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HOME AS REPRESENTATION: SPACE AND
IDENTITY IN EDNA O'BRIEN'S *SAINTS AND SINNERS*
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de

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Abstract

In this dissertation I explore a group of stories from the collection *Saints and sinners* (2011) by Irish author Edna O'Brien (1930-), whose prolific production spans from the 1960s to the present. For the study, I used both Augé's (2000) approaches to places and non-places and Heidegger's (1971) notion of building as dwelling, among others, in order to examine the ways in which the characters in the short stories under analysis create their homes in postmodern times. My focus was specifically on the construction of place in the stories and on women and men's experiences during their continuous search for a home, which eventually defines their identity. As results, I provide a description of homes as represented in the stories and a classification of places and their presence in identity construction. In view of those results, I sought to confirm my hypothesis that in *Saints and sinners* both space and identity are articulated as representations that the narrators and characters temporarily make theirs in order to create transient homes since there is a clear impossibility of truly permanent ones. I hope that the findings of this work provide useful insight for a better understanding of the issue and a broader comprehension of the significance of home in the framing of our still provisional identities.

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List of Abbreviations

SK.....Shovel kings

S.....Sinners

MC.....Madame Cassandra

BF.....Black flower

P.....Plunder

GG.....Green Georgette

MM.....Manhattan Medley

SMRR.....Send my roots rain

MTM.....My two mothers

OW..... Old wounds

Introduction

Edna O'Brien writes the most beautiful, aching stories of any writer, anywhere.

Alice Munro (2011)

Edna O'Brien was born in 1930 in a small village in the west of Ireland, which she describes as "enclosed, fervid, and bigoted" (Guppy, 1984, p. 22). Her parents, for example, openly rejected her literary inclination and her mother vociferously refused her career as a writer. O'Brien's first novel, *The Country Girls* (1962), broke the silence on sexual matters and social issues in the period following the Second World War. As a result of the frank portrayal of sex and her questioning about sexism within Catholicism, the novel was completely banned in Ireland, forcing the author to leave her native country. Since then, she has lived in London and written several novels, plays, poems and short stories. Informally considered the "mother" of Irish women writers, O'Brien is always celebrated for her talent as a realistic narrator.

In her works, she has long enquired into the emotional groundwater of family and personal resentment, the frustration of a life entrapped by exile and the exposition of sexual and romantic longing. Although many of the stories in *Saints and sinners* (O'Brien, 2011) return to those familiar themes, there is now the inevitable role of age, wisdom and sentimentality which well suits O'Brien's narrative and literary endowments. *Saints and sinners* includes 11 stories that introduce us to vivid descriptions of people that range from a lonely widow to an Irish shoveller and whose stories are set in places as far as the Irish countryside, London and New York. These stories broadly illustrate conspicuous aging, failed marriages and exile from self and home, together with a persistent sensation of loneliness which seems to flood the entire collection.

My first approach to O'Brien was as part of an internship project that I carried out in 2013 and for which I read *Girl with green eyes* (1962) and *August is a wicked month* (1965). In

2014, I read her then most recent short story collection, *Saints and sinners*, to which I felt particularly attracted, especially because of the subtle, delicate way in which they are written. O'Brien has an exceptional ability to make readers immerse within the characters' worlds and emotions. She gives us all that we need to picture beautiful but sinister sweet-smelling gardens and investigate the protagonists' secret stories and desires. While reading her narratives, we become part of them and finally they arouse our sympathy for the characters, no matter how despicable they may appear in our initial contact.

O'Brien's fiction has frequently been studied from a gender perspective and specifically examining women's problematic relationship with the rigid constraints of the patriarchal institutional structures in Ireland. Moreover, most critical work on O'Brien has been devoted to her initial works. There exists little criticism about her recent work and less about the spatial dimension as constructed by the characters in her short stories. In this dissertation I focus my research on the connection between space and identity and how they are articulated in the representations of home created by the characters in *Saints and sinners*.

In Chapter One, I provide my study with a theoretical framework that briefly develops the main concepts necessary for the development of my research. In Chapter Two, I introduce the corpus, the research questions and the methods I used to confirm my hypothesis. In Chapter Three, I offer a description of homes as represented in the stories. In Chapter Four, whose nature is more interpretative, I provide a classification of places and their presence in identity construction. In Chapter Five, I discuss features of place, identity and home in the short stories under consideration in light of the results presented in Chapters Three and Four. Finally, the last section provides closing comments on the significance of this research in view of the results of the process of reading and analysis of the selected corpus.

Chapter One

Theoretical Framework

Contemporary Identities

*In the World through which I travel,
I am endlessly creating myself.*

Frantz Fanon (1952)

Modernity was the dominant way of life central to the West and to the Modern age. It has repeatedly been linked with “the expansion of rationality, [which was] always embedded in the projects and practices of the state and capitalism” (Albrow, 1996, p. 53). Thus, the modern project expected rational identities and ordinary citizens involved in repeated, bureaucratic activities, generally carried out under the orders of the state. Now, however, we all seem to live in postmodern times and inhabit postmodern spaces. The postmodern condition contrasts sharply with the world of modernity. Eagleton (1996) describes the world in which we dwell as “contingent, ungrounded, diverse, unstable, indeterminate, a set of disunified cultures or interpretations which breed a degree of scepticism about the objectivity of truth, history and norms, the givenness of natures and the coherence of identities” (p. VII). We are suspicious of the traditional view of identity as static and unique and we tend to see identity as a process that is difficult to grasp because of its fragmented, constructed and contradictory nature.

Even though they are still constructed through the temporarily imagined communities of family, religion and nation, contemporary identities tend to be multiple, displaced and decentred. Moreover, they are not only usually limited by but they also expand beyond geographical, political, linguistic and cultural boundaries. They are assembled through the vertiginous and extended processes of interaction between people, institutions and practices,

which have gone further than it was expected in modern times and have caused our lives to be perceived as in a perpetual borderland (Michaelsen & Johnson, 1997). Identities, therefore, can never be understood as singular or static since identification is a never-ending process of construction. Hall (1996) argues that,

identities are never unified and increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. (p. 4)

Especially due to the processes of globalization, which both Albrow (1996) and Hall (1996) see as another stage of modernity, our identities are continuously involved in a constant process of construction and re-construction.

As we usually assign tags to individuals indicative of their gender, ethnicity or nationality, labelling is the first level in the construction of identity and it has a strong impact on the ways in which we see each other and ourselves. Labels need to be located in space and time. In other words, we need to understand identity in relation to given or precise spatial and temporal boundaries, not in the abstract. Thus, we now see labels not as *naturally* constructed unities. On the contrary, they develop within the play of specific modalities of power, creating difference and exclusion. However, it seems to be true that, throughout our lives, we reach points of relative closure in which our labels represent some stability. A distinction should be made then between *self-identity*, or “the verbal conceptions we hold about ourselves and our emotional identifications with those self-descriptions,” and *social identity*, or “the expectations and opinions that others have of us” (Barker, 2003, p. 220). Both necessarily inform the perceptions of ourselves in the light of those labels we socially acquire with time.

Thus, instead of asking “who we are” or “where we came from,” as if both were fixed pieces of information, we should ask how we have been represented and how that representation stands for us. For this study, we adopt Hall's (1997) initial definition of

representation: "Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language" (p. 17). It is only through that connection between concepts and language that we can refer to the real or imaginary world and it is also through representation that we conceive both our self- and social identities. Furthermore, and as already stated, we consider identity as cultural construction, thus concurring with Hall (2005) in that it is a process of becoming rather than one of being.

In this context, the narrativization of experience, the story we tell about ourselves (Sarup, 1996), emerges as a second level in the construction of identity. Therefore, identities are not only shaped as a form of representation but also within socio-temporal discourse. They require to be recognized as a product within specific discursive formations and practices in a particular historical and institutional space. Identities are usually not constructed outside difference but through it. Bhabha (1994) rightly points out that, in the case of minorities, the existent cultural hybridity is the result of a negotiation of the social articulation of difference, this difference producing moments or processes which initiate new signs of identity through the elaboration of strategies of singular or communal selfhood. Michaelsen and Johnson (1997) also underline that there is a notion of difference "in which particular constellations of practices are understood to be essentially related or organized by some principle of identity" (p. 3). In the borderlands, there exists an affirmation of difference, as it is only through the relationship with others that identity can be built. Eventually, this type of identification framed within the recognitions of some shared characteristics and common origin between individuals and groups is always *in process*, always in construction.

In this process of narrativization, the role of the past is truly significant. This represents an important aspect when memories become part of the present and influence the future in unknown ways. Memories of past events will, for instance, interfere with forthcoming circumstances. The past has the power of interrupting the performance of the present. "The

'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 7). Immigrants, among others, tend to reinvent their past and themselves and search for roots to settle in a chosen place since they commonly acknowledge "a sense of place or belonging [that] gives a person stability" (Sarup's, 1996, p. 1) and they attempt to reinvent their past recollecting and choosing the events they want to highlight and therefore most suitable to their own needs.

Even though multiple and fragmented, identities also seem to be considerably supported by a personally or communally constructed sense of home. As with the memories from the past, the notion of a home, to which we can tie our dwelling, generally provides us with momentary stability. When we imagine home, we remember significant events in our lives or objects that are related to our family members, valued experiences and shared activities. Sarup (1996) suggests that this "concept of home seems to be tied in some way to the notion of identity - the story we tell of ourselves and which is also the story that others tell of us" (p. 3). As we narrate our own life stories, we build up our personal identities and these narratives are the ones that result from the various contributions of institutions and practices we have lived through. In postmodern times, though, these identities can be not only diverse but also displaced, due to the many geographical, political, linguistic and cultural borderlands we need to cross. That is why we have highlighted all through this section the transient quality of both experience and identity.

Space as Representation

In order to study issues concerning home and identity, a careful consideration should be made of the meanings that we attach to the notions of space and time, what they represent and how they mediate upon our modes of action and interpretation of the world where we put them into practice.

Harvey (1989) sees space and time as basic categories of human existence whose meaning we seldom discuss and which we tend to provide with commonsensical or self-evident attributions. Space is usually treated as a natural fact established by the reasonable and everyday meanings we attribute to it. Although for modern rationality the idea of the objectivity of space was strong, Harvey (1989) challenges the viewpoint of a unique naturalized meaning of space in postmodern times. He acknowledges, instead, "the multiplicity of the objective qualities which space and time can express and the role of human practices in their construction" (p. 203). Space entails then not only an objective attribute of things that can be measured but also the realms of perception, imagination, fiction and fantasy, into which our subjective experience can take us, while we produce our own mental spaces and maps. Similarly, space varies depending on each society. In other words, each society holds a different meaning for the same concept, relying on their communal experience and history and on the personal representations that each individual brings to it.

Soja (2001) claims that, even though in some contexts space still tends to be treated as fixed, dead and undialectical, there exists a spatiality of social life, or "the actually lived and socially produced space of sites and the relations between them" (p. 114). Being inside a set of relations that delineates those sites, the space where we live can be constructed by diverse levels of experience and it is in itself a heterogeneous space. These heterogeneous spaces we inhabit and which Foucault (1986) calls *heterotopias*, are described as places and spaces that function in non-hegemonic conditions. They become part of every society but vary their forms and change according to the necessities of times. Heterotopias permit in a single real space the existence of several places that can be incompatible in themselves:

they have a function in relation to all the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory . . . Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed,

and jumbled. The latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation. (Foucault, 1986, pp. 25, 27, cited by Soja, 2001, p. 119)

Augé (2000) distinguishes *places* from *non-places*. A non-place is defined as a space that cannot be identified as relational, historical or concerned with identity, as it *is* in the case of place. A place is then a space in its anthropological sense, containing the places of memory related to it. Contrary to modernity, constructed by the amalgamation of places; postmodernity results from non-places. Non-places are created by a world where there is a multiplication of hotel chains, illegally occupied rooms, vacation clubs and refugee fields, a world where both supermarkets and means of transport are embodied as inhabited places, a world condemned to individuality, to the provisional and the ephemeral.

It would be erroneous, however, to believe that places and non-places are completely opposite. The first is never completely erased and the latter is not totally accomplished. In order to identify a non-place, we can establish two complementary but divergent realities at the same time. The spaces that built up in relation to certain means, such as transport and trade, for example, and the relation human beings maintain with those are typical examples of current non-places. To summarize, Augé's (2000) non-places have no identity, no history and no relationships. They are temporary, usually urban, spaces for quick passage, superficial communication and self- intelligent consumption.

Whereas postmodernity is a discourse articulated in colonial settlements that forsake their peripheral condition to become centres, e. g., Canada and the United States; post-colonialism is also a discourse articulated within the former colonies but in those that have never abandoned their marginal and peripheral condition, e. g., Africa and the Caribbean. Now, as post-colonialism pervades every culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day, the postcolonial experience has also generated its own set of concepts in relationship to space.

