

Céad Míle Fáilte – *How the Land of a Thousand Welcomes Coped with Mass Immigration*

Céad Míle Fáilte – *Como a terra das mil boas-vindas lidou com a imigração em massa*

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Abstract: *The Irish short story, highlighted in the national literary production and celebrated for reflecting the social upheavals that Ireland has gone through, is nowadays configured as the genre to echo an environment in metamorphosis. This article, derived from my doctoral research, highlights the relationship between the short story and the representation of identities involved in immigration. In it, I offer an analytical reading of two short stories, “The Summer of birds”, by Gerard Donovan, and “Fjords of Killary”, by Kevin Barry, selected for their portrayal of the clash between natives and immigrants, vertically analysing the literary pieces seeking to show how Ireland is revealed in literary textuality. It is proposed that immigrants were somewhat relegated to the margins, suffering the consequences of social inequality accentuated by the Celtic Tiger period, bringing the issue of Irish identity to the centre of the discussion.*

Keywords: Irish short story; Immigrants; Celtic Tiger; Gerard Donovan; Kevin Barry.

Resumo: *O conto irlandês, destaque na produção literária nacional e celebrado por refletir as convulsões sociais pelas quais a Irlanda passou, atualmente se configura como o gênero a ecoar um ambiente em metamorfose. Este artigo, derivado de minha pesquisa de doutorado, destaca a relação entre o conto e a representação das identidades envolvidas na imigração. Nele, apresento uma leitura analítica de dois contos, “O verão dos pássaros”, de Gerard Donovan, e “Fiordes de Killary”, de Kevin Barry, selecionados por retratarem o confronto entre nativos e imigrantes, analisando verticalmente textos que mostram como a Irlanda se revela na textualidade literária. Propõe-se que os imigrantes foram, de certa forma, relegados às margens, sofrendo as consequências da desigualdade social acentuada pelo período do Tigre Celta, trazendo a questão da identidade irlandesa para o centro da discussão.*

Palavras-chave: *Conto irlandês; Imigrantes; Tigre Celta; Gerard Donovan; Kevin Barry.*

It is practically impossible to stroll around Ireland without coming across, at least once, with a sign bearing the Gaelic saying *Céad míle Fáilte* – a hundred thousand welcomes. This phrase, a component of the state-endorsed Irish identity, gives the idea of a country open to the other, willing to grant everyone that sets foot on the land the benefits of the traditional Irish hospitality. The process of migration is a movement that deals not only with the hopes of finding a welcoming environment, but with the willingness to change oneself in the process, as Pierre Ouellet defines migration in *L'Esprit migrateur, essai sur le non-sens commun*:

[A] passage to the *other*, a transgressive movement from One to *the* other, which violates the laws of the proper, crosses the borders of property or individuality, to always go beyond the place from which one draws one's identity, to better undo this original link and reconnect it each time in a new destiny, *another* becoming which is also becoming *other*¹ (Ouellet 19, my translation, emphasis by the author).

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

Make yourself at home . . . Does anyone ever really mean that? What if you had guests who took you quite literally . . . On a more serious note, imagine guests from a different culture, quite literally making themselves at home in your home, bringing other customs and ways of behaving to your own cultural space.

The truth is that it's far easier to welcome guests when subtle power balances are observed between the host and the hosted, and where the host's rules, however unspoken, are understood and adhered to . . .

That's the challenge facing our Island of the Welcomes, as "welcome" is only truly tested when things get difficult. From *céad míle fáilte* to "no room at the inn", hospitality, or the lack of it, defines our cultural sense of self, as well as the foundation story of this country's dominant religion. (Tipton n.p.)

During the years of the Celtic Tiger period, Ireland experienced such an unprecedented economic growth that the country began to attract the attention and interest of people from all parts of the world. The demand for labour in many areas – such as construction, finances, information technology and healthcare – resulted in the return of a great number of Irish nationals, who left when prosperity was not a synonym of Ireland. The returned Irish

nationals, however, were not the only ones who decided to take advantage of the riches from the Celtic Tiger. In the article “Overview of Mass-Immigration in Ireland: Part I – The Tiger Years”, some data is presented on the matter, indicating new peaks of non-EU immigration flows, between 2001 and 2004, and the unprecedented levels of immigrants from new EU states between 2004 and 2007 (The National Party n.p.).

