Reconfiguring Irish Identity After the Celtic Tiger in Post-Crash Novels by Anne Enright, Sally Rooney and Caoilinn Hughes

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Abstract

This thesis examines the impact of the Celtic Tiger on the configuration of Ireland's identity in three novels written after its collapse, Anne Enright's *The Green Road* (2015), Sally Rooney's *Conversations with Friends* (2017) and Caoilinn Hughes *Orchid and the Wasp* (2018). The Celtic Tiger refers an economic boom that occurred in Ireland between 1995-2008. This was the first time, since becoming independent, that the Irish economy underwent a period of sustained economic success and thus the Celtic Tiger became a period of social and cultural change. No longer imprisoned by its past, the Celtic Tiger meant that Ireland's sense of self became closely linked to the neo-liberal economic model that enabled the Celtic Tiger. *The Green Road* explores the tensions that emerged in Ireland as a result of the country changing so quickly without fully processing the traumas of the past. The novel also examines how Ireland became uncertain in its sense of self as the country was unprepared for the materialism that the Celtic Tiger entailed. *Conversations with Friends* and *Orchid and the Wasp* are both coming of age novels set after the Celtic Tiger collapsed and they each demonstrate that the neo-liberal economic model that enabled the Celtic Tiger has become a dominant factor in the configuration of Ireland's identity. The major conclusion drawn is that these novels depict the Celtic Tiger as being a force that imposed new restrictions on the configuration of Irish identity.

Contents

Introduction

In 1997 Ireland's GDP surpassed that of Britain, its old colonial master, for the first time. While this was something of a watershed moment for the country, it was an event that occurred with little notice or commentary by the public at large, because people were too busy "buying and selling property and making money" (Kiberd, *After* 1). The economist Kevin Gardiner likened the frantic growth of the Irish economy in the 1990s to so called Asian "Tiger" economies from the late 1980s (qtd. in McCann 110), and thus this period of economic growth was dubbed "The Celtic Tiger"

Lasting between roughly 1995-2008, the Celtic Tiger was initially met with praise and celebration from cultural critics in Ireland, who largely regarded it as an opportunity to bring about real change to a country that largely seemed to be imprisoned by its own past. Declan Kiberd compared the entrepreneurial spirit of the Celtic Tiger to the ingenuity displayed by the Gaelic League in the 1890s after Charles Stewart Parnell's political efforts to secure political autonomy had come to nothing. According to Kiberd, The Gaelic League saw freedom as "an attitude of the mind" ("History" 269-70) and sought to create a sense of pride in being Irish, a spirit that Kiberd felt the initial phase of the Celtic Tiger embodied. Similarly, the journalist Fintan O'Toole argued that the Celtic Tiger meant that the resourcefulness and adaptability that had defined the Irish in exile now seemed to have "found their place at home" (*Ship* 213) and it seemed as though Ireland could finally allow its citizens to fulfil their potential. The critic Edna Longley went as far as to suggest that the Celtic Tiger was the final part of the "decolonising project" (76), because it voided Ireland's economic reliance on Britain.

The nature of the Celtic Tiger meant that Ireland's sense of identity was drastically altered; having spent much of the twentieth century languishing on the fringes of Europe as a priest-ridden, poverty-stricken backwater, the result of "centuries of misfortune and

victimhood" (Foster, *Luck* 5), Ireland was poised to enter the new millennium as an "ambitious, assertive and globally competitive" (Boss 130) state, a country that was suddenly ready to take its place at the table of the global cosmopolitan elite.

The Celtic Tiger ultimately saw Ireland transform, in a relatively short period of time, form a deeply religious, conservative and isolated nation into globalized, modern state that was at the forefront of Europe, if not the worlds, economy. This meant that the country's sense of identity was defined less by its history and tradition and more by the neo-liberal economic model that enabled the Celtic Tiger. This is precisely why the economic implosion of 2008 was especially devastating, because the Celtic Tiger and the materialism that it entailed had become a "substitute identity" (O'Toole, *Enough* 4). The collapse of the Celtic Tiger brought with it rising unemployment and emigration figures, which Marie Mianowski argues "plunged Ireland into a meta-historic narrative of loss, dispossession and displacement" (6). This is to say that instead of liberating Ireland from the past the Celtic Tiger both blinded the country from the need to reconcile the traumas of the past and entrenched an economic philosophy into Irish society that damaged the state's ability to determine its identity. Benedict Anderson argues that novels are a particularly useful in trying to understand a nation's identity because they are precisely what give "certain meanings to the everyday fatalities of existence" (36). This thesis is thus going to examine how the Celtic Tiger impacted on the configuration of Ireland's identity by analysing three novels written after the economy collapsed, Anne Enright's *The Green Road* (2015), Sally Rooney's *Conversations with Friends* (2017) and Caoilinn Hughes' *Orchid and the Wasp* (2018). *The Green Road* was selected because while it was written after the collapse of the Celtic Tiger the focus of the novel is intently on Ireland during the years of economic affluence and concerned with the tensions that emerged in Ireland as a result of that affluence. Enright was also named Ireland's first ever Laurate of Fiction just prior to the release of the novel, which

confirmed her status as Ireland's pre-eminent novelist, adding significance to the observations made in *The Green Road*. *Conversations with Friends* and *Orchid and the Wasp* are both coming of age novels written after the impact of the collapse of the Celtic Tiger has been absorbed by Irish society and they therefore provide an insight into the values inherent in post-Tiger Irish society.

This thesis is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter offers a brief overview of the Celtic Tiger and places it within the context of Irish history. The second chapter examines *The Green Road* in depth and the third chapter examines *Conversations with Friends* and *Orchid and the Wasp*. The conclusion discusses what these texts reveal about the configuration of Irish identity after the Celtic Tiger and also briefly discusses what these texts reveal about the role that literature plays in configuring Ireland's sense of identity.

Chapter One-From Revival to Tiger: The Ireland That We Dreamed Of?

One of the main impacts of British colonialism in Ireland was that it "denied the Irish mind the right to know itself" (Kiberd, "War" 162). Amid a burgeoning drive of political nationalism in the early twentieth century there were numerous cultural movements that played an important role in Ireland's "reach for self-definition" (White, "Playwright" 26). Chief among them was a largely theatre-based movement known as the Irish Literary Revival, which sought to create a sense that Ireland had a wholly separate cultural identity to Britain, which would in turn lend credence to the idea that Ireland should be politically independent. A problem that the Revival quickly ran into was the fact that because Ireland had been colonised for so long the only parts of the country that remained truly untouched by British influence were a few "scattered communities" (Kiberd, *Inventing* 286) on the western fringes of the island. Much of the dramas produced during the Revival were the result of bourgeois culture makers in Dublin, ironically some of the "most anglicized" (Kiberd *Inventing* 337) people in Ireland, venturing out into poverty stricken rural communities and romanticising them as the ideal Ireland, the true soul of the nation that was unspoiled by Britain. Frantz Fanon argues that authors writing under the immediate shadow of colonialism frequently risk creating a national culture that presents their country at its "most elemental, most savage" (1444). This is precisely what the Revival did, creating an image of Ireland that, in the words of Kiberd, would have "poetry as a compensation for poverty" and "culture as a compensation for squalor" (*Inventing* 623). Frequently eulogizing the idea of armed rebellion, the plays of the Literary Revival would often call for the audience to "give up their lives for the transcendent spiritual idea of nationalism" (Chadwick 157) rather than offering sober insights into Ireland's character. [1]

[1] W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory's play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902) serves as a prime example of a typical Revival play.

Stagnant Republic

When Ireland did attain its autonomy after a protracted war of independence, followed by a debilitating civil war, the leaders of the new Irish Free State, as it was initially known, feared that the country would remain influenced by Britain in both economic and cultural terms, so they made an effort to "prevent the future" (White, "Collapse" 30) by drafting economic policies that sought to make the Revival image of Ireland a reality. This Ireland is best summarised in Eamon De Valera's 1943 speech "On Language and the Irish Nation," a speech which is colloquially known as "The Ireland that we dreamed of."[2] In this speech De Valera, the only surviving leader of the 1916 Easter Rising, who would play an outsized role within the Irish political landscape for close to five decades stated that: [3]

> The Ireland that we would have, the Ireland that we dreamed of, would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit – a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the laughter of happy maidens, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. The home, in short, of a people living the life that God desires that men should live. (466)

To craft this Ireland economic policies were put in place that minimised the amount of trading that Ireland would engage in, to encourage self-sufficiency. For all the high-rhetoric about an agrarian Gaelic utopia, these policies proved to be utterly disastrous. Under British

[2] The historian Diarmaid Ferriter has referred to this as "the most famous broadcast by any Irish politician in the twentieth century" (363-4).
[3] Though he maintained control through democratic means De Valera's grasp on power was so strong that Foster argues he could be considered an Irish equivalent to Salazar or Franco ("Franco").

rule, only Northern Ireland had undergone the effects of industrialisation, meaning that the rest of the island was severely under resourced and thus unable to provide for the country (Battle 97). Likewise, trading tariffs where put in place to discourage international trade, meaning that Irish businesses could only meaningfully engage with a "restricted home market" (Battle 94), further limiting opportunities for growth and development. This led to decades of stagnation which, paradoxically, meant that the Irish economy began to rely on trade with Britain, leading some historians to wonder if Ireland's economy was forever destined to be linked with Britain (White, "Collapse" 28). Far from limiting his efforts to the economy, De Valera made further efforts to shape Irish life, largely with the aid of the Catholic Church. The Irish Constitution, which ratified the state as a Republic in 1937, privileged the family unit as the ideal model, the basis, for Irish society (Hansson 222). Further bolstering a national sense of isolation, a censorship board was also established to carefully prevent any materials deemed unfit for Irish eyes reaching a mass audience. This extended to works produced in Ireland and many Irish authors now considered to be canonical, such as John McGahern, Edna O'Brien and Brendan Behan, were unable to practice their craft in Ireland. Samuel Beckett described the actions of the Irish Censorship Board as betraying a desire to create a "paradise peopled by virgins" (qtd. in Carlson 148) and O'Brien would argue that censorship truly gave Ireland a sense of isolation, as it "closed the mind" of the country, which she claimed brought about a "psychic sickness" (qtd. in Carlson 77) on the island.

When De Valera left political life in the late 1950s, successive leaders began to bring about change the economic policies he had put in place. Séan Lemass, Taoiseach (prime minister) between 1959-1966 and his economic minister T.K. Whittaker began to investigate the factors that had led to a decades long period of stagnation in the Irish economy and began to draft new policies with the goal of expanding the economy. In 1972, under Taoiseach Jack

Lynch, Ireland joined the EEC, which was significant for two reasons. Most immediately it meant that Ireland could now use European monies to mend its "poor education system … and an infrastructure that featured inadequate roads and antiquated telephone service" (Morse 245). The other important impact of this was that trade avenues were now open between Ireland and the rest of Europe and this meant that outside influences began to trickle into the country. According to the critic Jim McLaughlin this meant that the "principal inventors" and curators of the imagined Ireland, "teachers, church leaders and cultural nationalists" (57), saw a diminishment on the influence they had on the Irish mind.

Whilst EEC membership did lead to flutters of economic growth in the late 1970s, far more was needed to correct the historical factors that exerted themselves on the Irish economy. Donald E. Morse has described Ireland as being "peculiar" (244) among European states in the sense that development had been stalled for so long by both colonialism and a self-imposed isolation. In the 1980s things got especially bad, with unemployment reaching nearly 20%, so the government began to take drastic action, rewriting the political framework of the country to encourage multinational investment. Chiefly this meant lowering Ireland's corporation tax to just 12% and allocating more funds for third level education. The Industrial Development Agency (IDA) was also established, which sought to promote Ireland around the globe as a well-educated, English speaking nation with a business-friendly government and close ties to Europe, a state that was open for business (McCann 108-10).

A New Ireland?

De Valera is said to have claimed that if he wanted to know the will of the Irish people he need only check his own pulse. If that was the case, the Celtic Tiger, according to Fintan O'Toole, was Ireland opting to "perform a bypass operation on De Valera" ("Scenes" 198). In just a few years Ireland morphed from one of the most isolated and weakest economies in

Europe to "one of the worlds most globalized" (Morse 244) with much employment and wealth being generated from I.T. and pharmaceutical companies that used Ireland as a European base.[4] Rising employment figures and growing levels of disposable income led to a gradual weakening of two of the major pillars of Irish identity, the Catholic Church and nationalism. The 1990s would see the Church face numerous sex scandals including the news that bishop Eamon Casey had fathered a child and evidence that systematic sexual abuse had routinely been covered up. The Church refused to enter, and indeed attempted to quash, any public dialogue about these scandals, which broadcasted that much of their power had been derived from "fear rather than respect" (Alvarez, "Exporter"), leading to a sapping of the cultural weight Catholicism once had in Ireland.

