the fact that rigidly-gendered roles can be seen as having their roots in Ireland's colonial past, with some scholars actually identifying the oppression of women in Ireland as part of a typical postcolonial gender ideology.[64] Given that colonial powers characterise the colonised as weak, passive and needing guidance, attributes that are seen as stereotypically 'feminine', it was common that, after Independence, the formerly subject-country aspired to be seen as possessing masculine attributes. The outcome is that in postcolonial nations, sometimes long after independence, strict gender roles are imposed 'in order to assert the masculinity and right to power of the (male) subject.'[65]

It is notable that Doyle keeps some of these gender issues alive when writing of the new millennium. In *Paula Spencer*, however, he also shows that change is happening, albeit slowly and painfully. Nicola, Paula's eldest, for example, is a successful businesswoman who can afford to 'fling a bit of money around' (p. 3):

> That's the most amazing thing about Nicola… Nicola is in control. Nicola can manage. Nicola is much, much more than she's supposed to be. Paula adores her… Nicola knows all about taking care. She's been looking after them all for years. They hate her for it… she's had her problems and they haven't cared. (p. 131)

Unlike Paula, or even Charlo who 'was never in control' (p. 108), Nicola has taken control of her life, presumably thanks to the fact that she has her own income and she is 'making something of herself. More than Paula ever did' (p. 32). However, this implies that she also has problems which no one seems to care about. In a way, she is as invisible as Paula had been.

In these novels as well as in the Enright novels which we will discuss later, the writer seems to respond to social and historical events happening or which have led to the

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Family', in Anne Byrne and Madeline Leonard (eds.) *Women and Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*, (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1997), pp. 327-341.

[64] See, for example, Maryann Valiulis, 'Power, Gender and Identity in the Irish Free State', pp. 117-136; Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*; Smyth, Gerry, *The Novel and The Nation*; Michael Pierse, *Writing Ireland's Working Class*.

[65] Gerardine Meaney, *Sex and Nation*, p. 7.

kind of society and social rules they experience around them. This novel traces not just the changing habits in a country becoming prosperous, as Rita, Paula's neighbour, remarks, but also visual changes in the cityscape:

> It's the first thing I noticed… the first sign the country was changing… the clothes shops for kids… they were the proof… people had more money than they needed. It's great… the talk about house prices. Even all the cranes. (p. 166)

The newfound economic prosperity in late twentieth-century Ireland also meant that the country shifted from identity as a place of emigrants to a place that attracted economic migrants. [66] From the beginning, this change in society is seen through Paula's consciousness:

> It's changing, the whole place. One of the old shops is a café now… an Italian place, real Italians in it. Not chipper Italians. (p. 12) [67]

There are EU citizens taking their chance to move and work in another nation. Also, as mentioned above, we see that the face of the city is visually changing:

> Finnegan's Wake. It's the local. Someone bought it a year ago. And the new name went up… The whole area has changed. She's been here since the beginning. It was a farm a few months before they moved in. It was all young families, kids all over the place. Out in the middle of nowhere… no proper shops, no pub. No church or schools. Nothing but the houses and the people… It had been great back then. It had been so simple. But that's just rubbish. She knows. It hadn't been great. It had never been great. (p. 16-7)

Besides depicting the changing face of a community, this passage also hints at the trap of thinking that the past is better. However, Paula does not fall into it: her past is too bad for her to idealise it. The name of the pub cannot go unnoticed either as it recalls both Joyce's

[66] See footnote 75 in Chapter 2.

[67] Doyle has stated that, '[t]he whole idea was to embrace the new changes in Ireland creatively, rather than see them as statistics', see Jody Allen-Randolph, *Close to the Next Moment: Interviews from a Changing Ireland*, (Manchester: Carcanet, 2010) p. 147. Again, Doyle sees Paula as 'a great guide through the changes', see Emily Firetog and Roddy Doyle, 'Roddy Doyle Interview', p. 78. Indeed, various commentators have mentioned Doyle's ability to describe the Celtic Tiger atmosphere of the city from Paula's perspective. See for example, Euan Ferguson, 'Love on the Wagon: Roddy Doyle's Lush Go Sober in an Intoxicating Sequel. Review of *Paula Spencer*'. *The Observer*, 03 September 2006; Pauline Hall, 'Review of Roddy Doyle's *Paula Spencer'*, *Estudios Irlandeses: Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 3, 2008, pp. 197-198.

experimental masterpiece and the exhortation to Irish people to acquire consciousness of themselves and their situation, something that Paula is striving to do. Moreover, if we see Paula as representing marginalised and subaltern womanhood in Irish society, her journey to find her own consciousness and to have her own voice heard becomes symbolic of how Colin Graham sees the subaltern as

> a cross-hatched collection of discourses in which the subcategories of the subaltern are not given a fixed or over-determined status.[68]

So, throughout the novel, we see through Paula's eyes the shifts made in her own consciousness through contemporary social changes and historical events, especially relating to immigration. As the narrator notes, although supermarkets are managed by the same people, there are now Africans on the check-outs:

> There's an African woman on the check-out… what would Charlo think? She wonders. What would he have said about it? Charlo was her husband. He died before all these people started arriving. Before the Celtic Tiger thing. She smiles at the African woman. the woman smiles back… it's funny, she doesn't know if he was a racist or not. She hasn't a clue. She'd know these days quickly enough. They're all over the place, the foreigners, the black people. Is that racist? They're all over the place. She doesn't know. She means no harm… she likes looking at all the foreigners. Some of them scare her a bit. The Romanians, the women. They're a bit frightening… but most of them are grand. (p. 25-6)

Paula is empathetic towards the newcomers: just as Henry naturally gels with members of other subaltern and marginalised groups, Paula appears to do the same. However, she channels potentially ambiguous attitudes on immigration through Charlo and how he might have felt about them. She does not know whether Charlo would have been a racist because there were no 'foreigners' when he was alive: the narrator gives us, in the space of a sentence, a snapshot of a rapidly changing society. Also, by focusing on 'she', the narrator might imply that indeed Charlo would have been a racist. However, the focus on 'she' also means that Doyle sees the female figure and these changes in society as intertwined – just like society, Paula is changing, going from battered and lost human

[68] Colin Graham, 'Subalternity and Gender: Problems of Postcolonial Irishness', p. 158.

being to rebuilding herself and her consciousness. At the end of the novel, there are new social possibilities both for her and for Ireland.

There is another layer to the relationship between Paula and the migrants. Paula, who, as we saw earlier, has been an 'invisible' presence in Irish society, dispossessed as 'She's been left behind… she was never in front' (p. 56), identifies with the migrants through their shared hard-working conditions. The novel groups Paula and the newcomers together, even physically:

> She's the only white woman in the van. What would she think if she was outside and the van was passing her now? She doesn't know. She wouldn't make much of it. Just that. The van is full of women and only one is white… She's a failure. She shouldn't be in this van. She should be outside, looking at it going by… Irishwomen don't do this work. Only Paula. That's not true. There's plenty do what she does. Going to work is never failure. Earning the money for her son's computer isn't failure. The money comes from nowhere else. (p. 56)

Unlike other working-class people who have become middle-class in the wake of the Celtic Tiger, Paula's financial status has been 'left behind' since she started behind everyone else, from nothing, just like the economic migrants who have moved to Ireland and started from scratch. It is worth noting the fact that in the above the focus is on women first and foremost, ethnicity comes second. Moreover, this passage highlights the dichotomy between social stereotypes about cleaning being humble work and what Paula believes. Again, Paula seems to be shaking socially imposed beliefs off, impositions that started when she was a young girl.[69] By showing us what is happening through Paula's eyes, Doyle is showing us change whilst it is happening, both socially and individually.[70]

The gender focus is present again when Paula muses over the shift in the division of labour which traditionally used to see women doing cleaning work:

[69] See, for example, the ones about how women should behave, such sitting on the wall/not sitting on the wall passage discussed in the section on *The Woman Who walked Into Doors*.

[70] The topic of immigration and its impact on social relations in Ireland must have been at the fore of Doyle's mind at the time. When he published *Paula Spencer*, he was also writing for short stories for *Metro Éireann*, a multicultural paper aimed at Ireland's immigrant population. The stories, which explored migrants' experiences, the changing meaning of Irishness and the complex relation between race and nation in an Ireland whose population is changing rapidly due to immigration, were published in 2007 under the title *The Deportees and Other Stories*. For a detailed discussion of the stories see Maureen T. Reddy, '"Reading and Writing Race in Ireland: Roddy Doyle and "Metro Eireann"', *Irish University Review*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2005, pp. 374-388.

> That's another big change, maybe the biggest. The men doing the cleaning work. Nigerians and Romanians. She's not sure if they're legal… She feels sorry for them. It's not work for a man; she'll never think different. The African lads come in dressed like… businessmen and doctors. They change into their work clothes and back into their suits before they go home. Ashamed… But everyone starts at the bottom, she supposes. But that's not true either… there's nothing fair about the way things work. She didn't start at the bottom. It was hard work getting there. (pp. 39-40)

To Paula, men doing the cleaning is the biggest change of them all. She is not overly bothered by the change in Irish society brought about by multiculturalism, but she will never get used to a man doing cleaning work. This gives an idea of how deep-rooted notions around the division of roles were in Irish society, more deep-rooted than notions about race as here Paula accepts a multiracial society rather than seeing a man doing a cleaning job. It is worth remembering that such a gendered view grew out of the gendered representation of the nation. Additionally, it is interesting to see how in such an unequal situation, where getting to the 'bottom' was already seen as hard work, there is a juxtaposition between Paula and the migrants – both working class, both dispossessed, both marginalised and out of their comfort zone. Moreover, just as Paula hides her drinking problem and her past, the male migrant workers try and hide their real jobs. They are both living hidden realities.

Both are motivated, in doing so, by social class and gender stereotyping. As Jennifer Jeffers observes, Paula 'is a subordinate' similar to the economic migrants who want to start a new life in prosperous Ireland.[71] Besides, Paula, a north Dubliner, as Doyle has remarked in another of his novels, is also an 'other' among her own.[72] It seems that, in *Paula Spencer*, the juxtaposition between North Dublin and Third World makes a reappearance, confirming a reading of Paula as 'other'.[73] Paula is then a subaltern both in terms of class and gender, doubly colonised in terms of social norms around class and gender. Similarly to Henry who finds a sense of belonging among the 'othered' African-American Chicago community, Paula is 'othered' both as a woman and as working-class,

[71] Jennifer Jeffers, "'What's it like being Irish?" The Return of the Repressed in Roddy Doyle's *Paula Spencer*', p. 266.
[72] Roddy Doyle, *The Commitments*, p. 13.
[73] To confirm that the juxtaposition between Dublin and the third world was not casual, in my interview with him, Doyle remarked that, at the time of writing *The Commitments* in 1986, 'Dublin… had a third of the population of the country. That's not a western model, so to speak, that's a third world model, like Mexico City, or Lagos. It's not what you'd expect in a modern country.' Genoveffa Giambona, 'The rhythm of the city', p. 258.

and in this closer to the marginalised economic migrants than to idealised constructions of gender and the nation.

Although in the first novel we are told that Paula is an alcoholic, the main focus of the story is on the violence she is subjected to. Here the focus switches onto her drinking problem. This is perhaps because in the first book the drinking was seen as a by-product of the abuse. Now, with Charlo gone, her main daily struggle is to keep away from the drink if she wants to re-build her life, to re-possess it and re-imagine it. Although the temptation is always there, the reader knows that she will not go back to it. In both *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* and *Paula Spencer*, women are seen as coping better than men – with the past, with illness, with relationships. They more readily re-invent themselves, as in the case of Paula but also, for example, her sister Denise who decides she has had enough of her uneventful life and plain existence so bags herself a lover and changes her looks:

> [Paula] looks again at Denise's ankle, at the little silver chain that's hanging around it. There's something shocking about it, and blatant. And high-heels, in her sister's back garden. Paula's jealous… she'd love to see that chain on her own ankle, and a man's hand on it. (p. 216)

Besides noticing that the reader is again plunged in the midst of Paula's free-flowing thoughts, taken back to her typical daydreaming, it is also worth noting that Denise is characterised as, and envied for, being shocking and blatant, rather than modest and homely: sign of the changing representation of women.

In the novel, women overall are resilient: Carmel and her mastectomy, Nicola and her carer role, Paula winning a daily struggle to rebuild herself despite her past. By contrast, Charlo a bully, is the image of pathetic maleness and idiocy which all seem to be embodied in the way he dies – trying to get a quick getaway by car but forgetting he cannot drive. All of Charlo's negative qualities seem to be encapsulated in the hollow way he seemed to support the hunger strikers in the North:

> Her husband loved all that hunger strike stuff. The black armbands, the armed struggle. He was going to march, support the hunger-strikers. But he never did… he stood still in the kitchen, a minute's silence, after one of the strikers died. They all stood… a few hours after Paula had wiped her own blood off the kitchen floor. (p. 14)

Charlo seems to embody Ireland's past, its repeated violence, its male meaninglessness. But, through Paula, the narrative moves us away from all that. Although Paula literally carries the violence in her past with her wherever she goes:

> A tap, on her nerve. It's there. A claw… Everything is hopping. Everything is sweating. Every hole and dent. Every thump and kick. All of Paula's past in her back. It's there, ready, breathing. One last kick from a man who died twelve years ago. (p. 247)

As a victim of violence, she cannot support violence, the morbid glorification of it, as Charlo did at a safe remove, and although she literally carries the past around, she wants to move on from it:

> She had a bowl ready, the nicest bowl… yellow with blue around the rim… she remembered buying them, in the basement of Roche's Stores… in a box with a plastic window that showed you the top plate… Charlo carried it home… [but] the woman bringing the soup to Leanne, holding the bowl in front of her, not shaking – the woman was the point [not the object]… that was Paula. (p. 100)

However, although things in the present remind her of her past, she knows that the important thing for her future is to focus on who she is now, on who she wants to become. Even when you hate someone, you can still move on:

> Hate's something you don't come back from. That's the way she sees it. You don't slip in and out of it. It builds up. You cross some sort of line. It's permanent… there's Charlo. She hated him. Her body is a map of his abuse… but it seems like a different world, and different people – all that happened then. It's the same house… she thinks back – she doesn't have to – she sees herself, lying on the kitchen floor… she could… go over to the exact spot where she lay after Charlo had given her a hiding. She could lie down and put her legs and arms in the right places, as if her outline had been chalked on the carpet. She could do that now, and she'd feel nothing… maybe it's the way the brain works to protect itself. It invents a new woman who can look back and wonder, instead of look back and howl. (p. 135)

Moving on does not mean forgetting, it means not feeling the same pain any longer, learning and focusing on your new life. Still, notwithstanding the past, moving on from one's past and condition is definitely possible.

There seems to be an interesting theoretical point to make here. Some of the theory on the subaltern, which we have established Paula stands for, seems to imply an element of fixed, immutable status that is cut off from potential change or mobility.[74] On the contrary, the fiction is mapping the way that, alongside history, change can and indeed does happen. Just as the country moves further away from its colonial past, Paula is moving away from her disempowered status – she has found her voice, her economic independence, and a group of people she feels part of. Elements remain and resurface, and a re-processing of the past is inevitable, after which Paula's condition is firmly future-looking.

Right from the start, the narrator has signposted that Paula has come to terms with her past by telling the reader that 'You cannot leave things behind. They come with you. You can manage' (p. 12). The rest of the novel is about how Paula succeeds in managing, about the self-renewal process she embarks on where she learns to accept her past and her mistakes as an inextricable part of who she is. That does not mean that all is transformed: the sense of guilt is still there from time to time, she still has moments when she thinks that 'she hates herself. It's true. She's shit. She's useless. Fuck that. She can beat it away' (p. 273). However, she can manage and cope much better. The main difference is that whilst in the past 'she wanted walls between her… and Charlo and the rest of the world. Now she doesn't care. She isn't interested in hiding' (p. 38). It is this new Paula who does not hide who, when she meets Joe, the first man after Charlo she really sees herself as starting a new relationship with, she tells him straight away that she is a former alcoholic. Paula does not deny her past because she does not believe it defines her as the person she is now, a sign of a new-found confidence in a woman who has decided she will no longer hide behind a door, metaphorically or literally.

Although it is not explicitly stated, *Paula Spencer* ends at around the same time the IRA's historic decommissioning process is complete: like Paula, this is a country slowly recovering and learning to reimagine the self. At one point in *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, reflecting about music, Paula muses that:

> I missed the 80s. I haven't a clue. It's just a mush. I hear a song on the radio from the 60s and the 70s and I can remember something that had happened to me… what did I do in

[74] See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Foreword', Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (eds.), *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) pp. xv- xxii; also, 'Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular', *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2005, pp. 475- 486. Colin Graham does critique this concept of the subaltern as so disempowered that nothing can change their status in *Deconstructing Ireland*, p. 110.

> the 80s? I walked into doors. I got up off the floor. I became an alcoholic. I discovered that I was poor, that I'd no right to the hope I'd started out with… trapped in a house that would never be mine. (pp. 203-4)

If we accept that, in the novels, Doyle is juxtaposing Paula and Ireland, we can almost see how, together with Paula, after the hope and promises of change of the sixties and the seventies, the nation suffers the disillusionment of the eighties. This interpretation is not far-fetched when we read that:

> By the early to mid-80s, Ireland faced the prospect of revisiting the dog days of pre-Lemassian impoverishment. Hamstrung by a national debt that by 1986 stood at IR£22 billion and an unemployment figure that stood at 17 per cent, the entire viability of the Irish nation-state was not beyond question.[75]

This juxtaposition continues in *Paula Spencer*, with both Paula and Ireland rising from the ashes but still needing to confront their past and a present that takes them out of their comfort zone.

In writing about Paula, Doyle continues his efforts to expose the need of the Irish nation to grow up, to mind its children, all of its children. Both Paula and Ireland need to take on responsibility for their children because they are 'their [the children's] future. That was what they saw. The grown-up world. Violence, fat and an empty fridge' (p. 204).[76] However, when the mother country fails in its duties, it is the daughters and the sisters who step in – as Paula herself, who is spurred to change by

> the sight of [her children] one day. One Saturday morning. She walked into the sitting room. Nicola was trying to change Jack's nappy. Really, he was too old for it… Nicola was crying. She couldn't do it. she was sixteen. (p. 213)

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[75] Eóin Flannery, *Colum McCann and the Aesthetics of Redemption*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011), pp. 22-3.

[76] In parallel with depiction of domestic violence, there are several references to political unrest in Ireland in *Paula Spencer* especially, with sentences peppered here and there in the text which give an instant snapshot. In *The Woman Who walked Into Doors* there are references to Charlo being 'big into the H Blocks. He knew all the names, how many days they'd gone without food; he was an expert. He'd have loved to have been in there with them… he still ate like a pig… and drank like one' (p. 180); or other references to contemporary political events such as 'The Royston fella's in trouble. They're talking about it on the News. Something he said about his da being abducted by the loyalist terrorists' (p. 13): Doyle is here referring to Cll Royston Brady, Lord Mayor of Dublin at the time, and to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings which had taken place on 17 May 1974.

As Nicola did in *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* when she helped care for her siblings and, in the end, helped Paula literally throw Charlo out of the house, through the front door; so do the sisters of Robert McCartney in *Paula Spencer*; as does Carmel, who saved Paula. Recovering from a mastectomy, she adds a new text to this condition-of-Ireland novel when she sends Paula the message: '1 tit. Hpy Brthy' – Carmel, who is Paula's saviour, symbolises the everyday stoic heroism of all these women.

III.4 Conclusion

Both *The Woman Who walked Into Doors* and *Paula Spencer* end with some optimism regarding Paula's future. However, whilst in the former this optimism is in the form of tentative promise, in the latter it is in the shape of a new Paula who has re-imagined and re-taken control of her life: she no longer is a woman trapped in a violent marriage but a working-class individual whose struggle to re-imagine and transform herself is beginning to pay dividends. As we have seen, even the title of the book highlights this new-found self-affirmation. Going back to what Carville remarked about trauma being used to explore identity and community, overcoming it and Paula's 'coming of age' development can be seen as the development of the nation as well. In the same vein, if we see the novels as a means of empowering Paula, of giving her a voice to make her story heard, this can be seen as true for the nation as well.

In both novels, the theme of real vs imagined memories is explored, of questioning and analysing oneself. If we accept that in the novels there is an overlapping of individual and collective, then it is interesting to see how Roddy Doyle, through Paula, develops the idea that this is part of an insight women have, dramatizing the issue of memory and the past through gender. We know that both colonialism and the strategies of anti-colonialism were themselves gendered, and that

> women developed a *de facto*… position very different from the anxious narratives of liberation constructed by male nationalists.[77]

This different way of re-examining narratives is present in the novels. So, whilst Paula is characterised by analysing and questioning – herself, the status quo, what she remembers – Charlo is never represented as questioning himself or what happens around him. Paula constantly contradicts herself, something which we see again in the female characters in

[77] Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction*, p. 357.

the Enright novels we are going to look at next. These characters seem to see things instantaneously from different perspectives. They are also resilient, more than capable of analysing and questioning themselves to resolve internal conflicts and then move on, so quite different from the traditional images of womanhood promoted, as we have seen, by nationalist and Catholic traditionalist discourse.

Linked to the above is the fact that, in order to create Paula's perspective and make it specifically hers, Doyle needed to adapt his narrative technique to his subject matter. As Deborah Cameron argues in *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*, men have created a number of everyday linguistic conventions to increase their power over women.[78] Moreover, as Liz Kelly points out in her study on women's definitions of their experiences of abuse:

> Male dominance of language and its meanings is undoubtedly responsible for the limited terms and definitions of sexual violence that are currently available… language is a further means of controlling women.[79]

Bearing also in mind that:

> Literary narratives set up and convey social worlds within which values and ideas are negotiated and contested in the actions and interactions of fictional characters

we can conclude that Doyle needed to adapt his narrative to allow his female protagonist to re-appropriate, through language and narration, her story. [80]

There is a wave of 'anti-idealism' in both *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* and *Paula Spencer*: by dismantling the ideology of an idealised, non-existent woman, Doyle is reacting against a tradition of the gendering of the nation in Irish literature by male writers who did not think about the actual treatment of women in everyday life, who did not see the 'invisible' real women such as Paula. Linked to this is the underlying theme, in both novels, of the child (Nicola) mothering the mother (Paula), which can be seen as linking back to the iconography of Mother Ireland: only that, this time, it is the mother who needs to be nurtured and guided by her children in order to find herself an interesting reorientation of the linear history tropes so associated with male thinking. If

[78] Deborah Cameron*, Feminism and Linguistic Theory*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985).
[79] Liz Kelly, 'How women define their experiences of violence', K. Yllo and M. Bograd (eds.), *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse*, (London: Sage, 1990), p. 130.
[80] Jarmila Mildorf, 'Words that Strike and Words that Comfort: Discursive Dynamics of Verbal Abuse in Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*', p. 120.

we think of the symbolic image of 'Ireland as "mother", the nation as family' and if we agree that

> the relation between the public and the private spheres, while always complex, is particularly entangled in the case of Ireland

we can conclude that private and public failings are intertwined, and project the failings of the Spencer family onto the public sphere: the whole national project seems to have failed.[81] Moreover, by making Paula imperfect and allowing her to fight against her subaltern status and reappropriate her story, Doyle firmly avoids what Colin Graham names a celebration of the 'ethics of oppression' which makes the subaltern 'a theoretical site of disempowered purity.'[82]

In *No Authority*, Anne Enright astutely notes that:

> In Ireland the question of ownership is not just about who owns the actionable present…but… about who owns the past, a place that remains unstable or unfinished, and one from which women tend to disappear.[83]

Through the processing and reclamation of Paula Spencer, a character that firmly avoids the fetishizing of the purity of the subaltern mentioned above, Doyle reinstates her voice into the actionable present and, indeed, she becomes an example of what Elleke Boehmer sees as 'women as *bearers* of national culture'.[84] In *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* and *Paula Spencer*, Doyle successfully brings to the fore another marginalised figure to enrich and expand what it means to be Irish. Like Molly Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses*, Paula appears to be truly Irish because she sheds the stereotypes created around Irish womanhood by external agencies and presents herself as a real woman, with all her imperfections and desires. However, unlike Molly, Paula does not become a symbol for everywoman – by remaining herself throughout both novels, by feeling part of the community she is embedded within, by having a sense of belonging with the 'gang' she travels with on her trips to her cleaning jobs, by stating that she sees women like her in

[81] Clair Wills, 'Women, Domesticity and the Family', pp. 37-8.
[82] Colin Graham, *Deconstructing Ireland*, p. 106.
[83] Anne Enright, *No Authority*, p. 78.
[84] Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, *Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 4, italics in original

A&E, she clearly becomes the spokesperson for an ignored section of Irish women, without becoming them.[85]

In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin wrote about a new way of studying a civilisation, using its rubbish as materials rather than its grandiose artworks, and thus effectively suggesting the re-instantiation of subaltern voices in a nation's history.[86] Paula is a cleaner who sees other people's 'rubbish' and dirt every day. Benjamin also spoke of a history centred on the sufferings of the defeated, rather than on the stories of those who won.[87] Roddy Doyle seems to have done just that: by giving literary status to a neglected voice and history he is giving new hope of both a new nation and a new generation of women – like Nicola, Ireland can 'shrug past the Charlos and the bastards' (p. 62) in the journey to build her new self.

