COLÓQUIO DE OUTONO

NOVOS COSMOPOLITISMOS.
IDENTIDADES HÍBRIDAS

Organização de
Ana Gabriela Macedo
Maria Eduarda Keating

Universidade do Minho
Centro de Estudos Humanísticos
Colóquio de Outono
Novos cosmopolitismos. Identidades híbridas
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ANA GABRIELA MACEDO
MARIA EDUARDA KEATING

UNIVERSIDADE DO MINHO
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The Irish Cosmopolitan writes Home

ADRIANA BEBIANO
Faculdade de Letras e Centro de Estudos Sociais
Universidade de Coimbra

The natives of the rain are rainy men.
WALLACE STEVENS

Wallace Stevens' line articulates in a poetic way the familiar idea of a strong connection between place and identity. It is a common sense perception – which is to say it is “received knowledge” or a hegemonic representation; it is not necessarily true, but has acquired, through repetition, the value of truth. The increasing awareness that our existence now takes place in a global world gives rise to a radical questioning of identities structured around territory (and blood, which comes with it). Identities are identifications in progress (Santos, 1996) and are thought to be for the most part culturally built and largely imagined at least since Benedict Anderson first published *Imagined communities* in 1983. Twenty some years later, this is an idea which has taken root to the point of being common place and the *locus classicus* in discussions of these issues. On the other hand, the call for the acknowledgment of new identities is perceived as being politically necessary and the very theme of this conference – “New Cosmopolitanisms, Hybrid Identities” – can be read as a symptom of the subject’s importance. Cosmopolitanism and hybridism are now buzzwords both inside academia – pioneer in such discussions and in thinking up new models for identity – and in the popular discourse of newspapers. At this point an uncomfortable – but necessary – question intrudes itself: can one build an identity independent of territory?
Irishness, like all identities, may very well be largely imagined but it is deeply rooted in the land/the island and goes back to it; as it goes back to blood—not only the blood lines, who one’s ancestors are, but literally to the blood as it was spilled in the fighting—eight hundred years of wars, skirmishes and urban terrorism—and then being rationalized and romanced as part of the identity-building process. It went on until quite recently, and in spite of the still on-going “peace process” there is no guarantee that it is over, given that the island of Ireland is still divided into The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, autonomous but under British sovereignty. Unionists and Nationalists still have different agendas and the number of guns are still in the hands of opponents of the peace process from both sides of the divide is unknown.

In the Republic of Ireland—or “the South”, as it is usually called—since the founding of the Irish Free State in 1922, and throughout the twentieth century, the hegemonic definition of Irishness was grounded on the key concepts of land, language and (catholic) religion. This is an inheritance from nineteenth century nationalism, but one which has proved resilient, despite the radically different present social, political and cultural realities of a country that has gone global in more ways than one.

In fact, at the present Ireland is sexy. In other words, Irish culture sells well worldwide. What sells, of course, is what is perceived as its “difference” and “authenticity”, i.e., the “traditional” Ireland. Being European, it is still represented as “exotic”, from another place and another time, deeply settled in the past, out of time as it were. This fabricated cultural Ireland has become a hot commodity.1 “Authentic” Irish pubs have become one of the major export successes of the country, along with computer components. The (allegedly) very old and the very new are two sides of the nation: rooted in an “immemorial” past, yet practising pragmatic, money-making politics, well embedded in the present globalized economy. It still remains a fact that computers are not thought to be Irish—i.e., are not part of the way the nation imagines itself or how the rest of the world imagines

1 It should be noted that this is not an exclusively Irish phenomenon. The invention and selling of “tradition” goes on, in a smaller or larger scale, all over the place, in part as what it seems to me a resistance to globalization (cf Bebiano, 2002), and Portugal is not an exception. The difference with Irish traditions is that they are high in the market.
Ireland—while pubs are, and thus are central to Irish imagination and to the imagined Ireland all over. It stands to reason that one can build an economy but not a sense of national identity around the idea of a computer. This brings us back to the centrality of “time-immemorial” practises, and their connection to place, to the identity building processes.

