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THE HETEROTOPIC PUB IN CONOR MCPHERSON'S *THE WEIR*

Kübra VURAL ÖZBEY[1]

ABSTRACT

Conor McPherson makes use of a pub setting in his play entitled *The Weir* (1997), in which characters come together and begin telling stories to each other after the appearance of the only female character Valerie in the pub. The act of storytelling reveals the individual traumas of characters along with allusions to Irish folk culture and the collective troubles of the nation. The pub enacts a cultural space where characters are isolated from the outside world and contemplate personal and national problems. While the pub appears as a site of retreat for characters in crisis, they create an alternative community, opposing the individualism and consumerism of the Celtic Tiger Ireland. McPherson's portrayal of the setting becomes heterotopic in the sense that the pub functions as a counter-site to contemporary Irish society by challenging new realities of the country in the 1990s. The juxtaposition of the past and the present in the pub not only reflects socio-cultural norms and values but also challenges them simultaneously, inverting the progress of everyday life in the dynamics of the Celtic Tiger Ireland. These aspects of the pub sit with Michel Foucault's dictum of heterotopia. This paper analyses the pub in *The Weir* as a heterotopic place where characters penetrate deeply into the stories teemed with cultural elements, uncovering individual and national troubles. In grounding the concept of heterotopia, this paper entails Foucault's discussion of the term and extends beyond his principles to elucidate McPherson's pub in the play.

Keywords: Conor McPherson, *The Weir*, Ireland, pub, Michel Foucault, heterotopia, storytelling

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CONOR MCPHERSON'IN *THE WEIR* ADLI OYUNUNDA HETEROTOPİK BAR

Kübra VURAL ÖZBEY[2]

ÖZ

Conor McPherson, *The Weir* (1997) başlıklı oyununda, karakterlerin bir araya geldiği ve tek kadın karakter olan Valerie'nin gelişiyle hikâye anlatmaya başladıkları yer olan barı mekân olarak kullanır. Hikâye anlatıcılığı, karakterlerin bireysel travmalarının yanı sıra İrlanda folk kültürünü ve ülkenin toplu sorunlarını ortaya çıkartır. Bar karakterlerin dış dünyadan soyutlandığı ve kişisel ile ulusal sorunlar üzerine düşündükleri kültürel bir alanı temsil eder. Bar, krizdeki karakterler için bir kaçış bölgesiyken, karakterler Kelt Kaplanı İrlanda'sının bireyselliği ve tüketimciliğine karşı koyan alternatif bir topluluk oluştururlar. Bar, 1990larda ülkenin yeni gerçeklerine meydan okuyarak, çağdaş İrlanda toplumuna karşı mekân işlevi gördüğü için McPherson'ın mekân tasviri heterotopik hale gelir. Barda geçmiş ile geleceğin bir araya getirilmesi sadece sosyo-kültürel normları ve değerleri yansıtmaz, aynı zamanda Kelt Kaplanı İrlanda'nın yeni dinamiklerindeki günlük hayatın gelişimini tersyüz ederek onlara meydan da okur. Barın bu özellikleri Michel Foucault'nun heterotopya açıklamasıyla örtüşür. Bu çalışma, *The Weir* adlı oyunda, karakterlerin kültürel ögelerle bezeli kişisel ve ulusal sorunlarını açığa çıkartan hikayelere derince daldıkları barı analiz eder. Bu çalışma heterotopya konseptini temel alırken Foucault'nun terim tartışmasını kullanır ve McPherson'ın oyundaki barını izah etmek için Foucault'nun heterotopya ilkelerinin ötesine geçer.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Conor McPherson, *The Weir*, İrlanda, bar, Michel Foucault, heterotopya, hikâye anlatıcılığı