In post-colonial contexts, the complex interaction of language and history and the significance of space in the process of identity construction are shown through the analysis of *place* and *displacement*. From a postcolonial perspective, *place* does not become an issue until colonial intervention produces a disruption in the cultural representation of colonial societies, thus separating the notions of space and place. This interference of colonialism disrupts the sense of place when it imposes the colonial language on the colonies. Another significant element to consider is the *dislocation* that the colonized subject suffers between the environment and the new language. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1998) point out that,

Indeed in all colonial experience, colonialism brings with it a sense of dislocation between the environment and the imported language now used to describe it, a gap between the “experienced” place and the descriptions the language provides (p. 178).

Displacement thus becomes of great significance in post-colonial literatures, causing a major interest in the development and recovery of the relationship between self and place. During this process,

a valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by *dislocation* Or it may have been destroyed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1994, p. 9).

Always produced by a process of settlement and intervention, place and displacement, as well as the gap created between the experience of place and the language available to describe it, represent permanent features in post-colonial societies and in their literary productions.

All in all, the meanings that we attribute to the spaces we inhabit, i. e., the *places* we make out of them, turn to be more than the landscape available for our scrutiny. They become the links between language and identity, issues within language and memory themselves. The places in which we dwell then are constitutive segments of our identities and of the systems of representation –language, writing and the creative arts– with which we create the world around us. Similarly, at a wider level, different societies may construct divergent meanings for their

places, having specific political and literary effects in the lives of their communities. Both a postmodern and a postcolonial reading of O'Brien's short stories can be attempted, having in mind the concepts of place and space. Being many of the aspects mentioned above possible to be traced throughout her stories, O'Brien's texts may make manifest not only the constructions of places but also their acute losses resulting from both the post-colonial as well as the postmodern condition.

Home as Representation and as Lived Experience

*Only if we are capable of dwelling,
only then we can build.*

Martin Heidegger (1971)

Homes as places are socially constructed. When we visualize our idea of home, there usually comes to the mind the old adage *home is where the heart is*, connecting it at once to beloved people and warm and pleasurable memories. Yet, not all the relevant events that we live at home generate a sense of love and comfort for every one of us. Moreover, for some, *home* even stands for unpleasant memories. Alternatively, many homes become private museums where we protect ourselves against those changes that we feel are not under our control. Home functions, anyway, as a lived space in which people interact with one another in a myriad of complex, inter-related and contradictory sociocultural relationships, or, as claimed by Rapport and Dawson (1998), "home brings together memory and longing; the ideational, the affective, and the physical; the spatial and the temporal; the local and the global; the positively evaluated and the negatively" (p. 8). Here, we offer a brief overview of different concepts in the representation of home as reviewed by Mallett (2004) and Der-Ohannesian (2013).

From a sociological perspective, home has sometimes been considered a haven or refuge, a place where we are able to retreat and relax. This notion is generally connected with our initial home, the place where we were born, as a secure, safe, free or regenerative space (Wright, 1991, cited by Mallett, 2004). Nevertheless, some sociologists believe that home as haven represents an idealized or romanticized view of the place, a nostalgic construct that is different from our real experience of it. For some people, home may even turn into a place of fear and isolation (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998, cited by Mallett, 2004). However, if we consider that the construction of the meaning of home depends not only on its social and historical context but also on the personal experiences of the mind that represents, it is plausible to state that, different people in different times and places will have different conceptions about what home means to each one of them. These persistently dichotomous views suggest that “most people spend their lives in search of home, at the gap between the *natural home* [conceived as the home environment conducive to human existence, i.e. dry land] and the particular *ideal home* where they would be fully fulfilled” (Tucker, 1994, p. 184), more often than not this one being a continuous search for a lost time and space.

In literature, the *ideal home* seems to have taken all the attention since it has had a relevant role both in the field of the narrated action and as a thematic element as regards the characters' origin and sense of belonging. In the former, home, or, in more familiar terms, the setting includes the idea of a physical structure or dwelling (e. g., a house, a flat, or an institution) where space and time, as in the literary work itself, can be controlled. The processes of identity formation are not only based on the recognition of shared characteristics with a certain group but also as belonging to a place constituted by the buildings, kinfolk and representations around us. Therefore, the home is taken not only as a place but also as a source of both personal identity and security, which coincides with some of the sociological approaches listed above (e. g., Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). In contemporary and especially in

postcolonial literature the notions of staying and leaving a place have been unceasingly represented (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998). In that context, the home has been significantly recreated as a dwelling or the *homeland*, to which the multiple, displaced and decentred individuals we introduced in the first section of this chapter desire to go back.

Now, what is constant in both literary and sociological approaches to the concept of home is the relationship between the physical dwelling and the usually idealized construct. Home is a multi-dimensional, multi-layered lived experience in which the connection between these two, idea and reality, must be defined and redefined, especially in view of the fact that we are trying to study a particular sociological notion as represented in literature. For the particular project of this dissertation, we discovered and decided to use one particular text by German philosopher Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," which was first published in English as part of *Poetry, Language, Thought* in 1971 but which originally appeared in German in 1954 and was based on a lecture delivered in 1951. In it, the philosopher ventures on a phenomenological exploration that seeks to provide an answer to two basic questions: (a) what is it to dwell? and (b) how does building belong to dwelling?

In order to answer the first question, what is it to dwell, Heidegger (1971) initially states that we dwell only as long as we build. The buildings we construct are therefore key to our existence. Moreover, he claims that even those, such as bridges, hangars, dams and market halls, which Augé (1996) would later label *non-places*, still remain in the domains of our dwelling. Dwelling is in any case the end that presides over all building. "To build is in itself already to dwell," (p. 144) asserts Heidegger (1971), as he embarks in an etymological examination of the word *building* which leads him to conclude that *building* and *being* are intricately related. We never merely *dwell* in a place and when we speak of dwelling we generally connect it to what men and women do alongside many other activities, such as practicing a profession, travelling and lodging, building up a family. "The old word *bauen*

[German for *house, home*],” Heidegger (1971) asserts, “says that man *is* insofar as he *dwells*” (p. 145). We are as long as we dwell, as we build.

Likewise, *building*, also rooted in the German *bauen*, is inseparable from preserving goods and providing shelter, all of these actions that tend to be performed at home. Consequently, “it recedes behind the manifold ways in which dwelling is accomplished, the activities of cultivation and construction” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 146), whose meanings can be traced back to the Latin words *cultura* and *aedificare*, both containing sparing and caring. Even though it is nowadays seldom considered the basic character of human beings, Heidegger (1971) claims that dwelling is central to the experience of who we are.

In order to answer the second question, how *building* belong to *dwelling*, Heidegger (1971) carefully studies now the etymology of the word *dwelling*, whose roots he claims to mean *to be at peace and safeguarded*. From that, he determines that the basic character of dwelling is to spare, to preserve and that men dwell only if they preserve the fourfold. The fourfold is the unity of the four elements in which we dwell: (a) on earth, (b) under the sky, (c) before the divinities and (d) belonging to men's being with one another and to their being capable of death. In current terms, these comprise the oppositions earth versus sky and human beings versus God. “To dwell, to be set at peace,” Heidegger (1971) concludes, “means to remain at peace within the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature” (p. 147).

Now, in order to preserve, we build. Heidegger (1971) exemplifies this with the concept of a bridge. A bridge, he claims, is a building for which room has been made and which, once made, has the function of preserving men within the fourfold among things. Consequently, places receive their being from the locations we build, not from empty space. Yet, there is another way we can build: “even when we relate to those things that are not in our immediate reach, we are staying with the things themselves” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 154).

This idea goes against our initial understanding of spaces as representation and in the direction of considering places as phenomenological instances of being. “The relationship between man and things is none other than dwelling,” Heidegger (1971, p. 155) claims, and that dwelling is by no means some representational content in our mind. In dwelling we persist through spaces by means of our being among things and locations. The making of such things is building. Building is then “a founding and joining of spaces,” (p. 156), a “letting-dwell” that “responds to the summons of the fourfold” (p. 156), be it in real places or in the confines of our minds.

Nowadays, however, the postcolonial and the postmodern experiences may have disrupted this unity of being in building and dwelling, making it therefore quite difficult to deal with a definite idea of home. In times of migration and diaspora, we may not be able to discern whether home is a mental construction, a *representation*, or an actual phenomenon, even if created in our minds and not close to us. As it has already been stated, the colonial condition brought with it a displacement, a dislocation, which in postcolonial times many people have tried to heal going back to their *homes* either physically or mentally in search for their roots and in order to learn aspects of their culture and history that they consider to have forgotten. The postmodern condition seems to offer non-places in which it may be quite complex to truly build and dwell and in which our experience of home can also be one of disruption and fragmentation. There always persists, however, both at an anthropological and sociological level the possibility of complementary places, of heterotopias, and of homes as sites of articulation and of momentary closure. Nevertheless, these homes in which we expect to revive our identities are always hard to find since they are continuously changing, persistently fluctuating. These mental representations or fleeting phenomena are what I seek to explore in the stories of Edna O'Brien.

Chapter Two

Corpus, Research Questions and Methods

Edna O'Brien, the author of the contemporary collection of short stories *Saints and sinners* was born in the bosom of a family whose father is an "archetypal Irishman- a gambler, drinker, a man totally unequipped" and whose mother considers the publication of her first novel as a "disgrace" (Guppy, 1984, p. 38). O'Brien's first novel, *The country girls* (1960), breaks the silence on sexual matters and social issues and, as a result of her frank portrayal of sex and her questioning of sexism within Catholicism, the complete *Country girls trilogy* (1960-1964) was banned. Hence, O'Brien leaves Ireland, where she still declares to feel a hint of "oppression and strangulation" (1984, p. 39), and settles down in London, where she currently lives. Although her literary work is mainly realistic, O'Brien is always celebrated as a gifted narrator and storyteller. She has been very prolific and is usually considered the "mother" of the Irish women writers who follow in her profession.

O'Brien's work has been recurrently studied from a psychoanalytic perspective. Pelan (2006), for example, proposes that her fiction should be analysed from the perspective of "the figure of an idealized 'love object'" (p. 58) which would be constituted by the repeated triad of God, mother and self. Fictional mothers become a powerful influence in the lives of O'Brien's main characters and they are established as the origin of a long line of idealized figures in her narratives. However, the crises of identity resulting from the mother/daughter relationship become the bases of all the future losses that would leave all women alone and in search of a sense of self beyond the existence of a love object. In a similar vein, Hargreaves (1998) also examines the sense of self in *The country girls* (1960) and establishes that the primary experience of the main character, Caithleen, gains value, identity and meaning only when she is desired and loved by another. This loss of the self, motivated by the infant's passionate sense

of self in the union with the mother, produces in O'Brien's female characters a constant sense of emptiness and desolation that is generally filled with sporadic love affairs and sexual relationships, signifying their inability to grow up emotionally and psychologically.

On the other hand, O'Brien's fiction has also been frequently studied having in mind gender parameters and the exploration of femininity in its problematic relationship with masculinity and the rigid constraints of the patriarchal structure. Byron (2006) examines the *Country girls trilogy* (1960-1964) to conclude that O'Brien has managed to deconstruct the prescribed roles for women in a patriarchal society, challenging the narrative conventions of the feminine romance plot, an issue also manifested by the author in her well-known essay "Why Irish heroines don't have to be good anymore" (O'Brien, 1986). Carpenter (1986), however, provides a significantly less positive vision of O'Brien's narrative and proposes that the central theme in her narratives is always the failure of human relations, especially those initiated by female characters for whom "the moments of happiness in love, of lace dresses and tears of joy are brief" (p.264). As a result of this, most women in O'Brien's fiction establish strong bonds among them, a product of their common suffering caused not only by men but also by the oppression suffered by the patriarchal family conventions promoted by the Catholic Church.

In sum, it could be argued that the existent critique around O'Brien's work has been devoted nearly exclusively to examine her initial fiction and especially her *Country girls trilogy* (1960-1964). On the other hand, it has been limited to study gender issues in the context of Catholic Ireland, which establish O'Brien as a pioneer in her approach to those topics. Suggestively, as in O'Brien's life, some of the characters in those narratives grow "protected from urban artifice" (O'Brien, 1982, p.181), but leave Ireland and migrate to London or New York. This event is hardly explored by the existing criticism until the conference "Edna O'Brien: A Reappraisal" is held at the National University of Ireland, Galway, in 2005, and the

subsequent publication of *Edna O'Brien: New Critical Perspectives* (Lang, Mooney, & O'Connor, 2006) in 2006. There O'Brien's narrative is reassessed, read in the light of postmodernist and postcolonial theory and even compared to that of Kincaid, a Black author questioning race in the context of the Caribbean. It is precisely the spatial dimension as constitutive of identity in the characters of O'Brien's (2011) latest fictional work *Saints and sinners* that I will study in this dissertation.

