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TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

Rewriting Memory and Identity
in Frank McCourt's *'Tis: A Memoir* (1999)

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ABSTRACT

This B. A. Thesis aims to present the main characteristics that make Frank McCourt's autobiographical novel *'Tis: A Memoir* (1999) one of the best examples of a twentieth-century Irish diasporic novel. In order to prove this theory, I describe the terms 'diaspora' and 'the Irish diaspora' and present an overview of the nineteenth and twentieth century Irish diasporas in the United States from a historical point of view. Then, I show the main features of the literary Irish diaspora of both centuries and their main differences. Finally, I analyze McCourt's novel to prove that it covers the main characteristics of twentieth-century Irish diasporas – a realistic approach to his past life in Ireland and in the United States and a new sense of Irishness – although it still has some features of nineteenth-century literary diasporas and also some peculiarities with regards to those of the twentieth-century.

Key Words: Frank McCourt, *'Tis*, diaspora, memory, identity, Ireland.

Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado pretende mostrar las principales características que hacen de la novela autobiográfica de Frank McCourt, *'Tis: A Memoir* (1999), uno de los mejores ejemplos de novela diaspórica irlandesa del siglo XX. Para demostrar esta teoría, defino los términos de "diáspora" y de "diáspora irlandesa" y expongo, desde un punto de vista histórico, una visión general de las diásporas irlandesas de los siglos XIX y XX en Estados Unidos. A continuación, muestro las principales características de la diáspora literaria irlandesa de ambos siglos y las diferencias entre ellas. Por último, analizo la novela de Frank McCourt demostrando que muestra una visión realista de su pasado en Irlanda y en Estados Unidos y una nueva visión del sentimiento de ser irlandés, aunque todavía cuenta con alguna característica de las diásporas literarias del siglo XIX y también con algunas peculiaridades con respecto a las del siglo XX.

Palabras Clave: Frank McCourt, *'Tis*, diaspora, memoria, identidad, Irlanda.

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Introduction

During the twentieth century, one of the most recurrent topics in American ideology is to face any difficulty to achieve the happy ending everyone hopes to fulfill. However, overcoming struggle is not easy, especially for the ones that are left in the margins, as the migrants that came to the United States in the twentieth century. One of the best instances of this fighting is Frank McCourt, an Irish migrant who could fulfill his dreams in the United States after a life marked by misery and obstacles. Indeed, his experiences in the United States are shown in his autobiographic novel, *'Tis: A Memoir* (1999). This

A. Thesis will study Frank McCourt's novel as an example of a typical twentieth-century Irish diasporic memoir which still reveals some features of the diasporic novels proper to the nineteenth century.

This analysis about the Irish diaspora in the United States has been also carried out by important figures such as Kevin Kenny in his book *The American Irish* (2000) which present a historical overview of the Irish migrants' circumstances in the countries to which they migrated, as the United States, and Aidan Arrowsmith, whose article "Imaginary Connections? Postmemory and Irish Diaspora Writing" (2012), analyzes the differences between nineteenth and twentieth centuries diaspora writings.

By applying Arrowsmith's contributions to the analysis of Irish diasporic writings, I will analyze the concepts of 'memory' and 'identity', on which Irish literary diaspora is based, in McCourt's *'Tis* through a close reading of the author's text according to Arrowsmith's definition of these elements with regard to twentieth-century Irish diasporic memoirs.

In order to reach these objectives, I will organize this B. A. Thesis into two sections. In chapter one, "A Historical and Literary Approach to the Irish Diaspora", I provide the definition of the term 'diaspora' and particularly of the term 'Irish diaspora'. This section, in itself, is divided into two subsections, 'The Historical Irish Diaspora' and 'The Literary Irish Diaspora', which give a historical and literary panorama of this literary subgenre. In chapter two, "A Twentieth-Century Diasporic Novel. Frank McCourt's *'Tis: A Memoir* (1999)", I will analyze the different features that make

this novel an example of a twentieth-century Irish diaspora. In fact, this section is divided in two different subsections, 'Memory, or Recalling of the Past: Homesickness, Compunction and Alienation', and 'Identity, or a New Concept of Irishness: Catholicism and Social Status', in which the main features of twentieth-century Irish diaspora are shown in the novel by analyzing different fragments of McCourt's novel.

Historical and Literary Approach to the Irish Diaspora

The United States is a country clearly built by migrants. One of the most important groups of migrants in the twentieth century is the Irish. According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2015, 32.7 million (or 10.2% of the people in the United States) claimed Irish origins. That means that they are seven times the population of Ireland. In fact, in the United States the Irish are the second most important migrant group in the twentieth century only surpassed by the Germans.

In order to talk about a particular kind of migration in a historical context, the term ‘diaspora’ is significantly used in the United States. The first use of this term was related to the migrations carried out by the Jews, for religious issues, according to Kevin Kenny’s “Diaspora and Comparison: The Global Irish as a Case Study” (7). However, the use of this term has evolved, as the article already mentioned makes clear. In order to understand what ‘diaspora’ means nowadays, it is important to consider that this term has recently started to be used with a broader meaning:

The term diaspora is now widely used to describe migrants, expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, and ethnic and racial minorities, along with a wide range of processes connected with decolonization, transnationalism and globalization. (140)

Therefore, nowadays it is related with diverse types of migration processes which involve different motivations, not only religious ones. Although the term has broadened its scope of meaning, there are some characteristics that differentiate diasporas from other types of migrations, as proposed in Kenny’s article. Firstly, diasporic migrations had to have more than one destination and their motivations may be not only traumatic ones, but the pursuit of work or trade. Secondly, people who carried out a diasporic migration create an idealized view of the homeland together with longing and the desire to return, but not necessarily in a literal sense. This meant also ‘psychological return’ by maintaining their traditions in their new homeland. Finally, these diasporic communities experience segregation in the countries where they settle. Therefore, the analysis of this set of

characteristics is important to differentiate diasporas from other categories of migration and to differentiate among different diasporas.

