STUDI IRLANDESI
A JOURNAL OF IRISH STUDIES

Firenze University Press
https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/bsfm-sijis

Citation: K. Thurlow (2020) Empathy in Exile: Edna O'Brien, Donal Ryan and the Contemporary Irish Novel. *Sijis* 10: pp. 115-130. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/SIJIS-2239-3978-11756

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Empathy in Exile: Edna O'Brien, Donal Ryan and the Contemporary Irish Novel

Kaitlin Thurlow
University of Massachusetts Boston (<kaitlin.thurlow@umb.edu>)

Abstract:

This paper explores how empathy and exile are represented as narrative strategies in Edna O'Brien's *The Little Red Chairs* and Donal Ryan's *From a Low and Quiet Sea*. I argue that post-Celtic Tiger economy novels of the recent past are turning to a more global, universal and empathic Irishness in order to shed light on the problems of nationhood, gender and identity. Both authors use poetic forms of literary mythmaking, fairy tale or fable to imagine future possibilities, they employ free indirect style to inhabit a character's inner state of mind and use collective witness testimonials and self-reflection in order to engage with the present. This study links research on narrative empathy with spatial, post-colonial and feminist theory to propose innovations in contemporary Irish fiction.

Keywords: Alterity, Empathy, Exile, Narrative Strategy, Post-Celtic Tiger

> We encounter the stranger in others in order to uncover the hidden, untransacted parts of ourselves.
> Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (1988)

1. Introduction: Roots of Disconnection, Multiculturalism and Transnationalism in the Contemporary Irish Novel

In a 2018 review of *Connect*, Julian Gough made a "public apology to Anne Enright and John Banville and Colm Tóibín" (Conroy 2018, 2) to reconcile a statement he had made about novels with regressive or nostalgic themes set in Ireland. To amend this assessment and address what he saw as the current "crisis of meaning", Gough decided to write the book that he had wanted to read. In *Irish Literature in the Celtic Tiger Years (1990-2018*): *Gender, Bodies, Memory*, Susan Cahill points to the controversial 2010 blogpost, when Gough asserted, "'If there is a movement in Ireland, it is backwards. Novel after novel is set in the nineteen seventies, sixties and fifties. Reading award winning Irish literary fiction, you wouldn't know television had

been invented'" (2011, 6). In *Connect,* Gough reflected on this "crisis of meaning" in order to write about underlying issues of entrenched tribalism, social isolation, seismic shifts in institutional power and the influence of technology on our lack of ability to communicate and empathize with others.

Along with problems of social connection, Ireland has had to readdress the issue of identity and belonging in the wake of the 2004 Citizenship referendum. In an attempt to reinforce a more "monocultural" Ireland, the nation became "hosts to foreign guests" states Pilar Villar-Argáiz in her introduction to *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland: The Immigrant in Contemporary Irish Literature* (2014, 5). The nation became more polarized in its views towards an influx of immigrants seeking asylum and employment in a downturned economy. From 1995 to 2000, more than 250,000 people immigrated to Ireland, including European Nationals and political refugees, causing a new reversal of emigration. These strains began to divide the twenty-first century debate over interculturalism into an opposing dialectic (5). As presented by Declan Kiberd, one side argued a more liberal model of the immigrant's representation in contemporary Ireland, a model as one that is a more "inclusive and empathic" (6). Critics of this inclusive point of view challenge the negative effects of globalization with hostility, xenophobia and exclusion of diasporic communities and argue against the notion of Ireland as hospitable, welcoming nation. As writers address contemporary social issues in an attempt to grapple with the "crisis of meaning" and with the "failure to connect", the issue of immigration presents a way to empathically respond. Turning to the "other" as a catalyst of self-reflection and re-imagining of identity, Irish authors are writing from a place that is firmly grounded in the present.

In this essay, I focus on two contemporary novels that foreground the subject of the exile who is navigating trauma. In order to confront the present challenges of multicultural Ireland and the UK they employ empathic, multi-faceted and innovative narrative strategies to address problems of nationhood, gender and identity. In Donal Ryan's *From a Low and Quiet Sea* (2018) and Edna O'Brien's *The Little Red Chairs* (2015) the authors take up the complexity of the global immigrant and refugee's experience to shed light on the problems of reconciliation with the past and of the difficulties of belonging as a person living in exile. Indeed, they exemplify how contemporary Irish authors have revisited the concept of exile, (and self-exile) to grapple with how issues of racism, poverty and exploitation hold a mirror to social problems in a rapidly evolving nation.

2. Narrative Empathy and the Exile

Colum McCann is perhaps the most prominent of contemporary Irish writers associated with employing empathy as a narrative strategy in his work. In his selection of essays, *Letters to a Young Writer* (2017), McCann argues against the advice "write what you know" as a way to encourage writers to form a more outward exploration of lived experience. "The only true way to expand your world is to inhabit an otherness beyond ourselves", he contends, "There is one simple word for this: *empathy*. Don't let them fool you. Empathy is violent. Empathy is tough. Empathy can rip you open. Once you go there, you can be changed" (12). For the skeptic who might misinterpret empathy as nostalgia or sentimentalism, he advises new creative writers to seek out source material from something or someone they don't yet know. McCann's recent novels, *Let the Great World Spin* (2009) and *TransAtlantic* (2013), apply his own advice as a directive in order to "weave together the stories of several characters told from various perspectives and in different authorial voices" (Lovell 2013, 3). To write fully from another perspective, he had to insist on embodying their frame of mind. McCann has described empathy as "the ability to step

with agility and decency into the shoes of someone else. The ability also to find ourselves in the stories of others" (O'Neill 2018, 4). By emphasizing "agility" and "decency" in embodying this form of perspective taking, McCann suggests a more urgent form of imagining another's inner world, one with a robust and respectful deference to another's experience, especially towards the exile who is in a precarious or traumatized circumstance.

