

DECONSTRUCTING STEREOTYPES AND OTHERING THROUGH HUMOUR IN LISA MCGEE'S *DERRY GIRLS*¹

Verónica Membrive

Linda Anderson has described Northern Ireland as “one of the most over-narrativised areas of the world” (qtd. in Kennedy n.p.), while Freya McClements reflects that “if there is a lesson in the literature of the Troubles, it is that its legacy is inescapable” (n.p.). Yet, literary and audio-visual representations of Northern Ireland as a territory that has suffered from extreme confrontation and violence often resort to stereotyped representations of all factions. The twentieth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement in 2018 saw a wealth of research papers, special issues, and monographs dedicated to reckoning with the problem of representing the Troubles in Northern Ireland. These works draw attention to misguided and prejudiced depictions of Northern Ireland in diverse media and reflect on the progression, if any, that has been made towards a more balanced representation of the conflict. Underpinning these critical conversations is the question of whether a change in the representation of Northern Irish identity is possible after twenty years of relative peace and reconciliation. Monographs by Siobhán Fenton and Etain Tannam – alongside edited collections by the Royal Irish Academy and Colin Coulter, et al. – interrogate what has been achieved in the twenty years following decades of violent bloodshed in the streets. Noting the interference of Brexit, they concur that current politics seem to have failed to establish a healthy and functioning political apparatus.² Between them, works by Jennifer Todd, Katy Hayward and Cathal McManus, and Colin Coulter and Peter Shirlow chart a critical turn from polarised to more multifarious approaches to post-conflict Northern-Irish identity. This transformation has been addressed from the perspective of culture and art in Armstrong et al.; however, there remains a gap in the scholarship regarding how contemporary Northern-Irish audio-visual products contribute both to changing how the Troubles are represented and to renegotiating Northern Irish identity after the peace process.

This chapter adds to the critical debate concerning the role of media in the process of renegotiating representations of the Troubles by analysing how the 2018 sitcom *Derry Girls* uses humour and irony to deconstruct stereotyped notions not only of the

-
- 1 Some aspects of this chapter have been published in a slightly different form in Membrive.
 - 2 Charles I. Armstrong, David Herbert, and Jan Erik Mustad wonder if the Agreement has “lived up to the hopes of its most enthusiastic supporters or has, quite to the contrary, the historical record proven the nay-sayers and doubters were right all along” (“Introduction” in Armstrong et al. 3). Certainly, since the Good Friday Agreement, doubts regarding the “fresh start” included in the Declaration of Support of the Agreement have persisted.

Catholic and Protestant populations but also of other 'Others' in the city of Derry – or Londonderry, "depending on your persuasion," as Erin, the series protagonist, says at the opening of the pilot episode (S1 E1). In particular, the chapter will explore how the legacies of Stage Irish hetero-stereotypes and auto-stereotypes are intermingled in seasons 1 (2018) and 2 (2019) of *Derry Girls*, as it represents changing sectarian, gender, and religious identities of Northern Ireland in the years 1994-1995 with humour and irony.

Stage Irishness, Sectarian Stereotypes, and Northern Ireland

The theatrical representation of the Stage Irish, historically associated with Irish Catholics, created a unique cultural identity throughout the centuries and has variously played a part in either perpetuating or critiquing popular English hetero-stereotypes concerning Ireland and the Irish. One of the most explored representations of Stage Irishry is the stereotype of the clownish Irish peasant – a dirty, shiftless person wearing country clothes and smoking from a pipe. Although affable and laughable, he is potentially belligerent, and he has traits of "garrulity, pugnacity and a rather unfocused ethnic pride" (Kiberd 13). Besides, he is also eloquent but easily duped. As Mary Trotter notes, for "imperialist audiences, Irish stereotypes on the stage affirmed English superiority to the Irish while also expressing a degree of anxiety over the relationship between the two cultures" (37). Imperial presence was justified as a civilising paternalistic force for the infantilised, feminised, and underdeveloped colonised people and culture. Trotter continues: "For Irish nationalist audiences, the plays pointed out discrimination against the Irish within the United Kingdom, so they either boycotted plays with Stage Irish characters or developed resistant readings of such dramas" (37).