[85] For a discussion of myth, womanhood and how Molly Bloom escapes them see Richard Kearney, 'Myth and Motherland'.
[86] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, (Harvard: Belknap Press, 2002).
[87] Andrew Benjamin and Charles Rice (eds.), *Walter Benjamin and the Architecture of Modernity*, (Melbourne: Re.Press, 2009), http://dro.dur.ac.uk/10531/1/10531.pdf.

Chapter IV

Narrative Structure and Ireland in Anne Enright's *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*

'The Irish, condemned to express
themselves in a language not their own,
have stamped on it the mark of their own genius…
The result is then called English literature'
James Joyce

IV.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed how Roddy Doyle, through Paula, a working-class woman, exposes the devastating effects of idealised constructions of womanhood on Irish women. These constructions elided the lived experience of real women such as Paula who were relegated to subaltern status as victims of a double colonisation process relating to both gender and class. In order to cast scrutiny upon the aspirations and preconceptions of a male writer deploying a female alter ego in this way, I will now turn my attention to the second writer I will discuss, Anne Enright.

Born in 1962 in Dublin, Anne Enright has secured high status within Irish literature. Her work has been both commercially well-received and critically acclaimed. In her short stories, novels and essays Enright has probed ideas of Irish national identity to explore the 'effects of its construction' on female subjectivity.[1] Despite repeated attempts to label her a postnationalist writer, Anne Enright's 'incisive fictional engagement with contemporary Ireland' proves that her work is deeply rooted in the Irish landscape, both geographically and, even more so, psychologically and emotionally.[2] In short, the increasingly-frequent label postnational about her ignores that Enright is

[1] Carol Dell'Amico, 'Anne Enright's *The Gathering*: Trauma, Testimony, Memory', *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 14, 2010, pp. 59–73, p. 59.

[2] See Frank Davey, *Postnational Arguments: The Politics of the Anglophone- Canadian Novel since 1967*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 259–60; Claire Bracken and Susan Cahill (eds.), *Irish Writers in Their Time: Anne Enright*, (Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2011), p. 1. For a discussion of Anne Enright and postnationalism, see Heidi Hansson, 'Anne Enright and postnationalism in the contemporary Irish novel', Scott Brewster and Michael Parker (eds.) *Irish Literature Since 1990*, pp. 216-229; Colm Tóibín, 'Introduction', Colm Tóibín (ed.) *The Penguin Book of Irish Fiction*, (London: Penguin, 1999), p. xxxiii; Ana-Karina Schneider, 'Postnationalism, Postfeminism, and Other "Posts" in Anne Enright's Fiction', *Studies in the Novel*, 2018, vol. 50, no. 3, pp. 400-418.

writing from well within Ireland, engaging with tradition, the nation and with what it means to be Irish today. Hence, although parts of her novels, such as, for example, the themes of globalisation and the Celtic Tiger, seem to speak to a postnational agenda which sees questions of 'nation' and history as exhausted tropes, there is also a strong pull towards tradition as filtered through a female consciousness.[3]

Although, when asked about the importance of Irishness to her work, Enright seems to suggest that it is no longer a central concern for the writers of her generation, we will see, through the enabling lens of postcolonial theory, how she continues to revisit familiar sites of Irishness, particularly the historical past, representations of womanhood, collective memory, Catholicism; in her fiction, the local landscape and cityscape are also prominent.[4] However, these are not just geographical places, but they are reimagined, given new meaning, so as to become symbols of the nation in more ways than one: geography and landscape stand for the impact of symbolism on the psyche of the collective.

Regarding the tension between resisting tradition by looking out, and being rooted in the local, Enright also appears to say that being influenced by this tradition cannot be avoided either. For example, she herself states that:

> I don't write about Ireland so much as from Ireland. I am keenly aware of the Irish tradition and I'm very happy to take what I can from it, but it's also quite important to push against it. We're all helplessly local writers.[5]

It is clear then that Enright is writing from an Irish perspective and is influenced by Ireland's traditions. When talking about 'pushing back' against tradition, Enright is possibly referring to monolithic ideals and ideas of Irishness put forward and enforced by post-independence nationalism, which turned Irish society into an obscurantist and culturally-protectionist state.[6] Enright realises that this tradition can become totalizing, that it can lead to the same sort of stereotyping as the colonial narrative. For this reason, it needs resisting and dismantling.[7] This act of dismantling emerges clearly when it comes

[3] Genoveffa Giambona, 'Re-Imagining Tradition: Identity and Depictions of Ireland in Anne Enright's *The Green Road*', *Études Irlandaises*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2020, p. 130.
[4] Caitriona Moloney and Helen Thompson (eds.), *Irish Women Writers Speak Out: Voices From The Field*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), p. 61.
[5] As quoted in Miranda Popkey, 'Anne Enright on *The Forgotten Waltz*', *The Paris Review*, 25 October 2011, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2011/10/25/anne-enright-on-the-forgotten-waltz/ last accessed 11 June 2021.
[6] Neil Corcoran, *After Yeats and Joyce*, p. 58.
[7] In the immediate post-independence period, monolithic representations of the nation were also encouraged, or enforced, in literary outputs, as Rose Atfield illustrates in her article 'Postcolonialism in the

to female identity. At the same time, her use of the word 'we' in the quote above implies that Enright feels part of a community which she might try to push back against. Rather than being 'postnationalist', then, the following two chapters in this thesis will demonstrate that the novelist is complicating, reworking and reimagining nationalist ideas and ideals: as previously mentioned, postcolonial theories and theorists, such as Kiberd, Gibbons, Flannery to name a few, dramatize the complications of this issue of global vs local as an important way to read novels. In this respect, Joyce is a valuable model for reading Enright in terms of dismantling stereotypes, reworking nationalist ideals, creating a new national literature which broadens the boundaries of Irishness through a radical rethink of language and narrative structure. In the next section, I will outline the elements of commonality between James Joyce and Anne Enright, before going on in subsequent sections to trace the resonances of Enright's fictions from postcolonial angles.

IV.2 Anne Enright and James Joyce

As I discussed in the Introduction, James Joyce has proven to be *the* lasting influence on Irish writers. As I pointed out there, Joyce exemplifies the Irish colonial writer who inextricably links the personal, the national and the role of literature in creating a new consciousness that did not replicate views originated during the colonial period. Moreover, Joyce does this through a radical rethink of language and narrative style. As Seamus Deane has remarked 'colonialism is a process of radical dispossession'.[8] Besides being deprived of a specific history, colonised people lack as in Ireland's case, a specific national language. In literature, the act of decolonisation and repossession has included a recovery of this lost language through 'an almost vengeful virtuosity' for Irish writers writing in English, an attempt to make Irish English a language in its own right rather than an appendage to English itself.[9] Deane sees Joyce as one of the most eminent examples of such efforts. Through his formal innovations, Joyce 'cracked' and broke the novel form to create a style that would be a more accurate vehicle for the traumatic experience of Irish colonial history.[10] In this respect, Irish writing, starting with Joyce, and albeit in a different way Yeats before him, is crowded with revisions and rebuttals of stereotypes affecting representations of the Irish national character by the colonial power.

Poetry of Mary Dorcey', https://www.postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/707/484, last accessed 11 June 2021. This is part of the totalizing tradition Anne Enright is trying to resist and dismantle.

[8] Seamus Deane, 'Introduction', Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, p. 10.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction', James E. Miller (ed.), *Myth and Method, Modern Theories of Fiction*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), p. 14.

This decentering and repossession of dominant forms of discourse is continued in the post-independence period and in contemporary fiction by those who try to dismantle not only the colonial assumption but also, as we have seen, some aspects of post-independence discourse. Besides, in order to question the status quo, to reimagine and rework issues of identity, female conditions, or Irishness, a writer cannot use tools accepted by the system to question and challenge that same system. So, the issue of language is not just about language *per se*, but reflects a whole historical question; that is to say the attempts made by postcolonial writers to discover new possibilities within a given language.

Irish fiction was always characterized by a more fragmented structure than its English counterpart. This fragmentation in form and structure originated in a split, visible in nineteenth-century Irish fiction, between subject matter and target audience. More precisely:

> The fact that the nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish novel takes Ireland as its subject matter but is commonly addressed to an English audience… [which] also gives rise to recurrent dilemmas at the level of narrative voice… the condition of constantly negotiating between two distinct cultures (the local and the metropolitan) … is conducive… to a habitual instability of narrative voice.[11]

Moreover, as the colonial centre was also seen as the authoritative cultural form, and the English novel the ultimate term of reference, writers, whatever their background, felt that they had to emulate it. This meant that even writers belonging to the 'native community… were not exempt… from [an] alienation from the masses of their own community'.[12] This also meant that the omniscient narrator, so typical of the golden age of English realist fiction, was never really a feature of nineteenth-century Irish fiction. The disjointed political and social situation caused by Ireland's colonial status was reflected in literary outputs which, because of the divisions in Irish society, did not manage to produce a unifying hero who embodied everyone's values. It is against this background that James Joyce's works emerge.

According to Christine van Boheemen-Saaf, Joyce's work is a response to his colonial status and to the colonial situation of Ireland. She sees his fiction, or as she puts

[11] Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortunes: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland*, (Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2007), pp. 59-60.
[12] Ibid., p. 59.

it, the 'texture of his discourse', as a response to his situation as a colonised Irish subject.[13] The critic is of particular interest here because she specifically focuses on the linguistic implications of British colonisation for Irish literature and culture. These include the suppression and loss of

> an autochthonous language, and with it the directly transmissible memory of destitution, starvation, and slavery.[14]

This suppressed experience which, as mentioned, is traceable to the trauma of colonisation, marks Joyce's writings, which Van Boheemen-Saaf sees as the work of

> an Irish writer, growing up with English as his first language . . . forced to allude allegorically . . . and in the . . . oppressor's language, to what can never be voiced with immediacy: the loss of a natural relationship to language.[15]

Van Boheemen-Saaf considers the stylistic experimentations in Joyce's entire *oeuvre* as directly linked to the traumatic experience or set of experiences that can be traced back to colonisation. As we will see in the last chapter of the thesis, the issue of how language has been hibernated, manipulated and reappropriated, which in postcolonial theory has given rise to concepts of hybridity, surfaces especially in Enright's *The Green Road*. In this novel, Enright uses Gaelic words and sentences, where characters are associated with traditional ballads and where iconic places are charged with symbolism which is mirrored onto the individual, especially women. However, rather than focusing on hybrid language specifically, in her fiction Enright appears to focus on a Joycean 'texture of discourse'. Enright appears to use a form of syncretism in language which is reminiscent of poetry, and her novels carry a metalinguistic element whereby language itself becomes the object. Additionally, the notion of trauma is particularly relevant to the Enright novels which form the object of study in this thesis, as is the ambition of her 'new' narrative style.

The interconnection between personal and national in literature that I discussed in the Introduction, especially as symbolised in the relationship between Joyce and Parnell's legacy, is also present in the novels discussed in this chapter. This juxtaposition is particularly evident in the sense of the individual which is a vector for a more collective

[13] Christine Van Boheemen-Saaf, *Joyce, Derrida, Lacan, and the Trauma of History: Reading, Narrative, and Postcolonialism*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 2.
[14] Ibid., p. 14.
[15] Ibid., p. 2.

sense of trauma and shame, and vice versa. Indeed, these concepts have surfaced in recent years in Irish literature as a way of providing a sense of identity and community.[16] This engrained sense of shame might be linked to the fact that 'the occupiers projected many of their own flaws onto the Irish and then felt free to criticise the Irish for these failings' - potentially creating a shameful self-image for the colonised.[17] The link between personal and national sense of shame is made clear by Enright herself:

> The country where I grew up in the 1970s was insular and impoverished, and the idea of greatness was very important to us. Books were not just an escape from the present, difficult moment, their greatness was a talisman against shame.[18]

It is interesting how Enright connects collective and individual, but also the nation and the literary: the link between an individual sense of shame and guilt reflects, in turn, a more collective one that we will see is present in her novels.

The similarities with Joyce do not end here. Some commentators have said that:

> Anne Enright's [*The Gathering*] is the *Dubliners* of the new millennium, even if she has not quite invented the wheel, stylistically and thematically, as Joyce did in his 1914 story collection. Both books are concerned with life now, though Joyce's now is turn-of-the-19th-century Dublin, whereas Enright's Dublin… is pretty much current.[19]

It is true that Joyce's *Dubliners* can be seen as a valuable model for reading Enright. For example, the name of the protagonist in *The Wig My Father Wore*, Grace, immediately recalls the eponymous story in Joyce's *Dubliners* in which themes of redemption, religion and paralysis are explored. The 'Grace' of Joyce's title is not a person. Rather, by choosing the title 'Grace', Joyce is word-playing - something we will see in Enright as well, in *The Gathering* especially, but also in *The Green Road*. However, what the critic is overlooking is that Anne Enright has evolved a style which is 'new' in the sense that it speaks to and from a woman's consciousness about these things. Although, like Joyce, Enright is thinking of a modern version of Ireland when reworking traditions, she does so from a female perspective.

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[16] Conor Carville, *The Ends of Ireland: Criticism, History, Subjectivity*, , p. 30.
[17] Declan Kiberd*, Inventing Ireland*, p. 15.
[18] Anne Enright, *No Authority*, p. 85.
[19] Peter Behrens, 'Review of *The Gathering by Anne Enright*', *The Washington Post*, 21 October 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/18/AR2007101801879.html, last accessed 11 June 2021.

Fittingly, all the novels analysed in detail in this chapter have as their focus women processing and interrogating memories, the past. If Joyce reworked the novel in order to reclaim it to the Irish experience and allow it to speak, Enright uses it to bring to light the fractured experiences of female subaltern-like characters and adapts an appropriate style to that purpose. Enright's formal innovations in the 'trilogy' of novels I foreground emerge as a way to present female consciousness whilst processing the ongoing impact of history and patriarchy in Celtic Tiger Ireland. Enright's narrative method is undoubtedly and understandably different from Joyce's. Like Stephen, Enright's women find themselves trapped in discourse that denies them agency and, in order to 'awake', they need to redress that discourse. However, unlike Stephen, they are victims of a society which denies them the possibility of having a say in that redress. Nonetheless, just like Joyce's, Enright's stories and formal strategies do not offer any linearity or final resolutions. Rather, her novels reimagine and rework the history and tradition that have made a subaltern of Irish women whose voices become agents for change from within, rather than outside, that history and tradition.

Ultimately, albeit in different ways, both writers covered by my thesis rethink and remold narrative structure. Like Joyce, Enright seems to be striving to make an imposed language new, to create a 'new' narrative in order to create a new literary Irish tradition rooted in the female. This is also true, albeit in a different way, for Roddy Doyle who makes working-class idiolect a novel literary language as a way to rethink traditional narrative forms. Unlike Doyle though, from the Joycean legacy Enright appears to be focusing on metalinguistic possibility. Having outlined the influence that Joyce bears on Enright's work, I will now move to the next section of my argument by analysing how Enright uses formal aspects to foreground female consciousness in her work.

IV.3 Foregrounding Female Consciousness through Narrative

Although in much recent Irish fiction, including the Enright novels being discussed here, there is insecurity and a quest for a real self on the characters' part, this can be linked back to a quest for narrative resistance and reappropriation in Ireland, rather than being a general postmodern convention. The characters often seem confused and lost, looking for roots and self-identification. This is, as Gerry Smyth tells us, fictionalisation 'left-over from colonial times' but it is also the outcome of 'a far more effective tactic [of resistance], according to currently dominant post-colonial theory', that is

> to refuse colonialism's 'reality' through a variety of anti-mimetic techniques… linearity, centredness, coherence, causation, closure, above all a *metanarrative* location from which to judge the action of the story are [all] challenged by ones which more closely represent the reality experienced by the colonised subject (confusion, displacement, … a radical alienation from the reality) because it was a reality built up by the colonial power.[20]

This can be seen as a way to re-examine the past from different perspectives, counter-balance the fixed identities of the colonial past, and dismantle its stereotypes.[21] If we take into account that Smyth perceives 'the novel and the nation to be closely linked' we can then infer that in Irish novels we can see the 'making of the nation'.[22] In this case, however, the novels I will be discussing are about Ireland in the sense that they challenge accepted views of the nation that do not include gender and subaltern female voices. Enright's fiction is trying to re-make rather than make the nation, trying to resist and rework a reality built not just by colonial power but also by iconographies in Ireland itself. *The Gathering* can be inscribed within these efforts.

Some critics have pointed out that:

> *The Gathering*… prompts questions about national identity and the effect of its construction… Enright's embedding of traumatic personal and national histories in the testimonial mode constitutes the basis of the novel's exploration of history's forms'.[23]

This view is echoed by Bridget English, who makes an argument linking Veronica's story to the Irish national condition:

> In the case of Ireland, the traumas resulting from repressed grief and unrecoverable losses are just beginning to be understood ... Paving over a painful or traumatic past results in a society that can never heal [and] suggests that the past must be reexamined, the pain exposed before grief can be overcome.[24]

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[20] Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and The Nation*, p. 23.
[21] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, pp. 122-4.
[22] Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation*, p. 18.
[23] Carol Dell'Amico, 'Anne Enright's *The Gathering*: Trauma, Testimony, Memory', p. 59.
[24] Bridget English, *Laying Out the Bones – Death and Dying in the Modern Irish Novel*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2017), p. 204. In the wider postcolonial debate, this perspective is mirrored by Ania Loomba, according to whom culture is an important site of decolonisation, especially so as it allows for 'the decentring of the human subject… because such a subject had been dominantly theorised by European imperialist discourse as male and white', Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, p. 41.

In this light, Irish literature, history and politics become inextricably linked and postcolonialism becomes a useful lens through which to examine contemporary culture and literature, especially fiction where the female subject takes upon herself the processing of the past.

Writing on the 'Production of Cultural Space' in Ireland, Seamus Deane argues that

> it is possible to characterize Irish writing from the Act of Union to the Irish Revival as having the standard characteristics of a minority or of a colonial literature.[25]

Moreover, for Deane, this literature was 'disempowered by the canonical forms of the colonizer's discourse' about Ireland and

> re-empowered by the experimental search for alternatives to it in the common plight of decenteredness, deterritorialization and even reterritorialization of the major language of the colonizer.[26]

Deane sets up a comparative relationship between experimental, anti-colonial Irish writing and other anti-colonial or resistance writing across the colonial world.[27] The linguistic and formal experimentations in Irish literature are an important step for the postcolonial nation in order to take over the old values system represented by canonical English language and literary tradition, and representations of the Irish during the colonial period: to reappropriate it and express a new set of values. Then 'new' literature that is

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[25] Seamus Deane, 'The Production of Irish Cultural Space', *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture,* vol. 21, no. 3, Autumn 1994, 117-44, pp. 138-9.
[26] Ibid., p. 139.
[27] In the case of the inheritance of colonial languages, an aesthetic issue is inherent in postcolonial writing because canonical imperial literature is seen as upholding 'colonial images and ideals' throughout the empire in the form of writing, Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 14. Chinua Achebe, for example, stated that he wrote his first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) to take on a section of English literature that is packed with stereotypes and misrecognitions of African culture, such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Edgar Wallace's *Senders of the River* (1911), and Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1939). As many of these texts were included on the English literature syllabus in the 1950s at University of Ibadan, Achebe saw Africa as a narrative construction in literature which was used to justify colonial regimes. He claims the right to quote from British literary heritage in order to rework this tradition for the African mind. See Chinua Achebe, 'The African Writer and the English Language', *Morning yet on Creation Day: Essays*, (New York: Anchor Press/Doubeday, 1975), pp. 91-103. Equally, as Alistair Cormack argues, a writer like Borges is in the fortunate position of knowing Western culture and being able to turn it on its head. It is interesting that Cormack mentions Borges as the latter is a figurehead of magic realism which he used to dismantle these stereotypes and to break the hold of so-called privileged centres of cultures. Alistair Cormack, *Yeats and Joyce: Cyclical History and the Reprobate Tradition*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 67-8. We will see how Enright uses elements of magic realism in her first three novels to specifically dismantle stereotypes linked to constructions of womanhood.

produced in Ireland by Irish writers attempts to decentre and repossess the formative elements of discourse in order to negotiate textual spaces which both question the assumptions of colonialism and re-empower the Irish author.[28]

We know that colonialism and early nationalism alike

> strived to present a coherent, linear representation of identity and history which ended up being mono-dimensional and monophonic. Debunking this myth also meant creating fragmented histories and identities abandoning chronologically linear time. This effort is reflected in some of the fiction.[29]

Consequently, re-appropriating language and creating new narrative forms are vital, as the linguistic mechanisms of imperialism were not adequate and 'therefore new forms, or radically reimagined forms, are necessitated'.[30] This is especially true, I argue, when it comes to expressing female realities.

Linked to the above is Enright's desire to capture multi-layered realities and her ability to capture multi-faceted emotions in one or two sentences which convey many images and meanings, a bit like the multi-layered language in a poem, showing

> the yearning for some kind of metaphorical shift which is contained already in language. The yearning for metaphor, transcendence.[31]

This suggests an interest in exploring the potentials of language and utilising it in a different way in order to capture hidden realities. So, the language in her novels, starting from the early ones, is charged with metaphors and unusual similes.[32] This is an almost direct reminder of Gibbons' concept of the 'allegory' that I discussed in the Introduction

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[28] From a wider postcolonial perspective, Helen Tiffin remarks that, as colonisers used language to control the colonised, it is no surprise that postcolonial writers use language to deconstruct an identity that was constructed for them. Moreover, she continues, one particular challenge postcolonial writers face is the struggle over the 'word', over written language. This is because the narrative of postcolonial territories was, until recently, largely constructed by the colonizers so that 'its functions, and language(s) in which they are written, operate as a means to cultural control', Helen Tiffin, 'Post-Colonialism, Postmodernism and the Rehabilitation of Post-Colonial History', p. 173.

