

**The migrant in contemporary Irish literature and film:
representations and perspectives**

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**THE MIGRANT IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH LITERATURE AND FILM:
REPRESENTATIONS AND PERSPECTIVES**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the University of Westminster
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2013

Abstract

The transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century saw Ireland transformed from a homogeneous emigrant nation into a multi-cultural society. A growing body of contemporary Irish literature and film is engaging with the reality of multi-cultural Ireland and representing the challenges of migrant life from a variety of perspectives. At the same time, these narratives reflect the contradictions, confusions and concerns that define Irish attitudes towards their new migrant communities. The central argument of this thesis is that this new cultural production, whilst interrogating paradigms of national identity, is also adding different perspectives to the Irish literary and cinematic canon.

I have chosen to focus on the novel, short story and film genres for their accessibility and potentially wide reach, as well as their tangible and permanent forms. Within my chosen genres, I have selected texts and films by both Irish and migrant writers and filmmakers that represent as diverse a range of perspectives as possible.

My close textual analysis of the novels, short stories and films draws on historic Irish literary tradition and in the case of migrant writers, those of their countries of origin, to examine key themes, narrative style and form.

More broadly, the research is informed by postcolonial, globalisation and transnational theory, reflecting its anthropological and sociological dimensions. My thesis reveals the impact of migrants on new Irish writing as producers of and protagonists within texts. It outlines changes to the notion of Irish identity, culture and writing as a consequence of immigration. Finally, as a study of a range of narratives that represent the experience of first-generation migrants in twenty-first century Ireland, it constitutes an original contribution to knowledge and provides a benchmark for further research into migrant writing and film of the future.

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Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisor Dr. Monica Germana who advised and supported me consistently throughout the writing process, and who encouraged me to explore interesting and ultimately fruitful lines of thought. Thanks also to my second supervisor Dr Anne Witchard for her enthusiasm, and for encouraging me to let my own voice come through in the writing. The wider staff of the English Department at the University of Westminster have encouraged my research in many ways, not least of which has been facilitating my attendance at a number of conferences that provided inspiration for my work.

I would also like to thank the writers and performers in Dublin and Galway who were so generous with their time and ideas when I interviewed them during the research process. Their interest in my subject matter gave me the confidence to pursue it and their knowledge of the Irish arts scene enriched my interpretations of my texts. Not all of the interviews made it into the final thesis, but they include valuable material for future research. I would like to thank in particular Chris Binchy, Jonathan Gunning and Miquel Barceló (The Gombeens) for their kind permission to include their interviews in this thesis, and Hugo Hamilton for allowing me to submit his for publication in the *Irish Studies Review*.

On a personal level, I want to thank my husband Anthony and children Rosie, Ciaran and Thomas. This thesis is testimony to their endless patience, support and understanding over the past few years. I would also like to thank Marge and Andy for their ongoing encouragement, and my parents, John and Yvonne Shanagher, who welcomed me back ‘home’ on those occasions where I needed the time and space to focus and write.

Author's Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Aisling McKeown

28 March 2013

Introduction

The historical and cultural experience of the western metropolis *cannot* now be fictionalized without the marginal, oblique gaze of its postcolonial migrant populations cutting across the imaginative metropolitan geography of territory and community, tradition and culture.¹

Foreword

As a nation historically defined by emigration, Ireland's transformation during the 1990s into a multicultural society as a result of inward migration was unprecedented in its history. For the first time, immigration overtook emigration.² Past phases of immigration had been on a significantly smaller scale and taken place more gradually.³ This change in the flow of contemporary migration was largely as a result of the demand for labour arising from Ireland's so-called 'Celtic Tiger' economic boom, that lasted from approximately 1995 to 2007.⁴ It was further fuelled by the accession of ten new member states to the European Union in 2004, the largest of which was Poland, with Poles now accounting for the largest non-national community in Ireland.⁵ Census results indicate a rise of 143 per cent in the number of non-Irish born people living in the country between 2002 and 2011, accounting for 12 per cent of the overall population and comprising 199 different nationalities.⁶ The speed with which this transformation took place can be gauged by comparing the fact that the percentage of the population in Ireland giving their ethnic

¹ Homi Bhabha, 'Novel Metropolis', *New Statesman and Society*, 16 February 1990, p. 16.

² Shane Hegarty, *The Irish (and Other Foreigners): From the first people to the Poles* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2009), p. 190. Hegarty states that '1996 was the year in which Ireland finally stopped being a country from which people left and instead became one of net immigration. It was the last EU country of the fifteen at the time to reach that milestone.'

³ Irish history is peppered with the arrival of various 'others', from the early Viking and Norman invasions of the eighth and twelve centuries respectively and the English invasions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The twentieth century saw the arrival of Jewish refugees during its first decade, Hungarians in 1956, Chileans in 1973 and Vietnamese refugees in 1979. Chinese immigration to Northern Ireland has been taking place since the 1950s and 1960s as Chinese migrants from the New Territories and Hong Kong had free access into Great Britain as Commonwealth citizens.

⁴ Philip Watson, 'Ireland at the end of the road', *Daily Telegraph*, 14 January 2012 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financialcrisis/8973421/Ireland-at-the-end-of-the-road.html>> [accessed 30 January 2013] (paragraph 4).

⁵ John Drennan, 'One in four Polish workers in country claiming dole', *Irish Independent*, 5 August 2012 <<http://www.independent.ie/opinion/columnists/john-drennan/one-in-four-polish-workers-in-country-claiming-dole-3190040.html>> paragraph 5 of 14 [accessed 30 January 2013]

⁶ Ruadhán Mac Cormaic, 'Ten Icons of Contemporary Ireland: Certificate of Naturalisation', *Irish Times*, 20 October 2012, Weekend Review, p. 1.

background as ‘something other than “White Irish”’ in the 2006 census of Ireland was similar to the percentage of people identifying as other than White British in the 2001 Census in the United Kingdom. What had taken sixty years to occur in Britain (with the majority of the ethnic minorities made up of the ‘British-born descendents of earlier arrivals’), had taken place in Ireland in ten, where the ethnic minorities were ‘overwhelmingly [first generation] immigrants’.⁷ The collapse of the Irish economy in 2008 and the consequent rise in unemployment saw a return to Ireland’s tradition of emigration. Irish people left the country in search of work, ‘[making] migration the mirror for Ireland in the tumultuous first decade of the century’.⁸ Migrants who arrived in Ireland during the boom years have been disproportionately affected by the economic recession (with employment figures for 2009 indicating that one in three migrant workers had lost their jobs, compared with one in ten Irish workers).⁹ Nevertheless, although the number of people arriving in the country has declined dramatically, and while some migrants have moved on or returned home, others have decided to remain in the country with many now having families there. Notwithstanding the impact of the economic downturn, Ireland’s social, economic and cultural landscape has been permanently altered by immigration and a return to its previous homogeneous state is likely to be an impossibility.

Liquid Modernity: Ireland in the Global Age

Avtar Brah’s definition of diaspora space is particularly apposite as a description of contemporary Irish society:

Diaspora space as a conceptual category is ‘inhabited’ not only by those who have migrated and their descendents but equally those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of *diaspora space* (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying put’.¹⁰

⁷ Kevin Howard, ‘National Identity, Moral Panic and East European Folk Devils’, in *Globalization, Migration and Social Transformation: Ireland in Europe and the World*, ed. by Bryan Fanning and Ronald Munck (Farnham, UK and Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2011), pp.169-181 (p.169). Howard cites statistics from the Irish Central Statistics Office, 2007 and the UK Office of National Statistics, 2005.

⁸ Mac Cormaic, p. 1.

⁹ Stephen Castles, ‘Foreword: Diversity and Post-Tiger Ireland’, in *Globalization, Migration and Social Transformation*, ed. by Fanning and Munck, pp.xix-xx (p. xix).

¹⁰ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 181.

Any assessment of contemporary Ireland reveals the extent of such ‘entanglements’. On a visit to the west coast of Ireland, it is possible to find yourself drinking a cappuccino in a café run by an American, overlooking a beach with an unspoilt view of mountains and sea, where an international selection of surfers ride the waves in their Australian branded surfwear, before returning to your B&B run by an Irish woman and her German husband. That evening you can relax over a pint of Guinness in the local pub, served to you by the Polish bar staff, while eavesdropping on two locals speaking Irish at the bar during a break in the traditional Irish music being played by an Irish piper and a Spanish bodhrán player. In the morning, you can start the day with a full Irish breakfast alongside homemade muesli and a selection of continental breads, eaten in the breakfast room where the low murmur of breakfasting German tourists is interspersed with the cadence of several regional Irish accents. Later, you can have lunch at a local restaurant, formerly a traditional pub, whose Irish owner returned from New York to transform it into a top-end restaurant serving international cuisine, using locally-sourced ingredients.

This blending of the traditional and the modern that characterises contemporary Ireland leads Carmel Kuhling and Kieran Keohane to conclude that the Irish ‘increasingly occupy multiple subject positions, and a variety of temporalities simultaneously [...] Ireland is a clear example of what Bhabha means by the hybrid, ambiguous status of the ‘in-between’.¹¹ It is the ‘in-betweenness’, hybridity and ambiguity characteristic of the migrant experience and indeed present in the internal exile felt by some of the Irish population as a result of their rapidly changing society, that informs my choice of theoretical framework for this thesis. The analysis of the narratives under consideration is filtered through an interdisciplinary theoretical framework. Firstly, it is informed by postcolonial theories of migrancy and otherness, in particular those put forward by Homi Bhabha and Julia Kristeva, with additional reference to Edward Said, Albert Memmi and Stuart Hall. It is well-documented that eighteenth and nineteenth century Irish nationalists chose to identify with the anti-colonial struggle of the white settler and creole populations of America, rather than that of the indigenous American Indians

¹¹ Carmel Kuhling and Kieran Keohane, *Cosmopolitan Ireland; Globalisation and Quality of Life* (London and Ann Arbor, Michigan: Pluto Press, 2007), p. 14.

or the indigenous peoples in colonial Africa and Asia.¹² This is not to imply that there were no alternative voices, such as that of Roger Casement, whose ‘fearless humanitarian endeavours in the Belgian Congo and Brazil’, Luke Gibbons explains, ‘derived not from socially denatured conceptions of human rights, but from a discovery of his own Irishness, and his repudiation of a privileged imperial, Loyalist upbringing’.¹³ In 1957, at a time when many African and Asian countries were fighting for their freedom from colonial rule, the then Irish foreign minister Frank Aiken gave a speech at the United Nations describing how Ireland’s memory of its experience of colonialism gave its people ‘a sense of brotherhood with the newly emerging peoples of today’ and that such a memory made it ‘impossible for any representative of Ireland to withhold support for racial, religious, national or economic rights in any part of the world’.¹⁴ This connection between Ireland and later decolonising nations is at the heart of the introduction of postcolonial criticism to Ireland in the 1980s, which led to a broadening of the scope for studying Irish identity and the contextualisation of Ireland’s struggles outside of a solely national or Western framework.¹⁵ Gibbons describes how ‘the post-colonial turn in Irish criticism [...] represents an attempt to extend the horizons of the local to distant and often very different cultures, beyond the comforting cosmopolitanism of the West’.¹⁶ This research draws on the work of a number of Irish critics including Declan Kiberd, Luke Gibbons, David Lloyd, Seamus Deane and Richard Kearney who have applied postcolonial theory to the specific situation of Ireland.

The rapid transformation of Irish society in the last two decades has largely been the result of globalisation. Therefore I draw on globalisation theory in my analysis, particularly the work of sociologist Zigmunt Bauman and anthropologist Marc Augé on the significance of space and place, with reference to the concept of

¹² Declan Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 133.

¹³ Luke Gibbons, “‘Guests of the Nation’: Ireland, Immigration, and Post-Colonial Solidarity”, in *Race Panic and the Memory of Migration*, ed. by Meaghan Morris and Brett de Bary (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2001) pp.79-102 (p. 81).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Declan Kiberd introduced Irish academia to postcolonial criticism when he invited Edward Said to address the Yeats’ Summer School in Sligo, Ireland in 1985. See Eoin Flannery, ‘Outside in the Theory Machine: Ireland in the World of Post-Colonial Studies’, *Studies*, 92 (2003), 359-369, (p. 361-362).

¹⁶ Luke Gibbons, ‘The Global Cure? History, Therapy and the Celtic Tiger’, in *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy*, ed. by Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin (London, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2002), pp. 89-106 (p. 104).

‘home’ in a permeable, global society. This underpins an assessment of how my chosen narratives represent the response of the Irish to immigration, both in terms of day-to-day interactions between host and migrant, and longer-term in their attitudes to the local and the global. Globalisation often gives rise to a movement towards localisation, a concept discussed by Piaras Mac Éinrí,¹⁷ where the ‘flattening’ of identity that is the result of mass migration causes the people of the host nation to turn back towards an identity that was particular to them, and constructed upon a base of ethnicity, language and shared history. It also leads them to seek a place that represents the pre-originary site of their national identity, the ‘primal shelter’ discussed by Bauman. In Ireland’s case, the west of the country functions as this site, for reasons that I explain later in this chapter. Doreen Massey takes issue with this glorification of ‘place’ as the site of security and refuge. She is concerned that by referring back to a historical version of place, boundaries are created, leaving an inside and an outside, a divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’.¹⁸ In chapter two of this thesis I examine an Irish character’s attempt to reinforce such boundaries in response to the arrival of a migrant community in his suburb of Galway, in Gerard Donovan’s short story, ‘The summer of birds’ [*sic*]. I also explore the representation of the Irish West as a refuge for both insiders and outsiders in Hugo Hamilton’s novel *Hand in the Fire* and in the films *Ondine* and *Nothing Personal*, where boundaries are erased as the West becomes a contact zone for migrant and Irish characters.

I also draw on transnationalism theory which Ronald Munck describes as having ‘given rise to a far more fluid and pluralist understanding of migration compared to the old ‘push-pull’ theories which dominated both economic and sociological interpretations’.¹⁹ Lucy R. Lippard uses the term ‘multicentredness’ to refer to the way in which people move around from place to place in contemporary society, choosing to live for periods of time in a variety of places.²⁰ This fluid conception of migration is relevant in considering the narratives at the centre of this

¹⁷ Piaras Mac Éinrí, ‘States of Becoming: Is there a “here” here and a “there” there? Some reflections on home, away, displacement and identity’ (University College Cork: Irish Centre for Migration Studies, 1998) <<http://migration.ucc.ie/statesofbecoming.htm>> [accessed 23 November 2008]

¹⁸ Doreen Massey, ‘The Global Place’, in *Place: a short introduction*, ed. by Tim Cresswell (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 63-70 (p. 66).

¹⁹ Ronald Munck, ‘Ireland in the World, the World in Ireland’, in *Globalization, Migration and Social Transformation*, ed. by Fanning and Munck, pp. 3-20 (p. 9).

²⁰ Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentred Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997), p. 5.

thesis, with some migrant characters exhibiting a commuter-like attitude to their migration, while others are prohibited from moving forwards or going back as a consequence of their asylum status. Writing in 1988, Richard Kearney noted that Irish cultural migration after 1960, unlike the emigrations of earlier periods, allowed for the option of return.²¹ Although he was referring to the Irish experience, the same applies to the voluntary migrants currently living in Ireland. Thanks to the presence of budget airlines, migrants from Eastern Europe in particular commute back and forth between Ireland and their countries of origin. This phenomenon is captured by Chris Binchy in his novel *Open-handed*, which I discuss in chapter one, and which reflects the detachment that this movement engenders in its Polish protagonists, in relation to both Ireland and Poland. Their detachment can be considered in the context of Jan Williem Duyvendak's description of the 'universalist' view of place, which attributes people's lack of 'thick' attachments to places to their increased mobility.²² This view resonates with Kearney's assessment that for the migrant who has left home, 'on returning home you know you will never be totally at home'.²³ Caitríona Ní Laoire's work on Irish migrants who left Ireland in the 1980s and early 1990s and returned in the late 1990s/early 2000s provides testimony of this state of mind²⁴ and informs my discussion of Hugo Hamilton's novel *Hand in the Fire* in chapter one. Rather than dwell on the identity crisis inherent in this liminal condition, Kearney celebrates the creative potential in being somewhat of an outsider in both the home of origin as well as the adopted home. The physical and mental distance allows for a new-found appreciation of what went previously unnoticed or was taken for granted. In the same way that Bhabha celebrates the spaces in-between, Kearney celebrates the liberating effect of migrancy. He believes that the 'double identity' or 'double belonging' inherent in a double residence should not be regarded as a schizophrenic condition but rather as 'a porous interchange between what is familiar to you and what is foreign'.²⁵ I explore this theory throughout this

²¹ Richard Kearney, 'Migrant Minds', in *Across The Frontiers: Ireland in the 1990s*, ed. by Richard Kearney (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1988), pp. 185-187 (p. 185).

²² Jan Williem Duyvendak, *The Politics of Home: Belonging and Nostalgia in Western Europe and the United States* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 9.

²³ Kearney, p. 185.

²⁴ Caitríona Ní Laoire, 'Return Migrants and Boundaries of Belonging', in *Globalization, Migration and Social Transformation*, ed. by Fanning and Munck, pp. 21-33.

²⁵ 'An Interview with Richard Kearney, Philosopher and Author', Business Interviews, *The Irish Mind* <www.irishmind.com/interviews.htm> [accessed 03 March 2010]. *The Irish Mind* was an international marketing campaign launched by the IDA in 2006 to attract FDI (Foreign

thesis, examining the effect that my chosen authors' and filmmakers' varying perspectives - Irish/non-Irish, Irish writer writing from within or outside of Ireland, a real or imagined representation of migrancy - have on the themes, style and tone of their narratives.

The creativity inherent both within and as a consequence of the migrant condition is also emphasised by Kiberd and Gibbons. Kiberd advocates the effectiveness of literature and popular culture in giving voice to those frequently rendered mute by officialdom, while Gibbons sees the arts as a bridging point between the indigenous Irish and immigrants.²⁶ Both of these views are contained in Bhabha's statement of how 'the national culture comes to be articulated as a dialectic of various temporalities – modern, colonial, postcolonial, "native"'.²⁷ In giving voice to the migrant through a variety of literary forms, my primary texts create a nexus between Irish and migrant characters, '[making] provision, not just for 'vertical' mobility from the periphery to the centre, but for 'lateral' journeys along the margins'.²⁸ The concepts of mobility and journeying referred to by Gibbons are key components of contemporary global society as discussed above and migration is no longer always a question of leaving one place to forge a life in another, entailing exile from the original home. While this is the case for involuntary migrants such as refugees and asylum seekers, for many voluntary contemporary migrants, 'here' and 'there' are interchangeable as people's social, cultural and economic mobility increase. The US-based Irish writer Colum McCann comments on the consequences for identity and the function of narrative under such conditions:

With the internet; with emigration no longer an issue (most people don't emigrate any more, they commute); with global media; with our lives becoming jumbles of co-ordinates, it is possible that we can belong to no country whatsoever. It is also possible that we can belong to more than one

Direct Investment). The campaign ran primarily in the United States' and used 'print media, online presence, and sponsorship of high calibre business and sectoral conferences and seminars in IDA's target markets'. For more details, see http://www.idaireland.com/news-media/publications/annual-reports/pdfs/2005_annual_report_press_statement.doc

²⁶ Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World*, p. 301 and Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: University Press, 1996), p. 180.

²⁷ Homi Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 291-322 (p. 303).

²⁸ Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, p. 180.

country. Which begs the question: How do we define ourselves? Perhaps through stories.²⁹

With McCann's question in mind, my thesis explores the extent to which Irish and migrant writers are defining this socially and culturally transformed society, and most particularly their representation of migrants within it. The success of contemporary Irish novelists such as Colm Tóibín, whose novel *Brooklyn* (2009), set in 1950s Ireland and New York, won the 2009 Costa Book Award, is indicative of the appeal of the past as a setting and a subject for Irish writers and readers of Irish fiction alike. As Declan Kiberd notes, 'the more that contemporary finance broke up old culture, the more necessary its sponsors in New York and London found it to celebrate writers who could supply vivid accounts of what had been erased'.³⁰ Fintan O'Toole takes this point further, albeit acknowledging that he is making 'an outrageous generalisation', when he suggests that 'the great theme of the contemporary Irish novel is not Ireland but the US'.³¹ To the aforementioned *Brooklyn* he adds Joseph O'Connor's *Redemption Falls* (2007) set during the US Civil War; Colum McCann's *This Side of Brightness* (1998) that begins in early twentieth century New York and *Let the Great World Spin* (2009) that unfolds there in the 1970s; Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (2008) that takes place in post 9/11 New York and Roddy Doyle's *Oh, Play That Thing* (2004) set across 1920s America. Significantly for the subject matter of this thesis, O'Toole regards these works as a response to the rise of immigration to Ireland, an experience from which, he says, 'by definition, native Irish writers were imaginatively excluded':

One way of responding to this has been to reclaim the Irish experience of being an immigrant in a strange country. That strange country couldn't be the contemporary US: when Irish people were doing their Christmas shopping in Macy's, it was hardly credible to posit today's New York as an alien planet. Hence the decision to reach back to the nineteenth century, the 1920s or the 1950s.³²

²⁹ Colum McCann in *Being Irish: Personal Reflections on Irish Identity Today*, ed. by Paddy Logue (Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 2000), pp.138-141 (p. 140).

³⁰ Cited in John Burns, 'Can Irish authors turn the page?', *Sunday Times*, 28 February 2010 < http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/world_news/article198945.ece > [accessed 20 April 2010].

³¹ Fintan O'Toole, 'Irish Writers have yet to awake from the American Dream', *Irish Times*, 7 July 2011, Weekend Review, pp. 9-10 (p. 9).

³² *Ibid.*, p.10.

The potential positive outcome of such a literary strategy is recognised by Gibbons who points out that the reclamation of ‘those lost narratives of the past’ can help to ‘generate new solidarities in the present’.³³ By reaching back into Ireland’s emigrant past as a point of reference, many critical commentators see the potential for such narratives to bridge the gap in understanding between host and migrant, described by Julia Kristeva when she explains that ‘the ear is receptive to conflicts only if the body loses its footing’.³⁴ Following a similar line of thought to Gibbons, O’Toole also focuses on the capacity of Ireland’s past experience of emigration to underpin its present and future adjustment to what he calls ‘metropolitan globalism’,³⁵ of which inward migration is one consequence. Kiberd outlines what the ‘process of adjustment’ entailed for those Irish emigrants, who adopted psychological masks, indulged in nostalgia for the homeland, and felt acutely aware of their otherness in relation to the host society.³⁶ Irish people who did not emigrate but migrated internally from the country to the city during the twentieth century, are also familiar with these strategies and therefore have also experienced the loss of footing which, in theory, should facilitate their understanding of the dislocation that characterises the experience of contemporary migrants to Ireland. There is a third category of migrant to be considered, that of the returned Irish migrant, whom Ní Laoire describes as ‘Irish but only partly Irish’. She outlines the in-between position occupied by this group:

[They] thus nicely subvert [...] the dominant binary opposition between the native white Irish and the incoming foreigners who would need to be integrated. Their fluid social and cultural identification and their liminal position betwixt and between the ‘real Irish’ and the ‘new Irish’ place them in a pivotal position for a complex understanding of migration and the politics of belonging.³⁷

³³ Gibbons, ‘The Global Cure? History, Therapy and the Celtic Tiger’, p. 105.

³⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p.17.

³⁵ Fintan O’Toole, ‘Green, white and black : Race and Irish Identity’, in *Emerging Irish Identities: Proceedings of a seminar held in Trinity College Dublin, 27 November 1999*, ed. by Ronit Lentin, pp. 17-23 (p.18).

³⁶ Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World*, p. 317.

³⁷ Ní Laoire, p. 16.

The analysis of the novels, short stories and films in my thesis demonstrates however that appeals to Irish historical memory are not always successful in informing Irish reaction to contemporary migrants. In addition, the figure of the 'returned emigrant' as represented in *Hand in the Fire* by Hugo Hamilton reflects Ireland's complicated relationship with those of its citizens who have lived elsewhere.

O'Toole continues his assessment of the US-centric approach of many contemporary Irish writers by opining that it offers 'relief from having to try and make sense of the confusing, vulgar, rapidly shifting Ireland of the last 20 years'.³⁸ Such a suggestion engages with a wider debate about contemporary Irish fiction initiated by the writer Julian Gough in 2010, complaining that Irish literature is moving backwards, with 'novel after novel set in the nineteen seventies, sixties, fifties. Reading award-winning Irish literary fiction, you wouldn't know television had been invented'. He describes Irish literary writers as 'a priestly caste, scribbling by candlelight, cut off from the electric current of the culture'.³⁹ While Gough notes such exceptions as Roddy Doyle and Paul Howard (who writes as the fictional Ross O'Carroll Kelly), Susan Cahill criticizes both him and O'Toole for 'a tendency towards reductive models of past-present relations which privilege rigid distinctions towards temporalities'.⁴⁰ Joseph O'Connor adopts a similar position to Cahill and describes the potential for novels about Ireland's past to explore and explain the creation of the current state of church, economic and political affairs.⁴¹ He also points to the contemporary focus in the work of the new generation of writers such as Kevin Barry and Kevin Power. Introducing the subject of genre to the debate, Kiberd acknowledges that over the last decade, women's fiction and crime novels by Irish writers *have* reflected the contemporary experience in Ireland. Declan Burke also points to the engagement of crime fiction writers with contemporary Ireland while Sheila O'Flanagan notes that 'female novelists have been writing contemporary Irish fiction which deals with modern issues for years. But it doesn't fit into the grand tradition because it's not dark, bleak and hopeless'.⁴² I will return

³⁸ O'Toole, 'Irish Writers have yet to awake from the American Dream', p. 9.

³⁹ Julian Gough, 'The State of Irish Literature 2010', 10 February 2010 www.juliangough.com [accessed 20 March 2010]

⁴⁰ Susan Cahill, *Irish Literature in the Celtic Tiger Years 1990-2008: Gender, Bodies, Memory* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 7.

⁴¹ Joseph O'Connor, 'An appeal to the sages of the snug', *Irish Times*, 20 March 2010, Weekend Review, p. 9.

⁴² Cited in Burns, 'Can Irish authors turn the page?'

to the subject of crime fiction and fiction by Irish women later in this introductory chapter, the former more extensively because of its significance in relation to the novels by Chris Binchy and Hugo Hamilton that I analyse in this thesis.

As I have previously noted, while I engage with the wider social and cultural environment of contemporary Ireland, my focus remains specifically on the representation of the migrant condition in the novels, short stories and films that comprise the primary material of this thesis. In 2002 Clair Wills pointed out that while much media coverage of Ireland's new immigrant population existed, 'there [had] been little space given to the ordeals and aspirations of refugees themselves'.⁴³ This is the space that my research is intended to expand, through an examination of the work of a selection of established *Irish* writers and film makers and also that of emerging *immigrant* writers and filmmakers in the ensuing decade. In the process, I aim to offer a critical study of the form and variety of representations of the migrant experience emerging from Ireland in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The majority of Irish writers (and film makers) who *do* focus on contemporary Ireland present immigrant characters infrequently, if at all. They appear on the margins of texts as workers in the service and construction industries, childcare workers, cleaners, taxi drivers, bar and restaurant staff, security guards and hotel porters. Their consciousness is rarely rendered. One notable exception has been Roddy Doyle, described by Maureen Reddy as 'the only well-known Irish writer trying to reach a broad audience with fiction that focuses on the changing Irish racial context and whose aim is to impact the developing racial discourse in Ireland'.⁴⁴ Doyle's short story collection *The Deportees* (2007) and short story column in *Metro Eireann* (Ireland's only multi-cultural newspaper) feature central migrant characters that reflect Dublin's multicultural society.⁴⁵ Since its establishment by two Dublin-based Nigerian journalists in 2000, *Metro Eireann* has provided a forum for aspiring immigrant writers through an annual writing competition. The paper's mission statement is 'to be a channel through which the diverse peoples of Ireland will inform, challenge, understand and learn to respect each other'.⁴⁶ The short stories 'Grafton Street of Dublin' (2010) by Ifedinma Dimbo and 'Shackles' (2010) by

⁴³ Clair Wills, 'Ethnicities', in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, ed. by Angela Burke and others (Cork University Press: Cork, 2002), pp 1656-1673 (p. 1657).

⁴⁴ Maureen Reddy, 'Reading and Writing Race in Ireland: Roddy Doyle and *Metro Eireann*', *Irish University Review*, 35 (2005), 374-388 (p. 387).

⁴⁵ Doyle's *The Deportees* (2007) was originally serialised in *Metro Eireann*.

⁴⁶ <<http://www.metroeireann.com/about-us>> [accessed 04 November 2009]

Melatu Okorie, which I discuss in chapter two, are by Nigerian writers whose work initially emerged through the paper. Amanda Tucker has discussed the role of art and literature in making cultural diversity more comprehensible to Irish people, rather than discussing it solely at the macro-level of political and economic policy.⁴⁷ I believe, like Tucker, that literature and film provide insights into the migrant condition through their representation of migrant characters, in a way that statistical and documentary material cannot. The challenge is to find texts that reflect the reality of that migrant experience.

Bhabha emphasises the potential of the ‘in-between’ spaces as places ‘from which to speak both of, and as, the minority, the exilic, the marginal, and the emergent’.⁴⁸ Perhaps this is an overly optimistic view of a state that all too often, particularly for first generation migrants, is defined by the practicalities of daily survival and where there is little time or space to entertain creative endeavours. Moreover, in the case of migrants who do not speak English, or who are not confident enough to write in that language, opportunities for translation and publication of any writing they produce are slim. A case in point is that of two female Polish novelists who lived in Dublin until 2009. Magdalena Orzel and Iwona Slabuzewska-Krauze fictionalised their experiences in the novels *Dublin: Moja Polska Karma* (*Dublin: My Polish Karma/Foodstuff*) (2007) and *Hotel Irlandia* (*Hotel Ireland*) (2006) respectively. Both novels are written in Polish but neither has been translated, despite the fact that they provide a valuable insight into life in Dublin from the point of view of contemporary Polish migrants. I have fortunately succeeded in gaining some insight into the novels through reading publications in English by Polish-speaking academics outlining the themes and concerns addressed in these texts. In the next chapter I provide a synopsis of their findings. In January 2013, a prize-winning short story, written in English by a Polish writer, was made available on the Irish Writers’ Exchange website, a promising sign indeed for future migrant writing. I discuss this story in more detail in my concluding chapter in the context of looking forward to future research and writing in this subject area. The two novels selected to represent the Eastern European migrant experience in this thesis are by the established Irish writers Chris Binchy and Hugo Hamilton, and it is interesting to note that the

⁴⁷ Amanda Tucker, “‘Our Story is Everywhere’: Colum McCann and Irish Multiculturalism’, *Irish University Review*, 40 (2010), 107-128 (p. 108-109).

⁴⁸ Bhabha, ‘DissemiNation’, p. 300.

experiences of their imagined migrants mirror those of the migrants whose characterisation is informed by the real-life experience of the Polish writers discussed above. Binchy and Hamilton both have some connections with the migrant condition - Binchy's wife has family in Poland and Hamilton is the Irish-born child of a German mother and an Irish father. Susan Ireland describes how writers who adopt this perspective 'become [the migrant workers'] spokespersons in the texts and seek to make the reading public aware of their plight [...] Their novels range in tone from highly polemical to tragic, and in style from realist to poetic'.⁴⁹ I explore the distinctive literary tones and styles of Binchy's *Open-Handed* and Hamilton's *Hand in the Fire* in the next chapter.

As referred to earlier, the two migrant writers whose short stories I include in my analysis are both Nigerian women, Ifedinma Dimbo and Melatu Okorie. As citizens of a formerly colonised country, the English language that is part of this colonial legacy has possibly been an advantage in making their work more accessible. The African writer Chinua Achebe defended his decision to write in English on the basis of the wider readership it allowed for his work within Nigeria itself, explaining, 'I can speak across two hundred linguistic frontiers to fellow Nigerians only in English'.⁵⁰ The value of such accessibility to Dimbo and Okorie's work lies in its first-hand accounts of life for African migrants in Ireland, with its focus on the difficulties of daily life there and the cultural readjustments required to make life bearable. The autobiographical nature of these texts is customary in first generation migrant writing, written either by or on behalf of migrants, as Susan Ireland discusses in relation to migrant writing in France.⁵¹ The writing of the Trinidadian writer Sam Selvon is evidence of this pattern, his fictionalised stories of the lives of West Indian migrants in 1950s London informed by his own experiences as a migrant in that time and place, while the novels and short stories of contemporary Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's reflect her personal observations as a migrant woman living in the United States. British-born writers who are the children of the 1950s and 1960s migrants to Britain, such as Monica Ali, Zadie Smith, Hanif

⁴⁹ Susan Ireland, 'First Generation Immigrant Narratives', in *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France*, ed. by Susan Ireland and Patrice J. Proulx (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp.23-43 (p. 33).

⁵⁰ Chinua Achebe, 'The Politics of Language', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 268-271 (p. 269).

⁵¹ Ireland, p. 24.

Kureishi, and Diran Adebayo, reflect less on the original homeland and more on their individual experience of second generation migrancy, while also giving an insight into the lives of their parents in their adopted home over the past forty years. In a discussion of German-Turkish literature, Meyda Yegenoglu outlines how the earliest literature produced by Turkish migrants was oriented primarily towards Turkey. When these writers turned their attention to the host country, the themes they focused on arose from their experience as *gastarbeiters* (guest-workers) – loneliness, despair, disillusionment, identity crises, prejudice and rejection. The term *gastarbeiter*, by which Germany historically referred to its Turkish migrants, carried the implication that as ‘guests’ these migrants were not invited to stay, but rather to return home to Turkey at some point. Even the children of these migrants, who have been born and raised in Germany, experience a sense of marginalisation, of not belonging. Many of them feel that ‘Germany cannot be transformed into a home; it remains a host country; it is neither a site of temporary abode nor a home. It is a place where they dwell *strangely*’.⁵² Hamilton, with his own dual heritage, sees parallels between the attitude of the Irish to immigrants and the German *gastarbeiter* situation, recalling reports ‘that mention that we [the Irish] don’t see them as people who are going to stay and take part in our culture’.⁵³ My analysis explores the relevance of this statement through an assessment of the attitudes of Irish characters in my narratives towards the migrant individuals and communities in their midst. Ireland’s migrant communities are still in the early stages of their establishment and therefore it will be at least another decade before we are likely to encounter the literary output of their English-speaking Irish-born children. For now, it is small publishing houses such as the Irish Writers’ Exchange and the aforementioned newspaper *Metro Eireann* that provide a forum in which aspiring first generation migrant writers can flourish.

⁵² Meyda Yegenoglu, ‘From Guest Worker to Hybrid Immigrant: Changing Themes of German-Turkish Literature’, in *Migrant Cartographies: New Cultural and Literary Spaces in Post-Colonial Europe*, ed. by Sandra Ponzanesi and Daniela Merolla (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005), pp.137-149 (p.145). There are, however, some encouraging signs of greater integration, with a number of Turkish/German players in the German national football team.

⁵³ Aisling McKeown, ‘*Hand in the Fire* and the bid to belong: an interview with Hugo Hamilton’, *Irish Studies Review*, 19 (2011), 427-432 (p. 428).

Genres and Themes

Having compiled a selection of primary source material by both Irish and migrant writers, where migrant characters are present and central to the narratives rather than operating as archetypes, I examine the form and the implications of their representation and identify what it indicates about the relationship between Irish people and the new immigrant communities. I have chosen to focus on three genres in my research – novels, short stories and film. For reasons of scope, my focus is on writing and film set in the Republic of Ireland. Its experience of immigration differs from that of Northern Ireland, where immigration policy and practice are historically tied in to the UK system, and which therefore constitutes a research project in its own right.

The establishment of the Irish Censorship Board in 1929, which had to power to ban any books believed to contain ‘indecent’ material, created a society that many Irish writers felt was ‘unconducive to artistic realism and therefore to the realist novel, indeed to the novel as a genre’.⁵⁴ By the late 1960s, censorship had become less rigid as a consequence of various amendments to the original legislation, until it gradually ceased altogether. John Wilson Foster describes how ‘the state of affairs in the Irish novel today is a busy and multifarious one’ in which ‘heretofore silent voices and subgenres are being heard and read’, including novels of working class life, ‘candid’ novels by women and gay fiction.⁵⁵ In such a climate, Foster is enthusiastic about the potential for the novel to reflect the changes in Irish culture and society as a result of multiculturalism, pointing out that ‘the best of them memorably express singular voices’.⁵⁶ The two realist novels I have chosen for my analysis represent ‘the best of them’ in their imagining of the migrant experience. *Open-handed* (2009) by Chris Binchy depicts the detached lives of a number of Eastern European immigrants in Dublin while *Hand in the Fire* (2010) by Hugo Hamilton recounts the contrasting experiences of a Serbian migrant who is desperate to assimilate into Dublin and Ireland as a whole.

Kiberd describes how the short story form has been the most popular literary genre with Irish readers since the early twentieth century, and was the form chosen

⁵⁴ John Wilson Foster, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion To The Irish Novel*, ed. by John Wilson Foster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1-21 (p. 16-17)

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.20.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

by many Irish writers ‘to depict their vision of the emerging Ireland’ during the years in which Ireland was developing into a modern nation.⁵⁷ He regards the form as ‘admirably suited to the task of reflecting the disturbances in Irish society as it painfully shed its ancient traditions’.⁵⁸ More recently, Heather Ingman makes an almost identical point when she attributes the renewed interest in the short story form amongst the Irish reading public since the late 1990s to its ability to provide an insight ‘into the liberations, dislocations and alienations consequent on the seismic changes the country underwent during those years’.⁵⁹ The writers of the four short stories that I have chosen use the form in precisely this manner and to these ends. Two of the short stories are by Irish writers; ‘The summer of birds’ by Gerard Donovan from his collection *Country of the Grand* (2008) and ‘As if There Were Trees’, by Colum McCann in the collection *New Dubliners* (2005), edited by Oona Frawley.⁶⁰ Both stories observe migrant life through the eyes of Irish characters and in relation to the internal exile suffered in response to the changes to their altered environment. Donovan and McCann are part of the Irish diaspora of the 1980s and as such constitute an interesting category of their own, that of the Irish writer writing about Ireland from the outside. The other two short stories, by Nigerian authors, are ‘Grafton Street of Dublin’ (2010) by Ifedinma Dimbo and ‘Shackles’ (2010) by Melatu Okorie, from the Irish Writers’ Exchange collection entitled *Dublin: Ten Journeys, One Destination* (2010). Both stories depict the lives of Nigerian asylum seekers living in Dublin, and are informed by their authors’ personal experiences of the asylum system. In Okorie’s case, a counsellor at the asylum centre where she lived encouraged her to ‘channel her frustration and stress into creative outlets such as writing’, which led to her writing a prizewinning short story ‘Gathering Thoughts’, set in Nigeria, for a competition run by *Metro Eireann* in 2009.⁶¹

The medium of film invites analysis of the visual embodiment of migrant characters, thereby adding an additional dimension to their representation. In the thesis I interrogate the extent to which my chosen films foreground the physical

⁵⁷ Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World*, pp. 43-44.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

⁵⁹ Heather Ingman, *A History of the Irish Short Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 11.

⁶⁰ ‘As if There Were Trees’ originally appeared in an anthology entitled *Shenanigans: an anthology of fresh Irish fiction*, ed. by Sarah Champion and Donal Scannell (London: Seiptre, 1999).

⁶¹ Catherine Reilly, ‘Asylum seeker has write stuff’, *Metro Eireann*, 19 February 2009 <http://metroeireann.com/article/asylum-seeker-has-write-stuff.1706#> [accessed 14 March 2010]

aspects, including gender and ethnicity, of their migrant characters. I also investigate how landscape is incorporated into the films' representation of migrancy, in view of the extent to which Ireland's natural beauty has featured in twentieth century film both as a backdrop and as a character in its own right. The three films I discuss are *The Front Line* (2006) directed by David Gleeson and reflecting the experiences of an African asylum seeker in Dublin; *Ondine* (2009) directed by Neil Jordan with a Romanian illegal migrant at its centre, and *Nothing Personal* (2010) directed by Urzula Antoniak and exploring a Dutch migrant's search for sanctuary in the west of Ireland. While the urban heart of Dublin provides a challenging setting that reflects the migrant characters' situation in *The Front Line*, the landscape plays a significant role in the latter two films where it contributes to the characterisation of the female migrant characters at the centre of the films' narratives. The implications of the choice of urban or rural settings for each of the genres that I analyse is discussed extensively in each individual chapter.

In selecting three genres, I have necessarily had to omit others due to the restrictions of the thesis in terms of length but I want to acknowledge in particular the significance of Irish drama in representations of both Irish and migrant identities, past and present. Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle's 2007 adaptation of *The Playboy of the Western World* is a prime example of the re-contextualising of a dramatic work to reflect Ireland's contemporary landscape.⁶² Sarah Townsend described the adaptation as an attempt 'to narrate a tale of globalization's triumph' set 'within the borderless, multiracial celebrity culture of the west'.⁶³ In September 2011, the play was performed at the Old Vic in London with Ruth Negga, an Irish-Ethiopian actress, playing the role of Pegeen. In 2007 Bisi Adigun also directed a version of Jimmy Murphy's 2000 play, *Kings of the Kilburn High Road*, with his Arambe Theatre Company where five black actors - four Nigerian immigrants and one Irish-Nigerian - played the parts of Irish emigrant labourers in London. Karen Fricker of the *Guardian* newspaper described the performance in Dublin as 'a fascinating use

⁶² In Adigun and Doyle's adaptation, the play is set in contemporary Dublin and the playboy character of Christy Mahon is a Nigerian refugee called Christopher Malomo. Produced and directed by Arambe Productions, the play premiered at the Abbey Theatre in October 2007, commemorating the centenary of J.M. Synge's original production in 1907. Unfortunately, a contractual disagreement has prevented further performances of Adigun and Doyle's 2007 version. See <<http://www.arambeproductions.com>> for more details.

⁶³ Sarah L. Townsend, 'Cosmopolitanism at Home: Ireland's Playboys from Celtic Revival to Celtic Tiger', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 34 (2011) <<http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>> [accessed 08 September 2012] 1-17, (p. 12).

of theatre to explore Ireland's changing cultural realities'.⁶⁴ The last decade has seen the creation of an increasing number of local theatre companies in Ireland such as *Calypso* and *Guna Nua*, that experiment with new forms such as 'physical theatre and performance, occasionally even abolishing the traditional focus on the playwright for the sake of joint authorship or the creation of devised pieces'.⁶⁵ A particularly interactive approach is that taken by a duo called The Gombeens, Irishman Jonathan Gunning and Majorcan Miquel Barceló. Their performance entitled *Stories of a Yellow Town* is a piece of theatrical storytelling in which they recount the stories of the newly-settled Brazilian community and the local Irish as both groups adjust to a changed society in a west of Ireland town. The Gombeens first performed the piece in 2009, having spent six months collecting, recording and transcribing the stories of the Brazilian and Irish inhabitants. Like the aforementioned local companies, The Gombeens 'create a space for the stories of people on the margins as well as those in the centre'.⁶⁶ It is to be hoped that these dynamic theatrical forms do not, as Patrick Lonergan fears, become squeezed out as funding for the arts comes under pressure from Ireland's economic crisis, with theatres reluctant to invest in innovative works.⁶⁷ To do justice to an analysis of the migrant in Irish drama could well constitute a thesis of its own. It is not entirely absent from this work, however, as I draw on dramatic references throughout the various chapters, where it has a bearing on thematic or stylistic considerations.

The narratives included in my analysis represent migrant characters who are outside the margins of Irish cultural and national space, and as such qualify as what Bhabha terms 'counter-narratives of the nation' that challenge its boundaries and its ideologies of identity and community.⁶⁸ They explore themes of identity and belonging, from both the migrant and the host perspective, across a variety of local situations and locations in the context of a globalised world. In the process I consider the concept of external exile for the migrant and internal exile for the Irish that is a consequence of the transformative effects of transnationalism on Irish

⁶⁴ Karen Fricker, 'The Kings of the Kilburn High Road', *Guardian*, 27 February 2007
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2007/feb/27/theatre>> [accessed 27 April 2011]

⁶⁵ Ondrej Pilny, *Irony and Identity in Modern Irish Drama* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006), p. 154.

⁶⁶ Mary Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p. 177. See Appendix III, pp. 230-235, for my interview with The Gombeens, conducted at Coole Park, Galway, in 2010.

⁶⁷ Patrick Lonergan, 'The Values of Irish Theatre', Plenary paper, IASIL Annual Conference, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, July 26-30, 2010.

⁶⁸ Bhabha, 'DissemiNation', p. 300.

society. Furthermore, I explore how the themes raised and their treatment differs according to the perspective from which the literature and films are presented. One of the key themes running through the primary material is the range of mobility that characterises contemporary migration. The Polish characters in *Open-handed* and the Dutch woman in *Nothing Personal* are in a state of perpetual motion, the fluidity of which is a feature of transnationalism, with the attendant benefit, according to Munck, that it avoids the assumption that ‘labour becomes localized and that newcomers will simply settle into the new society and be absorbed through a process of cultural assimilation’.⁶⁹ For other migrant characters who would welcome the opportunity to ‘settle in’, such as the asylum seekers in ‘Shackles’, their unconfirmed residency status inhibits their movement in any direction. The extent of migrant mobility therefore appears to be tied to the circumstances of their migrancy, whether they are voluntary or involuntary migrants, legally or illegally in the country or have confirmed residency status or not. Chelva Kanaganayakam points out that the sub-divisions inherent in the migrant condition - the exile, the expatriate, the refugee – are informed by different sensibilities and consequently the ‘thematic preoccupations’ of writers writing within, or about, the respective sub-divisions will be correspondingly different.⁷⁰ My analysis of the primary narratives therefore examines from whom or where the migrant voice originates, and the degree to which the origin of the migrant voice influences and/or dictates the themes and concerns enunciated in the narratives. Attachment to and/or detachment from the migrant’s *point* of origin is a corresponding theme that I explore along with the migrant’s desire, or lack of it, to belong to the adopted home. In the novel *Open-handed*, the main protagonist Marcin moves to Ireland to escape what he sees as the stultifying environment and restricted opportunities of his home town in Poland. He expresses no desire to return but neither does he regard Ireland as a potential home. In *Hand in the Fire* on the other hand, the Serbian protagonist, Vid, is eager to shut out traumatic memories of his life during the war in his country, and equally eager to create a new life in Ireland. The novel documents the lengths to which he is prepared to go to create a place for himself in Irish society. In the short stories ‘Shackles’ and ‘Grafton Street in Dublin’, thoughts of home engender homesickness but also

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Chelva Kanaganayakam, ‘Exiles and Expatriates’, in *New National and Post-Colonial Literatures: An Introduction*, ed. by Bruce King (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 201-213 (p. 203).

frustration. In film, *The Front Line* documents the strain and uncertainty of life on the margin from the perspective of an illegal African immigrant in Dublin. *Ondine* and *Nothing Personal* portray Ireland as a place of sanctuary for their female migrant characters. The Romanian woman in *Ondine* avoids contact with the local community because she is in the country illegally, while the Dutch woman in *Nothing Personal*, who has no such concerns, seeks solitude and therefore avoids socialising. For these women, ‘sometimes the place, or “nature” will provide nourishment that social life cannot’.⁷¹

Roger Bromley points out that ‘it cannot be assumed [...] that simply being within a diasporic community confers an automatic and common shared identity, as the dimensions of class, gender and sexuality also have to be addressed’.⁷² Consequently, I explore these dimensions in relation to each text and film, particularly that of gender in the light of Ronit Lentin’s statement that ‘the migration of women, [also] produced by globalization, offers an alternative narrative of globalization’.⁷³ Steve Loyal makes a similar case for addressing these elements within the Irish *host* community, noting that ‘migrants often expose the social and political fault lines of religion, ethnicity, class, gender and culture, which lie beneath the veneer of any ‘imagined community’, and Ireland is no exception’.⁷⁴ In order to understand Irish attitudes to migrants as they are represented in my selected texts and films, an historical overview of the aforementioned factors in the construction of Irish national identity and their implications for contemporary Irish perceptions of migrants will be useful.

Historical Overview: Irish Nationalism, Emigration and Immigration

The development of Irish nationalism, particularly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was a response to centuries of colonial occupation. For the

⁷¹ Lippard, p.6.

⁷² Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 8.

⁷³ Ronit Lentin, ‘Black Bodies and “Headless Hookers”: Alternative Global Narratives for 21st Century Ireland’, *The Irish Review*, 33 (2005) < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29736266> > [accessed 10 October 2012] 1-12, (p.2).

⁷⁴ Steve Loyal, ‘Welcome to the Celtic Tiger: racism, immigration and the state’, in *The End of Irish History?: Critical Approaches to the Celtic Tiger*, ed. by Colin Coulter and Steve Colman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 74-94 (p. 83).

majority Irish Catholic population living in the south of the country, the creation of a national identity served to restore national pride in a pre-colonial Irish culture that colonialism sought, as Franz Fanon pointed out in relation to French colonial Algeria, to ‘distort’, ‘disfigure’ and ‘destroy’.⁷⁵ In so doing, nationalism ‘helped to break up the self-hatred within an occupied people which led them to dream of a total, seamless assimilation to the colonial culture.’⁷⁶ However, there is a degree of defensiveness inherent in such nationalism. Bromley points out that ‘the more the “localised” have invested in the “sovereign” nation and drawn power from it, the more densely mediated, or overcoded, their lives become and a kind of territorial fundamentalism is produced – very often an effect of powerlessness.’⁷⁷ In his book *The Irish* (1969), Seán O’Faoláin demonstrated the relevance of this observation to the Irish context when he described how the concept of Irish nationality was locked into a defensive position against ‘foreign enemies’.⁷⁸ The narrow-gauge Catholicism and nationalism that promoted an ideal of Ireland as ethnically, ideologically and religiously ‘pure’ instilled a perception amongst the Irish that outside influences were corrupting. Arguing in a similar vein forty years after O’Faoláin, John Brannigan explains how the ‘fetishisation of homogeneity’ implicit in Irish nationalism led to an innate suspicion of otherness, whereby ‘the foreigner was associated with the contagion of a cosmopolitanism which knew neither home nor faith, which represented instead the secular and itinerant’.⁷⁹ For as long as the nationalist, Catholic, powers held sway, the country remained sealed off from the wider world. This insularity was particularly pronounced in the years after the War of Independence in 1922, when the government was busy ‘re-creating’ the Irish nation. DeValera’s vision of a cottage-based, rural idyll ensured that Ireland remained very much an island unto itself. An article from an *Irish Times* newspaper of 1947 demonstrates the protectionism that was at work across Irish culture. It discusses a paper given at the ‘Technical Students Literary and Debating Society’ that ‘[criticized] Irish writers for their interest in foreign markets’ and ‘Feis Ceoil

⁷⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 168.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.146 -147.

⁷⁷ Bromley, p.12.

⁷⁸ Seán O’Faoláin, *The Irish* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 9.

⁷⁹ John Brannigan, *Race in Modern Irish Literature and Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 146.

and Radio Eireann for their cosmopolitan rather than Irish outlook in music'. This was not however an unchallenged view as the argument of another speaker indicates:

Mr Brian Boydell said that when they should be keeping their eyes and ears open to the developments around them so that they might interpret them and expand from the viewpoint of their own national vision, as their contribution to the world, they were told by the loud voices of narrow-minded nationalism that they should shut their doors and develop their own culture from within.⁸⁰

With the ascent of the government of Seán Lemass in the early 1950s, Ireland began to open up to the outside world as the policy of economic protectionism was relaxed. By the 1960s, the Catholic Church's grip on the population was loosening and Ireland was changing socially and culturally. The country's admission to the European Economic Community in 1973 was a pivotal moment in opening up the economy and, significantly, breaking away from the country's postcolonial economic dependence on Britain that had lingered on in the wake of political independence. This is not to say that the narrowly-defined concept of Irishness as requiring a shared history, culture, language and religion has completely disappeared. On the contrary, this view remains deeply etched in the Irish psyche, to reappear at times of economic or socio-cultural crisis, when 'changes in demography or economy [...] can produce a sense of communal eclipse and group demotion which require redress'.⁸¹ Such are the changes that characterise Ireland at the start of the twenty-first century as a consequence of the effects of globalisation, increased immigration and, latterly, economic decline. The challenge of adapting to changes originating outside the nation space and indeed sharing that space is partly due to Ireland's extensive period of cultural, ethnic and religious homogeneity. Bauman describes the pitfalls of such a monocultural society:

The longer people stay in a uniform environment – in the company of others 'like them' with whom they can 'socialize' perfunctorily and matter-of-factly without incurring the risk of miscomprehension and without struggling with the vexing need to translate between distinct universes of meaning – the

⁸⁰ Joe Joyce, 'Opposing views on future of Irish culture', in 'From the Archives: November 10th, 1947', Weekend Review, *Irish Times*, 10 November 2012, p.6. (Original at iti.ms/STXFEB).

⁸¹ Richard English, *Irish Freedom: The History of Irish Nationalism in Ireland* (London: Macmillan, 2006), p. 460.

more they are likely to ‘unlearn’ the art of negotiating shared meanings and an agreeable *modus convivendi*.⁸²

Richard English explains that by 2002, the focus of modern Irish nationalism in the south had shifted from ‘an anglocentric-anglophobic political obsession born of lengthy tensions with the British neighbour, to a much more Europeanized focus’.⁸³ However, while celebrating the diminution of the old English-Irish binary in contemporary Irish identity, he attributes this positive remoulding of Irish self-image to increased confidence due to ‘long independence’ and ‘cultural and economic successes of the late twentieth century’.⁸⁴ However, a self-image that derives from the country’s economic success is at the mercy of the markets. In the wake of Ireland’s economic collapse, the concern is that national self-confidence and self-image have been undermined. In such circumstances immigrants may be regarded as more of a threat to the country’s self-image than they would have been when the Irish economy was thriving. David McWilliams draws attention to the connection between the Irish ethnocentricity referred to above and the country’s economic fortunes:

Given that Ireland struggled for independence in order to create self-rule for the Irish, the State’s foundation is ethnocentric. It is our place and it is highly unlikely and vaguely implausible to think that Ireland will suddenly enshrine in our constitution an objective to become a cosmopolitan honeypot. So until that happens, mass immigration will ebb and flow with the economy’s fortunes.⁸⁵

Kiberd reiterates McWilliam’s sentiments when he notes that ‘only a people secure in their national philosophy are capable of dealing confidently with those who come among them with deep commitments to alternative codes.’⁸⁶ It is to be hoped that the insecurity generated by Ireland’s current economic distress does not lead to a return to what Munck refers to as the ‘“container’ model of the nation-state’, with its emphasis on the connections between land and citizenship.⁸⁷ This model has its roots

⁸² Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: 2007), p. 88.

⁸³ English, p. 426.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ David McWilliams, *The Generation Game* (London: Macmillan, 2008), p. 148.

⁸⁶ Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World*, p. 319.

⁸⁷ Munck, p. 8.

in the cycle of possession, dispossession and eventual repossession (albeit partial when Northern Ireland is considered) that characterised Ireland's colonial history and which has left a legacy of deep insecurity amongst some Irish people. Shane Hegarty regards the present inward migration in historic terms when he states that by the time of the 2006 census, 'not since the Plantations had there been such an influx of people into the island of Ireland'.⁸⁸ The sixteenth and seventeenth century plantations to which Hegarty refers saw the expulsion of the native Irish from the fertile farming lands of Ireland to the fringes on the western seaboard. Daniel Corkery said that only in these areas, 'the hard mountain lands of West Cork and Kerry [...] the back places of Connemara', was the native Irishman 'at liberty to live in his own way'.⁸⁹ For some Irish people therefore, the arrival of large groups of migrants has re-activated a fear of once again being strangers in their own country. The Irish novelist Anne Haverty references the visible changes to Irish society in her novel *The Free and Easy* (2006) when an American tourist notes on his first day in Ireland that 'I haven't met any of the Irish yet [...] A shoe-shine I spoke to turned out to be Hungarian and the cab driver was Latvian'.⁹⁰ Notably, by 2006 there were more people in Ireland who spoke Polish on a daily basis than spoke Irish.⁹¹ Some Irish people have responded to these changes by clinging ever tighter to the emblems of nationality by which they define themselves, one example being the resurgence of interest in the Irish language over the last decade. The link between land and belonging underlies Georg Simmel's declaration that 'although [...] he may develop all kinds of charm and significance, as long as he is considered a stranger in the eyes of the other, he is not 'an owner of soil', meaning soil in both the physical and figurative sense of a life-substance'.⁹²

Kiberd's 'liberal model of interculturalism'⁹³ disputes the idea that the historical ideal of Irish nationality, with its emphasis on a shared cultural and historical heritage, renders Irish people today insular and resistant to other cultures

⁸⁸ Hegarty, p. 204.

⁸⁹ Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan: 1967), p. 23.

⁹⁰ Anne Haverty, *The Free and Easy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2006), p. 30.

⁹¹ Hegarty, p. 199.

⁹² Georg Simmel, 'The Stranger', in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. by Kurt H. Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), pp.402-408 (p. 403).

⁹³ Cited in Jason King, 'Black Saint Patrick: Irish Interculturalism in Theoretical Perspective and Theatre Practice', in *Global Ireland: Irish Literatures for the New Millennium*, ed. by Ondrej Pilny and Clare Wallace ((Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2005), 45-57 (p. 50).

and ethnic groups. He refers to the view of some commentators that what is perceived as racism in Ireland, and certainly presented as such by the media, is in fact evidence of ‘distress-signals emitted by local communities, who find the ecology of their street or village massively disturbed by a bureaucratic central government, which suddenly plants refugees in their midst’.⁹⁴ 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. McCann’s short story ‘As if There Were Trees’ and Donovan’s ‘The summer of birds’ reflect on the effects of this lack of communication between the Irish government and the local areas most affected by this policy. It must be remembered that in historical terms, Ireland’s state of (partial) national independence is less than a century old. A visible and increasing presence of migrants is likely to reactivate Irish people’s insecurity about their own identity, as evidenced in Irial Glynn’s description of how ‘pro-migrant sentiments’ were widespread in Ireland in 1995, rooted in Irish historical memory of the experience of Irish emigration.⁹⁵ However, Glynn goes on to explain that the increasing numbers of asylum seekers and immigrants who arrived during the following two years led to an increase in ‘public, media and political hostility’.⁹⁶ With echoes of the German attitude towards its ‘guestworkers’ discussed earlier in this chapter, Munck draws an analogy between the Irish attitude to migrants and wedding guests who have overstayed their welcome:

In rural areas, one would often hear comparisons between the migrant presence in Ireland and the presence of guests after a wedding in the downstairs parlour room of a small cottage. Guests, by definition, are eventually expected to go ‘home’ even when they have made their home elsewhere.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World*, p. 306.

⁹⁵ Irial Glynn, ‘Emigration Memories and Immigration Realities in Ireland and Italy’, in *Globalization, Migration and Social Transformation: Ireland in Europe and the World*, ed. by Bryan Fanning and Ronald Munck (Farnham, UK and Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2011), pp.65-77 (pp.71-72).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Munck, p. 14.

An examination of the relationship between Ireland and its historic others goes some way towards explaining this defensive contemporary reaction to ‘the person who comes today and stays tomorrow’.⁹⁸

Otherness in Ireland has historically been demarcated by religion rather than race. The rigid nature of the nationalist conception of Irishness - white, Catholic, rural, pre-industrial - reinforced in the wake of the War of Independence in 1922, meant that Ireland’s long-time resident Protestant minority, in situ since the plantations of the seventeenth century, and the smaller but established Jewish community, had no place in the national narrative. The marginalisation of the Protestant Anglo-Irish community is depicted in the work of Anglo-Irish writers such as Elizabeth Bowen, for whom the Catholic Irish ‘were simply “the others”, whose world lay alongside ours but never touched’⁹⁹. Bowen’s novel *The Last September* (1929) is set in 1920 and depicts the fluid position of these Anglo-Irish families, regarded as Irish by their English visitors, self-identifying as Irish, but perceived as English by the Catholic Irish population. In the novel, the young Anglo-Irish protagonist Lois describes her perception of Ireland thus:

She could not conceive of her country emotionally: it was a way of living, an abstract of several landscapes, or an oblique frayed island, moored at the north but with an air of being detached and washed out west from the British coast.¹⁰⁰

Writing five years earlier in 1924, Corkery identifies the same lack of an emotional connection to the land in his discussion of the factors that contributed to the sense of separateness between the Catholic Irish tenants and their Anglo-Irish landlords:

[For the Anglo-Irish landlords] all that Gaelic background of myth, literature and history had no existence. They differed from the people in race, language, religion, culture; while the landscape they looked upon was indeed but rocks and stones and trees.¹⁰¹

While the wariness and suspicion with which the Catholic Irish regarded the land-owning Protestant Ascendancy was in part due to the hierarchical nature of the landlord/tenant relationship, their lack of a shared cultural frame of reference created

⁹⁸ Simmel, p. 402.

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Bowen, *Bowen’s Court and Seven Winters* (London: Random House, 1999), p. 508

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September* (London: Vintage, 1998, orig. published 1929), p. 34.