Recent studies of empathy's application to narrative form borrow from new research on neurology, psychology and narratology. Though first developed in theories on aesthetics and art historical analysis, empathy and its inclusion in literary criticism served as a way to provoke altruism and other prosocial behaviors in the reader. According to Suzanne Keen, in a "Theory of Narrative Empathy", "the word empathy is a relatively young term, entering English in the early twentieth century as a coined translation of the German word Einfühlung. Aspects of empathy have been described by philosophers since the days of Adam Smith and David Hume under the older term sympathy" (226). Recent translations of late nineteenth century German essays also support our understanding of "the impact of spatial forms, and our readiness to describe aesthetic objects in terms drawn from the vocabulary of human moods and emotions" (Wilkinson 1995, 417). Keen describes empathy as "a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading" (Keen, 208). What do O'Brien and Ryan do in these two novels to motivate a "spontaneous sharing of affect" (*ibidem*)? To borrow from Keen, empathy is provoked by placing us in the mind of the narrator, by witnessing another's emotional state or in other words to stand in his or her shoes.

The intersection of Irish local identities with the influx of exiled immigrant characters in each novel offer a space for empathy to transpire as characters begin to heal through shared narratives of suffering. O'Brien and Ryan offer an empathic rendering of the complexity of moral life in a shifting the unstable global space of the exile. Like Colum McCann's weaving together of authorial voices, they center on rich collection of characters brought together through the circumstances of fate. In *From a Low and Quiet Sea* this complexity is encapsulated in the character Farouk's reflection: "if you observe a man closely and properly you'll eventually come to know the shade of his soul. No soul is brilliant white, save for the souls of infants. But there are men alive who will do evil without pause, who are without mercy, and there are men alive who would rather die than harm another, and all of the rest of us fall somewhere in between"(Ryan 2018, 13).

In this essay, I examine how the two authors employ three similar empathic narrative strategies in their structure. Both novels enter into the realm of poetic language by using a form of literary mythmaking, fairy tale or fable in order to imagine future possibilities. The authors weave a collection of polyphonic third-person and first-person narratives to fully develop the individual major characters while the role of minor supporting characters (who are often displaced or marginalized) are rendered equally in their attention to detail. Lastly, the central characters begin to restore their fractured lives through shared narrative and witness testimonials as an empathic strategy to confront and heal their own traumas.

In *From a Low and Quiet Sea*, Ryan uses a free indirect style to portray a displaced and traumatized Syrian doctor. With this narrative strategy in the first section of the novel, "Farouk", Ryan intimately places us in the mind of a man in a precarious state. In *How Fiction Works*, James Wood elaborates how this technique functions in the novel: "Through free indirect style, we see things through the character's eyes and language but also through the author's eyes. We inhabit omniscience and partiality at once" (2008, 11). According to Wood, through dramatic irony we can anticipate how a life altering decision awaits as Farouk is subjected to a series of

violent images. This begins to happen when "a gap opens up between the author and character, and the bridge – which is free indirect style itself – between them simultaneously closes that gap and draws attention to its distance" (*ibidem*).

In *The Little Red Chairs,* Edna O'Brien employs a similar narrative strategy with her protagonist, Fidelma, who resolves the complications of her own exile and banishment from her homeland by encountering and engaging in empathic testimonial sharing with war torn refugees. In both cases, shared encounters with exiled persons suggest the authors' conscious engagement with representing those facing global displacement.

Edward Said expresses the complexity of representing the exile in his essay, "Reflections on Exile", when he describes the transitional nature of space and the alienation of leaving one's home. Within this space, the refugee, one who has little or no control of his circumstances, experiences alienation and lives in suspended animation. "Exile is life lived outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal, but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew" (2000, 186).

In a 2004 review of *Exile, Emigration and Irish Writing*, Michael Kenneally notes author Patrick Ward's exhaustion with the term "exile" as a literary trope. The exile "needs to be broadened to accommodate such iterations as emigration, migration, displacement, banishment, and expatriation" (146) and often fails to critique the inherent causes of these issues such as colonization and mass emigration. Ward suggests that the exile is inherently woven into the fabric and historically rooted into Irish aesthetic expression. "For hundreds of years, the consequences of dislocation, banishment, wandering and negotiating 'otherness' have been a central if not *the* defining factor in the Irish experience" (150). With a focus on the Irish emigrant in this critique, these novels begin to offer a new way of negotiating the identity of the other.

Acting out the difficult circumstances of traumatized persons reveals the ways in which affect and empathy are narrated, how characters address their exile, fail to assimilate and hang adrift in identity in limbo between the past and a difficult to imagine future. Within open and closed spaces their sense of time and their identities are malleable and permeable. They oscillate between an attitude of skepticism and a longing for inclusion. Said describes how assimilation is complicated by the exile's relation to space. "Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience" (Said 2000, 185).

3. Narrative Strategies in The Little Red Chairs

O'Brien's novel begins with the story of Fidelma, a 40 year-old woman who lives in a small fictional Irish village named Cloonoila. A self-described healer/sex therapist, Vladmir Dragan, arrives as a mysterious blow-in and gains the trust of the village with his alluring, mystical sensibility. Fidelma's stagnant marriage to the much older Jack is upended by this "unwelcome newcomer". She finds herself in the vulnerable position of falling under his spell and confesses to him that she longs to have a child after two failed pregnancies with Jack. Vlad's healing nature causes her to overlook his occasional outbursts.

En route to visit the grave of William Butler Yeats, Vlad is abruptly arrested in front of the village onlookers. What she doesn't know is that Vlad is in fact a war criminal hiding in plain sight, a character O'Brien based on the life of Serbian general Radovan Karadžić. Unfortunately, Fidelma discovers the secrets of his past too late. In her review of the novel, "Healing and Horror Sit Side by Side in *The Little Red Chairs*" Annalisa Quinn outlines how the author subtly reveals the dark side of his character by hinting at his violent nature. Also known as "Vuk" a Serbian

nickname for wolf, Vlad perplexes his landlady by reading the poems from his journal which are full of images of bullets and strapping wolves. Puzzled, she expects him to write more in the style of his supposed literary hero, Yeats who leans towards the style of "wandering waters in the pools of Glencar" (Quinn 2016). With Vlad, O'Brien set out to explore how good and evil can coexist within one person. The complexity of this duality is revealed through narrative. Quinn argues, "Vlad is more than just a monster in a mask, who smiles […] and is a villain. He *does* heal his patients, and this duality reveals the way evil can coexist with grace and empathy […] His healing hands are also butcher's hands" (*ibidem*).

