UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM INGLÊS: ESTUDOS LINGUÍSTICOS E LITERÁRIOS

FRANDOR MARC MACHADO

QUEER AFFECTIVITY AND FAMILY REPRESENTATIONS IN THE "UNKNOWN REALM WHERE LOVERS ACT AS LOVERS": A STUDY ON JAMIE O'NEILL'S *AT SWIM, TWO BOYS* AND SEBASTIAN BARRY'S *DAYS WITHOUT END.*

FLORIANÓPOLIS
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O presente trabalho em nível de mestrado foi avaliado e aprovado por banca examinadora composta pelos seguintes membros:

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Certificamos que esta é a **versão original e final** do trabalho de conclusão que foi julgado adequado para obtenção do título de mestre em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários.

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Prof.(a) Maria Rita Drumond Viana, Dr.(a)

Orientador(a)

Florianópolis, 2020.

Dedico este trabalho a Luiz Filipi, ao meu sobrinho Thomas e a todas as famílias de escolha que trazem cores e cuidado a um mundo tão cinza.

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ABSTRACT

In the early years of the 21st century Irish scholars asked themselves if queer literature in Ireland, or gay writing as some would call, had become less interesting after the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1993 in the Republic of Ireland. Since those early years of the 21st century, however, the reality of LGBTQI+ individuals in Ireland has changed drastically – and to a better state, in many cases. The Marriage Equality Referendum of 2015 is, perhaps, one of the greatest accomplishments of the LGBTQI+ community in Ireland during the first two decades of this century. The Irish marriage referendum marks the very first time in our world in which the majority of the population voted in favour changing their nation's constitution to include marriage between people regardless of their sex. The objective of this study is to compare the representation of queer affectivity, family and marriage in an Irish novel published at the beginning of the 21st century with another published after the referendum. Thus, the study focuses on Jamie O'Neill's *At Swim, Two Boys* (2001) and on Sebastian Barry's *Days Without End* (2016); two Irish historical novels whose narratives are centered on queer characters. This study has found not only striking differences in the representation of queer affectivity, family, and to some extent, marriage between these novels, but it also demonstrates the extent to which the Irish Marriage Referendum of 2015 seems to have impacted and shaped the literary representation of queer family and marriage in *Days Without End* when compared to *At Swim, Two Boys*.

Keywords: Queer; affectivity; family; marriage; Irish; literature; referendum; *At Swim, Two Boys*; Jamie O'Neill; *Days Without End*; Sebastian Barry.

RESUMO

Nos primeiros anos do século XXI, acadêmicos Irlandeses se questionavam se a literatura Irlandesa "queer", ou gay, como alguns chamavam, havia se tornado menos interessante depois da descriminalização da homosexualidade na República da Irlanda, em 1993. A realidade dos indivíduos LGBTQI+ na Irlanda, no entanto, passou por mudanças numerosas e drásticas desde os primeiros anos do século – muitas vezes para uma situação melhor e mais positiva. O Referendo de Casamento Igualitário de 2015 ainda é uma das maiores vitórias que a comunidade LGBTQI+ irlandesa conquistou nas primeiras duas décadas deste século e marcou a primeira vez em nosso mundo em que a maioria da população de um país votou a favor de mudar a constituição da nação para incluir o casamento entre pessoas independentemente do sexo. O objetivo deste estudo, portanto, é comparar as representações de afetividade "queer", da família e do casamento em um romance irlandês publicado no início do século XXI em relação àquela a outro publicado após o referendo de 2015. Assim, este estudo foca nos romances *At Swim, Two Boys* (2001), de Jamie O'Neill, e *Days Without End* (2016), de Sebastian Barry; uma vez que ambos constituem romances históricos centrados em protagonistas "queer", i.e. não-heterosexuais. O estudo apresenta não apenas as diferenças marcantes nas representações de afetividade, família e casamento entre os dois romances, mas também demonstra a extensão do impacto do Referendo do Casamento Igualitário da Irlanda de 2015 e a forma como este molda muito das representações de família e de casamento em *Days Without End*, principalmente quando comparadas com *At Swim, Two Boys.*

Keywords: Queer; afetividade; família; casamento; literatura; referendo; irlandês; *At Swim, Two Boys*; Jamie O'Neill; *Days Without End*; Sebastian Barry.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The line to the past and context of investigation

In the essay entitled "Queering History: Contemporary Irish Lesbian and Gay Writing", Eibhear Walshe inquires if contemporary queer fiction in Ireland a decade after the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1993 is "intrinsically not as interesting because it is no longer liminal – at least within literary culture if not in a wider societal sense" (2007, p. 1). Walshe's question is framed by the idea of "a post-gay moment beyond marginality" which results from the increased legitimization of the literary representation of homoerotic subjectivity and affection after 1993. Now, almost 30 years after the decriminalisation and 5 years after Irish Marriage Equality Referendum was approved in 2015, perhaps another question is in order: is the representation of queer affectivity and family in the Irish literature contemporaneous to the referendum any different from the representation of those issues in the literature after the decriminalisation in 1993 but before it?

Before 1993, Irish lesbian and gay writing was "part of a borderland, an in-between space within Irish writing, without any openly lesbian or gay Irish mainstream writer visibly challenging this liminality in cultural or political discourse" (SMYTH, 1997 apud WALSHE, 2007, p. 1). After the decriminalisation, however, the new legal validation enabled many "out" and openly queer (LGBTQI+) Irish writers to "question the frames of reference that inform society's narratives about itself"; a questioning that has become particularly central in the "marginal voices" of these writers (PEACH, 2004 apud WALSHE, 2007, p. 1). Walshe's article focuses particularly on the voices of Emma Donoghue and Colm Tóibín and in their 2004 novels *Lifemask* and *The Master* respectively. His general concern is how these novels contextualize queer characters within a reclaimable historical past – a past in which no marginal sexuality had any legitimacy or rightful place for expression. Walshe concludes by claiming that both Tóibín's and Donoghue's novels make use of the historical past as useful imaginative arenas in which they are able to debate and make sense of contemporary Irish queer "selfhoods".

Critics and scholars have been arguing about the importance, limitations, and implications of the idea of claiming a queer historical past, as Walshe highlights, and in the idea of a queer past, or a queer history, as a reclaimable and knowable tradition; a relevant area within queer scholarship debate according to the author (WALSHE, 2007, p. 2). In *Love*

in a Dark Time (2001), Colm Tóibín comments that the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges – "a cautious critic" – would probably be interested in the notion that of the writers who have re-created an/or changed modern literature around the world were usually members of ethnic, religious, cultural, or sexual minorities – usually Jewish, Irish, and/or queer (gay/lesbian). Tóibín rightfully acknowledges a number of writers who, in one way or another, belong to these groups who represent either social and/or legal minorities: Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Henry James, W. B. Yeats, Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett, Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust, André Gide, Ronald Firbank, F. García Lorca, Jean Cocteau, Edward M. Forster, Constantine Cavafy. However, Tóbín does not fail to mention that, despite his merits as a literary critic, Borges

> would have been slightly unsettled, I think, by the thought of the gay element in this list, and by the idea that in place of "Irish" or "Jewish" or "Argentine" in his essay on tradition, you could put the word "gay" or "homosexual". He would also, I think, be disturbed by the idea that you could find enough traces, or indeed direct evidence, in the works of, say Shakespeare and Marlowe and Bacon to declare them, too, part of the gay tradition, the secret dotted line that runs right through Western literature. Yet, like most writers, Borges was obsessed with what came before him, with the books and writers… that represented his own secret dotted line to the past. He could not have done without them (TÓIBÍN, 2004, p. 10).

Tóibín's remark on Borges brings to the fore a few issues that often permeate discussions regarding the sexuality of prominent individuals from the past. First, Tóibín highlights how even the most cautious critics such as Borges himself may fail to acknowledge that some of these writers belong to these marginalized social groups. For LGBTQI+ individuals, however, it comes as no a surprise that "straight critics have tended to write about gay writers as though they were straight, or as though it did not matter which they were" (TÓIBÍN, 2004, p. 11). Those same critics, however, would probably be too eager to approach the lives and the literature of these writers in dialogue with their belonging to social groups such as "Irish", "Argentine", "Jewish", etc. So why are their status as members of a sexual minority any less relevant for the discussion of their work than any other constituting characteristics of their identity? Arguing that someone's sexuality is not relevant when considering the relevance of their work could also mean erasing aspects of their experience as humans which would shed light into different aspects of their work. Not to mention it could also contribute to, and promote, the erasure of queer individuals from narratives of societies, nations, and human history inasmuch individuals with unspecified sexual lives have, more often than not, just been assumed to have had normative heterosexual lives. Sara

Ahmed (2013, p. 146) argues that "it is important to consider how heterosexuality functions powerfully not only as a series of norms and ideals, but also through emotions that shape bodies as well as worlds". The author further comments on the mechanisms of presuppositions at play with heteronormativity:

> Heterosexuality as a script for an ideal life makes much stronger claims. It is assumed that all arrangements will follow from the arrangement of the couple: man/woman. It is no accident that compulsory heterosexuality works powerfully in the most casual modes of conversation. One asks: 'Do you have a boyfriend?' (to a girl), or one asks: 'Do you have a girlfriend?' (to a boy). Queer subjects feel the tiredness of making corrections and departures; the pressure of this insistence, this presumption, this demand that asks either for a "passing over"... or for direct or indirect forms of self-revelation. No matter how "out" you may be, how (un)comfortably queer you may feel, those moments of interpellation get repeated over time, and can be experienced as a bodily injury; moments which position queer subjects as failed in their failure to live up to the "hey you too" of heterosexual self-narration (AHMED, 2013, p. 147).

This mechanism of presuppositions which automatically places individuals within a world shaped by heterosexuality – and demands for corrections, reevaluation, and explanatory footnotes – is also at play during the encounter of an individual and a writer, artist, etc. The choice of not marking an individual as part of the LGBTQI+ community is also the choice of allowing these social sets of presuppositions to place this individual within the world of heteronormativity. As society becomes more accepting towards queer individuals, politics more diverse, and queer individuals and readers become more visible, so "gay history becomes a vital element in gay identity, just as Irish history does in Ireland, or Jewish history among Jewish people" (TÓIBÍN, 2004, p. 11). Borges did understand the importance and the necessity of knowing those who came before us – those who have helped create the possibility for us to be alive and to exist as we do in society nowadays. Borges sought to understand the books and the writers who, by sharing similar social experiences and/or characteristics with him – represent the line that links him to a shared past as the member of a group. Tóibíns remarks on the discrepancies experienced by many LGBTQI+ individuals with regards to connecting with a past in which they can recognize themselves; especially when compared to the heterosexual population.

> Other communities who have been oppressed – Jewish people, say, or Catholics in Northern Ireland – have every opportunity to work out the implications of their oppression in their early lives. They hear stories; they have books around them. Gay people, on the other hand, grow up alone; there is no history. There are no ballads about the wrongs of the past, the martyrs are all forgotten. It is as though, in Adrienne's Rich's phrase, "you looked into the mirror and saw nothing". Thus the discovery of a history and a heritage has to be made by each individual as part of the road to freedom, or at least knowledge (TÓIBÍN, 2004, p. 13).

It is only understandable, therefore, that LGBTQI+ readers and writers appear more interested in exploring the presence of other queer individuals in our past to the same extent that "critics and scholars have been arguing about the importance, limitations, and implications of the idea of claiming a queer historical past" (WALSHE, 2007, p. 2). The role of the historical past in Irish contemporary literature written by, and/or for queer individuals is not that of representing the facts and the reality of any given historical period, but rather, that of an "imaginative arena" in which it is possible "to debate current Irish gay selfhoods" and through which the contemporary readership of these novels can make sense of such "selfhoods" (2007, p. 7). Therefore, these queer historical fictions seem to be much more about the present than about the past.

In many respects, then, the attitude of Irish writers regarding the historical past in which they attempt to explore queer subjectivities mirror that of Linda Hutcheon in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989). Hutcheon argues that the past is not a complete and objectified unit – or an "it" – that can be represented in a totalising and neutral way (p. 57). She writes that "past events existed empirically, but in epistemological terms we can only know them today through texts. Past events are given *meaning*, not *existence*, by their representation in history" (p. 82). Thus, new forms of writing about the past and history not only provide the opportunity to "think possibilities" of a queer past – and Hutcheon rightfully acknowledges "think possibilities" from Judith Butler – but also call into question notions of closure, totalization, and universality that are part of the grand historical narratives. This new approach about the past brings radical and critical possibilities to the historical past fictionalized in literature; it allows the "histories (in the plural) of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few" to be told in more democratic and equal term (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 66).

In this sense, writing fiction about a historical past, as well as the challenging of pre-established totalizing narratives, enables writers to produce the stories of queer pasts that fill in the historical gap queer people have experienced by their overall absence from traditional representations of human history. However, writing about the past from the perspective of the present – with the concepts, language, ideas, and knowledge that contemporary society currently possess – also opens up the possibility for writing totalizing narratives about queer individuals and lives themselves. By retroprojecting contemporary subjectivities into

fictional representations of the past, it is possible to reproduce in such narratives a totalizing contemporary view of queer subjectivities and queer lives based on how such subjectivities are, or were, understood at a certain time and place – which could potentially be as prejudicial as the very erasure of queer subjectivities from discourses of the past.

A further step following Walshe's conclusion that the historical past becomes an imaginative arena in which contemporary queer subjectivities could be debated and understood is, perhaps, to inquire if the contemporary Irish queer subjectivities being represented in these imaginative arenas have changed in any way when literature produced in the first decade after the decriminalisation of sexuality is compared to the literature being produced in more recent years – especially during and after important social, political and historical changes that have marked Ireland and the lives of its queer citizens. One such landmark for social change in the 21st is arguably the Marriage Equality Referendum of 2015, which has impacted not only the Irish constitution to include marriage between people of the same gender but also Irish society's views and understanding of family. Therefore, the overarching interest of this study is the dialogue between the political environment and society's attitudes towards queer individuals in contemporary Ireland with the fictional representations of queer affectivity and family in contemporary Irish literature. In order to examine the implications of such encounter, this study analyses Jamie O'Neill's novel, *At Swim, Two Boys* (2001), which was written in the post-decriminalisation Ireland of the late 1990s, and contrasts it with an analysis of Sebastian Barry's *Days Without End* (2016), which was written around the time of the Marriage Equality Referendum in Ireland (2015) and published over a year later.

1.2 The novels and queer Ireland

There are a few Irish writers in contemporary Irish Literature who have attempted to engage intersectionally with issues of Irish national identity and queer subjectivities in their writings. Jamie O'Neill is among such writers and is best known to this day by his historical novel *At Swim, Two Boys* (2001), which won several literary awards among which the Ferro-Grumley Literary Award (2002) and the International Dublin Literary Award (2003). Jamie O'Neill engages in a coming-of-age narrative of two characters trying to understand their own (homo)sexuality in the context of Dublin in the years of 1915 and up to the 1916 Easter Rising. *At Swim, Two Boys* equates the growing and developing nationalism of that period to the discovery and development of queer subjectivities by the novel's young characters, using the nationalist discourse of the time to give meaning not only

to the homoerotic feelings and desires the characters nourish for one another but to their vision of a "Nation of the Heart" – a nation inclusive of (queer) individuals like themselves.

Regarding the idea of a "queer nation" as the underlying trope of *At Swim, Two Boys*, Joseph Valente suggests that the idea of nation in the novel is extended and resignified to accommodate the lives and subjectivities of the queer individuals often neglected or erased from history (VALENTE, 2005, p. 59-60). The characters' sexualities, desires, and political demands interweave, creating personal and communal narratives that overlap and result in an analogy between the characters queer relationship and the Irish nationalist momentum of the period.

> From these overlapping personal and communal narratives emerges a complex, historically incisive ethnic-erotic analogy. (…) As colonized Europeans, metropolitan subalterns, racially denigrated "whites," participant subjects and subdominant objects of the British empire, the Irish under the Union [with Britain after 1800] occupied a position of historical exceptionality that likewise rendered their ethnic status the central, all-consuming element of their subject formation and its profoundly destabilizing property, that which determines their sense of identity and that which disturbs its coherence, inhibits its self-enclosure. It is this unusually schismatic Irish condition that necessitates O'Neill's corollary, prescriptive resignification of the concept "queer nation" (VALENTE, 2005, p. 59-60).

The ethnic-erotic narrative of *At Swim, Two Boys* attempts to mend this historically constructed schismatic condition in which Irish national identity and queer sexualities are set as mutually exclusive categories. It does so by constructing an Irish nationalism that, "far from reifying some ethnically proper spirit, orientation, or form of life" (VALENTE, 2005, p. 60), would accomplish the queer intention of both instituting a relation of opposition to social/sexual norms and of resisting the very idea of the norm itself.

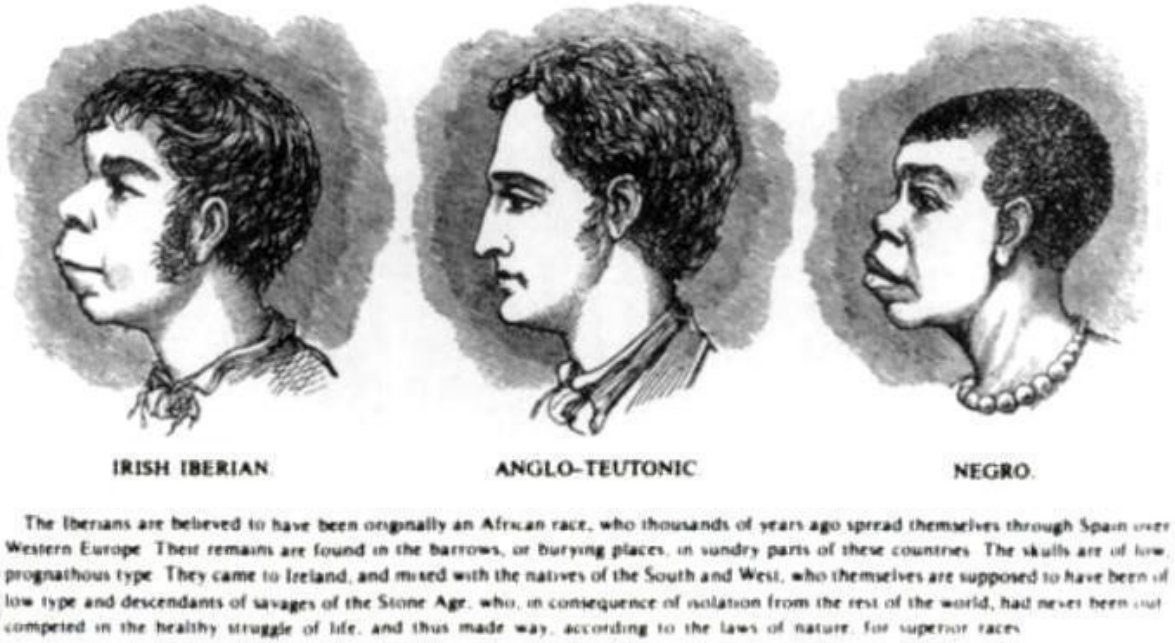
To a certain extent aligned with Joseph Valente's claim, Jodie Medd suggests that the novel appropriates the characteristic discourses of history, of "nation" and of its "people", and of ultimate "freedom" – discourses which have often sounded intransigent and teleological – to (re)imagine a national and temporal space for Irish queer individuals and their subjectivities in Irish history. As the novel resignifies nationalism it thematizes a parallel between decolonizing nationality and queer subjective formation, resisting both national and sexual conventions. Medd acknowledges, however, that the novel is aware that such a queer postcolonial national fiction has as much transformative possibilities as it has limitations, but emphasises the ways in which *At Swim, Two Boys* engages with politics of identity and queer sexualities in an attempt to cope with the social and political condition of discrimination and segregation towards queer individuals and their sexualities in Ireland.

Resignification of the past and traditional institutions of Ireland appear as recurrent elements in the narrative. For Valente (2005, p. 78), the resignification of a queer nation in *At Swim, Two Boys* is sustained because both the ethno-colonial Irish identity and the queer sexualities were inscribed in a "phenomenology of shame" and categorized as inferior sub-species in relation to dominant species . The "racial sciences" of anthropology, ethnology, criminology of the 19th century – fed by the new discipline of evolutionary science – have turned the so-called "pathologies" individuals possessed into whole "races" and subspecies (CONRAD, 2004, p. 7). Locating this phenomenon in an even earlier period, Valente explains:

> Having been elaborated and entrenched over eight hundred years of proximate colonialism, the stereotypes of Irish backwardness, wildness, and incontinence were more than ripe for interpretation by the dominant post-Darwinian "throwback" or "replication" thesis, wherein different subject peoples were situated at various stages of evolutionary immaturity… Indeed, the unique barbarity of the Irish was already so well established in eighteenth-century British opinion that a best-selling travelogue, Robert Twiss's *A Tour of Ireland*, could pronounce the natives "a race distinct from the rest of mankind," anticipating by a good eighty years this post-Darwinian ethnological propensity for conflating racial and species classifications (VALENTE, 2005, p. 71).

The racial discourses that both Conrad and Valente point out have been used to suggest that the Irish Iberian individual, as much as the African black and other people of color, belonged to an inferior – less evolved – subspecies of the human race. Figure 1 is a drawing by H. Strickland Constable featuring in his book *Ireland from One or Two Neglected Points of View* (1899). It illustrates the argument with anatomic comparison used to approximate the Irish to other already racialized peoples and to distinguish them from the British (Anglo-Teutons in the drawing). This argument was also employed to further justify colonialism and the subjugation of black individuals to the white European, and of the Irish to the British.

Figure 1 - Drawing of anatomic comparison attempting to justify racial superiority.



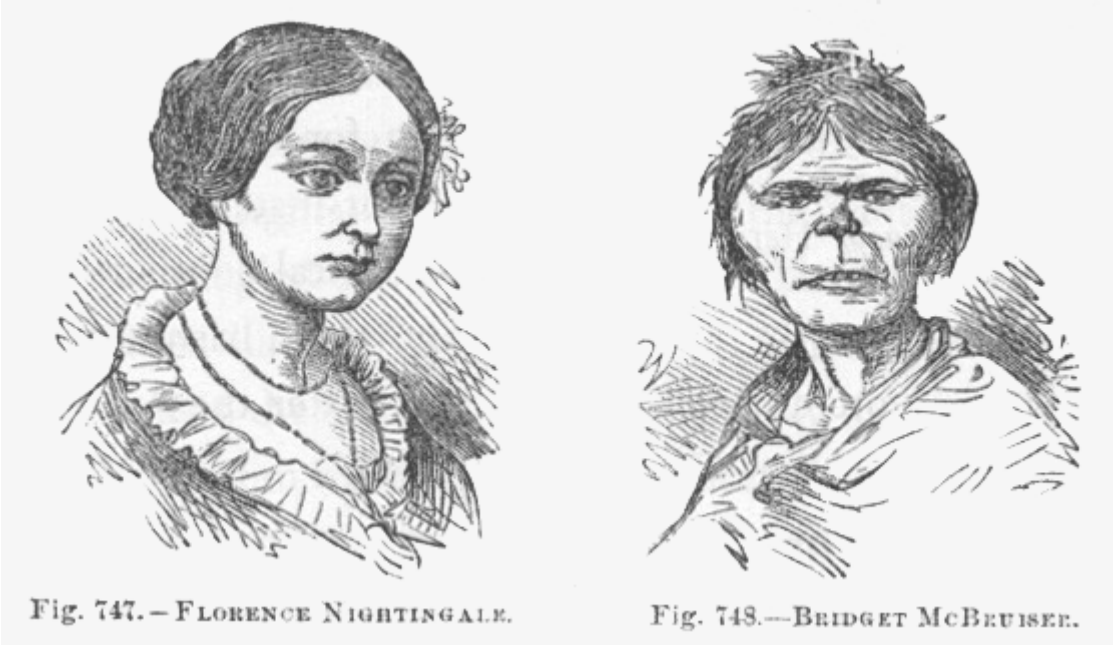
Fonte: CONSTABLE, H. Strickland. *Ireland from One or Two Neglected Points of View*. 1899.

The racial discourses employed to characterize the Irish as belonging to a human stage of "evolutionary immaturity" expanded beyond the scope of the so-called "racial sciences" of the 19th century and reached the media and mainstream discourses, where the process of dehumanizing people of different ethnic groups by animalizing them contributed to spreading the notions of an inferior racial "subspecies". Figure 2, which featured in Samuel Wells *New Physiognomy* (1866), compares the pioneer in modern nursing, Florence Nightingale (British, although born in Italy) with a fictional "Bridget McBruiser" (Irish) and exemplifies how such animalization appeared as part of the "racial sciences" dehumanizing discourses towards the Irish (and the Catholic, by consequence) in the 19th century. Figure 3, in turn, which featured in an 1870 issue from the British magazine *Punch; or the London Charivari*, portrays an Irish nationalist as an ape-like individual named Mr G-O'Rilla and exemplifies the already naturalized notion of the Irish – especially those who fought against British rule in Ireland – as an ape-like human subspecies. As Valente argues, the 19th century fields of comparative physiognomy, quantitative phrenology, comparative anatomy, taxonomy, and racist anthropology were

> all invoked and in certain cases invented to account for the perceived Irish want of rationality, civility, emotional temperance, cleanliness, and self-control, and they issued in academic and popular figurations of the Irish as Cro-Magnon, Africanoid, simian, juvenile, and feminine (VALENTE, 2005, p. 72).

For Valente, the Irish male portrayed as “juvenile” and “feminine” as part of the racializing process of dehumanizing them “bear a direct structural correlation with the subsequent pathologizing of the male homosexual in particular as either gender inverted or stalled… at an early stage of emotional development.” (VALENTE, 2005, p. 72).

Figure 2 - Drawing representing Florence Nightingale and Bridget McBruise.



Fonte: WELLS, Samuel. *New Physiognomy*. 1866.

Valente argues that even though the emergence of the homosexual individual “as a discrete ontological identity” is likely linked to Westphal’s 1970 article on “contrary sexual instinct” – which Foucault rightfully attributes as being the essence of the 19th century “newly conjured” idea of homosexuality as a “species-being” – that notion “did not consolidate as a diagnostic sign until the trial of Oscar Wilde” in 1895 (VALENTE, 2005, p. 72). Valente supports Ed Cohen’s argument that homosexuals were consolidated and characterized as a species category partially as a consequence of the press coverage of the Wilde trials, which also featured drawings of Wilde designed to portray signs of physical degeneracy in the same model of racialist dehumanization. For the author, these drawings “followed the unmistakable pattern of racialist anatomies in Victorian anthropology, ethnology, and criminology, which were designed to brand subdominant peoples as inferior” (VALENTE, 2005, p. 72-73).

Figure 3 - An Irish nationalist represented as an ape-like animal.

Mr. G-O'Rilla, the Young Ireland Party, exulting over the Insult to the British Flag. Shouldn't he be Extinguished at once?

Fonte: *Punch; or the London Charivari.* 1870.

Valente acknowledges the subtle "shift in the legal, medical, psychological, psychiatric classification of dissident sexuality to a focus on inborn constitution or being, and the corresponding demarcation of sexual types" (2005, p. 70). Foucault already discussed the process by which the study of human sexuality has moved its focus over time in his *The History of Sexuality*. He highlights a shift in the studies of human sexualities in which the focus of investigation drastically changes. This area of study was previously mainly interested in understanding dissident sexual practices and the behaviour of individuals who, for any number number of reasons, practiced sexual activities considered illegal and branded

as sodomy and other nomenclature such as “gross indecency” by the authorities. Foucault also demonstrates a growing interest in the idea of inborn characteristics and in the characterization of subtypes of individuals within the field, which would change social discourses regarding sexuality from then on. According to the author, the legitimate [heterosexual] couple and its sexuality, now considered as regular, finally received some years of discretion as the interest of scientists moved towards other groups (1978, p. 38). On the one hand, heterosexuality functioned as a norm,

> On the other hand, what came under scrutiny was the sexuality of children, mad men and women, and criminals; the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex; reveries, obsessions, petty manias, or great transports of rage. It was time for all these figures, scarcely noticed in the past, to step forward and speak, to make the difficult confession of what they were. No doubt they were condemned all the same; but they were listened to (FOUCAULT, 1978, p. 38-39)

Notwithstanding, Valente highlights that “the question that Foucault does not pose, let alone solve, is whence the late Victorian sexual sciences, broadly considered, derived the conception of subdominant social groups as species unto themselves, distinct ‘life forms,’ sub species humanitas” (VALENTE, 2005, p. 70). The answer to that question, he argues, “is the racial sciences… which achieved currency just a generation earlier.” (2005, p. 70). He, therefore, sustains that *At Swim, Two Boys* produces a “narrative parallelism that invites its readers to consider the historical, political, and ideological affinities between dissident sexual identity and ethno-colonial identity in an Irish context” (2005, p. 58). Similarly, Jodie Medd highlights that Jamie O’Neill himself has expressed on different occasions that the novel attempts to reconcile sexuality with race/ethnicity by tackling what the author calls “the apparent split between national and sexual identities”.

> Often when people would ask me ‘Are you Irish?’, I’d say, ‘No, I’m gay’ and I’d wanted to try to square that apparent circle. I wanted to write a book about two boys falling in love, about finding each other and their own country, the country that they would fight for. And the question was, Is the love of Ireland very different from loving an Irish man? (O’NEILL, 2001 apud MEDD, 2007, p. 4)

This schismatic condition between Irish and queer identities that both O’Neill and Medd comment about refers to the the process Kathryn Conrad discusses in “Queer Treasons: Homossexuality and Irish National Identity” by which homosexuality and queer individuals were completely excluded from the hegemonic discourses of what constitutes “Irishness” (CONRAD, 2004, p. 127). The press coverage of the Oscar Wilde trials is one of the examples acknowledged by Conrad. An already prominent Irish man convicted for gross

indecency by the British courts, contributing to further the association of the Irish with not only the idea of effeminacy but also of degeneration. Years after that, the Irish humanitarian and former British consul, Roger Casement, was imprisoned and charged for treason against the British crown for seeking German help in an attempt to gather support for the independence of Ireland during the First World War. Casement is another example she acknowledges, and one of great relevance considering that during Casement's trials, the circulation of the so-called "Black Diaries" have furthered the association of Irishness and homosexuality. These diaries, which the British authorities claim belonged to Casement (even though this is still a point of contention) described homosexual encounters he supposedly had while on diplomatic missions as a British Consul in the Congo, in the region of the Amazon rainforest, and in other countries. The Roger Casement trials, to this day, represents both a sensitive and unstable moment in the colonial relationship between Britain and Ireland. Conrad argues that the association of prominent Irish men with homosexuality troubled and destabilized the narratives of nation and of "Irish identity" (CONRAD, 2004, p.125) precisely at a moment when the Irish were trying to establish themselves as an independent people and to define the institution of the Irish State in relation – or rather in opposition – to British colonial powers.

These events have triggered a mechanism by which nationalist discourses completely excluded queer individuals and any form of deviant or non-normative sexualities from the narratives and other discourses that constituted the hegemonic ideas of Irish identity – an exclusion whose effects could still be perceived by the end of 20th century in Ireland and among its diasporic populations (CONRAD, 2004, p. 126). In the 1990's, for example, the catholic group Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) prohibited the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGO) from marching on the traditional St. Patrick's Day Parade down 5th Avenue, in New York, on the grounds that the Irish Lesbians and Gays of ILGO were not rightfully Irish. This exclusion of queer individuals from discourses of what constitutes the Irish nation and the Irish people could still be felt by Irish LGBTQI+ writers such as Colm Tóibín, who wrote about both Oscar Wilde, Roger Casement and other prominent queer individuals in *Love in a Dark Time* (2001), and by Jamie O'Neill, who attempts to reverse this schism and heal the split identities of the Irish queer individuals back to a whole in *At Swim, Two Boys*.

One prominent case in which a queer individual has been erased from the history of the Irish nation was that of Elizabeth O'Farrell. She was a republican nurse, member of the Cumann na mBan, and a participant of the 1916 Easter Rising. On 29 April 1916, O'Farrell left Moore Street in Dublin carrying the white flag and a message signaling the surrender of the revolutionaries. Despite having had a very active role during the conflict and being present when the photograph of the surrender was taken, it was discovered decades later that O'Farrell had been erased from that same photograph. Two versions of that photograph confirm that O'Farrell was, in fact, airbrushed – or Eirebrushed as Brian Merriman suggests in his play entitled *Eirebrushed* (2016) – out of that episode of Irish history. In one version, only the hem of her dress and her feet are visible, while in another version, even her dress and feet had been completely erased. O'Farrell became known not only as a symbol of how Irish women have been erased from Irish national history, but also of the erasure of queer individuals from the narratives of Irish identity, especially since it is widely known that O'Farrell lived, discreetly, most of her years with her life partner Julia Grenan in a same-sex relationship.

When Sebastian Barry wrote *Days Without End*, published in 2016, he was living in an Ireland that was, in many respects, a different social and political environment than that in which Jamie O'Neill wrote *At Swim, Two Boys*. By 2015, Ireland was not only dealing with the European Migrant Crisis – which according to the United Nations was probably the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War – but also heavily invested in discussing the Referendum for Marriage Equality. The bill no. 5 of 2015 proposed the Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland, which would permit marriage between two persons "without distinction as to their sex" (Bunreacht na hÉireann). The marriage equality referendum was preceded by months of intense campaigning, canvassing and heated debate on the media. The referendum was approved on 22 May 2015 by over 60% of voters, which ensured Ireland to enter history as the first nation State to legalise same-sex marriage through popular vote. Barry, therefore, was writing in a Ireland where queer individuals were not only entitled to their affection and sexuality, no longer a crime since 1993, but were also fighting for their right to access the institution of marriage and the civil status that comes with it – a right previously only extended to citizens willing to conform their affective and sexual lives to the norms of heterosexual unions.