Bolstered by their economic success, Bertie Ahern's government made efforts to seriously pursue peace in Northern Ireland and in 1998 the Good Friday Agreement brought about a tenuous end to the Troubles. As part of the agreement Ireland voted to rescind the Republic's constitutional claim on Northern Ireland, which Kiberd has interpreted as a clear sign that nationalism, as a socio-cultural force, no longer held political sway in Ireland ("History" 248). McLoughlin stated that these developments suggested that the Celtic Tiger had made Ireland "post-ideological" and brought the country to "the end of history" (64), in reference to Francis Fukuyama's proclamation that the collapse of the Soviet Union meant history, in terms of ideological struggle and conflict, would come to an end, as the world would move, under capitalism, in a "single coherent direction" (*End* xv).

The Celtic Tiger is generally considered to have lasted between 1995-2008, but the years 2001-2008 are now widely considered to be "the false boom years" (Benson 24). As the initial growth provided by multinational investment began to slow down the Ahearn

[4] Surely one of the greatest affronts to De Valera's legacy is the fact that much of Europe's Viagra came to be manufactured in Cork (Tóibín, "Tara" 15).

administration, described as being forever "willing to bow in the interests of capital" (Allen 70), sought to sustain the financial growth, largely by deregulating the construction and finance sectors to encourage property development. By 2005 the *New York Times* was referring to Ireland as the "wild west of European finance" (Laverty and O'Brien, "Regulators"), as the government fostered an "increasingly erratic" (McCann 112) banking culture where property developers could get 100% mortgages that stretched into the hundreds of millions. These mortgages could be leveraged as tax write offs and the banks, in turn, saw their share prices rise from investing in these developments. In other words, this meant that a lot of wealth was being generated not necessarily from the sale of property but rather from the mere building of it; in 2007 it was estimated that 27% of all construction in Ireland was purely investment property (Gleeson et al. 36). The tax cuts that facilitated these developments meant that budgets were cut in the areas of social welfare and health. This meant that the character of Ireland's economic boom was unique among European states, who generally sought to "strengthen the bonds of social justice" (Allen 62) during times of economic affluence. In 2002 Mary Harney, the then Tánaiste (deputy prime minister), proudly declared Ireland to be spiritually "closer to Boston than Berlin" (qtd. in Fisher, "Boston" 81), which is reflective of the change in the economic philosophy that drove the Celtic Tiger; where its initial phase was born of out Keynesian economics, the fruits of long-term investment, it became sustained by an aggressive strain of neo-liberal capitalism that the Irish government promoted. As a result, those who were already vulnerable in society began to suffer further; perversely during the Celtic Tiger Ireland's suicide rate rose and hospitals around the country deteriorated (Tóibín 20). By 2006 one in four males were employed in construction in some capacity and while a few "isolated economists" (Kiberd *After* 2) warned that this was economically risky and unsustainable they were largely ignored. Indeed, Ahern would publicly wonder why the economic doomsayers "didn't commit suicide" (qtd. in

Hennessy, "Remarks") after being proved so consistently wrong. "The boom times," he insisted in July 2006, were only going to get "even more boomer" (qtd. in Coleman)

As the Celtic Tiger entered its second phase, the tone of commentary surrounding it began to change; having seemingly removed the shackles of history, critics began to wonder what type of country Ireland was turning into. The historian Roy Foster characterised Ireland as having become "like America, determined to live aggressively in the present" and as a result "the past was disappearing so bewilderingly from view" (*Luck* 198). Likewise, Kiberd notes that Ireland had changed so quickly that any investigations into tracking those changes were liable to produce a sense of "motion sickness" ("History" 276). So vast were the changes that swept Ireland that even, according to Foster, the late 1980s seemed to belong to another country "in a dark age" (*Luck* 63). The past, it seemed, had become the "other" (Kiberd "History" 280) in Ireland's imagination.

In the novel *Shame,* Salman Rushdie wrote that the those who "deny their past become incapable of thinking it real" (144), an attitude that could be ascribed to Celtic Tiger era Ireland. In the essay "Tourists in Our Own Land" O'Toole claimed that the popularity of Interpretation Centres throughout the Irish countryside perfectly encapsulated the peculiarities of Ireland's relationship with its history. These Interpretation Centres were essentially a mixture of a museum and a tourist centre that put an easy to digest narrative around Irish history. According to O'Toole, this represented an attempt to turn Irish history into "a distant, emotion free object" (35). O'Toole argues that Ireland saw its past as "something so strange it had to be interpreted … but not strange enough to be afforded with wary reverence" (35). O'Toole suggested that this indicated that Ireland was "aware of the strangeness," the traumas of the past, "to want to control them, to put a frame of ordinariness around them" (36). He further argues that the effect of these centres recalled Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum. Baudrillard described simulacrum as a copy that

"provides all the signs of the real and short circuits its vicissitudes" (1557), an "idealised transposition" (1565) of what it represents, dangerous because the simulated idea threatens to become more powerful than the original. O'Toole argues that this was exactly the impact of the interpretation centres, an "anesthetization of reality" (39) where history had been "commodified in a suspended sense of place" (40). He claims that this meant that Ireland had become a postmodern society without ever having quite become a modern one (42).

The sociologist Michael Lewis argues that during times of economic affluence nations are afforded the opportunity to "reveal aspects of their characters they could not normally afford to indulge" and noted that during the Celtic Tiger, it seemed as though the Irish "wanted to stop being Irish" (42). Kieron Bonner claims that material examples of this could be observed by tracking changes on Irish high streets; on Dublin's Grafton Street, for instance, Bewley's, an iconic café described that Bonner described as playing an important role in "the essence of Dublin" (52), closed down and its premises was taken over by that great harbinger of globalisation, Starbucks. Bonner further noted that in Dublin "Oirish" pubs, which catered almost exclusively to tourists using very stereotypical images of Ireland threatened to become more popular that pubs frequented by locals (61). Employment opportunities meant that much of Ireland's population migrated to ever growing suburbs near the major cities, resulting in long commutes, and relaxed licencing laws meant that supermarkets could now offer alcohol at a far cheaper rate, which lead more people opting to drink at home; the journalist Carissa Casey states that Irish drinking culture was no longer represented by Flann O'Brien's working man and his pint of plain but by a "harried office drone with a huge mortgage [who] sipped Chablis in front of a widescreen" in an anonymous housing estate ("Orders"). Bonner argues that these changes were important because they represented a decline in "third spaces" (56), places that exist between spaces of employment and homes, where the identity of a community expresses itself. Place gives an individual a

sense of their connection to history, with the anthropologist Marc Augé noting that place is where "the presence of the past is made present" (54). In the face of such changes, Kiberd described Ireland as being a country that, in just under a century, had been swept with changes that took "four of five hundred years in other parts of Europe" ("History" 280) and speculated that this would make configuring Ireland's identity an increasingly challenging prospect.

Writing the Celtic Tiger

When it came to writing about the Celtic Tiger, Ireland's novelists were slow to react, particularly when compared to writers in other forms. The novelist Colm Tóibín describes theatre as being particularly early respondent to the economic boom, noting that the "dark and strange" ("Tara" 25) plays that came to prominence in the Celtic Tiger years, such as Marina Carr's *On Rafferty's Hill* (2000), Conor McPherson's *The Seafarer* (2006) and Mark O'Rowe's *Terminus* (2007), reflected how strange this period of great change felt. Eschewing the boundaries of social realism that normally dominated the Irish stage, these plays evoked the otherworldly or the supernatural in their understanding of contemporary Ireland, with the critic Molly Ferguson noting that magical realism had become a "particularly useful tool" (57) in attempting to symbolise how rapidly Ireland transformed. McPherson describes Ireland as being a country that is not "comfortable with success" (qtd. in Lonergan "Repent" 24) and argues that supernatural elements appearing on the Irish stage were manifestations of the neurosis that lay beneath the confident veneer of the Celtic Tiger. One of the few plays to challenge the Celtic Tiger narrative directly was Sebastian Barry's *Hinterland* (2002) which detailed a former (fictional) Taoiseach recounting corrupt business deals he had made. The Taoiseach was widely speculated to have been based on Charles Haughey, who led the state in the 1980s and is widely regarded as having grandfathered in the type of corruption that

would define the Ahern regime. The play was "widely panned" (Morse 251), with many critics complaining that Barry was being unnecessarily pessimistic and trying too hard to draw to many parallels between past and present Ireland. Elsewhere, films like John Crowley's *Intermission* (2003) and Lenny Abrahamson's *Adam and Paul* (2004) and *Garage* (2007) offered more immediate glimpses at a rapidly changing Ireland and at individuals struggle to locate themselves in it.

Kiberd noted in 2002 that Ireland's novelists seemed far more interested in writing about Ireland's past, though in quite a clichéd manner, and continuing to focus intently on the family unit instead of engaging with the new Ireland, with no literary novel engaging in "celebration or corrosive criticism" ("History" 276) of the Celtic Tiger and that it was "odd" ("History" 278) that Ireland had yet to produce a panoramic social novel that examined the Celtic Tiger in the way that a Martin Amis novel or a Tom Wolfe novel might. In a far more incendiary fashion, Julian Gough lambasted his fellow writers on his blog, writing that "[i]f there is a movement in Ireland, it is backwards. Novel after novel set in the nineteen seventies, sixties, fifties. Reading award-winning Irish literary fiction, you wouldn't know television had been invented." Novelists, according to Gough, had become a "priestly class cut off from the electric current of culture" writing "fairly polite stuff published by Faber and Faber that fits into the grand tradition" (qtd. in Flood, "Blasts") instead of innovating and probing, or indeed opposing, a changing Ireland. O'Toole argues that it was perhaps unfair to expect a novel addressing the Celtic Tiger at large to emerge because the economic changes meant that Irish society had become increasingly stratified and the "idea of a shared store of allusions and images had become increasingly tenuous." O'Toole further argues that because the Celtic Tiger had theoretically made Ireland a more open society the "dark corners" ("Writing") of Irish life were no longer under the strict purview of its novelists. Daniel Corkery famously claimed that truly indigenous Irish writing needed to cover three themes:

"[t]he religious consciousness of the people, Irish nationalism and The Land" (18). [5] These had all been effectively euthanized as cultural forces in Celtic Tiger era Ireland and O'Toole felt that this may have robbed Ireland's writers of their "traditional tools" ("Writing") so it was perhaps no surprise for writers to migrate to a past Ireland where blanket themes of repression were more concrete than the more varied and stratified issues of Celtic Tiger Ireland. Foster offered a more charitable take, stating that because Irish society had grown increasingly complex old techniques needed to be overhauled. The Irish short story, for instance, based around an "emblematic or epiphanic episode" (*Luck* 147) was no longer capable of expressing the social forces at play in the country.

The novelist Paul Murray argues that the cultural condition of the Celtic Tiger was one that was not especially receptive to literature, which posed further difficulties in writing about contemporary Ireland. Murray claimed that during the Celtic Tiger books became symbols of Ireland's past, when the country had little to be proud of and so consequently being a writer during the Celtic Tiger was akin to being the "village idiot masturbating in the square" (qtd. in Wroe, "Interview") whilst seemingly everyone else got rich. Foster notes that the only book to truly become a cultural phenomenon during the Celtic Tiger years was not a literary novel, but rather Frank McCourt's misery memoir *Angela's Ashes*. Foster argues that McCourt's recollection of his childhood was a "sentimentalised, market driven" and exaggerated account of the bad old days that embodied the Celtic Tiger's "reduction of Irish history into theme park kitsch" (qtd. in Freedland, "Not") and claims that its popularity was further evidence that Celtic Tiger era Ireland was only interested in looking backwards if it could "commercialise its past" ("Phenomenon" 137). In a piece published by the *Guardian* in 2015 on the "literary boom" that occurred in Ireland after the Celtic Tiger collapsed, Justine Jordan makes a similar argument about literary fiction produced during the Celtic Tiger,

[5] This is to say depictions of farmland and rural life

characterising it as being "conservative…all nostalgia and sexual repression," largely focused on a very stereotyped image of Ireland's past. Jordan interviewed Gough for the piece and he told her that in hindsight Tiger-era fiction had an air of being "smug and self-congratulatory," about how bad the past was, which he likened to "moral masturbation" ("Post-Crash"). The cultural condition of the Celtic Tiger was one of excess and hedonism and Eamon Maher and Eugene O'Brien argue that given this condition it is unsurprising that the country did not produce a literary novel that questioned the "naïve belief" of the "economic miracle" and told the country "what was really going on" (6). The novelist Anne Enright claimed that the collapse of the Celtic Tiger was the cultural equivalent of "getting back on a diet, regaining control" ("Inches"). It was after the economy collapsed that novelists began approach the Celtic Tiger as a subject and attempt to understand the impact it had on Ireland's character.

