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Foreign to One Another: The Critical Relationship between “Protholics” and “Cathestants” in Some Short Stories by John McGahern and William Trevor¹

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1. *Preliminary remarks*

The unprecedented economic boom that visited the Republic of Ireland in the early 1990s attracted massive numbers of workers, students and tourists from all over the world to what had traditionally been a country of emigration, rather than immigration. Yet, foreigners have been part and parcel of Irish society since before the Celtic Tiger years. They have been there throughout the centuries, merging with the indigenous population, rapidly assimilating the local habits and traditions and ultimately becoming “more Irish than the Irish themselves”, as the saying goes.

In modern history, the presence of foreigners in Ireland is primarily ascribable to British colonialism, one effect of which was—starting from the seventeenth century, and primarily in the North-East of the island—the injection (“plantation”) of English and Scottish elements into the Gaelic and Celtic context, which also brought the clash of Protestant and Catholic components (Connolly 1998). The complex stratification of the social texture that resulted still exists today, both North and South of the border, making Ireland a partitioned country not only at the political but also at the religious level.

This article will look at the relationship and mutual representations of Catholics and Protestants in pre-Celtic Tiger Ireland, as they emerge from specific Irish short stories of the 1970s and ‘80s, before the country became multicultural and globalized. Far from the “wonderful new hybrid” dreamed up by the intellectuals of the Literary Revival and “nicknamed a *Protholic* or a *Cathestant*”—a hybrid which should result from the “fusion of two traditions, not just Gaelic with

¹ This article is a revised and abridged version of my “*Protholics and Cathestants: l’appartenenza religiosa come foreignness in alcuni testi narrativi irlandesi contemporanei*”, written in Italian and published in Maria Grazia Profeti (ed.), *Giudizi e pregiudizi. Percezione dell’altro e stereotipi tra Europa a Mediterraneo* (Atti del Seminario, Firenze, 10-14 giugno 2008), Firenze, Alinea, 2009, Vol. II, 275-299.

Anglo-Irish, but Catholic with Protestant as well” (Kiberd 1996, 424-425, 685)—religious difference emerges as still problematic in today’s Ireland. Conflicting political interests and allegiances, as well as a long and still fresh history of mutual discrimination, distrust and prejudice, encourage a reading of the coexistence of the two communities in terms of a deeply rooted, if not always ostensible, crisis that still underlies and undermines Irish culture and society. My claim will be that belonging to different religious communities is conceived as a form of foreignness. Therefore, I will contend that sociological and philosophical theories about the role, function and representations of foreigners can be applied to the analysis of the relationship, imagery, and stereotypes through which Catholics and Protestants relate to one another in Ireland, or, at least, in Irish fiction.

2. Catholics and Protestants in Ireland: the “incestuous intimacy of [a] shared geography and history”

The composition and dynamics of Irish social texture is characterized by a complex intertwining of ethnic, religious and political elements and issues (see Feldman 2003). This situation can be said to date back primarily to British colonialism, whose “whole object,” as Declan Kiberd pointed out, “through the nineteenth century was, in the words of Friedrich Engels, ‘to make the Irish feel like strangers in their own country’” (Kiberd 2005, 317). In the words of another scholar, despite the 1800 Act of Union, the Irish never felt at ease as British citizens, and in fact in England they felt like “emigrants at home” (Aldobrandini 1993, 89).

In the context of the British colonial experience in Ireland, ‘Irish’ was often a synonym of Catholic and republican; Protestants, on the contrary, mainly of English (and Scottish) descent, often cooperated with the British crown in the local administration, and generally tended towards unionism. The conflicting interests of these two communities resulted in the division of Ireland into

two separate political entities in 1921: one in the South, independent and predominantly Catholic; the other in the North, still part of the United Kingdom and predominantly Protestant.