Along pubs—and its correlate, Guinness—narrative is another Irish product rated high in the international markets. Story-telling is an ancient tradition and one which remains thriving, and “the gift of the gab” is thought to be a “natural” feature of the natives. The pastoral is the predominant mode of the nation’s narratives; nostalgia and sentimentality goes hand in hand with it. Even violence—so much at the core of Irish history and identity—is given meaning, romanced and glamorized, be it in the nationalist tales of heroism in the nation-building process, be it in the tales of a civilization going, or gone, to pieces, in Anglo-Irish ascendency version. The stories written in the diaspora suffer the same sentimental influence and the same focus on soil and motherland and the grief of having to live it. The Frank McCourt’s best-seller *Angelas’ Ashes* is a good example of this current. Success, when it comes, happens in America, but is always accompanied by the nostalgia of the exiled and the romancing of the land left behind. It is no accident that “authentic Ireland”, as it is represented

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2 Of course other nations have long standing traditions of story-telling. Irish success can be highly explained by the global power of the language in which it is written—ironically, English. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that a population of (currently) 6 million people (north and south) has given birth to four Nobel Prize winners in Literature.

3 A recent novel by Irish-born but American-resident Frank Delaney is built precisely around this cliché. *Ireland* (Harper Collins, 2005) tells the story of the country from the Celtic era to the late twentieth century in the voices of about a dozen characters, from both sides of the political border and of different backgrounds, professions and political outlooks, but all taking up the role of story-teller in honour of and ancient tradition that is made, in the novel, to structure and define national identity.

4 I am aware that this is, up to a point, a generalization, but one which stands close scrutiny of the body of published narratives. There is, however, an alternative tradition: one of fabulism, which can be said to go back, in modern times, to Jonathan Swift and Bram Stocker, of Gulliver and Dracula fame, and which finds its present more famous representatives say, in Ciaran Carson or Patrick McCabe. Nonetheless, this tradition was largely abandoned in the long twentieth century and has been picked up again only quite recently, remaining secondary in the global perception and sales-market.

5 Even Roddy Doyle, best known for his modern working-class Dublin based novels, has been caught by this mood. See *A Star Called Henry* (Vintage, 2000). But then,
in the postcards and signified in the exported pubs, is very much an Irish-American invention, as Fintan O'Toole claims (O'Toole, 1996). My point is that Ireland written elsewhere still maintains the bond – precarious, yet binding – to the idea of territory and the identity of the exiled is still written around it.

On 'Reflections on Exile' Edward Said discusses the experience of exile as 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place', a state whose 'essential sadness can never be surmounted', concomitant with a sense of 'the loss of something left forever' (Said, 2001:173). Said is a particular case of the exiled given that his Palestinian origin and the circumstances that surrounded it have to be taken into account in this discussion; yet, taken in a broad sense his words illustrate well the ideology that, as a rule, informs narratives of exile in general, including Irish writing on the diaspora: "loss" and "the rift between the human being and the place" are central to the narrative. These will tend to be transfigured, at a distance, into a romance of the place left behind or dreamt of; healing requiring the return to place, romance on its turn. If identities are plural identifications-in-progress and cultural constructions, it remains that these identifications happen in history – not outside it – and that oral and written narratives play a crucial role in these constructions. This is where the novel comes in.

**Big House**

Given that it has endured for more than two centuries now and is still going strong, The "Big House" subgenre is a good place in the Irish novel to look into identity negotiations through narrative. Originally, it was a subgenre practiced exclusively by the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, i.e., by those in power, who claimed an English identity. The genre has survived the independence of the country and has indeed bloomed, being now worked on and reconfigured by writers of different blood-lines and allegiances. Back in 1800, in the novel that inaugurated the genre – Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* – the coming-up-in-the-world catholic gentry were already buying land from the Anglo-Irish Protestants, who, in turn, were already, two hundred

the "rags to riches" may well be the ultimate American plot structure, which can be read as influencing Irish narratives of the diaspora.
years ago, representing themselves as a dying breed under siege from the (Mere Irish) wild men in the bogs.