¹⁰¹ Corkery, p. 64-65.

a largely unbridgeable gap. In contrast, Corkery describes how the old Irish landowning families of the time co-existed harmoniously with their tenants largely because they ‘were one with the cottiers in race, language, religion and, to some extent, culture. [...] One, it may be maintained, with the very landscape itself’.¹⁰² Apart from the Anglo-Irish, a small Jewish community has existed in Ireland on and off since the thirteenth century. The population, usually fleeing persecution, settled mainly in Dublin and reached its peak of 5,500 in the late 1940s. Opinion, both Jewish and non-Jewish, is divided as to whether the community has suffered from discrimination. Irish Jewish commentator Joe Briscoe describes an anti-Semitic boycott that took place in Limerick city in 1904 as ‘an aberration in an otherwise almost perfect history of Ireland and its treatment of the Jews’.¹⁰³ Ronit Lentin on the other hand interprets the Irish lack of empathy for Jews fleeing the Nazi persecution (she states that only 60 Jewish refugees were allowed into Ireland between 1933 and 1946) as foreshadowing Irish attitudes towards migrants today:

The argument for not allowing more than a handful of Jews fleeing the Nazis into Ireland was that they couldn’t be trusted to be 100% Irish as they have dual loyalty to international Jewry and that it would cause anti-Semitism. A similar argument is used today in saying that allowing refugees into Ireland will cause ghettoisation and racism. Such responses shift the blame onto racialized minorities rather than dominant majorities.¹⁰⁴

The echoes of Mr Deasy’s statement in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, that Ireland had never persecuted the Jews because it did not allow them in, are clearly audible in Lentin’s assertion. Gibbons argues that ‘the reason Ireland did not ‘let them in’ had less to do with xenophobia than with its own chronic underdevelopment under colonial rule’, describing how Ireland’s ongoing departure of emigrants from the country as a result of ‘acute’ unemployment signalled its inability to accommodate immigrants from elsewhere.¹⁰⁵ According to the Irish Jewish Community’s website, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of Jewish people living in Ireland in recent years

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁰³ Joe Briscoe, cited on Irish-Jewish History page at <Jewishireland.org> [accessed 11 September 2010], paragraph 11 of 13.

¹⁰⁴ Ronit Lentin, “‘Who ever heard of an Irish Jew?’” Racialising the intersection of “Irishness” and “Jewishness”, in *Racism and Anti-racism in Ireland*, ed. by Ronit Lentin and Robbie McVeigh (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 2002), pp.153-166, (p. 161).

¹⁰⁵ Gibbons, “‘Guests of the Nation’”, p. 98-99.

as a result of inward migration. The website notes that ‘newly arrived families find a warm welcome. As the inward immigration continues to rise rapidly, there is a chance once again of Dublin becoming a thriving Jewish city’.¹⁰⁶ At the start of the twentieth century, James Joyce succeeded in giving a voice not only to the Jew but also the Eastern European in the character of Leopold Bloom, grandson of a Hungarian Jew. Irish literature up until the time of Joyce represented Eastern Europe as a dark, gothic-inflected place, as typified by Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, while a century after Joyce, Binchy and Hamilton represent their Eastern European protagonists as similar to rather than different from the Irish.

While Joyce set his novel in the urban heart of Dublin, Mártín O Cadhain’s 1949 novel *Cré na Cille* (*Graveyard Clay*) is set in a graveyard in his native Connemara and includes references to Jewish characters while also introducing black characters. The book was initially serialised in the *Irish Press* newspaper and on its publication in book form it was ‘hailed immediately as a masterpiece’.¹⁰⁷ The story is in the form of a conversation between the interred occupants of the graveyard. One of the characters, referred to only as the Curraoineach, has a son who has returned from England with his black wife and their children. Another character has a child married in England to a Jewish spouse. The themes of race and ethnicity run through the novel, which deals with the intersections between a traditional way of life and a more modern one that results from the interactions of the emigrants who have left the community and, in some cases, have returned. The novel provides a valuable snapshot of attitudes to race in rural Ireland mid-twentieth century and Brian O’Broin describes the story relating to the Curraoineach’s son as ‘a literary experiment in early race relations’.¹⁰⁸ He explains that ‘one could have easily written the experiment off as outlandish fiction had we not seen what has happened in Conamara [*sic*] and other supposedly hyper-traditional regions of Ireland over the last decade or two’, citing the arrival of black migrants into the area from the United Kingdom and ‘directly from Africa’. O’Broin describes how these migrants ‘have married into local communities, and been welcomed’,¹⁰⁹ although it is not clear what

¹⁰⁶ Irish-Jewish Community, History page at <Jewishireland.org> [accessed 11 September 2010], final paragraph.

¹⁰⁷ Brian O’Broin, ‘Racism and Xenophobia in Martin O Cadhain’s “Cré na Cille”’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 97 (2008), 275-285, (p. 275).

¹⁰⁸ O’Broin, p. 283.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

evidence underpins this statement. Such a welcome does not await the African migrants who arrive in Dublin in *The Front Line* film as I discuss in chapter three.

African migrants, predominantly from Nigeria, constitute the largest non-EU migrant group in Ireland today.¹¹⁰ Until the arrival of the first significant numbers of African migrants in the early 1990s, few Irish people had encountered people of African origin and their attitude towards them could only be examined in relation to their interactions with African or West Indian people abroad, primarily as a result of their own migrant experiences in the United Kingdom and the United States. Noel Ignatiev describes how the Irish who emigrated to America in the nineteenth century traded on their whiteness, thereby racialising their Irishness in order to get ahead in a labour market where they were competing for work with African-Americans.¹¹¹ In fact, the tensions were two-way, with some African-Americans formally complaining that ‘the arrival of the Irish was reducing the value of real estate in their neighbourhoods’.¹¹² Steve Garner has noted that Irish annals relating to Viking trade through Dublin indicate that there was a black population in Ireland from as early as the ninth century, when prisoners of war were brought to Dublin from North Africa and remained for some time.¹¹³ He cites W. Hart’s work that demonstrates that eighteenth century Ireland was home to one of Europe’s largest black populations, many of whom became prominent in the arts within a ‘relatively hospitable climate’.¹¹⁴ In terms of living memory, a small but steady presence of students from Africa and India passed through Ireland during the mid- to late-twentieth century, chiefly seminarians studying for the priesthood and medical students training in Irish hospitals (an experience captured by Cauvery Madhavan in her book, *Paddy Indian* (2001)). Generally, Irish people’s response to Africans during the twentieth century was significantly informed – or perhaps misinformed – by their perception of Africa as a destination for Irish missionaries. The Irish missionary movement began at the turn of the twentieth century when an Irish priest went to Nigeria with the aim of converting the native people to Christianity through the development of schools and

¹¹⁰ The 2006 Irish census recorded 16,300 Nigerians living in Ireland. For further details see Profiles of Nationalities <www.cso.ie/census/documents/profiles/nationalities.pdf> [accessed 24 January 2011]

¹¹¹ Noel Ignatiev, ‘Introduction’, in *How The Irish Became White*, by Noel Ignatiev (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-7 (p. 3).

¹¹² Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World*, p. 305.

¹¹³ Steve Garner, *Racism in the Irish Experience* (London and Virginia: Pluto Press, 2004), p. 141.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. Garner cites W. Hart, ‘Africans in 18th century Ireland’, *Irish Historical Studies* XXXIII, 129 (2003), 19-32.

an educational system. The Nigerian writer J.P. Clark fondly recalls the presence of the missionary priests during his childhood, describing how ‘their great network of primary and secondary schools [...] reached out to many parts of the country [...] and their gates were open to all children, regardless of religion, tribe or sex’.¹¹⁵ A 2010 television documentary on RTE, Ireland’s national television and radio broadcaster, described Ireland’s missionary movement as a proud chapter in Irish history:

Whether you believe the missions were a form of cultural imperialism or a case of the Irish running away from their own subjugation [...] you can’t deny that the Irish missions is an international success story that makes *Riverdance* look like a travelling hoedown. Sure, some missionaries had little regard for local culture [...] but there’s no doubt the missionaries improved the quality of life for their adopted parishioners. The programme-makers can be proud they’ve chronicled a valuable chapter in the growth of our national sense of self-worth.¹¹⁶

Irish self-worth, this seems to indicate, is a function of the success of Irish priests and nuns in developing Africa for the better. A missionary priest writing in 1920 refers to Nigeria as Ireland’s ‘diocese’ and states that ‘the co-operation of the priests and people of Ireland is needed for the successful completion of the conquest of this country for Christ’.¹¹⁷ This paternalistic attitude, with its undeniable undertones of colonialism, may well have a bearing on contemporary Ireland’s attitude towards its current African communities, particularly given that so many of the African immigrants are refugees and asylum seekers who are dependent on the state. Consequently, the ‘missionary/native’ dynamic is maintained and recreated within a new temporal and spatial context. It is worth pointing out that the role of the missionaries in Africa today, as numbers entering the priesthood in Ireland continue to decline, has been superseded by that of Irish aid workers and non-governmental organisations.

Irish missionaries also worked in the Caribbean but Ireland’s relationship with the West Indies goes back further, to the enforced transportations of Irish people by Oliver Cromwell in the seventeenth century. It is estimated that as many

¹¹⁵ J.P. Clark, ‘The First Doing: A Nigerian Encounter with Literature’, in *The Internationalism of Irish Literature and Drama*, Irish Literary Studies 41, ed. by Joseph McMinn (Maryland: Barnes and Noble Books, 1992), pp.284-293, (p. 286).

¹¹⁶ Kevin Courtney, ‘Rescue Missions’, *Irish Times*, 06 March 2010, Weekend Review, p. 16.

¹¹⁷ P.J. Whitney, *An Irish Missionary in Central Africa: By A Maynooth Priest* (Dublin: Talbot Press Limited, 1923), p.126-127.

as 40,000 Irish may have been sent to the Caribbean over the course of the century, to work as indentured labourers on the sugar plantations and, additionally, in the case of the women, as white female ‘company’ for the plantation owners.¹¹⁸ Enslaved Africans gradually replaced the Irish as a more productive workforce, but the Irish presence is still evident in place-names and surnames throughout the islands. Lee M. Jenkins points to the Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey’s identification with the Irish in his mass movement for black self-determination in the 1920s, and locates its historical precedent in Frederick Douglass’s association with the Irish political leader Daniel O’Connell and Douglass’s lecture tour of Ireland on behalf of the American Anti-Slavery Society during 1845 and 1846.¹¹⁹ Donal O’Kelly’s play *The Cambria* (2005) revolves around Douglass’s experiences on board the ship that carried him from the US to Ireland, and is an exploration of race relations in contemporary Ireland.¹²⁰ This shared experience of subjugation had its twentieth century equivalent in the prejudice encountered by Irish and West Indian immigrants in the UK, as they encountered signs in boarding houses windows stating ‘No Blacks, No Dogs, No Irish’ when seeking accommodation.¹²¹ The sense of common cultural references between Irish and West Indian people has led to new adaptations of dramatic literary works in particular. For example, well before Roddy Doyle and African writer Bisi Adigun’s 2007 adaptation of J.M Synge’s *Playboy of the Western World* discussed earlier in this chapter, Trinidadian dramatist Mustapha Matura’s *Playboy of the West Indies* (1984) transposed J.M Synge’s *Playboy of the Western World* (1907) to 1950s Trinidad, exchanging a west of Ireland pub for a Trinidadian rum shop.¹²²

Notwithstanding Ireland’s historic experience of migrant communities within its national boundaries, and its shared experience of the migrant condition, attitudes towards migrants in contemporary Ireland reflect the ongoing challenge that they present to Ireland’s sense of itself. The hope expressed by Frank Aitken in 1957 for

¹¹⁸ Tim Pat Coogan, *Wherever Green is Worn* (London: Hutchinson, 2000), p.574.

¹¹⁹ Lee M. Jenkins, ‘Beyond the Pale: Green and Black and Cork’, in *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross currents of the African and Irish Diasporas*, ed. by Peter D. O’Neill and David Lloyd (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 165-177 (p. 170). Daniel O’Connell referred to Douglas as the ‘Black O’Connell’ in recognition of their mutual fight for the liberty of their people.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ See Coogan, p. 136.

¹²² The production is revived at London’s Tricycle Theatre every ten years by Nicolas Kent. For further details see <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2004/dec/07/theatre>> [accessed 27 April 2011].

‘a sense of brotherhood’ in Ireland’s relations with African and Asian decolonising nations appear not to have been fully realised in light of Garner’s comments below:

[How to] account for the hostility of sections of Irish society to Catholic, Anglophone Africans, surely closer culturally than a secular Czech computer technician? At the end of the aporia of cultural defensiveness upon which unbridgeable cultural difference is premised is the cul-de-sac of racism.¹²³

Selvon alludes to this paradox in the context of British attitudes towards West Indian migrants in 1950s London when two West Indian migrants in *The Lonely Londoners* compare the treatment to that of white European migrants. They describe how ‘the most hurtful part of it ..The Pole who have that restaurant, he ain’t have no more right in this country than we. In fact we is British subjects, and he is a foreigner’.¹²⁴ Despite the altered economic and political environment of contemporary Europe which entitles Eastern Europeans to live in Ireland and the United Kingdom, and where many West Indians and Africans are no longer British subjects, the common implication of racism is clear. *The Lonely Londoners* represents a time in British history that corresponds to Ireland’s current experience, that is, extensive inward migration of ethnic groups, whose ‘otherness’ is immediately visible, and of whose cultures the host country has little knowledge or understanding, outside the context of colonialism in the case of the British perception of the West Indians in the 1950s, and the missionary projects in the case of the Irish perception of the Africans in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Bathia and Ram emphasise the inequalities faced by certain migrant groups on the basis of race.¹²⁵ One can surmise that in the case of a European citizen with black ethnicity, the dominant response is to their ethnicity rather than their nationality. Roddy Doyle explores this dilemma in the short story ‘Home to Harlem’ in his short story collection *The Deportees* (2007), where a black Irishman is responded to on the basis of his ethnicity rather than his nationality. The ethnicity of white Eastern European migrants does not prevent their being a source of anxiety for some Irish people, however. Edward Larrissy notes the similarities

¹²³ Garner, pp.170-171.

¹²⁴ Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin, 2006) p. 21.

¹²⁵ S. Bathia and A. Ram, ‘Rethinking “Acculturation” in relation to Diasporic Cultures and Postcolonial Identities’, *Human Development*, 4 (2001), pp.1-18. Cited in Insa Lichtsinn and Angela Veale, ‘Between “here” and “there”: Nigerian lone mothers in Ireland’, in *Immigration and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland* ed. by Bryan Fanning (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 99-112, p. 101.

between Ireland's reaction to its own Traveller population, its indigenous others, and to the immigrants who have arrived since Eastern Europe's accession to the EU, which 'has produced yet another version of Ireland's anxious finding of the same in the other and the other in the same'.¹²⁶ Anne Haverty satirises an Irishman's romantic conflation of Irish travellers and Eastern Europeans in her novel *The Free and Easy* (2006) where an Irish character describes how 'a pretty woman in gipsy dress' approached him:

She was not an Irish traveller, she was a gipsy, from some country to the east where the traveller still had the ancient pride and confidence of their tribe [...] What chance had the native tribe in the face of such colour and romance? Everything was against them. Society of course – but they themselves must take some of the blame as well. Their pride was eroded. They had abandoned their traditional costume, they had given up on their traditional trades.¹²⁷

The first migrants to arrive in the Irish Republic as part of the most recent movement of people were asylum seekers during the 1990s, with those who arrived before July 26 1999 entitled to work. However, as a result of government concern that the country would be 'inundated' with asylum seekers, particularly from Africa (which is where the majority of asylum seekers were coming from) this provision lasted for less than a year. Kieran Allen highlights the 'sharp about-turn' implemented by the Irish state, which withdrew the right to work for asylum seekers who arrived after April 10 2000, dispersing them throughout the country and housing them in state-provided, full-board accommodation according to the 'direct provision' policy.¹²⁸ Set up to provide temporary accommodation for newly-arrived asylum seekers, many direct provision centres are still 'home' to people three or more years after their arrival, with some waiting in excess of five years for a decision on their asylum application.¹²⁹ The short story 'Shackles' represents the mental and emotional effects of these living conditions on asylum seekers. These centres are in locations as diverse as a former Butlins' holiday camp at Mosney, Co. Meath, where

¹²⁶ Edward Larrissy, 'Irish Writing and Globalisation', in *Globalisation and its Discontents: Writing the Global Culture*, ed. by Stan Smith (Woodbridge, UK, Rochester, N.Y: D.S Brewer, 2006), pp.124-137 (p. 133).

¹²⁷ Haverty, p. 185.

¹²⁸ Kieran Allen, 'Neo-liberalism and immigration', in *Immigration and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland*, ed. by Bryan Fanning, pp. 84-98, p. 85.

¹²⁹ Gavan Titley and Ronit Lentin, 'Ireland's treatment of asylum seekers is unfair – and bad value for money', 13 November 2012 <http://www.thejournal.ie/readme/column-anti-deportation-ireland-gavan-titley-ronit-lentin-671759-Nov2012/> [accessed 23 February 2012] (paragraph 2 of 10).

Melatu Okorie, the author of 'Shackles' lived on her arrival in Ireland, and an apartment block in a rural Irish town. They qualify as 'non-places', a term coined by the French anthropologist Marc Augé to refer to depersonalised, transient spaces, exemplified by airports, motorway service stations and hotel rooms.¹³⁰ Bauman cites George Benko's description of a non-place as any space 'devoid of the symbolic expressions of identity, relations, history' and elaborates further:

The non-places accept the inevitability of a protracted, sometimes very long sojourn of strangers, and so do all they can to make their presence 'merely physical' while socially little different, preferably indistinguishable altogether, from absence [...] The temporary residents of non-places are likely to vary, each variety having its own habits and expectations; the trick is to make all that irrelevant for the duration of their stay.¹³¹

Hence, in Ireland, single mothers from a range of different countries, along with their children, share rooms with other women in the same situation, sometimes for several years. They exist in a protracted state of non-identity. This position of enforced dependence and passivity severely restricts the migrants' interaction with Irish society and ultimately, for those who are granted permission to stay, hampers their ability to integrate with and relate to that society, which they have been living on the margins of, but apart from, for a lengthy period.¹³²

Growing unease about the asylum system and fears by the Irish government that they were losing control of the numbers of incoming migrants led to a Referendum on Citizenship on June 12, 2004, when the Irish population voted by a majority of almost four to one to remove the citizenship birthright from Irish-born children of immigrants.¹³³ Munck describes this outcome as an example of how, 'at key junctures [...] Irish public opinion retreated firmly into nationalist if not nativist

¹³⁰ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. by John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 1995), p. 34.

¹³¹ Bauman, *Liquid Times*, p. 102.

¹³² For a more in-depth look at the difficulties encountered in the transition from direct provision to private accommodation, see Lichtsinn and Veale's interviews with Nigerian lone mothers in Ireland, in *Immigration and social change in the Republic of Ireland*, ed. by Bryan Fanning, pp.99-112.

¹³³ Siobhan Mullally, 'Children, citizenship and constitutional change', in *Immigration and social change in the Republic of Ireland*, ed. by Bryan Fanning, pp.27-46 (p. 28). For further information on this issue, see Bairbre Ni Chosain, 'Passports for the New Irish? The 2004 Citizenship Referendum', *Études Irlandaises*, 32 (2007), 31-47 (p. 32).

tropes'.¹³⁴ This concept of retreat by the Irish as a response to the perceived incursion of migrants into the national space informs my analysis of Colum McCann's short story 'As if There Were Trees' in chapter two. The discrepancy between Irish attitudes towards migrants in theory and in practice is highlighted by a 2005 report by The Irish Refugee Council, in which it refers to a government survey where 80% of respondents agreed that 'it is good that children in Ireland are growing up in a multicultural society'.¹³⁵ This positive indicator is undermined somewhat by the finding that a much smaller number of people were happy to have migrants living in their neighbourhoods and communities or with the idea of intermarriage between local people and migrants. The author of the report highlighted the low level of actual contact between migrant and indigenous communities. Notably, where contact *had* been established at a personal level, local communities actively protested against the deportation of people that they regarded not as 'immigrants or asylum seekers but as neighbours, classmates or friends'.¹³⁶ A similar dynamic underlies Gerard Donovan's short story 'The summer of birds', which I discuss in chapter two. In summary therefore, it appears that the behaviour of the indigenous Irish population towards migrants, and the level of anxiety to which migrants give rise, vary according to the extent of the interaction between the two communities. Such interaction is frequently inhibited by the perception of migrants as a threat to the established community and their way of life.

From Past to Present: Tracing the Migrant in Irish Literature and Film

This perception of the migrant as threat is reflected in the portrayal of non-Irish characters who populate Irish literature and film throughout the twentieth century. My analysis of the twenty-first century texts and films in this thesis, while identifying the endurance of the native/migrant binary in some cases, reflects a less rigid attitude in others, identified by G. Honor Fagan who says that although 'postcolonial Ireland has arguably been dominated by questions of cultural identity and the competing stories of who 'us' and the 'other' was, [t]oday, the literary text is

¹³⁴ Munck, p. 14.

¹³⁵ Peter O'Mahony, 'The challenge now is to deal with the fears some people have towards immigration', 01 May 2005 <<http://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/pub05/fears.html>> [accessed on 14 March 2008 (p. 2)].

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

less likely to seek a single vision of a stable Irish society'.¹³⁷ In his book *Race in Modern Irish Literature and Culture* (2009), where modern implies 1922 onwards, John Brannigan outlines how the recurring trope of the foreigner in the literature of the period undermined the nationalist sense of community and identity, provoking a re-imagining of the understanding of community.¹³⁸ In the variety of texts cited by Brannigan, the otherness of the foreign characters could not be accommodated within the restrictive nationalist model of Irishness of that time. Their exoticism, and the fear of what it may unleash, caused tremendous anxiety to the indigenous Irish characters in these texts. *The Moneylender*, by a Dublin-based Jewish writer called Joseph Edelstein, was published in 1908. The book paints a very unflattering picture of an unscrupulous fictional moneylender called Moses Levenstein. Edelstein himself was aware of the detrimental effect that the behaviour of the moneylenders had on relations between the Jewish immigrants and the host community. Although his objective was 'to integrate the Jewish community and protect it from the hostility and suspicion facing moneylenders',¹³⁹ his portrayal of moneylenders was unduly negative. It would have confirmed and reinforced any existing stereotypes of Jewish people, while doing nothing to alleviate Irish people's anxiety about them. The trope of the foreigner as 'pariah in the nation-state' became particularly significant in Irish fiction from the 1940s onwards - works such as Kate O'Brien's *The Last of Summer* (1943) and Francis MacManus's *The Fire in the Dust* (1950) have central female characters with Irish fathers and French and Spanish mothers respectively.¹⁴⁰ As a consequence of their mixed parentage, the women are perceived as exotic and dangerous, although Brannigan points out that the hostility they experience 'is not the consequence of prejudice against some specific national type, but rather against an imagined dissolution or unbinding of national identity'.¹⁴¹ James Plunkett's *A Walk Through Summer* demonstrates the failure of the Irish to engage with a Polish refugee, whose Catholicism allows for her partial inclusion but whose ethnicity

¹³⁷ G. Honor Fagan, 'Globalization, Identity and Ireland', in *Globalization and National Identities: Crisis or Opportunity?*, ed. by Paul Kennedy and Catherine J. Danks (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp113-123 (p. 122).

¹³⁸ John Brannigan, *Race in Modern Irish Literature and Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 148.

¹³⁹ Manus O'Riordan, 'Citizens of the Republic', *The Dublin Review of Books* <http://www.drb.ie/more_details/08-09-28/Citizens_of_the_Republic.aspx> [accessed on 28 November 2009]

¹⁴⁰ Brannigan, *Race in Modern Irish Literature and Culture*, p. 157, p. 158, p. 162.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

prevents her full assimilation. Brannigan describes the story as delineating ‘the impoverished social and cultural conditions in which racism and bigotry fester’ in 1950s Ireland.¹⁴²

Despite raising the issue of the inability of Irish nationalism to embrace the outsider, these texts from the first half of the twentieth century do not offer any vision of an alternative, less homogeneous community. Brannigan explains that it is this inability to move past the concept of Irish culture and identity as homogeneous that legitimises the ‘insidious ideologies of racial and cultural chauvinism’ of the mid-century period that linger on in contemporary Ireland.¹⁴³ In terms of the social, political and economic environment of the mid-twentieth century, the need to accommodate a post-national community was not as vital as it is in contemporary Ireland, where the scale of inward migration during the Celtic Tiger years has transformed Irish society, while the recent collapse of that same economy, along with the child-abuse scandals exposed within the Catholic Church, have given rise to questions amongst the Irish about their identity and the nature of the country they inhabit. As immigration became a significant feature of Irish society in the mid-1990s, writers such as Hamilton and McCann began to address this theme in their writing, albeit initially through the lens of the past, reflecting the immigrant experience of earlier decades, a strategy criticised by some cultural commentators and writers as discussed earlier in this chapter. In his short story collection, *Dublin Where the Palm Trees Grow* (1996), Hamilton recounts life through the eyes of a German-Irish boy growing up in Ireland during the 1950s, a theme he revisits in his later memoir, *The Speckled People* (2003). In Colum McCann’s collection *Fishing the Sloe-Black River* (1994) the story ‘A Basket Full of Wallpaper’ featured a Japanese man who had relocated to Ireland after the Second World War.¹⁴⁴ Both of these writers have gone on to produce work about the contemporary immigrant experience in Ireland as seen in Hamilton’s novel *Hand in the Fire* and McCann’s short story ‘As if There Were Trees’. The otherness of the migrant is the theme of George O’Brien’s ‘A Good Turn’, published in *The Faber Book of Best New Irish Short Stories* (2005), and concerned with a retired professor’s plan to recruit Milo,

¹⁴² John Brannigan, ‘Race, Cosmopolitanism, and Modernity: Irish Writing and Culture in the Late Nineteen Fifties’, *Irish University Review*, 34 (2004), 332-350 (p. 345 and p. 347).

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

¹⁴⁴ Colum McCann, ‘A Basket Full of Wallpaper’, in *Fishing the Sloe-Black River*, by Colum McCann (London: Phoenix, 1994), pp. 37-52.

an immigrant from the Balkans, into the priesthood. He sees potential for rolling this plan out across the country as a solution to the crisis in vocations, while also leading to 'the alleviation, God willing, of the State's refugee problem'.¹⁴⁵ The story captures Milo's sense of boredom and puzzlement at the routines of a small Irish town, and although the story hints that he has fled violence and war, he remains an enigmatic character. In his introduction to the *New Irish Short Stories* (2011), Joseph O'Connor expresses regret that 'these pages don't include a story by an immigrant to Ireland from the developing world',¹⁴⁶ although William Trevor's contribution 'The Crippled Man' features two protagonists from an unspecified Eastern European country.¹⁴⁷ Viewed in this context, the anthology *Dublin: Ten Journeys, One Destination* (2010) from which 'Grafton Street of Dublin' and 'Shackles' are taken can be seen to be an innovative publication. Des Geraghty's introduction to the collection draws attention to the fact that the contributors, many of whom are migrants, have produced material that is 'different and challenging, frequently disturbing but yet rewarding because they give us a fresh insight into how we live, bringing a vibrancy to Irish short story writing'.¹⁴⁸

Where the novel is concerned, crime writing is being identified as the genre that is currently engaging most closely with the key concerns of contemporary Ireland. Arminta Wallace argues that there has been a 'blurring of boundaries between literary and genre fiction'.¹⁴⁹ This has led to a broadening of the concept of what constitutes a crime novel, so that a novel such as Binchy's *Open-handed*, while containing many of the tropes of crime fiction - corrupt businessmen, prostitution, people-trafficking - also includes elements of realism in its portrayal of family strife, relationships and the drudgery of daily life. Crime writer Tana French believes that 'crime fiction is like a dipstick indicator in society, because crime itself is so shaped by the time and place in which it happens [...] it's very much shaped by the priorities

¹⁴⁵ George O'Brien, 'A Good Turn', in *The Faber Book of Best New Irish Short Stories*, ed. by David Marcus (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), pp. 155-195 (p. 187).

¹⁴⁶ Joseph O'Connor, 'Introduction' in *New Irish Short Stories*, ed. by Joseph O'Connor (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), pp. ix-xv (p. xiv).

¹⁴⁷ See William Trevor, 'The Crippled Man', in *New Irish Short Stories*, ed. by Joseph O'Connor, pp. 366-387 (p. 372).

¹⁴⁸ Des Geraghty, Foreword 'Destination Dublin', in *Dublin: Ten Journeys, One Destination*, ed. by The Irish Writers Exchange (Dublin: Irish Writers' Exchange, 2010), pp 7-10, p.10.

¹⁴⁹ Arminta Wallace, 'Out with the auld, in with the new', *Irish Times*, 12 March 2011, Weekend Review, p. 7.

of the time; the fears, the desires that go with a certain society'.¹⁵⁰ Kevin Power's award-winning novel *Bad Day in Blackrock* (2009) is a fictionalised account of the real-life murder of a student from Dublin's affluent suburbs by a group of his peers. Beyond the crime around which the story is constructed, the novel is a scathing observation of the social and moral degeneration within an enormously wealthy and influential sector of Irish society. These are Bauman's 'upper tier people' who live in 'the more benign and agreeable areas' of cities.¹⁵¹ Migrants appear as peripheral shadows in the story, mentioned in passing in their roles as hired help and domestic cleaners. One of the female characters in the novel hires 'a Nigerian maid named Namwali to pick up her shopping every week', listens 'with terrible patience as Namwali [tells] her hard-luck tale: emigration, poverty, isolation, abandonment', and when comforted by Namwali after a family tragedy, feels 'consumed by self-pity' at 'how bad she had become that she sought comfort in the arms of a black woman, a woman to whom none of her friends would even speak'.¹⁵² The novel was adapted for the screen and released as a film in 2012, entitled *What Richard Did*, directed by Lenny Abrahamson. The character of Namwali does not appear in the film, and a black character who does not appear in the book is introduced as a member of the private school's rugby team. Abrahamson appears concerned to reflect the African immigrant presence in Ireland, although his reasons for making these character changes can only be surmised.

Irish crime writer Declan Hughes believes that the genre of women's fiction also engages with contemporary Ireland in its realistic rendering of contemporary life.¹⁵³ Marian Keyes' novel *The Brightest Star in the Sky* (2009) has a number of immigrant characters including a Pakistani and a Taiwanese character employed by the same IT company as the two main Irish protagonists, a Nigerian taxi-driver, two Polish flatmates of one of the Irish female characters and at one stage, a stag party of Sikhs. Clichés abound in terms of the respective employment of the migrants and the author's representation of their speech patterns. The Polish characters, for example, are portrayed as speaking comically ungrammatical English. Literary merit aside, Keyes nevertheless reflects the reality of the multicultural city that Dublin has become, supporting Hughes's point and tackling reality in a way that some literary

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Bauman, *Liquid Times*, p. 75 and p. 72.

¹⁵² Kevin Power, *Bad Day in Blackrock* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2010), p. 183 and p. 232.

¹⁵³ Wallace, p. 7.

writers are not. This is not to imply that literary fiction is bereft of reference to Ireland's immigrant population. Anne Haverty's novel *The Free and Easy* (2006) reflects an Ireland staffed by Eastern Europeans - a Slovenian housekeeper, a Latvian taxi driver, a Hungarian shoeshine man - whose presence is referred to by the Irish characters purely in relation to the jobs they do, but who never speak. In *Truth or Fiction* (2009), the novelist Jennifer Johnston also positions Eastern Europeans in her narrative as service providers, giving voice to an elderly Irish woman discussing the staff at her local pub in Dublin's affluent southside suburbs:

‘They still have the odd Irish waiter here. Everywhere else they’re foreign. Really foreign, not just Italian or French. They’re Romanian, Bulgarian, Lithuanian, Polish, and Russian’. She threw her head back and laughed. ‘Who’d thought fifteen years ago that this private little country would be overrun with Lithuanians.’¹⁵⁴

This short speech encapsulates much of the attitude underlying Irish people's perceptions of the immigrants who have come to Ireland in the last two decades, and indicates that there are perceived degrees of foreign-ness. For Johnson's Irish woman, the Italians and the French are more familiar and therefore less 'other' than the Eastern Europeans who are 'really foreign'. The reference to the country being 'overrun' is reflective of the language used in referring to immigration where a lexicon indicative of a lack of control acknowledges the unspoken anxiety, certainly amongst the older generation, that they are becoming strangers in their own country. Hugo Hamilton alludes to this fear when he describes how some Irish people fear that 'we're being listened to, [the immigrants] are overhearing us on the streets, and it's going to change the personalities of Irish people'.¹⁵⁵ The dislocation experienced by older Irish people in particular, as the physical composition of their city alters as a consequence of both globalisation and immigration, is captured in a poem called 'The Russian Delicatessen' by Gerard Smyth:

‘When the Russian delicatessen opened
opposite the Chinese takeaway,
I thought of my father and what he might say...’¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Jennifer Johnston, *Truth or Fiction* (London: Headline Review, 2009), p. 64.

¹⁵⁵ McKeown, 'Hand in the Fire and the bid to belong', p. 430.

¹⁵⁶ Gerard Smyth, 'The Russian Delicatessen', quoted in Wallace, p.7.

While Ireland produced a steady stream of writers throughout the twentieth century, the development of an indigenous Irish film industry in the early years of that century was hindered by a lack of experienced technicians and production facilities, and the consequent reluctance of private concerns to invest in a venture that had no obvious means of production and distribution.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, from 1910 to 1920, a number of films were made whose themes reflected the film-makers' close connections with the nationalist movement. In the wake of Irish independence in 1922 however, film production dwindled, despite the accession to political power of many key nationalist figures. It was not until the 1930s that the industry resumed, albeit with intermittent output. Rather than support private indigenous film-makers, the government turned its attention to developing film studios in Ireland in an attempt to emulate Hollywood in the US and Elstree in the UK. Under the persistence of Sean Lemass, future president of Ireland, the studios were finally built at Ardmore, Co. Wicklow, in 1958, privately funded, but with state support.¹⁵⁸ Kevin Rockett notes that 'these studios were to primarily benefit foreign film interests during the following 25 years'.¹⁵⁹ Meanwhile, those Irish film-makers who *were* producing work tended to look backwards, to the War of Independence and its legacy, rather than focusing on their contemporary society. Apart from the occasional Irish-produced film, the country's screens were largely dominated by American films and Irish people's cinematic view of their country was therefore a foreign construct.¹⁶⁰ For the first overseas filmmakers attracted to Ireland by its natural beauty, the focus on the landscape was generally at the expense of character or plot development. The character of the 'outsider', when s/he featured, was represented as trying 'to gain access to a tightly-knit community and, by extension, to the natural unspoilt landscape which the native community inhabits.'¹⁶¹ Films such as John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952) and later, Jim Sheridan's film adaptation of John B. Keane's 1965 play *The Field* (1990) followed this form, in both cases

¹⁵⁷ Kevin Rockett, '1930s Fictions', in *Cinema and Ireland*, ed. by Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons and John Hill (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 51-70 (p. 68-69).

¹⁵⁸ Rockett, 'Preface', in *Cinema and Ireland*, pp. viii – xiv (p. x). Rockett notes at a later point in this text that 'it was [...] accepted that Ardmore was not going to serve as the panacea for indigenous film production. Even government departments and state agencies recognised that reality' (p. 114).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Martin McLoone, *Film, Media and Popular Culture in Ireland: Cityscapes, Landscapes, Soundscapes* (Dublin and Portland, Oregon: Irish Academic Press, 2008), p. 151.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 209.

with an Irish-American emigrant returning to his roots and upsetting the balance in a rural Irish community. Despite its widespread success with Irish and foreign audiences alike, Gibbons describes how Irish filmmakers and critics of the time and afterwards saw *The Quiet Man* 'as setting back Irish cinema for decades'.¹⁶²

The social, political, economic and cultural opening up that took place in Ireland under the Lemass government from the late 1950s began to be reflected by the Irish film industry. By the 1970s, the focus of Irish film-makers had moved on from the politics of Ireland and Britain to more intense examination of the social and cultural issues of Ireland at the time. By the 1980s, Irish film-makers were not only focusing on a wider range of subjects including class, family and sexuality, but also experimenting with style and form.¹⁶³ The writer and film-maker Neil Jordan, whose film *Ondine* (2009) I discuss in chapter three, wrote and directed his first film *Angel* (1982) during this period. The film concerns the psychological journey of a musician¹⁶⁴ who substitutes his life of music for one of violence when he sets out to avenge the murder of his manager and a deaf-mute girl after a concert. The story unfolds in Northern Ireland against the backdrop of the Troubles, where the violence encountered by the musician resonates with the violence of wider Northern Irish society at the time. Acknowledging the novelty of the film's form, a reviewer at the time remarked on the fact that it seemed to emerge from 'no clear cinematic tradition'.¹⁶⁵ By the 1990s, according to Conn Holohan, many of the films being produced by Irish film-makers seemed less engaged or concerned with traditional national culture than had formerly been the case. Within their films, 'the forces of tradition, if they appear at all, seem little more than an anachronism'.¹⁶⁶ In her novel *The Free and Easy*, Hegarty parodies the transnational approach that dismayed many critics:

'The rain, the drunken father...' the director was reported as saying, 'all that sob stuff, the mangy dogs, all that shite, it's over. It's over historically, it's

¹⁶² Luke Gibbons, *The Quiet Man* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), p. 3.

¹⁶³ Rockett, 'Preface', p. xi.

¹⁶⁴ The musician is played by Stephen Rea who also plays Martin in *Nothing Personal* and a priest in *Ondine*.

¹⁶⁵ Richard Cook, 'Angel of Death', *New Musical Express*, 13 November 1982, p. 30. Cited in John Hill, 'Images of Violence' in *Cinema and Ireland*, ed. by Rockett, Gibbons and Hill, pp.147-193 (p. 178).

¹⁶⁶ Conn Holohan, *Cinema on the Periphery: Contemporary Irish and Spanish Film* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010), p. 2.

over cinematically. Don't get me wrong, it happened. No question. [...] But I want to look at the real stuff, you know? I want to look at the present, the positive, something we can all relate to. Love, money, multiplicity of choices. We're global now, we're multicultural, let's celebrate. We're done with whingeing, right?',¹⁶⁷

Holohan questions the critics' view that such 'transnational' films lack 'cultural specificity' and are 'merely localised versions of an international product, the Irishness of which stretches no further than their cast, crew and setting'.¹⁶⁸ Their main objection is the failure of such films to express the relationship between elements of Ireland's traditional national past and its modern transnational present.¹⁶⁹ Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg are two such critics. They describe transnational film as 'film whose national and cultural provenance is no longer discernible because its creation is shaped by the confluence of many different cultural identities' and they criticise 'the so-called 'Euro-Puddings', European co-productions funded with the assistance of Eurimages, Media and other subsidies', which they regard as bland and created to appeal to a generic European and worldwide audience.¹⁷⁰

All three films under examination in this thesis are European co-productions, and have received a number of awards at various European film festivals.¹⁷¹ Like Holohan, I challenge the misconception that their cultural authenticity is compromised by the politics of co-funding. While they explore universal themes in a local Irish setting, and reference elements of Irishness, the films do not make the 'Irishness' of the films their central focus. Despite the critics' opinion that such an approach leads to blandness, on the contrary each film in its own way represents a blend of both Ireland's traditional national past and its more transnational present,

¹⁶⁷ Hegarty, p. 37.

¹⁶⁸ Holohan, p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg, 'Locating Migrant and Diasporic Cinema in Contemporary Europe', in *European Cinema in Motion: Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe*, ed. by Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg, pp. 12-49, p. 22.

¹⁷¹ *Nothing Personal* won six awards at the 2009 Locarno Film Festival in Switzerland including Best Actress for Lotte Verboek and Best First Feature for Ursula Antoniak <http://www.imdb.com/event/ev0000400/2009> [accessed 31 August 2012]. *Ondine* won awards for Best Actor (Colin Farrell) and Best Supporting Actress (Dervla Kirwan) at the 2010 Irish Film and Television Awards. *Ondine* was also nominated for, but not awarded, best film, best director and best script. <http://www.ifta.ie/winners/iftawinners2010.html> [accessed 31 August 2012]. *The Front Line* won the Jury Award for Best Feature Film at the 2007 Salerno Film Festival, Best Film Audience Award at 2007 Emden Film Festival and Best Film at 2007 Magners Irish Film Festival <http://www.highpointmediagroup.com/thefrontline/detail.htm> [accessed 31 August 2012]

resulting in a hybrid form befitting contemporary Ireland. Criticism about the lack of cultural specificity in Irish films of the 1990s had its roots in the fact that during that period, the dominance of *rural* imagery in Irish film was being challenged as Irish filmmakers used funding from the Irish Film Board to explore the urban experience. For example, film adaptations of Roddy Doyle's novels *The Commitments* (1991) and *The Van* (1996) reflected the life experiences of Dublin's working class. Reiterating Holohan's point about the criticism levelled at less identifiably 'Irish'-themed films, McBride notes that films such as *About Adam* (2000) and *Goldfish Memory* (2003), which portray the contemporary dating scene in Dublin, were criticised for 'uncritical acceptance and immersion in consumerist lifestyles, and an unquestioned and unquestioning embrace of globalised culture'.¹⁷² The new millennium gave rise to films that challenged those rather superficial and undemanding treatments of contemporary Ireland. Lenny Abrahamson's *Adam and Paul* (2004) chronicles the gritty lives of two Dublin drug addicts. Abrahamson looked to the margins of Dublin society again in 2007 when he made a four-part TV drama called *Prosperity*, described by O'Connell as revealing 'the complexity of a modern, neo-liberal capitalist society, giving voice not so much to the hidden aspects but allowing the shadows come to the fore'.¹⁷³ Each episode featured one of four characters alienated in some way from mainstream society – a single mother, a bullied and bullying schoolboy, a man with a drink problem and an African migrant. All represent sections of Irish society that exist on the fringes of the successful Celtic Tiger economy.¹⁷⁴ More recently, an examination of Ireland's changing landscapes and geographical spaces as a consequence of the Celtic Tiger building boom informed the film *Kisses* (2008) whose two protagonists, children from broken homes, run away to Dublin from their homes on a soulless new housing estate outside the city. Of particular note in the film is that 'many of the narrative's helpers are recently arrived immigrants [...] we hear newer voices embedded in the local patois [...] cultures and communities spill out, mingle and jostle in and across the streets'.¹⁷⁵ The immigrant characters appear as supporting rather than central characters in the film, whereas the migrant characters in the three films on which I

¹⁷² Stephanie McBride, 'Kisses: Dubliners after the Tiger', *Wasafiri*, 62 (2010), 8-11 (p. 8).

¹⁷³ Diog O'Connell, 'Prosperity: Social Realism in the New Millennium', *Estudios Irlandeses*, 3 (2008), 239-241 (p. 241).

¹⁷⁴ Abrahamson also explored *rural* marginalisation in his film *Garage* (2007).

¹⁷⁵ McBride, p. 11.

focus in the thesis are central protagonists. The film *Once* (2006) directed by John Carney put a migrant character at the centre of its story about the relationship between an Irish busker and a Czech immigrant with a shared love of music.¹⁷⁶ *The Front Line*, one of the films that I examine in chapter three, was made in the same year. The film's main protagonist is an illegal immigrant from Africa who is attempting to build a new life in Dublin, while haunted by memories of the traumatic events that forced him to leave his own country. It portrays the fear, loneliness and insecurity of the migrant condition in the context of urban living, while also representing the evolving multicultural spaces of the city.

Cityscapes and Landscapes: Spaces and Migration

The rural and urban spaces in which the films, short stories and novels at the centre of my analysis unfold are highly significant, both in terms of the development of the respective narratives and in their representation of Irish and migrant identities. Notwithstanding the broadening of the cultural space that has taken place, the physical space of the nation is, and has always been, a site of contention in the Irish arts. As previously mentioned, the primary feature of Irish nationalism was its focus on defining itself in opposition to Englishness. Hence Irishness was regarded as Catholic rather than Protestant, Gaelic-speaking rather than English-speaking, traditional rather than modern, and rural and land-based rather than urban and industrial. In describing the 'search for authenticity' implicit in nationalism's culture of resistance, Said points out the significance to Irish nationalism of the re-appropriation and renaming of the land, in the wake of the anglicisation of place names and redrawing of land boundaries that had taken place under colonial rule.¹⁷⁷ Consequently, the west of Ireland, located at the furthest point away from British influence and hence less diluted by the effects of colonialism, came to symbolise and represent the authentic Ireland, and its inhabitants were regarded as representing, in Seamus Deane's words, 'the national character in its pristine form, or at least, in such a state of preservation that the pristine form could be inferred from it'.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ *Once* has subsequently been made into a musical, completing a highly successful run on Broadway in 2012, and transferring to Dublin and London theatres in 2013.

¹⁷⁷ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 273.

¹⁷⁸ Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 52.

Ironically, as it was being constructed as the site of national authenticity, the rural west was simultaneously the site of greatest emigration from the country by those for whom the area could not sustain a living.¹⁷⁹ Gerry Smyth describes how ‘modern Irish tourist discourse [...] employs a kind of ‘spatial grammar’ [...] in which the movement westwards in space figures simultaneously as a movement backwards in time’.¹⁸⁰ He identifies this representation as deriving from nineteenth century nationalist discourse as well as earlier travel writing, of which H.V. Morton’s ecstatic reflection on Connemara in 1929 could be regarded as a prime example:

How can it exist in the modern world! In years of travel I have seen nothing like it. [...] It is a part of the earth in which progress - whatever we mean by it - has broken in vain against walls; it has been arrested by high hills and deep lakes to the east and by the sea to the west. These people have been locked away for centuries by geography and poverty. I have been to the tomb of Tutankhamen in Egypt, but entering Connemara gave me a finer feeling of discovery and a greater sense of remoteness from the modern life.¹⁸¹

The endurance of this perception of the west as largely unchanged and therefore a site of authenticity is clear from a survey carried out by *Fáilte Éireann* (The National Tourism Development Authority) in the Connemara area in summer of 2011. The *Visitor Attitudes Survey*, conducted among 900 visitors, revealed that 66% were ‘very interested’ in the country’s ‘natural heritage’, followed by 45% whose interest was in traditional culture and 41% in Ireland’s history. Notably, only 12% of respondents were very interested in Ireland’s contemporary culture,¹⁸² which perhaps they regard as lacking in authenticity on account of its global inflections.

¹⁷⁹ Patrick J. Duffy, ‘Writing Ireland: Literature and art in the representation of Irish place’, in *In Search of Ireland: A cultural geography*, ed. by Brian Graham (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 64-84 (p. 79-80).

¹⁸⁰ Gerry Smyth, *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* (Hampshire and New York: 2001), p. 36.

¹⁸¹ H.V Morton, *Thoughts on Connemara* (1929), cited by Amelia Joyce, ‘Connemara.com: A Hidden Gem in Connemara’

<http://www.connemaracottage.com/literature%20self%20catering%20connemara.html> [accessed 12 March 2012]. It is interesting to note that this extract from a longer piece is taken from a website advertising a cottage for rent in Connemara, an example of how an historic review is being employed in the contemporary marketing of the region.

¹⁸² Fáilte Ireland, ‘Connemara: Infrastructure and Interpretation Plan’, April 2012,

http://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/2_Develop_Our_Business/Key%20Projects/ConnemaraReport_Final_LowRes-1.pdf [accessed 06 November 2012], p. 10.

Writers such as W.B. Yeats and J.M. Synge contributed to the myth-making and idealisation of the west as a source of regeneration in their depictions of a rural space populated by men and women who were closely connected to nature and the land. Indeed, the land itself became defined in terms of gender. Catherine Nash describes how colonial discourse ‘primitivised both women and the colony’ so that women as colonial subjects were doubly primitivised, while the anti-urbanist and anti-industrialist slant of Irish nationalism led to the ongoing primitivisation of women in nationalist accounts of the West.¹⁸³ Barbara O’Connor discusses the consensus among many Irish critics that cultural nationalists, ‘far from making radical iconographic changes, were very much influenced by gendered ideas of nation [...] and they generally adopted, and in some case inverted, the images of Irish womanhood established under colonial rule’.¹⁸⁴ A key aspect of this representation of women was ‘the supposed unsuppressed instinctiveness, sexuality, and un-self-conscious sensuality of the primitive’.¹⁸⁵ The gender of the female migrants in *Nothing Personal* and *Ondine* is therefore central to their juxtapositioning against the natural landscape. The traits ‘of the primitive’ previously assigned to feisty Irish female protagonists in films such as *The Quiet Man*, *Ryan’s Daughter* (1970) and *The Field* are employed in *Nothing Personal* and *Ondine* in their portrayal of migrant female characters, even though their respective directors approach their representation from different perspectives, as I discuss in chapter three.

While the female continued to embody the Irish nation and to represent the land, the land was thence perceived as a male domain and nationalist writers constructed the west of Ireland male as the epitome of the Gael.¹⁸⁶ In his play *Riders to the Sea* (1904) and his book *The Aran Islands* (1907), Synge ‘confirms rather than disturbs’ the romantic nationalist view of the Irish peasantry of the time,¹⁸⁷ focusing on the versatility and earthiness of the islandmen. He describes how ‘each

¹⁸³ Catherine Nash, ‘Remapping the Body/Land: New Cartographies of Identity, Gender and Landscape in Ireland’, in *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*, ed. by Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1994), pp. 227-250 (p. 235).

¹⁸⁴ Barbara O’Connor, ‘“Colleens and Comely Maidens”: Representing and Performing Irish Femininity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’, in *Ireland in Focus: Film, Photography and Popular Culture*, ed. by Eoin Flannery (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2009), pp. 144 – 167 (p. 154).

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Nash, ‘Remapping the Body/Land’, p. 236.

¹⁸⁷ Aidan Arrowsmith, ‘Introduction’, in *The Complete Works of J M Synge*, ed. by Aidan Arrowsmith (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2008), pp. vii - xix, p. xv.

man [...] is a skilled fisherman, and can manage a currach with extraordinary nerve and dexterity. He can farm simply, burn kelp, cut out pampooties,¹⁸⁸ mend nets, build and thatch a house, and make a candle or a coffin'.¹⁸⁹ Synge's description is consistent with Tolstoy's use of the chronotopes of nature and 'the labour idyll' when describing peasant labour.¹⁹⁰ In his film *Man of Aran* (1934) by Irish-Canadian director Robert Flaherty, the self-sufficient islanders are similarly portrayed, and this representation endures in both *Nothing Personal* and *Ondine*. The Irish widower Martin in *Nothing Personal* grows his own vegetables, cuts turf, collects seaweed, travels by boat and lives in tune with the seasons. Contemporary Irish life is acknowledged however in the fact that Martin also cooks international cuisine, enjoys fine wines, listens to a wide range of music and reads from his extensive library. The Irish fisherman Syracuse in *Ondine* is represented as most comfortable in his own skin when at sea and involved in physical labour, although the trials of his personal life invoke modern society. With the passage of time, Synge saw beyond the pastoral idyll of the Aran Islands to the hardship of life lived at the mercy of the elements. In his subsequent plays, *Shadow of the Glen* (1903) and *Playboy of the Western World* (1907) he replaced the pastoral form by gritty realism,¹⁹¹ combining tradition and modernity as *Nothing Personal* and *Ondine* do.

The perception of the Irish West as a rural idyll has persisted in various forms throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, in parallel with Ireland's increasingly global outlook, unprecedented economic success and eventual economic collapse. The shake-up of the Catholic Church in the wake of the child-abuse scandals, the disillusionment with Irish politics and the economy as a result of the recession and the visible changes to Irish society resulting from immigration have all contributed to a vacuum of ideology, spirituality, morality and nationality. In the face of such disruption

¹⁸⁸ Pampooties are 'shoes of undressed cow-skin sewn together and tied across the instep, formerly worn in the Aran Islands' (Definition from *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English*, compiled and edited by Terence Patrick Dolan).

¹⁸⁹ Cited in Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 489.

¹⁹⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by Mikhail Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Texas: Uni of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 84-258 (p. 250).

¹⁹¹ Oona Frawley, *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth Century Irish Literature* (Dublin and Portland, Oregon: Irish Academic Press, 2005), p. 99. The riots that followed the first performance of *Playboy of the Western World* at The Abbey Theatre in Dublin on 26 January 1907 are regarded by many critics as an outraged nationalist response to the realism of these works.

and uncertainty, the lure of the West and its connection to a seemingly less complicated past, however romanticised, is still strong. Oona Frawley explains that for the poet Seamus Heaney, writing through the tumultuous time of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the theme of rural place was, and is, a constant, whereby 'place and nature could suggest stability and continuity of identity during a time when stability was lacking and both personal and national identity were under severe pressure'.¹⁹² An African poet living in Connemara and influenced by Heaney's work references this stability and constancy when he describes how 'this place fills me with the honey of untouched time'.¹⁹³ Martin McLoone sees the polarity of Dublin and the West as inextricably linked to the state of Irish culture :

When Irish culture reflected the values and aspirations of ascetic Catholic nationalism and its narrow rigorist ethos, the lure of the city (and the road out) was irresistible. Now that Irish culture reflects the dominant values of secular, consumer capitalism, the deep-lying romantic promise of the landscape now seems increasingly attractive.¹⁹⁴

Hall reiterates this sentiment when he describes the return to the local as a response to globalization, where people seek out 'terrains in between, little interstices, the smaller spaces within which [...] to work',¹⁹⁵ while Bauman describes the two oppositions present in modern society, that of 'taking up responsibility' or 'seeking a shelter'.¹⁹⁶ In these circumstances, people are drawn to a literature and visual culture that allows them to experience a less complicated world. The playwright Thomas Kilroy pointed out in 1992 this has always been the case, noting that 'within the metropolitan centres there is always a nostalgia for cultures which are untouched, untainted by the ennui, the busyness, the crowdedness of the centre'.¹⁹⁷ Keohane and Kuhling identify the contemporary manifestation of this nostalgia in their description of the exodus from Dublin that takes place at the end of the working week:

¹⁹² Frawley, p. 139.

¹⁹³ Oritsegbemi Emmanuel Jakpa, 'Connemara', in *Landing Places: Immigrant Poets in Ireland*, ed. by Eva Bourke and Borbála Faragó, (Dublin: Dedalus Press, 2010), p. 75.

¹⁹⁴ McLoone, p. 94.

¹⁹⁵ Stuart Hall, 'The Local and the Global', in *Culture, Globalisation and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. by Anthony King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp.19-39 (p.33-34).

¹⁹⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), p. 213.

¹⁹⁷ Thomas Kilroy, 'A Generation of Irish Playwrights', in *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*, ed. by Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2000), pp. 1-7 (p. 6).

Dubliners who become chronic ‘weekenders’, in Galway, Westport, Clifden, pushing westward until they fall into the Atlantic, or exhausted from the long drive, collapse in the door of the suburban house in the private development of exclusive holiday homes that they’ve relocated from Dublin to Achill Island.¹⁹⁸

The contemporary writers and film-makers locating their work in the West of Ireland, while indeed *re*-representing it as a site of personal regeneration and restoration, simultaneously embrace aspects of contemporary Ireland in their representations. It is their inclusion of migrant characters within their narratives, signifying an engagement with the realities of contemporary Irish society, that is pertinent to my thesis.

The appeal of the rural locale for Irish writers and readers alike throughout the twentieth century is demonstrated by the fact that, with the exceptions of Joyce and O’Casey and later Brendan Behan, writers tended not to represent the city in their work for most of the twentieth century. Even Joyce’s work, while marking a departure from the predominantly rural focus of Irish literature up to that point, nevertheless ‘does present us with characters whose own imaginations not infrequently dwell on projected pastoral dreams.’¹⁹⁹ In the 1980s however, writers such as Dermot Bolger and Roddy Doyle challenged this mainly rural representation of Ireland and began to render urban life, particularly as lived in Dublin, in their work. Their stories and characters reflect the socio-economic alienation of working-class Dublin at that time, as a consequence of unemployment and the construction of council housing ‘which created ghettos of unemployment and disadvantage throughout the city’.²⁰⁰ These areas feature as the settings of the short story ‘As if There Were Trees’ which I discuss in chapter two, and the film *The Front Line* analysed in chapter three, and are the site for confrontation between the local population and newly arrived migrants. Dublin as a space/place has always been characterised by inward migration, which, up until the 1980s, was largely an internal migration of Irish people from rural areas to Dublin. In contrast, the migrations of the 1990s and early 2000s were from other countries, a distinction made by Bolger:

¹⁹⁸ Kieran Keohane and Carmel Kuhling, *Collision Culture: Transformations in Everyday Life in Ireland* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2004), p. 176.

¹⁹⁹ Frawley, p. 100.

²⁰⁰ Michael Pierse, *Writing Ireland’s Working Class: Dublin After O’Casey* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 21.

For any city to be a lively, vibrant place it needs to have a perpetual influx of new people coming in with new ideas and new cultures and new influences. Forty years ago that influx was coming from Monaghan and Wexford, and its coming from Lithuania and Poland now.²⁰¹

Bhabha makes a similar connection between the arrival of new people and the vibrant nature of the city, describing it as the place to which ‘the migrants, the minorities, the diasporic come to change the history of the nation...it is the city which provides the space in which emergent identifications and new social movements of the people are played out’.²⁰² In the context of my thesis, I demonstrate that the city is not the *exclusive* site of migrant arrival. The rural spaces that feature in my selected novels, short stories and films are also the site of ‘emergent identifications’ where migrants play their part in the transformation of Irish society.

Chapter Outline

In the following chapters, my analysis of the representation of migrant experience in my selected texts and films is organised by genre. Each chapter opens with an exploration of the authorial perspective followed by a discussion of the significance of the setting for each narrative’s themes and tone. I explore the theme of belonging by investigating the nature of the migrant characters’ relocation to Ireland and the means by which they orientate and position themselves in relation to Irish places and people. An examination of the public and private spaces in which migrant life is played out in the texts and films informs my analysis, while the significance of gender and nationality is central to my assessment of the challenges the migrant characters face in Ireland. I also discuss the migrants’ relationship to the home of origin through memory or forgetting as they settle into or move on from life in Ireland.

Chapter One focuses on the novels *Open-handed* (2008) by Chris Binchy and *Hand in the Fire* (2010) by Hugo Hamilton. I explore their contrasting representations of the Eastern European migrant experience, identifying the reasons

²⁰¹ Dermot Bolger, quoted in Wallace, p. 7.

²⁰² Bhabha, ‘DissemiNation’, pp. 319-320.

behind the detached attitude of the Polish protagonists of *Open-handed* towards Ireland compared to the desire of the Serbian protagonist of *Hand in the Fire* for inclusion in Ireland's national space. Consequently, I arrive at some conclusions regarding migrant strategies for adapting to or resisting life in the spaces and places of Ireland. The significance of language in identity formation and as an indicator of inclusion is a theme of the novels, particularly *Hand in the Fire*, and I discuss this with reference to Bakhtin and Augé's theories of language. I also address the concept of 'historical memory' in an exploration of the parallels between the experiences of contemporary immigrants and returned Irish emigrants, examining their shared experience of disconnection and alienation from contemporary Irish society.

Chapter Two moves on to explore the short story genre. I discuss 'As if There Were Trees' (2005) by Colum McCann and 'The summer of birds' (2008) by Gerard Donovan, two Irish authors who live outside of Ireland and whose migrant status informs my analysis of their themes and their treatment of them. I locate these texts within the Irish short story tradition of reflecting the changing face of Irish society. McCann's choice of a socially marginalised area of Dublin as the location for the story is the focus of my discussion of its global as well as local resonance, through an exploration of the implications of local male unemployment on attitudes towards migrant workers. My analysis also explores the concept of mental and physical boundaries and their inhibiting effect on the interaction between the Irish community and the Romanian migrants. In my exploration of 'The summer of birds' by Gerard Donovan, I address the story's manifestation of Ireland's postcolonial legacy of fear and distrust of the foreigner through one Irish character's response to the migrant community in his new suburban estate. Said's work on nativism is particularly pertinent to the discussion, in which I also examine the concept of internal exile amongst the wider community. Stylistically, Donovan's use of a child narrator facilitates interaction between the Irish and the migrants and I discuss the implications of this literary device for the overall effectiveness of the story.

I begin my analysis of 'Grafton Street of Dublin' (2010) by Ifedinma Dimbo and 'Shackles' (2010) by Melatu Okorie with a discussion of the African oral and short story tradition and engage with the hybridity of form evident in the authors' use of both Nigerian and Standard English idioms. The urban setting of 'Grafton Street of Dublin' forms the basis for a discussion of the migrant as flâneur, drawing on the work of Hana Wirth-Nesher and Elizabeth Wilson in relation to the spaces of

the city and women's particular experience of them. In contrast to the external space in which 'Grafton Street of Dublin' unfolds, 'Shackles' explores the confined internal space of a hostel for asylum seekers, and I examine the story's representation of the implications of this 'non-place' for the mental wellbeing of its migrant residents.

