"TIES CONSTITUTE WHAT WE ARE": HAUNTED GENDER AND CLASS IDENTITIES IN POST-CELTIC TIGER NARRATIVES OF COMMUNITY

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> But maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something […] that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us.
>
> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*

Introduction

When the world financial crisis of 2008 ended the Celtic Tiger, it did not only stop this "spectacular growth of the Irish economy in the 1990s" (Battel 94) but also disrupted the manifold promises of the boom. As a "powerful cultural signifier for progress and newness" (Buchanan, "Living" 300), the Celtic Tiger had appeared as a possibility to sever modern Ireland's ties to a past shaped by colonialism and austerity. However, especially towards the end of the boom, which was marked in its later phase by a real estate bubble and an overheated building sector, Irish society had to face the shallow newness of the Celtic Tiger which conflated "economic growth with communal well-being" (Buchanan, "Ruined Futures" 51).

Even before 2008, Post-Celtic Tiger literature[1] had started to question Ireland's new identity as a wealthy nation, challenging the idea of absolute re-invention and the belief in the "necessity of orienting the nation towards the future rather than towards the past" (Smyth 135). Spectres of Irish history, which emerged as a threat to the nation's 'modern' identity, pervade Gerard Donovan's *Country of the Grand* (2008) and Donal Ryan's *The Spinning Heart* (2012). Both of these texts explore the ideological significance of the Tiger years by focussing on the place of individual, often male, characters within communities haunted by the spectral presence of Irish history. In these works, individual identities and communities, which both appear as complex networks of ties and bonds, are shown to be affected by the disruption and dislocation of time and space first created by the Tiger and then by its sudden end.

In regard to spatial and temporal dimensions of Irish identities, the narratives invite a reading from the vantage point of hauntology, meaning the "logic of haunting" (Derrida 10) that deconstructs the boundaries between past, present, and future. The microcosms constructed in Donovan's and Ryan's texts appear to be haunted by the idea of a unique Irish identity composed of the experiences of conflict, colonialism,

1 Declan Hughes's play *Shiver* (2003) can be considered one of the earliest harsh diagnoses of a society believing in a false promise.

and poverty. These aspects seem to originate in the past, invade the present, and simultaneously represent a possibly recurrent threat in the future; a temporal aspect that is particularly relevant to Derrida's concept of hauntology.[2] Derrida's original French term *hantise* furthermore incorporates the sense of a constant fear, obsession, or nagging memory (4n2) and thus includes a further aspect of the continued presence of the past. Spectres that haunt Irish individual and community identities thus throw into doubt borders between present reality (Molloy 140) and the past, and they are linked to the re-emerging idea of Irish exceptionalism and traumata, which seemed to have been overcome with the Celtic Tiger but re-emerged with the world financial crisis.

While the rampant capitalism and neoliberalism – regarded by various critics as the core of the Celtic Tiger – invited a focus on individualism, the notion of community provides an interesting lens through which questions of entwined gender and class identities in the wake of the massive social and economic ruptures of the early twenty-first century can be explored. In contrast to classic narratives of community, *Country of the Grand* and *The Spinning Heart* do not construct particular, preindustrial spaces (Zagarell 499) in need of protection and preservation but accentuate negotiations of identity in different forms of communities, placing particular emphasis on aspects of gender and class. Zagarell sees a close relationship between nineteenth-century women's culture and the structure of narrative of community, as such texts were linked to middle-class domestic spheres and rhythms of life (507) whereas the "public, male world [was] reorganized around requirements of market economy" (508).[3] The notion of market economy figures strongly in the texts chosen for discussion here, especially as they foreground how masculinity and male gender roles are inseparably connected to class issues and economic aspects and were thus particularly affected when the financial crisis hit Ireland. In this context, spectres of stereotypical ideas of exceptional Irish identities are rendered visible by Donovan's and Ryan's male characters. As Magennis and Mullen argue, moments of shift can reveal dominant modes of masculinity that are in operation and provide opportunities to debate whether or how such modes "should adapt and change" (3-4). While unresolved issues of history, also in terms of nation and gender, were mostly glossed over during the Celtic Tiger, the moment of disruption in Donovan's and Ryan's narratives invites a much-needed critical engagement with legacies of the past. It thus allows for introspection, providing a chance to revisit the effects of quick-paced change through the exploration of a literary microcosm.

2 Haunting spectres have been identified in a number of famous Irish literary works. Leerssen, for instance, highlights how the spectre of Michael Furey "is conjured up out of the past to trouble the present" in Joyce's "The Dead" (228). Leerssen here identifies the past as undead and as a nightmare from which Irish history cannot escape.

3 Nevertheless, Zagarell stresses that aspects of narrative of community, such as negotiations of class, have also been present in male authors' writings (512). She mentions, for example, how Sherwood Anderson or Charles Dickens "mediated between the tasks of representing an individual-based, contractual society and expressing a community-based vision" (512).

This essay takes as its points of departure Derrida’s concept of hauntology as well as the purposes and structures of narrative of community to analyze how Ryan and Donovan engage with the spectral presence of stereotypical legacies of Irish (gender) identities in the context of Ireland’s recent socio-economic history. This contribution thereby maintains that the notions of community and spectrality help us understand how different discourses of male gender and class identities were affected by the economic crash that signified a failed attempt to escape from Irish history. The community in crisis exposes bonds and ties between its individual members, but as a concept it also enables us to contemplate connected identity categories. Particularly regarding masculinity and class, Ryan’s and Donovan’s texts provide counter-narratives to dominant cultural narratives, such as the narrative of newness and departure from the past during the 1990s and early 2000s. Their stories thus question this cultural signifier by highlighting spectres of the Irish past and shedding light on the shallowness of this promised newness, on harmful stereotypes of working- and middle-class masculinities, and on relations between changing paradigms and identity constructions within fragile communities. In this regard, they focus attention on the continuous endeavours needed to construct and maintain identities in the liminal spaces between individual and community, self and other.