The need for discussion of social politics to cope with the transformations of the country during that period, especially the ones that entail questions about how to deal with the massive cultural changes that the country was subject to due to the arrival of immigrants, left open, to some extent, the road to a crisis in an Ireland experiencing “one of the most extreme demographic transformations in history, transitioning from a ‘homogeneous Catholic society to an ethnically, racially and religiously diverse society’” (The National Party n.p.). These fast and drastic changes were, somehow, translated into a surge of racism and xenophobia, especially when Ireland began to experience a downfall in its economy. Contemporary Irish literature was quick enough to become aware of these issues and transpose them to stories, as Roddy Doyle’s *The Deportees* (2007), one of the first authors to write about immigration and the contact with the other. In this paper, we look into two short stories who offer a rather different approach by revealing a facet of the migration issue through the eyes of the Irish characters.

The question of sharing the country with immigrants and the xenophobic attitude of some individuals towards them occupies the centre of the plot in “The summer of birds”, by Gerard Donovan. The short story revolves around a little girl who narrates the changes she has been experiencing since her mother left the house for an undisclosed reason. The sudden shift in the family routine is witnessed by the young girl, who is aware of the silences that began to occupy the house since her mother left, a silence that is disrupted by the noise of the birds which come to her bedroom window in the morning.

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

I knew he had to work a lot because the house was new and we had never had a lot of money, and since my mother would be gone for a few days, it was my turn to do something. I was old enough . . .

We lived in a suburb east of the city, another development of many that spread white houses over the green hills like spilled milk, where a new road appeared out of trees and grass every few months. Ireland was doing well. My father was busy working

because it was the same all over the country, he said, new houses going up everywhere, a boom. (Donovan 147-148)

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

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

All those new roads brought more than new houses to where I lived. New people too. They appeared one or two at a time, never in groups. One of them turned up in the schoolyard in the months before the summer break and stayed well away from everyone. Then two older ones were seen in the park near the woods. People said they found bags and a shoe by the river, and that if you saw a few of them, that meant many more were hiding; and sure enough, the single ones turned into groups of them coming out at night more often, that's what I thought, and then we heard news that they had even started to come into the pubs and the restaurants.

By April there were a lot in plain view moving around the town and especially near the supermarket in the car park, and they were groups now, four and five, each day a little closer, until I heard that if you stopped at all outside the supermarket they would gather at the car, and I heard that when people brushed them away they stepped back, all at once like birds, and some people said that soon the town would be full of them because they were bringing up their young. (Donovan 150)

The description of the massive arrival of strangers, and how they were to be found everywhere around the city, reveals the shock experienced by a society that, to some extent, dealt with their arrival as an intrusion and an invasion. The girl shows how impressed she is by the impact on her town of these people going to the same schools, pubs and restaurants, but being so different, so much like the birds that would scatter when confronted by others. The prejudice towards the newcomers is better represented in "The summer of birds" by the character Tommy, who starts coming to the house to look after the girl at her father's request. The girl

recalls her mother's dislike for Tommy, as someone who would never be around when she was still at home.

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

Don't be afraid, he said. You're safe in here, they can't touch you here.

I'm not afraid, I said.

In the concrete yard two older ones were sitting on a wall. They weren't doing anything. An evening rain shower blew papers across the parking spaces, but the rain didn't seem to matter to them, so I thought a different rain or a worse rain fell where they used to be. I liked the rain too.

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

Tommy's reaction portrays how people tend to feel threatened by the mere presence of the other and how difference can be a trigger to prejudice and hate. In the case of Ireland, which became a prime destination to immigrants when its economy was a synonym for success, the result was the increase of tension for the arrival of people from different cultural backgrounds, people who brought with them not only their specific physical traits, but their food, music, clothes and religion, forcing, in some ways, the reshaping of an Ireland that had, in its history, relied so much on The Irish Free State's representation of the nation as Celtic, Catholic and republican, following the works of the Gaelic Revival, which was mostly reinforced throughout the twentieth century, to support its identity. The reaction otherness can determine one's exclusion and marginalization. In the PhD thesis *The migrant in contemporary Irish literature and film: representations and perspectives*, Aisling McKeown points out that

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

Here, McKewon explains how Donovan's short story reflects the effects of the lack of communication between the government and the communities which were most impacted by the arrival of foreigners, and how this may result in reactions like Tommy's. His insistence in treating them as a threat, in forcing the girl – who expresses empathy for those people, by

relating to their undisturbed posture with the rain – to be prejudiced towards them, results in a conflict experienced by the child, who does not support his attitudes, but seems torn due to her father’s apathy in face of Tommy’s instructions:

As he walked into the room I saw a shadow outside because the windows were open with the heat, and they went by, a group of four this time, silent with their heads down, still nothing but fleeting shadows moving along our street and keeping close to the walls. Tommy ran straight to the window and shouted out after them, Go back to your own country . . .