[29] David Ludden (ed.), *Reading Subaltern Studies*, (Anthem Press, 2002), p. 20.

[30] Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 79.

[31] Hedwig Schwall, 'Muscular Metaphors in Anne Enright: An Interview', *The European English Messenger*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2008, pp. 16-22, p. 17.

[32] For instance, in *What Are You Like*? we read sentences that appear to stretch out meaning such as 'like killing a dead thing… making a pregnant woman pregnant' or 'whatever she wears, the child is clothed in silence' (p. 26 and p. 5). In *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, Eliza complains that 'they have strung me up in the bow, like a giant tick' (p. 20) and introduces us to a 'fusty magical smell' (p. 193). Going back to the multi-faceted emotions captured in a few words, this is the case when Grace says about her father that 'Anyway, I loved him so much it was difficult to see him. Even now I can't remember his laugh or his face' (p. 29).

– Enright seems to be expanding the figural ambiguity explored by Gibbons to give expression, in fiction, to the hard-to-express areas of experience of women. This is an area into which Enright's most recent fiction seems increasingly to have moved.

As far as concerns Irish female identity, Enright has remarked that:

> All beliefs, nearly all kinds of national and religious belief [involved] women staying at home… so that is part of the deconstructive project… when I started off… I thought it was part of my job to say things that Irish women had not said previously.[33]

For Enright, to grow up as a woman in Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s, was to grow up as an object within Ireland's culture of conservative, patriarchal Catholicism. While the introduction of universal free secondary education in the late 1960s and membership of the European Economic Community in the 1970s seemed to promise equality of opportunity for all Irish citizens, the culture of familism further enshrined in legislation following the Papal Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae* (1968) still emphasised the biological function of the female body while removing the subject's autonomy over it.[34] In an article on the role of personal stories in the 2018 referendum campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment – which was a de facto ban on all forms of abortion – Enright lamented the longstanding objectification of women's bodies in Irish political discourse. While personal accounts of women were the 'redemptive heart' of the successful repeal campaign, Enright suggested that by framing political debate through personal experience there was a risk of continuing to define women through biology.[35] Therefore, by shaping her story 'into words', a woman could 'possess an experience that might have possessed her'.[36]

So, from the outset, Enright develops her narrative discourse specifically around women and their situations, with women becoming sufferers under the historical context more than men. Rigidly gendered roles, often seen in postcolonial nations, can also be seen in Ireland, with some scholars identifying the oppression of women as part of a typical postcolonial gender ideology.[37] It appears that Enright has set herself a conscious

[33] Claire Bracken and Susan Cahill, 'An Interview with Anne Enright, August 2009', Bracken, Claire and Cahill, Susan (eds.), *Irish Writers in Their Time: Anne Enright*, pp. 21-2.
[34] Margaret Mills Harper, 'Flesh and Bones: Anne Enright's *The Gathering*', in Catherine E. Paul (ed.), *Writing Modern Ireland*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), pp. 81-94, p. 85.
[35] Anne Enright, 'Anne Enright: Personal Stories Are Precious Things and They Made the Difference', *The Irish Times*, 28 May 2018, https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/anne-enright-personal-stories-are-precious-thingsand-they-made-the-difference-1.3510189, last accessed 11 June 2021.
[36] Ibid.
[37] See Maryann Valiulis, 'Power, Gender and Identity in the Irish Free State', pp. 117-136; Heather Ingman, *Twentieth-century Fiction by Irish Women*, p. 7; for a discussion on postcolonial gender ideology see

task of dismantling stereotypical representations of Irish womanhood to give women a voice and, hence, agency by complicating, reworking and reimagining nationalist ideas and ideals. Such ideals cannot be ignored but, at the same time, they need updating and expanding in order to be more representative of the contemporary nation. It is legitimate, then, to see how concepts of Ireland and Irishness are explored in Enright's fiction.

This chapter will discuss how, rather than being postnational, Enright's fiction is firmly grounded in the exploration and processing of the nation and of national identity. A complex postcolonial identity comes through Enright's novels, and is mirrored in *The Gathering* (2007), *The Forgotten Waltz* (2011) and *The Green Road* (2015) by the novels' narrative structure. I will explore how a non-linear narrative, interspersed with gaps both in terms of time and memory, is a reimagining of notions of time, place and identity embedded in the nation, in an effort to explore the metaphorical shifts possible in refigured language. This is especially so as the novels in question foreground what we have termed the subaltern reality of womanhood in Ireland. I will also discuss how the domestic space turns into a site of female reappropriation in these fictions. The chapter also sets out to show how the 'difficult balancing act between returning and rewriting; between rejection and translation' that Elke D'hoker sees as typical of Enright's earlier novel *The Wig My Father Wore* (1995), is also a defining characteristic of *The Gathering*, *The Forgotten Waltz* and *The Green Road*.[38]

When seen as collective memory, national identities are also an outcome of narrative constructs. Once this is accepted, it is also implicitly recognised that these can be reinvented and reconstructed through narrative itself. Consequently, narrative and the choice of specific narrative strategies play a big role in dismantling, reinventing and rebuilding collective identities in order to include previously-elided ones. I believe that, like *The Gathering*, Enright's two subsequent novels, by intertwining the personal and the national, shift their focus more decisively towards the national question than her previous ones. In them, Enright uses a number of narrative techniques to question given notions of identity, both individual and collective. The chapter will also look at how the economy and monetary elements are embedded in the narrative, and how they might be seen as part of an attempt to re-describe modern Ireland and Irish identity, especially in

Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*; Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and The Nation*; Michael Pierse, *Writing Ireland's Working Class*; Gerardine Meaney, *Sex and Nation*.

[38] Elke D'hoker, 'Reclaiming Feminine Identities: Anne Enright's *The Wig My Father Wore*', Patricia Coughlan and Tina O'Toole (eds.), *Irish Literature Feminist Perspectives*, (Dublin, Carysfort Press Book: 2008), pp. 186-201, p. 186.

relation to womanhood. But first, I will start with an overview of Enright's earlier writing and how it led to the three novels I am going to discuss in detail.

IV.4 Narrative beginnings: Anne Enright's early novels

Before *The Gathering*, *The Forgotten Waltz* and *The Green Road*, which are my main object of study in chapters IV and V of this thesis, Anne Enright had already published three novels: *The Wig My Father Wore* (1995), *What Are You Like* (2000) and *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2002). These novels all include themes the writer develops and establishes in her later works, as well as tropes and methods familiar in the academy as 'postcolonial writing', such as elements of magic realism.

Magic realism is a feature of postcolonial literatures in South America, Africa and India. It affords postcolonial writers the opportunity to bring together past traditions and remake myths. These traditions and myths are then mixed up with present reality, in order to rework and reimagine possible future realities, thus tackling the social and political issues which ensued in the aftermath of colonisation.[39] Salman Rushdie, for example, uses magic realism in order to challenge the dominant discourse regarding India and to describe Indian experience in a way that would fill in the gaps left by the accounts of colonial experience by the colonisers. He imagines ways to unify, at least in a work of art, a country that appeared to have been only forcibly united as a colony. In *Midnight's Children* he combines the political and the fantastic of Marquez in a different context, using magic realism to take over the values-system. The magic realism in *Midnight's Children* speaks for a culture and Rushdie's focus is firmly postcolonial because specifically focused on India and its future.[40] Magic realism is then used by postcolonial writers to foreground national literary possibility, after the trauma and dispossession of colonisation.

The prevalence of imagination over memory is one of the characteristics of magic realism. In her earlier novels, Enright uses magic realism as a tool to bridge the colonial legacy of discontinuity, since it provides the link between real and unreal, imagination

[39] An exploration of magic realism is beyond the scope of this thesis. For a specific discussion on magic realism and postcolonialism see Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel Between Faith and Irreverence*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009); this book also has a specific chapter on elements of magic realism in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.

[40] For details on magic realism in connection with Salman Rushdie see Neil Ten Kortenaar, 'Salman Rushdie's Magic Realism And The Return Of Inescapable Romance', *University Of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 71, no. 3, 2002, pp. 765-785; and by the same author, *Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children*.

and reality, a fragmented past and an uncertain future.[41] There are elements of magic realism in both *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* and *The Wig My Father Wore*. In the latter Grace, the main character, falls in love with an angel, and the wig of the title seems to have a life of its own. However, in Enright these elements of magic realism dismantle stereotypes linked to womanhood and express a female consciousness. *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* offers glimpses into Enright's interest in exploring the role of women and their denied agency. Although the novel is based on historical events and characters, the writer's focus is not on examining historical facts. Rather, she is more interested in representing how Eliza, an intelligent, strong and attractive woman is not even 'real' without a husband:

> You could say she has everything, except the satisfaction of having it. Also, perhaps, that she cannot relax because she is not real… the only way she can become real is by getting married.[42]

Despite being a powerful woman and living in luxury, Eliza is not real because she has not been validated through marriage to her lover, Francisco Lopez. This puts her on the same level as her maid who dreams of 'a husband – a proper one [to give her] such respectability' so parodying the dominant belief, at the time, that women need a man to give them a place in society (p. 31). This social construct transcends social classes and puts Eliza and her maid, as women, on the same subaltern level, with gender being more powerful as a unifier than social status. As we have seen, this construct was not a thing of the past for Anne Enright or Ireland in general, a nation where, as previously pointed out, the role of women is still, constitutionally, tied to the home.

The question of gender is also central to *The Wig My Father Wore*. It is clearly implied, for instance, in Grace's reflections on Frank's behaviour. Frank is a colleague, and a womaniser who cheats on his wife, justifying his actions by convincing himself that women are 'complicated, or even false-hearted'.[43] Frank objectifies women and sees them as bodies that can gratify him. Grace tells him that 'a woman's body provokes a lot more anxiety if you happen to have one yourself', but he does not believe her (p. 62). It looks

[41] Stephen Slemon, 'Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse', Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Farris (eds.), *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 407-426.
[42] Anne Enright, *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, (London: Vintage, 2002), p. 59. All further references to this text are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the text.
[43] Anne Enright, *The Wig My Father Wore*, (London: Minerva, 1996), p. 62. All further references to this text are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the text.

as though men think they can describe women and define them better than women can define themselves and their own bodies. The incommunicability between the two sexes results in complicated relationships, leading Grace to conclude that 'married people should not tell tales. Being miserable in silence is the price they pay for being happy' (p. 45). There is here an oxymoron that reflects a narrative contradiction which was to become a hallmark of Enright's 'texture of discourse', one which we will see developed in the later novels. We can only infer that Grace is possibly alluding to the unhappiness of some relationships which is the price to pay for achieving the ultimate social ambition – getting married. It is interesting to note that Grace juxtaposes silence and married people, as if to stress incommunicability within couples, a theme that resurfaces crucially in later novels, and which provides some of the narrative gaps that are otherwise figured as postcolonial silences, absences from the record. It is, however, when we read that Grace's mother fell for her husband's 'crippled look on his face [because] what more could any woman want, than a rude, wounded man?' (p. 26) that we see a specific theme Enright develops in later novels: that of women who because of social, cultural and religious constructs, believe that they need to heal or comfort a man – the name of the protagonist of *The Gathering*, Veronica, with its Biblical reverberations, is a clear reminder of that.

Additionally, like Eliza in *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* and Rose in *What Are You Like?*, Grace is associated with diaspora as an opportunity to become a modern woman away from Ireland. When Grace leaves home, she thinks it is

> a political thing, because a *girl* has to grow up any way she can. So I went to England, a country where *women* didn't bury their babies in silage pits… exile was mainly a question of contraception and nice wallpaper. (p. 56, italics mine)

Here there is reference to babies of unwed mothers being buried in unmarked graves at Irish Catholic institutions, a dark historical chapter in Irish history that saw tens of thousands of unmarried mothers and their babies effectively being hidden in institutions run by both the state and the Catholic Church. These homes inflicted abuse and shame – with the complicity of wider society which knew but did nothing – for much of the twentieth century.[44] There is also a reference to the fact that, in Ireland, the sale of contraceptives was illegal until 1980, when it was legalised but with strong restrictions,

[44] An inquiry into these 'mother and babies homes' was ordered in 2015. On 12 January 2021, a judicial commission of investigation published a long-awaited 2,865-page report . The report is available here.

later removed. This was due to the strict moral teaching of the Catholic Church which, in the quote above, is implicitly seen as culpable of inhuman acts. It is also implied that women took the brunt of these restrictions. It is through Grace, then, that the Irish social situation is portrayed. It is through Grace that the topic of exile is recalled. It is, however, Grace that turns a little corner of an English hotel into 'forever Ireland' (p. 59) thus reversing the colonial trajectory. These themes are further expanded in Enright's later novels where the link between gender and the postcolonial nation is explored, and where the nation is foregrounded through female consciousness.

This different perspective on the role of women as repositories of national history and culture is accompanied by formal experimentation. Enright's experimentation with language and form, so evident in the novels I will discuss in detail, started in her first three novels where she uses simple words in a surprising way, making sentences that sound brand new. Together with language, her experimentation with form starts in her earlier novels as well – perspectives are often switched, different chapters are narrated by different characters, the narrative is punctuated by gaps and uncertainty. For example, in *The Wig My Father Wore*, we get an unorthodox perspective on Grace's world when she says that 'Under the table the world was huge. The sounds were old. Our childhoods were sitting there, with a finger to their lips' (p. 48). This episode is reminiscent of a similar one in the opening scenes of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, where Stephen, still a child, hides under a table (p. 4). As mentioned, the 'under the table' position conjures up a perspective that might even be a metaphor for how postcolonial language expresses a different view of the world and of the past, but also the perspective of those whose lives have been at a subaltern level and hidden.[45] Moreover, in *Portrait*, the scene under the table marks the moment when Stephen starts to gain consciousness of the sensuous possibilities of language which indirectly lead to his future possible career as a writer, just as Grace starts gaining consciousness of herself in that scene and starts asking a new set of questions. It then appears quite fitting that it is Grace who reflects on the limitations of a given language when she observes that 'I had no words for how new it was' (p. 178). The tension between trying to express something new through an 'old' language is immediately evident.

When we look at narrative techniques, we see what we will become accustomed to in Enright's later novels: non-linear narration, uncertainty, things said and immediately

[45] This recalls Henry's relationship with underground water discussed in the Chapter 2, which symbolises his relationship with a subaltern, 'submerged' reality, to use David Lloyd's expression in *Anomalous States*, p. 7.

denied. In some instances, there is no explanation of what is happening and why. In all three early novels, chapters are not sequentially connected to each other. In *What Are You Like*, the chapters are not in chronological order and the gaps in the action are not filled with explanations of what has happened and what has led to a certain point in the story. For example, in one of the chapters we leave Maria, the protagonist, in New York and, when we next see her, she is working as a shop assistant in Dublin. The reader is plunged in the middle of the action without being told what has led to it.

In *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, the chapters move back and forth in time. In addition, the narrative perspective changes – some chapters are in the third person, interspersed with free indirect speech, some are in the first person but narrated by different characters, something we see again in a later novel such as *The Green Road*. The novels are a patchwork of 'episodes' which show snapshots in the characters' lives – it is up to the reader to join the dots. Readers are left wondering what is going on. In *The Wig My Father Wore* the *LoveQuiz* itself, the reality show Grace produces, is a symbol of staged reality where contestants are instructed to 'pretend it's nice and hot' (p. 23), or where 'they check around the side of the cameras to see what is for real. Then they forget real because it is less confusing' (p. 200). In the same novel, Grace questions whether her memories are real when, for example, she recollects watching the landing on the Moon on TV:

> It is the night of the orbit, not by Apollo 8 as I had thought, but by Apollo 11. These tricks of memory do not distress me. I always knew that the picture of my father at the door [carrying a box with a TV] was more miraculous than true. (p. 31)

In the end, it is her mother that reminds her that they were at the seaside the night of the Moon landing, and they never watched it on TV. Another instance of real memories vs imagined memories is when Grace recollects that 'My mother thinks that the loss of my virginity caused my father's stroke and so do I. Never mind the facts' (p. 45). So, although we are told what the protagonist and her mother believe, we are also immediately informed that their belief is not true.

As we will see, ambiguity and uncertainty are a hallmark of the Enright novels subject of this thesis. This ambiguity, however, is present in her earlier novels as well. In *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* one of the characters states that he has kissed Eliza and, straight after, he doubts it, ending up saying that 'whatever it was, it did happen. Let us call it a kiss' (p. 119), a technique of self-revision around experience and language about

experience we see developed in Enright's later novels. The ambiguity about the kiss implies an ambiguity about this particular relationship, and relationships in general. To add to the ambiguity and to the challenge 'narrative' the reader is presented with, there are examples of characters appearing and disappearing without leaving a trace, like Anton in *What Are You Like*, or Francine, the maid, in *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, a technique reprised in *The Green Road*. In *The Wig My Father Wore* this ambiguity seems to be linked, ultimately, to a fragmented view of the world we each have, one which reflects diversity of perspective in society 'because, it would seem, we all saw our own show.' (p. 186). There are different views, different realities and all Grace can do is tell hers, at the same time warning us that there are others out there. The ambiguity, fragmentation, non-linearity of the novel are developed in later novels which we will discuss in more detail later.

As mentioned, in all of Enright's first three novels, there are themes we find in the others – the question of belonging; overwhelming memories of the past which lead to elements of irrationality, and the trope of real memories vs imagined memories; complex family and intersex relationships; the female condition; women trying to find themselves in a mainly male-dominated world; deep and complex women characters who are never clichéd; women that question themselves, the status quo and what surrounds them, whilst male characters do not seem to have the same depth, or the same conflicted nature; the paradoxes of being Irish in a global context in which all identities are constantly being questioned and challenged. *What Are You Like* encapsulates many of these themes as well. The story centres around twin sisters, Maria and Rose. The girls' mother dies giving birth and the twins are separated – Maria stays with her father, Berts, in Dublin and Rose is adopted by an English family. Both sisters have complex and conflicted relationships with their families and are trying to find themselves in a male-dominated world. For example, when Maria briefly starts seeing Anton, it is he who 'was always describing her. He never asked her to describe him back' (p. 23). It is very clear that Anton takes upon himself the task of defining Maria but does not want to be defined by her. Maria also remembers 'things she could not name' (p. 24), as if the power of shaping her own world by naming it is taken away from her. In this respect, it is important to remember the link between colonialism and naming. This idea of naming as a tool utilised by the coloniser to exert its hegemonic power in an Irish context surfaces, for instance, in Eóin Flannery.[46] That is why, one of the acts of repossessions Irish writers had and exercised was to 'name

[46] For a discussion of the link between the act of naming and hegemonic power, see Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 134.

the world for themselves'.[47] It is then intriguing that the impossibility of naming is here associated with an Irish woman who is being defined by an English man – it seems to be the perfect metaphor for the concept of double colonisation. There also seems to be a deliberate metalinguistic element in the novel, such as when we read observations like 'the Past Continuous – always, always, in the past. Or, at least, all the time' (p. 53). It is interesting that the metalinguistic attention is here on a tense which is in the past, but with an implication that the past is always there, all the time.

The question of Irishness and the stereotypes attached to it are touched upon in *What Are You Like* when Rose, who grew up with an English family, finds out she is Irish and tells her boyfriend. She notes that:

> William was very excited by the fact that Rose was Irish. This she discovered when he took her out to dinner and said 'This place used to be an abortion clinic' for no reason at all… So I am Irish, said Rose to herself, sitting in the abortionist's restaurant and eating Tagliatelle alle Vongole. So this is what it means. Perhaps he wants me to order potatoes (p. 135).[48]

However, Rose refuses to define herself in those terms:

> So this was who she was. She was a person who picked at her food. She picked at her food because she was a woman. She picked at her food because she was English, because she was Irish. She picked at her food because she was a Capricorn, because when she was a baby she had choked on a spoonful of pureed shrimp, because she had a famine gene, or a food-picking gene, or because when she was young her mother told her to sit up straight and not wolf her food. She picked at her food because she was middle class. (p. 136).

Interestingly, Rose defines herself as a woman first and foremost, as a product of both Irish genes and English upbringing. She defines herself in terms of her 'famine gene', which is clearly such a defining point that it has become a genetic trait. She is however

[47] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 168. The idea of naming as a form of mastery is explored in Brian Friel's play *Translations*. The play centres around the British Ordnance Survey in nineteenth century which wanted to anglicise Irish Gaelic geographical names and the attempt to resist the colonial effort by replacing the anglicised names with native, or authentic, names. The play is about resistance to cultural imperialism through language thus stressing the fact that colonialism was more than just a military act and that the manipulation of language, seen here the process of naming, and/or renaming, is deeply rooted in the colonial experience. This is a process that, according to Edward Said, happened in most colonised countries, see Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*.

[48] There is a very interesting aspect here which concerns Rose being defined, and seeing herself, as Irish despite having grown up since birth in England, with English adoptive parents.

also defined by her experience of being told by her adoptive mother not to 'wolf her food' something which, by association, we might link to the sense of deprivation imprinted in her through the famine gene. Rose is a product of all these possibilities which are, however, triggered by the discovery that she is Irish. Being Irish, then, unlocks the potential for Rose to re-imagine herself in contrast to the stereotyped views held by her English boyfriend. So, it is as if, as a woman, Rose is claiming the reinvention of Irish history and tradition. References to Ireland and its history are also present in the novel *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, like when Eliza recalls why she had to leave Ireland:

> I was born in Ireland and lived there… until the age of ten, when the hunger then raging in the countryside obliged us to leave from the harbour of Queenstown (p. 46).

Enright uses just a couple of lines (which also initially resonate with Leopold Bloom's famous declaration in *Ulysses* 'A nation is the same people living in the same place… Or also living in different places') to evoke vivid images relating to the human disaster caused by the Great Irish Famine which claimed over a million Irish lives and displaced many more. Eliza is a victim of the Famine herself and her subsequent misadventures and fight for survival, albeit social, can be seen as mirroring Ireland's fight for survival after the Famine. Again, female subject and the nation are linked and mirror each other. Despite the global setting, these novels have a preoccupation with the local as their DNA. The Famine, mentioned either directly or indirectly, is present in Enright's later novels as well, and form an essential part of the geography of *The Green Road*, as if this most symbolic Irish event was a preoccupation of hers in her fiction.

Besides the issue of stereotyped views of Irishness from the outside, the question of authenticity, so absolutely central to the narrative impetus of the later novels, starts being explored in these earlier novels. For example, in *The Wig My Father Wore*, Grace complains to Marcus, a colleague, that:

> You just think that 'urban' means 'privileged' and 'inauthentic', because where you come from, everyone went to Mass and lived in a cow's arse… while we sat around forgetting who we really were and trying to speak proper. (p. 35)

This recalls monolithic representations of Irishness and the tension between urban and rural Ireland which I have discussed in previous chapters. Additionally, the quote also links authenticity and language, who owns the definition of 'proper' language. It raises the question of which 'proper' language the character is referring to. Reflection on

language derives especially on the part of female characters. In *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch*, Eliza, an Irishwoman, promises that 'I will write in English, but I will not speak it any more' (p. 36).