In Chapter Three, my focus turns to three films – David Gleeson's *The Front Line* (2006) Neil Jordan's *Ondine* (2009) and Urszula Antoniak's *Nothing Personal* (2010). My discussion of *The Front Line* is informed by postcolonial theories of the body, in particular Fanon's theory of the ethnic body and Elke Boehmer's work on the wounded body. I examine the film's use of flashback and 'prosthetic memory' as devices through which to represent the trauma that lies behind the African migrants' departure from the Congo and impacts on their ability to adapt to a new life in Ireland. Alison Landsberg uses the term 'prosthetic memory' to connote that these memories are not the result of actual lived experience but rather, arise as a consequence of 'engagement with a mediated representation' such as seeing a film.²⁰³ In my analysis of the films *Ondine* and *Nothing Personal*, I engage with discussions on fairytale and myth in relation to their representations of the female migrant. The representation in postcolonial and Irish nationalist discourses of the connection between the female and the natural landscape is instrumental to my analysis here, where I map this representation onto the migrant female in the two films. Andrew Klevan's work on the 'undramatic' in film underpins my discussion of cinematographic style in *Nothing Personal*, while the symbolism of food as a means of negotiating identity and relationships is discussed with reference to the 'food film' genre as defined by Anne Bowers. Music also features strongly in the film and I explore what Maria Pramaggiore terms its 'disembodying potential' in its negotiation of the relationship between the migrant female and the Irish male.

In my concluding chapter, I review my findings across the literature and film analysed throughout this thesis, identifying areas of convergence and divergence within and across their narratives and reflecting on the current position of the migrant in Irish literature. I discuss newly emerging work by and about migrants, while also indicating the possible directions migrant literature and film in Ireland

²⁰³ Alison Landsberg, 'Introduction', in *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, by Alison Landsberg (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 1-24 (p. 20).

may take in the future. Finally, I explore the broader applications for my research in relation to these possible developments, and I identify the potential for widening the scope of future research to include other genres.

Chapter One

‘A distraction in other people’s worlds’: The Eastern European migrant in Chris Binchy’s *Open-handed* (2008) and Hugo Hamilton’s *Hand in the Fire* (2010)

Fintan O’Toole suggests that the propensity for contemporary Irish novelists to produce narratives of Ireland’s emigrant past is due to their lack of engagement with the realities of twenty-first century Ireland, and with immigration in particular, an experience from which he believes they feel ‘imaginatively excluded’.¹ He describes how some writers have addressed this by tapping into the Irish experience of being an immigrant in a ‘strange’ country. The effects of globalisation are such that the contemporary United States or United Kingdom no longer represent that which is unfamiliar and consequently these Irish writers access the migrant experience through narratives of Ireland’s nineteenth- and early twentieth-century emigrants. By looking back to the past, O’Toole believes these writers avoid ‘having to try and make sense of the confusing, vulgar, rapidly shifting Ireland of the last 20 years’.² However, the two novels under consideration in this chapter, *Open-handed* (2008) by Chris Binchy and *Hand in the Fire* (2010) by Hugo Hamilton, demonstrate that there *are* Irish novelists who eschew the backwards glance and use the reality of their own experiences of migration and identity to imagine the experience of Eastern European migrants in contemporary Ireland. By engaging closely with Ireland’s changing socio-economic landscape, they reflect the cultural and social changes being brought about by multiculturalism. They explore questions of identity and agency that arise as a consequence of transnational migration while the extent to which their Eastern European protagonists relate to Ireland and its people is represented in the novels through the spaces of work and leisure. As my analysis of the novels demonstrates, the heteroglossia of the novel form accommodates the multiplicity of voices described by Bakhtin,³ and these two novels are significant for

¹ O’Toole, ‘Irish Writers have yet to awake from the American Dream’, p. 9.

² Ibid.

³ Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’, in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by Mikhail Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist, pp. 259-422 (p. 263).

their representation of the individual, ‘singular voices’⁴ of specific migrant characters. As a result, these migrant characters are centralised in the texts rather than being consigned to the ‘collective anonymity’ described by Memmi.⁵ In the process, the novels imagine the range of motivations, attitudes and experiences of contemporary Eastern European men and women living in Ireland.

As I discussed in my Introduction, the novels *Hotel Irlandia* (*Hotel Ireland*) (2006), and *Dublin: Moja Polska Karma* (*Dublin: My Polish Karma*) (2007), written in Dublin by two Polish writers, are informed by the first-hand experiences of their authors, rather than being imagined as they are in *Open-handed* and *Hand in Fire*. Although they are only currently available in Polish, a number of Polish-speaking critics have written about them in English, and therefore it has at least been possible to gain an overview of the themes they address and the approach they take to the subject of Polish migration to Ireland. It emerges that they correspond significantly with the themes and concerns of *Open-handed* and *Hand in the Fire* so that Binchy and Hamilton can be seen to imagine the Eastern European migrant experience in a realistic way. Iwona Slabuszewska-Krauze’s *Hotel Irlandia* is set in the period before Poland’s accession to the European Union in 2004 and represents a contrasting migrant perspective, where, as Kinga Olszewska explains, Dublin is perceived as ‘not only a Mecca for labour migrants, but also a locus of opportunity and change. [...] migration connotes none of the traumas and alienation that were destined for Orzel’s characters, but rather is a journey of self-realisation’.⁶ The Eastern European protagonist of *Hand in the Fire* has the same positive approach to his migration and he regards Dublin as a place in which to reinvent himself. Olszewska describes how the Polish characters in Magdalena Orzel’s *Dublin: Moja Polska Karma* (2007) have left Poland in search of a better life in Ireland but ‘feel estranged both at home and in the realm of migration’.⁷ She also notes that ‘Saidian orientalism takes an unusual turn, whereby a migrant orientalises the indigenous people perceiving them as inferior’ so that the novel is ‘suffused with stereotypes of the indigenous Other which aggravates the sense of alienation’ of the Polish

⁴ Foster, ‘Introduction’, p. 20.

⁵ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. by Howard Greenfeld (London: Earthscan Publications, 1990), p. 149.

⁶ Kinga Olszewska, ‘Dynamic Identities: Polish Migrants in Ireland’, in *Contemporary Polish Migrant Culture and Literature in Germany, Ireland, and the UK*, ed. by Joanna Rostek and Dirk Uffelmann (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), pp.153-176 (p. 166).

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

characters.⁸ The Polish protagonists of *Open-handed* express a similar sense of disconnection in relation to both Poland and Ireland, and also describe the Irish in unflattering terms, as the following discussion of the novel reveals.

⁸ Ibid., p. 163.

***Open-handed* (2008) by Chris Binchy**

Open-handed represents the lives of a number of Eastern European migrants living in Dublin in 2006-2007 and working in the service and construction industries. The novel is recounted by an omniscient third-person narrator, although much of the story is focalised through the main male protagonist Marcin, a 24 year old Polish architecture graduate working as a night porter at a luxury Dublin hotel. The main female protagonist is Agnieszka, a single mother from Poland who works in a bar and also for an escort agency. Additional characters include Artur, Marcin's friend from his home town who offers him accommodation and helps him to find a job on his arrival in Dublin, and Victor, Agnieszka's Romanian boyfriend, who works as a doorman at a Dublin nightclub. Irish characters feature as work colleagues and business people, of whom the most prominent is a property developer called Sylvester Kelly, a client of the escort agency for whom Agnieszka works.

In line with the Irish tradition of emigration, the Irish writers and filmmakers whose work I explore in this thesis have lived and worked abroad at some stage during their lives. Binchy's earlier working life as a chef in Dublin when he worked with many migrant workers, and also his time spent as a migrant worker in New York in the late 1980s and early 1990s are brought to bear on his work.⁹ This double-consciousness of both host and migrant positions allows him a degree of access to the migrant mind that enriches his imagining of his protagonists' experiences. He also spent time in Poland in preparation for writing *Open-handed*, socialising with cousins of his wife, who is part-Polish, and talking to people who had friends and/or family working in Ireland. Commenting on the parallels with the Irish tradition of emigration, Binchy says that 'the conversations [in Poland] were exactly the same as ones I would have had twenty years earlier at parties in Ireland'.¹⁰ Marcin's experiences are frequently described in terms reminiscent of Irish emigration. Readers can recognise and empathise with Marcin's efforts not to think about his parents' sadness at his leaving, because imagining them 'making their way home in the car in silence, waiting for his call in the morning, after which their relationship would be defined by phone calls and the space between phone

⁹ See Aisling McKeown, Interview with Chris Binchy, (Unpublished, 2010), Appendix 1, pp. 219-228 (p. 219).

¹⁰ McKeown, Interview with Chris Binchy, Appendix I, p. 220.

calls, [...] would make him cry'.¹¹ His departure from Poland involves an exchange with his non-demonstrative father that would be familiar to an Irish readership that has made similar journeys from similar transport terminals across the decades:

They went inside the grim grey station and checked to see where his bus was leaving from, then walked in silence to the platform. [...] It was how Marcin had known it would be. 'So,' he said. 'You go on. There's no point in waiting.' 'Okay,' his father said. 'Let us know when you get there'. (*OH*, p. 14)

As the quotation above shows, the speech of the Eastern European characters in the novel is represented in Standard English. Polish words are noticeably absent from the novel, even in situations where Marcin is speaking to other Polish characters such as his parents or Artur and Agnieszka. He mentions when he arrives in Dublin that 'every couple of steps he heard Polish being spoken' (*OH*, p.30) and that a receptionist in a hotel 'answered him in Polish' (*OH*, p.31) but he does not report her answer and therefore no Polish words appear on the page. Where some authors draw attention to their characters' nationality through the insertion of occasional words in their native language, as seen in the short stories by the Nigerian writers discussed in the next chapter, this is not a feature of Binchy's literary style. Instead, he provides what Bakhtin calls 'an ideological translation of another's language, and an overcoming of its otherness – an otherness that is only contingent, external, illusory'.¹² Binchy therefore does not highlight his characters' otherness through their speech, unlike the novelist Marian Keyes who uses broken English in the direct speech of the minor Polish characters in her novel *The Brightest Star in the Sky* (2009), as they utter such phrases as 'Can you explain me why did this happen?'.¹³ Instead, by rendering their speech in Standard English, Binchy creates migrant characters that are recognisable to an Irish readership.

The Dublin-based setting of the novel is also recognisable, although when viewed through the migrants' eyes, it can appear strange and unfamiliar. The plot unfolds against a backdrop of the city still in the throes of the Celtic Tiger economic boom, with packed bars and nightclubs and fully occupied top-class hotels, and

¹¹ Chris Binchy, *Open-handed* (London: Penguin, 2008), p.15. All further references to the novel will be abbreviated to *OH* and parenthetically cited in the text.

¹² Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', p. 365.

¹³ Marian Keyes, *The Brightest Star in the Sky* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 175.

thriving construction and service industries that employ a substantial migrant workforce. The structure of the novel itself, with short, tight chapters which Binchy describes as being ‘like a series of snapshots’,¹⁴ captures the energy and pace of change in the country at the time. Stylistically, *Open-handed* contains elements of the crime fiction genre, regarded by G.K Chesterton, amongst others, as ‘inextricable from, and actively concerned with, city life’.¹⁵ Of particular relevance to the migrant theme of *Open-handed* is that the crime genre requires ‘the energy that derives from the random collisions of people, the endless social interactions between both strangers and acquaintances’.¹⁶ Many critics assert that crime fiction, which emerged in conjunction with the social upheaval of mid-nineteenth century urban industrialisation, is reflecting more effectively than any other genre the societal change of twenty-first century Ireland. Reviewing a collection of contemporary Irish crime writing,¹⁷ David Park quotes Fintan O’Toole, who believes that Irish crime writing ‘has become arguably the nearest thing we have to a realist literature adequate to capturing the nature of contemporary society’.¹⁸ Discussing the apparent reluctance of the literary establishment to acknowledge ‘even the genre’s best work’, Park also cites Alan Glynn’s argument on the increasing incorporation of elements of *literary* fiction into *crime* fiction, namely ‘depth of characterisation, subtle and poetic use of language, and a keen willingness to explore the darker corners of human nature’.¹⁹ While *Open-handed* is marketed as general fiction rather than specifically crime fiction, it has criminal activity at its centre, which reveals the less salubrious aspects and characters present in Irish society just before the collapse of the Celtic Tiger. Through their jobs in the business sectors driving the economic boom - the service industries and the building trade – the novel’s migrant characters are exposed to, or are inadvertently involved in, these criminal activities. Marcin is told to ignore evidence of the escort business being run through the hotel by an Irish businessman and in which Agnieszka is involved. Sylvester, an Irish businessman

¹⁴ McKeown, Interview with Chris Binchy, p. 2.

¹⁵ John Connolly, ‘What have we got here then? The mystery of Irish crime writing’, *Irish Times*, 14 June 2011
 <<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/features/2011/0614/1224298855815.html>> [accessed 27 October 2011]

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ The collection reviewed by Park is *Down These Green Streets: Irish Crime Writing in the 21st Century* ed. by Declan Burke (Liberties Press: Dublin, 2011).

¹⁸ Fintan O’Toole, cited in David Park, ‘Sleuthing its way around Irish crime’, *Irish Times*, Weekend Review, 25 June 2011, p. 13.

¹⁹ Alan Glynn cited in Park, p. 13.

who is a client of the escort agency, is a former local councillor currently involved in dubious property deals. An Irish journalist trying to expose Sylvester's illegal dealings provides the 'detective' element in the novel. Against this backdrop of a city fuelled by affluence and corruption, the migrant characters orientate themselves in Dublin, and to varying extents relate to Irish people and each other across a variety of private and public spaces. These spaces have the potential to engender a sense of belonging in the migrant characters, or alternatively, to increase their sense of isolation and alienation. The desire of migrant characters *to* belong and their attitude towards their migration are also determining factors in how they locate themselves in Irish society.

Marcin, Agnieszka, Artur and Victor have a pragmatic attitude to their migration to Ireland and are representative of contemporary transnational migrants whose mobility is a by-product of globalisation. Katarzyna Kropiwek describes contemporary migration from Poland as 'classic chain migration', whereby 'they came having been encouraged by someone who had already been staying in Ireland for some time; they had a place to live when they arrived, and in some cases a job also'.²⁰ Marcin's migration follows this pattern. On his arrival in Dublin, he contacts his friend Artur, moves into a house rented by Artur and some other Eastern European migrants, and finds a job as a night porter at the same hotel as Artur. Kropiwek attributes a lack of Polish integration into Irish communities to this pattern of chain migration, which leads to migrants socialising within their own groups of family or friends. She also points out that for some migrants, their lack of fluency in English may deter them from interacting with Irish people.²¹ The effort or lack of it, expended by the Eastern European protagonists of *Open-handed* to belong in Ireland is directly proportionate to the depth of their desire to belong. Lucy Lippard describes how it is possible to develop a sense of belonging without having lived in a place for an extended period. She believes that 'psychological ties can be as strong as historical ones, and they can be formed by 'rootless' individuals if their longing for roots is strong enough'.²² Neither Marcin nor Agnieszka in *Open-handed* displays any such longing. However, like the characters in Orzel's *Dublin*:

²⁰ Katarzyna Kropiwek and Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain, *Polish Migrant Workers in Ireland* (Dublin: National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism, 2006), p. 29.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²² Lippard, p. 42.

Moja Polska Karma mentioned at the start of this chapter, neither of them seems particularly attached to their homes in Poland either. Consequently, they remain relatively isolated in their Dublin lives, Marcin because he lacks motivation and Agnieszka because she does not want to disclose the circumstances of her life as a single mother in Poland, or her present employment in Ireland as an escort. Her guardedness is characteristic of that exhibited by women working in the sex industry – the Immigration Council of Ireland reports that ‘the majority of migrant women in prostitution rarely attempt to integrate into the host society. The majority have little contact with their own indigenous community or Irish life in general’.²³ Agnieszka’s evasiveness is indicated early on in the book, when she tries to avoid Marcin, who recognises her as she leaves the hotel after her first escort appointment:

He saw now that she really didn’t want to be there talking to him. They were standing on a street in Dublin in the middle of the night, nobody else around, two people from the same town a thousand miles away and she just looked like she wanted to run away. (*OH*, p.177)

Although their experiences in relation to work differ, both Marcin and Agnieszka can be described as ‘detached’ people, defined by Duyvendak as ‘people who have lost their ability to value a specific place’ and for whom ‘places eventually become interchangeable’.²⁴ Duyvendak attributes this to people’s increased mobility, which he blames for people’s failure to form ‘thick’ attachments to places.²⁵ Binchy concurs with Duyvendak’s attribution of this detachment to people’s increased mobility, as he explains that his characters’ alienation and lack of wider engagement with Irish society is a consequence of the nature of current Eastern European migration. He sees it as symptomatic of the commodification of labour as a result of

²³ Immigrant Council of Ireland, *Globalisation, sex trafficking and prostitution: the experiences of migrant women in Ireland* (Dublin: Immigrant Council of Ireland in collaboration with the Women's Health Project (HSE) and Ruhama, 2009) p. 84.

²⁴ Duyvendak, p. 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Kropiwek’s interviews in 2006 with 23 Polish migrants to Ireland, in the 18-30 age group confirms that this is the situation for many of them, who said that they had come to Ireland specifically to work and save for the future and to improve their own prospects and those of their families back in Poland. They also expressed a desire to return to Poland in the future. (See Kropiwek and Chiyoko King-O’Riain, p. 33.

globalisation, whereby people come to a *job*, rather than a *place*, and move about frequently as jobs finish in one place and begin elsewhere.²⁶ Victor, for example, ‘got away from home [Romania], had made it through Italy and had spent some time in Germany’ (*OH*, p.128). The representation of Marcin’s departure from Poland captures the lack of excitement that characterises migration in this contemporary context. Marcin describes his departure as ‘an escape’ (*OH*, p.15), and conveys the commuter-like atmosphere of the flight from Poland to Dublin as he recounts that ‘the plane was full of people like him, all doing the same thing. None of them seemed excited or interested or even happy about it’ (*OH*, p.29). The mobility of the so-called ‘Ryanair Generation’ who travel back and forth between home and jobs in a different country is seen by the Irish writer Eamonn Wall as an obstacle to assimilation. Wall has lived in the United States since the 1980s, commuting ‘from exile to Ireland’ on a regular basis and believes that ‘commuting makes assimilation impossible’.²⁷

The lack of engagement Marcin displays towards his migration spills over into his observations of the Irish people visible from the bus window as he travels into the city from Dublin airport, where the first person he encounters is a security official who yawns in his face. He describes how he ‘watched commuters standing in loose groups at a stop. Unfamiliar tired, angry faces with red puffy eyes that surely mirrored his own. I don’t know who you are, he thought, but I don’t think I like you’ (*OH*, p.29). His first impression of Dublin city itself is no more favourable, as he describes his surroundings in language connoting illness and odour. He notices that ‘the pavement beneath his feet was sticky and diseased, the air like that of a sick person’s room. The river smelled like a drain, slow and murky and green’ (*OH*, p.60). Marcin’s disaffected attitude has a bearing on all his subsequent experiences and encounters in Dublin. On his first day in the city, he walks through the streets, where ‘every couple of steps he heard Polish being spoken. He saw the faces of people he felt he should know. A rough crowd. Hard language’ (*OH*, p.30). Although surrounded by fellow Polish migrants, he feels disconnected from them, a feeling that is compounded when he checks into a hotel to get some sleep and finds that the receptionist is Polish. He is baffled by her reluctance to speak to him in

²⁶ McKeown, Interview with Chris Binchy, Appendix I, p. 219.

²⁷ Wall, *From the Sin-é café*, p. 3.

Polish or indeed to even acknowledge their common nationality. These encounters increase his sense of alienation and dislocation.

Walking becomes the means through which Marcin locates himself in the city and is one of the few aspects of his life over which he appears to exercise some semblance of choice and control, as the anonymity of the city space affords him the opportunity to wander at will. As a literary structure, Rebecca Solnit describes how ‘the recounted walk encourages digression and association’,²⁸ and during Marcin’s walks his thoughts about Irish people, Dublin landmarks and memories of home are rendered. The Irish poet Gerard Smyth celebrates the activity of walking through Dublin, where ‘the shape of the city hasn’t changed. The heritage of the city hasn’t changed. There are still the same statues and the same landmarks – the river is still the same river that courses its way through it’.²⁹ Because of the permanence of its physical landmarks, there is a sense of continuity and familiarity in the literary representation of Dublin by contemporary authors who allude to the same buildings and statues as Irish writers of previous eras. However, although united by the view before them, these texts are distinguished by their *point of view*. *Open-handed* reveals a migrant’s view of places and sites familiar to an Irish readership, but now re-viewed from the perspective of someone seeing them for the first time. The reader therefore experiences a familiar Dublin from Marcin’s point of view, and for whom, as for the young Stephen Dedalus newly relocated from the suburbs, ‘Dublin was a new and complex sensation’.³⁰ As Marcin walks through the city, he passes by and through the same areas as the characters strolling through the Dublin of Joyce’s stories. His lack of engagement with the people and places he encounters echo that of the young man Lenehan in Joyce’s short story, ‘Two Gallants’ (1914), of whom the story’s narrator says that ‘though his eyes took note of many elements of the crowd through which he passed, they did so morosely. He found trivial all that was meant to charm him’.³¹ Marcin’s walk through the picturesque quad of Trinity College leaves him similarly unmoved and even though ‘the world opened up into green and architecture and cobblestones’ he reflects that ‘even here there were too many people’ (*OH*, p.60). As he continues to walk, passing some playing fields

²⁸ Rebecca Solnit, cited in Eamonn Wall, *Writing the Irish West: Ecologies and Traditions* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2011), p. 7.

²⁹ Gerard Smyth, quoted in Wallace, p. 7.

³⁰ James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 55.

³¹ James Joyce, ‘Two Gallants’, in *Dubliners* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 47-58 (p. 54).

where a tractor is cutting the grass, a memory of home is evoked and ‘he remembered the last time he had smelled that smell, the same way in warm air before he had ever been here’ (*OH*, p.60). This is the only occasion in the novel on which Marcin refers to home with anything approaching nostalgia. Generally, his references are peremptory and involve dismissive allusions to his parents and their conservative ways.

Once he begins work as a night porter, Marcin walks to the hotel for each shift, his purposeful walking pace reflected in the text’s fast-paced, disjointed sentences, as he describes what he sees in the back gardens along his route, the ‘floating bathrooms clung to the back of buildings...Dodgy extensions, patched up paint jobs...Cracked windows, flaking paint, leaking roofs, crappy skylights’ (*OH*, p.116). Although walking helps him to orientate himself, it increases his sense of exclusion from Irish society, as his movements and his appearance mark him out as other. He feels out of step with the commuters around him, ‘a distraction in other people’s worlds, something grey-faced and feeble, going against the crowd. Why does he walk like that? State of his shoes. That suit’ (*OH*, p.115). In Sam Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Galahad, A West Indian migrant newly-arrived in 1950s London, expresses the same self-consciousness, noting that ‘everyone doing something or going somewhere, is only he who walking stupid’.³² Following a quieter route away from the main roads, more comfortable on the periphery than he is in the centre, Marcin walks along ‘tree-lined roads of big houses set back from the traffic, gravel drives and gardens maintained by crews of Chinese guys. To look at these houses from the front [...] was to feel that this world was beyond him forever’ (*OH*, p.115). His sense of exclusion from this luxurious life is compounded when his route cuts through the back lanes running behind the gardens of these houses, where, if the house owners happen to come out into their gardens and see him, they view him with suspicion, and ‘they watched him pass, just to be sure that he was going, blaming him for their own surprise’ (*OH*, p.116). Brah describes how the ‘situatedness’ of a migrant community, meaning the way in which they become situated in their new country, defines how they are located and perceived within and

³² Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, p. 23.

by the host society.³³ Just as Memmi referred to the ‘anonymous collectivity’ which frequently defines the host country’s perception of migrants, Simmel describes the categorisation of ‘the person who is a stranger to the country, the city, the race’ so that immigrants are ‘not really conceived as individuals, but as strangers of a particular type.’³⁴ The homeowners’ suspicious attitude towards Marcin described above reflects this perception of him as a stranger, while his employers, one of whom enquires on first meeting Marcin whether he is ‘another of our Polish brethren’ (*OH*, p.42), regard him as part of a collective. Binchy’s representation of these responses to Marcin appear particularly realistic in light of the words of a young Polish woman interviewed in Ireland in 2007 who complained that ‘Irish people don’t really know us as people. They perceive us not as people, but as foreigners.[...] They associate us with strangers, not knowing us at all’.³⁵

Even if the Irish *were* interested in Marcin as an individual, his working hours as a night porter largely prevent him from socialising and therefore his opportunities to get to know Irish people are limited. He does occasionally meet his Polish friend Artur for a drink and sometimes he socialises with one of his Irish co-workers, Tommy, when they go to the pub in the morning after their night shift. His relationship with Tommy calls to mind Kristeva’s description of how ‘the foreigner’s friends, aside from the bleeding hearts obliged to do good, could only be those who feel foreign to themselves.’³⁶ Tommy is estranged from his wife and children and temporarily living in a bedsit, as he explains to Marcin, ‘I’m not staying here. It’s just until I get sorted out’ (*OH*, p.188). His unsettled status and the temporary nature of his accommodation mirror Marcin’s transient status as a transnational migrant. Their first interaction does not auger well for a future friendship, as Tommy effectively challenges Marcin’s identity when he interrogates him about his name:

‘What did Ray say your name was?’

‘Marcin’.

‘Mar – What?’

‘Marcin. It’s Polish for Martin. It’s pronounced the same as Máirtín’.

³³ Avtar Brah, ‘Thinking Through the Concept of Diaspora’, in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), pp.443-446 (p. 444).

³⁴ Simmel, p. 407.

³⁵ Magdalena Klimczak, ‘“Island of Hope”: Polish Immigrants in Ireland’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 96 (2007), 37-45 (p. 43). Co-incidentally, the interviewee is a twenty-five year old woman called Agnieszka.

³⁶ Kristeva, p. 28.

‘What?’ Tommy said again. He had slowed down and was concentrating on Marcin’s face.

‘The Irish for Martin? A guy told me this in Poland’.

‘I don’t know what you heard. The Irish for Martin is Martin’.

‘No, I mean the Gaelic. The Irish language.’

‘Oh, that’, Tommy said. ‘I don’t care about that. I’ll call you Bob. I can’t spend my life arsing around trying to work out what your fucking name is.’

[Realising he has confused Marcin, Tommy relents]

‘I’m only messing with you,’ Tommy said, turning back to him.

‘Oh, right,’ Marcin said.

‘I’ll call you Marty. How’s that?’

‘Fine,’ Marcin said. (*OH*, p.72)

Although Marcin’s name is not difficult to pronounce, Tommy does not leave it as it is, but re-names Marcin, initially with a completely unrelated name and eventually with a diminutive form of his name. Agnieszka experiences similar scrutiny of her name by an Irish client in the bar where she works, who mocks the unfamiliar pronunciation:

‘Who’s this lovely girl?’ the man asked Gavin, staring calmly into her eyes.

‘This is Agnieszka’.

‘What a beautiful name,’ the owner said, a hard smile tickling the corners of his mouth. They all laughed, too loud.

‘Jesus, darling, you must have been an ugly baby.’

‘It was my grandmother’s name,’ Agnieszka said. (*OH*, p.13)

The man’s patronising tone reflects a general attitude shown by Irish businessmen towards female Eastern European staff throughout the novel. Self-made men who have become rich as a result of the Irish property boom, they are depicted as revelling in the unaccustomed sense of control that their money gives them over these foreign women, invoking colonial attitudes and behaviour of the past.

The representation of migrant characters in the novel is thus clearly split along gender lines, with the ‘male gaze’ given precedence in the portrayal of the female characters. Reflecting on the behaviour of her male employers at the bar where she works, Agnieszka describes how their recruitment of Eastern European female bar staff involves ‘making girls bend over in interviews, inspecting their haunches and teeth as if they were horses’, and she remarks on the no less predatory treatment of the girls by the clientele:

All that groping, brushing, sidling, passing, miming. The filthy comments they [the girls] would gradually begin to understand. The threats and promises and wet entreaties panted into their ears. The casual sense of ownership that the guys had when they were in groups [...] But the manager didn't care. This was what they were all here for. (*OH*, p.11)

Throughout the novel female migrant characters are portrayed as sexual commodities, the escort agency reducing its female employees to 'an inventory of measurements and body sizes [...], a list of overblown brochure descriptions' that they supply to their male clients (*OH*, p.20). As Agnieszka arrives in a club to meet the owner of the escort agency, she is described as though being selected from a display, 'walk[ing] the length of the bar watched by everyone because that was what this place was for. Watching'. She wonders 'where would she end up? To whom did she belong?' (*OH*, p.80). Her commodification and lack of agency is emphasised as the group of men around her boss refer to her proprietarily, one of them joking 'I might *abduct* you' and telling her boss that he might '*take* her from you' (*OH*, p.80, my italics). Their objectification of Agnieszka can be considered in relation to Trish Murphy's explanation that 'foreign women make it easier [for Irish men] to participate in prostitution [...]: it is easier not to see them as your sister. It is easier to objectify and therefore remove yourself from responsibility'.³⁷ The escort agency makes a point of telling Agnieszka that Sylvester, her first client, likes 'foreign girls' (*OH*, p.169). Chris Binchy retrospectively expressed concerns about his treatment of this theme in relation to Agnieszka's story:

In the case of Agnieszka I *did* want it to be the case that even if she ended up in the business she did [prostitution], that her core would remain her own. Of all the characters in the book, *the put-upon Eastern European girl dragged into this industry* [my italics]...I'm not sure if I was doing it again that I'd do it this way. I'm not confident that that strand of the story did what I wanted it to.³⁸

³⁷ The comment is by Trish Murphy, a psychotherapist, speaking on the RTE television programme 'Prime Time' in 2006. Cited in Stephen Rogers, *On the Game.ie: Prostitution in Ireland Today* (Dublin: Gill and McMillan, 2009), p. 118.

³⁸ McKeown, Interview with Chris Binchy, Appendix I, p. 226.

Notwithstanding whether or not Binchy succeeds in representing Agnieszka as unaffected by her experiences, her story represents the reality of life for some migrant women. In common with a number of other contemporary films and novels dealing with the theme of the exploitation of migrant women by the sex industry, including the film *Trafficked* (2010) written and directed by Ciaran O'Connor, and the novel *Hearts and Minds* (2009) by British novelist Amanda Craig, Irish women are instrumental in recruiting migrant women and organising the business.³⁹ This objectification of non-national women by Irish women as well as Irish and Eastern European men demonstrates the extent to which they are perceived as other and relegated to the servicing of yet another aspect of global Irish life. Craig's novel of Eastern European migrant women living in contemporary London develops this theme more generally, revealing the anxiety inspired in British women by their Eastern European domestic workers, as they swap stories about nannies and au-pairs who had allegedly 'stolen, worn your clothes, seduced your husband or had a parallel life as a prostitute'.⁴⁰ Ronit Lentin argues that the stories of these migrant women, whether employed in domestic labour, where they 'fill the care deficit for Irish women accessing paid labour in increasing numbers', or in the sex industry, where they 'arguably fill a compassion/desire deficit', offer what she describes as 'an alternative narrative of globalization in 21st century Ireland'.⁴¹

This alternative narrative is one of marginalisation and exploitation, and in the case of sex workers like Agnieszka, further inhibits her chances of becoming part of mainstream Irish society. Instead, she is diverted onto a route towards the criminal periphery. Given her financial commitments to supporting her son back in Poland, she is tempted by the agency's assurance that she will earn the equivalent of one week's bar wages for one night as an escort. Unlike the male migrant characters, who have only themselves to consider, her role as a mother increases the urgency of her economic need. When the option to become an escort is first presented to her,

³⁹ In the film *Trafficked* (2010) the Ethiopian-Irish actress Ruth Negga plays an African migrant, recruited into the sex trade by an Irish woman who presents herself as a protective mother figure, affecting concern for her welfare. It becomes obvious over the course of the film that her interest in this girl is solely in relation to her earning potential. In her novel *Hearts and Minds* (2009), British writer Amanda Craig also focuses on women as both facilitators and victims of sex trafficking. The difference in her novel is that *both* facilitator and victim are Ukrainian migrants.

⁴⁰ Amanda Craig, *Hearts and Minds* (London: Abacus, 2009), p. 315.

⁴¹ Lentin, 'Black Bodies and "Headless Hookers"', p. 2.

she ‘felt her stomach contracting’ but at the same time she seems almost resigned to her fate; ‘She shook her head. Get on with it now. Be done with it’ (*OH*, p.147). Nevertheless, as she walks to the hotel room to meet her first client, she is still ‘feeling sick’ (*OH*, p.171). She copes by mentally detaching herself from what is happening:

In an hour she would walk out of here and nothing in the world would have changed. Nobody would know what had happened except her and a man she would never see again. She would go home, have a shower and a large drink, and in the morning the only thing that would be different would be the amount of money in her bag. A week’s salary from nowhere. She’d forgotten plenty in her life. She could forget this. (*OH*, p.172)

Melissa Farley describes how women involved in prostitution disengage from what they are doing, as Agnieszka does above, by splitting ‘into two persona, trying to maintain a distinct self that is unharmed and untouched by the self that is engaged in prostitution’.⁴² This splitting of the persona is further facilitated by women’s adoption of false names and alternative styles of dress for escort work, strategies described by Bernstein as ‘donning uniforms’, and which fulfil a similar purpose of separating the public and private selves.⁴³ The novel reflects this strategy in its description of Agnieszka’s first escort job. She introduces herself as ‘Anneka’ from ‘Slovakia’ and her client, Sylvester, noticing her nervousness, wonders ‘why questions about where they came from unsettled them’ as he acknowledges that ‘the whole exchange was based on lies anyway’ (*OH*, p.172). A married man with children, Sylvester is one of the few Irish focalisers in the novel and representative of the ‘well-heeled executives’ whom Stephen Rogers describes as forming the client-base of the ‘myriad of escort agencies’ in Dublin city.⁴⁴ Sylvester’s internal monologue reveals his complicity in the lies, by omission in his case, commenting that ‘in the nowhere space of this room, which officially was empty, he was a man with no history or name meeting a girl whose name would be Natasha or Olga or whatever she had said it was’ (*OH*, p.19). Wirth-Nesher’s term ‘the erotic lure of anonymity’ describes the compulsion driving Sylvester’s desire for his secret

⁴² Melissa Farley, ‘Prostitution and the Invisibility of Harm’, *Women and Therapy*, 26, (2004), cited in Immigrant Council of Ireland, p. 100.

⁴³ Elizabeth Bernstein, *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity and the Commerce of Sex* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 49.

⁴⁴ Stephen Rogers, *On the Game.ie: Prostitution in Ireland Today* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2009) Rogers, p. 118.

assignments with unknown women in the anonymous space of a hotel room. She defines it in relation to Joyce's short story 'The Dead' from the *Dubliners* collection, describing how 'Gabriel Conroy is aroused by his wife only after he perceives her as a stranger, his sense of erotic adventure heightened by their arrival at a hotel'.⁴⁵

The migrant women working as escorts are therefore not only commodified sexually but also in terms of identity, as they are selected by clients on the basis of their 'stranger' status. This perception is essential to maintaining the boundary between the personal and the private. Despite Sylvester's objectification of the women, describing them variously as 'bleached blond, solid, curvy' (*OH*, p.99) or commenting on a 'tight arse under a black skirt' (*OH*, p.172), there are however occasions when his perspective moves beyond that of the male gaze and hovers on the boundary between the impersonal and the personal, as he reflects on the women behind the bodies he encounters:

Sometimes the girls carried evidence of their lives beyond this world – scars from operations, appendectomies and Caesareans, stretchmarks from pregnancies, an assortment of tiny lines, cuts and etchings that told stories he couldn't always translate. He hated seeing them, not because they were imperfections or brought reality into this neutral space but out of a sense of propriety, as if he was trespassing into territory that the money he paid gave him no right to access. (*OH*, p.20)

In light of Rogers description of how, in the sexual transaction between client and escort, 'in general [the men] discount the background, the feelings and the motivation of the woman they are with',⁴⁶ Sylvester's discomfort can be seen to arise from the unwanted insight the scars and marks provide into the women's private lives. In blurring the boundary between personal and impersonal/private and public space, they undermine the client/escort transaction which is founded on maintaining 'the mystery of identity in the act of intimacy'.⁴⁷ The commodification of female migrants in the novel is not confined to those working in the escort agency but extends outside it to two minor Eastern European female characters that appear only briefly. They are essentially one-dimensional characters who function as 'narrative

⁴⁵ Hana Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 173.

⁴⁶ Rogers, p. 115.

⁴⁷ Wirth-Nesher, p. 171.

objects in male-centred action', ⁴⁸ and to whom Artur and his housemates refer solely in terms of their sexual availability. Artur tells Marcin that he has found himself a girl called Katja, whom he describes as 'a total slut' (*OH*, p.161). She and her friend Basia, whom one of Artur's housemates refers to as 'always that opportunity [to have sex]' (*OH*, p.168), appear to circulate amongst the men in the household. In contrast to Agnieszka's situation as an escort, there is no financial basis to the arrangement and although they are no less objectified by the male characters, Katja and Basia appear on the surface (which is the level at which they are presented) to be willing and active participants in the sexual activity.

Where the female migrants are objectified on the basis of their *sexuality*, the male Eastern European migrants in the novel are objectified in terms of their *physicality*, as are the male Romanian migrants in the short story 'As if There Were Trees' by Colum McCann, which I discuss in the next chapter. Throughout the economic boom during which the novel is set, both the service and construction industries were flourishing and work was in plentiful supply for migrants, facilitating ease of transition from one job to another. Artur leaves his job as a hotel porter for a job in construction with some fellow Eastern European migrants. These men are strong and healthy and Artur, 'with his newly shaved head bending to fit in' (*OH*, p.95) changes physically as a result of doing construction work. Now, 'his hair was shaved tight, he was tanned and his T-shirt showed arms that were much bigger than Marcin had ever seen on him before. He was solid and he looked strong' (*OH*, p.161). Masculine identity amongst the group centres on traditional perceptions of the male as physically strong, and the manual nature of their work reinforces their masculinity. David Collinson and Jeff Hearn describe how, 'in response to organizational conditions that treat manual workers as second-class citizens', working-class men, and I suggest migrant men, 'may tend to redefine their sense of self, dignity and respect within the counterculture'.⁴⁹ This includes interacting with each other in a manner that is often 'highly aggressive, sexist and derogatory, humorous yet insulting, playful yet degrading'. New members are subjected to incessant teasing and 'the embarrassment of highly explicit sexual references'; those

⁴⁸ Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester and New York: Man University Press, 1997), p. 217.

⁴⁹ David Collinson and Jeff Hearn, "'Men" at "work": multiple masculinities/multiple workplaces' in *Understanding Masculinities*, ed. by Máirtín Mac an Ghaill (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1996), pp. 61-75 (p. 68). The authors refer to earlier publications by Collinson on this subject, in 1988 and 1992.

who can deal with it are accepted into the group, while those who cannot are regarded as having 'failed this particular text of manhood'.⁵⁰ Hence, when Artur's fellow construction workers hear about his inability to stay awake long enough to have sex with Basia, they mock his lack of virility, question his sexual orientation and present themselves as more masculine by virtue of their stamina and the physical nature of their work:

'He didn't score with Basia'.

'I didn't know that was possible,' Andrzej said. 'Are you gay?'

'No, I was just tired. I'd worked ten nights straight.'

'Ah, work. For Christ's sake, are you a man? I work seventy hours a week'.

(*OH*, p.168)

Agnieszka's Romanian boyfriend Victor is a doorman at a club where he is employed on the basis of his physical strength, and he is also described in terms of his physicality. He spends his free time working out in a gym and his long-term plan is to return to Bucharest when he has saved sufficient money to open a gym of his own. However, despite his work ethic, his focus and his dreams, there are hints throughout the novel that Victor has a violent temper that he struggles to keep under control. When Agnieszka confesses to him that she has been working as an escort, he is unable to articulate his upset and resorts to physical violence, hitting her twice across the face, 'because once seemed to lack the conviction that such a serious step implied' (*OH*, p.218). In response, two of Agnieszka's Albanian colleagues attack and stab him, leaving him for dead. These essentialist representations of Eastern European male characters are constructed on a concept of 'true masculinity' in modern gender ideology and, R.W Connell argues, are 'almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies. [...] Either the body drives and directs action [...], or the body sets limits to action'.⁵¹ Marcin is noticeably passive by comparison to the other Eastern European male characters and according to essentialist definitions of masculinity, this makes Marcin more feminine than masculine. In fact, he shares more character traits with the female migrant Agnieszka than with any of the male migrant characters. Life appears to happen to these two characters rather than them actively seeking it out. Noticing Marcin's pallor and physical exhaustion, Artur

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ R.W Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 45.

urges him to leave the night work. In *'Tis* (1999), his memoir of his early days as an Irish migrant in 1950s New York, Frank McCourt has a similar conversation with another Irish migrant and is inspired to move on to better things.⁵² However, Marcin lacks motivation, and his apathetic attitude, evident in the novel from the moment of his departure from Poland as discussed earlier, inhibits him from attempting to improve his situation. He is in a sense rendered impotent, both sexually and mentally, by his experience of migrancy. The boundary between his public and his private worlds dissolves, as his unsociable working hours affect his ability to socialise.

Wirth-Nesher suggests that 'the chronotope of the modern urban novel is a space that conflates the public and the private' and that much of the plot of such texts unfolds in 'spaces that fuse public and private, that are uneasily indeterminate: coffee houses, theaters, museums, pubs, restaurants, hotels and shops'.⁵³ The spaces in which Marcin lives, works and socialises are therefore significant in explaining his isolation and general detachment from society. On his arrival in Dublin, Marcin moves into a house with Artur and some other Eastern Europeans, located on one of the many new housing estates outside the city:

They got out at the entrance to an estate of solid-looking semi-detached red-brick family homes, with small patches of grass in front, each of which, he thought, had no greater ambition than to look exactly like the one next door. 'Stepford,' Marcin said. 'You live in Stepford.' (*OH*, p.43)

This housing estate is similar to many that were constructed all over Ireland in the early 2000s, with the help of a large Eastern European migrant labour force.⁵⁴ In the novel, Artur and his friends 'all headed off every morning together in a car to build new estates in Kildare and Meath and west Wicklow' (*OH*, p.95). Characterised by their anonymity and their lack of individuality, these estates resemble those described by Crang in the North American suburbs, whose 'relentless series of plots [...] provide fertile ground for arguing that these spaces may well destroy a sense of

⁵² Frank McCourt, *'Tis* (London: Flamingo, 1999), p. 61.

⁵³ Wirth-Nesher, p. 20.

⁵⁴ Many of the estates constructed during this period remain unfinished and partially inhabited. They are commonly referred to as 'ghost estates' by the media and the Irish public, and are visible reminders of the collapse of the Irish economy.

place just as much as tower blocks built according to Corbusier's maxim'.⁵⁵ In Ireland's case, the economic boom was largely fuelled by the property market and estates such as the one Marcin moves into appeared almost overnight, such was the pace of the construction industry. The thoughtlessness of their design and construction is captured in Marcin's observation of the house next door, where 'the plastic gutter [...] was starting to sag although the house could only have been a couple of years old' (*OH*, p.63). The soulless nature of these living spaces both reflects and is a consequence of the consumption-oriented nature of Celtic Tiger Ireland, in which, Kieran Keohane explains, 'a society that has sold its soul to materialism has left us short of places to shelter'.⁵⁶ Marcin soon moves out of this suburban space to a room closer to his job in the hotel. Although more centrally located, the room is on the top floor of an old house divided up into a number of rented flats with communal toilet and shower. The rudimentary room appears as the living space of new arrivals in many narratives. In *'Tis*, McCourt describes his room 'upstairs [...] at the end of a hallway blocked off with a partition [...] If I stretch my arms I can touch the walls on both sides'.⁵⁷ Marcin has merely exchanged a living space on the horizontal margins of the city for one on the vertical margins of the city centre, and he remains as detached from society as he was in the suburbs. Life in the house takes place around and outside of him, and he is not involved in it in any way:

His dreams were guided by the things that happened in the house during the day, the comings and goings, the phone calls and the loud, African conversations in the hallway four floors below. The cooking smells that came up to him and the whirling, grinding flush of the communal shower and toilet not far from his head through plasterboard walls. He woke disoriented, exhausted from living the life of the house. (*OH*, p.96)

This living environment is reminiscent of the conditions in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* (1974), in which their West Indian and Nigerian migrant protagonists are frustrated by their cramped living conditions and close proximity to fellow tenants. Marcin is irritated by the

⁵⁵ Mike Crang, *Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 104.

⁵⁶ Kieran Keohane, 'Ireland's Haunted Landscape; From the Deserted Homes of the "Faithful Departed" to the Post-Celtic Tiger Social Desert', in *Urban and Rural Landscapes in Modern Ireland*, ed. by Irene Gilsenan Nordin and Carmen Zamorano Llena (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 67-88 (p. 80).

⁵⁷ McCourt, p. 14.

‘handwritten signs in the hallway, telling him to close the door properly and not to put the bins out early and to leave messages attached to the cork-board’ (*OH*, p.96). The authoritarian nature of these instructions gives Marcin a sense of being controlled and watched that contributes to his negative state of mind. There is nothing homely about his living space, which has all the features of a public rather than a private space. These are also features that characterise the hostel accommodation of migrants awaiting the outcome of asylum applications, as I discuss in the next chapter in relation to the short story ‘Shackles’.

While his living environment is presented in the novel almost exclusively as a space in which to sleep, Marcin’s character is revealed more fully within the space of the hotel where he works. In the early days of their employment as hotel night porters, Marcin and Artur wonder ‘could there be a better job than this for two young fellows out in the world, earning more in a week than they would in a month at home?’ (*OH*, p.84). It is worth noting that increasing their earnings by this proportion is a strong motivating factor for taking the job, in the same way that Agnieszka decides to take the escort job on the basis of an equation - that of earning in a night as an escort what would take her a week to earn at bar work. However, although financially rewarding, the hotel job is socially isolating for the two Polish men - Marcin’s ‘living and working conditions serve to reinforce his sense of the gap between himself and others’ (*OH*, p.114). They work in an all-male environment, and Marcin describes his colleagues’ attitude towards him as one of ‘interest but not concern’ (*OH*, p.87). The most undesirable jobs are delegated to the migrant employees, and Artur is enraged when he is told to clean out the toilets where someone has been sick, complaining that ‘it’s not fair. They [the Irish employees] get to do room service and bags and the bus tours, all the money jobs, all the tips, and we’re fucking hovering and cleaning up puke and shit. They’re exploiting us’ (*OH*, p.86). His boss warns him that ‘there’ll always be somebody to do the work if you don’t want to’, reflecting the fact that while Ireland’s economy was thriving, ‘economic planners [...] held an impoverished belief in the migrant as pure economic unit’.⁵⁸ As I discussed in my introduction to this thesis, the commodification of the migrant is a consequence of globalisation and the transnational workforce to which it gives rise. However, the ease with which employers replace migrant employees can

⁵⁸ Munck, p. 19.

also work in the migrants' favour. In Artur's case, he walks out of his job as a hotel porter and easily finds work on a building site, where the hours are more sociable. Marcin however, remains at work in the anonymous space of the five star hotel, a space that Derek Hand says represents 'the dark, unpleasant reality amid the bright lights of the cityscape, a microcosm of a shiftless society. It is a nowhere, a neutral space'.⁵⁹ Sylvester describes the 'nowhere space' of the hotel room where he meets his escorts, as discussed earlier, so that the hotel can be seen to fit Augé's description of a 'non-place' as one which 'cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity'.⁶⁰ The hotel evokes the representation of the London hotel staffed by migrants in Stephen Frears' film *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002). As with the hotel in the film, the hotel in *Open-handed* is characterised by transience and anonymity, so that 'what reigns there is actuality, the urgency of the present moment [...] non-places are there to be passed through'.⁶¹ The novel plays on the transient nature of this non-place to create an air of mystery in keeping with the crime genre aspects of the text, describing arrivals and departures by cars and lifts, a mixture of occupied and unoccupied rooms, ringing telephones left unanswered:

[Marcin] ignored doors that opened and closed again as he walked along corridors and the lift that went up and down when no one was there. The porters' phone that would ring three times and stop. The cars that came and went in the middle of the night. The girls who arrived and left or disappeared. The room-service orders to rooms that were supposed to be vacant. (*OH*, p.114)

Agnieszka, in her job as an escort, is one of 'the girls who arrived and left or disappeared'. The Immigrant Council of Ireland describes how 'the core of the prostitution industry' began operating from indoor locations, including hotels, during the 1990s.⁶² That this was a global rather than specifically Irish phenomenon is supported by Bernstein's explanation that the 'privatization' of the sex industry is a feature of the post-industrial economic transformation of cities. She describes how it is effected spatially and socially, representing 'a shift away from a street-based social milieu to one-on-one, technologically mediated encounters with clients

⁵⁹ Derek Hand, *A History of the Irish Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 282.

⁶⁰ Marc Augé, *Non Places*, p. 78.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 103.

⁶² Immigrant Council of Ireland, p. 83.

through cell phones and the Internet'.⁶³ In this context, hotels function not only as venues but also as sources of information on escort services.⁶⁴ *Open-handed* captures the covert nature of the industry in Dublin, describing how the porters facilitate the operation of the escort business from the hotel. Binchy describes Marcin's dawning awareness of the porters' involvement in this parallel economy that exists just out of sight and is yet another zone of Irish life from which Marcin is excluded through lack of understanding:

Up there in the corridors and rooms, there was a whole world of activity that Marcin didn't know about but began to sense. Conversations stopped when he arrived. [...] Ray had told him that what happened during the nights was their own business. (*OH*, p.113)

He does not ask questions, but accepts the instructions of Ray the manager to 'sort things out. Make the calls. Take your money. Keep your mouth shut' (*OH*, p.113). In their work in Dublin bars, Agnieszka and Victor are similarly disengaged from the transient population passing through. Binchy explains that a central theme in the novel is the limited scope for contact between characters other than on a work-related basis, a theme that is reinforced by the dynamics of the migrant characters' work space:

Part of the whole concept of the book is that there is no contact, no real interaction between people, other than in situations where the roles and hierarchies are fairly clearly defined, i.e. that you are server and you are served, you are driver and you are driven. That would have fed in to the anonymity of the world that they are in, there's no sense of engagement at all.⁶⁵

Binchy's description has overtones of Augé's claim that 'a person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer or driver'.⁶⁶ Marcin's ongoing detachment from his environment is signified by the way he watches the hotel

⁶³ Bernstein, p. 69.

⁶⁴ Immigrant Council of Ireland, p. 87, cites a newspaper article by Stephen Rogers detailing how 'a survey of 30 three-, four-, and five-star Irish hotels by *Hospitality Ireland: The Magazine for the Food Service and Drinks Sector*, found that 59 percent were willing to give info on where escort services were available' (Stephen Rogers, 'How the Internet has cut a big loophole in the law on paid-for sex', *Irish Examiner*, 24 January 2007).

⁶⁵ McKeown, Interview with Chris Binchy, Appendix I, p. 223.

⁶⁶ Augé, *Non Places*, p. 103.

residents going about their business but does not aspire to move beyond the confines of his role and have lives like theirs. He remains unimpressed and ‘wanted nothing of it. He didn’t envy these people, didn’t waste his time imagining himself in their shoes or dream that his life would be happier or better if he was doing what they were doing’ (*OH*, p.114). In 1950’s New York on the other hand, Frank McCourt describes feeling ‘ashamed of my uniform and my dustpan and broom’ as he moved among the rich young Americans in the lobby of the New York hotel where he works. He confesses ‘I’d like to say Hi and be part of that lovely world for a minute’.⁶⁷ The difference in Marcin’s and McCourt’s attitudes illustrates clearly the contrast between the experiences and motivations driving migrants of the mid-twentieth century and those of the twenty-first. Where Frank McCourt’s memoir makes clear his determination to make New York his home and build a successful life there, *Open-handed* reveals the apathy at the heart of Marcin’s migrancy and his lack of interest in Ireland as a home.

Nevertheless, outside of his living and working space, and within the larger space of the city, Marcin does seek out spaces where he feels less marginalised. On his first day in Dublin, tired and disorientated, a pub offers him a public space in which he can create a private zone:

He sat on a stool and ordered a beer. When he turned he saw that everyone was staring straight ahead, each maintaining the sovereignty of his own territory. He was glad. He wanted to be alone. He wanted to sit at the counter in an Irish bar and have a drink and know for sure he was away. (*OH*, p. 38)

Once he starts work, his occasional early morning trips to the pub with fellow porter Tommy afford him a rare opportunity of involvement in the world outside the hotel. He enjoys the novelty of ‘doing the same thing as everyone else [...] To be participating in the real world’ (*OH*, p.137). David Lloyd explains how male drinking groups arose in the post-Famine period in Ireland as a consequence of, and a defence against, the economic and emotional ‘anomie’ of the period, so that ‘drinking rather than sexuality became the principal site for the performance of masculinity’.⁶⁸ It functions in a similar capacity in *Open-handed*, where Marcin, who cannot match up

⁶⁷ McCourt, p. 24.

⁶⁸ David Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800 – 2000: The Transformation of Oral Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 89.

to the physical ideal of masculinity displayed by his fellow migrants, and Tommy, separated from his wife and children and therefore falling short of ‘the hegemonic construction of Irish masculinity [that] emphasizes the “good family man”’,⁶⁹ find a home of sorts in the pub, with ‘the prospect of homosocial conviviality’.⁷⁰

Fundamentally, however, Marcin and Agnieszka remain detached from the places and spaces of Dublin city. This raises the question of the nature of their relationship to their homes in Poland. For the migrants of the twenty-first century, advances in communication technology and a reduction in the expense involved in air travel facilitate more immediate and therefore more frequent communication than that available to migrants of past generations. Marcin’s infrequent communication with his parents is therefore indicative of a reluctance rather than a lack of opportunity to do so. The novel refers to his making only one phone call home (*OH*, p.141). He and his father discuss how long it has been since they have been in touch, blaming some problem with the internet, while Agnieszka phones her mother from an international call centre to discuss her son and her finances. Neither character is nostalgic for Poland, nor do they plan on returning there in the immediate future. Instead, by the end of the novel, both Marcin and Agnieszka are moving on as befits contemporary transnational migrants. Marcin boards a bus for continental Europe, thinking about how ‘he could get off anywhere, go anywhere’ (*OH*, p. 256-7), while Agnieszka is en route to Poland to collect her son before leaving again. Her frank appraisal of her time in Ireland reveals that ‘there was nothing about here that she would miss. Wherever she went in her life, wherever the next phase would be, she would never come back here. A hard place [...]’ (*OH*, p.250). Her emphasis on the ‘next phase’ and Marcin’s flexibility about his destination reflect the fluidity of contemporary migration. However, in the case of these two migrants, such mobility is perhaps not as liberating as Duvyendak presents it, given that Marcin and Agnieszka appear unable to form any attachments to new places and their decisions to move on are motivated by the need to escape from difficult situations.

⁶⁹ Harry Ferguson, ‘Men and Masculinities in Late-Modern Ireland’, in *A Man’s World? Changing Men’s Practices in a Globalized World*, ed. by Bob Pease and Keith Pringle (New York and London: Zed Books, 2001), pp. 118-134 (p.124).

⁷⁰ Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity*, p. 91.

The detachment from Irish society that characterises *Open-handed*'s Eastern European protagonists allows them an objective perspective from which to observe the underbelly of Celtic Tiger Ireland, exposing the corruption, greed, decadence and criminality at its core, and foreshadowing its eventual demise. Binchy himself points out that 'over and over in the book there are constant themes of people being seen and being exposed doing something that they shouldn't have been doing'.⁷¹ In their roles as service providers - hotel porters, bar workers, security guards, escorts - the Eastern European migrants in *Open-handed* are well-placed to observe and comment on Ireland and the Irish at the height of the country's economic boom, 'spying and eavesdropping on private life with its secrets and intimacies'.⁷² In its representation of the specific experience of Eastern European migrancy, the novel reflects a predominantly pragmatic range of individuals, for whom Ireland is a temporary place in which to earn enough money before moving on to somewhere else, or moving back to Eastern Europe. The characters' experience of migrancy varies according to gender; male migrants are portrayed in terms of their physicality and their masculinity defined in terms of strength, stamina and action. Marcin is the exception because of his passivity and the less physical nature of his work. Female migrants are portrayed in terms of the male gaze, and represented as passive and lacking agency. The choices made by Agnieszka, the main female character, are driven by her status as a mother and the financial demands of providing for her child back in Poland, while male migrant characters are all presented as single and without responsibilities outside of themselves. The public and private spaces through which the migrant characters move as they live, work and socialise contribute to their sense of alienation from mainstream Irish society. Their living space is rarely referenced except in terms of a place to sleep off the exhaustion of the working day, while their work spaces of hotels and bars, characterised by transience and neutrality, reinforce their sense of being on the margins of Irish society. This lack of attachment is indicative of the fact that Agnieszka and Marcin's work environments both classify as 'non-places'. Socially, the only space which offers a sense of inclusion is the pub, where Marcin experiences a temporary sense of being part of wider Irish society without having to actively engage with it.

⁷¹ McKeown, Interview with Chris Binchy, Appendix I, p. 226.

⁷² Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by Mikhail Bakhtin*, ed. by Holquist, pp. 84-258 (p. 125).

***Hand in the Fire* (2010) by Hugo Hamilton**

Although I never felt unwelcome, I knew that Irish identity was very narrowly, and historically, defined, and I knew that even if I lived here until the day I died I would never come into possession of the collective memory. Because of that, because I couldn't *feel* it, the national conversation (what I liked to think of as 'my argument') would always, at the level of emotion, exclude me. The other reason for never feeling entirely relaxed was the shifting-sands feel of everyday discourse.⁷³

Hand in the Fire is the story of a Serbian migrant called Vid Ćosić and his determination to integrate himself into Irish society. He professes his love for his new country and embraces the opportunity to start afresh. He wants to forget his troubled life in Serbia, where he grew up during the Balkans War of the 1990s and subsequently survived a car accident in which his parents died. As Vid's father was employed by the secret police, a veil of suspicion hangs over the accident. Hugo Hamilton explains that in this novel he wanted to explore the desire of some migrants to distance themselves mentally and physically from their homeland. He chose to have a Serbian protagonist to reflect the fact that 'because of their recent history in Serbia, there's a lot of guilt there, and there are reasons for people not wanting to be Serb and trying to assimilate into another culture'.⁷⁴ As part of his effort to assimilate, Vid strikes up a friendship with Kevin Concannon, a young Irish lawyer with issues of his own. In the process he becomes involved with Kevin's wider family, including his estranged father Johnny, an emigrant from the west of Ireland who has recently returned from London. A parallel storyline set at an unspecified time in the past concerns the possibly deliberate drowning of Kevin's pregnant and unmarried aunt in the west of Ireland. As I argue in my analysis of the novel, her story has a part to play in Vid's inclusion in the narrative of Ireland, both in terms of the questions it raises about the nature of belonging and the ways in which the traumas of the past are dealt with. In her review of the novel, the writer Anne Enright points out that 'Hamilton loves the spaces between things: his

⁷³ Molly McCloskey, 'These are my floods', *The Dublin Review*, 47, (2012), 78-98 (p. 96).

McCloskey is an American author who lived in Ireland from the mid-1990s to 2011/2012.

⁷⁴ McKeown, '*Hand in the Fire* and the bid to belong', p. 431.

characters live, not just between cultures or between languages, but between the past and the future; they stay suspended between innocence and guilt, between knowledge and the lack of it'.⁷⁵ Vid's efforts to recreate himself are made more challenging by his unwillingness to occupy this liminal space, and he rejects a hybrid Serbian-Irish identity, in favour of an exclusively Irish one. He is therefore not interested in the double-identity celebrated by critics such as Bhabha and Kearney⁷⁶ and discussed in my introduction to this thesis. Such a celebration presumes an ongoing attachment to the homeland, whereas Vid has detached himself from his. His mission to escape from Serbia, literally and metaphorically, and to become Irish, determines the relationships he chooses to pursue and those he decides to avoid.

As with *Open-handed*, *Hand in the Fire* is an Irish author's imagining of the experience of Eastern European migration, but Hamilton employs a first person narrative voice rather than the third-person narrative voice used by Binchy. This stylistic choice creates a greater sense of empathy and connection between Vid and the reader in contrast to the detachment of Marcin's narrative. Vid's characterisation is informed by Hamilton's personal experience of a dual heritage, as the son of a German mother and an Irish father. At his father's insistence, Hamilton and his siblings spoke Irish at home while growing up and consequently his exposure to English and his use of it was restricted to the world outside the home. Hamilton's subsequent struggles in grasping the nuances of the English language as spoken in Ireland, and his consequent sense of being an outsider, inform the characterisation of Vid.⁷⁷ Bakhtin's statement therefore, that 'the intentions of the prose writer are refracted, and refracted *at different angles* [author's italics], depending on the degree to which the refracted, heteroglot languages he deals with are socio-ideologically alien, already embodied and already objectivized',⁷⁸ is borne out in the text. As a result there is 'almost complete fusion'⁷⁹ of Hamilton and Vid's voices in the sections of the novel concerned with Vid's comprehension of the English language. As well as drawing on his own experience, Hamilton also engages 'prosthetic memory' to provide a context for Vid's migration to Ireland. Kevin's mother shows

⁷⁵ Anne Enright, 'Hand in the Fire by Hugo Hamilton', *Guardian*, 17 April 2010
 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/apr/17/hand-fire-hugo-hamilton-review>> [accessed 26 July 2010] (paragraph 8 of 9).

