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The Short Story Cycle in Ireland:

From Jane Barlow to Donal Ryan

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In memory of Ally

and for Zooey

In a world like this… I've got you

Preface

Although I count myself fortunate for having been given the opportunity to write this dissertation, the process did not pass off without a hitch. There were some funding difficulties, as a result of which I was not able to spend as much time working on this project as I would have liked to. Moreover, after one year of research, I went through the terrifying experience of sustaining a fracture to the second cervical vertebrae in a riding accident. Six difficult months of convalescence followed, but eventually I got back on the horse – literally and figuratively. Even though it was challenging to take up my life and work again due to the serious impact this accident had on my health, I am very happy that I persevered. I would not have been able to do so without the support of the diverse group of people that shaped my life during the last few years.

First of all, I am greatly indebted to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Elke D'hoker, not only for selecting me to work on this project, but also for the trouble she has taken to ensure that I had the means to complete it. I am glad that she introduced me to the fascinating field of Irish Studies, and I thank her for her willingness to read and reread my work countless times, as well as for the extensive feedback she provided. I learned a great deal from working with her, and I cannot stress enough how much this dissertation benefited from her academic expertise. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the other members of my supervising committee, Prof. Dr. Heather Ingman and Prof. Dr. Hedwig Schwall, whose feedback and insightful suggestions were of crucial importance to this project.

Obviously, I am grateful to the KU Leuven for having given me the opportunity to dedicate myself full-time to my research on the fascinating short story cycles which this dissertation revolves around. I am thankful for having had the unique experience of devoting my days to reading, writing papers and articles, and attending conferences. I owe much gratitude to the 'Onderzoeksraad KU Leuven', for allowing me the extra year I needed to complete my research after the initial two-year scholarship had expired. I would like to thank 'Academische Stichting Leuven' as well, for letting me present my research at the 2012 IASIL conference in Montreal, Canada by way of a travel grant. I also want to mention the Leuven Centre for Irish Studies, which organizes many interesting academic events in the field of Irish Studies.

I thank my colleagues from the 'Subfaculteit Literatuurwetenschappen' as well, Lene and Benedicte in particular. Although I did not spend much time in our office during the final

stages of my research, their support was important to me. I especially valued the long talks I had with Lene, both about our work and home lives. I also thank the people who are part of the 'XXL19 Research Seminar', from whom I received some valuable feedback on my analysis of the 1890s cycle. In addition, I want to thank Mia Hamels, whom I could always turn to for practical questions, as well as the staff of the IBL service, who provided me with many urgently-needed academic sources over the years.

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Thanks are also in order to the friends I met during my student years in Brussels, particularly my travelling companion, Sven, with whom I exchanged many conversations of mutual encouragement. The frequent lunches I had with Fabienne were a welcome distraction from the daily routine as well. Furthermore, I want to mention the people – and horses – from 'Stal Amandus', where I ride, my fellow tennis players from 'Landen T.C.' and 'T.C. Wimbledon', and the people from 'RSC Anderlecht', where I am a proud volunteer. I thank them for providing me with the diversion I needed during the course of this project. Moreover, I felt greatly supported by their interest in the progress of my work. My thanks also go out to my extended family, including my grandmother, aunts, uncles and cousins. They do exactly what families are supposed to do: being there for you when you need them the most. It is nice to know that I have the *Brouckmans Mafia* behind me.

A very special thank you is of course due to my immediate family, who are also my life companions. I thank my father and doubles partner, Ralph, who always provides me with unconditional moral support, and my mother, Anne. Despite the fact that she initially wanted me to work in a sector completely opposite to academics, she has put considerable effort into the proofreading of this dissertation, for which I am grateful. I also thank my sister and fellow dog trainer, Dana, whom I spend more time with than with anyone else. As the only other academic(-to-be) in the family, she could perhaps empathize best with the challenges that are involved with academic research. My greatest thanks, finally, go out to my soulmate Ally, who sadly passed away two years ago, and to Zooey, the little man of my life, who needs me as much as I need him. It is with great love that I dedicate this dissertation to them.

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The Short Story Cycle in Ireland (1890s – present): Introduction

The short story cycle is a collection of interconnected stories, occupying a position mid-way between the loose collection of short stories and the more highly unified form of the novel. Consisting of individual stories, which are nonetheless linked to each other, this hybrid form is characterized by a tension between unity and fragmentation. The interrelation between the separate parts can be provided by a shared setting, character(s) or central theme, which is then underscored by other unifying elements such as a clear aesthetic structure or cross-references throughout the work as a whole. Well-known examples of short story cycles are James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) or, somewhat more recently, Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989). The critical study of the short story cycle started off in the 1970s with Forrest L. Ingram's monograph, and has since led to several prominent studies of the literary form in both the nineteenth and the twentieth century, mostly in the United States and Canada (e.g. Mann 1989, Lynch 2001, Nagel 2001).

Unlike in North America, the short story cycle is not recognized as a subgenre in Irish literary studies. Despite the popularity of the short story in Ireland, there does not appear to be a literary or critical tradition of the Irish short story cycle. If at all, the term 'linked stories' is used, but a clear genre concept does not exist. Still, much like in North America, the situation in Ireland is favourable for the short story cycle to flourish as a literary form. Critics have explained the success of the American and Canadian short story cycle by the presence of a strong oral storytelling tradition, an interest in place and national identity, a literary focus on conflicts between individual and community, and a strong tradition and popularity of the short story (Kennedy 1995, Lundén 1999, Lynch 2001, Nagel 2001). These statements are also true for the situation in Ireland. Moreover, Joyce's *Dubliners* is considered one of the archetypes of the cycle form, together with Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (Nagel 2000: 9). It is striking, then, that similar contexts have led to the critical prominence and popularity of the short story cycle in North America on the one hand, and the critical and commercial absence of the form in Ireland on the other.

In this dissertation, I aim to show that, in addition to *Dubliners*, many other Irish collections of short stories actually qualify as cycles as well. In doing so, I will investigate whether a tradition of the short story cycle can be discerned in Ireland, and what its

representatives are. I will discuss a number of what I believe to qualify as Irish short story cycles – written in English – focusing on whether they display the tension between unity and fragmentation typical of the cycle, whether there is a relation between form and content and whether traces can be found of the Bakhtinian concept of "genre memory".[1] This concerns the influence of generic conventions and traditions on individual writers – whether conscious or unconscious. In the context of Irish literature, a collection could for instance be viewed as displaying an awareness of the cycle as a literary form by writing back to *Dubliners*. In short, this dissertation seeks, on the one hand, to examine some twenty-five Irish cycles in formal, thematic and generic terms, and to trace the development of the short story cycle as a literary form in Ireland from the 1890s until the present on the other. The selected works will be analysed according to the methodology, research questions and hypotheses listed below.

Methodology, Research Questions and Hypotheses

After providing the necessary theoretical background on the short story cycle, the corpus works will be analysed individually in terms of genre, form and theme. First, the generic status of the books will be examined: what makes these volumes short story cycles, rather than novels on the one hand, or 'mere' collections of short stories on the other? What are the elements of unity in these works, and which other (para)textual markers can be found to determine that they are cycles? Is there a unified or rather multiple and variable narrative perspective? Are the stories arranged chronologically or is there another temporal patterning? Is a specific aesthetic organization or structure present in the cycles? Are the short story cycles also narratives of community – a subcategory of the cycle unified by setting, as defined by Sandra A. Zagarell (1988)?

Secondly, the structural and narrative set-up of the works will be analysed in more detail. The central hypothesis governing the formal analysis will be the tension between unity and fragmentation or openness and closure, as different individual stories are made to be part of a whole, which nonetheless does not quite achieve the sense of narrative integration characteristic of the novel. Can the cycle as a whole be seen as a closed or rather as an open text? What about the spatial, temporal or thematic gaps between the stories: how do they influence the coherence of the cycle as a whole? Can a tension be noticed between unity and fragmentation in a particular volume, and how is it realized?

[1] The term 'genre memory' itself was actually coined by Bakhtin commentators Morson and Emerson.

With regard to theme, finally, the critical analysis of the different works will also seek to determine the effect of the specific formal structure on the thematic content of the book. Thus, at the forefront here is the way in which form and content interact, or what the effect is of formal and generic structures on the thematic meaning of the texts. With regard to North American short story cycles, critics have pointed out that the short story cycle lends itself very well to the exploration of a family or community (Mann 1989: 13; Nagel 2001: 17). This observation, as this dissertation hopes to show, can be confirmed with regard to the Irish short story cycle as well. Jan Barlow's *Irish Idylls* (1892) and Somerville and Ross's *The Irish R.M.* (1898-1915), for instance, depict daily life in local Irish communities, whereas George Moore and James Joyce can be seen to question the possibility of community in *The Untilled Field* (1903) and *Dubliners* (1914), respectively. Of course, as we will see, Irish short story cycles address other themes as well, such as the relation between the individual and society, the question of (national) identity, issues of family or personal development, women's roles in a patriarchal society, etc.

In addition to analysing the selected works individually, I will also attempt to determine whether an evolution can be traced of the short story cycle as a literary form from the 1890s until the present. The development of the Irish short story cycle appears to follow international movements, with a cluster of cycles around the turn of the twentieth century, both narratives of community (Barlow, Somerville and Ross) and modernist works (Moore, Joyce, Stephens, Beckett). This seems to be followed by a period of relative scarcity for the cycle in mid-century Ireland – in spite of the considerable success of the short story in general – to be followed by a renewed interest in the form in more recent decades, specifically but not exclusively by female authors. The central research question here is whether traces of 'genre memory' can be found in either the text or the paratext of the short story cycles. As Gerald Lynch puts it, "writers cannot help but be influenced by the various historical-cultural contexts traced in and by the literary form, the genre, in which they choose to work" (2001: 5). Even in the absence of a prominent critical tradition of the short story cycle in Ireland, then, individual texts may signal their awareness of the generic tradition in which they function. In other words, I will investigate whether these works show an implicit or explicit awareness of their generic status by way of, for instance, indications in the (sub)title, the prologue or epilogue, or by intertextually referring to each other, to key texts such as Joyce's *Dubliners*, or to cycles from outside the Irish context such as Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*.

In all, this dissertation hopes to offer an important contribution to the study of Irish short fiction by placing the largely neglected form of the short story cycle on the critical map.

In doing so, its purpose is to demonstrate the importance and development of the cycle form within Irish literary history. In its detailed analysis of individual collections of short fiction as cycles with a specific formal and thematic finality, this dissertation also aims to bring about new interpretations of already well-known works such as Moore's *The Untilled Field* on the one hand, and recover highly interesting but largely forgotten works such as Barlow's *Irish Idylls* on the other.

Corpus and Outline

In what follows, I aim to provide a formal, thematic and generic analysis of the short story cycle in Ireland from the late nineteenth century until the present. To this end, based on the criteria set out by short story cycle theory (Ingram 1971, Mann 1989, Lundén 1999, Nagel 2001, etc.), I have selected some twenty-five Irish works of short fiction which I will read as cycles. The body of this dissertation consists of an overview of short story cycle theory on the one hand, and seven chapters analysing the selected works in the form of case studies on the other hand.

In the theoretical section, I will provide an overview of the existing – predominantly North American – short story cycle criticism. In doing so, I will especially focus on the most prominent studies of the form, such as Ingram's 1971 monograph *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century: Studies in a Literary Genre*, Mann's *The Short Story Cycle: A Genre Companion and Reference Guide* (1989), Luscher's "The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book" (1989), Dunn and Morris's *The Composite Novel: The Short Story Cycle in Transition* (1995), Lundén's *The United Stories of America: Studies in the Short Story Composite* (1999) and Nagel's *The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle: The Ethnic Resonance of a Genre* (2001). In addition, I will offer an outline of the evolution which the genre has undergone internationally: from its predecessors in the early classics such as Homer's *Odyssey*, to the emergence of the phenomenon of the modern short story cycle around the turn of the twentieth century, and its further development until the present day.

Chapter one will revolve around two turn-of-the-century cycles which narrate community life: Jane Barlow's *Irish Idylls* (1892) and Edith Somerville and Martin Ross's *The Irish R.M.*, a series consisting of *Some Experiences of an Irish R.M.* (1899), *Further Experiences of an Irish R.M.* (1908) and *In Mr Knox's Country* (1915). I have selected these works as a starting point of my analysis of the short story cycle in Ireland, because they are both unified by a shared, though varying, set of characters, by a narrator who is at the same time an insider and outsider to the community, as well as by setting and theme. Moreover, as I

will show, both cycles portray the life of a community which attempts to maintain itself as an entity.[2] In this chapter, I will demonstrate how Barlow and Somerville and Ross's books differ from earlier accounts of Irish life by analysing them as early short story cycles. Moreover, I will discuss how they fit into the regional practice of what Zagarell has called writing "narratives of community" (1988). In addition, I will look at how these works relate to Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), an early American short story cycle which also narrates the life of a community.

In chapter two, I will focus on George Moore's famous volume of short fiction, *The Untilled Field* (1903), which is unified by characters and themes as well as by setting, and can be seen, as I will show, as bridging tradition and modernity. Generally considered a precursor of Joyce's paradigmatic short story cycle *Dubliners*, Moore's work displays close resemblance to the earlier narratives of community as well. In addition to reading the book as a short story cycle, I will explore how *The Untilled Field* relates to the practice of narrating the life of a community discussed in the first chapter, by comparing it with Barlow's *Irish Idylls*. This comparison will allow me to establish in which way Moore harks back to this nineteenth-century regional practice and, to what extent he alters it, thereby prefiguring the modern cycles of the early twentieth century. To illustrate the latter, I will compare Moore's book with Joyce's *Dubliners* as well.

In the third chapter, I will discuss James Stephens's *Here Are Ladies* (1913)[3] and Samuel Beckett's *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934) in the context of a comparison with the modernist short story cycle par excellence, Joyce's *Dubliners*. Like Joyce's work, Stephens's

[2] It should be noted here that my analysis of the early short story cycle in Ireland does not open with William Carleton, who was among the first to use Irish culture and the native Irish-language tradition for short narratives in English in his *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (first series 1830; second series 1833), as Elizabeth Harris points out (42). Although Carleton's *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* is set in one region, i.e. South-East Ulster (Kiely 1-2), the work lacks unity in other aspects. There is, for instance, no consistent narrative voice. As Thomas B. O'Grady indicates, the stories are strikingly uneven. There are for example multiple shifts in focus in the Ned M'Keown stories (134). Similarly, the style, thought, mood and point of view shift throughout the volume. As a result, the work is not coherent enough to be seen as a cycle. Although Carleton does provide an extensive preface, which links the stories externally, there is no true internal coherence present in the work. As a result, *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* qualifies rather as a framed tale collection than as an early short story cycle. Incidentally, Carleton initially applied a storytelling framing device to *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*. As Ingman explains, the volume was originally meant to be a sequence of stories told by peasants around the fireside at Ned M'Keown's pub, a convention which Carleton left behind after the first few stories. She argues that there were two reasons for this: on the one hand, the reader might not have appreciated such an extensive use of Irish dialect and, on the other hand, this form would not have allowed for comments by an omniscient narrator (2009: 34).

[3] One could make a case for the analysis of several of Stephens's works as short story cycles, for example *The Crock of Gold*. However, I have opted not to take cycles of fairy tales into account for the purpose of this dissertation. With its modernist depiction of middle-class Dubliners, moreover, *Here Are Ladies* is Stephens's most interesting work to consider in the context of the cycle form as well as in comparison with Joyce's *Dubliners*.

volume, as I will show, uses the cycle form to tell the stories of middle-class Dubliners. Although *Here Are Ladies* consists of short stories as well as poems and monologues, I believe the work can be usefully read as a cycle, as it displays distinct thematic and formal links between the texts.[4] *Here are Ladies*, that is, has a very tight structure, which governs and unifies the work. In addition, the recurrence of the themes of paralysis and modern loneliness, as well as the recurring symbols such as triangles, increase the unity of the book as a whole. Furthermore, even though Joyce's influence on Beckett has often been discussed, *More Pricks Than Kicks* has not been compared with *Dubliners* in the context of the short story cycle. The stories in Beckett's debut, as I will argue, are not simply unified by their Dublin setting, they also share a common protagonist as well as recurring themes and symbols – reminiscent of the ones that run through Joyce's cycle. Moreover, Beckett explicitly refers to *Dubliners* in *More Pricks Than Kicks*. Finally, I will analyse how Joyce's *Dubliners* relates to that other archetypal short story cycle, Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, with the intention of establishing a link with the American tradition of the form. In doing so, I will focus in particular on how both cycles deal with the idea of community in the modern age.

The fourth chapter will look at the apparent low point of the cycle form in mid-century Ireland – despite the considerable success of the Irish short story in this period. Not only do relatively few cycles appear to have been published in the middle years of the twentieth century, the cycles published in this period are generally also, as I will show, far more 'loosely' unified than their predecessors. In the first section of this chapter, I will investigate to what extent Liam O'Flaherty's *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories* (1929),[5] Frank O'Connor's *Guests of the Nation* (1931), Seán Ó Faoláin's *Midsummer Night Madness* (1932)[6] and Mary Lavin's *Tales from Bective Bridge* (1942)[7] can be considered short story

[4] In the theoretical section, I will come back to the question of whether or not to include other forms, such as poetry, in one's definition of the short story cycle.

[5] From O'Flaherty's volumes of short stories, I have opted to include *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories* in this study of the Irish short story cycle because it focuses on the power of nature, and it makes use of recurring settings, themes as well as composite characters. Moreover, by centring on the life of Irish peasants, as I will argue, O'Flaherty echoes *The Untilled Field*. Thus, O'Flaherty can be said to hark back to Moore by using the cycle form to address similar themes. O'Flaherty's previous collections – *Spring Sowing* and *The Tent* – also deal with the lives of Irish peasants. For the purpose of this dissertation, however, I have selected *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories*, because of its greater critical focus on the repressive nature of peasant communities.

[6] For the purpose of this dissertation, I have selected O'Connor's *Guests of the Nation* and Ó Faoláin's *Midsummer Night Madness*, because I believe these works of short fiction to be their more unified ones. O'Connor's volume, as we will see, has a quite clear preoccupation with war. Moreover, in addition to its thematic focus on war, Ó Faoláin's book can also be seen to have a progressive argument, which is underscored by cross-references. It is not surprising that the works in question are the authors' respective debuts, as short story writers at that time often published one thematically unified collection in order to make an impression, after which they moved on to publishing 'loose' story collections.

[7] I have selected *Tales from Bective Bridge* for the purpose of this dissertation, because it is Lavin's most highly unified work of short fiction. The work does not only centre on the lives of people in Ireland's rural mid-lands, it

cycles. In the second section of this chapter, I will turn to Maeve Brennan's collection of short stories *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* (1997).[8] Although this collection may not technically qualify as a cycle, as the stories were selected and arranged posthumously by an editor, the book does, as I will argue, display many of the characteristics typical of short story cycles.

In the fifth chapter, I will suggest that the period of scarcity described in the previous chapter is followed by a renewed interest in the cycle form. That is, in the second half of the twentieth century, more short story cycles appear to have been published. These works, as I will show, are unified by theme as well as by style, recurring symbols and cross-references between the stories. Moreover, many of them refer back to Joyce's *Dubliners*, suggesting a greater awareness of the form of the short story cycle. Still, the cycles discussed in this chapter will also be seen to carry on a focus on domestic and personal concerns. From the considerable short fiction output published in the 1960s and 1970s, I have chosen to focus on the work of Edna O'Brien, John McGahern and William Trevor.[9] I will argue that the short story collections they published early in their careers are remarkably unified and deserve to be read as short story cycles. As far as O'Brien and McGahern are concerned, I have selected their debut works of short fiction – *The Love Object* (1968) and *Nightlines* (1970), respectively – for the purpose of this dissertation, not only because they are unified works revolving around love and family relationships, but also because they clearly echo Joyce's *Dubliners*. In the case of Trevor, I have opted for his second volume of short fiction rather than his debut, simply because *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories* (1972) has more unity, and takes up similar themes of human relationships while at the same time borrowing elements from Joyce's short story cycle.

The sixth chapter will consider how, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, several female authors have used the form of the short story cycle to criticize women's position and identity in patriarchal societies. In this context, I will discuss Emma

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also has a strong thematic focus on love, family ties and human relationships in general. As mentioned in the previous note, many mid-century short story writers started their careers with a thematically unified story collection, with the purpose of moving on to 'looser' volumes after having made a certain statement. Particularly in Lavin's case, it is striking that her following collections are much looser; they are also generally named after one story with the suffix 'and Other Stories', which is an indication of their lack of unity.

[8] *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* brings together the two collections of short fiction which were published during Brennan's lifetime: *In and Out of Never-Never Land* (1969) and *Christmas Eve* (1974).

[9] Another possible Irish short story cycle published in this period would be Val Mulkerns's *Antiquities: A Sequence of Short Stories* (1979), which also explicitly refers back to Joyce's *Dubliners*. For a discussion of this volume – together with Mary Beckett's *A Literary Woman* (1990) – as a short story cycle which revisits the late nineteenth-century practice of narrating community life, see Elke D'hoker and Debbie Brouckmans, "Narrating the Community: The Short Story Cycles of Val Mulkerns and Mary Beckett," *Narrating Ireland*, ed. Katharina Renhak (Trier: WVT, 2015).

Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch* (1997) and *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* (2002), as well as Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's *The Inland Ice and Other Stories* (1997) and Anne Enright's *The Portable Virgin* (1991), as cycles. As I will show, both in *Kissing the Witch*, a volume of postmodern feminist fairy tales,[10] and in *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, a volume of metafictional stories which draw on historical facts to bring to light women's ordinary lives in previous periods, Donoghue contributes to a feminist writing-back in contemporary Irish short fiction. I will argue that these works are not only unified by theme but also by a similar aesthetic structure – in the second book, each story is followed by a historical note – as well as by various other stylistic, thematic and ideological links. Furthermore, I will look at how Ní Dhuibhne and Enright share Donoghue's focus on ordinary women's rebellion against confining stereotypes. In the case of *The Inland Ice and Other Stories*, as we will see, this takes shape in the juxtaposition of an old Irish folk tale and contemporary stories, which together form a largely unified whole. In *The Portable Virgin*, on the other hand, this thematic emphasis reveals itself by addressing the continuing hold of certain words and images on gender expectations in contemporary society throughout a volume of experimental stories.

In the seventh chapter, finally, I will focus on how other contemporary authors have employed the cycle form to different effect. From the substantial amount of short fiction works published in recent decades,[11] I have chosen to discuss four works by authors from the Republic as well as by Northern Irish writers: Briege Duffaud's *Nothing Like Beirut* (1994), Bernard MacLaverty's *Matters of Life and Death* (2006), Christine Dwyer Hickey's *The House on Parkgate Street and Other Dublin Stories* (2013) and, Donal Ryan's *The Spinning Heart* (2012). These works, as I will show, all share an emphasis on place and, at the same time, revolve around a certain theme, which is inextricably connected to the setting of the book. I will argue that these collections can be usefully read as cycles, because they are markedly unified by place and theme, as well as by recurring symbols, cross-references and other connections between the individual stories – whether they have been marketed as novels, such as Ryan's book, or as short story collections, such as the other three works. In addition, I will look at how *The House on Parkgate Street and Other Dublin Stories* distinctly refers back to Joyce's *Dubliners* and thereby acknowledges the cycle as a literary form and

[10] Although I do not take cycles of fairy tales into account for the purpose of this dissertation, I have opted to include *Kissing the Witch*, as it is a cycle of rewritten fairy tales which is clearly a part of Donoghue's project of the revision of women's lives through short fiction.

[11] There are, of course, many more contemporary volumes of short stories which would qualify as cycles. To name but a few other possible recent works of short fiction that could be usefully read in the context of the short story cycle in Ireland would be Colum McCann's *Fishing the Sloe-Black River* (1994), Colm Tóibín's *Mothers and Sons* (2006), and Adrian Kenny's *Portobello Notebook* (2012).

thus contributes to the existence of the genre memory of the short story cycle in Ireland traced throughout this dissertation. Similarly, I will explore how *The Spinning Heart* rewrites the late nineteenth-century narrative of community discussed in the opening chapter by focussing on the isolated individuals of a fractured community rather than on a community of people which stands united against the threats that face it.

The Short Story Cycle from a Theoretical Perspective: Criticism and Development

Short Story Cycle Criticism

The critical study of the short story cycle took off with Forrest L. Ingram's 1971 *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century: Studies in a Literary Genre*, in which he discussed, among other works, Joyce's *Dubliners* and Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. For Ingram, the cycle has a specific formal organization, which harbours a "tension between the one and the many" (19) or, in other words, a tension between unity and fragmentation. Ingram originally defined the cycle as "a book of short stories so linked to each other by their author that the reader's successive experience of various levels of the pattern of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts" (19). His definition of the genre reveals an emphasis on the author's intentions. He accordingly distinguished between "composed" cycles, conceived as a whole by the author from the beginning on, "arranged" cycles, consisting of stories which the author brought together after writing them, and "completed" cycles, which lie somewhere in between, i.e. they are not strictly composed nor merely arranged. The author, for instance, may create a completed cycle by adding stories to already existing ones, completing a unifying task which he "may have subconsciously begun" (17-8). These subgroups, however, are not always clearly delineated: certain cycles may belong to several or not at all, or fall in between. According to Ingram, the stories in a cycle form a new whole mainly through the dynamic pattern of "recurrent development", which does not only bring unity to the cycle – for example through thematic consistency – but also causes it to move forward from one story to the next (13). Ingram's seminal study has since led to several prominent, mostly North American, studies of the literary form of the short story cycle.

The first major study on the short story cycle to appear after Ingram's was Susan Garland Mann's *The Short Story Cycle: A Genre Companion and Reference Guide* (1989), in which she discusses the development of the genre and its characteristics, analyses a number of "representative cycles" (including Joyce's *Dubliners*, Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* and William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*) and provides an annotated listing of twentieth-century short story cycles. She emphasizes that the stories in a cycle work independently of one another and work together at the same time. This "simultaneous self-sufficiency and interdependence" (15), she argues, is the one essential

characteristic of the short story cycle. In other words, the reader is able to understand each story individually, but at the same time the stories work together to create something beyond the individual story. As Mann points out, this simultaneous separateness and interdependence of the stories results in the tension between unity and fragmentation already described by Ingram. Through a number of illustrations of different types of short story cycles, Mann suggests ways in which cycles create meaning and ways in which their form and content are interdependent. She distinguishes three major types of the short story cycle: cycles unified by character, by theme and by setting. First, cycles unified by character share one or more protagonists, sometimes a family or a group of people. These works are often about the maturation of a protagonist, which means they form an alternative to the *bildungsroman* or the *künstlerroman*. An important subcategory here is the cycle unified by a "composite protagonist", created when the protagonists of the different stories bear a strong resemblance to one another (10). Secondly, she mentions cycles with thematic unity, which is mostly underscored by cross-references, recurring symbols, phrases and metaphors or by a clear aesthetic structure. Cycles unified by theme often focus on the theme of isolation or fragmentation. The cycle, with its tension between unity and fragmentation, seems particularly well suited to convey the sense of isolation, disintegration or indeterminacy that many modern characters experience (11). Even though it is true that many of these works focus on the individual, there are also many cycles that deal with groups such as families or communities. Mann indicates that a third type is the cycle that concentrates on a particular setting (13). A specific subcategory here is that of the cycles depicting the life of a community, called "narratives of community" by Zagarell (1988). Mann may not provide a definition of the cycle as clear-cut as Ingram's, but her study does distinguish itself by moving from an emphasis on the author's intentions to a focus on the formal criteria which constitute a short story cycle. In addition to the tension typical of the genre and the possible unifying elements, Mann also lists other generic markers. The title of a cycle, for instance, is often used to emphasize that a book is not a mere short story collection. In other words, a specific title is used which captures the book as a whole, rather than naming the volume after one of the stories and adding 'and Other Stories' (14). Mann indicates that the title or subtitle of a cycle can underscore the unity of setting (*Winesburg, Ohio*), the unity of theme (Faulkner's *Knight's Gambit* (1949)), or the unity of character (F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Pat Hobby Stories* (1961)) (14). The table of contents, Mann continues, is also a generic signal of the cycle, as many cycles distinguish themselves from modern novels by listing the titles of the stories in the table of contents (14-5). Other generic markers, according to Mann, may be

authorial statements, the blurb on the dust jacket, or a note, a preface, an epigraph, a quotation or a dedication at the beginning of the book (14-5).

In "The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book", an article which was published in the same year as Mann's study, Robert M. Luscher underlines the active participation of the reader in what he calls the "short story sequence".[12] He defines the form as a "volume of stories, collected and organized by their author, in which the reader successively realizes underlying patterns of coherence by continual modifications of his perceptions of pattern and theme" (1989: 148). According to Luscher, the individual stories in the volume are not completely closed. Instead, every story prepares the reader for the next one. In this way, the work as a whole "becomes an open book, inviting the reader to construct a network of associations that binds stories together and lends them cumulative impact" (148-9). The reader negotiates the tension between the openness of the book as a whole and the (partial) closure of the individual stories, and thus recovers the meaning of the cycle or sequence. He situates the form on "a continuum ranging from the miscellaneous collection, on the one end, to the traditional novel on the other", with Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and Welty's *The Golden Apples* serving as a midpoint, because of the "balanced tension between the independency of each story and the unity of the collection as a whole" which they exhibit (163).[13] Because of the sequential unfolding of meaning by the reader central to Luscher's definition, he prefers the term sequence to the term cycle, used by Ingram and Mann. Within a sequence, Luscher claims, the individual short stories do not lose their distinctiveness but rather "expand and elaborate contexts, characters, symbols, or themes developed by others" (149).

In *The Composite Novel: The Short Story Cycle in Transition* (1995), Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris propose the term "composite novel" for "a literary work composed of shorter

[12] Another critic who emphasizes readerly processes is René Audet, who mainly focuses on French Canadian literature. In *Des Textes à l'œuvre: La Lecture du recueil de nouvelles* (2001), he argues against the idea of a collection having internal unity, as the perception of such a construction, according to him, depends on the reader's experience, who may in fact choose not to act upon the reading processes suggested in the collection. In "To Relate, to Read, to Separate: A Poetics of the Collection and A Poetics of Diffraction" (2014), moreover, he proposes a "poetics of the collection", which focuses on how "the constant interference between the textual strata" of a collection result in "the production of an *entrexte* (literally, an 'in between text'), a semantic surplus value associated with the whole formed by the collection" (39). See *Interférences littéraires/Literaire interferenties* 12 (2014): "Cycles, Recueils, Macrotexts: The Short Story Collection in Theory and Practice," eds. Elke D'hoker and Bart Van den Bossche, 35-45.
J. Gerald Kennedy aptly describes the importance of the reader's activity as follows: "textual unity, like beauty, lies mainly in the eyes of the beholding reader" (1995: ix).

[13] In a 2013 article, moreover, Luscher looks at how Donald Ray Pollock's *Knockemstiff* (2008) and Laura Hendrie's *Stygo* (2000) are rewrites of Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* in a contemporary American context – thereby continuing the 1919 cycle's distinct tension between unity and fragmentation. See "Down the road from *Winesburg*: The spatiotemporal aesthetics of the short story sequence in Donald Ray Pollock's *Knockemstiff* and Laura Hendrie's *Stygo*," *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice* 3.2 (2013), eds. Elke D'hoker et al., 193-210.

texts that – though individually complete and autonomous – are interrelated in a coherent whole according to one or more organizing principles" (2). One of the examples they mention in their chronology of the composite novel is Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923). The composite novel, as they point out, permits the inclusion of text-pieces that the short story cycle might reject, such as poetry and drama (7). While Ingram and Mann (short story cycle) as well as Luscher (short story sequence) stress the individual short stories in the term they prefer to use, Dunn and Morris put emphasis on the novelistic unity of the whole book by using the term composite novel.[14] Moreover, they indicate that emphasizing kinship to the novel, the modern era's predominant literary genre, increases the prestige of the form, for the critics as well as for the readers (4-5).

Rolf Lundén, in *The United Stories of America: Studies in the Short Story Composite* (1999), rejects the term composite novel and makes out a case for the "short story composite". Instead of seeing it as a variant of the novel, Lundén prefers to view it as a "composite made up of discrete short stories" (13), existing on a continuum between the short story collection and the novel. He argues that, while the majority of the previously published studies on what he calls the short story composite are influenced by "the compulsion to create coherence" (19), his approach acknowledges the open structure of the form with its disruptive aspects. In doing so, he also recognizes the importance of the tension between openness and closure, between centripetal and centrifugal forces, characteristic of the form. Lundén discerns four substructures of the short story composite: the cycle, the sequence, the cluster and the novella. First, the cycle, he states, is a form of the short story composite that is basically organized cyclically, i.e. with a final resolution and a return to the beginning in the last story.[15] He mentions works like Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) and Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples* (1949) as examples. Secondly, as opposed to Luscher, Lundén sees the sequence as a "sequential narrative pattern where one story is added, as in a row, to the next, locking into it, but, taken together, not exhibiting a strong sense of unity and closure" (37). He lists examples such as Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) and Faulkner's *The Unvanquished* (1938). Thirdly, the cluster, according to Lundén, is a rather loosely structured subgenre, "in which stories seem to be striving in various directions; in

[14] Other critics also emphasize the novelistic unity of the work as a whole. Margot Kelley, for instance, has labelled the form "novel-in-stories". See "Gender and Genre: The Case of the Novel-in-Stories," *American Women Short Story Writers: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Julie Brown (New York: Garland, 2000).
[15] In a 2013 article, Ailsa Cox reads Helen Simpson's *Constitutional* (2005) as a short story cycle with a formal cyclical organization on the one hand, and a thematic focus on the human life cycle on the other. See "Walking in circles: Helen Simpson's *Constitutional* as short story cycle," *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice* 3.2 (2013), eds. Elke D'hoker et al., 211-20.

which chronology is not strictly adhered to; in which the gaps between the stories are wide; and in which some stories are not easily integrated into a coherent whole" (38). He provides examples such as Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1924) and Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942). Lundén takes his final subgenre, the novella, from the novella form of, for instance, Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, consisting of a frame-tale and a reappearing narrator, which link otherwise unrelated stories. Some examples Lundén gives of modern variations on this pattern are *Winesburg, Ohio* and John Updike's *Olinger Stories* (1964).[16]

In 2001, Gerald Lynch published a study on the short story cycle from a Canadian point of view. In *The One and the Many: English-Canadian Short Story Cycles*, he makes use of the Bakhtinian concept of 'genre memory' to establish that there exists a generic family of Canadian short story cycles, with members that constitute a "historic continuum of shared features, techniques, and subject matter" and share concerns that are identifiably Canadian (5).[17]

In the same year, a study on the American short story cycle by James Nagel appeared. In *The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle: The Ethnic Resonance of a Genre*, he argues in favour of seeing the short story cycle in the context of genre memory as well. He claims that, as a result of the dominance of the novel, the short story cycle has not been properly recognized. The tradition of the short story cycle, he maintains, is one of the most important in the history of American fiction, and the "obdurate critical innocence of this legacy has brought about misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and a distortion of literary history" (8). According to Nagel, there are numerous volumes in contemporary American fiction which have won significant literary awards and are widely recognized as giants in modern literature, but have been wrongfully seen as novels because of the lack of awareness of the history of the short story cycle:

[16] Furthermore, in "Centrifugal and Centripetal Narrative Strategies in the Short Story Composite and the Episode Film", Lundén on the one hand maps the short story composite's origin from a long tradition of episodic narrative art and literature. On the other hand, he intermedially compares the short story composite with the episode film, focusing on the similar centripetal and centrifugal narrative forces that exist in both. See *Interférences littéraires/Literaire interferenties* 12 (2014): "Cycles, Recueils, Macrotexts: The Short Story Collection in Theory and Practice," eds. Elke D'hoker and Bart Van den Bossche, 49-60.
In a 1985 article, Timothy C. Alderman emphasized the "cohering, centripetal and separating, centrifugal forces" characteristic of the "integrated collection" (135).

[17] In a 2005 article entitled "'Queer small town people': Fixations and fictions of fellowship in the modern short story cycle", Sue Marais traces a similar tradition of the short story cycle but for South Africa, from the late nineteenth century to the present. In addition, in a more recent article, An Van Hecke looks at the way Anglo-American critical perspectives on the cycle form apply to South-American literary texts. See "Augusto Montessoro's short story collections: More than stories in a box," *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice* 3.2 (2013), eds. Elke D'hoker et al., 235-46.

> Written from a variety of ethnic perspectives, by writers from differing sections of the country, about characters from vastly different social and economic backgrounds, these books are nevertheless united by the use of a common literary tradition […]. These are all volumes that deserve to be read in detail within the context of an understanding of the genre and the role it has played in American literary history. (8)

Nagel lists examples such as Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984), Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984), Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991). Similar to Mann's definition of the short story cycle, Nagel states that a central point is that "each component work must stand alone (with a beginning, middle, and end) yet be enriched in the context of the interrelated stories" (15). He places the cycle in contrast with the novel, by saying that, as opposed to the linear development of the novel, the cycle lends itself to "diegetical discontinuations, to the resolution of a series of conflicts, to the exploration of a variety of characters, to the use of a family or even a community as protagonist, to the exploration of the mores of a religion or ethnic group, each story revealing another aspect of the local culture" (15). Nagel puts particular emphasis on the use of the cycle form by writers from various ethnic groups for the depiction of characters from their own ethnicity and nationality. "As 'American' narratives", Nagel points out, "these stories often involve the process of immigration, acculturation, language acquisition, assimilation, identity formation, and the complexities of formulating a sense of self that incorporates the old world and the new, the central traditions of the country of origin integrated into, or in conflict with, the values of the country of choice" (15).[18]

In her 2003 article "Sequences, Anti-Sequences, Cycles and Composite Novels: The Short Story in Genre Criticism", Suzanne Ferguson objects to Nagel's view that a cycle can be considered as such in so far that its components are independent but are enriched by each other, claiming that "any episode that is a complete narrative (i.e., has a beginning, a middle, and an end) could be considered 'independent,' and there are countless such episodes in novels" (104). Moreover, Ferguson questions Nagel's designation of books such as *The House on Mango Street* as cycles instead of novels. In her opinion, nothing is gained by viewing this kind of work, usually seen as an example of the modernist "montage novel", as a cycle (106). She advocates a more precise label and urges other critics to respect authorial intention in linking the stories (as already emphasized by Ingram). In fact, Ferguson maintains

[18] In the introduction to his 1995 study on American short story sequences, Kennedy gave "the very determination to build a unified Republic out of diverse states, regions and population groups – to achieve the unity expressed by the motto *e pluribus unum*" as a possible explanation for the American passion for sequences (1995: viii).

that there are collections or groups of stories that might usefully be considered "anti-sequences", i.e. "where there are stories that obviously *do* fit together, or *could* fit together in a sequential pattern, but whose authors have refused to put them together or allow them to be put together" (107). The most striking examples, Ferguson suggests, are Grace Paley's stories of Faith Darwin and her family, which have been published in three collections (between the late fifties and 1985) as well as separately, but nonetheless trace Faith's development from a recently-divorced mother of two young boys through her late middle age and the growing up of her sons (107). Ferguson concludes that Paley has refused to put all of these individual short stories together in a sequence, thereby "resisting the pull of plot" (1999: 95).

In 2013 and 2014, two special journal issues on the short story cycle appeared. These were put together on the basis of a selection of papers from a conference on the short story collection in a comparative and international perspective, organized at the University of Leuven in 2012. In "Cycles, Recueils, Macrotexts: The Short Story Collection in Theory and Practice", a special issue of the online journal of literary studies, *Interférences littéraires/Literaire interferenties*, Elke D'hoker and Bart Van den Bossche bring together theoretical approaches and concrete case studies – from the Anglo-American, the Francophone and the Italian tradition – with respect to the interlinking of stories in a collection. These three critical traditions are found to deal with similar issues, such as the short story cycle's generic status, the tension between unity and fragmentation present in cycles, and the relation between authorial intention, the formal criteria which constitute a cycle as well as readerly interpretation.[19] A special issue of *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice* on the short story cycle – focusing on the Anglophone critical tradition – moreover, gathers new interpretations of both well-known and obscure literary texts, from the present as well as from the past.[20]

It is clear that critics do not agree on the appropriate terminology and the precise limits of the short story cycle form. For the purpose of this dissertation, I have opted to use the term short story cycle, as it is the most commonly used.[21] Admittedly, this term has been criticized

[19] See Elke D'hoker and Bart Van den Bossche, "Cycles, Recueils, Macrotexts: The Short Story Collection in a Comparative Perspective," *Interférences littéraires/Literaire interferenties* 12 (2014): "Cycles, Recueils, Macrotexts: The Short Story Collection in Theory and Practice," eds. Elke D'hoker and Bart Van den Bossche, 7-17. This issue includes articles both in English and in French.

[20] See Elke D'hoker, "The short story cycle: Broadening the perspective," *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice* 3.2 (2013), eds. Elke D'hoker et al., 151-9.

[21] In addition to being used by Ingram (1971), Mann (1989), Lynch (2001) and Nagel (2001), the term short story cycle is also applied in other critical works, including: Rocio G. Davis, "Oral Narrative as Short Story Cycle: Forging Community in Edwige Danticat's Krik? Krak!," *MELUS* 26.2 (2001) 65-81; Karen Weekes, "Identity in the Short Story Cycles of Lorrie Moore," *Journal of the Short Story in English* 39 (2002) 109-22; Peter Donahue, "The Genre Which Is Not One: Hemingway's *In Our Time*, Difference, and the Short Story

for suggesting an idea of circularity that cannot be found in all cycles. Luscher, for instance, emphasizing sequential reading by using the term short story sequence, claims that the term short story cycle fails to acknowledge the successiveness of these works (1989: 149). The term cycle, however, does not necessarily imply the idea of circularity. Furthermore, Dunn and Morris, underlining the form's novelistic qualities and looking to extend its reach – to include, for example, poetry and drama – prefer the term composite novel to short story cycle. In my view, however, the independence of the individual stories has to be respected, which is why I have a preference for the latter term. In addition, there exist rather few integrated collections of short fiction which include short stories as well as, for example, poems. Therefore, I prefer to interpret the definition of the short story cycle in a much broader way, i.e. to include other forms, without omitting the term cycle. My definition of the short story cycle, then, is a work of short fiction in which the individual parts can stand on their own yet are enriched in the context of the whole, the interrelation of which can be provided by a shared setting, character(s) or central theme, underscored by other unifying elements. The term short story cycle, moreover, emphasizes the form having predecessors such as Boccaccio's *The Decameron* and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*.[22]

Development of the Short Story Cycle

One could state that the short story cycle's earliest beginnings can be traced back the use of linked tales in early classics such as Homer's *Odyssey*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the Arabian *A Thousand and One Nights*, as well as to the cycles of Irish mythology, for example the Ulster Cycle (Nagel 2001: 2). In medieval literature, the concept of independent pieces that become enriched by inclusion in a group of related works became widespread through, amongst other works, *The Decameron*, *The Canterbury Tales* and epic cycles such as Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*: "[t]hroughout these early works two ideas became clear in the concept of a cycle: that each contributing unit of the work be an independent narrative episode, and that there be some principle of unification that gives structure,

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Cycle," *The Postmodern Short Story: Forms and Issues*, eds. Farhat Iftekharuddin et al. (Westport: Greenwood, 2003); Rachel Lister, "Female Expansion and Masculine Immobilization in the Short Story Cycle," *Journal of the Short Story in English* 48 (2007) 43-58; Karen Roggenkamp, "The Short Story Cycle and Western Gothic in *The Pastures of Heaven*," *Steinbeck Review* 4.1 (2007) 18-31; Paul March-Russell, *The Short Story: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2009); Michelle Pacht, *The Subversive Storyteller: The Short Story Cycle and the Politics of Identity in America* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009).

[22] Matthijs Duyck has traced how critics such as Ingram, Mann and Nagel have used Boccaccio's *Decameron* to argue that modern short story cycles either continue or depart from the older framed tale collections. See "The Short Story Cycle in Western Literature: Modernity, Continuity and Generic Implications," *Interférences littéraires/Literaire interferenties* 12 (2014): "Cycles, Recueils, Macrotexts: The Short Story Collection in Theory and Practice," eds. Elke D'hoker and Bart Van den Bossche, 75-86.

movement, and thematic development to the whole" (Nagel 2). Mann indicates that it is only in exceptional cases, such as *The Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales*, that the stories are connected by more than the framing device: generally, the prologue, epilogue and transitional paragraphs between the stories are primarily responsible for the unity of the work (2). During the Renaissance, the sonnet cycle or sequence flourished. Sequences such as Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1595) and William Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (1609), as Mann points out, may be linked by subject as well as character, action, imagery and tone (3). During the Restoration and eighteenth century, Mann continues, epic-length poems were often subdivided into more or less independent parts (4).

In the nineteenth century, lyric and epic verse cycles were more popular in England than works of short fiction, but Mann does list works such as Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892) as precursors of the English short story cycle (4-5). On the continent, the popularity of short fiction grew in the nineteenth century (Mann 5). For instance, in *Lettres de Mon Moulin* (1869), an early French short story cycle, Alphonse Daudet used both a framing device and cross-references to connect his pieces about life in the Provence (Mann 5). In Russia, in 1852, Ivan Turgenev produced *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*, which, as Mann shows, influenced some of the most important cycles written during the beginning of the twentieth century, including George Moore's *The Untilled Field*, Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and Hemingway's *In Our Time* (5). Mann refers to Alastair Fowler to discuss the different phases which genres may undergo: "It turns out that genre proper develops through at least three principal phases. These are organic and invariable in sequence, though development need not go beyond the first or second" (Fowler qtd. in Mann 5). According to Mann, the nineteenth-century development of the short story cycle corresponds to Fowler's first phase, during which "the genre-complex assembles, until a formal type emerges" (Fowler qtd. in Mann 5). For the short story cycle, this phase is complicated by the fact that the short story itself was generically evolving around the same time (Mann 6). The birth of the modern short story is generally situated between the middle and the end of the nineteenth century – the term being introduced in the 1880s. Nagel describes the modern concept of the short story as "evolving in the early decades as a form distinct from the 'tale', a loosely organized account of strange and often mysterious events, and the 'sketch', which stressed character description with little development of plot and little sense of narrative closure" (3). Although many critics do not consider short fiction written in the first half of the nineteenth century as short stories, Mann rightly identifies them as such "if they are an appropriate size (shorter than novels and generally longer than a few pages), if

they contain some kind of development (physical or psychological) or revelation, and if they create a sense of closure" (6). In the course of the nineteenth century, in England as well as on the Continent and in the United States, periodicals featuring short fiction became increasingly popular, which contributed to the development of both the short story and the short story cycle (Mann 6). Whereas early cycles in the first half and the middle of the nineteenth still depended on "external framing" (Reid 1977: 46) – i.e. the use of frame stories, prefaces or prologues and epilogues to link the individual pieces together – writers appear to have become more self-confident about the validity of the genre from that time on (Mann 6-7). As a result, this external framing device was gradually eliminated and writers switched to the use of linking devices such as recurring characters, settings and themes or, as Ian Reid calls it, "internal linking" (46). Mann lists *The Country of the Pointed Firs,* which takes place in a Maine seaport town during its declining years, as an example of a late nineteenth-century American cycle which makes use of internal linking (7). This cycle is unified by setting (the town), theme (life of the community) and character (returning characters). This writing of regional cycles of tales or stories about life in a particular community had in fact become quite established by in the end of the nineteenth century, not only in the United States, but also in Europe – especially in England, with works such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1851).[23] Zagarell introduced the term 'narrative of community' for this specific form of regional writing and it as follows: "[Narratives of community] take as their subject the life of a community (life in 'its everyday aspects') and portray the minute and quite ordinary processes through which the community maintains itself as an entity". In these works, the self functions as part of the community rather than as an individual (499). Narratives of community

> give literary expression to a community they imagine to have characterized the preindustrial era [and thus represent] a coherent response to the social, economic, cultural, and demographic changes caused by industrialism, urbanization, and the spread of capitalism. [These works] took shape in the first half of the nineteenth century in the United States, Great Britain, and Ireland (499).

From these popular regional works in the late nineteenth century, which are mainly collections of tales, a number of short story cycles with a strong internal unity came into

[23] By the 1870s, as argued by Raphaël Ingelbien, this writing of works about the life of a certain community had become so well-established that Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu could choose to parodically use the form in his *Chronicles of Golden Friars* – with the purpose of meeting his English publisher's demands to write stories in an English setting. See "Re-cycling Irish short fiction as English narratives of community: J.S. Le Fanu's *Chronicles of Golden Friars* (1871)," *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice* 3.2 (2013), eds. Elke D'hoker et al., 161-73.

being: for example, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* in the United States, and Jane Barlow's *Irish Idylls* (1892) in Ireland.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the phenomenon of the modern short story cycle truly emerged, with the publication of works such as *Dubliners*, *Winesburg, Ohio* and *In Our Time*. In the modernist period, the short story cycle reaches Fowler's second phase, which is a time of "sophisticated imitation, in the Renaissance sense, varying its themes and motifs, perhaps adapting it to slightly different purposes, but retaining all its main features, including those of formal structure" (Fowler qtd. in Mann 7-8). Writers like Joyce and Anderson commented on the fact that they were experimenting with a new form. About *Dubliners*, Joyce famously confided the following to Constantine Curran in 1904: "I am writing a series of epicleti – ten – for a paper [*The Irish Homestead*]. I have written one [*The Sisters*]. I call the series *Dubliners* to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city" (Joyce qtd. in Friedrich 1965: 421). Anderson, claiming that, looking for a "new looseness", he had created his own genre, wrote this to a friend about the "*Winesburg* form" in 1938: "It is a form in which I feel at ease. I invented it. It was mine" (Anderson qtd. in Mann 9). Reid states that the form used by Anderson for *Winesburg, Ohio*

> is clearly between an episodic novel and a mere collection of discrete items. The setting is fairly constant in place and time, and many characters appear in more than one story, with George Willard being present in all but a few. But the tight continuous structure of a novel is deliberately avoided […]. His people are lonely, restless, cranky. Social cohesion is absent in their mid-western town. […] The 'new looseness' of *Winesburg, Ohio* can convey with precision and pathos the duality that results: a superficial appearance (and indeed the ideal possibility) of communal wholeness, and an underlying actual separateness. (47-8)

Although there are of course differences between both works – while the stories in *Winesburg, Ohio*, for instance, share a protagonist (George Willard) and a common narrator, the stories in *Dubliners* follow a pattern of stories about childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life – it is no coincidence that *Dubliners* as well as *Winesburg, Ohio* are considered archetypes of the short story cycle. Both books are set in one particular place (turn-of-the-century Dublin and the mythical Midwestern town of Winesburg) and revolve around recurring themes (paralysis, isolation, frustration and disappointment in both volumes). According to Zagarell, the predominant viewpoint of *Winesburg, Ohio* is the "individual-based conviction that everyone has a story to tell" (513). Furthermore, Zagarell calls *Dubliners* an "anti-narrative of community" (513). According to J. Gerald Kennedy, cycles

like *Dubliners*, in which characters inhabit the same locality, "often evoke the sharpest sense of mutual estrangement; textual divisions correspond to absolute boundaries between one life and another. Figures who walk the same streets and whose stories appear side by side nevertheless remain oblivious to each other and unconscious of parallels between their own situations and those of other characters" (1995: 196). With its emphasis on the tension between unity and fragmentation, the short story cycle thus proves to be an interesting form for modernist writers. The influence of Joyce and Anderson on subsequent modernist authors of cycles, such as Hemingway, Steinbeck and Faulkner, is substantial. Mann, for instance, indicates that Hemingway acknowledged Anderson's influence on his cycle *In Our Time* by stating that *Winesburg, Ohio* was his "first pattern" (Anderson qtd. in Mann 7).

In the middle of the twentieth century, the evolution of the form of the short story cycle slowed down. This does not mean, however, that no cycles were published between the 1940s and 1960s. For instance, Welty's *The Golden Apples*, a cycle set around Morgana, Mississippi, in the first half of the twentieth century, revolving around the theme of the search for fulfilment, appeared 1947. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, one may speak of a 'revival' of the short story cycle form. In a reaction against the coherence of the novel, many postmodern writers, such as John Barth and Angela Carter, turned to the cycle form. Moreover, in the second half of the twentieth century, a great deal of female authors appear to have become attracted to the form, mainly because the looser, more episodic structure entails a difference in point(s) of view from the traditional novel (March-Russell 115). Munro, for example, has used the cycle in the form of experimental *bildungsromans*, which centre around one protagonist, but are not made up in a linear manner, for instance her 1978 *Who Do You Think You Are?* (*The Beggar Maid: Stories of Flo and Rose* in the United States). In addition to female authors, multi-ethnic writers – often women as well – have also contributed to the revival of the short story cycle in the second half of the twentieth century. Much like the short story itself, which according to Frank O'Connor flourishes in a "submerged population group" (1963: 18), the short story cycle is a preferred form of multi-ethnic writers, especially in the American context. Native American writers like Erdrich, Asian-American writers like Tan, and Mexican-American writers and Dominican-American writers like Cisneros and Alvarez have all used the cycle to express the experiences of their community. According to Nagel, whose study on the contemporary American short story cycle in fact focuses on the genre's link with multi-ethnic identity, works such as *Love Medicine*, *The Joy Luck Club*, *The House on Mango Street* and *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* should be read within the context of the short story cycle and the role it has played in American literary history:

"only from that perspective can these books be fully understood and assessed for their contribution to the growing multi-ethnic canon of the fiction of the United States" (8). One could state that the cycle here reaches Fowler's tertiary phase of genre development here, which occurs when an author "uses a secondary form in a radically new way. The tertiary form may be burlesque, or antithetic, or symbolic modulation of the secondary" (1971: 212-13). In the same way that short story writers use the genre in a different manner during postmodernism – and beyond – by, for instance, rewriting fairy tales and famous short stories or writing metafictional stories, authors of the cycle 'rewrite' the form and write cycles from a marginalised perspective.

In short, the tradition of the short story cycle can be said to have undergone an evolution. Predecessors of the form can already be found in the early classics, such as Homer's *Odyssey* and the cycles of Irish mythology. Cycles of linked tales became widespread in the Middle Ages, thanks to, among other works, *The Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales*. In the Renaissance, the sonnet cycle or sequence flourished. Over the course of the nineteenth century, lyric and epic verse cycles finally lost ground to short fiction, and precursors of the short story cycle were published in, among other countries, England, France and Russia. The phenomenon of the modern short story cycle can be traced back to the turn of the twentieth century, when a large number of cycles was produced, mainly in North America: the early regional volumes published in the second half of the nineteenth century and the modernist works which came out in the first half of the twentieth century. The mid-century, however, proves to be a period of relative scarcity for the form. Still, from the 1960s onward, a renewed interest in the form, particularly by female and (multi-)ethnic writers, results in a revival of the short story cycle, which continues until the present day.

Chapter I

Narrating Community Life: Jane Barlow's *Irish Idylls* and Edith Somerville and Martin Ross's *The Irish R.M.*

Although modernist works such as James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) generally serve as archetypes of the short story cycle (Nagel 2000: 9), critics have recently paid more attention to regional volumes dating from the second half of the nineteenth century, such as Ivan Turgenev's *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* (1852) and Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896). Short story cycle criticism now recognizes many of these regional works as forerunners or early versions of the modern short story cycle.[24]

Both in North America and in Europe, many books about life in a certain region were published throughout the nineteenth century. As part of this tradition, several works appeared which focused on describing life in a specific community. These particular volumes, which have been labelled "narratives of community" (1988: 499) by Sandra A. Zagarell, are often collections of tales or short stories. For the purpose of this dissertation, it is particularly interesting that a number of these works seem to qualify as early short story cycles. Mann lists *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and Stephen Crane's *Whilomville Stories* (1900) as American examples.[25]

In this chapter, I will discuss two Irish works which I consider to be early short story cycles which also narrate the life of a community: Jane Barlow's *Irish Idylls* (1892) and Edith Somerville and Martin Ross's *The Irish R.M.*, a series consisting of *Some Experiences of an Irish R.M.* (1899), *Further Experiences of an Irish R.M.* (1908) and *In Mr Knox's Country* (1915). First, I will demonstrate how these works differ from earlier accounts of Irish life by analysing them as early short story cycles. In addition, I will look more closely at the focus on community life which is central to these works, and discuss how they fit into what Zagarell

[24] March-Russell (2009) and Nagel (2001), for instance, respectively discuss Turgenev's *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* and Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* in the context of the early short story cycle. Turgenev's *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*, which records the lives of the Russian peasantry as observed by a landowner, influenced important cycles written during the beginning of the twentieth century, such as George Moore's *The Untilled Field*. Ingman refers to Moore's autobiography *Hail and Farewell*, in which he states that he used Turgenev's portrayals of Russian peasants as a model for *The Untilled Field* (2009: 87). See also Eileen Kennedy, "Turgenev and George Moore's *The Untilled Field*," *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)* 18.3 (1975) 145-59. Mann notes that Turgenev's cycle did not only influence Moore's *The Untilled Field*, but also other cycles published in the first half of the twentieth century, for example Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and Hemingway's *In Our Time* (5).

[25] See also Nagel's "The American Short-Story Cycle and Stephen Crane's Tales of Whilomville," *American Literary Realism* 32.1 (1999) 35-42.

has called the narrative of community. Finally, by way of comparison, I will analyse how these works by Barlow and Somerville and Ross relate to an early American short story cycle which also narrates the life of a community, namely Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*.

1. Barlow's *Irish Idylls* and Somerville & Ross's *The Irish R.M.*

1.1. Barlow and Somerville & Ross: Biographies

The Anglo-Irish writer Jane Barlow (1857-1917), born in Clontarf, County Dublin, was the daughter of a clergyman who later became vice-provost of Trinity College (Hansson 60). She wrote nineteen works of fiction, including poetry, short fiction and novels. Although largely forgotten today, her work was very successful at the time. She focused on Irish peasant life in her writing, even though her family background allowed her an education generally denied to Ireland's rural population. She was even called "the Sarah Orne Jewett of Ireland" by the American journal *Living Age*, because of their shared focus on rural life and ordinary events (Hansson 60). Her first published work was the poetry collection *Bog-Land Studies* (1892). In the same year, in London, she published *Irish Idylls*, a volume made up of linked stories describing peasant life in the fictional Connemara village of Lisconnel, some fifty years after the Famine.[26] The book went through at least eight editions in her lifetime and was widely read in England and America.[27] She was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Literature from Trinity College in 1904 (Hansson 65). She died in Bray, County Wicklow, in 1917.

Even more popular was the work of the Anglo-Irish writing team made up of the second cousins Edith Anna Œnone Somerville (1858-1949) and Violet Florence Martin (1862-1915), writing under the name Martin Ross. Somerville was born on the Greek island of Corfu and grew up at the family estate, in County Cork. Ross was born and grew up at Ross house, in County Galway. Both cousins belonged to landed Protestant families and met

[26] *Strangers at Lisconnel: A Second Series of Irish Idylls*, published in 1895, focuses more explicitly on the Famine years. However, I will focus on *Irish Idylls*, since some of the stories in *Strangers at Lisconnel* are told throughout different chapters, making the second series a work with a more novelistic nature and thus less interesting for the purpose of this dissertation.

[27] Henceforth, for reasons of availability, the 1893 (American) edition of *Irish Idylls* will be cited. There are virtually no differences between this edition and the 1892 (London) edition of the book, with two exceptions: on the one hand, the American edition has a preface – directed toward Irish emigrants living in the States – which does not appear in the original edition and, on the other hand, the New York edition has ten stories instead of nine, because 'Coming and Going' has been added as a final story. However, the adding of this story to the does not affect the overall picture painted by the cycle. Barlow later used an adapted version of the story in question, about the Patman family moving to Lisconnel, in *Strangers at Lisconnel* (entitled 'A Flitting' in this second series).

in 1886. They discovered a shared enthusiasm for writing and, within a year of meeting, they were working on a novel together. In addition to being literary partners, they also came to be lifelong companions who even shared a home. Their literary partnership lasted twenty-eight years and, together, they wrote five novels, as well as short fiction, travel essays and memoirs. From the publication of their first novel, *An Irish Cousin* (1889) onward, both authors enjoyed great popularity. Somerville and Ross's most critically acclaimed work is the novel *The Real Charlotte* (1894), but they are arguably best known for their extremely successful *The Irish R.M.* series, which consists of three volumes of linked stories on the life of an Irish Resident Magistrate (former British Army officer) among the Anglo-Irish gentry, aristocracy and peasantry in the Irish countryside approximately between 1890 and 1920, published in London: *Some Experiences of an Irish R.M* (1899), *Further Experiences of an Irish R.M.* (1908) and *In Mr Knox's Country* (1915).[28] In 1898, while writing the first series of R.M. stories, Ross was seriously injured in a riding accident and never fully recovered. James M. Cahalan notes that Somerville and Ross did not feel much affinity with the Irish Literary Revival, despite the fact that Martin was Lady Gregory's cousin (1993: 95). In 1905, the latter invited the duo to write a play for the Abbey Theatre, which they turned down (Cahalan 95).[29] Both writers were women's rights advocates and they campaigned for the suffragette cause in Ireland as well as in England. In 1910, Somerville became the first President of the Munster Women's Franchise League, and Ross took up the function as one of her Vice-Presidents. In 1915, Ross died of a brain tumour, after which Somerville continued to write under their joint pseudonym Somerville and Ross, believing she could still contact her cousin's spirit through automatic writing. She also made use of Ross's drafts and their joint notebooks. In 1933, when Somerville was awarded an honorary doctorate from Trinity College Dublin, she requested that the degree be conferred upon Ross as well (Orel 23). According to Gifford Lewis, Somerville exalted Ross after her death, which obscured the fact that Somerville probably was the major partner in their writing together.[30] He notes that there are many passages in Ross's letters to Somerville which show that the latter appears to have diminished her own part in their partnership (72). Ross adapted her writing style to Somerville's:

> Martin, before her meeting with Edith, had developed a wordy, over-wrought, Carlylean style that Edith was not in the least shy of criticizing. Martin learnt much

[28] Reprinted in one volume under the title *The Irish R.M. and his Experiences* in 1928.
[29] Cahalan points out that it is partly because Somerville and Ross went their own way instead of joining the Irish Literary Revival movement that they did not win much praise from nationalist critic commentators (89). Frank O'Connor, for instance, did admit that he enjoyed reading the R.M. stories but described them as "yarns, pure and simple" in *The Lonely Voice* (1963: 34).
[30] Somerville also created all of the illustrations that accompany their joint works.

> from Edith's pithy, smooth style; her adaptation of it lifted her into the realms of superlative writing. That Martin absorbed a great deal from Edith is as apparent as her absorbing the characteristics of Edith's handwriting, so that their hands were to become, at times, difficult to tell apart. (Lewis 73)

Lewis states that Somerville and Ross's joint manuscripts nonetheless show two personalities: "Edith forging on, covering reams as fast and heedless as talk; then Martin comes with spidery, hatching deletions, minuscule insertions, long lines leading to a space in the margin where she re-writes a paragraph" (70). Asked to explain how two people could write together, Somerville herself said "that it was just like paint – there was yellow and there was blue, and if you mixed them together, there was green". She emphasized that "their separate blue and yellow styles were distinct, but [that] the green was a style also and more than the two styles apart" (Lewis 74).[31] Lewis concludes that, while Somerville supplied "the power and mass of raw material", Martin did in fact control the form and finish of their joint works (108). Somerville died in 1949 and was buried alongside Ross in Castletownshend, County Cork.