The circumstances previously mentioned can be understood from a historical point of view, since migration is considerably important in the course of history and even more in a country like the United States. Therefore, the peculiarities of the Irish migration to the United States and the historical circumstances that surrounded it are important to analyze the diaspora writings of this community. In Tim Pat Coogan's *Wherever Green is Worn* (2001), the concept of Irish diaspora is clearly presented:

Abroad, the history of Irish emigration is one of the success stories of the world. Dispossessed and ravaged by war, famine and centuries of economic decline, the Irish nevertheless managed to battle their way to pinnacles of political and economic success, epitomized by the entry to the White House of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the descendant of a Famine emigrant from the County of Wexford. Success was not achieved without great suffering and loss, both in terms of life and human happiness. For some, the dream was never realized and they died nightmarish deaths: on the battlefields of Europe; in the coffin ships in which they fled the Famine; digging canals in the toxic swamps of New Orleans; or of alcoholism in the lonely doss-houses of the British Midlands. Some, however, not only hung in the lower rungs of the ladder of achievement, but battled their way to the top in the arts, the churches, finance, politics and the armies and navies of the world.
(x-xi)

Thus, it is shown that the Irish migration was marked by their desire to escape from the poverty and hunger they experienced in Ireland, in order to improve their way of life and even to rise socially. This definition can be applied to the Irish Diaspora in the United States, since in this quotation there are allusions to important events that provoked that the Irish people migrated, such as the Famine, and the difficulties they had to endure to migrate and prosper in the United States, digging canals in the toxic swamps of New Orleans. However, all these struggles and difficulties did not make them change their minds and they still tried to escape from the misery in which they lived in Ireland by moving to the United States. In fact, as shown in the quotation above, one of the best examples of the progress of the Irish in the United States is the thirty-fifth president of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. However, as said before, reaching this ideal American way of life was not easy and many Irish migrants have perished in the path towards a better life.

The Historical Irish Diaspora

In order to analyze a diasporic experience, the circumstances in which people migrated must be studied. Consequently, in this first section a historical overview of Irish migration to the United States is going to be presented. In order to do this, I have combined the information provided in Kevin Kenny's *The American Irish* (2000) and the article previously mentioned, "Diaspora and Comparison: The Global Irish as a Case Study" (2003), by the same author. Besides, to complete the information provided by Kenny, I have added some information from the book previously mentioned by Tim Pat Coogan, *Wherever Green is Worn* (2001).

A significant migration of Irish nationals to the American colonies, began at the eighteenth century, because the Irish people have been always willing to improve their precarious ways of life in their homeland provoked by famines, poverty, and conflicts with England. Consequently, a great number of Irish people came to America from the early eighteenth century. Regarding the conditions of this migration, they were very precarious, since the Irish people who came to North America were very poor and many had bad health; therefore many of them died in the journey. Because of the British policies against Catholics and Presbyterians passed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many of the Irish people, mainly Catholic, migrated to North America thinking of it as a promised land. For instance, in 1704 the 'Act to prevent the further growth of Popery' was passed by the British Parliament and it provoked that many Irish Catholics migrated, since this Act forced them to take an oath of loyalty to the Protestant Church. Consequently, the amount of Irish Catholics in North America hugely increased. However, it is proved that the first Irish that migrated to America were Protestant. In fact, 350,000 Protestants migrated to the United States in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and consequently nowadays over half of the North American population with Irish origins is Protestant.

In the late nineteenth century, the promised land, the United States, was even more difficult to reach since Ellis Island was opened as the point in which migrants from all the parts of the world, not only Irish ones, were examined and selected in order to let them move into the country or not. Therefore, due to the unhealthiness and poor state they had as a consequence of their harsh life in Ireland, many Irish immigrants were not

allowed to establish themselves in the United States. In spite of this, 2.1 million Irish fled their country and 1.5 million of them moved to North America in the mid-19th century, because of the great famine. The actual amount of Irish people who moved into the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is difficult to calculate as many Irish Catholic migrated without paying for their passage, since they sold their labor force for a time in exchange of it.

In the mid-twentieth century, Irish migration decreased. For instance, in the 1950s only 57,332 Irish migrants reached the United States. This decrease in the amount of Irish migrants can be due to the economic prosperity experienced in Ireland in the second half of the twentieth century. In fact, in the 1970s there was a process of return of Irish migrants, both people who migrated individually and family groups. Broadly speaking, Irish migrants were different from other European migrants. At the beginning, they did not migrate in families, but individually. Besides, the rate of male and female Irish migration in the United States was similar and they were generally young unskilled people. Therefore, they differ from other groups of migrants as the Jews that migrated in family groups and had high qualifications. However, as the twentieth century passed, the majority of Irish migrants and Irish Americans had more qualifications.

Since they had better qualifications, the second and third generation of people with Irish origins were part of the political, both regional and national, sphere of the United States, as well as other specific employments; as porters, cleaners, firemen, policemen, lawyers, etc. As a consequence, the conditions in which Irish migrants and Irish Americans lived in America ameliorated in comparison to the first Irish immigrants that moved there. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the majority of Irish immigrants were settled in states as Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. There, at first, they lived in the suburbs, but later on they lived in marginal areas. For instance, in New York, most of the Irish population was concentrated in Queens or Brooklyn. As their economic and social status improved, they moved to other states as Florida, Arizona, and California. The inner cities' Irish communities, which were settled in cities like Chicago, moved from marginal areas to better places, and these deprived areas were occupied by African Americans and Latinos. The movement of Irish immigrants and Irish Americans to better places shows that they were gradually assimilated in the society of the United States.

