

Nationalizing Realism in Dermot Bolger's *The Journey Home*

Erika Meyers

Abstract

Dermot Bolger's third novel, *The Journey Home*, emerged in 1990 in the author's home country of the Republic of Ireland, yet took 18 years to be republished in the United States in 2008. The novel's graphic depiction of an array of abuses, including sexual, physical, political, and economic, not only illustrated the author's intention to shock the reading public regarding the government's conscious disregard for these struggles, but its publication also elucidated the aftereffects of exposing the differences between experiences with abuse and the ways in which both national and socio-economic processes mediate their interpretations. In this paper, I will argue that Bolger's illustration of corruption and abuse does not only display a contrast between the public and those who represent their image, but also how socioeconomic paradigms are used to mediate perceptions of what constitutes 'reality'.

Keywords

Dermot Bolger, Ireland, Murphy Report, Ryan Report (CICA), reality, working-class literature, company scrip, company town, abuse, national identity

Following up on a *mélange* of literature focused on the Republic of Ireland's working class, including the work of Lee Dunne (*Goodbye to the Hill*, 1965), Heno Magee (*Hatchet*, 1978) and Roddy Doyle (*The Commitments*, 1987), Dermot Bolger's third novel, *The Journey Home*, traces Hano and his best friend Shay's gritty expedition through Dublin's nadir of corruption and abuse that is perpetuated by the political enterprises of the Plunkett family. In order to elaborate on themes of inequality, poverty, and stagnation in the Republic of Ireland in the 1980s, Bolger interlaces three narratives: one following Hano's life, one from Shay's posthumous perspective, and one omniscient viewpoint. While this could provide a feeling of movement and change, such a notion is undermined by Shay and Hano's increasingly limited job prospects as generations of corruption enacted through the Plunkett family maintain their economic immobility (McCarthy 1997, p. 99).

First published in Europe in 1990 and republished in the United States in 2008, *The Journey Home*¹ was written to shock the reading public with its interrogation of the wilful ignorance of the government toward sexual abuse and political corruption. While fiction should not be taken as a direct reflection of 'reality', it is important to note that one year after *The Journey Home*'s 2008 American publication, comprehensive revelations uncovered in both the report of the Irish Republic's Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA or 'Ryan Report') and the Murphy Report helped to maintain Bolger's pronouncement of the existence of the blatant disregard for abuse carried out by those in power.

¹ *The Journey Home* follows three friends, Hano, Shay and Cait in 1980s Dublin amid a backdrop of political corruption and capitalistic oppression in a city controlled by a powerful family (the Plunkett family).

The nine-year investigation (Ryan Report) found that Catholic priests and nuns for decades terrorised thousands of boys and girls in the Irish Republic, while government inspectors failed to stop the chronic beatings, rape and humiliation. The high court judge Sean Ryan today unveiled the 2,600-page final report of Ireland's commission into child abuse, which drew on testimony from thousands of former inmates and officials from more than 250 church-run institutions. Police were called to the news conference amid angry scenes as victims were prevented from attending. (McDonald 2009)

The eighteen-year gap between when this novel was first published in Europe and eventually found publication in the United States identifies a more global desire to persist with images of national identity, rather than the sometimes disturbing elements of social realism illustrated in this novel. This is highlighted by Rafferty's *New York Times* review where he asserts '[t]hat Ireland, perennially emerald green in the mists of memory, is dead and gone, Dermot Bolger wants us to know. This is news no Irish-American is keen to hear, which might explain (not justify) why this book has had such a long passage across the Atlantic [...]' (Rafferty 2008). The stagnation between its initial and American publications, contrasted by sweeping changes brought on by the Celtic Tiger² within this gap, is evident of the disconnect between the public and those who represent its image as well as between writers and readers of what constitutes 'reality'. Granted, books such as Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* also depict bleak images of the Republic of Ireland; however, by returning to the United States with hope for the future after a childhood of loss and turmoil in the Republic of Ireland, McCourt 'clearly maps one of the trajectories of the myth of the American Dream', which, in turn 'has certainly helped the book's sales' (Mitchell 2003, p. 619). By contrast, travel in *The Journey Home* merely reveals the ubiquitous nature of corruption, a phenomenon outlined via the Panama Papers, which contradicts the hope of prosperity instilled by the prospect of leaving one place for another. Therefore, the interpretation of subjectivity in Bolger's depiction of poverty and abuse in *The Journey Home* is based on a historical consensus between fiction and the public on what constitutes 'reality'. By focussing on this consensus, I will argue that the exact truth revealed in the realist novel is not as important as understanding how 'reality' is mediated through national and capitalist stratifications used to favor one perception over the other.