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Introduction

Conor McPherson (1971-) achieved early success in his play *The Weir* (1997), which was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in London and reached large audiences in Belfast, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston and Washington (Kerrane, 2006, p. 105). The play is a monologue play based on the storytelling of characters who deal with haunting stories. The characters from Northwest Leitrim gather in a rural pub, and Jack, Finbar and Jim begin telling stories to Valerie who has recently moved to the town. Their stories about a house built on a fairy road, the visiting ghosts of the dead and a pervert from the rural land portray the supernatural and traumatic past of Ireland. Then, Valerie's story of her late daughter and Jack's desperate love affair unveils the personal troubles of the Irish. Ostensibly, the stories come to the fore with the details about authentic Irish culture and communal anxiety. Most of the studies about the play posit an investigation into the implications of the stories by highlighting the Irish culture and life and its transformation. As a case in point, Margaret Hallissy (2016) underlines the tradition of Irish storytelling which bridges the gap between the past and the present in Irish culture (p. 30). In this analysis, Hallissy specifies the function of storytelling in Ireland as a sign of authentic culture against English supremacy and the recollection of the Irish past (2016, p. 38). Following this, Hallissy talks about Lady Gregory's collection of Irish folkloric stories and compares McPherson's stories in *The Weir* with those of Gregory (2016, pp. 38-45). In another instance, Matthew Fogarty (2018) lands McPherson's ghost stories in Irish folkloric tradition (p. 20) and argues that the play is an example of the Irish gothic genre (p. 21). Moving on to the stories in the play, Fogarty offers a reading of ghost stories by tracing the shifting values of Ireland with an emphasis on the entanglement of the old and new social, cultural and economic elements (2018, pp. 22-29). Furthermore, Eamonn Jordan (2019) dwells on each story of the play by commenting on Josie Rourke's production (pp. 141-145). In this analysis, Jordan deals with the terms of equality, sharing, generosity and friendship regarding the act of storytelling in *The Weir*. From that point on, Jordan argues that the sense of community offers a stark contrast to neoliberal economic policies of the 1990s in Ireland, since the critic recognises social connections, generosity and communal interactions among characters, sharing stories and beyond (2019, p. 149). Such debates illustrate the inquiry towards McPherson's use of storytelling in connection with Irish history and culture.

This paper aims to develop an alternative perspective by shifting the focus from the stories of the play to its pub setting. Drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, the study analyses McPherson's pub as a heterotopic place in *The Weir*. In his article "Of Other Spaces," Foucault lists his principles and examples of heterotopia by enabling a vast area of study for later critics. Most of his principles resonate with *The Weir*'s pub in that the setting turns out to be a site of retreat for characters, separating them from the outside world, even though it is a part of everyday life in Ireland. It fulfils a specific function for characters in crisis and juxtaposes the old and new values of the country. Hence, this paper offers a heterotopic reading of the setting where characters penetrate deeply into stories teemed with the cultural elements, traumas and troubles of the Irish on individual and national scales. The study mainly embarks on Foucault's understanding of heterotopia and the analysis also extends to the definitions and interpretations of other critics working on this spatial concept.

Heterotopia, the Irish Pub and *The Weir*

As the premise of this paper is based on the concept of heterotopia, it is necessary to explain the central tenets of the term first. In his 1967 speech (published as an article in French in the same year), Michel Foucault coined the nonce word of heterotopia, describing a counter-site that challenges everyday spaces and what these spaces represent in the dominant culture and norms. His talk was later translated into English and published in 1984 under the title of "Of Other Places: Utopias and Heterotopias." Foucault delineates heterotopia as

> places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. (1984, p. 3)

Then, he gives the example of a mirror to clarify a heterotopia:

> In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. . . . The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (Foucault, 1984, p. 4)

As can be observed from this depiction, heterotopia resonates with the real world while this counter-site is distinct from it. Following the initial depiction, Foucault lists certain principles to explicate the term in detail. Accordingly, heterotopias can be found in every culture; they have a specific function in each society; they may set a place against other places; they disrupt the usual flow of time; there is a set of rules for the accession to heterotopias; and, they either create an illusionary space or generate another real space (Foucault, 1984, pp. 4-8). To illustrate these principles, Foucault refers to cemeteries, libraries, museums, theatres, brothels and colonies. Also, in his preface to *The Order of Things*, Foucault briefly mentions another aspect of heterotopias as "disturbing" on the grounds that they ruin the linguistic formulation and make it impossible to identify things (2002, p. xix). Foucault's perspective, therefore, remains useful in identifying the spatio-temporal dimension of counter-sites that detach people from the real world.

As counter-sites, heterotopias generate resistance to the structures of power, social rules and norms. Foucault explicates this element by providing two categories for heterotopia: "crisis heterotopias" and "heterotopias of deviation" (Foucault, 1984, pp. 4-5). The first one refers to "privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis" (Foucault, 1984, p. 4). Although crisis heterotopias, belonging to primitive societies, cease to exist, heterotopias of deviation in modern societies emerge as places "in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed" (Foucault, 1984, p. 5). He looks at prisons, rest homes and psychiatric hospitals as examples of deviation heterotopias. This classification offers insights into the use of spaces in power structures as places are designed to regulate and

impose social norms. Heterotopic sites work against this type of spatial organisation as counter-places where transgression, exclusion and instability challenge the rules of ordinary spaces. In this regard, heterotopias become alternative places or sites of otherness as they exist outside social values and regulations.