Tommy turned to me and said, Go on, say it to them, they have to hear it. They’ve reached your street now, you can’t just do nothing. That’s how they win.

My father said nothing, and to keep Tommy quiet I said it, I told them go back home. (Donovan 152)

Even though she feels the need to please Tommy in order to avoid confrontation, the girl cannot help but to take pity on the others, as she observes that “The shadows looked like they didn’t want to be in our town either, like they were lost, and I wanted them not to be lost” (152). The constant reference to “these people” as “shadows” discloses a xenophobic attitude towards them, who in this case are destitute of a clear identification as human beings only because they are supposedly in someone else’s land, as people who remain in hiding, in the darkness. Tommy symbolizes the irony at the centre of the matter, for despite “going part-time to the university, taking courses in civilization” (Donovan 153), he is the one who expresses the most xenophobic attitude towards immigrants.

Behind his intellectual façade, lies the primal posture of someone feeling threatened, willing to instil into a child “his hatred for the other and his obsession with money and security”, (5) as Bertrand Cardin affirms in the article “Country of the Grand by Gerard Donovan, or the Chronicle of a Collapse Foretold”. In his piece, Cardin observes how complicated was the question around the economic boom, because, in its core, it was not the same experience to all inhabitants, pointing out that “The country may be grand but the gulfs between its inhabitants seem not only to remain but to be growing wider and wider” (6). This feeling of being left behind, of believing himself to be not only in disadvantage, but prone to a larger competition with the arrival of immigrants, turns into an obsessive posture of repulse and hate which the character Tommy does not hesitate in externalizing. When he overhears the little girl talking on the phone with her mother about the birds on her window, he uses the image to instil another abhorrent remark about the new people:

That reminds me of a film, he said . . . A famous film, you know, a man called Hitchcock. *The Birds*, there's more and more of them. I walked around him and into the kitchen. Tommy followed me and said that the film was about what happens if you don't keep count of things: the place gets full of them and they attack you. People's faces torn up and bloody. (Donovan 154)

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

On Monday morning I sneaked out of the house and walked to the supermarket to buy some sweets, and one of the shadows followed me. He smiled at me in his school uniform, the maroon tie looped under his strange face, and said that he was taking extra classes to catch up. I was surprised that I knew exactly what he was saying. His face broke into white smile and he held out his hand, and in it I saw the red spot with yellow stripes. I knew I should have walked away, but I didn't. I looked at it. It was one of the sweets I liked . . . I took the sweet and ran home, and out of my cupboard I took one of my own sweets.

I ran back to where the boy with the maroon tie was standing on the street with his mother. I had asked him to wait for me, and now I went up to them with my hand out. His eyes grew big around the sweet. His mother told him to say thank you. I went home with the red one he gave me, the one with the lemonade taste. (Donovan 156)

Through the innocent sharing of sweets, the narrator in Gerard Donovan's story evokes the willingness much more suited to the children of looking past differences. Although the girl reveals her surprise in how this boy was able to use the same language as her, the remark doesn't carry the same prejudice that comes from considering oneself superior, but symbolizes a child that is learning something new, someone who has the disposition to engage. The harmless exchange, however, becomes a problem when Tommy, who is a part-time worker at the supermarket, confronts the girl about her interaction with the foreign child. While her father was away talking to his estranged wife, Tommy forces the girl to admit what she had done, trying to manipulate her into believing that that simple contact with the foreign kid and his mother was wrong, that it was all part of their plan to make people like them. When he throws the traded candy into the fire and insists that she ought to go back to the supermarket to tell

them to go back to their country, the hesitating child recalls what resulted from her actions some days before: “I thought of the birds at that moment and what I’d done to them, left them without anything when they sang for me” (158).

The fear that Tommy instilled in her about the birds also deprived her from the gift of their singing. All her efforts to make them return – food, a letter – proved to be in vain, which upset her into crying. When her father returned from the meeting with her mother, the girl fights her tears, because she does not want to look like a baby who is sad about something as silly as birds. After he urges her to tell him the matter, she ends up talking about what happened with the boy in the supermarket and later with Tommy. The father’s reaction reveals his compassion and understanding. The trade between the two children is welcomed by him, who becomes infuriated with Tommy, throwing him out for good. Once he leaves, father and daughter go on with their lives, freed from the hatred of the one that truly represented an unwelcome and dangerous intrusion (Cardin 5).

