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The Representation of Working-Class Identity in Roddy Doyle's Fiction

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Frontispiece

Walter F. Osborne. *In a Dublin Park, Light and Shade*. c.1895, National Gallery of Ireland.

The National Gallery provides the following description for this picture:

Though the dappled sunlight may call to mind Parisian paintings of an earlier generation, this is not a scene of middle-class recreation, but rather a record of Dublin's poor, in which the careworn expressions of the figures jar with the pleasant setting. Especially poignant is the contrast between the sunken features of the young mother and the radiant youthfulness of the barefoot boy at her side. Osborne was not a social realist, but often recorded his native city in a matter-of-fact manner. The figures' engagement with the viewer is redolent of photography, a medium in which Osborne had a particular interest. ("Label Text")

I have chosen this picture for the cover of this document because of the thematic connections it holds with my thesis, especially, the fact that the central stage is occupied by figures belonging to the working class.

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conversations about politics and literature, and for discussing my ideas with me. Thank you, Mamà, for your sweetness, for giving me books to read and for always being there when I need to talk. Alfred, my little brother who takes care of me as if he were the eldest, thank you for keeping my feet always close to the ground. To my partner, Marc, thank you for listening, for comforting, for cooking, for making me laugh, for providing me with the necessary conditions to write this thesis.

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Prefatory Note

The following abbreviations are used for my primary bibliography throughout this thesis:

A Star Called Henry (ASCH)

Oh, Play That Thing (OPTT)

The Dead Republic (TDR)

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha (PC)

The Commitments (TC)

The Snapper (TS)

The Van (TV)

Smile (S)

Paula Spencer (PS)

The Woman Who Walked into Doors (TWWID)

The Deportees (TD)

This thesis has been formatted in accordance with the ninth edition of the MLA.

Due to the often-unconventional format that Doyle uses in his prose (like his use of long dashes to introduce dialogue, instead of inverted commas), I have respected the original format in the block quotations that I use to cite lengthier passages of his work.

Additional Digital Material

I have set up a digital repository with the audio file of the interview that I conducted with Roddy Doyle in September 2023. The transcript for this interview is available in Appendix 1 of this document.

I have also created a Spotify playlist with songs that are mentioned in Roddy Doyle's novels and short stories. Since, initially, I created this playlist for my personal use, it is not thorough. However, I considered that it might be interesting for anyone dealing with Doyle's work. Throughout the thesis, I also provide links for specific songs.

The digital repository is set up as a Google Drive account, the access details for which are the following:

- Interview File: <https://tuit.cat/o3keP>
- Spotify List: <https://tuit.cat/z0zIt>
- Username: did.you.know.that.Doyle@gmail.com
- Password: Doyle.dissertation.UAB

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Foreword

It is probably not an overstatement to suggest that Roddy Doyle (Dublin, 1958—) is considered, at the time of writing this thesis, one of Ireland’s most beloved writers. Whenever I have spoken to Irish people (north and south of the border), my impression has been that everybody has heard about Doyle and that they have read, at least, his first novel, *The Commitments* (1987). The manner in which my interlocutors’ faces light up and their conversation becomes more animated when I tell them about my interest in Doyle’s work, speak to their sense of pride and admiration for the Dubliner writer. This pride can perhaps be felt strongest in Kilbarrack, the north-side Dublin suburb where Doyle grew up and where he also used to work as a teacher, and that he fictionalised as Barrytown in the Barrytown Trilogy (1987, 1990, 1991) and *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (1993). As one travels past Kilbarrack Station on the DART (Dublin Area Rapid Transit), an impressive blue mural appears that reads, “WELCOME TO BARRYTOWN” and that depicts images evocative of Doyle’s novels (see Fig. 1). There is even a graffiti of Roddy Doyle’s face that smiles, from the wall, upon the passers-by.



Fig. 1. Lluisa Schlesier. *Kilbarrack Mural*. 2023, Private Collection.

This mural was created by young adults as part of the Reach Out Project, whose aim is to provide assistance to local people between the age of 18-25, “struggling with addiction or mental health issues by providing a creative outlet through artistic expression” (Jones and Mooney). As Laura Larkin, the project manager for Dublin City Council Culture Company at the time, remarked, Doyle “is very supportive of local initiatives” (Jones and Mooney) and, certainly, this mural is only one of the positive outcomes that Doyle’s fiction has had in Dublin. A striking example of this can be found in the effect that *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1996) has had on medical staff. The novel, which narrates the story of Paula Spencer, a victim of domestic violence whom doctors dismiss because of her alcoholism, is now on the reading list of medical students in Ireland (Doyle; “Interview” lines 35-6). Likewise, Doyle explains how reading this novel has helped several abused women realise that they were not alone in their predicament (Doyle; “Interview” lines 30-3).

Despite these examples—and others that I mention below—when asked whether he intentionally seeks to “make the world a better place” (Doyle; “Interview” lines 15-20) through his literary production, Doyle categorically denies that this is the case: “(...) all my consideration goes into the quality of the work. And that has always been the case, because, I think, if I started thinking about, ‘This piece of work might have an impact to social... or a political impact on the world’, it’ll be a bad piece of writing” (Doyle; “Interview” lines 26-9). We might agree more or less with the validity of Doyle’s statement, but Eamon Maher argues that this is one of the traits that makes Doyle’s fiction particularly admirable. In his analysis of Paula Spencer (the protagonist of *The Woman* and *Paula Spencer* (2006)), Maher argues that Doyle’s decision to not give Paula “an eloquent voice to rail against the inequity of her situation” is an aspect “that distinguishes Doyle from his talented contemporary, Dermot Bolger, who, in *The Journey Home* (1990) in particular, tends to allow social commentary too free a rein”. To this, Maher adds that “[t]he error Bolger makes is to allow the (justifiable)

anger he felt about political corruption and social discrimination to come across in the novel; Doyle is careful not to fall into that particular trap” (“Social and Cultural Change” 166).

This is not to say, however, that Doyle considers himself apolitical; quite the contrary. However, it seems to be the case that he makes a clear separation between his life and his production (at least, when it comes to politics). Indeed, he has called himself “a political writer” (Jamieson) and, as he has explained, “I was in a political party when I was a young man, but I saw that party implode and I don’t think there’s anything to gain in me joining [another one]” (Doyle; “Interview” lines 238-40).¹ I believe that, when it comes to Doyle’s fiction, it is crucial to understand what he means by *politics*. On the one hand, Doyle has always been vocal about his opinions on social matters, as Michael Pierse explains: “Doyle has made no secret of his distaste for the conservatism of the state in which he lives – if the second divorce referendum of the 1990s was not passed, he threatened to leave it” (*Writing* 240). On the other hand, as I pointed out above, Doyle has been involved in several social causes, especially by promoting literacy through different programmes, such as the Open Door and Quick Reads literacy series, or through the Fighting Words Charity, “a creative writing organisation established in 2009 by Roddy Doyle and Seán Love in Dublin” (“What We Do”).² Finally, important clues to understand what Doyle means by *politics* can be found in his fiction, particularly when contrasted with his belief that politics start at grassroots level, such as parents “becoming

¹ Doyle had been a member of the Socialist Labour Party when he was younger. The SLP was founded in 1977 and led by Matt Merrigan (1921-2000), “trade unionist and socialist” (L. White, “Merrigan”), and Noel Browne (1915-97), “politician and physician” (Horgan). The party was dissolved in 1982 (“Socialist Labour Party”).

² According to NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency), which defines itself as an Irish independent charity, “[t]he *Open Door* series was founded by Patricia Scanlan and New Island publisher Edwin Higel in the late 90s”. The books that appear in this series feature “stories [that] are written in plain English and are designed to encourage adults who do not read often, or find reading difficult, to discover the joy of books” (“Opening a Door to Reading”). Similarly, the Reading Agency describe the Quick Reads as “provid[ing] a route into reading that prioritises great story telling and adult-focused content while ensuring the books are written in an accessible and easy to read style”, with books written by “best-selling authors” since 2006 (“Quick Reads”). The Fighting Words Charity explains that its mission consists in “help[ing] children and young people, and adults who did not have this opportunity as children, to discover and harness the power of their own imaginations and creative writing skills” (“Our Mission”).

involved in the local football club” and “making sure that [their kids] have the right to have these games” (Doyle; “Interview” lines 232-3). Perhaps, reflecting Doyle’s own disillusionment in party politics, Jimmy Rabbitte, the protagonist of *The Commitments*, a novel about the rise and fall of a north-Dublin soul band, expresses the following ideas: “—Politics. —Party politics, said Jimmy, —means nothin’ to the workin’ people. Nothin’. —Fuck all. Soul is the politics o’ the people. (...) The Labour Party doesn’t have soul. Fianna fuckin’ Fail doesn’t have soul. The Workers’ Party ain’t got soul” (38). Likewise, as I show in Chapter One, *A Star Called Henry* (1999) registers the protagonist’s utter disappointment with party politics, after his committed fighting in the 1916 rebellion and the War of Independence (1919-1921). Instead, Doyle’s characters often attempt to express their ideology through small actions. For instance, taking up the case of *The Commitments*, the band decide to use their first gig as a platform to campaign against the use of drugs: “We’re supposed to be bringin’ soul to Dublin. We can’t do tha’ an’ smoke hash at the same time” (66), Jimmy argues. Hence, during their first performance, the band put up an anti-heroin banner.

Nevertheless, the most significant political aspect of Doyle’s work can be found in his choice of characters. As Mary McGlynn points out, “Doyle foregrounds voices seldom occupying center stage in novelistic prose” (“Why Jimmy Wears a Suit” 232). Although McGlynn, in this precise quotation, is speaking about Doyle’s unconventional use of language, I believe that this phrase can be applied generally to Doyle’s fiction: from working-class teenagers, twentieth-century slum-dwellers, victims of abuse and alcoholism to African migrants, Doyle’s protagonists are figures whose voices, as Åke Persson puts it, have traditionally been “silenced” (“Marginalisation” 161). In her assessment of *The Deportees* (2007), Maureen T. Reddy refers to “Martha Nussbaum’s argument that fiction can help to educate readers into deeper commitments to social justice by creating imaginative

identifications across social divides” (380).³ In my view, this is precisely the most significant potential contribution of Doyle’s fiction.

In the introduction to the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros rhetorically asks how art “can (...) make a difference in the world” and whether “a memoir by Malcolm X or a novel by García Márquez [can] save [her students] from the daily blows” they receive at home (xviii). Indeed, can art save lives? Although I do not remotely hope to provide an answer to this question, the following observation from Ann Jay, a medical practitioner, after reading *The Woman* sheds an interesting light on this matter:

One way we, as doctors, can feed our imaginations is by reading fiction. When we see our “Paulas” in the surgery we are constrained by lack of time and all the paraphernalia of our medical training, both of which encourage us to look for proper diagnoses and cures. When we read a novel we engage with the character in a different way. We can perhaps get under their skin and more fully realise how for some people “cigarettes are sexy—they’re worth the stench and the cancer”, as Paula Spencer says. (59)

Although, as I expressed above, I cannot and do not intend to answer the question *Can literature make the world a better place?*, I must acknowledge that, though vague at the beginning, it has been at the back of my mind throughout my undergraduate years, during the period in which I wrote my masters’ dissertation and, evidently, during the writing of the present thesis. It is my conviction that by studying an author like Roddy Doyle, who “insisted on writing previously ignored, indeed taboo, experiences into existence” (Persson; “Marginalisation” 138), I might contribute to answering this thorny question and, at the same time, to help vindicate the continued importance of the humanities in our global society.

³ I also use this quote in Chapter Three (p. 234) in relation to Doyle’s writing about race.

Introduction

This introductory chapter covers the formal aspects of my thesis. I begin by providing a literature review of published works about Roddy Doyle's fiction, focusing especially on authors who have written monographs, and on those who have been more prolific in their analysis of Doyle's work. Next, I discuss the gap in the current research and proceed to delineate the aims of my thesis, as well as my thesis statement, followed by the questions that have led my research. To continue, I explain the contribution that I hope this thesis will make to the field of working-class studies and to studies about Roddy Doyle's work. This is followed by a description of the theoretical framework and the approach that I have used for the analysis of my primary bibliography. After this, I offer a clarification of the term *working class*, as I use it throughout my thesis and in relation to the novels and short stories I examine. Finally, I have included a chapter overview that includes a justification for the selection of my primary bibliography as well as a summary of the contents of this document.

Literature Review⁴

Roddy Doyle is a writer who, in the approximately thirty years since his debut as a writer, has already received an important amount of critical attention. Nonetheless, a great part of the work written about Doyle's fiction consists of articles or book chapters that, given the limited nature

⁴ I have confined this literature review to the studies that have been conducted on Roddy Doyle's novels. There are, of course, many critical works that discuss the Irish novel in a comprehensive fashion. To name only a few examples, there is Gerry Smyth's *The Novel and The Nation* (1997), Linden Peach's *The Contemporary Irish Novel: Critical Readings* (2004), Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland* (2009), Derek Hand's *A History of the Irish Novel* (2011), Liam Harte's *Reading the Contemporary Irish Novel: 1987-2007* (2014), and Eugene O'Brien's series *Routledge Studies in Irish Literature* (2023-4) that includes, at the time of writing this thesis, twenty-four volumes dedicated to different authors from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Studies on the Irish working-class novel are discussed below.

of this type of format, focus on a single aspect or a single item of his work. At the time of writing this thesis, only a few monographs exist dedicated to Roddy Doyle.

The first author to make a comparative analysis of Doyle's novels was **Caramine White**, who in 1996 wrote her doctoral thesis, *The Novels of Roddy Doyle*, "the first of its kind about Doyle" (C. White, *Novels* i), which focussed on *The Commitments*, *The Snapper* (1990), *The Van* (1991), *Paddy Clarke* and *The Woman*. White's aim was "to introduce the novels to the reading public and to convince the reading public that Doyle, although a very popular artist, is also a gifted writer who should be taken seriously" (i). White's thesis has been adapted as a book and published under the title *Reading Roddy Doyle* (2001), which also includes the interview that White conducted with Doyle as part of her doctoral research, and a brief appendix dedicated to *A Star*.

The assessment that has been made of this monograph perhaps explains its only slight presence in later discussions of Doyle's work: James Drewett, for example, finds *Reading Roddy Doyle* too ambitious in its attempt to "capture every nuance of Doyle's *oeuvre*" ("Review of *Reading*" 389) and sometimes lacking in critical profundity. Maher who, in contrast, finds White's work an "excellent study of Doyle the man and writer" ("Review" 454), also refers to it as "an informed, yet accessible, *introduction* to Roddy Doyle" ("Review" 453; my emphasis). In any case, White's work was ground-breaking at the time that it was published and, as Drewett also acknowledges,

[t]aking into account the dearth of critical commentary upon which to draw, as well as the nature of Doyle's novels which defy traditional plot-led analysis, it is unfair to be critical of someone who has considered Doyle academically worthy of study, and who has dared to buck the trend of relegating him to the 'popular' corner of the literature class. ("Review of *Reading*" 391)

White's undeniable contribution might have been, indeed, that of "begin[ning] the inevitable procession of Doyle studies with a solid and surefooted step" (Falcetta 149).

In 2012, *Reading More of Roddy Doyle* was published, which, as the title indicates, offers an assessment of several works by Doyle that had been published since White's first monograph: *A Star; Oh, Play that Thing* (2004); *Paula Spencer; The Dead Republic* (2010), *The Deportees, Bullfighting* (2011) and *Rory & Ita* (2002), a nonfiction account of the lives of Doyle's parents. Additionally, White also examines other works by Doyle, such as his books for children, his screenplays and stage plays. Unlike White's first work on Doyle, *Reading More of Roddy Doyle* seems to have received no critical attention.

Without questioning the invaluable merit of White's pioneering work on Roddy Doyle, given the introductory nature of her analyses and the quantity of more in-depth studies that have been published since White's first publication, I have not relied on either of her works for the writing of this thesis. As Maher conveys in his review of *Reading Roddy Doyle*, I believe that White's works are probably a highly useful tool for students who wish to work on Doyle ("Review" 453) and, I would also suggest, for teachers who are interested in reading Doyle with their class.

In 1998, **Ulrike Paschel**'s thesis *No Mean City? The Image of Dublin in the Novels of Dermot Bolger, Roddy Doyle and Val Mulherns* was published by Peter Lang. As the title of her work indicates, Paschel compares the image of Dublin in four different novels: Bolger's *The Journey Home* (1990), Doyle's *Paddy Clarke and The Van*, and Mulherns' *Very Like a Whale* (1986). Moreover, Paschel's book includes interviews that she conducted with Bolger, Doyle and Mulherns. Paschel works from the premise that "Dublin rarely figures as a setting let alone as a theme for Irish novels, plays or poems" (21) and examines the reasons for this, from the "myth of the noble peasant" (25), promoted during the Gaelic Revival movement, to the "inhibiting" influence of Joyce's work (33). Paschel contends that "no unified picture of Dublin emerges from the new Dublin literature, just as there is no unified picture of Ireland as a whole" (39) and analyses the representations of Dublin in the four novels mentioned above.

To my knowledge, no review has been published on *No Mean City?*. As I see it, this is a thorough study, and the chapter devoted to Roddy Doyle offers an innovative approach to his novels. *No Mean City?* has certainly had a relevant role in deepening my own understanding of the relationship between Dublin and Doyle's fiction and in my examination of novels and themes in the second chapter of this thesis.

Another key study when it comes to Doyle's fiction is *Roddy Doyle. Raining on the Parade* (2003) by **Dermot McCarthy**. This monograph is part of a series called *Contemporary Irish Writers and Filmmakers*, edited by Eugene O'Brien, which seeks to examine "representations" of a new Ireland, distinct "from that which figures in the works of Yeats, Joyce and Beckett", one that has become "more secular, more European, and more cosmopolitan" (O'Brien ix). The series, "[a]imed at the student and general reader alike" (O'Brien x), also includes monographs about well-established writers like Seamus Heaney, Brian Friel, Jim Sheridan and John Banville, among many others, contributing thus to breaking the assumption that Doyle is not a serious writer (Donnelly 17, Maher; "Social and Cultural Change" 157, Paschel 38, 67). In *Raining on the Parade*, McCarthy examines six of Doyle's novels: those pertaining to the Barrytown Trilogy (*The Commitments*, *The Snapper* and *The Van*), *Paddy Clarke*, *The Woman* and *A Star*. Additionally, McCarthy also analyses the television series *Family*, in relation to *The Woman*. As Persson observes,

McCarthy's main argument is that Doyle is very much part of what has been referred to as "the new Ireland" that has (...) "leapt into the centre ring of the postmodern global circus" (1). Yet, he suggests, Doyle's participation in the shaping or construction of a "new Ireland" is ambiguous and complex, as Doyle does not seem to be happy with many of the consequences of Ireland's recent economic success. ("Review" 195)

With "recent economic success", Persson refers to the Celtic Tiger phenomenon, which I examine in Chapter Three, in relation to *Paula Spencer* and *The Deportees*. Drewett, likewise, comments that

[t]he undercurrent of the book, reflected in its title, is Doyle's ambiguous relationship with the PR machine that has ratified the mythology of the new Irish cultural nationalism: Doyle's writing being "a cold caustic rain on the green parade of the 1990s." McCarthy deconstructs the myth of "new Ireland" and critiques the Celtic Tiger as a phenomenon which failed to bring about necessary economic or structural change while effectively widened the gap between rich and poor. McCarthy argues that the major point in Doyle's writing is that class, rather than nationalism, is the principal determinant of individual identity in contemporary Ireland. ("Review of *Roddy Doyle*" 85)

The reviews that McCarthy's monograph has received have been highly positive: Persson calls it "the most convincing examination so far of Doyle's work" (195), and Drewett considers that it "[draws] together many well-discussed themes that have hereto been confined to odd chapters and articles, as well as introducing innovative ideas of his own", thus, "meet[ing] a critical gap in the ongoing study and appreciation" of Doyle's fiction ("Review of *Roddy Doyle*" 86). Indeed, in my view, McCarthy offers highly interesting insights and I have used his monograph as a constant reference throughout my analysis of Doyle's texts, as my thesis shows. Moreover, the chronology of Doyle's life and career that McCarthy provides at the beginning of his study (although understandably incomplete, as it stops in 2003), might prove useful to anyone embarking on an in-depth work on the Dubliner writer.

The more serious shortcomings that Persson and Drewett find with *Raining on the Parade*, and I agree with them, are related to McCarthy's style: both reviewers find that McCarthy "seems to allow personal value judgements to enter his interpretations" (Persson; "Review" 196), finding him "moralising" (Drewett; "Review of *Roddy Doyle*" 85). What I have personally found least appealing, however, is McCarthy's occasional harsh criticism of other scholars' work. Drewett points to this with the following example taken from McCarthy's chapter devoted to *The Commitments*: "McCarthy pulls no punches with Caramine White's racial analogy in *Reading Roddy Doyle*, rightly finding it 'absurd,' 'a most spurious rhetorical distortion' not justified by a close reading of the text" ("Review of *Roddy Doyle*" 85).

Notwithstanding these arguments, McCarthy's work remains, to this date, indispensable in any serious study of Roddy Doyle's fiction.

Recalling Drewett's words, every other analysis that has been published about Doyle's works (to this date) can be found in "odd chapters and articles", only that they are not "odd" anymore, since they constitute an important *corpus* of studies on Doyle's fiction. Furthermore, several authors are prolific in their research on Roddy Doyle or have produced such a significant contribution that their names stand out in most bibliographies. For example, Lorraine Piroux's article "'I'm Black an' I'm Proud': Re-Inventing Irishness in Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments*" (1998), provides a thorough examination of the connections that spring from the famous phrase "[t]he Irish are the niggers of Europe" (*TC* 13). Piroux contends that the novel "suggests (...) that Irish identity does not exist in and of itself but springs from variegated possibilities of transnational solidarity with the disenfranchised" (46). Similar to the case of Caramine White, Piroux's article was the beginning of a discussion centred on the connections between race and class as represented in *The Commitments* (see Chapter Three, p. 239).

Another author who has repeatedly written about Doyle's fiction is Åke Persson. He has done so through the lens of Homi K. Bhabha's "third space" theory⁵ ("Between Displacement and Renewal" (2006)), by applying a sociolinguistic analysis to Doyle's Barrytown Trilogy and later work ("Polishing the Working Class" (2003)), and by examining the manner in which Paula "tries to resist, and arguably overcomes, marginalisation" in *Paula Spencer* ("'You're Fuckin' Amazing'" 139).

⁵ Bhabha's "third space" theory emphasises cultural hybridity and the fluidity of identity, particularly in postcolonial contexts. It challenges binary notions of culture, such as coloniser/colonised, by highlighting the dynamic interactions that reshape identities. The third space is a transformative zone where cultures negotiate and blend, leading to new meanings and forms of expression. This space disrupts colonial power structures and emphasises the ongoing, hybrid nature of cultural identity and meaning-making in a globalised, postcolonial world.

Likewise, **Mary McGlynn** has published numerous studies about Doyle's fiction, often through the prism of working-class studies. Such works include “‘But I Keep on Thinking and I’ll Never Come to a Tidy Ending’” (1999), “Why Jimmy Wears a Suit” (2004) and “Pregnancy, Privacy, and Domesticity in ‘The Snapper’” (2005). In 2008, she published the compendium *Narratives of Class in New Irish and Scottish Literature*, which also deals with Doyle's fiction.

More recently, **Burcu Gülüm Tekin** completed her thesis titled *Heroines of the Working Class: The Representation of Motherhood in Roddy Doyle's Work* (2017), in which she examines the changing figure of the mother in Doyle's fiction. Additionally, Tekin has published several papers and chapters that focus (mainly) on the representation of characters in Doyle's fiction, often from a feminist perspective, such as “Wicked Female Characters” (2015), which examines “The Pram” from the short-story collection *The Deportees*, and “The Silent Mother of the Dysfunctional Family” (2017), a feminist approach to *Paddy Clarke*. Other works that do not necessarily focus on female characters are “An Analysis of Modern Day Dubliners” (2012) and “Ageing Men and Therapeutic Pints” (2017), the first of which examines the short story “Recuperation” from *Bullfighting* (2011) and, the second, the novel *Two Pints* (2012). In collaboration with Pilar Villar Argáiz, Tekin has also published “The ‘Others’ of the Celtic Tiger” (2014), an article that looks at the multicultural reality of Dublin and at how different Doylean characters experience it, and which I have drawn from for my analysis in Chapter Three. Finally, the specialised journal *Estudios Irlandeses* also published the interview with Roddy Doyle (2014) that Tekin conducted in the context of her thesis research.

Another scholar who has written repeatedly about Doyle's fiction is **Aída Díaz Bild**, whose research interests include humour and comedy. On Doyle, she has written about “‘A Star Called Henry’ and ‘At Swim, Two Boys’: The Deconstruction of the Tragic Paradigm”

(2005), “Oh, Play That Thing or the Wisdom of the Fool” (2006), and “*The Dead Republic*, by Roddy Doyle: The Wisdom of Comic Heroism” (2018), all of which look at the figure of the hero in the Last Roundup Trilogy through the lens of comedy. However, the two works by Díaz Bild that I have relied most upon for this thesis are “*Paula Spencer* or the Miraculous Transformation of Misery into Joy” (2012), which informs my third chapter, and “*Smile*, by Roddy Doyle: The ‘Magic’ of Art” (2018), which I have consulted for my analysis in Chapter Two. Díaz Bild’s latest work on Doyle’s fiction consists of the book chapter “The Guts (2013): The Quintessence of Roddy Doyle’s Art of Fiction” (2022).

As my thesis and my bibliography show, there are many other scholars who have written, perhaps more sporadically, about Doyle’s fiction. Although each of these contributions offers interesting insights and is an essential part of the *corpus* of existing studies on Doyle’s work, they do not form a central part of my own analysis (as they focus on their own specialist concerns). However, as a means of making visible the ongoing studies in Doyle’s fiction, please consult the list of other relevant studies on Doyle in Appendix 3.

Aims, Approach and Theoretical Framework

In “‘A Pole of Differentiation’: Pasts and Futures in Irish Working-Class Writing”, Michael Pierse laments that Irish working-class writing “has received less scholarly attention than it merits, most particularly *as* working-class writing” (214, original emphasis). Among the existing works on this subject, he counts three: “Mary McGlynn’s *Narratives of Class in New Irish and Scottish Literature* (2008), my own *Writing Ireland’s Working Class: Dublin after O’Casey* (2011) and Aaron Kelly’s 2013 special issue of the *Irish Review* on ‘Cultures of Class’ in Ireland” (215). The more recent *History of Irish Working-Class Writing* (2017), edited by

Pierse, has sought to “partially [address] this neglect and [open] up a range of possibilities for renewed exploration” (216).

Although Pierse acknowledges the existence of monographs dedicated to the study of “prominent Irish working-class writers”, and he includes Doyle among the examples, he finds that “studies have rarely linked [these writers], in any depth, in terms of one of the fundamentally formative aspects of their upbringings and great preoccupations of their works: class” (2016). Indeed, my impression when it comes to Roddy Doyle’s work is that class is often taken for granted, perhaps because it is such an obvious aspect in all his work. Therefore, critics tend to focus more on other elements of Doyle’s fiction, as the literary review above shows: his use of language, his use of comedy, the unconventional aspects of his writing, to name only some examples.

In light of the gap that Pierse highlights, the primary aim of my thesis is to examine in a consistent fashion how social class conditions Doyle’s characters into being who they are and into acting as they do. In selecting texts that cover an ample period of time, I have also sought to assess how different political and economic events have impacted the characters’ perception of their national, social and political identity. Moreover, due to the fact that Doyle is such a prolific writer, the monographs cited above cover his work only up to a specific moment in time, leaving posterior novels unexamined. This thesis, therefore, offers connections that could not previously be made between certain novels.

Considering this gap and my aims, my thesis statement is that Doyle’s fiction for adults expresses a concern over what it means to belong to the Dublin working-class, and that class conditions his characters’ alignment with the traditional Irish identity “rooted in Gaelic, Catholic, republican and rural Ireland” (McCarthy 13).

To assess the validity of my thesis statement, the main question that has led my analysis is how the works in my primary bibliography resist the imposition of traditional Irish identity

and how this resistance is conditioned by the characters' social position. Additionally, to help understand the perception that these working-class characters have of their identity as being distinct to that promoted by the Irish state, I have also sought to examine how their construction differs from that of middle- and upper-class characters. Finally, I have also attempted to assess whether the following contention by Pierse can be applied to Doyle's work, namely, that Irish working-class literature is in itself inventive and subversive (Brannigan viii) and that, quoting Michel Peillon, the "differences of behaviour [between the different social classes] expressed themselves in 'a specific lifestyle' that was radically averse to the norms of the Irish state: 'the particularity of the working class appears from whatever aspect one studies it, and it asserts itself *as a pole of differentiation in Irish society*'" (Pierse; *Writing* 25-6; original emphasis).

Thus, this thesis attempts to make a contribution to the ongoing discussion of Doyle's work by offering a class-based approach to his novels. Additionally, as I noted above, in this thesis I also examine novels that did not exist at the time of publication of previous monographs. Due to the same reason, this thesis shows new links between Doyle's novels and takes the understanding of this author's work a step further. I also hope that this thesis contributes to somewhat narrowing the gap pointed out by Pierse in the study of working-class writing.

My theoretical framework is informed by Marxist literary criticism.⁶ This approach to Doyle's texts has been taken, first, because of the marked presence of class in his works and, second, because of their realism, in the sense that Engels described as "the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances" (Foley 141).⁷

Thus, my reading of Doyle's novels has been shaped by various premises. First and foremost, regarding the question "how does a given text interpellate its reader in relation to

⁶ My analysis is particularly indebted to Barabara Foley's *Marxist Literary Criticism Today* (2019).

⁷ With the obvious exception of the Last Roundup Trilogy, as I discuss in Chapter One.

dominant ideologies and modes of class rule, past and present” (Foley 125), I read Doyle’s novels as a critique of the dominant Western capitalist system, as his work consistently shows the shortcomings of this system through the experiences of his working-class characters.⁸ Likewise, I believe that Doyle’s texts expose the contradictions of capitalism, something which perhaps is particularly visible in his representation of the Celtic Tiger period, as I show in Chapter Three. This brings me to my next point, the historic aspect of Doyle’s novels.

Considering that “for the Marxist, the literary work is constituted by its embeddedness in history” (Foley 131), I have read my primary bibliography both in light of the moment that it was produced as well as the period that it represents. Indeed, Roddy Doyle’s understanding of Ireland is deeply rooted in the country’s socio-political situation at the time of his upbringing in the 1960s, as I show in Chapter Two. In the same way, the periods of history in which his novels or short stories are set, are crucial in identifying specific aspects that bind them to Irish history. With this in mind, this thesis includes many references to the social, political and economic history of Ireland.

Finally, the question of the function of Doyle’s novels is more ambiguous. Foley addresses the issue of “the status in Marxist criticism of literary works that have expressly attempted to articulate a revolutionary outlook, the ‘standpoint of the proletariat’” (150). Doyle’s novels and short stories certainly fall under this category, as they focus primarily on the Dublin working class and are written by a former member of the Dublin working class.⁹ Nevertheless, as I see it, Doyle’s novels are not revolutionary. This connects to a current in

⁸ Although I do not examine all the representations of middle- or upper-class characters in Doyle’s fiction, together with the examples that appear in this thesis, characters like the protagonist of “Blood” (*Bullfighting*), as I see it, attest to the negative effects of capitalism on all human beings in society, as represented by Doyle. These characters, although rich and successful, are often portrayed as heartless, inhumane people, driven by economic motives above all else and far removed from Doyle’s usual charming figures.

⁹ With his increasing success as a writer, Doyle’s socioeconomic status has changed over the years, rendering his position as working-class writer more complex. Indeed, he has been accused of taking advantage of the working class for his own benefit. Nevertheless, since I am discussing Marxism in this section, it is interesting to note that, according to Foley, “[n]either Marx nor Engels (...) viewed a writer’s class background as in itself a barrier to representing reality” (141).

Marxist criticism that can be summarized in the phrase commonly credited to Brecht that “Art is not a mirror to reflect reality, but a hammer with which to shape it” (Foley 156). Foley adds, “[m]irror versus hammer; reflection versus transformation; portrayal of what is versus anticipation of what may be: the notion that literature can be a practical tool for transforming the world is an essential tenet of Marxist criticism” (156). This “tenet” connects with the ideas expressed in my foreword and, although I believe that Doyle’s fiction resembles in a much greater measure a mirror than a hammer (Cosgrove writes that “Doyle’s realism should be seen as being of the ‘I am a camera’ variety: his initial purpose is social documentation rather than cultural analysis” (231)),¹⁰ I also think that it constitutes a “practical tool for transforming the world”, due to the social problems it represents and the questions it raises.

I am aware that, for some Marxist critics, my analysis might seem overly concerned with the individual. After all, I read many of Doyle’s characters as the result of historical and social as well as psychological processes. This is the case of Henry Smart (see Chapter One) or Victor Forde (see Chapter Two). However, I have deemed it necessary to point out how individual experiences have shaped these characters’ lives to offer richer analyses of my primary bibliography. Nevertheless, there are two points that I want to make regarding this. The first one is that, as I hope to show in the coming analyses, the psychological sphere of Doyle’s characters is profoundly impacted by their experience as members of the working class. The second point is that, by making a case for individuality, Doyle’s works contribute to deconstructing the vision of the working class as a homogeneous group.

Finally, the approach that I have used to establish what I hope is the validity of my thesis statement consists of a close reading of passages from my primary bibliography and an analytical application of my secondary sources.

¹⁰ Reference to the narrator-camera derives from the opening sentence in Christopher Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939).

The Working Class in Roddy Doyle's Fiction

Up to this point, I have repeatedly referred to social class and, specifically, the working class; thus, it is necessary to explain what I understand by these terms. This is not a simple task, as “[c]lass analysis is notoriously prone to ambiguity, slippage and vigorous disagreement” (Pierse; *Writing* 4). Much has changed in Europe since the time when Karl Marx wrote about social class and class struggle. This includes as the type of jobs we do, access to healthcare and education or morality and ethics. The economist Yanis Varoufakis even claims that we are now living in a post-capitalist era, in which the great technological businesses like Amazon constitute a new economic system that he denominates “technofeudalism”.¹¹ In light of all this change, Marx’s erstwhile categorisation of social classes into “wage-labourers, capitalists and landowners” (Pierse; *Writing* 5) becomes problematic when one considers “occupational positions that have ostensibly contradictory or possibly conflated class interests” (Pierse; *Writing* 5). The sociologist Erik Olin Wright provides the example of “managers” who “exercise many of the powers of domination, but are also subordinated to capitalists” (“Understanding Class” 108), that is, they exploit the means of production of others who occupy a subordinate position, while they themselves do not own the means of production and are also exploited for the benefit of a third party.

As the study *Approaches to Class Analysis* (2005), edited by Wright, shows, there are several different models or traditions that attempt to understand class relations within society (the Marxist approach, the Weberian approach and the Durkheimian approach are just a few examples). Even though my understanding of class is aligned with the Marxist approach, the matter is further complicated by the fact that “among writers who identify with Marxism there is no consensus on any of the core concepts of class analysis” (Wright; “Foundations” 5). As

¹¹ See Varoufakis, Yanis. *Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism*. Vintage, 2024.

Wright also explains, in contemporary capitalist societies, class relations have become much more complex:

government restrictions on workplace practices, union representation on boards of directors, co-determination schemes, employee stock-options, delegations of power to managerial hierarchies, etc. all constitute various ways in which the property rights and powers embodied in the idea of “owning the means of production” are decomposed and redistributed. (...) Such systems of redistributed rights and powers move class relations considerably away from the simple, abstract form of perfectly polarized relations. (“Foundations” 13)

Nevertheless, social class is not only a matter of employment or the position one holds in a hierarchy. As Pierse argues,

[E.P.] Thompson indeed warned against “a static view of class”, postulating that it “is a relationship, not a thing”. Class is an organic, mutable concept, shifting according to the vicissitudes of historical change but nonetheless charting a solid continuity of human affairs under capitalism. “Class is never simply a category of the present tense. It is a matter of history, a relationship with tradition, a discourse of roots.” (*Writing* 5)

Wright also addresses this and defines “a set of categories in terms of which the actions of people that reproduce and transform (...) social relations can be understood”: “class interests, class consciousness, class practices, class formations and class struggle” (“Foundations” 20). Finally, as John Bissett puts it, “while the liminal boundaries between classes may be fuzzy (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), social classes share what Bourdieu called homologous or common conditions of existence that are outcomes of world historical class processes (Wallerstein, 1983)” (102).

Even another layer of complexity exists in the case of Ireland, as its political history has complicated the formation of the working class, when compared, for example, to Great Britain. According to Pierse, “‘Irish society is often thought of as a classless society’, as Perry Share, Hilary Tovey and Mary P. Corcoran observe in *A Sociology of Ireland* (2007)” (*Writing* 9). Share et al. “convey how Irish views on class have shifted into a common perception of ‘gross differentiation between the majority – the ‘more or less middle classes’ – and an

‘underclass’ made up of the poor, the long-term unemployed, substance abusers and marginalised groups” (Pierse, *Writing* 9-10). Moreover, David Convery notes that, in the case of Ireland,

[t]he existence of the working class is, for the most part, taken for granted by labour historians. It is not explained what is meant by the working class, how it formed and re-forms, how it relates to other classes and if and how it thinks for itself. To take a well-known example, there is, for instance, no Irish equivalent of E. P. Thompson’s famous preface to *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), where he theorises the working class not as ‘a descriptive term’, but as ‘a historical phenomenon’, an ‘active process’ with the working class being ‘present at its own making’. (Convery 44)

Similarly, Convery observes that “[p]art of the problem in understanding class in Ireland is the inheritance of a British model of interpretation, wherein commonly understood ideas about status are clearly linked to economic categories of class. The Irish case is more fluid” (49-50). To better understand the Irish working class, it is necessary to look at its history.

In *Writing Ireland’s Working Class*, Pierse offers a comprehensive overview of the history of the Irish working class, from which I have extracted the most significant details to provide a summarised account. To begin with, one of the principal differences between Ireland and Britain is the history of their industries. In contrast to Britain, Ireland had a very weak industrial economy which caused

[a] paucity of a well-paid body of tradesmen in Dublin and the consequent difficulty in building the necessary networks for proletarian social and cultural initiatives – organisations such as the Unity Theatre, Workers’ Musical Association and Left Book Club, which made their mark on twentieth century Britain. This difficulty, in turn, facilitated little by way of thoroughgoing class consciousness. (Pierse 12)¹²

Added to this, the “severe and abiding poverty” that plagued Dublin “throughout the nineteenth century” generated a “[lack of] stabilised working conditions that fomented class consciousness

¹² Convery has recently observed that, “the classical image of an urban, industrial working class may also be seen as applicable to the Irish – it is just that, outside the north-east, it was mostly not in Ireland itself”, but in places like Britain. Therefore, Convery adds that “Irish migrants can also be considered as part of an industrial working class, albeit based elsewhere” (54).

and political cohesion elsewhere”, a condition that “persisted well into the following century” (12).

What Pierse refers to as “the revolutionary period from 1916 to 1923” (13) saw an increased activity in worker unity and agitation, which had already been fostered through the 1913 Dublin Lockout led primarily by Jim Larkin. During this period, “workers played an important role in the decolonisation struggle, taking an active part in the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and using strike action to militate simultaneously against imperialism and capitalism. Union membership rose from 70,000 to 120,000 between 1916 and 1920” (13). Nonetheless, “Labour leaders failed to consolidate the opportunities inherent in this period of grassroots political unrest”, something that would negatively affect “their post-independence performance” (13). An element that, as I show in Chapter One, is reflected in Doyle’s *A Star*, is that “[a]s O’Connor remarks of the Free State dispensation, ‘while farmers, agricultural labourers and merchants all received something in return for their nationalism, urban workers got nothing’” (13).

After the Civil War had left the new Irish state deeply divided, “[c]lass cohesion became an expedient element in consolidating political stability at a time of national crisis, with the major political parties consequently eager to downplay social inequalities and to cement loyalty to the fledgling state” (14). Labour was no exception and this party too “was subordinated to nationalism, partly because it avoided taking a clear stance on the Civil War and largely because it agreed to toe the line in forming Free State hegemony” (14).

When independent Ireland became more consolidated, another actor played an important part in keeping left-wing political activity in check: the Catholic Church. As Pierse observes,

it can be argued that the power of Catholicism, aligned with capitalism, inveigling itself strategically into every institution and power block of the new state, was the principal reason why working-class consciousness was sublimated into more moderate forms.

This is perhaps also why a great deal of Dublin's writing of the working class aligns strongly anti-clerical opinions with a broader unease with the social and political trajectory of the state. (15)

The influence of Catholicism lasted long and was strong enough to curtail Labour's response to concrete problems. For example, Pierse notes that

while Britain was embracing the welfare state (...) Irish Labour's (and the unions' leaders') reticence about supporting Noel Browne during the Mother and Child Scheme controversy exemplifies just how much this movement was in thrall to, or in fear of, conservative Catholic values – and oblivious to, or afraid to broach, the desperate predicament of the working class. (17)¹³

If such was the case in the Republic of Ireland, Dublin could be considered a site of exception: “the city's class consciousness has in part intensified through isolation, punctuated by periods of frenetic activity like the 1913 Lockout, the Unemployed Protest Committee's campaign of the 1950s or the anti-drugs activism of the 1980s and 1990s” (18). Pierse describes how from the late 1960s on, with the “abandonment of protectionism”, trade unionism experienced “a ‘decade of upheaval’”, as the Irish economy “was transformed into an increasingly open, free-trading and industrialised financial system” (19). Urban Ireland “was ‘quite different from the Anglican – and the Gaelic’ Irelands, and Alexander Humphries noted in 1966 that ‘the sense of class remain[ed] strong among Dubliners’ who exhibited a ‘strong, continuing class consciousness’” (19).

Throughout the following decades, as Pierse shows, despite the change in economy, “considerable poverty endured” and, rather importantly, “working-class people largely remained working-class” (20). Indeed, the Celtic Tiger phenomenon, which seemed to shower Ireland in riches and fortune, actually deepened the difference between social classes, as I show

¹³ This was a government plan proposed by the health minister Noel Browne from Clann na Poblachta, which was “to provide free health care and education for mothers and children”. The plan was “opposed by the Catholic bishops” and, eventually, Browne was forced to resign (“Mother and Child Scheme”).

in Chapter Three. A final comment by Pierse is highly insightful in understanding the inner formation of the Dublin working class:

With the increasing and well-documented representation of working-class culture in British television, literature and media from the mid-century onwards, Dubliners took many of their cultural cues in music, sport and popular culture from across the water, as James McKenna was keen to emphasise in *The Scatterin'* (1959), or as Dermot Bolger stressed much later in *The Journey Home* (1990). In both works, young working-class Dubliners find themselves more at home in British than in Irish life. (25)

This fascination with a culture from overseas (whether that was the UK or the US) can also be found in Roddy Doyle, as many of his characters identify more with British or American cultural output than with Irish.

Returning to the representation of the working class in Doyle's fiction, perhaps, having acknowledged all the complexities exposed above, it is time to provide some simplicity. In his own discussion of the Irish working class, Convery describes this group as

people who work for a wage, who have to sell their labour to survive and who do not own independent means of subsistence in the form of monetary capital or land to farm or extract rent from. There is room for some tweaking, but overall, this definition forms a good bedrock from which to begin to conceptualise the nature of the Irish working class. (50)

In considering the characters under analysis in this thesis, Convery's description is highly befitting. Indeed, speaking in traditional Marxist terms, all these characters "sell [their] labor power on a labor market" (Wright, "Foundations" 21). To a certain extent, moreover, they all share the following characteristics:

- They lack monetary capital, and most experience some form of poverty to a higher or lesser degree. Henry Smart and Paula Spencer, for example, are practically destitute. Other characters, like the Clarkes, however, despite some shortcomings, live in relative comfort.

- They do not own their house. With only a few exceptions (sometimes this is not clarified in the narrative), these characters live in houses belonging to the Dublin Corporation. This is the case of the Rabbittes, Paula Spencer and, presumably, Victor Forde.
- They have a basic level of education. From all the characters analysed in this thesis, only three have a university degree: Victor Forde, Ray Brady and Declan O'Connor. Other characters, like Henry Smart and Jimmy Rabbitte, Sr., have not finished their primary education. Most of them, moreover, have had bad experiences in school.
- They have manual jobs. Henry Smart works as a soldier, a caretaker and a gardener (among other occupations); Jimmy Rabbitte, Sr., is a plasterer, before he loses his job; Paula Spencer works as a cleaner; Sharon Rabbitte stacks shelves in a supermarket and Alina is a babysitter. Only Victor Forde and Ray Brady, a journalist and a researcher, have white-collar jobs and other characters are too young to be working.
- Without exception, they all come from a working-class background. Only Ray Brady seems to experience some upward mobility.

Taking into account all these characteristics, these characters voice their class consciousness in different ways. For instance, Jimmy Rabbitte, Jr., and Victor Forde refer concretely to their belonging to the working class, but, although other characters may not voice this exact phrase, they acknowledge their underprivileged position in relation to the Irish society (for example, this is the case of Paula Spencer).

As I attempt to show throughout this thesis, class affects Doyle's characters in a wide variety of ways. In relation to this, there is an observation by Bissett that is striking in its similarity to many of the shared experiences of Doyle's characters. Bissett makes this reflection in the context of his ethnographic study *It's Not Where You Live, It's How You Live* (2023), centred on a real working-class community: "Written deep into bodies and minds (Adair, 2002) are the markings and inscriptions of class in that bodies are broken down prematurely by things

such as work, both paid or unpaid, institutional neglect or abuse, sexual assault, violence and addiction (Marsh, 2020)” (100). For Doyle’s characters, class is also a determining factor in that it marks their past, their present and their perspectives for the future, in the same way that it marks their bodies and their minds, their relationships and their sense of space and of belonging in the city.

Text Selection and Chapter Overview

I have pointed out above the importance of history when it comes to the analysis and understanding of Doyle’s fiction. To make this connection clear, I have decided to order the chapters of this thesis in a chronologic manner, beginning with novels set in the early twentieth century and ending with those set in the first years of the twenty-first. Thus, my first chapter covers the “revolutionary period”, to use Pierse’s words; my second chapter, the period between the 1960s and up to the years before the Celtic Tiger phenomenon, and my third chapter focuses on those works that are set directly within the Celtic Tiger years.

Due to the vast amount of material at my disposition, I have had to establish several criteria to reduce my primary bibliography to a volume adequate for a thesis. For example, I decided that I would respect the two trilogies, because I could find no apt reason to dismiss a volume from either. Another criterion that I followed was to offer as much thematic variety as possible, while avoiding unnecessary repetition. This consideration was the main reason for not including *The Guts* (2013), a novel that brings back the character of Jimmy Rabbitte, Jr., as an adult, and that deals principally with his cancer diagnosis. In my view, this novel did not contain any element novel enough that it would significantly enrich my discussion and, therefore, I decided to leave it out. Similarly, I decided not to include the analysis of the short-story collection *Bullfighting*. Although I was initially very inclined to include it, I finally

dismissed the idea on the grounds that it did not entirely fit in my third chapter, as it deals with the post-Celtic-Tiger crisis: to include *Bullfighting* would have led to the addition of a fourth chapter and to a stark imbalance in my thesis. Nevertheless, in the section “Further Research”, I make the case for studying this book together with other novels that have been published in the time that I completed this thesis. This leads me to note that I take into account the primary bibliography only up to the publication of *Smile* in 2017, when my thesis was already under way.

My thesis is arranged as follows:

Chapter One. My first chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the Last Roundup Trilogy (*A Star Called Henry*, *Oh, Play That Thing* and *The Dead Republic*), which contains Roddy Doyle’s only novel to this date that deals with the Irish “revolutionary period”: *A Star*. Therefore, this trilogy offers a unique insight into Doyle’s representation of Ireland’s recent past and, especially, of his views on the relative success of its process towards independence. In the introduction, I offer a literature review on the characteristic most discussed so far about the trilogy, its quality as historiographic fiction.

In my own analysis, I examine how Doyle shows a growing disconnection between the experiences of the working-class and the official narrative of the nationalist characters before and after the attainment of independence. By looking closely at the representation of Henry’s childhood in the Dublin slums, I attempt to demonstrate how poverty and loss shape his character as an adult and set him apart from other characters belonging to other social classes. Additionally, I analyse Doyle’s alignment of mythology with nationalism, as embodied by the Irish Volunteers and of secularity with socialism, as embodied by the Irish Citizen Army in his representation of the Easter Rising. As the trilogy progresses and shows Henry’s growing disappointment with independent Ireland, I also show how Henry’s experience as a member of

the working-class is rendered increasingly more “un-Irish” and practically erased from the official narrative.

Chapter Two. In my second chapter, I revisit some of Doyle’s most famous texts, including the Barrytown Trilogy, *Paddy Clarke*, but also *Smile*. *Paddy Clarke* and *Smile* offer highly interesting views on education and, more generally, on Dublin in the 1960s. Additionally, *Smile* is Doyle’s only text (to this date) that deals in a serious and lengthy manner with abuse in a Catholic institution. The novels pertaining to the Barrytown Trilogy, *The Commitments*, *The Snapper* and *The Van*, deal with members of the same family, the Rabbittes and they are an example of the type of literature most associated with Doyle: light-hearted comic representations of working-class life that also deal with such dark themes as unwanted pregnancy or unemployment.

My approach in this chapter has been to look at some of the signifiers of traditional Irish identity, such as land, religion or nationality, from a slightly different perspective. For example, in the case of land, I examine how class and geography intersect in Doyle’s novels to represent a unique experience of marginalisation for his working-class characters. When it comes to religion, I show how for Doyle’s characters, rather than constituting a unifying element, it is represented as a source of conflict. Nationality, viewed through the prism of national education, is also portrayed as something negative in the case of Doyle’s characters, who are beaten and abused at school. In opposition, I show how crucial community and solidarity are for Doyle’s working-class characters in the face of the shortcomings named above.

I did not include *The Woman* in this chapter, although chronologically it would fit, because I deal with the character of Paula Spencer in a general and comprehensive manner in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three. In my final chapter I analyse two different texts in light of the Celtic Tiger years. The first is *Paula Spencer* and the second, *The Deportees*. In the first part of the chapter, then, I examine how Doyle deconstructs the myth of economic success of the Celtic Tiger phenomenon by showing how the working class, es embodied by Paula and some of her family members, have remained in an underprivileged situation. I centre especially on Paula's feelings of un-Irishness that her experience as a working-class woman in Celtic-Tiger Ireland provokes in her. In the second part of this chapter, I analyse Doyle's representation of a phenomenon that came hand in hand with the economic boom: that of inward migration. With the reality of a multicultural Ireland, another question is raised regarding the traditional definition of Irishness: its intersection with race. By analysing four stories from *The Deportees*, I examine how Doyle's immigrant characters are constructed in opposition of either characters who belong to the middle- or upper-class or characters who represent the Irish institutions, like the government or the police.

The thesis ends with a section devoted to Conclusions and Implications and with another delineating Further Research proposals.

Appendix 1. This appendix includes the transcript of the interview that I conducted with Roddy Doyle.

Appendix 2. In this appendix can be found brief summaries of all the novels and short-story collections published by Doyle up to the month of August 2024. The intention behind this is that anyone reading this thesis and encountering a title that I do not discuss, can easily find some information about its plot.

Appendix 3. This appendix includes a list of works that have been written about Doyle's fiction and that I did not include in my literature review.

To close the introduction, I present a short overview of the most relevant events that took place in Ireland during the twentieth century. With this, my intention is to lighten the contextual load in the chapters, which look at specific historical events, while offering a guide that can be consulted if and when required.

The Twentieth Century in Ireland: Historical Context¹⁴

The twentieth century was a pivotal time for Irish history, as it saw the transformation of Ireland into the present-day Republic and Northern Ireland. As I pointed out above, to a certain extent, Doyle's fiction captures this period through the novels that are examined in this thesis. *A Star*, to begin with, is set at the beginning of the century, when Ireland was still a part of the United Kingdom. Yet Irish national sentiment was thriving and it received an important boost with the Cultural Revival movement, fostered by such cultural associations as the Gaelic Athletic Association (1884) and the Gaelic League (1893) and epitomised by the plays represented at the Irish Literary theatre (1899), which later became the Abbey Theatre (1904).

On a political level, following a long history of tensions and unrest, moves were made in 1912 by the Liberal Cabinet of the United Kingdom to grant Ireland Home Rule, something which was harshly opposed by the Ulster Protestants. This opposition led to the formation of the paramilitary group Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), which, in turn, prompted the creation of the Irish Volunteers, devoted to protecting Home Rule.

Meanwhile, in Dublin, poverty was rampant, as Doyle's slum-born protagonist Henry Smart attests. To give an example, in 1911, "118,000 working-class Dubliners were crammed into just over 5,000 tenement houses" (Pierse; *Writing* 12-3) living in the most appalling

¹⁴ For works on Irish history and society, see Breen et al.; Brown; Del R  o and Carregal; B. Fanning; Fanning and Hess; and Flanagan.

conditions.¹⁵ Indeed, the labourers' situation was so deplorable that, in 1913, led primarily by James Larkin, workers showed their indignation in the form of a strike, during the struggle known as the Dublin Lockout. The strike ended in failure in 1914, half a year after it had been called, due to a lack of funds and hunger.

In 1916, taking advantage of Britain's focussed efforts on the Great War, a group of insurgents belonging to the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) occupied the General Post Office (GPO) in Dublin, along with several other strategic posts.¹⁶ On Easter Monday, 24th of April 1916, Patrick Pearse read out the Irish Proclamation of Independence, which was signed by key figures of Ireland's cultural and political landscape. The rebellion, which became known as the Easter Rising, was brutally crushed only one week later by the British forces. The Rising, which, at first, was not well received by the Irish population, quickly became the driving force for the independence movement: the severe retaliations taken by the British turned popular opinion against them and in favour of the executed leaders of the rebellion, who became martyrs. The cultural and ideological implications that the Rising had on the collective imagination are examined more thoroughly in Chapter One.

Two figures which would play major political roles in the coming years survived: Éamon de Valera and Michael Collins.¹⁷ Their charisma and the popularity they gained, especially de Valera, worked in favour of their burgeoning political careers. In 1918, Sinn Féin, with de Valera as its leader, won the election with a sweeping majority and the party set out to

¹⁵ According to Mark Crinson, "[t]he poverty, the overcrowding and the insalubrious conditions are fully attested: by 1911 Dublin's death rate was higher than either Calcutta or Moscow; in 1913 the average number of persons living in one-room tenements was 3.31 with sometimes as many as 98 people living in one house; and in 1925 the number of people living in one-room tenements per 1,000 was nearly twice the number of the next most tenemented city in the British Isles" (630).

¹⁶ The Irish Citizen Army was founded in 1913 by the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union "to protect demonstrating workers and pickets" from the police during the Dublin lockout (P. Collins).

¹⁷ I have chosen this spelling of Éamon, with the accent and one *n*, as this seems to have been de Valera's preferred spelling for his name, as conveyed by R. Fanning (39).

found an Irish Republic.¹⁸ However, the first Dáil Éireann (the Irish Parliament), formed in January 1919, was declared illegal by the British Government only nine months later.

The War of Independence (1919-1921) ensued. While the Irish Republican Army (IRA),¹⁹ with Michael Collins as its director of intelligence and organisation (Augusteijn), relied on guerrilla tactics and on strategic attacks on the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), the British government sent increasingly more repressive forces to contain the insurgency. Eventually, the Irish and British governments began negotiations to put an end to all the bloodshed.

Although the events that followed are not represented in Doyle's work at the time of writing this thesis, they are crucial to understand the development of the Irish State. In 1921, de Valera sent a delegation of plenipotentiaries, led by Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins, to London to negotiate a peace treaty with the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and his cabinet. The negotiations were difficult, not less, at times, because of de Valera's eccentric behaviour. Added to this, the impending threat of a renewal of hostilities if the negotiations failed, prompted the Irish delegation to sign a version of the treaty that had not been sent to and approved by de Valera: one of the main conditions he had imposed. With this treaty, known as the Anglo-Irish Treaty, Ireland gained almost total independence from Great Britain, with the exception of Ulster and the fact that Ireland still had to pledge allegiance to the British monarch. In 1922, the Irish Free State was founded.

However, the Treaty, which some saw as the first step towards complete independence, was opposed by others, including de Valera, for it was perceived as a betrayal to the Republic

¹⁸ Sinn Féin (in Irish "We Ourselves") is described initially as a "movement" or "policy" fostered by Arthur Griffith that "included passive resistance to the British, withholding of taxes, and the establishment of an Irish ruling council and independent local courts". In 1905, the name Sinn Féin was adopted by its "adherents". After 1916, the party gained much relevance and came to be regarded as "the rallying point for extreme nationalist sentiment, referred to as Republicanism" (Cowell-Meyers and Arthur).

¹⁹ The Irish Republican Army became the successor of the Irish Volunteers in 1919. It was a paramilitary organisation with strong links to Sinn Féin (Augusteijn; Arthur and Cowell-Meyers).

proclaimed in 1916. De Valera resigned as President of the Dáil and publicly agitated against the Treaty and the pro-Treaty government. This conflict led to the Civil War (1922-1923), which was waged between the Provisional Government of Ireland and the IRA. Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith, among other prominent political figures, were killed during this conflict. The war ended with the victory of the Provisional Government. The building of a new state could begin and the one that emerged was Catholic, largely rural and conservative, something that would be captured in the 1937 Constitution drafted by de Valera in the following decade.

Nevertheless, de Valera remained outside of politics for several years, until he returned with his new party, Fianna Fáil, a split-off from Sinn Féin. In June 1932, Fianna Fáil won the general election, “establish[ing] the position that it was to retain subsequently: easily the largest party in the state, its support normally lying between 40 and 50 per cent” (Coakley; “Fianna Fáil”). Following 1932, Fianna Fáil remained in office for sixteen uninterrupted years with Éamon de Valera as its leader from 1926-59.

To briefly summarise what de Valera achieved during his first years in power (since his legacy is examined more profoundly in Chapter Two of this thesis), Ronan Fanning’s words are highly appropriate: “By December 1937, within six tumultuous years, [de Valera] had torn up those elements of the Treaty of 1921 he had opposed and had rewritten, almost single-handedly, the constitutional relationship between Ireland and Britain” (204). The culmination of de Valera’s work was the drafting of a new constitution that replaced that of 1922, which, among other aspects, changed the name of the country from Free State to Éire or Ireland. As John Gibney explains, “Catholic social thought could be seen in the articles relating to education, private property and social policy amongst other things. The constitution’s emphasis on the family unit and the prohibition on divorce were certainly in line with Catholic doctrine

and were seen, correctly, as having major implications for the prospects of Irish women” (08:02:27-46).

Due to Ireland’s neutrality during the Second World War, by which it attempted to prove its newly acquired sovereignty, the country became isolated and its economy was deeply affected. One of the results of this was “emigration, which reached massive levels in the 1950s” (Gibney, 8:17:17-22); curiously enough, this is precisely the time that Henry Smart decides to *return* to Ireland in *The Dead Republic*. Accusations of corruption together with Fianna Fáil’s inability to improve Ireland’s situation led to the party’s loss in the 1948 general election to a coalition formed by Fine Gael,²⁰ Labour²¹ and Clann na Poblachta²² with John A. Costello as Ireland’s new Taoiseach.²³ A year later, in 1949, Ireland officially became the Republic, through the enactment of the Republic of Ireland Act. The continued influence of the Catholic Church remained powerful during the 1950s, as evidenced by the Mother and Child Scheme controversy. Censorship, which had been introduced in the 1920s (and which Doyle refers to multiple times throughout the Last Roundup Trilogy), was also maintained. In relation to this, Gibney points out a striking fact, namely, that out “of 1,294 books [that Christopher J. O’Reilly] examined, 994, over 75% were banned” (8:14:45-53).²⁴

A change took over the Republic as, in the 1960s, the country’s economy swung from protectionism to “a more competitive free-trading economic environment” (Daly; “Economic

²⁰ Founded in 1933 “through a merger of Cumann na nGaedheal, the National Centre Party, and the National Guard”. Fine Gael’s position was “moderate” on “the national question” and, at least until 1948, “it was associated with support of Ireland’s position within the British Commonwealth” (Coakley; “Fine Gael” 204).

²¹ In 1912, James Connolly and James Larkin formed “the Irish Labour Party and Trades Union Congress”, which would become “the forerunner of the Labour Party”. The Labour Party was renamed and “formally established as an independent party in March 1930” (Marsh).

²² Founded in 1946, it was “made up of republican activists and led by Sean MacBride” (Coakley; “Clann na Poblachta 102).

²³ From this time on, changes in the Irish government became much more frequent and, therefore, not further tracked in this section. However, I considered it relevant to point out this particular change, as it marked the first clear break in Fianna Fáil’s long hold of power.

²⁴ Member of the eighth Censorship of Publications Board from 1951-56 (Kelly).

Development”) and, in 1961, the new Taoiseach Seán Lemass (Fianna Fáil) expressed his government’s intention to have Ireland join the European Economic Community (EEC). Daly further explains that “[r]ising living standards resulted in a marriage boom and some liberalisation of society, which was marked by the coming of television, and a weakening of the authority exercised by the Catholic Church” (“Introduction” 3).

Likewise, the old guard of the political landscape started being replaced by younger faces with a more modern outlook on life, a fact epitomised by de Valera’s accession to Presidency in 1959, a position whose power is mainly symbolic. Indeed, following Girvin’s analysis, the new “[Lemass] administration initiated the most comprehensive attempt at modernisation which had occurred in Ireland. (...) In retrospect the achievements of the 1960s were partial: more traditional norms quickly reasserted themselves; yet the achievements were real” (qtd. in Daly; “Introduction” 4).

As I examine in Chapter Two, this transition to modernisation has been captured by Doyle in his novel *Paddy Clarke*, which depicts Paddy’s childhood in the 1960s in the changing village of Barrytown, as it is being urbanised and transformed into a suburb. In *The Dead Republic*, Doyle also alludes to such changes, although more marginally, as part of the background of Henry Smart’s life.

In a similar vein to Girvin, Daly warns that the perceived modernisation of Ireland during this decade should not be overstated (“Introduction” 5), as “in the 1960s the process of economic and social development was carefully controlled - insofar as this was possible - to preserve strong elements of continuity with the past” (“Introduction” 6). Perhaps as a consequence of this, as Gibney notes, the one-hundredth anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966 was

an opportunity to articulate a critique of a state that for many was an abject failure when judged by the benchmark of the principles of the Rising, at least as contained in the famous

Proclamation. Republicans, feminists, *Gaeilgoirí* (Irish speakers), the Left — all could take issue with the state that had emerged in the twenty-six countries since 1921. (08:26:06-29)

According to historian Diarmaid Ferriter, “the island of Ireland in the 1970s” was defined by the Troubles, “not just internally, but in terms of how Ireland was viewed by the rest of the world, a case of ‘old arguments’ but ‘new deaths’” (*Ambiguous Republic* 1). This last idea is also portrayed at length in *The Dead Republic*, as an old Henry Smart is recruited by the Provisional IRA and reflects upon the similarities between the new struggle and the old fight for independence at the beginning of the century.

As is only natural, due to the horrific events that took place in Northern Ireland, most attention has been concentrated on what was happening there. However, the Troubles inevitably also had an impact in the Republic. The sympathies of the population in the South lay with the Roman Catholic of the North and, after the shocking murder of civilians at the hands of the British Army on Bloody Sunday 1972, “the reaction in the South, (...) was highly vocal, emotional and occasionally violent” (Ferriter; *Transformation*, ch.8). Indeed, as a response to Bloody Sunday, the British Embassy in Dublin was burnt down. On another occasion, in 1976, the IRA assassinated the British Ambassador Ewart-Briggs near Dublin. However, the violence was bidirectional and, in 1974, the UVF killed 33 people and injured over 100 through the explosion of four bombs that had been planted in Dublin and Monaghan. As Ferriter conveys, “the fear that [the Troubles] would spill over the border further entrenched [the conservative and authoritarian] traits” of the Republic (*Ambiguous Republic* 7).

Yet, the longevity of the struggle in the North, which lasted throughout the 1970s and all the way through to the 1990s, meant that “[f]or those in the South, its impact was more abstract, if not relentlessly monotonous. In the mid-1980s, Colm Tóibín suggested that for many people ‘the North became a dizzying spiral of abstractions and statistics, statements of

aspirations and numbers of dead, wounded, convicted and imprisoned” (Ferriter; *Transformation*, ch.8).

The Republic experienced other changes during the 1970s too, such as a shift of population from rural to urban areas, a rise in feminist movements and “the beginning of modern Irish consumerism” (Ferriter; *Ambiguous Republic* 6), the latter having received a boost with Ireland’s admittance to the EEC in 1973.

Nonetheless, Ireland experienced a new recession in the 1980s, with unemployment and emigration on the rise. Moreover, despite the growing liberalisation of the country, in 1983, a ban against abortion was ratified through the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution Act and, in 1986, an attempt to legalise divorce was rejected in referendum. This is also the decade that saw Roddy Doyle’s birth as a writer and his first two novels, *The Commitments* and *The Snapper*, are set in this period, reflecting the social preoccupations of this decade, as I show in Chapter Two.

Moving slightly on in time, Maher refers to the decades from the 1970s to the 1990s as “seismic”, pointing out that “[t]he cultural, economic, political and religious landscape was completely transformed by tribunals investigating payments to politicians, the unveiling of the systemic abuse of children in industrial schools and orphanages, and the clerical child abuse scandal” (“Social and Cultural Change” 159),²⁵ which led to the society questioning the Catholic Church’s moral authority and to an increased secularisation. More recently, Doyle explored the consequences of abuse in industrial schools in his novel *Smile*.

The 1990s also saw the economic boom known as the Celtic Tiger (which I look into in Chapter Three) infuse the Republic with a new sense of confidence and reverse the trend on emigration. However, the dark sides of this supposedly golden era, mainly the growing chasm

²⁵ This quotation is also given in Chapter Three (p. 205) in relation to background context for *Paula Spencer* and *The Deportees*.

between the rich and the poor, are exposed in *Paula Spencer* and the collapse of the economy that ended this golden era in 2008, in *Bullfighting*. As the collection of short stories *The Deportees* evidences, with the immigration that Ireland received during its boom years, the Republic had to face a growing social problem: racism and intolerance. As Ferriter writes, “[r]efugees and asylum seekers were often subjected to much the same prejudice that had been shown towards native marginalised groups in Ireland” (*Transformation*, ch.8).

Still, important milestones were reached as concerns civil and human rights. For example, Gibney refers to “the election of the liberal lawyer Mary Robinson to the Irish Presidency” in 1990 as a “symbolic milestone” (8:44:52-58) when it comes to the struggle for the emancipation of women, since she was the first woman ever to hold this office in Ireland. Other achievements include the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993 (Amnesty International) or the lifting of the ban on divorce in 1996. That same year, the last Magdalene Institution was closed.²⁶

²⁶ The Magdalene Institutions or Laundries were church-run “carceral, punitive institutions” that worked as “commercial and for-profit businesses” by offering laundry services and needlework. These institutions effectively incarcerated women and girls “who were perceived to be ‘promiscuous’, unmarried mothers, the daughters of unmarried mothers, those who were considered a burden on their families or the State, those who had been sexually abused, or had grown up in the care of the Church and State” (“About the Magdalene Laundries”).

Chapter One

1.1. Introduction

The Last Roundup Trilogy is, at the time of writing this thesis, Roddy Doyle's densest work, brimming with distinct characters and locations, and encompassing an entire and highly eventful century in the three novels that constitute it: *A Star Called Henry* (1999), *Oh, Play That Thing* (2004) and *The Dead Republic* (2010). Henry Smart is the protagonist and narrator of the trilogy and he takes the readers on a voyage that begins in Dublin in the last years of the nineteenth century, across the Atlantic, to the United States of America from the 1920s to the 1950s and ends, once again, in Dublin in the early years of the twenty-first century.

As he was born in 1901, Henry has a story to tell that is somewhat reminiscent of other works of fiction such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* (1981) in that the protagonist's life is intrinsically connected to the fate of his country—in the present case, that of twentieth-century Ireland (with the exception, of course, of the time that Henry spends in the US). Henry actively takes part in many of the events that defined recent Irish history, such as the Easter Rising or the War of Independence. Indeed, one of Doyle's greatest achievements throughout the trilogy is his faithful representation of many of those historical events, something that he achieved thanks to thorough research, testimony to which are the exhaustive lists of bibliographical references that can be found at the end of each instalment. Inevitably, due to Doyle's treatment of history, the majority of academic research that has been conducted about the trilogy focuses on historiography, as shown below.

Nonetheless, despite Doyle's historical accuracy in writing about Ireland's past, the novels also contain multiple elements that defy belief, such as the description of real-life personalities caught up in improbable situations, such as Louis Armstrong carrying out a

burglary in *Oh, Play* or the film director John Ford about to be strangled to death with a rosary in *The Dead Republic*. Another element that, at times, comes close to beggaring belief is the narrator's own version of events. Not only does Henry Smart have a tendency to brag and exaggerate, due to his inflated ego, but, towards the end of *A Star*, he also begins suffering from memory gaps. This problem becomes most accentuated in *The Dead Republic*, when Henry often loses entire days and, as he approaches the end of his life, even weeks.²⁷ Although it is not entirely clear at what moment in his life Henry is narrating his story (although some flashforwards seem to indicate that he does so towards the end of his life), the protagonist gives the impression of ageing with the novels.²⁸ Thus, maybe somewhat paradoxically, Henry's earlier memories are also those recounted with more precision. Still, as Péter Dolmányos observes, "there are redemptive measures taken" to counteract the novels' "undertone of unreliability": "the storytelling always returns to a proper chronology and there are occasions of more objective hindsight for the narrator. These manoeuvres reflect the need for honesty perhaps, a technique on the part of Doyle to counter the possibility of his narrator losing credibility with the readers" (128). As a result, the effect that Doyle achieves is that, although one needs to be on the guard with Henry, the essence of his stories is true and most of what he retells, took place as he says.

²⁷ It seems plausible to suggest that Henry's memory gaps might be a result of all the trauma that he suffers throughout his life (see "1.2.1. Henry's Childhood, Poverty and Loss", p. 50). Nevertheless, this is not an idea that I explore further in this thesis, since it would be out of its scope.

²⁸ This, I believe, is another of the trilogy's great successes, since the advanced age of Henry in *The Dead Republic* can be vividly felt by the readers, as Doyle masterfully represents the aches and difficulties of an ageing man, in a manner which marks a clear contrast between the narrator of the first two instalments and that of the last.

1.1.1. The Last Roundup Trilogy as Historiographical Metafiction and Revisionism

A Star is exceptional in that (at the time of writing this thesis) it is Doyle's only foray into Ireland's past. His novels, prior to this one, had been set contemporaneously with the time of Doyle's writing, that is, the late 1980s and the decade of the 1990s, with the exception of *Paddy Clarke*, which goes as far back as the 1960s. Therefore, Doyle's leap to the beginning of the twentieth century received the attention of many scholars who focussed, principally, on his treatment of Irish history.

The interest of late-twentieth century and twenty-first century Irish writers in the past corresponds to a trend in the country's literature. As Kristina Deffenbacher explains,

[f]rom the time of Henry Smart's birth in 1901 through to the late twentieth century, nationalist iconography and heroic tropes drawn from Irish mythology constituted a dominant medial framework through which Irish culture remembered its past and defined itself in the present. Such mediation produced idealized, heroic versions of Irish history that, as Boland asserts, erased lived experience and human suffering, particularly that of women and the poor. (150)

In line with this reasoning, McCarthy asserts that "O'Mahony and Delanty argue that there is a long tradition of discontent amongst 20th century Irish journalists and writers 'with their society's institutions—church, educational experience, politics, intellectual life, family'" (204), the institutions that, precisely, promoted the dominant medial framework that Deffenbacher mentions.

Likewise, in an article that analyses several Irish novels using the framework of post-traumatic realism, Leszek Drong explains that "determined to have a say in the matter [of the nation's past] are Irish artists, who often feel responsible for ensuring a fair hearing to all sides of the debate, including the routinely marginalised voices of the politically or culturally disenfranchised sections of society" (19). In the same article, Drong alludes to the famous phrase from Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922): "History (...) is a nightmare from which I am trying to

awake” (34), to argue that “[t]he fact remains that in many Irish novels written over the last few decades history is indeed portrayed as a nightmare from which numerous characters are desperate to awake” (Drong 21). Drong’s contention is that “[p]erhaps what underlies the widespread conviction that twentieth-century Ireland should be seen as a victim-culture (Foster 2001: xv) is a post-traumatic refusal to face the past as it actually was” (20). Moreover, the author also evokes the notion of dialogism introduced by Bakhtin in 1929, which “implies that [the novelistic] genre is possessed of the potential to interrogate and undermine canonical stories in a given society - official versions of its history and politically sanctioned narratives of its national identity” (23).

