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Magic Realism
in Contemporary Irish Short Stories

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ABSTRACT

In spite of the mythical and fantastical richness of Ireland, its imaginative people and its orography and landscapes, the country is not credited with having magic realistic literary texts in the twentieth century. The aim of this B.A. Thesis is to study four short stories—"Children's Children", "Costellos", "The Seventh Man" and "Ebenezer's Memories"—by three young Irish authors, Jan Carson, Oisín Fagan and Roisín O'Donnell, and to prove that they have features of magic realism. The methodology I have used is that of close reading of the four works and a comparison of their traits with the features of 'traditional' magic realism. As a result, we can conclude that there is magic realism in Irish literature but with some distinctive characteristics.

Keywords: Magic realism, Jan Carson, Oisín Fagan, Roisín O'Donnell, Ireland, short stories.

RESUMEN

A pesar de la riqueza mítica y fantástica de Irlanda, de sus ingeniosos habitantes, y de su orografía y paisajes, al país no se le atribuye la existencia de textos literarios magicorrealistas en el siglo XX. El objetivo de este Trabajo de Fin de Grado es estudiar cuatro historias cortas: "Children's Children", "Costellos", "The Seventh Man" y "Ebenezer's Memories", escritas por tres jóvenes autores irlandeses, Jan Carson, Oisín Fagan y Roisín O'Donnell, y demostrar que tienen rasgos de realismo mágico. La metodología que he utilizado es la de la lectura en profundidad de las cuatro obras y la comparación de sus características con las del realismo mágico 'tradicional'. Como resultado, podemos concluir que existe un realismo mágico en la literatura irlandesa, pero con algunas características distintivas.

Palabras clave: Realismo mágico, Jan Carson, Oisín Fagan, Roisín O'Donnell, Irlanda, historias cortas.

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1. Introduction

The present dissertation analyses whether there is magical realism in Irish literature. The aim of this analysis is to study three contemporary Irish writers, Jan Carson, Oisín Fagan and Roisin O'Donnell, and four of their short stories, "Children's Children", "Costellos", "The Seventh Man", and "Ebenezer's Memories", in the light of the main features of magic realism.

There are no previous studies on magic realism in Ireland and few on the works I am going to analyse because they are from the year 2016. However, there are two authors who have provided some foundations for this B.A. Thesis: Jean-Pierre Durix and his book *Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse* (2002) and Fernando Galván, José Santiago Fernández and Juan Francisco Elices and their book *El realismo mágico en lengua inglesa: tres ensayos* (2001). Durix's aim is to find the magic realism features and devices through the literature of very important authors such as García Márquez, Juan Rulfo, Alejo Carpentier, Witi Ihimaera and Salman Rushdie. Galván, Fernández and Elices analyse magic realism in the eighties through the work of Salman Rushdie, magic realism and postcolonialism in Africa and the work of Ben Okri, and the new uses of magic realism in the Hispano-American trilogy of Louis de Bernières.

Nevertheless, none of them analyses Irish literature and its new magic realism trends. The study I propose is something new, due to the youth of the writers and their brand-new short stories. Magic realism in Ireland only appears in the most recent narrative produced there.

In order to achieve these objectives, I have divided my B.A. Thesis in two different sections: "The Origins of Magic Realism and its Association with Latin American Literature" and "Magic Realism in Recent Irish Short Stories".

The methodology I have followed to accomplish these aims is that of close reading of the short stories. I have compared the Irish magic realistic short stories between them and with the parameters of Maria del Carmen Varela Bran's table of

the traditional features of magic realism, and other authors' works such as Jean-Pierre Durix's and Seymour Menton's.

2. The Origins of Magic Realism and its Association with Latin American Literature

Magic realism is a fiction that does not distinguish between realistic and non-realistic events, fiction in which the supernatural, the mythical, or the implausible are assimilated to the cognitive structure of reality without a perceptive break in the narrator's or characters' consciousness. Magical realism is a style associated with Latin American fiction especially in the 1960s and after. (Mellen, 1)

Magic Realism is a very wide-ranging concept whose origins in painting and transition into literature I am going to outline. First, I will analyse the origins of magical realism and the previous trends that inspired it; then I am going to enumerate its features when the term is applied to painting; next, its transition to literature and the growth of a new genre at the beginning of the twentieth century; and finally, its association with Latin American writing, fantasy and myth, to round up with Varela Bran's list of twenty-four features that traditionally distinguish magical realistic literature. The works of the following authors have helped me to analyse the roots and evolution of magic realism: Camacho Delgado's *Comentarios filosóficos sobre el realismo mágico* (2006), Joan Mellen's *Magic Realism* (2000), and García Sanchez's *Territorios de fantasía: El realismo mágico y otras formas en narrativa, cine y pintura* (2009).

2.1 Origins in painting

The term *Magic realism* was coined at the beginning of the twentieth century. Magic realism is a movement which has enjoyed a particular attention in the theoretical-critical discourse about arts and literature, mainly Latin American. It is usually associated with the mid-twentieth century Latin American literature, but its origins are the formal and technical innovations of the beginning of the twentieth century in the Europe of the avant-gardes. The conceptual origins of magic realism come from the visual arts; they are pictorial.

The term 'magic realism' was first used in 1925, when the German critic Franz Roh characterized a group of post-expressionist painters – Max Beckmann, Georges

Grosz, Otto Dix – with the name of ‘Magischer Realismus’ (quoted in Mellen, 9). The term was used to describe the fact that they painted already-existing common objects as if they saw them for the first time.

In opposition to the unrecognizable art of disfigured and transformed objects of expressionist painters, the new magical realism artists presented the objects as if they had come out of nothing, as if just born in front of the astonished eyes of the artist. Art becomes in these paintings a new Genesis, a magical recreation of the world’s birth. Magic is presented as an important part of that reality which springs from nothingness.

It wasn’t coincidental that the meaning of Magic Realism was produced in assistance with pictorial art. The plastic arts have the capacity of assembling in a single visual unit, in a real simultaneity, two orders or realities which are easily recognizable in the explanatory notes written by Roh to open his essay: “I would like to point out that the mystery does not descend to the represented world but hides and throbs behind it” (quoted in García Sánchez, 9). It is also true that magical realism can be cinematographic, but in painting it does not need the time dimension; it shows itself in a quintessential form. To conclude, the pictorial media provides a privileged perspective to explore the phenomenon of mystery, of the magic which is latent in the real.

2.2 Characteristics of pictorial magic realism

Three main characteristics of pictorial magic realism would be: the merging of orders of reality, estrangement as a goal objective and, finally, statism and oneiric character.