Chapter Two-Unwinding Ireland: Anxieties of Affluence and Tiger-era Tensions in Anne Enright's *The Green Road*

If Ireland's novelists were to be accused of shrinking from their duties and refusing to engage with the Celtic Tiger than the main brunt of those accusations would likely fall to the generation that the economist/broadcaster David McWilliams deemed "the Pope's Children."[6] McWilliams coined this term to describe the generation that were in their late adolescence/early adulthood when Pope John Paul II visited Ireland in 1979. Nearly a third of the country journeyed to Dublin's Phoenix Park to attend an open-air mass he gave, and it would be the young people in that audience, "the Pope's Children," that would instigate the Celtic Tiger and dismantle the myths of old Ireland (36). This generation would ultimately be the last to be schooled on, in the words of the writer/filmmaker Neil Jordan "ideologies of violence and instant salvation, the idea of history moving in a single coherent direction" (qtd. in Harte 2) and the first to study under revisionist historians like F.S.L. Lyons and J.J. Lee, historians who saw their task as being that of "cleansing Irish history" and making it "dense and complex" (Tóibín, "Father") so as to remove power from the half-truths and myths that had kept Ireland isolated and stagnant for so long. Jody Allen Randolph interviewed several novelists from this generation for her book *Close to the Next Moment*, which aimed to chart the changes that had taken place in Ireland and was met with varying responses about what it meant to write fiction amid the changes brought about by the Celtic Tiger. Colm Tóibín (born in 1955) stated that it was no longer taboo to question the "Great Events" (168) of Irish history which meant, he argues, that novelists no longer felt the weight of history bearing down on their work and a duty no longer existed to interrogate or dismantle the past. He told Randolph that because of the Celtic Tiger he felt comfortable in writing about Ireland's past without feeling a need to deconstruct the idea of that past. He went as far as to state that it

[6] While he didn't invent the term Celtic Tiger, Declan Kiberd has credited McWilliams for introducing the term to mainstream usage ("History 273).

was a "nuisance" (171) to have to negotiate social issues that inevitably appeared in the 1960s set novel he was writing at the time of the interview (December 2009). This novel was presumably *Nora Webster* (2014), a quiet meditation on grief revolving around a recently widowed mother's efforts to raise her young sons in 1960s Wexford, exactly the type of novel that Julian Gough, Fintan O'Toole and Declan Kiberd described as being a retreat into the past at the expense of the present; in an overall positive review Martin Doyle described it as being "the type of novel we're supposed to have evolved beyond" (qtd. in Goodman "Right").

Roddy Doyle (born in1958) told Randolph that the biggest change the Celtic Tiger brought about in Ireland was the fact that it meant the country could no longer "blame the Brits" (152) for any issues that plagued the island and he claimed that this meant that Ireland ceased to be a post-colonial state. He further questioned the notion that Ireland had been fundamentally altered by the Celtic Tiger, aside from becoming more multicultural, as inward migration occurred on a large scale for the first time, something he said would eventually create new subcultures and provide exciting material for novelists (150).

Anne Enright (born in 1962) offered a somewhat more nuanced answer, stating that the foundational myths of the Irish state had led to what she deemed a "false tradition" (6) that meant that writers had a duty of sorts to "rewrite the past" as "more information became available" (8), as this would be the only way to truly ease the pressure that history exerted onto Ireland's sense of its identity. Born in Dublin to parents who both worked in the civil service and educated at Trinity College and the University of East Anglia, Enright told Randolph that by virtue of writing from her own perspective she would challenge past notions of Irishness, because whatever being Irish was, "urban, middle class and female" (8) generally fell outside its paradigms.

Enright's Bibliography/Background

Initially working in television as a producer and director, Enright turned to writing full time following the publication of her first collection of short stories, *The Portable Virgin* in 1991. This collection was followed by the novels *What Are You Like?* (1995) and *The Wig My Father Wore* (2000). These early works are characterised by highly digressive, irreverent, fantastical and stylized plots, which led to Enright being favourable compared to Flann O'Brien and Laurence Sterne (Hansson 221). Following the turn of the millennium Enright's style would undergo a change and largely abandon the magical realist/postmodern elements of her early work in favour for a style that, whilst retaining some elements of formal experimentation, was more recognisably in the tradition of social realism. This stylistic shift occurred as the Celtic Tiger entered into its second, more dubious, phase and the novels that Enright would subsequently produce would become gradually more assertive in their examination of Ireland.

The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch began the second phase of Enright's career in 2002. Ostensibly a historical novel examining the process of icon construction, it revolves around the title character, a Cork woman who became Francisco Solano Lopez's paramour as he assumed the presidency and later dictatorship of Paraguay in the 1860s. Susan Cahill argues that the novel can be read as a coded Celtic Tiger novel, as there is an extreme focus on the sheer materiality of things that bring Eliza pleasure, emphasising her as a consumer, with Enright also carefully contrasting the splendour that surrounds her with its morally compromised source, the increasingly psychotic and deranged military campaigns waged by Lopez, which frequently used Eliza as a propaganda symbol (157).

Enright's next novel was *The Gathering* (2007), which catapulted her into literary stardom when it was awarded the Man Booker prize. The plot concerns Veronica Hegarty, an affluent Dublin housewife and mother, who finds her life in the Celtic Tiger fast lane slowing

dramatically when her brother Liam commits suicide in England. Tasked with claiming his body and organising his funeral, Veronica begins to reflect on their childhood and comes to realise that Liam was likely to have been routinely sexually abused by Lamb Nugent, their grandmother's landlord. The crux of the novel revolves not around the abuse, but rather Veronica's efforts to ascertain, for sure, what happened to her brother and as such when the abuse is recounted it is done so in contradictory and uncertain terms. Gerry Smyth argues that because the Catholic Church had such a firm grasp on "the regulation of sexual desire" (184) in Ireland it makes sense that, from a psychoanalytical perspective, that the body would feel betrayed by sexual abuse and attempt to deny its memory. Similarly, Liam Harte argues that Enright uses Liam's body as a vehicle to make tangible the almost unimaginable trauma existing on the fringes of Irish national consciousness (222). Enright herself told Randolph that when she heard sexual abuse survivors talk about their experiences, something that stood out was the fact that they "didn't have the language" (4) to articulate what had happened to them, because the abuse had been so deeply buried in Irish society. Carol Dell D'Maco argues that *The Gathering* is thus implicitly about the unprocessed trauma that lay beneath the façade of the Celtic Tiger and in particular the need for Ireland to face up to its past, especially amid the cultural condition of the Celtic Tiger, which "played down the need for national reckonings" (68) as it tried to jettison the traumas of history.

Enright's next novel *The Forgotten Waltz* (2011) was written in the immediate shadow of the collapse of the Celtic Tiger and follows an affair between Gina Moynihan, an ambitious career woman, and Séan Valalley, an older, married businessman. Marie Mianowski has described the first half of the novel as presenting an Ireland where all boundaries have seemingly vanished, only to spring back into being during the recession, as Gina and Séan's lives seem to disintegrate in near perfect tandem with the economy (48). Socially ostracised and drowning in negative equity, the pair retreat to Gina's mother's old

house, joined eventually by Evie, Séan's teenage daughter. In the final stages of the novel Gina discovers, much to her surprise, that she enjoys taking a maternal role in what has turned into non-traditional family unit.

The Green Road and Irish Writing

In January 2015 Enright was appointed Ireland's first ever Laurate of Fiction, which gave her an enormous amount of media exposure and social capital and just four months later she would release her sixth novel, *The Green Road.* Obviously the production of literature is a strange and mysterious process and there is no possibility that Enright could have known that she was going to be anointed as the representative of Irish writing on such a broad platform as she was writing the novel, but it is highly appropriate that *The Green Road* would be the only major work of fiction Enright released during her Laureateship as it reads as a culmination of the themes she had been building towards since *Eliza Lynch* and one of the most carefully nuanced examinations of how Irish identity struggled to re-configure itself amid the changes brought about by the Celtic Tiger.

Set mostly in County Clare, *The Green Road* revolves around five members of the Madigan family: matriarch Rosaleen and her four children, Dan, Constance, Emmet and Hanna (father Pat appears only fleetingly). The first half of the novel is entitled "Leaving" and reads more like a collection of five linked short stories set between 1980-2005, with each chapter focusing intently on one of the Madigans. The second half, entitled "Coming Home" takes place around Christmas 2005, when Rosaleen announces that she intends to sell Ardeevin, the family home, and insists that her children return to spend one final Christmas in the house.

Published seven years after the collapse of the Celtic Tiger, *Road*'s focus is intently on Ireland during the Celtic Tiger, and the tensions that emerged in configuring Irish identity

after such a time of rapid change. What makes the novel especially interesting is that Enright analyses Ireland using aspects of fiction that critics had claimed prevented Ireland's authors from engaging with the Celtic Tiger. Reviewing the book in the *Irish Times*, Belinda McKeon describes it as being "Irish novelly [sic]" to such an extent that it was provocative, calling it a book that was "utterly unafraid of being thought of as an Irish novel" with Enright evoking "all the things it seems embarrassing, these days, to talk about [in] Irish fiction," such as "the Mammy, the home place, the emotionally banjaxed siblings" ("Irish"). Elsewhere, Michele Roberts noted that in the afterword Enright goes to great lengths to stress that the book is wholly fictitious, which she interpreted as an indication that Enright wanted readers to think about how the novel evoked the "Ireland of the myth" ("Stones"), and how it may or may not fit within the Irish canon. These reviews indicate that Enright seems very intentionally to evoke the elements that Irish fiction that Julian Gough, for instance, said was proof that authors were more concerned about fitting into the "grand tradition" (qtd. in Flood. "Blasts") than engaging the Celtic Tiger or that O'Toole suggested was "retreat" ("Writing") into more familiar territory. With *The Green Road* Enright uses these supposedly tired tropes to craft a narrative about the Irish struggle to re-configure identity in a rapidly changing time. The fact that she uses the family unit to do so, which according to Kiberd Irish authors were writing about at the expense of writing a broader social novel ("History" 278), is all the more fitting because, as Heidi Hansson points out, the 1937 constitution privileges the family unit as the ideal base model for Irish society (223). Thus, if the Celtic Tiger was about Ireland's transition from tradition to modernity, the family unit is a particularly insightful way to examine the tensions resulting from this change.

Unmoored Selves

In an interview with the *London Review of Books* Enright stated that she felt that a major challenge that each Madigan faced was based around the nature of empathy, which is particularly evident in the first section of the novel, where each chapter builds towards a moment were the Madigan in focus comes to face a sharp lack of empathy ("Stories"). This evokes the mould of the classic Irish short story, based around an "epiphanic or emblematic" (Foster, *Luck* 147) moment, which Foster argues had become a spent force during the Celtic Tiger, as they could no longer bear the complexities of Irish society.

The second chapter, for instance, is set in New York in 1991 and focuses on Dan. While Dan is the focus of the chapter its narrator is a member of the city's fine art/gay community, a community being ravaged by AIDS, where Dan has become a minor player. When the reader is introduced to Dan in the previous chapter (set in Ireland in 1980 and narrated by a twelve-year old Hanna) he announces that he intends to become a priest; the Dan that readers are reintroduced to has long since abandoned the priesthood and is slowing coming to terms with his homosexuality. Much of the chapter is spent detailing his causal relationship with Billy, another young man, who helps him ease into his sexuality. At the close of the chapter, Billy contracts AIDS and asks to see Dan as he lies dying. One of his friends contacts Dan, who sounds "unsurprised" and overly "polite" (71) on the phone and promises to go to the hospital, never to show up.

The chapter centred around Constance unfolds largely as she awaits to be screened for breast cancer. Married to Dessie McGrath, the owner of a successful fence manufacturing business, and mother to three children, Constance spends much of the chapter ruminating on how disappointed she is with her life and how she feels as though she never quite reached her potential. In the waiting room she gets talking to Margaret Dolan, an overweight woman with self-harm scars etched along her body and later, just after she has tested negative, overhears that Margaret has tested positive for cancer. This puts her disappointments into perspective

and she starts to weep, "crying too for her own selfishness … she had everything, more than everything, her life was overflowing" (99). When she returns home from the hospital however her family provides little to be happy about; her husband is awkward about "the thingy," dismissing her fears by saying she must have known "of course it was fine" (102) and generally unable to emotionally support her. Later, she tries to spend time with her daughter, but her daughter is upset because another girl is bullying her, and Constance realises that "they could already be bitchy, at eight and nine" (104).

The difference between the lack of empathy faced by Dan and Constance is internal and external; the Madigan who left Ireland is unable to express empathy and the Madigan who remained finds a lack of empathy around her. This is a pattern that repeats within the family, the Madigans that leave Ireland struggle to connect to whatever new community they find themselves in and the Madigans that remain struggle to connect with a changing Ireland, with each failure being reflective of their struggles to establish a sense of identity.

