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Cultural Representations in Irish Immigrants and Their Descendants in *Tréboles del Sur*, by Juan José Delaney

Norma Liliana Alfonso, Graciela Obert
Universidad Nacional de La Pampa
([<normaalfonso1@gmail.com>](mailto:normaalfonso1@gmail.com); [<graciela.obert@gmail.com>](mailto:graciela.obert@gmail.com))

Abstract:

Prospects of better living conditions attracted thousands of Irish emigrants to Argentina between 1830 and 1930. In a hopeful attempt to redefine their lives, the newcomers contributed to the formation of the identity and the progress of our country. Although they were far away from their homeland, most Irish-born people kept strong ties with their land and relatives back in Ireland. *Tréboles del Sur* (2014 [1994]) by contemporary Irish-Argentine writer Juan José Delaney is a collection of short stories which recount the life of Irish immigrants in Argentina and their descendants, ranging from the 1870s until 1983. This article aims at analyzing the representation of cultural aspects in those Irish immigrants. Stuart Hall's concepts of representation, cultural identity and diasporic subjects, Raymond Williams' concept of culture and the notion of cultural hybridity introduced by García Canclini are taken into account for the study. Our analysis is restricted to some of the fictional characters in Delaney's work. The immigrants' preservation of the links with their country of origin proves to be highly significant while forging bonds in a new environment.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Irish diaspora, Literature, Representation

1. Introduction

Throughout the nineteenth, and even in the first decades of the twentieth century, thousands of Irish emigrants, mostly Catholic, moved to England, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and “to a certainly remote country,” Argentina, attracted by the prospects of better living conditions (Delaney 2014, 7), as the economic, social, and political conditions in Ireland at the time were quite poor. However, a majority of the emigrants bound to Argentina came from the Irish Midlands (Westmeath, Longford, and Offaly) and from

Co. Wexford¹. They belonged to social segments in which the economic conditions were not the worst. Others left Ireland attracted by favourable descriptions from early emigrants.

In his Introduction to *Los irlandeses en la Argentina* (1987), Coghlan² recounts the stories of Irish emigrants and their descendants in Argentina, from the period previous to the Declaration of Independence in 1816 and extending to the beginnings of the twentieth century. Around 1810, some 500 Irish lived in the Río de la Plata region, including the prisoners that had been left behind after the British invasions of the Río de la Plata, which took place between 1806 and 1807. In general, those Irish men and women lost contact with their homeland and many hispanicized their surnames, which makes it difficult to trace their Irish ancestors³. Along the process of the rise of the Argentine Republic, the local population barely reached half a million inhabitants; therefore, immigration of European colonists was fostered with the aim of occupying the lands which, so far, were populated by the Indians. This political decision to promote immigration was established in the Argentine Constitution of 1853, which also stated that the protection of the law extended to all the inhabitants of the country, including foreigners.

According to Coghlan, the first Irish colonists in the Río de la Plata arrived with their families or married the daughters of other countrymen who had come before, and created a colony, thus strengthening the bonds that distinguished them from all the other colonies which made up the Argentine society of the times. The Irish came mainly from 1830 to 1930, with the largest movement taking place in 1850-1870. These waves of Irish immigration occurring from the third decade of the nineteenth century onwards were the result of special circumstances in Ireland: the 1801 Act of Union, which united the Kingdom of Great Britain and the Kingdom of Ireland to create the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland; the failure of the potato crops⁴; and the news that reached Ireland about the social and economic success of the Irish who had settled in the Río de la Plata region. News had spread that land in Argentina was relatively easy to acquire, and, in fact, by the mid-nineteenth century migration networks had been gradually established by Irish landowners, merchants and Catholic priests, who as *ingleses* were highly regarded by the local bourgeoisie. They actively hired family members, friends and neighbours in Ireland to help them on their sheep-farms in the pampas (Murray 2004), mostly

¹ For further details on how the Irish emigrants travelled from their townlands and rural villages to the most important ports in Ireland and England, and from there to South American ports, on what means of transport they used on land and sea, on how expensive the fares were and how comfortable the accommodation was, on which the most common emigrant ships to South America were and what their usual travel patterns were, see <<https://www.irlandeses.org/road.htm>> (03/2021).

² Eduardo Aquilio Coghlan (1912-1997), genealogist and civil servant, was a notary public and landowner. He was vice-president of the Irish Argentine Federation and member of the Irish Catholic Association. Coghlan contributed articles to the *Review of the River Plate*, *The Southern Cross* and *La Nación* newspaper. He did valuable research over a life-time on thousands of Irish emigrants and their descendants from the date of their arrival in Argentina through the succeeding generations. Coghlan's *Los Irlandeses en la Argentina* (1987) is a 963-pages genealogical catalogue of the Irish-Argentine community, including 4,349 Irish-born emigrants to Argentina and most of their families up to the third and sometimes fourth and fifth generations. Recovered from <https://www.irlandeses.org/dilab_coghlanea.htm> (03/2021).