The merging of orders of reality is the feature that best helps to capture the essence of magical realism, since the confrontation between several orders, e. g. the objective and the subjective, the real and the unreal, is likely to reveal the unrealistic parts of the style. In short, the magic effect which defines the magical realism comes from the merging of the things attributable to the objective experience of reality with those which surpass that experience, breaking it and showing its limits. This magical effect is found in magical realistic pictures in a strict sense, in the period of the Weimar Republic (1918-1933) An instance would be *The Fatal Crash of Karl Buchstätter*, by Franz Radziwill (1928), but

it is also found in previous works such as *The abandoned Town* by Fernand Khnopff (1904), and *The Blind House* by Degouve de Nuncques in 1892, which clearly influenced René Magritte in his *Empire of Light* (1954). (See figures 1-4) In the latter two paintings, there is a square in the city of Bruges surrounded by fog and a house divided in two parts, the first one aggressively illuminated and the other one in shadows but with a mysterious light, abandoned and ghostly spaces, but beaten up by another reality which is presented as an internal possibility of the first one (García Sánchez, 18)



Figure 1. The Fatal Crash of Karl Buchstätter, 1928

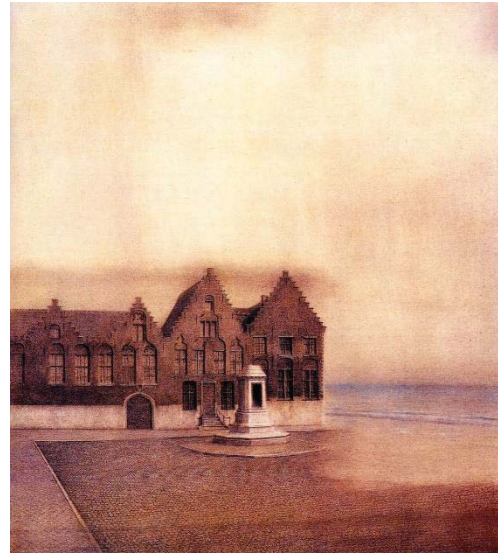


Figure 2. The abandoned Town, 1904



Figure 3. The Blind House, 1892

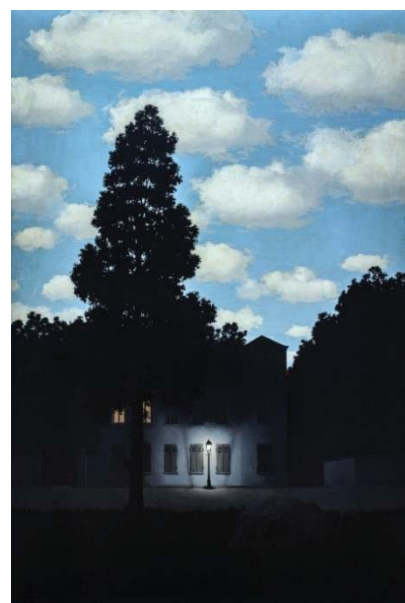


Figure 4. Empire of Light, 1954

As for estrangement as a goal in pictorial magic realism, the objectification in the forms of the images is achieved through the erasure of subjectivity in the image. The magical-realistic paintings present a tendency towards the descriptive, towards reality as an experience of vision. This is not an exclusive feature of magical realism since Dutch painters of the Golden Age (seventeenth century) already used it. However, if these images are shown as magical (see figures 5-8) it is because they are not possible; not even the amazing precision of the objects in van der Heyden's paintings (furniture, carpet, tapestry, world map, etc.) or the interiors of Houckgeest, Saenredam and van Hoogstraten, all three bathed in a similar unreal light, because they are strangely uniform. Neither is the meticulous scenography to which the pictorial space is subjected, such as the letter deposited on the first step of the staircase on the right in *View of a corridor* by van Hoogstraten.



Figure 5 Corner of a Library, 1710



Figure 6. Interior of the Nieuwe Kerk, 1650



Figure 7. The Interior of St Bavo's Church, 1648

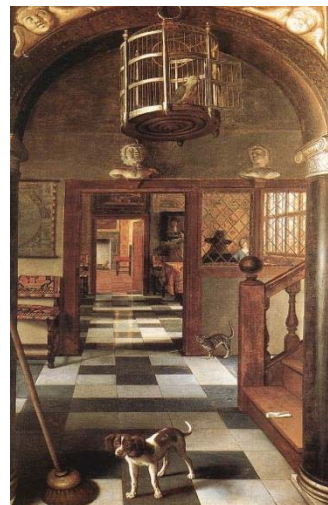


Figure 8. View of a Corridor, 1662

Finally, a magical realistic work is inconceivable without statism and an oneiric character. The overall effect of this technique is freezing and immobility, but it can also have a few dynamic elements. The most important key of magic realism is its merging with statism since this dimension allows it to detain the course of the presented reality and to give it metaphysical or unreal thickness. Statism is therefore the link where the fusion between two magical realistic times, two realities, crystalizes, with the consequent oneiric character of works where figures, objects and spaces seem to be lost, forgotten between two worlds. (García Sánchez, 23). The girl playing hoop in *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street* (1914) by Giorgio Chirico and mainly *The Water Tower in Bremen*, (1931) by Franz Radziwill are pictures which show this fusion of the oneiric and the real world. In Radziwill's painting we can see a bricked-up garden, a row of houses with some roofs on a back plane and a ghostly water tank lost in the dark. The rectilinear predominates, the objects are geometric figures that added to the immobility of the farmers who work the orchard and the artificial light that illuminates the orchard in front of the sinister darkness of the tower generate the disturbing magical effect of the work:

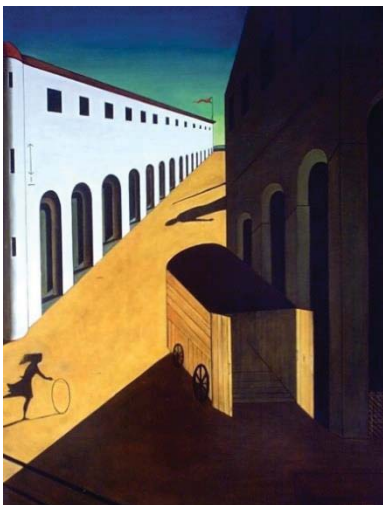


Figure 9. *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street*, 1914



Figure 10. *The Water Tower in Bremen*, 1931

2.3 From painting to literature

Because my main concern is with magic realism as a literary movement, I will discuss next the origins of magical realism in literature, magical realism as a literary style, and the postulates of some of the most important writers of Latin American magical realism at the beginning of the century.

In its transition from painting to literature, the term magical realism had to adjust to a new conceptual category, leaving aside the world of images and considering the new semantic margins gained by the word. In this new dimension, magical realism occupied an intermediate space between realistic literature, always faithful to the truth, and fantastic literature, constantly appealing to the supernatural according to Anderson Imbert (quoted in Camacho, 18). Yurkievich also marked these similarities with realism carried out by the avant-gardes and European modern literature:

The new literature inaugurated with the avant-gardes aims to break all ties with the objective world and thus create its own reality. Art must stop mimicking nature and the mankind to become a new source of creation, autonomous and independent, where words take on a special role. (quoted in Camacho, 13. My translation).