Irish Masculinities and Imagined Communities

In his article on Irish masculinity in life and literature, Foster explains how redefinitions of Irish masculinity during the Literary Revival were “bent on […] redefining masculinity so that nationhood could be achieved more decisively, […] it was no time for any serious undermining or diffusion of the integrity of the Irish male” (15). The “feckless, ineffectual peasant male and the roistering, irresponsible Big-House male of English and Anglo-Irish fiction” were thus replaced “with an Irish virility” that was oriented towards heroic, mythical males such as Cuchulain (Foster 15). Therefore, although the nation has traditionally been perceived as a woman, most visible in the trope of Kathleen Ni Houlihan, Magennis and Mullen also identify a correlation between nation and gender in terms of masculinity (4) while Foster asserts that female roles, in life as well as literature and legend, were merely “auxiliary” (15). The image of comradeship-in-arms as masculinist did not only become a foundation for a male-dominated imagined community[4] but also impacted on an image of masculinity that excluded emotional ties and all roles related to family and love, according to Foster (15).

4 Anderson introduced the term ‘imagined community’ to trace the origins and developments of nationalism; in his definition, the nation is an “imagined political community” (6). However, he also emphasizes that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (6). Anderson offers a detailed discussion of the role of communication, print media, symbols, and rituals. Throughout this essay, I use a simplified idea of imagined communities to refer to communities of different scopes – be they national or local, for example – which share a history, social structures, and any further aspects that are essential to their self-image as part of a community.

Instead, masculinity was evaluated in terms of heroism and patriotism, turning the self-sacrificing soldier and patriot (Foster 15) into the default Irish male.[5] Thereby, strength, the will to fight for Ireland, and a certain idea of aggression were important elements of hegemonic masculinity, defined by Connell as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees […] the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (2).

Shifting modes of hegemonic masculinity were thus related to the re-creation of the Irish nation as an imagined community. They eventually figured in the political, social, and economic foundations of the Irish Free State. The first years of Irish independence exemplify how economical aspects, hegemonic masculinity, gender roles, as well as notions of national identity are closely interconnected phenomena. According to Magennis and Mullen, the Irish male can be regarded as a "central battleground in the maintenance and dominance of certain codes of identity" (4-5) in this respect. Therefore, the decolonizing endeavours of the early Free State economy can also be considered in relation to modes of masculinity: on the one hand, the patriarchal order of the new Irish nation has to be taken into account here, as the "Free State was founded on a masculine ontology of hierarchical oppositions. The Irish State, by its very nature, gives way to binary understandings of the world" (Magennis and Mullen 4). On the other hand, the presentation of masculine identities as a "succession of martyrs, heroic, defiant, subversive but ultimately vanquished by colonial forces" (Singleton qtd. in Magennis and Mullen 4) also provides a perspective on the relation between gender, economy, and ideology.

Such relations become most visible in the early 1930s, when the Fianna Fáil government under Éamon de Valera arrived in power (Battel 96). The vision of Ireland de Valera's government sought to turn into reality was a highly "conservative rural idyll" (Battel 96). Their means to attain this goal included, on the socio-political level, a sharp gender division that was anchored in the constitution in 1937 and that relegated women to the home while reserving the public and economic sphere for men. After an initial attempt at reformation and stabilization that also relied on the UK as trading partner in the post-war years, the protectionism of de Valera's Ireland can be considered part of a decolonizing strategy that should have created and eventually strengthened an independent economy. This framework may have provided a "strong national self-image", according to Battel (96), but was economically unsuccessful and worsened the weak state of the Irish economy. While masculinity may not have been bound up with martyrdom and heroism anymore in the Free State, it was still connected

5 This essay can only highlight certain aspects of the connection between (hegemonic) masculinity and the values of the Revival and the Free State. See Foster for an in-depth discussion of the entanglements of the "imperatives of nationalism and its associated versions of masculinity", for instance in relation to literature and the "cultural demands made on" writers (17-18).

to the nation via conservative values and gender roles as well as partially class-specific roles in the economy (see Foster 24-25).

The Death of the Celtic Tiger: Hauntology and Spatio-Temporal Aspects

More than fifty years after the establishment of the Free State, the Celtic Tiger and its effect on gender and class identities should still be regarded against this foil. After the failure of different economic strategies,[6] the Celtic Tiger introduced new possibilities on the basis of the improved economic status of the Republic of Ireland as a wealthy global player in the 1990s. In this context, Ireland tried to leave behind the concept of national identity as based on alterity and shaped by the island's colonial past, famines, the struggle for independence, and the conservative values dictated by the Catholic Church (Battel 101). The widespread desire to turn away from history, in combination with the idea of Irish exceptionalism, had already been partially responsible for the birth of the Celtic Tiger as an economic event and signifier, which eventually "came to be understood as the culmination of, or escape from, Irish history" (Buchanan, "Living" 303). Newness promised a departure from the spectres of the past that reminded of famines and emigration, hard labour in the agricultural sector, and the dire situation of often large families. However, the rapid change hit a country still marked by rurality and seemingly left no time to reflect on its extensive possible effects not only on the economy but also on notions of identity, including dominant modes of masculinity.