Narrowly speaking, and in a very basic sense, a perspective of 'reality' can be established in literature when readers encounter stories and characters that are analogous to themselves. When looking at literature as a form of discourse, characters with similar speech patterns, for example, can provide one of the primary similarities in the reader's encounter with a likeness to their own styles of communication; however, taken further, characters who may display and understand similar speech patterns as, but whose interactions and experiences within the text differ from those of the reader can also expand the reader's concept of 'reality' beyond similarities and pre-existing beliefs about other potential 'realities'. It is the job of 'the speech act, as a unit of communication,' to 'not only organize the signs but also condition the way in which these signs are to be received', which therefore enables 'us to take the speech act as our heuristic guideline in considering the fact that the written utterance continually transcends the margins of the printed page, in order to bring the addressee into contact with nontextual realities' (Iser 1978, p. 55). As a form of communication then, the speech act can not only be interpreted by its linguistic qualities, but also in terms of context. This context elucidates an understanding of the nature of 'reality' while also potentially providing the reader with a percipience of 'reality' that exists outside of their personal lives.

² This term refers to the economic boom years of the Republic of Ireland from the mid-1990s to the late 2000s.

Iser suggests that a literary work should be thought of as an illocutionary act. In normal speech contexts illocutionary acts gain force only when speaker and recipient share the same conventions and procedures so that the recipient's response brings into being the speaker's intention or meaning. [T]his act of communication tells us something new about reality because the literary text reorganises the familiar repertoire of social and cultural norms. (Morris 2003, pp. 123-124)

Morris's interpretation claims that meaning, and therefore interpretation, can be derived from the recipient's recognition of commonalities between themselves and the speaker through their similar illocutionary acts. While perceptions of 'reality' can be recognized by similar speech patterns, these patterns are restricted due to their usage as literary techniques since '[r]hetorical devices manipulate or direct responses under the fictive stance so that a reader is guided not only in *what* to imagine but also *how* to imagine it' (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, pp. 139-140). Literary devices can show their own restrictions by facilitating narrow viewpoints, therefore mediating the audience's opinions by omitting other potential perspectives. While literary techniques could provide an unbalanced point of view, and therefore censor other potential 'realities', the reader's acceptance of them can overshadow investigations into the origins upon which the concept of 'reality' is based, underlining 'the precise definition of the real object: a cause which in itself does not exist--which is present only in a series of effects, but always in a distorted, displaced way. If the Real is the impossible, it is precisely this impossibility which is to be grasped through its effects' (Žižek 1989, p. 163). Perceptions of 'reality' can be based on the subsequent effects of what is, or what once was, 'real'. If the audience is to accept 'reality' on the basis of its effects and not its origins, then they are in danger of basing their opinions of 'reality' on concepts that are inauthentic to begin with.

The emergence of representations of 'reality' can be due, in part, to the influence of mass production on the public's perception of 'reality' and vice versa as '[t]he adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception' (Benjamin 2004, p. 66). This consistently augmented relationship between 'reality' and its mass interpretation is unlimited, therefore contesting the notion of 'reality' as historically stagnant. Adorno furthers this position by placing it into the context of the artworks that demonstrate 'the possibility of the nonexisting. The reality of artworks testifies to the possibility of the possible. The object of art's longing, the reality of what is not, is metamorphosed in art as remembrance. In remembrance what is qua what was combines with the nonexisting because what was no longer is' (Adorno 2013, p. 181). While art has the potential to connect us 'to the possibility of the possible' (Adorno 2013, p. 181), Adorno also recognizes that there are important factors that preclude the production of art when it does not conform to pre-existing standards and is subject to 'competing specialists, a victim of that division of labour whose hegemony it tries to challenge. The original, authentically bourgeois reduction of truth to what we have the power to do, as Bacon formulated the idea, affects the content of the work of art' (Adorno 2005, pp. 87-88).