Subsequent to Foucault's concept, varied interpretations of heterotopia emerge. Kevin Hetherington, for instance, reinterprets heterotopia by revising its definition. Hetherington eschews the notion of counter-spaces, which may create sites of resistance, and proposes heterotopias as "spaces of alternate ordering. Heterotopia organize (*sic*) a bit of the social world in a way different to that which surrounds them. That alternate ordering marks them out as Other and allows them to be seen as an example of an alternative way of doing things" (1997, p. viii). Shifting to this definition, Hetherington lays out new associations to determine heterotopic places, among which the concept of otherness comes to the fore. He maps heterotopic places as sites of otherness in "social ordering" deemed relevant to modernity (Hetherington, 1997, pp. 8-9). Hetherington links heterotopia with modernity because heterotopic space is related to "utopic ideas of freedom and order," the terms deemed relevant to modernity (Hetherington, 1997, p. 12), and he critically analyses coffee houses, lodges and factories in specific examples as these places map the contours of modern society. Moreover, Joanne Tompkins refers to Hetherington's inclusion of imagined spaces for heterotopic zones and argues that "it provides a literal and metaphoric basis to the spatial analysis of what might be possible in theatre and beyond" (2014, p. 26). What matters more in Tompkins's discussion is that the critic rests largely on Hetherington's heterotopia definition and extends the study of the analysis of theatre and performance from this perspective. Her main target is to examine alternative sites which "present an opportunity for characters to inhabit a zone that has a relationship with the workings of the actual world, but that is distinguished from that world" (Tompkins, 2014, p. 3). Moreover, Tompkins includes the audience's experience of heterotopic place although there is no need for the audience to occupy a heterotopic site (2014, pp. 3-4). Therefore, her method of analysis offers a multifaceted reading of places:

> the theatre venue in which a performance takes place (or, if it does not take place in a conventional venue, the location in which it is staged); the narrative space(s)/place(s) that the playwright establishes, which are generated in the venue or even referred to beyond the limits of the performance space; and the layers of design and direction that are added to the first two types of space and which continue to accrete (and in some cases challenge or subvert) meaning. (Tompkins, 2014, p. 29)

Before embarking on the discussion of the pub as a heterotopic place in the play, it is necessary to set Ireland's socio-economic shift in the 1990s as the play's setting illustrates a crisis heterotopia with the characters going through a period of crisis during Ireland's transition. The twentieth century's last decade marked the economic expansion in Ireland, referred to as the Celtic Tiger. Starting from 1994 till the end of the century, the Celtic Tiger years yoked the Irish economy with "low corporation tax, aid from the European Union, [. . .] and the attraction to multinational corporations of a well-educated workforce" (Cahill, 2011, p. 4). After financial prosperity, subsequent changes occurred in Irish society. New economic dynamics and Ireland's adaptation to globalisation led to the emergence of a consumer society, enjoying a new atmosphere of lavishnenss. "Reports about," Denis Linehan pinpoints, "new cars, new

houses, a surge in foreign holidays and crowded shopping centres contrast sharply with the traditional image of the Irish as a rural peasantry" (2007, p. 289). In addition to this capitalistic spirit, Ireland culturally and socially transformed in the 1990s, as Brendan Geary suggests that the Celtic Tiger did not merely denote economic progress, but rather excavated new dynamics of transition in all aspects of the society (2014, p. 51). The Irish challenged the Catholic Church's authority in terms of sexual politics, considering sexual abuse scandals involving children in the clergy, so people lost their trust in the religious institution, turning to the individual practice of religion (Geary, 2014, p.59). Moreover, the appearance of the first female Irish president, Mary Robinson, had a remarkable impact on Ireland's sexual politics and the place of women in society since certain laws and regulations were enacted during her presidency. While laws targeted to ameliorate the troubles of family institution and the representation of suppressed groups, more scandalous cases were unveiled in the 1990s regarding "multiple paedophile rape, paternal cruelty and family dysfunction, and [. . .] female rape victims" (Coughlan, 2004, p. 176). This amounts to saying that the Irish society was suffering from social traumas of violence and abuse in this transformation period. What is more, the economic success of the Celtic Tiger was only limited to the southern part of the country. That is to say, the rural part of Ireland did not benefit from financial success and suffered from emerging economic frontiers since it was becoming harder to continue agricultural activities in the global market, which resulted in the economic divide between urban and rural Ireland. Deprivation, alienation, rage and hardship still defined the realities of the rural population. In the face of all of these changes in the 1990s, John McDonagh addresses the general atmosphere of the country by highlighting the distinction between "the Ireland of the 'Celtic Tiger'" and "an Ireland struggling with new ideals, beliefs and values, with the old Ireland battered by changing attitudes towards sex, religion, work, consumerism and education" (2001, p. 14).