1.2. *Irish Idylls* and *The Irish R.M.* as Early Short Story Cycles

Barlow's *Irish Idylls* as well as Somerville and Ross's *The Irish R.M.* are works of short stories with a strong internal coherence. They are unified by, first of all, setting, but also by a shared, though varying, set of characters as well as by theme. *Irish Idylls* is set in the small rural Connemara village of Lisconnel and describes the life of its Catholic inhabitants, while *The Irish R.M.* more generally takes place in the South-West of Ireland, portraying the life of a community of Anglo-Irish gentry. In Barlow's volume, as we will see later on, the protagonist is the community of Lisconnel as a whole. The different stories zoom in on the daily life of different persons or families which are part of the community, but the emphasis always lies on the interaction between these inhabitants. As such, the stories depict the life of the community rather than of its individual members. Somerville and Ross's narrator-protagonist Major Sinclair Yeates,[32] on the other hand, does play a central role throughout the series. As we will see in the next section, the reader discovers how the community functions through the eyes of Yeates, who is an outsider to this community at the beginning of the series, but gradually becomes more of an insider. In the opening story of the first volume,

[31] According to Lewis, the particular writing style of the R.M. stories, which carries away the reader at a rapid pace, is "a tribute to Edith's pared-down, streamlined sense of what fits a particular place in a sentence" (74).
[32] Cahalan notes that there is a possibility that Major Yeates might have been named partly as a private joke at the expense of W.B. Yeats, whom Ross met in 1896, two years before the first of the R.M. stories was written (95).

'Great-Uncle McCarthy', the reader joins Yeates, who has just arrived in Skebawn and is looking for a house, in getting to know his new world. Throughout the stories, both Yeates and the reader get better acquainted with the community, among other things by discovering "the unsuspected intoxication of fox-hunting" (Somerville and Ross 1899: 134). Florence McCarthy Knox (or Flurry), the Major's landlord at Shreelane, is one of the first characters he meets, and he will be his guide throughout the stories. Thematically speaking, *Irish Idylls* and *The Irish R.M.* share a focus on community life in a certain village or region. However, the habits and customs through which the community maintains itself are quite different for these works. In Barlow's book, everyday habits such as farming, talking, going to mass and cooking dinner are central, whereas in Somerville and Ross's books, the focus lies on monthly customs such as (fox) hunting, fishing, fair days, sailing in a regatta, yachting, agricultural shows, trotting matches and auctions. Still, it is obvious that these works are unified to a greater extent than loose short story collections are. Moreover, each title captures the book as a whole, and each volume also lists the names of the short stories in its table of contents, both generic markers of the short story cycle according to Mann (14-5). Corresponding to Mann's definition, the stories are simultaneously self-sufficient and interdependent: they work independently of one another, but at the same time they work together to create something beyond the individual stories (14-5). The opening story of *Irish Idylls*, 'Lisconnel', which contains a complete description of the geography of the village of Lisconnel by the narrator, for instance, can be read on its own. The same applies to the other stories, which generally zoom in on the life in one or more of the cabins which make up the community of Lisconnel. Every story that follows, however, tells the reader more about community life in the village. As will become clear in the next section, this way of life is characterized by a great sense of solidarity. Similarly, *The Irish R.M.* stories can be read individually. However, as we will see later on, taken together they depict the life of the Anglo-Irish gentry and show how their position is threatened by the rise of a new class.[33] Hilary Robinson argues that most of the R.M. stories follow a similar pattern: after an easy start, a situation is brought about (either by the actions of a returning character or those of a new one), leading to a series of events and eventually resulting in an unexpected climax of disaster (129). As Yeates states in 'Major

[33] The twelve stories of *Some Experiences of an Irish R.M.* appeared in serialized form in the popular English *Badminton Magazine* before being published in book form. The first story, 'Great-Uncle McCarthy' appeared in the magazine in October 1898, and the monthly series concluded in September of 1899. The stories were collected under the title *Some Experiences of an Irish R.M.* (1899). The stories of the second volume, *Further Experiences of an Irish R.M.* (1908), first appeared in various periodicals as well (Cowart 3). The stories which were published under the title *In Mr Knox's Country* in 1915 were also first published in periodicals, such as the Scottish *Blackwood's Magazine*.

Apollo Riggs', it has been said of Ireland that "the inevitable never happens, and […] the impossible invariably occurs" (1915: 160). In 'The House of Fahy', for instance, Bernard Shute hires a yacht and insists that the others join him on a cruise. First, Philippa's water spaniel Maria escapes from Shreelane and is found on the yacht. Next, they are shipwrecked, after which they get caught up in vandalism and the destruction of private property, until, finally, Maria kills the pet cockatoo of the house they invade. Bernard and Yeates bury the bird and agree to keep this final incident hidden from the women. Then Maria shows up with the cockatoo in her mouth (Robinson 129). In *Irish Idylls* as well as in *The Irish R.M.*, there is a lack of linear plot progression: the nature of the volumes is more of an episodic one and the stories do not always appear in chronological order. Still, unlike in loose collections of short stories, a certain kind of evolution takes place throughout the works. Especially in *The Irish R.M.*, it is obvious that Major Yeates becomes more and more acquainted with the way of life of the Anglo-Irish gentry throughout the series. The first story, 'Great-Uncle McCarthy', clearly serves as an introduction to the series, opening with Yeates's comment that "[a] Resident Magistracy in Ireland is not an easy thing to come by nowadays; neither is it a very attractive job" (1899: 1).[34] Throughout the stories, however, he proves to be adapting himself to his new environment: "I got used to it all in time – I suppose one can get used to anything – I even became callous to the surprises of Mrs Cadogan's cooking" (1899: 11). Halfway through the first volume, he even talks about "Mohona, *our* champion village" (1899: 99; emphasis mine) to his English friend. Yeates is a bachelor in his thirties when the reader first meets him. He gets married, has children and advances into middle age over the course of the series. Regularly he refers to how long he has been at Shreelane House as well. In addition, throughout the stories, the reader watches a love relationship blooming between Flurry and his cousin, Miss Sally, daughter of Sir Valentine and Lady Knox. The first volume in fact ends with a marriage between the two in 'Oh Love! Oh Fire!'. Furthermore, the reader learns that Flurry leaves Ireland with the Irish Yeomanry to join the South African Boer War in the time period between the first and the second series. As a result, Yeates becomes Deputy Master of Fox Hounds (MFH) for a year. The latest stories take place a few years before the Great War. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the class of the Protestant Ascendancy was approaching its downfall, which results in a somewhat heavier atmosphere in the later

[34] Interestingly, in *The Irish R.M. and his Experiences* (1928), which combined all three volumes, Somerville decided to make 'When I First Met Dr Hickey' from *In Mr Knox's Country* the second story, placing it right after 'Great-Uncle McCarthy'. At first glance it might seem that, doing this, she 'improved' the chronological order. However, the action of this story actually takes place even before the opening story, as Yeates has not yet arrived in Skebawn in this story (Devlin 48). This shows that Somerville attached a great deal of importance to the introductory quality of 'Great-Uncle McCarthy'.

stories. The atmosphere in Barlow's book, on the other hand, is more of a timeless one. As the narrator describes it in the opening story, "by hook or by crook, Lisconnel holds together from year to year, with no particular prospect of changes" (Barlow 1893 [1892]: 11). Although members of the families occupying the cabins which make up Lisconnel do age, die, emigrate, etc., the community maintains itself across different generations, for instance by the passing on of customs. A "long-established social observance" (28), to give one example, is the following: when a member of the community goes to the town nearby, he or she first has to make a round of calls to inquire whether the others need anything. Of a newly-imported article in Lisconnel, to give another example, "everybody who is qualified to form an opinion has [to guess] how much it costs" (33) before it can be put to use. Still, despite the timeless atmosphere in *Irish Idylls*, the structure applied by Barlow in which the different stories zoom in on different characters or families – and in which the protagonists from one story become background characters in another – makes for a work which is not at all monotonous. *The Irish R.M.*, conversely, does have more of a repetitive nature as a result of the constant focus on Yeates throughout the volumes, even if Somerville and Ross's books display more of an evolution.

Despite certain differences, these books by Barlow and Somerville and Ross certainly share the typical feature of the short story cycle, i.e. that the stories are so linked to each other that "the reader's successive experience of various levels of the pattern of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts" (Ingram 19). In short, *Irish Idylls* and *The Irish R.M.* move away from the earlier practice of using frame stories, prefaces or prologues and epilogues to link the individual pieces together or, as Reid calls it, "external framing" (1977: 46). Instead, these works make use of "internal linking" (Reid 46), i.e. the use of linking devices such as recurring characters, settings and themes. This unity is, in both cases, underscored by cross-references, which are not crucial to understand the individual story, but do increase the coherence of the works. As Heather Ingman points out, the tight formal structure applied by Somerville and Ross clearly separates the R.M. stories from the "rambling, unwieldy tales of the early part of the nineteenth century", and their use of a consistent narrative voice prefigures the thematic unity of works such as *The Untilled Field* and *Dubliners* (2009: 46). Whereas there are critics who consider Somerville and Ross's R.M. volumes to be among the first Irish short story collections which are internally unified,[35]

[35] Heinz Kosok, for instance, argues that *Some Experiences of an Irish R.M.* is the first Irish collection of short stories which is successfully unified by way of internal linking devices. He considers Somerville and Ross to have paved the way for the modern Anglo-Irish short story as exemplified in *The Untilled Field* and *Dubliners*

it is perhaps less evident to start this study of the short story cycle in Ireland with Barlow's *Irish Idylls*. Still, more than many earlier accounts of Irish peasant life, Barlow's stories are structurally and thematically unified and share a consistent narrative voice in a manner similar to the R.M. stories.

1.3. *Irish Idylls* and *The Irish R.M.* as Narratives of Community

In addition to qualifying as early short story cycles, Barlow's *Irish Idylls* and Somerville and Ross's *The Irish R.M.* also participate in the nineteenth-century regional practice which Zagarell has labelled the "narrative of community". Zagarell states that this practice of portraying community life took shape in the first half of the nineteenth century in the United States, Great Britain and Ireland, with white women of the middle class as its initial main practitioners (499-500).[36] Although there are also novels which qualify as so-called narratives of community, most of these works are short story cycles. Roxanne Harde indicates that Zagarell, in her ground-breaking essay, does not use the terms 'short story sequence' or 'short story cycle', but that her work provides "an essential interpretative lens through which many, if not all, women's short story sequences ought to be read" (2). Harde states that, since the mid-nineteenth century, the form of the short story sequence has appealed to "women writers from around the world who often use it to negotiate the tensions between individual identity and community" (1-2). In *The Lonely Voice*, O'Connor has famously argued that the genre of the short story flourishes in "submerged population

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(131). More recently, Ingman has noted that Julie Anne Stevens, in her 2007 study *The Irish Scene in Somerville and Ross*, read the R.M. stories as challenging stereotypes about the Irish character by emphasizing the performative nature of Irish identity (2009: 46). Viewed in this way, Ingman has observed, Somerville and Ross's writing seems "markedly more modern" (46).

[36] Zagarell builds on feminist historical work on the culture shared by nineteenth-century middle-class white women both in England and the United States to contextualize the rise of this tradition (506). She, for instance, refers to Erna Olafson Hellerstein, Leslie Parker Hume, and Karen Offen, who have analysed the similarities that exist between women's culture in nineteenth-century France, England and the United States in *Victorian Women: A Documentary Account of Women's Lives in Nineteenth-Century England, France and the United States* (Stanford: University Press, 1981). In addition, Zagarell draws on works which focus on women's culture in nineteenth-century America, including Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's "The Female World of Love and Ritual" (*Signs* 1.1 (1975) 1-29). Zagarell states that few works have been published which centre on that culture in nineteenth-century England, but she for instance refers to Nancy Cott, who has looked into the connection between women's sphere and preindustrial life in *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Women's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). According to Zagarell, Cott's findings clearly apply to British women as well (506).

Zagarell indicates that her identification of narrative of community is indebted to feminist scholarship (507). She notes that traditions of nineteenth-century English-language women's literature are generally marked by "writers' concern with patriarchal constructions of femininity and by women's multifaceted efforts to manoeuver within or move beyond them", whereas her elucidation of narrative of community is "based on a more detailed pursuit of connections between the culture of certain nineteenth-century women of the middle class and these women's literary expression", proposing a thematic and structural connection between women's culture and writing (507).

groups". Although this is a contested notion, it is true that many writers marginalized from their society for some reason, such as ethnic and female writers, have been attracted to the genre of the short story rather than that of the novel (Hanson 2). According to Clare Hanson, this is due to the fact that the short story, as opposed to the novel, is a 'marginal' form which is "not part of official or 'high' cultural hegemony" (2). This appears to be applicable to the form of the short story cycle as well. As we will see in chapter six, the cycle form has, in recent decades, been used specifically in the context of the feminist and postmodern aesthetics of rewriting and metafiction. The works which I consider to be early short story cycles in this chapter are in fact part of a tradition which consists of nineteenth-century women's literary responses to the changes caused by the advent of modernization and, as such, privilege community over the self. In her conclusion to Harde's *Narratives of Community: Women's Short Story Sequences*, Zagarell describes how the idea originated to identify this tradition of narrative of community:

> […] while many women had written novels that merited attention, many had done noteworthy work in what were generally regarded as 'lesser' forms – short fiction, sketches, diaries, and so forth. As I read ('lesser') writings by ('lesser') nineteenth-century American women, I was struck by a strain of that writing which, though generally fictional, centred on the shared life of a group, often a rural village, far more than on individual characters. (2007: 437)

Zagarell states that "narrative of community cannot be identified as a full-fledged genre in works written before the middle of the nineteenth century", but indicates that that a number of earlier regionalist works in both Great Britain and the United States, mostly by women, display the same purposes of "presenting – and preserving – the patterns, customs and activities through which, in their eyes, traditional communities maintained and perpetuated themselves" (500). Examples are, in Great Britain, Mary Russell Mitford's *Our Village: Sketches of Rural Character and Scenery* (1824-32) and, in the United States, the village sketch tradition, which included works such as Lydia Sigourney's *Sketch of Connecticut, Forty Years Since* (1824) and Eliza Buckminster Lee's *Sketches of a New-England Village, in the Last Century* (1838) (Zagarell 500).[37] According to Zagarell, narratives of community

[37] According to Zagarell, the broader antecedents of narrative of community include "a diverse mixture of Romantic rural and regionalist literature largely authored by white men, among them Oliver Goldsmith, William Wordsworth, Sir Walter Scott, and Irving". She does underline, however, that here the portrayal of community life is overshadowed by the Romantic emphasis on individualized characters or individual consciousness (501). An example of an early-nineteenth-century tradition with largely female authors which already displays some characteristics of narrative of community, such as the use of a mediating narrator, is the Irish national tale, such as Lady Morgan's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806).

"take as their subject the life of a community (life in 'its *everyday* aspects') and portray the minute and quite ordinary processes through which the community maintains itself as an entity" (499). These works, she goes on, remain in one geographic place and make use of a mediating narrator. They are rooted in process and tend to be episodic – "built primarily around the continuous small-scale negotiations and daily procedures through which communities sustain themselves" – rather than being constructed around conflict and progress, as novels usually are (503). Focusing on community ties and negotiation, writers of narratives of community "give literary expression to a community they imagine to have characterized the preindustrial era" and thus represent a "coherent response to the social, economic, cultural, and demographic changes caused by industrialism, urbanization, and the spread of capitalism" (499). Interestingly, as Zagarell points out, these writers did not primarily present the values and experiences of such a community as belonging to women's culture, but rather as "valuable aspects of life usually located in the past that they wished to convey to everyone, male and female" (510).[38] Zagarell refers to a letter by Jewett in which the latter identifies these works as conveying a culture of community:

> How seldom a book comes that stirs the minds and hearts of the good men and women of such a village as this. […] The truth must be recognized that few books are written for and from their standpoint. […] Whoever adds to this department of literature will do an inestimable good, will see that a simple, helpful way of looking at life and speaking the truth about it […] in what we are pleased to call its *everyday* aspects must bring out the best sort of writing.[39]

In addition to Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1851), George Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858) and *Adam Bede* (1859), Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) and Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise* (1939),[40] Zagarell also mentions *Irish Idylls* as an example

[38] Zagarell indicates that traces of narrative of community may also be present in works by men. She, for instance, refers to Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1855-57), Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders* (1887), Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942) (512-14). I will come back to the presence of narrative of community in Anderson's short story cycle in chapter three.

[39] Jewett, letter, 1885 (See Richard Cary, ed., *Sarah Orne Jewett Letters* (Maine: Colby College Press, 1967) 51-2). Qtd. in Zagarell (498).
Zagarell points out that Jewett here adapts Matthew Arnold's famous description of Sophocles's plays ("saw life steadily … and saw it whole") to the literature of the *everyday* (514). Whereas Arnold believed in the possibilities that a high culture could offer, Zagarell states, writers like Jewett believed in "the restorative power of narrative of community and in the genre's capacity to reconnect the present with the common culture of the past" (514).

[40] Thompson's work is one of Zagarell's examples of twentieth-century narratives of community. She concludes her essay by saying that narrative of community has undergone changes, appearing in Afro-American works including Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923) and Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), as well as in works such as Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) (526).

in her article "Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre" (1988). Barlow's book indeed fits Zagarell's definition perfectly. *Irish Idylls* describes ordinary, domestic life in the village of Lisconnel with its everyday habits such as working, housekeeping and gossiping, and the inhabitants' daily struggles with the severe living conditions and the limited resources available to them. The community is shown in the "light of common day", "with no fantastic myths to embellish or disprove it" (Barlow 13). The protagonist, as previously mentioned, is in fact the community of Lisconnel as a whole. The individual stories do deal with certain characters or families, but there is a consistent focus on the interactions and negotiations between the different members of the community, as a result of which the cycle as a whole unmistakeably narrates the life of the community as a whole, rather than that of its individual characters. This is emphasized by the use of phrases in which the village takes the position of the subject, such as in "Lisconnel is not deficient in tact when […]" (20), "Lisconnel had finished dining" (86), "Lisconnel is seriously alarmed at thunderstorms" (179) or "Lisconnel opined that […]" (209). The manner in which the people of Lisconnel interact with each other is characterized by the concept of 'neighbourliness', a term which is often mentioned throughout the stories. The members of the community, in other words, take care of their neighbours: they show solidarity and compassion, an attitude which is in fact constitutive of the community. "[Not] letting on" (11), or turning a blind eye, for instance, is considered to be a neighbourly attitude. The inhabitants of the village are careful not to cause any conflicts or not to affect someone's dignity. In 'A Windfall', for instance, Mrs Kilfoyle tricks the poor widow M'Gurk, who is too proud to accept charity, into accepting potatoes from her, asking her whether she could take some potatoes off her hands. As opposed to this community of Lisconnel, which is restricted to one village, the community in *The Irish R.M.* is far less clearly defined: it covers a much larger area, i.e. the Big Houses in the South-West of Ireland, and it is not defined by everyday habits such as in *Irish Idylls*, but by weekly and monthly customs such as hunting, dinner parties, dancing, horse fairs, horse races, tug-of-war games, boat races, lawn-tennis parties, festivals and so on. In Somerville and Ross's volumes, it is not even clear whether the prosperous middle-class Catholic families, such as the McRorys (retired coal merchants) or the Flynns (wealthy farmers), and the Irish servants and peasants, such as the Cadogans, are part of the community central to the cycles. The latter are certainly not main characters, they remain in the background of the stories. However, as Robinson

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According to Zagarell, twentieth-century narratives of community required further research, a gap that has been filled by Harde's 2007 collection of essays on twentieth-century short story sequences by women read as narratives of community, including Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples* (1949), Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984) and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984).

indicates, characters like Yeates's servants are strikingly individualized (137). Moreover, in contrast to the characters in Barlow's book, whose social positions are clearly fixed, many of Somerville and Ross's characters' positions in the community seem to be variable. Flurry, as we will see later on, is considered to be a half-sir, and, in 'The Waters of Strife', Yeates mentions that Bat Callaghan's "social position appeared to fluctuate" (1899: 73), as he has seen him driving a car, but he also holds the Major's horse sometimes. Still, the only true members of the community appear to be the members of the Anglo-Irish gentry, such as the Knoxes. Much like in *Irish Idylls*, there is an emphasis on traditions and customs, such as the hunt, and shared experiences present in *The Irish R.M.* This is constitutive of the community of Anglo-Irish gentry. The importance which is attached to the hunt, horses and foxes in this community already becomes clear in 'Great-Uncle McCarthy', when Yeates is wrongfully accused of improving his shooting and his finances by selling his foxes, and he notes that this put him "in a worse position than if [he] had stolen a horse, or murdered Mrs Cadogan, or got drunk three times a week in Skebawn" (1899: 19). It is worth noting here that the hunt was not exclusively performed by the gentry. As Andrew J. Garavel argues, fox hunting could be seen as levelling social differences in the R.M. stories, with people from the lower classes as enthusiastic spectators and helpful guides to those straggling behind the hunt (97). If the lower classes are indeed part of the experience of the hunt, then they are somehow part of the community as well. The Irish servants and peasants, however, would never be truly assimilated into the community in the same way that the wealthy McRorys eventually are, as we will see later on.

According to Zagarell, narratives of community represent the contrast between community life and the modern world through mediating narrators (503). Barlow makes use of a heterodiegetic overt narrator in *Irish Idylls*: in a "general review of the inhabitants' pursuits" (11), she[41] clearly tells the story and articulates her views, but does not function as an actual character in the work, and thus resembles an editorial narrator. Her exact position in relation to the community is not clear, but this narrator is very familiar with the life in Lisconnel, to the extent that she from time to time places herself inside the community, for example by indicating that something "is not *our* custom in Lisconnel" (50; emphasis mine). Yet the narrator also often suggests that she is an outsider to this community, among other things by displaying her level of education, for example by referring to Chaucer. Moreover,

[41] It is not clear from the text whether Barlow's narrator is male or female. However, I have chosen to refer to this narrator as a woman, because – as we will see later on – female characters, especially the maternal figure, play an important role in *Irish Idylls*.

the story 'A Wet Day' opens with the following statement: "When *we* meet a stranger or a slight acquaintance on the roads about Lisconnel, we always say it's a fine day, unless it happens to be actually pouring, and then we say it's a fine day for the country" (76; emphasis mine). In the next sentence, however, the narrator clearly distances herself from this:

> *I* do not know exactly what meaning is attached to the qualifying clause, for the rain may all the time be trampling down the tangled oats and rotting the potatoes – facts which neighbours and friends point out to one another in unambiguous terms. But it appears to be a mode of speech adopted as a seemly cloak for our uppermost thoughts, on somewhat the same principle we avoid choosing our own engrossing domestic troubles as a topic of conversation in mixed society. (76; emphasis mine)

Similarly, the narrator uses Standard English, as opposed to the characters, who speak an Irish idiom. An Irish term is also from time to time used in the narrative sections, but in that case it is followed by the synonym or an explanation in Standard English as in "'[…] them woolly wads' – she meant knitted comforters – hanging up at Corr's" (39), or it is put between quotation marks, as in this example: "The live stock of Lisconnel never exceeds half a dozen goats, as many pigs, and a few 'chuckens' […]" (9). The narrator's ambivalent insider/outsider position is a feature typical of works which qualify as narratives of community, as Zagarell indicates (503). She negotiates between the traditional and rural world of the characters and the most likely modern and urban world of the reader. Moreover, the target audience of narratives of community about Irish life was generally English or American (Hansson 57). It was in fact an established nineteenth-century tradition for primarily Anglo-Irish writers to inform the outside world about Irish life. In the only existing article on *Irish Idylls* up until now, Heidi Hansson argues that, in order to be taken seriously by her English readers, the Anglo-Irish Barlow had to express kinship to her reading public in terms of class and education. At the same time, however, she needed to show that she had a thorough knowledge of the Irish communities she wrote about. Thus the narrator's mediating position as both an insider and an outsider is not only typical of narratives of community, it is also a consequence of Barlow's attempt at reconciling her non-Irish readers and her Irish characters. Hansson argues that the *Irish Idylls* narrator's uses of 'we' and 'our' are part of a linguistic strategy: "[t]he combination of [Barlow's] declarations of belonging and her linguistic dissociation from her characters becomes an expression of double loyalty, of a wish to side with the Irish peasants without losing the privileges of class and a good education" (60). Hansson argues that Barlow's language strategy worked outside of Ireland but not in her own country: "her choice to alternate between Standard English and dialect laid her open to

accusations of erecting a boundary between herself as educated and privileged and the country people as uneducated, poor and linguistically inferior" (65-6).[42] Elke D'hoker adds that, even when the narrator uses first person pronouns while narrating the life in Lisconnel, this is not always an expression of communion with the inhabitants.[43] As she indicates, many uses of 'we' and 'our' seem to refer to the community of the narrator, the author and the reader, rather than to that of Lisconnel,[44] for instance in the final part of the aforecited quote of the narrator talking about the inhabitants of Lisconnel always saying it is a fine day, even when it rains: "[…] it appears to be a mode of speech adopted as a seemly cloak for our uppermost thoughts, on somewhat the same principle *we* avoid choosing our own engrossing domestic troubles as a topic of conversation in mixed society" (76; emphasis mine). This ties in with Zagarell's argument that the narrators of narratives of community often draw "cultural and historical conclusions unthinkable to community members, for whom their life is simply a natural condition" (516). Barlow's narrator does state that "[h]appily it is not necessary for me, in a plain narrative of facts, to pass judgment upon [the actions of a certain character]" (107), but from time to time the narrator does – ever so gently – mock the community members. By drawing attention to the characters' ignorance and their peculiarities, Barlow's narrator is of course entertaining the educated readers. In the second story, for example, it is clear to both the narrator and the reader that the widow M'Gurk's late husband suffered from a double pneumonia. But the people of Lisconnel, as the narrator points out, diagnosed it as "a quare wakeness on his chest" (14). "The States", to give another example, to the people of Lisconnel, are "about the size of the Town down beyant, [a place] where you could scarcely miss any one you were looking for, if you streeled around a bit" (140). Somerville and Ross's educated narrator in *The Irish R.M.*, by contrast, makes fun of the native Irish servants and peasants in a more obvious way. In the very first story of the series, for instance, Yeates observes that "[i]mprobable as it may appear, [his] housekeeper was called Cadogan, a name made locally possible by being pronounced Caydogawn" (1899: 4) as well as that "the man

[42] Hansson indicates that, despite her popularity, Barlow was scorned by the literary revivalists (65). W.B. Yeats excluded *Irish Idylls* from his list of 'Best Irish Books' and explained it as follows: "[…] I have regretfully excluded Miss Barlow's *Irish Idylls* because, despite her genius for recording the externals of Irish peasant life, I do not feel that she has got deep into the heart of things" (*Dublin Daily Express* of 27 February 1895; qtd. in Allan Wade, ed., *The Letters of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1955) 248. Yeates's view was that Barlow was "only able to observe Irish character from without and not to create it from within" (qtd. in Wade 249). According to Hansson, the main reason for this were "the politics of linguistic representation": whereas revivalists such as Lady Gregory were concerned with Ireland's mythical past and retold its legends exclusively by using for instance the dialect of Kiltartan, Barlow focused on the present and, doing this, she moved between English and Irish (65).

[43] Cf. Elke D'hoker's unpublished paper "Conflict in the Community: Jane Barlow's *Irish Idylls* (1892) and *Strangers at Lisconnel* (1895)", presented during a conference in Limerick in June 2012.

[44] *Ibid.*

who accepts a resident magistracy in the South-West of Ireland voluntarily retires into the prehistoric age" (6). Resident Magistrate Yeates is a homodiegetic overt narrator, as is the case in many narratives of community. Much like Barlow's narrator, Yeates uses Standard English, while many of the characters do not. Not only servants such as Yeates's housekeeper, but also landowners such as Flurry speak an Irish idiom. The latter, as the Major describes it, speaks in a "slow, sing-song brogue" (5). Even though Yeates's "attitude with regard to the Celtic movement [is] sympathetic" (1908: 167) and his English wife Philippa attempts to learn the Irish language from the National schoolmaster, the language he uses sets him apart. As is the case with the narrator in *Irish Idylls*, however, the situation is more complicated than that of an outsider reporting on the life of a community. Yeates indicates that he is of Irish extraction,[45] but that he has lived in England for a long time, which means that he is neither an insider nor an outsider to the community. Particularly because of Yeates's Resident Magistrate function, his position within Irish society remains ambiguous. He is a central figure among the population in his region and he does become more of an insider as the volumes progress. For instance, he becomes Master of Hounds in Flurry's place for a while, even if it is a "reluctant and incapable" (1908: 3) one, as he himself says. But he is neither an established nor a permanent member. Virginia Crossman argues that this echoes the position of the Anglo-Irish within the empire: "[e]xisting uncomfortably on the margins of the central relationship between coloniser and colonised, the Anglo-Irish belonged wholly to neither group, but shifted between them in a process of oscillation over which they had little control" (23). As John Cronin describes him, Yeates is the perfect exponent of the Anglo-Irish experience, "the Englishman in him outraged by the lunacies of his encounters, the Irishman in him warmly responding to it all, the magistrate lost in the man and his desperate efforts after official propriety scattered to the winds by his English wife's delighted laughter" (1972: 58). In *The Irish R.M.*, Yeates is the one who reminisces and, at the same time, he is an observer and a critic. However, he is in the dark about many things that go on in the community, which the insiders use to their advantage. In 'The Holy Island', for instance, everyone except Yeates seems to know about a scam to smuggle liquor from a shipwrecked vessel. Another example can be found in the opening story of the second volume, 'The Pug-nosed Fox', where the people take advantage of Flurry's absence by making Yeates pay them for the fowl they have lost because of the foxes, when they could simply have kept their poultry inside at night. In 'The Waters of Strife', to give a final example, discussing the

[45] In the television adaptation of Somerville and Ross's three R.M. volumes, Major Yeates is portrayed as an Englishman, which results in even greater difficulties for him to adjust to rural life in the South-West of Ireland.

murder of James Foley, the Major comments that "as usual, the difficulty was to get any one to give information" (1899: 81). Yeates, no matter how much he learns about life in the South-West of Ireland, still remains connected to the authorities as an R.M., which means that the people unite against him. Consequently, he often turns out to be the dupe in the stories. Moreover, he frequently mocks himself, as he does the entire Anglo-Irish community, to which Somerville and Ross belonged themselves. Cahalan states that it is a case of the Ascendancy laughing at itself more than at the peasantry (89). Furthermore, Yeates sees Flurry as a "stable boy among gentlemen [and] gentleman among stable boys" (1899: 7) who occupies a "shifting position about midway in the tribe" (7). Cahalan states that the landlord is part of Somerville and Ross's own social stratum: he was most likely based on Somerville's brother Aylmer, who was Master of Fox Hounds as well (89).[46] As Julie Anne Stevens puts it, although Flurry is a landowner, he is more of a man of the people (172). His half-sir status may be a metaphor for "the second-class aristocracy which the whole Anglo-Irish had to endure when they dealt with the English, and for the affinity which they felt with the native Irish" (Chen 47). As the series progresses, Yeates often finds himself in alliance with the native Irish as well, and even on the wrong side of the law (Ingman 2009: 47). This puts him apart from the English, who are mocked extensively, even though the authors' reading public was primarily English. The Englishman Leigh Kelway, for example, is one of the main objects of mockery throughout the stories. Leigh, on his first visit to Ireland, comes to "collect impressions of Irish life" (1899: 100) and is planning on "popularising the subject in a novel" (99). To that end, Leigh says he intends to "master the brogue" (99) before his return. The Englishman's behaviour, even though he is a friend of Yeates's youth, quickly agitates the Major, as a result of which he even tries to dispose of him for the day. In another story, Yeates comments on "the common English delusion that [they] could imitate an Irish brogue" (94). In other words, the English authorities' interest in and prejudices about Ireland are also ridiculed extensively. Philippa's stepbrother, Maxwell Bruce, to give another example, is a collector of dialect and folklore. He is mocked for romanticizing the peasants he meets, thinking that they speak the Gaelic of ancient Ireland. Finally, Yeates also heavily satirizes the newly wealthy and excessive Catholic Flynn and McRory families, who ape the Anglo-Irish gentry as much as they can, for instance by speaking in almost impeccable English

[46] Somerville herself became Ireland's first female Master of Foxhounds in 1903. There are more characters in the R.M. series that were probably based on acquaintances of the writers, such as Slipper – Flurry's tipsy sidekick – who was, according to Violet Powell, founded on a famous Skibbereen character (95). Powell also points out that Lady Gregory was strongly reminded of Ross's mother by the conversation of Old Mrs Knox, Flurry's grandmother (97).

accents and attending Protestant church bazaars. The Flynn daughters, significantly, "hardly [know] the way to the stables". Similarly, Larkie McRory, a member of the latter bourgeoisie family, like Yeates, is first portrayed as an outsider to the community, as the reader learns that she rides poorly. She is, however, introduced to fox hunting by the Major. Her riding improves quickly, and she proves her worth. In the story 'The Comte de Pralines', for instance, she is among the first to catch on to the prank of representing an Englishman who speaks French as a French count who does not speak any English. Thus, by the end of the final R.M. volume, Larkie – and, consequently, the McRory family – has assimilated into the community. As we have seen, the community of Lisconnel is represented in a rather idealized way in *Irish Idylls*. The R.M.'s Anglo-Irish community in the South-West of Ireland is depicted in a comic and distorted manner. Similar to the notion of time conveyed in Barlow's book, the movement of time is cyclical rather than linear. Moreover, most of the stories focus on funny episodes in the life of the Anglo-Irish gentry. Still, the comic tone in the R.M. volumes shifts to a more nostalgic and bitter one from time to time. Some of the stories, for instance, have more of a tragic nature: 'The Waters of Strife' revolves around a fight between two men resulting in one murdering the other. In the end, the murderer shoots himself after seeing his victim's ghost out of guilt. In addition, there are references to events or issues from the outside world such as the Boer War, Home Rule, Nationalism and even the Great War (the latter to indicate that the action of the stories takes place before this period). Especially toward the end of the series, a number of pessimistic political messages can be read between the lines: it becomes clear that Somerville and Ross's class and thus the gentry's community is dissolving. This is for example noticeable in the way the once exuberant living conditions of the Ascendancy are deteriorating. The lingering threat of the ending of the community resulting from some kind of historical change – typical of narratives of community – is thus clearly expressed in *The Irish R.M.* As a result of a series of Land Acts, the Irish landed gentry was indeed losing ground to the newly emergent middle class of merchants and the like at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Families like the McRorys were in fact buying the properties the Anglo-Irish were selling because of recent land agitation. The Knoxes react bitterly to the defeat of their class. "I have no tenants", Mrs Knox says to the small farmer Stephen Casey, who comes to ask for her help in 'The Finger of Mrs Knox': "the Government is your landlord now, and I wish you joy of each other! […] When those rascals in Parliament took our land from us […] we thought we should have some peace, now we're both beggared and bothered!" (1915: 31-2). Yeates and Philippa, as Joseph Devlin emphasizes, react differently: "[t]here is an almost good-natured resignation to

historical inevitability in these pages, a sense that this new Ireland is not at all bad. And, more importantly, is not going away" (47). The impending ending to the community as it is and the march of the modern world thus appear to be welcomed in Somerville and Ross's works: the community described throughout the series, at the end, is on the verge of expanding. The assimilation into the community of Larkie McRory is an example here.

Barlow's community, by contrast, comes across as unchanging. Even though her narrator from time to time ridicules the characters, she definitely presents their community as an ideal and an aspiration, in line with the conception of community that flourished in the nineteenth century. Instead of welcoming the modern world, community life is seen as a nostalgic alternative to modern, industrial and urban society in *Irish Idylls*. As the narrator points out in 'A Windfall', the shops in the area "[give] little scope for the operations of the capitalist" (27). Writers of narratives of community, according to Zagarell, indeed describe preindustrial communities in which the self functions as part of the community rather than as an individual (99).[47] This certainly applies to the situation in *Irish Idylls*, to this extent that the narrator notes that there is little scope to be found for the development of individuality in Lisconnel. Contrary to what one might expect in such an "unsophisticated little community", a "very slight deviation from certain recognised lines of conduct suffices there to write you down roundly like mad or crazy, with no euphemistic flourished of 'eccentric' or 'peculiar'" (82). Barlow's narrator thus also hints at a negative aspect of community life, namely that it is coercive. The behaviour of the inhabitants of Lisconnel, in other words, must comply with the rules of the community. The nostalgic sense of community created in *Irish Idylls*, however, is not undermined by these limitations to individual development. There are, for instance, three characters in *Irish Idylls* who are all markedly different from the other members of the community – to that extent that these three women even form their own micro community. The first one is called Big Anne, as she is "a very tall, large-boned woman" (80). The people call the second one the Dummy, but they suspect that she only pretends to be deaf. They call

[47] In the conclusion of Harde's *Narratives of Community: Women's Short Story Sequences* (2007), Zagarell does state that, when she wrote her 1988 article, she was "relying on a concept of community that flourished in the late nineteenth century" (437). She thus acknowledges that she focused on the constructive dynamics of community and failed to recognize the destructive dynamics. Zagarell states that, while some of the texts discussed in Harde's book, for example Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1851), do represent community as a "fully positive form of social organization in which an interdependent group of people pursue a (usually rural) way of life, and, consciously or not, is committed to its persistence", others present communities as stifling (2007: 434). Moreover, a great deal of these texts explore the relationships between 'individual' and 'community' (434). In literature which focuses on community, Zagarell goes on, 'community' takes many forms: "[s]ome are sustaining, some limiting, some destructive; all are contingent on the specific history, culture, social structure, economic circumstances, cultural geography, racial and ethnic circumstances, gender relations, sexual norms, and other factors which inform them" (434).

the third one Mad Bell: she frequently goes missing or is found singing at the top of her voice in the pouring rain. Still, these three characters are all the same accepted and are even shown a great deal of respect. The narrator indicates that adjectives as mad or crazy are used in a "considerably less disparaging way" (82) than they are elsewhere. Mad Bell, for instance, is addressed as such "just as respectfully as if they had addressed her as missis or ma'am" (83). Strangers, on the other hand, are not well-received in Lisconnel: the community is a closed one and its members are suspicious of most outsiders. The inhabitants of the neighbouring villages are met with hostility, as are families that move to Lisconnel, since the outside world is generally seen as posing a threat to the community. Thus, in order to maintain itself as an entity, the community has to stand united against threats in the form of strangers, the authorities ("the peelers") and the landed gentry ("the Quality"). In most narratives of community, as Zagarell points out, an important sign of historical change forms the main threat for the community (503). In *Irish Idylls*, the most important threat the members of the community have to deal with is poverty, which may result in their being thrown out of their houses and, eventually, in emigration. Particularly the latter is a terrible punishment to them. When Mrs M'Gurk receives a letter in 'A Windfall', her first impression is that she has received "some ominous notice or 'warnin' about her rent, which would imply that she [stands] in imminent danger of being 'put out of it'" – an apprehension "prone to haunt the mind of the dweller in Lisconnel" (21), as the narrator observes. Larry Sheridan, in the story 'One Too Many' has "nightmare visions of being driven off into the great, strange, miserable world – away from Lisconnel" (55). Ingman rightly points out that, despite the title,[48] Barlow does not tone down the peasants' suffering (2009: 76). Yet it is striking that, given the poverty that is prevalent in the desolate landscape of Lisconnel, most members of the community die of old age and not of starvation. Community life is in fact described in such an idealized way in *Irish Idylls* that the inhabitants would prefer continuing their life in poverty over leaving Lisconnel, and that the members of the community survive because of their solidarity. The role which families, and specifically the maternal figure, play in the survival of the community as a whole is also strongly emphasized by Barlow. Moreover, it is interesting to note that men and women appear to contribute equally to communal life. It is true that the

[48] Barlow's choice of the title *Irish Idylls* obviously evokes associations with Theocritus's *Idylls* or short pastoral poems describing scenes from everyday life. Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1859-85), a cycle of twelve narrative poems recounting the King Arthur legend, was published during Barlow's lifetime. About *Irish Idylls*, Benedict Kiely made the following statement: "Jane Barlow called that book of stories about Lisconnel by the name *Irish Idylls* […] and Ireland is one of those odd countries in which it is almost always possible to uncover something of the idyllic. But even in Jane Barlow's coloured land the bog could turn grey and stiffen with frost, the cut wind could blow blighting, corrupting blackness into the seed-potatoes on which life in Lisconnel depended." (136)

male inhabitants of Lisconnel get jobs in other districts during harvest to earn some extra money, while the women knit stockings and sell them in a shop in the Town, but apart from this the community of Lisconnel is not a patriarchal one. On the contrary, one of the most respected social ranks in the village is that of the "lone widdy" (15).

In *The Irish R.M.*, on the other hand, little importance seems to be attached to family and motherhood. For instance, virtually no attention is paid to the fact that Yeates and Philippa have two sons throughout the series. Somerville and Ross do, however, emphasize the strength and independence of the women belonging to the Ascendancy. Cahalan argues that, since the Ascendancy's economic power was fading, the chief arena for their activity was no longer the marketplace, but rather the theatre, the dinner party, etc. – a social world often dominated by women (99). The most important pastime in the community is the hunt and the Anglo-Irish women prove to be liberated by taking part in this masculine activity as well. Cahalan notes that we do not only see the Anglo-Irish gentry mocking itself in the R.M. stories, we also experience two women making fun of an Anglo-Irish*man* (89). With respect to both class and gender, he maintains, the R.M. stories are subversive: in the same way that the gentry is powerless in the face of the lower classes, the male members of the Ascendancy are in fact outmatched by the women, who truly control the Big Houses (97). Lady Knox, Sally's mother, for instance, would according to Yeates have made "a very imposing little coachman, and would have caused her stable helpers to rue the day they had the presumption to be born" (1899: 126). It strikes Yeates that "Sir Valentine sometimes did so" (126). Particularly Old Mrs Knox, Flurry's grandmother, possesses a great deal of authority, in striking contrast to the Major. She is the matriarch of Aussolas Castle, which her grandson describes as "a nice stretch of demesne […], and one little old woman holding it all in the heel of her fist" (56). As Yeates points out, Flurry treats his grandmother "as a combatant in his own class and [does] not for an instant consider himself bound to allow her weight for either age or sex" (1915: 7). In the different volumes, Mrs Knox can be seen as representing the Old Anglo-Irish Guard, which is threatened by the rise of families like the McRorys. Yeates describes Mrs Knox as looking "as if she had robbed a scarecrow" (1899: 57). "[Her] skinny hand", he continues, "had the grubby tan that bespoke the professional gardener, and was decorated with a magnificent diamond ring" (57). According to Yeates, Mrs Knox's dictatorial voice is "always a shock when taken in connection with her beggar woman's costume" (1908: 80), wearing a purple velvet bonnet "that she was reputed to have worn since the famine" (1899: 292). The Major notes how she typically, in the same breath, quotes Virgil to him and "screeche[s] an objurgation at a being whose matted head [rises] suddenly into

view from behind an ancient Chinese screen […]" (59). Mrs Knox's strong voice and her expensive jewellery can be considered to express the bygone high days of the Anglo-Irish gentry, whereas her poor clothing and grubby hands convey the end of the gentry's community. The looming fall of the Ascendancy is also evident in the fact that Mrs Knox is not well in the final R.M. volume. Still, this does not prevent her from brilliantly outsmarting her rival "Goggin, the Gombeen" (1915: 30) in 'The Finger of Mrs Knox'. It is not just the ladies of the gentry who rule the households. Yeates's cook, Mrs Cadogan, for instance, is the one who actually runs his house. This already becomes clear in 'Great-Uncle McCarthy', when it turns out that Mrs Cadogan has allowed a number of her relatives and friends to run the disreputable business of selling foxes in the R.M.'s attic. Their eating of his food and drinking of his whiskey, as well as the noise they make, lead him to think that he is being haunted by a ghost. Cahalan argues that Yeates's wife, Philippa, is the stronger person of the couple: she does not only order him around, she also proves to take up the art of hunting foxes rather fast in 'Philippa's Fox-Hunt', which is the first story in which she actually appears (98). In addition, Philippa gets on much better with female servants, such as Mrs Cadogan, than Yeates. She perhaps even assimilates into the community faster than Yeates does in the early R.M. stories. Her husband describes her as being callous to the problems concerning their property, such as clogged drains, obstructed chimneys, rat holes, damp walls, etc.: "She regarded Shreelane and its flounderings, foundering ménage of incapables in the light of a gigantic picnic in a foreign land" (1899: 124). As an Englishwoman trying to acquire the language of her Irish housekeepers, she is of course mocked as well, especially for believing that she is able to read Irish after having taken five lessons and a half and even, according to Yeates, that she is "one of the props of the Celtic movement" (1908: 167). Nevertheless, whereas Yeates is sometimes annoyed by the way of life in the South-West of Ireland, Philippa settles everything by "[falling] away into unseasonable laughter" (1899: 125).[49]

In all, Barlow's *Irish Idylls* as well as Somerville and Ross's *The Irish R.M.* are, as opposed to earlier nineteenth-century works of short fiction, unified structurally as well as thematically. Not only do these cycles have a strong internal unity, they also display the "simultaneous self-sufficiency and interdependence", which is the most important feature of the short story cycle according to Mann (15). In this respect, these works qualify as early short story cycles and precursors of books such as *The Untilled Field* and *Dubliners*.

[49] Powell notes that Philippa shared this difficulty in keeping her countenance with Ross, "who sometimes spent an entire church service in helpless tears of laughter" (97).

Moreover, Barlow and Somerville and Ross's cycles, with for instance their focus on community life in a certain region and their use of a mediating narrator, can be viewed as part of the nineteenth-century regional tradition labelled narrative of community by Zagarell. By depicting the ties between a shared but varying set of characters throughout the different stories, these books can be seen as cycles which narrate the life of a community.[50] In addition, these works are also part of the tradition in which Anglo-Irish writers inform the outside world (particularly English and American readers) about Irish life.

2. The American Tradition: Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*

If *Irish Idylls* and *The Irish R.M.* are early Irish short story cycles which, primarily unified by setting, focus on life in a certain community and thus belong to both traditions, it is interesting to compare them with one of their counterparts in the American tradition. Short story cycle critics such as Mann and Lundén discuss Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* as an example of the late nineteenth-century American cycle. Like Barlow's and Somerville and Ross's works, Jewett's collection has a strong internal coherence with unity of setting, character and theme. Much like in *Irish Idylls*, the stories in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* are set in a small fictional village, i.e. the Maine fishing village of Dunnet Landing. Moreover, Jewett also makes the community the main protagonist of the book. Like in *The Irish R.M.*, however, it is through the eyes of a narrator-protagonist that the reader learns about life in the village. In the same manner as Yeates, Jewett's unnamed main character, a middle-aged female writer, starts out as an outsider, but gradually becomes more of an insider to the community. Thematically speaking, similar to the situation in Barlow's book, the focus lies on everyday life in Dunnet Landing: it is about storytelling, visits to neighbours, fishing, cooking, work, tea parties, family reunions, funerals, etc. Like for the other works, the title, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, captures the book as a whole, as it refers to the pointed firs which grow along and delimit the coastline. Although some of Jewett's stories are remarkably short, generally speaking, the stories still work independently of one another, and at the same time they work together to create something beyond the individual stories, i.e. they form a portrait of life in the Maine fishing towns at the end of the nineteenth century. As is the case for *Irish Idylls* and *The Irish R.M.*, Jewett's work has an

[50] In later short story cycles such as Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, as we will see, it occurs more often that the different stories all tell the story of an individual but that, taken together, these individuals do form a community – in the same way that the different stories taken as a whole form a cycle.

episodic nature, but there is still some kind of evolution present throughout the stories. Jewett's genteel narrator, for instance, is a female visitor, presumably from the city of Boston, who arrives in Dunnet Landing at the beginning of the summer in the first story, 'The Return'. Throughout the volume, she does not only befriend her hostess, Mrs Todd, her family and friends, and the rest of the inhabitants, she also (almost) becomes a true insider to the village community. Moreover, the book clearly has a closing story: in 'The Backward View', the narrator bids farewell to the village and returns to her life in the outside world. *The Country of the Pointed Firs* thus has a cyclical structure, which according to Lundén has influenced several major American cycles, such as William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942) and Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples* (1949) (1999: 37). *Irish Idylls*, on the other hand, as we have seen, is structured in such a manner that the perpetuity of the community is underscored, while the final stories of *The Irish R.M.* have a bleaker tone, which points forward to the ending of the community as it is known in the stories. As we will see later on, the community of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is near its last gasp. This results in a different approach compared with, particularly, Barlow's cycle.

In addition to qualifying as an early short story cycle, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* also specifically has this focus on community life in common with *Irish Idylls* and *The Irish R.M.* In her important article, Zagarell even uses Jewett's book as a primary example of what she calls the narrative of community. The individual stories deal with certain characters, but, as in *Irish Idylls*, the focus always remains on the relationships and negotiations between the different members of the community or, as Zagarell describes it, "the narrative does not feature individualized lives but develops an interdependent community network in which characters are portrayed with reference to how they intersect with and maintain the community" (519). Although the term 'neighbourliness' is not literally mentioned in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, the people of Dunnet Landing stand by each other as much as the inhabitants of Lisconnel do. Jewett – who in fact owned a copy of *Irish Idylls* (Zagarell 501) – clearly emphasizes the inhabitants' solidarity to the same extent as Barlow. The fact that the members of the community occasionally stop by the island of recluse Poor Joanna to bring her food and supplies, even though she has "committed the unpardonable sin" (Jewett 2005 [1896] 86) of cursing God, reminds one of the manner in which the inhabitants of Lisconnel show respect to deviating individuals such as Big Anne, Mad Bell and the Dummy.

An important difference between *Irish Idylls* and *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is the fact that it would be quite impossible for a visitor like Jewett's narrator to assimilate into the community of Lisconnel, as strangers are not well-received at all in Barlow's village. This

may be the reason why the *Irish Idylls* narrator does not function as an actual character, but rather resembles an editorial narrator, whose extensive knowledge of the community of Lisconnel is left unexplained. In Dunnet Landing, strangers are always hospitably received, and Mrs Todd even has a friend from out of town, Mrs Fosdick. In *The Irish R.M.*, as already discussed, assimilation into the community is difficult, but nonetheless possible. Much like Yeates, who becomes more of an insider to the community, Jewett's narrator identifies more and more with the community of Dunnet Landing throughout the stories. Toward the end of the volume, in the story 'The Bowden Reunion', she clearly sees herself as part of the community and its history: "*we* were no more a New England family celebrating its own existence and simple progress; *we* carried the tokens and inheritance of all such households from which this had descended, and were only the latest of *our* line" (Jewett 113; emphases mine). In the final story she even expresses her sorrow that she "fear[s] to find [her]self a foreigner" (141) when she returns to the outside world. Still, the narrator of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* remains an outsider with an urban identity, amongst other things because of her language, which does not only stand out because the people of Dunnet Landing speak a dialect, but also because her statements betray her educated background, for example when she says about Mrs Todd that "[t]here was something lonely and solitary about her great determined shape. She might have been Antigone alone on the Theban plain" (58). The reader to whom the narrative is directed of course also had an urban identity, as did Jewett herself. Although the narrator in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* has affectionate feelings for Mrs Todd and the other inhabitants of Dunnet Landing, she does point out that their vision is limited, for instance when her landlady and Mrs Fosdick reach the conclusion that "[e]verybody's just like everybody else, now; nobody to laugh about, and nobody to cry about" (75). At this point, the narrator indicates to the reader that the village has several eccentric people, Captain Littlepage, for example. Like Barlow and Somerville and Ross's narrators, Jewett's narrator thus mediates between her insider/participant and outsider/observer status.

Another difference between Barlow's and Jewett's cycle is the expression of the contrast between community life and the modern world. As in *Irish Idylls*, life in the village of Dunnet Landing stands in sharp contrast with life in the modern world. Almost all of the inhabitants are between the ages of sixty and ninety, and the majority of the members of the community are unmarried women and widows – although there are also a number of male characters, mostly former sea captains. Many people have left the community, especially the young ones, and those who have stayed often reminisce about the past, when the shipping

industry was still flourishing. Whereas the community of Lisconnel is depicted in an unchanging and idealized way, the impending threat of the ending of community life typical of many narratives of community has almost become reality in Dunnet Landing. Whereas emigration from Lisconnel is the worst possible punishment in *Irish Idylls*, many have seen fit to leave the village in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. In Somerville and Ross's volumes, community life as the gentry knows it is also coming to an end, but another class is taking over. In *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, by contrast, it is quite possible that, once the current inhabitants of the village have passed away, the community and the village will completely vanish. Despite all this, the narrator still depicts community life in Dunnet Landing as an antidote to the modern world and industrialization. However, the emphasis on mortality which lingers throughout the work results in a tone quite different from that in *Irish Idylls*, where the same families inhabit the same cabins throughout different generations.

As we have seen, the society of Lisconnel is not a patriarchal one and the women are the true rulers of the Big Houses in the South-West of Ireland. However, the emphasis on women and female relationships in the community is even greater in Jewett's cycle. Strong and independent elderly women are the central figures within the community in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Examples are the learned herbalist Mrs Todd and her mother, Mrs Blackett, the matriarch of the Bowden family – to which the entire community seems to belong somehow. The male characters, by contrast, appear to have become marginalized ever since the economic decline of the Maine fishing towns. Elizabeth Ammons points out that the male figures in the stories are dealt with individually within the narrative, whereas the women function in groups, and relate warmly and easily with each other. The narrator, Mrs Todd and Mrs Blackett for instance visit the Bowden family reunion together. The male characters, on the other hand, are clearly separated from each other and the rest of the community (88). It is true that, with the decline of seafaring, many men would indeed have left the Maine coastal villages, but, as Ammons maintains, Jewett's presentation of men as marginalized in the Dunnet Landing community is not merely economic (88). Jean Rohloff indicates that Captain Littlepage, William Blackett, and Elijah Tilley are "sympathetically, even lovingly, drawn, but they remain peripheral to the community of women which lies at the heart of Jewett's [book]" (41). Even though the female community of Dunnet Landing has very strong ties, whereas the men are marginalized and alienated, the village itself is isolated as well, i.e. from the outside world, which will result in the disappearing of their way of life. In *Irish Idylls*, the village of Lisconnel is isolated from the outside world as well, but this appears to be one of the reasons why the community sustains itself throughout the different generations.

In conclusion, this comparison of Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, and Barlow's *Irish Idylls* and Somerville and Ross's *The Irish R.M.* has made clear that these works share the specific focus on community life, typical of the nineteenth-century tradition labelled the narrative of community by Zagarell. She argues that nineteenth-century narratives of community are structurally akin, but that national particularities in the conception of community are evident (503). In British literature, she maintains, "a long history is often reflected, even […] reconstructed, and class is seen to have a strong influence on community life, whether community life is created by negotiation across classes, or within one class" (503). In the United States, on the other hand, according to Zagarell, "the community is generally located in a semi-mythological past marked by an important sign of historical change" (503), such as the advent of the railroad in Charlotte Jerauld's *Chronicles and Sketches of Hazelhurst* (1850) or the revolution in Lydia Sigourney's *Sketch of Connecticut* (1824). The latter is certainly true for *The Country of the Pointed Firs* as well, as the economic decline because of industrialization has led to the decay of the Maine fishing village of Dunnet Landing. As far as *The Irish R.M.* is concerned, on the other hand, the negotiation across classes indeed plays a central role, and in *Irish Idylls* there is clearly an emphasis on negotiation within one class. Yet, in all, characteristics of narratives of community as delineated by Zagarell, such as the focus on community life as well as the contrast with the modern world and the mediating function of the narrator, can be traced in each of these books. In addition, these works also qualify as early short story cycles. Moving away from the earlier regional loose collections of tales such as Carleton's *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, these late nineteenth-century works display a strong internal unity. By linking the stories through a shared setting on the one hand, and shared themes, characters and a consistent narrative voice on the other, these volumes of short fiction are not only more coherent narratives of community life, they also point forward to works such as *Dubliners* and *Winesburg, Ohio*, and the tradition of the modern short story cycle.

Chapter II
Bridging Tradition and Modernity:
George Moore's *The Untilled Field*

In his preface to the 1914 edition of *The Untilled Field* (1903), George Moore called the book "a landmark in Anglo-Irish literature, a new departure".[51] In a letter to Edmund Gosse, moreover, he described it as "a frontier book, between the new and the old style".[52] Although critics have often regarded *The Untilled Field* as a turning point in the development of the modern Irish short story,[53] Moore's appraisal of the transitional dimension of the volume appears to be the more accurate one. Ingman argues that *The Untilled Field* combines traditional and new techniques, as a result of which it may be more appropriate to see it as a transitional volume (2009: 93). With *The Untilled Field* generally considered a precursor of James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914),[54] criticism has focused on Moore's contribution to the birth of the modern short story. However, relatively little attention has been paid to Moore's book as a whole. Critics agree that *The Untilled Field* was modelled on Ivan Turgenev's *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* (1852).[55] This book, focusing on the Russian peasant, has been considered an early short story cycle which depicts life in a specific region.[56] Thus, it is interesting to see whether Turgenev's influence extends also to *The Untilled Field* as a whole. In this chapter, I will first consider Moore's volume from the perspective of the short story cycle. In the second section, I will explore to what extent *The Untilled Field* relates to the specific regional tradition of narrating the life of a community discussed in the previous chapter, by comparing it with the most typical Irish example of what Zagarell has called the

[51] George Moore, *The Untilled Field* (London: Heinemann, 1914) x. Qtd. in Karl Beckson, "Moore's *The Untilled Field* and Joyce's *Dubliners*: The Short Story's Intricate Maze," *English Literature in Transition* 15.4 (1972) 302.
[52] Moore, letter of 1 March 1915, to Edmund Gosse. Qtd. in Charles Burkhart, "The Short Stories of George Moore," *Studies in Short Fiction* 6.2 (1969) 170.
[53] See, for instance: Herbert Ernest Bates, *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey* (London: Nelson, 1945); Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (London: Macmillan, 1963); James Kilroy, *The Irish Short Story: A Critical History* (Boston: Twayne, 1985); Michael L. Storey, *Representing the Troubles in Irish Short Fiction* (Catholic University of America Press, 2004).
[54] See, for instance: Karl Beckson, "Moore's *The Untilled Field* and Joyce's *Dubliners*: The Short Story's Intricate Maze," *English Literature in Transition* 15.4 (1972); Patrick A. McCarthy, "The Moore-Joyce Nexus: 'An Irish literary comedy'," *George Moore in Perspective*, ed. Janet Egleson Dunleavy (Towata: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983).
[55] Moore explained this himself in his autobiography, *Hail and Farewell*, ed. Richard Allen Cave (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Ltd, 1976 [1911, 1912, 1914]) 345. See also, for instance, Eileen Kennedy, "Turgenev and George Moore's *The Untilled Field*," *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)* 18.3 (1975) 145-59; Paul March-Russell, *The Short Story: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2009).
[56] See, for instance, Susan Garland Mann (1989) and James Nagel (2001).

narrative of community: Barlow's *Irish Idylls*. This comparison will allow me to establish to what extent Moore harks back to this nineteenth-century regional tradition and to what extent he alters it, thereby prefiguring the modern Irish short story and cycle. To illustrate the latter, I will compare *The Untilled Field* with Joyce's *Dubliners* in the final section of this chapter.[57]

1. Moore: Biography

George Augustus Moore was born on 24 February 1852 at Moore Hall, County Mayo. In 1861, he was sent to school at St. Mary's College, Oscott, in England, but eventually withdrew without having completed his curriculum. The Catholic Moore family moved to London in 1869 and George Moore attended drawing and painting classes at the South Kensington Museum. After the death of his father George Henry Moore – MP for Mayo – in 1870, he inherited Moore Hall along with an estate of more than 12.000 acres. At the age of twenty-one, he moved to Paris and enrolled in art classes there. He met Bernard Lopez, who introduced him to the Montmartre café society, symbolist poets, realist writers and impressionist painters. He also read widely in aesthetic theory and French literature, particularly the realist work of writers like Balzac, Flaubert and Zola. Five years later, he had abandoned the idea of painting and published his first book of poetry, *Flowers of Passion* (1878). Between 1878 and 1883, he published another volume of poetry (*Pagan Poems*), a play (*Martin Luther*, written in collaboration with Bernard Lopez), short stories, reviews, and short articles in England. Moreover, he was forced to return to Ireland to pay debts incurred on the family estate as a result of the activities of the Irish Land League. Then he moved back to London to earn a living as a writer. His first novel, *A Modern Lover*, appeared in 1883. He published his memoir *Confessions of a Young Man* in 1888. In 1894, *Esther Waters* appeared, and one year later three novellas were published under the title *Celibates* (1895). According to Ingman, both works represent the culmination of the influence which French social realism had on Moore, after which he moved on to psychological realism, being particularly influenced by Flaubert's indirect style of narration (2009: 86). Moore joined Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats and Edward Martyn in the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, moved to Dublin in 1901 and developed an interest in the work of the Gaelic League. *The Untilled Field* was published in 1903. Around this time, he became disenchanted with the Gaelic League. He also

[57] An earlier version of this chapter was published as an article. See Debbie Brouckmans, "Bridging Tradition and Modernity: George Moore's Short Story Cycle *The Untilled Field*," *The Irish Short Story: Traditions and Trends*, eds. Elke D'hoker and Stephanie Eggermont. *Reimagining Ireland*, vol. 63, ed. Eamon Maher (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015) 85-103.

declared that he had converted to Protestantism, calling it "a stage in the evolution towards agnosticism".[58] In 1905, *The Lake* appeared. Six years later, Moore returned to London, and the first part of *Hail and Farewell* (1911) was published.[59] Another collection of short stories appeared in 1918: *The Storyteller's Holiday*. In 1933, *A Communication to My Friends* was published. Moore died in London on 22 January 1933.[60]

2. Moore's *The Untilled Field*

The Untilled Field came into being as a result of Moore's wish to contribute to the Gaelic Revival. Although he did not speak Irish himself, he believed that canonical texts should be translated into Irish for students. Among other works, Moore suggested Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, a selection of stories by de Maupassant and the *Arabian Nights*. However, none of these works were acceptable to the Gaelic League, among other things because they were not written by Irishmen (Moore 1976 [1911]: 336). Consequently, his friend Father Tom Finlay suggested that Moore write a work of fiction himself with the purpose of having it translated. When Moore mentioned to John Eglinton that he was thinking of writing a volume of short stories about Irish life, the librarian told him he should use Turgenev's *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* as a model. The stories were supposed to appear in the *New Ireland Review* of Father Peter Finlay (Father Tom's brother). However, because of Moore's criticism on Catholic Ireland, only three of the stories appeared there, in English as well as Irish versions.[61] Several of the other stories were published in English and American magazines. Six of the stories appeared in Gaelic translations in Dublin, under the title *An t-Úr-Ghort, Sgéalta,* in 1902.[62] The appearance of these translated stories went by rather unnoticed. The London publication of *The Untilled Field*, in English, followed in 1903.[63]

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[58] John Wilson Foster, *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival: A Challenging Art* (New York: Gill and Macmillan, 1987) 124. Qtd. in Nurten Birlik, "Two different Cases of the 'Self' Myth Which Is Not 'Self'-Reliant: George Moore's *The Untilled Field* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*," *Studia Neophilologica* 83 (2011) 211.

[59] Followed by a second part in 1912 and a third one in 1914.

[60] Biography based on Janet Egleson Dunleavy's chronology of the life of George Moore in *The Artist's Vision, The Storyteller's Art* (1973). For a complete bibliography, see Edwin Gilcher, *A Bibliography of George Moore* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1970).

[61] Ingman points out that these stories ('The Wedding Gown', 'The Clerk's Quest' and 'Alms-giving') had been previously published in English magazines, but Moore revised them with Turgenev's stories in mind (2009: 88). Taidgh O'Donohue translated the stories into Irish.