⁷⁶ Richard Kearney, p. 185.

⁷⁷ McKeown, '*Hand in the Fire* and the bid to belong', p. 429.

⁷⁸ Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', p. 298.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

Vid a newspaper report about The Balkans war of 1992-1995, with pictures of ‘some of the Bosnian women who had been given refuge here after the massacre of Srebrenica [in 1995]. Faded photographs of family members who had been killed by the Serbian army [...]’.⁸⁰ Vid’s reaction is one of shame and he describes feeling ‘like a war criminal’ (*HIF*, p.103). Hamilton’s use of prosthetic memory takes the reader beyond the cold facts in the newspaper, with which an Irish readership would be familiar, given that many Bosnian refugees settled in Ireland during and after the Balkans war. By creating a direct link between the Balkans war and Vid’s past life, the novel gives an insight into Vid’s psyche and an explanation for the depth of his desire to wipe his past from his memory and start afresh in Ireland. When Kevin tries to explain the situation in the North of Ireland to him, Vid makes sense of it by comparing it to the situation in Serbia, describing how ‘the history of this country was not unlike that of my own, full of handshakes and refused handshakes’ (*HIF*, p.133). He processes the story of Kevin’s drowned aunt in the same way, remarking that ‘the story Kevin told me seemed not unlike the way the secret police operated in my own country and the paralysis that people felt in the face of authority’ (*HIF*, p.89). By drawing parallels between the experiences of Ireland and Serbia, the novel further facilitates the effect of prosthetic memory on an Irish readership who can interpret Vid’s emotions in relation to his homeland through their own feelings in relation to theirs.

Despite the fact that the violent history of his country is partly behind Vid’s move to Ireland, Dublin’s spaces contain their own forms of violence. In the city, Vid’s unwitting involvement in a pub fight leads to his standing trial for a crime committed by his friend Kevin. The city is also the place where Kevin’s sister becomes addicted to drugs and where Kevin’s estranged father dies in a brutal attack by thugs. Vid nevertheless develops a social life and interacts with Kevin and his family, as well as work colleagues so that he becomes much more involved in Irish social life than Marcin in *Open-handed*. However, as a space, the city cannot fully satisfy Vid’s requirements for a home. He is in search of a more profound connection with the country through the land itself. Lippard explains that while some migrants change as a result of interaction with the local population, for others,

⁸⁰ Hugo Hamilton, *Hand in the Fire* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), p. 103. All future references to the novel will be abbreviated to *HIF* and parenthetically cited in the text.

‘sometimes the place, or ‘nature’ will provide nourishment that social life cannot’.⁸¹ As part of his quest to find such a place, Vid and a Moldovan girlfriend take a day trip to Howth, a fishing village on the outskirts of Dublin which, he muses, is ‘meant to be beautiful [...] Famous too, because this was the location where the writer James Joyce first made love to his future wife Nora’ (*HIF*, p.59). To his disappointment, the place has been urbanised:

Howth was just another hill, basically, with a big golf course and some wealthy villas and gates and planes landing nearby at the airport. It didn’t really mean anything to us [...] we couldn’t really *connect* [my italics] to the place. [...] It already belonged to somebody else. We were the latecomers. (*HIF*, p.59)

His search for a more authentic location leads him away from the city and towards the coast as he explores islands off the mainland, where he observes that ‘there was no one around and I felt like the last man on earth’ (*HIF*, p.5). His ultimate destination is the Aran Islands in the West of Ireland. Regarded as the repository of Irish authenticity by scholars and tourists alike, as I outlined in the introduction, the islands exert a pull on Vid throughout the novel and are central to his locating of himself in Ireland. ‘This was where I entered into the story of the country at last’ he proclaims as he stands on Inis Mór, the main island, ‘I became a participant, a player, an insider taking action’ (*HIF*, p.261). Vid is initially drawn to the West by Kevin’s story concerning the drowning of his aunt some decades earlier. As a pregnant unmarried young woman, she was denounced from the church altar by the local priest, who suggested that ‘if the men in the area were not decent enough to drown her, then maybe she would have the decency to drown herself’ (*HIF*, p.88). Some days later her body washed ashore on the Aran Islands but it was never ascertained whether her death was suicide or deliberate drowning by the men of her community on the mainland. The story became part of local folklore and the spot where she was washed up was named ‘Bean Bháite’, meaning ‘Drowned Woman’ in Irish. Like many women throughout Irish history whose voices were never heard,⁸²

⁸¹ Lippard, p. 6.

⁸² Eavan Boland discusses this subject at length in her book *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in our Time* (London: Random House, 1995). The Irish government’s final acknowledgment on 19 February 2013 of the many Irish girls and young women who were incarcerated in the country’s Magdalene Laundries throughout the twentieth century, is yet

Kevin's aunt is rendered mute through her transgression from the accepted norms of Irish womanhood in her time – chaste and compliant if unmarried, nurturing and self-sacrificing wife and mother if married. Expelled from her community and the world of the living, she is consigned to the realm of Irish myth and folklore where women have traditionally been depicted as 'passive objects,[...], or powerful and dangerous creatures',⁸³ both of which apply to the community's representation of the silenced aunt. Vid sees parallels between the experience of a migrant such as himself and the expulsion of Kevin's aunt from her community:

She had become a stranger overnight. Her residence permit had run out, you might say. Faced with deportation, only in her case she was forced out into the sea. She had lost her rights and had become an alien in a place where she had grown up thinking of as home. (*HIF*, p.173)

Claire Gleitman describes how Irish dramatists 'wrestle with the problem of how to remember the past and remember it fully, while also unloosing oneself from its ironclad grip'.⁸⁴ As a novelist, Hamilton addresses this dilemma by connecting the story of Kevin's aunt and his sister Ellis, who, pregnant and unmarried in twenty-first century Ireland as her tragic aunt was decades earlier, finds in Connemara a place where she can start again, thereby releasing the family from their historical association with the place as the site of their aunt's drowning. On their arrival in Connemara at the end of the novel, Vid, his Irish girlfriend Helen, and Ellis find the house where Ellis's father Johnny was born, and from which he emigrated to London:

We walked around the house and Ellis said that she would love to restore it and come to live here when the baby was born.[...] Promising to teach her child the language left behind by her father. (*HIF*, p.272)

another example of the expulsion and silencing of 'problematic' women that took place in Ireland.

⁸³ Pilar Villar-Arguiz, *Eavan Boland's Evolution as an Irish Woman Poet: An Outsider Within an Outsider's Culture* (Lewiston, New York : Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), p. 78.

⁸⁴ Claire Gleitman, "'I'll See You Yesterday': Brian Friel, Tom Murphy and the Captivating Past", in *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama*, ed. by Nadine Holdsworth and Mary Luckhurst (Malden, MA ; Oxford : Blackwell Publishing, 2008) pp. 26-47 (p. 27).

Like Vid, Ellis wants to leave her past behind, in her case one of drugs and self-destruction, and in this space she sees the possibility of a more hopeful future. Foreshadowing this ending, as Vid observes Ellis's unhappiness with her life in Dublin earlier in the novel, he wonders, 'Did she expect me to liberate her? Escape with her out to the west of Ireland and live a sustainable existence, all organic and home grown? Getting stoned on nature' (*HIF*, p.86). This depiction of life in the Irish West anticipates the imagery and themes that feature in the film *Nothing Personal*, which is set in this location and which I discuss in relation to its significance for a migrant woman in chapter three. Significantly there is also a liberation of sorts at the end of the novel for the drowned woman. She is referred to by her name for the first time – Máire Concannon – thereby restoring her identity and releasing her from her mythical status as the 'Bean Bháite'.

While restoring dignity and an identity to Máire and providing sanctuary for Ellis, Vid's arrival in the Aran islands is the culmination of his own journey to a place where he can '[begin] all over again [...], with a clean slate' (*HIF*, p.20). In direct contrast to the Eastern European characters in *Open-handed*, whose presence in Ireland is primarily economically-driven, Vid confirms that his move to Ireland 'had nothing to do with work. [...] I was not an opportunist, here to make a quick stack and fuck off again. It was the friendship, the family, the idea of belonging that mattered to me' (*HIF*, p.132). On his arrival in Ireland, his romantic enthusiasm for the country and the people contrasts sharply with Marcin's negative first impressions in *Open-handed*. Following Kristeva's description of how the foreigner perceives the host country's citizens as socially superior to him/herself,⁸⁵ Vid regards the Irish as 'being superior, more funny, more gifted with language and jokes' (*HIF*, p.60):

I loved the place right from the moment I arrived – the landscape, the wind, the change of heart in the weather. I didn't want to live anywhere else in the world. I loved the easy way you have of making people feel at home. All the talking. The exaggeration. The guesswork in the words. I wanted to belong here. I wanted to take part in this spectacular friendship. (*HIF*, p.8)

His desire to take part in Irish social life proves challenging because of the idiosyncratic usage of the English language in Ireland. He is confused by the

⁸⁵ Kristeva, p. 6-7.

colloquial turns of phrase, the phrases that make little sense in English because they are directly translated from Irish, the answering of a question with a question. These features of Hiberno-English are a consequence of Ireland's postcolonial legacy. As Kiberd points out, in adapting to the imposition of the English language and the suppression of Irish during their colonial occupation, Irish people found that when Irish was translated 'almost word-for-word into English, then the results could be strangely poetic', as is apparent from the work of the writers of the nineteenth century Literary Revival.⁸⁶ Augé describes how the specific use of language by the inhabitants of a particular place signifies that they belong to that place. Their sense of place 'is completed through the word, through the allusive exchange of a few *passwords* [my italics] between speakers who are conniving in a private complicity'.⁸⁷ In the context of *Hand in the Fire*, Augé's concept of encoded exchange underlies Kevin's statement to Vid that there is 'a secret language here, not the old, Irish language or the English language, but something in between the lines, like a code' (*HIF*, p.67). While the novel's representation of Vid's struggles to understand the language draws attention to his foreignness, it also reveals how Irish speech is perceived by non-Irish people. In Bakhtin's words, 'what is realized in the novel is the process of coming to know one's own language as it is perceived in someone else's language, coming to know one's own horizon within someone else's horizon'.⁸⁸ By experiencing Ireland and Irish people through Vid, the reader is made aware of the hyperbolic nature of Irish conversation and language, as he describes how 'people here didn't want the straight answer all the time. They needed lots of praise. They loved exaggeration. They used compliments like mind-altering substances' (*HIF*, p.61). Kiberd references the same aspects of Irish speech in his description of how Synge, another 'outsider' through whose eyes and ears the Irish have been regarded, 'exposed the ways in which a torrent of 'exotic' talk may be poor compensation for a failure to act':

Denounced as a stage-Irish exaggeration, *The Playboy* actually offers a sharp critique of the verbal exaggeration associated with the stereotype. The play's

⁸⁶ Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World*, p. 285.

⁸⁷ Augé, *Non-Places*, p. 77.

⁸⁸ Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', p. 365.

counterpoising of fine words and failed action makes it a caustic study of the fatal Irish gift of the gab.⁸⁹

In *Hand in the Fire*, Kevin is characterised in such a way as to confirm that the stereotype is still relevant in the context of contemporary Ireland. Despite his grand declaration that ‘a true friend is someone who would put his hand in the fire for you’ (*HIF*, p.30), his ‘fine words’ and ‘failed action’ result in his persuading Vid to take the blame for a vicious attack he himself carried out. The case goes to trial despite Kevin’s assurances the contrary. Vid’s determination to move from the margin to the centre of Irish society allows him to tolerate Kevin’s empty blustering and frequently questionable behaviour. He compares his situation to that of the peace process in Northern Ireland, describing how he is ‘an immigrant and I had no right to be angry. I didn’t want to be left on the outside. I needed the endorsement of his friendship and was ready to take peace at any price’ (*HIF*, p.133). The friendship is facilitated by the fact that Vid and Kevin understand their mutual desire to walk away from their pasts. When Kevin tells Vid a little about his life and his family, Vid senses that he is ‘disposing of his biography, so to speak, in a single breath, like something he needed to leave behind rather than something he had grown into over the years’ (*HIF*, p.41). Like Vid, Kevin has experience of being other, born to Irish emigrant parents in London, where he lived until his return to Ireland aged nine:

He learned what it was like to be excluded and tried to mix in and camouflage himself. He did his best to be Irish. He was aware of the inadequacies that come with being a stranger and denied the early part of his own childhood, ignoring the dog running after him. (*HIF*, p.42)

Kevin’s denial of his time away from Ireland can be considered as a condition of belonging for return migrants, a phenomenon discussed by Ní Laoire and alluded to in my introduction. She explains that ‘return migrants learn that to be accepted as fully belonging, their migrant experiences need to remain unspoken [...]. Return migrants become complicit in the denial of their own migrancy, so that they can be accepted as Irish’.⁹⁰ Vid also forms a friendship with Helen, another character who is somewhat detached from her origins, having moved to Canada with her

⁸⁹ Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, p. 186.

⁹⁰ Ní Laoire, p. 28.

family as a child, and returned to Dublin alone some years later. Both Kevin and Helen, in having spent part of their childhoods living away from Ireland, have broken the continuity of their Irish citizenship and thus share a liminal status with Vid. The extent to which this places them 'in-between' places is articulated by Eavan Boland, the 'returned' Irish poet. She describes how, 'like a daughter in a legend, I had been somewhere else. I had eaten different foods. I had broken the spell of place and family. By that logic alone, I could not return'.⁹¹ Vid recognises the similarities between his status as an Eastern European migrant and that of the returned Irish migrant through his friendship with Kevin's father, Johnny Concannon. Vid describes himself and Johnny as being 'in between places, neither here nor there' (*HIF*, p.164). Johnny is an Irish emigrant of the 1950s, who has come back to Ireland after decades in London, estranged from his wife and children. Like many return migrants, bolstered by their romanticised memories of their past in Ireland, he is struggling to find his way back in to the country he once knew. Vid describes him as being 'like a person who had arrived here for the first time. He could hardly recognise the place. Worse than that were the small corners of familiarity which made him feel this country was more hostile than any other place in the world' (*HIF*, p.164). In her analysis of the trope of the emigrant in Irish theatre, Emilie Pine identifies the nostalgic impulse that drives returning Irish emigrants such as Johnny Concannon, and describes how the socio-economic changes wrought by modernisation and more recently, the Celtic Tiger, present the returnee who left in the 1950s and 1960s with 'the trauma of recognizing that home as you once knew it - or have half remembered, half imagined it - is not, in fact, the place to which you actually return'.⁹² Echoing Hall's assertion that migration is a one-way rather than a return journey,⁹³ Vid observes that Johnny feels 'more of an exile here on his own doorstep than he had been anywhere abroad. There is no such thing as returning, I thought, only going further away' (*HIF*, p.129).

With return to Serbia neither an option nor a desire for Vid, he concentrates on inserting himself into the narrative of Ireland by making Irish friends while

⁹¹ Boland, p. 58.

⁹² Emilie Pine, 'The Homeward Journey: The Returning Emigrant in Recent Irish Theatre', *Irish University Review*, 38 (2008), 310-324 (p. 311) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40344301>> [accessed 10 October 2012]

⁹³ Stuart Hall, 'Minimal Selves', in *Identity: The Real Me. Post-modernism and the Question of Identity*, ed. by Lisa Appiganesi, (London: ICA Documents 6, 1987), pp. 44 -46, p. 44.

simultaneously distancing himself from his fellow migrants. A Russian acquaintance called Darius, separated from the Irish mother of his son, is envious of Vid's relationship with the Concannon family. Like the Eastern European characters in *Open-handed*, Darius socialises mostly with other Eastern Europeans and he complains to Vid that 'you have Irish friends. Me, I still get drunk in Russian' (*HIF*, p.141). For six months, Vid has a relationship with a Moldovan girl, Liuda, but he ends the relationship because he believes that 'in the long run, we were only preventing each other from integrating and moving ahead' (*HIF*, p.59). He foresees the problems that would arise if their relationship became permanent:

The idea of setting up a family seemed completely out of the question. Think of it. We would remain strangers to our own children. We would be like two homesick parents living in a fantasy. Lacking essential local knowledge. [...] Our children laughing at us and correcting our mistakes. Talking to us like we were deaf and blind and had no idea what was going on in the real world outside. We would speak to them in a foreign language and they would never get used to what we sounded like in our own mother tongue. It would remain a life of contradiction and confusion and naturally occurring blasphemies. (*HIF*, p.60)

Hugo Hamilton's own experiences of growing up in a culturally and linguistically split household inform the sentiments of the extract above. He describes how his Irish father 'almost turned himself into more of an immigrant than my mother', speaking to his children only in German or Irish, so that Hamilton felt 'he was a foreigner to us. That's what allows me to make that observation [about the children of immigrants]'.⁹⁴ Although not yet a widespread theme in contemporary Irish literature, the tension between immigrant parents and their children is likely to become so in the future as the children of today's migrants reach adulthood, as is evident from the work of many contemporary British writers who are themselves the children of immigrant parents. For example, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) captures the bafflement of the parents who wonder '*what was wrong with all the children* [author's italics], what had gone wrong with these first descendants of the great ocean-crossing experiment?',⁹⁵ while Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000)

⁹⁴ McKeown, '*Hand in the Fire* and the bid to belong', p. 431.

⁹⁵ Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 218.

explores the dilemma of the children who ‘stood schizophrenic, one foot in Bengal and one in Willesden’ and who ‘did not require a passport to live in two places at once’.⁹⁶ The desire to escape the dual identity of the migrant informs Vid’s thoughts and actions throughout the novel. Whereas Kevin’s estranged emigrant father ‘had written himself out of the family history’, Vid believes he is ‘being written in. And maybe that’s what I longed for most, to be pasted into the family scrapbook, whatever the consequences’ (*HIF*, p.44). Notwithstanding his relationship with the Concannon family, which Vid sees as a crucial step in placing himself in Irish society, Vid intends to integrate into Ireland historically and culturally as well as socially. Hamilton uses the motif of a map to explain how Irish people locate themselves in their country through an inherited historical, cultural and social tradition:

There is this invisible social map that [Irish] people have and everything connects up to everything else. An immigrant doesn’t have any of that information and they receive everything secondhand. So I suppose the only way of connecting, of making his own map of Ireland, is [for Vid] to go through this history lesson [...]⁹⁷

Vid therefore familiarises himself with some of the significant players and events in Irish history, through a mixture of historical fact and popular culture, noting ‘some of the most famous names, like James Joyce and George Best and Bono and Bobby Sands’ and landmarks such as ‘the GPO, where the Easter Revolution took place, and Burgh Quay, where the bus to Galway leaves from’ (*HIF*, p.3). He talks to the elderly residents of a nursing home where he works to construct a narrative into which he can insert himself:

It gave me the feeling of belonging here, a feeling of enemies and friends going back a long time. It made me think I had lived here all my life, with uncles and aunts talking about me, and waiting to hear from me. You can read as many history books as you like about this country, but it all sounds like fiction unless you have something tangible to link it up to. (*HIF*, p.12)

⁹⁶ Smith, p. 219.

⁹⁷ McKeown, ‘*Hand in the Fire* and the bid to belong’, p. 430.

Boland, the Irish poet referred to earlier, whose family left Ireland when she was five years old and returned when she was fourteen, describes going through a similar process of re-creating herself, explaining how she ‘thought’ herself ‘back into it [Ireland]’ through listening and reading, as she struggled to *re-place* herself (where Vid is trying to *place* himself) in a country that she left when too young to have retained substantial memories.⁹⁸

Vid’s obvious enthusiasm for Ireland and his efforts to integrate do not prevent his otherness being remarked upon by Irish characters. Various Irish agencies or characters assume he is Polish or Russian, his individual nationality subsumed under the collective identifier of Eastern European-ness. In light of his desire to dissociate himself from his Serbian origins, he allows this mistake to go uncorrected. In his more direct interactions with work colleagues, they comment on his name as Marcin’s work colleagues did in *Open-handed*:

The builder kept getting my name wrong and calling me Vim. I corrected it a number of times and told him it was Vid, but he insisted on changing it back to Vim. Some of the other workers had other names for me, like Video. Because my first name was so short and they were unable to shorten it any further to say, Pat or Joe, the only thing they could do was lengthen it, giving me versions like Viduka, or Vidukalic, or Videolink, sometimes Vid the Vibrator, or Vim the most effective detergent against household germs. (*HIF*, p.23)⁹⁹

The affected difficulties with pronunciation, the transformation of Vid’s name into risqué or mundane objects, are acts designed to draw attention to the fact of his non-Irishness, and to emphasise his otherness. Renaming is synonymous with issues of power and control, as evidenced historically in the re-naming of African slaves as a means of disconnecting them from their African cultures,¹⁰⁰ and in Ireland’s recent history through the re-naming of women who were incarcerated in Ireland’s Magdalene Laundries. This incident in the novel can also be considered as an

⁹⁸ Boland, pp. 55-56.

⁹⁹ Vid is in fact a name of German origin, meaning ‘sylvan man’, a man of the forest. This is significant in light of the fact that Vid is a carpenter by profession, and is also drawn to the west coast and the natural world.

¹⁰⁰ James Walvin, ‘Historical Notes: The autobiography of an African slave’, *Independent*, 27 January 1999 <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/historical-notes-the-autobiography-of-an-african-slave-1076505.html> [accessed 10 March 2013] (paragraph 3 of 7).

example of the failure of the Irish to empathise with migrants on the basis of their common experiences of migrancy, given that Irish emigrants' names were frequently altered to more recognisable forms by officials at their point of entry to countries such as the United States, or sometimes were changed by emigrants themselves as a response to the difficulties with pronunciation that Irish names posed to the host country.

Aside from being teased about his name, Vid's experiences in the workplace are not problematic. However his Moldovan girlfriend, Liuda, has a very different experience. Although she does not feature except as a peripheral character, her representation is dominated by her sexuality and echoes the representation of Eastern European women characters by Binchy in *Open-handed*. She is regarded as a sexual commodity even before she leaves Moldova, where an Irish businessman offers to bring her to Ireland to work for him. She accepts his invitation, although not without misgivings and with some awareness of the perils of sex trafficking:

She was nervous because she had heard about girls getting their passports taken off them when they arrived. But her passport didn't matter as much as her visa, which put her at the mercy of her employer. She could not work for anyone else. So she lived with him and slept with him and cooked for him and worked in the office of his joinery firm. Once he got tired of her, he allowed the permit to lapse. (*HIF*, p.62)¹⁰¹

Unlike Agnieszka in *Open-handed*, to whose consciousness we have some access, Liuda remains completely unknown to the reader. We have no knowledge of what motivates her and no information about her previous life and our view of her is restricted to the external male gaze. She is described in terms of her physical attributes, as Vid notes that Kevin 'couldn't keep his eyes off Liuda all night' (*HIF*, p.61) and a drunken stranger tells him that he should be proud of himself for having a girlfriend with 'the most beautiful arse I've ever seen' (*HIF*, p.63). Her status as a commodity for exchange is displayed by her passivity when Vid describes how she 'was taken out of my hands' (*HIF*, p.63) by the drunk Irishman, whose interest in her is seen by Vid as 'her opportunity to land on her feet at last' (*HIF*, p.63). Liuda's

¹⁰¹ Moldovan citizens require a visa for entry to Ireland. During the early 2000s in which the novel is set, the visa was granted to the employer for the migrant employee. The employer was responsible for its renewal and the migrant employee could not leave without the employer's consent, as they retained control of the visa.

sexual allure is presented as an asset offering her the chance to formalise her status in Ireland through establishing a relationship with an Irish citizen. It can of course be argued that Irish men are also commodified through this process, although as a consequence of their nationality rather than their sexuality. As previously discussed, Vid also seeks a relationship with an Irish person in order to consolidate his position in Ireland, but unlike Liuda, he does not rely on his sexuality as the basis for it.

This exchange, in which Vid and Liuda acknowledge that they are better off apart, takes place in a pub, the space in which Vid's social life predominantly takes place, as does Marcin's in *Open-handed*. Vid goes to the pub with work colleagues as part of his effort to become familiar with Irish culture and tradition and when there he gains an insight into the Irish psyche through his observations of people's behaviour. History and nostalgia permeate the space as he remarks on the urgency with which Irish people drink and how 'instead of living in the moment, they were more interested in getting away from the real world, stepping back and talking everything up into a big story, like people watching their lives pass in front of them' (*HIF*, p.24). Music contributes to the sense of escape and adds to the energy of the evening, with 'three men standing on a small stage with guitars, belting out songs which most of the people in the pub know by heart, old and young' (*HIF*, p.24). The singing and music also draw on history with their recourse to Irish ballads and patriotic songs. Alcohol and its promotion of 'a promiscuous interpenetration of spaces'¹⁰² is not the only substance available in the space of the pub. Contemporary Ireland is referenced in the drugs casually offered to Vid by a young woman, and drugs are at the root of Kevin's sister Ellis's problems. Vid uses terms of rupture and dislocation associated with migration to describe her 'ripping loose from the family' (*HIF*, p.141), as having 'emigrated to the land of dreams and drugs' (*HIF*, p.181) and having 'lost her foothold' (*HIF*, p.184). The motif of migration is reinforced by his reference to the drug addicts he observes, and who constitute a version of Ireland's internal others who have become detached from mainstream society:

The druggies are the real exiles now. They speak in a slow, swollen language. They had their own dialect and their own routines. They were like a separate ethnic group, living at the heart of the community, but with their own customs and rituals, free from having to own anything, sharing everything around them. (*HIF*, p.185)

¹⁰² Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity*, p. 87.

In taking Ellis away from Dublin to Connemara, Vid is in effect bringing her back from her exile in the world of drugs to which the urban space allows easy access. For both characters, the rural west of Ireland is a restorative space in which to put the past behind them.

However, in his work on contemporary migrant fiction in the United States, David Cowart notes that regardless of how ‘heartfelt the naturalization’ or ‘the scale of the brutality, suffering and poverty left behind’, the protagonists of these fictions are subject to ‘painful nostalgia’, and few immigrants abandon their former national identity completely.¹⁰³ In Vid’s case, despite his commitment to forging a new life in Ireland and his determination to leave his past behind, memories of Serbia filter through. They are evoked by events, sound or smells but while some are nostalgic, others are traumatic. For example, in the first few pages of the novel, a wave of anxiety washes over Vid when a barman gives him directions while slicing lemons. As the man speaks, he gesticulates with the knife and Vid’s reaction hints at violence in his past:

I was so distracted by the way he was stabbing the air...my concentration failed, watching only the silver blade flashing in his hand...as I turned to leave, I could not help thinking he was going to throw the knife at my back. A dark stain seeping through my clothes as I sank down to the floor. (*HIF*, pp.4-5)

This connection is developed further during Kevin’s assault on an electrician outside the pub when Vid states that the violence of the act ‘brought back everything I had been trying to leave behind’ (*HIF*, p.37). In an effort to restore some calm after the events of that evening, Kevin’s girlfriend Helen plays some Balkan wedding music, hoping it will make Vid feel at home. However, it causes him to be ‘overwhelmed by homesickness and horror simultaneously [...] the music was returning me to the same fatal scene in which my parents had died’ (*HIF*, p.37).¹⁰⁴ On another occasion, Kevin’s erratic driving invokes another memory of the same car crash, as Vid

¹⁰³ David Cowart, ‘Conclusion: We, Them, Us’, in *Trailing Clouds: Immigrant Fiction in Contemporary America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 205-211 (p. 208).

¹⁰⁴ For an interesting study of music and nostalgia, see Frederick S. Barrett and others, ‘Music-evoked nostalgia: Affect, memory, and personality’, *Emotion*, 10 (2010), 390-403.

describes how ‘the force of being suddenly motionless threw me back to the accident in which my parents had died. I felt I had moved no further ahead in time from that day’ (*HIF*, p.104). However, Vid does occasionally display the ‘painful nostalgia’ to which Cowart refers, demonstrating his conflicting emotions about his homeland. In contrast to the negative associations of the memories above, he recalls memories of daily life in Serbia in order to calm himself while awaiting a court hearing for the assault carried out by Kevin:

The familiar things in my life, images of home which I was running away from but which might still give me some comfort. I was thinking of the streets of Belgrade, the trees in summer, the sound of the language, the Cyrillic writing we learned in school. The people in the cafes, the wasps around the cakes. I could see my life condensed into a number of key memories. (*HIF*, p.53)

These memories are rooted in the senses, the sights, sounds and smells of his old home, the heat of the sun, the sound of the school bus door closing, the smell of coffee and leather. Although his relationship with Liuda does not last due to his focus on immersing himself solely in Irish culture, their shared memories of aspects of their previous lives in Eastern Europe are a powerful factor in drawing them together in the first place:

We remembered the same kinds of things, the sight of villages and church spires and headscarves and open shirts and unshaven smiles in the fields. We felt close to each other – same nostalgia, same tug of self-loathing, same shocks of familiar tastes and images from which we had walked away. (*HIF*, p.58-59)

Vid’s reference to the powerful images and sensory impressions he retains of his home provide a context against which to measure the cost of his decision to walk away. They indicate the strength of character and single-minded focus that are required for him to leave all that is familiar to him. The same character traits are at the root of his determination to make a home in Ireland and his perseverance in the face of any obstacle.

Conclusion

Vid's determination to belong allows him to overlook any shortcomings that he observes in his new home and its people, reframing them in positive terms. It is this characteristic that most distinguishes the representation of his migrancy from that of Marcin and Agnieszka's in *Open-handed*. Where they remain detached from Irish society, he attaches himself; where they are observers, he becomes a participant. Marcin and Agnieszka remain passively on the margins while Vid actively manoeuvres himself to a more central position, learning about Irish history and popular culture, struggling to decode the meaning behind the language, throwing himself into the social life of the pub and the wider social environment. Where Marcin confines himself to specific sites within the urban space, Vid explores the space beyond the city as far west as the Atlantic seaboard. The breadth of his focus is reflective of the breadth of his quest to become Irish. As he absorbs Irish culture, he tries to discard his Serbian identity and with it his past. Marcin and Agnieszka on the other hand, seem unconcerned about their identity. As with *Open-handed*, the pub functions in this novel as a central space in Vid's social life. However, it represents a space to which Marcin escapes whereas Vid engages with it as a source of insight into the Irish psyche and the nostalgia which underlies much of the music and song, a nostalgia to which he too is prone in relation to Serbia. He notes the overlapping of tradition and modernity performed within the pub space and the juxtaposing of the heroic past with the drug and drink-fuelled violence of the present. Through Vid's observations, as through Marcin and Agnieszka's, Irish readers are presented with a not always flattering vision of themselves as seen through migrant eyes, particularly in their tendency to see the ethnic group rather than the individual migrant. Ultimately, the two novels' representations of their respective Eastern European migrants reflect the fact that Marcin and Agnieszka follow the transnational trend of regular movement from place to place, while Vid is in search of a more permanent home and identity.

Chapter Two

‘Wandering around the fringes of society’: Irish and Nigerian Perspectives in Four Contemporary Short Stories

Writing to me is all about seeing things differently, and an outsider’s perspective on a place that’s not home is a good combination. The other side of this is writing about Ireland from a distance.¹

The short story emerged as a genre in Ireland during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.² The writers of the nineteenth-century Irish Literary Revival employed the form as a tool for propagating Irish identity through their work. Heather Ingman argues that this link between the short story form and identity formation is extant in contemporary Ireland, ‘a place where identity is made and unmade [...] This in-between place of shifting identities, of change and transformation, is the realm in which the Irish short story operates’.³ The writer Frank O’Connor associated the short story with ‘voices excluded from the ruling narrative of the nation’,⁴ noting that ‘always in the short story there is this sense of outlawed figures wandering around the fringes of society’.⁵ With these thoughts in mind, this chapter analyses the representation of migrancy in Ireland in four contemporary short stories. ‘As if There Were Trees’ (2005) by Colum McCann is from a collection entitled *New Dubliners* (2005)⁶ and ‘The summer of birds’ (2008) by Gerard Donovan is from his collection *Country of the Grand* (2008). The stories were written while their authors were resident in New York.⁷ The other two stories are ‘Grafton Street of Dublin’ (2010) by Ifedinma Dimbo and ‘Shackles’ (2010) by

¹ David Wheatley, ‘What daffodils were to Wordsworth, drains and backstreet pubs are to me’, *Irish Times*, 12 March 2011, Weekend Review, p. 11. Wheatley is an Irish poet living in Hull, UK.

² James F. Kilroy, ‘Introduction’, in *The Irish Short Story: A Critical History*, ed. by James F. Kilroy (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), pp. 1-19 (p.3).

³ Heather Ingman, *A History of the Irish Short Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵ Frank O’Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (London: Macmillan, 1963), p. 19.

⁶ *New Dubliners*, ed. by Oona Frawley (Dublin: New Island, 2005). Frawley explains in her introduction that ‘leading Irish authors were asked to celebrate Joyce and the Dublin of our own time’ in order to mark the centenary of Joyce’s writing of the original *Dubliners*. ‘As if There Were Trees’ originally appeared in an anthology entitled *Shenanigans; an anthology of fresh Irish fiction*, ed. by Sarah Champion and Donal Scannell (London: Seiptre, 1999).

⁷ McCann still lives in New York while Donovan has since relocated to the UK.

Melatu Okorie, two female Nigerian authors living in Dublin. Both stories are from the Irish Writers' Exchange short story collection entitled *Dublin: Ten Journeys, One Destination* (2010).⁸ As a selection, these four stories offer an interesting combination of perspectives – that of the insider looking back and that of the outsider looking in.

'As if There Were Trees' and 'The summer of birds' are narrated from the point of view of Irish characters and reflect their response to the migrant presence in their respective Dublin and Galway locations. Eve Patten anticipated this theme in 2002 when she asked, 'How will the Irish subaltern "Other", as one critic has put it, 'eventually cope with racial and ethnic Otherness within its own borders?'⁹ As part of the 1980s Irish diaspora, McCann and Donovan constitute a category in their own right, that of the Irish writer writing from the outside. Despite being migrants themselves in the United States, neither author has chosen to represent the migrant perspective in their stories, choosing instead to explore their theme from a more detached perspective, that which Trinh T. Minh-Ha terms 'that undetermined threshold place':

The moment the insider steps out from the inside, she is no longer a mere insider (and vice versa). She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Like the outsider, she steps back and records what never occurs to her the insider as being worth or in need of recording. But unlike the outsider, she also resorts to non-explicative, non-totalizing strategies that suspend meaning and resist closure. She refuses to reduce herself to an Other, and her reflections to a mere outsider's objective reasoning or insider's subjective feeling.¹⁰

The 'undetermined' location of McCann and Donovan is reflected in the fact that their generation of migrants who emigrated *from* Ireland in the 1980s is referred to in America as 'the New Irish',¹¹ the same term used in Ireland to describe the migrants who have come *to* Ireland over the last two decades. The irony of this fact hints at possible parallels in the migrant experiences of both groups, as I explored in relation

⁸ The Irish Writers' Exchange describes itself as representing 'both Irish authors and writers from around the world who have chosen to make Ireland their home away from home'. See <http://www.irishwritersexchange.com/> for further details.

⁹ Eve Patten, 'Contemporary Irish Fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, ed. by Foster, pp. 259 - 274 (p.273). The critic cited by Patten is Jennifer Jeffers, from *The Irish Novel at the End of the Century: Gender, Bodies, Power* (London: Palgrave, 2002), p. 179.

¹⁰ Trinh T. Minh-Ha, 'No Master Territories', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft and others, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 196-198 (p. 198).

¹¹ Wall, *From the Sin-é café*, p. 3.

to *Hand in the Fire* in the previous chapter, and underpins the historical memory argument that I interrogate later in this chapter. Both McCann and Donovan can be considered to be following in the footsteps of their fellow exile James Joyce, who ‘wanted to mediate between Ireland and the world, but most of all to explain Ireland to itself’.¹² Writing in 1934, Desmond Ryan argued that such ‘literary expatriates [...] do for Ireland what Ireland too seldom does for herself. [...]: looking back over their shoulders they see the thing half seen before’.¹³ In addition to reflecting on Ireland from a distance, Eamonn Wall hints that the act of writing is itself symptomatic of the migrant status of these writers, declaring that, ‘as writers [living in the US] I believe we write our stories, poems, plays and novels for an audience in Ireland, to remind the people that we may be gone, but are not silent’.¹⁴ The desire to be remembered in the homeland is a central one for many migrants, alluded to by Vid in *Hand in the Fire* when he says that ‘Anyone who lives in a foreign place must ask themselves that question all the time: Have they been forgotten?’¹⁵

Unlike the Nigerian stories which are narrated from the perspective of migrant characters, McCann and Donovan’s stories do not render the migrant consciousness. The absence of the migrant voice in their stories reflects Anastasia Graf’s observation that ‘to deny the Other its own active self-determination is for Bakhtin to efface the Other as other’.¹⁶ Applied to these two texts, Bakhtin’s view implies that the silence of their migrant characters results in a form of representation whereby they exist as a shadowy anonymous presence on the margins of the texts, rather than as defined individuals. Their otherness is therefore foregrounded to a greater extent than it is in the novels *Open-handed* and *Hand in the Fire* discussed in chapter one and written by Irish writers, writing from *inside* Ireland and focalised through the migrant characters. McCann and Donovan’s stories reflect the defensive attitude of the Irish people towards migrants, in both an urban and a rural context, emphasising their perception of migrants as other, and using language that reinforces the sense of their difference through allusion to darkness, shadows and stealthy

¹² Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 334.

¹³ Desmond Ryan, *Remembering Sion: A Chronicle of Storm and Quiet* (London: Arthur Baker, 1934), p. 37, cited in Liam Harte, “‘A Map with Places Missing’: Memory, Imagination and the Migrant Autobiographer”, *The Irish Review*, 44 (2012), 118-125 (pp. 118-119).

¹⁴ Wall, *From the Sin-é café*, p. 6.

¹⁵ Hamilton, p. 47.

¹⁶ Anastasia Graf, ‘Representing the Other: A Conversation among Mikhail Bakhtin, Elizabeth Bishop and Wislawa Szymborska’, *Comparative Literature*, 57 (2005) 84-99 (p. 85).

movement. Only the child narrator of 'The summer of birds' is sufficiently free of prejudice and cynicism to remain receptive to the newcomers. The two stories demonstrate the failure of Ireland's historical memory of its own emigrant past to engender understanding and empathy in the Irish population for the incoming migrants. Furthermore, while the novels previously discussed and the two short stories by Nigerian writers explore the migrants' dislocation and the ways in which they locate themselves in Ireland, 'As if There Were Trees' and 'The summer of birds' reflect the effect of the migrants' arrival on the Irish residents, and hence explore the concept of home in terms of the internal exile experienced by the local population as a result of the changes they observe to their living environment. In representing migrancy from this perspective, both stories encapsulate O'Connor's assertion that 'there is in the short story at its most characteristic [...] something we don't often find in the novel, an intense awareness of human loneliness'.¹⁷

'Grafton Street of Dublin' and 'Shackles' are first person narratives written by authors whose personal experience of the asylum process inform their representation of the experiences of their Nigerian asylum seeker protagonists, confirming David Cowart's statement that immigrant protagonists in the work of migrant authors 'resemble their creators'.¹⁸ These authors represent the first instances of the African migrant voice being heard *directly* in Irish literature, rather than filtered through an Irish author such as Roddy Doyle, who imagines the experience of African migrants in his short story collection *The Deportees* (2007). In the process, Dimbo and Okorie provide Irish readers with an insight into the African migrant experience, and allow them to see their city anew, reflected through African eyes. There are literary precedents for the themes the authors address and the form they adopt, in the short stories and novels of Sam Selvon and Buchi Emecheta and more recently in the work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Dimbo and Okorie write about the initial stages of African migration and adaptation in contemporary Dublin, just as the stories in Selvon's collection *Ways of Sunlight* (1957) describe the lives of newly- or recently-arrived West Indian migrants in 1950s London. The resourcefulness of Okorie's African women in her story 'Shackles' and Dimbo's determined and self-possessed female narrator Nwanneka in the story 'Grafton Street of Dublin' are reminiscent of the Nigerian female protagonist Adah in Emecheta's

¹⁷ Frank O'Connor, p. 19.

¹⁸ Cowart, p. 207.

novel of 1960s London, *Second Class Citizen* (1974), for whom ‘initiative and determination become the distinguishing marks’¹⁹. More recently, the Nigerian author Adichie has captured the experiences of young Nigerian women migrants living in the United States in her short story collection ‘The Thing Around Your Neck’ (2009). She has been described as representing ‘a new, feminist voice in search of healing for the post-independence generation’ and like Dimbo and Okorie, writes from abroad.²⁰ I refer to these texts as a basis for comparison when discussing the treatment of specific themes and concerns in my selected short stories by migrant authors.

Just as the Irish short story emerged from the oral storytelling tradition, the Nigerian short story is similarly rooted in storytelling. Dimbo’s narrator is from the Igbo tribe,²¹ while the ethnic origins of Okorie’s narrator are not specified, although Okorie is herself Igbo.²² The Igbo culture’s storytelling tradition and its ‘respect for language skills’²³ may account in part for the predominance of Nigerian writers in the African literary field. Dimbo and Okorie follow in the wake of those female African writers who came to the fore in the 1970s, when the writing of African women ‘came into its own and found acceptance’.²⁴ Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido describe how African women writers who are beginning to write draw on a female narrating tradition that makes the transition from oral to written literature quite straightforward.²⁵ Textual analysis of Dimbo and Okorie’s stories and their incorporation of African folktales, superstitions and myths, supports Yinka Shoga’s suggestion that African women writers’ successful use of the short story form is due to its ‘concentrated nature’:

¹⁹ <<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/buchi-emecheta>> [accessed 17 April 2012]

²⁰ Dennis Walder, ‘Remembering “Bitter Histories”: From Achebe to Adichie’, in *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 116-138 (p. 117).

²¹ See Raul Hernández-Coss and Chinyere Ekwuagu Bun, ‘The UK-Nigeria Remittance Corridor: Challenges of Embracing Formal Transfer Systems in a Dual Financial Environment’, World Bank Working Paper no.92 (Washington DC: The World Bank, 2007), p. 8. The authors explain that the Igbo tribe is one of the four major ethnic communities in Nigeria. The other three are the Yoruba, Edo and Ogoni. The Igbo and Yoruba constitute a significant proportion of the country’s migrant population.

²² Reilly, ‘Asylum seeker has write stuff’.

²³ Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, ‘African Women Writers: Towards a Literary History’, in *A History of Twentieth-Century African Literatures* ed. by Oyekan Owomoyela (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp. 311-346 (p. 319).

²⁴ Boyce Davies and Savory Fido, p. 317.

²⁵ Ibid.

Those writers marry two traditional elements in their stories: female conversational forms and such traditional African story forms as the cautionary tale, the dilemma tale and the moral fable. But they use these elements often to examine the meaning of highly complex modern life.²⁶

‘Grafton Street of Dublin’ and ‘Shackles’ are written in African-inflected English and demonstrate the truth of Mary E. Modupe Kolawole’s statement that ‘the colonial encounter [...] inheres in much African literature without any conscious attempt to insert or impose it’.²⁷ The teaching of the English language was regarded by the colonial powers as an aid to assimilation of native people into Western culture, and the effectiveness of Irish missionaries in implementing this strategy is clear from the statement of an Irish missionary priest to Nigeria in the early twentieth century who wrote that ‘for secular instruction English is as far as possible the medium. Its aim is to gradually train the pupils to converse, read and write freely in English. [...] The people of this parish and every other in the diocese will very soon be ready for the newspaper’²⁸ - a newspaper no doubt promoting a Western way of life. While promoting English, the priest nevertheless acknowledges the merits of the Igbo language, stating that ‘as a spoken language it seems to be absolutely perfect as a medium of accurate, vivid, passionate expression; it is very musical’.²⁹ In the 1950s, the Nigerian author Chinua Achebe harnessed the spirit of Igbo when he developed a writing style that incorporated elements of his native spoken language. His experimentation with the syntax and idioms of English created a unique hybrid of African English, the cadences of which are audible in both ‘Grafton Street of Dublin’ and ‘Shackles’. Robert Fraser identifies this literary style as characteristic of postcolonial texts, in which ‘different languages or linguistic registers jostle for space’.³⁰ In the case of texts employing first person narration, such as ‘Grafton Street of Dublin’ and ‘Shackles’, ‘the variety of English [...] that the narrator employs will often be permeated by local usage, and may well vacillate

²⁶ Yinka Shoga, cited in Boyce Davies and Savory Fido, p. 327.

²⁷ Mary E. Modupe Kolawole, ‘Multicultural Strategies and Alterity: Transgressing the Other in Contemporary Nigerian Women’s Short Stories’, in *Embracing the Other: Addressing Xenophobia in the New Literatures in English*, Ansel Papers 11, ed. by Dunja M. Mohr (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2008), pp 170-191 (p. 176).

²⁸ Whitney, p. 50-51.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 30.

³⁰ Robert Fraser, *Lifting the Sentence: a poetics of postcolonial fiction* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press: 2000), p. 37.

between such local flavouring and a comparatively uniform, 'received' idiom'.³¹ Many postcolonial writers, including Salman Rushdie and Wole Soyinka, intersperse words from their native languages with the English of the text, as Dimbo and Okorie do in the stories under consideration here. In this way the cultural hybridity of their work draws attention to itself, announcing its otherness to the reader. The parallels with the situation faced by Irish writers of the past who were forced to write in standard English are clear, where a similar experimentation with the imposed language of the coloniser and incorporation of aspects of the structure and syntax of the native Irish language led to the emergence of the distinct Hiberno-English form in the work of writers such as Joyce. Referring to form in African writing, Lynette Hunter writes about 'the nation language insistence on the present tense'.³² 'Grafton Street of Dublin' adheres to this convention with its stream of consciousness style, while 'Shackles', with its larger cast of characters, combines narrative commentary and dialogue.

³¹ Fraser, p. 44.

³² Lynette Hunter, *Literary value/cultural power: verbal arts in the twenty-first century*, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 48.

‘As if There Were Trees’ (2005) by Colum McCann

‘As if There Were Trees’ is set amongst the tower blocks in Ballymun, an economically deprived area on the north side of Dublin. The story reflects the hostile response of the local community to the Romanian migrant labourers employed on the construction of a nearby overpass, while the locals struggle with unemployment, drug addiction and anxiety about their children’s futures. McCann deals with the subject of migration in this story through the first person narrative perspective of Mary, an Irish resident of the flats who is employed as a barmaid in the local pub.

Commenting on McCann’s body of work, Eoin Flannery distinguishes between McCann’s generation of Irish writers living abroad, and earlier generations of emigrant writers, noting that ‘a process of cultural and artistic commuting has largely replaced the qualitative experience of early to mid-twentieth century exile’.³³ The geographical mobility of contemporary writers informs their work in its avoidance of the notion of identity as a fixed concept based on geographic or genetic inheritance. Discussing McCann’s writing, Amanda Tucker notes that, ‘in presuming that everyone has multiple attachments to different places and traditions, he loosens the constraints of both national affiliations and geographical ties’.³⁴ Hence, while his writing does not always deal directly with Ireland, it usually alludes to it in some form. The breadth of settings that feature in McCann’s work demonstrates the extent to which he challenges the narrow-gauge definitions of nationalism outlined in my introduction to this thesis, and instead regards Ireland within a global context:

His fiction [...] confronts directly the conundrum of how, despite Irish space offering a bedrock of stability and continuity, the discourses that surround it tell a story of dislocation and fragmentation. In the specifically Irish context, he investigates the boundaries between Ireland and the rest of the world, dealing in a number of his works specifically with the problem of emigration and immigration.³⁵

McCann’s novel *Zoli* (2006) confronts the discrimination and prejudice suffered by the Romany people in Eastern Europe while *This Side of Brightness* (1998) and *Let*

³³ Eoin Flannery, ‘Rites of Passage: migrancy and liminality in Colum McCann’s *Songdogs* and *This Side of Brightness*’, *Irish Studies Review*, 16 (2008), 1-17 (p. 3).

³⁴ Tucker, p. 110.

³⁵ Hand, p. 276.

the Great World Spin (2009) interrogate the lives and experiences of marginalised characters in New York of the past and in the present. These works share a focus on displaced people, who live ‘elsewhere’, in some cases voluntarily, in others against their will. Oona Frawley describes ‘As if There Were Trees’ as drawing ‘a startling picture of the collision between the world of the immigrant come to Dublin and the world of the inner city and its struggles’.³⁶ While the setting is Dublin, the subject matter has wider resonance in its portrayal of the response of the host community to immigrants. This literary device of addressing universal themes through local settings and vice versa is characteristic of McCann’s style. His representation of the situation in Ballymun is applicable to any similar working-class areas around the country, or indeed around the world, where competition for scarce resources breeds resentment and hatred. This story demonstrates the siege mentality that develops on the margins of society where people are most affected by inward migration, and therefore react most vehemently and negatively towards it.

McCann describes how ‘the art form that most inspires my fiction is photography. I love looking at photographs. I feel that in some ways my job is to become a photographer with words, or to paint with words’.³⁷ In an interview on the subject of the short story form, he explains how he begins a story with an image which then ‘suggests the voice and the landscape’.³⁸ Hence, ‘As if There Were Trees’ opens with the narrator Mary’s detailed description of a young drug addict riding an emaciated horse through the rubble-strewn field around the flats, while carrying his malnourished baby daughter under his arm. The image subverts the trope of the heroic cowboy of the Western genre and presents an unsettling image of Ireland far removed from that generally available for public consumption. The intertextuality of McCann’s story is revealed through the cowboy image, which appears in two earlier narratives set in this area of Dublin - Roddy Doyle’s novel *The Commitments* (1987) and the 1991 film adaptation of the same name directed by Alan Parker, and the film *Into the West* (1992) directed by Mike Newell. In *The Commitments* Doyle gave a voice to working-class Dubliners from the city’s north

³⁶ Oona Frawley, ‘Introduction’, in *New Dubliners*, ed. by Frawley, pp. v-vii (p. vi).

³⁷ Bret Anthony Johnston, ‘2009 National Book Award Winner Fiction’, Interview with Colum McCann’ <http://www.nationalbook.org/nba2009_f_mccann_interv.html> [accessed 29 October 2012]

³⁸ Brad Frenette, ‘Afterword, Short Story Month Q&A: Colum McCann’, *National Post*, 13 May, 2010 <<http://arts.nationalpost.com/2010/05/13/short-story-month-qa-colum-mccann/>> [accessed 29 October 2012]

side, while *Into the West* focused on the difficulties encountered by a Traveller family trying to live a settled life in the Ballymun flats. Eamonn Wall believes that the writing style of Irish writers such as McCann who live in the United States constitutes a hybrid form, part-Irish and part-American,³⁹ and McCann's approach to his location certainly differs from that of the Irish writer Roddy Doyle, who grew up and still lives on Dublin's north side. Doyle's writing is laden with dialogue imbued with the North Dublin vernacular, and this is instrumental in his creation of very specific and locally identifiable characters. McCann on the other hand, as he indicates in his interview quoted above, adopts a less constrained approach to language, choosing not to focus on the strongly identifiable dialect of Dublin's north side suburbs, and in fact not incorporating characters' speech into the narrative at all. In developing his own distinct style, he avoids the fate that Fanon warned awaited many 'native intellectuals':

The native intellectual who comes back to his people by way of cultural achievements behaves in fact like a foreigner. Sometimes, he has no hesitation in using a dialect in order to show his will to be as near as possible to the people...The culture that the intellectual leans towards is often no more than a stock of particularisms.⁴⁰

There is no reference in McCann's story to any specific Irish elements (apart from the pub) and no dialogue to help locate the reader, so that he can be seen to avoid 'particularisms'. The absence of dialogue increases the sense of the migrants' remoteness, as the narrator's dispassionate commentary evokes Joseph Conrad's representation of the African people in *Heart of Darkness*. Just as Conrad's African characters hovered on the margins of the text, the Romanian migrants in 'As if There Were Trees' remain peripheral, shadowy and unknowable figures throughout the story.

The peripheral status of the migrant characters in the story is reflected in its location in an area of Dublin referenced by recent popular culture and literature as a site of marginalisation, otherness, intolerance and conflict. The area, Ballymun, has until recently been dominated by its tower blocks, built in the 1960s and intended 'to symbolise a modern Ireland emerging from war, recession and mass emigration'.

³⁹ Wall, *From the Sin-é café*, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 180.

Instead, due to lack of investment in social and civic amenities, they ‘became synonymous with the city’s heroin crisis, 1980s unemployment and the gangland culture of the 1990s’.⁴¹ Michael Pierse cites from Lynn Connolly’s memoir, *The Mun, Growing Up in Ballymun* (2006), in which she describes how ‘within ten years [of being built] Ballymun had gone from being a model estate, filled with respectable families, to becoming a place where only the desperate wanted to live [...] somewhere that nobody seemed to care about anymore’.⁴² A two billion euro regeneration scheme, that began in the late 1990s and involving the demolition of the thirty-six tower blocks, is due for completion by early 2014. Although it is not specified when the story takes place, the presence of the migrant workers in ‘As if There Were Trees’ indicates that it is at some point in the late 1990s/early 2000s. The residents in the story therefore face an uncertain future and live in markedly deprived conditions, facts that are significant in analysing the views expressed by the Irish characters in relation to the Romanian migrants constructing the overpass. The narrator Mary is the voice of the working-class people on whose working lives and living environments immigration has had the greatest impact, as is so often the case in host countries. Her husband Tommy has been made redundant from the local Cadbury’s factory and stays home to look after their children while she is at work. At the end of the story, when he appears to derive some form of pleasure from observing an attack on the Romanian man, Mary describes him as doing so ‘in his loneliness’.⁴³ Paradoxically, the impotence Tommy feels as a result of being unemployed and dependent on his wife’s income is reminiscent of the asylum seeker Osita’s state of mind in ‘Shackles’, discussed later in this chapter. Both men, migrant and indigenous, feel emasculated and frustrated by their situation. The effect of such a domestic arrangement on the male psyche, particularly within working-class communities, was highlighted by Friedrich Engels in 1844, when he wrote of the potential disintegration of the working-class family in the city as a consequence of the gender role reversal taking place during the industrial revolution, whereby ‘the

⁴¹ Nicola Byrne and Henry McDonald, ‘More cheers than tears as Ballymun is destroyed’, *Observer*, 11 July 2004 < <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2004/jul/11/communities.regeneration> > [accessed 22 December 2012]

⁴² Lynn Connolly, *The Mun, Growing Up in Ballymun* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2006), p.120. Cited in Micheal Pierse, *Writing Ireland’s Working Class; Dublin After O’Casey* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 206.

⁴³ Colum McCann, ‘As If there were Trees’, in *New Dubliners*, ed. by Oona Frawley (Dublin: New Island, 2005), pp. 53-60 (p. 60). All further references to this story will be abbreviated to AWT and cited parenthetically in the text.

wife supports the family, the husband sits at home, tends the children, sweeps the room and cooks'.⁴⁴ While such role reversal is increasingly the result of a considered choice among the contemporary middle class, where both male and female partners are professionally qualified, it is usually the result of involuntary unemployment amongst working-class households. Masculinity in this context is usually held to be more directly linked to providing for the family and consequently the psychological impact of unemployment on men in such circumstances is significant. In 2007, Del Roy Fletcher interviewed residents of a council estate in Sheffield with a similar social profile to that of Ballymun, which had been described by the *Sheffield Morning Telegraph* in 1983 as 'a community being "overwhelmed" and "demoralised" by the scale and speed of job losses'.⁴⁵ Fletcher's interviews revealed that 'most men still subscribed to the "male breadwinner" role' and 'explicitly recognised that paid work was important for their personal identity and status'. Work was also seen as an antidote to the social isolation resulting from long-term unemployment.⁴⁶ Amongst the younger generation, Fletcher cites Connells's concept of 'protest masculinity' to describe the way in which economically marginal young men relate to the labour market. Violence, school resistance, crime, substance abuse and occasional bouts of work were found to be markers of 'protest masculinity'.⁴⁷ The short story is a form well suited to represent these aspects of life, through the character of the 'sub-man' hero, whom Elizabeth Bowen credits Chekhov with introducing to the short story genre, and who 'crystallised frustration, inertia, malaise, vacancy, futile aspiration [...]'.⁴⁸ The young male drug addict, Jamie, in 'As if There Were Trees' constitutes the 'sub-man' of the story, displaying the signifiers of protest masculinity outlined above, whilst also symbolising the response of the community overall to the Romanian migrants.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, cited in Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (London: Virago Press, 1991), p. 33.

⁴⁵ Del Roy Fletcher, 'The Workless Class? Economic Transformation, Informal Work and Male Working-Class Identity', *Social Policy and Society*, 9 (2010), 325-336 (p. 328) < <http://journals.cambridge.org> > [accessed 23 December 2012]

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 329-330.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Bowen, 'The Faber Book of Modern Short Stories', in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. by Charles E. May (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp.256-262 (p. 257). Originally published in *Collected Impressions* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950).

⁴⁹ It is interesting in this context to note that 'As if There Were Trees' re-appears in a short story anthology entitled *Silver Threads of Hope* (2012), sales of which are donated to Console, a

The setting of 'As if There Were Trees' is therefore crucial in exploring its themes and contextualising the attitudes of the Irish characters towards the migrant workers in the text. The general perception among the local population is that the migrants are employed in jobs to which the Irish workers are entitled and are therefore responsible for their unemployment and, by extension, responsible for all the problems that stem from their consequent socio-economic struggles. This perception is the main source of tension in the story and its disproportionate effect on the already disadvantaged section of the local population is noted by Duyvendak who discusses how, 'in cities and neighborhoods in their countries of arrival, they [migrants] can unintentionally upset the jealously guarded places of the (often relatively disadvantaged) native population'.⁵⁰ In his work on the present-day city, Bauman describes this section of the population as the 'lower tier' dwellers that are 'doomed to stay local'. He discusses how, unlike the city's upper stratum inhabitants whose focus is outward and globally inclined, the focus of those in the lower-tier group is on their immediate locale.⁵¹ In the context of this story, the location in which it takes place reflects the reality that the economic success of the Celtic Tiger, while creating enormous wealth largely among the upper stratum, simultaneously 'created poverty and social exclusion' in the lower tier.⁵² Loyal believes that it is this paradox that underlies the attitude amongst some sections of the Irish population that there is 'a causal link between observed, material differences in Irish society and signified phenotypical and cultural differences of black and ethnic minorities', which helped people to 'make sense' of the socio-economic deprivation experienced by some working-class communities 'within the context of a booming Celtic Tiger economy'.⁵³ When the disaffected Jamie takes action against the Romanian 'intruder', the reaction of Mary and the other Irish residents can be explained by Kristeva's theory that the presence of the 'foreigner' provokes a deep-seated anger and a coming together of the host community in a bid to 'expel the intruder or at least, keep him in 'his' place'.⁵⁴ Jamie has recently been fired from his job on the overpass as he was found carrying equipment for injecting drugs. As the only

charity which describes itself as 'supporting people in Suicidal Crisis and those Bereaved by Suicide' < <http://www.console.ie> > [accessed 28 February 2013]

⁵⁰ Duyvendak, p. 36.

⁵¹ Bauman, *Liquid Times*, p. 75.

⁵² Loyal, p. 87.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Kristeva, p. 20.

resident of the flats to be employed by the construction company, he complains to the Residents Committee. However, because of his drug problem, it will not lodge an appeal on his behalf. With his baby under his arm, Jamie rides his horse to the overpass, where he asks one of the Romanian workers for a cigarette, then stabs the man as he hands one over. Mary describes the expression on the Romanian's face as one of 'pure surprise' (AWT, p.59) and refers to the panic amongst his colleagues who try to pull him to safety as Jamie continues to stab him. Mary describes how the residents of the flats are 'hanging over the balconies watching' but 'they were silent' (AWT, p.60). Her husband Tommy is there with their children, 'and there was something like a smile on his face':

I could tell he was there with Jamie and in his loneliness, Tommy was crushing the Romanian's balls and he was kicking the Romanian's head in and he was rifling the Romanian's head in and he was sending him home to his dark children with his ribs all shattered and his teeth all broken and I thought to myself that maybe I would like to see it too and that made me shiver, that made the night very cold [...]. (AWT, P.60)

Jamie represents the collective attitude towards the migrants and therefore although he acts alone, he acts on behalf of the community, who are arguably complicit in their failure to intervene. Flannery O'Connor's short story 'The Displaced Person' (1954) reflects a similar passive-aggressive response to a migrant. Mrs McIntyre, the owner of a farm in the American South, is distrustful of her new Polish refugee worker, Mr Guizac, and two of her employees are resentful that his efficiency draws attention to their laziness. None of them warn Mr Guizac when they see that he is in the path of a runaway tractor, and Mrs McIntyre describes how she 'felt her eyes and Mr Shortley's eyes and the Negro's eyes come together in one look that froze them in collusion forever'.⁵⁵ Their deliberate failure to intervene leads to the death of Mr Guizac as the tractor runs over him. In McCann's story however, Mary snaps out of her inert state and tries in vain to reach Jamie, once she realises his intention is to injure the Romanian, because, she says, 'I could see my own youngsters in Jamie,

⁵⁵ Flannery O'Connor, 'The Displaced Person', in *Flannery O'Connor: Complete Stories*, by Flannery O'Connor (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), pp. 194-235 (p. 234). The fact that the black worker feels threatened by the white migrant relates to the point discussed in my introduction about the tensions between former black slave workers and Irish immigrants in nineteenth century America.

that's why I ran' (AWT, p.58). She is too late to stop him but does not condemn him his actions. To her horror, she can relate to her husband's response, described earlier, because she fears for her children's future, in which the presence of the Romanian migrants represents the reduction of whatever limited job opportunities are available. The fact that Jamie carries his baby with him during the events that transpire indicates that he also has his child's future in mind. As he calmly drops the knife and moves away from the scene on his horse, still clutching his baby to him, Mary sees that 'there were tears in his eyes' (AWT, p.59), implying that his performance of 'protest masculinity' does not leave him unaffected. After all, this is a young man whose drug habit came as a shock to the residents because 'Jamie never seemed like the sort [...] Jamie was a good young fella' (AWT, p.56).