One contributing factor that can be used to determine the survival of a book in the marketplace is the ways in which poverty is illustrated. This is evident through the opposing depictions of the experience of poverty in Dublin by Roddy Doyle and Dermot Bolger. 1993 Booker Prize winning author Roddy Doyle's *Barrytown Trilogy*, which includes novels such as *The Commitments*, (a humorous exploration of working-class Dublin through the trials and tribulations of a Dublin-based soul band trying to find success in the music industry) and *The Snapper* (which focuses on the social repercussions of a young woman's unplanned pregnancy) gained national and international attention due in part to successful marketing strategies and movie adaptations. In contrast, Bolger's early work has focussed on similar themes with

strikingly darker consequences: the unexpected pregnancy in *Night Shift* and ultimate death of the child that frees its young parents from adult responsibilities, and the exploration of the impact of political corruption and wilful ignorance towards abuse in working-class Dublin in *The Journey Home*, have struggled to reach markets in, for example, North America. One explanation for this difference between Doyle's work and Bolger's is through Doyle's references to American culture. This allows Doyle's work to be received on a more international level by occupying pop culture subject matter that transitions outside of Ireland and onto a more global scale.

Tracing the short lifespan of a soul group in 'Barrytown,' *The Commitments* self-consciously makes an iconic use of popular cultures and watches their mutation, examines their applicability, in the context of contemporary urban Ireland. [T]he terms of cultural reference in *The Commitments* are necessarily delimited by its subject matter (usually American soul music), but the hybrid 'Dublin soul' that is briefly born in the narrative points the way forward in Doyle's fiction to a continual, and politicized, prioritization of all elements of lived culture over the strictures of readily available 'literary' tropes. (Graham 2018)

Here, Doyle's ability to find the applicability of American pop culture in an Irish context allows him to connect on a cultural level that exists beyond literary devices. While both authors' work incorporate elements of dirty realism into their writing, the international attention of Doyle's fiction ironically makes the experience of poverty appear to be more 'authentic' as his depictions are more commonly accepted worldwide, which aligns with Adorno's notion that: 'Reality becomes its own ideology through the spell cast by its faithful duplication' (Adorno 2005, p. 63). By conforming to international expectations, Doyle can provide the notion that his illustration of poverty is more 'real', therefore pushing bleak depictions of social inequality in contemporary Ireland, as seen through Bolger's work, to the margins of Irish national identity, thus recognizing the subjective nature of our interpretations of 'reality' in the first place. What becomes significant then, is not looking for an exact truth, but examining how the idea of 'reality' is mediated through capitalist stratifications used to favor one perception over another.

One way that capitalist stratifications have been successful is through historical amnesia, which can constrict the understanding of the social processes that condition interpretations of 'reality'. For example, the ubiquitous nature of the Plunkett family's political and economic stronghold provides a sense of entrapment within Dublin. Such a depiction allows Bolger to demonstrate the limitations that reduce the ability to encounter more global modes of thinking and living due to the confines of their daily struggles under the control of the Plunkett family; however, Bolger's rendering of such restrictions is also a point of contention due to the exaggerated business practices of the Plunkett family.

The control that the Plunkett family exercise on business and politics in Finglas, for example, reads like a bad conspiracy theory. Plunkett Auctioneers, Plunkett Stores, Plunkett Motors, Plunkett Undertakers – 'the crucifixion' of Plunkett enterprise – plus, for good measure, their 'name on every second shop front', is a grossly exaggerated departure from any monopoly on commercial affairs in any Dublin suburb. (Pierse 2010, pp. 99-100)

Although the Plunkett family's autocracy is a hyperbolic depiction of Dublin, it is necessary to acknowledge the global practices of labor exploitation that have influenced Bolger's work. For, if the reader is to only examine this monopoly within an Irish context, then they are negating the historical origins of corporate monopolies and the acts of labor exploitation that exist worldwide. For example, a

company town can be defined as a place ‘where an individual company owned all the buildings and businesses’. Ownership over the flow and access to capital, combined with ‘remoteness and lack of transportation’ conspire to keep ‘workers from leaving for other jobs or to buy from other, independent merchants (...) Without external competition, housing costs and groceries in company towns could become exorbitant, and the workers built up large debts that they were required to pay off before leaving’ (‘Slavery by Another Name’ 2017). Therefore, by asserting economic control, the Plunkett family’s business dealings mimic the exploitation of labor that historically occurred throughout company towns. Hence, the overstatement of the pervasive enterprises of the Plunkett family provides the opportunity for Bolger to develop a correlation between Dublin and Appalachia. Moreover, Pascal Plunkett’s payment system further parallels the allocation of wages practiced in company towns. This is evident when Hano’s father is diagnosed with cancer and his mother, who works for Plunkett Undertakers, still needs to take out ‘a note for Plunkett Stores’ where she ‘can buy what I like there and use the rest as credit whenever I come down again’ (Bolger 2008, p. 97).