Conventionally, in such novels we have an Anglo-Irish protestant family that inhabits the Big House and owns the land, which is worked on by Catholics living in cottages in the village. The two cultures are represented as being at odds with each other; communication is impossible, resentments build up, the peasants riot, houses are burnt. The Big House is decadent – alcoholism and madness are current features of one or more of its members – while Catholics are coming into money and power, often wanting to marry into the Big House and, with it, bringing legitimacy to a miscegenation that is going on anyway. Regardless of who writes it, Catholic or Protestant, each community is represented as chained to its identity and heritance, despite attempts to cross over the rift. The underlying question, and one which shows clearly the relevance of this genre for today’s political issues in Northern Ireland, is: who is entitled to the land? Each side has its own gallery of heroes and its own version of history to legitimize their claim. The main issue remains the same, even if the details of the plot change according to the historical time it seeks to portrait. If it’s “the troubles” – as the “war of independence” is euphemistically called – a burning of the house is sure to happen (as in Farrell, Troubles). If it’s contemporary Ireland, the house is either going to pieces in the hands of an old and dying spinster (as in Aigins, Langshire, go down) or has been converted into a hotel (as in Bolger, Father’s music) whose owner – a woman, again – still manages to keep detached from the people in the kitchen. In such novels inheritance is a prison, roots define one’s identity and there is no option out. This model fits in with what Alain Benoist calls “pathologies of identity” (Benoist, 2004: 59) and Amin Maalouf calls “murderous identities” (Maalouf, 2002, passim) I am talking about novels; but novels that represent an identity that, quite literally, kills (or has killed until quite recently).

Religion and language and land owning are the ideas around which identity is defined; if the land has changed hands, and if Gaelic is a language that has virtually died out – despite the efforts of the Free State and of the Republic, which made it compulsory at schools and mandatory for state-jobs – religion is left as the core around which identity is built.

The persistence of the genre is a sign of its usefulness as an allegory to speak about national identity issues; on the other hand, it also brings to light how the national identity issue has occluded other
issues, such as money (new ways of making it), class issues, or sex (sex or pregnancy outside marriage and abortion). It also leaves out other minorities, the long standing ones – as Jews, or Quakers, or tinkers, also called “travellers” – or the new comers. Since immigration became a significant phenomenon in the 1990's, in a country used to people leaving, or going “across the water”, racist outbursts have made visible a divide other than the catholic/protestant that still makes the news.\(^6\)

Until the 1970s the policy followed by both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael – the two main parties that alternate in office since independence – was one of isolationism, very much along the lines of the Portuguese New State, and the paranoia about all that was “foreign” – products, ideas, fashion – ran deep in a country with a recent memory of colonialism. “Pure” Irishness was pursued, preached, invented, made real in the laws and cultural practices of the country, busy inventing itself and ruthless in uprooting anything with a scent of being unirish. As David Lloyd puts it, “the desire of nationalism is to saturate the field of subject formation so that, for every individual, the idea of nationality (...) becomes the central organizing term in relation to which other possible modes of subjectivity – class or gender – are differentiated and subordinated. (Lloyd, 1993: 27) Thus every Irish writer is asked after his identity; thus the exclusion of contemporary issues or themes. Colm Tóibín caricatures this screaming silence: “in Irish fiction instead of sex, we have snow.” (Tóibín: appud Nielsen, 1993). The novel, as “the study of the individual and its relations to society needs a stable society to develop” (Tóibín, Letters: 51). In a sense, it needs to be placed after nationalism.