The Irish pub is one of the places that emerges as a nexus of the Celtic Tiger spirit. The pub is a historical, cultural, social and economic space in Ireland. Starting from the seventeenth century, the pub has become an active part of public space in the urban and rural parts of the country. According to a research from 2013, there were almost 7400 pubs in Ireland, providing a significant business force (Cabras & Mount, 2017, p. 73). The local pubs are mostly family-run businesses (Cabras, 2016, p. 283), but, following the Celtic Tiger period in the 1990s, the Irish pub has moved from the local to the global context, and the experts operate the business in the global market (Kuhling & Keohane, 2007, p. 137). Undoubtedly, the process of globalisation in the twenty-first century has impacted the Irish pub culture since Irish cultural identity dovetails with the pub in the business market, and people in the pub are regarded as a part of the authentic culture by tourists (Kuhling & Keohane, 2007, pp. 80-81). Tourists believe in having a glimpse of Irish culture with their visits to the pub, even if it is located in a remote rural place, and this place promotes a romantic vision of a rural idyll. Despite the intrusion of foreign tourists, pubs still take on specific functions in the local structure. Accordingly, pubs contribute to the local economy by offering employment opportunities; they financially and psychologically provide an environment to support people; and, they facilitate communal ties. Ignazio Cabras and Matthew P. Mount give an account of rural Irish pubs as "third spaces" as zones for communal engagement in socio-economic systems of local communities (2017, p. 71) and highlight "the significance of . . . pubs in rural Ireland with regard to fostering

community cohesion and social capital, and increasing the level of economic wellbeing" (2017, p. 80).

McPherson's pub in *The Weir* resonates with the broad picture of pubs in Ireland, particularly in the rural areas. The playwright attributes his source of inspiration to the visits to his grandfather in County Leitrim (Grene, 2005, p. 302). The play's setting is depicted as "a rural part of Ireland, North West Leitrim or Sligo" at the beginning of the play (McPherson, 1999, p. 5). Therefore, the pub setting bears a resemblance to those in the local habitation. In the play, Brendan owns the pub which is used as a part of his house attached to a farm. Managing the pub is a kind of family business for Brendan, although his sisters have no attachment to the land any more. The first scene of the play is also important for recognising the social function of the pub for the community. The way Jack easily takes his drink before Brendan's appearance unveils that the pub members feel themselves at home. Later, Brendan, Jim and Jack chatter for a while and gossip about Finbar and the new woman in town. In so doing, they enable the reader/audience to realise the pub as a social space, allowing them to develop a web of connections. After Finbar and Valerie come to the pub, they share different stories about the land and themselves. Significantly, the act of storytelling, which is made possible by the heterotopic quality of the pub, fosters community ties and provides a sense of psychological relief. These aspects of the setting fit into the communal role that pubs play in rural Ireland. Additionally, the number of male characters – Brendan, Jack, Jim and Finbar – in the pub hints at the predominantly male environment of traditional pubs.[3] Moreover, the constant reference to the Germans coming to the town and pub illustrates a stereotypical vision of Ireland in the minds of tourists.

Having established the concept of heterotopia and the image of the pub, it is possible to dwell on the heterotopic pub in *The Weir*. The play's setting can be described as a heterotopic place as it fits snugly into most of the principles of Foucauldian heterotopia. Thomas M. Keegan, likewise, highlights the heterotopic essence of the pub by following Foucault's criteria:

> The pub meets all of the six in criteria laid out by Foucault in "Of Other Spaces." In their unique evolution out of Irish homesteads and inns pubs are culturally occurring. The mutation from grocers to strictly alcoholic establishments attests to their functional change through history. Certainly, pubs are composed of incongruent spaces. . . . They are heterochronous. They are isolated yet penetrable. And they function in relation to the existent space beyond them. (2010, p. 24)

Viewed in this way, *The Weir*'s pub demonstrates the precepts of a heterotopic place. The play's pub is a place of Irish culture, but enacts as a counter-site in the sense that it acts as a mirror to contemporary society by disrupting new realities of the country in the Celtic Tiger period. The play's pub juxtaposes the past and the present while bringing together the values of old and modern Ireland. Hence, it challenges social and cultural norms shaped by globalisation as the characters become members of an alternative community, providing a sense of fellowship in the social sphere of the play. The pub also becomes a "crisis heterotopia," a term Foucault uses (1984, p.4), regarding the characters in crisis reserve the setting as a hideout place. The stories