³ In this respect, Juan José Delaney in his "Explicación introductoria" to *Tréboles del Sur*, mentions some of the surnames which were hispanicized: Campbell: Campana; Gowan: Gaona, among many others.

⁴ The failure of the potato crops gave rise to the Great Potato Famine, also known as "the hard times", which took place between 1845 and 1852. Beyond doubt, it was the most traumatic event of modern Irish history. The cause of the famine was a potato blight which infected potato crops throughout Europe during the 1840s, and was a period of mass starvation and disease in Ireland (Kinealy 1994, 357) as well as all over Europe. During the famine, about 1 million people died and 1 million more left the country, (Ross 2002, 226), causing the country's population to fall by 20%-25% (Kinealy 1994, 357).

single farmers in their twenties or non-inheriting children of Catholic middle-sized tenants, who preferred to emigrate than to enroll in the British army or in the church.

As most of the Irish emigrants came from the country, not from the towns, upon arrival in Argentina some settled in Buenos Aires, but the greater part went to the rural areas of the homonymous province and to the littoral provinces, often surpassing the frontier between what was considered “the civilized world” and “Indian territories”.

After the second half of the nineteenth century, with the development and expansion of the railroads, many Irish could reach new areas and set up communities around the railway stations⁵, which still today bear Irish names.

The Irish living in urban areas usually worked as labourers, merchants, employees, artisans, teachers, professionals and, increasingly after the 1860s and especially women, as domestic servants. The Irish who had settled in the countryside worked as labourers in the *saladeros*⁶, or were employed as *peones* in the *estancias*⁷. Many worked as cattle dealers and shepherds. In the flourishing sheep-farming business of 1840-1890, as a consequence of the expansion of the economic activity associated with wool during the Industrial Revolution in Europe, many of them found sheep-breeding a highly rewarding activity.

According to Edmundo Murray (2006), they led a solitary life, with enormous distances between one house and the other, living in far-away huts minding flocks of 1,500 to 2,000 sheep. They would work on halves or on thirds with their employers and at the end of the year they were paid a half or a third of the produce in lambs and wool, which meant that in two or three years a good shepherd was able to acquire his own flock. Eventually, many of those shepherds were in a position to rent their place and, after ten or fifteen years, to purchase land. However, only ten per cent of the Irish emigrants to Argentina could purchase land (Murray 2006b), thus achieving their dream of becoming landowners.

A large number of Irish migrated to the cities and were committed to tasks related to political, cultural and commercial activities. In the field of journalism, for example, *The Standard* and *The Southern Cross*⁸ were created with the aim of spreading the immigrants’ ideas and sharing the community news.

The Standard emerged in 1861, and was founded by the brothers Michael and John Mulhall, with the collaboration of Michael Duggan, an influential member of the Irish community. The newspaper was directed at all English-speaking readers, so that the Irish did not consider it an organ of their community and the attitude of the publication was pro-British. *The Southern Cross*, a weekly newspaper, was created in 1875 and became the loyal and principal organ of the ideas of the Irish community. Its first director was Patrick Dillon and one of his successors, William Bulfin, was a man charged with inculcating an Irish nationalist sentiment in the Irish-Argentines (Cernadas Fonsalías 2009, 31).

An outstanding figure of the Irish diaspora in Argentina was Father Anthony Fahy (1805-1871), a Galway Dominican Priest and missionary between 1844 and 1871. He was appointed

⁵ The construction of railroads in Argentina began in the 1860s, and performed a remarkable role in national consolidation, facilitating access to new areas, thereby aiding geographical and economic integration (Lenz 2005).

⁶ Saladeros are places used for salting fish and meat in order to preserve them.

⁷ Peones are laborers who work on a farm and receive wages regularly. Estancias are cattle ranches.

⁸ *The Southern Cross* is an Argentine newspaper founded on January 16, 1875, by Patrick Joseph Dillon (1842–1889), a Roman Catholic priest, editor and politician, born in Tuam, East Co. Galway, Ireland. *The Southern Cross*, which is mentioned by Delaney in *Tréboles del Sur*, provides readers with a beginners’ guide to the Irish language, helping Irish Argentines keep in touch with their cultural heritage (see *Wikipedia*, <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Southern_Cross_\(Argentina\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Southern_Cross_(Argentina))>, 03/2021).

to the Irish chaplaincy of Buenos Aires in place of father Patrick O’Gorman in 1844, and soon became leader of the Irish community in Argentina, encouraging many nineteenth century Irish emigrants to make new homes for themselves in Argentina. Part of his job was to wait for them in Buenos Aires harbor, convince them to make their homes in the country and to work as shepherds. He also acted as consul, postmaster, financial adviser, judge, interpreter, and employment agent for the members of his community.