Although he is the only member of the community to take direct physical action against the migrants, others do not hold back from making their feelings clear through more indirect means. As a reaction to what they perceive as their powerlessness to control the Romanians' incursion into their work space, they stake their claim on those spaces that *are* within their control, in this case the pub. Mary explains that 'we don't serve the foreigners or at least we don't serve them quickly because there's always trouble' (AWT, p.56). She quotes her unemployed husband's comment, with its overtones of violence, that 'they were lucky to walk, let alone drink, taking our jobs like that, fucking Romanians' (AWT, p.59). There are two observations to be made here. Firstly, the locals' response to the migrants in the pub is in marked contrast to that experienced by Marcin and Vid in *Open-handed* and *Hand in the Fire*, who encounter no such treatment. It is possible that their acceptance by the patrons of the pubs they frequent is due in part to the fact that they enter the pub alone, or with Irish people, but not as part of a larger migrant group. Hence they are not perceived as a threat. Secondly, there are similarities in the treatment of the migrants in 'As if There Were Trees' and of the Irish travellers, Ireland's 'internal others', who are frequently refused service in pubs and like the migrants, are regarded as trouble.⁵⁶ This is a point that merits further investigation outside the confines of this thesis, in light of Mary Burke's work on Irish nationalism's investment in theories that support Oriental origins for the Irish

⁵⁶ See José Lanter, *The Tinkers in Irish Literature: Unsettled subjects and the Construction of Difference* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008) for further discussion of this topic.

travellers.⁵⁷ In her analysis of Dermot Bolger's play *The Townlands of Brazil* (2007), also set in Ballymun, Marita Ryan discusses Bolger's juxtapositioning of the Irish migrants who left the area in the 1950s and 1960s and the contemporary Eastern European migrants who have just arrived. Crucially, and equally pertinent in relation to 'As if There Were Trees', she states that 'in spite of Ireland's own legacy of economic migration, there is little accommodation for the new economic migrants that people Bolger's play'.⁵⁸ This lack of accommodation in Bolger's play and McCann's short story indicates a failure, or at least a refusal, on the part of the Irish residents of Ballymun to 'look outward' and to 'identify with the plight of refugees and asylum-seekers' as described by Gibbons, 'by reclaiming those lost narratives of the past which generate new solidarities in the present'.⁵⁹

Rather than generating new solidarities, the story reflects the local community's dissociation from the migrants by focusing on their otherness, physically in terms of their appearance and abstractly, in terms of their spatial separateness. In contrast to the malnourished and drug-addicted young Irishman Jamie, whom Mary describes as being 'all thin. You could see the ribs in his stomach' (AWT, p.53), the Romanian migrant workers are represented as vibrant, lively and strong. They are not named individually, but referred to collectively as 'the Romanians' or 'the foreigners' and in the case of one specific member of the group, the man who is stabbed, as 'the Romanian', in the same way that the Polish refugee in Flannery O'Connor's story, while occasionally referred to by his name Mr Guizac, is also referred to as 'the Displaced Person', 'the D.P' and 'the Pole'.⁶⁰ In addition to maintaining emotional distance between the local people and the migrant by avoiding the use of personal names, McCann's use of imagery creates a physical distance that evokes Conrad's representation of the African population in *Heart of Darkness*. Hence Mary's description of 'the Romanian', whom she describes in animalistic terms, inspires an image of a Tarzan-like character:

⁵⁷ See Mary Burke, *'Tinkers': Synge and the Cultural History of the Irish Traveller* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

⁵⁸ Marita Ryan, "'I Feel Foreign Even to Myself': A Passage Between Self and Other, and Past and Present in Dermot Bolger's *The Townlands of Brazil*", in *Passages: Movements and Moments in Text and Theory*, ed. by Maeve Tynan, Maria Beville and Marita Ryan (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 97-111 (p. 106).

⁵⁹ Gibbons, 'The Global Cure?', p. 105.

⁶⁰ Flannery O'Connor, p. 197, p. 195, p. 214, p. 205.

There were four of them altogether. Three of them were standing on the ramp smoking cigarettes and one was on a rope beneath the ramp. The one below was swinging around on the rope. He had a great movement to him – I mean he would have made a great sort of jungle man or something, swinging through the trees, except of course there's no trees around here. It was nice to look at really. The ropeman was skinny and dark...' (AWT, p.55)

Irish missionaries described the African people amongst whom they lived in similarly animalistic, physical terms, describing the men as possessing enviable 'strength and endurance. They are as active as wild cats, as swift as deer, as tough as steel'.⁶¹ The differentiation of the migrants as 'other' in 'As if There Were Trees' is therefore registered on their skin, where 'the skin functions as a boundary or border, by supposedly holding or containing the subject within a certain contour, keeping the subject inside, and the other outside'.⁶² The motif of the boundary is also apparent in the spatial environment of the story. Mary describes how the construction site begins 'where the shadows [of the tower blocks] ended' and is surrounded by a chickenwire fence 'to stop vandals' but which is 'cut in a million places' (AWT, p.57), suggesting that attempts have been made to break through. The boundary ostensibly demarcates the point from which access to the site is restricted, but can also be read as symbolising the point behind which the Irish congregate amongst their own and beyond which otherness and difference exist. Bauman describes how barriers that are ostensibly erected to keep the 'others' out, also function to 'fortify the shaky, erratic and unpredictable existence of the insiders'.⁶³ Ultimately however, the boundary also applies a limit to the local residents' sense of the home space.

The concept of boundaries underpins this story, separating locals and migrants mentally, preventing the migrants from accessing the community socially and seemingly restricting the local community's opportunities economically. Despite the fact that the socio-economic problems of the local community predate the arrival of the migrants, they are held responsible for them by the Irish residents. The lack of access to the migrants' consciousness in the story means that they remain remote and unknowable throughout, depersonalised by 'the mark of the plural'.⁶⁴ The one

⁶¹ Whitney, p. 22.

⁶² Sara Ahmed, 'Embodying Strangers', in *Body Matters: Feminism, Textuality, Corporeality*, ed. by Avril Horner and Angela Keane (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 85-96 (p. 90).

⁶³ Bauman, *Liquid Times*, p. 85.

⁶⁴ Memmi, p. 149.

interaction that occurs in the story between an Irish character and a Romanian is described by the narrator Mary from a distance, maintaining the remote perspective. In this interaction, the Romanian's gesture of sociability is turned against him by the young Irishman Jamie to facilitate an act of shocking violence, with the tacit support of the larger Irish community. Migrancy as represented in this text is a wholly negative condition, both from the perspective of the host community and in the treatment meted out to the migrant community.

‘The summer of birds’ (2008) by Gerard Donovan

‘The summer of birds’ takes place in a suburb of Galway in the west of Ireland, and explores the local people’s wary observation of the arrival of a group of migrants whose country of origin is not specified. It is focalised through an unnamed young Irish girl of primary school age, living alone with her father, her mother having left for reasons that are not explained. The departure of her mother has disrupted her life and rendered her home a strange place to her, so that her situation reflects elements of the migrant experience of place and space. The child’s innocence and openness override her fear of the other, signified through her interaction with a migrant boy of a similar age to herself. An Irish character called Tommy represents the section of Irish society for whom ‘the abject holds an uncanny fascination [...], demanding [its] attention’.⁶⁵ His commentary on the movements of the migrants runs through the narrative as he tries to bring the child around to his way of thinking, regarding them as a threat to the local community.

In a review of the short story collection *Country of the Grand* in which ‘The summer of birds’ appears, Emer O’Kelly alludes to ‘the almost brittle carapace’ in Donovan’s characters that ‘reflect[s] the unsure breaches in the walls of our self-absorption. Born into a new prosperity, his people feel obliged to look outwards, but the changed focus of their gaze still makes them fearful’.⁶⁶ Like McCann, Donovan explores the arrival of migrants in twenty-first century Ireland from the perspective of the local Irish community and does not render the migrants’ consciousness. Consequently they remain in the shadows, with the exception of one largely wordless exchange between the Irish girl and a migrant child. The fearfulness of the local community is exacerbated by the lack of interaction between themselves and the migrants. Donovan’s approach differs from McCann’s however in his references to Irish national identity. The character of Tommy reverts to nationalist posturing and draws on elements of Irish culture as a defence mechanism against the new arrivals. The setting of the story in the ‘in-between’ space of a suburb on the border

⁶⁵ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 93.

⁶⁶ Emer O’Kelly, ‘Finely crafted short stories reflect grand little country in all its glory’, *Irish Independent*, 9 November 2008 <<http://www.independent.ie/entertainment/books/finely-crafted-short-stories-reflect-grand-little-country-in-all-its-glory-1529956.html>> [accessed 22 February, 2012]

between Galway city and the wilds of Connemara provides a context for the nationalist references hovering at the edges of the narrative.

Joseph O'Connor's description of how, in Donovan's short story collection, 'subtly subverted images of the Irish west abound' and 'rural idylls are unavailable, the stuff of daytime television'⁶⁷ is particularly relevant to this story. Its west of Ireland location, as I explained in the introduction to this thesis, was enshrined in nationalist rhetoric as the site where the traditional customs and culture of Ireland are best preserved. However, a book entitled *Galway: A Sense of Place* (2012) by a Galway-born architect, Roddy Mannion, 'bemoans the city's relentless sprawl and tellingly contrasts the compact medieval core that everyone finds so appealing to the amorphous, low-density suburbs with their bleak distributor roads.'⁶⁸ O'Connor's comments above indicate therefore that Donovan's subversion of the west of Ireland imagery reflects the reality of contemporary Galway. The child narrator describes the estate on which she lives as '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'.⁶⁹ The Irish poet Eavan Boland notes that 'a suburb is all about futures. [...] There is little enough history, almost no appeal to memory'.⁷⁰ A new suburb such as that in which this story is set should, in theory, be an ideal place in which to accommodate migrants. The suburbs lack of history combined with their forward-looking perspective point towards an environment where belonging is not dependent on the nationalist criteria of shared history. However, this is not the reality that is presented in the story, which instead demonstrates the perseverance of nationalist parameters of belonging as represented by the attitudes and responses displayed by Tommy. Donovan employs the motif of music to convey Tommy's recourse to the nationalist markers of his identity, in response to what he sees as the disturbance caused to his familiar environment by the migrants' arrival. Irish music is a central element of Irish national identity and constitutes an ongoing connection

⁶⁷ Joseph O'Connor, 'On Gerard Donovan's Country of the Grand' <http://www.josephoconnorauthor.com/erm-on-gerard-donovans-country-of-the-grand.html> > [accessed 19 July 2011]

⁶⁸ Frank McDonald, 'Planners look to the potential of built-up core in "party capital"', *Irish Times*, 30 July 2012 < <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2012/0730/1224321086790.html> > [accessed 02 January 2013] (paragraph 4 of 21).

⁶⁹ Donovan, Gerard, 'The summer of birds', in *Country of the Grand*, by Gerard Donovan (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp.150-167 (p. 152). All further references to the story will be abbreviated to *TSB* and cited parenthetically in the text.

⁷⁰ Boland, p. 172.

with the country's past. However, it has also shown itself to be open to hybridisation, both historically in the way it has been adapted and blended with other musical forms when taken by Irish emigrants to the United States and contemporaneously as is evident from the buskers that perform on Dublin's streets, blending the sounds of Irish and Eastern European traditional music, African drums and Irish bodhráns.⁷¹

'The summer of birds' reflects the differing musical tastes of Tommy and the narrator's father, which in turn reflect their broader world view. Hence, the girl's father is portrayed as unconcerned about the arrival of the migrants in the town, despite Tommy's efforts to arouse his anger at the situation. When Tommy warns him that the migrants will probably be moving in next door soon, the father replies calmly and resignedly 'You're probably right' (*TSB*, p.156) and he does not engage in further discussion of the subject. His openness to elements outside a national context is symbolised by the breadth of his musical taste, as his daughter, the narrator, describes his declaration that he loves Waylon Jennings, an American country and western singer (*TSB*, p.160). Tommy responds by demanding that he 'play some national songs [...]. Let's hear some patriot songs' (*TSB*, p.160) as he seeks refuge from his changing environment in the certainties of Irish music, in a similar way to the Irish crowd observed by Vid in the pub in *Hand in the Fire*.

Tommy's request for 'patriot' songs in particular, which encapsulate the insider/outsider dynamic of colonised Ireland, reflects his sense of his country being 'invaded' again. While the identity of the 'outsider' may have changed from that of Ireland's time of colonial occupation, the siege mentality it engendered has not. He warns that 'they've moved to the end of the street. Won't be long now. Next thing they'll be moving next door' (*TSB*, p.156), 'you can't just do nothing. That's how they win' (*TSB*, p.157). In clinging to such markers of Irish identity, he remains entrenched in the 'nativist' stage of decolonisation, defined by Said as that in which one 'confine[s] oneself to one's own sphere, with its ceremonies of belonging, its built-in chauvinism, and its limiting sense of security'.⁷²

In his adherence to an exclusive Irish identity, Tommy embodies the limitations of the idea of nation outlined by Benedict Anderson, who notes that 'the most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the

⁷¹ The blending of Irish and Eastern European music is central to the Irish film *Once* (2006), directed by John Carney.

⁷² Said, p. 277.

human race will join their nation'.⁷³ Duyvendak describes the way in which the concept of home is arrived at by an assessment of what and who are regarded as belonging to the place and what and who are not, 'what is mentally near and what is far; what feels like 'inside' and what does not; who are considered 'we' and who are labelled 'others'.⁷⁴ Tommy is adamant about maintaining the boundary between insiders and outsiders and consistently reinforces the binaries of native and other in his conversations, referring to the migrants as 'them' and 'they'. He is, in effect, an internal exile, one of those 'who stay put in a mobile world' and 'have to deal with both mobile goods (Starbucks and McDonald's) and mobile people, and often not out of choice'.⁷⁵ His reaction to the migrants' arrival is an accurate reflection of the effect of inward migration on many county towns in Ireland, as demonstrated in a 2003-2004 article by Chris Sparks, an English sociologist living in the Irish northwest. Sparks observed the changes to Leitrim as a result of the arrival of 'increasing numbers of 'new-agers', continental Europeans, 'black' and 'brown' people, British escapees and Irish returnees':

Leitrim is increasingly a strange place for those who regard themselves as indigenous to it and who expect the security of familiar, unchanging customs. In a positive light, this situation contains the possibilities integral to social change. It is the point in time and 'place' at which new Leitrim identities are being forged.⁷⁶

In 'The summer of birds' Tommy views the migrants in a 'negative light' in a response that can be described as 'homely racism', defined by Morley as 'a fearful response to the destabilization, through new patterns of migration, of the privileged link between habit and habitat'.⁷⁷ Tommy argues that because the migrants 'don't live in their own country' one must wonder, 'Can you trust people like that? They'll get you to talk to them, to like them' (*TSB*, p.163). His statement can also be interpreted as indicative of a broader attitude towards migration that applies to *Irish* emigrants who don't live in their own country either, lending credence to the following suggestion by Augé:

⁷³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p. 7.

⁷⁴ Duyvendak, p. 31.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷⁶ Chris Sparks, 'A Stranger Abroad in Leitrim', in *Uncertain Ireland: A Sociological Chronicle 2003-2004*, ed. by Mary P. Corcoran and Michael Peillon (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2006), pp. 169-180 (p.179)

⁷⁷ Morley, cited in Duyvendak, p. 31.

Perhaps the reason why immigrants worry settled people so much (and often so abstractly) is that they expose the relative nature of certainties inscribed in the soil: the thing that is so worrying and fascinating about the immigrant is the emigrant.⁷⁸

Many emigrants who left Ireland through the centuries never returned, or returned only occasionally, having put down roots elsewhere. Tommy's attitude may have its origins in a subconscious fear that the success of Irish emigrants in becoming embedded in the fabric of their adopted countries will be replicated in immigrants' incursion into Irish society.

Unlike McCann's story, where the migrants constitute a visible albeit distantly viewed workforce, the migrants in this story appear in phases, their numbers increasing incrementally as they appear 'one or two at a time, never in groups' (*TSB*, p.154). The seemingly covert nature of their arrival contributes to the anxiety of the local community and reflects the shortcomings of the Irish government's migrant dispersal strategy, discussed in my introduction. Residents of towns around the country were not given any explanation about where migrants were coming from, how many to expect, or what living and working arrangements had been made for them. The reaction of the local people described in 'The summer of birds' conveys the anxiety that grows within this information vacuum and the paranoia that develops as a consequence:

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* [my italics] of them coming out at night more often [...] then we heard news that they had even started to come into the pubs and the restaurants. (*TSB*, p.155)

The migrants' appearance in public places is described in a manner that evokes the tentative encroachment of wild animals into social spaces as they become less fearful of the local inhabitants. Consequently, the story reflects the locals' fear that they are losing control of their own spaces. The anxious tone is reinforced through Donovan's extended use of a bird motif:

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,

⁷⁸ Augé, *Non-Places*, p. 118.

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 soon they would be bringing up their young. (TSB, p.155)

Tommy also employs a bird motif as he tries to inspire fear of the migrants in the narrator. When he finds out that she feeds the birds on her windowsill, he tells her about Alfred Hitchcock's film *The Birds* (1963), warning her 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' (TSB, p.158). His pronouncements reflect his concerns at being outnumbered by the migrant population, and the breaching of the insider/outsider boundary to which that could lead. Flannery O'Connor's short story 'The Displaced Person', discussed previously in relation to 'As if There Were Trees', conveys the same concern amongst the employees of an American farm of being overwhelmed by Polish refugees from the war in Europe. Mrs Shortly, the wife of a dairy worker, has visions of 'ten million billion of them pushing their way into new places over here'.⁷⁹ She describes 'a war of words' as she fears the Polish language will take over, and uses imagery denoting contamination as she imagines 'the Polish words, dirty and all-knowing and unreformed, flinging mud on the clean English words until everything was equally dirty'.⁸⁰ A similar fear of contamination lay at the root of British attitudes towards Irish migrants in the 18th and 19th centuries. Gibbons describes how writers such as Thomas Carlyle, Samuel Coleridge and John Pinkerton, living in a society anxious about immigration and over-population, 'demoniz[ed] the Celt[s]', who were arriving in Britain in large impoverished numbers, portraying them as a source of moral and physical contamination.⁸¹

The story moves beyond the fear of invasion associated with Tommy's attitude, however, primarily by challenging the collective representation of the migrant groups through the child narrator's desire to know more about them and where they have come from. As I discussed in relation to the novels in chapter one, and as I develop in the next chapter on film, the Irish people with whom migrants are

⁷⁹ Flannery O'Connor, p. 200.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 209.

⁸¹ Luke Gibbons, *Gaelic Gothic: Race, Colonisation and Irish Culture* (Galway: Arlen House, 2004), p. 42.

seen to forge a connection tend to be those who ‘feel foreign to themselves’.⁸² In this story, the child narrator is disoriented by the departure of her mother and her uncertainty as to whether she will return. Her non-judgemental perspective and her uncynical youth, combined with her personal circumstances, allow her to empathise with the migrants, while her narration lends some insight into their circumstances. Referring to them in terms of darkness and shadows, she describes their attempts at remaining unobtrusive as they move through the town, ‘silent with their heads down, still nothing but fleeting shadows moving along our street and keeping close to the walls’ (*TSB*, p.156). She notices their enforced inactivity, signifying their asylum-seeker status, and recognises that they appear to feel out of place, as she does without her mother, describing how ‘the summer lay in front of me and felt like a space too big for me to ever fit inside. When my mother returned it would be smaller again and I could play in it’ (*TSB*, p.151). Later, she empathises with the migrants as she remarks 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’ (*TSB*, p.157). When she comes face to face with one of the migrant children and his mother at the local supermarket, and the boy speaks to her, she is surprised to find that she understands him:

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 a white smile and he held out his hand. (*TSB*, p.161)

The shock of recognising that the stranger is familiar is also referred to in O’Connor’s ‘The Displaced Person’ when the farm owner Mrs Shortley notes with surprise that the Polish refugees ‘looked like other people’.⁸³ In ‘The summer of birds’, the boy the narrator initially describes as ‘one of the shadows’ with ‘his strange face’ becomes familiar through their brief exchange of words and gestures. The close of the story hints at a positive outcome, as the narrator confides in her father that she and the boy exchanged sweets. Unlike Tommy, who had witnessed the event and berated the child, her father ‘didn’t seem to mind’ (*TSB*, p.165). When he hears that Tommy threw the sweet the boy gave his daughter into the fire, he forbids him to come near the house or the child again. In my introduction, I referred

⁸² Kristeva, p. 23.

⁸³ Flannery O’Connor, p. 195.

to research by the Irish Migrant Council that describes the positive relations that develop between local Irish people and migrants in communities where there is direct interaction between them, and here, the girl's exchange with the migrant boy symbolises the possibility of a more interactive future between the two communities. Tommy's expulsion represents the removal of his negative focus on the threat presented by the migrants so that, as the narrator says, 'With Tommy gone, now the world could change' (*TSB*, p.166).

Unlike McCann's story 'As if There Were Trees', in which the migrants' presence has a direct economic impact on the local community in Dublin, the migrants in this story are still in the process of arriving, and there is no indication as to whether they will be working in the area. Instead, the story captures the local people's fears about the migrant's very presence and their concerns about their unknownness. Through the character of Tommy, the story represents Ireland's post-colonial legacy with its insecurities about identity and fears of again being overrun by a foreign force. From the perspective of the local community who are uninformed about the new arrivals and therefore wary of their intentions, the migrants represent a threatening group presence. Their appearance in public spaces such as supermarkets or restaurants prompts a disproportionately anxious response. Fear of the unknown inhibits interaction between the local community and the migrants and increases the sense of the migrants' otherness. It is clear that the migrants are aware of the effect of their presence as their movements about the area indicates their desire to conceal themselves, avoiding eye contact as they try to remain inconspicuous. However, the story's transition from the representation of the migrant presence as a wholly negative and hopeless condition for all concerned, to one with scope for interaction and understanding in the future is symbolised by the narrator's interaction with a migrant boy. This scene demonstrates that there is potential in moving beyond the restrictions of fixed definitions of nation, home and identity.

‘Grafton Street of Dublin’ (2010) by Ifedinma Dimbo

‘Grafton Street of Dublin’ is a first person narrative account that documents a day in the life of a Nigerian asylum seeker called Nwanneka, as she strolls through Dublin, browsing in the shops and cafés on Grafton Street and enjoying the city’s public spaces. As she is not yet permitted to work in Ireland, her wander through the city is a means of passing the time while her two children are at school. The story captures her sense of optimism about her future in Ireland, and her devout Christian faith which sustains her belief that her husband who is still in Nigeria will eventually join them.

The author of the story, Ifedinma Dimbo, has first-hand experience of the asylum process. She completed an MA at University College Cork, during which time she gave birth to her son before returning to Nigeria. In 2005, she came back to Ireland with her husband and son. However, the 2004 referendum on citizenship, discussed in my introduction, led to a change in their residency status. Under the new legislation, their previous residency entitlement on account of their son’s birth in Ireland no longer applied. During the course of a protracted battle with the immigration authorities, the Dimbo family spent three years living in one room in a hostel for asylum seekers and was ultimately successful in obtaining residency. Informed by her experience, Dimbo’s short story straddles the genre of life-writing and incorporates many key themes of African women’s writing. Boyce Davies and Savory Fido outline the important contribution made by autobiographical narratives to African women’s writing, as a result of the themes they address and the forms they adopt.⁸⁴ These themes include gender roles, marriage, and cultural tradition, all of which feature in ‘Grafton Street of Dublin’. From the outset, the narrator Nwanneka indicates her intention of reflecting the migrant experience from the *inside* by addressing the reader directly and stating that ‘you can look at Grafton Street anew, with my eyes, that is, and wonder’.⁸⁵ This literary device creates an intimacy in the narrative, as the reader moves along Grafton Street with Nwanneka who explains, ‘I want to walk you through it from the College Green end’ (*GSD*,

⁸⁴ Boyce Davies and Savory Fido, pp. 322-323.

⁸⁵ Ifedinma Dimbo, ‘Grafton Street of Dublin’, in *Dublin: Ten Journeys, One Destination*, ed. by The Irish Writers Exchange (Dublin: The Irish Writers’ Exchange, 2010), pp. 45-61 (p. 47). All further references to this story will be abbreviated to *GSD* and cited parenthetically in the text.

p.48). In contrast to the *imagined* experience of Eastern European migrants represented by the authors of the novels discussed in chapter one, Nwanneka's observations and reflections are informed by Dimbo's *actual* experience of the Irish asylum system, her upbringing according to Nigerian custom and her immersion in religion and superstition. The result is a story that provides a rare insight into the lived life of a Nigerian woman in present-day Dublin as she negotiates the spaces of the city.

In the story's opening sentence, Nwanneka explains that she lives 'on Hatch Street Lower. What this means is that I can easily walk to a lot of places in Dublin City Centre' (*GSD*, p.45). During the course of this walk to the centre, the narrative unfolds within the places and spaces of consumption in the heart of the city and Nwanneka reflects on the bustle and noise of urban life, noting the traffic, both vehicular and human, the mechanics of queuing at the cash machine and the crowds of tourists and shoppers. Seeking respite from the busy streets in the greenery of a city centre park, she employs religious and pastoral imagery to describe the natural beauty of the space:

I stretch my eyes to behold St Stephen's Green Park, seeing the vibrant rays caressing the greens, the gentle breeze fluffing the grasses, the rich blooms bending thither and then hither [...] when I stretch my eyes further up, beyond the lush trees, beyond the clear-blue clouds, I catch sight of celestial beings floating around, their wands igniting the rays, spreading exhilaration and happiness. At times like this, it seems easy to worship God [...] (*GSD*, p.48)

It is interesting to compare Nwanneka's enthusiastic response to nature with that of an Irish priest's to Nigeria's natural wonders almost a century earlier:

See the wonderful effect of the sunshine upon the foliage. What varied shades of green, what wonderful tones of colour! If the landscape were splashed with red and white marigold it would be too beautiful to look upon. Do not those tall majestic iroko trees, immense towers of evergreen, remind you of all you have heard and read about the cedars of Lebanon? ⁸⁶

Both accounts reflect an awed appreciation of nature, imbued with a sense of God-given grandeur, Nwanneka's through her direct reference to God, the priest's with his allusion to the cedars of Lebanon, trees that symbolise strength and goodness.

⁸⁶ Whitney, p. 18-19.

The narrators share a common worship of God in and through nature, indicating the shared Catholic belief system that underpins Nwanneka's hopes for her future in Ireland, and which is the legacy of her education by Irish missionaries. For many Nigerian migrants, their preconceptions of Ireland, realistic or not, are informed by their experience of their Irish missionary teachers in childhood. The Nigerian academic J.P. Clark recollected fondly in 1992 that 'my first memories of Ireland, which I am now visiting for the first time, are of these missionary fathers'.⁸⁷ Nwanneka's trust in God is at the root of her optimism about her new life in Ireland and she alludes to Him frequently throughout the story, describing how 'even here, so far away from home, I have lined Him up above to stir things in my favour, while I relax and await the miracles' (*GSD*, p.46). Although she does not explicitly state her reasons for coming to Ireland with her two children, she describes her asylum seeker status which prohibits working until her residency is approved. She remains positive and hopeful that 'one day God will bless me with my own residency paper; then I can work to my heart's content' (*GSD*, p.46). Although Nwanneka encounters Irish people in her movement around the city – on the street, on the bus, in shops – her contact with them is primarily in a bureaucratic capacity, or in transient situations such as in shops or on public transport. While her passing interactions with people around her are largely positive, for some her presence prompts a negative reaction. A security guard in one store adjusts his stance 'in *readiness*' (author's italics) whenever she enters. When she 'bursts' into song in a joyous response to the beauty of nature she observes in the park, however, the reaction of the people around her is largely positive, in the form of 'bewildering looks, affirming nods, and sometimes outright smiles' (*GSD*, p.48). Boarding a bus and still singing, she is not affronted or surprised that nobody takes the seat beside her, noting self-effacingly that 'I'll die of shock if anyone does. White man steers clear of trouble whenever they can decipher that as the case. And I must look like folds of trouble, bellowing like that' (*GSD*, p. 48).⁸⁸ She also makes allowances for the wariness of sales assistants who are watching her in a department store, attributing their reaction to her unfashionable clothes that identify her as an unlikely customer for their expensive designer brands:

⁸⁷ Clark, p. 286.

⁸⁸ See Whitney, p. 62, where the author describes how 'the African loves singing and the more violent and voluminous it is the better it pleases him. None of your soft harmonies and vanishing cadences for him.'

My God! Eight thousand five hundred Euros. I do not begrudge them their reticence at my even coming near the dress. My low-heel Clarks sandals and Dunnes jeans trousers and an indeterminate blouse all housed in a slightly weighty bought from Enable Ireland wool jacket do not make their potential customer list. I now know. They knew. (*GSD*, p.54-55)

Significantly, at no point during her interactions with the Irish public does she imply that they are reacting to her ethnicity. Although she refers to the fact that ‘white man steers clear of trouble’ (*GSD*, p. 48) and describes measuring her walking pace against that of her ‘black kin’ (*GSD*, p. 45), she does not refer to herself in terms of colour. Her narrative focuses rather on how and where she engages with the city’s public spaces and participates in it as fully as her asylum seeker status allows. Unlike the anonymous migrants in Donovan’s ‘The summer of birds’ who attempt to minimise their visibility and avoid drawing attention to themselves, Nwanneka confidently announces her presence through her loud singing and purposeful entrance to shops and cafés.

Her positive approach to her migrancy further manifests itself in the way Nwanneka embraces aspects of Irish culture. Her absorption of words from the Irish vernacular into her speech and her consumption of Irish and international foods demonstrate her capacity to adapt, while also drawing attention to Ireland’s globalised cuisine. Her perusal of the shops is punctuated by stops for food and drink – ‘Earl Grey tea’ and ‘Green Tea with Jasmine’ (*GSD*, p.58), and later a turkey melt bagel (*GSD*, p.59). The Earl Grey tea, in its absolute Englishness, alludes to her colonial history while the bagel is indicative of the extent to which American fast food has colonised Ireland. Her description of the ‘level of hush’ in a department store being sufficient to ‘butter thick slices of home-made soda bread’ (*GSD*, p.54) demonstrates her familiarity with traditional Irish foodstuffs. The overall effect of her references to food is to illustrate the hybrid nature of the food available and importantly, Nwanneka’s openness to sampling it all. The language of her narrative is further evidence of her adaptation to Irish life with her inclusion of words and phrases in Dublin dialect, just as Selvon’s West Indian protagonists used English slang in the London-based short stories in the collection ‘Ways of Sunlight’ (1957). As well as using the common Irish response ‘grand’ (*GSD*, p.57), Dimbo describes how people walk away from the cash machine ‘pocketing their wad’ (*GSD*, p.51)

and a pair of shoes costs ‘fifty smackeroos’ (*GSD*, p.51). In marked contrast to Vid in *Hand in the Fire*, who is wary of using Irish turns of phrase, Nwanneka’s more relaxed usage may be attributable to the fact that English is one of her first languages, a legacy of Nigeria’s colonial past. The transformation of language and its usage that takes place as a consequence of migration is a theme also alluded to by Adichie in her short stories. Her Nigerian protagonists in the United States adopt more informal American forms of address than those to which they are accustomed, and a newly-arrived wife notices as her husband speaks that ‘his Igbo [was] interspersed with English that had an ungainly American accent: ‘Amah go’ for ‘I will go’.⁸⁹ Adichie’s stories are narrated in Standard English, whereas Dimbo’s narrator Nwanneka retains the idiomatic and syntactic structures of the English language spoken in Nigeria, a style employed by Selvon and Achebe with their respective West Indian and African dialects. This, along with Nwanneka’s allusions to biblical language and slippage into Igbo words at points of excitement in her story, point to the story’s heteroglossia. In Bakhtinian terms, she ‘does not eliminate those language characterisations and speech mannerisms [potential narrator-personalities] glimmering behind the words and forms’.⁹⁰ The shared nationality and gender of author Dimbo and narrator Nwanneka means that the distance between the language of their two voices is minimised, and at times achieves ‘almost complete fusion’,⁹¹ as observed in chapter one in relation to Hugo Hamilton and his migrant narrator, Vid.

Despite Nwanneka’s embracing of the language and culture of her new surroundings, her full participation in Dublin life is not possible until her residency is approved and finalised, allowing her to work. Unlike Marcin in *Open-handed*, whose walks through Dublin are purposeful as he is on his way to work, Nwanneka strolls through the streets of the city to fill ‘this unending time on my hands’ (*GSD*, p.46) as she awaits the outcome of her asylum application. The migrants in ‘The summer of birds’ are presented in a similar state of enforced inactivity as they are observed congregating in supermarket car parks and sitting on walls. Identifying a connection between walking and form, Eamonn Wall points out that the literary form of a text recounting a walk must be ‘aligned to account for the recorder’s progress

⁸⁹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, ‘On Monday of Last Week’, in *The Thing Around Your Neck*, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (London: Fourth Estate, 2009), pp. 74-94 (p. 84).

⁹⁰ Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’, p. 298.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

and discoveries' in the same way that the body is realigned in accordance with the terrain encountered on a walk.⁹² With this view in mind, 'Grafton Street of Dublin' opens with the narrator Nwanneka observing the slowness of her walking pace in comparison to that of the white Irish people around her. Her walking pace is rooted in her country of origin, and the slow gait that is essential in the heat of Nigeria marks her out as different in Dublin. She is initially upset by the fact that 'all the people I meet on the road or those that are behind me always, without fail, pass me and very soon disappear from my horizon and I am still trudging' (*GSD*, p.45). Her concern about this is alleviated when she paces herself against other black people, whom she refers to as now being 'everywhere':

You won't believe this but I can match them step by step, stride by stride [...] I surmise that it must be innate in them – them being white man, seeing that theirs is a cold country. Walk like that in Nigeria and see if you won't collapse and die. (*GSD*, p.45-6)

The physical act of walking draws attention to a series of binary oppositions – black/white, slow/fast, hot/cold – that emphasise Nwanneka's otherness. Walking at her natural pace, entirely appropriate for the hot climate of Nigeria, leaves her trailing in the wake of the Dublin crowds. It is a metaphor for her position as an asylum seeker on the fringe of the society *in*, but not *within* which, she lives. The verbs used to describe Nwanneka's movement through the city are indicative of her pace – 'stroll', 'browse', 'amble', 'loiter', 'saunter'. The text itself meanders and drifts from paragraph to paragraph, encouraging the reader to move along at the same leisurely pace as Nwanneka but also emphasising the purposeless nature of her walk. The resigned tone of the story reflects her own resignation at the forced inertia that is her lot as an asylum seeker, only occasionally breaking out into exclamations as she muses on her situation – 'These people's love for free work remains unmatched!' (*GSD*, p.46) when she refers to the fact that she is allowed to do voluntary work but not paid work, 'and to think Nigerians are on the fast track!' (*GSD*, p.58) when she thinks about the length of time it is taking to process her husband's application for asylum.

⁹² Eamonn Wall, *Writing the Irish West*, p. 8.

Discussing Joyce's short story 'Counterparts' from his *Dubliners* (1914) collection, James F. Carens remarks on 'the particularity with which Joyce renders the streets of Dublin, the actual pubs that are visited, the series of drinks that are stood', all of which reflect 'Joyce's passion not only for verisimilitude but for verity'.⁹³ Paying similar attention to the details of her surroundings in Grafton Street and its environs, Dimbo's narrator Nwanneka describes her walk along a route designed to take in her favourite shops and buildings, naming the shops and cafés she visits and what she buys and consumes within them. The sense of freedom her browsing and consumption afford her amidst her otherwise restricted lifestyle offsets what Elizabeth Wilson terms 'the 'disorder' of urban life'. Wilson suggests that this disorder is less inclined to disturb women than men because 'the socialisation of women renders them less dependent on duality and opposition: instead of setting nature against the city, they find nature *in* the city'.⁹⁴ As Nwanneke walks, she locates herself and the reader in the city by naming and referencing real buildings and landmarks, shops and streets. Her knowledge of the history of Dublin's Georgian buildings and the statues of its politicians and academics alludes to her education in Nigeria under the British colonial system, in many cases imparted by Irish nuns and priests, as discussed in my introduction. This narrative device has echoes of earlier writers' inscriptions of the city, as in Stephen Dedalus's walk through the city in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and the perambulations of Flann O'Brien's student character in *At Swim Two Birds* (1939). Clark commented that, rather than being influenced by the writers of the Celtic Literary Revival - with whom Nigerian writers had in common the experience of adapting and writing a language that was not their own - 'it is the influence of the loner and exile, James Joyce, its declared critic, that shows in some of our [Nigerian] fiction'.⁹⁵ Although both Nwanneka and Stephen make reference to the same places, the context of their walking and observations are very different, and are reflected in the respective tones of the narrators. Stephen is full of the arrogance of the young Irish university student, represented by his use of intellectual language, as he stands at Trinity College musing over the statue of the poet Thomas Moore:

⁹³ James F. Carens, 'In Quest of a New Impulse: George Moore's "The Untilled Field" and James Joyce's "Dubliners"', in *The Irish Short Story*, ed. by James F. Kilroy, pp. 45-93 (p. 69).

⁹⁴ Wilson, p. 7-8.

⁹⁵ Clark, p. 291.

The grey block of Trinity on his left, set heavily in the city's ignorance like a great dull stone set in a cumbrous ring, pulled his mind downward; and while he was striving this way and that to free his feet from the fetters of the reformed conscience he came upon the droll statue of the national poet of Ireland. He looked at it without anger for, though sloth of the body and of the soul crept over it like unseen vermin, over the shuffling feet and up the folds of the cloak and around the servile head, it seemed humbly conscious of its indignity.⁹⁶

In contrast, Nwanneka's awestruck tone as she contemplates the intimidating scale of the historic buildings, reveals her origins in an alternative cultural space:

I [...] retrace my steps, feeling like a dwarf; you see, the buildings here are so gigantic: take the Bank of Ireland building, in its colonnaded, elegant and magnificent character, for instance, and then add the statue of pointing Moore across. [...] there is Trinity College, another intimidating edifice. (*GSD*, p. 48-49)

Nwanneka observes the people around her as well as the buildings and monuments, and her description of the city's street performers reveals Dublin's developing multiculturalism. She comments on 'some Romanian men and a boy [...] playing accordion', 'a motley collection of dream-catcher Indians playing nerve-calming tunes', 'a black man sonorously roaring away' (*GSD*, pp. 59-60). Sitting in Bewley's Oriental Café, Nwanneka remarks, with no hint of irony, that 'a Chinese gal comes with a menu' (*GSD*, p.58).⁹⁷

While Nwanneka refers to these migrant characters, she merely observes them in passing and does not engage with them. She appears not to feel any affinity with them on account of their shared migrant status, and consequently avoids self-identifying as a member of Memmi's 'collective anonymity'. Instead, she maintains her sense of self throughout, through her first-person narrative. However, she only reveals her name in the very last line of the story, when she says, 'Oh, lest I forget, I is Nwanneka' (*GSD*, p.61). She literally has the last word. The meaning of the

⁹⁶ Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 151.

⁹⁷ Joyce refers to Bewley's in the story 'A Little Cloud', from the *Dubliners* collection, writing that '[Little Chandler] had forgotten to bring Annie home the parcel of coffee from Bewley's'. See Joyce, 'A Little Cloud', in *Dubliners*, pp. 68-83 (p.79). Joyce would have been referring to one of the two other branches of the café which were in existence at the time of writing, as the Grafton Street branch did not open till 1927.

sentence is ambivalent – it may indicate that she is afraid of forgetting who she is, now that she is living away from Nigeria. Or she may simply want to tell the reader her name, in order to personalise her story. It is not clear whether the declaration of her name is for her benefit or ours, or both. Theophilus Okere describes how, within Igbo culture, names ‘demonstrate the power of the special technique devised by an illiterate culture to put into record some of the best thoughts and ideas of its heritage’ and ‘provide a window into the Igbo world of values as well as their peculiar conceptual apparatus for dealing with life’.⁹⁸ The name Nwanneka means ‘my siblings are supreme’ in Igbo,⁹⁹ a meaning which has a poignancy given that Nwanneka is far from any siblings in her new life in Dublin. Her name therefore offers an insight into the importance attached to sibling relationships in Igbo culture, which Chinwe M.A Nwoye attributes to the practice of polygyny amongst some Igbo people.¹⁰⁰ When Nwanneka is concerned about the superstitious significance of some bird droppings that have landed on her, she texts her younger sister, who ‘responds immediately’ (*GSD*, p.51). While this communication indicates a close relationship between the sisters, it also draws attention to the fact that Nwanneke lacks a kinship network in Dublin, or contact with fellow Nigerians who would understand and share her cultural references. In the course of her day as she describes it to the reader, she has no direct interaction with any other Nigerian, or any other African, despite having informed the reader that ‘my black kin [...] are everywhere’ (*GSD*, p.45).

A similar solitariness is evident in Adichie’s short stories about Nigerian women in the United States, many of whom have come to America to join their

⁹⁸ Theophilus Okere, ‘Names as Building Blocks of an African Philosophy’ <http://www.crvp.org/book/Series02/II-3/chapter_viii.htm> [accessed 13 December 2012]

⁹⁹ Behind the name: the etymology and history of first names
<http://www.behindthename.com/name/nwanneka> [accessed 10 July 2012]

¹⁰⁰ Chinwe M. A. Nwoye, ‘Igbo cultural and religious worldview: An insider’s perspective’, *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 3 (2011), 304-317 (p. 311)
 <<http://www.academicjournals.org/ijasa/PDF/pdf2011/21Sept/Nwoye.pdf>> [accessed 13 December 2012]

Polygyny is having more than one *wife*, as distinct from polygamy which is defined as having more than one *spouse*. Nwoye explains that ‘sibling relationships are highly focused on the mother as a point of reference because of polygyny. Children from one mother relate to each other with a stronger bond of affection than they do with their half-siblings. In the struggle for limited economic opportunity and education within such settings, sibling rivalry among children of the same mother is reduced but is allowed to operate or even escalate among children of the same father but different mothers in childhood and through adulthood. In this context, children of the same mother are encouraged to present a united front.’

husbands, or have arrived with them. Nwanneka's situation differs in that she and her children rather than her husband have arrived in Dublin first, as they wait for his paperwork to be arranged. She refers to the fact that she misses him, but also notes that in terms of his attitude to life, 'he is old school' (*GSD*, p.57). When reflecting on his manner of criticising the behaviour of others, she expresses her relief that 'I am usually the only audience to his diatribe' (*GSD*, p.58). The story hints at the dynamics of their marital relationship, a significant consideration in both this story and 'Shackles', and indeed in the writing of Adichie, as they draw attention to the shift in gender relations that occurs for Nigerian women as a consequence of their migration. Gender politics has been a key theme in literature by African women from their first publications, as discussed earlier. Buchi Emecheta, for example, remarks on a similar shift in the gender power structure for Nigerian women coming to Britain in the 1960s, describing '[...] the Nigerian wife who, for the first time, was tasting the real freedom of being a wife. She was free from the hindering influences of her kith and kin, she was free to work and earn money'.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, feminist critics such as Hazel Carby view this perception of African cultural traditions as 'oppressive to women' and problematic in its generality. She criticises it for '[reinforcing] the view that when black women enter Britain [and Ireland] they are moving into a more liberated or enlightened or emancipated society than the one from which they have come'.¹⁰² Indeed, testimonials of contemporary migrant women indicate that they miss aspects of Nigerian life such as the support of extended families in relation to child-rearing.¹⁰³ The absence of such networks in their lives in Ireland adds to the challenge of adapting to their new home. Nevertheless, the hopeful tone of 'Grafton Street of Dublin' is maintained through Nwanneka's optimism about the prospect of a better future for herself and her family, and her forward- rather than backward-looking attitude towards her migration to Ireland. There is no such optimism in the story 'Shackles' by Melatu Okorie, which will be examined later, in which the Nigerian migrants live in an asylum seekers hostel, indicating that the spaces in which migrants live and move about are crucial factors in their experience of migrancy.

¹⁰¹ Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen* (London: Allison and Busby, 1974), p. 50.

¹⁰² H. Carby, 'White women listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood', in *Black British cultural studies: a reader*, ed. by H. Baker and others (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 61-86 (p. 67).

¹⁰³ Lichtsinn and Veale, p. 108.

Like Marcin in *Open-handed*, Nwanneka lives in multi-occupancy rented accommodation in the heart of the city. Inner city Dublin is home to many African migrants, particularly in an area of Georgian houses to the north of the city around Parnell Square, which is referred to as 'Little Africa'. Many African migrants begin their lives in Ireland in these houses, some of which function as accommodation centres for asylum seekers and also contain cheap flats for rent for migrants such as Nwanneka who have moved on from hostel accommodation. I suggest that these houses can be seen as a contact zone between Irish and migrant people when the trajectory of their occupation is considered. In the time span between their glory days as townhouses in the eighteenth century, when they were home to the Anglo-Irish elite, and the current incarnation of some as hostels and accommodation centres, they served as the tenement dwellings of the impoverished native Irish in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Joyce and O'Casey reflected this social group in their work, informed by their own personal experience of urban life at the time – Joyce through his descriptions of the living conditions of the Dedalus family as they slid down the social scale in the first decade of the twentieth century, O'Casey in his plays set in the Dublin slums of his childhood, *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) and *The Plough and the Stars* (1926). Kiberd refers to Dublin in those years as 'a raw and desperate place' where overcrowded tenement dwellings were home to a third of the city's citizens, the majority of those living in one room.¹⁰⁴ The 'poetic speeches' in O'Casey's plays are described by Kiberd as 'attempts by characters to create a more spacious world in the imagination than the drab, constricted place in which they are expected to live'.¹⁰⁵ The same could be said of Nwanneka and her vibrant narrative about the world outside of her accommodation. Where Selvon's West Indian migrants in such short stories as 'Basement Lullaby' (1957) describe themselves as 'living under the earth, with the street above our heads' in their basement flat in London,¹⁰⁶ Nwanneka complains that she has 'to climb three flights of stairs to the sky where our room is' (*GSD*, p.47), on the top floor of a Georgian house. Like Marcin in *Open-handed*, she lives out of sight *above* rather than *below* the city. Their accommodation in the most densely populated parts of the inner-city reflects a timeless worldwide trend in migration as incomers congregate initially in

¹⁰⁴ Kiberd, p. 219.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Sam Selvon, 'Basement Lullaby' in *Ways of Sunlight* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1987), pp. 163-168 (p. 167).

cities for economic reasons or as a result of government policy on migrant accommodation. Adichie's short story 'The Arrangers of Marriage' reflects the universality of this experience as her contemporary Nigerian migrants in New York encounter the same living options, arriving at their accommodation in Brooklyn which is 'up a flight of brooding stairs, down an airless hallway with frayed carpeting' to an apartment whose small rooms 'lacked a sense of space, as though the walls had become uncomfortable with each other, with so little distance between them'.¹⁰⁷

The Nigerian husband of Adichie's story promises his wife that they will move to a better neighbourhood when he qualifies as a doctor, describing the people shopping in the local supermarket as 'the ones who immigrate and continue to act as if they are back in their countries [...] They will never move forward unless they adapt to America'.¹⁰⁸ In 'Grafton Street of Dublin', Nwanneka's narrative indicates her propensity to adapt to her new circumstances and her desire to move forward. Her adaptation is in part facilitated by the familiarity of Dublin's retail environment that is a consequence of globalisation. Proving Jan Campbell and Janet Harbord's view that 'the spaces of narrating the self are not worked entirely within the private sphere, but are largely embedded in the practices of everyday life, where commercial products play a significant role',¹⁰⁹ Nwanneka escapes the confinement of the private sphere of her room and narrates her progress through Augé's 'depersonalised' spaces, in the form of internationally branded shops. The sight of Boots pharmacy, which she describes as her 'favourite drugstore', causes her to 'sigh with relief. Here, I'm at home and can browse as long as I want without anybody eyeing me surreptitiously' (*GSD*, p.52). She moves on to Marks and Spencer, confessing that 'I need this shop to recapture my mood; it is a shop with no boundaries' (*GSD*, p.55). These *British* stores allude to both the globalisation of contemporary commerce and Ireland's (and Nigeria's) colonial past – although the British occupying presence is no longer a feature of life in the Irish Republic, the retail landscape could be regarded as a twenty-first century form of colonisation by brand. Nwanneka's references to Lidl, Lush Handmade Cosmetics, Wallis, River Island, Burger King,

¹⁰⁷ Adichie, 'The Arrangers of Marriage', in *The Thing Around Your Neck*, pp. 167-186 (p. 167).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁰⁹ Jan Campbell and Janet Harbord, 'Introduction', in *Temporalities, autobiography and everyday life*, ed. by Jan Campbell and Janet Harbord (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press), pp. 1-17 (p. 15).

McDonalds and Vodaphone indicate the global nature of Dublin's retail trade. It is precisely what Beatley refers to as 'the proliferation of mind-numbing sameness'¹¹⁰ that arises through globalisation that provides a familiar streetscape for Nwanneka. In the manner of the *flâneuse*, she is 'a dedicated stroller, who has the leisure time to treat the frenetic motion and turbulent life of the city as a spectacle [...] feasting [her] eyes on the flow of new commodities in new shopping spaces, enjoying watching the truck and barter of the streets'.¹¹¹ In the space of Brown Thomas' department store, one of the 'dream palaces' described by Emile Zola, where beautifully displayed goods create worlds somewhere between reality and illusion,¹¹² Nwanneka informs the reader that 'I lose myself in Chanel, then I glide to Louis Vitton's [*sic*]' (*GSD*, p.54). Moving on to the Swarovski crystal shop, the language of her interior monologue captures the effect of such spaces on the customer. She describes a 'quiet hush' descending on her, and she experiences 'a very solemn feeling' as she observes how the precious stones 'blink and wink, beckoning' (*GSD*, p.53).

Despite their widely divergent circumstances, Nwanneka's enjoyment of the bustle and energy of the city streets and shops calls to mind the character of Mrs Dalloway in Virginia Woolf's 1925 eponymous novel. The novel is a detailed description of the interior life of the well-off Clarissa Dalloway over the course of one day, as she shops in preparation for a party. Almost a century later, the spaces of the city are similarly engaging for Nwanneka whose limited resources do not prohibit her from browsing and dreaming of a day when the items she admires are within her reach. As she wonders how rich people choose what to buy, she states confidently that 'I will cross that bridge when I get there; it probably grows on you' (*GSD*, p.55). Her optimism demonstrates Wirth-Nesher's assertion that 'every glimpse is an invitation to speculate, not about the lives of others but about possible transformations of self through acquisition'.¹¹³ The parallels between 'Grafton Street of Dublin' and *Mrs Dalloway* become obvious once again with regard to the relating of strangers in narratives of the city. Wirth-Nesher describes how in Woolf's novel,

¹¹⁰ Beatley, *Native to Nowhere: Sustaining Home and Community in a Global Age*, 2004, pp.1-2 cited in Duyvendak, p. 9.

¹¹¹ Crang, p. 54.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹¹³ Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel*, p. 75. The author is speaking in relation to Theodore Dreiser's novel *Sister Carrie* (1900). The protagonist is a country girl who migrates from rural Wisconsin to Chicago.

the recurring stranger is ‘not an invasion of private space, but rather a catalyst for a new kind of space that only the city makes possible’.¹¹⁴ Nwanneka’s narrative reflects this characteristic of the city when she describes how an assistant at the perfume counter in Brown Thomas department hands her a perfume sample and ‘knows me from my regular browsing visits’ (*GSD*, p.54). Later, outside the Body Shop store, she notes that ‘somebody touches me [...] She smiles and gives me a tiny bottle of some citrus-based body wash’ (*GSD*, p.56). Moving inside the shop crowded with people, she explains that ‘I mingle with them’ (*GSD*, p.56). This encounter demonstrates the relaxed manner in which Nwanneka moves amongst the other shoppers, comfortable in the crowd, interacting physically as well as verbally, and contrasts sharply to the experience of Adichie’s female narrator in her story ‘The Arrangers of Marriage’. She describes her first visit to the depersonalised space of an American shopping mall as an alienating experience, akin to being ‘in a different physical world, on another planet. The people who pushed against us, even the black ones, wore the mark of foreignness, otherness on their faces’.¹¹⁵ In Nwanneka’s case, Duyvendak’s argument that ‘in order to really be able to belong somewhere, others have to agree that you belong’¹¹⁶ implies that Nwanneka’s positive interactions with the people around her, and her inclusion in the commercial exchanges of the city, point towards the possibility of her belonging. Her experiences in the shops and cafés reveal that the spaces of commerce provide ‘forms of shared culture’,¹¹⁷ and points towards the expansion of the concept of home beyond the private sphere and into the public, which Duyvendak sees as symptomatic of a ‘democratic and diverse society’:

The ‘home’ of the public sphere is necessarily *hybrid*; neither a haven nor a heaven, but a place one has to share with many others. And it is precisely because ‘home feelings’ are no longer limited to the private and individual sphere that we need this hybrid conceptualisation of the public and collective home.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 198.

¹¹⁵ Adichie, ‘The Arrangers of Marriage’, p. 176.

¹¹⁶ Duyvendak, p. 121.

¹¹⁷ Campbell and Harbord, p. 16.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

While engaged in this process of adjustment to a new culture and environment, Nwanneka's experiences are informed by memories of her Nigerian home, and her perception of her surroundings is filtered through her national culture, a perspective that is common to first generation migrant writers as discussed in the opening section of this chapter. She compares the drumming of street musicians to the superior drumming of Nigeria while the 'eccentric ensemble' of some South American musicians reminds her of 'native doctors back home' (*GSD*, p.59). Even the city centre streets, if she looks long enough, resemble Lagos. Unlike Vid, however, there is no trauma associated with Nwanneka's memories, only fond nostalgia. There is no suggestion in the narrative that she is fleeing persecution and she makes no reference to specific events from her past. Rather, her references to Nigeria are principally in the context of her religious and superstitious beliefs. The overlap between the religious rituals of Nigeria and those she encounters in Ireland hints at another area of her life in which hybridisation is taking place, as she wonders whether or not to make the sign of the cross when in the vicinity of a church. She explains that it is 'a habit I'm trying to acquire [...] back home we cross ourselves when we pass a cemetery but here it is at passing a church' (*GSD*, p.59). Clark points out the similarities between Ireland and Nigeria, not only in relation to the Catholic religion but also their oral culture:

a deep sense of God, whether mediated by angels or saints on the one side or by spirits and ancestors on the other, is only one of several attributes that Ireland and Nigeria have in common [...] Both countries have great oral traditions of folklore, legends and myths with a vast pantheon of gods and heroes, of kings and queens opposed by demons and villains [...].¹¹⁹

Throughout the story, Nwanneka's references to God and her confidence that He will work things out for her future reflect what Nwoke describes as the Igbo's 'fundamental religious outlook on life', with a focus on improving one's situation in the world.¹²⁰ Hence, although Nwanneka complains about the boredom she endures because she is not permitted to work, she remarks that 'tomorrow will always be better than today, is the prayer of a poor man. I have come to develop the knack to begin with the end in sight' (*GSD*, p.46). References to superstition and folklore also

¹¹⁹ Clark, p. 287.

¹²⁰ Nwoye, p. 307.

pepper her narrative, revealing the carrying over of elements from the Nigerian oral tradition, as I discussed earlier. She alludes to Nigerian beliefs about good and evil, angels and demons, and when some bird droppings land on her head, her concern about the implications preoccupies her for much of the story:

My euphoria is dissipating before my eyes. [...] there is something about a bird shitting on the crown of one's head that is eluding me. Or is it that bad luck awaits you? Or that you die? What is it? [...] I can no longer bear the worry so I send a text to my sister in Nigeria. (*GSD*, p.51)

Nwanneka's worry about this situation, and her urgency in contacting her sister can be understood in the light of Nwoke's description of how the world-view of the Igbo people includes fear of spirits and 'people feel constantly threatened by all sorts of supersensible forces'.¹²¹ Her casual stroll through the perfume section of Boots leads to further concern as she initially avoids trying a tester for a perfume called 'Ange ou Demon', claiming that 'I am not superstitious naturally or anything like that, but coming from Nigeria, there are so many darkneses to contend with, so spray the Demon thing on myself? Forget it' (*GSD*, p.53). The typeface of the text changes to indicate Nwanneka's mental asides to herself through the story, and as she walks away from the perfume counter she reflects, '*Strange that you encounter a black bird and now demon perfume*' (*GSD*, p.53). Impatient with herself for giving in to superstition, she returns to the counter and buys a bottle of the perfume. When she subsequently feels the arm on which she is carrying the bag with the perfume becoming hot and itchy, she worries that 'the demon thing will burn a hole right through the bag' (*GSD*, p.57). However, superstition gets the better of her and she returns the perfume, relieved at having averted potential disaster. It seems she is not prepared to ignore her cultural heritage although she is living elsewhere, nor is there any requirement for her to do so, as her day in the city has revealed it to be a space that contains aspects of a wide range of cultures.

Nwanneka's interactions with the general public in this story reflect, in the main, a willingness on the part of the Irish to include her. The question is whether these positive interactions are the cause, or the result of, her optimistic outlook for the future in Ireland. Her religious faith is instrumental to her positive outlook on her

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 308.

situation and her unfailingly forward-looking attitude to her future. Taken as a whole, the text indicates how Nwanneka's nationality informs her assessment of her new surroundings, from her mapping of her cultural beliefs on to situations in her new environment, to her reflections on the differences and similarities between scenarios in Dublin and in Nigeria. In describing Nwanneka's pleasure at finding shops that she recognises, the story demonstrates a positive consequence of globalisation and answers a resounding 'Yes' to Duyvendak's question, 'Might some people not feel more at home in generic places, [...]?' Might their sense of belonging be facilitated by goods having become more mobile and generic as well?'¹²²

¹²² Duyvendak, p. 31.

‘Shackles’ (2010) by Melatu Okorie

Focalised through the character of Osita, a forty-year-old male dentist from Nigeria, ‘Shackles’ reflects the restrictions, frustrations and confinement signified by its title in the context of hostel life in Dublin. Osita describes the challenges of daily life for himself, his pregnant partner Mary and his daughter Uju. He shares confidences with his friend and fellow migrant Joe, nicknamed Daddy, who advises Osita when his community in Nigeria demands money to conduct his mother’s funeral. The men reflect on their home country’s perception of them as sources of income, and their new country’s unwillingness to clarify their residency status. Melatu Okorie, the author of ‘Shackles’, has first-hand experience of life in a hostel. She spent her first years in Ireland living at the Mosney asylum seeker centre in Co. Meath with her daughter.¹²³ By rendering the consciousness of a male asylum seeker constrained by hostel life, Okorie’s representation of migrant life opens up an alternative perspective to that of ‘Grafton Street of Dublin’ in which its female protagonist Nwanneka lives in rented accommodation and is free to move about the city. It also offers scope for exploring the significance of gender to the protagonists’ experience of migrant life.

Osita and his family live in St John’s Hostel, a fictional hostel in Dublin city. With the exception of one incident that takes place in a pub where Osita has a temporary job cleaning toilets, the story unfolds almost entirely within the confines of the hostel, and the wider urban setting of the city is scarcely mentioned. The hostel setting lends ‘Shackles’ a darker tone than the largely optimistic one of ‘Grafton Street of Dublin’. Osita left Nigeria to escape persecution and has spent the past eight years awaiting a decision on his asylum application.¹²⁴ His asylum seeker status has prevented him from visiting Nigeria, a fact made all the more distressing

¹²³ The Mosney accommodation was formerly a Butlins holiday camp.