In 1924, André Breton wrote *The Surrealist Manifesto* which brings together and attaches two facts of the literature of the twentieth century: the birth of surrealism and the creation of magical realism. He postulates that the important thing about reality is what it hides, what it doesn't show; the rejection of the inviolable laws of the rational world, to get into the irrational dimension. It is a literature in which the dream mechanisms of sleep, the transient states of alcohol and drugs, wakefulness and hallucinations derived from insomnia become fashionable. He appeals to madness and mental insanity to seek new paths of the imagination.

These transgressive mechanisms of reality are enriched by continuous entries into the world of magic and the exoteric, the superstitions and all those elements that have traditionally been removed from daily life. Everything that produces wonder is a source of beauty, according to Breton; things are not ugly or beautiful by themselves but due to the effect of surprise and the impact they cause on others. (Camacho Delgado, 14).

Breton met several Latin American writers in Paris in the 1920s, such as César Vallejo, Alejo Carpentier, Arturo Uslar Pietri and Miguel Angel Asturias, among others. Paris brought together the fathers of magical realism. These first writers blend magic realism with the indigenous and the mythical side of the Latin American reality. Venezuelan writer Arturo Uslar Pietri, in an article called "Realismo Mágico", presents the new aesthetics that extends throughout Latin America as a confluence of elements where the indigenous, the black-African culture, and the Western cultural model

converge. The Guatemalan writer Miguel Angel Asturias records the *Maya-Quiché* cultural substratum in his *Legends of Guatemala* (1930), the importance of indigenous oral histories, the mythical stories from the *Popol Vuh* (a creation narrative written by the K'iche' people before the Spanish conquest of Guatemala), and everything related to pre-Columbian cultures. Alejo Carpentier focuses his attention on black culture and the religiosity which comes from Africa.

2.4 The new Hispanic literature from 1930 and its differences with surrealism.

Important writers such as Alejo Carpentier and García Márquez, representative of the Latin American literature of the 1930s, separate magic realism from avantgardes and defend that the American reality is much richer than the European one. This is how Ainsa acknowledges this greater richness of American reality:

Nature, so often the narrative axis of the new continent, shares prominence with the complex forms of religiosity, the diversity of languages, the enormous melting pot where societies of all kinds merge. In this atmosphere of cultural syncretism, surrealism provided the techniques and ways necessary for the representation of the 'American' to take a new look, drawing from the subconscious of the American people the other culture that had been crushed by the weight of colonization. (quoted in Camacho, 15. My translation).

And Miguel Angel Asturias supports this statement of renouncing occidental culture because theirs was richer:

For us surrealism meant finding in ourselves not the European, but the indigenous and the American, because it was a Freudian school in which what acted was not the conscience but the unconscious. This was hidden under the western consciousness. When one began to search the inside, he found the indigenous subconscious. (Camacho, 15-16. My translation)

For García Marquez, in Latin America and the Caribbean, artists have found it difficult to make the reality of America credible. American reality goes beyond imagination. It is a disproportionate reality that confronts literature with the insufficiency of words to come close to it. In a sense, the meanings of the dictionary are incapable of adjusting to the

exuberant and excessive American world, while European writers have tried to create another imaginary reality through their literature (Camacho Delgado, 16).

The artists of magical realism differ from the surrealists in that they did not want to make unusual games with the objects and words of the tribe, or paint melted clocks; on the contrary, they wanted to reveal, discover, express in all their unusual fullness the almost unknown and rather hallucinatory reality that was that of Latin America in order to penetrate the great creative message of cultural crossbreeding.

Alejo Carpentier said that the magical realistic writer tries first and foremost to provoke surprise in the reader. In his literature there is always something unusual that surprises and disturbs our reality, turning the impossible into probable. The reader feels drawn into a new dimension of things where nature does not respond to rational laws and the time machine seems to have broken down.

Many people confuse and mix fantastic literature with *lo real maravilloso* (the marvellous real), a term that Carpentier invented. He wanted to put an end to this controversy with his prologue in *El reino de este mundo* where he introduced the idea of the 'wonder':

There is a wonderful literature of European origin, referring to supernatural events. Nevertheless, the American reality is superior in its 'wonder' to all the artifice invented by European writers. That is why it is licit to speak of 'the marvellous American reality'. The marvellous American reality can be transferred to literature only if writers have faith in its ability to transmit it. (quoted in Camacho, 19. My translation)

For Carpentier, the American writer is in constant 'contact with the wonderful'. The magic of reality lies in its wonder, the magic and the wonderful are equated by giving rise to a literature which is very similar, even though it may have different names. However, the term 'magical realism' is the most appropriate one because it embraces an aesthetic phenomenon that exceeds the limits of literature and goes beyond the American continent. In magical realism, the prodigy, the miracle, the strange and the abnormal is subject to the laws of this world, although its mere existence causes us surprise. Instead of presenting magic as if it was real, the writer presents us the reality as if it was magic. In

short, the reality that is presented as magical is that where mythical archetypes coexist with the profane aspects of everyday life (Camacho, 20).

2.5 Magical realism and mythical conscience

Magic realism draws from myths, legends and common wisdom to create its stories and realities. However, mythical literature and magic realism, although directly related, are not one and the same thing.

Mythical literature and magical realism are intimately linked concepts. When magical realism tries to present the world as virginal, emerged in a new genesis, it does so by relying on different myths. These myths are the axes on which the writer builds his fictions. Literature is thus imbued with an atmosphere of unreality, halfway between the biblical and the mythological, in which incredible things happen. These myths give a universal character to human circumstances and contribute to the creation of a circular representation of time.

In magical realism, time does not advance in a straight line, but goes round and round, recreating the magical structures of thought and literature. With mythical consciousness, man is situated within nature, constituting a unitary whole where things seem to have taken on a life of their own. Nature can only be modified from within and always by means of the wizard, mage or sorcerer. Once inside the sacred space (mythical territory), the character is immersed in a new order of things in which the boundaries of life and death disappear, the differences between the animate and the inanimate are diffused, the plausible is presented as implausible, it is a kind of 'upside down world' that allows myth and mythical consciousness to reveal a new dimension of reality deeply rooted in many towns, inside and outside Latin America. (Camacho, 22).

In the literary assembly of magical realism, a mythical substratum operates and confers a generic value to the storyline. This mythical-magical substratum is greater in those peoples such as the Hispano-Americans, who live their traditions intensely and practice a deep and atavistic religiosity, in a polytheistic pantheon where the God of the Christians shares the stage with the African and pre-Columbian deities. In this B.A. Thesis I am going to analyse if we can see the same pattern in Irish works.