The use of magic realism and its deviation from the realist literary canon establishes a way of writing that is congenial to writers outside of the dominant discourse who are marginalized by society. This is pertinent in the context of Enright's novels, where she is foregrounding a subaltern female consciousness. It is true that Enright uses magic realism to connect to other cultures and literatures.[49] However, I believe that she might have started off by using magic realism because it provides the link between real and unreal, imagination and reality, a fragmented past and an uncertain future necessary to her postcolonial situation. But her subsequent fictions extend some of the underlying aspects of this literary method. As her writing becomes more socially-grounded, paradoxically the dichotomy between imaginary and real is moved to the psychological sphere, and her attention becomes focused on the conflicts that arise between for instance, imagined memories and real memories, literal and imagined truths.

In Enright's later novels boundaries are much more blurred and it is left much more up to the reader to work out what is real and what is imagined. Besides, in the three novels I am going to discuss in more detail, the early magical realism hardens into a much more open concern with the Irish present, and the effects of history and tradition on that present. This coincides with the new conditions in Ireland around the time the first of these three novels, *The Gathering*, was published. However, this switch goes along with a new interest in literary experiment by Anne Enright that involves readers more in the issues the books address by asking them to actively explore their gaps.

Nevertheless, it is in these early novels that the image of the long-suffering passive Irish womanhood is dismantled in favour of representations of women who instead possess agency. These early books are then a *sine qua non* for the later ones. These early novels are the Joycean 'smithy' where Enright forges her unique style and consciousness. It is in the later novels that narrative techniques and story marry together tightly, and form and content work together in a much more balanced way. I choose to discuss *The Gathering*, *The Forgotten Waltz* and *The Green Road* as in these novels Enright's focus and style shift: she leaves magic realism behind and foregrounds interior monologues, realism, memory and authenticity. Although there is a sense that, from the outset, she is positioning herself as an Irish writer, it is, finally, with *The Gathering* that

[49] Heidi Hansson, 'Beyond Local Ireland in The Wig My Father Wore', Claire Bracken and Susan Cahill (eds.), *Irish Writers in their Time: Anne Enright*, pp. 51-66, p. 57.

Anne Enright turns more decisively towards Ireland and Irish tradition, finding a way to ground all her themes in Irish history in order to reimagine and rework its complications.

I will start by discussing *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz* to then move, in the next chapter, to *The Green Road*. I will show how, rather than being postnational, these novels focus on the nation and on reimaging and reworking traditional tropes around accepted versions of womanhood. I have decided to devote particular attention to *The Green Road* in a separate final chapter of the thesis, as I see it as the best example to date of Enright's progressively deeper engagement with Irish history and tradition, the completion of a journey started with *The Gathering* – but also as exemplary of the various themes and ideas presented in the thesis as a whole. The novel also best exemplifies Enright's focus on reimagining tradition, rather than rejecting it in favour of a cosmopolitan outlook – in other words, *The Green Road* is the most vivid proof that Enright's narrative is rooted in a reimagination of the national through the filter of female consciousness.

IV.5 *The Gathering*

On the surface, Anne Enright's *The Gathering* seems to be another example of 'testimonial writing' or 'family memoir' narrative that includes a sort of crisis diary of the narrator. However, the first difference we can notice is that, whilst it is more common to have this kind of account and/or family memoir written by men, even when purporting to tell the story from a female point of view, examples of such narratives by female writers are less common.[50] Enright herself notes:

> Fiction, as a trade, is fraught with the thrills and anxieties of feminization. When a woman writes 'like' a woman this tension disappears. There is also, weirdly, an added sense of authority. Irish men writing about women are sometimes praised for their insight, as though this was something women themselves were incapable of.[51]

The preoccupation with a lack of female voices, the authority of literary and critical female voices, and the fact that often these voices are heard through the filter of male representation is again something Enright tackles in *No Authority*, where she challenges 'the idea that women are somehow present when men write… about them'.[52] Whilst this

[50] See, for example, Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*; Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*; Peter Sheridan's *44*; Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* and *Paula Spencer*.
[51] Anne Enright, 'Diary', *London Review of Books*, vol. 39, no. 18, 21 September 2017, pp. 33-35, https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v39/n18/anne-enright/diary, last accessed 11 June 2021.
[52] Anne Enright, *No Authority*, p. 75.

is of course what Doyle attempts in the Paula novels – and I've argued the value to an extent of this – Enright's point stands. Presenting an elided female voice is a preoccupation of Enright's and one that is at the core of *The Gathering*.[53]

According to one reviewer, the novel fits into a

> sub-genre of uniquely Irish literature that I could happily do without: the Catholic childhood misery memoir. Sure I found *Angela's Ashes* touching, but… I found I'd had more than enough of big families, bad parents, worse nuns and dipsomaniac uncles with the gift of the gab.[54]

Surely, rather than dismissal, this should prompt us to ask ourselves why the above themes are so recurrent in contemporary Irish fiction. Moreover, it is worth noting that the 'clichés' mentioned by the reviewer are looked at very differently in this novel. As mentioned, the examples of memory novels we have are mainly written by male novelists, with the reviewer herself mentioning Frank McCourt. However, unlike her male counterparts, Enright focuses on the psychological fallout of past events and the impact of trauma.

The same reviewer adds that:

> Eventually… the conclusion [was] disappointing. I was unconvinced by the insistence that childhood events inescapably determine our adult present and wondered if Veronica's intentions for the future weren't something of a cop out.[55]

This is somewhat debatable. Firstly, plenty of literature, starting with Freud, explores how childhood events have a strong influence on adult development; secondly, this is not the main theme or outcome of the novel.[56] Rather, the key theme of *The Gathering* might

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[53] Gerardine Meaney, 'Waking the Dead: Antigone, Ismene and Anne Enright's Narrators in Mourning', Claire Bracken and Susan Cahill (eds.), *Irish Writers in their Time: Anne Enright*, pp. 145-164, p. 145.
[54] Sam Jordison, 'Booker club: *The Gathering* by Anne Enright', *The Guardian*, 4 September 2007, https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2007/sep/04/bookerclubthegatheringbya accessed on 21 June 2021.
[55] Ibid.
[56] For example, see Anda et al.'s study of how childhood maltreatment has been linked to a variety of changes in brain structure and function and stress–responsive neurobiological systems and how epidemiological studies have documented the impact of childhood maltreatment on health and emotional well–being, R. F. Anda et al. 'The enduring effects of abuse and related adverse experiences in childhood', *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*, April 2006, vol. 256, Issue 3, pp. 174–186; or Chapman et al. to see how childhood abuse is linked to depressive disorders, D. P. Chapman et al. 'Adverse childhood experiences and the risk of depressive disorders in adulthood', *Journal of Affective Disorders*, vol. 82, no. 2, 2004, pp. 217-225.

be seen in how coming to terms with and reappropriating the past can give more clarity to the present.[57] In light of Enright's statement in relation to women and an Irish past that:

> In Ireland the question of ownership is not just about who owns the… present… but overwhelmingly about who owns the past

the re-evaluation of the past has both relevance to how we interpret the present and wider national connotations, especially when it comes to womanhood.[58] We will see that, in *The Gathering*, this reappropriation often happens by means of imaginative recreation, as if it were a last remnant of her previous magic realist fiction. Characters seem to 'invent' lives for each other rather than getting to know each other, an example of this being Veronica writing and rewriting her story of her grandmother Ada and Nugent, both deceased, which means she is constantly imagining and reinventing past places, personalities, events and, consequently, the past.[59]

On the surface, the story told in the novel seems to be quite straightforward: Veronica Hegarty has to go to Brighton to retrieve the body of her dead brother, Liam, after he committed suicide. She also needs to gather the family for the wake. However, this death triggers the recollection of traumatic events which happened when both Veronica and her brother were children. While staying at their grandmother Ada's house, Liam was sexually abused by Lambert Nugent, Ada's landlord. So, the narrator's stated aim seems quite simple, namely 'to write down what happened in my grandmother's house the summer I was eight or nine'.[60] Yet, despite the seemingly straightforward topic,

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[57] According to Robert F. Garratt's *Trauma and History in the Irish Novel: The Return of the Dead*, (London: Palgrave, 2011) contemporary Irish fiction published between 1970 and 2000 is different from standard historical fiction in that it focuses on the trauma past events have caused, p. 4. However, Garratt continues, this re-examination of the past is necessary in order to open up the future, pp. 16-17.

[58] Anne Enright, *No Authority*, p. 78. This statement recalls Doyle's belief that a lot of Irish history is about who has the right to define the country which I have quoted previously.

[59] On the topic of imagination filling the gaps when memory cannot be relied on, it is interesting to mention Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'Postmemory' to define the relationship that the 'generation after' has with the personal, collective, and cultural traumas borne by a previous generation. The new generation 'remembers' these experiences only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up. These experiences, however, were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Hence, the connection between postmemory and the past is mediated not by memory but by 'imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one´s consciousness, is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension', Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, pp. 106-7.

[60] Anne Enright, *The Gathering*, (London: Vintage, 2008), p. 1. All further references to this text are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the text.

the structure of the novel is anything but straightforward or linear.[61] I mentioned in the section on Anne Enright and Joyce the topic of ambiguous titles as a mirror of ambiguous narratives: in *The Gathering*, the uncertainty and ambiguity which characterise the narrative start with the title itself. The gathering in the title might not strictly be about the family gathering for the wake, which makes up a relatively small part of the novel: the reader is left wondering what the title really refers to. Is it the gathering of the protagonist's dead brother's body? Is it the gathering of feelings and of oneself? There is no doubt that, once we have read the novel, the title also refers to the gathering of memories and past emotions and to an attempt to deduce and understand.[62] Then the title might be seen as a metaphor for trying to stop things, and the self, from falling apart. So, that 'texture of discourse' whereby Enright makes you aware of the power of language and of metaphor to change perspective, on which I reflected in the introductory paragraphs to this chapter, appears to start in the title of the novel.

As this is a novel, so a written medium, Enright has to explore the linguistic system and, through language, find a way to give her characters agency. In fact, we only have Veronica's perspective on people and events. We get to know Veronica, the protagonist, through her thoughts, which are laid bare. There are many instances where we are plunged into Veronica's train of thoughts, as when Veronica is describing a scene at home after Tom, her husband, and herself get back from a dinner party; at one stage, her thoughts wander off to the emotional relationship between the two of them and to her recurrent sense of guilt:

> We rarely shout, myself and Tom, we just hate… I know hating when I see it. I know it, because there is a part of me that wants to be hated, too. There must be. Anyway. (p. 180-1)

Then she carries on with the original topic. In this case it is as if she realises she has gone off track following the train of her thoughts and the 'Anyway' signals to the reader precisely that we are witnessing that train of thoughts. Consequently, just as thought processes are not linear, the narration is digressive. As the novel 'progresses', Veronica moves further and further away from an apparently settled life to unsettledness, both

[61] According to Bridget English, for example, 'the novel's fragmented structure… deliberately resists assimilation into linear narrative, along with the self-conscious mode of narration… and suspicion of the authority of grand narratives', Bridget English, *Laying Out the Bones*, p. 151

[62] According to the online Cambridge dictionary, 'to gather' also means ' to understand something as a result of something that has been said or done' and it is also a synonym of 'conclude' or 'deduce' https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/gather, last accessed on 06 February 2021.

physical and mental, so that the disjointed and uncertain narrative might be seen as a metaphor for her mental state. However, when seen through a postcolonial lens, the disjointed narrative can also be seen as a projection of wider displacement and uprootedness. The novel spirals further and further into unsettledness. The novel's moment of making Veronica confront the past exposes her to the realisation of the effects of that history which is correlative to the nation's. Then, Veronica's tale can be seen as the representative attempt of a subaltern individual to tell her own story. That this is an act of reappropriation is particularly clear in her act of writing and rewriting Ada and Nugent's story about which Veronica says 'I can twist them [Ada and Nugent] as far as you like, here on the page… I can bend and reconfigure them' (p. 139); or 'Is it possible that Nugent is imagining it all – or that I am' (p. 17); or 'I write about Ada and Nugent in the Belvedere, endlessly, over and again' (p. 38), with the latter quotation appearing to suggest an act of rewriting the past, again and again, that is agonised in Veronica's personal situation, but which is also correlative, as we shall see, to the national inheritance.

Perhaps a consequence of this intended discontinuity, there is something hidden in the narrative of *The Gathering*. It does not reveal 'the truth' – if anything, it adds to the uncertainty. This is a novel of things hidden away – the mentally ill, abuse, who was abused, whether it really happened, Ada knowing/not knowing about it, Veronica's mother knowing/not knowing about a secret involving Nugent and Ada. To this effect, poignant sentences in the novel that seem to refer to opposites encapsulated in the same event is:

> Fact/Conjecture. Dead/Alive. Drunk/Sober. Out in the world that is not the world of the Hegarty family, we think these things are Not The Same Thing. (p. 26)

It appears that what to other people might be clear distinctions to the Hegartys, to herself, might be conflations or have blurred boundaries. This is a novel where things are never quite what they seem, something which transpires when Veronica describes meeting her younger sister, Kitty, after not having seen her for a while:

> Kitty – a woman weirdly like my little sister, though much too old… her hair feels fake, like a wig… from a distance, it was just as curly and beautiful and black as it ever was, though when I check her face I see that it has collapsed… has melted as easy as wax, leaving the flesh hanging on to bones, bones, bones. (pp. 153-4)

Our narrator, however, never tricks the reader into believing that what she is writing is the one and only truth. On the contrary, she states right at the start that, although her aim is to write down what happened when she was eight or nine 'I am not sure if it really did happen' (p. 1). Veronica's statement foregrounds one of the recurring themes, that is to say the power of memory and the blurred boundaries between false and real memories. This, in turns, results in a narration that develops by way of suggestions, silences.

The only exception is Veronica's description of the scene of the abuse itself, which is told in a short and straight-to-the-point manner which makes it even more disturbing. Here, the narration switches to the present tense: it is as if Veronica is reporting the event in real time and both herself and the reader are witnessing what is happening. This might be because that event is still vivid in her mind and still shapes her present. Although, at the same time, we wonder whether it did really happen the way Veronica recalls. Because, as mentioned, the narrator makes us aware of the possibility the event might never have happened how she remembers it, or even at all. Indeed, at one point, the possibility she was abused comes to light. In a scene towards the end of the novel, seeing her sister and mistaking her for Ada's ghost, triggers buried memories to come to the surface:

> I remembered a picture. I don't know what else to call it. It is a picture in my head of Ada standing at the door of the good room in Broadstone. I am eight. Ada's eyes are crawling down my shoulder and back. Her gaze is livid down one side of me… and on the other side of me is the welcoming darkness of Lambert Nugent. I am facing into that darkness and falling. I am holding his penis in my hand (p. 221).

If this is what happened, the whole story could be seen from a different light – her difficult relationship with men and sex, her ambivalent view of Ada, who is at times described as a victim, but at times depicted as having 'a sharp enough way about her' (p. 143) and whose death was 'completely tedious' (p. 86) to Veronica. This ambivalence might be explained by the fact that Ada did 'nothing' (p. 222). If we accept that she was the abused child and not Liam, or as well as Liam, her statement at one point that she did not like Liam would make sense; Veronica might have thought he did not protect her from Nugent (p. 200).[63]

[63] Towards the end of the novel, a whole new scenario is hinted at and left unexplored when Veronica says that 'He [Nugent] had the house, and he had the woman, more or less, and he did what he liked with the children passing through… children in those days were of little account. We three Hegartys were manifestly *of little account*' (pp. 235-6). It appears that Nugent, who owned Ada's house, blackmailed the latter into sex and molested all the children that passed through, so even little sister Kitty and Ada's children might

But was she? Immediately after what we think is finally the truth, the narrator adds:

> This comes from a place in my head where words and actions are mangled. It comes from the very beginning of things, and I cannot tell if it is true. Or I cannot tell if it is real. (pp. 221-2)

suggesting that some memories might not be factually real but are still psychologically true. Again, what has begun as a moment of truth turns into one of uncertainty and ambiguity. We have been given more pieces to add to the puzzle, and far from helping, this has made it more difficult for the reader to piece the narrative together. Moreover, at times, the denial of something opens up the possibility that it might have happened:

> These are the things that I don't know: that I was touched by Lambert Nugent, that my Uncle Brendan was driven mad by him, that my mother was rendered stupid by him, that my aunt Rosie and my sister Kitty got away. In short, I know nothing else about Lambert Nugent; who he was and how Ada met him; what he did, or did not do. (p. 224)

Here, we are told that the narrator does not know whether these things happened, which is not the same as saying they did not happen. Moreover, if they did not happen, why does she feel the need to mention them? We cannot help but think that, in Veronica's mind, there is much more than she is sharing with the reader. All the half-told 'truths', the vague statements, the different representations of the same events, the telling and, at the same time, denying, make for an elusive narrative which we can never really fully own. The past is both 'spoken' and illegible – and so traumatises those in the present.

It is not surprising then that the story Veronica keeps writing and re-writing at night is about Ada and Lambert Nugent, both deceased. In her story, she gives the two characters an imaginary life and relationship. She imagines encounters and dialogues which happen in settings of her choice. The opening of this story she is writing, and which she details to the reader, although rich in detail and opulent both in terms of description

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have been victims of abuse. There might a reference here to the clerical abuse of children which, when the novel was published, was being more fully investigated after decades of cover ups. In fact, in 2005, the Ferns Report, detailing extensive child abuse and cover-up, was published. This, in turn, prompted the appointment of Judge Yvonne Murphy to head up the Commission of Investigation into the Dublin archdiocese. The Murphy report was published in 2009. For a timeline see https://www.irishtimes.com/news/clerical-child-abuse-an-irish-timeline-1.880042, last accessed 05 April 2021.

and setting, sets the scene for silence and stasis. The scene is one where 'nothing has been said. No one has moved' (p. 17). This sense of Joycean paralysis and helplessness is reinforced immediately: 'By fourteen minutes past seven, they [Ada and Nugent] are back just where they began' (p. 18). The description of this scene is also peppered with minute details and repetitions, as if to add to the sense of slowness. This sense of stasis persists throughout the novel. We are reminded of it, for example, when we are told that Charlie, the narrator's grandfather, wanted 'his luck to turn, though his luck was always turning, and his luck was always the same', constantly moving to stay still (p. 215).

In addition to this sense of paralysis, like in Joyce's *Dubliners*, a lot of the colours in the novel are dark, brown, yellow, tan, symbolising decay.[64] Moreover, again like *Dubliners*, which follows a narrative structure where the stories develop from childhood to maturity, a 'temporal' trajectory is superficially present in *The Gathering* as well; it starts with the narrator reminiscing about and analysing childhood events and ends with a wake and a funeral, symbolising the end of life.[65] Enright's use of the domestic space reminds us of *Dubliners* as well.[66] She details the narrative space as the kitchen, the bedroom, the sitting room, even a garage. As mentioned, she identifies the house as a place in which and about which you can write, a place that lets her speak rather than being the traditional place of female 'servitude'. The similarities with Joyce's characters such as Eveline cannot be ignored: the picture Veronica gives us of herself sitting and looking out of the window at nighttime is reminiscent of Eveline 'sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue'.[67] Besides, the narrator, like Eveline, tries to break away from home, only to end up going back and staying. Nowhere else is the sense of stasis and paralysis in *The Gathering* more evident than in the utter lack of progress the reader makes in trying to piece together the puzzle represented by Veronica's account(s), and the lack of any resolving revelations in the narrative which, hence, becomes a symbol of paralysis itself.

[64] For example, in 'Araby' the houses gaze 'at one another with brown imperturbable faces' (p. 21); in 'A Painful Case' the streets in Dublin have a 'brown tint' (p. 104); in 'The Dead' Miss Ivors has 'prominent brown eyes' (p. 187); in 'Eveline' we see 'yellowing' photographs hanging from the walls (p. 30) and in 'The Dead' the landscape is dulled down by a 'yellow light' (p. 214), all quotations from *Dubliners* are from James Joyce, *Dubliners*, with an Introduction and Notes by Terence Brown. For an analysis of the meaning of colours and darkness in *Dubliners*, see Pyeaam Abbasi and Hussein Salimian, 'Binary Oppositions and the Meaning of Joyce's *Dubliners*', *Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2012, pp. 63-69.

[65] Incidentally, the same temporal trajectory is present in *The Green Road*, a novel whose first five chapters start with childhood ('Hannah', Chapter I) and end with maturity/old age ('Rosaleen', Chapter V)..

[66] In a 2008 interview Enright herself claims 'James Joyce as an honorary female ("she writes domestic and introspective books, not the slightest bit socially aware")', in Susan Rustin, 'What Women Want', *The Guardian*, 15 March 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/mar/15/fiction.featuresreviews, last accessed 11 June 2021.

[67] James Joyce, *Dubliners*, p. 259

The events of the novel are mostly set in those domestic spaces – the grandmother's house, her parents' house, the 'three-storey over-basement' (p. 119) in London, namely Michael Weiss' bedsit where, poignantly, Veronica, the narrator remembers herself as 'a woman… lying on a bed, with her back arched, and her mouth open… No sound' (p. 88). In the novel, houses are not safe havens but places that at times feel as prisons. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in choosing a house as the place where the (negatively) defining event in the novel takes place. Liam, the narrator's brother, is seemingly abused at his grandmother's house, a place where the children had been sent to, presumably, be looked after and be kept safe. The irony is even greater when we learn that, in fact, the house belongs to Nugent, the perpetrator of the possible abuse. It might not be by chance then that this, which Veronica had initially imagined as happening in 'Ada's good room', is moved to a space characteristically associated with men:

> Whatever happened to Liam did not take place in Ada's good room – no matter what picture I have in my head… the abuse happened in the garage. (p. 223)

Houses and domestic spaces also become metaphors for the core of the narrative itself, which, as we have seen, is broken, full of gaps, open to interpretation and never stating a single 'truth'. As Joe Moran has rightly pointed out in relation to the symbolic value of houses in fiction:

> It is true that houses provide us with a sense that the past can be preserved within the stable confines of their solid walls. But the house is not fixed forever by its site and structure: it is also an evolving entity of layered residues and accretions, responsive to the subtle modifications of habitual experience.[68]

Houses become a metaphor for shifting memories, broken memories as represented in the narrative; at the same time, they are seen as a site of preservation of those memories, something that, as we will see, Enright touches upon in *The Forgotten Waltz*. The different and often contrasting layers that the narrative presents might be exemplified by Veronica's reflection on the parental house:

[68] Joe Moran, 'Houses, Habit and Memory', Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft (eds.), *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture*, (Amsterdam, New York: Editions Rodopi), 2006, p. 42.

> I wonder how you might undo all these sheds and extensions, take the place back to the house it once was. If it would be possible to unbuild it all and start again (p. 24).

Sheds and extensions become constructs as unalterable as the main buildings, and possibly what stops her from distinguishing between real truths and imagined truths.