The Celtic Tiger finally introduced Ireland to the paradigm of modernity, which rather centres on the individual subject than the community and is connected to grand narratives. These "[d]iscourses of science, religion, politics and philosophy which are supposed to explain the world in its totality, and to produce histories of the world as narratives of progress" (Wolfreys et al. 47) rely on linearity through development and growth that appears without alternative. The notion of development also relates to increasing diversity in regard to identity, a trend from which gender identities are no exception. Cosmopolitan middle-class masculinities, modelled on successful US-American entrepreneurship, as well as working-class masculinities that took pride in their share in building the country, both literally and metaphorically, are exemplary of the sudden changes in Ireland. The year 2008, however, came "to signify a clear moment of demarcation […] when the so-called New Ireland of the Tiger collapsed under the weight of speculative global capitalism" (Buchanan, "Ruined Futures" 50).

Although the Irish workforce was far from being all-male, the traditional ties between the public realm, economy, and masculinity still invite a particular view on the economic crisis that also appeared as a defeat. The self-confidence of 'new' middle- and working-class masculinities, which seemingly profited from modernization, was

6 See Battel for a more detailed discussion of the difficult economic situation in the early years of the Free State and during the 1970s and 1980s (94-95).

affected by the economic crisis due to renewed unemployment, for instance because of the crash of the building sector and the threatening separation of Ireland from the realm of global players that middle-class entrepreneurship relied on. The economic crisis thus not only disappointed expectations, but also affected diverse identity issues and deepened social divisions (see Battel; Smyth).

When the crisis disrupted linear narratives of growth as well as progress, it opened the gateway to haunting, in Derrida's sense of the term. The invasion of the imagined community by national spectres thus highlighted circularity instead of linear progress. Taking into account the connotations of the French term *hantise*, the breakdown re-evoked fears and nagging memories of more dire living conditions inscribed in the national psyche. Moreover, it seemed to disrupt the border between present 'modern' reality and the colonial past. In this context, hauntology relates to a violence that interrupts a new order and that is central to the "national imaginary" (Molloy 143).[7]

Recourses and apparent anachronisms come to the fore when considering the modern individual subject in relation to its surroundings, i.e., by taking into account the "ties or bonds that compose us" (Butler 22).[8] As shown above, "[m]odes of masculinity must always be in shift/crisis/flux in order to redefine and be appropriate to the demands of a changing society" (Magennis and Mullen 3). Thus, masculinities, no matter if conceived of as ideals or negative types, need to be considered in relation to the expectations ingrained in family, community, and overall societal structures. Connections between gender and class – with the latter essentially linked to religion, at least before the second half of the twentieth century – traditionally manifest in stereotypes such as the patriot, the hard-working farmer, the desperate emigrant, the stern father of a large family, or the wealthy landowner in Ireland. Such connections highlight, once again, that masculinity cannot be considered "a coherent object" but is always to be viewed as an "aspect of a larger structure" (Connell 67).

While such stereotypes were apparently left behind with the transition of the Tiger Years, they resurfaced with a rising unemployment rate and the return of economic difficulties and mass emigration (Cardin 4). The rupture that the end of the Tiger came to signify can be regarded as a chance to confront the persistent modes of masculinity that may have still been lurking below the surface before 2008. As a moment of shift, then, the end of the Tiger also revealed "the dominant modes which are in operation" (Magennis and Mullen 4) and especially highlighted the liminal state of male identities between traditional expectations and the promise of newness of the Celtic Tiger. The return of the legacy of the past in form of spectres of Irish hegemonic

7 Molloy here talks about the "haunting of the national imaginary" (143) by the experience of death and mourning which resurfaces with spectres of poverty and emigration in times of economic crisis.

8 Butler wrote the essays published in *Precarious Life* as a response to US policies after 9/11, but despite this entirely different context, the fundamental truth of these words connects them to the dispossession of communal identity.

masculinity highlights the lack of a critical examination of such stereotypes during the Celtic Tiger. Post-Celtic Tiger literature eventually attended to such matters and thereby critically revisited the dominant cultural narrative of the Tiger years which relied on the severing of ties to the colonial and violent past.

Post-Celtic Tiger Literature: Donovan’s and Ryan’s Narratives of Community

Post-Celtic Tiger literature increasingly highlighted the impact of the world financial crisis on the country as a whole, on local communities, and on individuals when the disillusionment with the Celtic Tiger, its shallowness and false promises reached its climax in 2008. In this context, issues of gender and class (for example in regard to social division) and the legacy of Irish history were once again foregrounded in stories such as those collected in *Country of the Grand*. Such literary texts highlight how economic success and its promise of newness never resolved lasting issues: the “Celtic Tiger years merely covered up a past of suffering and victimhood that has never really been gone” (Haekel 26). When Post-Celtic Tiger literature concentrates on shock and caesura, it often critically deals with the neoliberal turn and the collective identity issues brought about by the (end of the) Celtic Tiger. The changed landscape is one visible marker of the collapse and soon, the “vocabulary of ‘ghostlands’, ‘ghost estates’, ‘zombie hotels’ and ‘haunted landscapes’ came to dominate the narrative of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland in the national news media, as well as in academic scholarship” (Cronin 80). The idea of the nation being haunted thus quickly re-emerged as an essential aspect of the national narrative and of Irish literature. As Haekel stresses, “[many] of the topics of Irish fiction have their roots in […] centuries-old history. First, there are general topics that haunt Irish fiction: questions regarding identity formation, nationalism, and religion” (22). While the theme of religion is mostly absent – and it is possible to interpret this lack as a comment on the erosion of the authority of the Catholic Church –, the texts discussed here illustrate that other dimensions of identity figure prominently in Post-Celtic Tiger literature. It does not only capture the moment of crisis, the shock, and the atmosphere of the time, but also highlights how the death of the Tiger disappointed national expectations and engendered the return of atemporal spectres of masculinity. Since these spectres relate to the temporal disjunction signified by the disruptive moment of the crisis, they invade discourses that informed diverse constructions of male identities during the Celtic Tiger period. As explained above, the crisis and its aftermath thus become a lens through which modes of masculinity can be critically revisited.