After partition, both the Catholics in the North and the Protestants in the South of Ireland found themselves “locked into states defined overwhelmingly in terms of the nationality of the majority groups” (Cleary 2002, 22). The problem was that, if the political border that was drawn between Éire and Ulster in 1921 was arbitrary, the same cannot be said of the border between Catholics and Protestants, which remained as blurred on the Irish territory as their relationship remained unresolved. Joe Cleary convincingly argues that “in situations where two antagonistic national groups with conflicting aspirations to self-determination inhabit a shared territory”, partition is an inadequate and unsuccessful strategy, because “the people concerned are geographically intermingled” to such an extent that their clear and homogeneous separation is virtually impossible (Cleary 2002, 11).

The southern state defined itself, from its very birth, in Gaelic and Catholic terms (the “special position” accorded to the Catholic Church by Article 44 of the 1937 Irish Constitution was abolished as late as 1972, through the Fifth Amendment), yet the Protestant community could lead a substantially calm and comfortable existence there, with only rare attacks against them—mainly the burning down of several Big Houses during the Civil War. The Catholic minority in the North, on the contrary, had to come to terms with a state which discriminated against them socially, politically and economically, and which was exclusively Protestant and British in its symbols, public ceremonies, and national narrative. The forced coexistence of Catholics and Protestants in the North, characterized by mutual segregation and by “a whole series of internal partitions” (Cleary 2002, 100), degenerated into the so-called Troubles of the late ‘60s.

As far as the mutual discursive representation of the two states is concerned, it is interesting to notice that de Valera’s 1937 Constitution identified the Irish national territory with the whole island, while at the same time it also excluded “the six northern counties from *de facto* jurisdiction”

(Kiberd 1996, 416). Thus, basically giving partition a formal recognition, an attitude confirmed with the *Ireland Act*, in 1949, when the Irish Republic was born. Important changes occurred in 1998, in the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement, which marked a relaxation of the armed conflict in the North and fostered important developments in the peace process. In the *British-Irish Agreement* the two groups in question, for the first time, were not referred to as Catholics and Protestants, or as majority and minority, but as “national communities.” The Irish Constitution was also modified in the same year, to acknowledge “all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland, in all the diversity of their identities and traditions” (Cleary 2002, 44).

In the Catholic imagery, the equation was commonly made between Protestants and British colonizers; the presence and the privileges of the latter were resented by the former, who had the perception of a comfortable existence, an undeserved wealth, and a total ineptitude at practical matters. Protestants, for their part, saw the Catholic rural population as uneducated and uncivilized; violent and disrespectful of the law; gifted with imagination, but politically incapable and with no economic initiative.

The negative view of the Irish as ‘other’ is as old as the Norman conquest of Ireland (see the works of twelfth-century Norman clergyman and chronicler Gerald of Wales, in Sanna 1993) and survived throughout the centuries. Similar images of alterity characterized the Irish immigrants in Britain in the eyes of many English people, as newspapers and satirical cartoons, but also historical and ethnological studies demonstrate (Aldobrandini 1993, *passim*). Finally, many famous late nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish intellectuals also expressed their opinions about the relationship between Catholics and Protestants. W.B. Yeats, for example, thought it necessary to “bring the two halves together,” while his father, John Butler Yeats, more sharply reckoned that the Catholic Church was “good for the heart but bad for the brain,” and that “had the Irish been Protestants they would long ago have thrown off the English tyranny.” Similarly, G.B. Shaw “argued that without strong doses of Protestant self-reliance, the Irish Catholic mind would never free itself of imperial

occupation,” and that “the unquestioning obedience given by Catholics to a priest whom they called ‘father’ [. . .] merely fostered in them a submissiveness which had proved invaluable to the English too” (Kiberd 1996, 418-427).