Corpus

Saints and sinners is O'Brien's (2011) last collection of short stories. Written at the age of 81, they are only followed by a memoir, *Country girl* (O'Brien, 2012), and a revised selection of the short stories she has written over the last 50 years, *The love object: Selected stories, a fifty-year retrospective* (O'Brien, 2013). Even though she has not abandoned the characteristically realistic tone of her previous work, O'Brien shows in the 11 stories of which the volume is constituted, a deliberate tendency towards open-ended narratives, the juxtaposition of events from the present and the past and a strong questioning of the reader's stability, close to that experienced through fragmentary postmodernist texts or turbulent postcolonial writing.

Saints and sinners receives mainly positive reviews, as the fiction O'Brien offers in it is catalogued as afflictive but somehow exquisite (Brownrigg, 2011). Set in London, rural Ireland and New York, most of the stories still deal with the exposition of sexual and romantic longing and the emotional constraints of family and personal resentment, the initial sources of O'Brien's inspiration. Yet, as Akbar (2011) points out, they also present a meditation on the terrible price the Irish have paid for the troubles between Catholics and Protestants, as in the case of "Black flower" (Yardley, 2011; José Manuel Estévez-Saá, 2011) and on the disaffection of a life entrapped by exile, as displayed in "Shovel kings" and taken even to

extremes in "Plunder," set in a place without a name and under siege. With age, there has also come for O'Brien the inevitable role of wisdom and reflection, which well suits her keen observational skills and her narrative and literary endowments.

Due to reasons that will be explained in the methods section of this chapter, I have circumscribed the corpus of this dissertation to four short stories in the collection under analysis: "Shovel kings," "Plunder," "Black flower" and "Sinners." Copies of the stories under analysis can be consulted in the Appendix.

Research Questions

Many of the critical reviews of *Saints and sinners* insist upon seeing Ireland as the central basis of O'Brien's work. In spite of having moved to London several decades ago and being a New Yorker by affinity, Ireland seems to constitute "the heart, or more properly the soul, of all her work" (Brownrigg, 2011). However, I must concur with Murray (2013) when he states, "given the persistent presence of migration in the work of O'Brien, it is surprising how marginal a theme it is in critiques of her work" (p. 87). For this reason, I propose to unveil in this dissertation the connections between space and identity that go beyond the issue of Irishness. In my opinion, this collection of short stories deserves to be read as a work though which O'Brien makes us ponder about our place in the world and our contemporary loneliness, about the chances of total plunder and about the many and difficult roads back home.

Many questions sprang from a preliminary reading of *Saints and sinners*, such as: Which are the standard settings for the stories? Up to what extent are those settings considered *homes*? Which characteristics are attributed to those homes? Which other places are believed to be homes? In search for answers, I decided to group these enquiries into two research questions that guided my analysis of the stories:

(1) Which places in *Saints and sinners* represent homes?

(2) How are place and identity articulated into those representations?

My hypothesis is that in *Saints and sinners*, both space and identity are articulated in *representations* that the narrators and characters temporarily make theirs in order to create provisional dwellings and fleeting homes. However, I foresee that these homes do not necessarily imply either Ireland or fixed and concrete locations but just ephemeral and fragmented sites that can be only temporarily located and felt as homes. Moreover, I believe that in *Saints and sinners*, space and identity are possibly articulated not as stable and static categories home but as provisional types mediated by a feasible fiction which can be catalogued as migrant.

Method

Language should not be left aside in literature since it is through language that we construct meaning. Moreover, the form of language in a discourse is chosen according to ideologically and socially determined circumstances. A strong connection exists between linguistic and social structures, the linguistic meaning becoming inseparable from ideology. Therefore, during the interpretation of a text, the social meaning expressed in the discourse is recovered by the analysis of its linguistic structure in relation with its interactional and social contexts. In order to reach a conclusion about the wider meanings that I decided to explore in this work, i. e., space, home, identity, I needed then a fairly detailed linguistic analysis. To analyse a text is “to understand the whole of a text from its details, and the details of a text from its whole” (Birch, 1989, pp. 25). This becomes significant in that it creates a method of endless reading and re-reading of a text. In view of this, the steps I followed in the analytical and interpretative processes of this dissertation were the ones I briefly describe below:

1. I proceeded with a preliminary but informed reading of the texts, following basic strategies of document analysis (Rapley, 2007) and I continued with a preliminary codification of the data (Gibbs, 2007) around the categories of *space*. By making use of this coding technique, a way of categorizing the text so as to establish a framework of thematic ideas, I undertook an intensive reading of each story trying to group each space described as *home* by the characters in it. This helped me produce an initial description of each of these places which constitutes the basis for Chapter Three in this dissertation.

2. Alongside this step, following Fowler (1986) and Toolan (1998) I examined the point of view in each story. Three types of variation in point of view can be distinguished: spatio-temporal, ideological and psychological/perceptual. Whereas *temporal* point of view refers to the impression a reader gains of events moving rapidly or slowly, in a continuous chain or isolated segments or including disruptions of the “natural” flow of time; in the *spatial* dimension it is the organization of language that helps the reader to imagine the objects, people and buildings in certain spatial relationships. From an *ideological* perspective, point of view can be understood as the narrator's linguistic manifestation of her degree of commitment to the truth of his/her discourse using modal auxiliaries, modal adverbs, evaluative adjectives and adverbs, verbs of knowledge, prediction, evaluation and generic sentences. *Perceptual* point of view concerns the question of who is presented as the observer of the events and in this case a distinction should be drawn between *internal* and *external*. This contributed to the description carried out in the first step since I could appreciate the particular perspective from which each home was constructed.

3. The analyses depicted in the previous two steps comprised the eleven stories in the collection. However, when I reached this analytical stage, I decided to circumscribe my interpretation of the results to four stories that I considered to be the most representative of the issues I was specifically trying to study. Those stories were “Shovel kings,” “Plunder,” “Black

flower” and “Sinners.” The first two stories offer a broad approach to space, while the other two display more intimate settings. At the same time, I discovered subtle changes in the perceptual point of view from which each story is retold. I deal with those aspects throughout Chapters Three and Four.

4. Once the initial description was finished and already at the interpretative stage of this work, I examined all the data resulting from the previous steps and I reconsidered the categories of space, identity and home as *representations* (Hall, 1996, 1997). While in the process of this examination, I realized that two particular approaches have enlightened my work: Augé's (2000) theory of places and non-places and Heidegger's (1971) concept of building as dwelling. Those are in turn the two concepts in the light of which I produce the classification I offer in Chapter Four, the former because it helped me understand the postmodern condition O'Brien so accurately portrays in her work and the latter because it shows her longing for an identity in communion with the fourfold. These issues informed the discussion of her work with which I concluded my analysis.

Chapter Three

A Description of Homes as Represented in the Stories

In this chapter I will describe the physical and mental homes that the characters create in four representative stories selected from *Saints and sinners*. Here, the short stories under consideration can be classified into two main groups: “Shovel kings” and “Plunder,” which display a broad panorama of the impossibility of a home or the possibility of a total effacement of it, and “Black flower” and “Sinners,” which exhibit the particular cases of displacement caused by imprisonment or old age.

“Shovel kings”

“Shovel kings,” the first and longest story in *Saints and sinners*, is initially set in an Irish pub in North London. It is in this pub where an unnamed first person narrator meets the main character, Rafferty, who has left Ireland in the 1960s and has been living in England ever since. From a psychological or, for a better description, *perceptual*, point of view, the story is revealed to its readers from an internal perspective and a first person narrator that is not the main character but that manifests the latter's feelings about the principal events and the characters in the story. Thus, we get to know through the narrator's voice and consciousness and through his dialogue with the main character, everything about Rafferty and the different places that become significant in his life. Ireland, his native land and the pubs in London, in which he spends long hours in search for company, constitute those places where, either through his imagination or in the actual experience, Rafferty tries to build sporadic homes and temporary dwellings.

Ireland in the mind. Ireland is present in the text from the very first sentence, from the moment the narrator describes in relationship to Rafferty that “in one lapel was a small green and gold harp, and in the other a flying angel” (p. 1) and in the ensuing dialogue:

‘What’s the harp for?’ I asked one morning when, as had become the habit, he made a little joke of offering me the newspaper.
‘To prove that I’m an Irishman,’ he replied.
‘And the angel?’
‘Oh that’s the guardian angel... We all have one,’ he said, with a deferential half smile.
(p. 5)

Significantly, from early times, Ireland is unique in having the *harp* -a musical instrument- as its national emblem. As well as the *green* colour, standing for the shamrock used by St. Patrick to teach the Irish people, the *angel* also embodies Irish Christianity. There is, however, a hint of disbelief in Rafferty’s half-smile.

Ireland, the place where all the shovellers are born, becomes a recurrent topic in the story¹. An example of this is when Rafferty recounts, “they talked and yarned to keep the spirits up. They would talk about everything and anything to do with home” (p. 8). Their native land becomes then a motif to gladden them in the everyday life activities or when sorrows and difficult times arrive. Even the smallest details can bring to light the deepest feelings about home, as it can be the case of a simple *pair of brown felt slippers*, the brown felt stuff reminding “him of a tea cosy they had at home, the same material, with a white thatched cottage embroidered on it” (p. 15).

Moreover, Ireland, represented as the home, permanently remains in the minds of the shovel kings as the original place they want to go back; “Daddy loved Ireland so much that he flew home every Thursday evening, so as to step on Irish soil and be reunited with wife and family” (p.15). They even feel the necessity to return in death; for example, when an Irish worker has an accident and dies, his co-workers eagerly long to send his body back to Ireland:

¹*Shovel Kings* refers to the group of Irish shovellers who helped construct the lines of cable that light all the streets of London in the 1960s and who were said to have the ability to cook with a shovel.

“A collection was taken in the pub to send the remains home.... He’s saying, ‘Come on J.J., we’re going home’” (p. 13). This attests to not only the everyday ornamental representation of Ireland evidenced before but also its permanently “felt” presence in the life and experiences of the shovellers.

As I have already mentioned, Rafferty has also possessed a real dwelling place in Ireland, which he traces back through the memory of his mother and the activities he has performed at home but now misses, all of them always connected with rural life: “because I missed the outdoors, missed roaming in the fields around home and hunting on Sundays with a white ferret” (p. 10). Those oppose the activities he carries out with his companions in London, such as “digging a long trench, for the electricity cables” (p. 7). Just as the next passage demonstrates, among those warm and pleasurable memories of Rafferty are his mother, the nature that surrounds the place and the mystique he attributes to it.

The night before I left home for good (he went on) my mother decided that we would pick fraughans for a pie. They are a berry the colour of the blueberry, but more tart, and they grew in secret places far up in the woods. It was one of those glorious summer evenings, the woods teeming with light, with life, birds, bees, grasshoppers, a sense that the days would never be grey or rainy again. We were lucky. We filled two jugs to the brim, our hands dyed a deep indigo. For some reason my mother daubed her face with her hands and then so did I, and there we were, two purple freaks, like clowns, laughing our heads off” (p. 23).

Not only does the main character explicitly call the house where he was born *home*, but also the lexicon used to describe it exposes the glee and the joy he has experienced as a young boy living there. *Glorious*, *life* and *light* connote extreme happiness; whereas the sense *that the days would never be grey or rainy again* adds to the optimistic permanence of Ireland in the mind. Everything seems to make the experience of the Irish countryside special and blissful.

Encouraged by his childhood memories, Rafferty also wishes to go back home but that never happens: “he had toyed with the idea of going home, to visit the grave [his mother’s], when he saw Christmas decorations in the shop windows ..., or got the cards from his sisters,

... Except that he never went" (p. 23). However, once Rafferty has the chance to change that situation and he enthusiastically tells the narrator about his prospective journey back home: "He could not contain his joy. He was going home.... Then he took the letter from his leather wallet that was worn and crinkled, but hesitated before handing it to me, since he needed to explain the circumstances" (p. 30). A benefactor has been asking for a good person to go back to Ireland and take care of a kin, so he has contacted Rafferty. The passage manifests the happiness as well as the anxiety of returning to Ireland, the place where everything seemed perfect, after 40 years. Nevertheless, when he finally accomplishes the trip, Rafferty realizes that the experience of being at *home* is rather different from the nostalgic representation of the place:

Even when he went to the pub, Rafferty didn't feel at home.... As for the garden that he had intended to plant, the grounds around the house had been landscaped with bushes and yellow flowering shrubs. Nothing was wrong, as he told Adrian, but nothing was right, either (p. 34).

The home he has kept in the memories of his past does not exist in his present. From Rafferty's point of view, everything has changed in Ireland. Dublin, once a small town, has become an urban hub and its current reality does not fit his mental construction of it.

