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The construction of national identity as portrayed
in contemporary irish fiction: An analysis of the
butcher boy by Patrick McCabe

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THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY AS PORTRAYED IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH FICTION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE BUTCHER BOY BY PATRICK MCCABE

1. Introduction

Language seems to serve two main functions. On the one hand, it is an instrument of communication. On the other hand, it can constitute a means of asserting one´s identity or one´s distinctiveness from others. Language may be the ideal vehicle to express the unique character of a social group, as it can be a powerful marker of social identity, capable of binding or dividing groups and its salience may displace other identities (Dieckhoff, 2004 cited in Jaspal, 2009).

As a primary means of socialization, language enables individuals to participate in a community of speakers in the present and also to connect past, present and future by means of cultural transmission. In other words, language is not only a marker but also a maker of social identities, as it plays a vital role in forming, promoting, and maintaining them.

One of the means through which language reflects and also recreates our identity, and more specifically, our national identity, is through literature. Society´s beliefs are portrayed in literature in order to mirror the perceptions, preconceptions or misperceptions individuals hold and to reflect a group´s identity. For example, in the case of Ireland, Irish writers have been able to represent the Irish consciousness with an authenticity that is difficult to replicate in other studies about national identity (Sahueroff: 2010). In addition, the relationship between identity and literature is particularly strong in Ireland because its formation is closely tied to that of its colonizer, England.

From its very beginning, colonialism has shaped the lives of the oppressed and has had to do with the destruction of these people´s culture. Literature is one of the main means through which the feelings and experiences of those who are marginalized or stigmatized can be expressed. In post-colonial literature, language has become one of the most important tools to depict the colonizer and the colonized (Pope, 2003).

According to Heininge (2009), there is a dichotomy that is seen in Irish writing and Irish culture, which is handled both seriously and lightly. This dichotomy of identity arises because of a tension between two cultures, one that wants to reinvent the Irish image, which has been appropriated by the other culture, which is the dominant English culture.

When portraying national identity in Irish fiction, many writers embark on the search of what constitutes Irishness, i.e. how the Irish distinguish themselves from their neighbours. Surprisingly, the use of stereotypical features in their stories is very frequent. Many of these stereotypes have their origin in the violent and harsh past during colonialism and their struggle to form an independent national identity.

Generally speaking, stereotyping is a natural way of categorizing the world. However, in its social aspect, stereotypes can construct some people to be ugly, some to be beautiful, some to be heroes, and some to be monsters. Dominant groups, which may influence and shape social identities, employ stereotypes to caricature one group of people as insignificant, foolish or dangerous in the eyes of another group of people. However, marginalized groups also stereotype those who dominate them. In this context, literature plays an important role in reflecting on how the British have stereotyped the Irish and how the Irish have seen themselves and have perpetuated those stereotypes through fiction.

A novel which illustrates how the Irish have been stereotyped as a result of this long-standing tension between colonizer and colonized, in the context of a post-independent Ireland, is *The Butcher Boy* by Patrick McCabe. McCabe is a contemporary Irish writer, known for his dark and violent novels set in small-town Ireland. Writing in the early 1990´s, when Ireland enjoyed the 'Celtic Tiger', a nickname for Ireland during its economic boom years of the late 1990´s, McCabe decided to look back at the turn of the 1960´s, when Leman´s modernizing projects signaled the onset of Ireland´s modern transformation. The images that had once been celebrated in the previous nationalist era were no longer cherished in the modernizing principles.

McCabe has also been recognized as the creator of the *Bog Gothic* genre. Despite his disagreement with the term, as he prefers to call it "social fantastic", *The Butcher Boy* comprises many Gothic elements which characterize the Irish struggle to form a new modern identity. In *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, Ellen McWilliams (2016) argues that *"Patrick McCabe demonstrates a Gothic sensibility that is fundamental to his engagement with twentieth-century Irish history and politics*" (2016, 431-432). McWilliams explains that McCabe´s work is sometimes classified as *"Bog Gothic"* because of the macabre content of his novels and his preferred setting of small town, rural Ireland. History is, for McCabe´s characters, a nightmare from which they are trying to awake and the horror in his novels is linked to the violence that permeated Ireland´s past and so he resorts to an abuse narrative to portray the genesis of modern Ireland.

The Butcher Boy narrates the story of a boy who retreats into a fantasy world while his troubled home life collapses. It was published in 1992, during a period which witnessed accelerated change in different spheres of Ireland´s economic, social, cultural, political and religious life. Nevertheless, McCabe turns back to the 1960´s to narrate his story, which was also a key period in Irish history, as it describes the transition between a sentimental Ireland and a modern one. Therefore, it will be interesting to analyse how the author re-imagines his country as a place which is open (or not) to the construction of a new identity.

For the purpose of the analysis, the concept of identity and how it is formed will be described. Then, the concept of stereotypes and its connection with identity from the point of view of sociolinguistics will be analysed. A further objective of this study is to provide an analysis of how Irish identity is portrayed in contemporary literature and of certain characteristics of the *Bog Gothic* genre that will be relevant for the analysis. Furthermore, an interpretation of the effect McCabe´s work has in conveying either a sense of Ireland´s cultural distinctiveness as opposed to the need to move away from stereotypical models and search for a new identity is also intended. In other words, the aim is to unfold the role of language in the novel, to reveal if it is used as a means of concealment or as an act of transgression. As a result of this analysis, the present study also intends to throw light on the connection between language and culture, by enlarging our knowledge of the role of literature as a powerful means to reflect and also to recreate national identity.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Language and identity

Language and culture are inextricably related. Language does not only reflect the values and ideas in society but it also provides its speakers with their own sense of self. In other words, it is a means to construct their cultural identity (Kramsch, 1998). We use language to convey images of ourselves, but also to identify others, to classify and judge people, to align ourselves with them signalling our similarities or to distance ourselves from them underlining our differences. In this sense, language is central not only to the construction but also to the negotiation of identities (De Fina, 2011).

According to Schwartz (2011: 2), identity comprises *"not only "who you think you are" (individually and collectively) but also who you act as being in interpersonal and intergroup interactions, and the social recognition or otherwise that these actions receive from other individuals or groups"*. Identity is a valuable theoretical construct to analyse, since it is simultaneously a personal, relational and collective phenomenon. It is formed and revised throughout the lifespans of individuals and the histories of social groups, and also, through an interplay of processes of self-discovery, personal and social construction (Schwartz, 2011).

Schwartz (2011) also argues that existing approaches typically focus on different levels at which identity may be defined. Baggioni & Kasbarian (1996, cited in Versluys, 2000), for example, distinguish two, namely the personal and the collective. They name *'identification'* as the process of linking the former to the latter. In the majority of discourse analytical studies, this collective identity is privileged mainly under the name of 'social identity'. Social identity is, in Duszak´s definition, *"that part of an individual´s self-concept that came from knowledge of his/her membership in a social group, together with emotional significance attached to it"* (Duszak, 2002:2). Kroskrity´s definition also highlights the idea of membership to a group: *"Identity is defined as the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories"'* (Kroskrity, 1999:111, cited in Versluys, 2000).

The concept of identity is therefore used to describe a certain sense of belonging, reflecting people´s need to define themselves, which in turn leads to the notion of 'otherness', or as Tajfel & Forgas state: *"We are what we are because they are not what we are"* (Tajfel & Forgas 1981: 124). Furthermore, Stuart Hall (1995, cited in Lindsay, 1997) emphasized emphasizes the importance of *'counter identities'*, which means that the identity we project onto the group from which we seek to distinguish or assert ourselves is an important aspect of defining 'us' (Lindsay, 1997).

2.2   The constructed nature of identity

Speakers identify themselves and are identified as members of a social group by their accent, their vocabulary and their discourse patterns. However, in modern, historically complex societies, it is much more difficult to define the boundaries of any particular social group and the identities of its members (Kramsch, 1998). Firstly, because using a particular language variety does not automatically imply identifying with the group who speaks that language. People will put on accents and imitate language styles for a variety of reasons which may include mocking or rejecting the identities associated with them (De Fina, 2011). Secondly, every individual is a member of more than one group (nationality, ethnic group, age group, etc) all at the same time. And depending on the immediate social situation, an individual will fluctuate in terms of which group he wishes to represent and therefore, will change his language accordingly (Hoyt, 1996).

This complex relationship between language and identity has stressed the need for a dynamic approach to identity as an active discursive process. Consequently, recent trends in the study of identity within discourse have shifted the focus from the traditional sociolinguistic studies that reduce the connection between language and identity to a one-to-one-relationship between social categories and linguistic phenomena to an interactionist paradigm, in which identity is seen as a social construction (De Fina, 2011). Identity, therefore, is *"not a clear-cut natural fact but a cultural construct which involves several processes and our perception of someone´s identity is very much culturally determined"* (Kramsch, 1998: 69).