The texts discussed in this essay sharpen the view on a nation and on masculinity/ies in crisis due to multi-layered conflicts. When we regard the Irish nation, with Anderson, as an imagined community, and view families and small communities as microcosmic time-spaces, the focus on communities and their narratives is particularly worthwhile. The communities depicted in *Country of the Grand* – which centres on the area around Galway on the West coast, conventionally interpreted as the ‘real’ and

authentic Ireland – or in *The Spinning Heart*, set in a village in the West, do not signify premodern or preindustrial spaces. Therefore, the generic label only serves as a point of departure for a discussion of Donovan's and Ryan's narratives here. According to Zagarell, narratives of community

> take as their subject the life of a community […] and portray the […] ordinary processes through which the community maintains itself as an entity. The self exists here as part of the interdependent network of the community rather than as an individualistic unit. […] Narrative of community thus represents a coherent response to the social, economic, cultural, and demographic changes caused by industrialism, urbanization, and the spread of capitalism. (499)

Donovan's and Ryan's texts are no reactionary tales turning against modernity, but they dissect communities and identities by focussing on (the severing of) ties and the disruption of identities in moments of (looming) crisis, thereby highlighting connections between individual and collective or local and global, and drawing attention to intra-community roles and expectations. Hence, they still focus on everyday lives of small communities and on struggles of individuals to be part of a network in times of crisis. In addition to the thematic focus on reactions to a crisis that causes uncertainty regarding societal positions and identities, the form of these narratives contributes to their effect. Both texts can be classified as short story cycles, although *The Spinning Heart* was marketed as a novel.[9] The short story cycle is a particularly interesting form as it can be considered a hybrid genre oscillating between the "lonely voice" that marks the Irish short story according to Frank O'Connor, and the more encompassing view of the novel. The central characteristics of the short story cycle, such as "simultaneous self-sufficiency and interdependence" (Ingram qtd. in Brouckmans 87) of its parts and "a tension between unity and fragmentation" (Brouckmans 87), actually define the form of *The Spinning Heart* and *Country of the Grand* as well as the communities they depict. By establishing "diversity within unity" (Cardin 3), these short story cycles underline the dissection of (comm)unity through various subjective viewpoints and simultaneously allow for tracing connections, further highlighting how ties are severed or at least damaged through moments of haunting.

Spectres that disrupt linear history appear to Ryan's and Donovan's characters and take various forms, belying the belief that Ireland has successfully escaped from history and traditional roles or types of Irish masculinity. That such an escape from history is impossible without reprocessing becomes most visible in the male characters: they are increasingly insecure about their identities, roles, and their communities' expectations when haunted by diverse spectres that represent stereotypical forms of masculinity still inscribed in societal structures. These works thus exemplify the above-established connections between masculinity, economy, and dominant cultural

9 There are, however, good arguments for classifying the text as a composite novel (see D'hoker). Nevertheless, I will treat it as a cycle due to its structure and unification by a shared setting.

discourse (Magennis and Mullen 3). Although they apparently centre on personal crises, these narratives frequently foreground connections between individuals' and communities' insecurities and conflicts on the one hand, and between economy, class identity, and the legacy of the Irish past on the other.

Country of the Grand: The Shaky Foundations of New Middle-Class Masculinities

Donovan's thirteen stories capture the mood towards the end of the Celtic Tiger by depicting a society made insecure by wealth and economic boom. The stories are connected by this mood and by motifs that, for instance, relate to movement and paralysis in the wake of disruptions of personal life that affect the characters' self-images and identities. Both the ironic title and the epigraph – "Frailty, Thy Name Is Man" – of the cycle prepare readers for stories that do not praise Ireland's economic prosperity as successful departure from austerity and alterity.

The centre of Donovan's imagined community is located in the West of Ireland, which "came to represent an idealized Irish cultural past and a wellspring of inspiration for its future" (Cronin 84). Heinz et al. emphasize the prevalence of the image of Ireland as a nation that had "succeeded in keeping its unique cultural self and traditions that value the community, family and solidarity" (4). The notion of a preserved value system is particularly interesting with regard to narrative of community, as Zagarell emphasises that this form was used to express and maintain community values (503, 513). However, as Cronin also argues, the Celtic Tiger years effected a sense of displacement and disorientation that also affected traditions and values in many ways. In this regard, the liminal temporal and spatial positions of Donovan's characters allow for a further discussion of spectral presences in Ireland with regard to class-specific masculinities.