[3] Although pubs were traditionally male-driven in rural areas, this fact has been changing in the twenty-first century according to various research (Markham & Bosworth, 2016, p. 275).

recounted in the pub offer an uncanny and unsettled experience for the reader/audience by challenging the perception of reality. More interestingly, the setting amalgamates ancient and modern Ireland so that Ireland's new modernity in this period, as reflected in the pub, can be considered in terms of Hetherington's understanding of heterotopia.

The Heterotopic Pub in *The Weir*

The play's pub from western Ireland initially looks like an ordinary bar with its counter, bar taps, stools, tables and fireplace (McPherson, 1999, p.7). The description inducts the reader into detail about the pub's in-between position as "part of a house and the house is part of a farm" (McPherson, 1999, p. 7). Although the setting seems to be an everyday place, the meeting spot of the characters proves to be a heterotopic site as a counter-place by reversing the norms of the Celtic Tiger society and creating a sense of alternative community. In the 1990s, the Celtic Tiger economy introduced the country into the global market, where the local culture was promoted for the sake of global demand. Ireland attracted a huge number of tourists during the years of the Celtic Tiger. The tourism policy highlighted Irish heritage "as a key part of the tourist experience and a way of sustaining and developing tourism" (Kelly, 2007, p. 175). At the centre of heritage was located the Irish pub, not only as a reflection of the Irish spirit but also a product of "the cultural political economy of globalisation" (Fagan, 2003, p.114). Yet, unlike the commercial pubs, the play's rural pub inverts the new norms of society by consisting of domestic space with a home, cultural space as a local gathering place and agricultural space with a farm. This aspect of the setting entails a connection with one of the principles of heterotopia that Foucault identifies: "[A]n existing heterotopia function[s] in a very different fashion; for each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society and the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another (1984, p. 5). Henceforth, the rural pub in Irish culture, as revealed in *The Weir*, operates on three levels: domestic space, social area and economic site. The way that McPherson illustrates the pub as domestic and social sites intermingles with each other. To start with these aspects, the pub is partly Brendan's home, and other characters regard this place as their home where they come together and socialise. Jack, for instance, cleans his boots before entering the pub, takes his bottle of drink from the shelf himself and leaves his money when Brendan is not there. His easy manners in the pub show that he feels himself at home. To further argue, Jordan claims that Jack's actions "allow the spectator to grasp instantly some of the functional dynamics of this rural micro-community" about their "communal sensibility," "collective trust" and "mutual respect" (2019, p. 147). The homely pub makes all of these interactions possible for the alternative community, functioning as a counter-site. At a time when County Leitrim, a rural part of Ireland, undergoes a process of change within new economic realities, Brendan's pub turns out to be a site of compensation for the lost sense of communal ties in a stark contrast to the commercial culture of tourism. Moreover, Jack and Jim prefer spending their time in the pub after work which makes this place a cosy site for them. More interestingly, the pub represents the sense of belonging to the land in Brendan's case. When his sisters force him to sell the field where the pub is located, Brendan bitterly opposes this idea. He strongly attaches himself to the pub and his land and voices their materialistic aim, saying that "all they see is new cars for the hubbies" (McPherson, 1999, p. 9). While the sisters' attitude unveils the growing capitalism and individualism in Irish society, Brendan is trying to

redeem the connection with the land, advocating a sense of belonging to the homeland. Brendan complains that they do not attach themselves to the land, but they are after financial gains. Andrew Hazucha discloses Brendan's portrait in the play and expounds that he has "a belief that the land has stories to tell if one will but listen closely, and that the numinous experiences associated with the immediate landscape are based in reality. For Brendan, land that is alive with narrative and myth and legend is sacred soil" (2013, p. 76). The pub appears, in other words, as a means of affinity and connection with people and the land. As with this emphasis on the land's stories, Brendan and his pub oppose the transformation of Irish storytelling at the turn of globalisation in the new commercial culture of pubs in the Celtic Tiger Ireland.