If nationalisms are to work, a pure identity is required; if we are always already hybrid, purity has to be invented. The invention of a pure identity pursued by the Free State and the Republic, well into the 1960's, stumbled into the failure of the revival of the Gaelic language. Though a couple of novelists and poets still write and publish in Gaelic as a political option, the audience is very small, and in the end such work gets translated into English. English is the first and common language, which makes the Irish already inescapably hybrid, both in language and culture.

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\(^6\) Racist outbursts have, of course, happened before, a case in point being the Limerick program in 1904. An ethnic book generally known as “travellers”, nomads of obscure origin who still resist sedentarization, have been the particular target; yet, like Irish Jews, they have remained invisible in the narrative of the nation.
Now, the question is how comfortable is one with the concept of hybridism? When asked “where is home?” can one answer, “I am a hybrid nomad?” Which components come into “hybridity”? Can one transcend, or do without, the concept of “place” when speaking of “home” and “belonging”? Can one be outside place, which, up to a point, entails being after and outside history? If a community is people united by shared experience, who belongs to that community? What defines its borders? (Territorial or otherwise defined.) Who decides who to include or exclude from it?

New Island

Among the young generation of Irish writers that acquired an international reputation in the 1990s, Cólom Tóibín stands out as an example of the kind of novelist who is trying to write Ireland away from home. A journalist and editor before he became a full-time writer – following the awards given to his novels7 – Tóibín’s agenda as an editor of Magill had been to promote ways of representing the nation other than the mainstream ones. His own novels can be seen as a map of this search for an identity that lies beyond, or rises above, the land, working through it without rejecting it.

Take the away he uses the Big House novel and reconfigures it in his first and award winning novel, The South (1990). The novel is set in Catalonia – a possible meaning for “the south” – and Wexford, on the southern coast of Ireland. As both geographical spaces can be read as a possible explanation for the title of the novel, one is tempted from the very beginning to read these overlapping geographies as an invitation to make connections between the social realities each one stands for; or, to make it simpler; the overlapping geographies of the double-meaning of the title creates an expectation of overlapping histories, an expectation that the novel does confirm. Furthermore, in Irish-speak

7 Colm Toibín has been the recipient of many prizes and awards, the following ones being perhaps the more significant: The South: IrishTimes/ Aer Lingus First Novel Prize; short-listed for Whitbread First Novel Prize; The Story of The Night : Ferro-Grumley Prize “Best gay novel” of 1997; The Master: Prix du meilleur livre anger for the best foreign novel published in 2005 in France; winner of Los Angeles Times Novel of the Year. (atenção a esta nota)
“the south” signifies also the Republic (of Ireland) while “the north” means Ulster, or Northern Ireland. Thus, Catalonia will work throughout as a metaphor for the whole Irish nation or, alternatively, as a screen into which Irish history will (also) be displayed. If to write about Ireland Tóibín goes abroad, what are the consequences of this displacement? Is the Irish writer breaking free of the shackles of Irishness and locality, which has precluded many writers from being free to pay attention to so called “universal” issues? Or will place haunt all travellers? A question that Robert Creeley raises in beautiful lines: “Wherever / you are / can you ever / be away from / wherever / you were?”

Take The South’s protagonist, Katherine Proctor. A protestant and landowning “Big House” wife and mother who chose to leave Ireland, leaving also her husband and her ten-year old-son, to go to Barcelona. The difference between Katherine and the emigrant protagonists of conventional Irish novels as well as the subversion of the traditional plot structures lies in her choice for another country. In fact, she does not “emigrate” out of financial necessity; nor is she ever nostalgic for the “old country”; nor does she ever regret having left it. Asked why she had left the country, she makes an unambiguous answer: “I was sick of Ireland. If you knew anything about the country, you wouldn’t ask me why I left.” (The South, 74) Another novelty to be found here is that this is a woman making this choice, in a country – and a body of fiction – crowded with absent fathers and stay-at-home mothers who hold the fort and mind the brood. One is tempted to read here an inversion of roles – absent mother, stay-at-home-and-mind-the-child father – a symptom of the country’s modernity or, at the very least, the acknowledgement of a shift in the forms that the male/female relationships have been taking. In the novel, however, Katherine is already following a pattern: her own mother had left the country when she herself was a child. Commenting on both their flights, the mother tells her: “You escaped from Ireland just in time. I got out of that place and put it all behind me.” (The South, 50-51) When Katherine’s mother left,

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8 Brian Moore can be read as precursors of this mode of writing home, a minor trend before the 1990’s.