Although it seemed like a brighter and more positive period in Irish history, especially for queer individuals, Ireland after the Marriage Equality referendum was not necessarily all rainbows and unicorns. In the interview "Costa Winner Sebastian Barry: 'My

Son Instructed Me in the Magic of Gay Life'", Sebastian Barry – who is a married heterosexual man and the father of a gay young man – discloses to Stephen Moss moments of fear and concern for him and his family.

> *Days Without End* is dedicated to Barry's son Toby… a tribute to the teenager. "Three years ago, when he was 16 and I was doing the reading for this book, Toby was very unhappy, and when a young man is unhappy we must take note. I was desperately trying to find out what was wrong, but you can't ask him directly. You have to be a sleuth, a kind of Sherlock Holmes of his unhappiness." The anxiety continued until one day Toby gave a name to his turmoil. "He came into our bedroom and said, 'The thing is Dad, I'm gay.' I can't describe to you the immense sense of relief and freedom in the very speaking of the words. His unhappiness fell away, my unhappiness fell away…" (BARRY, 2017 apud MOSS, 2017).

However, Toby was later threatened on a train after kissing his boyfriend, "he was very frightened by that and it led to more unhappiness, so I thought we're on a bit of a war footing here." (BARRY, 2017 apud MOSS, 2017). In 2015, at the time of the referendum for marriage equality in Ireland, Barry wrote an open letter to the Irish Times in support of a Yes vote. "'I felt I had to do something,' he says, 'so I wrote to the *Irish Times*, which is the default action of the middle-aged Irish Catholic…'" (BARRY, 2017 apud MOSS, 2017). From its conception, therefore, *Days Without End* is the product of a fatherly concern for the place of his queer child in Irish society – which resonates with the concern queer individuals themselves had for their place Irish history – and with an active support for current social struggles and causes such as the Marriage Equality referendum. However, the struggles of queer individuals and their place in society and history is not the only concern of the novel. In a book reading for the *5x15* in February 2017, Barry comments at length on some of the ideas behind his novel, including the issue of migration.

> In the 1850s there was this no-nothing movement which was saying there's enough people in America now, we're all full up – and this is before people even went west more or less. That's it, close the borders, don't let anyone else in. And then, god help them, what happens is this half a million Irish people come flooding in, destroying the beautiful balance of Protestantism – which is, you know, a very admirable religion – but unfortunately these people were Catholic… There was an outcry against this lice-like people spreading out over the countryside. These deeply uneducated, hungry, starving, ragged, undesirable, Catholic, rabble – and indeed quite an angry group of people… And we were, in essence, a sort of terror on the countryside because a lot of [Irish] people were caring fevers and diseases, you know; there was a justice in their fear as well. The lack of welcome of Irish people reminds me, as I was writing the book, of all the things I was hearing. And I wanted to – as a father, never mind a bloody writer – ask someone to explain to me how, for instance, the government here was allowing even that tiny group of people – even those few hundred children who had a right to be in Britain – to remain in Calais. And then was allowing them to be dispersed when Calais was destroyed, and who are still out there in the countryside somewhere. How anyone

> could not, in their brains, see that those children – that boy, in that camp, is my son; that girl in that camp is my daughter; our daughter, our children (BARRY, 2017 apud MOSS, 2017).

Here the writer develops the link between the social and political struggles contemporary to his time and the past struggles of the Irish people, in this case, as immigrants fleeing the Famine in Ireland and seeking refuge in the United States of the late 1840s and 1850s. In fact, what emerges from Barry's comments on the foundations for *Days Without End* is a deep concern for the disenfranchised; a radical empathy for those in despair and a denunciation of injustices that have their roots in Irish history and the struggles of the Irish people. For Barry, therefore, the prejudice, discrimination, and hatred against his own son and other queer individuals in Ireland based on their sexuality and public displays of affection is not very different from the racial prejudice that the Irish faced as immigrants in the past. This past reality of the Irish as immigrants, in turn, is not so disparate from that of present day immigrants and refugees when facing the lack of empathy and indifferent attitudes towards them by European individuals and, at times, even governments – Ireland included. Furthermore, Barry highlights that to some extent, at least, *Days Without End* also explores the ambiguity – and indeed, the incoherence – of Irish individuals displaying such attitudes towards immigrants and other minorities.

> Thomas McNulty in *Days Without End* is one such poor unfortunate creature who had watched his family die on a stone floor in Sligo, and at the age of 13 is sneaking onto, of all things, a coffin ship – which is another dreadful way to leave your country. And all during the Syrian crisis – the ongoing Syrian crisis – there's, for me just as an ordinary human being, a kind of an undertone; sort of an Irish note being played under it… So I was writing a book about the… ambiguity of an abandoned Irish person who had lost his past in Ireland, who had lost his future, had lost the people who were close to him, had lost the people who had loved him and who he had loved… Lost all that and then goes to America, because it's kind of what he had to do, and gets in the army uniform of the US cavalry and then sets about engaging in battles and massacres of people not unlike himself. So that's what worries me, ultimately (BARRY, 2017)

Another remarkable issue arising from Barry's comments on the foundations of his novel is the coalescing of the racial struggles of ethnic minorities – highlighted by the novel's exploration of the life of an Irish immigrant in the 19th century USA and by Barry's concern for immigrants and refugees in contemporary Ireland and Europe – with the queer struggles of the LGBTQI+ people for basic human rights, and for their place as queer individuals in history and society to be acknowledged. In "'The Seam of Something Else Unnamed': Sebastian Barry's *Days Without End*", Neil Campbell also highlights that "central to the novel is the irony of the Irish involvement in the indian Wars" as well as Thomas McNulty's role in dispossessing "people like his own people" (2018, p. 231).

In his article, Campbell focuses on the how the novel destabilizes and challenges the history and the myths of the United States "West", and the ways in which Barry contributes to "queer the directional norms of the US frontier" and to reinscribe gender, sexuality, and race as intersecting and complex formations of identity" (CAMPBELL, 2018, p. 233). Campbell highlights that the novel "focuses [its] attention not upon America's obsessive desire for a settled national identity so crucial to the cohesive move westward… but rather upon a more complex and fluid performativity that problematizes all forms of gendered and racial identity", and acknowledges that the "struggle to survive at all costs in this New World as poor, Irish, and homosexual in a fiercely heterosexual, racist country" (CAMPBELL, 2018, p. 232-233). This intersection is, for him, at the core of McNulty's process of becoming aware of his own complex subject position as a queer racialized subject who contributes directly in the violence against other marginalized and racialized individuals. Thomas' new consciousness leads him towards a path of redemption: he joins the army of the Union with his lover, John Cole, to fight in the US Civil War in the name of his black friends in Grand Rapids. When he murders an army officer – who formerly was also his friend – it is in order to save a Native Indigenous girl, Winona, from the slaughtering of her tribe, for which he ends up imprisoned for treason against the army.

Despite Sebastian Barry's comments on his investment on the Marriage Equality Referendum campaign and other social and political issues contemporary to his process of writing the novel, criticism on the novel is still scarce, especially regarding issues such as marriage and family for queer individuals. In fact, while most of the available criticism on both *At Swim, Two Boys* and *Days Without End* highlight the interweaving of race/ethnicity, queer subjectivities, and sexuality as complex elements of identity formation and as intersecting sources of hardships and struggles for queer characters, none of these novels have been studied specifically in regards to queer affectivity in relation to family. In order to explore this gap, this study aims at analysing the literary representation of queer affectivity, family, and marriage in O'Neill's *At Swim, Two Boys* and Barry's *Days Without End*. The aforementioned issues will be discussed in relation to the sociopolitical environment for queer individuals, their sexualities, and the possibility of forming families in Ireland, especially considering the late 1990s/early 2000s and the Ireland of mid-2010. Moreover, this study also demonstrates that the impact of the Irish Marriage Equality referendum for

the representation of queer affectivity, marriage and family in *Days Without End* was far greater – and more complex – than what might have initially been assumed.

For the purposes of this study, therefore, the term *queer* is defined and employed as a term that maintains specific correlations – "at times contradictory and elusive" – with the terms homosexual, non-heterosexual, and homoerotic, but also as a "capacious index for a series of non-normative desires, sexualities, people, politics, and cultural expressions", as suggested by Patrick Mullen in *The Poor Bugger's Tool* (2012, p. 6). Thus, the characters in the novels whose affectivity and sexuality are non-heterosexual will be considered here as queer. Referring to them as queer, however, does not mean that the gender and sexuality of these characters – as they are represented in the novels – necessarily point to something entirely different from that which present day society understands as a gay man, at least according to a broader and more general understanding of gender and sexuality. Moreover, the acronym LGBTQI+ stands for lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, intersex, and other gender or sexually nonconforming individuals. The acronym will be employed here to indicate the queer community as a whole, especially when considering issues or phenomena which impacts – to a greater or lesser extent – not only a single section, but most, if not all, individuals who do not conform to contemporary cisgender, binary, heterosexual norms of gender and sexuality. The use of the LGBTQI+ acronym to refer to the queer community as a whole, however, does not absolutely mean that their needs, struggles, hardships, subjectivities, affectivities, and sexualities are the same nor that they are always socially and politically aligned. As it is the case with any other forms of categorization or generalization, it should be highlighted that individuals under the LGBTQI+ are diverse, plural, different in many ways and in many levels. What is meant is that these individuals have historically banded together due to the different degrees of shared exclusion that they have experienced in society – an exclusion that often, but not always, originates from the general cis-heterosexual population. Moreover, these individuals have also joined forces as a community – despite their differences – to fight for the right to exist, to be, and their right to access some of the most basic human and civil rights in society.

1.3 Queer literature, family and marriage

Chapter II presents a discussion on family that will inform the remainder of the chapters in this study. It introduces family as a social institution and discusses how such an institution is understood by the Irish State according to its constitution. Additionally, the chapter also introduces the idea of the institution of family as a tool for social regulation and

control. The chapter, then, proceeds to a discussion of the origins of the family from the earlier stages of human society. This discussion is mainly informed by Engels' treatise *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) which provides not only a good overview of the different types of early social organization and configuration of family that preceded even individual marriage. Engels' text also exemplifies the discourses on family and general academic understanding of the issue by the end of the 19th century – which is also noticeably close to the time in which the fictionalized past of the two novels are set. After that, the chapter proceeds to contrast the issues raised by Engels' text with more contemporary discussions of family, taking into consideration the works of Margot Backus and Kathryn Conrad. Here, the chapter gradually approximates the discussion to the specific context of Ireland once again and accounts both for the queer individuals and the subjectivities that have been eliminated or erased from hegemonic discourses of family in society. The role of the family cell as a survival social unit is also highlighted, especially with regards to its role in protecting its members from external threats – threats which at times spring up from the very institutional powers whose purpose should be that of protecting the citizens. Finally, the chapter brings the discussion of family to more contemporary times, including concepts such as the late 20th century idea of the chosen family.

Chapter III begins the discussion of *At Swim, Two Boys* and the novel's queer construction of a chosen family and of a project of a nation through the idea of the "Nation of the Heart". The discussion highlights how physical touch is ambivalently presented in the novel sometimes as a tool for institutionalized control and violence, and sometimes as a liberating force that enables characters to resist oppression, to cope with trauma, and to overcome physical and emotional inhibitions. The chapter then proceeds to comment on the ways in which past stories of both nationalism and of male love are appropriated by the characters and transformed into their own – somewhat unique – queer versions of nationalism and love. At the core of such discussion is the characters' realization that the "nation" they wish to fight for is, in fact, each other: their safety and their right to live out their vision of a future together. Finally, the chapter discusses the novel's denouement and how certain aspects of it resonate with biographical elements of O'Neill's own life and his experiences in a pre- and post- decriminalisation Ireland, as well as with the history of queer individuals in 20th century Ireland.

Chapter IV introduces the discussion on marriage in Ireland with particular focus on the Marriage Equality referendum of 2015 and its impact in Ireland as a nation. The discussion proceeds to explore the fears and anxieties expressed by those who opposed the referendum and how they resonate with the prejudices, misconceptions, and overall hatred for queer individuals deeply entrenched in Irish history from the late 19th and throughout the 20th century. The chapter focuses on the main strategies employed by the "Yes Equality" campaign to engage the general Irish population with the campaign and the impacts of such strategies for queer individuals more generally as well as for specific groups of individuals. The chapter moves on to discussing how the Marriage Referendum has been co-opted to serve both internal and external institutional purposes other than promoting equal rights for all of Ireland's LGBTQI+ individuals. Finally, the chapter concludes by highlighting the erasure of ethnic minorities, queer subjectivities, lives, and affectivities from the general discourses regarding queer individuals and marriage that have been enacted by the referendum campaign itself.

Chapter V approaches Sebastian Barry's novel *Days Without End*. The chapter opens up with an overall discussion regarding the construction of the narrative voice of Thomas McNulty. The characterization of this narrator also includes some of the narratological strategies employed in order to carefully arrange the story and give Thomas the appropriate tone as a narrator who is not merely telling his story, but also building his own defense case. After that the chapter comments on how both race/ethnicity and queer subjectivity enable Thomas to develop a consciousness of racism and the disenfranchisement of other minorities in the USA – further highlighting the novel's commitment to the issues of race and ethnicity in relation to queer sexualities. The discussion moves on to explore the ways in which Thomas constructs his sexuality and affective life with John Cole throughout the narrative – which is rather different from ways in which the narrator approaches the exploration of his own identity, the limits of gender, and his understanding of family. Finally, the chapter concludes by highlighting the main aspects of the representation of queer family in the novel.

The Conclusion narrows down the discussions hitherto outlined and develops the contrasts between the two novels and the sociopolitical context of Ireland at the time in which the novels were written. Additionally, the conclusion emphasises the merits of the novels and of the marriage referendum, as well as their failures – especially with regards to how the representation of queer affectivity and family in the novels reflects, and to some extent impacts, the lives and experiences of queer individuals living in Ireland. Moreover, the

conclusion attempts to tie the discussions proposed throughout this study with the history of Ireland from the 1916 Easter Rising up until the post-referendum Ireland of 2016 and the late 2010s – revisiting over one hundred years of the history of queer individuals in Ireland. Finally, the chapter expresses its hopes for this study and its relevance for thinking Irish literature in relation to queer rights in Ireland – especially on the eve of a new decade for Ireland, its LGBTQI+ community, and all queer families around the world.

2 FAMILY, THE STATE AND SOCIAL REGULATION

The concept of family and the discourses associated with it have been historically important for Irish society at least in regards to the role of family in the foundation of the Irish state and its constitution. Family has also been consistently present in Irish literature, theatre, political discourses, and as a trope employed almost to the point of exhaustion during the Irish revival. An in-depth discussion of family enables a better understanding of what family means in the context of social organization and the regulation of the Irish society.

The term family, here, refers both to the social unit organized around clusters of individuals who usually share some level of kinship ties, and to the socio-legal institution regulated by laws, by the State, and sometimes, by other institutional forces. Such a discussion sheds light on which family – or families – this concept might be referring to. Is family a single social unit with a rigid configuration of kinship ties between its members, or does it mean a social unit with a plethora of possible configurations of kinship between its members. It is imperative to bring into light the powers and forces that contribute with shaping the concept of family in contemporary times, or at least, those with an accentuated prescriptive tone in regards to the configuration for it.

Article 41 of the original text of the Constitution of Ireland (1937) is, perhaps, one of the best starting points for the discussion regarding the role of family in the Irish State. This is the second constitution of the Irish State since its independence from the United Kingdom in 1922 – replacing the Constitution of the Irish Free State of 1922. With its several reviews and amendments, this constitution still remains one of the fundamental laws of the Irish State to this day. In the text, the Irish State declares that

> The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law … The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State. (IRELAND, 1937, Bunreacht na hÉireann)

Moreover, the same article adds that "the State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the family is founded, and to protect it against attack." It becomes evident, from one of its very foundational texts, that the Irish State sets itself as both defender and advocate of an idea of family that is understood as something natural and moral. Family, as the constitution of the Irish State itself puts it, is understood as a moral institution which possesses rights of its own superior "to all positive law." The State not only guarantees the protection of this moral institution but also proclaims it as indispensable for the welfare of the State. One specific form of Family is, therefore,

reproduced and regulated by the state through a complex system of institutional forces, legal mechanisms, cultural practices, and other forms of discourses which together grant the state - and to some extent the church - the power to dictate what family is and what is its legitimate configuration. Even the concept of citizenship and the different degrees of access to civil rights that a person can be acquired through the institution of family – an idea we shall return to – are examples of how the family legislation can have strong implications for social organization and control in regards to civil rights.

The State, however, is not the only one with the power to regulate family since religious institutions also have, historically, at least some degree of influence over the institution of family. Although the influence of religion in regulating family might be subtle – often resulting from the narratives of family that are employed and reproduced within religious spaces of society – it is also not uncommon for institutionalized religions to possess considerable access to governmental spaces for lawmaking. The 1937 Constitution of Ireland in itself is one such example of the extent of access that religious institutions can have in spaces for lawmaking. The very text of the Constitution reveals the ways in which the Church is imbricated in the Irish. From the very beginning of its "Preamble", the text employs the traditionally Christian discourse of holy trinity and divine lord to enact that both the State and its individuals were subjects to a higher authority – of whom the Church claims to be the rightful representative (IRELAND, 1937, Bunreacht na hÉireann).

Since the text of the constitution itself suggests that the primary purpose of family is to secure the welfare of the Nation and the State, it is only reasonable that the State would be considerably invested in regulating it. One of the many mechanisms for regulating family is the institution of marriage, which in turn, has its roots in religious rituals conducted by organised religions. Marriage has acquired, however, a more secular status in recent times as people are given the option to civil marriage and to secular ceremonies, thus respecting individuals whose viewpoint and affectivity does not include religious notions. While in religious marriage the legitimacy of the union, and of the rite itself, arises from the common belief, shared among the members of a given community, that the priest (or other figure of authority within organized religion, such as pastor or minister) uses their powers and connection to the divine to bestow a blessing. Whether the community perceives the power which gives that union its legitimate status as mystical or not, it is, nonetheless, always linked to a political power. This political power comes from the very fact that the religious authority

performing the ceremony is given the power to change the social status of those undertaking the ceremony. In recent times, of course, the registrar that performs the civil and secular ceremonies of marriage possesses the same political power – granted to them by the Irish State – to change the civil status of those undertaking the marriage ceremony.

As modern societies change they start to demand different forms of government, usually more secular and independent from any religious institution and its beliefs. As this process takes place, the state gradually incorporates what was once a religious rite into the sphere of civil rights – in many cases replacing most of the mystical and religious elements of the rite with the presumably more secular discourses of civil rights and legal obligations between the parts. Ideally, this should result in a more democratic form of social union since it is not restricted to one religious point of view of the other. Regardless of it being civil or religious, the primary purpose of marriage, nonetheless, remains much the same. Marriage has been and, to a great extent still is, the institution that gives legitimacy to the family in the Irish State. In that sense, both the State and institutional religion remain the primary forces organizing, controlling and regulating the most fundamental forms of social bonds in human society.

2.1 The origins of family following Engels

In order to understand the process by which some form of social and emotional bonding between humans came to occupy such a central position in modern societies – of which the Irish one is no exception – it is imperative that we briefly revisit the history of family in its many social configurations throughout the history of human societies. The starting point of this discussion will be a general overview of the origins of family, focusing primarily on the work of Friedrich Engels and his exploration of this subject in his late 19th century text. Engels' work is particularly interesting here for a couple of reasons. First, it is one of the major scholarly works on both the history and the economics of family, which already reviews and expands on the works of other important names of the 19th Century field of anthropology, such as Lewis Morgan. Additionally, Engels' publication is arguably the first of its time to relate the origins of family to other social issues such as class, the social subjugation of women, and political-economic aspects such as the development of private property and modern notions of State.

Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) is also one of the most relevant scholarly treatises on family to be published around the time in which the stories of the two novels analysed in the following chapters take place; 1860s and 1870s

for *Days Without End* and 1915 and 1916 for *At Swim, Two Boys.* Because of its publication date almost halfway between the period in which the two novels take place, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* also provides us with a good parameter for the kind of knowledge around family that circulated among scholarly circles in late 19th Century and the paradigms around family that often informed European societies and States at the time. Finally, however dated, Engel's work is still relevant nowadays even in spite of its shortcomings "based on the paucity of knowledge available in the 19th century", and Pat Brewer argues *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* still "stand[s] up well" today (BREWER; ENGELS, 2004, p. 11).

Engels' exploration of the origins of the family represents an interesting paradigm of thinking and studying family against which the works of Conrad and Backus can be more effectively contrasted. Additionally, Foucault already observes that, during the 18th and 19th Centuries, society's interest in the forms of sexualities that did not fit the norm of heterosexual marital bond increased, which has led to human sexuality being more closely scrutinized under medical and scientific discourses, especially later in that period. From the more general overview of family offered by Engels, the discussion proceeds, then, to a gradually more specific discussion on family in the context of Ireland. It takes into consideration the work of Margot Backus and her exploration of how certains subjectivities have been excluded – or rather eliminated – from social life and from constituting the family unit both in Europe and in a Ireland still under colonial presence of the British. Additionally, Kathryn Conrad's discussion regarding the different roles of the family cell in (and for) the Irish society and how sexuality has been mobilized in order to both regulate and be regulated by family in the Irish context is also brought to the forefront of the discussion as it moves towards the specifics of the Irish context.

2.1.1 Group marriage

In *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), Engels employs the concept of family to denote "the social organization of reproduction and production of daily life at all stages of human society", and not necessarily as a synonym to a social unit based on the heterosexual union and their children. Moreover, Engels sustains that group marriage was the very first manifestation of family - in a broader sense - among humans. The earliest forms of group marriage had their roots in the *Consanguine Family*

system, in which all men and women of the same generation were considered to be common husbands and wives to one another. In such a system, therefore, marriage between brother and sisters was not only seen as natural, but was, in fact, a *sine qua non* condition for men and women to be considered common husbands and wives to one another, and thus, being allowed to mate and have children.

> Thus, in this form of the family, only ancestors and descendants, parents and children, are excluded from the rights and obligations (as we would say) of marriage with one another. Brothers and sisters, male and female cousins of the first, second and more remote degrees are all mutually brothers and sisters, and precisely because of this are all mutually husbands and wives. (ENGELS, 1884, p. 51).

Although such forms of group marriage were already virtually extinct by the time Engels wrote his treatise, the evidence that such systems must have existed could still be found among many peoples, one example is the "Hawaiian system of consanguinity, still prevalent throughout Polynesia, which expresses degrees of consanguinity such as can arise only under such a form of the family" (ENGELS, 1884, p. 52)

Even though people living under such marriage configurations could know, and as a matter of fact most likely did know, who their biological parents were, such information simply would not have major implications in regards to the social position of a person within the group or to the types of social relationships that person would establish with other members; at least not to same extent that the generation to which one belongs to. Even though mothers most likely were able to tell their own biological children from the others, they would nonetheless fulfill the role of mothers to all children from their brothers, sisters, and cousins just as they would their own – and all of their brothers and male cousins would fulfill the role of fathers. The only restriction from childbearing in this form of family system was that of generationality, meaning that men and women who were common husbands and wives with each other (that is, brothers and sisters) could neither bear children with their fathers or mothers (or grand fathers and grand mothers), nor with their children or grandchildren.

While the first mode of exclusion from mating among humankind early societies was the generational one, which excluded parents and children from mutual sex relations, the second exclusion that seemed to be added to family over time, and therefore, to the configuration of group marriage, was that of the natural brothers and sisters; which proved to be a much more difficult change to be accomplished, but also an infinitely more impactful one in the history of human family configuration (ENGELS, 1884, p. 52). The addition of this restriction gave rise to a different form of family configuration and group marriage which came to be known as the *Punaluan Family*. In this new form of group marriage family system,

each family nucleus formed by natural sisters would constitute what could be considered as the social class of common wives, while a group of men constituted the class of their common husbands. The sisters in a family nucleus would constitute the class of common wives together with women who were not necessarily their sisters. The class of common husbands that any and every woman would share included all men except, for each woman, their own natural brothers (ENGELS, 1884, p. 53).

This new system would introduce the class of nephews and nieces to the social structure of family in human society, and therefore, that of the cousins. Through the addition of the concept of cousins it became possible that among the men constituting one punalua (social class of common husbands) both brothers and cousins could be found, and among the women who constituted another punalua (common wives), both sisters and cousins could be found. Previously, the class of nephews and nieces would be considered senseless, and in fact, such classes of kinship did not exist under the *Consanguine s*ystem. In the *Punaluan* system*,* however, the establishment of these two new classes of kinship by way of distinguishing natural siblings from cousins, admitted a series of essential features which would become the baseline for the social structure for many forms of family configuration that would later appear in human history. One of the major accomplishment of Punaluan system, however, was that it enables the mutual community of husbands and wives to coexist within a household or a community while, at the same time, preventing consanguine marriage from happening by excluding natural siblings from the group of individuals which, collectively, constitute the class of mutual husbands or wives for any given person.

The *Punaluan Family* is not only relevant in human history because of the features it seems to have originated for the family systems that would later appear – such as the distinction between siblings and cousins – but also because this system is believed to be the origin of the *gens*, which is another family unit that has emerged within the group marriage systems and is closely related to the origins of the female line of descent, i.e., the matrilineal system of tracing of kinship (ENGELS, 1884, p. 55). In all forms of group marriage that have existed in human history, the identity of the father of a child was almost always uncertain since it was virtually impossible to trace it. Women who lived in similar family systems could have as many sexual partners as the group of common husbands could provide them. All men who belonged to the class of common husbands to these women would be equally available for sexual intercourse with them. Moreover, be it by custom or by right, women were free to

maintain as many of their common husbands as sexual partners as they would like to. For that same reason, it was virtually impossible in many cases to actually know who the biological father of a child was. This is believed to be one of the reasons why it was customary for all men in the class of common husbands to a woman to collectively fulfil the role of fathers. Engels argues, in that regard, that "it is thus clear that, wherever group marriage exists, descent is traceable only on the maternal side, and thus the female line alone is recognised" (ENGELS, 1884, p. 55).

A *Gens* is formed by a group of sisters together with their children and any of the brothers of these sisters who share the same mothers with them – that is, any of their natural or collateral brothers. In other words, a *gens* is centered around, and managed by, groups of women with common female ancestors, and they include in their *gens* any of their children and the brothers who share female ancestors with them. The class of common husbands to this group of women would only – and could only – belong to any other *gens* than that of their common wives. Husbands and wives, therefore, could never share common female ancestors (mothers, grandmothers, etc) with each other. Thus, even though *gens* is still formed by a system of group marriage, the marriage itself is no longer consanguine and the social organization that emerges from it guarantees that the fundamental unit for the constitution of a family is a group of women, linked together by a common female ancestors, and those who share with them the same female ancestor. Even though group marriage has been largely considered as inherently immoral by the cultures and moralities that have later developed in human society, Engels sustains that where most European can see only immorality and lawlessness, strict law actually reigns (ENGELS, 1884, p. 58). When a woman chooses to spend the night with a stranger visiting her village, she does so knowing that the stranger belongs to her marriage class – the class of men who, according to custom, naturally constitutes the group of common husbands of this woman. She knows this man is one of her rightful husbands and that she is one of his rightful wives precisely because they do not share common female ancestors with each other. Therefore, be it by law or costume, that stranger is one of the born husbands of that woman and the same moral law which gives her the right to have one of her husbands as her sexual partners, also prohibits, on pain of banishment, all intercourse outside the marriage classes, i.e. intercourse between those with common female ancestors (ENGELS, 1884, p. 58).

2.1.2 Individual marriage

Other tendencies regarding social configuration of family and marriage arise from within group marriage and are, in fact, sometimes present alongside it regardless of which particular structure it presents. The pairing of a couple, relationships based on exclusivity, as well as polygamy, are all examples of other unions that have also been present, to a greater or lesser degree, among human societies. Engels, for instance, highlights that "a certain pairing for longer or shorter periods took place already under group marriage" (1884, p. 58). Engels acknowledges, however, that individual choices to pair exclusively with someone else for longer periods of time would most likely not have overridden current social customs, and the group marriage system would continue existing, at least for time, even after marriage based on exclusive pairing had emerged. Among other practices that emerged alongside group marriage, Engels points to the abduction of women, at a later stage of the group marriage system, as representative of this period of transition between group marriage to that of the individual. Contrary to popular belief in which the abduction of women is usually associated with the earliest stages of human society, however, Engels actually places this abhorrent practice at a much later stage, a time in which marriage between classes of people in society was giving way to a structure that would inform most forms of marriage that would later appear, even the ones existing today, which is the marriage of individuals through individual pairings.

> The abduction of women already reveals even here a trace of the transition to individual marriage — at least in the form of the pairing marriage: after the young man has abducted, or eloped with, the girl with the assistance of his friends [...] she is regarded the wife of the young man who initiated the abduction. And, conversely, should the abducted woman run away from the man and be captured by another, she becomes the latter's wife, and the first man loses his privilege. (ENGELS, 1884, p. 58).

Engels highlights how the struggle to prevent marriage between blood relatives grew further and the classes of common husbands and wives under group marriage became gradually more restricted. Thus, group marriage was gradually supplanted by the *Pairing Family* system, which also set structures for the marriage system that would still develop.

> This growing complexity of marriage prohibitions rendered group marriages more and more impossible; they were supplanted by the pairing family. At this stage one man lives with one woman, yet in such manner that polygamy and occasional infidelity remain men's privileges, even though the former is seldom practised for economic reasons; at the same time, the strictest fidelity is demanded of the woman during the period of cohabitation, adultery on her part being cruelly punished (ENGELS, 1884, p. 59).

Human labour acquired ever increasing exchange value with the introduction of cattle breeding, the working up of metals, and of weaving on a larger scale in society. Previously, as Engels puts it, "human labour power [...] yielded no noticeable surplus as yet over the cost of its maintenance", with the development of cattle breeding in addition to field cultivation, this changes (ENGELS, 2004, p. 65). "The family did not increase as rapidly as the cattle, more people were required to tend them; the captives taken in war were useful for just this purpose, and, furthermore, they could be bred like the cattle itself" (ENGELS, 2004, p. 65). Human societies begin to satisfy their newfound need for human labour by either acquiring it in the form of conquering others, or buying it in the form of slavery. In fact, Engels correlates the emergence of slavery trade with the practice of purchasing women as wives, both precisely at this transitional stage from group marriage into individual marriage. He suggests that "Just as the once so easily obtainable wives had now acquired an exchange value and were bought, so it happened with labour power, especially after the herds had finally been converted into family possessions" (2004, p. 65).

This new system did not, however, dissolve the communistic household that has established itself at the center of society in earlier times. The communistic household maintained the centrality of women due to the matrilineal system and the recognition of the natural mother and female line as the only way to trace back descent. The "mother right" system of inheritance – which came to existence as a result of the female centered communistic household within group marriage – would have the wealth and belongings of any deceased person to remain within the *gens* to which that person belonged. Property, therefore, was always passed down to the closest descendent in the female line of the deceased, i.e., the closest daughter, sister, granddaughter, etc (ENGELS, 2004, p. 66). There was no inheritance, therefore, ever being passed down by fathers to their children, as fathers could never belong to the same *gens* as their wives. The *Pairing Family* system, however, "introduced a new element into the family. By the side of the natural mother it had placed the authenticated natural father " (ENGELS, 2004, p. 65). Paternity, now, was now as easily certifiable as maternity previously was, due to the strict fidelity that was now demanded from women, at least during the period of cohabitation. Cattle breeding and private property allowed men to accumulate wealth, which,

> on the one hand, gave the man a more important status in the family than the woman, and, on the other hand, created a stimulus to utilise this strengthened position in order to overthrow the traditional order of inheritance in favour of his children. But this was impossible as long as descent according to mother right prevailed. This had, therefore, to be overthrown, and it was overthrown; and it was

> not so difficult to do this as it appears to us now. [...] The simple decision sufficed that in future the descendants of the male members should remain in the gens, but that those of the females were to be excluded from the gens and transferred to that of their father. The reckoning of descent through the female line and the right of inheritance through the mother were hereby overthrown and male lineage and right of inheritance from the father instituted. We know nothing as to how and when this revolution was effected [...]. That it was actually effected is more than proved by the abundant traces of mother right (ENGELS, 2004, p. 66)

It was, then, established that men only could inherit the belongings of their fathers, and the descendants of the female members should be removed from their mother's *gens* and relocated to the *gens* of their respective fathers – becoming dependants of their male ancestors rather than of their female ancestors (ENGELS, 2004, p. 66).

The Roman Family constitutes what can be considered as the perfect example of this new form of family. The very word *familia* "did not originally signify the ideal of our modern Philistine" definition of family, which is more often than not a "compound of sentimentality and domestic discord" (ENGELS, 2004, p. 67). Among the Romans the word "family" did not refer to the married couple and their children, but rather, to the slaves owned by a man. *Famulus* is the latin word for the household slave in Rome, and *familia* is the word used to describe the totality of household slaves owned by a single man. The word was created and employed in Rome to describe a social institution which was relatively new in terms of human history. At the head of such a social institution was the man, who "had under him [his] wife, children, and slaves". Under Roman paternal power, therefore, the head of the *familia* had power of life and death over all under him – wife, children and slaves alike (ENGELS, 2004, p. 67). It is not surprising, therefore, that Marxist scholars, much in agreement to Marx, would comment that the modern family contains the embryo not only of slavery – *servitus* – but of serfdom also (ENGELS, 2004,p. 67).

The *Monogamous Family*, in turn, arises from the *Pairing Family* and is based on the establishment and in the maintenance of a male-centric society resulting from the substitution of the mother right of inheritance and female line of descent for the father right of inheritance and male line of descent. Under the *Pairing Family* system men acquired enough social power to not only sustain such social changes but also to take it even further. The *Monogamous Family*, for instance, tends to be particularly strong among societies in which women also constitute a class of individuals who are not considered citizens, and therefore, do not have the rights associated with citizenship. The non-citizen class of individuals – of which women and slaves were often a part of in the case of Rome – could

not vote and or participate in the process of social and political decisions and law making. Furthermore, infidelity was considered a heinous crime for women, quite severely punishable, with the same restriction and severity never being applied to men. Commenting on the emergence of the *Monogamous Family* system, Engels states that "we are confronted with this new form of the family in all its severity among the Greeks", more specifically "among the Ionians — of whom Athens is characteristic." (ENGELS, 2004, p. 71-72).