Temporality plays an essential role in this context: since the stories were written before the collapse of the economy, Cardin calls Donovan's short story cycle a "chronicle of a collapse foretold" (4). The sense of a collapse of a society that has already ceased to be a community permeates these stories, evoking a pervasive feeling of mourning and loss that the characters find difficult to pinpoint. Even though Donovan's characters continuously claim that all is well, or "grand", the feeling of an ungraspable threat persists and is underlined by Donovan's frequent use of hetero-diegetic voices and internal focalizers. This narrative situation evokes a feeling of closeness to the characters while simultaneously maintaining a distance. Since many of the stories collected here feature male protagonists[10] and their struggles with insecurities in a "new" Ireland, the narrative situation emphasizes the male character-focalizers' wilfully limited access to their own thoughts and feelings. The lack of

10 Not all of the thirteen stories focus on male middle-class protagonists, but these are clearly in the majority. For a discussion of the ironic paratexts, see Cardin.

introspection[11] on the part of many of Donovan's middle-class characters often results in hurtful epiphanies that are immediately pushed away. Insecure about their roles and identities and looking for membership in (imagined) past or present communities, they fantasize about belonging through wealth and social position, and thus gloss over the lack of rootedness. Many of these characters deny the problems in their private lives; they refuse to recognize the loss of connection to their surroundings. For instance, Jim, in "Morning Swimmers", only acknowledges the failure of his marriage when he accidentally overhears his friends discussing his wife's presumptive affair with an archaeologist.[12]

Jim is only one example of Donovan's male characters whose insecurity about their own position in relation to other people connects to the stereotype of male refusal and inability of introspection (Middleton 2, 10) on the one hand, and to the whole nation's belief in the empty signifier of the Celtic Tiger on the other. Their personal lives mirror how the dominant discourse of newness could only be upheld by the refusal to accept the present reality and the threat of invasion of glossed over issues and spectres from the past, which simultaneously threatened to shape the future. While linear temporality appears to have no alternative within the framework of (grand) narratives of progress, Derrida's theory of haunting hinges on temporal disorder and the spectre's capacity to expose the non-linearity of time (18-22). That haunting does not follow linear trajectories becomes apparent in Donovan's short stories as well. Pondering if the comings and goings of a spectre are ordered according to the linear succession of the past, present, and future, Derrida states: "If there is something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents and, especially, the border between the present, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence, non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality, or even the simulacrum in general" (39). When we read Irish history as a linear narrative, the collapse of 2008 seems to mark a short break of progress only. However, it can also be seen as part of a narrative of change, as Morash argues in "Spectral Ireland": "Irish writing is still grappling with a more profound, existential crisis whose origins go back to the middle of the last century, but which took an acute form in the mid-1990s" (18). In addition, the dividing line between actual present reality and the spectre (Derrida 38) is never safely drawn and was certainly not safely drawn by the Celtic Tiger, as progress is not irreversible. Moreover, the spectres that invade Donovan's characters' lives also relate to spectres possibly lurking in the future, which is marked by insecurity and the dreaded loss of community in its smallest form – marriage and relationship.

Lost connections between married people prevail in the cycle. "How Long Until" revolves around Brenda and Peter, a married couple in their early thirties, and part of

11 For a detailed discussion of the lack of introspection and self-conscious writing, see Middleton.

12 Archaeologists feature frequently in several stories, highlighting the presence of the past.

“an upward class of *nouveau riche* whose major concern is the accumulation of wealth” (Cardin 165). The “substitute identity” (Buchanan, “Living” 300) of consumption in the Celtic Tiger years (Smyth 132) does not effect happiness and stability but rather presents Peter with a challenge. He and Brenda are on a symbolic journey West, from Dublin to Galway, when an advertisement for life insurance prompts him to ask Brenda how long she would wait until she slept with someone else if he died tomorrow. He immediately regrets his question and feels foolish but remains silent rather than talk about his feelings and his fear that he might already be competing with a rival without his knowledge. Peter longs for reassurance as a form of insurance (the word is repeated in different situations) but his insecurities are triggered and eventually reinforced by Brenda’s admission that she prefers a man who does not always present a “neat appearance” or who is not “so nice at all times” (Donovan 27). Peter’s job in the real estate sector requires a certain neat appearance, however, and he is not able to deal with Brenda’s wish for a man who is a “little bit of everything” (27).

Peter symbolizes a form of masculinity in a state of in-betweenness and is thus made insecure by the contrasting demands of his professional, public life on the one hand, and his private life in which he should perform a different role, on the other. He signifies a ‘modern’ type of man, the successful entrepreneur that stands in stark contrast to the traditional Irish stereotypes of, for instance, the hard-working farmer in the agricultural sector or the patriot fighting for his country. Despite Peter’s contribution to their sophisticated lifestyle and his embodiment of the ‘new’ Irish man of the Celtic Tiger, he cannot live up to his wife’s expectations that bear witness to more traditional modes of masculinity based on a strong binary understanding. The virtual impossibility of fulfilling both the expectations of his customers and Brenda’s wish for a stereotypical ‘manly man’ further highlights Peter’s insecurities, which were only glossed over by his adoption of a cosmopolitan male identity. While the ideological connection between modern masculinity and economy is rendered visible when Peter tells Brenda that he knows the type of man she wants him to be – “One who doesn’t have a job” (Donovan 27) – her wish exposes the instable foundation of their marriage and makes room for uncertainties and the threat of a spectre that is already waiting in the future. Following Eibhear Walshe’s argument that a form of masculinist nationalism, which originated in the Irish Literary Revival, suppressed counter-discourses, Magennis and Mullen state that the “male subject, in any way feminized, is troubling to the national consciousness” (4). The refusal to face insecurities, also with regard to his virility and sexual open-mindedness, and complex emotions, which are typically depicted as female problems, is poignantly emphasized when Peter wishes never to have said anything, “to have let it go and thought about it instead at three in the morning like anybody else” (Donovan 23). The spectral presence of hierarchical and heteronormative dichotomies highlights the lack of a nuanced debate over the adaptation of modes of masculinity (Magennis and Mullen 3) that would be accompanied by a deconstruction of these very binaries.