The pubs: pure heaven. Two pubs, the Aran and Bidy Mulligan's, become key places in Rafferty's existence. Although following Augé's (2000) we can consider the pubs to be non-places, settings for quick passage and superficial communication, they stand in this case for places in which Rafferty, sometimes a homeless, finds temporary homes. The Aran, located in Camden, turns into a refuge, a replacement of his paternal company: "after [his] father went home, [he] started going to the pub." (p. 11). The second pub is Bidy Mulligan's, in North London, where Rafferty and the narrator meet and the story starts and ends. Drinking at the pubs becomes a routine in the main character's life, as "he drank the one pint in Bidy Mulligan's each morning, returning in the evening to have his quota of two" (p. 17).

At some point in the story Rafferty ponders on the Aran. "Pure heaven, the warmth, the red table lamps, the talking and gassing, getting a pint, sitting down on a stool, without even exchanging a word" (p. 11), he states. Notwithstanding their qualities as non-places here listed through a stream of consciousness technique, pubs are vital places for the main character because they create in his mind the precise atmosphere he looks for and the sites both of his sense of belonging and of some safety in his loneliness. That is why he calls them *pure heaven*, thusly invoking the state of supreme happiness derived from his urban anonymity among the coming and going of other human beings.

These two pubs are not the only ones that give Rafferty that sense of belonging in the world. For Christmas, another pub momentarily replaces the Aran and Bidy Mulligan's:

Christmas he had spent with Donal and Aislina at their pub in Burnt Oak. The pub shut early on Christmas Eve so as to entertain the visitors, which included him, Clare Mick, who lived over Fulham way, and Whisky Tipp, who had had a stroke, but luckily his brain wasn't affected. Also the lodgers upstairs, three Irishmen, a Mongolian, and a black. Pure heaven, as he put it. Up behind the counter and pull your own pint or whatever you wanted. The light in the pub dimmed, the steel shutters drawn, carols on the radio – 'A partridge in a pear tree' – bacon and cabbage for the Christmas Eve dinner, and then, on Christmas Day, as he put it, a banquet. At the start of the dinner, Donal plonked a bottle of champagne in front of each guest, although he and Aisling never themselves touched a drop. What with the roast goose, potato stuffing, sage and onion stuffing, roast spuds, the children larking about, crackers, paper hats, jokes, riddles, and gassing, these dinners were unadulterated happiness. This was how you imagine a home could be, Rafferty said, his voice surely belying the melancholy within it. (p. 18)

Throughout the passage, we find many instances that reflect a similarity of this pub with Rafferty's previous construction of home. Set also in *pure haven*, the Christmas dinner becomes *unadulterated happiness*, as the relatively ordinary events taking place in the evening turn into a temporary home since it can be mentally tied to an Irish childhood. Food, moreover, retains a central role in the construction of the joy he feels at the pub and dinner with friends becomes a simple but warm ceremony that makes the main character feels part of family and community.

In its warmth and simplicity, this scene at the pub parallels those in which Rafferty finds “his dinner, with a plate over it, on a rack above the gas cooker” (p. 29) and in which “in the evenings when he got home, two glasses of milk would be on the table” (p. 29). It is in a flat in Camden where he starts living and sharing his life with a woman and where the possibility of *love* flourishes. It is also there where we observe the presence of food and drink as a token for the kind nourishment offered by the home and contrasted with the beer provided in the pubs. Nevertheless, after living for some time with Grania in that place, “he was missing the pub, the noise, the gas, and before long he would be dropped off at The Aran and have a few drinks and arrive home late” (p. 29). Unable to develop strong and stable relationships with other human beings, Rafferty lets the feeling of being at home vanish the moment she gives up and goes away leaving him alone.

“This was how you imagine a home could be” (p.18). Homes are for Rafferty always imaginary: when at the pubs, he mentally returns to his idealized home in Ireland; when at the flat with Grania, he wishes to come back to the pubs. Thus, after his arrival in England from his failed return to Ireland, he finally becomes a homeless: ‘He doesn’t belong in England and ditto Ireland,’ Adrian said, and, tapping his temple to emphasise his meaning, added that exile is in the mind and there’s no cure for that” (p. 35). If the sense of having a home secures people their stability, the never-ending succession of occasional homes turns them into exiles, both situations, however, being only continuous constructions of the mind.

Nevertheless, human beings always inhabit all of Rafferty’s temporary images of home. In his idealized Ireland, there dwells his mother; in London there are his father and friends; in the flat in Camden lives his lover; in the pubs are his acquaintances and among them the narrator. However, the bonds he establishes are feeble and short as his father goes back to Ireland, his lover leaves him and his co-workers die or return to Ireland. Therefore, he idealizes

the pubs, those non-places that cannot completely provide him with the stability of a dwelling that he needs. Hence, he becomes an exile and there is no cure for that.

“Plunder”

“Plunder” is a story which retells the unfortunate events that an unnamed girl and her family undergo when a group of foreign soldiers arrive in their land. The story is told by a first person narrator. It begins with a participating narrator in the *plural* first person that near the end turns into a *singular* first person narrator. The internal perspective positions the reader within the main character's consciousness and privileges her or his access to her private emotions and thoughts. The narrator freely manifests her thoughts and feelings about what she is telling and her evaluation of the events and of the other characters taking part in the story, as can be appreciated by the choice of evaluative adjectives and adverbs. Here, I present the most significant traits related to home in the story. I examine, firstly, the effects of invasion in the characters' sense of home and then I study the role of nature in that construction.

Home under siege. Though the story is set in the woods and not in an urban environment, the house retains a central role in which all of the events and the climax take place. Furthermore, the house plays a dual role which is neither static nor unique. When the soldiers first arrive at the girl's house in the wild,

our mother herded us all into one bedroom, believing we would be safer that way- there would be no danger of one of us straying and we could keep turns at the watch. (p. 77)

The bedroom seems to be, for the mother's mental process, a secure place for the children to stay in, as displayed by the phrase *believing we would be safer that way*. However, there is not such certainty about it and this is showed by the use of modal verbs like *would* and *could*.

Even though the soldiers are mainly “in the kitchen, laughing and shouting in their barbarous tongues” (p. 80), the whole house losses the sense of home when they take

possession of it. They disrupt the place, which once was a pleasant one, and transform it into a chaotic building infected by “a hulk of smoke. Black ugly smoke” (p. 81).

However, the idea of a secure dwelling fades away completely the moment the mother is taken away and the children walk downstairs and find her clothes: “strewn all over the floor” (p. 78). They realize that she is not going to return and the love and shelter with which she has nurtured them die out with her disappearance. Furthermore, the house itself changes since “the door between it and the hall was barricaded with stacked chairs” (p. 78) and therefore the idea of home has also collapsed: “the sight was grisly” (p. 78).

Behind all the disturbing incidents, the characters can find some reasons to be hopeful and remember good moments. Once, in spite of their dreadful circumstances, they imagine what they will do at their mother's return: “Our mother would come back. We spoke of things that would do for her” (p. 79). As well as in “Shovel kings” and “Black flower,” through past memories, the characters recreate that image of peaceful and pleasant home in their minds. In addition, at the end of the story, a different kind of hope is born. In the only explicit reference to home throughout the narrative, we are informed that “many and terrible are the roads to home” (p.84).

The meaning of the house as home then, depends upon each family member and the events lived by each one of them within or without its walls. The mother and children cannot find refuge in the house where they live since they are raped and taken away, respectively. However, the surviving girl manages to secure some protection from the house and she is sexually abused precisely when she decides to leave it and walks in to the woods. Neither the house nor nature are guaranteed to function as protective entities but both may provide with solace and rape and terror.

Nature: a safe heaven? At the beginning of the story we are informed that “one morning we wakened to find that there was no border- we had been annexed to the father land”

(p. 77). Since the mother and her children live in the wilderness, that does not represent an immediate threat for them. As native dwellers, the main and secondary characters stay momentarily protected by nature from the effects of the invasion of a foreign army. The wilderness, nature in its pure state, serves as a capsule that keeps them apart from what is happening in a nearby town. At the same time, it is their own small-scale rural production that provides them with all the necessary supplies, such as apples and nuts, to survive while they are trapped in their house: "As luck had it, only the week before we had gathered nuts and apples and stored them on wooden trays for the winter" (p. 77-78). They also have a cow they milk every day². As the story advances, we can notice that in the character's mind the farm and its surrounding fields stand for "somewhere safe" (p. 81), a chance of safeguarding from an eminent menace.

Nevertheless, the peacefulness of the fields and woods become disturbed due to the intervention. It is later in a natural environment that one of the most traumatic events in the story, the narrator's rape, takes place:

It was crossing a field that I heard the sound of a vehicle, and I ran, not knowing there was such swiftness in me. They were coming, near and near, the wheels slurping over the ridged earth that bordered the wood.... the one who jumped out picked me up and tossed me to the Head Man. (p.82).... Putting on their trousers, they kept telling each other to hurry to fuck up.... he blood was pouring out of me and the ground beneath was warm. (p.83)

Though clefting, nature is focalized in this passage from the very first sentence and in the whole of the scene it is presented through various descriptive phrases, such as *the ridged earth that bordered the wood* and *the ground beneath was warm*. Nature thus becomes a silent

² The cow stands as a significant figure in the characters' lives before and after the invasion. First, the mother worries about the fact "that by not being milked her poor udder would be pierced with pain, said the milk would drip all over the grass" (p. 78). Then, the cow becomes a relevant element to their survival because they can use its milk during the siege. Nevertheless, soon after the invasion, "[their] cow had stopped moaning, and [they] realised that she too had been taken and most likely slaughtered" (p.79). As well as their mother, she has disappeared and so their hope for survival. It can be suggested that in its feminine and rural quality, the cow duplicates the image of the mother as it embodies protection and nurture and its capture represents final destitution and isolation.

witness of human violence. While “the blood [is] pouring out of [her,]” the ground remains untouched. Once the rape has taken place, for the main character, now speaking as a collective female entity, nature remains inert of human tragedy: “We, the defiled ones, in our thousands, scattered, trudging over the land, the petrified land, in search of a safe haven, if such a place exists” (p. 84). Nevertheless, it still potentially contains the possibility of a dwelling, a home: “Many and terrible are the roads back home” (p. 84).

“Black flower”

From a perceptual point of view and an internal perspective, “Black flower” is a story retold in the third person by a limited omniscient narrator. We are faced with a participating character named Mona who acts as the observer of the events in the narrative and we know what is happening only through her point of view. She is a voluntary art teacher at the prison in the Irish Midlands where she meets the main character, Shane, a renowned but lonely Republican activist. At the time of the story, he has been recently released from jail and they arrive at the dining room of a countryside hotel called Glasheen, where they have decided to stop for dinner. In this section, the maternal home in Ireland will be presented, together with a series of impossible visions of home and a general description of Glasheen, the beautiful but sinister setting of the story.

Ireland: home and prison. The fundamental places in Shane's life are geographically located in Ireland, the homeland for which he is fighting and which provides him with sense and significance. His Ireland is the reason why he is captured and sent to prison. “He had fought for what he believed in, which was his country to be one, one land, one people and not have a shank of it cut off” (p. 69). The Ireland he tries to preserve as a home for all the Irish people turns, as the story unfolds, into his home and prison.

Yet in the story there is only one instance in which *home* is used by Shane himself and this one makes reference to his initial home, when he is a boy and lives with his mother and siblings in Ireland. "We were ten children at home... the mother had a lot of other things to do" (p. 68), he once tells Mona shyly. As in the case of Rafferty in "Shovel kings," Shane links home with family through recalling his childhood dwelling in his native land. After that, he has built up his own family and established a new place of residence. But unfortunately this last home vanishes when his wife is killed in retaliation for his activism and his child dies soon afterwards:

While in prison, his wife had been shot, bathing their child, shot in lieu of him and long after, the child, who was being reared with relatives, had died, of meningitis.... How he managed never to crack up was a mystery to Mona. (p. 65)

After losing his family and his ordinary life, he changes beyond recognition. He does not only change physically but also emotionally; he seems to be "the very incarnation of loneliness, of isolatedness" (p. 68). We can infer that this transformation results from the loss of a sense of belonging and of a home built up with a family. As well as in "Shovel kings," home is created only with reference to the human beings that people the places they inhabit and the feelings attached to them. If in "Shovel kings" there is the possibility of building temporary or at least imaginary homes, though, here there seems to be a permanent hope to finally dwell in a place where one belongs but that chance remains impossible throughout the story.

The prison Portakabin in the Irish Midlands, where he has served a long sentence, constitutes a refuge from the outside world, a world that is always threatening him to death due to the fact that "he'll always be a wanted man" (p. 67). Whereas Mona imagines that "on those nights [in prison] he would mull on the past and on the future, too, possibly envisaging how the world had changed in the fifteen years since he was captured" (p. 66); Shane has committed himself to such a strict order of regular activities that it has provided him with a locus of

security, a point of centring and orientation in relation to what happens beyond the prison's walls. Shane configures the place then as a temporary home where he has been able to "keep to himself" (p. 66).