The expressed purpose of the *Monogamous Family* system is the production of descendants of indisputable paternity. The authenticated paternity had now become the most fundamental requirement, under the patriarchal system, for sons to be able to inherit, in due time, their father's slaves, properties, land, and wealth; always keeping it within the male lineage (ENGELS, 2004, p. 70). The most pronounced difference between the *Pairing Family* and the *Monogamous Family* is that, in the latter, there is greater rigidity of the family tie. Marriage can no longer be dissolved by either side of marriage. Since the man is the only one who, in most cases, retains full citizenship status under the *Monogamous Family* system, only he would be able to dissolve marriage "and cast off his wife" (ENGELS, 2004, p. 70). The right to conjugal infidelity remains with men only, and it is sanctioned most of the times, at least by custom, but sometimes also through legal documents such as the "Code Napoléon", which expressly concedes the right of infidelity to husbands as long as they do not bring their "concubines" into the conjugal home (ENGELS, 2004, p. 70).

In more recent times, especially during the 19th and 20th century, different formats of marriage and of family configurations have emerged quite strongly and – to some extent – have been sanctioned by institutional powers under modern and contemporary sociopolitical systems. One important example of such a family is the so-called *Nuclear Family*, which was already quite prevalent in Europe and in the Americas (south, central and north) by the beginning of the 20th century. The *Nuclear Family* is generally understood as a social unit centered around the two married spouses, the husband and wife, and their dependent unmarried children, although it also keeps the husband's and the wife's kindred in orbiting each nucleus in close proximity (SCOTT, 2014, p. 237).

The discussion Engels' *The Origins of the Family* lays out evokes three main points of reflection that are central to the remainder of this discussion and to the establishment of a framework that will be informing the literary analysis and discussion of the novels – which is taking place in the following chapters. However dated, Engel's work continues to be relevant nowadays – despite the shortcomings "based on the paucity of knowledge available in the 19th century", it still "stand[s] up well" today, as Brewer argues in the introduction for

the 2004 edition (ENGELS, 2004, p. 11). If nothing else, *The Origins of the Family* represents an interesting and historically relevant paradigm in the way of thinking and studying family against which more contemporary studies can be more effectively contrasted.

The first point of major relevance arising from the discussion of family in *The Origins* is that it presents a very definite picture of the fact that marriage systems and family configurations – either the ones available nowadays or the ones that have existed in the past – are far from being the product of any inherent superior morality, law, or structure. The discussion exemplifies how marriage systems and family structures changed historically – quite drastically, sometimes – as a result from the social, political and economic forces at play in society at any given time. Thus, both family and marriage are subject to socioeconomic, political, and cultural changes in society, which also includes our contemporary notions of family and marriage. All of the changes regarding social and cultural understanding of family and marriage throughout human history have allowed societies to adapt to new material conditions of life to new social, cultural and economic demands. It is precisely for that reason that, rather than something "sacred" which cannot be questioned, family is understood here both as a social institution that produces effects in the way society is organized and as a social construct that results from the cultural, political, and economic forces at play in society.

The second major point of relevance arising from Engels' discussion is that it highlights one of the major biases underlying the narratives and discourses of family, especially in Engels' time: family is often studied and understood under the light of human procreation and childbearing. Most of the discussion regarding human bonds and kinship ties orbits the issue of child-producing systems and the regulation of the rights and responsibilities of both parenthood and private property, i.e., inheritance. Almost all marriage systems and family configurations outlined by Engels are centered around how society organizes human procreation and the set of rules that govern the rights and restrictions for heterosexual intercourse, tracing descent, and regulating the inheritance of private properties. While it is completely reasonable that in older stages of human social life the production of new generations to inherit what the previous generations have accomplished was at the core of human survival, it is hardly suitable for us to suggest that this remains the case in contemporary times, at least not in the same extent that it has been in the past. The number of humans in the world today, the ratio of birth rates and death rates around the world in the

21st century compared to the 20th century, as well as the overall increase in life expectancy of people across the world may be enough to put humankind in a position of relative stability so that compulsory parenthood and child-producing systems no longer need to be our central purpose and concern when considering the ways in which contemporary societies are organized. While human societies should care for their young, for the children and for the rights of any of their citizens under legal age, it is still possible to do so in legal and democratic ways while also discussing family and marriage without restricting these social institutions to their child-producing role, nor centering our understanding of them on the issue of human procreation.

In regards to this discussion on marriage systems and family configurations, therefore, as well as how far we can bring that discussion, it is only reasonable to assume that such discussion could be carried out not necessarily by putting away concerns regarding the production of new generation, but by consistently including those who wish to contribute to society and humankind in ways other than the (re)production of children. Such a discussion of family would require having in mind not only the wellbeing of future generations and of those helping produce them, but also the wellbeing of those who are living their lives right now and who are developing structures of human affection and social bonds that do not include the childbearing process. Individuals who are, nonetheless, contributing to society and human life in their own way. Such a discussion, of course, demands that we take into consideration the level of access that individuals can have to their civil rights, to citizenship, and to minimally humane and adequate living conditions both in their private and in their public lives.

The last major issue outlined by the discussion on *The Origins of the Family* is the fact that in Engels – just as in the works of many other scholars – the discussion is tied to the paradigm of heterosexual relationships and affection. Each one of the marriage systems and family configurations outlined by Engels is centered on the ways in which heterosexual individuals organize their affection, sexuality, the production of descendants, and their subject position in a society organized around the male-female gender binarism. This, of course, is also a direct result from the focusing of that discussion on childbearing, which has historically been regarded as the central pillar of heterosexual unions, with religion having an important role in that. However, if we are to take into consideration works such as that of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, then it is necessary to remember that there is nothing in the heterosexual union that makes it any more "natural" than any other forms of affectionate and/or sexual union. What was taken into consideration in the 18th and 19th centuries to

condemn homosexuality, for example, was equally taken into consideration to also condemn marital infidelity or marriage without parental consent; it was a matter of legality.

> They were perceived simply as an extreme form of act "against the law"; they were infringements of decrees which [...] had been established for governing the order of things and the plan of beings. Prohibitions bearing on sex were essentially of a juridical nature. (FOUCAULT, 1978, p.38)

Nonetheless, Foucault reminds us in "Part II: The Repressive Hypothesis", that by the 18th and 19th centuries, society had ceased to scrutinize the sexual habits and lives of heterosexual married individuals and was now, instead, taking an increasing interest in the sexualities that fell outside of the married heterosexual unions. "The legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality… tended to function as a norm, one that was stricter, perhaps, but quieter" (FOUCAULT, 1978, p. 38). It was in the pursuit to scrutinize the sexualities that did not fit into the heterosexual married union that criminals, the mentally ill, and those with either a sexual interest for people of the same sex, or with no interest for the opposite sex, were brought into light and, slowly but surely, equally branded as "perverts" (FOUCAULT, 1978, p. 39). "Debauchery", which includes adultery, marrying a close relative, seducing a nun, or engaging in sexual activities outside of marriage, was previously not any different from the concept of "sodomy" (anal and/or oral intercourse, sexual intercourse between people of the same gender, and non-procreative sexual activities) in the sense that they were all equally considered illegal acts and were, morally and judicially speaking, of a similar nature. However, with the emergence of the concept of the "perverted",

> The natural laws of matrimony and the immanent rules of sexuality began to be recorded on two separate registers. There emerged a world of perversion which partook of that of legal or moral infraction, yet was not simply a variety of the latter. An entire sub-race race was born... From the end of the eighteenth century to our own (FOUCAULT, 1978, p. 40)

This new interest in peripheral sexualities has not only caused criminals, people affected by mental illness, and those with homosexual inclinations to be regarded as similar to each other – belonging to the same category of "perverted" individuals – but has also led to increasing persecution, which entailed in "an incorporation of perversions and a new specification of individuals" (FOUCAULT, 1978, p. 42-43). According to "ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them", however, once these new "perversions" were incorporated into a "new specification of individuals", both legal and medical discourses have turned the nineteenth century homosexual into a subspecies. Prevailing scientific and

medical discourses of the time, supported by changes in the law, contributed to turning the homosexual into

> a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized… less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (FOUCAULT, 1978, p. 43)

Before this social and historical change highlighted by Foucault, the homosexual was nothing more than an individual who would partake in sexual acts and whose expressed desires happened to be considered illegal according to the laws of its time. These acts, however, were no more illegal, more immoral, or more "unnatural" than adultery, sex before and outside marriage, or masturbation for that matter. The discursive creation of "perversion" as an inbuilt singular nature transformed individuals whose sexuality deviated from the norm into a subspecies – different than, and precisely for that, considered to be inferior to those whose sexuality and sensibilities conformed to the heterosexual norm. When examining that, one could only reasonably consider the connection between The History of Sexuality and the issue of family and marriage. If peripheral sexualities and affections which do not necessarily subscribe to the prescribed norms of married heterosexual behaviour do exist among human – and evidence does suggests that such forms of sexualities have, in fact, always existed among human societies – then it is only fitting to question why they have so seldom been factored into discussions regarding the origins or the history of family, or even in legal discourses of what constitutes family, except, perhaps, as examples of social behaviours considered to threaten the institution of family itself.

It is precisely with the intention of exploring – and as an attempt of answering – the aforementioned issues that the chapter now turns onto more contemporary considerations of family, focusing more specifically on the works of Kathryn Conrad and Margot Backus. After briefly exploring the broad history of family in humankind, the discussion also returns to the specifics of how the institution of family has developed in – and with – the Irish society, and to a lesser extent, European societies. Moreover, the chapter examines the socio-political forces that have led dissident subjectivities and affection – such as those of LGBTQI+

individuals, generally speaking – to be alienated from the process of constituting family and, in some cases, to even be persecuted and eliminated from society.

2.2 Family as social organization and regulation

The centrality of the nuclear family in the Irish society has been historically treated as arising from the Catholic ideology and its influence over the country's history. To some extent, Kathryn Conrad backs this argument in *Locked in the Family Cell: Gender, Sexuality, and Political Agency in Irish National Discourse*, in which she demonstrates that most modern features of contemporary family configurations, such as gender roles and status distinctions, were already in process of being established as the norm by patriarchal Christianity in medieval Ireland (CONRAD, 2004, p. 4). The author remarks, however, that some of the gender roles and status distinctions associated with the family cell and the private sphere in modern times were further stabilized and reinforced by the State, especially during the the rise of British settlement and British control in Ireland between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – a time when strict order and penalization imposed by the imperial power consolidated what patriarchal christianity had already set in process in Medieval Ireland (CONRAD, 2004, p. 4). Thus, the forces of institutionalized christianity and of the British colonial powers have both contributed immensely to enforce that which is commonly known as the heterossexual nuclear family as the primary institution for regulating and organizing Irish society. The controlling of patriarchal systems of family relationships as well as the penalization of behaviors – or other "social formations that did not further the interests" of the state – were some of the central mechanisms used to stabilize the heterosexual nuclear family as the axis for social organization during that period (CONRAD, 2004, p. 5). Nonetheless, Conrad argues that this phenomenon goes beyond the boundaries of religion and class alone, and as the discussion below will demonstrate, it becomes clear that economic forces, social changes, the politics of the relationships between the individuals and the state, as well as gender and sexuality, have also contributed to the shaping for the family unit throughout early modernity.

The nuclear heterosexual configuration of the family cell evolved through the course of early modernity under the control of State and Church to become socially essential not only as requirement for individuals to be accepted as members of a society – which sometimes means access to citizenship – but also as a form of socio-economic protection and survival. In *The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice and the Anglo-*

Irish Colonial Order, Margot Backus argues that a large range of divergent lives, and by consequence their subjectivities as well, were annihilated from social life as the lives and behaviours of such individuals were made to represent either forbidden or undesired subject positions in society. The practices of incarcerating and executing those whose subjectivities did not conform to the social norms was not limited to the women who did not conform to the role prescribed for women by religion – such as those accused of being witches – but also extended to men or anyone who failed to conform to the prescribed religious norms of masculinity, femininity, and morality. As the author puts it,

> Over the course of early modernity, Europe annihilated within itself a broad range of subjectivities through the destruction of individual subjects who were, regardless of their actual proclivities, made to represent forbidden subject positions. The newly enforced heterosexual monogamous, childbearing dyad was pushed to the center of social order as all other available alternatives to it were symbolically destroyed, legislated against, or, later, representationally made to disappear. In order not to disappear themselves, those early modern adults that survived rapidly organized themselves into the sole sanctioned social unit: the capitalist family cell… As the conjugal unit became nothing short of a life raft, the emotional ties that initially bound members of this unit to each other were necessarily of the most extreme, violent, and compulsory nature. During this period, kinship bonds and community bonds in general athrophied. Needless to say, this was hardest on the poor and socially disenfranchised (BACKUS, 1999, p. 41).

Subjectivities and affections that either threatened the institutional authority of the State and the Church – or those who somehow destabilized the norms and morals prescribed by these powers – were constantly at risk, which has led to countless family configurations, kinship bonds, and human affections to being erased from social life. Communal or neighbourly bonds became riskier and more dangerous as any form of affective bonding outside that of the family cell could potentially expose to the institutional powers those individuals whose subjectivities were considered deviant or undesirable.

Backus acknowledges that the disintegration of community bonds has had huge negative impact for women, especially since, legally, wives maltreated by their husbands could no longer turn to their kin for help and support; while children in general, and especially daughters, would become more vulnerable within their families (BACKUS, 1999, p. 42). “With the breakdown of prior bonds of mutuality, kinship systems that had stabilized” social relationships in the past gradually collapsed (BACKUS, 1999, p. 42). Rich and poor alike grew increasingly anxious to concentrate resources within the confines of family unit itself and to protect themselves from everything external to the family cell and its own interests, especially since “in such an environment, ties of familial or neighbourly obligation that ranged beyond the nuclear family’s narrow confines grew increasingly risky and

unsustainable" (BACKUS, 1999, p. 41-42). This process highlights not only how the family cell evolved to become a source of survival and protection for its members against "external" institutional forces, as Kathryn Conrad defends, but also how institutionalized fear and mistrust in the government – and in the people around you – has indoctrinated society into losing the collectiveness and communal bonds of the time in which family and kinship extended far beyond of the confines of the heterosexual, monogamous, childbearing couple and their children. The elimination of affections, subjectivities, and all expressions of human bonds that fall outside of the heterosexual family cell also explains why many nineteenth century scholars such as Engels – as well as others who came after him – failed to discuss human affections and social bonds that did not fit into that paradigm; not to mention that they could not have done so without risking their own socially privileged positions as well-respected citizens and scholars whose lives as well as their research followed the prescribed moralities of their time.

Kathryn Conrad, in turn, highlights the effects of having the family unit being pushed to the center of social organization in Ireland, becoming essential for economic survival particularly during the nineteenth century. According to the author, women at that time were an essential part of family economy in rural households, contributing to their family's economy with wages from different forms of income-producing labour, both in house and field work and as away from home in various but limited forms of industry, such as made available to them in linen factories. Although they were very often underpaid, the income these women would bring to their families encouraged a number of changes for the Irish families, such as the expansion of household size, early marriages, and population growth (CONRAD, 2004, p. 6). The arrival of the mill-based spinning industry reduced the income of household spinning and weavers, and later on, the potato blight severely threatened the subsistence of families. As most rural households were beyond their capacity for survival, household size and population growth started to decrease rapidly (2004, p. 6). This highlights how family households were sceptical to trust the government and ultimately could not rely – as time taught them – on institutional powers such as the State to help them in times of need; many were reluctant even to seek help from neighbours and their community. Social, political, and economic changes in early modernity forced families rely solely on their own material means of income and to adapt to the changes on their means of income in order to

survive – what was seen as external to the family household was met with apprehension or distrust.

Although many Irish women moved from rural to industrial work during the nineteenth century, strong public discourse about women's appropriate "place and value" still shaped women's social possibilities and forced them to be generally more dependent on their families than men (CONRAD, 2004, p. 6). The assumptions regarding the "right" place of women and men in society resulted from a shift in nineteenth-century discourse and general views on gender. Conrad remarks that the hierarchy of traditional patriarchal view of gender with men being regarded as superior to women was slowly being replaced by an ideology of "separate spheres", in which men and women were regarded as "naturally" belonging to different social spheres that were not only opposite to each other, but also mutually excluding (CONRAD, 2004 , p. 6). Women's place was that of the private sphere, under the guidance of the male head of the family, while men belonged to the public sphere, socializing with other men and dealing with politics, business, and industry. This "separate-sphere" ideology caused women who assumed social positions in the public sphere – or who had moved from household to industrial work, as many Irish women did – to be often and much more intensely subjected to scrutiny than men occupying the same positions and jobs. Conrad further comments that "they found themselves still shaped by public discourse about a woman's place and value and still thus ultimately dependent on the family cell" (CONRAD, 2004 , p. 6). The actions and decisions of these women who ventured into the public sphere were thus often perceived as a challenge to society's cultural views on gender and to the morals prescribed by the institutionalized powers of the State and Church, as well as a destabilization of the traditional heterosexual family configuration – by then already well-established.

The cultural views on gender brought deep implications for the politics of control over individuals, their affections, and their bodies. Foucault's discussion on the process by which the control over women's bodies, their sexuality, and their role in human reproduction was further reinforced by new medical and psychological discourses in the 19th century – resulting in even stricter control and surveillance by institutional powers – are further supported by Conrad. On that very issue, she remarks that the concept of "hysteria" and the medicalization of women's bodies helped pathologize women who did not conform to the private sphere and did not fit their "prescribed roles as reproducers and caretakers of the family" (CONRAD, 2004, p. 7). Women, however, were not the only ones who had to deal with the negative effects of people's bodies and their private lives being more heavily

scrutinized. As society's views on gender gradually accommodated middle-class notions of masculinity, surveillance and control over the expression of male sexuality also increased greatly.

Men were expected and required not only to control and guide the family cell but also to moderate and mediate the relationship between the private sphere – the family household and all that happens within its confines – and the public sphere. The private sphere, therefore, was the only space in which men were allowed to give expression to their emotional subjectivities and fruition to their affective bonds. It was the only space in which men's emotional allegiances, that is, the bond between husband and wife and between a man and his own family, were legitimized. Unsurprisingly, these affective bonds that men were only allowed to have in their private sphere – and only within a heterosexual marriage family structure – were usually expressed in the public sphere through words that either erased or rendered invisible the emotional aspects of such emotional allegiances; words such as "duty". Homosexuality, therefore, was believed not only to be a threat to the very cycle of human reproduction (i.e. childbearing) but also to the aforementioned system that attempted to control people's affections and allegiances in society. Conrad remarks that men's affection or desire for other men provided them with affective bonds and allegiances beyond those of the private sphere and its nuclear family, which was seen to undermine both the primacy of the family cell for social organization and the perceived "proper" configuration of the private and the public spheres respectively (2004, p. 7).

Despite the increasing surveillance and control over people's bodies and sexualities, both abortion and homosexual affection/desire were no longer punishable with death penalty under the British law in the second half of nineteenth century. Conrad argues, nonetheless, that these less severe forms of punishment were not a sign of a more flexible society (2004 , p. 9). In fact, Foucault argues in *Discipline and Punish* that one of the most effective methods of social control is that in which individuals perceive themselves under constant surveillance – at all times. Surveillance originating not only from representatives of the institutional power but also from their own neighbours, co-workers and, ultimately, from themselves through the process of internalization of the very idea of society's gaze constantly watching over us and judging our every actions and behaviors (1979, p. 173).

Constant (self) surveillance was enforced and constantly reinforced through a multitude of discourses in different spaces of society, many of which have helped produce

social categories of individuals and of behaviours that could be identified, regulated, and legislated against. In that regard, 19th century scientific discourses, religion, as well as discourses of national identity and the idea of citizenship have all contributed to enforcing that surveilling gaze. Such control over people's affections and the family cell resulted not only in a generalized anxiety to follow the rules and avoid punishment, but also a tendency to self-regulate by means of keeping to itself and hiding private lives from public eyes. In such a context, whenever transgressions were made by individuals, the family would often attempt to hide and protect these transgressive subjects from institutional powers that could possibly punish them. Thus, the family cell became central not only for the economic survival of the individuals, but also their main source of protection against institutional forces that threatened to punish or eradicate those whose affections or subjectivities have been legislated against. For Conrad, such phenomenon marks the role of the family cell as a survival; a necessary protection for individuals against institutional powers attempting to eradicate unwanted subjectivities by eliminating transgressive individuals.

Thus, the family cell shaped what was socially accepted as the normative sexuality – and that which fell outside of it – while also limiting the borders of the public and private spheres. As a regulatory ideology with strong and concrete implications in social, economic, and political organization, the family cell not only controls and limits the agency of its subjects across and within the private and public spaces, but also defines the possible roles and choices available. Those who step outside the ideal are either "pilloried in the public sphere or confined to silence in the private sphere" (CONRAD, 2004, p. 14). A growing tendency of individuals to hide their idiosyncrasies and keep their subjectivities confined to the private sphere was not the only long term effects of such regulatory ideology, as it also produced suspicion and social anxieties within the family cell regarding what was beyond its safe confines – that is, that which was seen as "external", the "other".

For Conrad, the anxieties and suspicion projected beyond the family unit may have contributed to producing a collective mistrust regarding outside influences and feeded into other political or social sectarian divisions (2004, p. 6). An ideological system similar to that developed inside the family unit for protecting itself from external influences can be observed in other social and political discourses in Ireland, especially at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century. Conrad, for example, discusses how nationalist discourses employed a rhetoric in which Ireland, sometimes personified as a woman and other times as a "home", needed to be saved by her devoted children from foreign threats and the dangers of those who are not from "home", the outsiders from other nations

(2004, p. 11). This particular example of nationalist symbolism constructs Ireland as the ideal Lady of the House, trying to keep it safe and taking care of her sons while also constructing the threat to both family and nation as that which is external and foreign (CONRAD, 2004, p. 11). This example of nationalist discourse uses home as a metaphor for the nation and employs the fears and anxieties regarding external influences that have developed within the family cell to exemplify the difficulties and threats faced by the nation. The framing of such nationalist discourses within the discourse of family made it more easily recognizable, understood, and relatable to those who have already been living under such configuration for generations. The national identity proposed by this particular form of nationalist symbolism capitalizes on the allegiance of family members to family itself, and the differences and opposition of these members to the external "others".

This is particularly important considering how homosexuality – just like any other form of non-heterosexual affection and desire – was often considered a threat to the family cell and the appropriate system of social affections and allegiances established throughout the centuries. It is not surprising to find, then, nationalist discourses with a tendency to exclude or deny the homosexual (and other non-heterosexual) affections and subjectivities from their narratives, especially considering how "family" became the symbolic framework upon which they were constructing and representing nation. Conrad remarks that both Ulster Nationalism and Irish republicanism, until very recently, excluded quite explicitly homosexuality from their discourses of nation and narratives of national identity (2004, p. 22). The range of affections, desires and subjectivities generally contained within what is generically referred as homosexuality cannot be confined within the the borders of what defines family, nation, or the ideology of masculinity upon which they are based. Homosexuality, not unlike gender for that matter, poses a threat to such clear-cut categories and their primacy as central pillars of social organization and regulation.

Conrad argues that homosexuality is often perceived quite literally as a threat to the notion that the heterosexual childbearing family cell is the only "natural and fundamental" social unit possible (CONRAD, 2004, p. 22), despite the fact that such configuration is but a social construct built through a series of political and ideological mechanisms over the centuries. Nonetheless, as a threat to both the family cell and to the nationalist notions of masculinity, homosexuality was either excluded, or its existence among the Irish people entirely denied in nationalist discourses between late 19th and early 20th century. In most

cases in which homosexuality does appear in nationalist discourses, “it does so as a sign of foreign corruption and disintegration” of the nation and its values, and as something that is not natural to the nation; the resulting of external influences threatening the national truth (2004, p. 22). Once again, such discourses capitalize on the self-protective notion of the family cell that all threats to it can only be external or foreign.

The connection highlighted by Conrad between the family cell and nationalist discourses also point to the role of marriage as a tool of social control and organization; by maintaining the family cell as the fundamental social unit of the nation, the state guarantees control over who will be allowed as part of the nation by regulating marriage and who will have access to family formation. Marriage is arguably the single most important institution to determine which unions and social bonds can be legally recognized as families – thus receiving protection from the State – and which unions and bonds cannot. Not constituting a traditional nuclear family as it is envisioned, prescribed, and sanctioned by the State could potentially mean, in some cases, losing access to legal/social protections, citizenship rights, as well as being labelled an illegitimate citizen. Marriage, in some cases, has even the power to grant individuals full citizenship and civil rights, and as such, has complex legal implications in society, especially as it can be used to either grant or deny individuals access to certain rights that come with the status of citizen. Any attempt to change society’s view on what constitutes family entails changing legislation on which citizens are allowed to marry; and changing who is allowed to marry, in turn, entails changing society’s understanding of who can constitute family. This intricate relationship between marriage legislation and family configuration is further explored in Chapter 4, in which the Irish marriage referendum of 2015, its context, as well as its implications for society is brought to the fore of the discussion.

Moreover, the institutionalized and often traditional view of the State regarding family and marriage has been constantly shaken by the lives and realities of queer individuals who, at least in more recent years, have sought more diverse and ever inclusive ways of forming kinship and family. The concepts of “chosen family”, or “family of choice” are, perhaps, one of the most relevant social contributions of LGBTQI+ individuals to society when it comes to our contemporary thinking of family and kinship bonds. Unfortunately, the reasons why any individual would ever feel forced to constitute such alternative family systems, especially when this is forced upon them, also reveal to us some of the failures of our own societies. The chosen family has been a commonly recognized family system in the queer community (LGBTQI+ people), but has also been observed to form among other

groups individuals in society, such as war veterans, people living in situations of homelessness, and people who, for any number of reasons, can no longer count on their biological parents and relatives for care or support. In “Conventional and Cutting Edge: Definitions of Family in LGBT Communities” (2018), Hull and Ortyl report on a study in which lesbians, gays, bissexual, and transgender people were asked how they would “define” family and whom they consider to constitute their current family. The study demonstrates that

> The concept of chosen family continues to resonate in how LGBT people define family in the abstract. A large majority of respondents also included chosen family members in defining their own current families, and chosen family members often figured more prominently in the lives of respondents than biolegal relatives. Despite the rapidly changing context for LGBT people in society, these findings reaffirm the findings of older studies about the importance of chosen families in the lives of LGBT people. (HULL, K. E.; ORTYL, T. A, 2018, p. 43)

While it was not unusual for participants to employ the terms “chosen family” or “family of choice” when trying to define their current family – which points to the status of the term as a “wide currency in LGBT communities” – the study also shows that the concept of chosen family is not employed in opposition, or even as an alternative, to the biological and/or legal family, but rather, it demonstrates that the chosen family and its members co-exist with the biolegal family in the lives of the participants (HULL, K. E.; ORTYL, T. A, 2018, p. 38). However, the findings of the study do suggest that different life experiences tend to translate into different “propensities” to constitute a chosen family, i.e. to constitute a system of kinship bonds beyond those of the biolegal family or the family origin. For example, the study shows that transgender people, in particular, as well as single LGBTQ individuals, are more likely to include chosen family as their current family, while older LGBT people, especially those who are parents already, and transgender/genderqueer individuals in particular, are less likely to include members of their family of origin in what is often defined by them as their “current” family (HULL, K. E.; ORTYL, T. A, 2018, p. 40-41).

The findings of Hull and Ortyl seem to resonate the position of *Efniks - Color Bloq*; an online magazine by a collective of Queer and Trans People of Color. In the article “The Queer Innovation of a Family Based on Choice and Necessity”, the authors highlight that Chosen Family is the very foundation of the shared history of queer and trans people of color – QTPoC – in the USA. Black and Latin queer and trans people have “carved out safe spaces

for themselves to exist and care for one another through the HIV epidemic, persistent violence, abandonment, and disenfranchisement", especially in the 1970s and the 1980s as a response to the rejection of QTPoC by the State, by general heterosexual society, and by the white queer community as well. This has lead, at least in Harlem, USA, to the development of the ball culture and the organization of the community of QTPoC in different "Houses", which often had a trans woman of colour as the matriarch responsible for taking care of their adopted children and for providing them with nurturing, with love, support, and the necessary security against a homophobic and transphobic society. The position of QTPoC, as expressed in the article, seems to reinforce Hull and Ortyl findings that "different life experiences may translate into different propensities to 'do' chosen family" and that "transgender/genderqueer" people tend to have different approaches towards chosen family and family of origins when compared to cisgender participants.

Finally, Hull and Ortyl also show that, when responding about family, participants drew very heavily on the idea of a diverse family, constructed by individuals with at least some level individual choice; and while biological parents and consanguine relatives are not excluded from it, they are not always necessarily part of what participants consider as their current family (2018, p. 35). To some extent, this is explained by the fact that most participants drew heavily on the functional characteristics of family, which means that they were almost always more concerned with what families do or with the functions they perform for family members than with more structural characteristics. For most of the participants, family is defined by the people who love you and who are loved by you, those who support you and who can count on you for support, and those you feel very close to or feel a deep affinity for (HULL, K. E.; ORTYL, T. A, 2018, p. 35-36). In other words, "respondents placed more importance on the substance of how a family functions (characteristics such as love, commitment, and care) than on trying to identify what types of relationships specifically count as family" (HULL, K. E.; ORTYL, T. A, 2018, p. 43). According to the authors, this is evidence that LGBT people continue to pioneer new ways of "doing" family and it further supports previous studies which point to LGBT conceptions of family as "leading edge of a broader cultural shift" (HULL, K. E.; ORTYL, T. A, 2018, p. 43). The authors also emphasise their hope that by studying how queer individuals define family and construct inclusive and diverse systems of family configuration, society as a whole will be able to evolve its views on family.

> Ideally, laws and regulations would be crafted and implemented in ways that are sensitive to departures from narrower and more traditional definitions of family

> that do not capture the lived experience or meaning of family across all populations. This kind of informed sensitivity to diverse family forms might, for example, lead policymakers to create more options for people to designate non-biolegal family as "next of kin" for certain purposes. (HULL, K. E.; ORTYL, T. A, 2018, p. 42)

This is not to say, of course, that traditional configurations of family will lose their value or their legitimacy. Such family systems will probably always persist as legitimate options available in society. However, it might be important to consider the ways in which our laws could include, in equal terms and with the same level of access to legal rights, families which are not necessarily formed by and/or around heterosexual unions and bonds of marriage and cosanguinity.

Although the concept of the chosen family has been central to the development of the ball culture of the drag houses in the United States during the 70s and 80s, something which has received particular attention in the entertainment industry in recent times thanks to productions such as *Paris is Burning* (1990) and the TV show *Pose* (2018), the chosen family system is neither restricted to the LGBTQI+ community in the USA nor to late 20th century. Queer individuals who have been cast out of their biological families for expressing affections and subjectivities that deviate from the prescribed norms often found themselves needing and relying on other queer individuals in order to feel accepted and to create a network of affective bonds and mutual support. In fact, Jamie O'Neill's *At Swim, Two Boys* (2001) has, at its very core, the concept of the "nation of the heart", which underlies the affective development of the characters. The idea of the "nation of the heart" in is not so different from late 20th-century concept of the chosen family, so familiar among the queer individuals around the world. Chapter 3 further explores *At Swim, Two Boys* and and how the concept of the "nation of the heart" is constructed as a force that drives the characters forward and informs their vision on family and queer affectivity.

The narrative of *At Swim, Two Boys* (2001) challenges the primacy of the heterosexual nuclear family for the development of the queer character at the center of a story which takes place in a 1915 and 1916 Ireland. Jamie O'Neill manages to construct and represent an early 20th century version of a queer chosen family in a pre-independence Ireland. In the novel, the protagonists find themselves constructing a network of affective bonds and mutual support that provided them with both the security and the socio-emocional environment they need to develop their subjectivities and to feel protected against the institutional forces attempting to regulate and control their political and emotional

allegiances. The novel's greatest accomplishment is, perhaps, being able to narratively construct and develop the characters queer subjectivities in a somewhat symbiotic – even if sometimes controversial – relationship with the Irish nationalism and the other prevailing ideologies circulating Irish society from 1915 up until the 1916 Easter Rising and the War of Independence that followed soon afterwards; something that will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

3 NATION OF THE HEART AND FAMILY IN *AT SWIM, TWO BOYS*

At Swim, Two Boys is set in County Dublin, Ireland, in the years of 1915 and 1916. Most of the narrative takes place in the south, around Glasthule and Sandycove, and at least a couple of scenes in the novel takes place in Kingstown, which is nowadays known as Dún Laoghaire. In a corner house in Glasthule road that has been partially turned into a small shop for people's everyday needs – a cramped, half-a-shop, half-a-house place – Jim Mack lives with his father and owner of the shop, Mr Mack, and with his aunt Sawney. Both in the house and in the shop, the absence of Mr Mack's late wife, Jim's mother, is still as deeply felt as the absence of Jim's brother, Gordie, who has left to join the United Kingdom army in the Great War. Not far from the shop, across from the Glasthule church, stands the orange brick walls of the Presentation College Glasthule where Jim studies. The college is also the place in which both Jim and Doyler Doyle – Jim's childhood friend – have joined the college band to play the flute under the watchful eyes of Brother Polycarp and Father O'Toiler, both members of the catholic congregation of the presentation brothers in Ireland.