Father Fahy worked in Buenos Aires and travelled to the interior parishes of the province every six months, and also held stations in different districts to say Mass, administer the sacraments, and preach. He provided more than just spiritual support to Irish immigrants in Argentina, as he got to know his fellow countrymen who worked in the pampas and even managed to find many an Irish bride. Above all, he was instrumental in aiding the Irish families to progress in Argentina so that more Irishmen were attracted to these lands.

Many writers have depicted the life of the Irish and their descendants in Argentina. The fiction writer and essayist Juan José Delaney, in his “Explicación” at the start of his collection of short stories *Tréboles del Sur* (2014), states that the stories gathered in his book deal with “men and women, their descendants, their achievements and failures, people that [...] also chose or were chosen to be part, in our country, of a nation made of nations” (8). In fact, *Tréboles del Sur* gives “an account of the Irish in Argentina, their struggles and their ups and downs” (Zuntini de Izarra 2007, 166) over a period ranging from the 1870s until 1983. The identities of its protagonists, in words of the author “fictional beings” (Delaney 2014, 8), are marked by the interaction between their European roots and the Argentine context in which they are immersed.

It is in this spatial-temporal context that this article aims at analyzing the representation of cultural aspects in the Irish immigrants that share geographical spaces with the Argentinian-born people⁹. Our analysis is restricted to the fictional characters of a selection of stories in Delaney’s *Tréboles del Sur*. In order to explore this issue, we resort to the concept of representation as described by cultural theorist Stuart Hall, who views representation as “an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things” (1997, 15). We also consider the role of language within a wider cultural context. Our analysis takes into account Hall’s concern about cultural identity in relation to diasporic subjects, as well as Raymond Williams’ concept of culture, as a product of developments of this term in the English cultural studies of the 1970s. Finally, we explore questions of cultural hybridity as a result of the contact between two different cultures.

2. Theoretical Framework

The concept of “representation”, according to Stuart Hall, occupies an important place in the study of culture, because “representation connects meaning and language to culture” (*ibidem*). Hall explains that “representation” means using the language, the signs, the images to represent the world meaningfully, to other “people”, which is the same as saying that meaning is produced through language.

⁹ This topic has also been the subject of the article “Las representaciones culturales en los ‘Gringos’ de Eduardo Cormick” (Obert, 2016), on Eduardo Cormick’s book *Entre gringos y criollos* (2006).

Language operates as a *representational system*, and in language we use signs and symbols, be they “sounds, written words, electronically produced images, musical notes, even objects,” (1) to represent thoughts, ideas and concepts in a culture. And because members of the same culture share sets of concepts, images and ideas, they are able to think and feel about the world “in roughly similar ways” (4). Semiotics focuses on the study of signs and symbols which constitute essential elements in communication. The semiotic approach examines how language and representation produce meaning, and deepens into the way in which knowledge connects with “power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practised and studied” (6).

Now let us consider the term “culture”. This term can be understood in a variety of ways and its different meanings have aroused tension and been the subject of current debates about the place of culture in the social sciences and the humanities. Therefore, it is necessary to contextualize it whenever it is used. British cultural critic and sociologist Raymond Williams, as well as Stuart Hall and other prestigious researchers at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the University of Birmingham, England, identified culture with consumer goods and free time activities (such as the arts, music, the cinema, foods, sports and clothing). In this way, Williams focused on the “popular” as an object of study and gave the subject a central role. In the decade of the 1970s, Williams and the Birmingham researchers developed their ideas about the relationship between culture and society, providing a “social” definition of culture. Culture, in this context,

is the description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis of culture [...] is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture. (Williams 1998, 48)

Raymond Williams also claims that culture is not an end product, but an ongoing process which is defined in the relationship of the social, the political and the historical (48-56). For such a reason, it involves activities, practices, artistic and intellectual processes and products that make up the culture of a specific group at a particular time. Among these is literature. It is therefore possible to analyse literary works in relation to particular traditions and societies, in relation to “the organization of production, the structure of the family, the structure of institutions which express or govern social relationships, the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate” (57).

When we think about “text”, we do not only think about the written language, but also about films, photography, fashion, hair styles. It can be asserted, then, that the texts of cultural studies involve all the meaningful artifacts of a culture. In this context, the concept of “culture” includes not only the traditional culture of “high” classes, but also the “popular” culture, as well as meanings and daily practices.

The concept of identity, which is essential in socio-cultural studies, seems to be inseparable from the idea of culture, as identities can only be shaped by the different cultures and subcultures to which we belong and with which we interact. Without a sense of identity society would not exist (Jenkins 1996, 819 cited in Giménez 2007, 54). In Madan Sarup’s words (1996), “identity [...] may perhaps be best seen as a multi-dimensional space” (25), which “is fabricated, constructed, in process, and [...] we have to consider both psychological and sociological factors” (11-14). As a social construction, it arises as consequence of a process of interaction between people, institutions and practices and, in some ways, is “an effect of socialising institutions – mother, father, the family, schooling, the factory/office, friends, media” (48).