This view of identity as something that one does or performs and recreates through concrete exchanges is the basis of social constructionism, an approach to the study of socio-cultural phenomena that has influenced discourse studies. What it means to be a member of a social group is not only contextually variable and open to continuous redefinitions but it is also related to actions, feelings and thoughts. Social reality does not exist as an independent entity, as the essentialist paradigm suggests, but is socially constructed. Thus, identity should be analysed as a process rather than as an attribute (De Fina, 2011: 267).

2.3   What is national identity?

In the case of national identity, like other geographically located collective identities which are generally contained within real political and geographical borders, it is to some extent *'imagined'* by the individuals who feel allegiance to it (Anderson, 1991 cited in White, 2006). This means that individuals will differ in how they experience and define *'national identity'*, and some aspects of that identity might be more important for individuals within particular contexts. However it does not mean that it might not have some recognizable characteristics.

The term national identity has been defined in countless ways. Smith (1991: 14), for example, describes five fundamental features of national identity: a historic territory, or homeland; common myths and historical memories; a common mass culture; common legal rights and duties; and a common economy. The first three features seem to be necessary for a cultural concept of national identity; the other two seem to be more concerned with the existence of national identity in a political sense.

2.4   Identity and stereotypes

As mentioned above, our perception of someone´s identity is culturally determined and socially constructed; therefore, much of what we perceive about a person´s culture and language is influenced by the stereotypes ingrained in society (Kramsch, 1998). This means that perceptions of identity can never be value-neutral. They are strongly value-laden (Lindsay, 1997).

Stereotypes are an essential component in the construction of identity. They are a universal way of trying to find pattern and predictability in complex experience and they are also closely related to the sociological concept of role. While stereotyping per se is a universal, not pathological behavior, it can be used in an infinite variety of ways, fair and foul (Lindsay, 1997).

There has been a long history of academic exploration of the concept of stereotype, most of it in social psychology rather than other disciplines. Walter Lippman (1922) first introduced the concept as a simplified 'picture in our heads', a cognitive tool that assists us in processing knowledge by selecting salient features to represent the whole, and indicated that stereotypes are a means or organizing our images into fixed and simple categories.

Stereotypes do not only involve any generalization or image of a group, but widely-held and widely-recognized images of socially salient groups. When we say that a group is stereotyped in a certain way, we generally refer to the recognizable presence in a certain sociocultural context of salient images of that group – or associations between a group label and a set of characteristics. In this sense, stereotypes are cultural entities, widely recognized by people who may not themselves hold the stereotype. Stereotypes in this sense are referred to as 'cultural stereotypes' (Blum, 2002). Therefore, stereotypes are learned, maintained and changed through the language and communication of a culture. In this way, language transcends the individual and it is a means of storing stereotypic beliefs at a collective level (Stangor and Schaller, 1996).

Stereotyping has a cognitive as well as an evaluative aspect. As regards the cognitive aspect, stereotypes arise from a process of categorization (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). As previously stated, they introduce simplicity and order where there is complexity and nearly random variation. Stereotyping then is a functional cognitive device by means of which we systematize our social environment, creating distinct and apparently homogeneous categories. Stereotypes may be defined as a shared set of beliefs (and disbeliefs) about a cognitive group (Kristiansen, 2001: 138). Social categorization enables us to understand our social environment: just as we categorize objects in order to understand them, we also categorize others and ourselves into large or small groups.

Nevertheless, categorization is more than just a cognitive process that serves to simplify and systematize information: *'Categorization is believed to produce two basic, relatively automatic effects: the distortion of perception such that intergroup similarity and intergroup difference are accentuated, and evaluative and behavioural discrimination favouring the in-group. Both are considered fundamental to stereotyping'* (Oakes et al. 1994:37 cited in Kristiansen, 2001).

Therefore, stereotypes do not merely systematize the social world; they also provide a system of orientation for self-reference: they create and define the individual´s place in society. Social groups, understood in this sense, provide their members with an identification of themselves in social terms. These identifications are to a very large extent relational and comparative: *"they define the individual as similar to or different from, as "better" or "worse" than, members of other groups […] It is in a strictly limited sense, arising from the considerations, that we use the term social identity"* (Tajfel and Turner 1979: 40).

Social groups or categories and the membership of them are associated with positive or negative value connotations. The evaluation of one´s own group is determined with reference to specific other groups through social comparisons in terms of value-laden attributes and characteristics. According to Kristiansen (2001), individuals strive to maintain positive social identity and when social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive either to leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct group and/ or to make their existing group more positively distinct.

In the Encyclopedia of Identity (2010: 788), James Haywood Rolling Jr. states that a stereotype is a representation. *'Whenever something is represented, something is always left out of the account."* And he further explains that *"stereotypes are literary- and image-based texts based on sensory data, typifying and creating narratives of identity around harshly delimited sets of identity markers to stigmatize some and normalize others."*

2.5   The concept of 'stereotype' in sociolinguistics

In sociolinguistics, Labov (1972) distinguishes three types of linguistic variants: indicators, markers and stereotypes. The three-way distinction reflects the social significance of a particular variant as well as the degree to which speakers are aware of the social significance of particular forms. In the case of indicators, members of a particular speech community attach no social significance to the use of a particular form, while markers reflect social stratification which speakers are usually aware of. According to Labov (1973 cited in Wardhaugh 2010: 148), a stereotype is "*a popular and therefore, conscious characterization of the speech of a particular group. Such stereotypes are stigmatized. A stereotype need not conform to reality, rather, it offers people a rough and ready categorization.*"

Stereotypes are variants that are readily perceived and commented on (rightly or wrongly) as salient in the speech of particular social or ethnic groups, nationalities, etc. An item of any linguistic level can be a stereotype in this respect, whether it is a phonological, suprasegmental, morphological, syntactic, lexical or pragmalinguistic feature of the particular variety it is associated with (Furkó, 2013).

2.6   The case of Ireland

2.6.1   Irish identity in literature

In Ireland, national identity constitutes a complex concept to analyse because of the country´s historical background. The country has always found itself in a controversial position because over the centuries it was both the colonized land and the land from which some English left either to migrate or to expand the Empire. Nevertheless, a striking feature since at least the late 19th century is an impulse to define what constitutes Irish identity, an impulse that manifests itself in literature (Heininge, 2009).

As previously stated, there is a dichotomy that is seen in Irish writing and Irish culture, which arises because of a tension between two cultures, one that wants to reinvent the Irish image, and the other one, the dominant English culture (Heininge, 2009). Dowd (2011) explains that this anxiety and tension allowed writers to transmit an anti-Irish sentiment, as Irish were portrayed as cultural boogeymen, societal villains, and ethnic clowns. The Irish are generally stock characters, and a bit of Irish brogue signifies an immediate otherness that distinguishes them from the English.

Nevertheless, Gál (n.d) characterizes contemporary Irish writers as presenting the theme of identity with a romantic and nostalgic view, but also focusing on coping with the past, demolishing the stereotypes and looking towards the future. Apparently, there is a need to reconstruct national identity by demolishing the stereotypes; which is quite hard because stereotypes are generally interiorized (Gál, n.d.).

The contemporary Irish novel has a strong sense of both continuity and disruption. The present may be seen as a disarming of the past, interrupting the continuum but with a view of the future. Gál (n.d.) states that the construction of identity arises from a sense of dispossession because those who have been previously marginalized enter an *"in-between"* space and a *"time-lag"* before they find their new identities. This new identity is marked by uncertainty and ambiguous situations, which are the product of the binarism that has always been part of Ireland´s history: North-East, Protestant-Catholic, Irish-English.

This binarism which characterizes contemporary Irish fiction builds up stereotypical features as regards different issues such as family (men are associated with violence and women, with suffering); religion (Catholics and Protestants occupied two different, divided social worlds and they are commonly held conceptions of national and individual identity); the issue of insider and outsider (Irish are stereotyped as romantic and cynic and they are seen as not being able to rule themselves and need someone else to help them (Gál, n.d.). England, on the other hand, is seen as the old enemy and oppressor but many Irish have Irish as well as English blood. There are also opposing patterns, like "us" and "them"; "inside" and "outside"; or "familiar" and "foreign", but the proximity of the two nations means their history and culture are intertwined (Colman, 2012).