9 Seen from the outside, it is difficult to understand this pressure Irish novelists are under. One does not demand of Portuguese or French novelists that they write national identity issues into their novels. This is only an issue for countries whose recent independence, on-going wars or similar historical circumstances, makes this question mandatory. This can be seen as a restriction to the poetic licence of the writer and a policing of imagination.
she forsook her inheritance and her share of the land. But what exactly is this “it all” that she had put behind herself on leaving? It turns out to be history, in the shape of the memory of yet another Big House burnt down by “the locals”.

Unlike her mother, Katherine will not escape history. In Barcelona in the 1950’s, she gets involved with an anarchist, Miguel. The memory of the Spanish Civil War hangs like a shadow over the characters and controls their relationship. In many ways, the war is not over: for Miguel, as much as for Katherine – as she will later find out – the past does not go way. Through the character of Miguel, the issues she thought she had left behind re-emerge and the connections between both countries recent histories are piled up. She tries hard to be detached from it all. “I am bored with this obsession with the war” (The South 86), she says of Miguel, very much like she had answered her husband’s reminders of “the Troubles” and her burnt house: “I want this to stop.” (The South, 43) But it never stops and her escape into Catalonia will prove to be not an escape from history, but into history.

From very early in the novel the depictions of the Catalanian landscape merge with the memories of the landscape in Enniscorthy: “a deserted square reached by two narrow alleyways, dimly lit, with a fountain, two trees, a church and some church buildings (...) I thought of Enniscorthy; I thought of the desolation of the place and I stared at this desolation.” (The South, 12) The overlapping geographies are followed up even in dreams, deep into the character’s inner life. She kept having “vivid dreams which mix up where I am with where I come from, the stream at New Town Barry with the fountain at Plaza San Filipo with the market square at Enniscorthy” (The South, 15)

Following the conventions of travel literature, all travels are voyages into self-discovery and knowledge and into one’s past and (repressed) memories. In the Catalonia poor Katherine finally comes to know the poor – and the catholic – of her own village back in Wexford. Does this mean that life is the same, everywhere alike, the same landscape, the same gulf between the poor and the rich, the same war? Local differences are apparent and allow for the possibility to look at Irish history from the outside, in many ways problematizing it and questioning its (absolute) received truths. In Catalonia, unlike in Ireland, the Big House owners are catholic; yet the shared religion does not make any difference for the village poor. Class is, after all, the central question, and religion only the pretext or façade. More disturbing for the character, however, is the fact that her lover, Miguel, has been in his past a church and Big House burner, someone that
shot a child who was trying to escape the flames. This episode reminds her of herself as a child, trying to escape the flames of her own burning house. Katherine is sleeping with the enemy; yet, she does not judge him – she loves him. It is as if identity could be transcended; as if one could escape from it in a foreign country; be the self, unconnected to inheritance and memory, as if the individual could escape the symbolic order into which she or he was born into. Or, on a more pragmatic and reality-bound level, as if reconciliation between the two sides of (the memory) of war was possible.

On the other hand, while Katherine attempts to be free as an individual, Miguel is stuck in his memories of the war and chained to the place he lives in, and where political territories and allegiances are still well defined. Furthermore, against Katherine’s individualism, his choice is for belonging to a community of believers. After having been again (locally) imprisoned and tortured, he collapses mentally, and ends up dying with their girl-child in a car accident that might well have been a suicide. Belonging kills you; being of a place kills you.

