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**A voyage into Irish English
through the short story *Brilliant*
by Roddy Doyle**

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A few words for those persons without whom I would not be the person I am today.

Dedicated to you....

...to Massimo, my never-ending love and my husband-to-be...

...to my father Enrico, my guide and my sun...

...to my mother Lucia, my angel....

...to Antonia, the mother I had been given as a gift...

...to my brother Sebastiano, and to my sister Chiara, my puppies...

...to each and all of you, thank you for being the reason I live for.

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With love,
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INTRODUCTION

The present dissertation deals with the Irish English language and literature and it offers an example of language use and peculiarities through the translation of the work of a contemporary Irish writer.

Brilliant is a short story written by the contemporary Irish writer Roddy Doyle. The story has been chosen as an example of the contemporary English spoken nowadays in Ireland, since, though being a story for children, it is a clear example of Irish English language and its peculiarities, both syntactical and phonological.

The aim of this work is to present the reader a variety of English which has achieved great importance in language studies during the last century, most probably because of the important historical events that took place in Ireland and that has been of high importance in language characterization. Starting from the nineteenth century, Irish English has become the most spoken language in Ireland. It is one of the many different English varieties spoken in the former English colonies. Its origins can be found in the contact of Irish and the languages of the different invaders and colonizers – Vikings, Scots, etcetera. As an English variety, it mainly reflects the English-English, but it is characterized by some aspects – phonology, morphology and syntax – that can be found only in it or few other English former colonies, whom Ireland was in contact with (Australia or Canada, for example). The

translation has just been the starting point for a further discussion. The first three chapters analyse different aspects of the language, while the fourth and last chapter is about translation techniques with reference to the translated text.

Chapter One starts defining what is meant by language, dialect and language variety and, according to this, it tries to explain why Irish English is a language variety. It continues by discussing the issue on terminology, that is, the use of different name to refer to the English spoken in Ireland – Irish English, Hiberno-English and Anglo-Irish – giving explanations about different scholars' choices. An overview of Irish English history is presented, then, from the origins up to present-days together with an investigation on differences in language between north and south of Ireland and features of Dublin City Irish English. The chapter ends by presenting some of the main scholars whose works are – or have been – of great importance for the development of studies and theories on Irish English, including just a few who has been useful for the current work.

Chapter Two is a detailed analysis of Irish English grammatical features. After an introduction that describes vernacular and foreign influences which are at the basis of Irish English characteristics, the investigation starts treating syntactical aspects first, by highlighting constructions peculiar to Irish English – the 'after perfect', the 'subordinating and', relative clauses, focusing devices, etcetera – and then focusing on the use of definite article, peculiar uses of prepositions and some others. The discussion goes on by investigating Irish English phonology – vowels and consonants – its features and its differences compared to the standard British English to which non-English speaking persons are used to. In the end, some morphological aspects are analysed, together with an overview on the origins of Irish English lexicon.

In **Chapter Three** the focus shifts to the main subject of the work, that is the translation, anticipated by a presentation of the literary background of nineteenth and twentieth century. Some of the most important Irish writers are presented, such as Oscar Wilde, William Butler Yeats, James Joyce, Sean O'Casey and Samuel Beckett together with a description of their poetics. Themes and genres has undergone some changes starting from the beginning of the nineteenth century and these changes are of great importance for a deep understanding of Irish literary production. This

general analysis is of use to introduce and clarify the narrative style of Roddy Doyle, whose life and works are presented in this chapter. Finally, the short-story *Brilliant* is presented, together with some personal comments and a personal analysis of the text and its meanings. Doyle's short story is a good example of how Irish English is nowadays in the most important Irish city, Dublin. There can be found typical expressions and constructions, sometimes hard to be translated in the proper way, not to lose the real sense of them. But, in addition to that, the story also reflects Ireland's – and most of all Dublin's – sense of belonging to a Nation and a Culture people really feel part of. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of studies on this author, also due to his being a contemporary writer and almost nothing can be found as criticism about *Brilliant*, thus the investigation on the text is based on personal knowledge arisen writing this work.

Finally, in **Chapter Four** the main translating techniques are discussed. Those devices useful to work on the original text in order to reach a proper target work are treaded, as for example the importance of context, text's cohesion, and words' selection. For every device a correspondence with choices made in for the translation are presented.

The whole work is presented by dividing spheres of interest and themes, all connected to each other and all focused on the central subject of this dissertation, that is, Irish English and the translation which is strictly connected to it. Some observations on the work, together with some personal comments and motivations that brought its realisation, will be the end of this voyage.

CHAPTER ONE

Irish English: history and terminology

1.1 Language, dialect and language variety

There is no linguistic difference between a language and a dialect, even if some differences do exist and the most important is that the real identity of a nation is represented by its language.

As per its definition, a **language** is “the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country” (Wehmeier 2000); it is the collective mean and system of communication used by a community, representing its own cultural, political and ethnical identity. On the other hand, a **dialect** is “the form of a language that is spoken in one area with grammar, words and pronunciation that may be different from other forms of the same language” (Wehmeier 2000). It is a linguistic system characteristic of an area of a territory , more or less limited, that is usually united from a linguistic, cultural and political point of view (De Felice/ Duro 1993).

Focusing the attention on Ireland and considering the two definitions above, it is hard to place Irish English under one definition rather than the other one. Anyhow, having cleared the issue of terminology, it is worth trying to define exactly what Irish English is from a linguistic point of view. First of all, Irish English cannot be

minimized to a simple dialect of the English language. But, at the same time, it cannot also be defined as a language in the strict sense of the term. At this point, the most suitable solution is to consider Irish English as a variety of English. A **language variety** represents the different actualizations through which the system of a language and its uses among a certain community manifest themselves concretely¹. It is strictly connected to the country it is spoken in, to its ethnicity and politics.

The problem is that a language variety can be easily mixed up with both language and dialect – indeed sometimes they can match – but, considering the different aspects that characterize Irish English, we cannot easily put it under the definition of language or dialect. From some points of view it is a real language itself, because it has its own grammar and it comes not directly from English and its ‘alteration’, but also from the influence at a high level of other languages, that is Irish – in the biggest part – and Scots, which influenced Irish English a lot – as it will be analyzed later on. On the other side, Irish English could also be considered a dialect, but this is not a proper definition. As it will also be seen later on, Irish English is quite homogeneous but it has its own dialects.

In conclusion, from my point of view, the most suitable term to refer to Irish English is as a language variety, because it holds both the concept of language and at the same time the specification of its being a variety, something hybrid. In order to better explain this utterance and before speaking about Irish English features, it would be of great interest to understand the history and evolution of one of the most studied English varieties. For convenience, from now on I will refer to Irish English as a language in the collective meaning of the term, as explained above, that is using it as an abbreviation of language variety.

1.2 A question of terminology: Anglo-Irish, Hiberno-English and Irish English

At this point, reflection on the terminology that will be used is necessary. Different scholars discussed the issue of terminology with reference to the proper way to call

¹ Source: <

Irish English. The discussion focuses on three terms – Anglo-Irish, Hiberno-English and Irish English – even if definitions of each one can differ among scholars. **Anglo-Irish** is the less common and it is not used by the most quoted scholars, even if some definitions can be found.

According to Jeffrey L. Kallen, the term stands “for English spoken in areas which have only recently become predominantly English-speaking” (Kallen 1994: 148), while for P. L. Henry the term indicates “the rural variety compounded of Irish and English or Irish and Scots” (Filppula 1999: 14). On the other hand, for other scholars as Raymond Hickey and Markku Filppula, the term is mainly used in the literary field to speak about “works written in English by authors born in Ireland” (2007a: 135), that is “English literature written by Irish people” (Filppula 1999: 34), but “In recent linguistic and dialectological studies, however, the term ‘Anglo-Irish’ is not so common” (Filppula 1999: 34). For its being so vague and not so common, I decided not to use it. **Hiberno-English** derives from the Latin name for Ireland, that is Hibernia. Scholars use it to refer to “urban varieties with a longer history” (Kallen 1994: 148), as for Kallen, or just as a “general term for the Irish dialect of English” (Filppula 1999: 34) for Filppula and others. Though more common than Anglo-Irish, it was mainly used in 1970s and 1980s, but it was later abandoned because of the difficulty to fully understand it from a non-Irish audience. From my point of view it sounds old-fashioned and the reality it refers to is not clear.

For these reasons, I personally decided to use the term **Irish English** in my analysis, in accordance with the definitions of the term offered by Filppula and Kallen who say that it is a neutral and convenient term, with a general sense and no further implications. In addition to that, it also reflects the way other English varieties are called as for example American English, Canadian English, Australian English and so on. It just illustrates “the English language as spoken in Ireland” (Kallen 1994: 148) and I will use it in the whole work as a general term, even when speaking of authors that in their works decided to use one of the others.

1.3 Irish English history

The interest for English varieties spoken in the Celtic lands has raised in the last few decades and Irish English is the one which most studies focus on due to its features and, in some way, its uniqueness. Even though it is the most spoken language in Ireland, spoken by all island's inhabitants, Irish English is not Ireland's official language. In 1937, after Ireland was recognized as an independent country in 1921, it was established that Irish was Ireland's first official and national language, relegating Irish English as second official language. This was the result of a policy whose aim was to recognize a primary role to Irish language and people in order to legitimize the new nation, as opposed to the former dominion of Great Britain – even if it still remained and remains even today in that part of the island known as Northern Ireland.

Irish was the first means of communication among the people living in the country, but when English colonization took place, English people spread their language in the conquered countries, most of the time requiring their language to be the official language of their colonies. This factor and the contact between English and native languages, gave rise to new means of expression, originating by the mother tongue of the conqueror and its coexistence with vernacular languages. This gave birth to all the different varieties of English we know nowadays, most of which have become national languages – think for example to American English, Canadian English or Australian English to mention some. The definition of Irish English as a language variety of English, suits more to its reality than to any other English variety, being Irish English made up of linguistic aspects – phonological, morphological and syntactical ones – coming from both Irish and English and their coexistence.

Irish English is the final result of a linguistic evolution that took place in the country starting from Norman's invasions in the twelfth century, when the first period of Irish English evolution started. This is the period known as Medieval Irish English, also called Old English of Ireland and, using Filppula's words, it "represents the earliest stage in the development of the Irish dialects of English" (Filppula 1999: 29).

Indeed, it is in this period that we can place the first and important contacts between British English and Irish. In the previous centuries – from ninth to eleventh century – the arrival of Vikings in the coastal cities, made possible for Ireland to open itself to Europe, but there was not such an influence in this period that sustained the development of Irish English. Reporting Bliss' statement, Norman invasion is what really “led to the establishment of English and Norman French as vernacular languages spoken in Ireland alongside Irish” (Filppula 1999: 4). Nevertheless, in this early period, Irish still had a great power, so the diffusion of English did not last long.

It is only in the fourteenth and fifteenth century that English tries to overwhelm Irish, in the sense that English rulers started their attempts to stop the gaelicisation process in the island. During this period, English lords took a lot of devices so as to fight against Irish language spread, as for example by introducing penalties for all those people using Irish and the prohibition of any relation with the native population. But it is from the late sixteenth, or better mid-seventeenth century on, when the so called Modern period of Irish English history or New English starts, that the influence of English on the Irish language becomes more relevant. It is in this period that English-speaking Protestants spread their domain and Irish-speaking servants and tenants has to learn English so as to be able to communicate with their masters. The curious fact is that while English was becoming more and more used and the language for written and official documents, a sort of decline of it as spoken language started.

From a linguistic point of view, the measures taken in order to fight against Irish language reinforced Irish identity through the use of Irish among some spheres of the society and led to a sort of resentment towards English. Colonizers started spreading their influence and language all over the country, above all in the most important commercial areas. This means that the influence of English was not homogeneous, indeed, it was bigger on Northern and Eastern coasts. As a matter of fact, it is in these areas that the influence of English was greater on the native Irish language. On the other hand, for those people living on the West and South-West the contact with the invader was smaller and they could keep on using their native

language for a longer period. Nowadays, it is in the Western and South-Western areas that we can find some small realities still knowing and speaking Irish.

As a matter of fact, it is in the Nineteenth Century that it happens a shift from Irish to English – actually Irish English - as vernacular language. After a first period of bilingualism, the language situation changed definitively and Irish was set apart. Nevertheless, in the beginning English was still considered the second language, even though it was achieving a big status as main language, becoming half century later “the symbol for opportunity and success, whereas Irish was increasingly associated with poverty and illiteracy” (Filppula 1999: 9). What caused this shift were some important facts. First of all, the Great Famine of 1840s. It mainly affected the rural areas, where most of the Irish-speaking population was living. A great number of people died and others had to emigrate, trying to find a better way in other countries. In the same period, the National school system started, banishing Irish and fixing penalties for every person found using it.

It is at this very stage that Irish English grammar starts to be shaped as we know it nowadays. Nevertheless, all previous influences cannot be forgotten, since they also contributed to the formation of the language. Some scholars consider the two period of Irish English – the Old English Medieval Period and the New English Modern Period – to be separate periods, without any continuity. But for other scholars, some continuity does exist and this is the most reliable opinion, according also to some records of the time. They show that, even if English had been put aside for a short period of time, it was however used within the Anglo-Irish population, though it was most probably different from the contemporary English spoken in England. In fact, it is important to remind that when we say that English influenced the language of Ireland from the sixteenth century on through its coexistence and interaction with the other vernacular languages, we are speaking about the Early Modern English, hence an English that no longer existed in Great Britain and that passed through many steps and modifications during the time. That is, using McCaffrey’s words, it is an English whose “features [are] now defunct or marginal in Great Britain” (McCafferty 2007b: 122).

From now on Irish English starts spreading as Ireland's vernacular language – though not first language – and it becomes the every-day language, with its standard variety as basis.

1.4 The standard English of Ireland

A standard language is strictly the kind of language used in writing and in published works, a formal language, but not too specific or complicated; a realization of the language as codified in grammar books. It can be seen as a formal, polite and grammatically correct way of using the language. This is also the term of comparison in order to define standard Irish English.

Obviously, in this case, it could be hazard to speak of a 'grammatically correct form' if we think of some peculiar uses of prepositions or constructions in Irish English. This would not be the right way to look at Irish standard English. Irish English has not to be compared to British English, since Irish English comes also from that, though not only. The concept is clarified by what Bliss says on this matter, that is

the Irishman learning English had no opportunity to learn it from speakers of standard English. [...] Irishmen learning English, therefore, had to rely on teachers of their own race, whose own English was very different from standard English [...]. In each generation the speech of the teachers was already strongly influenced by Irish, the speech of the learners even more so.

(Filppula 1999: 20).

Hence, standard Irish English is the language used in published works and in grammars whose authors are of Irish origin and who speak Irish English language.

As John M. Kirk notes

varieties of a given language exhibit the same linguistic features, but each national variety has its own peculiarities. [...] The Celtic element shows that standardisation has not made Irish Standard English identical to standard Englishes found elsewhere.

(Kirk 2011e: 35).

And these peculiarities characteristic of a variety have to be considered part of what makes it standard.

1.5 Northern Irish English and Southern Irish English

Apart from its being a language variety and hence a language in the strict meaning of the term, Irish English also has its own dialects, as almost all languages have. There are, indeed, some features that involve a distinction of Irish English in two big groups: Northern Irish English and Southern Irish English.

Northern Irish English is a real mixture of different languages brought by colonizers in the sixteenth century and the subsequent plantation of these populations. Invaders came mainly from Scotland and North-Eastern Great Britain, even if some of them also arrived from Great Britain's Midlands and South-Western areas. The colonizers first aim was to replace both Irish language and Irish population, but they never achieved it. Due to this fact, the coexistence of Irish Gaelic, Scots and English - the three main different vernacular languages of the time in this area - remained and brought to the formation of what we currently know as Northern Irish English. Properly, the denomination of Northern Ireland is referred to the sole six Counties under the government of Great Britain; that part of the island that did not achieve independence as the rest of the country and does not constitute the Republic of Ireland. However, it is not a mistake if linguistically we consider the nine counties which constitute the Ulster province when speaking about Northern Irish English. Due to political, religious and ethnical reasons, this area has been considered the image of Irish nationalism and Irish language has been used for a long time also during the nineteenth century. Because of this, Northern Irish English is usually treated separately because of its having very few in common with the Southern variety. Three big groups constitutes Northern Irish English dialect: Ulster Scots (coastal areas of Ulster), Mid Ulster English (urban centres) and South Ulster English east-west band). Apart from the first two dialects, South Ulster English is the only one sharing some aspects with the rest of the island.

Thus, for an analysis of Irish English as Ireland's second official language – though being the first spoken language – the discussion needs to focus on Southern Irish English. This is the part of the island that experienced more the influence of the British English spoken on the West coasts of Great Britain and where Irish English evolutions was more homogeneous. This is why Southern dialects do not differ so much and the main division is usually made between rural and urban dialects. Rural dialects are connected to those area settled mainly in the Western part of the island, where Irish influence and use lasted long, while urban dialects are mainly referred to the dialects spoken in the bigger urban areas, mainly set in the East and South-Eastern areas. Four Counties are considered representative to compare and study Irish English variety and its different expressions and also to better analyze the historical background of Irish English: County Clare, County Kerry, County Wicklow and Dublin. Counties Clare and Kerry reflects dialects of the rural South-West; County Wicklow is representative for eastern dialects, while Dublin reflects the urban dialect as it is spoken in Dublin City.

1.6 Irish English in Dublin City

Dublin is the capital of the Republic of Ireland and its most populated city – approximately one third of the population lives in the city and its suburban areas. The Irish name of the city is *Baile Átha Cliath*, that is ‘town at the fortified ford’. The name comes from the fortification – the Pale - made around Dublin area in the fourteenth century to separate the English domain and rules of the Anglo-Normans living inside the Pale from all the other people living outside it and considered barbaric. The English name is an Anglicism of the less used and improper Irish *Dubh Linn*, meaning ‘black pool’, which reminds of the years when the city was born and the area was a swampland, lately restored. This was the name of the Viking settlement, later unified with the Celtic one, whose name was *Ath Cliath*. The origins of the city are to be found in prehistoric time, even though Viking pirates were the first to actually settle here in the ninth century, creating their outpost from which they could leave towards other Irish coastal areas and ports.

Dublin is located on the mid East coast – on the Dublin Bay – at the mouth of River Liffey, opposite to Great Britain. Thanks to its strategic position, Dublin became the most aimed and important city, mainly starting from Norman invasion first and English colonization later. Its central position as economic, political, commercial and cultural centre has made it important as a model to follow also linguistically, for what concerns Irish English. In the 1980s and the 1990s the city underwent an unbelievable increase both in economics and in population growth. Dublin was the city where a lot of people moved to in order to find prosperity and job opportunities. This created a variegated population made of prestigious persons on one side and common people on the other.

It is at that time that educated and fashionable Dubliners started and tried - using R. Hickey words - to “dissociate themselves from the local population”², chiefly operating a change in language inflection. But, because of proud and national identity as Irish people, the goal of the new fashionable style was not the one of reaching the eloquent style of cities like London, Oxford and Cambridge, being British English considered too snobbish. Hence, what happened was a deliberate change in pronunciation that differed both from the English and the general local one, that also aimed to represent “a more general dissociation on a social level”³. At this point, we assist then to a split in Dublin speaking: non-local or non-vernacular Dublin English on one side and the local or vernacular Dublin English on the other; the former corresponding to the new style; the latter to the traditional style spoken by both middle and working class.

Nevertheless, the division between the two dialects quickly disappeared. The reason is that these changes took place in the capital city and happened in a period in which television and radio acquired great importance. For these reasons, the new and fashionable Dublin English rapidly spread all over the country. Young people, above all, started acquiring the new style, suppressing vernacular features and “leading to forms of a language in which there is less variation than in local speech”⁴. The final result is then a single supra-regional variety that has become the current standard of Irish English.

² Hickey, Raymond. Source: < <http://www.uni-due.de/>>. Last access: October 2013.

³ Hickey, Raymond. Source: < <http://www.uni-due.de/>>. Last access: October 2013.

⁴ Hickey, Raymond. Source: < <http://www.uni-due.de/>>. Last access: October 2013.

As previously said, the variation took place mainly in pronunciation, while concerning syntactical and lexical constructions they were kept and they will be treated in the following chapter.

1.7 State of the Art

Interest in the linguistic study of Irish English emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century and it has been carried on by both Irish and foreign scholars with great success. Actually it is approximately from the 1950s that a real interest in this area arises and Irish-English studies achieve great importance. Among all the scholars whose interest is focused on this topic, some have been chosen for the current work and for this reason a few lines to them and their studies are needed. The first one is **Markku Filppula**, the author of “The Grammar of Irish English” (Filppula 1999), a great source for my study and the reference work for many other scholars. He is a Finnish scholar and his studies focus on the analysis of Irish English syntactic aspects and their possible origins and genesis, through investigations among a corpus based both on personal, previous or contemporary researches. The second one is **Jeffrey Kallen**, an American scholar, who focuses his studies on Irish English history and development, mainly analysing verbal and lexical aspects.

But, as previously said, also in the Irish outline there are well-known scholars. The first one to be mentioned is the Southern Irish **Raymond Hickey**, who is particularly interested in Dublin English, in Irish English phonology and present-day varieties from a language-contact perspective. Recently, he created one of the main sources for Irish English studies, that is part of his project “Variation and Change in Dublin English”⁵, a website continuously updated with his studies, analyses and researches on Irish English – and Dublin English in particular – ranging over language variations and pronunciation changes connected to the geographical area and the social status. Another scholar of Southern Irish origins and, with some licence, one of the fathers of Irish English studies, is **Patrick Leo Henry**, whose studies started in 1950s with his doctoral dissertation that arose the interest on Irish English. Many scholars – see Filppula and Kallen – confronted themselves with his

⁵ Hickey, Raymond. Source: < <http://www.uni-due.de/>>. Last access: October 2013.

theories and studies; they generally agree with him, but as Hickey says “Henry’s stance is firmly substratist and has been rejected by later authors as it does not pay sufficient attention to regional English input in Ireland”⁶. Moving North, the Ulster scholar **John Harris** dealt with retentionist theories on Irish English genesis – otherwise called ‘sustratumist’ by other scholars and in my dissertation, too, while Karen Corrigan mainly worked on the rural Irish English of Armagh province, a Northern dialect.

Last but not least, the peculiar case of the English philologist **Alan Joseph Bliss**, whose interest in Irish English raised when moving for a chair at University College Dublin. His merit has been to revitalize studies on Irish English in the 1980s. Bliss studies focuses above all on spoken Irish English - particularly phonetic analysis - the origins of some peculiar sounds and etymology of Irish English words. His first studies, besides investigating themes mentioned above, also presents the author’s approach towards them. According to him, the origins of modern Irish English has to be found in mid seventeenth century, when the English of Cromwellian settlers “was heavily affected by the sound system of the Irish who switched to English in a slow and difficult process of language shift” (Hickey, 2002: 140). His studies have also been the basis for current research.

⁶ Hickey, Raymond. Source: < <http://www.uni-due.de/>>. Last access: October 2013.

CHAPTER TWO

Linguistic features of Irish English

2.1 Introduction

Irish English is one of the most studied varieties of English, mainly because of its connections with, and influences, from Irish. Some peculiar constructions of Irish English can be found also in some other English dialects from Scotland, Hebridean islands and a few others, but what makes Irish English so peculiar are those features whose origins are most of all related to Irish. Anyhow, it cannot be said that even the most peculiar features come only from corresponding Irish constructions or terms, because it cannot be forgotten the fact that this language was born and generated during a period of colonization, in which different realities were in contact with each other. To use Corrigan's words,

this new variety is characterized by: (i) innovative forms; (ii) the incorporation of features drawn from Irish, the indigenous language prior colonization, and (iii) other characteristics caused by the mixing of Irish with the regional Scots and English vernaculars of the new settlers. Interestingly [...] modern varieties of Irish English still retain this mixed heritage.

(Corrigan 2011a: 39).

In this chapter then the most important constructions and characteristics will be explained, giving also some hypothesis brought by scholars about their most probable origin, according to the kind of influence - substratal or superstatal - Irish English has gone through.