2.6.2 The Butcher Boy: Synopsis

The Butcher Boy was written by Patrick McCabe in 1992. The book was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in Britain and won the Irish Times-Aer Lingus Prize for fiction. It tells the story of Francie Brady, a troubled boy whose family life collapses and retreats into his own fantasy world. Francie´s mother is frequently abused both verbally and physically by her husband Benny, who is an alcoholic. Francie´s mother often considers suicide and is sent to a mental hospital. However, Francie seems to be unaware of the problems at home, and spends the early part of the story with his friend Joe Purcell. The two of them befriend their classmate Phillip Nugent, the son of Francie´s neighbour, Mrs. Nugent, but they end up stealing his comic books. Mrs. Nugent then confronts Francie´s mother, claiming that the Bradys are "a bunch of pigs". Francie takes this insult to heart and begins to harass the Nugents while they are walking through the town, denying them access through a certain street until they pay a fictional "Pig Toll Tax". So begins an unhealthy obsession that lasts for the rest of the novel.

When Francie´s uncle Alo comes to town, Benny, Alo´s brother, drunk as usual, launches a verbal assault at his brother and Francie decides to run away from home. He spends some time in Dublin and when he returns, he discovers his mother has committed suicide. His father blames him for this. Again, Francie´s mind turns to the Nugents. He attempts to harm Phillip but Joe stops him. Eventually, he breaks into the Nugent´s house when they are out and pretends to be a pig, defecating on the floor. The Nugents interrupt him and call the police. Francie is sent to an industrial school run by priests. During his internment, he is molested by one of the priests, Father Sullivan. Francie is determined to get back to town and regain his friendship with Joe. However, he finds it hard to get in touch with his friend, and when he does, Joe rejects him.

Francie then gets a job at the local butchery and dedicates himself to being a butcher boy. He also begins to drink at weekends and he goes to clubs with the specific aim of getting into fights. After some months, the police enter his home and discover his father has been dead for a long time and Francie is taken to a mental hospital.

After he is released, Francie discovers that Joe Purcell is attending boarding school and he decides to go there. On his way, he stops at a boarding house where his father had said he and Francie´s mother had spent their honeymoon. He interrogates the landlady, and she informs him that his father had treated his mother terribly for the duration of their honeymoon. Things get worse when he arrives at Joe´s school and he discovers that his friend has outgrown him and befriended Phillip Nugent.

Francie returns home and gets back to his job at the butcher´s. One day, while on his rounds, he calls at the Nugent´s house. Mrs. Nugent answers and Francie attacks her and shoots her in the head with the butcher´s gun. He cuts her open and writes the word 'PIG' over the walls in a room with her blood. He puts her into the cart in which he transports the meat-waste. He resumes his rounds and makes his way back to the butcher´s, where he is caught by the police. He leads them on a chase for Mrs. Nugent´s body, and escapes from them for a time, but is recaptured after revealing where her body is.

2.6.3 Patrick McCabe: the King of the Bog Gothic

In an interview for *The Guardian*, John O´Mahonny (2013) highlights Patrick McCabe´s ability to reveal the brutality and corrupting stagnation of Irish small-town life. His works use everyday language to deconstruct the ideologies at work in Ireland between the early 1960s and the late 1970s and his books can be read as a plea for a pluralistic Irish culture that can encompass the past without being dominated by it.

McCabe is also known for having invented the "Bog Gothic" genre. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, the Gothic novel is an English genre of fiction popular in the 18th and early 19th centuries, characterized by an atmosphere of mystery and horror and having a pseudo-medieval setting. However, *'Gothic'* is notoriously one of the most slippery terms in the literary critical dictionary, and it can be defined in very many ways. Indeed, the terms used for such definitions keep multiplying; depending on the critic, the Gothic is a *genre*, a *domain*, a *mode*, or a *discursive site*.

Because of the looseness of the term, when approaching varied novels, it is appropriate to use "Gothic" as an adjective to describe certain aspects of the texts rather than a discrete category into which works unerringly fit (Hillard, 2009 cited in Rate, 2013). Apart from that, expecting a genre to be categorically pure is to misunderstand genre entirely, which means that the textual event may have membership in many genres and it is never fully defined by its genre.

Much of the literature that was produced in Ireland, especially after the decline in the Irish language after the Great Famine of the 1840´s, focused on national identity. In the 19th century, there was a growing movement for Irish cultural identity, which was identified as the Gaelic Revival. Another movement in Literature began in the 19th century and it reflected the social and political anxieties of the Anglo-Irish middle-class in Ireland. This movement is the beginning of the Gothic genre in Irish language (Rate, 2013).

Gothic novels used aspects of the sublime and the uncanny to express the fears and apprehensions that existed in Anglo-Irish identity in the 19th century. This effect is used to enlighten the theme of arrested development in national identity through the use of children who are haunted by Ireland´s repressed traumatic history (Rate, 2013).

Gothic literature employs either horror or terror to convey cultural desires, fears and anxieties through examination of the transgressive, the taboo, the grotesque, the excessive or the supernatural. The Gothic is useful to contemporary Irish authors because it lends itself easily to represent the history that haunts the nation. History permeates the identity of Ireland and arrests the development of a new, modern Ireland.

One important Gothic element in Irish novels is the dualism of appearance versus reality. The appearance of time progressing chronologically is contrasted by the reality of a community trapped by its past and living among the ghosts of history. In addition, the victimization of children is a crucial element to representing identity. The significance of a child is that he is in the process of forming an identity for the first time. The child is portrayed as haunted, even though he is supposed to be protected and innocent. However, in the aftermath of the Irish war of independence, the child becomes burdened with the history that the mother has lived through (Rate, 2013).

3. Analysis

3.1 Setting: Tradition vs modernity

The Butcher Boy is set in in an unnamed rural village in 1962, the year of the Cuban Missile Crisis and of the introduction of Ireland´s national television service. The novel describes the mythical and ideological imperatives of both tradition and modernity in relation to the family, community and religion at a key period (1957-62) in the history of Ireland, when the De Valera´s conservatism was finally replaced by the modernizing vision of Sean Leman (Herron, 2000). De Valera was a leader in the War of Independence and under his leadership, Ireland adopted conservative nationalism and protectionist economic policies, which led the country to an economic crisis, making Ireland suffer from poverty for decades (Wu, 2014).

Leman´s succession marked a significant change in the island, as he launched liberal economic projects and wished to transform the Irish Republic into a developed nation through economic expansion. In other words, Leman´s liberal economic policies signified Ireland´s plunge into the capitalist world. With a better economy, Leman believed Irish people could achieve political independence and unity between North and South. In this light, Leman succeeded in arousing patriotism in the people, and he managed to summon the Irish to a mission of economic revival (Wu, 2014).

That period is imagined as a time of liberalizing potential in some ways. However, it did not signify a complete untroubled celebration of the passage to modernization. And this is exactly what McCabe reflects in the novel. *The Butcher Boy* ridicules De Valera´s utopian conservative vision. This vision, however, bore little resemblance with reality, which concealed different issues such as mental illness, alcoholism, domestic violence and child abuse, as well as social stagnation, all of which are factors that influence Francie, the protagonist of the story, to become the butcher boy. De Valera´s imagined Ireland is not the Ireland that Francie and his family inhabit (Herron, 2000).

In this context, the dichotomy of tradition and modernity is a remarkable aspect which shapes Ireland´s hybrid identity. On the one hand, traditional Ireland is represented in the novel by recurring ballads and pastoral images which transmit a nostalgic and sentimental atmosphere:

"Farmers drove off to the mountains with big blonde dolls saying mama roped to the roof racks. Tyretracks of slush webbed the streets and there was music all night long in the upstairs of the Tower." (p. 18)
"Alo sang Tyrone Among the Bushes… then there were recitations, Dangerous Dan McGee mush mush in the Artic snow." (p. 27)

"He called for another song. What about the Inspector of Drains from the County Leitrim? The man himself – Percy French?" (p. 28)
"I waltzed around the landing singing one of the Emerald Gems to myself. O the days of the Kerry Dances O the ring of the piper´s tune!" (p. 60)
"A loudspeaker whistled and screeched then a hymn started up. It was called Faith of Our Fathers." (p. 192)

Traditional Ireland finds an enthusiastic adherent in Francie himself, and the De Valera´s vision of an organized, organic society is close to Francie´s own ideal. He also longs for a state of stable family values and is disgusted when 'traditional' standards no longer prevail:

"It was all going well until the telly went. Phut!" (p.9)
"He looked at me and says: I´m sorry Francie but there´s no more hanging. No more hanging? I says. For funck´s sake! What´s this country coming to!" (p.213)

Francie holds on to a mythical notion of Ireland, and sees the past as something to be cherished and valued, represented through those few happy childhood moments with his friend Joe:

"There was some good laughs in them days, me and Joe at the river with our noses in the water." (p. 9)
"They were the best days, them days with Joe. They were the best days I ever knew, before da and Nugent and all this started." (p. 40)

Modernity, on the other hand, is portrayed by the values the Anglicized Nugents bring to the community: wealth, style, and order. In Shaffer´s words, they represent the *"pleasant middle-class home-life, replete with refinement, reserve, restraint, and taste – the stereotypical English traits on which the Celt vs Saxon dichotomy depended, qualities that for centuries had presumably made the English suited to govern the Irish"* (Shaffer, 2013: 188).