[62] Signed Seorsa O Morda, Moore's name in Irish. Gaelic translations by Pádraic Ó Súilleabháin and Tadgh Ó Donnchadha.

John Cronin provides a comparison of *An t-Úr-Ghort* (1902) and the first edition of *The Untilled Field* (1903): the first story of the Irish version ('Tír-ghrádh') is not included in the English version, but a few of its details do appear in 'The Wild Goose'; the second Irish story ('´San n-Diothramh Dubh') becomes 'A Playhouse in the Waste'; the third Irish story ('Tórna') appears as 'The Wedding Gown', which remains close to the original; the

2.1. *The Untilled Field* as a Transitional Short Story Cycle

As we have seen in the previous chapter, one of the most important features of the short story cycle is the presence of a tension between unity and fragmentation. As far as *The Untilled Field* is concerned, critics have often claimed that it lacks unity in comparison with the 'archetypal' short story cycle, *Dubliners*.[64] Moore, however, clearly had the intention to create a unified book. While writing *The Untilled Field*, he stated that "the book is a perfect unity"[65] and expressed his hope that it would "not be reviewed as a collection of short stories".[66] He had even suggested to his publisher, Thomas Fisher Unwin, that the volume be titled "The Untilled Field – A Novel in Thirteen Episodes".[67] Moreover, Neil Davison has argued for the presence of a loose progressive argument in Moore's book, which charts a movement from "the dominance of the priest in the countryside; to peasant superstition; to the delusions of bourgeois projection; to an exposé on the opposing forces of middle-class political nationalism, neo-Gaelicism and orthodox Irish-Catholicism" (291). Davison discerns five kinds of stories in *The Untilled Field*, which are all tied up with the decline of a community or a nation: stories about the injustices of poverty, arranged marriage and priestly despotism ('Some Parishioners'), about emigration or exile ('The Exile', 'Home Sickness', 'The Wild Goose'), about the well-intentioned failures of one clergyman as opposed to the hypocrisy of another ('A Letter to Rome', 'A Playhouse in the Waste'), about the predominance of superstition in the Irish countryside ('Julia Cahill's Curse', 'The Wedding Gown') and, finally, about Irish bourgeois wish-fulfilment ('The Clerk's Quest', 'Alms-giving', 'So on he Fares') (302). Moore's use of recurring themes such as loneliness, emigration and exile, poverty and religious oppression does indeed contribute to the unity of the work. These themes also highlight the meaning of the title, *The Untilled Field*, which, significantly, is not the title of one of the stories used for the entire collection.[68] As is commonly known, Moore blamed the Church for Ireland's decline: to him, the people's minds

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fourth Irish story ('Galar Dúitche') becomes 'Home Sickness', which also resembles the original closely; the fifth Irish story ('An Deóraidhe') appears as 'The Exile', which does not deviate far from the original either; the sixth Irish story, finally, becomes the fifth section of 'Some Parishioners' or 'The Window' (1979: 115-16).

[63] Henceforth, the 1903 edition of *The Untilled Field* will be cited.
The genesis of *The Untilled Field* described in this paragraph is based on Moore's account of it in *Hail and Farewell* ("Salve" 335-53) and Ingman's discussion of *The Untilled Field* in *A History of the Irish Short Story* (2009: 86-94).

[64] See, for instance, Ingman 2009: 88-9.

[65] Moore, letter of 7 February 1902, to Thomas Fisher Unwin. Qtd. in Beckson (304).

[66] Moore, letter of 7 February 1902, to Unwin. Qtd. in Beckson (304).

[67] Moore, letter of 13 March 1902, to Unwin. Qtd. in Beckson (304).

[68] As previously mentioned, short story collections are often named after one of the stories, with the possible addition of the phrase '… and Other Stories'. Short story cycles, on the other hand, generally carry a title which applies to the entire book, such as *Dubliners* and *Winesburg, Ohio*.

as well as their fields were untilled as a result of their oppression by the Church.[69] In addition to themes, the stories in *The Untilled Field* are also unified by setting. Even though Moore looks at Irish rural life as well as at Irish urban life in *The Untilled Field*, the stories all take place in either North Mayo or in the Dublin of the 1880s. Moreover, the stories share certain characters. The book certainly does not have one protagonist who appears in all of the stories, as is the case in many other regional short story cycles. However, a number of characters do return in different stories. Father Tom Maguire and his uncle Father John Stafford as well as "local saint" Biddy M'Hale, for instance, appear both in 'Some Parishioners' and in 'The Wild Goose'. Ned Carmady, the main character in 'The Wild Goose', also appears in 'The Way Back'. Father MacTurnan, to give another example, is the main character in 'A Letter to Rome' as well as in 'A Playhouse in the Waste'. Moreover, similar types of characters often recur in *The Untilled Field*. For instance, many stories feature emigrants who leave Ireland to escape poverty and the oppression by the Church. Kate Kavanagh in 'Some Parishioners', James Phelan in 'The Exile', James Bryden in 'Home Sickness' and Julia Cahill in 'Julia Cahill's Curse', to name but a few examples, all leave Ireland because of the narrow-mindedness of the parish and the lack of opportunities. There are also many cross-references present throughout the book, which help tie the stories together. In 'A Playhouse in the Waste', for instance, the narrator says to his driver that he "like[s] the story about Julia Cahill better" (Moore 2006 [1903]: 133), thus linking this story to the previous one, 'Julia Cahill's Curse'. In the same story, the narrator learns from his driver that Father MacTurnan, whose idea it was to build the playhouse referred to in the title, had once "written to the Pope asking that the priests might marry, 'so afeard was he that the Catholics were going to America and the country would become Protestant'" (134). This is a reference to one of the previous stories, 'A Letter to Rome'.[70] Finally, *The Untilled Field* as a whole is framed by two stories – 'In the Clay' and 'The Way Back' – which both revolve around artists and emigration, share the same set of characters (Rodney, Harding and Lucy), and narrate successive events.[71] These "Artist Stories", as Kenneth Newell points out, "envelop the themes of the other stories

[69] Kennedy points out that Moore considered titles like *The Sin Against the Holy Ghost* and *The Passing of the Gael*, before eventually returning to his first idea (1969: 155).

[70] There are several cross-references between 'A Letter to Rome' and 'A Playhouse in the Waste'. For instance, it is explicitly mentioned in both stories that Father MacTurnan's coat was once black but has grown green with age and weather.

[71] Moore made numerous revisions to his volume after the 1903 edition, the most important one being the omission of 'In the Clay' and 'The Way Back'. He did replace them with a new story, 'Fugitives', consisting of material from both stories, in the 1931 edition. He also split up 'Some Parishioners' – which consisted of five sections – into four different stories: 'Some Parishioners' (I & II), 'Patchwork' (III), 'The Wedding Feast' (IV) and 'The Window' (V).

and 'round out' the collection" (123). The use of these particular opening and closing stories thus enhances the cyclical effect of the volume. Because of these different kinds of unity created in *The Untilled Field*, I would argue that it can be considered a short story cycle. The work displays "simultaneous self-sufficiency and interdependence" which is the one essential characteristic of the short story cycle according to Mann (15), as the stories can be read on their own, but together they create a more general sense of Irish life which the reader would not perceive by reading the stories individually.

Although Moore's early novels were heavily influenced by French realists Balzac, Flaubert and Zola, it was Turgenev's symbolic example he followed when writing *The Untilled Field*.[72] Paul March-Russell calls Turgenev's 1852 *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* "[t]he most influential of the early short story cycles" (108).[73] This regional work is a collection of observations about the abuse of the Russian serfs narrated by an educated landowner, who is dispassionate but at the same time compassionate. The stories[74] all zoom in on the lives of different characters the narrator meets, as he travels the Russian countryside with his guide Yermolay. The volume is thus unified by setting as well as theme, and Turgenev's use of a consistent narrative voice and returning characters also increases the internal coherence of the book. Moreover, in the opening story of *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*, 'Hor and Kalinitch', the role of the narrator and the purpose of the work are introduced. There is also an epilogue, 'The Forest and the Steppe', in which the narrator shares observations about his own life. In other words, although it lacks linear plot progression, the book has a clear beginning and ending. Most importantly, in view of its inclusion in an analysis of the short story cycle, when read as a whole, the different stories of Turgenev's work paint a complete picture of the suffering of the Russian peasantry. Ingman notes that the social context of *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* was particularly interesting for the Irish reader. She states that Turgenev himself recognized the parallels between the Russian and the Irish situation of the peasantry being exploited by the landlord class (2009: 87). It was not far-fetched, then, for Moore to use Turgenev's cycle as a model for his work about Irish life. Moore had already written an essay on Turgenev in the 1880s, in which he did

[72] This is not to say that the French realists did not produce any collections of short stories which could qualify as early short story cycles. Ingram for instance mentions Zola's *Les Soirées de Médan* (1880) as a collection of six naturalistic short stories which deserves closer inspection as a cycle, particularly because of its shared military setting. The collection was engineered by Zola, but only the first story – which set the scene for the others – was his. The rest of the stories were written by five different authors, including de Maupassant (Newell 1971: 16).

[73] The work is also known as *A Sportman's Sketches*. The stories were published in the journal *The Contemporary* before appearing in book form.

[74] The volume in fact consists of short stories as well as other forms such as sketches and anecdotes.

not elaborate on *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*, but did analyse Turgenev's method.[75] In the essay, Moore underlines two techniques used by Turgenev. First, he refers to the painter's technique of indication: "an object skilfully indicated [i.e. portrayed by suggestion] has a charm that the complete painting cannot have" (1891: 51). He gives an example of how this technique is applied to writing by Turgenev. Moore speaks of "scenes for the most part in dialogue, where no one phrase is remarkable or striking when read separately, but when taken with the context continues the picture – a picture tense with emotion, a well-nigh fabulous photograph of the mind" (51). Secondly, Moore lists the technique of instrumentation, which he defines as follows: "the introduction of physical phenomena, used either in alternate or combined effect with the theme of suffering or joy which the characters are uttering" (56). Moore observes that Turgenev makes subtle use of these devices, whereas they are too obvious in the work of Flaubert (56). Almost fifteen years later on, Moore would use the techniques employed by Turgenev in *The Untilled Field*. Eileen Kennedy indicates that Moore for instance makes 'The Clerk's Quest' revolve around an indication – i.e. the cheque which represents Henrietta Brown – and in 'The Wedding Gown' he uses an indication of the moon leaving the old Margaret Kirwin in the shadow, rather than literally describing her death (1975: 146-57). Moreover, he uses instrumentation in stories such as 'The Wedding Gown', by employing a motif of wedding/funeral bells which only the grandaunt can hear, and 'Some Parishioners', where only Biddy can hear the sound of the saints playing their harps (Kennedy 146-57). There are more similarities to be found between *The Untilled Field* and *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*. Kennedy considers the final part of 'Some Parishioners' ('The Window') as an Irish version of Turgenev's 'A Living Relic': "[b]oth authors probe sympathetically the spiritual vision by which two poor, ill-favoured women live and contrast their transcendental visions with the pragmatic attitudes of the institutional church" (154).[76] However, the most important parallel between these books is the fact that they paint a critical picture of Ireland and Russia respectively, by telling the stories of the individual residents of these nations. Kennedy puts it as follows: "Turgenev and Moore use the personal tragedies of their characters to highlight the greater tragedies of their societies: in Russia, serfdom; in Ireland, a life-denying religion" (150-1). Thus, as March-Russell argues, both works are of particular importance because of their political use of the short story cycle (109).

[75] Moore's essay on Turgenev was entitled "Turgueneff" and was first published in *Fortnightly Review* on 1 February 1888. The essay was reprinted, with minor changes, in *Impressions and Opinions* (1891).
[76] For a detailed comparison of *The Untilled Field* and *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*, see Kennedy (1975) 149-57. Ingman points out that Biddy's visions also recall Félicité's in Flaubert's 'Un cœur simple' (2009: 92).

2.2. *The Untilled Field* and *Irish Idylls*

Considering the similarities that exist between *The Untilled Field* and *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* in their use of the literary form of the short story cycle, it is also interesting to look at how Moore's volume relates to the regional tradition which Turgenev's book is part of. As we have seen in the previous chapter, *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* participates in the nineteenth-century tradition of regional literature. A specific subcategory is that of works describing the life of a community or, as Zagarell has called them, narratives of community. Chapter one has shown that Barlow's *Irish Idylls* is a typical Irish example of this kind of writing. Thus, in this section, I will compare *The Untilled Field* with *Irish Idylls*, with the purpose of determining the extent of Moore's indebtedness to and transformation of this specific regional tradition.

There are a number of similarities to be found between *The Untilled Field* and *Irish Idylls*. One of the aspects shared by both works is the use of a mediating narrator. As Zagarell has pointed out, in narratives of community, the narrators typically "mediate carefully between their positions as participants in community life and their role as its observers" (515). In some works, these narrators are first-person character narrators, who also participate – though mostly marginally – in the plot (the narrator in Gaskell's *Cranford* is a good example here); in other works, the mediating narrator occupies a more distanced observer position and resembles an editorial narrator. As stated in chapter one, this is the narrator we find in *Irish Idylls*. Both types of narrators, however, are given to "draw cultural and historical conclusions unthinkable to community members, for whom their life is simply a natural condition" (Zagarell 516). Overall, these narrators thus mediate between the traditional world of the characters and the modern world of the reader. In a number of stories of *The Untilled Field*, we also find this type of mediating narrator. In 'A Playhouse in the Waste' and 'Julia Cahill's Curse', the first-person narrator is an agent of the Irish Industrial Society, who is trying to spread the use of technology.[77] He learns the stories about certain members of the community from his driver. This storyteller whom the agent gets his information from clearly is an insider to the community, whereas the narrator is an outsider, who records the stories but also gives his perspective on them. In 'A Playhouse in the Waste', for example, he comments on the poverty in "the poorest parish in Ireland" (125): he notices that the sheep are "hardly bigger than geese" (128). Moreover, the sight of the poor parishioners has made a lasting impression on him: "There are degrees in poverty, and I remember two men: their feet were bare, and

[77] These are the only two stories in which the mediating narrator has a prominent role. He also appears, though almost imperceptibly, in other stories, for example in 'The Wedding Gown'.

their shirts were so torn that the curling breast hair was uncovered. They wore brown beards, and their skin was yellow with famine […]" (129). In addition to learning stories from his driver, this narrator also speaks with some members of the community himself. In 'Julia Cahill's Curse', for instance, the narrator talks to the reactionary Father Madden, who has virtually no parishioners left, as everyone has emigrated to America: it is "the loneliest parish in Ireland" (115). The priest tells him that people find his ruling severe because he does not allow young boys and girls to loiter along the roads: "I don't want any bastards in my parish" (119). The secular narrator, in retrospect, states the following: "It seemed to me that perhaps bastards were better than no children at all, even from a religious point of view – one can't have religion without life, and bastards may be saints" (119). In the end, the narrator concludes that "[i]n this country religion is hunting life to the death" (120). The mediating function of the first-person narrator in these stories clearly ties in with the mode of storytelling in narratives of community: the narrator is an actual character, who travels across different rural villages and informs the reader about the local communities. In most of the other stories of *The Untilled Field*, however, the narrative mode is more modern: an omniscient narrator gives way to the characters through focalization and free indirect discourse.[78] Katie Gramich argues that there is a tension between the oral storytelling conventions used in some of the stories and the experimental nature of the others. As such, the traditional and the modern, as well as the modernist, collide (27). In stories like 'The Exile', Ingman indicates, Moore maintains the respect for the peasantry which he borrowed from Turgenev (2009: 91). However, at the same time he enters into the worlds and minds of his characters by way of a technique modelled on Flaubert's (Gramich 91).[79] While the narrative mode of some stories clearly harks back to an earlier, regional storytelling tradition, several other stories thus point forward to the more 'objective' narrative mode of the modern short story.

The importance of community is another point of interest in the comparison of *The Untilled Field* and *Irish Idylls*. While *Irish Idylls* focuses on one community, even staging it as a central protagonist, as in "Lisconnel opined that …" (209), Moore's stories look at different communities. Still, there is a strong sense of community in *The Untilled Field*. The inhabitants of Moore's villages all show a similar kind of solidarity and compassion for their

[78] There is also one first-person narrative in the volume, 'Alms-giving', where the middle-class 'I' speaks directly to "its kind", as Davison puts it (313).

[79] Ingman opposes the majority of the stories in *The Untilled Field* to Turgenev's stories as far as the narrative mode is concerned. Moore, on the one hand, enters directly into the characters' minds in most of the stories. On the other hand, Turgenev allows the peasants to tell their own stories, but always lets the educated narrator comment on these passages (2009: 91). As we have seen, this is also the case in *Irish Idylls*.

neighbours. There is, for example, no one in the parish who would rob Biddy, as the priest puts it in 'Some Parishioners' (67). And when Biddy has been evicted from her house, she "lives on bits of bread and the potatoes the neighbours give her" (69). In 'The Wedding Gown', to give another example, Margaret "had nothing to eat but a few scraps that the neighbours gave her" until the O'Dwyers give her a room in their cottage (136). This sense of solidarity recalls *Irish Idylls*. In Lisconnel, as we have seen, the members of the community take care of one another in a highly neighbourly way. Local customs and traditions, which are constitutive of the community in *Irish Idylls*, are still important in *The Untilled Field* as well. The community has specific customs with respect to marriage, for instance, as Margaret Dirken tells James in 'Home Sickness': "[K]eeping company is not the custom of the country, and I don't want to be talked about. […] [m]arriages are made differently in these parts; there is not much courting here" (97). These specific customs and traditions to which the community clings are presented in *The Untilled Field* as limiting the development of the individual. In 'Some Parishioners', even though Kate does not want to marry Peter, "the neighbours knew it was the priest's wish that they should do all they could to help him bring about this marriage and everywhere Kate went she heard nothing talked of but her marriage" (42). In 'Home Sickness', to give another example, Margaret stops James from standing up to the priest, who is mad at the villagers for dancing and drinking, as "the priest would speak against them from the altar, and they would be shunned by the neighbours" (98). This emphasis on the destructive dynamics of community, such as its moral intolerance, is what makes Moore's view of community life diverge from Barlow's. *Irish Idylls* paints a relatively idealized picture of the community of Lisconnel, paying little attention to the limiting effect community life has on individuality. *The Untilled Field*, on the other hand, stresses the coercive features of community life by, for instance, showing how the community talks badly about its own members and even censors them. In 'Some Parishioners', the Kavanaghs are "the talk of the parish" because of their "dissolute life of drinking and dancing" (19). In the same story, to give another example, Annie Connex, who does not want her son marrying Kate Kavanagh, says she must keep her son Pat "out of the low Irish" (45). To this, Mary M'Shane replies: "The low Irish! Indeed, Annie, it ill becomes you the way you talk of your neighbours. Is it because none of us have brass knockers on our doors? I have seen this pride growing up in you, Annie Connex, this long while" (45). Not only does Moore diverge from the regional tradition by underlining how community life limits individuality, he also attributes more importance to the individual in *The Untilled Field*. In 'A Playhouse in the Waste', he puts a great deal of emphasis on the alienated figure of Father MacTurnan, who

does not read but knits. This is considered a "strange occupation" (129), but, as he himself explains it, he does it out of necessity: "I used to read a great deal. But there wasn't a woman in the parish that could turn a heel properly, so that I had to learn to knit" (132). The priest has vainly attempted to improve the lives of the people in his parish – which is the "poorest parish in Ireland" (125) – by building a playhouse. He had hoped that people would come from Dublin to see a miracle play similar to the one performed in Oberammergau. The wind, however, blew down one of the walls, which the parishioners took as a sign of God's disapproval of the playhouse. "The people are very pious", the priest tells the narrator, "[t]he idea of amusement shocks those who are not accustomed to the idea. The playhouse disturbed them in their ideas" (131). According to the narrator's driver, the parishioners find the priest to be a very queer man: "He has been always thinking of something to do good; and it is said that he thinks too much" (133). Father MacTurnan's ironic struggle with the piety of his parishioners perfectly illustrates Moore's shift in focus to the individual. This priest is also a typical character of the modern short story according to O'Connor, who would later equate the form with the figure of the outsider in *The Lonely Voice* (1963). Moore stresses the fate of individuals more than Barlow does. Consequently, his volume has more plot progression. In *Irish Idylls*, the fate of an individual is always secondary to that of the community. In *The Untilled Field*, Moore looks at what happens to the development of the individual when a community enforces repressive measures. Kate, in 'Some Parishioners', believes a woman should be able to arrange her own marriage, but the priest does not allow her to do so. He arranges a marriage for her, which leaves her feeling "that she was being driven into a trap" (42). In the end, she decides to escape the narrow-mindedness of this community by emigrating to the States. It is worth pointing out that the characters who are not afraid of the village priest are often women. Kate Kavanagh and Julia Cahill are both strong characters who choose their own principles over acceptance by the priest and the community. Moreover, one of the most memorable characters in *The Untilled Field* is a woman. In 'Some Parishioners', Moore focuses on the old Biddy M'Hale who has driven Father Maguire crazy with her quest to donate a stained glass window to the church, while the church walls in fact require urgent renovation. Ironically, she is the one who experiences the miracle of a mystical vision – instead of the official representative of institutionalized religion, as Kennedy argues (1975: 156). Afterwards, Biddy's life "seemed to pass more and more out of the life of the ordinary day" (66). Because she has forgotten all about her chickens, which were her livelihood, she is evicted and ends up living in an out-house. Nevertheless, she is happy: she tells the story of her vision to the priest "joyful, and with brightening eyes" (69). Although the

"local saint" draws people and their donations to the church, as a result of which it can be rebuilt, the priest finds that Biddy disturbs Mass. Moore actually implies that the priest values institutional ritual more than he does individual mystical experience: "The priest has his church; Biddy, however, has Christ" (Beckson 294). Moreover, the priest envies how the people gather about Biddy: "[n]o one notices him when he came out of the sacristy; they were listening to Biddy, and he stood unnoticed amid the crowd for a few minutes. 'She's out of her mind,' he said" (68). "Look at her", a young visitor says to Father Maguire, "can you doubt that she sees Heaven, quite plainly, and that the saints visited her just as she has told us?" (70). Still, the priest complains that "she's a great trial to [them] at Mass" (70), to which the man replies that "even miracles are inconvenient at times" and suggests that the priest let her enjoy her happiness (70). "And the two men stood looking at her", the story concludes, "trying vainly to imagine what her happiness might be" (70). Biddy's visions thus not only allow her to escape priestly control but also bring her closer to God than the tyrannical Father Maguire.

It is clear that *The Untilled Field* finds itself somewhere in between narrating the life of a community and telling the stories of individuals. One could argue that this corresponds to Moore's own conflicting views on community life: on the one hand, he was a cosmopolitan and a loner and, on the other hand, he belonged to different kinds of communities throughout his life, from the Montmartre café society to that of the Irish Literary Theatre. Still, Richard Rankin Russell argues that, through this duality, Moore realistically depicts a communal Ireland in stories such as 'Home Sickness' which is "intriguingly different […] from the mythologized version even then being proffered by Yeats and Lady Gregory" (2005: 29). Moore's characters are caught between the idyllic images of their memories and the desolate Ireland of their present. Nurten Birlik uses Pat Phelan's impression of rural Ireland in 'The Exile' as an example of how the characters in *The Untilled Field* still see the image of the Ireland of the past in their surroundings, despite the present bleak state of the country (216):

> [S]oft clouds curled over the low horizon far away, and the sky was blue overhead; and the poor country was very beautiful in the still autumn weather, only it was empty. He passed two or three fine houses that the gentry had left to caretakers long ago. The fences were gone, cattle strayed through the woods, the drains were choked with weeds, the stagnant water was spreading out into the fields, and Pat Phelan noticed these things, for he remembered what this country was forty years ago. The devil a bit of lonesomeness there was in it then. (84)

In line with his well-known anti-clericalism, Moore attributes the loneliness and deprivation which are prevalent throughout the work to the power the Church exercises over Ireland. In *Irish Idylls*, religion plays virtually no part at all, even though the community of Lisconnel is a Catholic one. In *The Untilled Field*, on the other hand, the majority of the priests are depicted as highly conservative. Moreover, Moore holds the Roman Catholic Church responsible for the poverty and, as a result, for the emigration which threatens community life: "The Church", Ned says in 'The Wild Goose', "is very rich in Ireland. If Ireland is the poorest country in the world, the Irish Church is richer than any other. All the money in Ireland goes into religion" (199). Pat Phelan, in 'The Exile', notices that the town he is entering, "in broken pavements and dirty cottages", has "no building of any importance except the church" (85). Furthermore, Moore's idea of religion casting a shadow over Ireland and its people takes shape in the descriptions of the landscape in his book. The narrator of 'Julia Cahill's Curse' talks of "scanty fields, drifting from thin grass into bog, and from bog into thin grass again, and in the distance there was a rim of melancholy mountains, and the peasants I saw along the road seemed a counterpart of the landscape" (114). The land has made them, he says, "according to its own image and likeness" (114). Whereas Moore underlines that the villagers are as poor as the landscape which surrounds them, Barlow rather puts emphasis on the fact that the community of Lisconnel stands united against the threats that face it. Moreover, even though the villagers in *Irish Idylls* also suffer from poverty and their landscape is equally desolate, they do live in tune with nature. Moore instead focuses on the reasons for the poverty of the parishioners. In 'In the Clay', Rodney's patron, Father McCabe, who has "ruined two parishes by putting up churches so large that his parishioners could not afford to keep them in repair" (9), travelled to America to collect money for building churches with the purpose of reviving the Irish Romanesque. Moreover, he got permission to "set an example of what Ireland could do 'in the line' of Cormac's Chapel" (9). Yet, *The Untilled Field* also features gentle priests, such as Father MacTurnan, who criticizes the clergy himself and genuinely cares for his parishioners. In 'A Letter to Rome', he points out that the "priests live in the best houses, eat the best food [and] wear the best clothes" (104). At the same time, he indicates, the parishioners are barely earning their living by building useless roads as part of relief works, as a result of which "their fields [are] lying idle, and there will be no crops next year" (109). Father Stafford, who first appears in 'Some Parishioners', is another example of a reasonable priest, who wants to allow the parishioners more freedom and tries to temper the strictness of his nephew, Father Maguire. "My dear Tom", he tells him,

> you told me the other day that you met a lad and a lass walking along the roadside, and that you drove them home. You told me you were sure they were talking about things they should not talk about; you have no right to assume these things. You're asking of the people an abstinence you don't practise yourself. Sometimes your friends are women. (18)

Despite his anti-clericalism, then, Moore does not provide a one-sided negative depiction of the parish priest. Similarly, the peasants in *The Untilled Field* are not stereotypically depicted as just pitiable or comic: they are taken seriously as individuals (Gramich 25). However, as Gramich points out, it is striking that the majority of the characters lose their agency when they are confronted with the village priest: "the priest's word is law, however ludicrous that word might be" (25). When the priest does not allow his parishioners to go to dances, their only reaction, if any, is to cross over into "another parish where the priest [is] not so averse to dancing" (97), as Margaret tells James. Still, there are a number of characters who do stand up to the priest. As a result, they are forced to leave the community. Mary M'Shane tells Annie Connex about how Kate Kavanagh stood up to the tyrannical Father Maguire:

> […] She called him a policeman, and a tax collector, and a landlord, and if she said this she said more to a priest than anyone ever said before. 'There are plenty of people in the parish', she said, 'who believe he could turn them into rabbits if he liked'. As for the rabbits she isn't far from the truth, though I don't take it on myself to say if it be a truth or a lie. (44)

"But I know for a fact", she goes on,

> that Patsy Rogan was going to vote for the Unionist to please his landlord, but the priest had been to see his wife, who was going to be confined, and didn't he tell her that if Patsy voted for the wrong man there would be horns on the new baby, and Mrs. Rogan was so frightened that she wouldn't let her husband go when he came in that night till he had promised to vote as the priest wished. (44-5)

Birlik argues that journalist Ned Carmady is the only character who intellectualizes his opposition against the Church (217). The American protagonist – with Irish roots – of 'The Wild Goose' tries to liberate Ireland from Britain as well as from the Church, amongst other things by publishing a magazine called *The Heretic*. However, on the advice of her priest, his wife Ellen thwarts his plans by withdrawing her money from the project. As a result, their marriage falls apart and Ned leaves Ireland at the end of the story.

In addition to attacking the repressive power of the village clergy, Moore also diverges from the regional tradition by presenting the themes of exile and emigration, and the contrast

between community and modern life in a different way. Emigration, in *Irish Idylls*, forms a threat to the community. Barlow offers a nostalgic depiction of community life, seeing it as an antidote to modern life. Her characters, therefore, do not want to emigrate, but are sometimes forced to. They are terrified to be "put out of it" (21), i.e. lose their house, and thus to have to emigrate. This is a punishment to them, as they would rather live in poverty than leave the community. In *The Untilled Field*, many people have to leave their country as well, but to them it is an escape rather than a punishment. Moore's characters emigrate because of poverty or, like in 'Julia Cahill's Curse', because the priest has driven them away. In this story, a curse put on the village by Julia twenty years ago has allegedly caused a roof to fall in and a family to move away every year. She had refused to be forced into a marriage and had been shut out by the priest and thus by the community. The priest even convinced her own father to "put her out" (123). Before leaving for America, she cursed the village. When the narrator pays it a visit, there is virtually no one left. He describes it as follows:

> [W]hat was more significant than the untilled fields were the ruins, for they were not the cold ruins of twenty, thirty, or forty years ago when the people were evicted and their tillage turned into pasture, but the ruins of cabins that had been lately abandoned. Some of the roof trees were still unbroken, and I said that the inhabitants must have left voluntarily. (115)

The driver confirms this: "Sure they did. Arn't we all going to America. … Sure why should we be staying? Isn't most of us over there already. It's more like going home than leaving home" (115). So, the contrast between community life and the modern world typical of narratives of community reappears in Moore, but the meaning is reversed: *The Untilled Field* is a rejection of Barlow's idealized image of Irish rural life, as a result of which the modern world becomes more attractive than community life. In other words, as Karl Beckson puts it, "departing for America, […] in *The Untilled Field*, is the recurrent symbol of deliverance from poverty and priestly rule" (293) or even "secular salvation" (296). Still, Moore's characters have mixed feelings about emigration. In the same way that they find themselves stuck in between being an individual and being a member of the community, many of them are also caught between their old and their new home. Moore was a self-imposed exile who lived both in France and England, but did return to Ireland in the first decade of the twentieth century. Although he eventually became disillusioned with the Gaelic League, he worked very passionately for the Irish Literary Theatre for a number of years. The author's ambiguous view on Ireland and emigration shows in *The Untilled Field* as well. The best example of a character who is trapped between two worlds is James in 'Home Sickness'. He has lived in

New York for more than a decade, but returns to Ireland on his doctor's advice. Back 'home', he receives land from the landlord and becomes engaged to be married to Margaret – only to eventually escape to the freedom of the Bowery slum again, because he cannot put up with the absolute authority of the village priest. At the beginning of the story, he is homesick in the sense that he misses his native village in Ireland. At the same time, his adopted home has literally made him sick (Russell 2005: 31). After a while, however, he is homesick for the very same adopted home which made him sick in the first place. On his return to the States, he feels "the thrill of home that he had not found in his native village" and he wonders how it is that "the smell of the bar seem[s] more natural than the smell of the field, and the roar of the crowds more welcome than the silence of the lake's edge" (101). Still, when he is an old man with but few years ahead of him, the only thing he has left is the memory of the village where he was born. This ambiguity with respect to the theme of exile ties in with the sense of transition and in-betweenness which is present throughout the volume, as well as with the tension between unity and fragmentation generated by the use of the literary form of the short story cycle.

The juxtaposition of *The Untilled Field* and *Irish Idylls* thus shows that Moore is clearly indebted to the regional tradition of writing community, as defined by Zagarell. *The Untilled Field* shares with *Irish Idylls* a focus on community life, on emigration and on the contrast between life in a community and the modern world. Moore, however, also moves away from this tradition by underlining the oppressive nature of community life, by portraying emigration as a means of escape rather than as a punishment, and by initiating a shift in focus to the individual – which would later be completed in the modern short story and short story cycle. In other words, Moore's use of elements typical of narratives of community lead to a message which is completely different from that of *Irish Idylls* and other narratives of community. Far from leading an idyllic, rural life, the villagers in *The Untilled Field* suffer under the oppression of the Church, as a result of which the modern world becomes more attractive than community life. With this shift in focus to the individual and the modern world, Moore prefigures the birth of a new tradition, i.e. that of the modern short story and short story cycle.

2.3. *The Untilled Field* and *Dubliners*

If *The Untilled Field* finds itself on the crossroads between this older regional tradition of writing about the life of a community and the modern story which focuses on the individual, Joyce's *Dubliners* could be seen as completing the transition started by Moore. As

we have seen, Moore's book is unified to such a degree that the stories are simultaneously self-sufficient and interdependent (Mann 15). Moreover, many elements from the regional tradition of writing cycles about the life of a community reappear in Moore's volume. *The Untilled Field*, however, at the same time moves away from this tradition by emphasizing the negative features of community life, turning toward an urban setting in a number of stories and shifting the focus toward the individual. This shift in focus is one of the main reasons why Moore's book has so often been linked with the birth of the modern short story, described by O'Connor as dealing with alienated individuals in *The Lonely Voice*.[80] *Dubliners*, with its famous structural arrangement into stories about childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life culminating in 'The Dead',[81] its exclusive setting in turn-of-the-century Dublin and its thematic focus on paralysis, has rightfully been designated as a paradigmatic short story cycle. Mann illustrates the essential characteristic of the short story cycle – simultaneous self-sufficiency and interdependence – by referring to *Dubliners*: "the pervasive and overwhelming sense of paralysis […] is established only by the series of different examples", including characters such as Eveline ('Eveline'), Mr Doran ('The Boarding House'), Little Chandler ('A Little Cloud'), Maria ('Clay') and Mr Duffy ('A Painful Case') (15). Mann states that the unifying pattern in *Dubliners* consists of "the gradual ageing of the protagonists and the broadening of their perspectives from the subjectivity in 'The Sisters' to the more objective and comprehensive point of view revealed in 'The Dead'" (30).[82] It is worth noting here that Moore's 'The Wild Goose' performs a similar function in *The Untilled Field* as 'The Dead' does in Joyce's *Dubliners*, namely to draw together the central themes of the volume. March-Russell notes that this contrasts with the sense of fragmentation which pervades throughout the book (109), which of course results in an added tension between unity and fragmentation. Although it is not the closing story in the 1903 edition, 'The Wild Goose' is the longest piece and brings together the work's central themes of emigration and religion.[83] Interestingly, *Dubliners*, which obviously belongs to the

[80] O'Connor in fact attached much more value to Moore's achievement in *The Untilled Field* than to Joyce's in *Dubliners*.

[81] Childhood: 'The Sisters', 'An Encounter' and 'Araby'; adolescence: 'Eveline', 'After the Race', 'Two Gallants', 'The Boarding House' and 'A Little Cloud'; maturity: 'Counterparts', 'Clay' and 'A Painful Case'; public life: 'Ivy Day in the Committee Room', 'A Mother', 'Grace' and 'The Dead'.

[82] In addition, Mann lists the following as unifying devices in Joyce's cycle: character (the archetypal Dubliner, who is a product of middle-class Catholic Ireland), plot (the character is forced into a position where he or she must choose to act or be acted upon), imagery (locations, images of light and dark, of colour and of weather, Christian or Catholic imagery, etc.), theme (spiritual, physical and intellectual paralysis), and point of view (first person, third-person limited and third-person omniscient point of view) (30-7).

[83] In the revised 1914 edition, Moore did make 'The Wild Goose' the final story of the volume, after having dropped 'In the Clay' and 'The Way Back'. Interestingly, Moore wrote the following about *Dubliners*: "[some of

category of cycles unified by setting, has been called an "anti-narrative of community" (513) by Zagarell. One could argue that, with the rise of the modern short story and the change in focus from community to individual, the form of the short story cycle also moves its focus away from the community and toward the individual. March-Russell emphasizes that "[w]hile, on the one hand, the short story cycle has been used successfully to create a sense of regional identity, on the other hand, it has been an effective tool in describing the modern city where social ties are looser, kinship systems less structured and personal identity more alienated" (109). Kennedy argues that the gaps between the stories in this short story cycle express the loss of community in *Dubliners*: "textual divisions correspond to absolute boundaries between one life and another. Figures who walk the same streets and whose stories appear side by side nevertheless remain oblivious to each other and unconscious of parallels between their own situations and those of other characters" (1995: 196). Whereas there was still some kind of community feeling present in *The Untilled Field*, this has vanished in *Dubliners*. Mr Duffy in 'A Painful Case', for instance,

> [h]ad neither companions nor friends, children nor creed. He lived his spiritual life without any communion with others, visiting his relatives at Christmas and escorting them to the cemetery when they died. He performed these two social duties for old dignity's sake but conceded nothing further to the conventions which regulate the civic life. (Joyce 2000 [1914]: 105)

Joyce himself, as Beckson points out, was reluctant to recognize the artistic achievement of *The Untilled Field*: in a letter to his brother Stanislaus, written when he was completing *Dubliners*, he wrote the following: "I read that silly, wretched book of Moore's […] which the Americans found so remarkable for its 'craftsmanship'. O, dear me! It is very dull and flat, indeed: and ill-written".[84] In addition, Joyce also called *The Untilled Field* "damn stupid"[85] because of factual inaccuracies: it irritated him, that a character in Moore's volume looks up the train schedule from Bray to Dublin, "though of course these trains run regularly".[86] Joyce's adverse opinion of *The Untilled Field* might also be linked to Moore's political use of

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the stories] are trivial and disagreeable, but all written by a clever man, and the book contains one story, the longest story in the book and the last story which seemed to me perfection whilst I read it: I regretted that I was not the author of it" (letter of 3 August 1916, to Edward Marsh). Qtd. in Burkhart (170). Richard Allen Cave refers to Richard Ellmann to show that Joyce, who had praised Moore's 1892 *Vain Fortune*, reworked it into the ending of 'The Dead'. See *A Study of the Novels of George Moore* (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Ltd, 1978) 130-31.

[84] Joyce, letter of 24 September 1905, to Stanislaus Joyce. Qtd. in Beckson (304).

[85] Joyce, letter of 19 November 194, to Stanislaus Joyce. Qtd. in Beckson (304).

[86] See Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford: University Press, 1959) 200. Qtd. in Linda Bennett, "George Moore and James Joyce: Story-teller versus Stylist," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 66.264 (1977) 290.

the short story cycle. March-Russell argues that *Dubliners* displays a lack of political commitment because Joyce saw nationalist politics as contributing to "the political limbo of Ireland caught between the past and the future, the rural and the urban, the Catholic Church and the British empire" (109). Still, Joyce's hostile view of *The Untilled Field* does not preclude Moore's influence on *Dubliners* (Beckson 302). According to Brendan Kennelly, Joyce was quite right in regarding *Dubliners* as 'a chapter of the moral history' of Ireland and the Irish people. However, as Kennelly puts it, "*Dubliners* is the second part of that moral history. *The Untilled Field* is the first" (159). In *The Untilled Field*, he maintains, "Moore began to examine a certain sickness at the very heart of Irish society which Joyce later examined at far greater depth" (159). There are in fact several elements present in *The Untilled Field* which return in Joyce's cycle.[87]

First of all, Moore adds stories with an urban setting to his cycle, so that it does not only depict the life of the Irish peasantry, but also that of Dublin's middle class. John Cronin indicates that the rural and urban stories share a strong concern with loneliness, poverty and despair (1979: 122). As previously discussed, Moore at the same time initiates a shift in focus from community to individual. This takes shape in Moore's use of focalization in the majority of the stories in *The Untilled Field*, prefiguring Joyce's sustained use of free indirect discourse in *Dubliners*. In 'Home Sickness', for instance, the reader enters into James's mind to learn that he longs to see his native village in Ireland again after thirteen years in America. To the villagers, however, he is an American rather than a fellow-countryman, and he cannot help but set himself apart from them either: he sees them as "the peasants". After a while, he begins "to wish himself back in the slum" (95). Contrasting the "weakness and incompetence of the people about him with the modern restlessness and cold energy of the people he had left behind him" (98), James concludes that the people of his native village's submission to the

[87] See chapter three for a discussion of Joyce's *Dubliners* in the context of the modern short story cycle – in comparison with Stephens's *Here Are Ladies* (1913), Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and Beckett's *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934).
It is interesting to briefly refer to Benedict Anderson's famous work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) here. According to Anderson, "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (2006 [1983]: 6). Anderson lists two forms which he sees as having provided the "technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation": the novel and the newspaper (25). He explains that characters in a novel are linked, even if they never meet or know of each other's existence, for two reasons. Firstly, because they are "embedded in 'societies' (Wessex, Lübeck, Los Angeles)" and, secondly, because they are "embedded in the minds of the omniscient readers". In other words, the characters of a novel exist and act simultaneously, while they may be unaware of each other (25-6). One could argue that the form of the short story cycle can also be used to express the "imagined community that is the nation". Sherwood Anderson, who claimed to have invented the form with *Winesburg, Ohio*, even saw the cycle as a better form to express US nationhood than the novel. Similarly, both Moore and Joyce use the cycle form to write their chapters of the moral history of Ireland. I will return to this point in the following chapter.

priest is pathetic. Still, at the end of the story, when he is old and alone, he has forgotten about the bar-room in the Bowery and starts to long for "the green hillside, and the bog lake and the rushes about it, and the greater lake in the distance, and behind it the blue lines of wandering hills" (101). Thus, in stories such as 'Home Sickness', the reader experiences directly how the protagonist's state of mind changes. In this respect, Moore clearly anticipates Joyce. In 'A Little Cloud', for instance, the reader witnesses a similar kind of evolution in Little Chandler's perception of his long-time friend Gallaher.

In addition to his free indirect style, Moore's use of literary techniques such as suggestion also point forward to *Dubliners*. According to Ingman, Joyce extends Moore's method by "using ellipses, hiatuses and silences in a way that obliges the reader to become an essential part of the equation in order to complete the story's meaning" (2009: 96). Moore's shift in focus to the individual also reveals itself in his use of the literary device of epiphany, which can again be seen to prefigure *Dubliners*. In one of the urban stories in *The Untilled Field*, 'The Clerk's Quest', which takes place in a Joycean lower-middle class setting, bank clerk Edward Dempsey is trapped in a routine life. However, he escapes because of his love for Henrietta Brown, whom he only knows through her cheques. Although his love is unrequited and he loses his job and all of his money as a result of his obsession, Edward breaks free after the following epiphany:

> He lay there looking up at the stars, thinking of Henrietta, knowing that everything was slipping away, and he passing into a diviner sense. Henrietta seemed to be coming nearer to him and revealing herself more clearly; and when the word of death was in his throat, and his eyes opened for the last time, it seemed to him that one of the stars came down from the sky and laid its bright face upon his shoulder. (145)

By contrast, Joyce's clerks such as Farrington ('Counterparts'), Little Chandler ('A Little Cloud') and James Duffy ('A Painful Case') remain trapped in their milieu. Beckson argues that the epiphany of James Duffy in 'A Painful Case', who learns that his rejection of Mrs Sinico's love has resulted in her death, is very similar to Edward Dempsey's (300): "She seemed to be near him in the darkness. At moments he seemed to feel her voice touch his ear, her hand touch his" (113). In the end, however, James Duffy "could not feel her near him in the darkness nor her voice touch his ear. He waited for some minutes listening. He could hear nothing: the night was perfectly silent. He felt that he was alone" (114). Similarly, Little Chandler realizes that he is "a prisoner for life" (80) at the end of 'A Little Cloud'. Characters such as James Duffy and Little Chandler thus realize that they are trapped in their current situation with no means of escape. Edward Dempsey, on the other hand, does manage to

break away. In the world of *The Untilled Field*, escape still appears to be a possibility. Moore, in other words, does not present the Irish as beyond redemption. Similarly, Ulick Burke escapes his unloving mother twice in 'So on he Fares'. Whereas Joyce's characters are unable to evade their state of paralysis, Moore's Ulick does decide to leave his mother's cottage after her putting a bee in his neck to sting him. He jumps into the canal and is picked up by some bargemen. Eventually, he becomes a sailor and he ends up travelling around Ireland. Ten years later, he returns home, only to find that his mother has replaced him with a little brother, who has the same appearance and is also named Ulick. When the protagonist realizes that his mother still hates him, he decides to leave his old life behind again – this time without throwing himself into the canal: "It seemed to him a pity that he had ever been taken out of the canal, and he thought how easy it would be to throw himself in again, but only children drown themselves because their mothers do not love them; life had taken a hold upon him" (158-59). According to Beckson, the circular return in Moore's story leads to a mature vision, unlike in *Dubliners*, where characters like Eveline experience a "paralyzing circular motion" (299).

In conclusion, Moore is indebted to the regional tradition of the so-called narrative of community, but at the same time moves away from the idealized depiction of community life in cycles such as *Irish Idylls*. That is, he emphasizes the coercive features of community life and shifts his focus to the fate of the individual. The picture he paints in *The Untilled Field* is that of a people suffering under the yoke of the Catholic Church. As a result, emigration becomes a means of escape instead of a punishment to them. However, Moore's portrayal of the Irish situation is not quite as bleak as Joyce's in *Dubliners*: Ireland is a desolate place in *The Untilled Field*, but there are ways for the characters to escape. Still, Moore's introduction of modern ideas such as the focus on the individual and his use of, for instance, epiphanies in *The Untilled Field*, paved the way for Joyce's famous short story cycle.

Chapter III

The (Post-)Modern Dubliner: James Stephens's *Here Are Ladies* and Samuel Beckett's *More Pricks Than Kicks* versus James Joyce's *Dubliners*

As I have shown in the previous chapter, George Moore's *The Untilled Field* (1903) can be considered a transitional cycle, bridging tradition and modernity, the rural and the urban, and community and individual. Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), on the other hand, is widely hailed as one of the archetypes of the modern short story cycle. With *Dubliners*, Joyce radically shifts the focus from a rural Irish setting to the urban setting of turn-of-the-century Dublin. Moreover, instead of focusing on community life, this cycle revolves around individuals who suffer alienation and paralysis. Although generally seen as a short story collection, James Stephens's *Here Are Ladies* (1913), as I will show, also uses the form of the short story cycle to tell the stories of middle-class Dubliners. By focusing on isolated and paralysed individuals, *Here Are Ladies* can be seen to participate in the same international modernist movement as *Dubliners*. Interestingly, Stephens's volume has received relatively little critical attention, even though the work – at least in publication – predates Joyce's famous cycle. In the first section of this chapter, I will offer a comparative analysis of *Here Are Ladies* and *Dubliners*, so as to establish whether Stephens's depiction of urban reality is as negative as the one offered by Joyce. In doing so, I will pay particular attention to the manner in which the short story cycle form enhances the thematic focus of *Here Are Ladies*. Twenty years after the publication of Joyce's *Dubliners*, Samuel Beckett published his first full-length book, *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934), which is in fact an urban short story cycle set in Dublin as well. Even though Joyce's influence on Beckett has been discussed extensively, *More Pricks Than Kicks* has not been compared with *Dubliners* in the context of the short story cycle.[88] In the second section of this chapter, therefore, I will provide a comparative analysis of both works as cycles. My purpose here is to determine to what extent *More Pricks Than Kicks* and *Dubliners*, while using the same literary form, depict a different urban reality. In the third and final section of this chapter, I will analyse how Joyce's *Dubliners* relates to that other archetypal short story cycle, Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, with the intention of establishing a

[88] See, for instance, Gluck (1979) and Pilling (1994). *More Pricks Than Kicks* in particular has often been analysed alongside Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), see e.g. Harrington (1992). Adrian Hunter has discussed the influence of *Dubliners* on *More Pricks Than Kicks* (2001), but he has not taken into account the form of the short story cycle.

link with the American tradition of the short story cycle. In doing so, I will particularly focus on the way in which both cycles deal with the idea of community in the modern age.

1. Stephens's *Here Are Ladies*

1.1. Stephens: Biography

James Stephens was extremely secretive about his early childhood. To this day, even his date of birth remains a matter of speculation. Hilary Pyle has identified him as "the 'unnamed boy child' born on 8 February 1880, to Francis Stephens of Her Majesty's Stationary Office, Dublin" (4). Stephens himself, however, claimed that he shared the exact birth date as James Joyce: 2 February 1882. Augustine Martin points out that Stephens persistently replaced biographical facts with childhood legends (1977: x). Martin maintains that the anecdotes he told of his childhood "may well have been invented to deflect curiosity from the facts, if he knew them, or from their absence, if he did not" (x). According to these romantic stories, Stephens for instance worked as a clown in a circus for some time, walked all the way from Dublin to Belfast on foot, and once fought a swan for a crust of bread when he lived in parks and slept on benches (Martin x). Martin notes that Stephens was remarkably successful in causing confusion about his past: even Birgit Bramsbäck's extensive biographic research on the author concludes that the mystery is unsolved to the extent that 'James Stephens' might very well be an assumed name (xi).[89] According to Martin, the facts that have been established suggest that Stephens actually led a rather conventional life: he boarded at the Meath Protestant Industrial School for Boys between 1886 and 1896, after which he started to work in Dublin legal offices until George Russell, AE – who had read some of Stephens's pieces in *Sinn Féin*[90] – discovered him in 1907 (xi). Stephens was married and had a stepdaughter and a son. He published two successful volumes of poetry, *Insurrections* (1909) and *The Hill of Vision* (1912) and two equally successful novels, *The Charwoman's Daughter* (1912) and *The Crock of Gold* (1912) – both based on Irish fairy tales – before publishing his first work of short fiction, *Here Are Ladies*. This volume, published in London

[89] See Birgit Bramsbäck, *James Stephens: A Literary and Biographical Study* (Dublin: Hodges and Figgis, 1959).

[90] Martin divides Stephens's contributions to Arthur Griffith's newspaper into three categories: "nationalistic articles with such titles as 'The Seoinin', 'Irish Englishmen', 'On the Viceregal Microbe'; then whimsical sketches, 'On Wasking', 'On Shaving', 'On Eating', mostly spoken by his fictional persona, the Old Philosopher; finally, short fictional sketches such as 'Miss Arabella Hennessy', 'Mrs Larry Tracy', 'Old Mrs Hannigan', 'The Man who was Afraid'" (1977: 56). As noted by Martin, Stephens reused the last two pieces mentioned in *The Crock of Gold* and the two previous ones in *Here Are Ladies*. Moreover, the Old Philosopher's reflections became 'There Is a Tavern in the Town' – the final section of *Here Are Ladies* (56).

in 1913, consists of short stories, sketches, poems and monologues. With *The Demi-Gods*, another novel appeared in 1914. After this, he mainly published retellings of Irish fairy tales, myths and legends, such as *Irish Fairy Tales* (1920), *Deirdre* (1923) and *In the Land of Youth* (1924). In 1928, he published another collection of stories, *Etched in Moonlight* – also based on Irish fairy tales. Ingman argues that, taken together, Stephens's reworkings of saga material and his story collections "illustrate the overlap between Irish Revivalist preoccupations and modernist tendencies" (2009: 77). At the end of the 1920s, Stephens became friends with Joyce. They were both born in Dublin and lived far from Ireland during much of their lives,[91] but at the same time stuck to their native city and land as their subject matter. At one point, Stephens formally agreed to complete *Finnegans Wake* in the event of Joyce's premature death. The accidental death of Stephens's son in 1937 almost completely put an end to his writing career. In 1938, he published one last work entitled *Kings and the Moon*, a volume of poetry. In the 1940s, he recorded a highly popular series of BBC broadcasts, during which he read his work and discussed literature. He died in London in January 1951.[92]

1.2. *Here Are Ladies* as a Short Story Cycle including Poetry

Stephens's *Here Are Ladies* (1913) is made up of short stories, sketches, poems and monologues. Despite the presence of different literary forms, the work is unified in multiple ways. First of all, *Here Are Ladies* has a very tight structure that governs and unifies the book. It is made up of seven sections: five of these consist of an introductory poem, a set of three sketches (which each explore the theme in a different situation) and a concluding short story. The sixth section contains only a poem and a triad, and the seventh section is made up of a poem and a set of twelve monologues. Stephens originally conceived the work as a collection of triads. The book was originally meant to have thirty items[93] – six sets of three sketches and twelve monologues – and was supposed to be titled *Triangles* (McFate 124). Stephens, however, added the short stories and poems so as to reach the necessary number of words. The five concluding and more mature stories as well as the seven poems were included to bring the manuscript up to the 60.000 words requested by Macmillan (Martin 1977: 57). After

[91] Albeit for different reasons: contrary to Joyce – who was not part of the Irish Ireland movement nor of the Irish Literary Revival and considered himself an exile – Stephens remained a devoted Irish nationalist, even though he spent more time in France, the United States and England than in Ireland. During the Second World War, however, he felt he had to go against Irish neutrality and thus became a supporter of the Allies.
[92] Based on Augustine Martin's *James Stephens: A Critical Study* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977) and Patricia McFate's *The Writings of James Stephens: Variations on a Theme of Love* (London: Macmillan, 1979).
[93] Eight of these pieces were originally published in *Sinn Féin* and were modified by Stephens to appear as part of *Here Are Ladies*.

the addition of these items, the total number of works in the volume became forty-two – still a multiple of three (McFate 124). Stephens, in other words, did not just add words so as to reach the required number of 60.000, he also provided the book with a different structural coherence. The first section consists of 'Women', a poem which laments that women are not "half as kind as they are fair" (Stephens 2006 [1913]: 7), 'Three Heavy Husbands', a triad of three sketches about unhappy marriages,[94] and 'A Glass of Beer', a story about a widower who had wished his wife dead. The second section is made up of the poem 'One and One', which describes two people who never speak, the triad 'Three Women Who Wept', about women who are deceived by men,[95] and the story, 'The Triangle', about a love triangle. The third section begins with the poem 'The Daisies', describing lovers walking hand in hand, and is followed by 'Three Angry People', which focuses on men being dominated by their wives,[96] and the story 'The Threepenny-Piece', about an angry man who upsets the order in the hereafter.[97] The fourth section contains the poem 'Brigid', in which the poet pleads with a young girl not to marry an old man, the triad 'Three Young Wives', which revolves around marriages that end badly for the woman,[98] and the story 'The Horses', concerning a man being repressed by his wife. The fifth section is made up of the poem 'Mistress Quiet-Eyes', about a woman looking outside, the triad 'Three Lovers Who Lost', about young suitors who fail to win their loved ones,[99] and the story 'The Blind Man', about a man who is indifferent toward women. The sixth section consists of 'Sweet-Apple', a poem about an apple tree, and 'Three Happy Places', a triad revolving around youth experiences.[100] The seventh section, finally, is made up of the poem 'The Moon', which describes a voyage to an ice-covered strand, and 'There Is a Tavern in the Town', a set of monologues by an old man.[101] In these

[94] In the first sketch, a wife leaves her tyrannical husband; the second sketch is about a shy husband; the third sketch focuses on a husband who is too controlling.
[95] In the first and the third sketch, a woman's heart is broken by a talkative young man; the second sketch is about a mother who is the only one to cry over the death of her vicious son.
[96] The first and the second sketch are about men whose wives have a temper; in the third sketch, a woman complains about how men are always surrounded by their wives.
[97] This story found its way into Stephens's *The Demi-Gods*, which was published one year later than *Here Are Ladies*.
[98] In the first sketch, a woman dies in childbirth; the second sketch revolves around a cold woman whose husband dies; the third sketch is about a woman who is married to an egocentric man.
[99] In the first sketch, a young man is rejected by a girl; the second sketch is about a boy who is forced to reject what he believes to be a 'Beautiful Princess' because she turns out to be married to a 'giant'; the third sketch centres on a clerk who is dismissed by his employer's daughter. The first sketch was rewritten as a play, *The Marriage of Julia Elizabeth* (McFate 129).
[100] The first sketch is about a bully; in the second sketch, a child enjoys the sun and a soaring hawk; the third sketch is about the joys of skipping school.
[101] The piece includes twelve talks by the old gentleman. His conversations are about marriage, dancing, smoking, education, drinking, language, poetry, Englishmen, locomotion, the North Pole, shaving and eating. He appreciates dancing, smoking, drinking and writing poetry, but condemns formal education, Englishmen, locomotion and exploration, and marriage. Interestingly, he contradicts himself, as he for instance condemns

two final sections, the fixed pattern of a poem, a triad of sketches and a short story from the earlier sections is clearly abandoned: in the fifth section the concluding short story is left out and, in the sixth section, the triad and the story are replaced by the set of twelve monologues. According to Martin, it is likely that Stephens would have continued the pattern throughout the volume if there had been more time for him to hand in the adapted manuscript (1977: 57). In any case, even with these two deviating sections, the book has a distinct structural coherence.

The separate pieces in *Here Are Ladies* all introduce different characters: Dublin middle-class clerks and typists and their employers – stockbrokers and bookmakers – as well as husbands and wives, spinsters and bachelors, etc. Yet their manner of presentation is very similar, as the reader only learns about them what is essential for the purpose of the story. In other words, even though the texts in *Here Are Ladies* do not focus on a single protagonist, the volume is unified by character. Stephens provides his readers with as little detail about the characters as possible, often even leaving out their names. The anonymous characters, which are generally referred to as 'he' or 'she', thus become 'types' rather than individual characters: misogynistic men, credulous women, husbands who are dominated by their wives or vice versa, maladjusted people, powerful bosses and powerless employees. Moreover, they are all presented as defined by modern city life. The first sketch of 'Three Women Who Wept' opens with the following description: "He was one of those men who can call ladies by their Christian names […] and she was the very merest of girls" (32). In the first sketch of 'Three Young Wives', to give another example, the wife is described as "a soft, babyish creature, downy and clinging, soft-eyed and gentle", while her husband belongs to the "type known as 'fine men', tall, generously-proportioned, with the free and easy joviality which is so common in Ireland" (86). This approach to characterization, in which Stephens focuses on types rather than individuals, has a dehumanizing effect on the characters (Martin 1963: 4). Viewed from the perspective of the short story cycle, one could argue that Stephens has created a composite protagonist (Mann 10) in *Here Are Ladies*. Although none of the characters appear more than once in the work, because of these resemblances, the readers feels as if there is one 'composite' protagonist, i.e. the inhabitant of the modern city – in the

talking during his own lengthy monologue (McFate 129): "It is my opinion that people talk too much. I think the world would be a healthier and better place if it were more silent. On every day that passes there is registered over all the earth a vast amount of language which, so far as I can see, has not the slightest bearing on anything anywhere" (Stephens 177).

same way that the protagonist of Joyce's *Dubliners* can be called the 'archetypal Dubliner'.[102] In *Here are Ladies*, Stephens emphasizes the "quality of modern absurdity" in the behaviour of his characters (Martin 1977: 60). He identifies them by exaggerating distinguishing features in a caricatural way. The third sketch of 'Three Angry People', for instance, opens with this description: "She was tall and angular. Her hair was red, and scarce, and untidy. Her hands were large and packed all over with knuckles and her feet would have turned inwards at the toes, only that she was aware of and corrected their perversities. […] Her voice was pleasant enough, but it was so strong that one fancies there were bones in it […]" (68). Although the reader does not learn much more about the woman than this, the insistence on angularity, knuckles and bones is sufficient to establish a female character who wants to throw off the yoke of male dominance (Martin 1977: 59). "If I happened to be you", the narrator tells her, "I would cut off my hair, I'd buy a man's clothes and wear them always, I'd call myself Harry or Tom; and I'd go wherever I pleased, and meet whoever I wanted to meet" (72). Stephens's minimalistic characterizations result in a focus on general pictures instead of on the individual. However, this does not mean that Stephens does not enter into the minds of his characters. The closing short story of the first section, 'A Glass of Beer', for example, builds up to the protagonist having an epiphany which causes him to realize that now that his wife is dead – which is what he had wished for – his liberation has no meaning, as his life as an artist is just as empty as his marriage had been. Even though Stephens's focus in the volume lies on Dublin life, this particular story is set in Paris.[103] Martin underlines that "[i]n a city synonymous with freedom he is locked within the burnt-out case of his self" (61). Just as he was trapped in a marriage which suffered from a lack of communication, he is now trapped in a foreign city, where he feels completely alienated and is still unable to communicate. Night after night, he strolls from the Place de l'Observatoire to the Font St. Michel and, on the way back, sits down at the same café, at the same table, and orders the same drink: a glass of beer, not because he likes it, but because "it was not a difficult thing to ask for" (24). At the end of the story, the widower goes to bed, "agreeing to commence the following morning just as he had the previous one, and the one before that, and the one before that again" (30). The protagonist thus remains stuck in his situation. The themes of lack of

[102] Mann emphasizes that the strong impact of *Dubliners* is largely created "through the cumulative effect of the same basic story – of an individual's attempt to escape from dullness and paralysis – being told again and again with a different cast" (38). These individuals are all part of Dublin's (lower) middle class of clerks, salesmen, tradesmen and shopkeepers.

[103] *Here Are* Ladies is primarily set in Dublin. However, there are a number of pieces, such as 'A Glass of Beer', which take place elsewhere. 'The Threepenny-Piece', to give another example, takes place in the supernatural setting of the hereafter. These departures from the Dublin setting do not disturb the unity of the work as a whole, as *Here Are Ladies* is still tightly unified by way of structure, character and theme.

communication, alienation and paralysis which are the focus of this first short story of the volume recur throughout the work. Stephens primarily deals with these modernist themes in the context of intersexual relationships. The middle sketch of 'Three Heavy Husbands', for instance, is about a solitary man who is afraid of the "extraordinary debate called marriage" (13). "After one has married a lady, what does one say to her?", he wonders:

> He looked upon his sweetheart as from a distance, and tried to reconstruct her recent conversations. – He was amazed at the little he could remember. "I, I, I, we, we, we, this shop, that shop, Aunt Elsa, and chocolates." […] [S]o far as he could recollect, he had said nothing in reply but "Oh, yes" and "To be sure!". Could he sustain a lifetime of small-talk on these meagre responses? […] After a time they would not even dare to look at each other. (15)

The lack of communication has made the husband construct terrible scenarios in his head, as a result of which he becomes too paralysed to even speak. When they sit next to each other on the train in silence, he frantically starts looking for something to talk about. Suddenly, his wife buries her face and her shoulders start convulsing. So he brings himself to asking why she is crying. "Her voice, smothered by the fur, replied – 'I am not crying, darling,' said she, 'I am only laughing'" (17-18). The wife's humour about her husband's shyness thus puts his problems into perspective. Perhaps her fit of laughter will even release the man from his paralysis, the ending seems to suggest. The poem 'One and One' continues the theme of the lack of communication between men and women. The narrator-poet and the woman whom he speaks about sit across from each other and never speak: "Of what do you think", he asks, "Sitting opposite me, / As you stir your tea / That you do not drink, / And frown at nought / With those brows of thought" (31). As in many other instances in *Here Are Ladies*, a lack of communication has once again led to a paralytic state. The story 'The Blind Man' also centres on the theme of the lack of communication between man and woman. The protagonist, who "was one who would have passed by the Sphinx without seeing it" (139), is "sex-blind", which means that he cannot appreciate women. His mother comes to dislike him until every kind of communication between the two of them becomes impossible and he becomes completely alienated: "between her son and herself there was a gulf fixed, spanned by no bridge whatever; there was complete isolation; no boat plied between them at all" (141). As a result, the mother leaves the farm to his younger brother when she dies. For a number of years, both men live and work there together, until the younger brother gets married. At that point, the elder brother has to move out. The man has no training or desire to live any other life than that of a farmer, but he has no money. "Without money he could not get a farm [and]

being a farmer's son he could not sink to the degradation of a day labourer" (143). As he is desperate, he marries as well: "[h]e married a farm of about ten acres" (143). After a while, however, he realizes that he "had not married a farm at all. He had married a woman – a thin-jawed, elderly slattern, whose sole beauty was her farm" (144). And "[i]t was not alone that he was married; he was multitudinously, egregiously married. He had married a whole family, and what a family" (144): "They insulted his eyesight, his hearing, and his energy. They had lank hair that slapped about them like wet sea-weed, and they were all talking, talking, talking" (145). As a result of his desperation, the protagonist starts going to the public-house to get drunk. At the end of the story, it is predicted that this will turn into an act of violence, which will end in him being "quietly hanged by the neck until he was as dead as he had been before he was alive" (145). Notice the repetition of the word 'talking' in the last but one quote. This adds to the symbolic recurrence of triads in the book as a whole. In addition to the number of texts in the volume being a multiple of three, the title – which at the same time refers to the book's focus on women – also has three words. References to the number three occur throughout the work as well. There are groups of three people, three-penny pieces, triangles and phrases such as 'Open Sesame' which are said three times. According to Martin, Stephens was a reader of Helena Blavatsky (57). His interest in the work of the theosophist, who among other things analysed the sacredness of the number three or the triad, could explain why three is such an important number in *Here Are Ladies*. Stephens multiple uses of triads and triangles could also be, as in Joyce's *Dubliners*, allusions to the Holy Trinity.