Visions of home. What happens beyond the prison's walls only becomes meaningful for Shane when he meets and gets in contact with Mona. When he visits Dublin and calls her after his confinement, Shane does not only feel at home with her presence but also perceives that he has a reason to exist. Through Mona's point of view we realize how significant she has become in his life: "he liked being with her, she could feel that" (p. 64), "he liked letting her talk" (p. 69) and "he said once to her and only once that she herself could be the judge of his actions" (p. 69). Their bond has become remarkably strong and Mona takes a key position as the human being who truly knows him and with whom he feels he could build a home.

Place emerges as a key issue in the dialogue Mona and Shane maintain at Glasheen. The loneliness and isolatedness of the prison in contrast with the overwhelming presence of people in the outside world are brought to light in the following exchange:

'How do you find the world, Shane?', since he was only out of prison a few short weeks.

'Crowded,' he had said, and half smiled. (p. 65)

The warm loneliness of the home in prison accompanied only by routine and the sound of old favourite Irish songs seems impossible to be re-created in a world which for Shane is crowded with people with whom to create a tie is a complex enterprise.

Once again, Mona completes the image for the readers: "She pictured him in some cold, isolated cottage, by himself, wrapped in an overcoat, on edge, day and night on the look-out" (p. 71). Here, the place reads more like a watchman's than as a home but it is only Mona's picture that we get and she emphasized through it both the imaginary qualities of home and the unlikelihood of its becoming true. So later Mona decides to turn more straightforward in her addressing the issue:

'Where will you live Shane?'
'Maybe in the west,' he said, but vaguely. (p. 71)

Acknowledging perhaps the scanty chances he has of reaching a place to dwell in and foreshadowing his imminent death, Shane hazily answers the question. Those chances, however, result from Mona's desire to fill in the gaps and to foresee a joyful hearth that will be temporarily constructed only by the dinner at Glasheen.

Glasheen. The trip to Glasheen takes place in the spring, a season that can be associated with Shane's re-birth having been released from prison and with the prospect of a shared life with Mona. When they arrive at the gateway leading to Glasheen, she feels "it was ideal, so sequestered and the building far below, smothered in a grove of trees" (p. 69), its being *smothered*, however, already a prediction of Shane's end. Yet, after being there for a while, Mona changes her mind and tells Shane: 'You're not thinking of staying in this dungeon' (p. 71), while Shane answers: "No one would find me here" (p. 71). For him, the *dungeon* resembles Portakabin since it also potentially provides him with the anonymity that may keep him safe from his feuds. Glasheen serves as the configuration of a fleeting ideal home, but reality challenges that idea.

The very beginning of the story faces us with a contradictory description of the place that will become its main setting.

'It's a dump,' Mona said.
'Tis grand,' Shane said, looking around. (p. 63)

Through a flashback, we are allowed to know that the hotel has seemed to be for both a pleasant place to stay in for some time:

It was late spring and when from the roadway they had spotted the rusted iron gates and the long winding avenue, they thought how suitable, and how enchanting it seemed. Moreover, the hotel had a lovely name- Glasheen. They drove up the long avenue, trees on either side, oak, sycamore, ash, all meshed together, fighting amiably as it were for ascendancy, and birds in their evening sallies, busier than the pigeons who cooed softly in their roomy roots. (p. 63)

The adjectives and adverbs used to depict the surroundings of the hotel - *suitable, enchanting, lovely, amiably, softly* – and the lavish description of the nature around it entail a sense of hope for the main characters and make us envisage the possibility of a home. However, Mona immediately spots a telephone kiosk looking “glaringly forlorn, the floor strewn with litter” (p. 69), its nasty appearance clearly contrasting with the life and beauty of its surroundings and anticipating Shane's fatal ending: he will be found dead laying “half in and half out of the telephone kiosk” (p. 74).

Similarly, the hope contained by the first glimpse of the place fades away when they enter the hall and the black flower referred to in the title appears in scene:

In the hall, a nest of candles glimmered on a high whatnot and a luxurious flowering plant trailed and crept along the floor, amoeba-wise. The petals were a soft, velvety black, with tiny green eyes, pinpoints, and there was something both beautiful and sinister about it. She had never seen a black flower before. (p. 64)

Both the black flower and the telephone box display the same qualities: beautiful but sinister. At the same time, this duality between beauty and danger is revealed once again by the natural context:

The horse chestnut trees were in full bloom, pink and white tassels in a beautiful droop. And in the meadow lambs bleated ceaselessly. It was a pandemonium, what with them bleating and racing around for fear of losing their mothers. (p.69)

Not only does the lexicon used in the passage above juxtaposes a harmonious atmosphere with a disturbing one but also the *fear* in the last noun phrase anticipates Shane's death and makes us foresee the ultimate fear we have felt in “Plunder.”

Surely, the security, calm and innocence Shane is looking for can be provided by the anonymity of a secluded hotel set in a rural landscape but nature cannot prevent his murder. “A brooding quiet filled the entire landscape and the trees drank in moisture...Hard to think that in the valley murder lurked, as from the meadow there came not even a murmur, the lambs in their foetal sleep, innocent of slaughter” (p.76). As the memory of his maternal home and the

regular routine of the prison, Glasheen embodies the hope of a home, yet, as the small stream invoked by the meaning of the very name Glasheen in Irish, nature follows its course and, beautifully but sinisterly, life and death intertwine as part of a natural cycle.

“Sinners”

The whole of “Sinners” takes place in a house owned by Delia, the main character in the story, which is turned into a Bed and Breakfast place during the summer months. Delia is an aging widow who lives alone and is waiting for a family who has rented two rooms. Even though sometimes there is the total gaze of an omniscient teller, “Sinners” is a story mainly told by a partially omniscient narrator who most of the time knows only about Delia's thoughts. It is then through the internal perspective of a third person narrator that is not a participating character but who has knowledge of the main character's feelings that we are introduced to the most significant aspects of Delia's life: her house and its memories and her new lodgers. Equally important, though, happens to be the very end of the story, in which Delia's relation with the fourfold turns full circle.

The souvenirs of her past. It is evident that the main character finds it difficult to feel her house –the building where she lives- as her home. While the *house* is mentioned five times throughout the story (pp. 37, 38, 43 and 44) mostly in reference to the improvements already made or to be made at the place, *home* is used only once in the set phrase *go home* (p. 38). This demonstrates that at some point in Delia's past her house has been felt as a home but, for reasons we will describe later, now it is only the remains of a home. The derelict building still keeps, though, the memories of past events, the carcass of a life already lived, as the personification “the whole house listened” (p. 43) seems to suggest. Delia knows every corner of the house and she distinguishes every sound made inside it as she knows herself: “So at night, awake, she would go around the house in her mind and think of improvements that she

would make to it in time” (p. 37). Moreover, she is able to tell what her lodgers are doing by only listening to their movements. At some point in the story, for example, she realizes that “they climbed the stairs. They used the bathroom in turn. She could tell by their footsteps” (p. 39). It can be suggested then that the house functions as an extension of Delia, faithfully reflecting the stillness she seems to be feeling at that moment. This immobility clearly opposes the past lived in the house, when there has been a husband and there have been children and when she has been an active wife and mother and not the passive lonely lady she has become with age.

The souvenirs of the past seem to be contained in the rooms and the objects in the house. In only one part of the house is Delia able to feel safe from the *immoralities* of her guests: “She hurried back to her room and sat on the edge of her bed, trembling” (p. 44). Her current room constitutes a refuge where she can be safe against not only the private life of her lodgers but also her own past life still haunting her memories. Her room is a different room from the one in which she has –rather unpleasantly— fulfilled the functions of wife and mother:

the blue room... had been her and her husband's bridal room, the one where her children were born and where, as the years went on, she slept as little as possible, visiting her husband only when she was compelled to and afterwards washing and rinsing herself thoroughly. Five children were enough for any woman. Four scattered, one dead, and a daughter-in-law who had made her son, her only son, the essence of graspingness. (p.40)

The room is displayed as a memento of the time in which the house has been inhabited by her unloving husband and when her children have been born and raised. Yet, we can read that as a time when, with all the hardships and unpleasant situations of family life, Delia's house has been a home, in contrast with her present, in which she seems to have withdrawn from life and receded to the sheltered loneliness and lifelessness of her room.

Similarly, Delia's remembrances of her family life are mainly related to the objects she keeps in the house. They either bring back to life memories of her close kin, as "a little round box in her bedside drawer, she felt for the sleeping tablet that was turquoise in colour, identical to the sea on a postcard that her youngest daughter had once sent from the Riviera" (p. 44) or trigger feelings of lost affections, as the china tooth mug her lodgers break in the bathroom: "She would miss that tooth mug, she would mourn it. Her things had become her faithfuls, what with all else gone or scattered" (p.40). She has become strongly attached to the objects in her house because they have become the remains of past relationships and gone-away people. Yet, as the rest of the house, the things in it are in a highly deteriorating state, as "the dish cloths [which] smelt of milk, no matter how thoroughly she soaked or boiled them. They had that sour, gone-off smell" (p. 38). That state most probably stands as a token for Delia's current lonely life, revolving only around the house and its components. Through an accurate comparison, we are told that Delia "knew, yes, she knew, that the love from children became fainter and more intermittent with time, not unlike a garment washed and rewashed, until it is only a suggestion of its original colour" (p. 40).

Nevertheless, even from the beginning of the story there is the need to heal the ties with life. As we have already spotted, awake at night, Delia goes around the house in her mind and think of improvements that she has make to it in time. Those include

new wallpaper in the good room, where the existing pink was stained around the window frames, brown smears from repeated damp. Then in the vacant room where apples were stored, the wallpaper had been hung upside down and had survived the years without any visitor noticing that the acorns and hummingbirds were the wrong way around. (p. 38)

There persists in Delia the strong desire to rebuild the house and to care for it as she has cared for her children and despised her husband. There is in Delia the need to dwell there and to start feeling it as her *home*, a temporary feeling she is oftentimes able to recreate through the presence of her lodgers.

Sinners. Delia has lived alone ever since her husband's death and her children's departure and, apart from the lodgers she keeps in the summer, she rarely interacts with any other people. It is when an English couple and their daughter arrive at her lodge that the actual events in the story take place. The first night, "after they [the lodgers] went out to dinner, she [Delia] had peered into their room. She did not open their suitcases, as a point of honour, but she studied some of their possessions" (p. 42). It is through their belongings that she can recover their lives. So, here again, we can notice how objects become significant as tokens of people's lives and for Delia's sense of a tie to life.

Her new lodgers are the ones who bring back to life the house and the objects inside it. Through the use of the mugs, the cups, the towels, the tea towels, the dishcloths, the bed, the bedroom and the bathroom in the house, the place turns once again into a temporary home. The couple rents the blue room where Delia's marriage bed is located and

she imagined them, professional man and plump wife, lying side by side, the square pouches of the quilt rising and sinking with their breathing, and she remembered the clutching of it as her husband made wrathful and unloving love to her. (p. 41)

What she really imagines is life: by reconstructing their breathing reminding her of the times when her husband has alive and sex a regular though undesired action, she projects what she has lived throughout her life. Once again, though, her memories are not necessarily sweet: life is sometimes bitter and love can also be made unlovingly.

But not only has the couple brought back Delia's past and troubled feelings. Their daughter Samantha also plays a key role in her remembering. Delia is truly judgemental of the girl's appearance and personality even from their very first encounter. Samantha is portrayed as cocksure and naughty, which discloses Delia's initial envy of her, as illustrated from her perspective by the following extract:

The daughter, Samantha, was cocksure, with toffee-colour hair, narrowing her eyes as if she were thinking something mathematical, when all she was thinking was, 'Look at me, spoil me.' Her long hair was her chief weapon, which she swept along the table....

Samantha's short skirt drew attention to her thighs, which were like pillars of solid nougat inside her cream lace stockings. (pp. 38-39)

Even though there is not a first person narrator in the description, we can recognize a highly prejudiced version of the girl, which emerges from Delia's perspective. With her long hair, short skirts and firm thighs, Samantha is a reminder of the youth, sensuality and sexuality that Delia has lost. She stands then in an opposite position to her: "the diaphanous pink nightie was laid out on her [Samantha's] pillow and looked *life-like*" (p. 42, emphasis added).

Yet, more revealing of her guests' activity and of Delia's passivity becomes the first climatic scene in the story, in which she hears the three of them apparently having sex together. First, "she hears her [Samantha] going towards the parents' room" and then she hears "a series of taps," and "whispers and tittering and giggles" (p. 42) and then "the exclamations" (p. 43). As readers, however, we only know Delia "pictures" (p. 43) of the action supposedly taken place in the room, knowing in advance that "it would reach the vileness of an orgy" (p. 43). There is no distinct evidence that the lodgers are actually having sex but for Delia's recognition of the sounds they make. The sexual innuendo of those sounds is enough, though, for her to acknowledge her willingness to feel desired and alive once again. This is confirmed by her later dream in which she appears in a regal but very profane church surrounded by naked saints and is asked to undress and help herself to wine. So strong is her desire to feel alive that "she kept believing that she was not dreaming, except that she was" (p. 45). Moreover, there is also a hint that the lodgers are the ones who possess life in Delia's fear that they "get forward and start to think that the house [is] theirs, opening wardrobes and drawers, finding the souvenirs of her past" (p. 41), to which we have referred in the previous section.