Dismantling them would mean going back to the true essence of things without all that has been built around them by memory and imagination.[69] Indeed, we are constantly reminded that Veronica is manipulating events as seen through her own eyes and her mind's eyes while she is relating them, that she owns the story. Indeed, all through the novel there are reminders that women have been the victims of social constructs and have been denied a voice. Like the sheds and extensions in the house, these constructs have become barriers that need dismantling. Examples of women not having their own voices start with Ada. From the beginning Ada is the product of someone else's imagination: 'My grandmother was Lamb Nugent's most imaginative act. I may not forgive him, but it is this… that defines the man most, for me' (p. 22). Hence, Ada's most defining act is that she was 'imagined' by a man, that she had no apparent agency of her own. In a way, it also means that Ada is owned, first by Nugent, then by Veronica, who, by writing her story, makes Ada say or think what she decides. Ada's status as voiceless is further confirmed in the description of Ada, Nugent and Charlie in one of the opening scenes at the hotel, as imagine by Veronica:

> On the other side of the room, Ada's breathing is so shallow and mild she might be an angel occupying, for the moment, the figure of a doll… her lips are sculpted shut in the light… Nugent's ghosts twitter, soft and unassuaged, while Ada's make no sound at all. (pp. 31-2)

Ada is here depicted as an object of other people's thoughts, including the narrator's. Unlike Nugent and Charlie, we are not told what she thinks and feels. She is a statue, with 'her lips sculpted shut,' so destined to remain shut forever.

It is not by chance that throughout the novel there are reminders of the social and historical condition of women as subjugated victims of stereotypes, unable to express in their own voices. This starts with a clear vision of men and women as two opposed categories, with few exceptions.[70] Talking about her husband, Veronica says that she

[69] Nugent, in *The Gathering*, takes cars apart and puts them back together in the garage, which can be seen as an extension of the house, but not the house.

[70] It is worth remembering that this gendered view of society has its roots in Ireland's colonial past. As Gerry Smyth highlights, 'During the nineteenth century, the opposition between coloniser and colonised

knows that 'What he wants, what my husband has always wanted, and the thing I will not give him, is my annihilation… I know all men aren't like this' (p. 145). The female condition was the same in the past, as represented by Ada, as it is in the present, as represented by Veronica, with only some minor cosmetic changes:

> I think of her [Ada] when I do the dishes. Of course I have a dishwasher, so if I ever cry, it is not into the sink, quietly, like Ada. The sink was her place for this… I have a stainless steel Miele dishwasher. And if I have any crying to do, I do it respectably, in front of the TV. (p. 89)

This seems to convey some of the things women have been blighted with in the past, and still in the present – that a woman's place is in the kitchen; that women suffer quietly, without speaking out; that women put up with things as they believe this is the way it is, and carry on; that, although, on the surface, things might now appear different, this situation has changed little at its core. There is also an incredible sense of loneliness created by the scene of women crying alone. However, the narrator turns the domestic space into a writing space which gives her a voice and lets her reappropriate her own story. Veronica tells us that 'if I look to where my imagining started, it was at Ada's sink, in Broadstone' (p. 90). This image, with its juxtaposition of a place traditionally seen as a place of domestic labour, and the act of imagining which eventually leads to Veronica creating her own story, seems to encapsulate the novel's turning domestic space into the site for reappropriation. Through this discursive process of reappropriation, and from a distinctive female perspective, Veronica is undoing what Cairns and Richards see as a constant in colonial relationships, that is to say 'the process of describing the colonised and inscribing them in discourse as second-class citizens'.[71] However, Veronica is doing more than that: she is also undoing another process that saw women being cast in a subaltern status: that created by the ossified accounts of the nation.

I mentioned in the introductory sections that, starting with *The Gathering*, Enright's novels juxtapose the individual and the national, while foregrounding female

was cast in terms of the "natural" division of the sexes, the former as the generally benign but always controlling male, the latter as the female, by turns vulnerable and predatory, attractive and dangerous', Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation*, p. 55. One of the aims of the Nationalist movement was to reverse these stereotypes. So, the Irish male who was characterised by the coloniser as weak and effeminate, was now represented as strong, self-assured, active and brave; women instead, as a reversion of the colonial depiction, were the angels of the home, and were seen as sweet and passive. The attention in Ireland was centred on men. As a consequence, Irish women had to be put aside to make men's courage and virility shine. For more, see Dana Hearne, 'Rewriting History', Sean Finbarr Gallagher (ed.), *Women in Irish Legend, Life and Literature*, (London: Colin Smythe, 1983), pp. 138-9.

[71] David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland*, p. 8.

consciousness as the filter through which history and tradition are seen and reworked. Interestingly, the narrator draws parallels between Ireland and herself, the individual 'It was 1981. Nothing had happened yet, in Ireland… nothing had happened yet in my life except the need to get out of it' (p. 88). Moreover, Veronica explicitly links individuals and nations, presumably her own nation, suffering from shame:

> This is what shame does to you. This is the anatomy and mechanism of a family – a whole fucking country – drowning in shame… as if the world was built on a lie and that lie was very secret and very dirty. (p. 168)

Veronica's reference to shame might reference the psychological impact a colonial past has had on Ireland, whilst the shift in focus, from psychological or emotional to the monetary (mortgages), can be seen as an attempt to try and rid herself, as with the nation, of a psychological legacy harder to shift than the economic one.[72] As in Doyle's Paula novels, this impression is reinforced by the parallel between nation and family – we know that early Irish nationalism founded Irish identity on the idea of the traditional family. The above seems to make it clear that the sense of shame she is suffering from is linked to a 'lie that was very secret', something that, again, reconnects to the sense of shame, both individual and national, which I discussed in previous sections. It feels as though Enright is using the novel to open up a traumatic scenario. Things not adding up is the issue.

The Gathering is like a puzzle that the reader needs to piece together. Anne Enright is aware of psychoanalysis and exposes its clichés. One such cliché, for example, is that when trauma surfaces then all the rest of experience will fall into place. In the novel, it definitely does not. In fact, the surfacing of the trauma seems to accelerate the deterioration of Veronica's mental state and personal life. As she says herself 'I have gone mad' (p. 176). Hence, we might say that, in Enright, alongside the temporal gulf, the discontinuity is psychological, emotional. Thanks to a carefully crafted narrative strategy, the narrator retains ownership of the story and all its parts whilst not herself being certain as to how those parts fit in. Although we find lots of statements about authenticity in the novel, they are often followed by statements that negate an objective authenticity. As a consequence, it is always unclear what is objectively true and the

[72] In *Inventing Ireland*, Declan Kiberd says that 'it was 1930s Ireland which insisted on defining the family as the basic unity of society'. Declan Kiberd*, Inventing Ireland*, p. 295.

concept itself of objective truth is questioned.[73] If we accept, as I posited, that in the novel individual and nation overlap, then this negation of objective authenticity at a personal level implies that this is also questioned at a national one, as the author appears to question prescribed notions of Ireland and Irishness.

The ultimate impossibility for the reader to unravel what is real from what is not, to put together a coherent narrative, is reflected in the following passage:

> We know that real events have real effects. In a way that unreal events do not. Or nearly real. Or whatever you call the events that play themselves out in my head. (p. 223)

Again, as she has done every step of the way, the narrator reminds us that this is her story, her events. It is in her head that these events – real or unreal – take shape and come to life. Veronica is burdened by a version of the past that might not even be the past, by events that might not have happened. But they are true to her and, so, real. In Veronica's own words, the perfect metaphor for the novel is 'Family sins and family wounds, the endless pricking of something that we find hard to name' (p. 210). Despite the pricking and re-pricking of the subject matter, despite the little pinholes which the narrative opens up, we never get a complete picture: we infer the link to a traumatic past, but it is nonetheless hard to name what the whole story is. However, the reader had been warned right from the start that 'I do not know the truth, or I do not know how to tell the truth. All I have are stories' – again, the narrator has told us immediately that her narrative is not going to lead to any articulation of a final revelatory truth for the reader (p. 2).

The Gathering ends with Veronica returning from Gatwick to Ireland and to all the things she has run away from. Again, there are echoes of Joyce: like Gabriel in 'The Dead' Veronica, deeply dissatisfied with her life, ends up in a hotel room. But the Veronica at the very end of the novel is not the same Veronica that had, up until the arrival at Gatwick, been narrating the story. She realizes that 'Being in a Gatwick hotel does not mean that you have arrived… it means that you have plenty left to go' (p. 255). Her choice of an airport as the epiphanic locum symbolises that she is in transit towards unearthing a better-defined self by coming to terms with, or at least accepting, the past. Moreover,

[73] See, for example, the very opening of the novel we have mentioned, on p. 1; or: 'I know, as I write about these three things: the jacket, the stones, and my brother's nakedness underneath his clothes, that they require me to deal in facts… It is time to call an end to romance and just say what happened in Ada's house, the year that I was eight and Liam was barely nine' (p. 142). We realise that, over halfway through the book, and despite the opening statement, we still do not know what the truth the narrator wants to tell us about is; or statements such as 'I owe it to Liam to make things clear – what happened and what did not happen in Broadstone' (p. 223).

on leaving her hotel room at Gatwick, Veronica decides to 'put on new pants and leave the old ones in the bin. I discard this other life, and leave the hotel behind' (p. 257).[74] The final thought, 'I have been falling into my own life, for months. And I am about to hit it now', presents a new Veronica who accepts that, although confronting the reality of her past has not meant escaping its grip, she has to 'hit' her life (p. 261). Interestingly, in the final scenes of the novel, when meeting Liam's English girlfriend and their son, Rowan, at the funeral, Veronica feels 'very Irish as I reach out to take her hand in both my hands' (p. 241). This act at the end of the novel, as well as Rowan, Liam's son, symbolise a present and future reworked in the light of histories that are suddenly newly-perceived, thanks to revisiting and reclaiming the past through the female act of writing. This act recalls the idea of fiction as reappropriation tool: in this case, it is a woman who is reappropriating her own story through the act of processing it.[75]

However, if we accept that Veronica also stands for the nation, this act of processing the past is a collective one as well. Indeed, we are explicitly told right at the beginning of the novel that to Veronica bones are words: 'I lay them out in nice sentences, all my clean, white bones' (p. 2). So, by association, words, just like bones, are the skeleton of our bodies and our lives. It is no surprise that she regrets wasting 'much of my life writing about heated towel rails. Endless words. About the difference between mulberry leather and tan' (p. 71). The meaninglessness of this act of writing can perhaps be seen as a metaphor for the meaninglessness of her life. So, to go back to the quotation, she does not give us the full story, but the 'bones' of it and it is up to the reader to link it together. The flashbacks in the novel do not help join it together; in fact, they add to the uncertainty. However, the mention of the word 'bones' also implies an almost 'archaeological project of recovering the past' and the fact that, although the narrative is giving the reader the bones of the story, it is up to us to add the 'flesh'.[76]

For Gerry Smyth, what makes *The Gathering* a typically 'Irish' text is its preoccupation with how 'the sins of the past continue to poison and distort the present'.[77]

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[74] Changing clothes is seen as changing identities. There is another example in the novel where Charlie disappearing and coming back in different clothes suggests a change in identity (p. 103). A similar instance can be found in Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry*, when running away from the British Army, Henry dives into the Liffey and, from rebel, he turns into just an unassuming boy after discarding his clothes, Roddy Doyle, *A Star Called Henry*, p. 141.

[75] Literature seen as a site of reappropriation is, according to Eóin Flannery, one of the fundamental aspects of Irish postcolonial studies, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 3. In the wider postcolonial debate, Ania Loomba remarks that culture is an important site of reappropriation and decolonisation, especially so as it allows for 'the decentring of the human subject… because such a subject had been dominantly theorised by European imperialist discourse as male and white', Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, p. 41.

[76] Bridget English, *Laying Out the Bones*, p. 157.

[77] Gerry Smyth, *The Judas Kiss: Treason and Betrayal in Six Modern Irish Novels*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p. 181.

In particular, he suggests that 'betrayal' emerges as the central legacy 'informing the narrative' on a personal but also national level.[78] In the end, I think the spirit of the novel can be summed up by the following: 'History is only biological – that's what I think. We pick and choose the facts about ourselves – where we came from and what it means' (p. 158), just how we pick the facts to develop a novel.

IV.6 *The Forgotten Waltz*

Like *The Gathering*, *The Forgotten Waltz* is grounded in the everyday Ireland of its creation. The setting is Dublin during the economic boom of the early 2000s, heading into the crash of 2008. The story is told in retrospect – the end is the present: the winter of 2009. Enright takes up a seemingly mundane plot: that of adulterous love. Gina, married to Conor, narrates her affair with Séan – himself married and father to Evie – which comes to a head as Ireland's economy collapses. The romance between Gina, the narrator, and Seán, her lover, is intertwined with, and indeed is a mirror for, the Irish economic situation. It starts at the height of the boom, when financial optimism is at its apex, and has come to a disappointing stagnation when the economic crash arrives.[79] Love and finances seem to be inextricably linked all through the novel, starting with Gina's marriage to Conor, about which the narrator says:

> I can't remember what this [the practicalities of finances] did to the love we were supposed to be in. The next few months were all about work and there was something frantic and lonely about our love in that little house… mortgage love. Shagging at 5.3 per cent.[80]

The individual story mirrors the national one, so the failure of the former reflects the failure of the latter. Even Gina's adultery can be seen as a metaphor for Ireland – trying to get something different, better, but ultimately failing and going back to the initial situation. In respect to the national project, which started as a search for Irish sovereignty and identity as opposed to the one imposed by the coloniser, and thinking about the links between the economy and postcolonial condition, in *After Ireland* Declan Kiberd writes that the economic crash of 2008 impacted the development of the Irish national project:

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[78] Ibid., p. 187.

[79] It is also worth noting that the financial crash affects both Gina and Séan financially. The resulting stagnation in the housing market, for example, is the reason why Gina ends up living in her mother's house and Séan moves in with her.

[80] Anne Enright, *The Forgotten Waltz*, (London: Vintage, 2011), pp. 12-15. All further references to this text are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the text.

> There had always been uncertainty as to how much sovereignty a small nation could enjoy in a globalizing world. Even after political independence in 1922, Ireland remained highly dependent on the neighbouring island for markets and materials, and as a source of employment.[81]

This dependency is both a leftover of the colonial situation and a step through which decolonising nations pass, before achieving full economic and cultural independence. So, like Gina who is trying to break away to live a new life, Ireland, through the Celtic Tiger, tried to break away from this form of economic dependency. However, just as the crisis between Gina and Séan brings uncertainty and vulnerability in Gina's life, the Crash brought back the feeling of vulnerability for the postcolonial nation. However, this sense of uncertainty also presents opportunities both for the individual and the nation. The narrative opens up opportunities to rethink individual identity and the national one.[82]

Some have pointed out the lack of narrative tension resulting from the fact that Enright starts by telling us, in the brief 'Preface', exactly what will happen in the rest of the book. Gina has an affair; her marriage collapses; she ends up living with her lover; and things are complicated by the involvement of a child.[83] Since we know all this by the end of the very first few pages, the rest of the novel is spent exploring the precise way in which it happened. I believe that this sort of anti-climax approach is a precise narrative strategy by Enright. She is not interested in the affair as such, but she wants to delve into an analysis of what, emotionally, getting into the affair entailed as well as what the emotional response to it is – she wants a narrative that focuses on the un-straightforward act of retrieving memories, without any distractions. In this light, both what paved the way to the affair, and the response to it, are hardly linear and, far from being resolved, the narrator's uncertainties deepen and become more 'uncertain' by the end of the novel. In fact, the narrative tension is kept throughout the novel by this sense of uncertainty, by things said and then denied. As readers, we are never let off the hook: as with *The Gathering*, we constantly need to piece together the narrative. The apparent lack of narrative progression also results in a sense of stasis and paralysis which, we will see, reflect Gina's own. Consequently, Enright's decision to reveal the main events of the

[81] Declan Kiberd, *After Ireland*, p. ix and p. 2.
[82] Gerry Smyth, 'Irish National Identity after the Celtic Tiger, A Lecture Delivered in the "New Perspectives on National Identity" Series Liverpool, Thursday 15th March 2012', *Estudios Irlandeses*, no 7, 2012, pp. 132-137, p. 136.
[83] Edmund Gordon, '*The Forgotten Waltz* by Anne Enright: review', *The Telegraph*, 28 April 2011, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/8480088/The-Forgotten-Waltz-by-Anne-Enright-review.html, last accessed 11 June 2021.

story in the 'Preface' form part of the writer's efforts to break with narrative conventions discussed earlier in the chapter.

The narrator is the first to highlight the overarching theme of uncertainty, and to put forward how unreliable the narrative itself is. But, although Gina is not a reliable narrator, she is not a typical unreliable one either. Like Veronica in *The Gathering*, she often warns us that 'I might be getting things in the wrong order here' (p. 45). Gina is, like Veronica, 'sceptical of linear histories and of a past that leaves no room for the complicated aspects of life'.[84] It is then no surprise that the narrative is rambling, contradictory, and doubles back on itself, since we see the story through Gina's eyes; we see her perceptions and judgments of other people and their motives. These perceptions and judgements change, sometimes within the same sentence. At times, the narrative is like overhearing one side of a phone conversation, so that we have to work out the missing bits. This ambiguity in the narrative allows for different readers to bring their own life experiences to Gina. So, in turn, Gina can be seen as a woman who falls in love; or as a woman whose love affair causes a disaster, because that is what love is; or as an adulterer, a liar, a home-wrecker and a man-stealer. As well as meaning freedom of interpretation, the potential for various interpretative possibilities means a lack of certainties in the narrative.

As I discussed in the Introduction, and once again stressed in the opening sections of this chapter in relation to Ireland specifically, 'uncertainty of meaning, dissolution of universals, indeterminacy of selfhood' are a hallmark of postcolonial narratives, as well as of subaltern histories.[85] In the next few pages, I am going to show how Enright evolves these narrative and structural aspects in the early part of *The Forgotten Waltz*. In fact, the opening of the novel immediately sets the tone for what follows:

> If it hadn't been for the child then none of this might have happened, but the fact that a child was involved made everything so much harder to forgive. Not that there is anything to forgive (p. 1).

The opening sentence, rather than setting the scene, confounds it. We do not know what child the narrator is talking about, and how, or in what, this child is involved. We do not know who the narrator is either. Besides, already in this opening sentence, the narrator says something and then, immediately after, its opposite. This establishes the tone of

[84] Bridget English, *Laying Out the Bones*, p. 157.
[85] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 221.

uncertainty and, possibly, fragmentation. It then goes on: 'The fact that a child was affected meant we had to face ourselves properly, we had to follow through'. However, whoever this child is, it seems that it forced them to follow through with something which, otherwise, they might have abandoned.

The sense of ambivalence continues even when the child is identified as being Seán's daughter: 'There was… an amount of ambivalence about Evie, the sense of things unsaid' (p. 1). As it appears that Evie is, somehow, at the core of how the events unfold, it is interesting that she is immediately characterized in this way. It is therefore fitting that the one person Gina's story appears to be hinging upon is dealt with very peripherally at the beginning and end of her story.[86] The start of the affair itself is rooted in uncertainty and memories as we see from Gina's description of when she first saw Seán:

> There was nothing fated about it, though I add in the late summer light and the view. I put him at the bottom of my sister's garden… Half five maybe… the end of my sister's garden becomes uncertain… The light is at his [Seàn's] back. (p. 5)

Again, we see the story through the narrator's eyes and we are made aware that she might be embellishing and romanticising it ('I add in… I put him'). It is as if we are being warned that she chooses the pieces of the puzzle we are presented with. It is also interesting that all we, and the narrator, see of Seàn in this first scene is a silhouette. This might be a metaphor for her not seeing the core but just the outline of things in this story. This sense of disconnect between what appears and what is (or might be) is further

[86] In this respect, Enright again seems to be rewriting history, turning it. It is worth bearing in mind that periphery and childlike are two attributes colonisers gave to colonies. In response to the perceived threat posed by the Other, 'colonialism conceptually depopulated countries either by acknowledging the natives but relegating them to the category of subhuman, or simply by looking through the native and denying his/her existence. These were necessary to claim the *terra nullis* upon which the now-disputed legality of imperial settlement (as opposed to "invasion") was based. Only empty spaces can be settled, so the space had to be made empty by ignoring or dehumanising the inhabitants… The blankness of the map is not an innocent ignorance because it enables… the subsequent practices of dispossession and annihilation. Inscribing the natives as primitive and unable to make use of the natural resources around them allowed first the biblical parable of the ten talents, and then the Darwinian theory of natural selection to justify their dispossession as part of the plan of Destiny... the solution was to see the native as, in Kipling's phrase, "half savage, half child"', Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson, 'Introduction', Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (eds.), *De-scribing Empire: Postcolonialism and Textuality*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 5. Or as Joe Ann Wallace puts it: 'The construction of "the child" coincides with the apogee of English colonial imperialism; indeed, it was an idea of "the child" - of the not yet fully evolved or consequential subject - which made thinkable a colonial apparatus officially dedicated to… "the improvement of" colonised peoples', Jo-Ann Wallace, 'Describing the Water Babies – The Child in Post-Colonial Theory', in *De-scribing Empire: Postcolonialism and Textuality*, Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (eds.), p. 176. The parent-child metaphors underscored much of nineteenth-century colonial imperialism and 'stressed age, experience, roots, traditions', Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, p. 1. In *The Gathering* there is a quote that appears to subvert this type of colonial construction when Veronica muses that 'There has always been something childish about England' (p. 41).

developed when the narrator carries on by pointing out that the house where she first sees Seán, her sister's house, 'sits like a missing tooth in the row of new homes, exposed… a little stage set, for this afternoon, of happiness' (p. 5). In this instance, the house becomes a stage. As house and stage are juxtaposed, there is an implicit suggestion that what was happening there, although appearing real, was not entirely so – from her perspective, Gina might have interpreted what she was seeing in a way that did not match what was happening beneath the surface.[87] This implicit highlighting of the 'fakeness' of the situation, of what might have appeared as real to her, is brought up again when she mentions that

> there is a little log house here for the kids, made out of brown plastic: a bit disgusting actually – the logs look so fake, they might as well be moulded out of chocolate. (p. 8)

The domestic space, rather than being reassuring, is here used as the site of deception and misleading, characterisations that were already present in *The Gathering*.

As in *The Gathering*, the domestic space is very important in the novel. It appears to be so both in terms of a space that constrains women and in terms of a space that preserves memories. It is interesting that Gina ends up living in her mother's house. She preserves the house and finds things scattered around or hidden behind and on top of furniture, like archaeological findings. It is as if, through the house, she is preserving the past. The house seems to be characterised as a 'female' space right from the start, when Gina is talking about the fatidic party at her sister's house where she sees Seàn for the first time: 'The mothers hover around the table where the kids' food is set, while, out in the open air, the men sip their drinks and glance skywards' (p. 6).

In this scene, the women are placed firmly within the domestic space, taking care of the children, while the men are out in the open looking upward. Women and men are seen as two separate groups, with different roles. For example, when talking about going to visit her in-laws, Gina tells us that:

> What Conor liked about being home was the chance it gave him to be a boy again. He liked wrestling with his brothers and being a slob and leaving the kitchen work to the women… My rage at the sink was only partly to do with the drudgery of being a guest in that house, it was more to do with the loss of the man I knew to this loutish teenager. (p. 71)

[87] It is worth noting here that Enright's latest novel, *Actress* (2020), is all about all about acting, the stage and staged realities, stories as catharsis and as a way to tell your own story.

As in *The Gathering*, and later in *The Green Road*, it seems that going back to the family home makes people regress in time and reignites old dynamics. However, it is interesting that in the family house, Conor reverts to the old traditional split of roles where a woman's place is in the kitchen. Here too we see Gina at the sink. However, whilst Veronica wants to pull down her grandmother's house and her mother's, Gina wants to preserve it. Moreover, there seems to be parallel between houses and identities: 'I loved Conor then… and all the versions of him I have invented, in those houses, in my head, I loved them all' (p. 14). This passage seems to reinforce something mentioned earlier, namely that we create the object of our love in our heads and they become real.