2.6 Main parameters of magic realistic literary works

To conclude this presentation of the main traits of magic realism let us quote that from Maria del Carmen Varela Bran's proposed parameters that describe the features of magic realism. All these characteristics are those on which I am going to base myself to analyse the magic realistic stories of the Irish authors:

1. Has introspective desire.
2. Starts from reality.
3. Is developed on different planes of reality.
4. Discovers the inner mystery of things.
5. A kind of second reality.
6. Expresses a magical world.
7. Takes root in the 'Being'.
8. An unexpected disruption of reality.
9. Introspection to indigenous reality.
10. The characters live in an atmosphere of magic and reality.
11. Ingrains the 'wonder' with reality.
12. The supernatural complements and coexists with reality.
13. Blends the realistic elements with indigenous thoughts.
14. Does not distort reality.
15. Pre-logical and pre-scientific thoughts.
16. Aesthetic procedure.
17. Reality, imagination and dream.
18. Takes refuge in the mythical past and farming communities.
19. Close to the myth.
20. Several aspects of reality are complemented.
21. Ubicated in an ethnic level.
22. Transformation of reality into legend.
23. Uses mythic elements.
24. Uses oneiric elements.

(Varela Bran, 30)

3. Magic Realism in Irish Literature

As seen in the previous chapter, magic realism is a characteristic genre of Latin American literature thanks to its world and its reality, that are much richer than the European. There are an enormous mixture of cultures, races and ethnicities with their respective myths, legends and tales that, together with its wonderful landscapes and fauna, make Latin America the cradle of magic realism. Nevertheless, Ireland, due to its tumultuous history, has a great mythical and folkloric richness too. What is more, the characteristics, landscapes and orography of the island make it a perfect place to write fantastic and magic works.

Magic realistic stories are interwoven with elements of magic, fable, allegory, and the supernatural which fit very well with Irish culture. It is full of hand-me-down myths and it is quite steeped in legend and mystery. Moreover, the Irish people are so rich in imagination that they often have an illogical way of doing things and it is as if they lived in an exciting realm between reality and magic. “I firmly believe that in Ireland most every ordinary experience is infused with a sense of the mystic, while even our most transcendent moments feel rooted in the brick and dirt realism of everyday life.” (Jan Carson, quoted in O'Donnell, 2016c).

What is surprising is that there are very few magic realistic Irish works. This may be because Irish authors have stuck to writing purely realistic works or naturalistic works but without mixing reality and magic as Roisin O'Donnell, one of the authors I am going to analyse, points out:

[F]or much of the past century, Irish fiction, and in particular the Irish short story, has been tightly wedded with naturalism. There have of course been exceptions, such as the magical elements in the novels of Brian Moore, and some of the stories of Kevin Barry, but for many years naturalism has held sway over the Irish literary canon. (O'Donnell, 2016c)

Jan Carson, whose 2016 short story collection *Children's Children* uses elements of the surreal to weave masterful tales of family, ancestry and identity, also agrees with O'Donnell about the shocking scarcity of magical realistic works in Irish literature: “I've always found this trend quite strange. To me Irish culture is so steeped in legend and

mystery and the Irish people are so rich in imagination, I could never understand why most of our literature seems bent towards the realist.” (quoted in O'Donnell, 2016c)

Magical realism is a trend that is starting to become fashionable in Irish literature among the 21st century writers. In previous Irish literature, as Carson proposes, there were very few magical realistic works, and if so, only in smaller numbers since Irish authors did not use to mix magic and reality. Jane Gilheaney, another young Irish writer and artist, argues that in Irish literature there has been almost no tradition of writing magic realism and that Irish magic realism is much less romantic than the Latin American one.

It comes from Latin America with authors like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabel Allende, but my feeling is that this is a genre that also belongs firmly in Ireland and could scarcely be more relevant. As to the question of why we haven't a tradition of writers in this genre I can only surmise that magic is such an intrinsic part of Irish life that we haven't thought that much about it. Fairy forts, stray sods, hidden meanings, the fae, banshees, superstitions, ghosts, curses, are part of the fabric of life still. For me the latin [sic] American version is exotic and romantic, or perhaps that is a foreigners view? Irish magic realism is a blend of our natural world, the intense relationship we have with a tough landscape, with the elements, plus our superstitions, tradition, and folklore. It is anything but romantic, unless you count tragedy, which of course we do. To someone on the other side of the world it may seem exotic, romantic. Ireland is geographically western but psychologically magical. Our feeling for magic runs deep. (Gilheaney)

To prove that there is such a thing as magical realism in Irish literature, I am going to analyse four short stories (“Children’s Children”, “Costellos”, “The Seventh Man”, and “Ebenezer’s Memories”) by three Irish authors (Jan Carson, Oisin Fagan and Roisin O'Donnell), whose common denominator is the use of this Irish magical realism in their works. They are young authors and their books have been written during the twenty-first century, more precisely in the year 2016. These four short stories are settled in different points of Irish geography.

3.1 Jan Carson's "Children's Children". The dilemma of two children to save their island from extinction.

"Children's Children" is a short story which belongs to a collection of short stories, all of them written by Jan Carson and whose title is the same as the story I am going to analyse: *Children's Children* (2016). Jan Carson is a writer and community arts officer based in Belfast. Her first novel, *Malcolm Orange Disappears* was published in 2014, followed by a short story collection, *Children's Children* in 2016.

The story is located in an island, divided in two, where two children, one from the north lands and the other from the south, must confront the extinction of population in the island. All other children have left the mainland in order to get a job and study abroad, and only these two are still living in the island. The island, probably Ireland, is divided by a huge rock which marks the exact point of the midland. They've been told since they were children stories and prejudices about the other inhabitants of the island since North and South people never talked or related between them. They had to marry; they had not been given a choice. It was an arrangement with a simple equation: if more people were not soon 'made', there would be no one left to keep the island afloat. After marrying they must agree on the place they should settle for the island not to be unbalanced. They had an exchange where both of them were polite and happy with the other but realized that they could not marry because the weight of both combined would upset the balance and tip the island into the sea. They could not settle in the North nor in the South because their combined weight would ruin everything. Finally, they concluded that they must love the island enough to be neither North nor South, foreigner or familiar, but rather following a new direction, balanced in the centre of everything.

"Children's Children" is clearly a magic realistic work: it uses fantastic elements in a story which tells about the everyday ordinary. The story talks about the division north-south that is pretty rooted in Ireland since the partition of Ireland in 1921. There is a huge use of the mythological and magic elements that allude to the marvelousness of the island and its importance for its inhabitants:

They were leftover children, set aside for such a time as this. Tomorrow they would be married for the good of the island, both northern and southern sides. They

understood what this meant and could picture themselves tomorrow evening, in good clothes and music. Yet, they tried to imagine one month later, drinking tea and making up a stranger's bed, they could not alight upon anything more concrete than the details: shoelaces, crockery, the caustic smell of Lifebuoy soap on an unfamiliar sink. (Carson, 184-185)

The island is an additional and very important character, it needs to be saved and balanced and the only way is the two remaining children to get married and have descendance. It is as if the adults have given up, they aren't able to solve their own problems, and therefore they cannot solve the island's either. What is more, it follows from the story that the island's division must disappear, there should be no north nor south so that this equilibrium of the island can remain.