Dolmányos, for his part, claims that “[t]here is a tangible revisionist perspective observable in Doyle’s treatment of Irish history” (129),²⁹ which consists, precisely, in debunking many of the myths surrounding the Easter Rising as well as the War of Independence and “produc[ing] his own version” of history, which is “essentially non-conformist” (131). Chiming in with Drong, Dolmányos asserts that Doyle’s “revisionist position can be seen in the courage and willingness to examine some of the deep-seated traumas of the Irish psyche through such motifs as dysfunctional family, bodily mutilation and the hatreds and anxieties that mark the relationship of the characters” (131). In doing so, according to McCarthy, Doyle would have answered a question which other writers have long neglected, namely,

“(…) the reason why these institutions took the form they did”: “Neither in revisionist or new nationalist writing, has the central question of the responsibility of Irish nationalism for the subsequent history of the Irish nation-state been directly addressed” (O’Mahony and Delanty, 1998, 14,13). But from *The Commitments* to *A Star Called Henry*, Doyle has satirised these very institutions through his representations of the economically impoverished, socially disenfranchised and politically weak — the under- and unemployed urban working-class, women, and children. And in *A Star Called Henry* he does offer an explanation of why these institutions evolved the way they did. By showing the nationalist-political revolution to contain

²⁹ The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines the term *revisionist* as “[d]edicated to the overturning of an established interpretation or widely shared assumption, especially in the contexts of politics and the study of history” (“Revisionist” 483). This is also the sense referred to throughout this chapter.

and conceal a failed — or repressed — social-economic revolution, Doyle's view of history is that the modern Irish state was born disabled, deformed and retarded. (204-5)

Dolmányos points out that “one of the basic features of postmodernism is its sceptical approach toward grand narratives” (125). According to him, “[t]his incredulity toward metanarratives’ (Lyotard 1984: xxiv) is observable in the revision of the notion of history: history becomes a language game, a discourse in the absence of universally accepted criteria of validation and legitimation” (125). Hence,

[t]he result is a narrative whose verifiable relation with the real has been severed, yet what is still considered as a representation of the real, and it is still this representation which is regarded as the past itself. This creates the impression that the representation takes the place of the real and is substituted for it, just as Jean Baudrillard (cf. 1994:1-42) claims in his theory of simulation and simulacra, undermining the concept of the reality of reality itself. (Dolmányos 125-6)

Addressing the question of whether it is possible to retrieve the past, or history, as it actually took place, Dolmányos invokes similar conclusions by Berlatsky (2011) and Foucault³⁰ that “there is no objective recovery of the past, only subjective versions are possible” or, in other words, an “interpretation” of it (126). Therefore, if history is a narrative, argues Dolmányos, the act of narrativising it “involves an ethical dimension, the ‘ethical necessity of finding the real’ (Berlatsky, 2011:8), which endows the author not only with specific powers but with responsibility as well, including the responsibility of acknowledging the fact that his version of history is only one possible version” (126).

Drong distinguishes between two currents in retrieving the nation’s past: that of the nationalists who “want to fetishize and petrify the past” and that of the revisionists who “reserve ‘the right to reinterpret [it] in the light of their desired future’ (Kiberd 1996: 293)” (23-4). At any rate, he asserts that “[i]n Irish reality, there is no room for a *Noli me tangere*

³⁰ Dolmányos does not cite directly from Foucault, but from Berlatsky, so that he gives no bibliographical reference for Foucault. For Berlatsky, see my bibliography.

when it comes to the basic political divisions and identifications: no one is immune from being embroiled in the not infrequently catastrophic ramifications of the internal conflicts. Even permanent emigration does not seem to liberate one from the shackles of Irish history and politics” (30). The last sentence, as I discuss in this chapter, is particularly true for Henry in the second instalment of the Last Roundup Trilogy.³¹

In a different vein, Pierse contends that “contemporary revisionism has become more of a political intervention than a historiographical precept, and that this political intervention buttresses anti-nationalist concepts of history” (223). Pierse distinguishes between the early Irish historical revisionism of the 1930s which “sought to professionalise Irish historical analysis by grounding it in academic principles of sound research and objective scrutiny”, and later revisionism, which “has in part subverted this methodology through tendentious, overtly anti-nationalist interventions - many of which are inspired by the lived experience of contemporary political developments” (223). The fact that “second-wave revisionism is very much about the now” (226) is crucial in Pierse’s analysis of *A Star* and it certainly sheds abundant light on many of Doyle’s literary choices in the novel. As I see it, Pierse’s comment merges with Drong’s contention that “contemporary Irish novels (...) may contribute to rewriting the present and, thereby, reworking some of the historical traumas” (33). That is to say, in the case of *A Star*, Doyle’s interest in rewriting the past responds more to an urge to understand the present and, perhaps, rethink the future, rather than to an interest in setting any historical record straight.

Nevertheless, the genre of *A Star* problematises its categorisation as a revisionist novel or even as historiographic fiction, because (unlike Doyle’s previous novels) it is not realistic. Despite Doyle’s praise-worthy historical accuracy as mentioned above, he also includes elements that escape realism. For example, although Henry is the first-person narrator of his

³¹ See “1.2.4.4. Censorship and Jazz” (p. 114).

story, he is not born until page 21, which recalls Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-67), in which the narrator also describes his own birth. As a newborn, moreover, Henry "is endowed with unusual health and strength, in addition to an ability to divine" (Dolmányos 127), and his grandmother, Granny Nash, suddenly gains the ability to read (*ASCH* 22). Nonetheless, McCarthy explains that "Doyle has denied that he was consciously emulating the 'magic realism' of South American fiction of the 1980s (Costello, 2001: 90)", instead, he claims that "[h]is intention was to be satirical, parodic, vividly entertaining", therefore writing "more in the manner of a Flann O'Brien than a Marquez or Rushdie". McCarthy concludes, thus, that "[i]n *A Star Called Henry* [Doyle] has exaggerated the exaggeration that has always been part of his style" (199). However, the parallels between the magic realism in the novels mentioned above and *A Star* are undeniable. What is more, Pierse considers that "[a]s in other magic-realist works, this implicit parallel between family and nation in *A Star* is a conceit that dominates the novel" (231).

Yet not all critics have considered Doyle's playfulness with history a success.³² For instance, as José Lanfers explains, "Brian Donnelly (...) finds that the kind of 'magic realism' introduced with [Henry's] father's wooden leg 'increasingly jars against the pervading naturalism of a novel that constitutes a critique of the revolutionary period (...)'" (29)" (256-57). Pierse also quotes Donnelly's critique, as well as a comment by Rüdiger Imhof, who found that "our narrator 'beggars credulity'", and who also wonders why Doyle has "'seen fit to people his novel with so many grotesques?'" (Pierse 227). Pierse declares the analysis unfair and asserts that it springs "from Imhof's own refusal of the logic (or anti-logic) of the novel's experimental style" (227). This is not to say, however, that Pierse considers *A Star* an unconditional success. The main difference, perhaps, between Pierse's criticism of the novel

³² Roddy Doyle said in an interview that his intention in *A Star* was to "take liberties and mess around and poke fun" (qtd. in Pierse 227).

and that of other scholars is that, while most scholars comment on the novel's formal aspects, Pierse finds that "if Doyle's *fin de siècle* work challenges (...) nationalist discourses with a radically unconventional, proletarian history 'from below', it also glibly reasserts many debilitating, hackneyed historical discourses 'from above'" (222), as I discuss in more detail below.

Regarding the novelist's experimental style, Lanthers considers "Doyle's approach to history" to be "satirical" (246), but he finds the novel partly problematic in the sense "that the satire is not sustained all the way through" (257), which would "ultimately [lead] to an imbalance in the novel" (246). According to Lanthers, "Henry's narrative demythologizes the Rising; but his own demythologized version of events is itself erased and made irrelevant, along with the myths it set out to replace, by Ivan's version of the national narrative" (257).³³ Hence, he concludes, "*A Star Called Henry* succeeds completely neither as a satire, nor as a revisionist history, nor as a liberating re-invention of the past" (257).

Dolmányos, on the other hand, considers that Doyle "clearly demonstrates his distance from historiografic [sic] metafiction, as he does not explicitly enter the story to impose authorial hierarchy on the relation" (131) of different perspectives of reality and that "Doyle decides to reject what historiographic metafiction offers him as a postmodern framework" (131), ultimately reading Henry as an "example of non-historic conformism" because "in spite of his rebellious nature, he always fits exactly into the context in which he operates" (131-2).

Alternatively, Deffenbacher sees the Last Roundup Trilogy, and most of Doyle's fiction, as "dialogic", that is,

[r]ather than opposing the official nationalist narrative with the alternative, 'true' story in *The Last Roundup* trilogy, Doyle adapts and performs nationalist iconography, popular song, and iconic film in ways that open and extend the medial frameworks upon which the nationalist

³³ For my discussion of Ivan's version, see "1.2.4.2. Dalton's and Reynolds' Irelands" (p. 104).

narrative depends: he hereby imagines a more inclusive mythology of Irish history and identity. (150)

This author reads the story of Miss O'Shea (Henry's wife) as "the richest example of dialogic mythmaking" in the trilogy, because of how Doyle combines "her sexual identity and ideological desire" with her love for Ireland, "despite the nationalist leadership's hostility towards her independence" (162). According to Deffenbacher:

Doyle posits a possibility beyond the false narratives of, on one side, an homogeneous nationalism that fails to comprehend the lives of the urban working class, women, and ethnic and racial minorities, and on the other, a neo-imperial global capitalism that underwrites revisionist obfuscation of the history of colonial oppression and discredits resistance to it. (165)

Like Pierse, McCarthy warns that *A Star* "should be read in the context of the 'new cultural nationalism' that emerged in Ireland during the mid- to late 1990s, as well as the ongoing debate over historical 'revisionism' and the more recent discursive-ideological controversy over the application of postcolonial theory to Irish politics, society and culture" (191). Alluding to the question, "What went wrong with Daddy?" (54), that the character of Paula Spencer poses in Doyle's 1996 novel *The Woman*, McCarthy considers *A Star* to be an allegorical answer to it,

where "Daddy" is Ireland and the Irish State that de Valera, Collins, and the rest built. The novel shows this state to have been born in bloodshed, heroic and sordid, out of idealism and greed, naïveté and cunning, honesty and graft, a state in which the urban poor, women and Jews were no better off — perhaps even worse off — than they were before independence, and in which society and culture were dominated by the conservative ideologies of nationalism and the Church. (195)

Contrary to what Dolmányos writes, McCarthy asserts that "Henry is better approached as the dynamo in a work of historiographical metafiction" (200). Finally, he argues that

Doyle subscribes to a materialist view of history which sees murder, mayhem and massacre where others see "blood sacrifice", and so he places at the centre of his outrageous account of the birth of his nation a hero who refuses not only the "mumbo-voodoo" of martyrdom (...) but eventually citizenship in an Ireland that was becoming a vampire preying on the poor and deluded. (217-8)

All these critics agree to a certain extent on similar points: it is clear that *A Star* is a (more or less successful) experimental novel, as far as Doyle's previous literature concerns; that it contains revisionist traits and that it opposes and even deconstructs several myths of Irish nationalism. However, as I commented above, Pierse's critique goes slightly further, as can be gathered from the following comment that he makes about the novel:

Doyle's own revisionist stance problematises his outwardly socialist pose, because the heavily politicised, anti-nationalist ideology he adopts carries with it also a dismissal of the socialist, proletarian thrust of the revolutionary period from 1916 to 1923. (...) Doyle's remaking of the uprising also undermines the possibility of working-class political activism more generally as a vehicle for social change. (223)

Pierse's main concern is that "Henry is repeatedly portrayed as (...) a passive being, incapable of 'discerning', reacting to and pre-programmed by highly personal grievances and traumas" (233) and, quoting Veena Das, Pierse also asserts that "[i]n any focus on 'the historical moment of rebellion' (...) it is imperative that 'the subjects of [colonial] power are not treated as passive beings, but are shown at the moments in which they try to defy this alienating power'" (233).

Another aspect which Pierse strongly criticises is Doyle's portrayal of violence. Not only does Pierse compare Henry's revolt as represented in *Star* to the sprout of a disease, following Guha's analysis that "the omission of a thinking insurrectionary is (...) 'dyed into most narratives by metaphors assimilating peasant revolts to natural phenomena: they break out like thunderstorms, heave like earthquakes, spread like wildfires, infect like epidemics'" (*Writing* 239), but he reads Doyle's portrayal of violence in the trilogy as reductively symbolic in that "Ireland's legacy of violence (...) might be explained away by a 'taste for blood' - an animalistic, visceral barbarism induced by the most specious circumstances, the most individuated of conditions" (239), lacking any "depth of meaning" (238) and "buttress[ing] the imperial view of anti-colonial resistance as something beyond logic and beneath integrity" (239). Notwithstanding, Pierse allows the fact that "there is a (...)

profoundly proletarian thrust to this novel” and that “there can be little doubt that [Doyle’s] repudiation of Irish nationalism, and its all-too-comfortable relationship with capitalism and Catholicism, conveys more of his ire for the claustrophobic political milieu he has lived in than for the formative period that the novel depicts” (240).

1.2. Text Analysis³⁴

To assess the validity of my thesis statement, in my analysis of *A Star* I look at how Doyle portrays his working-class characters as opposed to those belonging to the middle- or upper classes.³⁵ In this particular novel, the distinction between myth and secularity, that I take from Kearney’s *Myth and Motherland* (1984) plays a central role, as I discuss in section “1.2.2. Mythology versus Secularity” (p. 66). I am especially interested in the alignment that Doyle makes of mythology with nationalism, and secularity with socialism.

In the first part of my analysis, “1.2.1. Henry’s Childhood, Poverty and Loss” (p. 50), I look at how the poverty that Henry grows up with as a child of the Dublin slums has a major role in defining his character. In the same vein and intrinsically connected to the protagonist’s socio-economic situation, I cover Henry’s experience with loss—first, that of his parents and brother and, later in life, that of his son. Apart from this, in this section I also analyse Henry’s early disengagement with the nationalist cause as well as the first instances of his alignment with a secular outlook on life, as opposed to the nationalists’ mythological vision.

³⁴ Due to the great number of characters, locations and themes that appear in the Last Roundup Trilogy, I have structured my analysis of the texts into four parts and ordered them thematically. Despite this, some minor overlapping of themes occurs at times. Likewise, although the chapter follows a certain chronological order (progressing from Henry’s childhood towards his old age), it has been inevitable to jump back and forth between the trilogy’s three instalments when comparing some of the scenes under discussion.

³⁵ Although the character of Miss O’Shea, Henry’s former teacher and wife, certainly contradicts the ideal of femininity as put forward by Irish nationalism, I do not discuss her in this thesis. The main reason for this is that I have concentrated the focus of my analysis mainly on social class issues in this chapter, due to considerations of length.

The second part of the text analysis, “1.2.2. Mythology versus Secularity” (p. 66) is specifically devoted to showing how the differences between mythology and secularity are rendered throughout the trilogy. An important portion of this section is devoted to Doyle’s portrayal of the Easter Rising, because in the novel it is depicted as the defining event that led to the transformation of Ireland into the republic of the trilogy’s third instalment. Not only is it important that Doyle demythologises an event that, in the collective imagination, belongs to Ireland’s tradition of heroic martyrdom, but his rendition of this event foreshadows the differences between nationalists (as personified in the Irish Volunteers) and socialists (the Irish Citizen Army) that are crucial in Doyle’s depiction of the Republic.

As stories, legends, myths and ballads fill the pages of the Last Roundup Trilogy, the third section of my analysis, “1.2.3. The Triumph of Stories” (p. 86), explores a number of their functions in the trilogy. Stories, deeply rooted in Irish oral tradition, are used to cajole Henry into taking up arms against the British in the War of Independence and, more importantly, into overlooking the evidence of a growing social and ideological disparity between the leaders of the nationalist cause and members of the working class. Stories, too, are the resource that a character named Alfie Gandon uses to cover his true identity, while Henry, instead, uses them to find out the truth about Gandon and, by extension, about the corrupt nature at the core of the nationalist government. Most in line with my thesis statement, however, is the use that several working-class characters make of storytelling to fill in the gaps in their lives—for example, Henry resorts to stories to imagine his parents’ past, as he knows very little about them. This last theme also connects with a major critique that the trilogy makes of the erasure of working-class experience from official history, as I also argue in this section of the chapter.

Finally, in the fourth and last section, “1.2.4. The New Republic” (p. 102), I examine in what ways the concept of Irishness is envisioned by certain characters with enough influence to shape the independent state, like the Volunteer Jack Dalton, who is anti-Semitic and

antisocialist; the warlord Ivan Reynolds, whose outlook is misogynistic, capitalist and corrupt; or John Ford, who, in his film *The Quiet Man*, sanctioned by the Provisional IRA, projects an image of Ireland that has little or nothing to do with reality. Most importantly, however, I show how all these visions have in common that they either erase the experience of Henry and other working-class people or contribute to making it un-Irish. Finally, in this section I also compare these visions with the reality that Henry encounters on his return to the Republic, after having been in contact with the culture of the United States of America, especially with jazz, and having attempted to erase all Irishness within him.

1.2.1. Henry's Childhood, Poverty and Loss

Throughout his life, Henry experiences the most extreme forms of poverty. This is especially true of his childhood in the Dublin slums, which is represented in *A Star* and examined in detail in this section. However, in *Oh, Play*, Henry once again endures severe deprivation, when he and his family are travelling across North America during the first years of the Great Depression (ca. 1929-1939). Eventually, in *The Dead Republic*, Henry's economic situation is somewhat alleviated, as he finds a steady job and is taken care of by others.

Yet there is another aspect which dominates Henry's life, and which is equally present in the whole trilogy: trauma, often brought on by the loss of his closest family.³⁶ What is more, Henry's continued connection to violence keeps exposing him to other sources of trauma too: not only does he see the death and mutilation caused by the different armed struggles that take place in Ireland during the twentieth century, but he himself becomes the victim of the 1974

³⁶ Whenever I refer to *trauma* throughout this chapter, I use it in the sense of a "psychological injury, lasting damage done to individuals or communities by tragic events or severe distress" (Davis and Meretoja 1). Although I look at different episodes in which Henry experiences trauma, I have not dedicated a particular section to analysing it. These episodes are therefore alluded to throughout this chapter, in its different sections.

UVF attack in Dublin. During his whole life, Henry has dreams of his lost ones and flashbacks of the horrors he has seen, which, in my view, form the evidence of a restless mind, stricken by grief and, essentially, trauma.³⁷

1.2.1.1. Life in the Slums: Misery, Illness and Violence

Born in 1901, Henry Smart is a child of the twentieth-century Dublin slums: his first years of life are nothing but hunger, deprivation, violence, sickness and death. In the first part of *A Star*, Doyle draws a highly faithful image of the miserable lives of the capital's poorest citizens. For example, in the following scene, of which the language marks Doyle's style for this part of the novel, Henry recounts the Smarts' gradual descent into absolute deprivation:

Poor ruined mother. She sat in the rain, the hail, the heat. (...) 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. Banisters that shook when held, floors that creaked and groaned, timber that cried for spars. There was no rest, nowhere she could lie down and forget. Shouts and fights, rage and coughing, coughing — death creeping nearer. And the rooms behind the steps got smaller and darker and more and more evil. We fell further and further. The walls crumbled and closed in on us. Her children died and joined the stars. Rooms with no windows, floors that bred cockroaches. We cried at the smell of other people's lousy food. We cried at the pain that burned through our sores. We cried for arms to gather and hold us. We cried for heat and for socks, for milk, and light, for an end to the itches that stopped us from sleeping. We cried at the lice that shone and curled and mocked us. We cried for our mother to come and save us. Poor mother. Finally, finally, we crept down to our last room, a basement, as low as we could go, a hole that yawned and swallowed us. We lay down and slept in the ground water of the River Liffey, we slept piled together with the sewer slugs and worms. (8)

That this situation applies to any family living in the slums is also made clear by Doyle.

Foreshadowing Victor Smart's tragic demise, the text insists on the ubiquitous presence of

³⁷ It is not the objective of this thesis to explore the trilogy from the perspective of trauma studies, although this would undoubtedly produce some highly interesting results. However, it is my contention that trauma, in the case of Henry Smart, is a direct result of his social class. For works on trauma and silence in Irish literature, see McAteer; and Terrazas.

illness and death in Dublin. Throughout the three volumes of the Last Roundup Trilogy, Henry directly links coughing (as an indicator of TB) to poverty and in *A Star* this connection is made evident in the following passage:

In the dead of night, when we walked alone through the streets (...) that was what we heard - the city coughing. (...) Dead, dead silence except for the thousands coughing, a steady, terrible beat coming from the rooms above us and basement areas, children and adults being choked to death by poverty. They were too late; we could hear pain in the noise, we could feel life desperately clinging. It was how night-time was measured in the slums, in blood coughs and death rattles. (...) It [cough] was what you did when you breathed Dublin air. When you slept on the ground. When you didn't have shoes. (...) You coughed when you ate bad food or none. When you'd never worn a coat. When everyone else around you coughed. When you'd no mother to fix you and no father to run for the doctor. And no doctor who'd come, anyway. (82-3)

Several decades later, it is also a cough that makes Henry question the young Republic's success, a place that, for a while, he had believed to be a genuine improvement from the country he had left in 1922. It is the early 1950s when Henry begins working as a caretaker in a newly built school, a place that he believes James Connolly would have liked (*TDR* 139). However, soon enough Henry realises that there are boys disappearing from the school and he points out that this "last lesson came with a cough" (*TDR* 142). Again, this observation is accompanied by the comment that "[i]t took me a while to accept that poverty could also be suburban" (*TDR* 142). In the same way, another crucial indicator of poverty throughout the trilogy is the lack of shoes, as expressed in the quote above, where Henry talks about Dublin's coughing.³⁸ Throughout this chapter, I refer to this trope on several occasions, especially in the section about the Easter Rising, in which the meaning of shoes takes on a symbolic nature for Henry. Right now, however, it is enough to point out that Henry gauges other people's affluence by their ability to own shoes.

³⁸ Doyle's choice of shoes, or rather the lack of them, instead of any another element to indicate poverty, springs from personal experience, as his father would retell him anecdotes from his youth in which shoes, in particular, were a luxury that not everybody could afford (Doyle; "Interview" lines 107-8).

Returning to Henry's childhood, his family's particular tragedy springs from a combination of poverty and loss. Both elements leave an indelible mark on Henry which, as said above, are so severely traumatising that they ultimately condition his behaviour as an adult. When Henry is born in 1901, his parents' marriage is already falling apart and the first loss that the boy experiences is that of his father. Henry Smart, Sr., works as a bouncer at a brothel, run by the mysterious and exotic Dolly Oblong, while, at the same time, he bullies and kills people for a character named Alfred Gandon.³⁹ The legacy of Henry, Sr., is one of violence and death: even the coat that he wears is drenched with dirt and blood from his victims and it is this same coat that Henry tries to suckle on as a baby and whose smell he remembers when his father is no longer there. Likewise, Henry ends up inheriting his father's wooden leg (the weaponised instrument that Henry, Sr., takes off in the blink of an eye and uses to kill his victims), which Henry carries in a holster and also uses as a weapon to fight his way through the War of Independence. As Pierse observes, for the two Henrys "violence is both a weapon and a metaphoric crutch - a means of defence and a symbol of their underlying weakness" (230). However, violence is not the only legacy left by Henry, Sr. Another trait that Henry inherits from his father is a penchant for storytelling. As Henry explains, his father "invented himself, and reinvented", not with the intent of lying, but because "his stories kept him going. Stories were the only things the poor owned" (*ASCH* 7).

The disintegration of the Smarts' marriage becomes irremediable after Henry, Sr., decides to name their only surviving child Henry after another baby who died, a choice with major consequences in the novel. The first and true Henry is, in fact, the one that gives the novel its title, the one that, according to Melody, is the star that shines the brightest among all the other stars that represent her dead children, as she tells young Henry. This causes a deep impression in Henry and leaves him with an ever-lasting feeling of being an impostor.

³⁹ I discuss this character in "1.2.3.2. Who is Alfie Gandon?" (p. 94)

Consequently, Henry's birth, described as something miraculous (principally because of his unusual good health for a slum child), an event that should have been a source of joy, soon turns out to be the final blow to his parents' marriage. The pain that the naming causes to Melody sends her into a state of depression. While Henry, Sr., believes that "[n]aming me [the protagonist] Henry would take the pain and weight away; it would let them start again. It would let them include the dead in their new life" (*ASCH* 31), Melody "looked up at the ceiling, at her children beyond it, waiting for her. She looked up at her first Henry. Her one and only Henry" (*ASCH* 31). As I see it, the couple's conflicting thoughts here work as an allegory for the debate about remembering the past or forgetting it, something which is especially relevant for countries that have a traumatic history.⁴⁰ Ultimately, despite the good intentions of Henry, Sr., his imposition causes Melody to stop eating, which Henry poetically describes by saying that "[s]he was closing down, packing to join the stars" (*ASCH* 44).

Henry, Sr., unable to bear the situation at home and the mixture of feelings of love and regret that his son awakens in him, starts leaving his family for progressively longer periods of time, until he stops returning at all. However, before Henry, Sr., disappears completely, Henry sees him one last time, when the bouncer saves Henry and his little brother Victor from a furious mob and the police, after little Henry tells the visiting King Edward VII to "fuck off" (*ASCH* 51-2). After an adventurous escape through Dublin's sewage system, surrounded by the stories that Henry, Sr., tells his sons to distract them, he leaves the two boys in a safe spot and Henry has the intuition that he will never see his father again. This idea, despite the little time that Henry has actually spent with his father, drives him to a fit of self-destruction:

I dropped my head to the street. I lifted it, and dropped it again.

⁴⁰ For example, in Spain a debate has been ongoing over recent decades concerning the victims of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), as well as those executed during Franco's regime (1939-75). While many families whose relatives were executed and buried in mass graves insist on their right to have the bodies exhumed, identified and properly buried, others seek to oppose this under the premise that any attempt to—literally—dig up the past is painful and that it is preferable to forget and to look towards the future.

I wished now that he'd never seen me. (...) The royal procession, my perch on the lamppost - I tried to knock them all out of my head. His hands as he lifted me, the crazy escape, his love, his hands as he lifted me, his hands as he lifted me - I dropped my head on to the cobbles again, and again and again. I made darkness to match what we'd had down below but nothing came back with it. I was absolutely alone. (...) I tried and tried to forget the last hours and minutes. I moved and hit the shore with my forehead and tried to kill my father's face and his hands and voice. I hit and hit until I could see nothing and all I could hear was Victor bawling and my blood roaring to escape and I knew that it was dropping through the shore, although I couldn't see it, falling onto the stones and into the Swan River below and on to the Dodder and the bay and the sea. (*ASCH* 59)

When this scene takes place, Henry is only five years old. Such a harrowing description of violence experienced by a child is not unique in *A Star*, as I further exemplify below with the scene of Victor's death. This certainly clashes with Doyle's earlier fiction, especially when considering the Barrytown Trilogy.⁴¹

The fact that Henry, Sr., gradually abandons his family has other consequences too: Melody is left alone in an absolutely dire situation with more and more children and no help at all. A life of poverty and terrible working conditions had already left her in an awful shape: "[s]he was twelve when she walked into Mitchell's beads factory and she was sixteen when she walked into my father. Four years in between, squinting, counting, shredding her hands, in a black hole making beads" (*ASCH* 3). The brief interval of joy provided by Melody's romantic relationship with Henry, Sr., lasts less than five years and is tainted by the deaths of their first offspring. Bearing the children fruit of the sporadic visits that Henry, Sr., makes and seeking refuge in alcohol, Melody quickly wastes away. In the end, the woman that little Henry finds on his visits home is not "much more than twenty (...) but she was already old, already decomposing, ruined beyond repair, good for some more babies, then finished" (*ASCH* 1). Through her broken speech, interrupted in odd places, sometimes even in the middle of a word,

⁴¹ When I asked Doyle why he had chosen to be so explicit in his depiction of violence towards children in *A Star*, his response was clear: "I wanted to show what was there" (Doyle; "Interview" line 143). Reminiscing about the living conditions of poor Dubliners at the beginning of the twentieth century, he felt the need for the text "to be stark", specifying that "you can't romanticise it" (Doyle; "Interview" lines 157-8). Yet, there is also the hyperbolic aspect that characterises Henry's account and that Doyle attributes to his own attempt at "deliberately bending the rules. I was making more of the story that was actually there. So [...] a lot of what [Henry] does is kind of heightened or exaggerated" (Doyle; "Interview" lines 168-71).

Doyle skilfully manages to convey the likewise broken state of her mind. This conversation with Henry serves as a brilliant example:

—You're. Get. Ting big.
 I'd watch her mouth fighting, remembering shapes. I had to look at every word.
 —Are. You. Being good?
 —Yes, Mammy.
 (...)
 If it was early enough she'd have the attention for a few last words.
 —Stay out. Of troub. Trouble now.
 —Yes, Mammy. Bye bye.
 —Bye. Bye. Tell your father. His tea's read. Y. (*ASCH* 65-6)

Melody's last speech in this dialogue also shows her confusion and her lack of touch with reality, since, at this point, Henry, Sr., has already been gone for a long time.

Still, the loss that most deeply affects Henry is that of his little brother Victor: his dearest companion. Once Melody and her children have reached their final destination in the basement described at the beginning of this section, Henry decides that it is time for him to leave, only to find that his nine-month-old brother Victor has followed him up the stairs. Thus, together they embark on a new adventure and become inseparable in the process. As Henry explains, "I shared everything with Victor, even the stories that were only mine. He went into the crib beside me. There was never me; it was always us" (*ASCH* 63).



Fig. 2. *Faithful Place off Lower Tyrone Street*. 1911, National Archives of Ireland. (Children of the Dublin slums)

Victor and Henry roam the streets of Dublin and do all sorts of odd jobs to survive, even resorting to petty criminal activity. According to McCarthy, this is what constitutes “the most important revisionist feature of the novel”, more specifically, the “construction of a social and economic rather than nationalist-political context for the 1916 Rising by telling the story of Henry and Victor’s childhood as ‘street Arabs’” (205). Referring to Henry’s activities as “‘beggar’s assistant’, rat-catcher, and cattle-rustler” (McCarthy 205), Pierse comments that “[f]oreshadowing his future as a violent insurrectionist, Henry steadily becomes inured to various barbarisms (...) reduced, like his father, to violence, by the vicissitudes of economic necessity”, to which he adds that “the Smarts are socially conditioned in a way that makes them prone to barbarous behaviour” (*Writing* 230).

Soon, signs emerge in the form of coughs and shortness of breath, presaging the impending tragedy: shortly after the boys’ failed attempt to attend school, Victor dies. The scene is described with such harrowing detail that Henry’s pain and shock can be vividly felt:

Victor coughed again and I remembered the noise that pulled me from sleep. I'd never heard it as bad. It was a cough that broke bone, an unbelievable hack that would destroy anything in its way. (...) I could see him now. (...) I knew he was dead, even as I rushed back in. His mouth was open, and his eyes, staring into darkness. There was a mark, where a line of watery blood had run from his mouth past his ear. I rubbed it away with my sleeve. There was nothing in his eyes now, just what I thought was the memory of his last agony and terror - the last cough and the utter darkness on top of him. I'd been right beside him. He was white and glazed. His mouth was stretched, the cracked, bursting lips were losing colour as I looked. He was changing under me, hardening, gone. (ASCH 80-1)

Henry tries to bring Victor back to life, but his attempts are futile and heart-wrenching. The trauma which this event causes to Henry's mind can still be felt in *The Dead Republic*, when, about forty years later, Henry hears "a cough that opened flesh" in the school where he works, a sound that "came straight out of my memory (...). Came out, and down, and sliced me. My mouth, my eyes - I was split in half. Victor. My brother, and his last cough" (143). In my view, Victor's death has an undoubtedly crucial impact on Henry's personality and it affects his behaviour even as an adult, as I show throughout this chapter.

1.2.1.2. *The Great Depression and the Loss of a Son*

Although Henry never experiences a great improvement in his material conditions, it is not until the ending of *Oh, Play* that he returns to a state of misery comparable to that of his childhood. This occurs when Henry is in the United States and, after having reunited with his family (his wife, Miss O'Shea, and his daughter Saoirse), they travel across the country jumping trains and begging for food. It is also during this period that a new family member arrives: Henry and Miss O'Shea's son Séamus Louis, or, as Henry likes to call him, Rifle.

At first, Miss O'Shea and Henry seem to enjoy this way of life. Miss O'Shea, indeed, calls it their honeymoon (OPTT 343) and Henry says that Miss O'Shea and himself "were back in our good old days. And they *were* fuckin' good. We were happy" (344; original emphasis). However, with the beginning of the Great Depression, the Smarts are joined by more and more

nomads who travel the country in the hope of finding job opportunities. It is precisely when they help another family jump onto their boxcar, that Henry is reminded of Dublin: “They sat away, didn’t look at the passing country. They didn’t talk. The kids didn’t squabble or roll. Then I saw it, another child at her [mother’s] breast, grey rags in her grey rags. No bundles, food. No shoes or boots. I was back in Dublin, on the move across America” (347). In this passage, the reference to the lack of shoes is once again relevant.

The growing poverty of the USA is registered by Henry and expressed in the form of comparisons, like when he goes from describing how people would stop and smile to listen to Saoirse and Rifle singing and how they “found a penny deep down in worn pockets (...) and left the pennies at [the kids’] feet” (*OPTT* 349) to saying that, although the people still stopped, “nothing came out with their hands, or the hands stayed in the pockets. They’d nothing left to give” (349).

Faced with the risk of starvation, very much like Henry and Victor were forced to do, in order to survive, the Smarts resort to “small-time family crime” (*OPTT* 352) by stealing. Indeed, Henry tells Miss O’Shea in an anguished manner, “I’m living the way I was when I was a kid. Exactly the way I was when I was a kid”; “the exact same” (353) he keeps insisting, and the memory of Victor quickly resurfaces together with Henry’s fear of losing his loved ones: “It happens when you live like this” (353). Certainly enough, although Henry does not learn this as a fact until he is over seventy, Rifle does not survive that way of life. As Miss O’Shea recounts Rifle’s death to Henry (after their reunion in Ratheen) she explains that what killed him was “[e]verything, Henry. And nothing. A cold he couldn’t shake. God love him. Because he’d nothing left in him to shake. He just died” (*TDR* 197). Although Rifle’s death is not presented in the same detailed and tragic manner as Victor’s, its effect on Henry is no less devastating.

Henry is separated from his family again very close to the ending of *Oh, Play*, when, by saving Rifle from falling under the passing train that Miss O'Shea and Saoirse have jumped on, he loses his leg and does not make it onto the boxcar.⁴² In the decades that go by until he reencounters Miss O'Shea, Henry never stops thinking about his family (in particular about Rifle, as he is its weakest member), musing about their fortune and often presuming their death.

During the first months of their being separated, Henry learns about his family through meandering stories that are passed on from settlement to settlement.⁴³ However, when the figure of the boy, that is, Rifle, disappears from the stories, Henry explains how he “worried; I died” (*OPTT* 359), conveying the distress that this thought causes in him. On another occasion, Henry lies in the Utah desert and shouts at the stars, as he waits for Rifle to appear among them:

I waited for my little boy to shimmer and fuss; I looked for his rough twinkle.
 —Come on!
 I watched.
 —Come on, Rifle! Come on!
 I tried his other names.
 —Séamus! Séamus Louis!
 I tried them all.
 —Rifle! Come on out! Please.
 I tried them all.
 —I was looking for you! Rifle!
 I tried them all. I tried them all.
 I tried them all. (365)

The repetition of the phrase “I tried them all” perfectly captures Henry’s pain and his feelings of defeat and exhaustion.

⁴² Henry’s leg becoming amputated is never treated as an overly tragic event in the trilogy, although, once Henry loses it, there are constant references to his missing leg: either through brief comments about Henry learning to walk again, mentions of his various prostheses or even scenes rendered in a humorous tone, like when he assures his rescuers after the UVF attack in Dublin that he lost his leg in another occasion. Yet, although it is not explicitly shown to be so, I believe that his amputation is another traumatic experience for Henry.

⁴³ See section “1.2.3.3. Stories are the Only Things that the Poor Own” (p. 97).

1.2.1.3. First Contact with Nationalism and Religion

So far, I have attempted to show how Henry's life is deeply influenced by poverty and loss from a very early age and how the deaths of his loved ones are a direct cause of deprivation. Continuing with my analysis, the part devoted to portraying Henry's childhood in the Dublin slums also contains several scenes that refer to the ongoing political struggles in Ireland and that testify to Henry's non-alignment with the nationalist cause. Of course, one could argue that Henry at that time is far too young to either understand or care about what is happening on a political level, but this is not the ultimate reason for Henry's disengagement with nationalism. Additionally, the scenes discussed in this section are also the first examples in which the difference appears between myth and secularity, the abstract and the concrete, typified correspondingly by the nationalists and Henry.

In contrast to nationalist sentiment, something that Henry undoubtedly comprehends is the difference in social status between his family and others. For instance, in the aforementioned episode in which Henry tells King Edward VII to "fuck off", it is not nationalist motivation which causes the protagonist's outburst, as Henry explains:

Why had I told the King of Great Britain and Ireland to fuck off? Was I a tiny Fenian? A Sinn Feiner? Not at all. I didn't even know I was Irish. I saw the procession from my perch on the lamppost and I saw the fat man at the centre of it. I saw the wealth and colour, the shining red face, the moustache and beard that were better groomed than the horses, and I knew that he didn't come from Dublin. I didn't know that he was the King or that the floozy beside him was the Queen. (...) He didn't belong. I looked at his carriage and thought of the cart that had carried us from house to house to basement. (*ASCH* 52)

Indeed, Henry's understanding of his economic and social position is the key factor that, years later, motivates a great part of his fighting, especially during the Easter Rising. The following passage, which is very similar to an idea voiced by Paula Spencer, when she declares that

“[s]he’s been left behind. She knows that. But she’s always known it. She was never in front”

(*PS* 56),⁴⁴ leaves no doubt as to this:

We [Henry and Victor] survived but never prospered. We were never going to prosper. We were allowed the freedom of the streets - no one gave a fuck - 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. I knew it every time I jumped out of the way of a passing coach or car, every time I filled my weeping mouth with rotten food, every time I saw shoes on a child my age. I knew it every time a strange man would offer us money or food to come with him. I knew it, and the knowledge fed my brain. (*ASCH* 66)

Henry understands his social position with the same sense of clarity with which he knows that poverty is the cause of Victor’s untimely death. What is more, poverty is precisely the factor that Henry claims to have kept him aloof from politics as a child. During the brief interval in which Henry sells newspapers for a living, he explains that “[a] thing called Sinn Féin was mentioned. The name Carson was followed by curses or spitting. And Home Rule. It meant nothing to us who had no homes, but I listened and tried to understand” (*ASCH* 70). Similarly, when one night some men approach Henry, Victor and other children to ask them whether they love Ireland, to which the children do not respond, Henry explains that “[w]e didn’t understand the question. Ireland was something in songs that drunken old men wept about as they held onto the railing at three in the morning and we homed in to rob them; that was all. I loved Victor and my memories of some other people. That was all I understood about love” (69).⁴⁵ It is only by offering the children money, that the men can convince them to engage in the practice of moonlighting.⁴⁶ The dichotomy between the abstract and the concrete arises here, when the

⁴⁴ As I discuss in Chapter Three, in my view, this passage reflects Paula’s class consciousness and her awareness that her social position implies having a lack of opportunities in life (see Chapter Three, p. 224).

⁴⁵ Quite interestingly, a similar dialogue takes place in *The Dead Republic*, when Henry is talking to John Ford and the latter says, “I love this country” and confronts Henry with the accusation, “You never did”, to which Henry replies, “How can you love a fuckin’ country?” (119). While Henry expects a specific answer to his question “[w]hat’s out there that you can love? (...) Trees and water and trout”, Ford points to his head and explains that he loves “what’s in here” (119).

⁴⁶ In this case, moonlighting refers to “the carrying out of cattle-maiming (...) during the night in protest against the land-tenure system” (“Moonlighting”)

nationalists attempt to stir the boys' consciousness by alluding to patriotism, a feeling that the children cannot comprehend. Instead, the boys perfectly understand the concrete use and value of money.

Regarding this dichotomy, Pierse offers the following explanation in relation to the concept of Home Rule: "Henry explains that an immaterial concept such as Home Rule means 'nothing to us who had no homes' (SCH, p. 70). 'Imagined communities,' as Benedict Anderson has argued, are the preserve of those with property, with a stake in society; nationality means nothing to those without it – like Henry and Victor, who sleep beneath a sheet of tarpaulin by a canal" (*Writing* 232). Pierse applies the same analysis to the scene with King Edward VII discussed above, in which he also sees "[t]his dramatic conflict between abstract ideology and concrete poverty" (232). Indeed, Pierse even finds a link between Melody's "obsession with this ethereal child", meaning the first son she had named Henry, who "is pointedly indulged at the expense of the tangible one by her side", and "the real Ireland" which works as "an ersatz replacement for the imagined utopia of nationalist fantasists" (231). Pierse's conclusion here is that "Doyle correlates the devotional, sentimental nonsense of nationalism, as he views it, with Melody's excessive grief. Both deflect attention from the difficult 'here-and-now' of working- class life" (232). This last sentence becomes especially relevant when applied to Doyle's representation of the Easter Rising, as I discuss in "1.2.2.3. The Rising through Roddy Doyle's Eyes" (p. 71).

It is not only nationalism, however, that Henry rejects from early childhood. His first experience with state education is severely tainted by an unpleasant encounter with a representative of religion. As McCarthy observes, education and religion are two elements whose "representation (...) continues to be negative" (193) in *A Star*, something in line with Doyle's previous work. As happens with other adverse episodes from Henry's youth, this one

in particular determines the manner in which Henry perceives one of the elements that became crucial in the making of the Republic of Ireland: the Catholic Church.

The scene occurs when Henry decides to take himself and Victor to school, where they meet Miss O'Shea, the teacher who ends up becoming Henry's wife. Miss O'Shea makes the first show of goodness that the two brothers have received from an adult in their short lifetime: she's kind, cheerful and patient.⁴⁷ The brothers' experience at school is also highly positive: it is soon clear that Henry is smart and quick to learn and both boys enjoy being in class. However, their delight has an abrupt end when one morning a nun walks into the classroom and, spotting Henry and Victor, demands to know who they are. Miss O'Shea, in a manner which marks the extent of her transformation throughout the novel, is visibly afraid of the nun and, according to Henry, even "sound[s] like a child" when she speaks, leaving "me and Victor against the nun" (*ASCH* 77).

Henry's refusal to address the nun as Mother (77), together with the boys' responses, which she quickly interprets as cheekiness (78) rapidly increase her antipathy towards them and she decides that "[t]his is not the place for you", but rather that "[i]t's Saint Brigid's you should be in" (78). As Henry quickly clarifies, St Brigid's "was the orphanage up on Eccles Street" (78). This threat provokes Henry and Victor's escape through the classroom window, after Henry hits the nun on the nose with his father's wooden leg, all in front of a baffled and completely passive Miss O'Shea. Reflecting on the episode somewhat later on, Henry states the following:

Miss O'Shea had just been a bit of good fortune. A lucky knock on the door. The nun had been the normal one. Mother, she'd wanted to be called. Never. Not even Sister. Fuck her. And

⁴⁷ Interestingly (and, perhaps, somewhat in contradiction with the ideas put forward in *A Star*) the description that Henry gives of Miss O'Shea evokes Western depictions of the Virgin Mary: "I saw brown eyes and some slivers of hair that had escaped from a bun that shone like a lamp behind her head" (*ASCH* 71-2). In the same vein, Deffenbacher comments that the image of Miss O'Shea "invokes the Virgin Mary and Ireland-as-woman as the two icons are imagined and conflated in nationalist mythology, ask in James Clarence Mangan's nineteenth-century poem 'Dark Rosaleen'" (163).

religion. I already hated it. *Holy God we praise Thy name.* Fuck Him. And your man on the cross up over the blackboard. Fuck Him too. That was one good thing that came out of all the neglect: we'd no religion. We were free. We were blessed. (*ASCH* 79; original emphasis)

Henry's attitude towards religion becomes relevant in the second part of the novel, when his background and his beliefs set him apart from the other men he is fighting with at the GPO. This attitude towards religion, however, is not unique to Henry Smart, as I demonstrate throughout this thesis, but quite common to all of Doyle's characters. Not necessarily the hatred, but certainly the fact of not participating in the rituals or beliefs that were to be one of the pillars of the Republic of Ireland.

Before moving on to the next section, I want to point out a curious contradiction, that, in any case, speaks to Henry's shrewdness. In *The Dead Republic*, Henry encounters another religious figure: the local priest at Ratheen, where Henry has settled down. When one day the priest seeks out Henry and begins questioning him, the following conversation takes place:

—I've been asking around about you, he said.
 He was a lucky man; thirty years later, he'd have been dead for doing that.
 —Why? I asked.
Then I made a quick decision.
 —Why, *Father?* (137; my emphasis).

Despite having categorically refused to call the nun from his childhood Mother when ordered to do so, in his middle age, Henry decides to call the priest Father, of his own accord. Nevertheless, the circumstances are very different in each scene and, in the second one, Henry plays on the priest's self-importance to get a job he wants, not only by calling him Father, but by going regularly to mass.

1.2.2. Mythology versus Secularity

1.2.2.1. A Closer Look at the Easter Rising

One of the most important events in the Last Roundup Trilogy is, without a doubt, the Easter Rising. Not only because it is rendered in great detail and occupies a significant part of the novel (in contrast to the Civil War, for example), but because it is portrayed as the defining event that led to the transformation of Ireland into the independent state. As I explain in this chapter, Doyle's depiction of the outcome of the struggle for independence as a "capitalist coup" (Pierse; *Writing* 223) has its roots in his portrayal of the Easter Rising.

As I explained in the introduction (p. 29), the Easter Rising was a rebellion consequence of years of growing political tensions in Ireland and of a revival of nationalist sentiment. Such tensions can be seen, for example, in the split that the outbreak of the Great War (1914) caused within the Irish Volunteers: the majority answered John Redmond's call for arms in support of the British troops and became the National Volunteers;⁴⁸ about 3000 Volunteers, however, refused to join the war and remained part of the Irish Volunteers under the leadership of Eoin MacNeill.⁴⁹

Following the proverb that England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity,⁵⁰ the supreme council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB)⁵¹ took advantage of the fact that most British effort was focused on the Great War to establish a military council in May 1915 in

⁴⁸ Leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party (1900-18) and nominal political leader of the Irish Volunteers (1914) (Laffan).

⁴⁹ Eoin MacNeill (1867-1945) was a "historian and political activist". He was a founder of the Gaelic League, became "commander-in-chief of the Volunteers" and "opposed participation in the First World War". After 1916, for which he was imprisoned, he became "minister in the first Dáil, and then minister for education 1922-5" (Connolly 354-5).

⁵⁰ Cf. Speake. *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, p. 92.

⁵¹ According to James Loughlin, the Irish Republican Brotherhood was "a revolutionary organization that grew out of the Fenian movement of the 1850s" (284).

which it planned the Rising, with such prominent members from the Irish Volunteers as Patrick Pearse, Joseph Mary Plunkett, Eamon Ceannt and Thomas MacDonagh. The plan, however, was kept a secret from Eoin MacNeill. The conspiracy was joined in January 1916 by James Connolly, founder of the Irish Socialist Republican Party and commandant of the ICA.

After MacNeill learned of the planned rising, he addressed the Irish Volunteers and countermanded the order to rebel. This caused a one-day delay in the Rising and it thwarted a nation-wide insurrection; nevertheless, the leaders decided to go through with their plan on Easter Monday, despite their numbers having been greatly reduced and having to confine the rebellion to Dublin. Thus, on 24 April 1916, the rebels seized the GPO and turned it into their headquarters. It was there that Patrick Pearse read out the Proclamation of Independence, which bore his signature together with those of Thomas J. Clarke, Sean MacDiarmada, James Connolly, Thomas MacDonagh, Eamon Ceannt and Joseph Mary Plunkett.

The Rising was brutally crushed by the British forces, who bombarded the city centre, completely devastating it. In order to prevent further bloodshed, Pearse issued the command to surrender. The draconian nature of the British response following the rebellion soon turned public opinion, which so far had been deeply critical of the insurrection, in favour of the rebels. All the signatories of the Proclamation were executed, together with other leaders of the Rising; many people who had had no part in the rebellion were arrested and many others imprisoned without trial.⁵² Exceptionally, two key figures of the Rising, Michael Collins (who was Joseph Plunkett's "aide-de-camp" at the GPO) and Eamon de Valera ("Commander of the Third battalion") were not executed, but imprisoned, and their participation in the Rising would mark their political careers in the following years.⁵³

⁵² According to the Government of Ireland, "in the Rising, 132 members of the crown forces were killed. Official figures put rebel combatants and civilians together - 318 killed and 2,217 injured". Of the 318 killed, 250 would have been civilians (Department of the Taoiseach; "1916 Rising"). This same source puts the number of those arrested at over 3,500, "over twice the number who took part in the rising".

⁵³ In order to support the historical details presented in these paragraphs, I have consulted Connolly's *Oxford Companion to Irish History*, as well as Department of the Taoiseach ("1916 Rising" and "Executed Leaders");

The significance of the Rising becomes clear when its consequences are taken into account, since the rebellion *per se* was a military defeat and, as mentioned above, initially the Irish population did not welcome it. Nonetheless, it was precisely the bloody nature of the retaliations that transformed the rebel leaders into martyrs. This is crucial to understand the demythologising aspect of Doyle's narrative in the second part of *A Star*.

1.2.2.2. *A Tradition of Self-Sacrifice*

The death of the 1916 rebels has been regarded as belonging to a tradition of self-sacrifice that runs deep in the Irish psyche: in *Myth and Motherland*, Richard Kearney talks about the “idiom of sacrificial martyrdom” taken on by the Maze prisoners in the 1980s, who by “resorting to hunger-strike (...) realign[ed] their suffering with a mythic-religious tradition of renewal through sacrifice: a tradition stretching back through the 1916 leaders, Terence McSwiney, O'Donovan Rossa and the Fenian Martyrs to the timeless personae of Cuchulain on the one hand and of Christ on the other” (5-6).^{54, 55}

the site “History of The Irish Volunteers”, the entry “Michael Collins” from the Irish Central Statistics Office's website and also the BBC article “Easter Rising 1916: Eoin MacNéill, the rebellion's forgotten man?”.

⁵⁴ Terence McSwiney (1879-1920), Sinn Féin Lord Mayor of Cork, died after 74 days of hunger strike, a fact that drew international attention to the Anglo-Irish struggle (Breathnach). Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa (1831-1915) was a Fenian who devoted his life to the struggle for Irish independence. At his funeral, Patrick Pearse delivered the graveside oration. A newspaper article of the time puts the number of people who gathered in Dublin for the funeral procession in the hundreds of thousands. (Maume, “Enormous Crowds Attend Funeral of O'Donovan Rossa”). The Fenian Martyrs is probably a reference to William P. Allen (1848-67), Michael Larkin (c.1835-67), and Michael O'Brien (1836-67), also known as the Manchester Martyrs, three Fenians who were hanged to death in 1867 for the murder of an English sergeant during an ambush. Neither Larkin nor O'Brien died immediately, thus, the executioner pulled on Larkin's legs to accelerate his death, but a Catholic priest forbade him to do the same to O'Brien, who struggled for 45 minutes before he eventually died (Hayhurst, J. Collins, Woods, McCabe; “Larkin” and “O'Brien”). The Irish demigod Cú Chulainn is said to have been wounded by a spear in battle and, refusing to die on the ground, he would have “tied himself to a standing stone using his own entrails and died raising his sword to the heavens” (A. Williams).

⁵⁵ Although this tradition of self-sacrifice is not named in such straightforward terms in *A Star*, it certainly is in *The Dead Republic*, where Doyle draws a clear connection between religion and the Provisional IRA, as I explain in “1.2.2.4. Mythology and the Provisional IRA” (p. 81).

Likewise, much has been written about the figure of Pearse and his fascination with the idea of sacrificial martyrdom. Although scholars like John Marsden warn that “[i]t was only after defeat and the executions that followed, that the ‘blood sacrifice’ interpretation of the events in Easter week established itself” (35), it is undeniable that the links between the theme of sacrifice and the rebellion were present long before the actual Rising took place. Marsden’s point, rather, is to contest the claim that the leaders of the 1916 rebellion initiated it without any hope for success, that is, already as martyrs.

In stark contrast, Patrick Hogan argues that the Easter 1916 poets [Pearse, MacDonagh and Plunkett] saw the Uprising as a sacrifice that would renew Ireland and ultimately redeem the nation, ending foreign rule, and restoring sovereignty. The final sentence of the proclamation makes the point explicit, referring directly to “the readiness of [Ireland’s] children to sacrifice themselves for the common good” (28). In addressing this dichotomy, James Heaney writes that

[t]he historical evidence seems (...) to pull in contrary directions: some of Pearse’s writings seem to suggest that he looked upon the Rising as a Christ-like sacrifice that would inspire a nationwide revolution by awakening the Irish people to the real conditions of their relationship to the British Empire, but there is also evidence that he envisaged a successful military outcome to the rebellion and that he continued in that frame of mind even as the events of Easter Week were unfolding. (309)

Indeed, in an analysis of Pearse’s political and fictional writings, P. Hogan claims that the poet and schoolmaster “almost always formulated the national question in terms of sin and redemption” (31) and that he “developed his nationalism in spiritual terms, emphasizing the special relation of Ireland to God in a way that fit well with sacrificial emplotment” (31). According to P. Hogan, “[t]he Easter Uprising is inseparable from the sacrificial narratives that Pearse and others used to organize and understand Irish nationhood” (32). For P. Hogan even the fact that the Rising took place during Easter week, “the major Christian feast celebrating the sacrificial narrative of Jesus” (28), is no coincidence. In any case, there is consensus on one

point: it was “the British reaction to the uprising (...) —the executions, thus the martyring of the leaders” that “inspired the Irish people with a renewed desire for independence and a will to work for independence” (P. Hogan 28).

In an opinion article written for *The Guardian* on the centenary of the Easter Rising, Fintan O’Toole reflects on the entity of the rebellion and its actual meaning and importance. He highlights one of the most striking qualities of the Rising when he says that it “can be seen as a foundational event for three political entities: the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and (...) the current United Kingdom, which changed radically when most of Ireland won its independence” (“The Terrible Beauty”). O’Toole’s theory that would explain why such a “relatively minor disturbance”, when compared to the magnitude of the Great War, became “so potent”, is that “[i]t is one of those events that has a protean quality - it continually changes its shape”. By alluding to the poem “Easter 1916” by W.B. Yeats, in which the poet refers to the momentum of the Rising and its impact with the line “a terrible beauty is born”, O’Toole argues that “in fact the terrible beauty was not just born: it remains alive. And, like any living thing, it alters over time. Amount the things that change utterly and constantly is the meaning of the Rising itself”.

O’Toole, then, moves on to the idea that “what happened to the Rising is that it very quickly moved out of the realm of historical fact and into that of the imagination” and draws on the imagery of the Rising’s executions, particularly that of James Connolly,⁵⁶ to exemplify the force of this “realm of the imagination” and to state that “[t]he Rising itself, retrospectively reshaped as a ritual of heroic male self-sacrifice (...) is an even more potent drama than O’Casey’s masterpiece [*The Plough and the Stars*]. It is gripping, compelling and intensely moving”. According to O’Toole, “this imaginative triumph is also the reason why the Rising

⁵⁶ James Connolly had been badly wounded on one leg during the Rising and, therefore, he was tied to a chair in order to be executed. (P. Collins; “Connolly”)

generates such anxiety”: while “facts can be analysed, weighed, placed in perspective”, “[i]maginative happenings make different kinds of demands. They compel us to enter fully into their spirit”. This spirit would consist, always according to O’Toole, of “the notion that a visionary minority can, without popular consent, stage a symbolic coup that will awaken the slumbering minority to its historic duties”. The problem, as O’Toole admits, is that “its imaginative logic is equally available to violent minorities”, even for any such groups “[f]ar beyond Ireland”. Thus, in order to “contain this imaginative power”, O’Toole suggests that it is necessary to “[shift] back to facts”, although he also acknowledges that “facts will not be enough”, since “the Rising will always be imaginatively powerful”. Therefore, in recalling Yeats’s and O’Casey’s works, O’Toole invites us “to ask (...) what it is exactly that we want to imagine”, as he himself offers “the idea that the rebels themselves imagined: a real republic of equal citizens”.⁵⁷

1.2.2.3. *The Rising through Roddy Doyle’s Eyes*

As I pointed out above, although McCarthy contends that “[t]he most important revisionist feature of the novel is its construction of a social and economic rather than nationalist-political context for the 1916 Rising”, based on “Henry and Victor’s childhood as ‘street Arabs’” (205), he also adds that “where his revisionist fiction really takes off is with the pointed juxtaposition of Connolly and the other leaders, and of the Citizen Army soldiers and the Volunteers” (206).

⁵⁷ As O’Toole himself acknowledges in his opinion article, the work of recovering the facts of 1916 has already begun. There are books and documentaries that seek to move the gaze away from the martyrs’ stories during that fateful Easter week in order to focus on what the Rising meant for other, more ordinary people. O’Toole provides the example of Joe Duffy’s book *Children of the Rising: The Untold Story of the Young Lives Lost During Easter 1916* (2015), which recovers the true stories of the forty children who were killed during Easter week. A similar effort can be found in the docudrama *A Terrible Beauty...* (2013), written and directed by Keith Farrell, which narrates the Rising through the dramatised accounts of both Irish and British soldiers, as well as ordinary people who were caught up in the fighting.

Indeed, Henry's experience at the GPO greatly differs from that of the Volunteers. What is more, he openly despises the Volunteers and their attitude and makes a clear distinction between their fight and ambitions and his own and that of his comrades from the ICA. For Henry it is clear: "I was one of the few real soldiers there; I had nothing to fear and nothing to go home to" (*ASCH* 89). Despite being only fourteen years old, Henry's harsh childhood experiences have hardened him to an unusual degree for his age. An example of this difference can be found in a passage, in which Henry mocks a Volunteer called O'Toole, because he reports having found "tills full of money" (88), but has failed to keep some for himself. Henry's criticism, yet, runs deeper:

The fuckin' eejit. I looked at his trousers as he went off with the officer and there wasn't the bulge of a wad or a pull on a leg that would have come from the weight of half-crowns or florins. The eejit. I could tell from the back of his head, he was one of the Christian Brother's boys, here to die for Ireland, dying to please his betters. (...) I watched O'Toole carrying a pile of till drawers out to the stairs, the self-importance running out of him in his snot. His mammy had combed his hair that morning, before he'd gone off on his manoeuvres for Ireland. He was seventeen. Three years older than me. And lifetimes younger. (89)

Henry knows from experience that no-one is going to look after him and, although he believes that he will die in the GPO, he "d still been hoping to get a few quid into my pocket in case the worst came to the worst and I lived" (*ASCH* 89). Not only does Henry declare that his conscience would not let him ignore that he finds himself in "a great building full of money" (89), but, more importantly, he despises O'Toole's appearance of integrity: he thinks that the Volunteer is plainly stupid. As I see it, the differences that Henry perceives between him and O'Toole form another example of what Kearny terms the tension between the idioms of piety and secularity. According to him, "[i]f the former pertains to the sacred time of myth, the latter pertains to the profane time of our ordinary experience" (7). Thus, while O'Toole's main objective is to prove his attachment to the nationalist cause by risking his life for Ireland, Henry scorns such behaviour and thinks in strictly material terms. Tracking the opposition between the mythological and the secular in the field of literature, Kearney points out that Yeats's work

“sponsored mythology” (13), while Beckett “repudiated Yeats’ mythologising as sanctimonious clap-trap” (15), a critique that is echoed by Henry in his criticism of the Volunteers, as I show below. Additionally, in an analysis of Pearse’s belief system, Kearney argues that

[i]n the name of a national Revival, Pearse sought a return to the foundational myths of our [Irish] identity, to a sense of rootedness in the past which would allow us to make the break with the ‘alien’ culture of colonial Britain which had uprooted and alienated us from our original sense of ourselves. These foundational myths, which would enable the orphaned child to return to the security of its maternal origins, were identified by Pearse in a positive sense with the three mothers of our historical memory: the mother church of the Catholic revival; the motherland of the nationalist revival; and the mother-tongue of the Gaelic revival. (18-9)

Throughout the whole trilogy, but particularly in the part under analysis here, Henry performs a clear break with these “three mothers”.

As mentioned above, Henry’s distance from the Volunteers and, by extension, with the nationalist cause is especially marked through the opposition between the mythological and the secular. While throughout his account of the Rising, Henry describes the Volunteers’ actions as being spurred by abstract ideas, he remains tied to the material world and his present problems. This is further exemplified in the difference with which the Volunteers and Henry treat the women who attempt to storm the GPO and the looters on the streets.

The women who storm the GPO (or the shawlies, as Henry refers to them) are none other than the wives and widows of the soldiers who are fighting in France and who demand to be given their allowances (*ASCH* 101). Henry, who understands the women’s desperate situation from his own experience, tries to persuade Michael Collins to give the women money from the tills he has seen before. There are two crucial aspects that I wish to point out in this scene: the first one is Henry’s alignment with the women’s cause, rather than with that of his comrades in arms and, the second one, Henry’s empathy towards the soldiers who are fighting in the British Army.

That Henry should align with the shawlies could seem surprising, for the women, who “don’t want a republic” (*ASCH* 102) and believe that the real war is the one going on in France, have been mocking the rebels. Still, Henry’s class awareness prompts him to side with the women and leads him to conclude that the Volunteers, in turn, despise working-class people like him: “Jesus, I hated the Volunteers. The poets and the farm boys, the fuckin’ shopkeepers. They detested the slummers - the accents and the dirt, the Dublinness of them. When was the last time Collins had been hungry? I knew the answer just by looking at the well-fed puss on him” (103). When Collins attempts to dismiss Henry’s proposal by reminding him that the women are only asking for their allowances “[b]ecause their husbands are in the British Army” (103), implying that they are allied with the enemy, Henry retorts that: “[a] job’s a job, sir (...). — Some of the men here were in the Army. And most of the military garrisoned here in Dublin are Irish” (103). It is this last sentence that gives way to the second interesting aspect that I pointed out above: unlike Collins, Henry is able to empathise with the soldiers who fight for the British, because he understands that, for them, need goes before ideology.⁵⁸ In his realisation of this circumstance, Henry may be closer than ever to the Marxist rallying cry “Workers of the world, unite!”.⁵⁹ Only a few pages later, a brief dialogue between Paddy Swanzy (another ICA soldier) and Henry prompts the latter to make the following reflection about their enemy: “[Paddy] knew as well as I did: most of the British soldiers were Irish. Irishmen who’d needed the work. And anyway, we’d nothing against Englishmen either, or Scots or Welshmen. We were fighting a class war. We weren’t in the same battle at all as the rest of the rebels. And they’d find that out soon enough” (107).

⁵⁸ According to the hierarchy of needs designed by Abraham Maslow (1943, 1970), which consists of five levels from highest to lowest priority (physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualisation), a human being will only be able to focus on less priority needs once the most basic are fulfilled. In the case of the slum-dwellers that appear in *A Star*, neither the most basic physiological needs (including hunger and health) nor the safety needs (including peace, security or stability) are covered (Navy).

⁵⁹ The phrase, “Workers of the world, unite!” is the popularised form of the rallying cry that appears in the English translation of the 1848 Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Working men of all countries, unite!”. The German original reads “*Proletarier aller Länder, vereinigt euch!*” (Marx and Engels).

Another incident that shows the social difference between the Volunteers and the Citizen Army men occurs as a result of the looting that takes place in the confusion of the fight. Already the manner in which Henry describes the Volunteers' reaction ("I heard the shock in the Volunteer voices: —They're looting over there, sir!" (*ASCH* 113)) points at this self-righteous quality he so despises.⁶⁰ When Henry observes the scenario in which "[t]he kids had broken into Lawrence's toy and sports bazaar, and had released all the fireworks" and that "the citizens of Dublin were lifting everything they could get their hands on", he states that "once again, I felt that I was on the wrong side of the barricade" (113). In stark contrast, the Volunteers' reaction is one of rage and closely tied to the capitalist concept of private property:

An outraged voice beside us cried out.
 —They're Irish shops they're robbing!
 —Good for them, said Paddy Swanzey back at the Volunteer.
 —It's all Irish property!
 —It'll still be Irish after it's taken. (114)

In this typically Doylean humorous exchange, the relaxed attitude of the ICA soldier Paddy Swanzey contrasts heavily with the concerned attitude of the Volunteer, whose anger does not seem to be caused so much by ethical or moral preoccupations, but rather by a wounded national pride. Very soon, the situation takes a turn for the worse, when "[o]ne of the Volunteer officers (...) came storming towards our section. He was unbuckling his holster as he went but his fury made his fingers hopeless. —We'll have to make an example of them, he shouted. —Or we'll be hanging our heads in shame among the nations in the world" (114). It is in this precise moment that Henry, Paddy and Felix (all ICA soldiers) feel the obligation to turn their weapons toward the Volunteers "to protect the people outside" (114). The situation comes to its climax when Henry aims his rifle at Patrick Pearse and claims that he was "ready to shoot" (115). However, Connolly manages to diffuse the tension and, when everything is settled once

⁶⁰ It is noteworthy that the soldiers are presented *en masse* in the "Volunteer voices" and, perhaps quite unfairly, any appearance of individuality has been erased.

again, he privately tells Henry, “We’re surrounded by gobshites” and specifies, “Catholic and capitalist, Henry. It’s an appalling combination” (115-6).

This last exchange between Connolly and Henry, immediately following Henry’s confrontation with Pearse, also exemplifies the different light in which the leaders of the Rising are portrayed in *A Star*. While James Connolly is pictured as a wise man, a father-like figure who takes Henry under his wing and teaches him how to read and write while making him acquainted with socialism, the representation of some of the other leaders, revered icons of Irish nationalism, verges on caricature. For instance, in the following passage, Henry describes that “I’d seen Commandant Pearse arrive in full uniform, pistol, provisions, sword, the lot, all under his greatcoat, cycling over Butt Bridge, the Commander-In-Chief of the Army of the Irish Republic and President-Elect, struggling across the bridge and sweating like a bastard. And his little brother and faithful hound, Willie, pedalling away behind him” (*ASCH* 91). Likewise, Henry sarcastically calls a group of officers, who, in real life, would also be turned into martyrs, “a fine body of men”, as “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” (*ASCH* 93).⁶¹ Once again, in stark contrast, Connolly is portrayed as “[a] tangible, humane figure”, as Pierse writes, “in an almost Messianic light” (242). Indeed, the shock that Henry and his comrades experience on learning the news that Connolly has been wounded during the fighting attests to their love and respect for their mentor (*ASCH* 126-7).

As I see it, the different light under which the leaders of the Rising are portrayed in *A Star* clearly pushes the idea that, at least for Henry, Connolly’s vision for Ireland would have been preferable to that of the other leaders (especially Pearse’s). Still, it needs to be pointed

⁶¹ Thomas Clarke was born in 1858, hence, at the time of the Rising, was 58 years old—probably an impressive age for young Henry. Joseph Mary Plunkett (1887-1916) suffered from glandular tuberculosis, among other sporadic illnesses, and had undergone surgery a short time before the Rising (L. White; “Plunkett”).

out that Connolly was not only a Marxist, but that he also believed that the emancipation of Ireland went hand in hand with the emancipation of the working class.⁶² Therefore, Pierse criticises Doyle's simplified representation of Connolly and argues that the author "eschews the actual politics that Connolly espoused, in which nationalism and socialism, 'the two currents of revolutionary thought in Ireland [...] were not antagonistic but complementary'" (*Writing* 242). Furthermore, according to Pierse, Connolly's vision

is conveniently remoulded, like so many other aspects of the Rising, to accord with Doyle's revisionist views. In doing so, the author is ironically open to the very charge he makes against the emergent nationalist hegemony, that of rendering Connolly, who was "dangerous alive", "more useful washed and dead" (SCH, p. 318). The novel traduces Connolly's political vision, supplanting it with a liberal-humanist ethic of eternal verities – of a benevolent essence, which he comes to characterise. (*Writing* 242)

Thus, Connolly's representation in *A Star* could also be taken as a caricature, although a much more elaborate and benign one than that of the other leaders.

Returning to the differences between the Volunteers and Henry, the latter continues denying any attachment to the nationalist cause, maintaining his position from "Part 1" of *A Star*. This can be seen in Henry's comment about the banner that had been hanging on the façade of Liberty Hall, that read "We Serve Neither King nor Kaiser, but Ireland" (see Fig. 3): "If I'd had my way, *Or Anyone Else* would have been added, instead of *But Ireland*. I didn't give a shite about Ireland." (ASCH 91; original emphasis).

⁶² This idea is expressed, for example, in the collection of writings *Socialism and the Irish Rebellion* by James Connolly, published in 2008 by Red and Black Publishers.

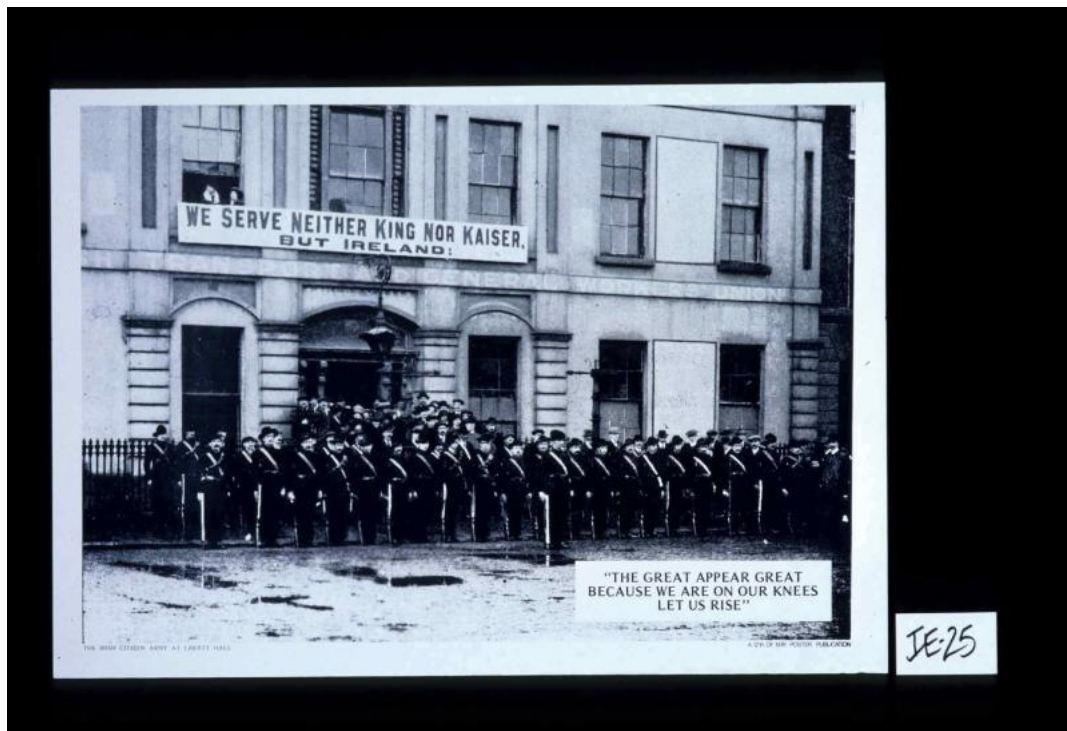


Fig. 3. *Photograph of Irish Soldiers*. ca. 1914/18, Hoover Institution Library & Archives. (Liberty Hall).

As Henry affirms, he is not at the GPO to liberate Ireland but to fight a class war (ASCH 107). Thus, his first bullet is not aimed at an English soldier, but at the windows of the shops in front, where Henry “shot and killed all that I had been denied, all the commerce and snobbery that had been mocking me and other hundreds of thousands behind glass and locks, all the injustice, unfairness and shoes - while the lads took chunks out of the military” (105). Although Henry’s actions here have been criticised as futile (see Krause), I believe that this passage has, above all, a symbolic value: it shows the readers what Henry’s true motivations are and that he is not fighting for any of the ideals that most of the other soldiers, especially the Volunteers, share. Henry’s reason for hating and for wanting to fight the oppressors is that he identifies them as the main cause of inequality in Ireland and, hence, as the ones responsible for his miserable childhood and, by extension, that of all the other slum children in Dublin, but, ultimately, for Victor’s death. This is also the reason that Henry aims his weapon specifically at shoes, which in the enumeration above is paired with the word *unfairness*.

More can be learned about Henry's personal cause in another passage. When Pearse and the other leaders of the rebellion stand in front of the GPO and the Proclamation of Independence is read out, Henry explains that the phrase "[t]he Republic (...) declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally" was "[m]y part. My contribution. My present to Victor" (ASCH 96; original emphasis) and proceeds to explain how Connolly had shown him the text of the Proclamation only the night before and asked for Henry's opinion. Henry would have been the one to suggest that "[t]here should be something in there about the rights of children" (97).

Although Lanthers (254) correctly emphasises that the use of *children* in the Proclamation stands for the Irish population and not for actual children, in my view this is beside the point.⁶³ I have already established in the introduction to this chapter that Henry is an unreliable narrator and that he has a very high self-esteem. Most of his accounts are not only exaggerated but tend to place him in a fantastic light (as the most handsome man or the bravest). Therefore, whether Henry is exaggerating his contribution to the Declaration of Independence, or making it entirely up is not so relevant. In my view, the importance of this scene (much like Henry's shooting at shoes) is that it serves the purpose of showing Henry's ultimate concerns and motivations, in other words, of letting the readers see a key part of his character, like his unwavering wish that no other child will ever have to endure the utter misery that Victor and himself experienced.