By contrast, the drama of the Irish revivalist and nationalist movements attempted to subvert imperial representations by presenting rather idealised versions of Irish national identity, Ireland's cultural as well as political right to independence, and, above all, Ireland's distinction from English national identity and culture. "Stage Irish stereotypes appear in these plays, but their vices are turned to virtues" (Trotter 39). The positive outcome of this strategy of auto-stereotyping was that it allowed the Irish to take "many images which were rejected by English society, occupy them, reclaim them, and make them their own" (Kiberd 32).³ Thus the Stage Irishman "provided a rhetorical structure for staging an identifiable 'Irish' identity, a structure that remained in use – adapted, transformed, or merely employed for pro-Irish purposes-well into

3 Pastor and Fuentes define the term "hetero-stereotype" as "a group's perception of another group's members' traits, characteristics, or values with a tendency to define others as rigid ethnic characterisations and strong generalisations about group membership. Different national or cultural assumptions can be described as either simple or projected" (649). By contrast, "auto-stereotype" refers to "a group's views about the traits or characteristics of its own members" (649).

the 1920s" (Trotter 39). This process of negotiating a new but still identifiable national identity by reframing comic Stage Irish clichés provides a framework for McGee's attempts in *Derry Girls* to use humour and self-ironising comic performance to deconstruct and reclaim stereotypes about not only Catholic but also Protestant communities in 1990s pre-Agreement Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland is particularly significant, if often overlooked, in this history, as there the Irish stereotype assumes certain sectarian dimensions. As Liam O'Rourke writes:

It is a practical and necessary social skill [in Northern Ireland] to be able to "tell the difference" between Protestants and Catholics if the problems endemic to a sectarian social milieu are to be avoided. Telling the difference is based on the social significance attached to name, area of residence, school attended etc. These elements provide the material for fashioning in an ongoing and narrative manner the theories and stereotypes which each side has of the other. (n.p.)

Central to the peace process is the idea of reconciliation between these communities, yet Arthur Aughey argues that the Agreement "appeared to strengthen the very [sectarian] tendencies it was designed to weaken" through "its elevation of cultural divisiveness driven not by equality and discrimination but by the idea that Northern Ireland has two distinct communities whose cultures and interests are different, and who must be constantly policed and kept apart" (170). Although there are in fact multiple, overlapping and diverging internal and international sides to these communities and their encounters in Northern Ireland, the "ideological representations" of these sectarian stereotypes "are based on a mixture of myth and reality. In order to understand sectarian stereotypes, it is necessary to understand their material roots in society. To do otherwise is to fatally underestimate their strength and durability" (O'Rourke n.p.).

One of the effects of the peace process, then, is that it effectively transformed the Northern Ireland conflict from a political dispute over national sovereignty into a cultural conflict over respect for identities. The most recent Northern Ireland Life and Times survey from 2018 reveals that 35% of the population identify themselves as British, 28% as Irish and 25% as Northern Irish. Kevin McNicholl, Clifford Stevenson, and John Garry note that:

Northern Irish was first given as an option on surveys in the late 1980s (Moxon-Browne), replacing Rose's hybrid category of "Anglo-Irish." It is now the preferred option for 25% of citizens, making it the third most popular in the region, and the only [category] that is accepted by equivalent numbers of both Catholics and Protestants. (4)

Elsewhere, McNicholl notes that as "the societal division" in Northern Ireland "is often (and arguably increasingly) described as an 'identity conflict.'" Such survey results that suggested a growing identification with the third category of "Northern Irish" were

taken by many as an indication of a deep psychological change within the region that could signal a movement towards a natural post-conflict identity, associated with a young, enlightened urban middle class that were keen to emphasise that "we are all the same." This movement was called the "Rise of the Northern Irish" in the *Belfast Telegraph* (n.p.).

McNicholl goes on to ask:

Now that the common narratives have been tested to destruction what can we say about this new identity? The academic literature in this area using qualitative methods is keen to emphasise that even those who identify this way are not entirely certain of its meaning. This ambiguity of meaning is even said to be one of the appeals of Northern Irishness. (n.p.)

Given the promise of this emergent “new identity,” novelist David Keenan asks if we are “finally far enough away from the events of 1968-1998 to start fictionalising them” in a new way beyond the standard binaries and if it is “necessary for there to be a sort of cultural/historical gap before we can interrogate trauma” (n.p.).

Humour in Representations of the Troubles

In their foreword to *Humour and Tragedy in Ireland*, Patricia Trainor de la Cruz and Blanca Krauel Heredia reflect on whether “‘humour’ and ‘tragedy’ are inextricably linked as they are emotions which are complementary and therefore difficult to separate” (9). Writing in 2018, Katie Markham observes that “humorous reflections on the Troubles appear to be experiencing a renaissance in the North” (n.p.). Markham’s article on “Troubles tourism” in Belfast highlights the impulse towards gallows humour as one of the defining features of the black cab mural tour in particular (n.p.). Markham claims that she “always got the sense when on these tours that such jokes went beyond mere ‘stage Irishy’ [sic] and were in fact illustrative of a significant change that has taken place since the signing of the Good Friday agreement” (n.p.). It is in this context that I am interested in exploring how *Derry Girls*, too, both exploits and goes beyond “Stage Irishry” in exploring the possibility of challenging binary stereotypes about Irish Catholics and Protestants through humour in post-Agreement Northern Ireland.