The “love-across-the-barriers” plot is a conventional strategy used for dealing with identity divides. This convention – which might, and then again, might not, correspond to the realities that it seeks to portray – also tells us that they often come to a tragic end. One has only to remember *Romeo and Juliet*.

Katherine had never reached Miguel, never understood him fully. Being on the opposite side of the class war and thus having been brought up under quite different expectations and different values, makes understanding and sharing difficult, if not impossible. While Miguel’s paintings are political statements, hers are a search for beauty (*The South*: 61), uncontaminated by politics. Or so she thinks – but I will get back to her paintings presently. The love across-the-barri-cades plot may be a necessary tool for reconstruction, or offer hope for a way out of the characters’ historical circumstances, but does it work? In other words, this kind of plot raises the old question: can the individual transcend history?

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10 This is a verisimilar feature. The “Recovery of Memory” movement, which is taking place in Spain right now, and that seeks to record the memories of the Civil War in the voices of those who lived it and are still alive – though very old –, is facing all kinds of difficulties. Almost seventy years after the war was over, emotions still run high and each family still knows which side of the divide it fought; many still carry their colours.
Like all lovers in such plots Katherine claims "she could have loved him anywhere". *The South*: 131 But the dream of any place — which is the dream of "no place" — does not hold. Thus, when later in the novel, and after having lost both Miguel and her daughter to death, Katherine goes back to Ireland, her quest will come to a dead end. She finds her son Richard not only married to a Catholic, but converted to Catholicism himself — i.e., he has "gone native", forgetting his roots — something which she finds difficult to accept or even understand. Not being nostalgic about place, or not belonging to the place, nevertheless when she goes back her roots assert themselves, her blood-memory returns and she even refuses to meet her daughter-in-law's family: "all that talking. They seem to chatter about nothing." *The South*: 202.
The Catholics are still "they", a lumpy collective with no room for the recognition of individual particularities, the Other, the ones whose culture she cannot understand. This happens through Katherine's point of view but it is reinforced by the portrait of the Catholics and in their own voices. They, too, remember a different time: "we used to look at the house... and now we have our dinners here." *The South*, 202 Things have changed: barbarians have taken over the land and the Big House. In Katherine's son's marriage to a catholic woman one might be tempted to read a love-across-the-barriers story that has succeeded and thus a way out of the trap of history; yet the characters from both sides of the barriers see it as a power-struggle won or lost, not as reconciliation. If warfare is over — has been over for several decades — war is preserved in memory and, in fact, it goes on under a different form. Very much like in Catalonia, after all.

Katherine is a landscape painter. This is used, again, as a way out of history: "in the beginning she had been trying to paint the land as though it had no history, only colours and contours. Had the light changed as the owners changed?" *The South*: 220 But the fact is that history is inscribed in the landscape — even nature is political. She ends up by "trying to catch the landscape rolling backwards into history, as though horizon was a time as well as a place (...) In the distance the rebels are bleeding. In the distance no one has yet set foot. In the distance, a car is moving. (...) In the distance is the light and the darkness falling, the clouds moving, the full moon rising." *The South*: 220-221

Back in Ireland, she finds herself a Catholic boyfriend, a local man called Michael Graves, and an obviously symmetric character to Miguel. There's no innocence in names. Names — and accent — betray
one's identity, as seen in their first meeting: "he said "you’re Irish (...) You sound English. (...) Proctor, a good Protestant name" (The South: 34) The acknowledgment of (past) roots is important to move towards (present and future) options. Michael’s memory of Enniscorthy is entirely different from Katherine’s: what he remembers is TB, that is, the illness of the poor (The South:153), not known in the Big House.

There is, however, another pattern here, one that speaks of history as repetition with a difference. Katherine’s mother had been in love with another Michael Graves, a RC – read “Roman Catholic – from town (The South: 77), an affair forgotten and shrouded in silence. “Pure” identities need silence to survive as they are: all memories of mixing have to be silenced. Silence, then, becomes a major factor in the survival of self-enclosed communities, and it is still another way of avoiding facing history and working through it.