Returning to the differences between the Volunteers and the ICA men, another key point of divergence between the two groups is religion. While the myth-driven Volunteers

⁶³ According to Lanthers, Henry "undermines this Gaelic conceit", meaning the image of Ireland as a woman who summons her children to her flag. However, Lanthers continues "the problem with Henry's version of the story is that the metaphor of the nation's children being summoned to her flag introduced in the first sentence of the Proclamation is sustained throughout the text (...). To interpret literally only one of the four references to children makes no sense; to take them all literally makes even less sense" (254).

display great shows of devotion, the secular ICA men are rather critical of their peers' behaviour. For example, when, at a given moment, the rebels begin to pray, neglecting their duty of guarding the barricades, Henry wonders "[w]hat sort of a country were we going to create?" and states that "[i]f we were attacked now, we were fucked. I didn't want to die in a monastery" (*ASCH* 112). Henry's comrades do not like the situation either. Observing Count Plunkett, who "could hardly stand", who "was dying, a waste of a bullet, but (...) had the energy to beat his breast and drive his knees into the tiles", Paddy muses, "The first sorrowful mystery (...) How we ever ended up with those gobshites" (111). Even Connolly is "grinding his teeth" and Henry claims that he "could almost hear them crumbling above the rosary drone" (111), indicating the socialist leader's barely controlled anger at the scene he is witnessing.

In another scene, women belonging to Cumann na mBan are serving dinner while the GPO is under enemy fire,⁶⁴ when a Volunteer refuses his plate, claiming that he "won't eat meat on a Friday" (*ASCH* 130). Henry, instead, who, during his childhood experienced severe hunger ("The sweet factory, I'd often put my mouth under a pipe and swallowed the waste that poured out of Williams and Woods; it had been my dinner and tea" (*ASCH* 132)) and consistent with his earlier behaviour and principle on not wasting any opportunity, gladly takes the plate:

I stood up straight in the main hall and ate the Volunteer's dinner, the best bit of chicken I'd ever tasted. I felt the hot draught of passing bullets, a slice of shrapnel flew into one of my spuds and fizzled, but I ate it all up, every last mouthful. They watched me, waited for God's bullet to send me down to hell. But, as two of the gawking Volunteers were hit by machine-gun spray and fell screaming onto the wet tiles, I lifted my head up, brought the empty plate up to my face and licked it clean. Then I handed it back to the woman.

—Thanks very much, I said. —That hit the spot.

—You're very welcome, she said.

She was trying to control a grin. (130)

The force of this scene is striking. It presents Henry as a hero-like figure, standing tall amid absolute chaos, immune to harm, infusing as ordinary an action as eating with an epic quality,

⁶⁴ "The League of Women", set up in 1914, were "the women's auxiliary corps to the Volunteers". During the Rising, they mainly played a role "in signals, first aid and dispatch-running" (Clear).

especially when he takes his time to lick the plate amid enemy fire. His courage (or carelessness) starkly contrasts with the Volunteers' fear and fussiness. What is more, the woman's approval of Henry's actions further reinforces his attitude (which is strictly linked to his heightened ego) in detriment of the Volunteers'.

1.2.2.4. *Mythology and the Provisional IRA*

If the distinction between mythology and secularity is not described through such direct terminology in *A Star*, it most certainly is in *The Dead Republic*, especially in the scenes in which Henry interacts with the Provisional IRA. The "Provos" contact Henry after he becomes the victim of one of the UVF bombs that exploded on Talbot Street in 1974 and explain to him that he is "the living proof" that the IRA are "the legitimate government of Ireland" (184).⁶⁵ For them, Henry has acquired the status of a prophet and the word religion is used frequently in their exchanges.

The bomb that Henry becomes a victim of is detonated in the context of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.⁶⁶ After this, as I introduced above, the Provisional IRA recruit a confused

⁶⁵ See "Historical Context" in the Introduction (p. 29).

⁶⁶ The beginning of the Troubles is usually situated in 1968, after a march organised in Derry by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), to protest against the discrimination of Catholics and gerrymandering, was violently suppressed by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) (Wallenfeldt). From that moment on, tension and violence in Northern Ireland escalated until the British Army was sent there to restore peace, something which, however, only led to an intensification of the conflict. The IRA, which in 1969 split into the Official IRA and the Provisional IRA (also known as Provos), were the paramilitary force that fought on the side of the Catholic nationalists. After a decade of fighting, in 1980, several IRA prisoners who had already been protesting because their Special Category Status as political prisoners had been suspended in 1976, began hunger strikes. After ten of the strikers had died without achieving any significant result from their demands to the British Government and, seeing that the families of the remaining strikers announced that they would intervene to avoid any further deaths, the strike was abandoned in October 1981. According to the information provided by the CAIN Archive, nonetheless, "[t]he hunger strike of 1981 had very important and far-reaching consequences for Northern Ireland and proved to be one of the key turning points of 'the Troubles'" ("A Chronology"). This was mainly because "[t]he Republican movement had achieved a huge propaganda victory over the British government and had obtained a lot of international sympathy" ("A Chronology"). An increase in support for the IRA and, politically, for Sinn Féin, added to "[t]he British government's fear that [Sinn Féin] would overtake the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) as the main representative of the Catholic population of Northern Ireland", would have been "a key reason for the government signing the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) on 15 November 1985" ("A Chronology"). The AIA was "[s]igned (...) by the British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, and the Irish

Henry who, to his own embarrassment, “hadn’t paid attention to the Troubles” but “been living in [his] own contented republic” (*TDR* 165). Believing that Henry, an old IRA veteran due to his fight in the War of Independence, had been elected to the First Dáil, the Provisionals want him to make official appearances with them and to legitimate their fight in the North. Henry, who first believes he is going to be the IRA’s mascot (185), explains how “the realisation came, the reminder - the man with the beard had actually said it: this was religion. They thought I was Moses, someone who’d actually spoken to God. I wasn’t a symbol: I was an old, rediscovered fact. The eleventh commandment” (186).⁶⁷ Desperately wishing to be useful again and to fight, in his old age, Henry decides not to tell the IRA that he was not actually at the First Dáil. Although, at this point, readers know that Henry tends to exaggerate, in this particular instance, it is not he who does so; he even rejects any sort of special treatment. In line with his disgust for religion,⁶⁸ he correlates it with madness (*TDR* 186) and when the IRA leader tells Henry that the reason they want him is, precisely, religion, Henry’s blunt answer is “[f]uck religion” (192). On another occasion, when Henry gets caught in the middle of a riot and, although unharmed, is covered in other people’s blood, he demands to be photographed as a strategy to generate sympathy for an old, apparently bleeding man and, by extension, the

taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald. It was agreed that the British and Irish governments would consult regularly and formally on major aspects of Northern Irish policy” (Connolly and Hepburn). However, a final solution to the Troubles was not found until 10 April 1998, when the Belfast Agreement (or Good Friday Agreement) was signed, after 30 years of violence which left about 3,600 people dead and over 30,000 wounded (Wallenfeldt). The Belfast Agreement “created a new power-sharing arrangement, including an Executive and Assembly, and was based on a series of fundamental principles including: the parity of esteem of both communities; the principle of consent underpinning Northern Ireland’s constitutional status; the birthright of the people of Northern Ireland to identify and be accepted as British or Irish, or both, and to hold both British and Irish citizenship. (...) The Agreement resulted in the creation of the three strands of political structures, respectively covering Northern Ireland’s governance, North-South relations, and East-West relations. (...) The Agreement also set out a series of important rights for the people of Northern Ireland, including on identity and citizenship, and made commitments on decommissioning, security, policing and prisoners” (Northern Ireland Office).

⁶⁷ Although the readers never learn the identity of this character, who remains “the man with the beard”, Henry does point out that it is not Gerry Adams in a parenthetical comment: “You think it was Adams. But it wasn’t. It was a different man. Adams was in Long Kesh, in Cage 11, becoming Gerry Adams” (*TDR* 182).

⁶⁸ Henry’s hatred for religion goes so far that, in *A Star*, during military training he makes his men shout: “Fuck you, God!” (227), an act which Ivan Reynolds, a character that becomes Henry’s enemy and who had shouted “loudest and longest” (*ASCH* 227), later regrets (*TDR* 229).

IRA's cause. However, the IRA's response is that "[w]e don't want you to be seen bleeding, (...) You're not flesh and blood" to which Henry replies, "I fuckin' am" (276).

It seems likely that the religious imagery used by Doyle in his representation of the IRA could be rooted in real facts. In *Myth and Motherland*, Kearney focuses on the hunger strike strategy used by the IRA convicts in Maze Prison. As he explains,

the death of the hunger-strikers in Long Kesh was frequently presented in sacrificial terms. Posters showed battered, tortured or starved prisoners in Christ-like posture, the wire of Long Kesh transformed into a crown of thorns, the H-Block blanket into a crucifixion cloth. (...) the 'prison wing' of the movement often invoke the more mythic idioms of Gaelic, Catholic tribalism. Daily mass in Long Kesh became, by the prisoners' own admission, a major source of sustenance by enabling them to identify with the 'Gethsemane' agonies of Pearse and other Fenian martyrs. (11-2)

Thus, by employing what Kearney terms "the extraordinary propaganda power of mythic logic" (11), the IRA were able to raise Catholic sympathy north and south of the border. Indeed, recovering a citation from the beginning of this section, the IRA hunger-strikers "realign[ed] their suffering with a mythic-religious tradition (...) stretching back through the 1916 leaders, Terence McSwiney, O'Donovan Rossa and the Fenian Martyrs to the timeless personae of Cuchulain on the one hand and of Christ on the other" (Kearney 5-6). In *The Dead Republic*, this realignment is not lost to Henry who equates the past with the present. For example, after the death of Bobby Sands, Henry describes how "[t]housands of people marched slowly behind his coffin to the republican plot in Milltown cemetery. Thousands more stood at the roadside as we passed. In Belfast this time, not Dublin. 1981 this time, not 1917. Bobby Sands, not Thomas Ashe"⁶⁹ and adds that "I thought I'd stood there before; I'd already been at this funeral" (251).

⁶⁹ Thomas Ashe (1885-1917) was a teacher, a member of the IRB and of the Irish Volunteers. After his arrest in 1917, he initiated a hunger strike, together with other prisoners, demanding "'political prisoner' or 'prisoner of war' status". Ashe died after being force-fed by an inexperienced medical practitioner (Woods and Murphy).

Henry sees such a big similarity between the two different periods of fighting that, when special agents in Dublin recruit him to inform for them about the IRA, Henry manages to content them by talking about the past in present terms: “I shifted the geography from Dublin to the north, but I told them what I’d seen and known – or thought I’d known – in 1920. I changed the tense from past to present and informed of men who were long dead” (*TDR* 255). On another occasion, while musing about the manner in which Thatcher was “the Provisionals’ greatest asset”, as her actions kept hatred for the English focused, Henry again makes a comparison with 1916: “I knew the story. I was the story. I knew how the stupidity of 1916 had been turned to glorious success. The British had helped there too, when they’d executed the leading men instead of kicking them in their holes and sending them home” (284).⁷⁰

Still, Henry refuses to participate in the abstract and keeps his feet rooted in the ground, not only by rejecting the IRA’s continuous religious terms to describe him, but also by showing his contrary opinion to the hunger strike as a strategy. Echoing Henry’s reasoning at the GPO, when he takes the plate of a Volunteer who refuses to eat, he tells the IRA leader the following: “I knew hunger all my life, I said. —And it was never a fuckin’ strike. Only the middle class could come up with starvation as a form of protest” (*TDR* 242). Nonetheless, this time Henry is not as harsh in his criticism, as he later reflects that, although he does not “like the hunger strike as a tactic (...) it was honest - it was absolutely clear. The striker chose silence, emptiness, the step forwards into nothing. Nothing was better than what was on offer. It was full freedom, or death” (257). Henry even admits that the strikers’ “silence impressed me more than anything I’d met since Citizen Army men ran out the side door of the GPO and took the bullets for the men who were right behind them” (257). More importantly, however, Henry recognises “the extraordinary propaganda power of mythic logic” (Kearney 11): although he

⁷⁰ Although what Henry means by *stupidity* is not clarified in the text, his use of this word testifies to his altered view of 1916 now that he is much older. As I see it, in light of the context in which the phrase is uttered, I believe that by *stupidity* Henry, now disenchanted with his struggle, means the futile loss of lives in 1916.

does not like it, he acknowledges that “[d]efeat was always victory, another telling of the old story, to lure the latest young lads into the movement. Defeat was impossible. It was just a horrible kind of victory, the victim's wheezy triumph” (276).

In *The Dead Republic*, Henry also uses different methods to fight his war against mythology, as I showed with Henry’s strategy of calling the Priest of Ratheen *Father* to his own advantage (see “1.2.1.3. First Contact with Nationalism and Religion”, p. 61). Other instances of this can be observed, for example, in the scenes in which Henry works as a school caretaker. Despite making it his personal quest to intimidate the teachers into not exceeding the number of slaps they give the students beyond “[s]ix of the famous best” (*TDR* 145), when the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Rising is coming near and the teachers become more impatient and violent as the students need to learn “rebel songs and laments”, Henry decides not to intervene, because “I knew it would poison the boys, that they’d always associate *A Nation Once Again* and *Kevin Barry* with being skinned alive by some mad culchie teacher with spots across his forehead, bouncing up and down with a tuning fork in a cloud of chalk dust and dandruff. It would make real rebels of them later, as they grew up” (160-1).⁷¹

Likewise, Henry knows how to play on the IRA men’s sentimentality when they test his loyalty through a violent interrogation. Thus, when they ask Henry if he has ever been arrested before, Henry responds affirmatively and that the reason for it was “[b]eing Irish”. Immediately, Henry notices that “[t]hey loved that one; I heard them behind me” and acknowledges that “[i]f I’d been in charge, I’d have slapped the head off the man who gave that answer. The sentimentality nearly made me puke” (*TDR* 246). In the same scene, Henry also tries to win the interrogator’s sympathy by singing *Kevin Barry*, although this time “[n]o one joined in, took the bait” (248). Still, Henry makes it clear that “I hated that song. I hated

⁷¹ To listen to *A Nation Once Again*, visit <https://tuit.cat/YwIG0> and to listen to *Kevin Barry*, <https://tuit.cat/mYHr2>.

all songs” (248).⁷² Although Henry respects the IRA men in a way that he had not respected the Volunteers, he still feels a distance between them and himself and, in this case, it is mostly rooted in their use of and belief in a mythological discourse that Henry despises.

1.2.3. The Triumph of Stories

Throughout the trilogy, storytelling is a recurring theme and, as I analyse in this section, it has different functions. On the one hand, storytelling—perhaps more than this, something akin to mythmaking, or even telling tales—takes on a crucial role in *A Star*, in the part devoted to the War of Independence (1919-1921), when a character named Jack Dalton uses it to win Henry over to the Republican cause. On the other hand, Henry tries to construct the truth about a mysterious character known as Alfie Gandon through the stories that he learns from different people. Moreover, storytelling is used by different characters, especially by Henry, Sr., to fill the holes in their lives, as, recalling Henry’s words, “[s]tories were the only things that the poor owned” (*ASCH* 7). For example, lacking crucial knowledge about his past and his ancestors, Henry makes it up, something which is reflected in the scenes of *A Star* in which he tells the readers about his parents’ and Granny Nash’s past. Likewise, as I advanced in the section “1.2.1.2. The Great Depression and the Loss of a Son” (p. 58), in *Oh, Play*, Henry and his family use storytelling as a sort of radar to try to locate each other, again as the only means they have of attempting to communicate with each other. Finally, in *The Dead Republic*, the superposition of stories also adopts a major role, as Ford demands that Henry read Maurice Walsh’s *The Quiet Man* in preparation for the film that Ford wants to make, supposedly, about Henry’s life. This last element, however, is analysed in “1.2.4.1. Contesting Versions of Reality” (p. 102).

⁷² This is explained in “1.2.3.1. The Bold Henry Smart” (p. 87).

1.2.3.1. *The Bold Henry Smart*

At the beginning of the War of Independence, in “Part 3” of *A Star*, Henry is only eighteen years old and a wanted man, hiding at Piano Annie’s place and going by the name of Fergus Nash.⁷³ At this stage, Henry has lost everyone that had once been close and dear to him: apart from the characters who died or disappeared during his childhood, Henry cannot find his mother anywhere (*ASCH* 162); Connolly, who had been his mentor, has been executed following the Rising (*ASCH* 147); Paddy Swanzey has been brutally shot in the head while storming out of the GPO (the images of which haunt Henry, adding to the list of traumatic experiences he has had (*ASCH* 133, 143)); the fate of Miss O’Shea, with whom Henry had reconnected during the Rising, is unknown, and when Piano Annie’s supposedly dead husband turns up at the front door of his tenement flat, Henry has to leave there too (*ASCH* 160).⁷⁴ This is the situation in which Henry finds himself when, in the pub, Jack Dalton approaches Henry and calls him by his real name.

Jack, who is also a 1916 rebel, has recently been let out of an English prison, joined the Volunteers and is raising support for the fight against the British. By the end of the night of their first encounter, Jack and Henry are very friendly and Jack surprises Henry by singing the following verse: “*The pride of all Gaels was young Henry Smart*” (*ASCH* 170; original emphasis). In response to Henry’s bafflement, Jack explains that the song is “doing the rounds, man. I heard Dev himself singing it when he was in solitary” (170).⁷⁵ To the question of who

⁷³ Piano Annie is one of the shawlies that Henry had met during the Easter Rising and who takes him in after he escapes from Richmond Barracks.

⁷⁴ Piano Annie believed that her husband had died in the Great War. When it is revealed that this is not the case, the fact that Henry keeps referring to him as “Annie’s dead husband” throughout the novel adds a comical note to the text.

⁷⁵ Éamon de Valera’s birth name was Edward de Valera; it was after he became an Irish nationalist that he changed it to Éamonn, which “became Éamon in the late 1920s” (R. Fanning 39). As a child, he would have been referred to as Eddie. As R. Fanning explains, at Bruree national school, some of de Valera’s peers would call him “Eddie Coll” (17), Coll being the name of de Valera’s Irish family, who took him in after his mother sent him from America, where she stayed, to Ireland. It was at Rockwell College where de Valera “acquired what became the

has written the song, Jack replies: “Who knows? (...) The people. That’s where all the real songs come from” (170). Jack Dalton’s flattery proves to be powerful, especially bearing in mind Henry’s previous disinterest in nationalism, for Henry states that

by the time [Dalton] announced that he had the legs walked off his tongue and he needed some sleep for the next day, I was ready to die again for Ireland; me, who had never been further than Lucan, who less than a year before had jumped over the bodies of friends lying dead and destroyed, who would never have given a fuck what de Valera sang in his prison cell. I was ready to die for Ireland. I was ready to die for Limerick. Ready to fall dead for a version of Ireland that had little or nothing to do with the Ireland I’d gone out to die for the last time. (171)

It is hard to tell if thoughts such as the one voiced in the last sentence of this passage belong to young Henry or to the experienced narrator, who has the perspective that only time can give. Still, there are some instances in which young Henry shows a certain wariness of Jack’s ways. For instance, just before the last passage, Henry explains that “it struck me even then, although I didn’t think much about it at the time, that his [Dalton’s] Ireland was a very small place. Vast chunks of it didn’t fit the bill; he had grudges stored up against the inhabitants of most of the counties. His republic was going to be a few blameless pockets, connected to the capital by vast bridges of his own design” (171).

Other similar comments that could have put Henry on his guard include, for instance, one in which Jack tells Henry not to “be bothering yourself with socialism. That stuff’s only old Jewish shite” (*ASCH* 172), which combines antisocialism with anti-Semitism.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Henry is so swayed by the image of himself as a hero, that, despite these early warnings, he prefers to ignore what he does not like and throw himself into the life of an IRA soldier. The following passage shows how extreme Henry’s sense of self-importance becomes:

lifelong nickname of ‘Dev’” (R. Fanning 28). Due to his remarkable height, de Valera was also known as the Long Fellow (R. Fanning 333) and, according to *Brewer’s Dictionary of Irish Phrase & Fable*, Michael Collins called de Valera the Long Hoor after they became enemies in the context of the Civil War (478). In “De Valera Imagined and Observed”, Ged Martin recounts how “to Britain’s outspoken Dominions Secretary, Jimmy Thomas, [de Valera] was ‘the Spanish onion in the Irish stew’” (93).

⁷⁶ The theme of anti-Semitism in relation with the construction of an Irish national identity is explored further in Chapter Three, “3.2.3.1. Racism in Ireland” (p. 236).

I was one of the legends, one of the survivors of Easter Week. (...) They gawked at me like I was an apparition, one of the executed men come back. They were afraid to speak to me, scared even to meet my glance; their arses hovered over their chairs, in case I wanted to evict them. It was heady stuff; I was a walking saint. And there were women there too, secretly looking at me. (...) I'd hear their talk and whispers, the boys and girls, before I entered the room, and I quickly loved the silence and adoration that were coming my way. (*ASCH* 172)

Similarly, Henry explains that “I was a living, breathing hero - and the best-looking man in the room, owner of the eyes that brought tears to the fannies of every woman who ever as much as glanced at them” (*ASCH* 177). Still, Henry’s highest claim is that, on one occasion, “I was riding the arse off the mother of one of 1916’s executed heroes. I won’t name names. Her son’s portrait was wobbling on the opposite side of the wall as the dancers cantered past him and his grieving mammy backed into me” (177). This scene is yet another example of the myth-shattering nature of *A Star*: not only does it desecrate the image of an actual mythical Irish figure (the martyred son), but, more importantly, it challenges the image of the pious, asexual woman that gained utmost importance in the Irish tradition.⁷⁷

Still, it must be noted here that, in spite of all the myth-shattering elements in *A Star*, as other authors have pointed out, there is also a certain amount of mythmaking, which Henry either contributes to or, at the very least, believes in: the myth surrounding himself. For instance, as Charlotte Jacklein writes, “meaningful existence requires myth-making as well as myth-shattering; Henry continually attempts to construct a story that will give him identity and purpose” (134). Nonetheless, as Lanthers adroitly observes, “myth making is a double-edged sword, and self-creation can easily turn into self-delusion” (251) and, although Lanthers refers

⁷⁷ In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the image of Ireland as a woman took hold of the country’s imagination, as influential poets like Yeats, Mangan or Pearse united images of heroines of Celtic origin with Catholic notions of womanhood in their works. Most representations fell into the category of Ireland as a maiden or Ireland as a mother. In the scene under analysis here, Henry is talking about the mother of a revered icon and, as Aida Rosende writes, “[e]n Irlanda, Padraig Pearse ha sido el autor que más ha utilizado la metáfora de la nación como madre, generando una imagen poético-política *siempre inseparablemente unida a la asexualidad* característica de la iconografía femenina del cristianismo y a la retórica católica del sacrificio y el martirio” (‘in Ireland, Padraig Pearse is the author who has most used the metaphor of the nation as mother, generating a poetic-political image *always inseparably united to the asexuality* characteristic of Christianity’s female iconography and the Catholic rhetoric of sacrifice and martyrdom’, my translation; 263; my emphasis).

to Henry's father in this precise quote, the same applies to the son, as Henry finds out towards the end of *A Star*. I also believe that there is a main difference between Jack's story and the myth and abstraction discussed in "1.2.2. Mythology versus Secularity" (p. 66): in the case of Henry's song, the myth plays on Henry's heightened ego, thus, he never questions the veracity of Jack's words. Later, however, when Henry learns the truth about the song (that Jack made it up to recruit Henry), he becomes quite wary of this sort of praise, a lesson which it becomes clear that he has learned in *The Dead Republic*, when he expresses, for instance, that he hates all songs (248) or refuses to be treated as a prophet by the IRA (192).

As the plot of *A Star* develops, Henry finds himself more and more often in a position that contradicts his socialist views and the principles he held during the Easter Rising. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to say that he is not aware of these contradictions, as can be gathered from several scenes. An example of this is a scene in which Henry attends a secret meeting, where Dinny Archer heavily criticises unions, the men who fought in the British army and calls Larkin and, by extension Connolly, Englishmen (which, in that highly nationalistic context is meant almost as an insult). Archer's rant provokes the following reflection in Henry:

What the fuck was I doing there? Now, according to Dinny Archer and the True-for-you men behind me, that was what Connolly and Larkin had been up to: setting Irishman against Irishman, colluding with the Empire, forcing young men to become fodder for the King. I'd lived in Liberty Hall during the Lockout; I'd been taught to read, write and stand up straight by James Connolly himself; I'd been one of the first and certainly the youngest to join the Citizen Army, and I'd watched my comrades - there was a word I hadn't used or thought of in a long time - I'd watched them being mown down on Moore Street as they ran at the barricades for Irish Labour. And now, I sat there and listened and left Annie's dead husband stranded. I watched him shrink deeper into his threadbare jacket. (...) I let Archer insult him and me and the only people and everything I'd ever believed in.

Why?

And why did I come back the evening after? (*ASCH* 182-3)

Although Henry does not provide an answer for his first question, he does for the second: "Jack Dalton" (183). After the meeting with Archer, Jack manages to sway Henry for the cause yet again, by telling him that the "real work" will be done by a few selected people and taking him

to meet Michael Collins. On their way there, Dalton sings one of his verses, “*Oh he slipped through the night, did the bold Henry Smart*”, and, exactly as the night they met, Henry explains that “[b]efore I went back to bed that night I’d been sworn into the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the secret society at the centre of the centre of all things. I was a Fenian. I was special, one of the few” (184).

Nevertheless, despite being “special” and “one of the few”, during an undercover mission, Henry’s loyalty is secretly tested. When he finds out that he “‘d been watched all the way. In the pitch dark. When I’d cycled into the ditch. Right through Kildare and Westmeath. When I’d slowed down for directions”, he feels “rattled. I hadn’t been trusted. Not enough. Until now. And where was Jack? Was I trusted now? And enough?” (ASCH 199). While this constant climate of secrecy, on the one hand, adds a thrill to the novel, on the other, it seems to be a warning (of which the readers might be more aware than Henry) that Henry is not as prominent in the organisation as he is made to believe he is.

However, it does not take much longer for Henry to find out his true status. In the general election of 1918, Sinn Féin, with Éamon de Valera at its head, obtained a majority of votes.⁷⁸ Henry describes the party thus: “Sinn Féin had very quickly become respectable, the party of the parish priests and those middle-class men cute enough to know when the wind was changing. It was the party with money and faith, and thrilling with it because of its links to the buried martyrs; it was outlawed by the British, but cosy” (ASCH 207). What is more, Henry notices that “many of my fellow revolutionaries, in their Sinn Féin guises, were adding letters to their names. There was Michael Collins M.P. There was Dinny - Denis on the posters - Archer M.P. There was Alfred Gandon M.P. And there was Jack Dalton M.P.” (207). However, Henry realises that “[t]here was no Henry Smart M.P.” (208) and his notion of this leads him to a breakthrough revelation that he voices in the following passage:

⁷⁸ “Sinn Féin candidates won 73 of the 105 seats in Ireland” (Houses of the Oireachtas).

I was four years short of the voting age, I was never a member of Sinn Féin; I wouldn't have stood for election if I'd been asked, but that was the point, and a point that didn't drill itself into my head until 1922: *I hadn't been asked*. I was bang in the middle of what was going to become big, big history, I was shaping the fate of my country, I was one of Collins's anointed but, actually, *I was excluded from everything*. (...) There was no Henry Smart M.P. There was no Annie's Dead Husband M.P. And none of the other men of the slums and hovels ever made it onto the list. *We were nameless and expendable*, every bit as dead as the squaddies in France. We carried guns and messages. We were decoys and patsies. We followed orders and murdered. (ASCH 208; my emphasis)

Instead, Henry is charged with recruiting and training young men for the guerrilla war against the British.⁷⁹ He does this not in Dublin, but in different rural parts of the island. This turns out to be another challenge for him, another reminder that he does not (entirely) belong. The reason for this is his Dublinness and what it represents for the country people:

There was the Dublin problem to be got out of the way as well: they hated anyone or anything from Dublin. Dublin was too close to England; it was where the orders and cruelty came from. And the homespun bollixes in Sinn Féin and the Gaelic League were to blame too; Ireland was everywhere west of Dublin, the real people were west, west, west, as far west as possible, on the islands, the rocks off the islands, speaking Irish and eating wool; the Leaguers lived in Dublin but they went west for their holliers, to the real people. (ASCH 212)

And, referring to the men Henry has to recruit, he adds: "they spoke English but they knew that they were more Irish than I was; they were nearer to being the pure thing. Yet here I was lording it over them, not like the English or the old landlords but a bit like one of their own, a returned Yank or something, like them but not enough. I dressed like them (...) and I looked like them but I was from Dublin" (212). At this point in the novel, hence, another crucial difference between Henry and others appears: rural Ireland versus urban Ireland. If Henry's social class, his anti-religious stance, and his lack of identification with national symbols have already set him apart from the growingly predominant beliefs of the time (epitomised by Sinn Féin's

⁷⁹ There is a passage in R. Fanning's biography of de Valera that attests to the authenticity of Henry's situation. It reads thus: "'The fighting men of limited education, like myself,' observed an officer in Fianna Éireann, the nationalist youth movement, 'devoted most of our energy to the reorganisation of military organisations, while the men of education took over the political machinery. In other words, men of my type were to accept the position of citizen soldiers'" (68).

success), his belonging to the urban working-class further alienates him from, what he himself calls, the “real people” or the “pure” Irish.

As Henry adopts this more reflective attitude, he gives voice to some of his feelings in a scene which has been overlooked by most scholars, but which I take to be quite significant, especially bearing in mind everything that has been written about Henry’s lack of commitment to the socialist cause. While Henry is travelling around the country, always sleeping in different places, he explains that sometimes he would wonder why he was leading this sort of life, especially,

far from Jack and Collins and songs written about me. But some memory of belief would calm me, a feeling of belonging that came when I thought of the people I knew and, always, it was parts of them that came to me - Victor’s hand, my father’s breath, my mother’s lap, Connolly at my shoulder opening the words, his finger following mine across the page, Annie and her singing, her dead husband’s empty sleeve, even Granny Nash’s whispering as she rode deeper into the stories in front of her on the table, Victor’s cough, my mother’s broken words, Paddy Swanzy’s back, him falling on Moore Street, Miss O’Shea running into the bullets on Henry Street, Victor under the tarpaulin and the frost on the gravel path that morning behind the Grand Canal Dock, his cheeks, I rubbed them and rubbed them and all I wanted was to hear another cough, and Victor on my shoulders and Victor beside me at the school railings and Victor and me falling from the wall onto our father’s stomach and the grunting of the fat rozzers trying to follow us. And I knew why I was there, on the damp floors of those strangers’ houses, and I knew that I was right and it gave a point to my loneliness and made a good friend of my anger. (*Star* 227-8)

To me, this passage says more about Henry than his bragging and exaggerations, because it shows that the people that he has lost and most cares for are still so present to him. From Henry’s overall discourse it is easy to assume that he is just a superficial, careless man. However, this glimpse into his private thoughts, shows, again, the ongoing influence of his past on him (most of the people he mentions were only present during his childhood) and, also, how lost and lonely he feels since they are gone. What is more, this passage shows that Henry does not need to believe in a specific political ideology to know that he wants to fight to change the reality around him: he instinctively seems to understand that he needs to take an active part in

shaping the future and aligning it to the needs of the people like himself, that is, of the working class.

1.2.3.2. *Who is Alfie Gandon?*

Another element that promotes storytelling in *A Star*, and that plays a crucial role in freeing Henry from Jack's charm, is a mysterious character that goes by the name of Alfie Gandon. Although Gandon does have a certain relevance in the story, I believe that he mainly serves a narrative purpose by showing certain shady aspects of the Sinn Féin government, at least as these are represented in *A Star*. On another level, Alfie Gandon works as a sort of MacGuffin element that adds intrigue to the plot and helps it develop.

Gandon first appears in relation to Henry's father, as he is the elusive figure who orders the bouncer to kill his victims, by means of a name written on a piece of paper. When Henry, Sr., performs the killings, he only ever gives one message before the lethal stroke: "Alfie Gandon says Hello" (*ASCH* 17). The mystery around Gandon begins when Henry, Sr., precisely at a time when he is "invent[ing] himself, and reinvent[ing]" (*ASCH* 7), chooses to believe that Gandon and Dolly Oblong (the brothel's madame that Henry, Sr., works for and who he falls in love with) are the same person: "—I've always admired Mister Gandon, said Henry. Never met the man, he said to himself. Then, again to himself: *She's* Alfie Gandon. It made him smile. It was brilliant; it thrilled him. He liked her even more" (41; original emphasis).

Years later (many after Henry, Sr., disappears), Henry begins questioning his grandmother, Granny Nash, about Alfie Gandon. The retrieval of information is progressive, as Granny Nash will only give away tiny pieces of the story when Henry brings her a new book to read: thus, the mystery of who Alfie Gandon is, stretches until the last pages of *A Star*.

According to Granny Nash, and referring to Henry's parents, Gandon was "[t]he cause of all their troubles" (*ASCH* 163). She also reveals that Henry, Sr., or "the hoppy fella", as she calls him, alluding to his wooden leg, "did the killing for Gandon" (188). What is more, Granny Nash is aware of Henry, Sr., being mistaken regarding Gandon's identity, for she tells Henry that:

—He thought he was a woman, she said.
 —Who did?
 —The Smart eejit, she said. —The wooden fella.
 (...)
 —Did Gandon dress like Dolly Oblong?
 —Not when I saw him, she said. —The wooden fella was an eejit. Gandon walked past him every night of the week and he never saw him. (163)

This exchange (in which Henry quite comically tries to understand his father's reason for believing that Gandon and Oblong were the same person), points at the fact that Henry, Sr., seemed happy to fool himself. Or, rather, that if he had opened his eyes wider or paid more attention, he too would have realised that Alfie Gandon was a separate entity from Dolly Oblong. Towards the end of the novel, when Henry learns the truth about his father's disappearance, he draws parallelisms between his father's foolishness and his own blindness regarding the part he has played in Ireland's bloody road to independence.

Nevertheless, what Henry learns about Alfie Gandon from Granny Nash is only one side of the story. Henry also learns from another bouncer that "Mister Gandon was a businessman, and one of our own (...) He was a Home Ruler and a Catholic, not like most of the tailgated fuckers who robbed the people blind and called it business" (*ASCH* 165). Later, Henry finds out from Jack Dalton that, in fact, Alfie Gandon is their landlord, and Dalton too, like the bouncer, insists that Gandon is "one of us, man" (189). When Henry asks if that means he is in the organisation, Jack specifies:

—Not at all, (...). —He can't get his hands that dirty. Although he has been fitted for a Volunteer uniform. (...) He's a giant in this city, man. Property, transport, banking, Corps. He's

on them all. He's a powerful man, Henry. And a good one. There's more widows and orphans living off that fella's generosity than the nuns could ever handle. (...) Chamber of Commerce, Gaelic League and a great sodality man. He's perfect. I'll tell you what Mister Gandon is. He's our respectable face. He'll declare for us when the time is right. We're keeping him on ice. (189)

In his new role as a “respectable face”, Alfie Gandon changes his name to the Gaelicised version of O’Gandúin and becomes an MP. Nevertheless, in one of their exchanges, Granny Nash unveils the following secret to Henry: after acknowledging Gandon’s apparent new identity by saying that “[h]e’s a changed man”, she confides to Henry that “he isn’t changed at all” and explains that “[h]e’s still up to his old tricks, (...)—The things the wooden fella used to do for him. Except he has other eejits now to do his dirty work for him. He hasn’t changed a bit” (*ASCH* 239). Considering the direction into which Henry’s story is moving at this point, Granny Nash’s revelation of Gandon’s unchanged habits should work as a warning for Henry. Gandon is effectively covering himself with stories or, rather, with a narrative that he feeds to the rest of the world. Not only is Gandon creating a new version of himself, but he is introduced in crucial moments of Ireland’s history, as Henry finds out in conversation with Jack Dalton. In a manner deeply remindful of George Orwell’s novel *1984* (1949), Dalton has fabricated some details about Gandon’s life, including the fact that Gandon was at the GPO during the Easter Rising. When Henry attempts to confront Jack with the truth, Jack dismisses him completely:

I knew I had to be careful.
—I don’t remember seeing him in the G.P.O., I said.
—He was there, said Jack.
He looked straight at me.
—Other people remember him. (254-5)

This scene is one of the first in which the shady nature of the people who are in charge of constructing the new Republic arises.

As the War of Independence gets bloodier and bloodier, Henry is asked to do increasingly more gruesome things. In one of the parallelisms between Henry's and his father's lives, Henry starts executing people for Collins: "He'd give me a name and I'd deliver a dead man" (*ASCH* 240). Once more, Henry works on the premise that he "was one of the Squad, one of the secret elite. An assassin" (240). The ever-observant Granny Nash, however, delivers an eye-opening message to Henry, as she tells him that

—O'Gandúin whispers names into the ears of the men that matter. Alfie Gandon says Hello.
She stared at me.
—You're just like your father. And that's no compliment. (289)

Henry ends up killing Alfred Gandon as a revenge for ordering the killing of Henry's friends David and Maria Climanis.⁸⁰ It is also then that Dolly Oblong, who is present during the whole scene, pours light on the novel's remaining mystery, mainly, that it was Gandon who ordered the assassination of Henry, Sr., because Henry's father "knew too much and he was trapped" (*ASCH* 338).

1.2.3.3. Stories are the Only Things that the Poor Own

One of the direct results of being slum dwellers, as represented in *A Star*, is that there are no official records of these people's existence.⁸¹ As a consequence, Henry knows practically nothing about his parents and even less about his ancestors. Precisely, speaking about his father, Henry affirms that "[t]he family trees of the poor don't grow to any height" (*ASCH* 7). When

⁸⁰ See footnote 85.

⁸¹ According to Connor, et al. a "complete census of Ireland was taken as part of a larger census of the UK" in 1911. Although this census accounts for the families who lived in tenement houses, it did not really form an accurate system of identification of Dublin's citizens. Doyle's concerns in this regard seem to spring, once again, from personal experience, as he explained of the trouble that his own father had finding any records of his grandmother, that is, of Doyle's great-grandmother (Doyle; "Interview" lines 151-4).

he talks about Granny Nash, his grandmother on his mother's side, Henry clearly states, after giving details of her life, "I don't know any of this" (*ASCH* 2), admitting to his invention of her past. Deffenbacher discusses this and writes that

Henry's first imaginings of Granny Nash's past seem filtered through nationalist iconography, images from the poetic tradition of women as Ireland, Ireland as woman: she is a mythic hag 'wrapped in her sweating black shawl,' then a young, untainted girl from the West, from Roscommon or Clare - Cathleen ni Houlihan, Dark Rosaleen. She then gets down on her back for a queue of foreigners; here Henry is perhaps invoking the 'crone' as 'gay betrayer' or 'common cuckqueen', as does Stephan Dedalus (...). Henry does not (and cannot) know his grandmother's past solely through nationalist icons of Irish womanhood; the best he can do is to imagine through and beyond such images to the fear, desire, and suffering that exceeds them. (151-2)

Having already warned the readers about his limited information, Henry proceeds to talk about his parents and what they were like before they met. However, once again, Henry acknowledges that he knows "precious little" about "poor Mother" (*ASCH* 2) and "nothing real about my father; I don't even know if his name was real" (7). The only stories that Henry knows about his parents are those that Melody has told him, which, taking into account her woeful mental state when Henry is still a small child, could not have been either too many or very reliable.

Nevertheless, the most painful realisation of the lack of an official record comes when Henry tries to find his mother after the Easter Rising:

I walked the city until it was time to walk to work. I walked in circles and bigger circles, (...). That night and the nights after, I walked every square inch of Dublin and looked on every step for my mother. I hadn't seen her in years. I'd run out of basements to search. One day she was where she always was, face pressed to the black sky, the next day she'd vanished, not a hint or a child left behind. (...) I looked for her shadow in the windows of the South Dublin Union. I climbed into Glasnevin Cemetery and tried to feel her as I crawled among the paupers' graves. (*ASCH* 162)

Needless to say, Henry never learns anything about his mother or his siblings again. Henry himself owns no official record of his birth, as he explains in *The Dead Republic* ("There were no records in Dublin; I'd never existed" (86)). If this was not enough, a scene in *A Star*

exemplifies Henry's erasure from history, when Hanratty, the photographer taking a picture of de Valera (see Fig. 4), decides to leave Henry out of it:

The famous photo. The last man to surrender. Hands behind his back, a Tommy on each side of him, another behind. I was there, to the left of de Valera (...). I was beside the great man but Hanratty wouldn't see me. I'd just put my life into the hands of the Empire by answering back with one of the few Irish words I knew - *Anseo* - still defiant, still proud and unrepentant. But 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's elbow. (...) If Hanratty had moved his camera just a bit to the right, just a fraction of a bit, I'd have been in. You'd know my face, you'd know who I was. (...) It became the photograph of Éamon de Valera. It became proof, part of the legend. There he is, the soldier, the father of the state. (...) I was there. (138-9)



Fig. 4. Sherwood Foresters Regimental Museum. *Eamon De Valera Arrested Accompanied by Sherwood Foresters After his Arrest*. 1916, South Dublin County Libraries. (Presumably this is the picture that Henry Smart refers to).

To me, this scene is a direct criticism of the tendency to remove the poor and dispossessed from history, something which Roddy Doyle assiduously works against by placing marginalised characters at the centre of his stories. The fact that Henry points out that if the photographer had wanted to, or cared enough, he could have taken a more accurate picture, points at an intentional erasure of certain elements, in this case of the slum dwellers and members of the working class, from history. Therefore, telling stories, telling *their* stories,

is fundamental to people like Henry, because otherwise they will never have existed. In this vein, in *The Dead Republic*, Henry begins writing down the names of his long-lost siblings and other people that he remembers from his past (pp. 35, 36, 42, 43, 54, 56, 59) and, in the face of Ford's script that diverges more and more from Henry's account, Henry claims the following: "There'd be two stories. There'd be Ford's, *The Quiet Man*, or whatever it was going to be. (...) The names would be my story" (59).

In the last part of *Oh, Play*, storytelling becomes once again the only resource that Henry and his family have left, although this time it is not to fill in a hole (*ASCH* 7). After finding himself in the middle of nowhere, Henry resorts to stories and storytelling in an attempt to find his family, from whom he has become separated, after falling off the train they were traveling on. Nevertheless, living in a nomadic environment, Henry finds that it is practically impossible to locate Miss O'Shea and his children: "[t]he stories came from all directions; she was everywhere" (356). Still, Henry is able to learn important facts about his family, mainly, that they are alive (with the exception of Rifle's gradual disappearance from the stories), but, also, that Miss O'Shea has become a sort of resistance fighter, as she busts tractors to prevent them from braking up farms, organises strikes and even robs banks (356-7).

Henry, familiar with his father's ability of "invent[ing] himself, and reinvent[ing]" (*ASCH* 7), clearly understands the function that these stories have for the people who tell them: "The stories kept these people going. They took some of the heat off their shame, gave them back some self-respect. The teller was part of the story, and so were the listeners, and that was one of their own out there, doing all the winning" (*OPTT* 358). Although the creative quality of these stories makes Henry wonder at their authenticity and shows him that he is probably following an invisible thread, Henry does not give up. Indeed, at one point he even finds wanted

posters, in which Miss O'Shea appears under fake names, such as Kathline O'Houlahan or Dark Rosaleen, which Henry understands are winks to him.⁸²

This gives Henry the idea to do the same and he begins telling the people at the Hoovervilles⁸³ made-up stories about how he has lost his leg: "I'd left Dublin with both legs but I wanted them to know, Miss and Saoirse and Rifle, when they heard about the man with the wooden leg who'd beaten his way out of an ambush of fat rozzers, I wanted them to hear it - Dublin, Ireland - and they'd know: I was out there, looking for them" (*OPTT* 361).

Nonetheless, gradually, the stories stop arriving or they become old and repetitive. Both Miss O'Shea and Henry's alter-egos become entities of their own and the people start making up the tales. It is not until a scene in *The Dead Republic* that Miss O'Shea confirms the authenticity and the intentionality behind the stories:

—I heard stories, I said. —And Wanted posters. Dark Rosaleen. Lady O'Shea.
 —I knew you'd see them.
 —I saw them alright. Too late.
 —I heard about you too, Henry. I knew it was you. One-Leg O'Glick. (199)

1.2.4. The New Republic

1.2.4.1. Contesting Versions of Reality

All the storytelling in the three novels, eventually, leads to the most transversal theme of the trilogy: reality as a construct and its contesting versions; more precisely, the meaning of independent Ireland, what it should be like and what it stands for. As I have shown, Henry's

⁸² The misspelling of the name Kathleen Ní Houlihan seems to be one of the multiple references in the trilogy to the difficulty that US citizens have in understanding and pronouncing Irish names, like Saoirse, which is rendered as "Seer-she" (*OPTT* 207).

⁸³ According to James Gregory, "'Hooverville' became a common term for shantytowns and homeless encampments during the Great Depression". The name was chosen after President Herbert Hoover, as he and "the Republican Party were to be held responsible for the economic crises and its miseries" and, thus, the name *Hooverville* was "a deliberately politicized label".

initial motivation for fighting for Ireland's independence is class-based ("We were fighting a class war" (*ASCH* 107)), and his ideal nation can be guessed from the bits that he claims to have added to the Proclamation of Independence. However, with Connolly's death, these ideas lose their grip on Henry and he seems increasingly to forget his political principles.⁸⁴

The first alternative vision for Ireland appears with Jack Dalton, whose country "was a very small place" (*ASCH* 161), since he despises many parts of the island as well as its inhabitants. Dalton's position, moreover, is antisocialist and anti-Semitic, a view which ends up having major consequences when Henry becomes friends with David Climanis, a "Jew from Latvia" (283) and a communist. As Henry learns towards the ending of *A Star*, Jack Dalton's vision of Ireland is supported by men like Miss O'Shea's cousin Ivan Reynolds, who, having gained great power during the War of Independence, has become a warlord and a businessman and projects a misogynistic, capitalist and corrupt future for Ireland.

In *The Dead Republic*, yet another version of Ireland appears and it is that of John Ford, who envisages an Ireland through the mist of nostalgia, a vision which he portrays in his film *The Quiet Man*. As Henry also learns toward the end of *The Dead Republic*, the film's representation of Ireland colludes with the image that the IRA want the outside world to have of the country, a view that is in line with Éamon de Valera's famous words in the speech "The Ireland that We Dreamed Of" (1943).

There is still another version of Ireland to be discussed, and it is the reality that Henry encounters on his return to the Republic. Having been practically forced to leave the island in 1922 and having spent years attempting to erase his Irish identity, Henry comments with a critical eye on the changes that he finds and reflects on the outcome of his fighting.

⁸⁴ In Doyle's words, Henry becomes "disillusioned" ("Interview", line 63).

1.2.4.2. Dalton's and Reynolds' Irelands

The reasons for Henry's leaving Ireland are varied, but they amount to his disenchantment with the ideals he has been fighting for, or, perhaps more accurately, with the people he has been fighting with. As I advanced in "1.2.3. The Triumph of Stories" (p. 86), after the escalation of violence during the War of Independence, Henry becomes an assassin and is tasked by Jack Dalton and Michael Collins with killing targeted individuals. Some of the victims are men whom Henry knows, like Piano Annie's 'dead' husband (*ASCH* 256), a man with whom ideologically and socially Henry has much more in common than with either Dalton or Collins. This is also the time when Dalton begins questioning Henry's friendship with David Climanis. Mr. Climanis is presented as an endearing man, one of the only real friends that Henry makes throughout his life and whom he can confide in: "He asked for nothing except my company and I loved to listen to him; he told me everything. And I told him everything. I couldn't understand what was happening to me. It just seemed safe and right. It was in every crease and gesture: he was a good man" (*ASCH* 244-5).

Moreover, Mr. Climanis already has a history of suffering, due to his Jewish heritage, for which the Bolsheviks murdered his wife and burned his house to the ground. Still, Mr. Climanis states that he does "not like religions" (*ASCH* 283) and that he believes in communism (284), aligning himself with men whom Henry had admired, like Connolly. Nevertheless, to Jack Dalton, who does not pay attention to nuances, Climanis is a threat and he warns Henry to stay away from the man (250-1). Some time later, Henry learns that David Climanis and his wife have been killed and he demands an explanation from Jack, who simply states that Climanis "was a spy" (324), something which Henry knows to be untrue.⁸⁵ A more

⁸⁵ As stated above, Henry ends up learning from Granny Nash that it was Alfie Gandon who ordered the killings of the Climanis, which prompts Henry to take revenge by killing him too, while repeating his father's famous but slightly altered phrase: "David Climanis says Hello" (*ASCH* 336). The reason behind the killings is that Maria

accurate reason for Dalton's interest in getting rid of Mr. Climanis can be gathered from the following statement Dalton makes: "[w]e've nearly got rid of the English. And we want no more strangers in our house. Those guys, the pedlars and the moneylenders, your poor little friends with no country of their own, they're roaming the country getting the small farmers into hock. Ready to take the land off them when the time comes" (325). Thus, Jack's Ireland is one that has no room for immigrants (despite the Irish people's strong history of emigration), for Jewish people, for socialists and, in general, for non-conformists, since, at the end of this conversation, Dalton hands Henry a paper with Henry's name on it: his death sentence.

A short time before Henry becomes an official enemy to the Republican cause through Jack's sentencing, he has already decided to abandon the fight, and this occurs when he realises that the people in charge of the coming republic have a bias against the working class. Henry takes his decision on the day that became known as Bloody Sunday.⁸⁶ On the fatal day, Henry joins Dinny Archer on a mission to assassinate a British agent. When they burst into the target's rooms, they find him and a woman in bed and, after executing him, they realise that the woman next to him is not his wife, but a prostitute. Henry manages to convince Archer to let her live, but, at a later meeting, one of the other men that were at the assassination expresses remorse at

Climanis used to work as a prostitute at Gandon's brothel and the fact that she left with Mr. Climanis was an act that Gandon would not tolerate.

⁸⁶ According to John Dorney, there have been four Bloody Sundays in recent Irish history, although two are practically unknown. The first Bloody Sunday would have taken place in 1913, during the Dublin Lockout, when two men were killed and hundreds more injured. The next Bloody Sunday took place in 1920 and it is the one described in *A Star* and discussed in this section. Dorney tracks another Bloody Sunday in Belfast in 1921, in the context of the War of Independence, resulting in 16 deaths and 161 destroyed houses. The last Bloody Sunday is probably the most well-known and it took place in Derry on 30 January 1972, when British paratroopers killed 13 civilians who were demonstrating (Dorney). Regarding the Bloody Sunday represented in *A Star*, William Derham explains that on Sunday, 21 November 1920, "Michael Collins's 'Squad' shot fourteen suspected British military and intelligence officers at locations across the city of Dublin". The British response was brutal: "Later that day, at a Gaelic football game between Dublin and Tipperary in Croke Park stadium, British forces fired indiscriminately into the crowd of spectators, killing a further fourteen people". Moreover, Peadar Clancy, Dick McKee and Conor Clune (the first two men had fought at the GPO and were involved with the IRA; the third was a member of the Gaelic League, but unrelated to any of the events that took place that day) had been arrested before the assassinations and were kept in custody at Dublin Castle. Derham writes that "[w]hat happened to the three men that night [following the killings] is still contested to this day, but none made it out of the guard room alive. Evidence suggests that they were possibly tortured and then killed in revenge for the day's earlier killings. The government's official line was that they were shot while trying to escape" (Derham).

not having shot her, for “[s]leeping with an Englishman, (...). —For money”. This is the moment that Henry states: “I’d decided: my war was over” (*ASCH* 288). Returning to his reasoning at the GPO, when he showed comprehension for the Irish men who fought in the British army purely out of necessity, Henry empathises with the prostitute’s circumstances and, therefore, does not consider her “sleeping with an Englishman” an act of treason, like the other men do. Deffenbacher refers to this scene as “[t]he final blow (it takes many) to Henry’s repression of his class history and identification” (157).

Another reason for Henry’s disenchantment with the emerging Irish state is his realisation of its corrupt nature, which he learns in a conversation with Ivan Reynolds. Ivan is Miss O’Shea’s cousin and one of the farm boys that Henry had trained for guerrilla combat at the beginning of the War of Independence. He is the man that Henry decides to leave in charge: “Ivan was born to it. He had respect, know-how, he never slept. But he was no one; he’d no land, no connections. I wanted to leave him in charge, our own man. The coming war was his big chance and I needed him to see that, to fight for the leadership and what he could do with it” (*ASCH* 226). The relationship between Henry and Ivan is so good at one point, that Ivan is Henry’s best man at his wedding. However, the Ivan that Henry meets in the last part of *A Star* is a changed man: “Ivan Reynolds was on the rampage, getting fatter on power and all the food and drink that got in his way. He’d broken the knees of a twelve-year-old spy in Ballymacurly and placed the placard around his neck: *Too young to be shot - keep your mouth shut*. He took four men from a village and shot them on the road - *a bloody pile of spies*” (*ASCH* 310; original emphasis).

Henry’s re-encounter with Ivan is motivated by a tyrannical act: the warlord has ordered that Miss O’Shea’s hair be cut off (Henry finds this out after she assists his escape from Kilmainham Gaol). Ivan and Henry meet at his mother-in-law’s, that is, Old Missis O’Shea’s burnt-down place. Although the exchange between the two men represents one of the novel’s

key moments, in my view, it is also its weakest scene. The reason for this is that the dialogue feels quite artificial, as it is remindful of the typical scene in which the villain puts the hero through a long speech in which they explain every detail of their Machiavellian plan, something usually made more for the benefit of the readers or spectators than for actual narrative purposes. In the exchange in question, Ivan finally opens Henry's eyes to what has really happened in Ireland during the fight for independence (hence its importance in the novel).

The first issue that arises is, of course, "the hair-cutting business" (*ASCH* 312). Here, a conversation that Henry and Miss O'Shea had held at the GPO, in which she expressed her wish for freedom, gains relevance.⁸⁷ Henry had already predicted that the men in charge during the Rising would never let her "behave like a man" (123) and Ivan confirms this, in a way which foreshadows one of the most controversial points of the 1937 Irish Constitution, namely article 41.2.1 which "recognized that 'by her life *within the home*, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved'" (Collins and Hanafin 63; my emphasis). Thus, despite denying having ordered the haircutting himself, Ivan tells Henry that he approves of it and asks Henry "[h]ave you any control over your wife at all?" (*ASCH* 312). Ivan proceeds by explaining that the reason for this punishment is that "she's queering things for the rest of us" (313), while he adds that she should join Cumann na mBan to "give the boys a hand" with packing rucksacks and making sandwiches (313), but not by fighting like a man. This sexist treatment is even more striking, as, throughout the novel, Miss O'Shea proves on several occasions that she is as good as or even better at fighting than the men. Moreover, Ivan declares that the only reason that her life has been spared is that she is his cousin and Henry's wife (313), that is, he defines the worth of her life according to the men she is related to, not to any rights that she may have as an individual.

⁸⁷ In this conversation, specifically, Miss O'Shea tells Henry that she is not at the GPO "to make stew", but "for my freedom. Just like you and the men upstairs" (*ASCH* 122).

The other important topic that the men discuss is Henry's role in the War of Independence and what the fighting has actually led to. After Ivan reveals to Henry that Henry is a wanted man in Dublin (at this point in the novel, Jack Dalton has not yet handed over Henry's death sentence), Henry reminds Ivan that it was him who trained Ivan to be who he is, to which Ivan replies: "You fuckin' did. Spot on. But that, now, is another reason why it would make sense for me to finish you off. I'm king of the Republic around here, boy. And I don't want reminders that I was once a runt that people only noticed to laugh at. All the originals are dead, Captain. All the lads that met beyond in the barn that morning" (314). Thus, in the same manner that Gandon became O'Gandúin, a changed man, Ivan has also constructed a new narrative for himself. As he further explains,

Here's how it is. I'm a businessman. (...) I discovered this a few months ago only. All these years I thought I was a soldier, a warrior even. A fuckin' nation builder. Fighting for Ireland. And I was. But here's the truth now. All the best soldiers are businessmen. There had to be a reason for the killing and late nights, and it wasn't Ireland. Ireland's an island, Captain, a dollop of muck. It's about control of the island, that's what the soldiering's about, not the harps and the martyrs and the freedom to swing a hurley. (*ASCH* 314)

Ivan also tells Henry that "nothing moves in this county without my go-ahead. I have cattle, land, a cut of the creameries, the pubs. Every bloody thing. I'm even in on the Sunday collections" (314-5). Then, Ivan explains to Henry that "peace is on the way", referring to the Anglo-Irish Treaty, and confesses that he has "made deals with (...) [t]he Tans, the Auxiliaries, the Military, the poor old peelers" (315).⁸⁸ Thus, the fact that Miss O'Shea keeps fighting them, is costing Ivan "a fortune, Captain. She's interfering with free trade and I can't have that" (316). Henry soon understands that the killings being done on one side and the other are just "to show

⁸⁸ The Tans is short for the Black and Tans, "a specially recruited armed auxiliary police force sent to Ireland in 1921 by the British Government to combat Sinn Féin" ("the Black and Tans"). The "sobriquet" Black and Tans referred to the uniforms that this police force wore, which consisted of "khaki military trousers and dark green police tunics" (Malcom; "Black and Tans"). The Auxiliaries refers to "the Auxiliary Division of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), raised from among demobilized officers of the British Army in response to the escalation of the Anglo-Irish War" (Malcom; "Auxiliaries").

the flag” and to meet quotas (316), and he learns that Old Missis O’Shea’s barn (the place where they are having this conversation) was, in fact, burnt down by the Tans, but with Ivan’s collusion. Thus, in this speech, Ivan ends up correlating the liberation of Ireland from the British with a simple matter of business, denying any ideological aspect (“the harps and the martyrs and the freedom to swing a hurley”), except from a strong belief in capitalism. After the eye-opening conversation with Ivan, Henry admits the following:

I was a complete and utter fool, the biggest in the world. It had been niggling away at me for years but now I knew. Everything I’d done, every bullet and assassination, all the blood and brains, prison, the torture, the last four years and everything in them, everything had been done for Ivan and the other Ivans, (...). That was Irish freedom, since Connolly had been shot - and if the British hadn’t shot him one of the Ivans would have; Connolly would have been safely dead long before now, one of the martyrs, dangerously alive, more useful washed and dead. (317-8)

Regarding Henry’s gradual awakening to the truth and his realisation that he has been used, Pierse writes another of his key critiques of *A Star*, namely, that it “emphatically revises the ‘revolution’ as a capitalist coup in which stupid proletarians, led by Machiavellian middle-class forces, caused a lot of trouble for no good reason” (*Writing* 243). What is more, Pierse points out that “Doyle’s conclusion is not quite as much a critique of conservative politics as a capitulation to them. For him, it is Henry’s idealism that was unwise, not the logic of the conservatives and capitalists. Reviewing his years of warfare, Henry articulates a rather bleak evaluation of the results of his toil that summarily depoliticises a period of profound political importance” (243-4). Although I partially agree with Pierse’s analysis in that Henry, indeed, can be seen as a gullible, unthinking figure and that the capitalists like Ivan seem to have much more cunning and agency than the working-class characters, I also partially disagree with him. On the one hand, I believe that a certain degree of Henry’s anger towards himself springs from his final realisation that he has followed the wrong people. Although he does not explicitly say so, the instances in which Henry doubts whether he is on the correct side of the fight or in which he feels ashamed for not standing up for his past as a Citizen Army soldier, prepare the

reader for the ultimate harsh truth: that Henry has indeed betrayed his ideals for a group of people and a country that does not represent him or even want him (or the likes of him). Again, perhaps, Henry's self-centred vision brings him to give much more importance to his feelings of disappointment (in the fight, but also in himself) than to properly analyse the situation. Hence, it is not the fact that he was idealistic that was unwise, but that his idealism was based on the wrong principles. On the other hand, I also have the strong impression that Doyle's representation of the working class as lacking agency versus the middle and upper classes, who have the power and ability to shape the new country, is strictly related to the time of his writing. That is, the "bleak evaluation" that Pierse refers to, might actually be the result of Doyle's disappointment in Ireland's politics at the time of writing *A Star*, which Doyle seems to trace back to the foundation of the Republic and on which he, therefore, may project a negative image.⁸⁹

1.2.4.3. John Ford's Ireland

Apart from the visions for Ireland belonging to Jack Dalton and Ivan Reynolds, another one is presented in *The Dead Republic*. This vision corresponds to John Ford, who, having found Henry on the verge of death in the Utah desert, engages him as his IRA consultant, under the premise that they will be making a film about Henry's life. Nevertheless, that the film is going to be something different from what Henry believed starts to become clear with Ford's insistence that Henry read a story published in a copy of the *Saturday Evening Post*. This story,

⁸⁹ In "The Aftermath of the Irish Civil War", Tom Garvin insists on the "enduring hatreds" (74) that the Civil War generated. He postulates that the mentality present after the Treaty was signed that 1922 "was a defeat" (75), "persisted for many years, and perhaps still is among us" (74-5). Likewise, Garvin suggests that "the mutual contempt" (75) that each side felt for the other "still (...) residually poisons political relationships in the politics of the Republic two generations later" (75-76). All of this is to suggest that the events that surrounded the birth of the Republic were still vividly felt by the time that Doyle began to write.

which Henry initially refuses to read, and which haunts him in the form of innumerable copies of the newspaper that keep reappearing wherever he goes, is no other than Maurice Walsh's "The Quiet Man" (1933). This, together with Ford's over-simplification of the War of Independence are a bad omen for Henry's story, which once again, is about to be erased from history.

While Ford waits for Henry to read "The Quiet Man", both men continue working on their film script, based on Henry's experience during the struggle for independence and it is then that it becomes clear that the actual version of events will never see the light of day. For instance, when Henry tells Ford that he and Miss O'Shea "shot a cop", who happened to be Irish, the film director sentences that "[w]e'll make him English, (...). —Keep it simple" (*TDR* 28). Moreover, Ford also states that "[w]e can show him doing some of the bad things that earn him his bullet" (50). Likewise, when Henry points out that the Black and Tans were not only "Limeys", but also "Scottish and Welsh", Ford decides "[w]e'll stay with the English" (28). Then, yet another problem arises with Henry's story: Dublin. According to Ford, "Dublin doesn't really count, (...). —Folks just didn't get *The Informer* back then. Because it was set in the city. It wasn't Irish. Dubliners aren't really Irish. They're scum" (89). Here, Ford is buttressing the view that the "real people" (*ASCH* 212) are the rural inhabitants of the island, a fact which Henry had already felt during his training of the young country people during the War of Independence, dismissing the realities of the urban Irish like Henry. All these details do not only show how oversimplified Ford's version of the Anglo-Irish War is, but how easy it is to construct a particular narrative.

Besides this oversimplification, Ford's vision of Ireland is one tainted by sentimentalism, something that the actress Maureen O'Hara warns Henry about, when she says (referring to Ford) that "[n]o one is as sentimental as the Irishman who was never [in Ireland] in the first place" (*TDR* 76). She (following the pattern that it is always women who attempt to

make Henry aware of reality)⁹⁰ is also the one to warn Henry that Ford “wants to blend the two stories. *The Quiet Man* and yours. But *The Quiet Man* will win” and reveals that Ford has been “desperate” to make the movie “for ever”, “[l]ong before he ever laid eyes on you” (77). However, Henry seems to be always slightly slow catching on to people being dishonest (or, perhaps, he simply does not want to believe that he is being used). Apart from O’Hara’s warnings, another unsettling element takes the form of Danny Borzage’s playing of *The Bold Henry Smart*, at Ford’s request (*TDR* 53),⁹¹ a song which readers already know Dalton used to charm Henry. Yet, once again, the prospect of being the protagonist, of having his story celebrated, seems to blind Henry to reality, although in *The Dead Republic*, he does impose his will at times, by walking away, refusing to read “The Quiet Man”, keeping information to himself and other small acts of resistance. Likewise, as Henry’s suspicion that his story is probably not going to make it becomes stronger, he begins writing his own story which consists of the names that he remembers from his past and that he writes down in a notebook.⁹²

Eventually, on the flight back from the USA to Ireland, Henry gets hold of the final script of the film and sees that it has nothing to do with the script he had thought was being written. Hence, he decides to abandon the project, but creeps into the hotel where Ford and the film crew are staying and, after almost strangling Ford to death with a rosary, he and the film director have one last conversation. During this exchange, Ford explains to Henry why he could not make the film they had written together, and the ultimate reason has a lot to do with the emigrant’s nostalgic vision of the lost homeland: “[w]ithout our nostalgia we would die, [Ford] said. —We’d be nothing. Landless. The place mightn’t exist, Henry, but we need it. (...) They

⁹⁰ Deffenbacher enumerates the “knowing women who try to delineate power structures” (159) for Henry and includes Piano Annie, Granny Nash, Miss O’Shea, Dora and Fast Olaf’s half-sister (a character that appears in *Oh, Play*).

⁹¹ According to Jim Beaver, Danny Borzage was, besides a small-part player, “an accomplished accordionist, he was a staple on Ford’s sets, where he provided mood music before and sometimes during scenes”.

⁹² See “1.2.3.3. Stories are the Only Things that the Poor Own” (p. 97).

[the emigrants] need the home in their heads” (*TDR* 121). Additionally, Ford wants to make Ireland an attractive place, one that will “bring in the tourists” (127). Henry sums it up thus:

Dublin and the slums didn't exist; Ireland was a village called Innisfree. (...) *The Quiet Man* would be the emigrant's dream, soft and green. And Ireland was going to play up to it. The rest of the world would see the film, and Ireland would give the world what it had seen. The village, Cong, was outside the castle window. I'd walked through it and I'd seen the hungry faces; they hadn't changed since 1922. But they wouldn't be making it into the picture. The extras would all be red-cheeked and smiling. That would be Ford's Ireland. (124)

Henry, who this time does not fall for the lie, tells Ford that “[t]hat's the shite they [Jack Dalton and the boys] said they wanted, (...). —A rural Ireland, the simple life, spouting fuckin' Irish. That's what they hid behind” (*TDR* 127). Henry's analysis goes even further, as he accuses Ford of having yet another motivation, namely that of “taking the war to Ireland, (...). — Your fuckin' Cold War. You're making Ireland part of America and you've sent in John Wayne. Ireland will be the land worth dying for” (127). At this point, Henry does not yet know that the Provisional IRA are behind Ford's decision against turning *The Quiet Man* into Henry's story. As “the man with the beard” argues, Henry's story would have been “the last nail in the coffin of republicanism” and that Ford made the film “[t]o show a place worth fighting for. (...)—Something beautiful that was going to be destroyed” (316). Ultimately, in this cacophony of versions of Ireland, in “the armed struggle”, it all came down to “[w]ho owns Irishness”, who, according to the IRA men is “[u]s. *Sinn Féin*. (...)—We've battered all the other definitions into submission” (313-4). The definition of the only Ireland, of the true Irishman will be “Republican, Catholic, oppressed by Britain, fond of a jar, game for a laugh, prone to violence. But only for political reasons. He'll fight to the death. For freedom. He's a great lad” (314). When Henry asks “[w]hat about the Prods and them?”, the IRA man retorts “Not Irish, (...)—There is no other definition” (314). Thus, this utterly reductionist view, exactly like Dalton's vision of Ireland, leaves out “vast chunks of it” (*ASCH* 171). In his speech, moreover, the IRA man connects his definition of Irishness with Ford's film and “De Valera's

Ireland, (...).—Comely maidens and the rest of it” (*TDR* 316).⁹³ As I advanced in the introduction to this section, this is a direct reference to a speech that de Valera delivered on St Patrick’s day 1943, in which he described “the Ireland that we dreamed of” as

the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit - a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the laughter of happy maidens, whose fire sides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. The home, in short, of a people living the life that God desires that men should live. (“The Ireland that We Dreamed Of”)

It goes without saying that such a highly bucolic and idealised vision could hardly correspond to any reality, but, as can be easily surmised by doing some research, de Valera’s vision was actually never realised. What interests me most, nevertheless, is how such visions as presented in the Last Roundup Trilogy, upheld by Dalton, Ford and the IRA man, contribute to erasing Henry’s experience or making it un-Irish and, by extension, that of the rest of Roddy Doyle’s characters.

1.2.4.4. Censorship and Jazz

One version of Ireland remains to be explored: the actual country that Henry encounters on his return from the USA. This, in *The Dead Republic*, is presented as the objective reality that serves as a counterpoint to all the individual visions presented above. The construction of the Republic of Ireland had begun during Henry’s absence from the island, in the time corresponding to the plot of *Oh, Play*. That Doyle did not portray Ireland during the years

⁹³ In a letter to *The Irish Times*, the historian John Bowman addresses the controversy that arose concerning the expression “comely maidens”. This controversy springs from the fact that, although the expression often quoted in relation to de Valera’s speech is “comely maidens”, in a recording (the same one that I used for this thesis), the Irish statesman can be heard saying “happy maidens”. Apparently, this dichotomy is the result of the differences between the original typescript of the speech and two different extant recordings of this (Bowman; “Eamon de Valera”).

between 1922 and 1951, of course, prevents a thorough examination of his representation of the first years of the Free State. Nevertheless, there are certain aspects in *Oh, Play* that can be related to events that were taking place in Ireland and that already anticipate Henry's continued alienation from "the real people" or, in other words, real Ireland.

The plot of *Oh, Play* begins in 1924 with Henry's emigration to America (the three years between his leaving Ireland and his arrival in the continent correspond to a first stop in Liverpool). One of the most relevant plot elements in *Oh, Play* is that Henry meets Louis Armstrong in Chicago and ends up working for him. Jazz, therefore, plays a major role in the novel, to the point that it even motivates some of Henry's most important changes, decisions and actions throughout substantial parts of it. As I argue in this part of the chapter, most of these changes are related to Henry's identity and to his struggle with this, after his deep disillusionment with the conditions of the foundation of the Irish Free State and his role in it. Desiring to eliminate all Irishness within him, Henry believes that he has become a "Yank" (*OPTT* 134) when he first hears Louis Armstrong playing. However, it is also by listening to Armstrong's music, some years later, that Henry once more embraces his Irish identity and decides that he wants to return to Ireland, his home (*Oh, Play* 264). As I argued in a previous paper that I wrote about *Oh, Play*,⁹⁴ it is my contention that a close analysis of its representation of jazz can contribute to an innovative interpretation of this work. My argument is that Henry's departure to America allows for connections that otherwise might have been lost.

One of these connections can only be established by a comparison of what was happening in Ireland while Henry explores the USA. Bearing in mind that the first and third instalments of the Last Roundup Trilogy are set in Dublin, *Oh, Play* represents a gap in the

⁹⁴ The text from this section has been adapted from the paper "'Ireland's Gone Black Bottom Crazy': The Potential of Jazz and the Construction of Irish Identity in Roddy Doyle's *Oh, Play That Thing*" that I delivered at the XVII International Conference of the Spanish Association for Irish Studies (AEDEI), "Eco-Fictions & Irish Studies", which was held at Santiago de Compostela, from 31 May to 1 June 2018. This paper has not been published.

timeline of the historical events that occurred in Ireland during the twentieth century. A gap, which I read as a silence in the middle of the trilogy and which connects with an important phenomenon that characterised the Irish Free State (1922-37) and, later, the Republic of Ireland, namely, the growing force and scope of censorship, something which becomes relevant in Henry's perception of his identity.⁹⁵

The Ireland that Henry leaves in 1922 is one left deeply divided by a bloody Civil War, in whose context the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Free State could be described as symbiotic, for each depended on the other in order to thrive. As R. Fanning explains in de Valera's biography, in the chapter devoted to the drafting of the 1937 Constitution, while urging the reader to "ignore the twenty-first century context" and to "look backward to the traumatic impact of what happened in 1921-2",

[n]o one was more conscious than Éamon de Valera of the wounds inflicted on the body politic by a civil war for which he was in large part responsible.⁹⁶ (...) Together they had created not merely a divided nation but a state so bitterly split that many citizens paid it no more than a grudging allegiance, while a smaller number continued to claim the right to bear arms against it. In so deeply divided a state there was a real need to find common ground where citizens could gather irrespective of political affiliation, a need that found expression in a search for badges of national identity. Religion and language — identifiably different from those that characterise the British national ethos — were the two most obvious hallmarks of independent Ireland. (222-3)

Referring to this same period, Anthony Keating explains that "[a] battle for the hearts and minds of the Irish people ensued in which the church was to play a decisive role in legitimizing the new state and its fledgling democracy" ("Censorship" 290). Hence, the aim of censorship,

⁹⁵ The Film Censorship Legislation was introduced in 1923; in 1926, the Committee on Evil Literature was created; the Irish Censorship Board was established in 1929 and the Censorship of Publications Act passed ("Acts of the Oireachtas").