To name a few examples, pre-Agreement comic depictions of Northern Ireland can be observed in plays ranging from Stewart Parker’s off-beat wry comedies of the 1970s and 1980s, Christina Reid’s *Did You Hear the One About The Irishman...?* (1985), and Mary Jones’s *A Night in November* (1994), two plays that stage terrible events through a humorous perspective. Markham’s claim for a current renaissance of “humorous reflections on the Troubles” (n.p.) is evidenced on the stage, for instance, in *Lally the Scut* (2015) by Abbie Spallen and *Cyprus Avenue* (2016) by David Ireland. In fiction, Lucy Caldwell’s collection of short stories *Multitudes* (2016), although at times bittersweet, deserves acknowledgement as a relevant representation of the pre-Agreement 1990s society. Anna Burns’s Booker-Prize winning *Milkman* (2018) enacts an equally humorous and scarring image of 1970s Belfast. Finally, Paul McVeigh’s *The Good Son* (2015) is “a warm-hearted, funny novel about growing up gay in Troubles Ardoyne” (McClements n.p.).

In relation to audio-visual products, the cinematic legacy of the conflict has been examined in several publications (Rockett et al.; Neve; Pettitt; McLroy; McLoone, *Film, Media* and McLoone, “Film, Television”; Armstrong et al.). Literature on television

representation of the conflict mostly focuses on its news coverage and its impact on the peace process (Smith; Cairns et al; Cairns; Collins; Spencer, "The Impact" and Spencer, "Pushing"). However, while there have been many television dramas during and after the conflict, none of them were produced in Belfast until the 1970s. The "Golden Age" of this genre occurred during the 1960s with productions by the BBC and ITV which dealt with Northern Irish politics and violence (McLoone, "Film, Television" 7); it is worth noting *Cemented with Love* (BBC, 1965) and *Progress to the Park* (BBC, 1965) as examples. McLoone considers that this 1960s television drama falls into three broad categories: drama/documentary, thrillers, and authored drama ("Film, Television" 11), leaving no room for a comical approach to these events, although the later series *Foreign Bodies* (1987-1989) and *So You Think You Have Troubles* (1991) tried to explore this intricate and distressing topic through the sitcom genre with inauspicious results. Some years later, the well-known satirical television comedy series from BBC Northern Ireland *Give My Head Peace* (1995-2007) poked fun at political parties, paramilitary groups, and the sectarian divide in the territory. Other recent comedic representations of the Troubles include *Divorcing Jack* (1998), *An Everlasting Piece* (2000), *Wild about Harry* (2000), and *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* (2000) (see Crosson, "The Shore").

Derry-born stage and screenwriter Lisa McGee had already portrayed the Troubles in some of her works, such as the play *Girls and Dolls* (2006), but the sitcom *Derry Girls* consolidates her as a contemporary Northern Irish comedy writer who skilfully draws heightened comic characters from the region that nevertheless reflect and perform the experiences of adolescence in times of local and national transformation. The success of *Derry Girls* provokes us to ask whether it is the case that when a conflict is represented from a humorous perspective, in which stereotypes are turned into the material not only for prejudice but also for self-ironising comedy, reconciliation has taken place or is in an advanced stage of development?

Deconstructing National, Sectarian, and Gender Stereotypes in *Derry Girls*

Derry Girls is produced by Hat Trick Productions and broadcast on Channel 4 in the UK and on Netflix internationally. Its story of a gang of 16-year-old girls in early 1990s Derry (or Londonderry) shows the reality of Catholic families in the city from a comical point of view. The series is a celebration of clichés and conveys a nostalgic, but not sentimental, gaze at stereotypes in order to embrace and, simultaneously, deconstruct them. The show is based on McGee's own experience as a teenager in Derry and offers the audience the chance to follow the milestones and tribulations of four Catholic Irish girls and an English boy in a place full of contradictions, surveillance, and violence. The group is composed of Erin Quinn (Saoirse-Monica Jackson), a 16-year-old who aspires to become a writer and seems to be concerned about the political turmoil of the city; Clare Devlin (Nicola Coughlan), an anxious teen who comes out as a lesbian; Michelle Mallon (Jamie-Lee O'Donnell), a foul-mouthed teen and the most subversive of the gang; Orla McCool (Louisa Harland), Erin's cousin

who likes to burn things; and the English boy, James (Dylan Llewellyn), Michelle's cousin whose Irish mother went to London to have an abortion and never came back. James is assigned to a girl's school owing to the fear of suffering violence in a boy's school in Derry for his status as an outsider.