3.2 Stereotypes in The Butcher Boy

3.2.1 The Bradys vs the Nugents

The central tension in the novel lies in the conflict between the Brady family and the Nugent family. The two families are portrayed in direct opposition. They represent *'counter identities'*, as each family seeks to distinguish from the other one, and in that way, they define who they are.

The Bradys embody many Irish stereotypical features, such as alcoholism, madness, poverty and violence, which remain from the colonial period when the English dominated the island, and the native Irish culture was dismissed as primitive and barbaric. The Nugents, on the other hand, are wealthy, stylish and Anglicized. They have the same nuclear family members as the Bradys, but their home is stable. These two families are represented in the figures of Mrs. Nugent, with her modernizing values associated with Britain; and Francie, who embodies the Irish nationalist efforts to overturn the derogatory stereotypes.

The Nugents, with their wealth and economic adaptability are the desired model for modern Ireland. As their family name implies, they are the *"new gents"* of the new Ireland. They are distinguished by their English accent and their special interest in "high-up" things:

"You could see by him that he had a high-up job. He had that look in his eye that said I have a high-up job. I don´t know if he was English but he spoke like it. He said good afternoon when everybody else said hardy weather or she looks like rain." (p. 51)

They are not only the new gents that embody the modernizing project in Ireland, they also replicate the British cultural values that portray them as a little standoffish and pretentious:

"But Nugents didn´t smell like that. Oh no. It smelt of freshly baked scones; that´s what it smelt of.2) (p. 56)
"Mrs. Nugent polished everything till you could see your face in it. The kitchen, the table, the floor." (p. 57)
"Flies? Oh no, not in Mrs Nugents! And any cakes there were were all under lock and key where Mrs Fly and his cronies couldn´t get at them." (p. 57)

This dichotomy is also clearly depicted in the descriptions of the homes of each family:

"It was a nice warm room with an amber glow that reached out to you and beckoned you in." (p. 52)
"It was warm and glowing." (p. 44)
"It was as if by being the Nugents it all came together as if by magic not a thing out of place" (p.44)

"The cakes were stacked in towers on the chairs. There were some on top of the wardrobe and the washing machine… I had a hard job keeping all the flies away." (p. 25)
"You could almost hear the whisper of the dead afternoon as we stood there in the empty, lost silence of that huge room." (p. 85)

Francie seems to be neutralized and neglected by his community, as they see the Brady family as a bad influence on good citizens. This is shown by Mrs. Nugent´s wish to keep a distance from the Bradys, which represent the national fear of the derogatory stereotypes of the Irish (Wu, 2014):
"She said she knew the kind of us long before she went to England and she might have known not to let her son anywhere near the likes of me what else would you expect from a house where the father´s never in, lying about the pubs from morning to night, he´s no better than a pig."(p.4)

The dysfunctional Bradys, living in the shadow of projected English stereotypes such as alcoholism, mental instability and unruly behavior, are the dark side of the same face that haunts the country. Their existence is portrayed as an inconvenient truth to the modernizing project Ireland was launching in the early 1960´s. In this respect, they represent the primitive features of the Irish race that were rejected and could not be incorporated into the new national image (Wu, 2014).

However, Wu (2014) argues that even though Irish nationalism had struggled to reverse the derogatory images, it only succeeded at the rhetorical level. Both Irish nationalism and the modernizing project have ignored the fact that these stereotypes are indicators of social unease in their homeland. The Brady family is the embodiment of such social problems, and they are also victims: Francie Brady is not only a murderer. He is both terrorized and the terrorizer, both pig and butcher.

McCabe achieves this double effect by approaching a murderous story with irony and horror, but he also uses tenderness and sympathy to depict Francie, and also, the relationship with his mother:

"She said there was nobody in the world meant more to her than me… Francie, you would never let me down would you?" (p. 4)

"All I could see was ma smiling and saying to me over and over again don´t worry Francie no matter what she says about you I´ll never believe it I´ll never disown you ever ever not the way I did you ma I said no son no! she said…" (p. 91)

"I was crying because we were together now. Oh ma I said the whole house is burning up on us then a fist made of smoke hit me a smack in the mouth its over says ma its all over now." (p. 209)

3.2.2 A dysfunctional family

Francie´s family is clearly stereotyped as dysfunctional, as it is characterized by poverty, female depression, male alcoholism and domestic violence.

3.2.2.1   Maternal relationship

Annie Brady, Francie´s mother, is portrayed as weak and mentally unstable, the reason why she has spent some time in a mental hospital. On many occasions, Francie reveals that his mother has been deeply disappointed and traumatized by his father, and may even have become depressed because of her misery and misfortune:

"She said that all there was in this world, people who let you down." (p. 5)
"Francie if you ever have a sweetheart you´ll tell her the truth and never let her down won´t you?" (p.6)

The country of Ireland has long been represented in literature as a maternal figure. Francie´s dysfunctional family can be seen as the dysfunction that exists as partitioned Ireland attempts to reconcile an identity in the coexistence of two nations on one island (Rate, 2013). After his mother´s death, Francie´s identity seems to exist in some limbo, as he starts to search for objects and relationships capable of replacing the tender relationship he experienced with her:

"At the bottom was an old woman in a red shawl rocking by the fireside: "A mother´s love´s a blessing no matter where you roam"." (p. 41)

In many episodes, Francie´s mother tries to make him remain loyal to his past and heritage:

"She said we´d never be run down in this town again we´d show them we were as good as any of them. She looked into my eyes and said: we don´t want to be like the Nugents. We don´t want to be like any of them! We´ll show them- won´t we Francie? They´ll envy us yet!" We´re the Bradys Francie! The Bradys!" (p. 18)

"Then ma smiled and said she understood she knew it wasn´t my fault. Come home Francie she said. I´m sorry ma, I said again then she said it again, come home, I´m waiting for you." (p. 41)

However, Francie then turns to Mrs. Nugent as a mother figure in the breastfeeding episode, which means that he longs to be accepted in his community. This clearly reflects society´s anxiety, trying to form a sense of nationalism, but is divided between staying loyal to Ireland or being drawn by the fascination of England (Rate, 2013).

3.2.2.2   A failing father

Francie´s father is an alcoholic, traumatized by his childhood in a Belfast orphanage. Benny constantly reminds Annie of his own father´s abandonment of his family when he was 7 years old and accuses her of not understanding him and of being 'mad' like everyone in her family.

"He said she was mad like all the Magees, lying about the house from the day they married never did a hand´s turn why wouldn´t he go to the pubs she had never made a dinner for him in his life?." (p.6)
"He said at least he never had to be took off to a madhouse to disgrace the whole family" (p. 35)

Benny is also the result of a broken home and he cannot stand to hear that word:

"I knew as soon as he had said the word home that he regretted it. When you said it even when you weren´t talking about orphanages, da went pale sometimes he even got up and left the room." (p. 32)

From Francie´s point of view, Benny is the mythic grand musician whose relationship with Francie´s mother is perfect and loving. The narrative constantly returns to the parents´ time spent in a Bed & Breakfast where Benny sang and everyone loved the special couple. However, each fantasy Francie has about his father is broken by reality, leaving him with a failing father as a role model:

"What can I tell you about a man who behaved the way he did in front of his wife. No better than a pig, the way he disgraced himself here. Any man who´d insult a priest the way he did. God help the poor woman, she mustn´t have seen him sober a day in their whole honeymoon." (p. 181)

Benny Brady thus represents a failing father to Francie, whose stereotypes of violence, drinking and abuse Francie seems to perpetuate as the story flows.

3.2.3 Pigs!

One word with a derogatory meaning which appears in the most significant parts of the novel is the word pig. A crucial episode occurs at the beginning of the story, when the Bradys are depicted by Mrs. Nugent as 'pigs':

"Pigs – sure the whole town knows that!" (p. 4)

Muck Inis or *'hog island'* in Gaelic is one of Ireland´s old epithets. This epithet started as a neutral nickname, referring to the large pig population on the island due to Ireland´s peasant economy. The pig then became a symbol for Ireland. For example, one of the traditional distinctions between Britain and Ireland was *"John Bull and Paddy the Pig"*. Irish people´s association with pigs then became a source of mockery for the British (Potts, 1999 cited in Wu, 2014).