1.3. *Here Are Ladies* versus *Dubliners*

Stephens's modernist depiction of middle-class Dubliners in *Here Are Ladies* rather stands out against the rest of his Celtic Revivalist's oeuvre, such as his "idealized" depiction of Dublin slum life in *The Charwoman's Daughter* (Putzel 199). Moreover, one cannot help but be reminded of Joyce's *Dubliners* when reading Stephens's volume. It is clear that these works participate in the same international modernist movement, seeking alternative textual formats to represent the urban experience of alienation and paralysis. Both cycles are tightly structured and were originally meant to be even more so. As already mentioned, *Here Are Ladies* was meant to be a collection of triads, and Joyce planned *Dubliners* as a volume with twelve stories organized in four triads: on childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life. Interestingly, Stephens's reputation at the time was far greater than Joyce's (Martin 1963:

353). Therefore, whereas Joyce struggled for almost a decade to get *Dubliners* published,[104] Stephens had no difficulty at all with *Here Are Ladies*. He was offered several advances for the work and Maunsel & Co even attempted to outbid Macmillan for the book (Putzel 201). When *Here Are Ladies* appeared in 1913, it became popular with the reading public and obtained generally positive reviews (Putzel 201). The eventual publication of *Dubliners* in 1914, on the other hand, turned out to be a financial disappointment and a critical catastrophe. Today, Stephens's book has been largely forgotten, whereas Joyce's portrait of "that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city" has become immortal.[105] It is therefore interesting to look at the way in which Stephens represents the urban reality of Dublin life with its paralysed middle class, so as to determine whether his depiction of urban reality is as negative as the one offered by Joyce.

Comparing *Here are Ladies* with *Dubliners*, Steven Putzel has noted that "[f]or many of Stephens's characters, Dublin is a place where man has ceased to be free, where he is constricted by loveless marriages, meaningless routines, and wanton cruelty" (201). While it is true that a great deal of the characters in *Here Are Ladies* find themselves in a state of paralysis similar to that of Joyce's Dubliners, Stephens's take on this turns out to be more positive than Joyce's. In the first sketch of 'Three Heavy Husbands', for instance, a misogynistic husband, who sees women as creatures who should be "seen and not heard", has "bought and paid" for his wife (9). He fails to understand "that she had a head on her shoulders which was native to her body, and that she could not be aggregated as chattel property for any longer period than she agreed to" (9). Stephens allows the wife to escape this man's tyranny by leaving him for a clerk from his office. The third sketch of 'Three Angry People' also ends on a cautiously hopeful note, with the woman deciding to take the narrator's advice of changing her name, cutting off her hair and wearing men's clothes in order to be able to open the doors which are closed to her as a woman. Thus, although these characters are all trapped in a way similar to Joyce's Dubliners, many of them manage to somehow escape. The husband in 'The Horses' is allowed a remarkable escape from his dominating wife as well (Martin 1977: 62). He identifies with an old horse that is being whipped and gets so caught up in his dream of horses running freely in the fields that he jumps onto a train and flees at the end of the story:

> […] The train gathered speed, went flying out of the station into the blazing sunlight, picked up its heels and ran, and ran, and ran; the wind leaped by the carriage window,

[104] For an overview of the publication history of *Dubliners*, see for instance Mann (26-7).
[105] See Richard Ellmann, ed., *Selected Letters of James Joyce* (New York: The Viking Press, 1975) 22.

> shrieking with laughter; the wide fields danced with each other, shouting aloud 'The horses are coming again to the green meadows. Make way, make way for the great, wild horses!' And the trees went leaping from horizon to horizon shrieking and shrieking the news. (108)

Martin argues that the husband will probably have to get off the train at the next stop or when he runs out of money. But at least he is able to take the romantic plunge which Joyce denies his characters (63). Ingman sees this story as an illustration of how Stephens experiments with modes in *Here Are Ladies*. Whereas the story starts out in the realist mode, it is interrupted by the husband's fabulist identification with the horse and the modernist inconclusive ending (2009: 78). This is not to say that all of the characters in *Here Are Ladies* are allowed to make a run for it – even if it is just for a while: the protagonist in 'A Glass of Beer', for instance, remains every bit as trapped in his state of paralysis as, for example, Joyce's Mr Duffy ('A Painful Case'). The wife in 'The Triangle' does not manage to get out of the rut which she is in either. She has been married for quite a few years and is terribly bored with her husband: "[t]here is no escape from him and he is always the same. […] He eats this way and drinks that way, and he will continue to do so until he stiffens into the ultimate quietude. He snores on this note, he laughs on that, dissonant, unescapable, unchanging" (48). The woman's life changes for a little while when a cousin and her toy terrier come to stay with them. The wife makes friends with the dog and becomes happier. However, when she notices that her husband has become infatuated with the cousin, it becomes "a pressing necessity" to get her relative out of the house (51): "Our husbands are barely tolerable until a lady friend has endeavoured to abstract their cloying attentions" (50). She decides to send the terrier back home in a basket, as a result of which the cousin understands that she has to leave. Although on the surface it may seem that she has achieved her aim by sending away her rival, she ends up in the same paralysis which she suffered at the beginning of the story. "For a little time peace would reign in that household, but […]", the narrator concludes, in the end "the position was unchanged", for "[l]acking the serpent we are no longer in Paradise, we are at home, and our sole entertainment is to yawn when we wish to" (54). Another interesting text in this respect is the third sketch of the triad 'Three Young Wives', in which the protagonist is pondering on whether to leave her husband or not, as he is egocentric:

> He was always asking her to do something, but he never did anything for her. – It was, "Will you hand me the paper, like a good girl?" […] or, "You might see, old lady, if there is a match anywhere." Before their marriage she had been accustomed to men who did things for her, and the change was sudden: likeable enough at first – (97)

At this point, Stephens switches to the first person: "… How red the fire is tonight! […] I wonder will he be sorry when he comes home, and finds. … Perhaps his friend will be sufficient for him then" (97). By gradually turning to the woman's thoughts, Stephens reduces the distance to the character and the difficult decision she is trying to make. Putzel juxtaposes this sketch with Joyce's famous story 'Eveline'. The latter, as commonly known, ends with Eveline becoming so paralysed by her fear of the unknown that she lets the one chance of escape pass her by: as Putzel points out, "[s]he does what a good Catholic girl should do and her reward will be a life of drudgery and petty violence" (204). Stephens's protagonist does not run away with her lover either. As in 'Eveline', the female protagonist's situation remains the same. Still, there is a difference: although Stephens's story ends with the man coming home, finding his wife and complaining to her, the woman reacts by laughing at the fate she has chosen (Putzel 204): "'You are always giggling about nothing,' said he, and he banged the door." (Stephens 100). In other words, Stephens manages to leave his female protagonist with the upper hand, as the selfish husband does not have a clue. According to Putzel, it is possible that Stephens had read 'Eveline', as Joyce's story was first published in *The Irish Homestead* in 1904 and Stephens's sketch only appeared in *The Nation* in 1913 (204). However, he argues that it is not likely that 'Eveline' influenced Stephens's sketch, as he had nothing good to say about Joyce until the start of their friendship in the late 1920s (205). Stephens even spoke of "a rather disconnected, unpleasant prose work called *Dubliners*", which according to him was "anything but representative of Dublin".[106]

Interestingly, whereas the sense of paralysis created by Joyce is inextricably bound up with turn-of-the-century Dublin,[107] Dublin itself does not play much of a role in *Here Are Ladies*. There are sufficient indications that the book is predominantly set in Dublin, but Stephens uses this setting to represent a generic urban experience rather than to depict Dublin life in particular. Martin argues that Stephens's characters are Dubliners, but they might as easily have been Londoners (1977: 60). This is due to the fact that Stephens modified the eight pieces originally written for *Sinn Féin*: he eliminated names and other details, as a result

[106] See Richard J. Finneran, ed., *Letters of James Stephens* (London: Macmillan, 1974) 209. Still, as argued by Terence Brown in the introduction of the Penguin edition of *Dubliners*, Joyce himself at the very least intended the work to be a realist study of Dublin, a work "representative of Irish experience" (2000: xv). Brown for instance refers to Joyce's letter to Grant Richards, in which he made the following statement: "[…] I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilization of Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass" (xv).

[107] As Joyce wrote to Grant Richards, his intention "was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis" (Gilbert and Ellmann 1957-1966 II, 134). Yet, as Mann points out, it is "not the fidelity with which the stories recreate turn-of-the-century Dublin" that mainly unifies the stories but the fact that the "action in the stories consistently takes place in dreary, dark or dimly lit, and confined urban spaces" (32-3).

of which they became less 'Irish' (McFate 140). Written in Paris, all but one of the five short stories in *Here Are Ladies* particularly lack the nationalistic tone found in Stephens's earlier writing. McFate notes that 'A Glass of Beer' could just as well be the story of an expatriate American, and 'The Blind Man' could be about an English farmer. Moreover, 'The Triangle' and 'The Horses' are domestic dramas without any ethnic aspect (140). However, there are a number of texts in *Here Are Ladies* which are more specifically Irish in character, particularly the pieces which deal with supernatural elements and that are more reminiscent of the Celtic Revivalist in Stephens. The best example is the short story 'The Threepenny-Piece'. This fablelike story deals with a conflict between a man and a seraph which disturbs the order in Heaven and Hell. Although there appears to be a great contrast with Joyce's realistic setting in *Dubliners*, as far as theme is concerned, the story still deals with a modern preoccupation: money. In *Dubliners*, the preoccupation with money is seen as the cause of spiritual paralysis (Mann 35). In Joyce's 'Two Gallants', a small gold coin is stolen, and in Stephens's story, a silver threepenny-piece is believed to have been stolen. The protagonist, Brien O'Brien, dies and loses the threepenny-piece his daughter put in his coffin on his way to Hell. It is found by a seraph, Cuchulain, but Brien thinks it has been stolen: "'I have been robbed', he yelled. 'I have been robbed in heaven!'" (75). He does not stop yelling and turns Hell upside down with his protests, so that even the Chief Tormentor is disturbed. The story ends with a fight between Brien and the seraph, who eventually get thrown down to earth by Rhadamanthus. In the process, the coin is lost and, in the end, Brien ends up where he began: on earth, without any money. Even though the story is very comical, this ending could be interpreted as Brien not even being able to escape his state of paralysis through death. Similarly, the second sketch of 'Three Lovers Who Lost' – Stephens's version of Shaw's *Candida* – is a comic fairy tale which nonetheless ends in despair. It is about a young boy who, after listening to his mother reading a tale about the Beautiful Princess, imagines that a matron with six children is in fact an enchanted princess who needs him to rescue her: "[…] she looked very stout, and much older than is customary with princesses – but that was owing to the fact that she was under an enchantment" (127). In the end, however, he realizes that "she was unworthy of being rescued" (129), because she says that she loves the 'giant' with whom she lives: "He said that he had grave doubts about her being a princess at all, and that if she was marries to a giant it was no more than she deserved, and further he had a good mind to rescue the giant from her, and he would do so in a minute, only that it was against his principles to rescue giants" (129). Although this is a very comic tale, the boy's rejection of the 'princess' has pained him more than he lets on: "[…] he walked slowly away, hiding behind a cold and impassive demeanour

a mind that was tortured and a heart that had plumbed most of the depths of human suffering" (129). In a way similar to Joyce's childhood story 'Araby', Stephens's sketch, although presented as a comical tale, ends in bitter disappointment.

In conclusion, Stephens's *Here are Ladies* is unified by structure as well as by character and by the modernist urban experience that is being represented. At the same time the texts in the volume are separated from each other: some stories have a serious tone, while others are comical. As it does for *Dubliners*, then, the form of the short story cycle, with the simultaneous self-sufficiency and interdependence of its component parts (Mann 15), reinforces the content of the work, as the thematic focus on a lack of communication between men and women, estrangement and paralysis is formally underscored by the connections and disruptions between the different parts of the book. Both works thus give expression to the fragmented urban reality, but from different perspectives. While *Dubliners* conveys an extremely bleak image of Dublin and its inhabitants, Stephens often gives a humorous twist to his stories of alienation and paralysis, and also provides more routes of escape for his characters. Still, this does not mean that all of Stephens's stories end happily: several of the stories are tragic ones which end in complete despair. Many of his Dubliners remain as stuck in their situation of stasis as Joyce's, with the difference that some of Stephens's protagonists at least take charge of their misery by making it the object of laughter.

2. Beckett's *More Pricks Than Kicks*

2.1. Beckett: Biography

Samuel Barclay Beckett was born on 13 April 1906 in Cooldrinagh, the family home in Foxrock, County Dublin (Pattie 5).[108] He had a fairly comfortable early childhood, despite the agitated political situation at the time, but he appears to have been a solitary child (Pattie 5-6). Between 1911 and 1915, he attended a small local school, after which he first went to a preparatory school in Dublin and then, in 1920, to Portora Royal School in Enniskillen. Finally, he entered Trinity College, Dublin, in 1923 (Pattie 6). As an undergraduate, Beckett

[108] As is the case with Stephens, however, there is some uncertainty about Beckett's exact date of birth: the author himself celebrated his birthday on 13 April, although the date on his birth certificate was 13 May. Because of the significance of the April date (i.e. Good Friday), critics long thought that Beckett invented this date. But James Knowlson has recently discovered that Beckett's birth was announced in the Irish Times on 16 April, which would confirm the April date. This could mean that the date on the birth certificate was simply a mistake (Pattie 5).

studied French and Italian, and he was an outstanding student (Pattie 8-9). From 1926 onward, however, he suffered increasingly from a neurotic condition with severe panic attacks (Pattie 10). In his early twenties, he started a relationship with his cousin Peggy Sinclair, on whom he would base the character of the Smeraldina. In 1928, Beckett had the opportunity to spend some time as a tutor at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, where he met James Joyce – whose daughter Lucia's advances he would end up rejecting. He became an unpaid researcher for the older writer, who was working on *Finnegans Wake*. Although Joyce's influence on Beckett as a writer has been a matter of debate, the latter was undoubtedly affected by the former's attitude to writing (Pattie 10-3). Especially in Beckett's early work, there is clear evidence of Joyce's influence (Hunter 2007: 84). However, as we will see later on, this does not mean that Beckett simply imitated his model's style. In 1929, Beckett's first published study appeared: "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce", the lead essay in a collection promoting what was to become *Finnegans Wake* (Cochran 3). The essay was soon printed separately in the literary journal *Transition*, along with a short story titled 'Assumption' (Cochran 3). In 1930, he was forced to return to Dublin and take up a post in modern languages at Trinity, from which resigned two years later (Pattie 18-20). From 1932 until 1937, when he settled permanently in Paris, Beckett travelled in Europe, especially in Ireland, England, France and Germany. He wrote his first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, between 1931 and 1932 (Pilling 2011: 1), but he was not able to find a publisher for it, nor did he complete it – the book finally appeared in 1992. The work became an important source for his first published full-length book, a collection of ten interlocking stories entitled *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934). In the same year, Beckett published another short story, 'A Case in a Thousand'. In 1935, a collection of his poetry entitled *Echo's Bones and other Precipitates* appeared, and he also started work on *Murphy*, which would be published in 1938. Before this publication, he was stabbed in the street by a man whom he had refused to give money to. After this incident, Beckett started a relationship with the Frenchwoman Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil, whom he had already met at the École in the late 1920s. She was one of his visitors at the hospital. They spent much time together during his recovery and, when Beckett left hospital, they decided to live together. They would eventually marry in 1960 (Pattie 20-7). During the Second World War, Beckett joined the French Resistance. In 1942, he and Suzanne were forced to flee to the village of Roussillon, where he largely wrote his final novel in English, *Watt* (1953). After the war, Beckett returned to Paris and, between 1946 and 1953, he produced the works that brought him international fame as a writer: four lengthy short stories ('First Love', 'The Expelled', 'The Calmative' and 'The End'), four

novels (*Mercier and Camier*, and the novels of the trilogy: *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*), and two plays (*Eleutheria* and *Waiting for Godot*) – he wrote most of these works in French and translated them into English himself (Pattie 30). This period of great creativity came to an end with the completion of *Stories and Texts for Nothing* (1954). In the succeeding years, he often turned to drama instead of writing fiction. Examples of his later dramatic writing are *Endgame* (1957) and *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958). He also tried out other forms, such as radio, television and cinema. Moreover, he kept on experimenting with short narrative forms as well. As Hunter puts it, Beckett explored "the limits of expression at the border with silence" (2007: 84). During the 1960s, Beckett's fame had reached its peak and, in 1969, he was awarded the Nobel Prize, which he refused to collect himself (Pattie 35-43). He continued to write almost until his death. He began his last work, the poem *what is the word* (1988), in hospital and completed it in the retiring home in Paris where he would die one year later, on 22 December 1989 (Pattie 47-8).

2.2. *More Pricks Than Kicks*

Beckett's work is not often considered in the context of twentieth-century short fiction writing (Hunter 2007: 84). William Trevor, for instance, excluded Beckett from *The Oxford Book of Irish Short Stories* (1989), arguing that he "conveyed [his] ideas more skilfully in another medium".[109] Yet, Beckett wrote short fiction throughout his career: at first influenced by the modernist aesthetic, he subsequently reworked the modernist short story and eventually went on to challenging the scope of the genre of the short story altogether (Hunter 84). Important for the purpose of this dissertation is the fact that his first full-length book publication, *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934), like Joyce's *Dubliners*, can be read as a short story cycle. This will be the focus of my analysis in this section. As we will see, only by viewing the work as a cycle rather than as a collection, do its thematic focus and the manner in which content is reinforced by form take shape.

More Pricks Than Kicks was not well received in Ireland. There were few copies in circulation and, when the volume was eventually banned, even library copies were removed (Nelson xiv). In England, the number of reviews was surprisingly high given the fact that *More Pricks Than Kicks* was Beckett's debut – and a work of short fiction at that (Nelson xiv). As Cassandra Nelson points out in the introduction to the 2010 edition of the work, "[r]eactions ranged from dismissive ('A farce for highbrows' and 'too clever a book to be

[109] William Trevor, ed. *The Oxford Book of Irish Short Stories* (Oxford: University Press, 1989) xvi. Qtd. in Gontarski (1997: xi).

first-rate') to baffled ('The meaning of *More Pricks Than Kicks* completely eludes me') to cautiously approving ('there is a definite, fresh talent at work in it, though it is a talent not yet quite sure of itself')". The book sold poorly, perhaps because the reviewers claimed that it would not appeal to a wide audience (xiv). This resulted in Beckett regretting having published the book: he regarded the stories as juvenilia, and was against a reissue, which is why the work did not come back in print until the late 1960s (Nelson xv-xvi). Still, because of its use of the cycle form and its similarities with and deviations from Joyce's *Dubliners*, *More Pricks Than Kicks* is Beckett's most interesting work of short fiction in the context of this dissertation.

2.2.1. *More Pricks Than Kicks* as a 'Belacquan' Short Story Cycle

The ten stories in *More Pricks Than Kicks* are all set in and around Dublin. Moreover, they all revolve around the (love) life of one protagonist, Belacqua Shuah,[110] whom we follow from his days as a university student until his accidental death and subsequent burial.[111] As we will see, the stories in the volume also share a dense style with many allusions and similar themes (e.g. life and death). Furthermore, I will show that there are many cross-references between the stories. In other words, although the stories are all self-contained, together they clearly work as a whole. Still, the work is – in Ingram's terms – a completed rather than a composed cycle, as the first story, 'Dante and the Lobster', was already accepted to appear in *This Quarter*[112] when Beckett started work on *More Pricks Than Kicks*. In addition, Beckett had already written a version of 'Walking Out', which may have dated from the summer of 1931. He also took two sections from his unfinished novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (written between 1931 and 1932) and turned them into 'A Wet Night'[113] and 'The Smeraldina's Billet Doux'[114] (Nelson ix). Interestingly, Beckett had first called the volume *Draff*, after the tenth and final story, but when his London publishers Chatto and Windus asked him to think of a different name, he opted for a title different from any of the story

[110] Belacqua Shuah gets his first name from Dante's *Purgatorio* and his surname from the Bible (Cochran 5).
[111] In the story 'Echo's Bones', not to be confused with Beckett's 1935 collection of poetry, Belacqua even returns from the dead. Beckett wrote this tailpiece to *More Pricks Than Kicks* on demand of Chatto and Windus, who rejected it and ended up publishing the volume as it was originally submitted by the author. Beckett left the story out of subsequent editions himself and the Beckett estate did the same for *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose: 1919-1989* (Gontarski xiii). The story was finally published in 2011.
[112] Beckett slightly revised the story for inclusion in the cycle (Nelson ix).
[113] When adapting these pieces for *More Pricks Than Kicks*, Beckett mostly carried out changes of phrasing, especially in 'A Wet Night' (Pilling 2011: 157).
[114] Three of the stories in *More Pricks Than Kicks* were reprinted individually in several magazines and anthologies between the 1950s and 1970s as well: 'Dante and the Lobster', 'The Smeraldina's Billet Doux' and 'Yellow' (Nelson xv).

titles, one that captured the book as a whole: *More Pricks Than Kicks*. Nelson argues that the title refers to "[…] Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus – in the King James Bible, the voice from heaven says: 'It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks', Acts 9:5 – and to the phrase 'more pricks than halfpence' (that is, more bashfulness than kindness, as often meted out to performing monkeys by their owners) […]" (239). In other words, the title of the cycle is based on the idea that it is futile to resist the divine will, as a prick or a goad was a "pointed stick used to prod an ox or other animals" and, by kicking against it, the animal would hurt itself more than if it simply were to follow the right direction (Coogan 1966). Combined with the reference to the phrase 'more pricks than halfpence', i.e. more punishment than reward, Beckett's choice of the title *More Pricks Than Kicks* puts the emphasis on authority and punishment rather than on the useless fight against it. This ties in with the large number of accidents and deaths that occur throughout the book. As Robert Cochran describes it, the world sketched by Beckett is a "purgatory verging on hell, a place of more pricks than kicks" (8).

It is striking that one of the deaths in the volume is in fact that of Belacqua. He dies in the operating room at the end of the penultimate story, 'Yellow': "By Christ! he did die! They had clean forgotten to auscultate him!" (Beckett 2010 [1934]: 164). As already mentioned, cycles unified by character are often about the maturation of a protagonist. As such, they can form an alternative to the *bildungsroman* (Mann 10).[115] By contrast, this cycle might rather be seen as some kind of *anti-bildungsroman* which focuses on the futility of the protagonist's life and actions. In other words, with *More Pricks Than Kicks*, Beckett completely turns around this type of cycle: the protagonist does not really amount to anything and he dies instead of maturing. In one of the earlier stories of the book, the narrator had described the protagonist as "[b]eing by nature […] sinfully indolent, bogged in indolence" (31). Throughout the volume, the reader learns more about Belacqua's eccentric character: in the opening story 'Dante and the Lobster', for instance, the grocer from whom he wants to buy "a good green stanching rotten lump of Gorgonzola cheese" (7) feels "sympathy and pity for this queer customer who always look[s] ill and dejected" (8). Other examples of Belacqua's peculiar behaviour are his buying of seats in heaven from a beggar woman in 'Ding-Dong' and the joint suicide he plans with his girlfriend Ruby in 'Love and Lethe' (Fernández 116). Despite

[115] In the only book-length study of *More Pricks Than Kicks* that I know to have been published up until now, John Pilling remarks that "[c]ollections of stories do not of course typically require a single hero or the same one in all of them, nor are they expected to. But Beckett knew Saki, and Saki had done this more than once, in *Reginald* (1904) and *The Chronicles of Clovis* (1911)" (2011: 17). Remarkably, Pilling does not take into account the possibility of analysing Beckett's volume as a short story cycle, not even when he compares the work to well-known cycles such as Joyce's *Dubliners* and Hemingway's *In Our Time*.

the unusual habits of the "pale fat man" (Beckett 25), David Pattie notes that he is more part of the world than Beckett's other protagonists: for instance, he marries three times, which is unique for Beckett's male characters (54).[116] He is also shown in everyday scenes: preparing lunch, taking an Italian lesson, going to pubs and parties, going to the mountains, etc. However, as a result of Belacqua being part of the everyday world, he is also at the mercy of it: in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, Beckett "creates an external reality that is threatening, not only to the protagonist's peace of mind […], but also to his physical and mental well-being" (Pattie 55). Pattie maintains that the characters in the work are constantly threatened by "an uncaring, unfeeling, brutally yet comically dangerous world" (55). Belacqua himself dies by mistake, even though he was only undergoing a simple procedure, after which his third wife and widow, the Smeraldina, starts a relationship with her late husband's friend, 'Hairy' Capper Quin. Belacqua's first and second wives, moreover, die grotesque deaths: Lucy died after two years of suffering from a terrible riding accident that crippled her and Thelma "perished of sunset and honeymoon […] in Connemara" (Beckett 167). Pattie states that this world of *More Pricks Than Kicks* is one in which "there is no clear distinction between people and things, and where suffering and death are reducible to the simplest, most callous, and most brutal terms" (56). He refers to a passage in 'Ding-Dong', in which a little girl gets run down after having bought milk and bread. Strikingly, the girl's death is recorded quite casually, whereas the milk and the loaf of bread are described as if they were human beings: "The good milk was all over the road and the loaf, which had sustained no injury, was sitting up against the kerb […]" (Beckett 34-5). Furthermore, the people who have witnessed the accident care more about their place in line at the Palace Cinema than about what has happened (Pattie 55-6).

In addition to Belacqua, there are a few other characters who return in the different stories, even though the protagonist has a different girlfriend or wife in almost every story. Belacqua's platonic lover Alba Perdue and his best friend Hairy, for instance, appear more than once. Furthermore, Belacqua's third wife the Smeraldina takes centre stage not only in 'The Smeraldina's Billet Doux', which consists of a love letter from her to Belacqua, but she is also the main focus in 'Draff', the final story of the volume, in which the protagonist is buried. Another important unifying element is the presence of a narrator who is markedly present in the majority of the stories. In 'Ding-Dong', the narrator calls the protagonist his

[116] Belacqua's first wife is Lucy (see 'Walking Out'; she is perhaps a later version of the Syra Cusa from *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* – who was based on Lucia Joyce), his second wife is Thelma bboggs (see 'What a Misfortune'), and his third wife is The Smeraldina Rima (see 'The Smeraldina's Billet Doux'; based on Beckett's cousin Peggy Sinclair).

"sometime friend Belacqua" (31). He remarks that he knows all of the things he is telling the reader, because Belacqua told him: "We were Pylades and Orestes for a period, flattened down to something very genteel; but the relation abode and was highly confidential while it lasted" (32). Although the narrator is not identified as a character, his voice appears the same throughout the work as a whole. The reader is often addressed by the narrator, as in this passage from 'Love and Lethe': "'And the rosiner' said Mrs Tough, 'will you have that in the lav too?'. Reader, a rosiner is a drop of the hard. Ruby rose and took a gulp of coffee to make room. 'I'll have a gloria' she said. Reader, a gloria is coffee laced with brandy" (80). On the other hand, the narrator holds back much information from the reader as well. In 'Draff', the final story, the narrator for instance casually drops the remark that – in addition to Thelma and Lucy – both Belacqua's former girlfriends Ruby and Winnie are dead as well. The reader does not learn more about what has happened to them. Moreover, in the final pages of this closing story, the narrator states that "Little remains to be told" (179), after which he continues:

> On their return they [the Smeraldina and Hairy] found the house in flames, the home to which Belacqua had brought three brides in raging furnace. It transpired that during their absence something had snapped in the brain of the gardener, who had ravished the servant girl and then set the premises on fire. He had neither given himself up nor tried to escape, he had shut himself up in the tool-shed and awaited arrest. (179)

Cochran rightly states that it is "part of the story's harsh comedy to undercut such melodrama by so offhanded an introduction, presenting it as the draff of 'Draff'" (17). However, he also suggests that the reader may think back to other things seen as 'little' by the narrator: "What happens, for example, to the aunt who provided shelter and dinner in 'Dante and the Lobster'? Or to the Ottolenghi [Belacqua's female Italian teacher]? Or to Alba Perdue, perhaps aptly named, who after disappearing with Walter Draggin in 'What a Misfortune', is mentioned briefly as dead […] at the beginning of Draff"?, he asks (17). Cochran fails to take into account the cycle form used by Beckett here, as such gaps are typical of the short story cycle. It is precisely the tension that arises between the numerous elements of unity and the blatant gaps that makes *More Pricks Than Kicks* a short story cycle rather than a 'mere' short story collection on the one hand or a novel on the other. Despite Cochran's comments on the gaps between the stories, he views the book – as most critics do[117] – as a "collection of stories" (5). Hunter, on the other hand, calls the book a "sequence" (2007: 84). He does not elaborate on

[117] See, for instance, Reid (1979) and Pattie (2000). There are also a number of critics who appear to acknowledge the hybridity of the form used by Beckett. In his introduction to *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose: 1929-1989*, Stanley E. Gontarski for instance calls the book "as much a novel as a collection of stories" (xiii). However, he does not consider the possibility of analysing the work as a cycle.

the implications of viewing the work as such, but he does analyse the gaps in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, comparing them with gaps used by Joyce, as we will see later on. As already mentioned, Beckett's narrator at the same time explicitly makes himself present and leaves many matters unexplained throughout the stories. However, he makes explicit the fact that he leaves out certain information. Hunter states that "Beckett's narrator makes explicit the uncertainties which the narrative itself has prompted" (88). In 'Love and Lethe', for instance, the narrator comments on the question of why Belacqua wishing to commit suicide: "How he formed this resolution to destroy himself we are quite unable to discover" (82). The narrator also anticipates possible criticism on the style of narration. In 'Love and Lethe', for example, he makes the following statement:

> We know something of Belacqua, but Ruby Tough is a stranger to these pages. Anxious that those who read this incredible adventure shall not pooh-pooh it as unintelligible [which is of course exactly what they did] we avail ourselves now of this lull, what time Belacqua is on his way, Mrs Tough broods in the kitchen and Ruby dreams over her gloria, to enlarge a little on the latter lady. (80)[118]

The narrator refers to Beckett and the sources he used for *More Pricks Than Kicks* as well. For instance, he describes Walter Draffin, the lover of Thelma's mother and also her real father, as an "Italianate Irishman [whose powers of invocation] were simply immense"; and "if his *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, held up in the *limae labor* stage for the past ten or fifteen years, ever reaches the public, and Walter says it is bound to, we ought all be sure to get it and have a look at it anyway" (134).

As is often the case with Beckett, the stories in *More Pricks Than Kicks* brim over with intertextual references: to his own work, to Dante and the Bible, but also to many other works and authors, including Joyce.[119] Belacqua is for instance not only named after a Dante character – i.e. the indolent Florentine lutemaker who is stuck on the shores of Purgatory because he is so lazy that he postpones repentance until the last possible moment – but the first story 'Dante and the Lobster' also opens with Belacqua's difficulties in understanding the first of the canti in the moon, an "impenetrable passage" (3) of Dante's *Paradisio*. In addition to these intertextual references, there are also many cross-references present which tie the stories together. At the end of 'Walking Out', for instance, Belacqua is still married to the

[118] Immediately after this, the narrator informs the reader that Ruby is in the "thirty third or fourth year of her age" (81). John Pilling argues that this description stands out, since information of this kind is normally not given in *More Pricks Than Kicks* (2011: 176).

[119] Pilling notes that Beckett deliberately includes many allusions in *More Pricks Than Kicks* which only he or a very close friend could know anything about, such as Ruby knowing an unpublished revision of a Beckett poem in 'Love and Lethe' (2011: 21-3).

crippled Lucy, and at the beginning of the next story, 'What a Misfortune', the reader finds out that she is dead. When Thelma is introduced in 'What a Misfortune', to give another example, the narrator compares her with Belacqua's women from the previous stories, stating that "[s]he was not beautiful in the sense that Lucy was; nor could she be said to transcend beauty, as the Alba seemed to do; nor yet to have slammed her life and person in its face, as Ruby perhaps had" (111). Beckett clearly makes the links between the stories explicit. For example, one of the five footnotes which occur throughout the work even refers the reader to the previous story for the explanation of Lucy's terrible accident. In 'What a Misfortune', the narrator remarks that "Alba Perdue, it may be remembered, was the nice little girl in *A Wet Night*" (120), and in 'Draff' he refers to "the theatre nurse from *Yellow*" (178). In addition, Beckett makes use of what John Pilling calls "'flash-forward' ploys" to increase the unity of the work (2011: 198). In 'What a Misfortune', for instance, Belacqua's funeral in 'Draff' is anticipated: "One of these fine days Hairy will observe, from where he sits bearing up bravely behind the hearse in a family knot […]" (126). To give a final example, there are also many instances throughout the book in which an unexplained 'it' is used, such as in 'Walking Out', when Belacqua tells Lucy that he went out "to walk it off" (Pilling 187). It is not clear what he is referring to, even Lucy has no idea: "'Walk *what* off?' cried Lucy. She was sick and tired of his moods" (100). Beckett thus does not simply leave the explanation out, he also makes the fact that it is left unexplained explicit. All of these cross-references between the stories serve to support the cycle's main themes: life and death, and their futility. In 'Dante and the Lobster', the very first story of the volume, Belacqua discovers that lobsters are boiled alive: "Well, thought Belacqua, it's a quick death, God help us all. […] It is not" (14). Joseph F. Connelly argues that Belacqua's finding "indicates his own movement to death ['Yellow'] and beyond ['Draff'], encapsulated in the nine stories that follow" (51). In other words, this "unending suffering that is the lot of living creatures" (Pattie 57), as in Dante's *Inferno*, is the main theme that runs through *More Pricks Than Kicks*. The "comically reductive fate" of all beings (Pattie 56), is aptly underscored by the final words of the cycle – the narrator's closing comment on Belacqua's death and the subsequent events – "So it goes in the world" (181).

2.2.2. *More Pricks Than Kicks* versus *Dubliners*

Many critics have viewed Beckett's *More Pricks Than Kicks* as an imitation of Joyce's *Dubliners*. It is true that there are a number of obvious similarities between both works, but – as I will show in what follows – these are overshadowed by even more blatant differences. First of all, *More Pricks Than Kicks* and *Dubliners* share their Dublin setting with detailed

descriptions of the city. Ingman, for instance, notes that Beckett describes the locations of Belacqua's wanderings in Dublin with Joycean precision (2009: 144). At first glance, the setting of the city of Dublin appears to figure as prominently in Beckett's book as it does in Joyce's. However, Belacqua has no greater love for this city than Beckett himself, although the protagonist of the cycle does like the countryside: "he suffers too much from self-love, or at least self-regard, to feel either a great love or a great loathing for anything but himself" (Pilling 2011: 16-7). It is true that Belacqua is familiar with and feels comfortable in the area around Trinity College, but he does not seem to belong there, or anywhere for that matter (Pilling 17). What Belacqua is looking for, he says in 'What a Misfortune', "is nowhere as far as [he] can see" (128). Pilling argues that he would probably be largely the same person wherever he was, according to the narrator's statements in 'Ding-Dong' about locations (2011: 17): "as for sites, one was as good as the other" (31) and "for the moment there were no grounds for his favouring one direction rather than the other" (33). Moreover, compared with *Dubliners*, the social spectrum of Beckett's volume is very limited. Pilling emphasizes that "[p]overty and its associated social skills, disease and prostitution (both rife in Dublin) leave almost no mark on the stories" (18). As a result, little attention is paid to the life of the streets, even though the street names of certain neighbourhoods are listed in detail (Pilling 18). From this, he concludes that "[…] the only details that suggest these stories must be set in Dublin are horse-riding, alcohol, death and an overarching anxiety about sexuality […]. However, none of these details, small or large, is unique to Dublin, even if the setting can, as it chooses, make them seem as if they might be" (18-9).

Moreover, both works are short story cycles, and *More Pricks Than Kicks* was the first full-length book publication for Beckett, exactly as *Dubliners* was for Joyce. However, these cycles are structured in a different manner. Whereas the reader witnesses the maturation of the archetypal Dubliner in Joyce's book, the only 'evolution' that Belacqua seems to undergo in Beckett's book is dying. Pilling points to the fact that *More Pricks Than Kicks* starts with the phrase "It was morning […]" (3) and ends in the darkness of the cemetery (19). Apart from this, throughout the cycle Belacqua remains as stuck as he was at the beginning of 'Dante and the Lobster': "[h]e was so bogged that he could move neither backward nor forward" (3) (Pilling 19). In other words, Beckett's protagonist suffers the same paralysis which features so conspicuously in Joyce's famous cycle. However, Belacqua appears to prefer inertia. As the narrator states in 'Ding-Dong', the protagonist would like to "consecrate his life to stasis" if only he had the means to do so (36). Instead, he experiences what he calls "moving pauses"

(32), during which he moves around without really going anywhere, much like Joyce's Dubliners who move around in circles, for instance in 'Two Gallants'.

This brings me to my next point: the thematic similarities between Beckett's cycle and Joyce's. Some of the main themes of *Dubliners* return in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, but in different variations. Death is, as commonly known, present in all of Joyce's stories. Similarly, death is a prevalent theme in Beckett's book. But whereas deaths in *Dubliners* – e.g. of characters such as Father Flynn ('The Sisters'), Mrs Sinico ('A Painful Case') and Michael Furey ('The Dead') – carry major implications, deaths in *More Pricks Than Kicks* are as futile as the lives that precede them. As we have seen, Beckett completely turns around Joyce's idea of the maturation of the archetypal Dubliner by killing off his protagonist. Moreover, he mocks the importance of the concepts of life and death by, for instance, barely giving the death of the girl in 'Ding-Dong' a moment's thought and at the same time elaborating on the bread and milk she has dropped. Paralysis and alienation, which are of course dominant themes in *Dubliners*, also play an important part in *More Pricks Than Kicks*. However, Beckett's protagonist experiences them differently. Ingman argues that "Belcaqua's alienation is not just from a particular society but from all society and, in the end, from life itself" (2009: 145). Like Joyce's Mr Duffy, Belacqua prefers being isolated from society. However, Mr Duffy finally understands Mrs Sinico's loneliness at the end of 'A Painful Case'. Beckett's protagonist, on the other hand – apart from a few minor instances, e.g. when he buys seats in heaven for others – is not concerned with anyone's sake but his own. As already mentioned, Belacqua is as paralysed as Joyce's characters are. His world in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, like that of *Dubliners* but also that of Dante's *Inferno*, is a world of suffering from which no escape is possible. Joyce's Dubliners are constantly moving around physically but always end up right back where they started. The same goes for Belacqua, but the difference is that he is aware of the futility of his actions. Whereas characters such as the narrator of 'Araby' and Little Chandler ('A Little Cloud') experience great disappointment when they realize that they are stuck in a vicious circle and will never be able to fulfil their goals, Belacqua's main objective is to remain in the darkness of his own mental world. As opposed to characters like Little Chandler, who at the beginning of 'A Little Cloud' believes that "every step [toward Gallaher] brought him nearer to London, farther from his own sober inartistic life" (Joyce 68) but eventually has to return home miserably, Beckett's protagonist seems to be already aware of his own inertia. In 'Ding-Dong', for instance, he does not only express regret that he cannot continue his paralysed state in the pub where he is sitting, he also buys seats in heaven because the beggar woman says it "goes round […] and round and round and round and

round" (38). In other words, he is attracted to the circular motion which implies no progress whatsoever or, as Pilling denotes it, "constant motion that is at the same time perfect inertia" (26). Thus, in the same way that Beckett lets his protagonist die instead of mature, he lets him play with his state of paralysis rather than endure it.

Finally, there are several obvious references to *Dubliners* in *More Pricks Than Kicks*. This is not surprising, given the fact that the young Beckett's aspirations to become a writer were heavily influenced by his acquaintance with Joyce, whom he met some five years before his debut was published. However, Beckett's references to Joyce's cycle in *More Pricks Than Kicks* do not only show how the former writer was influenced by the latter, but also how he was already developing a different kind of writing. Beckett's 'A Wet Night', for instance, contains a clever parody of the famous conclusion to Joyce's 'The Dead' in which the poetic snow is replaced with rain: "But the wind had dropped, as it so often does in Dublin when all respectable men and women whom it delights to annoy have gone to bed, and the rain fell in a uniform untroubled manner. It fell upon the bay, the littoral, the mountains and the plains, and notably upon the Central Bog it fell with a rather desolate uniformity" (74). Cochran argues that this reference to Joyce is "not so much a gesture of homage as a comic declaration of independence. The new man, it says, will be doing things differently" (11). Compared with the passage in *Dubliners*, in 'A Wet Night' there is rain falling with a "rather desolate uniformity", "upon the bay, the littoral, the mountains and the plains, and notably upon the Central Bog" instead of snow falling softly all over Ireland. To Cochran, Beckett thus subverts the passage's lyricism (11). Moreover, he takes away the passage's closing function. Beckett devotes the final words of the story to Belacqua's leaving the Alba's house in the morning, throwing away his boots and being urged to move on by a policeman (Cochran 11).[120] Hunter puts forward a similar argument. He states that Beckett does pick up on aspects of *Dubliners* in *More Pricks Than Kicks*, but that this is not to be taken as a mere imitation of Joyce. Instead, throughout the cycle, Beckett makes explicit what normally remains implicit in the Joycean short story (2007: 85). Hunter refers to a passage in 'Draff' where Hairy "could

[120] Pilling notes that, if Belacqua's throwing away his good boots is a reference to the galoshes in 'The Dead', this may be Beckett suggesting his need to rid himself of Joyce's influence (2011: 175). Pilling provides several instances in *More Pricks Than Kicks* which show that Beckett was explicitly not rewriting *Dubliners*. The sun, for example, is often mentioned in *More Pricks Than Kicks*: "a Dublin flooded with sunshine" (127), "the sun, that creature of habit" (158), etc. According to Pilling, this is one of Beckett's ways of not rewriting *Dubliners*, as rain is rarer in *More Pricks Than Kicks* – not including the rainfall in 'A Wet Night' – than it is in Joyce's cycle and then it would typically be in Dublin (215). Pilling also lists many examples of 'foreigness' in Beckett's cycle, such as the reference to 'Aschenputtel', the German version of the Grimm fairy tale 'Cinderella', in 'Yellow'. According to Pilling, this is "another way of indicating that this is not *Dubliners*, however many Dubliners may be in it" 215-6).

not throw off the impression that he was letting slip a rare occasion to feel something really stupendous, something that nobody had ever felt before" (Beckett 172). According to Hunter, Beckett makes the "constructed nature of the epiphanic moment" explicit and thus exposes the "implicatory sleight of hand by which the Joycean story achieves its complexity of effect" (86). He concludes that Beckett's early short stories can in fact all be read as counterpoints to Joyce's (88) and, as such, the stories in *More Pricks Than Kicks* can be viewed as Beckett starting to move past modernism (84). In other words, it is only by considering Beckett's book as a postmodern parody of *Dubliners* that the intelligence of the former work truly emerges (Hunter 2001: 230). From this point of view, one could also state that, with *More Pricks Than Kicks*, Beckett is moving away from the modernist short story cycle, and its most famous example *Dubliners*. As in *Dubliners*, where the thematic focus on alienation and paralysis is formally underscored by the connections and disruptions between the different stories, the cycle form also reinforces the fragmented urban reality presented in *More Pricks Than Kicks*. However, Beckett's approach to the form is different: as we have seen, his narrator explicitly refers to previous stories. Thus, whereas Joyce implies the links between the different stories of the cycle, Beckett makes them explicit. Similarly, there are gaps in and between the in Joyce's as well as Beckett's cycle. However, the difference lies again in Beckett making them explicit. Hunter defines gaps in Joyce as "apertures, silences that do not threaten the illusion of objectivity in the presentation", whereas the narrating voice in Beckett "is explicit about its act of omission, advertising what it leaves unsaid. There is no offer to maintain the objective stance to disguise the authorial sleight of hand" (2007: 85). In addition, whenever an epiphanic moment occurs in Beckett's cycle, as we have seen, its genuineness is undercut by laying bare the fact that it has been constructed.

In conclusion, all three Irish short story cycles discussed in this chapter focus on the same modernist themes of alienation and paralysis. Moreover, these works all focus on the urban individual, the inhabitant of Dublin in particular. However, some of Stephens's Dubliners find ways to escape from their state of inertia – whether as an actual escape or through fantasy or laughter – whereas Joyce's Dubliners all find themselves in dead-end situations. Beckett's Dubliner Belacqua is definitely trapped as well, but in *More Pricks Than Kicks* the seriousness of these modernist concerns is undercut by the emphasis on the futility of life and death that is predominant throughout the cycle.

3. The American Tradition: *Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio*

Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) is considered one of the archetypes of the short story cycle – not just in Ireland, but also internationally. Therefore, it may be interesting to compare the work with Sherwood Anderson's famous American cycle *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), with which it is often bracketed together in studies of the cycle form.[121] In my comparison of *Dubliners* and *Winesburg, Ohio*, I will focus on how these works present the influence of modernity community life. In addition, I will consider to what extent the cycle form and themes of alienation and paralysis are used differently in the Irish works discussed in this chapter and in what I consider to be their American counterpart.

As is the case with *Dubliners*, Anderson's cycle is first of all unified by setting, as all of the stories are set in the fictional Midwestern town of Winesburg, Ohio.[122] However, while the title of Joyce's book refers to the inhabitants of Dublin, the title of Anderson's work – originally followed by the subtitle *A Group of Tales of Ohio Small-Town Life* – puts more emphasis on the town itself. The fact that the cycle is named after a fictional town reminds one of early cycles which narrate the life of a community, such as Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and Barlow's *Irish Idylls*. However, unlike in these works, the reader is never able to visualize the complete geography of Anderson's Winesburg: the details suggest small-town life rather than give a precise overview (Mann 52). The map of the town included in the 1960 edition of the book illustrates this. Even though there are more than one hundred inhabitants of Winesburg and over fifty houses and buildings mentioned in the book, only three streets and eight places are indicated on this map (Mann 52). Moreover, as we will see, community plays quite a different role in Anderson's cycle than it does in narratives of community. In addition, thematically speaking, *Winesburg, Ohio* clearly has more in common with *Dubliners* and the other Irish short story cycles discussed in this chapter. As will become clear in what follows, variations on the familiar themes of isolation and paralysis can also be found in the American cycle. Finally, whereas narratives of community revolve around community life, *Winesburg, Ohio* centres around an actual recurring protagonist: George Willard, reporter for the *Winesburg Eagle*. He appears or is mentioned in almost every story, he is one of the few characters to develop throughout the volume and he resembles both the

[121] See, for instance, Ingram (1971), Mann (1989), Lundén (1999) and Nagel (2001). Nagel states that "[i]n English literature, James Joyce's *Dubliners* has served as an archetype of the genre [of the short story cycle], a role fulfilled in the United States by Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*" (2000: 9).
[122] Anderson based the mythical town of Winesburg, Ohio on his hometown, Clyde, Ohio.

narrator[123] and the old writer from the prologue[124] (Mann 54). In other words, one could see this cycle as a variation on the *bildungsroman* or the *künstlerroman*. Like the 'archetypal Dubliner' who matures throughout *Dubliners* or Belacqua who does quite the opposite in Beckett's cycle, George Willard ties *Winesburg, Ohio* together. Still, George is not the only character connecting the stories. Like Joyce's and Stephens's Dubliners, Anderson's Winesburgers share many similarities. Most importantly, they all have problems with establishing close relationships with others. From this point of view, one could state that the characters together function as a composite protagonist. According to Mann, Anderson's characters are generally more conscious of their situation than Joyce's. However, the Winesburgers cannot communicate these insights to anyone, except for George Willard (49). In fact, each story is about a specific character's struggle with alienation. In the end, George Willard manages to become a writer and communicate to his readers what the people of Winesburg are not able to express (Mann 50). Unlike Joyce, Anderson allows his central protagonist to escape from his surroundings. As we have seen, some of the characters in Stephens's *Here Are Ladies* are given the same privilege, but they escape through fantasy or laughter more often than they do in reality. Moreover, there are several characters in *Winesburg, Ohio* who are eventually able to connect with another person, for example Doctor Reefy in 'Paper Pills' and in 'Death', Elizabeth Willard in 'Death' and Helen White in 'Sophistication'. The most obvious difference between the Irish cycles discussed in this chapter and *Winesburg, Ohio* appears to be ability to eventually break out of isolation and paralysis. Still, before that happens, the general pattern of the Winesburg stories is quite similar to that of *Dubliners*, which consists of an individual's failed attempt to escape from paralysis. Irving Howe views the pattern of Anderson's cycle as follows: "There develops in one of the grotesques a rising lyrical excitement, usually stimulated to intensity by the presence of George Willard. At the moment before reaching a climax, this excitement is

[123] Dallas Marion Lemmon argues that the perspectives of the narrator and of the protagonist, George Willard, merge at the end of the book: "the narrator, without giving up his omniscience, moves closer and closer to a selective omniscience limited to seeing the world not only through George's eyes but also through his opinions and ideals" (1970: 176; qtd. in Mann 60). According to Lemmon, such a shift in point of view takes place in a number of short story cycles, for instance in *Dubliners* (1970: 176; qtd. in Mann 60). Mann argues that the narrator in *Dubliners* becomes increasingly less ironic and defensive in 'The Dead', as a result of which he can move closer to the world which he has distanced himself from before (60).

[124] As opposed to the other stories, the prologue, 'The Book of the Grotesque', is not set in Winesburg. It features a writer and an old carpenter and it is an introduction to themes such as the relationship between art and society, and the old writer's theory of the grotesque (Mann 52), about people who have built their lives around a certain truth and, as such, have "embraced […] a falsehood" (Anderson 25). The characters are called "grotesques" in the book, as their lives have been distorted by their inability to express themselves: because they cannot communicate with others, they have become, as Malcom Cowley calls them in the introduction to the 1960 edition of the book, "emotional cripples" (15).

frustrated by a fatal inability at communication and then it rapidly dissolves into its original diffuse base" (7). As in *Dubliners* and *Here Are Ladies*, the theme in Anderson's book becomes more powerful as a result of the repetition of situations in which individuals fail to connect (Mann 61). As is the case with the Irish cycles, in addition to unity by setting, character and theme, *Winesburg, Ohio* is unified through recurring imagery. For instance, in the same way that Joyce consistently makes use of dark and confined spaces to underscore the themes of paralysis and alienation in *Dubliners*, the theme of isolation in Anderson's cycle is enhanced by the descriptions of spaces throughout the book as "run-down and poorly or sparsely furnished, as claustrophobic, as unoccupied except for the protagonist, even as located in a precarious setting" (Mann 52). These themes are underscored by Christian and light and dark imagery. Moreover, in the same way that the theme of paralysis is emphasized by the use of the short story cycle form in the Irish works discussed in this chapter, the cycle form particularly suits the theme of isolation in *Winesburg, Ohio*. The form of the short story cycle with its simultaneous self-sufficiency and interdependence as well as its tension between unity and fragmentation illustrates the theme of "lives touching, never quite touching" very well.[125] Interestingly, both Anderson and Joyce commented on the fact that they were experimenting with a new form. Joyce called *Dubliners* a "series of epicleti" on "that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city" and Anderson stated that *Winesburg, Ohio* was the result of a "new looseness" he was looking for.[126] He stated that the stories were "individual tales but all about lives in some way connected" and that, through this method, he succeeded in "giving the feeling of the life of a boy growing into young manhood in a town".[127] Martha Curry notes that "there is a remarkable coincidence in the fact that in the opening decade of the twentieth century Joyce wrote a series of stories depicting the life of drab, isolated, and frustrated citizens of Dublin and that in the next decade Anderson wrote stories of the same kind of people in a small Midwestern American town" (236). Consequently, many critics have concluded that Anderson must have been influenced by Joyce when writing *Winesburg, Ohio*. However, Anderson's letters suggest that he did not meet Joyce or read any of his works until he visited Paris in the spring and summer of 1921 (Curry 236). If the first examples of modern short story cycles in English (Ingram 13-5) did

[125] Anderson, 1938 letter to Maxwell Perkins (qtd. in Mann 61).
[126] *Winesburg, Ohio* was not Anderson's first published work as was the case with *Dubliners* for Joyce. However, *Winesburg, Ohio* is considered to be Anderson's breakthrough work. Talking about the cycle form he believed to have invented ("It is a form in which I feel at ease. I invented it. It was mine", qtd. in Mann 9), he indicated that he hoped to develop it in several other books. Anderson never did develop the cycle form further himself, but – as opposed to Joyce – he did publish more works in the short story genre.
[127] Anderson, *Memoirs* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942) 289. Qtd. in Curry 1980: 242.

come about independently of one another,[128] this supports the idea that the cycle form is particularly suited to deal with modernist problems such as paralysis and isolation. Indeed, in the same way that Joyce wrote a chapter of the moral history of his country, Anderson wanted to express the "starved side of American small town life", in the hope that "these stories would, in the end, have the effect of breaking down a little the curious separateness of so much of life, these walls we build up about us…".[129] Anderson even saw his 'new loose form' as a better alternative than the novel to express American nationhood. In other words, both writers used the cycle form to give voice to the way in which international modernist concerns influenced their respective nations.

The most prevalent of these problems of modern man in both the Irish cycles and *Winesburg, Ohio* are paralysis and isolation. As already mentioned, Kennedy notes that cycles like *Dubliners*, in which characters inhabit the same locality,

> often evoke the sharpest sense of mutual estrangement; textual divisions correspond to absolute boundaries between one life and another. Figures who walk the same streets and whose stories appear side by side nevertheless remain oblivious to each other and unconscious of parallels between their own situations and those of other characters (1995: 196).

Moreover, in the same way that Zagarell has called *Dubliners* an anti-narrative of community, one could also view *Winesburg, Ohio* as such. On the surface, Anderson's cycle might appear a nostalgic depiction of a small American town between the Civil War and the turn of the century or, in other words, a narrative of community. As we have seen, the authors of these nineteenth-century regional works generally painted an idealized picture of what they imagined pre-industrial communities to be like. The negative features of community life, such as coerciveness, were ignored or toned down in these works. However, Anderson's cycle shows the constrictedness of small town life. In the second part of 'Godliness', for example, the narrator states that "in Winesburg it was said that [Louise Bentley] drank [and] took drugs" because she was often angry or silent (Anderson 1960 [1919]: 74-5), and in 'The Teacher' he says that "[t]he people of the town thought of [Kate Swift] as a confirmed old maid […] because she spoke sharply and went her own way" (162). Moreover, whereas the

[128] Both books were written ten years and published five years apart: *Dubliners* (1914) was largely written by 1904 and *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) by 1915 (Curry 241). Between February 1916 and December 1918, ten of the Winesburg stories were published in magazines, but – like Joyce – Anderson insisted on the unity of his cycle (Mann 50). William L. Philips indicates that the manuscript of *Winesburg, Ohio* shows that "from the first the Winesburg stories were conceived as complementary parts of a whole, centered in the background of a single community" (17-8).

[129] Anderson, *Memoirs* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942) 289. Qtd. in Curry 242.

rise of the modern world is generally a distant threat in narratives of community, the ailments of isolation and paralysis are all too real in *Winesburg, Ohio*. The community of Winesburg, which once bound men together in fraternity, is now "merely an institution external to [the characters'] lives" (Howe 4). Reid argues that Anderson's people are "lonely, restless, cranky. Social cohesion is absent in their mid-western town" (1977: 47-8). Thus, while Anderson's cycle may at first sight seem to narrate the life of a community, it actually tells the stories of alienated people who are as unable to break out of their stasis as Joyce's characters are in *Dubliners*. As Reid puts it, Anderson's cycle revolves around the duality of "a superficial appearance (and indeed the ideal possibility) of communal wholeness, and an underlying actual separateness" (47-8). The cycle form, with its typical tension between unity and fragmentation, appears to be particularly suited to convey this duality. The inhabitants of Winesburg all reside in the same small village, yet there are no instances of community to be found. Wing Biddlebaum in 'Hands', for instance, "did not think of himself as in any way a part of the life of the town where he had lived for twenty years" (Anderson 27). In 'Mother', to give another example, the narrator states that "[t]he communion between George Willard and his mother was outwardly a formal thing without meaning" (41). As is the case in *Dubliners*, the inhabitants of Winesburg are unable to break out of their isolation and communicate with others because they are trapped in a state of stasis. This inability to change the circumstances of one's life "is epitomized by Joyce's word 'paralysis' and by Anderson's word 'grotesque'" (Curry 247). As in *Dubliners*, the Winesburg characters often try to escape entrapment but eventually realize that they are incapable of doing so. Many of these epiphanies – or significant "moments" as Anderson called them (Curry 247) – in *Winesburg, Ohio* are preceded by a dramatic gesture. In 'Adventure', for instance, Alice Hindman runs naked through the town on a rainy night, only to realize at the end of the story that "many people must live and die alone" (120). Unlike 'the Dubliner' in Joyce's cycle, however, the protagonist in Anderson's volume is able to escape from Winesburg: George Willard leaves the town in the end, feeling "grown up" (234). Significantly, he goes away to become a writer, which suggests that he will be able to express himself and thus escape the fate of isolation. But he will also "fulfil the wishes of his grotesques [and] give form, expression and meaning to their isolated lives" (Conner 223). Thus, the most important reason why the Winesburg characters feel alienated from each other, their inability to communicate, symbolically ceases to exist with George Willard leaving the town.

In conclusion, Stephens, Joyce and Beckett as well as Anderson have used the cycle form to express the modernist experience of alienation and paralysis, respectively in Ireland and the United States. Like in the Irish cycles, all sense of community has been lost in *Winesburg, Ohio*. The characters in both the Irish works and Anderson's book are trapped in situations from which they cannot escape. Especially the Winesburgers are unable to establish relations with other individuals. In each cycle, the succession of the different examples of characters failing to escape their wasted lives (esp. in *Dubliners*) or failing to connect to others (esp. in *Winesburg, Ohio*) results in a general image of a state of desolation. However, in Anderson's cycle, who may have been more driven than Joyce to provide his readers with an elevating ending (Mann 49), the protagonist's escape from Winesburg and its paralysis symbolizes the possibility of connection and communication in the modern world.

Chapter IV
The Short Story Cycle in Mid-Century Ireland: 'Loose' Cycles by O'Flaherty, O'Connor, Ó Faoláin and Lavin and Brennan's *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin*

In the previous chapters, I have outlined an evolution of the Irish short story cycle from late nineteenth-century narratives of community such as Barlow's *Irish Idylls* to early twentieth-century modernist works such as Joyce's *Dubliners*. This development, as I will suggest in this chapter, is followed by a low point of the cycle form in mid-century Ireland, despite the considerable success of the Irish short story in this period. Not only do relatively few cycles appear to have been published in the middle years of the twentieth century, the cycles published in this period are generally also, as I will show, far more 'loosely' unified than their predecessors. In the first section of this chapter, I will investigate to what extent Liam O'Flaherty's *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories* (1929), Frank O'Connor's *Guests of the Nation* (1931), Seán Ó Faoláin's *Midsummer Night Madness* (1932) and Mary Lavin's *Tales from Bective Bridge* (1942) can be considered short story cycles. In the second section of this chapter, I will turn to Maeve Brennan's collection of short stories *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* (1997). Although this collection may not technically qualify as a cycle, as the stories were selected and arranged posthumously by an editor, the book does, as I will show, display many of the characteristics typical of short story cycles.

1. 'Loose' Cycles by O'Flaherty, O'Connor, Ó Faoláin and Lavin

1.1. O'Flaherty's *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories*

Liam O'Flaherty (1896, Inishmore – 1984, Dublin) is generally mentioned in the company of grand masters of the short story such as Frank O'Connor and Seán Ó Faoláin. Even though O'Flaherty himself preferred his novels to his short stories,[130] he published no less than three works of short fiction in his first decade as a writer: *Spring Sowing* (1924), *The Tent* (1926) and *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories* (1929) (O'Brien 1973: 92).[131] O'Flaherty's contemporaries O'Connor and Ó Faoláin made their respective debuts with

[130] O'Flaherty's debut, *Thy Neighbour's Wife* (1924), was in fact a novel, not a volume of short fiction. He published several other novels during the 1920s as well, for instance *The Black Soul* (1924), *Mr Gilhooley* (1926) and *The House of Gold* (1929).
[131] O'Flaherty's fourth short story collection, *Two Lovely Beasts*, followed in 1948.

volumes of short stories in the 1930s: O'Connor's *Guests of the Nation* appeared in 1931 and Ó Faoláin's *Midsummer Night Madness* was published in 1932. Whereas O'Connor's book as well as Ó Faoláin's, as we will see later on, revolves around the Irish Revolution, O'Flaherty's volumes of short fiction tend to focus on the life of Irish peasants. In other words, whereas his contemporaries focus on war and nation in their early works, O'Flaherty appears to return to the more traditional theme of life in the Irish countryside in his three volumes published in the 1920s.[132] He does not mock the Irish peasants, nor does he idealize their lives like many other Irish Revivalists. Rather, he realistically depicts peasant life as hard but dignified (Ingman 2009: 126). Particularly in *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories*, O'Flaherty echoes Moore's *The Untilled Field* – both in its bleak depiction of the life of peasants and its criticism of Irish peasant communities and their repressive nature (Ingman 129). In what follows, I will argue that *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories* can also be read as a short story cycle.