With regard to the social construction of our national identity, Sarup claims that “every nation has its own story,” and that “nations make claims to land, and they make appeals to blood, native soil, homeland, motherland, fatherland” (131). National culture provides collective self-awareness and is based upon communication. Through language a group becomes aware of itself: “language and place are inextricably interconnected” (*ibidem*). A common language allows people to share meanings, and culture is about “shared meanings” (Hall 1997, 1).

The question of cultural identity, or the identity of belonging to a group, arises especially when considering the case of migrant subjects. Sarup defines a migrant as “a person who has crossed the border,” and who “seeks a place to make a new ‘beginning’, to start again, to make a better life” (1996, 1). As might be expected, certain aspects of the migrants’ native culture, such as their mother tongue, are gradually “left behind” (our emphasis) as they spend their time far from their homelands, immersed in a new environment, sharing their lives with subjects whose identities have been constructed in a different space. On the other hand, those aspects of the migrants’ native culture can be “revived” and resorted to as a way to nurture their saddened spirits when suffering hardships.

It is possible to analyse the concept of cultural identity from different perspectives. One such perspective is essentialism, which asserts that there exist some objective traits of particular groups of people that are inherent, eternal, and unalterable, determined prior to the individual based on their shared history; “cultural essentialism is the practice of categorizing groups of people within a culture, or from other cultures, according to essential qualities” (Barta, Levitas 2021). On the other hand, non-essentialist theories consider culture as a construction, as not being fixed, but movable and in constant change due to the relations with others. In this article the concept of identity will be approached from a non-essentialist position, which regards identities as fluid, as having different elements which can be reconstructed in new cultural conditions, and as not fixed essences locked into differences which are permanent for all time (Woodward 1997, 29). Understanding cultural identity in this way, it is not surprising that immigrants may retain elements from both cultures and may not feel locked into one single cultural identity, which means that they are likely to construct a hybrid identity. This has been the subject of research of many postcolonial theorists and writers, who have described these identities in their fictional works.

In fact, individuals do not generally live isolated; instead, they belong to groups through which they define themselves. Thus, culture plays a major role in shaping their identity. Individuals are also dynamic in nature and, therefore, in constant interaction with the community to which they belong. The values and attitudes prevalent around them shape their cultural identity along their lives. This fact relates to the individual’s need to belong, to feel accepted and “at home” with a certain group. However, it is not only the group the individual belongs to that helps define his identity; the role of personal experiences in combination with his relationships also change or add up to his identity and the identities of those with whom he relates.

The process of identity re-construction of migrant subjects in places to which they do not feel an attachment, or a belongingness, is one of the topics that has worried postcolonial critics so much. Thus, they intend to explain the experiences of these subjects and their representation by focusing on the development of their subjectivities. The migrants’ crossing of borders, languages and traditions bring them into contact with other cultures and lead to changes of attitude that characterize their lives (Gikandi 2010, 23-29). For that reason, diasporic subjects usually develop hybrid identities (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2007, 62).

A hybrid cultural identity is created as time progresses, in part based on contingency. The boundaries of hybrid cultures are negotiated and able to absorb diverse cultural influences:

borders are active sites of intersection and overlap, supporting the creation of in-between identities. Where two cultures are combined, new, different forms of culture emerge, and individuals become cultural hybrids. Hence, the background of cultural hybrids is often a blend of two diverse cultures or traditions.

The concept “hybrid culture” has been defined by Argentine-born academic and anthropologist Néstor García Canclini as a phenomenon that “materializes in multi-determined scenarios where diverse systems intersect and interpenetrate” (1995, 53). In *Culturas Híbridas* (1989), Canclini explains that the expression “hybrid culture” refers to a process of integration stimulated by the encounters, the interaction and the reconstruction of different local cultures; that is to say, discrete social practices or structures, that existed in separate ways, combine to generate new structures, objects, and practices in which the preceding elements mix. In this process, culture is changed through adaptation. With reference to this topic, Lowe (1991) explains that in post-structuralist and post-modern analysis, syncretism and hybridity have become keywords. Syncretism refers to the methodology of montage and collage, to the combination of different forms of belief or practice; and hybridity is considered to be the antidote to essentialist notions of identity. Hybridity concerns the mixture of phenomena which are held to be different, the mixing of cultures and not their separateness.

Culture, as “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time”¹⁰, mainly as shown in their ordinary behaviour and habits, attitudes to each other, literature, art, music, dance, theatre, etc., allows for the identification of small groups or whole nations that share those characteristics. Nowadays it is common to speak of sociocultural hybridity, or the extent to which cultures are intermixed, because migratory processes give rise to interculturality.