 In the colonial era, Britain took advantage of this animal image of Ireland and characterized Irish people as pigs. In other words, the word pig became a racial stereotype of the Irish people. Pigs are often associated with ferocity, violence, dirt and vulgarity. They are devourers of everything in their path and a menace to farmers. The Irish as pigs are also irrational and insurgent creatures to be feared. The Irish rebellions against Britain had seen Irish revolutionaries appear in the political comics as swinish monsters. The pig image therefore embodies British people´s complex feelings for the Irish: disgust, contempt and fear (Wu, 2014).

Tim Gauthier (2003) in *'Identity, Self-Loathing and the Neocolonial Condition in Patrick McCabe´s The Butcher Boy'* explains that *"Francie´s piggishness has been imposed on him by Mrs Nugent. Lacking the necessary tools to fight back, Francie´s only choice is to adopt that identity and make it his own refuge"* (Gauthier, 2003: 202). Since Mrs. Nugent´s naming, Francie begins to obsess over his new identity. He takes the notion of a pig one step further by personifying every aspect of pigs as a filthy animal and it infiltrates every aspect of his daily life (Doman, n.d.):

"You don´t usually expect to come out of your kitchen and see a pig wearing a jacket and trousers crawling round your front step." (p. 54)
"What would you call someone that does that? Not at a boy at all – a pig! Say it everyone! Come on! Pig! Pig! Pig!" (p. 62)
"We went into every pub in the town. The pig men are here I shouts and got down on all fours with the drunk riding on my back singing I wonder who´s kissing her now." (p. 137)

If we consider the setting of the novel, when conservative nationalism gave way to a modernizing project, Irish primitivism was dismissed as derogatory. Therefore, Francie´s struggle with the pig image signifies Irish people´s unceasing negotiation of their stereotypes and their identity. According to Wu (2014), from this perspective, the stereotypes of the Irish people symbolize a *"repressed fear"* that comes back to the nation as it launches its modernizing project. This repressed fear is one element of the Bog Gothic which McCabe resorts to in order to narrate his story.

In *The Butcher Boy*, the dichotomous issue of outsider and insider is also present in the complexity of the pig image: the pig is both victim and victimizer. By insulting the Brady family, Mrs. Nugent has, as Wu (2014) points out, *"unwittingly planted the seed for her own gruesome death"* (Wu, 2014: 5), as the piggish boy turns out to be a butcher boy who slaughters his Anglicized neighbour like a pig. The depiction of the young murderer as a pig-like monster is also considered to be evident Gothic influence.

By evoking this pig image, Mrs. Nugent not only replicates the British fear of the wild Irish, but she also reveals her internalization of the colonizer´s view of her own country. Francie´s negotiation with the pig image, on the other hand, is more complicated. He first tries to reverse the derogatory meaning by investing pride in that image. This is clearly seen in the episode in which Francie stops Mrs. Nugent and her son Philip in the street and asks them to pay the "Pig Toll Tax":

"It was called the Pig Toll Tax. Yes, Mrs. Nugent I said, the pig toll tax it is and every time you want to get past it costs a shilling" (p. 11)
"Right, I says I´ll tell you what, I´ll let you by this time folks but remember now in the future – make sure and have the pig toll tax ready." (p. 12)
"Oh its invented by me, I told them. But of course Nugent won´t pay it. You might as well be trying to get blood under a stone." (p. 16)

The pig image in the novel is also embraced as a symbol of transgression. On the one hand, it denotes Ireland´s colonized and "eaten" position in its relationship with England. Nevertheless, the swinish features of the Irish can be inverted to highlight the cruelty of the "eater". The Anglo-Irish relationship is an eater-eaten one (Wu, 2014). In other words, Ireland as the Pig Island is consumed by England´s imperialism. Therefore, the pig image can also be used to denote Ireland´s victimization in the context of the imperial power.

Thus, the pig image can be taken as a weapon to assault the British. This is what is ironically conveyed when Francie starts the pig school in the Nugent´s house. In a fantasy, he starts "the pig school" and teaches Phillip and Mrs. Nugent how to behave like nice pigs and defecates in the house, manifesting his rejection to the pig label:

"I said: are you talking to me Mr. Pig? When he didn´t answer I said: Did you not hear me Philip Pig? Hmm? Oh maybe you didn´t know you were a pig. Is that it? Well, then, I´ll have to teach you." (p. 60)
"Right, today we´re going to do pigs. I wrote in big letters across the wallpaper Philip is a pig." (p. 61)
"Pigs are forever doing poo all over the farmyard, they have the poor farmer´s heart broken. (p. 61)

These unflattering stereotypes imposed on the Irish through the pig image suggesting they were alcoholics, insane and violent, are not pure English fantasy. According to Wu (2014), they are symptoms resulting from the unaccommodating and stressful living circumstances in the Irish nation, especially in the period in which the story is narrated. In this light, the wild Bradys are the embodiment of this social disease.

Despite Francie´s attempt to reject the pig image, after his family collapses, he fails to resist the pig label. When he is alone in Mrs. Nugent´s home and has a party by himself, he fantasizes with being a member of the family, revealing that his innermost fear is being a pig. In this way, he has also internalized Mrs. Nugent´s fear of the pig image: (pigs)

"Ah this is the life I said. I wonder have we any cheese or pickle. We certainly had." (p. 58)
"I would definitely be staying at Nugents Hotel on my next trip to town." (p. 59)
"You know what he´s doing here don´t you mother? He wants to be one of us. He wants his name to be Francie Nugent." (p. 60)

Therefore, although the pig image may contain the strength to reverse the unflattering stereotypes on a rhetorical level, it is still burdened with many derogatory connotations that Francie cannot bear. Being a pig is in fact Francie´s deepest fear that he tries to repress. The pig image as the Irish people´s repressed fear works in two ways: the Anglicized people fear living with the pigs, and the Irish fear that they might be pigs.

These imagined stereotypes also imply that the Irish race is unfit for governing itself, and therefore, the British colonial dominance on the island is justifiable. A moment in the story which metaphorically illustrates this dominance is when, in one of Francie´s hallucinations, Mrs. Nugent breastfeeds him:

"She unbuttoned her blouse and took out her breast. Then she said: This is for you Francie." (p. 60)

3.2.4 Religion

The Butcher Boy endorses an anti-clerical and broadly secular humanist discourse. This dichotomy of the secular or worldly versus the spiritual or sacred is also part of the hybrid Irish identity portrayed in the novel.

According to Brereton (2008), criticism of the church in Ireland is still a relatively new phenomenon. Traditionally, until the 1980´s, it was difficult to challenge the prevailing religious orthodoxy. Clearly, this has changed since the 1990s, when the Irish began to 'speak out' with a new openness, focusing attention on the suffering of children and other marginalized citizens. Many considered the election of Mary Robinson, president of Ireland between 1990 and 1997, to influence this transformation. In her inaugural address, she invoked an open and pluralist notion of national identity, claiming that the Ireland she would represent 'is a new Ireland, open, tolerant, inclusive'. Therefore, exposure of religious scandals certainly fit into this pattern.

If we consider the setting of the story, De Valera was a strong believer in maintaining close ties between Irish politics and Catholicism and promulgated the idealized patriarchal notion of a 'comely Irish maiden' needing protection from the vagaries of sexual promiscuity and modernity. *The Butcher Boy* questions this conventional religious worship in a humorous, transgressive and ironic manner:

"I went upstairs to the dormitory where there was a saint on every window-sill, such a shower of dying-looking bastards I never seen." (p. 69)
"I pointed to Our Lady. She´s in a bad way I said to him, she needs to suck a zube" (p. 69)

At the industrial school, we see Francie having imaginary conversations with Jesus in a casual manner, who in turn surprisingly appears a bit intimidated:

"There was a little Jesus over on the window across from my bed. He was looking over at me. Poor poor Francie Brady he was saying: Isn´t it a terrible pity too? (p. 69)

Francie also generates his own myth of himself as receiver of religious messages from the Virgin Mary and the saints.
"It was around that time I started the long walks and the holy voice. I told him I thought Our Lady was talking to me" (p. 77)
"She had some voice that Blessed Virgin Mary. You could listen to it all night. It was like all the softest women in the world mixed up in a huge big baking owl and there you have Our Lady at the end of it." (p. 77)

In *The Pig and Priest*: *A Legacy of Violence Intensified*, Trayers (2006) reveals that his myth serves two purposes: to reconnect with his mother whose suicide has induced an enormous amount of guilt and to attract special notice within the religious community. Francie lost his mother and he wants approval and acceptance from the Virgin Mary to substitute for the loss of his mother´s loss. *"She stands for all the women in the world, and this figure can give him a sense of forgiveness for his mother´s death. Yet, the fantasy that he produces for himself eventually falls apart in the presence of the Father, manifested literally as Father Sullivan"* (Trayers, 2006: 187).

Father Sullivan represents the second failing father for Francie and also, the inclusion of a stereotypical abusive father figure. This stereotype represents the ways in which the colonial, patriarchal and religious structures recreate themselves generation after generation, despite attempts to change or revise these same structures.