This excerpt is twofold. On the one hand, Bolger is using Hano’s mother’s reaction to this payment method to criticize her level of acceptance with the system that determines the status quo, which can be seen through her inability to recognize that if she had been paid better wages in the first place, she would not have to take out a loan. Satisfaction with the status quo has appeared elsewhere in Bolger’s work. For example, in Bolger’s play, *Blinded by the Light*, protagonist Mick is characterized by his refusal to join or become a part of anything. This can be witnessed via statements such as ‘I’ve a life-long aversion to joining anything’ (Bolger 2000, p. 160) and ‘I’m not lazy, I’m just trying to live my life in my own way in the Independent Republic of Mickonia’ (Bolger 2000, p. 162). While contentedness can sometimes be depicted through lack of ambition for class mobility, which can be seen through Jennifer’s Johnston’s *How Many Miles to Babylon?*: ‘It is a sad fact, boy, that one has to accept young. Yes, young.’ (...) ‘The responsibilities and limitations of the class into which you are born. They have to be accepted’ (Johnston 1974, p. 29), it can also be recognized through the condemnation of political leaders who contributed to social inequality. This is similarly shown through Michael O’Loughlin’s poem ‘Stalingrad’: ‘This is my childhood and country/ the cynical knowing smile/ Plastered onto ignorance/ Ideals untarnished and deadly/ Because never translated into action/ And everywhere/ The sick glorification of failure’. Thus, social dissolution through ‘the sick glorification of failure’ (O’Loughlin qtd. in Mac Anna 1991, p. 22) is due, in part, to political corruption. This is particularly applicable to the scandals that characterized Charles Haughey’s tenure as Taoiseach. Son-in-law to former Taoiseach Seán Lemass, Charles Haughey was Taoiseach for three terms between 1979 and 1992; a career defined by allegations of corruption.

Several official investigations into his private life revealed that he had received millions of pounds from a number of top businesses, including payments from the Irish Permanent Building Society, the hotelier PV Doyle and the property developer Patrick Gallagher. Ben Dunne, head of Dunne Stores, acknowledged that he had paid him more than £1million in donations which began within weeks of Mr Haughey’s election as Taoiseach in 1987. Haughey denied this but later admitted it was true. (Obituary: Charles Haughey 2003)

The investigations mentioned refer to the McCracken Tribunal, its successor, the Moriarty Tribunal, and the Tribunal of Inquiry into the Beef Processing Industry. Although each tribunal attempted to implicate Haughey in illegal financial dealings, they reached varying levels of achievement in proving his guilt. Notably, the Moriarty Tribunal (also known as Tribunal of Inquiry into Certain Payments to Politicians and Related Matters) began in 1997 and investigated the financial dealings of Charles Haughey and

Michael Lowry (Communications Minister) (Moriarty Tribunal publishes final report 2011). The tribunal implicated Haughey in financial corruption because it uncovered ‘payments totalling £8.5 million that appear to have been made to Charles Haughey between the years 1979 and 1996’ (Tribunal identifies £8.5m in payments to Haughey 2000). So while Haughey was concerned with his own personal financial gains, unemployment doubled between 1978 (8.2 percent) and 1988 (16.3 percent) (Ireland and the EU 1973-2003 Economic and Social Change 2004, xiv).

Secondly, in terms of *The Journey Home*, Bolger does not only include this experience to assert the power of the Plunkett family, but he is also calling attention to a historical practice within company towns between workers and wealthy business owners who keep their workers poor by only paying them in company scrips. Company scrip is a form of payment to employees that is only redeemable in stores that are owned by their employers; a practice that still exists today. For example, in 2008, the Mexican Supreme Court ruled that Wal-Mart de Mexico violated the constitution after a complaint was made that employees received ‘coupons as part of their pay’, which is reminiscent of ‘‘the practices carried out in old-time stores where workers also received their salaries in the form of vouchers to be redeemed in the stores owned by the boss,’ the court said’ (Aspin and Rosenberg 2008). By incorporating a more global experience of labor exploitation, Bolger is not only widening perceptions of ‘reality’ beyond the Dublin suburb in which *The Journey Home* is set, but he is also creating an indelible link between past and present.