Doyler, who was Jim's childhood friend, left Kingstown for almost 4 years to live with some of his relatives. At the beginning of the novel Doyler has just recently returned to town to start working as a dung collector and help his family. The boy lives with his family in The Banks, a slum-like area close to Glasthule road which sits in abysmal contrast with the area of Sandycove beach, a rich area mostly populated by the big houses of the Anglo-Irish families. It is in Sandycove – in the Ballygihen mansion – that the aristocratic Irish nationalist Eveline MacMurrough lives with her nephew, Anthony MacMurrough, who has only recently moved in with his aunt after going through a traumatic experience while living in England. By the seawall in Sandycove beach, almost halfway between Ballygihen mansion and Martello tower, is the Forty Foot – one of Dublin's favourite bathing places, traditionally used by gentlemen in the first half of the twentieth century. With a view to both the Dalkey and the Muglins Islands, the Forty Foot is the gravitational centre of the narrative in *At swim, two Boys* – the place in which Jim, Doyler, and Anthony will spend time together and where they will, eventually, develop their intricate relationships. The great harbour of Kingstown – populated with a diversity of Irish fishermen, harbour workers, soldiers of the British army, and passers-by – completes the main set of scenarios in which the interplay of nationality and sexuality of the protagonists takes place and is explored throughout the novel.

These places represent spaces in which the characters are confronted by and exposed to what Patrick Mullen, in his *The Poor Bugger's Tool,* terms the Institutions of Moral Abstraction – the forces of the Church, the Colonial State, of the Family, Nation, etc. Throughout the novel, the forces of these institutions will "seek to interpolate the allegiances and desires of the various characters" (MULLEN, 2012, p. 151), and some of the places in which the narrative takes place are closely linked to certain institutional forces at play. Catholicism, colonial state, and bourgeois ideologies, for example, are the norms governing Mr Mack's household and shop. Rosaries, images of the sacred heart of Jesus and of the virgin Mary fill up the walls and sit on top of bedside tables and on the shelves of the family shop. Theses objects and images share the house's limited visual space with Mr Mack's old military medals – from his time with the "Old Toughs" (Royal Bombay Fusiliers and Royal Dublin Fusiliers), and with the images of Mr Mack's personal heroes: King George V of England and Redvers Henry Buller. It is in such an environment that Jim grows up listening to his father's heroically idealised narratives of war and of the army. Mr Mack's faith in the British colonial forces is parallel to his faith that the family shop is the key to bringing them to a better economical state and to a higher social status. Understanding the effects of the institutional forces on the characters is imperative for the notion of the "Nation of the Heart" and how it develops in the novel – especially since it often appears as both a form of resistance and as an alternative to the prescribed norms and morals of the institutions of moral abstraction in their lives.

Growing up without his mother who died giving birth to him, Jim was raised by his father, his older brother Gordie, and his Aunt Sawney. Jim's formal education, in turn, is almost entirely entrusted to the Brothers of the Glasthule Presentation College, where he also attends daily devotions under the supervision of one of his teachers, Brother Polycarp. Most of Jim's education revolves around Classical education and Catholic doctrine, which includes Latin language, classical works such as Virgil and St Augustine of Hippo, as well as religious sermons. Brother Polycarp's sermons, his British-centric views on education and knowledge, and his loathing for Erse language and culture only strengthens the presence of the religious and colonial institutional ideologies in Jim's life. As Mullen suggests in his book, these Institutions of Moral Abstraction oppose not only politicised materialism – that is, socialism – embodied in the novel in the figure of Jim's friend and lover, Doyler Doyle, but also any form of organized affection or queer sentiment (MULLEN, 2012, p. 151). And although both Brother Polycarp and Jim's father – the major figures of authority in Jim's life – are themselves subjected to the morals and values of these institutions themselves, they also act

as agents attempting to regulate other people's behaviours according to these institutions through surveillance, control, and sometimes, through physical force.

3.1 The touch that violates and the touch that heals

The use of intimidation and physical force in order to impose the morals and values of institutional powers can be exemplified by one of the arguments Jim has with his father. Mr Mack is concerned with Jim's friendship with Doyle because the nationalist and socialist views of the latter represented a direct opposition to some of the core ideologies Mr Mack subscribes to, such as his loyalty to the British colonial powers and faith in the bourgeois middle-class idea of social ascension through money accumulation. Mr Mack also loses his temper because he finds out that Brother Polycarp plans for Jim to become a Brother while Mr Mack intends for Jim to take over the shop eventually. The situation escalates to the point in which Mr Mack threatens to use physical violence against Jim.

> [Jim] 'Wasn't it you told me keep in with the brothers?'
>
> [Mr Mack] 'This is lip only. Any more of this and I'll settle you hash for you'. He was half-rising in his seat. He had his arm held up and it shaking, the way he felt the threat of it himself. He brought his hands down to his belt where his fingers pulled at the leather. 'I'll hit you such a clatter, young man, you won't know 'tis Monday or doomsday.' (O'NEILL, 2001 , p. 134)

The use of physical force by Mr Mack, however, is not driven by a tyrannical personality. Mullen argues that such an aggression is a response to the position Mr Mack himself occupies as a father, Catholic, and petit bourgeois shopkeeper trying to re-establish the order and norms in his house according to the institutional ideologies that regulate his own life and ideologies (2012, p. 164). When Mr Mack sees such order and normality threatened by external ideologies – ideologies foreign to those reigning in his household – he attempts to re-establish control through physical and violent subjugation of his own son; not unlike how he himself has learned to follow the rules and maintain order during his time in the British army.

Jim's father is often portrayed as an affectionate person. He thinks about his late wife with both sadness and passion and he constantly worries about Jim's future and about Gordie, his older son who was sent to fight in the Great War. Mr Mack's ambivalent feelings regarding his two sons result from the incompatibility between his desire to follow the norms and the expectations placed upon him by the institutional ideologies he subscribes to and his actual feelings regarding his sons. Although he has encouraged Gordie to enlist in the army due to the status he believed this would bring to the boy and their family, Mr Mack also

worries about Gordie's safety while fighting in the Great War to such a point that he eventually regrets encouraging his son to enlist. Similarly, Mr Mack is happy, at first, about Jim reconnecting with his old childhood friend, Doyler, especially once he recognizes the positive effects their friendship has on Jim. Nonetheless, he sometimes attempts to prevent Jim from spending time with Doyler for fear that the boy could either become a bad influence for Jim or threaten the social status of their family. Mr Mack's concerns are driven not only by Doyler's sympathetic views on socialism, which directly threatens all of the ideologies he believes in, but also by the Doyler's low social status and the fact that their relationship does not seem to conform to the socially approved norms of friendship between young men, especially among those of the "higher social classes", which Mr Mack wishes his son becomes a part of by spending time with the Brothers and by making friends with the other boys at school.

The threats and other forms of violence that Jim receives from his father, especially when the boy expresses ideas, aspirations or wishes that would differ from the expectations that Mr Mack projected for him and his life, were not the only forms of violence from authority figures that Jim had to deal with. Another example of the violence Jim faces from other figures of authority in his life takes place with Brother Polycarp during his devotions after school. Polycarp has the habit of touching Jim's body during some of the prayers in the latin language he forces the boy to repeat. When Polycarp learns about Jim and Doyler becoming closer, he attempts to manipulate Jim's feelings for Doyler by resorting to discourses of sin and by making Jim feel guilty about liking to spend time in Doyler's company. While forcing the boy to close his eyes and kneel, Polycarp touches Jim's chest and neck and – in a fit of anger – grabs Jim by "the windpipe, along his throat, pressuring his apple, which made Jim gulp and swallow. The physicality of that reflex surprised [Jim] from abstraction" (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 138). Alone in the chapel room with Polycarp, Jim's only form of agency and resistance against Polycarp's authority over him – and the recurrent physical, psychological, and emotional abuses therein incurred – is a form of imaginative dissociation. Through the abstraction of his thoughts, Jim's imagination takes him into distant places and different activities – especially swimming in the sea – and away from what he felt in his body. The physicality of Polycarp's violent act, his word games, as well as the preaching about shame and sin represent the Brother's attempt to organize and regulate Jim's language, his ideas, and above all, his affection and desires.

> The hand held now in its span the round of its neck.
> 'Do you understand solicitation?'

> ‘I think I do’
> ‘Would you make solicitation to another boy?’
> ‘No, Brother.’
> ‘Would you accept solicitation was it made to you?’
> ‘Brother, you hand is hurting.’ (O’NEILL, 2001, p. 138)

Soon after that, Doyler interrupts the session with the excuse that he was looking for Jim. He was, in fact, aware of what was going on and decided to put himself at risk of reprisals from the authority of the Church to prevent the Brother from continuing with his abusive behaviour in front of a witness. It becomes clear, later on, that Brother Polycarp is able to both recognize and understand the feelings, desires and the confusion Jim feels for Doyler because Polycarp himself seems to have experienced similar feelings in the past. However, just as Polycarp learned to repress and control such feelings and desires in order to pursue a clerical life, he hopes to regulate and control Jim’s attitudes and emotions in accordance with the Catholic and Colonial ideologies that he has subjected himself to. Through both discourse and physical violence he attempts to impose his own will over Jim’ms, “through coercion and domination”, hoping “to produce an entire worldview that [both] Jim and the novel reject” (MULLEN, 2012, p. 174-175), and to prevent Jim from straying from the path of following a clerical life, which Polycap himself has projected over the boy.

Jim needs to deal with the oppressive presence of the institutions of moral abstraction even when he is alone at home. Late at night, when he feels the urge to masturbate, his thoughts eventually lead him to think about old scary stories that his brother used to tell him. Eventually, he starts struggling with bad memories related to Brother Polycarp and fights to keep them away from his mind. He closes his eyes in order to hide his mind from Jesus, King George, and Sir Redvers Buller – who seemed to gaze at him at all times from their portraits on the wall – so that he could have some moments of privacy at least inside his own mind. As a last resource to keep himself safe from the prying eyes of the figures surrounding him, Jim again resorts to imagining himself in a different place.

> He shut[s] his eyes from the gaze of Our Lord and the reddening gaze of King George and Sir Redvers Bullers, and he crossed out the image of Brother Polycarp’s face and squeezed the mimosa from his mind, and he wondered what would it be like to swim in the sea off the Forty Foot, while his shirt lifted and the sheet began to move and the smell came up of the glue-pot. Old Horny. (O’NEILL, 2001, p. 88-89)

This almost constant sense of surveillance that Jim feels results comes from a life-long internalisation of the institutionalised norms and morals enforced over him, by his father

at home, and by the brothers at church and at school – all of which feed the psycho-emotional mechanisms of shame regarding his own feelings and sexual desires. In "Race/Sex/Shame: The Queer Nationalism of *At Swim, Two Boys"*, Joseph Valente argues that "shame registers in psychic, sensory, and even physiological ways a profound internalisation of given social norms by subjects who find themselves in default of them" (2005, p. 75); or in the words of Helen Lynd "Guilt involves a feeling of wrongdoing; shame involves a feeling of inferiority." (LYND apud VALENTE, 2005, p. 74). As Jim's feelings and desires clash against the norms and morals he has internalized, he attempts to avoid the psycho-emotional burden of the shame at play within himself by resorting to the only defense mechanism he has at his disposal: displacing his mind and thoughts out of his body and towards the idea of swimming at the sea. The dissociation of body/feelings from his mind/thoughts during these moments of privacy and self pleasure are not different from the ones he experiences during Brother Polycarp's abusive touching during Jim's daily devotions. The boy has never learned to process his feelings and desires, or how to deal with his own body and sexuality in any other way, and has been exposed to acts that incurred both guilt and a sense of shame.

> Guilt and shame can overlap, to be sure, particularly when both issue from an ethical offense. But even then guilt reacts to the nature and consequences of the infraction, shame to the nature of the self revealed thereby, to how the offense redounds upon and belittles that self. Conversely, shame can arise from feelings of diminished worth or agency in the absence of any sense of culpability whatever. To return to the Foucaultian model: guilt is to the law, the standard for regulating social practice, as shame is to the norm, the standard for evaluating social being, collective as well as individual. (VALENTE, 2005, p. 75)

This sense of surveillance gradually changes as Jim starts taking swimming lessons with Doyler at Sandycove beach – which leads them to promise each other to swim together to the Muglins Island on Easter Sunday the following year, unaware that the Irish Easter Rising would begin precisely on that day. There, by the sea, Jim feels free from the forces attempting to control his feelings and his every thought – a place in which the surveilling eyes of Jesus, King George, Sir Redvers Bullers, Brother Polycarp, and of his father were nowhere near him. As Jim starts to spend more time in the company of his childhood friend at the beach, he also manages to process the events that were happening around him. He reflects on the way his father threatened to use violence against him and – in the relative safety the sea offers him as the place he imagines himself when he needs comfort – he reaches the conclusion that "what brutality he [Mr. Mack] had in him, he could not purpose. Impulse alone gave it vent" (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 144). The boy feels immediately proud of the way he managed to understand the situation between him and his father and of the way he had

managed to form the thought itself in his head, and associates it to the company, protection and support Doyler offered him.

Mullen suggests that the coordination in Jim's words emerges – as it does in previous encounters with his father –

> as both elegant in a literary way and as critical of prevailing ideological values[…] The increased coordination of literary elegance on Jim's part, and the increased eloquence of the queer characters on the subject of their desires and political situation, correspond to a more deeply philosophical and sharply rational understanding of the world around them (MULLEN, 2012, p. 172).

However, Jim is still only capable of processing the deepest and more troublesome situation he faces with his father or at school/church when he is either in the company of Doyler or Anthony, which suggests that his understanding and eloquence does not come solely from a philosophical and rational understanding of his situation. Jim develops his eloquence and philosophical perspective because of the emotionally positive environment he encounters when he is in the company of Doyler or Anthony; precisely because they neither offered him any judgement regarding his feelings nor attempted to control his behaviour, his desires or his wishes. The boy finds not only an emotional environment in which he is able to question things around him and think for himself without reprisals, but he also learns in practice that less oppressive and less violent configurations of social relationships and emotional bonding are not only possible, but are also better and emotionally liberating. The development of the queer emotional relationship between himself, Doyler, and Anthony serves as a counter-model for the relationships marked by surveillance, control, oppression and physical abuse that his father and Polycarp have established with him.

While the bond of trust, acceptance, affection and companionship the characters develop with one another is extremely important for them to cope with their traumas and resist oppression from institutional forces, the very physicality of their relationship becomes equally important for Jim and marks the benefits that the exploration of sexuality, desire, and physical pleasure has on the psycho-emotional development of the 16 year old. During one of their conversations by the sea, Doyler touches Jim's neck gently, which triggers a cascade of feelings and sensations on him:

> "Gently … though still the touch shot through Jim's clothes, through his skin, even. It was this way whenever their bodies met, if limping he brushed against him or laughing he squeezed his arm. The touch charged through like a sputtering tram-wire until it wasn't Doyler he felt but what Doyler touched, which was himself.

> This is my shoulder, this is my leg. And he did not think he had felt himself before, other than in pain or in sin." (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 97)

Polycarp's physical touching during Jim's devotion caused the boy's mind to wander away from the physicality of his body – a defense mechanism that numbed his own senses and denied both the unwanted, unrequired touch and the shame that came with it. When any of Jim's behaviours or ideas are disapproved of by his father and answered with violence, Jim also feels his body in pain and/or guilt. Doyler's touch, on the contrary, causes Jim to recover his bodily perception and brings his mind back to the physicality of his experience. It is precisely because of that difference, and the positive response resulting from Doyler's and, later on, from Anthony's touch, that Jim is able to reconnect with his own body, with his own feelings, and his own sense of self. Through the development of his relationship with them he learns which types of physical contacts are pleasant and welcomed, and which ones are violating; which bonds allow him to feel better about himself, and which ones increase his sense of unworthiness and shame.

A few months after that, due to an incident during a party in Anthony's mansion, Doyler decides to leave town for a few months and Jim stops practicing his swimming. Without the safety and the solace of Doyler, especially against the sources of oppression, violence, and shame in his life, Jim starts feeling anxious, stressed, and eventually falls ill. During a feverish delirium during a school activity on a rainy day, Jim sees what seems to be the ghost of a recently deceased Polycarp, and faints right in front of it. While resting in bed at home, Jim receives the visit of Anthony, who is worrying about how Jim is doing. This marks an important transition in the novel in which Jim and Anthony, both of Doyler's previous lovers, start getting close to each other in order to fill in each other's lives the void left by Doyler's absence.

Jim starts practicing swimming once again, now receiving lessons from Anthony himself, who previously enjoyed swimming with Doyler as much as Jim did. Anthony, being almost a decade older than the two sixteen year-old teenagers, starts to feel deeply touched and inspired by the kind of love that Jim and Doyler are developing for, and sharing with, each other. This inspires him to help the teenagers succeed in their plan to swim to the Muglins island, on the Easter Sunday next year, and materialize their love for one another by having sex with each other for the first time in the island. As the swimming lessons continued, Anthony gradually realized that the kind of love that Jim felt for Doyler was one that he never had the opportunity to experience – it was young love. Jim was discovering his sexuality, his feelings, and affections for the first time at the same time that he was experiencing love also

for the first time. This realization caused Anthony to treat the love between the two teenagers as something rare, sacred, and worth protecting.

During their swimming lessons, Anthony's hands in Jim's stomach offered him the support he needed for practicing his swimming thrusts. He rested his hand on Jim's lower back and buttocks, which was necessary for helping Jim regain his back, hips and knee posture when he seemed to start losing his bodily perception. Anthony's caring touch, albeit erotic, helps bringing Jim's mind – very used to wandering away from the physicality of his body – back to sensing himself again: his muscles, limbs, and his perception of his body. During the lessons, Jim realizes he "never knew. [he] never thought it could be like this. It's the most wonderful thing" (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 427). Physical touch, therefore, appears in the novel ambivalently. It represents, at times, violence, abuse and oppression experienced by one (or more) of the characters; an attempt to control, regulate, and as Mullen suggests, "to interpolate the allegiances and desires of the various characters" (2012, p. 151). However, touching gradually develops, in the novel, to represent mutual support, understanding, and a (re)connection; not only between Jim and his own body but also between him, Doyler and Anthony.

3.2 Trauma and emotional reconnection

Despite the palpable amount of eroticism among Jim and Anthony, as they both feel aroused by each other, the two of them refrain from adopting attitudes that could either lead to or suggest the sexual act – even on the few situations in which they are able to openly talk about sex (and sexuality). To a great extent, the love that both Anthony and Jim share for Doyler is also responsible for their hesitation. Anthony acknowledges he would definitely have reasons to desire Jim, sexually. In fact, the mentor-pupil dynamic of their relationship mirrors that of the ancient Greeks and their naturalization of the sex between younger and older men. With Anthony being a scholar of classic literature, Greek history, literature, and culture were among Anthony's main references for love between men. A relationship with Jim would not only substitute the relationship that Anthony had with Doyler, but would also mirror the love between Alfred Douglas and Oscar Wilde – which serves as an archetypical prototype for Anthony in the novel. However, one of Anthony's main concerns in the novel is to help Jim – and Doyler, in turn – to develop their sexualities in a healthier and safer way; something that Anthony was rarely able to experience in his own life.

The relationship that Anthony had developed with Doyler before the teenager decided to leave town mirrors that of Anthony and Scrotes, his former and now deceased lover. In his relationship with the Doyler, however, Anthony was assuming the role of the more experienced partner – the role that previously belonged to Scrotes in Anthony's previous relationship. For Anthony, therefore, the relationship between Jim and Doyler represents something that he has never been able to experience. Both Jim and Doyler know what sex is and. Despite his young age, Doyler had already experienced sex with men, including with Anthony. The relationship between Doyler and Jim is unique to the extent that both of them have similar ages, they are transitioning from an age in which they felt alienated from any discussion related to sexuality or any topics associated to ti, to an age in which they were able to develop their sexuality together and to experience the discovery of mutual infatuation and love first time. This queer teenage experience of discovery of sexuality and consummation of mutual love is precisely the experience that Anthony has never had – at least not until much later in his life, when he went to college and met Scrotes.

In fact, experiencing mutual love and the discovery of sexuality with someone else of the same age – as it was happening with Jim and Doyler – was a rarely possible experience, not at all something that queer teenagers had the opportunity to experience over the course of the 20th century, much less In Ireland at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, when Anthony was a teenager. Thus, Anthony's determination to help Jim live the experience which Anthony himself was never able to have is probably the source of Anthony's self-restraint regarding his infatuation for Jim. Moreover, Anthony appears to see Jim as a younger version of himself, and is driven by an urge to offer guidance and support to the teenager, which was also something he was never able to experience until he met Scrotes later in his life. Jim, on the other hand, sees Anthony not only as an inspiration but also as a representation of the person Jim could, and in fact would, love to become in the future, especially in regards to their common interests. In that sense, Jim gets fascinated by everything Anthony has to offer him in terms of scholarly knowledge, the life experiences of an older queer man, platonic yet eroticised affection, and the feelings of security and acceptance.

Anthony MacMurrough, in turn, gradually learns how to reconnect with others and with his feelings because of the bond he establishes with both Jim and Doyler. A bond that allows him to heal from the trauma he experienced while living in England. Both Anthony and his former lover, Scrotes, had been charged for gross indecency in England and were sentenced to two years of hard labour in Wandsworth Gaol – an almost direct reference, of

course, to what happened to Oscar Wilde, who is often mentioned by characters in the novel as well. While in prison, Anthony witnessed his lover, Scrotes, slowly dying from their forced heavy labour and the inhuman conditions. The death of his lover deeply hindered Anthony's ability to emotionally connect to others thereafter. Once his time in prison was over, Anthony decided to go back to Ireland to live with his aunt, Eveline MacMurrough, which leads him to meet and, eventually, get involved with the practical, sceptical, and hardworking teenager boy, Doyler. At the beginning, the relationship between Anthony and Doyler is "equal parts mercenary and tutelary" (VALENTE, 2005, p. 61). Anthony spends time with Doyler in the Forty Foot, gives him free lessons on the Irish flute, and encourages Doyler to follow his passion for the Irish language. Although Anthony genuinely likes Doyler, he also feels incapable of emotionally connecting with anyone again, which is both a consequence of his previous trauma and an attempt to protect himself from getting hurt if he lost another loved one. In his attempt of keeping the relationship with Doyler in a practical and somewhat emotionally detached manner, Anthony decides to offer Doyler money after one of their sexual encounters.

Doyler, on the other hand, due to his low economic status and characteristic worn out clothes, faces constant exposure to ridicule not only by other boys at school but also by people in town. Doyler's shame also stems from a multitude of other sources, for example, the fact that Doyler limps as a result from an injury in his leg. He often tells other people that the injury was caused by police officers who had hurt him during a lock out of the Irish workers he participated. The truth, however, is that it was actually his father, Mr Doyle, who got home drunk and permanently injured Doyler's leg while beating the young boy. While morally and physically unable to direct his anger and resentment at his father, who is a veteran of the British army despite having wasted their family's finances with alcohol, Doyler directs that resentment towards other figures of authority, such as police officers and the British army. Moreover, Doyler's shame also results from the conflict between his personal feelings and his material needs. He resents the subjection of the Irish poor to the British colonial forces and to the rich and powerful but, at the same time, he finds himself obliged to sell his time and labour to the Anglo-Irish aristocratic families and the bourgeois class in town in order to survive and help support his mother and siblings. He associates this ambiguous relationship, quite understandably, with a form of prostitution, and when Anthony – driven by a hypocritical and almost narcissistic feelings of charity – offers Doyler money

after they have sex, the boy accepts out of need even if it serves only to increase Doyler's shame and the feeling that his life resembles a form of prostitution. Doyler eventually expresses this by confronting Anthony about paying him for sex and buying Doyler nice new clothes:

> 'How much will you pay me so?'
> Little toe rag. 'Must we bring that up?'
> 'You know that suit, MacMurrough, I sold that suit.'
> 'My dear, it was yours to do as you pleased. I'm glad you sold it. I never liked it.'
> 'Why'd you buy it me so?'
> 'I thought it made you happy. You surely knew I was fond of you.'
> '[...]You'd pay Jim so, would you?'
> '[...]I used see them in Dublin, MacMurrough, the girls in their glad-necks. Up and down the street they'd go. I wanted to burn that suit. I knew what that suit made of me. But I needed the brass, so I sold it instead." (O'NEILL, 2001 , p. 596).

In an attempt to make peace with Doyler again, Anthony acknowledges to Doyler "whatever passed between us, you must understand it was only me paying you. It made something of me, not of you. You never sold anything" (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 597). Thus, Doyler's relationship with Anthony, which starts partially "mercenary" and gradually develops "tutelary" features, eventually falls down during an incident in a party held at the Ballygihen mansion in which Doyler's trust in Anthony is deeply shaken.

Throughout the first half of the novel – in which Doyler maintained complex relationships with both Anthony and Jim – Anthony consistently encourages Doyler to be himself and stand up for what he believes in. For example, Anthony supports Doyler in wearing with "pride" the badge of the ICA that the boy used to hide on the inside of his clothes. Anthony announces, in a playful tone, "I hereby grant you the freedom of my garden to wear your badge with pride. Then he kissed him [Doyler]" (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 296). For Doyler, that was "not any badge. [it was] The Red Hand of Liberty, emblem of the Citizen Army. Sword and shield of the working man, the red-flag socialists of Liberty Hall" (p. 139). After the speech delivered by Patrick Pearse during the party at the MacMurrough's mansion, Doyler is caught by Father O'Toiler while wearing the socialist symbol, which enrages O'Toiler into shouting "no god, no hell, no heaven, the black devil of socialism, hoof and horn, is among us" (p. 331). After Doyler is beaten down by two other boys – in the presence of the Father and with his blessing – the badge is ripped from his shirt, tearing it and exposing his chest and nipples to the rest of the people at the party. Anthony attempts to intervene in favour of Doyler but is frustrated by O'Toiler's insinuation regarding his past conduct. Anthony feels paralysed with "his head lowered in shame" (p. 332).

> ‘Mister MacMurrough your aunt awaits you. I advise you speak with her immediately lest something be said you may after regret.’
> ‘Nevertheless, I really must protest—’
> ‘Then you will protest to your aunt who has vouchsafed your good conduct.’ His two eyes cocked independently. ‘I believe I need say no more.’
> ‘MacMurrough felt a crumple inside. He saw the friend on his feet, only father restraining him. He saw the turned faces in the benches. The priest cracked his smile.’ (O’NEIL, 2001, p. 331)

This insinuation triggers Anthony’s shame regarding his conviction for gross indecency in England and his fear that people in Kingstown could learn about it, or that he could do something that would send him back there. He is forced to submit to the institutions of moral abstraction, acting through Father O’Toiler, and is unable to help his friend and lover. Once again, he witnesses powerlessly someone he loves exposed, beaten down, and driven away. After the incident, Anthony withdraws from his activities as the boys’ bandmaster and Doyler leaves Glasthule to join the Irish Citizen Army in Dublin. Anthony and Jim find no alternative to deal with their feeling of shame and the oppression they experience other than spending time together, each one trying to fill in the emotional gap left by Doyler and his supportive company.

Anthony reflects upon the incident in the party and how the priest managed to use Anthony’s past to undermine his authority in front of the boys who were his students, effectively undermining Anthony’s authority within the very house of Anthony’s family. “I can’t pretend myself into acceptable shapes. His Majesty’s Wandsworth has seen to that. Besides, it’s not the doing, it’s the being that’s my offense” (p. 327), he concludes. After the confrontation Anthony had during the party, despite his attempts to leave the past behind and to start his life in Ireland once again, he realizes how

> They make it so damn difficult. They make a thing so deeply wrong that no morality can afterward apply. It does not matter how we go about it, kindly or coldly. No good is so good as to mitigate; all further wrong is a feather’s weight upon the deed itself. See it in the newspaper reports. One can be a gentleman thief. One can be a love-struck murderer. We’re just unspeakables. We’re sods. (O’NEILL, 2001, p. 372)

Either as an attempt to cope with his trauma or as some kind of visitation from the ghost of a lost lover, Anthony starts seeing Scrotes and having conversations with the ghost. In one of the final conversations he has with Scrotes, he confesses to the haunting memory of his lost lover that he wants to guarantee that the teenagers will not suffer what he and Scrotes have. “I want it to be all right for him [Jim], for them both” (p. 329), Anthony confesses. He acknowledges that, despite being so reluctant, he eventually became far more

attached to both Doyler and Jim than he would have anticipated, while also realizing that it was time to say goodbye to Scrotes, finally accepting that his former lover will never again be physically present in his life. The ghost of Scrotes answers Anthony by asking him to

> Help them make a nation, if not once again[1], then once and for all.
> What possible nation can you mean?
> Like all nations, Scrotes answers, a *Nation of the Heart*. Look about you. See Irish Ireland find out its past. Only with a past can it claim a future. [...] Only a language its own can speak to it truly. What does this language say? It says you are a proud and ancient people. [...] The struggle for Irish Ireland is not for truth against untruth. It is not for the good against the bad, for the beautiful against the unbeautiful. These things will take care of themselves. The struggle is for the heart, for its claim to stand in the light … And should you encounter an ancient tribe whose customs, however dimly, cast light on their hearts, tell them that tale, and you shall name the unspeakable names of your kind" (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 329, emphasis mine).

Scrotes encharges Anthony with helping in the creation of the *Nation of the Heart* for Jim and Doyler: a nation in which everything would be all right for them; a nation in which they would not be imprisoned or killed for whom they love, nor would ever have to witness their loved ones dying while being unable to give him any help. Anthony's wishes for Jim and Doyler to never experience what he and Scrotes have speaks of a broader and archetypical generational concern that is different from popular notions of romantic love. Such intergenerational concerns are more commonly expressed by – and is representative of – the love between parents and their children, or family members and their relatives. More often than not, such demonstrations of care and concern are associated with the family cell and consanguine relatives. Here, however, the generational concern expressed by Anthony's attempt to either protect the two teenagers from harm or make sure they will suffer less that he did, is marked by individuals whose relationships are not only queer, but also do not include any blood relations. Besides the eroticism and emotional bond between the three of them, the only other thing Anthony, Jim and Doyler share in common is the fact that they all feel emotionally and/or sexually attracted to other men; resulting in a set of relatable subjectivities and social experiences that promotes a certain degree of empathy between them. However small and volatile the foundations of the emotional connection between the characters might seem in comparison to the well established social role of the nuclear family, this emotional connection is, nonetheless, powerful enough to drive them towards taking care

[1] "A Nation Once Again" is a song written by Thomas Davis, one of the founding names of the movement for an independent Ireland in the nineteenth century. The lyrics express the dream for a free Ireland and urge men to stand up and fight for it since "righteous man must make our land / a nation once again".

of one another, wanting to create a better nation for one another, and eventually, even going against social norms and morality and planning to live with one another.

In regards to Anthony's wish to "make it all right" for the Jim and Doyler, Scrotes tells Anthony to "ransack the histories for clues of their past. Plunder the literatures for words they can speak. And should you encounter an ancient tribe whose customs, however dimly, cast light on their hearts, tell them that tale; and you shall name the unspeakable names of your kind" (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 329). The mentioning of the "unspeakable names of your kind", Scrotes summons Oscar Wilde's words "the love that dares not speak its name," an idea that first appears in an exchange of the poems "The Sphinx" and "Two Lovers", written by Oscar Wilde and his lover Lord Alfred Douglas respectively. These words became even more famous when Wilde was questioned about them during the trials who led him to be imprisoned for gross indecency in England in the late 19th century. During his defense at the trials, Wilde argues that

> "The Love that dare not speak its name" in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art like those of Shakespeare and Michelangelo, and those two letters of mine, such as they are. It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as the "love that dare not speak its name," and on account of it I am placed where I am now. It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it… That it should be so the world does not understand. The world mocks at it and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it. (WILDE apud LINDER, 2017)

By conjuring such images which are so well known for Anthony, the haunted memory of Scrotes points to similarities between what himself and Anthony had, what Anthony feels for the two young men, and the love Wilde had felt for Alfred Douglas. Scrotes entrusts upon Anthony the project of a nation not only of pride but also of freedom – not only freedom from colonial powers but also freedom to love and freedom to live their different affections and alternative forms of kinship. Jim and Doyler's love and relationship become a reminder for Anthony of something he has virtually been unable to feel or experience since Scrotes died. At last, Anthony asks one final question to the last appearance of the haunting memory of Scrotes: "was I truly your friend? [...] I believe I loved you. But I forget, you know", to which Scrotes replies with his very last words, and with his usual old tenderness: "You were. You did. You do."

3.3 Appropriating the past: queering nationalism

Anthony first attempts to help the boys make sense of their feelings by sharing with them stories and tales of old and ancient people so that the boys could find a language and a framework upon which to produce meaning and understanding for themselves and their feelings. One of the stories Anthony invokes in order to provide the boys with point a of reference to make sense of themselves is that of the *Sacred Band of Thebes*[2] in ancient Greece. Anthony's strategy attempts to claim affiliation for him and the boys with an ancient culture in which homosexual love and desire was at least normalised – if not celebrated. Jodie Medd argues that Anthony is trying to reverse the erasure that people "of his kind" – such as Jim and Doyler – have suffered throughout history by recognizing "that the invocation of historical possibilities of same-sex desire provide a hopeful… foundation and legitimation of a desire that has been rendered shameful and criminal" (MEDD, 2007, p. 19).