2.2 Irish English as a contact variety: substratum, superstatum and adstratum

Due to its origins and evolution, Irish English is considered a 'contact variety'. Using Filppula's definition, the term is used

to refer to varieties which have emerged in second-language acquisition situations through intensive contact between two or more languages and in conditions which typically involve a fairly rapid process of language shift. [...] In the early stages of the contact, of course, bilingualism is usually widespread and, indeed, a prerequisite for the emergence of the contact variety.

(Filppula 1999: 15).

This is indeed the situation in which Irish English was born, before acquiring its status of language variety of English.

The whole process leads to Irish English as we know it today; a language in which both **substratal** and **superstatal** influences can still be recognized or found out. In order to understand what the terms substratal and superstatal mean, Filppula's definition can be again of some use:

The terms 'substratal' and 'superstratal' refer to the outcomes of the two types of 'interference' which take place in a language shift situation: the former refers to those elements in the emergent contact variety which are carried over from the indigenous, the 'substratum', language of the population shifting to another language and which persists in the speech of subsequent generations; the latter represents the input from the target or 'superstratum' language, which is very often (though not necessarily) in a prestigious and socially superior position in the speech community.

(Filppula 1999: 15).

As a consequence, Irish can be easily recognized as the substratum, while English is the superstratum. Most of the scholars tries to explain Irish English features as coming either from one or the other source, but the analysis is not so easy and direct. Even though sometimes it seems clear that the origin of some features is only Irish, there are a lot of other characteristics in which the Irish component seem to prevail, although this cannot always be proved and for this reason cannot be confirmed completely. So the doubt on how much substratum and superstratum may coexist and have influenced Irish English is an open theme.

But, while theories about substratal or superstratal origins have been analyzed by many scholars, even if using sometimes different terms – see for example Kallen (Kallen 1994: 191), using the terms “substratumist” and “retentionist” respectively - there is another possibility taken under consideration by few of them – Filppula as the major one –and this is the ‘adstratal’ influence. It is clear, however, why this concept has not been considered by the most part of scholars. As per its definition, the **adstratum** refers to (Filppula 1999:24) “linguistic developments which take place in conditions of long-standing close contact between speakers of different languages or dialects and which in the course of time lead to structural isomorphism between the grammars of these languages or dialects”.

As already mentioned above, this possibility has not been considered by many scholars and I think this is because of the peculiar situation which Irish English was involved in. In the whole period of its formation as a distinct variety of English, the two main languages involved, that is Irish and English, have never been on the same level. English has always been since the beginning the language that tried to overwhelm the vernacular Irish, so the linguistic interchange was never really bidirectional. Irish had always been despised and considered the language of people of low extraction, at the point that English people and even Scottish were careful not to be influenced in their accent by Irish speakers.

Evidence for this comes from the variety we know today, that is to say a language that is very close to English and rather far away from what Irish is: apart from some characteristics which differ from standard English and will be discussed in the following sub-chapters, Irish English has most of his features in common with English and just few taken from Irish but modelled on an English basis. English was

the main language to which some Irish features have been transferred to. It is only in Irish English features that we can find Irish influence, starting from lexical, for example, that is completely different from the Irish one, even though some loanwords do exist – and they are not so few. Hence, the analysis of Irish English features is focused on showing how big the influence of the substratum has been, even though apparently it would not appear so clearly at a first sight.

2.3 Irish English grammatical features

Having cleared some concepts that will appear in the analysis of Irish English features, a detailed description of some of the most important characteristics will be treated in this paragraph. The organization is done accordingly to the grammatical sphere each characteristic is part of: syntax, morphology and phonology. Inside each category, characteristics will be ordered according to their frequency in Irish English language and particular attention will be given to those features that are used in the short story “Brilliant”, by Roddy Doyle (Doyle 2011c), that is the subject of the translation treated in chapter no. 5. Denomination, description and influences for each feature are taken principally by Filppula’s (1999) “The Grammar of Irish English” and supported by other sources indicated during the discourse and under “Bibliography”. The order chosen for the list is based on the occurrence of each category in the short story and on what particularly caught my interest.

2.3.1 Phonology

As described in Chapter One, Irish English pronunciation went through interesting phonological changes, initially due to the influence of Irish pronunciation and, lately, in order to differentiate itself from the standard British English pronunciation, achieving those features that are have become peculiar in Irish English. First changes took place among educated people and then spread all around the country, becoming supra-regional.

Then, innovation continued and took place among subgroups and, in this case, the most prolific society subgroup is that of young female who looked for a more ‘trendy and ‘cool’ speaking (Hickey 2013). At this point a distinction arises

between innovator and adopter [...]. The innovators are a small number of central members among young female [...]. The adopters, as their name implies, adopt the pronunciation they hear from the innovators. At an early stage of a possible change one can distinguish the different sub-groups, though later when the change is complete or nearly complete [...] then it is not possible to recognise different types of agent anymore.

(Hickey 2013).

This means that also in this case, almost all innovations are becoming supra-regional in the end, depending on the spread of these changes among the community. Some innovations were born and soon they died, while some others were adopted in the end by all Irish English speakers and became the current pronunciation.

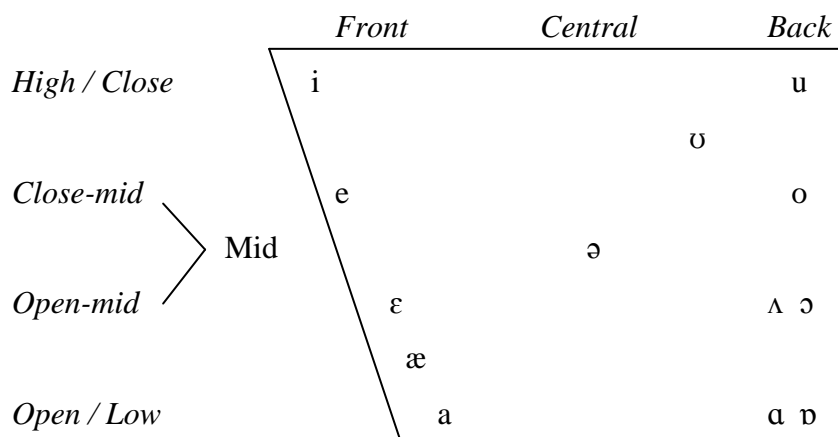
In this paragraph the most important phonological feature of current Irish English are presented, focusing mainly on those features that are most frequent in Dublin English and those few appearing in Doyle’s writing (Doyle 2011c). A comparison is made between standard British English pronunciation and Dublin English current one, starting from vowels and then moving to consonants.

2.3.1.1 Vowel changes

Changes in vowels’ pronunciation can affect both single vowels or diphthongs. A scheme is offered in order to better clear these changes, a reproduction of the International Phonetic Alphabet⁷ revised according to the needs of the current work. Double naming of groups is made considering both the international naming of vowels (Close / Close-mid / Open-mid / Open) and Hickey’s naming⁸.

⁷ *Reproduction of The International Phonetic Alphabet*. Available at: <www.langsci.ulc.ac.uk/ipa/vowels.html>. Last accessed: October 2013

⁸ Hickey, Raymond (2013), *Variation and change in Dublin English*. Available at: <www.uni-due.de/VCDE>.



One of the main changes in Dublin pronunciation that occurred quite recently is the so-called **short front vowel lowering**. According to it, the pronunciation of a front and close-mid sound such as [e], becomes lower and more open such as [æ]. Examples of this shift is clearly explained by Hickey (Hickey 2013), by the use of the word ‘dress’: in British English it is [dres], while in Dublin English it becomes [dræs], with a possible intermediate pronunciation as [drɛs]. Similar to it is the **back retraction**, but it is actually the movement of an open-mid vowel that goes not only downwards, but also backwards. An example is given by Hickey (Hickey 2013) once again, using the word ‘trap’: British English pronunciation [træp] becomes [trap] in Dublin English. This downward movement affects mainly words in which the short vowel is preceded by /r/ or /l/, even though it can spread to other environments, as for example in ‘back’: British English is [bæk], while Dublin English is [baq].

Another peculiar aspect is the so-called **goat-diphthongisation**. The phenomenon occurs in words such as ‘goat’ that in British English are usually reproduced through a diphthong, whose sound starts from a high-mid back position and move towards a high back position, that is [gout]. But in reality Irish English does not adopt the same pronunciation and the process that leads to it is completely different than the British English one: in Irish English “GOAT-diphthongisation was a reaction in the vowel space of speakers to the raised realisation of THOUGHT, NORTH and CHOICE” (Hickey 2013). This means that while the pronunciation of words such as ‘thought’, ‘north’ and ‘choice’ was moving upwards, words such as ‘goat’ were moving to diphthongs. Here below and explanation of the way the

pronunciation moved to diphthongisation in words such as ‘goat’, and how low back vowel raised in words such as ‘thought’, ‘cot’ and caught’:

- diphthongisation: goat [gɔ:t] → [go:t̚] → [gəʊt̚]⁹;
- raising of low back vowel:

thought	[tɔ:t̚]	→	[to:t̚]
cot	[kɒt̚]	→	[kɔ:t̚]
caught	[kɒ:t̚]	→	[kɔ:t̚]; [ko:t̚]

Evidence for both diphthongisation and raising of low back vowels can be found in Doyle’s short story (Doyle 2011c). Diphthongisation appears in the text through the use of the words ‘old’ – in (1) and (2) – and ‘whole’ – in (3) – which are actually spelt in the wrong way, thus appearing with a spelling that reflects the way they are pronounced.

On the other hand, the raising of low back vowel is presented by a personified *Spire* “teaching the *Eiffel Tower* how to speak proper English” (Doyle 2011c: 24), through the pronunciation of the word “story”, here taken with its American meaning of ‘floor’. It is significant to see how *The Spire* spells the word so as to make the pronunciation clear for the *Eiffel Tower* and the latter keeps on using a more British pronunciation – in (4).

- | | | |
|-----|--|------------------------|
| (1) | Poor <i>oul</i> ’ Dublin. (Doyle 2011c: 1). [my italics]. | [əʊl] |
| (2) | It’s good for the <i>oul</i> ’ digestion. (2011c: 1). [my italics] . | [əʊl] |
| (3) | An <i>oul</i> ’ one in Finglas West. (2011c: 1). [my italics]. | [əʊl] |
| (4) | [The Spire] - What’s the STORE-Y?! he said, again. | [stɔ:ɹi] ¹⁰ |
| | [Eiffel Tower] -Wot iz ze stor-ee? | [stɔ:ri] |
| | [The Spire] -No, listen. What’s the STORE-ORE-Y?! (2011c: 24). | [stɔ:ɹi] |

With reference to diphthongs, there are few other changes to be mentioned. The first one is the **retraction of diphthongs** with a front low starting point in words such as ‘time’. In this case pronunciation becomes [taim] in Irish English, while in

⁹ For the pronunciation of /t/ in a word’s final position, see the discourse on *T-frication* on page 23.

¹⁰ For the pronunciation of /r/ see the discourse on *R-retroflexion* and *Rhoticity* on page 24.

British English it is [taim]. Secondly, an almost equal change happens with the **raising of diphthongs** with a back low starting point in words such as ‘toy’: Irish English passes from [tɔi] to [tɔi] and [toi], in this case moving towards the British English pronunciation [tɔi].

Finally, **epenthetic vowel** needs to be mentioned. This is the “pronunciation of syllable-final cluster [...] with a schwa” (Hickey 2013). The schwa[ə] is realised in between consonant clusters formed by a liquid /l/ or /r/ followed by a nasal /m/ or /n/. Doyle (Doyle 2011c) gives a great example of this realisation through the voice of one of his characters (Ernie), almost spelling the word ‘film’ as it would be realised phonetically:

(5) Seen it in a *fillum*, said Ernie. (Doyle 2011c: 11). [my italics] . → [‘fɪləm]

(6) harm → [hərəm] (Cesiri, 23/2001-2005: 113).

2.3.1.2 Consonants changes

As for vowels, there are some important changes and innovations also in the consonant phonemes. First of all, it has to be said that in Irish English /l/ is always clear, it means that it is always pronounced, even though in the 1990s, most of all in metropolitan speech, the phenomenon of **L-velarisation** started spreading among, becoming then a marker of non-local speech for young people.

The consonant /t/ is then subjected to some changes in pronunciation. When it is not in syllable-initial position and only if it has a position of high sonority, the main phenomenon that can happen is the so-called **T-frication**, that is the realisation of /t/ with a high sonority, in which “the alveolar stop shifts to an alveolar fricative with no change in place of articulation” (Hickey 2013).

Staying on affricates, it is curious to notice how sounds like unvoiced fricative [tʃ] and voiced fricative [dʒ] are both replaced by the unvoiced postalveolar fricative [ʃ], as it is shown in examples below (Cesiri 23/2001-2005: 113):

(7) **chain:** British English → [tʃ]; Irish English → [ʃ]

(8) **much:** British English → [tʃ]; Irish English → [ʃ]

(9) **gentleman:** British English → [tʃ]; Irish English → [ʃ]

Another important change happens with other two fricative dental sounds, that is the unvoiced [θ] and voiced [ð], which become plosive alveolar – (10), (11), (12) and (13). At the same time, the plosive alveolar sounds shift to fricative dental – (14), (15), (16) and (17) – exchanging their usual phonetic realisation (Cesiri 23/2001-2005: 113; Kallen 1994).

- (10) **thin:** British English → [θ]; Irish English → [t] *as if it were written 'tin'*
- (11) **three:** British English → [θ]; Irish English → [t] *as if it were written 'tree'*
- (12) **then:** British English → [ð]; Irish English → [d] *as if it were written 'den'*
- (13) **those:** British English → [ð]; Irish English → [d] *as if it were written 'dose'*
- (14) **try:** British English → [t]; Irish English → [θ] *as if it were written 'thry'*
- (15) **dry:** British English → [d]; Irish English → [ð] *as if it were written 'dhry'*
- (16) **butter:** British English → [t]; Irish English → [θ] *as if it were written 'butther'*
- (17) **under:** British English → [d]; Irish English → [ð] *as if it were written 'undher'*

Other two prominent innovations in consonant sounds affect the alveolar trill /r/ in post-vocalic position: the so-called **low rhoticity** and **R-retroflexion**. While the former is the realisation of a standard velarised /r/, the latter is realised as retroflex approximant [ɽ] and took place approximately in the 1990s among educated people first, as a reaction to the 'low rhoticity' – according to the process of dissociation treated in the previous chapter¹¹.

2.3.2 Morphology

Two morphological aspects are worth mentioning, that is the distinction between second singular and plural personal pronouns and the use 'them' as demonstrative. With reference to the **second personal pronoun**, in Irish English two forms can be used: 'you' for the second singular, and 'yous' for the second plural. The distinction comes directly from Irish (sing. *tà*; pl. *sibh*), but is formed through the standard way of creating plurals in British English, this means by adding '-s' to the singular noun (Cesiri 23/2001-2005: 114). Concerning the use of '**them**' as demonstrative pronoun,

¹¹ Hickey, Raymond. Source: < <http://www.uni-due.de/>>. Last accessed : October 2013

there is not so much to be said, even because it is widely used in Irish English, but it also appears in many English dialects. It substitutes the standard deictic plural pronoun ‘those’ and it seems to be of English origins.

Finally, a few lines to speak about Dublin English – but also Irish English in general – reduced number of verb forms, particularly for verbs such as ‘do’ and ‘see’. With these verbs, the past participle is often used as simple past or as shortened form of present perfect (Hickey 2013). This peculiar use of past participle can be seen in Doyle (2011c).

(18) *Seen it* in a fillum, said Ernie. (2011c: 11). [my italics].

(19) And then *I seen him* (2011c: 17).

(20) It was the night before St Patrick’s Day, so *their kids*, Raymond and Gloria, *been let stay up* later than usual, to watch a film. (2011c: 4).

2.3.3 *Syntax*

In this chapter the most important syntactical aspects are analysed and described. The discussions goes through some peculiarities of either verb phrases (VP)¹²– as for example the use of the ‘after-perfect’ construction, noun phrases (NP)¹³ – such as the use of the determinative article, structures of complex sentences – as relative clauses or the use of relative pronouns, the typical Irish English use of some prepositions and focusing devices.

2.3.3.1 *‘After-perfect’ construction*

This is the most renowned construction of Irish English and probably the most used one both in present times and in the past, also by writers. Filppula (Filppula 1999: 99) defines it as a construction that “refers to an even or an activity which has taken

¹² In grammar, a verb phrase is “a constituent of a sentence that contains the verb and any direct and indirect objects but not the subject”. Source: <<http://dictionary.reference.com/>>. Last access: October 2013.

¹³ In grammar, a noun phrase (NP) is “a group of words in a sentence that behaves in the same way as a noun, that is as a subject, an object, a complement, or as the object of a preposition”. (Wehmeier 2000)

place in the more or less recent past but the effects of which persist some way or other into the present moment or [...] into a secondary point of time orientation in the past”. Even though its effects persists into the moment of utterance, the action is completed. Because of the meaning it brings with it, this construction is also called ‘Hot News perfect’ by some scholars, as for example Harris, as reported in Filppula (Filppula 1999: 99). Compared to other syntactical characteristics, this is the most common not only in Irish English in general, but also in Dublin, and its use is mainly related to formal speech. The structure is the following: subject + inflected ‘be’ + ‘after’ + verb at –ing form. Here below there are some examples taken from “Brilliant” (Doyle 2011c):

- (21) My dog’s after dying. (Doyle 2011c: 3).
- (22) But I’m after whacking my funny bone. (Doyle 2011c: 6).
- (23) The Black Dog of Depression’s after robbing Dublin’s funny bone. (Doyle 2011c: 7)

The construction is quite recent in its use, since it starts appearing with some relevance in the nineteenth century and its origins can be found in the substratum, as a possible calque from Irish. Some small differences exist, although they are only due to the structure of Irish language¹⁴ and for this reason they are not so relevant for the analysis on the origins of the construction. As a further element supporting the substratumist theory, there is the fact that British English does not have such a structure and the closest one is made with the use of ‘just’ together with a present perfect (i.e. subj. + have/has/had + *just* +past participle). Hence, the ‘after-perfect’ can be properly considered typical and representative of Irish English language.

2.3.3.2 Subordinating ‘and’

As it can be deduced by its name, in this peculiar construction the conjunction ‘and’ is not used to coordinate sentences – as it should be in the standard use. Indeed, it is

¹⁴ The words’ order, with reference to the three main components of a basic sentence, that is subject, verb and object differs between Irish English and Irish. Reporting Filppula, Irish English, as “English, in its present-day stage in particular, is a strict subject-verb-object (SVO) language, whereas Irish – like the other Celtic languages – is, and has long been, a very consistent verb-subject-object (VSO) language”. In Irish the corresponding word for ‘after’ is *agus*. (Filppula 1999: 243).

used to introduce subordinate sentences, semantically expressing, in most cases, “a relation of causal or concessive dependence between the actions or states of affairs expressed in the two clauses connected by *and*” (Filppula 1999: 196). Although less common, this construction can also be used to express a “temporal relation of simultaneity” (Filppula 1999: 196). The sentence introduced by the ‘subordinating *and*’ always follows the main clause – there are few cases in which it precedes the main clause – and it can be realised in different ways through VPs, in which the main verb is either a ‘to’-infinitive, a bare infinitive, a past participle, or an ‘-ing’ form, thus giving to ‘*and*’ different meanings, such as ‘although’, ‘because’, ‘while’ (simultaneity), ‘since’ (causal) (Cesiri 23/2001-2005: 114). In Doyle (2011c) the construction is not used, apart from the case reported below (24), expressing simultaneity. Other examples are taken from Filppula, in (25), and Cesiri, in (26), in which ‘*and*’ has respectively the meaning of ‘while’ and ‘although’.

- (24) Gloria followed, to the front of the house *and out to the street*. (Doyle 2011c: 8).
[my italics].
- (25) I only thought of him there *and I cooking my dinner*. (Filppula 1999: 196-197).
- (26) *and him no more than a minster’s man*. (Cesiri 23/2001-2005: 114).

As the ‘after-perfect’ construction, the ‘subordinating *and*’ is a quite recent structure of Irish derivation, being the Irish *agus* replaced by the English ‘*and*’. The structure has a larger diffusion in rural areas than in the urban ones, even though some occurrences can be found in Dublin, as showed above in the example taken from Doyle’s story.

2.3.3.3 Use of the definite article

The definite article is widely used in Irish English, even in those cases in which it is not used or not allowed in standard British English. In Irish, one single article exists, that is ‘*an*’, and it corresponds to the definite English article ‘*the*’. Being the only Irish article, it is used even in those cases in which an indefinite article, a pronoun or no determiner would appear in Standard English. But some of this peculiar uses can

be found in Irish English, making definite article “usually the first or second most frequent word in any corpus [...] in Irish English” (O’Keefe 2011h: 62). Those peculiar cases in which definite article is used even if not required or not correct corresponds exactly to its occurrences in Irish. Some of the main context taken directly from Filppula (1999: 56) are listed below, accompanied by some examples from Doyle (2011c), in whom this peculiar use of definite article is widely spread.

Plural count nouns with generic reference:

- (27) It was *the people* who lived in Dublin who were depressed. (Doyle 2011c: 2). [my italics].
- (28) *The people of Dublin* were low. (Doyle 2011c: 3). [my italics].
- (29) [...] *the grown-ups* never noticed. (Doyle 2011c: 3). [my italics].
- (30) *The houses and stuff* are in the way. (Doyle 2011c: 13). [my italics].

Names of geographical areas and localities, public institutions, buildings, monuments, and streets:

- (31) [...] the River Liffey (Doyle 2011c: 1).

Physical sensations or states (mainly unpleasant ones):

- (32) when people where talking, *the sadness* was there to be seen. (Doyle 2011c: 3). [my italics].

Expressions involving reference to body parts or items of clothing (normally preceded by possessive pronouns in Standard English):

- (33) when people where talking, the sadness was there to be seen on the faces, across the shoulders, in the feet. (Doyle 2011c: 3). [my italics].
- (34) Raymond saw his Uncle Ben’s feet moving. He saw the white paint spots on *the shoes*. (Doyle 2011c: 5).
- (35) He grabbed Raymond under *the arms*. (Doyle 2011c: 21).
- (36) And they see *the face* and decide that I’m a – God! (Doyle 2011c: 25).

These are just some cases that are useful to give an idea of the phenomenon, but they are also useful to show the wide use of definite article in Dublin speaking. It means that this is not a wrong use of definite article by lower educated and rural people. Actually, the high frequency of the peculiar use of the article found in Doyle's story (Doyle 2011c) shows how this is its standard use in Irish English and gives further support to theories about its Irish origins. Nevertheless, the same uses of the article can be found with less frequency in few other English dialects in Scotland, North England, South Wales and South-West England. This would seem to give some importance to the superstratum influence as well. But these peculiar occurrences are so few that one could also think of a possible influence of the Irish use of the article on English dialects, rather than the opposite.

2.3.3.4 Relative clauses

In Standard English the markers used to introduce a relative clause, expressing the subject or the object of the main clause, are usually WH-relatives (who, whom, which, what). In Irish English these markers can also appear, even though the most common relative pronoun is 'that', followed in frequency use by 'zero relatives', that is to say there is no relative marker between the main and the relative clause, no matter if the omission refers to the subject or the object of the main clause.

(37) ...most of the working class *that* lived on the street was like that. (Corrigan 2011a: 44).
[my italics].

(38) ...because of all the paedophilia \emptyset went on in the church. (Corrigan 2011a: 44). [my italics].

But in Doyle (2011c) it appears a standard use of relative markers, as shown in (39), (40), (41), even though an example of zero relative is present (42).

(39) It was the people *who* lived in Dublin *who* were depressed. (Doyle 2011c: 2). [my italics].

(40) Although there was one boy there who looked like he might be a leprechaun. (Doyle 2011c: 16). [my italics].

- (41) Gloria asked the girl who was running beside her. (Doyle 2011c: 17).
 (42) The difference is we're Irish! (Doyle 2011c: 22).