The historical overview presented in the previous paragraphs shows that the Irish diaspora can be defined by using two words: 'struggle' and 'improvement'. Taking into account their experiences at first in Ireland and then in America, their history is marked by the difficulties they had to endure. However, they found their own path towards progress improving their life in America and becoming part of American society. All the historical circumstances in which their experiences in America are framed can be linked with the literary diaspora that is going to be analyzed next, since diasporic texts produced by Irish migrants or Irish Americans are usually inspired by the circumstances they had to endure to settle in their new homeland.

The Literary Irish Diaspora

In diasporic literature, the historical component is very important since diasporic works are based in actual migrants' experiences or framed into important historical events. In fact, this type of literature describes the migrants' conditions in their new homes in a realistic or fictional way.

According to the different chapters edited by Oona Frawley in *Memory Ireland* (2012), there exists a great differentiation between the nineteenth century and the twentieth century Irish diasporic texts. Indeed, the Irish diasporic works from both centuries differ in the way that reality and identity are presented. However, there was not a complete shift from one century to another, since in twentieth century diasporas some common characteristics from the ones of the nineteenth century are still present. Furthermore, according to the book already mentioned, Irish diaspora is usually told throughout memory writings, that is autobiographical texts not composed in the moment when their plots are set and which can include fantastic or realistic events. Therefore, in the next paragraphs the different elements that characterize diasporic texts from both nineteenth and twentieth centuries are going to be presented according to the contributors to Frawley's collection.

These memoirs have evolved throughout time from a romantic evocation of a fantasy Ireland in the nineteenth century, to a more accurate description of the reality of the Irish migrants' situation in the twentieth century as a way of rewriting Irish memory.

The Nineteenth-century diasporic idealization of Ireland is related to the migrants' sense of Irishness. In fact, this sense of Irishness shows the romantic nationalism and the sense of deterritorialization which were experienced by the Irish migrants at that time in the United States. Regarding the implications of romantic nationalism, it is related with the idealization of Ireland presenting it as the 'paradise' from where the Irish were expelled. In fact, the view of Ireland as an ideal place was mainly constructed on the idea of deterritorialization. This new idea is strongly rooted in the Irish migrants' feeling of being expropriated from their own cultural background, history, language, and even land, by England. Therefore, the romantic nationalism and the feeling of deterritorialization are connected, since they were the basis of the concept of Irishness of that time. In fact, as they were forced to flee from their own country, they created a romantic or even mythical image of it. As a result of this view of Irishness, a union among Irish migrants was born, since they turned to constructed images of an ideal Ireland as a way to be united against the misfortunes they had to endure in the United States.

One of the best examples of nineteenth-century diasporic texts is the work written by James McHenry, *The Wilderness, or the Youthful Days of Washington* (1823). This novel published in 1823 depicts the life of one of the first Irish migrants' groups in the United States, the one established in the colony of Pittsburgh.

In twentieth-century diasporas, a more accurate vision of Ireland and the lives of the migrants in their homelands and in their new homes are presented. Indeed, since diasporic writings of this century were conceived as a realistic recreation of the Irish experience, they can be considered as part of the twentieth-century Irish history. Furthermore, the sense of Irishness presented in nineteenth-century diasporic works is still relevant, but its presentation is more realistic in the twentieth century, since it is not only based in a romantic view of their homeland but in actual elements like religion and social status.

The key aspects in this faithful presentation of their past are alienation, homesickness, and compunction. The feeling of guilt the Irish migrants felt in the twentieth century for having run away from their homeland leaving their beloved relatives (compunction) is reflected in twentieth-century diasporic texts, as is the nostalgia they felt towards Ireland and their families (homesickness), though their lives improved in

comparison to the conditions they had had to endure in Ireland. In fact, from a historical point of view, in the United States some of the most relevant manifestations of the nostalgia they felt for their country are the Irish cultural associations like the Irish American Cultural Institute. However, historically Irish migrants, mainly in the first half of the twentieth century, felt as strangers in their new homes (alienation), as reflected in this type of literature, since it had to pass some time until American people accepted them in society because of the stereotypes related to Irish people. For instance, American society considered that Irish people were uncivilized and had to be tamed. This stereotype towards the Irish, reflected in twentieth-century diasporic literature, is inherited from the view that the English had of them.

However, a complete shift between diasporic texts from both nineteenth and twentieth centuries has not been achieved in the twentieth century. In fact, in the Irish diasporas from the twentieth century there are still some nostalgic traces of a fantastic and romantic Ireland, though Ireland is presented in a more realistic way. This is so, because as they wanted to reimagine their past, they fell into some ideal stereotypes about Ireland. Furthermore, there is still an important sense of nineteenth-century Irishness in twentieth-century diasporic texts, with some differences though, as the idea of Irishness is now connected with Catholicism and the working classes. In addition to the new aspects added to the idea of Irishness – religion and social status – the concept of ‘Un-Englishness’ is still essential in twentieth century diasporas as the resentment they felt towards English people. As introduced in the idea of nineteenth-century Irish identity, the Irish people generally blamed the English people for forcing them to leave their country.

One of the most relevant examples of twentieth-century diasporas is Colm Toibin’s *Brooklyn* (2009), which shows the story of an Irish migrant woman in the city of New York in the mid-twentieth century.

Therefore, there are new important elements in Irish diasporic writings of the twentieth century such as a more accurate memory of the Irish past and the new aspects added to the sense of Irishness. However, from my point of view these aspects do not show a shift, but a development of the idea of Irishness and Irish experience, since they added new elements to the sense of identity and narrated more realistic experiences and feelings to twentieth century diasporas in comparison with the ones of the nineteenth

century. Therefore, memory and identity are going to be explored in Frank McCourt's *'Tis: A Memoir* (1999) since they are two of the most important elements in twentieth-century Irish diasporic texts.