Fidelma and Vlad's affair turns out to short lived, and the drama is compounded by the scandal of Vlad's arrest in Cloonoila. His comrades arrive to seek revenge with a traumatic assault resulting in the loss of her pregnancy. Fleeing to London, her only recourse is to immerse herself in a community of hidden immigrants who work as night cleaners at a bank. At a safe house community centre, Fidelma comes to terms with her own binary feelings of shame and guilt by witnessing other's traumatic personal testimonials. Her remorse seems to pale in comparison to those who are the victims of genocide and violence. But she, too, has experienced a despicable trauma and begins to repair her life in this community of exiles.

Recent scholarship on O'Brien's earlier novels map out a new way of addressing the theme of failed romance scripts and how they have evolved in her work. Elizabeth Weston's 2010 article "Constitutive Trauma in Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls* Trilogy: The Romance of Reenactment," reads O'Brien's novel through developments in trauma theory, "turning life into a reenactment of the past rather than a process of change" (83). Often framed as a *Bildungsroman*, *The Country Girls* upends the trope of coming of age development with the two protagonists, Caithleen (Kate) and Baba who fail to develop agency as young adults as they cycle through unfulfilling relationships. By this reenacting of childhood traumas, Caithleen narrates the cycle of "escaping a violent alcoholic father and unhappy mother […] trying to repair the pain of unmet childhood needs through losing herself in a relationship with a caretaking man, which ends in disaster every time" (*ibidem*).

In *The Little Red Chairs*, O'Brien challenges this notion of Irish women reenacting a series of romance scripts Weston lays out in her analysis of *The Country Girls*. Fidelma endures her own traumas and enacts a way to rewrite the failed double romance disaster script of her mature husband Jack and the sex therapist, healer and war criminal Vlad. She begins to embody a sense of agency by immersing herself in a new community of migrants who are attempting to start over in their new home. Though London may have at first provided escape for Fidelma as a way to flee a shameful and violent episode in her past, she finds a kind of humble redemption living among like-minded souls who are reconstructing a new beginning.

In her new life, she leaves behind the relative comfort and identity as a former shop keeper and wife. By extracting herself from her former life, she erases her identity as member of the Cloonoila community. As a night cleaner, Fidelma becomes invisible, anonymous and unattached to her former self. With the assistance of two references from home, she slowly embarks on a new found identity at her new job. Window and surface cleaning acts to wipe away the ingrained dust covering of her former self. In this passage, she catches herself in a state of transformation: "In her blue tunic and her hair drawn back severely, [her friend] Dara would hardly recognize her now. Not that she looked in mirrors, but occasionally, she caught sight of herself in one of the big windows that looked out onto the Thames, the water a sheet of dark at night" (O'Brien 2015, 175). Time, for Fidelma, like the exilic sense of space, becomes as Edward Said suggests "decentered, contrapuntal" (Said 2000, 186). In the chapter fittingly called "Dust", she tries to hold on to her transient cleaning job despite a number of arbitrary obstacles placed in front of her by petty supervisors: "[…] she endured everything, so as to cling onto this job. She forgot

to eat, she forgot to pray, she forgot the seasons, although once, snow drops appeared in her mind and she reckoned that she must have sighted clumps of them, under trees in the part, milk-white, with their mantles of drooping green" (O'Brien 2015, 185-186).

4. Realism, Folklore and Myth

In her examination of Irish women writers and the short story, Elke D'hoker detects underneath Edna O'Brien's prevalent style of realism "a thin veneer covering an underlying symbolic structure, which dramatizes recurrent psychic patterns and processes" (2016, 147). In her analysis of the author, "Edna O'Brien's Desiring Subjects", D'hoker, quoting Sinéad Mooney outlines the underlying "archetypal patterns that are contained in the myths and fairy tales of Western culture" (*ibidem*). This structure is explored further in a number of chapters in *The Little Red Chairs.* At the outset of the novel, O'Brien overlays the description of the village setting with intertextual references to folklore in order to set a mysterious and ominous tone. An epigraph from the Serbian saga, *The Mountain Wreath* opens the novel, "The wolf is entitled to the lamb" (O'Brien 2015, 1). The introduction in the first chapter, "Cloonoila" (3) borrows from the text of the ancient epic, Gilgamesh to draw a parallel to Vlad: "The dirt of his travels, Gilgamesh washed from his hair, all the soiled garments he cast them off, clean new clothes he put on" (*ibidem*). By the time he makes his way to the village, this curious traveler takes the form of the mischievous shapeshifter, "The Pooka Man":

> […] there would be those who reported strange occurrences on that same winter evening; dogs barking crazily as if there was thunder, and the sound of the nightingale whose song and warblings were never heard so far west. The child of a gipsy family, who lived in a caravan by the sea, swore she saw the Pooka Man coming through the window at her, pointing a hatchet. (4)

Ron Rosenbaum, in his *Smithsonian Magazine* review of *The Little Red Chairs* notes the author's uncanny twist on a creature from Irish folklore. A Pooka Man is "a precursor of terrible tidings […] sometimes a reversal in fortune for the better – but not often when he has a hatchet in his hand" (2016). O'Brien's use of myth and folklore upend how narratives of evil circulate and morph as they are embodied in human form.

Throughout the novel, myths and fairy tales re-appear and often work as a device to assist in enacting an alternative future or an imagined possibility for minor characters experiencing trauma or displacement. Little goes right for Fidelma until she befriends a young undocumented immigrant named Mistletoe. As she begins to become familiarized with her own routine, she empathizes with Mistletoe's isolated existence. The two begin to stage getaway fantasies by creating a series of whimsical drawings imagining exotic scenes of the two together as "voyagers setting out for distant places" (O'Brien 2015, 199). They record the titles of their stories, "Mistletoe and Fidelma on their way to China with scenery replete with pagodas and palm trees" (*ibidem*) and establish an unlikely bond of friendship through a generative experience of shared narrative. Mistletoe's drawings are later discovered by her protective father who fears his daughter is being brainwashed. This imagining appears as an intrusion on the father and causes him to abruptly sever their relationship. Fidelma suffers the loss just as deeply as Mistletoe. O'Brien describes how the lights dim on their ability to imagine an alternative future, "At the very last moment, Mistletoe turned and waved. It was a wan wave, identical to when they first met, a wave bringing the curtain down on their world of make-believe" (210). As the relationship is severed, her empathic connection with Mistletoe compounds Fidelma's grief over losing a child and leaving her more vulnerable and wary of trusting others.