Throughout his career, Bolger has hinted at how the link between past and present has provided a sense of stasis. In *Temptation*, he notes ‘[l]ives overlap, events recur but differently’ (Bolger 2001, p. 174), suggesting that the redistribution of experiences from life to life prevents forward progression. In *Emily’s Shoes*, the feeling of repetition and torpor is again witnessed: ‘In those years silence and reserve had formed like a glacier around me and I was preserved within it, each day a replica of the one before [...]’ (Bolger 1992, p. 197). However, in *The Journey Home*, the tie between past and present is especially significant because it is maintained by inherited cycles of poverty that reinforce notions of ‘reality’ by keeping the poor working against the poor, despite certain advancements in social policy, as the basic structures that facilitate select notions of ‘reality’ are maintained. Such perceptions of ‘reality’ help to ensure their own survival by embedding themselves in the social consciousness of the poor. For example, Bolger does not only use historical inheritances in order to establish a theme of alienation, but he also repeatedly emphasizes the inheritance of social position through father-child relationships. Within *The Journey Home*, one of the most significant elements of inheritance of social position is through Bolger’s use of the death of the father. This occurrence is threefold. Firstly through the death of Hano’s father, secondly through Hano’s co-worker Carol as she carries the family responsibilities after her father’s death, and, in the end, through Hano’s own impending death as he considers the future of his unborn son.

After losing his job as a filing clerk, Hano returns home to help his family while his father struggles with his cancer treatments. Hano’s first major realization of his inheritance is encountered when he is at his father’s deathbed in the hospital. As they wait for the rest of the family to arrive, he states: ‘It was only when my family arrived that the horror began’ (Bolger 2008, p. 104). It is important to be cognizant of Bolger’s word choice. Though his father is still alive and they share the same family, Hano does not refer to them as *our* family, but rather, ‘my family’ (Bolger 2008, p. 104). While subtle, this word choice not only marks the acknowledgement of the imminent death of his father, but the entrance of his family also marks the arrival of the responsibilities that, as the oldest son, he will now be in charge of.

Further to Hano's role as the head of the family, Bolger's illustration of the conditions for females in Irish society can be used to support the argument that the pressures to provide for the family are not just passed down from father to son, but this is a hardship that can also be experienced by women. This can be identified most clearly through Hano's co-worker Carol's social position where, as the eldest of her siblings, she, too, is responsible for their care and financial well-being after her father's untimely death, which left her with 'a large house which had cost every penny he had' (Bolger 2008, p.89), thus draining their savings. Parallel to Hano's experience, Carol finds herself responsible for the care of four younger siblings as she assumes her role as the breadwinner of the family following her father's death; however, where Hano encountered work as a place to earn money in often corrupt and exploitive forms, Carol differed from Hano insofar as she incorporated her career as a part of her identity. Here, Bolger notes strides for gender equality in the Republic of Ireland since the Marriage Bar, a law that forced women to leave their public and civil service jobs once they got married, was abolished in between the years of 1973 and 1977, and discrimination in employment was made illegal in 1977 under the Employment Equality Act. As a result of these significant changes, from 1971 to 1992 '[t]he Irish labour force increased by 240,000, or 21.6 per cent (...). The female labour force grew by 54.6 per cent, but the male by only 10.2 per cent. As a result women accounted for almost two-thirds (65 per cent) of the total increase and the share of women in the labour force rose from 25.8 per cent to 32.8 per cent' (Walsh 1993, p. 369). This was also buttressed by the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act, 1974, which mandated that men and women receive equal pay when performing the same job:

Subject to this Act, it shall be a term of the contract under which a woman is employed in any place that she shall be entitled to the same rate of remuneration as a man who is employed in that place by the same employer (or by an associated employer if the employees, whether generally or of a particular class, of both employers have the same terms and conditions of employment), if both are employed on like work. (Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act, 1974' 1974)

Although legally women were provided with more rights, in *The Journey Home*, the death of Carol's father and her subsequent role as the head of the household demonstrate that their access to these rights did not necessarily guarantee a better life. It also depicted a lack of change in their social position when the structure used to maintain cycles of poverty endure since women were 'found in a restricted range of occupations, primarily professional and managerial, white-collar and semi-skilled manual classes; they are largely excluded from farming, petit bourgeois, technician and skilled manual occupations' (Share and Tovey 2003, p. 165). Consequently, as Carol is faced with the combined impact of limited options and an obsolescent career, her mental state soon deteriorates as she is "[o]ut sick for the past month" after she was under the impression that her dedication and overtime hours meant she could 'be taking over from' their manager only to learn that 'a new system' (Bolger 2008, p. 169) was to be implemented, rather than a change in roles. So while access to employment may appear to provide females such as Carol with a greater possibility for upward mobility, the fact that her skillset is soon to be made obsolete reinforces her financial immobilization when the sources that allow for the 'reality' of socioeconomic inheritance remain intact. Therefore, by illustrating unremitting economic confines, Bolger is able to show that this lack of change is a result of Carol and Hano contributing to a workforce that they are simultaneously thwarted by. Rather than directly fight against the structures that threaten her job and therefore her identity, Carol commits suicide in the company bathroom. So where Hano takes part in the cycles of poverty keeping the poor working against the poor, Bolger further develops themes of economic stagnation through Carol, who internalizes her struggles.