Its origins seems to have both substratal and superstratal influences and not only Irish connections, since the same occurrences can be found in some English dialects, as for example in northern England, Scotland and Northern Ireland (McCafferty 2007b: 133).

2.3.3.5 *Negative concord and failure of negative attraction*

The failure of negative attraction is the phenomenon according to which the “so-called non-assertive pronouns or determiners [...] in subject position” should attract the negative particle which is usually placed after the verb. Examples (43) and (44) show the phenomenon:

- (43) [...] *Any* country couldn't stand that. = No country could stand that. (Filppula 1999: 180).
 (44) [...] And *anybody* won't know [...] = Nobody will know. (Filppula 1999: 180).

Almost the same structure, but with non-assertive pronouns in object position is the ‘negative concord’, that is a double negation present both after the verb and in the negative form of the non-assertive pronoun; a kind of double negation which is never accepted in Standard English. An example is taken from Hickey (Hickey 2007a: 146):

- (45) He's *not* interested in *no* car. [my italics].

Studies on these construction are quite limited, most of all because the use of both ‘negative concord’ and ‘failure of negative attraction’ is rare in Irish English and it seems to be relegated to rural and bilingual areas, supporting substratal origins. In standard Irish English and Dublin English in particular, it seems not to be used. In Doyle (2011c) there is no example available, but rather the standard and correct use, as in (46), (47), (48).

- (46) But *no one heard* her. (Doyle 2011c: 18). [my italics].
(47) But *no one was* listening. (Doyle 2011c: 20). [my italics].
(48) But *no one would* notice. (Doyle 2011c: 25). [my italics].

2.3.3.6 Periphrastic ‘do’

In Irish English ‘do’ is used in VPs so as to express and habitual action or a generic aspect. Its use does not correspond neither to the emphatic ‘do’ – the structure in which ‘do’ is used to emphasise an utterance – nor to the use of ‘do’ as “support” (Filppula 1999: 130), that is to say in standard constructions of negative or interrogative forms. In Irish English construction, ‘do’ acts as an unstressed auxiliary, mainly used for habitual actions placed in present time. It can be found, sometimes, in the past tense – ‘did’ – but it seldom appears, since the standard construction made with ‘used to’ is the most common. There are also some other markers of habitual actions, such as the inflective ‘be/bees’ and the construction made by inflected ‘do’ + be + -ing form; but alternatives are more common in northern dialects of Irish English.

No example of habitual ‘do’ or other northern constructions can be found in Doyle (2011c), but it is proved that the construction exists and it is used both in Ireland and by other English dialects. There is no way to say whether periphrastic construction with ‘do’ has superstratal or substratal influences, because of its affinities with Irish, but also its being used by other dialects, so the discussions remains opened. Just to give a rough idea of habitual ‘do’ and northern alternatives, some examples are reported.

- (49) He *does* come when he hears the noise. (Kallen 1994: 181). [my italics].
(50) The boys *bees* up late at night. (Hickey 2007a: 146).
(51) She *does be* reading books. (Hickey 2007a: 146).

2.3.3.7 Focusing devices: clefting, topicalisation and nominalisation

In Irish English there seems to be a wide use of focusing devices, expressed in different ways, three of which are the most important and worth to be mentioned. Clefting and topicalisation are very similar to each other, indeed, both imply a dislocation to left of that part of the sentence which the focus is addressed to and they can be differentiated only because of the way they are realised, while nominalisation differs in its construction but it aims at the same result.

“**Clefting** is a device which is employed in discourse to give special thematic and focal prominence to a constituent placed in the ‘hinge’ position of the sentence” (Filppula 1991: 52) [my bold]. The element to be highlighted in the sentence is usually positioned at the beginning of the sentence and introduced by ‘it is’ or ‘it was’ and the rest of the sentence is then presented as a relative clause introduced by ‘that’ or no relatives.

(52) *It was the window that* John broke. (Filppula 1991: 52). [my italics].

(53) *It's to Glasgow* he's going. (Hickey 2007a: 146). [my italics].

“**Topicalisation** [...] is an operation which moves a constituent to the very beginning of its clause and assigns thematic and focal prominence to it in a way similar to that of clefting” (Filppula 1991: 52) [my bold]. In other words, it can be said that “a clause element can be considered to have been fronted from its ‘neutral’ position [...] to a ‘marked’ position at the very beginning of its clause”, keeping “the syntactic relations within the clause [...] unchanged: for example, a topicalised object continues to function as the object of its clause, etc.” (Filppula 1999: 260). The final result is almost the same of clefting, but the way it is realised is slightly different, since in topicalisation there is nothing introducing the highlighted element and no relative clause follows it. The marked element is just moved to the beginning of the sentence, keeping its function unchanged.

(54) *In some building* he is workin' with the couple of weeks. (Filppula 1991: 56). [my italics].

(55) [...] Oh, *about a distance of twenty and three or four miles* it were. (Filppula 1999: 261).

(56) [...] *Danced* all night we did. (Filppula 1999: 261).

Finally, **nominalisation** is that peculiar process according to which a clause or a single term is transformed into a noun, with the function of completing the description of the subject (57), substituting the object (58) or constituting a prepositional phrase (59) (Cesiri 23/2001-2005: 115).

(57) It's his own *rearing*. = He reared it himself. (Cesiri 23/2001-2005: 115).

(58) If I had *the doing* of it again, I'd do it different. = If I could do it again, I'd do it differently. (Cesiri 23/2001-2005: 115).

(59) I was at *the leaving down* of the first stone. = I was there when the first stone was being laid. (Cesiri 23/2001-2005: 115).

Topicalisation is usually less frequent than clefting, probably because clefting shares some features with both Irish and Standard English, while topicalisation could sound quite strange to a Standard English speaker, so probably for this reason its use has been abandoned with the passing of time and it has been relegated mainly to rural speech. Nevertheless, there is almost no doubt about the origin of these structures, which come mainly from the Irish substratum, being these structures “attested in Irish earlier than in any other Western European language” (Filppula 1999: 259). But superstratal influences cannot be left aside considering the presence of similar structures in some English dialects and the major flexibility of English language with reference to words order.

2.3.3.8 Prepositional usage

The usage of prepositions is another peculiar aspect of Irish English in which some prepositions are used in ways that have no correspondence in Standard English. Almost all scholars agrees on the Irish origin for these structures. Indeed, in Irish there is a wide use of prepositions with a syntactic value to reproduce meanings that in other languages are expressed by using verbs, adverbs and adjectives. Here below

a list of the main and most used prepositions is presented, together with some examples.

2.3.3.8.1 *With*

‘With’ is widely used, but the most peculiar construction in which it is used corresponds to the duration form of Standard English, that is the standard structure made with ‘present/past perfect or present/past perfect continuous + for/since + expression of time’. In Irish English the same concept is expressed by ‘present/past tense + with + expression of time’, that is the construction known as ‘extended-now’ which includes

(i) reference to a state, event, or activity which has been initiated in the past and which leads up to the moment of utterance (or to some other point of time-orientation in the past in those cases where the past tense is used); (ii) obligatory presence of a time adverbial expressing duration [...]; (iii) use of the present or past tense, including the corresponding progressive and passive forms [...].

(Filppula 1999: 123).

When used in this way, the preposition ‘with’ expresses duration of a state or an activity, as shown in examples (60) and (61):

(60) *I didn't hear him playin' with years and years.* = I haven't heard him playing for years and years. (Filppula 1999: 122-123). [my italics].

(61) *Hugh Curtin is buried with years.* = Hugh Curtin has been buried for years. (Filppula 1999: 232). [my italics].

But there are also some other peculiar meanings which the preposition ‘with’ can acquire, such as ‘within the space of’ (reference to future time as in (62)); ‘by’ (agency in passive constructions as in (63)); ‘because of’, ‘owing to’, ‘by means of’ (causal use when expressing the cause of a state, an event or an action as in (64)). ‘With’ can also be used to express possession and physical attributes, as in (65) and (66). (Filppula 1999: 232-236).

- (62) It [Irish] have died away, our language is dying away *with a few years*, you know. = in a few years' time / within the space of a few years
- (63) A man with the name of Kellett. I did mention his name before, he was taken away *with the Tans* [the Black and Tans] = by the Tans
- (64) And he told us, when he went out first, for the first eighteen months he could hardly free the teeth from each other *with the cold*. = because of the coldness
- (65) The money is with them. = They have plenty of money.
- (66) The weight was with him. = He was heavy.

No occurrence of these peculiar uses was found in Doyle (2011c), but only the preposition used in its standard ways.

2.3.3.8.2 *In*

The use of preposition 'in' in Irish English is conspicuous and the meanings it assumes are different, even though in most of the cases it occurs as a prepositional phrase, that is 'in it'. Moreover, all its uses do not correspond to the structure as it would be in Standard English.

The more common and literal meaning of the prepositional phrase 'in it' is that of concrete location and it corresponds to the Standard English 'there / in there'.

- (67) [...] There was acres and miles of land just for to live *in it*. (Filppula 1999: 227).

Some other meanings are for example involvement (68) and (69) – the only use that can be found in Doyle (2011c) – or notion of location in a metaphorical sense, both as existence in the general sense (70) and presence (71) of somebody or something in some place (Filppula 1999).

- (68) Mrs. F: And then it sort of died out, and then the man that was *in it*, a certain Defoe that was *in it*, he sold the licence, you see. (Filppula 1999: 229).
- (69) The bad dream with the Dog *in it*. (Doyle 2011c: 20). [my italics].
- (70) [...] last winter wasn't that cold, wet. And the few heavy frost, and there was only the one bit of snow *in it* last year. (Filppula 1999: 228).

(71) They'd speak a lot of Irish. Well, they spoke Irish, but God, I think, well, I didn't know them. I wasn't in this part of the world, when they were in it. (Filppula 1999: 228).

Only when it expresses some inherent quality or property of something, 'in' is used alone and it is followed by a noun or a personal pronoun.

(72) [...] Well, you do, ah, if it's in a dog he'll train himself, if the goodness is *in'im*. (Filppula 1999: 229).

(73) Oh, the Pollack is nice fish for eating though. [...] there's lot o' bone *in the corner*. (Filppula 1999: 229).

Other meanings are connected with peculiar expressions (e.g. 'live in the sea' or live in hard work') which seem to come directly from Irish, even if there is not any direct proof of it, while in some other cases the preposition 'in' is used where some other preposition would be expected; for example, 'in' is largely used with the meaning of 'into' (Filppula 1999: 230).

Comparing occurrences in Irish English and British English dialects, it is clear that there is a huge substratal influence. There is a wide use of 'in it' in Irish English and even though occurrences do not lack in British English dialects, their distribution is not enough to justify a superstratal influence.

2.3.3.8.3 On

'On' has a high frequency in use in Irish English and it can acquire different meanings. The most common one is the so-called 'dative of disadvantage', that is "expressions which imply a disadvantage of some kind or another from the point of view of the referent of the pronoun acting as the complement of the preposition" (Filppula 1999: 219).

(74) But eh, there was some island, like, where there was a man living. And he was marooned, like, and there was no one in it but himself, like. And...this day the fire went *out on him*. (Filppula 1999: 219).

Physical and mental sensation, usually negative (75), possession of some type or another (76), and other uses in which Standard English would require a different preposition or construction are also very common.

(75) [...] the breath was gettin' short *on him*. (Filppula 1999: 220).

(76) And then they christened the name *on them* Black and Tans [...]. (Filppula 1999: 221).

(77) I was just reading it *on the paper* here. (Filppula 1999: 223).

(78) They were pelting 'im with rotten spuds and all that kind of thing, and great sport *on him*. = and had great sport at his expence (Filppula 1999: 223).

Some of these uses can be found in English dialects such Scots or Hebridean English, showing some kind of superstratal presence, even if it has to be seen only as a presence and not a real influence. Most probably these uses were transferred to old English dialects through the contact with Celtic vernacular languages.

In general, it has been shown how variegated is the use of the most common prepositions and how their use is strictly connected with Irish language.

2.3.3.9 Unbound uses of relative pronouns

In Standard English reflexive pronouns are always bound, in the sense that they “normally require the presence of another nominal element in the same clause or sentence with which they stand in a coreferential relation” (Filppula 1999: 77), since they cannot refer to themselves. In Irish English, the use of reflexive pronouns without any antecedent in the same clause is quite usual. Doyle (2011: 17) also shows this use.

(79) I'm feeling a bit low, *meself* (Doyle 2011c: 2). [my italics].

(80) And d'you hear me, you didn't know the minute they'd burn *yoursel* an' the house. (Filppula 1999: 78).

Initially, it seems that unbound reflexive pronouns were used to refer to the mistress or the master of the house, but later it was discovered how their use was not

limited to this even in ancient times. The substratum seems to be the main source, also because of the high use of unbound reflexive pronouns in some Irish dialects.

2.3.3.10 Use of ‘now’

Standard uses of ‘now’ as temporal marker or in clause initial position “marking a new phase of discourse” (O’Keefe 2011h: 60) are present also in Irish English. But what is curious is the use of ‘now’ in clause final position, a very common and widespread use in Irish English and particularly in Doyle (2011c), even though rarely treated by scholars, maybe due to its formal and familiar use. ‘Now’ in clause final position can perform the following functions:

Downtoning assertions: it has a softening effect on the assertion (O’Keefe 2011h: 60).

- (81) They knew where they were *now*. (Doyle 2011c: 16).
- (82) The kids who’d been frightened felt less frightened *now*, inside the Zoo. (Doyle 2011c: 21).

Marking events: functioning in a deictic way to point to an event’s completion (O’Keefe 2011h: 60).

- (83) They were in under him [the table] *now*. (O’Keefe 2011c: 4). [my italics].
- (84) They were near town *now*. (Doyle 2011c: 16). [my italics].
- (85) It was darker *now*. (Doyle 2011c: 17). [my italics].
- (86) It was brighter *now*, dawn, and the birds were working hard. (Doyle 2011c: 24). [my italics].
- (87) It was daylight *now*, so ‘brilliant’ didn’t light up. (Doyle 2011: 25). [my italics].

Approximator: [...] marking the vagueness of the time reference (O’Keefe 2011h: 60).

- (88) She'd been frightened twice *now*, and she didn't like it. (Doyle 2011c: 12). [my italics].

2.3.3.11 Taboo items: religious references

Some scholars, as O'Keefe, made an analysis on the use of terms considered as taboos, among whom religious forms are included. It is interesting to spend few words on this issue, since the use of religious references seems to be very prolific in Doyle (Doyle 2011c): only in *Brilliant* there are six occurrences, that is quite enough for a short story like this. The high frequency in dialogues is representative of the use of these references in Irish English and using Murphy's words "as religion has been a highly esteemed and respected part of Irish culture and society to date, it is not surprising these religious references occur" (Murphy 2010b: 183). Murphy also underlines how the use of religious references is very common in women and Doyle's text is highly representative on this, since most of these references are pronounced by women or personified object or buildings to which a feminine gender is attributed.

The most common words are 'God' and 'Jesus' and wide range of variations, while in Standard English 'God' is usually the only one used (O'Keefe 2011h: 61; Murphy 2010b: 184). Examples below are illustrative of this variety of forms.

- (89) Ah Jaysis, look at me shirt! (Doyle 2011c: 3).
(90) Oh God! (Doyle 2011c: 6).
(91) Oh my God! (Doyle 2011c: 8).
(92) - ohmygod . . . ! (Doyle 2011c: 10).
(93) -Oh my God! (Doyle 2011c: 14).
(94) What in the name of God was that?! they asked. (Doyle 2011c: 27).

2.3.3.12 'For to' infinitives

This construction does not show a quantitative big corpus in Irish English and no occurrence in Doyle (2011c), but it is present, in any case, particularly in South Armagh English and in Belfast, in Northern Ireland. It is mentioned because of its

Irish origins, as it seems, since Irish has a similar structure made by “preposition + verbal noun construction with equivalent function and syntactic structure” (McCafferty 2007b: 133). The construction is used in clauses which express purpose, aim, intention. Some examples are taken from McCafferty (2007b: 133) – (95) and (96) – and Filppula (1999: 185) – (97) and (98). ‘For to’ could be replaced by ‘in order to’, ‘so as to’ or simply by ‘to’ in standard constructions.

(95) They’d go up the Shankil *for to close* a gap.

(96) This woman had expected her *for to cure* her.

(97) And it took them fifteen years *for to beat* him out of it [a horse race].

(98) I was sorry *for to* hear the death of Mr. O’Connors: but it is all our fate *to die*.

2.3.3.13 Use of Present Progressive with stative verbs

There are some verbs that cannot be used in continuous tenses, even when speaking about temporary situations or states. They are called stative verbs and include verbs such as think, want, believe, feel, and other verbs which are connected with emotions, feelings, opinions and what is not action. This is the English standard rule for stative verbs, but in Irish English some of these verbs are used also in the progressive form, even though the frequency in use is reduced and for this reason there is not any specific study about it. Nevertheless, few examples are present in Doyle (2011c) and for this reason this feature was worth to be mentioned, at least.

(99) *I’m feeling* a bit low, meself (Doyle 2011c: 2). [my italics].

(100) Gloria *was feeling* better now. She *was feeling* almost unhappy. (Doyle 2011c: 22). [my italics].

2.3.4 The Lexicon

The lexicon of Irish English takes most of its words from British English; most of them keep the same meaning and are used in the same contexts as British English, but other words, though keeping their original British ‘structure’, have acquired a new meaning in addition to that of the original word and thus usually occur in non-

standard contexts or with a different and sometimes dialectical hint. In addition to these groups, there is a third one connected to British English, which includes those words that have become obsolete in current British English, though keeping on being used as actual words in Irish English. This differentiation is due to the fact that the English language that got in contact with Irish during the formation of Irish English is a language that was limited to that period and that area. English spoken by settlers came at a standstill after the first plantation period, while in Britain the language was changing and moving all the time, being a living spoken language. This is also the reason why a “division between ‘Irish’ and ‘English’ components in the general Irish English lexicon is not always clear (Kallen 1994: 183). A fourth group is composed by those terms that are usually supposed to be of Irish origin, but this big and peculiar group can collide sometimes with the others, making a clear answer about origins quite difficult. According to studies made by Irwin and reported in Kallen (Kallen 1994: 167), some categories has been created to divide Irish English lexicon and among these one of the most important is the category including Irish loanwords. This category includes “legal and technical terms as well as those related to farming and related pursuits” (Kallen 1999: 167) and other words derived from religious beliefs. An example is given by the word **leprechaun**, also used in *Brilliant* (Doyle 2011c: 16). The word comes “from Old Irish luchorpan literally "a very small body," from *lu* "little" [...] + *corpan*, diminutive of *corp* "body," from Latin *corpus* "body"¹⁵ [my italics]. The final group is made by words coming from Scots Gaelic which also had a great importance on Irish English formation.

In the end, what is clear is that whether these terms come from a language or another, or from a coexistence and co-influence of two or more languages and dialects, Irish English linguistic baggage is very rich, interesting and peculiar, also because of its historical implications that have not to be forgotten.

¹⁵ Source: <<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=leprechaun/>>. Last accessed : October 2013.

CHAPTER THREE

Roddy Doyle's *Brilliant* and its literary background

3.1 An outline of Irish literature in the twentieth century

The eighteenth-century literary production in Ireland was characterised by the use of English language, at the expense of Irish. This is due to the colonialist policy operated in Ireland starting from English invasions and plantation and to the consequences this process had upon language after Penal Laws were issued in 1690, which prohibited the use of Irish language for all spheres in everyday life and as mean of communication and expression both in speaking and in writing. The same policy was actuated by English Government in all British colonies, but in Ireland the results were different because of some important factors. As Kiberd notes,

the colonial occupation which lasted more than seven centuries [and] the close proximity of Ireland to England: affinities of climate, temperament and culture made it hard for the English to treat the Irish consistently as their absolute Other [...] the Anglicisation that they [writers such as Yeats] countered had penetrated every layer of Irish life, a situation rather different from that to be encountered in Africa or Asia, whose emerging peoples were not so deeply permeated by the culture of the colonizer. Ireland was so thoroughly penetrated that, apart from

some scattered areas of the western seaboard, it had ceased to exist as an “elsewhere” to the English mind.

(Kiberd 1995: 251).

During this period, up to the nineteenth century, the only literature available for the high society was the English literature produced by English writers and promoted in Ireland as the only means of education. This does not imply that there were no writers of Irish origins who could achieve great importance in this period, indeed there were. One for all was Oscar Wilde¹⁶, whose works are still considered best sellers. But for Wilde, as for his contemporaries, the success arrived because they adapted their works to the English canon, even though including subtle references to Gaelic culture. They spent most of their lives abroad, mixing up their own culture with the English one – Wilde, for example was born in Dublin, then moved to England and studied at Oxford University. For this reason, up to the end of the nineteenth century, writers could be considered Irish because of their origins, but at the same time they could also be considered English because of the way they express their art and because of their being part of a wider world and reality.

Nevertheless, at the turn of the century the situation started changing. After a long period of submission, in which personal and national identities had been repressed, Irish people felt the need to take possession of it again. The first step was to refuse British submission and fight against it so as to be recognised as an independent country. In fact, “what they [Irish] rejected was not England but the British imperial system, which denied expressive freedom to its colonial subjects” (Kiberd 1995: 199). But after this, the second step came and it was even harder: when independence had been achieved by twenty-six of the thirty-two Counties, the research for identity as a people started, but this was not an easy goal. In order to do that Irish people had to recover their Celtic traditions, look at their past and revitalised it and literature was a proper mean to reach this goal. Thus a new literature was born at the beginning of the twentieth century, a literature that set the genre of the novel apart, promoting new meanings of expression or, even better, choosing those ancient genres that may support Ireland’s aim in a better way.

¹⁶ Wilde Oscar (Dublin 1854 – Paris 1900). Writer of comedies. He wrote about English aestheticism and decadentism. He lived most of his life in Paris. <www.britannica.com>.

The reaction materialized in two fields: on one side in politics, through the Gaelic League¹⁷, founded in 1893, which fought to restore a Gaelic and independent Ireland; on the other side in literature which saw the flourishing of oneiric tales about melancholic and fairy worlds, so as “to provide in the ancient heroes exemplars who might reanimate the declining Anglo-Irish aristocracy” (Kiberd 1995: 196). Literature of this period was then the basis for new ideals that drove to the Easter Rising of 1916¹⁸ and the subsequent War of Independence in 1919-1921.

The poet William Butler Yeats¹⁹ was one of the most important literary figures of the period: following Wilde’s thoughts, but expressing them with the eyes of a new and restored nation, Yeats gave birth to new ideas, refusing “to inspire imitation in others, preferring to teach them to become themselves” (Kiberd 1995: 203), seeing in self-expression an heroic actions of self-conquest. The importance of artists like Yeats and his generation was their strong believing “that each generation was set its own task and that theirs must fulfil a mission to renovate Irish consciousness” (Kiberd 1995: 205). This was the principle that drove the mind and creativity of these artists, giving the first concrete incentive for renovation and self-assertion. All these ideals were proposed as a searching to re-establish some kind of ancient and past glory which could allow Ireland and its people to re-define their identities as independent people and selves. However, it is important to notice how almost all writers, both of nineteenth and twentieth century, wrote in English – rather Irish English by that time – and not in Irish, because as Yeats said – and it was clear also for all those writers succeeding him – “Gaelic is my native language, but it is not my mother tongue” (Kiberd 1995: 253).

¹⁷ The Gaelic League was founded in 1893 for the preservation of the Irish language. Patrick Pearse (Dublin 1879 – Dublin 1916), Irish poet and statesman was its Director. He considered the use of Irish language as an instrument to resist English dominion. <www.britannica.com>

¹⁸ “The roots of the Rising lie in the ‘new nationalism’ which emerged in Ireland from the 1890s. [...] when a number of them [Irish revolutionary nationalists] met in Dublin on 9th September 1914 to discuss the circumstances arising from the outbreak of war, they agreed to appeal to Germany for its support in an insurrection. [...] the German government declared its support for Irish independence. [...] The Easter Rising was virtually confined to Dublin. [...] Their [the British] strategy was effective. It compelled the insurgent leaders, based at the Post Office, first to evacuate the building and later to accept the only terms on offer – unconditional surrender. Their decision was then made known to and accepted sometimes reluctantly, by all the rebel garrisons still fighting both in the capital and in the provinces”. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/easterrising/>>.