Just as “Ireland’s great economic miracle was built upon very, very shaky foundations” (Smyth 133), so is Peter and Brenda’s marriage and their individual sense of identity. “[B]oth working with their own careers, doing well, money in the bank, shopping trips to New York” (Donovan 24), they try to live up to an imagined “true” modern Irish identity, which is not marked by alterity but modelled on an American cosmopolitan consumer culture and thus threatens to become a simulacrum. Their reliance on consumer culture as the modern ideal shows how Brenda and Peter mistake financial well-being for happiness: when Peter asks Brenda “We’re speaking the truth here? We’re happy, aren’t we?” (Donovan 26), the very need to voice this question exposes the couple’s happiness as illusionary. This orientation towards consumer culture does not only contradict the established representation of Irish people “as the antithesis of materialistic values” (Heinz et al. 4). It also alludes to the shaky foundations of an overall new Irish identity, and especially of middle-class masculinity as presented by Peter, highlighting the shallowness of Irish society’s modernization and the instable performativity of new masculinities.

Both Jim and Peter are afraid of loneliness and long for companionship. The longing for belonging is also foregrounded by the character of Frank Delaney in “Country of the Grand”. The solicitor is overwhelmed by his sense of disbelonging and retraces his steps to the past only to find the house where he grew up inaccessible and altered: extensions have been added to the once familiar house that is now inhabited by somebody else. At the same time, his wife wants to buy property in Westport that, according to her, is the “next Galway” (55) and thus the next boom town. The idea of a “society that tried running before it had learned to walk” (O’Connor) is highlighted when Frank decides to participate in a race to beat the daughter of a colleague against whom he had lost in his youth. Trying to keep up with the better prepared runners, Frank does not only ruin his expensive tailor-made suit that symbolizes his wealth, he also eventually collapses. The character Frank appears as a synecdoche for the whole nation (see also Cardin 4-5) and thus “Country of the Grand” can be read as a bitterly ironic, allegorical comment on the Celtic Tiger period.

Unable to attend his wife’s dinner party in such a state, Frank walks even further until he arrives at the farm where he grew up, only to find it altered and unwelcoming as well. Frank’s nostalgia is no mere longing for the past; it also affects his sense of himself as a successful man. Eventually, sitting at the now empty dinner table after the guests have left, he imagines a rival competing for the company of his wife and wonders if he could tell his wife that this morning, “he had cried, suddenly and with great force” (Donovan 67) while sitting in his car in front of the house he once lived in: “Was that what a successful solicitor does?” (67). His inability to amalgamate his needs and emotions with his image of a successful (male) solicitor can be traced back to the persistence of hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, the story not only ties in with the spectral presence of stereotypical masculinity in a changing society and with Derrida’s haunting in the sense of *hantise*, understood as an obsession, fear, or nagging memory (4n2), but also with the modernization of the ‘authentic

West' as a time-space. The character Frank, with his longing for any kind of connection to the past and for a community that he seeks but does not dare to enter, thus exemplifies that the "fabric of the Irish experience of space and time as a culture that was in some respects pre-modern came into collision with modernity" (Morash 13).

The Spinning Heart: Haunted Working-Class Masculinities

The ties constitutive of a community and its individual members become particularly evident in times of loss and mourning. While established ideas of Irishness styled the community as an antidote to the frequent political and socio-economic caesuras of Irish history, the Celtic Tiger and capitalist ideology affected imagined ties in local communities by offering new models that were again disrupted by the collapse in 2008. As Butler says, "[i]t is not as if an 'I' exists independently over here. When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do." (22) The impossibility of an independent "I" is emphasized in Ryan's polyphonic narrative, which consists of twenty-one monologues narrated by twenty-one different characters. While the form of Ryan's narrative does not allow for a classic protagonist, Bobby Mahon emerges as its central character who is referenced in all the monologues and whose fate is entangled with the country's and the community's development. *The Spinning Heart* here seems to follow an inverted principle of the narrative of community which "typically exemplifies modes of interdependence among community members" (Zagarell 503). In *The Spinning Heart*, the members' narratives constitute the community as a network. Relations and interdependence are revealed on various levels and via different motifs. One of these is Bobby's performative masculinity that only hides his insecurities but still turns him into a role model, until rumours about his affair with the "blow-in" Réaltín – one of the only two inhabitants of Pokey's "disaster area" (Ryan 122) – and the accusation that he murdered his father lead to his fall from the position as saviour-like figure and effect his exclusion.