McGee wanted to articulate her story through the female experience, since the discourse from women from Northern Ireland has been largely sidelined in representations of the Troubles. As *Derry Girls* demonstrates, Northern Ireland is not only experiencing a political transition but also a shift in gender roles and stereotypes. There has been a relevant change from 2015 since new policies ("Six Point Plan on Gender Equality") and movements such as Women in Film and Television Ireland have been promoted in order to support gender equality in the Irish audio-visual industry. Two recent studies help to situate McGee's sitcom in the current Irish, British, and even international audio-visual scene. Ruth Barton's *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century* (2019) "foreground[s] representations of women in contemporary Irish filmmaking" (20), while Susan Liddy's *Women in the Irish Film Industry* (2020) "identifies and challenges the inequalities, and the disenfranchisement of women in the Irish film industry, which replicate, in many ways, women's position in Irish society and culture [...], echo[ing] the ongoing, vigorous international debates" (11-12).

McGee claims in a recent interview that "a lot of stuff about Northern Ireland is very male" (O'Reilly n.p.), and *Derry Girls* does explore changing male gender norms and stereotypes through the character of Erin's grandfather, who constantly teases his son-in-law for representing a new affectionate parenting model. However, McGee is not interested in presenting the main gang using the stereotype of the coquettish "Colleen" – the "female version of the [Stage Irish] Paddy" defined by Mary Trotter as "a virginal beauty in need of protection" in the middle of the conflict (43) – but as independent people who "did the things you heard about. I want them to be the urban myths themselves" (O'Reilly n.p.). We do, in fact, find an Irish stereotyped woman in the form of Erin's mother Mary, obsessed with surveillance and gossip, being a religious and moral beacon and worrying about the possibility of Erin getting pregnant. But at the same time, she makes Erin swear on a portrait of Dolly Parton instead of the Pope, in an affectionate nod to Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments*, in which Jimmy Rabbitte Senior hangs a portrait of Elvis Presley above the Pope's. McGee also delves into the cliché of the Irish woman who left the city for London after bringing shame to the family for being pregnant and returns after many years. James's mother is represented as a liberated cosmopolitan woman from a comic perspective, but the drama of abortion, misjudgement, and abandonment, a lived reality for many Irish women, is also there as the backdrop of James's story.

Religion is one of the most explored themes in the sitcom's reflections on stereotypes. The show's irreverent representation of priests and nuns is imbued with the spirit of *Father Ted* (1995-1998), "a comedy of terminal and unalleviated desperation" (Crowley 30) in its reworkings of religious mores. Apart from the handsome priest

Peter, who at one point doubts his spiritual vocation, the cliché of ambivalent religious devotion is embodied by Sister Michael (Siobhán McSweeney) who works at Our Lady Immaculate College. She epitomises the trope of the tough, strong, and severe Catholic nun who hates Protestants, likes a good statue, and whose main aim is to ensure that all religious conventions are followed by the students; she even applies restrictions to the songs they can listen to. At the same time, however, McGee confers Sister Michael with an ironic eye and wit that challenges commonplace hetero-stereotypes. The nun delights in reading *The Exorcist*, drinking red wine, and practicing judo, and she does not seem to relish her work at the college. In season 2, when then-US president Bill Clinton visits Derry after the ceasefire is declared, Sister Michael does not want to give the students a day off because she does not have faith in real change, and she does not seem to yearn for that change. Thus, McGee suggests an unspoken fear among institutions that they may lose the power that is allowed to them under the status quo.

Certainly, the most remarkable element of *Derry Girls* is the way in which violence and sectarianism are conveyed. Although from the very beginning the armed conflict overshadows the gang's everyday lives, the series does not explicitly centre the Troubles. The sitcom rather focuses on the perception of cultural alterity, stereotyping and Othering of Catholics and Protestants (in particular Protestants, considering that the series is communicated through the Catholics' point of view) through the teenagers' everyday lived cultures. There is a blatant distinction between "same" (victims) and "the Other" (perpetrators), as in the pilot episode in which Sarah (Erin's aunt who lives with the family) learns that a bomb has exploded on the bridge and she claims that "they want ordinary people to suffer." Protestants are mostly referred to as "they" or "these Protestants," with comments such as: "that's the English, they are fucking savages" (S1, E1). Thus, "both sides of a conflict perceive it through the lens of the myth of pure evil – but in mirror images. Each side sees itself as the innocent victim and the other as the evil attacker" (Baumeister 102). A clear distinction between 'victim' and 'perpetrator' is identifiable in older characters, as they experienced the worst years of the conflict (especially the 1960s and 1970s) as well as a more radical position: the grandfather regards Protestants with a higher level of disregard than his daughter (Erin's mother) does.