On the whole, it seems that the real issue with her lodgers is that they bring their lives and more specifically their youth and sex inside the house, thus disrupting Delia's world of stillness. In contrast with her, they apparently enjoy the life that she has lost. The moment they

enter the house, they unlock her past memories and disturb the passivity that has protected her for so long.

The give and take that is life. If we consider that to feel at home we have to keep to the fourfold or, in other words, to the natural communion of earth, sky, divinity and mortality, we can conclude that Delia has remained in her house for a long time but she has not been *at home*. First, there are no instances in the story in which Delia is in contact with earth and sky since, as in "Plunder," most of it takes place inside the building. The moment she sees her dog coming from under the hedge, she just goes to the window and looks at the outside from inside the house. Furthermore, it is through her guests that she learns of the natural qualities of faraway places but also of the Irish countryside surrounding her. Second, Delia has also lost her connection with the divinity. "Prayers," we are told, "come only for her lips and not from deep within anymore" (p. 37). The Virgin has also become a "cold plaster statue" (p. 42). Thus, the rapport with God has gone in ways that will be described further in Chapter 4. Last, Delia has seen her relations with her fellow mortals wane almost to disappearance. Her unloving husband has long been dead and the love of her children has faded away and, as a consequence, Delia has only remained attached to the souvenirs of her past and to the brief and provisional contacts with her guests.

Nevertheless, the lodgers in the story force her back to life. Having noticed the youth in Samantha opposite to her forthcoming death and witnessed what has been from her perspective and orgy that make her body "stiffen[ed] with revulsion" (p. 43), Delia decides to act and take revenge: with utter sarcasm she tells the guests that she will charge them for one room only for the other has not been occupied. To that, the couple chooses not to react as she has expected and they only doggedly insist on her taking the money, after which they leave. Once the car is out of sight, "she flopped onto the grass and began to cry. She cried from the pit of her being. Why was she crying? It has to do with herself." (p. 47). It is in contact with the grass and

soil that she realizes how within the artificial boundaries of her house she has built up a wall not only against nature but also against the life contained in the rest of humanity, how “her heart had walled up a long time ago, she had forgotten the little things, the little pleasures, the give and take that is life. She [has] forgotten her own sins” (p. 47). After all of that have left, Delia has not been able to rebuild a home. It is only within the fourfold that we construct our homes and our identities, the pit of our being. Moreover, it is precisely this what Delia started perceiving through the visit of her guests, if we consider that her identity, as everyone's, is founded on a sense of home or a sense of belonging. There are chances then for Delia going back home, to live within the fourfold. After a blank space in the page, we are told that “the grass was soft and silken and not too dry, nourished from rain and spells of sunshine” (p. 47).

Chapter Four

A Classification of Places and their Presence in Identity Construction

In this section, I will classify the places that represent homes in *Saints and sinners* in view of the theoretical framework I have selected for this work and the way in which the characters construct their identities in the different geographical and mental spaces they inhabit. The places present in the short stories under consideration can be classified having in mind two conceptual binary oppositions, urban versus rural and non-places versus dwellings, and the persistent notional framework that has informed this dissertation, the Heideggerian (1971) fourfold. Although so far I have only worked with four representative stories, in this section I will also take into account other stories in the collection.

Urban and Rural

Urban areas are mainly represented by the spaces that appear in the cities of “Send my roots rain,” “Madame Cassandra” and “Manhattan Medley,” the first two stories set in Dublin and the last one in New York City. In “Manhattan Medley,” New York is described as a city full of similar buildings which lack any kind of singularity. The narrator thus “came up and hailed a taxi. Passing row after row of identical tall blocks of flats” (p. 139), which creates confusion in the main character’s mind who believes she knows “the buildings from a previous excursion, but finds [her]self in wrong hallways” (p. 136)”. The standard and repetitive qualities of the place attest most probably to the also regular and routinary life of city dwellers.

Other urban traits are abuse and homelessness. In several instances the lexicon used to refer to cities as chaotic and unfriendly reinforces this argument. In the next extracts the relevant words have been italicized to show how cities are verbally constructed through the characters’ or the narrators’ powerful descriptive words:

Across the street came a more *vociferous voice, shouting*, calling it a *city of abuse, a shit-hole, a hell-hole* and saying that everyone sucked. (MM, p. 138)

She had walked *briskly* from the bus station through *the busy streets*, strains of music, melodeon and guitar, *fraught* young mothers wielding their pushchairs, and *beggars* of various nationalities. (SMRR, p. 154)

A mass of people in mindless urgency hurtling through the turnstiles and with *no time to speak*. I came up and hailed a taxi. Passing row after row of identical tall blocks of flats, [...]. (MM, p. 139)

Crowded noisy cities are also represented as spaces where human beings become undifferentiated and where they aimlessly roam rowdy areas. For instance, in New York we find that “the *homeless* had already decamped for the night, in doorways, in recesses, on church steps, lying there in heaps, *like sacks of potatoes*” (MM, p. 146). That notion is also duplicated by a vision of Camden underground station in London, “where lorries and wagons were parked and young men waited to be recruited, literally hundreds of them, hundreds of Irishmen” (SK, p. 6). As stated elsewhere, even the earth upon which cities are built have turned damp and artificial, sticky and blue from leaking gas.

The cities described in *Saints and sinners* never imbue their dwellers with a sense of belonging to a home that may take an important place in their process of identity formation or turn into a source of personal identity and security for them. More than dwellers, the urban characters in the collection appear to be mere inhabitants of those “cities of abuse” in which the connection with the most essential and simple elements of life fades away. This foregrounding of urban isolation and homesickness has already been pointed out by many of the sociological works reviewed in Chapter One (e.g. Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). Furthermore, all the features of the fictional cities in the work of O'Brien listed above, i.e. uniformity, homesickness and isolation, broadly coincide with the description of postmodernist urban settings which Augé (2000) has appropriately labelled *non-places*.

On the other hand, rural spaces are positively depicted. It is suggested that wider and more encompassing natural phenomena than cities are able to contain both awful and awesome elements at the same time. We encounter several instances where rural areas are introduced in the stories as food providers. In "Plunder," there is the family's cow, which "by not being milked her poor udder would be pierced with pain" and "the milk would drip all over the grass" (p. 78). This clearly represents a key source of survival since the family can count on its milk while under siege. Similar examples can be found in "Green Georgette" and "My two mothers":

On one occasion [...] the grass was very rich and hence the milk did smell somewhat strong, [...]. (GG, pp. 123-124)

Up there on the slopes of the mountain there were ripe blackberries, masses of them on the briars, and not wishing to have them rot she began to pick them to make blackberry jelly. (MTM, p. 176)

Here, grass-fed animals and organically-grown fruit make people feel in close contact with nature and with their own natural origins, a sensation that seems to be lost in urban life as can be deduced from Rafferty's desire to plant a garden in "Shovel kings."

The following extract is also evidence of how the closer characters get to a rural habitat, the closer they feel to nature.

In our front garden, there were a few clumps of devil's poker- spears of smouldering crimson when in bloom, and milky yellow when not. But my mother's sister and her family, who lived closer to the mountain, had a ravishing garden: tall festoons of pinkish-white roses, a long low border of glorious tulips, and red dahlias that, even in hot sun, exuded the coolness of velvet. When the wind blew in a certain direction, the perfume of the roses vanquished the smell of dung from the yard, where the snow and her young pigs spent their days foraging and snorting. (OW, p. 183)

The description of a ravishing garden close to the mountains in contrast to a more modest one in the suburbs attests to this and lets the reader imagine the blissful sensation of life in contact with nature. Moreover, in "Old wounds," as well as in "Black flower," it is suggested that, when we die, even nature will keep to us so as to accompany the end of our vital cycle:

[...] the grassy mound that covered [their] family grave was *a rich warm green strewn with speckled wildflowers*. (OW, p. 199)

In contrast, in urban settings, as in “Black flower,” “Send my roots rain” and “Old wounds,” the only instances in which flowers appear are in arrangements placed in vases inside hotels or cut in order to be taken to hospitals. These flowers are more *tamed* than *natural* in view of their artificial cultivation and of their fading quality and closeness to death.

From a metaphorical perspective, at the end of “Sinners,” nature gives Delia the opportunity of a new beginning when she, in contact with grass and earth, has new chances of going back to life after being for so long within her house walls. This opportunity is also offered to the hippies in “Old wounds,” who “crossed the Irish Sea and found ideal havens by streams and small rivers, building houses, growing their own vegetables” (pp. 194-195), thus returning to a more basic and natural form of life.

Yet, not all in nature is life and beauty. In “Plunder,” as can be seen in the following passages, it is evident that nature can be negatively affected by human action, thus turning the providence and peacefulness of the fields and woods into a barren land. After the invasion, the field is “ghost-like, despite the crows and jackdaws making their usual commotion at evening time” (p. 79) and a ghastly void haunts the place.

A deathly emptiness to the whole world, to the fields and the sacked farmyards and the tumbledown shacks. Not a soul in sight. Not an animal. Not a bird. Here and there mauled carcasses and bits of torn skins where animals must have fought each other in their last frenzied hungers. (p. 81)

Only the woods, the tangly woods, and in some parts tillage, small patches of oats and barley. Even to think of corn, first green and then a ripening yellow, or the rows of cabbage, or any growing thing, was pure heartbreak. (p. 81)

It has to be noticed, though, that the heartbreaking void described in the story results from the invasion of an army foreign to the rural ways of the inhabitants of an unnamed land.

In sum, up to here, we recognize two kinds of geographical places, urban and rural. Those urban areas characterized by its postmodern features such as tall buildings and crowded streets rarely receive positive descriptions that can provide the characters with a sense of belonging. Those places are complex heterotopias in which to survive since the experience of home is lived in them as fragmented and artificial as its surroundings. Moreover, from a post-colonial perspective (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1994), urban areas create in the characters a feeling of displacement where the relationship between the self and the place seems to have been disrupted. This, however, has not always been the result of a colonial imposition but of the otherwise violent situations to which the characters have been exposed, i.e., migration, terror, old age.

In contrast, those rural environments that I have described above result in being places of relax and comfort coinciding with the nostalgic or romantic ideas of home reviewed in Chapter One. These places mainly encourage feelings of freedom and security within the characters' selves. Moreover, when characters such as Rafferty in "Shovel kings" and the narrator in "Old wounds" think of home, they bring to light happy and enjoyable memories that depict rural areas as a warm and pleasurable nature.

Non-places and Dwellings

Now, I am going to concentrate on those spaces that I may specifically consider to be non-places. In most of the stories, those are built around settings such as pubs, hotels and restaurants. In "Shovel kings," as well as in "Green Georgette," "My two mothers" and "Old wounds," pubs give their customers the sensation of warm and cosy places with their attractive red table lamps and warm lights which turn them into refuges from the literal and figurative coldness of the outside. Nevertheless, not all pubs involve that feeling of comfort and some are

presented as unhomely and unfriendly, as an Irish one that is “noisy and brash, young people coming and going, not a quiet corner to brood in.” (SK, p. 34)

Moreover, pubs also provide the characters with alcohol, which is an important element for most of their lives. At the Aran pub, “weeknights were quiet, but [...] because everyone got drunk.” (SK, p. 11) and “every pub [...] gave a different measure, and Biddy’s was popular because they gave five millimetres extra on a small whisky or vodka” (SK, p. 19). The relatively fixed routine and the easy socializing boosted by the consumption of alcohol turn pubs into ideal non-places in which each patron is able to reach light moments of evasion and left to temporarily wander in his or her own thoughts.

As regards hotels and restaurants, we should take into consideration two main stories, “Black flower” and “Send my roots rain”. In “Black flower,” a hotel called “Glasheen” is described from an ambivalent perspective. Despite the joyful natural surroundings of the place, its entrails are depicted as dark and morbidly suggesting the end of the story. After having tried several hotels “only to discover that the restaurant was too rackety or too dismal” (p. 69), Mona and Shane “landed themselves in this big, gaunt room that seemingly, served as both bathroom and dining room” (p. 63). In the uniformity of their conditions, the hotels in the story resemble the buildings in New York City (MM) or the pubs in Dublin (SK).