García Canclini asserts that, when “cultural hybridity” occurs, ancestral practices and folklore tend to blur and disappear, previous to changing within new scenarios (1995). This blending process of various aspects of one culture, including ethnicity, religion, language, and even food and drink, precedes the phenomenon of assimilation. Assimilation is a process of fusion or blending, whereby cultural differences tend to disappear and individuals and groups once dissimilar become similar. It results in the modification of attitudes, values, patterns of thinking and ultimately behaviour. Acculturation, on the other hand, is a process whereby a social group (usually ethnic group) loses its cultural distinctiveness and progressively adopts and appropriates the language, religion and other cultural attributes of another group. This process can take place with consent, as in the case of immigration to another country or by imposition or force, as in the case of colonization, for example, in periods of war or conflict. Acculturation, therefore, implies modification but not complete assimilation.

Interwoven with the concept of cultural hybridity is the concept of “interculturality”. Processes of cultural hybridity do not always occur; often, there are cases of interculturality. While cultural hybridity occurs when two cultures are combined and new, different forms of culture emerge, interculturality occurs when relationships and interactions take place intentionally between different cultures in order to promote dialogue, mutual respect and the awareness of preserving the cultural identity of each individual. In the case of interculturality, differences between cultures are respected, and the notion of superior and inferior cultures is utterly rejected. Undeniably, contact between people with different cultures usually leads to changes in both systems. The effects of cultures’ contact involve changes in artifacts, customs, and beliefs

¹⁰ *Cambridge Dictionary*, “Culture”, <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/culture>> (03/2021).

that result from cross-cultural interaction. Hybridity can even be part of a people's identity, a hybrid being a person whose background is a blend of two diverse cultures or traditions.

Argentina can be considered a melting pot of different peoples. Most Argentines are descendants of nineteenth and twentieth century immigrants of European descent, among whom the Irish have formed a large community. Besides, the country is populated by some Amerindian groups who maintain their cultural roots but are under continuous pressure for religious and idiomatic integration, by people from neighbouring countries, and also by people from Asian descent. In the case of *Tréboles del Sur*, Delaney concentrates on characters whose identities are marked by the interaction between their Irish roots and the Argentine environment in which they are immersed. The stories in the book, and in others he wrote, constitute "his personal account as a writer always concerned with creative ways of representing the unofficial version of Irish-Argentine historiography seen through contemporary eyes" (Zuntini de Izarra 2007, 165).

3. Analysis

Migrant literature frequently centers on the migrants' social contexts of origin as well as on their own process of integration and adaptation to the host country. Such process of integration and adaptation is affected by the reception of the "new" country in terms of hostility, sense of rootlessness and search for identity.

Juan José Delaney's own cultural affiliation with both the Irish and the Argentinian cultures permeate most of his books. He has acknowledged that he is nourished by both the Argentinian and the Irish cultures (Amador-Moreno 2018, 143). Being a writer of Irish descent in *Tréboles del Sur* Delaney recounts the lives of his Irish ancestors who settled in Argentina, along the fifteen stories that cover more than a century. The hard experience of immigration together with a search for a better standard of living constitute a recurrent topic in the literary productions of writers of Irish ancestors. Delaney introduces fictional characters, who bear Irish names and surnames, and plausible events that evoke a reality he handles with authority. He makes reference to religion, music, reading material, children's boarding schools, typical food, drinks, language, cities, neighbourhoods where the immigrants landed – Rojas, Moreno, Palermo, Flores and Villa Urquiza, guesthouses, traditional festivities, hispanicized surnames and the history of Ireland. As regards language, Argentina was the only non-English speaking destination for these migrants, so the language was a major difficulty to achieve integration.

Language has always been a major issue for the Irish-Argentine community, being Irish-English the language used by the first generation to address the older people, while the next generation would speak a strange mixture called Irish-Porteño. Nowadays, Spanish is the regular language spoken by the Irish-Porteños. As it has already been hinted at, language is a crucial element in people's identity since it is a system of representation. Stuart Hall claims that there is not a true representation of people or events in a text, but there are lots of ways these can be represented (1997). Through language the meaning of the concepts we hold in our minds are represented. The fact of sharing a culture means sharing the same linguistic codes which allow the members of a community to interpret the world in similar ways and interact successfully. Hall asserts that the culture of a community is made evident by means of the discourse that conveys its identity and provides a place where to strengthen both its identity and sense of belonging (1997).

The Irish immigrants, the same as other diasporic subjects, tried to protect and reinforce their identity and unity by preserving the English language, though it was not their original

language¹¹. Thus, the Irish families taught their children their mother tongue in order to transmit a wide range of cultural aspects, including the Catholic religion. However, the English language they spoke admitted Spanish interpolations and neologisms, such as “camp” for “campo”, instead of using the word “countryside”; “convention” from “conventillo”, instead of saying “boarding house”. They would use expressions like: “I’m afraid the food won’t alcazar” or “Throw that into the basura”. These changes reveal the slow process of assimilation of the Irish and their descendants into the Argentine community (Amador-Moreno 2018, 146).