There are several elements that unify the stories in O'Flaherty's *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories*. Like *The Untilled Field*, O'Flaherty's volume is mainly set in the Irish countryside of the second half of the nineteenth century. The stories take place on rural farms or at sea; in villages in the West of Ireland or in fishing towns on the Aran Islands. Accordingly, the characters are peasants or fishermen. What strikes one immediately with respect to the characters in *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories* is that many of them have identical or similar names. For instance, several characters are named Martin, Michael, Bartley or Mary, and many of them have a nickname, for example starting with 'Red' (e.g. Red Michael, Red Barbara). Moreover, these characters also have certain traits in common. For instance, because of their hard lives, they look old despite their age (e.g. Red Michael in 'The Child of God', Kate in 'The Painted Woman'). They also tend to be quite fickle: they often change their minds, going from reverence to contempt or from kindness to cruelty without any apparent reason. In other words, as is the case in *The Untilled Field*, similar types of characters recur throughout *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories*, which contributes to the unity of the book. O'Flaherty's book can thus be said to make use of composite protagonists. The main unifying element in the work is the recurrence of certain themes, such as birth, old age and death, the forces of nature and, as in Moore's cycle, emigration, poverty,

[132] By contrast, O'Flaherty also published a number of war novels – *The Martyr* (1923), *The Informer* (1925), *The Assassin* (1928) and *The Return of the Brute* (1929) – in the 1920s. *Insurrection* followed in 1950. O'Flaherty himself had joined the Irish Guards in 1915, but was seriously injured in 1917 and discharged in 1918. After the First World War, he joined the Irish Republican Army, pushing for Irish independence. He opposed the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty.

religious oppression and the narrow-mindedness of peasant communities. Particularly in stories such as 'The Fairy Goose', 'The Child of God' and 'Red Barbara', O'Flaherty echoes Moore by emphasizing the repressive nature of community life and peasant communities' hostility toward artists or anyone else who deviates from the prevailing standards (Ingman 2009: 129). For instance, people criticize Kate because she paints her face and lips in 'The Painted Woman', Maggie's baby is killed for fear of the reaction of the parish in 'The Ditch', the community in 'The Fairy Goose' turns against its beloved goose for fear of the priest, in 'The Child of God' the priest expels Peter from the parish for practising his art, while Joseph in 'Red Barbara' is ostracized by the people and by his own wife because he is different. Despite O'Flaherty's obvious critique of peasant communities in these stories, the predominant tone of the book is still quite nostalgic: one that celebrates the stability of rural life. O'Flaherty's personification of nature in stories such as 'The Oar' and 'The Stream' as well as his use of animal protagonists in 'Birth' (a cow), 'The Blackbird's Mate' (two blackbirds), 'Prey' (a donkey and a dog), 'The Fairy Goose' (a goose), 'The Black Rabbit' (rabbits and cats) and 'The Little White Dog' (a bull and a dog) enhances this view. Whereas Moore's use of the cycle form in *The Untilled Field* was political, O'Flaherty's *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories*, as James H. O'Brien suggests, can be seen as a "response to a life that had been mangled or smothered by industrialization, cities, and wars" (1973: 94). In other words, the final say of nature over human life and strife can be considered to form the governing idea of the stories. The vision of nature as a healing force even emerges in 'The Mountain Tavern', one of the two stories in the volume that deal with war.[133] This story, set during the Irish Civil War, is about two Republican soldiers who are carrying their wounded Commandant toward a mountain tavern, where they hope to find refuge. The tavern, however, has been burnt to the ground. They cannot turn to the woman who owns the tavern either, as she blames the Republicans as well as the Free-Staters for the loss of her home and livelihood. In the end, the wounded man dies and his two comrades are taken by the Free-Staters as prisoners, after which "[n]ight fell and snow fell, fell like soft soothing white flower petals on the black ruin and on the black spot where the corpse had lain" (O'Flaherty 1929: 108). With this story, O'Flaherty does not only prefigure O'Connor and Ó Faoláin's early volumes of short stories on war and nation, he also echoes Joyce's *Dubliners* by letting snow cover the land at the end of 'The Mountain Tavern'. In the same way that snow can be viewed as unifying Ireland in 'The Dead', it can be seen as restoring the damage that was done by war in

[133] The other story that deals with war in *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories* is 'The Alien Skull', which is set during the First World War.

O'Flaherty's story. Famously, the ending of 'The Dead' unifies Joyce's entire cycle. Similarly, the ending of 'The Mountain Tavern' underscores the unity of O'Flaherty's volume. The story may not conclude the work – it is the sixth of a total of twenty stories. But the fact that 'The Mountain Tavern' lays its final emphasis on the prevailing power of nature, makes its title a fitting one for the book as a whole, even if it is a story of war.[134]

Despite the presence of this overall philosophy, there are also elements in the book which disrupt its unity. Like in *The Untilled Field*, some stories in *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories* have an urban setting. Moore's transition from rural stories to urban ones in *The Untilled Field* coincides with an evolution in focus from community to individual throughout the cycle. Therefore, as we have seen, the presence of these urban stories contributes to the unity of Moore's volume rather than disturbing it. In *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories*, on the other hand, the urban stories rather appear to work against the book's unity, as they do not fit into the picture of the work as a whole. O'Flaherty's work has an explicitly rural focus and the urban stories stand out for several reasons. The stories are not placed together, nor do they introduce or conclude the volume, as is the case in *The Untilled Field*. Moreover, the stories take place in Dublin and deal with urban people and their problems. The protagonist in 'The Fall of Joseph Timmins' finds himself lusting after a maid because his pious wife is frigid, and 'The Sinner' is about Julia's desire for her husband, who pursues other women and leaves her untouched. What makes the experiences in these stories urban is not the fact that they are about adultery, but the way this subject is dealt with. In the rest of the book such themes are viewed in light of the reactions of the community or the parish priest. In O'Flaherty's urban stories, on the other hand, the way in which the protagonists cope with their own problems is central. Consequently, the presence of these stories works against the unity of the book, which makes for what I call a 'looser' kind of cycle.

In short, I believe that *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories* can be read as a short story cycle because of its focus on the power of nature as well as its recurring settings, themes and use of composite characters. Moreover, by focusing on the life of Irish peasants, O'Flaherty echoes Moore's *The Untilled Field*. Thus, O'Flaherty can be said to hark back to Moore by using the cycle form to address similar themes. However, as we have seen, there are also elements in *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories* which disrupt the unity of the work as a whole, as a result of which it is better described as a loose type of short story cycle.

[134] However, it should be noted that the suffix 'and Other Stories' to the title works against the unity of the volume. As we have seen, short story cycles generally carry titles that capture the book as a whole.

1.2. O'Connor's *Guests of the Nation* and Ó Faoláin's *Midsummer Night Madness*

Whereas O'Flaherty touches only briefly upon the themes of war and nation in *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories*, the first volumes of short fiction of his contemporaries Frank O'Connor (pseudonym of Michael O'Donovan; 1903, Cork – 1966, Dublin) and Seán Proinsias Ó Faoláin (born as John Francis Whelan; 1900, Cork – 1991, Dublin) centrally revolve around the Irish Revolution. Published more than a decade after the fighting, O'Connor's *Guests of the Nation* (1931) and Ó Faoláin's *Midsummer Night Madness* (1932) "embody [the authors'] mature reflection on their youthful involvement with the republicans and reveal their disillusionment with the way the Irish state had subsequently developed" (Ingman 2009: 133). As such, these works may have spoken more directly to the new Ireland and its problems than did O'Flaherty's *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories* (O'Brien 93). In other words, both O'Connor and Ó Faoláin, who were collaborating closely in the 1930s, made their debut with a collection strongly focused on the Irish Revolution. In this section, I will compare *Guests of the Nation* and *Midsummer Night Madness*. In doing so, I will examine to what extent this specific thematic focus on war and nation increases their unity and whether they can be read as short story cycles. The stories in both O'Connor's and Ó Faoláin's collections take place during the Anglo-Irish War and the Civil War. They are set in County Cork; some in the city, but most of them in towns or the countryside and mountains surrounding them (Mallow, Kilcrea, Macroom, Bantry, Youghal, etc.). Both works feature recurring characters which help tie the stories together, such as Alec Gorman (three stories) and Eric Nolan (two stories) in *Guests of the Nation* and anti-hero Stevey Long (two stories) in *Midsummer Night Madness*. In addition to setting and character, another important unifying element in these two works is of course their thematic focus on war and nation.

In O'Connor's *Guests of the Nation*, the protagonists are generally Republican rebels, either in the Anglo-Irish War or in the Civil War, who find themselves in one way or another confronted with the adverse effects of war. Especially the effect of war on human relationships functions as a connecting thread throughout the work. Paul Delaney argues that O'Connor most likely modelled *Guests of the Nation* on Turgenev's early short story cycle *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* (59). According to O'Connor's biographer, James Matthews, writer and teacher Daniel Corkery introduced the book to him. It became O'Connor's blueprint for the organization of his stories in *Guests of the Nation*.[135] As we have seen in the second chapter, *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* was Moore's model for *The Untilled Field* as

[135] James Matthews, *Voices: A Life of Frank O'Connor* (Dublin: Atheneum, 1983) 20, 68. Qtd. in Delaney 59.

well.[136] It could be argued, then, that with *Guests of the Nation* O'Connor did have the intention to create a unified book.[137] The previously mentioned settings, characters and themes that recur throughout the stories confirm this. As a result, I would argue that *Guests of the Nation* can in fact be read as a short story cycle. However, there are many elements present in the volume that work against its unity as well. Several stories in the book stand apart from the others because they have a different subject matter than war. Examples are 'After Fourteen Years' (Nicholas returns to his home town after fourteen years), 'The Late Henry Conran' (Henry emigrates to America and is proclaimed dead in his son's marriage announcement), 'The Sisters' (Kate, who keeps her mad sister indoors, is found dead)[138] and 'The Procession of Life' (Larry looks back on the confusion and anxiety of growing up). Moreover, the mode of narration varies throughout the work. The majority of the stories have a first-person narrator. In a number of those, the I-narrator tells his own story in retrospect. An example is the famous title story 'Guests of the Nation', in which Bonaparte recounts how his experience of being forced to execute the two English prisoners he had befriended changed him forever. In other stories, a narrator reminiscent of the oral storytelling tradition is used, for example in 'The Late Henry Conran': "'I've another little story for you,' said the old man. 'I hope it's a good one,' said I" (O'Connor 1993 [1931]: 175). In stories such as 'Jo' and 'Alec', the tone, expressing the joy of combat, is so cheerful that the balance between participation and perspective is lost (Peterson 63). Ingman points out that these stories, which are related almost entirely through dialogue, are different from O'Connor's later work (2009: 132). Other stories in the volume – such as 'September Dawn', in which the protagonist is disillusioned with the futility of war – are more characteristic of the mature O'Connor, as they make use of Flaubert's technique of conveying a character's internal consciousness (Ingman 133). The tone is also more realistic and suited to the tragic subject. In short, *Guests of the Nation* has a quite clear thematic focus than because of its focus on war. However, the varying modes of narration and tone throughout *Guests of the Nation* make it a loose short story cycle.

[136] Incidentally, just like Moore dedicated an early essay to the Russian author, Turgenev was also the subject of O'Connor's first published essay, which was written in Irish and was awarded a prize by the Gaelic League (Matthews 392; qtd. in Delaney 59).

[137] Note that O'Connor named his collection after the story 'Guests of the Nation'. This may not be a title that captures the work as a whole, but the fact that he did not add 'and Other Stories', as is the case with for instance *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories*, could be taken as an expression of the volume's unity. That is, it could be meant as an indication that the themes which are dealt with in 'Guests of the Nation' recur throughout the work as a whole.

[138] Despite O'Connor's later criticism on Joyce's *Dubliners* in *The Lonely Voice* (1963), it is significant that he would entitle a short story about two sisters, paralysis and death 'The Sisters'.

The disillusionment with war which shines through in a number of O'Connor's stories, becomes a more stable connecting thread in Ó Faoláin's *Midsummer Night Madness*. As a result, not only did the IRA take offence at the book, it was also immediately banned after publication under the 1929 Censorship Act (Ingman 2009: 134). The theme of idealism turned into disillusionment finds expression in the composite protagonist that emerges in Ó Faoláin's collection. The main characters of the stories that make up *Midsummer Night Madness* are mostly young men whose idealism leads them to fight for their nation but turns into disillusionment in the end. Together, the protagonists of the different stories form the composite protagonist of the work as a whole. Maurice Harmon describes this figure as a romantic young rebel who initially responds to the call of fighting for independence but ultimately comes to question it, whereupon he embarks upon a search for a purpose behind the movement (64-5). This search starts in the early stories of the collection, which take place during the Anglo-Irish War, such as 'Midsummer Night Madness' and 'Fugue'. In the title story, I-narrator John discovers that Stevey Long has been tyrannizing Henn, the elderly Anglo-Irish man whose house he is staying in, instead of taking on the Black and Tans. Significantly, the narrator ends up pitying Henn, even though he has been brought up to hate him and his class (Ingman 135). In 'Fugue', which depicts two gunmen fleeing from the Tans, the I-narrator expresses his disillusionment with war and his desire to settle down. The quest fittingly ends in the final story of the book, 'The Patriot', which deals with the Civil War. It is noteworthy that the work as a whole moves on from the Anglo-Irish War to the Civil War, involving an evolution in time as well as in the composite protagonist's stance. His change in attitude throughout the volume is underscored by this contrast between the Anglo-Irish War, a "period of national unity and optimism", and the Civil War, a "period of disillusion and bitterness" (Harmon 65). In the closing story of the book, rebel Bernie finally chooses his concrete love for Norah over abstract patriotism, personified by extreme nationalist Edward Bradley (Ingman 134-5). The thematic unity of the work as a whole is underscored by cross-references between the different stories. The narrative thread about anti-hero Stevey Long reaches a conclusion in the last but one story, 'The Death of Stevey Long', and the latter story also clearly connects with 'The Bombshop'. While on the run from the Tans, Stevey discovers the body of the woman who was killed in the preceding story: "He peeped through the keyhole and there before a warm fire he saw an old woman sitting bold upright in her chair. […] He laid his hand on her shoulder – on her face – on her left breast. She was dead" (Ó Faoláin 1982 [1932]: 139). In 'The Bombshop', the reader learned about a group of revolutionaries who, instead of performing heroic acts, end up leaving their bombshop after

having killed the elderly lady who supported them. This story concludes with the image of Mother Dale, whom "they left seated before the warm fire, staring into its flames" (123). The thematic focus which unifies *Midsummer Night Madness*, underscored by these cross-references, as well as the presence of a composite protagonist and the shared County Cork setting allow Ó Faoláin's debut to be read as a short story cycle.[139]

Nevertheless, the volume contains elements which work against its unity as well. The second story, 'Lilliput', for example, is clearly the odd one out. Although it also takes place during the Anglo-Irish War, the story has a different focus: instead of narrating the story of a rebel, 'Lilliput' zooms in on the life of a poor woman, whose husband is in jail, as a result of which she has to live in a cart with her three children. Narration is not constant throughout this book either: some stories have an editorial narrator, while others display modernist focalization. Ingman argues that the speaking voice of oral tradition "becomes transformed into the perspectivalism of the modernist narrator" in stories like 'Midsummer Night Madness' (Ingman 2009: 136). 'The Small Lady', to give another example, is opened by a traditional storyteller: "Three days after the disappearance of Mrs Sydney Browne this scandalous ballad – I dare not give it in full – was being sung in every market town in Munster" (Ó Faoláin 65). However, as Ingman has noticed, the main characters of the story, Bella and Denis, are partly portrayed by way of stream-of-consciousness techniques (136).

In conclusion, whereas O'Connor's *Guests of the Nation* is a relatively loose cycle because it includes both glamourized war stories about characters who love the thrill of the fight and stories about those who are disillusioned with the revolution, Ó Faoláin appears to have created a more unified cycle. In addition to its thematic unity, *Midsummer Night Madness* can also be seen to have a progressive argument, which is underscored by cross-references. Still, some of the stories in the volume seem to be incongruous, as a result of which I still prefer to view Ó Faoláin's *Midsummer Night Madness* as a loose cycle, albeit one that is closer to the 'tight' cycles on the continuum. It is clear, however, that Ó Faoláin's book resembles the modern short story cycles discussed in the previous chapter more closely than *Guests of the Nation* and *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories*, which rather present a return to Turgenev – directly or via Moore.

[139] Note that, like O'Connor, Ó Faoláin named his collection after one of the stories, i.e. 'Midsummer Night Madness'. Similarly, this could be taken as an expression of the volume's unity. See note 137.

1.3. Lavin's *Tales from Bective Bridge*

Like O'Connor and Ó Faoláin, Mary Josephine Lavin (1912, Walpole, Massachusetts – 1996, Dublin) made her debut with a collection of short stories. Unlike *Guests of the Nation* and *Midsummer Night Madness*, Lavin's *Tales from Bective Bridge* (1942) centres on the lives of people in Ireland's rural mid-lands. The title of the volume reminds one of the narratives of community discussed in the first chapter, evoking as it does the area around Bective in County Meath. However, whereas works such as Barlow's *Irish Idylls* depict the life of a specific community, the ten stories in *Tales from Bective Bridge* focus on separate characters in different, mostly unspecified, locales. Yet because of its strong thematic focus on love, family ties and human relationships in general, I will argue, Lavin's book is unified to such a degree that it can be considered a short story cycle.[140]

Although the title of Lavin's debut creates expectations for a certain degree of unity, there are no settings or characters which explicitly recur throughout the work. Still, *Tales from Bective Bridge* ties together the various, and often unspecified, Irish locations as well as the different characters by its focus on private human interaction. The situations in which the characters find themselves may be different in every story, but they all emphasize the way people interact in the context of families, local communities, love relationships or society in general. For instance, the opening story 'Lilacs' is about a family feud over a smelly dunghill, which is their main source of income. At the onset of the story, Phelim's family are ashamed and complain to him about the fact that "people can smell [the dunghill] from the other end of town" (Lavin 1996 [1942]: 1). When he dies, his wife Ros decides to keep dealing in manure, much to the regret of daughters Kate and Stacey. When Ros dies as well, the eldest daughter Kate in turn takes her place. Finally, when Kate gets married and moves out, Stacey reveals her plans to replace the dunghill with odoriferous lilac trees to her father's solicitor. The latter reminds her that the manure is her source of income. 'Sarah', to give another example, focuses on the protagonist's position in the community. She has "a bit of a bad name" (43), because she has three sons out of wedlock. Still, her neighbours do not condemn her because

[140] Theresa Wray also looks at *Tales from Bective Bridge* as a collection of interconnected stories in "Mary Lavin's First Short Story Collection *Tales From Bective Bridge*". See *The Irish Short Story: Traditions and Trends*, eds. Elke D'hoker and Stephanie Eggermont. Reimagining Ireland, vol. 63, ed. Eamon Maher (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015) 235-56.
In addition to two novels which could alternatively be viewed as cycles – *The House in Clewe Street* (1945) and *Mary O'Grady* (1950) – Lavin also published five stories, each of them dealing with the Grimes family. As these stories were never published together but do fit in a sequential pattern, they form what Suzanne Ferguson calls an "anti-sequence" (2003: 107). For an analysis of this group of stories as a whole, and the links and inconsistencies between them, see D'hoker 2013.

she is a hard worker who never misses Mass. However, women who are not long married or have grown sons do not hire her to scrub for them. In other words, the community knows about – and even accepts – Sara's promiscuity, but the women are cautious when their own husbands and sons are concerned. Kathleen, who is newly married and new to the village, deliberately flaunts the advice the women give her: she does hire Sarah, who after a while turns out to be pregnant again. When Kathleen receives an anonymous letter naming her husband Oliver as the father, she informs Sarah's brothers. Up to this point, Pat and Joseph have accepted their sister's public secret, because she works as their housekeeper. However, now that the news is out in the open, they feel obliged to throw her out of the house and on to the street, as a result of which Sarah and the child die. In these stories and throughout *Tales from Bective Bridge*, public opinion and social control are clearly a dominant force, weighing on people and their relationships. Rather than returning to the idealized view of community displayed by narratives of community, Lavin's book exposes the repressive nature of provincial environments. However, whereas a work such as *The Untilled Field* marks a transition from a focus on community toward individual, Lavin takes a different road: *Tales from Bective Bridge* deals with individual characters, but focuses on their relationships with others. In this respect, Lavin's cycle bears closer resemblance to books like *Guests of the Nation* and *Midsummer Night Madness*, which depict the effects of war on human relationships. The major difference here is that, while O'Connor and Ó Faoláin appeal to the central theme of war and nation to unify their volumes, Lavin makes the interaction between people in itself the main focus of her collection. Significantly, however, many of the characters in *Tales from Bective Bridge* suffer loneliness and paralysis within the family, relationship, community or society they are part of. In 'At Sallygap', the reader learns that Manny abandoned his dream of escaping and living an artist's life in Paris years ago. Instead, he stayed in Dublin for his sweetheart Annie. However, today he finds himself stuck in a conventional life as a shopkeeper as well as in a loveless marriage: "[…] South King Street was a dungeon in which he was imprisoned for life" (82). His wife is so fed up with his ever-lasting timidity that she even fantasizes about him beating her. Although the rural landscape of Sallygap briefly appears to offer Manny some relief, by the end of the story he comes to realize that there is no escape possible from his wife's loathing of him: "[…] there was no sanctuary from hatred such as he saw in Annie's eyes […]. She had him imprisoned forever in her hatred" (93). A character who has reached a similar state of paralysis is Agnes Holland, the protagonist of the first story Lavin ever wrote. 'Miss Holland' deals with a lonely genteel spinster who moves into a boarding house after the death of her father. She soon finds that

there is a gap between herself and her vulgar fellow lodgers. She desperately makes attempts at conciliation, but they continue to ostracize her. When her final effort to make a joke about a neighbourhood cat fails because one of the boarders turns out to have taken a shot at the animal, she stops trying and decides to protect herself from people like these in the future. Consequently, her isolation becomes even greater at the end of the story than it was at the beginning. Lavin's recurring use of such concerns throughout *Tales from Bective Bridge* suggests that the volume is far less conventional than critics have made it out to be.[141] Furthermore, contrary to what O'Connor's famous condemnation of her short stories in *The Lonely Voice* (1963)[142] might imply, it is clear that Lavin's domestic subject matter does not prevent her from addressing universal issues. In the closing story of *Tales from Bective Bridge*, she even deals with a theme that is prevalent in O'Connor and Ó Faoláin's cycles, namely the futility of war. Admittedly, the story does not deal with the Irish Revolution, but with the First World War. Still, what matters here is the fact that in Lavin's story such a public issue is viewed privately: 'The Dead Soldier' is about a mother who is terrified by the imagined ghost of her son who died in the war. Thus, Lavin's collection is unified through its focus on human interaction within the domestic sphere. In addition, this thematic unity is enhanced by the emphasis on universal concerns such as loneliness throughout the work. In this respect, *Tales from Bective Bridge* could be seen as a short story cycle, albeit a very loose one.

In conclusion, the 'loose' cycles by the mid-century masters of the short story discussed in this chapter can be said to have considerably less unity than early twentieth-century modernist volumes such as Joyce's *Dubliners*. A possible explanation for the relative scarcity of the cycle in this period may be the fact that no strong novel tradition existed in Ireland at that time.[143] As the genre of the short story was valued very highly, there was perhaps no need for highly unified works of short fiction to increase sales. Another reason may have been that these mid-century writers were less influenced by Joyce than later generations. The ending of O'Flaherty's story 'The Mountain Tavern' does recall 'The Dead' and one of the stories in O'Connor's *Guests of the Nation* is called 'The Sisters', but these

[141] Anne Fogarty makes a compelling case that, "in prolonging the artistic experimentalism of the early decades of the twentieth century" in works like *Tales from Bective Bridge*, Lavin may be aligned with "what critics now dub 'intermodernism', a belated modernism that is practiced by writers between the two world wars into the 1940s and 1950s and beyond, and takes on characteristics of its own" (2013: 52).
[142] See 'The Girl at the Gaol Gate', chapter eleven of O'Connor's *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (London: Macmillan, 1963) 202-13.
[143] See, for instance, the fifth chapter of Derek Hand's *A History of the Irish Novel* (Cambridge: University Press, 2011).

authors clearly write back to Moore and Turgenev rather than Joyce. Ó Faoláin's *Midsummer Night Madness* can be said to bear closer resemblance to the modern short story cycles discussed in the previous chapter, although it is still a rather loose cycle which is mainly unified by the themes of nation and war. Lavin's *Tales from Bective Bridge* is not at all a tightly unified cycle either, but echoes of its thematic move toward domesticity will, as we will see, return in later short story cycles. Lavin focuses on family, relationships, community and society, while at the same time addressing the concerns that are central to works such as Joyce's *Dubliners*, rather than depicting the idealized life of a specific community as in the nineteenth-century narratives of community. This approach, as I will show in the following section, can also be found in Maeve Brennan's short fiction.

2. Brennan's *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin*

2.1. Brennan: Biography

Maeve Brennan was born on 6 January 1917 in the Dublin suburb of Ranelagh. Her parents were avid Irish Republicans: Maeve's mother changed her name from Anastasia to Una to support the Irish language, and her father, Robert, was deeply involved in the 1916 Easter Rising and the subsequent political turmoil of the early twentieth century. He fought against the British during the Irish War of Independence and then on de Valera's side during the Civil War. Because of his political activity, Robert was imprisoned twice between 1916 and 1920. When Maeve was born, he was in jail in England and, when she was growing up, the family house was raided by Free Staters in search of her father. In 1933, Robert was appointed Secretary of the Irish Legation, as a result of which the entire Brennan family moved to Washington. Maeve obtained a degree in English and moved to New York, where she worked as a copywriter for *Harper's Bazaar*. When the family returned to Ireland at the end of the Second World War, she remained in the United States. In 1949, Brennan joined the staff of *The New Yorker*, where she would work for nearly thirty years. Under the pseudonym 'The Long-Winded Lady' she wrote sketches about New York life in 'The Talk of the Town' section. She also contributed fashion notes, essays, book reviews and short stories. Brennan's stories began to appear in *The New Yorker* in the 1950s. She became a popular author in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, whereas in her native Ireland she was virtually unknown during her lifetime. In 1969, forty-seven of her *New Yorker* sketches were published in a book entitled *The Long-Winded Lady*. In the same year, her first work of short stories, *In*

and Out of Never-Never Land, appeared as well. *Christmas Eve*, her second volume of short stories, was published in 1974. The stories from both collections originally appeared in *The New Yorker*. Brennan died in a nursing home in New York on 1 November 1993. In 1997, four years after her death, *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* appeared, which gathered her short stories set in Dublin. *The Long-Winded Lady* was reissued one year later. Brennan's novella *The Visitor*, completed while she was working at *Harper's Bazaar* in the 1940s, was discovered among publishers' papers in 1997 and appeared posthumously in 2000. In the same year, *The Rose Garden: Short Stories* was published, a collection of a number of her *New Yorker* stories, set both in New York and in Dublin. In 2004, Angela Bourke published a biography of Maeve Brennan entitled *Wit, Style and Tragedy: an Irish Writer in New York*.[144]

2.2. *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin*

The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin, published posthumously in 1997, brings together twenty of Brennan's stories which were published in *The New Yorker* between February 1953 and March 1973 for the first time, and one story – 'The Poor Men and Women' – which first appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* in April 1952. All of the stories were previously collected by Brennan herself, although not in the same book of short fiction. Sixteen of the stories already appeared together in *In and Out of Never-Never Land* (1969) and the other five stories were published together in *Christmas Eve* (1974).[145] Both collections are out of print. *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* is made up of three clusters of stories, each dealing with a Dublin family living in the Ranelagh suburb. The first cluster consists of seven stories which have a first-person narrator called Maeve and are usually read as autobiographical sketches. The second cluster is made up of six stories about the couple Rose and Hubert Derdon. Finally, the third cluster, which contains eight stories,

[144] Based on William Maxwell's introduction to *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* (1997), and Heather Ingman's entry on Maeve Brennan in *Irish Women's Fiction: From Edgeworth to Enright* (2013).

[145] The sixteen stories from *In and Out of Never-Never Land* are 'The Morning after the Big Fire', 'The Old Man of the Sea', 'The Barrel of Rumors', 'The Day We Got Our Own Back', 'The Lie', 'The Devil in Us', 'The Clever One', 'A Young Girl Can Spoil Her Chances', 'A Free Choice', 'The Drowned Man', 'The Twelfth Wedding Anniversary', 'The Carpet with the Big Pink Roses on It', 'The Shadow of Kindness', 'The Sofa', 'The Eldest Child' and 'Stories of Africa'. The collection contains six more stories, which are not set in Dublin but in and around Manhattan.
The five stories from *Christmas Eve* are: 'The Poor Men and Women', 'An Attack of Hunger', 'Family Walls', 'Christmas Eve' and 'The Springs of Affection'. The collection contains eight more stories, not set in Dublin either but in and around Manhattan.

revolves around the couple Delia and Martin Bagot.[146] The twenty-one stories in question were selected and arranged by Christopher Carduff of Houghton Mifflin Company. The introduction was written by William Maxwell, who was Brennan's editor for twenty years as well as her long-time friend.

It is true that *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* as a whole does not strictly qualify as a short story cycle, since the stories were selected and arranged posthumously by an editor. Still, the stories from the three clusters, even though they were published individually, already formed three series of stories in *The New Yorker*. The seven Maeve stories were all published between 1952 and 1953, four of the six Rose stories appeared between 1962 and 1964,[147] and the eight Delia stories were all published between 1964 and 1972. Because of their shared subject matter, the readers of *The New Yorker* will undoubtedly have recognized the stories as part of series. As already mentioned, Brennan collected her Dublin stories herself in two works of short fiction as well.[148] Moreover, the volume as a whole, as I will argue in the following section, displays many of the characteristics typical of short story cycles. In addition, because of its form, its Dublin setting and its subtitle, Brennan's *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* also invites comparison with Joyce's famous cycle *Dubliners*. Therefore, I will conclude this chapter with a comparison of both works.

2.2.1. *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* as an 'Unconventional' Short Story Cycle

Brennan's *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* as a whole is unified in various ways. First of all, as the suffix to the title suggests, all of the stories are set in Dublin, more specifically in the suburb of Ranelagh where the author spent her childhood years. The Maeve stories take place in the small brick family house on a dead-end street with a tennis club and a garage beyond the garden wall. Moreover, both the Rose and Delia stories are set in a similar modest red-brick house in Ranelagh. Secondly, there are certain types of character that recur throughout the volume. Each of the three clusters has its own set of characters. In the first cluster, the main characters are the members of I-narrator Maeve's family: her mother and

[146] Henceforth, I will refer to the stories from the first cluster as the 'Maeve stories', to the stories from the second cluster as the 'Rose stories' and to the stories from the third cluster as the 'Delia stories'.
[147] The other two Rose stories have deviating dates of publication: 'The Poor Men and Women', as already mentioned, already appeared in 1952 (in *Harper's Bazaar*), and 'Family Walls' was not published until 1973.
[148] The seven Maeve stories were all published in *In and Out of Never-Never Land* (1969), together with three of the Rose stories and six of the Delia stories. However, the three other Rose stories – 'The Poor Men and Women' (1952), 'An Attack of Hunger' (1962) and 'Family Walls' (1973) – and the two other Delia stories – 'Christmas Eve' (1972) and 'The Springs of Affection' (1972) – only appeared in *Christmas Eve* (1974). Three of the five stories in Brennan's second collection, *Christmas Eve*, had obviously not yet been published in *The New Yorker* when her first collection, *In and Out of Never-Never Land*, appeared. The other two could have been included in the first collection but were not.

father, her elder sister Emer, her younger sister Derry and her little brother Robert. The main characters in the second cluster are Rose and Hubert Derdon. They have a son, John, who has left home to become a priest. The main characters of the third cluster are the Bagot family, consisting of Delia, Martin, their two daughters, Lily and Margaret, and three stray animals: two cats, Rupert and Minnie, and one dog, Bennie. Delia and Martin also had a son, Jimmy, but he died when he was three days old. Particularly the characters in the Rose and the Delia stories tend to display similar features, because both clusters, as we will see, deal with characters who are trapped in unhappy marriages. Thirdly, like in the other works discussed in this chapter, theme is the most important unifying element in Brennan's volume as a whole. Throughout the three clusters of stories, recurring themes include love, relationships, marriage, family and life and death. In this respect, Brennan emphasizes the same domestic issues as Lavin in *Tales from Bective Bridge*. In the Maeve stories, the focus lies on childhood reminiscences, as the first-person narrator looks back on the time she was growing up in Dublin. Although Maeve's father is on the run during most of these years because of the political situation[149] and the constraints imposed by Irish society in the first half of the twentieth century also play an important part in these stories, the tone of the first cluster is still a fairly light one. Both the Rose and Delia stories, on the other hand, deal with unhappy marriages where love has been replaced by gameplay between husband and wife. In both clusters, the husband regrets the marriage, while the wife always complies but at the same times plays the martyr, and neither of them ever truly addresses the problems they are having. In the stories about the Derdons as well as in those about the Bagots, the reader moves in and out of the consciousness of the family members. This provides us with a more complete picture of their lives. The reader learns that Rose fears her husband and is fixed on his remoteness and that Hubert, in turn, is dismissive of his wife because of her insecurity and her country ways. While Hubert goes off to work as a sales clerk, Rose is bound to the house and dreams of the return of her son, who was all she had. Her husband is completely unsympathetic: according to him, she is responsible for their son's leaving the house because of her possessive behaviour toward him. In addition, Rose still finds it hard to come to terms with the loss of her loving father, who died when she was ten years old, after which she was left with a mother who was very hard on her. Consequently, the Rose stories are quite dark in tone. The third cluster of stories is somewhat more hopeful, because Delia does experience moments of happiness with her children. Still, Delia and Martin's marriage is disappointing as

[149] For instance, 'The Day We Got Our Own Back' narrates how Free Staters raid the family house while Maeve's father is on the run.

well: he is fed up with her timidity and apprehension, and she feels useless. They have grown apart to such an extent that they have separate bedrooms. The reader learns that Martin is not sure whether his family is what keeps him going or what holds him down. That is why he usually only comes home after the other family members have gone to sleep. Because her husband purposely avoids her, Delia is terribly lonely and her children and pets are all she has. Thus, the women protagonists from the second and third cluster of stories are the most clear example of a recurring type of character throughout the work. Rose and Delia, who are both financially dependent on their husbands, suffer from an inferiority complex: they feel that Hubert and Martin are too clever for them. To cope with all this, as well as with the loss of their sons, both women resort to daydreaming. Rose has two recurring daydreams and both dreams "ended at the moment when John became her own again, only hers" (Brennan 1997: 155). In the first dream, her son comes back to her and, in the second one, he has not gone away at all, he has died: "It had not been his fault, after all. He had not wanted to leave her. […] [S]he visited his grave every day, and sat beside it for hours, and wore black, like a widow. When she cried, everybody sympathized with her, because who had better right to cry than a woman who has lost her only son. […] She would mourn John constantly, and even Hubert would hardly have the heart to reproach her for her long face" (159). Like Annie in Lavin's 'At Sallygap', Rose is tired of her husband's routine that never shows any sign of change. However, while Manny in Lavin's story is sick of his own habits, for Hubert, his own routine "never became monotonous" (149). Hubert continues living "in his habitual way, coming in after work and sitting down with the paper and then sitting down to his tea and going to bed and getting up in the morning and doing all the things he always did" (149). Rose, on the other hand, has nothing but her imagination to escape the dull reality of her life. In the same way that she imagines everyone would feel sorry for her if John had died, she is always picturing that Hubert would maltreat at her, even though he is not a violent person at all. Here Brennan's use of the theme of domestic violence recalls Lavin. Similarly, Delia, who even feels lonely when the children are at home, completely breaks down when she has sent them off for a month to her brother and sister in the country in 'The Shadow of Kindness'. They have only been gone for twenty-four hours when she starts fantasizing about their return. She loses herself in her daydreaming about the letters she will receive from the children:

> […] [T]he letter would come into Dublin on the night train, and it would be here in the

> morning. […] [B]ut if it came in the morning post, she would have to give it to Martin – he would be sure to ask if there was a letter from Lily, so that he could take it along to the office and show his friends what a clever daughter he had. (245-6)

She goes on thinking about a letter which may not even have been written yet:

> And then ten chances to one she would never see it again. […] She would ask Martin to bring it back, and he would promise to bring it to her, but he would forget, and she might ask him a second time but not the third time – it was too much like nagging. (246)

All this makes it clear to Delia just "how little she meant to anyone in the world except the children. And Bennie and the cats" (246). She tries to come to terms with her husband's coldness and her feelings of loneliness by imagining that her shadow on the wall is her mother's, following her: "She felt all different – not sad, not tired anymore. She felt very hopeful all of a sudden. It was wonderful how seeing that shadow had raised her spirits. It was wonderful knowing that shadow was upstairs and that it would never go away. It was almost like having somebody in the house" (254).

In addition to a shared setting as well as recurring types of characters and themes, there is yet another element that unifies the book as a whole. Similar situations occur time and time again throughout *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin*. Consequently, the reader gets the feeling that the stories are all variations on the same character constellation and set of themes. This is exactly the effect that is created in famous short story cycles such as Joyce's *Dubliners*. In Brennan's book, the mother figures take an interest in the socially marginalized. Maeve's mother cannot find it in her heart to refuse an old man selling apples in 'The Old Man of the Sea' and Rose, in 'The Poor Men and Women', tries to approach beggars, probably to compensate for her son's absence and her unsatisfactory marriage (Ingman 2009: 175). Brennan's mother figures also try to cope by taking control within the confines of the house. For both Rose and Delia, their house functions as a prison, which they rarely leave. Nonetheless, they are very active within that prison: they are always cleaning, cooking and gardening. Moreover, they assert power and agency within the house and the garden in different ways. In 'A Young Girl Can Spoil her Chances', Hubert is waiting upstairs for Rose to leave for Mass, because he does not want to see her. She plays a trick on him by opening and closing the front door, so as to make him come down, thinking that she has left the house. In 'Family Walls', to give another example, Rose closes the kitchen door at the exact moment that Hubert enters the house. He fails to see why, but he knows that she did it on purpose. Both Rose and Delia also seek solace in gardening, the garden being the least enclosed place

in the domestic sphere. These recurring situations intensify one another. Furthermore, there are a of number cross-references, particularly with respect to the house and the garden, which tie the stories in the book together. For instance, the tennis club and the garage that lie beyond the house's garden wall – which stretches the whole length of the street – in the Maeve stories are literally referred to in the Rose and Delia stories as well. It is worth pointing out there is a move from stories about childhood (first cluster) to stories about marriage (second and third cluster) in the book. One cannot trace the maturation of a composite protagonist throughout the work as is the case in Joyce's *Dubliners*, but Maeve's childhood stories which open the volume were also the ones which Brennan first published in *The New Yorker*, i.e. between 1953 and 1955. One of the Rose and Hubert stories, 'The Poor Men and Women', was already published in 1952 (in *Harper's Bazaar*), but the characters were only returned to between 1962 and 1964, when the rest of the six stories from the second cluster were published in *The New Yorker* – except for 'Family Walls', which did not appear until 1973 and was actually the final Dublin story Brennan published. Before this, between 1962 and 1972, the eight stories about Delia and Martin appeared in *The New Yorker*. In other words, Brennan started out with one story about Rose and Hubert. After this, she first moved on to the Maeve series, then to the Rose and Hubert series, and finally to the Delia and Martin series, after which she returned to Rose and Hubert once again for one final story. The Maeve stories together relate the protagonist's childhood, roughly between the ages of five and eighteen. The Rose stories as a whole narrate the marriage of Rose and Hubert from the moment they first met until Rose's death. In 'The Drowned Man', the reader learns about Rose's final moments through Hubert's eyes. It is striking that this story is not the final one on Rose and Hubert that Brennan published: both 'A Free Choice' and 'Family Walls' appeared in *The New Yorker* after 'The Drowned Man' did. Finally, the Delia stories recount the marriage of Delia and Martin until their deaths. 'The Springs of Affection', which is the title story of the book as a whole, takes place after both Delia and Martin have died. The reader learns what has happened through the eyes of Min, Martin's eighty-seven-year-old twin sister. Again, this story was not the final one on Delia and Martin to appear: Brennan published 'Christmas Eve' in *The New Yorker* after 'The Springs of Affection'. Brennan's return to these characters after she wrote about their deaths suggests that she placed more importance on the general character constellation which is basically the same in all of the stories.[150] As a result, the three clusters of stories together form a convincing whole.

[150] In her biography of Brennan, Bourke suggests that, with her stories, she was working through her memories of her parents' marriage in different fictional ways.

It is clearly the emphasis on marriage, relationships and family that unites *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin*. The different kinds of love that feature in the different stories are all twisted: the love between husband and wife in the Rose stories has almost completely vanished, Delia and Martin's love relationship has become distorted, Rose's love for her son has been twisted to such a degree that she wishes him dead in order to get him back, and Min's love for her brother has been perverted to the extent that she is satisfied to have him back in death. Of course there are many elements that work against the unity of the book as well. For instance, the Maeve cluster stands somewhat apart from the Rose and Delia clusters. Whereas the latter tell the stories of unsatisfactory marriages, the former is a collection of childhood memories. Still, their shared Dublin setting unifies the work as a whole. The Maeve stories share an emphasis on the repressive nature of Irish society in the first half of the twentieth century (Ingman 2009: 175). For instance, in 'The Devil in Us' Maeve and three other girls are wrongly accused by the nuns at school of not doing their best during choir practice. They are scolded to such a degree that they eventually clam up completely. Therefore, they are not able to sing when they have the chance 'to redeem themselves'. The nuns impose a feeling of guilt on them, telling them that they have been defeated by the devil, even though they had been singing along perfectly well before they were punished:

> The reason for our guilt was still hidden from us, but in a dim but comforting way we were now convinced of its existence. We had not seen the shape of the Devil, but we had felt its power, in our dry throats and thumping hearts. The thing was now clear to us that had always been clear to the nuns, because we realized as well as they did that if God had been on our side, surely He would have given us the voice to sing His praises. (55)

It is the same society, clinging to convention and being weighed down by the church, that keeps the female protagonists of the Rose and Delia clusters within the confines of domesticity. In other words, on the one hand the Maeve stories stand apart and, on the other, they are connected to the Rose and the Delia stories. But it is exactly this tension between unity and fragmentation that allows for *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* to be read as a short story cycle, even if these twenty-one stories have been selected and arranged by an editor. Moreover, the thematic focus of the work on affections that have been lost or twisted is formally emphasized by the gaps that are present between the story clusters. In conclusion, the stories in *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* intensify each other by a shared setting as well as by the recurrence of types of characters, themes and cross-references throughout the work as a whole. As far as the thematic focus of the book is concerned,

Brennan echoes Lavin through her focus on domesticity as well as her approach of viewing public issues through private eyes, such as the restricted and repressive nature of Irish society at that time and its negative influence particularly on the lives of women.

2.2.2. *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* and Joyce's *Dubliners*

Although *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* does not qualify as a cycle in it strictest definition, the book as a whole does appear to have much in common with Joyce's famous cycle *Dubliners*. We can safely assume that Brennan had read Joyce's debut, since Bourke mentions him as one of Brennan's heroes in *Maeve Brennan: Wit, Style and Tragedy: an Irish Writer in New York* (2005: 224). Moreover, the subtitle of Brennan's book invites comparison with Joyce's cycle, even though it was provided by the editor. Therefore, it is interesting to conclude this chapter with a brief comparison of both works. According to Ingram, *Dubliners* is one of the most important examples of what he calls completed cycles, by which he means

> sets of linked stories which are neither strictly composed nor merely arranged. They may have begun as independent dissociated stories. But soon their author became conscious of unifying strands which he may have, even subconsciously, woven into the action of the stories. Consciously, then, he completed the unifying task which he may have subconsciously begun. (18)

Brennan never truly completed the unifying task of bringing together her three series of Dublin stories herself. Still, as we have seen in the previous section, the posthumous arrangement of these twenty-one stories together only adds emphasis to a unity which was already created by the author.

The most obvious similarity between Brennan and Joyce's volumes is of course their Dublin setting. However, while Joyce roams through different parts of the city, Brennan focuses on the suburb of Ranelagh. Moreover, whereas many of the action in *Dubliners* takes place in the streets, the reader mostly experiences the characters in *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* at home. Still, when Brennan's characters leave the house, the description of the streets and the city are reminiscent of Joyce. For instance, in 'The Morning after the Big Fire', Maeve echoes the protagonist of Joyce's 'Araby': "Our street was called an avenue, because it was blind at one end, the farthest end from us" (15). When Rose is walking around during her short-lived escape in 'An Attack of Hunger', to name another example, the route she takes is described much like in *Dubliners*. Significantly, after leaving her own street, taking Sandford Road and reaching the crossing with Eglinton Road, she realizes that she has

nowhere to go and will have to return to her husband. Like the *Dubliners* characters, then, Rose runs around in a circle, ending up right back where she started from. The reason why she has tried to escape from the house is that she feels there is no hope for her there:

> Her entire life was in the house. She only left it to do her shopping or to go to Mass. […] [S]he and Hubert never went anywhere or visited anyone. He never brought anybody from the shop to his house, to spend an evening or to see the garden in summertime or anything like that. […] [A]s the years went by he had come to distrust her presence everywhere except in the house. (150)

Joyce's consistent use of dark and confined spaces to underscore the themes of paralysis and alienation in *Dubliners* is echoed in Brennan's depiction of the dark and small house which symbolizes Rose's feelings of entrapment: "She might as well have been in a net, for all the freedom she felt" (183). Similarly, in the third cluster of stories, Martin sees his wife Delia as a "wild animal in a trap", "too weak to go very far" (269). Indeed, she never makes it further than the garden. Like Rose, Delia longs to escape from her little red-brick Ranelagh house, even if just for one moment: "To disappear for a little while would do no harm to anyone, and it would be very restful to get away from the house without having to go out by the front door and endure the ceremony of walking down the street, where everybody could see you" (233). Like Joyce, Brennan thus criticizes the social constraints of early-twentieth-century Dublin. As in Lavin's *Tales from Bective Bridge*, the fear of 'what the neighbours will say' restricts the characters in Brennan's book. Yet, whereas all of Joyce's characters, including the ones in his childhood and adolescence stories, remain trapped, there may be a bit of hope for Brennan's I-narrator in the first cluster of stories, since the world still lies open for her. However, from this somewhat lighter cluster of childhood stories, Brennan's cycle moves on to two heavier clusters about unsatisfactory marriages. 'The Drowned Man', which describes Rose's death through the eyes of her husband, concludes with Hubert crying because he is not able to feel any grief at all for his late wife. Additionally, 'The Springs of Affection', which looks back at the lives and deaths of Delia and Martin through the eyes of Min, is a story about a woman trapped in hatred and self-pity. Although Min thinks she is triumphant, being the last one standing, after Martin and Delia as well as all of her other relatives have died, she is stuck in her flat, completely alienated from the rest of the world. In this respect, one could state that Brennan's Dublin is as much a centre of paralysis as Joyce's.

In conclusion, whereas works such as O'Flaherty's *The Mountain Tavern and Other Stories* and O'Connor's *Guests of the Nation* echo Moore and Turgenev, Brennan's *The*

Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin may have been influenced more by Joyce's *Dubliners*. Furthermore, while O'Flaherty returns to depicting the life of Irish peasants in his book, and O'Connor and Ó Faoláin unify their volumes mainly through emphasis on the themes of war and nation, Brennan can be said to echo Lavin. Brennan's focus on domestic life as well as on public issues and concerns such as loneliness and entrapment in *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* will, as we will see, return in short story cycles from the second half of the twentieth century.

Chapter V
'Revival' of the Short Story Cycle: O'Brien's *The Love Object*, McGahern's *Nightlines* and Trevor's *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories*

In the previous chapter, I have argued that the development of the cycle outlined throughout this dissertation reaches a low point in mid-century Ireland. Relatively few cycles were published in this period and the ones that did appear have considerably less unity than their predecessors. This period of scarcity, as I will suggest in this chapter, is followed by a renewed interest in the cycle form. That is, more short story cycles appear to have been published in the second half of the twentieth century. These works, as I will show, are unified by theme as well as by style, recurring symbols and cross-references between the stories. Moreover, many of them refer back to Joyce's *Dubliners*, suggesting a greater awareness of the form of the short story cycle. Still, the cycles discussed in this chapter will also be seen to carry on a focus on domestic and personal concerns, such as love and family relationships, which we found in Lavin's *Tales from Bective Bridge* and Brennan's *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin*. From the considerable short fiction output published in the 1960s and 1970s, I have chosen to focus on the work of three of the most famous Irish short story writers: Edna O'Brien, John McGahern and William Trevor. I will argue that the short story collections they published early in their careers are remarkably unified and deserve to be read as short story cycles. These are O'Brien's *The Love Object* (1968), McGahern's *Nightlines* (1970) and Trevor's *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories* (1972). I will also offer a comparative analysis of each volume with *Dubliners* so as to determine to what extent these works borrow elements from Joyce's 'archetypal' cycle, while at the same time adapting the form to their own concerns and aesthetics.

1. O'Brien's *The Love Object*

1.1. O'Brien: Biography

Josephine Edna O'Brien was born on 15 December 1930 as the youngest child in a Roman Catholic family on a farm in Tuamgraney, County Clare. After attending the National School in Scariff, she went to boarding school at the Convent of Mercy in Loughrea, County Galway. In 1946, she moved to Dublin, where she studied at a pharmaceutical college.

Around this time, Joyce became her model and inspiration, following her purchase of T.S. Eliot's *Introducing James Joyce*. In 1948, she began contributing small pieces to the *Irish Press*. In 1952, O'Brien married the Czech/Irish author Ernest Gébler, who had published *The Voyage of the Mayflower* two years earlier. They went on to have two sons: Sasha, who would become an architect, and Carlo, who would become a writer. During the twelve years that O'Brien was married to Gébler, her literary success would often be attributed to her husband. In 1958, she moved to London, where she published her first novel, *The Country Girls* (1960). This book was the first of six novels by O'Brien to be banned in Ireland because of its frankness with respect to female sexuality. It was also the first part of a trilogy, followed by *The Lonely Girl* (1962) and *Girls in Their Married Bliss* (1964), which were banned by the Censorship Board as well. In 1962, her short story 'Come into the Drawing Room, Doris' was printed in *The New Yorker*. Throughout her career, she would continue to publish in *The New Yorker* as well as in other periodicals. Also in 1962, her first play, *A Cheap Bunch of Nice Flowers*, was staged in London. The next two novels published by O'Brien, *August is a Wicked Month* (1965) and *Casualties of Peace* (1966), were banned as well. In 1968, she published her first work of short fiction, *The Love Object*. The last of her novels to be denounced by the Censorship Board was *A Pagan Place*, which appeared in 1970. O'Brien published two more novels, *Night* (1972) and *Johnny I Hardly Knew You* (1977), and two more short story collections, *A Scandalous Woman* (1974) and *Mrs Reinhardt and Other Stories* (1978), before celebrating twenty years of writing. More works followed in her third decade of writing, including *Virginia*, a play based on the life and works of Virginia Woolf (1980), *James and Nora: A Portrait of a Marriage* (1981), the first of several nonfiction works about Joyce's life and works, a short story collection entitled *A Fanatic Heart* (1984), and the novel *The High Road* (1988). O'Brien remained a prolific writer in the nineties with works such as the short story collection *Lantern Slides* (1990), the novel *Time and Tide* (1992), the novel trilogy about contemporary Ireland consisting of *House of Splendid Isolation* (1994), *Down by the River* (1996) and *Wild Decembers* (1999), as well as *James Joyce*, a biography in the *Writer's Lives Series* (1999). O'Brien continued publishing in the final decade of the twentieth century, with works such as the novels *In the Forest* (2002) and *The Light of Evening* (2006). In 2004, she received an honorary doctorate from the University of Limerick. In 2010, O'Brien celebrated her eightieth birthday as well as the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *The Country Girls*. More recently, she published *Saint and*

Sinners, a short story collection which won the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award (2011), and her autobiography entitled *Country Girl: A Memoir* (2012).[151]

1.2. *The Love Object*: One Narrative with Eight Variations

The Love Object (1968), O'Brien's short fiction debut, consists of eight stories, five of which first appeared in *The New Yorker*.[152] The stories in the volume are unified in various ways. First of all, the protagonists are all women who are involved in problematic love or family relationships. Five of the stories have an omniscient narrator who relates a defining experience from the female protagonist's recent or distant past through internal focalization. Although some of these stories have multiple focalizers, it is the main character's perspective which always prevails. In the other three stories, the protagonist herself narrates the events in retrospect. Whatever the narrative situation, in all of the stories the focus lies on desperate situations experienced by the main character. When reading *The Love Object*, one is immediately struck by the fact that the protagonists are rarely referred to by name. In 'The Love Object', Martha's name is mentioned only once and, in 'An Outing', Mrs Farley's first name is never revealed. In 'Cords', which opens with the mother's perspective and closes with that of the daughter, the reader learns Claire's name but not her mother's. In addition, in four of the other stories – 'The Rug', 'The Mouth of the Cave', 'How to Grow a Wisteria' and 'Paradise' – the protagonist's name is not mentioned at all. O'Brien's limited use of names contributes to the unity of the work as a whole: it seems to generalize a specific female experience as shared by many women. Although these women differ in age and reside in different countries, they all suffer similar problems with respect to love. I would argue therefore that one can consider the female central characters to form a composite protagonist.

It follows that the relationship misfortunes of O'Brien's composite protagonist unify *The Love Object* thematically. Schrank and Farquharson argue that, no matter how differently nuanced, all of the stories explore "a similar complex of emotional and sexual experiences" of the central character, who is continuously defined in terms of love (21). In each story, the protagonist clings to a love object in order to escape from her current situation, but instead she is left in an even more desperate situation than before. Although its nature varies throughout the work, the love object plays a central role in every story. As the quotation of Aristotle – "As matter desires form so woman desires man" – at the beginning of the book suggests, the

[151] Based on Alice Hughes Kersnowski's introduction to *Conversations with Edna O'Brien* (2014).
[152] The stories that first appeared in *The New Yorker* are 'The Love Object' – the title story of the collection, 'An Outing', 'The Rug', 'Irish Revel' (originally published under the title 'Come into the Drawing Room, Doris') and 'Cords' (originally published under the title 'Which of Those Two Ladies is he Married to?').

love object is a man in several of the stories, such as in 'The Love Object', 'Irish Revel' and 'Paradise'. Other kinds of love objects feature in the volume as well: literally an object in 'An Outing' (a three-piece suite) as well as in 'The Rug' (a rug), another woman in 'The Mouth of the Cave', or Claire's mother in 'Cords'. But above all, the protagonist herself often functions as the love object in some way, namely in the title story and in stories such as 'The Mouth of the Cave', 'How to Grow a Wisteria', 'Cords' and 'Paradise' (Schrank and Farquharson 21). O'Brien's decision to name the book after the opening story underscores the unity of the whole, as the concept of the love object clearly is a connecting thread between the stories, even though Martha, the protagonist of the title story is the only character who refers to her lawyer lover with those exact words: "He sat opposite. *The love object*. Elderly. Blue eyes. Khaki hair" (9; emphasis mine). Kiera O'Hara argues that there is something problematic about the notion of a 'love object', "perhaps an acknowledgment that love objects are more often the objects of obsession or addiction than of love" (318-9). Still, Martha does not appear to use the term 'love object' ironically at any point in her account of the affair (O'Hara 319). Not even when her behaviour clearly becomes obsessive, after the ageing lawyer has put an end to their affair. She drinks heavily, writes him letters, rings his acquaintances, fantasizes about the death of his wife and even contemplates suicide, all the while holding on to his cigar butts. Gradually, however, her feelings of hatred begin to make way for what she describes as a "new sensation": "I thought of him and my children in the same instant, their little foibles became his: my children telling me elaborate lies about their sporting feats, his slight puffing when we climbed steps and his trying to conceal it. The age difference between us must have saddened him. It was then I think that I really fell in love with him" (39). O'Hara suggests that, at this point, the reader learns that Martha has not been able to release her love object (319). On the contrary, she has now created one which only exists within herself. When they meet again as friends, on his initiative, she simply tells her former love that she is over it: "I could not have told him anything else, he would not have understood. In a way it was like being with someone else. He was not the one who had folded back the bedspread and sucked me dry and left his cigar ash for preserving. He was the representative of that one" (40). The love object that Martha has created in her mind is the one she describes waiting for at the end of the story: "There is a lamp in my bedroom that gives out a dry crackle each time an electric train goes by and at night I count those crackles because it is the time he comes back. I mean the real he, not the man who confronts me from time to time across a café table, but the man that dwells somewhere within me" (41). Although she is aware of the fact that she is tormenting herself, she admits that she simply cannot let go of this love object, because then

"all our happiness and my subsequent pain […] will have been nothing, and nothing is a dreadful thing to hold on to" (41). Martha's decision to cling to a painful love object so as to fill an even more painful void is a recurring one throughout O'Brien's volume. In 'An Outing', Mrs Farley desperately throws herself at the idea of procuring a second-hand three-piece suite to impress a new lover, thus escaping the reality of her loveless marriage, as well as the unlikelihood of the affair becoming real. Of course, in the end she finds the pieces of furniture to be a great disappointment. Similarly, the narrator's mother in 'The Rug' places all her hope to escape the harshness of her life as a lonely farmer's wife on a gift she has received: a beautiful black sheepskin hearthrug. Eventually, it turns out that the gift was meant for someone else and she has to return it: "[…] she wept, not so much for the loss – though the loss was enormous – as for her own foolishness in thinking that someone had wanted to do her a kindness at last" (72). In 'Irish Revel', young country girl Mary clutches to the idea of having a darling, even after her hopes of being with the English painter John Roland have been shattered: "If only I had a sweetheart, something to hold on to" (113). The lonely narrator of 'The Mouth of the Cave', to give a final example, desperately longs for a young girl to turn up at her house. One day, when she was taking the rougher route beside the mountain to the village, rather than the one beside the sea, she had seen the girl dressing behind some trees. Ever since that moment, the narrator has been waiting in vain for the girl to come to her. Ingman argues that the two roads toward the village represent the narrator's sexual options: the "dusty ill-defined stretch of road littered with rocks" (O'Brien 73) beside the mountain symbolizes her fear of lesbianism and its hidden nature at that time, while the sea route stands for heterosexuality (2009: 210-1). The road beside the mountain thus leads to two love objects, the girl and the narrator's desire for lesbianism. Yet, even though she hopelessly yearns to go this way again, she always finds herself taking the sea route. Thus, no matter who or what the objects of the protagonists' affections are, their encounters with love always end in despair. This succession of experiences which lead to emotional distress in *The Love Object* clearly increases the unity of the book as a whole. In other words, each story contains a variation on one basic subject. This is an effect typical of the short story cycle form: by developing the same idea in different contexts throughout the stories, it becomes a central theme.

Moreover, the thematic unity of the collection is underscored by recurring symbols and cross-references between the stories. For instance, there are numerous references to figs in the volume, more specifically in the opening story, the fourth story and the closing story. Schrank and Farquharson argue that these exotic fruits are given an implicit sexual

connotation in ‘The Love Object’, where Martha and her lover eat figs several times during their – mainly sexual – affair (23). Further on in the book, in ‘The Mouth of the Cave’, the narrator imagines eating figs with the girl she desires as a more explicit sexual act. In ‘Paradise’, finally, the mistress of a millionaire refers to the fig trees she sees and the figs she eats on the Mediterranean island where they are staying. These recurring references to figs in the context of sexual relationships thus underscore the thematic unity of the work as a whole. Similarly, the book contains several references to rugs, which would appear to be more sexually neutral objects than figs. Yet, because the lovers’ most passionate sexual encounters in ‘The Love Object’ take place on a goatskin rug, further references to rugs in the book become charged with a sexual undercurrent as well. This leads Schrank and Farquharson to the conclusion that the happiness of the narrator’s mother with the sheepskin rug in the ‘The Rug’ reveals her sexual neglect and need for an erotic adventure (22-3). The flower of ‘How to Grow a Wisteria’ also recurs in ‘An Outing’, when Mrs Farley is in the furniture shop where she is looking to buy the three-piece suite: she is looking at “a display of cut glass vases that where on a glass-topped table”. […] Wisteria would go lovely in a tall vase like that. […] Her favourite flower” (44). She also refers to wisteria while picturing what her house and garden will look like when her husband is away on an outing and “her friend” will finally come over – they normally only meet outside because they are both married: “‘You’ll see the garden,’ she said. She heard herself describe the garden as it would be, wisteria on the fence […]. And then as he opened her coat and put his arms around her she heard herself describe her own front room and in it the olive-green, three-piece suite figured prominently” (51). Mrs Farley’s references to wisteria are thus linked to the seduction of her male friend she is planning. In ‘How to Grow a Wisteria’, the sexual connotation of the flower re-emerges, as the story deals with a person’s need for change, including sexual partners (Schrank and Farquharson 25). In addition, the sexual encounters of the protagonist of ‘How to Grow a Wisteria’, who goes from living in isolation to a highly social lifestyle and back again, are linked to Mrs Farley’s affair by the use of the word ‘outings’: “No matter where she went, no matter who she was, it simply had to happen. It began to control her life, her *outings*. […]” (83-4; emphasis mine). By way of these cross-references, the stories thus reinforce each other’s subject matter. Yet another example of recurring references that tie the stories together are the allusions to superstition. In ‘The Love Object’, Martha wants her lover to return the safety pin she has lent him, and she wants him to take back the pins that he has left at her place with him as well, as she believes it brings one bad luck to give away pins. In ‘An Outing’, Mrs Farley tells her friend that “she’d broken [a cup] that day and was afraid she’d

break two other things" (61). In both stories, the references to superstition appear to introduce a turning point in the protagonists' respective affairs. It is at the same moment when Martha is worrying about safety pins that her hatred for her lover and his wife begins to emerge. Similarly, Mrs Farley and her friend's discussion of the broken cup "reminded them both of home and duty. He would have to go shortly" (62). When he has left, she realizes that "[s]he and her friend were fated to walk up and down the streets toward the railway bridge, and in the end they would grow tired of walking, and they would return, each to a make-shift home" (62).

In summary, because of its strong thematic unity, underscored by recurring symbols, cross-references between the different stories and the presence of a composite protagonist, O'Brien's *The Love Object* creates "a single narrative [of female identity] with eight variations" (Schrank and Farquharson 22). In other words, this collection clearly qualifies as a short story cycle. O'Brien's literary hero, as she herself has stated in interviews, is Joyce. Therefore, it is interesting to continue this discussion of *The Love Object* in comparison with Joyce's 'archetypal' cycle *Dubliners*.

1.3. *The Love Object* and *Dubliners*

Like Joyce, O'Brien left her native country at the beginning of her career but kept using Ireland as a topic in her work. Whereas Joyce's cycle is exclusively set in Dublin, O'Brien's stories in *The Love Object* are set in different locations, including the West of Ireland but also London and a number of unspecified foreign places. In a way similar to the characters in *Dubliners*, many of the protagonists in *The Love Object* are looking to escape from their birthplace, be it from Ireland to another country or from the countryside to the city. Unlike Joyce's Dubliners, some of O'Brien's characters manage to physically move away from their roots. To give a few examples, the protagonist in 'How to Grow a Wisteria' moves from the mountains to the city, in 'Irish Revel' Mary makes the – albeit temporary – journey from her parents' mountain farm to Mrs Rodgers's Commercial Hotel in the town, and Claire has moved away from her family in Ireland to live in London in 'Cords'. However, in the end O'Brien's protagonists are either forced to return home ('An Outing', 'Irish Revel') or they remain physically removed from their initial home but still end up in essentially the same state as they started from: the woman in 'How to Grow a Wisteria' is as isolated at the end of the story as she was at the beginning even though she lives in the city, and although Claire now lives a bohemian life in London, she has not been able to completely leave her Irish identity behind and create a new life in 'Cords' (Ingman 2010: 259). Claire may have gone one step

further than Joyce's Eveline in so far that she has left her abusive father behind in Ireland, but O'Brien's protagonist has not been able to cut the cords that tie her to her painful past. This becomes all the more clear when she attempts to reconnect with her mother, whose presence in London and disapproval of Claire's lifestyle brings back excruciating memories of her childhood. Moreover, the friends and lovers the aspiring poet has surrounded herself with in London do not appear to provide her with more support than she received back home: "She could not confide in them even they were old friends. They might sneer. They were not friends any more than the ex-lovers, they were all social appendages, extras, acquaintances" (124). Thus, Claire does not seem to have escaped from her surroundings any more so than Eveline. Instead, she remains stuck in some kind of in-between state.