The moment Dan realises that he can explore his sexuality in New York occurs when an elderly millionaire that he is fitting for a pair of shoes flirts with him and Enright explicitly frames this moment as a stripping away or an escape from his Irishness:

> Dan forgot for a moment that he was a spoilt priest and an English literature graduate with plans to go home, after his year abroad and do a masters in librarianship. He forgot that he was a shoe salesman, or a barman, or even an immigrant. For a moment, Dan was an open space, surrounded by a different future to the one he had brought. (60-1)

In other words, Enright frame this moment as a move away from his past, similar to how the Celtic Tiger Ireland was moving away from its own past. Simultaneously though, Dan uses his Irishness as something to enchant and draw people into his orbit, with Billy first noticing him when he recites Yeats at a party so beautifully that it is as though a "scroll was

unfurling" (47) as he spoke. Billy's infatuation with the supposed Irish mysticism inherent in Dan is echoed by the narrator of the chapter, who frequently refers to Dan as "Irish Dan" (67) or "Danny Boy" (62). Even his name in Billy's address book is described as having "little dancing shamrocks" (71) around it. Maria Del-Rio has noted that Dan's Irishness, or a version of his Irishness that he performs, is his primary tool for attract sexual partners "in the absence of any other merit" (39). This is not dissimilar to how the Ireland of the Celtic Tiger attempted to market a sanitised version of Ireland and its history to the world and turn it into a "fashionable global brand" (Harte 6). In behaving in this way Dan moves into an unmoored, liminal space where he is unsure of who he is and how he should behave. Reflecting on Dan's aloofness, for instance, Billy states that all he wanted from Dan during their relationship was "recognition. The feeling that what they were doing was real to Dan too" (62). In the second half of the novel when Dan the news that he has to return back to Ireland the prospect terrifies him. Now living in Toronto with Ludo, a wealthy lawyer, he still sees Ireland as being a place of repression and going home to Ardeevin, a return to his roots, is precisely what frightens him. Far from being an idealised lost home, he tells Ludo that if he returns to Ireland is afraid that he will "get trapped in 1983 with white sliced pan on the table and the Eurovision Song Contest on TV" (177), Ireland's past remaining something that has yet to be reconciled. This fear of returning home makes stark the rootlessness of his life, with Dan realising that he is effectively "a raging blank of a human being" a person with no meaningful connections who could find himself "useless and alone" (180). This prompts him to actually commit to someone; he tells Ludo that he loves him and accepts his subsequent marriage proposal and what follows is, in a oeuvre fraught with violent, abusive or otherwise awkward sexual encounters, one of the tenderest sex scenes Enright has ever written, with the "two men-no longer young," making plans for the future and Dan hoping that the memory of Ludo's body will be a "talisman" (181) that will protect him in Ireland.

The unease that Dan feels about Ireland is felt similarly by Constance, even though she has stayed in the country and is enjoying all the material trappings of the Celtic Tiger. The critic Frederic Jameson argues that in a society where value and worth are closely linked to materialism the individual subject exists in a state of "perpetual present and perpetual change" (1186) that makes it difficult to forge any real sense of identity. This is immediately evident in Constance's recollections about her life in Celtic Tiger Ireland, which is presented as being a draining and exhausting existence:

> Constance was spoilt with tickets to Bruce Springsteen and the Galway Races, a leg of lamb brought home on Friday, chocolates if she wanted them or No Chocolates! … if one sister in law went to Prague, the other went to Paris, because in the years Constance had known them the McGraths did well and then did better yet. There was no stopping them. If Constance got her chairs reupholstered, some other Mrs. McGrath would discover minimalism and a third would be into shabby chic and somehow the whole process would start again. (90-1)

Enright highlights that the materialism of the Celtic Tiger has warped Constance's imagination to a point where she is unable to imagine a life outside of the facets of material goods. She recalls how she and Dessie went to New York, a city that she had dreamed of emigrating to as a youth, to visit Dan and her main impression of the city was that "this was a place you went to start a whole new life and all she got was a couple of Eileen Fisher cardigans in black and grey" (87). She is also unable to understand that America offered Dan a chance to escape from the weight of repression that exists in Irish history; when Dan's enthusiasm about food in the city annoys her, she thinks to herself "*Is it for this that you left? Is it for the Ice Cream?"* (87). This is to say that the materialism of the Celtic Tiger has blinded Constance to the realities of the unreconciled past in Ireland that have, at least in part, driven Dan away. Enright also makes it clear that it is not only Constance who seems

unhappy in the promised land of the Celtic Tiger writing that "everyone was so disappointed, these days, Constance thought, it was like an epidemic," (93) nobody feeling that what they have is enough.

Mathew Ryan has noted that throughout her fiction Enright uses the body as a place to make "abstracted social relations and tensions" (166) more concrete, so it is significant therefore that much of Constance's chapter occurs as she awaits to be screened for breast cancer. Naturally her thoughts continue to circle back to her body, a body that she used to be "so pleased with" but that she is now "fed up with" (74). Throughout the book, Enright makes constant reference to how much weight Constance has gained from overindulging during the Celtic Tiger, and this is hinted at being one of the root causes of her cancer scare, because "fat, [Constance] knew, was a toxic thing" (74). This reads as though Enright has written Constance's body as turning on, betraying her and transforming into something potentially hostile that she no longer understands because of the materiality of the Celtic Tiger. Enright frames Constance's anxieties about her body in such a manner to suggest that it is not the money or the materialism of the Celtic Tiger, as such, that has created this anxiety but rather the fact that Ireland was culturally unprepared for this materialism and thus uncertain as to what it might entail. Even though she enjoys a life of comfort and luxury, Constance is unable to escape a feeling that had she left Ireland the anxiety she feels about her body would be non-existent:

> If she had gone to New York she would not be worried about cancer now. She would have been jogging for years, living on wheatgrass, she would have a yoga 'practice' and maybe even a personal trainer. (87)

When the Madigan children reconvene in the second half of the novel, this theme of Ireland having become a place they can no longer understand is further developed. Emmet, who has

lived throughout the third world as an aid worker, looks at Ireland with a mixture of disgust and sadness when he returns:

> Since the money came in, Ireland depressed Emmet in a whole new way. The house prices depressed him. And the handbag thing, the latte thing, the Aren't We All Brilliant Thing. That all depressed him too. (206)

What stands out about Emmet's distaste for Ireland is that he is unable to put into words exactly and name what the money has done to Ireland, what has changed exactly about the country that makes him unhappy, yet he is aware that Ireland has changed and expresses a belief that the country's new identity is an increasingly fragile construct. When he realises that his Kenyan housemate, Denholm, has nowhere to spend Christmas he briefly considers inviting him to Ardeevin, but quickly realises that this could potentially overload what promises to be an already stressful gathering. He is unable to precisely say why though, and he wishes that he could apologise to Denholm, thinking to himself "I am sorry. I can not invite you home for Christmas, because I am Irish and my family is mad" (212). This sense that his identity has become ever more fragile and sense that he is unable to articulate why is a feeling that Emmet shares with his siblings. When they interact with each other in the second half of the novel, the only pleasant thoughts that they have about each other are rooted in the past, a past that seems incredibly far away. Constance thinks that "the place where [she] loved Dan he was eight years old" (198) and Dan remembers being close to Emmet as a child, but as an adult "the man bored and frightened him" (248). Ardeevin only reminds the siblings how disconnected they are from the past and how ambiguous their sense of self has become and how unsure they are in behaving around one another as a result. The form of the novel helps to emphasise this point. The fractured nature of the first section leads to a dramatic irony that the reader is more intimately familiar with each Madigan than they are with each other, and this creates a frisson in the second half of the novel, a tension between

the siblings that is near wordless, as if unable to be expressed by language, but omnipresent. When Constance collects Dan from Shannon Airport she immediately notices how stilted the conversation between them is, and is unable to fully articulate why, "*I don't care!!!* she wanted to say *I don't care who you sleep with or what you do!* Even though she did care" (197). As they drive back to Ardeevin, a seemingly innocuous question from Dan heightens tension because it threatens to expose the vacuous nature of Constance's life; he asks what she has been "up to" and in response:

> Constance tried to tease out the usual tangle of house, kids, mother, husband, mother's house, Christmas presents, dinner for ten, maybe thirteen, … What could she talk about? Looking up Pilates on the internet, trying to manage her own stupidity, a long weekend in Pisa on Ryanair that was three months ago now. Constance was doing everything. She was 'up to' damn all. (201)

This sense of alienation from each other and uncertainty as to how to behave around one another extends beyond the immediate family and to their village at large. On Christmas Eve, Hanna and Emmet go to Mackey's, the local pub and find a near alien scene, the place that they remember smelling like "old men and wet wool" (221) now crammed with perfumed young professionals showing off, everyone in the building, according to Hanna, acting like the "returned yank" (223). Emmet wonders how much cocaine is being consumed on the premises and has to stop in shock at the thought, "Cocaine. In Mackey's" (221).

Myth versus Modernity: The Celtic Tiger and Irish Tradition

The unease and the struggle that the Madigan children face in configuring their identity in a changed Ireland serves as an analysis of roughly Enright's own generation, the generation that brought about the Celtic Tiger. Through Rosaleen Madigan, Enright is able to explore in greater depth the clash between the Ireland created by the Celtic Tiger and the Ireland that

was dreamed of at the foundation of the state and examine in closer detail how the lack of reconciliation with, or indeed abandonment of, the past posed further difficulties in configuring Irish identity during the Celtic Tiger.

From the moment Rosaleen is introduced in *The Green Road* it is immediately apparent that she is not a typical Irish mother. She spends much of the opening chapter engaged in what Dan calls the "horizontal solution" (13), retreating to her room and refusing to leave for days, upset to the point of near hysteria over Dan's announcement that he intends to become a priest. Rereading the scene where Dan tells the family about his intention to join the priesthood with knowledge about the nature of his sexuality, it is striking how much Enright frames the scene as though Dan is coming out, as he tells his parents that he wants to ask for their "forgiveness for the life you had hoped for me and for the grandchildren you will not have" (10). Homosexuality was still illegal in Ireland in 1980, utterly taboo, whereas having a priest in the family was considered to be a great honour, so Rosaleen's response is the exact inverse of what might be expected of a woman of her generation. When Rosaleen explains to Hannah why the news upsets her she says that "I made him the way that he is, and I don't like the way that he is" (35). This reads as though Rosaleen is upset with Dan for complying with Irish tradition rather than breaking from it. Enright threads plenty of evidence throughout the novel that Rosaleen has spent her life trying to evade or otherwise break from Irish tradition; reflecting on a mass she recently attended, for example, Rosaleen thinks that had she a choice, she "would have been a Protestant" (150), which is an indication of how much of a disavowal she feels towards the cultural factors that play an important role in the construction of Irish identity.

D'Maco has noted that Enright is always quite particular in how she names her characters (66) and so it is significant therefore that where each Madigan child, ironically, shares a name with a well-known patriot from the Irish War of Independence, Rosaleen is

named not after a living figure from Irish history, but for James Clarence Mangan's poem "Dark Rosaleen," a poem that cast Ireland as a "longed for maiden" (O'Neill 183)[7]. This use of naming is significant, as "Dark Rosaleen" is a part of a long tradition in nationalistic Irish writing that gendered the country, frequently personifying Ireland as a mother, creating the well-known Mother Ireland trope. Susan Cahill argues that this is inherently problematic because while the female body was used to nourish the image of an ideal, imagined Ireland "the mother as a subject is simultaneously removed from cultural imagery" (157). Ferdia Mc Anna similarly argues that because of the Mother Ireland figure, "sex was nationalised" (15) in foundational myths of the Irish state, with acts of love onstage simply being manifestations of patriotism. Enright herself argues that Ireland being frequently symbolised as a mother is the origin of the Irish state's attempt in "keeping the lovely Irish girl lovely" ("History" 117) for as long as possible by crafting rigid gender binaries, where motherhood became a duty that Irish women had to fulfil. Judith Butler argues that crafting rigid gender roles are commonly found in the manufacturing process of a "primary and stable identity" (136), and this was applied to Ireland on a national scale, through various legal means: the 1937 constitution with its emphasis the family unit, laws in place until 1973 whereby women employed in the civil service had to resign upon getting married, and battles to legalise divorce and contraception that were waged up until the mid-1990s. These legal solidifications, according to Butler's arguments, meant that these binaries congealed "over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (33).

Jacques Lacan argues that an individual subject's identity formation begins at the "mirror stage" of development, where they observe the world to "establish a relation" (1166) with society. Lacan warns that if forced to suppress parts of their id in order to adjust into

[7] Respectively the names of the Madigan children recall Dan Breen, Constance Markievicz, Emmet Dalton and Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington

society, a sense of "aggressive disintegration" (1167) might occur within an individual. This might be applied to Rosaleen as an explanation for the inner conflicts she feels throughout the novel, stemming from having to conform to rigid image of Irish womanhood. Nearly every time she is referred to in a maternal way Enright pays careful heed to note her discomfort; when Constance calls her "Mammy" Rosaleen is angry her children "never grew out" (156) of calling her that, and Emmet is later described as having "winced" (207) after referring to her as "Mam" over the phone, knowing it would annoy her. This may also serve as an explanation for her almost visceral distaste of Dan's early aspiration to become a priest, because it is as though he is going to deny his true nature to fulfil Irish tradition. Conversely, Rosaleen has a particularly strained relationship with Constance, the daughter whose life most closely resembles her own. After failing to get into university Constance spent her time "waiting to get married" (88) and in this way Constance's life reads as a pastiche, "parody without the laughter" (Eagleton 147), of Rosaleen's. To briefly re-examine names, the name "Constance" has its origins in, and indeed echoes, the word "constant," as though this path in life for Irish women is destined to remain unchanged forever. The psychoanalyst Paul Ricoeur argues that memory is not so much a process of recalling the past but rather a process of "actualising what has been learned or stored" (62), so in leading a life similar to Rosaleen's, Constance is in essence a reminder of an Ireland that had severely limited options for women. Rosaleen appears to resent any happiness that Constance has in leading this life, with Constance remembering that Rosaleen once said she sounded "so smug" (93) when she talked about how happy she was with her children. Constance further recalls that Rosaleen referred to "balding, plainspoken" Dessie McGrath as being an "eccentric choice" of a husband, a comment that she felt was "odd thing to say, because Dessie was just the opposite really" (93). Whilst the upwardly mobile Dessie McGrath may seem utterly conventional to

Constance, he contrasts with Pat Madigan, Rosaleen's husband and more broadly how Constance attempted to use marriage to subvert what was expected of her.