⁹⁶ De Valera's opposition to the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty prompted him to resign as President of the Dáil and, on a later date, abandoned the Dáil with other Treaty opponents, as a form of protest against the election of Arthur Griffith as President of the Irish Republic. De Valera denied his allegiance to the new government and proceeded to deliver "a series of incendiary speeches" (R. Fanning 170) of sanguinary nature, such as when in Thurles he spoke "to a crowd that included 200 Volunteers carrying rifles", saying that "[i]f they accepted the Treaty (...) they would have to wade through Irish blood, through the blood of the soldiers of the Irish government, and through, perhaps, the blood of some of the members of the government in order to get Irish freedom" (R. Fanning 170).

which “was introduced by an insecure state at the insistence of the Irish Catholic Church” (Keating; “The Uses and Abuses of Censorship”), was to protect the newly founded nation from foreign influences. Keating further describes the situation thus: “The Church and Ireland’s governing political and administrative elite (...) both conceptualized the Free State as a spiritual and national rebirth of a dynamic Christian tradition that was said to have existed in the early medieval period before the English occupation of the country, typified as the land of ‘saints and scholars,’ a beacon of purity in a world otherwise sullied by sin (“The Uses and Abuses of Censorship” 290-1). According to Keating, a particularity of Irish Catholicism was that it viewed Irish people “as ‘children’ in need of ‘parental’ protection and guidance” (“Censorship” 289-90) and thus,

[t]he church saw its primary role as restoring Ireland to its former virtue through the spiritual re-education of its people and by stemming the flow of “vice” to its shores. Both church and state feared dangerous forces, within and without the state, could ultimately lead to its collapse, an eventuality inconceivable in the minds of the religio-nationalist elites who set about building the conditions and national characteristics that would withstand these threats. (“Censorship” 291)

Hence, “the church provided the state with domestic legitimacy and was, in the main, willingly ceded power by the Free State Government” (Keating; “Censorship” 291). This is not to say that there were no critical voices that spoke up against the dangers of censorship inside and outside the government, but they were rather isolated and not powerful enough.⁹⁷

In the midst of this climate (now, again, bearing in mind *Oh, Play* and its focus on jazz) a fear of the negative influence that modern foreign music and, hand in hand with this, non-Irish dancing might have on the younger generations of the Free State, led to an Anti-Jazz Campaign in 1934 (Brennan). The leader of this movement, Fr Peter Conefrey, is said to have been “an ardent cultural nationalist and (...) heavily involved in the promotion of Irish music

⁹⁷ Cf. Keating (“Censorship”).

and dancing and the Irish language” (Brennan). In opposition to Irish music and dancing, there was “unsupervised dancing”, which supposedly involved “a potent brew of alleged sources of evil and degradation: cars, darkness, jazz music and the prospect of illicit and unsupervised dalliance between the sexes” (J. Smyth). This combination of fears (of the foreign and the bawdy) can be perceived in a newspaper article, published in the *Leitrim Observer* and attributed to Fr Conefrey (though signed under a different name). Almost at its beginning, the text claims that “the Gael has his own customs, games and amusements, and they are second to none”, and asks “why imitate the foreigner?”. The author asserts that “having failed to ruin our faith by force, Satan and Saxonland are now endeavouring to sap its foundations by sully the virtue of the Gael”. Next, the author repudiates foreign music: “Let the pagan Saxons be told that we Irish Catholics do not want and will not have the dances and the music that he has borrowed from the savages of the islands of the Pacific”. Finally, readers are assured that “the West (...) will not now slumber but rush forth again to expel the last and worst invader – the jazz of Johnny Bull and the niggers and cannibals” (Bowman; *Ireland* 147-9). With such a strong sentiment being expressed against jazz, one can hardly be surprised at comments such as that attributed to Canon Masterson, parish priest of Mohill and chair at a meeting held after the march to start the Anti-Jazz Campaign, who stated that “the man who would try to defile these two noble heritages [Irish faith and Irish music] was the worst form of traitor and the greatest enemy of the Irish nation” (Brennan). This last claim, as I argue below, particularly clashes with the view of jazz in *Oh, Play* and generates a paradox in Henry, who is at one and the same time a national hero (for his role at the GPO)⁹⁸ and loves jazz.

If one thing can be said for certain about *Oh, Play*, it is that the novel is a celebration of jazz. The text insistently details concerts, songs, impressions and feelings that jazz awakens

⁹⁸ Although Henry, as I have shown, is declared a traitor by Dalton and practically forced to seek exile, his role during the Easter Rising had not only granted him the status of national hero in the past, but this status is brought back by the Provisional IRA in *The Dead Republic*, when they treat Henry like a prophet.

in its various characters. Doyle's novel not only contests the ideas put forward by the detractors of jazz, but it also highlights the potential that jazz has to improve relations between people and even, perhaps, to change the world. Henry immediately recognises this potential and his discovery of this new music leads him to make life-changing decisions. On a general level, jazz is portrayed as a means to channel and deal with feelings, to generate empathy and to break down barriers between people. This can be seen, for example, when Louis Armstrong returns to the stage after his mother's death. Henry and the audience are struck by Armstrong's music and the almost tangible pain it expresses:

It was the blues, [Armstrong's] grief crying out of the bell. But it was no lament. It was the cry of a terrified child, left alone, forever. No notes, no breaks, but all one howl that rushed at her dead body; it was angry and lost and (...) it turned, and turned, and returned to the body, and washed, and dressed her. His mother, mine – *she skips and she laughs, her black eyes shine happy* – he sent his mother home (*OPTT* 155).

Not only does Armstrong express his own grief through music, but Henry can also channel the pain that he himself feels at the memories that now arise of his own lost mother, for the first and last time in the trilogy.

Another jazz-related aspect that appears in *Oh, Play* is the problem of racial segregation in America. Although in its fullest sense this issue is beyond the scope of this thesis, I want to further exemplify the depiction of jazz as having the potential to break down barriers and deconstruct prejudice and stereotype. For instance, Henry explains that Armstrong was “the first black man to talk on the radio, the sound that made America quiver, the smile that made America feel tolerant” (166). Henry records this potential for change and he recognises the knowledge of it in one of Armstrong's managers: “Glaser had seen what Louis's music did to white shoulders, feet and faces. He'd seen what happened, and he saw what was going to happen” (178). Similarly, and in light of the fear that existed in the Free State (and later the Republic) that jazz could motivate improper sexual behaviour, for Henry and his girlfriend

Dora (who is described as neither black nor white (*OPTT* 134)), as well as for other interracial couples, it creates a space in which they can legitimately be together.⁹⁹ At the Panama Café, a *black and tan* —“a club where white men and black women (...) had licence to dance, together” (*OPTT* 149)—Henry and Dora can openly be close to one another: “we rubbed close for a second – we were free to while we danced” (152). What is more, Doyle describes the music and dancing as so exciting that he compares it to sex (a comparison that is a recurrent motive in his work): “it was stupid, but the sex beneath was well worth all the sweat” (153). Jazz is freedom; it is sex and life. To put it in Henry’s words: “This was living like I’d never seen it. This wasn’t drowning the sorrow, the great escape, happy or unhappy. It was life itself, the thing and the point of it. No excuses: it was why these men and women lived” (146).

For a great part of *Oh, Play*, Henry is not only trying to escape Ireland and his past, but, as he explains, his Irish identity: “I’d spent three years trying not to be Irish” (143). When he suddenly hears jazz for the first time, he believes he has achieved his goal:

At last. I wasn’t Irish any more. The first time I heard it, before I was properly listening, I knew for absolute sure. It took me by the ears and spat on my forehead, baptised me. There was a whole band of men on the bandstand, and a little woman at the piano, all thumping and blowing their lives away. Two horns, a trombone, tuba, banjo, drums, filling the world with their glorious torment. There were two trumpets blowing but the spit on my forehead came from only one man’s [Armstrong]. I looked at him through the human steam – it was too hot there for sweat – and I knew it. I was a Yank. At last. (133-4).

In part, of course, what Henry feels is an illusion. As Deffenbacher points out, “through *Oh, Play That Thing*, Henry still fails to understand that history, unlike a coat, cannot be shed and left behind” (157-8). And at the same time that he feels new, he believes that he is becoming his old self again: the sensual, irresistible man (*OPTT* 134-5). While successfully flirting with Dora, he believes that he is “recovering” (134), that he is “Henry Smart again” (135). Clearly, Henry is struggling between the old and the new, the past and the present. As I see it, *Oh, Play*

⁹⁹ Having lost all contact with Miss O’Shea, Henry has several extramarital relationships during his first years in the US.

brings to light the discomfort that Henry feels, the tug within him between his past and his desire for something radically new and different. Deffenbacher reminds her readers of a crucial aspect when she explains that “[e]ven as Dora and Armstrong try to warn Henry that he cannot outrun or simply refuse his identity as determined within the cultural framework of Irish nationalism, Armstrong demonstrates ways of challenging and expanding dominant cultural constructions of identity” (160). I would suggest that this is why Henry feels captured by Armstrong’s singing of *Irish Black Bottom*, especially the line where he jokingly says, “and ah was born in Ireland” (*OPTT* 158), since by doing so Armstrong “challenges the nationalist imagining of Irish identity as exclusively white, Gaelic, and Catholic” (Deffenbacher 160) and, therefore, opens new possibilities for Henry.¹⁰⁰ Through this song, Armstrong is allowing Henry to recognise that there is an alternative space for him, one which is not constrained by the nationalist view of what the Irish people should be like.

Henry never manages to escape his Irish identity.¹⁰¹ When he re-encounters his daughter Saoirse in Chicago he cannot help but notice, maybe with some tenderness, that “she wasn’t long from home. A little Roscommon girl; there wasn’t much of the Yank there yet” (*OPTT* 196). His language keeps giving him away when he uses expressions such as “eejit” (187), “grand” (202) or “Jaysis” (225). Moreover, by re-encountering his wife and daughter, Henry is inevitably reconnected with his past and Ireland. Miss O’Shea embodies the love for Ireland and the nostalgia for the abandoned home. In a revealing scene, Henry plays one of Armstrong’s records for Miss O’Shea and Saoirse (*OPTT* 217-8) and Miss O’Shea, seemingly not overly impressed with the music, in turn plays *Macushla* by John McCormack, whom

¹⁰⁰ To listen to *Irish Black Bottom*, visit <https://tuit.cat/0sqC6>.

¹⁰¹ Instead, Henry’s daughter Saoirse seems to succeed in this, although not without a cost. As Henry expresses in *The Dead Republic*, “[s]he was a woman whose life began in her twenty-fifth year. She didn’t just deny or bypass her childhood and wandering, or the weight that had come with her name. She’d erased them. They just weren’t there. She’d managed what I’d failed to do when I’d gone to America; she’d invented herself, new-born and ready, with no history or anything dragging her back. It must have taken her years, and she must have been mad” (271).

Henry “can’t stand” (223).¹⁰² Still, hearing this music, Henry believes that he and Miss O’Shea are “both home now” (223): although ‘home’ is not Ireland, but Chicago, the fact that they are surrounded by such various cultural elements, allows them both to feel comfortable in the space they share, with enough room for their different desires and ways of understanding the world.

In the end and quite suddenly, although the novel does not really account for this, Henry decides that he wants to return to Ireland. This thought occurs to him, once again, while he is listening to Armstrong singing a song that the two men have written together: it is about Piano Annie. Nothing that has happened previously in the novel really foreshadows Henry taking this decision, but suddenly he exclaims the following: “I listened to the first take and, for the first time since I’d left, I wanted Dublin” (*OPTT* 262). Notwithstanding the suddenness of this change, I believe that certain conclusions can be drawn when focussing especially on Henry’s thoughts expressed immediately subsequent to his yearning for Dublin:

It was there, in the studio, clear as the notes that Louis sent at me – the decision. I was itching, and happy. I’d get back to Chicago first. I could see, feel, the three of us [Henry, Miss O’Shea and Saoirse]. Leaving, and arriving. I’d left Dublin many times but I’d never arrived. I’d always crept back in, on a stolen bike, in someone else’s threads, with someone else’s name. A travelling salesman, a happy father, the second son of a big, big farmer. These men and more men, I’d crept into Dublin as all of them. But never as me. Henry Smart had never gone home. He was now, though. Going home. Henry S. Smart. Henry the Yank. (264)

As I see it, it is only after consolidating his own identity that Henry is thus enabled to return, head held high, to Ireland; and, significantly, it has been the contact with another culture (and specifically with jazz) that has allowed Henry to do this. The name “Henry the Yank” tells the story of his arriving in America, the struggle with his past, his apparent adoption of a new identity after discovering jazz and, finally, his coming to terms with who he really is: not an Irishman *or* a Yank, but, ultimately, a little of both. I suggest that it is possible to apply Deffenbacher’s comment that we must extend “our field of vision (...) beyond the terms of the

¹⁰² To listen to *Macushla*, visit <https://tuit.cat/y4cRZ>.

nationalist/revisionist opposition” (150) to Henry’s American experience. It is impossible to reduce him to a nationalist hero *or* to a traitor; impossible to label him an Irishman or a Yank, because his life has been too complex to allow for such a strict dichotomy. Doyle seems to be proposing, I suggest, that it is only by taking into account the most varied experiences that a true understanding can be gained of what it really means to be Irish, something which, as has been shown above, stands in completely contradictory terms to the vision of other characters in the trilogy.

1.2.4.5. Return to Ireland

Henry’s return to Ireland, however, does not take place in the manner that he had imagined in *Oh, Play*, as has already been explained above. Rather than travelling back with his family (from which he is violently separated during the Great Depression) and which he believes to be dead, he returns with Ford and his crew. Yet, by the time the plane lands, Henry has already read Ford’s new script for *The Quiet Man* and decided that he will not continue participating in the making of the film. Henry’s first action in Ireland is to seek out Old Missis O’Shea’s house in Roscommon, which, nevertheless, he cannot find as it has completely vanished. Already at this moment, Henry observes that “[t]hirty years after I’d freed it, parts of Ireland still didn’t have electricity. It didn’t surprise me, and I didn’t know if it should have” (*TDR* 101). Likewise, on his visit to Dublin, Henry finds that “[t]he slums were still there, like broken teeth in a rotten mouth, but far worse now because I’d been away and seen different” (132). After standing a while in front of a tenement house and listening to its sounds, Henry decides that he will “stay away from the old places. I’d stop feeding the anger” (132) and so, he decides to move to Ratheen. There, at first, he gets a sense of calmness that derives from the fact that “[t]here were shoes in Ratheen; there were no gaping Georgian doors. The black prams were

pushed by well-fed mothers, and they were pushing babies, not coal. No one begged, no one hugged the walls” (133). For the first time, Henry starts to wonder “if [his] fight had really been a total waste”, because, although Dublin “was still the kip I’d climbed out of”, as “the city follow[s him] out to Ratheen”, he notices that “the children had parents and coats. There were bedrooms and electricity, the certainty of dinner. Women stopped and chatted to each other, and none of them stood at wet corners, waiting desperately for business. Men came home from work at the same time every day. It was boring, but maybe freedom was supposed to be boring” (133).¹⁰³

When Henry begins working as the school’s caretaker, at first, he is also pleasingly surprised by what he finds and, especially, by the positive environment that the children seem to be growing up in: “These boys ran out of the new houses every morning. Most of them had been born in rooms like the one I’d been born into – (...) But their parents had brought them out to clean air, fresh paint and free primary education. The houses were good, and built by the state. The school was good, built by the state” (*TDR* 141). Nevertheless, quite soon, Henry starts noticing the cracks in the system.¹⁰⁴ The way in which he expresses this is by saying that “[i]t took me a while to calm down, to notice the shivers and malnourishment, the ringworm, the bruises” (142). This is also the time referred to above when he hears the cough that takes him back to his childhood with Victor. This incident is what prompts Henry to “w[a]ke up. I began to see and hear. I still saw the progress, and smelt it. (...) But I knew I wasn’t in a republican heaven. Bad lungs weren’t left at the gate, and bad bastards occasionally crawled off the farm and became teachers” (144).

¹⁰³ This expansion of the city took place in the 1960s and it is also the backdrop of *Paddy Clarke* (see Chapter 2).

¹⁰⁴ In my view, in a certain way Doyle also began to point out “cracks in the system” with his writing. The clearest example of this is his representation of domestic violence in the Paula Spencer series. As I discuss in Chapter Three, “3.2.1. Paula: from *Family* to *Paula Spencer*” (p. 207), Doyle received much backlash for suggesting that domestic violence could take place in a Dublin suburb.

Moving into the 1970s, after the explosion of UVF bombs on Talbot Street, Henry states that “[o]nce I started paying real attention to Ireland beyond the parish, I realised that it was 1920 again” (*TDR* 203), due to the violence of the Troubles. Additionally, in the context of the 1980s, Henry points out that “[t]he country stopped growing” and he sees children being collected from school by their fathers and grandfathers, since “[t]hey’d no work and no chance of work” and their wives are “off cleaning houses or working up in Cadbury’s” (214-5). A feeling of generalised hopelessness seems to have taken hold of the Republic and Henry notices that “the kids in the school began to change as well - they were looking ahead to nothing. Even that young, they knew they were fucked” (215), something which is inevitably connected to an even darker phenomenon: drug addiction. As Henry becomes upset because he feels that people are not reacting to the country’s worsening situation, but simply standing by, he realises what happens when the population actually stops caring at all: “I saw my first Dublin junkies” (216).¹⁰⁵

The question of whether the fighting in the early decades of the century was “worth it”, arises when Henry meets Ivan again, at the nursing home where Miss O’Shea has been put in. Ivan is bedridden and not a threat anymore, so that the two men can have a quiet conversation. For Ivan, it is clear that the fight was “worth it”, as he declares, “God, it was. Sure, look at us” (*TDR* 227), presumably referring to the fact that they seem to be doing well in life (to a certain degree, both men live comfortably, although Ivan’s life has been much more rewarding than Henry’s). However, Henry later makes his own analysis of the situation, which is rather pessimistic, as he finds that “outside [of the nursing home], the country was already dead” (227). At first, Henry had felt proud when observing “women with time on their hands, still

¹⁰⁵ As I show in this thesis, the personal situations described in this paragraph are explored in more profundity in other novels by Doyle’s. For example, in *The Van*, Jimmy Rabbitte, Sr., suffers the consequences of unemployment; Paula Spencer from *The Woman* and *Paula Spencer* works as a cleaner and her son John Paul is an ex-junkie. The phenomenon of drug addiction is also observed and commented on by different characters in different novels.

young after three and four children”, as he felt that “I’d created the land that fed them - me and Ivan and Miss O’Shea” (227). For the old rebel, women “as much as their kids, were the measure of my success” (227). The fact that the young women can wear trousers and that they do not “cringe or hide” when passing a church fills Henry with pride. Likewise, Henry comments on the increased life expectancy, as, “when I was born, (...) forty was the ripe old age” and “working men and women who crawled across the forty mark often wished they hadn’t” (227-8), while now (in the 1980s) “old was properly old (...). Men could walk up to sixty, and seventy, and still chew carrots at eighty” (228). These, for Henry, are “success stories, written by me, secretly happy with the work that strolled and hobbled past me every day” (228).

Nonetheless, with the recession that Ireland experienced in the 1980s, the country changed: men lost their jobs and began to loiter, “[t]heir backs to everything; nothing belonged to them” (*TDR* 228), women stopped laughing and began to worry, while their children emigrated if they could. The most harrowing description is reserved for the young drug addicts, young people that “were grey. And yellow. Kids I’d seen running around in the school yard, (...). They were ancient teenagers, derelicts still in their early twenties” (*TDR* 228-9). Ultimately, Henry states that he “decided that the place was worse than it had been when I was the young, hungry king of Dublin’s corners. Poverty then had seemed natural, but this was just atrocious” (229). Thus, Henry’s balance turns out to be mainly negative, to the point that he even expresses that “Ireland was dead, a failure, a third world country in Western Europe” (263), a phrase which probably explains the novel’s title.

Regarding the struggle for absolute independence, at one point, towards the end of the novel, the IRA man tells Henry that the war is over and that they have won (this is also when he speaks about the “ownership of the definition of Irishness”, that has already been discussed above). Moreover, “the man with the beard” explains that “[t]here’ll be a 32-County Republic

by 2016” (*TDR* 318), which will be declared on the centenary of the Easter Rising. When Henry tells Miss O’Shea that “[t]he war’s over, (...). —No fourth green field” (321), he believes that for the first time in years, after a stroke left her in a coma, he can see a reaction in her, one of anger. This makes him decide to tell her “a different truth”: that the British are leaving Ireland and “getting onto the boats in Belfast” (322). Immediately after Henry says this, he realises that Miss O’Shea has died, and believes that his lie has “released her” (322).

Towards the very end of the novel, Henry is asked to publicly give his approval to “the motion (...) that Sinn Féin should drop its longstanding and consistent opposition to running candidates in the elections to the Free State parliament” (*TDR* 328). Henry does so immediately before the vote to approve the motion is taken, and the old rebel states that “I’d done the right thing. I knew it then. I know it now. (...) The war raged on but the end had started. (...) The wedge had been driven in by me” (329).

Henry’s very last act in the trilogy, deciding that he is going to die, or perhaps more accurately, refusing to continue living, is one of resistance and, as I see it, of reclaiming his life. The IRA had expected that he would still be alive in 2016, “on the podium with them, declaring the next and final republic” (*TDR* 329). Instead, Henry declares: “I’m going to die. Tonight” (329). His very last sentences, those closing the novel and the trilogy, seem to express a calm and peaceful state of mind, as Henry says: “I’ve lived a life. I’m a hundred and eight. I’m Henry Smart” (329).

1.3. Partial Conclusions

In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate how Henry’s social background has a decisive impact on his life and on the perception of his identity as an Irishman. Henry’s experience is shown to be radically different from that of other Irishmen throughout the trilogy, to the extent

that it is not taken into account in the official definition of pure Irishness. This definition, according to the IRA man in *The Dead Republic*, would be “Republican, Catholic, oppressed by Britain, fond of a jar, game for a laugh, prone to violence” (314).

Since his childhood in the Dublin slums, Henry knows that his existence does not matter: neither his nor that of his family is officially recorded. The lives of the Smarts are so precarious that they die under the most appalling circumstances. Henry, Sr., and Melody, whose start in life had already been filled with hardship, completely lose any remaining hope at happiness after their first offspring die. Driven to desperation, Melody seeks refuge in alcohol and Henry, Sr., abandons his family and is eventually murdered due to his dubious job as a hitman. Both Victor and Rifle, on the other hand, die at a very young age, as a direct consequence of poverty, for they are malnourished and lack the necessary conditions for a healthy environment or medical care. These losses, especially that of Victor, among other issues, are what determines many of Henry’s beliefs and actions as an adult. Besides this, the harshness of Henry’s childhood makes him “socially conditioned in a way that makes [him] prone to barbarous behaviour” preparing him for “his future as a violent insurrectionist” (Pierse; *Writing* 230).

Neither a nationalist nor religious, Henry’s experience during the Easter Rising greatly differs from that of his fellow revolutionaries belonging to the Irish Volunteers. Being familiar with utter need, Henry feels more aligned with the Dubliners who loot the streets and with the women who demand their allowances than with the Volunteers. The division between the Volunteers and the ICA is, nonetheless, vividly felt by both groups and Henry remarks that the Volunteers “detested the slummers - the accents and the dirt, the Dublinness of them” (*ASCH* 103). This differentiation between the two groups is likewise extended to its leaders. Although all of the historical figures portrayed here lack roundness or profundity as characters, James

Connolly is represented under such a benevolent light that the readers' sympathy is unmistakably guided towards him, to the detriment of the other leaders.

The importance of the Easter Rising in the Last Roundup Trilogy is twofold. Firstly, it is the moment when Henry's motivation in fighting against the British is expressed more clearly: he wants a social revolution and, above all, a country where children will not experience need but have the promise of decent lives. Secondly, the Rising is presented as the defining element of the future independent state and the characteristics of the myth-driven, fanatical Volunteers already foreshadow the actions of future characters, like Jack Dalton or Ivan Reynolds. Essentially, the Volunteer's vision of a nationalist, religious, rural Ireland, shown to be radically contrary to Henry's experience, is the one that gains weight as the trilogy progresses.

Thus, the people in charge of building the new independent state consistently show their rejection of working-class characters, something is epitomised by Henry's erasure from the historical photograph of Éamon de Valera. This rejection is further exemplified by Dinny Archer's dismissal of Jim Larkin and James Connolly, both of whom were greatly involved in furthering the cause of the working class, or by Archer's (frustrated) intention of assassinating the Irish prostitute who slept with a British agent. Likewise, Jack Dalton's hardly concealed hatred for socialist principles and men like David Climanis, with whom Henry establishes his only adult friendship and who echoes Connolly's beliefs, point to a generalised disdain for all the values that in the trilogy are presented as good. Additionally, the recurring disdain for working-class Dubliners, embodied by the Volunteers at the GPO, the young country men that Henry trains for guerrilla combat and John Ford, add even more complexity to the bias against people like Henry, that belong to the urban working-class.

Henry's frustration and disappointment in the fighting, as well as a death sentence issued against him, lead him to emigrate to the USA, where, for some time, he believes that he

can forfeit his Irish identity and become a Yank. However, the constant influence of Henry's past on him and his re-encounter with Miss O'Shea and Saoirse dash his hopes of erasing the Irishness within him. Nevertheless, Henry's contact with a foreign culture and, especially, his passion for jazz (a style of music censored by the Irish Free State) once again complicate a strict categorisation of his identity. Henry's dual status as an Irish hero for his fight against the British, but also as someone who, in the eyes of the guardians of Irish morality, would be considered a traitor for his love of the American culture problematises the existence of a pure Irish identity. It is only after Henry acknowledges his Irish past and embraces another culture that he feels ready to travel back to Ireland.

The question that Henry asks himself during the Easter Rising, when the Volunteers stop guarding the barricades and begin to pray: "What sort of a country were we going to create?" (*ASCH* 112), resonates throughout *The Dead Republic*, when Henry returns to Ireland and reflects on the changes he finds in the country. Although, in the beginning, he sees improvements and modernisation to a certain extent, the fact that the Dublin slums still exist, the continued presence of illness and malnourishment and, ultimately, the violence of the Troubles, lead Henry to find the Republic faulty in many aspects. Furthermore, with Ireland's recession in the 1980s, and the appearance of the first Dublin junkies, Henry's conclusion is that the country is in worse shape than when he left it in 1922. The ultimate revelation of the trilogy is that, according to the IRA, all the fighting had always been about ownership of the definition of Irishness, which, as has I have argued repeatedly, continues to exclude Henry's experience: as a member of the urban working-class, as someone who, recalling Kearney's words, does not identify with any of "the three mothers of our historical memory: the mother church of the Catholic revival, the motherland of the nationalist revival; and the mother-tongue of the Gaelic revival" (19), Henry is in danger of being perceived as un-Irish.

As I stated in the introduction to this chapter (p. 43), seeing the bleak outlook on Ireland as described in *The Dead Republic*, it seems that Doyle's rewriting of the past might respond more to a need to understand the present and, quite possibly, to the rethinking of Ireland's future.

Chapter Two

2.1. Introduction

If the Last Roundup Trilogy is written by Roddy Doyle as a more experimental writer, indeed as a historiographer, the novels analysed in this chapter are representative of his most traditional style. All are set in Dublin, some time between the 1960s and the early 1990s and they are written in a style that seeks to imitate life. Four of these novels are also Roddy Doyle's earliest novelistic work: The Barrytown Trilogy—which consists of *The Commitments* (1987), *The Snapper* (1990) and *The Van* (1991) and whose plots take place at a time very close to Doyle's writing—and *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (1993), Doyle's fourth novel, for which he was awarded the Booker Prize, and that takes place in the 1960s.¹⁰⁶ What these four novels have in common is that they are all set in the fictional suburb of Barrytown (real-life Kilbarrack),¹⁰⁷ although, while in *Paddy Clarke* the estate is still undergoing a transformation, in the Barrytown Trilogy it is already a consolidated working-class area. One might wonder why, then, *Paddy Clarke* is not included in the Barrytown Trilogy, but the answer is simple. The trilogy focusses on the lives of the Rabbitte family: the protagonist of *The Commitments* is the family's eldest son, Jimmy Rabbitte, Jr.; Sharon, Jimmy's sister, is the main character of *The Snapper*, although her prominence is somewhat contested by the family's patriarch, Jimmy Rabbitte, Sr., who, in *The Van*, claims full protagonism. In *Paddy Clarke*, ten-year-old Paddy narrates the games and adventures with his friends and his little brother Sinbad, against the

¹⁰⁶ Roddy Doyle is considered to be the first Irish writer to win the Booker Prize, in 1993. However, more precisely, Iris Murdoch would have been the first, since she was born in Dublin, although she is conventionally regarded as a British author. She received the award in 1978 for *The Sea, the Sea* ("Full List of Booker Prize Winners, Shortlisted and Longlisted Authors and their Books").

¹⁰⁷ Paschel explains that Barrytown is based on the real "north-eastern Dublin suburb of Kilbarrack, the home of Doyle's own family and the place where he subsequently worked as a teacher in a secondary school" (67-8).

background of a changing neighbourhood, as Dublin Corporation are building new homes to relocate the people still living in the inner-city slums, and of the progressive disintegration of his parents' marriage. Finally, the last novel under analysis in this chapter, *Smile* (2017), tells the story of Victor Forde, a middle-aged man whose childhood memories revolve around the abuse he suffered at the hands of the headmaster at his Christian Brothers School.¹⁰⁸

The five novels discussed in this chapter share numerous traits that make their comparison highly apt. They are all set in a similar historical context, that of an independent Ireland between the time of the so-called modernisation of the 1960s, with the election of Seán Lemass (Fianna Fáil) as Taoiseach,¹⁰⁹ and right until the beginning of the Celtic Tiger period, which is covered in Chapter Three. In *Smile* and *Paddy Clarke*, religion still plays a major role, as the society represented in these novels is heavily influenced by the representatives and the rules of Irish Catholicism. Contrarily, in the Barrytown Trilogy, religion has nothing more than a vestigial presence. The same can be said about the Irish language, which still has some presence in *Smile* and *Paddy Clarke*, but has disappeared completely in the Barrytown Trilogy. This is not to say that the protagonists of *Smile* and *Paddy Clarke* feel represented by the Ireland that nationalists like de Valera envisioned. On the contrary, in a time when land, language and religion were still major signifiers of identity, Roddy Doyle's characters continue to define themselves against the norm. Like Henry Smart, all the characters present in this chapter are Dubliners for whom rural Ireland has no real meaning, but who find themselves increasingly confined to working-class estates. Likewise, with the growing influence of American and British culture that entered Ireland through television, Celtic culture has little or no meaning for these figures.

¹⁰⁸ Although the plot of *Smile* is set in the 2000s, many of the novel's most significant events take place in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, therefore it is discussed in this chapter.

¹⁰⁹ For a fuller context, see "The Twentieth Century in Ireland: Historical Context" (p. 29) in the Introduction.

In this chapter, which follows a thematic structure, rather than an individual discussion of each novel, I analyse some of the signifiers of traditional Irish identity from a different perspective. Thus, for example, in section “2.2.1. Land: The Urban Working Class”, I look at the Dubliner urban working-class and the novelty of their representation in Irish writing, with Doyle as one of its pioneers. In this section I also use Bissett’s understanding of the term *geography of class* to explore themes of belonging and of how class and geography intersect in Dublin.

In the second section, “2.2.2. Religion and National Education”, I examine another crucial signifier of Irish identity, namely, religion. When it comes to religion in Doyle’s work, from which it is usually absent, I analyse its representation not as a unifying element that fills the characters’ lives with hope and meaning, but as a source of conflict and hurt and as an example of hypocrisy. National education, which is discussed in the same section, as it was intrinsically connected to religion from the time of birth of the independent state, is also depicted as an outdated system, in which violence is the norm. Like in my discussion of “Land”, I also look at the way in which religion and national education intersect with the characters’ class.

Finally, in the last section of this chapter, “2.2.3. Poverty, Community and Solidarity”, I analyse the importance of. In the absence of other elements of union (such as a strong sense of nationality or religion), many of Doyle’s characters thrive on solid ties with their community. The sense of belonging, I argue, is interlinked with the characters’ poor socioeconomic circumstances and with solidarity. Moreover, the character’s, at times, complicated relationship to the group due to their contrary desires for individuality and belongingness exacerbates some of their worse qualities, something which adds complexity and profundity to their construction.

2.2. Text Analysis

2.2.1. Land: The Urban Working Class

In Chapter One, I argued that some of Henry Smart's feelings of alienation from Irish society and history spring from his belonging to the city rather than the country. Because of his urban origins, Henry is not perceived as truly Irish.¹¹⁰ Indeed, the tension between urban experience and rural experience reflects a larger reality in Irish culture. O'Toole referred to this when, in 1985, he wrote that "[f]or the last hundred years, Irish culture and in particular Irish writing has been marked by this dominance of the rural over the urban, a dominance based on a false opposition of the country to the city which has been vital to the maintenance [sic] of a conservative political culture in the country" ("Going West" 111). Among other aspects, this "dominance of the rural over the urban", led to a neglect of some of the cultural traits that characterised modern Ireland. In Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch's words,

the emphasis given in the cultural ideology of de Valera's Ireland to folk tradition, as an expression of Irish identity, served in effect to mask and to mute the actual cultural history of Ireland in the four middle decades of the [twentieth] century, and (...) another Ireland of those years has gone largely unrecorded. That other Ireland is the Ireland whose cultural expression was the popular culture of the city streets and the factories, the popular culture of town life in the urbanising countryside, the popular culture arising from the modernising aspects of village and rural life, as in the effect, for example, of rural electrification that culminated - in popular cultural terms - with the establishment of an Irish television station in 1961 (...) (155)

Ó Cruaíoch's argument echoes O'Toole's critique that "[t]his kind of division between the city and an idealised notion of the country is not simply that it denies urban experience but it prevents an affective and radical critique of the political and economic exploitation of the countryside itself" ("Going West" 114).

¹¹⁰ See Chapter One, "1.2.3.1. The Bold Henry Smart" (p. 92).

Focussing on the denial of urban experience (for the purpose of this thesis and keeping in line with my primary texts), Ferdia MacAnna wrote the following, recalling his primary education in 1960s Dublin, about the Christian Brothers at this school “who were all from the country”: they “made it plain that they thought that anyone who could not use a hurley stick or sing a ballad in Irish or plough a field with their bare hands, was not a true Irishman” (14). MacAnna continues by explaining how “[t]here was no trace of Dublin in our schoolbooks. Most of the Irish literature we were taught dealt with life on the land or the struggle against the British or the horrors of the famine” (15). For him as well as many of his contemporaries, Lee Dunne’s novel *Goodbye to the Hill* (1965), “a novel about Dublin life” (15) proved to be captivating in that it was “the first book we had read that dealt in a realistic and believable way with the realities of modern Dublin life” (16) and it

updated Daniel Corkery’s famous maxim that Irish literature, in order to be considered truly indigenous, must deal with three themes: the land, religion and nationalism. Here the city replaces the land, religion is seen as more of a social nuisance than a stifling force and nationalism is redefined in terms of individual rather than state freedom. (15-6)

MacAnna also addresses the Dublin writers’ “fear of Joyce” (18) as a key factor in making them seem “reluctant to grapple with the realities of life in their city” (18), for the celebrated author would have already covered everything there was to say about Dublin. To use MacAnna’s humorous way of putting it, Joyce “intimidated the bejzus out of the Dublin writers of the 60s, 70s and 80s” (18), with only a few exceptions.¹¹¹ Most interestingly, MacAnna devotes a section of his article (“Renaissance? What Renaissance?”), to a generation of Irish writers that had a new vision of Dublin. He traces this “Renaissance” to the foundation

¹¹¹ In “The Anxiety of Influence and the Fiction of Roddy Doyle”, Danine Farquharson alludes to an interview in which, being asked whether he was conscious of writing within or against any specific tradition, Roddy Doyle answered with a blunt “no” (415). More specifically, Doyle has made not few controversial remarks about the quality of Joyce’s texts (Farquharson 418). In relation to Doyle’s experience when it comes to “the burden of being a contemporary Irish novelist and having to address the question of Joyce’s influence” (418), Farquharson writes that “[i]f O’Casey is a kindly grandfather whose birthday you often forget, then Joyce is that annoying and scandalous uncle you cannot escape and your family simply will not stop talking about” (418).

of the Raven Arts Press (in Finglas in 1979) by Dublin writers Michael O'Loughlin and Dermot Bolger. MacAnna describes Raven in the 1980s as "Ireland's leading underground and alternative press, publishing new work by many young Irish writers (Colm Toibin, Roddy Doyle, Eoin McNamee, Aidan Murphy, Katie Donovan and many others) and launching the careers of young Dublin poets Sara Berkeley (...) and Davoren Hanna" (21). The vision that this new wave of writers, spearheaded by O'Loughlin and Bolger themselves, had in common was that of Dublin "as a troubled modern entity, plagued by drugs, unemployment, high taxes, disillusionment and emigration" (21). MacAnna recognises only a few pages later that Paul Mercier and Roddy Doyle, in their use of comedy, provide

a perfect counterpart to the bleak poetic realism of the Raven writers. Combine the two, and a portrait emerges of a city that is full of slices of contemporary life yet struggling to find its identity and shake off the stultifying influence of its own heritage. The identity of Dublin was being questioned and probed and, in many ways, redefined. Throughout the 80s, Mercier, Doyle, O'Loughlin, Bolger, Meehan and others explored elements of Dublin life that many people (...) had tried to ignore or sweep under the carpet. They were our guides to a new city, a 'new Dublin' that was developing as fast as its writers. (26)

Finally, MacAnna suggests that

perhaps the real truth revealed by the renaissance in Dublin is that the myth of a single Ireland is no longer true, in either a social or a literary sense. Now there are three very different Irelands, each with its own distinctive literary and social ethos and traditions: rural Ireland of the prying priests and repressed passions with its marvellous chroniclers Paddy Kavanagh, O'Faolain, O'Flaherty, O'Connor, McGahern and others; 'The North' of sectarian division and strike and famous poets, Heaney, Hewitt, Muldoon, MacNeice, Mahon and Paulin; and now, at last, emerging from the shadow of its literary giants and indeed, the myths and folklore of the other Irelands, the city and environs of Dublin with its urban sprawl and modern plagues and flock of young writers. (29-30)

Hence, it seems reasonable to suggest that, by writing about a Dublin estate such as Barrytown, Doyle was, in a way, writing against tradition and against the notion that Irish writers could or should only focus on rural Ireland. I want to suggest that, in choosing the city as a setting, Doyle was actually doing much more.

Although, at a first glance, the setting of Doyle's novels might not seem extremely relevant to their plots, I believe that the opposite is true. As Paschel explains, "[b]y his own admission, Doyle does not even consider his novels as particularly Irish" (70) and offers the following insight from an interview with Doyle, in which he claimed the following:

The message I've got from people who have spoken or written to me is that the stories seem to be quite universal, some people forming a band [*The Commitments*] or a woman being beaten [*The Woman who walked into Doors*], these things obviously happen all over the world and across class and religion. (...) I think if they were particularly Irish they wouldn't be translated into so many languages. (71; omission in the original)

While Doyle's comment is partly true in that there is a universality and probably even an atemporality to the stories he writes (as with most, if not all, stories), his view, when applied to his novels as a whole, is not so accurate. Indeed, Paschel argues that Doyle's novels are very much rooted to Dublin through many of their features, such as their concrete and traceable geographic location; the speech of their characters, which is inflected by geographic location and social class; and all the specific cultural references that abound in the texts and that make them seem so close to real life (Paschel 81). I want to go slightly further and propose that there is an unequivocal correlation between the settings of Doyle's novels and his characters' social class. This correlation manifests itself through several aspects that I discuss below.

In his fascinating ethnographic study, *It's Not Where You Live, It's How You Live*, Bissett documents the lives of a group of working-class men and women living in a public housing estate in Dublin. As I see it, many of the conclusions that Bissett reaches have an echo in Doyle's fiction. Bissett writes about "the geography of class" and claims that "[c]lass has an address in that it is located somewhere in space-time, in that lives are lived out and end in particular places. This is the geography of class, and it grids and striates the city and country with clear lines of demarcation. We live here and you live there. We live like this, you live like that" (ix). Indeed, this idea is strongly present in some of the novels that I discuss in this

chapter. For example, Bissett explains that “[p]eople located in similar positions and places in the social class structure are positioned and placed (...) together” (119-20), leading to a “class homogeneity” (120), something which can be tracked in the history of Barrytown as depicted in its transition from semi-rural suburb in *Paddy Clarke* to solid working-class estate in the Barrytown Trilogy. Likewise, when Bissett writes about the city as both “a production site for the economics of class” and “a site for playing out of distinction” (121) and argues that “[c]lass boundaries, while generally implicit, remain clearly demarcated, and one must know one’s place not alone in the social and economic hierarchy, but also in the spatial landscape” (121), he provides a background explanation for Jimmy, Sr., and Bimbo’s feelings of displacement in *The Van*, when they decide to spend a night out in the centre of Dublin. Finally, Bissett emphasises that “[s]uch understandings and knowledge of how to use the city and of where to go and not to go are deeply embedded in people’s practices and consciousness” (121) and this knowledge is also true for several of Doyle’s characters, from Jimmy, Jr., in *The Commitments* to Victor Forde in *Smile*.

Perhaps the phrase that most clearly shows the intersection between geography and class is the claim voiced by Jimmy, Jr., in *The Commitments* saying that “[t]he Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads. (...) An’ Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland. (...) An’ the northside Dubliners are the niggers o’ Dublin” (13). Suffice it to say, for now (I go into aspects of race in Chapter Three), that here the term “niggers” is used to create “a rapid metonymic slide associating Irishness, Dublinness and Blackness without substantiating these notions” (Piroux 18). As Piroux further argues (and I fully agree with her), “such a slogan implicitly evokes the commonality of minorities’ experience in their struggle against oppression” (18). Thus, Jimmy, Jr., is locating the most oppressed people in Dublin in its northern side, that is, north of the river Liffey, creating an unequivocal link between this specific area of the city and the working class. Indeed, the history of how Barrytown became the working-class suburb of Doyle’s early

texts is specific to Dublin. This history alights in the phrase that Paddy Clarke uses to refer to the new children that have moved to Barrytown: “Slum scum” (*PC* 118).

2.2.1.1. Moving to the Suburbs

Change is probably the most important theme in *Paddy Clarke*. Paddy’s outward world is constantly changing, as Barrytown is being transformed from a semi-rural area into a fully urbanised suburb, and so is Paddy’s private world, as his parents’ marriage disintegrates. When Dublin Corporation begin building new homes in Barrytown, to house the people that are still living in the city slums, “the place becomes less green, as concrete and rubbish left over from the building sites take over everywhere, giving Barrytown a neglected and almost desolate atmosphere” (Paschel 76). Apart from the implications that this has for Paddy and his friends, who lose playground space and start to miss certain areas that have disappeared, the context in which the urbanisation takes place is worth considering: the slum clearance programme. As Ruth McManus explains, although this programme had been attempted for decades (as early as 1876 (40), it had failed due to manifold reasons.

In Chapter One, I showed in relation to Henry Smart’s childhood that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Dublin had one of Europe’s worst housing situations, as “[t]he bulk of the city’s population lived in tenements, the decaying homes of the eighteenth-century aristocracy (...) or in tiny cottages in courts and alleys behind main streets” (McManus 39). People living in Dublin’s tenements did so under dreadful circumstances, such as poor diets, extreme poverty, overcrowding, lack of water and proper sanitary conditions and diseases (McManus 39). Although the first suburban housing built by Dublin Corporation was erected as early as 1905, “many of the workers resisted moving from their homes and communities” (McManus 40). When in the 1920s, “suburban ‘cottage estates’ were built by Dublin

Corporation for tenant purchase”, only “the better-off members of the working classes” could afford them (McManus 45). This problem remained for several decades and, as McManus puts it, “[e]ven extensive building would not enable any single slum area to be actually cleared, as the majority of the inhabitants were unable to afford the cost of living in the outer areas” (46). This led to yet another problem, namely that “the evolving housing policy was destined to reinforce social segregations, as the wealthier workers could move to the suburbs, leaving the poorest people in the decaying core” of the city (McManus 46-7). A key issue, one that I return to below, was the feeling that many workers had “of being ‘banished’ to the outskirts of the city, as the ‘housing schemes gave them houses, but stripped away the fabric of their lives”” (McManus 48). McManus refers to an anecdote in which the writer Brendan Behan “likened his family's move to suburban Crumlin to going to Siberia!” (50). Going more deeply into this, she adds that “[a] lack of amenities in many of the new areas, as well as poor and expensive transport links, led to problems for the new suburban dwellers. ‘They were all moved out to places like Ballyfermot and Finglas ... And none of them wanted to go (...) And it was funny, you could move a man ten miles out and on a Saturday night he'd come back into the old pub for his drink”” (McManus 50; omission in the original). It was not until the 1970s that “the last of Dublin’s tenements were finally demolished” (McManus 51). Hence, returning to *Paddy Clarke*, the families that Paddy refers to as “slum scum” would have been some of the last being moved from the centre’s slums to a suburb and, by extension, some of the worst-off members of that particular society. Regarding this event, in her analysis of *Paddy Clarke*, Paschel writes that

[t]rouble starts when the first families move into the new houses. (...) What is relevant to the children is that these families bring with them children of their own, a new set of boys to challenge Paddy’s gang’s claim to the streets of Barrytown. (...) Consequently, as a means of defence, they simply refuse to acknowledge the kids from the Corporation houses as their playmates and, moreover, they regard the newcomers with contempt and condescension. Even among the children there is a strict class hierarchy between the middle and the working

classes.¹¹² Stereotypes are quick to develop and the new children are looked down upon as poor, rough and trouble makers, and are referred to as “slum scum” (p. 118). (78)

Although McCarthy rejects Paschel’s notion that the problems for Paddy begin with the appearance of the new families (141) and, instead, argues (in my view, correctly) that “Paddy’s middle-class suburb is already fairly unstable before the dreaded ‘Corpos’ arrive” (141-2), I want to pay some more attention to the arrival of the families from the slums, despite the fact that they do not play the most relevant role in the novel.

It is only towards the end of the novel that Paddy, having rejected the children from the Corporation houses for its greatest part, becomes drawn to one of them: Charles Leavy. Among other aspects, Paddy is fascinated by Charles’s apparent imperturbability. Thus, when Paddy claims that he “wanted to be like Charles Leavy. I wanted to be hard” (250), it is presumably because Paddy wishes to forfeit the feelings of pain caused by his parents’ fights and to be as unaffected by reality as Charles seems to be. Nevertheless, in my view, succeeding in his wish would be rather far from a good outcome for Paddy. Despite being only about ten years old, Charles does not behave at all like a happy, healthy child. The cause for this is, probably, poverty. Whatever little information the text provides about Charles is quite negative. For example, the readers learn that “Charles Leavy wore plastic sandals, blue ones. We laughed at them but we were careful. He brought nothing into school the first day. When Henno asked why not he said nothing, he just looked at his sleeves on the desk. He didn’t squirm. There was

¹¹² Both Paschel and McCarthy refer to Paddy’s family, the Clarkes, as middle class. There is no evidence in the novel to support such a claim, other than the fact that the Clarkes are slightly better off than some of the other families in Barrytown. However, I believe that this reading might not be the most accurate. On the one hand, in the same way that, when considering the middle class, one might differentiate between the higher middle class and the lower middle class, the working class is not a monolithic group. In fact, as gathered from McManus’s article, not all workers could afford to buy homes in the suburbs, meaning that not all workers had the same purchasing power, while still belonging to the same class. On the other hand, none of Roddy Doyle’s texts, and *Paddy Clarke* is no exception, can be considered a middle-class novel or to be representative of the life of a middle-class family. Moreover, the fact that “a strict class hierarchy” is established among the children in *Paddy Clarke* does not necessarily mean that the children actually belong to different social classes. The lack of a clear class consciousness and of solidarity can lead Paddy and his friends to discriminate against somebody who is only slightly their inferior (in terms of purchasing power). Therefore, I have chosen to read the Clarkes as, at the most, slightly privileged members of the working class.

nearly a hole in one of his elbows. You could see lots of his shirt through it” (*PC* 184). Similarly, on another occasion, Paddy comments that Charles Leavy “was wearing runners. There was a split where the rubber joined the canvas. The canvas was grey and frayed” (249). Readers also learn that Charles Leavy smokes, that he is alone most of the time, that “[h]e never smiled” (251) and that he says “fuck off” (249) like no other child in Barrytown.

All this evidence inevitably creates a link between the Leavys’ poor economic circumstances and Charles’s over-early adulthood, similar to the case of Henry Smart, who learns to fend for himself from a very early age. The ending of *Paddy Clarke* also supports this idea, as Paddy is forced to mature at an unnatural speed, as a result of his parents’ separation. The months of growing tension, fear and pain that Paddy spends being aware of and trying to prevent the fights between his parents take a great psychological toll on him. As McCarthy puts it, “Paddy’s childhood ends when he decides to leave the gang [of his friends], Barrytown ceases to be the secure personal ‘country’ (*PC*, 150) that it once was, and his father leaves home” (145). There are never any positive circumstances in the premature loss of childhood for any of these boys (Charles Leavy, Henry Smart and Paddy Clarke).

Finally, as I mentioned above, there remains the problem that families living in the slums faced, who felt that being moved to the suburbs uprooted them from their community. Although *Paddy Clarke* does not engage with this problem, there are elements in the novel that invite the reader to imagine what the Leavys’ life is like. Such an element, for instance, is the description of the Leavys’ house:

Charles Leavy lived in one of [the houses across the road]. I didn’t know which one. I wondered was it the one with the big hill of broken bricks in the garden, bricks and muck and hard cement and bits of cardboard box sticking out of it. And huge weeds growing by themselves out of it with stalks like rhubarb. The one with the cracked window in the hall door. I decided it was. It seemed to fit. It scared me, just looking at the house, and thrilled me. It was wild, poor, crazy; brand new and ancient. The artificial hill would stay there for years. The weeds would creak, lean over, turn grey and become more permanent. (*PC* 249)

The fact that the new house into which the Leavys' have just been relocated, already looks uninviting, might have been either a disheartening shock for the family, or just one more disappointment accepted with resignation in a long list of shows of disdain from the state and society. Paschel points at this when she argues that

[w]hat Paddy, (...), obviously does not realise is that the displacement of the new children's families probably left them as bewildered as the locals feel by the new arrivals. (...) It is the same dilemma that Shay in *The Journey Home* described when he talked about his parents' feeling they were being deported into exile when they arrived in a half-finished place, unwelcomed by a hostile community far away from their own friends and relations. (79)

Although in *Paddy Clarke* none of the families coming from the slums have the opportunity to voice any of their concerns, unlike in Dermot Bolger's *The Journey Home* (1990), their presence in Doyle's text is not to be overlooked. Thus, considering the history of Dublin's slum clearance programme, I believe that Paddy's encounter with Charles in the context of the transformation of Barrytown is an element that firmly roots the novel to a specific place and time, reinforcing the link between geography and social class.

2.2.1.2. *Knowing Your Place*

To continue my discussion about how class and geography intersect in the work of Roddy Doyle, in this part I focus on Bissett's argument about the presence of class boundaries inside the city and its citizens implicit acknowledgement of them, as applied to Doyle's characters. In *The Van*, for example, there are several scenes in which the notion of belonging to a certain area in the city is discussed. The first instance of this occurs one time that Jimmy, Sr., notices "three couples, all young and satisfied looking" (TV 30) that he does not recognise in his local pub. To the question of who they are, Jimmy's friend Bertie responds "Gringos" (29). Immediately, Jimmy, Sr., and his friends start discussing whether it is appropriate for the

strangers to be there: “They should be upstairs” (30), comments Jimmy, Sr., referring to the Lounge. Bertie, with his—to him—humorous imitation of the Italian accent he often uses, manifests, “I speet on them” (30). Only Bimbo thinks that “[a]nyone should be able to come into a pub if they want” (30), an argument that the others reject. Nevertheless, as is often the case with Jimmy, Sr., he cannot provide a rational explanation for his opinion: “he hadn’t a breeze what he was going to say” (31); however, Bertie points out that the three friends would probably not be allowed into “one o’ those disco bars” in town (31) and states that this is “because we’ve no righ’ to be there” (32). Disco bars, according to Bertie, are for young people and ladies, but not for (presumably) older men like Jimmy, Sr., and his friends. Continuing his argument, Bertie “swept his open hand up and across from left to right, and showed them the room” and explains:

—This is our scene, compadre, he said.
 —Fuckin’ sure, said Jimmy Sr.
 Bertie was really enjoying himself. He pointed the things out to them.
 —Our pints. Our table here with the beermat under it stoppin’ it from wobblin’. Our dart board an’ our hoops, over there, look it.
 He stamped his foot.
 —Our floor with no carpet on it. Our chairs here with the springs all stickin’ up into our holes. We fit here, Bimbo, said Bertie. —An’ those fuckers over there should go upstairs to the Lounge where they fuckin’ belong. (33)

McCarthy offers another reason for Jimmy’s positioning with Bertie, that “[t]he inclusive-exclusive outlook that Jimmy subscribes to here reflects his need for a stable social milieu in the microcosm of the pub to counter the unstable world he experiences outside it” (100). If Bimbo is not entirely convinced by his friends’ point of view from the very beginning, on the occasion that he goes into town with Jimmy, Sr., for a night out, he slightly changes his perspective on this notion of belonging. This time, however, it is Bimbo and Jimmy, Sr., who feel like intruders. The difference between Dublin’s centre and Barrytown is so evident, that it is even reflected in the people’s physical appearance. This is something that Jimmy, Sr., quickly discerns while observing a group of young people:

There were huge crowds out, lots of kids – they [Jimmy, Sr., and Bimbo] were on Grafton Street now – big gangs of girls outside McDonalds. Not like the young ones in Barrytown; these young ones were used to money. They were confident, more grown up; they shouted and they didn't mind being heard – they wanted to be heard. They had accents like newsreaders. They'd legs up to their shoulders. Jimmy Sr did a rough count; there were only three of them that weren't absolutely gorgeous. (TV 234)

Similarly, Jimmy, Sr., and Bimbo notice a difference between the women in the city centre and the women from Barrytown, a difference which Jimmy, Sr., attempts to put into words in the following exchange:

— (...) —Veronica an' Maggie. We're lucky fuckin' men. But — they're wives. Am I makin' sense?
 —Yeah.
 —Those ones back there aren't. They might be married an' tha' but — they're more women than wives, eh — Fuck it, that's the only way I can say it.
 —I know wha' yeh mean, said Bimbo. (238-9)

Jimmy and Bimbo might not be able to express what it is exactly that makes these women different to their wives, but, like in the conversation they had with Bertie, they can feel it. There is also a moment in which both men, but especially Bimbo, feel uncomfortable in their new surrounding:

Bimbo wanted to get out; Jimmy Sr could tell. (...) Jimmy Sr wasn't going anywhere yet though. He hated this place, and liked it. It was crazy; himself and Bimbo were the only two men in here who needed braces to hold up their trousers and they were the only two not wearing them. They were also the only two that weren't complete and utter fuckin' eejits, as far as he could see. There was lots of loud laughing, at fuck all. (235)

Towards the end of the night, Bimbo and Jimmy, Sr., meet two women and try to flirt with them. Quite surprisingly, Bimbo, who had been uncomfortable during the whole trip into the city, ends up kissing one of the women. This makes Jimmy, Sr., who had been hoping “to see if he could manage a young one or one of these glamorous rich-looking, not-so-young ones” (236), feel jealous and resentful of his friend. The night, thus, ends in disaster, as Jimmy, Sr.,

bangs a door into Bimbo's face and the two friends return to their known place with feelings of regret and defeat.

The protagonist of *Smile*, Victor Forde, has also a very keen sense of how class and geography intersect in Dublin. He refers to this intersection when he says that, after falling in love and starting a romantic relationship with his partner Rachel, "I left my country and my class behind" (*Smile* 123), despite only moving from one part of the city to another. In my paper "It Happened to All of Us: Disclosing Sexual Abuse in Catholic Ireland in Roddy Doyle's *Smile*", one of the arguments that I made and that I wish to expand here was that Victor attempts to escape the truth about his past (namely, that he was repeatedly raped by the Head Brother at his Christian Brothers School) by trying to escape from his social milieu and class, as I show below.

The analysis of *Smile* can prove to be challenging because of the narrator's unreliability. Having experienced severe trauma as a child, Victor has unconsciously erased certain memories and the story that he narrates is partly made-up. The reader only learns this at the very end of the novel, when Edward Fitzpatrick, a character whose presence troubles Victor from the first pages of *Smile*, reveals his true identity as Victor's alter-ego and forces Victor to acknowledge the gruesome truth. Nevertheless, *Smile* holds a powerful social critique towards a society complicit with the Catholic Church, a critique that, in my view, is not invalidated by Victor's unreliability: the fact that some of the events that Victor recounts have not happened to him, does not mean that he could not have observed them directed to someone else. Likewise, Victor understands society's attitude towards such themes as the use of contraception or abortion, not necessarily because of his direct experience with these matters, but because of what he has learned while growing up in this very society: it is implicit knowledge.

An important element of *Smile* is that it holds great resemblance with actual events that took place in Ireland during the twentieth century. The correlation between the lower social

classes and clerical abuse towards them has been established at length (Powell et al., Ferguson, Coldrey, Pierse; *Writing*) and, in my view, *Smile* exposes this through Victor's case. It is due to this correlation that Victor invents his ascension to the upper middle class, because he knows that it is a safe haven, where such abuse as the one he was a victim of would probably never have taken place. There are many instances in *Smile* that support this idea, as I discuss below, and that, simultaneously, attest to the existence of a class geography.

Dublin is divided by the river Liffey into the northern side, considered to be poorer, and the southern side, where the well-off reside.¹¹³ Victor refers to this division when he states that he “was back home, back across the river” (*Smile* 143), in the poorer estate where he grew up. In a similar way to how Jimmy, Sr., perceives a difference between the women in Barrytown and the women in the city centre, Victor comments on the following difference between himself and Rachel: “I learnt the verb, ‘to fuck’, from Rachel. Where I came from, where and when I grew up, men rode women. (...) I left my country and my class behind and started fucking Rachel” (*Smile* 123). I already pointed out above how Victor does not leave his country, but only moves across the river to a different area, and Rachel is also Irish; thus, the difference in the use of language springs from a different factor, such as education and social milieu.

¹¹³ According to Dublin City Council, “[t]raditionally, the north side of the river was home to the city’s working class residents, while the south side was associated with Dublin’s middle and upper classes” (“Dublin Neighbourhoods”). This traditional structure, however, seems to be undergoing a change, as certain neighbourhoods “to the north become gentrified” (Dublin City Council; “Dublin Neighbourhoods”). Nevertheless, the 2011 Dublin City Indicator Catalogue still establishes that “neighbourhoods located in the north of the Dublin City administrative area have the highest levels of disadvantage, along with some areas to the west of the city centre. The highest concentration of affluent areas are located south of the city centre” (Dublin City Council; “Dublin City” 19). Nevertheless, “[t]oday [in 2024], the county would be more accurately described as having a west-east division”, with the East considered to be more affluent (Dublin City Council; “Dublin Neighbourhoods”). Paschel adds an interesting dimension to this by addressing the perception of Dubliners. She claims that the North-South division along the River Liffey, “has also generated a variety of stereotypes among the population. Southsiders consider the northside to be too rough, and hold it responsible for the growth of crime and drug problem in the city. The Northsiders in turn think the affluent southside is too anglicized, too full of people talking with pseudo-English accents, and they claim that their own part of Dublin is more natural, more Irish even” (9).

The idea of class geography is further reinforced by a scene in which Victor recounts a very mild version of the abuse he suffered (the one that he remembers and believes to be the truth for the greatest part of the novel) to a group of people belonging to a higher social class:

—Which school did you go to, Victor?

Which? The possibilities were limited. There were only five or six schools I could have gone to, if I was one of them. The women always knew before the men: I wasn't one of them – they knew I was interesting. I'd come from another world, across the city. (162; original emphasis)

Not only does Victor differentiate between himself and *them*, but he stresses how starkly apart his experience is from that of his interlocutors by emphasising that they come from different worlds, despite living in the same city. Likewise, when Victor addresses his experience with violence and abuse at his school, the people listening to him react by either feeling “appalled, delighted, spellbound” (162) or by expressing doubt or disbelief. The latter can be seen in the following excerpt:

—Did anything like this ever happen to any of us? he asked.

Us.

Most of them shook their heads. (...)

—The nuns were lovely. (163-4; original emphasis)

As I argued in my paper,

the emphasis on the word “us” signifies to Victor the clear distinction between the speakers' world and Victor's world; it marks the difference between his experiences in life and that of the others in the group: Victor is an outsider, he is different, because he went to a Christian Brotherhood School as a direct consequence of belonging to a different part of the city and, most especially, to a different social class (the two things, of course, essentially being related). (Schlesier 178)

In addition, as I pointed out in the same article,

[t]he remark about the nuns, spoken by one of the women in the group, also refers to a class distinction that can be traced to real-life situations. It is a fact, which Raftery and O'Sullivan point out, that “the *real* orphanages run by religious orders mostly charged fees and catered for ‘the children of the middle-classes who had fallen on hard times’” (cited in Pierse 211, original emphasis). Pierse argues that “these institutions [the orphanages for middle-class people] –

which were sharply distinguished from the industrial-school sector in practice, if not in the popular imagery – served a specific purpose in *maintaining a rigid class divide* between children from different backgrounds” (211, cited in Pierse, original emphasis). (Schlesier 178)

When Victor moves back to his old milieu, at the beginning of the novel, he gradually starts to recover his memory. This reinforces the idea that Victor attempted to escape his traumatic memories, his past, by running away from the place where he grew up. Thus, on his return, the memories begin flooding him again.

Putting all the examples discussed above together, I believe that it is plausible to suggest that Roddy Doyle’s Dublin is a city clearly marked by class divides and segregation, something which most of his characters seem to be acutely aware of. This class divide, moreover, can be perceived in the way that people speak, look, and in their understanding of the world. This, as I see it, buttresses my thesis that Doyle attributes to his working-class characters an experience in life that sets them apart from other Dublin citizens.

2.2.2. Religion and National Education

In this section I have chosen to discuss both the representation of religion and of national education in this chapter’s primary texts.¹¹⁴ The reason for this is twofold: on the one hand, although religion does not play a relevant role in most of Doyle’s fiction,¹¹⁵ *Paddy Clarke* and *Smile* are an exception and, in the case of *Smile*, religion and national education are presented as an indivisible unit, as part of the plot takes place in a Christian Brothers School. Moreover, the great similarities in the representation of education in both novels invites a parallel analysis of the texts. On the other hand, religion and national education were intrinsically related in

¹¹⁴ Whenever I speak of religion throughout this chapter, the Catholic denomination is meant, unless it is otherwise specified. Likewise, when I refer to the Church, the Catholic Church is meant. In all cases, the context remains that of Catholicism in Ireland.

¹¹⁵ As McCarthy points out, “Doyle explains the absence of religion in the Barrytown trilogy as intentional: ‘There’s no religion in me own life, for certain. I’ve no room for it at all’ (White, 2001: 168)” (130).

independent Ireland, as I explain below. The Catholic Church had already been in charge of national education before Ireland achieved independence and “throughout the first 4 decades following Irish independence, the Catholic Church maintained its dominant role in Irish education irrespective of the political party in power (Whyte 1980, 21)” (O’Donoghue and Harford 325). Therefore, before continuing with my analysis of the primary texts, I believe that it is necessary to look somewhat closer at the importance of religion in post-independent Ireland, especially bearing in mind the 1937 Constitution, as well as to briefly examine the ties between the Catholic Church, national education and social class.

*2.2.2.1. The Catholic Church and the 1937 Constitution*¹¹⁶

In Chapter One of this thesis, I emphasised how crucial it became after independence to promote a national project that would unite a population greatly divided by the Civil War (see “1.2.4.4. Censorship and Jazz”, p. 114). In the words of Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, there was a “major project of decolonisation which informed the ambitions of a section of the nationalist leadership which came to power in the new independent Irish state in 1922” (166). The “central objective” of this project was “the restoration as the main vernacular of the Irish language” (166-7), but, as Ó Tuathaigh adds, “the alternative badge of communal identity” to the Irish language was religion: “[r]eligious identity was, for historical reasons, deeply and pervasively communal” (171).¹¹⁷ Therefore, both the Irish language and Catholic faith were considered crucial elements to bond a divided people. Pragmatically speaking, moreover, “[a]mid the

¹¹⁶ For works on religion and childhood in Ireland, see Ganiel; Inglis; Kitching; and Valente.

¹¹⁷ According to Daithí Ó Corráin, “[t]he 1926 census revealed that Roman Catholics accounted for 92.6 per cent of the population in the Irish Free State”.

uncertainties of the 1920s the Church offered the new State continuity, stability and an extensive infrastructure” (Ó Corráin).

Nonetheless, although Church-State relations were maintained when Fianna Fáil won the 1932 elections, the Catholic Church expected a more solid proof of allegiance from the party with members who had once rejected the Anglo-Irish Treaty: there existed “suspicions that derived from pronouncements by the Catholic hierarchy of the early 1920s against those who had opposed the Treaty in arms during the Civil War” (FitzGerald 200). Thus, when Éamon de Valera granted the Catholic Church a special position in the 1937 Constitution, he did so, partly, out of the necessity of making amends with the powerful institution.¹¹⁸ According to FitzGerald, de Valera ensured his success and political power as Taoiseach by “giv[ing] some kind of formal recognition to [the Catholic Church]” (FitzGerald 200), which he did in the 1937 Constitution,¹¹⁹ *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (the “basic law of Ireland” (Ó Tuama 59)), through Article 44.¹²⁰ The special position granted by Article 44.1.2. (which was repealed in 1973 (*Constitution of Ireland*)) has been heavily debated and criticised, especially in light of the scandals which the Irish Catholic Church has been involved in that have been revealed in the past decades with the State’s, at times, complicit role¹²¹ (the physical and sexual abuse

¹¹⁸ The fact of granting the Catholic Church a special position was remarkable in so far as “[t]he 1922 Constitution was secular and did not mention the Catholic Church at all” (Ó Corráin), although Church-State relations had remained uninterrupted since partition.

¹¹⁹ Already before the drafting of the 1937 Constitution, “[u]nprecedented and frequent joint appearances under circumstances of grandeur and devotion by leaders of church and state in front of vast crowds stamped de Valera’s government with the Catholic Church’s seal of approval” (R. Fanning 255). There were also other circumstances that propitiated de Valera’s good relationship with the Church, such as “his close friendship with John Charles McQuaid, then the president of Blackrock College and subsequently Archbishop of Dublin” (R. Fanning 255-6). De Valera, a staunch Catholic, had received his education at Blackrock College and, later, taught there too.

¹²⁰ In Article 44.1.2., the 1937 Constitution specified the following: “2. The State recognises the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of the citizens” (qtd. in G. Hogan 297).

¹²¹ Investigations about the abuse that took place in certain Church-run institutions, like industrial schools, orphanages or Magdalene Laundries, have found that the Irish State was often aware of the deplorable conditions in these places, but did not take any significant measures to improve them. For example, Powell et al., describe how in the 1970s “the government reluctantly established an official enquiry into the industrial and reformatory school system, known as the Kennedy Committee” (12). Although the “Kennedy Report (1970), (...) recommended the closure of the industrial and reformatory schools system” it also “decided not to disclose the abusive nature of the care regimes, leading to accusations of a ‘cover-up’ and ‘whitewash’ (Arnold, 2009, pp. 67-

of children in Catholic institutions or the imprisonment of women in Magdalene Laundries are only some examples). However, as R. Fanning observes, “[f]rom the perspective of 1937, (...) Article 44 was a compromise that denied the Catholic Church the kind of exclusive recognition it wanted” (223).¹²² Regarding de Valera’s decisions in relation to Article 44, I find Conor Cruise O’Brien’s remark highly insightful:

‘Mr de Valera did stand up to the Church, where he thought the Church was wrong – about the Irish Republic. But on issues like divorce, contraception, obscene literature, there was no question of standing up to the Church because Mr de Valera – a Catholic, in the traditional sense, from rural Ireland – agreed with the Church on such matters.’ (Qtd. in R. Fanning 225)

Returning to the notion of the national project of communal identity and the relevance of Catholic faith for its fulfilment, I explained in Chapter One how Irish Catholicism believed that its role was to guide the people,¹²³ a view which was shared by the Irish State. In Chapter One, I described how one result of this was the establishment of a censorious regime that banned anything that could prove to be a harmful influence on the Irish population, particularly if it came from abroad. In the current chapter, the notion of purity gains weight, especially in the discussion of *Smile*. Louise Brangan describes how “[i]n this time of panic [the 1920s, due to a perceived “rise of evil”], purity was declared to be a key source of the new nation’s ‘strength’ (Irish Independent, 1925). Purity requires living without error, to be morally

70)” (12). It took around thirty years for the truth about the sexual abuse that took place in these institutions to be revealed to the wider population. Similarly, the group Justice for Magdalenes published the report *State Involvement in the Magdalene Laundries* (2012), in which it provides evidence of the State’s role in sending and keeping women in the Laundries, of the State’s financial support of the religious orders responsible of the Laundries and of the State’s failure in supervising the operation of the Laundries (Smith, et al.). In 2013, the Irish Government published the MacAleese Report that “found that the state and the Irish police force bore a major responsibility for sending the women [to the Magdalene Laundries] and failing to protect their rights as workers” (McDonald).

¹²² This is due to Article 44.1.3., which provides that: “3. The State also recognises the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Religious Society of Friends in Ireland, as well as the Jewish Congregations and the other religious denominations existing in Ireland at the date of the coming into operation of this Constitution” (qtd. in G. Hogan 297). Article 44 received criticism from Pope Pius XI and the Secretary of State, Cardinal Pacelli (R. Fanning 222). The problem by which de Valera “incurred the displeasure of these Catholic prelates” was that of “including the heads of the other churches in Ireland in his consultation process” (R. Fanning 221).

¹²³ See “Censorship and Jazz” (p. 117).

unblemished. This could only be achieved through the rigours of self-denial, such as chastity and abstinence” (398). As Brangan continues to explain, “[i]n post-independence Ireland, it was believed that the government simply did not have the capacity to manage, let alone foster, morality on a national scale. In the Irish Free State, the government and Catholic Church increasingly shared power. Religious orders of nuns, priests and Christian brothers took greater control of the schools, hospitals, and welfare provision (Inglis, 1998)” (399). For the purpose of this chapter, I pay particular attention to the Church’s control of schools. As Ó Buachalla puts it, Ireland’s bishops’ firm attitude regarding “the clerical managerial system” of schools

carried a clear message for political leaders of the new Irish state; if the independence movement wished to secure the blessing and support of the church, then church and state would need to be *ad idem* on such basic issues as educational policy; this inevitably meant among other things, that the state would accept the church’s specification of the respective roles of state and church in the provision and management of education. (354)

Thus, the Church was successful in maintaining a structural status quo (Ó Buachalla 353) since, at least from the 1920s to the 1960s, “it was loyal conservative Catholics who administered the [education] system (Dunn 1988, 101), maintaining the management of primary and secondary schools, while secondary schools received state funding as capitation grants” (O’Donoghue and Harford 323). However, the influence of the Church did not stop at the managerial level of education, since “Church personnel had been centrally involved in the development of new curricula with a strong religious ethos, for primary and secondary schools (Inglis 1998, 58)” (O’Donoghue and Harford 324). As Ó Buachalla explains, “Irish Catholic education and policy” was heavily influenced by the papal encyclical of 1929, *Divini Illius Magistri* (354).

Despite Irish Catholicism’s pervasive influence in the national curriculum, it is not a particularly insidious religious indoctrination that Doyle reflects or criticises in his novels; if there is a sort of indoctrination that Doyle criticises, it is rather that of an excessive romantic

nationalism, as I argued in relation to *The Dead Republic*¹²⁴ and as I discuss below in relation to *Paddy Clarke*. The Doylean character who has the worst experience in a religious context is Victor Forde who, at his Christian Brothers School, is physically and sexually abused by the Head Brother. Nevertheless, *Smile* does not show any internal conflict that Victor could have suffered due to any disparity between religious beliefs and the evil behaviour of the Christian Brothers at his school.¹²⁵ Indeed, all of Roddy Doyle's main characters are either atheists or, at the most, agnostics. Perhaps the character whose world is most shaped by religion is Paddy Clarke (although Victor Forde spends a longer time in the grips of institutional religion): for Paddy, religious festivities, traditions and rules are a natural part of everyday life.¹²⁶

The same cannot be said, however, of secondary characters. I pointed out above that the Catholic Church saw itself as having the duty to preserve the country's morality, but it was not only the Catholic Church who exercised this control. As Tom Inglis explains (when talking about sexuality in Ireland in the first half of the twentieth century) the "rigorous and censorious regime" present in Ireland "necessitated the supervisory eyes of priests, nuns, brothers, teachers, and parents" ("Origins and Legacies" 24). Of course, this regime did not apply exclusively to sexual matters. Precisely, it is this supervisory attitude from society that is represented in some of Doyle's novels, especially in *Smile* and in *Paddy Clarke*. The society represented in *Smile*, as I discuss below, is highly conservative and reacts aggressively to anyone who dares to defy traditional norms, particularly those related to sexuality. This censorious atmosphere has major consequences in Victor Forde's life, as it complicates a

¹²⁴ I refer to Henry Smart's pointed disgust for the mythologic dimension embodied by the Provisional IRA or by the schoolteachers in the school where he works, especially when it takes the form of rebel songs. Henry's disgust, although permeating the whole trilogy, is articulated more clearly in *The Dead Republic*.