A Twentieth-Century Diasporic Novel

Frank McCourt's *'Tis: A Memoir (1999)*

As we have just seen, Irish literary diasporas have developed from an idealized view of the migrants' past in Ireland and the idea of Un-Englishness as a way of creating a sense of Irishness and consequently of union among migrants, to a more accurate overview of the Irish migrants' past experiences in Ireland and a new sense of Irishness in which Catholicism and working class social status are the basis. In this context of changing from one type of diaspora to another is framed Frank McCourt's autobiographical novel *'Tis: A Memoir (1999)*.

Frank McCourt's *'Tis* is the continuation of his first autobiographical novel *Angela's Ashes (1996)*, which describes his early life in the United States and then in Ireland. In fact, McCourt was born in New York and after a few years living there and some traumatic experiences for his family, as the death of his younger sister, he moved to Limerick, Ireland. This novel finished with McCourt leaving Ireland and returning to the United States in order to improve his life. Therefore, *'Tis* can be described as the work in which he presents his experiences in the United States in his adult life. At the beginning of this narration, McCourt describes his first years in the United States, which were marked by misery and difficulties. However, he enlisted in the United States Army during the Korean War, though he never fought due to his poor health, and this meant a huge change in his life as it began to improve. After returning from the Army, he got better labor opportunities, but above all his dream of studying at the University could be achieved, though it was difficult for him to study and work at the same time. In this way, he became an English teacher and improved not only his life but the life of his family. Therefore, Frank McCourt's life can be described as a life of overcoming struggle and misery with a happy ending.

'Tis can be considered one of the best examples of a twentieth-century literary diasporic novel. This affirmation is not only based on the fact that this work covers the main character's experiences during the twentieth century, from 1949 to 1985, but also on account of the features of this type of diaspora – a realistic and accurate view of his

past in Ireland, and a new sense of Irishness – which are presented by the author to describe his experiences in the United States as an Irish migrant. This new image of the Irish past, typical of twentieth-century diasporas, is marked by three main aspects: homesickness, compunction, and alienation, which are largely shown in Frank McCourt's work. In addition to this, in McCourt's *'Tis* is also shown the new sense of Irishness, characteristic from twentieth-century diasporic texts, in which being Catholic and a member of the working class are essential.

However, there are still some passages in which nineteenth-century diasporic traces can be seen, mainly in regards of the idea of Un-Englishness. Moreover, it is important to point out that in this diasporic text the main character finally breaks with some elements considered crucial for twentieth-century diasporic texts since his idea of the American dream and his personality lead him to overcome them. Indeed, his American dream was not based on getting success by just working, but on getting a higher education that makes him improve personally, economically, and socially. We will see him trying to break with the homesickness he feels at first for his homeland on account of the hardships that prevails in Ireland, and trying to break with the sense of Irishness that is imposed on him in order to achieve his goals and rise socially and economically.

In what follows, I will carry an analysis of these aspects, the new sense of memory and identity, in the diasporic work written by Frank McCourt, *'Tis*, in order to prove that this novel can be considered a twentieth-century diaspora with some obvious reminiscences of the nineteenth-century diasporic memoirs and some novelties with regard to other twentieth-century similar texts.

Memory, or Recalling the Past: Homesickness, Compunction and Alienation

a) Homesickness

At the beginning of McCourt's novel there is a constant recalling of his difficult and miserable past in Ireland. As a result, two different types of nostalgic memories are shown. On the one hand, there are nostalgic memories related to the longing he feels for his homeland, Ireland, and the activities that he carried there. On the other hand, there are several passages in which McCourt shows how he misses his family when he migrates to the United States and how lonely he feels since he does not know anyone in New York City.

This constant reimagination of his homeland due to the nostalgia he feels for Ireland and his family is shown in the first chapters of *'Tis*:

It's lovely to go into a church like St. Vincent's where you know the Mass will be just like the Mass in Limerick or anywhere in the world. You could go to Samoa or Kabul and they'd have the same Mass and even if they wouldn't let me be an altar boy in Limerick I still have the Latin my father taught me and no matter where I go I can respond to the priest. No one can scoop out the contents of my head, all the saints' feast days I know by heart, the Mass Latin, the chief towns and products of the thirty-two counties of Ireland, songs galore of Ireland's sufferings and Oliver Goldsmith's lovely poem "The Deserted Village." They could put me in jail and throw away the key but they could never stop me from dreaming my way around Limerick and out along the banks of the Shannon. (68)

This quotation presents how a Catholic mass reminds McCourt of any mass in Limerick and of Irish songs, poems, landscapes. In fact, at the end of this passage he states that he will never forget Ireland as he will reimage it during all his life. It is remarkable to see the type of elements that remind him of Ireland. On the one hand, as the Catholic mass is one of the elements that he links to Ireland it shows how Catholicism was important in the Irish cultural background and education. For instance, he explains that his father taught him Latin in order to answer the priest during the mass. On the other hand, he alludes to the culture and places of Ireland. But above all, it is remarkable how suffering is important in the Irish collective mind as he remembers an important poem about this topic. Therefore, it is shown that Catholicism and suffering are two main images or ideas used in order to identify Ireland, resulting in nostalgic elements for Irish migrants which are idealized in this novel.