The symbolism of the house confirms that Enright is very much writing from within and against the Irish Big House tradition. The Big House was symbolic of the social and political organisation of the ruling Ascendancy classes and of 'culture besieged by barbarity'.[88] As in the case of the Big House tradition, the domestic space in the novel equates to memory and is personified.[89] Besides, just as with the representation of the Big House in novels by female writers especially, Enright's domestic space has strong female characterisations.[90] However, in Enright's fiction, the Ascendancy mansions of the Big House novels become ordinary, small suburban Irish houses. We will see how this theme continues and is also altered, in *The Green Road*.

Seán's house is symbolic as well – it is portrayed as modern and sleek, the perfect match for this symbol of modern, successful Irish men, whose Irishness we are constantly reminded of by the spelling of his name. But then the Crash comes and we also find out that his house, so attractive on the outside, hides the fact that life inside is not as glamorous as it might look from the outside. It seems that the scene where Gina is parked outside, thinking that life inside matches the smart, desirable exterior, might be a metaphor for her desiring to be in a relationship with Seán, a relationship that might look desirable while she is still on the outside of it but that turns sour and disappointing once she is on the inside. Again, this seems to be another example of external vs internal dichotomy we have been describing. As Gina herself says 'I had gone to the edges of myself, and what was in the centre was anyone's guess. Nothing, that is one answer. Or nothing much' (p. 30).

[88] Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 31.
[89] For more on the Irish Big House novels, see Neil Corcoran, *After Yeats and Joyce*, pp. 32-56.
[90] Ibid., p. 37.

The narrator is not fully aware of what is going on at the beginning of the story and she finds out in retrospect 'what was going on [in Seán's life], the Christmas I wandered the streets' (p. 216). She clearly did not have all the pieces of the puzzle either for a while. She discovers (some of) what was happening as time goes by, after the event, although Gina herself never owns all the pieces of the picture, or if she does, she does not pass them on to us. This is partly because it is Seán who owns some of the pieces which form the story. It is Seán who, sometimes, holds and withholds key information about what happened. Seán is depicted as a rather shady character whom, Gina realises, 'tells the story differently every time, and he believes it differently each time' (p. 216). The narrator realises that Seán's accounts are not reliable and makes us aware of this:

> Of course, I know Evie's story mostly from Seán's point of view, and I know that Seán does not always tell the truth… but whatever way he remembers it, there is something in Evie's story that Seán is constantly trying to understand. Something about himself, perhaps. (p. 200)

If Seán is not reliable, that makes the narrator's account unreliable as well. The impression that neither character can be relied upon as far as the narrative is concerned is further reinforced when Gina concludes:

> And that, as far as I can tell, is what happened to Evie. But it is not the whole truth. It is the truth in a concentrated form. (p. 202)

This passage raises questions about what 'truth' is and how to define it. Gina continues:

> But though you might think Aileen pushed him away, it is also true… if you work the connections and listen to the silences that Seán had knocked out at least one affair before Evie fell off the swing… this is the real way it happens, isn't it… there is… no clear cause and effect. Or the effect might be clear, the cause is harder to trace. (p. 202)

There is a hint at the fact that imagined memories can become true memories.[91] The latter has already been hinted at right at the beginning, when the narrator muses that 'So my

[91] To show that this tension between real and imagined memories is something important to Anne Enright, it is noteworthy that she specifically reflects on this tension in her 'Introduction' to *No Authority* where she writes that 'The danger with something that is not real… is that it can turn very simply into its opposite' (p. 4). Given that in the same book there is a lot of focus on nationalism and tradition in Ireland, these comments might also sound true when related to the collective memories. It is also worth mentioning that, in the same book, Enright connotates nationalism as male dominated (p. 87).

first sight of Seán (in this, the story I tell myself about Seán) takes place at the beginning of my first exhalation' (p. 9). The narrator knows and makes clear that she is in a way deceiving herself. She tells the reader, indeed, that she is deceiving both herself and her audience, the novel's readership.

The narrator is playing with us, telling us that there are gaps and silences in the narrative which we need to bridge, discontinuities which we will need to make sense of in order to give the story more linearity – something Gina says she has done herself. However, even so, we might not be able to find a clear 'cause and effect'. This lack of linear development is part Enright's efforts to disrupt chronology and open up the narrative.[92] The quotation above, from nearly the end of the novel, recalls another in the opening pages, where Gina foretells the sense of uncertainty, the lack of sequentiality, of chronology, of before and after, of cause and effect that run throughout the novel when she says 'But this was later. Or perhaps it had already happened, perhaps it was happening all along. We might have run along these parallel tracks, of believing and not believing… I don't know' (p. 19) because 'Things, clearly, did not happen in a particular order anymore: first this and then that' (p. 35). Gina goes as far as telling us that chronology is not her main concern when she states that:

> Still, I can't be too bothered here, with chronology. The idea that if you tell it, one thing after another, then everything will make sense. It doesn't make sense. (p. 46)

Like *The Gathering*, *The Forgotten Waltz* is a novel about memory and develops through memories; just as in the former novel we have the feeling that reflecting upon past experience, processing it, does not make everything fall orderly into place. The gaps, the uncertainties remain and still:

> My memory skips the beginning of it, like a needle in an old record, so I have lost the moment of decision… Or perhaps… I might be imposing the lover I know now on the memory of the man I slept with then. (pp. 34-5)

Memories, true or false, become the reality; what is psychologically true is presented as factually real, albeit though it might be denied a few sentences later. As in *The Gathering*,

[92] Claire Bracken and Susan Cahill, 'Introduction', Claire Bracken and Susan Cahill (eds.), *Irish Writers in their Time: Anne Enright*, p. 7. Moreover, as I noted in the Introduction, commentators agree that fragmented narratives are part of a strategy to bring to the surface fragmented histories and identities. See footnotes 118 and 119.

Enright is aware that some believe that processing the past might lead to an epiphany-like moment and everything will fall into place. However, she does not seem to believe this is the case. In fact, as mentioned above, Gina warns us against such an assumption. As readers, we realise it is as if the narrator is trying to thwart our attempts at bridging the gaps and 'owning' the story.

Consequently, in the novel, what is left unsaid, is part of a precise narrative strategy; or that perceptions of people and events differ depending on our perspective on them. Throughout the novel there is an undercurrent, starting with Evie who sees that the world is different from what appears on the surface when she sees Gina and Seán kissing and thinks that they are just exchanging Christmas greetings. The narrative is a process that delves into the conflict between the narrator's perception of what was happening, what she 'believed' was happening, and what was really happening (p. 93). For example, when Gina first sees Evie, she thinks the child is weird, adding that she suspected it was 'her mother's fault… '"Poor child"' I said. "It's all her, you know." Meaning the mother', Aileen (p. 25). She finds out later on that Evie is actually suffering from seizures, in another example of wrong perceptions.

As mentioned, Gina and Seán's relationship is interwoven with the economic boom of the early 2000s, as if the two mirror each other and can be seen as metaphors for each other. Hence, the relationship can be seen as symbolic of Ireland's condition, with the promise of something better which is then thwarted as the country goes back to the same situation as before. That Ireland is left with what is there, that it cannot get rid of the past, is symbolised by Gina's mother's house that, despite having been on the market for seventeen months, cannot sell (p. 131). The fact that Ireland has become vulnerable within global markets must be implicitly linked to its postcolonial status and be part of its postcolonial inheritance. The cyclical nature of this going back to something and somewhere you thought you had escaped from can be seen in Gina's relationship with Seán, which turns into something very similar to the one she had with Conor; or the fact that the novel opens and closes with Evie.

The 'anti-climax' approach discussed earlier, by which Enright tells us what happens in the story by the end of the very first pages, is therefore a narrative strategy to reflect a lack of any exciting development or life-changing ending – the country's situation reverts to type and so does Gina's. Hence, the parallel between Ireland and the affair is an attempt 'to reconcile the individual's subjective experience with a larger culture history': these attempts, whilst preventing 'Enright's novel from being easily classified as realist, modernist, or even post-modernist' root it finally in a postcolonial

dimension.[93] Perhaps fittingly, in the novel, in contrast with the apparent new-found economic buoyancy and progress, the narrative conveys a sense of lack of progress, of stasis, of paralysis which is reflected in the idleness, the lack of decisions, the feeling that events happen to the characters rather than the characters actively driving events. As a consequence, it is unsurprising that this economic vigour is not matched by an equal desire to do, to act, to take responsibility for their own lives on the characters' part. The characters are led by events rather than leading them. Chance seems to be ruling their lives: 'It seemed that choice had nothing to do with it, or that I'd chosen a long time ago' (p. 33). Of the affair itself, the event that leads to both Gina and Seàn leaving their families, the narrator says 'I just think that if I hadn't been on the pill things would have gone differently' – there is a feeling that more than fate, it is down to chance (p. 30). In addition to this sense of paralysis, there are again here other elements that recall Joyce.

For example, at the end of the novel Dublin is covered by a blanket of snow; it is quiet, the streets are empty, Gina is less certain now of what her life is/will be than when the novel starts: it is impossible not to think of 'The Dead'. The inability of the characters to act, to make active decisions and not be led by events is mirrored by the Joycean image of a Dublin 'flattened by monochrome', covered by a blanket of snow which makes moving around difficult (p. 204).[94] Gina is not happier, her mind is not clearer, she has moved to stand still. This similarity can also be seen at the level of relationship dynamics: there is a definite similarity between the Gabriel/Greta relationship and the Gina/Seán one. This comes particularly to mind when Gina looks at the silhouette of Seán in her sister's garden and assumes he is thinking of something exotic when in fact it is very likely that he is thinking about the trouble at home and his daughter's seizures (p. 5). This reminds us of the scene in 'The Dead' where Gabriel is observing Greta at the top of the stairs, viewing a painting and assuming she is thinking of him.[95] The roles are swapped. It is as if Enright is looking at these misunderstandings from a female point of view. This is appropriate in a story where, as mentioned, it is women that take on the burden of processing the past, of agonising over it. A bit like in *The Gathering*, where an explanation and an account of what happened is constantly promised, *The Forgotten Waltz* is a repeated promise of explaining and telling what happened to Gina and Seán and why, a promise that is never fulfilled. Vagueness envelops identities as well and, as

[93] Bridget English, *Laying Out the Bones*, p. 151.
[94] For a postcolonial reading of 'The Dead' that focuses on notions of subalternity, otherness and the construction of the national subject, see Conor Carville, 'Modernism, Nationalism and Postcolonialism: Four Figures from "The Dead"', *Journal of Irish Studies*, 2008, vol. 23, pp. 12-23.
[95] James Joyce, *Dubliners*, p. 211

we have seen, Gina feels that identities are blurred, uncertain. At the same time, having unfixed identities can also be turned into an advantage because the characters have the option to become who they want, according to the circumstances they are in. Indeterminacy and lack of closure are tools that challenge inadequate representational forms and allow reappropriation of one's story, both at an individual and at a national level.

Is the novel pessimistic? Is the message that whatever you do you cannot get rid of the past? If there is a message, it is that no matter how much one processes the past, one might never make sense of it and just has to learn to live with it. In the end, although going over the past does not bring any resolution, it still empowers Gina to be open to the future, however uncertain that might be. The individual process of going back to a condition that was thought to be in the past might reflect a collective processing of the past. This will not mean that the past traumas are forgotten, it will not mean that the end of the process is better than the beginning, that there is positive progress. This concept of progress is mindful in other terms of a vexed postcolonial debate in an Irish context around Ireland's enforced insertion into imperial 'progressive' modernity under a British colonial regime.[96] In other words, the Irish experience of modernity was traumatic.[97] In this context, it is worth remembering that the contraposition between modernity and counter-modernity, as well as between speech and silence, is important within subaltern studies as it ties in this exploration of progress, or lack thereof, to the concepts I have been exploring, through the literary medium of Enright's work, in these chapters.[98]

So, if the 'significance of childhood ordeal in the formation of adult identity' translates into the significance of traumatic events in the nation's past, the individual's coming-of-age by processing the past can be seen in national terms as well. [99] The individual childhood trauma becomes a metaphor for the nation's traumatic past which still has a bearing on its present identity. The novels, then, seem to nuance and dramatize the very real human uncertainties that underlie theoretical terminologies, the difficulties in trying to discover and live a new life, as reflected in Gibbons' observation that 'modernisation… requires the… transformation of a culture from within, a capacity to engage critically with its past'.[100] In the novels discussed in this chapter, Enright performs

[96] Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, pp. 7-10.
[97] Joe Cleary, 'Introduction: Ireland and Modernity', Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1-21, p. 9.
[98] For more on modernity/counter/modernity and subaltern historiography, see Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 126.
[99] Conor Carville, *The Ends of Ireland*, p. 24.
[100] Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, p. 3.

this by foregrounding female consciousness particularly, given the double-colonisation women have undergone, an insightful rendition of the pain within national consciousness. In order to be ready to move on, albeit in an uncertain environment, the past needs to be processed. So, although, apparently, at the end of the novel Gina seems to be in the same situation she was at the beginning, this is not strictly true. Indeed, although she does not know what the future holds, she also has found herself more, is open to the prospect of moving on, with or without Seán, because 'the snow will melt [and] the houses will sell' (p. 230).

In the next chapter I am going briefly to explore another of Anne Enright's novels, *The Green Road*. I am going to focus on how, in the novel, the writer performs the re-embodying of the myth and symbolism of Irishness into contemporary places and spaces by focusing and reinventing traditional tropes. Far from being postnational, as it has been read, the novel very much focuses in timely ways on the nation.

Chapter V

The Green Road

V.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed Anne Enright's *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*. I noted how, rather than being postnational, Enright's fiction is grounded in the exploration and processing of the Irish past, of the nation and of national identity. In novels that foreground female consciousness and the subaltern reality of womanhood in Ireland, a postcolonial approach enables fuller understanding of the underlying instigations to the (lack of) narrative progression. But novels too cast light on the presumptions underlying the theory, and re-embody them: individual and national identities are represented as an outcome of constructs that can be reinvented and reimagined through narrative. Seen in this context, the choice of specific narrative strategies – something which theory elides - plays a big role in dismantling, reinventing and rebuilding collective identities in order to include previously absent voices.

In this chapter, I will discuss *The Green Road*, another of Enright's novels that deals with families and family dynamics. However, unlike *The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*, *The Green Road* is told through a whole family by means of making each family member the subject of a chapter. Besides, the fractured structure of the novel can be seen as a formal strategy now directly to reflect 'the disruptive and multifaceted condition of Ireland and the Irish'.[1] We will see how, in *The Green Road*, the nation becomes a construct as traditional tropes are re-focused and reinvented.

As argued previously, although some aspects of Anne Enright's fiction appear to reflect globalising themes, it nonetheless remains rooted in nationhood: *The Green Road* is the most intense example of this.[2] In fact, the novel has been described as 'So Irish it's

[1] Margarita Estévez-Saá, 'A Map of Things Lost and Known in Anne Enright's *The Green Road*', *Estudios Irlandeses*, vol. 11, no. 11, 2016, pp. 45-55, p. 45.

[2] The Green Road is an actual place in Co. Clare, north of Kilkee above the Flaggy Shore. It is a place Anne Enright knows well, since in 2012 she and her family 'rented a house… there and could look out the window to the Aran Islands and up to Galway. I went out every day for a walk up the Green Road. The Green Road is literally that – where the tarmac road stops and it's unpaved. It's in The Burren – a distinctive landscape of limestone with these lovely little wildflowers growing in the crevices and a few herds of goats in the heather scrub. I was writing about an Irishman in Africa while I was in County Clare. When I came back to Dublin, I wrote about County Clare', in *My Coast: Anne Enright*, https://www.coastmagazine.co.uk/content/my-coast-anne-enright, last accessed on 31 August 2020. Enright was well aware that this road is iconic and the symbol of 'a wild and beautiful part of the world'.

almost provocative'.[3] The impact of globalization and internationalization in economic terms, and the meaning and relevance of locality are all interrogated in this novel. *The Green Road* also seems to indicate a propensity towards dialogue between local and global, rather than the supremacy of one over the other. In other words, Enright is not trying to transcend the nation as an idea, rather she wants to reshape and reimagine it in order to understand what it means to be Irish in today's changed and changing situation; and, at the same time, to make notions of Irishness more inclusive, without nostalgia for old national tropes. Still, at the end, *The Green Road* implies that the local cannot be forgotten in favour of the global, and that the former still has relevance in shaping identities. A transnational perspective is thus mitigated by a representation of both continuities and discontinuities in Irish history, with an implication that both must be dealt with and incorporated. The idea of the Green Road in itself acts as a metaphor for this (re)connection.[4]

The Green Road establishes a travelling metaphor which could also be applied to Irish history or, as mentioned, symbolise a return to Ireland's roots. Unsurprisingly, the Green Road, the physical road, which is a symbol for traditional Ireland, becomes a vector not just for the family and the story. This is the road

> that went across the Burren, high above the beach at Fanore, and this was the most beautiful road in the world – *famed in song and story*… and if you lifted your eyes from the difficulties of the path, it was always different again… the Atlantic surging up the distant cliffs in a tranced, silent plume of spray.[5]

The image of the Green Road is one that juxtaposes a place steeped in history and the past, but also an outward-looking place that opens up to the vastness of the ocean and its possibilities, albeit unknown ones.

In this light, Ireland's colonial and postcolonial past becomes a useful lens through which to examine contemporary Irish culture and literature, especially fiction

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Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory all wrote about the islands; Heaney and, especially, Michael Longley about the Flaggy Shore. It is an iconic landscape of the Irish national revival', *The Guardian* https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/may/09/return-western-shore-anne-enright-yielding-irish-tradition, last accessed 02 April 2021.

[3] Belinda McKeon, '*The Green Road* by Anne Enright review: So Irish it's almost provocative', *The Irish Time*, 02 May 2015, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/the-green-road-by-anne-enright-review-so-irish-it-s-almost-provocative-1.2196658, last accessed 11 June 2021.

[4] Maria Amor Barros Del Rio, 'Fragmentation and Vulnerability in Anne Enright's *The Green Road* (2015): Collateral Casualties of the Celtic Tiger in Ireland', *IJES*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2018, pp. 35-51, pp. 37-8.

[5] All quotations from Anne Enright, *The Green Road*, London, Penguin, 2005, p. 15. All further references to this text are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the text.

where the female subject seems to take upon herself the processing of the past. The past in question can be that of the individual but also representative of the collective. After an illusion of stability and rediscovered Irishness during the 1960s, post-independence nationalist ideology collapsed, giving way to a new feeling of displacement and non-belonging, especially in fiction. So, in the 1990s and beyond, when Ireland was reinventing itself from a social and economic point of view thanks to the Celtic Tiger, fiction remained focused on the Irish past and a quest for identity. In this respect, Joe Cleary observes that:

> It is the very nature of historical trauma that it should take a long time to disclose itself. The pain and suffering endured by one generation in one set of historical conditions is often doomed to remain silent and inarticulate, sometimes awaiting the radically altered historical conditions of a later generation before it can find terms and conditions propitious to its expression… this perspective… suggests a sense of Irish history as trauma.[6]

From this perspective, *The Green Road* can be seen to process the traumas and the quest for a national identity through the past, in an attempt to discover and reinvent what Ireland and Irishness meant, rather than to move towards a postnational stance. Moreover, given all of the above, I believe that a postcolonial legacy, both financial and psychological, is at play in these depictions rather than a postnational one. After all, it would be incorrect to assume that postnationalism is merely what follows the project of nationalism, or to label as postnational all reactions against nationalism, and conclude that any discourse about globalisation and economic liberalism in Ireland is automatically postnational.[7]

If it is true, as I argued in the introductory sections to the thesis, that a country's 'struggle for self-definition is conducted within language', then manipulations of, and experimentations with, language and form, provide further evidence of an effort to build a national literature.[8] As argued in the previous chapter, new narrative forms give the same language new power, especially when interspersed with the autochthonous language. The issue of how language has been manipulated and reappropriated surfaces in this novel, where the writer uses more Gaelic words and sentences than previously,

[6] Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune,* p. 210.
[7] Ana-Karina Schneider, 'Postnationalism, Postfeminism, and Other "Posts" in Anne Enright's Fiction', p. 404.
[8] Declan Kiberd*, Inventing Ireland*, p. 11.

where modern characters are created from traditional ballads, and where iconic places are charged with symbolism which is mirrored within the individual.

In the novel, the juxtaposition between collective and individual is particularly evident in the use of the family as Enright's main locus of interest. As in post-independence Ireland the rural and the family had become two of the main identifiers of Irishness and the nation, it is legitimate to conclude that the dissection of family dynamics, in a rural setting, can be seen as the analysis of a nation and its children.[9] This is especially so when the family's matriarch has clear associations with the figure of Mother Ireland. *The Green Road* makes, then, an exemplary case to study when considering recent strategies towards the past evolved in Irish fiction. Firstly, it intertwines the personal and the national, and, secondly, in the novel Enright uses a number of narrative techniques to question given notions of identity, both individual and collective. Specifically, Enright seems to play with questions of Irish female identity in relation to myths in Irish society that are a legacy of the country's colonial and postcolonial history. A complex postcolonial identity comes through in the novel and its narrative structure. Besides, once again, like in the previous novels, the domestic space is reimagined and transformed into a site of female reappropriation rather than subjugation.

V.2 'Famed in song and story' – *The Green Road*

The Green Road spans twenty-five years in the life of the Madigan family, originally from Co. Clare, where the family matriarch, Rosaleen, and one of her children, Constance, still reside. It portrays an Ireland awash with Celtic Tiger money but, like the characters, still in search of itself. Despite the geographical setting being wider than in any of Enright's previous novels, the book ultimately starts and ends in and with Ireland, confirming Enright's focus on the contemporary nation. Ireland after the Celtic Tiger, as figured in the book, might appear to have become a global country more-or-less like others. It might have seemed that rural Ireland as we knew it, with all its symbolic potential, has disappeared. The opening of the novel looks as if Anne Enright has stepped into the Roscommon/Leitrim setting of John McGahern's most famous novels. It is then interesting that the rural background of the opening scenes is left behind in the second 'episode' of *The Green Road*, before the book returns in disturbing ways towards the end.

[9] Declan Kiberd, *After Ireland*; Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*; Gerry Smyth, 'Irish national identity after the Celtic Tiger', pp. 132-7; Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and The Nation*.

It confirms the impression that the novel traces a shift in Ireland: from rural to global and, ultimately, back to rural.

Rosaleen, the mother, displays many unmotherly characteristics, as we shall see, but Constance, Dan, Emmet and Hannah are her children. The first part of the book, called 'Leaving', introduces the four Madigan siblings and, at the same time, moves the family through the years, from 1980 to 2005. Two of the siblings, Dan and Emmet, have left Ireland, thus reflecting the Irish diaspora of the mid-late twentieth century.[10] The second half of the book, called 'Coming Home', shows the Madigans gathering together for one final Christmas, as Rosaleen announces she is planning to sell the house.[11] A lot of the domestic action happens against the background of the Green Road, with its history and symbolism. Although a postnational reading would say this stands as a symbol, a vector that reaches out from the heart of Ireland to the outside, via the Atlantic, the road is also a symbol of Gaelic Ireland, of tradition. Although it goes towards the ocean, in the book it also takes us back to an old Famine cottage in Boolavaun. This going outwards to return is also reflected in the titles of the two sections: 'Leaving' and 'Coming Home'. It is possible that, with reference to assimilating past tradition, with the use of the word 'Leaving' Enright is referring to moving beyond a narrative based on monolithic ideals and ideas of Irishness themselves.