¹²⁴ A survey conducted amongst migrant residents of Hatch Hall, a residence for asylum seekers in Dublin, indicates Osita’s experience represents the reality of migrant life in the city. Migrants described the stress they were suffering as a consequence of having waited for periods of up to nine years for their status to be confirmed, with still no decision in sight. See Michael Freeman, ‘I love the food’ – first-hand stories from asylum seekers in Ireland’ <http://www.thejournal.ie/readme/interviews-%E2%80%98i-love-the-food%E2%80%99-%E2%80%93-first-hand-stories-from-asylum-seekers-in-ireland/> for the full report [accessed 12 November 2012]

as his mother has just died. His grief is compounded by not being able to work in his professional capacity as a dentist, a qualification which entailed great financial sacrifice on his mother's part. While 'Grafton Street of Dublin' portrays the boredom of daily life for a female migrant who is not yet allowed to work, it also reflects on the small pleasures to be gleaned from simple things. 'Shackles' on the other hand represents the bleakness of the migrant experience, and, significantly, demonstrates the misperceptions relatives in Nigeria have of the lives of their migrants abroad. Osita's sense of estrangement from Nigeria is exacerbated by the financial demands being made on him by family there in order to cover the costs of his mother's funeral. He complains that 'it is a waste of time trying to explain to any of my relatives in Nigeria that I am only an asylum seeker here in Ireland and not a millionaire with trees made up of Euro leaves in my backyard'.¹²⁵ There is no romanticisation of the homeland here, but rather a clear indication of the extent to which its exiled members are commodified, due to the country's reliance on remittances from its migrants. Ijnut Eda describes the importance of these monies to the national economy and their significance as a source of foreign exchange, citing a World Bank study that shows Nigeria 'is by far the top remittance recipient in Africa, accounting for \$10 billion in 2010' and that 'each migrant may help anywhere from 10 to 100 people through remittances'.¹²⁶ Adichie's short stories of Nigerian migrants in the United States also refer to the remittance culture, with the young Nigerian woman in the story 'The Thing Around Your Neck' sending home half of her monthly earnings from her waitressing job.¹²⁷ Like Adichie, and indeed McCann and Donovan, the Irish authors of 'As if There Were Trees' and 'The summer of birds', Okorie's diasporic position affords her a detached perspective

¹²⁵ Melatu Okorie, 'Shackles', in *Dublin: Ten Journeys, One Destination*, ed. by The Irish Writers Exchange (Dublin: The Irish Writers' Exchange, 2010), pp. 138-151 (p. 146). All further references to this story will be abbreviated to *SK* and cited parenthetically in the text.

¹²⁶ Ijnut Eda, 'Remittances: A Boom to Africa', *African Bulletin*, August 2012, p. 20
<http://www.intent.eu/sites/default/files/TAB%20Remittances%20August%202012.pdf>
 [accessed 20 December 2012].

Ireland has demonstrated what could be regarded as a similarly mercenary attitude towards the members of its diaspora, in its marketing of 'The Gathering', a year-long series of events taking place in the country throughout 2013. The government hopes that the event will 'attract an extra 325,000 visitors and generate €200 million in tourism revenue.' ('What You Said: Gabriel Byrne and the Gathering 'shakedown'', News Review, *Irish Times*, Saturday, November 10, 2012, p.4). Ronan McGreevy reported on the statement by the Irish actor Gabriel Byrne, who has lived in New York since the 1980s, that 'most people [in Ireland] don't give a shit about the diaspora except to shake them down for a few quid'. Byrne was speaking on an RTE radio programme being broadcast from New York at the time.

¹²⁷ Adichie, 'The Thing Around Your Neck', in *The Thing Around Your Neck*, pp. 115-127 (p. 118).

from which to observe and present the reality of her country. Thus, in 'Shackles' her protagonist Osita tells a friend at the hostel that there are rumours of informants in the churches back in Nigeria and 'the second a member of the congregation dies, they will send their people to go and find out how well off the children are [...] you are finished if they should hear that you are living 'abroad'. Their demands will just skyrocket' (*SK*, p.148). Forced to borrow money from a Turkish moneylender (another signifier of multicultural Ireland) in order to meet his mother's funeral costs, Osita puts his asylum application in jeopardy by working illegally. He comments bitterly on the greed of his countrymen, describing how 'those gluttons in the village will eat and drink, go home happy and wait for the next victim' (*SK*, p.151).

Osita's narrative illustrates his lack of nostalgia for Nigeria or his extended family, unlike Nwanneka in 'Grafton Street of Dublin' who recalls home and family fondly. Osita is caught between two locations, as he describes how he is 'running away from persecution' (*SK*, p.144) and bitterly frustrated to find himself 'being persecuted in the country that is meant to provide safety' (*SK*, p.144). He and his family are therefore doubly exiled, forced to leave Nigeria but not permitted to create a new home in Ireland, where the restrictions of hostel living dictate the nature of their interactions with others. The proximity of the hostel living quarters makes interaction with his fellow migrants unavoidable while the restrictions on movement outside it curtail the possibility of contact with Irish people. Osita describes only one brief interaction with an Irish character and that experience is a negative one. As he waits outside the pub after work one evening to meet his friend Daddy so that they can return to the hostel together, a drunken man sidles up to him and pinches his bottom. As Osita tries to ignore him, 'he continued to call out things he'll do to my 'coloured asses[sic]'*(SK*, p.147). Apart from that encounter, Osita makes oblique references to 'the Management', but he does not describe any encounters with individuals within it. His only direct reference to Irish people is an observation about their unpredictability, commenting that 'the Irish weather reflects the average Irishman's personality. You can never be sure of what you'll be getting at any point; the answer you get in the morning is definitely not the answer you'll get in the afternoon' (*SK*, p.142). His despair at his situation and his lament that he is 'stuck in a system that does not care, living amongst people who speak to me with disdain and treat my family with a barely veiled contempt' (*SK*, p.151) contrasts markedly with

Nwanneka's optimism about the future in 'Grafton Street of Dublin'. While she plans ahead for better days, Osita cannot see a life beyond the walls of the migrant hostel. The hostel functions as a metaphor for the migrants' 'in-between' existence, between Ireland and Nigeria but also living *within* Ireland but *outside* of Irish society. Living 'in-between' places, they are to all intents and purposes effectively 'homeless', according to the United Nations definition of the word, as 'a condition of detachment from society characterized by the lack of affiliative bonds ...[that] carries implications of belonging nowhere rather than having nowhere to sleep'.¹²⁸ In discussing homeless shelters, Blunt refers specifically to the 'unhomely' nature of the reception centres for asylum seekers.¹²⁹ Homeless shelters and asylum seeker centres have in common the regulation of space and movement that prevent them from being considered a home. In this sense they possess the characteristics of Augé's non-places, spaces 'which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity'.¹³⁰

In addition to problematising the concept of home, the hostel environment impacts on the dynamics of migrants' relationships, particularly where gender is concerned. Through its interrogation of the interpersonal dynamics of the immigrant hostel, 'Shackles' illustrates the demarcation of gender rights and roles within the patriarchal structure of Nigerian culture. Despite the male characters' efforts to replicate and maintain these structures within the context of the hostel, it is clear from the story that their control of their womenfolk is diminished by their living conditions and that in fact it is the women who have the greater capacity to adapt and flourish in their new home. Osita's pregnant partner Mary challenges his assumption that taking care of laundry is solely her responsibility. Unlike his friend Daddy, however, whose fecklessness and lack of input into helping his wife take care of their children resembles that of the protagonists of Emecheta and Adichie's stories, Osita is desperate to provide for his family. Like Mary's husband Tommy in 'As if There Were Trees', he feels emasculated by his inability to do so, in his case as a consequence of the asylum system that prevents him from working. He complains that all he does 'is sit around helplessly every day, like an old woman [...] In Nigeria I might not have been a rich man, but I was providing for my family'

¹²⁸ UNCHS/Habitat 2000, cited in *Home*, by Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), p. 128.

¹²⁹ Blunt and Dowling, p. 129.

¹³⁰ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, p. 77-78.

(SK, p.144). The dismantling of the patriarchal structures inherent in life in Nigeria as a consequence of their irrelevance in the context of the hostel causes enormous frustration for Osita. Despite his academic qualifications, his strong work ethic and his desire to provide for his family, he is powerless to use his initiative in the face of immigration bureaucracy. His encounter outside the pub described earlier, when he is groped by ‘a well-dressed man leering drunkenly’ (SK, p. 147), further undermines his masculinity. He is forced to curb his instinct to hit the man in order to avoid drawing the police to the scene where the fact that he is working illegally could potentially be revealed. His disgust at himself and the situation is clear as he describes how he ‘ran away with my head weighed down with an enormous feeling of shame and dirt’ (SK, p.147). The loss of his self-respect is accompanied by a simultaneous sense of a change for the worse in the dynamics of his relationship with Mary, as he feels *her* respect for him ‘slipping away’ (SK, p.143) and they argue increasingly frequently. His frustration manifests itself ‘on a couple of occasions’ in physical violence towards Mary, as he seeks control over some aspect of his life. Nevertheless, his repentant attitude and statement that ‘it’s something I’ve never done before and would not have believed that I was capable of doing’ (SK, p.143) points to a somewhat more progressive position than that reflected in Emecheta’s work. Domestic violence by men towards women in her novel *Second-Class Citizen* is presented as an acceptable means of controlling and disciplining wives, daughters and sisters in Nigerian society.¹³¹

Although Mary features only marginally in ‘Shackles’, her voice, when we hear it, is that of a strong woman. Throughout the story, women are represented as trying to maintain family structure and routine. Daddy refers to the female migrants in a casually misogynistic manner, warning Osita that ‘if you follow these women and the things that come out of their mouth, you’ll kill them’ (SK, p.144). In contrast to the single Eastern European women in the novels discussed in chapter one whose representation centres around their passivity and sexual attractiveness, the African mothers and/or wives in ‘Shackles’ are portrayed as argumentative, shrill and bossy.

¹³¹ According to The Global Press Institute, Nigeria has the highest level of domestic violence of any African country. It cites the *African Journal of Reproductive Health* which, in 2005, reported that ‘a husband has the liberty to “violate and batter” his wife if he feels she has not adequately fulfilled her obligations. See Obisakin Christianah Busayo, ‘Domestic Violence Rates Soar in Nigeria, Women Describe Culture of Silence’, *Global Press Institute*, 10 November 2010 <<http://globalpressinstitute.org/africa/nigeria/domestic-violence-rates-soar-nigeria-women-describe-culture-silence>> [accessed 09 October, 2012]

In their disagreements over the use of the communal washing and food storage facilities, they are described in hyperbolic terms as ‘gesticulating wildly’ and in verbs suggestive of hysteria and over-reaction, such as ‘shrieked’, ‘glared’, ‘puffed’, ‘screech’. Referring to Achebe’s portrayal of Nigerian women in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Kirsten Holst Petersen discusses the failure of African writing from the 1950s to scrutinise the place and role of women in their societies. She describes how the inequality between men and women seems to be a source of ‘mild amusement’ for Achebe and observes that in his work, ‘traditional women are happy, harmonious members of the community, even when they are repeatedly beaten and barred from any say in the communal decision-making process and constantly reviled in sayings and proverbs’.¹³² In contrast, Emecheta constantly refers to the damaging effect of the patriarchal structure of both Igbo and Yoruba culture on the lives of the women, both in Nigeria and as maintained and replicated in the migratory environment. As well as the cultural differences reflected in Petersen’s criticism of Achebe above, Achebe’s work may also be said to reflect a generational difference in attitude. Achebe was writing over fifty years ago, when Western attitudes to domestic violence and women’s rights were arguably not dissimilar to those Holst Petersen believes Achebe fails to challenge in relation to Nigerian culture. Melatu Okorie, the author of ‘Shackles’, is a young Nigerian migrant woman living in twenty-first century Ireland and her writing resembles that of Adichie in drawing attention to the patriarchal attitude of the male migrants. Like many of the female protagonists of Adichie’s stories, the women in ‘Shackles’ are presented as fighting to maintain family life, despite their unhappiness and frustration.

Like the characters in Emecheta’s novels and Adichie’s short stories, the women in ‘Shackles’ ‘were brought up in situations far different from the ones in which they find themselves in England, America and Ireland respectively. Contemporary testimony from Nigerian women living in Ireland reiterates these sentiments and indicates that the lack of family support is a major challenge that they face in migrant life.’¹³³ As well as reflecting the lives of migrant women whose

¹³² Kirsten Holst Petersen, ‘First Things First: Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature’, in *The Post Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Ashcroft and others pp. 233-235 (p. 237).

¹³³ See Lichtsinn and Veale, p. 108. One Nigerian woman who was interviewed described how ‘In Africa, when I had my first child, my mother-in-law was there, my mother too, aunties taking care of the child, bathing him; [...] Since I had my child here, I’ve been doing everything myself’.

husbands are with them, the situation of lone Nigerian mothers in Ireland is raised in the story. Osita refers to an African woman, Noreen, who lives in the room next to his and he empathises with the fact that she is bringing up four young children on her own. He notices that she never mentions her husband and he senses a ‘sadness about her’ (SK, p.140). Okorie may be hinting at the possibility that Noreen is a single mother without a husband. However, Noreen’s reticence at discussing her circumstances is understandable in light of the actual testimony of a Nigerian woman interviewed by Lichtsinn and Veale in Dublin in 2005. The woman described how single mothers are rare in Nigeria and regarded as ‘irresponsible’, frequently ‘disrespected’ and isolated, and Lichtsinn and Veale reported that ‘disclosure to other Nigerian mothers in Ireland that she was a lone mother ‘out of wedlock’ would reduce her status and result in social marginalisation.¹³⁴ Silence for women in such situations stems from a desire to protect themselves and their children from stigma, and to avoid the prospect of being doubly marginalised – within their own ethnic group, and within Irish society itself. There are, of course, other reasons for Nigerian women’s lone status, such as that of the female protagonist, Jumi, in Okorie’s most recent short story, ‘If George Could Talk’ (2011), set primarily in Nigeria, which describes Jumi’s flight from Nigeria to Dublin with her children in the wake of her husband’s involvement and subsequent death during an attempted coup. She wonders ‘How do I tell the children? How do I tell the people living around me?’¹³⁵ Perhaps, like Noreen in ‘Shackles’, she chooses to remain silent.

Notwithstanding the pressures of gender expectations, one of the greatest challenges for both male and female migrants in the story derives from the space within which they are forced to live as asylum seekers. The restricted scope of the hostel environment lends a tone of claustrophobia to Osita’s narrative, conveying the sense of confinement, frustrated hopes, lack of privacy and thwarted ambition of the characters within. Osita and Mary share a room with Uju, Osita’s daughter from a previous relationship:

It could be described as a large room in size, but it has been made tiny by the fact that it is being occupied by a family of soon-to-be four. Two twin beds

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 104.

¹³⁵ Melatu Okorie, ‘If George Could Talk’, in *Alms on the Highway: New Writing from the Oscar Wilde Centre* (Dublin: Myrtle press, 2011) pp. 133-144 (p. 144).

pushed together on one side and opposite the bed is a white plastic table with a radio on top and underneath it, two bin bags filled with clothes that are almost rags [...]. The single wardrobe is filled to the brim with Mary and Uju's clothes. My few belongings have been shoved into an old suitcase that we keep on top of the wardrobe (SK, p.150).

The hostel matches Bauman's description of 'non-places' described in my introduction to this thesis, which 'accept the inevitability of a protracted, sometimes very long sojourn of strangers, and so do all they can to make their presence 'merely physical' while socially little different, preferably indistinguishable altogether, from absence'.¹³⁶ In addition, it qualifies as one of Michel Foucault's 'heterotopias of deviation' - spaces or sites where people are placed (their entry is compulsory) when they do not fit into the 'normal' spaces of society.¹³⁷ Examples of such spaces include prisons, psychiatric hospitals and rest homes, and to which can be added asylum seeker hostels in the context of global migration. By catering only to the physical needs of the hostel residents, the administrators of the hostel deprive them of their dignity and self-worth. The standardised nature of the hostel regime further undermines migrants' identity by inhibiting their ability to follow their own cultural traditions, while their status as asylum seekers restricts their interaction with the world outside the hostel. Osita's disgust with the hostel is rooted in his sense of it as a dehumanising space in which desperate people are forced to live together. Describing the equally dehumanising living space of Dublin's tenement dwellings at the turn of the twentieth century, to which I referred briefly in my discussion on 'Grafton Street of Dublin', Kiberd discusses how O'Casey captured its dehumanising nature in his plays, 'each of which is a study in claustrophobia, in the helpless availability of persons, denied any right to privacy and doomed to live in one another's pockets'.¹³⁸ This description is equally applicable to the living conditions of the migrants in 'Shackles', as the women struggle to maintain living standards for their families in the communal environment. Osita tells of how Mary had a row with a Congolese woman in the launderette who took Mary's washing out of the machine in order to use it herself. At another point, Osita discovers Mary hiding under the duvet in tears when the okra soup she made for the family has gone

¹³⁶ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, p. 102.

¹³⁷ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (1986), 22-27.

¹³⁸ Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 219.

off because another resident took it out of the communal fridge. He describes how 'the fridge is shared by all 28 [*sic*] occupants in our Block B floor' (SK, p.149). Mary's effort to cook Nigerian food on an electric stove she keeps hidden in their room symbolises a degree of resistance to the new culture along with a desire to hold on to her Nigerian culture. There is an interesting comparison to be made here with Achibie's short story 'The Arrangers of Marriage' in which a young woman who had come from Nigeria to join her husband in Brooklyn is dismayed at the fast food culture to which he has taken so enthusiastically and sets about cooking him some traditional food. Despite his evident enjoyment of the meal, he tells her that he does not want them to be known as 'the people who fill the building with smells of foreign food,'¹³⁹ indicating that, unlike Mary in 'Shackles', his desire to assimilate overrides his desire for Nigerian cuisine. Mary's difficulty in preparing traditional dishes for her family is just one effect of the impact of communal living on hostel residents. Lichtsinn and Veale describe the case of a woman who was forced to stop breast-feeding her new baby because the communal fridges in her Dublin hostel did not facilitate the storage of her expressed breast milk.¹⁴⁰

The restrictions of hostel living are compounded by the presence of security cameras, and Osita remarks that 'it feels like *everywhere you turn there is a camera* mounted somewhere: the dining area, the kitchen, the common rooms, the corridors, the launderette, the reception area...anywhere the residents can possibly wander to, *there is a camera watching them*' (SK, p.142, my italics). In his discussion of the Panopticon,¹⁴¹ Foucault describes the debilitating effects of constant surveillance and the sense of powerlessness it induces in those being watched.¹⁴² The effect on Osita and his fellow residents in the hostel is to deny them any control over their lives, in an environment that resembles a prison in its desire to keep the residents/inmates apart from mainstream society. Ultimately, this strategy increases fear and suspicion on both sides, and hampers the future potential for asylum seekers to become

¹³⁹ Adichie, 'The Arrangers of Marriage', in *The Thing Around Your Neck*, p. 179.

¹⁴⁰ Lichtsinn and Veale, p. 105-106.

¹⁴¹ The Panopticon was proposed as a model prison by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). It functioned as a round-the-clock surveillance machine. Its design ensured that no prisoner could ever see the 'inspector' who conducted surveillance from the privileged central location within the radial configuration. The prisoner could never know when he was being watched and in this sense, it has wider applications as an instrument of social organisation beyond the prison context. People end up self-policing as their uncertainty as to whether or not they are being watched leads them to behave as if they are.

¹⁴² Michel Foucault, 'Panopticism', in *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) pp. 195-228.

embedded in Irish society, as seen in ‘The summer of birds’. In her frank rendering of the experience of hostel life through the eyes of one man, and the compounding effect of a seemingly opportunistic and exploitative mother country, ‘Shackles’ is a story that captures the mental and emotional price that its Nigerian protagonists pay for their hope of a better future.

Conclusion

Discussing the short story form, Irish writer Kevin Barry quotes fellow writer William Trevor’s statement that ‘a short story doesn’t need a plot, it needs a point’.¹⁴³ The four short stories analysed in this chapter share this approach to the genre. Rather than developing a central plot as in a novel, these stories all focus on the same central point, which is the migrant condition in twenty-first century Ireland. Anne Enright suggests that the central theme of the short story form is ‘connection and the lack of it’¹⁴⁴ and in the case of the short stories discussed here, this theme encapsulates their central point of migration by exploring the interaction, or lack of it, between the Irish and the migrant characters. Where the stories differ is in the perspective they adopt. The two stories by Irish writers – ‘As if There Were Trees’ by Colum McCann and ‘The summer of birds’ by Gerard Donovan – represent the effect of inward migration on the existing Irish community. The focus of McCann’s story is on the inability and the unwillingness of an already demoralised and economically deprived community to accommodate the ‘strangers’ whom they perceive to be encroaching on their territory. While Donovan’s story reflects similar concerns and explores the concept of internal exile amongst the Irish community, it nevertheless offers some hope of movement beyond the anonymity of the group and the possibility of interaction between the Irish and the migrant communities at the level of the individual. Both stories are open-ended and offer no overt clarification of the situations represented within their narratives. As with Joyce’s *Dubliners*, their method is ‘not to provide us with explanations but to expect of us sensitive responses both to what is depicted and what is unuttered’.¹⁴⁵ In this approach to the short story form, these writers are stylistically connected to the Irish short story writers who

¹⁴³ Sinéad Gleeson, ‘Forget plot, be honest, read in order’
<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/features/2012/1221/1224328078568.html> [accessed 17 February 2013]

¹⁴⁴ Anne Enright, ‘Introduction’, in *The Granta Book of the Irish Short Story* (London: Granta, 2010), pp. ix–xviii (p. xv).

¹⁴⁵ Carens, p. 73.

have preceded them, and whose narrators James F. Kilroy describes as commanding attention because ‘they have *authority* [author’s italics], investing their narratives with such importance that they demand of the reader a careful, respectful response even when their narration turns out to be biased’.¹⁴⁶

The migrant voice, which remains silent in the stories by McCann and Donovan, resounds directly and with clarity in the two stories by Dimbo and Okorie, where it constitutes the first-person narrative voice. The Irish voice remains largely silent in these texts, which are informed by the personal experience of their writers. Like the two stories above, they represent two different perspectives on the migrant condition, one hopeful and one despairing, and illustrate Ryan, Benson and Dooley’s claim that ‘psychological well-being is intimately linked with the pursuit of life goals’.¹⁴⁷ ‘Grafton Street of Dublin’ is an optimistic account of its narrator Nwanneka’s hopes for her future in Ireland, and that of her family. Her experience of life in Dublin and her passing encounters with Irish people are largely positive and she embraces the aspects of Irish culture that she encounters. Ultimately, the story represents migrancy as a challenging state but one that holds the prospect of an improved quality of life. ‘Shackles’ on the other hand, with its representation of the psychological impact of institutional living on migrants, functions as a deterrent rather than an incentive to leave the homeland. In their representation of the migrant from varying perspectives, in varying locations and with varying assumptions about their future, the writers of these short stories demonstrate Ingman’s thesis that ‘the short story, focusing on the stories of individuals [...], is admirably suited to chart the inner experience of those from different historical periods caught up in the process of change’.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Kilroy, ‘Introduction’, in *The Irish Short Story*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ Dermot Ryan, Ciarán Benson and Barbara Dooley, ‘Forced migration and psychological stress’, in *Immigration and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland*, ed. by Brian Fanning, pp. 113-128 (p. 127).

¹⁴⁸ Ingman, p. 12.

Chapter Three

‘Forever, happily ever after, once upon a time’: Migrant Belonging in David Gleeson’s *The Front Line* (2006), Neil Jordan’s *Ondine* (2009) and Urszula Antoniak’s *Nothing Personal* (2009)

The steady output of literature from Irish writers during the twentieth century was not matched by that of the Irish film industry, the development of which was hindered by a lack of experienced technicians and production facilities as outlined in the introduction to this thesis. With the building of the privately funded and state supported Ardmore Studios in Co. Wicklow in 1958, the industry was given a boost, although as Kevin Rockett points out, foreign film interests were the greatest beneficiaries for the first two and a half decades of the studio’s existence.¹ In a pattern similar to that discussed in relation to contemporary Irish novelists in chapter one, many of the mid-twentieth century Irish film-makers responsible for the occasional Irish-produced films focused on the past rather than addressing the contemporary concerns of their rapidly modernising country. By the 1970s Irish filmmakers were engaging more with the realities of Irish society and the 1980s saw experimentation with style and form. Conn Holohan points out that filmmakers of the 1990s, however, were criticised for neglecting traditional national culture in their work, and accused of producing films whose cultural provenance was compromised as a result of their co-funding by European film companies.² The three films that I discuss in this chapter are European co-productions but I demonstrate in my analysis that their cultural authenticity is not compromised by their transnationalism. Rather, they engage with the realities of contemporary Irish culture and the presence of the migrant within it, and combine local and global references. The three films that I analyse are *The Front Line* (2006) by David Gleeson, *Ondine* (2009) by Neil Jordan and *Nothing Personal* (2009) by Urszula Antoniak.

The Front Line reflects the experiences of an African illegal immigrant in Dublin. The main characters are the Congolese asylum seekers Joe, Kala and Daniel and the Irish immigration officer Harbison who deals with their case. Supporting

¹ Rockett, ‘Preface’, in *Cinema and Ireland*, p. x.

² Holohan, p. 2.

characters include the caretaker Mikey who works with Joe and two criminals, one a fellow Congolese migrant who knows Joe from Congo and the other the Irish leader of a criminal gang who blackmails Joe to facilitate them robbing the bank where he works. Through a series of flashbacks, the horrific events of Joe's past life are revealed and the effect of the trauma on his life in Ireland is explored. With its gritty urban setting, and a focus on the challenges facing its migrant protagonists amongst an Irish population for whom the circumstances of their lives in Africa are completely alien, the film tackles its subject with an uncompromisingly realist style.

Neil Jordan also employs the realist genre in his film *Ondine*, interweaving it with mythology in his representation of his migrant character. Writing in 1985, Augustine Martin concluded that the disappearance of 'the strange, the magical, the miraculous'³ from Irish writing at that time may have been attributable to the death of superstition and religion in the country. Martin did not anticipate the work of a new generation of writers including Eilís Ni Dhuibhne, Julian Gough and Kevin Barry, whose respective novels *Fox*, *Swallow*, *Scarecrow* (2007), *Jude: Level One* (2007) and *City of Bohane* (2010) combine satire, the fantastic and fairies in their depictions of a contemporary and futuristic vision of Ireland. In the primary material of this thesis, it is in film rather than literature that the fantastic manifests itself. The blending of Celtic mythology and gritty realism is at the heart of Neil Jordan's film *Ondine* (2009), the plot of which revolves around the arrival of a mysterious woman in a coastal town in West Cork and her discovery by an Irish fisherman, Syracuse. The film lays a trail of visual clues to suggest that she may be a selkie, a creature in Irish and Scottish folklore that has the appearance of a seal but is also 'able to assume a human form'.⁴ As the plot of *Ondine* progresses however, it emerges through the realist storyline that the woman is in fact is a Romanian migrant. The weaving of the romantic legend through the gritty realism of the story creates a sense of the unexpected, in a film where the social and cultural context are instrumental to the outcome of the story.

Unlike *The Front Line* and *Ondine* which are written and directed by Irish men, *Nothing Personal* is the directorial debut of a female Polish director Urszula Antoniak. In contrast to *Ondine*, this is very much a character rather than a plot-

³ Augustine Martin, 'Fable and Fantasy', in *The Genius of Irish Prose*, ed. by Augustine Martin (Dublin and Cork: Mercier Press, 1985), pp. 110-120, p. 110.

⁴ Oxford English Dictionary definition <<http://www.oed.com>>

driven film that follows the physical and emotional journey of a Dutch woman called Anne to the west of Ireland. Anne's migrant status is less clear-cut than that of the migrant characters in the other texts and films that I examine, and demonstrates the breadth of situations and circumstances encapsulated by the term migrant. Unlike the African migrants in the short story 'Shackles' and the film *The Front Line*, Anne is not fleeing persecution. Neither is she an economic migrant in search of work like the Eastern European characters in the novels *Open-handed* and *Hand in the Fire*, and the short story 'As if There Were Trees'. Where the Romanian migrant in *Ondine* is in Ireland illegally,⁵ Anne has the right to be there as an EU citizen. She walks away from her past life voluntarily and as my analysis shows, she takes no reminders of that life with her. She therefore fits Rosi Braidotti's description of the migrant as 'caught in an in-between state whereby the narrative of the origin has the effect of destabilizing the present [...] The migrant's favourite tense is the present perfect'.⁶ On the other hand, the character's enigmatic nature and initial resistance to forming attachments to places or people suggests elements of Braidotti's 'nomad', whom she describes as 'the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire or nostalgia for fixity',⁷ so that 'the nomadic tense is the imperfect: it is active, continuous'.⁸ As I discussed in my introduction, transnationalism theory has opened up what Munck describes as a more 'fluid and pluralist' understanding of migration, appropriate for discussing the multicentredness of contemporary life, where migrants can move on, or move back and forth as well as putting down roots at the first point of arrival. Therefore I refer to Anne in this chapter as a migrant in the broad sense of the word, moving between countries, which incorporates elements of nomadism.

⁵ When the film was made in 2009, only Romanian nationals who had been resident in Ireland on a valid employment permit for an uninterrupted period of 12 months or more before 31st December 2006 could seek work. The situation of Romanian migrants has now changed. As of July 2012 the Department of Justice lifted all restrictions on the rights of Romanian and Bulgarian nationals to work and they now have the same rights as all other EU member states. On July 20th 2012, thejournal.ie reported that the reason for the early lifting of the restrictions (which had originally been due to stay in operation until 2014) was the low number of applications for work permits by Romanian and Bulgarian nationals, an average 450 annually. See Gavan Reilly, 'Government drops working restrictions on Bulgarian, Romanian immigrants', 20 July 2012 <<http://www.thejournal.ie/government-drops-restrictions-on-romanian-and-bulgarian-workers-528205-Jul2012/> [accessed 13 September 2012]

⁶ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 24.

⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

The thematic and stylistic approaches of the three films vary as widely as the experiences of the migrants that they represent, and reflect the range of migrant experiences in contemporary Ireland. *Ondine* and *Nothing Personal*'s treatment of migrancy is less overt than that of *The Front Line*. They do not focus specifically on the migrant nature of their female protagonists, and apart from one flashback scene in *Ondine* and a short opening segment of *Nothing Personal*, no details of the women's lives before their arrival in Ireland are provided. *The Front Line*, on the other hand, accords with Berghahn and Sternberg's description of migrant and diasporic cinema which makes 'the experience of minority social groups and individuals its prime concern'.⁹ Despite their differences in focus, however, all three films have in common their representation of the migrant condition, and their introduction of Irish male characters who are, in various ways, estranged from Irish society. Just as the Irish male characters represented in the novels and short stories of chapters two and three were portrayed as uniformly lonely, so too are the separated husband and grieving father of *The Front Line*, the single father of *Ondine* and the widower of *Nothing Personal* who reflect how the changed socio-economic environment of Irish society has altered the relationships between Irish men and Irish women. The taboo of separation and divorce that formerly forced unhappy couples to stay together no longer exists so that the separated/divorced male characters in *The Front Line* and *Ondine* are representative of a new reality in Irish society. Irish female characters in *The Front Line* appear in roles as professional career women – police officers, immigration officials, bank workers. There are no romantic thematic strands in the film, and therefore no reference to Irish women as mothers or wives, girlfriends, lovers. Any allusion to a female partner or mother is to indicate their absence. Here, the nationalist enshrinement of Irish women as primarily wives and mothers is clearly defunct and no longer relevant. In *Ondine*, Syracuse's ex-wife is an alcoholic, now living with a Scottish man who shares her drinking habit. She has custody of their daughter, Annie, despite the fact that Syracuse has stopped drinking in his effort to keep her with him. This scenario reflects Harry Ferguson's description of the difficulties faced by Irish men in gaining access to their children

⁹ Cited in Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg, 'Locating Migrant and Diasporic Cinema in Contemporary Europe', in *European Cinema in Motion: Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe*, ed. by Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg (New York and Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 12-49 (p. 22).

after relationship breakdowns with the mothers.¹⁰ The relationships that develop between Syracuse and Ondine and between the Irishman Martin and Anne in *Nothing Personal* indicate that the female stranger has become familiar while Irish women have become less so. In their exploration of migrancy therefore, the three films that I discuss here can effectively be regarded as belonging to what Will Higbee terms a 'cinema of transvergence', a form that 'draws attention to the inversion of relations between the centre and the margin' and thereby challenges binary oppositions while reflecting 'postcolonial theory's desire to re-frame marginality as a point of resistance'.¹¹

While challenging these binary oppositions, the films nonetheless introduce another in relation to their rural and urban settings that are fundamental to the way in which the films represent migrancy. *The Front Line* with its gritty representation of the lives of asylum seekers takes place around Dublin while *Nothing Personal* and *Ondine* unfold in idyllic rural locations in the west and south-west of Ireland. The movement of people across borders that is a feature of the global economy is represented particularly in films located in the urban margins of cities, described by Dina Iordanova as the genre of the 'metropolitan multicultural margin'.¹² Pinpointing the French film *La Haine* (1995) directed by Mathieu Kassovitz as 'the classic cinematic text of the multicultural urban periphery', she refers to the growing body of European film from the mid-1990s onwards chronicling the lives of immigrants living on the periphery of European cities, particularly in areas that until recently were characterised by their ethnic homogeneity.¹³ *The Front Line* fits into this category, with Joe, Kala and Daniel living in a flat in a deprived inner-city area, not geographically peripheral perhaps, but peripheral in relation to mainstream Dublin society. The Irish people who inhabit this part of town and with whom Joe in particular comes into contact are criminal gangs and unemployed youths and also marginalised characters within the city. The imagery of this urban milieu is of deprivation and poverty, with shots in the film of run-down estates and inner-city

¹⁰ Harry Ferguson, 'Men and Masculinities in Late-Modern Ireland', in *A Man's World? Changing Men's Practices in a Globalized World*, ed. by Bob Pease and Keith Pringle (New York and London: Zed Books, 2001), pp. 118-134 (p. 129).

¹¹ Will Higbee, cited in Berghahn and Sternberg, 'Locating Migrant and Diasporic Cinema in Contemporary Europe', p. 23.

¹² Dina Iordanova, 'Migration and Cinematic Progress in Post-Cold War Europe' in *European Cinema in Motion*, ed. by Berghahn and Sternberg, pp. 50-75 (p. 57)

¹³ Ibid.

wastelands. As with other films of the city where ‘urban space is always contested and a site of potential conflict’,¹⁴ the migrant characters in *The Front Line*, having fled the violence of their homeland, face a new threat of violence in the urban space of Ireland, as Vid did in the novel *Hand in the Fire*, discussed in chapter one.

It is in the space of rural west and south-west Ireland that the migrant protagonists of *Ondine* and *Nothing Personal* are revealed, although in the case of *Ondine* that does not mitigate against the incursion of violence into the rural space. As I explored in my introduction to this thesis, the writers and artists of the nineteenth-century Irish literary and cultural revival contributed to the nationalist agenda of idealising the west of Ireland as the authentic Ireland by virtue of its remoteness from the colonial centre in Dublin. The endurance of this perception is evident in films made in Ireland in the twentieth-century. One of the first filmmakers attracted by the natural beauty of the west was Irish-Canadian Robert Flaherty who arrived in 1934 and made his influential film *Man of Aran*. Ruth Barton describes the film as ‘part of a tradition of envisioning Ireland, for which the Aran Islands function as a palimpsest, as the bearer of an authenticity otherwise lost in Western culture’.¹⁵ Irish filmmaker’s colluded to an extent in promoting this vision of Ireland as can be seen in Patrick Heale’s film of the Blasket Islands, *The Islandman* (1938). The influence of Flaherty’s aesthetic is clear in Heale’s focus on the wild beauty of the landscape. Tim Ecott describes the importance of the landscape to the ‘atmosphere’ of John Ford’s *The Quiet Man*, the central theme of which is ‘a desperate truth at the heart of Irish history: ownership of the land’.¹⁶ The same theme underlies *The Field* (1990), described by its director Jim Sheridan as ‘a story about a land war that is under the surface. It’s about Ireland itself, whether we own the country or not’.¹⁷ The promotional posters for both films present clichéd images of Ireland, in green, blue and brown tones that emphasise the majestic mountains, lush vegetation and wild landscape. It is through viewing the promotional images used for *Ondine* and

¹⁴ Elisabeth Mahoney, ‘The People in Parentheses’ - space under pressure in the post-modern city’, in *The Cinematic City*, ed. by David Clarke (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 168-185, (p. 183).

¹⁵ Ruth Barton, *Irish National Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 47.

¹⁶ Tim Ecott, ‘West side stories’, *The Guardian*, 23 September 2006
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2006/sep/23/filminspiredtravel.ireland.walkingholidays>
 [accessed 03 March 2012]

¹⁷ Aileen Moon, ‘Jim Sheridan talks about “The Field”’, *The Irish Film and Television Network*, 23 December 2010 <
<http://www.iftn.ie/?act1=record&aid=73&rid=4283580&tpl=archnews&only=1>> [accessed 19 March 2012]

Nothing Personal that the change of focus in contemporary film-making located in rural Ireland is hinted at. Like *The Quiet Man* and *The Field*, both *Ondine* and *Nothing Personal* are set on the Irish Atlantic coast. However, the images used to promote the two contemporary films are primarily white, softer, lighter, and less saturated with colour than the earlier two films, and seemingly less dependent on referencing the 'Irishness' of their locations.¹⁸ Notwithstanding this fact, reviews of the film still remarked on the 'stupefying beauty' of its location and 'almost embarrassingly effusive' sights.¹⁹ The changed focus of the films' imagery is indicative of accompanying changes in the manner of representation of the rural areas in which the films are set, and the themes that they explore. Patrick Gillespie criticises contemporary film for being less pioneering in its portrayal of Irish rural life than *The Quiet Man* was in its time, pointing in particular at how that film dispelled 'the fatuous supposition of mindless conviviality' that underpinned viewers' assumptions about rural Irish communities.²⁰ He blames the contemporary lack of innovative representation of these locations on 'the erosion of their environment',²¹ arguing that satellite television and the internet have contributed to the standardisation of life in urban and rural environments and the erosion of the 'uniqueness' of a rural way of life. The result, he believes, is a lack of subject matter for filmmakers wishing to focus on contemporary rural life. This is a somewhat generalised assessment. In my experience, there is still a marked and recognisable difference between urban and rural life in Ireland, some of it intangible, but rooted in the ways in which people relate within their communities and to people outside of the communities; the spaces in which they socialise; and their relationship to the land, all of which are elements that feature in *Ondine* and *Nothing Personal*. However, Gillespie is correct in noting the lack of *uniqueness* of the rural experience in Ireland, as in fact much about rural life is not nationally specific but universal. The rural life represented in these films could equally take place on a remote farm in Scandinavia or a smallholding in Spain, which may account for the success of both films at European film festivals.

¹⁸ See the promotional images for the films in Appendix II, p. 229.

¹⁹ Jeanette Catsoulis, 'Tensions Between Companionship and Solitude', *New York Times*, 18 November 2010 < <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/19/movies/19nothing.html> > [accessed 22 September 2011]

²⁰ Patrick Gillespie, *The Myth of an Irish Cinema: Approaching Irish-Themed Films* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008), p. 118.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

Ondine deals with unemployment, alcoholism, estranged families and marital breakdown while *Nothing Personal* explores themes of loneliness and solitude, companionship and escape, themes that are far from unique to Irish or indeed rural life. These themes unfold through the characters of the respective films. As in *The Quiet Man* and *The Field*, the two contemporary films feature outsiders as central protagonists. Unlike the older films however, both of which feature Irish-American men descended from Irish emigrants, people in search of their ancestral roots in the Connemara landscape, the migrant women in *Nothing Personal* and *Ondine* have not come to stake a claim on Irish soil. Both women are trying to escape from traumatic past lives, and although *Ondine* ends up in West Cork by chance, and Anne in Connemara by choice, the west of Ireland is portrayed as a place of refuge for them both. Consequently, the two films can be classified as belonging to what Luke Gibbons terms ‘a sub-genre of “therapeutic narratives” in Irish cinema’, in which ‘the romantic appeal of the Irish countryside and the search for home is offset against the disenchantment of life in the metropolis, but more specifically against traumas from the past for which modernity has no answer’.²² Rather than trying to ingratiate themselves with the local community as the Irish-American protagonists of *The Quiet Man* and *The Field* do, the migrant protagonists of *Ondine* and *Nothing Personal* actively avoid contact with anyone but the Irish male protagonists with whom they first interact. In common with those earlier films, however, the dramatic landscape is constantly foregrounded in the films and functions as a character in its own right, as the films reference Irish nationalist tradition in their portrayal of the connection between women (in this case migrant rather than Irish) and the landscape.

²² Gibbons, *The Quiet Man*, p. 97.

***The Front Line* (2006) David Gleeson**

The Front Line combines the genres of social realism and thriller in a plot that centres on a Congolese asylum seeker named Joe, now resident in Dublin, and a woman and child, Kala and Daniel, who join him from London, posing as his wife and son. Joe is the central character of the story, and the film reflects his experiences with the immigration service, employment and an Irish criminal gang as he struggles to make a life in Ireland for himself and his adopted family. The attitudes of the Irish people with whom he comes into contact reflect a variety of perspectives related to their class, gender, occupation and life circumstances. It is one of a number of contemporary Irish films that focus on the representation of ‘ethnic otherness’ and racism.²³ Werner Huber and Seán Crosson identify these films as the product of ‘at least [...] one strand of Irish cinema that continues to eschew the easy option of the theme-parking and exoticisation of Ireland as Ireland Inc., Eiredisney, or ‘cappuccino’ Dublin’.²⁴ Although critical of what she sees as their limited insight into the non-white characters, Zelia Asava acknowledges that such films ‘bring this social demographic from the margins to the centre of Irish visual culture by projecting mixed and black masculinities onto an Irish landscape’.²⁵

The film is an Irish/German/UK/Swedish co-production, written and directed by Irishman David Gleeson, originally from Limerick, Ireland, and now living in New York. The idea for the film came to Gleeson as he drove past a bank in Dublin and saw an African security man standing outside:

Driving on, he pondered what sort of life the security guard might have; what material deprivation he had escaped, what pressures may have impelled him halfway around the world to a city in the chaos of an economic boom, what was pushing him from his homeland, what was pulling him here. As Gleeson

²³ Sean Crosson, ‘Irish Intolerance: Exploring Its Roots in Irish Cinema’, in *Contemporary Irish Film: New Perspectives on a National Cinema*, ed. by Werner Huber and Sean Crosson ((Braumuller, Vienna, 2011), pp. 23-36. Crosson refers to *A Black Day at Blackrock* (2001, Gerry Stembridge), *When Brendan Met Trudy* (2000, Kieron J. Walsh) and *W.C* (2007, Liam O Mochain) .

²⁴ Werner Huber and Sean Crosson, ‘Contemporary Irish Film: An Introduction’, in *Contemporary Irish Film*, ed. by Huber and Crosson, pp.1-12 (p. 2).

²⁵ Zelia Asava, ‘The Nephew, Irish Jam, and The Front Line: Black and Mixed Masculinities in Irish Cinema’, in *Contemporary Irish Film*, ed. by Huber and Crosson, pp.51-66 (p. 63).

let his mind wander, he began to imagine a back story for the smiling guard.²⁶

Eventually, he travelled to the Congo, where he wrote the script for the film. It is informed by Gleeson's conversations with refugees whom he met when travelling in the country with John O'Shea, the director of Irish aid agency GOAL. The people they spoke to had witnessed and experienced events similar to those encountered by the Congolese characters in the film.²⁷ Commenting on comparisons that have been made between *The Front Line* and Terry George's *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and Michael Caton Jones's *Shooting Dogs* (2005), both of which are set during the Rwandan genocide of the mid-1990s, Gleeson emphasises the two ways in which his film is different:

The first is that those films tell their stories from an African point of view, within Africa and within the refugee camps. Ours is very much an Irish story told within Ireland. The second is that *The Front Line* certainly relates to the African genocide and deals with the same issues, but this is the aftermath, and a European point of view.²⁸

In addition, Gleeson's own experiences as a migrant in Germany and his encounters with refugees living there were a source of inspiration when writing the script.²⁹ However, his primary mode of representation of his migrant characters is through prosthetic memory, a technique I discussed in my introduction, and also in chapter one in relation to the novel *Hand in the Fire*. Despite the gulf of *actual* experience dividing the viewer and the characters in *The Front Line*, the use of prosthetic memory allows the viewers to empathise and engage with the characters, through a process whereby 'the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply-felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live'.³⁰ In his exposition of the plot, Gleeson draws on the images and narratives relayed globally by the media coverage of the war-torn Congo and weaves

²⁶ Paul Byrne, 'Ireland: Film: David Gleeson', Culture Section, *Sunday Times*, 20 August 2006 <<http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/culture/article161726.ece>> [accessed 18 August 2012]

²⁷ The Irish Film and Television Network (IFTN), 'Gleeson and Lichtenthaeler On 'The Front Line'', 24 August 2006 <<http://www.iftn.ie/news/?act1=record&only=1&aid=73&rid=4279925&tpl=archnews&force=1>> [accessed 18 September 2012] (paragraph 6 of 14).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, paragraph 4 of 14.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, paragraph 5 of 14.

³⁰ Landsberg, p. 2.

Joe, Kala and Daniel's stories around them. Gleeson describes the challenge of making 'a film of two halves. The trick was to hide the seam between the two'.³¹ He does so by intercutting between scenes set in contemporary Dublin and news footage from the period of the war along with flashback scenes to Africa primarily from Joe's perspective, to build the story behind these characters. It can be argued that in its employment of the prosthetic memory technique, the film comes uncomfortably close to recreating stereotypes of Africa, portraying it almost exclusively in terms of violence and bloodshed. This is a concern raised by Berghahn and Sternberg who argue that prosthetic memory in cinema 'may [...] draw on clichés and stereotypes and thus reinstate images and narratives that others have struggled to deconstruct'.³² However, if the purpose of prosthetic memory is to generate empathy across cultural and ethnic difference, which Gleeson suggests is his aim in his description of the film as a 'universal kind of story',³³ then the reality of the war in the Congo cannot be ignored in exploring the events behind the displacement of thousands of people, the creation of refugees, their reason for seeking asylum in Ireland and the ongoing trauma that they suffer.

The first prosthetic memory lays the foundation of Joe's back story, and is revealed through a nightmare he experiences while living in an immigrant hostel in Dublin. Scenes of torture, with images of fire and machetes flash across the screen. After the next scene, in which Joe is seen in the communal hostel bathrooms preparing to leave and move into his own flat, the opening credits appear, followed by a montage of newsreel footage from the Congo, showing armed rebels rounding people up, child soldiers carrying weapons, refugee camps, refugees clambering into boats, barbed wire, military helicopters, African people being put on planes – it is not clear whether they are been taken away to safety or returned following deportation. The effect is to indicate the trajectory of refugees and asylum seekers as they are forced to flee their homeland. The viewer is thereby given a snapshot of the circumstances and experiences which lie behind Joe's (and subsequently Kala and Daniel's) presence in Ireland. On the night that Kala and Daniel arrive from London, accompanied to Joe's flat by immigration officers, the viewer is again party to his nightmares – the screen is filled with images of a chair in a burnt-out room, men

³¹ Byrne, 'Ireland: Film: David Gleeson'.

³² Berghahn and Sternberg, 'Locating Migrant and Diasporic Cinema in Contemporary Europe', p. 17.

³³ Byrne, 'Ireland: Film: David Gleeson'.

with machetes and sounds of shouting and screaming. Kala also awakens screaming from a nightmare as the little boy Daniel cowers in the corner. These flashback dream sequences disrupt the narrative, '[breaking] into the action without any prior warning or motivation', and evoking the experience of trauma by depicting the experience of the characters with such 'painful immediacy' that they 'seem to belong to the present'.³⁴ Over the course of the film, the flashback scenes in which Joe remembers the events that preceded his flight from Congo reveal the arresting fact that he was a priest and teacher, tied to a chair by invading rebel forces and forced to watch the slaughter of the inhabitants of his village, with the exception of Kala, who miraculously survived having her throat cut, and Daniel, who hid and escaped the fate of the rest of his family. As Joe lies dying in an ambulance at the end of the film, bleeding from a stab wound sustained while rescuing Daniel from an Irish criminal gang, he has a flashback which contains his only non-violent memory in the film. He relives an event that took place in his church before the massacre, when he recorded the village children singing, Daniel among them. This memory links the past and the present as the recording of the song is on a cassette tape that Joe gives to Daniel shortly after he and Kala come to Dublin to live with him. Hamid Naficy describes the significance of such objects when he says that 'sometimes a small, insignificant object taken into exile [...] becomes a powerful synecdoche for the lost house and the unreachable home, feeding the memories of the past and the narratives of exile'.³⁵ Laura Marks concurs with this view when she argues that such objects are not employed as a aid to assimilation to the migrant's new culture, as they in fact 'make strange the place into which they arrive'.³⁶ This is true of the cassette in the film, where Joe uses it as a means for Daniel to shut out the fear and concerns of his new life. Pointing to his heart, Joe tells Daniel 'you carry those you love in here like you carry your favourite music in your head. Remember that and no-one can hurt you...ever.'

This music cassette re-appears later in the film when Daniel is being held captive by Irish criminals and Joe plays the tape through Daniel's headphones so that he hears the music rather than the sounds of the violence in the background. Scenes

³⁴ Gibbons, *The Quiet Man*, p. 58.

³⁵ Hamid Naficy, 'Framing Exile: from homeland to homepage', in *Home, Exile, Homeland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1-13 (p.5-6).

³⁶ Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 125.

such as this reflect a menacing side of Dublin, where the migrant characters are unwillingly drawn into contact with the criminal element that preys on their vulnerability as migrants. The thriller aspect of the film is reinforced by its gritty inner-city locations. Framing shots of the back streets of inner-city Dublin represent a generic urban locale and for large sections of the film there is an absence of specific Dublin landmarks to help orientate viewers. This is partly due to the fact that some scenes were shot in Hamburg, as a condition of the co-funding arrangement of the film, and, I assume, the presence of fewer identifiable locations facilitated the editing process. Additionally, this cinematographic style supports the creation of a film with the universal appeal that Gleeson was aiming to generate:

Gleeson and his cinematographer, Volker Tittel, have created a vibrant Dublin. By utilising its dark back-alleys and less salubrious environs, via a judicious use of lighting, the mean streets Joe Yumba has to walk down resonate with a palpable threat akin to cinematic depictions of New York, LA or London.³⁷

The marginalised nature of the area in which Joe's flat is located is demonstrated by shots of dirty stairwells, derelict buildings, burnt-out abandoned cars and empty concrete spaces with weeds growing among the flagstones. Of the narratives considered so far, the urban locale represented in the film most closely resembles that of McCann's short story, 'As if There Were Trees', discussed in chapter one. In the film, as in that story, many of the signifiers of gritty urban life are present - drug dealers, petty criminals, young unemployed men prowling the streets - demonstrating the parallel world that exists alongside the thriving business and banking centre of Celtic Tiger Dublin. For example, during the film Joe is grabbed from the street and thrown into and later out of the back of a van on a side street; Kala and Daniel are held hostage in a dark flat on a run-down estate. This is not an area of Dublin traversed by the Eastern European migrants of *Open-handed* or *Hand in the Fire* discussed in chapter one, who move between their work spaces of trendy bars and five star hotels. Although there are also Irish criminals in *Open-handed*, they are businessmen rather than the petty criminals of this film, and live in grand

³⁷ Declan Burke, 'Insider Trading', *Politico*, 24 August 2006
http://www.politico.ie/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2576:insider-trading&catid=216:reviews [accessed 18 September 2012] (paragraph 3 of 5).

mansions in the gentrified suburbs of the city. The Nigerian migrant, Nwanneka, in the short story 'Grafton Street of Dublin' discussed in chapter two also experiences a vastly more welcoming and non-threatening city than that through which Joe, Kala and Daniel move. This can be explained in part by the circumstances of her arrival which are less traumatic and without the mental and physical trauma experienced by migrants coming from the Congo.

The debilitating effects of their collective trauma render Joe, Kala and Daniel vulnerable to further abuse, in this case at the hands of Irish criminals. Their characters are defined by physical and mental suffering, manifested in their permanently anxious facial expressions and, in Joe and Kala's case, also inscribed on their bodies. Berghahn and Sternberg argue that the corporeality of the immigrant in recent Spanish, Greek and Italian film is 'over-signified [...] the foreign, ethnically marked body is used as a visual and narrative stratagem to foreground questions of cultural, gender and sexual identity'.³⁸ The same can be said of Irish film, as discussed by Asava in a critique of three Irish films that feature black or mixed race protagonists, one of which is *The Front Line*. Asava notes that 'as films made by white Irishmen – albeit diasporic – they reflect Frantz Fanon's complaint that as a black man 'I am overdetermined from without'.³⁹ Developing this point, Elleke Boehmer describes how 'the seductive and/or repulsive qualities of the wild or the other [...], are figured on the body' in colonial and postcolonial discourse,⁴⁰ as evident in the Irish missionary priest J. P. Whitney's description of the physical appearance of the native population of Nigeria, praising their 'fine physique, their massive build, their erect and graceful bearing'.⁴¹ Said puts such remarks into context when he refers to 'the paradox that [Wole] Soyinka himself articulates, that (he had Fanon in mind) adoring the Negro is as 'sick' as abominating him'.⁴² Boehmer also refers specifically to the explorer Richard Burton's 'spectacular fascination' with the size of African men's genitals and their sexual prowess.⁴³ Asava's and Boehmer's statements are relevant to the representation of the

³⁸ Berghahn and Sternberg, 'Introduction' in *European Cinema in Motion*, ed. by Berghahn and Sternberg, pp. 1-11 (p. 8).

³⁹ Franz Fanon, cited in Asava, p. 51. *The Nephew* and *Irish Jam* were made in 1998 and 2006 respectively.

⁴⁰ Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of women – gender and narrative in the postcolonial nation* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 129.

⁴¹ Whitney, p. 6.

⁴² Said, p. 277.

⁴³ Boehmer, p. 129.

Congolese migrants in *The Front Line*, in which there are scenes that focus on both the sexualised and the suffering body. In one, an Irishman called Eddie Gilroy, the leader of a criminal gang who kidnap Joe, threatens to ply him with Viagra in order to see what effect it has on his sexual performance. In a later scene, when he has kidnapped Kala, he stares at her lustfully and the threat of a sexual attack hangs in the air, as Kala's expression reveals her terrified state. However, Gilroy is distracted by the scarring on her throat, which the film later reveals was slit during an attack on her village. Notwithstanding his own violent and threatening behaviour towards both Joe and Kala, Gilroy is appalled at the perpetrators of Kala's wounds, seemingly regarding them as in a different league to him by virtue of their ethnic and cultural difference. 'Jesus', he says to Kala, 'what did they do to you? Animals', invoking postcolonial representations of the African other.

Kala's scars are the narrative of her flight from Africa, and testimony to Boehmer's description of how the iconography of the body begins to fragment in tandem with the fragmentation of the national narrative, so that 'where national histories are revealed as stochastic, divided, painful, where origins are obscure, the body, too, is exposed as fissured, reduced, violated'.⁴⁴ Hence, the trauma Joe and Kala have suffered is inscribed on their bodies which bear witness to the descent of their country into a state of war. The theme of suffering is further alluded to in a scene where the camera zooms in on the cover of a book in Joe's flat during a police search in the wake of the bank robbery. The book is entitled *The Wounded Healer* (1979) written by a Dutch priest called Henri Nouwen. The premise of the book is that 'woundedness' is a fundamental condition of human beings and the awareness of it can be 'a source of strength and healing when counselling others'.⁴⁵ The title of the book reflects the role Joe has taken on in protecting Daniel and Kala. It is also a foreshadowing of the revelation that Joe is a priest who was made to witness the atrocities that were visited on his village, leaving him with both physical and mental wounds. A shared emotional woundedness is the basis for Joe's connection with two Irish male characters in the film. Mikey is the caretaker at the bank where Joe works,

⁴⁴ Boehmer, p. 134.

⁴⁵ A précis of the book on Amazon.co.uk explains that 'it is Nouwen's contention that ministers are called to recognize the sufferings of their time in their own hearts and make that recognition the starting point of their service. He believes that ministers must be willing to go beyond their professional role and leave themselves open as fellow human beings with the same wounds and suffering. [...] In other words, we heal from our own wounds'.
<www.amazon.co.uk> [accessed 17/09/2012]

and is yet another example of the marginalised Irish males who have appeared in all the narratives discussed so far, irrespective of genre. He confesses to Joe that he has been living in the basement of the bank since his wife threw him out of the family home. Their first interaction is not promising, as Mikey's initial response to the sight of Joe is to mutter 'black bastard' under his breath. The same racism is evident in a scene where Joe is walking through a council estate on his way home, and his presence attracts the attention of two white Irish men. They are instantly aggressive and confront him, calling him 'Darkie', threatening to kill him, and giving chase when Joe punches one in self-defence and runs away. In both incidents, Joe is negatively determined by his ethnicity and his visible difference. His relationship with Mikey however eventually establishes itself on a firmer footing when Mikey responds to Joe's appeal for help in securing Kala and Daniel's release, recognising the importance of his 'family' to him. It emerges towards the end of the film that Harbison, the police officer who has been dealing with Joe's immigration case, is also estranged from his wife in the wake of the death of their only child. It is this mutual experience of suffering and loss that leads to his empathising with Joe, along with his growing awareness of the atrocities that forced Joe to come to Ireland. This representation places *The Front Line* within the broader framework of contemporary European cinema, in which, Isabel Santaolalla explains, 'representations of inter-ethnic encounters as well as of violence against immigrants, their deportation or death seem to lead protagonists from the majority culture to become aware of the predicaments of migrant individuals and communities within a largely inhospitable host society'.⁴⁶

While these interactions with Mikey and Harbison indicate the possibility of relationships between Irish and migrant characters, there are other profound factors that contribute to the migrants' sense of rootlessness and homelessness. Their original home no longer exists as their village has been destroyed by war and their families murdered. Ireland, however, is not 'home' either, but an intended place of

⁴⁶ Isabel Santaolalla, 'Immigrants in recent Spanish, Italian and Greek Cinema', in *European Cinema in Motion: Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe*, ed. by Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg, pp. 152-174 (p.169).

refuge. Even that is denied to them as they are drawn into Dublin's criminal underworld through blackmail and robbery. At their stage in the asylum process, survival takes priority and belonging has yet to become a possibility, much as it has for the Nigerian character Osita in the short story 'Shackles' discussed in chapter two. However, while the Nigerian migrants in 'Shackles' and 'Grafton Street of Dublin' were at least fluent in English, Joe, Kala and Daniel, in coming from a Francophone former colony have the added strain of having to communicate in a language that is foreign to them. The film contains a small number of sub-titled scenes in which the characters speak neither French nor English but their own indigenous language, a device which creates a distance between the viewers and the characters, and presents Dublin in an unfamiliar light. In a scene between Joe and Erasmus, who is now involved in criminal activity in Dublin, but who witnessed the same atrocities as Joe in the Congo, the men speak in their native tongue and when Kala and Daniel are brought to Joe's flat by immigration officers, Joe conducts a whispered conversation with them partly in their own language, after the officer has left. As with the Nigerian short stories discussed in chapter two, the insertion of African words into the narrative of the film emphasises the changing cultural environment in Dublin. The Irish have had a history of using their own native language during the transition from an Irish-speaking to an English-speaking society when they wanted to convey something secret or to undermine the authority of the British, an ironic parallel that comes to mind here. Therefore, while at one level Joe's use of his own language emphasises the sense of him as other, at another it creates a connection to an Irish audience with their own history of having their native tongue suppressed.

In addition to adjusting to a new language, the migrants in the film have to adapt to a series of new spaces in the city. Joe moves through a succession of spaces that reflect his progress through the asylum system, and the film's opening scene quickly establishes Joe's status by showing his interview with Harbison, a police officer working with the immigration department. The camera focuses on Joe's anxious face as he sits at a desk facing Harbison, who reads aloud from a document in his hand, describing Joe's current circumstances as 'applying for political asylum, citing fear of persecution from warring rebel factions. Currently living in a hostel.[...] Married with wife and one child, whereabouts unknown'. The scene is notable for Joe's silence as he listens but does not speak until the very end of the

scene. The next scene shows Joe in the hostel as he prepares to move out, having obtained permission to stay and work in Ireland. The scene captures the anonymity of this living space, as the camera pans across a dormitory of sleeping men in bunks, stopping briefly to focus on a window in a small room at the far end of the dormitory, through which a warden is clearly visible. As in 'Shackles', the residents are under constant surveillance. Joe's permit allows him to rent his own property as Nwanneka does in 'Grafton Street of Dublin', and he is next observed living in a one-bedroomed flat in a run-down area of Dublin's inner-city. The noise from the neighbouring flats can be clearly heard through the thin walls, providing a living space similar to that of Marcin in the novel *Open-handed*, where the activity of other people's lives constantly intrudes on his. Unlike Nwanneka who is still awaiting permission to work, Joe is a stage further on in the asylum process and has a job as a security guard at a bank. The bank functions as one of Augé's 'non-places' so that within his work space, Joe is 'relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences [...] he tastes for a while [...] the passive joys of identity loss, and the more active pleasure of role playing'.⁴⁷ In his role of security guard, Joe can put his past to one side and focus on the present rather than being defined by his previous history. For most of his time at work, he is seen standing to the side in the lobby area, observing people coming and going, but not engaging with them, in a similar position to Marcin in *Open-handed*.