¹⁹ Yeats, William Butler (Sandymount, Dublin 1865 – Roquebrune-Cap Martin 1939). One of the biggest poets of his period. Poet, dramatist and critic. Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923. In 1922, after Ireland achieved independence, he was elected member of the Senate. <www.britannica.com>.

In the years following the Rising and after independence was achieved, there was a new change in Irish literature. The first step to redefine national identity had been achieved, but identities still felt lost after so many troubles and wars. People could still feel the power literature – and plays, above all – had, at the point that

such was the interaction between street and stage in the years after 1916 that the following note appeared on the programme for Sean O’Casey first successful play: “Any gunshots heard during the performance are part of the script. Members of the audience must at all times remain seated”.

(Kiberd 1995: 218).

In the previous years, the influence of literature in the real life and its acting like inspirations for action had not been forgotten yet, so any change in the literary field was taking place slowly. Sean O’Casey²⁰ was a great exponent of the post war period, he was a playwright and his plays talk about contemporary historical events or events coming from a recent past and he concentrates on the effects they had, and actually has, upon life in Dublin. His works, compared to those of writers who preceded him, were based on realism, without any attempt of inciting to violence or reaction, “ he was at his best in describing the horrors of war rather than its causes” (Kiberd 1995: 223). His way of writing was quite traditional with reference to the style, because “unlike Pearse and the rebels, he failed to make the older forms vibrate with an authentic contemporary feeling” (Kiberd 1995: 232). However, there was, at the same time, some innovation in O’Casey, both in his research to accurately reproduce, in writing, the Dublin’s speaking of his time (Cesiri, 23/2001-2005), and in the combination he made of realism and expressionism, which let “his audience [...] know something of the extinction of personality which they now endure” (Kiberd 1995: 242).

But who really introduced something new both in language and in style, above all, was James Joyce²¹. He reflected the image of the artist of that period:

²⁰ O’Casey, Sean (Dublin 1880 – Torquay 1964). Playwriter. One of the main authors of Abby theatre. His plays take their inspiration on political and social events of his time. <www.britannica.com>.

²¹ Joyce, James (Dublin 1882 – Zurich 1941). One of the main authors of the nineteenth century. He reinvents the genre of the novel, highlighting individuality and human psyche. <www.britannica.com>.

War and civil war appeared to have drained all energy and imagination away: there was precious little left with which to reimagine the national condition. [...] By the end of the 1920s many artists and intellectuals had come to the bleak conclusion that Ireland was no longer an interesting place in which to live: now they left.

(Kiberd 1995: 263-264).

Joyce, after a first period in which he wrote some novels, following standard patterns, decided to make something new, to dismantle “the master narratives of the neighbouring island and, in truth, of imperial Europe” (Kiberd 1995: 276), representing through and in his writing the disintegration of social and domestic relations and also the idea of “the most thoughtful Irish [who] sought to free Ireland in the only meaningful sense by freeing their expressive selves” (Kiberd 1995: 290).

Joyce was just one of the many artists and writers that did not personally take part in the reconstruction of Ireland in-land, but left it to live abroad, in other European places which allowed him to express identities and new ideas in a more free way, even though the main background for his works was Dublin. All these elements are present in his masterpiece ‘Ulysses’²²: it is a novel in its complete form, but in a new style.

The short-story genre was chosen by Joyce as new way of expression to create something that looks like a novel, but in reality it is not, since the standard canons of the traditional novel are subverted, starting from its form. The work is actually a collection of short stories, all connected to each other to the realisation of a story as a hole, but each and every one can be seen as a single short-story. Actually,

the short-story genre promised Joyce an escape, a line of flight from the formal inappropriateness of the novel, which was calibrated to a settled society rather than one still in the settling.

(Kiberd 1995: 330).

²² “Ulysses” was edited in 1922 after a long and hard work, since Joyce started working on it in 1914. <www.britannica.com>.

Joyce presented the reality travelling inside the human mind, through the use of the stream of consciousness, the frequent use of allegory and inventing new words, thanks to subtle associations of ideas and sounds which recall obsolete words to the mind²³. All this represented the new world and the new life, a life that looks both to the future and to the past. New theories in psychology were born in this period through new studies of which Freud was the biggest representative, but through his works and his exile, Joyce did not forget his origins, indeed he “took with him the ancient Gaelic notion that only in literature can the consciousness of a people be glimpsed” (Kiberd 1995: 328).

A similar experience, just few decades later, had been followed by Samuel Beckett²⁴, one of the main playwrights of the twentieth century and representative of the so-called ‘theatre of the absurd’, in which aspects of the human mind are represented, sometimes – also apparently – with no meaning or without any sense. As Joyce, Beckett realised his art through new means of expression and he lived most of his life abroad. As complete refusal of British supervision and power, he decided to write most of his works in French, probably in order to “free him[self] from the pressure of an Anglo-American audience and from its attendant temptations” (Kiberd 1995: 535), the same way Joyce did by using the stream of consciousness. At the same time, while exiling himself both in language and physically – he also moved to Paris as Joyce did – he set his plays in Dublin, giving this fact a kind of metaphorical meaning: he released himself and his art by physically moving away from Ireland and, by doing this, it seems he was trying to release Ireland, too. Dublin background, confronted to his life, was a way to say that

Freedom from ancient spiritual authorities will be meaningful only if the character is capable of actual thought. Too often what he calls “freedom” is actually and only the freedom to be like everybody else. As Erich Fromm²⁵ has written: “the right to express our thoughts means something only if we are able to have thoughts of our own”. (Kiberd 1995: 548).

²³ Source: <www.britannica.com>. Last accessed: October 2013.

²⁴ Beckett, Samuel (Dublin 1906 – Paris 1989). Playwriter, but also poet and essayist. He met Joyce in Paris. Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. <www.britannica.com>.

²⁵ Fromm, Erich (Frankfurt 1900 – Muralto, Switzerland 1980). German psychoanalyst. Important contribution in psychoanalysis and individual psyche. <www.britannica.com>.

Artists such as Joyce and Beckett, by exiling themselves, probably wanted to show Ireland that a renaissance was possible, both as nation and individuals, but in order to do that Irish people had to think as Irish and as part of a biggest world to which they had to be equal and not subdued. In this context Kiberd's words acquire a certain importance:

The years of evolution from the nineteenth century to the twentieth had not been some kind of apprenticeship for an understanding of Europe: rather, the culture of Europe might offer an apprenticeship for a fuller understanding of the writings of Yeats, Joyce and Beckett. All three handled many classic themes of European art, but they did not feel tied to that tradition by any special devotion, and so their handling was irreverent, subversive, even insolent. Of nothing was this more true than of their treatment of English literary culture.

Living at such an angle to official English canons, Irish artists "read England as a prelude to "writing Ireland".

(Kiberd 1995: 560).

These are the basis that give rise to a new literature in Ireland that becomes Irish and international at the same time. It is in the 1960s that Ireland goes through a period of modernisation and improvement, opening itself to international influences.

The pace of modernization in the 1960s astonished many and no area of Irish life was left untouched. [...] manufacturing enterprises came from overseas to take advantage of the attractive terms offered by the government [...]. At the same time, Ireland became a holiday destination for members of the international jet-set [...].

(Kiberd 1995: 565).

Ireland opens itself up to the international scene allowing "the "unbanning" of books after a period of twelve years" (Kiberd 1995: 582). The new renaissance in literature finds important names such as Seamus Heaney²⁶, whose works are permeated by his political commitment and reflections and observations on how "violence insinuates

²⁶ Heaney, Seamus (Castle Dawson, Londonderry 1939 – Dublin 2013). Poet. Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995. <www.britannica.com>.

itself into even the most everyday activities” (Kiberd 1995: 591). Hence, the new literature is inspired by Irish life and places, but it interprets, at the same time, the discomfort of contemporary youth, international themes and problems that affects different people all around the world. Concepts like tradition, culture, identity and the sense of one’s own nation are often discussed and compared to experiences of other and different countries and peoples. All this has given birth to a kind of literature that is at the same time Irish, multicultural and international.

3.2 Roddy Doyle

Roddy Doyle is a contemporary writer and he is part of the twentieth-century Irish literary outline. He was born in Dublin in 1958. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts and then majored in English and geography at University College, Dublin. His career started as a teacher of English and geography in a Dublin grade school. In this period he starts writing, but it is in 1993 that he decides to dedicate himself to full-time writing²⁷.

He publishes his first novel “The Commitments” in 1987 (made into a film in 1991) through his own company, King Farouk, until a London-based publisher took over. The novel was then made into a film in 1991 and also collected into “The Barrytown Trilogy” together with other two novels: “The Snapper” (published 1990; made into a film in 1993) and *The Van* (published 1991; made into a film in 1996). The trilogy is centred around the Rabbitte family, who lives in a Dublin slum among many difficulties and problems, but it is pervaded by love and understanding. Doyle’s fourth novel, “Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha”, won the Booker Prize in 1993. The main character is a ten-year-old boy who suffers his parents’ marriage breakdown and fears his classmates’ ostracism. “The Woman Who Walked into Doors” (published in 1997) is a novel about domestic abuse, while “A Star Called Henry” (published in 1999) is about an IRA soldier and his adventures, the participation to Easter Rising and the birth of his child.²⁸

²⁷ <<http://postcolonialstudies.emory.edu/roddy-doyle>>.

²⁸ <<http://www.britannica.com/>>.

All Roddy's novels – as well as short-stories are about contemporary themes, settled in Dublin but representative of life all over the world. But Doyle is also the author of short-stories for children, in which contemporary themes are also handled, but they are simplified as in tales.

3.3 *Brilliant: the story and its background*

In 2010 Dublin gained the UNESCO's designation of 'City of Literature', thanks to the city's rich historical and literary past, its lively contemporary literature, the variety of feasts and entertainment offered and because of it being the home of the biggest writers²⁹. The following year, literature was the main theme of St. Patrick's festival, which focused on Irish literary tradition.

Ireland gives great importance to its culture and traditions and the St. Patrick's Day Festival is one of the contemporary and main representative events in Dublin. The festival is celebrated every year on March 17th. Unexpectedly, the first celebrations took place in the United States, where a lot of Irish soldiers serving the English military found in this celebration a way to keep their culture alive in a foreign country.

In Ireland the anniversary for St. Patrick's death, supposed to be in the fifth century, on March 17th, gave birth to celebrations and the establishment of the feast-day. In the beginning, all pubs and shops had to be closed during this day. It is in 1995 that the Irish Government decided to turn St. Patrick's Day to a national festival, so as to drive tourism and increase interest for Irish culture and Ireland all over the world. Some prohibitions were lifted - as for example those against the consumption of meat and the closure of pubs and shops – so the celebration became a real festival with parades, dance, music, entertainment and fireworks shows. The festival is a kind of transposition of what is happening in writing:

Like the surrealists who would later explore those rejected images and ideas which had been banished to the sub-conscious, Irish writers sized upon all that

²⁹ From the speech of the Irish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Mary Hnafin, in 2010. Source: <<http://travelbetweenthepages.com/2010/07/31/dublin-has-the-write-stuff/>>. Last access: October 2013.

was denied in official culture – holy wells, pagan festivals, folk anecdotes, popular lore – and wrought these things into a high art.

(Kiberd 1995: 274).

The parade of St. Patrick's festival in 2011 gathered inspiration from Doyle's newly-written short-story, "Brilliant". The story is set in Dublin and it appears as a celebration of the city: its strength, unity and will to show its value and culture. The happy purpose of St. Patrick's festival is reflected by the story, by the common aim to release the city and its people from a boring and oppressive feeling.

Though being a children's story, the subject is a very topical issue, representative for a worldwide condition and maybe difficult to be completely understood by children. Behind the whole story there seems to be the writer's will to celebrate its people and country, the power of acting together for a common aim, the power of Irish people when they join their strength for a goal they share and the message – by addressing the story to children – that children are the future and the only spur for a genuine renewal.

The festival is taken as starting point so as to revitalize old themes of the colonial period and to show how Irish power has brought to a winning condition. The story, then, can also be read from the point of view of the status of literature and Ireland in the twentieth century, making a comparison both to the old condition and the new, winning one, in which people together can fight and win against difficulties and troubles and take back their own identities and lives.

The story is somehow a looking into the present with a hope for the future. A future that is in the hand of the new generation who has to confront themselves with problems they can hardly understand but which they face with the candour typical of a child for whom nothing is impossible and everything can be realized.

What was offered in such works was not a *revival* so much as a rebirth, a *renaissance* which assumed the inadequacy of fathers and which celebrated children who proceeded to act as parents to themselves.

(Kiberd, 1995: 299).

Together with the hope for a better future, there is also the assertion of the present, as if to say that Irish identity do exists already and nothing can destroy it again. This is achieved by emphasizing the language use – actually Irish English – underlining that it is not the English spoken in Britain, but the English spoken in Ireland and the new generations are those who are keeping and will keep it alive. Indeed, it is in children's dialogue that most of the references to Irish English language and pronunciation are offered.

To summarise the whole background and, hence, the meaning of the story, Kiberd's words are suitable once again:

Many people – probably a clear majority – were better fed, educated, housed and cared for than ever before: yet by the 1990s three hundred thousand were unemployed and one in every three lived below the official poverty line. For them the loss of the old coherent codes would prove especially traumatic, for they had few material comforts to make the new spiritual emptiness bearable. This, along with the lack of employment opportunities, high taxation and the burgeoning debt crisis, may have prompted many young people to decide that there was no future for them in the country. [...] Yet, for all that, the conviction remained that it was from younger generations that the answers must finally come.

(Kiberd 1995: 573).

The choice to settle the novel in Dublin seems to come from the will to choose a city known by many and also the city in which people seems to see as the hope and the starting point for the future of Ireland and its people.

‘Brilliant’

written by **Roddy Doyle**

for St. Patrick’s Festival Parade 2011
& Dublin UNESCO City of Literature

Poor oul’ Dublin.

Dublin was a city on the west coast of –
East.

Dublin was a city on the east coast of Ireland. Dublin was the biggest city, and the capital. And Dublin was depressed. Bored black clouds had been hanging over the city for months. Every night after dark, the M50 crawled slowly away. The waves in Dublin Bay rushed the wrong way, trying to escape.

Even the River Liffey – the famous, dirty Liffey – was refusing to flow. –I’m going back to Wicklow where I’m wanted, said the Liffey. –And I am *not* dirty.

–Go on then, said the Ha’penny Bridge. –Go back to mammy. You’re only a bogger an’anyways.

All the other cities had tried to help – except Cork. Galway, a city on the east –
West.

West coast of Ireland, had sent a Get Well Soon card. Limerick had sent a Get Well Soon Or Else card. New York had sent a basket of fruit and Paris, the capital of Germ-

France.

Paris, the capital of France, had sent the Eiffel Tower – because Paris was a generous city and, actually, Paris was a bit sick of the Eiffel Tower and happy enough to get rid of it. So the Eiffel Tower, renamed the Eiffel Yoke, now sat in Dublin, right over the junction of O’Connell Street and Abbey Street. The Luas went under it and the seagulls sat on it.

-This is new, said a seagull.

-And very comfy, said another. –Did you ever try sitting on the Spire?

Other cities had tried to help too. Copenhagen’s Little Mermaid now sat beside the pond in Stephen’s Green, looking out at the ducks and the soggy bits

of bread. But no present or card could lift the gloom. Dublin stayed depressed.

Actually, it wasn’t Dublin. Buildings and streets can’t be depressed.

-Yes, they can, said Westmoreland Street. –I’m feeling a bit low, meself.

-You *are* a bit low, said Liberty Hall. –I can hardly see yeh from here.

-Oh, always the bitter word.

A city is made of bricks and cement, and bricks and cement can’t be depressed.

-I’ve never been depressed a day in me life, said a brick on the second floor of Arnott’s.

-Me neither, said a bag of cement on the back of a truck on Bachelor’s Walk. –Although I wouldn’t mind a drop of water.

Dublin was made of bricks and cement, tar and, eh –

Glass.

Glass. So Dublin wasn’t depressed. It was the people who lived in Dublin who were depressed. Although most of them didn’t know it.

More than a million people lived in Dublin.

-And they’ve all walked down me, said Henry Street.

More than a million Dubliners, most of them depressed. But they didn't really know. The most used, the busiest, word in Dublin was 'brilliant'. It was the city's favourite word.

-That was a great funeral.

-Brilliant.

It was a great word, really. It burst out of your mouth when you said it.

-How's the soup?

-Brilliant!

-Ah Jaysis, look at me shirt!

It was a very handy word, very adaptable. It could be used in all sorts of ways.

-The car won't start.

-Well, that's just brilliant.

It made people smile, even when they didn't want to.

-My dog's after dying.

-Ah, no. What was his name?

-Brilliant.

-Ahhh, that's brilliant.

And that was the problem. 'Brilliant' was a brilliant word. It lit up everything around it. It was hard to see the gloom when the word was constantly bursting all over the city, like a firework display that never ended. But sometimes, only for brief moments, when very few people were talking, the sadness was there to be seen – on the faces, across the shoulders, in the feet. The people of Dublin were low. They were worried and sometimes angry. They felt trapped, surrounded by bad news. There was no escape.

Even children noticed.

Two children noticed – at first.

They were sitting under their kitchen table. They often did this and, if

they stayed still, the grown-ups never noticed. Raymond and Gloria Kelly were supposed to be in bed but they'd been under the table for an hour and forty minutes, listening to their parents and their uncle and their granny. Six more minutes and they would break their sitting-under-the-table-insecret record.

Only six minutes, but they weren't going to be easy. Their bums were sore, maybe even dead. A spider had built a web from Raymond's left ear to Gloria's right shoulder. The spider was tickling Raymond's ear – deliberately. The spider's wife was standing on Gloria's neck, right under her ear, and Gloria thought she could hear the spider whispering.

-Whack me. Go on. I dare yeh!

It was agony. Raymond was trying hard not to moan. His bum was definitely dead. He was going to wallop the spider. Gloria was about to scream. She was sure she was – she couldn't take any more. She could feel the spider's wife climbing into her ear. All eight legs were tickling her to death.

Then Gloria and Raymond heard something that made them forget all about spiders and breaking their record. They heard the words that would change their lives.

2.

Jack and Una Kelly sat at the kitchen table, with Jack's brother, Ben, and Una's mother. The kitchen table was a bit annoyed because it was supposed to be his night off and he'd been looking forward to a bit of peace and darkness. But now he had four people putting their hot cups on top of his head. They were tapping their spoons and spilling sugar and teabags all over him. It was the night before St Patrick's Day, so their kids, Raymond and Gloria, been let stay up later than usual, to watch a film. Then they'd

been sent up to bed. But they weren't up there. They'd sneaked back down from their bedrooms - and that annoyed the table too. They were in under him now, playing some sort of a stupid game that involved doing absolutely nothing. He was sick of being a table, sick of being taken for granted.

Una's mother put the teapot down on the table.

-Get that thing off me scalp! roared the table - to himself.

-That's terrible news, said Una's mother. -Isn't it?

-Yes, said Una. -It is.

She looked across at Ben. Ben had just told them that he was closing down his painting business.

-Are you sure about this, Ben?

Ben shrugged.

-Two years ago I stopped answering the phone because I was too busy, he said. -I couldn't keep up. Now but, the phone never rings.

Raymond, under the table, was trying to listen. He knew something bad was happening but the spider was sitting in his ear hole. Raymond saw his Uncle Ben's feet moving. He saw the white paint spots on the shoes.

Ben stood up.

-So, that's that, he said.

Gloria watched her Uncle Ben's feet walk slowly to the kitchen door. She knew by the way he moved, something sad was going on.

Gloria heard the kitchen door open, then close.

-Poor Ben, said her mam.

-You'd want to mind that poor lad, said Gloria's granny.

Gloria saw her granny's feet move. She was standing up. Gloria listened - she tried to. But the spider's wife was hanging from the tip of her nose.

-What d'you mean? said Jack, to Gloria's granny.

She leaned on the table.

-Jaysis, missis! the table screamed - to himself. -Go on a bloody diet!

-Depression, she said. -The black dog of depression has climbed onto that poor fella's back.

Under the table, Raymond heard the bit about the black dog.

-The whole city's depressed, said his granny.

Gloria heard that bit.

-But anyway, said her granny. -I'm off to my bed.

Gloria watched her granny's feet. She was wearing her huge slippers, the ones with dog's ears. Gloria saw one heel stand on a dog's ear. She saw her granny trip. She heard her granny hit the table.

-Oh God!

-Are you alright? said Gloria's mam.

-No!! yelled the table – to himself.

-I'm grand, said Gloria's granny. –But I'm after whacking my funny bone.

Raymond heard her say 'funny bone'.

-And it isn't funny at all, said his granny.

Raymond watched his granny's slippers continue the journey to the kitchen door.

-It's desperate, said his granny. –Young Ben and all the others. All that happiness, stolen.

Gloria and Raymond heard 'stolen'.

-Anyway, said their granny. -I'm off to my little damp granny flat.

Raymond watched his parents stand up. There was a tiny hole in his dad's sock.

-Her flat isn't damp, is it? said his mam.

-She's damp, said his dad.

-Ah stop.

Raymond heard his parents pick up cups and stuff. He heard his dad.

-Leave them. I'll do them in the morning.

He heard his mam.

-Are you worried about Ben?

-I am, yeah, said his dad. –A bit. She’s probably right about the black dog.

Gloria watched her parents leave the kitchen. She could hear her mam.

-Her poor funny bone, she said. –We’ll have to keep an eye on Ben.

She heard her dad.

-I suppose, he said. –But I wish there was more we could do.

He sighed.

-What a bloody country.

The door clicked, shut. The kitchen was empty, and dark.

Gloria and Raymond crawled out from under the table. They stood up and rubbed some life back into their bums.

-Did you hear what they said? said Raymond.

-Granny’s damp, said Gloria.

-Not that, said Raymond. -The other thing.

-The black dog thing?

-Yeah, said Raymond. –The Black Dog of Depression’s after robbing Dublin’s funny bone.

-Yeah, said Gloria. -And they’re worried about Uncle Ben.

-The Black Dog’s been on his back.

-Did you see him on Uncle Ben’s back, Rayzer?

-No.

Raymond and Gloria loved their Uncle Ben. He was easily their favourite relation. He made brilliant breakfasts when he stayed in their house. He knew exactly how to talk to kids. He never teased or embarrassed them and he always gave them great sweets.

-We have to get the funny bone back, said Raymond.

-Yeah, said Gloria. -It’ll cheer up Uncle Ben.

-Let’s go.

-What’s a funny bone?

-It's the bit of the body that makes you laugh.

-And does Dublin have one of them? Gloria asked.

-Granny said so, said Raymond.

-Ah, well then, said Gloria. -Let's go.

Raymond ran to the kitchen door.

-Where are we going, Rayzer?

-Upstairs, to get our clothes on.

-Oh yeah.

They ran quietly – kids can do that when they want to – up the stairs, into their bedrooms. They took off their jammies and put on proper clothes.

Then back down the stairs – quietly – back into the kitchen.

Raymond was 10, and Gloria was 8. Raymond was unlocking the back door, about to step into the night.

The door was open.

-Where are we going now, Rayzer? Gloria asked.

-Don't know, said Raymond. -But we have to find the Black Dog.

They ran out.

3.

They ran outside, into the back garden. The security light from O'Leary's house next door went on, with a click and a blast of white light.

-Oh my God!

-Come on!

Raymond led the way, to the side passage. It was cold and there was a smell of old wheelie bin. O'Leary's security light clicked off.

Raymond stopped.

-I can't see.

-Brilliant, said Gloria, and the word popped open above them and filled the passage with gentle, yellow light. Raymond got going again and Gloria

followed, to the front of the house and out to the street.

-Where now, Rayzer? said Gloria.

-There are three black dogs on our road, said Raymond. –One of them might be the Black Dog of Depression. Come on.