The novel moves between the five surviving members of the family, plus a third-person narrator who occasionally slips into a familial 'we' but who always remains anonymous. Although the novel looks back at several specific moments in the past lives of each family member, the main events, namely the reunion and its fallouts, are set in the mid-2000s, when Rosaleen is thinking of selling her house to cash in on the Irish property boom.[12] Consequently, this is the Madigans' last Christmas in the family home. As noted, of Rosaleen's children, only the aptly named Constance has remained in their hometown in County Clare. The other three have moved away – Dan to New York and then Canada, Emmet has been travelling around the world working for charities in famine-stricken Third-World countries, whilst Hanna has been chasing an acting career

[10] Maria Amor Barros Del Rio, 'Fragmentation and Vulnerability in Anne Enright's *The Green Road* (2015): Collateral Casualties of the Celtic Tiger in Ireland', p. 37.
[11] Given the children's opposition to the sale of the house and that the family reunion sees 'each of them silently shouting that she could not take it away from them, whatever it was – their childhood, soaked into the walls of this house' (239), the family get-together turns into a form of 'wake' as well, into 'mourning' for the loss of a piece of their family history.
[12] A buoyancy in the property market as a sign of economic development present in Enright's *The Forgotten Waltz* as well.

in Dublin, 'making it a mosaic of five people in three continents, an allegory of the diaspora of the Irish in the 20th century'.[13]

Just as in Enright's previous books, *The Green Road* is punctuated by the unsaid and absences, with gaps in time particularly evident in the first five chapters of the novel. As Enright herself notes 'a lot of the book happens between the sections, in the silences'.[14] Like the previous novels, the story begins *in media res,* and slowly unspools backwards. The opening of the novel itself, which lands us in the midst of something that is happening and gives us no context, is, in some ways, puzzling: 'Later, after Hanna made some cheese on toast' (p. 3). As readers, we are left wondering what that 'later' refers to, we feel that there is something that went on before that we do not know about: in other words, we already feel we are missing part of the story.

From the start, then, the narrator captures snapshots, moments of transition, of becoming, of fluidity – it is as though we are being presented with one moment in time and we do not know what was before and what will be in the end. This also means that characters lack definition as they appear to be captured in their in-between state. This recalls what Bhabha describes as the ambiguity of representation of the national subject in counter-narratives of the nation that both evoke and erase its monolithic boundaries. This act also questions homogeneous and linear time of the nation's narrative.[15] Nonetheless, this ambiguity also means that characters become 'an open space, surrounded by a different future to the one… brought in through the door' (pp. 60-1), which implies that lack of rigid definition becomes an opportunity for reinvention. This is the case, for example, with Dan, who is gay but who also has a girlfriend early in the novel, later his wife, of whom he says: 'I love her. I have always loved her. And I fucked her willingly. And none of that is a lie' (p. 68). It is then clear that there is not one single truth, even to character and sexuality in the novel; there are evolving and multiple layers of truths (although the reference to lies here reminds us of how precarious even this assertion is). Dan is also described as a man 'who was discarding his former self before he had found a new one' (p. 61). A duality of identities is also hinted at in the description of Rosaleen's father, the four children's grandfather whom:

[13] Maria Amor Barros Del Rio, 'Fragmentation and Vulnerability in Anne Enright's *The Green Road* (2015): Collateral Casualties of the Celtic Tiger in Ireland', pp. 37-8.
[14] BBC 4 'Anne Enright Talks About *The Green Road*', *Open Book*, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b05tbwsg, last accessed 11 June 2021.
[15] See Homi K. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation', Homi K. Bhabha (ed.) *Nation and Narration,* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 291-322, pp 297-303.

> People said… was a saint – a saint, they said – to the townspeople who knocked him up at all hours for a child with whooping cough or an old lady crazed by the pain of her kidney stones. (p. 22)

The repetition of 'said' seems to mimic the oral stories passed from one villager to the other. This hint towards oral tradition is interesting in a context where the narrative breaks the boundaries of linearity. This is particularly relevant in the context of narrative strategies that are trying to interrogate the past. Moreover, it seems to contradict previous critical assertions that Enright rejects Irish storytelling traditions and myths.[16]

Going back to Hanna

> as far as [she] could tell, old John Considine was a saint to everyone except the people who did not like him, which was half the town… and she did not know why that might be. (p. 22)

It is then all about perspective and individual perceptions. Real and not-real are encapsulated in the same person, two sides of the same coin. This is again the case when we read that 'Her [Hanna's] knowledge of him [Dan] came from two directions and met in the human being sitting at the table' (p. 217). It is as if two conflicting versions merge to give life to something new and independent of them.

We see the same imagery of opposites that meet to form something new when we read about Constance and Dan

> on the beach in Lahinch coming around a headland to find something unexpected. And the thing they found was the River Inagh as it ran across the sands into the sea. Sweet water into salt… rainwater into seawater, you could taste where they met and mingled, and no way to tell if all this was good or bad… if it was corruption or return. (p. 198)

This again speaks of indefinability, of hybrid formation, of half-formed things that cannot be fully described but that still take their own shape.[17] Facts become unclear, starting with Rosaleen who, according to Emmet, sees 'truth… [as] a problem… facts were an

[16] Heidi Hansson, 'Anne Enright and postnationalism in the contemporary Irish novel', in Scott Brewster and Michael Parker, *Irish Literature Since 1990*, p. 222.

[17] This recalls Bhabha's a definition of the state of hybridity of the colonised subject as 'never simply a question of the admixture of pre-given identities or essences [but] the perplexity of the living as it interrupts the representation of the fullness of life… through which all forms of cultural meaning are open to translation because their enunciation resists totalization', Homi K. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation', p. 314.

irrelevance, or an accusation' (p. 214). However, the narrator makes us repeatedly aware that even *they* do not know all the facts, that they are working on some assumptions. For example, we are told, through the characters, that 'it wasn't easy to join the dots' (p. 146); or that they 'stay… between things' (p. 184). So, the narrative as a whole conveys an inescapable sense of indeterminacy.

Moreover, the character at the centre of Chapter I is Hanna as a child: choosing to start with a child might be a warning light that we will not be able to make sense of some things, just as a child cannot make sense of a lot of events in an adult world.[18] As a consequence, the different chapters work as snapshots of some events in the characters' lives.[19] As readers, we need to make sense of these snapshots the narrator chooses to include in the narrative, we need to glue them together, in order to give some coherence to the story. We are not always successful, and we are required to make a lot of assumptions to compensate for missing links.

Hence, there is a dual narrative style which flows internally and externally to the characters. We have again this duality of imagined real and true real. This concept is introduced early in the novel, for example in the following exchange between Emmet and Dan about the latter's vocation for priesthood:

> Later, that evening, Emmet sneered at him. 'You don't actually believe… you just think you do'… 'And what is the difference again?' And so, it became real. (p. 26)

This duality also leads to the ambivalence between what is and what appears to be, as in the case of the young Hanna's visit to the theatre:

> The darkness of the theatre was a new kind of darkness for Hanna… it was the darkness between people: between Isabelle and Dan, between Dan and the priests. It was the darkness of sleep, just before the dream… He [the actor] was very real, he was as real as the spittle that flew from his mouth, though the words that came out of him were not. (p. 29)

This seems to directly speak about the sense of opacity that pervades the novel, and sums up several of its themes: the darkness can be symbolic of the gaps in the narrative; there

[18] There is a similarity here with the character of Evie in *The Forgotten Waltz* who does not see things, in an adult world, for what they are.

[19] This structure reminds us of Joyce's *Dubliners* as the latter 'frames, time and again, "frozen moments in which the characters stand before us"', Brian G. Caraher, 'Reviewed Work: A New & Complex Sensation: Essays on Joyce's "Dubliners" by Oona Frawley", *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 42(43), no. 1/4, 2004, pp. 359–363.

is an insight into the tension between real and dream through the theatre, so between what is real and what appears to be real but remains unexplained and, like dreams, can be invested with symbolic value.

To add to this sense of indeterminacy, there is a sense of mystery that runs all through the novel, a sense of impalpable guilt and things unsaid, as with:

> Rosaleen [who] was afraid it was all her fault… all the things that were unsayable: failure, money, sex, drink. (p. 224)

This sense of the unsayable, which relates to all issues affecting her children that are never discussed, might explain the gaps in the narrative. These gaps, besides the temporal ones, also apply to characters, in the sense that they keep appearing in, and disappearing out of, the narrative. Dan for example, an emotionally dry individual, is a mysterious character who 'disappears' from the gay community in New York to reappear next in Canada, without us being told how he got there or what has happened in between. We know he is a spoilt priest, but it is never explained how he came to be so. Or Greg, who appears to be dead and then reappears at the end of the novel, with no explanation whatsoever of what happened. Other characters disappear from the narrative even without being in it fully, such as Isabelle, Dan's wife. The first part of the novel, 'Leaving', is made up of five chapters each devoted to one of the children and to Rosaleen; yet it can almost be seen as five isolated, self-sufficient short stories. The second part, 'Coming Home', is not less fragmented: this fragmentation culminates in the chaotic family Christmas get-together.

The Green Road's opacity is also symbolised, as we said, by the fact that the narrator's identity is never disclosed: the narrator is part of an indefinite 'we': 'We had been, for those hours on the dark mountainside, a force. A family' (p. 292); or:

> We can assume, of course, that Dan went back to his melancholy little apartment and his brave wife-to-be… she was nice… it takes a quality woman to keep a guy like Dan straight… or not… who is to judge, Meine Damen und Herrrren? (p. 59)

The use of the word 'Assume', and the whole passage, implies that the narrator, whoever they are, is not so omniscient. Moreover, by explicitly admitting that s/he does not know everything, the narrator is also admitting that there is a large amount of uncertainty in their story and that it is up to us as readers to make up our own minds about the events.

It is as though we are always expecting some ultimate fact to be revealed and resolve the uncertainty. However, no backstory surfaces. 'It's like there's some secret… but there just isn't' Hanna says at one stage in the novel (p. 243). When Rosaleen wonders:

> Where did it begin?... It was more a cadence than a question, it was another scrap in a life full of scraps, some of them beautiful. (p. 259)

we are not even sure what 'it' is. Actually, there is no story either, not in the traditional sense anyway. There then comes the realisation that 'there was no path. She [Hanna] thought there would be a path… but there was no path. No *trajectory*' (p. 193).[20] This works as another warning light to the reader not to expect any guidance from the narrator in joining the dots of the story. The characters fall through the gaps of the narrative 'Because there were gaps between things, and this frightened her. This is where Rosaleen was now. She had fallen into the gap' (p. 266). This is something that we can link back to what Enright stated about a lot of the novel happening in the gaps, but also, as previously argued, to fragmentation as a trait of postcolonial narratives and subalternity.

In this light, it is fitting that it is Rosaleen herself who comes to symbolise the undefined, the split identities, when, while searching for her, her children all call her by a different name:

> Mama… Rosaleen… Mam… Mammy… the comedy of it was not lost on them, the fact that each of her children was calling out to a different woman. They did not know who she was – their mother, Rosaleen Madigan – and they did not have to know. (pp. 283-4)

If we accept, as argued below, that Rosaleen can be seen as a symbol for Ireland, then it is clear that she can also be interpreted as an image of an Ireland whose children are in the process of figuring her out. She is, in fact, what each character makes of her, a projection they do not 'have to know' or agree upon. Rosaleen is also depicted as having little to do with normally accepted concepts of time and temporality. We are told that she has 'no idea what the proper time was' (p. 154). Yet her very name, Rosaleen, has clear nationalist connotations and associates her with the nation's past. It evokes, for example, James Clarence Mangan's patriotic poem where the 'Dark Rosaleen' of the title stands

[20] The only path, the only trajectory seems to be the Green Road. So there is a paradox here: despite the statements about gaps, lack of paths and trajectory in the present, the whole of the book is centred, from its title, around a road, a sign of clear trajectory, which represents the past. It is then as though something has become disconnected between Irish past and present.

for Ireland itself. This is a poem which the character herself quotes at one point (pp. 160-1).[21] When we first see her, she appears to be in a sort of timeless limbo, staring at a clock that

> had been stopped for years, maybe five years… some time after Dan went… some time after her own true love Pat Madigan died. (p. 152)[22]

Rosaleen, or Mother Ireland, has been deserted by her men. The juxtaposition between Rosaleen and the nation recalls that more general juxtaposition within nationalist discourse, whereby Ireland was often represented as an abandoned mother.[23]

Rosaleen's association with the past is made even more explicit by her immediate association, in the narrative, with a poem that she recites to herself throughout. The poem in question is Emily Lawless's 'Fontenoy 1745', part of the poet's *Wild Geese* series. The Wild Geese were Irish soldiers who served in continental European armies from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. According to Enright herself:

> The Wild Geese were the first lost Irish generation, remnants of the defeated Irish nobility who left in 1691, seeking alliances and fighting other men's battles on the European mainland. Laments for this lost leadership were everywhere in the bardic poetry I learned in Irish class at school, with the figure of Ireland waiting for her rescue: Ireland as lost heifer, as dream, as beautiful woman or old woman, awaiting their return… this was a poetry of abandonment, not of exile.[24]

Lawless' poem strengthens the nationalist connotations with Rosaleen's name. From a nineteenth-century perspective, Lawless challenged questions of national identity and cultural validity. Like many Anglo-Irish contemporaries, she was anxious to formulate a credible continuity for her ethnic class within the frame of an overall shared national history. Moreover, whilst never supporting Home Rule, she was at the same time critical

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[21] It is worth mentioning another connection to Joyce in relation to the choice of Mangan. In 1902, James Joyce delivered a lecture on the poet. While praising Mangan's technical skills, Joyce also criticised the extent to which Mangan had succumbed to 'national' history to the degree that he was imprisoned by it. James Joyce, 'James Clarence Mangan', James Joyce, *Occasional, Critical and Political Writing*, Kevin Barry (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2000), pp. 51–61, pp. 59-60.

[22] According to Bridget English, stopped clocks are symbolic of corresponding pauses in time and, hence, of gaps in time. This is fitting in a narrative characterised by gaps. See Bridget English, *Laying Out The Bones*, p. 170.

[23] Clair Wills, 'Women, Domesticity and the Family', p. 38.

[24] Anne Enright, 'A return to the Western shore: Anne Enright on yielding to the Irish tradition', *The Guardian*, 09 May 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/may/09/return-western-shore-anne-enright-yielding-irish-tradition, last accessed 11 June 2021.

of British attitudes towards Ireland, so that her own identity was in a way syncretic as she harboured both nationalist and unionist sympathies.[25] Besides, like Rosaleen who is introduced sitting silently in her kitchen, Lawless' female characters are often silent.

This is the case with Grania, for example, whose frustrated silences are seen by some as embodying the plight of womankind.[26] According to Gerardine Meaney, Lawless' work speaks of an Irish literary history that is more heterogeneous and discontinuous than the canon indicates. Indeed, Lawless' denunciation of frustrated female silences is a denunciation of Irish women as silent historical victims, both as citizens and as writers.[27] We can then see that Enright is evoking more than a mere poem when citing 'Fontenoy' in *The Green Road*. She is invoking a need for syncretism when thinking about Irishness. Besides, bearing in mind that Enright's belief that whilst 'traditionally, Irish writing has been about breaking silences. The biggest silence has continued to be about the real lives of women', she is bringing to the fore the plight of forgotten, silenced and/or ignored female voices, something that the gaps in her broken, discontinuous narrative seem to reflect as well.[28]

Rosaleen feels oppressed by her own house, soon to be abandoned - she wonders 'why was there no one to love her' (p. 260). She is shown as the last keeper of a place that is falling 'apart all around her' (p. 164), where the bed above her was 'ready to fall through the plaster' (p. 162). It is not surprising, then, that she is associated with a poem about abandonment, loneliness and the wait to be rescued. If we accept that Rosaleen stands for Ireland, her feelings of being neglected and abandoned by her own children who spend 'their lives getting out of there' (p. 272), is symbolic of the Irish diaspora. Moreover, thinking back to the earlier quote where she wonders whether her children's problems are her fault, we can infer that the failures of the Irish 'children' might all be imputable to the 'motherland'. Nonetheless, just like the narrative, the character and 'meaning' of Rosaleen are not straightforward either: despite on the one hand appearing as a clear nod to a whole nationalist tradition, she nonetheless seems to be the one who wants to move on from 'the stillness of [her] stopped kitchen clock' (p. 268). It sounds as if she wants to relinquish her role of preserving the past through the house. Moreover, we

[25] Heather Ingman, *Irish Women's Fiction: From Edgeworth to Enright*, (Sallins: Irish Academic Press, 2013), pp. 37-43.
[26] See Michael O'Flynn's 'Introduction', Emily Lawless, *Grania. The Story of an Island*, (Brighton: Victorian Secrets Ltd, 2013).
[27] Gerardine Meaney, 'Decadence, Degeneration and Revolting Aesthetics: The Fiction of Emily Lawless and Katherine Cecil Thurston', *Colby Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2000, pp. 157-175.
[28] Quoted in Justine Jordan, 'A new Irish literary boom: the post-crash stars of fiction', *The Guardian*, 17 October 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/17/new-irish-literary-boom-post-crash-stars-fiction, last accessed 11 June 2021.

must bear in mind that, as mentioned, throughout the novel, Rosaleen is associated with unmotherly and suffocating characteristics, as if to highlight the overpowering overtones of the Mother Ireland discourse put forward by conservative nationalism, and to dismantle its accepted representations of womanhood. *The Green Road* gives a glimpse into how Enright is reimagining and dismantling colonial and postcolonial conceptualisations of womanhood and the nation.[29]

Like in *The Gathering* and in *The Forgotten Waltz*, houses and the domestic space play then the crucial role here. Rosaleen's house, the family home, is set against the capitalist havens of housing developments which in the novel are seen as

> popcorn houses… because they went – pop, pop, pop – to twice the size they had been the week before. (p. 153)

Rosaleen is seen in a sort of symbiotic relationship with the home. When we first see her, she is sitting in her 'kitchen… the easiest room in the house' (p. 143). The kitchen, often defined as the heart of a home and, according to the strict gendered view of society mentioned both in the Introduction and in previous chapters, as the place where a woman belongs, might appear to be the most natural place to find this elderly woman. However, we are soon after told that Rosaleen feels like she is 'living in a shell… the whole place should be stripped and done properly… the wall turned to glass, dissolved' (pp. 144-5). This reminds the reader of Veronica's attitude towards the sheds and extensions of her family home which we discussed in the previous chapter in relation to *The Gathering*, where we noted that they stood for barriers to getting to the essence of things. We get a feeling that, like Veronica, Rosaleen feels imprisoned by the house and its 'constructs', and possibly by a role that has been bestowed upon her.

Hence, although the reason to sell the house might appear economic at first, there might also be other reasons. We see Rosaleen, who is reflecting on her life, moving around her home, going to explore the upstairs, then come

> down again, to stand in the middle of the hall. The big bedroom was directly above her now, its two windows facing the morning. And in the centre of it, just over her head - the

[29] For further reading on the myth of Mother Ireland and womanhood in colonial and postcolonial Ireland see Richard Kearney, 'Myth and Motherland'; Catherine Nash, 'Embodied Irishness: Gender, Sexuality and Irish Identity', Brian Graham (ed.), *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, (London, Routledge, 1997), pp. 108-127. For a discussion of reclaiming female identities, with a particular attention to *The Wig My Father Wore*, see Elke D'hoker, 'Reclaiming Feminine Identities: Anne Enright's *The Wig My Father Wore*', Patricia Coughlan and Tina O'Toole (eds.), *Irish Literature Feminist Perspectives*.

> double bed where her father lay dying, and then died. It was the bed where she herself was conceived, and it was also her marriage bed… In it, all the pomp of her family life: kisses, fevers, broken waters, the damp of their lives, the sap. (p. 161)

In navigating the house, Rosaleen seems to navigate her life, and the life and death in her family. More than economic reasons, what seems to push her to want rid of the house is the feeling that:

> There was something wrong with the house and Rosaleen did not know what it was. It was as though she was wearing someone else's coat, one that was the same as hers… but it wasn't her coat… it just looked the same. Rosaleen was living in the wrong house, with the wrong colours on the walls, and no telling any more what the right colour might be… and where could you put yourself: if you do not feel at home in your own home… the pity of it – an old woman chased into a corner by her own house. (p. 165)

The house makes Rosaleen feel uneasy. It is as if, by getting rid of the house, she might want to get rid of the legacy of the past, and the present in which something has 'gone wrong'. On the other hand, her children appear to be very attached to the house with

> each of them silently shouting that she could not take it away from them, whatever it was – their childhood, soaked into the walls of this house. (p. 239)

Unlike her children, Rosaleen seems to want to live in the present.

That the house equates to memory seems to be confirmed when we read that to Dan

> his father's hands were wet and cold. His mother was foolish… and, yet, everywhere he looked**,** the house held memory and meaning that his heart could not. The house was full of detail, interest, love… The house made sense in a way nothing else did. (p. 248)

The house is personified, it makes up for his parents' failures and is the repository of Dan's memories. Again, Enright appears to be reappropriating the Big House tradition and domesticating it, the more so when we consider that a characteristic trait of the Big House novels was the figure of the cruel, emotionally dry mother, a description that can well fit Rosaleen.[30]

[30] Neil Corcoran, *After Yeats and Joyce*, p. 38.

Rosaleen embodies past and tradition whilst, at the same time, she also expresses a desire to escape from them. This tension recalls Deane's observation on the politics of modernity in Ireland, which saw a contrast between the traditional and the contemporary especially in literary texts. However, according to the critic, it is also thanks to literary constructions of such an opposition that modernity was achieved: this is because modernity, seen as the new emerging from the old, needed and retained some elements of tradition against which it articulates its difference.[31] In the end, it is not surprising that it is Rosaleen who grows 'tired of waiting. She had been waiting, all her life, for something that never happened and she could not bear the suspense any longer' (p. 259). If, like Hanna, Rosaleen had thought there was a path, her navigating and re-examining the past makes her realise that there is not one, or at least there was not one, in the past. Selling the house can be seen as a metaphor for leaving the past behind. Rosaleen does 'not bother going over to Ardeevin' (p. 302) for a last goodbye, she does not want to revisit it. Possibly, her detaching herself from the past will not heal the scars and will not set her firmly into the present, as symbolised by her refusal to move into a 'new house in the neat estates [which] seemed only to confuse her' (p. 302). But possibly the move will give her a springboard for building a new future by paying 'more attention to things' (p. 309).

The house in Ardeevin, the family home, is not the only example of a building of significance in the novel. Another episode that carries collective resonance, and grounds it further into Irish history and symbolism, is the one in which Rosaleen gets lost after running away from the Christmas family reunion. The empty Famine cottage where Rosaleen finds shelter, the 'little famine cottage' that is at the end of the Green Road, has central symbolic value (p. 273).[32] The abandoned cottage speaks of imperial dispossession. Both the cottage and the Green Road are near Boolavaun, the grandmother's house that Hanna used to visit as a child, a place of mystery as well, built among

[31] Seamus Deane, *Strange Country*, p. 53.