Set in a village in the West in 2010, the narrative focuses on a microcosmic space to highlight the tension between the image of a stereotypical rural village space and the altered Irish land- and mindscape. It imagines how the village community as microcosm focusses attention on (performative) endeavours to maintain class and gender identities in relation to a community falling apart in times of "deepening social divisions" (Battel 105). The glocal[13] collapse comes to signify a rupture in time that allows for the entrance of spectres of Irish history and of its connected forms of dominant masculinity discourses. The different generations' struggles with masculinity exemplify the lasting effect and influence of such discourses and types. The narrative begins with Bobby Mahon's monologue, which sketches the dire situation of the village. Due to the bankruptcy of the local building company owned by Pokey Burke, who de-

13 The term "glocal" designates the interconnectedness of global and local levels as well as their reciprocal influence.

frauded his employees of social security benefits and fled the country, many of the villagers are left without employment but with a ghost estate and anger at a man whom they never respected but who was still able to betray them: they were "[r]obbed [...] not even by a man, but by a little prick." (Ryan 11)

While space and time are integral to such struggles again, hegemony features all the more heavily in this microcosm. In a different context, Derrida asserts that "[a]t a time when a new world disorder is attempting to install its neo-capitalism and neo-liberalism, […] hegemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of haunting. Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony" (37). In the context of neo-capitalism and new disorder, hegemonic masculinity emerges as the structuring principle of a haunted community. The concept of hegemony applied by Connell derives from Gramsci's analysis of class relations and refers to cultural dynamics; it is a "historically mobile relation" (Connell 77). For Connell, "the most visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity" are not always "the most powerful people" (77) because wealth or institutional power also play into such hegemonies. "Nevertheless", continues Connell, "hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual" (77). While Bobby's insecurities relate to his endeavour to be the "manly man" (Ryan 98) that others see in him and thus to live up to their expectations, the struggle for 'real' masculinity even propels the plot when characters strive to adhere to the economic and power-related aspects of masculinity. Suddenly unemployed, many of Ryan's male characters suffer from stereotypical gender roles and ideals, making them "victims of societal expectations that failed as a whole" (Altuna-García de Salazar 91). Such stereotypes become increasingly harmful to intra-community relations, leading to the kidnapping of Réaltín's son by the Montessori teacher Trevor and to the murder of Frank Mahon by Denis, who is shunned by his economically successful wife.

At the same time, Bobby's monologue evokes classic motifs of Irish literature, such as the dysfunctional family and the violent father, by providing insights into his own insecurities that spring from a childhood marked by the despotic behaviour of his father Frank. Together, Bobby's and Frank's monologues provide a perspective on the transmission of violence across generations. They simultaneously highlight the prevailing silence of Irish men in the face of crisis. Bobby suffered from his tyrannical father who verbally abused and psychologically injured his son, despite the fact that he was a victim of his own father's physical violence. Frank wonders "how it is that [he] was able to do to Bobby exactly what was done to [him]" (Ryan 145) without ever being able to tell him that he is a "good man" (Ryan 140). The "spectre of violence" (Magennis and Mullen 2) eventually forcefully invades, and thereby connects, the lives of Denis, Bobby, and Frank. The notion of aggressive masculinity was integral to traditional models of hegemonic masculinity (Magennis and Mullen 7) and re-surfaces when Denis fails to cope with his new situation – at home without work where his wife is "only barely tolerating [him]" (Ryan 120) – after the collapse of the Irish building sector. Taking into account Butler's and Connell's seminal work on

performativity and hegemonic masculinity, Magennis and Mullen ponder how dominant discourse in the twenty-first century sees masculinity as vulnerable and perpetually in crisis. They claim that, instead of a "nuanced debate over whether modes of masculinity should adapt and change" (3), the idea of emasculation of a generation is present in the popular press, for instance. Within this framework, Denis is relegated to a 'feminized' position of powerlessness and financial dependence on his wife, who perpetuates the neoliberal turn. While Denis is unable to obtain the "near a hundred grand" (Ryan 121) owed to him by former contractees, his wife maximizes profit by exploiting the employees of her crèche. Denis thus suddenly fails to adhere to the dominant discourse of productive and proud (working-class) masculinity of the Tiger period and actualizes the stereotypical male aggression potential instead. When his anger and aggression increase, he first damages a car and starts thinking about hitting his wife (Ryan 122), but eventually loses control when, while in search for Bobby, he meets Frank. Frank's insults and laugh remind Denis of his own father and the abuse he suffered from during his youth. The trauma of transgenerational violence makes Denis lose control and, thinking he is killing his own father, he beats Bobby's father to death.

Even though Bobby himself breaks this circle of violence when he becomes a father, the dominant image of masculinity he performs lasts, also in the code of silence he seems to follow. Unable to answer for himself in the face of false accusations, Bobby even remains silent in front of his wife Triona and his friends, letting the community condemn him rather than speak for himself, which results in Triona's despair. The traditional connection between masculinity and the trope of silence, also evoked in the case of Donovan's middle-class characters Peter and Frank, seems to anticipate the impossibility of profound and stable bonds between men as long as stereotypical Irish masculinities prevail.[14] As Madden argues, traditional hegemonic masculinities foreclose male intimacy (78), rendering "structures of affect and feeling [unavailable] to self-consciousness and self-reflection" (Magennis and Mullen 8). While Donovan's characters shy away from self-analysis through introspection (see Middleton), the structure of *The Spinning Heart* allows for a different view. The deep insights the characters offer in their monologues provide a stark contrast to the silence that prevails in their relationships, particularly when they are confronted with problems and emotions.