The second story in this collection, “El Profesor O’Hara” (Delaney 2014, 17-23), occurs in Rojas, a town in the province of Buenos Aires, in 1888 – year that coincides with the last period of Irish immigration to Argentina. At that time, many Irish people lived in small communities close to Catholic churches, in rural areas of Buenos Aires province. They had their own institutions and the children were educated either at boarding schools or by teachers who were hired and lived with the families. These teachers taught the children the English language and ancient customs and traditions as a way to preserve their culture (Delaney 2000, 131-133). The protagonist of this story, Stephen O’Hara, is an Irish man who, lacking any teacher training, is hired by a widow named Brenda Shannon. O’Hara possesses an “oratorical magnetism” (1994,18) that let him use both languages with ease. This story exposes some of the characteristics of the former generations of Irish Argentines who Delaney recreates in his writing, and which he explains in the aforementioned interview: “They always spoke English (or Irish English), they were very religious, they had a good sense of humour, they loved Argentina [...] they preferred living in the countryside, and, basically, they were very good people” (Amador-Moreno 2018, 146).

Some of the tales in *Tréboles del Sur* have an epistolary style which discloses a means that the characters have found to maintain a fluid communication with their family members back in Ireland and let them know about their lives far away from their homeland. In “Destinos” (Delaney 2014, 53-64), the first letter – dated March 1929 – is written by an Irish immigrant who has settled in New York and is addressed to her cousin who lives in Argentina. The former, Jessie, has achieved “a better destiny” leaving behind “the poverty she has gone through in their [her] beloved Ireland” (53), since she has found a job, prosperity and happiness in her new place. Most of her success is connected to her knowledge of the English language. The latter, Tessie, instead, is unable to succeed in her aspirations, mainly because although she knows English, she lacks knowledge of the Spanish language. However, her command of English eventually turns highly beneficial for her, as she is able to find a way of saving some money by teaching English lessons at a local school. Nevertheless, this does not cater for her feeling of loneliness and isolation. In one of her letters she exposes her feelings,

I carry so many things deep inside! Education, family bonds, stories, secrets... A pretty hard burden for a needy immigrant. You can share your things through language, but you know it is not the same here due to my poor Spanish, a substitute language that lowers my self-esteem, and isolates me. (55-56)

¹¹ When Father Anthony Fahy arrived in Argentina as the chaplain of the Irish immigrants, he organized the community in such a way that all its members belonged to an Irish colony, socially and culturally apart from the rest of the population. Fahy felt it was his duty to “protect” his people from the “natives” influence, whose way of living did not conform to the values of the Catholic Irish people of the nineteenth century. In order to keep the immigrants away, great emphasis was put on cultural and ethnic differences, and keeping the use of the English language was a key element to avoid assimilation. Therefore, around the 1850s, most immigrants had little knowledge of Spanish, and could not read the language (McKenna 1997 qtd. in Romera 2009, 223-229).

On one occasion, Tessie remembers Galway Bay and the beautiful but sad “Lament of the Irish Immigrant”, and states her feelings about it: “I taught the song to my advanced students, but I think they were not able to grasp its real meaning” (56). Here and in many other cases, language turns into an obstacle. Though the Irish learnt the Spanish language, they often spoke it wrongly, as John Donovan (“La última cena”) whose “Spanish was faulty and unnatural” (76).

Nevertheless, in Delaney’s collection of stories there are several instances in which having knowledge of English becomes a great advantage. In “El regreso” (111-114), the main character, Bernardo Kenny, succeeds in his job and pursues “a career”, “since it turns out to be reasonably easy thanks to the fact that he knew the English language, which positioned him better in relation to those immigrants who had no domain of business English” (112). Bernardo had left the farm where he grew up and gone to the city as a young boy. Like many other Irish Argentine boys belonging to poor Irish families, he had had a hard time in his school days at the Fahy Institute, and after finishing primary school he had started working as an office boy and had gradually progressed, thanks to the English language.

Many of the Irish devoted themselves to teaching English, and so they could make a living in spite of the difficult economic situation they often went through. A clear example is Anette Fleming’s, in “La vida imita al arte” (37-51), who, as a little girl, is sent to Buenos Aires to live with some relatives, but she does not find a true home there. When it is time to start school, she has to go to Saint Brigid’s boarding school – “the institution the Irish-Porteños threatened their girls with if they misbehaved” (41). Several years later, “since the school had nothing else to teach her, she was assigned the teaching of the English language” (43). Then, in order to find a job as a governess, she places advertisements in *The Southern Cross* and the *Buenos Aires Herald*¹². Given that she finds a job with an Argentine family, she thinks she can have the opportunity to learn Spanish and the customs of the country. For some time, she teaches English and music to an eight-year-old girl, but after a failed relationship, she devotes herself to “giving English classes at Guadalupe parish school” (47).