In the end Katherine finds a kind of balance with Michael, not as a hybrid, but as an Anglo-Irish who can live with a Catholic. They keep a separate social life, thus acknowledging the different territories and cultures each of them comes from. Through the acknowledgement of separate roots and identity, they make options with no need to launder or forget history. They are working through history, not turning their backs on it.

Is this a way out? In Tóibín’s fiction the biggest sin is indifference. This is seen in the early Katherine, then still the lady of the manor, ignoring the poor old woman – “one of the Kennys”, with no individual name to her – who stood at her door for days under the rain, begging that the landlords drop a complain in court against her family (The South: 39-40). This indifference has to be redeemed, if hope is to be found for a common future in the same land.

Indifference as the greatest sin is nowhere better seen than in The Story of the Night. Tóibín first “gay” novel, it is set in Argentina during the military dictatorship of ill repute. It is a story about gay love and about AIDS, in a way plunging into the issues that nationalism silenced or pushed aside. But is also a story about indifference and blindness versus commitment and sight: indifference to the ones dying next to you, or to the ones who disappear inside the dictatorship’s dungeons. The big issue is illustrated in a little episode: in an empty street, there’s an army truck reviving up all night yet going nowhere. People stay indoors and ignore the noise and the fumes. We find out that what the truck is doing is generating extra energy for the torture tools being used on someone’s body inside the police station. Choosing
blindness, being indifferent to what is happening next to you, whether it is someone dying of AIDS, someone being tortured, or someone dying of TB in the village or an old woman sitting for days outside your door under the rain, is a moral flaw. Tóibín’s characters have this flaw, but they learn about it and learn who to reach towards the other, the one not-us, the one suffering. And in this learning process lies the possibility of redemption for the communities involved.

After history

Geography and eight hundred years of common history with England, plus the high rate of immigration, particularly to England and to the United States of America, have created what can be safely called an hybrid culture, local particularities notwithstanding.

The question is: what kind of hybrid is it? Tóibín himself said in an interview that “we, the Irish, do feel pretty English” (Nielsen, 1998). He also wrote that “I am not an Irish nationalist (or at least I hope I am not)” (Tóibín, 1993). And yet, being a bit English and not being a nationalist – in the atavist sense of the word – he cannot help but go back to the identity he inherited.

Irish historical revisionism asserted itself in the 1980’s and was all the rage in the 1990’s. It has the merit of denouncing the pieties of nationalist histories and of having made nationalist historians demythologise their own history. Yet both trends of historiography do have an agenda – there’s no such thing as a neutral, or politics-free “science”. The revisionists claimed a place for the English and the Anglo-Irish in the history and culture of the country – which had been silenced in the post-independence years – and quite rightly. But the multicultural stand that they defend has still to be examined. Thus Tóibín, the non-nationalist, and himself in many ways a revisionist, cannot but reject Roy Foster’s – perhaps the most famous Irish historian of revisionist fame – view of history, brilliant that he recognizes it to be at times. (cf. Tóibín, 1993) A multicultural framework can be used to hide or silence power asymmetries and this can also be done through the laundering of past crimes. Ambiguity, much praised by Foster, hybridism or multiculturalism, are not virtues per se; certainly not when and if used as a tool to silence differences and history.

The conventional understanding of cosmopolitanism links the concept to ideas of uprooted universalism and individualism, a world citizenship that entails the denial of territorial and cultural frontiers.
This is not Tóibín's cosmopolitism: his model is closer to Boaventura de Sousa Santos model: a cosmopolitism consisting of roots and options. (Santos, 1996). Also closer to Antony Appiah's "cosmopolitan patriot" (Appiah, 1997): of the world, but also of the place.

Works Cited:


Tóibín, Colm (1990), The South. London: Picador.