In "Strangers in Our Mist", his review of O'Brien's novel, James Wood suggests that the local in fiction has become more global, even in a small somewhat cloistered Irish village. Though the novel begins in Ireland it soon begins to broaden in scope to link smaller, individual perspectives into larger network of global interconnectedness. A gauze of provincialism may distract the reader at the outset. Wood argues that through these familiar seeming characters, we can relate to the unfamiliar more empathically. "*The Little Red Chairs* is obviously about displacement and immigration, obviously about the toll of war and its murderers and victims, it is also about how the tentacles of globalization reach everywhere, even into the corners of provincial Ireland" (2016, 11). He notes that through adeptness in writing in a realist fashion, "O'Brien pays sympathetic attention to many different lives, from ordinary Irish villagers (the priest, the nun, the draper's wife) to refugees, migrants, and displaced workers in London" (2). In her late style, "Her novels […] no longer scandalize, but they have retained their deeper, authentic radicalism: they commit themselves to exploring the lives of women as gambles on freedom and acts of rebellion" (3). Furthermore, Wood reminds us, O'Brien retains empathy for the supporting roles of women, a descriptive animation of minor characters and a "brilliant ear for offhand description, the kind that immediately situates us in a location, or in a consciousness" (4). An example of Wood's characterization is the description of one of Fidelma's allies, Sister Bonaventure. The nun is described as both whimsical and practical at the same time. "She wore a navy skirt, navy jumper, black stockings and good strong black shoes for the journeys she made to isolated places, up by roads and bog roads, where she wouldn't dare risk her little Mini, her chariot of freedom" (O'Brien 2015, 6-7).

5. Women and Narrative Spaces

Fidelma's disconnected existence in London leaves her with a desire to seek the companionship of others in similar circumstances. At a community centre, she eventually finds this support. O'Brien describes the space as full of "the flotsam of the world, unable to go home, wherever home is" (203). Through group discussions, an opportunity arises for the women to bear witness to stories of their fractured lives. Fidelma's story begins by hinting at the late capitalist repercussions of Post-Celtic Tiger depression affecting both urban and rural Ireland: "Many things have changed for the better, more so in the cities; in the countryside there is a lot of prejudice and they crave scandal as if it were nectar" (*ibidem*). Details of her circumstances seem trivial compared to the stories of a collection of refugees, some of whom were survivors and victims of Vlad's genocidal war in Bosnia. Reluctantly, she shares her shame to the group in the form of a confession:

> I ruined things for my husband and for our reputation, by being faithless. It turned out that a new man came amongst us in the guise of a prophet, but he had done an appalling thing, had ordered and orchestrated thousands of deaths, in his own blighted land. I feel that by having been with him I am an accomplice to those appalling things. I feel a guilt that is, if you like, counterfeit guilt and so I stand accused. On my last morning, I stood on a hillock outside the convent, where I had been given shelter after my downfall, and spoke to the landscape itself, saying I wanted to cleanse my house, my soul, myself. (215)

This confession, though complicated by her own feelings of complicity with evil, suggests Fidelma's willingness to confront the past and develop agency in a space in communion with refugees escaping their own traumas. Her guilt as a fallen woman in this space begins with personal narrative. Testimonial sharing dissipates her shame by initiating a form of self-healing.

She develops a tentative sense of confidence through sharing her experience, perhaps O'Brien's acknowledgement that women's voices are evolving into a more prominent role as storytellers and writers. In *Inventing Ireland*, Declan Kiberd offers some historical perspective for what underlies her motives: "In the literature of the emerging nation, woman reverted to being a site of contest rather than an agent of her own desire. This created a 'double colonialism' that Irish women experience in the private sphere as well as the public" (qtd. in Weston 2010, 105). Kiberd's assertion provides context for the complexities of Fidelma's situation and elicits empathy for Irish women who are "twice victimized" (*ibidem*).

In the wake of Mary Robinson's presidency in the 1990s, Irish women writers grappled with themes of social change by writing in a neo-gothic style, staging their novels in familiar, domestic settings. Anne Fogarty describes this as a type of domestic horror, a desire for mobility and a quest for escape from the home. Underlying this thematic turn was the notion that women were far less likely to be political or financially empowered by the Celtic Tiger boom that followed. She argues the neo-gothic novels written during this period "invariably concentrate on taboo subjects and use their symbolic resources to probe the fundamental anxieties of a culture" (Fogarty 2000, 81). In *The Little Red Chairs*, neo-gothic themes re-occur in a new treatment of the domestic space, the community centre, where women are extracted from their isolation in the home. Scandalous secrets are exposed outside the home allowing for empathic narrative sharing among the dislocated.

Within the last fifty years, women's writing has found a more generative place in Ireland in the documenting of personal narratives and witness testimonials. Anne Mulhall argues that articulation of experiences democratizes auto-biographical writing and offers an inclusive form for articulating the feminist concept of the how the "personal is political" (2018, 383). In her essay "Life Writing and Personal Testimony, 1970-Present", women's voices and access to representation are varied by class and other forms of institutional power. Mulhall points to Gayatri Spivak's observation of witness testimonial as form of expression that crosses boundaries of class: "As distinct from autobiography, testimony is the genre of the subaltern giving witness to oppression to the less oppressed other" (384). In a culture where women's voices have been "subordinated and silenced, life writing has emerged as a form for transformation and inclusion" (383). In *The Little Red Chairs,* Fidelma's testimonial sharing among refugees offers an opportunity for her to empathize with other exiles. Opening up about a shared trauma is a way to articulate and uncover her own inner conflicts by speaking of the shame and feelings of inadvertent complicity with Vlad's past crimes. Opening the doors of expression where women's voices are "vividly represented [in] spaces and places, in tandem with identity themes […] work out boundary-crossing potentials for connection, communication, and change" (Keen 2006, 228). Fidelma finds acceptance for herself and a newfound identity in the community centre. In the final moments of the novel, she feels she is no longer an exile. "I am not a stranger here anymore" (O'Brien 2015, 293) she shares in the final chapter, "Home".