When Enright describes Rosaleen and Pat's marriage she pays particularly close attention to the intimacies of their relationship, with Rosaleen describing how the two of them would "go to bed for days" and how their sex life was almost like an "animal thing" (162) in its urgency, an enormously sex-positive attitude for an Irishwoman of Rosaleen's generation. Her marriage to Pat seems to have been an attempt to express a degree of autonomy and control over her life. Rosaleen recalls how she was courted by a "brace of young men; wealthy men" and instead she "gave it away to Pat Madigan in a hayrick" for his "forty acres of bog and rock" (163). Pat being several social classes below her, the marriage was gossiped about around town as being and unusual one, a "love match" (161) and further evidence in the novel suggests the marriage was downright scandalous; as stated by a twelve-year old Hanna, when "grandfather Madigan was shot during the civil war, their grandfather Considine refused to help" (23), refusing to allow provisions from his pharmacy to be used in treating the wounded man. Enright carefully notes that Rosaleen transformed her father's bed, the bed he died in, into her and Pat's "marriage bed" (161) just three weeks after he died which would further emphases that her marriage to Pat was a rebellion of sorts from what was expected of her. She recalls how Pat would sometimes say, after sex "when the dawn came 'I don't know what I am doing here.' By which he meant lying with her, John Considine daughter," indicating that he was aware of how unconventional their marriage was. Rosaleen is described as being envious of this, because that comment was an indication that "Pat Madigan always knew who he was, of course, or who he should be. Good for him" (161). While the marriage was an effort at rebelling against history, in the sense that it broadly places her in contrast with the chaste woman that the Irish state sought to create, "passive, asexual and dependent" (Saá 49) and an afront, a rejection, of her own familial

history, crossing barriers of class and old family controversies, Enright also places evidence in the novel that this was, like so many Irish rebellions, a failed one because it did not help Rosaleen to a grasp a firmer sense of self; reflecting on her marriage with Pat she realises that the reason he "worshipped her" for was for the "the money she had, for the fine house and for the children he could get out of her" (263), which indicates that while her marriage to Pat was an act of autonomy it still placed her within a narrow, domestic space.

Ricoeur further argues that an open discussion about the wrongs and falsehoods of the past was essential for healing "symbolic wounds," especially in societies where the glory from the mythic past is derived from "acts of violence" (79) that history has legitimised. This is certainly true of Ireland, where the myths propagated by the Literary Revival played a role in fuelling armed rebellion. Ireland largely avoided doing this during the Celtic Tiger, and it is through Rosaleen that Enright examines this avoidance. Considering she seems to have spent her life attempting to escape from Irish tradition, the Celtic Tiger might be expected to be something that has allowed Rosaleen to realise her humanity and discover a sense of self, as Ireland no longer aspires towards the myths of the Literary Revival. Enright however depicts Ireland as aspiring towards a new set of myths that prove to be equally confining to Rosaleen. In an essay written about the collapse of the Celtic Tiger, Enright wrote that while she was hesitant to get "Freudian about the money shit" she did see money in Celtic Tiger era Ireland attaining the cultural significance of the Mother Ireland figure, money becoming "mother's love; her body, her attention, the blessing of her gaze" ("Inches"). Money, the announcement that Rosaleen intends to sell Ardeevin, is what ultimately draws the Madigan children home but alas it is also what prevents them from recognising Rosaleen's humanity. Marie Mianowski argues that during the Celtic Tiger, the spiritual value of land was superseded by "land as a commodity" (19) and this is precisely what happens to Ardeevin, and by extension, Rosaleen. When the family sits down on Christmas Day Enright describes

them as being “four children on the brink of middle age” who have “no traction, no substance in the world,” which is the source of the “power Rosaleen had over them” because none of them “grew up to match her” (240). Over dinner an argument erupts about who Rosaleen is going to live with when the house is sold, with Constance, ironically, being the only Madigan capable of hosting her and rendered furious by the idea. This provokes the climactic action of the novel, Rosaleen leaving Ardeevin on Christmas night, her children thinking she has gone to visit a friend, when in fact she goes to walk along the Green Road of the title, in spite of the darkness and the cold.

As Rosaleen walks along the green road, the two thoughts that spur her on are “where did it begin?” and “how long would she have to continue being like this. Being herself” (260). This frames her walk along the green road as being an attempt at liberating herself from the forces that have influenced construction of her identity and an effort in broadcasting her humanity. Certainly, this is the effect it has because when her children realise what she has done they are forced to contact the police and organise a search party, which means that Rosaleen “shrank into a human being, any human being, frail, mortal and old” (284). Enright has described Rosaleen’s walk at the end of the novel as being an action that as being an attempt to grasp a sense of her “concentrated and individual humanity” (qtd. in Prokop). The walk along the green road brings Rosaleen to the brink of death, but it is an action that forces her children to see her as “an elderly woman in desperate need of assistance” (284). Rosaleen eventually takes shelter in a ruined cottage and as she begins to become delirious from the cold she thinks to her herself “I am awake…I am alive” (280). When she is found, the months that follow are described as being a time of “great kindness and generosity, as her children begin to treat her as a person. Enright implies that previously what had prevented them from developing a relationship with her was the fact that they viewed her as being a symbol of an older Ireland, and this meant that certain things “were unsayable: failure, money, sex, drink”

(224). The Celtic Tiger did not alleviate this, as begin to render their relationship along economic lines, where she became more a benefactor than a parent to them. Her walk along the green road results in her children seeing her as a person, and they realise how lonely and isolated she had been in Ardeevin after Pat died. That Rosaleen has to walk along a Green Road to get a sense of her humanity is somewhat ironic, as Green Roads are roads that, quite literally, lead precisely nowhere. Described by Richard Collins as being a "landscape legacy of an often well-intentioned but hopelessly misguided initiative" (210), Green Roads weave throughout the Irish countryside because of the Great Famine. Also known as Famine Roads, they were built for the sole purpose of providing employment to the poor during the Great Famine as the British government at the time adhered stringently to a laissez faire ideology that "resisted state intervention in any part of the economy" (Brantlinger 197). In the novel Enright draws a through line from the myths of the Literary Revival to the Celtic Tiger through Rosaleen, suggesting that the economic boom created an Ireland to aspire towards that was just as equally stifling. This is where the title of the novel becomes significant, as it reads as though Enright is suggesting that the Celtic Tiger was a similar path for Ireland, a road that lead precisely nowhere.

Paying Attention

Margarita Estavez-Saá has described Enright as novelist who has a sharp eye for excavating Ireland's past with "an undeniable interest in dissecting the contemporary socio-cultural issues on the island" (47). Similarly, Hansson argues that Enright's oeuvre reflects an understand that identity is "a constant process" (218), something that must be subject to revaluation to be accurate. Change took so long to occur in Ireland that during the Celtic Tiger any public event, be it political, sporting, social etc. was loaded with significance and commented upon as Wthe death of something old and the birth of something new" (Hand

254). The sociologist Benedict Anderson claims that when vast changes sweep a country they often bring with them a sense of "amnesia" (204). Enright's work, and *The Green Road* especially displays an awareness that the death of an old Ireland and the birth of a new Ireland was not a clean break and seeks to charts the tensions that arise when that sense of amnesia is left unchecked. Indeed, Rosaleen's final line, the final line of the novel, "I should have paid more attention to things" (310) reads as plea to readers to interrogate national narratives and myths and the role they play in identity configuration.

Chapter Three-After the Crash: Fragmented identities in Caoilinn Hughes' *Orchid and the Wasp* and Sally Rooney's *Conversations with Friends*

Upon its publication in 2018, Paul McVeigh compared Caoilinn Hughes' novel *Orchid and the Wasp* to Sally Rooney's debut from the previous year, proclaiming it to be "this year's *Conversations with Friends*." McVeigh wrote that the arrival of Hughes and Rooney heralded "a sound coming from over the hill of Irish fiction. The new guard may find that it's not leading the charge anymore" ("Year's"). The collapse of the Celtic Tiger provoked a literary renaissance of sorts in Ireland, as a myriad of new voices emerged to portray, and comment on, the impact of the sudden collapse of the Celtic Tiger, with some the chief literary pathologists of the Celtic Tiger including Claire Kilroy, Paul Murray, Mike McCormack and Donal Ryan. What McVeigh's words indicate is that Hughes and Rooney signalled the arrival of a new generation of Irish writers, a generation not shaped by the tail end of the Celtic Tiger or its immediate collapse but rather from the years of austerity economics that followed. Though *Conversations with Friends* and *Orchid and the Wasp* have little in common superficially, they do read as though in dialogue with one another in their set of concerns and in how they attempt to configure Irish identity.

Tiger Collapses

As mentioned in the first chapter, the deregulation of the banking and construction sectors meant that the percentage of Ireland's GDP generated by construction was disproportionately high during the Celtic Tiger's second phase and much of that construction was funded on borrowed money. This meant that when a global recession occurred in 2008 Ireland was in an especially vulnerable position and the Celtic Tiger was brought to a spectacularly ignominious end as the debts that fuelled many of the construction projects suddenly fell due and the Irish economy came to a juddering halt. Michael Boss argues that seven main factors

had made Ireland incredible vulnerable to the effects of recession, each one a damning indictment of the mismanagement of the state by the government and the country's business leaders:

> (1) Unsustainable taxation policies;
>
> (2) Corruption among bankers;
>
> (3) Inadequate regulation of the financial sector;
>
> (4) Economic ineptitude among political leaders;
>
> (5) Political populism and clientelism;
>
> (6) Cronyism between politicians, bankers, builders and developers;
>
> (7) A weakening of state capacity. (Boss 128)

Fintan O'Toole argues that the Celtic Tiger presented Ireland with a unique opportunity to invest in the country's infrastructure and lay the foundations for a state defined by prosperity and equality and instead the government chose to practice the "the economics of utter idiocy" (*Ship* 21). Bank lending to developers had become so unsustainable that the government was forced provide bailouts to prevent bank runs, and these bailouts brought Ireland to the brink of insolvency. The Irish government was forced to ask the "Troika"-the IMF, the European Central Bank and the European Commission-for assistance on covering these loans. In return Ireland had to hand over its "economic sovereignty" (McDonald 66) to the Troika, who began to play a large role in dictating the budgeting and taxation in the country; Kilroy would memorably quip that the actions of those who had caused the collapse of the Celtic Tiger amounted to "economic treason" (*Devil* 349). The subsequent budgetary cuts and taxes introduced in Ireland meant that the Irish public would have to pay for the losses that resulted from reckless borrowing during the Celtic Tiger. The budget and tax cuts introduced during the recession, mostly in the areas of health, social welfare and education, largely meant that Ireland's youth would be most adversely affected by its collapse.

More cerebrally, O'Toole argues that the end of the Celtic Tiger was a particularly calamitous event in Ireland because far from simply being an economic boom, the Celtic Tiger was something that filled "a void … it was a substitute identity … it wasn't just money that had been lost, it was a sense, for better or worse, of what it meant to be "us"(*Enough* 4-5). This sense of loss was articulated in an anonymous blog published by *The Economist* in 2011, analysing the impact of the crash in Ireland, "After the Race." In the article, the author visited a half-completed housing estate and observed that the "exposed foundations of houses never built" and "rubble and rubbish lying everywhere" gave them the impression that they were observing the "ruins of a failed civilization." Half-finished housing estates came to litter much of the Irish countryside after the crash and are now known as "Ghost Estates." Not unlike Shelley's Ozymandias, these Ghost Estates serve not only as monuments to the economics of excess that had driven the Celtic Tiger, but reminders of the promises that the Celtic Tiger had failed to deliver. In the words of the critic Shirley Peterson, these developments were supposed to represent "Ireland's optimistic future" only to be fated to "take their place in the long history of Ireland's troubled past" (79).

A term that describes the sense of loss evoked by the Ghost Estates is "hauntology." Originally coined by Jacques Derrida to describe the state of socialism following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the term would be broadened and popularised by Mark Fisher, who defined hauntology as being the loss of "all the futures the twentieth century had taught us to anticipate" ("Hauntology" 18), with Fisher offering the demolishment of brutalist apartment blocks in the north of England as a material example of a future that did not arrive. This is where Ireland is unique, because instead of the destruction of structures it was the remains of buildings left unfinished that evoked a sense of hauntology. What is even more significant about the Ghost Estates is that they were frequently criticised as they were built for damaging local wildlife, infringing on areas of cultural importance and spoiling the natural beauty of

the landscape.[8] This means that the Ghost Estates are doubly hauntological, symbolising the demise of both Ireland that De Valera dreamed of and the economic boom that that killed the mythic Ireland. This is all to say that two visions of Ireland came to an end in relatively quick succession, which makes configuring and understand Irish identity after the crash a particularly complicated subject.