This prejudice is less obvious when the spotlight is put onto younger generations of Northern-Irish citizens in the show, especially the main gang. An apparent banalisation of terror and evil could be derived from the series' filter of a comical outlook on the armed conflict. For instance, we learn that a bomb on a bridge inconveniences Erin's mother because it means her daughter has to stay home from school another day, and because Sarah would miss her date at a wellness centre. Similarly, in the final scene of one episode, a voiceover acting as Erin's thoughts is reading a passage from her diary: "injustice is something I have become used to. I am after all the daughter of crossfire. But I choose to get over it, the road to peace is paved with tolerance and understanding. Violence is never the answer" (S1, E1). After that final

sentence is pronounced in voiceover, Erin – together with the audience – realises that Orla is actually reading from her diary, and Erin springs into action and tries to hit Orla, as the sincere sentiments of the voiceover are comically undercut. McGee represents the process of identity change experienced among the population after decades suffering from terrorist attacks, kidnappings, and murders. To this end, McGee underlines the difficulty for this community to establish their individualism in a very uniform, sectarian, and closed group, holding the balance between a strong provincialism and a thriving globalisation. The urge of these teenagers to define their own identity in the microcosm that is Derry is represented and subsequently ironised through the scene in which Erin tells her mother that she “should be allowed to express [her] individuality” (S1, E1) by wearing a denim jacket with her school uniform. Once she meets the gang without the garment, Clare decides to take off her own jacket and claims that she is not going to be “individual on [her] own” (S1, E1).

The genuine interest in the multi-layered concept of alterity that is hinted at in season 1 is explored and developed in greater detail in season 2. The girl gang takes part in the peace project “Friends Across the Barricades,” in which there are gatherings among boys and girls from Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods in order to promote cross-community relations. As it happens with foreign students who visit the city for a short period, in *Derry Girls* Protestants are also regarded as exotic: the gang all believe that if they are able to become friends with a Protestant, they will be considered cool at school. During this exchange experience, the girls’ main aim is to have sex with one of the Protestant boys. This scenario seems to be a nod to the cliché of “love across the barricade” based on the “Romeo and Juliet syndrome” present in many Northern Ireland television dramas in the 1960s (McLoone, “Film, Television” 9). O’Rourke dismisses such “‘peace and reconciliation’ programmes” as “profoundly idealist and conservative in nature because they are based on the axiom that it is a matter of ‘educating,’ of removing individual prejudices and stereotypes rather than a change of sectarian realities” (n.p.). In this episode, however, the series both blurs and comically amplifies the lines between ‘same’ and ‘Other.’ When the whole group is instructed to fill two blackboards, one marked “similarities” and the other marked “differences,” both the Catholic girls of Our Lady Immaculate College and the Protestant boys of Londonderry Academy are only able to stress differences: “Catholics like to walk” while “Protestants like to march”; “Catholics must obey the Pope” while “Protestants love the Queen”; “Catholics go to Bundoran” while “Protestants go to Newcastle”; “Catholics love statues” while “Protestants love hymns”; “Catholics love bingo” while “Protestants keep toasters in cupboards,” and so on (S2 E1). Donald Clarke observes that the blackboard’s “slurs and generalisations [...] cross the spectrum from genuine prejudice to harmless misconception” (n.p.). The audience does not know which team wrote that “Protestants think Catholics keep coal in the bath” or “Protestants think Catholics are all alcos,” thus these could constitute “a manifestation of bigotry or a complaint about such bigotry” (Clarke n.p.). This is the moment when the gang, and especially Erin, come to realise that they are ‘the Others’ Others’

and the lack of knowledge and trust between both communities is hampering reconciliation.

Indeed, there are minor plots in both seasons in which – apart from the Othering of Protestants – women, Travellers, gypsies, and homosexuals are Othered as well. At one point, even Belfast is described as a “primitive and savage place” (S2, E2), and Erin's grandfather hates it. Those identified as different, as not ‘proper’ members of the in-group, are always a potential enemy and “the more threatening the behaviour of these outsiders seems, the more clearly is the internal enemy identified” (Elliot et al. 157). The role of James in the story, then, is essential to developing this dynamic, as he seems to represent the only outsider outlook on the conflict inside of the main gang as a complicated figure of Irish descent but born and raised in England. The Derry Catholic community considers him an Other (part of the Protestant community), and there is a deliberate mirror situation between James and Orla: while James is constantly emasculated, Orla is presented as a stereotyped ‘masculine’ character. Yet, the main issue of the story is less the violence and terror of the armed conflict than the gang's aims and anxieties as teenagers. This is explicit at the end of the season 2 episode 1 when the whole group starts fighting and Erin writes “Parents” on the blackboard as one thing they all have in common.