6. Narrative Strategies in From a Low and Quiet Sea *(2018)*

In *From a Low and Quiet Sea,* Farouk, Lampy and John are all in their own way exiled and searching for home and belonging. Donal Ryan's choice to foreground Farouk at the outset of the novel is an example of what Edna Longley describes as the Irish writers' move towards a "cultural coexistence rather than cultural exchange" (qtd. in Estévez Saá 2014, 80). Reading a news article inspired the author to write a fictional story from the perspective of a Syrian doctor who loses his wife and daughter on a harrowing boat passage. Farouk, who at

great risk convinces his wife that they must leave Syria and pays a shifty character to transport them to safety on an overcrowded boat. Ryan suggests within Farouk's harrowing story there is an empathic pull of human connectivity. The novel opens with a striking parable: "If a tree is starving, its neighbours will send it food. No one really knows how this can be, but it is. Nutrients will travel in the tunnel made of fungus from the roots of a healthy tree to its starving neighbour" (Ryan 2018, 3).

While crossing the Mediterranean Sea, Farouk's wife shares an ominous fable with her daughter about a king who tries to court a suitor with jewels and other amusements. Indifferent to his charm, she becomes more interested in feeding a small bird who visits her window sill. The king decides to hire an archer to kill the bird and all birds obstructing his path. Farouk, uneasy about his wife's unusual choice of a soothing bedtime story, comforts his daughter by telling her it's only a fable, "Its moral is how useless it is to blame others for things not being as we'd like them to be" (29). A passenger then informs the passengers, "There are no life jackets on this boat. There is no captain. There is no crew. There is nothing on this boat but us" (30). Adrift in the sea, Farouk's family and the other passengers are in an indeterminate void. The boat, formerly a space of potential and hope, waivers and trembles on the open sea. Gaston Bachelard in his essay "The Dialectics of Inside and Outside", included in *The Poetics of Space*, aptly describes how we experience a feeling of disorientation in the precarious border between home and the unknown. "Intimate space loses its clarity, while exterior space loses its void, void being the raw material of possibility of being. We are banished from the realm of possibility" (1964 [1958], 218). Farouk and his family have entered into the space of the exile who have become as Edward Said's describes "[…] nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal" (Said 2002, 186). Ryan's inclusion of fables in Farouk's story can be employed to imagine alternative futures other than the instability and the reality of his trauma in the moment. After the boat tragedy, he begins to revisit the bird fable in order to construct a new narrative of survival. "Farouk enjoyed the telling of the story. Each time he told it something new occurred to him, some different meaning […]" (31).

Ryan's narrative strategy in *From a Low and Quiet Sea* differs significantly from the polyphonic style of one of his first novels, *The Spinning Heart*. In his 2017 article, "Ruined Futures: Gentrification as Famine in Post-Celtic Tiger Irish Literature", Jason Buchanan describes the novel as one that "unfolds via twenty-one first-person narratives [to] provide a patchwork picture of post-Tiger life" (62). *From a Low and Quiet Sea* is paired down to three main characters, all men, who readers may not anticipate intersecting. After Farouk's story, told in the third-person, we next shift to the 23 year-old Lampy, who is unable to actualize or even envision a future for himself. Lampy is the most realized character in the novel and Ryan utilizes free indirect style to place us closer to his motivations and inner conflicts. His actions are frustrating as he can't seem to get out of his own way. Yet as readers, we are privy to his inner conflicts and the obstacles that impede him, especially the advice he receives from his grandfather, Pop, and a failed relationship to a girlfriend, Chloe, who leaves him behind in frustration.

In *The Spinning Heart,* characters have difficulty imagining a future in the rapidly declining economy of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. Buchanan argues that fiction during this period re-enacted some of the themes of social and economic paralysis of the mid-nineteenth-century Irish famine. The novel depicts a place where "rituals and routines are disconnected from a grounded relationship to the space on which communities construct their identities. Ideas of home, space, nation, and community are reduced to a system that uses land as a mechanism to accumulate capital" (53). In his latest novel, Ryan engages with the inherited repercussions of Ireland's "ruined futures" more closely. By depicting the intersection of unlikely strangers

drawn into despair by the circumstances of fate, he begins to include and empathize with the displaced "other" who is trying to make a foothold in Ireland's precarious economy.

7. Fairy Tales, Thisness and Order

In the next section of the novel, Lampy innocently reminisces about his love connection though a fairy tale. "The first conversation he'd ever had with Chloe was about the three little pigs" (Ryan 2018, 60). In this scene we witness Lampy's naïveté, as Chloe impresses him with a riff of alternative endings to the *Three Little Pigs*, seeming to prefer the most fatalistic of the lot. Lampy is seduced by her audaciousness and falls quickly into infatuation. He fails to see how Chloe's ability to write her own preferred ending of a story foreshadows his own life's trajectory which leads to frustration and disappointment.

Chloe and Lampy's relationship is short-lived and he attempts to deny the devastation of his wounded heart. She leaves their village for a brighter future at Trinity College and naturally finds a more compatible mate. We wonder, was he being manipulated by Chloe when she breaks off her relationship with him? Ryan's free indirect style draws us into the character's inner thoughts describing bodily details to intimately engage the reader with his emotional state of mind. When Lampy thinks of Chloe he catches himself in a state of despair: "He was stopped on the stairs now, halfway down, and the knuckles of his left hand were white from the force of grip on the bannister. The thought of Chloe always stopped him, paralysed him" (61). After the breakup, Lampy is speechless: "There was a lump in his throat, an actual lump, and it was blocking his windpipe, it seemed because he was having trouble breathing properly; his heart was beating hard and irregular in his chest […]" (63).

We can empathize with his humiliation when Ryan focuses on the minor details acutely felt in Lampy's mind and body. As he pleads with Chloe to take him back after running into her at a take away counter, he is outnumbered by a number of her family members and friends who try to diffuse the situation. This compounds his isolation and desperation. In *How Fiction Works*, James Wood describes the concept of "thisness" as "any detail that draws abstraction toward itself […] or any detail that centers our attention with its concentration" (2008, 67). The emotion of the scene is rendered in Lampy's run on, inner monologue and lack of bodily control as he slips on a ketchup sachet:

> Her brothers stood between them in the chipper, blocking him, saying, Come on Lamp, don't be stupid, we don't want to fall out with you. And he took a swing at the eldest lad and missed, and he slipped on a ketchup sachet someone had opened and dropped, and he'd hopped off the floor of the chipper and the whole place laughed at him, and he saw from the ground that Chloe was standing near him and she was looking straight ahead and she had her hand to her face and her friend had her arm around her, as though to protect her, and he was saying, Chloe, please, just come outside with me a minute […]. (Ryan 2018, 64)

Wood traces this idea of "thisness" or *haecceitas* from the medieval theologian Duns Scotus.