While the 2008 global recession had a particularly devastating effect on Ireland, it is important to note that its impact was felt worldwide, with Andrew Hoeberek arguing that it would become "one of the most significant events in early twentieth century literary history" (237), because of how wide reaching its consequences were. Ireland was not alone in its government having to cover toxic bank loans and Fisher argues, in *Capitalist Realism*, a short polemical published in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 crash, that this was evidence that neo-liberal capitalism had become "realism itself," the effect of which was that "beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual and symbolic elaboration and all that's left is the consumer spectator, trudging through the ruins and relics" (8) of history. Fisher further argues that this put Western society in a stasis point of sorts, "abandoned, stranded in the desert, confused about the way forward" (34). This applies especially to Ireland; a report by McGill University on the state of post-Crash Ireland estimated that Ireland "did not want" (169) to go back to the pre-Tiger years but at the same time was unsure about its way forward.

Post-Tiger Childhoods

[8] The public controversy over the expansion of the M3 motorway is emblematic of the debates that were waged about building during the Celtic Tiger. The expansion of the M3 impeded onto the Hill of Tara, an area renowned for both its natural beauty and the site of one of the most well preserved ancient temples in Ireland. One protestor said that the expansion was a sign that the there was nothing in the country that "wouldn't be sold" (qtd. in Rountree 521) and Colm Tóibín argues the "arrogance" (qtd. in McDonald 69) displayed by the government in infringing on such an important landscape was evidence of the moral bankruptcy that lay at the heart of the Celtic Tiger. This episode highlights the callousness of many of the construction projects in the second phase of the Celtic Tiger, where the symbolic importance or natural beauty of an area was often ignored in favour for short term economic gain.

Anne Enright's *The Forgotten Waltz* (2011) is one of the texts examined in Kinga Foldvary 2014 paper "In Search of a Lost Future: The Posthuman Child" which analyses the use of children in several post-crash European novels.[9] According to Foldvary, a trend emerged in post-recession European writing whereby children or adolescents became manifestations of the "guilt, worry and shame" (208) that their parents had about the financially unstable environment they had created, representing an oncoming world of "obscure and savage darkness" (218). Where *The Green Road* examines the tensions that emerged in Ireland's identity changing as a result of the Celtic Tiger, *The Forgotten Waltz*, written earlier but set after, is a more straightforward and less multi layered examination of the Celtic Tiger, focused more on the immediate effects of its collapse. Though largely focused on the affair carried out between Gina Moynihan and Séan Vallely, an extended metaphor for the heady, excessive Ireland of the Celtic Tiger, Enright is careful to draw the reader's attention to how this affair will affect a younger generation. On the opening page Gina recalls that the first illicit kiss she shared with Séan was witnessed by his daughter Evie, a fact that "made everything that much harder to forgive" (1). At the close of the novel Gina, attempting to become a maternal figure to Evie, tries to console her about the breakdown of her parents' marriage by telling her that it seemed as though the marriage was doomed from the start and that "one way or another" the divorce was "going to happen," admitting that while she may have hastened the process "it could have been anyone." In response, Evie tells her that it was not just anyone though, "it was you" (230). These lines read as a particularly devastating conclusion to the novel, because they perfectly convey not only the guilt and shame felt by Gina but the absolute lack of a resolution that Evie, and by extension, her generation, refuse to offer about assuaging those anxieties. This is why Rooney (born in 1991) and Hughes

[9] Though Foldvary's essay specifies European novels, the three she examines-Enright's *The Forgotten Waltz*, John Banville's *The Infinities* and Emma Donoghue's *Room*- are all Irish, perhaps indicating the extent to which Ireland was globalised during the Celtic Tiger.

(born in 1985) are especially interesting novelists, because their protagonists are of the same generation as Evie, grown up and attempting to negotiate an Ireland that has been irreversibly altered.

The follow up to her acclaimed 2014 poetry collection, *Gathering Evidence*, Hughes' *Orchid and the Wasp* is a contemporary picaresque novel, comprising of nine sections, each one unfolding over a handful of days and with increasingly smaller gaps between them. The narrative revolves around Gael Foess, following her from her teenage years to her early adulthood. [10] The plot gradually becomes centred on her efforts to provide financial security for her mother and her brother after her father, Jarlath, a financier at Barclays, abandons the family immediately prior to the collapse of the Celtic Tiger. This proves to a journey that that takes her beyond Ireland, to London and New York, and moves into the worlds of classical music and art forgery. Rooney's *Conversations with Friends*, largely written while she was studying for an M.A. in American Literature, is a much more intimately focused novel, following an affair that unfolds over the course of seven months between the narrator Frances, a 21-year-old student and performance poet, and Nick, an older, married actor. Despite the discrepancies that exist between these novels in terms of plot and style, they could be summarised as being accounts of young women attempting to find their place in post-crash Irish society, in essence coming of age novels, or Bildungsromane. The Bildungsroman is an especially useful form for examining how identity is configured in post-crash Irish writing because, as noted by the critic Tobias Boer, a Bildungsroman is typically a novel that charts the "development towards a normative ideal" (4). In the context of Irish writing, Anne Fogarty notes that the Bildungsroman is frequently used to explore the tension that emerges when "social, cultural and ethical issues are inculcated and passed on" (13), as

[10] While it is tempting to read Gael's name as a metaphor for Ireland, Hughes has explicitly denied that this is the case ("Very cool")

the frisson that emerges between younger and older generations provides an insight into the "divisions within a given society and the working out of historical destinies" (14).

Family After the Crash.

Heidi Hansson argues that much of Enright's oeuvre represents a sustained assault on the once sanctified unit of the Irish family, seeking to reduce it from the idealised social model to "a series of coincidences and the solution to practical problems" (223). While the family unit is not the main focus of Rooney and Hughes' novels, they each use the family to evoke aspects of Irish literary tradition, which provides an insight into forces that influence identity configuration after the recession.

Reviewing *Conversations with Friends*, Kilroy used Rooney's depiction of family to argue that the novel almost read as being a "post-Irish" ("Young") Irish novel. This is to say that Rooney places well known tropes associated with Irish literary families into the novel but uses them in a way that the reader might not expect, a trait that she shares with Hughes. Frances' father Dennis is presented, like countless literary Irish fathers, as an out of control alcoholic, a pathetic wastrel that haunts Frances throughout the novel. While Frances does recall a few instances of embarrassment and one episode of near violence from her childhood as a result of his drinking, remembering how he would pawn furniture to fuel his drinking binges or how he once threw a pair of shoes into the fire after tripping on them, her mother had him removed from the family home when it became evident that he was unwilling or unable to change his behaviour. Dennis largely appears in the novel in the form of phone calls he makes late at night to Frances whilst inebriated, but far from harassing her or berating her, these phone calls largely consist of him rambling incoherently before devolving into uncontrollable sobbing. Instead of anger or shame, Frances instead feels a crushing sense of nothingness when she interacts with her father, stating that he simply makes her feel "cold,

like a fish" (49). Later, when her mother reports that he seems to have hit a particularly low point and gently suggests that Frances might visit him because she must love him in some way, Frances is supremely indifferent, responding "who says that I have to love him?" (175).

One of the earliest familial interactions in *Orchid and the Wasp* comes in the opening chapter when Gael observes her father masturbating in the shower. Like Rooney, Hughes seems to be very consciously subverting readers expectations with this scene as she frames Gael's observation in such a manner to consciously evoke a similar scene from John McGahern's *The Dark* (1965), a canonical Irish Bildungsroman. In *The Dark*, Young Mahoney is haunted by the nights his father, Old Mahoney, would come into his room and molest him, with McGahern rendering the abuse in oblique terms, focusing on Old Mahoney's "breathing growing restless with excitement" and the "hotness and the sweat" (17) of his hands. Hughes similarly renders Gael's observation by focusing intently on Jarlath's hands, "cleaning his groin" and moving as though "washing his hands" (18) and the sound of his breathing, a "throaty moan" (17). When Jarlath realises that Gael is in the room he immediately orders her to get out and when she laughs at catching him at a particularly vulnerable moment he tells her:

> "If you ever try to use this moment against me" he said "If you ever misremember it. If your life takes a bad turn and you need someone to blame and you think of saying that your father exposed himself to you when you were a little girl, I am telling you now to get out." (19)

Where Young Mahoney remembers the nights his father "wanted love" (16) because it is the horror of these nights that drives him from home, Gael remembers this night as being important because it was the night her father attempted to instil what he calls his most valuable lesson into her, words that will shape the rest of the narrative. After she turns away Jarlath gets dressed and tells her to go to bed and when she makes a comment about being

"practically a teenager" (21) he tells her that as she moves into adulthood she has a simple choice to make, she can "aspire to have worth and influence and risk tragedy or she can aspire toward love and togetherness and risk that it won't been enough" (22). In evoking the spectre of abuse at the beginning of this important scene, Hughes seems to be very knowingly confounding expectations that readers may have and indicate that the conflict Jarlath is going to cause is unlike what might be expected in an older Irish novel. The Irish family is further deconstructed just a few pages later when Gael asks her mother Sive, an obsessive composer/conductor with little interest in being a mother, why she had children and Sive tells her it is because her father had "political ambitions" and felt that a "nod to convention wouldn't go amiss." Consequently, she notes that the "government works for the banks these days," so Jarlath is "politicking away" (36) at Barclays. No longer needing the social capital of a family, Jarlath seems indifferent about his children, not unlike the indifference that Frances feels about her father. Appropriately, the main source of conflict caused by Jarlath in the novel comes not from the identity he expects his children to conform to, but from the financial turmoil he creates when he walks out on the family just before the Celtic Tiger collapses. This is similar to the conflict that Dennis eventually causes in *Conversations with Friends*. After informing Frances that he has had a "bad year" (284) he reveals that he is unable to pay her an allowance every month which forces Frances, who considers herself to be something of aesthete with no interest in taking an "economic role" in society, rationalising that her disinterest in money is "ideologically healthy" (23), to try and find a job for the first time in her life. Frederic Jameson argues that late capitalism would create a sense of feeling "dispossessed from history" (1860) and so while Rooney and Hughes each make gestures towards recognisably awful Irish literary fathers, it reads as though they each knowingly draw attention to clichés in Irish writing, only to abandon them and defuse them rather than actively deconstruct them. That the familial conflict that emerges in each novel is

financial in nature reads as a logical conclusion of what Enright explored in *The Green Road*, of an Ireland where tradition and history where gradually being supplanted by economics.

Blank Protagonists

An immediate similarity between Frances and Gael is that they are each somewhat blank as protagonists. A comparison could be made to the liminal space that Dan finds himself in in *Road* after moving away from his Irishness. In a study on Bildungsromane written during late-stage capitalism, Caren Irr describes their protagonists often being "functionally a social orphan" (222) with consumerism being a more powerful force of identity configuration than tradition. A similar argument was put forth by Jonah Peretti in the paper "Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Contemporary Visual Culture and Identity Formation/Dissolution" published by the online journal *Negations*. Peretti argues that as the rules of the marketplace come to play a greater role in social interaction identity formation will become intrinsically linked to consumerism. As market forces become more sophisticated, products that sell an image of a lifestyle will be "consumed and circulated" with increased "efficiency and rapidity." Because this is a system that relies on the individual continuing to purchase a new idea or product, Peretti argues that it placed the individual into a state where they constantly "re-enact Lacan's mirror stage of development." This makes it harder for the individual to develop a sense of self, because they are forced to "oscillate quickly between schizophrenic consciousness and idealized ego formation." This idea is present throughout *Conversations with Friends*, though humorously Rooney depicts Frances and her friends trying to configure their identities not through consuming products but through consuming social theory and philosophy. Madeline Schwartz has noted that in Rooney's novels "her characters talk politics all the time, testing

out new ideas like outfits for a get-together" ("Should").[11] For example, describing her best friend, ex-girlfriend and spoken word performance partner Bobbi, an ardent, self-described anarcho-communist, Frances states that:

> Bobbi had a way of belonging everywhere. She said she hated the rich, but her family was rich and other wealthy people recognised her as one of their own. They took her radical politics as a kind of bourgeois self-depreciation, nothing too serious, and talked to her about restaurants and where to stay in Rome. (95)

Much of the conversations that the title refers to revolve around Frances and Bobbi's attempts to both deconstruct and make sense of Ireland they live in, with results that are frequently inconclusive:

> Bobbi: if you look at love as something other than an interpersonal phenomenon
>
> Bobbi: and try and understand it as a social value system
>
> Bobbi: it's both antithetical to capitalism, in that it challenges the axiom of selfishness
>
> Bobbi: which dictates the whole logic of inequality
>
> Bobbi: and yet it's also subservient and facilitatory
>
> Bobbi: i.e. mothers raising their children without any profit motive
>
> Bobbi: which seems to contradict the demands of the market on one level
>
> Bobbi: and yet just functions to provide workers for free
>
> Me: yes
>
> Me: capitalism harnesses 'love' for profit
>
> Me: love is the discursive practice and unpaid labour is the effect
>
> Me: I mean, I get that, I'm anti love as such
>
> Bobbi: that's vapid frances

[11] Rooney's second novel *Normal People* was published just 14 months after *Conversations with Friends*, so much of the critical writing that exists on her work examines them in tandem.