Another way in which people retain their sense of identity is by maintaining their links with the past (Sarup 1996). Those links with the past are the foundation of individual and collective identity, and they are “an important agency in adjustment to a crisis” (97), especially when one’s sense of confidence is weakened or threatened. In these cases, the past seems to be more attractive than the present, as the individuals seek refuge in it. In the last story of the book, “Las dos monedas” (2014, 115-123), Delaney makes reference to a song, written in English, which the protagonist knows by heart, “Galway Bay” by Arthur Colahan, the lyrics of which he often remembered:

And if there is going to be a life hereafter
 And somehow I am sure there’s going to be,
 I will ask my God to let me make my heaven,
 In that dear land across the Irish sea. (118)

¹² The *Buenos Aires Herald* was an English language daily newspaper published in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 1876 to 2017. Under the original name of *The Buenos Ayres Herald*, it was founded on 15 September 1876 by Scottish immigrant William Cathcart. At first, it consisted of a single sheet with advertising on the front and mostly shipping coverage on the back. It quickly became the main source of local information for the English-speaking population of Buenos Aires (see *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buenos_Aires_Herald>, 03/2021).

The poetic voice expresses that, if there is a life after death, it will develop in Ireland. It is made evident here how nostalgic those who live far away from their country feel; this idea is present in most of the stories since the characters express their bond to their homeland and to their ancestors in different ways. In this tale, Timothy O'Connor keeps an epistolary relationship with a distant relative whom he has never met, as a manner of preserving "bonds with the Old Ireland, the land of his ancestors" (116).

Peter Larkin, the main character in "Una carta de Joyce" (27-30), who settled in La Plata so as to teach English at the beginning of the twentieth century, "was soon involved in rural issues which somewhat returned him to the atmosphere in Ireland", and he is remembered because he alternated "agricultural work with reading, a habit he had acquired at Belvedere College, in Dublin" (27).

Such emotional bond with Ireland and with the past becomes evident in "La última cena" (65-83) as Delaney explains that Father Charlie Flanagan, 83 years old, "loved Ireland (Celts, Vikings, Normans were in his blood...)" (79). Though he "has a good domain of Spanish [...], his voice inflections disclose his origin"; however, "on few occasions he does insert an English voice" [...] or some Gaelic interjection such as *musha!*" which has more than one meaning: "good" or "is this true?" (66).

In the story "El Profesor O'Hara" (17-23), the narrator describes, in a long paragraph, the superstitious nature of the Irish people, as represented by Mrs. McGarry: "[the old woman] had brought from Ireland all the superstitions she shared with the widow" (20). These are some examples of her superstitious character:

she was afraid of thunder and she lit a 'holy' candle when there was a storm in the area; [...] from her window, she used to throw salt towards the fields in order to avert the violence of nature [...] She felt the necessity of holding strange rites when she sensed the presence of evil spirits, which was very frequent. Besides, she talked about the souls as frequent visitors and frightened the children with spooky stories about ghosts kidnapping them if they misbehaved. (*ibidem*)

Another Irish characteristic that is present in this tale is the audacity to achieve goals. Teachers are depicted as men "whose audacity leads them to venture into the mysteries of theology" (17). In the case of this protagonist, the daring O'Hara considered himself "a member of the family" (20) so as to win the widow's heart, which he succeeded, through "an audacious strategy" (21): he pretended to be Father Hopkins, "who introduced himself as the new priest of the Irish colonies in the northwest" (22), and who knew well the central role religion played in Irish-Argentine families. Thus, he had no difficulty in persuading the widow to confess her feelings towards him.

Tréboles del Sur also depicts some Irish customs, such as consuming alcoholic drinks or the habit of drinking tea, among others. Professor Stephen O'Hara in "El Profesor O'Hara" (17-23), described as "bearded, red-haired and obese," had the ability to tell "stories and Celtic legends which he unfolded [...] according to his curious imagination not rarely stimulated by brandy" (18-19), and usually "the liberating nectars he had roused socially unacceptable behaviour" (18). Father Charlie Flanagan, in "La última cena" (65-83), is depicted as "a strongly-built man, tall, a bit hunched, of light complexion, thick grey hair and big blue eyes" (66). He lives in the refuge next to the Santa Cruz *porteño* temple, and despite the rules at the monastery banning it, "during several afternoons we shared Irish whiskey hidden in tea cups" (67).

In "El Heredero" (97-110), the Flynn's devotion for the consumption of alcohol causes them to lose their jobs on the farm and their moving to the city, facts which lead to family disintegration since the girls are sent to Saint Brigid's boarding school, one of the brothers

goes to Fahy Farm, and the other, Dionisio Flynn, is “rescued” by an old aunt and confined in Metropolitan Seminary. After long years there, and having been ordained priest, Dionisio has doubts as regards his religious vocation. Some years pass, but his hesitation and inner questioning still persist, so “it was not difficult for him to accept the first whiskey and feel that after some recurrent events he could unravel the ropes that submitted him to an undeserved torment” (102). His advisor and friend, Father John Windsor, an Irish Salesian, also enjoys drinking alcohol, and in return for a “banned cigarette” that Dionisio offered him, “he gave him a glass of Irish Mist (women’s whiskey), something that boosts the happiness of having met a confidant and the will to gain access to a different reality” (*ibidem*). Finally, “he has no option but to resort to alcohol which quiets his stormy evenings” but leads him to death because of “the cirrhosis which affects him and consumes his liver” (103).