[32] The Irish Famine has great significance in Ireland's colonial history. Although regular emigration from Ireland to North America and Britain was already taking place by mid-nineteenth century, it was because of the Great Famine of 1845-1849 that the Irish started emigrating in large numbers, Declan Kiberd, *After Ireland*, p. 103. The Famine has been seen as the event that symbolises the historic trauma Ireland underwent under, and because of, the British Empire. According to Conor Carville 'it is principally through consideration of the Famine that notions of "historical" trauma… make their way into Irish studies', see Carville, Conor, *The Ends of Ireland*, p. 28. Moreover, Terry Eagleton sees the Famine as the event in Ireland that 'shatters space as well as time, unmaking the nation and scattering Irish history across the Globe', see *Heathcliff and The Great Hunger*, (London: Verso, 1995), p. 15.

> grey rocks under a grey sky, and there were days when the sea was a glittering grey and your eyes could not tell if it was dusk or dawn… and that was the thing about Boolavaun, it was a place that made itself hard to see. (p. 16)

Boolavaun is depicted as a ghost-like place, and if we accept it does stand for past memories, then it is as if these past memories themselves are ghost-like and hard to see. To Rosaleen, 'her walk on this road… was the road to her youth' (p. 264). It is symbolic that Rosaleen survives when the original inhabitants very likely died because of the Famine – and that this symbol of connection to individual and national pasts ends at this ruined, yet life-saving, shell.

In tune with the idea of *The Green Road* as a geographically open novel, deprivation resonates beyond the Irish borders: it is seen in the section about Dan and the devastation caused in the New York gay community by AIDS; or in the relief-efforts Emmet is involved with, trying to help famine-stricken communities in Africa. Yet it finds its historical prompt and centre in Enright's rendering of the recent Irish past. If we accept the symbolic value the Famine cottage takes on when it acts as the safe place where Rosaleen can shelter in and change her life, it can be seen as how tradition can offer roots and wings. In a novel that challenges given notions of gender, the fact that tradition and modernity both coexist in Rosaleen, a woman, is fitting.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Declan Kiberd makes the connection between economy, the financial crash and the postcolonial in Ireland. The Celtic Tiger, and its aftermath, have become part of the paradigms explored in the Enright fiction discussed in this thesis. The financial boom in Ireland and the theme of the Celtic Tiger are interwoven with the narrative, a preoccupation that reconnects to themes of postcoloniality. *The Green Road* makes reference to the recent Irish economic situation. A postcolonial legacy, both financial and psychological, is at play in these depictions. So, we see snapshots of a country transformed when Hanna and Emmet walk into

> a pub that, in their youth, smelt of wet wool and old men [and] was now a gallery of scents, like walking through the perfume department in a Duty Free. (p. 221)

This already suggests that it is not something real, but rather staged and temporary. Therefore, we get the feeling that the economic boom of the Noughties is a false promise of change when we read that:

> Since the money came in, Ireland depressed Emmet in a whole new way. The house prices depressed him. And the handbag thing, the latte thing, the Aren't We All Brilliant thing. (p. 206)

In fact, the whole situation makes Emmet feel that 'He should go back to counselling. Ireland was wrecking his head' (p. 225).[33] The newfound prosperity is seen as ephemeral, a way of lulling the Irish into thinking that they have moved away from the problems of the past, as 'showing off' (p. 223) rather than a substantial change.

This tension is encapsulated in the description of the shopping trips to New York Constance and Dessie, her husband, can afford to take, rather than emigrating there. Apparent glamour is however in striking contrast with her just getting 'a couple of Eileen Fisher cardigans in lilac and grey' while 'she and Dessie stayed with her brother Dan on a fold-out bed in his apartment in Brooklyn' (p. 87). Interestingly, the most significant episode in the novel that signals middle-class prosperity in that period is Constance's trip to the supermarket for her Christmas shopping (pp. 228-230). Constance buys plenty of delicacies and more food than the family can possibly hope to eat, with her bill coming in at around 500 euros. In a country where the average Catholic Irish person was historically often malnourished, or the victim of famines as recalled by the centrality given in the novel to the Famine cottage, it is not by chance that Enright chooses to include splashing out on unnecessary and/or exotic food as a sign of questionable new economic prosperity.

Nonetheless, despite this new-found belief that things have changed thanks to the improved economic situation, for some of the characters 'actual life… happened far away from here' (p. 247). Further, 'Constance still liked Ireland, the way you could talk to anyone. It would not be the same in America' – Ireland, with all its downfalls, is still seen as more human and preferable to a more cosmopolitan place (p. 86). Constance is the only second generation family-member who stays in the native county; she is the only one who, despite everything, stays close to Rosaleen and seems to really care about her; and she is the one who is represented as quietly accepting life, and Ireland, as it is. By choosing Constance in these episodes which reflect the new Ireland of the Celtic Tiger boom, Enright maintains the intersection between the national dimension and women – even in the novel's exploration of the socio-economic state of the nation.[34] By describing

[33] It is interesting to see what power the nation has on the individual.

[34] Besides the economic situation, Enright wants to capture specific moments in Ireland's social life, further evidence of the writer's ultimate interest in the becoming of the nation. This is the case when she talks about contraceptives, mentioning that, at a time when the pill was not readily available in Ireland, her uncle's wife 'was on the pill, because they had access to the pill' (p. 5). Contraception was illegal

small, personal memories, the narrative, at the same time, gives a snapshot of the social status of a nation.

At the end of the novel, the past comes back into the present: figures who had disappeared, as if swallowed by the narrative, resurface, and it is as if the characters try to reach out to the past to tidy up the present. This is the case, for example with Dan who gets in touch with someone he thought was dead; or Emmet who reaches out to his ex-girlfriend. By foregrounding the Green Road, Enright is foregrounding history, myths and traditions. At the same time, the road provides a platform to look into the space beyond it. Once again, going over the past provides a springboard for diving into the future. Like the Green Road, the characters are steeped into their own history, but ready to look away from it and into the future.

Such returns to the past in order to confront it form a common thread in recent Irish fiction and this seems to be the case as well with Anne Enright's *The Green Road, The Gathering* and *The Forgotten Waltz*. The traumas of the past and the fragility of the subject are major themes in Anne Enright's novels. This fragility is very likely caused by past traumas which must be at least acknowledged before the future can be realised. However, this is further complicated by the impact of a new globalised world and economy which asks questions of an Ireland that was still working out an identity. Traumas and fragility have been shown here to apply both to the individual and the collective, the local and the international. The individual effort of trying to move into the future by confronting the past reflects that of the collective, and imagination mediates these encounters with the past. Moreover, the impact of globalization and internationalization, and the meaning and relevance of locality are all interrogated in these novels. They belong to a newly-created category of Irish literary response, and seem to indicate a propensity towards a dialogue between local and global, national and international all as art of remaking conceptions of the national. They all conclude that the local, national histories cannot be forgotten in favour of the global, and that the former still have relevance in shaping identities.

This negotiation between local and global reminds the reader that the process of identity and nation-building is still in progress in Ireland. Imagination plays a big role in

in Ireland from 1935 until 1980, when it was legalised with several restrictions, later loosened However, even after contraception got legalised, there still was a social stigma due to the strong anti-contraception stance of the Catholic Church. So, when reminiscing about her stint working at a pharmacy, Constance recollects that "Every customer who walked in the door came in with a look on their faces and a prescription for condoms folded four times. They came into town so their local chemist would not know" (p. 84). For a discussion on contraception, the Catholic Church and women's rights see Diarmaid Ferriter, 'Faith, Secularism, and Sacred Institutions', Erica Falci and Paige Reynolds (eds.), *Irish Literature in Transition: 1980-2020*, pp. 228-245.

re-working the past and making it a springboard for the future: characters 'read' each other by imagining each other. All three novels are a window into the imaginative life of the characters by showing, with little mediation, what goes on inside their heads, by means of dramatic soliloquies. Like Joyce, Enright is giving us snapshots, moments in time in the (psychological) life of the characters. It is as if, by turning to Joyce, who at the beginning of the twentieth century wished 'to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race', Enright is at the same time, re-imagining Ireland from a woman's perspective and rooting it in the twenty-first century.[35] Enright is re-shaping narrative. At the same time, by openly making the reader aware that some of the characters are romanticising aspects of the stories by ignoring that in reality they might have had a different nature, by purposely suppressing it, Enright draws a parallel with the romanticised image of Ireland promoted in the past. Hence, an exploration of the past that acknowledges its pitfalls but does not completely discard it can be used as a springboard for the future.

Far from going through a 'postnational' phase, Ireland as seen through these novels is rather reworking and reimagining constructs of Irishness and national identity in relation to the nation's newfound role in a global context. The preoccupations with Ireland's role in a global setting, its emergent cosmopolitanism and the effects of a liberal economy, rather than being seen as a move away from discourses around national identity, can be seen as a representation of the challenges they pose to Ireland's emergent identity. We have seen how, despite some suggestions that she is uninterested in national discourse, Enright is deeply engaged with the usual sites of Irishness, particularly the past, identity, collective and individual memory, and traditional tropes around womanhood. In this respect, through their formal aspects especially, the novels foreground a fractured female identity that needs reinstating in the national discourse. In her female characters Enright juxtaposes Ireland and women. However, with Rosaleen a perfect example, this juxtaposition challenges the well-established and traditional tropes of Ireland-as-woman. The indeterminacy and non-linearity of the narrative mirror the individual's, but rather than being seen as a negative trait, they can work as a positive one: they allow the fractured subaltern reality of Irish women to emerge, offering scope to reimagine both the individual and the collective by effectively representing the 'agency of… gendered subaltern constituency'.[36] This is achieved by confronting and dramatising 'the gaps and silences which official history so often leaves', silences that have also been

[35] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 276.
[36] Eóin Flannery, *Ireland and Postcolonial Studies*, p. 149.

perpetuated in much of the theory.[37] In this sense, Rosaleen confirms that Enright's way of engaging with the debate around identity offers a synthesised, rather than analytic and antithetical, approach to Irishness. She marries the local and the global rather than seeing them as antagonistic.

In light of what I have been discussing then, the quote by Gerry Smyth about building a prefiguring critical discourse to create a series of social and institutional spaces in which a decolonising literature can function and have meaning should be read to mean that as fiction becomes more flexible, starting with its own techniques, its relationship with theory might be becoming more flexible as well.[38] In the case of *The Green Road*, it seems that narrative itself has become a space in which to reimagine the nation and its past, to bridge old and new. It is as if Enright is taking physical, traditional Irish locations and charging them with new, symbolic meaning. If 'no other culture illustrates the push and pull of globalization and localization better than Irish culture, then *The Green Road*, as a novel, exemplifies this pull'.[39] However, ultimately, this pull seems to be resolved with a 'Coming Home' within Ireland and all that the Green Road as a physical and emotive space represents.

[37] Elke D'hoker, 'Reclaiming Feminine Identities: Anne Enright's *The Wig My Father Wore*', Patricia Coughlan and Tina O'Toole (eds.), *Irish Literature Feminist Perspectives*, p. 186.
[38] See footnote 60, Introduction, p. 15.
[39] Ana-Karina Schneider, 'Postnationalism, Postfeminism, and Other "Posts" in Anne Enright's Fiction', p. 400.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

'The worker is the slave of capitalist society, the female worker is the slave of that slave' – James Connolly

In this thesis I explored how the contemporary Irish novel reflects issues of identity that have been characterised through Ireland's colonial legacy and postcolonial situation. The postcolonial approach of the thesis has argued the importance of considering the subaltern narrative in the fiction of two contemporary Irish writers: Roddy Doyle and Anne Enright. Additionally, it has explored characterisations that link back to ideas of double-colonisation. This has been the basis for assessing to what extent and in what form the texts selected for discussion have enabled or foregrounded a space in which to make subaltern and marginalised voices audible, and to explore and challenge subaltern issues of disempowerment and oppression, pertaining in particular to aspects of class and gender. The texts I have chosen differ in important ways but they also have strong affinities and solidarities which, as I have shown, can be traced in renegotiating Irish fiction in forms which refuse the linear narratives of both colonial and state-building versions of nationalism.

Doyle's and Enright's fictions refuse to develop through beginnings, middles and ends; they reject a chronological order and a narrative development based on cause and effect. Besides, they have strong metafictional elements whereby the narrative, through its characters, attracts the attention to the fact that theirs is one version of the story, or on the process of writing itself as representational. There is also strong emphasis on the refusal of closure: the very fragmented nature of the novels in question asks more of the readers in that they need to join the dots and might come to different conclusions and interpretations. As I have argued, this fragmentation also results in a kaleidoscope of split identities both in Doyle and Enright – as in the case of, for example, Henry in the trilogy and Rosaleen in *The Green Road*. There are, for instance, different versions of Rosaleen, a character strongly associated with Ireland and who is 'dark', possibly in the sense of obscure: the different versions of Rosaleen held by others reflect the different versions of Ireland held by others. However, unlike in Doyle, where the gaps are largely temporal,

especially in *The Last Roundup* trilogy, in Enright's fiction they seem to be relating to memory and reinforce the broader sense of uncertainty.

An important part of my discussion of my chosen writers and fiction related to how they negotiate the relationship with the proto-postcolonial James Joyce. In *Ulysses*, Joyce found an apt metaphor for the ideological constraints of form, characterising Irish art as the 'cracked looking-glass of a servant'.[1] His metaphor implies that when it comes to representing Irish experience, the conventions of the novel risk reifying the power relationship between colonising master and colonised servant that are coded into the formal tradition. For Joyce, the formal 'skin' of the English, nineteenth-century realist novel was too constricting to accommodate Irish language and experience, operating as key part of the colonial project. In *A Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man* and *Ulysses* this incompatibility of colonial forms and Irish experience manifests as a crisis of personal expression for Stephen Dedalus. Always positioned as an object within Irish political discourse, the young artist finds himself the symptom of a traumatic history he cannot possess, lacking a discourse with which to redress his traumatic objectification. However, while this is a problem for Stephen on the level of plot, in Joyce's hands this crisis becomes an opportunity for formal experimentation. Departing from the 'wideawake language, cutanddry grammar, and goahead plot' of the nineteenth-century realist novel, in his increasingly experimental texts he prioritised innovative formal strategies that frustrated any readerly or broader cultural desire for catharsis, resolution and answers.[2] In doing so, he was able to better enact Irish experience and the impact of colonial history and discourse on the individual. Irish novelists have frequently engaged with the Joycean legacy of needing to rework the novel form itself, remaking it in order to force it to admit Irish history and subjectivity. However, the novelists I looked at in this thesis added something else: subalternity and double colonisation.

I have argued that both Doyle and Enright, from different gender perspectives, are interrogating the actual Irish situation as opposed to previous formal accounts. While each novel is distinct, I showed that, as novels that deal with reinstating forgotten histories and subaltern voices into the national tale, they each participate in the legacy of formal innovation initiated by Joyce. In order to advance this argument, I posited that in their novels there is not a clear chronology, as this is continually frustrated by fragmented narrative that reconnects to the nature of academically-theorised postcolonial writing and

[1] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 33. This is an image that Joyce takes from Oscar Wilde.
[2] James Joyce, *Letters of James Joyce Volume III*, Richard Ellmann (ed.), (New York: Viking, 1966), p. 146.

of subaltern histories. But, *as novels*, they find strategies and formal means to animate what would otherwise be the abstract discourses that have become familiar through the theory. These strategies, through their often first-person perspectives, remove the barriers between the reader and the (often traumatic) experience narrated, and give it direct effect. As such, then, the novels everywhere encourage a nuancing and a repurposing of what, in the theory of its nature, often seems generalising and to some extent (given the longevity of Irish postcolonial writing) by now straightforward or expected. Particularly around this issue of 'subalternity', we can see that the novels' encapsulation of experience directly challenges the resistance of some forms of Irish postcolonial thought to class-inflected and female-gendered voices. The Irish postcolonial narrative can from these perspectives seem immobile, whereas the fictions are always fresh and surprising, not to be anticipated in their energies, as in their silences and indirections.

When we turn to language, we can see that the language of Enright's novels is different from Doyle's – no idiomatic expressions, no colloquial language, less immediacy. As I argued, Doyle's use of the idiolect spoken in Dublin by the working classes can be seen as a means of reappropriation, as a way to literally give voice to the subaltern in their own language, of adding their voice to the nation. In Doyle's *The Last Roundup* trilogy the characters come to life through dialogue – we are meant to get to know the characters through what they say. In Enright, the language is more reified, showing a yearning for metaphor and transcendence. Enright's desire to capture multi-layered realities and her ability to capture multi-faceted emotions in one or two almost poetic sentences convey many images and meanings, showing some kind of metaphorical possibility in the language itself. This suggests an interest in exploring hidden realities. The language in her novels, starting from the early ones, is charged with unusual similes. In both cases, I argue, the writers look for new narrative forms, as the linguistic mechanisms inherited from the colonial tradition or from mainstream representation of the nation were not adequate and new forms, or radically reimagined forms, are necessitated.

What both writers share is the writing of narratives that are involved with politics and ethics. Their fiction includes a retelling of people who have often been marginalised by dominant discourse, historical records and stories. What matters is not the individual perspective of the writer but the fact that these writers can make a larger sense of what is happening by reshaping perceptions of events and their impact on identity and nationhood. Enright is reshaping narrative by reconfiguring things through imagination. So, in other words, while Joyce, through Stephen Dedalus wants to escape history, Doyle

and Enright want to add layers to it by including the voices of those who have been left out.

I have argued that, in all the novels, individual and collective are juxtaposed and the individual stands for the nation. Moreover, in the Paula novels and in Enright's books the possibilities of the nation are foregrounded and reimagined through the female consciousness. As I have argued, both writers are preoccupied with reinventing the nation through literature, but whilst Roddy Doyle in these novels rewrites history and the past, Anne Enright shows the impact of it. The male writer rescripts the whole thing while the female writer takes the past, recognises its importance in the process of making it different whilst recognising the trauma it has caused.

In my thesis, I bring two theoretical approaches together, namely cultural materialism/historicism and subaltern theory. By putting the fiction to the fore in my argument, I can see that these theoretical frameworks are brought together in the fiction: so whilst the theory appears to be about watertight compartments, the fiction pushes boundaries. So, my thesis offers a more expansive reading of the fiction than some criticism of it allows, and the fiction seems to contradict the often-compartmentalised nature of the theory. The fiction is more about fusion. This is true, for example, of the Enright novels and it is the same with the Paula novels: postcolonial and feminist perspectives blend together.

I argued that postcoloniality is essential to understanding both Roddy Doyle and Anne Enright. Through the postcolonial, aspects of the novels overlooked by a global audience become important again, and what at first sight might appear postnational is very much rooted in the national. They also provide a reading of a nation that is struggling to modernise itself, or to rid itself of late colonial strains. Therefore, I argue, the Celtic Tiger and the Crash in their fiction becomes a sign of the vulnerability of the postcolonial nation. Or the individual breaking away, for instance Gina in *The Forgotten Waltz*, reflects the efforts of reimagining a nation breaking away from the past and starting a new life.

In both authors, what emerges is that the academic-theoretical idea of the subaltern needs to be more flexible. Indeed, I argue that such postcolonial terms as subaltern and double colonisation need to reflect the themes, tropes and flexibility that play out in the novels. For instance, the switch from first person narration in Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* to third person narration in *Paula Spencer* give us a glimpse of what I see as the flexibility of fiction, of narrative techniques to adapt to the perspectival content of social changes. I consistently question the terminology, whether

it is still relevant, whether it still applies to contemporary fiction and its flexible literary techniques.

Should the theory become more flexible as well? How much is the theory able to articulate what is happening in the fiction? When people talk about postcolonial fiction, they do not automatically think about Doyle or Enright. Doyle seems to be absent from the critical scene of postcolonial fiction as such: because of the nature of his work, the multitude of genres he works in, his love of dialogue, we have few tools to think about his work in a consistent, uniform way. He writes about working class, women, children, victims of abuse. Some aspects are enigmatic, leaving us wondering why he writes in the way he does, about apparently disparate characters, using disparate techniques – first person narration, third person narration with free indirect speech, fragmentation, gaps, flashbacks. However, thinking about Roddy Doyle in relation to postcolonial theory offers a useful lens to unpack his themes and narrative techniques. Moreover, just as he has written for multiple media, he uses multiple media in his novels' techniques – dramatic dialogue, visual (film), audio (music/song text) - possibly to break genre boundaries just as he wants to break identity boundaries.

We have seen that neither writer fits easily into straightforward academic paradigms. I argue that the postcolonial lens is a useful tool through which we can unpack their themes, such as the quest for identity, and narrative techniques, such as the fragmented nature of his narrative. I aimed to provide a toolkit that allows a more comprehensive reading of both novelists in dialogue with the material and cultural changes reflected in their work. When writing this thesis, it was a deliberate decision to feature novels written over a period spanning about thirty years from the 1980s to the early twenty-first century in the Republic. This is because I wanted to explore the interplay of Irish postcolonial theory and fiction in two established Irish writers, Roddy Doyle and Anne Enright. Specifically, given that the theory I reviewed sees the making of the nation as indissolubly linked to the novel, I wanted to see how representations of Irishness play out in the fiction. Given the limitations of this thesis in terms of length, I found that they provided a sufficiently-established and broad canon for analysis. Obviously, as it is contemporary writers I focused on, they carried on writing and publishing after I had finalised my choice of novels and my writing plan. Roddy Doyle has published two more novels *Smile* (2017) and *Love* (2020), whilst Anne Enright published *Actress* in 2020. Albeit, again, settings and characters differ from novel to novel, some of the same themes and formal characteristics resurface in all three.

It felt important that this thesis, has been framed by contemporary social, historical, and political events. For those whom Irish society has historically marginalised, there has long been a lack of 'discursive space' in which their voices can be articulated and acknowledged. The controversy around the Mother and Babies Homes report is evidence that there is still a way to go.[3] What these novels do is to help carve out a space for that discourse. Postcolonial writers are conscious of their role in nation-building. In postcolonial literature, this project often seeks to complicate and resist the colonial past such as constructions of the 'other' as primitive, savage, demonic, and by seeking to retrieve a pre-colonial past that would help redefine a nation by linking it to an ideal period which saw a superior moral stand of the colonised. Postcolonialism brings with it a new process of exclusion, marginalization and 'subalternisation'. Literature of postcoloniality emphasizes the modes of constructing, imagining and representing the nation, the role of locality, space, community, religion, spirituality, cultural identity and the politics of nativism in the making of a national identity. In this process, new minorities are made. I argue that the message in Doyle and Enright is to try and take things in a different direction. They are rewriting different versions of the nation where marginalised voices find expression, they are questioning the various forms of monolithic depictions of the nation and of Irishness, coming to the conclusion that a new nation is possible. The openness of their fictions mirrors the openness of an emerging nation they are imagining, a nation not constrained by ideal representations. Doyle and Enright, from different gender perspectives, interrogate the actual Irish situation. They are able to do this because social and historical conditions are becoming different, and hopefully will continue to become more so.

[3] A group of leading Irish historians are rejecting the recently published report into the atrocities that took place in Church-run homes for unwedded mothers. The historians lament a lack of 'survivor-centred' approach saying that the testimony of the women victims of abuse has been neglected and their voices once again ignored, https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-40305698.html

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