While the time of the boom suppressed competition between the men in the village, the collapse provides a time-space for the return of such struggles. Bobby was respected by his working-class colleagues and the wealthy Burkes, but when Pokey loses his and his employees' money through speculation and financial crisis, such respect between men can only be voiced in the monologues, which allow for more direct access to the characters' thoughts than Donovan's mediated stories. This is exemplified by Pokey's father Josie Burke: "I snapped [at Bobby] out of crossness

14 For a discussion of heteroglossia and silence, see Altuna-García de Salazar.

with myself. I was too ashamed to look the man in the eye. [...] Pokey was more than half-afraid of Bobby Mahon. He wished he *was* Bobby Mahon" (Ryan 22). This wish is shared by some of the male members of the village community, as Brian's monologue reveals. The young man tries to live up to an imagined masculine essence he sees in Bobby, whom he regards as a "proper man" to whom "[t]hings come easy" even though he thinks Bobby is not the "brightest star in the firmament" (Ryan 60). Brian's longing to "be Bobby Mahon" appears ironical because they already share hidden insecurities. Furthermore, Bobby has worked hard to hide his intelligence in order not to be praised by his English teacher, for instance (14-15) – the same teacher whose praise Brian can hardly stand since it does not correspond to his idea of 'real' masculinity (Ryan 59). While Brian envies Bobby for his assumed virility, an image evoked by Bobby's marriage to Triona and his alleged affair with Réaltín, Bobby is convinced that Triona "let herself down when she married [him]" instead of one of "them smart boys that got real money out of the boom: the architects, solicitors, auctioneers" (Ryan 12-13). Bobby thereby again highlights how issues of class and wealth figure in hegemonic masculinity and power relations between men in general.

Masculinity and class are also emphasized through a spectre that seemed to be absent from Celtic Tiger Ireland but that is re-introduced by Brian before his work-and-travel trip to Australia. Trying to ironically distance himself from the situation, he asserts that he is "going to Australia in the context of a severe recession, and therefore [he is] a tragic figure, a modern incarnation of the poor tenant farmer […] forced to choose between the coffin ship and the grave" (Ryan 57). Brian thus evokes an idea of ongoing crisis in a quickly changing environment that unavailingly attempted "to separate old from new, local from global, and past from present", as Buchanan states ("Living" 300). The impossibility of such a separation is also emphasised by Derrida's assertion that spectrality throws into doubt borders between "the reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it" (39), such as absence. The spectre hence "challenges the present in the name of both the past (that returns) and a future yet-to-be" (Molloy 140) and thus implies a breakdown of the boundaries between apparently different temporalities. The seeming anachronism of the poor tenant farmer in a time of "newness" relates to time "out of joint" particularly "when 'things are going badly'" (Derrida 22); Brian's recourse to the past thus alludes to a strange simultaneity of discourses and paradigms. Drawing on Derrida, such a reading of *The Spinning Heart* allows for seeing how presence is ordered and distributed in two directions of absence – what is no longer and what is not yet (25). This insight also appeals to masculinity and inheritance of spectres of masculinity, and it pertains to the question if future change is even possible for a younger generation. Brian symbolizes a generation positioned in a liminal space between real and imagined borders, between conservative ideals and longing for new experiences. However, his orientation towards a role model who shares the same insecurities can be seen in the light of the simulacrum. At the same time, his

turn towards the past, in terms of traditional masculinity and Irish history, seems to prefigure the impossibility of change as healing as long as harmful ideals of masculinity prevail.

Conclusion

In *The Spinning Heart* and *Country of the Grand*, the characters’ feelings of disappointment as well as of spatial and temporal displacement relate to the emergence of spectres from Irish history that again threatened to shape their present and future when the Celtic Tiger was disclosed as a sham. Suffering and bleak prospects are connected to the severing of interpersonal connections, especially when the expectation of male strength prevents Ryan’s and Donovan’s characters from voicing their struggles and fears. As Altuna-García de Salazar states, “it is silence that reigns, a silent dialogising discourse. Ryan’s characters need a way to represent the move from affluence to bust, but cannot find a collective voice.” (99) The inability to find a voice is most obvious in the case of Frank Mahon, whose monologue in *The Spinning Heart* comes from the mouth of a ghost, now a spectre whose haunting presence had already shaped his son’s life when he was still alive.

Although the “social and psychological matrices of real-life Irish masculinity are obviously complex” (Foster 24), the texts discussed in this essay succeed in engaging with these complexities as well as with the stereotypical legacies of Irish masculinities. The different subjective viewpoints of Ryan’s and Donovan’s narratives hold up a mirror to society, forcing readers to reflect on the loss of values and the refusal to acknowledge problems that the Celtic Tiger years covered up with consumption instead of attempting to solve them. National and communal issues are unveiled in these stories when the logic of haunting, as a violent act, interrupts a new order by deconstructing the boundaries between past and present and allowing spectres of Irish history and identity to invade ‘modern’ Ireland. Both works highlight the complexity of societal structures and the intricate connections between, for instance, gendered expectations, class issues, and the economy. Although *The Spinning Heart* and *Country of the Grand* present a mostly homogeneous society – they hardly feature immigrants or homosexual characters, for example – they emphasize the need to critically examine stereotypes and expectations that relate to hegemonic masculinity in a moment of disruption and shifting paradigms. This moment of shift allows for recognizing the still dominant stereotypes and ideologies that masculinity, as “an unfixed signifier” (Magennis and Mullen 3), is tied to. By highlighting and, to some extent, countering stereotypes and dominant cultural narratives, Ryan’s and Donovan’s works offer the possibility to account for both the past and the future through an exploration of the ties or bonds that compose communities and individual identities.

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