The characters in *Tréboles del Sur* also find auspicious occasions for alcohol consumption, as for example Saint Patrick’s festivity on 17 March. The narrative voice in “La última cena” (65-83) recounts that “there were many people who chose to meet, toast and have a good time” (75). In one part of the story, the narrator considers the fact that “a glass of whiskey is always good encouragement for reflection” (78).

As regards the habit of drinking tea, the Irish women keep this tradition alive. In “La vida imita al arte” (37-51), Anette Fleming, the orphan girl who spends her childhood and adolescence at Saint Brigid’s School, finds consolation in “the essential cup of tea that would always be available,” (42) though food proves to be scarce. Tea is also mentioned in relation to the possibility of fulfilling her dream of being part of a local filmmaking when “somebody left a clipping from a woman’s magazine under her tea cup in the lodge dining-room” (48). For Tessie, in “Destinos” (53-64), “drinking tea is a suitable sedative” (56) to lessen her anguish. Madge Malone, in “Madge los viernes” (89-92), also keeps the tradition of drinking tea – on Fridays, she “cut down the four cups of tea to one” (90); but also “at five o’clock, she went to her sisters’ grave where she had a cup of tea with some rubbery scon” (92).

4. Conclusion

As explained at the beginning of this article, our aim has been to explore the representation of cultural aspects in the Irish immigrants and their descendants that share geographical spaces with the Argentinian-born people, as shown in a selection of stories narrated by a writer of Irish descent that lives in Argentina. Delaney’s intention was to write the story of the Irish in Argentina from a fictional point of view. In an interview published in 2007, he said: “since I had been immersed in the Irish community all my life, going through all kind of situations concerning that small European community in America, I was in a good condition [...] to start a collection of tales on the topic” (Zuntini de Izarra, 166). And so, in *Tréboles del Sur* he gives an account of the Irish in Argentina, their struggles and their ups and downs.

In our analysis we have considered the homeland, social relationships and social spaces, language, and customs as cultural elements that influenced the characters’ lives. Having analysed those specific cultural aspects of the Irish immigrants and their descendants in the collection of stories under study, it can be concluded that the characters presented in the stories do not show traits of complete “acculturation”, as they have not fully adopted the culture of the host country. Both the Irish immigrants and the inhabitants of Argentina show to have been open to daily interactions, and to have partially achieved integration. The Irish adopted most of the sociocultural structures of the host culture, that is to say, the elements that were meaningful and useful for success, and they were never left aside. In a certain way, the Irish assimilated

without losing their unique traits, as they retained elements of their culture of origin that were important for them to survive in a new environment, mainly because the host culture was open to establishing a relationship with them.

As regards identity issues, in the condition of migration, a “contact zone” develops from the cross-cultural encounter between the emigrant’s country and the host country. The experience of cultural contact of the Irish has shaped their identity as individuals or as members of a wider group. In the stories selected, the characters’ identities are defined as a process, not as a product, and therefore, they are incomplete, and always in construction in relation to their social context. For this reason, their identities are hybrid identities. Most of the characters have accepted their “inbetweenness” and learned to live as Argentinians while, at the same time, they have kept their links to their homeland.

Apart from undergoing a process of re-construction of their cultural identity, the Irish depicted in Delaney’s stories have had to come to terms with their hybridity, and at the same time have maintained their cultural distinctive features. They feel identified with the host culture, which is essential to achieve feelings of belonging and security, thus contributing to their welfare.

However, it is undeniable that they have undergone a long process of detachment and cultural reconstruction, and gradually adapted into a different sociocultural environment, which at times has been hostile. Despite all the hardships, they can be considered “cultural hybrids” because they have been able to keep alive several aspects of their home culture, especially in reference to customs, traditions, religion and language, and transmit them all to their descendants. Asserting their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness implies strategies to face the impact on the immigrants’ lives of the multiplicity of situations in cases of intercultural contact brought about by migration. Besides, in a hopeful attempt to redefine their lives, the Irish newcomers have contributed to the formation of the identity and the progress of Argentina. However, though having embraced life far away from their homeland, most Irish-born people have kept strong ties with their land and relatives back in Ireland.

The selection of stories explored also provides insights into the significance of the immigrants’ preservation of the cultural heritage from their country of origin in an attempt to soothe feelings of loneliness and nostalgia entailed in exile, as multiple stresses – especially adjustment to the new culture and changes in identity – have surely impacted their mental well-being.

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