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

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

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

The effect that the fast-paced city produced in him, a noticeable trait of the Celtic Tiger years in Ireland, pulling a great number of young people to the main city centers, proved to be a real hazard for the character’s health, prompting Caoimhin to look for a different kind of life in the countryside. The promise of managing a hotel, keeping himself busy with its small errands, and devoting himself to writing in the nights seemed like the perfect solution for him. This idyllic expectation, however, is frustrated in the opening lines of the short story, as made clear

by the description of the landscape, its “disgracefully grey skies above” (27) and constant rain proved in the period of eight months that the place “would be the death of me” (27).

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

All my friends, every last one of them, said, ‘*The Shining*’.

But I was thinking, the west of Ireland . . . the murmurous ocean . . . the rocky hills hard-founded in a greenish light . . . the cleansing air . . . the stoats peeping shyly from little gaps in the drystone walls . . .

Yes. It would all do to make a new man of me. Of course, I hadn’t counted on having to listen to my summer staff, a pack of energetic young Belarusians, fucking each other at all angles of the clock. (Barry 30)

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

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

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

Nadia, one of my Belarusians, came through from the supper room and sullenly collected some glasses . . .

I believe all nine of my staff to be in varying degrees of sexual contact with one another. I housed them in the dreary, viewless rooms at the back of the hotel, where I myself lived during what I will laughably describe as high season (the innocence), and my sleepless nights were filled with the sound of their rotating passions.

‘Thank you, Nadia,’ I said.

She scowled at me as she placed the glasses in the dishwasher. I was never allowed to forget that I was paying minimum wage. (32-33)

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

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

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

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

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

The construction of the foreigner’s characters in the narrative, although vague, is enough to instil a prejudicial tone to them. Every mention of the young foreigners made by Caoimhin comes with judgment, whether it might be for their scolding attitude towards him – the penny-pincher employer –, or his references to their sexual liberties – probably putting himself on a higher ground for the Irish approach to sex forged by the Catholic doctrine – or finally for the author’s record of Nadia’s use of the English language, a brief example in the narrative that denotes the real struggle that many immigrants face on adapting to a new language:

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

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

Kevin Barry's midlife crisis story – which one might suspect to flirt with an autobiography, for he shares the same age and name with its main character, Caoimhin (Irish for Kevin) – reveals, even if by accident, a portrait of Ireland post Celtic Tiger, setting in a hotel established in 1648 some of the struggles of contemporary Ireland. “Fjord of Killary” contrasts the urban with the countryside, the notion of a sensible, restrained and learned man – Caoimhin – trapped with his simpleton countrymen – habitual drinkers that keep talking regardless of what is happening around them or who can listen to them – and the Belarusians – whose bigger fault, as far as the main character is concerned, seems to reside in their youth more than in their nationality. Their presence and the reaction of the Irish towards them is a reliable reference to the effort that the country found itself obliged to make to avoid conflicts based on the fear of losing ground, money and ultimately a sense of the Irish identity.

Although there are some differences as to the way the immigrants are treated by the other Irish characters in the short stories presented here, they bare a significant resemblance as far as foreign people are perceived in general by society. The same group of people that once found a welcoming land, where their diversity was celebrated and they could be of service and even profit from the common bounty in times of plenty, suddenly began to witness the decay of their social stance when the national economy became an issue, experiencing a different attitude from the so called natives, whether in the scolding words of Tommy in “Summer of birds”, or in Vivien Harty's comments on them in “Fjords of Killary”. As Homi Bhabha pointed out as a keynote speaker in *Boundaries, Differences, Passages*, “The ‘secular’ liberalisation of the markets has seen, side by side, the rise of xenophobia and religious fundamentalisms” (3).

In Ireland's case, migration could be taken as some sort of social practice to which a great number of Irish people were submitted throughout the country's history for several reasons. Theirs, many times, was the place of the foreign. Now, on the other side of the spectrum, Irish people got to experience the role of the dominant group that holds the power,

as Eric Landowski suggests, of imposing upon the other the speech of exclusion, of regarding her/him immediately disqualified as subjects (Landowski 7, my trans.), a notion that is based solely on superficial traits such as appearance, language, food and cultural habits.

As mentioned in the beginning of this article, Roddy Doyle was one of the firsts Irish writers to tackle the matter of immigrants in the short story. The texts presented here follow this trend but bare an important distinction from Doyle's works: in them there is hardly any meaningful exchange between the native character and the foreigners, but this does not prevent the making of derogative statements by those who are themselves reacting to the changes of time and of society, people who might be finding it difficult to cope with such drastic transformations and, as a desperate attempt to lessen the damages that might result from it, resort to the imposition of cultural boundaries and discrimination.

Notes

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

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