¹²⁵ This contrasts greatly, for instance, with the character of a priest in John Banville's novel *Snow* (2020), a sexual predator who, during a brief confession, dwelling on the objects of his sexual appetite wonders, "what I could never understand was how God, having created us, should expect us to act differently to the way he'd made us" (267), voicing theological, but mostly, in my view, existential concerns.

¹²⁶ In the same interview alluded to in fn. 115, Roddy Doyle "admits that '*Paddy Clarke* is filled with religion — a childish version of it, because it's a different time [from *The Barrytown* trilogy], the 1960s' (White, 2001: 169)" (McCarthy 130).

successful disclosure of the abuse he suffered and, therefore, impedes his healing from it. In *Paddy Clarke* the community also act in a supervisory manner, although in a lighter fashion. Thus, for instance, Paddy's mother acts as a guardian and preserver of Catholic traditions within the family. Instead, the case of the Barrytown Trilogy is the complete opposite, since neither its community nor its main characters attempt to censor anyone or to moralise.

Finally, before starting the analysis of my primary texts, an important matter needs to be addressed, namely, the relation between the Irish Catholic Church and social class. O'Donoghue and Harford point out that "[n]ew Catholic religious teaching orders", such as the Christian Brothers (established in 1802), the Presentation Sisters (1775), the Sisters of Charity (1815) or the Sisters of Mercy (1831), were "founded and run by middle-class men and women in Ireland", who "played their part in the associated process of class formation and class consolidation through using schools for 'the imposition of bourgeois values and beliefs on the lower classes' (Margay 1998, 34)" (316). As I argue in my discussion of *Smile*, the working class were seen as especially vulnerable to dangerous influences. When referring to the system of industrial schools, for instance, Pierse writes that they represented "the most brutal expression of class-inflected cultural apparatus of dominations" and, quoting from Ferriter's *Occasions of Sin*, Pierse adds that it was "the work of 'more calculated and sinister forces [...]' who were obsessed with the visibility of those whose behaviour or existence challenged the notion of the Irish as more chaste, pious and respectable than people elsewhere'" (193; omission in the original). This "'visibility' of the unchaste", Pierse points out, "was most likely to find expression (...) amongst Dublin's working class" (193). In Doyle's novels it is not uncommon that the representatives of the Catholic Church are seen by working-class characters as aloof or hypocritical due to their wealth, marking the extent of the distance between the two groups. For example, in *Smile*, Victor Forde's father is "impressed that mendicants like the

Brothers could hold such vast tracts of land” (61). Similarly, Paddy Clarke’s father considers that priests get paid “too much” (47).

It is only fair to point out that, by the time that Victor and Paddy go to school, the situation of national education had started to change. Several modifications were introduced starting in 1959 (O’Donoghue and Harford 328), which saw the influence of the Catholic Church in education diminished:

[t]he Church lost some ground in the primary schools, with the relegation of the parish priest from the position of manager to that of being just one member of the new management boards. In the secondary schools, the number of religious personnel fell dramatically due to a major drop in the number of men and women joining religious orders, but priests, brothers, and sisters continued to exert influence as school principals and members of management boards, which now also had parent and teacher representatives. (O’Donoghue and Harford 329)

The same changes took place in the vocational school sector. However, it was not until the late 1990s that, with the 1998 Education Act, “a significant step” was taken “toward framing a wider legislative base for first- and second-level education (Glendenning 1999, 61)” and “an increasingly interventionist state role” was enacted (O’Donoghue and Harford 332). In 1999, “a new curriculum for primary schools (...) left decisions on the content of religious instruction to the individual primary school” and “secular instruction and religious instruction were more clearly separated officially than heretofore” (O’Donoghue and Harford 333). Thus, although the influence of the Catholic Church on education remained in place until quite recently, it did so slightly diminished from the 1960s.

2.2.2.2. Traces of Religion in Doyle’s Work

The presence and importance of religion varies from one novel to the other in Roddy Doyle’s work. Apart from it being a literary choice, as Doyle has claimed in interviews, as I pointed out above, I believe that the absence of religion in Doyle’s work might also reflect a general

change in Irish society's attachment to the Church. Thus, in *Paddy Clarke*, religion still has a major presence: despite the country's so-called modernisation from the 1960s onwards, the Church still held its sway over the Irish population. In *Paddy Clarke*, a text which, according to Brian Cosgrove, is "thoroughly permeated by [references to religious practice and icons]" (339), religion plays an important role in the children's games, in the characters' domestic life and in Paddy's understanding of the world. A similar case can be made for *Smile*, with the difference that Victor Forde has no attachment to religion, but it is rather the people around him who are described as being deeply influenced by Catholicism and its moral teachings. When it comes to the Barrytown Trilogy, however, the context is entirely different.

From the 1990s onwards, the period in which the Barrytown Trilogy is set, there was "an increasing detachment from the institutional Church" (Ó Corráin) caused by multiple factors, such as the scandals involving some of its members or the discovery of the abuse that took place in many of its institutions. This detachment, in my view, is reflected in the Barrytown Trilogy, where, unlike in *Paddy Clarke* or *Smile*, not even the adult characters possess any particular knowledge of or interest in religion. Religion is marginally present in some of the characters' opinions and expressions, although it is not clear whether they are even aware of this influence. As I argue below, I believe that the instances relating to religion present in the Barrytown Trilogy, especially in *The Snapper*, rather serve the function of showing the contradictions in the behaviour of certain characters.

In *Paddy Clarke*, both the main and secondary characters are influenced by religion. Moreover, although religion is presented in an ambivalent light, from all of Doyle's novels, this is the one in which it receives the most benevolent treatment (especially in contrast to *A Star* or *Smile*). Regarding religious influence, for example, ten-year-old Paddy "displays a degree of theological sophistication" (Cosgrove 237) that is striking when compared to other Doylean characters. Paddy's knowledge about such elements as the Angelus (*PC* 39) or the

precise way to conduct the rites during Holy Communion (*PC* 47-8), among many others, strongly contrast with Sharon's failed attempt to recite the Hail Mary prayer in *The Snapper*: "She tried to remember the Hail Mary but she couldn't get past Hello Be Thy Name" (26). Moreover, in *Paddy Clarke*, the influence of religion can be seen in how society contributes to uphold Catholic moral values. In the Clarkes' domestic sphere, according to Cosgrove, "Paddy's mother makes sure that he follows Church rule about fasting at least one hour before receiving Holy Communion (*PC*, 154)" (237). Similarly, Paddy turns to his parents when he wants to know whether people are "allowed to wear jeans on a Sunday" (*PC* 61). When it comes to the wider community, there is a telling example that shows how the upholding of Catholic values is supervised by society. The example involves Mr. O'Connell, a widower living together with his new girlfriend. Mr. O'Connell is the father of Aidan and Liam, two of Paddy's friends. When Mr. O'Connell is introduced at the beginning of the novel, it is in the context of his wife's death and he is described as suffering greatly:

Liam and Aidan's da howled at the moon. Late at night, in his back garden; not every night, only sometimes. I'd never heard him but Kevin said he had. My ma said that he did it because he missed his wife.

—Missis O'Connell?

—That's right.

My da agreed with her.

—He's grieving, said my mother. —The poor man. (3)

Nevertheless, when Mr. O'Connell initiates a romantic relationship with Margaret, a woman who eventually moves in with him, the boys' aunt decides to remove them from their home: "She'd gone to their house in the middle of the night. She had a letter from the Guards saying that she could take them, because Margaret was staying in the house and she shouldn't have been" (*PC* 40). Whether the involvement of the Guards is real or not (after all, Paddy's account is based mainly on rumours), the fact remains that the boys are removed from their home, because their aunt does not consider it proper that they should live under the same roof as an

unmarried couple, never once minding how positive Margaret's presence might be for the two boys and their father.

Regarding the ambivalent light under which religion is presented in *Paddy Clarke*, meaning that, although it is not severely criticised, it is not positive either, McCarthy (129-30) writes the following:

Doyle's representation of the Catholic religion in *Paddy Clarke* is also ironic and satirical. (...) Much more seriously, and more darkly, Doyle shows Catholicism failing Paddy as a source of solace in his misery. Listening to his parents fight, he descends into a psychological darkness whose contours mock the religious master-narrative of his culture:

All I could do was listen and wish. I didn't pray; there were no prayers for this. The Our Father didn't fit, or the Hail Mary. But I rocked the same way I sometimes did when I was saying prayers. Backwards and forwards, the rhythm of the prayer. ...

I rocked.

—Stop stop stop stop — (PC, 154). (omission in the original)

Besides showing how religion ultimately fails Paddy, the novel also places religion at the core of some arguments between Paddy's parents, as I show below. In one of the scenes that McCarthy qualifies as "ironic and satirical", Paddy has read the story of Father Damien, who becomes a saint after joining a leper colony, where he builds a new church and houses, and where he dies, after contracting leprosy too. Paddy is so fascinated by the story (it was "[t]he best story I ever read" (46)) that he tries to emulate Father Damien's hosts made of flour (47) and then forces Sinbad and other younger children to play the lepers while he plays Father Damien (50-2). However, when Paddy tells his mother that he wants to be a missionary because "I have a vocation" and "God has spoken to me" (52), Paddy's father begins an argument with his wife:

—I told you, he said.

He sounded angry.

—Encouraging this rubbish, he said.

—I didn't encourage it, she said.

—Yes, you bloody did, he said.

She looked like she was making her mind up.

—You did! He roared it.

She went out of the kitchen, beginning to run. (52-3)

Given the strong presence of religion in Ireland at that time and knowing that, at school, the children receive regular visits from Father Moloney who tells them all sorts of stories, it is somewhat surprising that Mr. Clarke should get so upset about what are evidently Paddy's childish ideas (most children express desires for the most varied and unlikely professions: from becoming an astronaut to an explorer or adventurer like Indiana Jones). As I see it, the point of this scene is not so much to criticise religious fervour, but to represent the futility of the arguments between Paddy's parents and the ease with which they flourish. Nonetheless, I believe that it is noteworthy that the argument rises as a consequence of a topic related to religion: religion here is not shown as a conciliatory element, but, rather, it is at the core of the Clarkes' dispute.

When it comes to *Smile*, its main characters, contrary to those in *Paddy Clarke*, are much less influenced by religion or directly reject it. Instead, the wider society depicted in *Smile* is highly conservative, especially in its opinions about sexuality, which are often expressed in a violent manner. For example, when Victor Forde (who, in his twenties, becomes decidedly outspoken in his anti-religious stance) expresses on the radio his support for legalising abortion close to the time of the 1983 Abortion Referendum, he finds on returning to his family home that "someone painted a cross on the front door and wrote 'Killer' on the step with the rest of the paint" (78). Victor's mother, Mrs. Forde, who does not believe that abortion is murder, still clarifies that she "won't be jumping up and down telling people that" (79). Mrs. Forde's caution suggests, firstly, the censorious and oppressive nature of the community in *Smile*, which does not allow for debate, and, secondly, the idea that opinions, especially if transgressive, should be kept private. This constitutes a difference when compared to *Paddy Clarke*, where, although some characters like Mr. O'Connell might transgress certain limits, they do so in the private sphere of their home and, therefore, relative peace is kept in the community in this regard. Another example that shows the aggressive nature of the

community in *Smile* can be found in a scene in which Victor's girlfriend Rachel explains in an interview that the couple want to have children "[a]t some point in the future – loads of them, actually. But not just now" (156; original emphasis), a notion that outrages many people as it involves the use of contraceptive methods. Thus, when Rachel "visited the Irish Family Planning Association on Cathal Brugha Street", "[s]he walked past the prayer groups reciting the rosary outside. And she was recognised. *Hoor. Slut. Prostitute.* She was followed. She felt the drops of holy water hit the back of her head. She saw the spit on the back of her jacket when she got home to the loft" (156; original emphasis).

The case of the secondary characters in *Smile* is, perhaps, ambivalent. This can be seen in the example of Victor's mother, Mrs. Forde, who is presented as an open-minded character for her views on abortion, as I pointed out above. Nevertheless, there is a phrase which reveals her ties to a slightly different social context than her son's. This can be seen in the scene in which Victor brings his girlfriend home for the first time and Mrs. Forde asks, "[i]s she a Protestant?" (*Smile* 106), which Victor denies. This question, which for Rachel and Victor has no relevance, nor does it for the plot (religion is not something that the couple ever discuss or partake in), for Victor's mother clearly has certain importance. Nonetheless, despite the centrality of religion in Ireland and the historic feud between Catholicism and Protestantism (the lines along which society had been structured, in part), Mrs. Forde's question has less to do with religion than with class. Mrs. Forde's question springs from Rachel's beautiful appearance and, most importantly, "her teeth" (106). Although this is not specified, from the context it is easily guessed that Rachel's teeth must be strikingly good to warrant such notice. Thus, Mrs. Forde's question is more related to an issue of socioeconomic status than to an

actual concern about religion, although it is unclear what her reaction would have been if Rachel were indeed a Protestant.¹²⁷

In the Barrytown Trilogy, neither the main nor the secondary characters express any interest in religion. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there are not any vestigial traces of it left in the characters' beliefs and speech. The first element that invites comparison with *Paddy Clarke and Smile* is the community's reaction to Sharon's pregnancy in *The Snapper*. Sharon becomes pregnant at twenty, after the father of one of her friends virtually rapes her outside the local pub, when both are very drunk. Nevertheless, these circumstances are quickly glossed over by all characters, even Sharon only briefly wonders whether she has been raped (*TS* 45).¹²⁸ Thus, one of the main conflicts in *The Snapper* is how Sharon's family and Barrytown will react to the knowledge that she carries the child of Mr. Burgess.

The conversation that opens the novel, in which Sharon discloses to her parents that she is pregnant, revolves around the mysterious identity of the baby's father: Jimmy, Sr., wants to know whether the father is married (4), or black (6) and whether he intends to marry Sharon (5). Sharon's parents, indeed, take the news quite well: "Jimmy Sr wasn't angry. He wouldn't be either, but it all seemed very unfair" (*TS* 1) and, in the case of Sharon's mother, Veronica,

¹²⁷ Kurt Bowen describes how Irish Anglicans, despite being a minority of the population in independent Ireland, occupied many of the higher-class occupations well into the 1970s (the time scope analysed in this study coincides with Mrs. Forde's life, as she would have been born in the 1940s). Of course, this implies that many Protestants were also situated in the higher ranks of the social hierarchy, a link which Victor's mother is quick to establish as Rachel's appearance suggests wealth and, therefore, her being a Protestant.

¹²⁸ Although such an analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis, some comment must be made about the fact that no character in *The Snapper* takes Sharon's rape seriously. I believe that there are several reasons that account for this. First, there is the issue of the legal age of consent, which in Ireland has been seventeen since the early twentieth century (*Saidléar* 1) and Sharon is twenty. Second, the fact that Sharon herself does not dwell too long on the circumstances of her pregnancy, has presumably been one of the core reasons why this scene from *The Snapper* has not received more attention. Another reason for this, presumably, can be found in the year of publication of the novel: one wonders if, at the time of writing this thesis, thirty years after *The Snapper* was published, Roddy Doyle could have written the same book without openly addressing the problem of rape. It is also noteworthy, and perhaps something which can be read as a social comment, that, in *The Van*, Sharon's father and some of his friends keep making highly improper comments about 16-year-old girls (70-2, 102), despite the outrage of Jimmy, Sr., in *The Snapper* at the idea that a man his age should have had sex with Sharon. Such comments as the ones made in *The Van* by Jimmy, Sr., and his friends only help normalise a predatorial attitude from men towards women, notwithstanding that they are underage girls. The only character who shows discomfort with this attitude is Bimbo.

“[a]s far as [she] was concerned this was the worst thing that had ever happened the family. But she couldn’t really explain why, not really. (...) Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad once she got used to it” (7). During the conversation, no-one voices any moral concern about the fact that Sharon is having a baby without being married, something which a family with strong Catholic values would immediately have pointed out.¹²⁹ Indeed, Veronica cannot pinpoint the reason why she believes that Sharon’s pregnancy “is the worst that had ever happened the family”, which, in my view, indicates that, although she has been brought up to believe that pregnancy is wrong if you are unmarried (and in this an example of the vestigial trace of Catholic teaching can be found), she cannot give a practical reason for this, showing her disconnection to any sort of moral or religious doctrine. This is reinforced later in the novel, when Veronica tries to convince her husband that they should tell their younger daughters Linda and Tracy “that they should only have babies when they’re married” (49), but Jimmy, Sr., refuses to talk to the girls and points out that “[t]imes’ve changed” (49).

Returning to the novel’s opening scene, after worrying about the identity of the baby’s father, the next concern that arises is what the neighbours will say. Jimmy, Sr., acts defensively by asking Veronica, “You don’t care wha’ tha’ lot says, do yeh?” (7), and Sharon believes that the neighbours will “have a laugh when they find ou’ an’ they’ll try an’ guess who I’m having’ it for. An’ that’s all” (8). This is confirmed at length, as the major conflict in the novel does not involve the Barrytown community at all, but rather Sharon’s relationship with her father: when Jimmy, Sr., finds out who the baby’s father is, he begins acting in a selfish and childish

¹²⁹ In the case of Ireland, taking into account its history of Magdalene Laundries, Sharon’s story could have been entirely different if it had only taken place a few decades earlier or if she belonged to a different kind of family. According to Justice for Magdalenes Research, the last laundry, on Sean McDermott Street in Dublin, remained operational until as late as 1996. As the same source explains, “[t]he women and girls who suffered in the Magdalene Laundries included those who were perceived to be ‘promiscuous’, unmarried mothers, the daughters of unmarried mothers, those who were considered a burden on their families or the State, those who had been sexually abused, or had grown up in the care of the Church and State” (“About the Magdalene Laundries”, “Sean McDermott Street”). The contemporary reader is probably all too familiar with literary accounts of the lives of women confined to such laundries.

way, until, eventually, he recognises his mistake and mends his relationship with Sharon. The Rabbittes' relaxed attitude to disclosing Sharon's pregnancy contrasts with the treatment of teenage pregnancy, or out-of-wedlock pregnancy, in other novels by Roddy Doyle. For instance, in *Paula Spencer*, set in the early 2000s, Paula explains that she knows that her neighbour Rita's daughter is actually Rita's granddaughter: "She knows that the girl who calls Rita Mammy is actually Rita's daughter's kid. Her name is Shelley, a lovely kid. She's a few years younger than Jack. It's no big deal. Everyone knows, including Shelley. But Paula *knew*" (133; original emphasis). Although the narrator highlights that nobody really minds about Shelley being Rita's granddaughter, it remains a fact that Rita's family went to some length to hide the pregnancy of Rita's daughter, who would have probably been pregnant around the same time as Sharon or a little earlier, presumably fearing the consequences of it being publicly known. Likewise, the fact that the narrator indicates that "Paula *knew*", shows that Paula knew the truth about the pregnancy before it became public knowledge, reinforcing the idea that Rita's family intended to hide it.

As Jimmy, Sr., and Sharon suggest to Veronica, Sharon is not the first woman in Barrytown to be in this predicament:

—Sure look, said Jimmy Sr. —The O'Neill young ones have had kids, the both o' them. An' —an' the Bells would be the same 'cept they don't have anny daughters, but yeh know wha' I mean.

—Dawn O'Neill had her baby for Paddy Bell, Sharon reminded him.

—She did o' course, said Jimmy Sr. (8)

Indeed, Sharon's real trouble only begins when the identity of the baby's father becomes known.

After having disclosed the news of her pregnancy to her parents, Sharon tells her friends who feel happy and excited for her (53). It is only after Barrytown finds out that the father is Mr. Burgess that problems start:

Sharon lay on her bed. She couldn't get downstairs, she couldn't go to the Hikers, or anywhere. She was surrounded. She was snared. If she went anywhere or ——she couldn't. All because of that stupid fucker. (...)

The baby was nothing. It happened. It was alright. Barrytown was good that way. Nobody minded. Guess the daddy was a hobby. But now Burgess —He'd cut her off from everything. She'd no friends now, and no places to go to. She couldn't even look at her family. God, she wanted to die; really she did. She just lay there. She couldn't do anything else. (119)

It is only then, especially bearing in mind that one of Sharon's friends is Yvonne Burgess, the daughter of Mr. Burgess, that Sharon considers saying that the baby's father is a Spanish sailor, a story, however, that nobody believes.¹³⁰ However, Sharon's final decision in the novel to name her baby Georgina (the birth name of Mr. Burgess is George) shows the young woman's pride and unapologetic attitude in the face of anybody who might have laughed at her for carrying the child of Mr. Burgess.

Returning to the topic of religion, despite the general acceptance of pregnancy without being married in *The Snapper*, it is interesting to observe how a residual influence of Catholic morality still shapes some of the characters' thoughts. This can be seen in Veronica's hesitant remarks about it being wrong to have children without being married, but also in Sharon's reaction to the question of whether she wants to have an abortion:

Jimmy Sr now said something he'd heard a good few times on the telly.

—D'yeh want to keep it?

—Wha' d'yeh mean?

—D'yeh —d'you want to keep it, like?

—He wants to know if you want to have an abortion, said Veronica. —The eejit.

—I do not! said Jimmy Sr.

This was true. He was sorry now he'd said it.

—There's no way I'd have an abortion, said Sharon.

—Good. You're right.

—Abortion's murder.

—It is o'course. (6)

¹³⁰ Although Sharon shows no awareness of this myth, it is unavoidable to read about her idea without thinking of the legend of the Black Irish. In O'Toole's words, the Black Irish were Irish people that had "a dark, swarthy appearance" ("Alluring Myth"). The legend says that these Black Irish were descendants of ship-wrecked sailors from the Spanish Armada who had washed up on the Irish coast and who ended up mingling with the Irish population (O'Toole; "Alluring Myth", "Who Were the Black Irish"). As Ann Gibbons explains, however, this myth has been scientifically refuted through DNA tests, as "[i]n two studies, researchers have found only 'a very small ancient Spanish contribution' to British and Irish DNA" (680).

Apart from the comic element of Jimmy, Sr., asking something without knowing what it means, the way in which Sharon responds to her father's question sounds more like a slogan that she is repeating, much like her father, because she has heard it before, rather than from any genuine reflection about the implications of abortion. As I see it, Sharon's statement is not to be read as an argument against abortion, but, rather, as a reflection of the predominant sentiment reigning in Dublin in the 1990s.¹³¹ If there is an attitude that Doyle's work criticises, it is rather that of the fanatics who stalk Rachel outside the Irish Family Planning Association in *Smile*.

Finally, I want to argue that the one recurrent reference to religion present in *The Snapper* serves the function of showing the hypocrisy of Mr. Burgess. Mr. Burgess has the habit of using the expression "swear on the Bible" to convince others that what he says is true. While this invocation of the Bible is supposed to convey innocence and honesty, Mr. Burgess is probably the most dishonest character in the novel, and his use of the expression "swear on the Bible" only reinforces this. First and foremost, he takes advantage of Sharon, whom he more than doubles in age, at a moment when she is extremely vulnerable and abuses her sexually (44-5); afterwards, he openly tells other men in the local pub that Sharon "was a great little ride" (79). When Sharon confronts him about this, at first, he tries to deny it (86) and then offers Sharon money, "a ten pound note" (89) as a way to make up for his behaviour. When Mr. Burgess suddenly abandons his wife (103-4), he writes a letter to Sharon (on whose envelope he has written and later erased the letters "S.W.A.L.K." (112)) and to his wife, explaining what he has done. After this, he appears unannounced at Sharon's workplace to tell her that "I've always liked yeh, Sharon; you know tha'. I —— Sharon, I've been living' a lie for the last fifteen years. Twenty years. The happily married man. Huh. It's taken you to make

¹³¹ In 1983, the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, which protected the right to life of the unborn child, was voted in referendum, "with 841,233 votes in favour and 416,136 against". In 1992 (the time closest to the setting of *The Snapper*), two amendments were made which allowed women to travel outside of Ireland to have an abortion as well as "to obtain or make available information on abortion services outside the State". Abortion would not be legalised in Ireland until 2018 ("History of Abortion in Ireland").

me cop on. You, Sharon” (128) and asks Sharon to go to London with him. Finally, after all of this, Mr. Burgess returns home (182). It is noteworthy that Doyle’s only mention of religion, here through the image of the Bible, should be related to the least likeable, pathetic and dishonest character in the novel.

2.2.2.3. *National Education*

When it comes to the topic of national education, which is especially relevant in *Paddy Clarke* and *Smile*, there are several comparisons to be established between the two novels, despite the fact that their protagonists attend different types of schools: while Paddy goes to a national primary education school, where all the teachers seem to be lay, Victor goes to a Christian Brothers School for his secondary education, where most of the teachers are Brothers (although there are also lay teachers at St Martin’s CBS (*Smile* 16)). In *Paddy Clarke*, particular attention is paid to the celebration of nationalism in class, rather than to the teaching of religion. This can be seen in the relevance that the scene is given, in which the children study the Proclamation of Independence, as I discuss below. Instead, in *Smile*, much attention is devoted to the lessons in which the students learn Seán Ó Riada’s Mass, that is to be sung at the funeral of one of the Brothers.¹³²

In *Paddy Clarke*, Paddy’s teacher, Miss Watkins, one day brings a tea-towel to class “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” (20). Some of the pupils bless themselves in front of the tea-towel when they are allowed to inspect it one by

¹³² Seán Ó Riada (1931-71), born John Reidy, wrote (among many other musical compositions) a mass in vernacular Irish, known as *Ceol an Aifrinn* (1968). This is probably the mass referred to in *Smile*, as it was Ó Riada’s most popular. He also composed another mass called *Aifreann 2* (1969) as well as a requiem (1969) (O’Keeffe; Contemporary Music Centre).

one, and Miss Watkins does not correct this behaviour, allowing for a link to be established between the religious and the national. During the lesson, Miss Watkins has the students applaud after she reads out the proclamation as well as march in step beside their desks while she reads it again. The episode ends on a bittersweet note, when Kevin, one of Paddy's classmates, tells Miss Watkins that Paddy is claiming "his granda's Thomas Clarke on the tea-towel" (21). Paddy, either out of a real misunderstanding or just as a prank, seeing the coincidence between the rebel's surname and his own, had tried to convince the rest of the class that Thomas Clarke is his grandfather. After Miss Watkins asks Paddy where his grandad lives ("Clontarf, Miss" (21)), she makes him read out in front of the class that Thomas Clarke was actually "—Ex – eh – executed by the British on 3 May, 1916" (22). Once it is established that, therefore, Thomas Clarke cannot be Paddy's grandfather, the teacher "[gives] him three on each hand" (22). In McCarthy's view, this episode evinces "Doyle's scorn for a system that subjects children to such blatant ideological indoctrination" (128). Taking into account McCarthy's words, I believe that this episode can be linked to the moment in *The Dead Republic* when Henry Smart expresses his wish that the blows that the students receive from their teachers while practicing nationalist songs, will breed in them a hatred for romantic nationalism (see Chapter One, "1.2.2.4. Mythology and the Provisional IRA", p. 85).

The violence from teachers towards students is the clearest similarity between *Paddy Clarke* and *Smile*, although in Paddy's case it is a much lighter version of what Roddy Doyle represents in *Smile*. One of the elements that is present in both novels is the students' fear of sudden bursts of violence from their teachers. For example, Paddy describes the following: "I felt the rush of air when Henno's hand swept through and smacked Ian McEvoy's neck. Ian McEvoy shot up and gasped. He groaned. I couldn't see him. I could see the side of Kevin's face. It was white; his bottom lip was out further than his top one" (PC 64). In *Smile*, during choir practice, the Brother whom the children call Tom Jones brutally assaults one of the older

boys “when he didn’t move fast enough. He thumped the side of his jaw and pushed him back, to the back line” (*Smile* 51). Victor claims that this “was the most frightening thing I’d seen. And we had to keep singing the national anthem” (51). Some pages further on, Victor declares that “Tom Jones never got any less frightening. I never got used to him” (55). The fear of violence in the context of school, thus, is present in both texts.

Although the teachers at Paddy’s school are not as violent as the Christian Brothers at Victor’s, there is a strain of cruelty that runs through some of them. The case of Mr. Hennessey, whom the children call Henno, is very illustrative of this. Henno is capable of showing goodness, as can be seen in the scene in which Paddy falls asleep in class (because he stays awake at night, trying to prevent his parents’ arguments) and Henno carries him gently to another room, lets him sleep and later speaks kindly to him (*PC* 235-8). When Paddy returns to class, he remarks that his classmates believe “there was something really wrong with me, the way Henno hadn’t battered me but had nearly carried me out” (236). Precisely, as this last phrase implies and the children know well enough, there is a much more sinister side to Henno. This other side is revealed in another scene, in which, while Paddy is working in class, Henno suddenly puts a notebook under his eyes:

It was open. It wasn’t mine. There were wet streaks in the ink all the way down the pages. They’d made the ink a lighter blue; there were bars of light blue across the page where someone had tried to rub the tears away. I expected to be hit. I looked up. Henno had Sinbad with him. They were Sinbad’s tears; I could tell from his face and the way his breath jumped. (211)

At first, Paddy does not understand what is happening and, again, the fact that his first thought is that he is about to be hit is very telling of what he is used to. Slowly, Paddy begins to see that “something really unfair was happening; something nearly mad. [Sinbad]’d only cried. Henno didn’t know him; he’d just picked on him” (212). Although Henno could be forgiven for not knowing what Paddy and Sinbad have to endure at home (their parents’ arguments are having a negative effect on all four of their children) —an awareness that only the readers

possess and which, therefore, makes the episode seem even more cruel in their eyes— there is absolutely no pedagogic value in Henno’s singling out and punishing a young pupil for crying that could justify his actions. Calling Sinbad’s copy “disgraceful” (211), Henno expects Paddy to take the copy home and show it to his mother, something which Paddy, secretly, refuses to do.

As a consequence of the constant fear described above, the students in *Paddy Clarke* and *Smile* are in an incessant state of alertness and there is an atmosphere of unpredictability that reigns in the classroom. In the same manner that Paddy “expected to be hit”, without having done anything wrong, Victor, when talking about another of his teachers, Brother Murphy, claims that “[s]omething would snap and there’d be no warning” (*Smile* 16). In the same vein, Victor speaks of “the violence and the constant threat of it” at school (18). Unlike *Paddy Clarke*, however, *Smile* succeeds in articulating a denunciation of the Brothers’ behaviour. The dissimilar ability to elaborate a criticism is presumably related to the narrators’ ages when recounting their stories. In the case of Paddy, his age is uncertain because, although the language he uses is one very close to that of a small boy and the impression that the readers have is that they are listening to a child’s account, there are signs of retrospection in the novel that place the narrator at an uncertain moment in time. As McCarthy observes,

[t]here is obvious prolepsis, for example, in [Paddy’s] anecdote about hiding in the sewer pipes with Kevin, when Paddy remarks “These were the last moments. Me and Kevin” (*PC*, 108), and it is also a much older narrator who informs us – and reminds the reader of the [Barrytown] trilogy – that “There was no chipper in Barrytown then” (*PC*, 36). So when the narrator remarks “Sometimes when nothing happened it was getting ready to happen” (*PC*, 33), it is not a lapse in realism but a moment, dramatically ironic in retrospect, when the adult Patrick is heard rather than the ten-year-old Paddy. It is the voice we hear in the last line of the novel and it is this modulation of the narrative voice that expresses the transformation of Paddy into Patrick Clarke during the months leading up to his parents’ separation. (124)

In the case of *Smile*, however, it is clearly an adult who is not only narrating his memories, but commenting on them. If this device had been used in *Paddy Clarke*, the illusion of reading a child’s words would have been entirely lost. Hence, Paddy can only express a sense of

unfairness regarding Henno's attitude towards Sinbad and fails to articulate in precise words what it is that constitutes this injustice. Victor, on the other hand, is perfectly able to do so and to analyse certain situations more deeply. This can be seen when Victor, after recounting an incident in which Brother Murphy, who "wasn't as savage as most of the other Brothers and lay teachers" (15-6), headbutts a student and breaks his nose, explains that "nothing happened; there were no consequences" (16). Victor clarifies that "it wasn't assault. Not back then" (16) and also that "I never thought I was witnessing anything illegal" (16). Here, the words *consequences*, *assault* and *illegal* show how Victor, as an adult, is able to categorise these instances of abuse as something criminal and to condemn them.

Despite the constant threat of physical violence, nevertheless, Paddy and Victor manage to escape it to a certain extent. Victor, however, becomes a victim of sexual abuse at the hands of the school's headmaster and this abuse constitutes the novel's major link between religion, national education and social class. The extent of the horror that Victor experiences is only recounted at the very end of the novel, by Victor's alter-ego Fitzpatrick:

—He didn't molest you - me. Us. Once. He didn't stop there. Once. Twice. It was seventeen times. He raped us, Victor.

—No, he didn't.

—He did. And you know it. He raped you. He got your trousers down. He told you to help him. That was the killer. Because I did. I unbuckled my belt. I helped him. And he raped me. For a month. And no one said a thing. Remember?

—Yes.

—Yeah. The blood on my underpants. I tried to wash it off but there was still a stain and I couldn't throw them out cause I only had two pairs. And I even hoped Mam would notice the stain and I was scared shitless she would. The fuckin' shame - the consequences. And no one asked why I was late home from school all those times. None of the lads asked why I had to stay behind. And Dad being sick. He was a clever fucker, Brother McIntyre. Wasn't he?

I nodded. (...)

—I'm betting most people think it – it wasn't my fault. And try to get through it. Who've been raped, I mean. The guilt. But. It was what he said.

—What?

—I'll tell you now. It was the – the eleventh time he called me to the room. I was too frightened not to go – disobeying him. (...) But then he said it. 'You're old enough to stop me.' D'you remember?

(...)

—'You're old enough to stop me.' That was the evil part. Or the most evil - the worst. When he said that. Do you remember?

—Yes.

—Yeah, he said.—He condemned us there, didn't he?
 —Yeah. (*Smile* 211-4)

The link between religion and education is quickly established, as it is the Christian Brothers who are in charge of teaching the national curriculum to the boys at St Martin's CBS. Nevertheless, the link between these two elements and class might not be so apparent at a first glance. On the one hand, as I argued in "2.2.1.2. Knowing your place" (p. 149), the fact that Victor attends a Christian Brothers School is most especially related to his class.¹³³ According to Barry Coldrey, "[t]he [Christian Brothers] institutions shared a common aim: they wished to make respectable working class adults from rough working class youth. They wished to recast the proletarian family, to reform the improvident working class culture, and to tame the undisciplined behaviour of its young people" (352). That the Fordes belong to a low socioeconomic class is represented at length throughout the novel: this can be gathered from such details as the description of the Fordes' home (*Smile* 107, 108), or Victor's sense of defamiliarisation when he has lunch with Rachel's family for the first time (speaking about the food, for example, Victor exclaims: "And, Jesus - the taste! This was the Southside. This was what it was all about" (115), highlighting the exquisiteness of the food served in the wealthier part of Dublin, as in contrast to the—presumably—plainer food served in the north). More important, however, is the fact that, due to the Fordes' poor socioeconomic status, Victor's secondary education depends on the Christian Brothers, a chance which Victor's parents are highly excited about. In the following scene, Mrs. Forde's reaction after Victor's first day at St Martin's is represented:

—So, said my mother when I got home.
 She was excited, young; she'd never gone to secondary school, herself.
 —How was school?
 —Great, I said.

¹³³ O'Donoghue and Harford explain that "[t]he majority of the children whose parents held lower-status occupations attended schools run by the Irish Christian Brothers, the Sisters of Mercy, the Loreto Sisters, the Dominican Sisters, and the Presentation Sisters" (327 n12).

I meant it.

Her eyes were wet.

—I'm so proud of you, Victor.

She picked up my sister and made her kiss me, then made egg and chips to celebrate the occasion. (21)

Later, Victor explains that he is “the first in my family, both sides, to have any kind of third-level education; we didn't know what that phrase, third-level education, meant” (43).

However, the headmaster at Victor's school exploits the Fordes' situation, especially when Victor's father becomes terminally ill, when he preys upon Victor using private wrestling lessons as a subterfuge for his sexual assault: “he knew that, without my father at home I was the man of the house and he was going to teach me to defend myself” (163).¹³⁴ Yet, the headmaster's ultimate act of cruelty, as revealed in the book's final scene, is that of putting the blame of the abuse on Victor:

[T]he power imbalance and class bias that were behind the idea of the working class being perceived as unchaste, and, therefore, deserving of violence and abuse (Ferguson, 2007), is (...) represented in *Smile*, through a malicious comment that the Head Brother makes when he says to Victor: “You're old enough to stop me” (213). This terrible phrase conveys the idea that Victor could actually have stopped the abuse from happening and that if he did not do so, it can be taken as his implicit wish for it to continue. It cruelly puts the weight of the responsibility of what happened squarely onto Victor's shoulders and imbues him with a feeling of guilt and shame that he carries for the rest of his life. The phrase represents the ultimate manipulation by the Head Brother, his perfect guarantee of safety, and it springs from the notion that Victor deserves this punishment, because something inside him is sufficiently *crooked* to warrant abuse rather than resisting it. (Schlesier 176-7; original emphasis)¹³⁵

With his phrase, then, not only is the headmaster warranting Victor's compliance, but he is reinforcing the Victorian notion of impurity or corruption of the soul (Ferguson 132) of which

¹³⁴ As Doyle explained in the interview he granted me, his inspiration for Victor's abuse at a time of crisis came from real life: “it wasn't based on my experience, but it's based on the experience of others. And I know that a Christian Brother in the school that I was- I attended, homed in on boys that he thought were vulnerable. You know, because he knew they wouldn't bring that horror home. In a house that was already struggling” (“Interview” lines 300-3).

¹³⁵ The notion put forth by Ferguson also lied at the core of the philosophy at the Magdalene Laundries, which the Justice For Magdalenes Research (JFMR) describes as “carceral, punitive institutions” that ran “commercial and for-profit businesses” among which were “primarily laundries and needlework” (“About the Magdalene Laundries”). Ran by religious orders, the laundries were places where so-called fallen women were “subjected to grueling [sic] physical labor scrubbing, folding, and ironing garments in order to ‘wash away their sins’” (Whitt 5; my emphasis).

people belonging to the working class were most suspect, as I explained above (see p. 156). Thus, religion, national education and class are linked in one of Doyle's (at the time of writing this thesis) most tragic novels. Moreover, Doyle's representation of St Martin's headmaster as a sexual predator serves the function, on a much larger scale, of highlighting the hypocrisy of one of the most powerful institutions in Ireland in the twentieth century: while, on the one hand, supposedly veiling for the Republic's moral wellbeing, on the other, certain members of the Catholic Church could behave in the most immoral manner, as represented in *Smile*. To this can be added the thoughts that Victor has in relation to a book that he is supposed to be writing: when Rachel's father asks Victor what the book is about, Victor answers "[a]bout what's wrong with Ireland" (118), but when he is asked to clarify what he means, Victor is unable to provide an answer. Nevertheless, he has the following thoughts:

‘I don't really know,’ should have been my answer. Or ‘I don't really know yet.’ The Church, politics, inequality, being stuck in the past, the political clout of the farmers. These were my targets but I hadn't been able to do much with them. I'd been felt up by a Christian Brother but I didn't blame the Church for that. I didn't know how to blame the Church; that came decades later. I knew the dominance of the Catholic Church was a bad thing but I didn't know how to expand on that, or even start. (118-9; original emphasis)

I wrote above that Victor has the tools to articulate why the violence and sexual abuse that he was a victim constituted a crime, as opposed to Paddy. In the quote above, Victor is still a very young man and, as he himself explains, he would still need decades to completely grasp what had happened to him and how to blame the Church for it. In the timespan of *Smile*, Victor never writes the book. Nevertheless, since *Smile* is a first-person narration, in my view, it could actually stand in for the book that Victor wanted to write and it ultimately constitutes his denunciation of the Church. The idea that *Smile* puts forth is that both the sexual abuse at St

Martin's CBS and the aggressive attitude of a conservative society combined are what destroy Victor's life.¹³⁶

2.2.3. Poverty, Community and Solidarity

As Bissett puts it, "[s]carcity is a profound and common characteristic of working-class life" (102) and as all of Roddy Doyle's characters, those under examination in this chapter belong to the working class and experience varying degrees of poverty. Nevertheless, unlike Henry Smart (see Chapter One) or Paula Spencer (see Chapter Three), the characters here are less defined by restrictive socioeconomic circumstances, but often more by their sense of belonging to a community. To a certain extent, moreover, the characters studied here often engage in acts of solidarity that help foster and strengthen relationships within the community. These three elements (poor socioeconomic circumstances, the sense of belonging to a community and solidarity) are interlinked in that each influences the others. On the one hand, given that most of Doyle's characters cannot or do not aspire to a higher economic level,¹³⁷ they seek their personal happiness in healthy family relations as well as in communal activities such as going to the pub, playing music or, in the case of children, playing games together. On the other hand, understanding how restrictive poverty can be, many of Doyle's characters have a natural habit of helping others when they have the chance. Finally, throughout this section, I want to show how the failure of some of these characters to behave in an exemplary or selfless way is a feature that adds complexity and veracity to them and avoids a romanticisation of the working class that, otherwise, could verge on patronisation. Likewise, despite the texts' general

¹³⁶ This idea is fully developed in my article "It Happened to All of Us" that I have quoted from in several occasions throughout this chapter.

¹³⁷ With the exception of Victor Forde, who attempts to move into a higher class, not as a consequence of ambition, though, but as an effort to escape his past, as I argued above (see p. 147).

celebration of community, the fact that in several of them the struggle between group identity and individuality is represented, only adds more depth to Doyle's novels.

2.2.3.1. The Consequences of Poverty and the Importance of Community

Not all the characters in this chapter have to endure severe economic circumstances. For example, as I mentioned above (p. 142, fn. 112) the Clarkes have been situated by several critics in the middle class. Nevertheless, as I also pointed out, although the Clarkes are the family who are better off in Doyle's novels, I disagree with the notion that they do not belong to the working class. Although in *Paddy Clarke* little attention is given to the Clarkes' material conditions, there is one scene that challenges the idea that the family are very affluent. In this scene, Paddy's mother fails to close the zip of a pair of handed down trousers on Paddy, so that she must send him to school with a safety needle to hold the trousers in place (96). On that same day, the children have a medical check-up at school. When Paddy is asked to remove his trousers, remembering the safety needle, he turns away embarrassedly from his friend Kevin (the check-ups are being done in twos), so that Kevin will not see it (102). Although I do not take this episode to be highly indicative of the Clarkes' economic background, it does seem to be the case that Paddy only owns one pair of trousers (he might have another that is unclean), something which forces him to experience an embarrassing situation and a slight degree of discomfort.

In the case of the other characters in this chapter, limited income has a more determining role in their lives.¹³⁸ For example, in *The Snapper*, Sharon often worries about the way that the physical changes that she will experience during pregnancy might affect her at work, which

¹³⁸ I do not discuss the Fordes from *Smile* here, as I already covered their financial situation in "2.2.2.3. National Education" (p. 173).

she does at a supermarket “stackin’ shelves” (56). Thus, Sharon, reading about pregnancy, “hoped [her widening pelvic bones] wouldn’t pinch a sciatic nerve (...) because she had to stand a lot of the time in work and a pinched sciatic nerve would be a killer” (13). Likewise, it is described how “[w]hat worried her the most was the bit about vaginal secretions. They’d make her itchy, it said. That would be really terrible in work, fuckin’ murder” (13). In another scene it is revealed that Sharon occasionally steals food from her workplace: the fact that it is “cod steaks” (111) and that she gives them to her mother suggests that she steals more out of necessity than because of a passing fancy. When Sharon experiences her first morning sickness, Veronica sends Tracy, one of Sharon’s younger sisters, up to their room to deliver the following message: “Ma said to say if yeh keep not goin’ to work you’ll be sacked an’ jobs don’t grow on trees” (29). As in the case of Paula Spencer (see Chapter Three, “3.2.4.5. Paula’s Predicament”, p. 225), *The Snapper* highlights the added difficulties that certain manual jobs have for women, especially if they are forced to keep these jobs out of pure necessity. Nevertheless, in the end, Sharon decides to resign from her job and explains to her mother that, apart from her growing impatience with customers, “[m]e back’s really killin’ me these days an’ I’m always wantin’ to go to the toilet” (190), to which she adds that her manager “is always houndin’ me” and Gerry Dempsey, presumably a colleague, “put his arm around me. In front of everyone, an’ he said to give him a shout if I was havin’ anny more babies” (190-1). Although Jimmy, Sr., responds in a more sympathetic way, Veronica repeatedly shows her concern at her children not having a job. This preoccupation also extends to Leslie, who is described as a complicated young man who ends up running away from home, after “[h]e’d been caught robbing a Lifeboat collection box out of Howth” (TV 61). Therefore, in *The Snapper*, Veronica keeps asking Jimmy, Sr., whether he has enquired at his workplace “about a job for Leslie” (32). Being jobless is not an option in a family that lives in an overcrowded house (TV 39) and that depends mainly on one income, that of Jimmy, Sr. Veronica’s fear

suggests the immediacy of danger if money dwindles and it is reminiscent of the reality of other characters like Paula Spencer, who practically depends on daily wages to survive. As Paschel conveys, “[u]nemployment is an important fact of life in working class communities, especially for people in the building trade as this is one of the first affected when the country’s economy goes into a recession as it did in Ireland in the 1980s” (90).

Indeed, the Rabbittes’ crisis begins when Jimmy, Sr., loses his job as a plasterer, which is portrayed in *The Van*. Despite being two less in the house (Jimmy, Jr., has moved away and Leslie has disappeared), the lack of Jimmy’s income means that the family have to resort to lower quality food (9), that they often do not have hot water anymore (23), that they cannot substitute the VHS player that Jimmy, Jr., has taken with him to his new place (5) or that planning Christmas becomes extremely complicated (13-4). More than the material difficulties, however, the worst negative impact that being on the dole has on Jimmy, Sr., is psychological.

Jimmy, Sr., prided himself on his skill: “He always got a few walls done before he stopped for the tea. Even if the other lads were stopping he kept going, till he felt he needed it; he deserved it. He’d look around him at the plastering. It was perfect; not a bump or a sag, so smooth you’d never know where he’d started” (TV 42). Being inactive makes Jimmy, Sr., feel useless and guilty. While describing how he tries to fill his days, Jimmy, Sr., recognises how “[t]he good thing about winter was that the day was actually short. It was only in the daylight that you felt bad, restless, sometimes even guilty” (TV 62-3). Likewise, he expresses that the hardest about being jobless is not having money and, therefore, “having to be mean” (62), especially to his children. Finally, it is “humiliating” (65) for Jimmy, Sr., not to be able to afford such things as a pint for himself or an ice-cream for his granddaughter Gina. For Jimmy, Sr., the loss of his job goes hand in hand with a sense of emasculation, as he fails to fulfil his role as the family’s breadwinner and, at times, he has a keen impression that his family have lost respect for him, something which is depicted throughout several scenes. For example,

when Veronica is upset because the family cannot afford to buy and send Christmas cards, the couple become involved in an argument and Jimmy, Sr., accuses Veronica of “blaming him”:

—You’ve decided tha’ we haven’t the money to buy Christmas cards an’ you’re probably right’. But then you put this puss on yeh ——It’s not my fault we’ve no fuckin’ money for your fuckin’ Christmas cards!
 —I never said it was.
 —No, but yeh looked it; I have eyes, yeh know. (*TV* 51)

Despite Jimmy’s accusation, there is no detail in the scene that warrants his impression that Veronica is blaming him for anything. In another scene, in one of the displays of solidarity that I have mentioned above, Jimmy, Jr., gives his father five pounds so that he can go to the pub. Although Jimmy, Sr., at first feels grateful, “at the same time, or just after, he’d wanted to go after [young Jimmy] and thump the living shite out of him and throw the poxy fiver back in his face, the nerve of him; who did he think he was, dishing out fivers like Bob fuckin’ Geldof” (*TV* 29). Similarly, when Bimbo offers to pay Jimmy’s round at the pub (when the men meet, each one, in turn, pays for a round), Jimmy becomes so agitated that for a moment it looks like there will be a fight (*TV* 34). Finally, the worst attack on Jimmy’s pride occurs during family dinner, when Darren makes a rude remark and the following situation unfolds:

[Jimmy, Sr.] pointed his fork at Darren.
 —Don’t you forget who paid for tha’ dinner in front of you, son, righ’.
 —I know who paid for it, said Darren. —The state.
 Jimmy Sr looked like he’d been told that someone had died.
 —Yeh prick, Jimmy Jr said to Darren.
 But no one said anything else. Linda and Tracy didn’t look at each other. (94-5)

Not only is Darren’s retort highly inappropriate, but it confirms a breaking-down of the relationship between the young man and his father that Jimmy, Sr., had already noticed (“Jimmy Sr wondered, again, why Darren wouldn’t talk to him properly anymore” (*TV* 7)). That Darren should, above everything else, point out his father’s inability to provide for the family, absolutely rattles Jimmy, Sr.: “For a while after the dinner, he’d had to really stretch

his face to stop himself from crying. And that passed and he thought he was going to faint – not faint exactly — He kept having to lift himself up, and sit up straight and open his eyes full; he couldn't help it” (97). All of these scenes show how fragile Jimmy, Sr., becomes, to the point of experiencing panic attacks (*TV* 28; 50) once he cannot provide for his family, evidencing how deeply pervasive material deprivation is, going much further than just not being able to purchase certain commodities.

I have left the analysis of *The Commitments* for last because in this novel class consciousness and class belonging are represented in more detail than poverty. Thus, with *The Commitments* I open the discussion of the sense of belonging and community in this chapter's primary texts. From the very beginning, the music band The Commitments, formed by Jimmy, Jr., establishes clear criteria of belonging, as Jimmy, Jr., delineates them in the advertisement he posts in Hot Press: “Have you got Soul? If yes, The World's Hardest Working Band is looking for you. Contact J. Rabbitte, 118, Chestnut Ave., Dublin 21. Rednecks and southsiders need not apply” (15). This ad, brief as it is, sets up several boundaries: firstly, the genre of music to be played is soul, since, according to Jimmy, Jr., “[s]oul is the rhythm o' the people” (*TC* 38). Secondly, the description of the band, “The World's Hardest Working Band”, locates it along specific socioeconomic lines. Indeed, in one of the speeches that he gives to his friends, before the band is properly formed, Jimmy, Jr., highlights the importance of class to the music they are going to be playing: “Wha' class are his? Working' class. Are yes proud of it? Yeah, yis are. (...) —Who buys the most records? The workin' class. (...) Your music should be abou' where you're from an' the sort of people yeh come from” (13). Returning to the ad, its last sentence also specifies what type of working-class people Jimmy, Jr., is looking for: urban and from the North of Dublin, conditions that determine a highly specific experience. Indeed, when the band change the lyrics of “Night Train” (composed by Jimmy Forrest and first performed in 1951) and adapt it to the Dublin context, it quickly becomes their most popular

song, as they manage to capture a common experience to many inhabitants of Barrytown (that of travelling north by DART), fostering a sense of community:¹³⁹

Deco growled: —STARTIN’ OFF IN CONNOLLY——
 (...)
 Deco was travelling north, by DART.
 —MOVIN’ ON OU’ TO KILLESTER ——
 They [the audience] laughed. This was great. They pushed up to the stage.
 —HARMONSTOWN RAHENY ——
 They cheered.
 —AN’ DON’T FORGET KILBARRACK — THE HOME O’ THE BLUES —
 Dublin Soul had been delivered.
 —HOWTH JUNCTION BAYSIDE ——
 THEN ON OU’ TO SUTTON WHERE THE RICH FOLKS LIVE——
 (...)
 His voice went but he got it back.
 —EASY TO BONK YOUR FARE——
 Wild, happy cheers.
 —NIGH’ TRAIN——
 AN ALSATIAN IN EVERY CARRIAGE——
 NIGH’ TRAIN——
 LOADS O’ SECURITY GUARDS ——
 NIGH’ TRAIN——
 GETTIN’ SLAGGED BY YOUR MATES——
 NIGH’ TRAIN——
 GETTIN’ CHIPS FROM THE CHINESE CHIPPER——
 OH NIGH’ TRAIN——
 CARRIES ME HOME— (92-3)

However, despite the celebration of community present in *The Commitments*, in the end, it is the tensions between a desire for individuality and group identity that accelerate the band’s dissolution, setting a theme that is repeated in *Paddy Clarke*, as I explain below.

In *The Commitments*, trouble begins when the ego of the band’s lead singer, Deco, starts interfering with the normal functioning of the group. Deco stops adhering to the band’s rules, he often argues with the other members and, finally, he signs up for two different music contests without telling the band. Deco claims that “I’ve me career to think of” (119), which Jimmy, Jr., reads as a lack of loyalty towards the band (119). Likewise, when it is revealed that Dean,

¹³⁹ To listen to James Brown’s version of *Night Train* (the one that *The Commitments* use), visit <https://tuit.cat/Tn1Og>.

the saxophonist, has begun to play jazz, the tension between individuality and group belonging is put to the front. According to Joey the Lips, the oldest member of The Commitments, jazz is “[i]ntellectual music (...). It’s anti-people music” (108) and, later on, he claims that jazz “makes the man selfish. He doesn’t give a fuck about his Brothers. That’s what jazz is doing to Dean” (115). However, Dean tries to explain to Jimmy, Jr., why he loves jazz: he considers it art (122) and he enjoys that “[t]here’s no rules. There’s no walls” (122) unlike in soul. More importantly, however, Dean has no intention of leaving the band, since “jazz is in me spare time” (123). Shortly afterwards, however, due to multiple reasons, The Commitments break up. Nevertheless, the novel ends in a hopeful note, as the last pages picture Jimmy, Jr., Mickah, Outspan and Derek listening to music and planning the formation of a new band; thus, part of the community is still intact and the reader can easily imagine Jimmy, Jr., enjoying long-lasting relationships with his friends. This, as I explain below, stands in stark contrast with the ending of *Paddy Clarke, The Van and Smile*.

First, however, it is necessary to point out that there seems to be a difference caused by gender in the manner in which Doyle’s characters relate to their community. For example, in the novels analysed in this chapter, men are portrayed as much more dependent on social acceptance than women, while women seem to fare quite well on their own.¹⁴⁰ Veronica, for instance, is not portrayed going out with friends and, when Jimmy, Sr., invites her to go to the pub with him, she often refuses. Nevertheless, Veronica’s thoughts are rarely represented, so that it becomes hard to tell what her own desires might be: perhaps she would like to go out more often, but is too busy or too tired to do so. The only female character whose thoughts and feelings come to light are Sharon’s, who, despite having a solid group of friends, in *The Snapper* pines for a more intimate friendship: “She felt a bit lonely now. She’d have loved

¹⁴⁰ No strict comparison can be made here, for, at the time of writing this thesis, Roddy Doyle has not written enough female characters who, in addition, reflect upon the theme of community or belonging.

someone to talk to, to talk to nonstop for about an hour, to tell everything to. But —and she was realizing this now really— there was no one like that. She'd loads of friends but she only really knew them in a gang" (41). Although Sharon receives emotional support from her family and her friends, especially Jackie, there is no-one to whom she can address the many doubts and fears that come with her pregnancy. It is especially striking that Sharon does not have a tête-à-tête with Veronica, the most indicated person in Sharon's social circle to give her some advice. Some time before giving birth, Sharon feels "terrified" (109) and "[s]he wished she'd someone to talk to" (109), which, again, puts the question to the foreground as to why she does not speak with her mother. Besides this, Sharon often expresses a strong character in that she does not care what others think about her. Despite the negative consequences that such actions may have, Sharon confronts Mr. Burgess, decides to quit her job and calls her baby girl Georgina, among others. The novel ends with Sharon reaffirmed in her decisions, although her friendship with Yvonne Burgess (the daughter of Mr. Burgess) has probably been irrevocably broken. This situation and, more importantly, Sharon's final nonchalance differ greatly from the situation that Paddy Clarke and Jimmy, Sr., find themselves in at the end of their stories.

2.2.3.2. *Community and Belonging*

Unlike Sharon, the male characters in this chapter, especially Paddy, Jimmy, Sr., and Victor, are dominated by their desire for acceptance in a group. This often leads them to act in questionable ways, only to secure their legitimacy inside the group. McCarthy addresses this issue in his discussion of *Paddy Clarke*, when, referring to Paddy's friends, he explains that "the group punishes difference with exclusion, which can take the form of emotional or physical violence" (148). Precisely, in *Smile*, Victor Forde expresses how his friends were "the only people I cared about and the only people who really, really frightened me, because of how

things shifted, how the wrong word, the wrong shirt, the wrong band, and irresistible smile, could destroy you” (61). Likewise, Jimmy, Sr., reflects a similar fear as he often checks his behaviour when he feels certain emotions, for fear of being ridiculed by others, even by his sons. For example, in a scene in which he is about to kiss Veronica on the cheek, he changes his mind: “But no, he decided, not with the boys there. They’d slag him” (TS 39). Similarly, after his reconciliation with Sharon, Jimmy, Sr., asks her not to “tell Jimmy [Jr.] yeh saw me cryin’ there, sure yeh won’t?” (TS 163).

The case of Paddy and his friends is particularly extreme, as the fear of being expelled from the gang and a seeming lack of empathy lead the children to perform dangerous and cruel acts, often under the leadership of Kevin, perhaps the most reckless of all. This can be seen in one of the earliest scenes in the novel, when Paddy and his friends force Sinbad (Paddy’s little brother) to put lighter fuel in his mouth to alight it. Paddy, instead of protecting Sinbad, is most keen on forcing him to comply: “I pinched Sinbad’s arm; no good. This was terrible; in front of the others, I couldn’t sort out my little brother. I got the hair above his ear and pulled it up; I lifted him: I just wanted to hurt him. His eyes were closed now as well but the tears were getting out. I held his nose. He gasped and Kevin shoved the [fuel] capsule half-way into his mouth” (8-9). Not only is Paddy as excited as his friends to see what will happen when they put Sinbad’s mouth on fire, but he also needs to prove to the gang that he is able to control his little brother. It is just towards the end of the novel, once Paddy is profoundly affected by his parents’ quarrels and wants the two brothers to stick together, that he feels the result of his bullying: Sinbad does not want to be close to Paddy and Paddy is left feeling extremely lonely.

Returning to the group dynamics in *Paddy Clarke*, there is another scene that illustrates the lengths that Paddy and his friends are willing to go to in order to secure their place inside the community. This occurs during a game that the boys like to play together, in which Kevin,

personifying Zentoga, the high priest of Ciúnas the Mighty,¹⁴¹ demands that the boys, sitting around a fire with closed eyes, say a swearword whenever he hits them across the back with a poker. The word that the boys choose becomes their new name until the game is played again. During one of these games, Liam fails to say a word the first time he is hit, so that he is hit a second time. When Liam starts crying (he is not the only one crying, as Paddy explains), Kevin refuses to stop the game and intends to hit Liam a third time, so that Liam decides to leave the round and walk away. However, nobody else joins Liam, not even his brother Aidan, even though Kevin shouts “Ciúnas the Mighty killed your mother!” (131) after Liam. When Paddy is getting ready to be hit, he explains: “I’d take my punishment now, for the same reason that Aidan was staying. It was good being in the circle, better than where Liam was going” (131). Nevertheless, Paddy learns his lesson about friendship the hard way. When Paddy begins a fight with Seán Whelan, one of the boys who has recently moved from the Dublin slums to Barrytown, Séan’s friend Charles Leavy jumps in to defend Seán and kicks Paddy. As Paddy later observes, “[n]o one had jumped in for me when Charles Leavy had been going to kill me; it took me a while to get used to that, to make it make sense. To make it alright. The quiet, the waiting. All of them looking. Kevin standing beside Seán Whelan. Looking” (186). For Paddy, who in multiple occasions had sided with Kevin when there was some disagreement in the clique, this betrayal is especially hurtful.

Slowly, Paddy’s world begins falling to pieces. On the one hand, his parent’s fights become more frequent and more intense, to the point that on one occasion he hears the sound of what he believes to be his father hitting his mother (*PC* 190). For a while, Paddy believes that by intervening in the right moment when his parents begin to argue, by telling a joke or

¹⁴¹ Ciúnas is the Irish word for “clamness; stillness, silence” (“Ciúnas”). Apart from this word, the rest seems to have been made-up by the children. Luke Strongman finds this mixture of names an example of the novel’s “code-switching”, a device by which Doyle “can juxtapose the ‘dead’ hieratic Gaelic language of the past with that of the newly invigorated demotic language of popular and mass culture introduced largely via the media and particularly through the television screen” (35).

distracting them, he will be able diffuse the tension, and thus, prevent the argument from escalating. Similarly, when Paddy hears his parents arguing after bedtime, he often gets up and sits at the top of the stairs until everything is quiet again, watching out for his mother. Moreover, Paddy's descriptions of his dad slowly become more negative, indicating Paddy's growing dislike of his father and anticipating the worsening of their relationship. On the other hand, as Paddy becomes more conscious of the crisis unfolding between his parents, he also becomes concerned about Sinbad and wants "to look after him" (224), something, however, which comes too late and which Sinbad, as I explained above, rejects. Finally, as the situation at home worsens, Paddy feels increasingly distanced from the rest of his classmates and starts tiring of his old pastimes while, at the same time, he becomes fascinated with the seemingly inexpressive Charles Leavy, as I explained in "2.2.1.1. Moving to the suburbs" (p. 142). Towards the very end of the novel, Paddy has a serious fight with Kevin, after which Paddy is ostracised from the group. To conclude this discussion about *Paddy Clarke*, I find these words by McCarthy highly insightful:

The heart of *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* — the core of the narrative consciousness — is the undoing and reforming of the fragile, ambiguous, insecure sense of belonging, of feeling "at home" in the world, which begins with the sense of identity the boy takes from the rough nurture of his experiences with the gang and from the security of his home life. Both these sources of selfhood prove unstable and unpredictable. Life in the gang becomes a constant strategy and challenge, and family life becomes a continuous storm-watch. (140)

Paddy Clarke does not end in a hopeful note like *The Commitments*. Before the last scene, the chant that gives the novel its title is introduced:

—Paddy Clarke —
Paddy Clarke —
Has no da.
Ha ha ha!
I didn't listen to them. They were only kids. (281)

Paddy's comment that he did not listen to his former friends and that he considers them "only kids" indicate his complete distancing from them and his over-early adulthood (he is the same age as them, but sees them as children). In the novel's very last scene, in which Paddy's father returns home for a visit, the degree of formality in the exchange between the two indicates how distanced they have become too:

—How are you? he said.
 He put his hand out for me to shake it.
 —How are you?
 His hand felt cold and big, dry and hard.
 —Very well, thank you. (282)

Thus, as far as the readers know, Paddy has been deprived of his childhood, for he has been forced to mature prematurely to the point that he does not identify with his peers anymore, and he is alone. In this sense, the ending of *Paddy Clarke* contains a note of hopelessness in its outlook towards a future that, for Paddy, bodes anything but well.

Moving on to the discussion of *The Van*, it is striking how similarly Paddy and Jimmy, Sr., behave at times, given the great age difference between them. Like Paddy, Jimmy, Sr., is greatly dependant on others' opinions about him. This is surprising, as in the beginning of *The Snapper*, it is Jimmy, Sr., who exclaims, "Fuck the neighbours!" (8) when Veronica worries about what they will say when they find out that Sharon is pregnant. Likewise, Jimmy, Sr., proves to be highly sensitive of the opinions of others when Barrytown learns that Sharon is having the child of Mr. Burgess. Indeed, Jimmy, Sr., feels that Sharon "was making an eejit out of him (...) his life was being ruined because of her. He was the laughing stock of Barrytown" (147). Not only is this attitude quite selfish, bearing in mind all the implications that this pregnancy has for Sharon, but it is based on an entirely subjective view: there is no evidence in *The Snapper* to suggest that anybody is making fun of or laughing at Jimmy, Sr., (like in the scene discussed above, in which Jimmy, Sr., unwarrantedly accuses Veronica of

blaming him for their money shortage). This side of Jimmy, Sr., is further explored in *The Van*, as the novel centres on him, and Jimmy's personality is often revealed to be petty. He is also portrayed as emotionally dependent on others and, on several occasions, he behaves like a bully.¹⁴² A detail in one scene reveals how insecure Jimmy, Sr., actually is and how easy to influence: "[Bertie] stood up and hitched his trousers back up over his arse. Jimmy Sr stood up and did the same thing with his trousers, although he didn't need to – he just did it – cos Bertie'd done it" (TV 107). For Jimmy, Sr., like for Paddy, acceptance in the group is essential. Thus, even in the most desperate of times, when Jimmy, Sr., has lost his job, he can claim that "money wasn't everything" (TV 65): what he really misses is being able to go to the pub more often, because "[t]here was nothing like it, the few scoops with your mates" (TV 29).

At the same time, as I explained above (p. 179) in *The Van*, Jimmy, Sr., is experiencing a masculinity crisis which seems to be partly caused by the loss of his job (and presumably also by his becoming middle-aged). Thus, throughout the novel, Jimmy's behaviour is often brutish, as he seems to want to reaffirm a masculinity and a control that he feels to have lost. In such an instance, he reacts aggressively when his son Darren, who does not eat meat and who is working for his father and Bimbo in their chipper van, complains that the meat and the fish are cooked in the same oil. In the scene, Jimmy, Sr.,

¹⁴² Several critics have addressed the issue of the problematic personality of Jimmy, Sr., and the word *childish* is often used in the debate. For instance, Paschel writes that an "aspect of the portrayal of Barrytown for which Doyle has been criticized is that he presents his working class community like a group of grown-up children, little boys in particular", especially when it comes to the portrayal of Jimmy, Sr., and Bimbo. Likewise, she considers that *The Van* "corroborates [the] stereotype" that "the working classes cannot take care of themselves and need to be led by people outside the working class community". In opposition, the women are often portrayed "not only wives but mother-figures (...) as well" (100). McCarthy adds a crucial insight, namely, that Jimmy's "culture infantilises him as much as it encourages Veronica to mother him" (94). Moreover, he adds that "unemployment"; like drink, "reduces the man to the grown-up infant that Veronica is expected to nurse" (94). As McCarthy further explains, "[f]or the working-class Jimmy Rabbitte Sr, gainful employment is the prime guarantor of his manhood" (94-5). Pierse addresses the issue about how social inequalities arrest the development of working-class characters in his chapter "Angry Young Men: Class Injuries and Masculinity" (*Writing*). Indeed, Pierse alludes to the "theme of impotent, infantile male fantasy" and cites Doyle's play *Brownbread* (1992) as an example that features this theme (*Writing* 90).

flicked a dunphy¹⁴³ into the fryer so that it would send some oil flying in Darren's direction. Darren got some of it on his arms. He said nothing but he went outside.

Jimmy Sr's ears hummed while he waited for Darren to come back. He prayed for him to come back but he wouldn't go to the door to look out; he wouldn't even look at it.

He felt Darren going past him, on his way back to the fryer.

—Sorry, he said.

He looked at Darren: he looked fine.

—Okay? said Jimmy Sr.

—Yeah. (187)

Jimmy, Sr., follows a pattern here that for him becomes typical: first, he acts in an inappropriate way, but then is unable to ask for forgiveness, although he wishes for the conflict to disappear. Something similar happens when, during the night that he and Bimbo go to the city centre, Bimbo is successful in flirting with a woman and ends up kissing her, but Jimmy, Sr., is unsuccessful with the woman he has been talking to. His first thought when he sees Bimbo and Anne Marie kissing is that “[i]t wasn't fuckin' fair” (*TV* 250). When Dawn, the woman with whom Jimmy, Sr., has been flirting, refuses to kiss him, in a petty act of revenge, Jimmy reveals that his friend, who has introduced himself with his real name Brendan, is nicknamed Bimbo, expecting to ridicule Bimbo in the eyes of the women. Then, when Dawn rejects to kiss him for the third time, he shouts, “Fuck yeh!” (250) and goes to find Bimbo at the toilet, where he pushes the toilet door into Bimbo's face. The moment that Jimmy, Sr., realises that he has hurt Bimbo, however, all the rage leaves him and, this time, he apologises. Bimbo, nevertheless, tells him, I'm sick o' you an' your bullyin' —, sick of it —” (252). Jimmy's greatest problem, in my view, is that he is unable to communicate his emotions, and everything that he does instead of speaking openly about the way that he feels (like insulting, joking or punching) is

¹⁴³ In *The Van*, a dunphy is a sausage. This is explained by a young customer to Jimmy, Sr., in the following scene:

—Sausages look like pricks, righ'?

—Okay; fair enough.

—An' Eamon Dunphy's a prick as well, said the young fella.

By Thursday of the second week, the night of the Holland game, the word Sausage had disappeared out of Barrytown. (160)

Eamon Dunphy is an ex-professional soccer player and in the 1990s, particularly during the Italian Worldcup that is the backdrop of *The Van*, he was a “pundit for RTÉ television” (Gallagher).

what makes him appear immature. For example, when Jimmy, Sr., wants to suggest to Bimbo that they change the name of their business from *Bimbo's Burgers* to *Bimbo and Jimmy's Burgers*, he can only do so in the form of a joke:

Jimmy Sr wiped his brow with his arm.
 —D'yeh know wha'? he said.
 Here went.
 He chuckled first so it would sound right, half a joke.
 —This place should be called Bimbo and Jimmy's Burgers, he said.
 —No, said Bimbo, very – too fuckin' quickly.
 Jimmy Sr's heart was pounding.
 —It wouldn't sound righ', said Bimbo.
 —Yeah, Jimmy Sr agreed with him. —You're righ'.
 —Too long, said Bimbo.
 —Exactly, said Jimmy Sr. —It wasn't serious —
 —I know tha', - still —
 —No, you're righ'. (212-3)

Jimmy's inability to say exactly what he wants and to express how certain events make him feel is what ultimately leads the two men's business venture to failure, although Jimmy, Sr., blames Bimbo's wife Maggie. When Jimmy, Sr., starts to disagree with the manner in which the business is conducted, and grows resentful against Maggie, because he believes that she has "ruined" Bimbo (*TV* 270), instead of having an open conversation with Bimbo about this, Jimmy, Sr., performs small acts that keep increasing the tension between the two friends. The gradual disintegration of the relationship between Bimbo and Jimmy, Sr., proves to be devastating for the latter. Thus, when Bimbo decides to move Jimmy, Sr., from the position of business partner to that of ordinary worker, Jimmy, Sr., experiences confused feelings. Although Jimmy, Sr., tries to remain optimistic by telling himself that "[h]e'd the best of both worlds now; his days to himself and a job to go to later. He got a good wage on Thursdays, and he'd none of the responsibilities. The hours weren't bad, just a bit unsocial. He was a lucky fuckin' man; he had no problem believing that. He believed it" (262), there is another reality pressing at him: "he really couldn't understand why he felt so bad, why at least a couple of times a day, especially when he was hungry or tired, he was close to crying" (262).

Nevertheless, Jimmy does know why he feels so bad: “He was lonely. That was it” (262). Bimbo was his best friend and Jimmy, Sr., used to draw a greater pleasure from going out to the pub with his friends than from any other relationship.

Eventually, Bimbo and Jimmy, Sr., get into their most serious fight towards the end of the novel, a fight in which they physically harm each other. Although Bimbo insists on trying to fix their friendship and even drives the van into the sea, as if by killing the cause of their trouble, everything could go back to normal, Jimmy, Sr., refuses to make amends. The novel ends with Jimmy, Sr., asking Veronica to comfort him and, like in Paddy’s case, with an uncertain perspective for the future. It does not seem likely that Jimmy, Sr., and Bimbo will succeed in mending their broken relationship, something which, undoubtedly, will also affect the group dynamics, thus, leaving Jimmy, Sr., ostracised and completely dependent on his family for social contact.

Finally, in *Smile*, the sense of belonging has yet another meaning for Victor Forde. I have argued above (p. 147 and ff.) that Victor had attempted to escape his class in order to escape his past. Conversely, it is when he returns to a working-class neighbourhood, similar to the one in which he grew up, that he begins to remember his past, as embodied in the apparitions of Edward Fitzpatrick. Shortly after moving into his new flat, Victor begins frequenting the local pub where he becomes acquainted with some of the regular patrons, a group of middle-aged men like him. For Victor, this routine symbolises a glimmer of hope that he will recover something that he feels he has missed out on in life: “the life I hadn’t had, I was getting a bit of it now. The companionship, the ease of it, the acceptance - I was going to live it” (139). From the moment that Victor returns to his social milieu, which happens at the beginning of *Smile*, he starts to recover.¹⁴⁴ Of course, the biggest sign of this, which the reader does not

¹⁴⁴ I acknowledge that the term *recover* might be problematic and in need of disambiguation, since I obviously have no specialist knowledge in such matters and cannot state with certainty that Victor’s mental state is improving. What I read as recovery in the case of Victor is, principally, the restoration of his memory and, by extension, his return to reality. For Victor, this also involves a renewed ability to connect to his surroundings in a

know until the very end of the novel, is Fitzpatrick's presence. Nevertheless, there are other signs of recovery, such as the fact that Victor is "listening to music again" (139). Moreover, Victor realises that "I was a kid again, reading the signs. That was what had happened when my father died: I'd stopped being able to read" (142). What Victor means with this phrase, is that he is able to "read" people, to observe them and draw conclusions, such as the following: "I liked Harry. (...) The women liked Harry. *I knew that before I saw the proof*" (142; my emphasis) or "*I could tell*: Pat was the fucker and he wanted to mention Rachel" (141; my emphasis). It is also important to note, regarding Victor's allusion to the time "when my father died", that the time of Mr. Forde's death was also the period during which the Head Brother raped Victor. This, in my view, reinforces the idea that it was the trauma of the sexual abuse that erased Victor's memory and ostracised him from the world, that is, Victor did not lose his social abilities due to his father's death, but due to the sexual abuse he suffered.