Although Joe's living space gives him a degree of independence and autonomy, and his work space allows him to focus on the present and not the past, neither space contributes to his sense of belonging to the city. Augé describes how the creation of recognisable spaces within the new environment is 'the quintessence of urban belonging. The claim to microlocal belonging is how we express belonging to the larger place'.⁴⁸ Dermot Bolger's novel *The Journey Home* (1990) outlines the efforts of Ireland's internal rural migrants to re-create their rural landscape in their new suburban locale in 1960s Dublin, where 'they planted trees in the image of their lost homeland, put down potato beds, built timber hen-houses'.⁴⁹ Contemporary Dublin's multicultural migrants are unable to adapt their living space to the same extent because of its inner-city location and the fact that they live in rented or hostel

⁴⁷ Augé, *Non Places*, p. 103.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 114.

⁴⁹ Dermot Bolger, *The Journey Home* (London: Flamingo, 2003), p. 9.

accommodation. Instead, they have adapted one of the public spaces of the city, the long-standing Moore Street market, on one of the city's main thoroughfares. It is here that Joe, Kala and Daniel find an environment that is more familiar than anywhere else in the city. Formerly a space dominated by local Dublin traders, today those traders are surrounded by multicultural shops selling diverse foodstuffs and offering a range of culturally specific services.⁵⁰ Marks refers to such places as the materialisation of sensory experience such as 'cooking, music, and religious ritual' around which are created 'new, small sensuous geographies whose monuments are grocery stores, places of worship, coffee and tea shops, and kitchens. [...] Sensuous geographies form a kind of microculture within a mass culture'.⁵¹ This creolisation of space leading to zones of familiarity for migrant communities is also alluded to in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, where the West Indian narrator remarks that shops which previously did not even stock garlic now 'all about start to take in stocks of foodstuffs what West Indians like, and today is no trouble at all to get saltfish and rice'.⁵² The extent of the changes that have taken place in Moore Street is evident in Shane Hegarty's description of the evolution of this space, 'so quintessential as to be stereotypical of the city and its people' and 'considered the heart of Dublin', which began to change during the 1990s with the arrival of the first migrant communities :

An abandoned bingo hall on the street developed into an ethnic market with Chinese and African stalls. Shops opened along the street specialising in hair braiding, world music and ethnic food. A number of mobile phone shops, Asian markets and internet kiosks sprouted up.⁵³

Moore Street features on two contrasting occasions in *The Front Line*. The first scene captures one of the rare instances in which Joe, Kala and Daniel appear untroubled and relaxed. They walk through the crowded market, where other African migrants are visible in the crowd, clearly enjoying the bustle and energy of the stalls,

⁵⁰ See a celebration of the creolisation of this public Dublin space in *Moore Street Masala* (2009), a five minute short film directed by David O'Sullivan and featuring a Bollywood-style scenario in which an Asian shop clerk working in Moore Street falls for an Irish girl working in the estate agents across the road. Available at <www.thisisirishfilm.ie/shorts/moore-street-masala>

⁵¹ Marks, p. 245.

⁵² Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, p. 63.

⁵³ Hegarty, p. 207.

where Joe buys Kala a beaded necklace. The location features again in a less light-hearted way in a scene towards the end of the film. Some employees of Erasmus, the Congolese crime boss, are trying to find the Irish criminals who have kidnapped Daniel and Kala, and the action unfolds in the back of an African hairdressing salon. While the African gang member is on the telephone in the back, the foreground of the scene is dominated by young African women laughing and chatting in their own languages as they socialise in the salon, evidence of the extent to which the African migrant population has established itself within a certain part of the city. These scenes also raise the question of the internal exile that such alterations to the formerly familiar marketplace may engender amongst the local inhabitants. Although this is not a theme addressed by the film, it is explored from an interesting perspective in the film *Pavee Lackeen* (2005) by Perry Ogden, featuring Moore Street as seen through the eyes of Winnie, a thirteen-year-old girl from Ireland's Traveller community. Winnie is shown looking bemusedly at the multicultural marketplace in front of her, as the film alludes to the fact of the different forms of marginalisation present in Ireland in relation to both internal and external others.⁵⁴

Joe, Kala and Daniel's time browsing in Moore Street is a moment of peace in an overwhelmingly stressful time in their lives. Their migrancy is determined by fear, suspicion and uncertainty and the haunting memories of the events they have witnessed during the destruction of their war-torn homeland. As involuntary migrants, they are caught between two cultures, struggling to move forward in an environment where their visible difference makes them conspicuous, and unable to return to their war-torn homeland. There are moments of hope in the film when Joe connects with Harbison and Mikey, where the men relate on the basis of what is common to them while respecting and empathising what is different. Their visible difference however attracts the negative attention of the criminal fraternity who inhabit the same inner-city spaces in which the migrants have to live, and who exploit the migrants' vulnerability and the precariousness of their residency status.

⁵⁴ For an analysis of *Pavee Lackeen*, see Agnes Kakasi, 'Migration and Intercultural Cinema in Ireland: A New Direction', in *Contemporary Irish Film: New Perspectives on a National Cinema*, ed. by Huber and Crosson, pp. 37-50 (p. 41).

***Ondine* (2009) Neil Jordan**

Ondine was written and directed by Neil Jordan and explores the arrival of a mysterious woman in a town by the sea in West Cork, when a local fisherman named Syracuse unexpectedly catches her in his fishing nets. The film presents the possibility that the woman, who calls herself Ondine, is a mythical creature called a selkie, a seal woman. She is finally revealed to be a Romanian migrant. Through the interweaving of a realist and mythological storyline, the film moves between the gritty realism of unemployment, alcoholism and parochial mindsets in a small Irish town and the possibility of the fantastic amidst idyllic locations by the sea, encircled by mist-shrouded mountains. Syracuse allows Ondine to stay in a summerhouse owned by his late mother and located in a secluded bay. It provides Ondine with a place of refuge in which to hide from the Romanian drug dealer from whom she has escaped, a fact of which Syracuse is unaware. The love affair that develops between Syracuse and Ondine is encouraged by his daughter Annie, who lives with his estranged alcoholic wife. Their marriage at the end of the film, after the drowning of Ondine's boss, provides both a fairytale ending and a pragmatic solution to Ondine's residency issue and the threat of her deportation.

Santaolalla has noted that in Italian and Greek cinema, Eastern European women are 'conventionally identified with marginality, sexual trafficking and prostitution [...] - as, indeed, more widely'.⁵⁵ Carrie Tarr develops this point when she describes how films featuring such storylines tend to be made by 'liberal, non-diasporic (mostly male) film-makers rather than by migrant or diasporic women'.⁵⁶ *Ondine* does not challenge either of these points, given that its Romanian female protagonist is involved in trafficking (although of drugs rather than sex) and it is the work of Neil Jordan, an Irish film-maker feted for his liberal and non-conventional film-making. Jordan, who lives in Ireland, addresses both Irish and international themes and audiences in his work, crossing and blurring genre boundaries in the process. His films range from the low-budget *Angel* (1982) and *The Crying Game* (1992), to the highly commercial Hollywood studio-funded *Interview with the*

⁵⁵ Santaolalla, p. 165.

⁵⁶ Carrie Tarr, 'Gendering Diaspora: The Work of Diasporic Women Film-Makers in Western Europe', in *European Cinema in Motion*, ed. by Berghahn and Sternberg, pp.175-195 (p. 175).

Vampire (1994) and *The End of the Affair* (1999). In 1984 he directed and co-scripted Angela Carter's *Company of Wolves*, a film imbued with the gothic and fairy tale imagery and motifs which continue to be characteristic of his work.

Marguerite Pernot-Deschamps describes how Jordan, 'through superstition and myth, [...] gives shape to three very human preoccupations – the nature of hope, the quest for love, and the notion of destiny'.⁵⁷ These preoccupations, manifest through the themes of *Ondine*, are universal and apply across national and ethnic boundaries, combining local and global concerns and referencing both tradition and modernity in Irish society. While addressing the notions of 'transgression, perceived normality and appearance' in his films, his characters explore their identity 'through a slippage between one state of reality or identity and another'⁵⁸. Carole Zucker outlines the 'crossroads' of genres at which Jordan's films are located:

Neil Jordan's overarching aesthetic strategy is to locate the fantastic and the uncanny in an otherwise realistic setting. This aesthetic form then allows for the uncanny to surface ... Jordan marries the prosaic world with the poetic, the physical world to the spiritual world, the world of the beautiful to the world of darkness and terror. All boundaries are left in question.⁵⁹

A perusal of Ireland's tourism literature and imagery reveals a similar blurring of boundaries in the industry's appropriation of myth and legend to market Ireland as both magical and modern. In film, this duality extends to the rural/urban context, where urban film predominantly falls within the genre of social realism, as seen in my analysis of *The Front Line*, while the fantastic, if it features, appears in films of rural life. Two films in particular, Mike Newell's *Into the West* (1992) and John Sayle's *The Secret of Roan Inish* (1994) combine references to cultural nationalism and the romantic tradition in their narratives of 'maternal spirits and mothering selkies', depicting the possibility of the fantastic in rural Ireland.⁶⁰ Jordan similarly employs the imagery and symbolism of Celtic legend in *Ondine* in the context of

⁵⁷ Marguerite Pernot-Deschamps, *The Fictional Imagination of Neil Jordan* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), p. 49.

⁵⁸ Kevin Rockett, 'The Miracle', in *The Cinema of Britain and Ireland*, ed. by Brian McFarlane (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2005), pp. 207-215 (p. 207).

⁵⁹ Zucker, p. 130.

⁶⁰ Matthew Fee, "'Sometimes the imagination is a safer place": Fantastic spaces and The Fifth Province', in *Genre and Cinema: Ireland and Transnationalism* ed. by Brian McIlroy (London: Routledge, 2007), pp.123-135 (p.125). A selkie is a creature from Celtic legend, a seal who takes the form of a woman when on dry land, shedding and burying her seal coat for the duration of her land-based stay.

twenty-first century Ireland, through his ambiguous representation of Ondine's dual selkie/illegal immigrant identity. The film is set in Castletownbere, Co Cork on the Atlantic seaboard, and Jordan describes how the 'tone' of the film 'reflects the place down there – it's harsh, beautiful, magical, terrifying'.⁶¹ The coastal location demonstrates Jordan's continuing use of the sea and water-sites in both his writing and his filmmaking, where they function as 'the mis-en-scene of desire and sexual liberation'.⁶² The house in which Ondine hides away from the townspeople and her Romanian boss is located on a track off the main road, a place, Syracuse assures her, 'where people won't see you'. The cinematography, involving shots of the swirling water in the bay, the brooding mountains and the summer house, presents it as if in a fairytale, very effectively conveying a sense of the space's otherworldliness. In a scene following her arrival at the house, Ondine appears in a mid close-up shot sitting alone on the steps outside. As Ondine sits, she hums a haunting melody while looking out to sea, invoking the trope of the siren, a beautiful woman from Greek mythology who lures sailors to their death on the rocks. Her singing can also be considered in relation to author and storyteller Duncan Williamson's explanation that 'seals are awful fond of music, any kind, even whistling or singing'.⁶³ The camera lingers on her face drawing attention to her beauty which, combined with her enigmatic expression, recalls Synge's suggestion in relation to the Aran Islands that there may be some truth in the 'possible link between the wild mythology that is accepted on the [Aran] islands and the strange beauty of the women'.⁶⁴

The narrative is structured around allusions to mythology and storytelling, and motifs of stories run through the film. Syracuse's telling of tales is referenced at several points during the film, from his ex-wife asking him 'what kind of stories are you spinning?' when she wants to know who Ondine is, to his daughter Annie's desire for an explanation about events taking place when she asks him 'what's the story Da?'. Syracuse copes with the unbelievable fact of catching a girl in his nets by transforming it into a story to entertain Annie during her weekly kidney dialysis

⁶¹ Interview with Neil Jordan and Colin Farrell
<<http://www.entertainment.ie/movie/feature/ONDINE/2/544.htm>> [accessed 25 June 2012]

⁶² Emer and Kevin Rockett, *Neil Jordan, Exploring Boundaries* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2003), p.109, cited in Alain Chouinard, 'Water-sites in the Fiction and Cinema of Neil Jordan', *Wasafiri* (25), 2010, 73-77 (p. 73).

⁶³ Duncan Williamson, 'Preface', in *Land of the Seal People* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 2010), pp. xi-xvi (p. xiv).

⁶⁴ J.M Synge, *The Aran Islands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 10. Originally published in 1907.

session. Syracuse begins his story with the phrase ‘once upon a time’, the ‘deliberate vagueness’ with which fairytales indicate that the events about to be recounted are outside the realm of known reality.⁶⁵ Syracuse’s use of fairytales signifies his confusion about what is real and what is not in relation to the presence of Ondine. Later in the film, when she tells him that the length of her stay depends on him, Syracuse reverts to fairytale terminology again, replying that she can stay ‘forever, happily ever after, once upon a time’. Annie’s character is instrumental to the storytelling device in the film. Marina Warner discusses films which have a child at the centre of the narrative, bearing witness to the events taking place. A film’s representation of events through a child’s eyes is dependent on ‘a very long established notion of the child’s closer intimacy with the irrational and with fantasy’.⁶⁶ As discussed in chapter two in relation to the child narrator in the story ‘The summer of birds’, a child’s perspective also allows for greater openness to unfamiliar people as well as events. Consequently *Ondine*’s centralising of Annie allows the storyline that suggests Ondine is a selkie to unfold in parallel with the reality that eventually reveals her true identity. When Syracuse returns from a fishing trip with Ondine, during which she sings a haunting melody which coincides with his nets filling to overflowing with fish, he transforms this remarkable event into the next instalment of the story for Annie. She in turn embraces the story and clarifies it, telling her father that ‘that’s how they [selkies] communicate underwater. She’s a seal, she’s not human.’ Syracuse is aware that the fairytale he is constructing to address his confusion about Ondine is taking on its own life, through Annie’s acceptance of it as real. As a child, she ‘trusts what the fairy story tells, because its world view accords with [her] own’.⁶⁷ As the plot proceeds, Annie interprets unusual or unexplainable events by placing them into the world of the story. Hence, when she witnesses Ondine’s distress at finding a bundle wrapped in seaweed, she immediately assumes that it is her ‘seal coat’, and encourages her to bury it, according to the selkie myth, so that she can stay on land for seven years. She remains oblivious to the fact that the bundle is in fact the backpack of drugs that Ondine was trying to smuggle into the country. Similarly, when Ondine’s drug

⁶⁵ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (London: Penguin, 1991) p. 62.

⁶⁶ Marina Warner, ‘Through a Child’s Eyes’, in *Cinema and the Realms of Enchantment: Lectures, Seminars and Essays by Marina Warner and others*, ed. by Duncan Petrie (London: BFI Publishing, 1993), pp. 36-62 (p. 39).

⁶⁷ Bettelheim, p. 45.

dealing boss appears in town looking for her and the drugs, Annie assumes he is her 'selkie husband' who has come to take her back. When Ondine rescues Annie after she throws herself into the sea from her wheelchair, Annie says it was lucky for her that Ondine is a selkie, because she can breathe underwater. Ultimately, the film has a fairytale conclusion with the death of the villainous selkie (Romanian drug dealer) husband by drowning and the marriage of Syracuse and Ondine. The marriage means Ondine the selkie can stay with her landsman, and Ondine the illegal Romanian immigrant will not be deported. By playing with Ondine's identity in this way, Jordan ensures that her placement is problematic and her otherness reinforced until the closing scenes of the film.

The ambiguity of Ondine's identity is established from the outset. When Syracuse catches her in his nets in the opening scenes of the film, he believes that he has saved a drowning girl while his daughter Annie immediately assumes that she is a selkie. Myth and reality are played off against each other throughout the film as Syracuse struggles to maintain his belief that Ondine is real in the face of seemingly fantastic events, while Annie's belief is reinforced by *her* interpretation of these events. The line between what is real and what is fantastic is blurred by the way in which the film intercuts scenes of Annie describing the actions of a selkie with scenes of Ondine engaged in the actions described. For example, a scene of Ondine singing a haunting melody cuts swiftly to a scene of Annie telling Syracuse that 'you hear them [selkies] singing out on Seal Rock'. The scene continues with her explanation that, according to the selkie myth, a seal woman (selkie) comes ashore and buries her seal coat on land until the sea calls her back. It then cuts to a shot of Ondine on her hands and knees under the table in the summer house, where she retrieves a long coat from a heap of clothes. Throughout the film the fantastic storyline runs in parallel with the realist one, raising questions about Ondine's identity while simultaneously allowing for the possibility of a rational explanation of what is taking place. Nonetheless, she is a character defined by her 'unknownness', reinforced by the fact that she does not explain who she is, where she has come from or why she is there for most of the film. Syracuse asks her whether she is 'one of those asylum seekers' and, more poetically, whether she 'swam all the way here from Arabia?'. Despite the accuracy of his guess that she is an asylum seeker, albeit not from Arabia, which Syracuse names to denote an exotic, far-away location, Ondine does not answer his question. In fact, there is no reference to where she is

from until almost the end of the film when she finally confesses to Syracuse that she is ‘a prisoner and a drug mule from Romania’. Her confession is followed by a flashback scene to her on a boat with the drug dealer for whom she is working. As a coast guard helicopter hovers overhead, the dealer makes her jump overboard with a backpack of heroin as he is unable to swim. Thus her arrival in Syracuse’s net is explained and the fact that she is in Ireland as a result of a drug trafficking venture that has gone wrong rather than specifically seeking asylum.

Names are significant in the film, and are used to conceal as much as to reveal identity. When Ondine claims not to know her name, Syracuse suggests that she lost her memory ‘in the water’. Later, when he asks if she has remembered her name, she suggests he call her Ondine, explaining that it is the name of a god who came from the water.⁶⁸ Syracuse himself is named after a city in Sicily, founded by the ancient Greeks and the birthplace of Archimedes. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Jordan, with his love of water motifs, chose to name the character after the birthplace of a man whose major scientific discovery was based on the immersion of a body in fluid.⁶⁹ Syracuse tells Ondine that the people of the town mispronounce his name as ‘Circus... to let on that I’m a clown.’ The mispronunciation of Eastern European characters’ names in the novels discussed in chapter one was similarly employed to mock and humiliate the characters. In this film, the reduction of Syracuse’s name, with its associations of history, civilization, culture and knowledge to a word implying light entertainment and lack of gravitas reflects the film’s interplay between myth and reality. In addition, this manipulation of his name robs it of its original importance and reconfigures it as a signifier of foolishness. By extension Syracuse is robbed of his self-respect and is defined by the associations of his re-named self rather than those of his original name. As he becomes more involved with Ondine, who persists in calling him by his correct name, he begins to correct the pronunciation of people who refer to him as Circus. In reclaiming his proper name, he is reclaiming his self-respect.

⁶⁸ The Encyclopedia Britannica describes Ondine as ‘A mythological figure of European tradition, a water nymph who becomes human when she falls in love with a man but is doomed to die if he is unfaithful to her. Derived from the Greek figures known as Nereids, attendants of the sea god Poseidon, Ondine was first mentioned in the writings of the Swiss author Paracelsus, who put forth his theory that there are spirits called “undines” who inhabit the element of water’ <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/614337/undine>> [accessed 27 September 2012]

⁶⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/archimedes.shtml> [accessed 14 September 2012]

His fortunes also appear to turn as a consequence of Ondine's arrival, as her singing corresponds to a huge increase in the number of lobsters in Syracuse's pots. This leads him to infer that she brings him luck, as if the fish are responding to the singing. In one particular scene on board his fishing boat, the camera cuts to an underwater shot with Ondine's singing still audible, but with a chanting, echoing effect replicating the distortion of sound that occurs when music or any other sound is heard from under the water. Although Syracuse tries to shrug off the possibility that Ondine's singing is the reason for his hugely increased catch, he nevertheless asks her not to sing for anyone else. The same scenario is reprised later in the film when Syracuse and Ondine are trawling, and as Ondine sings Syracuse pulls in a bulging net full of salmon. Mystified, he comments that 'you don't catch salmon trawling'.⁷⁰ Myth and reality collide again towards the end of the film when Annie is flicking through the television channels and the contemporary Icelandic band, Sigur Ross appear on the TV screen, singing the song with the haunting melody that Ondine has been singing throughout. Syracuse realises then that the song is not a magical selkie song, but, nonetheless, his fishing successes remain unexplained. Maria Pramaggiore notes Jordan's claim that 'he often associates a film with a particular song that capture's the story's emotional texture'.⁷¹ In the case of *Ondine*, he appears to have found that association in Sigur Ros's music, which is described by rock critics as 'a sonic transmutation of the sublimely melancholic Icelandic landscape',⁷² and indeed the selkie myth appears in Icelandic folklore. The revelation of Ondine's illegal immigrant status sets up the closing of the film for an ending that references both fairytale and realist elements. The final scene opens with a shot of Ondine and Syracuse on his boat, safe now that the Romanian drug dealer is dead, as they sail to town to get married, leading to the happy ending that is a central theme of folktales and achieved through 'liberation in the broadest sense: liberation from imprisonment, from marriage to the monster, from superior adversaries'.⁷³ From the realist point of view, the marriage is a pragmatic move to ensure that Ondine is not

⁷⁰ The salmon has its own significance in Irish mythology, symbolising wisdom and knowledge.

⁷¹ Maria Pramaggiore, *Irish and African-American Cinema: Identifying Others and Performing Identities, 1980-2000* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 39.

⁷² Gerard Mazarati, 'Popstars on Ice', *New York Times* <<http://www.sigur-ros.co.uk/media/articles/newyork0.php>> [accessed 26 September 2012]

⁷³ Lutz Röhrich, *Folktales and Reality*, trans. by Peter Tokofsky (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 210.

deported, but allowed to stay in this beautiful but far from mythical place whose social problems frequently intrude in the film.

Although the ending suggests that Ondine has made the coastal town in Ireland her home, her arrival there was not the result of a search for a place to relocate to, but rather the outcome of her escape from an unsuccessful drug-running incident. As no reference to her previous life is made during the film, apart from the criminal activity that has sent her into hiding, she appears rootless and there is little context available within which to examine her behaviour or to understand her motivations. Her desire to remain hidden reflects her reluctance to venture into the wider community, so that insight into her character is gained through her interactions with Syracuse and Annie. Although guarded in her exchanges, her words and her actions demonstrate a desire to belong. Arriving back at the summerhouse with Syracuse one evening after a day out with Annie, Ondine comments as they walk in the door, 'Strange. Feels like home'. Annie is keen to encourage the relationship between her father and Ondine, informing Ondine that 'Selkie women often find unexpected happiness with a landsman'. However, as their relationship becomes more intimate, Syracuse's uncertainty about Ondine's identity renders the idea of what constitutes her home problematic. Hence, on the only occasion in the film when he turns back to alcohol, his frustration at his lack of information about Ondine is revealed. He takes her out in his boat to the place called Seal Rock, telling her that he's taking her home. This is near the spot where he caught her in his nets and where Annie has told him that seals congregate. Angered by Ondine's refusal to explain the presence of the man who has been asking about her in the town, who it turns out is her former drug boss, Syracuse leaves her behind on the rocky outcrop. As he sails away, he announces, 'Your kind and mine don't belong together.' His comment and his abandonment of her re-position Ondine as other, a different 'kind' to him. When he subsequently sobers up, and hears the pop group Sigur Ros singing her 'selkie' song on television, his lingering doubts about her identity are dispelled. Returning to find her on Seal Rock, she asks him to take her home, and when enquires as to where that is, Ondine, as usual, gives an enigmatic answer, 'Where do you think?' This is the point in the film at which she dispels the myths, confesses her true identity, her real name (Ionna) and the circumstances of her arrival in West Cork. Before the resolution in the form of a fairytale ending can take place, however, her return to a home with Syracuse and Annie is delayed by the realist storyline involving an

altercation with her Romanian boss, and Ondine's subsequent removal to a detention centre while her illegal migrant status is investigated.

The storyline involving Ondine's vulnerability to the Romanian drug dealer reflects the lack of agency exhibited by the Eastern European female migrants in the novels discussed in chapter one, albeit to a lesser degree. Although not involved in prostitution as Agnieszka is in *Open-handed*, or dependent on predatory men like Liuda in *Hand in the Fire*, Ondine's sexuality nevertheless features strongly in the film through shots that linger on her body and in terms of her relationship with Syracuse. When buying clothes for her at a shop in the town, he chooses a sexy black dress and also shoves a selection of underwear into his pockets to take to her. Throughout the film her body is frequently the focus of scenes that reflect the male gaze. A scene in which Ondine tries on the clothes alone at the cottage is shot in shadow, the camera framing her as she dresses in front of a mirror. A shot of her hand inside a black fishnet stocking echoes the first image of her in the film's opening scene, her body encased in Syracuse's net. Later, when she tells Syracuse that the underwear he got for her is too tight 'around the edges', he responds by saying 'you have edges?', clearly acknowledging his appraisal of her body. A couple of scenes that are less overtly body-related nonetheless convey the sexual tension between the characters. One takes place on Syracuse's boat when Ondine steers the tiller with her foot in order to stay out of sight of the coast guard. Syracuse's facial expression conveys embarrassment as the camera focuses on her extended leg as she slowly and sensuously moves it from side to side to steer. The same camera angle is used again in a scene at the cottage, when Syracuse walks in as Ondine is trying on some high-heeled lace up purple ankle boots. The shot focuses on her leg as Syracuse ties up the bootlaces, again looking coy and self-conscious. While these scenes serve to indicate Syracuse's physical attraction to Ondine, they can also be read as alluding to the mythical selkie strand of the story, the camera's focus on Ondine's legs drawing attention to the fact that her legs are the notable evidence of her human form. The film plays with seal imagery in relation to Ondine's body throughout. She is frequently dressed in black so that in framing shots of her from a distance, reclining on a wooden raft or on a rack, her silhouette resembles that of a seal.⁷⁴ As the camera zooms in, Ondine's human form becomes clear. At other times

⁷⁴ See the top right hand corner of the image for the film in Appendix II, p. 229.

the camera renders her movements in a manner suggestive of the languid movements of a seal. In a number of close-up shots, such as one in which Annie meet hers for the first time, Ondine emerges from the water after a swim, evidently a human woman, but with her wet hair sleek and plastered to her head and her eyes wide open in surprise so that she again resembles a seal. The overall effect is to maintain the suggestion that Ondine is a selkie throughout the film, while also emphasising her physical female beauty and the beguiling effect of both on Syracuse. Her otherness arises from the impossibility of defining her, from her difference to everyone else around. Even her true identity, that of a Romanian migrant, when revealed retains the allure of difference, albeit real rather than mythical.

Ondine's otherness is maintained by her attachment to the private spaces of the summer house and Syracuse's boat. Both house and boat are detached from the town and are spaces in which she can remain invisible to the local community. She makes the house homely by putting her personal touches on it, bringing in wild flowers from outside, rearranging furniture, draping it with colourful fabrics and taking down old curtains to let the light in. Referencing the fairytale aspect of the film, Syracuse's daughter Annie comments when she visits that 'You've cleaned it up. Like Snow White.' The house is defined as a female space and a refuge, from Syracuse's first mention of it as a place in which his mother lived from time to time. He goes on to describe her as having been 'a kind of a loner. A bit like you. Didn't like people much. She was a kind of gypsy.' This description evokes the migrant woman who is the protagonist of *Nothing Personal*, which is the next film I discuss, and is consistent with the portrayal of migrant women in both films as being at a remove from mainstream society. When Ondine eventually braves the public space of the town, Syracuse prepares her for the reaction of the local people, telling her 'tis a small town, everyone stares'. The truth of his remark becomes clear when the camera cuts to a shot of the window of the shop in which Ondine, Syracuse and Annie are browsing. A crowd of local people are up against the glass, clamouring to see her, intrigued by the exotic stranger in their midst. The physical barrier provided by the window is a boundary between the private world in which Ondine exists with Syracuse and Annie, and the public one which she actively avoids, and in which she is a stranger. It is also the space which contains the Romanian drug dealer who is searching for her and hence is a dangerous one. When she gets caught up in events that occur within the public space, her illegal status is revealed and she is

temporarily put into an immigrant hostel, until Syracuse comes to her rescue with his offer of marriage. The contrasting worlds of the private and public spaces encapsulate the mythical and realist versions of the film's plot, the private space of Ondine's world with Syracuse allowing for the possibility of the fairytale, while the public space contains the realist storyline and a harsher version of reality.

By closing the film with the marriage of Syracuse and Ondine, Jordan moves Ondine out of the fantastic narrative of the landscape and into the realist narrative of the town. Her arrival in Syracuse's life offers him a chance of a fresh start also, and because she has not witnessed the experiences of his former life, she does not judge him by his past as the townspeople do. Consequently she restores his self-esteem. Similarly, Syracuse does not condemn Ondine's criminal past but instead rescues her from it. Their relationship brings them both in from the margins and gives them stability. In effect, Ondine's migrancy is the catalyst for new beginnings for both characters, and in that sense it is a representation similar to that of the Serbian migrant Vid in *Hand in the Fire* as discussed in chapter one, who discarded his past to begin afresh in Ireland.

***Nothing Personal* (2009) Urszula Antoniak**

Nothing Personal is the directorial debut of the Polish director Urszula Antoniak and explores the physical and emotional journey of Anne, a Dutch woman who leaves her home in Amsterdam and travels to the west of Ireland. In Connemara she happens upon a house in a remote location, owned by a widower called Martin, for whom she agrees to work in exchange for food. They come to an agreement that they will not discuss or ask each other anything about their personal lives. Antoniak explains that she wanted the two characters to be ‘archetypes of the old sage and the eternal rebel’.⁷⁵ By creating a scenario within the film whereby the characters agree not to share anything personal about themselves, Antoniak explores the question of how people who are essentially strangers to each other can form a relationship, explaining, ‘That’s basically what the picture is about – how much do you need to know, or want to know, about the other person?’⁷⁶ The difficulty of sustaining such an arrangement becomes evident as the characters’ curiosity about each other grows and they get to know each other through more indirect means such as music, while the trajectory of their relationship is represented through the meals they initially eat apart and eventually together. The film ends with Martin’s suicide at the point when Anne appears to have found a form of inner peace through their largely self-sufficient and isolated existence. His death sees her moving on again, her enigmatic mask restored as the place appears to hold no significance for her without his presence. The film explores themes of loneliness, refuge, the healing power of the natural world, the comfort of routine and the tentative development of a relationship between two people who choose to live on the margins of society, spatially and emotionally.

Antoniak fits into the category of ‘transnationally mobile’ filmmaker, defined by Berghahn and Sternberg as those who ‘move fluidly across Europe [...] while migratory identities may be of interest to them, so are a host of other, very different themes’.⁷⁷ Eamonn Wall highlights the value of an outsider’s perspective on a location such as the Irish West, mentioning in particular the contemporary English

⁷⁵ Urszula Antoniak, *Nothing Personal* DVD interview.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Iordanova, p. 65.

cartographer and writer Tim Robinson, who lives in Connemara and whose work is an example of how an 'outsider' can refresh and revitalise the representation of a place.⁷⁸ For Antoniak, the west of Ireland is a site for exploration of the human rather than the national condition as the film filters universal themes through this specific location. She chose to film in Connemara because it fulfilled her requirement for 'very dramatic landscape that kind of resembles her [Anne's] state of mind'.⁷⁹ The landscape is shrouded in various forms of rain, from drizzle and mist to torrential downpours. Gibbons explains that rain-laden skies and wild landscape operated as signifiers of 'Irishness' in the melodramas and stage productions of the Victorian period.⁸⁰ In *Nothing Personal*, they signify, if not 'Irishness' directly, then at least the wildness and atavism which Irishness implied to those Victorian audiences. Antoniak uses the German word 'unheimlich' to refer to the Connemara landscape, defining it as 'mysterious, inhuman in a way'.⁸¹ This is equally a reflection of Anne's character in the film as she remains essentially unknown and unknowable throughout. In his essay 'The 'Uncanny'' (1919), Freud cites Jentsch's statement that 'in telling a story, one of the most successful devices for creating uncanny [unheimlich] effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure is a human being or an automaton'.⁸² Hence, the uncertainty about Anne's background or motivation creates an 'unheimlich' effect so that she remains as remote as the landscape. The film's 'awe in attention to the natural world'⁸³ is a convention of post-pastoral narrative, which according to Terry Gifford steers a path around the anti-pastoral as well as the idealised representations of the rural idyll to arrive at 'a vision of accommodated humans, at home in the very world they thought themselves alienated from by their possession of language'.⁸⁴ Anne and Martin constitute 'accommodated humans' with their daily routine lived in tune with the seasons as they tend to the vegetable garden, cut turf from the bog and collect seaweed from the shore. This lifestyle does not entail a rejection of modernity in the film however, as the characters access elements of it, in the form of labour-saving

⁷⁸ Wall, *Writing the Irish West*, p. 31.

⁷⁹ Antoniak, *Nothing Personal* DVD interview.

⁸⁰ Luke Gibbons, 'Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema', in *Cinema and Ireland*, ed. by Rockett, Gibbons and Hill, pp.194-257 (p. 211).

⁸¹ Antoniak, *Nothing Personal* DVD interview.

⁸² Jentsch, cited in 'The Uncanny' by Sigmund Freud < web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf > [accessed 09 January 2013]

⁸³ Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 152.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

devices and in entertainment terms through radio, cds and music players.

Contemporary Ireland is represented as a space combining the traditional and the modern and open to outside influences.

It is not just the dramatic external world that features in the film. Antoniak explains that ‘sixty per cent of the movie happens in the house, or around the house [...] everything in this house [had] an aura because it was something like a hundred years old; every book and painting on the wall, the walls themselves’.⁸⁵ Her attribution of *aura* to objects echoes the anthropologist Kathleen Stewart’s description of how ‘objects settle into scenes of life and stand as traces of a past still resonant in things’.⁸⁶ Tradition and modernity exist side by side in the objects of the house. The camera’s focus on the characters’ daily routine of working and eating, and the objects that are part of it is a key component of the film’s style. Bakhtin describes this as ‘commonplace, philistine cyclical everyday time’ in relation to the novel, stating that ‘time here is without event and therefore almost seems to stand still. [...] It is a viscous and sticky time that drags itself slowly through space. And therefore it cannot serve as the primary time of the novel [or film]’.⁸⁷ I would argue that the uneventful time of this film does not preclude it from being the film’s primary time frame. Rather, the viewer ‘reads’ the film in an alternative way, finding in the characters’ performance of their chores what Boland describes as ‘a sequence and repetition which [allow] the deeper meanings to emerge: a sense of belonging, of sustenance, of a life revealed, and not restrained, by ritual and patterning’.⁸⁸ The film’s combination of uneventful time and absence of action locate it in a category that Kelvan calls ‘undramatic’ films, ‘whose compositions are not influenced by eventful scenarios’ and he compares viewing them to viewing a painting, where ‘an observer’s absorption in this painting might be because of the painting’s visual prominence, its vivid rendering of uneventful domestic objects, food, clothing and décor’.⁸⁹ Running through the film are a series of close-up shots reminiscent of a Dutch still-life as described above – in one scene where Anne is listening to opera on a portable cassette recorder, the camera acts as her eyes, showing what she is seeing

⁸⁵ Antoniak, *Nothing Personal* DVD interview.

⁸⁶ Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 56.

⁸⁷ Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel’, in *The Dialogic Imagination : Four Essays by Mikhail Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist, pp. 84-258, (p. 247).

⁸⁸ Boland, p. 170.

⁸⁹ Andrew Klevan, *Disclosures of the Everyday: Undramatic Achievement in Narrative Film* (Wiltshire: Flick Books, 2000), p. 53.

through a succession of static shots; the vegetable garden in the rain, a boat moored at the water's edge, colourful clothes on the washing line. The camera then moves indoors, framing a shot of the objects on the kitchen table - a bowl of fruit, a cake of soda bread, a teapot, a jug and a half-full glass of milk. Stewart describes how a still life 'gives the ordinary the charge of an unfolding. It is the intensity born of a momentary suspension of narrative'.⁹⁰ As the film has minimal dialogue, the characters' relationship 'unfolds' through the execution of their daily 'ordinary' tasks, transformed by the camera into moments of resonance.

The composition of the shots is such that 'our consciousness is heightened by becoming alive to [characters'] experience even within mundane scenarios'.⁹¹ In the film there are scenes where the camera focuses on Anne sorting through her things in her tent; inspecting and rearranging the crockery in Martin's kitchen; peeling potatoes; doing laundry; ironing; setting a table. In the absence of dialogue as a means of character exposition, the manner in which Anne executes these mundane tasks becomes meaningful to the viewer as an insight into her character. Klevan makes a similar assessment when he identifies elements of the thriller genre that have been transposed to 'undramatic' films, moving them out of a suspenseful context into a less eventful one. The element in question here is the desire to understand what motivates a character, and he explains that 'the discovery process which [the film] then reproduces is one akin to getting to know people in daily life. By subtly shifting the contexts within which we experience the characters, the film gradually adjusts what the viewer feels about them'.⁹²

Antoniak explains that she deliberately avoided explaining the two characters' motivations or revealing anything about their pasts.⁹³ While focusing on a female character who is clearly a migrant in the sense that she has moved from her home country to another, Anne's national identity is not the focus of the film, as it was in the case of the migrant characters in the novels and short stories discussed in chapters one and two. The film is concerned with *personal* rather than national identity, and Anne's character was inspired by the female character Mona in the French film *Vagabonde* (1985) by Agnès Varda.⁹⁴ The similarities between Anne

⁹⁰ Stewart, p. 19.

⁹¹ Klevan, p. 57.

⁹² Ibid., p. 179.

⁹³ Antoniak, *Nothing Personal* DVD Interview.

⁹⁴ Ibid. The French title of the film is *Sans toit ni loi*.

and Mona resonate in Alison Smith's comment that in *Vagabonde*, 'of Mona herself we learn very little, except that she remains outside all the social structures which surround her, and that her insistence on continual movement ultimately leads to total detachment'.⁹⁵ Home is consequently an elusive and transient concept in *Nothing Personal*. If home is 'a place/site, a set of feelings/cultural meanings, and the relations between the two',⁹⁶ then the end of a relationship implied at the opening of the film severs Anne's relationship with her home in Holland, while Martin's death at the end of the film disrupts her relationship to Connemara and ends any prospect of it as a new home. In many ways, *Nothing Personal* is characteristic of the American road movie genre, which Crang describes as offering 'an escape from being tied to places'.⁹⁷ Crang refers to film director Wim Wenders's portrayal of America as a country that 'privileges mobility', an idea of being at home while simultaneously moving on that contrasts with the perception of home as belonging to a specific place.⁹⁸ Anne's migration from place to place indicates that for her, as for Marcin and Agnieszka in the novel *Open-handed*, home is a mobile concept.

Anne's initial rupture with home is signified in the opening scene of the film, set in her apartment in Amsterdam. The camera focuses on her sitting in an empty room as people outside riffle through boxes of her possessions. She takes a ring off her wedding finger, introducing Bakhtin's chronotope of the 'threshold', the action signifying a 'break' with her former life.⁹⁹ Time proceeds chronologically as the camera tracks the course of Anne's journey to Connemara, the first few scenes concentrating on her progress across a windswept Ireland largely on foot. The only sounds are the discordant and ethereal soundtrack by Ethan Rose that is in keeping with the ambient sound of the wind and the waves also audible in the film.¹⁰⁰

Walking is part of Anne's process of dissociating from her home in Holland and connecting to the new environment in Ireland and is also therapeutic, a walking

⁹⁵ Alison Smith, *Agnès Varda* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 115.

⁹⁶ Blunt and Dowling, p. 2-3.

⁹⁷ Crang, p. 114.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', p. 248.

¹⁰⁰ Ethan Rose is an American sound artist and composer. He appears to be a particularly appropriate choice by Antoniuk, with his music described as reflecting 'his varied interests in old technologies, new sounds, and all things both inside and out', in keeping with the film's blending of the elements of old and new Ireland, and the fact that, like Anne and Martin, he reportedly enjoys 'the natural world in all its splendor, cooking and eating delicious food, bridging gaps, reading books [...]'. 'Ethan Rose' <http://www.last.fm/music/Ethan+Rose> [accessed 12 March 2013]

rather than a talking cure in this film of few words. Díog O'Connell explores how certain Irish films transfer the American road movie to the Irish landscape, utilising the genre's central convention of a narrative trajectory of 'escape from some sort of threat, unwanted lifestyle or just the norm' and 'the embarkation on an existential journey in the pursuit of knowledge or a new lifestyle, as a means of challenging the status quo and re-imagining an alternative'.¹⁰¹ The concepts of 'escape' and an 'existential journey' make this genre relevant to the representation of Anne's journey. Rather than the Irish motorways that symbolise modern Ireland, O'Connell points out that the roads that features in contemporary Irish film are the more traditional 'byways' that pre-date the expansion of the country's road network and symbolise a simpler time.¹⁰² Hence, we only see a modern motorway in one of the opening scenes of the film when Anne is travelling by car to the port to catch the ferry to Ireland. From there, her journey to Connemara takes her across remote and largely empty stretches of rural roadway.

The iconography of the bleak, barren Connemara landscape fulfils the trope of isolation and space that is a key element of the road movie. In a scene mid-way through the film, the two protagonists are walking home in the early hours of the morning after an impromptu evening in the pub. The screen is filled with the endless vista of the road behind and before them, and the complete absence of any habitation or other human life. In fact, the film's main departure from the American road movie genre is the absence of the car as a central element. This is a significant difference between American and European road movies generally, as Mazierska and Rascaroli point out that in place of the car or motorbike that characterise the American form, European films 'often opt for public transport [...] if not hitchhiking or travelling on foot'.¹⁰³ Anne's only encounter with a vehicle is when she hitches a ride in a truck and has to jump out when the driver starts making sexual overtures. She becomes aware of a potential sexual assault when he begins to undo his trousers while driving. The camera pans from his face to his lap and then her face, where her expression reveals her sudden realisation of what is happening. She jumps out of the moving truck, and screams after him, visibly distressed. He refers to her as a 'mad bitch',

¹⁰¹ Díog O'Connell, *New Irish Storytellers: Narrative Strategies in Film* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect Books 2010), p. 47.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁰³ Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli, *Crossing New Europe: Postmodern Travel and the European Road Movie* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), p. 5.

compounding the attempted sexual assault with a verbal one. This scene partly adheres to a convention that pre-dated the feminist road movies of the 1990s such as Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise* (1991) where women, when they appeared on the road, are usually hitchhiking and reliant on 'vehicles invariably belonging to men [...] women are often passengers in men's cars, thus adopting a passive and subaltern positioning'.¹⁰⁴ Anne's reaction challenges this representation as she refuses to be a passive victim. Nevertheless, the scene reflects her vulnerability as a woman travelling alone. This is emphasised by shots of the landscape, where the camera pans out to reveal a panoramic view of the bog stretching farther than the eye can see, against which Anne appears as a tiny figure dwarfed by the natural surroundings. Antoniak plays with the scale of Connemara's natural features rather like Robert Flaherty did in his film *Man of Aran* (1934) by 'positioning his subjects so that they seemed engulfed by the mass of land and sky. Man [...] is part of nature but subordinate to it'.¹⁰⁵

This combination of Anne's being at the mercy of nature and yet being part of it is reinforced by the rain-sodden scenes that are dominated by enormous brooding mountains and the endless vistas of fields and bogs, but which also portray her as blending into her surroundings, her red hair and earth-toned clothing camouflaged amongst the orange, red and brown shades of the landscape. This representation is consistent with the primitivist representation of woman in both colonial and nationalist discourse. In her work on the iconography of the Irish colleen, a figure representative of rural Irish womanhood and portrayed as 'either beautiful or pretty with long dark or red hair',¹⁰⁶ Barbara O'Connor explains that 'the most typical background image of rock, bog with mountain and water/sea included embeds her [the Irish colleen] firmly in a rural landscape – in nature'.¹⁰⁷ Antoniak describes how she strove to prepare the actress who plays Anne (Lotte Verboek) for the role by asking her 'not to look in a mirror, listen to music, wear makeup or see people for about three weeks before filming began' in order to bring her to a state

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 199.

¹⁰⁵ Barton, p. 48.

¹⁰⁶ Barbara O'Connor, "'Colleens and Comely Maidens': Representing and Performing Irish Femininity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in *Ireland in Focus: Film, Photography and Popular Culture*, ed. by Eoin Flannery (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2009), pp. 144-167, p. 146.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 148.

similar to that of her character, who ‘becomes one with nature’.¹⁰⁸ The representation of Anne and nature as one also has echoes of Synge’s writing about the women of the Aran Islands, when he remarked on the ‘natural picture of exquisite harmony and colour’ formed by sunlight falling on a young woman with a red dress in front of some ‘nets and oilskins’.¹⁰⁹ This is the type of imagery captured in shots of Anne’s journey through the landscape. The camera lingers on still-life framings of Anne’s red hair against her vivid blue sleeping bag and tent. Throughout the film her red hair draws the viewer’s eye and signifies her elusive character and fiery personality, while the unexpected combination of her Irish looks and her non-Irish accent (and occasional lapses into Dutch) reinforces the fluidity of her identity. Discussing colonial discourse’s deployment of red-headedness to construct Irish otherness,¹¹⁰ Amanda Third argues that ‘redheaded women are constructed as particularly prey to their passions, as the outer limit of women’s potential for irrationality. At best they are spontaneous, at worst, impulsive’.¹¹¹ Anne’s unconventional and at times blatantly anti-social behaviour, such as in a scene where she eats food from a dustbin to the disgust of a family picnicking nearby, can be regarded as falling within ‘the outer limit’. While on the one hand she embodies the stereotypical representation of the irrational, impulsive woman at the mercy of her passions, on the other she defies such simplistic categorisation because of her independence and lack of attachment to people or places.

Anne’s journey comes to an end, at least temporarily, as a series of tracking shots follow her across increasingly remote and mountainous terrain until, in a scene reminiscent of fairytales where the female protagonist emerges from the forest to find a house, she arrives at a point on a height, looking down at the island on which Martin’s house is located. As she makes her way to the house, having observed Martin leaving by motor boat, the camera switches from the dramatic outdoor environment to the more intimate interior of the house and follows her through the rooms. Extending the fairytale motif, Anne resembles a Goldilocks character, a stranger trespassing in a house while the owner is away. Like Goldilocks, she

¹⁰⁸ Antoniak, *Nothing Personal* DVD interview.

¹⁰⁹ J.M Synge, *Plays, Poems and Prose* (London: J.M Dent and Sons, 1961), p. 283.

¹¹⁰ Amanda Third, ‘Does the rug match the carpet?’, in *The Irish in Us: Irish, Performativity and Popular Culture*, ed. by Diana Negra (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 220-253 (p. 229).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

interferes with objects in the house. She rehangs the cups on the traditional dresser so that they all face the same direction. She sits on the chairs, listens to CDs and tries out Martin's bed. In his analysis of the significance of Goldilocks' arrival in the bears' house, Alan C. Elms discusses how, 'at first glance the story may appear to concern an intrusion into a private space', but in fact may have an alternative significance related to 'a disturbance of the proper order of things. In virtually every version of the tale, stress is placed on the orderliness of the bears' household organisation'.¹¹² Extrapolating from this argument, it is possible to interpret Anne's intrusion into the private space of Martin's house, revealed by the camera to be extremely tidy and orderly, as just such a 'disturbance' of the 'proper order of things'. When she reaches the bedroom, a series of mid- close-up shots show her taking off her clothes and getting onto the bed, wrapping herself in the fresh cotton sheets. The scene is sensuous rather than sexual, reflecting Anne's physical pleasure in the feel of the sheets after days spent sleeping outdoors. Although she tidies up the sheets before she leaves, she places a strand of her distinctive red hair on the sheet in a deliberate disruption of the orderliness of the room. In the wider context of Irish society, Anne's arrival in the house, uninvited, can be seen as symbolic of the arrival of migrant groups to Ireland, 'uninvited' by the general population amongst whom they must live. As I discussed in chapter two in relation to the short stories 'The summer of birds' and 'As if There Were Trees', some members of the Irish public see migrants as disrupting the existing order. However, when Martin meets Anne, he appears unfazed, and he registers no surprise at her arrival in such an isolated space. He simply accepts the fact of her presence, inviting her to leave her temporary home in a tent and to take a room in his house while providing her with work and food. As a metaphor for migrant and host, the film demonstrates tolerance, acceptance and welcome. Nevertheless, their interactions are characterised by a mutual wariness at the outset and proceed with caution.

The characters maintain a certain distance by withholding their names from each other for most of the film. This device is introduced in a scene in which the two characters first meet, opening with a shot of Anne sitting on a bench outside the

¹¹² Alan C. Elms, "'The Three Bears': Four Interpretations', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 90 (1977), 257-273, (p. 265) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/539519>> [accessed 07 September 2012]

kitchen door of Martin's house. When Anne does not reply to his tentative greeting, he perseveres nonetheless:

Martin: 'What's your name?'

Anne: 'It's none of your fucking business'.

He responds by kicking the bench and she falls off. Admonishing her for her rudeness, he offers to feed her in exchange for work, and no further reference to her name is made at that point. They return to the subject a little later in the film, when they have agreed that she will work for him on condition that they do not discuss personal matters. He does, however, enquire about her name again, explaining that 'I might want to call you or something'. Anne replies, 'If you want to call me, you can just call me "You"'. They largely maintain this agreement until near the end of the film, when Anne calls Martin by his name, having discovered it on a bottle of pills. He reacts angrily, despite having been the one who originally wished to know her name. Although he has also found out Anne's name, he never uses it and even addresses her, 'Dear You', in his suicide note at the end of the film. The effect of not having the characters address each other by name is similar to that described by O'Connell in relation to the unnamed Czech and Irish protagonists of the film *Once*, where 'the narrative intimacy [is] confined to *them* rather than shared with the audience'.¹¹³

Intimacy is also demonstrated by the characters' physical gestures. Describing *Nothing Personal* in terms of a poetic genre, Antoniak sees it as belonging to the 'haiku' rather than the epic form of much contemporary commercial cinema, a fitting analogy given that one of the conventions of the haiku form is that 'feelings are suggested [...] rather than directly stated'.¹¹⁴ Consequently, in the film feelings are suggested through touch, which functions as a communicative tool in place of conversation. In a scene where Anne and Martin are sitting in silence on the bench outside the house, the camera zooms in for a close-up of their hands as they move slowly towards each other until touching. Anne slides her hand under Martin's

¹¹³ O'Connell, p. 174. In the film *Once*, the lead characters are never addressed by name, and are referred to as 'guy' and 'girl' in the credits.

¹¹⁴ Chris Baldick, *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 148.

and he covers it gently. The camera maintains its focus on their hands for a few seconds before the scene fades out, without revealing their faces. Another small but equally significant gesture takes place in an earlier scene, when Martin asks Anne to watch over him as he is afraid he may die in the night. As they lie facing one another on his bed, he tentatively reaches out to touch her hair. This is not a sexual overture but a simple need for physical contact. The closing scenes of the film in which Anne discovers Martin's body are characterised by the complete absence of language, apart from Martin's voice-over as Anne reads his suicide note. Her grief is expressed not verbally but physically, in a scene resembling a ritualistic rite. It is shot in a series of mid close-ups of the bed in very bright, white light as Anne wraps Martin's body in the white bed sheets, forming a shroud and arranging his limbs into a foetal position. Taking off her own clothes, she then lies behind his shrouded body, wrapping hers around it protectively and lovingly. The scene references the one described above where she lies beside him to allay his fears of death, and an earlier one from her arrival at the house, where she wraps herself in the sheets on his bed.

While the characters' tentative physical touches indicate the development of intimacy between them, their mutual interest in music provides them with another means of communication. They avail of what Pramaggiore refers to as 'music's disembodying potential' to 'get out of themselves'.¹¹⁵ Music allows them to reveal something of themselves without the need for reference to the details of their lives, and acts as a filter between their private and public selves. Music also functions as a key to Anne's enigmatic character. It is one of the few elements to which she is seen responding in the film. Antoniak explains that when Anne leaves Amsterdam, music is the one thing she takes with her, because 'you can sleep in a tent and listen to nature sounds but you also need music because it contains the essence of the harmony'.¹¹⁶ This suggests it has a therapeutic effect on what the film's opening scene hints is her unharmonious life. Whenever Anne is exposed to music in the film, her normally unreadable demeanour visibly relaxes and softens. On discovering a music system when she first enters Martin's house, she puts on a Patsy Klein CD and the song 'Crazy' begins to play. Only the first line is audible - 'I'm crazy for feelin' so lonely' - as the camera pulls back to a long shot of Anne reclining

¹¹⁵ Pramaggiore, p. 38.

¹¹⁶ Mariana Hristova, 'Urszula Antoniak: Things around us are extension[sic] of who we are', 21 October 2009, CentEast<<http://www.filmneweurope.com/news/region/urszula-antoniak-things-around-us-are-extension-of-who-we-are>> [accessed 02 March 2012]

in an armchair with a peaceful expression on her face as she listens. She reprises this song for Martin later in the film when they are more emotionally close and the words have an added significance. When he discovers Anne listening to opera on a CD after she has completed her chores, he leaves a Walkman player and a cassette tape with her lunch next day. When she puts on the headphones, she closes her eyes and appears transfixed by the music. Music also becomes a medium for more light-hearted interaction between the characters. They agree that whenever one of them breaks their agreement of not asking personal questions, they have to sing a song. Martin is the first to do so and he sings a 'Country-Gothic' or 'Psycho-billy', song called 'The Rubber Room' by Porter Wagoner, his usual dour demeanour transformed by the event. When it is Anne's turn, she sings a ballad in German while later, during a scene shot in a pub, she is shown dancing with abandon to the traditional Irish music being played by the musicians. This is one of the few occasions on which she appears free of the self-restraint that characterises her interactions with Martin. Irish music is just one of a number of musical genres that are referenced throughout the film, reflecting the hybridity within contemporary Irish culture and its combination of traditional and modern elements. The film closes with singing that provides a poignant contrast to the previous light-hearted scenes between the two characters. While the film opened in silence with a shot of Anne sitting alone in her apartment, it also closes with a shot of her alone, this time in a hotel room in Spain in the wake of Martin's death. However, the silence in this case is broken by the sound of an elderly woman singing mournfully in Spanish outside, the camera holding Anne's face in the frame, its inscrutable expression back in place, before the screen fades to black and the credits roll. Here again music provides a clue to Anne's state of mind as the sorrowful tone of the song and the absence of any animation in her face indicate that although she has moved forward spatially, she has once again retreated emotionally.

While music's signification lies in providing insights into the personalities of Anne and Martin, as well as an indirect means by which the characters communicate and learn about each other, the gradual evolution of their relationship is most clearly signposted through the semiotics of food. In the short story 'Shackles' discussed in chapter two, food is referred to as a means of maintaining a link with the homeland while in 'Grafton Street of Dublin' it symbolises Nwanneka's embracing of her new home. In *Nothing Personal*, the visual capacity of film affords Antoniuk the

opportunity to exploit food's signifying potential to great effect. James Keller describes how, frequently in film, 'even when the subject of the dialogue is food, the food is not the subject, the meaning of food is'.¹¹⁷ Throughout the film, whole scenes are devoted to the growing, harvesting, preparation, cooking and consumption of food, so that it matches Anne Bower's description of the 'food film' genre where 'often the camera will focus in on food preparation and presentation so that in close-ups or panning shots, food fills the screen'. Such films 'consistently depict characters negotiating questions of identity, power, culture, class, spirituality, or relationship, through food'.¹¹⁸ In *Nothing Personal* the camera lingers over close-up shots of the table set with breakfast and dinner, a glass of rich red wine, pots of new potatoes boiling on the stove. As the relationship between the characters develops, the manner of food preparation and consumption changes, becoming more social as they progress from eating alone to preparing meals together and finally eating together. The first scene in which food features is near the beginning of the film when Anne is hiking across Ireland to the west coast. A mid close-up shot shows her riffling through a bin beside a picnic area where a young family are eating. Their faces register disgust as she retrieves some discarded food and eats it hungrily. This behaviour reflects the primal nature of her existence at that point as she avoids human contact, walking in all weathers and sleeping in the wild. The next food-related scene occurs during her first day working with Martin and establishes the parameters of their relationship. When he invites her to come inside where he has laid out lunch in the dining room, she replies 'I'd rather eat alone'. Angry at her rebuff, Martin storms back inside the house, the camera cutting to a shot over his shoulder where he eats his lunch at a beautifully laid table set for two, with an abundance of food, and wine poured into cut-crystal glasses. A review of the film compares Anne's unwillingness to join Martin inside at the table to that of 'a feral animal who worries that even coming inside for a meal is too much of an emotional risk'.¹¹⁹ Subsequent scenes in which the day's work is punctuated by lunch breaks show Anne continuing to take her meals alone on the bench outside the kitchen,

¹¹⁷ James R. Keller, *Food, Film and Culture: A Genre Study* (North Carolina and London: McFarland, 2006), p. 193.

¹¹⁸ Anne Bowers, *Reel Food: Essays on Food and Film* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 5-6.

¹¹⁹ Betsey Sharkey, Review of *Nothing Personal*, *LA Times*, 26 November 2010
<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/la-et-nothing-personal-20101126,0,424405.story> [accessed 23 February 2012]

where Martin leaves a selection of dishes accompanied by a glass of wine. As well as preparing recognisably Irish foodstuffs such as soda bread and seafood, Martin prepares a range of international cuisine. The camera zooms in on Anne's hands as she cuts into, variously, lobster, artichokes and exotic salad, then moves in for a close-up of her face to register the pleasure she takes in the food, leading another critic to comment that 'not since "Flashdance" has a lobster dinner been seasoned with so much unspoken emotion'.¹²⁰ Martin is seen sitting alone at the dining table laid for one, a bottle of wine and one glass, signalling that his earlier expectations of a dining companion have been revised.

As Anne gradually becomes less guarded and more involved in the house through her chores, she begins to share in the preparation of food. A series of scenes depict the characters involved in a domestic routine of cooking and eating. Anne stirs a sauce on the hob, while Martin cuts some herbs from the garden; an oven-timer rings and Martin takes freshly baked soda bread from the oven. One evening, Anne enters the dining room and puts a plate in front of Martin with a flourish, launching into her most lengthy speech of the film, as she adopts the style of a maitre d' to describes the dish of 'potato, the spirit of the earth, enjoyed and celebrated in this simple yet sophisticated parfait of freshly covered potatoes'. In using the commonly perceived staple of the traditional Irish diet, the potato, as the key ingredient in a non-Irish dish, this meal incorporates the national and the international.¹²¹ When Martin thanks Anne for the dinner, she wishes him 'Eet smakelijk' ('bon appetit' in Dutch) and he thanks her in Irish, 'Go raibh maith agat'. The scene is one of only two in the film which reference their national identities. The other is one where they are walking home from an evening in the pub, both a little drunk, and muttering to themselves, rather than to each other, in their native languages. Anne's gesture of preparing this meal signifies a turning point in the characters' relationship, although they do not eat this particular meal together. Up to this stage in the film, Martin has prepared breakfast for her and left it outside her bedroom door. Now, however, a

¹²⁰ Jeannette Catsoulis, 'Tensions Between Companionship and Solitude', *New York Times*, 18 November 2010 < <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/19/movies/19nothing.html> > [accessed 23 February 2012]

¹²¹ Katharina Schmid takes the view that this speech 'aims to expose the mystification of a lifestyle which is more often than not a product of economic necessity rather than free choice'. To read more about her interpretation, see Katharina Schmid, 'An Outsider's Vision of Ireland in Urszula Antoniak's *Nothing Personal*', *Estudios Irlandeses*, 8 (2013), 105-113 (p. 112).

series of scenes follow, with close-up shots of Anne carefully arranging bread and fruit on a plate. A pivotal moment in the film is signalled when she carries her lunch tray into the dining room and finally sits down to eat with him. As Anne accepts Martin's offer of more wine, they begin a conversation based on a series of personal questions about favourite colours and numbers (notably, Anne's favourite number is zero). Martin, emboldened by their interaction, pauses briefly before asking Anne 'Who are you?', as the camera pans across to Anne's face on which there is an unreadable expression. She does not answer and the screen fades to darkness. The significance of this scene lies in the fact that the social interaction arising from the act of sharing food has weakened their resistance to each other and both have let their guard down. This is the point in the film at which the characters abandon their promise to respect one another's privacy and in subsequent scenes they are seen going through each other's personal belongings, looking for clues to each other's identity. Martin finds Anne's name and address on her driving licence, and sets off for Amsterdam to see her apartment. While he is away, Anne goes into his room and rifles through the pockets of his clothes, finding a bottle of pills with his name on. The final scene in which we see preparation for a meal is one in which Anne is setting the table with a white tablecloth, wine glasses and white china plates. This scene demonstrates the evolution of their relationship from one in which a wary distance was maintained through the act of eating alone in separate locations, to this dressing of the table in the dining room with care and attention, in anticipation of sharing a meal. This meal, not shown on screen, will be their final one together before Martin's death.