Even though the equivalence between modern gay individuals and the ancient Greek male lovers – much like the idea of a queer community in itself – can be regarded as fiction, it is nonetheless "a necessary fiction: an imagined community, an invented tradition which enables and empowers (WEEKS apud MEDD, 2007, p. 20). Medd evokes here the idea of "imagined communities", a very familiar concept nowadays thanks to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), to contextualize the attempts of the characters, within the limitations of their society and culture in the early 20th century, to position themselves as part of a recognizable group of individuals who shared similar experiences and who had their own particular – and often neglected – historical narratives. This process is not unlike the one employed by the Irish nationalists in Ireland, during the Irish Revival, to (re)construct an Irish national identity as something different, and often opposed to, the British national identity. *At Swim, Two Boys* is "utterly aware that this emancipatory historical storytelling is selective, inventive, mediated, and utterly fallible" because "'historical error' is […] necessary for nation building" (MEDD, 2007, p. 21). Moreover, Anthony's attempt to provide Jim and Doyler with a framework upon which they could make sense of who they

[2] *The Sacred Band of Thebes* consisted of 150 pairs of lovers responsible for ending Spartan domination in the 4th century BC. The group was entirely formed by male lovers according to Greek custom at the time, and constituted the elite force of the Theban army, having crucial roles in the battles of Leuctra in 371 BC and of Tegyra in 375 BC. Records of Plutarch indicate that when they were defeated by Philip II of Macedon in the Battle of Chaeronea, in 338 BC, Philip II wept when he encountered their corpses and exclaimed "perish any man who suspects that these man either did or suffered anything unseemly." (Plutarch, trans. by John Dryden, 1683).

were also comes from a conversation he has with Doyler about some of the things he learned with Scrotes in the past.

> You asked me earlier were there many of us about. The question for my friend was, were there any of us at all. The world would say that we did not exist, that only our actions, our habits, were real, which the world called our crimes or our sins. But Scrotes began to think that we did indeed exist. That we had a nature our own, which was not another's perverted or turned to sin. Our actions could not be crimes, he believed, because they were the expression of a nature, of an existence even. Which came first, he asked, the deed or the doer? (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 284)

Anthony's conversation with Doyler regarding whether or not people like them exist in the world acquires an even deeper implication once Backus's and Conrad's discussions are taken into consideration. As mentioned in the previous chapter, many queer subjectivities and alternative existences have been eliminated by the State and other institutional powers throughout history in the process of edifying the childbearing, monogamous, heterosexual family configuration as the pivotal framework for social and moral regulation, through the controling of people's behaviours, bodies, and sexualities. Moreover, the very fact that Anthony shares with Doyler a conversation he previously had with Scrotes about other [queers] individuals like them already inscribes their relationship within a queer genealogy of relationships in which the love, knowledge and self discovery that Scrotes shared with Anthony was now being shared by Anthony with Doyler. This further suggests that Anthony expects, consciously or not, to become for Doyler what Scrotes was for Anthony: a lover, a mentor, and a person with whom he could freely explore his own sexuality and subjectivity without the judgements and reprisals that normally were directed at them by society.

Later on, after Doyler leaves the town and both his lovers behind, Jim and Anthony grow gradually closer to each other over course of their daily meetings in the Forty Foot for swimming lessons. Jim pays close attention to Anthony's tales and stories regarding the ancient Greeks and the ancient peoples from Ireland. These stories, in turn, start having an even greater impact on Jim and eventually become Jim's source of determination for coping with the feelings of shame he had internalised and with the pressures he constantly endures at home and at school with both Brother Polycarp and his father trying to mold him according to the fashion of institutional forces. Jim develops his own identity and his own way of thinking by appropriating and resignifying, according to his own experiences and new examples he has found in Doyler and Anthony, the stories he was told at school, at home by his father, and by Anthony.

This process, however, could not happen at home or at school since neither Brother Polycarp nor his father gave him space to question or to resignify the lessons and stories he was told in order to reach his own conclusions. In the novel, it was only by the sea and in the company of either Doyler or Anthony that Jim felt free to think on his own, to process his feelings, and to feel both welcomed and accepted regardless of what he thought or felt. Thus, the stories Jim listens to become central to the formation of his queer identity as they provided him with the language necessary to name his feelings, desires, and anguishes. This becomes particularly evident when Jim and Doyler visit the tomb of Wolfe Tone in Bodenstown and listen to a speech delivered by Patrick Pearse. An excerpt of the real speech delivered by Pearse at the tomb in 1913 – which is omitted in the novel – reads as:

> I believe he was the greatest of Irish men. And if I am right in this I am right in saying that we stand in the holiest place in Ireland, for it must be that the holiest sod of the nation's soil is the sod where the greatest of her dead lies buried. I feel it difficult to speak to you to-day; difficult to speak in this place. It is as if one had to speak by the graveside of some dear friend, a brother in blood or a well-tried comrade in arms, and to say aloud the things one would rather keep to oneself. But I am helped by the knowledge that you who listen to me partake in my emotion: we are none of us strangers, being all in a sense own brothers to Tone, sharing in his faith, sharing in his hope, still unrealised, sharing in his great love. I have, then, only to find expression for the thoughts and emotions common to us all, and you will understand even if the expression be a halting one. (PEARSE, 1913)

In the novel, while Jim listens to the speech, he realises that "this man's [Pearse's] heart was deep and true, for he made [Jim] wish for an equal love and an equal truth in his heart. He was swept by a great desire to take hold of Doyler's hand and tell him in his ear. That's how I think of you, that's exactly how I think of you" (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 228). According to Medd, Jim uses the public discourse of Irish nationalism given by Pearse in memory of Wolfe Tone to find a language that enables him to understand his intimate thoughts, and which translates what he feels for Doyler (MEDD, 2007, p. 7). This excerpt best exemplifies how both historical discourses and nationalist sentiment are internalised by the characters and transformed into a way of expressing the queer feelings at the core of the type of kinship ties developed by them – their *Nation of the Heart*, their "imagined community".

The importance of stories for Jim, as Medd argues, "is not the truth or untruth… but that the transmission of these stories has forged meaningful relationships to him and helped him live into his identity" (2007, p. 22). Doyler tells Jim that some of the stories Mr Mack told his son about loyal soldiers defending the Muglins Island were false, and that the men in the island were, in fact robbers and murderers, but Jim, however, "reveals he already knows that the story was not true" (2007. p. 22) but it does not matter to him. What matters

to him is the meaning he has created to himself about the place as well as his plan to swim there with Doyler. When Doyler comes back to town before Easter, the two of them finally fulfill their promise and consummate their love in the island on the weekend of the Easter Rising. At the ocasion, Jim realizes "it was here was their home. It was in the sea, [in] an island" (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 534). Unfortunately, their meaningful first time at the island after swimming there almost ended tragically. On their way back from the island, Doyler almost drowns and could have died if it was not for Anthony who was on the opposite shore waiting for the safe return of the two teenagers. Anthony was able to rescue both Doyler and Jim, and took them back to Ballygihen mansion with him where they both helped Doyler recover from nearly dying.

While staying with Anthony and sharing his bedroom, Jim tries to tell Doyler the tales of the *Sacred Band of Thebes* Anthony told him, explaining that they were an army who fought together as equals, each man beside his own lover. Doyler, however, sceptical and cynical with that idea, asks Jim: "the sergeants too? [..] Was they not worried they'd be thought partial? Giving out guard detail and that, [...] was the general's chap a general also? That was two generals. Two generals is a very chancy business" (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 584). Jim refuses to let Doyler's remarks dissuade him of the meanings he has given to the story, and answers "I know what you're doing [..] You're only wasting your breath. You know it's the most wonderful thing" (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 84). As the conversation goes on, Jim tells Doyler of his vision for the future with the three of them together; a future not only for him and Doyler, but for Anthony with them as well. Instead of satisfying his father's wishes for him to take over the family shop or Brother Polycarp's intentions for him to become a brother, Jim decides he wants to move out to Dublin city, pursue higher education and become a school teacher. Interestingly enough, becoming a school teacher was Doyler's impossible dream, one that could never become reality since Doyler never had the opportunity to conclude his studies being forced to drop school and start working from an early age. As he shares his plans, it becomes clear that Jim expects Doyler would want to come with him to Dublin as well. Doyler, however, has difficulty imagining Jim's vision working out for them – not as much for doubting their ability to get by together, but because of what it would mean for two or three men to live together in times like theirs. This is especially relevant because after the incident during the party in the Ballygihen mansion, Doyler leaves Glasthule to join the Irish Citizen Army in Dublin, where he lives for months serving in the paramilitary group

until he decides to go back for his swimming date with Jim before Easter Sunday. Unlike Jim, Doyler knows from experience what it means trying to live by oneself in a Dublin city at that time.

3.4 Conflict as the antithesis to *The Nation of The Heart*

While with the ICA, Doyler conditions himself to internalise the morals and conduct of the military organization, hoping that by being a part of it he would feel protected from the institutional forces which often abused or oppressed him in the past, while also fighting for a cause he truly believes. Contrary to the idealistic and sometimes overly philosophical Jim, Doyler is not only practical but somewhat cynic when it comes to hope. Already at a young age Doyler had to endure the violence of his father, Mr Doyler, when the latter fell into alcoholism after returning from the Boer War where he fought alongside the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. After getting permanently injured, Doyler leaves his family to spend some time with his mother's relatives in Co. Clare. When he comes back, four years later, to work as a "dungman", cleaning excrement from other people's residences, Doyler already shows signs of his ideological position and his sharp criticism to Irish society. In a conversation with Jim's father about his new job and employers, Doyler mentions that "most of the men they laid off. Employed a grush of boys in their places. Half the wages and the same blow they proves their loyalty to the Crown. [...] Sure what hope has the men but they list in the Army? The contractors is held for a great example" by the crown (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 48). This demonstrates Doyler's keen understanding of the class issues and the struggles of the Irish working class. Despite his practicality, Doyler is also empathic and caring with people he loves – especially his hard-working mother and her efforts to raise Doyler and his siblings almost by herself while taking care of a husband who is often drunk and violent. Like Jim, Doyler also dreamt of becoming a school teacher, but he was forced to drop school at a young age and start working to help his family – which took from him the possibility of ever pursuing that dream. It was Doyler himself who – after realising the extent of Jim's talent at school and his passion for classical history – first encouraged Jim to finish his studies and to become a school teacher. Doyler, on the other hand, found solace in the idea of joining a resistance group and fighting for an ideology he believed would end Ireland's social inequalities.

After Doyler leaves Glasthule, however, his experience with the ICA reveals to him a different truth: Doyler's sexuality and his feelings for Jim – as well as his bonds to others like him – would never have a place within the ideological structure of a military armed

group, such as the ICA, or in the life of a soldier. Among his duties for the ICA, Doyler had to watch for any movement by British troops from the rooftop of the Russell Hotel by Stephen's Green. Doyler meets one of the boot boys who worked in the hotel and who demonstrates interest in Doyler. He also finds out that the boy's employer had been sexually abusing him. "For a moment Doyler had a thought of putting his arm round [the boy's] shoulder, try to cheer the chappie up. But he shook that nonsense out of his head" (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 481). Instead of offering the boot boy any help or consolation, Doyler actually tells the boy "don't come looking for me no more… If you've time to go walking, you've time to go looking for a decent employment" (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 481-482). By doing so, Doyler contradicts his own political views by blaming the poor boy for the situation the boy finds himself in. Doyler's hypocrisy goes against three main pillars from his own experience. First, Doyler himself had endured degrading job positions out of desperation, in the past, when money was needed. Second, both the military organization and political cause he has been fighting for claim to be sympathetic to the plight of the Irish working class. And finally, Doyler himself has felt sexually exploited in the past, and his attitude towards the boot boy do not translate his own understanding of his situation, nor his empathy for Jim when he found out about Brother Polycarp's abuse.

It eventually becomes unbearable for Doyler to deal with the regret of having left Jim and the guilt for the way he treated the other teenager at the Russell Hotel, and the anger and frustration that caused him to leave Glasthule. On his way back to Jim, however, he stops by the Russell Hotel and sends for the boot boy he had previously met there. Doyler and the boy start undressing and are about to have sex but Doyler acts aggressively and eventually hurts the boy, pushing him to the ground. The teenager was still on the floor when Doyler realised the way he was acting and his own frustrations. The "boot boy" asks Doyler why he was being so rough, and inquires "do you miss him?" – referring to the person Doyler loved – which leads Doyler to finally let go

> All the tide of his loneliness and fears. 'I miss him, eye,' he said. 'He was pal o' me heart, so he was. I try not to think of him, only I can't get him off my mind… I try to make him go away, for I'm a soldier now and I'm under orders. But he's always there and I'm desperate to hold him. I doubt I'm a man except he's by me.' (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 498)

Doyler's outburst and confession is one of the few moments in the novel in which he truly and openly expresses his emotions and what he feels for Jim. The other young man

comments “maybe he misses you too. I’d miss you was you my friend” (O’NEILL, 2001, p. 499). He opens up to Doyler about his fears of not finding someone and ending up alone, and throughout their conversation Doyler realises he would never be able to have such an open and honest conversation with anyone, especially about his love for another man, while being part of the ICA; at least not with anyone else who was not “like” Anthony, Jim, and himself. Doyler realizes that being a soldier and fighting for a cause is not really worth it unless he can be true to who he is, to what he feels, and if he cannot be with the people he loves. “To hell with his guard duty,” he concludes before heading back to Glasthule to find Jim; “they’d get some other jasus to guard their Hall for them.” (O’NEILL, 2001, p. 499)

The biggest difference between how Doyler and Jim deal with the old stories Anthony tells them is that Doyler has actually received military training, he has knowledge on how a military institution works, and he understands what is at stake during an armed conflict. Jim, on the other hand, only has his father’s heroic versions of the war – filled with stories of honor and glory – and Anthony’s stories about the *Sacred Band of Thebes* and his romanticized vision of an army of true lovers fighting with and for one another. Doyler knows by his own experience the raw reality of a military institution and armed conflicts, and is much more reluctant to buy into Jim’s idealised version of lovers fighting side-by-side. When Doyler goes back to Glasthule to meet Jim and swim with his lover to the Muglins island, the idea of abandoning the ICA and the upcoming revolution so that he could stay with Jim is already on his mind. Doyler is taken care of by both Jim and Anthony, which causes him to miss on the start of the 1916 Easter Rising.

For Anthony, rescuing Doyler and taking care of him represents Anthony’s attempt to correct his past mistake and get over his regret for not being able to help Doyler when the latter was being beaten down at the party. Thus, this was the materialization of Anthony’s desire to be able to help and protect both Doyler and Jim. While staying with Anthony and being taken care of, Doyler and Anthony are able to romantically reconnect and resume their past relationship. The two of them have sex for the first time since Doyler left Glasthule. This time, however, Doyler and Anthony switch roles during sex, marking both Anthony’s willingness to accept his love Doyler and surrender to idea of getting romantically involved again. For Doyler, the occasion marks the realization that Anthony was finally seeing him in equal terms – at least as his lover – and also represents Doyler getting over his past frustrations and cynicism regarding love. It is especially meaningful that the loving encounter between Doyler and Anthony happens after Jim and Doyler fulfil their promise to consummate their love at the Muglins island. One of the reasons why Anthony held back his

feelings and sexual desires over so many months was his determination to help the two teenagers materialize their promise and be able to have that rare and special moment. Anthony was able to redeem himself for failing with Doyler by helping with the promise Jim and Doyler made each other, and felt once again free to pursue his love and desires. For Doyler, this occasion marks the end of most of his troubles. He is able to not only keep his promise to Jim and his commitment to their love, but also to get over his resentment for Anthony and give their relationship a new and more honest start.

3.5 "A Stone to trouble the living stream"

As the narrative progresses and the characters start to hear whispers of a revolution about to break in Ireland, or get themselves involved with military armed groups – the Irish Citizen Army in the case of Doyler and the Irish Volunteers in the case of Anthony – Jim also becomes increasingly resolute about fighting for his own vision of a nation – *the Nation of the Heart*. When Anthony inquires "but what is Ireland that you should want to fight for it?" "Sure I know that… It's Doyler," Jim replies (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 435). Anthony is incapable of hiding his own astonishment at the answer and exclaims "Doyler is your country?" Jim, however, answers quite confidently "It's silly, I know. But that's how I feel… I love him. I'm sure of that now. And he's my country." (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 435). While Anthony takes his time to process the lack of hesitation with which Jim talks about such a intimate feelings, Jim adds

> 'I think a little bit of it is yourself, MacEmm.'
> 'Me? My gracious.'
> 'Though I don't suppose you'd want me fighting about it. But I don't know anybody I could talk these things with. I used think I'd burst with all the words in my head. I can talk things now. I don't know but it's like we have a language together. It's great with swimming, but it's better with the talking. You're a part of my country too now, McEmm.' (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 435)

Jim's country is not Ireland itself, nor his family of origin or the rest of his blood relatives. Jim's idea of his country and nation is, in fact, formed first and foremost by the people he came to love and wants to be together with. His decision to include both Doyler and Anthony as part of the "Ireland" he wishes to fight for highlights the fact his idea of a nation is not that far from the idea of a family. More specifically, Jim points to something that is quite familiar among queer individuals around the world: the concept of a family of choice. Jim chooses Doyler and Anthony as his country – and his family – not only because of the love he feels and receives from them, but also because they were able to develop a

language among themselves; a language that has allowed them to understand, create, and give expression to their subjectivities, feelings and ideas with one another. It is through this common language that they are able to communicate things they were previously unable to understand or even think about – let alone translate into words or actions – when they were with their family of origin, with priests, and with members of (para) military groups. Jim further reinforces this idea by stating "I don't hate the English and I don't know do I love the Irish. But I love him…. I think a little bit of it too is yourself, MacEmm (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 435). Here, the novel establishes a remarkable parallel between Jim's political views regarding the English and the Irish with that of Yeats's poem "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death", which reads:

> Those that I fight I do not hate,
> Those that I guard I do not love,
> My country is Kiltartan Cross,
> My Countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
> No likely end could bring them loss
> Or leave them happier than before. (YEATS, 1919 In: YEATS, 1994, p. 111)

Like the speaker in the poem, Jim does not nurture any particular hate for those the Irish nationalist are fighting against, nor any particular love for the Irish themselves – of course, apart from his family of origin. After all, Jim has suffered more abuse and oppression in the hands of Irish figures of authority than he ever did with any Englishman. Contrary to the speaker in Yeats' poem,however, who expresses a "lonely impulse" later on in the poem, Jim seems to be resolved in that regard and is resolute in his wishes to share a life in the company of Doyler and Anthony.

Jim's political position and decision to participate in the coming armed conflict becomes even more evident when Doyler talks to him about it while resting in Anthony's room. Jim mentions that "it's only sensible it's an Irish war, not an English. That way, we'll all be fighting together." Doyler, however, who only recently decided to leave the ICA and the idea of an armed conflict behind to go back to Jim, mocks by saying "Mary and Joseph, but you're the bloodthirsty animal." (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 585) Jim – by now quite used to Doyler's snarky comments, answers by saying "I'm not. Did you know the English had him [Anthony] in gaol?" Doyler, however, remains sceptical of using this example as a reason to join an armed conflict, and argues that "sure the Irish would gallows him, only for the scandal of naming what he done" (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 585).

Doyler's statement is a powerful one for a number of reasons. First, when such a statement is contextualized within Ireland's struggle for independence, it calls attention for

challenging, instead of reiterating, the nationalist narratives that often portray Ireland and the Irish as the victims and the English as the villains. Second, the statement calls attention to sentiment and general opinion regarding homosexuality at the time. While England has sentenced Anthony to hard labour in gaol as punishment for his sexuality, Doyler suggest that the Irish would kill Anthony merely for naming his so-called "crime". Additionally, Doyler's opinions and views on the matter reflect the fact that the character, himself, has suffered far more on the hands of other Irish citizens than any harm the English could ever have caused him. Finally, Doyler's views are, arguably, the ones who best represent some of O'Neill's own opinions on the matter. In fact, some of the biographical information available regarding Jamie O'Neill himself further illuminates some of the views on family in the novel.

O'Neill was born to Irish parents in 1962, in Dún Laoghaire. He grew up in the Dublin suburb of Cabinteely and went to school at Presentation Brothers in Glasthule – the same school Jim goes to in the novel. In the article "Whatever happened to Jamie O'Neill", Donal Lynch writes that O'Neill grew up as an unhappy teenager who did not get on very well with his father – not only for being gay but also because of their different values regarding ideals, religion, and politics. O'Neill left his parent's home at the age of 17 and went to London where he worked for a while. It is important to highlight that O'Neill arrived in England around 1979. At that time, homosexuality had already been decriminalized in the UK by the Sexual Offences Act of 1967, while in Ireland, homosexuality remained a crime until 1993.

O'Neill eventually returned to Ireland, but a gay culture in the 80's was virtually nonexistent in the country, which encouraged him to keep visiting London somewhat frequently. He then met British television star Russell Harty at a party, at the age of 21. The two fell for one another and O'Neill lived with Harty in Giggleswick, North Yorkshire, for many years. Harty was much older than O'Neill, and much like Anthony, Jim and Doyler in *At Swim,Two Boys*, there also seemed to exist a certain tutelary and mentoring aspect to Russell and O'Neill's relationship – which seems to have been positive for both of them considering how long they lived together. Harty greatly encouraged O'Neill to start writing, and with the support of his lover, O'Neill published his first two novels. Unfortunately, however, Harty got sick and died when O'Neill was around 27 to 28 years old. O'Neill was hounded by journalists trying to buy his story and had to deal with Harty's family, which took control over Harty's estate and finances and would not allow O'Neill access to the place

he called home for the past 7 seven years or so. O'Neill was not even given a front seat at the funeral of his late partner. Eventually, O'Neill was left homeless, sleeping sometimes in park benches and sometimes at friends' houses. It took about two years for O'Neill to find a nighttime job and start writing *At Swim, Two Boys*.

At Swim, Two Boys, therefore, is not the product of a queer man's fantasies. The novel is heavily informed by reality – O'Neill's reality at least, if not the realities that many queer individuals faced at that time. O'Neill's biological family failed to accommodate his queer subjectivities and welcome who he was among them, forcing him to leave home at an early age and to rely mostly on himself and on his circle of friends. At least until his late twenties, one of O'Neill's biggest sources of support, care, and acceptance was his lover, Russell Harty, who happened to be 28 years older than him. It is no surprise, therefore, that both Jim and Doyler's greatest source of support and acceptance in the novel is Anthony – a man in his late twenties. Moreover, Jim, and to some extent Doyler as well, become extremely dependent not only on each other but also on Anthony to get by and cope with the failure of their families of origin to accommodate them and their queer subjectivities. Not unlike the life of the author, the chosen family becomes so essential for the characters in the novel that it gradually becomes the central aspect of their social and emotional life and a source of protection and security against the institutional forces at play in society and inside the houses of their family of origin. Finally, Doyler's suggestion that the Irish would be even harsher with Anthony with regards to his sexuality than the British were also seems to reflect O'Neill's own experiences in an Ireland pre-decriminalization. Like Doyler, O'Neill experienced a very difficult relationship with his father and family, and his position as an Irish queer (gay) teenager in a Ireland in which homosexuality was still considered a crime was not at all comfortable or accommodating. In England O'Neill was able to live out his sexuality somewhat more freely than in Ireland and it was also there that he found the love of the man with whom he lived for almost a decade. It is not surprising, therefore, that one of his characters would emphasise that – at least in regards to how they treated homosexuality – the British were not worse than the Irish themselves were.

By the end of the novel, however, Jim learns the hard way that an armed revolution and a military conflict are incompatible with the *Nation of the Heart* and his project of a future with his lovers at his side. Doyler is shot dead while both he and Anthony are trying to find Jim and save him from the shootings taking place during the Rising. Doyler's death leaves Jim in shock, cradling Doyler's blooded head almost in the middle of the crossfire. Later on, inside the prison cell in which he and Anthony have been put in after they are

arrested, Jim says “I’ll be ruthless with them. I’ll shoot them easy as stones. I won’t never give up. I’ll be a stone myself” (O’NEILL, 2001, p. 636). Jim would no longer be able to swim to his ideal “home” in the Muglins Island, “he wouldn’t be swimming no more. He would be a stone and he would sink” (O’NEILL, 2001, p. 637). He abandons all romanticized plans he previously had for the future, becoming a heart “with one purpose alone”, echoing another of Yeats’s poems: “Easter 1916” (MEDD, 2007, p. 17); the comparison, of course, making a reference to Yeats’ verses “Enchanted to a stone / To trouble the living stream” (YEATS, 1921 In: Yeats, 1994, p. 152).

Lying in Anthony’s arms in the prison cell and terrified by the excruciating pain of losing Doyler, Jim says: “He’d never want me this way. Nor you too, MacEmm. That’s why I hope they’ll shoot us all. I don’t know can I bear to become what I’ll be” (637). Anthony, however, still holds on to the promise he made to Scrotes of helping Jim and Doyler find a nation their own. If they cannot make Ireland their nation, he thinks he could, perhaps, make them an island. “I’ll find an Island where we’ll live. A small island all to ourselves. There’ll be sand and dunes and cliffs. [..] we’ll have a cow and pig and hens. We’ll go swimming every day” (O’NEILL, 2001, p. 636). Anthony’s plans reflect, yet again, on another of Yeats’s poem, this time “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”, in which the voice of the poem says

> I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree
> And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
> Nine bean-rolls will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,
> And live alone in the bee-loud glade. (YEATS, 1893 In: YEATS, 1994, p. 31)

Anthony, however, does not intend to live alone like Yeats’s poem suggests. He plans to have the one he loves with him, Jim, since his other loved one is now dead. He decides to name this utopic island Noman, “because no man is an island” (O’NEILL, 2001, p. 636). The novel’s denouement indicates that Anthony has kept his hope for the future and for the legacy that Scrotes’ left him: the *Nation of the Heart*. Even after losing almost everyone else he loved – Scrotes, Doyler, his Aunt Eveline – Anthony still pictures himself building *Nation of the Heart* in the form of a home for Jim. Anthony promises to build it “brick by brick, washed by the rain and the reckless sea. In the living stream they’d swim a season. For maybe it was true that no man is an island: but he believed that two very well might be” (O’NEILL, 2001, p. 641). Despite Anthony’s hopes, the novel ends with their tears, mourning for Doyler even after years of his death.

On Anthony's arm, Jim has dreams and visions of Doyler walking away from him. During the War of Independence in Ireland, and with his gun lying on the ground beside him, the troubled Jim is met by a vision of Doyler on the horizon while Anthony holds him and hopes that the army of the Free State nearby does not find them. During his dreams, Jim says "You'll be walking away from me soon, won't you now? [...] I wish if you wouldn't, Doyler. It does break my heart when you walk away". Jim repeats during the visions in which he meets with Doyler on grass fields. "Old pal o' me heart" answers Doyler every time before walking away. "And though Jim tried to keep pace, he could not, and sometimes he called out Doyler! Doyler! but he never heard or did not heed, only farther and farther he walked away." (O'NEILL, 2001, p. 642). The novel's denouement marks the very end of the idea of the *Nation of the Heart* – a nation in which queer individuals would be free to live their lives with their chosen families. A family which transcends the narrow confines of the childbearing, monogamous, heterosexual nuclear family prescribed by the Constitution of Ireland of 1937. A family like that of Jim, Doyler, and Anthony – constituted of individuals bound by mutual love, by the desire to care for each other, by the will to to fight for the wellbeing and protection of each other – a supportive, protective, accepting, and above all, liberating family. The dream of the *Nation of the Heart* and of such a family went away with Jim's visions of Doyler.

4 THE 2015 MARRIAGE EQUALITY REFERENDUM IN IRELAND

While *At Swim, Two Boys* was mostly written during the 90s – when Ireland was still going through its first years of decriminalised homosexuality – Sebastian Barry's *Days Without End* was mostly written during the climax of the discussions regarding the same-sex marriage referendum, which took place in 2015, with the novel being published roughly one year later. Before delving into an analysis of *Days Without End* in terms of its queer relationships and family configurations, an in-depth examination of the same-sex marriage referendum of 2015 and how it has impacted the Irish society seems imperative for better contextualizing the novel with the overall situation with the issues of marriage, family, and LGBTQ rights in Ireland.

Ireland's marriage referendum of 2015 was arguably one of the greatest achievements for Lesbian and Gay rights in Ireland – and probably in the world as well. Ultimately, the referendum was the result of months of political mobilization and diligent canvassing after which Ireland was able to approve the Thirty-Fourth Amendment of its Constitution – by popular vote – which allows individuals to get married regardless of their sex. The referendum campaign and its results were not only important to further the rights of some of the memebers of the LGBTQ community in Ireland, but also made possible to many (heterosexual) Irish citizens to get in contact for the very first with the realities of the Irish lesbian and gay individuals and to learn about their stories directly from them. In order to avoid complications resulting from the different meanings that the words "sex" and "gender" may have, the referendum will be henceforth treated as the same-gender marriage referendum for the purposes of this text. The reason for this decision is that the word "sex" is – generally speaking – associated with anatomy, physiology, and biological categorizations of human beings. Judith Butler suggests that gender is, by no means, tied to biophysical facts but is, rather completely linked to a social construction, somewhat of a fiction, and as such, it can change change and be contested:

> there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various [performative] acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis (BUTLER, 1988, p. 522).

The origin of gender, therefore, is not genetic, corporeal, or anatomical but strictly performative in the extent that the body becomes the gender it performs only "through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (BUTLER, 1990, p. 523). People's gender may or may not match the sexes that have been assigned to them at birth based on their corporeality. For that reason, and considering the purposes of this study, the marriage equality referendum will be addressed as the same-gender marriage since most of its purpose was to discuss whether or not the Irish constitution could be changed to allow homosexual couples (couples in which both individuals have the same gender) to get married. It should be noted, however, that officially, the referendum is known as the same-sex referendum and "sex" is the term employed in its text.

While the result of the referendum was widely celebrated across and beyond the country, it also prompted complex reactions. In her article "Republic of Love", Anne Mulhall provides a thoughtful analysis of the referendum and its consequences in both broader and more specific terms.

> For the people who drove the campaign; for those who canvassed during the hard emotional slog of its last month in particular; for all those who told their stories of hurt, of lives lived in closeted fear and repression in newspapers, on TV, across social media, to family and friends; for the LGBTQ young people who had not before witnessed the extent and depth of homophobia written in to longstanding norms as to what and who constitutes the 'nation'; for those who had to face the harsh truth of homophobic discursive violence enacted under the guise of 'democracy' and 'balanced debate' and smile and thank the homophobes for their consideration; for the thousands of recent young Irish emigrants who came #hometovote on the eve of the referendum; and especially for all those personally invested by way of their own positioning as 'queer' in the resounding victory, the outcome catalyzed a confusion of raw emotional responses. There was of course joy – the joy that was broadcast across a transnational stage, an unfettered jubilation. But the tears of joy were complicated. They communicated emotional and physical relief and exhaustion, a kind of system-wide collapse into elation. They articulated – for many, not for all – gratitude and vindication at the 'majority' acceptance that the vote represented. (MULHALL, 2015)

Nonetheless, Mulhal also acknowledges the negative emotional cost of the referendum. The author comments that "as time passes, the more difficult constituents of those tears become more clear," and goes on to comment on the ambiguity that has revealed itself once the referendum was over. When enough time was given, it became clear that the tears were also of "anger that the rights of a minority were the gift of a majority to bestow; anger at the emotional and political costs exacted by the campaign itself; anger and sorrow for personal and collective histories mired in pain and exclusion that cannot be recuperated."

The referendum victory, however, was only reached after many years of controversies. Debates regarding the possibility of same-gender marriage had already started

around 2010, when *The Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act* was instituted in Ireland. However, it was only in 2011, with the general elections, that the discussion started to gather momentum throughout the country, especially after the coalition between the Labour's and the Fine Gael political parties had included same-gender marriage as a part of their programme. Heated debates have followed the topic throughout the following years and escalated particularly during the heavy months of canvassing and campaigning preceding the day of the vote.

4.1 The fears and anxieties of the traditional Irish family

Mulhall comments on the fears and anxieties expressed by the "NO" campaigners – the ones who were actively campaigning against the referendum, and on a few rhetorical strategies that have been employed by the opposition. According to the author, the "NO" vote "was driven by a small but ubiquitous collection of right-wing lay Catholic fundamentalists… established in 2008 as self-appointed guardian of the 'traditional family' and Ireland's system of compulsory reproduction" (MULHALL, 2015). The nature of the fears and anxieties expressed by the "NO" voters orbited the uncertainty they felt regarding the idea of accepting and accommodating into the very notion of the "Irish Family*"* those whose bodies, subjectivities, affection have historically been described as threat to the nation and to institution family itself – as it has been argued by Kathryn Conrad and discussed at length in Chapter I.

> The fulcrum of the No campaign was the argument that including same-sex marriage in the constitution would catastrophically change the nature of the institution (which is, of course, about producing children) and fatally damage children's 'right' to a mother and a father. Groups such as *Mothers and Fathers Matter* and *First Families First* emerged to flank the usual suspects. Lurid fantasies populated the mediascape and seeped out into the general populace, suddenly abuzz with the spectres of mothers marrying daughters, gay men stalking the streets in search of vulnerable women from whom to harvest eggs and/or rent wombs, small armies of fatherless children wandering the streets of Copenhagen in search of their 'donor daddy' (MULHALL, 2015).

As it can be observed, the "NO" campaign preferable targets were, in its majority, individuals whose affective bonds and social allegiances were considered foreign and beyond that which constitutes the traditional configuration of family in Ireland – at least according to these groups – which still privileges the narrow structure of the childbearing monogamous heterosexual family cell highlighted by Margot Backus.

Not surprisingly, the referendum opposition has accused the media of being biased and of "silencing" their views throughout the campaign debates. The situation escalated to

such a degree there was a point in which both TV channels and newspapers, in fear of litigation, adopted an obsessive quest for balance of opinion. For Mulhall, the lines were drawn when drag artist Panti Bliss (Rory O'Neill) named – during a TV show on RTÉ – Breda O'Brien, David Quinn, John Waters and the Iona Institute as homophobes, and "quite reasonably so," adds the author.