By means of the parameters of Maria del Carmen Varela Bran, there are two that stand out above the rest: 'The characters live in an atmosphere of magic and reality' and 'Takes refuge in the mythical past and farming communities'.

As regards to 'the characters live in an atmosphere of magic and reality', the work is full of this kind of connection between the magical and the real world. The equilibrium of the island and the division North-South are magical elements in the story that reflect the political gap that originated since the partition of Ireland:

They lived in either the north or the south. Even those who hovered around the midlands, like small children toeing the bonfire's edge, knew exactly which side of the line they laid their heads on. On the island, you were north, or you were south, or you left for the mainland. The east and west were not considered. They remained geographical afterthoughts, as inconsequential as a pair of open brackets. (Carson, 185-186)

Carson points out that both north and south inhabitants have lived under the same conditions and events, they share similar backgrounds and places but they are separated by an invisible line which differentiates the peoples of the North from those of the South. Northern Irish and southern Irish people are strangers despite the fact that they share the same culture and tradition, and they had a common past:

All the island's children had been formed from the same sandy soil and sprouted annually, in metric units, towards the same sap-grey sky. They spoke the same words, darkly set, and drunk from the same slow river, rising as it did in the north, and

fumbling southwards through fields and forests in pursuit of the motherless ocean. When it rained, as it every day did, it was the same cloud sulk which settled on all their pitched roofs, their swing sets and off-road vehicles, the same rain which coaxed the lazy turnips out of the island's muck-thick belly and into their soup pots. (Carson, 186)

Nevertheless, the prejudices and stereotypes are signs of the reluctances and reservations between north and south inhabitants:

They fell to talking, he and then she, describing at length the very many exotic things which existed on their sides of the island: tall trees in the north and a man with seven fingers in the south, five kinds of ale on her side of the line and five completely different, but similarly potent, draughts on his. (Carson, 189)

The physical division of the island is clearly fantastic, it is symmetric and perfect, with both sides of the same length and divided by a rock that marked the exact midpoint of the island. And this is not possible in the real world, where everything is imperfect and inexact: "The rock marked the exact midpoint of the island, seven foresty miles from the northern shore and a similar, open-fielded seven from the opposite coastline. The island was long and puckered like a section of intestine, recently unravelled." (Carson, 185).

Varela Bran's statement that magic realism 'Takes refuge in the mythical past and farming communities' is reflected in the story's treatment of the depopulation of Ireland. The 'Great Famine' devastated the island between 1845 and 1852 and was a crucial event in Ireland's history. Because of this starvation, there was a mass emigration of people leaving the country in search of a better life overseas: "She was the last and he was the last. All the other young ones had left for the mainland with the notion of becoming beauty therapists or PhD students. The pair of them were leftover children, too fat and too faithful to consider leaving." (Carson, 184). Finally, the arrangement of the marriage is a remnant of the past, where all marriages were of convenience.

In conclusion, the themes of the novel are the political gap north-south, the suffering of the island, the exodus of the population, the reminiscences of the past... Jan Carson combines a fantastic story of an unknown and marvellous island divided in two with Ireland's current and past political situation, addressing social themes that directly affect the real island. Some of these themes of magical realism agree with what Jean-Pierre Durix pointed out in his work *Mimesis, Genres, and Post-Colonial Discourse*:

What many ‘magic realistic’ works have in common is this mixture of ‘fantasy’ and a clear concern with reference, historical allegory and social protest. Such novels often evoke the process of liberation of oppressed communities. The scope of these books largely transcends the individual fate of a few characters in order to constitute an imaginary re-telling of a whole nation through several decades. (Durix 116)

3.2 Oisín Fagan’s “Costellos”. The vicissitudes of a family over almost seven centuries.

“Costellos” (2016) is another short story which belongs to a collection of short stories, called *Hostages*, written by Oisín Fagan, a very young Irish writer of county Meath. He was graduated in English and French in Trinity College Dublin. His novella *Heiropphants* was winner of the inaugural Penny Dreadful Novella Prize in 2016, when he published his collection of stories, *Hostages*. He is an activist with the Irish Housing Network.

“Costellos” is based on the history of an Irish family over almost seven centuries, from 1574 to 2144. This family suffered and survived shortages, wars and other disgraces, combined with periods of prosperity and wealth. The Costellos’ line starts with Alphonse, who leaves Calais for Wexford in 1574 and Married Mary Gallagher. The story of Ireland is told through the events that happen to the family: first, the attack of Cromwell’s soldiers in 1650; secondly, the creation of the Republic of Connaught in 1798; then, the emigration of several Costellos to America in the late nineteenth century; later on, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Olly Costello was arrested by the RIC (Royal Irish Constabulary) for collaborating with the IRB (Irish Republican Brotherhood) and sent to Australia.

Eventually, the story ends with the narrator, a ghost Costello who died in 2039 and watches his offspring. His grandson Jacques became governor of Meath. USA and China shared interest in turning Ireland into a failed state to weaken Europe and they supported him to rule a faction and fight other warlords of the island. He had descendance with his slaves who believed and obeyed him. Two of his bastard daughters, Julia and Genevieve, knew the truth and plotted against him. In 2133 he crucifixes Julia in public, Genevieve escapes to the hardwoods of the island and starts to remember her family’s history, from Alphonse to her grandmother. Hence, she realizes that there is no such thing

as memory and that remembrances should be told amongst the dead, the living and the unborn. Finally, the revolution starts in 2144.

“Costellos” is a short story which gathers several features of magic realism and combines many important characteristics of this genre such as dystopian or historic traits. First of all, the structure of the novel is pretty similar to García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, thus both stories are family chronicles. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the chronicle of the Buendías over a century and “Costellos” is the narration of the Costellos, over almost seven centuries. It is the history of a family with inescapable repetitions, confusions, and progressive decline, a satire sometimes but other times it is like an invocation of the magical.

The Costellos chronicle is historical and accurate, merging real events with invented ones, and giving a kind of magical essence to some of them: The Cromwell attack, the Republic of Ireland, the sending of prisoners to Australia, the emigration to America... all these events have historical basis and they give verisimilitude to the story along with other brutal events which happened to the family members. These ferocious episodes are so precisely described that it makes the reader believe in their plausibility: cruel deaths, expropriation of lands, emigration, cancer and other diseases, consumption of drugs... and all these phenomena make it a historic and magical realistic story.

There are some features of Magic Realism reflected in the criteria listed by Varela Bran such as ‘Starts from reality’ and ‘Takes refuge in the mythical past and farming communities’.

The story starts from reality by telling the ups and downs of the Costellos. It tells us all their history from the sixteenth century. This is the first part of the story, very historic and accurate, telling us very specific details but without showing us a specific character, by jumping from generation to generation of Costellos:

Three lines of the Costellos who stemmed from Alphonse and Mary survived this holocaust. One line was sent to Jamaica where they were ill-used as indentured servants. As for the rest, they were forced west, both families ending up in Bohola, Mayo, where they continued to raise cattle to varying degrees of unsuccess for a century or so. There is no report of what these Catholics did except for sprawling their sex lives around the neighbouring vicinities where they multiplied like rats. [...]