According to Clodagh Harvey (1996, cited in Trayers, 2006: 88), the priest figure was traditionally seen as a heroic figure fighting for the Irish peasantry. However, over time, the stories began to concern themselves with what was viewed as the "most significant clerical vices" which included drunkenness, lust and avarice. Father Sullivan begins as a character that seems to help Francie but eventually evolves into an abusing figure.

Trayers (2006) argues that under the control of the Father, Francie´s feminization makes him unable to sustain the mythic persona as the special boy who talks to Mary and the priest is portrayed as a disgusting, twisted man, who plays a big role in robbing Francie of his innocence:

"You´re my best little girl says Tiddly and went away off spluttering at his desk." (p. 80)

In the novel, McCabe exposes religious conformity and portrays a self-protecting system where abuse was tolerated and abusers protected:

"Remember that we are here at all times. That is what we priests are for after all. We´re not ogres Francie! Yes Father I said, I know that" (p. 81)
"He said life was difficult, people had their troubles. Some of the things people did were hard to understand. He said Father Sullivan was a good man. I said nothing." (p. 94)

It is not only religious orthodoxy which is questioned. *The Butcher Boy* also portrays the anger engendered by abuses and failures in Ireland´s institutional care system. Francie personifies the need of victims to liberate themselves from the anger and their past. Patrick McCabe interrogates society´s imprisonment of those it deems socially aberrant and historically reflects on how the Church controlled many of these institutions. The novel clearly exposes the failure of the nation´s institutional responses to Francie (Trayers, 2006).

3.3   The construction of identity in The Butcher Boy

The Butcher Boy essentially revolves around the childhood events that shape Francie´s identity. He is constrained by the manners and styles of tradition, but he also imagines himself to be part of a world

constituted mainly by British and also American components, which are in fact out of his reach. Francie´s mind is continually open to influence and his identity constantly shifts, as he adopts the names and characteristics of mythic British and American characters: *Adam Eterno*, *The Time Lord*, Winker Watson, *Algerman Carruthers*. He also transforms many of the real people he meets into mythical, comical, fantasy figures of his own. Thus, Philip Nugent is *Detective Inspector Philip the Nooge of the Yard*, the abusing Father Sullivan becomes *Father Tiddly*, a policeman is called *Sergeant Sausage*. Nevertheless, by the end of the novel, as Herron (2000) notes, his identity becomes fixed, defined by a subject position identified as *The Butcher Boy*.

Now, how does Francie Brady become the butcher boy? The first major change in Francie´s identity occurs when he overhears Mrs. Nugent confront his mother. Francie´s factors that influence his identity are destroyed by Mrs. Nugent, who labels Francie and his family as pigs. By the use of the word pig instead of Brady, his family name is erased and therefore his revisionist family history is ruined. In other words, Francie loses his sense of identity.

Until the point when Mrs. Nugent calls his father a pig, Francie can construct this normal family through imagination. Fantasy is so real to Francie that he incorporates it into his reality, but after Mrs. Nugent´s comment, his alteration of reality becomes chaotic and confused, just as his identity does (Trayers, 2006).

Francie embraces this identity of the pig within the community, especially in the presence of Mrs. Nugent. However, he attempts to retain his sense of an individual identity by clinging to his family´s past. According to Rate (2013), this is important to the paradox of national identity because it serves to define the identity of the community by establishing what is Other. David Lloyd (1993, cited in Rate, 2013:14) argues that there is an *"implicit violence of identity formation which requires the negation of other possible forms of existing"* (Lloyd, 1993:4). Gauthier (2003) also explains that for the community, that Other is the Bradys, who must be excluded and rejected for the new conception of the community to be established. The community is haunted by Francie Brady, a reminder of *"an Irishness that the new Ireland would rather not acknowledge"* (Gauthier, 2003:202).

As mentioned above, after Mrs. Nugent´s name-calling, Francie internalizes the pig image, but at first, he tries to turn this pig label into a strength, an identity. Francie reverses the derogative pig name into a positive identity marker. By enacting the tax man, Francie assumes an authoritative figure, reversing the power relation between him and the Nugents. He also re-names Mrs. Nugent as *Mrs. Nooge*. Apparently, according to Wu (2014), if Nugent signifies New Gent, the newly emerging social gentry, *Nooge* might be read as a truncated version of *nouveau riche*, a term referring to an opportunistic social-climber.

However, despite Francie´s success in enacting the Pig Toll Tax man, the power relation between him and Mrs. Nugent is reversed only on a symbolic level. In reality, the Bradys are still poor, under-privileged, and dysfunctional (Wu, 2014). Those are the stereotypes that Mrs. Nugent and the community are separating themselves from and which make them identify Francie in the role of the Other. In other words, their "new" Irish identity is clearly not associated with those stereotypes.

As previously stated, the concept of identity is related to the notion of 'otherness'. "*We are what we are because they are not what we are*" (Tajfel & Forgas 1981: 124). Without the Brady´s as the Other, Mrs. Nugent´s beliefs and values would not be dominant in the community and her constructed identity of the Brady´s as pigs would not exist. Upon being named as a pig, Francie finds himself in an uncertain environment with the presence of an uncertain authority, and begins to transform into his new identity, leading to an identity crisis (Doman, n.d.).

Francie thus becomes the butcher boy, a monster, a menace to society which has to be neutralized. The nature of the monster is a function of the fears and anxieties of the society that constructed it in the first place (Rate, 2013). The communal identity the town aims to form without the Bradys is one which is separate from the Irish stereotypes they represent and therefore, they reject them. It is in this manner that Ireland strives to become more English as they attempt to leave behind the "uncivilized" history of Ireland. By rejecting Francie, the representation of the negative Irish stereotypes, the town suffers from the uncanny return of the repressed:

"We´ll have him and we can do what we like with him. The whole town wants him to get what he deserves." (p. 23)

Furthermore, Rate (2013) also argues that the failures of Francie´s community and of Irish institutions create the murderous Francie Brady. There are numerous *"Houses of the Hundred Windows"* he is institutionalized in throughout the novel and which also shape his identity:

"How many windows do you think are there says da. Seventy fine says Alo. I´d say at least a hundred says da." (p. 36)
"Up she rose out of nowhere the house of a hundred windows. This is a grand spot I said. H´ho says the sergeant we´ll see if you say that in six months´ time! H´ha." (p. 66)

All the institutions, which are supposed to take care of Francie, fail in fostering his growth and incorporating him into his community. Eldred (2007, cited in Rate, 2013: 22) argues that readers must ask themselves *"to what degree is Francie a monster and to what degree is he a neglected little boy who deserved better from society and its institutions?"*

In *"Surviving the House of a Hundred Windows: Irish Industrial Schools in Recent Fiction and Memoirs"*, Molino (2001) states that *"Francie´s cohesive identity shatters with the abandonment of all his relationships"* (Molino, 2001: 44). The death of his parents drives him to multiple institutions and in the end, his best friend Joe fails to admit recognition of Francie. After this point, the monster in Francie is revealed. In Rate´s words, it is not surprising then, that Francie´s paranoia results in Mrs. Nugent´s murder and his imprisonment. Because Francie cannot exist in society, he is excluded and locked up in a place where he can continually relive his few happy childhood experiences.

3.3.1 National identity in The Butcher Boy

As stated above, identity comprises not only who you think you are at an individual level but also collectively, for it constitutes a social construct which depends on the interpersonal and intergroup exchanges among individuals. In addition, the cultural concept of national identity implies a historic territory, or homeland; common myths and historical memories; and also a common mass culture.

When taking the analysis of Francie´s individual identity to national grounds, we could say that the novel explores, on an individual and also familial level, the Irish production of an independent national identity. Francie´s belief in his own narrative, his own fantastic stories that create, as Trayers (2006) notes, a revisionist history for himself and his family may also function as a way to interrogate revisionist histories of the heroic Irish past, replacing them with stories of failure and violence.

According to Scheible (2012 cited in Trayers, 2006), The Butcher Boy illuminates the paradox underlying Irish national identity: a unified nation depends on the erasure of personal identity. However, as individualism resists conformity, the forward motion of cultural and national modernity is evaded. In this way, McCabe confronts *"the dualistic components of Irish identity"* or the notion that *"partitioned Ireland must accept the coexistence of two nations on one geographical location"* (Scheible, 2012: 5-6 cited in Trayers, 2006: 13). This is represented throughout the novel by the tension between Francie, the rural, Irish narrator, haunted by his family and past, and Mrs. Nugent, the modern, English-Irish antagonist. The conflict between these two characters represents how failure to remedy the past arrests the development of a progressive national identity. Francie represents the consequences of the repressed, unaddressed, and traumatic Irish history, which are made evident in the transition between traditional and modern Ireland.