> As it is difficult to know what else one should call people who suggest that queers should abstain from sex (because "intrinsically disordered"), oppose programmes to combat homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools, call for the continuing enforced closeting of teachers, declare LGBT people to be unfit to parent children, regard same-sex relationships as inherently inferior to the great gold standard of hetero[sexual] coupling, and so forth. (MULHALL, 2015)

As a result of this so called quest for "balance", "NO" campaigners have been allowed not only to employ harsh hate speech but also to be publicly homophobic in media; even succeeding "in making freedom to express homophobic bigotry appear as not just normal and right, but pretty much a duty in [the] service of democracy" (MULHALL, 2015). This has been taken to such an absurd and extreme level that even delusions such as "predatory gay men buying children to satisfy their paedophilic desires could be framed as legitimate fears to be answered with a concerned tilt of the head and even-handed discussion" both on television and in everyday interactions with other people at home or on the streets. On that regards, Jen O'Leary comments that

> Homophobes have been given platforms to air their hateful views by the media and the streets have been adorned with posters which attempt to draw the issue away from one of civil rights towards a defence of an ahistorical concept of "traditional" marriage and the family. The fundamentalist homophobia has been defended by liberal voices of hegemonic common sense, in the name of "balance" and for some warped concept of freedom of speech which entitles the oppressor while giving no consideration to the freedom [or to the psychological and emotional well being] of the oppressed (O'LEARY, 2017)

The campaign in favor of the referendum, on the other hand, managed to counter much of the derogatory political environment and tried to maintain a positive image through the smear campaign of the "NO" voters – which has been widely attributed as one of the reasons for the referendum victory. Nonetheless, some of the strategies and narratives employed by the "YES" campaign also had controversial and – some would argue – harmful effects for the larger queer (LGBTQI+) community. If the campaign opposing the referendum was harmful because of its generalized queerphobia – against almost all non-heterosexual individuals – its hate speech, and the constant reproduction of dated and highly negative stereotypes of queer individuals, the campaign in favor of the referendum, on the other hand, has contributed negatively by sanitizing many of the queer narratives used on the

campaign and by rendering invisible the subjectivities of a large part of the queer community. Bisexual, transgender, and genderqueer individuals (people whose gender identity does not fit traditional notions of either male or female, and who sometimes prefer to use this concept over any others) were some of the LGBTQ individuals who became virtually nonexistent during the referendum campaign; which focused almost entirely on cis-normative gay and lesbian subjects.

4.2 Ethnic erasure and social hygienization

Mulhall comments that in the very last months preceding the vote there was a change in tone and pitch of the "YES" campaign, "The focus was on the personal, on family ties and friendship circles, on the 'positive story', on self-revelation and emotional truth. And the address was, of course, to the straight population." For the author, the primary purpose of the campaign was no longer that of convincing the general heterosexual public of the social benefits and economic logic behind "welding" queer individuals together as couples by means of "commitment devices" and/or "forever love", but rather, convincing the general heterosexual public "of the 'sameness' of lesbian and gay love and family-making." The author further develops her argument by stating that

> From a particular perspective, this normativizing drive is a corollary of the argument for marriage as neoliberal devolution of State and collective social responsibilities to the family, both being held in position by the marriage contract. If lesbian and gay people are 'just like us'... then they deserve what 'we' have – equality granted on the basis of sameness, on a shared humanity – but a humanity that does not diverge in any alarming way from what 'we' recognise as 'just like us', a fellow 'citizen' who does not disturb the established image the nation has of itself (MULHALL, 2015)

Mulhall's observations are in tune with Backus and Conrad, especially in regards to Conrad's observation on the family cell as a guarantee of survival for its members, which results not only from the State relegating the function of caring and protecting its own citizens to the institution of family, but also from the threat that the State itself offered to those whose subjectivities and/or affectivities were not welcomed by the values and morals prescribed by the State.

While the campaign attempted to portray the L (lesbians) and the G (gays) as "just like" their heterosexual counterparts in order to convince the general public to vote in favor of giving them the rights heterosexuals already had access to, the B (bissexuals), the T (trans men, trans women, and trans non-binary people), the Q (the queers who do not comfortably fit in any of the previous categories of the acronym), and the I (intersexual individuals) were

consigned to unspeakability for the duration of the campaign – forgotten into non-existence and barely, if ever, spoken of. With regards to the choices made by those leading the campaign in favor of the referendum, other voices have also joined Mulhall in her concerns. In the article "Marriage is not Equality: Thoughts on #MarRef from a worried radical Queer", Ariel Silvera comments that "between the overt homophobic abuse spouted by the 'No' campaign and the rather horrid effect of single-issue liberal politics and policing of identity from the mainstream, acceptable parts of the... 'gay' community, *I've felt quite homesick for Dublin*" (emphasis added); in hindsight, the apparent irony in Silvera's statement is very telling. The lesbian transgender woman, who was already living in Glasgow at the time of the campaign, also comments on her impression that

> the referendum has brought out some of the worst aspects of Irish society, both the homophobic, bigoted, misogynistic right-wing elements (church-led and otherwise) as well as the assimilationist, clean-cut "we are just like you" part of the gay community, which seems more focused on adapting to a cishet norm than actually fighting for queers in the streets (SILVERA, 2015)

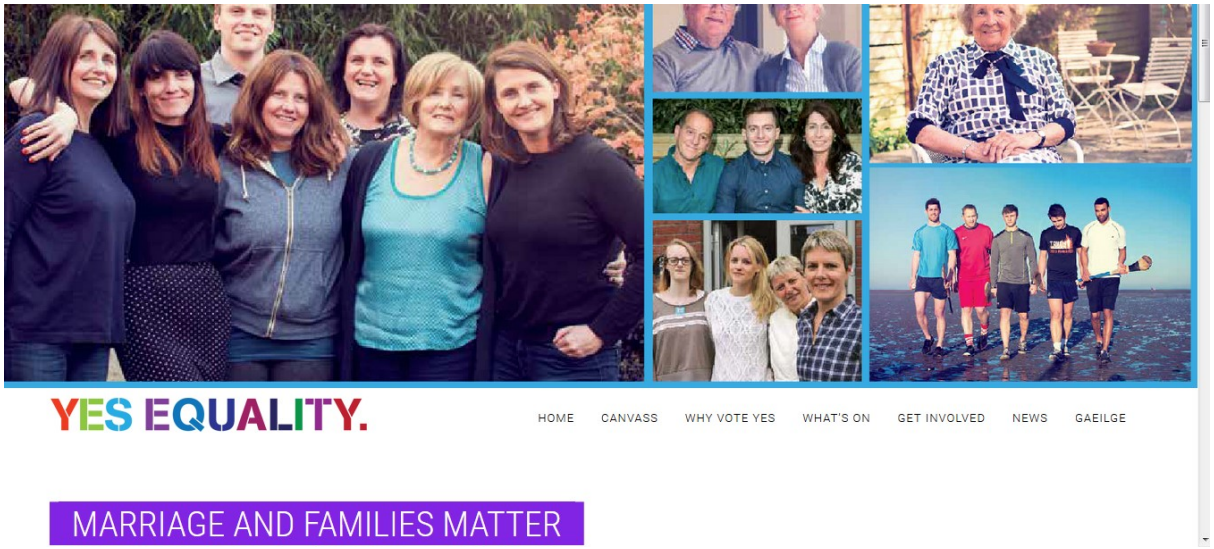
Moreover, the campaign started tending more heavily towards a more "positive" tone, privileging personal narratives involving family members, long relationships, and stories of self-revelation, of emotional truth, and vulnerability; stories which seemed to specifically addressed the straight Irish population (MULHALL, 2015). The aforementioned strategies produced a controlling and totalizing *modus operandi* to the campaign which, as Mulhall argues, eventually exposed the ideological position of the campaign directors regarding "legitimate political action" and "legitimate political subjects" who could give voice to the campaign. Mulhall highlights that this came as no surprise, especially since many "well-known right-wing conservatives such as Noel Whelan, former Fianna Fáil politician and adviser" were involved in the campaign management.The campaign project has been carried in such a way that, in the end, the campaign itself performed the exclusion of LGBTQ individuals and subjectivities who did not neatly fit in the traditional narratives of gender, romantic love and family more easily accepted by the general heterosexual public. The "YES" campaign strategy,

> while pragmatic, was for some at least coextensive with their ideological position on what constitutes legitimate political action and what actors are accepted as legitimate political subjects. In other words, in retrospect the campaign touched on fundamental conflicts about what constitutes politics as such, a question that includes but goes beyond the normativizing mystification of love and marriage that most partook of, with widely varying degrees of enthusiasm and 'sincerity', for the sake of winning the referendum that could not be lost. (MULHALL, 2015)

The way in which some subjectivities and realities of LGBTQI+ individuals were considered as unfitting for the campaign's overall strategy exposed not only the selectiveness of the campaign in regards to queer subjectivities as political subjects but also to the obvious class and ethnic-racial bias of the campaign. Mulhall comments that the "whiteness of the campaign was striking, though not surprising given that the target 'audience' was, as Noel Whelan says, 'middle Ireland'" (2015). The whiteness at the center of the campaign predominates on the posters, leaflets, campaign videos, and other materials – as Figure 4 so clearly demonstrates. Moreover, "campaign managers and strategists who featured in [the] GCN's [Gay Community News] special issue were likewise uniformly white", as it is possible to observe in Figure 5. Thus, the campaign managed to exclude both those whose "queerness were not respectable enough to be allowed to be visible" by the heterosexual public (O'BRIEN, 2017, p. 264), and those whose economic or ethnic backgrounds were believed to not represent the intended audiences of the campaign – the so-called "middle Ireland".

The challenge faced by those campaigning for the referendum was indeed huge and difficult. It was necessary to mobilize a huge portion of Ireland's citizens into recognizing queer affective bonds as just as legitimate as heterosexual ones have historically been recognized. By doing so, they hoped people would agree that queer subjects had the right to constitute families just as much as the heterosexual subjects have. It was a complicated feat to be accomplished considering the history of homosexuality in Ireland as something foreign and as a threat to what constitutes family and the Irish nation.

Figure 4 - Ethnic and LGBTQ "Representation" of Yes Equality.



Source: MULHALL, 2015.[3]

Needless to say, however, it was imperative for the referendum to be approved. Another opportunity such as that was not expected to occur any time in the future in Ireland. Not to mention that a possible defeat could – and would – potentially legitimate the generalized queerphobia and hate speech that had been reproduced so far by the opposition in the media. The whole process, of course, came with great personal cost for the referendum diligent campaigners. Many of them had to deal with the prospect that they were "too queer", so "queer" that it was almost unacceptable for them to openly discuss it with the general public so as to avoid the risk of shocking the public into not supporting the campaign. It highlights the human and emotional cost of a campaign in which, as Anne Mulhall argues, queer individuals were made to believe their own subjectivities could threaten the cause they, themselves, were fighting for and working on. It is regrettable that basic human rights of a part of the population – rights that should not even be questioned – are treated as a gift for a majority to bestow based on their own personal judgements.

Figure 5 - LGBTQ Ethnic and Economic Diversity of the Equality Heroes

[3] The image originally belonged to http://www.yesequality.ie. Website no longer unavailable.

Source: MULHALL, 2015.[4]

4.3 The economic and political implications of the referendum

Considering some of the political and economic environment in Ireland before 2015, it is clear that the referendum served internal and external political and economic interests other than that of guaranteeing the right of marriage for some of their citizens. Internally, for example, the controversies that followed the discussion of the same-gender marriage referendum after 2010 have helped – at least to some degree – driving the media's attention away from the scandals of the post-2008 banking crisis in Ireland at the end of the so called "Celtic Tiger" period – when many Irish financial institutions faced imminent collapse and had to be bailed out by the Irish government. In that sense, the referendum gave the Irish population not only a complex and controversial question to focus on, but to some extent, also worked as a mechanism for coping with their collective disappointment with the State and with the future of the nation.

In "Queer Feelings", Sara Ahmed argues that, in most Western societies, people can incite both sympathy and envy on others based on "the authenticity of their suffering, their vulnerability, [and] their pain". Ahmed further comments that "the investment in the figure of the suffering *other* gives the Western subject the pleasure of being charitable" (ŽIŽEK apud AHMED, 2013, p. 435). Subjects considered as "the other" are attributed with affect (of pain, suffering, etc) and become an investment to the normative subjects by providing the

[4] IRELAND SAYS YES. Ireland: GCN Magazine, issues 306, Jun. 2015. Available in: https://gcn.ie/magazine/ireland-says-yes/#.

latter with a vision of bliss: the moment when the disenfranchised receives whatever is lacking – even if just momentarily. In that sense, the marriage referendum has enabled a country-wide cathartic effect for the Irish people. Symbolically, Ireland became a stage in which citizens had the possibility of achieving such a catharsis by capitalizing on and acting according to the country-wide feeling of benevolence and charity towards Ireland's disenfranchised minority. If this cathartic vision of bliss has been achieved, it was only because an Irish majority got so invested in their "suffering others" that, by deciding to bestowed upon that minority the gift of basic human rights and full citizenship that historically has been denied them, they got to experience that bliss themselves – at least partially.

Externally, on the other hand, Ireland was also able to challenge and reverse some of the international repercussion of the post-2008 bank crisis. The country was able to project a worldwide image of a progressive and diverse nation in the forefront of human rights and social change. A "political and discursive terrain... [which] borrows heavily from an established North American lexicon of same-sex marriage as an instrument of neoliberal governance." (MULHALL, 2015). In fact, Anne Mulhall quotes some of the political and economic arguments that have been used at an early stage of the campaign to justify it as a demonstrative that marriage equality in Ireland "did not diverge in any substantial way from the familiar white middle-class neoliberal register." (2015)

> Research shows that marriage is good for people: married people are healthier, happier and earn more. Marriage is also a commitment device, it keeps couples together and families together. It is accepted by the majority of people as good for society e.g. the family unit looks after itself, takes on a caring role for the members of that family and therefore is less dependent on the State for support…. On top of this, introducing civil marriage equality is austerity proof. It won't cost the State anything but will improve the lives of thousands of people and arguably improve Irish society in general. (Five Reasons to Support Marriage Equality, 2014)

The government and local business were quick to capitalize on the image of a new, open-minded and progressive Ireland – a nation which allegedly embraces diversity – in order to attract foreign markets and promote local business; especially wedding tourism. Mulhall highlights that the "utility" of gay marriage for political and economic interests aligns the Irish state politics for LGBTQI+ rights with a broader white middle-class neoliberal register of business and politics around the world. On one hand, therefore, the totalizing aspect of the referendum campaign as well as the erasure of queer subjectivities that the campaign has helped performing facilitated the referendum acceptance and its victory. On the other hand, however, these features have also enabled such victory to be more easily co-opted by national

and international neoliberal markets and economic interests beyond those of the rights and well being of the LGBTQI+ population in Ireland.

Additionally, the ethnic minorities and migrants in Ireland, who were consistently excluded from the campaign material, have also helped to expose the role of marriage as a social "filtering device". Mulhall argues that "the functions that marriage and family perform within the machinery of the State are nowhere so apparent as in the migration apparatus." In regards to the Irish politics to deal with migration, both the marriage referendum and the idea of love have played their parts in promoting State politics regarding migrants. "Within the idealising and normative terms of the marriage equality campaign, marriage equality is also about love – about the 'forever love' that is supposedly deserving of full State recognition" (MULHALL, 2015). The author explores the issue even further by commenting how "love" becomes one of the tools to turn marriage into

> a filtering device for inclusion in and exclusion from the protections of the State. There's the kind of marriage that grants 'full and equal citizenship' on the one hand, and then there's another kind that is held under suspicion, subject to racial profiling, interviews with immigration officers, the kind of marriage that words like 'sham', 'bogus', 'illegal' and 'deportation' stick to… 'Marriage for Love' in a form recognisable to the State's norms becomes the filtering device here, acknowledgement of its presence being one determinant of the right to remain. (MULHALL, 2015)

The focus of the referendum campaign on middle to upper class white Irish subjects has also helped fostering the idea that legitimate gay love has not only an ethnicity, but also a class; "it legitimates the belief that being queer is a white thing" (MULHALL, 2015). Subjects who fell outside such categories were met with suspicion and were subjected to greater scrutiny before acquiring the rights of marriage granted to others. Cormac O'Brien argues that the "Yes Equality" campaign assumed – and to some extent even suggested – not only that "every queer citizen want[s] to get married, but also that they had the means to do so", which only reinforces the neoliberal notions that queer citizens are "aspirational, middle-class, and… well-heeled" individuals (O'BRIEN, 2017, p. 256). Interestingly, a great chunk of the votes in favor of the campaign actually came from the working classes rather than from the middle or upper classes which were the main targets of the campaign. For Mulhall, this results from the suffering of the Irish working class with disenfranchisement and with the politics of austerity that took place after 2008. Individuals from this class were not only more inclined to relate to – and vote for – other minorities whose rights have also been denied, but

also felt more inclined to defy "the multiple impoverishments and oppressions that the State has enacted" upon them.

4.4 The unspeakables of the referendum campaign

Despite their impressive and undeniably important victory, the kind of erasure that has been enacted by Yes Equality has had serious effects on LGBTQI+ people who are also part of other minority communities – such as immigrants or people of color. The campaign not only reinforced some of the class and ethnic biases in Ireland's social politics, but contributed to the erasure of queer subjectivities from the very LGBTQI+ community they were trying to represent; especially que T (trans people), the Q (queer or gender non-conforming people), and the I (the intersex individuals). Many of these individuals – by virtue of their own subjectivities – do not aspire to be assimilated into the narratives of gay life centered on monogamous everlasting love and traditional marital romantic relationship as it has been portrayed by the "Yes Equality" campaign. This, of course, is not without precedent. As the writings of Backus on the institution of family in Ireland discussed on Chapter I remind us, the State has legislated against and even acted to eliminate those subjectivities which were, in early modernity, considered too deviant or forbidden to keep on existing. This time, however, instead of elimination, Ireland has witnessed the erasure of queer subjectivities from general narratives and discourses of queerness – effectively "sanitizing" the LGBTQI+ community in order to present the general heterosexual public a "cleaner" and "lighter" version of who those individuals are.

One such example of queer subjectivities completely erased from the discourses of the referendum is that represented by Neil Watkins in *The Year of the Magical Wanking*, first produced in 2011 and published in 2012. In this testimonial monologue, the audience is presented to Neil, a mid-30s gay man, HIV positive, who is addicted to masturbation and pornography. In this play about disaffection, Neil portrays the life of a gay man who grew up ashamed by his sexual desires, who was deeply marked by child abuse, by family indifference, by unemployment, social isolation and marginalization, and who struggles for feeling virtually unable to emotionally connect or experience his sexuality in a "healthy" and non-destructive way. While commenting on Neil Watkins' play and other plays of queer testimonial theater, Cormac O'Brien poses the following reflection

> To what extent is the demand for queers to narrate easily digestible life stories – and thus assimilate into mainstream culture – about centralising and redeeming heteronormativity? By judging queer citizens as fit subjects for the constitutional family and the institution of marriage, heteronormative societies get to grant humanity to those who narrate queer testimonial, to those who want to be redeemed

> and confirmed as a good person by the subjects of their magnanimity. This redemption and confirmation means that, to draw from Mulhall, 'in contemporary Ireland good heterosexuals and homonational subjects are produced by marriage, given its regulatory function in enforcing love for the imaginary family, community, and nation' ('Queer in Ireland' 110). But what of those queer subjects that see no need for redemption, or baulk at the idea of living a normative life? What would happen if queer subjects refuse to tell their stories? Or told their stories in different, less-digestible and more radical ways? (O'BRIEN, 2017, p. 264)

While it is possible to argue that Irish society is finally accepting and accommodating some of the individuals whose subjectivities had been eliminated and legislated against in the past, that seems only partially true. In reality, only those whose "queerness" relates more closely to the middle- or upper-class white heterosexual subjectivity and its idea of *Family* have really been fully embraced. "The complexities of race and migration in relation to marriage equality had no place, of course, in a campaign like Yes Equality, which appealed to the familiar, the homely, to reassuring sameness and the norm in all respects. (MULHALL, 2015). The context of the marriage referendum in Ireland reveals both "the centrality of marriage and the family to the nation's symbolic image of itself, and how that symbolic image operates within the State's machinery of inclusion and exclusion". As an institution, this discussion has demonstrated the power that marriage possess in order to legitimize unions and families – granting citizens access to rights such as constituting a family, adoption and guardianship, full Irish citizenship, visitation rights to your spouse in a hospital, life insurance, pensions, welfare entitlements, and other State protections. However, marriage can also be used as a filtering device, sometimes for inclusion, but often for the exclusion of individuals from certain rights. In that regard, Ariel Silvera poses a relevant question in her online article: "why are our rights limited by whether or not we get access to a specific state-sanctioned form of relationship? What if we need those rights but we do not want the state involved in our affairs? What about the other things we have a right to but are often marginalised," among which housing, employment, and minimal conditions of life could easily be listed. The answers for these questions, unfortunately, remain mostly unanswered. Nonetheless, this discussion on marriage, similarly to that of family in Chapter I, will be informing our exploration of Sebastian Barry's *Days Without End*, in the following chapter, and how queer affectivity and family are represented in a post-marriage-referendum novel.

5 *DAYS WITHOUT END* AND POST-REFERENDUM QUEER REPRESENTATION

This chapter explores Sebastian Barry's novel *Days Without End* (2016) and discusses how queer affection and family are represented in one of the first novels to be published after the referendum with an Irish gay man as its protagonist. This discussion allows not only for a better understanding of how literary representation of queer affectivity and family has changed when compared to *At Swim, Two Boys* (2001), but also to demonstrate how *Days Without End* appropriates discourses and narratives from the Marriage Referendum Campaign and use them as a framework to explore both the subjectivities of the novel's queer men and the concept of family underlying the novel's fictionalized historical past. The strong impact of the marriage referendum on the novel, this chapter argues, can be perceived even in the more formal aspects of the novel. With regards to the core aspects of *Days Without End*, Neil Campbell argues, quite reasonably so, that central to the novel is the Thomas' struggle

> to survive at all costs in this New World as poor, Irish, and homosexual in a fiercely heterosexual, racist country where performing onstage as a woman or being a soldier fighting Indians were contrasting ways to feed oneself in such an unforgiving place. (2018, p. 233)

In acknowledgement to Susan Lee Johnson, Campbell argues that Barry is able to render the often mythologized "West" in a different and more complex way, by "adding to it the complicated histories that result" from the production of "countermemories" and the challenging of dominant narratives that reinscribe social inequalities (CAMPBELL, 2018, p. 233). Barry manages to reinscribe, somewhat critically, "gender, sexuality and race as intersecting and complex formations of identity" (CAMPBELL, 2018, p. 233) primarily by telling the story as a first person narrator, emphasizing the character's personal point of view regarding his own life.

Another aspect of the narrative that has received attention is the overall tone with which the story is told. While Campbell acknowledges the "hopeful possibility of love and community" that the novel promotes (2018, p. 231), Benedict Page explores this hopefulness and overall positive tone even further, and argues that *Days Without End* is

> against all probabilities, a story more about happiness than tragedy and the opening sentence conveys the buoyancy of its narrator. Thomas' life may be brutal, scarred by the trauma of his death-laden voyage from Ireland; the soldiers kill and are killed; the slaughter of the Native Americans is relentlessly cruel; there is frostbite, gangrene and starvation. Yet in spite of all of that there is, for Thomas, the energy and blitheness of youth... And there is young love (PAGE, 2016).

The positioning of the novel towards the hardships Thomas McNulty and John Cole experience and its overall tone already point to a certain degree of convergence between the narrative of *Days Without End* and the tone that the "Yes Equality" campaign for the Marriage Referendum in Ireland has acquired in the very months preceding the vote. Not unlike Page's observation, the "Yes Equality" campaign have also focused more "on the personal, on family ties and friendship circles, on the 'positive story', on self-revelation and emotional truth", as highlighted by Anne Mulhall.

In the novel, the teenager Thomas McNulty takes one of the famine ships towards North America to escape the terrible reality of the Western Ireland after his family died from the famine in the 1840s. The famine ship leads Thomas to Canada, where it briefly stops, and then Thomas and the rest of the Irish immigrants are taken to the United States of America. Once there, the 14 year-old Thomas meets John Cole, another orphan and homeless boy also struggling to survive by himself. Throughout the novel, Thomas narrates to a nameless interlocutor the stories of different periods and central moments of his life. Together with John Cole, he joins the US army, takes part in the wars against native indigenous people and eventually joins the fight in the US Civil War. "I am talking now about… my first engagement in the business of war. 1851 it was most likely. Since bloom was gone off me, I had volunteered aged seventeen in Missouri" (BARRY, 2016, p. 1).

Already in its first pages, the novel reveals that this narrator – Thomas – is telling his story in retrospective; the story being narrated by Thomas happened at a different time that in which the narration is taking place. Furthermore, by resorting to his own memories, this first-person narrator moves back and forth in time during his accounts as the narrative progresses. He starts his narrative by telling the story of one of his first experiences in the army, but moves back in time soon after to tell about the time he and John Cole met each other. He then proceeds to tell his interlocutor how both he and John eventually ended up working in a small saloon as crossdressing dancers to entertain the miners who were working nearby town. After that, Thomas jumps forward in his narrative to the time when both him and John were seventeen and had to leave their job, with Mr Noone, and joined the US army together.

Throughout his narrative, Thomas makes a series of digressive interruptions to offer personal comments and, sometimes, even meditates on the story he is narrating. Such strategy draws further attention to the distinction between the very moment in which the narrative act

is taking place in contrast to the time of the events he narrates. The different strategies employed in the novel to foreground the retrospective characteristic of the narrative are relevant not only as a device for the plot development, but also to characterize the narrator himself. Thomas as a narrator fits in the figure of the storyteller. Additionally, Thomas is not telling a tale or a story he has heard about, he is narrating a story from his own point of view, his personal experience. Not surprisingly, the novel employs the informal and casual linguistic features which are common in the oral communication linguistic register, and such narratological strategies highlight certain devices that impact the dynamics between this narrator and the supposed reader of the novel. The following section will further elaborate on these devices and dynamics.

5.1 The construction of the narrator and his interlocutor

The consistent reliance on his memories, for example, brings into question the reliability of Thomas as a narrator. He repeatedly questions himself throughout the narrative, calling attention to the lack of accuracy of the memories he relies on to tell his story. “Maybe it wasn’t Kearney”, the narrator questions, “I forget, Kearney is an Irish name. The mind is a wild liar and I don’t trust much in it that I find there. To tell a story I have to trust it but I can issue a warning” (BARRY, 2016, p. 30). Thomas not only interrupts his narration to consider whether or not the name of the place was really correct but also issues a warning to his interlocutor – and thus, signaling to the reader – about the unreliability of his own memory. In doing so, however, he also establishes a more direct relationship with his interlocutor (and in turn, with the reader). The recurrence of this device throughout the narrative puts Thomas in a vulnerable position – someone who is trying to remember the correct facts to tell his interlocutor. This, of course, contributes to lower the defenses and to soften the judgements of his interlocutor – and arguably of the reader – in regards to the story itself. Thus, the narrator seeks to gain the allegiance of his interlocutor to himself and to his perspective of the events.

While it may seem, at times, that the narrator is directly addressing the reader during his interruptions and digressions, that is not necessarily the case in this novel. Some of the literary devices employed in *Days Without End* suggest the second-person singular “you” to whom the narrator addresses is not necessarily the reader, but rather, an intradiegetic interlocutor characterized by the narrator himself as a *sir*. “Somewhere in there all mixed up with not knowing was knowing something. I ain’t saying we knowed what we knowed, I ain’t saying Starling Carlton or Lige Magan jumped up and said he knowed something, or

anyone else. I ain't saying that. No, *sir*." (BARRY, 2016, p. 85, italics added). The usage of the second-person singular "you" in the novel and the honorific *sir* are particularly revealing and could point to two different aspects. On the one hand, "sir" could be nothing more than an expression, and the "you" to whom the narrator addresses is, in fact the reader. However, the word "sir", which appears throughout the novel, is not used consistently enough to suggest it's nothing more than an expression Thomas uses indiscriminately as it seems to be well placed and intentional. One the other hand, "sir" could be establishing the presence of an intradiegetic interlocutor in the narrative – someone who is there listening to Thomas' story. Moreover, the expression "No, sir" is quite meaningful when we take into consideration that this narrator, Thomas, was in the army for a long period of his life, and has learned the customs of military life. The honorific sir was traditionally used for knights, in the past, and for army officers in later periods, if not by law than at least by custom, which suggests that, as a former soldier in the 19th century, it would be unlikely for Thomas to use this honorific indiscriminately.

The first-person narrator is the novel, therefore, is not merely telling the story in any way that he would want to since both possibilities for the characterization of his interlocutor point to the fact that even if Thomas does not know very well who that person is, he seems to at least assume, considering his language and choices throughout the narrative, that the person is not "like" John Cole and himself and probably does not share similar life experiences. Whether this interlocutor is a reader to whom Thomas is writing the story or an intradiegetic interlocutor who is there with him, listening to his every word – it seems that Thomas adds at least some level of filtering to his language and story. Moreover, considering the overall tone that Thomas employs in the narrative, it suggests that he does not seem to be addressing someone who would immediately understand some personal aspects of the story he is telling, or at least, someone who he was not certain would outright sympathize with his subject position. The aforementioned aspects indicate that whether or not Thomas is infact addressing a single person, he seems to be telling the story to a someone who is either imagined or perceived by him as a heterosexual. This is an important point to which the discussion shall return to.

If the literary device *sir* is indicative of the presence of a nameless interlocutor listening to Thomas, then it helps construct an extra narratological layer within the narrative. This extra narratological layer frames the story being told by Thomas within another scene –

a scene in which the storytelling act itself is taking place. It is noteworthy that neither this framing scene nor this *sir* to whom Thomas addresses are objectively described in any way throughout the novel – which means the reader of the novel cannot know until much later in the novel if the storytelling is happening in a near or a distant future in relation to the moment in which the story is being told. These strategies help produce what Roland Barthes terms "the effect of reality", which masks from the reader the literary artifice itself (BARTHES, 1984, p. 148). This effect attempts to conceal from the reader the literary medium in which the narrative is constructed – that is, the written text itself – by employing literary devices which produce the sensation that one is not only inside, but also witnessing, a real story; a device that produces an effect of reality. Therefore, even if the honorific s*ir* does not signify to a human referent, this choice of language still signifies to "reality" itself; the supposed "real" situation in which a man addresses his interlocutor.

The way in which reported speech is dealt with by the narrator in *Days Without End* is also quite telling when it comes to the characterization of this protagonist-narrator. Instances of directly reported speech are completely absent throughout the narrative. Some of the strategies employed by the narrator to deal with cases of reported speech in the novel are best exemplified by the two following excerpts. In the first one, the narrator describes a scene in which one of the soldiers attacks one of the Native Indigenous tribes' chiefs when the latter is trying to diplomatically settle a conflict between soldiers and his people.

> Starling Carlton unsheathes the old indian knife and runs at the chief… by Jesus he just drives the knife into the chief's side… The gun [of the chief] just seems to go off then and Starling Carlton is hopping around and roaring because the bullet has struck his foot. (BARRY, 2016, p. 113)

The second excerpt follows up on the scene and demonstrates some of the devices employed by this storyteller narrator to deal with the reported speech of others. Soon after the incident, Thomas describes the moment in which John Cole interrogates Starling Carlton regarding why the latter attacked the chief seemingly without motive.

> So, why'd you go stabbing him, says John Cole. *Weren't it obvious. Goddamn it, didn't John Cole see the chief raise his carbeen to him? Goddamn, did he not shoot him with it? What you saying? Ain't it a fact,* Handsome John Cole*, that you got Indian in you somewhere? I guess you feeling sorrow for your own kind, goddamn it.* Then John Cole is confused for a moment and so am I. I can't remember if the shot came before the stabbing or after. I am trying to get back to the vision of it in my head. I reckon it was after but my mind's not sure. (BARRY, 2016, p. 115-116, italics added).

Thomas is certainly the one reporting to his interlocutor the speeches of both John and Carlton – he is, after all, the one who usually refers to John as "Handsome John Cole."

Starling Carlton, on the other hand, who is the one actually having an argument with John, would never address the latter in such a way; not only because he was of a higher rank than Cole but also because Carlton expresses quite openly his negative opinions for the Native Indigenous, the Black, the Irish, and those of mixed race origin. Likewise, it is extremely uncharacteristic of Thomas to either talk about or address John in such a confrontational tone, much less commenting about his Native Indigenous ancestry. Furthermore, Thomas is as confused as John at the end of the exchange which suggests he could not be one confronting him. Thomas, therefore, is incorporating Starling's own words and state of mind to his account of the scene.

This strategy resonates with what Mikhail Bakhtin defines as the *texture-analysing* modification of the indirect speech. In this modification, the person who is reporting the speech incorporates the "words and locutions that characterize the subjective and stylistic physiognomy of the message" from whoever produced the speech in the first place (BAKHTIN, 1973, p. 131). Carlton's words were not reported in direct speech in the novel – for example, such as "weren't it obvious. Goddamn it, didn't *you* [John] see the chief raise his carbeen to *me*? Goddamn, did he not shoot *me* with it?*"* Rather, the narrator incorporates the particularities of that message to his own speech, and delivers it using the third person singular "he" to refer to John. By resorting to that, the novel further highlights that Thomas is delivering those words to his interlocutor in real time as the narrative progresses, instead of having the controntation appear in the narrative as a directly reported speech from Carlton. All these stylistic features, therefore, help stabilize the framing of the story within the storytelling scene.

Towards the end of the novel, however, there are clear signs of a change – even if slightly – in the characterization of Thomas' narrative voice. As the narrative progresses, Thomas starts questioning gradually less and less his own memories and his perspective of the events. This evolves to a point in which his narrative voice borders becoming partially omniscient of events he has never witnessed or experienced himself. At some point in his story, he defects from the army. Some time after that incident, he tells the story of when soldiers came looking for John and himself. When this happens, Thomas is inside the house crossdressed and attempting to pass as one of the women in the house, while John Cole tries to trick the soldiers into believing Thomas is dead. Nonetheless, Thomas narrates the scene as if he, himself, were present and listening to the conversation between John and the soldiers.