While on the topic of violent deaths, in 1722, one Patrick Costello, a handsome young man who took far too much pride in the scarlet shade of his cape, was summarily executed for poaching three pheasants that he intended to give to his newly betrothed to celebrate Christmas. (Fagan, 164-165)

When you go deep in the novel, the magic realistic elements begin to appear. Fagan introduces the idea of ghost in the middle of the novel and it is very relevant because then, in the denouement, we discover that the narrator is a ghost. We begin to assume and take as normal the magic elements because they are being introduced progressively without altering reality:

He waited till they were gone and, petrified, he began crying wildly while steadily munching hungrily on the rotten, shrunken mulberries that still clung to the tree so late in the season, and then he cut across the fields and was admitted to a workhouse because he was young, where he was set to work on the Corrib and Mask Canal and where he died of exhaustion after six days. Later his ghost would trawl through the deserted, derelict workhouses, haunting absolutely no one. (Fagan, 168)

Eventually, it takes refuge in the mythical past and farming communities; most of the Costellos were peasants and lived in the countryside and, in the end, even though it is situated in the future, Irish cities were almost destroyed popping up forests and jungles. Therefore, people came back to live as in the past, in a world of warlords and slaves, which promoted the denialism of history. The author depicts a dystopian future where society has regressed to communities of warlords and slaves under the tyranny of Jacques Costello. People live even worse than at the beginning of the story, when the Costellos were peasants:

Jacques, having once been a tactically astute despot, slides happily into chaotic tyranny, his disorganised aberrations encouraged by the gringos who gave him his small allotment of power and the Chinese who maintained it for him. The haphazard nature of his cruelty towards his subjects is only matched by the organised splendour with which he honours his hidden masters, and all his subservient fawning is structured in a careful, unquestioning manner with the express intention of never having to learn the truth. (Fagan, 177)

There are five traits of magic realism that Seymour Menton discerns in *Historia verdadera del realismo mágico* (pages 62-73) about *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and share with “Costellos”:

1. The use of dates in the story, which shows an encyclopaedic portrait of history and each event has its correspondent year appear in the story.

She graduated in sociology from NUIM in 1985 and went to London to continue her studies, where she dropped out in 1987 after meeting an American. She married him in 1989. The American left in 1990 and Jennifer returned home and became a teacher at St Mary's Convent Primary School in Trim and quickly married a wealthy farmer from Bohermeen who laughed a lot and who had a two Junior All-Ireland medals on his mantelpiece. I am born to them early in 1991. (Fagan, 171)

2. A past-future technique. There is a clear use of the past with very few participations of the present and the future. The story is written in past tense since the beginning of the Costellos family in the sixteenth century until the narrator presents himself in the twentieth century: "I am born to them early in 1991, the eighth ever Costello to be born above the poverty threshold" (Fagan, 171) and he uses this present tense until the birth of the two twins: "Jacques impregnates her and in 2111 she will bear two female twins, named Julia and Genevieve" (Fagan, 177). The narrator keeps using the future tense until the end of the novel ending it with the beginning of a revolution, started by Genevieve.

3. The island of Ireland as the centre of the story where all the action is concentrated but with allusions to many other regions around the world, that are a geographic extension of the novel. But all the actions take place in the island.

4. The cyclic and backward time, a 'vicious circle' where same events occur once and again, the importance of memory at the very end of the novel. Genevieve begins to remember her ancestors and their story. Memory as such, that keeps being repeated through centuries and people don't learn about. They just forget and make the same errors as their ancestors:

She will remember Alphonse and Mary and even the name of my poor mother and all the names that were us and she will remember what she has been born for and she will realise that there is no such thing as memory and that no ghosts exist unless we are made to exist and that all the suffering is determined but pointless unless the egalitarianism of memory is spread through the centuries in an eternal present that stretches towards a point in the future when the planet ends and time is abolished and

that all of this is pointless unless the distribution is equal amongst the living, the dead and the unborn. (Fagan, 178-79)

5. Finally, the sneaky narrator. The narrator is a ghost, and the story does not end with him, he keeps telling the family's story through the experiences of his descendance. We do not know he is dead until the end of his story:

Luckily, I do not live to see this as I die in 2039, not of the lung cancer I have been diagnosed with, but instead by cracking my skull open on the ice on the morning of December 4 when I go out to the yard to feed the hens and collect the eggs. I bend over and slip and that is it. (Fagan, 173)

3.3 Roisin O'Donnell's "The Seventh Man". A mythological witch immersed in our times.

The Glass Shore is a collection of short stories by women writers from the North of Ireland. The story that I am going to analyse and belongs to this collection is "The Seventh Man" written by Roisin O'Donnell a young woman writer from Derry. She was a graduate of Trinity College Dublin and the University of Ulster; her stories and poems have been published internationally. Her short stories appear in *Young Irelanders* (2015), and in the award-winning anthologies of Irish women's writing *The Long Gaze Back* (2015) and *The Glass Shore* (2016). Nationally and internationally recognized, she has received many awards. Roisín's debut short story collection, *Wild Quiet*, was published in 2016.

In "The Seventh Man", the protagonist is Cara, a witch who has outlasted death for centuries by absorbing her husbands' vitality. Her seventh husband is in hospital struggling between life and death and the doctor says that there is no solution. She has never fallen in love with any of her previous six husbands but her seventh was special to her. She seduced every one of them from the rocks of Beara. She grew fat and gorgeous on the men's energy, allowing her to survive for hundreds of years. She created a spell that prevented locals from questioning. First of all, she married with a Spaniard she saved from his sinking galleon. She snatched her second husband from the Skelligs when he was praying to his God, yet he started to adore her as a deity. The third and fourth husbands blur into a tangle of straw, whitethorn and sex. Her fifth husband belonged to the Ulster aristocracy, and she seduced him on the sound off Bere Island. The sixth

husband knocked at her door, he had suffered the horror and scarcity of WWI and she kept him with her. Between the sixth and the seventh, a long time passed in which men no longer went to the coast of Beara. For this reason, she met a man by using the Tinder application and, inexplicably, she fell in love with him. Unfortunately, he caught a deadly disease, and Cara reverted her powers and saved him. She extracted the doctor's vitality and gave it to her husband. In the end, she let him free, and he didn't remember anything about their previous relationship.

The short story of "The Seventh Man" has straightforward features and characteristics of magical realism. The use of myth and legend is more obvious than in the other short stories analysed in this B.A. Thesis. This story is full of references to Irish places close to the Beara peninsula, where the witch could be seen, according to the legend.