Furthermore, the pub is at the core of economic life in this play. After the Celtic Tiger, tourists began to discover the beauty of rural lands in Ireland like Leitrim, and the pub became their target for tasting authentic Ireland. The play evidences this fact by referring to some German tourists thirteen times in the text (McPherson, 2010, pp. 17, 28, 41, 69, 70, 71). They are said to enjoy trekking, discovering the town and visiting the pub in the evenings during summer. Brendan is about to overhaul the pub before their arrival although he does not mind fixing the toilet for the locals (McPherson, 1999, p. 48). This attitude indicates the care for tourists as a source of income for the pub despite Brendan's open statement of hatred for the strangers. The material profit that tourists provide for the locals is also evidenced in Finbar's approach. Finbar, the hotel owner, is interested in new investments, and he seems to be in the market of tourism when he brings an outsider, Valerie, to the pub. He leads her to meet "the natives" (McPherson, 1999, p. 10) and declares that the Germans enjoy the natural view of Leitrim. When he realises that Valerie is impressed by the environment like a German tourist, he also wants her to discover the genuine culture, asking: "Em. There's what's? There was stories all, the fairies be up there in that field. Isn't there a fort up there? . . . The Germans do love all this" (McPherson, 1999, p. 28). Introducing an element of local culture, Finbar turns the pub into an interesting site for the gaze of tourists and strangers, and, hence, offers an economic strategy, making Irish pubs authentic globally in the business market. Thus, the play makes use of the pub setting to deal with tourism, one of the themes observed in Irish drama after the globalisation process (Lonergan, 2010, p. 4). The play ends with a reference to German tourists as Valerie hopes to learn German with her visits to the pub and Jack questions tourists' real identities, whether they are from Denmark or Norway. Brendan's response that "I don't know [he does not] where the fuck they're from" (McPherson, 1999, p. 72) discloses his hostility to tourists. As he is the pub's owner, his approach to tourists indicates resistance to new realities of society. Although globalisation in the Celtic Tiger years enforces the intrusion of tourists into the rural locale, the community does not welcome them. In this regard, even though Brendan earns money in the pub, his place becomes a heterotopic zone of hostility for tourists, challenging our perception of rural community.

As the play provides, the pub attracts the globe with new marketing strategies, and it still offers an old tradition of storytelling. The pub as a home for traditional storytelling yokes Foucault's another principle of heterotopia that concerns a "juxtaposi[tion] in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault, 1984, p. 6). This aspect of heterotopia may denote the inclusion of several symbolic spaces in a single site, allowing the reading of representative meanings of each layer. From this vantage point, the pub

becomes heterotopic since it hosts old and new Ireland in its symbolic narrative spaces as the stories recounted by characters unveil. A look at these stories is necessary here if we are to discuss multiple spaces that the pub presents as a heterotopic place.

The first story told by Jack is about the place of the weir and gives an account of the history of the place. Jack starts telling the scary story of Maura Nealon's house where Valerie is living now. Maura was a frequent visitor of the pub, sitting near the fireplace and telling the locals the story of her house. According to Maura's account, the house is built on a fairy road which caused Bridie, Maura's mother, to hear knocking at their doors and windows during the 1910s. They believed that the fairies disturbed the family when their house was constructed on their road, and a priest had to bless the house, ending the hearing of such sounds. Later, when the weir was constructed in the 1950s, Maura heard some knockings for the last time. While Jack is narrating this story, the pub setting moves to the house built on the fairy road that he depicts as follows:

> Like it wasn't a road, but it was a . . . like a . . . From the fort up in Brendan's top field there, then the old well, and the abbey further down, and into the cove where the little pebbly beach is, there. And the . . . legend would be that the fairies would come down that way to bathe, you see. And Maura Nealon's house was built on what you'd call . . . that . . . road. (McPherson, 1999, p. 33)

Undoubtedly, the setting in the narration creates an uncanny experience as the focus moves from the pub to the house. Moreover, the story of the house connects the pub with pre-modern Ireland. The house reminds the pagan roots of old Ireland, the residues of which are cleared by the Catholic priest's blessing. The story indicates that the local environment, a symbol of old Ireland with fairies, is destroyed when the house, a domestic site of civilisation, and the weir, a symbol of modernisation, are built in the area. The process of destruction leaves a significant mark on the psyche of the Irish as the story of haunting fairies pinpoints. On the verge of the real and the unreal, the heterotopic juxtaposition of sites, the house-the fairy road and the house-the pub, prevails the first ghost story. Jack's use of these settings responds to Minna Vuohelainen's claim that "heterotopias' ability to question dominant culture [Ireland's Catholic culture in the case of *The Weir*] renders them likely settings for ghostly encounters with past transgressions" (2015, p. 89).