Herron (2000) explains that *The Butcher Boy* is a novel which shows the infiltration on modernity in the "traditional" Ireland (family, small town, social and religious character of the State) but the success of the new is contaminated by the past. The interface between modernity and tradition is imagined as seriously pathological and it is a zone in which past and present contaminate each other, neither is settled or secure. This unsettled zone in McCabe´s work is not merely temporal but extends continually to the boundaries between apparent fact and apparent fiction.

This pathologized and blurred interface or transition between tradition and modernity is also expressed through madness. Madness, according to Herron (2000), represents the consequence of the clash of two systems, incapable of accommodation. Insanity, in Herron´s words, functions as *"a device in order to inform the characters´ identity, whether from an external source, like Mrs. Nugent, or from within the character himself or herself. Insanity functions as the antithesis of a functional identity in the modern world: in a search for"* (Herron, 2000: 12).

Pathology is notoriously depicted in Francie´s home. Far from being a place of security, Francie´s home is a site of permanent conflict between his father and mother, his father and uncle, and also his father and himself. It is where he discovers his mother preparing to kill herself, where he hears his drunken father screaming at his wife. As previously stated, the somber atmosphere is always present in Francie´s home descriptions:

"I said what fire do we want its just as good sitting here staring into the ashes" (p. 6)
"When I got back ma was doubled up in the chair by the dead fire for a minute I thought she was shivering with the cold." (p. 7)
" Shadows ate up the room" (p. 31)
"It was the silence around da that made me ice all over. Then ma wept. He paid no heed to that either just sat there behind a glass wall of silence." (p. 32)

In McCabe´s narrative, there is no access into the bright world of a new Ireland. His vision of the pathological state of the nation leaves very little room for the possibility that a happy modern life might be lived there. In other words, *The Butcher Boy* promotes a view of the nation as incapable of adapting to changing times. This is portrayed in the novel through Francie´s inability to negotiate successfully the path from childhood to adulthood. Not being aware of his own lack of maturation, Francie describes his expectations when he returns home from the industrial school:

"I wanted to talk about the hide and the old days and hacking at the ice and whose turn it was to toss the marble and all that. They were the best days. You could see through them days, clear as polished glass. But Joe didn´t want to." (p. 97)

 This clearly shows that Joe has matured. Francie´s frustration is the result of Joe´s maturation and his remaining immature. Francie was unable to mature due to the traumas of his childhood and since he was unable to reconcile his fantasy with the truth, his identity is perpetually arrested in a childlike state (Rate, 2013).

As stated by Gauthier (2003), *The Butcher Boy´s* narrative represents a culture struggling with its postcolonial identity. The struggles of Francie Brady invoke both neocolonial Ireland´s residual relationship with the colonizer and its search for nationhood: *"Francie´s ambivalent relationship with the community, his search for identity, his lack of a sense of history combined with an idealization of the past, his fascination with the life led by the Nugents as adopters and representatives of dominant culture values, and finally his own self-loathing all mirror the country´s neocolonial condition"* (Gauthier, 2003: 196).

As a representation of the national struggle for identity, the lack of a normal father figure creates an individual whose self is divided into an imagined self and the tough reality of the past, haunting the present. With his mother Ireland dead and his replacement, Mrs. Nugent, unavailable to him, Francie lives on the stories of his father´s past. Fathers, however, consistently verbally and physically abuse Francie throughout the novel. This allows reality to overcome the fantasy and to shatter Francie´s fragile mind (Trayers, 2006).

From the above analysis, it is clear that *The Butcher Boy* is an Irish concern for the violence of the past, haunting the present and continuing in the future. This is related to the strong sense of continuity and disruption described by Gál (n.d). In the story, the present is seen as disarming of the past, interrupting the continuum. It is this "in-between" and "time-lag" in Ireland´s construction of a new modern identity that is perceived in Francie. He seems to be stuck in the past but he also desires to be part of modern Ireland.

If we relate the construction of national identity and the Gothic, Robert Miles (2001: 31 cited in Rate, 2013) claims that *"the nation and the Gothic are inextricable in the sense that the formation of a national identity will inevitable create a monster by excluding and denying certain traits or aspects that are not desirable"* (Miles, 2001: 31). Francie exists as a constant reminder to the town of the Irish stereotypes that they wish to not be associated with. Thus *The Butcher Boy* underscores the anxiety and trauma that may be hidden but is always present within the formation of a national identity.

3.3.2 Identity and colonialism

The Butcher Boy can be read not only as a search for a cohesive national identity bur also as a warning. In *Colonizer and Colonized: Unraveling the Dynamics of Identity Formation*, Sarah Doman (n.d.) claims

that imperialism and colonization become the driving forces for the identity formation of the characters. The Nugent´s position and economic condition in the community represent a strong link to colonial power where Francie becomes the colonized through their reassigning of his identity of an animal.

The roles and positions of colonizer and colonized shift in the novel as the characters learn to appropriate and rewrite their identities. Nevertheless, the dynamic remains stable, as one character (Mrs. Nugent) or social group (the community) continues to dominate another. Francie represents Ireland´s neocolonial condition and relationship with the colonizer. In other words, the Nugents establish a hierarchy, as they colonize the community, and the community in turn colonizes Francie. Francie´s life mirrors the effects of colonization through his search for identity and idealization with the past. Francie´s status combined with the institution of the *"Nugents as adopters and representatives of dominant culture values"* leave Francie with notions of instability and an imposed identity (Gauthier, 2003: 197). Gauthier (2003) also argues that Francie´s desire to be like the Nugents refers to the paradoxical relationship between colonizer and colonized. Although the colonized desperately wish to free themselves from the colonizer, they unconsciously crave for all that the colonizer has and is.

Nevertheless, at the end of the novel we perceive that violence is his only method for coping with reality. Francie´s violent acts are the only alternative in his struggle against the colonizer and dominant culture. In *The Butcher Boy*, colonization becomes the force in which the dominant culture is able to impose identities on others. Francie represents the effects of colonialism, he internalizes his identity and is never able to free himself. His only release is to accept his identity and use it in a way he can claim it and allow his identity to become his own, not society´s (Doman, n.d.).

3.4 McCabe´s narrative

One of the most engaging aspects of the novel, as Schaffer (2006) describes, is the first- person protagonist Francie´s humorous and perceptive narrative voice. On the one hand, despite his mental unbalance, Francie´s eye for observation and sense of humour clearly engage the readers, as he can be sometimes perceived as a child with an innocent charm.

Francie´s innocent childish voice many times describes reality in comic terms. In fact, there are many references to famous British and American comics, which constitute a symbol of American popular culture and form part of Francie´s comic-book saturated mind:

"I could read the comic on the table beside his bed. It said: Adam Eterno Time Lord" (p. 44)
"Then I told him about the comics I got from my aunt in America. Comics like you never seen in your whole life, I said. Not English ones, you couldn´t get them in England or anywhere. Oh no – only America." (p. 47)
"Dandy Beano Topper Victor Hotspur Hornet Hurricane Diana Bunty Judy and Commandos" (p. 53)

As previously said, Francie´s narrative also makes use of phrases from the comics to portray other characters:

"Philip Nuget, I said to myself, you are a crafty devil, the way they say it in the comics. That old Philip Nugent, the trickster!" (p. 56)
"oops sorry it was like Toots a Little Mo Out of The Beano" (p. 178)
"He was like Winker Watson out of the Dandy" (p. 3)
"Just the same as Sausage the clown." (p. 66)

In addition, the use of comic-like onomatopoeic expressions adds an expressive and humorous effect. Onomatopoeia is frequently used in comic books where space is limited and words must be used to their fullest to maximize their effectiveness in telling a story. These expressions are used to engage the senses and provide a more immersive reading experience:

"Pop pop out go" (p. 58)
"Beep beep goes the echo" (p. 58)
"Brrm brrm phut phut" (p. 68)
"swish swish" (p. 86)
"mumble mumble" (p.89)
"Ting-a-ling-a-ling!" (p. 170)

Francie´s tragic-comic stream of consciousness is perceived though this näive aspect combined with the voice of a murderous criminal, whose mental instability intensifies as the novel progresses:

"I was getting as bad as ma. Whiz this way then whiz the other way. I´ll do this no i´ll do that" (p. 184)

Another aspect of Francie´s narrative voice is its unreliability. The story is retrospective, i.e. Francie narrates his murderous story from a psychiatric hospital twenty or thirty or forty years after the events happened. Although the narrative seems to be that of a young boy, we know it to be a man decades older than that:

"When I was a young lad twenty or thirty or forty years ago I lived in a small town where they were all after me on account of what I done on Mrs Nugent. " (p. 1)
"That was a long time ago. Twenty or thirty or forty years ago, I don´t know." (p. 214)

In Wayne Booth´s influential definition of the term (cited in Shaffer, 2006: 178), an 'unreliable narrator' is one who fails to speak for or act in accordance with the norms of the work and who therefore is ironized by the work. In the case of Francie, the meaning of his narrative is not what he understands it to be. In other words, the story that Francie tells is not the story he thinks he is telling.