The hotel in “Send my roots rain” is similar to that in “Black flower” as regards its contradictory presentation. Despite its luxury and the significance of its history, the main character feels smothered by the noise and excessive heat of the place. “The heat in the room was now quite oppressive and a mobile phone rang repeatedly from the depths of someone’s handbag” (p. 164). The place is too crowded and people do not truly connect with each other because they seem to be too busy and continually moving: “Men and women hurled themselves through the revolving door of the hotel with urgency, and so quickly did they follow one upon the other [...]” (p. 149). In contrast to the pubs in “Shovel kings,” this hotel, full of patrons and

apparent warmth, is seen by the narrator as a cold place where people find it difficult to establish relationships with one another, as they are only interested in their own lives.

The non-places sketched above are mostly urban places of transit that lack the spirit inherent in the social purpose for which they are, according to Heidegger (1971), originally built to constitute places in which we somehow *dwell* alongside the way other activities we daily carry out. Instead, in contemporary times, this aim seems to have been replaced by the postmodernist enactment of standardized identities and the performance of mostly artificial social relationships, such as those described by Albrow (1996) and Eagleton (1996).

In a clear opposition to non-places, dwellings are usually built around the warm feelings invoked by the presence of a fire, a central site in the house around which the main characters gather and act. Examples can be traced in “Green Georgette,” “My two mothers” and “Old wounds”:

There was a fire in the room, with an embroidered screen place in front of it. The various lit lamps had shades of wine red, with masses of a darker wine fringing. It was like a room in a story, what with the fore, the fire screen, the fenders and fire irons gleaming, and [...] looking at Drew and then looking out the window at the setting sun from which thin spokes of golden light irradiated down [...] (GG, pp. 116-117)

My grandfather, who snored, slept in a settle bed down in the kitchen, near the fire. (OW, p. 186)

We all sat at the same fire, ate the food, and when a gift of a box of chocolates arrived looked with longing at a picture on the back, choosing our favourites in our minds. (MTM, p. 170)

Fires help to create in the readers' minds the image of a hearth, where characters feel comfortable and protected. Moreover, around the fires they have opportunities of reaffirming their relationships in a familiar or brotherly atmosphere and showing their belonging to the dwelling.

In other stories, dwellings are built around the figure of the mother. In many of O'Brien's stories, mothers become more than human and they acquire traits that make them nearly embody the homes themselves:

She was the hub of the house, the rooms took on a life when she was in them and death when she was absent. She was real mother and archetypal mother.
(MTM, p. 169)

I could not imagine anyone other than my mother in our kitchen, in our upstairs or downstairs; she was the presiding spirit of the place. (OW, p. 199)

“Sinners” presents a similar case in which its main character, Delia, is absorbed by and amalgamated with the house itself with all its rooms and ornaments³. Contrary to the nurturing quality of mothers referred to in the previous paragraph, Delia has mentally made of her house a private museum where she has collected the remains of a life and has found protection against those changes that she has not been able to control. This attests to the socially produced quality of the sites we inhabit surveyed by both Harvey (1989) and Soja (2001).

Similarly, other dwellings in *Saints and sinners* emerge from the mental representations of the characters, mostly recalling the pleasant homes of their childhood. As it has already been stated, Rafferty, Shane and the girl in “Plunder” bring to light beautiful memories that involve their initial homes in Ireland where they live with their mothers and siblings and enjoy an ordinary life. In most of these stories, Ireland in the characters' childhood has been a dominant element and it has haunted their hearts and memories. It is noticeable that in all the stories there is a desire to revive the infancy and there are children or youngsters that entice the characters to that revival. O'Brien once declared that “childhood really occupies at most twelve years of our early life...and the bulk of the rest of our lives is shadowed or coloured by that time” (O'Brien, 1982, p. 197). Therefore, it can be suggested that the presence of a home set in

³ Delia provides us with a detailed description of the materials of which furniture are made (*oak, cold plaster* pp. 41-42), the colours of the rooms (*blue* p.40) – as well as an undesired stain on the wall (*the existing pink was stained around* p.38), and the sound (*rattle, clutch* p. 41) of an old bed.

Ireland in most of O'Brien's stories might have been triggered by her own childhood in her native land.

At a first glance, I would generally argue that the meaning the characters attach to the notion of home is tied to a dwelling or physical place such as a childhood house. When they imagine their homes, they commonly remember significant events related to their family members, specifically their mothers. However, after analysing the different stories, I discover that the construction of this concept depends on each character's experience and their perception of the world. That is why even pubs, elsewhere described as temporary spaces, can become places that provide the characters with warmth, comfort and a sense of belonging where they can share experiences of life with friends and family. What is more, all these places in which the characters feel comfortable to dwell may become part of their identities and vice versa, the characters in turn do have a role in the construction of homes. Although in postmodern times identities are fragmentary and in constant change, they appear to be able to somehow build a fleeting sense of belonging to those places that can provide them with a temporary stability, a home. It is then in harmony with the fourfold that they try to reach a provisional state of completeness.

O'Brien's main characters may inhabit provisional and ephemeral *non-places* (Augé, 2000), specifically pubs, hotels and restaurants, defined by their individuality and isolation. Nevertheless, the protagonists always manifest a strong desire to build their *dwellings* (Heidegger, 1971) in which they may spare and preserve the unity of the four elements, thus feeling at peace and safeguarded as at home. This ideal seems to be difficult for most of them, but it is not completely impossible since there is always a hope for those who do not desist from such thought.

The Heideggerian Fourfold

Heidegger's (1971) concept of the fourfold consists of four elements in which we dwell: earth and sky, divinities and mortals. If we are at peace and in harmony with these elements, we dwell and therefore we enjoy the pure state of home. Nonetheless, the buildings we inhabit can be real or imaginary places and they have the function of preserving us within the fourfold.

Earth and sky. In "Shovel kings," Rafferty's relationship with the earth is not the same he has had with it as a child. From the moment he arrives in London in the 1960s, the close connection with nature is lost and that is what he misses from his native place. In the city, he only finds blue clay when he digs long trenches for the electricity cables. The clay, however, is "blue from leaking gas and sticky, so sticky you had to dip the shovel in a bucket of water every so often, [...]" (p. 7). City dwellers have damaged their relationship with a once prodigal earth, now deadly and filled with chemicals. Yet, Rafferty still keeps his contact with the sky. Even though he seems to despise the polluted urban soil, he is able to enjoy being under the sky: "he was totally at ease out in the open, big white lazy clouds sailing by in the sky above us [...]" (p. 5), therefore somehow returning his communion with nature.

Although in "Sinners" most of the story takes place inside the house, there are few instances where Delia is in contact with the nature that surrounds her place and those examples are worth mentioning. One of them leads to the moment when she goes to the window and sees her dog coming from under the hedge. This case, in which she looks at the outside from inside the house, signifies Delia's entrapment in the material world and her detached relationship with the natural world. Another similar instance is when her guests tell her about other places.

Often with guests, she would [...] learn of faraway places- the coral reefs, or the wildly contrasting climates in different parts of Australia, or Table Mountain in Cape Town, [...]. (p. 45)

Once again, she envisions the outside from inside the walls of her house. Her costumers –the outsiders- are the ones who tell her about the nature she cannot see and the life she does not

enjoy because of her never abandoning the house and always worrying about its decay. It is only at the end of the story that earth and sky reappear in her life; "She flopped onto the grass and began to cryThe grass was soft and silken and not too dry, nourished from rain and spells of sunshine" (p. 47). The connection that she is now able to re-establish with the natural elements offers Delia a new chance of going back to life. It is in contact with the grass and the sunshine that she realizes how, within the artificial boundaries of her house, she has built up a wall against nature, how "she [has] forgotten the little things, the little pleasures, the give and take that is life. She [has] forgotten her own sins" (p. 47).

The main character in "Black flower," Shane, seems to be less detached from the earth than the other characters in the stories but this only happens when he goes out of jail. While he is in prison, he is confined to live within the concrete walls of the building but, unlike Delia, he manages to keep to a relatively natural cycle through the regularity of his daily activities. However, when he is set free, he is capable of enjoying "the view and the rolling countryside" (p. 71) and the picture we get of its surroundings is that of an abundant nature with long avenues and gateways full of various trees and animals. The same closeness Shane eventually feels with the sky. Even in the final moments of his life, when he lays "half in and half out of the telephone kiosk" (p. 74), he tries to keep in his eyes the image of "the sky with its few isolated stars" (p. 75). Opposing to Delia's fortune of being brought to life after re-connecting with nature, Shane experiences in death his going back to it through a vision of the sky and stars.

As Shane's harmonious relation with the first two elements of the fourfold reaches full closure with his death, the ties with nature of the female narrator in "Plunder" are destroyed by human violence. Her family has developed respectful ways of sustaining an organic relationship with the fields surrounding their dwelling place but a group of men disrupt that tie inflicting violence on both nature and family all way through until the ultimate rape. However,

it is in connection with the sky that they locate in time and find solace while under siege: "We could guess the hours roughly by the changing light and changing sky. Later the placid moon looked in on us" (p. 79). The message appears to that, no matter the hardships or the conditions we human beings inflict upon each other, earth and sky will always be with us since they are the natural shelter to which we belong.

Divinities and mortals. The divinities constitute one of the four basic criteria to keep the unity of the fourfold. They are defined as "beckoning messengers of the godhead" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 148) in which a godly presence, or absence, sets the standards for dwelling and everything that surrounds us. I understand that Heidegger (1971) means a broader notion of divinity that that offered by institutionalized religion, one encompassing all forms of spiritual activity knowledgeable of O'Brien's background and position towards Catholicism, though, I trace in this section instances of the characters connection with the religious entities available for them, as those are the most noticeable instances of the presence or absence of the divinities in the construction of home.

In "Shovel kings," Rafferty has become disconnected or has never being connected with the divinities. It is difficult for him, for example, to feel comfortable with religion, because when he attends "the big white, wide chapel with three altars where the Irish priest gave thunderous sermons on a Sunday," he I was full of fears, thought everything was a sin" (p. 9). The divinities represented here by the Catholic Church not only deprive him of the security and satisfaction that the contact with the deities is supposed to provide but also denies his humanity by reinforcing the supposedly sinful aspects of life.

In "Sinners," Delia's relationship with the divinities has also been broken, as the following passage shows:

In her wide-awake vigils, she prayed or tried to pray, but prayer, like sleep, was on the wane now, at the very time when she should be drawing closer to her blessed Maker.

The prayers came only for her lips and not from deep within anymore. She had lost that most heartfelt rapport that she once has with God. (S, p. 37)

Delia has tried to keep a connection with the divinities but her soul has lost the capacity to do it and she has become too attached to the material elements that remind her of the people in her life. In stressful situations, she attempts to re-establish that link, as when “put[s] her hand on the cold plaster statue of the Virgin, asking for protection” (p. 42). That relation, however, is not possible anymore and she only receives as an answer the coldness of a frozen object without life.

Similarly, the characters in “Plunder” get minimal answers to their pleas to the divinities. In difficult times, it is in prayer that they try to find a cathartic solace from the horror of the outside: “Sleep was impossible and so we watched and we prayed” (p. 80). As when Shane lay dying, the children are reassured of their tie with the divinity by being told that the reason why they “have a dent in our upper lip is because when we are born an angel comes” (p. 83).

In “Black flower,” Shane seems to be no luckier than Delia. About to die, “a woman, who had been first on the scene, said she had heard him repeatedly utter, ‘Oh Jesus, oh Mary’ ” (p. 75). Whereas Delia seems to have maintained all the formal aspects of Catholicism without any actual rapport from her God; Shane appears to have turned his fight for the Irish cause into a *religion* trying to recover his ties with the divinities only with his last gasps of life.

Although some of the characters attempt to get in contact or revive their relationship with the divinities, that harmonious and complete connection is never fully achieved. I can partially conclude then that, as represented in *Saints and sinners*, there is no possibility of recreating the fourfold in postmodern times. Yet, in “Sinners” and “Plunder,” there exists a sense of hope to return or reinvent that unity between all elements and find a new dwelling, a new home. The ways in which that can occur are discussed in the next chapter in this work.

Lastly, the characters in the four stories have a point in common and that it is their mortal condition: they are human beings capable of death and they dwell in as much as they protect the earth, receive the sky and aspire to the divinities (Heidegger, 1971, p. 148). This view emphasizes the finiteness of a person's existence, as illustrated for example by Shane in "Black flower" who is always conscious of his mortal condition and cannot prevent his death. It is through the recognition of an inevitable death that they begin to accept their essential nature and, in some cases, experience moments of epiphany. In particular, when Delia realizes that she is growing old and leading a lifeless existence, the open ending of the story leaves exposed the possibility of rebuilding a communion with the fourfold. Likewise, the girl in "Plunder" senses a difficult yet persistent chance of hope, after facing her own rape and the death of her fellow mortals.