Ryan's "concentration" on the ketchup sachet in this scene draws us from the abstraction of the mind into a concrete form of "thisness". The scene continues to compound his humiliation as he ends up in an altercation with a foreign worker who tosses him out on the sidewalk. We begin to empathize with his heightened state of anxiety. During this expulsion, he describes his humiliation, "he was saying something in a high-pitched voice and Lampy couldn't make it out so he swung again and missed again and the chipper lad had him in a chokehold and he was out the door and in to the street and he was falling, falling" (*ibidem*).

Lampy later reflects on a time when he returned home and overheard his grandfather, Pop, downstairs on the phone chastising Chloe's mother about the whole affair. In this scene, we learn how protective Pop is of Lampy: "He thought of the day Pop rang her mother. What possessed him?" (65). Frustrated, he hurriedly interrupts the call and lashes out at Pop who "was on his back foot, wordless now, embarrassed suddenly, and Lampy nearly hit him but he caught himself in time, and instead he said I'm not your boy Pop. I'm not your boy. And he left those words between them and he went out the door, and his grandfather didn't call him back" (65-66).

The question of the identity of Lampy's father underlies the secrets that paralyze the two characters in this chapter. Lampy's frustration and Pop's inability to legitimately act in the role as a parent are a central conflict in the novel. What we learn in the penultimate section of the novel is how Lampy, John and Farouk intersect. In the only first-person testimonial, "John", Ryan shifts the tone again in the third section. Though it is not clear why these narratives are separated, we become immersed in each man's story. Ryan's use of both free indirect style and first person narrative are central to his empathic treatment of each man's struggle.

"John" begins with a self-reflective confessional as a way to seek redemption. "This confessional is fine and wide […]" he proposes, suggesting we are about to embark on a long, sordid and self-indulgent passage through the far reaches of his mind, "Bless me father, for I have sinned. I'll tell you them in order, one by one, and the roll of them is short, though each one might be made of a hundred parts or more" (105). One of reasons for his need to unburden himself stems from the trauma of losing his beloved older brother, Edward. This formative relationship and the subsequent loss of his beloved mentor still impacts him in adulthood:

> He was beautiful, even I knew that, and I only a wobbling grey gosling in the corner of the field he commanded, adoring him. I knew my parents loved him best and I didn't care; sure, how could it been otherwise? I had a devilish knack for it. (109)

John's first person narrative is as Wood describes "generally more reliable than unreliable". From this point of view, the character "tells us his story from a position of belated enlightenment" (2008, 5). By showing us a long view of his life and in the form of a confessional, we are more intimately acquainted with him as if he is sharing a testimonial.

Reading *From a Low and Quiet Sea,* writer Martina Evans was reminded "of something Sylvia Beach said about James Joyce, 'He told me that he had never met a bore', I don't think Donal Ryan ever met a bore either, because he can blow attractive life in any number of characters, no matter how compromised, mean or dreary" (Ryan 2017). He manages to make unsavory men likable and multi-faceted. Suzanne Keen describes this as "authorial empathy" (2006, 215). With John, where there is little to empathize in how he conducts his life, Ryan uncovers how his hardened exterior is grounded in a buried childhood trauma.

As John experiences turbulence on a flight, he begins to reflect on the consequences of his compartmented and unethical life as a lobbyist. He even qualifies his confessional to God as "offering this not in mitigation but only by way of explanation" (Ryan 2018, 106). He witnessed his father accumulate farmland in order to busy himself out of grief, even if it meant taking advantage of down and out farmers. We see how John takes a cue from observing his father and is driven to be a cold-hearted businessman. By doing so, he associates this direction in his life with a turn away from morality. The indoctrination into and seduction of the lure of capitalism is described in this passage, "I was given a tour of the vaults of a bank one time years later by a man who said he didn't believe in God […]. He put gold in my hand, that shining standard, a bar of it, and I felt its coldness on my skin, leaking into me (107). The man he calls "the little

alchemist", sells John the bar of gold for 40,000 pounds. He takes it out from time to time wishing for it to magically become a calf: "standing on my hands, placid and sinewed, graven by some magic from the gold, gleaming in a lightless place" (*ibidem*). Here, John engages a distorted imagined future in a myth of his own redemption.

For Farouk, Lampy and John, fables and fairy tales become an alternative narrative intersecting their own precarious fate, and a way to construct order out of the chaos in their lives. Historically, mythmaking has been a way to create meaning in times of crisis. In his 1923 essay "Ulysses, Order, and Myth", T.S. Eliot defended James Joyce's use of Homer's *Odyssey* as a structural device. He suggested myth is "simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (5). Representing the contemporary moment in fiction presents a set of analogous challenges. Indeed, the characters are searching for a way to establish control in their uncertain futures and with mythmaking, fairy tale and storytelling, they attempt to envision a future however they can construct it.

8. Intersections

In the final section of *From a Low and Quiet Sea*, "Lake Islands", Pop, also known as "Dixie Shanley," sets out on a walk where in free indirect style ruminates about his recent conflict and frustrations with Lampy. While opining to himself about his colorful neighbors, Mickey Briars, Ad Foyle and Herbie Grogan, he reflects on the quality that he most values in his grandson, a bond he shares with Lampy more than with his own daughter. "All the stories he had from last night were still untold, except to his daughter, but she didn't appreciate them, and damped the punchline always down to nothing, because in fairness to the boy he appreciated a good story, he got a kick out of some of the yarns he brought home from Ciss Brien's or the Half Barrell" (Ryan 2018, 157).

Ryan's use of the stream of consciousness to render his character's inner thoughts as well as Dixie's hyperbolic storytelling are grounded in his ability to tie language to place. He also pays close attention to the humor of the syntax of rural dialects to draw out the specificity of his characters. In an interview written after his novel *All We Shall Know*, which is set in his hometown, in North Tipperary, Nenagh, he elucidates on the specificity of place to render a character's voice. "I think [humor] often arises from the places my fiction is set and the way people communicate. We retained the syntax and inversions and tendency towards high drama and obfuscation and hyperbole of the Irish language in rural Ireland, and overlaid it to spectacular effect on our English. We speak in stories and play and joke and lie in every sentence […]" (Ryan 2017).