They ran along the street, to Mooney's house. They went – they crept - to the front door. Raymond pushed open the letter box and, together, they looked through the slit.

They saw two black eyes - and a tongue. The eyes and the tongue belonged to Lulu Mooney.

The tongue tried to lick their faces through the letter box.

-I don't think Lulu's the Black Dog of Depression, said Gloria.

-No, Raymond agreed.

Lulu started barking.

-Run!

They ran back to the street. They could hear Mister Mooney from inside the house.

-Shut up! Or I'll go down there and take that bloody bone off yeh!

Gloria stopped running.

-The funny bone!

-No, said Raymond. –It's just an ordinary bone. It's Lulu's. She's been minding it for years. Come on.

They ran to the next house, O'Driscoll's. The black dog, Fang O'Driscoll, slept in a shed in the back. They crept down the dark side passage.

-Can't see.

-Brilliant.

-Now I can.

The shed door was open.

-Here, Fang.

Fang was an old dog. He didn't get up.

-Are you depressed, Fang?

Fang farted.

-Is that depression? Gloria asked.

-Don't think so, said Raymond. –Or if it is, Dad's really depressed. Here's the test, watch. Fang?

Fang's tail walloped the floor – and stopped.

-Fang?

The tail drumming started again.

-See? said Raymond. –It's not Fang. Depressed dogs don't wag their tails.

This job was going to be harder than Raymond had expected – although he hadn't really expected anything. There was one more black dog on the street but Raymond didn't know if there was any point in –

-What are yis doin'?

The voice came from nowhere.

Gloria screamed – but nothing came out. She could feel the scream in her throat but it was clinging there, too scared to climb out of her mouth.

Gloria wasn't afraid of the dark. She never had been. And that had always made her feel a bit special. But it wasn't the dark that was frightening her now. It was the voice. A voice with no body.

The scream, finally, came out.

-. . . . ohmygod . . . !

Then she saw the head.

Raymond saw it too. An upside-down head.

-Ernie? said Raymond.

-Wha'? said Ernie O'Driscoll.

-What are you doing?

-Hangin' upside-down, said Ernie.

-Yeah, said Raymond. –Why, but?

-Well, said Ernie. –I'm a bit of a vampire, like.

Ernie was 16. His name was well known all along the street. ‘If you don’t do your homework, you’ll end up like Ernie O’Driscoll.’ ‘If you don’t eat your broccoli, you’ll end up like Ernie O’Driscoll.’ All the local kids knew Ernie but the fact that he was a vampire was red hot news.

-A vampire?

Ernie nodded once, upside-down.

-Since when?

-Last week, said Ernie. –Me ma told me to get a job, so – there you go.

-Vampire’s a job?

-There’s a recession, bud, said Ernie. –We need young people with vision. And I get to stay in bed all day.

Gloria wasn’t scared anymore.

-Why are you hanging upside-down, Ernie?

-Seen it in a fillum, said Ernie. –It’s good for the oul’ digestion.

-Did you suck someone’s blood tonight?

-An oul’ one in Finglas West -

East.

-Finglas East, said Ernie.

-Cool. Did she scream?

-She didn’t notice, said Ernie. –She was watchin’ *Corrie*. Hang on.

They heard a grunt, and the whoosh of a black cape – and Ernie was standing in front of them.

-Brilliant!

They could see him clearly for a second.

-You don’t look anything like Robert Pattinson, Ernie, said Gloria.

-He can’t have everythin’, I suppose.

-Did the light there not hurt your eyes?

-No way, said Ernie. –That’s just a story.

-But you really drink blood, don’t you?

-Ah yeah.

He belched.

-It's heavy goin', but.

-We're chasing the Black Dog of Depression, Ernie, said Gloria. –Want to come?

Ernie thought about it.

-Is he big, is he?

-Huge, said Gloria.

-Grand, said Ernie. –Dessert. What're we waitin' for?

Gloria laughed.

-Are you coming, Fang? said Raymond.

Fang thumped his tail and farted.

-There's your answer, said Ernie.

They followed Ernie out to the garden, then out to the street.

-So, said Ernie. -Where's this Black Dog?

But, as Ernie spoke, they saw the Dog. At the end of the street. Not the Dog - its shadow, for only a second. It was huge, sliding against the wall as it

turned the corner. It made no noise. But it was definitely the black dog.

It was gone. But they'd seen it.

-Come on!

4.

They ran to the corner but the Black Dog had gone. It was cold – a kind of moving cold - like a freezing, invisible animal was rubbing against them.

-Come on, said Raymond.

Gloria didn't want to go any further. The cold frightened her, the way it seemed to move. She'd been frightened twice now, and she didn't like it.

Raymond started running.

Then Gloria thought of her Uncle Ben, and the weight of the Black Dog on his back, and she went after Raymond.

They ran to the next corner.

No Dog. Just the cold. Waiting for them.

They could see nothing on the street ahead, no shadow or anything solid.

It was very late, very quiet.

-Here, Ernie, said Raymond.

He shivered.

-Can you not fly?

-Oh yeah, said Ernie. –Forgot.

And they watched him –

-Brilliant!

- as he lifted himself off the ground, higher, like he was in an invisible lift, higher and higher.

-Look at this bit, he called down to them.

He spread out his arms so his cape looked like a huge bat's wings.

-The biz, wha'!

-Can you see the Black Dog?

-No, said Ernie. –The houses and stuff are in the way. Hang on, but –

-What?

-I can see somethin', said Ernie. –And it isn't the usual stuff.

He glided back down.

-It's like a cloud of smoke or somethin', he said, when he'd landed. –

Darker than the dark, like.

-Where?

-Down this one, said Ernie.

He ran ahead, and they followed. He waited for them at each corner and, at every corner, they were quickly cold. The corner was a cold hint – the Dog seemed to be leaving a trail, telling them which way to run.

They preferred to run. They stayed warmer that way, and stopping for too long made Gloria nervous.

-Where are we, Rayzer?

-Don't know.

They'd run out of the place they knew and, for the third time that night, Gloria was scared. She really didn't want to see the Black Dog.

-Look!

-Oh my God!

Raymond had seen it – the Dog. It was moving, just a shadow, right under a bunch of small trees, in front of a huge building. He knew it. He'd been here before – loads of times.

They were at the Liffey Valley Shopping Centre.

-Come on!

There were no cars or people – it was very late. Just Raymond, Gloria, Ernie. And the shadow. Raymond ran at it. He'd never grabbed a shadow before. He knew you couldn't hold one, that shadows were made of light and shade. So he wasn't just surprised when his hands touched something solid.

He was terrified.

-What's the story? said Ernie.

-I felt it!

-Felt what, Rayzer? said Gloria.

-The Dog.

-But there's nothing here, said Gloria.

She was right - but she wasn't. There was no dog near them, or in among the trees.

But there *was* something.

The cold.

It seemed to be right over them now, an icy, black cloud. Or the freezing,

silent animal leaning over, sniffing them.

-Ah here! said Ernie. -It's only a cloud.

Gloria laughed.

-Brilliant!

And the cloud, the weird lump of extra darkness, moved away.

They weren't sure it was even there now.

-Here, said Ernie. -Why are we doin' this, an' anyway?

-For our Uncle Ben, said Gloria. -He's depressed.

-And the Black Dog has Dublin's funny bone, said Raymond.

-And Uncle Ben will feel better if we can get it back, said Gloria.

-Says who?

-Our granny.

-Ah, well then, said Ernie. -Fair enough.

-Do you know our granny, Ernie?

-No, said Ernie. -But I always feel brainier after I've drunk some granny's blood.

-Really?

-On the level.

-Cool.

The cloud was back – it was definitely there. They were definitely looking at it. But they weren't sure it was a cloud. They hoped it was, just a cloud behaving strangely. But they watched it sink to the road ahead and, whatever it was, it stopped being something they thought they'd seen and became something solid and real that they could definitely see.

-The Dog!

A big black dog. A real, ordinary dog – they could hear his paws smack the ground as he ran away.

-Come on!

They ran after it.

They ran along the side of the N4, towards town. They knew where they were now. The Dog stayed ahead of them. Sometimes they seemed to be catching up, even though Gloria and Raymond were getting tired and Ernie had forgotten he could fly. And sometimes the Dog seemed to be getting away but they could still hear his paws, just ahead of them.

-Is he letting us chase him?

-Think so.

-Why?

-Don't know.

They kept running. They could see Phoenix Park, and the shape of the trees, ahead, to the right.

Left.

Left. And there was something else they noticed now. They could hear other feet, other shoes hitting the ground, behind and beside them. And they began to see the other kids. Two of them, then four, eight, nine, more. All of them running, all of them chasing the Black Dog.

5.

But the Dog was gone again. They could still hear his paws but they couldn't see him.

-Where is he?

They were near town now, on the stretch of road that led to Kingsbridge, down where the Liffey used to flow.

They stopped.

They all stopped, the other kids too, girls and boys, all panting. Ernie seemed to be the only vampire. Although there was one boy there who looked like he might be a leprechaun.

-Hey, Rayzer? Gloria whispered. -Is that fella a leprechaun?

-Think so, said Raymond. –But he’s a bit on the tall side.

They all stood looking at one another. And they felt it – the cold. The sliding cold, telling them to follow.

They ran. Over a bridge, to the next corner. Phoenix Park was right in front of them. They felt the cold again, guiding them right.

Left.

Left. Then they were running into Phoenix Park. And, again, Gloria wondered.

-Why is he letting us chase him?

They kept running, up a steep path. It was darker now because the trees were on both sides of them, blocking the moon and other light. They ran together in a group, like a dark cloud of their own.

-Why are you chasing the Black Dog?

-My da.

-My mam.

-Is she depressed? Gloria asked the girl who was running beside her.

-Yeah, said the girl. –She’s down in the dumps, like. My auntie said something about getting the Black Dog off her back. And then I seen him.

-Me too, said a boy. –My da stays in bed all day since his job got shut down.

The boy was panting. They were still running along the path, up a hill.

-The Black Dog blocks the bedroom door.

-Where’s the Dog now, but?

They all felt it, the rush of cold wind. It went past them. Then it came back, on the other side. It pushed them – it seemed to – off the path. Then they could see it, the darker shape in the darkness, going into the trees.

And they heard paws - and panting. The panting that only dogs make.

And they could see the Dog now. He barked – he yapped – just before he disappeared into the darkness of the trees.

-Come on!

They started to run at the trees. Then they heard a voice.

-Be careful!

-Who said that?!

-None of us, said Raymond. –It was an owl fella's voice. Come on.

-They wouldn't listen to me, said the Wellington Monument, who'd been standing there since 1861.

-Ah now, said the Papal Cross who'd only been there since 1979. –We all have our cross to bear.

The kids were in among the trees. And lost. And Gloria's question, 'Why is he letting us chase him?', seemed to answer itself.

-It's a trap, said Gloria.

But no one heard her.

But *she* heard the voice.

-I'm not going to bite you, said the voice.

It was the Dog. Gloria was sure of it, even though she couldn't see. She'd stopped moving because the branches were grabbing at her face and legs. She was afraid she'd trip. She could hear the other kids around her, but none of them were near enough to see.

-No, said the voice, the Dog. –You're not worth biting.

It was a horrible voice.

-You're useless.

The voice came with a stink.

-That's right, said the voice. –That's how useless you are. That's what happens to everything around you.

Gloria wanted to cry. She felt the Dog's fur against her face.

-Useless, he whispered.

She couldn't hear the others now. It was quiet, as if the Dog was whispering

the same thing to all of them.

-You're no good to anyone.

Gloria knew it wasn't true. But she *felt* like it was true. She was going to lie down on the cold ground.

-Good idea.

But then, she had a different idea.

-Brilliant.

She whispered it, and it produced a little, whispered light. She heard a groan.

She said it again.

-Brilliant.

Louder. The groan was further away this time. The Dog was moving, slouching away. The stink was gone. And she knew the Dog was a liar. She wasn't useless.

-Hey, Ernie!

- - - Wha'?

Ernie sounded sad.

-Fly up in the air and shout 'Brilliant'!

- - - Why?

-Just do it! Brilliant!

- - - Okay.

She heard Ernie smacking the leaves and branches.

-Brilliant, brilliant, bleedin' brilliant!

The trees were lit up and gorgeous. She could see the other kids now. Some of them were getting up off the ground. They all looked like they'd been asleep and stuck in a horrible nightmare.

-Everyone shout! Brilliant!

They all walked side by side through the sparkling trees.

-Brilliant!

They could hear the Dog charging away from their voices and the light. They came out at the other side of the trees. They could see the dark shadow – the Dog – huge and curling, gliding towards the Zoo.

-Come on!

The tall leprechaun spoke.

-Can we not just, like, go home?

-No, said Raymond. –We have to stop the Dog.

-Yeah, said Gloria. –And now we know how to.

-Come on!

They all ran towards the Zoo.

-It's shut, said the Wellington Monument, but no one was listening.

6.

They saw the Black Dog gliding over the wall of the Zoo. He seemed to be even bigger now, and longer.

He was gone, over.

It was still nighttime, although the morning birds were starting to sing.

The Zoo was shut.

-Told you, said the Wellington Monument.

-How'll we get in? asked a girl.

Some of the kids were a bit relieved that they couldn't go any further.

They were cold and frightened. The bad dream with the Dog in it –

Useless!

- was still floating around their heads. They wanted to go home.

-Ernie, said Raymond.

-Wha'?' said Ernie.

Raymond lifted his arms.

-Hold me, said Raymond.

-Wha'?' said Ernie. –No way.

-Go on, said Raymond. –You can carry us over the wall.

-Gotcha, said Ernie.

He grabbed Raymond under the arms –

-Ahh, you're tickling!

And he flew straight up, as if he was in his invisible lift again.

-Goin' up, said Ernie. –Monkeys and accessories.

His cape flapped and he disappeared over the wall, with Raymond.

Then he was back.

-Who's next?

-Me!

They were all over the wall, inside the Zoo, in less than three minutes.

The kids who'd been frightened felt less frightened now, inside the Zoo.

They felt safer near the animals. And they all knew why they were there:

they had to stop the Dog.

They stood outside the souvenir shop.

-Ernie.

-Wha'?

-Can you see the Dog?

Ernie started rising.

-My batteries'll be wasted.

They all watched as he rose way over the shop and started to turn slowly.

-See anything?

-Over there, said Ernie. -The big things. The what're-they- called? The elephants.

He pointed ahead, a bit to the – right?

Well done.

-They're goin' a bit mad, said Ernie.

-Come on!

They all ran together – they felt safer together - past the meerkats, the

lemurs and spider monkeys.

-I'm glad I'm not paying for this, said the tall leprechaun. –It'd be a terrible waste of money.

They ran past the flamingoes but they didn't stop to look.

-The nerve of them, said a flamingo, but they didn't hear.

Gloria was running beside Ernie.

-Is it good being a werewolf, Ernie?

-Couldn't tell yeh, said Ernie. –I'm a vampire.

-Is it good?

-It's alright, said Ernie. –A bit boring.

-You like drinking blood though, don't yeh?

-Ah yeah.

Gloria was feeling better now. She was feeling almost happy. She'd outtricked

the Black Dog. She'd found out what his weakness was.

They ran along the forest trail, towards the elephants.

They had the Dog on the run and she knew they'd be able to beat him.

-Brilliant.

They couldn't see much on the trail. The path was bendy and the trees were close by. There was one last bend that made some of the kids laugh and bump into one another. And then there was the shock.

The Black Dog was there.

Waiting for them.

They heard his howl before they saw him. A howl that ripped the Zoo apart. Everything was gone. Just the howl. A howl that stayed and became a word that hung there, like poisonous gas.

USELESS.

The fright made them quickly tired, exhausted – they'd been up all night.

USELESS.

They sank to the ground. All of them. Even Gloria. Her eyes were stinging and sad. They were closing. There was a word she needed, an important word, but she couldn't remember it.

USELESS.

It was true. She was useless. She was too tired to do anything. Her eyes were –

-Excuse me!

Gloria's eyes stayed open. There was something pink. A flamingo. Lots of flamingoes. Marching up to the Dog.

-Some of us are trying to sleep, you know! We need our eight hours!

USELESS.

-We're pink! said the flamingo at the front. –Of course, we're useless!

That's the point!

Gloria smiled – she couldn't help it. Flamingoes that could talk. It was –

-Brilliant, she said.

She remembered. It was the word she'd forgotten, the word she remembered she needed.

-Brilliant, she said.

-Thanks very much, said a flamingo. –Too little, too late.

-Brilliant!

She heard the groan – they all did – and the weight of the Dog seemed to lift off them. The night, the dark, seemed to be sailing away.

-Brilliant!!

They were all standing up again, some of them yawning, one or two of them crying. They were upset, low. But they could see it, and feel it. The Black Dog was moving away – running away. He'd become an ordinary dog again. A very big black dog jumping over the fence.

-Come on!

Raymond started to run. And all the kids followed. They all knew what

they had to do.

-Brilliant!

They were winning again. They'd get rid of the Black Dog for good and they'd go home to happier houses.

-Brilliant!

It was brighter now, dawn, and the birds were working hard.

-Cheep, cheep! Cheep, cheep! The difference is we're Irish!

They were coming up to the gate.

-Are you not afraid of the daylight, Ernie? asked Raymond.

-That's just an owl myth, said Ernie. -To make you feel safe in the daytime.

-The Black Dog's afraid, though.

-It's lookin' that way.

The Zoo was open. A man was opening the gate.

-Here, Mister, said the tall leprechaun. -Do we have to pay to get out?-No.

-See yeh, so.

The kids ran, back out to the park and the city.

7.

It was early morning in the city of Dublin. People lying awake could hear a sound that everyone liked, a ship's foghorn out on Dublin Bay.

But it wasn't a foggy morning and it wasn't actually a foghorn. It was the Spire on O'Connell Street, and he was teaching the Eiffel Yoke how to speak proper English.

-What's the STORE-Y?! he said, again.

-Wot iz ze stor-ee?

-No, listen. What's the STORE-ORE-Y?!

-It must be foggy down at the O2, said Raymond.

-Yeah, said the tall leprechaun.

They were running along the quays, beside the Liffey's dry riverbed.

-Where is he?

They'd lost sight of the Black Dog. He'd been in front of them, a few corners ahead. Then he was gone.

They all slowed down, unsure, a bit worried. Relieved, and disappointed.

-Keep going, said Raymond.

He knew that if they stopped now they probably wouldn't start again. The other kids knew it too. They wanted to stop – but they didn't. They knew they had to beat the Dog.

-What's the STORE-ORE-Y?!

They kept running, past Collins Barracks

-Are you actually a leprechaun? Raymond asked.

-No way am I, said the tall leprechaun. –People just think that, because I'm tall.

-That's mad.

They were looking up at the sky, at every corner, for any sign of the Dog.

-I've got kind of a leprechaun face, said the tall leprechaun. –But no one would notice. Only, I'm six foot, two. And they see the face and they decide

I'm a – God!

The Dog was there. At the corner of Smithfield. First a shadow. Then the shadow became solid, and muscular. The Dog kept coming around the corner, like a black truck slowly turning.

This was the biggest he'd been. He was monstrous, horrible. He started to open his mouth.

-Quick! said Gloria. –Shout before he does! Brilliant!

-Brilliant!

Nothing happened.

-What's the STORE-ORE-Y!

It was daylight now, so ‘brilliant’ didn’t light up. It was just a word. Some of the kids slowed down. Some stopped, too frightened to go any nearer. But Gloria kept running at the Dog. So did Raymond and Ernie. Gloria knew now that the Black Dog wasn’t afraid of the light. But she wasn’t going to give up.

-Brilliant!

The Dog didn’t budge.

-Brilliant!

They kept running at him, straight for the mouth that seemed to be growing bigger – and deeper.

-Brilliant!

The mouth stopped growing.

-Brilliant!

The word was working. The Black Dog had heard it. ‘Brilliant’ had hit him, like a dart. He turned sideways, to get away from it.

-It’s the word he hates, not the light!

-Brilliant!

The other kids saw what was happening and they followed Gloria. And other kids too. They came from behind, running. There were twice as many now, and all of them shouting.

-BRILLIANT!

The Dog was up on his hind legs. Then he fell backwards, and landed on his front paws and charged away, down Arran Quay. His paws smashed down on the street. The kids could feel the weight, the vibration in their feet as they raced after him. Other kids, hundreds of them, were running across the Father Mathew Bridge, to join up with the kids on the south – *North.*

The Northside.

-BRILLIANT!

The Dog was charging away – they were winning again. But he was getting even bigger. His fur rubbed the sides of buildings as he ran along the quays. The railings in front of the Four Courts got a shock.

-What in the name of God was that?! they asked.

Then hundreds of kids ran past, shouting and panting.

-What in the name of God was *that*?!

-BRILLIANT!

The Dog was too big to escape quickly. They all saw him turn on to Capel Street. They heard his fur scraping bricks. They heard glass breaking. They ran over the broken window glass as they turned the corner and followed. They were all tired now. They'd been running for miles and hours

– all night. The 'brilliant's' were getting smaller.

-brilliant.

They were out of breath and it was harder to say the whole word.

-illiant.

The Dog turned on to Mary Street. They heard the crunch of corner bricks. And they noticed, he was slowing down. That gave them new energy.

-BRILLIANT!

They charged around the corner, over the rubble, on to Mary Street. The Dog's paws on the street, the hundreds of children's shoes, the shouting, hundreds and hundreds of voices - the noise was unbelievable.

-I'm phoning the Guards, said Mary Street.

-I'm phoning Childline, said Little Britain Street.

The Black Dog was on Henry Street, heading straight for the Spire.

-What's the STORE-ORE-Y?!

Then he lifted. He took off, exactly like a plane. He flew slowly, a colossal, dog-shaped cloud, too dark for rain or anything normal. He sailed over O'Connell Street, over the Spire and the Eiffel Yoke, over the statue of Big

Jim Larkin, whose big hands seemed to be reaching up to help the kids and grab the Dog.

The kids stopped at the Spire. They were exhausted, thirsty, frightened again.

-Do we have to keep going? one of them asked. -He's floating away.

-Yeah, we do, said Gloria.

She'd just remembered why.

-He has Dublin's funny bone, she said. -We've got to get it back.

8.

The Black Dog seemed to be spreading out – the cloud was getting wider and thicker. He covered more and more of the city. The kids could feel his weight on top of their heads. They could see grown-up people along the street, sitting on the ground, holding their heads.

-Shout!

-BRILLIANT!

The cloud had made the city centre very dark, so the light from the word was explosive –

-BRILLIANT!

The cloud started to shift, to move away, over Talbot Street and Connolly Station, over the Five Lamps, East Wall and Fairview.

-Come on!

Years later, they would never really understand how they'd been able to run so far and for so long. But now they just kept running. More kids joined in, kids who'd been running all night. Thousands of kids ran through Fairview, under the railway bridge. They could see the Dog ahead. He was covering all of Dublin Bay.

-What's the STORE-ORE-Y?!

They were beside the sea now. The wind was strong and loud.

-BRILLIANT!

Spray from the waves flew at them, like freezing spit. But they kept running.

-BRILLIANT!

They ran alongside the sea but they couldn't get any nearer to the Dog. Until they came to the wooden bridge that went out to Bull Island. Now they could run straight at the Dog. They knew – they felt it: This was the last fight.

The Battle of Clontarf.

-Charge!

They ran across the wooden bridge – trip, trap, trip, trap.

-Who's that tripping over my bridge? roared the troll, as he climbed out from under the bridge.

-It's only me, said the smallest Billy Goat Gruff.

Wrong story - sorry.

They ran across the wooden bridge.

-Wazzup? said the troll, as he climbed out from under the bridge.

-We're huntin' dog blood, bud, said Ernie.

-Cool, said the troll, and he ran beside Ernie.

They were off the bridge now. They ran past the golf club, straight into the gale and the darkness – BRILLIANT! – all the way down to the beach.

They stopped. They couldn't run any further. There was no more land.

They were on the edge of Dublin and the Black Dog was right over them.

He was turning, starting to move. His fur, the cloud, was rolling, growing.