If Mrs. Austin won't let me have a light I can still sit up in the bed or lie down or I can decide to stay in or go out. I won't go out tonight because of my bald head and I don't mind because I can stay here and turn my mind into a film about Limerick. This is the greatest discovery I've made from lying in the room, that if I can't read because of my eyes or Mrs. Austin complaining about the light I can start any kind of a film in my head. If it's midnight here it's five in the morning in Limerick and I can picture my mother and brothers asleep with the dog, Lucky, growling at the world and my uncle, Ab Sheehan, snorting away in his bed from all the pints he had the night before and farting from his great feed of fish and chips. (55)

This makes me wonder if ever I had been sent to live in comfort with a relation would I have missed my family? It's hard to think I would have missed the same tea and bread every day, the collapsed bed swarming with fleas, a lavatory shared by all the families in the lane. No, I wouldn't have missed that but I would have missed the way it was with my mother and brothers, the talk around the table and the nights around the fire when we saw worlds in the flames, little caves and volcanoes and all kinds of shapes and images. I would have missed that even if I lived with a rich grandmother and I felt sorry for Mike Small who had no brothers and sisters and no fire to sit at. (263)

The examples above illustrate how much he misses his family, as he imagines what they are doing in Limerick, and the loneliness he feels in New York as he does not have any relative or friend yet. Therefore, it shows that his nostalgia does not lie in an idealized image of his past in Ireland, but in everyday activities or situations. In fact, this sentiment resulting from the most common situations is more accurate than the one felt out of an idealized image of the past, as nineteenth-century diasporic texts show. Furthermore, McCourt feels this homesickness in some important family events as Christmas, when he only wants to get the affection of his relatives, even though their celebrations are more humble than the ones of other families:

I wish I could open a door somewhere and have people say, Oh, hi, Frank, you're just in time. The people walking here and there on the streets of New York take it all for granted. They bring presents and get presents and have their big Christmas dinners and they never know there are people walking up one street and down the other on the holiest day of the year [...] Or I wouldn't mind being back in Limerick with my mother and brothers and the nice goose. (70)

However, this nostalgic reimagination of Ireland shown in the previous quotations breaks at a point in the novel. In fact, when he goes to Ireland for the first time after living in the United States he breaks with nostalgia since he sees that everything is still the same: misery and poverty. Reality strikes his nostalgic reimagination of Ireland. Indeed, he realizes that he only misses his family, though they lived in complete misery, but not what he has lived in Ireland. At the same time, though the economic situation of his family has improved, they do not have the same economic level that McCourt can afford in the

United States. As a result, he wants his family, especially his brothers, to migrate to the United States with him since he thinks that their future will be more hopeful there:

I don't know what's the use of coming back to Limerick where children are still running around in bare feet and looking at the world through scabby eyes, where my brother Michael has to wash dishes and my mother takes her time moving to a decent house. This is not the way I expected it to be and it makes me so sad I wish I were back in Germany drinking beer in Lenggries. Someday I'll get them out of here, my mother, Michael, Alphie, over to New York where Malachy is already working and ready to join the air force so that he won't be drafted and sent to Korea. I don't want Alphie to leave school at the age of fourteen like the rest of us. (135)

Therefore, from this inflectional point to the end of the novel he only shows homesickness for his country when he is afraid of an unknown experience in the United States, but not because he really wants to return to Ireland or even wishes not to have come to America. In fact, his ironic view of how it would be his life in Ireland and the ironical tone he uses show that he does not want a typical life there. Thus, he only feels a real homesickness for his family and friends and what he has lived with them, though it was a miserable life:

I'm sorry I ever left Limerick. I could be back there with a pensionable job in the post office, postman respected by one and all, married to a nice girl named Maura, raising two children, confessing my sins every Saturday, in a state of grace every Sunday, a pillar of the community, a credit to my mother, dying in the bosom of Mother Church, mourned by a large circle of friends and relations. (299)

b) Compunction

As said before, another important element in the process of reimagination of McCourt's past experiences is compunction, typical of twentieth-century diasporas. He felt compunction for living a better life in America than his family in Ireland, though at first his life in the United States was not very comfortable or happy. Therefore, this guilt is due to the comparison he makes between what he is experiencing in the United States and what his family is experiencing in Ireland. Even though the conditions he endures in New York are harsh and full of difficulties, the experiences his family endures in Ireland are even harder. As shown in the quotation below, he would like to see all the poor people in Ireland progress in America and then return to their homeland to live a happy and easy life:

It's hard to see children shivering when they have to leave their beds for school or Mass and there's no heat in the house like the heat we have here in New York with radiators singing away at six in

the morning. I'd like to empty out the lanes of Limerick and bring all the poor people to America and put them in houses with heat and give them warm clothes and shoes and let them stuff themselves with porridge and sausages. Someday I'll make millions and I'll bring the poor people to America and send them back to Limerick fat-arsed and waddling up and down O'Connell Street in light colors. (55-56)

In addition to the previous quotation, since he has had to endure hunger in his childhood in Ireland, he feels guilty of having rejected a meal. In fact, this presents the precarious situation people in Ireland have to live after the Great Famine: "I'm not much in the mood for Hungarian goulash anymore and this is the first time in my life I ever pushed food away. If they could see me in Limerick now pushing away the food they'd say I was gone mad entirely" (118).

Furthermore, he does not only feel compunction for his family or the people in Ireland, but for other European migrants that have to move to the United States to live a better life. Indeed, he feels sorry for the ones that were not admitted in the United States alluding to the controls migrants have to pass in Staten and Ellis Islands and wonders about how many like him, with a bad physical condition, were not allowed to enter the country. This last thought is the one that makes him feel more guilty, as he can fulfil his dreams in the United States but the ones with poor health like him were not allowed in:

We ride the Staten Island Ferry and it's lovely to stand on deck, hand in hand, to watch the Manhattan skyline recede and loom even though I can't stop thinking again of the ones who were sent back with the bad eyes and the bad lungs and wondering what it was like for them in towns and villages all over Europe once they had a glimpse of New York, the tall towers over the water and the way the lights twinkle at dusk with tugboats hooting and ships blaring in the Narrows. Did they see and hear all this through the windows at Ellis Island? Did the memory bring pain and did they ever again try to slip into this country through a place where there weren't men in uniform rolling back their eyelids and tapping at their chests? (262)

c) *Alienation*

Alienation is another key aspect of a typical presentation of the past in twentieth-century diasporic memoirs. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the Irish people were not well accepted in America and this situation continues in a way during the rest of this century. Indeed, some people, even other migrants, thought that the Irish people were undesirable: "Siddown, says Hannah. Lemme tell you something, Irish boy. I don't give a shit about your people. You may be nice, my sister says you're nice, you bring nice doughnuts, but right under your skin you're nothing but shit." (65)

According to what is narrated in the novel, this way of thinking is the result of many stereotypes about the Irish that were prevalent at that time. According to McCourt's diaspora, the most important stereotypes attributed to the Irish are the ones of the uneducated or savage and the drunkard.