There are many episodes that illustrate Francie´s unreliability. For example, when he appears to know his father is dead but he cannot admit it and pretends he is still alive, which shows that apparently he wants to suppress his history:

"I sat with da thinking was there anything I could do then in the end I went round to Leddy. Don´t worry da, I said, I´ll start early in the mornings and get home early in the evening. It´ll be OK, you´ll see. He looked at me and he said: You won´t leave me son?
But he didn´t have to worry. I wasn´t going to leave him. I wasn´t going to let ma and da or anyone down ever again." (p. 121)

Francie´s unreliability is also explained, as Shaffer (2006) claims, by his 'out of sight, out of mind' logic: his sense that the mere passing of time, which allows forgetting upsetting circumstances, can cure it all:

"in a couple of days everything would be all right again" (p. 121)
"I left it for a few days so that it would all be forgotten" (p. 122)

As mentioned above, most personal stories and memories are shown to be fabrications, and Francie is sometimes unaware where his waking life ends and his fantasy life begins:

"I knew I would look back some day and wonder had I ever been there in that church or did I imagine it all?" (p. 40)

Francie´s unreliable narration, apart from his constant role-playing, adopting personae and accents, makes real events and emotions to be displaced, and disarmed, and this makes the reader struggle to reconstruct what is really happening.

As previously stated, the pathologized present moment is imagined by Francie as one which he finds it impossible to inhabit in any meaningful way and reality is portrayed as something he wants to escape from:

"I just lay there with my eyes closed pretending I was asleep." (p. 33)
"When all this came into my head I wanted to leap up and yahoo" (p. 34)
"I wanted to walk and walk until the soles of my boots were worn out and I could walk no more." (p. 36)

Molino´s claim of the term "social fantastic" (Molino, 2001) to refer to the narrative technique employed in *The Butcher Boy* aligns with McCabe´s opinion, probably because he combines historically sensitive social realism with fantastical intertexts. In other words, he addresses social issues, but which are embedded in a fantasy world. And by locating the entire story in the mind of his central character, the reader struggles to determine to what extent the events in the novel actually occur and the extent to which Francie´s unique perspective controls his account of events.

As regards the novel´s organization, in *Transgression and Dysfunctional Irelands*, Wallace (2004) states that *The Butcher Boy* narratively works in transgressive spaces of borders and boundaries. Boundaries, Wallace explains, are intrinsic to any notion of transgression, and are dividing lines which are fundamental not only to the concept of transgression but also to identity. Borders differentiate, separate, mark difference.

Framed in this manner, McCabe´s writing in many ways seems to wander in what might be referred to as border spaces, in a geographical sense, but more often metaphorically in terms of his characters´ worlds. In the geographical sense, this is perceived, first, through a fragmentary, repetitive and often disjointed narrative; i.e. a cut-up style. Secondly, through an untidy organization, as the novel is broken into sections varying in length from a couple of lines to several pages, and also through the lack of punctuation in many passages.

Metaphorically speaking, because all these writing strategies try to approximate to Francie´s state of mind, to his deteriorating mental health. The strategies simulate transgression or crossing over between apparent reason or sanity and apparent madness where the imaginary is privileged over the real. These narrative strategies are also transgressive because they involve a distortion of the distinction between what is assumed to be real and what is assumed to be imaginary. This corruption of fantasy or reality infects the boundaries between past, present and future to produce a sense of time which, like a scratched record, sticks at certain points or jumps erratically back or forward. Francie is obsessed with pasts in which they seem to be arrested to the extent that the present seems hallucinatory (Wallace, 2004).

4   Conclusion

This study, initiated with the purpose of exploring how Irish identity is portrayed in contemporary fiction, not only has displayed many aspects which render *The Butcher Boy* a fine example of how hybridity, or the blending of cultures, is a clear component of Irish identity which characterizes contemporary Irish fiction, but it has also enlarged our understanding that literature is a creative tool through which writers recreate national identity.

In *The Butcher Boy*, we have seen how McCabe succeeds at depicting a hybrid Irish identity through a constant dichotomy. First, exposing the tension between the traditional view of Ireland and the advance of modernity, symbolized in the antagonism between the Nugents and the Bradys, which are mirror images of each other and represent the clash between colonizer and colonized. Secondly, through Francie´s own struggle to construct his identity and his ambivalent feelings towards the Nugents. He seems to both love and hate Mrs. Nugent. Being trapped by his past, he nevertheless fantasizes with a stable ideal home. However, despite his struggle, he cannot escape the violence of the past. On the contrary, he perpetuates it in a more violent form. Finally, the dichotomy is also shown in the two different sides of Irish stereotypes depicted in the novel. On the one hand, they serve the purpose of identification, of defining what the Other is, but they can also be used for trickery or mockery, and also as a weapon to manipulate and to threaten others, as Francie does when he is called a pig.

A question to reflect upon would be whether these stereotypical features depicted in the novel are just part of a writing technique that is used to portray the division between colonizer-colonized at a symbolic level or they reflect reality as it really is. As Heininge (2009) argues, part of the identity problem that the Irish experience actually comes from stereotypes created by the Irish themselves, stereotypes which are then perpetuated and spread through their literature, and which exist because of anxiety about identity. Nevertheless, what *The Butcher Boy* clearly shows is that stereotypes are not merely containers of shared ethnic characteristics but discursive sites that reveal the process of how identity is socially and popularly constructed.

As it was initially predicted in the introduction, identity is a complex construct to analyse. It is not an individual phenomenon or something static, but it is constructed though social interaction, which results in our defining who we think we are and how we act in intergroup interactions. McCabe´s novel displays the fight of a nation in order to get rid of his past and move on to the new modern capitalist world. Unfortunately, he does not render Ireland capable of adjusting to those new values. Instead, he presents an apocalyptic scenario. This context could be a symbol of the transition between the end of a period and the beginning of a new one.

Far more than a portrait of an unstable boy within an impoverished dysfunctional family, *The Butcher Boy* also portrays a society that fails to address the well-being of its children when society is neglectful, abusive and mentally ill. It is a critique of Irish society in general and of its *"institutions of containment"* in particular.

Francie´s community chooses to confine rather than provide treatment and support. Therefore, it is not only the notion of national identity which is questioned. As Tom Herron (2006) concludes, it is the notion of community, who in fact contributes to shape national identity, which is the target of *The Butcher Bo*y.

Another of my major concerns had to do with Gothic elements which are present in the novel. Throughout the analysis, we have seen how the Gothic is central to McCabe´s portrayal of the shocking realities that existed alongside political ideals in Irish society in the 20th century. The Gothic elements of his fiction, in McWilliams ´s words, are *"the means by which he interrogates the inequalities and injustices perpetuated in post-Independence Ireland in ways that are resonant with larger revisionist trends in the contemporary Irish novel"* (McWilliams, 2013: 433).

Furthermore, what Francie´s story demonstrates is the intertextuality of Irish history and culture present in the author´s own personal narrative and according to his own perspective. In other words, the narrative is shaped by the way in which the author perceives the world and provides for the intertext in which the culture and history of the relationship between England and Ireland echo its presence (Doman, n.d.) This is in alignment with the notion of literature as a tool in which language connects past, present and future by means of cultural transmission.

As regards the narrative, McCabe has resorted to humour, wit, and also linguistic violence, using language not as a means of concealment, but as a means of transgression. This transgression is not only metaphorically perceived through Francie´s voice but also through the use of organizational patterns in McCabe´s writing, which show language as chaotic or out of control. In addition, the role of naming and role-playing, which make Francie adopt different personae, contributes to destabilize his identity, i.e. to lose his sense of belonging. In other words, through McCabe´s novel, the reader becomes aware of the dynamics of the colonizer and colonized in identity crisis and formation, within an abusive narrative.

Finally, we may conclude that *The Butcher Boy* approaches the complex issue of national identity at a symbolic level. And that is what makes this novel unique, for it is only after a thorough analysis of McCabe´s narrative that we can gain an insight into the long-standing struggle of a nation to get rid of its traumatic past by revealing what each element in the novel symbolizes. There might be other literary works which also address this struggle to redefine Irish identity in a less pessimistic way. Nevertheless, this idea of a nation not succeeding in leaving its violent past behind serves as a warning to society and provides readers with a better understanding of the inextricable connection between language and culture, and more specifically, of the role of literature in addressing historical and social issues.

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