To conclude, in contemporary times, the preservation of the fourfold becomes a difficult task for those characters in "Saints and sinners," because they lack connection with either earth and sky or divinities and mortals. It can be suggested, however, that there is in O'Brien's work a constant struggle of the characters to reach a connection with nature, i.e. earth and sky. Furthermore, we can make that notion extensive to our undeniable connection with it due to our mortal quality: in the end, we human beings will all go back to nature. In postmodern times, the contact with the divinities, though, is still persistently elusive.

Chapter Five

Discussion

In this section, I offer a series of concluding statements on the way in which characters construct their homes in different mental, physical and geographical places in *Saints and sinners*. It remains to consider these processes together so as to examine the insight resulting from this study. This entails answering my first research question in this work:

(a) Which places in *Saints and sinners* represent homes?

Taking into consideration that the representation of home depends on personal experiences and conceptions, it becomes difficult to find a unanimous answer since the process is an active construction that frequently changes according to each human being. Most of the homes constructed by the characters in *Saints and Sinner* either trace back memories of past houses or project into the present and the future ideal places in which the presence of fellow beings or significant objects becomes central.

Confirming Wright's (1991) sociological approach to the issue, in *Saints and sinners* most of the characters generally connect home with the initial physical **houses** set in their childhood. Mostly geographically located in Irish lands, those are places where the characters are born and they stand for a secure space in their memories. As in O'Brien's previous works, the figure of the mother does not only play a powerful role in the characters' lives (Pelan, 2006) but it also stands as a key element in the their construction of home. In "Sinners", for instance, though the protagonist is a feminine character, her motherhood has already been lost and with it the place has also lost its sense of home. In contrast, in "Shovel kings" and "Black flower", both Rafferty and Shane display nostalgic feelings derived from special moments shared with their mothers as symbols of their homes. Similarly, in "Plunder" the mother embodies protection and shelter. In the same way, in this last story, the house inhabited by the

main character shifts into a space of fear and isolation (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). As well as in post-colonial contexts, the place is inhabited by a foreign power causing the displacement of the characters' sense of home.

The spaces already levelled as **non-places** are no less important than the homes of childhood. Although pubs, hotels and prisons are frequently described as places that cannot provide security or stability as *real* dwellings, they are settings where to build a home becomes possible. The Aran and Biddy Mulligan's pub and the Glasheen hotel and Portakabin prison represent temporary homes for Rafferty in "Shovel kings" and Shane in "Black flower", respectively. These places foster feelings of belonging and guarantee a refuge from those events that are out of their control, thus turning into *ideal* non-places, mentally constructed by the characters. On real versus ideal homes the enlightening review of the literature by Mallett (2004) can be consulted. In all cases, there exists a gap between a place and a non-place: when we are in presence of a non-place the notion of place is never totally eliminated and the non-place is not completely achieved (Augé, 2000). So, it is in this fissure where the characters find a space with the qualities of both place and non-place.

However, not all representations of home are triggered by a physical existing dwelling. Homes are kept or created as **abstractions** as part of the characters' past memories or projections to the future. In "Shovel kings" and in "Black flower", the main characters have kept in their minds nostalgic representations of Ireland either as the rural haven where Rafferty has once lived or as the unified country it has once been for Shane and his fellow unionists. In "Sinners", Delia is only able to feel the home in the house she remembers, where her whole family has lived and she has been an active mother. In "Black flower", Shane envisions a home with Mona but finally that idea is only possible in his mind since death interferes in its concretion.

It is significant that **the human element** is always present for the characters to feel at home or to create a temporary one. Human beings are always integrated to the physical or mental spheres at play in the process of constructing a home. For example, in the London pubs Rafferty frequents in "Shovel kings," it is with his acquaintances that he shares a temporary home. Nevertheless, when he travels to Ireland, he does not have any close relationship; hence the pubs make him feel a foreigner for whom it becomes impossible to recreate a hearth. Similarly, in "Sinners," Delia attempts to create ties with her lodgers during their stays. Those, however, are always feeble and flickering. The relationships that the characters are able to establish with others do not endure since they generally develop weak bonds that do not guarantee stability, when building a permanent home is desired. Thereafter, these people always inhabit fleeting images of home.

The **natural element** also acquires a central significance in the characters' representations of home since it usually stands for security and comfort. When the protagonists make it visible in their thoughts, they remember pleasant moments such as the natural garden in "Shovel kings," or the final one in "Sinners." We perceive how characters prefer to avoid living in urban places and move closer to nature where they have the possibility of returning to a basic form of life, thus appreciating the beauty of their gardens, orchards, fields and meadows, as well as cultivating and collecting what they have to offer them.

As a conclusion, though retaining the natural and human elements, in postmodern times homes can only achieve provisional purposes. The places that represent homes in *Saints and sinners* usually lack in physical solidity and they are more often than not mentally constructed. Whereas houses are generally derelict or destroyed in the process of the story; pubs, hotels and the houses of childhood constitute abstract constructions realized by circumstantial ties, passing memories or future plans. The precarious quality of these homes mirror in a certain

way the provisionality of postmodern identities, a relationship that will be examined with reference to my second question:

(b) How are place and identity articulated into those representations of home?

The concept of home is undeniably tied to the notion of identity because who we are is usually understood in relation to the spatial and temporal boundaries within which we inhabit. Moreover, it is that sense of place or belonging that gives us stability (Sarup, 1996). However, we do not construct those homes alone. As our identities, they are partially formed in the process of interaction between us, in the story we tell of ourselves as well as in the stories that others tell of us (Barker, 2003). It can be suggested that there are epochal tales of both home and identity that particularly show the ways in which both were articulated in a specific time in history. There remains then to study how space and identity are articulated in the construction of homes in *Saints and sinners* as a token of the postmodern times we are living.

First, **all characters in the stories under analysis are either physically or imaginatively in search of a home.** In "Shovel kings," Rafferty has various homes in his mind, his childhood home in Ireland and the pub in London being the most salient ones. In "Plunder" the unnamed characters are expelled from their home just to realize by the end of the story that, though difficult, there are always many roads back home. In "Black flower," Shane wishes to settle down and he provisionally does so just for the brief period that the dinner retold in the story takes place. In "Sinners," Delia discovers that the natural and the human elements are missing from the house she inhabits and that therefore she actually needs a home. In view of all this, I concur with Akbar (2011) in that in *Saints and sinners* "notions of home - real and flawed, imagined and Edenic- pulse through these stories, alongside its inverse - alienation, exile and spiritual homelessness" (n. p.).

Second, in view of the theory under consideration, **the search for a home involves an attempt to reach the fourfold.** Dwelling, Heidegger (1971) declares, is only accomplished

through the activities of cultivation and construction, caring and preserving. Those in turn include in O'Brien's (2011) stories mostly the presence of the natural or the human elements already described in the previous section. Thus, the characters trying to build their homes require the presence either of the natural and rural spaces profusely described throughout this dissertation or of fellow human beings. These include occasional acquaintances in "Shovel kings" and "Sinners" and family members and prospective partners in "Plunder" and "Black flower," respectively. There is also in all cases the acknowledgement of the tangible presence of death and the absolute absence of the divinities. The latter can be read, of course, as a signal of the author's well-known position against Catholicism (Byron, 2006; Pelan, 2006) but it can also function as a trait of modern and postmodern times. Postmodernity is certainly distrustful of totalizing entities such as religion or the nation (Eagleton, 1996) and consequently the characters in *Saints and sinners* seem not to be under the fatherly protection of any of these institutions⁴.

Another point to be made about the fourfold is that **the characters' attempts to reach it always fail**. That happens as a result not of the absence of God, which does not seem to represent a problem either for the characters in the stories or for their narrators, but of certain experiences that, one way or another prevents them from building permanent homes. Rafferty in "Shovel kings" remains a homeless throughout the story and in "Black flower" Shane is murdered and therefore loses his chances of building a home. In the remaining stories, we are left with a hope of a home but in no case the presence of an actual stable place is finally accomplished.

Fourth, at some point in their lives **all of the characters have suffered some kind of postmodern displacement** which might have disrupted their unity of being in building and

⁴ Catholicism is subtly criticised in "Shovel kings" and "Sinners" and extreme nationalism finds its doom in "Black flower."

dwelling, thus resulting in “alienation, exile and spiritual homelessness” (Akbar, 2011, n. p.). Shane in “Black flower” has been incarcerated for his defence of a united Ireland and Delia in “Sinners” has suffered the seclusion of old age. Both find themselves to be out of place in a society that hails constant change and transformation. The cases of Rafferty in “Shovel kings” and the unnamed characters in “Plunder,” both living under conditions similar to the ones described by Albrow (1996), seem to be cases of postcolonial dislocation (Stoddard, 2006): Rafferty belongs in the group of Irish men who have moved to England to find hard manual labour and “Plunder” stands out as a “fable about cultural clash and rape” (May, 2011, n. p.). It is no wonder then that *Saints and sinners* have been seen as peopled by “imperfect characters we can all recognise: the sad and the stranded, the hopeful and the lovelorn – people who fully inhabit their complex present, yet anticipate the losses that will befall them” (Brownrigg, 2011, n. p.). That complex present can be related to the postmodern condition, one that seems to offer only non-places in which it is quite a struggle to truly build and dwell and in which our experience of home becomes one of disruption and fragmentation (Augé, 2000)⁵. The characters then develop only fragmented identities in a continuous process of becoming and the readers experience their elusiveness through the distance created by third person narrators, with the exception of the disturbing events in “Plunder” that are retold by a frightened but powerful first person.

Fifth, even in that perpetual process of becoming, **there always persists the possibility of heterotopias and of homes as sites of articulation and of momentary closure.** In *Saints*

⁵For Yardley (2011), the setting of all stories in the collection is the new Ireland, one that she [O'Brien] ferociously dislikes. This is the Ireland of the 2000s and the Celtic Tiger, the mad boom that made the country momentarily the envy of almost every other nation on earth and then plunged and recrimination that will plague it for decades. (n. p.) This helps confirm the hypothesis that the context in which the displacement of the characters takes place is a postmodern one.

and sinners both space and identity are framed as representations that the narrators and characters temporarily make theirs in order to create transient homes since there is a clear impossibility of truly permanent ones. It is in this process that Foucault's (1986) *heterotopias* become significant. Being places that function in the non-hegemonic conditions that the characters inhabit, the heterotopias let them build real and fictional homes at the same time. Pubs in "Shovel kings," the dinner at the Glasheen hotel in "Black flower" and the future prospect of Delia's home in "Sinners" all represent heterotopias, fluctuating sites in which neither the actual place nor the imaginary one are totally lost or utterly complete. Perhaps due to O'Brien's (1962, 2011) concern with contemporary loneliness (Brownrigg, 2011; May, 2011) and the failure of human relationships (Carpenter, 1986), it is through their subjective experience that the protagonists produce their own mental spaces that may change according to their needs (Harvey, 1989; Soja, 2001).

The postmodern condition, O'Brien (2011) asserts in *Saints and sinners*, offers non-places in which it becomes difficult to dwell and in which the building of a home, as well as the construction of identity, are always fragmentary and in progress. Nevertheless, it is in these sites where the characters find the possibility of homes that can provide momentary closure. In sum, temporary homes are taken as physical or mental sources of personal identity. The places in which we try to construct our homes and eventually dwell become fundamental facets of our identities.

Conclusion

In view of the analysis and discussion of the stories I selected for this dissertation, I can highlight five salient findings in this work:

1. It is possible to linguistically describe the physical and mental places constructed as *homes* by the characters in *Saints and sinners*. In O'Brien's (2011) collection space does not only function as a mere setting but it involves the characters' perception of it as a home, a place where they try to belong.
2. The homes in *Saints and sinners* can be broadly classified into houses, non-places and abstractions. Mental representations, however, become central throughout the text because most of the homes built by the characters involve memories of the past and projections into the present and future. Those representations always include in turn the human and natural elements to temporarily make the protagonists feel at home.
3. The characters in the selected stories are continually engaged in a search of a home that includes an attempt to reach the fourfold. However, their endeavours to achieve a complete connection with the human, natural and godly elements generally fail.
4. That failure I attribute to the postmodern displacement experienced by all the characters in *Saints and sinners*. In this, I consider the collection to be an exceptional diagnosis of the postmodern condition.
5. There only remain for the characters the possibilities of heterotopias, fictional homes grounded on the real settings mentioned above which offer the characters in the stories the chance of building homes as sites of articulation and of momentary closure.

These points provide me with suitable evidence to support my initial hypothesis that in *Saints and sinners* space and identity are articulated into representations that the characters create to construct provisional dwellings and temporary homes. Those places are not necessarily fixed locations or physical structures but mostly mental constructions based on those sites that, in postmodern times of change and transformation, can be felt as short-lived yet pleasant homes.

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Appendix

The copies in this appendix belong to O'Brien (2011). *Saints and sinners*. New York: Back Bay Books/Little Brown and Company. The references in the body of the text belong to O'Brien (2011). *Saints and sinners*. London: Faber & Faber.

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