The second story narrated by Finbar is about the spirits with whom Niamh Walsh, his neighbour's daughter, had engaged. The Walshes lived near Finbar's house: "There was a house out near where we were on the other side of the Knock there. It would have been the nearest place to us, Valerie, about a quarter mile down the road" (McPherson, 1999, p. 36). The youngest daughter of the Walshes, Niamh, was playing the Ouija board with her friends, and after she returned home, Niamh went hysterical. She claimed that she saw a woman on the stairs, and she refused to leave the living room. Niamh's mother asked Finbar's help. He called Doctor Joe Dillon while the mother phoned Father Donal to bless the house. Taking a sedative, Niamh felt better. Then, the family got a phone call from their neighbour. The woman who looked after Niamh and her sisters was found dead at the bottom of the stairs in her house. The story implies that the one Niamh saw on the stairs was the late neighbour. In this story, the Ouija board and the stairs may suggest an in-between liminal space between this world and the other world. Moreover, both points of passage can be counted as heterotopic on the grounds

that "[i]n contrast to the concept of liminality, the concepts of the neutral and of heterotopia embody not only structure but also process, and in particular, the uncertainties and unintended consequences of process" (Hetherington, 1997, p.67). More closely considered, Hetherington's "consequences of process" pertain to the fact that the experience of heterotopias may drive one to experience ambiguity, insecurity or uncertainty. The heterotopic sites, likewise, cause unsettlement in Niamh's story as her mental state is devastated. The Ouija board disturbs her state of mind, and, then, the stairs unnerve Niamh. The ghostly story also affects the pub's atmosphere, making the visitors experience a sense of uncanniness.

The tension of the storytelling increases with Jim's other ghost story. He narrates a grave-digging scene when an unknown man showed him to dig a grave next to a late little girl. After the funeral, Jim realised that the man was a dead man, and he was notorious for being a pervert. This story is of significance in terms of the heterotopic space and the Irish cultural context. Initially, the graveyard is one of the places that Foucault exemplifies heterotopias. He refers to the cemetery while explaining heterotopia's relation to time by stating that "the cemetery is indeed a highly heterotopic place since, for the individual, the cemetery begins with this strange heterochrony, the loss of life, and with this quasi-eternity in which her permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance" (Foucault, 1984, p. 6). Thus, the story narrated in the pub is set in a heterotopic site, that is the cemetery, which juxtaposes life and death and past and present and functions as a counter-site to contest the ordinary course of life. Moreover, the heterotopic graveyard story recounted in the gothic tone evokes terror in the listeners' minds, considering the idea of pedophilia. Although Jim claims that he was sick with a fever and probably made up the conversation in his mind, the details of the story unveil unsettling news from contemporary Ireland. Anthony Roche concentrates on such details in this story and relates them to some historical facts of the time. Roche states that "Jim's story dates from the early 1970s [when] the newspapers were filled with court cases in which older men (many of them Catholic priests or brothers placed in charge of young people) were brought to trial charged with sexual abuse of children" (2009, p. 227). In a decade when the corruption of the Catholic church and other social and moral deteriorations are outstandingly exposed to the public, "[t]hese scenes evoke a particular moment in Irish society and culture when such stories were becoming public knowledge so that the imagination of the audience is engaged with what is not said, but implied: that the man means harm to the child, and that that harm is likely to involve sexual abuse" (Fitzpatrick, 2012, p. 62). Through such ghost stories, the Irish find a way to uncover the traumatic past. The story at hand pertains to the use of the heterotopic site by juxtaposing several places. The graveyard and the pub where this story is told return the reader/audience's gaze to the dark portrait of Ireland, recalling the scandalous news of violence during the Celtic Tiger period as referred to social shifts in Irish society.

In turning to the connection between the pub and these stories, it is apparent that storytelling in this site allows the characters to illustrate the Irish past with its fairies, ghosts and haunting troubles that make the country question certain norms towards the end of the twentieth century. In effect, the characters' return to the past and their experience of these troubles in their recounting demonstrate that the pub is still a trace of the past, but it preserves its presence in contemporary times. The pub's amalgamation of the past/the present and the imagined/the real makes it a heterotopic place, "destabilis[ing] its realistic setting, creating an

imagined, spectral halo (of an alternative, haunted, landscape) around what is depicted on stage" (Cousin, 2007, p. 33). Storytelling tradition is presented to the contemporary listener, and its tunnel to such fantastic stories turns the pub into an unreal space despite its existence in Irish culture. While there is no disruption from the outside world, the characters move back in time. This causes them to penetrate into the stories more in that the past in their imagination is entangled with the modern. It is a central contention in Foucault's interpretation of heterochrony, the temporal aspect of heterotopia: "Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time – which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" (1984, p. 6). He further explains that

> there are heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time . . . . [T]he idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity. (Foucault, 1984, p, 7.)