Bobbi: you have to do more than just say you're anti things (180)

What the above conversations illustrates is that in post-crash Ireland, Frances almost has to constantly re-evaluation and re-assert exactly what everything means in society and what the implications of it are. Alexandra Schwartz argues that Frances frequently reads as though she is trying to take an ascetic position that removes her from societal interaction, her refusal to engage in the world reflecting a belief that "to act in the world is to do inevitable damage to it" ("Adultery"). This is a strikingly post-Tiger attitude to have, reflecting an awareness that to commit to a set of beliefs in Ireland risks becoming acquiescent in a potentially calamitous social order. The above passage also illustrates Rooney's major innovation as a prose stylist, which is that she seamlessly incorporates conversations that are largely are non-spoken in the novel, with most of the discussions in the book unfolding over instant messaging applications, email exchanges and text messages. Indeed, her characters interact more online than they do in the real world; when thinking about her affair with Nick, Frances likens it to a "Word document we were both editing together" (185). This is significant because gives the impression their lives are somewhat removed from their physical selves and divorced from reality. This is especially true of her friendship with Bobbi, as many of the conversations shown in the novel, like the one quoted above, are archived ones that Frances reads back on, further emphasising that her sense of self is removed from her present reality. Claire Lynch notes that social media became particularly popular in Ireland as the economy collapsed, arguing that it became a "post human armour" (88) of sorts to distract from the ugly reality of the demise of the Celtic Tiger and warns that when an individual lives more online, they are in a state of "constant flux, perennially unfinished" (133). Like Enright, Rooney uses the body to examine the detrimental effect this has on Frances. Throughout the novel she attempts to portray herself as being perennially unfazed and coolly detached from the world around her, but a contrast is often presented between what she says and what she does. In one

of the first instances, for example, of Rooney detailing her and Nick's sexual relationship she tells him "we can sleep together if you want, but you should know I'm only doing it ironically" (114). Frances attempts to maintain this disposition throughout the affair, but when it becomes clear that Nick is not going to leave Melissa, his wife, she begins to self-harm after each sexual encounter. Schwartz argues that this is emblematic of the fact that within Rooney's novels the only power that her protagonists appear to possess when they engage with the world is "the power to hurt themselves" ("Millennial"). Frances appears to aware of both her fragmented sense of self and her lack of autonomy in defining her identity. Towards the end of the narratives, an ill Frances, after fighting with Bobbi and ending her relationship with Nick, sits down in a church, hoping the peace and quiet will help her think and is struck by a swirling series of thoughts about how unsure she is in own identity:

> Am I myself..? Is this me, Frances? No, it is not me. It is others. Do I sometimes hurt and harm myself, do I abuse my unearned cultural privilege of whiteness, do I take the labour of others for granted, have I sometimes exploited a reductive iteration of gender theory to avoid serious moral engagement, do I have a troubled relationship with my body, yes. Do I want to be free of pain, therefore demand that others also live free of pain, the pain which is mine and therefore also theirs, yes, yes. (294-5)

This scene has obvious echoes of Molly Bloom's soliloquy at the end of *Ulysses* but instead of affirming anything for Frances, she has a panic attack and she subsequently faints in the church. Unable to take this as a sign that she should perhaps seek medical help, she immediately attempts to place a frame of meaning around it, emailing Bobbi that her fainting in a church is "probably a metaphor" (299) for something.

The main difference between Gael and Frances is that Gael is a far more active protagonist, one who readily accepts the flawed moral landscape of post-crash Ireland and seeks to use it to her advantage. After her father abandons the family, she re-arranges

everything in her life to provide financial security for her mother and her brother, using the amorality of post-Tiger Ireland to justify the lying and cheating she engages in to reach that position of security. Critical consensus on Gael as a character generally casts her in an unfavourable light; Kim Ode has described her as a "despicable" protagonist, "wholly self-absorbed" and "unfailingly cold" ("Review") and elsewhere Elke Power characterised her as a person whose moral compass "varies with interest rates" ("Review") and wondered if she was written by Hughes as an exercise in keeping readers interested in an unlikeable protagonist. The point that these reviews appear to be missing is that the underlying sadness present in Gael's character comes from the fact that she is forced to constantly re-configure and change her personality so as to maximise the financial reward from whatever social situation that she might find herself in; where Frances is rendered somewhat blank and distanced from the world around her by her passivity, Gael is made blank through her activity. A comparison could be made between Gael and Constance from *The Green Road,* because where the materialism of the Celtic Tiger left Constance feeling unfulfilled, Gael's near constant efforts to try and squeeze profit from social interactions leave her with a personality that is in constant flux and unable to establish any connections with the world around her. In assessing her relationship with Harper, the only friend the reader observes her interact with in the novel, her main criteria in this assessment is how well she has "serve[d] as a prop" (125) in exploiting social interactions. Elsewhere in the narrative when she finds herself in New York without money or a place to stay she finds that her Irishness, and the financial ruin now synonymous with the country, makes her welcome at an Occupy Wall Street camp which she dubs, as she uses it for food and shelter, a "fool's paradise" (250), privately deriding the protestors and their aims. While critics have commented on Gael's callousness and her seeming lack of any defining characteristics, these traits are commented on by characters within the novel. Her brother Guthrie describes her as somebody who would

rather think of herself as being part of "a mechanism," a functional part of a machine that does not have to "perceive anything or participate in some culture" (49). Likewise, when an interviewer at an MBA program asks Gael what her "values" are, Gael can only think in terms of her professional "attributes" or her "personal net worth" (101) and this perhaps the closest in the novel she comes to facing the shallowness of her identity.

Post-Tiger Artists

A similarity between *Conversations with Friends* and *Orchid and the Wasp* is that art comes to play an important role in the development of each protagonist, meaning that Rooney and Hughes each evoke the Künstelroman, a novel that charts the development of an artist. Ernst Bloch argues that the central concern of the Künstelroman is a desire to "articulate that which has never been heard" (274); the maturation of the character deriving from their ability to crystallise their beliefs into a work of art. This work of art gives the character a voice and also presents them with an opportunity to understand, or even transcend, the workings of society. The most well-known example of this in Irish writing is undoubtedly James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). At the conclusion of *Portrait*, Joyce's protagonist Stephen Dedalus likens Ireland to "an old sow that eats her farrow" (208), claiming that "when the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight" such as "nationality, language and religion" and art is how Stephen intends to "fly by those nets" (207). In the closing passage of the novel he exuberantly announces his belief that he can "forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race" (257).

Stephen's artistic awakening occurs in *Portrait* when he observes a young woman wading on the beach and is struck by her beauty and desire to recreate that beauty. Joyce frames this as though Stephen is encased in an aura of sorts, his soul "swooning into some

new world, fantastic, dim, uncertain as under sea, traversed by cloudy shapes and beings" (177). When Rooney and Hughes depict the creation of art, they each similarly depict the art emerging from an aura of sorts. Hughes' main treatment of art in *Orchid and the Wasp* comes in the form of paintings created by Guthrie, which are a direct result of epileptic like seizures that he suffers from as a child, seizures that are later revealed to be entirely psychosomatic. It is from these seizures that Guthrie gets his inspiration; he is described as being encased in "the rarest kind of aura" (190) during his seizures and has visions of colours that are shapes that are "beyond the known spectrum" (191). He does not have the "words to begin with to describe" (191) these images, so he attempts to paint them. Rooney's treatment of art in *Conversations with Friends* comes in the form of a short story that Frances writes and when she describes Frances writing it, it is as though the words are being conducted through her by a higher power, "the lines forming full sentences and attaching to each other like prose" as though of their own volition. When Frances stops writing, Rooney writes that everything breaks into a "shower of visual noise" and a "wave of dizziness" (210) comes over her, as though she has stepped out of an aura. The subject of the short story, like Guthrie's paintings, is something deeply personal to Frances, a lightly fictionalised account of her teenage romantic relationship with Bobbi, which depicts Bobbi as "a mystery so total [Frances] couldn't endure her" (224).

In contrast to Stephen Dedalus, the liberation that art offers in both *Conversations with Friends* and *Orchid and the Wasp* is purely economic. Walter Benjamin argues that in a consumer society the "cult value" that art had, the value that was produced by the power of the work in of itself, its "embeddedness in tradition" (1050) would be rapidly supplanted by the "exhibition value" of the work, the value that the work has as a commodity, which Benjamin argues would diminish any "aura" (1055) that the work had. Both Rooney and Hughes literalise this process in their novels. In *Orchid and the Wasp* Guthrie gifts Gael five

of his paintings and she subsequently travels to New York where she presents herself as Guthrie's agent, without his knowledge, telling people he is a reclusive, agoraphobic, outsider artist. A gallery agrees to auction off the paintings, but the owner tells Gael that they can only host an auction if she has fifteen paintings, so she finds a forger on the Darkweb, an unregulated part of the internet and pays him to create ten paintings that are of similar style to Guthrie's paintings. In *Conversations with Friends* the main benefit that Frances derives from writing the short story about Bobbi is that a literary journal offers to buy it. The joy that Frances gleans from this is rendered purely in financial terms, as the money means she no longer has to rely on her father financially and thus she feels as though there is "no way for [her] father to harm [her] anymore" (251). When Bobbi later confesses to feeling hurt about the publication of the story the only defence that Frances is able to offer is that she got offered "good money" (265) for it.

Post Tiger Maturity

McVeigh argues that the central theme that preoccupies both Hughes and Rooney's novels was the "personal, political and social ramifications" ("Year's") of the failures of neo-liberal capitalism in Ireland. What is very striking about the conclusion of each novel is that as each protagonist voices a rejection of the system that produced the Celtic Tiger they find themselves forced to continue to engage with it. When Melissa eventually confronts Frances about the affair Frances is unable to explain to her why she embarked on an affair with Nick. Melissa tells her that she believes it was from a subconscious desire that Frances had to take revenge on the generation that caused the Celtic Tiger. Melissa, an essayist and photographer, had introduced Frances to Nick when she invited Frances and Bobbi to their home because she was interested in writing a profile on them and she claims seeing her home was what prompted Frances to instigate the affair:

> The first time you came to our house you just looked around like: here's something bourgeois and embarrassing that I'm going to destroy. And I mean, you took such enjoyment in destroying it. Suddenly I'm looking around my own fucking house thinking: is the sofa ugly? Is it kitsch to drink wine? And the things I felt good about made me feel pathetic. Having a husband instead of just fucking somebody else's husband. Having a book deal instead of writing nasty little short stories about people I know and selling them to prestigious magazines. I mean you came into my house with your fucking nose piercing like: oh, I'll really enjoy eviscerating this whole set up She's so establishment. (296-7)

Frances then tells Melissa that she realises that she did not want to destroy her life, she "wanted to steal it" (297), a life of financial security that she herself is unlikely to ever know. Shortly afterwards she apologises to Bobbi for publishing the story about them and two decide to rekindle not only their friendship, but their romantic relationship. The way that Rooney frames this relationship is as though the two of them are forming a dyadic society, as they start to think of themselves as a single unit and decide they will avoid referring to themselves as girlfriends or partners as an act of rejecting any "prefabricated cultural dynamic … that's outside our control" (306). In the closing pages of the novel Nick accidently phones Frances and the two subsequently have a conversation about their affair. Realising that they are nearby one another in Dublin city centre, Nick proposes that they meet face to face and implicitly suggests that they continue the affair. It is important to note here that Rooney frames the power dynamics of the affair primarily along economic lines and Jane Hu argues that this turns Nick's sexual interest in Frances into an "allegory for an older generations illicit and almost vampiric fascination with a younger generation that seemingly exemplifies our precarious present" ("Great"). In turn, the incompatible nature of Frances and Nick's relationship becomes an allegory for the impossibility of the generation that came of

age after the Celtic Tiger ever being able to achieve the lifestyle it promoted and championed. Frances says as much to Nick, telling him she is happy in her new relationship with Bobbi and that anything with him as always going to be "fucked up" (320). They then realise how to close to each other they are in Dublin city centre and when Nick asks Frances what she wants to do Rooney writes:

> I closed my eyes. Things and people moved around me, taking positions in obscure hierarchies, participating in systems I didn't know about, and never would. A complex network of objects and concepts. You live through certain things before you understand them. You can't always take the analytical position.
>
> Come and get me, I said. (321)

With this ending, Frances admits to herself that she is essentially going to continue in engaging with a system that she knows leaves her in an inverse position of power, because that is what it means to engage in the world of post-Tiger Ireland. Gael finds herself in a similar position at the end of *Orchid and the Wasp*. She meets her father shortly before the art auction and tells him that after selling the paintings she will no longer have to engage him financially and thus she will longer have "nothing to do" (293) with him. When she gives the money that she raises from selling the paintings to Guthrie and her mother she develops a feeling of alienation from them because of what they do with it. Sive uses her share to set up a community orchestra in inner city Dublin, telling Gael she has decided to eschew the upper echelons of classical music because seeing the joy that it brings to the community satisfies her "deepest desires" (324). Likewise, Guthrie ignores Gael's suggestion that he use the money to invest in rental property and instead announces plans to set up a community arts centre, where gentle people like himself "can prosper" (342). In the closing moments of the novel Gael finds it hard to be around "people you love, but don't respect" and realises that if she wants her love for her family to continue it "means putting a glass case over it and sealing

it" (343), resolving to support them financially but avoid any emotional interactions with them. This means that she essentially fulfils the words espoused by her father, that she can aspire to togetherness or wealth and so whilst she spent the bulk of the novel trying to escape from his influence, she ultimately conforms to his worldview.