Like the Dubliners in Joyce's cycle, the protagonists in *The Love Object* all suffer loneliness and isolation. Although they believe their love objects can help them to break out of this, they end up with nothing but bitter disappointment when they have been robbed of their illusions. Martha's affair, which is supposed to bring her the happiness she craves, leaves her "paralysed" (19) and feeling as if she is "a little animal locked away" (23). Mrs Farley and her friend are stuck in a vicious circle in which they meet, walk around and return to their respective houses, where they feel lonely being married to people they do not care for. After she has learnt that the sheepskin rug that lighted up her life was actually not meant for her, the narrator's mother in 'The Rug' depicts her return to utter restriction by undoing her apron strings and retying them in a tighter knot (Ingman 2009: 201). Seventeen-year-old Irish country girl Mary, to give a final example, is hopeful at the beginning of 'Irish Revel', as she has been invited to her first party in the town by Mrs Rodgers. Mary's mother does not want her to go, because to her "all *outings* were unsettling – they gave you a taste of something you couldn't have" (emphasis mine). Her use of the word 'outings' links this story to others in the volume, especially 'An Outing', where Mrs Farley's plans to seduce her male friend fail. Mary's mother predicts her daughter's failure to obtain her love object and escape from her harsh life as a mountain farmer's daughter. However, she finally caves, as Mrs Rodgers, "as owner of the Commercial Hotel, was an important woman, and not to be insulted" (88). While cycling to town in her best clothes, Mary thinks of the English painter John Roland, who lives in Italy with his wife and children. He was staying alone at the Commercial Hotel when he stopped with his motorcycle to ask her the way: "Two long years since; but she had never given up hoping – perhaps this evening. The mail-car man said that someone special in the Commercial Hotel expected her" (89). However, when she arrives at Mrs Rodgers's house, it becomes clear that John is not waiting for her at all. Instead, the person who inquired about

her was Michael O'Toole from the slate quarry, a vulgar lad who does not even call Mary by the right name. Moreover, she realizes that she has only been invited to serve and clean at the party, and that she is seen by the townspeople as one of those "shy mountainy people" (91) they dislike, as an inferior "country one" (112). To add to her misfortune, she is the victim of an attempted rape by the drunken O'Toole while she is spending the night at Mrs Rodgers's house. Thus, instead of providing a temporary escape from a life of "pumping bicycles, carting turf, cleaning out-houses, doing a man's work" (87), the party leaves Mary feeling "the joy leaking out of her heart" (93) – like the air that is analogously leaking from the rotted front tyre of her bicycle (Lynch 1996: 38-9). On her way home the next morning, pushing her bicycle, she stops to rest on a bank, longing for someone to hold on to. The lines that follow are an explicit reference to a story about another bleak Irish revel, namely Joyce's 'The Dead':

> The frost lay like a spell upon the street, upon the sleeping windows, and the slate roofs of the narrow houses. It had magically made the dunged street white and clean. […] The poor birds could get no food as the ground was frozen hard. Frost was general all over Ireland; frost like a weird blossom on the branches, […] on the ploughs left out all winter; frost on the stony fields, and on all the slime and ugliness in the world. (112-3)

Whereas Joyce covers Ireland in snow, and Beckett replaces the poetic snow with common rain, O'Brien converts it into frost. Like Joyce's snow, the frost in 'Irish revel' softens the harshness of the world with a white cover. However, at the same time, O'Brien's frost is more severe: it turns the countryside into a cold and rigorous landscape (O'Hara 318). This image depicts the lack of progress in Mary's life. When she gets to the top of the hill, she realizes that she now has to go back to the imprisonment of her own house that looks "like a little white box at the end of the world, waiting to receive her" (O'Brien 114). She has to return to the isolation of living in the mountains. And although Mary's home, for all its hardships, is in fact quite a wholesome one in comparison with the vulgarity of the townspeople (Lynch 42), her future appears to be one of stasis. O'Brien thus transforms Joyce's Dubliner watching the snow and contemplating his journey westward into an Irish country girl looking at the frost and realizing she will never leave the West of Ireland. O'Brien's explicit reference to *Dubliners* in this story reinforces my analysis of *The Love Object* as a short story cycle. Like the other protagonists in O'Brien's book, Mary goes from hope and excitement to utter disappointment when it turns out that she has failed to obtain her love object and escape from isolation.

In short, like the main characters in Joyce's *Dubliners*, O'Brien's protagonists in *The Love Object* are all trapped in a given situation. In the same way that Joyce's characters lead a paralysed existence in Dublin, the central figures in *The Love Object* are caught in a desperate state of loneliness. O'Brien's women try to break free from this by searching for a love that will transform them. However, the composite protagonist in *The Love Object* never manages to find that great love. Instead, she is stuck in a circle of initial euphoria about her object of love followed by agonizing disappointment, after which she goes through the same experience all over again.

2. McGahern's *Nightlines*

2.1. McGahern: Biography

John McGahern was born on 12 November 1934 in Dublin, as the first of seven children. He grew up in the northwest part of Ireland, on a small farm in Ballinamore, County Leitrim. When he was about nine years old, he lost his beloved mother to cancer. Thereupon, he and his siblings went to live with their father, a Garda sergeant, in the police barracks at Cootehall, County Roscommon. McGahern attended the Presentation Brothers College in Carrick-on-Shannon and then went on to study at the St. Patrick's Teacher Training College in Dublin. From 1955 to 1966, he worked as a primary school teacher. In 1965, he married Annikki Laksi, a Finnish theatre director. They divorced soon after, and in 1973, he would marry Madeline Green, an American photographer. His debut novel, *The Barracks*, appeared in 1963 and was well-received. It was followed in 1965 by a second novel, *The Dark*, which was banned by the Irish Censorship Board for being "pornographic" because of its depictions of masturbation as well as its portrayal of an abusive father and its allusions to a paedophile priest. On the instructions of the Archbishop of Dublin, McGahern lost his teaching job. He moved to London and worked on construction sites before establishing himself as a full-time writer. Subsequently, he went to live in Spain and the United States for a while before returning to County Leitrim with his second wife in the seventies. In 1970, his first volume of short fiction appeared: *Nightlines*. McGahern's third novel was published in 1975: *The Leavetaking* tells the story of a school teacher who is fired for having married a divorced non-Catholic woman. It was followed by a second work of short stories in 1978, *Getting Through*. One year later, *The Pornographer* (1979) appeared: his fourth novel deals with a protagonist who writes pornography for a living. In 1985, he published his third short story collection,

High Ground. Five years later, McGahern's fifth novel, *Amongst Women* (1990), came out. The book was shortlisted for the prestigious Man Booker Prize in 1990. It also won the *Irish Times* Award and the GPA Book Award, and was later made into a four-part BBC television miniseries. He received an honorary doctorate from Trinity College, Dublin in 1991. In 1992, *The Collected Stories* appeared, which compiles his first three volumes of short fiction and also includes two new stories. His final novel was published in 2001: *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. In 2005, McGahern published his autobiography, *Memoir*. It was followed one year later by *Creatures of the Earth: New and Selected Stories*, which brings together stories from *The Collected Stories* as well as two new short stories. He was diagnosed with cancer and died on 30 March 2006 in Dublin.[153]

2.2. *Nightlines*: Movement without Progression

Nightlines (1970), McGahern's debut book of short fiction, is made up of twelve short stories, six of which were previously published in magazines.[154] The stories are set primarily in rural Ireland, more specifically in Counties Leitrim and Roscommon – with the exception of 'My Love, My Umbrella' (Dublin), 'Hearts of Oak and Bellies of Brass' (London) and 'Peaches' (Spain). Time is often left unspecified in the work, but most of the stories seem to take place in the 1940s and 1950s. The central figures of the stories are children as well as adolescents and adults. Six of the stories have relatively young protagonists, i.e. 'Coming into his Kingdom', 'Christmas', 'Strandhill, The Sea', 'Bomb Box', 'Korea' and 'Lavin'. The protagonists are adults in the other half of the stories: 'Wheels', 'Why We're Here', 'Hearts of Oak and Bellies of Brass', 'My Love, My Umbrella', 'Peaches' and 'The Recruiting Officer'.[155] All the protagonists in *Nightlines* are male. Most of them tell their own story in retrospect; only 'Why We're Here', 'Coming into his Kingdom' and 'Peaches' have a third-person narrator who tells the central characters' stories, through internal focalization in the case of the last two mentioned. 'My Love, My Umbrella' and 'Peaches', which both deal with

[153] Based on McGahern's autobiography *Memoir* (2005) and David Malcolm's *Understanding John McGahern* (2007).
[154] The story 'Coming into his Kingdom' first appeared in *Kilkenny Magazine* in 1963. In the same year, *The New Yorker* published 'Strandhill, The Sea' under the title 'Summer in Strandhill'. 'Why We're Here' was published in *The Cork Review: A Magazine of Poetry and Criticism* in 1968, and 'Christmas' first appeared in *The Irish Press* in the same year. In 1969, 'Bomb Box' was published in *The Listener* – the same story was retitled 'The Key' in McGahern's *The Collected stories* (1992). 'Korea' first appeared in *Atlantic Monthly*, also in 1969 (Sampson 157).
[155] The stories with young central figures and those with adult main characters alternate: the first two stories deal with adults, the two that follow with young children, the fifth story concerns adults again, the next four stories revolve around adolescent protagonists, the next two are about adult characters again and the twelfth and final story concerns a middle-aged central character.

couples, are the only stories that feature female focalizers as well. Still, it is the male protagonist's perspective which always prevails. Notably, in only two of the stories are the main characters names' mentioned, namely in 'Why We're Here' and 'Coming into his Kingdom'. Even though there are considerable age differences between the protagonists of McGahern's volume, they can essentially be divided into two types of characters: they are either young lads who lose their innocence and realize that they need to escape from their constrained rural surroundings, or they are the grown-up versions of the former: adults who are stuck in purposeless lives, be it in the country, in the city or abroad. What these protagonists have in common is that they all live lives of quiet desperation, suffering under their failed relationships, but never taking any true action. For instance, in 'Wheels', 'Bomb Box' and 'Korea', the protagonists are sons who struggle with the unspoken failure of the relationships they have with their fathers. 'Why We're Here', 'Christmas', 'Lavin' and 'The Recruiting Officer' deal with individuals who in one way or another have become alienated from their surroundings. 'My Love, My Umbrella' and 'Peaches', to give a final example, revolve around destructive love relationships. Thus, although McGahern's protagonists differ in age and live in different places, the fact that they are all unnamed male figures who fail to make any progress in life increases the unity of the work as a whole. Moreover, David Malcolm argues that it provides the volume with a universal character (46). Together, as we will see, the stories put forward a dark vision of human life as disillusioning. This is underscored by the title of the book. *Nightlines* refers to the eighth story, 'Korea', where father and son leave fishing lines overnight and gather them the next day – a job for which the father is expecting to lose his licence soon. The story focuses on a son's discovery that his father, a Korean War veteran, has an ulterior motive for asking his son to move to America. It turns out that the father does not want his son to emigrate in order to have a better life. Instead, he has his eyes on the two hundred and fifty dollars a month that parents receive for the duration of their son's military service in the States. Furthermore, as he tells his friend, American soldiers' lives are insured, which means he would be given ten thousand dollars if his son were to be killed. The young protagonist's disillusionment in this story returns in other situations throughout the book. Thus, McGahern extends the scope of 'Korea' to the volume as a whole. This effect is enhanced by references to fishing throughout the work, in particular the literal reference to "someone's night line" in 'Lavin'. The narrator describes that it "had no fish though the hooks had been cleaned of bait" (98), which again points to disappointment. On a metaphorical level, Malcolm suggests that the twelve stories in

Nightlines are metaphoric fishing lines let down into the darkness by the author, hoping "to draw up some insights or truths to the light of day" (45).

The presence of recurring symbols also underscores the thematic unity of the book. For instance, there are numerous references to wheels and other circles in the stories. The first story of the book is entitled 'Wheels', and it opens with a reference to wheels: "Grey concrete and steel and glass in the slow raindrip of the morning station, three porters pushing an empty trolley up the platform to a stack of grey mail-bags, the loose wheels rattling, and nothing but wait and watch and listen […]", the narrator begins (11). The narrator is on his way from Dublin to the west of the Shannon, where he will visit his father, who holds it against him that he has left his rural home for the city. The father particularly resents his son for not supporting his plans of following him to Dublin with his second wife. When the narrator arrives at his old home, hoping to reconcile with his father, the latter reacts spitefully. The narrator realizes that leaving home has saved him from mutual dependence: "I knew the wheel: fathers became children to their sons who repay the care they got when they were young, and on the edge of dying the fathers become young again, but the luck of a death and a second marriage had released me from the last breaking on this ritual wheel" (19). However, even though the son has been able to take some physical distance by moving to Dublin, he is still passively waiting for an unattainable harmony with his father. Travelling between the city and the country, he is stuck on a "journey to nowhere" (15) with "as much reason to go back as home" (21). Like O'Brien's Claire, he is stuck in an in-between state, caught between the bonds that tie him to his home on the one hand and his life in Dublin on the other. This is once again illustrated by a reference to a wheel at the end of the story when the narrator is travelling home by train and watches the countryside:

> Through the windows the fields of stone walls, blue roofs of Carrick, Shannon river. […] Rustle of the boat through the bulrushes as we went to Moran's well for springwater in dry summers, cool of watercress and bitterness of wild cherries shaken out of the white-thorn hedge, black bulrush seed floating in the gallons on the floorboards, all the vivid sections of the wheel we watched so slowly turn, impatient for the rich whole that never came but that all the preparations promised.

Like for Claire in O'Brien's 'Cords', exchanging the rural for the urban has not helped the protagonist of 'Wheels' to build a new life. In the city, he has not amounted to much more than some shallow pub-based friendships. The symbol of the wheel also plays a prominent role in the closing story. In 'The Recruiting Officer', a rural teacher who lives above a pub, drinks too much and has become a "clockwatcher" (160), looks back on his life. Even though

he suffered the same oppression and manipulation as a child, he passively watches a schoolboy being beaten for theft by the parish priest in the school where he teaches. He also stands back and observes how a Christian Brother 'recruits' pupils from his school, convincing them that they have vocations. His entire life, the teacher has been unable to take any action. The only change he ever made was leaving the Holy Brothers, which he – significantly – obtained by doing nothing: as he had "neither the resolution to stay on or the courage to leave" (165), the year before Final Vows he took to bed and did not get up until he was dismissed. This state of stasis characterizes his whole life: he has found that there is no use in taking action, "for it is all a wheel" (165). Even though there are references to circular shapes throughout the entire book, the symbol of the wheel features most prominently in the opening and closing stories. This extends the idea of circularity to the volume as a whole. The arrangement of the stories also results in the idea that progressive movement is impossible. Although the different main characters include children, adolescents and adults, the stories are not arranged according to their ages: the first two stories have adult protagonists, the central figures in the two stories that follow are children, the next story revolves around adult figures again, etc. Thus, instead of organizing the stories so they would portray the maturation of a composite protagonist as is the case in *Dubliners*, McGahern has arranged them to depict a movement which lacks progress, or a circular movement. This circular organization is reinforced by the recurring imagery of the wheel in the book.

Because of the presence of similar types of characters and situations throughout the work as a whole, underscored by recurring symbols and cross-references between the stories, *Nightlines* can be read as a short story cycle. The main connecting thread of the work, what Malcolm calls "nonprogressive motion" (48), recalls one of the central themes of Joyce's *Dubliners*, i.e. inertia. In what follows, I will compare *Nightlines* with this cycle, so as to establish the extent to which McGahern refers back to Joyce.

2.3. *Nightlines* and *Dubliners*

In Joyce's 'A Little Cloud', Little Chandler believes that escaping Dublin equals breaking away from paralysis. However, the case of the protagonist's long-time friend Gallaher suggests that emigration is not enough. The reader learns that the latter has moved to London and has made a career for himself as a journalist. Yet, as the story progresses, it becomes clear that Little Chandler's friend looks unhealthy, talks in a vulgar manner and acts arrogantly. It thus appears that leaving one's claustrophobic birthplace is not necessarily a change for the better. This is a point which McGahern seems to pursue in his cycle. The

protagonists in *Nightlines* who have moved away from their homes, have not been able to find meaning in their new lives. For instance, the couple in 'My Love, My Umbrella' is not able to go beyond meaningless sexual relations in Dublin, and the man and woman in 'Peaches', who have moved to Spain to work, literally get nothing done (Carroll 180). The Irish workers on the London construction site in 'Hearts of Oak and Bellies of Brass', to give a final example, have not been able to genuinely start new lives either. According to Margaret Lasch Carroll, the characters in the stories continue to struggle, looking for purpose away from their stifling rural homes, which suggests that "leavetaking alone does not satisfy the underlying search for selfhood" (180). In their search for meaning, McGahern's protagonists are, like the characters in *Dubliners*, always on the move without actually going anywhere. Whereas Joyce's Dubliners generally roam the streets on foot, the central figures of *Nightlines* – in keeping with the wheel motif – mostly take the train, the tram or the bus. Characters like the narrator in 'My Love, My Umbrella', desperate after the failure of his affair, find "relief in movement, in getting on buses and riding to the terminus" (114). McGahern's protagonists may travel further from their birth places than Joyce's Dubliners, but in their lives they are restricted to a certain terminus: at one point, they are always forced to turn back. The adult figures are clearly trapped in a state of inertia, trying to simulate a life by simulating progress. For instance, in 'Wheels', father and son never break out of their pattern of bitterness and accusation, and the narrator keeps on travelling back and forth between his old house and his new one, neither of which is a true home to him. In 'Why We're Here', where the bored Gillespie and Boles discuss outsider Sinclair, the protagonists do not arrive at any answers, and they certainly do not resolve the question implied in the title. Life may not be completely static for the younger protagonists, as they still have resolutions to escape from their confining surroundings. For instance, for the narrators in 'Christmas' and 'Korea', the future still appears to be open. However, Malcolm argues that it is questionable whether they will be able to break away from inertia, as they have not had the best start in life. The orphan in 'Christmas' believes that a new life is waiting for him but he is marked by wretched experiences, and although the son in 'Korea' is determined to change his life, he is greatly disillusioned by his father's treatment of him (48). Moreover, if one views the adult main characters in *Nightlines* as older versions of the young protagonists, it becomes clear that the future may not bring escape or hope. The sense that the protagonists in *Nightlines* are to live out a restricted life is underscored by the author's references to *Dubliners*, which McGahern praised for having "the unity and completeness of a novel" (1991: 36). For example, the story 'Lavin' reminds one of Joyce's 'An Encounter'. Both stories are about a young boy whose

first contact with adult sexuality is a perverted one, but McGahern's story is transferred to a rural setting. Moreover, whereas the encounter in Joyce's story is accidental, the protagonist in 'Lavin' seeks out John Lavin, an alcoholic pervert who is sexually attracted to minor adolescents and lives in a decayed house. The narrator, who is struggling with homosexual feelings for his friend, is afraid of and disgusted by the figure of Lavin. Yet he is also fascinated by him, because it puzzles him that the old carpenter used to be a handsome, skilful and hard-working man. One could state that McGahern provides the reader with a more detailed character sketch of Joyce's old man. Another story that echoes *Dubliners* is 'My Love, My Umbrella', which immediately follows 'Lavin' in *Nightlines*. Like 'A Painful Case', 'My Love, My Umbrella' tells the story of a failed love affair set in Dublin. However, whereas Mr Duffy and Mrs Sinico have an intellectual connection, the relationship in McGahern's story revolves around casual sex. The story opens with the narrator's statement that "It was the rain, the constant weather of this city, made my love inseparable from the umbrella" (101). This object becomes the symbol for the sexual intercourse he engages in with the unnamed woman, as it always takes place under the umbrella, by an orchard wall behind the church. At one point, because they have "so fallen unto the habit of each other" (108), the man makes an attempt to discuss marriage, to which she replies with a question: "What would it mean to you?" (108). The narrator, however, has "longings or fears rather than any meanings" (108). This eventually leads to his decision to "break free from her" (109). But after a while "[t]he body [he] tried to escape from" becomes his only thought (113). He attempts to reunite with her, but she denies him because she has realized that there is no love between them. At the close of the story, the narrator is standing "under the trees where so often [they] had stood, in the hope that some meaning of [his] life or love would come, but only the night hardened about the growing absurdity of a man standing under an umbrella beneath the drip from the green leaves of the trees" (114). He tries to pretend he is moving forward by purposely riding buses, until one day he overhears a conductor saying to the driver that "[t]here's a gent up here who looks normal enough who must umpteen times this last year have come out here to nowhere and back" (114). After this, he grips the black umbrella "with an almost fierce determination to be as [he] was before, unknowingly happy under the trees, and the umbrella, in the wet evenings that are the normal weather of this city" (114). Pascal Bataillard argues that there is a striking parallel between Mrs Sinico and the female character of McGahern's story in so far that they "both administer a painful truth to the male characters" (83). Mrs Sinico takes Mr Duffy's hand and presses it to her cheek, implying that their mental bond may also have a physical aspect. Similarly, the woman in 'My

Love, My Umbrella' invites the man to think about what getting married would mean to him. In both cases, the male protagonists react by dismissing the female characters. In doing so, the men break away from the possibility of love, as a result of which they end up in a state of isolation once again. Mr Duffy comes to realize that he is alone and that he has missed out on his chance of escaping from his loneliness. Similarly, McGahern's narrator realizes that he did not know what he had until it was gone. Thus, both characters eventually go back to the constricted lives they led before, but in the knowledge of what they are missing.

In short, like O'Brien's *The Love Object*, McGahern's *Nightlines* echoes elements from *Dubliners*, thereby underscoring the despair experienced by his protagonists. Whereas O'Brien focuses on the central characters' high hopes for their love object and their subsequent disappointment, McGahern on the one hand looks at how the young protagonists lose their innocence and realize they need to escape from their stifling rural surroundings. On the other hand, he explores the way in which the adult characters are caught in the same old routines: not only those who have not left their rural homes, but those who have left for the city as well as those who have gone abroad. In telling the stories of the adult protagonists who have physically moved away, McGahern suggests that leaving one's repressive birth place does not guarantee evolution. This lack of progress in the protagonists' lives returns throughout the different stories and becomes a central theme, reinforced by the recurring circle imagery, as a result of McGahern's use of the cycle form. Furthermore, by referring to Joyce's cycle, McGahern highlights the status of his own volume as a largely unified whole.

3. Trevor's *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories*

3.1. Trevor: Biography

William Trevor Cox was born on 24 May 1928 in Mitchelstown, County Cork, into a middle-class Protestant family. Throughout his childhood, the family moved between different provincial Irish locales because of his father's banking business. From 1941 to 1946, Trevor studied art at St. Columba's College, near Dublin. He received his degree in history from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1950. In 1952, he married Jane Ryan, with whom he would have two sons. Throughout the 1950s, he taught art at secondary schools in County Armagh, Northern Ireland, and at Rugby and Somerset, England. During his time in Northern Ireland, he started work as a church sculptor. Trevor and his wife emigrated to England for financial reasons in 1954. He continued his artistic work there, until he was no longer satisfied with his

sculpture and turned to writing. Trevor's first novel, *A Standard of Behaviour*, was published in 1958, and from 1960 to 1965 he worked as an advertising copywriter in London. In 1964, he published his second novel, *The Old Boys*, for which he won the Hawthornden Prize. As a result, he started writing full-time, and he and his family moved to Devon, South West England. Before long, two more novels appeared: *The Boarding-House* (1965) and *The Love Department* (1966). In 1967, his first short story collection, *The Day We Got Drunk on Cake and Other Stories* was published. In 1969, another novel followed: *Mrs Eckdorf in O'Neill's Hotel*, which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Two years later, the novel *Miss Gomez and the Brethren* appeared. His second collection of short fiction, which established Trevor's reputation as a master of the short story, *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories*, was published in 1972. In the following year, another novel – *Elizabeth Alone* – and his third volume of short stories – *The Last Lunch of the Season* – appeared. In 1975, he published his fourth work of short stories, *Angels at the Ritz and Other Stories*, which was nominated for the Booker Prize. One year later, the novel *The Children of Dynmouth* appeared. In 1977, he was awarded an honorary CBE (Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) for his services to literature. His fifth work of short fiction, *Lovers of Their Time and Other Stories*, followed in 1978. In 1979, his next short story collection, *The Distant Past and Other Stories*, was published. One year later, another novel, entitled *Other People's Worlds*, appeared. In 1981, Trevor published the short story collection *Beyond the Pale*, which won the Giles Cooper Award. In 1982, a film version of his well-known short story 'The Ballroom of Romance' came out.[156] Many more works followed in the late decades of the twentieth and the early decades of the twenty-first century, including short story collections and novels but also plays and nonfiction. His short stories – which he prefers over his novels[157] – have been published in the most prestigious periodicals in Ireland, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as in many anthologies. His collections of short fiction have also been published in aggregate volumes, the most recent one being the two-volume *Collected Stories* (2009). Trevor was knighted for his services to literature in 2002, he was awarded the Bob Hughes Lifetime Achievement Award in Irish Literature in 2008, and he has received honorary doctorates from universities in Ireland and England. *Cheating at Canasta*, his latest

[156] The film adaptation of 'The Ballroom of Romance' received a BAFTA TV Award in 1983.
[157] "I'm really a short-story writer but I'm lucky that I write novels as well because when you get tired of the one form […] it's lovely to turn to the novel", Trevor stated in a 2006 interview with Constanza del Río Álvaro.

short story collection, was published in 2007, and his most recent novel, *Love and Summer*, appeared in 2009.[158]

3.2. *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories*: Moments of Realization

The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories (1972), Trevor's second volume of short fiction, consists of twelve stories, which first appeared in various magazines and anthologies.[159] The stories take place in Ireland and in England, and the protagonists are mostly rural and small-town Irish as well as middle and lower-middle class English men and women, although the book also features some upper-middle class characters. Most of the central figures are adults, but some of the stories also focus on children or adolescents. In the case of Eleanor, who is a only a child in 'A Nice Day at School', the adult version of the same young character returns in another story ('Kinkies'). The majority of the stories have a third-person narrator who recounts the central characters' experiences through focalization, often with multiple focalizers. In two of the stories, an I-narrator relates the events in retrospect. Thematically, the book centres on love, as well as on the disillusionment and loneliness that result from failed love. No matter whether the main characters are Irish or English, rich or poor, children or adults, male or female, single or married, the protagonists all share a striving for romantic or family love, which ultimately disappoints them. While this thematic unity in itself may not be strong enough to read the volume as a short story cycle, it is reinforced by the moments of realization with respect to their love or family lives that all but two of the protagonists experience. As we will see, these insights shatter the protagonists' illusions, as a result of which they either end up in misery or come to terms with their disappointment. In the opening story 'Access to the Children', Malcolmson, who had an affair that broke up his marriage, finally realizes that his wife is never taking him back, after which he drinks away his disillusionment. Eleanor, a young working-class girl confronted with sexuality in her school environment, comes to understand that her parents are both trapped in their marriage in 'Nice Day at School'. She decides that she should give up on her dreams of a romantic marriage and settle for becoming a spinster, like her teacher, Miss Whitehead. In the title

[158] Based on Gregory A. Schirmer's *William Trevor: A Study of His Fiction* (1990), Dolores MacKenna's *William Trevor: The Writer and His Work* (1999) and Andrew Maunder's entry on William Trevor in *The Facts on File Companion to the British Short Story* (2007).

[159] The stories were first published in the *London Magazine*, *Transatlantic Review*, *Nova*, *Redbook*, the *Antioch Review*, *Winter's Tales*, and *Penguin Modern Short Stories*. The story 'Going Home' was first broadcast by BBC Radio Three as a radio play.

story, 'The Ballroom of Romance',[160] thirty-six-year-old Irish Bridie lives with and cares for her disabled father on a mountain farm, even though she would rather work in the town. One night, she comes to realize that she should stop her weekly Saturday night visits by bicycle to Mr Justin Dwyer's isolated roadside dance-hall called "The Ballroom of Romance".[161] This place is the only chance of entertainment and romance for middle-aged spinsters and bachelors who are burdened with the care for their elderly parents. When she was sixteen, Bridie had already given up her romantic dream of marrying someone out of love. Now she understands that she even has to let go of her hopes of marrying a decent man like the amiable road mender Dano Ryan, and that she should settle for a marriage to a lazy drinking middle-aged bachelor so as not to be lonely when her father dies.[162] Twenty-seven-year-old Mavie thinks she is having a love affair with a fifty-two-year old married man with two children in 'The Forty-seventh Saturday', but in reality Mr McCarthy is a bachelor who wants to keep her at a distance. They meet every Saturday, but he always leaves after a few hours under the pretext of keeping a weekly appointment while, in truth, he goes to the pictures. Mavie thus fails to come to a moment of insight. In 'A Happy Family', the I-narrator realizes that his wife, who claims to have been contacted by a man who knows everything about her, is obsessed with the imaginary friend from her childhood. As a result, he decides to have her committed, which leaves him pondering on their former life together. In 'Going Home', thirty-eight-year-old Miss Fanshawe, a single teacher who takes care of her parents, pours her heart out to the thirteen-year-old Carruthers, a pupil who is unwanted by his own mother. She tells him about her dreams of mothering him, but she then understands that he is completely unsympathetic to her confession, after which they both settle for their lives as they were and thus go their separate ways. John Joe Dempsey, a teenage boy whose only friend is the town's idiot, realizes that the small Irish town he lives in is highly repressive and hypocritical in 'An Evening with John Joe Dempsey'. He decides to settle for being alone rather than being part of that religious society. In 'The Mark-2 Wife', Anna Mackintosh is thought to be delusional when she claims that her husband is going to leave her and marry another woman because she has not been able to give him children. However, in the end, after Anna has reconciled herself with the fact that her marriage is over, it turns out that she had come to the right conclusion all

[160] For an extensive analysis of Trevor's famous story, see O'Toole's "The Ireland That We Dreamed Of?: 'The Ballroom of Romance'" (2013).
[161] Trevor based his "Ballroom of Romance" on a dancehall of the same name, which was built in early 1934 in Glenfarne, County Leitrim. Even though the high days of the Irish dancehalls are situated between the thirties and fifties, the story itself is set in 1971, because – as Trevor explained in a 1986 interview with MacKenna – for him, the story was about the "tail-end of something" (qtd. in O'Toole 109).
[162] For a gender-based analysis of 'The Ballroom of Romance', focusing on Bridie and the relationship with her father, see Suzanne Morrow Paulson's *William Trevor: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1993).

along. Mrs Angusthorpe, who has been married to the headmaster of an English public school for forty-seven years, advises the wife of a former pupil of Mr Angusthorpe to leave her husband in 'The Grass Widows'. Yet, she fails to realize that she should have taken her own advice years ago. In 'A Choice of Butchers', a seven-year-old small-town boy discovers that his father's assistant in the butchery is leaving them. The I-narrator is devastated, as he comes to the realization that he should be the sensitive Mr Dukelow's son instead of his father's. Twenty-seven-year-old Eleanor – the grown-up Eleanor from the story 'Nice Day at School' – is unwillingly drugged by her boss in 'Kinkies'. During their psychedelic experience, she comes to understand that he has problems with himself and others because his mother loved him perversely, which deeply affects her. In the closing story 'O Fat White Woman', Mrs Digly-Hunter, the wife of a cruel headmaster of Milton Grange, an English boarding school for backward boys, fails to respond to a pupil's cry for help. When the boy dies, she realizes that her husband and his teachers have been battering the children and deriving sexual pleasure from it. The story ends with her mad outburst of the truth, which no one takes seriously. Thus, apart from the central figures in 'The Forty-seventh Saturday' and 'The Grass Widows', all of the protagonists experience some kind of epiphany with respect to love, which increases the unity of the work as a whole. Although Trevor's work carries the title *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories,* it simply could have been named after the story 'The Ballroom of Romance' without adding 'and Other Stories', since Bridie's moment of insight and her subsequent resignation recur throughout the stories. This is highlighted by references to dancing in the book. In addition to the thematic similarities between the different protagonists' moments of realization, there are also structural parallels. That is, the central figures harbour illusions with respect to love before they come to new insights. For instance, in 'Access to the Children', Malcolmson deceives himself, imagining that his wife's new relationship is only temporary, after which they will be reunited:

> He counted in his mind: if Richard had been visiting the flat for, say six weeks already and assuming that his love affair with Elizabeth had begun two weeks before his first visit, that left another four months to go, allowing the affair ran an average course of six months. It would therefore come to an end at the beginning of March. His own affair with Diana had lasted from April until September. (20)

When Bridie in 'The Ballroom of Romance' was sixteen, she cherished illusions about Patrick Grady – the love of her life – marrying her, but then a girl from the town who never danced in the wayside ballroom stole him from her. Since then, she has been dreaming about marrying Dano Ryan, whom she does not love but considers a decent man. This illusion is shattered as

well when she learns that he is to be engaged to his widowed landlady. The protagonists often have their eyes opened when they are confronted with a character whose situation parallels his or her own (Gitzen 61). For instance, in the same story Bridie discovers that she is starting to resemble Madge Dowding, who is only a few years older than she is and who is a figure of fun because she is desperately looking for a husband. Partly as a result of this insight, she decides to give up on her pointless search for romance. John Joe Dempsey, to give another example, draws a parallel between himself and the middle-aged bachelor Mr Lynch, who has never left his possessive mother and spends his time telling melancholy sexual anecdotes in the pub in 'An Evening with John Joe Dempsey'. The fifteen-year-old lad, too, lives with his protective widow-mother for whom he has to conceal his desires, which have been corrupted by keeping company with the perverted elderly dwarf Quigley. Mrs Angusthorpe also sees the parallels between her own marriage and that of Mrs Jackson in 'The Grass Widows', although she fails to see the bigger picture, namely that she herself should have left her husband at the beginning of their marriage (Gitzen 61). Similarly, the volume as a whole is unified by the presence of such parallels between the situations of the protagonists in the different stories. For instance, both young Eleanor in 'A Nice Day at School' and young John Joe in 'An Evening with John Joe Dempsey' realize that life and love are not what they had expected, as a result of which they settle for being alone. Bridie ('The Ballroom of Romance') as well as Miss Fanshawe ('Going Home') are spinsters in their mid-thirties who are burdened with the care for their parents. Both Mrs Angusthorpe ('The Grass Widows') and Mrs Digly-Hunter ('O Fat White Woman') are married to a headmaster who has not given them any children. They have both settled into the role of passive wives of commanding men, and when they finally take some kind of action, they are not listened to: Mrs Jackson does not take Mrs Angusthorpe's advice of leaving her husband, and no one listens to Mrs Digly-Hunter's outburst about the true cause of the schoolboy's death. Finally, some stories also depict opposite situations. For example, the I-narrator in 'A Happy Family' believes that his wife Elizabeth is really being contacted by a man who knows everything about her childhood, until he discovers that this Mr Higgs is imaginary. Conversely, everyone – including her psychiatrist – believes that Anna is imagining that her husband is leaving her in 'The Mark-2 Wife', but in the end it turns out that she has been right all along.

In short, because of its thematic focus on (failed) love, which is underscored by the recurring situations of characters realizing they have to let go of their illusions as well as by parallels and cross-references between the stories, *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories* can be read as a short story cycle. As in O'Brien's *The Love Object* and McGahern's

Nightlines, Trevor's protagonists have to contend with disillusionment. Yet, whereas O'Brien's main characters continue to make the same mistakes in their search for an unattainable perfect love and McGahern's central figures passively undergo their suffering, most of Trevor's protagonists – after having experienced some form of epiphany – resign themselves to the limitations of their lives and relationships. In what follows, I will compare *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories* with Joyce's cycle *Dubliners*, so as to investigate the extent to which Trevor's use of epiphany echoes Joyce's.[163]

3.3. *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories* and *Dubliners*

Like Joyce's protagonists in *Dubliners*, the central figures in Trevor's cycle experience moments of realization. As opposed to the characters in *The Love Object*, who do not learn from their mistakes, and the characters in *Nightlines*, who are stuck in the routines of their constricted lives, Trevor's main characters at least reach new insights. Still, much like Joyce's Dubliners, the protagonists in *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories* remain trapped despite their epiphanies. Some are doomed to repeat the mistakes made by their parents or other members of the previous generation (Gitzen 61). John Joe Dempsey knows he will turn into Mr Lynch, being suffocated by his overprotective mother and concealing his sexual fantasies from her ('An Evening with John Joe Dempsey'). Despite Mrs Angusthorpe's warning that Mr Jackson resembles her own husband – egocentric, dominant and ruthless – Daphne Jackson is convinced that her husband is a considerate and caring man. As a result, Mrs Jackson will one day wake up and realize that it is too late to escape from her unequal marriage. In 'Nice Day at School', Eleanor dreams of a kind "man whose fingers were long and thin and gentle" (45) to marry her and take her away to Biarritz in an Air France aeroplane for their honeymoon. She thinks about the way her parents are "trapped by each other" (49), stuck in a marriage that neither of them wants to be in: "Her mother was trapped, married to him, obliging him so that she'd receive housekeeping money out of which she could save for her morning glass of gin. He was trapped himself, going out every night in a doorman's uniform […]. He crushed her mother because he'd been crushed himself" (49). She realizes that "there was no man with delicate hands who'd take her away when the leaves in London were yellow-brown, that there were only the blubber lips of Denny Price", the local butcher's boy who fancies her (49). In the end, the schoolgirl concludes that, like Miss Whitehead, she still has a chance to escape from a similar marriage, but only by becoming a

[163] O'Toole notes that Trevor cites Joyce as one of his key influences in a number of interviews (115).

spinster: “It was better to be Miss Whitehead than a woman who was a victim of a man’s bad back. […] Miss Whitehead was complete and alone, having discarded what she wished to discard, accepting now that there was no Mr Right” (49). Further on in the book, the reader learns that the single Eleanor, at twenty-seven, will become the victim of her boss Belhatchet, who will drug her orange juice. In ‘Kinkies’, she confesses that she would like to be married, to “a man with delicate hands […] who would marry her in a church and take her afterwards to Biarritz for a honeymoon” (239). Thus, it appears that, as an adult, she has returned to the illusions she entertained as a young girl. As is the case in *Dubliners*, some of Trevor’s characters look for ways to escape from their disappointment. But remedies like alcohol, drugs, fantasy as well as outbursts of anger and speech only offer them temporary reprieves. Most of Trevor’s protagonists resign themselves to their limited lives, giving up their plans to escape and find love. The best example is Bridie, the central figure of the title story. Contrary to Eleanor in ‘Nice Day at School’, who resolves that it is better to remain alone than to enter into a loveless marriage, sixteen-year-old Bridie first decides that “[i]f you couldn’t have love, the next best thing was surely a decent man” (61) after her loss of Patrick Grady. When she learns at thirty-six that she will not be able to marry a decent man like Dano Ryan either, she realizes that she will have to reconcile herself to marrying Bowser Egan, whom she does not love and who is not a decent man:

> She rode through the night as on Saturday nights for years she had ridden and never would ride again because she'd reached a certain age. She would wait now and in time Bowser Egan would seek her out because his mother would have died. Her father would probably have died also by then. She would marry Bowser Egan because it would be lonesome being by herself in the farmhouse. (72)

Like O’Brien’s ‘Irish Revel’, ‘The Ballroom of Romance’ echoes Joyce’s ‘The Dead’ in its depiction of a revel which ends in anti-climax and entrapment, transposed to a rural setting (Ingman 2009: 196). Moreover, like ‘The Dead’, Trevor’s story focuses on the shoddiness of an Irish revel and the protagonist’s subsequent epiphany. The fact that precisely the title story of *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories*, which is the most explicit expression of the thematic focus of the work, hints at ‘The Dead’, the story that brings together the stories in *Dubliners*, highlights the status of Trevor’s volume as a largely unified whole. Furthermore, Tina O’Toole argues that, in ‘The Ballroom of Romance’, Trevor also echoes the central concerns of another famous story from Joyce’s *Dubliners*, i.e. ‘Eveline’. Although he adapts the social context so that it reflects the sixty-year gap between the publication of the two stories, on the whole, Trevor’s story clearly captures the essence of the earlier narrative. Like

Eveline, Bridie is the good daughter who keeps the house after the death of her mother. Although Trevor's protagonist is not maltreated by her father as Eveline is, they are both trapped in a life of servitude to an elderly father (116). O'Toole concludes that Bridie may be viewed as a "projection of what the nineteen-year-old Eveline might have become by middle age in Free State Ireland". Moreover, if we are to read Bridie's story as a sequel to Joyce's 'Eveline', she continues, "the half-century between the publication of the two stories reinforces Trevor's point about how slowly social change came about in Ireland, particularly where women's lives and opportunities are concerned" (116). Given these intertextual references to *Dubliners*, Trevor can thus be seen to acknowledge Joyce as a predecessor, and hence the short story cycle as a literary form, in *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories*.

In conclusion, the first decades of the second half of the twentieth century can be said to have carried with them a renewed interest in the form of the cycle. Not only were there more short story cycles published in Ireland in this period, the works discussed in this chapter also distinctly refer back to Joyce's cycle *Dubliners*. Therefore, these volumes are evidence of the existence of a genre memory of the short story cycle, even if there are no explicit references to the form in the subtitle or preface of the works. In addition, it is striking that these cycles all put forward a rather dark vision of mankind as well. In *A History of the Irish Short Story* (2009), Ingman attributes the bleakness of the Irish short story in this period to Ireland's insularity at the time. I believe, moreover, that the bleak tone of the cycles which are the focus of this chapter is evidence of the authors' existentialist vision of human life – one that is not exclusive to Ireland. After all, these works do not solely focus on Irish settings and characters: the stories are set in Ireland as well as abroad, within Ireland the stories are set in the city as well as in the country, and the protagonists are Irish as well as foreign men and women. It is no coincidence that O'Brien, McGahern and Trevor have used the cycle form to put forward a more general view of human life. That is, more than other literary forms, the short story cycle has the power to bring markedly different lives together as parts of a more or less unified whole.

Chapter VI

Rewriting the Short Story Cycle: Emma Donoghue's *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* and other Experimental Feminist Cycles

In the fifth chapter, I have argued that a renewed interest in the form of the short story cycle emerged at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century. This 'revival' of the cycle form in Ireland, as we will see, continues in recent decades. In this chapter, I will argue that in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, several female authors used the form of the short story cycle to criticize women's position and identity in patriarchal societies. As I will show, all four of Emma Donoghue's short story collections can be read as short story cycles with a feminist concern. In addition, the early postmodern collections of Éilís Ní Dhuibhne and Anne Enright also qualify as short story cycles with a strong feminist focus. In what follows, then, I will read Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch* (1997), *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* (2002), *Touchy Subjects* (2006) and *Astray* (2012), as well as Ní Dhuibhne's *The Inland Ice and Other Stories* (1997) and Enright's *The Portable Virgin* (1991) as short story cycles.[164]

1. Emma Donoghue

1.1. Donoghue: Biography

Emma Donoghue was born on 24 October 1969 in Dublin as the youngest of eight children of Frances, an English teacher, and famous literary critic Denis Donoghue. She attended Catholic convent schools in Dublin, apart from what she herself calls "one eye-opening year in New York at the age of ten".[165] In 1990, she obtained a first-class honours Bachelor of Arts in English and French from University College Dublin, after which she moved to England and received her PhD from the University of Cambridge in 1997. She wrote her dissertation on the concept of friendship between men and women in eighteenth-century English fiction. At the age of twenty-three on, she started working full-time as a writer. On 1998, after years of commuting between Ireland, England and Canada, she settled

[164] An earlier version of this chapter was published as an article. See Debbie Brouckmans and Elke D'hoker, "Rewriting the Irish Short Story: Emma Donoghue's *The Woman Who Gave Birth To Rabbits*," *Journal of the Short Story in English* 63: "The 21st Century Irish Short Story," ed. Bertrand Cardin (Presses de l'Université d'Angers, Autumn 2014) 213-228.

[165] See the section 'Emma Donoghue' on *emmadonoghue.com.* 2014. <http://emmadonoghue.com/emma-donoghue.html>.

in London, Ontario, where she lives with her partner and their two children. Donoghue holds joint Irish and Canadian citizenship, but she calls herself "an Irishwoman and an Irish writer, having spent those formative first twenty years of life in Dublin".[166] Although she works as a literary historian and writes drama for stage, radio and screen as well, Donoghue is best known for her fiction, which has been translated into over forty languages. In 1994, she published her debut, *Stir-fry*, a coming-of-age novel set in contemporary Dublin. Her second novel, *Hood*, also set in present-day Dublin, followed in 1995. The book won the 1997 American Library Association's Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Book Award (now known as the Stonewall Book Award). Donoghue also has a great love for the short story form: her stories have been published in *Granta*, the *New Statesman*, *One Story*, the *Sunday Express, Mail on Sunday*, *The Lady*, the *Globe and Mail*, as well as in thirty other journals and anthologies. They have been broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and 4, RTE and CBC as well. In 1997, she published her first work of short fiction, *Kissing the Witch*, a volume of postmodern fairy tales, which she adapted into a play of the same name in 2000. She moved to historical fiction with *Slammerkin* (2000), a novel set in London and Wales, inspired by a 1763 murder. The book won the 2002 Ferro-Grumley Award for Lesbian Fiction. In 2002, she continued on the historical fiction course with *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, a volume of short stories based on real incidents in the history of the British Isles between the fourteenth and the nineteenth century. *Life Mask*, a historical novel which tells the story of a love triangle in 1790s London, followed in 2004. *Touchy Subjects*, a volume of contemporary short stories about social taboos, appeared in 2006. It was longlisted for the 2006 Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award. In 2007, she published *Landing*, a novel which contrasts Dublin with small-town Ontario. The work won the Golden Crown Literary Award. In 2008, Donoghue published *The Sealed Letter*, a historical novel on the Codrington Affair, a 1864 British divorce case. The book was joint winner of the 2009 Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian Fiction. Her 2010 novel *Room*, which is narrated by the five-year-old Jack who lives in a single room with his mother and has never been outside, became an international bestseller. The novel was shortlisted for the 2010 Man Booker Prize, and won the 2010 Hughes & Hughes Irish Novel of the Year, as well as many other awards. In 2012, she returned to the historical short fiction of *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* with *Astray*, a volume of fact-inspired short stories about travels to, from and within North America. The work was longlisted for the 2013 Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award.

[166] See the section 'FAQ' on *emmadonoghue.com.* 2014. <http://emmadonoghue.com/faq.html>.

Donoghue's latest work of fiction, *Frog Music* (2014), is a historical novel based on a murder in 1876 San Francisco.[167]

1.2. Re-imagining Fairy Tales: *Kissing the Witch*

Donoghue's short fiction debut, *Kissing the Witch* (1997), consists of thirteen re-imagined fairy tales. This postmodern volume has been treated as a work for adolescents.[168] Yet, as I will show, the book can also fruitfully be read as a short story cycle with a distinct feminist concern. In what follows, I will look at the way in which Donoghue uses fairy tales to shed light on the ordinary lives of women in *Kissing the Witch*, as well as how the use of the cycle form reinforces her revision of women's traditional roles. As already stated in the introduction, although I do not take cycles of fairy tales into account for the purpose of this dissertation, I have chosen to include *Kissing the Witch*, as it is a cycle of rewritten fairy tales which – as we will see – is clearly part of Donoghue's larger project of revising women's lives through short fiction.

On her website, Donoghue describes *Kissing the Witch* as "the easiest book [she has] ever written – a delight from start to finish", which she attributes to the fact that she took all its storylines from "the ultimate plot-mistress, the Oral Tradition".[169] That is, the stories are inspired by traditional European folktale sources such as the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen and Charles Perrault.[170] Donoghue's method in this book is to re-imagine the fairy tales, with the purpose of refashioning gendered roles and relations. The question she poses here is 'What if?': "What if Thumbelina wasn't actually small, she just felt small?", she

[167] Based on the sections 'Emma Donoghue', 'Books' and 'FAQ' of the author's personal home page <http://www.emmadonoghue.com>.

[168] As Donoghue explains on her website, she wrote the volume for adults but it was, despite her strong reservations, published as a young adult book in the United States, under the title *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* (see the section 'Books' on *emmadonoghue.com.* 2014. <http://www.emmadonoghue.com/books/short-story-collections/kissing-the-witch.html>). Consequently, the book has been treated as a work for adolescents (see Martin 2010). However, the postmodern techniques deployed in the volume have also been discussed (see Zarranz 2012).

[169] See the section 'Books' on *emmadonoghue.com.* 2014. <http://emmadonoghue.com/books/short-story-collections/kissing-the-witch.html>. Donoghue dedicates the book to "Frances, my mother and first storyteller, who read me Andrew Lang's 'Pinkel and the Witch' more times than she can bear to remember […]".

[170] According to Donoghue, 'The Tale of the Shoe' is based on the Grimm brothers' folk tale of Cinderella; 'The Tale of the Bird' on Hans Andersen's Thumbelina; 'The Tale of the Rose' on Madame le Prince de Beaumont's Beauty and the Beast; 'The Tale of the Apple' on Grimms' folk tale of Snow White; 'The Tale of the Handkerchief' on Grimms' folk tale of the Goose Girl; 'The Tale of the Hair' on Grimms' folk tale of Rapunzel; 'The Tale of the Brother' on Andersen's Snow Queen; 'The Tale of the Spinster' on Grimms' folk tale of Rumpelstiltskin and similar stories of magical helpers; 'The Tale of the Cottage' on Grimms' folk tale of Hansel and Gretel; 'The Tale of the Skin' on Grimms' folk tale of Donkeyskin; 'The Tale of the Needle' on Charles Perrault's Sleeping Beauty; 'The Tale of the Voice' on Andersen's Little Mermaid; 'The Tale of the Kiss' is not based on any source text, but suggested by various folk motifs about oracles and magical helpers, discussed in Marina Warner's *From the Beast to the Blonde* (see the section 'Books' on *emmadonoghue.com.* 2014. <http://emmadonoghue.com/books/short-story-collections/kissing-the-witch.html>).

wonders.[171] The answer is, significantly, offered by the fairy tale character herself. In fact, every story has a female I-narrator, who tells her own story in retrospect, in her own particular voice.[172] For instance, the language proficiency of Little Sister in 'The Tale of the Spinster' (Rumpelstiltskin) is limited. When she tells her story in 'The Tale of the Cottage' (Hansel and Gretel), she does so in her own way: "[…] Tell you story? Tale of cottage. […] I once had brother that mother say we were pair of hands one fast one slow. I once had father he got lost in woods. I once had mother. […]" (131-2). Not only do the female narrators tell their own story from a retrospective point of view, they also tell it to each other. To be precise, each story is told by its protagonist to the protagonist of the previous story. For instance, at the end of 'The Tale of the Rose', the protagonist ("Beauty") asks the female "Beast" to tell her own tale. The latter does so in the following story, 'The Tale of the Apple', which turns out to be the story of Snow White. At the end of this story, the protagonist asks to hear the story of her stepmother: this is told in the following story, 'The Tale of the Handkerchief', which turns out to be the story of the Goose Girl, etc. The formulaic expressions typical of fairy tales such as 'Once upon a time…' or '… and they lived happily ever after' are replaced by phrases which emphasize the identity and voice of the female narrators. "Who were you before …?", the protagonist asks after the conclusion of each story, to which the protagonist of the following tale always replies, "Will I tell you my own story? It is the tale of a …".[173] Each narrator learns something about women's traditional roles from the character to whom she will pass on the narration, i.e. the protagonist of the next tale (Orme 118). For instance, the narrator of 'The Tale of the Shoe', Cinderella, learns from her fairy godmother that marrying the prince

[171] See the section 'Books' on *emmadonoghue.com.* 2014. <http://emmadonoghue.com/books/short-story-collections/kissing-the-witch.html>.

[172] With the exception of the narrator of 'The Tale of the Rose', who is a bird (but used to be Beauty from Beauty and the Beast, and the narrator of 'The Tale of the Hair', who is a horse skull (but used to be Rapunzel).

[173] These lines always appear in italics on the page following the conclusion of each story. The first line says something about the time and place as well as about the meeting between the current and the future protagonist: "In the morning I asked, Who were you before you walked into my kitchen?" ('The Tale of the Shoe', 9); "In the orchard I asked, Who were you before you married my father?" ('The Tale of the Apple', 59). The final line includes the title of the following tale: "And she said, Will I tell you my own story? It is the tale of a bird" ('The Tale of the Shoe', 9); "And she said, Will I tell you my own story? It is the tale of a handkerchief" ('The Tale of the Apple', 59).

The reader thus discovers that Cinderella's fairy godmother used to be Thumbelina; that Thumbelina's bird used to be Beauty (from Beauty and the Beast); that the – female – Beast used to be Snow White; that Snow White's stepmother used to be maid who became queen from the Goose Girl; that the horse skull (from the Goose Girl) used to be Rapunzel; that Rapunzel's keeper used to be the girl whose brother was taken (by the Snow Queen); that the Snow Queen used to be the woman who hired the – female – Rumpelstiltskin (Little Sister); that Little Sister used to be Gretel (from Hansel and Gretel); that the witch from Hansel and Gretel used to be the girl from Donkeyskin; that the woman who made Donkeyskin's dresses used to be Sleeping Beauty; that the spinster from Sleeping Beauty used to be the Little Mermaid; and that the witch from the Little Mermaid used to be the witch from the original 'The Tale of the Kiss'.

is not necessarily the right path for her. This character is usually an older woman: a fairy godmother like in the opening story, or a stepmother or a witch, who turns out not to be a mere supporting character nor the evil antagonist, but who in some way becomes the protagonist's mentor. She teaches the narrator to resist the gender norms of their society (Martin 2010: 6). For instance, the narrator of 'The Tale of the Apple' (Snow White), who "knew from the songs that a stepmother's smile is like a snake's" (46), learns that the apple offered by her stepmother was not poisoned, and that she did not need a prince to kiss her, as she was able to awaken all on her own. The witch in 'The Tale of the Voice' (The Little Mermaid), to give another example, explains to the narrator that it was not she who had taken her voice. Instead, the girl had silenced herself by trying to change in order to make a merchant's son love her: "I don't have your voice, you know, she said softly. You do. […] Your silence was the cost of what you sought […]; it had nothing to do with me. What would I want with your voice? The music you make has always been in your power" (202-3). The mentor figure also inspires the narrator to challenge society's norms with respect to sexuality. That is, some of the tales in this volume are lesbian rewritings. For example, in 'The Tale of the Shoe' Cinderella leaves the prince behind and starts a new life with her fairy godmother. In 'The Tale of the Rose', Beauty falls in love with the Beast, who turns out to be a woman. And, to give a final example, in 'The Tale of the Cottage', Gretel chooses to stay with the witch over going home with her brother.

However, whether the stories deal with homo- or heterosexual love, or with the protagonist's search for a family or a home, the main message is always that the female protagonist should choose her own path instead of blindly following the one that society has mapped out for her. Libe García Zarranz argues that Donoghue uses parody in the volume to expose society's gender and sexual norms as fabrications "historically maintained for patriarchal and heterosexist purposes" (194).[174] For instance, Donoghue's Cinderella in 'The Tale of the Shoe' – who sweeps and scrubs "because there was nothing else to do" (1-2) – asks the fairy godmother to be taken to the ball: "Isn't that what girls are meant to ask for?" (3). There, she "knew just how [she] was meant to behave" (4). She smiles prettily, refuses food and says nothing but "Indeed and Oh yes and Do you think so?" (4). However, when the key moment arrives and the prince is about to propose marriage to her, her body reacts by vomiting, which symbolizes her refusal of the imposed norms (Zarranz 194): "I had barely time to wipe my mouth before the prince came to propose" (6). When the prince leads her out

[174] Hutcheon includes postmodern parody as a subversive strategy in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988: 22-36; 124-40).

on the steps, under the half-full moon, she moves away from stereotyped gender roles by metafictionally describing the situation as "all very fairy-tale" (6). The girl then realizes that she "got the story all wrong": "How could I not have noticed she was beautiful?" (7). At this, Cinderella runs away with the fairy godmother: "So then she took me home, or I took her home, or we were both somehow taken to the closest thing" (8). This open ending is characteristic of all of the stories in the volume. By transforming the very rigid and fixed endings of fairy tales into situations where possibilities are left open, Donoghue does not only offer her protagonists the opportunity to choose their own paths, she also leaves her readers with a choice. We never learn what became of Cinderella and her fairy godmother. And, although it becomes clear that the mentor from 'The Tale of the Shoe' used to be the protagonist of 'The Tale of the Bird', it remains unclear how this Thumbelina ended up as Cinderella's fairy godmother. In addition, the reader never learns to whom the Cinderella of the opening tale tells her story. Jennifer Orme argues that these gaps expose the fairy tale's narration as partial and fragmented, while at the same time underlining the unlikelihood of never-ending happiness (128). 'The Tale of the Rose', at its close, provides other possible readings of Donoghue's version of Beauty and the Beast: "And as the years flowed by, some villagers told travellers of a beast and a beauty who lived in the castle and could be seen walking on the battlements, and others told of two beauties, and others, of two beasts" (40). Thus, Donoghue is careful not to replace one limited view of a happy ending with another. For it is the meaning of words like 'happy', enforced by patriarchal society, which traps the protagonists in the first place (Martin 20). There is "no harm" in the prince of 'The Tale of the Shoe', the woodsmen in 'The Tale of the Apple' are "not bad men" and the narrator's husband in 'The Tale of the Bird' is a "good man", but that does not mean that these men understand what the protagonists are looking for. "But now I knew that what I wanted was not the same as what he wanted for me", Donoghue's Thumbelina explains, "What this good man had sworn to protect me from was not the same as what I feared. I trusted that he would never let anything hurt me, but he would never let anything touch me either" (21).

The open-endedness which Donoghue emphasizes in the stories is reinforced by her choice of form for the work as a unified whole which nonetheless displays gaps between its parts. As in all short story cycles, the thirteen stories are on the one hand individual units which can be read separately. On the other hand, however, they are held together in several ways. As we have already seen, they are all re-imagined fairy tales, linked by a sequence of narrators, each of whom tells the story to the narrator of the previous story. In addition, as I will show, this unity of the work as a whole is underscored by the presence of recurring

symbols and cross-references between the different stories, as well as by the accumulation of the book's themes in the closing story. All the protagonists of *Kissing the Witch* have in common that they undergo a transformation thanks to a mentor, as a result of which they are able to assert some kind of agency. In addition to parodying traditional fairy tales, the protagonists also break away from gender and sexual norms by reversing the meaning of some well-known symbols. The red dancing shoes from Andersen's tale, for instance, which warn women not to cross the boundaries of patriarchy,[175] are given an alternative meaning in Donoghue's version of Snow White (Zarranz 194). In 'The Tale of the Apple', the stepmother describes to Snow White how much she has missed her: "I haven't had a night's sleep since you left, she said; it feels like dancing in shoes of red-hot iron" (55-6). The symbol negatively associated with sin in the Christian tradition thus comes to stand for lesbian desire. Zarranz points out that red shoes have also been interpreted as a symbol of woman's power and imagination. So the red dancing shoes in 'The Tale of the Apple' might be seen to represent transgression and freedom as well (195). The symbolic actions of wearing red shoes and dancing appear in different stories. Donoghue's Cinderella describes her feelings for the fairy godmother as "dancing on points of clear glass" (3); the girl in 'The Tale of the Brother' is given a pair of red shoes with which she sets off her journey in search for her brother; and Little Sister describes her feelings for the witch in 'The Tale of the Cottage' in terms of dancing as well: "I dance like white flowers pushing through cold headfirst" (139). By letting this positive symbol recur throughout the work, Donoghue underscores the volume's revision of the identities of female fairy tale characters. Moreover, her re-imagining of fairy tales in *Kissing the Witch* is completed in the final tale, 'The Tale of the Kiss', which is the only story not based on an existing fairy tale. This story returns to a motif which appears throughout the book, and for which it is named: that of the protagonist kissing the witch rather than the prince. In this tale, the witch from 'The Tale of the Voice' tells the story of the transformations she has undergone to Donoghue's version of the Little Mermaid. As a young woman, she discovers she is barren, which to her community means that she cannot do her 'job' as a woman: "As far as my people were concerned, women like me had no future. […] A barren woman was hated […]; the way they saw it, she had never earned a bite of bread" (208). She can only escape such strict gender norms by leaving society, so she chooses a solitary life in a cave. In addition to freedom, what she finds there is power, "[p]ower that

[175] Karen, the protagonist of Andersen's 'The Red Shoes', wears her red dancing shoes to church, for which she is punished by an angel who makes the shoes dance on their own. In the end, she has to have her feet cut off to dispose of the shoes and is condemned to wear wooden feet, after which she is finally forgiven and dies.

came not from my own thin body or my own taut mind, but was invested in me by a village" (213). The villagers are convinced that the protagonist must be a witch, as she is a woman living alone outside of the community. They bring her presents in the hope that she will solve their problems. Thus, because the people believe it to be true, she is transformed into a witch. From then on, she feels untouchable, until one morning a woman comes to ask for help with her red-haired daughter. The woman wants her daughter to stay with her, as she is her last child living at home. On the evening of the same day, the woman's husband visits her as well, pleading to help him with the same daughter, whom he wants to marry his friend. The next day, the beautiful and self-assured girl herself appears in the cave, telling her that she only wants some time. The witch finally tells the mother that she can never order her daughter to stay at home, because otherwise she will turn into a hare; to the father she says that if he orders his daughter to marry, her husband will turn into a wolf and eat her. When the girl returns to the cave to thank her, the protagonist says she can pay her back with a kiss, which she does. The kiss transforms the witch once again, as it awakens feelings of need and love within herself: "On the whole I am inclined to think that a witch should not kiss. Perhaps it is the not being kissed that makes her a witch; perhaps the source of her power is the breath of loneliness around her. She who takes a kiss can also die of it, can wake into something unimaginable, having turned herself into some new species" (226). She contemplates whether she should go in search of the girl and vows that, when she sees her again, she will not let pride stop her from declaring her love for her. At that point, the witch suddenly addresses the narratee directly: "And what happened next, you ask? Never you mind. There are some tales not for the telling […]" (227-8). She thus refuses to offer the reader closure for this story. Instead, she suggests multiple possibilities: "[…] whether because they are too long, too precious, too laughable, too painful, too easy to need telling or too hard to explain" (228). By leaving open the options for this closing tale, Donoghue explicitly leaves the ending of the story cycle as a whole open as well. As Orme puts it, rather than with an ending, we are left with the potential for more stories and desires (127). In the very final line, the witch addresses the narratee again: "This is the story you asked for. I leave it in your mouth" (228). When looking at the structure of the work, logically, the narratee here should be the Little Mermaid from the previous story. Orme suggests, however, that the final sentence is addressed to the reader who has already been actively filling up the gaps throughout the cycle up until that point (129). The reader is thus invited to tell the next story and, thus, to undergo a transformation in the same manner that the protagonists of the book did. In other words, he (or he) is invited to become a kind of storyteller as well, along with the author and the

narrators of the work. Since it never becomes clear to whom the protagonist of 'The Tale of the Shoe' is telling her story, one could argue that the narratee is also the reader there. In other words, the reader would then become the link which completes the circle, tying up the closing and the opening story.

Thus, by selecting the cycle form for her rewriting of traditional fairy tales, Donoghue is able to create a cumulative effect which reinforces the feminist meaning of the whole. Her emphasis on the protagonist's transformation while being taught to look past the prevailing standards is given more weight because it occurs time and time again throughout the volume. As a result of this cumulative impact, at the close of the cycle, the readers are invited to undergo their own transformation.