Twentieth-century literary and cinematographic narrations of Ireland show a telling concern for the problematic relationship between Catholics and Protestants, less so for the political partition of the island. Frank O’Connor’s and Seán O’Faoláin’s short stories, Bernard MacLaverty’s novels, and Neil Jordan’s and Jim Sheridan’s films, to mention but a few examples, demonstrate how the often tense coexistence and dramatic interactions of the two religious communities appear to interest Irish authors far more than the parallel existence of two Irish states. Literature and cinema, thus, tend to deal with the North and the South of Ireland separately, contributing to the discursive invisibility of what is probably “the most militarised border in the archipelago” (Cleary 2002, 98-99). But then, on the contrary, the blurred and unstable demarcation line between Catholics and Protestants features in numerous works that, in fact, focus on the relationship between members of these two religious groups and on the “incestuous intimacy of their shared geography and history” (Cleary 2002, 57). What fosters the creative endeavours and the critical stances of contemporary Irish artists is ultimately the crisis that marks Irish society in its religious composition; the changing balance in power relations, depending on geographical and economic factors; the unstable and dangerous hovering between sectarian hatred and peaceful coexistence, between exclusion and hybridization, among the many different threads that interweave in the complex Irish social texture.

3. Foreigners, internal strangers, strangers-within-oneseif: religious crisis and images of the other in some recent Irish short stories

The semantic field around the word ‘foreigner’ comprises words such as ‘stranger’, ‘guest’, ‘visitor’, ‘outsider’, ‘alien’, and so on, which interestingly display a whole range of slightly

different shades of meaning. The common denominator is difference, otherness, coming from and belonging to an elsewhere. For the purposes of this study, I will use the terms ‘foreign’ and ‘stranger’ interchangeably to refer to those outside an established and identifiable group.

I decided to focus on a few short stories published between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s by two of the great masters of contemporary Irish fiction, John McGahern and William Trevor: McGahern’s “Oldfashioned”, “Eddie Mac”, and “The Conversion of William Kirkwood” (all in *High Ground*, 1985); and Trevor’s “The Distant Past” (in *Angels at the Ritz and Other Stories*, 1975), “Beyond the Pale” (in *Beyond the Pale and Other Stories*, 1981), and “The News from Ireland” (in *The News from Ireland and Other Stories*, 1986). These stories present us with a variety of situations and contexts that well illustrate and support my contention that the relationship and mutual representations of Catholics and Protestants in pre-Celtic Tiger Ireland could and should be analyzed and interpreted through the lens of sociological and philosophical theories about foreigners.

The persona of the foreigner has constantly featured in literature with varying connotations. Before being considered a literary theme, however, the foreigner, and the stranger in general, the outsider and ultimately the other, are firstly considered as an existential condition and a psychological projection. Such projection plays a crucial part in the processes of formation of ethnic and national identity and is always ideologically biased and charged with symbolic meanings.

As a cultural stereotype, the foreigner has been the object of sociological and anthropological studies. In his seminal works, *The Civilizing Process* ([1939] 1978-82) and *The Established and the Outsiders* (1965), the German sociologist Norbert Elias (1897-1990) studied the ways in which individual psychic structures are moulded by society, and the mechanisms of identity formation and marginalization. It is claimed that the members of a given group construct and defend their identity by denigrating the newly arrived through gossip, a process which projects negative images of the other and positive images of oneself, as well as stereotypes—that confirm

the other's inferiority and one's superiority. The newly arrived are thus marginalized by a cohesive group that has its own rules and codes and that wants to preserve its power and privileges.

In mid-twentieth century rural Ireland, those Protestants who still live in the Republic are perceived as different and peculiar by their Catholic neighbours: "They're strange. They're different. They're not brought up the like of us. Those hot climates they get sent to does [sic] things to people" (*HG*, 38), the local barman says about the Sinclairs in McGahern's "Oldfashioned". Similarly, "In the town and beyond it", the Middletons of Trevor's "The Distant Past" "were regarded as harmlessly peculiar. Odd, people said" (*AR*, 32). Their difference can be attractive, as is the case with Johnny in "Oldfashioned", who likes the Sinclairs' patience and good manners, "the order and luxury" of their house, and most of all "the silence. There was no idle speech" (*HG*, 43). Similarly, in "The Conversion of William Kirkwood", William's "strangeness and gentle manners made him exceedingly popular with the girls and women, and the distance he always kept, like the unavailability of a young priest, only increased his attractiveness" (*HG*, 126). But the Protestants' difference can also be despised and laughed at: footballer and womanizer Eddie, in "Eddie Mac", talks about the Protestants he works for, the Kirkwoods, "derisively" (*HG*, 72) and with contempt, because they waste their time in ridiculous activities, such as astronomy and beekeeping, while they are totally unable to deal with their land and cattle:

"They're both fools. [. . .] If I owned their fields, I'd be rolling in money in a few years, and they can't even make ends meet. The whole thing would make a cat laugh. [. . .] They're there with one arm as long as the other. Useless to themselves or anybody else" (*HG*, 72-73).

The stranger plays a crucial role in the construction and definition of our self, of that "we" that we perceive as a circular or spherical space, and as an inside, characterized by order and peace

(see Bettini 1992). The stranger's very existence makes us insecure and unstable, and encourages us to create myths, rituals and traditions that reinforce and protect our identity; the other thus defines us, negatively, through comparison and difference, in a critical but fruitful encounter (see Aldobrandini 1993). Julia Kristeva points out, in *Strangers to Ourselves* ([1988] 1991), that the stranger is not necessarily someone who comes from a different place, but, rather, whomever does not belong to our family, our group, our tribe, our religious community. "The foreigner," Kristeva explains, "is at once identified as beneficial or harmful to the social group and its power, and, on that account, he is to be assimilated or rejected" (Kristeva 1991, 96). In other words, a different degree of political power is entailed rather than a difference of nationality, gender, age, profession, or religion, to determine the status of foreigner/stranger. But, first of all, the foreigner's condition is existential: being far from one's family, country and mother tongue produces a feeling of otherness, of strangeness. Foreignness is actually inside us. This connects with and is supported by Freud's notion of the unconscious, where what is 'strange' in the human psyche is not exclusively pathological, but an essential component of everybody's self. Drawing on Freud's definition of the 'uncanny' (*unheimlich*), as that which is at the same time familiar and foreign, attractive and repulsive, and therefore uncomfortably strange (Freud 1919), Kristeva's key thesis is that foreignness is in us. It is only by acknowledging that foreignness in us that we can understand and accept ourselves and the others.

This body of critical reflections proves cogent, I believe, when applied to the analysis of the relationship and mutual representations of Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, and urges us towards an interpretation of the crisis between these two communities not only in terms of a socio-political instability, or a cultural clash, but also, at a deeper level, as a psychological, internal crisis, a condition of uncertainty and fear that has unavoidable repercussions on the process of identity formation. In recent Irish fiction, differences between Protestants and Catholics are sometimes laughed at and tolerated, provided that different worldviews remain separate and that political and

economic circumstances are favourable. The Sergeant in "Oldfashioned" initially approves of his son's helping the Sinclairs in the garden:

All that work they do isn't work at all. They imagine it is. It's just fooling about the garden. [. . .] You never know what might come of it if the Sinclairs take an interest in you. More people got their start in life that way than by burning the midnight oil'. He could not resist a hit at the late hours the boy studied; 'a woeful waste of fire and light'. (*HG*, 42)

But when the Colonel suggests that Johnny might join the British army, in the Sergeant's eyes he stops being a potential source of advantage and he becomes yet another embodiment of the colonizers he fought against as a young man during the War of Independence. The Sergeant resentfully rejects such an outrageous idea and forbids any further contacts between his son and the Sinclairs. Similarly, the Catholics' attitude to the Middletons, in "The Distant Past", varies from tolerance and friendship to ostracism and open enmity, depending on the prevailing political and economic circumstances. They see them as eccentric but inoffensive—as "an anachronism" (*AR*,34), and boast that "We can disagree without guns in this town" (37). Nonetheless, when the Troubles begin in the nearby North, those old Protestants rapidly come to embody British imperial power:

As anger rose in the town at the loss of fortune so there rose also the kind of talk there had been in the distant past. [. . .] It was as though, going back nearly twenty years, people remembered the Union Jack in the window of their car [on the day of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II] and saw it now in a different light. It wasn't something to laugh at any more, nor were certain words that the Middletons had gently spoken, nor

were they themselves just an old, peculiar couple. Slowly the change crept about, all around them in the town. (40)

Protestant characters, for their part, are depicted as loyal (for example, the Kirkwoods do not hesitate to help their maid, Annie May, abandoned when he discovers she is pregnant by Eddie Mac: “You did no wrong. Stay and have the child here. We don’t have to care what people think”; *HG*, 121), but they are not totally immune from preconceptions and stereotypes either. The Sinclairs in “Oldfashioned” are surprised at Johnny’s aesthetic sensitivity and at the school manager’s polite and civilised ways, but they also remark on the boy’s “hopeless” accent, when they consider the—in hindsight, unlikely—possibility that he might join the British army. The Middletons in “The Distant Past” blame “for their ill fortune the Catholic Dublin woman” whose passion for drink and jewels, they claim, pushed their father to mortgage their estate; they also make “no secret of their continuing loyalty to the past,” praying for the king and thinking that the newly-born Irish Republic “would not last [. . .]: what sense was there in green-painted pillar-boxes and a language that nobody understood?” (*AR*, 33).

In a similar vein, all the Protestant characters in “The News from Ireland” seem to share the view that the rural Irish Catholic population are unable to solve their own problems, superstitious and untrustworthy. Mr Pulvertaft condescendingly orders the distribution of soup from his gates every evening and the construction of a road around his estate, as a magnanimous act of charity to the local farmers, severely hit by the Famine (the story is set in the late 1840s). His wife, for her part, voices the opinion of official propaganda, that “[i]t is nobody’s fault [. . .] what more can be done than is already being done?” (*NFI*, 27). Miss Heddoe, the new English governess, is appalled at the horrors of the famine, and wonders “what in His name these people have done to displease God so,” while she also considers that “they have not been an easy people to govern; they have not abided by the laws which the rest of us must observe; their superstitious worship is a sin”

(*NFI*, 37-38). The estate manager, Erskine, an Englishman and a former soldier, thinks that "It is ill fortune that people have starved because a law of nature has failed them," these people "whose speech he at first found difficult to understand" and whom "he does not trust, as he feels he might trust the people of Worcestershire or Durham" (*NFI*, 24).

The relationship between insiders and outsiders was studied by Austrian-born sociologist Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) in *Phenomenology of the Social World* ([1932] 1967). Drawing extensively on Max Scheler's *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge* ([1926] 1980), Schutz explained that the members of a group share a cognitive system and a set of moral values through which they interpret the world. While appearing homogeneous, coherent and unquestionable to the group, such mental schemes and interpretive frames are in effect arbitrary and specific to that group only. This is clearly demonstrated by the arrival of an outsider, who is no longer able to avail of his own cognitive and moral systems, but who cannot automatically embrace those of the hosting community either. A cultural hybrid, located between two different models of social life, detached and therefore better able to observe and criticize, the outsider is perceived as a threat by the members of the group, who can no longer take their knowledge for granted (see Cotesta 2002, *passim*).

In *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman also point out that feeling part of a group depends largely on accepting a shared symbolic reality; the existence and the appearance of alternative universes is threatening, because it empirically demonstrates the fact that ours is not inevitable (see Pozzi 1993, 88-106). Every contact and interaction with a 'stranger' highlights the discrepancy between our claim of uniqueness and a multiplicity of possible alternatives, ultimately producing a change in us. The stranger himself changes, or, to put it differently, the stranger's category is unstable, precisely because our contact with him (commercial exchanges, war, marriage, etc.) prevents him from remaining a stranger indefinitely.