A cloud seemed to grow out of the main cloud, and became his face.

He snarled.

USELESS.

-It's a trap! Raymond shouted.

He knew what was happening – he suddenly knew it. The Black Dog

had dragged the kids away from the city and now he was going back, to destroy it.

USELESS.

-Shout!

BRILLIANT!

-Louder!

-BRILLIANT!!

Every kid shouted – one huge shout. And it was working. The Dog was slowing, curling, buckling.

But he was still moving – escaping.

-Ernie!

-Wha'?

-Grab me, said Raymond. -And fly right into the Dog.

-You're jestin', said Ernie.

-I'm not, said Raymond.

-Me as well, said the tall leprechaun.

Ernie held onto Raymond's collar, and the leprechaun's, and he lifted himself.

-Hate this.

Fast this time, he flew straight into the Dog. The kids below could hear the three voices inside the cloud.

-BRILLIANT, BRILLIANT, bleedin' BRILLIANT!

The wind grabbed their own voices. They'd no breath left. They could see chinks, tiny holes in the cloud. They were winning. But they were drenched; they'd no more strength. They could hear the boys in the Dog. But then that stopped too. There was just the wind. The holes in the cloud were filling in.

Useless.

Gloria got enough breath back.

-One more time, she said.

All the kids grabbed mouthfuls of wind, sent them down to their lungs – and fired them back out, and straight up.

-BRILLIANNNNNT!

This time was the last time. And it worked. The word ripped through the cloud. The holes were bigger – the kids could see sky. The cloud was breaking, becoming smaller, harmless clouds.

But that stopped, and the cloud snarled. The snarl came from a mouth and the mouth was holding something very big and white.

The funny bone.

Gloria was ready.

She'd kept her breath, just enough for one last word.

- . . . brilliant . . .

It was enough.

The word hit the cloud and the Black Dog exploded. It just disappeared.

One minute, there was the gale and the snarling Dog. Next, there was silence – nothing. Except blue sky and quiet.

And guts.

They ran to the dunes, to get away. They heard the guts fall, slapping the sand like hard-boiled rain. The air was full of the caws of hungry seagulls.

And the shouts of three screaming boys.

-Look out!

The kids ran again, into the dunes, even into the water. They heard the thump – they felt it. They turned, and saw Dublin's funny bone. Lying on the beach, white and bright, and kind of funny.

Ernie, with the two boys, landed beside it. He stood up and shook the guts off his cape.

-What'll we do with this thing? he said.

* * *

Raymond and Gloria crept to their back door. They looked in the kitchen window. There was no one there; they couldn't see anyone.

-It's Saint Patrick's Day, Gloria remembered.

-Oh yeah, said Raymond. -They're still in bed.

They opened the door and got smacked by the smell of rashers and sausages.

There was someone at the cooker.

-Uncle Ben!

He turned to them, and smiled.

* * *

Big Jim Larkin stood on his plinth, on O'Connell Street.

At last.

He'd been waiting all these years, with his huge hands in the air. Those kids had brought it, down O'Connell Street. And now he was holding it, Dublin City's funny bone. Holding it proudly up to the clear blue sky.

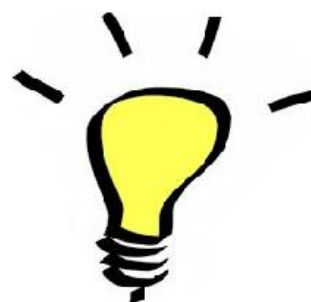
-You have your hands full there, Big Jim, said the Spire.

-That's what they're there for, comrade, said Big Jim.

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SPLENDIDO!



Po'ra vecchia Dublino.

Dublino era una città nella costa ovest de –
Est.

Dublino era una città nella costa est dell'Irlanda. Dublino era la città più grande, era la capitale. Eppure Dublino era depressa. Nuvole nere annoiate incombevano sulla città da mesi. Ogni notte nell'oscurità l'autostrada M50³⁰ scorreva via lenta. Le onde nella Baia di Dublino fluivano rovinosamente nella direzione sbagliata, tentando di fuggire. Persino il fiume Liffey – il famoso, sporco Liffey – si rifiutava di scorrere.

- Me ne sto tornando a Wicklow dove sono ben voluto, disse il Liffey. –
E *non* sono sporco.

³⁰ M50 motorway: it is a semi-ring-road that runs around south, west and north of Dublin.

- Vattene allora, disse il Ponte Ha’Penny³¹ - torna da mamma. E comunque sei uno zozzone.

Tutte le altre città avevano cercato di dare il proprio sostegno – eccetto Cork³². Galway, una città sulla costa est – Ovest.

Sulla costa ovest dell’Irlanda aveva inviato un augurio di pronta guarigione. Limerick aveva inviato un augurio di pronta guarigione o qualcosa di simile. New York aveva inviato un cesto di frutta e Parigi, la capitale della Germ –

Francia.

Parigi, la capitale della Francia, aveva spedito la Tour Eiffel – perché Parigi era una città generosa e, per dirla tutta, Parigi si era un po’ stancata della Tour Eiffel ed era alquanto felice di sbarazzarsene. E così la Tour Eiffel, ribattezzata Eiffel il giogo di ferro, si trovava ora a Dublino, proprio all’incrocio tra O’Connell Street e Abbey Street. La metro Luas ci passava sotto e i gabbiani vi stavano appollaiati.

- Questa è nuova, disse un gabbiano.

- E pure comoda, rispose un altro. – Hai mai provato la Spire³³?

Anche altre città avevano cercato di aiutare. La Sirenetta di Copenhagen sedeva ora accanto a quello che ormai era lo stagno del parco di Stephen Green, guardandosi dalle anatre e dai pezzetti di pane inzuppato. Ma

³¹ The Ha’Penny Bridge is the most known bridge in Dublin, officially known as Liffey Bridge. It is a pedestrian bridge that joins the two riversides of Liffey River. The name comes from the fact that for the first one hundred years from his construction, people were asked for half penny whenever they passed through it.

³² It is considered by its inhabitants as the real capital, because of its anti-treaty role during the Irish Civil War. The city was against accepting a treaty with the UK which established Ireland as an independent country but within the British Empire. The acceptance of the treaty was considered as a betrayal of the Irish Republic.

³³ The Spire: this is one of Dublin’s newest monuments, a steel pillar also called “Monument of Light”. It is a conical spire made of stainless steel, 121.2 mt. high.

nessun regalo né augurio era riuscito ad allontanare la tetra malinconia. Dublino era ancora depressa.

In realtà non si trattava di Dublino. I palazzi e le strade non possono essere depressi.

- Sì, certo che possono, disse Westmoreland Street. – Io stessa mi sento un po' giù.

- Veramente tu *sei* un po' in giù, disse il grattacielo Liberty Hall. – Riesco a malapena a vederti da quassù.

- Oh, sempre le parole più aspre.

Una città è fatta di mattoni e cemento e i mattoni e il cemento non possono essere depressi.

- Non mi sono sentito depresso mai un giorno in vita mia, disse un mattone al secondo piano dei grandi magazzini Arnott's.

- Nemmeno io, disse un sacco di cemento dal retro di un camion in Bachelor's Walk. – Anche se non disprezzerei un goccio d'acqua.

Dublino era fatta di mattoni e cemento, catrame e, eh – Vetro.

Vetro. Quindi Dublino non era depressa. Erano le persone che abitavano Dublino ad essere depresse. Nonostante la maggior parte di loro non lo sapesse.

A Dublino vivevano più di un milione di persone.

- E tutte mi hanno calpestato, disse Henry Street.

Più di un milione di dublinesi, molti dei quali depressi. Sebbene non ne fossero pienamente consapevoli. La parola più usata, quella sulla bocca di tutti, era "Splendido". Era la parola preferita della città.

- È stato un funerale intenso.

- Splendido.

Era davvero una gran parola. Schizzava dalla bocca quando la si pronunciava.

- Com'era la zuppa?

- Splendida!

- Ah, gisù, guarda la mia maglietta!

Era una parola molto alla mano, molto versatile. Poteva essere usata in qualunque contesto.

- L'auto non ne vuole sapere di mettersi in moto.

- Beh, splendido direi.

Faceva sorridere le persone, anche quando non ne avevano intenzione.

- Mi è appena morto il cane.

- Oh no. Come si chiamava?

- Splendido.

- Ahhh, è splendido.

Ed era proprio questo il problema. “Splendido” era una parola splendida. Illuminava tutto intorno. Era difficile intravedere la tetra malinconia quando la parola sprizzava costantemente per la città, come lo scoppio di un fuoco d'artificio senza fine. A volte però, solo per brevi momenti, mentre poche persone chiacchieravano, la tristezza si faceva vedere – sui volti, sulle spalle, tra i piedi. La gente di Dublino era giù di corda. Era preoccupata, a volte arrabbiata. Si sentiva in trappola, circondata da cattive notizie. Non c'era via di scampo.

Anche i bambini l'avevano notato.

Due bambini se ne accorsero – inizialmente.

Se ne stavano seduti sotto il tavolo della cucina. Lo facevano spesso e, se rimanevano immobili, gli adulti non li notavano nemmeno. Raymond e Gloria Kelly avrebbero dovuto essere a letto, invece erano lì sotto il tavolo da un'ora e quaranta minuti, ad ascoltare i propri genitori, lo zio e

la nonna. Ancora sei minuti e avrebbero battuto il record di permanenza sotto il tavolo in segreto. Solo sei minuti, ma non si sarebbero dimostrati semplici. Avevano il sederino dolente, forse addirittura addormentato. Un ragno aveva teso una ragnatela che partiva dall'orecchio sinistro di Raymond sino alla spalla destra di Gloria. Il ragno stava solleticando l'orecchio di Raymond – deliberatamente. La moglie del ragno si trovava sul collo di Gloria, proprio sotto l'orecchio, e Gloria era convinta di poter sentire il ragno bisbigliare.

- Dai. Colpiscimi. Sì, ti sto sfidando!

Era un'agonia. Raymond si tratteneva a stento dal lamentarsi. Il suo sederino si era decisamente addormentato. Stava per dare una botta al ragno. Gloria era in procinto di urlare. Era certa che l'avrebbe fatto – non poteva più resistere. Sentiva la moglie del ragno arrampicarsi sull'orecchio. Tutte e otto le zampine le facevano un solletico da morire. Poi Gloria e Raymond udirono qualcosa che fece loro dimenticare del tutto i ragni e battere il record. Udirono quelle parole che avrebbero cambiato le loro vite.

2 .

Jack e Una Kelly sedevano al tavolo della cucina, assieme al fratello di Jack, Ben, e alla madre di Una. Il tavolo della cucina era un po' infastidito poiché quella avrebbe dovuto essere la sua serata libera e non vedeva l'ora di trovare un po' di pace e oscurità. Invece ora aveva quattro persone che poggiavano le proprie tazze calde sul suo capo. Lo picchiavano con i cucchiaini e lo cospargevano di bustine di tè. Era la notte che precedeva il giorno di San Patrizio, quindi ai due bimbi, Raymond e Gloria, era stato permesso di rimanere alzati più del solito

per guardare un film. Poi erano stati mandati a dormire. Ma non si trovavano di sopra. Erano sgattaiolati fuori dalle proprie camerette – e anche questo contribuiva ad infastidire il tavolo. Erano proprio sotto di lui ora e giocavano ad una sottospecie di gioco stupido che consisteva nel non fare assolutamente niente. Era stufo di essere un tavolo, stufo di venir dato per scontato.

La madre di Una appoggiò la tazza sul tavolo.

- Togli subito quella cosa dal mio scalpo! Ruggì il tavolo – a se stesso.

- È una notizia terribile, disse la madre di Una – No?

- Sì, disse Una – lo è.

Si voltò verso Ben. Ben aveva appena detto loro che stava per cessare definitivamente la propria attività di pittore.

- Ne sei sicuro, Ben?

Ben alzò le spalle.

- Due anni fa avevo smesso di rispondere al telefono perché ero troppo impegnato, disse. – Non riesco a stare al passo. Adesso, invece, il telefono non squilla mai.

Raymond, da sotto il tavolo, provava ad ascoltare. Sapeva che stava accadendo qualcosa di brutto, ma il ragno se ne stava seduto sul suo padiglione auricolare. Raymond vide il piede dello zio Ben muoversi. Vide la macchia di pittura bianca sulle sue scarpe.

Ben si alzò in piedi.

- E questo è quanto, disse.

Gloria guardava i piedi dello zio Ben dirigersi lentamente verso la porta della cucina. Lo sapeva dal modo in cui si muoveva, stava accadendo qualcosa di triste.

Gloria sentì la porta della cucina aprirsi, poi chiudersi.

- Povero Ben, disse sua madre.

- Vi dovrete preoccupare di quel povero giovanotto, disse la nonna di Gloria.

Gloria vide i piedi della nonna muoversi. Se ne stava in piedi. Gloria ascoltava – ci provava. Ma la moglie del ragno penzolava dalla punta del suo naso.

- Cosa vorresti dire? disse Jack alla nonna di Gloria.

Si appoggiò al tavolo.

- Gisù, signora! Urlò il tavolo – a se stesso. – Mettiti a dieta dannazione!

- Depressione, disse lei. – La bestia nera della depressione ha attaccato quel poveraccio alle spalle.

Da sotto il tavolo, Raymond apprese del morso della bestia nera.

- L'intera città è depressa, disse la nonna.

Gloria udì quella parte.

- Ad ogni modo, disse la nonna. – Io me ne vado a letto.

Gloria guardò i piedi della nonna. Aveva indosso le sue enormi pantofole, quelle con grandi orecchie da cane. Gloria vide che uno dei talloni stava pestando un orecchio. Vide la nonna inciampare. Sentì la nonna urtare contro il tavolo e cadere.

- Oh mio Dio!

- Tutto bene? Disse la mamma di Gloria.

- No! strillò il tavolo – a se stesso.

- Sto bene, disse la nonna di Gloria. – Ho soltanto preso una botta all'osso sacro.

Raymond la sentì dire “osso sacro”.

- E non è affatto divertente, disse la nonna.

Raymond vide le pantofole della nonna proseguire il proprio tragitto verso la porta della cucina.

- È orribile, disse la nonna. – Il giovane Ben e tutti gli altri. Tutta quella gioia, rubata.

Gloria e Raymond udirono “rubata”.

- Comunque, disse la nonna. – La nonna se ne va alla sua umile e fredda dimora.

Raymond guardò i propri genitori alzarsi in piedi. Il calzino di suo padre era bucato.

- Il suo appartamento non è freddo, no?

- È lei che è fredda, disse il padre.

- Ah, smettila.

Raymond udì i propri genitori raccogliere le tazze e tutto il resto. Udì suo padre.

- Lascia stare. Sistemio io domattina.

Udì sua madre.

- Sei preoccupato per Ben?

- Certo che lo sono, disse il papà. – Un po’. Probabilmente lei ha ragione riguardo la bestia nera.

Gloria vide i propri genitori lasciare la cucina. Riusciva a sentire sua madre.

- Povero osso sacro della nonna, disse. – Dobbiamo tener d’occhio Ben.

Gloria udì suo padre.

- Suppongo di sì, disse. – Ma vorrei potessimo fare di più.

Sospirò.

- Che razza di paese maledetto.

La porta fece uno scatto, chiusa. La cucina era vuota, e buia.

Gloria e Raymond sgusciarono fuori da sotto il tavolo. Si alzarono in piedi e restituirono un po’ di vitalità ai propri sederini.

- Hai sentito cos’hanno detto? Disse Raymond.

- La nonna è fredda, disse Gloria.
- Non quello, disse Raymond. – L'altra cosa.
- Quella sulla bestia nera?
- Sì. Disse Raymond. - La Bestia Nera della Depressione ha rubato l'osso sacro di Dublino.
- Sì, disse Gloria. – E sono preoccupati per lo zio Ben.
- La Bestia Nera gli sta alle calcagna.
- Tu l'hai vista dietro lo zio Ben, Rayzer?
- No.

Raymond e Gloria volevano bene allo zio Ben. Era senza dubbio il loro parente preferito. Preparava splendide colazioni quando si fermava a casa loro. Sapeva esattamente come parlare ai bambini. Non li prendeva mai in giro, né li metteva in imbarazzo e portava sempre le caramelle più buone.

- Dobbiamo recuperare l'osso sacro, disse Raymond.
 - Sì, disse Gloria. – Risolleverà il morale allo zio Ben.
 - Andiamo.
 - Cos'è l'osso sacro?
 - È quella parte del corpo che ti fa ridere³⁴.
 - E Dublino ne ha uno? Chiese Gloria.
 - Così ha detto la nonna, disse Raymond.
 - Ah, bene allora, disse Gloria. – Andiamo.
- Raymond corse verso la porta della cucina.
- Dove stiamo andando Rayzer?
 - Di sopra, a vestirci.
 - Ah, sì.

³⁴ 'Funny bone' is the expression used in the original text. It has a double sense in this case. It can be used to refer to the elbow and to the sense of humor. Here lays the word-play.

Si misero a correre silenziosamente – i bambini lo sanno fare se lo vogliono – su per le scale, nelle loro camerette. Si tolsero il pigiama e si vestirono adeguatamente. Poi tornarono giù senza fare rumore – di nuovo in cucina.

Raymond aveva dieci anni, mentre Gloria otto. Raymond stava aprendo la porta sul retro, pronto ad immergersi nella notte.

La porta era aperta.

- E adesso dove andiamo, Rayzer? Chiese Gloria.

- Non lo so, disse Raymond. – Ma dobbiamo trovare la Bestia Nera.

Corsero fuori.

3.

Uscirono di corsa, nel giardino sul retro. La luce d'emergenza dei vicini, la famiglia O'Leary, si accese, con un click e uno sprazzo di luce bianca.

- Oh mio Dio!

- Su dai!

Raymond faceva strada, nel vialetto laterale. Faceva freddo e si sentiva l'odore del vecchio bidone della spazzatura. La luce d'emergenza degli O'Leary si spense.

Raymond si fermò.

- Non ci vedo.

- Splendido, disse Gloria, e la parola, come fosse un essere animato, spuntò come un barlume sopra le loro teste e pervase la stradina di una luce calda e dorata. Raymond proseguì, mentre Gloria lo seguiva, verso l'ingresso principale, poi fuori per la strada.

- E adesso dove, Rayzer? chiese Gloria.

- Ci sono tre bestie nere nella nostra strada, disse Raymond. – Una di queste potrebbe essere la Bestia Nera della Depressione. Andiamo.

Corsero lungo la strada, verso la casa dei Mooney. Si diressero – sgattaiolarono – verso la porta d’ingresso. Raymond fece pressione sulla buca delle lettere per aprirla e, assieme, sbirciarono attraverso la fessura. Videro due occhi neri – e una lingua. Gli occhi e la lingua appartenevano a Lulù Mooney.

Quella lingua tentò di leccare i loro volti attraverso la buca delle lettere.

- Non credo che Lulù sia la Bestia Nera della Depressione, disse Gloria.

- No, concordo, disse Raymond.

Lulù iniziò ad abbaiare.

- Corri!

Tornarono di corsa verso la strada. Sentivano il Signor Mooney da dentro la casa.

- Zitta! O scendo giù e ti porto via quel dannato osso!

Gloria smise di correre.

- L’osso sacro!

- No disse Raymond. È soltanto un semplice osso. È quello di Lulù. Lo custodisce da anni. Andiamo.

Corsero verso l’abitazione accanto, quella degli O’Driscoll. La bestia nera, Zanna O’Driscoll, dormiva in un capanno sul retro. Si mossero furtivamente lungo il vialetto.

- Non ci vedo.

- Splendido.

- Adesso ci vedo.

La porta del capanno era aperta.

- Qui, Zanna.

Zanna era un vecchio cane, non si mosse.

- Sei depresso Zanna?

Zanna scoreggiò.

- È depressione questa? chiese Gloria.

- Non penso, disse Raymond. – O, se lo è, papà è proprio depresso. Ecco la prova, guarda. Zanna?

La coda di Zanna picchiettò sul pavimento – poi si fermò.

- Zanna?

La coda riprese come un rullo di tamburi.

- Vedi? disse Raymond. – Non è Zanna. I cani depressi non scodinzolano.

L'impresa si dimostrava essere più ardua di quanto Raymond avesse immaginato – sebbene non si fosse aspettato nulla in particolare. C'era ancora una bestia nera in quella strada, ma Raymond non sapeva se avesse un qualche senso nel –

- Che fate voi?

La voce giunse da non si sa dove.

Gloria strillò – ma non fuoriuscì alcun suono. Sentiva l'urlo lì, in gola, saldamente aggrappato, troppo spaventato per poter giungere sino alle sue labbra.

Gloria non aveva paura del buio. Non ne aveva mai avuta. E questa cosa l'aveva sempre fatta sentire un po' speciale. Non era infatti il buio a spaventarla ora. Era quella voce. Una voce senza volto.

L'urlo, alla fine, fuoriuscì.

-ohmiodio....!

Poi vide una testa.

Anche Raymond la vide. Una testa capovolta.

- Ernie? Disse Raymond.

- Che c'è? disse Ernie O'Driscoll.

- Cosa stai facendo?

- Sto appeso a testa in giù, disse Ernie.

- Sì, disse Raymond. – Ma, come mai?

- Beh, disse Ernie. – Sono tipo una specie di vampiro.

Ernie aveva sedici anni. Il suo nome era ben noto lungo tutta la strada. “Se non fai i compiti, diventerai come Ernie O’Driscoll”. Tutti i bimbi del vicinato conoscevano Ernie, ma il fatto che fosse un vampiro era una notizia bomba.

- Un vampiro?

- L’altra settimana, disse Ernie. – Mamma mi dice di trovarmi un lavoro, e così – ecco qua!

- Fare il vampiro è un lavoro?

- C’è crisi, amico, disse Ernie. – Ci vuole gente giovane con intuizione. Così ho iniziato a rimanere a letto tutto il giorno.

Gloria non era più spaventata.

- Perché stai appeso a testa in giù, Ernie?

- Visto in un filmino, disse Ernie. – Fa bene alla roba nello stomaco.

- Hai succhiato il sangue di qualcuno stanotte?

- A una tipa in Finglas West –

Est.

- Finglas Est, disse Ernie.

- Forte! Ha gridato?

- Neanche accorta, disse Ernie. Stava guardando *Corrie*³⁵. Aspetta.

Udirono un grugnito e il sibilo di un mantello – ed Ernie era ora in piedi davanti a loro.

- Splendido!

Per un attimo lo videro chiaramente.

³⁵ Irish famous tv-serie.

- Non assomigli affatto a Robert Pattinson, Ernie, disse Gloria.

- Non può mica avere tutto lui, dico io.

- Non ti ha dato fastidio agli occhi quella luce?

- Per niente, disse Ernie. – Tutte frottole.

- Ma tu lo bevi davvero il sangue, no?

- Già.

Ruttò.

- Non va proprio giù liscio, però.

- Stiamo dando la caccia alla Bestia Nera della Depressione, Ernie, disse Gloria. – Ti va di venire?

Ernie ci pensò su.

- È grande, vero?

- Enorme, disse Gloria.

- Grande, disse Ernie. – Dessert. Cosa stiamo aspettando?

Gloria si mise a ridere.

- Vieni anche tu, Zanna? chiese Raymond.

Zanna menò la coda e scoreggiò.

- Eccoti la risposta, disse Ernie.

Seguirono Ernie fuori dal giardino, poi per la strada.

- E quindi, disse Ernie. – Dov'è sta Bestia Nera?

Poi, mentre Ernie parlava, videro la Bestia. Alla fine della strada. Non la Bestia – la sua ombra, per un solo istante. Era enorme, scorreva sul muro mentre girava l'angolo. Non produceva alcun rumore. Di certo altro non era che la bestia nera.

Se n'era andata. Ma l'avevano vista.

- Andiamo!

4 .

Corsero verso l'angolo ma la Bestia Nera se n'era andata. Faceva freddo – una sorta di gelida scia – come se un animale invisibile, raggelante si stesse strusciando su di loro.

- Andiamo, disse Raymond.