Furthermore, Bolger overlaps male and female views toward work and family through Carol's boss, Mooney, and his description of his personal life following Carol's death: "No wife, no son, no daughter. I have this desk, boy, this room. Soon I won't even have that" (Bolger 2008, p. 176). By illustrating the sacrifice of personal life for work for both males and females, Bolger is able to use employment to demonstrate each individual's vulnerability to the stifling effect of poverty. This reinforces a continuity of disharmony that exists in the lives of those who have few options but to work the jobs they can get and further explores how notions of 'reality' can be facilitated through experiences with inheritance that do not allow for upward mobility. In this way, Bolger achieves symmetry in male and female discord through the sacrifices that work forces upon those who have few other options due to their inheritances.

After witnessing Shay's murder at the hands of Justin Plunkett, along with experiencing the futility of trying to report Justin's guilt to a bureaucracy influenced by the Plunkett family, Hano's liberation from greed and corruption has been interpreted as the point when he kills Pascal. Noting that 'Hano's murder of his rapist' can serve as 'a cathartic act' that 'represents a release from the clutches of sexual *and* social oppression', Michael Pierse also suggests further acts of liberation can be recognized when Hano wrecks 'Pascal's house, in another, parallel fire, following the murder scene,' an act that 'represents the young man's release from further social trammels (...)' (Pierse 2010, p. 98). Although this may suggest relief from Pascal's power, an earlier excerpt in the novel provides insight into what could end the reign of the family when Pascal attempts to bribe Hano, offering to 'pay for any course I wanted' (Bolger 2008, 161). As a childless man, Pascal has no direct heir to pass his wealth and power down to and therefore the continuation of his individual power is undermined. Hano's refusal to take Pascal's offer marks a departure from the continuity of greed and corruption that inhabits Pascal's everyday life.

While the death of one nefarious individual can provide relief from some from their corruption, it does not alleviate them from the environment that condones such abuse. By portraying Pascal as a man who has no one to bequeath his fortune and power to, Bolger is insinuating that there may be an opportunity for change through the discontinuity of inheritance, therefore providing further insight into the possibility of different perceptions of 'reality' that can occupy one's life once the cessation of inheritance is enacted. Conflicting notions of continuity versus discontinuity play a prominent role in Hano's thoughts as he considers both his impending death by Pascal's men and the futures of his unborn son and his unborn son's mother, Katie/Cait, noting that he will remain on the run from Pascal's men, 'Then it will be your turn and the child inside of you' (Bolger 2008, p. 240). Here, two aspects of inheritance are salient. On the one hand, there is the possibility of the continuity of the reign of the Plunkett family if Patrick Plunkett recognizes his political ambitions and wins the election. On the other hand, the implied birth of Hano's future son with Katie/Cait can be indicative of hope for a change in the continuity of inheritance, especially since Pascal will not dominate his life. By considering the birth of a child along with the continuation of the power of the Plunkett family through Patrick Plunkett's potential election, Bolger is again reinserting the tension between common perceptions of change versus stagnation, ultimately marking both his child's and the Republic of Ireland's future views of 'reality' with ambiguities.

Whether it has been through gritty depictions of poverty in books like *Night Shift* and *The Journey Home*, a recurrence of ghosts and hauntings (*The Passion of Jerome*, *New Town Soul*), or indictments of the treatment of women in Irish society (*A Second Life*), Bolger's hyperbolic approach can elucidate the ways in which literature can trouble conventional views of national identity. So while the tenebrous final pages of *The Journey Home* offer no solutions, and no guide for a path toward change, the uncertainty of his characters' futures forges the possibility for readers to consider multiple outcomes. This not only

challenges readers to consider the possible realities Bolger's characters could face as a result of their actions, but also urges us to diversify notions of what constitutes national identity.

Author Bio

Erika Meyers earned her PhD in Irish Literature from the University of Edinburgh and her MA in Creative Writing from University College Dublin. Her first book, *Strangers in America*, won first place in the Great Lakes Novel Contest and was published by Bottom Dog Press.

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