William Trevor's "Beyond the Pale" is set in the 1970s and focuses on four English tourists that spend their summer holidays in Northern Ireland every year. One of them, Cynthia, witnesses the tragic death of a young man. Everybody sees this death as an accident, but Cynthia knows the boy committed suicide, as he was unable to cope with the revelation that a girl he loved turned into a terrorist. This traumatic experience estranges Cynthia from her husband and friends and triggers off her strong attack on centuries of English violence and prevarication in Ireland:

Just so much history it sounds like now, yet people starved or died while other people watched. A language was lost, a faith forbidden. Famine followed revolt, plantation followed that. But it was people who were struck into the soil of other people's land, not forests of new trees; and it was greed and treachery that spread as a disease among them all. (*BP*, 98)

The target of Cynthia's indictment is also the attitude of many people she knows, who take no historical responsibilities and pay no attention to what happens, unless it touches them personally. These people lead an otherwise comfortable existence and idealize the enchanted landscape and friendly people of what used to be a colony and is now a tourist destination:

In Surrey we while away the time, we clip our hedges. On a bridge night there's coffee at nine o'clock, with macaroons or *petits fours*. Last thing of all we watch the late-night News, packing away our cards and scoring pads, our sharpened pencils. There's been an incident in Armagh, one soldier's had his head shot off, another's run amok. Our lovely Glens of Antrim, we all four think, our coastal drives: we hope that nothing disturbs the peace. (*BP*, 106)

Another type of stranger, in fact one that proves particularly appropriate and useful for the present study, is what the German philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel (1858-1918) defined as early as 1908 as the "internal stranger". The enemy that confirms and reinforces our identity is often not beyond the border, but rather mixed among us, in many respects actually so similar to us that he is barely distinguishable from us. He is an "internal stranger," in that he differs from the other members of the community only in part; he is a paradoxical figure, at the same time inside and outside the group, heterogeneous, but not extraneous (Simmel 1908, qtd. in Pozzi 1993, 11-12).

Fogarty, arguably the most interesting character in Trevor's "The News from Ireland", is a poor Irish Protestant, which makes him different from both the wealthy English Protestants he works for as a butler and from his poor Catholic fellow country people—a typical "internal stranger" as defined by Simmel. His views are partly those of the Catholic farmers. For example, when he rejects the idea that nobody is responsible for the famine: "A blind eye was turned. [. . .] The hunger was a plague. [. . .] The hunger might have been halted. [. . .] The people were allowed to die" (*NFI*, 42). Also, Fogarty resents the presence of his employers as well as that of every other invader before them: "He does not dislike the Pulvertafts of Ipswich, he has nothing against them beyond the fact that they did not stay where they were" (*NFI*, 9-10); if they had, their estate could have provided sustenance for the locals (*NFI*, 42). At the same time, though, Fogarty also shares the Protestants' idea that Catholics are superstitious and credulous. For example, he reminds the two maids that legends illustrate the truth, they do not tell it, though their "own religion might take it differently" (*NFI*, 22), and that ignorance, poverty and hunger make them do horrible things—"he would not be surprised" if they ate their babies (*NFI*, 17) and he and his sister suspect that a local family, who has already buried seven children and all four grandparents, made up the story of their last baby having been born with stigmata, only to attract attention (*NFI*, 31-32). As an "internal stranger" to both communities, Fogarty is half way between Catholics and Protestants, belonging to

neither, sharing their alternative views and allegiances partially, marginally, interchangeably. He is, in a sense, a cultural hybrid, but his condition does not appear to be unproblematic or final. Through this story, Trevor is committed to providing a comprehensive account of the Famine, of its impact on the Irish rural population and of the different points of view of those who participated in that tragedy, with different roles and levels of responsibility. Interestingly, however, though set against a different historical background, this story diagnoses the relationship between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland in similar ways to the other stories we have looked at, that is, in terms of a crisis. By staging a range of characters that differ not only for their being Protestants and Catholics, but also because they are English and Irish, wealthy and destitute, educated and superstitious, content and alienated, “The News from Ireland” also proves strikingly relevant for an analysis of the different types and degrees of foreignness and otherness that mark the dynamics of the Irish social texture.