Gloria non voleva andar oltre. Il freddo la spaventava, il modo in cui questo sembrava muoversi. Aveva già preso paura due volte sino ad ora e la cosa non le piaceva affatto. Raymond iniziò a correre.

Poi Gloria pensò allo Zio Ben e al peso della Bestia Nera sulle sue spalle, così corse dietro a Raymond. Corsero all'angolo successivo.

Nessuna Bestia. Solo il freddo. Ad aspettarli.

Non videro nulla lungo la strada, nessuna ombra, né altro di concreto.

Era molto tardi, e tutto molto tranquillo.

- Qui, Ernie, disse Raymond.

Ebbe un tremito.

- Puoi volare?

- Oh sì, disse Ernie. – Me n'ero scordato.

Lo guardarono –

- Splendido!

- mentre si sollevava dal terreno, sempre più su, come fosse su di un ascensore invisibile, sempre più in alto e ancora più su.

- Guardate un po' qua, gridò loro laggiù.

Distese le braccia così che il suo mantello prese le sembianze di enormi ali di pipistrello.

- L'affare, quella roba!

- Riesci a vedere la Bestia Nera?

- No, disse Ernie. – Ci sono in mezzo le case e tutto il resto. Un momento, ma –

- Cosa?

- Vedo qualcosa, disse Ernie. – E non è quella solita cosa. Planò nuovamente a terra.

- È come una nube di fumo o qualcosa del genere, disse, quando fu atterrato. – Più scura dell'oscurità.

- Dove?

- Giù di qua, disse Ernie.

Iniziò a correre e gli altri al seguito. Li attendeva ad ogni angolo e, ad ogni angolo, d'improvviso rabbrivivano dal freddo. L'angolo era una gelida traccia – la Bestia sembrava lasciare una traccia che indicava loro in che direzione correre.

Preferivano correre. Si mantenevano più caldi in quel modo e rimanere freddi per troppo a lungo innervosiva Gloria.

- Dove siamo, Rayzer?

- Non lo so.

Correndo erano giunti al di fuori dei luoghi a loro conosciuti e, per la terza volta quella notte, Gloria aveva paura. Proprio non voleva vederla, la Bestia Nera.

- Guardate!

- Oh mio Dio!

Raymond l'aveva vista – la Bestia. Si muoveva, solo un'ombra, proprio sotto un gruppo di piccoli alberi, di fronte ad un enorme edificio. Lo conosceva. Era già stato lì prima d'ora – un sacco di volte.

Erano al Centro Commerciale Liffey Valley.

- Andiamo!

Non c'erano auto, né persone – era molto tardi. Solo Raymond, Gloria ed Ernie. E quell'ombra. Raymond le corse incontro. Non aveva mai afferrato un'ombra prima d'ora. Sapeva che non era possibile stringerne una, le ombre erano fatte di luci e penombra. Quindi non rimase semplicemente sorpreso quando le sue mani toccarono qualcosa di solido.

Ne fu terrorizzato.

- Che ti prende?, disse Ernie.

- L'ho sentita!

- Sentito cosa, Rayzer? chiese Gloria.

- La Bestia.

- Ma non c'è niente qui, disse Gloria.

Gloria aveva ragione – e torto allo stesso tempo. Non c'era nessuna bestia vicino a loro, o tra gli alberi.

Eppure qualcosa *c'era*.

Il freddo.

Sembrava trovarsi proprio sopra di loro adesso, una nube nera e gelida. Ovvero un agghiacciante, silenzioso animale che chino su di loro li annusava.

- Ah ecco! disse Ernie. – È soltanto una nuvola.

Gloria si mise a ridere.

- Splendido!

E la nube, quella misteriosa massa di buio estremo, si allontanò.

Non erano sicuri che si trovasse ancora lì adesso.

- Beh, disse Ernie. – Perché stiamo facendo 'sta roba, dico io?

- Per lo zio Ben, disse Gloria. – È depresso.

- E la Bestia Nera ha l'osso sacro di Dublino, disse Raymond.

- E lo zio Ben starà meglio se riusciremo a riprenderlo, disse Gloria.

- E chi lo dice?

- La nonna.

Ah, beh allora, disse Ernie. – D'accordo.

- Conosci la nostra nonna, Ernie?

- No, disse Ernie. – Ma mi sento sempre più cervellone dopo aver bevuto un po' di sangue di nonna.

- Davvero?

- Sul serio.

- Forte.

La nube era tornata – era proprio lì. Per la precisione la stavano fissando. Ma non erano sicuri fosse una nuvola. Speravano lo fosse, una semplice nuvola che si comportava in modo strano. Ma la osservarono mentre calava avanzando per la strada e, qualunque cosa fosse, smise di essere ciò che credevano di aver visto e divenne qualcosa di solido e reale che riuscivano chiaramente a distinguere.

- La Bestia!

Un'enorme bestia nera. Un comune e autentico cagnaccio – potevano sentire le sue zampe sbattere per terra mentre correva via.

- Andiamo!

La rincorsero.

Corsero seguendo il corso dell'autostrada N4, verso la città. Adesso sì che sapevano dove si trovavano. La Bestia li precedeva. Di tanto in tanto sembravano raggiungerla, anche se Gloria e Raymond sentivano la stanchezza ed Ernie si era dimenticato che poteva volare. A volte poi la Bestia sembrava essere scomparsa, sebbene potessero ancora udire le sue zampe, proprio davanti a loro.

- Ci permette d'inseguirla?

- Penso di sì.

- Perché?

- Non lo so.

Continuarono a correre. Potevano vedere Phoenix Park³⁶ e le sagome degli alberi, in fondo, sulla destra.

Sinistra.

Sinistra. E allora si accorsero che c'era qualcos'altro. Udirono altri piedi, altre scarpe che colpivano il suolo, dietro e di fianco a loro. Quindi iniziarono a vedere altri bambini. Prima due, poi quattro, otto, nove, e ancora. Tutti di corsa, tutti a rincorrere la Bestia Nera.

5.

Ma ancora una volta la Bestia era scomparsa. Sentivano ancora le sue zampe, ma non riuscivano a vederla.

- Dov'è?

Erano ormai vicini alla città, nel tratto di strada che portava al Kingsbridge, sotto il quale era solito scorrere il Liffey.

Si fermarono.

Si fermarono tutti quanti, anche gli altri bambini, maschi e femmine, tutti ansimanti. Ernie sembrava essere l'unico vampiro. Sebbene lì ci fosse un bambino che avrebbe potuto essere un leprecano.

- Hey, Rayzer? sussurrò Gloria. – È un leprecano quello lì?

- Penso di sì, disse Raymond. – Anche se sarebbe un po' altino.

Rimasero tutti a guardarsi l'un l'altro. E lo sentirono – il freddo. Quel flusso gelido, che diceva loro di seguirlo.

³⁶ Phoenix Park: the biggest city park. The Dublin Zoo is inside the park.

Corsero. Sul ponte, all'angolo successivo. Phoenix Park si trovava proprio di fronte a loro. Sentirono nuovamente il freddo, che li guidava verso destra.

Sinistra.

Sinistra. E così correndo si addentrarono in Phoenix Park. E Gloria, ancora una volta, rimase sorpresa.

- Perché ci permette di seguirla?

Continuarono a correre, lungo un sentiero scosceso. Era più buio ora poiché gli alberi si ergevano tutt'intorno a loro, ostruendo la luna e le altre luci. Corsero tutti assieme in gruppo, quasi fossero essi stessi una nube oscura.

- Perché inseguite la Bestia Nera?

- Per il babbo.

- Per la mamma.

- È depressa? chiese Gloria alla bambina che correva al suo fianco.

- Sì, disse la bimba. – È come giù di corda. Mia zia ha detto qualcosa tipo toglierle di dosso la Bestia Nera. E poi l'ho vista.

- Anche io, disse un bambino. – Il mio babbo se ne sta a letto tutto il giorno da quando ha chiuso bottega.

Il bambino ansimava. Stavano ancora correndo lungo il sentiero, su di una collinetta.

- La Bestia Nera blocca la porta della camera da letto.

- Ma, dov'è la Bestia ora?

Lo sentirono tutti, l'impeto del gelido vento. Li superò. Poi tornò indietro, dalla parte opposta. Li sospinse – o almeno così sembrava – lungo il sentiero. Allora la videro, quella sagoma più scura nell'oscurità, addentrarsi tra gli alberi. E udirono le zampe – e il respiro affannoso.

Quell'ansimare proprio dei cani. E allora la videro la Bestia. Latrò – guai – un attimo prima che scomparisse tra l'oscurità degli alberi.

- Andiamo!

Cominciarono a correre verso gli alberi. Poi udirono una voce.

- State attenti!!

- Chi ha parlato?!

- Nessuno di noi, disse Raymond. – Era una voce da vecchietto. Andiamo.

- Non mi hanno voluto ascoltare, disse il Monumento di Wellington³⁷, che si trovava lì dal 1861.

- Eh beh, disse la Croce Papale³⁸ che si trovava lì soltanto dal 1979. – Tutti noi abbiamo una croce da portare.

I bambini erano in mezzo agli alberi. Smarriti. E l'interrogativo di Gloria, “Perché ci permette di inseguirla?”, sembrava trovare risposta da sé.

- È una trappola, disse Gloria.

Ma nessuno la udì.

Lei sì però udì la voce.

- Non ti voglio mordere, disse la voce.

Era la Bestia. Gloria ne era certa, sebbene non potesse a vederla. Non si muoveva più, perché i rami le cingevano il volto e le gambe. Temeva di aver fatto un passo falso. Udiva gli altri bambini attorno a sé, ma nessuno di loro era abbastanza vicino per riuscire a vederla.

- No, disse la voce, la Bestia. – Non meriti un morso.

Era una voce orribile.

³⁷ Wellington Monument: most properly known as Wellington Testimonial, located in Phoenix Park. It is the largest obelisk in Europe (62 meters high).

³⁸ Papal Cross: a large white cross situated in Phoenix Park. It was erected in 1979 for the visit of John Paul II.

- Sei inutile.

La voce giunse assieme al fetore.

- Proprio così, disse la voce. – Ecco quanto sei inutile. Ecco cosa accade a tutto ciò che ti circonda.

Gloria avrebbe voluto piangere. Sentiva la pelliccia della Bestia sul suo volto.

- Inutile, sussurrò.

Non udiva più nessuno. C'era quiete, come se la Bestia stesse bisbigliando la stessa cosa a tutti loro.

- Non sei utile a nessuno.

Gloria sapeva che ciò non era vero. Sebbene avesse l'impressione che questa fosse la realtà. Stava per coricarsi sul terreno gelido.

- Buona idea.

Poi però le venne un'idea diversa.

- Splendido.

Lo bisbigliò, e questo produsse una piccola, flebile luce. Udì un gemito.

Lo ripeté.

- Splendido.

Più forte. Il gemito era più distante stavolta. La Bestia si stava muovendo, si allontanava goffamente. Il fetore era svanito. E Gloria sapeva che la Bestia stava mentendo. Lei non era inutile.

- Hey, Ernie!

- - - Che?

Ernie sembrava triste.

- Alzati in volo e urla 'Splendido'!

- - - Perché?

- Fallo! Splendido!

- - - Okay.

Sentì Ernie scrocchiare le foglie e i rami.

- Splendido, splendido, dannatamente splendido!

Gli alberi divennero radiosì e rigogliosi. Adesso riusciva a vedere gli altri bambini. Alcuni di essi si stavano rialzando da terra. Sembrava che tutti si fossero addormentati e fossero piombati in un terribile incubo.

- Urlate tutti! Splendido!

Camminavano tutti assieme tra gli alberi scintillanti.

- Splendido!

Sentivano la Bestia fuggire dalle loro voci e dalla loro luce. Uscirono dalla boscaglia all'estremità opposta. Videro l'ombra oscura – la Bestia – enorme e accucciata, scivolar via verso lo Zoo.

- Andiamo!

Il leprecano alto parlò.

- Non è che magari, dico io, potremmo andarcene a casa?

- No, disse Raymond. – Dobbiamo fermare la Bestia.

- Sì, disse Gloria. – E adesso sappiamo come farlo.

- Andiamo!

Corsero tutti verso lo Zoo.

- È chiuso, disse il Monumento di Wellington, ma nessuno stette ad ascoltarlo.

6.

Videro la Bestia Nera scivolare oltre il muro dello Zoo. Ora appariva ancora più grande e più lunga.

Se n'era andata, svanita.

Era ancora notte, sebbene gli uccellini del mattino iniziassero a cinguettare. Lo Zoo era chiuso.

- Ve l'avevo detto, disse il Monumento di Wellington.

- Come facciamo ad entrare? chiese una bambina.

Alcuni bimbi si sentivano un po' sollevati dal fatto di non poter andar oltre. Avevano freddo ed erano spaventati. Il brutto sogno con la Bestia – Inutili!- fluttuava ancora nelle loro teste. Volevano andare a casa.

- Ernie, disse Raymond.

- Che? disse Ernie.

Raymond alzò le braccia.

- Prendimi, disse Raymond.

- Che? disse Ernie. – Neanche per sogno.

- Forza, disse Raymond. – Tu puoi trasportarci dall'altra parte del muro.

- Afferrato, disse Ernie.

Prese Raymond sotto le braccia –

- Ahh, mi fai il solletico!

E volò in alto, come se si trovasse ancora una volta su di un ascensore invisibile.

- Si sale, disse Ernie – Scimmie e quant'altro.

Il suo mantello svolazzò ed Ernie scomparve oltre il muro, assieme a Raymond.

Poi tornò.

- A chi tocca?

- A me!

Passarono tutti oltre il muro, dentro lo Zoo, in meno di tre minuti. I bambini prima impauriti si sentivano meno spaventati ora, all'interno dello Zoo. Si sentivano più al sicuro in mezzo agli animali. Nonostante

conoscessero tutti quanti il motivo per cui si trovavano lì: dovevano fermare la Bestia.

Erano davanti al negozio di souvenir.

- Ernie.

- Che c'è?

- Riesci a vedere la Bestia?

Ernie iniziò a salire.

- Ho le batterie scariche.

Lo guardarono tutti salire in alto, oltre il negozio, e iniziare lentamente a guardarsi intorno.

- Vedi niente?

- Laggiù, disse Ernie. – Quei così grandi. I come-caspita-si-chiamano? Gli elefanti.

Indicò davanti a sé, un po' verso – destra?

Complimenti.

- Sono come impazziti, disse Ernie.

- Andiamo!

Corsero tutti assieme – uniti si sentivano più sicuri – passando davanti a suricati, lemuri e scimmie ragno.

- Sono contento di non dover pagare per tutto questo, disse il leprecano alto. – Sarebbe un bello spreco di denaro.

Correndo passarono davanti ai fenicotteri, ma non si fermarono a guardare.

- Che faccia tosta, disse un fenicottero, ma non lo udirono.

Gloria correva di fianco ad Ernie.

- È bello essere un licantropo, Ernie?

- E che ne so, disse Ernie. – Io sono un vampiro.

- È bello?

- Non male, disse Ernie. – Un po' noiosetto.

- Ma ti piace bere il sangue, vero?

- Eh già.

Gloria si sentiva meglio ora. Era più serena. Aveva sopraffatto la Bestia Nera con l'inganno. Aveva scoperto qual era il suo punto debole.

Corsero lungo il sentiero nella foresta, verso gli elefanti. La Bestia Nera era in fuga e Gloria sapeva che sarebbero stati in grado di sconfiggerla.

- Splendido.

Non vedevano molto lungo il sentiero. La stradina era piena di curve e gli alberi erano vicinissimi. Ci fu un'ultima curva che fece ridere alcuni dei bambini quando piombarono gli uni sugli altri. Poi, però, venne lo shock.

La Bestia Nera era lì.

Li stava aspettando.

Udirono il suo lamento prima ancora di vederla. Un ululato che devastò lo Zoo. Non c'era più nessuno. Solo l'ululato. Quel lamento che perpetrava, sino a divenire una parola sospesa lì, come un gas velenoso.

INUTILI.

Il terrore li fece sentire immediatamente stanchi, esausti – erano rimasti svegli per tutta la notte.

INUTILI.

Si accasciarono al suolo. Tutti quanti. Anche Gloria. I suoi occhi pungevano e pesanti per la tristezza. Si stavano chiudendo. C'era una parola di cui aveva bisogno, una parola importante, ma non riusciva a ricordarla.

INUTILI.

Era vero. Lei era inutile. Era troppo stanca per fare qualunque cosa. I suoi occhi erano –

- Scusa!

Gli occhi di Gloria rimasero aperti. C'era qualcosa di rosa. Un fenicottero. Tanti fenicotteri. Avanzavano proprio verso la Bestia.

- Alcuni di noi stanno cercando di dormire, sai! Abbiamo bisogno delle nostre otto ore!

INUTILI.

- Siamo rosa! disse il fenicottero che stava davanti. – Ovvio che siamo inutili! Questo è il fatto!

Gloria sorrise – non poté trattenersi. Fenicotteri rosa parlanti. Era –

- Splendido, disse.

- Grazie mille, disse un fenicottero. – Troppo poco, troppo tardi.

- Splendido!

Udì un lamento – tutti lo udirono – e il peso opprimente della Bestia sembrò alleggerirsi. La notte, l'oscurità, sembravano salpare via.

- Splendido!!

Erano di nuovo tutti in piedi, alcuni sbadigliavano, uno o due piangevano. Erano turbati, deboli. Ma la vedevano, la sentivano. La Bestia Nera che si allontanava – fuggiva. Era tornata ad essere una bestia qualunque. Una bestia nera enorme che balzava oltre la recinzione.

- Andiamo!

Raymond iniziò a correre. E tutti i bambini la inseguirono. Tutti sapevano quello che si doveva fare.

- Splendido!

Ancora una volta stavano per avere la meglio. Si erano sbarazzati della Bestia Nera una volta per tutte e sarebbero tornati a casa, in case più felici.

- Splendido!

Era più chiaro adesso, l'alba, e gli uccellini lavoravano sodo.

- Ciip, ciip! ciip, ciip! La differenza è che noi siamo irlandesi!³⁹

Erano all'altezza del cancello.

- Non ti spaventa la luce del giorno, Ernie? chiese Raymond.

- È solo un vecchio mito, disse Ernie. – Per farti sentire al sicuro durante il giorno.

- La Bestia Nera, però, ha paura.

- A quanto pare.

Lo Zoo era aperto. Un tale stava aprendo il cancello.

- Ecco, Signore, disse il leprecano alto. – Dobbiamo pagare per uscire? -
No.

- Ci vediamo, allora.

I bambini corsero di nuovo verso il parco e la città.

7.

Era mattina presto nella città di Dublino. La gente già sveglia poteva udire quel suono amato da tutti, una sirena per la nebbia giù alla Baia di Dublino.

Ma non c'era alcuna nebbia mattutina ed in effetti non era una sirena per la nebbia. Era l'imponente Spire in O'Connell Street, che insegnava alla Tour Eiffel come parlare correttamente l'inglese .

- Che PI-ANO?! ripeté.

- Chi PI-O-NO?

- No, ascolta. Che PII-A-NO?!

- Deve esserci nebbia giù all'O2 Arena⁴⁰, disse Raymond.

- Eh già, disse il leprecano alto.

³⁹ In Irish English sounds like unvoiced fricative [ç] are replaced by the unvoiced postalveolar fricative [ʃ] (Cesiri 23/2001-2005: 113). It means that this should sound as if written 'sheep'.

⁴⁰ The O2: it is an amphitheatre, the biggest indoor arena in Ireland.

Stavano correndo lungo il molo, lungo il letto arido del fiume Liffey.

- Dov'è?

Avevano perso di vista la Bestia Nera. Li aveva preceduti, qualche angolo più in là. Poi era svanita. Rallentarono, incerti, un po' preoccupati. Sollevati, ma contrariati.

- Andiamo avanti, disse Raymond.

Sapeva che se si fossero fermati ora, con tutta probabilità, non sarebbero più ripartiti. Anche gli altri bambini ne erano consapevoli. Avrebbero voluto fermarsi, ma non lo fecero. Sapevano di dover sconfiggere la Bestia.

- Che PII-A-NOO?!

Continuarono a correre, passando davanti al Museo Nazionale Collins Barraks⁴¹.

- Davvero sei un leprecano? chiese Raymond.

- Neanche per sogno, rispose il leprecano alto. – La gente pensa di sì, solo perché sono alto.

- È pazzesco.

Stavano scrutando il cielo, ogni angolo, alla ricerca di una qualunque traccia della Bestia.

- Ho un po' la faccia da folletto, disse il leprecano alto. – Ma nessuno lo noterebbe. Solo che sono alto un metro e novanta. Poi vedono la faccia ed è fatta – sono un... Oddio!

La Bestia era lì. All'angolo di Smithfield. Prima un'ombra. Poi l'ombra divenne solida e muscolosa. La Bestia iniziò a comparire da dietro l'angolo, come un camion nero in lenta manovra.

⁴¹ The National Museum of Ireland – Decorative arts and History, at Collins Barraks. <www.museum.ie/en/list/collins-barraks.aspx>.

Non era mai stata così imponente. Era mostruosa, orribile. Iniziò ad aprire le fauci.

- Svelti! disse Gloria. – Urlate prima che lo faccia lei! Splendido!

- Splendido!

Non accadde nulla.

- Che PII-A-NOO!

Era giorno ormai, e così “splendido” non brillò. Fu soltanto una parola. Alcuni bambini rallentarono. Altri si fermarono, troppo spaventati per andar più vicino. Gloria invece continuò a correre verso la Bestia. E così fecero Raymond ed Ernie.

Gloria adesso sapeva che la Bestia Nera non aveva paura della luce. Ma non aveva alcuna intenzione di mollare.

- Splendido!

La Bestia non si mosse.

- Splendido!

Continuarono a rincorrerla, dritti verso quelle fauci che sembravano crescere a dismisura – sempre più profonde.

- Splendido!

Le fauci smisero di crescere.

- Splendido!

La parola stava funzionando. La Bestia Nera l’aveva udita. ‘Splendido’ l’aveva ferita, come un dardo. Girò i tacchi, per allontanarsi da quella parola.

- È la parola che non sopporta, non la luce!

- Splendido!

Gli altri bambini videro quanto stava accadendo e seguirono Gloria. E così fecero tutti gli altri. Arrivarono da dietro, di corsa. Erano più del doppio ora urlavano tutti.

- SPLENDIDO!

La Bestia si eresse sulle zampe posteriori. Poi cadde all'indietro, atterrando sulle zampe anteriori, quindi si allontanò alla svelta, giù per la banchina di Arran Quay. Pestava pesantemente le zampe sulla strada. I bambini potevano sentirne il peso, le vibrazioni sotto i loro piedi, mentre le correvano appresso. Altri bambini, a centinaia, correvano, lungo il Ponte Father Mathew, per unirsi agli altri bambini a Sud – Nord.

La sponda Nord.

- SPLENDIDO!

La Bestia si dava alla fuga – stavano avendo la meglio ancora una volta. Ma diventava sempre più grande. Il suo manto sfregava le facciate degli edifici mentre correva lungo la baia. I parapetti di fronte alle Four Courts⁴² ne ebbero uno shock.

- E quella cos'era per l'amor d'Iddio?! si domandarono.

Seguirono poi centinaia di bambini, di corsa, urlando, ansimanti.

- E quelli invece cos'erano per l'amor d'Iddio?!

- SPLENDIDO!

-La Bestia era troppo grande per fuggire velocemente. Tutti la videro svoltare in Capel Street. Udirono il manto fare il mille pezzi i mattoni. Udirono i vetri infrangersi.

Corsero sui vetro rotti delle finestre mentre svoltavano l'angolo e proseguirono. Erano tutti quanti stanchi. Avevano corso per chilometri e ore – tutta la notte. Gli 'Splendido' divenivano sempre più deboli.

- splendido.

Erano senza fiato ed era dura pronunciare l'intera parola.

- endido-

⁴² The Four Courts: an elegant palace that houses the High Courts of Justice.

La Bestia svoltò in Mary Street. Udirono sgretolarsi i mattoni all'angolo. Poi si accorsero che stava rallentando. Questo diede loro nuove energie.