Returning to the situation in the pub, it is also when Victor hears specific phrases that he feels that he is back home: "*What about yourself?* I was doing well, I thought. I'd heard men say that, the uncles of my father, gathered in the hall and kitchen at home, when I was a child. *What about yourself? Ah sure* - I was back home, back across the river" (143; original emphasis). As I see it, *Smile* celebrates the importance of community and underlines the necessity of having places, like the pub, where adults can socialise. For Victor, at least for a while, having this possibility is what brings him back to life. In a scene similar to the one above, Victor expresses again the hope of having found a place inside a community: "I carried the pints across to the window. *How's it going? Good man; thanks very much.* The words felt great and a bit forbidden. I hadn't earned the right to slip into the rhythm of the middle-aged Dub.

realistic way (as opposed to the fantasies he has created about his past) as well as a renewed interest in regular pastimes, as I argue in this section.

My father had liked a pint, my mother told me. He'd liked the company of other men. Maybe that was me. A late arrival" (179; original emphasis).

It is also Victor's new friends who defend him when Fitzpatrick makes distasteful comments about Victor, like when he tells the men that Victor is actually not married anymore to Rachel Carey, who they have been talking about. Immediately, one of the men tells Fitzpatrick to "[s]hut it, (...).— We all have our issues, so fuck it. Enough" (138). That everybody can see Fitzpatrick (although he is a sort of supernatural entity or a figment of Victor's altered psyche), allows Doyle to show the personality of other characters, as in the case just mentioned. Nevertheless, his presence also permits a darker interpretation of how society in *Smile* is portrayed. In my personal interpretation of *Smile*, I take Fitzpatrick to be an incarnation of the truth: of the reality that sexual abuse took place in Irish institutions. Therefore, the people's reaction to Fitzpatrick can also be read as society's wilful ignorance of this reality:

(...) speaking of one of his new friends at the pub, Victor comments that "he didn't want to look at Fitzpatrick. I could see that. They all wanted Fitzpatrick to go away" (138). If (...) Fitzpatrick is a sort of incarnation of the truth, that is, of the abuse that Victor suffered, and by extension, the possibility that abuse might be occurring in Irish Catholic institutions, the same comment takes on a far deeper and far more disturbing meaning: "he didn't want to look at *the truth*. I could see that. They all wanted *the truth* to go away". (Schlesier 174; original emphasis)

If my reading is correct, it problematises the future of Victor's integration in the community. What will happen to Victor after the ending of the novel is more uncertain than in the case of Jimmy, Sr., or Paddy Clarke. Although Jimmy and Paddy end up relatively alone and it is doubtful whether they will be able to recuperate their place in their group of friends, it is possible that they will encounter new people with whom they will be able to establish relationships, especially Paddy, due to his young age. Nevertheless, at the end of *Smile*, Victor is left unable to stop crying (214), as his world has been turned completely upside down. I believe that, on the one hand, the fact that Victor is able to remember his past is a good sign,

as it seems to be the first stepping stone towards the possibility to recover from trauma: now that he has learned crucial information, he can seek adequate help. On the other hand, Victor will have to live with the knowledge of what was done to him, something which warrants a highly painful and difficult future. It is not clear what will happen with Victor's new friends, but the fact that the novel ends on such a tragic note with Victor alone, seems to indicate that this is how he will remain: alone. The play with the verbal tenses in the closing sentence of the novel ("I was crying. I couldn't stop crying. And I can't stop" (214)), creates a link with the present, giving the impression that the situation in which the novel ends still endures.

2.2.3.3. *Solidarity*

Before ending the discussion of the novels in this chapter, the question of solidarity remains to be addressed. As I indicated above, the characters discussed in this chapter often act out of solidarity. This attribute shows, again, the importance of community and the links established within it, and it also helps counteract some of the worse qualities of characters like Jimmy, Sr. In *The Snapper*, for instance, Jimmy, Sr., is described as someone who "often did things just like that, gave away pounds and fivers or said nice things; little things that made him like himself" (11). In the same vein, although, at first, Mr. and Mrs. Rabbitte believe that buying a bicycle for Darren is "much too dear for a birthday" (TS 70), Jimmy, Sr., manages to make a deal with Bertie and gets a practically new bicycle for Darren. The scene of Darren's birthday showing the family's happiness at giving and receiving such a present constitutes, in my view, one of the best scenes in *The Snapper*. Although Veronica and Jimmy, Sr., do not own much, they are always seen doing their best to fulfil their children's wishes.

Regarding Sharon's pregnancy, her brother Jimmy, Jr., also shows his solidarity to her, after it is revealed that Mr. Burgess is her baby's father, when he says, "I couldn't give a shite

who the da is. D'yeh know what I mean?" and adds, "An' the lads couldn't give a fuck either" (TS 140), referring to his friends. This is highly meaningful, as Sharon is being mocked and criticised for carrying the child of Mr. Burgess. Towards the final part of *The Snapper*, once Jimmy, Sr., gets over the fact that Mr. Burgess is "the da", he also works hard to show Sharon his support, by reading about pregnancy (170) or bringing new pillows to the house to make Sharon more comfortable: "It'll take some o' the pressure off the oul' diaphragm, Sharon" (174). Although McGlynn this attitude by Jimmy, Sr., to be "intrusive" ("Pregnancy" 149) and an attempt at exerting control in "an effort to claim typically female space as his own" (149), I believe that what is being portrayed is the effort that Jimmy, Sr., is willing to make for his daughter and to make up for his previous petty behaviour in the novel.

The Van also includes several examples of solidarity. For instance, after Bimbo is made redundant like Jimmy, Sr., Jimmy takes care of him, by taking Bimbo out and helping him keep busy. Later, when Bimbo buys the van with the idea of turning it into a chipper, he immediately offers Jimmy, Sr., to be his partner (115), something which moves Jimmy, Sr., so deeply that he has to "wipe his eyes" (115). On another occasion, Jimmy, Sr., gives a free meal to a young man who seems to have a mental health condition (190-1), although he refuses to do the same for a woman who asks if she is allowed to trade some butter vouchers for her dinner, on the grounds that "if she could afford to go to bingo then she could afford to pay for her supper" (153). Another example is that, when Bimbo and Jimmy, Sr., start their venture, Rita Fleming, a neighbour, allows them to fill the water-bottles with the water they need for cooking at her house (148).

In *Paddy Clarke*, despite all the cruelty and violence among the children, there is also an example of solidarity that stands out: after Paddy is excluded from the gang towards the end of the novel, David Geraghty, a boy with polio from Paddy's class who is often mocked, is the only one to show Paddy some kindness:

None of them talked to me, none of them.
 Except David Geraghty. He wouldn't stop. We were beside each other on different sides of the first aisle. He leaned out, hanging onto the desk, right under Henno.
 —Howdy.
 Trying to get me to laugh.
 —Howdy doody.
 He was mad. (279)

Although Paddy believes that David “wasn't doing it to make me feel any better; he was just doing it. He was absolutely mad, completely on his own” (279), I believe that Paddy fails to grasp the situation fully. Knowing what it feels like to be marginalised, David is the only boy in the class able to empathise with Paddy and, therefore, the only one who tries to alleviate Paddy's suffering. Another scene, which immediately follows the one above, speaks to David's sincerity:

I heard it before I felt it, the zip of the air, then the thump on my back. It pushed me forward and I decided to fall. It was real pain. I rolled, and looked. It was David Geraghty. He'd whipped me with one of his crutches. I could feel the line on my back. The noise of it was still around me.
 He was crying. He couldn't get his hand into the arm hole. He was really crying. He looked at me when he said it.
 —Kevin said to give you that. (279-80)

Most of the boys in *Paddy Clarke* do not mind being cruel to each other, even to their best friend or their siblings, as I have shown above. In their world this is normal: one day the boys are friends, the next they fight and then everything is forgiven and forgotten. Hitting Paddy, however, visibly causes David great pain. Probably, because in doing so, he is betraying his own principles by which he had determined to be nice to Paddy. Additionally, this scene shows how power dynamics are already present among Doyle's children: Kevin continues being the leader of the gang (despite all his bullying throughout the novel) and his influence, one imagines in the form of threats, in this occasion, remains strong.

In the case of *Smile*, I believe that the greatest example of solidarity can be found in the men's friendliness towards Victor at the pub, as I showed above. Although they do not need to

include Victor in their group, they make the effort of getting acquainted with him and allow him to integrate, something which, as I have argued, proves to be highly beneficial for Victor.

2.2.3.4. Unlikeable Characters or Good Writing?

As I suggested above, I believe that many of the examples of solidarity help soften some of the more cruel or harsh scenes in the novels: despite all the pain present in some of them (like in *Paddy Clarke or Smile*), goodness persists and there is always someone, be it a family member, a friend or a neighbour, who can be counted on. Moreover, in such characters like Jimmy, Sr., his shows of solidarity help to redeem some of his worse qualities. That Jimmy, Sr., is capable of goodness, certainly makes up for his pettiness and often selfish attitude. Nevertheless, as I see it, that same pettiness and selfishness make him a more believable character than if he were a champion of virtue. As I already showed in the foreword to my thesis (see p. 2), critics like Maher find that certain shortcomings in Doyle's characters (Maher specifically refers to Paula Spencer's lack of "an eloquent voice to rail against the inequity of her situation" ("Social and Cultural Change" 166)), provide Doyle's writing with a particular form of authenticity. I would suggest that this formula, applied to the characters' personalities, is true for all of Doyle's characters under analysis in this thesis: most of them are more inclined to act in questionable ways than in a morally correct manner. This behaviour might be caused by their own sense of injustice in the world, for why should they follow a moral compass, when they can be fired on a whim, like Jimmy, Sr., and Bimbo; raped by the father of a friend, like Sharon, or by the schoolmaster, like Victor; beaten by their husband, like Paula Spencer (see Chapter Three); or condemned to the most restrictive poverty and death by tuberculosis, like Henry Smart and his little brother Victor (see Chapter One)? On another level, these characters' failures, in my view, keep them true to Doyle's style that, except the Last Roundup Trilogy, seeks to imitate life.

Their mistakes and flaws certainly add a layer of complexity to these characters that complicates a straightforward liking of them and, by extension, an exaggerated compassion. These characters are not to be pitied, in my view: they are to be regarded as people who, in the worst circumstances (which the novels *do* criticise), continue to behave like the imperfect human beings that they are. As I put it above, the danger in writing about marginalised or underprivileged groups that often lack a platform to express their voice, is that someone attempting to speak for them (in this case a writer who, moreover, has socially moved to a higher position) might do so in a manner that might come across as patronising. With his style, I would say, Doyle avoids this and creates characters that feel alive and are authentic.

2.3. Partial Conclusions

The objective of this chapter has been to show how the characters in *Paddy Clarke, Smile* and the Barrytown Trilogy are disengaged from the nationalist project that was launched after Ireland became an independent state. Through this representation, as in the case of Henry Smart, Doyle is vindicating the existence an unofficial, but equally real Ireland. At the same time, throughout these novels, set in different decades of the twentieth century, Doyle articulates a criticism against the conservatism of many of the most important institutions in independent Ireland, of which the harshest is reserved for the Catholic Church.

In Chapter One, I had already addressed the tension between urban and rural Ireland, mainly in relation to the construction of Henry Smart's identity. In this chapter, this issue has maintained its relevance in two different aspects. On the one hand, MacAnna's essay shows how Roddy Doyle, in writing about the Dubliner working class, contributed to a new literary movement spearheaded by writers who attempted to narrate the lives of the urban Irish. On the other hand, by choosing Dublin as his setting, Doyle is writing into existence the lives of the

urban Dublin class, giving a (fake) continuity to the fate of the characters in the Last Roundup Trilogy.¹⁴⁵

Doyle's Dublin is a city marked and divided along class lines. Although Doyle has claimed that his stories could take place in any European city, I have argued that the opposite is true: for example, in *Paddy Clarke*, the encounter between Paddy and Charles Leavy occurs as a result of Dublin's slum clearance programme and, thus, the novel is rooted to a specific place and time, while it offers a glimpse into a uniquely working-class experience in Dublin, that of being forced to move from the inner city slums to the suburbs. In a similar vein, Victor Forde from *Smile* continuously compares his experience as a member of the working class to that of other, richer characters. The story of abuse told in *Smile*, Doyle implies, happened to Victor because his class located him in a specific area of Dublin, forced him to attend a specific school and warranted a certain treatment from his teachers, circumstances which sound entirely foreign to the better-off characters that appear in the novel. In *Smile* as well as in *The Van*, social class can be traced along the city (across the river, from North to South, from the inner city to the suburbs) and it is clearly visible and audible: Rachel and Victor are both Dubliners, but they talk so differently that they could belong to different worlds, as Victor puts it. Jimmy, Sr., and Bimbo are able to spot at a simple glance the differences between the women from the city centre and those from Barrytown, and Victor's mother immediately recognises Rachel as distinct, solely based on her elegant and healthy appearance. In my view, all the examples discussed in this chapter reinforce the idea that Doyle attributes to his working-class characters a life experience that stands at odds with that of other Dubliners, especially that of those who belong to higher classes.

¹⁴⁵ I call it *fake*, because it is me, by ordering Doyle's works in the manner that I have, who has created a chronological continuity between the works. As far as I know, Doyle did not intend to create such a continuous reading of his works.

Another element, a crucial one in the Irish context, that sets the experience of Doyle's characters apart from others is their relationship to religion. This relationship, in most of Doyle's novels, is non-existent. Nevertheless, this chapter includes several works that are an exception and in which religion plays a major role. Still, in all cases, religion is portrayed as an external factor in the characters' lives, rather than an element that guides their thought or action. Likewise, religion does not have any positive impact on any of the characters portrayed here: it fails Paddy when he tries to pray in his darkest moments and it is presented at the bottom of some of the conflicts between his parents; for Victor, the Church represents one of Ireland's worst problems, as he intends to denounce in the book he is supposed to be writing, and his life has been ruined by the sexual abuse that the headmaster at his Christian Brothers School inflicts on him; religion plays no role at all in the Barrytown Trilogy and is only ever mentioned in a passing manner, perhaps to show how vestigial its presence is for the Rabbittes. Thus, the characters non-attachment to religion also sets them apart from an Ireland in which the Church had a major presence and that was highly significant for many of its inhabitants.

As with religion, Doyle is highly critical of national education, as can be seen especially in *Smile* and *Paddy Clarke*. Victor's and Paddy's teachers, like the teachers portrayed in *The Dead Republic*, use violence indiscriminately during their lessons, something which keeps the students in a constant state of dread. Like religion, nationalism is portrayed as an external factor that bears no importance in the characters' everyday life: none have a nationalist discourse or show any sign of interest in politics or the history of their country, they do not even show any inclination to learn the Irish language. All these elements play absolutely no role for Doyle's characters, at least, not outside of the school gates, never minding how hard their teachers might try to instil a nationalist sentiment in them.

Finally, in the third section of this chapter I have looked at how, in the absence of other unifying elements, community plays an important role in Doyle's novels and is presented at

different levels: the smallest unit being the family, moving on through the group of friends and finding its largest expression in the urban suburb, such as Barrytown. Community is crucial for these characters, whose lives are often marked by poverty, and it is fostered through different acts of solidarity. In my analysis of how poverty affects the characters that appear in this chapter, I reached the conclusion that material deprivation is often given less importance than other more insidious aspects that go hand in hand with having little means: for instance, in *The Snapper*, Sharon repeatedly stresses what a toll her manual job takes on her body once she becomes pregnant (something which connects to the physical pain that Paula Spencer endures from her job as a cleaner, as I argue in Chapter Three). Likewise, when Jimmy, Sr., loses his job, it is not so much the lack of money what plagues him, but the feelings of guilt, uselessness and a sense of emasculation that derive from his inability to fulfil his role as a breadwinner. These experiences are also more common to the lower classes, especially when it comes to the fear of falling into deprivation, as represented through the character of Veronica, who worries about her children finding a stable position in life.

In general, the characters presented in this chapter enjoy having a healthy relationship to their communities and community is celebrated in most of Doyle's texts. This can be seen in *The Commitments*, when the band becomes popular after it changes the lyrics of several songs to adapt them to the context of Barrytown, managing, thus, to capture a common experience and fostering a sense of belonging. Likewise, characters like Paddy, Jimmy, Sr., and Victor thrive in their respective groups of friends and all of them suffer greatly when, due to their particular predicaments, they become alienated from said groups. Moreover, I have argued that *Smile* presents the pub as a crucial locus of adult socialisation as, in the case of Victor, it becomes a lifeline for a person whose ties with the world have become severed for the most terrible reasons. Nevertheless, as I have also shown, Doyle does not present group relations as easy and straightforward, but his novels also feature the tension between group

identity and individuality and his female characters do not engage in the community in the same way than his male characters. I cannot claim that community is exclusive to the working class, for the human species is gregarious by nature and its individuals form numerous and varied social bonds throughout their lives. However, it seems plausible to suggest that community holds a very high position on the scale of importance of working-class people. This is reflected in several of the quotes that I have shared, in which working-class people complained when they were relocated from one part of Dublin to another, because that meant that they would have to break the ties with their community, a concern that is also reflected at large in Bissett's study. In the work of Roddy Doyle, the loss of community is certainly presented as a tragic event in the character's lives, as I have argued with the examples of Paddy Clarke, Jimmy, Sr., and Victor Forde. While *The Commitments* and *The Snapper* end on a comic note, with community intact, despite the main characters' struggles, *Paddy Clarke, The Van* and *Smile* end on an uncertain note, with their protagonists emotionally damaged.

In my discussion of how Doyle's novels often contain characters that show solidarity towards others as an important factor for group cohesion, I have also argued that these displays serve the purpose of redeeming some of the main characters' worst qualities. The example of Jimmy, Sr., is especially relevant, as throughout *The Van* he becomes increasingly insufferable. However, it is also my conviction that the fact that many of Doyle's characters are deeply flawed and often fail to act in a morally upright manner is what saves them (and him as an author) from falling into stereotypes of helpless or excessively virtuous working-class characters.

Chapter Three

3.1. Introduction

Starting in the mid-1990s and ending in the first decade of the twenty-first century—there is no consensus on the exact dates—an unprecedented period of economic growth upheaved the Irish economy: this phenomenon was called the Celtic Tiger.¹⁴⁶ The growth that took place during this time helped accelerate several changes that were already underway in Ireland, with such impetus that the country was radically transformed in what seemed like an almost unbelievably short timeframe. Roddy Doyle captures this exact impression in his foreword to *The Deportees* (2007) where he observed: “It happened, I think, some time in the mid-90s. I went to bed in one country and woke up in a different one” (xi). This sense of immediateness is likewise transmitted in the introduction of *Recalling the Celtic Tiger* (2019), in which its editors, Eamon Maher, Brian Lucey and Eugene O’Brien, state that “Ireland had become a consumer driven, multi-ethnic and multi-racial economy *almost overnight*, it seems, and there was a great sense of pride in being Irish” (Maher et al. 1; my emphasis).¹⁴⁷

This “different country” that Roddy Doyle woke up in, the Ireland that emerged in the mid-1990s, has been described by McCarthy as “a transcendent, post-nationalist Ireland aris[ing] out of its evolution from colonial to postcolonial, rural-agricultural through urban-industrial to post-industrial, Catholic and nationalist to secular and post-nationalist” (6). There were various factors that contributed to this shift, but one of the most crucial was the downfall of the Catholic Church in the people’s regard, as increasingly more scandals involving it came

¹⁴⁶ The term Celtic Tiger is commonly used to refer to the period of rapid economic growth that Ireland experienced starting in the mid-1990s and ending in the 2000s, when the economy collapsed. The name Celtic Tiger was coined in 1994 and refers to Ireland’s Celtic heritage and to the similitude of the Irish economy at the time to the South-Asian Tiger economies (Maher et al., G. Smyth; “Irish National Identity”).

¹⁴⁷ For more works about the Celtic Tiger period, see Allen; Cahill; Clark; and Kirby.

to light. This is something that Maher captures in his article about the Paula Spencer novels, in which he summarises the transformation of Ireland between the 1970s and 1980s (the time corresponding to Paula's youth) and the Ireland of the early 2000s, as represented in *Paula Spencer*. Maher refers to this time as "a seismic period for Ireland" and describes it in the following terms:¹⁴⁸

The cultural, economic, political and religious landscape was completely transformed by tribunals investigating payments to politicians, the unveiling of the systemic abuse of children in industrial schools and orphanages, and the clerical child abuse scandal. (...) The moral authority of the former pillars of Irish society, Church and State, slowly crumbled. People were no longer to be preached to by people or the institutions they represented, especially when serious flaws had been exposed in relation to the activities of some of their number. Change was everywhere visible: divorce was legalised, and homosexuality decriminalised. Contraceptives became widely available, emigration stopped as the economy showed signs of unprecedented growth, and generally a wave of consumer liberalism swept through the country. ("Social and Cultural Change" 159)¹⁴⁹

As I discussed in Chapter Two, some of these changes were already palpable in the earliest instances of Doyle's writing. The case of Doyle's representation of religion, for example, is paradigmatic of its dwindling presence in people's lives: religion plays absolutely no role in the Barrytown Trilogy. Later, this disengagement with religion would turn to the denunciation in *Smile*. The books written after the start of the Celtic Tiger years and whose plots take place post-2000s, like *Paula Spencer* or *The Deported*, depict this transformed society, to use Maher's terminology, as could not happen otherwise with a writer who is famous for his ability "to record and preserve the spirit of the times" (Donnelly 23). In this chapter I analyse several of these changes that Maher alludes to as captured in the novel *Paula Spencer* and in the short-

¹⁴⁸ This quotation was also given in the Introduction (p. 36), in my overview of the historical events that took place in Ireland during the twentieth century.

¹⁴⁹ When Maher talks about the "serious flaws" that "had been exposed", he refers, for example, to the scandal in which Bishop Eamonn Casey was involved. The scandal took place when, in 1992, the Bishop of Galway resigned after it was revealed that he had fathered a child with a divorced American woman ("Bishop Eamonn Casey removed from public ministry in 2007"). In 2007, nevertheless, he was "removed from public ministry by the Vatican following 'allegations' which (...) included his niece's complaint of child sexual abuse" (Conneely). In July 2024, a documentary called *Bishop Casey's Buried Secrets* aired that appears to confirm the truth behind these allegations (Conneely; O'Regan).

story collection *The Deportees*, taking into special consideration how these changes affect the characters' lives.

The novel that opens the discussion in this chapter is *Paula Spencer* (2006), since it is the first novel that Doyle wrote after the advent of the Celtic Tiger phenomenon and the one that, in my view, best captures the shifts and changes that the new prosperous economy triggered.¹⁵⁰ As *Paula Spencer* is the second part of an earlier novel, *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (1996), these differences are even more conspicuous and have naturally led to comparisons between the two texts.

The Deportees focuses on stories of immigrants living in Dublin, and immigration was a phenomenon that boomed along with the economy and changed the Irish social landscape in a significant way. Each of the stories in this collection challenges the traditional definition of Irishness, especially by rejecting its equalisation with “whiteness”. Instead, the short stories encourage the inclusion into the concept of Irishness of people with what Eva White calls “hyphenated identities”, that is, “identities that encompass more than one nationality, ethnicity or culture” (95).

3.1.1. ‘Cosmetic’ Changes versus ‘Structural’ Changes.

In order to carry out my analysis, I have opted to classify the changes brought about during the Celtic Tiger period into two categories: cosmetic and structural. Although these names are rather self-explanatory, it is still necessary to clarify my use of them. When applied to an architectural construction, the meaning of these terms becomes straightforward: a structural

¹⁵⁰ The two novels that followed the publication of *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1996), the first novel that features Paula Spencer as its protagonist, were *A Star Called Henry* (1999) and *Oh, Play That Thing* (2004). Although these novels were published when the Celtic Tiger phenomenon was already roaring ahead, their plots, as I show in Chapter One, take place at the beginning of the twentieth century.

change would affect the internal structure of a building, such as, for instance, the tearing down of a wall or the changing of a roof; whereas a cosmetic change would imply modifying only the outward appearance of a place, for example, by painting its walls (“Landscaping”). Raymond Williams mentions this same distinction in his definition of the term *structural*: “In building, by 1C19, there was a conventional distinction between structural and *decorative*, which reinforced the sense of an internal framework or process” (302; original emphasis). In the case of my analysis, although both types of changes have the same origin (the economic boom and the modernisation of Ireland) and the texts under scrutiny reflect both, their importance in the narrative is clearly different.

The cosmetic changes, as discussed below, are generally shown in descriptions or brief comments made by the narrator or a character and they serve the purpose of framing the story in a distinct time and place. For instance, they might include the description of a new restaurant or a passing mention of a character’s nationality. In contrast, structural changes are usually presented as a main theme in the novel or story, or as a central preoccupation for characters. The importance of these structural changes can be gathered from the characters’ inner discourse and from main events that affect the plot. An example of such structural changes is immigration, which is the central theme of *The Deportees*, and which represents a novelty to the native Irish characters, who attempt to come to terms with it.

3.2. Text Analysis

3.2.1. Paula: from *Family* to *Paula Spencer*

The figure of Paula Spencer first appeared in the four-part television series *Family* (1994). The series was written by Roddy Doyle and directed by Michael Winterbottom and its first

instalment aired on RTE on 3 May 1994. Set in the northside Dublin suburb of Ballymun, each episode follows the life of a different member from the Spencer family, the last episode focussing on Paula. The mini-series caused such a great commotion, because it “contained violence, wife-battering, unemployment, alcoholism and a dysfunctional family, which (...) infuriated a great number of viewers” (Persson; “You’re Fuckin’ Amazing” 138), that Doyle even received several death threats (“Roddy Doyle Received Death Threats”). The upset viewers “argued that Doyle had given a false image of Ireland” (Persson; “You’re Fuckin’ Amazing” 138) and “Doyle was accused of tampering with and disturbing revered notions of Irishness and what Ireland represented” (Persson; “You’re Fuckin’ Amazing” 138), such as the institutions of family and marriage as well as the concept of motherhood.

Two years later, concordant with his feeling that he was not done yet with the character of Paula Spencer, Doyle brought her back as the protagonist of the novel *The Woman*.¹⁵¹ In a compelling first-person narration, Doyle had Paula uncover a horrific story of consistent abuse since her childhood and culminating in her marriage to Charlo Spencer. Not only does the novel register the continuous physical and psychological assaults that Charlo inflicts on Paula, but it also exposes the society’s silence and wilful ignorance of Paula’s fate: even the doctors who visit her after several particularly brutal episodes seem unwilling to ask the necessary questions to help Paula and they simply accept her implausible explanations that her injuries stem from having walked into a door.¹⁵² As a consequence of the violence and her utter helplessness, Paula is left without proper agency and practically without a sense of self. This, in turn, drives Paula into alcoholism, resulting in the ties between her and her children to become severely

¹⁵¹ Maher quotes from G. Smyth’s *The Novel and the Nation* (1997) the following phrase by Roddy Doyle: “I like the idea of somewhere along the line going back to Paula when she is six years older and I’m six years older, Ireland will have changed dramatically, and there’ll be plenty of material there to wonder what has happened to her” (163). At the time of writing this thesis, it seems that Doyle is still not finished with Paula Spencer, as he announced that “I just finished a new novel with Paula Spencer in it” (Doyle; “Interview” lines 21-2). This novel has recently been announced: titled *The Women Behind the Door*, it was published on 10 September 2024.

¹⁵² The criticism that *The Woman* makes of a society that prefers to look away rather than acknowledge its monsters is a theme that Doyle took up again in *Smile*, as I argued in Chapter Two (p. 147).

damaged and even to break, as is the case of her eldest son John Paul, who has a heroin addiction, and who decides to abandon the family home. In a great act of courage, Paula finally confronts Charlo and kicks him out of the house. Eventually, Charlo is shot by the police after an attempted robbery that involved the kidnapping of a woman.

Paula Spencer (2006) is the sequel to *The Woman* and its main events take place a decade after the end of its prequel. Unlike *The Woman*, *Paula Spencer* is written in the third person; however, the narrator's focus remains on Paula, the distance between the two being so short that readers always know what Paula is thinking and feeling. The woman that the readers meet at the beginning of *Paula Spencer* is forty-seven years old and cleans offices and homes for a living. Paula has been sober for four months and fights a serious battle against the constant urge to drink. The plot, which spans over a year of Paula's life, develops at a slow but steady pace which brilliantly reflects the manner in which Paula experiences time, as she needs to face each day, sometimes each minute, at a time. Time, for Paula, is shaped both by her fight against alcoholism and her meagre financial situation, as I explain below. The backdrop of the narrative being the flashy Dublin of the Celtic Tiger years only exacerbates the Spencers' poverty, as the city seems to be brimming with opportunities for success, in which everyone, except Paula and the immigrant population she works with, appears to be faring splendidly.

Still, Paula's main preoccupation are her children and the novel tracks Paula's efforts to rebuild her connections to them and to be a good mother, especially to Jack and Leanne, the two that still live with her. While her eldest daughter Nicola and her youngest son Jack seem to be doing well, Leanne's health is dangerously poor, as she too has developed an addiction to alcohol. Moreover, the fact that Leanne blames Paula for her wretched life often leads to raw confrontations between the two. These fights, the reappearance of John Paul—completely sober and with a family of his own—and the ups and downs with her other children continually force Paula to remember and acknowledge shocking memories from her past in which she

recognises herself as an absent, neglectful mother, something which adds greatly to her pain, as is seen throughout the novel.

Nevertheless, in spite of Paula's plaguing feelings of loneliness, guilt and of her deteriorated physical condition (due to the violence in her past and her current job as a cleaner), *Paula Spencer* is a book about recovery,¹⁵³ as it follows Paula through her rediscovery of the world (after years of disconnection from it) and her attempts to improve her life and the lives of her children. The novel ends in a hopeful note, as Paula manages to stay sober for an entire year, her relationships with her family have become better and she has met a man with whom she enjoys spending time. The only open question that remains after the ending of the novel is whether Leanne will be able to overcome her addiction and lead a healthy and happy life.

3.2.2.1. *The Debate about Paula's Recovery*

Several critics have focussed on the themes of healing and recovery present in *Paula Spencer* and on which factor it is exactly that keeps Paula moving forward despite her terrible situation. For Díaz Bild, for instance, it is Paula's "comic spirit". Díaz Bild analyses *Paula Spencer* from the perspective of generic comedy and argues that "the comic response to tragic dilemmas is (...) the appropriate response to a situation which would otherwise destroy the human being" ("*Paula Spencer*" 24). According to her, "[Paula] possesses the true comic spirit which allows her to realize that the simple basics of life and survival are the most important ones" (26) and, therefore, Paula "can celebrate life in spite of all her suffering because of her comic outlook on the world" (27).

Persson, instead, focuses on how Paula's work (despite its negative side) "operates as

¹⁵³ Contrary to the case of Victor Forde in *Smile*, here it is clear what recovery means for Paula: to remain sober, to regain control of her life and to heal as much as possible from her past injuries.

a positive force in Paula's life" and how, therefore, "work has what could be termed a therapeutic value, in addition to that of empowerment, and becomes part of a transformative process in that it helps Paula to re-shape the negative image she has of herself and to re-connect to the world around her" ("You're Fuckin' Amazing" 156). In the same vein as Persson, Caitlin McGuiness, who looks at Paula "through the lens of the protagonist's work as an Irish-born cleaner in Celtic Tiger Dublin" (122), sees Paula's work as "a vital part of her gradual recovery from years of abuse" (124) as well as "provid[ing] her with private, unmonitored spaces in which she can reflect upon her past, and attempt to re-insert herself into a different Ireland" (125). Additionally, McGuiness analyses the act of story-telling as well as some of Paula's actions as "tactics" of resistance against the system that oppresses her (126).

Denell Downum, in complement to this, focuses on the importance of memory and on the role that individual experiences play to "help to constitute shared cultural memory" (77) in three novels set in Celtic-Tiger Ireland.¹⁵⁴ According to him, in *Paula Spencer*, "Doyle structures the narrative in a way that illustrates the necessity of memory and of a coming-to-terms with traumatic experience that can only happen after the fact" (79). He sees the "gaps in Paula's memory" as produced by "moments of conflict and failure" (80). Hence, for him, Paula's recovery is a result of her "willingness to deliberately narrate into memory her most traumatic moments" (81).

Jennifer M. Jeffers looks at several of Roddy Doyle's works, including *Paula Spencer*, through the prism of class and multiculturalism in order to answer the question, "What does it mean to be Irish?", which, according to her, "Paula answers (...) by stating that she is not Irish: she is a subordinate just like the Africans, Romanians and Latvians in Ireland" (266). My argumentation is quite in line with that of Jeffers and, therefore, I have quoted her work in

¹⁵⁴ The novels are Roddy Doyle's *Paula Spencer*, Anne Enright's *The Gathering* (2007) and Tana French's *Into the Woods* (2007).

numerous instances in my analysis of *Paula Spencer*. Finally, there is no closing this review without referring to Maher's essay comparing *The Woman* and *Paula Spencer* with the aim "to demonstrate the extent to which [these two novels] chart the move from the Ireland of the 1970s and 80s right through to the early twentieth-first century" (158-9).¹⁵⁵

3.2.3.2. *Paula Spencer and the Myth of Wealth*¹⁵⁶ during the Celtic Tiger Period

Maher refers to McCarthy's work, *Roddy Doyle: Raining on the Parade*, to state that

McCarthy argues that [Roddy Doyle] refuses to buy into the myth according to which Ireland suddenly 'reinvented' itself in the 1990s, with its spectacular shift from being a colonial to postcolonial, rural-agricultural to urban-industrial, Catholic and nationalist to secular and post-nationalist society. (158)

To this enumeration I would add the supposed shift that Ireland made from being a poor country to having one of the world's top economies during the Celtic Tiger period. This, according to O'Toole, is a myth too. Written in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, in his 2010 book *Enough is Enough*, O'Toole seeks to provide a road map for the reconstruction of Ireland and its transformation into a real, functioning republic, such as the one envisioned "by the putative founders of the Republic" (22), the one that, perhaps, Henry Smart was fighting for in *A Star*. O'Toole works from the principle that the Republic of Ireland has serious political and social deficiencies and that, therefore, it is not a real republic, that is, following Philip Pettit's definition:¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ For Díaz Bild, see "*Paula Spencer* or the Miraculous Transformation of Misery into Joy"; for Persson, "'You're Fuckin' Amazing, by the Way'"; for McGuinness, "Interrupting the Spin-Cycle"; for Downum, "Learning to Live", for Jeffers, "'What's it Like Being Irish?'" and for Maher, "Social and Cultural Change in Ireland as Seen in Roddy Doyle's *Paula Spencer* Novels".

¹⁵⁶ I have taken the concept "Myth of Wealth" from Fintan O'Toole's *Enough is Enough* (2010) which is discussed in this chapter.

¹⁵⁷ Philip Pettit is an Irish philosopher, political scientist and university professor. O'Toole quotes from Pettit's work *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (1997).

‘a state that can operate effectively against private dominion, helping to reduce the degree of domination people suffer at the hands of other individuals and groups (...) a state that is organized in such a way that it will not itself represent a source of domination in people’s lives (...) a state that is conducted for the public interest, that pursues its policies in the public eye, and that acts under public control - a state that is truly a *res publication*, a matter of public business’. (qtd. in O’Toole 26)

Hence, the first part of O’Toole’s work is dedicated to the deconstruction of the five myths which, according to him, prevent Ireland from reinventing itself and becoming a functioning republic. These myths are “the Myth of the Republic”, “the Myth of Representation”, “the Myth of Parliamentary Democracy”, “the Myth of Charity” and “the Myth of Wealth”. For the purpose of my analysis in this chapter, I focus specifically on the last item: “the Myth of Wealth”.

As I pointed out above, this myth was constructed during the Celtic Tiger years and O’Toole introduces it as follows: “Even as they become poorer, Irish people have a tantalising memory of a golden age when Ireland was one of the richest countries in the world. Like all golden ages, this one is a figment of the imagination” (*Enough is Enough* 111). The key problem leading to the false belief that Ireland had become “the second richest nation in the developed world” (111), O’Toole explains, lay in using the wrong indicators of wealth. “This canopy of myth”, he argues, was held up by “the statistical quirks of GDP; the identification of wealth with income; and the ignoring of both the burden of debt and the cost of living” (113). O’Toole then proceeds to clarify that “real national wealth is accumulated over many generations and manifests itself in fixed assets, public services, infrastructure (both physical and social) and capacity for innovation. The Celtic Tiger did not make Ireland richer by any of these measures” (114-5). To support his argument, O’Toole also provides numerous examples and data that show how poor Ireland actually was during the Celtic Tiger years in certain fundamental areas such as public education and healthcare. One of these examples, which is illustrative of the general tone of O’Toole’s work and that finds echoes in both *Paula Spencer*

and *The Dead Republic*, reads as follows:

The primary school in Julianstown, County Meath, has 70 per cent of its pupils in prefabs (some more than twenty-five years old), just four of the thirteen classrooms meeting national standards, nowhere for parents and teachers to meet privately, mouse-traps in every room and toilets ‘from another era’, their smell ‘permeating the classrooms’. Eglisk primary school was described by its principal as a ‘rat-infested fire-trap’ in which children were endangered by slates falling off the roof. The primary school in Ballinakillen, County Carlow, was described by the local priest as reminiscent of scenes from *Slumdog Millionaire*, with black mould growing on the walls and fifty-seven pupils in one prefab ‘that reeks of urine’. Teachers invented stories to explain away the sounds of rats scurrying under the floorboards. In 2008, when Ireland was at its ‘richest’, 2,256 prefabs were in use in primary schools throughout the country - meaning that around 50,000 children were being educated in glorified sheds. (119)

The phrase that refers to “slates falling off the roof” is deeply remindful of a scene in *The Dead Republic*, in which Henry, working as the school janitor, notices “a slate, fresh-smashed, on the ground, near the front door – dangerously near it” (142). This occurs at the same time that Henry hears a child coughing in the schoolyard and is reminded of his brother’s death (see Chapter 1, “1.2.1.1. Life in the Slums: Misery, Illness and Violence”, p. 51) and both events help challenge the idea that the Republic is as modern as Henry had, at first, believed it to be. Although the scene in *The Dead Republic* takes place in the 1970s, several decades before the plot in *Paula Spencer* and before the time that O’Toole refers to, it is telling that, as represented in Doyle’s fiction, there does not seem to have been a great improvement between the 1970s and the 2000s, something which, in turn, challenges the notion of Ireland’s modernisation at the turn of the century.

Paula Spencer is particularly powerful in its representation of the dichotomy between the apparent glamour of Celtic Tiger Ireland and the utter poverty of certain social groups. Indeed, Paula finds herself struggling to survive in a city in which everybody else (including her sisters) seems to be succeeding and in which, like a window-shopper without money, she can only look on as Dublin (some parts of the city, at least) undergoes quick changes and becomes a dashing European city. What is more, Paula’s realisation that she belongs to the same social class as the newly arrived immigrant population, leads her to question her identity

as an Irish person. In relation to this very problem, Jeffers comments the following: “With the novel *Paula Spencer* we are at a crossroads of Irish identity. In Doyle’s universe, Paula and her immigrant cohorts are the truly Irish, ‘the niggers of Europe’, as a long-suffering, economically depressed people. Yet, in terms of the rest of Ireland and the idea of global Ireland, Paula and the immigrants are decidedly not Irish” (269).¹⁵⁸ Although I partly agree with Jeffers’ argument in this paragraph, I do not agree with the wording of the sentence in which she states that “Paula and her immigrant cohorts are the *truly* Irish” (my emphasis), because, according to my own analysis of Doyle’s work, I do not find that he establishes any sort of gradation in which some characters are more truly Irish than others. On the contrary, my argument is that Doyle’s novels and short stories reject this sort of classification and advocate an inclusive identity in which, at the most, his characters are ‘as Irish as’ those who represent the most traditional attributes of an idealised Irish identity. However, I completely agree with Jeffers’ last remark saying that for “the rest of Ireland (...) Paula and the immigrants are decidedly not Irish” and it is my aim to demonstrate that *Paula Spencer* resists the notion of Paula and the immigrant population being “decidedly not Irish” while, simultaneously, it questions the actual success of Ireland as a wealthy, modern nation.

3.2.2. Ireland and the Celtic Tiger Period in *Paula Spencer*

Paula Spencer is, at the time of writing this thesis, the novel by Doyle which pays most attention to the changes that Dublin underwent during the Celtic Tiger period. Indeed, as Jeffers puts it, the novel consists of a “constant charting of new Dublin” (264). Doyle skilfully carries out this mapping by allowing the readers to participate in Paula’s own rediscovery of the world.

¹⁵⁸ The phrase “niggers of Europe” is taken from *The Commitments*. The full sentence reads, “The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads” (13). See “2.4.2. ‘The Irish are the Niggers of Europe’” (p. 239) for a review of the criticism surrounding this quotation.

After decades of domestic abuse, alcoholism and poverty had deprived Paula from having any contact to the outside world, her awakening and tentative excursions into the transformed city as well as her amazement at what she finds there are plausible and convincing.

3.2.4.1. *Cosmetic Changes*

It cannot be denied that, at least on a superficial level, with the economic boom, Ireland appeared to have become a rich, modern nation. In G. Smyth's words, "[p]eople could afford to buy lots more stuff, and they did buy lots more *stuff*: cars, more cars, holidays, more cars, houses, more houses and more cars! Ireland became a bastion of consumption" ("Irish National Identity" 132; original emphasis). Roddy Doyle manages to capture this sense of a more sophisticated way of life, of a glamourisation and modernisation that touched on many different aspects of the everyday, by alluding to a vast array of details which, to the youngest generations, might feel highly familiar and, therefore, insignificant. Nevertheless, when contrasted with studies on the Celtic-Tiger period, the extent of Doyle's dominion on the subject and his attention to detail, adding to the realistic effect of the novel, become evident. Such a study, for example, is the multidisciplinary volume *Recalling the Celtic Tiger* that I introduced above, and that is made up of brief texts, whose aim is to "constitute a canvas that has never up until now been woven. [The topics] cover areas as diverse as economic factors, society, culture, politics, religion and people, in a way that provides a comprehensive survey and analysis of how the Celtic Tiger came into being, the way it developed and the ramifications it has had, and is having on Irish society" (Maher et al. 4-5). Hence, the subjects of the contributions that make up this compendium range from such varied topics as the popularisation of craft beer to bank lending policies in Ireland. Given the characteristics of this study, it is a highly useful asset when it comes to understanding the significance of several of

the passages from *Paula Spencer*.

This is the case with coffee culture, which changed dramatically during the Celtic Tiger period, according to Murphy, as coffee became a sign of an improved economy. In *Paula Spencer*, Paula frequents a café “opened a few weeks ago. An Italian place, real Italians in it. Not chipper Italians. Selling bread and coffee and oil” (12). As the plot progresses, Paula develops a taste for coffee and establishes a routine of going to this Italian cafeteria and ordering some coffee and cake for herself (a sign, too, of her own slightly improved economy and her reconnection to the world). What is also highly relevant in this quote is Paula’s specific reference to bread, coffee and oil, which are typical ingredients in the Mediterranean cuisine, as this alludes to Ireland’s growing connection to Europe and its other cultures.¹⁵⁹

Likewise, for Paula, using a computer and the internet are a foray into the unknown. According to Maignant, in Ireland “the very first Internet connection was established in Trinity College in 1991” (182). Only twenty-eight years later, “in 2019, the Industrial Development Agency (IDA) could rightly claim that ‘Ireland is fast becoming the internet capital of Europe’” (181). Therefore, Paula’s hesitant first steps into the field of IT can be read as mirroring the country’s own budding relationship with the World Wide Web. When Paula finds out that her sister Carmel has cancer and asks her son Jack to help her search the word *mastectomy* on the computer, her slow and careful movements indicate the awe that Paula feels when using such novel technology: “She finds each letter and taps. She checks to see the word building up in the box on the screen” (231).

Quite similarly, another important development that is represented in the novel is the use of mobile phones to communicate, or, more specifically, to text each other instead of

¹⁵⁹ The boom period favoured the return of Irish emigrants, who had been living abroad (all over the world) and who brought back to their homeland ingredients and recipes from foreign cuisines. Moreover, with its growing status as a modern economy, Ireland attracted tourists as well as a wave of wealthy and well-travelled customers who expected to find the same type of comforts as in any other developed Western Country (Maher et al.).

calling.¹⁶⁰ In *Recalling the Celtic Tiger*, Nolan addresses this issue and explains that “prior to the Celtic Tiger, we voice-called our friends and family to catch up, arrange a meeting, or ask a question. Today, our communication with family and friends has shifted from voice calls to text messages” (313). Indeed, Paula uses her mobile phone to call, but mostly to text throughout the novel. Nevertheless, although she receives the phone at the beginning of the novel, as a birthday present, one year later, at the end of the novel, she is still learning how to properly text, which emphasises the great novelty that this action still represents to her: “She texts Leanne. What’s the text for Sorry? *Sy?* *Sry?* She writes the full word. *Sorry.* *Xx M.* She fires it off” (272; original emphasis).

Lastly, I have chosen a passage which refers to one of the phenomena most closely associated with the Celtic Tiger period and that led to the economic crisis following it: the property boom. In the following (often quoted) scene, Carmel tells Paula that she has bought an apartment in Bulgaria:

—Bulgaria?
 (...)
 —Yep.
 —Where’s Bulgaria?
 —Eastern Europe, Paula.
 —I know. But where? Do people go there on their holidays?
 —Yes, Paula. (*PS* 28)

The slightly impatient tone that Carmel uses with Paula throughout this dialogue (this can be better appreciated in the full text) seems to indicate that the fact of buying property in Bulgaria is something so commonplace, that Paula’s ignorance on the subject is, to say the least, unusual. Deeter explains that “[i]n the Celtic Tiger, everybody seemed to have a buy-to-let, even the taxi drivers who would pick up the young, drunk version of me at the time, and they would tell

¹⁶⁰ The presence of smartphones seems to have become a trademark in Doyle’s more recent writing, as it can be found in many of his stories. In his latest published collection, at the time of writing this thesis, *Life Without Children* (2021), for example, smartphones have a marked presence in stories like “Life Without Children” or “The Charger”.

you all about their gaffs in far-fetched places like Cape Verde and Bulgaria” (59).

My intention was to show through these examples (many more can be found in the novel) how *Paula Spencer* reproduces quite faithfully the spirit of novelty and change that took Dublin with the phenomenon of the Celtic Tiger. From the smallest cup of *espresso* to the acquisition of second homes, Ireland, in this case Dublin, experienced changes that modernised it in a very brief period of time. Nevertheless, the examples provided above, as they appear in the novel, perform the function of providing context and describing the atmosphere, rather than actually dealing with change. The structural changes that truly shook the fundamentals of society as portrayed by Doyle, need to be analysed in more detail.

3.2.4.2. *Structural Changes: Religion*

As Ireland became more modern and open to the rest of the world, inevitably, some of its most revered traditions began to fall apart. The most notable case of this was, perhaps, religion. In the introduction to this chapter, I quoted Maher’s brilliant summary of what happened in the last two decades of the twentieth century (see p. 205). In what he calls “a seismic period”, he referred to the crumbling of “the moral authority of the former pillars of Irish society, Church and State” (159). Since I have discussed the topic of religion in the two previous chapters, I cannot do otherwise in this chapter, if it is only to illustrate religion’s even greater absence, or, perhaps, the characters’ heightened irreverence towards it, when compared to the Barrytown Trilogy.

The most similar novel in its treatment of religion to *Paula Spencer* is, in my view, *The Snapper*: both novels retain traces of religious influence, attesting to Ireland’s long history with Catholicism, while, at the same time, its characters are not interested in it at all. Paula, who is particularly observant, however, makes certain remarks that provide a fuller context than the

one given in *The Snapper*. For example, in *The Snapper*, no comment is made about people's adherence to religious traditions. In opposition, in *Paula Spencer*, Paula makes a remark about her Polish neighbours as being the only ones going to Church anymore: "They come home late. They go off early. Sunday's the only day she really hears them. She sees them go out on the street, in their good clothes. They're the only ones heading off to Mass" (272).¹⁶¹ Paula's observation contains two noteworthy elements. The first one is her passing comment on the nationality of her neighbours, subtly pointing at the topic of immigration, as happens so often throughout the novel. The second element is that the neighbours are the only people going to Mass, by which Paula is presumably establishing a comparison to a former time in which probably most people would have been seen going to Mass. In my view, the fact that nobody else goes to Mass is striking enough to warrant notice from Paula, something that, for example, did not happen in the Barrytown Trilogy.

Paula's own position to religion is interesting: the passages that appear in *Paula Spencer* show an irreverence towards Catholic religion, as I discuss below; however, her eldest son is called John Paul, presumably indicating a prior more positive sentiment towards the Church (or the adherence to a trend without questioning it). This ambivalence can be detected in a scene in which Paula and her daughter Leanne are watching television and, triggered by the news they hear, they discuss whether Pope John Paul II has much time left to live. The situation quickly acquires a humorous tone when Leanne says that they should be giving their condolences to her brother John Paul, as she jokingly presumes that he will be affected by the death of his namesake (*PS* 196). Thus, the demise of the head of the Catholic Church becomes

¹⁶¹ Writing in 2006, the same year that *Paula Spencer* was published, Inglis explained that "[a] national survey in 1973/74 found that 91 per cent of Catholics in the Republic of Ireland went to Mass at least once a week. The European Values Study indicated that this fell by 25 per cent in 25 years" ("Catholic Identity" 205). Additionally, Inglis pointed out that Mass attendance "is declining rapidly in urban areas, particularly among the young" (205). Writing ten years later, in 2016, Patsy McGarry declared that "[w]eekly Mass attendance levels in Dublin are currently put at 20-22 per cent (of the population), while being as low as 2-3 per cent in some working-class parishes", confirming the continuity of the trend described by Inglis and captured by Doyle in *Paula Spencer*.

the grounds for a joke. Another scene that immediately follows the one described shows Paula leaving Leanne and going into the kitchen: “She’s in front of the stereo. It’s lit, even though it’s not on. It’s like an altar or something, the tabernacle. She keeps looking at it. She can’t help it” (197). The appearance of the words *altar* and *tabernacle* only several lines after the Pope is mentioned, seem an intended choice rather than a coincidence. The fact that these two terms belonging to the semantic field of religion are used to describe such a commonplace object as a stereo, indicates either a desacralisation of said words or a sacralisation of the stereo, both of which actions might be perceived as sinful by someone with a strong religious sentiment and, hence, demonstrating Paula’s complete obliteration of it. What remains curious, as I pointed out above, is the fact that Paula’s son is called John Paul. Although Paula does not specify calling her firstborn after the Pope, the text does mention that “John Paul was born a few months after the Pope came to Ireland. She’d been big and sick when she watched it all on the telly” (196), which makes the connection that Leanne establishes between the two John Pauls very likely. It is, then, quite interesting to observe the change in religious feeling that Paula might have undergone from naming her son after the Pope to idolising a common object in the space of almost thirty years.

3.2.4.3. *Structural Changes: Immigration*

In his enumeration of changes that took place between the 1970s and the 2000s, Maher indicates that “emigration stopped” (159). Instead, Ireland became the destination for immigrants who were looking for better living conditions and job opportunities. Reflecting on the legacy of the Celtic Tiger phenomenon, G. Smyth explained that during the economic boom “[a]nother change was the advent of relatively large-scale economic emigration - Chinese, Africans and Eastern Europeans (...) By 2007 over 10% of people resident in the Republic

were foreign-born” (“Irish National Identity” 132-3). As I discuss at length in the section about *The Deportees*, Roddy Doyle’s interest in multiculturalism and the interaction between people belonging to different nationalities can be found from the very beginning of his writing career. It is, therefore, no wonder that the theme of immigration occupies an important position in *Paula Spencer*, the novel dealing with the Celtic Tiger period. Nevertheless, the gaze continues to be that of a white European woman and, hence, the theme of immigration is treated according to Paula’s perception of it. This, as I show below, changes in *The Deportees*.

In the same way that Paula discovers the technological advancements that I described above, with a sense of mild surprise and an almost child-like curiosity, her encounter with the immigrant population residing in Dublin does not leave her any more indifferent. Either because this too represents a great novelty for Paula or because Doyle wanted to heighten the impression that Dublin had become a multicultural city in the blink of an eye, the novel is full of phrases that indicate certain characters’ nationalities. Often, it is as simple an observation as “[s]he smiled at the East European young one in the shop” (256) and, in a similar manner, Paula identifies people coming from places as diverse as Italy, Nigeria, Romania or China. The immigrant population that Paula meets are mostly working people: especially shop assistants and cleaners like herself. This last factor, as I explain in the main discussion of the novel, is the one that triggers a train of thinking in Paula which takes her from wondering at her status in this changed Ireland to concluding that it is the country’s fault that her situation is so miserable.

3.2.4.4. *Misery in Times of Splendour: Whose Fault is it, anyway?*

There is a particular passage in *Paula Spencer* that, in my view, brilliantly captures the contradiction between the glamour and success of Celtic Tiger Ireland and the structural

poverty in several of the country's most basic needs. It is the following, in which Paula compares her new fridge (a present from her eldest daughter Nicola) to its contents: "It's a good fridge (...). It takes up half the kitchen. It's one of those big silver, two-door jobs. Ridiculous. (...) She opens it the way film stars open the curtains. Daylight! Ta-dah! Empty. What was Nicola thinking of? The stupid bitch. How to make a poor woman feel poorer. Buy her a big fridge. Fill that, loser. The stupid bitch. What was she thinking?" (3). By juxtaposing the luxuriousness of Nicola's presents (in this case the fridge, but she also gives Paula a new television and a mobile phone) with Paula's fragile economic circumstances, Doyle foreshadows one of the main themes in the novel: the disparity between the apparent wealth of Ireland during the Celtic Tiger years and the misery in which people like Paula seem to be doomed to live. What is more, as Paula angrily observes, it is futile to own such a glamorous object when the family's basic needs are not covered, a metaphor that, in my view, works perfectly when applied to Ireland during the Celtic Tiger period. To put it in McCarthy's words: "The Celtic Tiger was merely pawing at the surface — or more precisely, scratching the backs of the Irish professional class and the multinationals — and not bringing about the deep structural changes to Irish economic life that would secure a better future for everyone" (2).

This conflict is explored in more depth when Paula acknowledges her own contradictory status as an Irish working-class woman in Celtic Tiger Ireland. The scene in which this occurs takes place when Paula is being driven to a White Stripes concert, as she will be part of the cleaning crew. The very moment that Paula enters the minivan that is to take her to the venue of the concert, she observes that "[s]he's the only white woman" there (*PS* 55). During the drive, at first, Paula feels awkward because of the silence that reigns in the van, as opposed to the "crack" she presumes there would be if her companions were Irish (55). After trying to guess the nationality of the other passengers, Paula quickly deduces that she and the driver are the only Irish natives in the van. Soon enough, her train of thought leads her to the

following conclusion:

She's a failure. She shouldn't be in this van. She should be outside, looking at it going by. On her way home from work. Already home - on her way out again. 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 a failure. The money comes from nowhere else.

Ten years ago there wouldn't have been one black woman on this bus - less than ten years. It would have been Paula and women like Paula. Same age, from the same area, same kids. Where are those women now? Carmel used to do cleaning and now she's buying flats in Bulgaria. (56)

In the first paragraph of this passage, the narrator echoes an ideology that has flourished in recent years, but that has been at the bottom of racism for much longer. Here, it can be seen quite clearly how the idea of "racial superiority" might resonate in the minds of people who, like Paula, feel that their situation is unfair. Following the rhetoric of those who claimed that Ireland had become one of the richest countries in the world, Paula would have expected, as an Irish woman, to have risen above her current situation. As an Irishwoman in successful Celtic Tiger Dublin, she should no longer be at the bottom of the social ladder. However, as she is wont to do, Paula immediately checks these intrusive thoughts by reminding herself that what she is thinking is not true and that the reality is that "[s]he's been left behind. She knows that. But she's always known it" (56). The fact that Doyle represents Paula as being thoroughly aware of the actual causes of her situation contribute to the novel's debunking of the false belief that the immigrant population is in any way responsible for Paula's predicament. Indeed, as Downum observes, "Paula, unlike some of her friends, embraces the new Ireland, as indicated by her attitude toward a Nigerian woman newly employed by her local shop: 'It's the first time she's seen a black woman working here. Good luck to her. She's lovely' (PS 26)" (78).

Returning to Paula's claim that she has always been left behind, she adds that, in fact, "[s]he was never in front" (56), a phrase that rather puts the blame on a flawed system. Indeed, when reviewing Paula's biography, it becomes clear that it has been the Irish society

exclusively and as a whole that has failed her: since her childhood, whenever she was in need of help, she was ignored by her teachers, and later, when she started being beaten by her husband, it was also the nurses, doctors and even her family who turned a blind eye to her plight.

3.2.4.5. Paula's Predicament

Paula's predicament began when she was only a little girl and, in the long run, it was a mixture of society's failure to protect her and a series of wrong decisions that she took (fuelled by traumatic events), like her marriage to Charlo, that caused her to be left behind. To put it in Maher's words, "the account of Paula's life up until the moment she meets Charlo shows her to have been damaged by her experiences at home and in school" ("Social and Cultural Change" 160). Indeed, Maher also argues that there is a clear connection between Paula's decision to marry Charlo Spencer and the trauma of growing up with an abusive father: "[Charlo] offered an escape from a home that was dominated by an abusive father whose attentions were more focused on Paula's sister Carmel than on her. He played horsey-horsey with Paula and her younger sister Denise (a dubious enough activity) while ordering Carmel to make tea" (159). Although the readers do not learn many more details about this, it is a fact that Carmel refuses to talk about their father and that all her memories from the sisters' childhood seem to be bad. However, Paula provides some more insight when she explains the following:

Carmel was always fighting him. I remember the screams and the punches. She remembers them as well but she refuses to remember anything else, the good things about home and my father. It was hard for her, I know; she was the oldest and she had to fight all our fights. Fights — Jesus, they were wars. He tore clothes off her. He set fire to a blouse she'd bought with her first pay money. He dragged her up to the bathroom. He washed her face with a nailbrush. He locker her in our bedroom. He went after her when she got out. He took his belt to her in front of all her friends. (*TWWWID* 46)

Even if it appears that it was Carmel who received the worst treatment from the girls' father, it is clear that the atmosphere at home was oppressive.

Likewise, for Paula and her peers, “[s]chool was an unpleasant experience from start to finish. Teachers had no interest in the children and little enthusiasm for their profession, whereas boys, probably following on their fathers' example, saw girls as ‘sluts’” (Maher; “Social and Cultural Change” 160). Certainly, Paula quickly learned as a young girl that, being a woman, she would only too often be categorised as either a “slut” or a “tight bitch”:

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. You didn't have to do anything to be a slut. If you were good-looking; if you grew up fast. If you had a sexy walk; if you had clean hair, if you had dirty hair. If you wore platform shoes, and if you didn't. Anything could get you called a slut. (*TWWWID* 45-6)

Without the help and protection of parents (Paula explains that her own father called her a “slut” (*TWWWID* 46) and so did her little brother Roger (47)) and teachers, Paula developed a low self-esteem. This, according to Maher, made it “natural that Paula should seek out a man who exuded confidence and disdain for all about him” (“Social and Cultural Change” 160). Indeed, if Charlo was Paula's “escape” from home, it was also after Paula started going out with him that people stopped calling her a “slut” (*TWWWID* 45, 49).

Even after everything that Charlo did to her, Paula still recollects feeling like a winner when she met Charlo: “She was never in front. Except when she first met Charlo and for a while after that. She thought she was winning then. Because she was with Charlo and people got out of his way” (*PS* 56). However, when Charlo begins to act violently towards Paula, she was once again ignored and left unprotected, as in her childhood. Neither her parents nor the doctors whom she visited after especially vicious attacks seemed willing to acknowledge the truth. Maher explains that “[t]here is a sense in which society was complicit in what happened [to Paula], in much the same way as Irish people turned a blind eye to the plight of girls who

were committed to the Magdalen Laundries or children who were sent to the industrial schools” (“Social and Cultural Change” 161).

Furthermore, it seems inevitable to make a link between Paula’s alcoholism and the traumatic events in her life. Like her marriage to Charlo, alcohol became an escape, this time from reality. This connection is reinforced in this passage from *The Woman*:

What did I do in 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. I was going nowhere, straight there. Trapped in a house that would never be mine. With a husband who fed on my pain. Watching my children going nowhere with me; the cruellest thing of the lot. No hope to give them. They saw him throw me across the kitchen. They saw him put a knife to my throat. Their father; my husband. (204)

Yet, despite Charlo having left and managing to somewhat control her addiction, Paula’s predicament is not over, and she is still trapped by her economic circumstances. Although in *Paula Spencer* Paula works as a cleaner (cleaning offices and private homes), she has no document to prove this:

There’s no tax, no stamps. It’s money into her hand. If she stops working, she never worked. She’s never been happy with it, but it’s all there ever was. And all there is. If she doesn’t do it, other people will. She knows, she sees them. It’s why they’re [the immigrants] here. Go back to your own fuckin’ country. That’s not her; that’s not Paula. There’s plenty of work. But she doesn’t want to lose the extra money for supervising, or the name, and the years that went into getting it. She’s near the bottom of the heap. (246) ¹⁶²

Once again, as in her acknowledgement that she has always been left behind (a long time before the immigration boom), Paula recognises that her situation does not derive from any immigrant ‘stealing’ her job. She is aware that her circumstances are much more complicated than that: “There’s other work. There’s real work, with stamps and pensions. But how does she get one of those jobs; how does she explain? She hasn’t worked since 1975? What does she say? She

¹⁶² To me, this passage shows the fortitude of Paula, who, despite being aware of the racist and conservative discourse that tries to put the blame of the failure of the capitalist system on refugees and asylum seekers, manages to stop these corrosive thoughts and remain fair. For her, in her desperate situation, it would be easy enough to fall into the trap of this type of demagogic thinking.

doesn't know" (*PS* 247). Although in this passage Paula is only speculating about the treatment that she would receive, it shows how abandoned she feels, as she has nobody to turn to, she is afraid to ask, she stepped off the 'right' path too many years ago and now she does not know how to return to it. Paula believes that her only possibility to make a living is through certain managers that are willing to pay her black money and ask no questions.

There is one more element that keeps Paula tied firmly to the bottom of the socioeconomic trap in which she finds herself: Paula's body is a constant source of physical torment. On the one hand, Paula's body is afflicted by old pain (this is what Paula calls the remaining scars from Charlo's brutal beatings); on the other hand, there is the new pain that stems directly from her work as a cleaner: "She feels like a cripple already. (...) She feels fat and breakable; her belly is sticking out. The pain lights up every other pain. Every wound and break she's had, going on and off" (*PS* 245). Paula describes this feeling "like the wiring, across and up her back, through her ribs and up, to the back of her neck - it's like the wire has been tapped and the pain is singing through the wires, humming, loudly, softly. A bird has landed on the wire. It won't get off. It keeps opening and closing its claws" (246) and "[e]verything is hopping. Everything is sweating. Every hole and dent. Every thump and kick. All of Paula's past is in her back. It's there, ready, breathing. One last kick from a man who died twelve years ago" (247). Bissett writes about how precarious work leaves "visible traces on bodies" (112) and quotes from Vivian C. Adair's article "Branded with Infamy: Inscriptions of Poverty and Class in the United States" (2002) in a passage that I find highly relevant in the discussion of Paula's case:

Using her own life history as a base and through her own research with other poor women in the US, Adair describes how female bodies carry on their person for a lifetime the physical scars and marks of class and gendered positions, of work paid and unpaid and of scarcity and lack. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, and echoing Kafka's story of the penal colony, she describes how bodies function as surfaces or texts onto which are (often physically) inscribed messages confirming and reiterating their social position, subordination and immiseration: 'The bodies of poor women and children, scarred and mutilated by state

mandated material deprivation and public exhibition, work as spectacles, as patrolling images socializing and controlling bodies within the body politic' (Adair, 2002, p 461). (112)

The cruelty in her situation, as Paula is perfectly aware, is that, despite the terrible pain she has to endure, she cannot quit, because "[a] week on her back and the job is gone. The house jobs aren't enough" (*PS* 246). Unlike Sharon in *The Snapper*, who still has her parents' support, Paula cannot take a leave of absence, least of all quit. Paula's dependence on every single one of her jobs becomes manifest when one of the families she works for disappears without a warning:

The house was empty. The minute she opened the door, she knew there was something wrong. The door didn't drag across the rug.
There was no rug. There was nothing. Everything was gone. Everything.
(...)
This is Paula's Tuesday house, in Clontarf.
There wasn't a trace of anything. The emptiness was spotless. (...)
Three years. Near enough.
There's no For Sale sign. There's no sign of anything.
(...) She feels like she's been sacked. It's not fair.
(...)
She needs the money. Sixty euro a week, always on the table. (*PS* 173-4)

Not only is this sort of treatment unfair and disrespectful to Paula (as it would be to any human being), but it further reinforces the idea that Paula does not matter, she is not even worth the effort of writing a note or giving a phone call: Paula seems to be invisible for certain parts of society. Still, Paula's immediate thought goes to the money she will be losing, which points to her critical situation.

Paula's poverty shapes the way in which she perceives time. She is forced to live in the present, as she never knows how much money she will have a few days into the future. This can be gathered from such passages as the following, in which Paula is "standing on a corner here and she has fuck-all. She actually has €23 and a few cent - Payday's two days away and she should do well tonight" (*PS* 53). Paula must manage with the twenty-three euros for the next two days and hope that then she will receive more money. Only when and if she receives

this payment, will she be able to plan for a couple more days. The awful consequences of not receiving said payment, like in the situation of the family that vanishes, are only too easy to guess: no food, but fear. In a harrowing passage, Paula reminisces about the times when she was practically destitute: “She’ll never get over the terror of having no money, the prison of having nothing. Putting things back up on the supermarket shelves because the tenner in her pocket turned out to be a fiver. Stopping at the front door because the fiver she’d felt in her pocket was gone. Going five days before the next hope of a hand-out from Charlo” (*PS* 52). The intensity of this terror, the dread of this prison, still haunt Paula, and although now she has slightly more money than she used to, she has not yet been able to re-wire her brain accordingly. For instance, the sense of elation that Paula feels at not having “to do the arithmetic” when she is filling her shopping basket (*PS* 26) is very telling of the circumstances that she is used to. Thus, like the glamorous fridge with no food inside, Celtic Tiger Dublin is presented as a modern European city—supposedly one of the world’s top economies—¹⁶³which at the same time, however, is home to citizens like Paula who are forced to live on the margins of society.¹⁶⁴

3.2.4.6. *A Glamorous City?*

There are other ways, too, in which Roddy Doyle illustrates the contradiction between the image of a successful modern Dublin and places like the damaged schools described by O’Toole above. For example, the construction of the modern Luas tram system (operating in Dublin since 2004 (“Luas”)) is both a source of excitement for Paula who wishes to ride it and

¹⁶³ O’Toole explains that “[i]n 2007 Bank of Ireland Private Banking declared Ireland the second richest nation in the developed world, after Japan” (*Enough is Enough* 111).

¹⁶⁴ Although the Rabbittes are never in such a desperate situation as Paula, since Jimmy, Sr., at least receives the dole, it is presumable that when Veronica admonishes her children about not taking their jobs seriously enough it is because of the fear that they could end up in a similar situation to Paula’s.

also the cause of her son John Paul and his family having to leave their apartment. When Paula visits them for Christmas, John Paul explains the following to her:

—The landlord wants us out, he says.
 —Oh no.
 —He wants to sell.
 —Because of the Luas?
 —Yeah, says John Paul. —The value of the houses around here.
 —They’ve gone up?
 —Yeah. (PS 112-3).

Hence, something that should be a source of joy and comfort for all Dubliners, becomes an element which divides the population according to their economic capacity and John Paul’s family is utterly unprotected from a landlord who cares only about his own profit.

Similarly, the descriptions of certain areas of Dublin that appear in *Paula Spencer* show a very different picture to that which one would expect of a rich and modern city. For instance, when Paula visits Leanne in Beaumont Hospital—after the latter had an accident which is never described, but which seems likely to have ensued after an excessive intake of alcohol—she observes her surroundings, remembering the previous occasions when she had been there, either because of Charlo’s beatings or in the occasion(s) when John Paul overdosed on heroin:

She sat all night while Leanne slept, and woke, and slept. It was a long time since Paula had been one of the women alone or John Paul had been one of the unconscious young lads. But the place was still the same. A war zone - worse now, when she was sober. She’d been hearing people on the radio, on Joe Duffy, giving out about people having to lie on trolleys for days because there were no beds. Now she saw it when she went to the toilet. All along the corridor, women, old men, people who might have been injured at work earlier that day, the day before, on trolleys. In rows, like a weird queue for the bus. There was a smell of smoke in the jacks, dirty toilet paper on the floor. (PS 83-4)

The phrase “the place was still the same” reinforces the notion that, despite the country’s improved economy, there seems to have been no spending on social services and O’Toole’s comment that, compared to the education system, “[w]ithin parts of the public health system,

the squalor was even more degrading” (*Enough is Enough* 119) takes on particular relevance.

As Maher points out:

Paula doesn’t express an opinion as to whether things have changed for the better or the worse but the reader has the distinct impression that she and the other inhabitants of this estate are the forgotten people, the ones who are left to survive as best they can in this concrete jungle, this ghetto where there is little hope of advancement. Religion, education, social amenities are conspicuous by their absence. (“Social and Cultural Change” 164)

Before closing my discussion of *Paula Spencer*, I want to comment on a theme that has not appeared frequently in Doyle’s fiction: politics.¹⁶⁵ Leaving aside the case of Henry Smart, who rebels against the English in *A Star Called Henry*, none of Doyle’s other characters discuss politics openly. Neither does Paula; however, in *Paula Spencer*, there is a scene in which Paula listens to the news as the upcoming European elections are being discussed (“Boring, Jesus” (13)) and it is mentioned that “[s]he’ll be voting for Proinsias de Rossa” (13). The text adds that “De Rossa’s Labour, and his eyes are gorgeous. And he’s nearer Paula’s age” (14), which seems to indicate that Paula is more familiar with politics and politicians than might seem at a first glance. Another noteworthy passage follows only a few lines below:

She doesn’t like Sinn Féin. 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 didn’t march. But he stood still for a minute in the kitchen, a minute’s silence, after one of the strikers died. They all stood, Paula and the kids. A few hours after Paula had wiped her own blood off the kitchen floor. (14)

In my view, this passage is relevant for two reasons. On the one hand, because it highlights Charlo Spencer’s hypocrisy in that he is capable of mourning a stranger in the same spot where, several hours before, he had brutally attacked his wife. On the other hand, this is not the only

¹⁶⁵ When I asked Roddy Doyle why his characters are rarely seen taking political action, he answered that “it depends what you decide is political. If being political means joining a political party or [unclear] an organisation, you’re right. Partly, because I don’t think they do, but partly, it’s bad storytelling” (“Interview” lines 222-4). However, he added that “I think the politics is in different actions. I think people often express themselves politically by becoming involved in the local football club. And it’s not just bringing kids to games, it’s making sure that they have the right to have these games” (lines 231-3).

occasion in which Roddy Doyle presents Sinn Féin in a dubious light. In the example above, as I see it, this dubious light comes from the connection between the violent Charlo and the political party (although I do not wish to suggest nor do I think that Doyle is putting forward the idea that all of Sinn Féin's voters are like Charlo). However, in *A Star*, as I explained in Chapter One ("1.2.3.1. The Bold Henry Smart", p. 91), Henry describes Sinn Féin as "the party of the parish priests and those middle-class men cute enough to know when the wind was changing. It was the party with money and faith, and thrilling with it because of its links to the buried martyrs; it was outlawed by the British, but cosy" (207). The passage from *A Star*, especially the phrase mentioning the "middle-class men cute enough to know when the wind was changing", also reinforces a link between Sinn Féin and hypocrisy. As I see it, although the discussion on politics is practically non-existent, the few times that political parties are mentioned are significant. Doyle seems to be suggesting, throughout his work, that Sinn Féin is not the party that might hold the interests of his working-class characters closest at heart.