4. *Conclusion*

The 1990s saw the transformation of the Republic of Ireland into a globalized, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional country, as well as a gradual relaxation of the armed conflict in the North. Since then, there has been widespread hope that such political and economical developments would soon be paralleled by a resolution of the internal conflicts connected with religious and ethnic difference.

The analysis of some short stories published only a few years before the arrival of the Celtic Tiger and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement has demonstrated that one of the oldest and deepest splits in the Irish society, that between Catholics and Protestants, is still problematic. Stereotypes and preconceptions with which the members of the two groups look at and relate to one another are very similar today to what they have been for centuries, and certain colonial legacies are far from being defunct.

John McGahern's stories acknowledge certain important differences between Catholics and Protestants, for example in the conception of education (a waste of time and money for the Sergeant, a means to social promotion for Colonel Sinclair, in "Oldfashioned"), or in the organization of work (based on the exchange of favours and on a "casual [. . .] sense of coming and going" for Catholic farmers, on payment and "strict timekeeping" for Protestant landlords, in "The Conversion of William Kirkwood") (*HG*, 52). At the same time McGahern seems to imply that difference is often based on preconceptions. The farmers' derision of William Kirkwood, for instance, "was based on no knowledge of the man. It came from casual observation, complacent ignorance, simple prejudice, that lazy judgment that comes more easily than any sympathy" (*HG*, 123) and can be overcome through knowledge: "Only for your being a Protestant, there'd not be the slightest difference now between you and the rest of us" (*HG*, 127). McGahern's view emerges as altogether sceptical about the viability of an effective integration between Catholics and Protestants. He seems to be of the opinion that there can certainly be contacts and exchanges between them, but that their worlds will remain ultimately separate and irreconcilable. "Your father would never have been able to live with that. You really have to be born into that class of people. You don't ever find robins feeding with the sparrows" (*HG*, 48-49), Guard Casey tells Johnny, in "Oldfashioned", commenting on the Sergeant's angry reaction at the Sinclairs' plans for the boy. And a similar image is used to comment on William Kirkwood's conversion to Catholicism, which is what allows him to ultimately become part and parcel of the community around him, but which is also seen as "alarming" — "It broke the fierce law that everybody stayed within the crowd they were born into, like the sparrows or blackbirds. [. . .] Catholics had turned Protestant for money or position, it was an old sore and taunt; but the only reason a Protestant was ever known to turn was in order to marry" (*HG*, 127-128).

Trevor's stories offer us a wider and more diverse range of situations and geographical and historical settings, but, like McGahern's, they also suggest that integration and peaceful coexistence

are only possible on certain conditions: that everybody stays where they belong (“The News from Ireland”); that the state enjoys economic prosperity and political stability (“The Distant Past”); that troublesome aspects of history are conveniently forgotten or kept at a safety distance (“Beyond the Pale”). Trevor’s view seems to be that a peaceful, balanced and harmonious coexistence is only attainable by acknowledging the respective roles and responsibilities, by knowing history in its different versions, and by being open to different points of view.

In conclusion, we can say that the marriage of Celtic and Catholic elements with Anglo-Irish and Protestant ones, imagined by the intellectuals of the Literary Revival over a century ago, continues to be little more than a mirage. The funny neologisms, *Protholic* and *Cathestant*, seem to better describe the simultaneous and parallel presence of the two communities on the national territory than their effective and harmonious fusion. Recent Irish fiction portrays a society in which different ethnic and religious components coexist in (more or less) peaceful and civilized ways, while remaining distinct and separate; the overall picture, in short, is one of tolerance, but of no real integration; the condition of mutual foreignness persists in a nagging way. From the vantage point of 2010, which sees a post-Celtic Tiger Republic struggling to recover from recession, and of a still delicate peace in the North, the ultimate question, “Is integration possible?” remains a challenging and open one.

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