- SPLENDIDO!

Svoltarono l'angolo, alla carica, sui detriti, in Mary Street. Le zampe della Bestia sulla strada, a centinaia le scarpe dei bambini, le urla, centinaia e centinaia di voci – un frastuono incredibile.

- Vado a chiamare le Guardie, disse Mary Street.

- Io chiamo il Telefono Azzurro, disse Little Britain Street.

La Bestia Nera era in Henry Street, diretta proprio verso la 'Spire'.

- Che PI-A-NOO?!

poi si innalzò. Prese il volo, proprio come un aeroplano. Volò lentamente, una colossale nuvola a forma di cane, troppo scura per portar pioggia o qualcos'altro di normale. Superò senza alcuna difficoltà O'Connell Street, la 'Spire' e la Tour Eiffel, oltre la statua del Grande Jim Larkin⁴³, le cui grandi mani sembravano distendersi verso l'alto come ad aiutare i bambini a catturare la Bestia.

I bambini si fermarono alla Spire. Erano esausti, assetati, nuovamente impauriti.

- Dobbiamo continuare ancora? chiese uno di loro. – Se ne sta andando.

- Certo che dobbiamo continuare, disse Gloria.

Si era appena ricordata del perché.

- Ha l'osso sacro di Dublino, disse. – Dobbiamo riprenderlo.

8 .

⁴³ Jim Larkin Statue: it stands in O'Connell street. Jim Larkin was a trade union leader and a socialist activist. He was involved in strikes and boycotting of goods. www.tourist-information-dublin.co.uk/james-larkin-statue.htm

La Bestia Nera sembrava distendersi – la nube diveniva sempre più vasta e fitta. Dominava sempre più la città. I bambini ne sentivano il peso sopra le loro teste. Vedevano adulti lungo la strada, seduti a terra, con la testa tra le mani.

- Urrlate!

- SPLENDIDO!

La nube aveva reso particolarmente buio il centro della città, così la luce sprigionata dalla parola fu esplosiva –

- SPLENDIDO!

La nube iniziò a muoversi, si allontanava, passando su Talbot Street e Connolly Station, oltre l'Incrocio delle Cinque Lanterne⁴⁴, la East Wall⁴⁵ e i sobborghi di Fairview.

- Andiamo!

Dopo anni, nemmeno loro capirono veramente come fossero stati in grado di correre così lontano e così a lungo. Ora, però, continuarono semplicemente a correre. Altri bambini li raggiunsero, bimbi che avevano corso per tutta la notte. Migliaia di bambini correvano per i sobborghi di Fairview⁴⁶, sotto il ponte della ferrovia. Vedevano la Bestia davanti a loro. Ricopriva tutta la Baia di Dublino.

- Che PII-A-NOO?!

Erano vicino al mare ora. C'era un vento forte e persistente.

- SPLENDIDO!

Gli spruzzi delle onde si avventavano su di loro, come gelidi schizzi. Ma continuarono a correre.

- SPLENDIDO!

⁴⁴ Five Lamps: it is a decorative lamp post with five lanterns, which stands at the junction of five streets. www.dublincitypubliclibraries.com/dublin_buildings/five-lamps

⁴⁵ East Wall: it is an inner city area of the Northside of Dublin. www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Wall

⁴⁶ Fairview is a coastal suburb of Dublin.

Correvano in riva al mare, ma non potevano avvicinarsi alla Bestia più di così. Fino a quando giunsero al ponte di legno che portava a Bull Island⁴⁷. Adesso potevano correre dritti incontro alla Bestia. Lo sapevano – se la sentivano- Questo era lo scontro finale.

La Battaglia di Clontarf⁴⁸.

- Carica!

Corsero lungo il ponte di legno – trip, trap, trip, trap.

- Chi attraversa il mio ponte? ruggì il gigante mentre si arrampicava per uscire da sotto il ponte.

- Sono io, disse il più piccolo della fiaba de I Tre Capretti⁴⁹.

Sbagliato storia, scusate.

Corsero lungo il ponte di legno.

- Che succede? disse il troll, mentre si arrampicava per uscire da sotto il ponte.

- Siamo a caccia di sangue canino, amico, disse Ernie.

- Forte, disse il troll, e corse dietro ad Ernie.

Erano ormai giù dal ponte. Passarono di corsa davanti al golf club, dritti incontro al vento e all'oscurità – SPLENDIDO! – fino in fondo alla spiaggia.

Si fermarono. Non potevano andar oltre. Non c'era più terra. Erano ai margini di Dublino e la Bestia Nera era proprio sopra di loro.

⁴⁷ Bull Island: it is a natural reserve, a very small island on the coast, at 10 km. from Dublin's city centre. Source: <www.minube.it/posto-preferito/north-bull-island-a-dublino-a44541>.

⁴⁸ Battle of Clontarf: a battle that took place in 1014 between Irish Celtic chieftains and the invading Norsemen, because of the opposition towards the presence of the Vikings (Norsemen) in Ireland. Irish chieftains won. 'The Battle of Clontarf was the watershed of all the hatred, division and rivalries that had consumed Ireland for centuries'. Source: <www.clontarf.ie/history-of-clontarf/battle-of-clontarf/>.

⁴⁹ "The Three Billy Goats Gruff": a Norwegian fairy tale. Source for English text: <www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0122e.html>. Source for the Italian version: "I Tre Capretti" on <www.traparentesi.it/tempolibero/favolefiabe/fiabe/trecapretti.htm>.

Girava, iniziava a muoversi. Il suo manto, la nube, roteava, cresceva. Una nube sembrava nascere dalla nube principale, finché ne divenne il volto.

Ringhiò.

INUTILI.

- È una trappola! urlò Raymond.

Sapeva cosa stava accadendo – d'un tratto capì. La Bestia Nera aveva trascinato i bambini lontano dalla città e ora si apprestava a tornare indietro, per distruggerla.

INUTILI.

- Urrlate!

SPLENDIDO!

- Più forte!

SPLENDIDO!

Ciascun bambino urlò – un unico enorme urlo. E stava funzionando. La Bestia rallentava, si accucciava, si deformava.

Ma si muoveva ancora – fuggendo.

- Ernie!

- Che c'è?

- Afferrami, disse Raymond. – E vola dritto dentro la Bestia.

- Mi prendi in giro, disse Ernie.

- Affatto, disse Raymond.

- Anche me, disse il leprecano alto.

Ernie afferrò saldamente il colletto di Raymond e del leprecano e si levò in alto.

- Odio tutto questo.

Rapidamente stavolta volò dritto verso la Bestia. I bambini da giù potevano sentire le tre voci dentro la nube.

- SPLENDIDO, SPLENDIDO, dannatamente SPLENDIDO!

Il vento catturò le loro voci. Erano rimasti senza fiato. Videro delle fessure, dei piccoli fori nella nube. Stavano avendo la meglio. Ma erano fradici, stremati. Udivano i bambini dentro la Bestia. Ma poi anche questo cessò. C'era solo il vento. I fori nella nube si stavano richiudendo. Inutili.

Gloria riprese fiato a sufficienza.

- Ancora una volta, disse.

Tutti i bambini presero delle boccate di vento, le fecero scendere sino ai polmoni – e le spararono fuori, dritte verso l'alto.

- SPLEEEENDIDOOOOOO!

Questa volta fu l'ultima. E funzionò. La parola squarciò la nube. I fori erano più grandi – i bambini potevano vedere il cielo. La nube si stava diradando, diveniva sempre delle piccole nuvole inoffensive.

Poi tutto cessò e la nube ringhiò. Il borbottio giungeva da una bocca e le fauci trattenevano qualcosa di bianco e molto grande.

L'osso sacro.

Gloria era pronta.

Aveva conservato il fiato, quanto bastava per un'ultima parola.

- ...splendido...

Fu sufficiente.

La parola colpì la nube e la Bestia Nera esplose. Semplicemente svanì.

Un istante, c'erano il vento forte e il borbottio della Bestia. Poi, silenzio – nulla. Fatta eccezione per un cielo azzurro e sereno.

E budella.

Corsero verso le dune, per andarsene. Udirono quelle budella infrangersi sulla sabbia come pioggia scrosciante. L'aria era colma del gracchiare di gabbiani affamati.

E delle urla dei tre bambini che strillavano.

- Attenti!

I bambini correvano ancora, tra le dune, persino nell'acqua. Udirono il tonfo – lo percepirono. Si voltarono e videro l'osso sacro di Dublino. Giaceva sulla spiaggia, bianco e radioso, e un po' buffo.

Ernie, assieme ai due ragazzi, vi atterrò accanto. Si alzò in piedi e si scrollò le budella dal mantello.

- Cosa ne facciamo di 'sta roba?

* * *

Raymond e Gloria sgattaiolarono verso la porta sul retro. Diedero un'occhiata attraverso la finestra della cucina. Non c'era nessuno lì; non vedevano nessuno.

- È il giorno di San Patrizio, si ricordò Gloria.

- Ah già, disse Raymond. – Sono ancora tutti a letto.

Aprirono la porta e furono investiti da un profumo di pancetta e salsicce. C'era qualcuno ai fornelli.

- Zio Ben!

Si girò verso di loro e sorrise.

* * *

Il Grande Jim Larkin si ergeva sul proprio plinto, in O'Connell Street.

Finalmente.

Aveva atteso tutti questi anni, con le sue enormi mani al cielo. Quei bambini lo avevano portato, giù per O'Connell Street. E ora lo stringeva, l'osso sacro della città di Dublino. Con orgoglio lo teneva stretto teso verso un cielo blu terso.

- Ecco, hai le mani occupate, Big Jim, disse la Spire.

- È proprio a questo che servono, compagno, disse Big Jim.



Roddy Doyle 2011

Translated by Giulia Scapin 2013

CHAPTER FOUR

From *Brilliant* to *Splendido!*: translation techniques and strategies

The translator as writer or the writer as rewriter saw that the challenge was to convey the excitement and beauty of the source language in the target language. [...] Translation is the fault-line that runs between the native and the foreign.

(Cronin 2011b: 55).

Cronin expresses the heart of translation: it is an art, a creation, something that was born from an original text in a certain language and which takes another life when translated in the target language: there is something in it that acts like a connection between two cultures, two people, two languages.

A translation has first of all to give peculiar attention to all those aspects related to the text's structure: cohesion, lexicon and collocation of words. Secondly, a translation has to reflect also the essence of the original text and convey all the nuances there are in it in the best possible way, taking peculiar attention to the context of the original text, its cultural constraints and the register used in it (Taylor 1998). In this chapter these aspects are analysed so as to better explain choices made in the translation of the short-story *Brilliant*.

4.1 Translation strategies

All the following translation strategies are fundamental for a text's cohesion, which is

of major importance in the analysis of text organisation and of great relevance to translation [...]. Cohesion is created in a number of ways within the text and indeed refers only to the links that exist within the discourse, within the co-text, that is, created by the words themselves.

(Taylor 1998: 19).

A proper use translation strategies is the only way not to lose something of the original text and not to misunderstand it. According to Taylor's studies on translation and to other theories he analysed, there are

nine strategies the translator can applying in translating at a structural, lexicogrammatical level:

Equation and Substitution

Divergence and Convergence

Amplification and Reduction

Diffusion and Condensation

Reordering

[...] The basic tenets of this classification are useful in providing the translator with the justification for making adjustments of form in line with the semantic, stylistic and communicative requirements of the target text

(Taylor 1998: 47).

Eight out of nine are presented as opposed pairs, meaning that one of the two has to be chosen as the most appropriated translating strategy, according to the context and the meaning to be conveyed through a clause or a single term.

Equation is usually a one-to-one translation, meaning that the word used in the original text can find a direct equivalent in the target language. When no equivalent term is available, then a **substitution** is needed. But in this case, the important factor is to find a word which has a semantic correspondence even though being

morphologically different. A good example is given in Doyle in which the expression “funny bone” (Doyle 2011c: 6) is one of the central elements for the development of the whole story. In English the locution ‘funny bone’ can acquire two meanings: it can refer to the elbow or the sense of humour. In *Brilliant* the author plays with it since the locution is used to refer to an anatomic part of the body, but, at the same time, it conveys the idea that the searching of it can give back happiness to the family. In Italian, the same result cannot be achieved by keeping the focus on the elbow, since there is not any hidden meaning in it. Thus, in order to obtain the same effect, a substitution is needed: ‘osso sacro’ seems to be an appropriate option since it refers to a human bone, but at the same time the word ‘sacro’ can imply some other subtle references. The most important thing for a translator is to deeply understand what the source text wants to say. Because of this, lexis may not always corresponds to the exact equivalent to be found in a dictionary

Translator must be particularly sensitive to the meaning of the words on the page, because words are what have to be translated, though there may be a great deal more behind those words than may seem the case at first glance.

(Taylor 1998: 22).

A good example is given by the title of Doyle’s short-story. The word ‘brilliant’ has a direct equivalent in Italian, that is ‘brillante’ and this could have been a proper translation if there had not been some subtle nuances to be caught and to be rendered for the addressees of the translation. In the source text ‘brilliant’ conveys the idea of light and positiveness, but it is also presented using the following words: “The most used, the busiest, word in Dublin was ‘brilliant’. It was the city’s favourite word” (1998: 2). By this, an additional element is added to the word and this is the reason why a translation like ‘brillante’ is not suitable any longer. Indeed, ‘brillante’, though conveying the idea of light and positiveness, is not such a common word that can be used in everyday life just as an interjection, a use which occurs very often in the story. At this point, an alternative needs to be found and the most proper one seems to be ‘splendido’: it is a common word, sometimes used as interjection and it conveys the ideas of something positive, nice and brilliant at the same time.

Sometimes it is harder to translate just a single word than a whole sentence or page, above all if the word to be translated is fundamental for the development and the meaning of the whole story.

For a translation from English to Italian, **convergence** is almost never used, because English is usually more concise than Italian, hence this process could be interesting only when translating from Italian to English: different Italian terms conveying almost the same image but with different connotations could be translated in English by a single term which contains them all. What is important in an English-to-Italian translation is **divergence**, that is “the strategy [...] of choosing a suitable term from a potential range of alternatives” (Taylor 1998: 53). A good example from Doyle is the translation of ‘dog’ – the “black dog of depression” (Doyle 2011c: 5) – for which the common translation is ‘cane’. The problem is that in the context it is used, that is to say together with ‘depression’, the translation of ‘dog’ into ‘cane’ does not sound good in Italian, for whom ‘bestia’ is most appropriate to be associated with ‘depressione’. In this case, a secondary meaning has been chosen, but the semantic field is kept and also the image the author wants to convey.

“**Amplification** requires that the translator add some element to the source text for reason of greater comprehensibility” [my bold] (Taylor 1998: 55). In most cases amplification is needed in order to clarify something that is taken for granted in the source text. When the clarification can be given adding one or a few words, the amplification is included in the text close to the term it refers to. In the first lines of *Brilliant*, for example, there is a reference to the “M50” (Doyle 2011c: 1): for an Irish the reference to the most important motorway in Ireland is clear, but for a foreigner it has no meaning or, at least, the reference is difficult to be caught. An amplification in this case is needed, but with no real need for footnotes, since it can just become ‘autostrada M50’⁵⁰. Nevertheless, sometimes a few words are not enough and the translation would become too complicated. In this case the translator’s note is the best way to give more references and clarify the meaning. In *Brilliant* there are a lot of references to monuments of Dublin which are called through their name, but at the same time they want to give some additional pieces of information that an Irish could catch. The ‘Spire’ is an example (Doyle 2011c: 2): in

⁵⁰ There is actually a note in the translation, but this is just to give additional info that could be omitted. The reference is clear anyway.

the translation the original name is left and all specifications are included in the footnote. **Reduction** is the opposite of amplification and it “consists of omitting elements in a target text because they are redundant or even misleading”. A clear example is the omission of a subject pronoun when it has no emphatic use; in this case Italian does not require any subject pronoun to be used and it would be redundant.

Diffusion and **condensation** are similar to amplification and reduction apart from the fact that the formers “are concerned with the phenomenon of linguistically slackening or tightening source text expressions for the target text version, that is providing more or less elaboration” (1998: 56). Just to have an idea of the phenomena, we can take the word ‘informazioni’, at plural, which cannot be translated in English with one single word, being the term ‘information’ an uncountable name in English. For this reason diffusion is needed and the English version would be ‘pieces of information’ (1998: 56-58). *Brilliant*, instead, provides with some examples of condensation when translating from English to Italian. The verb ‘look’ can be followed in English by different prepositions so as to convey the verb a slightly different meaning which is usually resumed in a single word in Italian. For example, in “*look at* me shirt!” (Doyle 2011c: 3), the verb locution ‘look at’ is translated in Italian by ‘guarda’.

Finally, **reordering** requires a reordering of sequences of words, hence, it is strictly related to syntax and collocation, that is, “how words ‘go together’” (1998: 26). Sometimes this is needed from English to Italian – or vice versa – mainly because of the fixed structure of English based on SVO subject-verb-object) words order, compared to a more free one in Italian. An example is the use of the adverb ‘too’ at the end of a sentence with the meaning of ‘also’. In this case, in Italian, the corresponding term ‘anche’ cannot be put at the end, so a sentence like “and that annoyed the table *too*” (2011c: 4) becomes “e *anche* questo contribuiva ad infastidire il tavolo” in the target language [my italics].

4.2 Register

A linguistic register is “the level and style of a piece of writing or speech, that is usually appropriate to the situation that it is used in” (Wehmeier, 2000). According to the definition, the register to be used when translating has to be coherent to the register used in the original text. In the translation of *Brilliant*, apart from the themes and the linguistic devices adopted by its author, it has not to be forgotten that the story was born as a children story. For this reason, the target language has to be simple, fluent and sometimes characteristic. It is not correct to simply say that the target language has to reflect the original language, because, considering English and Italian in this case, it is possible – and it do often is – that an English basic word can be rendered in Italian by a series of words from different registers. In this case, an analysis of the register – together with the context in which the word is spoken or written – is fundamental not to betray the original.

4.3 Context and cultural constraints

A literary work is something special, personal and shared at the same time and it always has an aim, a message to grasp which cannot be underestimated. Hence, apart from the more technical devices needed to create cohesion on the target text, a knowledge of the context is of great importance to render in the translation all those aspects which are important to fully understand the meaning of the text and connect it to the world it is settled in. A text, above all a literary work, is strictly connected to the place in which the action takes place, to its author’s world and reality and sometimes to a wider world, when speaking about problems or facts that can affect other people in other countries.

In *Brilliant* the Irish context seems not to interfere so deeply with the story, in the sense that the work is centred on the fight against depression, an issue that may be common to people all over the world. Nevertheless, there is some hidden message that can be recognized only through a deep knowledge of Irish history: it is ,indeed, the story of a group of Dublin children who fight against the ‘Black Dog of Depression’ in order to save their families and give them back their happy lives. But it is also the story of a language which wants to affirm its uniqueness and of the strength of a people who can act together to reach a common goal for their nation

welfare. It is clear that a translator cannot explain all that lays behind a text, but some elements can be highlighted, as for example language peculiarities that are culture-bound.

In *Brilliant* this can be done and it must be, since those features are underlined by author himself. One of the most peculiar features of Irish English is its phonetic: even though words are written as in British English, they have a different pronunciation in speaking and the story aims to make it clear to the reader by writing some words as they would be pronounced by an Irish English speaker. Being the target language Italian, the best way to convey the message is the use of dialectal words or some other devices which sounds differently from standard Italian.

A perfect correspondence cannot always be achieved, so the challenge is to find the best possible solution in order to underline Irish English peculiarities and convey them to the addressee of the translation. For example, a word such as ‘film’ becomes ‘fillum’ (2011c: 11) so as to reproduce the sound of the word as an Irish would say it. In Italian it can be expressed by ‘filme’, which is the way an elderly person would pronounce it. The final result is almost the same, but, considering that the word is spoken by a sixteen-year-old boy, the option chosen for the translation – representing an elderly person’s speaking – gives in some way a different tone to the word. Nevertheless, this seems to be the most appropriate translation to highlight that there is something peculiar in the original to be transmitted. In other cases, a translator has to move the focus from the word highlighted in the original texts in order to achieve almost the same result. Take as example the beginning of Doyle’s story: “Pour oul’ Dublin” (2011c: 1) has been translated in “Po’ra vecchia Dublino”. While the original text focuses on the word ‘old’ written ‘oul’ so as to represent the way it would be uttered, the translation moves the focus to ‘poor’, translating it in a dialectal form – ‘po’ra’ instead of ‘povera’. The focus has moved to another word just because this was the most proper word in the sentence that could offer the possibility to be realised differently from the standard.

As previously said, a translation creates a connection not only between two languages, but also between two cultures and two people. Translating does not simply mean to reproduce a text in a language different from the one used in the original text. It is something more, it is a work that has to take care of both fidelity

and creativity, and they have to run together. A translator is also an artist him/herself: he/she takes the art work made by another person, he/she makes it his/her own and he/she gives it a new life, different but close enough to the original one.

CONCLUSIONS

The current work has been a voyage into the world of Irish English. It has gone through its history as a language and a nation, it has investigated Irish English characteristics and it has offered a tangible example of its being and its peculiarity through one of his most quoted contemporary authors, Roddy Doyle, and a short-story for children that is of high interest for adults as well.

Brilliant is representative of Doyle's literary production and, to some extent, of the Irish literature in the twentieth century, because, apart from being a concrete example of Irish English use in current and common speech, it also clearly represent the real soul of Irish people. It is true that today, in a globalised world, the subject of the story can be representative of a wider range of people and nations. But it is the way the theme is treated that makes this story more Irish than worldwide. Inside it there is a whole nation, centuries of submission of the country by foreigners and annihilation of personal identities, aspects that emerge in the story which is a real fight to re-affirm identities that seems to be lost. And the fact that the fight is operated by children, is of particular importance, since it means that the renascence has to be handled now more than ever by the new generations. And this concept clearly express the poetics of Irish literature of the twentieth century.

The last chapter, dedicated to translation techniques, was needed in order to explain the devices used when translating *Brilliant* into its Italian version *Splendido!*, but it has also been of great interest so as to highlight some of the numerous Irish English features, through examples taken directly from the story. It also shows how, in the end, not all the original peculiarities can be offered to the Italian reader, even though a strength to present the story as closer as possible to the original one was done. As previously said in this work, a translation is a reproduction and a creation at the same time.

This work was born because of my personal interest in translation and, above all, translation of literary works, because these offer the possibility to express yourself as an artist. It is not a work a translator creates by him/herself, but it is through and thanks to the translator that this work is given a new life. This is a hard job, because, whenever a different culture is crossed, there has to be awareness about it, in order not to transfer in the translation aspects that are too much bounded with the personal culture, but to transmit the real message incidental to the original work. To do this the best possible way, a deep knowledge of the culture, the background, the history, the thinking and also the literature which lay behind the text that is chosen as the subject of your translation.

This work for me has been some kind of a challenge. I started studying foreign languages at University and since the beginning I had decided that my final disquisition would have been a translation, so here it is. But, to tell the truth, it has been quite a hard work. On one hand, for the translation itself. I have been given some options concerning authors and I chose *Brilliant* for two reasons: first, because it had never been translated before and, second, because it was such a strange and peculiar story that I have been completely captured by it. On the other hand, I had absolutely no knowledge of Irish English and no idea of the peculiarities it could have, so I had to learn a lot about it, since its knowledge has been fundamental for my work and for the translation in the first place.

All things considered, I can say that the work I did has been satisfactory, since also my challenge and my struggle have finally had a ‘happy ending’, the same Irish people has achieved. With this work I have realised a goal I have been pursuing since I started my academic career, I managed to give birth to a new art work through my

translation. I achieved my aim with a positive ending. Irish people did it as well: they have been fighting for years to have their identity and their culture to be recognised and they pursued their aim. They have big names representing them in literature, they have a rich historical culture and they now are a new people and a new country, independent and important in the international outline. Whoever hardly believes in him/her own capacities can offer his/her own little but important contribution to history, whether it is his/her own history or the world's one.

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