3.2.3. *The Deportees*: How do You Measure Nationality?¹⁶⁶

Roddy Doyle's concern with issues of race can be tracked to the very beginning of his writing career, to the famous phrase "[t]he Irish are the niggers of Europe" (13), expressed by a young Jimmy Rabbitte in *The Commitments*. Several years later, in *Oh, Play*, Doyle delved deeper into the theme of race by having his protagonist Henry Smart work for Louis Armstrong as his white man in 1920s Chicago, while Henry learns the implications of racism through his relationship with his girlfriend Dora (see Chapter One, "1.2.4.4. Censorship and Jazz", pp. 119-20). As I have shown above, with *Paula Spencer*, Doyle introduced the topic of immigration

¹⁶⁶ This question is adapted from the phrase "How did you measure nationality?" from the short story "57% Irish" (Doyle; *TD* 101).

in his fiction, although only marginally, as his protagonist is still a white Irish woman. This changed radically with the publication of the short story collection *The Deportees* (2007), the central theme of which is multiculturalism, several of the stories' protagonists are immigrants and, in some cases, it is they who tell their story.¹⁶⁷

Indeed, before the publication of *The Deportees*, several of the stories that appear in the volume ("Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner", "The Deportees", "57% Irish", "I Understand" and "Home to Harlem") were published in the Irish newspaper *Metro Éireann*.¹⁶⁸ In her article "Reading and Writing Race in Ireland: Roddy Doyle and *Metro Éireann*", Reddy explains that "Roddy Doyle got involved in writing for *Metro Éireann* through his admiration for Abel Ugbu [sic] and his sympathy with the aims of the paper" (379). She alludes to the potential that Doyle had in mind for his stories in this venue, referring to "Martha Nussbaum's argument that fiction can help to educate readers into deeper commitments to social justice by creating imaginative identifications across social divides, including the divide of race. Fiction, then, offers the possibility of direct intervention in racial discourses with potentially profound effects" (380).¹⁶⁹ However, Reddy also argues that Doyle "has struggled to invent a voice that is up to the political task" (380), as is wont to happen in the case of authors who, belonging to a privileged group, attempt to write about the experiences of a minority. In Reddy's words, "Doyle's own positionality (white, Irish, settled, male, economically secure) cannot be ignored: he is the one

¹⁶⁷ From the eight short stories in *The Deportees*, four are recounted through the focus of white Irish male protagonists ("Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner", "The Deportees", "57% Irish" and "Black Hoodie"), three through the focus of male protagonists from African descent ("New Boy", "Home to Harlem" and "I understand") and one through the focus of a Polish woman ("The Pram"). For a short summary of all the stories, see Appendix 2: Plot Summaries (p. 335).

¹⁶⁸ *Metro Éireann* is not operative anymore. However, their profile on the social media platform X still holds this description of the newspaper: "Metro Éireann is Ireland's first and only multicultural newspaper set up by two Nigerian journalists, Chinedu Onyejelem and Abel Ugbu" (https://bit.ly/ch3_fn22). Obalanlege et al. write that *Metro Éireann* "started publication on 17 April 2000" and that it "has enabled active participation of Africans in the ethnic media sector of the Irish media landscape, particularly in terms of investment" (12). Once a monthly paper, it became weekly in 2007 (Obalanlege et al. 12).

¹⁶⁹ I also used this quote in my Foreword (p. 4) when I discussed the potential of Roddy Doyle's work to improve human relations.

ventriloquizing blackness, so to speak. In 'I Understand', an African speaks for himself but only through the good offices of a white Irishman. From that perspective, the Other remains silent" (386). Indeed, Reddy's stance towards *Metro Éireann* and Roddy Doyle's stories is quite critical. For instance, in her analysis of the first story that appeared in the newspaper, "Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner", Reddy believes that the protagonist

Larry Linnane's change (...) acts out what Doyle deeply believes about what is needed to end racism in Ireland; as he puts it, 'contact is the key'. However, this view of racism misses the historical development of discourses of race and racialization in the country across centuries; contrary to the popular belief shared by Doyle, racism did not arrive with immigrants of colour in the 1990s and in fact is independent of any significant population of colour, as Steve Garner demonstrates conclusively in *Racism in the Irish Experience* (382).

Moreover, Reddy argues that Doyle's representation of racism in Ireland is not comprehensive enough, as his "stories tend to focus on the top and the bottom of [Ireland's race] hierarchy, with glancing attention to the stages in between" (382). This hierarchy would place "white, settled Irish at the top and recent African immigrants at the bottom. In between, in rough order from top to bottom are white European immigrants (except Roma people), established South Asians, Chinese, South Pacific Islanders (Filipina nurses, for instance), and Irish Travellers and Roma immigrants" (382). Despite the existence of this hierarchy, as Reddy points out, "various government officials and powerful pundits keep insisting there is no racism in Ireland, or, at most, they assert that racism is a new phenomenon that arrived with the wave of immigrants of colour" (379). As my analysis of *The Deportees* shows, I believe that, although Doyle's attempt at bridging the gap between the Irish and the immigrant population is highly commendable and he manages to point out several troubling aspects of the racism present in Irish society, I also find that the stories are often too superficial in their treatment of these issues. Doyle's desire to create optimistic portrayals of intercultural encounters is fulfilled to the detriment of the criticism he makes in the stories.

3.2.3.1. *Racism in Ireland*¹⁷⁰

Somewhat reminiscent of the myths according to which Ireland became one of the world's richest nations during the Celtic Tiger period, or that Ireland has a classless society, it has been popularly believed, as Reddy indicates, that Irish society is not racist. Nevertheless, as Jeffers points out, long before the 1990s,

Ireland already had logged several centuries of Irish-Ireland racism toward Jews and Travellers, in particular; racism that had nothing to do with colonisation or Britain. For example, the founder of Sinn Féin and well-known anti-Semite Arthur Griffin, who also participated in the Limerick Pogrom of 1904–06, was the author of numerous anti-Semitic essays. (259–60)¹⁷¹

To this, Jeffers adds that “the discrimination against Travellers in terms of cultural and racial Otherness (...) predates the famine” (260). Bryan Fanning registers the history of racism in Ireland in *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland*. One of the assumptions that he challenges is that Irish people are not racist, but xenophobic:

The term ‘xenophobia’ is often used in the Irish context in arguments that the exclusion faced by new minority communities is a response of a homogenous society to the unknown rather than racism. It fits easily with arguments that Irish society has not been racist in the past because the nature of prejudice against other groups, be they refugees or immigrants, is represented as ahistorical. (18)

Indeed, B. Fanning explains that “[t]he monocultural Irish society at the heart of theorising about Irish xenophobia is itself a social construct that emerged from a nineteenth-century discourse of nation-building with represented nations as races” (18). Furthermore, B. Fanning demonstrates that the Irish have historically participated from the same Western ideological structures that reinforced notions of white supremacy. For example, he points out that “[t]hroughout the nineteenth century the British army, colonial police forces and, at times, the

¹⁷⁰ For more on immigration and Ireland, see Hickman.

¹⁷¹ This anti-Semitism has been recorded by Doyle in *A Star*, although the character who is seen professing it is Jack Dalton, but not any of the historical figures that appear in the novel.

Indian civil service, were disproportionately of Irish origin” (13) and that “Irish regiments proved as capable of brutality towards native populations as any other colonial troops” (14). Likewise, B. Fanning writes about the “ideological justification in the Hollywood westerns” of “[t]he genocide of Native Americans”, films “that entertained generations of Irish people in the decades that followed” (14). Therefore,

[t]hrough the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Irish people, along with those of other western countries, imbibed a popular culture which presented tales of colonial adventure and conquest alongside white supremacist beliefs about race. Novels of the era of colonial expansion, or the twentieth-century films based upon these, were part of a broad popular culture which represented Africans as primitive and as the ‘white man’s burden’. Collectively, these promoted and reproduced racist beliefs within western society. (14)

B. Fanning also refers to “Irish missionaries” who “convinced indigenous populations to abandon their own cultural systems to embrace those of the conquering peoples” (14-5). He describes how the construction of Irish national identity was developed “in terms of spiritual superiority” (16) and that “[t]he heroic sacrifices of the missions were necessary to ‘assure millions unborn a faith permanent and pure as the faith of the Gael’” (16). This Irish nationalism was also behind the exclusion of Jews, Travellers and Protestants, that Jeffers points out. As B. Fanning explains, “Jews could be constructed as enemies of the nation within the racialised discourses which sometimes accompanied representations of ‘self and ‘other’ within nationalist discourses. Protestants were constructed as ‘other’ within similar discourses” (53).

When it comes to Ireland’s handling of refugees and asylum seekers, B. Fanning finds that, despite Ireland’s ratification of the UN Convention of Human Rights (1951) in 1956, the state showed great shortcomings in its responsibilities towards the immigrant population.¹⁷²

¹⁷² The UNHCR (The United Nations Refugee Agency) describe “[t]he 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol” as “the key legal documents that form the basis of UNHCR’s work”, as “[t]hey define the term ‘refugee’ and outline their rights and the international standards of treatment for their protection” (“About UNHCR”). Likewise, they state that “[t]he core principle of the 1951 Convention is non-refoulement, which asserts that a

For example, until the 1990s, “[r]efugees obtained rights to work and welfare but support from the state in accessing employment through education and training was minimal. In other areas such as housing and English language education they remained largely dependent upon voluntary provision” (B. Fanning 95). To sum this up, Fanning states that “[s]low shifts in state practices relating to refugees occurred over several decades within a framework designed to exclude certain categories of non-nationals” (108) and also highlights that, recently, at the beginning of the twentieth century, “histrionic media accounts depicted a threat of the country being swamped by asylum seekers”, a “panic” which “was fuelled by representations of the asylum issue by ministers, politicians and public officials, as insoluble. Arguably, racism within Irish society continues to be mobilized for administrative purposes” (109). Finally, addressing the recent view of Ireland as a multicultural society, B. Fanning contends that

[c]urrent state practices, legislation and voluntary initiatives are described as amounting to a ‘weak’ multiculturalism. This multiculturalism is characterised by a narrow focus on liberal democratic rights with little emphasis upon racism as a factor in inequality and discrimination. Irish equality legislation has been characterised by a narrow understanding of racism that defines it principally in terms of attacks, hate speech and overt acts of discrimination. (178)

B. Fanning’s criticism here does, indeed, recall Reddy’s analysis of *Metro Éireann* and *The Deportees*, as I have shown above. However, B. Fanning recognises that “the decline of Irish-Ireland nationalism and secularisation have contributed to [a] more pluralistic sense of Irish identity”, although “this has not in itself unravelled dominant monocultural conceptions of Irishness” (184). Furthermore, B. Fanning explains that

[b]y the early 1990s a new popular discourse on Irish identity, which sought to reconstruct Irishness as diasporic, globalised and inclusionary had emerged. This new Irishness was strikingly represented by the national soccer team consisting, for the most part, of first- and second-generation descendants of emigrants. Yet, acknowledgement of an enlarged universe of Irishness arguably posed few challenges to protestations of social homogeneity. Irishness has retained, within one set of claims, a homogeneous religious-ethnic base. (185)

refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom” (“About UNHCR”).

Despite the shortcomings that Reddy points out regarding *The Deportees*, I believe that the texts selected for my analysis reflect Doyle's awareness that racism in Ireland is structural and that there are still very many issues that need to be improved. In three of the four short stories that I have chosen, Doyle includes deeply racist characters that either work for the government (a minister in "57% Irish" and An Garda Síochána in "Black Hoodie") or that belong to the country's elite (a successful businesswoman in "The Pram"). It is my view that by representing the racism of these powerful characters, Doyle might be insinuating that many Irish institutions are racist and thus, perhaps inadvertently, pointing at the weakness of multicultural Ireland that B. Fanning describes. In their analysis of "The Pram" and "The Slave" (from *Bullfighting*), Villar Argáiz and Tekin remark that these two stories "offer a rather gloomy, even dystopian, portrayal of multicultural Ireland, by revealing the existence of conservative attitudes, and racist and xenophobic behaviours" (168-9). Indeed, I believe that, although this was not Roddy Doyle's intention (see p. 260), in a more or less explicit manner, this statement can be applied to all the stories that I analyse here.

3.2.3.2. "*The Irish are the Niggers of Europe*"

When the phrase that gives the title to this section first appeared in this thesis (see p. 139), I clarified that it is used to create "a rapid metonymic slide associating Irishness, Dublinness and Blackness without substantiating these notions" (Piroux 18) and that "such a slogan implicitly evokes the commonality of minorities' experience in their struggle against oppression" (Piroux 18). Nevertheless, in the present discussion about multiculturalism and racism, I find it necessary to pay more attention to the criticism that this phrase has received. Before doing this, however, I wish to establish a connection that, to my knowledge, has not been made before

between Jimmy's phrase in *The Commitments* and a song by John Lennon and Yoko Ono titled "Woman is the Nigger of the World".¹⁷³ The parallels between the two uses are multiple: in both cases the phrase is uttered in a musical context; the Irish context is present in both instances too, as John Lennon links the phrase to James Connolly, and, as I see it, in both cases the term "nigger" is used to refer to the most disadvantaged position imaginable in society.

In a television interview that John Lennon and Yoko Ono gave on the American talk-show *The Dick Cavett Show*, after alluding to his initial scepticism towards the phrase coined by Ono, Lennon explains the following: "So, I said, 'Come on, Yoko, this is it. You've said it here. I agree with you now. I think she is. [Woman] is the slave of the slaves.' That's what Connolly said, the great Irishman" ("John Lennon" 1:27-35). Alluding to the backlash the two artists received for their use of the word *nigger*, Lennon also explains the following:

And then strangely enough, the chairman of the black caucus, the great guy Congressman Ron Dellums—Democrat, California, it says here—he came out with this, which is fantastic: [Reads.] "If you define *nigger* as someone whose lifestyle is defined by others, whose opportunities are defined by others, whose role in society is defined by others, then good news: you don't have to be black to be a nigger in this society. Most of the people in America are niggers" (Burger 314, "John Lennon" 1:59-2:24).^{174 175}

¹⁷³ From the album *Sometime in New York City* (1972).

¹⁷⁴ Ronald Dellums (1935-2018) "was an American politician who served as a U.S. Democratic representative from California (...). He was known for his outspoken criticism of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, his efforts to reduce U.S. military spending, and his championing of various progressive causes. He was a founding member (1971) of the Congressional Black Caucus and the first African American member (...) and the first African American chairman (1993-94) of the House Armed Services Committee" (D. Williams).

¹⁷⁵ It is unclear in what exact context Ron Dellums pronounced these words. In the interview with John Lennon and Yoko Ono, Lennon holds up a copy of *Billboard* magazine from 6 May 1972. There, the congressman's words that Lennon reads can be found printed on the back cover (without any further reference to the time or place that Dellums would have uttered them) together with a reference to Lennon and Ono's song ("Back Cover"). Nevertheless, a column in *The Daily Independent Journal* from 20 Mar. 1972 cites from a speech given by Dellums in which the congressman made the following observations: "the 'overwhelming majority' of Americans are 'niggers' because their lifestyles are limited by others" and that "blacks 'no longer have a monopoly on niggerism in America.' 'If you define a nigger as someone whose lifestyle is limited by others, whose very role in society is defined by others, whose justice and freedom and opportunity is limited by others,' (...) 'You've suddenly come to the realization that there are black niggers, brown niggers, red niggers, yellow niggers, white niggers, women niggers, long-haired niggers, anti-war niggers...'" ("Most In U.S. Are Niggers").

It seems likely that Doyle, given the great influence that music has in his fiction, could have had Ono's phrase in mind when writing *The Commitments*. If this is the case, however, it is also slightly odd that there should be no reference at all to either Ono or Lennon in the novel. In any case, I believe that Lennon's explanation joining the thoughts of James Connolly and Ron Dellums throws light on what Jimmy Rabbitte's intention was in comparing the Irish to "niggers". The main problem in both cases is that Lennon and Jimmy (or Doyle, speaking through his character) are white males, rendering the use of the word "nigger" and the comparison that they make problematic. As B. Fanning writes referring to the scene in *The Commitments*,

there are racialised assumptions about black promiscuity [Jimmy says that "[r]ock an' roll is abou' ridin'. That's wha' rock an' roll means. (...) [t]hat's wha' the blackies in America used to call it" (*TC* 13)] and black people are referred to as niggers. 'Nigger' is a derogatory colloquial term with a clear power to shock. Here the shock comes in its use to describe white characters. The novel was published in 1987 at a time when few black people lived in Dublin. A decade later racist attacks against black asylum seekers in inner-city Dublin were commonplace and racist graffiti, stickers, posters and leaflets bearing slogans such as, 'Save Ireland - Stop the Nigerian Invasion' and 'Niggers Out' were being distributed in parts of the city by a group calling itself 'Reclaim Dublin'. (...) The use of the term 'nigger' within such racist discourse prompts a reconsideration of the seemingly naive use of the term by the young Dubliners as fictionally represented in *The Commitments*. Attitudes to black people in Ireland at a time when there were apparently few black people living in the country were not based upon encounters with black people. They were instead distilled from a broader history and culture of racism that seemingly emerged outside of Irish society but somehow became intrinsically part of Irish society. (23)

Other critics have sought to establish historical connections between the Irish and blackness. For example, Timothy D. Taylor makes a highly insightful connection between the Harlem Renaissance and the Irish Renaissance, especially bearing in mind the short story "Home to Harlem", discussed below. Taylor explains that "[m]any of the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s looked to the Irish Renaissance of the turn of the century for a model of creating new art that would be by and for themselves, and that would provide more accurate representations of their people" (291). He mentions a particular anecdote involving the Jamaican poet Claude McKay who "described attending a Sinn Féin demonstration in London

in which he was addressed as ‘Black Murphy’ and ‘Black Irish’” (291).¹⁷⁶ Taylor also reads Jimmy’s analogy as class-based, because, after stating the fact that *The Commitments* are white, he argues that “Jimmy’s analogy with African-Americans still works because of class, however: soul is working-class music, made and heard by the disenfranchised. References to class appear frequently in both the novel and film, and in the scene where Jimmy tells bassist Derek and guitarist Outspan what kind of music they are going to be playing, he offers class as a rationale” (294). Nevertheless, Taylor’s conclusion about the success of the politics in *The Commitments* is rather pessimistic, as he acknowledges that “Dublin’s problems (...) take a backseat to concerns for moving the plot along” (300) and that the novel and the film *aestheticise* failure. In the end he concludes that

[i]t is probably Doyle’s main point that commonalities do not or cannot work if they cross racial boundaries. No matter how poor or hopeless, these young Dubliners are still white. And given the kind of race- and ethnicity-based exclusionary identity politics practiced in America, should the band ever have encountered an African-American, they probably would have been met with incomprehension. (300)

Lorraine Piroux also connects Jimmy’s analogy to class in her analysis of *The Commitments*, as she states that the novel

suggests (...) that Irish identity does not exist in and of itself but springs from variegated possibilities of transnational solidarity with the disenfranchised. Being Irish, [Doyle’s] young protagonists contend, is synonymous with being Black because oppression is the only reality that makes the notion of identity meaningful and can account for what it means to be either Irish or Black (46)

Nevertheless, Piroux clarifies that “[t]he Commitments’ dedication to soul (...) overrides the recognition of sharing with Afro-Americans the same negative subject-position since their political self-assertion implies full appropriation of soul beyond the metaphoric level” (49).

¹⁷⁶ This anecdote is highly reminiscent of Louis Armstrong’s singing of the line “And ah was born in Ireland” from the song “Irish Black Bottom” that I discussed in Chapter One (see “1.2.4.4. Censorship and Jazz”, p. 121).

Like Taylor, she also provides insights into historical connections between Irishness and blackness:

A too-often forgotten feature of Irish colonial history, Said reminds us, is the extent to which “a whole tradition of British and European thought has considered the Irish to be a separate and inferior race, usually unregenerately barbarian, often delinquent and primitive” (1993, 236). (...) very early on, the Irish were identified as being essentially black and were incriminated with the same stereotyping rhetoric used against people of color. That identification is epitomized in Edmund Spenser’s famous 1596 *View of the Present State of Ireland* in which he uncovers an African ancestry for the Irish through methods of comparative anthropology (...). (Piroux 49)

This supposed ancestry was later reappropriated to express the singularity of the Gael, as F. R. Higgins exposed in *The Dark Breed*, where he expressed ideas such as the following: “‘The racial strength of a Gaelic aristocratic mind—with its vigorous coloring and hard emotion—is easily recognized in Irish poetry. ... Like our Gaelic stock, its poetry is sun-bred ... the eyes of Gaelic poetry reflect a richness of life and the intensity of a dark people, still part of our landscape’ (1927, 91)” (Piroux 49; omissions in the original). Piroux additionally points out the use of the word *black* by Catholics to refer to Protestantism (49). Regarding these historical connections, Piroux finds that “Doyle appears conspicuously silent in his treatment of Irish Blackness. Jimmy’s slogan ‘the Irish are the niggers of Europe’ merely spurs the band’s plunge into the world of soul without subsequent return to the Irish question. In his text, nativist mythologies, narratives of national character and liberation are non-existent” (50). Piroux makes an interesting argument when she points out that

[i]n *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have aptly argued that national ideologies, symbols, and histories at some stage required invention, sometimes even forgery. Irish Blackness whether in its negative colonial version or its devalorized local appropriation was itself the result of carefully engineered narratives about barbarianism and purity. To dismantle those narratives as Doyle does, is in effect to make their constructedness all the more obvious. If there is nothing natural about an Irishman declaring “I’m black and I’m proud,” then there is nothing natural either about the Spenserian definition of Irish barbarianism. And neither is the dark aristocratic Gael a given Irish identity. (54)

Alternatively, McGlynn's criticism of *The Commitments* is constructed from a socioeconomic perspective and, according to her,

[The Commitments'] manipulation of images of blacks, specifically African Americans, and their manipulation of their own image reveal them to be cannily employing the capitalist strategies that have left them disenfranchised: that is, they exploit their marginalization as a marketing technique, eventually abandoning this strategy for one they hope will be more profitable. ("Why Jimmy Wears a Suit" 234)

Like Taylor, McGlynn considers that the political message of *The Commitments* is lost, and she argues that "the use of the word 'nigger'" in Jimmy's analogy "bears a certain weight, and there's a slippage between Jimmy's words and the text's ultimate critiques of capitalism and postcolonial theory" (235). Nevertheless, she adds a highly interesting point about The Commitments' sense of identity by pointing out that Jimmy's analogy "brings to light the degree to which the northsiders [of Dublin] do feel themselves to be on the losing side of any binary opposition" (236). Essentially, like the critics I have quoted from above, McGlynn claims that "[t]he word 'nigger,' then, becomes a class signifier rather than a racial one" (237). Furthermore, in the same manner that B. Fanning explains that, when *The Commitments* was published "[a]ttitudes to black people in Ireland at a time when there were apparently few black people living in the country were not based upon encounters with black people" (23), McGlynn reminds her readers that "the Irish perception of American blacks will be filtered through media representation, which leads, in Onkey's reading, to something between 'tribute and racism' (150)" (241). Thus, according to her, "it is true that the Commitments, individually and as a band, exhibit racist tendencies" (241), but she also acknowledges that

[i]n using demotic language to make a racist remark [in the phrase "blackies, Jimmy.—They've got bigger gooters than us" (37)], Doyle reminds us how rooted the economically-deprived Commitments are in Barrytown, how few people of color live in Ireland, how ignorant the kids are of race, and, ultimately, how this configuration of circumstances inevitably results in racism. (242)

Finally, before moving on to the analysis of my primary texts, I find it relevant to include an observation by B. Fanning in which he shows a historical link between poverty and a “language of domestic colonisation” that, in my view, reinforces the approach that Jimmy’s phrase is made on the basis of class. Writing about the Victorian period, Fanning explains that

[t]he poor were depicted in the journalism and social research of the day as ‘the people of the abyss’. Their children were described as ‘street Arabs’. The journalists and researchers, such as Charles Mayhew, who wrote about them were referred to as ‘social explorers’ and their visits to the slums were likened to journeys to darkest Africa. The language used to depict the lives of the poor was a language of ‘domestic colonisation’. Domestic missionaries went amongst the poor; ‘who lived in parishes “as dark as Africa”, in “darkest” Liverpool or London, or in Darkest England, as put in the title of a book by General Booth who founded the Salvation Army’. Within these discourses the poor were a race apart and poverty was constructed as a moral problem. The poor were perceived as living outside of society. They were deemed to constitute a threat to the social order. (20)

Hence, I believe that it is safe to conclude that, keeping in mind that the experiences of black people are unique and cannot be simply transferred to another collective, there are clear connections between blackness and a sense of oppression caused by a low socioeconomic status. These connections can be found in the Victorian conception of poverty, in Ron Dellums’ speech and they are behind the phrase “the Irish are the niggers of Europe”. I believe that it is plausible to suggest that Doyle’s understanding of race issues developed as he, too, came more fully in contact with immigrant people. It is my view that, although it may still show several shortcomings, Doyle’s portrayal of race issues in *The Deportees* is much more sophisticated than when he wrote the notorious phrase in *The Commitments*.

3.2.3.3. “57% Irish”

After Ray Brady sees “a big lad from Poland” (TD 100) celebrate “Robbie Keane’s goal against Germany in the 2002 World Cup” (100) and his Russian girlfriend tells him that she is pregnant—“Russian ma, Irish da – what would that make the baby?” (101)—a question pops

into Ray's mind: "How did you measure nationality?" (101). In an attempt to answer it, Ray builds a machine that is supposed to measure people's nationality by gauging their excitement to the replay of the historic goal, something which, three years later has not given any satisfactory results. Then, Ray is summoned by the Minister for the Arts and Ethnicity and hired to develop the Fáilte Score, a test that will measure immigrants' nationality. The Irish government's objective is to appease Brussels, who want the walls of "Fortress Europe" to come down (105-6), while limiting the influx of immigration to Ireland. Therefore, Ray needs to "make it harder to be Irish", while "mak[ing] it look easier" (106).

This short story contains several noteworthy elements: one is the problem of defining nationality, and this story in particular shows how, keeping in line with my argumentation throughout this thesis, Doyle's fiction resists the notion that there is any fixed set of characteristics that form a genuine Irish identity. Another interesting element in the short story is the portrayal of the Minister and his wife, who are presented as racist and hypocritical, and who encapsulate a criticism to the Irish government and two of its measures regarding immigration policy. Finally, the portrayal of Ray, as compared to that of the Minister, is also worthy of comment, as it goes from highly negative to positive, perhaps pointing at the possibility of redemption for working-class characters, who maintain the same flawed type of personality that, as I argued in Chapter Two, makes Doyle's figures more authentic than if they were examples of virtue.

As Ray finds out, measuring nationality is not a straightforward quest. His first idea to create a "good quiz" (*TD* 107) to test a person's knowledge on Irish history and culture is quickly dismissed, as he realises that "[a]nswers could be learnt" (107) and that "[a] Nigerian could become an expert on all things Irish without leaving Nigeria; he could be quiz-perfect Irish before he'd packed" (108). Then, Ray puts together on a tape a mix of visual and auditory inputs that consist of fragments from Irish songs, sports events, TV documentaries, films and

even pornography, and creates a device that consists of a machine attached to the viewer's body that analyses the viewer's reaction to the tape, resulting in a percentage indicative of the viewer's degree of Irishness. Soon, however, Ray realises that not even two Irish people will respond in the same way to the same stimuli. Thus, while Ray's mother, when tested, does not "think that lady's bottom at the end was very nice" (111), in the case of the Minister, Ray observes the following: "'The Fields of Athenry' sent him into the 80s, but a quick blast of Joe Duffy dropped him back down. *The Riordans* picked him up, and the Chemotherapy Virgins kicked him in the bollix. Five minutes later, the Minister was falling under the 40 mark – 'Teenage Kicks', *Disco Pigs* – but a pornstar's fanny dragged him over the finish line" (114). Hence, the element that Ray's mother dislikes is the one that brings the Minister's score to a 57%. Thus, Ray decides to make the following adjustments to the machine:

A longer gawk at Shamrock's arse would have pulled his brother's score over the 40 per cent, and no gawk at all would have kept his mother's score well over the same mark. Different strokes for different folks. A different test each time, hidden inside the one official test – that was what Ray was after; he could burn all the variants onto the one CD. The Fáilte Score. Success and failure pre-ordained. Come into the parlour or piss off. And no one would know. Except Ray and the Minister. (112)

As Ray later explains to the Minister: "Your response to one image or sound can send you to a series of images or sounds that will bring your score up, or down. (...) Depending on whether *we* want to bring it up, or down" (115; original emphasis). E. White's words regarding Ray's realisation are highly insightful:

Ray's approach to the test illustrates the fact that nationality is a fluid, subjective condition rather than a monolithic, homogenous identity. It also acknowledges that nationality is expressed differently for everybody, and more importantly, it proves that it is constructed and arbitrary and no longer contained by physical borders. (...) Ireland itself is a vague term that cannot be contained within a geographical space only. It is a concept, a state of mind, and an imaginary community that can be expressed through a set of variable signifiers (like the artefacts in the Minister's office). (103)

As I see it, this is also Doyle's view as represented throughout his fiction. The problem of nationality, specifically, of being Irish enough, is explicitly addressed in the case of Henry Smart in *The Dead Republic*, when his status as an Irish hero is challenged by the fact that he likes jazz and when he openly expresses that he does not wish to continue being Irish, or by Paula Spencer, when she states that an authentic Irish woman would not be doing her job. Likewise, other characters like Jimmy Rabbitte, Jr., and, again, Henry Smart voice their strong impression that being from Dublin or, in Jimmy's case, from northside Dublin, also confers on them a special status that sets them apart from the experience of the rest of Ireland. As I show below, this is also the case of Declan O'Connor in the short story "Home to Harlem".

When, towards the ending of the short story, Ray manipulates the Fáilte Score to make his girlfriend Darya (with whom he has reconciled) an Irish citizen, his device is to create a test mixing cultural elements both from Ireland and Russia: "She sat in front of a screen that delivered Behan and Chekhov, Christchurch and the Kremlin. It was boring, but she still scored 83 per cent" (*TD* 128). In my view, this scene is deeply remindful of the episode in *Oh, Play*, in which Henry plays an Armstrong record for Miss O'Shea and she, in turns, plays *Macushla* for Henry. As I argued in Chapter One (see "1.2.4.4. Censorship and Jazz", p. 121), it is this co-existence of cultural elements that allows Henry to believe that they are "both home now" (223), despite the fact that they are in Chicago and that jazz is considered to be anti-Irish. Returning to "57% Irish", E. White makes the following argument in connection to Ray's altered test:

This test represents Ray's acceptance of Darya's hyphenated identity as Russian-Irish. The intercultural connection between both characters is illustrated by their exchange after the test: 'How did you get on? She answered the Irish way. – Grand. – Cool, said Ray' (*ibid.*). Thus, Ray's test functions as a bridge between the couple and solidifies their relationship. His new understanding of the immigrant psyche in turn allows him to travel through the new landscape of Ireland, both virtually through the designing of the Fáilte test, and concretely by interacting with the multicultural population of Dublin. Ironically, his reinvention of 'Irishness' helps reveal the real modern Ireland. (105)

To this analysis I would only add that Ray's understanding of "Darya's hyphenated identity as Russian-Irish" will be crucial in the raising of and successful communication with his son Vladimir Damien.

Moving on to the portrayal of the different Irish characters in the story, the representation of the Minister for the Arts and Ethnicity and his wife is important for two reasons. Firstly, because it exposes a racism perceived to be present in Irish institutions and, secondly, because it is remindful of Doyle's negative portrayal of other figures of power. The first description of the Minister already presents him as a dubious character: "He was a big man in a big suit. The smile was big too but it wasn't warm. It was the smile of a man who might have had a gun or a bread-knife hidden up one of the big sleeves" (*TD* 103). The reason that this man has become the new Minister for the Arts and Ethnicity is that in his previous role as Minister for the Arts and Tourism he made "[o]ne little joke about putting a wall around Offaly and calling it Inbred-land. And An Taoiseach takes the tourism out form me" (104). Moreover, the Minister considers "the arts" to be mostly "bolloxology" (104). When he speaks about the meetings with other European delegates, he refers to them as "the wee lads with the sandals on the other side of the Cabinet table" (106). As E. White puts it,

the new Minister of Arts and Ethnicity resists the multicultural reality of modern Ireland. He is not ready to embrace interculturalism as a viable, enriching possibility for both natives and immigrants. He experiences the encounter with foreigners as a threat to traditional Irish culture and values. Doyle's characterisation of the Minister for the Arts and Ethnicity as a thug with no cultural sensitivity poses the question of how genuine the Irish government is in terms of accepting the ethnic minorities in Ireland unconditionally. (101)

White's argument is reinforced by two phrases spoken by the Minister that are discussed below. First, however, the analysis of this character needs to be completed. At one point in the short story, Ray's mother kicks him out of the house, because Ray's ex-girlfriend Darya reveals to her that she has a grandson that Ray had never mentioned. Ray then, asks the Minister for a place to stay and, it is in that moment, that the Minister and his wife's hypocrisy is exposed in

full. To begin with, the Minister takes Ray to his own place and tells the young man, “—Mind you, Raymond (...) It’s one of many. We’ve the big one at home, this one, a little place in Spain, and a couple of apartments round and about” (*TD* 116). Despite owning all these places, however, the Minister brings Ray to a place that holds two surprises: on the one hand, when Ray opens the door to what he thinks is his new apartment, “[a] black man sat up in the bed” (119), as the place already has an occupant, Itayi from Zimbabwe. On the other hand, Ray finds out on arriving that his ex-girlfriend Darya is his neighbour. On top of everything, Itayi’s apartment has only one bed and the shocking truth is that Mrs Minister, as her husband calls her, “thought the African lad would give you the bed and sleep on the floor. Isn’t that gas?” (123). This comment implies the woman’s belief that Itayi should recognise himself as less deserving of a bed than Ray, the only plausible reason for this being his skin colour, which exposes the woman’s deeply entrenched racism or, as the Minister lightly puts it, that “[s]he’s a bit old-fashioned” (123). Of course, the Minister’s diminishing of the gravity of his wife’s remark as well as his opinion that it is funny, equally exposes his own racist attitude.

Considering a different side of the Minister’s portrayal, the first time that Ray visits the Minister’s office, he observes that it is filled with decorations of a nationalist nature: “It was a huge room, more like a hall, Jack B. Yeats prints on the walls, a typed page of *Ulysses*, author’s corrections and all, framed, behind the Minister, an autographed photo of Ronan Keating – before the baldness – on the other side. The Proclamation of Independence, a U2 gold disc – before the split – all sorts of interesting stuff around the place” (*TD* 103). As I see it, all these elements, central to a highly concrete understanding of what Ireland is, define the Minister’s (limited) view of his country. Moreover, taking into consideration a trope repeated throughout Doyle’s fiction, according to which those characters that make the most overt shows of nationalism, are often not to be trusted, the Minister’s decoration is also indicative of his suspicious character. I have pointed this trope out before, especially in relation to the Last

Roundup Trilogy, that comes to light in such characters as Jack Dalton, Alfie Gandon and Ivan Reynolds. Likewise, the nationalist teachers in *Paddy Clarke* are criticised for their violence, the headmaster of the Christian Brothers School in *Smile* is a sexual predator, and Paula Spencer's husband Charlo would mourn the death of an IRA man, after brutally beating his wife. Thus, Doyle's texts often present figures of power, connected to state institutions (with the exception of Charlo Spencer) as behaving in hypocritical and criminal ways. When it comes to the Minister in "57% Irish", moreover, E. White states the following:

[T]he fact that [Doyle] locates the Department of the Arts and Ethnicity in fictional Castletimoney, which he describes as a conservative stronghold with a definite anti-immigrant stance, is another jab at the Irish government, as it underscores the Minister's hypocritical stance: 'Castletimoney boasted two pubs, a monument, a Spar that stayed open till ten, and the country's fourth biggest lap-dancing club, the Creamery. ONLY GENUINE IRISH GIRLS USED ON THESE PREMISES, said the banner over the door, ALL HEADAGE CHEQUES CASHED' (Doyle, 2007: 106–7). (102)

The full hypocrisy of the club's claims (where you can have "a good soup and a sandwich" (107)) is revealed when Ray is having lunch and "a genuine Irish girl from just beyond Kraków hovered over [his colleague's] minestrone" (107). Again, like the Minister's superficial and *clichéd* understanding of Irishness, the club uses an empty claim to attract customers, transforming an abstract notion of 'pure' identity into an apparently desirable and valuable asset. Apparently, immigrants are welcome, if they can visually pass for Irish women (that is, if they are white) and only if their presence can be capitalised on to further Ireland's economy.

When it comes to the story's criticism of the government's measures towards immigration, there are two phrases spoken by the Minister that stand out. The first of these appears during the initial conversation between the Minister and Ray, when the Minister is portrayed as having absolute freedom regarding immigration policies, as he tells Ray to "go easy on the racial (...) But the rest is up to yourself" (TD 107). Regarding this, E. White writes the following:

It seems shocking that the Minister of Art and Ethnicity would have such a free hand in devising ways to limit access to Irish citizenship to specific groups, but according to Piola (2006: 49), in real life the Minister of Justice in Ireland does have such freedom. As the official website for Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service states, one of the ways one can acquire Irish citizenship is ‘by naturalisation at the absolute discretion of the Minister for Justice and Equality’ (see section ‘Citizenship’). (102)¹⁷⁷

E. White’s assessment, and I fully agree with her, is that “[i]t is clear that Doyle is attacking such a state of affairs” (102). That this is the case, as I see it, is reinforced by the negative characteristics that surround the process of obtaining citizenship in the story: not only is the Minister in charge portrayed as a racist and superficial character, but the fact that Ray, who had been unsuccessful in his research for years, is the person chosen to create the Fáilte Score, instead of a professional team, proves to be deeply troubling. The weakness in the story’s flimsy protocol to decide who can become Irish and who cannot, is exposed when, at the end of the short story, Ray manipulates the test to help immigrants obtain Irish citizenship. It is revealed that, after years, “Ray had granted Irish citizenship to over 800,000 Africans and East Europeans” (*TD* 128).

Ray’s manipulation is not gratuitous either, but triggered by the second remark that the Minister makes in relation to immigration policy. This happens when Ray spots Darya’s name on a list of people that he is supposed fail through the Fáilte Score and deny citizenship, precisely after the couple have mended their relationship and Ray has been investing time into his relationship with his son. The scene is presented as follows:

—There’s a woman here, [Ray] said. —And she has a kid born in this country.
 —We ironed out that difficulty some years ago, Raymond, said the Minister. —The child’s nationality does not entitle his mother or father—
 I’m his fuckin’ father, thought Ray.
 —to citizenship or residency rights. The child is welcome to stay, or he can come back to Eireann when he’s had enough of his mammy.
 —What if the father’s Irish? said Ray.
 —Does it say that there?

¹⁷⁷ At the time of writing this thesis, the conditions exposed by Piola are still in place. The Department of Foreign Affairs gives the following explanation regarding naturalisation: “If you are of Irish associations, the Minister for Justice and Equality has absolute discretion to waive the conditions for naturalisation. Irish associations means being related by blood, affinity or adoption to an Irish citizen” (“Naturalisation”).

—No.

—Well then, said the Minister. —Don't let it come between you and your sleep. (125-6)

On this occasion too, E. White provides an illuminating explanation regarding this conversation: “The Minister’s statements in this passage explicitly direct readers to the IBC/05 Scheme which requires the foreign national parents of Irish-born children to apply for permission to remain in Ireland with their children” (104).¹⁷⁸ That Doyle has the protagonist of his story, who, at first, does not hesitate to participate in the Minister’s outrageous plan, manipulate the test after he mends his relationship with Darya is significant. Doyle is perhaps showing how a law that does not, in principle, affect Irish people, can quickly become a personal matter. The injustice of this law is felt by the reader, who is aware of what it would mean for Ray and his family: an enforced separation, the loss of a way of life and a home, and, in any case, a traumatic experience. Nevertheless, that Ray only decides to intervene when the Fáilte Score threatens to affect his own life shows his egotism, which brings me to my next point: the portrayal of Ray throughout the short story.

Ray is presented in quite a negative light at the beginning of “57% Irish”. He is described almost as an overgrown teenager, who lives with his parents and works in a shed in their back garden. He calls Darya *Stalin*, due to “her temperament” (TD 101) and refers to her in highly questionable terms, as when he explains that “Stalo was making angry noises about going back to Russia. And good riddance to the bitch” (102).¹⁷⁹ Moreover, Ray is described as a neglectful father, since “[h]e’d seen Vladimir Damien (...) only twice in the last year” (102) and, as I showed above, he has not even told his parents that they have a grandson. Moreover, when Darya tells Ray’s mother about Vladimir Damien, at first, Ray denies that the little boy

¹⁷⁸ At the time of writing this thesis, the IBC/05 scheme is still in place, and it specifies that the parent of an Irish-born child may renew their permission to remain in Ireland. This permission “will be for a duration of between 6 months and 3 years, depending on the circumstances of [the applicant’s] individual case” (“Irish Born Child Renewals”).

¹⁷⁹ Although these phrases are not voiced by Ray, but by the narrator, I believe that they represent Ray’s thoughts, as the distance between Ray and the narrator is minimal.

is his son (114). Nevertheless, the forced contact with Darya, her brothers, Vladimir Damien and Itayi throughout the story, produce a change in Ray. According to E. White, Ray's "reconnection with Darya marks a turning point in his life and initiates his identity migration. From that moment on, Ray is able to embrace his relationship with her as well as with the immigrant Other that she represents, establishing as a result a true intercultural connection" (104). This seems to suggest that, in Doyle's view, the solution to racism is contact with the Other, something which Reddy criticises as a superficial understanding of racism (see p. 261). Thus, Doyle grants his, at first, unlikeable character, the possibility of redemption. This differs greatly from the fate of the Minister and his wife, who are clearly portrayed as the villains in this story, as "Mrs Minister said something to the Mexican ambassador. The words were never reported but in the quick reshuffle that followed the poor man's suicide, the Minister lost Arts and Ethnicity" (*TD* 128).

It is important to notice, however, that Ray does not willingly seek contact with the immigrant population, apart from his first affair with Darya, which almost no information is given about. As I pointed out above, Ray is forced to have contact with the Other due to an array of disparate circumstances that escape his control: his mother throws him out, he is put in an already-occupied flat and it so happens that Darya lives in the same building. Hence, Ray's contact with Darya and Itayi is entirely accidental. Although, in *The Deportees*, the majority of the characters belonging to the higher classes are portrayed as being racist, in "57% Irish", the fact that Ray belongs to the working class does not predispose him to be any less racist than the Minister and his wife. I believe that being aware of this is crucial, as, otherwise, it might seem that Doyle infuses his working-class protagonists with superior moral values than the characters belonging to a higher class. Yet, it is also true that, because Ray cannot afford to choose where he wants to live, he ends up sharing his living space with Darya and Itayi and this, in the end, proves to be beneficial, as it forces Ray to open his mind and accept the

presence of the Other. As in the case of Paula Spencer, the fact that Ray shares the same poor living conditions as Darya and Itayi creates grounds for mutual understanding. For example, the first time that he visits Darya's apartment, Ray "sat on the floor with her brothers" and his son "was asleep in the bed. (...) he looked at Stalin sitting neat in the only good chair in the room" (*TD* 122). This, together with the description of Ray's and Itayi's apartment that boasts the one only bed, seems to indicate that the apartment consists of one room where all the living is done, with a bed, a table and a chair: far from the comforts that Ray knows the Minister and his wife to be living in. Ray, indeed, has more in common with Darya and Itayi than with the Minister and his wife.

3.2.3.4. "*Black Hoodie*"

In this short story, the protagonist is a Dublin teenager who will not tell the readers his name nor that of his friends, and who narrates the events that lead all of them to be arrested by the Gardaí. Everything begins with a school project, in which students are asked to design a business plan and put it into practice. The idea that the protagonist, Ms Nigeria (a girl form Nigeria whom the protagonist is in love with) and a third boy referred to as not-Superman's brother come up with is a mini-company named Black Hoodie Solutions.¹⁸⁰ The explanation that Ms Nigeria gives the teacher is that "[w]e are all labelled and stereotyped (...) Automatically: We don't have to say or do anything" (*TD* 134) and, based on this premise, the three teenagers "are going to establish a consultancy firm, to advise retail outlets on

¹⁸⁰ These characters are referred to with multiple names, always keeping their anonymity. The reason why the protagonist calls Ms Nigeria this way is obvious. Alternatively, he also calls her "Name Omitted" (*TD* 134) and "my Nigerian lover" (136). In the case of not-Superman's brother, the name was coined because this teenager's brother is in a wheelchair, like Christopher Reeves, the actor who once played Superman. However, after the actor died, the protagonist's friend "asked us to stop (...); it was upsetting his ma whenever she answered the landline. 'Is Superman there?'" (132).

stereotyping of young people, and best practice towards its elimination” (135). The strategy they follow is simple: while Ms Nigeria and the protagonist, wearing a black hood, walk through a shop being followed by the security person who will have targeted them due to their appearance, the third member of the team steals different items from the shop. Then, the teenagers return to the shop, give back the stolen goods and explain to the shop manager how their stereotyping may potentially cause the shop financial losses. Interestingly enough, the teenagers also exploit positive discrimination (although they never use such nomenclature) when they borrow not-Superman’s wheelchair and have his brother use it in several of the shops: “while the Feds follow me because (a) I’m with a black person and (b) I’m wearing a hoodie, he’s robbing everything he can stretch to, because (a) he’s in the wheelchair, and (b) he’s wearing glasses. And no one follows him. In fact, everyone wants to help him” (132). Everything seems to work fine until, after one of their experiments, they are caught by the Gardaí.

While there are several phrases voiced by different characters that already expose the othering that Ms Nigeria has to endure on a daily basis, the Gardaí are represented as being deeply racist. The most obvious example of the daily racism that Ms Nigeria is exposed to is precisely the fact that she is followed through the shops because of her skin colour: “You’re never lonely if you’re with a black girl, or even if your hoodie is black. There’s always someone following you” (*TD* 130). Likewise, the protagonist experiences increased attention when he walks down the street with Ms Nigeria: “No one really noticed me until I started going with her, kind of. Now they all look, and you can see it in their faces; they’re thinking, *There’s a white fella with a black girl*, or something along those lines” (130; original emphasis). When the kids explain their idea for the mini company to the teacher, she inadvertently taps into the same racial othering, because when Ms Nigeria explains that “I walk into a shop and the security staff immediately decide that I am there to shoplift”, the teacher asks, “Because you’re

black?” and Ms Nigeria immediately specifies, “Because I’m young”, although then she adds, “And, yes, because I’m black” (135). Despite the fact that the teacher is not wrong in her initial assumption, it is telling, nonetheless, that the first reason that springs to her mind is Ms Nigeria’s skin colour and not any of the other stereotypes that the students point out: that they are teenagers, that they wear hoods or, something that is not mentioned and perhaps does not apply to these particular characters, but that could also be the case, that they belong to a low socio-economic class.

In contrast to these examples of racial microaggressions,¹⁸¹ the situation that the teenagers experience at Pearse Street Station is deeply troubling. First, when Ms Nigeria whispers something to the protagonist, one of the Garda tells her to “[s]hut your sub-Saharan mouth” (*TD* 141). Later, when another Garda wants to know the teenagers’ parents’ telephone numbers, he specifies to Ms Nigeria “[t]he jungle drums in your case, love” (141) and tells her not to worry, because “[w]e don’t torture people in this country” (142). Nevertheless, the Gardaí’s stereotyping goes further, as the following scene demonstrates: when the protagonist is taken in for questioning, the “plainclothes cop” (143) that interrogates him, demands that the protagonist put on his hood, despite the protagonist’s discomfort at the request. Once the policeman turns the camera on to film the questioning, however, he startles the protagonist by asking: “Would you take the hood down, please?” (144). What the protagonist needs a moment to understand is that the policeman has framed him to make him look like a thug, also by using a stereotypical image of a criminal youth.

When the teenagers’ parents arrive, the protagonist gathers the courage to tell the plainclothes Garda that he will report him “[f]or using racist language intended to inflict hurt

¹⁸¹ I use the term “racial microaggression” to refer to “[r]emarks and behaviours, which might be experienced occasionally and brushed off as ‘rude’ or ‘inconsiderate’ by white people” (“Common Racial Microaggressions”). Although the examples that I list here are not included in the source that I have quoted from, I believe that they fall into the same category and, in any case, they differ greatly from the explicit racist insults that Ms Nigeria receives at the Garda station.

on a member of an ethnic minority” (TD 150). With the fact that the protagonist, despite the great distress he has endured, summons the courage to speak up for his Nigerian friend, Doyle seems to suggest that the responsibility of denouncing racism lies also in the hands of the native Irish population. Towards the ending of the short story, Ms Nigeria’s father arrives at the station and his presence is described as so impressive that the Garda is left looking like a fool. In the end, the families walk out of the station together, the protagonist and Ms Nigeria holding hands, in what could be called a typical happy ending. Whether this can be said about the general message of the short story is another question. The portrayal of Ms Nigeria’s parents, which I develop below, is rather problematic. First, however, there are a few other considerations that must be pointed out.

Despite the denunciation that “Black Hoodie” constructs of racism in the Irish society and inside the police corps, in my view, this criticism remains rather superficial. It is significant that, after the protagonist’s framing as a thug during his questioning, he fails to realise how the brief moment of terror he endures is something that for a person of colour might be a recurring ordeal. The most striking element of his appearance and that constitutes the basis for his stereotyping is a hood, an element that can be easily removed. In contrast, in the case of Ms Nigeria, the reality is entirely different: the stereotypes and the racism spring from her skin colour, an element that she cannot change or hide, and, thus, she is constantly vulnerable to racial othering.¹⁸²

¹⁸² The report *Policing and Racial Discrimination in Ireland* sheds light on the issue of racial profiling and An Garda Síochána’s (AGS) often biased actions. According to this report, “[t]he absence of official disaggregated data on racial and ethnic indicators during policing operations has been used by officials to deny that racial profiling happens in AGS” (*Policing* 5). However, this report confirms the alarming extent of racial profiling present in AGS and informs that “[t]o date, Ireland does not have legislation prohibiting racial profiling” (12), in contrast to other countries. The report includes a number of statements from people who have experienced racial discrimination by AGS, one of which connects with “Black Hoodie” and speaks to the authenticity of Doyle’s story: “A Black African woman reported that this [excessive scrutiny, including by being observed and followed] constantly happened to her and her young children ‘for no apparent reason’. Supporting this claim, a Black participant added that his Roma friends have complained of being continuously followed by Gardaí, as well as by private security whenever they enter a shop. A view was shared that members of the Roma community get ‘followed around for no apparent reason’” (24). The deep gravity of racial profiling is finally exposed by a finding that shows that “[a] stark 41.5% of participants reported a newfound fear of Gardaí in the community following

Regarding the portrayal that the protagonist makes of Ms Nigeria's parents, I see it as problematic, as it consists of, what I believe to be, an unrealistic representation of the immigrant population. To begin with the description of Ms Nigeria's father, this is what the protagonist sees: "His suit is blue and serious looking. But the really serious thing about him is his face. He's the most serious-looking man I've ever seen" (*TD* 151). When the girl's father speaks, the protagonist narrates that "[h]is voice takes over the room, and the station, and the street – the dogs bark in Coolock and Clondalkin. He's huge. He's like a whole African country, Uganda or somewhere, that just stood up one day and put on a suit. Like, he's massive and so is his voice. And so is his wife – you should see her. If he's the country, she's the country's biggest lake or something" (151). Moments later, the protagonist is observing Ms Nigeria's mother, trying to imagine what Ms Nigeria might look like when she grows up, and he says the following: "I have to admit, her ma's lovely too. Big and all. Black-big has a lot more going for it than white-big – in my opinion, like. You should see her hair. It's amazing – it's like hundreds of snakes curled up on her head. It's not a ma's hairstyle at all" (153). It is clear that Doyle wanted to emphasise the positive qualities of the Nigerian family, but, in my view, the language and images used to do this are also racist, and the overall result comes across as artificial. Perhaps, this is due to the excited tone in which the descriptions are made, since the protagonist, at that moment, is feeling exhilarated after telling the Garda that he will report him. However, this does not make these passages less problematic, especially those in which Ms Nigeria's parents are compared to a country and a lake. By attributing larger-than-human characteristics to these characters, the text is also incurring in stereotyping, which, in the end,

the deaths of George Floyd and George Nkencho" (19). George Nkencho was "a young Black Irish man who was experiencing severe mental health difficulties" (14) and was shot and killed by a Garda. George Floyd was "tortured and extrajudicially executed" by four police officers from Minneapolis (USA) in 2020. His murder, which was filmed and, therefore, could be viewed by an audience worldwide, sparked multitudinous protests all around the globe. In particular, "[t]he United States recorded its largest protests in the history of the country's existence" (Roth and McCracken Jarrar).

results in another kind of dehumanisation.¹⁸³ If the Gardaí have dehumanised Ms Nigeria by referring to elements such as jungle drums and torture, usually connected to a view of African people as uncivilised and savage, the protagonist's superhumanisation of Ms Nigeria's parents also erases a human perception of them. Moreover, the comparison of the mother's hair to snakes also invokes images of a tropical landscape and of wilderness.

Additionally, Reddy recounts how Doyle had a "vision" for the stories in *The Deportees*, which was that "'from the word go,' (...) 'they were all going to be funny, optimistic stories that would bring people together'" (382). Reddy also uses two noteworthy phrases when describing two of the short stories from the collection. When referring to the first story from *The Deportees*, "Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner", Reddy writes about the "reassuring" quality of the story: "African immigrants do not want to marry your daughters; they just want to work and live in peace in Ireland. In this story, racism equates with prejudice and is entirely personal, not systemic or social, not intimately intertwined with all the basic conditions of daily life" (381). In the case of the short story "The Deportees", Reddy writes that this "is certainly a feel-good story, conveying a hopefulness to the readers of Metro Eireann that multiracial cooperation and even love are possible despite the machinations of government agencies (...) and the racist hatred of what Doyle depicts as a tiny minority of Irish" (383). Although these exact criticisms are not directly applicable to "Black Hoodie", as they are particular to the other two short stories, I find that the superficial treatment of racism in *The Deportees* that Reddy's critique implies that also rings true in "Black Hoodie".

¹⁸³ In a 2015 study, Waytz et al. found that white people tend to confer superhuman abilities onto black people. According to them, "[s]uperhumanization similarly involves depriving others of human character and attributes, but represents a distinct, independent process from inhumanization" (352). This study points at how perceiving black people as superhuman, involves the assumption that they experience pain differently to white people, something which has an impact in the medical treatment of black people. Similarly, the view that black people possess superhuman strength, has been used as a justification by police officers to treat them with extreme violence which has often resulted in the death of the black person (Meighan et al.).

In my view, despite the important denunciation that “Black Hoodie” makes of racism in the Irish society and, especially, in the security staff of shops and in An Garda Síochána, the story exposes a situation that is probably the exception. One cannot help but wonder how the story would have ended if Ms Nigeria’s parents had been perfectly normal people and not these exceptional beings, or if they had had trouble speaking or understanding English. Moreover, like the representation of Ben in “Guess Who’s Coming for the Dinner” (“Tracy stepped aside and there he was. In a fuckin’ suit. The best, most elegant suit Larry had ever been close to. A small lad – very, very black – and completely at home in the suit. The wall looked filthy behind him” (11)), the refinedness of Ms Nigeria’s parents seems to convey the reassuring notion, to use Reddy’s words, that these are exceptional people who deserve to be in Ireland, as their sophistication raises the country’s cultural level. Again, however, the question comes to mind of what the protagonist’s and the Garda’s reaction would have been if Ms Nigeria’s parents had been normal people or had struggled to speak English. Likewise, the rapid and triumphal resolution of this short story leaves the impression that this is also a “feel-good story”, again quoting Reddy, as the evil Gardaí have been beaten and the heroes and love (between the protagonist and Ms Nigeria) have won: an optimistic ending that, nevertheless, leaves many doubts as to the authenticity of what Doyle has represented here, and, in its stead, an impression of artificiality.

3.2.3.5. “*The Pram*”

“The Pram” is rather unique in Doyle’s production. Together with the short story “Blood” from the collection *Bullfighting*, “The Pram” can be termed, at the time of writing this thesis, one of Doyle’s only horror stories. Although “The Pram” contains several elements that are

reminiscent of the supernatural,¹⁸⁴ the story ultimately records what seems to be the protagonist's psychotic break, after she has endured systematic abuse from her employers.¹⁸⁵

In "The Pram", a Polish woman named Alina works for a successful Irish family and her main task is to look after the children: two young girls, Ocean and Saibhreas, and Alina's favourite, a baby boy called Cillian. However, in a Cinderella-like fashion, Alina is mistreated by her employer, the mother of the children. This woman is presented as powerful and hard, something which is epitomised by her demand that everybody, including her children, call her O'Reilly: "it terrified her clients (...). It was intriguing; it was sexy" (*TD* 158). From the very beginning of the story, it is made clear that O'Reilly and Alina espouse highly different values, something which Alina struggles to understand and that makes her feel alienated. When Alina's romance with a Lithuanian man comes to an abrupt end, she swears to make the two little sisters, whom she blames for this, pay the consequences by terrorising them with an old Polish folk tale. However, Alina becomes entangled in her own horror story, loses touch with reality and ends up murdering O'Reilly and attempting to run away with Cillian.

In my view, it is O'Reilly's behaviour that causes most of Alina's pain and that contributes to the young woman losing her mind. O'Reilly is the embodiment of boorish capitalism, perhaps even constructed as a critique of a particular type of behaviour during the Celtic Tiger years, as her humanity is practically non-existent, and she seems to operate only according to financial motives. In my reading of this story, even the fact that one of O'Reilly's daughters is called Saibhreas is telling, as this Irish word stands alternatively for luxury,

¹⁸⁴ For example, the description of the two sisters, Ocean and Saibhreas, who seem to never be apart is suggestive of other eerie famous pairs of sisters, like the twins that appear in Stanley Kubrick's horror film *The Shining* (1980), especially in Alina's account of her first morning in the house, when the sisters creep into her room and sit on her bed (*TD* 156). Likewise, the fact that the pram moves on its own breathes a feeling of ghostliness into the story (166). Another element that adds to the spooky atmosphere is the weather, like the wind that "shrieked in the chimney" (161).

¹⁸⁵ I find "The Pram" redolent of Chekhov's short story "The Black Monk" (1894), in which the protagonist, Andrey Vassilitch Kovrin, also experiences encounters with the supernatural figure of a monk dressed in black, only to find out, in the end, that he suffers from a severe mental illness and that the monk is nothing but a hallucination.

opulence, richness or wealth (“Saibhreas”). In the first exchange between O’Reilly and Alina that appears in the story, the difference between the two women is established. The conversation concerns the pram in which Alina will be promenading little Cillian and that Alina had associated to her memories of a similar pram—owned by her grandmother—which had been her father’s. The exchange starts with O’Reilly warning Alina not to “scrape the sides” of the pram:

She tapped the sides of the pram.
 —It is very valuable, said the mother.
 —It was yours when you were a baby? Alina asked.
 —No, said the mother. —We bought it. (*TD* 155)

For O’Reilly, the pram has an economic value, while Alina had assigned it sentimental value. O’Reilly’s high regard for the material is also exemplified in one of the story’s last scenes in which, severely terrorised by Alina’s ghost story, Ocean and Saibhreas have urinated on a rug, prompting O’Reilly to say: “My fucking rug (...) Have you any idea how much it cost?” (174). The rug, in the circumstances of this scene, is the least important element, but it does not escape O’Reilly’s notice.

It is O’Reilly’s harshness or what Alina terms her “crudity” (*TD* 160), what most unsettles Alina about her employer. In the great majority of exchanges between the two women, O’Reilly treats Alina in a condescending and impertinent way, an attitude that deeply upsets Alina. There are two scenes in which this dynamic is represented and that, as I see it, greatly contribute to the deterioration of Alina’s mental state. The first one takes place after Ocean and Saibhreas spot Alina’s Lithuanian boyfriend on their way home. Alina had met this “handsome” man during her daily strolls with Cillian along the seafront: “He was a biochemist from Lithuania but he was working in Dublin for a builder” (158). The couple meet regularly during Alina’s strolls, drink hot chocolate together and share some intimate moments. This portion of the day becomes Alina’s main source of happiness and something to look forward

to. However, on one occasion that the two sisters finish school earlier, Alina is forced to bring them on her regular path and, afraid of them finding out that she has a lover, she decides to ignore him. Nevertheless, seeing the Lithuanian man waving at Alina, Ocean and Saibhreas tell their mother that same night that “Alina has a boyfriend” (159). O’Reilly takes Alina to the kitchen for a private conversation, that develops as follows:

—So, she said. —Tell all.

Alina could not look at O’Reilly’s face.

—It is, she said, —perhaps my private affair.

—Listen, babes, said O’Reilly. —*Nothing is your private affair*. Not while you’re working here. Are you fucking this guy?

(...)

O’Reilly put one foot on the chair beside Alina.

—I couldn’t care less, she said. —Fuck away, girl. But with three provisos. Not while you’re working. Not here, on the property. *And not with Mister O’Reilly*. (159-60; my emphasis)

The distress that O’Reilly’s attitude causes Alina is patent. Alina “felt herself burn. The crudity was like a slap across her face” (160) and, after O’Reilly speaks the last words in the conversation above, Alina feels “[s]hocked, appalled, close - she thought- to fainting, (...)”. O’Reilly smiled down at her. Alina dropped her head and cried. O’Reilly smiled the more. She’d mistaken Alina’s tears and gulps for gratitude” (160). Indeed, two aspects from this conversation, corresponding to the phrases with emphasis, stand out, as they reflect more layers of the abuse that torments Alina. The first one touches upon Alina’s lack of privacy inside the house: she has no key to her room and, after a particularly disagreeable dinner with the family, which I describe below, Alina feels compelled to chew on a paper and to push “the pulp into the keyhole of her bedroom door” (170). This, together with the fact that Alina is given the strictest orders about how she must behave (like the length of her daily stroll with Cillian, the exact route she is to take (155) or the prohibition of talking to Cillian in Polish (157)), contribute to Alina’s impression that she is being watched. This sensation is referred to multiple times throughout the story (155, 157, 167), each time with increased intensity, until it develops into a sort of paranoia, as “all the time, and all the way, [Alina] felt she was being watched.

(...) She was watched. She felt it - she *knew* it - on her face and neck, like damp fingers” (171; original emphasis).

The other aspect that stands out from the conversation quoted above is O'Reilly's "proviso" that Alina stay away from Mr. O'Reilly. However, this proves to be highly cynical on O'Reilly's part as it is her husband who sexually harasses Alina and O'Reilly knows this. During another family dinner, Mr. O'Reilly strokes Alina's foot with his own and, after he apologises as if it had been an accident, O'Reilly tells Alina, "[l]ock your door tonight, sweetie" (TD 169), implying that her husband might attempt to intrude into Alina's room, instead of offering the young woman comfort or protection. This is the same night that Alina feels compelled to obstruct the keyhole in her door. That O'Reilly is right in her suspicion towards Mr. O'Reilly is revealed later, when his thoughts are briefly known: "He looked at [Alina's] breasts, beneath her Skinni Fit T-Shirt, and thought how much he'd like to see them when she returned after a good walk in the wind and rain" (176).

This second dinner is particularly disagreeable for Alina, as it is during its course that Ocean and Saibhreas recount to their parents the ghost story that Alina has been telling them. O'Reilly, as always, exhibits her "crudeness", to use Alina's words. When one of the girls expresses her belief that the pram is haunted because it "moved" (TD 169), O'Reilly's response is, "I should hope so (...) It's supposed to bloody move. I pay a Polish *cailín* to move it" (169), which causes Alina to "blush" as "her rage pushed at her skin. She hated this crude woman" (169). Alina, knowing that she has gone too far with her story-telling, feels increasingly embarrassed as the little girls tell on her. O'Reilly, noticing this, centres her attention on Alina's appearance: "And look at the fair Alina's skin. How red can red get?", and goes as far as touching Alina's face, "She felt the shock – O'Reilly's fingers on her cheek. —Hot, said O'Reilly" (170). By touching Alina, O'Reilly once again trespasses boundaries and invades Alina's privacy, treating her more like a possession than a grown-up individual.

As I explained above, Alina's story-telling is a (misdirected) act of vengeance for the loss of her lover. After the incident in which Alina feels compelled to ignore him and hopes that she will be able to explain her behaviour to him on a later occasion, the couple never meet again. The Lithuanian man simply stops attending their meeting-place and, since he owns no mobile phone, Alina has no possibility of contacting him. That the relationship falls apart is not the girls' fault; after all, the Lithuanian man never returns and it is him who denies Alina the possibility of explaining herself. Nevertheless, after the humiliating scene with O'Reilly described above, Alina directs her rage towards Ocean and Saibhreas, to the point that she even fantasises about murdering them (*TD* 160). That Alina plots her revenge against the two girls might be because these children are, to a certain extent, the only element over which Alina has some control and, therefore, over which she can also have some influence. In contrast, Alina would probably not dare to stand up to O'Reilly to protest against the woman's mistreatment. Finally, Alina decides that "[s]he would terrify [Ocean and Saibhreas]. She would plant nightmares that would lurk, prowl, rub their evil backs against the soft walls of their minds, all their lives, until they were two old ladies, lying side by side on their one big deathbed" (160).

Thus, Alina tells the two little girls the story about a "wicked lady" who "lived in a dark forest" in Poland (*TD* 161). This "wicked lady" would steal babies from their cribs and little girls from their beds, to take their skin and eat them. To make the story more effective, Alina tells the sisters that the "wicked lady" was chased out of Poland and now lives somewhere in Dublin. According to Villar Argáiz and Tekin, "[a]s Ferguson notes, ghost stories 'give voice to people at the bottom of the social hierarchy, disrupting the continuity of the powerful'" (54). Indeed, Alina's transformation from an ineffectual maid to an empowered woman is envisioned through her articulation of a ghost story about the Polish mythological figure 'Boginka'" (162). Moreover,

[t]he parallelism between the migrant protagonist and the Polish mythological figure is glaringly apparent. Through Alina, Doyle creates a modern Boginka who is far away from her native land and has the urge to be a mother but is only able to push the prams of others. Like Boginka, Alina takes the pram of Cillian every day, and nurses a baby which is not hers. She sees various “mothers and other young women like herself” who push modern prams and “she envies them” (Doyle, *Deportees* 157). Her first opportunity to be a real mother is hindered by the O’Reilly family because they do not approve of her relationship. (162)

In the course of Alina’s story-telling, that she spaces out along three days, she gets increasingly convinced that the pram is actually haunted. The reasons for this are that, on the one hand, the pram appears to move on its own (*TD* 166) and, on the other hand, the sisters tell Alina that O’Reilly believes the pram to be haunted (168). When O’Reilly explains to Alina that she had only said that to keep the sisters away from the newborn baby (174), Alina’s mind is already too afflicted to comprehend O’Reilly’s words. Desperately, Alina tries to convince her employer that she has witnessed the pram moving on its own and that she has heard “more babies” (174), apart from Cillian, inside the pram. Angered by the terror that Alina has provoked in her daughters, O’Reilly fails to understand that Alina is in urgent need of medical assistance and, instead, tells her “[t]he sooner you find a peasant or something to knock you up the better” (174) and proceeds to fire her.

While O’Reilly is calling someone from her workplace to tell him that “[w]e have to cancel tomorrow’s meeting. Yes. No. My Polish peasant. Yes again. Yes. Yes. A fucking nightmare. You can? I’ll suck your cock if you do” (176), Alina brings down a poker on O’Reilly’s head and kills her. Regarding this scene, Villar Argáiz and Tekin make a highly insightful observation:

At this stage in the narrative we, as readers, have lost all sense of sympathetic identification with [Alina]. The use of indirect speech at the beginning gradually disappears throughout the story as we stop having access to Alina’s mind. The narrative progressively becomes more mysterious, to the extent that, at the moment of O’Reilly’s murder, we are not allowed to hear the Polish migrant’s thoughts. (163)

In my assessment, most fairytales (“The Pram” has been called “a modern pessimistic fairy tale of twenty-first century Dublin” (Villar Argáiz and Tekin 160)), would probably have similar endings to “The Pram” if the protagonist had not been saved by magic or a prince. In my view, the amount of abuse that Alina must endure, the feelings of fear and loneliness and her inferior position as an immigrant, leaving her practically without agency, end up creating so much pressure that Alina’s mental sanity simply breaks. Following this train of thought, it is also possible that readers stop hearing Alina’s thoughts, because she loses all ability of rational thought.

When it comes to the theme of immigration in “The Pram”, I find it questionable whether the outcome of this story would have been different if, instead of being Polish, Alina had been an Irish babysitter. In this regard, I wish to make some observations about the following phrase: “‘The Pram’ challenges [that Doyle’s “stories ‘ease cultural anxieties surrounding recent inward migration’ (55)” (160)] as Doyle puts forward a rather different setting when compared to the other peacefully resolved stories in *The Deported*. Unlike most of these stories, ‘The Pram’ offers a gloomy portrayal of Irish interculturalism” (Villar Argáiz and Tekin 160). As I wrote in the introduction to this section, I believe that all the stories that I analyse from *The Deported* “offer a gloomy portrayal of Irish interculturalism”. Villar Argáiz and Tekin make this specific criticism only about “The Pram”, because it ends in a murder. However, the two stories analysed above, that is, “57% Irish” and “Black Hoodie”, depict a government with deeply racist individuals in it that are hostile to the immigrant population, and the same can be said about An Garda Síochána. In neither of these two stories, is there ever a positive interaction between the individuals in power and the immigrant characters: nothing indicates that the racists’ attitudes have changed. The difference between these two stories and “The Pram”, is that the immigrant characters in “57% Irish” and “Black Hoodie” succeed in establishing healthy, positive connections to the local population. Alina, instead, is completely

alone in the face of her abusers and the only escape that she sees possible, in the end, is that of acting violently towards them. However, the fact that Alina is Polish should not be read as a condition for her final behaviour, it is not the key factor that makes her have a psychotic episode, but rather the constant abuse that she has to endure in highly difficult social circumstances. To my mind, the other Doylean character who experiences complete solitude, is traumatised by past abuse and experiences mental health struggles is Victor from *Smile*. Thus, perhaps as in Victor's case, with Alina's story Doyle might be pointing at the importance of community and the danger of isolation. Indeed, Alina's solitude springs, partly, from her status as an immigrant, but, as Doyle shows in his other fiction, this is not a condition exclusive to the immigrant. In the end, "The Pram" is a story about dehumanisation provoked by a capitalist view of the world, as embodied by O'Reilly, and what the effect of such dehumanisation can have on the most vulnerable individuals of a society.

3.2.3.6. "*Home to Harlem*"

From the short stories analysed in this chapter, "Home to Harlem" is the one that most clearly denounces the limitations of traditional Irishness. If "57% Irish" places to the fore the impossibility of defining nationality in a manner that englobes all the different experiences and sensitivities of a people, then "Home to Harlem" denounces the exclusive (as opposed to integrative) nature of traditional Irishness. This is represented through the story's protagonist, Declan O'Connor, a young Irish man with an African-American grandfather, who struggles to define his identity. The information that Declan has about his grandfather is minimal, as everything he knows he has learned from his grandmother who, during the Second World War, had a sporadic encounter with an African-American soldier that resulted in the birth of Declan's mother. Declan's grandmother does not even know her lover's first name: only that his surname

is Powell and that he is black. Thus, Declan decides to travel to New York with two objectives: to complete a doctorate on the question of the influence of the Harlem Renaissance on Irish literature, and to find his American family.

The question of Declan's ambiguous identity is put at the forefront of the story. Indeed, the very first scene is telling, as Declan cannot find himself in the university's registry form. The options available to him are: "White, Non-Hispanic; African-American; Hispanic, the rest" (TD 179) and Declan does not fit into any of these categories, leaving the woman in charge no other option than to add "OTHER beside Hispanic. And a little box" for Declan to tick (180). Thus, from the beginning of the story, Declan's condition as Other is established, although this is not explicitly mentioned at any point. During his initial conversation with the professor that is supposed to direct Declan's doctorate, she asks him why he wants to work on the Harlem Renaissance and Ireland, and he responds the following:

He starts with his granny and his grandad. He tells her about Ireland and about being black and Irish. He tells her about first reading *The Souls of Black Folk*, about the question repeated in the first paragraph of the first chapter: 'How does it feel to be a problem?'
—The problem is but, he says. —I'm black and Irish, and that's two fuckin' problems. (185)¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ In his collection of essays *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) "disputed the main principle of the political program of the era's other leading Black American spokesperson, Booker T. Washington". According to Du Bois, "Washington's 'accommodationist' philosophy would doom Black Americans to indefinite subservience to whites". Instead, "Du Bois was convinced that social change could be accomplished only through agitation and protest". Interestingly enough,

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, he described what he called the "double-consciousness" of African Americans:

One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder....He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face" ("The Souls of Black Folk"; omission and emphasis in the original).

Bearing this in mind, one wonders whether it is Declan or Doyle who has not read the entirety of Du Bois' work, as, in my view, this quotation directly addresses the issue that Declan puts to his professor.