As well as the physical nourishment provided by food, Anne receives psychological nourishment from both the external and internal spaces of Connemara through which she moves. Dominic Stevens describes how 'landscapes have a scale [...] which emotionally affect their occupants',¹²² and this observation is clearly borne out by the representation of Anne in *Nothing Personal*. As Anne works in exchange for food, much of the film takes place in spaces of work where the characters sometimes work alongside each other, at other times alone. Their work takes place predominantly outdoors in traditional rural Irish occupations - tending a vegetable garden, collecting seaweed from the seashore, cutting turf in the bog. This

¹²² Dominic Stevens, *Rural: Open to all, beginners welcome* (Cloone, Letrim: Mermaid Turbulence, 2007), p. 35.

equates with what O'Connor refers to as 'a more cultivated or tamed series of representations of the colleen [...] encapsulated in her portrayal as cultivator/gatherer'.¹²³ The physical nature of the work has a therapeutic function and the viewer sees Anne immersing herself in her tasks. In one scene, the camera focuses on her hands as she plunges them into piles of seaweed, which she spreads on top of the soil to fertilise and nourish it. This calls to mind another of the conventions of the post-pastoral mode described by Gifford which is 'the recognition of a creative-destructive universe equally in balance in a continuous momentum of birth and death, death and rebirth, growth and decay, ecstasy and dissolution'.¹²⁴ Anne's actions with seaweed and soil are symbolic of her own rebirth in this remote rural location. Symbols of tradition and modernity sit alongside each other, as Martin shows her how to cut turf from the bog in the unmechanised, traditional way and collect seaweed from the seashore in traditional wicker baskets. Yet when tackling household chores, Anne makes use of a washing machine and vacuum cleaner.

The external spaces of the garden, seashore and landscape and the internal space of the house are connected by the layout of the rooms. The scenes shot within the house reveal that all the furniture is positioned by windows, so that the landscape is permanently in view. The lush greenery of the vegetation and the constantly shifting sky envelope the house, adding to the sense of it as a protective and protected space. The still-life style of much of the cinematography discussed in relation to the film's 'undramatic' nature reveals objects in the house that are emblematic of Ireland's present and past, reinforcing the co-existence of tradition and modernity that characterises contemporary Ireland and symbolising that it is not a space with a fixed identity. A radio on the table suggests a connection to the wider world and is tuned in to an Irish language radio station, audible when Martin is seen listening to it the next day, and another reference to Irish cultural identity, and signifying that Anne is in an unfamiliar space. Panning around, the camera shows a wooden dresser with a fruitbowl, a range of hanging blue striped mugs and some willow-pattern plates. Claudia Kinmonth describes the dresser as 'the most important and aesthetic item of furniture' in rural Irish homesteads of the nineteenth and

¹²³ Barbara O'Connor, p. 149.

¹²⁴ Gifford, p. 153.

twentieth century.¹²⁵ Its presence in the film is a link to Ireland's past, while a cafetière on the dresser's top shelf references the modernity of transnational Ireland and locates the film in the present. The camera then moves into the light-filled dining room, furnished with a combination of antique furniture and a modern music system.¹²⁶ While the combined presence of objects with resonances of both Ireland's past and its more global present symbolise an incorporation of new outside influences, it confirms Kiberd's description of the Irish as simultaneously 'modern and counter' on account of their capacity to adapt to changing circumstances.¹²⁷ Martin's accommodation of Anne can also be viewed in terms of openness to new circumstances, in this case the arrival of an outsider. Within the film this acceptance of the migrant character is symbolised within the house itself - when Anne first arrives and is cleaning the house, she cannot get into some of the rooms because the doors are locked. As the film progresses, there are several shots of open doorways and Anne is seen moving freely through the rooms and making herself at home.

As the film takes place mainly within the space of the house and its environs, with only Martin and Anne present, the one scene in which they are shown in a social space amongst a crowd of people in a pub is notable. The atmosphere of the pub has a visibly positive effect on the two protagonists as both appear more relaxed than they have up to this point. The scene is suffused with warm orange light, as the camera follows Anne who partners an old man doing traditional Irish 'sean-nós' dancing. Lloyd explains that the drinking that takes place within an Irish pub bears 'some of the habits and codes of other times and places',¹²⁸ as this scene demonstrates. At the same time, the scene continues with a shot of Anne drinking a pint of beer while the largely male clientele conduct a countdown while cheering her on. The space of the pub in contemporary Ireland is clearly no longer the exclusively male domain of old and Anne's actions are a further challenge to any attempt to categorise her.

¹²⁵ Claudia Kinmonth, *Irish Rural Interiors in Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 53. Kinmonth discusses the dresser in the context of its prominence in Irish painting from the nineteenth century, as an indicator of the social status of the occupants of a household.

¹²⁶ In the DVD interview, Antoniuk describes how the current owners of the house allowed her to use it for the film on condition that she left it in its normal furnished state. Consequently, the contents reflect the reality of contemporary Irish life. The house is connected to the past through its original ownership by the family of Oscar Wilde, who used it as a hunting lodge.

¹²⁷ Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World*, p. 280.

¹²⁸ Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity* p. 87.

Her relationship to the spaces of Connemara alters with Martin's death as, without his presence, the place no longer has meaning for her. In the final scene Anne checks in to a hotel unencumbered by possessions (she answers 'No' to the Spanish receptionist's question as to whether she has luggage), the same state in which she arrived in Connemara. The next shot is of Anne standing at a blue-shuttered balcony window, an unreadable expression on her face as she looks out over the rooftops of an anonymous Spanish town. Turning, she goes to lie on the white bed, her expression as enigmatic as it was at the beginning. The viewer knows from the voice-over of Martin's suicide note earlier that he has left her the house and some money but we do not know whether she has left it temporarily or permanently. Despite telling Martin earlier in the film that what she wants is 'to be like you. Living in this house, on this lonely island. Nobody looks at you, nobody talks', when the opportunity presents itself, she chooses not to stay. Anne therefore represents the 'multicenteredness' of contemporary life discussed by Lippard, whereby people move from place to place at regular intervals. Antoniak describes Anne's initial departure from Holland as 'very radical – no things, no roots, no connections, just being like a rolling stone moving from one place to another'.¹²⁹ Her departure from Connemara is similarly conducted. When Martin reveals that he has been to her apartment by handing her a hair clip that he found there, she refuses to meet his gaze and goes to her room, locking the door behind her. In divesting herself of all her possessions at the start of the film, she sought to cut her ties with Amsterdam and her life there. Martin's retrieval of an object from her former life reconnects her to a place she wants to leave behind, raising the question of how objects from migrants' lives are linked to memories of place. In her work on intercultural cinema, Marks argues that 'even commodities [...] retain the power to tell the stories of where they have been'.¹³⁰ This is true of a cassette tape in *The Front Line* as discussed earlier in this chapter, and in *Nothing Personal* the hair clip is an unwanted reminder of her past, functioning as a 'mute witness[es] to a character's history'.¹³¹ Her arrival in Spain without any possessions signifies that she has severed her connections with Ireland. Alluding once more to the Goldilocks story, Bettelheim's assessment that it presents the age-old strategy of 'running away' as a solution to life's problems

¹²⁹ Hristova, 'Urszula Antoniak: Things around us are extension [*sic*] of who we are'.

¹³⁰ Marks, p. 78.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

contributes to the sense that *Nothing Personal* has universal resonance outside the space and time of the film:

Not only in modern times, but all through the ages, running away from a problem – which in the unconscious means denying or repressing it – seems the easiest way out when confronted with what seems to be too difficult or unsolvable a predicament. This is the solution with which we are left in Goldilocks.¹³²

The ease of movement inherent in contemporary migration makes the option of running away from difficult situations more possible than ever, as I discussed in chapter one in relation to Marcin and Agnieszka, the Polish protagonists in the novel *Open-handed* who leave Ireland when their lives there become problematic.

In conclusion, although *Nothing Personal* qualifies as a transnational film, it does not suffer from the ‘blandness’ that critics of such films claim is a consequence of their lack of cultural specificity. On the contrary, this film’s range of cultural references reflects the reality of contemporary Ireland, where elements of traditional Ireland sit comfortably alongside those that have been adopted from outside the national culture. In the same way that objects, music and foodstuffs from elsewhere have been accommodated in the spaces of the film, Anne, as a person from elsewhere is also accommodated. The film’s exploration of how much one needs to know or understand about a stranger in order to relate to them can be seen as representing the broader situation of migration into the country. Martin’s lack of knowledge about Anne’s background is not presented as an obstacle to her being invited into his home. Ultimately, through the discovery of common interests and the gradual development of intimacy through shared daily experiences, the two characters, one from inside the country, the other from outside, are shown to find their own harmony. Despite the fact that Anne moves on after Martin’s death, the film represents the possibility of Connemara as an inclusive space for both migrant and native, where the binaries of nationality are not invoked. More broadly, it represents migration as a fluid, transnational phenomenon in its contemporary form. By moving on, Anne ‘remains an outsider who never becomes an insider. [...] Goldilocks has no story to tell; her entering is as enigmatic as her leaving’.¹³³

¹³² Bettelheim, p. 224.

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 217-218.

Conclusion

Through their exploration of the condition from three different perspectives, the three films analysed in this chapter represent the variation that exists within the migrant experience in contemporary Ireland. Joe, Kala and Daniel's experience in the urban location of Dublin is grim and testing. As asylum seekers fleeing persecution, they have little control over the circumstances of their migration and are at the mercy of the Irish state. Their ethnicity advertises their migrant status so that they attract attention, frequently of an undesirable nature. The trauma that they endured in their home country follows them wherever they go, haunting their dreams and hindering their ability to feel safe or to trust people. *Ondine* and *Nothing Personal* represent their female migrant protagonists' experiences in rural Ireland in a more positive light. Although *Ondine* is an illegal immigrant with a criminal background, the love of a good Irishman helps to overcome these obstacles, while her presence renews and reinvigorates his and his daughter's lives. As a white Eastern European, she does not stand out as the African migrants do, but as an exotic, beautiful stranger in a small country town, she is a source of curiosity. In *Nothing Personal*, the Dutch migrant Anne finds a place where she can be solitary in the company of someone who respects her wish to remain largely unknown. Earlier representations of the migrant in Irish film, such as the Irish-American protagonists of *The Quiet Man* (1952) and *The Field* (1990), disrupted the rural communities into which they arrived, reflecting author Emma Donoghue's description of how places 'that charm tourists today were shaped by the need to keep strangers where they belonged, outside the walls come nightfall, beyond the pale'.¹³⁴ *Ondine* and *Nothing Personal* demonstrate that these communities today, while curious about the 'strangers' in town, do not endeavour to keep them outside or prohibit them from belonging if they choose to stay.

¹³⁴ Emma O'Donoghue, 'Afterword', in *Astray* (London and New York: Picador and Hachette, 2012), pp. 261-271 (p. 262)

Conclusion

While Ireland's past continues to feature as both subject and location in Irish writing and film of the present, a small but substantial body of both Irish and migrant writers and filmmakers is engaging with the multicultural reality of contemporary Ireland and the experience of the migrant within it. The novels, short stories and films that comprise my primary material were chosen for the breadth of migrant circumstances and experiences that they reflect. Inspired by both imagination and experience, produced by writers and filmmakers living in Ireland and outside of it, interweaving mythology and realism, involving protagonists immobilised by inertia, trauma or despair, or propelled forward by hope, determination and the dream of a better future – these texts and films represent twenty-first century migration in the context of the transnational movement that is a consequence of globalisation.

In chapter one I explored how technological progress and affordable air travel have transformed economic migrants from Eastern Europe into commuters, while my analysis of African asylum seeking migrants in the short stories in chapter two considered the restrictions on their mobility as they await decisions on their asylum applications. While the forces of globalisation lead to zones of familiarity for migrants in otherwise unfamiliar spaces, they do not silence the echoes of colonialism, as I discussed in chapter three, in relation to the unwanted negative attention paid to African migrants in response to their ethnicity in *The Front Line*. In chapter three I also engaged with the transnational migrant who inhabits a space somewhere between that of the economic migrant and the political refugee, and for whom movement is an end in itself and home a mobile concept.

I chose to read my primary material through an interdisciplinary framework of postcolonial, globalisation and transnationalism theory. This methodology supported the fact that my analysis interrogated issues of history, places and spaces, and the movement of people in and through them. It allowed me to explore how the response of certain sections of Irish society to its migrants reflects the country's postcolonial legacy of insecurity in relation to identity and control of its spaces, as demonstrated by the short stories 'As if There Were Trees' and 'The summer of birds' discussed in chapter two. At the same time, this theoretical framework

underpinned my examination of how my texts' and films' incorporation of material and cultural elements from outside the national space reflects the contrary propensity for Irish identity to adapt and transform itself in response to the forces of globalisation, including immigration, with its consequences for further changes to the concept of Irishness. Within the national space, my exploration of the circumstances affecting migrants' ability to locate themselves in Ireland was conducted across their living, working and social spaces. This area of my analysis was significantly enriched by drawing on Marc Augé's anthropological notion of places and non-places, and further developed by Zigmunt Bauman's sociological discussions on the effects of modernity on the quality and interactions of daily life.

The commodification that is an inherent element of globalisation is also seen to extend to perceptions of migrants themselves in my texts and films, where they are regarded as units of labour and, in the case of female migrants, sexual commodities for trade. The dehumanising effect of this attitude is represented most particularly in relation to the Eastern European migrants in the novels examined in chapter one. Globalisation theory has also been integral to my interrogation of the ways in which the texts and films represent the response of the Irish to the migrants in the spaces of their cities and towns. The resentful and anxious response of the Irish characters in the short stories 'As if There Were Trees' and 'The summer of birds' discussed in chapter two, are indicative of an alternative response to globalisation – that is, localisation and a closing of borders, an erection of boundaries, mental and where possible physical, to try to keep 'them' out.

My chosen genres - novel, short story and film - accommodate a range of perspectives in the representation of the migrant experience. With their breadth of scope, the realist novels of Binchy and Hamilton facilitate exploration of a range of migrant characters within the context of Irish society as a whole, while their verisimilitude allows for engagement with the reality of the migrant experience. The characteristic condensed nature of the short stories, with their concentrated focus on a pivotal incident or moment of transformation in a specific location, provide an insight into very specific aspects of migrant life, while the films offers a visual equivalent to the literary representations, presenting evidence of Ireland's blending of local and global elements, along with a picture of its changing landscape.

Throughout the thesis I sought to explore the connections between the literature and film that were the subject of my analysis, and that of other national

literary traditions, both past and present, in terms of their representations of the migrant and the perspectives through which they are explored. From the perspective of Irish literature and film, it allowed me to locate my primary material within a context whereby writers and filmmakers reflect the socio-economic concerns of their time, while also demonstrating the intertextuality between narratives of the past and the present, in terms of both style and content. Furthermore, by extending my base for comparison spatially as well as temporally, I discovered areas of convergence in texts that at first glance may seem to have little in common. For example, Flannery O'Connor's short story 'The Displaced Person' set in the rural American South in the 1940s proved a valuable text through which to read Colum McCann's 'As if There Were Trees' set in a densely populated blighted urban area of Dublin sixty years later. Despite their wildly differing locations, they share a perspective that concentrates on the anxieties of the host community about the stranger in their midst, without ever revealing the migrant's consciousness. By locating the short stories by Ifedinmo Dimbo and Melatu Okorie in a continuum of Nigerian women writers from Buchi Emecheta to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, I identified that many aspects of the Nigerian female migrant experience transcend time and place, connecting migrant lives in 1960s London with those in twenty-first century Dublin and Brooklyn. While I acknowledge that Dimbo and Okorie are not yet established writers of comparable skill to Emecheta and Adichie, the fact remains that, literary merit aside, their stories demonstrably engage with the reality of Nigerian migrant life, and therein lies their value in this study of literary representations of the migrant experience.

My assessment of migrant narratives of the past and present naturally leads me to speculate about migrant narratives of the future. Even since my initial selection of the texts and films analysed in this thesis, the two Nigerian migrant writers of 'Grafton Street of Dublin' and 'Shackles' have written additional material about the migrant experience. As I alluded to in chapter two, Melatu Okorie contributed a short story to a collection entitled *Alms on the Highway: New Writing from the Oscar Wilde Centre* (2011) at Trinity College, Dublin. Her story, 'If George Could Talk', explores the events in Nigeria leading up to the departure of its female protagonist and her children, and only refers to her arrival in Ireland on the last

page.¹ Ifedinma Dimbo self-published a novel entitled *She Was Foolish?* in 2012. Stylistically it resembles her short story, 'Grafton Street of Dublin' in its use of both standard English and Nigerian dialect. In addition, much of the novel takes place in Nigeria and provides a back story for its protagonist, Gift. It takes the reader beyond the situation of Nwanneka in 'Grafton Street of Dublin' who is still awaiting the outcome of her residency application and explores a later, more settled stage in migrant life. Gift has successfully obtained both residency and a work permit. She lives in a private rented house with her children, who attend a local school while she goes to work as a fund administrator in the financial sector. Her working life is happy and fulfilled, she makes friends and her interactions with Irish people are positive and personal. The taxi drivers, local shopkeepers, and colleagues she encounters are chatty and friendly and at no stage does she reference racism in their responses to her. On the contrary, she exclaims that 'we couldn't have chosen a better country!'² The novel engages with many of the themes explored in 'Grafton Street of Dublin' and 'Shackles' in relation to women and kinship networks, the conflict that arises in gender politics between Nigerian men and women in Ireland, and the creolisation of Dublin's public spaces evident in the busy African hair salons and restaurants.

The Irish Writers' Exchange, which published the short story collection in which 'Shackles' and 'Grafton Street of Dublin' appear, published a short story called 'Piece by Piece' on its website in January 2013.³ The story was the winner of a competition run by the Exchange and is written in English by Natalia Olszowa, a young Polish woman living in Ireland. Her work marks another step forward in the emergence of literature from migrants themselves. Unlike the novels *Hotel Irlandia* (2006) by Iwona Slabuzewska-Krauze and *Dublin: Moja Polska Karma* (2007) by Magdalena Orzel which to date are only accessible to Polish speakers, Olszowa's story speaks directly to English speaking readers as it provides a direct insight into the experience of a Polish migrant in Ireland today. The story references the mobility of the transnational migrant and her struggles with a double identity as she explains that 'the more often I fly home, the less it feels like home. I feel neither Polish nor

¹ Melatu Okorie, 'If George Could Talk', in *Alms on the Highway: New Writing from the Oscar Wilde Centre* (Dublin: Myrtle Press, 2011), pp. 133-146.

² Ifedinma Dimbo, *She was Foolish?* (Bloomington, Indiana: XLibris Corporation, 2012), p. 299.

³ See Natalia Olszowa, 'Piece by Piece', 2013 <http://www.irishwritersexchange.com/news.html> [accessed 02 February 2013]

Irish'.⁴ Many of her statements and opinions echo those of Marcin's in *Open-handed*. A graduate like Marcin, she works stacking shelves in Ireland. Like him, her initial impression of Dubliners is one of disdain as she confesses that 'I didn't want to identify with the fast food culture and the tracksuits' (*PP*, p. 2). In considering her reasons for coming to Dublin, she wonders, like Marcin, whether it is 'just an appetite for freedom', or a case of 'running away from the life we've left behind' (*PP*, p. 2). She describes the transient feeling of a life in which everything is rented, nothing owned, and the loneliness of sharing a house with people who are not family or friends, and being surrounded by 'empty spaces' (*PP*, p. 3). Concluding that a return to her old self is not possible, she advocates focusing on the future, because 'you can't change where you're from and who you were, but you can always choose the place where you want to live and who you want to be' (*PP*, p. 4). This is a reiteration of Vid's philosophy in *Hand in the Fire*, while her view that 'the journey is what makes you a more valuable person – not the achievements' (*PP*, p. 5) calls to mind the nature of Anne's migrancy in *Nothing Personal*.

Reading Olszowa's story, I was struck by the accuracy with which both Chris Binchy and Hugo Hamilton had imagined the experience of Eastern European migrants in their respective novels. While the critical articles by Polish-speaking academics in relation to the themes and concerns of the novels in Polish by Slabuszewska-Krauze and Orzel revealed this is the case, the opportunity to read Olszowa's story directly allowed me to confirm this for myself. Hence, Olszowa's story also validates writing about the migrant experience by writers who create it from the imagination rather than real life. Discussing *This Is Where I Am* (2013), the latest novel by Scottish writer Karen Campbell, which imagines the story of a Somali refugee in Glasgow, Susan Mansfield describes how it is Campbell's job to find 'glimpses of common humanity which make it possible for us to share another's experience'.⁵ Campbell herself explains that she had to 'rethink my city from the point of view of somebody who is surrounded by this forest of sandstone buildings and doesn't know which way is up'.⁶ In doing so, she adopts a technique similar to

⁴ Natalia Olszowa, 'Piece by Piece', p. 2. All further references to the story will be abbreviated to *PP* and cited parenthetically in the text.

⁵ Susan Mansfield, 'Karen Campbell on reimagining Glasgow to write a novel about refugees', *Scotsman*, 9 March 2013 <http://www.scotsman.co/the-scotsman/books/reviews-and-views/karen-campbell-on-reimagining-glasgow-to-write-a-novel-about-refugees-1-2827522> [accessed 12 March 2013]

⁶ *Ibid.*

that used by Binchy in his descriptions of Marcin's walks through Dublin city, while her exploration of how her Somalian 'gradually gets to grips with Glasgow speech, with the oddities of Scottish culture'⁷ mirrors Hamilton's portrayal of Vid's struggles with Irish speech and behaviour.

All the novels and short stories analysed and referred to in this thesis reflect the experiences of recently arrived migrants who allude to their homeland and describe their struggles to adapt to their new culture. Susan Ireland explains that this is a common feature of writing by first generation migrants, as I discussed in my introduction. This may well continue to be the focus for this generation, as my references to the newly emerging work above indicates. It will be interesting to follow the progress of these writers and the emergence of new migrant writers as they gain confidence from reading the work of fellow migrants. Looking forward, writing by the Irish-born or Irish-raised children of this first generation of migrants will provide a fascinating source of potential research for the future. It will be of great interest to study the emergence of their writing across genres, and to observe the themes that inform their work as the Irish equivalents of Britain's Monica Ali, Zadie Smith and Hanif Kureishi take up their pens. I anticipate research in the future that focuses on how the work of this second generation in Ireland compares to that of the aforementioned British second-generation writers, and also to that of the first generation writers whose work is the subject of this thesis.

Perhaps there will also be migrant filmmakers amongst the writers. One contemporary filmmaker who is himself the London-born son of Irish migrants is Michael McDonagh, whose 2011 film *The Guard* acknowledges the reality of Ireland's migrant presence and its globalising culture. Having already selected my three films by the time of *The Guard*'s release, there was not the space to include it in the thesis. It would however make an interesting subject with which to commence further research into Irish film in this area of study, particularly in light of reviewer Steve Rose's comment that 'even the racism [in the film] turns out to be part of a larger take on Ireland's insularity, eroding identity and inexorable Americanisation'.⁸ This dark comedy about an Irish policeman in Connemara unfortunately resorts to the clichéd representation of the Eastern European woman as

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Steve Rose, 'The Guard – review', *Guardian*, 18 August 2011
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/aug/18/the-guard-review> [accessed 20 March 2013]

prostitute, criticised by Isabel Santaolalla in relation to the representation of Eastern European women in contemporary Greek and Spanish film,⁹ and present also in the novels discussed in chapter one. The women only appear briefly in the film, and when they do they are represented as jolly, fun-loving types more akin to the saloon girls in the Wild West than the depressed, passive representation to which Santaolalla refers. The film also features a black protagonist in the form of an FBI agent from New York, to whom the locals refuse to speak in English initially, reverting instead to Irish as this area of Connemara is an Irish-speaking region. Given the contrast between the representation of Connemara in this film and *Nothing Personal*, both films could form part of a wider selection that investigates the portrayal of the Irish West in the era of globalisation.

The subject matter of a selection of conferences in recent years indicates the growth of research in a number of areas to which my research relates, including transnational poetics, hybridity, space and dislocation and interactions between new and old literary forms. In July 2010, I gave a paper at the University of Lincoln conference, *What Happens Now: 21st Century Writing in English*, which positioned my research within the broader literary context of developments in contemporary writing. At NUI Maynooth in the same month, a conference called *Irish Literatures and Culture: Old and New Knowledges* took place, which explored work across a range of genres, and included papers relating to migrant drama, poetry and fiction, past and present. A conference entitled *Hybrid Irelands: At Culture's Edge* at the University of Notre Dame in March 2012 centered on the subject of hybridity and Irish literature in the context of much of Irish literature's resistance to 'traditional, narrow categorization', a fact demonstrated by the range of my own primary material. In June of the same year, the University of Santiago de Compostela hosted an interdisciplinary conference called *The Discourse of Identity*, exploring how 'linguistic processes and other strategies embedded in social practices shape the way individuals and groups (re)create themselves'. The areas of convergence with my research are clear, and even a short selection such as the above indicates the presence of a growing body of work to which my research contributes.

My critical study of the form and variety of migrant representations being produced by writers and filmmakers in Ireland today demonstrates the ways in which

⁹ Santaolalla, p. 165.

these works build on and enrich the Irish literary and film tradition, extending and developing the canon in new directions. In the future, I envisage expanding my research into the genre of theatre and drama, which I touched on in my analysis, but did not have scope to develop in depth given the constraints of space and the breadth of material to be analysed in this area. My interview with The Gombeens concerning their performance of the stories told to them by Brazilian migrants, as discussed in my introduction, revealed the innovative approaches being taken by that duo and other small pioneering theatre groups as they experiment with new hybrid forms through which to represent the migrant experience in Ireland. There are research opportunities in exploring this area in a number of directions, including an examination of whether migrants themselves become writers and practitioners of theatre and reflect their own experiences directly, or indeed whether they address different themes entirely and do not allow their migrant status to lead their themes. A play entitled *Quietly* by Owen McCaffrey, for example, debuted in November 2012 and includes a Polish barman, played by Polish actor Robert Zawadski. The play opens and closes with Robert texting in Polish, the texts projected onto the mirrors behind the bar. It takes place in a pub in Belfast, and in his review Fintan O'Toole located it in a wider dramatic tradition, describing it as 'continuous with a kind of drama that has been around for a very long time: some men in a pub; pints downed; lots of talk'.¹⁰ In the play, as in the novels, short stories and films of this thesis, the old and the new sit side by side, and the migrant is relocated from the margins to the centre of the stage.

¹⁰ Fintan O'Toole, "'Quietly' does it: a pub play with potent purity', *Irish Times*, 24 November 2012, Weekend Review, p. 8.

Appendices

Appendix I: Interview with Chris Binchy

Appendix II: Film Images

Appendix III: Interview with The Gombeens

Appendix I

**Aisling McKeown, Interview with Chris Binchy (Unpublished)
Dublin, 25 March, 2010.**

The following transcript is reproduced verbatim from the recording of the above interview

AM: If we could start with Marcin, one of the main characters, in the section where he is leaving Poland on the bus. The whole scene, with his parents, the mood, is very evocative and reminiscent of our own emigrant past. Was that a deliberate strategy? What was the purpose of starting it like that?

CB: I think it was that there *are* universal things about the immigration (or emigration, depending on where you're standing) experience that are always the same. The book was coming out of my experience...my experience coming out of college was everybody left, everybody went. That was 1990, 1991. At that stage, for people I would have known, it was not a particularly sad experience, it was more one of optimism and freedom, you were breaking out. It wasn't an entirely negative experience, the actual process of leaving. From having done that [myself] a bit, (I worked abroad on and off) and having worked with people here who were also coming from that experience, across the board there was a similarity – a slight sense of disconnection from the place that you were in. In the Irish context what I thought was interesting about our experience of immigration was that people had no ties or no connections or nothing to specifically bring them here and that nobody really throughout the history of Ireland [had done that] –everybody who came was interested in it [Ireland], even in the context of tourists, they had some sort of reason for being here, they had family here, (the English or Americans). There would be Europeans, some you couldn't get a handle on, German tourists, Dutch tourists who settled in Cork. They were still after something specific about the place. It wasn't something familiar to us at all, the fact that people would be here ...it wasn't *here* that they were coming to, it was a *place* that provided a very specific and obvious purpose and I thought that was interesting.

In Ireland it seemed to me....we were living in north inner-city at that time and every time we went away for two or three weeks new places had gone up and new apartment blocks and the vast majority of people living around us were Eastern European mostly, in that part of town. There was a certain anonymity about it, parts of Dublin were entirely unknown, every bit of which had been recognisable, a new environment came into it, which looks exactly like the place those people would have been living in. There was a certain sameness about the whole experience.

By starting Marcin with his family....the way I was structuring the novel was by not really releasing very much information about the characters at all, there's not much insight into who he is, after that. But you take him out of a very understandable,

familiar kind of environment with family and close relationships and that early twenties frustration that you feel with your parents where there's affection but also the sense that if you don't get the hell away from them you're going to kill them. So that was the starting off point. But when he goes into that world then I kind of wanted him to become a drone. Structurally I just wanted the book to gradually reveal and build up that way; the people in it were essentially anonymous and just functioning but not revealing very much about themselves.

AM: So you'd almost represent them as they're *seen* and that by revealing what was behind that...

CB: That was the hope, that by putting it on layer after layer throughout the course of the novel...that's the structure of it; there are 75 short snippety little chapters. Initially I had kind of arbitrarily divided it up into long chapters and then my editor suggested that that would be a better way to do it.

AM: Like snapshots?

CB: Yes, that would be it, literally like snapshots, that it would be like 'picture, picture, picture'. I hoped it would work; there was a fear obviously that by looking at people from that point of view that it ends up a bit like 'Oh, this is an Eastern European working', and that person becomes a trope or an archetype.

AM: But you've got the Artur character so Marcin isn't a trope [of Eastern European-ness] because they have very different ways of dealing with their situation. One (Marcin) is dragged down by it and can't get himself out of it, whereas Artur seems to have a bit more get up and go, he finds an Irish girlfriend, he's trying to make more of a life out of it.

CB: Yeah, I went to Poland a few times as part of the research [for the book]. My wife is part-Polish and she would have cousins over there. I was hanging around with them in Warsaw and going out and meeting people at parties and a lot of them would have known people who had come over here. The conversations were exactly the same as ones I would have had twenty years earlier at parties in Ireland where the people who stayed had logical and emotional reasons for staying and the attitude towards the people that went was that some of them thought it was perfectly acceptable, some of them thought that they were letting the place down. The observable experience both in terms of having been a part of it – like going to America, it's sort of a silly point, but that in three months some people would be speaking with American accents and would be drinking with their American work colleagues at bars after work and would become a complete part of that, and other people would remain pretty much just within an Irish context, that would be three young fellas drinking in a room, you know?

AM: But it was a [time] limited experience...

CB: Yeah, but that can go on...

AM: Yeah, like the [now] elderly Irishmen and women in their seventies who never did [integrate], who live in the same area in Queens, and America is not home but neither is Ireland and all the dislocation that goes with that, and yet other people have got on....I think it was to do with being single, I think that was the big difference with that generation, certainly for the men.

CB: Yeah, the people who stayed single stayed outside it [the American world], didn't find a way of actually engaging with it or putting roots down.

AM: Yes, because particularly when you have children...

CB: Yes, you're into it, whether you want to be or not.

AM: Another point about Marcin is that he isn't in any rush to get a job in his field, he pretty much predicts what eventually happens to him, he want to be drunk etc...

You say in the book that he wants 'to shake off all the pathologies of his parents' generation' – drunkenness, laziness, chronic fatigue' – yet that's what he himself ends up inheriting. In referring to these pathologies, is that any reference to why people left here?

CB: Actually that was probably more specific in the context of the Polish guys. That's a sense that I got talking to young people in Poland that the generation above, literally one generation, would have grown up in a system under which they were beaten down, that taking chances or striking out or any idea of innovation had been knocked out of them. Not in a way you could criticise them for, because it was a brutal system. But there was an atmosphere in a generation or two up that was overly cautious and too regimented and too prepared to sit within the boundaries, so for them, getting out and going off in no particular direction was hard to understand. For any one of twenty-one, twenty-two, they regard the older generation as not quite understanding the need that they have to break out and go free and run wild for a few years. I would imagine that's nothing specific [to Poland].

AM: In the book there's a description of the plane journey [to Dublin]. Marcin comments on the fact that the other passengers don't seem interested or excited about where they're going or in what's going on. Is that a reflection of the fact that they're forced to leave, or just jaded with the world?

CB: No, I think it's just more the nature of that flying back and forth to parts of Central and Eastern Europe. I've flown there around that time, 2005/06/07 it was, and the atmosphere was that of a bus. It *was* like a bus because people would go home at weekends, as opposed to the Irish experience of coming back on those flights from New York or Boston which were complete party flights on the 22nd December or whatever. It was a huge celebratory thing. This was about the ease and facility of moving around and how it isn't a big deal. If someone is doing it for the first time you will still feel that thrill and excitement but if not you'll feel completely blasé and slightly deflated.

AM: And when Marcin gets to Dublin and checks into a hotel to sleep, the Polish receptionist isn't keen at all to engage, just because they're both Polish.

CB: I had similar experiences myself when abroad, like in subways in New York and coming face to face with someone you knew but you just didn't want them to be there right at that moment. Obviously that's a reflection of the numbers of people that were engaging in that [working abroad] at the time. In the context of the Polish stuff here, the numbers were so huge; it's not pushing it to say that you'd be coming up against people that you'd known all the time. And also, that recognition thing as well, it's Irish but it's an everywhere thing. It's very difficult to say what makes you recognise someone as your co-national but you can. No matter where you are, in the most unlikely places, you can recognise the other as one of your own. I'm not entirely sure what that's about but you know what I mean. I'm not entirely sure if it's comfortable either. It's quite dog-like, the whole thing!

AM: In last week's Irish times Joseph O'Connor wrote a piece about 'the sages of the snug' and the pontificating that goes on about Irish fiction and that it constantly harks back to the past, particularly the 1950s. He was saying that this is not necessarily such a bad thing because what we are now is determined by things that happened then. It's accessing the present through the past. He believes the great Celtic Tiger novel will take longer because we need to have moved sufficiently far beyond it.

What do you think about the fact that you are one of few, as far as I can see, Irish writers writing about the contemporary city? There's a whole other genre dealing with it, Cecilia Aherne and Marian Keyes, but that's almost international, it could be anywhere, it could be in New York or London. It's not specifically reflecting on the condition of being in Ireland. What made you take this theme and approach?

CB: My working life would have beenI worked as a chef throughout the 1990s on and off in Dublin mostly and bits and pieces in other places. That was quite an interesting place to be in terms of a country that was moving ahead economically and the spread of immigration as well. When I started out everywhere I worked was 100% Irish and when I left it was essentially 100% not Irish, or very close to it – a very quick turnaround. Also, the kinds of places you'd be working – restaurants are just big emblems to optimism and aspiration. You need to be 'the type of person who eats in a place like this'. I worked in a revolving sushi bar which was the first one in Dublin, standing in the middle slicing fish with the machinery going around you – that was the kind of environment I was in. It was so completely on top of me.

With the first book I'd been writing about abrasive but superficially charming characters, riven with insecurity and blackness, which seems to come quiet easily to me! Sylvester (in Open-handed) is like those characters grown up. That character seemed to match some of the superficial changes you saw going on around you quite nicely. That upfront presentation that was quite plausible, but there was still a sense

underneath it of uncertainty, unhappiness and a lack of confidence. I genuinely do think – and this would have informed more the *Open-handed* book – that just when there was a sniff of the end of things in the air, that this kind of increased the voracity of people, because people know it was all going to come crashing down and people know it but they weren't saying anything but on some fundamental level that it was all just cursed, the foundations were gone and that made people take chances and grab and overextend themselves in a way. So that's where I was coming from. I would have been wanting not to be too Zeitgeisty and just doing 'picture, picture, picture' Patrick McCabe talking about it in the mid 1990s (I think he was in England at the time) saying that every time he saw any mention of Ireland in a newspaper he just waited until the word 'cappuccino' was mentioned and would say 'there it is!', and at the last minute I pulled the word cappuccino out of every book.

AM: It was a sign of the time!

CB: Exactly. But the fear when you write a book is that by focusing too much on something that is passing it's going to be too much completely of its time. I would have maintained in all of the books that it was the behaviour and interactions of the people in their situations are what the books were about.

AM: Speaking of interactions, it's obvious too that although there's some interaction between the Irish and Polish porters in the hotel, and although they do seem to accept Marcin once they've got the measure of him, and the leveller is the job they do, otherwise, certainly in the bar Symposium, Agnieszka has no interaction with anybody Irish apart from the woman who does the payroll. Is that how you saw it, how it really was and is, with not a great deal of integration going on? There's a work relationship but outside of that the characters don't have any Irish friends. I suppose they don't really have a social life, they work nights, they have a twilight existence.

CB: Yeah, I think that would be absolutely the case, that the scope for contact with local population would be very limited, that would have been my experience. Part of the whole concept of the book is that there is no contact, no real interaction between people, other than in situations where the roles and hierarchies are fairly clearly defined, i.e. that you are server and you are served, you are driver and you are driven. That would have fed in to the anonymity of the world that they are in, there's no sense of engagement at all.

AM: It's like the Irish in Kilburn in the 1950s isn't it? They socialised amongst themselves, people make a choice to assimilate or not.

CB: Although I think the difference now is that I never really got a strong sense that people from the Eastern European countries working here had any strong community ties. I never got much of a sense that there was a big Polish scene – there were bars that people would drink in to some extent. It seemed to me that people work and they disappear. There's no really Polish area in Dublin, Polish people are dotted around

the place here. In some ways you could say there's a lack of ghettoisation here, with this type of immigration, people go to where the job is and they leave when the job is finished without any real level of ties or anything like that. It's quite an inchoate kind of thing. It's hard to get a handle on and I think, and I'm imagining here, that if you're in that world it could be quite isolated. You would need quite a lot of strength.

AM: You do get that impression from the characters in the book, that they're lonely, a bit rootless and alienated. You deal with the Eastern Europeans – do you think it would be the same situation with African migrants or is that a very different experience?

CB: There's a guy who set up a magazine called 'Inspirations' or something like that, which is the first African-Irish magazine, he does occasional book reviews, he has an academic background, quite high-powered stuff...

AM: If people come and don't have a writing background, I guess they're unlikely to start. It's more likely to be their children, who'll be African-Irish.

CB: Yeah, I think you could really be talking twenty years, there will be, and have always been, new arrivals who write, but it will take a while. I think the African experience is completely different, even the scope for levels of contact – even the [evangelical] Churches are their own world.

AM: Yes, certainly the newspaper *Metro Eireann* covers many of these churches. There is Eastern European news too, but it seems to be primarily African-focused advertising. And Irish people, certainly of our parents generation, their only experience of Africa is as a destination for missionary priests and nuns, and similarly the African people's view of Irish people is framed by that experience so I imagine that for both (Irish and African) there is a degree of uncertainty about any encounter when they are living in Ireland.

CB: Oh yeah, and certainly in Ireland there's a strong perception that essentially African person means asylum seeker, means Nigerian and so on, and that's riven with difficulties I think.

AM: And when there is no point of contact I don't know how you get around that.

CB: I don't either.

AM: That's where a book would help I think, and give the view from the inside.

CB: Yeah. There is a sense that people just slightly shrug and hope that the schools will get on with it and kids will integrate by virtue of being in the same classroom. Running in parallel with that, which you'd be slightly concerned about, is what attitudes will harden and build up, by just waiting for it (integration) to happen.

There's no sense, I don't get any sense, that this is important, an important thing to get right and that mistakes have been made that could be learnt from.

There has been a policy of dispersal around the country and that might not have been the worst thing in the world, spreading people around. It means when you go to small country towns you will see the same mix of faces as anywhere else.

AM: To go back to the book for a bit – all the Irish characters are people you wouldn't connect with as an Irish person, apart from Dessie, who has some redeeming features. I found myself definitely identifying with the immigrant characters, having had similar experiences of working abroad. Was there a reason you didn't have any Irish characters who were more identifiable with?

CB: I think it was that I wanted all of the characters to have a sense of pressure and to be striving, just to be working hard towards a specific goal. I think probably the Sylvester character came across as less sympathetic than I would have wanted, which, given that he was a corrupt, cheating, vain philanderer isn't that surprising. I didn't want any of them to be essentially bad. It was more that someone ostensibly secure and successful, who had achieved a level of recognition and was a person held in a degree of esteem in the community that he lives in, that his sense of uncertainty and insecurity about what he wants to happen – it's the same experience for him. I was reading some essays by Jonathan Franzen saying that there's a tendency for modern realist fiction about the commercial world to go 'It's an infernal machine, it's an infernal machine', you just find yourself going 'Ah no, I'm back here again!'

I wouldn't have wanted for any of the characters to be more sympathetic than the others. I hoped I could deliver him in a way that was complicated enough and hopefully nuanced enough that there'd be a degree of sympathy for him. He gets his come-uppance.

AM: The book captures the sense of desperation underlying it all - which does inspire a degree of empathy I suppose.

CB: Yes, through a mixture of greed and vanity he has put himself in a place where now the stakes are high enough for it all to come caving in on him.

In terms of the characters, it wasn't as if there was a line and I put the Irish characters on one side and the immigrants on the other. What I did try to do was to keep them true to their story, the balance between outside/inside, local/nonlocal or whatever, but that is actually much more of a plot structure thing than a core issue.

The Sylvester character.....there's a local politician in Dublin who has not sued me yet, I watered it down enough for him not to be recognisable, but there was some sort of development in north Dublin and half the community were for it and half against it, and he wrote letters for and against! Is there anything in that, if you're someone who's flexible enough, that you could actually simultaneously believe two

things? I think that for someone who's ambitious, it's not a complete moral failing, it's certainly duplicitous but that someone like that could be motivated from a sense of representing both arguments. It's quite difficult to represent someone without taking sides and to do so creates a character who is morally ambiguous.

Everything I've written seems to be about people having difficulties in keeping their lives as organised as they would want, things get messy and the separate aspects of a personality coming into conflict.

AM: So Marcin then, gets into that netherworld almost; he seems incapable of getting out, although he does eventually flee, as does Agnieszka. Tell me a bit about why he ended up where he did?

CB: I suppose there's a sense that this guy is going in this direction for no particular reason and he's just not actually fit for it, he's not capable of it. I wanted there to be some sense that his character was going to go in this direction. From his conversations with Artur, there's a sense that he's not robust enough for this lifestyle. Him lifting the money, that just zipped off the page. From quite early on, that whole scenario, that last day with people going this way and that and running around, that was there, which seemed like a Heath Robinson-type. That was the target and the characters were led in that direction and their paths all cross.

This character is looking for an escape but is not quite up to it. He thinks that it's about the pursuit of money, he thinks it's about establishing himself and that the money will provide the solution to him getting out of everything and then that money is literally presented to him on a plate. And I would hope that there is a big question mark over that, whether it presents him with more problems than it resolves. We're back to the infernal machine again!

AM: And what about the Agnieszka character, she's quite tragic. It was really hard to get a sense of who she was.

CB: That was the intention... at the end of the book and in retrospect, I feel a bit uncomfortable about it, that I wouldn't quite have done that in the same way. I did want there to be a sense that she was slightly mysterious, that you weren't going to get as close to her, that you would know as much about her as she wanted to reveal. The sense as well that even people who knew her, where she came from, had no idea of who she was at all; that there was a part to her that would stay private. Over and over in the book there are constant themes of people being seen and being exposed doing something that they shouldn't have been doing. In the case of Agnieszka I *did* want it to be the case that even if she ended up in the business she did, that her core would remain her own. Of all the characters in the book, the put-upon Eastern European girl dragged into this industry.... I'm not sure if I was doing it again that I'd do it this way. I'm not confident that that strand of the story did what I wanted it to.

AM: Well, there was a sense that it was a conscious decision, that she wasn't dragged into it. She already had a job, there were plenty more jobs if she had to leave this one.

Victor was also an enigmatic character. He was very focused, working hard, planning on opening a gym, but he didn't seem to be what he appeared.

CB: I had worked with a lot of guys who were of that ilk, who were really gentle, nice guys - when I say gentle, I don't mean physically, they were built guys who spent their days in gyms and standing on doors. I would be having conversations with them about what they wanted for dinner, civilised exchanges. But the conversations I would come across....I remember at Christmas time this one guy showing me a tea set he'd bought for his mother. I was thinking, 'It's a tea set!' and it was really beautiful, an art deco style thing. And the next day, there was this guy and he was standing on someone's neck [in his capacity as a bouncer] and I was thinking 'Holy Shit!' Again, it's that compartmentalising, the idea that there are different parts of the self and you try to keep them separate but that occasionally they bleed over into each other. That's what I thought about for the Victor character. It's different now because Romania are part of the EU but back then (1990s) working in a restaurant in town where everybody was ostensibly Italian and every one of them had Italian ID cards and they're using the name that was on the card, Salvatore and Paolo and in fact their names are Marta and Victor. There's material in that, using somebody else's name, using someone else's nationality and disappearing.

AM : Yes, and in a way becoming even more removed from your original identity. Because that's what I'm looking at, the whole idea of embracing the other, it's happened throughout our history. What used to happen was that people 'became Irish', whether happily or easily, who knows. But the scale of it is what's different now. I wonder why fiction is slow to catch on to reflecting this - perhaps it takes a while and it's difficult to know how to incorporate it. How do you feel about it? Are writers reluctant to portray a passing phase or moment?

CB: Well, it's not as if you're writing to leave a legacy or anything like that. It's the difference between taking an accurate photograph of a place at a specific time and reflecting that and being too distracted by the noise of the current moment and unable to identify what's really significant. Writing about working in a revolving sushi bar tells you nothing about what it was like to live in Dublin in the early 2000s.

AM: So where do you see Irish writing going? Is there an Irish style of writing?

CB: I'm not sure that there is an Irish style. In terms of dialogue, it's obviously going to be reflective of the *way* that people talk, not just in terms of the words they use but in the performance. I'm slightly reluctant to overstate that but if you were to look at the people coming up around. ... A guy called Julian Gough wrote a blog that was picked up by the *Guardian*. *Prospect* magazine ran a short story competition a few years ago which he won. There was a debate going on which he took up [on his

blog]. He was basically saying that he had given up on reading Irish writing altogether because it's completely mired in a 1950s version of Irish society, where it's all priests and bogs and drink. That Irish writers are a priestly caste and he makes that point that the Irish books that win big literary prizes ...*Brooklyn*, Sebastian Barry, even the issues in *The Gathering* slightly harkens back to that time. He finds this bizarre, he asks where are the people who play on X-Boxes ..

AM: That's Roddy Doyle and Dermot Bolger's books!

CB: Well, I mean that's the thing. Anyway, it was essentially a rant that got picked up by the *Guardian* and has been spinning back and forth in newspaper articles.

There was also an article in The Sunday Times by John Byrnes a month or so ago on that topic. It may be of relevance to you because it's dealing with the topic of where these things are going and whether newer Irish writers are engaging with things – it's a questions that keeps on rearing its head – 'Where is the great Celtic Tiger novel? Where is it?'

AM: Colum McCann threatened to write it a few years back if no one wrote it in the next(then) five years.

CB: Thank you Colum!

AM: A point to make about the books set in the past is that it is very much the rural world that they focus on. Novels about contemporary Ireland do tend to focus on the city. As a nation we do tend to hark back to that lifestyle , maybe because we feel we had a clearer identity then.

CB: Yes, but even Colm Toibin, before ever he wrote *Brooklyn*, would have been writing *The Blackwater Lightship*

AM: And *The Heather Blazing*..

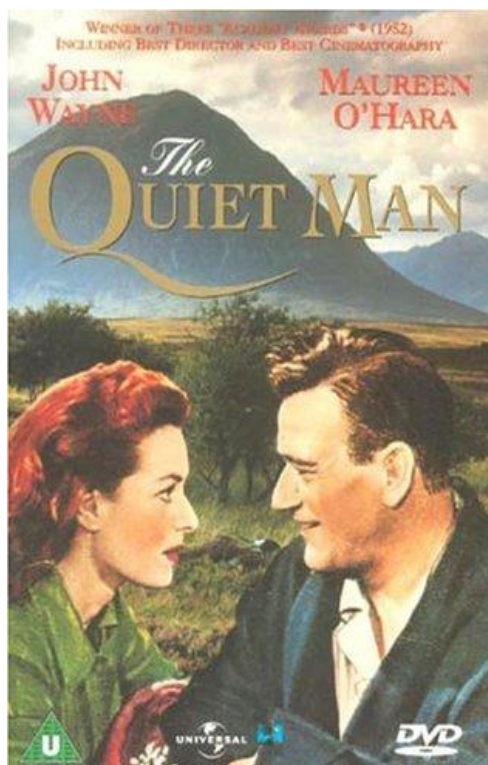
CB: Yes, absolutely, and completely set in the contemporary world

And running in tandem with that , very few of the issues dealt with in those stereotypically Irish books have really been resolved. A couple of years ago we thought we were done with emigration, now it's back. The church stuff is now front page news. McGahern lost his job and there was a cost to what he did. It's difficult to imagine anyway now writing anything so contentious that that would happen. The difficulty for people writing in certain styles is that they're peripheral. Books were banned but people would talk about them. The idea that a book would have that kind of power ...that's just gone.

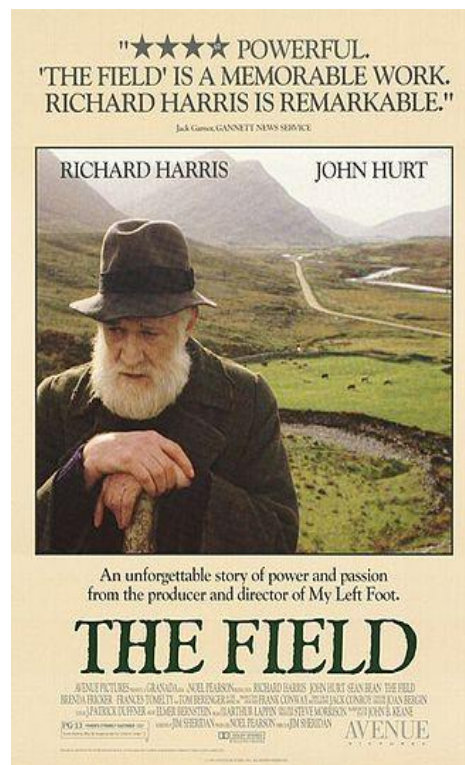
AM: And yet you could read them all in England.

CB: Unimaginable really, the change in such a short space of time...only 40 years or so.

Appendix II Film Images



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Appendix III

Aisling McKeown, Interview with The Gombeens (Jonathan Gunning and Miquel Barceló), at Coole Park Visitor Centre, 19 February 2010.

The following transcript is reproduced verbatim from the recording of the above interview, following a performance of The Gombeens 'Stories of a Yellow Town'.

AM: What prompted you to start this project in the first place?

MB: The project was in the back of our heads for a while because we wanted to do a show about the stories, because our work in general is really to be close to the community, to the people, so for us it's our main source of inspiration. Without that, I think we are only aiming to do plays in the normal way. So what happened is the County Council came and said 'We want you to be the Artists in Residence for 2008-2009 and we have this amount of money. Do you want to do something with it?' And we said, 'Sure, we'll go for it'.

JG: They said 'you've got to do the project in Co. Galway. Originally we wanted to collect stories from Gort and we wanted to pick a place where there was Irish as well. There was so much effort and time put into it, we just focused on Gort, and it's so rich [as a source of material]. And also, we were interested, we wanted to know about it, and it's a good way of doing that.

AM: It's not possible to classify your performance as one thing or the other. It reminds me of the oral storytelling tradition. What would you classify it as yourselves?

MB: The problem these days is that what I call the old literary tradition hasn't been recognised at the same levelwe studied literature, the people that wrote, but this is seen as something apart from that. It hasn't got the recognition that it should have. It should be at the same level. I think that what we do is directly linked with the old oral tradition. We tell stories that carry a cultural weight just as the traditional travelling storytellers used to. Generally the educational side to performance is seen as secondary to entertainment. We are quite stubborn in how we do and see our work. We see ourselves as modern bards or social clowns. We know that we are redundant without our audience and so we make our work accessible to a broad audience. I think that the general theatre community are not so willing to practically explore the relationship with the audience. They generally perform in the confines of theatre spaces and stick to critically acclaimed scripts. This is what they get funded to do. There is a fundamental problem with how theatre is done and funded. We don't fit into that category and though we are accepted as being theatre artists we are also seen as mavericks.

AM: I'm categorizing it as contemporary literature, to me that's what it is. You transcribed the words of the people so it's the voice of the people, and the way you perform it is what makes it unique.

JL: What we didn't want was to do impressions, so we're not doing impressions, that would be something completely different. We try to be respectful so basically we're trying to provide a platform that will present the stories, which is the most important thing, and the words, as respectfully as possible. A platform that will raise them (the words) so that people will receive them. If we over perform then suddenly people are no longer listening to the story, they're thinking about how funny this character is or whatever, so it's the *words* that are important.

MB: It can sound like a mystical concept but it's not. It's that we are the bodies through which the story is delivered to the audience, through our bodies and our voices. It's the most basic way of doing theatre.

AM: Have you had any feedback from the Brazilian community, not just about the performance, but at a personal level? Have they felt that it's a good reflection of their situation? Not just the words, but the way you perform it, conveying the emotional side.

JG: Now that they've seen...well, it's all about trust so originally, to get contact, we spoke to the Arts Community Development Officer or someone like that, someone within the community. Then they would pass on our request (to speak to people). People would trust them and therefore think that if their contact trusts us then we must be okay. But then after the show has been performed, and some members of the Brazilian community have seen it, and the news goes around like wildfire, you know, everyone then knows that we're respectful. So now people will very easily tell us stories. They respect what we're doing, they think it's important. They *know*, they've come to realise that their stories are important, because before, they didn't realise it. They just thought that they're here, they should keep their heads down, survive and go home, and that none of their experiences were important and nothing they had to say was important. But now they realise that it is, they are valued and they're delighted that we want to talk to them.

AM: Although things are moving towards integration, do you think it's still an 'Us and Them' scenario?

JG: Yes, it is.

MB: Oh yeah.

AM: And is that a deliberate thing? Is it because the communities are deliberately staying apart or that it's just taking time for things to evolve?

MB: No, I think there haven't been the *places* put in place for this mixing to happen. As a foreigner myself (MB is from Majorca) it's difficult, there are no places where

people can gather. Of course you don't have the outside here because of the weather. But the Brazilians here in Gort and all over Ireland, reclaim the outdoor space. There are no spaces where people can gather. You have the pubs where drink is involved, and the relationship becomes different.

JG: And also, there's a real sense of ownership about a pub, it's completely territorial.

MB: The only place was the Wednesday night that we went to the Men's Only Night (at the pub) when Irishmen did start to come to it. There were Brazilian men there too, but then it was stopped because there weren't enough people to keep it going, everyone was working.

JG: I think generally there's no network or foundation for anything. It's so new, it's only recently there's a teacher in the school that speaks Portuguese, that seems so rudimentary. Translators, interpreters, that sort of stuff is much more important. And then the idea of socialising and getting to know people in the local community...the only reason (Brazilian)people would get to know locals is because there are people with good hearts. The Gort woman whose husband took the Brazilian children to a hurling match. She's the same woman who looked into the pram of the Brazilian couple's newborn baby and said 'She's Irish now'. She's a brilliant woman. I love this because she isn't some fantastic PC thinker.

AM: That brings us to the question of identity and the hybrid identities emerging. I imagine most children are still being born to parents who are both Brazilian – have there been any children born of Brazilian/Irish parents?

JG and MB: There have, yeah, there are a few.

AM: It begs the question of what it means to be Irish.

JG: It's funny, every time we talk to people, *every* time, they always mention the same person – Leonardo, who was a young boy who was a fantastic hurler. I've spoken to kids and they always go, 'Oh, Leonardo (sighing)'. Even Irish kids go, 'Oh, my God! Leonardo!'. The latest thing we've heard is that he's really missing the hurling ...he's gone back to Brazil and it's too hot to play.

MB: But for a while he became like a myth.... People said he was gone and other people said he was still here. People didn't know if he was around.

AM; You can imagine in years to come people will be asking 'Do you remember Leonardo in the olden days!'

JG: He could almost become a 'Setanta' character [a figure from Irish mythology, who was a legendary hurler].... 'There was the time when Leonardo met the O'Halpin brothers...!' (JG mimics an old Irish storyteller embarking on a tall tale)

AM: In terms of places of contact, in addition to sport, is music a point of contact?

MB: It is, but it should be more so. When we did our opening here, we had two Brazilian musicians with us and we said ‘You should tour Ireland’. One of them is gone now.

JG: But also, they don’t valuewe got them a few gigs and they worked with us but they didn’t think first of all that anyone wanted to hear their music. We’d organise an event, people would come, and everyone would think it was amazing. The music is very different from what you’d expect from Brazilians, it’s sort of country music. But they didn’t value it themselves. But also they’re hardworking, they’re labourers, they just want to work. They don’t imagine there’s a career in music. They played a few events and occasionally in O’Grady’s (a pub). But I think their focus is survival and to make money - at the moment it’s certainly survival. We’ve heard some awful stories.....

MB: The carnival, it happened one year or two, then finished. It didn’t happen anymore because there’s no funding, no support. It always ended up being the same people who did everything. The county should support these things.

AM: One of the Irish characters in the performance remarks that the Brazilian workers he employs remind him of the Irish emigrant labourers of the past with their strong work ethic. Has the historical memory of Irish emigration given people any understanding of what life is like for the Brazilian migrants?

JG: You get the odd person who is open enough and aware enough of our experience and is able to relate that experience to other people. But I don’t think so (that the Irish experience informs people’s attitudes)...That’s just the way it is. If that was the case, if we all learned from our own experiences, then there would be no racism, but unfortunately it’s not like that.

MB: Because the stories of exploitation now are ..phw.

AM: Really? Because of the difficulties in finding work?

JG: Yeah, there’s an element - in fact we heard it from the Brazilians – of the Brazilians exploiting each other. They were exploited when they came, but it got to the stage where they were saying to their fellow Brazilians, ‘I can translate for you, I can fill the form in’ and people were paying huge amounts of money for very menial tasks, until finally the support network was put in place. But then eventually Brazilians got together and the local Brazilian Community Development Officer said ‘Look, you have to support each other, this is having a negative effect on your community. They’ve more or less wiped it out now (the exploitation). And it happens as well with the Irish people, it’s shocking when you hear the stories.

AM: Has your work encouraged any writing within the Brazilian community, once they knew that their stories were valued?

JG: No, but I heard an Irish person wanted to put a statue to represent the Brazilian people in the town...that would be very hard to do, but writing, no. A few good people were trying to help people to express themselves. A woman called Margaret Geraghty, a bilingual Portuguese language support teacher, she teaches a class in ESL, she tries to organise lots of things but I think she finds it quite frustrating.

AM: So you're both continually updating your performance as circumstances change, so it's very much a live production?

MB: Yes, like the oral tradition that it is.

JG: We occasionally take stories out. We're meeting people next week to record more. We take things out, add lines in. It also depends on the audience. With children we may use different stories.

AM: What do you find at the Universities? Would you do pretty much what you did here tonight?

MB: Yes, exactly the same. It works well.

AM: How do you account for the success of this form of performance?

JG: Well, you can read about these themes in books. We're doing theatre but it's in a storytelling style. We're making eye contact with people, we're making it much more personal and therefore it's much more accessible. It's live.

MB: When we read out one of the scripts early on, one of the wives of the characters was there. She loved it and at the end she said 'Now I can see things that my husband didn't tell me. Now I can see things from the distance and I can see the effort he made in coming here.' Because he came here alone at first and she joined him later.

JG: It was really powerful when this woman said that and it was mostly Irish people in the audience. She said 'I understand now the sacrifice my husband made'. And what's also important is that this is a woman who would never normally speak in public but she felt the urge to say it (having seen the performance), and she thanked us for this. For us, it was good to feel we had made an impression on someone.

AM: Are you the only people you know of who are doing this kind of performance?

MB: In Ireland yes. I did this project before in Majorca, for the island.

AM: Which communities in Majorca did you do it for?

MB: Well, there were lots of stories from the Civil War that people were afraid to talk about and it was great to do that. We had a character who was a Nigerian in the play as well and the power of it made me think about doing this here in Ireland. Because the first part of the project was to play in houses and that was brilliant.

JG: Yeah, we performed it for Nigerians and that was amazing because they said that if we had recorded them, they would have told us the same stories.

AM: So it's the migrant experience – it's not where you've come from, it's the fact that you've come.

JG: Yeah, people ask us if we would ever do the same project (for another immigrant community). I don't know, I don't think I'd like to keep doing the same project for different communities. But I think there's something universal about it.

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