Alexandra Schwartz argues that neo-liberal capitalism is to Rooney and Hughes' generation what nationalism and Catholicism were to an earlier Irish generation, "a rotten national faith to contend with" ("Adultery"). Where Enright offers an examination of the tensions present in a changing Ireland, Rooney and Hughes explore how Irish identity is configured after those changes have occurred and new socio-cultural forces stemming from the Celtic Tiger are ingrained in Irish society. Lauren Collins argues that while the characters in their novels would be very easy to dislike, it is hard not to feel sympathy for them because "the game was over by the time they'd arrived" ("Head"). Even though the system that caused the Celtic Tiger had evidently failed in Ireland, the economic model that it championed, neo-liberalism, remains intrinsic in identity configuration.

Conclusion

In February 1996 Galway's new Civic Theatre opened to much public excitement. Unemployment and emigration were each falling rapidly in Ireland, encouraging signs in Northern Ireland suggested that peace was attainable, and the country had recently voted to legalise divorce. In short, Ireland was in the grip of "a sense of hope about the future" (Lonergan "Ethics" 437) and the Civic Theatre was heralded locally in Galway as a sign of the country's growing cosmopolitanism. Druid, a well-known theatre company, had been selected to stage the Civic Theatre's first production and their director Garry Hynes caused some surprise by selecting a debut play by an unknown playwright, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* by Martin McDonagh. McDonagh had been chosen precisely for the profane and irreverent attitude that his work showed towards Irish theatre; on the eve of the play's opening Hynes, who was well regarded for the productions she had helmed of well-known Irish dramas by Tom Murphy and J.M. Syne, stated "for the first few moments the audience will feel 'oh lovely, this is a Druid play, we know where we are.' And then…" (qtd. in Woodword). Set in a rural cottage, the opening scenes of *Leenane* seem to promise a relatively conventional Irish drama, focusing on the relationship between spinster Maureen and her elderly mother Mags before McDonagh confronts the audience with several dark and shocking twists, putting onstage levels of graphic violence rarely seen in Irish drama. The play received mixed reviews but proved to be enormously successful for McDonagh, who would launch four more plays over the next five years: *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1996), *A Skull in Connemara* (1997), *The Lonesome West* (1997) and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (2001). These plays established him as the enfant terrible of Irish drama and drew much criticism for the seeming revelry that McDonagh took in making fun of troubling aspects of Ireland's past, including IRA atrocities, the Church's suffocating influence and the supposed ignorance and naivety that was the result of Ireland being so isolated from the rest of the

world. Michael Billington described him as a playwright with "nothing original to say" (qtd. in O'Hagan "McDonagh"), only interested in shocking his audience and other critics argue that his style consisted solely of wilfully exploiting Irish stereotypes, a charge that was heightened by the fact that he was born and raised in London to Irish parents, and thus thought of as being an outsider (Lonergan, "Ethics" 439). Patrick Lonergan defended McDonagh from these criticisms and argues that his work is important because it places a burden of sorts on the audience, by forcing them to "examine afresh [their] own sense" of how national identity was constructed and consider the "values that are assumed" (448-9) in that construction.

This is very similar to what Enright accomplished with *The Green Road*, carefully exploring how Irish identity was constructed as the county underwent a period of rapid change and how that the construction of a new idea was to the detriment of processing and understanding the myths that had informed Ireland's character at the birth of the state. Enright told Jody Allen Randolph that Ireland was a country that was not especially "primed for materialism" (8) and this proves to be another central concern of *The Green Road*, a warning that the Tiger could create a new set of myths that where just as spurious as Cathleen Ni Houlihan and Cumman na nGeadheal. Heidi Hansson argues that Enright's fiction "exposes the limits" (225) of the foundational myths of Ireland and that consequently a question her work broaches but never quite engages with is whether an idea of Ireland can continue to exist after those myths have been dispelled. Ciaran Benson claimed that while the Tiger briefly offered a new way to configure Irish identity, its collapse prompted a wave of existential angst because it meant that the country had to ask itself if there was any "authentic substance" behind the idea of Ireland or if the country was truly just "separate-from-England" (35)?

The irony of the collapse of the Tiger bringing about this question is that it is precisely the same question that faced Ireland before the country existed as a politically autonomous state. Declan Kiberd argues that because Ireland had been ruled by Britain for so long, the country had essentially been "patented as not-England" (9). According to Kiberd this meant that by the end of the nineteenth century Ireland existed as a "sort of nowhere, waiting for its appropriate symbols of images to be inscribed on it" (115). As it was unable to determine its own destiny, the idea of what Ireland was could "be embodied only in the written word" (118). This is why the foundational myths of the Literary Revival carried political weight, because flawed as they might have been, they at least offered a vision of an identity that was for Ireland alone. In the poem "The Man and the Echo" W.B. Yeats grappled with the political weight that the work of the Literary Revival carried, writing "I lie awake night after night/And never get the answers right/Did that play of mine send out/ certain men the English shot?" (393) which summarises the power that literature had in envisioning an independent Ireland.[12] In "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" W.H. Auden wrote that "poetry makes nothing happen" a line that the novelist and critic Tom McCarthy argues is frequently misconstrued to mean "poetry doesn't make anything happen" when in fact the line is supposed to be read as a "positive one, one that casts nothing as an occurrence that takes place" (215), with poetry, writing, giving conceptual reality to what is non-existent. The philosopher Richard Kearney has claimed that this is precisely why narratives are important on a national scale, because they are concerned with "making possible at an imaginary level what is impossible in our real, empirical experience" (*Post-nationalist* 88). Kearney has elsewhere written that "the problem is not that each society constructs itself as a story, but that it forgets that it has done so. Whenever a nation forgets its own narrative origin it becomes dangerous" (*Stories* 81). This is why Enright's work is important, because it strives

[12] The play in question is *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*

to examine the dangers inherent in narrative origins congealing into myth and also examines the tensions that arise when myths are not resolved, but simply discarded. While the Celtic Tiger meant that the myths that had come to imprison Ireland no longer held any sway, it did not offer any new ideas as to what Ireland could be beyond the minutiae of financial transactions, which meant that Ireland's sense of self became all the more tenuous, as Rooney and Hughes' adventures in late capitalism indicate. That Rooney and Hughes struggle to find a concrete idea of Ireland amid the ruins of the Celtic Tiger is perhaps not unexpected. As mentioned in the first chapter, Jim McLaughlin claimed that the Celtic Tiger seemed to have brought Ireland to the "end of history" (64). Francis Fukuyama, who pioneered the idea of history coming to an end under neo-liberal capitalism, argues that:

> The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination and idealism will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history. ("End" 17-18)

Fukuyama's sentiment is echoed by some of the writers that Randolph interviewed for *Close to the Next Moment.* Seamus Heaney, for instance, stated that the Celtic Tiger introduced something "venal and nihilistic" into Ireland's character and claimed that "the biggest shift in my lifetime has been the evaporation of the transcendent from all our discourse and our sense of human destiny" (qtd. in Randolph 205). Similarly, the playwright Marina Carr characterised Ireland after the Celtic Tiger as being a "country without a myth and desperately in need of one to steady us" (qtd. in Randolph 108). Rosaleen's walk at the end of *The Green Road* is could be described as her risking her life for an abstract goal, an attempt

to have her individual humanity recognised against the myths of the Literary Revival and the Celtic Tiger. The myths of the Celtic Tiger were dispelled by its collapse, but the neo-liberal economics that enabled it remained embedded in Irish society to such a degree that the attempts to configure identity in Rooney and Hughes' novels are defined by material, rather than abstract, concerns, their protagonist's identities defined by Ireland's economic system even as they disavow it. This raises questions about the extent to which Irish literature is capable of opposing or challenging the neo-liberal economics that define the Irish state.

After Ireland?

A way in which these questions might be approached is to look at how the three authors examined in this thesis have spoken about their work publicly. The major difference between Enright, Hughes and Rooney in terms of reception is that where Enright and Hughes each received broad critical praise and moderately successful sales figures, Rooney has become a bona fide sensation, described as being the type literary novelist that crosses over into mainstream stardom that occurs once a generation, like Zadie Smith, Donna Tartt or Bret Easton Ellis (Smallwood, "Great"), with the *Guardian* and the *New York Times* respectively referring to her as "the voice of a generation" (Clark, "Conversations") and "the first great millennial novelist" (Barry, "Author") In the face of this success, Rooney has been notably ambivalent any importance that her books might have. In contrast, Enright and Hughes have both spoken about the sense of duty they feel in presenting narratives for public consumption. Enright used the annual lectures she gave as Ireland's Laurate of Fiction to chastise the Irish literary establishment for its failure to incorporate women writers into the Irish Canon ("The Count"), and more broadly to voice concerns that the Irish state had yet to truly reconcile matters of historical abuse ("The Genesis of Blame"). Hughes has likewise stated that *Orchid and the Wasp* was written to express that anger she felt about the collapse of the Celtic Tiger

(qtd. in Lanneman, "Ambition") and to insert an assertive and self-confident female protagonist into Irish writing ("Not"), which she felt there were too few of. In commenting on her work, Rooney has expressed doubts that it has any levels of importance. In an interview with the *Irish Independent* she claimed that at a time of political crisis her work amounted to the creation of "decorative aesthetic objects" (qtd. in White "Yeats") and in conversation with Benjamin Secher she stated that she felt as though she "could devote [her] time to something more useful than the writing of novels." She further told Secher that she was contemplating abandoning writing after the publication of her second novel *Normal People,* because she was uncomfortable imagining that "there are landlords who read [*Conversations with Friends*] and probably thought it was a great read. Am I happy giving those people 10 hours of distraction? Not really!" ("Failure").

Similar ideas permeate Rooney's fiction. In *Normal People,* Connell, one of the protagonists, attends a literary reading and observes that the only people in attendance are "the type of people who wanted to be the kind of people" (225) that attend literary readings. The novel, he concludes is merely "a way of appearing cultured…fetishized for its ability to take educated people on false emotional journeys so to that afterward they might feel superior to the uneducated people whose emotional journeys they liked to read about" offering "no potential as a form of resistance to anything" (235). Nathan Goldman argues that when Rooney's characters make observations like that it reads as satire, as though she is gently mocking her young, sheltered protagonist's grandiose world views, so a dissonance is produced when she herself sincerely expresses similar political views, creating a sense that her work is "earnestly uncertain about any value" that it might have and thus "animated by…ambivalence" ("Conventional"). Jane Hu similarly argues Rooney creates a paradoxical effect within her work because while she peppers social critique throughout her novels, the engines that drive them are the compelling love stories she writes, with most readers drawn to

her work, according to Hu, because they want to know if the characters "will get together at the end" ("Novels"), the appeal thus being the emotional journeys she seems to bemoan. According to Fredric Jameson, under late capitalism all art, even art that aims to question to dominant social order, will be "taken in stride by society" (1859) and ultimately turned into just another commodity to be sold. Rooney, in her ambivalence about the success of her novels, could serve as a case study for Jameson's observation. Indeed, after writing a profile on her, Lauren Collins was struck by both the radical nature of her politics and the irony that an avowed "Marxist ended up writing a book that sits alongside body lotion and silk pyjamas in *GQ*'s '30 Fail-Safe Gifts for Her' guide" ("Head").

Rooney's popularity means that she is likely to become, on an international scale, a representative of Irish literature and what is striking about this is how un-Irish her work reads. Adam Mars-Jones has noted that "Irish writing often makes a conscious effort to brand itself as such. Rooney does not. Her diction is low-key, the rhythms uninsistent [sic]." Mars-Jones contrasts Rooney's use of language with an incident in Joyce's *Portrait* where Stephen Dedalus and his English college dean debate the merits of word "tundish [sic]," Dublin slang, over the standardized English word "funnel" and he argues that this creates a sense that there is no "sociolinguistic significance" or weight in the language that she uses ("Time"). Christine Smallwood similarly argues that Rooney's "paragraphs are built for the Instagram age. They are as plain as white walls" ("Expectations"), and elsewhere it has been speculated that "muting the voice on the page" and curtailing any "regional sounds" (Schwartz "Great") has played a factor in her broad, transnational appeal, which reads as though the loss of cultural identity associated with globalisation has extended to the language employed by Rooney. This is to say that one of the most acclaimed novelists to emerge from Ireland after the Celtic Tiger doubts the extent to which her work carries any social or cultural weight, an attitude reflected in her prose style.

In 2011 Derek Hand warned that after the Celtic Tiger the “drivers of aesthetic judgement” within Irish literature could be determined by “vulgar fiscal forces” (291). Hand’s warning now reads as prescient for two reasons. As Ireland’s sense of self became more and more defined by the state of the country’s economy it is unsurprising that this is what the country’s literature becomes preoccupied with. It is therefore perhaps appropriate that the most successful literary author to emerge from this Ireland is the one that has the broadest popular appeal.

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