> There he lies, he [John] says. Who that? says Poulson. Corporal McNulty as you was saying. That him lying there? says Poulson. I guess it is, says John. How was he killed? We was jumped by bandits. These other beds is where three of them abide. (BARRY, 2016, p. 282).

Thomas could not have known what happened between John and Poulson, nor any of the exact words they said, since he was hiding from the soldiers inside the house the whole time. The partial omniscience he attempts to demonstrate when narrating this scene calls into question the very characterization of him as a narrator at the beginning of the novel. Up until that point, Thomas told the story from his own personal experience, through his perspective, even when he offered comments about things he could not know – he usually makes it clear to his interlocutor that it is either an opinion or a conjecture on his part. Such a change could suggest that Thomas is actively, and consciously, trying to convince his interlocutor of certain events and details even if there is not evidence that they did happen in that particular way; perhaps to provide a version of those events that are more convenient to the perspective of the story he wants to produce. The strategies he employs to lower the defences and negotiate the allegiance of his interlocutor (and of the reader) throughout the narrative are not without reason and seem to point to some ulterior motive behind Thomas' investment in telling his story to the *sir* he addresses.

There are a couple of other indications that Thomas's choices throughout the narrative consist of an attempt to control the opinion or conclusion that this interlocutor might reach with the story. Thomas seems to purposefully arrange the events of his story and his digressive comment to align it with certain themes that, seemingly, point to an overarching goal. One such indication is the narrator's timely decision to skip certain periods of his life every now and then in his story. At some point he even justifies it by saying that "two years, three pass by, and the only change I can put a clock on is the Major's two girls… Major would be on his porch cooing at them in the cot. Why shouldn't he, they was his" (BARRY, 2016, p. 88). He, then, continues his story by describing the Major's relationship with his daughters, focusing particularly on the bonds between the Major and the girls and other issues regarding parenthood. It is also noteworthy that, at this particular moment in the narrative, Thomas seems to disregard the role of Mrs Neale – the girls' mother – in raising them. Mrs Neale works around the fort and actively takes care of her daughters while still working as a teacher for the Indian orphans in the fort. While Thomas previously acknowledges the admiration he feels for Mrs Neale, once he starts his account of the girls' childhood under the protection of their parents, he focuses almost entirely on Major Neale. Thomas' decision to skip a couple of years of his life and his relationship to John to focus particularly on the

parental relationship between the Major and his daughter already points to his intention of approaching the issue of family and parenting which he further explores as the novel progresses.

Thomas eventually skips a few years in time once again, this time to focus his narrative on the parental feelings both John and himself start to develop for an Indigenous girl in the fort.

> Next part of my story happens about two years later. Only thing that happens meantime out of the general going on of things is one of the Indians whipper-snapper takes a shine to me and as she learns her English from Mrs Neale I begin to learn about her… Starling Carlton got angry and said I shouldn't be friending vermin, that's what he said (BARRY, 2016, p. 117).

Both of the aforementioned moments in which the narrator skips periods of his life are particularly suggestive in two different ways. First, both moments demonstrate how the narrator chooses to explore issues of male parenthood and filial bonds. At first, he explores parenthood by focusing on Major Neale and his daughters and by using the parental bonds between Neale and the girls as both a point of reference and a framework to make sense of the issues of family and parenting. Later on, he begins to disclose how he and John Cole start developing a similar affection for the girl, Winona, until they eventually decide to adopt her as their daughter. The aforementioned examples reveal that at least one of the motives for Thomas' choices throughout his narrative is to establish a parallel between the major's relationship with his daughter and that of himself and John with Winona; a parallel which becomes pivotal for the remainder of the story he is telling.

After living with Thomas and John as their daughter for a couple of years, following their discharge from the army, Winona is taken from Thomas and John under Major Neale orders, and by the very soldiers that fought beside them during their years in the army. The girl is returned to her people. the Sioux, as an attempt of negotiating with the tribe for the release of Major Neale's daughters, who had been previously captured. Thomas describes the complexity of his situation when he finds out that the army intends to exterminate all members of the Sioux tribe – including Winona, once the Major's daughters were safe. He is, then, forced to disobey direct orders from the army and his superiors in order to save the girl he now saw as his daughter as well. Thomas is eventually forced to murder one of his superiors in order to take Winona from the battlefield into safety. By establishing such a parallel between his own parental bonds with Winona and that of the Major with his

daughters, Thomas attempts to justify to his interlocutor his own actions – which now include the murdering of an army official – and to demonstrate that what he did for Winona is not different in any way from what Major Neale did to save his own daughters; or from what any other father would do for that matter. Thomas attempts, therefore, to orchestrate his story so that he could demonstrate that any crime he could be accused of committing was more than justified, considering his duties to Winona, and that the filial bond he had with Winona should be considered as legitimate and strong as that of a Major Neale and his daughters.

What is striking about this is not necessarily the fact that Thomas decides to save Winona or that he had to kill someone in order to do so. We can only assume that one would try to help and save a loved one, especially a child, regardless of whether that child is biological or adoptive. What is striking about Thomas' attempt to justify his action is that he relies on arguments that are very similar to the ones used by the "Yes Equality" referendum to convince the general public of Ireland to vote in favor of the referendum. Thomas arranges his story based on the concept of "sameness" that was also used during the marriage referendum to argue that same-gender couples should have the right to marriage mainly because it was the exact same right that heterosexual population already had. In other words, "equality granted on the basis of sameness, on a shared humanity – but a humanity that does not diverge in any alarming way from what 'we' recognise as 'just like us', a fellow 'citizen' who does not disturb the established image the nation has of itself", as Anne Mulhall so rightfully observes regarding the referendum.

The second aspect that is evidenced by the two aforementioned excerpts in which Thomas decides to skip a few years in his narrative is the extent to which his relationship with John is, at times, eclipsed in the novel. Details of their relationship are not only consistently omitted, but John is also considerably underdeveloped as a person in Thomas' story, especially when compared to other characters. Although Thomas explicitly states that he and John are in love and maintain a relationship ever since before they joined the army – he offers little to no other information about the particularities of their relationship. The narrator moves forward in time a couple of times throughout the novel, and yet, he barely comments on how (or if) his relationship with John changed or developed in any particular way during that period of time. Such lack of development of John and their relationship often puts John in the position of a narratological device for the story.

Some of the other characters in the novel are, in fact, much better developed by the narrator in regards to their characteristics, their faults, complexities of their relationships with others Thomas' life partner. Chapter nine is one good example of this as the narrator focuses

almost entirely on sergeant Starling Carlton's life, his personality, and on the complexities and ambivalence of the types of relationship Carlton would establish with Thomas and his other army comrades. John Cole's characterization, on the other hand, is flat throughout the novel except for his mixed native indigenous ancestry. John is described as handsome, quiet, always kind and loving with Thomas and Winona, yet ruthless and brave in battle and in face of danger. He is never rude, never acts in an offensive way towards anyone, never makes mistakes, never disagrees or argues with Thomas over anything. In fact, John hardly ever shows opinions or positions of his own that do not align with, or endorse, the views that Thomas himself expresses in his narrative. When Thomas describes John taking the initiative or doing something out of his own will, it is usually to offer an easy and often simple solution to a problem that Thomas mentions he had been struggling with at time point in his life. In that sense, Thomas' description of John sometimes builds him more as an archetype, an idea, or generic model of a man – or even of an ideal lover – than a round and complex individual with his own faults and idiosyncrasies with whom Thomas maintains a relationship with.

5.2 Promoting ethnic empathy and sexual understanding

Family and the issues of parenting and adoption, however, are not the only major concerns in the narrative of *Days Without End*. Events, situations, and the attitude of some of the characters explicitly demonstrate how the lives of the native Indigenous people were considered to be less meaningful and less valuable than the lives of other white United States citizens. Additionally, Thomas himself – much like most other Irish immigrants in the novel – is consistently reminded that he occupies a social position in that society that puts him closer to the Native Indigenous and the Blacks than to the white americans. He is acutely aware that his security and social position in the United States society – much like that of Winona – is delicate and fragile. He depends on other people's trust and help in order to survive and he is aware that, were it not for his white skin, he would have been in a much worse situation in life. In regards to the issue of race, the following excerpts prove enlightening.

> The other silent creature was Winona… What we walked through was the strike-out of her kindred. Scrubbed off with a metal brush like the dirt and dried blood on a soldier's jacket. Metal brush of strange and implacable hatred (BARRY, 2016, p. 263).

After demonstrating the extent of the hatred and bigotry against Native Indigenous peoples in the USA, Thomas proceeds to comment on the hatred and bigotry soldiers and

other United States citizens had towards the other "others" beyond the Native Indigenous; the "others" which the Irish immigrants were also a part of. The narrator, then, establishes a parallel between this context and that of the Irish people under British colonial powers in Ireland.

> Same would be if the soldiers fell on my family in Sligo and cut out our parts. When that old ancient Cromwell come to Ireland he said he would leave nothing alive. Said the Irish were vermin and devils. Clean out the country for good people to step into. Make a paradise. Now we make this American paradise I guess. Guess it be strange so many Irish boys doing this work. (BARRY, 2016, p. 263-264).

During his first period in the army, Thomas realizes that the natives are attacking white citizens travelling west because these travelers are invading Indigenous territory, taking the resources and driving the natives away, which eventually leads the Natives to fall prey to the Famine during harsh Autumn and Winter. He comments that "Indians had to make way in their villages for that old murderer called Famine. That filthy dark-hearted scrawny creature that wants the ransom of lives. Because government food that was promised was late or never coming" (BARRY, 2016, p. 70). By remembering the horrors of the Famine in Ireland, which killed all of his family, and the history of his country and the Irish people he is able to empathize and relate to the situation of Natives. Once again, it becomes clear that it is through his digressions that he suggests to his interlocutor the meanings he intends to produce with the events he is describing.

After joining the army, Thomas starts to realize the similarities of how Native Indigenous, Africans, and Irish people were treated by the average white american citizen. Throughout the narrative, he offers a few examples of how some characters address him and the other Irish lads as the undesired "others". Thomas comments, for example, that Sergeant Starling Carlton used to say that "the Irish was bad enough and as far as he's concerned you can take all Africans and put them into a great feed for hogs but he says the Indians is the worst" (BARRY, 2016, p. 117). Even though there is a hierarchy that puts the Irish above the Black and the "Indians" in his comment, it nonetheless points to the fact that Carlton does not see any of them as his equals, at least to the extent of the way Thomas' describes Carlton's hatred comments. Not unlike some of the people Thomas and John meet after their time in the army, Carlton treats Thomas and the other Irish lads in the army as the "others". Despite their whiteness, the Irish are treated by him as a "race" that is both different and inferior to the one Carlton believes he is a part of – not very different from the way people of color themselves are generally treated.

This eventually leads him to reflect on the role he and other Irish immigrants had on the slaughtering of so many of the native indigenous peoples – including Winona's relatives. As Campbell argues, central to the novel is "the irony of the Irish involvement in the Indian Wars" and of Thomas McNulty's role in dispossessing people in a situation similar to the one his own people have experienced with the British (BARRY, 2016, p. 231). The intricate strategies produced by the narrator call into question the very process of racialization that the Irish as a people have been subjected to and highlight the similarities between that and what the original peoples of the USA have experienced. He invites his interlocutor – and the reader by consequence – to questioning the several discourses that attempt to justify atrocities against ethnic minorities, and by carefully arranging the events of his own storytelling, he demonstrate that the Irish themselves have gone through a similar process and have more than enough reasons to empathize with the Blacks and the Native indigenous. This allows Thomas to consciously break with the discourses used for racializing the other ethnic groups into subspecies and to avoid the dehumanizing discourses employed to trivialize slaughter and to suggest that the lives of the Blacks and the Native Indigenous are less valuable those of the white US Americans – discourses that remind the narrator of the treatment that the Irish received from the British in his homeland.

Thomas gradually develops his awareness around the racializing discourses that attempt to separate and categorize him and other citizens into different and hierarchically inferior categories of people. When Thomas and John are discharged from the army and leave with their unofficially adopted daughter, they move into a place called Grand Rapids and start working once again with Mr Noone, who had previously employed them when they were teenagers. Thomas and John start living and working with people of colour – most of them former slaves in US plantations. There, they became friends with Beulah McSweny, a black man who had the privilege of receiving education from his father, who was the son of a free man who worked ferrying people along the Mississippi river. Since Winona is refused by all schools in the regions for being an "Indian", "the elegant Beulah McSweny [...] says he'll teach Winona. He says his nickname is poet McSweny and he has written maybe three songs used in the minstrel shows" (BARRY, 2016, p. 134). At that point in the narrative, Thomas comments that "all the news in the Grand Rapids courier is that man was once an ape which John Cole says is no surprise." (p. 139). This explicit and yet reductive mentioning of the post-Darwinian debates that circulated US society in the late 19th century demonstrates

the narrator's attempt to emphasise to his interlocutor the extent of the racializing discourses circulating in society at the time.

The emphasis on ethnicity in *Days Without End* acquired an even greater importance when contrasted with the social and political context in Ireland at the time the novel was being written. Europe was dealing with increasing numbers of immigrants and asylum seekers since the beginning of the second decade of our century – a phenomenon that has been named "The European Migrant Crisis" in 2015. According to a report by the U.N. refugee agency[5], this was probably the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War, with over 63 million refugees (not including economic migrants) around the world by the year of 2015, meaning that roughly one out of every hundred people on the planet was a migrant by that year. In an online article regarding Irish attitudes to immigration in 2018, Hayley Halpin argued that general support for migrants in Ireland had greatly decreased after the economic recession of 2008, being worse than the European average by 2018, with 58% of those surveyed showing support for migrants only in cases in which migrants have the same ethnic and religious background of the majority in Ireland – and ultimately,

It is worthy of praise, therefore, that *Days Without End* goes to such lengths to remind its contemporary Irish readership that the Irish people were also immigrants once, and that they, too, suffered with prejudice and xenophobia at the time – not unlike migrant groups nowadays. Furthermore, the whiteness and the erasure of ethnic minorities from the "Yes Equality" campaign did not escape the Irish audience at the time. The Anti Racism Network Ireland (ARN) even produced a video as an attempting to intervene and include racial equality in the campaign for the referendum; a video that was addressed not so much to the "middle Ireland" as it was for the migrant communities in Ireland and the LGBTQI+ people in those communities. The narrative of *Days Without End*, therefore, seems intrinsically connected with the social struggles contemporary to the time the novel was written, especially with regards to how the narrative foregrounds the diverse ethnic background of the 19th century USA and the place of the Irish immigrants among such diversity.

> No one can imagine the motley crowd that go to make an american town. First you got the have-nothing know-everything goddamn Irish… then you got the half-breed Indian mixed with god knows what. Then you got the blacks, maybe they came up from Carolina or them places. Then you got the Chinese and the Spanish

[5] United Nations Refugee Agency. "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015."

> families. Where we are is where all these folks come home at night to roost when they're done working (BARRY, 2016, p. 135)

5.3 Demure sexuality and gender uncertainty

If on one hand, the narrative engages with issues of ethnicity in a more open and explicit manner, on the other hand, Thomas decides take a considerably more subtle and careful approach when disclosing about (queer) affection and desire between men in his story – which seems consistent with the level of interest that Thomas anticipates from his interlocutor regarding such issues. Thomas provides a few details regarding general displays of affection and sexuality between men in the context of the army. "The boys [...] shown regard for John Cole in his extremity. Handsome John Cole they called him. Got the cooks to make him broth and so forth. Bringing in to him like he was an emperor" (BARRY, 2016, p. 69-70). Here, Thomas emphasises the forms of affection and caring that existed among men in the army, even if only through a brief and seemingly unpretentious comment on the politics of affection among soldiers. What is important about this excerpt, however, is the subtlety with which he demonstrates to his interlocutor how some of the boys – especially Nathan and Lige – also used to refer to John as "Handsome" – which highlights aspects of the homosocial nature of relationships between men in the army.

Simultaneously, however, Thomas seems to avoid portraying his relationship with John as something singular or exceptional – something unique to them that could not be found elsewhere. In fact, he emphasizes how forms of affection between men, such as the one he shares with John, were not uncommon among other men, especially in the army, even if such forms of affection were not always encouraged or treated as naturally as heterosexual sex and desire. To some extent, then, Thomas' overarching objective is in line with the idea of resisting the discourses that attempt to categorise and differentiate people into ethnic or sexual subcategories. Thomas seeks to prevent John and himself from becoming representatives of a sexual subspecies – to use the term Foucault suggests in *The History of Sexuality* – by demonstrating to his interlocutor that his affection and behaviour were already widely present in society as social and private practices and expressions of affection and desire. Such practices, therefore, could not be considered as inherently constituting a "sexual subspecies". While the narrator generally avoids discussing intimacy and sexuality within the context of his own private life and relationship with John, he does comment on their

experience in life and expectations as male lovers. After they start living together, Thomas describes his feelings as John and himself lie side by side in the privacy of their bedroom.

> John Cole's left hand snakes over under the sheets and takes a hold of my right hand. We listen to the cries of the night revellers outside and hear the horses tramping along the ways. We're holding hands then like lovers who have just met or how we imagined lovers might be in the unknown realm where lovers act as lovers without concealment (BARRY, 2016, p. 128)

Eventually, however, Thomas and John decide to change the nature of their relationship and get married. They hoped that, by making their union as official as possible, they would be entitled to greater legitimacy as family and, therefore, greater social protection. On their marriage, Thomas discloses to his interlocutor that there was

> [...] a half-blind preacher in a temple called Bartram House and I don my best dress and me and John Cole go there and we tie the knot. Rev. Hindle he says the lovely words and John Cole kiss the bride and then it's done and who to know. Maybe you could read in their holy book. John Cole and Thomasina McNulty wed this day of our Lord Dec. 7th 1866. (BARRY, 2016, p. 204)

By making use of the acting and the performative skills he developed as a "show girl" while working with Mr Noone's, Thomas hopes that they will be able to socially perform as a traditional (and heterosexual) family, alongside John and Winona, by crossdressing as Thomasina. Thomas realizes, then, that only a family sanctioned by the institution of marriage could provide them with the safety they could never experience as a homosexual couple in the late 1860s USA. While such artifice would allow them to live their relationship without worrying about concealing it from society – keeping their "love in plain sight" (BARRY, 2016, p. 132), it also emphasizes society's hostility to homosexual love and to homoaffective family. The emphasis on their struggle to socially perform as a family is yet another strategy employed by Thomas during his storytelling to exemplify and demonstrate to his interlocutor the unfairness they had to deal with in society as a result of their gender, their affection and sexual desires, and their attempt to constitute a family. Thomas's relationship with John, after all, does not appear to change in any way because they got married or because of the crossdressing, and neither does the filial bond between Winona and the two of them. Nonetheless, the treatment they received from society changes drastically merely as a result of them now performing as a traditional family unit. Passing as a heterosexual family has such an impact in their lives that, for a while, it even protects Winona and John from the prejudice they sometimes met because of their native indigenous acenstry.

Thomas' crossdressing and performing as John's wife marks an important shift in the narrative, moving from a more subtle discussion on sexuality towards a broader and somewhat more complex discussion on gender. While the narrator is reluctant to expose his own intimate life in order to either exemplify or explore male desire and affection, he definitely does not seem so reluctant when it comes to using his own experience with crossdressing to questioning the limits of his own identity and of gender in his life. At first, when Thomas starts working as a crossdressing dancer, he compares the feeling of performing as a woman in front of an audience to his experience facing danger in war, and comments to his interlocutor that "what surges into us is that elixir that do come from putting a danger in front of yourself like people intending to leap into those falls and surviving them" (BARRY, 2016, p. 130). He marvels at the effects he produces in the audience and how he, himself, is affected by the effects he produces.

> Something strange has happened, the hall has fallen into silence. Silence more speaking than any sound. I guess they don't know what they are seeing. I guess it is true that they are seeing a lovely woman… All day they've laboured in the beds of gypsum crystals, hacking and gathering. Their fingernails are a queer white from the work. Their backs are sore and they must troop out again in the morning. But for a minute they loved *a woman that ain't a real woman* but that ain't the point. There was love in Mr Titus Noone's hall for a crazy foggy moment. There were love imperishable for a rushing moment (BARRY, 2016, p. 132-133, grifo nosso).

This evokes a number of relevant topics regarding the narrator's views on gender. He fully recognizes, at least at this point in the narrative, that being able to perform femininity in such a way does not make him a "real woman;" he is performing a character – a persona – which according to his own narrative does not reflect his own gender identity outside of that character. Crossdressing here assumes the meaning more closely related to that of the contemporary art form of Drag (drag queen/drag king) performances. On that, Campbell comments that crossdressing as a form of living, in the novel,

> suggest anything is possible and nothing is as it might be assumed. In the spirit of Judith Butler's interest in drag as a performative and "subversive enactment" (Gender 125), Barry utilizes scenes of gender and racial disruption to question the wider hierarchies at work in the nineteenth century American West… The "problematic dualisms" that lock down power relations (129), for example, gender as male/female, sexuality as straight/gay, and race as white/"other," come under scrutiny and critique within the sweeping national drama and intimate everyday moments of *Days Without End*, which constantly "queers" these supposed stable points of reference (CAMPBELL, 2018, p. 234).

In the interview "Costa Winner Sebastian Barry: 'My Son Instructed Me in the Magic of Gay Life'" Sebastian Barry discloses to Stephen Moss how his gay son, Toby,

became both an inspiration and a source of material for Barry to write the novel. “Toby discussed drag with Barry and how gay men from tough backgrounds sometimes used it as a form of empowerment. Those ideas seeped into the book…” (MOSS, 2017). Crossdressing, therefore, is brought to the novel not only as a tool for questioning gender stereotypes and exploring the the limits and boundaries of gender but also as an appreciation of the role that the art of Drag has had for queer culture as an art form that blurs the limits of genders and, above all, emphasise the performative aspects of gender. The male narrator, who is also a former soldier, is able to perform femininity not only artistically during his performances but in his everyday social life. By having a soldier engaging with, and enjoying, an activity that is so distant from traditional notions of masculinity – especially the type of masculinity that is often associated with soldiers – the novel manages to call into question contemporary mainstream representations of masculinity. Moreover, by having Thomas perform femininity in order to pass as a woman, the novel tackles on the issue of gender performativity and troubles essentialist views of gender especially by demonstrating that “masculinity” and “femininity” are not characteristics inherently associated with biological sex/genitals and that, even as a man, Thomas is equally able to perform masculinity and femininity for different purposes.

If at first, crossdressing is introduced in the narrative as a form of art and paid labour – a job which both John and Thomas have engaged with on a daily basis – on a second moment, it becomes an artifice of convenience and security which allows them to live their relationship beyond the privacy of their bedroom without fearing reprisals from institutional powers. Ultimately, however, Thomas starts changing his discourse and crossdressing starts acquiring a completely different dimension for him; one with complex social implications. After months of performing in Mr Noone’s hall, it starts feeling natural to Thomas to simply not be changing garb all the time, and as he remarks, “there seems to be greater contentment in it for me to wear a simple-hued housedress and not be always dragging in the trews… I am easier in the dress, that’s all I can say” (BARRY, 2016, p. 137). Later on in the narrative, he brings his discourse on gender a step further and comments that “maybe in my deepest soul I believe my own fakery. I suppose I do. I feel a woman more than I ever felt a man, though I were a fighting man most of my days” (BARRY, 2016, p. 273). This comment marks an important yet controversial shift in his own discourse regarding gender in which he starts implying he “feels” more woman than man.

This raises a number of controversial questions and opens up a variety of relevant topics regarding the intersections of gender, sexuality, and identity – many of which are

beyond the scope of this study explore – however, there are a couple of imperative issues that could not be disregarded. First, however, it is important to highlight how complex it can be to discuss gender and sexualities of individuals living in the past, even in a fictionalized representation of the past, mainly because most of the knowledge around sexuality and gender identity that is available nowadays did not yet exist then. Much of the the language and the conceptual apparatus at our disposal to understand the intricacies between gender and sexuality nowadays have not been socially constituted until much later than the 1860s and 1870s – even though "dissident" sexualities and gender non-conforming people did already exist even before that time. That limitation is, of course, also acknowledged by Barry himself who, when commenting about McNulty, states that "he is gay – not that the word would have meant anything in 19th-century America. That, says Barry, is one reason why the book is short: his narrator did not have the words or the notions to make it longer" (Barry qtd. in Moss). Nonetheless, since *Days Without End* was published in 2016 and is addressing a twentieth-first century readership, it seems only advisable to anchor this discussion on the language and conceptual apparatus available nowadays regarding gender and sexuality, at least for the current discussion, especially since contemporary readers will read those characters according to the knowledge and background available to us today.

The first issue arising from the shift in the narrator discourse on gender is the complex history of dated myths and negative stereotypes regarding queer individuals evoked by such discourse. While the narrator recognizes, at first, that despite being able to perform femininity this does not make him a woman, he contradicts himself later on and implies how he "feels" more woman than man. Of course, that statement does not mean he feels exactly like a woman, since feeling more woman than man does not mean feeling exactly like a woman. Nonetheless, this statement in itself is already controversial. Does it assume that one can "feel as" a woman because there is a certain "essence" that can be felt? Here is when the language around gender in the novel becomes trickier and slippery, especially when "feeling" starts getting mixed with "being" and "becoming".

Such a statement produces an interesting, albeit dangerous confusion in regards to how this narrator is to be perceived by the novel's contemporary readership. Is he a gay man, as Barry himself asserts in his interviews, or is this narrator someone in the process of finding that, in fact, she is a trans woman who is in love with man – that is, a trans heterosexual woman. If that was the case, far from being a gay couple trying to mimic and perform

heterosexual models, it would characterize them as a hetrosexual couple in the process of recognizing themselves as such. Is Thomas trying to explain – despite the restrictions and liminations of language about gender and sexuality in the 19th century – that they are a non-binary trans person? The language around gender employed by the narrator does not seem to answer, in a satisfactory way, any of those questions and leaves much of it open to the novel's contemporary readership to fill in the gaps. While some level of uncertainty does have its value, especially in a art form such as literature, when it comes to representation of gender identity and sexuality of queer individuals in literature, there are ambiguities and uncertainties that risk subjecting queer characters and narrators to ingrained prejudices and other damaging beliefs regarding gender and sexual minorities that still exist in society nowadays, such as the the idea of the "inverted" that is further explored in the following paragraph.

The myth of the inverted homosexual, for example, which was produced by medical discourses in the late nineteenth-century – such as that of sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing in *Psychopatia Sexualis* (1892) – states that queer individuals consist of men and women which have an inborn reversed inclination towards traits, behaviours, and sexual preferences of the opposed sex rather than the "proper" inclinations often associated with biological-anatomical sex of individuals. Consequently, the idea of the inverted queer contributed to the creation of notions such as "the soul of a woman on a man's body" and vice-versa. One of the problems of such a discourse is the assumption that there are specific innate traits, or more specifically, innate sexual inclinations which are inevitably attached to male and female anatomical structures. This assumption has led theorists of the pasts to assume, quite reductively, that if an individual presents inclinations believed to belong solely to individuals of the opposite biological sex, then such individual was a "reversed" – and was born in the "wrong body".

Despite such theories having been consistently questioned and ultimately refuted since they were first introduced more than a century ago, the effects of such discourses still linger in the way society thinks about gender and sexuality and can be found, for example, in the discourses of those who advocate for practices such as that of "conversion" therapy even today. The presupposition that personality, social traits, behaviors, and sexual inclinations are "naturally" attached to the anatomical sexes remain, much to our disappointment, still part of contemporary common sense regarding gender and sexuality. Such claims completely disregard the possibility that such behaviours, traits, and sexual inclinations are not at all defined or determined by one's body and or biological sex/genitals.

By disclosing to his interlocutor how he "feels" more woman than man, the narrator not only contradicts the discourse on gender he previously employed, but also produces an uncertainty that feeds into this narrative of the "inverted", implying that because he feels sexually and affectively attracted to men and because he enjoys crossdressing and performing femininity, that he possesses a "soul" or an "essence" of woman can be "felt" inside.

The contradicting and ambiguous discourse on gender employed by Thomas leaves this issue very much open for the interpretation of the contemporary reader. When opening up such possibilities, the narrative produces both intradiegetic and extradiegetic implications that evoke important contemporary social and political issues. The "inverted queer" is one of the stereotypes that LGBTQI+ individuals have historically struggled to fight against and change. This is particularly important considering the history of medical abuse that LGBTQ+ individuals suffered in the past, methods often presented as either treatment or corrections to their "dissenting" subjectivities. This struggle is not only against the idea that one's physical sex determines what inclinations they should or should not have – or how they were supposed to feel – but also for changing the essentialist idea that one's desires or and personality traits are determined by a "soul" or essence that one carries inside. The presence of elements in the novel that point to such perspectives could indicate the presence of a "heterosexual gaze" (to acknowledge Mulvey's "male gaze") at play in the novel. Of course, objectively defyning what this "heterosexual gaze" is would be impossible without also riking essentializing heterosexual subjectivities. However, it could be understood as point of view in which romantic and sexual relationships of people who previously belonged to discriminated, pathologized and criminalized social minorities are discoursively framed according to any given culture's socially prescribed and state-sanctioned configurations of heterosexual relationships, values, and politics of affection. Could this "heterosexual gaze" regarding relationships and gender be framing the way LGBTQI+ individuals, their sexualities, and relationships are being represented in the novel and being read by others?

The presence of the "heterosexual gaze" framing queer affectivities and subjectivities became particularly evident during the marriage referendum campaign and its attempt to construct queer relationships and affectivity as similar and following the same framework of heterosexual relationship and marriage. Much like the narrator's approach regarding queer sexuality in *Days Without End*, the "Yes Equality" campaign avoided discussing aspects of the subjectivities, desires, and of the diverse ways in which LGBTQI+

individuals experience their sexuality with the general public – especially those aspects which could destabilize their attempt to win public support by arguing for "sameness". The referendum privileged narratives of "true" monogamous love constructed within the framework of marital union which, ultimately, was portrayed as in "equal" terms to the "true" monogamous love of the heterosexual marital union already sanctioned by the State and prescribed by society. If the love and the union is the same, how could lesbians and gays have their rights denied by the State? At the cost of downgrading the subjectivities and diverse ways in which queer individuals experience their sexualities, affectivities, and relationships, the "Yes Equality" was able to achieve victory mostly by framing the diversity of queer affectivity within the same framework of the monogamous heterosexual marital union and family already sanctioned by the State and its Constitution.

Similarly, at the cost of discussing the diverse ways in which John Cole and himself explore and develop their affection and sexuality in a new world in which there exists few scripts prescribing how such unions and affections should unfold, Thomas's storytelling frames their love and affection in terms of its "sameness" to the prescribed monogamous heterosexual union. While Thomas, as the narrator, highlights how he and John get married at a church, perform as a heterosexual couple, and keep any signs of their queer sexuality and subjectivity hidden away from the public sphere and pretty much confined to the privacy of their bedroom and in the obscurity of what is suggested but, ultimately, left unsaid in his narrative. It is remarkable that such tendencies in Thomas' narrative reflects so well the structure highlighted by Conrad in which male affection has been controlled and restricted to the private sphere of the family cell. One cannot forget, of course, that in terms of survivability and security, there were not many options for queer individuals in the 19st century other than hide or perform as heterosexual individuals. Nonetheless, Thomas comments on some of the alternatives he and John have had. While living with Mr. Noone in Grand Rapids, for example, John and Thomas were able to live their relationship and affection without having to hide from those around them or perform as heterosexuals. Considering the personal and often confessional tone of the narrative almost entirely focused on his lifetime alongside John, it is noticeable how Thomas rarely ever comments on how John Cole makes him feel on a more corporeal and less abstract level. What is it that he liked about John? What is it that he liked to do to John, or John to do to himself? Did he enjoy being held in a certain way? Being kissed? What happened to the corporeality of his experience as a queer man? Why is touch and emotional connection, so emphasized in *At Swim, Two Boys*, so absent in *Days Without End*? Thomas may not have the language to give

meaning, name, or talk about his own subjectivity and affectivity, but he sure had the language to talk about how he felt with John and what, if anything, made it different from how he felt about other men or other people. It is interesting to notice, therefore, that the physicality of touch and the importance of emotional connection, so central to the narrative of Jim, Doyler, and Anthony in *ASTB* as they are for the development of virtually any affective relationship, are mostly absent in Thomas' own account of his love life and affectivity; almost as if filtered out.

5.4 Family and the shadow of the irish marriage referendum

Ethnicity and gender, however, are not the only themes that expose the ways in which the social and political environment of Ireland at the time the novel was being written seem to seep into the novel's own narrative. The treatment of both family and marriage in the novel reflects and, to some extent even follows, some of the narratives and "scripts" employed by the marriage referendum campaign in Ireland to address these same issues. Much of Thomas' narrative focuses on the social struggles he and John face while trying to establish themselves and Winona as a legitimate family. Thomas creates parallels between his feelings of parental duty with that of Mr and Ms Neale and to emphasize to his interlocutor how the filial bonds between non-biological parents and children are the same as those of biological parents. Despite their duties and filial bond with Winona, Thomas provides at least a few examples of how their status as a family and, more specifically, as Winona's parents are consistently questioned and delegitimised by others. When Carlton attempts to murder Winona during the attack to the Sioux camp, Thomas tries to argue with Calrton by saying "captain... can you help us, please help us. This is John Cole's daughter" to what Carlton replies "This ain't his daughter… That ain't nothing but a squaw." (BARRY, 2016, p. 260-261). Thomas expresses his thoughts on the matter to his interlocutor by saying "these are Winona's people and my brain is now aflame. What chokes my throat is love. I ain't saying love for them but for her. I don't care if she ain't my daughter but all I know is the fiery feeling" (BARRY, 2016, p. 260).