The former one is related to their poor educational background, since they have to start working at a very young age. Consequently, the Irish people are seen as uneducated or even not very intelligent. This way of thinking is shown in the following quotation where they are accused of lacking any type of artistic skill. In fact, the character to whom this quotation belonged also uses a very prototypical image of Ireland, as a very rural area and not very illustrated, in order to justify the lack of artistic skills of the Irish people. Therefore, this stereotype, the Irish as uneducated or savage, comes from the conception that Ireland is a rural country in which people are not cultivated or even they are like animals.

That's what I mean. You're nice people, the Irish, great singers, John McCormack. Great cops, politicians, priests. Lotta Irish priests but no artists. When didja ever see an Irish painting on the wall? A Murphy, a Reilly, a Rooney? Nah, kid. I think it's because your people know one color, green. Right? So my advice to you is stay away from anything to do with color. Join the cops, run for office, pick up your paycheck and have a nice life, no hard feelings. (218)

Besides, the stereotype of the savage is not only related to a lack of education, but to religion. However, this stereotype is answered by the main character, Frank McCourt, as he alludes to the Puritans' hypocrite behavior since they are horrified by sex but not by killing women considered to be witches. Indeed, McCourt is shocked about the image Americans have about their English Protestant ancestors, since it is very different from the one that the Irish people have. He still sees English Protestants as the ones who exploited the Irish people and not as the fair founding fathers venerated by the people from the United States.

If I hadn't slumped with the weariness I would have reminded her how her ancestors hanged women right and left for being witches, how they were a dirty-minded lot, rolling their eyes in shock and horror at the mention of sex, but having a grand time between their thighs listening in court to hysterical Puritan maidens claiming the devil appeared in various forms and frolicked with them in the woods and how they became so devoted to him all decency went out the window. I would have told Alberta how the Irish never carried on like that. In the whole history of Ireland only one witch was hanged and she was probably English and deserved it. And, just to clinch it, I would have told her the first witch to be hanged in New England was Irish and they did it to her because she said her prayers in Latin and wouldn't stop. (396)

The last stereotype is closely connected to the belief that the Irish people are always drinking. In fact, as shown in the novel, many Irish men are willing to drink alcohol at any time of the day, but this cannot be a reason to generalize with that complex issue. For instance, many people thought that the only thing the Irish people had in Ireland was alcohol, thus they were thought of as being alcoholics. In fact, in the following quotation, the character talking makes a kind of metaphor between cockroaches and the Irish people under the alcoholic stigma mainly in the last sentence:

She's Swedish and she can tell I'm Irish. She hopes I don't drink and if I do I'm not to bring girls into this room under any circumstances, drunk or sober. No girls, no food, no drink. Cockroaches smell food a mile away and once they're in you have them forever. She says, Of course you never saw a cockroach in Ireland. There's no food there. All you people do is drink. Cockroaches would starve to death or turn into drunks. (18)

In addition to this example, even Frank McCourt's students had this idea of the Irish people, as shown in the following lines. In fact, what is shocking in this quotation is that even his students consider that, as he is Irish, he is a drunkard, and consequently they do not treat him with the same respect as they treat other teachers.

Teacher, you Scotch or somethin' ?
No. Irish. Oh, yeah?
Irish like to drink, eh? All that whiskey, eh? You gonna be here Paddy's Day?
I'll be here on St. Patrick's Day.
You not gonna be drunk an' throwin' up at the parade like all the Irish?
I said I'll be here. All right, open your books. (303)

In brief, the three main elements in the process of reimagination of the past typical of twentieth-century diasporic novels – homesickness, compunction, and alienation – are clearly presented in McCourt's novel, though he goes beyond twentieth-century diasporas when he breaks with nostalgia at some point of the novel.

Identity, or a New Concept of Irishness: Catholicism and Social Status

In twentieth-century literary Irish diasporas, two new aspects were added to the Irish identity: being Catholic and belonging to the working class. Therefore, the concept of Irishness has evolved; during the twentieth century, being Irish was not only related to the idea of Un-Englishness and the sense of deterritorialization that was caused by it, as in the nineteenth century. However, there are still some examples in the novel of the sense of Un-Englishness as a main characteristic of being Irish, and consequently of deterritorialization.

The professor is saying the Pilgrims left England to escape religious persecution and that puzzles me because the Pilgrims were English themselves and the English were always the ones who persecuted everyone else, especially the Irish. I'd like to raise my hand and tell the professor how the Irish suffered for centuries under English rule but I'm sure everyone in this class has a high school diploma and if I open my mouth they'll know I'm not one of them. (194)

McCourt alludes directly to the religious persecution of the English against the Irish people and to how the Irish people have suffered as a result. In fact, it can be connected with his idea of Protestantism and how he was shocked at the image the American people have of the Protestants, as explained in the previous section. In fact, in his period in the university, it was the first time in his life when he listened to people referring in a positive way to the Protestants. Therefore, it is not strange that these positive thoughts and images about the Protestants in America shock him, and this also shows how the image of a same community changes depending on the point of view.