In the conclusion, Farouk, the widowed Syrian doctor, reappears as a semi-integrated "locum" at the hospital where Lampy's mother Florence works. He begins an unlikely courtship with her, offering to take her on drives throughout the countryside. This relationship uncovers a divide between the older, more conservative and the younger socially liberal generation's views towards the immigrant entering Ireland. Pop rewrites how a more traditional nationalist might read the "shadowy other", Farouk. As he arrives home, he sees two figures seated at the kitchen table and at first glance conjures an idealized image of an Irish family enjoying dinner by the fire. He believes the man sitting with his daughter is his grandson, but as he approaches, he realizes it is indeed Farouk and decides to let Florence have some space. Pop begins to reconcile his idealism about his Irish family hearth scenario at the dinner table and questions his assumptions about the plight of the refugee, his own ignorance and complicity in their exile. This passage suggests a more optimistic, liberal acceptance of another kind of blending of the Irish family:

Every foreigner had a story, a lament, and they had all to be taken with a pinch of salt or, even better, not at all. He wondered how it would go a Ciss's if Florence married a foreign Johnny, after all the jokes cracked he'd heard cracked there and all the jokes he'd cracked himself and all the talk along the years about keeping them out, about there not being space enough for all the maddening hordes […] The loudest mouths of all were the ones who'd never done a hand's turn their whole lives. (Ryan 2018, 161)

9. Conclusions

As outlined in a number of arguments in this essay, Edna O'Brien's *The Little Red Chairs* and Donal Ryan's *From a Low and Quiet Sea* employ affective narrative strategies by foregrounding exiled characters in a state of instability. With the globalization of Ireland, comprehensive anthologies such as *Literary visions of multicultural Ireland: the immigrant in contemporary Irish Literature* (Villar-Argáiz 2014) reflect this emerging form of representation. Some scholars urge others to include narrative empathy in a discussion of the exile in Irish literature. Katherine O'Donnell's essay in this anthology "The Parts: Whiskey, Tea and Sympathy," analyzes empathy in author Keith Ridgway's second novel. She discusses the history of "Irish empathy for black people" as being a key component in the construction of Irish political and cultural identity (188). The idea of "feeling with" the subject, and more generally the study of affect, she notes, is a dynamic interdisciplinary conversation beginning to evolve in a number of disparate fields such as literature, neuroscience and literary studies (199). O'Donnell urges more scholars to consider feminist scholar Breda Gray's work in this area as a way to employ empathy and affect for an "ethical response" to Irish literary criticism. Gray's essay, "Remembering a 'multicultural' future through a history of emigration: Towards a feminist politics of solidarity across difference" (2004), engages well with Edna Longley's concept of "cultural coexistence" rather than merely a cultural exchange to strive for new possibilities of representation.

As Gray points out, ethical questions arise in the analysis of literature written by authors who represent foreign subjects in their work, especially in the stories of the vulnerable and displaced refugee. However, employing feminist theory modeled on solidarity involves self-reflection. She notes, "empathy can involve identification that assimilates the other into the self, or identification that maintains the distance between the self and the other. When discussing empathy, therefore, the question of identification also arises. Identification as it operates across discourses and cultural differences has been a central concern of feminist theory for some time because of its centrality to politics, solidarity, and action" (421-422). Certainly Ryan and O'Brien's novels demonstrate the role that gender plays in the exile's ability to adapt in their new homeland and complicates our ability to apply fixed identity to another. An ethical response could be adapted for a gendered analysis of both novels. One might ask: had Farouk been a woman in *From a Low and Quiet Sea*, would he be able to imagine a future such as one that he might experience with Florence? We might imagine how O'Brien might re-write Fidelma's character in *The Little Red Chairs* if she were a displaced refugee repairing her life in Ireland.

Identity continues to remain a subject of reflection for writers in a time of transition for postcolonial Ireland. In an interview with Caitriona Moloney, included in Margarita Estévez Saá's article "Transnationalism and Transculturality in Twenty-First-Century Irish Novels", the author Éilís Ní Dhuibhne posited that postcolonial societies are in a continued state of questioning. In her novels, she remarked, this search is central to a postcolonial binary identity and a central theme of the contemporary fiction emerging out of Ireland. "I am interested in the duplicitousness, a split personality of the Irish psyche […]. Irishness is so dualistic: the duality of the North and South, Irish and English, Catholic and Protestant" (5-6) In *Fox, Swallow*

and Scarecrow, she engages with the complications of this dual identity in relation to the other. The novel "resolves to stage national and transnational identities as contacts and clashes feature prominently" (6).

In the article, "'The best banned in the land': Censorship and Irish Writing since 1950", Donal Ó Drisceoil reminds us of the challenges that contributed to issues of self-expression and identity for contemporary writers such as restricted access to publication. "[S]tate censorship that had cast a shadow over the Irish Literary landscape since 1930 eventually began to lift in the late 1960's" (2005, 146). The backlash against this mostly symbolic "Censorship of Publications Acts" (1929-1967) and the public hearings of the censorship board of the 1960s forged a new path for a younger generation of writers, including Donal Ryan. According to Ó Drisceoil, O'Brien, whose books were banned in Ireland in the 1960s, and McGahern who lost his teaching job after his novel *The Dark* (1965) was published, were instrumental in this cultural shift and its subsequent removal (157).

For Donal Ryan, reading John McGahern's novel *Amongst Women* (1990) was one of his primary inspirations to become a writer. As he remarked in a 30 March 2017 article, McGahern's writing had "a particular quality, beyond the limits of empathy, beyond the boundaries of easy explanation" (Ryan 2017). By studying McGahern's writing style, Ryan discovered a guiding principle for the stories of others in empathy. He suggests the universality of stories come from "common motivations and impulses, to love and be loved, to survive, to propagate, to find meaning for ourselves" (*ibidem*). Reflecting on McGahern's work, he learned to avoid absolute certainty and appropriation noting: "All fiction is guesswork […] each of us experiences the world in our own unique way, and none of us can be certain of the quality of the next person's experience" (*ibidem*).