The structure of the story has some resemblances to that of "Costellos", although in "The Seventh Man" the protagonist is not a family but a single person over the centuries. There are temporary leaps between the present in which her beloved seventh husband is dying and the past memories of her previous marriages. Ireland is the centre of the action as in the other stories, and there is a mixture of realistic and magical events. These magical events are stronger in this story because of the protagonist. She is a thousand-year-old witch; she is a mythic figure that belongs to the Irish folklore, full of magic and fantasy. Thus, this is the magic realistic story with a clearer use of myth and magic.

Turning to Varela Bran's table, three features are of important mention: 'It is close to the myth', 'It expresses a magical world' and there is a 'transformation of reality into legend'.

The refuge in the mythological past and the legend is much more recurring and transparent than in the previous stories. The witch of the story is based on the myth of the Hag of Beare but living in a modern world:

The Hag of Beare is an interesting character and is embedded in folklore going back to the beginning of time. Her origins may spring from the Irish Goddess Buí (Cow – Old Irish). She was a Sovereign Goddess, an Earth Mother, a Supernatural Creator and who presides over the Irish landscape. She has also been noted for forming

islands, transforming lakes into mountains and placing boulders in rivers. An Cailleach Bhéara was known to have a long life span, passing through seven periods of youth. Not only is she associated with the Hags Chair at Loughcrew Hills but also with the Beara Peninsula in Co. Cork where a natural rock is said to bear her facial image. Her burial site is stated to be at Labbacallee Wedge Tomb in Cork. [...] Her demise from a goddess of destruction to an old woman or hag came about following the first written records of her in the ninth century by the Christian scribes. “The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare” is a text from the ninth century which has been called a ‘remarkable’ poem in medieval Ireland. The poem tells of An Cailleach Bhéara as once a formidable being, able to renew her energy from the forces of nature but is now a pitiful degraded old woman in a new patriarchal society. (Kesp)

The transformation of reality into a legend is the essence of this story. Cara fell in love with the seventh man and she decided to save his life, as the Hag of Beare who had seven periods of youth. It is likewise a rewriting of the ancient poem “The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare”:

This is one of the oldest examples of Irish poetry. Written in the ninth century, the poem is narrated by the Cailleach herself and is a lament for her lost youth as she decides to take the veil. Over the course of the poem, she describes the grief and loneliness she feels as an old woman, her sadness that the days of putting her arms around ‘comely youths’ and kings are over and her struggles to recognise anything of the world she remembers from her younger days. The Cailleach who is reputed to have lived seven times over before she was turned to stone, seeing multiple husbands and children die across the course of her lifetimes. (Fergus)

Characters live in an atmosphere of magic and reality; the supernatural complements and coexists with it. There is a portrait of a magical ancient world in modern times: she is an immortal creature in a world of mortals, she pretends to be normal and lives a normal life with the exception of the habit of consuming her husbands’ energy. People think she is normal, a sweet and innocent girl:

Magicking myself was easy, and I magicked the locals too. In Castletown, and as far away as Ballinskellings, people believed my family were fishing folk who lived in Bearhaven Bay. For nuptials, I’d magick some bewildered ole fella into walking me up the aisle. There’d be a veil, a kiss on the cheek and a button-hole stuffed with a white carnation. It was smokescreen rather than sorcery. I didn’t deceive them. I just created a spell that prevented them from questioning. They believed what they wanted to. (O’Donnell, 2016b, 368)

What is more, around crackling fires, the Irish told tales about “The Hag of Beare, the oldest woman in Ireland” but they never suspected she was her. (O'Donnell, 2016b, 366)

Time and memory are very important concepts, as in “Costellos”. Time is the resource she never lacked, and she realizes that she is tired of living, she only wants to save her husband:

Time is all I've had. From one era to the next. Endless, infinite, boundless time since before the mountains had settled. A banquet of minutes has left me on the edge of narcosis, as after an obnoxious feast. I'm tired of time, nauseated by it. After tasting the moments with my seventh husband, I want nothing else. (O'Donnell, 2016b, 372)

Memory on the other hand is the thread running through the story. The past moments are her memories, she is the narrator of her story. Moreover, in the end, she remembers each of her former six husbands and what she did to them with the purpose of using their energy to save her seventh husband: “But what if I could give time back? What if I could summon the lifeblood of a captured Spaniard, the breath of an Ulster aristocrat, the pulse of a soldier, caught between wars?” (O'Donnell, 2016b, 373)

In conclusion, “The Seventh Man” is a story that blends excellently the magic and fantasy of a Celtic legend with the issues and problems of modern life. It is a magic realistic work with deep mythical and magical influence but ending in current times.

3.4 Roisin O'Donnell's “Ebenezer's Memories”. A monster in a cupboard keeps the memories of an Ireland split in two.

Roisin O'Donnell is also the writer of *Wild Quiet*, another collection of short stories, and “Ebenezer's Memories” is one of its stories. Another magic realistic story placed in Ireland with great references to her recent convulsive past.

Catherine's parents were a Protestant-Catholic mixed marriage, and when they eloped to England their families refused to speak to them. It lasted nearly a decade, until her father died, and her grandparents got back in touch. Catherine first found out about Ebenezer in the mid-1990s during one of the Christmas she spent in Derry, Northern

Ireland. Her grandfather told her that Ebenezer was a monster who hid in the cupboard under the stairs and he fed him with newspapers and other scary things, things they'd rather forget. She opened the cupboard's door and saw half-remembered faces, she felt and saw her granddad manning big guns in Egypt, her parents eloping, and many more memories of her relatives. She used to go to the cupboard on lonely afternoons to discover new memories. Ebenezer showed her father's death, mistakenly attacked by a paramilitary member of the IRA in Derry. Then another image about her grandparents complaining because her father was a Catholic... On the summer of 1998 she began to realize the hatred of Derry's population towards English symbols and culture. Then, there was another bomb threat, people didn't know that the memories that fuelled the conflict were not gone, only buried. Finally, a car bomb exploded in Omagh, taking thirty-one lives with it. She understood the reasons her parents left Derry, and that in the process of leaving, something undefinable had been lost. Her father's death was not a political killing as such, but the details were never uncovered. Last time she visited Ebenezer, she was grown, married to a Dubliner. Catherine was even more confused that when she was a child, she didn't feel neither Irish nor English, she felt lost between worlds. She opened the cupboard and Ebenezer displayed her grandpa feeding him with his newspapers, his memories, into the dark.

The structure of the novel has features similar to those of other magic realistic works previously analysed such as "Costellos" or "The Seventh Man". It talks about the past of an Irish family, whose memories, many of them unpleasant, are hidden inside a cupboard. The narrator is Catherine and she is remembering her convulsive childhood during The Troubles in Northern Ireland. The story, historically very accurate, shows the lives of a Northern Irish family with its problems and worries. It combines fantasy with the figure of the monster Ebenezer, a recurrent character used to show both critical and ordinary moments of the memories of that family. "Granddad gave a single nod. 'Aye. That's coz Ebenezer's hungry. I've to feed him newspapers every day, and other things. What things, Catherine? Scary things, pet. Things we'd rather forget.'" (O'Donnell, 2016a, 11). Ebenezer is a very important character as he shows the eagerness for concealing bad visions or images of those periods of upheaval: "No one could else hear Ebenezer's calls, which thrilled and terrified me. Each time I slipped my fingers under

the door, blue dots would dance and turn to white, and I'd witness episodes of family history, like snatches of a stolen documentary.” (O'Donnell, 2016a, 13)

Some themes as religion and historical and political issues are themes of magical realism as Durix defends in his book *Mimesis, Genres, and Post-Colonial Discourse*, thus many authors merge fantasy with those themes of protest.