The narrator's discourse on parenting, however, is not solely based on his filial bond and his sense of duty as Winona's father. Rather, he attempts to legitimize their parent-child relationship by framing their family within the same framework of the monogamous childbearing heterosexual union Backus and Conrad highlight as the foundation of the

institutionalized traditional family – a framework that Thomas represents in his narrative through the Major and Ms Neale and their children. What best exemplifies the ways in which Thomas attempts to frame his own views on parenting according the traditional heterosexual family configuration is, perhaps, the contrast between his own views regarding family with those of Winona. When the girl is taken from John and himself and offered back to her tribe in exchange for Major Neale's daughter, Thomas finds out the army is planning to slaughter the whole tribe. After saving Winona from the massacre of her own tribe Thomas travels back with the girl to the house of his old friend, Liege, where Winona, John and himself had been living since the end of the Civil War. While on the road, Thomas reflects on his relationship with Winona during these last years concludes that

> She might be fifteen years, my daughter, but who can say. I call her my daughter though I do know she ain't. Let's say my ward, my care, the product of some strange instinct deep within that rob from injustice a shard of love… A daughter not a daughter but who I mother best I can. Ain't that the task in this wilderness of furious death? I guess so. Got to be. My breast is surging with a crazy pride to be bringing her back homeward (BARRY, 2016, p. 275).

Winona is characterized by Thomas as considering herself as their daughter, something that becomes particularly evident at the end of the novel when Thomas describes a letter he receives from her in which she signs "your fond daughter, Winona" (BARRY, 2016, p. 297). For her, however, both John and Thomas consist of her chosen family – they are the ones she trusts to take care of her, to support her, and to love her while she has chosen to care of them, support them, and to love them. In fact, in regards to her family of choice, Winona also considers Beulah McSweny as a member of her chosen family. McSweny was, after all, not only her teacher and mentor, but also her guardian for a couple of years when John and Thomas were away fighting in the Civil War. Ultimately, however, Winona knows that her original family was her tribe among the Sioux people – the ones she was robbed from and who were slaughtered by the US army. While Winona does recognize both of them as her chosen parents, she usually only refers to John as her father. The narrator justifies Winona's choice with the fact that John has Native Indigenous heritage and there is something about him that reminds the girl of her original fathers. As a Native Indigenous child, Winona was not raised with the eurocentric notion of family. For her, her whole tribe was her family and the many of the tribe's women and men were her mothers and fathers – not only her biological parents. Thomas, however, when making sense of his own relationship with the girl and his role as a parent, frames them within the traditional

heterosexual father-mother-children configuration of family with John as the father and Winona as the daughter he "mother[s]" the best he can.

As Anne Mulhall argued, the fears and anxieties of the "NO" campaign against the marriage referendum in Ireland mainly orbited around the idea that the inclusion of homosexual marriage in the Irish constitution would "catastrophically" change the institutions of marriage and family and "fatally damage children's 'right' to a mother and a father" (Republic of Love). It is not surprising, therefore, that the campaign for the marriage equality in Ireland did include quite extensively the issues of queer parenthood, "proper" family configurations, and on the right of adoption by queer couples. It is not surprising, therefore, that the novel attempts to apply the referendum rhetoric of "sameness" into its own portrayal of family. Instead of characterizing his [chosen] family in terms of the function that the family has for its members in mutually providing protection, love, support, Thomas emphasizes in his story the structural characteristics of his family – to borrow the words from Kathleen Hull's and Timothy Ortyl's study – and how well they can fit and properly reproduce the heterosexual father-mother-child structure of family configuration and parenting.

To some extent, the representation of queer parenting in *Days Without End* does not disregard the fears and anxieties regarding "children's 'right' to a mother and a father" that have circulated in the media during the Marriage Referendum campaign. Needless to say, however, that the discourses of the "No" campaign regarding the "appropriate" family configuration at the time of the 2015 referendum backfired and only contributed to strengthening support for "Yes Equality". Unmarried parents, solo mothers and fathers, families formed by children and other relatives, as well as families constituted by parents and their adopted children were all excluded from the quite restrictive view on family shared by the "No" campaign. The "Yes Equality" side of the campaign on the other hand, employed the testimonial life-narratives of lesbian and gay people telling stories oftentimes marked by society's homophobic attitudes and violence towards them (O'BRIEN, 2017, p. 251). In social media, for example, the "Tell your Granny" got young people involved in either coming out to their grandparents and other relatives or talking to them about voting yes in the referendum, with the videos being posted online. Much of the campaign, therefore, was centered on broadcasting to the media the lives and subjectivities of a selected group of queer individuals who would represent the campaign and reinforce the idea that homosexuality was

both an integral part of many Irish families and that homosexual individuals were fully able to constitute family within the already existing framework of family configurations in the country.

It is easy to perceive, then, how mainstream narratives regarding queer lives and affectivity during the period of the referendum were heavily interested in scrutinizing issues of family and parenting. *Days Without End* borrows from such narratives and centers much of its exploration of queer subjectivities around similar issues – at times even following some of the scripts used by the "Yes Equality" campaign for representing queer subjectivities as those were probably the narratives more widely available for the general heterosexual public at that time. Likewise, Thomas' narrative in *Days Without End* seems to borrow from the "testimonial" characteristics consistently present in the material for the referendum campaign. Cormac O'Brien remarks that the campaign has led thousands of queer citizens to disclose their personal, private, and often traumatic stories to the public – something that most heterosexual individuals are never required to experience. Cormac O'Brien argues that this phenomenon, much like the act of "coming out" itself, echoes the confessional ritual of catholicism in which individuals who are considered "damaged" or "sinful" confess their faults to a benevolent authority and are, once again, accepted into society (2017, p. 263).

Not unlike the general tone of the confessional narratives of the referendum campaign, Thomas discloses much of his story in *Days Without End* as either a confessing his feelings of guilt or as an attempt to justify the crimes he has been accused of. In fact, the very last chapter of the novel consists of Thomas talking about his days in prison and how he was certain he would be executed for murdering Starling Carlton.

> I don't know but most likely I was forty years of age. That's early to go but plenty died in the war younger. I seen a lot of young men go. That ain't the point so much until it's you going… A printed notice is nailed to the door. You wouldn't believe the sweating caused by that (BARRY, 2016, p. 297).

Before he could be executed, however, old Major Neale who is now retired from the army manages to arrive in the fort with legal documents and statements of other soldiers who witnessed that Thomas did not kill Carlton in a act of treason against the army, but rather as an attempt to save Winona, the girl he had adopted as his daughter. The retired major reveals he is there in gratitude for the help he received from Thomas when Neale needed to rescue his own daughter who had been kidnapped. And even though the evidence was not enough to stop the sentence, it was enough to commute the death sentence for one hundred days of

hard labor. Once his hundred days of work are done, Thomas finds himself free to go back to John and Winona in Tennessee.

Much of Thomas' story revolves around guilt, justification, and need for redemption. Thomas feels guilty for his role in the slaughtering of so many Native Indigenous people, including Winona's family. After that, when he is working as a crossdressing with Mr Noone he feels compelled to rejoin the army during the Civil War and fight for the freedom of the black friends he made in Grand Rapids as well as for the other immigrants he met there. During the Civil War, Thomas is once again faced with guilt and regret when he realises he and the other Irish lads fighting "Mr Lincoln" and the Union were killing other poor Irish immigrants who were fighting for the Confederacy in a desperate attempt to make a living in this new land. Once the war is over, Thomas and John are discharged from the army for good and decide to take Winona and move in with an old friend and his family in Tennessee. When the army demands Winona from John and Thomas so that she could be traded for Major Neale's daughter, Thomas decides to go after her and ends up killing Carlton who – despite their past differences, is still considered as a friend by Thomas. After his Odyssey of wrongdoing, guilt, and justification, Thomas finally finds his path for redemption after finishing his one hundred days of hard labor and taking the road back to John and Winona.

> Set free like a mourning dove. In my exultation I forget I ain't got a bean of money but it don't concern me and I know I can rely on the kindness of folk along the way. The ones that don't try to rob me will feed me… I never felt such joy of heart as in those days traipsing southward. I never felt such pure charge and fire of joy. I am like a man not just let loose from the death but from his own discomfited self. I don't desire nothing but to reach our farm and witness the living forms of John Cole and Winona step out to meet me (BARRY, 2016, p. 300).

While most of the narrator's guilt comes from racial and war crimes and not from his sexuality and/or queer affectivity, the overall confessional tone of the narrator and his attempts to win the sympathy of his interlocutor throughout the novel bear remarkable similarities with O'Brien's observation about the confessional tone of most of the stories that lesbians and gay individuals have shared with the general public during the Referendum Campaign regarding their life struggle. Moreover, O'Brien's observation that, through such rituals of confession, individuals who are considered "damaged" or "sinful" are once again accepted into society by a benevolent authority (2017, p. 263) mirrors the denouement of *Days Without End*, in which Thomas is saved from death by Mr Neale – the benevolent

heterosexual figure of authority in the story – and receives back his freedom to return to his lover and daughter. Not only that, but it also resonates with Mulhall's observation that many of the tears shed after the Marriage Referendum were charged with frustration that "the rights of a minority were the gift of a majority to bestow." Nonetheless, *Days Without End* is, undoubtedly, a powerful twenty-first century literary landmark as it is, arguably, one of the best representatives of the complex and intricate ways in which literature is able to appropriate both the discourses and the struggles of its own time and reflect upon them in a completely different context through fiction and storytelling.

6 CONCLUSION

In *At Swim, Two Boys*, the idea of the "nation of the heart" sits at the core of the narrative – an idea which represents both the project of a nation and the possibility to live out the dream of freely establishing social, affective, and even sexual bonds and relationships beyond the confines of compulsory heterosexual marriage and the family cell. Ultimately, however, the "nation of the heart" – the ideal that Jim, Doyler and Anthony carry out throughout the novel – fails and dies by Stephen's Green in front of the Royal College of Surgeons together with Doyler's body in the arms of Jim. Despite its failure at the end of the novel, idea of the Nation of the Heart is still a powerful driving force, one that promotes profound transformation for the protagonists throughout the novel

One great example of such transformation is that of Anthony MacMurrough, who never sympathized with Irish nationalism. Anthony finds himself worrying so much about Jim and Doyler's future safety as queer individuals in Ireland that he, nonetheless, decides to support his aunt Eveline with her unwavering faith in Roger Casement's cause and eventually joins the Irish Volunteers. On the other hand, Doyler who from the very beginning of the novel sympathized with both socialism and the Irish nationalist cause to such an extent that he eventually joins the Irish Citizen Army, ultimately realizes that following the strict moral code and the values of the organized military group would require him to erase parts of who he was.

While working with the ICA and following their orders, Doyler becomes closer to a young man around his age who works at a hotel by Stephen's Green. Doyler finds out that the queer young man wwho works there is not only being exploited by his employer but is also being subjected to sexual abuse from his employer so as not to lose his job. Doyler's first reaction is to act indifferent and turn his back to the disenfranchised teenager since getting involved could jeopardize his work for the ICA. Unable to cope with the guilt of turning away someone in such a desperate situation – especially a disenfranchised queer young man who was facing a situation not so different from the ones Doyler has himself experienced in the past – Doyler decides to leave the ICA. Doyler realizes he could not fight for a cause if that meant becoming indifferent to others in situations such as the ones he himself has experienced – much less turning his back away from others like Jim, Anthony, and himself. It is by realizing that he could not give expression to Anthony's and Jim's

abstract yet compelling idea of the Nation of the Heart while in the ICA that he decides to go back to Kingstown to reunite with Jim.

The often idealistic Jim, inspired by his father's stories about heroic deeds and glorious battles while in the army, deeply touched by Anthony's stories about the Sacred Band of Thebes and the idea of male lovers fighting side-by-side for a common cause, decides to take up arms and joins the Easter Rising despite his complete lack of experience in any form of armed conflict. Jim decides to join the fight not only because he dreams of being able to move in with Doyler and live his life beside him, but also to guarantee that both they and Anthony would be able to live out their affection and desires without fearing being imprisoned or executed for it. Albeit honorable, Jim's inconsequent decision makes Doyler and Anthony rush to Stephen's Green in an attempt to save him from the crossfire, which eventually leads to the death of not only Doyler but of their dreams as well.

The outcome of the novel, the failure of the protagonist's dream, and the loss of their love is symbolic in a multitude of levels. First, it is hard not to establish a connection between the queer nationalism of *At Swim, Two Boys* and the Irish nationalist ideology that informed not only the 1916 Easter Rising, but to some extent, the Irish Revival as well. The failure of the "nation of the heart" also resonates with the failure of the 1916 Easter Rising itself in their attempt to drive the British military away and retake the country back to the Irish citizens, and with the shattering of the idealised dreams and views of the revolutionaries. Not only were the rebels executed – which arguably promoted anti-British and pro-independence sentiment among the Irish but a great human cost – but it also led Ireland into the Anglo-Irish War of Independence, into an Irish Free State and, ultimately, into a Republic of Ireland that was, in many respects, very different from the one envisioned by the leaders who idealised the 1916 Easter Rising. This becomes especially evident when contrasting the equality expressed by the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic with the Irish Constitution of 1937.

Second, despite its obvious connections to early twentieth century Irish nationalism, *At Swim, Two Boys* and the "nation of the heart" also speak – quite undeniably – to a different nation and a different people: the queer Irish "unspeakables". The 1916 Easter Rising had at its core not only a nationalist view of a free Ireland, but also an egalitarian view of an Irish nation more accepting and inclusive than the one debuted in the first two decades of the twentieth century. This vision of a more inclusive and accepting Ireland is not only subtly present in the very text of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic of 1916 and its promises of "equal rights and equal opportunities to all citizens", but also in the diversity of individuals

who – until this day – still represent the vision of an Ireland that never came to pass as it was envisioned then. Among such individuals, Elizabeth O'Farrell, is perhaps the most commonly and less controversially acknowledged representative – at least nowadays – of the queer Irish "unspeakables" at the very core of the narrative of *At Swim, Two Boys*. Others names are still clouded by controversy with regards to their place as queer representatives of the Irish nationalist movement, such as Patrick Pearse; and there are those who, even today, could cause scandal and outright disagreement merely by having their names and the word queer mentioned in the same sentence – which is, perhaps, still the situation of Roger Casement. Nonetheless, the failure of the Nation of the Heart in the novel also speaks of the failure of this vision of a more egalitarian, inclusive and accepting Ireland – a vision which, at least for the forgotten and often erased Irish queer individuals, never became a reality in the 20th century Ireland.

In a reading of *At Swim, Two Boys* in Western Michigan University in November 2006, Jamie O'Neill comments that despite its failure as an effort to end British rule in Ireland, the 1916 Easter Rising became, "in a very Irish way", a "triumphal failure" which ultimately inspired Ireland to think of itself independently from British colonial powers. For O'Neill, such an important and symbolic moment of Irish history could not have happened any other day than on Easter Sunday, which reminds people not only of the biblical symbol of the crucifixion but also of the resurrection. O'Neill compares this symbolism of the crucifixion and resurrection of Easter with the figure of Oscar Wilde himself as "someone who sunk so low and then rose again to be virtually supreme" as one of the greatest names of the literature in the English language in the 19th century, one of the greatest Irish writers and playwrights to this day, and as a symbol of the history of queer individuals in the world. For O'Neill, the figure of Wilde and his history bear similarities not only to that of the 1916 Easter Rising and its revolutionary vision, but also to the history of Ireland throughout the 20th century – especially when the Ireland of the 1910s is contrasted with the Ireland of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Much like the Irish revolutionaries of the Easter Rising and their vision of a nation, the *Nation of the Heart* dies and ultimately fails at the end of the novel, not only during the Easter Rising itself but as a consequence of it as well. If we are to consider the Nation of the Heart in the novel as a symbol for the failure of Irish Nation to accommodate and accept their queer citizens and other disenfranchised minorities, then the decriminalisation of

homosexuality in Ireland in 1993 and the gradually growing, albeit slow, acceptance of queer individuals in Ireland in the late 1990 would symbolically represent the Easter resurrection of the dream of the *Nation of the Heart*. Even though the voices of several openly queer Irish writers did appear in Ireland during the 1990s - writers such as Emma Donoghue, Colm Tóibín, Keith Ridgway, and Jamie O'Neill who, quite often, also included queer lives in their writings – these writers were part of a generation that has lived a good part of their lives conscious that their affection and desires were socially and politically considered a crime; it was marginalized, discriminated against, and liminal at best. The vision for the future of queer individuals in Ireland was somewhat hopeful, but a generation of LGBTQI+ individuals who were able to live consciousnessly of the fact that their affection and sexuality were no longer a crime was still years to come. Any queer Irish individual who was born after homosexuality ceased to be a crime in 1993 would only reach legal age to freely engage with their desires and sexuality during the 2010s.

It it understandable, then, that one of the major landmarks in the history of queer individuals in the 21st century Ireland was the referendum for marriage equality in 2015 – which probably marked the coming-of-age period and the beginning of adult life for many young queer citizens in Ireland. While the LGBTQI+ individuals in Ireland before 1993 were fighting for the basic right of not having their affection and desire either pathologized or criminalised, those who grew up with that right already guaranteed – even if with a limited social impact in some contexts – wanted fight for their right to constitute legitimate families and, therefore, to have access to the same rights that their fellow heterosexual citizens or those willing to submit – at least socially – their sexual and affective lives to the State-sanctioned institution of hterosexual marriage.

In that regard, at least, the Irish referendum for Marriage Equality was particularly successful. Through its approval, lesbian and gay Irish citizen have ensured their right to constitute family and the same right to marriage that was already granted to the heterosexual citizens of Ireland. Moreover, the referendum was able to invite millions of Irish citizens to discuss the rights of an Irish minority and to engage them with the stories and the realities of some of these queer individuals. It is regrettable, however, that not all queer individuals and their subjectivities have been included in this civic performance of bestowing Irish citizens with full access to the rights that should have been granted to all Irish citizens anyway. Ultimately, the Marriage Referendum campaign has enacted the erasure of the subjectivities of many queer individuals. Trans women, trans men, and non-binary individuals; the queer and gender-nonconforming, the intersexual, the asexual, those who are not monogamous,

those who are not interesting in the either producing or raising children, and many others who for any number of reasons do not wish to confine their affective bonds and sexuality to a specific form of institutionalized union (marriage) have all been omitted and effectively erased from the discourse of queer affectivity, love and from the acceptance promoted by the referendum campaign. Thus, in its own way, the marriage referendum also represents a "triumphal failure" in the early 21st century Irish history – a social victory achieved at great "emotional and political costs exacted by the campaign itself" (MULHALL, 2015). The question remains of whether or nor queer individuals who decide not to marry will ever have their right to constituting a family – their families of choice – without subjecting themselves to the sanctioned union of marriage.

At Swim, Two Boys, published in 2001, is symbolically representative of the realities of queer individuals in Ireland during the 20th century, with the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993 marking the ressurrection of the still out of reach vision of a *Nation of the Heart*. *Days Without End* (2016), on the other hand, is particularly representative of the Ireland of 2015 that approved the Marriage Referendum but also of the hopes of queer individuals who, just like Thomas himself, would now be free to have their unions recognized and legitimized by the nation. The role of *Days Without End* as a 21st century landmark, not only for its proximity to the marriage referendum, but also for the representation of queer individuals in literature is already a great merit; and Barry's novel is extremely successful in many other remarkable regards. *Days Without End* has ensured that its Irish and global readership could learn about the life, the subjectivities, the affection, fears and expectations of a queer (gay) Irish immigrant in the mid- to late- 19th century USA. The novel's reception has been quite positive, winning the Costa Book award in 2016, the Walter Scott Prize in 2017, being listed as one of the top ten novels in 2017 by *Time* magazine, one of the 100 best books of the 21st century by *The Guardian* and one of the 100 most influential books by the *BBC News* in 2019. It would not be unrealistic to imagine that the novel might have reached readers who never before saw the lives of queer individuals represented with such openness in literature – not unlike how many Irish citizens had their first contact with the live narratives of queer individuals during the Marriage Referendum of 2015. The publication of the novel only a year after the referendum only strengthens its cultural role in cementing the social changes brought by the referendum result in the previous year.

Unfortunately, however, the merits of *Days Without End* come at the cost of it contributing with the framing and confinement of queer affectivity within the same traditional framework of monogamous heterosexual union in Ireland. The novel also reproduces much of the homogenization of queer subjectivities and the same hygienization of sexualities and affection enacted by the "Yes Equality" campaign that Mulhall, Silvera, O'Brien and other voices have highlighted. Undoubtedly, there are queer individuals who do wish to live their affection and sexuality according to the institutions of marriage and family despite – or perhaps, precisely because – of its intrinsically heterosexual structure. Those individuals would probably be happy to have their own aspiration and queer affection represented in novels such as *Days Without End*. Sebastian Barry's own son, perhaps, is one the lucky ones who will have the affectivity and sexuality they have always aspired to have access to finally legitimised, available, and sanctioned. Every portion of the LGBTQ+ community that gets access to basic civil rights, and that gets their subjectivities and affection to be legitimized, represents another collective victory. It is important, however, not to forget that that the privilege of these lucky queer individuals comes at the expense of all the other queer subjectivities, affections, unions, and families that have not only been erased but also delegitimised for not fitting neatly within society's and the State's narrow understanding of family and marriage.

Despite this limitation, however, *Days Without End* does manage to call the attention of the Irish nation – which expressed ever increasing hostile attitudes towards immigrants and ethnic minorities over the last decade – to the fact that the Irish have also been immigrants in the past and they, too, have been subjected to racism and xenophobia. Moreover, *Days Without End* is remarkable to the extent that it marks a prominent heterosexual Irish writer openly voicing his support for the cause of a minority group and actually commitment to representing the lives and subjectivities of individuals from that minority in his writings. In one of his interviews, Barry reveals that "Days Without End is dedicated to [his] son Toby – and McNulty's sexuality is also a tribute to the teenager" (Bary qtd. in Moss). When discussing the reasons behind Barry's decision to write the novel, Moss comments not only on the role of Toby, Barry's son, but also on the role of the Marriage Referendum as some of the driving forces behind the novel.

> At the time of the 2015 referendum in Ireland on same-sex marriage, Barry wrote an open letter – with his son's permission – in support of a yes vote. "I felt I had to do something..." Later Toby was threatened on a train after kissing his boyfriend goodbye on the platform. "He was very frightened by that and it led to more

> unhappiness, so I thought we're on a bit of a war footing here." (BARRY, apud MOSS, 2017).

Barry's statement is striking not only because it openly acknowledges his engagement with – and overall support to – the "Yes" vote during the Marriage Referendum campaign, but also because it recognizes that, at least to some extent, there was an ongoing struggle in Ireland. On the one hand, there was a queer minority struggling for their right to exist and to freely live out their subjectivities and affection while, on the other hand, there were those who still treated that minority as unwanted individuals whose affectivity and sexuality was not only shameful and condemnable, but also not Irish. Barry's determination to fight for his son's future and wellbeing as well as his decision to support a cause which was not his own in an individual level mirrors that of Anthony MacMurrough in *At Swin, Two Boys*. However, it is always important to remain critical especially when a member of a social majority receives the spotlight for representing social minorities and their subjectivities through traditional lenses.

Anthony's concern for the future and the wellbeing of his loved ones is similar in many respects – if not the "same" – to the feeling that Barry has for his own son. To avoid superficially reproducing the rhetoric of "sameness", however, it is imperative to point out at least one fundamental difference between their seemingly analogous sentiment. Barry's concern for his son's rights, future, and well-being is legitimized and socially sanctioned by their consanguine filial bond as father and son, which is also framed by their status as members of a State-sanctioned heterosexual family. The bond between Anthony, Jim, and Doyler, however, is neither sanctioned nor legitimized by any sanctioned form of union or institutional powers. While it is common for those linked by either consanguinity (parents-children; siblings, relatives) or marital bond (married couples) to have their bond and mutual feelings of love, care and support legitimized simply by being a part of a State-sanctioned family system, it is not rare for queer individuals to have their own bond and mutual feelings of love, care, and mutual support – such as those of the protagonists of *At Swim, Two Boys* – considered as marginal, less legitimate, and often inappropriate. Such discrepancies further highlight how social and affective bonds developed within the confines of the State-sanctioned family and marriage unions are privileged when compared to queer and/or alternative social and affective bonds not conscripted to structurally heterosexual institutions.

Despite the differences in the novel's representations of family and queer affective bonds, both *At Swim, Two Boys* and *Days Without End* agree in their representation of the struggles of queer minorities for their right to exist and to live out their subjectivities as an unfinished continuing fight. *At Swim, Two Boys* ends in a bleak and hopeless tone, with an armed and delusional Jim having a vision of Doyler's ghost and lying in Anthony's arm while they both hid from the army of the Free State years after the death of Doyler. *Days Without End*, however, ends in a brighter and more hopeful tone with a redeemed and free Thomas on his way back to his lover John and his daughter Winona. Nonetheless, both endings emphasize the unfinished struggle of the queer protagonists and the hardships of the path ahead of them. The position of the two novels with regards to the hardships of queer individuals as being far from over resonate with the realities that LGBTQI+ people face in Ireland in recent years. Despite the decriminalisation of homosexuality almost three decades ago and the referendum for marriage equality in 2015, recent studies and reports demonstrate that LGBTQI+ individuals in Ireland still face a dire and difficult reality.

"The LGBTIreland Report: National Study of the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex People in Ireland" (2016), is a study commissioned by *GLEN - The Gay and Lesbian Equality Network* and by *BeLonG To - Youth Services* which was led by Professor Agnes Higgins from the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Trinity College Dublin. The report demonstrates that, regarding mental health of queer individuals in Ireland, a total of 35% of the participants experience high levels of stress varying between moderate (20%) and extremely severe (15%). 42% of the participants also experience high levels of anxiety varying between moderate (19%) and extremely severe (23%) and a total of 47% of queer individuals experience high levels of depression ranging from moderate (27%) to extremely severe (20%). The general levels of stress, anxiety and depression between queer individuals in the 14-19 years old age group was 4 times (400%) higher when compared to a similar age group (12-19 year) in the *"*My World National Youth Mental Health*"* study – which focuses on Ireland's general population with no distinction of gender or sexual identity. Intersex people scored the highest levels of depression, anxiety and stress followed by transgender and bisexual individuals.

With regards to self exposure to danger and harm, the numbers are also worrying. A total of 34% of the LGBTQI+ individuals self-harm with at least 60% of them stating that their LGBTQI+ identity was part of the reason. 56% of those aged 14-18 years old and 43% of those aged 19-25 years old had self-harmed in the past. Self-harm numbers were 2 times (200%) higher among LGBTQI+ individuals when compared to a similar age group in the

"My World" study. In terms of suicidal thoughts and attempted suicides, the numbers are also alarming. A total of 60% of the LGBTQI+ individuals seriously thought about ending their own life, with 21% of the total of participants having attempted to take their own lives in the past. 70% of those aged 14-18 years old thought about ending their lives with a total of approximately 33% having attempted it. Among the group aged 19-25 years old, 62% have thought about suicide and at least a total of 20% having already attempted to take their own lives. Attempted suicide was at least 3 times (300%) higher when compared to a similar age group in the "My World" study.

When it comes to day-to-day harassment of the LGBTQI+ individuals in Ireland, a total of 75% of the participants have been verbally abused for being LGBTQI+. 33% of them have been threatened with physical violence and another 33% have had someone threaten to "out" them to others. 20% of them have already been physically attacked in public for being LGBTQI+ and at least 16% of them have been victims of sexual violence. Society's hostility towards queer individuals has also been exposed by the results of how safe or unsafe LGBTQI+ feel about showing affection or holding hands in public. While only 33% of participants felt safe showing affection or holding hands with a partner in public, around 50% of the LGBTQI+ felt very unsafe about showing affection or holding hands in public and another 15% revealed they would never do either. The fears and the overall feeling of unsafety experienced by queer individuals is further supported by the results of the general public attitude towards public displays of affection by LGBTQI+ individuals. While only 17% of the general public in Ireland reported being uncomfortable seeing heterosexual couple kissing in public, at least 30% of them reported being uncomfortable seeing two women showing affection and 40% reported being uncomfortable with affection between two men.

The worrying numbers of the "The LGBT Ireland Report" study are evidence that, despite homosexuality's decriminalisation and the recent victory of the marriage equality referendum in 2015, queer individuals still face a harsh and hostile social environment in Ireland. The online article "50% of LGBT Students in Ireland Have Heard Homophobic/Transphobic Remarks from their Teachers", from 2019, provides even more evidence to support that the victory of the Marriage Equality in 2015 was far from solving Ireland's hate and discrimination towards LGBTQI+ individuals. In the article, Moninne Griffith from *BeLonG To Youth Services* comments that "despite misconceptions, growing

up LGBTIQ+ isn't all rainbows post-the marriage equality referendum. Our findings indicate the intense discrimination, harassment, isolation and stigma that LGBTIQ+ students experience in Ireland" (Griffith qtd. in Brent). Of course it would be naive to expect that the victory of Marriage Equality in Ireland could change in any significant way the realities of queer individuals in Ireland. Nonetheless, it is still striking that a nation which promotes itself as being in the forefront of social change in regards to the rights of LGBTQI+ people still has not approved laws that criminalized hate crime against queer individuals (homophobia, transphobia) or any other legal measures to offer social security to its queer individuals even with such worrisome numbers demonstrating the harsh realities its queer citizens still face in the country.

While recent studies and reports continue to highlight the general hate, discrimination, bullying and abuse that queer individuals still face in Ireland, the LGBTQI+ individuals keep waiting for their government to create and enact legal measures to protect the citizens who belong to more vulnerable minority groups and to criminalise hate crime towards sexual and/or gender minority groups – that is, homophobia, transphobia, etc. Meanwhile, This study shares on the expectations of Hull and Ortyl in their recent study on the definition and understanding of family among LGBTQI+ individuals, which express the hope that by studying the "cutting edge" ways in which queer individuals construct and understand family, society will be able to evolve its own laws and general attitudes towards family and develop a society that is more accepting and inclusive of social affective bonds which do not subscribe to the institutionalized forms of unions sanctioned by the State. Or as Hull and Ortyl argue, a hope that "laws and regulations would be crafted and implemented in ways that are sensitive to departures from narrower and more traditional definitions of family that do not capture the lived experience… of family across all populations." (2018, p. 42)

Likewise, this study hopes that by exploring the complexities and implication of how queer affection and family are represented in *At Swim, Two Boys* and *Days Without End* it would be possible to further understand both how social and political environment for queer individuals can impact literary representations of queer affectivity and family – especially when contrasting these novels with the Ireland of the 2015 Marriage Referendum with the Ireland of the early 21st Century and late 1990s. Hopefully, the discussion outlined here will prove fruitful to our understanding of how literary representation of queer affectivity can provide us with different frameworks and parameters for thinking family and social bonding in contemporary society. Moreover, the discussion hopes to demonstrate how the

appropriation of mainstream discourses directed to the general heterosexual public regarding queer individuals, their subjectivities and affection can impact the literary representation of such issues in different and rather radical ways when compared to how the experienced reality lived by LGBTQI+ individuals impacts the way family, affectivity, and sexuality is represented in literature written not only by then, but also for them.

Finally, this study also expects that the outlined discussion regarding literary representation of queer affectivity and family in *At Swim, Two Boys* and *Days Without End* proves helpful to the Irish nation and society in their process of becoming an even more accepting society – especially towards the disenfranchised and more vulnerable minority groups of which the lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, intersex, and other gender and sexual non-conforming individuals are still a part of. This study demonstrates that literature is as capable of challenging society's prevailing paradigms regarding queer affectivity and family as it is capable of assimilating queer affectivity into the existing forms of regulating family, sexuality and affective unions and of reproducing and enacting the homogenization of affection and sexuality and the social hygienization of people's subjectivities.

By highlighting such processes, this study hopes to promote an increasingly diverse and inclusive way of thinking about family and of access to civil rights – both socially and legally. Queer individuals – not only in Ireland – still hope for a society in which the possibility of constituting family – or not – and the access to their civil rights does not require them to subject themselves to institutionalized forms of affective unions that ultimately do not reflect their unique subjectivities or the ways in which they experience affectivity or social bonds. Thus, this study supports the idea that all citizens – queer individuals included – should have some of their rights guaranteed regardless of whether or or not they decide to get married or if they have family members with whom they are related by consanguinity; this includes their right to a next of kin, the right to constitute a legitimate family with their significant other[s], the right to adoption, the right to inherit from a significant other or a member of your chosen family, the right to visitation in hospitals for the members of your chosen family, the residence rights for members of your family of choice, the right to a widow's/widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's pension.

Such an inclusive and diverse approach to family and citizenship could ensure that queer individuals who have been through traumatic experiences such as that of losing a loved one or significant would have their right of inheritance and of a widow's/widower's or

Surviving Civil Partner's pension secured. This example was precisely the case of both Anthony in *At Swim, Two Boys* – who lost his beloved Scrotes while in prison – and of Jamie O'Neill himself, who found himself disenfranchised and with no legal rights after the death of his partner with whom he had lived for so many years. Moreover, such an inclusive and diverse approach to family could be key to creating the Nation of the Heart – "if not once again, then once and for all". A nation in which the bond of mutual love and support between Anthony, Jim and Doyler would be recognized as legitimate family and allow them to live out Jim's vision of a life together. Such a nation would also recognize as legitimate the chosen families that so many queer individuals have constituted as a network of mutual and love and support after facing rejection from their own biological family of origin. In moving towards such a vision of nation, Ireland would be able to not only reverse its failure to accommodate the lives and subjectivities of its queer individuals in the past but, hopefully, also to reverse the hostile and bleak reality that many Irish queer individuals still faces nowadays. Additionally, it would allow the Irish nation to start healing the psychological and emotional scars of the LGBTQI+ population of Ireland caused by the lack of acceptance and inclusion they have faced throughout this last century of Irish history. In doing so, perhaps, the Irish nation could get even closer to reaching the egalitarian, more accepting and inclusive vision of the nation spoken of in the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic.

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