According to Declan, in Ireland there is an incompatibility in being black and Irish, as he also tells his professor somewhat later on:

—In Ireland, he told her, —there are rules.
 —You haven't noticed some here?
 —I know, I know, he said. —But, like, here you can be called an African-American or a Native American or a good American or a bad American or a liberal American or a Neo-con whatever-the-fuck American. But you're always American. You're never less American.
 She said nothing; she let him at it.
 —But not in Ireland. You *can* be less Irish. I am. At least, I used to be.
 —Explain.
 —I'm black.
 —And?
 —That's not Irish. Or Irish enough. And my dad used to say there was a Dublin thing too. Dublin wasn't really Ireland.¹⁸⁷ And there's the language. The fuckin' *cúpla focail*. You're not fully Irish if you can't fart in Irish. (212; original emphasis)

Before continuing the analysis of Declan's sentiment, it is important to address a highly apt criticism of this scene that Reddy forwards:

[Declan] tells [the professor] that there are 'rules', and that although she as a black person is no less American than her white fellow citizens, blacks are somehow 'less Irish' than whites. The professor does not dispute Declan's analysis, so I am not sure whether the fundamental misunderstanding is the character's or Doyle's own, but blacks are indubitably 'less American' than whites in the eyes of the majority of white Americans, a view that no adult black American could possibly fail to grasp. Indeed, whiteness remains the *sine qua non* of Americanness, far more important than nation of birth or first language or religion or any other variable. Whether whiteness is a necessary prerequisite to Irishness is in fact a more open question than is its relation to Americanness. (386)

As I see it, Reddy's criticism here goes in the same line as my observation in footnote 186. In many ways, this short story gives off an impression of superficiality and it lacks authenticity, both of which characteristics make the overall quality of the text somewhat doubtful. For example, the following exchange that represents the first interview between Declan and his prospective thesis director would probably be cause for Declan's immediate dismissal in a real academic context. When Declan uses the word "fuckin'", the professor "smiles" and says, "The

¹⁸⁷ Here, the issue that Dublin is not considered to be Irish enough appears again, connecting this story to *A Star* and *The Commitments*, that make the same critique and that reinforce the idea that the Dublin working class, as represented in Doyle's fiction, feel alienated from a particular view of Irishness.

Irish and their famous profanity” (*TD* 184). Declan’s response to this is, in my view, utterly disproportionate, as he asks the professor if she got her position “on a sporting scholarship” and explains: “You were indulging in a bit of the oul’ stereotyping there. The Irish and the profanity, like. So, I kind of thought, you being black and that, you must have got in here on a sporting scholarship. So, was it basketball or the sprinting?” (184). What the objective of this exchange should be is not clear at all. Whether Doyle is trying to make a point about the ubiquitousness of stereotyping, or whether Declan is supposed to be teaching the professor a lesson remains completely out of grasp. Moreover, despite his charge of stereotyping, Declan ends up exploiting his Irishness to impress a young woman whom he likes, because he sees that she finds it interesting: “He’ll give her the whole Irish bit, get in a few *grands*. [Americans] love it” (195; original emphasis), he also drinks Guinness although he “hates” it (195) and when he toasts with “Sláinte”, he thinks, “God, he fuckin’ hates himself” (195).

Returning to Declan’s troubled sentiment towards his identity, at one point he tells his professor that he has “never felt Irish enough” (*TD* 211). Likewise, talking about his mother, Declan explains that “[w]hen she grew up, back then in Ireland, you were Irish or you weren’t, one thing or the other. You couldn’t be both; you couldn’t be black. Has it changed? He doesn’t know. When he’s here he thinks so. When he’s there he’s not so sure” (203). Quite interestingly, from what Declan recounts, it seems that his mother has always tried to minimize the black parts of Declan’s identity: from claiming that her own mother’s stories are “all bullshit” (184), putting a question mark on the account of the love story between Declan’s grandmother and the African-American soldier, to telling Declan, “Look at yourself. You’re not even black” (184). On another occasion, when Declan was a child and his mother had to search his hair for lice with a special comb, she complained about the difficulty of the task. Little Declan, then, had told his mother that his hair “[i]s like yours, Ma”, to which she had responded, “No, it isn’t”, prompting Declan’s insisting response: “It is. All curly” (205). She

had also told him repeatedly that he was not black, specifying: “I’m black but you don’t have to be” (203). What is surprising, if one considers Mrs. O’Connor’s insistence on Declan’s non-blackness, is that every other character that appears in the short story immediately reads Declan as black. The woman with the registry form, assumes that Declan is “African-American” (179), and his supervisor calls him an “Irishman of colour” (183), thus it does not seem likely that Declan actually passes for white, as Mrs. O’Connor would wish. I believe that Mrs. O’Connor’s attitude might rather be indicative of the trouble that she encountered as a result of growing up black in Ireland, an experience that she seems to want to alleviate when it comes to her son, testifying to the problematic nature of being black and Irish. Nevertheless, unlike his mother, Declan uses his feelings of rage at the “pride” and “smugness” of his literature professor back in Ireland (180), and at Irish society in general to try to find out the truth about his origins.

Eventually, Declan succeeds in contacting a man called Franklin whom he believes could be his uncle. The only two connecting pieces of evidence are the man’s surname, Powell, and the fact that this man’s father fought in Scotland during the Second World War. When Franklin Powell offers Declan a picture of Declan’s could-be grandfather, so that Declan can show it to his grandmother and that she might confirm if, indeed, this was her lover, Declan takes an odd decision. Instead of choosing a picture from Powell’s soldier days, Declan chooses a picture of Powell as an old man, some time before his death. This, which will inevitably difficult any recognition on the part of Declan’s grandmother, might be Declan’s attempt to remain in the unknown and keep the possibility alive that he has a family in America. For Declan this is important, it is “the thing that he used to pray to God for – a family that made sense. A photo he could wave at all the fuckers who’d ever looked twice at him, who’d put his colour beside his accent and laughed” (*TD* 209).

In my view, Doyle’s message in this story is that being black does not make you less Irish. After all, despite Declan’s African-American ascendancy, his place of birth, his accent

and his culture are all Irish. Nevertheless, I believe that a great part of the pedagogical value that this story might contain, is undermined by Declan's superficiality. As Reddy writes, "Declan repeatedly sees similarities between black American and black Irish experiences" (386), however, he never seems to go much deeper. For example, he sticks a picture of "Colin Powell on his fuckin' wall" (198), only because of the coincidence between the politician's surname and that of his grandfather. That this man was a collaborator in the Bush administration and responsible for "present[ing] intelligence to the UN that supported the claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction" in 2003, and that "some of the intelligence that Powell had brought before the UN (...) was found to be erroneous" ("Biographies"), is not unknown to Declan, but it does not matter much to him. However, when he ends up meeting his maybe-uncle, Declan asks him whether he is "anything to Colin?" (209) and admits that he is "not even sure what he does", to which Franklin Powell replies, "He invades Iraq more often than is necessary" (209), prompting Declan to say, "Then we're better off without the bollix" (209).

Declan's story ends with many questions unanswered. It is not certain whether he will be completing a doctorate, but he seems to be better situated in his research question than he was at the beginning. Likewise, it is not clear whether Franklin Powell is Declan's uncle nor if they will maintain some sort of relationship. Indeed, the story's most interesting aspect is Declan's protest at the difficulty he encounters in being black and Irish, and this also constitutes the story's main critique.

3.3. Partial Conclusions

In this chapter I have analysed the representation of Irishness in *Paula Spencer* and *The Deported*, two works that have the Celtic Tiger as their historical background. As in the case

of the novels examined in my previous chapters, Doyle continues to deconstruct certain myths that affect the traditional understanding of what it means to be Irish. In the case of Paula, it is principally the myth according to which Ireland became a successful country with the Celtic Tiger phenomenon, a vision that Paula questions by pointing out her own paradoxical status as a poor Irish woman. The assumption that *The Deportees* contests, on the other hand, is that to be Irish one needs to be white, as Doyle demonstrates specifically through the character of Declan O'Connor in "Home to Harlem".

A crucial vision that both books put forward, in my opinion, is that a multicultural Ireland should be seen as a welcome development for the country. By having Paula reject her intrusive thoughts in which she blames the immigrant population for her situation, Doyle contests a dangerous discourse that attacks some of the most vulnerable members of our current societies (like refugees) and that, thus, avoids a revision of the status quo. Indeed, Paula demonstrates that her predicament has not been caused by any immigrant taking her job, but by the consistent failure from Irish institutions to protect her. Similarly, *The Deportees* does not fall short in its critique of certain Irish institutions, such as the government and the police, in promoting racist attitudes instead of combating them. As I argued in relation to "57% Irish", Doyle seems to suggest that the immigrant population means an enrichment for the Irish population. Both Ray Brady and the anonymous protagonist fall in love with immigrant women, and the possibility of such relationships is presented as beneficial to the two men: Ray becomes a more tolerant person, and the anonymous teenager seems to learn a lot from Ms Nigeria. Additionally, the fact that Doyle contests the presence of whiteness in the definition of Irishness, would appear to indicate that he is interested in continuing to record and to analyse the changes that take place in Ireland.

Regarding Doyle's more traditional writing, with the case of Paula, it is clear that Doyle has also continued to place often-marginalised voices at the centre of his narrative. With Paula,

as with Henry Smart, Doyle shows how pervasive the effects of poverty are, from affecting Paula's perception of time, as she is forced to live in the present, to her physical integrity. Also, like his previous novels, Doyle's *Paula Spencer* shows a disengagement with religion and a rejection of a nationalist mindset. The latter is exemplified by Paula's dislike for Sinn Féin, the party that her abusive husband used to vote for.

The Deportees too, despite its superficiality in its treatment of racism in Ireland, reinforces notions put forward in Doyle's previous work. In this collection, his protagonists are also people often denied a voice in society, especially when they are members of the immigrant population. As in the case of Paddy Clarke's and Victor Forde's fathers, who expressed their view of the Church representatives as far removed from their working-class reality, *The Deportees* also shows the extent of the remove between such characters as the Minister from "57% Irish" or O'Reilly from "The Pram" and the working-class characters such as Ray, Darya or Alina. Likewise, the suspicious nature of the Minister, who makes an open show of his nationalism, connects this character to figures like Jack Dalton, Alfie Gandon, Ivan Reynolds, Paddy Clarke's teachers, certain religious figures and Charlo Spencer. The difference between Dublin and the rest of Ireland is also brought back in "Home to Harlem", creating a thematic bridge to Doyle's first novel, *The Commitments*.

Conclusions

In this thesis, I have analysed a number of novels and a short-story collection that cover the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first, and represent Irish society, especially the Dubliner working-class, as portrayed by Roddy Doyle. As I have attempted to show, many of the themes treated in these works are recurrent, something which allows us to draw conclusions regarding Doyle's concerns in his treatment of the working class. In my class-based approach to Doyle's fiction, I have also detected patterns and commonalities that I highlight below.

With respect to my principal aim, which was to examine how the social class of Doyle's characters conditions their experience of life, I have found that most of the characters analysed in this thesis are, indeed, impacted by their social circumstances. In the case of Henry Smart, his childhood in the Dublin slums leaves an everlasting stamp on his character, which prompts him to fight for a new and distinct Ireland in many of the country's violent struggles. The hunger, the deaths of his relatives and the violence on the streets, all largely caused by crippling poverty, are crucial factors behind Henry's wish for a social revolution. In a similar manner, for the characters examined in Chapter Two, their social class intersects with the city's geography, setting them up for particular experiences, such as the encounter of Paddy Clarke with Charles Leavy, whose family has been relocated from the inner-city slums. Similarly, Doyle seems to imply in *Smile* that the sexual abuse that Victor suffers occurs because his class located him within a specific area of Dublin and forced him to attend a specific type of school. The negative treatment that other characters, such as Paddy Clarke, Paula Spencer or the students in *The Dead Republic*, also receive in school seems to suggest that this is a common issue in working-class life, as represented by Doyle. Another habitual element in these characters' lives seems to be fear: in the same way that Paddy and Victor dread their teachers'

blows, Veronica and Paula worry about the consequences of unemployment and poverty, and Jimmy, Sr., suffers from panic attacks when he loses his job. A further element that appears in Doyle's fiction, especially in connection to women, is the relation between the physical body and manual labour. In the case of Sharon, the experience of performing a manual job while dealing with the consequences of pregnancy is presented as both difficult and problematic. Paula suffers greatly from the physical deterioration that comes from her work as a cleaner; the fact that she cannot rest for fear of losing her employment renders her situation even more appalling. I would argue that, taking all of these examples into account, it is plausible to suggest that Doyle's fiction presents social class as a determining element in the lives of his characters.

If Doyle's novels show some of the negative impacts of belonging to the working-class, I maintain that it also portrays the continuity of this group's predicament through history. My approach to Doyle's fiction in a chronological order allows for the following observation to be made: in the century between the birth of Henry Smart and the lives portrayed in *The Deportees*, many of the issues plaguing the working class have improved only slightly. Indeed, in *The Dead Republic*, Henry observes the differences between the Free State as he left it in 1922 and the Republic of Ireland, on his return in 1951. His general appreciation is that the country is in a worse state than when he left it, ridden with unemployment, affected by drug-abuse and without having successfully combatted poverty. Jimmy, Sr. is presented as a victim of the crisis that afflicted Ireland in the 1980s; but the fact that his friend Bimbo is also fired from his job reflects how common this experience was for the working-class. It might be plausible, then, to expect a story of success in the fiction written in the context of the Celtic Tiger years, the economic boom that allegedly situated Ireland at the very pinnacle of the world's economies. Nevertheless, the portrayal of Paula Spencer and her family, as well as the representation of the neglected state of the public health service, as seen in the hospital depicted in *Paula Spencer*, speak of an alternative reality: that, even in a period of splendour, the

working class remained tied to the bottom of the economic ladder. In Doyle's fiction, the working class has left the slums and lives in specific suburbs, but, apart from this, he does not show any significant improvement in their material conditions from the texts set further in the past to those set in more recent times.

This leads me to my thesis statement, which states that Doyle's fiction for adults expresses a concern over what it means to belong to the Dublin working-class, and proposes that class conditions his characters' alignment with the traditional Irish identity "rooted in Gaelic, Catholic, republican and rural Ireland" (McCarthy 13). I believe that throughout this thesis I have successfully argued for the validity of this thesis statement. Because of the manner in which social class affects Doyle's characters, as I described above, they are often pressured by their immediate concerns to act from abstract notions, such as nationality. This is not to say that these characters are not reflective, but that they often have little time or do not have the necessary tools to carry out deeper vital reflection. This point is given especial visibility in *A Star*, where Henry Smart is constantly shown as struggling to understand concepts such as national sentiment. More to the point, however, is the manner in which Doyle presents Henry as radically different to the Irish Volunteers during the Easter Rebellion. While the Volunteers are devout and willing to die for their country, Henry despises religion and believes in social revolution. The fact that Henry is aware of the bias that the Volunteers—and later the leaders of Sinn Féin—have against the working-class, attests to their mutual acknowledgement of social divisions and, by extension, distinct experiences of Irishness. Through his love for jazz music, Henry also highlights the contradictions in the romantic view of nationalists, who considered this type of music anti-Irish, since he is a national hero who fought in the struggles for Ireland's independence. In a similar way, Henry is acutely aware of his erasure from history, as attested by the fact that there are no official records about him or his family. Doyle seems

clearly to be suggesting that the experience of the working-class was not taken into account in the formative period of independent Ireland.

Henry's non-conformist identity, according to the tenets of Irish nationalism, is mirrored in Doyle's other characters. As I have argued throughout my chapters, Doyle's characters are not religious. Even for those such as Paddy or Victor, who grow up at a time when the majority of the population was (or wished to seem) highly devout, religion is only ever an external factor: it never guides their thoughts or action. Moreover, the representation of religion (in those cases where it is represented) is mostly negative. At all events, it is never portrayed as an element that brings comfort or solace to these characters' often troubled lives. The same can be argued for nationalism: none of the characters discussed in this thesis are seen engaging in activities that are related to the Gaelic past or are concerned with such issues as the reunification of Ireland. The only individual who, in this sense, could be called *republican* is Miss O'Shea, (not analysed in this thesis and, in any case, a character who represents an exception). What is more, the characters that are shown to express a romanticised view of nationalism are often presented in a dubious light: they are often hypocritical, deeply conservative, like Jack Dalton, Ivan Reynolds or the Minister in "57% Irish", and sometimes even criminal, like Alfie Gandon or Charlo Spencer. Again, Doyle establishes a clear difference between these characters, who, except for Jack, Ivan and Charlo, also belong to the middle- and upper-classes. Continuing with the representation of Doyle's working-class characters, another critical difference that is established between his protagonists and secondary characters is their urban origin. The *Dublinness* of characters such as Henry, Jimmy Rabbitte, Jr., and Declan O'Connor is portrayed as a factor that sets their experience apart from that of other Irish people: all three characters declare that they are seen as less Irish for belonging to the city. Thus, in McCarthy's definition of an Irish identity "rooted in Gaelic, Catholic, republican and rural Ireland" (13), there is no available space for Doyle's characters. To this enumeration, *The*

Deportees, adds the problem of skin colour: as Declan and his mother convey, being black and Irish seems to be perceived as incompatible. However, in this collection, Doyle forwards the idea that Ireland is enriched by its recent development into a multicultural country, underlining the absurdity of determining a person's identity according to the colour of their skin or their place of birth.

As I have also argued in my thesis, perhaps in the absence of the unifying elements that traditional Irish identity provides, Doyle's fiction places a great importance on community. His male characters, especially, depend on their social networks for their mental wellbeing. Whenever there is a break with this community, as in the case of Jimmy, Sr., or Paddy, who quarrel with friends, this event is portrayed as a tragic event in these characters' lives. Moreover, of all the characters that I analyse in this thesis, the two that have the most tragic stories are also those who are lonely: Victor and Alina. Of course, in both cases, these characters have strong reasons for their particular predicaments: Victor is traumatised by his rape as a child and Alina is systematically mistreated by her employers. Nevertheless, the fact that they lack a circle of friends or a family that could support them undoubtedly makes their situation even worse. Victor, who has a short glimpse of what his life could be like if he belonged to group, shows a great improvement in his mental health until everything is shattered by the novel's tragic end.

To complete this line of argument, I find it necessary to also address Doyle's portrayal of characters that do not belong to the working class. I have already commented above on several common traits that these characters have. However, before concluding this portrayal, I believe that it is important to acknowledge that Doyle's representation of middle- or upper-class characters, or of figures of authority, is never profound or complete. These characters are often depicted through the eyes or thoughts of Doyle's protagonists, so that their thoughts are seldom heard. Taking this into account, the presentation of characters that do not belong to the

working-class is often negative. For example, in the Last Roundup Trilogy, the powerful figures are presented as cynical, deeply conservative and driven by economic interests. Likewise, the representatives of religious institutions are seen as hypocritical and malevolent (such as the Mother Superior at Miss O'Shea's school or the Brother who rapes Victor). Similarly, in *Paula Spencer*, the family that employs Paula and then vanishes without a word gives the impression of being utterly indifferent to her, and in "The Pram", Alina's employers use highly questionable tactics to control her. In *The Deportees*, both the Government as a whole, and An Garda Síochána, in particular, are presented as deeply racist.

The differences between the social classes as conveyed by Roddy Doyle, lead me to believe that this, to a considerable extent, confirms Pierse's contention that "'differences of behaviour'" in the working class "expressed themselves in 'a specific lifestyle' that was radically averse to the norms of the Irish state: 'the particularity of the working class appears from whatever aspect one studies it, and it asserts itself *as a pole of differentiation in Irish society*'" (Pierse; *Writing* 25-6; original emphasis).

Implications

Doyle's work gives voice to characters who often do not find the opportunity to express themselves, whether this is to celebrate their lives or to complain. None of the characters examined in this thesis, with the exception of Henry Smart, seek a political solution to their problems and, like Paula Spencer, seem to feel abandoned by the State. As I have attempted to show throughout this thesis, many of the issues raised in Doyle's work find resonance in the real world: unemployment, sexual abuse, racism and alcoholism are only a few examples of this. Thus, Doyle's work brings an awareness of the realities experienced by a large part of the population in Dublin, realities that people belonging to a different social class might not be

aware of. What is more, by showing how many of his characters' problems are caused by an unjust system, Doyle's work contributes to breaking age-old stereotypes that portray the working-class as lazy or as deserving of their misfortune. In light of this, I believe that my thesis shows the continuing importance of working-class studies and of studying the fiction of writers such as Roddy Doyle. Doyle's fiction shows the urgency of improving the material conditions for a large number of people. By humanising this sector of the population often referred to in numbers and percentages (thinking particularly here of the treatment that unemployment or immigration receives in news reports), Doyle places his characters on a plane that is closer to more privileged people. Like Ann Jay, the medical practitioner I quoted in my foreword (see p. 5), people reading *The Woman* might be more benevolent or considerate in their regard of a person who suffers from alcoholism. Someone reading *Paula Spencer* might reflect more on how they treat the person who cleans their house. Someone reading "Black Hoodie" might reconsider their feelings of suspicion when they encounter a teenager wearing a hoodie, or a black person walking into a shop.

This brings me to another point that I raised in my foreword, regarding the potential that Doyle's texts have to bring about change in society. After my analysis of Doyle's fiction, I feel quite confident in saying that his work is not revolutionary. In none of his novels or short stories does Doyle point towards a clear solution to improve his characters' lives. Apart from Henry Smart, who is willing to fight to death for his ideals, none of the other characters are seen carrying out any sort of social activism or protest. Nevertheless, because of the characteristics that I highlighted out above, I emphatically believe that Doyle's work holds the *potential* for revolution. Not only can Doyle's stories shake the conscience of the individual reader, but, taught and discussed in a classroom, for example, they can be used to effectively debate such themes as social justice or empathy through a dramatic and realistic contextualisation of these characters' experiences, thoughts and words.

Further Research

Through my analysis of Roddy Doyle's work for this thesis, several other possible approaches suggested themselves to me concerning how Doyle's work could be studied in further research. As these matters fell outside the direct scope of my concerns, they were unable to be accommodated in this project; however, I believe that they would make a positive contribution to Doyle studies.

A very obvious research option, of course, is that of continuing to apply the approach used in this thesis to the fiction that has remained out of the scope of this document as well as to any works that Doyle might be publishing in the future; there are, however, several other issues to consider.

As I pointed out in Chapter One, in relation to *A Star*, I believe that interesting insights might be drawn from analysing Doyle's work through the lens of trauma studies. The theme of trauma in Doyle's fiction and his representation of it are topics that remain to be explored in a consistent fashion. In this regard, Downum has made the following observation concerning *Paula Spencer*: "Roy Foster has described Irish cultural memory as exhibiting a type of 'intentional amnesia,' in which events that trouble the smooth arc of nationalist history are excluded from the narrative. Doyle works with the same dynamic, but transposes it from the collective to the individual, showing how moments of conflict and failure produce gaps in Paula's memory" (80). Downum differentiates between repressed memories and an amnesia produced by "a neurobiological inability to cope with the traumatic event as it occurs" (80) and adds that "[c]rucially, much in Doyle's narrative highlights the importance of remembering and associates forgetting with guilt" (80). As I have argued in my thesis, Paula is not the only character who struggles with memory gaps: this is also the case with Henry Smart and Victor Forde. In both of these instances, I believe that their amnesia or difficulty with memory has

been caused by traumatic events in their lives. Moreover, in certain cases, particularly in *The Woman* and in *Smile*, the narrative structure is affected by Doyle's representation of his characters' difficulty with recollection. A comparative analysis of the novels mentioned above would, I think, throw an interesting light on Doyle's treatment of trauma and its connections onto individual memory and, more broadly, onto the nation's past.

With respect to memory loss, however, trauma is not the element portrayed as its cause. This leads me to my next proposal for research on Doyle's fiction, that of analysing certain novels through Age Studies. Increasingly, Doyle's texts are populated by people, especially men, of an advanced age. This was the case in *The Dead Republic*, but many stories in *Bullfighting* deal with what looks like midlife crises, and in *Life Without Children*, most stories focus on a character who is either close to retirement or has already retired. Many of these characters seem to deal with an uncomfortable reality, namely, that of an unreliable memory. This is also a crucial theme in *Love* (see plot summaries). Indeed, Doyle has acknowledged his growing interest in this matter (see "Interview" lines 262 and ff.) and it seems likely that he will be producing work that deals with the implications of ageing, such as a complicated relationship with memory, but also other subjects like physical pain, illness, the empty-nest syndrome, or the death of parents in old age.

With reference to illness and death, another subject of relevance is Doyle's representation of the Covid-19 pandemic in his short-story collection *Life Without Children*. As humanity deals with the myriad consequences of this pandemic, which has had such a marked impact on people at both collective and individual levels, I believe that research on the fictional treatment of this phenomenon is of considerable contemporary relevance. Not only do people continue to resort to fiction in extraordinary circumstances (perhaps seeking comfort; perhaps distraction); in addition to this, however, Bulfin describes how "sales of classic contagion novels, such as Albert Camus's *The Plague* (1947), have dramatically increased,

while pandemic movies such as *Outbreak* (dir. Wolfgang Petersen, 1995) and *Contagion* (dir. Steven Soderbergh, 2011) have experienced huge spikes in viewership in recent weeks”, but, as the same author notes, “[p]andemic fiction has a long history as imaginative writers across the centuries have offered us fictional versions of plagues and epidemics, often in response to real-world outbreaks of infectious diseases”. In this sense, Doyle’s contribution to this literary trope calls out for further study in the context of one of the most important crises in the current century. To cite from Bulfin again, “it seems likely that the Covid-19 pandemic will be the event that marks a (...) shift into the twenty-first century proper from what can be thought of as a long twentieth century. Whatever is to come, this shift will probably be accompanied in the literary sphere by a new genre of pandemic fiction which is no longer speculative”.

Finally, as I suggested in the introduction to my thesis, I believe that a study of Doyle’s representation of the 2008 economic crisis, a theme especially relevant in *Bullfighting*, might also give rise to interesting results. I would suggest an analysis of the consequences of this crisis on Doyle’s working-class characters, focussing on economic downturns, unemployment, and social upheaval, also taking into account the real-life implications that this had, following the pattern that I have begun in this thesis. In this sense, the historical dimension of working-class experience as fictionalised by Doyle that I refer to in my conclusions can be progressively completed. Additionally, this could be part of a broader comparative study that examines how other contemporary Irish authors represent the impact of the financial crisis on working-class communities, and would further enrich the discussion of class in Doyle’s fiction.

Similarly, taking my cue from the discussion of Jimmy’s case in *The Van* (see p. 189, fn. 142), it would be of considerable interest to explore the intersection of unemployment or economic struggle with male midlife crises, as represented in *Bullfighting*. More generally, I think that my analysis of the male characters in the Last Roundup Trilogy, the Barrytown Trilogy, *Smile*, but also Paddy Clarke’s father in *Paddy Clarke*, points to the potential to

explore how Doyle portrays male working-class identity in relation to other themes, apart of unemployment, such as fatherhood, and the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles.

I hope that these suggestions will encourage ever more fruitful research into one of Ireland's most relevant contemporary writers.

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Appendix 1: Interview

I interviewed Roddy Doyle in his office in Dame Street, Dublin, on Thursday, the 14th of September 2023 at 2 p.m.

Roddy Doyle offers me a comfortable seat beside his desk in his tiny office, which is located in the very centre of Dublin, in front of Dublin Castle. After offering me some water, he finishes typing something in his computer and I take the chance to study the room. The decoration is minimal, except for several framed contemporary pictures and photographs that hang on the walls. Once he has finished his work, he directs his attention to me and signals with a nod and a smile that he is ready to begin the interview, a gesture which he continues using throughout our conversation to indicate that he has finished answering a question. Thus, without any previous small talk we delve right in.

A note about the transcription: I have used short dashes (-) to indicate places in which Doyle interrupts an idea or thought in mid-sentence, usually to correct himself, whereas I have used three dots (...) to indicate that he has left a phrase unfinished, suspended. I have used three dots in square brackets [...] to indicate that there are some words missing (either because they are unrelated to the interview, or because they are unintelligible). Last, I have chosen not to transcribe repetitions (I I I think), to make the comprehension of the text easier.

- 1 **Ll: Thank you so much. Alright, so my first question is if you are aware of what the**
- 2 **academic world says about your work.**
- 3 **RD: No, not at all.**

4 **Ll: No? And you don't care about it?**

5 RD: I don't know if it's quite- I wouldn't care much about it, that's for sure, and I wouldn't be
6 indifferent about it, I find it very flattering, but it's not my world and- My working day, ideally
7 is writing and when I'm not working, I don't want to really know anything about my work or
8 think about my work. And I think it could be a bit like social media, it could be quite distracting,
9 you know? So, I'm not aware. And I know that there are a couple of books being written that
10 I'd either I'm the subject or one of the subjects. I haven't read them. I read an essay about myself
11 once. I didn't recognise the person in it.

12 **Ll: Really?**

13 RD: Yeah. I stay away from all this, you know? But, as I said, very content that there is an
14 interest in my work, you know?

15 **Ll: One of the reasons for my studying literature is that I believe it has the potential to**
16 **make the world a better place, and especially with works as the ones you produce where**
17 **we can find characters, for example, I'm thinking of Paula Spencer now, that go through**
18 **situations that are unimaginable for some groups of people but very real to others, and I**
19 **would like to know if you believe that literature has this power and if maybe this is one**
20 **of the reasons why you write.**

21 RD: When I'm- When I'm writing, when I've got a, when I'm writing about- For example, I just
22 finished a new novel with Paula Spencer in it, you know? And I'm working on that. Well, I'm

23 finished, but, when I was working on that, all I thought about every page is: is it good? Are
 24 these her thoughts? Is this the way she would think? Are these the words that she would use?
 25 Is this her going up the stairs? Really? Am I describing- is this *her* reaction as *she* looks out
 26 the window and not my reaction? So, all my consideration goes into the quality of the work.
 27 And that has always been the case, because I think, if I started thinking about, "This piece of
 28 work might have an impact to social or a political impact on the world", it'll be a bad piece of
 29 writing. It'll be well-intentioned, perhaps, you know, but it'll be- it won't be very good.

30 So, I am aware over the years that a lot of women have seen the television series *Family*
 31 or read the books, Paula Spencer books, and have seen elements of their own lives there and
 32 have drawn comfort from that. One or two women have literally told me that they thought that
 33 they were the only woman in a violent relationship until they read the book. And I like to hear
 34 that, although I'd much rather that there were no women in violent relationships or men in
 35 violent relationships, but it's not why I write. And I know that *The Woman Who Walked into*
 36 *Doors* is on the reading list for medical students and some medical schools, so that they're men
 37 particularly, but also the women, the medical doctors, cause there's a class issue as well.
 38 Middle-class people looking at working-class people and making assumptions about working-
 39 class people. And again, I find- I think to myself that's great, but it's not why I write, so...

40 I'm often drawn to working class characters and of necessity, then, you're talking
 41 sometimes about very tough lives, you know. But that's because they are the subjects that I'm
 42 drawn to. They're what I find most fulfilling. I'll give you an example. I wrote a film script
 43 about a homeless woman. It was called- The film is called *Rosie*, it was released in 2018. It
 44 was about a woman, about twenty-four hours in her life as she looks for somewhere to live
 45 temporarily for herself and her children and her partner. And the people involved in the making
 46 of it, we all, I think, would be happy that we did a good job. We made a nice film, a very good
 47 film, very cheap film. A lot of people in Ireland watched it, but there are more people homeless

48 today than there were when... So, I think, if you tried to change the world with a piece of work,
 49 your mind will stray from what you should be [...] Well, I, in my particular type of work,
 50 where it's all about words, I'd be straying from what I should be thinking about.

51 **I have a few questions about *A Star Called Henry*. Many critics seem to agree on the fact**
 52 **that, in the first book of the trilogy, in *Star*, Henry gives up his beliefs and principles on**
 53 **a whim, and I think that they tend to forget how young he is., and I would like to know**
 54 **what your view is on this.**

55 RD: I don't think there's anything whimsical about it. Last night or yesterday, all day yesterday,
 56 I went to the three Sean O'Casey plays. They're all, three of them are on in the Abbey Theatre
 57 and you can go- So, I started at 12:30 in the morning and stayed till 22:00 and saw the three
 58 plays in the order not that they were written in, but as they're presented, so 1916, 1920 and
 59 1922. That's seven- six years and when you're living those years, it's a long, long, long, long
 60 time and Henry lives those years and he's a very young man. And, so, he experiences and he
 61 witnesses idealistic people becoming quite cynical, he sees beliefs- he sees things that he
 62 believed in, if you can see beliefs, but he sees them being pushed astray and he becomes
 63 disillusioned. So yes, he's very young and we are, you know, our minds are still forming when
 64 we're that age. But also, he is, if you like, very much influenced by what he sees, what he
 65 experiences and disappointment. It's not uncommon among the old revolutionaries, see,
 66 because, you know, what do you do when the revolution is over? So, I don't think it's a
 67 whimsical thing at all. No, I don't. I mean, I haven't read the book since I wrote it. No, but I
 68 don't think it's whimsical. I think it's a- I think it worked out, you know?

69 **LI: Yeah, I think so too. Like, that's my- I've read it three times... [...] So, I think that, I**

70 **agree with what you say. And then there is another scholar in particular who says that—**
71 **I won't name names—that Henry is not a revolutionary, but a reactionary. He compares**
72 **Henry's lack of agency with the character of Mullholand in O'Flaherty.**

73 RD: In what?

74 **Ll: In a play by O'Flaherty.**

75 RD: Liam O'Flaherty.

76 **So, this is a very idealistic character who wants to- He talks about slum idealism and he**
77 **compares O'Flaherty's character, who believes in the revolution, with Henry. And this**
78 **critic says that Henry, as I said, is a reactionary. And what I thought is that, maybe, for**
79 **you, writing from the vantage point of the twenty-first century and knowing how history**
80 **went down, that maybe this influenced your... Well, that you maybe transmitted this in**
81 **Henry.**

82 RD: Yeah, I mean, it's a novel, for a start. It's not an attempt at writing the history of Ireland,
83 never was. It's a novel and I play with the history of Ireland. And I don't know if you're familiar
84 with the word piety. Some of the pieties, you know, some of the almost- it's almost the religious
85 rules around Irish nationalism, so I was having to a degree, a certain amount of fun. And people
86 my age who grew up in Ireland, I think, would appreciate that to a degree, because the centenary
87 of the 1916 Rising was seven years ago, and I was in primary school for the fiftieth anniversary
88 of the 1916 Rising and a lot of the- and we're talking about men, a lot of the men who were in
89 the GPO or were involved in the War of Independence were still alive. The president, for

90 example, Éamon de Valera was still very much alive. The Prime Minister, the Taoiseach at the
 91 time, a man called Sean Lemass. He was a sixteen-year-old boy in not- a bit like Henry in 1916.
 92 So, yes, I think the whole- in the fiftieth- The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary was very
 93 much the triumph of good over evil: Good being Ireland and the [...] and the bad being the
 94 British, the British Empire and the English, basically, and Protestantism. And in the fifty years
 95 that came after that, Ireland changed so much, so completely. So, it's inevitable that me, sitting
 96 at writing in 2000 or, it was- the book came out in 1999, so, say 1997, I'm writing away and
 97 it's inevitable that some of this living goes into the character. I wouldn't be writing it, if it hadn't
 98 happened to be, because, as I said, I'm not interested in recording. Liam O'Flaherty wrote much
 99 nearer the event, Sean O'Casey wrote a couple of years after the event, I didn't, and I wasn't
 100 interested in trying to copy them.

101 Henry witnesses the death of his brother and tuberculosis was a huge killer. My father,
 102 who was born in 1923, he thought that around about half the boys in his primary school class
 103 died of tuberculosis, you know.

104 **Ll: It's terrible.**

105 RD: Yeah, it's terrible, but I mean, it's a living thing. I mean, he died. My father died nine years
 106 ago, so he was ninety and he- but I would, I would hear these things as he told them, that so
 107 many boys in bare feet... and his mother hitting him because he took his shoes off, when she
 108 was so annoyed that he took his shoes off, because she was so proud that he had shoes. So, and
 109 that's my father, not my grandfather or my great-grandfather. My father, you know. So, there's
 110 an element of me playing with the pieties of Irish history and then, actually, going back, so
 111 Henry, he's, you know, he witnesses the death of his brother and he's helpless, he can't do
 112 anything about it. So, he's emasculated, you know. And in a sense, as a young man, and he's

113 only a boy, he's a little boy, but, as a young man, he can't save his brother. And then he meets
 114 and becomes, as many did, including Sean O'Casey- He goes into Liberty Hall and he meets,
 115 in the case of Henry, James Connolly, in the case of Sean O'Casey, James Larkin, Jim Larkin,
 116 whose statue is on O'Connell Street [here Doyle imitates the statue's famous pose with uplifted
 117 arms and open hands], the union leader. And so, he does become more politically formed. But
 118 when he goes into the GPO, it's for a workers' republic and that's not what- and he knows quite
 119 quickly that's not going to happen.

120 So, again, it's disillusionment. He becomes disillusioned. He becomes almost, in a way,
 121 middle-aged in his, in his view, at the age of fourteen, fifteen or sixteen, you know? And to a
 122 degree, yeah, he reacts to what happens, but it's also... In the later books, I think it's more
 123 reactive. In the first book, I think he's more- There's much more belief in what- he actually
 124 becomes disillusioned. And I think because he's highly intelligent as well. I mean, he's a, what
 125 we'd call a spoofer. He exaggerates things, he makes more of things. And again, it's a novel.
 126 It's not a record of history. But I think I would disagree with that. I'd, not with any anger and
 127 not with any- I would actually disagree with that, you know. Again, it's a novel. So, it's not
 128 even a criticism really, because it's a novel. It's a story. It's not supposed to be about a real
 129 historical figure. Great, great fun writing about a fictional figure meeting real figures. You
 130 know, like Michael Collins. Just, real glee doing that. You know, it's as happy a thing as a
 131 writer can do.

132 **Ll: That's so cool and you did it really well. I think it's my favourite, *A Star Called Henry*.**
 133 **So, more about it. You were talking about Victor's death and I wanted to ask you about**
 134 **this too, because this is something that occurred to me while I was rereading the novel**
 135 **and it's that there are two scenes from Henry's childhood, one being Victor's death and**
 136 **the other one is Henry's auto destructive fit when he knows that he's not going to see his**

137 **dad again when he starts banging his head against the floor. And I think that nowadays**
 138 **it's really hard to see, like, if you watch a film, modern film, or read a-, well, maybe not**
 139 **so much in literature, but we're not often confronted with violence against children.**
 140 **We're not shown it in so much detail, you know. And I wanted to ask you what you were**
 141 **trying to- What effect did you want to achieve in the reader, you know? Showing this, all**
 142 **this pain and this hurt.**

143 RD: Well, I wanted to show what was there. [...] When I'm writing or when I'm- I assume it's
 144 the same for all writers, when you write you want to make it as good and as vivid as... You
 145 know? And I mean this word in its broadest sense, as entertaining-

146 [An interruption follows here, as the lady from Doyle's neighbouring office requests his help
 147 to open her office door. As Doyle comes back, I briefly remind him of where we had stopped]

148 RD: You know, you just- He's denied so much, really. Including, you know, look- Even
 149 knowledge of how many brothers or sisters he actually had or where they went, their own, they,
 150 you know, the undocumented, literally, I think [...]. And there's an element again, I'm thinking
 151 about my father's side of the family. He, his grandmother was born in a workhouse, like a
 152 Victorian workhouse and when my father tried to find solid information about her, she lived to
 153 be a hundred, you know, so she was alive up to the 1950s. And he couldn't find solid
 154 information. And that's the reality of the working class if you go back several generations. And
 155 the mortality rate in Dublin at the turn of the twentieth century was higher than possibly any
 156 other European country, including Moscow, which was on the verge of revolution, you know.
 157 So, you become, when you look at these figures and you're looking at the living conditions of
 158 people, that it has to be stark, you can't romanticise it, you know. And then Henry just has a

159 glimpse of his father. And I know, like, the father is no longer the figure that the father used to
 160 be. And, like, children have been very successfully and lovingly reared without the presence
 161 of the father. But, he has a glimpse of his father, and he's carried by his father, you know, so
 162 late in life, really, but him and his brother have this great insight of what this could have been.
 163 And the father rescues them and brings them down to this place, this secret place. And then
 164 gone, you know.

165 And that's why, I mean, again, deliberately-, you know, when I was writing that book,
 166 bear in mind that the first three, the kind of Jimmy Rabbitte books [...] we had called them, I
 167 was a happy slave to realism. With Paula Spencer, even more so. Every word had to be that
 168 real woman's words. This time, quite deliberately, this is my fifth book, if I remember right.
 169 Quite deliberately, I was giving myself more elbow room, as we say. I was deliberately bending
 170 the rules. I was making more of the story than was actually there. A lot of what he does is kind
 171 of heightened or exaggerated. You know, leaving at that first time he has sex with Miss O'Shea
 172 and the nipple marks on the- [he gestures towards his forehead and laughs].

173 **Ll: That's great, though. So, the last question about this, about *A Star Called Henry*. I'm**
 174 **from Spain, right. And when I think of our history, I often wonder what would have**
 175 **happened if Franco's coup hadn't succeeded and the values put forth by the artists and**
 176 **the politicians of the Republic that we had, had prospered. And reading your book and**
 177 **imagining what Ireland could have been like if, instead of de Valera, James Connolly had**
 178 **become, I don't know, the president. Do you think that Ireland would be a different place?**

179 RD: I think it would have gotten- To a degree- I mean, it's a strange one because again, we start
 180 thinking as we do now and superimposing our, things we kind of take for granted, like even
 181 the status of women and life expectancy. Like, we add decades, expected decades to our lives.

182 So, we're a bit shocked sometimes, when we realise that somebody was considered an old
183 character, yet they're only thirty-seven, you know? So, I think it's a- I think if you can kind of
184 lift yourself from those presumptions or whatever, I think we would have, possibly, have got
185 to something as, socially, some of what we have now here in this country sooner. Divorce
186 wouldn't have come in the 1990s. It would have been possibly there when it was everywhere
187 else in Western Europe. And then there's the tolerance, the level of tolerance that there is in the
188 country now for those who are a bit different and totally absent in the first decades, right up to
189 possibly when I was a child in the country. So, I think we would have got where we are sooner.

190 But I think also if there'd been- You see, we assume as well if, for example, as you
191 said, James Connolly had become the Prime Minister, the Taoiseach, or the, you know, the
192 president doesn't really have any power. But if Connolly and people like Connolly had become
193 the leaders of this new state, what's to say that there wouldn't have been a rebellion against
194 them fifteen years into the new state, you know and I think one of the good things about this
195 country is that there's been a, the belief in democracy became embedded very, very quickly.
196 Very, very quickly. And the guns that were buried and then, leaving aside Northern Ireland,
197 the guns that were buried here were- stayed buried. And my father has a story that his father,
198 who was involved in the IRA, had buried his gun somewhere and when World War One was
199 declared and he joined, as my father did, he was only 16, joined the kind of- as in Britain, they
200 call Dad's Army. You know, the reserve. He went through fields and with my father, and they
201 dug up the gun and it was totally rusted and useless. Yeah, and that's what happened. And the
202 belief [...] something going right, right back to the very beginning of the state. The decision
203 not to arm the police. Like, such a brave thing to do, because they were so- like, violence was
204 lurking around every corner. But, they made a decision.

205 So, economically the place was a disaster. The level of, you know, poverty, the
206 conservatism allied to the Church, but also, you know, economics and religion side by side

207 both keeping people down. Dreadful. But- and that's never really been sorted. The Church, yes,
 208 but the economics, no. But lots of other things slow coming into the country, but the firm belief
 209 in boring democracy, elections, coalitions. People who don't necessarily agree, really don't
 210 want to particularly stay in the same room, but somehow or other, they believe that this is what
 211 you do. And that's stayed steady. And it's not the only country... but, you know, when you go
 212 through Western Europe and, you know, you've got the Nordic countries, possibly, and you've
 213 got Holland and maybe Belgium. Belgium had a shocking empire. Brutal. Look, it's quite an
 214 achievement, really, to have a working democracy for [...] years and it's still, there's no sign
 215 of that being nibbled away just yet.

216 **Ll: Now, I know that you are a writer and, as you said, you're not trying to change**
 217 **anything or improve anything, you're just writing. So, I know that you don't have to**
 218 **provide any sort of solution. But when I read about, for example, Henry Smart, Jimmy**
 219 **Rabbitte Jr, Paula Spencer, and they are characters who are aware that they have been**
 220 **left behind by society, but you never show them or you or the book never shows them**
 221 **taking any political action, you know?**

222 RD: Well, it depends what you decide is political. If being political means joining a political
 223 party or a movement or an organisation, you're right. Partly, because I don't think they do, but
 224 partly, it's bad storytelling. Do you mean, what do you want Jimmy rather to do? Form a band
 225 or join the Labour Party? Which will I read: Jimmy Rabbitte, young man from the north side
 226 of Dublin, joins the Labour Party. Good luck with that. Forms a band. Oh yeah. Play black
 227 American music. Oh yeah. So yeah, Paula isn't or wasn't a politically motivated person. She's
 228 not aware that there is a, you know, there's a different way that life can be run, but she hits her
 229 husband with a frying pan. So. And Henry, I think, is a very political character. Very, very

230 political. And then he's in the General Post Office in 1916. I mean, you can't ignore that.

231 So yeah, I think the politics is in different actions. I think people often express
 232 themselves politically by becoming involved in the local football club. And it's not just bringing
 233 kids to games, it's making sure that they have the right to have these games. You know what I
 234 mean? So yeah, it's politics expressed differently. But actually, you know, party politics doesn't
 235 particularly interest me. It does insofar as I like to know what's going on in the world and in
 236 my own country. And I like to think about, you know, which parties are- I'm going to vote for.
 237 There's an election next year, possibly. And I, you know, think which of the left-wing parties
 238 are closest to what I think. So, I do think politically in that way. But- and I was in a political
 239 party when I was a young man, but I saw that party implode and I don't think there's anything
 240 to gain in me joining a political party. Whereas I am involved in literacy schemes and things
 241 like that, which that's where my politics will come in. Yeah?

242 **Ll: So, would you say that the change comes from below?**

243 RD: I think, yeah, I think I know of a lot- certainly, say, same-sex marriage here during the
 244 referendum of some years ago. That came from the realisation of politicians that, actually, their
 245 constituents knew these gay people. They didn't care anymore. They didn't see it as a bad thing
 246 or a wrong thing. And then the politicians took their line from the people. And I think that's
 247 often the case. Politics from below. Politicians react to that and respond to that. We've got now
 248 this thing called the Citizens Assembly, where a group of random people are selected to discuss
 249 the possibility of changing legislation, most recently on euthanasia, you know? Mercy killing?
 250 And they'll be discussing that. Something else, like, less controversial: should Dublin's city's
 251 mayor have real power? And they discuss that. And out of that then sometimes comes the
 252 decision to go ahead with legislation, as was the case with abortion and same-sex marriage. So,

253 in that case, literally, the ideas came from below and the politicians were guided by that, which
 254 I think is great.

255 **Ll: Yeah, me too. Me too. I think it's- I think it should work like this, not the other way**
 256 **around.**

257 RD: But, there isn't a good novel in it. Do you know what I mean? You're never going to get a
 258 good film about this.
 [...]

259 **Ll. So, I'm thinking of *Smile* and *Love*, now. I have the impression that they deal a lot**
 260 **with the problem of being able to rely on memory and I was wondering, just, if this is**
 261 **something that you're becoming more interested in?**

262 RD. Yes, it is indeed, because, you know, as you get older you tend to look- You carry more
 263 memories for a start, and memory, like, you used the word whimsical a while back. Memory
 264 does seem to be quite whimsical in that you remember things and don't. Trivial things. One
 265 remembers, like, opening the fridge, you know, when I was seven. And then much more
 266 important things, no recollection of. So, memory seems to- and I was reading an interesting
 267 article. I think it was a book review. And I realised that I'd buy the book and then I'd never get
 268 round to reading it cause it's probably too technical. And memory. Why don't we remember
 269 things that happened when we were very, very, very young? Because memory is allied to
 270 language. And even if we're remembering something visually, we're actually describing it to
 271 ourselves. So, if you don't have the language, you don't remember, you know, it's interesting.

272 So yeah, there is the worry. It's a simple thing that people have, you know, my age,

273 younger, older, you know, you're trying to remember the name of something trivial like a
 274 footballer? Or maybe something really more important, your partner. Oh, Jeez! And you think
 275 immediately, oh, dementia, you know? That's that, but it's not really. And then the names come
 276 back. It's just, you know, the filing cabinet, I suppose, in the back of the head gets bigger and
 277 bigger and bigger.

278 So, say *The Commitments*, Jimmy Rabbitte, it's very much the book of a young writer
 279 because Jimmy is looking forward. He wants the band to have a future. I'm at a stage in my life
 280 now where I'm not looking- well, anything I write I'm looking forward. I have to, because that's
 281 what you're trying to achieve to finish it. But, I'm not looking forward, because in terms of
 282 anticipating something far ahead, like the career of a band, because there's not much- there's
 283 not all that much ahead. And there's a lot of material behind, so. A lot of images that are now
 284 historical, a lot of things that are... There's a lot of interesting stuff, but the memory then is
 285 kind of, can you rely on it? Creatively you can, because part of the story is not being able to
 286 rely on it, which in itself is a good story, you know.

287 And say, in the case of *Smile*, this man has literally forgotten. It's a bit like they say
 288 when somebody gets so drunk they have a blackout. The reason they don't remember is because
 289 there's no memory. They almost, somehow or other, die. Not, they don't stop inhaling.

290 **Ll: No, but, the brain.**

291 RD: It's in that novel. *The Girl on the Train*, I think it's called?

292 **Ll: Ah, I haven't read it.**

293 RD: It's really good. It's a great page turner, but that notion is in it, because the girl in the- on

294 the train is an alcoholic. So, it's really interesting. It's thought-provoking in that way. But, so,
 295 memory is kind of a very, it's very fickle. You know, very, very fickle. And that's part of it.
 296 The thing in *Smile*, like it literally- And when you think about what- How can he forget that?
 297 And of course, probably, psychologically, somehow or another, he had to.

298 **Ll: Yes. Yes, to- the brain protects you.**

299 RD: Yeah, at a time when his father was dying, possibly. And that's why the Christian Brother
 300 homed in on him. And I know that, it wasn't based on my experience, but it's based on the
 301 experience of others. And I know that a Christian Brother in the school that I was- I attended,
 302 homed in on boys that he thought were vulnerable. You know, because he knew they wouldn't
 303 bring that horror home. In a house that was already struggling. And, so, I thought,
 304 psychologically, it's, it was, you know- And again, it's part of the storytelling. Like it's *Doctor*
 305 *Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. You know, that's a- You know, what we do, what we don't, what we
 306 remember and what we don't remember. So, you try to- I used the term to play with it. I don't
 307 mean it in any trivial way. Balance it, you know. So, yes, I think-

308 I've just started a new novel now. And again, it's kind of a man in his late middle years
 309 or older, you know, mid-60s. Meets somebody that he used to know and it sparks off memories,
 310 but they're still in the present tense, so. And he doesn't, you know, he thinks, he's an old school
 311 teacher and he thinks that this is a girl who something happened to and, actually, she
 312 immediately- She, you can clearly tell she remembers him with great fondness and she starts
 313 relating to him a time when he was very kind to her. But it's not the event that he thought it
 314 was. So, he's mixing up his old students, you know? So, yes, he remembered, but no, he didn't
 315 remember, and their memories of what happened then, it- because it opens up that little door
 316 and he's beginning to remember, but it doesn't tally exactly with... And he remembers, you

317 know, he remembers one, and the two of them are laughing because, actually, there's an
 318 absurdity to it. And he remembers the whole thing to a point and then has no idea, no idea what
 319 happened after that.

320 I was lucky I never had that with my parents. They physically fell apart, but their brains
 321 were very... they were the healthiest thing about them, luckily, and they died so, yeah. But I
 322 know people have done that. It's horrendous. Bad design, isn't it? Ultimately. Bad design.

323 **LI: So, my last question for you. I was listening to a conversation between you and**
 324 **Sebastian Barry on YouTube. And there was something that I think it was him that said**
 325 **that there was a certain fear of becoming repetitive in writing. And I wanted to ask you,**
 326 **would you say that writing with time has become easier or harder?**

327 RD: Harder. To a degree, there's a kind of yes and no, an either or answer to it. At some levels
 328 it's easier insofar as, like, I try- looking at a blank page isn't as intimidating as it used to be.
 329 And I've gone through, say, right- I've- My twelfth novel will be coming out next year, so I've
 330 gone through it twelve times and I'm reasonably confident that I can do it the thirteenth time,
 331 whereas when I started the second novel, it began to dawn on me, well, it has to be different
 332 from the first one, and that's kind of crippling.

333 And now, so, there is that I know myself as a writer quite well. I know I can trust myself.
 334 I know that, you know, I didn't work on Monday, for example, and I went to the Abbey Theatre
 335 yesterday and spent the day there. And I'm talking to you now and I'm going off to walk around
 336 Dublin with a theatre director to show him places. So, strictly speaking, I'm not doing what I
 337 do for a living. But I know I'll be. I know it's fine, I can trust myself. It's there for when I get
 338 back to it tomorrow. So, in that way, the habits of- the habits of decades are reassuring, you
 339 know. And I'm happy to break rules as well, you know? And I think as I get older, as well, I'm

340 not sure if it's a general thing about life, but I care less about what people think. What- I couldn't
 341 give a shite what critics think, for example, you know? Obviously when a book comes out, I'm
 342 keen to know if it's going down well or not, you know? But, so these things don't affect me as
 343 much as they would have done. On the other hand, though, the fear of repetition is very real.
 344 And more than once- I had a collection of short stories out. Two years ago, was it? Can't even
 345 remember what it's called, now.

346 **LI: *Life Without Children*?**

347 RD: *Life Without Children*, yeah. I wrote eight of those stories during the lockdown, you know?
 348 And it was more than once where I had a feeling- Because the short stories, I kind of, I'd finish
 349 one and get going on another one very soon afterwards and I'd have a character name and the
 350 editor had asked me, "Did you intend using the same character name for a man three times?"
 351 And I didn't, I'd no... So, you know. I think now, possibly a younger writer would have a bigger
 352 pool of names in their head. When I started teaching, for example in 1979, if I said Jacqueline,
 353 three or four girls in a class of thirty-something would say, "What?" Because they were all
 354 born around about the time when Jacqueline Onassis and Jacqueline Kennedy was the... And
 355 then, when I was leaving teaching in 1993, it was a huge gang of young boys entered into
 356 secondary school called John Paul. After the Pope, who came here in 1979. So, all these kids,
 357 these, you know, major criminal minds were called John Paul, so... So, there's that element of
 358 it.

359 And, also, I've been writing away. Luckily not a novel, but a short story, writing away
 360 and I think, "It's a bit familiar" and I realise, when I think about this element of the plot, I've
 361 done it before. I've had that idea before that this man would walk into a building like this and
 362 he'd be encountering anything. No, actually, I've done it before, not literally. It's not that I'm

363 regurgitating the exact same story with the same words, but the idea. And that is all I want to
364 do at this stage, all I've ever wanted to do was to write something that's a bit fresh, and if you-
365 I think that gets harder and harder.

366 But, then again, ageing is actually quite inspiring, d'you know, I suppose at some point
367 you stop. But it is quite inspiring because it is interesting. It changes the camera angle, so to
368 speak. The priorities change. The weight of children in your arms stops being a thing. The days
369 of the week stop being dominated by the school year or things like that. So, there's a kind of
370 weightlessness to it all, even, you know what I mean? And that goes into the work as well, you
371 know, so...

372 **Ll: All right. Thank you so much.**

373 **RD:** No, it's a pleasure. A pleasure. Short and sweet.

Appendix 2: Plot Summaries

The purpose of this section is to provide brief plot summaries of Roddy Doyle's works in order to facilitate the overall comprehension of my analysis. The selection presented here includes all the novels and short-story collections published up to the date on which this thesis was formally deposited. It does not contain any plays, non-fiction works, children's literature or the books *Two Pints* (2012); *Two More Pints* (2014); *Two for the Road* (2019); and *The Complete Two Pints* (2021), which contains the three "Two Pints" books and some additional previously unpublished material, as these consist of extended dialogues, which aligns them more closely to plays than to novels, and they do not develop an explicit narrative perspective. The following books have also been omitted, as—strictly speaking—they are not novels: *Not Just for Christmas* (1999); *Dead Man Talking* (2015); and *Charlie Savage* (2019). The first two are considered long tales or novellas and are part of the Open Door and the Quick Reads series, whose objective is to foster literacy.¹⁸⁹ *Charlie Savage*, on the other hand, is the result of the compilation of a year worth of journalistic sketches that Roddy Doyle wrote for *The Irish Independent's* weekend magazine.

The plot summaries have been arranged chronologically, according to the books' original year of publication, as follows:

1. *The Commitments* (1987)
2. *The Snapper* (1990)
3. *The Van* (1991)
4. *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (1993)

¹⁸⁹ For more information on the Open Door series, see "Introduction" (p. 3, fn. 2).

5. *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1996)
6. *A Star Called Henry* (1999)
7. *Oh, Play That Thing* (2004)
8. *Paula Spencer* (2006)
9. *The Deportees* (2007)
10. *The Dead Republic* (2010)
11. *Bullfighting* (2011)
12. *The Guts* (2013)
13. *Smile* (2017)
14. *Love* (2021)
15. *Life Without Children* (2021)

Summaries:

1. *The Commitments* (1987)

Roddy Doyle's debut novel is set in the fictitious working-class suburb of Barrytown, in the North of Dublin. The novel, also, constitutes the first volume of *The Barrytown Trilogy*¹⁹⁰. It tells the story of how a group of young partly unemployed people decide to form a band, under the management of Jimmy Rabbitte, Jr. The band's mission is to bring soul to Dublin and they do so by playing covers of famous songs and adapting the lyrics to make them sound more Irish. Despite The Commitments' enthusiasm, the band's manyfold inner tensions play an important role in their final disintegration.

¹⁹⁰ Although *The Commitments*, *The Snapper* and *The Van* are not the only novels set in Barrytown, originally, they have been the only ones included in the trilogy, as they have the Rabbitte family as a common nexus.

2. *The Snapper* (1990)

In the second volume of the Barrytown Trilogy, Jimmy's sister Sharon reveals to her parents that she is pregnant, but refuses to say who the father is. The novel portrays the Rabbittes' daily life and their efforts to support Sharon throughout her pregnancy. This is especially challenging for Jimmy Rabbitte, Sr., Sharon's father, who, despite the contradictory nature of his thoughts and feelings, tries to learn as much as he can about pregnancy and labour, in order to connect to Sharon and to be present for her.

3. *The Van* (1991)

This is the third volume of the Barrytown Trilogy and it focusses on Jimmy Rabbitte, Sr., who has become unemployed. When his best friend Bimbo loses his job too, the two men decide to restore an old chipper van and go into business together. The ups and downs of the enterprise and the long hours the two friends spend together, eventually start to affect their relationship.

4. *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (1993)

Paddy Clarke is a ten-year-old boy living in Barrytown. What used to be a rural village is quickly becoming urbanised as part of Dublin's expansion programme in the 1960s, and the children's playing grounds are being transformed into building sites. With the arrival of new families, which are being rehoused from the inner city, Paddy and his friends find themselves in a constantly changing environment to which they have to adapt. On top of this, Paddy notices that his parents' relationship is falling apart, but is unable to fully understand why this occurs.

5. *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1996)

In this novel, Paula Spencer tells the story of her life, putting special emphasis on her romance with Charlo Spencer, who had made her feel special when they first met. However, the story

takes a drastic turn when Paula reveals Charlo's abusive and violent nature, and her history as a victim of domestic violence. What is worse, Paula explains how she was left completely alone, as nobody (not Paula's family, not the doctors who examined her after particularly vicious beatings) ever stepped in to rescue her and her four children, the only ones to stand between their parents whenever Charlo wanted to hurt Paula.

6. *A Star Called Henry* (1999)

This novel is the first instalment of The Last Roundup trilogy, whose protagonist is Henry Smart, born in 1901 in the utter misery of Dublin's slums. Having to roam the city's streets in order to survive, with the company of his little brother Victor, Henry learns to fend for himself from a very early age. The extreme poverty that the two boys endure and Victor's tragic death of tuberculosis lead Henry to join James Connolly's Irish Citizen Army. At only fourteen, Henry participates in the 1916 Easter Rising, motivated by the thought that he is fighting for an Ireland in which no child will ever suffer from poverty again.

With the newly acquired status of national hero and side-by-side with his former schoolteacher and future wife Miss O'Shea, Henry continues to fight for his ideals by joining the IRA, for whom he recruits and trains young men during the War of Independence. When, at last, Henry is tasked with executing so-called enemies and traitors to the nationalist cause and starts questioning his role in the fight, he too is declared a traitor and sentenced to death.

7. *Oh, Play That Thing* (2004)

The second instalment of The Last Roundup trilogy begins with Henry's emigration to the United States of America in 1924, not only to escape the men who want to kill him, but also as an attempt to run away from his Irish identity. Having been forced to leave his wife and daughter Saoirse back in Ireland, Henry, always on the move, engages in all sorts of shady

activities, performs a variety of odd-jobs and gets caught in sometimes absurd, sometimes life-threatening situations.

When Henry meets Louis Armstrong in Chicago and discovers jazz, he believes to have finally found his real identity as a Yank. Armstrong engages Henry to work for him as his manager and bodyguard in the midst of the highly racist climate of the 1920s. However, Henry's unexpected re-encounter with his wife and daughter force him to acknowledge his past and his Irish origins. In the last part of the novel, Henry, Miss O'Shea, Saoirse and Séamus Louis (or, Rifle, as Henry calls him), born on a boxcar, are traveling across the United States of America as stowaways on freight trains. Henry becomes once more separated from his family when he fails to jump into a train in time, which, moreover, rolls over his leg amputating it. The novel ends with Henry lost and almost dead in the desert, when the film director John Ford and his crew find and rescue him.

8. *Paula Spencer* (2006)

Paula Spencer is the sequel of *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* and it portrays Paula's life almost a decade after her literary introduction. Paula is a middle-aged woman, living in Celtic-Tiger Dublin, working as a cleaner and doing her best to stay sober. Despite her economic, physical and mental struggles, Paula's objective is to reconnect to her children after years of neglect and to become a good mother to them. Paula's main preoccupation is Leanne, who is following her mother's steps and becoming an alcoholic too.

9. *The Deportees* (2007)

9.1. "Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner"

Larry, a middle-aged father of five, feels his world begin to crumble when he learns that his daughter Stephanie is bringing her Nigerian friend Ben home for dinner. The story focuses on

Larry's weak attempts to prove to himself that he is not a racist and, afterwards, on the extremely tense dinner.

9.2. "The Deportees"

The protagonist of this story is none other than Jimmy Rabbitte, Jr., from *The Commitments*, now thirty-six years old and with a family of his own. Jimmy is once again trying to form a band and, thus, The Deportees, whose integrants have the most diverse nationalities, is born.

9.3. "New Boy"

It is Joseph's first day in his new Irish school. The nine-year-old's thoughts about his new surroundings, his efforts to meet the teacher's demands and to understand the power dynamics among his new classmates, are at whiles interrupted by his memories of his former school and the soldiers who killed his father, a teacher there.

9.4. "57% Irish"

In this story, Roy Brady is the inventor of a machine which is supposed to measure nationality. Three years into his research, Roy is about to throw in the towel when he is tasked by the Minister of Arts and Ethnicity to create a (manipulated) test that will measure the participants' Irishness and which will be aimed at the immigrant population.

9.5. "Black Hoodie"

This is the story of three teenagers who create the mini-company "Black Hoodie Solutions" as part of a class project. Their objective is to prove how prejudiced Irish society is. When they are mistaken for thieves and taken to the police station, they witness first-hand the racism with which the Guards treat the narrator's Nigerian friend.

9.6. “The Pram”

Alina is a Polish woman working as a babysitter for a successful Irish businesswoman. Her main task is to take care of her employer’s baby boy, whom she loves. However, her extremely harsh employer and her other two daughters treat Alina in such a cruel way, that she decides to take revenge by terrifying the sisters with a horror story.

9.7. “Home to Harlem”

In this story, Declan has travelled from Dublin to New York, where he wants to conduct post-doctoral research on the connection between the Harlem Renaissance and Irish Literature, while also looking for his African-American grandfather, of whom Declan only knows the last name. Declan’s research becomes a quest to understand his double identity as black and Irish.

9.8. “I Understand”

Tom has only been in Dublin for three months, working illegally in two different jobs, when he is approached by a gangster who threatens him with deportation if Tom refuses to do some dirty work. While trying to find a solution to this problem, Tom remembers traumatic scenes from his past and makes new friendships in Dublin.

10. *The Dead Republic* (2010)

This novel is the third and final instalment of the Last Roundup Trilogy and it begins with Henry’s return to the Republic of Ireland in 1951, alone and with the conviction that all his family members are dead. Disappointed in John Ford and the film they were supposed to be making about Henry’s adventures, he settles down for the first time in his life in the village of Ratheen. Working as a school janitor there, Henry is able to observe the changes that have taken place in the Republic since his departure twenty years before.

Meanwhile, Henry's relationship with a widow called Mrs O'Kelly, whom he had worked for as a gardener, develops until she reveals her true identity, which, as Henry had at times suspected, is that of Miss O'Shea. She explains to Henry that Rifle died in the USA, but that their daughter Saoirse is alive, married, and that she lives in Chicago. When Henry becomes the victim of a UVF bomb in the context of the Troubles, his role during the Easter Rising is also revealed during an interview for a newspaper and, soon after, he is once again recruited by the Provisional IRA, this time to be used as an icon for the nationalist cause in Northern Ireland.

After Miss O'Shea has a stroke that leaves her forever paralysed and unconscious, she is taken to a nursing home, where Henry re-encounters his former enemy, Ivan Reynolds, who is also spending his last days there, and Saoirse, with whom Henry attempts to rebuild a gravely damaged relationship. Apart from this, two special agents from the Irish government force Henry to inform on the IRA for them, which Henry does, slightly altering the facts that he tells them. When the IRA find out about this, they ask of Henry that he provide the Irish agents manipulated information. The novel ends with the IRA's prospect of achieving a 32-County Republic in 2016 and Henry's death at a hundred and eight.

11. *Bullfighting* (2011)

11.1. "Recuperation"

Mr Hanahoe, a middle-aged man, emotionally estranged from his wife and children, takes his regular walk, designed to avoid people, during which he reflects about his life, his routine and his feelings of loneliness, trying to understand when things started falling apart.

11.2. "The Photograph"

Martin mourns the passing away of his friend Noel from cancer. He reflects on how he has

replaced the image that he used to have of his strong and youthful friend with that of a sick and fragile man. Besides this, Martin has recently found out that he suffers from diverticular disease, but does not know whether it is the best moment to tell his wife.

11.3. “Teaching”

An experienced teacher reflects on the transformation that the school and students have undergone since the beginning of his career. This leads him to think of his own time as a pupil in a Christian Brothers School and to remember a particular day when he felt sick and one of the Brothers took care of him.

11.4. “The Slave”

Terry’s life takes a drastic turn when one morning he finds a dead rat in his kitchen. The discovery causes such a strong impression on Terry that he even changes some of his daily habits. Gradually, however, Terry realises that the feelings of terror he has begun to experience might be actually related to a midlife crisis and that the dead rat he found was only the trigger that set it off.

11.5. “The Joke”

In this story, the protagonist thinks about his marriage and tries to find out what has gone wrong to make him and his wife grow increasingly distant. He wonders whether he would still be able to make his wife laugh like he used to in the old times.

11.6. “Ash”

One day, all of a sudden, Ciara tells her husband Kevin that she is leaving him. While Kevin tries to figure out how he will manage the household alone, take care of their two daughters

and find out whether Ciara has a lover, she quietly comes back and acts as if she had never left at all.

11.7. “Funerals”

Bill has developed a habit of driving his parents to funerals. What started as a practical solution, has become a routine in which the funerals are only an excuse to spend time together. During the trip that is described in the story, Bill’s mother makes a shocking revelation.

11.8. “Blood”

The protagonist of this story—a successful forty-one-year-old man with a family he loves and a job at a bank—discovers that he has developed a taste for blood. What begins as incursions into the kitchen to secretly eat some raw meat, ends up with him climbing over his neighbours’ wall in the middle of the night in order to eat one of their hens. All this time the protagonist insists that he is a perfectly normal man.

11.9. “The Plate”

Jim believes that he is dying when an excruciating pain assaults him one day and he remembers the fight that he and his wife Maeve had the night before. As they are driving to the hospital to get Jim’s kidney stone removed (after all, he was not going to die), they realise that they have forgotten their baby at home. Suddenly, contrary to what Jim’s thoughts seemed to reveal, he acknowledges that he and his wife are actually happy.

11.10. “The Dog”

In this story, Joe reflects about his relationship with his wife Mary and how they have drifted in the last years. When Mary gets Emma, a little Jack Russell, the couple seem to do better for

a while, until, one day, Emma disappears.

11.11. “Animals”

In the context of the post-Celtic-Tiger crisis, George remembers the past and the pets that his children had over the years and reflects about the current situation in the country and how difficult life has become.

11.12. “Bullfighting”

Donal and his three best friends, Gerry, Ken and Seán, four middle-aged men, travel to the region of Valencia, in Spain, in order to have a good time together. As Donal goes out with his friends and enjoys a beer, or hangs around the pool in the morning, he thinks about his life, his job and his family, as well as the changes that have taken place in Ireland over the previous years.

11.13. “Sleep”

Tom has always loved watching his wife Tara sleep. Now, having just found out that he has colon cancer, he remembers how they met, their first years together and bits of his life, while he watches her sleeping soundly.

12. *The Guts* (2013)

In this novel, Doyle brings back Jimmy Rabbitte, Jr., for the third time. Jimmy, Jr., is now almost fifty, has four kids and still loves music. He also has bowel cancer and the novel portrays how this affects Jimmy’s life and that of the people around him from the moment he lets them know about his diagnosis.

13. *Smile* (2017)

Victor Forde, a middle-aged man, returns to the neighbourhood where he grew up. When Victor runs into a mysterious man called Fitzpatrick, who claims to have known Victor when they were schoolboys, Victor begins to remember and reveal details from his past, such as his days at a Christian Brothers School, the tragic loss of his father and the beginning of his relationship with his ex-wife Rachel. The plot takes a sudden turn when Victor reveals that he experienced abuse at the hands of the school's Head Brother.

14. *Love* (2020)

Joe and David used to be great friends as young adults, but they started growing apart after David moved to England. Now they have met again at a fancy restaurant in Dublin, where they talk about their lives. Inevitably, they also start remembering the past and, as they revisit the regular pubs in which they used to hang out together in their youth, David realises how certain memories that involve them both are very different for each of them.

15. *Life Without Children* (2021)

15.1. "Box Sets"

After an argument with his partner Emer, Sam —recently unemployed— takes their dog for a walk and a cyclist crashes into him. Pain-ridden, Sam manages to return home, where he finds that Emer has packed her suitcase. Although she tends to him, when Sam wakes up in the middle of the night, he does not know if Emer is sleeping in a different bedroom or whether she has left.

15.2. "The Curfew"

While ex-hurricane Ophelia approaches Dublin, the protagonist of this story walks home after

a visit to the cardiologist. His thoughts meander from the preparations he has taken for the storm to his recent discovery that he suffers from coronary artery disease. When he walks past a woman who is carrying a teddy bear in a baby sling, he remembers the time when his children were babies too and recalls a particular day trip to the beach.

15.3. “Life Without Children”

In the context of the Covid pandemic, Alan is spending a night in Newcastle. Prompted by the memory of a time when he told someone that he did not have children (in fact, he has four), he reflects on his anxious character and plays with the idea of never returning home to Ireland. Commenting on the difference between the crowded streets in England and the social distancing at home, Alan attempts to encourage himself to act in a careless way, ignoring his naturally prudent attitude.

15.4. “Gone”

This story, written in the first person, switches between two narrators: Jim and Laura. Both, in turns, recount their separation and the time leading up to it, as Laura decides to leave their home without a warning the day before the Covid lockdown.

15.5. “Nurse”

A glimpse into the thoughts and feelings of a nurse, exhausted after a day’s work, in the context of the Covid pandemic.

15.6. “Masks”

A lonely man goes for a walk during the second lock-down. He thinks about his past and about how well he used to sing before his voice broke. In the present, he feels anger at himself, at the

people he meets, at the lockdown. Then, he begins picking up discarded masks from the floor and putting them on.

15.7. “The Charger”

During the lockdown, Mick wonders who in his house (his wife Mary or one of his four daughters) might want to murder him by leaving his phone charger dangling in a bowl with water. Thinking about the way that electricity works, Mick starts wandering down memory lane and remembers the time that his father died and he was sent to live with different uncles and aunts. He also recalls anecdotes from when his daughters were children and the time that a teacher gave him three of the best on each hand. Most importantly, he reflects upon his relationship to Mary and on how central she is in his life.

15.8. “The Funeral”

Bob’s mother has passed away during the Covid lockdown and he has not been allowed to attend her funeral. When he wakes up at five in the morning, still drunk, he remembers an encounter with his mother in hospital in which she told Bob that she had excluded him from her will.

15.9. “Worms”

Joe and Thelma begin having meaningful conversations again when, during the Covid lockdown, they share the songs that come to their mind when performing certain activities. For Joe, it is hearing ‘The Whistling Gypsy’ when he shaves or ‘Back to My Roots’ when he is taking a shower. Thus, thirty years into their marriage, Joe finds that he has fallen in love with his wife. Only, Thelma has asthma and the lockdown is coming to an end.

15.10. “The Five Lamps”

It’s the beginning of the Covid Lockdown and the protagonist of this short story believes this is his opportunity to find his son. While he walks along the empty streets of Dublin, looking for the young man, the protagonist recalls the fight that drove his son away from home and encounters several characters that challenge his negative view of the city.

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