1.3. Recovering Histories: *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*

Donoghue also makes use of the practice of feminist rewriting in her second work of short fiction. In *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* (2002), which consists of seventeen short stories set in the British Isles between the fourteenth and the nineteenth century, she draws on historical facts rather than on fairy tales to call attention to women's lives in patriarchal societies.[176] In general, critics have devoted more attention to the larger rewriting projects of Donoghue's historical novels than to her recovering of women's history in this work.[177] As I hope to show, *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* deserves the same kind of critical scrutiny, as Donoghue's use of the short story cycle form puts a different spin on this feminist rewriting project. By using the cycle form, as we will see, she is able to recover the histories of a large variety of female characters while at the same time drawing attention to the things all women in patriarchal societies have in common.

First of all, the stories in Donoghue's volume are tied together by a shared aesthetic structure as well as by a common aim and method, which are explained at the beginning of the work. "*The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* is a book of fictions, but they are also true", Donoghue announces in the 'Foreword', and she continues, "Over the last ten years, I

[176] Although about half of the stories were first broadcast on the radio ('A Short Story', 'Figures of Speech', 'Night Vision'), or appeared in anthologies ('Words for Things', 'Looking for Petronilla') or journals ('How a Lady Dies', 'The Fox on the Line') before the publication of *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, Donoghue does state in her dedication that she "conceived this book all at once".

[177] Emma Donoghue, *Slammerkin* (2000); *Life Mask* (2004); *The Sealed Letter* (2008); *Frog Music* (2014). Two recent articles investigate Donoghue's feminist project of rewriting history in her novels: Maria Mulvany highlights *Slammerkin*'s self-conscious attempt to redress "the spectralization of women in history" (158) and Claire O'Callaghan reveals how Donoghue tackles contemporary postfeminist problems through the neo-Victorianism of *The Sealed Letter*. Both articles briefly refer to *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* as part of a similar "project of rewriting feminist histories" (Mulvany 158; O'Callaghan 68).

have often stumbled over a scrap of history so fascinating that I had to stop whatever I was doing and write a story about it" (ix). The motivation guiding this project of recovery and re-imagining, is revealed as curiosity, asking 'What really happened?' as well as 'What if?'. Its main method is described as a combination of historical facts and imaginative creation: "I have used memory and invention together, like two hands engaged in the same muddy work of digging up the past".[178] The stories, that is, often take as starting point half-forgotten anecdotes or submerged facts to offer a different, skewed perspective on the dominant historical narrative. The "scrap[s] of history" she refers to in the foreword, are "the flotsam and jetsam of the last seven hundred years of British and Irish life: surgical case-notes; trial records; a plague ballad; theological pamphlets; a painting of two girls in a garden; an articulated skeleton" (ix). Most stories, in fact, seek to imagine the private life, thoughts and feelings of the historical characters referred to in these historical or pseudo-historical documents. Some are rather well-known figures, whose main achievements have been recorded in history, such as the Blind Poetess of Donegal, Frances Brown(e), Mary Wollstonecraft and Dame Alice Kyteler; others are only mentioned as a name, or have remained anonymous, like Mr Knox's niece in 'Acts of Union' or the patient in 'Cured'. Depending on the availability of historical facts, the stories seek either to plumb the private struggles hidden behind well-known public figures and events or to imaginatively reconstruct the lives of ordinary people forgotten in the folds of history. In all seventeen stories, however, the imaginative reality takes precedence before the historical facts as each story is followed by a brief 'Note', in smaller font, which mentions the facts that are known and which lists historical sources.

This hierarchical inversion of fact and fiction points to the metafictional dimension of Donoghue's volume, as it seeks to challenge our belief in history as 'objective', as a sequence of 'true' facts. In doing so, *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* positions itself within the postmodern aesthetics of metafiction. The historical axis of this postmodern project has perhaps most famously been described by Linda Hutcheon as "historiographic metafiction", to refer to works "which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (5). One of the main aims of historiographic metafiction, Hutcheon has argued, is to "open [the past] up to the present, to prevent it from being

[178] Donoghue here refers to Monique Witting, who in her novel *Les Guérillères* (1969), urges "Try to remember, or, failing that, invent" (ix).

conclusive and teleological" (110).[179] Historiographic metafiction thus plays "upon the truth and lies of the historical record. […] [C]ertain known facts are deliberately falsified in order to foreground the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and the constant potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error" (838). The hazy border between truth and lies, fact and fiction is often foregrounded in the stories of Donoghue's book, which adds to the unity of the work as a whole. The significantly placed first story, 'The Last Rabbit', centrally revolves around a lie. "And if who can tell what's true and what's not in these times, Mary, why then mayn't this rabbit story be as true as anything else?" (2), Mary's sister-in-law asks when they decide to initiate the scam of a woman giving birth to rabbits. In retrospect, as she is telling her own story, Mary says that, in the end, she supposed her lies had infected her and that her "counterfeit pains had become true" (12). The title of the work[180] in fact already announces the ambivalence of truth and fiction: while a woman who claimed to have given birth to rabbits seems indeed to have existed, the very phrase "the woman who" alerts us to the pattern of storytelling, while conjuring up rabbits is of course a well-known magician's trick.

Interestingly, the title of the volume also foregrounds that other important unifying theme of the work, which Donoghue oddly keeps silent about in the foreword, namely the fact that the imaginative recovery projects of the book all revolve around women. In all of the "forgotten puzzles and peculiar incidents" which Donoghue aims to uncover and remember in her stories, women are indeed the central protagonists. In this way, her questioning of history and truth acquires a clear feminist dimension. *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* is then not just a sceptical, postmodern investigation into the impossibility of truth or necessarily subjective and incomplete nature of historical narrative, but also an inquiry into the ideologies that motivate historical narratives, the interests and values that lie behind so-called historical facts. As Linden Peach has put it:

> Underpinning the engagement with different histories in [Donoghue's] work are questions about the writing of history itself. In whose interests and from what standpoint is it conceived? Who is excluded and who is privileged as a result of the particular narrative perspective? How incomplete are particular histories and who is it that benefits and who is it that is disadvantaged by this incompleteness? (31)

[179] Judy Lochead points out that postmodernism sees teleological notions of history as having negative implications for "those groups whose 'stories' have been erased" (6).
[180] Donoghue's original title for the book was *Histories of Nothing*, which she changed to make it more user-friendly, she explains on her website (see the section 'Books' on *emmadonoghue.com.* 2014. <http://emmadonoghue.com/books/short-story-collections/the-woman-who-gave-birth-to-rabbits.html>).

In *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, these "excluded" and "disadvantaged" are, primarily, women. The fact that Donoghue, in her stories, imaginatively reconstructs the lives of these forgotten or marginalized historical women fits in a larger feminist project of recovery and empowerment. In some stories, the women are literally empowered by being given a voice with which to tell their version of the facts, while in other stories their perspective is revealed through focalization. The importance of having a voice is referred to by Mary in 'The Fox on the Line', when she ponders in her diary: "Keeping a diary is a monstrous waste of time. But I cannot seem to help it. Without words, we move through life as mute as animals" (29). The blind poet-to-be Frances in 'Night Vision' also emphasizes the significance of words: "My brothers and sisters think words are to be scattered carelessly, like corn in front of hens. They don't know how much words matter" (65). Gayle Greene has emphasized the metafictional dimension of this self-conscious attempt to give voice to those women who have been marginalized, misrepresented or forgotten in history or in literature: "feminist metafiction may have more radical implications than male post-modernist texts, in having more urgency and edge, more relevance to lived experience: for when women write of being trapped in an alien tradition, they write from a sense of living in a culture not their own" (19).[181]

By selecting the short story cycle form for her imaginative recovery of women's lives and histories, neglected or distorted in the official history of the British Isles, Donoghue is able to include a variety of voices in *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*. Unlike novels which tend to zoom in on one historical frame and one or at most a few female protagonists, the women staged by Donoghue differ considerably in terms of age, class and nationality. Some are upper-class ladies, like Mary Stuart O'Donnell Countess Tyrconnell in 'Figures of Speech', Elizabeth Pennington in 'How a Lady Dies' and the Cottage Ladies in 'Salvage'; others are middle-class, like Frances and Mary in 'The Fox on the Line' and Euphemia in 'Come, Gentle Night'. Women like Mary Toft in 'The Last Rabbit', Kitty (Caroline Crachami) in 'A Short Story' and Margery Starre in 'The Necessity of Burning' belong to the lower classes or are entirely outcasts and outsiders. Some of the characters are only girls, like Frances in 'Night Vision' and Dido in the story of that title, while others are middle-aged or elderly. Still other characters are followed over an entire lifetime, such as Margaret Drummond in 'Account' and Kitty in 'A Short Story'. The women also come from different

[181] Liedeke Plate claims similarly that through the aesthetics of rewriting, women writers seek "to propel them [the silent and the silences] into the space of representation that is also the place of remembrance. Seeking to 'know the past' differently, women's rewriting 'writes back' to silence in an effort to generate usable pasts, answering it with stories of its own" (97).

parts of the British Isles – from London over Nithsdale, Scotland and Hengwrt, Wales, to Dublin – and live in widely divergent time periods, ranging from the fourteenth century of 'The Necessity of Burning' to the twentieth century of 'Looking for Petronilla'. The female protagonists differ with respect to sexual orientation as well: some of the stories depict love affairs or marriages between men and women, while others – recalling some of the stories in *Kissing the Witch* – recount the story of a lesbian love ('How a Lady Dies') or the awakening of lesbian feelings ('Words for Things'). Moreover, while some women clearly are victims of patriarchal oppression or violence, others employ violence themselves or oppress and exploit those who stand beneath them. The most glaring example, perhaps, is the female prophet Friend Mother (Elspeth 'Luckie' Buchan), who founded a personal cult based on the book of Revelations in eighteenth-century Scotland, and makes her Children fast until disease and death while she remains healthy by secretly eating bacon. What is more, Donoghue adds to this sense of diversity by employing different styles and narrative forms for the stories as well. Most of the stories, for instance, have third-person narration. Both female and male narrators appear, but the majority of these stories are focalized through a woman. The I-narrators in the book are all female. They include Mary Toft ('The Last Rabbit') and Dame Alice ('Looking for Petronilla'), as well as Mary Lloyd ('The Fox on the Line'), Frances Brown(e) ('Night Vision') and Dido Bell ('Dido'). Since the women are all explicitly staged as narrators, Donoghue carefully adapts their different voices to their nationality, class and age. This stylistic and narratological variety thus further adds to the diversified picture Donoghue paints of women's lives in Britain and Ireland in the last seven hundred years.

This diversity and variety is then again counteracted by the many cross-references, similarities, recurring symbols and other connections that tie the different stories together. As a cycle, that is, *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* contains a network of associations, which together have a cumulative thematic impact on the book as a whole. The most important thing the women characters in Donoghue's cycle, in spite of their marked differences, have in common is the fact that they are all depicted as firmly fixed within a patriarchal structure.[182] Even if some women occupy positions of power with regard to their servants, children, or even – as in 'Revelations' – to an entire community, they are all shown to labour under the gender norms and gendered hierarchies of a patriarchal society. Margaret King's forbidding mother in 'Words for Things', for instance, embodies patriarchal rule in

[182] Interestingly, they are often given identical or similar names (e.g. Frances, Euphemia, Mary, Margaret or Margery) and last names (e.g. Bell and Gray). Thus, since the protagonists resemble each other in so far that they all live in patriarchal society and that they share similar names, the book could be seen as unified by the presence of a composite protagonist.

enforcing her daughter to obey gendered expectations for young ladies and she dismisses the governess, Mary Wollstonecraft, for leading her daughter away from her duties.[183] Most of the female characters are, however, more clearly depicted as victims of patriarchal oppression. Mary Toft ('The Last Rabbit'), Mr Knox's niece ('Acts of Union') and Kitty ('A Short Story') are all exploited by men in various money-making schemes. Miss F. ('Cured') is tricked into undergoing a cliterodectomy by a surgeon she admires and trusts. Frances and Mary ('The Fox on the Line') are thwarted by the "old boys' network" of the legal and political system in their struggle for animal rights in the 1870s. Similarly, the blind girl Frances ('Night Vision') has to stand up against the local authorities to receive the education she desires in order to become a poet. Another interesting example is 'Account', which exposes the inferior position of women in the mediaeval feudal system through a bulleted account of the life of King James IV of Scotland and of the many mistresses he took on, dismissed and – allegedly – killed.

If the female characters of *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* share a position of subordination in the society they live in, the male characters are mostly depicted as occupying positions of power and authority. Although some characters, such as Frances's father in 'Night Vision' or Margery's husband in 'The Necessity of Burning', embody this position with tact and empathy, others can be seen to take advantage of it and to abuse their power in various ways. Especially men of specific authority in a patriarchal society, such as priests, lawyers, doctors and scientists, are depicted in a negative way throughout the book. They are shown to use their authority to mislead women and to misuse language in order to exercise power over them. For instance, the priest in "The Necessity of Burning," who did not arrive in time to christen a dying baby because he was drunk, refuses to bury it in holy ground, because its mother, trying to christen the boy herself, mixed up the order of the words:

> The priest was shaking his head. 'Ah, woman,' he said crossly. […] Margery was almost shrieking. 'What? Aren't those the right words?' 'Aye', the priest said, pursing his lips, 'but in the wrong order. The Father goes before the Son, as any ignoramus knows. It's the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost.' She stared at him.

[183] Margaret, who is "hungry for words" (132), is punished by her mother for keeping a journal and writing the history of a fictitious family. She does this by taking away her daughter's voice and throwing her manuscript on the gardener's bonfire. From that moment on, the girl stops writing words of her own: "In the strongbox behind her eyes, she stacked volumes of stories about her pretend families. She sealed her lashes and reread the adventures only in bed before it was light […]. By day she stole other people's words: romances, newspapers, treatises, anything left beside an armchair in an unlocked cabinet in the library. Margaret swallowed up the words and would give none back" (137).

> ‘What does that mean?’ ‘It means that this child’s soul is lost to hellfire through your carelessness, woman, that’s what it means!’ (196)

Frances’s father in ‘Night Vision’, to give another example, asked the Minister the reason for his daughter’s blindness and was told that “it might be a punishment from the Almighty for some sin [they] had committed. But they couldn’t think which sin that might have been” (71). In most stories, in fact, the authority and power these men enjoy is not the power of physical strength, but the power of knowledge and language. In ‘Cured’, for instance, the famous Victorian surgeon Isaac Baker Brown uses technical terms and his position of authority to trick his patient, Miss F., who suffers from back ache, into admitting to symptoms of hysteria, a medical condition he proposes to cure by means of a cliterodectomy. The story, focalized through the hapless patient, is interrupted by the doctor’s notes on the case, so as to illustrate once again the manipulations and distortions that lie behind ostensibly objective scientific descriptions. As Peach indicates, the woman’s lack of command of medical language in fact equals a lack of control over her body (38). The surgeon examines her in “a part she has no name for, or not one that could be said aloud” (111). When she threatens to tell her brother what the doctor has done to her, he asserts his power again: “‘I’m afraid he would not understand which part you mean. He is not a man of much education.’ A pause. ‘How would you describe the part to him, Miss F.?’ Another moment went by. ‘Would you point perhaps?’” (121-2). ‘Cured’ thus brings together the two lines of subjection and control which the stories bear witness to: the physical subjection or containment of female bodies, by doctors and scientists in particular, and the power of words, learning and official discourse to control or manipulate women. Women are reduced to mere bodies in several stories, whether in a medical context as in ‘Cured’, in the frame of a freak show as in ‘The Last Rabbit’ and ‘A Short Story’, or simply as part of a marriage deal, as in ‘Acts of Union’ – where an Irish woman is fraudulently married off to a pox-ridden English soldier.[184] Moreover, many of the female characters have a physical defect which seems to symbolize their reduced position: they are blind, crippled, too small, or suffer from severe pain. In ‘The Last Rabbit’, the first-person narrator has been so thoroughly examined by medical men that she remarks wryly, “for a month I had been nothing but a body” (12). In some stories, the fate of women is linked to that of animals. The rabbits referred to in the title crop up in other stories as well,[185] and

[184] Peach reads ‘Acts of Union’ as an analogy for Ireland, the niece standing for Ireland itself “dependent upon and controlled by elderly men whose affiliations and actions are not in her best interests” (42).

[185] To give some examples, the parson “gnaw[s] on a rabbit bone he ha[s] found in his soup” (17) in ‘Acts of Union’; the Brothers in ‘Revelations’ “hire themselves out as labourers in exchange for fresh rabbit meat” (46); the cavalryman’s horse “startles a plump rabbit from the ditch” (76) in ‘Ballad’; in ‘Come, Gentle Night’, John’s

references to words associated with rabbits also recur throughout the book – "The doctor's hands were as cold as carrots" (3). Moreover, in 'The Fox on the Line', the narrator links the practice of vivisection to the oppression of women's bodies:

> Nowadays I see vivisections everywhere. In the heels that deform women's feet, for instance; in the corsets that grip our lungs. 'If we dress like slaves,' Fà says, 'no wonder men enslave us.' I have known two women who died of having their ovaries removed, quite unnecessarily. I have heard whispers of another fashionable operation, where a part is cut away that is not diseased at all. The surgeons do it simply to kill passion. Simply to make women quieter. Simply because they can. (34)

Recalling both the cliterodectomy of 'Cured' and the vivisectionist practice of 'The Fox on the Line', the seven-inch long girl in 'A Short Story' is, quite literally, dissected after her death by "a butcher in the service of science" (167) and her skeleton is displayed. There is, however, a symbolical victory in this: "She was a fossil, now; she had her niche in history. […] She would stand grinning at her baffled visitors until all those who'd ever known her were dust" (169). This girl, who could only speak a few words, will outlive the men who took advantage of her in order to make money and leaves her mark while they are long forgotten.

In a similar way, in fact, most of the female characters in *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* are granted moments of rebellion or revenge. The protagonist in 'The Last Rabbit' ultimately revolts against her being reduced to a mere body and decides to tell her story.[186] Bell, in 'Figures of Speech', suggests that Mary should write her own history to counter the lies that have been told and written about her. Mary then goes on to tell her version of the Flight of the Earls, the famous episode in Irish history with Red Hugh O'Donnell and Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, leaving Ireland for mainland Europe in 1607: "When I was a child, no one ever told me [the Flight of the Earls] was just a figure of speech. […] [I]t was an inglorious business, their so-called Flight. […] [W]hat did my father Rory ever do but rule Ireland for a matter of months in his brother's wake, then scuttle away to the Continent with a

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nose "twitches like a rabbit's" (83); Anna says that she feels "As trapped a rabbit in its hutch" (99) in 'Salvage'; Miss F. in 'Cured' thinks of "stuffing rabbits with forcemeat and rosemary" (112) while she is being examined; "Aren't the Irish famous breeders? We're as known for it as rabbits!" (126), the lady-in-waiting says to the Countess in 'Figures of Speech'; in 'How a Lady Dies', Frances tells Elizabeth "how becoming her lavender pelisse is, and her little muff of rabbitskin" (151-2); a porter calls Dido a "runaway rabbit" (178) in the story of the same title; Margery's dead baby boy is buried in a hollow "no bigger than a rabbit hole" (196) in 'The Necessity of Burning'; in 'Looking for Petronilla', Alice mentions she fed her first husband "tidbits of roast rabbit on his deathbed" (209).

[186] Interestingly, the titles of the book and of the story about Mary Toft are not identical. The title of the first story, 'The Last Rabbit', refers to Mary's wish to bring about "one last rabbit" (11) when she is being watched by Sir Richard. *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, on the other hand – although named for Mary Toft – covers all of the stories. Like the book, this title shows women to be both victims and rebels. It can be seen as objectifying women ("The Woman"), but also as assigning them agency ("Who Gave Birth").

hundred men and his baby son?" (127). Serena Todesco states that, by shedding light on the less heroic aspects of the Flight of the Earls, Mary subverts what is acknowledged as a great episode of Irish history in an "anti-history" (93). In 'Cured', the female protagonist successfully plays the role of the submissive patient in order to achieve her release – "I'm cured of all my delusions" (123). In 'Come, Gentle Night', Effie Ruskin reacts against her husband's disembodying her into an idealized "queen" by divorcing him on the grounds of "non-consummation" (94). In 'The Necessity of Burning', to give a final example, Margery takes revenge on the priest who refused her new-born son a Christian burial by throwing the Church's books into the fire during the Cambridge Peasants' Revolt of 1381: "The pen outdoes the sword, or so they say, but Margery reckons the flame outdoes them both" (198). In this story, moreover, the woman's rebelling against the clergy's and clerks' power of words becomes a metafictional mise-en-abyme of Donoghue's own feminist rewriting in *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*. "What good ever came out of a book," Margery wonders:

> She doesn't need to read them to know what's in them; she's heard enough. Tales of lickerous widows who force men to lie with them; tales of clever young men who trick girls into lying with them; whole books full of wicked wives, like Eve who let the snake into Paradise. No wonder, Margery reckons, seeing as it's men who write the books. (187)

The story ends with Margery asserting agency and power, not just through the act of book-burning, but also by claiming – somewhat ironically – a place in the history books: "the churchmen will tremble when they hear of Margery Starre – read of her, even, maybe. In the turning of a page, in the lifting of a pen, they will pause to think how fast paper burns" (198-9). The text, about a woman burning books, who will be mentioned in texts read by those whose texts she destroyed, becomes metafictional to the second degree. Although the power of words and books were used against her, Margery and her rebellion against patriarchal society will in fact be remembered by way of a written record.

In giving these neglected or forgotten female lives a space, and often a voice, within the covers of her own book, Donoghue herself also aims to set right the injustices done to them, whether in their own times or in their subsequent marginalisation in authoritative histories. It is important, however, that Donoghue always seeks to highlight elements of agency or rebellion within the women's lives themselves. As a result, they are not staged as mere victims of patriarchy which have to be rescued by the more enlightened feminists of today. By this repeated staging of women who are not quite or not just victims, Donoghue also implicitly addresses some of the problems which feminist historiographic metafiction

often faces: in retelling history from the perspective of the oppressed outsider, these works run the risk of repeating rather than reversing this position of marginalisation. Donoghue's emphasis on women's agency within a structure of confinement and oppression thus offers a correction to this tradition of victimization. As we have seen, some of her characters use and abuse power themselves, while even those who are victimized find ways of resisting patriarchal structures and oppression.

That fact that Donoghue's female characters are not "the weeping piteous victims who flock across the pages of history" (204) is even more emphatically demonstrated in the final story of the book, 'Looking for Petronilla', which nicely ties together the different thematic, symbolic and metafictional strands of the short story cycle. Also in terms of space and time, the story functions as a true closing story. It is narrated by Dame Alice who has restlessly travelled the world, haunted by guilt for having allowed her faithful maid Petronilla to be burnt as a witch while she herself managed to escape from her executioners. As a result, she cannot die and is now revisiting Kilkenny, the scene of the crime, after seven hundred years – which is, not coincidentally, also the time-span of the book. In Kilkenny, she tries to imaginatively recover surviving evidence of her life, and in particular the life of her maid, in a bid to redress her former neglect. Her quest thus mimics that of Donoghue who has similarly 'travelled' the British Isles and revisited seven centuries of British history for evidence of women's hidden, private lives. The story again comments on the distortions and omissions of our histories. Alice's own life has become the stuff of tourist attractions – "History always becomes a cartoon, where it survives at all" (201) – and is remembered chiefly because of the mythic demonization of a woman's crime: "When a man kills a wife, he is a tortured rebel, criminel de passion, dusky Othello or bluff King Hal. When a woman kills her husband, she is never allowed to forget it" (201). She has become a "long-nailed monster, a Kilkenny Clytemnestra" (201). What is forgotten in the process, as *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* points out, are the ordinary lives of women who are neither victim nor monster – such as Petronilla, her maid, who is interesting in her "extraordinary ordinariness" (202). Yet, evidence of this ordinary life is hard to find: "Petronilla is not here. There is nothing left. I do not know what I was hoping for, exactly: some sign of presence, some message scratched for me on the prison wall, some whisper from her walking ghost" (208). Even though Alice fails to find any facts or truths about her maid, she keeps searching and hoping: "My one faith is that I will find some trace of Petronilla. My one hope is that she will teach me how to die. My one love now, the only one whose face I can remember. There, around some corner, she burns, she burns" (212). In this closing story, in other words, the feminist aesthetics of

rewriting history by recovering forgotten lives is both enacted and questioned for its truth and efficacy. Once again, the representation of women as victims of men, society and history is explicitly engaged with. In an obviously feminist revisionary history book, Dame Alice discovers that she is portrayed as a "victim of a combination of the worst excesses of fourteenth-century Christo-patriarchy. […] As in so many other 'witch trials', powerful men (both church and lay) projected their own unconscious fantasies of sexual/satanic perversion onto the blank canvas of a woman's life" (206). Alice laughs at this, knowing, although there is some truth in it, she is certainly not innocent: "blank canvas, my eye" (206).

In all, the stories in *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* are unified by a clear aesthetic structure as well as by a common aim and method. That is, Donoghue's volume participates in the feminist project of recovering forgotten female voices, through the practices of historiographic metafiction, so as to question the gender and sexual politics of patriarchal society. However, this unity is not confined to foreword and structure alone but is continually strengthened by the cross-references, similarities, and symbols that tie the different stories together. Moreover, a diverse cast of female protagonists and narrators destabilizes these unifying forces, resulting in a tension between coherence and diversity. For these reasons, *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* can be read as a short story cycle. By using the cycle form rather than that of the novel, Donoghue is able to, on the one hand, paint a broad canvas and present a large variety of female characters and, on the other hand, to draw attention to the things these characters – and beyond them, all women in patriarchal societies – have in common. What stands out in this respect is that, in spite of their structurally submissive and secondary position in society, which renders them vulnerable to abuse by men of authority, they are nevertheless not without agency, nor simply innocent. By emphasizing in particular the gestures of rebellion or resistance, however small, on the part of her female characters, Donoghue refuses them the status of "weeping piteous victims" which both official histories and, ironically, feminist revisionary histories have often bestowed on them. The women Donoghue manages to rescue from oblivion or to resurrect from the 'facts' that remain, are above all shown to be ordinary human beings, with their own dreams, hopes and disappointments, who always exceed the stereotypical images of "monster", "cartoon" or "blank canvas" with which history and culture have too often sought to contain them.

1.4. Donoghue's other Cycles

1.4.1. *Touchy Subjects*

In her third volume of short stories, *Touchy Subjects* (2006), Donoghue moves from the postmodern experiment of her two previous works of short fiction to a more realist mode of writing. Still, it is interesting to include a brief discussion of the book in this chapter, as, like *Kissing the Witch* and *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, it can be fruitfully considered as a short story cycle.

On her website, Donoghue describes *Touchy Subjects* as a volume of "contemporary stories about taboos and embarrassment", dramatizing "the small acts upon which our lives often turn". Most of the stories, she states, were inspired by various incidents in her life and that of her friends, as well as by trips she took.[187] The book consists of nineteen short stories,[188] which are subdivided into five thematic subgroups: 'Babies' (six stories), 'Domesticity' (three stories), 'Strangers' (three stories), 'Desire' (three stories) and 'Death' (four stories).[189] Whatever category the stories belong to, they all share this focus on taboos and embarrassment, and thus revolve around 'touchy subjects': a man attempting to donate sperm to his wife's best friend (title story 'Touchy Subjects'); a woman finding her life being taken over by a polite social lie ('Expecting'); a grandmother watching her daughter suffer from postnatal depression ('Through the Night'); a man panicking over a hair on his girlfriend's chin ('Pluck'); a woman experiencing embarrassment during an encounter with a mentally disabled person ('The Sanctuary of Hands'); a Writer in Residence struggling to advise hopeless aspiring authors ('WritOr'). The stories are set in various locations, from Ireland and England, over France and Italy, to the United States and Canada. Moreover, the protagonists differ in age, class, ethnicity, nationality, sex and sexual orientation. This diversity is underscored by the different narrative forms that are used throughout the stories: some of the stories have I-narrators and, in others, the protagonists' perspectives are revealed through focalization, often with multiple focalizers.

These stories about different characters living in different parts of the world are not just linked by their shared preoccupation with social taboos, they are also tied together by

[187] See the section 'Books' on *emmadonoghue.com.* 2014. < http://emmadonoghue.com/books/short-story-collections/touchy-subjects.html>.
[188] Thirteen of these stories were published in various magazines or anthologies, or broadcast on the radio before appearing in this volume.
[189] One could argue that this classification suggests some kind of evolution throughout the book as a whole, as it starts with 'Babies' and ends with 'Death'. However, most of the stories could appear in one of the other categories as well – e.g. 'Expecting', which is the second of the 'Babies' stories, could be classified under 'Strangers' as well, because it revolves around a woman's polite lie to a stranger.

similarities and recurring references. For instance, in several of the stories, the narrator makes use of brackets, thus indicating what the focalizer or first-person narrator really thinks about the subject in question: "He acted like a gentleman. He assured her it could happen to anyone. (Anyone, he mentally added, who made a habit of inseminating herself in hotel bedrooms)" (22); "Kay burst into tears and said she'd come to this co-up to escape male aggression (which was the first any of us had heard of it)" (212). Italics are in some occasions used for the same purpose: " '[…] I just curl up like a seed in the earth all winter, that's all I do.' *Apart from coming in to bore the pants off of me twice a week*, the writer added mentally" (151). The idea that clearly runs through the book is the fact that people worry too much about what others might think of them and that, for this reason, many subjects are touchy ones: "It was a very cold look she gave him. Surely she couldn't think he meant it? A touchy subject, clearly. (Weren't they all, these days?)" (19). The title-word 'touchy' also appears throughout the work: "Padraic was looking as if he wished he hadn't mentioned Eamonn's name. She hadn't sounded *touchy*, had she? She hadn't meant to, if she had" (9; emphasis mine); "'You're just shitting your shorts at the thought of anyone calling you a faggot, aren't you?' 'Don't say that.' '*Touchy*, aren't you? It's only a word'" (174; emphasis mine). *Touchy Subjects* thus appears to emphasize that, even in the twenty-first century, shame still plays a major part in people's lives. By writing stories about how this shame manifests itself in different situations, and thus addressing these touchy subjects herself, Donoghue seems to say that talking about these subjects might somehow make them less delicate.[190] Especially stories like 'Pluck', where a man obsesses about a hair on his girlfriend's chin, suggest that not talking about something can make it much more of an issue than it actually is. After Joseph has noticed the hair on Róisín's chin, he cannot bring himself to ask her to pluck it: he "couldn't imagine saying those words. Not to Róisín. This sort of thing was a delicate matter; you didn't just tell a woman she was growing a beard. They were sensitive about these things" (108). He becomes so fixated on the hair that he even tries to pluck it while she is asleep. When all else has failed and he simply tells her in the end, she plucks it and does not make anything of it. What can be a touchy subject for some women, then, is not necessarily one for another, the character of Róisín serves to show us here. In fact, Donoghue suggests that people are often held back because of their own generalizations. The female protagonists in 'Speaking in

[190] The power of literary works to tackle all sorts of topics is also highlighted by references to literature which recur throughout the book: the protagonists' dogs in 'Do They Know it's Christmas?' are called Proust, Gide and Mallarmé; the Writer in Residence in 'WritOr' expresses his hope that the year he will be spending in a small American town will "bring out a new humour and warmth in his writing, a sort of Sarah Orne Jewett quality" (143); the protagonist in 'Baggage' takes Marcel Proust's *Remembrances of Things Past* with her on holiday.

Tongues', for example, both restrain from expressing their true feelings for each other, because they are afraid the other does not want to address the subject. This becomes painfully clear through Donoghue's juxtaposition of the perspectives of the poet as well as the student on the same scenes throughout the story. As in her other works, Donoghue also addresses the topic of homosexuality in some stories. This can sometimes be seen as a taboo, even today, as Donoghue for instance points out in 'Team Men', where the protagonist is afraid his father might learn about his relationship with a boy on his football team. The fact that biblical references occur throughout this (the figures of David, Saul and Jonathan) and other stories in the book (e.g. the tale of Lazarus, Martha and Mary) could be taken as highlighting the Church's contribution to shame and taboo which still lingers nowadays. Moreover, the reader is constantly reminded of the fact that the stories are contemporary by way of the many references to television series such as *Nip/Tuck* (118) and *Seinfeld* (126), films such as *Star Trek* (210) and *Pulp Fiction* (271), and pop songs such as *Tubthumping* by Chumbawamba (167) and *Hotel California* by The Eagles (257). In this way, the contrast between the old-fashioned fear of 'what the neighbours will think' and the contemporary setting is further underscored.

In short, by selecting the form of the short story cycle for *Touchy Subjects*, Donoghue is able to write about different people living in different places, but at the same time link their stories through the fact that they are all somehow affected by embarrassment and social taboos. The connection that exists between these diverse protagonists is reinforced by various similarities and recurring references between the stories. As a result, an opposition between the old-fashioned nature of shame and taboo – e.g. with respect to homosexuality – on the one hand, and the contemporary setting of the stories on the other is built up throughout the work as a whole. In addition, by dealing with these 'touchy subjects' in her writing, Donoghue highlights the necessity of breaking taboos by addressing them.

1.4.2. *Astray*

In her fourth and most recent work of short fiction, *Astray* (2012), Donoghue returns to the method of combining historical facts and imaginative creation which she developed for *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*. However, in *Astray*, she moves the setting from the British Isles to North America, focusing on the theme of life-changing journeys to, in and from this continent. As I will show, this work can usefully be read as a short story cycle as well.

Astray consists of fourteen short stories,[191] which are subdivided into three categories: 'Departures' (four stories), 'In Transit' (five stories) and 'Arrivals and Aftermaths' (five stories). On her website, Donoghue describes the work as "an oddly autobiographical book": having emigrated twice, she has a stake in these storylines.[192] The epigraph to the volume is a quote from Virgil's *Aeneid*: "Tell us underneath what skies, / Upon what coasts of earth we have been cast; / We wander, ignorant of men and places, / And driven by the wind and the vast waves". In the 'Afterword', Donoghue explains: "In my experience, migrants are awkward. Sometimes our self-consciousness can take the form of standoffishness. We want to be let in, yet keep our distance. We don't want to lose our accent, nor be mocked for it. We nurse a grudge, either suspecting the new country of not welcoming us, or expecting it to compensate us for all we've given up to get here" (261-2). She continues that she chose the title *Astray* because, as well as a geographical one, straying has always had a moral meaning:[193] "If your ethical compass is formed by the place you grow up, which way will its needle swing when you're far from home?" (262), she wonders. In addition to geographical and political boundaries, the protagonists of these stories indeed cross other ones, i.e. of law, ethnicity, sanity or sex. They are, as Donoghue calls them, emigrants, immigrants, adventurers, runaways and drifters, who travel for love or money, under duress or incognito (263). These wanderers, young and old, rich and poor, male and female, black and white, either tell their stories themselves, in their own particular voice, or their perspectives are revealed through focalization. Whether they are Irish, British, French, German, American or Canadian, they all leave their places of birth behind. Most of the travellers, Donoghue states in the afterword, are real people who left traces in the historical record. Others are characters she has invented to put a face on real incidents of border crossing (263). By looking at the stories behind these travels, Donoghue moves the focus from the phenomenon of migration to the individuals who undertook the journeys. What her protagonists have in common is of course the fact that they are all emigrants. Yet, by using the cycle form, Donoghue is able to highlight the individual histories of a large variety of characters, thereby looking past their status as migrants.

[191] Ten of these stories appeared in a variety of magazines or anthologies, or were broadcast on the radio before being published as part of this volume.

[192] See the section 'Books' on *emmadonoghue.com.* 2014. < http://emmadonoghue.com/books/short-story-collections/astray.html>.
The work is dedicated to her "seven far-flung siblings", who are spread across Ireland, England, France and the United States.

[193] Donoghue here refers to the Book of Isaiah: *All we like sheep have gone astray* (53:6). On her website, she adds that the word 'astray' also has connotations of being a bit 'astray in the head', as they say in Ireland (<http://emmadonoghue.com/books/short-story-collections/astray.html>).

Unlike in *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, the protagonists in *Astray* are not well-known figures – except for zookeeper Matthew Scott and his lifelong companion Jumbo the Elephant from 'Man and Boy', and the female sculptors Frances 'Queenie' Long and Florence Wyle from 'What Remains'. The stories mainly deal with the obscure or forgotten histories of four centuries of travelling to, in and from North America: they take the reader from 1639 Massachusetts and 1776 New Jersey, over nineteenth-century London, Chicago, Louisiana and Klondike, to 1901 New York City and 1967 Toronto. The page before each story mentions the place and year where it is set. Moreover, on the page following each story, the title of the story is repeated in italics, followed by a note listing the facts that are known about the travel in question as well as historical sources. Several of the histories are not recorded in more than a single source. For instance, the existence of Caroline Thompson from 'Onward' is recorded nowhere but in the letters of Charles Dickens. 'The Widow's Cruse' is based only on a single sentence from a newspaper. 'Last Supper at Brown's', to give a final example, solely draws on a clipping from the *Tuscon Star*. Through her method of combining memory and invention, Donoghue is able to turn the echoes of wanderings from the past into full stories that are still relevant today. To give but a few examples, 'Counting the Days' tells the story of Jane's ill-timed crossing of the Atlantic in 1849, from Ireland to Québec, where she is to meet her husband Henry, in the hope of having a better life with their children over there; 'The Gift' narrates how in the late nineteenth century the birthmother and the adoptive father of Lily May Bell, aka Mabel Bassett, both laid claim to her through correspondence with the bureaucratic New York Children's Aid Society; and 'Daddy's Girl' recounts Minnie (Imelda) Hall's discovery, in early twentieth-century New York City, of the fact that her recently deceased father was in fact a woman. Like in *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits,* many of the stories in *Astray* also trace the stories of ordinary women who have been forgotten by history, which adds unity to the work as a whole: 'Onward', 'The Widow's Cruse' and 'Last Supper at Brown's' ('Departures'), as well as 'Counting the Days', 'The Long Way Home' and 'The Gift' ('In Transit'), and 'Vanitas', 'The Hunt', 'Daddy's Girl' and 'What Remains' ('Arrivals and Aftermaths') look specifically at women's travels to, in and from North America.

However, this volume is held together by more than Donoghue's method of imaginative recovery of life-changing but forgotten journeys, underscored by the presence of an afterword and a common structure. Like *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, *Astray* also displays significant similarities, cross-references and other connections between the different stories. First, there are several references to strays in the volume, be it with respect to

animals or humans:[194] Matthew, the protagonist of the opening story, reminisces how his friend Jumbo the Elephant fell into his hands "as a crusty little stray" (9); after her father's posthumous exposure as female, Minnie in 'Daddy's Girl' comes to question her identity, "God knows what I am. A stray, a foreigner?" (233). This recurring of the word 'stray' throughout the work highlights the importance generally attached to one's birthplace. That is, someone who has left his or her place of birth is often first and foremost viewed as a stranger, or someone who is lost. Even the persons in question tend to see themselves as such. In other words, by repeatedly referring to strays, Donoghue emphasizes the influence that place has on one's identity: people who move become emigrants to their former homes and immigrants to their new homes. Again, what she seems to suggest here is that we should look past the random element of where one was born. Secondly, in the story 'Snowblind' there is a reference to Matthew's friend from 'Man and Boy': "Injun pasted woodcuts from yellowed newspapers over the cracks: *Jumbo the Elephant*, and *Ladies Admiring Niagara Falls*, and *A View of Kew*" (97). Thirdly, many of the protagonists throughout the book find themselves in similar situations: not only in between places, but in between identities as well. In 'Onward', the narrator says about the lower-middle-class Caroline, who cares for her brother and little girl by prostituting herself at home, that "no woman of her own sort would know her, and she doesn't want to know the other sort. She lives in the crack between two worlds" (32). Swegles, alias Morrissey, in 'The Body Swap' is more at home among the counterfeiters he is double-crossing than with the agents he is working for. Other protagonists end up separated from their loved ones as a result of some kind of displacement, such as Henry and Jane in 'Counting the Days', but also the protagonists in 'What Remains', because, as Donoghue puts it in the afterword, Queenie, having dementia, "stray[s] across the line between clarity and confusion" (270). Finally, as in *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, the crossing of the border between fact and fiction, or truth and lies, is emphasized in many of the stories. For instance, both 'The Widow's Cruse' and 'The Body Swap' revolve around some sort of scam. Moreover, both 'The Gift' and 'Daddy's Girl' deal with children who do not know their true identity or where they come from because they have been lied to by their parents. Similarly, in 'Vanitas', the young protagonist discovers that her family has been keeping a secret from her with respect to the death of her cousin. Finally, in 'The Hunt', a story about the topical issue of child soldiers and rape during war, but going back all the way to the American

[194] On her website, Donoghue states that the working title of the book was *Strays*, "a genealogical term for people who end up far from home" (<http://emmadonoghue.com/books/short-story-collections/astray.html>).

Revolution, a girl meets with a terrible fate by believing the lie that a fifteen-year old soldier found himself forced to tell her.

All this results in a rather unified volume which nonetheless consists of individual stories. These feature highly diverse protagonists and are set somewhere between the seventeenth and the twentieth century. Like in *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, the stories are not ordered chronologically. Still, their order is significant. The reader is not only taken from stories about departures, over stories about transitions, to stories about arrivals, the theme of border crossing also culminates in the closing story, 'What Remains', which deals with crossing a final border. In the final lines of the afterword, Donoghue ponders about what migration tells us about life. Perhaps "moving far away to some arbitrary spot simply highlights the arbitrariness of getting born into this particular body in the first place" (270-1). Her means of escape from this claustrophobia of individuality, she continues, is by writing stories: "It lets me, at least for a while, live more than one life, walk more than one path" (271). Through her use of the cycle form for her project of recovering life-changing travels from the past, Donoghue is not just able to experience very different histories, she can also bring them all together into a more or less unified whole. Furthermore, by looking at the different stories of so many different people, she also maintains a focus on individual lives, thus complementing the characters' status as migrants with the very personal details of every single life.

2. Éilís Ní Dhuibhne and Anne Enright

Like Donoghue's short story collections, both Anne Enright's and Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's postmodern fictions can more appropriately be read as short story cycles. In what follows, I will look at the way these works share Donoghue's focus on ordinary women's rebellion against confining stereotypes. Both writers, that is, make use of the cycle form to address the position and identity of women in patriarchal society, but they do so in radically different, though interestingly complementary, ways.

2.1. Revising an Irish Folk Tale: Dhuibhne's *The Inland Ice and Other Stories*

As we have seen, Donoghue's metafictional stories in *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* draw on historical facts to bring to light women's ordinary lives in previous times. Moreover, in her earlier volume *Kissing the Witch*, Donoghue uses fairy tales to revise

traditional female roles. Similarly, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne (born as Elizabeth Deeny; 1954, Dublin), focuses on folk tales in her early short stories. By juxtaposing them with contemporary stories, as we will see, she criticizes women's place in patriarchal societies.[195] As Caitriona Moloney has argued, in the story 'Midwife to the fairies', Ní Dhuibhne juxtaposes an ancient folk tale and a contemporary story – based on newspaper reports of a case of infanticide – to "emphasize the longevity of practices that silence women in literature and history" (2). In her third work of short fiction, *The Inland Ice and Other Stories* (1997), Ní Dhuibhne, as I will argue, combines the use of the cycle form and the techniques of feminist metafiction to recover and revise the often passive and submissive roles of women in traditional fairy and folk tales.

The Inland Ice and Other Stories is, first of all, held together by the fragmented telling of 'The Search for the Lost Husband'. This tale is Ní Dhuibhne's adaptation of 'The Story of the Little White Goat', female storyteller Máire Ruiséal's Irish version of the international folk tale of Beauty and the Beast (D'hoker 2004: 130). It is told in fourteen parts, alternating with the thirteen other stories, and it both opens and closes the work as a whole. 'The Search for the Lost Husband' tells the tale of a girl who is courted by a little white goat and falls in love with him. She leaves her parents to go and live with the goat, who becomes a man by night. After a year, she becomes pregnant, and he warns her not to cry when the baby boy is taken away, because otherwise she will lose him as well. Exactly the same happens with the second child. However, when she loses her third child, she cannot help but shed a tear, upon which the goat leaves her. She immediately goes after her husband, crossing every kind of terrain so that she does not lose sight of him. No matter how difficult the chase is, she refuses to give up: "I will follow you", she tells him, "through fire, through water, through ups and downs, through thorns and brambles and briars and ditches" (139). Three nights in a row, on the goat's advice, the girl stays with friends of his. In the first house she receives a magical comb, in the second she gets a magical pair of scissors and in the third one a magical tablecloth. Then the goat disappears into the earth and the girl follows him into his country, where she meets an old couple, who send her to the goat's mother, the Scabby Crow. The latter tells the girl that they are all under the spell of a wicked old witch: the little white goat, his mother and his three sisters. With the help of the old couple and the Scabby Crow, the girl

[195] Another example of an Irish author who looks at the influence of folklore and myths on women's position in society is Angela Bourke. Her short fiction debut *By Salt Water* (1997), which could also be read as a short story cycle, is on the one hand held together by a series of narratives about the experiences of an adolescent girl called Una. On the other hand, the volume as a whole is unified by Bourke's critique of the reduction of women to mere bodies as well as the connection between femininity and nature in Irish folklore. See Balinisteanu (2007) for an analysis of Bourke's use of folklore to subvert traditional gender roles.

manages to have the witch lift the spell in exchange for the three magical objects. As a result, she is reunited with her husband and their three children. At that point, however, the girl tells the young man that she is tired of running around and chasing after him: "I am weary of ardent ways. Passion is so time consuming, and it makes me so unhappy" (261). Despite his strong objections, she returns to her own country without him and takes her children to live with her parents. There, she marries a young farmer, and they live happily together "for many years" (262). D'hoker argues that Ní Dhuibhne's version of this folk tale remains rather close to the original, with the exception of three major changes (2004: 131-2). First, although Ruiséal's fairy tale already tells the story from the perspective of the female protagonist, Ní Dhuibhne emphasizes the heroine and her quest even more by changing the title from 'The Story of the Little White Goat' to 'The Search for the Lost Husband'. Secondly, Ní Dhuibhne alters the ending. Whereas the girl stays with her husband in the original tale, she assertively gives the young man a piece of her mind in this version:

> 'Goodbye to you now. I'm going home to my father and my mother, and I'm bringing my dear little children with me. And we'll have a bit of fun, playing together and laughing, and I'll love them more than I ever loved you or anybody else. And maybe I will find another husband, who will be kind to me and my children, and who will look after all of us and not lead us around in circles. Because it's time for me to try another kind of love. I'm tired of all that fairy tale stuff.' (262)

By rejecting Prince Charming, a 'happily ever after' ending and other "fairy tale stuff", and choosing "many years" of happiness instead, Ní Dhuibhne's heroine – much like the protagonists in Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch* – exposes the fabricated nature of fairy tales. Finally, the postmodern connotation which the girl's decision lends to the tale is underscored by the protagonist's metafictional claim on the right to tell her own story in the closing lines: "That is my story. And if there is a lie in it, it was not I who made it up. All I got for my story was butter boots and paper hats. And a white dog came and ate the boots and tore the hats. But what matter? What matters but the good of the story?" (262).

In the other stories of *The Inland Ice and Other Stories*, Ní Dhuibhne reveals the continuing hold of fairy tale notions about women, love and marriage on contemporary women's lives today. Ten out of the thirteen stories have a female protagonist, who is somehow struggling with the difficulties that marriage and love entail. In some of the stories, the women narrate their own history, while in the majority of the stories their perspective is uncovered through focalization. In any case, like in the tale, the female protagonist's perspective is always conveyed to the reader. The fact that these women, with the exception

of the protagonists of 'Gweedore Girl' and 'Summer Pudding', are all contemporary middle-class Irish women, somewhere between their thirties and fifties, also unifies the volume as a whole. This unity is underlined by the similarities that exist between their experiences. They all, in one way or another, suffer from disillusionment, be it with married love or with an all-consuming passionate kind of love. These feelings of disillusion appear to be attributed to the fairy tale ideals that these women have expected from their lives (D'hoker 2004: 136). For instance, the protagonist of 'Swiss Cheese' thinks back to when she was an adolescent and first fell in love with Paddy: "That her dream had become reality she could hardly believe. For so long he had been a figment of her imagination, and now here he was, solid, stinking, lovely – the most real fact of her life. Patience paid off apparently. You trimmed your lamp, you bided your time. Your prince came" (154). However, in the present time the middle-aged Clíona finds herself cheating on her husband and daughter with this 'prince', who treats her inconsiderately. As a result, she feels greatly disappointed in herself and in her life. In 'The Woman with the Fish', one of the few stories to be told from a male point of view, Michael claims not to understand "why women did this […]. They fell in love with him, or with some ideal of him to which he could never measure up" (234). To give another example of how fairy tale notions influence contemporary women's lives: the protagonist of 'Lili Marlene' marries a rich husband who treats her "like Cinderella" (98) and tries to make her into "a lady of leisure, a princess in the garden" (102). Yet, she realizes that it is a role she "can't accept". Although she is grateful to her husband for what he has offered her, it is her lover John whom she calls her "great love" (102). Polly in *The Inland Ice*, finally, also feels disillusioned with her life. Instead of being rewarded with a princely life for years of hard labour like Cinderella, she finds herself in a marriage which is not the "blissful union it should have been" (217). While visiting Greenland with her dying husband Frank, she expresses her disappointment as follows: "I thought my life would be so different. I thought it would be, you know, wonderful! I always worked so hard and now it's this. It's just so hard for me to believe that this is my life" (211). The link between the women in the contemporary stories and the heroine from the tale is stressed by references to other fairy and folk tales, Irish myths and Scandinavian sagas (e.g. *Njal's Saga* in 'How Lovely the Slopes Are') that occur in the different stories. In addition, references to dreams and fantasies about idealized love recur throughout the book.

Like the girl from 'The Search for the Lost Husband', many of the protagonists find themselves faced with the choice between two types of love, or alternatively, between husband and lover (D'hoker 2004: 135). About half of the stories revolve around adulterous affairs, and the hold that the passionate kind of love has over these women. In 'Love, Hate

and Friendship', Fiona temporarily flees to Bordeaux, hoping to escape from her lover's power over her: "Edward colonized her territory. Everywhere she looked in Ireland reminded her of him. He had taken over every place and every object in her life" (36). Bernadette, in 'Hot Earth', moves to Perugia to get away from her problems but fails to put Kevin completely out of her mind after the end of their affair: "She sees him flitting across an archway […]. She sees him grinning from the belly of a gargoyle that coils into a ruby window in a church. She sees him and his wife on a bed in Dublin […]" (121). "Honest, decent James" (120), as Bernadette calls him, has forgiven her for the affair, and does not remonstrate against her moving to Umbria: "His love was loyal and enduring, if not very passionate. Probably it is loyal and enduring for that reason" (121). In 'Swiss Cheese', Clíona is disgusted with her own behaviour since she has started up an affair with her old boyfriend. "She is not a smart professional married woman as far as Paddy is concerned. She is just another woman he has had enough of. A whiny, clingy, irritating woman who loves too much, who loves illicitly too much", she thinks when her lover stands her up for the umpteenth time (149-50). However, the moment she hears his voice again she makes a – as the narrator calls it – "crazy swing from hatred to love, from despair to happiness" (162). She wants to return to the life she had with her husband and daughter, but does not manage to break free from the feelings she has for her lover, which are like an "addiction which has her in its grip" (162). Even a story such as 'Gweedore Girl' – which stands out because it is set in the past and deals with a young lower-class girl – displays the same inward conflict between passionate and 'safe' love. Bridget, a girl from Gweedore who becomes a maid in Derry, falls in love with a butcher boy named Elliot, who calls her his "fairy". He convinces her to give him her savings, so that they can get married, but uses the money to marry another girl. She sues him, gets her money back and even finds a new boy, who is "funnier than Elliot, and earning much more money", and whom she can marry any time she wants to (28).[196] However, Bridget, who grew up with folk tales, keeps dreaming of the fantasy love she had with Elliot: "I know that Seamus is good and kind and honest and will never mistreat me; also I will never love him" (28).

In short, the female protagonists in *The Inland Ice and Other Stories* resemble each other, and so do their experiences. As Anne Fogarty describes it, they are "either caught in marriages that have turned out to be unsatisfactory or fixated on lovers who are uncaring and

[196] With its focus on a boy cheating a girl out of her money, but the latter winning it back, 'Gweedore Girl' can be read as a feminist retelling of Joyce's 'Two Gallants'. This reference to *Dubliners*, moreover, could be viewed as an expression of awareness, on Ní Dhuibhne's part, of the literary form of the short story cycle.

casually sadistic" (2013: 80). One could therefore consider the female central figures to form a composite protagonist. In fact, D'hoker argues that a "fairly specific singular image of 'The Woman'" emerges in the work, as the female characters all experience similar hopes and disappointments and encounter similar problems (2004: 133). Indeed, the male characters in the book share similar traits as well, which further underscores the unity of the volume. The husbands are usually conservative and introvert but at the same time loyal and caring, whereas the lovers are generally handsome and charming but also selfish and fickle (D'hoker 2004: 135). Fogarty points out that the similarities between the heroine of the tale and the female protagonists of the other stories, on the one hand, and the parallels between the husband from the tale and the rest of the male characters on the other, indicate the extent to which gender roles are embedded in our culture (2013: 80). A story such as 'Bill's New Wife', in which wife and husband have exchanged gender roles, illustrates just how difficult these are to alter, since they remain fixed even when they have been traded (Fogarty 2013: 80): "Bill screamed. Just what she had been trying to avert. 'O dear, it's not that time again, is it?' Catherine said. 'No, it's not that time again,' said Bill. 'Stop saying is it that time again every time something goes wrong. It is not that time again, but it is the time when I realise that I am being trampled alive by you and your damned kids –'" (73).

As is the case in a cycle such as *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, moreover, the unity of *The Inland Ice and Other Stories* is increased by an emphasis on the grey zone between truth and lies, between fact and fiction throughout the stories, suggesting that the power of stories and storytelling easily overrides that opposition. Like in several of Donoghue's stories, the narrator in 'The Search for the Lost Husband' underlines the fabricated nature of her story through metafictional comments. Similarly, throughout the contemporary stories, the third-person narrator who focalizes through the protagonist frequently comes to the fore by providing comments between brackets, as in the following examples: "James went abroad to guide precious objects loaned to other museums, leaving Bernadette unguarded in their house, and once Kevin stormed the Bastille, telling some story to his wife. *(What? Alas, he refused to divulge the fascinating details to prurient Bernadette, schooled as he was in keeping officially secret practically every detail of his life.)*" ('Hot Earth' 115; emphasis mine); "Sitting in a minor jam on the Green, she stares at the number plate of the car ahead of her. He simply didn't show up. *(He sent a fax. I read it in the* New York Times.*)*" ('Swiss Cheese' 147; emphasis mine). In the stories told by the protagonist herself, the I-narrator also draws attention to the story as a story by addressing the reader. For instance, in 'Gweedore Girl', Bridget introduces the ending of the story by stating "You know

how this story ends" (24), and in 'Lili Marlene', the narrator includes the reader in her view on love: "People can have a great, passionate love. I have. *Probably you have.* But it doesn't seem to survive. One way or another it gets done in, either because you stay together or you don't" (102; emphasis mine).

In all, *The Inland Ice and Other Stories* is not simply unified by the structural insertion of Ní Dhuibhne's feminist retelling of an old Irish folk tale. The stories are also tied together by, on the one hand, the use of a composite protagonist and, on the other, a strong thematic focus on fairy and folk tales and how they are still able to influence contemporary women's views on life and love. By means of the repetition of highly similar scenarios in which women in different contexts struggle with the same unrealistic ideals, the work as a whole tackles the roles traditionally bestowed upon women.

2.2. Reclaiming Images: Enright's *The Portable Virgin*

For Anne Enright (1962, Dublin), it is not so much folk tales or histories that performatively represent women's secondary place in a patriarchal society. In her highly experimental early stories, she focuses rather on the continuing hold of certain words and images on gender expectations in contemporary society. In the only of her stories to actually use the technique of feminist rewriting, 'Felix',[197] Enright uses the frame of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* to tell the story of a middle-aged woman's passionate affair with a young boy. The female narrator can be seen to struggle against ingrained Catholic taboos to find words to express her desire. "Descriptions of the sexual act always pain me", she admits and she notes self-consciously, "I must stop. 'Ghost,' 'flesh,' 'fine, blunt cheekbones,' these words are all strangers to me" (297; 300). Hence, she tries to follow "Poe, and Proust, […] Keats and Thomas Mann" as "the secret must be in the style" (297-8). The power that words and images have in maintaining patriarchal constructs of femininity is also a connecting thread throughout Enright's debut work, *The Portable Virgin* (1991), which – as I will show – can fruitfully be read as a short story cycle.

The Portable Virgin consists of seventeen stories, which generally have female protagonists, and share a thematic focus on female bodies and desire, albeit in different contexts. Some of the stories deal with women who, like in *The Inland Ice and Other Stories*, are on a quest to regain their men's attention. The protagonist of the title story, for instance,

[197] 'Felix' is one of Enright's earliest stories. Together with 'Seascape', it was first published in the tenth book of Faber's *First Fictions* (1989). Both stories can be found in her collected stories, *Yesterday's Weather* (2009), which also contains all the stories from *Taking Pictures* (2008) and eleven of the seventeen stories from *The Portable Virgin*.

bleaches her hair to look like her husband's mistress, and the wife in 'Revenge' is willing to swap partners in order to win back her husband. D'hoker points out that other stories revolve around a more active kind of female desire. In stories such as '(She Owns) Every Thing' and 'Luck be a Lady', the married protagonists' sexual desire for a stranger turn their otherwise highly structured lives upside down (2011: 34). Throughout the book, women strain to find words for their bodies and desires. In '(She Owns) Every Thing', for example, Cathy unexpectedly falls in love with a woman who comes to her counter. When the woman asks for her opinion about a handbag, she hears herself say "DIVE RIGHT IN HONEY, THE WATER'S JUST FINE!", to which the narrator comments: "a phrase she must have picked up from the television set" (6). Since she is not able to articulate her desire, the protagonist thus reverts to an artificial phrase, spoken by female television characters. Similarly, the different protagonists of the stories, when faced with adversity, fall back on constructed words and images. Bridget, the protagonist in 'Fatgirl Terrestrial', is a free and successful woman who is satisfied with being overweight. Yet she feels compelled to behave a certain way, to meet with society's expectations of her. She develops "a motherly laugh" (131), wears linen suits and says "Oh my aching feet!" to the person she sits down next to on the bus (134) in order to match the image of a heavy woman. She also goes halves on dates because "fat girls were expected to be cheaper" (132). Moreover, her mother wants her to find a husband, because otherwise "her insides would wither away and have to be removed" (134). Since her friends are settling down as well, Bridget starts her search for "some lonely and sensible man [to] save her womb from ossification in the grateful boredom of the marriage bed" (134). She meets a travel agent whom she thinks is the ordinary man she has been looking for, a man she can be seen with in public. However, he turns out to believe he is a witch. Still, she starts a relationship with him, and lets him treat her like a body, which he "flipped […] on the bed like a cake in a pan" (138). From that moment on, she feels bad about her body and starts neglecting herself, as a result of which she loses a lot of weight. She realizes that she needs to keep her lapses as well as her man's aberration a secret from the rest of the world. In the end, she marries him and her friends and family are pleasantly surprised to see that she has become a thin woman with a normal husband. The protagonist in 'The Portable Virgin' also tries to conform to the established image of femininity. When she discovers that her husband is cheating on her with a woman named Mary, she goes to an expensive hairdresser and asks for her hair to be dyed blonde so that she resembles her rival. At that point, she realizes that all the women in the salon are pursuing a similar Barbie-doll ideal of female beauty: "Mary is sitting to my left and to my right. She is blue from the neck down, she is reading a magazine,

her hair stinks, her skin is pulled into a smile by the rubber tonsure on her head. There is a handbag at her feet, the inside of which is coated with blusher that came loose" (86). She steals one of the purses, "Mary's handbag" (86), on her way out. When she goes through it, she finds a portable virgin, a gift from Lourdes conveniently filled with holy water. Jeanett Shumaker notes that the portable virgin is beautiful but fake, like the protagonist, who is willing to change herself to regain her husband's interest (109). Ironically, Shumaker continues, "the portable virgin's convenience as an all-purpose receptacle also suggests that of the servile mistress, the shadow of the Madonna in the Virgin-Whore dichotomy" (109). The protagonist drinks the water and sets the portable virgin "sailing on back, off to Ben", longing to go along with her husband's story of "doves and prostitutes" (88). By zooming in on the iconic image of the Virgin Mary, Enright thus highlights the unattainable role, still expected of women, of being chaste and submissive but maternal and sexually attractive at the same time.[198]

In addition to a focus on the part that words and images play in maintaining traditional gender roles in contemporary society, the stories in *The Portable Virgin* also share other characteristics, as a result of which they nonetheless make up a largely unified whole. For instance, the stories are all written in a particular, highly fragmented, style. In other words, they consist of separate passages which do not always have a clear-cut link to each other. Whereas the pieces that make up a story such as 'Revenge' are all passages from the life of the protagonist, stories such as 'Liking' and 'What are Cicadas?' are made up of conversations and tales around a certain topic, told by different characters. The gaps within the stories, moreover, are formally underscored by the use of blank spaces. D'hoker argues that these gaps between the pieces invite the reader to actively tie the story together (2011: 38). The same happens in the volume as a whole: the seventeen stories are not explicitly linked through the use of a common protagonist or a shared setting. Instead, readers are asked to draw their own conclusions from the various instances of characters struggling with gender expectations in different contexts. Furthermore, throughout the book, similar types of narrators recur. On the one hand, the third-person narrators all tell the story in a quite detached manner. Although they occasionally reveal the protagonist's perspective, the stories with third-person narration tend to be descriptive. 'The Brat', for instance, opens as follows: "She was a brat. It wasn't that she was good-looking – she could be, but she wasn't. She wore her ugliness like a badge. Her clothes were tight in all the worst places, but she pushed her

[198] Hedwig Schwall points out that 'Ben' is Hebrew for 'son', i.e. Jesus, son of Mary, as a result of which one could read the "doves and prostitutes" as references to the Holy Spirit and Mary Magdalene (345-6).

body forward as she spoke. She had fat arms and small breasts. She wore bovver boots and cheap pink cotton trousers. She was all wrong […]" (159). The first-person narrators, on the other hand, are very much aware that they are telling a story and they constantly emphasize this fact (D'hoker 2011: 39): "This is the usual betrayal story, as you have already guessed", the I-narrator of 'The Portable Virgin' states (81). She includes literary references in her story as well. At a certain point, she compares herself with Mrs Rochester, also known as the madwoman in the attic in 'Jane Eyre'. This metafictional aspect is in fact also a unifying element in the work, as several references to stories and storytelling occur. As already mentioned, stories such as 'Liking' consist of different tales that are told. 'Indifference', to give another example, is partly told through a letter a woman writes to her flatmate in Toronto. And in 'The House of the Architect's Love Story', the word 'story' is even explicitly mentioned in the title. "Of all the different love stories, I chose an architect's love story", the narrator says in the opening lines (55). The narrators in the different stories, finally, also make numerous references to popular culture. For example, the protagonist in 'Juggling Oranges' can "sing anything from the television and re-enacts entire Tom and Jerry cartoons without a mistake" (24), and in 'Mr Snip Snip Snip' Frank imagines a parallel universe existing of thrown-away film scenes, "A world where Captain Kirk says 'shit' and Spock's ears become detached" (175).