Conclusion: Local and International Gazes

Derry Girls reverses the common use of Northern Ireland “as a colourful ‘background’ for universal human drama” (Donnelly 395). McGee presents the city of Derry, where violent acts perpetrated by both sides are part of the story, not just as a background but as a device for telling the story from the inside: in actual locations with localised characters who adapt their everyday lives to the surrounding violent environment. In *Derry Girls*, the differences between good and evil, right and wrong, are never simplistic, and there is a process of demystifying the conflict through humour, especially in season 2.

In the show, there is an array of character categories, all of them personifying virtues and immoralities. The Stage Irish trope of the Fighting Irish is integrated at the end of both seasons. In season 1, we encounter the apparently affable member of a paramilitary group who slips into the family car to leave the city unnoticed, and Michelle is attracted to him. This character embodies the cinematic stereotype of the romantic freedom fighter with a surface allure of evil as “relentless desire” (Bradley Salamon 27). Episode 5 from Season 2 also exemplifies how McGee plays with violence, terror, and teenage experience. The girls go to the end of the semester prom, and a girl from Donegal wants to reproduce the final scene from the film *Carrie* to ruin their dresses and spoil the entire night. In the very moment that the paint falls from above, shots of Erin's parents watching the announcement of the ceasefire on TV are interpolated. The final episode from Season 2 focuses on Bill Clinton's 1995 visit in which he referred to terrorists as “yesterday's men.” McGee again composes the episode's

storyline around an actual historical event related to the Troubles, but the main plot revolves around the gang. However, on this occasion the episode closes the season with a special remark on the importance of reconciliation as the only possible solution to the conflict: James becomes a full member of the 'Derry girl' gang as Clinton is giving his speech in which he says: "build on the opportunity you have before you."

The origins and meaning of the armed conflict are challenged through characters who do not belong to the region. In season 1 episode 4, the school participates in a project to host students from Ukraine some years after the nuclear catastrophe in Chernobyl. The student, Katya, coming "out of the frying pan into [...] a different type of frying pan, or some sort of wok," as Sister Michael defines it, is regarded as coming from a very deprived family. Erin wants to take a leading and educating role derived from her pre-conceptions of Katya's place of origin. However, Katya defies the group and tells them that "you people like to fight each other and, to be honest, what person understands why," as "you're not two different religions here, you're different flavours of same religion" (S1 E4). After this, Clare experiences an epiphany, as she wonders about the conflict's true nature while wearing a T-shirt bearing the Union Jack.

McGee combines alterity with the search for identity as a teenager, especially through James, the English boy who wonders "how things work here" and sometimes feels that "he fucking got into the other side of the mirror." References to the shift between two perspectives scattered throughout the episodes with nods to *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Wizard of Oz* enable the spectator to approach the gang's struggles to become adults and deal with the armed conflict. The English Other is, most of the time, embodied by James even if he is not actually quite aware of the political situation of Northern Ireland, and he "cannot tell the difference between the rebellions and the uprisings" (S1, E3). People around him make fun of his accent and take for granted that the English are violent "savages" who have "all the jobs, all the lands, and all the fucking rights" (S1, E2) and who are "worse than Chinese people" (S1, E2). The question of who the Others are is exposed in *Derry Girls*, since the Catholic characters feel themselves to be the oppressed Others, and every episode is riven with colonial stereotypes (Markham n.p.). It is only through representations that the experience of the traumatic event can be conveyed – as Jeffrey C. Alexander puts it, "imagination is intrinsic to the very process of representation" (9), and this trauma process occurs in the "gap between event and representation" (11). Now that twenty years have passed since the Good Friday Agreement, this gap is increasingly becoming the key site for the renegotiation of Northern Irish identity.

Certainly, what makes *Derry Girls* an achievement both inside and outside the boundaries of Ireland and Britain is its local take on transcultural experiences, which is achieved, in part, through references to pop culture signifiers.⁴ Which girl from the

4 *Derry Girls* has become the most watched TV show in Northern Ireland with a 54% share in general terms and a 64% in the target 16-34 years old (*Belfast Telegraph*, 21 February 2018). As a result of its rating success, Channel 4 confirmed a second season and sold the international rights to Netflix. The specialised critic has conveyed very

90s did not listen to The Cranberries, love Take That, or learn the choreography of Whigfield's "Saturday Night" by heart to dance with friends at a party? McGee transcends nationality and has been able to put together two moments of transformation: the time when Northern Ireland was walking towards the beginning of peace, and the changed view of these events from the vantage of the twentieth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, both periods of uncertainty. The success of the sitcom lies in how this process is enriched by these local particularities encoded through comedy.