In the foreword to *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland,* Declan Kiberd provides a historical framework for the continued emergence of what he posits as the "worlding of Irish writing" (2014, xii). However, his assertion that the "worlding of Irish writing" may have started long ago, it gives us a historical underpinning for a re-emergence of empathic representations of the exile occurring in contemporary Irish writing. Kiberd looked toward writers of the past to uncover how this trend is more deeply rooted in the Irish psyche. How is it that writers living in a more monocultural Ireland and "perhaps *because* of this" he writes, "managed to explore alterity?" (xvi). He urges, "If you want accounts of negotiations with the Other, you only have to read *Gulliver's Travels*, *Castle Racknet*, […] *Ulysses*, Beckett's writings and of course those of John McGahern" (*ibidem*). For further accounting of the expression of alterity, he looked for clarification from McGahern himself in order "to explain how a traditional Ireland that seemed monocultural could nonetheless produce so many people able to imagine all sorts of persons quite unlike themselves" (xvi-xvii). McGahern recounted his experience of growing up in Leitrim in the 1940s was in a sense a "rehearsal for emigration" (xvii). In McGahern's time, Kiberd notes "between 1921 and 1985 one in every two persons born in the Irish state had to leave it" (*ibidem*). Travelling ten miles by bike to another village, had felt like being in a foreign country, McGahern remembered: "The people's way of walking as well as talking, of holding their heads and moving their bodies – it was all so different that what you knew" (*ibidem*). Perhaps these formative observations had prepared him for an exceptional ability to stand in another's shoes and write with empathy on the experience of the other?

Works Cited

Bachelard Gaston (1964 [1958]), *The Poetics of Space,* English trans. by Maria Jolas,New York, Orion Press.
Buchanan Jason (2017), "Ruined Futures: Gentrification as Famine in Post-Celtic Tiger Irish Literature", *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 63, 1, 50-72, doi: 10.1353/mfs.2017.0004.
Cahill Susan (2011), "Introduction", in Ead., *Irish Literature in the Celtic Tiger Years 1990 to 2008: Gender, Bodies*, *Memory*, London, Bloomsbury, 1-28.
Conroy Catherine (2018), "Julian Gough: 'I want to make an apology to Anne Enright, John Banville…'", *The Irish Times*, 28 April, 1-5, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/julian-gough-i-want-to-make-an-apology-to-anne-enright-john-banville-1.3471343> (05/2020).
D'hoker Elke (2016), "Edna O'Brien's Desiring Subjects", in Ead., *Irish Women Writers and the Modern Short Story*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 141-175.
Eliot T.S. (1923), "Ulysses, Order, and Myth", *The Dial* LXXV, 5, 480-483.
Estévez Saá Margarita (2014), "Immigration in Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger novels", in Pilar Villar-Argáiz (ed.), 79-92.
— (2015), "Transnationalism and Transculturality in Twenty-First-Century Irish Novels", *Nordic Irish Studies* 14, 1-17.
Fogarty Anne (2000), "Uncanny Families: Neo-Gothic Motifs and the Theme of Social Change in Contemporary Irish Women's Fiction", *Irish University Review* 30, 1, 59-81, doi: 10.2307/25517126.
Gray Breda (2004), "Remembering a 'multicultural' future through a history of emigration: Towards a feminist politics of solidarity across difference", *Women's Studies International Forum* 27, 4, 413-429, doi: 10.1016/j.wsif.2004.10.009.
Keen Suzanne (2006), "A Theory of Narrative Empathy", *Narrative* 14, 3, 207-236, doi: 10.1353/nar.2006.0015.
Kenneally Michael (2004), "Review of *Exile, Emigration and Irish Writing*, by Patrick Ward", *New Hibernia Review* 8,1, 146-150.
Kiberd Declan (2014), "Foreword: The Worlding of Irish Writing", in Pilar Villar-Argáiz (ed.), xii-xvii.
Lovell Joel (2013), "Colum McCann's Radical Empathy", *New York Times Magazine*, 30 May, 1-5, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/02/magazine/colum-mccanns-radical-empathy.html> (05/2020).
McCann Colum (2017), *Letters to a Young Writer*, New York, Random House.
Mooney Sinéad (2009), "Edna O'Brien: 'A Rose in the Heart of New York'", in Cheryl Alexander Malcolm, David Malcolm (eds), *A Companion to the British and Irish Short Story*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 431-439.
Mulhall Anne (2018), " Life Writing and Personal Testimony, 1970-Present", in Heather Ingman, Clíona Ó Gallchoir (eds), *A History of Modern Irish Women's Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 383-409.
O'Brien Edna (2015), *The Little Red Chairs*, New York, Little, Brown and Company.
O'Donnell Katherine (2014), "The Parts: Whiskey, Tea, and Sympathy", in Pilar Villar-Argáiz (ed.), 188-200.
Ó Drisceoil Donal (2005), "'The best banned in the land': Censorship and Irish Writing since 1950", *The Yearbook of English Studies* 35, 146-160.
O'Neill Elizabeth (2018), "Is our empathy failing us?", *The Irish Examiner*, 24 January, 1-6, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/lifestyle/features/is-our-empathy-failing-us-824397.html> (05/2020).
Quinn Annalisa (2016), "Healing and Horror Sit Side by Side in *The Little Red Chairs*", *NPR National Public Radio*, 2 April, <https://www.npr.org/2016/04/02/472137289/healing-and-horror-sit-side-by-side-in-little-red-chairs?t=1586017873049Z> (05/2020).
Rosenbaum Ron (2016), "Novelist Edna O'Brien Explores the True Nature of Evil", *Smithsonian Magazine*, July, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/novelist-edna-obrien-true-nature-evil-180959499> (05/2020).

Ryan Donal (2017), "A Conversation with Donal Ryan", *PenguinCoUK*, 13 March 2017, <https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2017/donal-ryan-q-and-a.html> (05/2020).
— (2018), *From a Low and Quiet Sea*, London, Penguin Random House.
Said E.W. (2000), *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays,* Cambridge, Harvard UP.
Villar-Argáiz Pilar, ed. (2014), *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland: The Immigrant in Contemporary Irish Literature*, Manchester, Manchester UP.
Weston Elizabeth (2010), "Constitutive Trauma in Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls Trilogy*: The Romance of Reenactment", *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 29, 1, 83-105.
Wilkinson Robert (1995), "Review of *Empathy, Form and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics 1873-1893*", *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 35, 4, 417-421.
Wood James (2008), *How Fiction Works*, New York, Farrar Straus and Giroux.
— (2016), "Stranger in Our Midst: A war criminal rusticates in Edna O'Brien's *The Little Red Chairs*", *The New Yorker*, 18 April, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/04/25/edna-obriens-the-little-red-chairs> (05/2020).