For all these reasons, the prevalence of memory is a very important theme, as in “Costellos”. Catherine realizes that her father died in Derry probably because of the terrorists her family supports. That episode was thoroughly hidden by them. Other episodes as the participation of her Grandad in WWII or the eloping of her parents were other well-kept memories in the family. Like other magic realistic works, memory is tormenting the characters, Catherine cannot avoid seeing those images and events again and again, despite the fact that some of them are terrible. She and her family are trapped in their memories and history, they cannot change their history and they are doomed to live with it. This curse of memory is extrapolated to society, embedded in a conflict of difficult solution, fighting for affronts of ancestors that have little to do with them anymore, but they cannot stop fighting.

And yet in that summer of '98 I began to notice things about Derry that I hadn't heeded before. The grey rainbow of the New Bridge arced across the Foyle. Bands of red-white-and-blue paint wrapped the kerbs of the Waterside to the point of strangulation. Stripes of green-white-and-orange lined the pavements of Rosemount. The skull of a paramilitary was painted on a gable-end near Grandad's house with the words *No surrender* written in a scroll above it. A tricolour tied to a machine gun adorned a gable-end at Rosemount, and the words *You are now entering Free Derry* guarded the Bogside. Checkpoints were manned by British soldiers cradling long black rifles, their eyes scanning the area just above our heads. (O'Donnell, 2016a, 14)

Religion is another theme treated in the story, because in Northern Ireland there was a religious conflict between Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants. Irish Catholics supported the IRA and the fight against the British Government. They wanted to enter in the Irish Republic. The fact that her parents' marriage is a mixed marriage means that her mother's family was Protestant and her father's Catholic. This fact entailed the repudiation by both families of that union and the breakdown of contact with the elopers: “Grandad knowing before she continues, in the way some stories are known before they are heard, that the

boy is Catholic. His silent tears were made horrific by the reddish hued of the electric fire.” (O'Donnell, 2016a, 20) The ruling population in Derry was Protestant and there were many murders of Catholics in those years of conflict that may be the cause of her father's murder.

The last theme treated in the novel is the political issue in Northern Ireland, the fight between the Irish nationalists and the British government. This fight is due to centuries of grievances and confrontations, events that the twentieth-century fighters do not even remember, which does not prevent them from continuing the struggle. The attacks committed by the IRA were supported by a large part of the population, but the family of the story is unionist and the IRA attacked both the unionists and the British:

Grandad hobbled into the kitchen and stood beside her, staring at the TV. By then there were things written on their faces that I didn't —and, having been brought up in England, by definition couldn't —ever understand. I remember wanting to react but not knowing how. And while I knew it was possible to envy someone their happiness, I would experience for the first time the aching loneliness of envying someone their grief. (O'Donnell, 2016a, 24)

In the story we can distinguish Varela Bran's characteristics 'The supernatural complements and coexists with reality', 'There is an unexpected disruption of reality' and 'It does not distort reality'. The monster in the cupboard and the living memories of Catherine are the best examples of supernatural things introduced in the real world. They are very well merged; thus, reality and magic events are combined as a single entity.

There is an unexpected disruption of reality the moments Catherine goes into the cupboard to enter in the world of memories. There she can see images and visions of her family members. It is like a new world, different from the real one, a world of events and memories, an oneiric world and a world of imagination.

I tugged at the brass latch of the cupboard door, and to my fright it gave way a little. It rocked on its rusty nails, creaking in slight complaint as the brass hinge bent. For the first time the blistering door opened a chink, through which I could peek. Again came the dots of purple, blue, and then a blazing white glare. The memories were fuller now, and I was standing in the middle of them. (O'Donnell, 2016a, 17)

However, there is not a distortion of reality, the historical events are not altered, and the magical ones just help to introduce the reader to that reality, very hard to comprehend

without this magic help because of its dreadfulness and crudeness. The memories are oneiric elements which help Catherine and the readers to know the background of the story. On balance, the story is a combination of reality, imagination and dream.

Another magical realistic feature is the use of dates: there is an encyclopaedic portrait of history, each historical event has its correspondent year which is precisely mentioned in the story. It gives verisimilitude to those events that happened in the real world. As in “Children’s Children” and to a lesser degree in “Costellos”, there is a mixture of fantasy and a huge concern with reference, historical allegory and social protest.

To conclude, “Ebenezer’s memories” is the magic realistic story that most criticises the recent issues in Irish history. O’Donnell uses the fantastic creature of Ebenezer as the monster of our memories, from which we cannot flee. The story is developed in reality, in a Northern Irish family, who cannot brave their conflicts as the rest of the society does and just bury them. The themes O’Donnell criticises are the gap north-south, the social religious and political differences that have made society in Northern Ireland split in two and made the solution to the conflict difficult to find.

4. Conclusions

After reading these four works by these young Irish writers, it is undeniable that there is magic realism in Irish literature. I have found out that the Irish reality is as rich and outstanding as the Latin American one. The characteristics of the culture and folklore of Ireland, influenced by the Celts, and the convulsive political situation, under the power of the British crown, have made the Irish a very imaginative people. Their island's natural features also contribute to the creations of myths and legends. Ireland is full of rocky landscapes, huge cliffs, and strange formations such as the Cliffs of Moher and the Giants Causeway that have given rise to the creation of multiple tales and legends among the locals over the centuries. These are key elements in most magical realistic stories.

All the authors analysed have in common the use of the short story to write magic realism. In those short stories, the use of the myth and the legend is a magic realistic trait that prevails. In all these stories there is a fantastic figure which links the real with the magical world: The Hag of Beare in "The Seventh Man", the monster of Ebenezer in "Ebenezer's Memories", the ghost in "Costellos" and that the island comes to life in "Children's Children"; these are the best examples. All these characters, however fantastic, fit very well with the 'normal' world, making the transition between the unreal and the reality slightly pronounced.

Another magic realistic aspect is the return to farm societies as a plea of the writers to come back to an idyllic past, as if modern life were a worse scenario for life. The use of the magic and the fantastic is a way to criticise the political issues Ireland has suffered and is still suffering and to evade from that reality, as we can see in "Costellos" or "Ebenezer's Memory".

In summary, magic realism is starting to flourish in Ireland through the books of young authors. The main features are the use of the short story and the Irish themes, from mythology, folklore and legend to the Irish past and the recent political issues. As they are short stories, they are more limited than the novels of Latin American writers, but they are as complex and rich as many of them.

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