Works Cited

- Alexander, Jeffrey C. "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma." *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. Berkeley: U of California P, 2004. 1-30.
- ARK. *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2015*. June 2016. www.ark.ac.uk/nilt (20 May 2021).
- Armstrong, Charles I., David Herber, and Jan Erik Mustad, eds. *The Legacy of the Good Friday Agreement: Northern Irish Politics, Culture and Art after 1998*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
- Aughey, Arthur. *The Politics of Northern Ireland: Beyond the Belfast Agreement*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Barton, Ruth. *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2019.
- Baumeister, Roy F. *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty*. New York: W.H. Freeman, 1997.
- Bradley Salamon, Linda. "Screening Evil in History: Rope, Compulsion, Scarface, Richard III." *The Changing Face of Evil in Film and Television*. Ed. Martin F. Norden. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 17-36.
- Cairns, Ed. "Impact of Television News Exposure on Children's Perceptions of Violence in Northern Ireland." *The Journal of Social Psychology* 130.4 (1990): 447-52.
- Cairns, Ed, Dale Hunter, and Linda Herring. "Young Children's Awareness of Violence in Northern Ireland: The Influence of Northern Irish Television in Scotland and Northern Ireland." *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 19.1 (1980): 3-6.

positive comments in general for its authenticity and its ability to represent Northern-Irish society daily life (*The Guardian*, 11 February 2018).

- Clarke, Donald. "Derry Girls' Blackboard Scene is the TV Moment of 2019." *The Irish Times*, 9 March 2019. <<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/derry-girls-blackboard-scene-is-the-tv-moment-of-2019-1.3817703>> (20 May 2021).
- Coulter, Colin, and Peter Shirlow. "Northern Ireland's Future(s)." *Reimagining Irish Studies for the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. Eamon Maher and Eugene O'Brien. Bern: Peter Lang, 2021.
- Coulter, Colin, et al. *Northern Ireland a Generation after Good Friday: Lost Futures and New Horizons in the 'Long Peace.'* Manchester: Manchester UP, 2021.
- Crosson, Seán. "'All this must come to an end. Through talking': Dialogue and Troubles Cinema." *The Crossings of Art in Ireland*. Ed. Ruben Moi, Brynhildur Boyce, and Charles Armstrong. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014. 81-96.
- . "The Shore (2011): Examining the Reconciliation Narrative in Post-Troubles Cinema." *The Legacy of the Good Friday Agreement: Northern Irish Politics, Culture and Art after 1998*. Ed. Charles I. Armstrong, David Herbert, and Jan Erik Mustad. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. 175-88.
- Crowley, Cornelius. "Father Ted: Priests on Screen and Irish Self-Images." *New Perspectives on Irish TV Series: Identity and Nostalgia on the Small Screen*. Ed. Flore Coulouma. Bern: Peter Lang, 2016. 30-55.
- Derry Girls*. Created by Lisa McGee, Channel 4, 2018.
- Donnelly, K. J. "The Policing of Cinema: Troubled Film Exhibition in Northern Ireland." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 20.3 (2000): 385-96.
- Elliott, Philip, Graham Murdock, and Philip Schlesinger. "'Terrorism' and the State: A Case Study of the Discourses of Television." *Media, Culture & Society* 5.2 (1983): 155-77.
- Fenton, Siobhán. *The Good Friday Agreement*. London: Biteback, 2018.
- Hayward, Katy, and Cathal McManus. "Neither/Nor: The Rejection of Unionist and Nationalist Identities in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland." *Capital and Class* 43.1 (2019): 139-55.
- Keenan, David. "Top 10 Books about the Troubles." *The Guardian*, 30 January 2019. <www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jan/30/top-10-books-about-the-troubles-northern-ireland-david-keenan> (20 May 2021).
- Kennedy, Maev. "The Trouble with Fictional Troubles." *The Guardian*, 2 June 2005. <www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/jun/02/hayfestival2005.northernireland> (20 May 2021).
- Liddy, Susan. "Introduction: Setting the Scene: Women in the Irish film industry". *Women in the Irish Film Industry: Stories and Storytellers*. Ed. Susan Liddy. Cork: Cork UP, 2020. 1-16.