However, in the twentieth century, being Irish in the United States also meant being Catholic and belonging to the working class. As shown in the novel, the resentment towards British people as part of being Irish lost importance in the twentieth century in America in favor of connecting Irishness with Catholicism and working class status. Firstly, in regards to Catholicism in the novel, it is shown as a stereotype connected to the Irish people and as a stigma that the main character has to carry throughout his life in the United States. In regards to Catholicism as a stereotype, it can be considered so because every time someone perceives that he is Irish, mainly in the University, he is overwhelmed with questions or allusions to the Catholic faith. In fact, this situation is shown in the first quotation below in which the teacher assumes that McCourt has the same ideas that the Catholic Church has since he is Irish and Catholic. Besides, in the

second quotation below it is shown how he is bothered about people who assume that, since he is Irish, he knows everything about Catholicism and strongly defends it. In fact, everyone sees him as Catholic only because he is Irish, though he does not want to identify himself with that faith.

At the next meeting of the psychology class the professor asks me a question about Jung and the collective unconscious and the moment I open my mouth I know everyone is staring at me as if to say, Who's the one with the Irish brogue? The professor himself says, Oh, do I detect an Irish accent? and I have to admit he does. He tells the class that, of course, the Catholic Church has been traditionally hostile to psychoanalysis. Isn't that right, Mr. McCourt? and I feel he's accusing me. Why is he talking about the Catholic Church just because I tried to answer his question on the collective unconscious and am I supposed to defend the Church? (223)

It's the same with Catholicism. If I answer a question they hear my accent and that means I'm a Catholic and ready to defend Mother Church to the last drop of my blood. Some professors like to taunt me by sneering at the Virgin Birth, the Holy Trinity, the celibacy of St. Joseph, the Inquisition, the priest-ridden people of Ireland. When they talk like that I don't know what to say because they have the power to lower my grade and damage my average so that I won't be able to follow the American dream and that might drive me to Albert Camus and the daily decision not to commit suicide. I fear professors with their high degrees and the way they might make me look foolish before the other students, especially the girls. (237)

As for the idea of having a working-class status being one of the elements on which the Irish identity is based, it has to do with economic status and, again, the Catholic religion. In fact, according to what is shown in McCourt's novel, Protestants had a higher economic status. Therefore, since in a Capitalist society the higher social classes are composed by the richest people, Irish Catholic people belonged to the lower classes. On the one hand, it is shown that Protestant people were richer than Catholics, who were considered very poor, since the Protestants exploited the Irish. On the other hand, McCourt fears that his deteriorated physical state, mainly his teeth, that is the result of the poverty he had to endure in Ireland, make him fail on his American dream. In fact, for McCourt getting a job was extremely complicated, since his physical appearance is described as very deteriorated. Consequently, it is shown that social status is linked with wealth, and this with religion. Thus, belonging to a lower group in society, meaning being poor and Catholic in Ireland, could risk your physical health and appearance, which can make you fail in your purposes.

I wanted to ask what was the proper way to be nice to rich Protestants who raise racehorses but I couldn't for fear the priest might think I was a fool. I heard the Protestants say the Irish people were so charming and their children so adorable you hardly noticed how poor they were. I knew that if I ever talked to the rich Protestants I'd have to smile and show my destroyed teeth and that would be the end of it. The minute I made some money in America I'd have to rush to a dentist to

have my smile mended. You could see from the magazines and the films how the smile opened doors and brought girls running and if I didn't have the smile I might as well go back to Limerick and get a job sorting letters in a dark back room at the post office where they wouldn't care if you hadn't a tooth in your head. (6-7)

Besides, it is depicted how people in the United States reject Irish migrants, because of their social status. In this instance, McCourt is rejected by a girl, before becoming an English teacher, since she considers that she has a higher social status: she is a private secretary, meaning that she has a higher level of education, and also she thinks that he is not attractive enough to go out with her since he was in a precarious physical state at the beginning of his experience in America: "Home? she says. You kiddin' me. That's a laugh. I'm a secretary, a private secretary, and you don't even have a high school diploma. I mean, did you look in the mirror lately? She laughs and my face is on fire again." (28).

Furthermore, it is important to analyze that he wants to improve his economic status, hence his social status, by having an education, which was his goal. In fact, he has always had the desire to have an education and get more cultivated, as seen in the first part of his memoirs, *Angela's Ashes*. Therefore, his desire for an education is a constant in his life and has much more importance than for any American college student since he has to make a greater effort to achieve it:

In June the papers are filled with stories about university commencement exercises and pictures of happy graduates and their families. I try to look at the pictures but the train rocks and jolts and I'm thrown against passengers who give me superior looks because of my work clothes. I want to announce that this is only temporary, that one day I'll be going to school and wearing a suit like them. (173)

In addition to the two new elements added to the sense of Irishness, Catholicism and working-class social status, and after closely reading McCourt's novel, I consider that there is another element in the novel important for the construction of the Irish identity: the Irish accent pejoratively called 'the brogue'. The reason for which I think that the Irish accent is important in the idea of Irishness is the fact that it is a way of identifying the Irish people, as this fragment shows: "If professors look directly at me and ask questions I can never finish the answers with the way they always say, Oh, do I detect a brogue? After that I have no peace. Whenever an Irish writer is mentioned, or anything Irish, everyone turns to me as if I'm the authority." (237). Moreover, it is shown that the Irish

accent is related to unprofessionalism, since McCourt has problems when applying for a work as a teacher because of his accent:

The Academic Chairman at Grady Vocational High School in Brooklyn says, yeah, he'd like to help me out but, You know, with that brogue you'd have trouble with the kids, they might think you talk funny and teaching is hard enough when you speak properly and doubly hard with a brogue. He wants to know how I passed the speech part of the teachers' license examination and when I tell him I was issued a substitute license on condition I take remedial speech he says, Yeah, maybe you could come back when you don't sound like Paddy-off-the-boat, ha ha ha. (288)

I sit on the Staten Island Ferry thinking of teacher recruiters from suburban high schools at NYU, how they told me I seemed intelligent and enthusiastic but really my accent would be a problem. Oh, they had to admit it was charming, reminded them of that nice Barry Fitzgerald in *Going My Way* but but but. They said they had high standards of speech in their schools and it wouldn't be possible to make an exception in my case since the brogue was infectious and what would parents say if their kids came home sounding like Barry Fitzgerald or Maureen O'Hara? (295)

In McCourt's *'Tis*, there are new aspects with regard to other twentieth-century Irish literary diasporas that make this work different from other twentieth-century texts of its same subgenre. This is so because he does not want to be considered Irish or Irish-American. Indeed, he needs to get rid of all the burden of being Irish that at some point stops him in a way to achieve his American dream. He defends that he cannot deal with the problems of being Irish in another country where he has already enough obstacles to fulfill his goals: "There was a darkness in my head from the whiskey and I was ready to tell Paddy and the old man, I'm weary of Ireland's sufferings and I can't live in two countries at the same time." (275). In fact, this recurrent allusion to one's origins is typical of American society, but in this case McCourt tries to escape from his Irish identity and live only as a common American, since being Irish is detrimental to him. He is constantly turning to this idea of only being a young man trying to reach his dreams by adding that he has enough problems in America, his job, the university, etc. to be worried about being Irish:

I'd like to stand up in those classes and announce to the world that I'm too busy to be Irish or Catholic or anything else, that I'm working day and night to make a living, trying to read books for my courses and falling asleep in the library, trying to write term papers with footnotes and bibliographies on a typewriter that betrays me with the letters "a" and "j" so that I have to go back and retype whole pages since it's impossible to avoid "a" and "j," falling asleep on subway trains all the way to the last stop so that I'm embarrassed I have to ask people where I am when I don't even know what borough I'm in. (235)

In sum, Catholicism and working-class social status are two important elements associated to being Irish in twentieth-century diasporic texts. However, there are still instances of Un-Englishness, typical of nineteenth-century diasporas. Besides, it is remarkable how McCourt tries to escape from his Irish identity in order to progress in the United States, in the face of all the problems he had to endure there.



In short, it is shown that *'Tis* can be considered a clear example of a twentieth-century diaspora, since it fits in its main aspects, the presentation of a more realistic past and the new idea of Irishness, though the main character, Frank McCourt, tries to break with some of them in order to achieve his American dream: having an education. On the one hand, a more actual image of the past based on homesickness, compunction, and alienation, typical of twentieth-century diasporas, is accomplished. On the other hand, it presents the new sense of Irishness constructed in twentieth-century diasporas with its basis in Catholicism and working-class social status. Consequently and as said before, this memoir is a twentieth-century diaspora in which the main character breaks with some of its main characteristics in relation to other twentieth-century literary diasporas to achieve his goals.

Conclusions

In order to demonstrate that Frank McCourt's *'Tis* is a clear example of a twentieth-century Irish diasporic novel, which was the main aim pursued with this B. A. Thesis, it was necessary to present firstly the concepts of 'diaspora' and of 'the Irish diaspora'. The later one was described into its two main levels, historical and literary, showing that the literary Irish diaspora depends to a great extent on the circumstances of the historical one. Besides, it was necessary to present the differences between the nineteenth and twentieth literary Irish diasporas.

The close reading of McCourt's novel allows us to confirm that even if it is one of the best examples of a twentieth-century Irish diasporic memoir, it presents some of the features proper of the nineteenth-century diasporic works as well as innovative elements that represent a novelty in regards of twentieth-century literary diasporas. These three aspects of McCourt's autobiographical memoir have been framed in the study of the concepts of 'memory' and 'identity'.

As the main elements of the twentieth-century literary Irish diaspora presented in McCourt's work, according to Aidan Arrowsmith's contribution, the most important ones are a realistic vision of his past experiences in Ireland and as a migrant in the United States, and his new vision of the sense of Irishness.

On the one hand, the realistic representation of McCourt's past is fulfilled by the concepts of homesickness, compunction, and alienation, described by Arrowsmith. Indeed, nostalgia for the Ireland he left behind, the pain at the suffering of the Irish and of his own family, and the lack of fitting in are the three elements in which McCourt's realistic representation of memory is based on.

On the other hand, the new Irish identity presented in McCourt's novel is not only based on the hate the Irish people feel against the English for forcing them to leave their homeland. Besides, Catholicism and working class social status are two of the most important elements in the construction of the Irish identity in this work. Moreover, from my point of view, another element can be added to the sense of Irishness presented in this work: the Irish accent, since it is a crucial aspect of identification of the Irish people.

However, the rupture with nineteenth-century literary diasporas is not complete. In fact, the presence of the sense of Un-Englishness and deterritorialization, typical of nineteenth-century diasporic works, is essential in *'Tis*.

Finally, McCourt innovates with respect to the twentieth-century diasporic novels. In fact, he totally breaks with the homesickness he feels for his homeland, since the poor situation lived in Ireland impacted him, and with the sense of Irishness imposed on him that stops him in his path to achieve his dreams in the United States.

After analyzing the three diasporic characteristics that marked Frank McCourt's *'Tis*, it can be affirmed that it is one of the most clear examples of a twentieth-century diaspora and its relevance among the works of its subgenre. Furthermore, I consider that it is of a prime importance to continue analyzing this type of works as a form of getting a better understanding of migrants' experiences and of the conversion of these type of experiences into literary works.

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