In all, Enright's *The Portable Virgin* can usefully be read as a short story cycle. Through its thematic focus on female bodies and desire, underscored by the stylistic and formal links between the stories as well as by the recurring metafictional references, the volume as a whole brings to the fore a critique of the way certain images influence the position of women in contemporary society.

In conclusion, with Donoghue's recovery of women's histories in *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits*, Ní Dhuibhne's feminist rewriting of an old Irish folk tale in *The Inland Ice and Other Stories* and Enright's reclaiming of the words, symbols and images of feminine identity in *The Portable Virgin*, all three writers can be seen to employ the cycle form for the purpose of a feminist writing-back. It is no coincidence that authors have chosen to convey their message through the use of the short story cycle. By using this form, they are able to stress the individual stories of highly diverse female protagonists, living in different times and places, while at the same time addressing more general concerns about the position of women in past and contemporary societies.

Chapter VII
Contemporary (Northern) Irish Short Story Cycles: Place and Theme in Works by Duffaud, MacLaverty, Dwyer Hickey and Ryan

As I have argued in the previous chapter, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, several female authors used the form of the short story cycle to criticize women's position in patriarchal societies. Other contemporary writers, as this final chapter will demonstrate, have employed the cycle form to different effect. From the substantial amount of short fiction collections published in recent decades, I have chosen to focus on four works by authors from the Republic as well as from Northern Ireland: Briege Duffaud's *Nothing Like Beirut* (1994), Bernard MacLaverty's *Matters of Life and Death* (2006), Christine Dwyer Hickey's *The House on Parkgate Street and Other Dublin Stories* (2013) and, finally, Donal Ryan's *The Spinning Heart* (2012). These works all share an emphasis on place while also revolving around a certain theme, which is inextricably connected to the setting of the book. In the works by Duffaud and MacLaverty, this place is Northern Ireland, whereas the stories in Dwyer Hickey's volume centre on Dublin and Ryan's book focuses on the community of a small Irish town. I will argue that these collections of short stories can be usefully read as cycles because of the emphasis on setting which unifies the works. Moreover, this unity is underscored by recurring symbols, references and other connections between the different stories. In addition, *The House on Parkgate Street and Other Dublin Stories*, as we will see, explicitly refers back to Joyce's *Dubliners*, thereby acknowledging the cycle as a literary form and thus contributing to the existence of the genre memory of the short story cycle in Ireland, which I have tried to trace throughout this dissertation.

1. Contemporary Northern-Irish Short Story Cycles

1.1. Duffaud's *Nothing Like Beirut*: Northern Ireland and Emigration

Briege Duffaud was born in 1960s Northern Ireland and grew up during the Troubles. She later moved to France to work as a freelance writer. In the 1990s, she published two novels, *A Wreath upon the Death* (1993) and *A Long Stem Rose* (1995), and a volume of short stories, *Nothing Like Beirut* (1994). She currently resides in London.

Duffaud's short fiction debut, *Nothing Like Beirut* (1994), consists of thirteen stories, some of which were previously published in *New Irish Writing*, *Image*, *She*, and *The Guardian*. The volume as a whole is unified in various ways. First, the stories are all somehow concerned with Northern Ireland and the Troubles.[199] Although only three of the stories are actually set there, the protagonists, most of which are female, were all born and raised in Northern Ireland. Moreover, what ties these central figures together is precisely the fact that they have all left their place of birth behind. The protagonists of the stories set in Northern Ireland are expatriates who return to see their family. In the opening and title story 'Nothing Like Beirut', I-narrator Kathleen has returned to the house where she grew up in the Northern Irish countryside to spend Easter Sunday with her sisters and brother. She ponders on how, when going back there after a long absence – knowing it only from media clichés – she always expects her former home to be like "Beirut or some place" (2). Although she can buy Jeffrey Archer and Seamus Heaney at the airport, her "manipulated brain still always expect[s] Beirut or Baghdad or San Salvador" (2), until she arrives in "this safe townland of forsythia in gardens and tractors busy in tiny hedged fields, and the bogs and the lakes and the hills of always" (2). Even though she sees four British soldiers marching where the sheltering sycamore trees and the scented rosebush of her safe childhood used to be, she tells herself that it is "nothing like Beirut all the same" (2). However, as the story progresses, she comes to the realization that the lost childhood happiness she has been cherishing is just an illusion, "a fairy tale of secure innocence" (15). When she talks to her siblings about her fond memories of gathering blackberries in the fields and walking to Mass via a narrowed primrosed lane, it turns out that they do not feel the same way at all. Her sisters tell her how they hated going back to the Convent in September with scratched arms, being taunted by the nuns and sneered at by the children for earning their winter uniforms by picking fruit. And her brother describes how they had to walk to Mass through muck, in fear of the half-starved Alsatians the old sadist Moloney used to scare the neighbours and threaten his wife with. When they hear an explosion and the subsequent sirens and helicopters, she suddenly realizes that "[t]his landscape had always been more violent and less innocent than I'd let myself remember, our house had been poor and overcrowded and ugly with jealousies, the sheltering sycamore trees had never sheltered me" (14). She now remembers what the others knew all along, but she made herself forget: "[I] walled the truth up somewhere: […] the roses turning brown and

[199] For a comprehensive examination of Irish short stories written between the 1920s and the early twenty-first century that have treated the Troubles, see Michael L. Storey, *Representing the Troubles in Irish Short Fiction* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2004).

dead, terror falling from the sycamore trees […]" (15). Kathleen and other emigrated protagonists who return to Northern Ireland struggle with their vision of the place where they grew up, feeling connected with and distanced from it at the same time. Emigration and exile are of course recurring themes in Irish literature, as well as the migrants' nostalgia for the home they have left behind. Yet, these familiar themes are further complicated by the book's preoccupation with Northern Ireland. Kathleen has turned the memory of her former home into an ideal image of innocence. However, the violence that surrounds her birthplace eventually filters through as soldiers symbolically replace the rosebush from her childhood. It is only by experiencing this violence related to the Troubles that the scars of the more general violence which surrounded her as a child resurface. In this respect, the roses, which after all have thorns, could be seen as symbolizing this violence as well.

The nonsectarian violence which is at the forefront in the opening story also recurs in other guises throughout the book. Duffaud's foregrounding of violence in general, as we will see, reinforces the work's subtext of the Northern Irish Troubles, demonstrating how it resonates in 'ordinary' violence. For example, Helen in 'Innocent Bystanders' returns to Northern Ireland from Amsterdam to see her ageing mother Nellie. They have not had any contact for seven years, because Helen divorced her violent husband and remarried. Thus, she did not only leave the violence of Northern Ireland behind, she also walked away from the violence in her relationship. In the eyes of her Catholic mother, divorce is an unforgivable sin and the fact that her husband battered her does not matter, since "violence [is] considered a natural hazard of marriage" (26). By juxtaposing the domestic violence Helen experienced with her husband and the sectarian violence that is going on in the protagonist's homeland, Duffaud extends the impact of both kinds of violence: they reinforce each other by their presence. In 'Nothing like Beirut', the protagonist's witnessing of sectarian violence triggered her memory of a childhood surrounded by everyday violence. Similarly, in 'Innocent Bystanders', the relationship between Helen and her mother is mirrored in the parallels that are drawn between both types of violence. Helen has distanced herself from her husband as well as from Northern Ireland. Nellie, on the other hand, believes that marital violence does not justify divorce, nor does she agree with her daughter's decision not to live in the violence-ridden Northern Ireland. Still, at a certain point Helen's mother writes her that it is a pity to keep up old disagreements and asks her to visit and bring her daughter Caroline: "You wouldn't know there was a bit of trouble in the country at all" (18). Although Helen knows that "all that Spring and Summer one man after another had gone deaf and blind and mad with hunger" and that "young fellows […] were sitting naked in bare rooms repeating other

people's slogans, smearing and choking their minds with the left-over excrement of History" (20), she lets the ties with home pull her back to what her mother's letter describes as "the peace of small rocky fields, turf bog spread lazily at their feet, child's drawing of mountain lying across the horizon" (20). Moreover, when she first arrives in the rural border town where she grew up, it seems to Helen that both Ireland and Nellie – the embodiment of the institution of 'The Irish Catholic Widowed Mother' – have mellowed. Her mother watches *Dallas* on television, and there are copies of a Mills and Boon romance and *Gone With the Wind* on the bookshelf. Helen "remembered that being hidden under the mattress long ago when it came in the Yankee parcel, for fear that [Father Feeney's sister] might drop in with her holy spying eyes and now here it was out in the open" (17). The very book she is reading, published in Dublin, has an abortion in it, without any protest from her surroundings. It could not have been written and would not have got printed the last time she was home, Helen thinks to herself, it would have been "on the Index or something, Archbishop McQaid thundering from his pulpit" (17). Her mother, who was always very patriotic and taught her children that it was "a great thing to die for your country" (32), even complains that the violence dominating Northern Ireland was not what she had meant or visualised by patriotism: "I'm not saying they haven't a just cause [but] nobody every recommended such –", Nellie hesitates (32). "Such blood", Helen thinks, "you imagined one could die for Ireland without blood and without vomit and without squeals, and above all without killing anyone else. A nice white smooth death, lying in one smiling photogenic piece under the green and saffron flag" (32-3). But she keeps this to herself, because she has reached the conclusion that Nellie is "after all just an innocent bystander" (33) in all of this. At that point, however, her mother's old self of bigotry resurfaces. It turns out she has put Father Feeney and his sister up to baptizing Caroline behind Helen's back. When she confronts her mother with this, the latter replies that she had every right to do so: "My only daughter living like a slut with a man she's not married to, my only grandchild reared like a heathen. […] [D]on't expect me to stand by and do nothing when I see my only grandchild headed straight for Hell!" (36). On her way back to the airport, Helen looks at the handwritten posters proclaiming "DEATH TO TRAITORS! THATCHER OUT! KILL THE BRITS!" and she realizes that neither her mother nor Ireland have changed (37). By connecting these nationalist slogans to the protagonist's mother, Duffaud again ties both themes together in this story. Nellie may not approve of the physical violence that surrounds her, but she does use a form of psychological violence against her daughter. The paralleling of these forms of violence again increases their impact. Moreover, the religious motives for Nellie's psychological violence against her

daughter and the nationalistic violence called out by the posters also reinforce each other. The juxtaposition of the slogans and Nellie's actions could be taken as demonstrating how violence has roots in (religious) bigotry.

The stories that are not set in Northern Ireland focus on the protagonists' lives, as immigrants, in their new home. The connecting thread of how their upbringing and the ties to their home influence their lives, however, remains the same. Throughout the work, the immigrant characters experience both the freedom and the loneliness which the distance from their homes entails. As we have seen, the same applies to emigrant characters from the Republic in stories such as O'Brien's 'Cords'. However, for the protagonists in Duffaud's book, moving away from home does not only mean leaving one's abusive father or husband and one's bigoted mother, it also means walking away from conflict. Tessa, the protagonist of 'Furniture', has left her discontented and violent husband and has moved from Belfast to London with her little girl Kathleen. Although the three weeks since they have arrived in London have been lonely and the job and place to live she has found are not ideal, she delights in "the forgotten freedom of being able to jump on and off buses and wander around shops without checkpoints and bomb scares" (68). Like Helen, Tessa has left both the violence of Northern Ireland and that of her husband behind. As such, throughout the work, all kinds of violence become linked to the Troubles. As is the case in 'Innocent Bystanders', Tessa's mother does not support her daughter's choice to divorce her husband. And, as it turns out, nor do her brother Gerry and his wife Liz. When Tessa contacts them, not expecting pity for what she has gone through but praise for her ability to survive, they offer her neither. Instead, her brother reproaches her for not having paid heed to her religion and her family ties. Apparently, her family wanted her to remain married to Liam and "put up with things like everybody else" (70) and stay in Belfast, because, although life is difficult there nowadays, "there's thousands have to put up with it, they can't all run away" (75). In the end, Tessa realizes that the cords tying her to her family form a pattern of "recriminations, self-justifying tears and humiliating forgiveness" (78), which she is unable to break out of, even if she has moved to London. In the same way, other protagonists find that moving away from home is not a guarantee for them to find their own identity. In 'Pièces d'Identité', for example, Josie has moved from Belfast over London to Paris. Although her years in Northern Ireland are behind her, she can still remember "the long trembling walk home on dark evenings when anything could happen" (86). Living a life surrounded by conflict, then, has left its marks on her. Still, she does feel safe and loved now, living in Paris and engaged to a Frenchman. However, she has had to change everything about herself in order to be accepted

by Christophe and his surroundings, even her name. She now goes by the name Brigitte, because his mother did not find 'Josephine' appropriate. She spends her time "choosing clothes that were *exactly* right for the person Christophe's fiancée was supposed to be, reading not just any old rubbish to kill time between two stations but what everyone else was reading, building up a stock of phrases, of fresh ways to say things, small rehearsed flippancies and allusions that might go down well" (81). Despite all her attempts to leave her old identity behind and replace it by a new one, tailored to her fiancées wishes, she still feels like an outsider when she finds herself defending refugees in a discussion with Christophe and his friends: "you can take Brigid from the bog … But big Josie's great hairy hooves will always be stuck halfway up a mountain" (88), she thinks to herself. Josie's defence of refugees underscores the fact that she herself in a way has fled her birthplace as a result of conflict. Similarly, in 'Mixed Marriage', Alice from Ulster lives in Paris with her French husband, Leon. When she arrived in France, she had been delighted to trade in Irish for French folklore. However, during a visit to his family in the Midi, she understands just how different she is when they are arguing over the repatriation of immigrant workers: her logic is that of "the colonised, not of the ex-colonist" (163), she realizes. Alice's nationalist vision of Northern Ireland as a colony again reminds the reader that Duffaud's migrant protagonists all carry the extra baggage of the conflict that dominated their homeland. I-narrator Eve in 'Escape', to give a final example, is "in exile" (93) in the French countryside. She is glad to be "[f]ree of the spite and the jeers, of the narrow intolerant streets and the grey council walls" (94). But, because she wants "to be accepted, can't bear to be thought foreign and through-other" (93), she finds herself playing the role of a French housewife instead of enjoying her new-found freedom. Thus, the theme of migration and the difficulty to create a new identity away from the Irish catholic family, which featured in volumes by writers like O'Brien and McGahern, also recurs in Duffaud's book. Together with the focus on Northern Ireland and the consequences of an upbringing during times of conflict, this theme unifies the work as a whole.

This unity is further underscored by various other connections between the stories. For example, three of the stories share the character of Josie. In 'Things Fall Apart', which takes place in London, she becomes an acquaintance of the protagonist, Flanagan, since they are both "exiles" (42). The following story, 'On the Stairs', is told from the point of view of a child, Carmel, whose Irish family lives in the same London building as Flanagan and Josie. Finally, in 'Pièces d'Identité', which appears further on in the book, the reader learns what has become of Josie in Paris. In addition, many of the central figures throughout the stories

are women, some of which have left behind their violent husband as well as their home in Northern Ireland. This is often condemned by their family, especially by their catholic mothers, who prefer to keep up the illusion and see their daughter married to a violent man rather than divorced. There are also numerous references to the mythical image that is often created of Ireland by emigrants. For instance, Tessa, who has just moved from Belfast to London in 'Furniture', notices an emerald sign proclaiming 'Back to Ireland!' and thinks to herself: "You had the usual misty dreams of the exile – green fields and white cottages and easy friendliness". However, she goes on, "[y]ou didn't expect the built-up suburb and the council flat and a discontented husband with no job, loneliness and empty streets and the lurking threat of violence" (70). This mythical vision, then, stands even further from reality in the case of Northern Ireland. In other words, the Troubles and the accompanying violence further complicate the Northern Irish exile's vision of home. The rosebush, symbolic for both Kathleen's idealized memory of home – and perhaps also for her realization of the violence that surrounded her childhood – in 'Nothing Like Beirut', also returns in other stories. The references to Beirut in the title story are repeated in other stories as well. For example, in 'On the Stairs', Miss Dolan tells Carmel's mother that she will never go back to Ireland, as she got robbed in the centre of Dublin "and not a Guard to be seen and nobody as much as looked at what was happening to her, drug addicts and cornerboys of all descriptions, you were as well in Beirut" (56). Finally, the references to the 'innocent bystanders' of the second story are also repeated in other stories. "They're innocent bystanders like ourselves", Alice says about her French in-laws with their racist ideas in 'Mixed Marriage', "as guilty and as helpless as bystanders always are" (163).

In short, *Nothing Like Beirut* can be read as a short story cycle, because of its unity of theme and place, which is reinforced by recurring characters, symbols and cross-references between the stories. Although the protagonists throughout the work have moved to different countries, their Northern Irish background as well as the fact that they are all emigrants ties them together. Whether they are returning to their old home or struggling to find their place in a new country, they all encounter difficulties that follow from building a life away from one's roots. The problem of finding one's identity away from home is further complicated by the fact that the characters were born in Northern Ireland. The mythical image that many emigrants and exiles have of home, similarly, becomes more problematic because of the violence that suffused Northern Ireland. Sectarian and nonsectarian violence, as we have seen, mirror and reinforce one another throughout the work. Thus, by using the cycle form, Duffaud is able to tie the many references to violence throughout the stories to the Troubles, even if

the story in question does not directly involve violence related to the conflict in Northern Ireland. As we have seen in other cycles, *Nothing Like Beirut* contains a network of associations, which together have a cumulative thematic impact on the book as a whole.

1.2. MacLaverty's *Matters of Life and Death*

1.2.1. Biography: MacLaverty

Bernard MacLaverty was born into a Catholic family on 14 September 1942 in Belfast. He lived there until 1975, when he moved to Scotland with his wife and four children. He has been a Medical Laboratory Technician, a mature student, an English teacher and occasionally a writer-in-residence. After having lived in Edinburgh as well as on the Isle of Islay for some time, he moved to Glasgow, where he still resides today. MacLaverty has written four novels, i.e. *Lamb* (1980), *Cal* (1983), *Grace Notes* (1997) – which was shortlisted for the 1997 Man Booker Prize – and *The Anatomy School* (2001). In addition, he has published five works of short fiction: *Secrets & Other Stories* (1977), *A Time to Dance & Other Stories* (1982), *The Great Profundo & Other Stories* (1987), *Walking The Dog & Other Stories* (1994) and *Matters of Life and Death* (2006). The latter volume was longlisted for the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Awards, and chosen as one of the Sunday Times Top Five Books of the Year. Most of these stories are gathered in his *Collected Stories* (2013). He has also written versions of his fiction for other media – drama, radio and television plays, screenplays, libretti, etc. – and he wrote and directed the short film *Bye Child* (2003) which won a BAFTA award in 2004.[200]

1.2.2. *Matters of Life and Death*: Northern Ireland and Death

Matters of Life and Death (2006), MacLaverty's fifth and most recent volume of short stories, consists of eleven stories written over a number of years – some of which were published prior to appearing in this work, e.g. in *The New Yorker*. The book features a wide range of protagonists. Most of them are middle-aged, but others are elderly (e.g. 'The Assessment', 'Matters of Life & Death 2: Visiting Takabuti') or still children (e.g. 'The Trojan Sofa', 'Matters of Life & Death 1: Learning to Dance'). Seven of the stories have a

[200] Based on the sections 'Biography', 'Bibliography', 'Other Works' and 'Awards and Prizes' of the author's personal home page <http://www.bernardmaclaverty.com>.
There is one monograph on MacLaverty, which discusses his novels and his works of short fiction, including *Matters of Life and Death*. See Richard Rankin Russell, *Bernard MacLaverty* (Bucknell: University Press, 2009).

male main character, and the other four have a female one. Furthermore, some of the central figures are lower-middle class, others middle class and yet others upper-middle class protagonists. They thus move in different circles: the characters are burglars, artists, teachers, doctors, etc.

In spite of this variety, the stories are tied together in various ways. First of all, like in Duffaud's book, they are concerned with Northern Ireland. With the exception of the protagonists of 'Up the Coast' and 'Winter Storm', who are English and Scottish respectively, the central characters are all Northern Irish or from Northern Irish descent. Moreover, all but three of the stories[201] are at least partly set in Northern Ireland. In addition, several of the stories are set during the Troubles, focusing on sectarian violence. In the opening story, 'On the Roundabout', the I-narrator, who is in the car with his wife and two children, sets the mood: "We were driving back into Belfast – we could have been in Omagh or Enniskillen – visiting Anne's aunt maybe. But that's not important. It was the early seventies and that *is* important. Not long after Bloody Friday – nine dead, God knows how many maimed – all courtesy of our friends, the Provos. So everybody was a bit hyper" (1). When he drives into a roundabout, he sees men from the Ulster Defence Association battering a hitcher. Instinctively, he rescues him by dragging him onto the floor of the backseat and bringing him to the hospital. The victim, ironically, turns out to be a Presbytarian who was mistaken for a Fenian. The narrator is shocked when nobody in the hospital wants to know about the attempted murder he has just witnessed. To give another example, the eleven-year-old I-narrator of 'The Trojan Sofa', Niall Donnelly, is exploited in the name of Ireland by his father and uncle: "He has very strong opinions, has my Da. A war is two sides, one against the other, he says. It's as simple as that. 'The wrong done to this country was so great that we can do *anything* in retaliation.' If it's done against the Brits it's OK by him. 'A broken phone is a British liability,' he says. 'So's a burnt bus. They're things that have to be replaced – by the English exchequer.'" (6). The father and uncle have conjured up a scheme to burgle the houses of Orangemen "for Ireland" (7): they sell them a piece of furniture, Niall hides inside and they deliver it to their home for free. The boy spends the night in the 'Trojan sofa' and, when the house is empty, he cuts himself out and lets his father and uncle in so they can steal everything, including the couch. During the third job, he gets caught and is almost shot by the Englishman they were trying to rob. In 'A Trusted Neighbour', finally, Ben and his family are Catholics living in a mixed Catholic and Protestant area in Belfast. Believing in religious

[201] 'The Assessment' is set in the Republic, 'Up the Coast' in a Scottish coastal town and 'Winter Storm' in Iowa.

tolerance, he befriends his Protestant next-door neighbour, Dawson Orr, who is in the police. The latter displays some abnormal behaviour: he only visits his neighbour at night, often when he is a bit drunk, and he never gives him a lift with his car, only with his motorcycle. When Ben offers his garage as a storage room to his Catholic colleague Paul, who is moving because he was threatened by Loyalists, Dawson meddles and says that Ben's colleague must be involved in the Republican cause. Around that time, he starts parking his car in front of their house, which Ben decides not to say anything about. In the end, Dawson and his family move to a different neighbourhood. Afterwards, Ben discovers that Dawson received a bomb threat at his address on pirate radio and that he warned the other neighbours to put the children in the back room. He realizes that he did not warn him and his wife because they are Catholics: "'Not only did he not warn us,' Ben's eyes widened with realisation, 'he tried to set us up. That's what the bad parking of the car was all about. He wasn't drunk. He didn't miss. He parked his fucking car in front of my house so'd we'd get it…'" (86). These stories set in Northern Ireland during the Troubles also, perhaps unsurprisingly, share a focus on violence and death. Whether in the context of a sectarian beating, a misplaced act of revenge or a bomb threat, the characters escape death. These people, living their lives surrounded by conflict, are confronted with violence and death, but nevertheless survive.

This focus on life and death also forms a connection between the Troubles stories and the other stories of the book. As the title of the work indicates, all the stories somehow deal with matters of life and death. The volume as a whole shares its title with the third and the tenth story in the book: 'Matters of Life & Death 1: Learning to Dance' and 'Matters of Life & Death 2: Visiting Takabuti'. These two stories, set in Belfast in the 1950s, revolve around twelve-year-old Tony and ten-year-old Ben, two brothers whose father has just died. Both stories look at how people cope with the loss of their loved ones. In 'Learning to Dance', the two boys spend the night at the house of acquaintances while their mother is arranging their father's funeral. The story, told from the point of view of the elder brother, juxtaposes the boys' grief with Doctor D'Arcy and his wife Phyllis's well-intended attempts to act like nothing has happened. Phyllis, for instance, tries to teach Tony to dance. The doctor and his wife actually turn out to dance around another topic as well: the fact that they were not able to have any children, which she greatly regrets. The other story, 'Visiting Takabuti', is told from the perspective of the boys' great-aunt, Nora, an elderly woman who lost her only love in the Great War. As a result, she never had any children of her own, which she, like Phyllis, finds extremely difficult to deal with. Now that Nora feels her own end nearing – "These days she was like eggs. Too sudden a movement and she felt something would give. […] [The doctor]

told her she was showing signs of osteoporosis – effectively her inner scaffolding was dissolving" (197) – she looks back at her life, which has revolved around the loss of Arthur. She tries to teach her great-nephews something about death by taking them to an exhibition at the Ulster Museum. When she shows them Takabuti, a female mummy who died two and a half thousand years ago, they are not as intrigued as she hoped they would be: "The smaller brother pulled a face and walked away to look at something else. Tony followed him" (209). She is disappointed that she has not been able to teach them the Irish story Arthur told her of how the soul, at the moment of death, returns to the body to bid it adieu. On the bus ride home from the museum, she sees this happening at her own death: "The soul, in her own image, leans over and with tenderness kisses her empty body. Adieu. And each time the soul makes the journey to the doorway reluctance takes hold and it returns to kiss the body with its shrunken frame and its frail bones of honeycomb. Adieu. Three times in all. From one vital part of herself to another. Adieu" (211). Then she passes away. Both stories thus offer lessons of loss. While in one story the doctor and his wife avoid the topic of death, Nora tries to deal with it in the other story. However, in neither case are they able to get through to the boys, for whom it is perhaps too difficult to place such a great loss, given their young age. Along with the focus on life-threatening sectarian violence in the stories set during the Troubles and on grief in the title stories, other kinds of deaths feature in the volume as well. As in 'Visiting Takabuti', the health of the ageing protagonists in 'The Clinic' and 'The Assessment' is deteriorating, as a result of which they feel their death nearing. In 'Up the Coast', a young artist, out of fear for her own life, murders the man who has violently raped her – a horrible experience which she deals with by way of her art. To give a final example, in the closing story 'Winter Storm', a Scottish poet-in-residence has a near-death experience getting lost in a blizzard on the campus of an American Midwestern university.

Throughout the stories, then, characters are nearly killed, are approaching their death, have just died or are long gone. Some of them are murdered, others die of natural causes. Still, the book's focus on Northern Ireland has an impact on all of these deaths. Because of the violent nature of death in the Troubles stories, that is, the other deaths in the volume acquire an added significance: although life and death are universal themes, the danger of death is markedly prevalent, even in the stories that are not set during the Troubles. As in Duffaud's cycle, where sectarian and other forms of violence reinforce each other, violent and nonviolent deaths resonate in one another here. As a result of this constant lurking of death, the stories seem to attach a greater value to life as well. Whatever the situation, the connecting thread is the fact that wherever death is involved, there is always life. The stories set during

the Troubles focus on how the characters live with the threat of sectarian violence. Other stories look at the way the bereaved live with their losses, on how people live after having been confronted with their own mortality, or on the way they live after they have taken someone else's life. Thus, *Matters of Life and Death* is unified by exploring the connection between existence and mortality in different situations. Furthermore, MacLaverty's stories also stress the importance of having other people in one's life. As we have seen, in the opening story, the protagonist – who may even be a Catholic – ironically saves a Protestant he does not know from the violence of the UDA. A similar situation recurs in a completely different context in the closing story, where the protagonist is saved from dying in a blizzard by a Native American cleaning lady he barely knows. The fact that the first story revolves around saving the life of a stranger in the context of the Troubles, inevitably affects one's reading of the final narrative. The impact of the final story, then, is much greater because the need for others in our lives has already been highlighted in the context of conflict. In addition, as Russell points out, the conviction that people need each other in order to live their lives to the fullest returns in other stories as well (2009: 136). By focusing on the support people need when dealing with the loss of loved ones, both 'Learning to Dance' and 'Visiting Takabuti' add emphasis to the importance of others in our lives. Similarly, in 'The Clinic', the protagonist's telephone call to his wife after his appointment in a diabetic clinic underscores his need for support, and thus adds to the unity of the volume.

Finally, the unity which results from the focus on life and death and the concern with Northern Ireland is also underlined by other connections between the stories. For instance, it is notable that, throughout the book, the word 'death' is often used in a figurative sense: "I'm dead – they've killed me" (3), the assaulted man shouts in the opening story; Phyllis tells Tony that, for her, "dancing is a matter of life and death" (45); Jimmy Jones was kicked "half to death" in 'A Belfast Memory' (97). When death is actually involved, however, the characters in the different stories fail to explicitly refer to it. Doctor D'Arcy and his wife do not really address the topic of the death of Tony and Ben's father in 'Learning to Dance', and although Annie and Susan are laying out the body of their dead niece, they never literally talk about her as being dead in 'The Wedding Ring'. Similarly, even though the ageing protagonists feel the end of their lives approaching, they do not refer to it as such. This stresses the difficult interplay that exists between life and death.

The stories also share a variety of references to literature and film, which increase the unity of the work: in 'The Clinic', the protagonist is reading Chekhov's 'The Beauties' in the waiting room of a diabetic clinic; the main character of 'Up the Coast' refers to Plath and

Shakespeare, and she also compares her experience with the movies – "If this was a Hollywood movie he would come back" (188); Nora in 'Visiting Takabuti' takes Tony and Ben to see *Oliver Twist*. It is also worth mentioning that, although only four of the eleven protagonists are female, the women that appear throughout the stories are markedly strong. Ellie, the – significantly – dead protagonist of 'The Wedding Ring', which is set in the early 1900s, was extremely sheltered by her aunts. Yet, after her death, it becomes clear that she was leading a double life, being secretly married to a man whom she loved but who was not approved of by her aunt Annie. The Northern Irish protagonist in 'The Assessment', despite the fact that she has dementia, keeps her head up in the nursing home she is staying in "south of the Border". To give a final example, the protagonist in 'Up the Coast' is up in the mountains nearby a Scottish coastal town to work on her art, when she is brutally raped. She feels "somehow representative" afterwards: "[s]he endured the condition of women across the world" (182-3). Still, she does not passively let her perpetrator get away with what he has done to her. She conjures up a plan, capitalizing on his vanity. She knows that he cannot swim, so she asks if she can take his picture and, while he is posing, she pushes him into the sea. She later sells out an entire exhibition with works about that particular period in her life. On their own, these female characters may not appear to unify the work, but when viewed in the context of all the other connections between the stories, the presence of these strong women does underscore the unity of the work as a whole.

In short, because of its concern with Northern Ireland as well as with the theme of life and death, underlined by other connections between the stories, this work can be viewed as a short story cycle. By using the particular form of the cycle to tell these stories, MacLaverty is able to zoom in on the stories of the different protagonists and, at the same time, bring them together by way of the universal themes of existence and mortality. These themes are, throughout the cycle, connected to the underlying subtext of the Troubles. Whereas in *Nothing Like Beirut* the focus lies on people who have left their birthplace behind, *Matters of Life and Death* rather looks at those who have remained in Northern Ireland. In both cycles, however, the concern with Northern Ireland affects the volume as a whole. In Duffaud's book, the focus on the Troubles in some of the stories results in a different take on the themes of emigration and exile in the rest of the work. Similarly, the Troubles stories and the corresponding fear of sectarian violence in *Matters of Life and Death* bring about a new significance for the themes of life and death in the book as a whole. The inevitable presence of death, so MacLaverty seems to suggest, tells us not to be afraid to live.

2. Contemporary Irish Short Story Cycles

2.1. Dwyer Hickey's *The House on Parkgate Street and Other Dublin Stories*

2.1.1. Dwyer Hickey: Biography

Christine Dwyer Hickey is a Dublin-born novelist and short story writer. She divides her time between Dublin and Italy. She has won several awards with her short stories, which have been published in various anthologies and magazines. Her debut novel, *The Dancer* (1995), the first part of her Dublin Trilogy, was shortlisted for Irish Novel of the Year in 1995. The second part, *The Gambler*, followed in 1996 and the third part, *The Gatemaker*, in 2000. She published *Tatty*, her fourth novel, also set in Dublin, in 2004. It was longlisted for the Orange Prize and shortlisted for the Hughes & Hughes Irish Novel of the Year Award. Her fifth novel, *Last Train from Liguria*, appeared in 2009. *The Cold Eye of Heaven*, her sixth novel, about an elderly Dublin man who finds himself paralysed, was published in 2011. It won the Irish Novel of the Year 2012 and has recently been optioned by Newgrange Films. In 2013, Dwyer Hickey published her first volume of short stories, *The House on Parkgate Street and Other Dublin Stories*. Her first play, *Snow Angels*, premiered in Dublin in 2014 and will be published in 2015. Her seventh novel, *The Lives of Women*, will also appear in 2015.[202]

2.1.2. *The House on Parkgate Street and Other Dublin Stories*: Dublin and its People

Dwyer Hickey's debut short fiction work, *The House on Parkgate Street and Other Dublin Stories* (2013), consist of ten stories, some of which were previously published in magazines or anthologies. As the title suggests, these stories are, without exception, set in Dublin. In other words, the setting is one of the main unifying elements of the book. In each story, Dublin – with its streets, pubs, shops and landmarks – plays a prominent part, to the extent of it becoming the main character of the book as a whole. Together, the stories roughly cover the area from Phoenix Park and Capel Street in the north to Rathmines in the south, and from Chapelizod village and Ballyfermot in the west to Ballsbridge in the east. As such, *The House on Parkgate Street and Other Dublin Stories* clearly echoes Joyce's *Dubliners*, thereby living up to the expectations created by the 'Dublin stories' of the subtitle, and thus laying claim to the cycle as a literary form. As a whole, the work paints a portrait of the city and its

[202] Based on the sections 'Biography' and 'Books' of the author's personal home page <http://www.christinedwyerhickey.com/>.

people. For this volume, like Joyce's, also looks at the people who inhabit the city and its suburbs: the Dubliners. Whereas only three of the stories in *Dubliners* focus on childhood, seven out of ten stories in Dwyer Hickey's volume are told from the point of view of a child, both girls ('Across the Excellent Grass', 'La Straniera', 'Windows of Eyes', 'Bridie's Wedding', 'The House on Parkgate Street') and boys ('Saint Stephenses Day', 'Esther's House'). In addition, two stories are told through the eyes of adult men ('Absence', 'The Yellow Handbag') and, in 'Teatro La Fenice', an elderly woman who has dementia tells her story. Through these protagonists, different facets of Dublin society are explored: the little girl in the opening story is left to wander a racecourse alone while her father is betting; the boy who, staying at his aunt Esther's house, discovers that she secretly has a mentally handicapped son living in an institution; Mary finds that she is unable to tell her family that she was sexually abused by their lodger, because she is afraid of losing her mother's income and ruining her sister Bridie's wedding; thirteen-year-old Gráinne befriends a prostitute while staying at her aunt's house on Parkgate Street in the title story; the Indian taxi driver Ashok has been living in his car ever since his divorce in the closing story. While the central figures of the volume clearly differ in terms of age, sex and class, their stories all revolve around families that are somehow divided. This unifies the book thematically: Frank, who lives in Mumbai, returns home for his father's funeral, but does not have the heart to face his family after the terrible fate his elder sister met with twenty years ago; a family is divided over a cousin raised in Italy, who appears to be free-thinking but turns out to suffer from a mental illness; twelve-year-old Billy sees his little brother cracking his head on their way to a Saint Stephen's Day family visit; a schoolgirl has run away from home and is spending the night on the streets; an elderly woman with dementia in a retirement home tries to remember details about her family. The fragmentation that dominates these family lives is underscored by the open-endedness of the stories. For instance, the reader never learns what exactly happened to Frank's sister in 'Absence', only that she was often "locked into the box room for the day. Punished by exclusion. Because as Ma would often say, 'Slapping Susan was a complete waste of time.' Not that it ever stopped her" (15). To give another example, it is never revealed why the schoolgirl in 'Windows of Eyes' is out there on her own at night, far away from home. The protagonists' fractured family lives are also mirrored in the fragmented picture painted of Dublin throughout the stories. That is, the city with its different neighbourhoods is portrayed through various time periods, but the stories are not chronologically ordered. To give but one example, 'Absence', which is set in the present time, appears before 'Saint Stephenses Day', set in the 1970s. Moreover, milestones in the history

of Dublin or Ireland are generally not described. Instead, the reader observes the changes the city has undergone implicitly, by seeing it through the eyes of the protagonists. In each story, the focus more or less lies on a specific area of Dublin, as a result of which the reader experiences different parts of the city at different stages in time. The changes that Irish society undergoes over time happen, so to speak, in the gaps between the stories, and it is only by connecting the different parts of the work that one gets a clearer picture. As in *Dubliners*, thus, the tension between unity and fragmentation typical of the short story cycle distinctly emerges in this volume.

Much like 'The Dead' does for Joyce's cycle, the closing story in Dwyer Hickey's volume ties the stories together. 'The Yellow Handbag' is told from the perspective of taxi driver Ashok, who moved from India to Ireland fifteen years ago. Ever since his divorce, as a result of which he is not allowed to see his daughter, he has been living in his taxi, which he parks in Phoenix Park by night. In this story, he drives his VIP, an elderly woman carrying a yellow handbag, around Dublin. Mrs Ridell, who has been living in hotels since her husband died twenty years ago, wants to "ride down memory lane" (184) now that she is finally back in the country. Together with this woman, we witness how the Dublin from the rest of the stories has changed. Ashok first drives Mrs Ridell to see the Four Courts from the far side of the river Liffey. On their way over, they pass Capel Street, the protagonist's street in 'Esther's House'. In her yellow handbag, which can be taken to symbolize the book as a whole, she keeps a pack of old photographs of Dublin sites. Looking at the Four Courts, Mrs Ridell, "her head dipping up and down from the photo to the subject, appears to be verifying something, or perhaps, Ashok thinks, even looking for changes" (185). Next, they drive to Phoenix Park. After visiting the ambassador's residence, where Mrs Ridell also looks at her photos, they drive over to Farmleigh House. The official Irish State guest house since 1999, Farmleigh used to be one of the residences of the Anglo-Irish Guinness family. Ashok's VIP, who – as her photographs show – once was a guest there when it was still a private house, is disappointed to find out that it is now closed for the public. Then they drive to the Phoenix Park racecourse, where the young child wandered around in 'Across the Excellent Grass' and which bordered on the garden of the retirement home in 'Teatro la Fenice'. Standing at the entrance to the former racecourse, "the ground beneath their feet mutilated by heavy machinery, the air muffled with the churn and rattle of a half-constructed building site", Mrs Ridell exclaims with disbelief: "Oh no! Oh my! […] I never thought […] I mean, I just never. Of all the – you know? The last thing I expected in Ireland – in Dublin – was to find a racecourse, well, obliterated, I guess" (191-2). After a series of disappointments, the only

thing Mrs Ridell manages to retrace in present-day Dublin is the view of the deer in Phoenix Park. While they are watching the deer, Ashok tells his VIP the story of the yellow handbag his mother used to carry. Working at the Taj Palace Hotel in Bombay as a cleaner, she received the handbag from a German lady, out of gratitude, because she had comforted the guest when she was crying. As a child, Ashok thought she "carried a piece of the sun around with her in that yellow handbag. Every time she opened it, something wondrous would emerge: small, fragrant soaps, pieces of individually wrapped chocolate, pens and writing paper too […]. A stick of kohl for [his] sister's eyes, a ribbon for their hair. Once a *Boy's Own annual* for [him]!" (198). Later, however, the taxi driver's childhood illusions were shattered, when he realized "that these things were stolen from the great Taj Hotel and that the sun had nothing to do with it" (198). Similarly, Mrs Ridell has realized that it is impossible to return to the Dublin of her past, as it is no longer there: all she has left are fragments of her former life, in the form of photographs. Spending time with his VIP, Ashok has come to the conclusion that he, too, has been clinging to a version of the city which does not exist anymore: the Dublin where he was living with his wife and daughter. He decides to return to his family in India and stop trying to restore contact with his Irish family, who do not want him in their lives anymore. Thus, this story brings together the pictures painted of the different parts of Dublin throughout the stories. This is counterbalanced by the recurrence of the thematic focus on fractured family lives in this final story. Moreover, the focus on fragmentation is highlighted by the fact that both protagonists decide to let go of the idea of a united family. As in the rest of the work, then, a tension between unity and fragmentation emerges in the final story.

In addition to the shared setting and recurring theme, the stories display other connections, which further underscore the work's status as a cycle. For example, many of the central figures, as in *Dubliners*, are depicted while moving through the city. As these characters often travel by taxi, tram or bus, they are repeatedly described during the act of looking out of a window. As such, the reader observes the city through the eyes of the protagonists. In 'Absence', Frank looks out of the windows of the taxi driving him from the airport to his father's funeral in Ballyfermot: "He'd been half looking forward to playing a game of spot-the-changes with himself" (14). Billy in 'Saint Stephenses Day' watches the houses and streets pass by through the window while he is sitting on the bus on the way to his aunt's in Clontarf. The reader learns about the I-narrator's home life in 'Esther's House' from his descriptions of Capel Street, seen from the tram:

> I looked up to the sign above the front door on the building next to the pub – *Select Accommodation for Artistic Performers. Music Rooms Available. Best Weekly Rates* – so clear I could trace the letters with my finger through the window of the tram. This was my mother's enterprise […]. It was also where we lived. […] Nobody ever bothered with my room, except for myself, and I wasn't there. I was here with Aunt Esther. […] [T]he tram gong sounded and the view rattled out of my sight. (68)

The run-away schoolgirl in 'Windows of Eyes', conversely, walks through little streets with barely enough room for a car to pass through, so as to have "no fear of a bus with its windows of eyes" (81). This protagonist thus feels that she is being watched by the city. She walks from Castlewood Avenue via Mountpleasant Avenue into Rathmines centre, she has a cheap dinner of chips and tea in a late-night café, after which she ends up in Castlewood Avenue again, back where she started. Like Lenehan in 'Two Gallants', then, the girl has been moving around without making any progression; she is walking in a circle. Gráinne, finally, watches prostitutes practising their trade from a window in her aunt's house on Parkgate Street, where she has to stay once a week when her mother meets her new boyfriend:

> It had started to snow again, a slow lacy fall, barely visible. Gráinne went over to the window and sat on the ledge. […] An elbow had come into view under the streetlight. Another elbow. Then a knee. A shoulder belonging to somebody else. A whole woman then appeared. Followed by another woman. […] The snow was thickening now, spinning out of the darkness. […] One by one, [the women] came from the corner and stepped out onto the road, circling in and out of her view. (154-5)

Clearly, Dwyer Hickey's tribute to Joyce is further underscored in this closing scene of the title story, echoing Joyce's 'The Dead'. In the same way that the snow observed by Gabriel Conroy unifies Ireland, the snow seen by Gráinne temporarily unites her with her family, in Dublin and beyond: "She looked up at the sky, into the spin of the snow: faster and faster it was coming. She couldn't stop looking. She thought of Mam and her friend and wondered if they were looking at the snow now. […] Then she thought of Dad and wondered if there was snow in Liverpool […]" (155). However, after watching the women and the snow for a while, she knows it is time for her to go back downstairs and get into bed before her aunt comes home, as "[h]er eyes were beginning to hurt, as if they were too heavy for their sockets, the snow making her dizzy and feel a bit sick" (155). Gráinne thus seems to realize that she should let go of her ideal of a united family.

In short, because of its focus on fractured lives in Dublin, its tension between unity and fragmentation and its echoes of Joyce's *Dubliners*, *The House on Parkgate Street and*

Other Dublin Stories certainly qualifies as a short story cycle, unified primarily by setting and theme. While the interplay between place and theme manifests itself by way of a focus on Northern Ireland and emigration in *Nothing Like Beirut*, and on Northern Ireland and death in *Matters of Life and Death*, in Dwyer Hickey's book, the city of Dublin is the character that ties together and breaks up the stories and their protagonists at the same time.

2.2. Ryan's *The Spinning Heart*

2.2.1. Ryan: Biography

Donal Ryan was born in Newtown, North Tipperary, in 1976. Between 1999 and 2008, he worked for the Department of the Environment. He holds a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of Limerick, which he obtained with honours in 2004 after four years of evening education. In 2008, he started working for the National Employment Rights Authority. He wrote his debut, *The Spinning Heart*, as it says in the blurb on the dust jacket, during the long summer evenings of 2010. The book, set in an unnamed rural town in the aftermath of Ireland's financial collapse, was rejected nearly fifty times by publishers. It finally appeared in 2012, after which it was chosen as the Irish Book Awards Book of the Year in 2012, longlisted for the Booker Prize in 2013 and won the Guardian First Book Award – for the best debut work in any genre – in the same year. *The Thing About December*, which was in fact written before *The Spinning Heart*, was published as a prequel to his debut in 2013.[203] His second work was well-received as well and he became a full-time writer in 2014. He is currently working on his third book, about a young teacher who has an affair with a traveller and gets pregnant. Ryan lives with his wife and two children just outside of Limerick city.

2.2.2. *The Spinning Heart*: A Fractured Community and the Recession

Ryan's debut *The Spinning Heart* (2012) consists of twenty-one narratives, which are all set in an unnamed small rural Irish town in the aftermath of the property crash, more or less covering the period of the summer of 2010. The work has been marketed[204] and

[203] In *The Thing About December* (2013), set in the same town as *The Spinning Heart*, but in 2001 – i.e. some years before the property crash – Ryan depicts how its community is going from harmony to greed, and how a lonely young man suffers under people's cruelty. I will focus on *The Spinning Heart*, since the prequel uses a third-person narrative to tell the story of a single protagonist, Johnsey Cunliffe, through twelve chapters that cover one year in his life. As a result, *The Thing About December* is a work with a more novelistic nature and thus less interesting for the purpose of this dissertation.

[204] *The Spinning Heart* is called a novel in the blurb, and it has no table of contents.

reviewed[205] as a novel, but in what follows I will argue that it can be more aptly read as a short story cycle. *The Spinning Heart*, as we will see, is not simply a unified work, it also displays a marked degree of fragmentation and, consequently, a tension between the two.

The twenty-one narratives of which Ryan's book is made up are, I would argue, more accurately read as short stories than as chapters. What marks them out as stories is, first, the fact that they are all told by a different I-narrator, whose voice completely dominates the story. These accounts are highly individual ones, told by people who are very much preoccupied with their own story, often only incidentally referring to each other. Secondly, as these individuals all focus on their own troubles, present and past, there are disconnected plots present in the different stories. There is plot progression in the book as a whole, but the separate storylines of the different protagonists can definitely stand on their own. Finally, considerable gaps occur between the stories. These are, as we will see, far greater than the gaps between chapters in a novel. As such, these twenty-one narratives are self-sufficient accounts which all focus on the story of a particular individual and thus reach a certain degree of closure. Each story is named for its narrator: the opening story is entitled 'Bobby', the second story 'Josie', the third one 'Lily', etc. In other words, there are twenty-one protagonists, nine female and twelve male, who each tell the reader their own story, which springs from their tunnel vision on the events that have occurred in a small Irish town in the South-West of Ireland, probably near Limerick, in the aftermath of the recession.[206] These individual characters, as it turns out, are all inhabitants of the same town and, together, form a community. In this way, the book appears to revisit the late nineteenth-century narratives of community discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. However, unlike Barlow's rather idealized picture of community life in *Irish Idylls*, Ryan's portrayal of this small-town community in contemporary Ireland is a far more realistic one.[207] Whereas the community of Lisconnel stands united against the threats that face it, the members of the community in *The Spinning Heart* are divided as a result of the economic crash. That is, the inhabitants of the town are struggling to make ends meet after the collapse of the local building firm that allowed them to prosper before the bubble burst, and corrupt owner Pokey Burke's subsequent flight from the country. What Ryan depicts here, then, is a fractured community,

[205] Richard Lea, however, has referred to the book as being made up of "interlocking stories of austerity Ireland" (Rev. of *The Spinning Heart*, by Donal Ryan. *The Guardian* 28 November 2013. 3 December 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/nov/28/guardian-first-book-prize-2013-donal-ryan>).

[206] There are in fact twenty-three voices present in the volume, as the second story, 'Josie' – in addition to Josie's point of view – also puts forward the perspectives of Josie's husband Joseph, and of Mags's father.

[207] The contemporary setting of *The Spinning Heart* is of course in the first place evident from the references to the property crash. In addition, references to Facebook, Angelina Jolie and the Fifa World Cup underline its 2010 setting too.

whose members have not only been betrayed but also have been completely ruined, for it turns out that the crooked employer did not contribute to his workers' social security funds. It is precisely this fractured nature of this community that ruptures the unity in Ryan's book. Because each individual reveals his or her personal take on the consequences of the recession, substantial gaps and contradictions occur between the stories, which results in a fragmented whole. The reader learns the stories of those who have been directly affected by what the crooked boss of the building firm has done: Pokey's former construction foreman, Bobby Mahon, and his builders, including simple Timmy Hanrahan, fat Rory Slattery, Seanie Shaper, Siberian Vasya Afonasiev and ex-apprentice Brian. But the reader is also given the stories of people who have been affected in a different way, such as Josie Burke (Pokey's mother), Triona Cahill (Bobby's wife), single mother Réaltín (Seanie's former girlfriend), who is stuck in an unfinished house with an enormous mortgage on a 'ghost estate', young child Millicent, who is suffering badly from her parents' constant fights about money, and Montessori school owner Kate who lost many of her customers when the Dell computer company laid off all high earners. In other words, the recession has affected all layers of society, as well as different generations. As a result, various tensions surface between the members of this community, who have been stuck in a rut since the bubble burst: they all have money problems, and a general despondency has caught hold of them. Several of the characters are looking to leave the town and even the country to go and work in London for the 2012 Olympics, or in Australia, such as Brian, who describes himself as "a tragic figure, a modern incarnation of the poor tenant farmer, laid low by famine, cast from his smallholding by the Gombeen man, forced to choose between the coffin ship and the grave" as a result of the financial collapse (57). In short, the fragmentation of the community takes shape in the formal division of the book into twenty-one first-person accounts that contain virtually no dialogue.

However, as is the case in all cycles, taken together the stories tell the reader more than they do individually. By putting the separate accounts together, that is, the reader learns more about the morally-upright figure of Bobby Mahon, who is marked by what Pokey has done but also by his past. In every narrative, the central figure summarizes what has happened and conveys how the disaster has affected him or her. Moreover, mostly toward the end of each story, the narrator's link to the well-liked and much-respected Bobby is revealed. In the opening narrative, told by Bobby himself, the reader learns that he goes to the cottage he was reared in every day, and that he is always disappointed that his father, Frank, is still alive. He is planning to burn the cottage down and sell the two acres surrounding it, but the longer his father lives, the less money he will get for it. Frank "drank out" his own father's farm years

ago (9), drove a wedge between his son and his wife and, eventually, drove the latter into her death, as a result of which Bobby often thinks about killing his father. In the centre of the low front gate at Frank's house, there is a red metal heart, "skewered on a rotating hinge": "It's flaking now; the red is nearly gone. It needs to be scraped and sanded and painted and oiled. It still spins in the wind, though. I can hear it creak, creak, creak as I walk away. A flaking, creaking, spinning heart" (9). This fractured spinning heart – which lends the book its title – returns throughout the work as a symbol for the way the community has been damaged at its heart as well as for the stasis the people have been left in. In the twenty stories following Bobby's, it becomes clear that Frank has been murdered. Although Bobby is innocent, the community seems all too eager to see him knocked off his pedestal and thus generally condemns him. Jason, one of Frank's neighbours, for instance, begins his story as follows: "I seen a lad walking up the road towards me that day last week when your man Bobby Mahon killed his father. But then the lad hopped in over a wall before I could make out who it was. The dogs smelt something. I know in my heart and soul it was Bobby Mahon" (76). Hillary, to give another example, only knows Bobby through her colleague Réaltín, but she does see it fit to judge him: "you won't believe this: he's only after *killing* his own *father*" (83). In reality, Denis, school owner Kate's husband, is the one who murdered Bobby's father. Desperate because of the money he lost due to Pokey, Denis went to the cottage to corner Bobby but only found Frank. He ended up killing him, because Frank reminded him of his own father telling him he was useless. Bobby simply found Frank's dead body when he passed by the cottage some time after the murder. In addition, there is gossip that Bobby cheated on his wife Triona with Réaltín, one of the two residents of the ghost estate, even though he was only helping her finish her house. Throughout the stories, the reader also discovers that Réaltín's little boy Dylan – Seanie's son – is kidnapped from Kate's school by two mentally disturbed characters, Trevor and Lloyd. Eventually, the boy is freed by Sergeant Jim Gildea. However, it is only toward the end of the book that the narrators start commenting more on these plots, as the first thing they are preoccupied with is their own situation. In the closing story, Triona condemns the community for its hypocrisy: everyone acted as if they were empathizing with Dylan's mother, looking "all sad and serious in Mass when he was prayed for", she says, but "deep, deep down some of them were more worried about their pensions and medical cards and wages and profits and welfare payments and what they haven't that their neighbours have and who's claiming what and how many foreigners were allowed in the country […]. The air is thick with platitudes around here. We'll all pull together. We're a tight-knit community. We'll all support each other. Oh really? Will we?"

(154). The gossips, or "Teapot Taliban" (154) as Triona calls them, "fattened on their stories about Bobby and that girl. And she had the child for young Sean Shanahan, imagine! What a triangle! Or is it a square? Ha ha ha! When Frank was killed they must have nearly exploded with pleasure. Now! He *is* only an animal! Who'd have thought he'd stoop that low? Blood will out, the father was a desperate quare hawk too, God rest him!" (154). The fractured nature of the community, united only in its members' shared misfortune and prejudice, is further underscored by gaps between the stories. The action, i.e. the murder and the kidnapping, takes place in these gaps rather than occurring in the stories. The perpetrators do relate what they have done in their respective stories, but only in retrospect. The lack of true action in the work puts extra emphasis on the rut the people of the town are stuck in. Furthermore, dodgy boss Pokey Burke, who has fled to Dubai, does not have a voice in the book. In other words, the story of what he has done is entirely told by the victims of his crime, which also contributes to the many gaps and contradictions in the book. This constant play of connections and gaps results in the distinct tension between unity and fragmentation which is typical of the short story cycle.

Unlike Pokey, Bobby's father Frank is allowed to tell his story – as a ghost who has been "death about a month", no less (140). From his story, the reader can gather that he himself was treated badly by his father. Frank never physically harmed his wife and son, but he did terrorize them with his constant criticism, in so far that they eventually just stopped speaking. This still hunts Bobby today: "I wish to God I could talk to her the way she wants me to, besides forever making her guess what I'm thinking. Why can't I find the words?", he asks himself in the opening story while thinking about what a closed book he is to his wife (15). In the final story, Triona expresses her view on how difficult it is for Bobby to express his feelings:

> He had the words; I knew that. Bobby always read a lot. Every now and then, and with no trigger that I could ever figure out, Bobby would start to tell me things. […] Thinking about it now, the dead stillness I'd assume, the way I'd almost hold my breath while he spoke, it was the very same as when I'd be trying not to startle a wild animal that had startled into the garden. (148-9).

At the very end of the book, Triona describes how Bobby, after he has been arrested and released on bail, does not find the words to tell her what happened either. Recurring references like these emphasize the fact that the twenty-one unique voices all add a new perspective on the other characters' narratives. At the same time, however, many of the protagonists zoom in on the personal tragedies they have experienced. Bridie Connors,

Sergeant Jim Gildea's sister, relates how she was never able to cope with the drowning of one of her children many years ago. To give another example, Mags, daughter of Pokey's governess Eileen and her husband, recounts how she discovered that her father cannot accept her sexual orientation. The fragmentation that results from the narrators focusing on their own hardships is then again counterbalanced by other cross-references between the stories. For example, there are many references to the word 'heart', on the one hand allusions to the symbolic spinning heart on Frank's gate: "I hear the spinning heart on their gate, creaking slowly around", neighbour and former prostitute Lily says (31); Denis, Frank's murderer, describes it as "a red metal heart, spinning in the breeze in the centre of the low front gate. The hinge was loose but rusty, it squeaked and creaked but still allowed that little heart to spin. It reminded me of my palpitations" (124); Triona refers to it as "a spinning heart on the gate at the front of their house, a mocking symbol, Bobby's rough cross" (148). On the other hand, there are also references to the hearts of the members of the community which have been damaged by what has happened: "When I think about it, what people must be thinking and saying, I can hear my heart beating in my chest", Pokey's father Joseph reveals (24); Denis listened to his "heart pounding in [his] ears" after he went looking for Pokey but did not manage to find him, "[p]alpitations, that's called, when you can feel your heart beat" (121-2), and after the murder, he describes how he is lying with his "guilty heart pounding, pounding, pounding in [his] ears" (125). Forming a tension that is characteristic of the short story cycles, these cross-references add something to the individual stories that does not alter their self-sufficiency but clearly surfaces when the work is read as a whole.

In all, *The Spinning Heart* cannot be done full justice by reading it solely as a fragmented novel. By analysing it as a short story cycle instead, the particular tension that exists between the individual stories and the work as a whole comes out more clearly. It is obvious that the book is unified by place and theme, as well as by plot progression. This unity is further underscored by other connections between the stories. However, Ryan's book is also a fragmented one, as it consists of highly individual accounts by the members of the fractured community of the town. These individuals are all very much concerned with their own troubles, present and past, and often only incidentally comment on other characters or on the plot. And when they do, their views are highly influenced by their shocked state of mind and their prejudice. Moreover, the many gaps and contradictions that occur between the stories emphasize the fragmentation of the work as well. The formal tension that results from this in the cycle highlights the thematic tensions between the different inhabitants of the town. As in the other works analysed in this chapter, place and theme also play a prominent role in Ryan's

book. Whereas in *The House on Parkgate Street and Other Dublin Stories* it is the city of Dublin which unifies but also separates the stories and the characters through the ages, in *The Spinning Heart* the shared suffering of a community in a contemporary small Irish town is what brings together and breaks up the book at the same time.

In conclusion, in the four contemporary cycles I selected for this chapter, the interplay of place and theme stands out. The cycles by Duffaud and MacLaverty are primarily unified by their focus on Northern Ireland. Dwyer Hickey's cycle, moreover, revolves around the city of Dublin and the fractured family lives of its inhabitants. With its intertextual references to *Dubliners, The House and Parkgate Street and Other Stories* clearly puts itself in the tradition of Joyce's famous cycle and thereby asserts its status as a short story cycle. In addition, *The Spinning Heart* can even be said to refer back to the late nineteenth-century narratives of community discussed at the beginning of this dissertation. On the surface it would seem that, by narrating the life of a community, Ryan abandons this tradition of acknowledging Joyce in modern Irish cycles so as to return to an earlier practice. However, by focusing on the discord that has arisen in the town's community since the recession as well as on the violence, prejudice, jealousy and stasis that are prevalent among its members, Ryan's cycle has much more in common with *Dubliners* than with a volume like Barlow's *Irish Idylls*. That is, *The Spinning Heart* looks at how twenty-one protagonists all very much focus on their own troubles. As in Joyce's masterpiece, these characters are never able to break down the boundaries that exist between them – even though they live in the same place and have experienced similar hardships. They are, as it were, trapped in the separate stories within the cycle. It is only through the reader's cumulative reading of these stories that their shared narrative eventually emerges.

From Barlow's *Irish Idylls* to Ryan's *The Spinning Heart*: Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to trace the development of the short story cycle as a literary form in Ireland from the 1890s until the present. To this end, I have examined some twenty-five Irish cycles in formal, thematic and generic terms. From the analyses of these works in seven case studies, we can conclude that a considerable amount of Irish short story collections can usefully be read as short story cycles. Moreover, the obvious links between some of these works also suggest that it is possible to speak of a tradition of the short story cycle in Ireland.

This development follows the better-documented trajectory of the short story cycle in North America. Indeed, the first story cycles in Ireland can be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century, with Jane Barlow's *Irish Idylls* as an exemplary narrative of community. These were followed by transitional works – moving the focus from rural communities to urban individuals – such as Moore's *The Untilled Field*, and modernist cycles such as Joyce's *Dubliners* in the first decades of the twentieth century. The mid-century, however, proved to be a period of relative scarcity for the form, which took shape in the appearance of rather 'loose' debut cycles by short story authors such as O'Connor, Ó Faoláin and Lavin. Still, from the 1960s onward, the cycle can be said to have experienced a 'revival', with famous Irish short story writers such as O'Brien, McGahern and Trevor making use of the form in their early works of short fiction. From the final decades of the twentieth century until the present day, moreover, the cycle form has been put to use in different contexts. For instance, Donoghue, Ní Dhuibhne and Enright have employed the cycle to criticize women's position in patriarchal societies, while Duffaud and MacLaverty have written about the Northern Irish Troubles in the form of the short story cycle. Donal Ryan in *The Spinning Heart*, to give a final example, has used the form to depict how contemporary individuals living in a small rural town have been affected by the recession.

When looking at the evolution of the short story cycle in Ireland outlined in this dissertation, it becomes clear that Joyce's archetypal cycle has often functioned as a connecting thread. After its publication in 1914, various Irish cycles have referred back to *Dubliners*, be it explicitly or implicitly, including Beckett's *More Pricks Than Kicks*, Brennan's *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin*, O'Brien's *The Love Object*, McGahern's *Nightlines*, Trevor's *The Ballroom of Romance and Other Stories*, Ní

Dhuibhne's *The Inland Ice and Other Stories* and Dwyer Hickey's *The House on Parkgate Street and Other Dublin Stories*. In this respect, it is striking that the loosest cycles discussed in this dissertation, by mid-century masters of the short story such as O'Flaherty, O'Connor and Ó Faoláin, are the furthest removed from *Dubliners*. This supports my argument that the development of the short story cycle form in Ireland has been inspired by Joyce's archetypal cycle. One might say that from the 1970s onward, when the critical study of the short story cycle began, cycles such as O'Brien's *The Love Object* have shown an awareness of the form by intertextually referring to *Dubliners*. This trend continues until the present day, with cycles such as Dwyer Hickey's *The Parkgate Street and Other Stories* rewriting Joyce's famous work. Together, these cycles are evidence of the presence of a genre memory of the short story cycle in Ireland.

The works that I have read as cycles in this dissertation have turned out to be relatively diverse. Following Ingram's distinction, some of these cycles are composed, while others are completed, arranged or fall somewhere in between. One work includes poems and monologues as well as short stories, whereas another has a folk tale threaded through its contemporary stories. Some of the cycles benefited from an analysis focusing on authorial intent, while an emphasis on their formal characteristics worked better for others, and yet other cycles gained more from being viewed from the perspective of the reader. In fact, in the majority of the cases, a combination of these approaches was used. Moreover, in addition to examining the individual works with their different features, my analysis of the tradition and historical development of the form in Ireland has shown how both authors and readers are influenced by the generic expectations that the cycle brings with it. The focus of this dissertation, then, was not on taxonomy. Instead, my purpose was mainly to emphasize the cycle form's power of bringing different parts together into a more or less unified whole, and to look at how this specific quality has taken shape in the context of Irish literature. Particularly notable in this respect is that, between the 1890s and the present, the form of the short story cycle has been used to put across a diversity of views: from the idealized depictions of Irish rural life in the early narratives of community, to the modernist portrayals of paralysed Dublin life around the turn of the century; from some of the loose mid-century cycles' focus on war and nation, to the 1970s cycles' more general existentialist views of private human life; and from the postmodernist use of the form for feminist purposes, to other contemporary uses such as the depiction of a fractured post-recession rural Irish community.

In conclusion, I hope to have demonstrated that, precisely because of its diversity, the short story cycle is a rich literary form which has in different ways contributed to the literary

tradition in Ireland. The cycle also proves to be a fascinating form for contemporary Irish authors to continue exploring. It will be interesting, then, to observe the Irish short story cycle's further development, which will hopefully lead to more critical approaches in the future.

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