- Markham, Katie. "Humour as Black as a Black Taxi: Joking about the Troubles." *The Irish Times*, 4 April 2018. <www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/humour-as-black-as-a-black-taxi-joking-about-the-troubles-1.3448041> (20 May 2021).
- McClements, Freya. "Giving Voice to the Troubles: How Literature Has Told the North's Story." *The Irish Times*, 6 October 2018. <www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/giving-voice-to-the-troubles-how-literature-has-told-the-north-s-story-1.3642490> (20 May 2021).
- McIlroy, Brian. *Shooting to Kill: Filmmaking and the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland*. Richmond, BC: Steveston Press, 2001.
- McLoone, Martin. *Film, Media and Popular Culture in Ireland: Cityscapes, Landscapes, Soundscapes*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008.
- . "Film, Television and the Troubles: A 'Troubles Archive' Essay." *Arts Council of Northern Ireland* (2009). <http://uir.ulster.ac.uk/11861/1/Film%2C_TV_and_the_Troubles_-_sent_version.doc> (20 May 2021).
- . *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema*. London: British Film Institute, 2019.
- McNicholl, Kevin. "The 'Northern Irish' Identity is No New Dawn." *The Detail*, 3 April 2017. <<https://thedetail.tv/articles/the-northern-irish-identity-is-no-new-dawn>>.
- McNicholl, Kevin, Clifford Stevenson, and John Garry. "How the 'Northern Irish' Identity is Understood and Used by Young People and Politicians." *Political Psychology* (2018): 1-19.
- Membrive, Veronica. "Banalising Evil? Humour in Lisa McGee's *Derry Girls*." *International Perspectives on Rethinking Evil in Film and Television*. Ed. Dilan Tüysüz. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2021. 164-75.
- Moxon-Browne, Edward. "National Identity in Northern Ireland." *Social Attitudes in Northern Ireland: The First Report*. Ed. Peter Stringer and Gillian Robinson. Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1991. 23-30.
- Neve, Brian. "Cinema, the Ceasefire, and 'the Troubles.'" *Irish Studies Review* 5.20 (1997): 2-8.
- O'Doherty, Malachi. "Yes, I Call Myself Northern Irish but that Could Change." *The Belfast Telegraph*, 12 December 2012. <<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/news-analysis/yes-i-call-myself-northern-irish-but-that-could-change-29056051.html>> (20 May 2021).
- O'Reilly, Seamas. "*Derry Girls*' Lisa McGee: 'A Lot of Stuff about Northern Ireland Is Very Male'." *The Irish Times*, 18 August 2018. <www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/derry-girls-lisa-mcgee-a-lot-of-stuff-about-northern-ireland-is-very-male-1.3593727> (20 May 2021).

- O'Rourke, Liam. "Sectarian Stereotypes." *The Vacuum*: 6. <<https://www.thevacuum.org.uk/issues/issues0120/issue06/is06artsecste.html>> (20 May 2021).
- Pastor, Silvia C., and Milton A. Fuentes. "Hetero-stereotypes." *The Encyclopedia of Cross-Cultural Psychology 2 E-O*. Ed. Kenneth D. Keith. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2013: 649-51.
- Pettitt, Lance. *Screening Ireland: Film and Television Representation*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000.
- Rockett, Kevin, Luke Gibbons, and John Hill. *Cinema and Ireland*. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Rose, Richard. *Governing Without Consensus: An Irish Perspective*. London: Faber and Faber, 1971.
- Royal Irish Academy Pub. *Irish Studies in International Affairs: Reflections on the Northern Ireland Conflict and Peace Process*. Special Issue. 2018.
- Smith, Anthony. "Television Coverage of Northern Ireland." *Index on Censorship* 1.2 (1972): 15-32.
- Spencer, Graham. "The Impact of Television News on the Northern Ireland Peace Negotiations." *Media, Culture & Society* 26.5 (2004): 603-23.
- . "Pushing for Peace." *European Journal of Communication* 18.1 (2003): 55-80.
- Tannam, Etain. *Beyond the Good Friday Agreement: In the Midst of Brexit*. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Todd, Jennifer. *Identity Change after Conflict: Ethnicity, Boundaries and Belonging in the Two Irelands*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
- Trainor de la Cruz, Patricia, and Blanca Krauel Heredia, eds. *Humour and Tragedy in Ireland*. Málaga: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad, 2005.
- Trotter, Mary. *Ireland's National Theaters: Political Performance and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2001.
- Waddell, Neil, and Ed Cairns. "Identity Preference in Northern Ireland." *Political Psychology* 12.2 (1991): 205-13.