To pursue the case of the play, the pub compiles Celtic myths and historical events. The heterotopic place, therefore, enables the reader/audience to bring diverse times together; while the narration in the pub flows in contemporary time, it presents Irish pasts simultaneously. In his essay, Foucault ventures into the libraries and museums as examples of heterochrony (1984, p. 7). Just like the books in libraries or objects in museums, the stories recounted in *The Weir*'s pub encapsulate the break in the usual course of time. What is more, the pub further amasses personal hi/stories through Valerie's traumatic maternity and Jack's love affair. Although the first three stories are functionally used to allude to the cultural traumas of Ireland through which the reader/audience is left to face social problems, the last two stories underpin the individual problems of the contemporary Irish people.

Moving on to the last two stories in the heterotopic pub, a look at Valerie's case is necessary at first. Valerie's presence in the pub is absolutely significant as she is permitted to enter this site. She is accompanied by Finbar who introduces her to the pub attendants, and Brendan's warning of Jack about a female visitor points out that the entrance to the pub is with permission. In other words, Valerie needs the guidance or company of a man to enter the pub so it unofficially requires her to get the sanction or consent of the male group. After a working day, the single men of rural community spend time together in the pub and establish a sense of fellowship in their masculine environment. This male companionship avoids female participation as can be observed in Jack's discomfort after learning that Finbar will bring a woman visitor: "He's bringing her in. And there's you and men, and the Jimmy fella, the mugging's, the single fellas" (McPherson, 1999, p. 11). Therefore, Valerie needs an affirmation of her access to the pub. This entry resonates with an aspect of heterotopia that the place "is not freely accessible . . .. To get in one must have a certain permission and makes certain gestures" (Foucault, 1984, p. 7). Ostensibly, her accession does not include a specific rite or ceremony. Still, Finbar's introduction of her to the locals suggests that she needs approval to become a part of the pub's community, referring to the traditional pub's space as male-dominated. Then, she turns out to be an intruder in the male domain.

Valerie gets an active role at the pub when her position changes from a listener to a storyteller. Her personal story explains the reason lurking behind her moving from Dublin to Leitrim. Although she had a good life with her husband and their daughter Niamh, their life was destroyed when Niamh had an accident in a swimming pool and died. Valerie could not recover after this tragic event, and she appeared to accuse herself of Niamh's death. She was working at Dublin City University, and she did not attend her daughter's swimming activity organised by the school on time. As she arrived late, she found out that Niamh had an accident and died. After Niamh's death, Valerie claims that her daughter called her, and they talked on the phone. Niamh was scared of the knockings of the children and a man on the road, so she wanted her mother to take her. After listening to others, Valerie seems to use the elements in their stories: Niamh's name from Finbar's, knocking from Jack's, the man on the road from Jim's and the return of the dead from two ghost stories. Although three stories teem with local Irish elements, Valerie's narration draws attention to her loss, emotional pain and guilt with contemporary references to modern Ireland. The university and the specific swimming pool's name from Dublin (McPherson, 1999, pp. 53-54) portray contemporary life in the city. In contrast to the men in the pub, her world represents the modernisation process in Ireland, and Emilie Morin sheds light on her difference from others:

> Unlike her companions, whose stories are articulated against the onset of the modern, Valerie makes a threatening modernity the very fabric of her narrative: for the first time, ghosts speak, and their channels for making contact with the world of the living are the telephone and, to a lesser degree, the television – a medium which Jeffrey Sconce has memorably designated as 'haunted', by virtue of the spiritualist hopes that it carries, and its capacity to create simultaneity and doubleness like the telephone and the radio. Valerie's account of hearing her dead daughter's voice on the phone has much in common with reports of EVP (Electronic Voice Phenomenon), a staple of psychical research since the 1950s, related to a belief that electromagnetic fields can provide entry into a multilingual spirit world. (2014, p. 1110)

Upon these details, storytelling reaches a new phase because the supernatural becomes concrete and tangible in its emergence in the phone with a voice. The men, except for Brendan, do not believe in Valerie's story, believing that her sense of loss troubles her. Although she is a good listener and does not attempt to challenge other stories, she is forced to accept that the phone call is just a dream, a kind of illusion or a sign of madness (McPherson, 1999, pp. 57-58). She neither agrees with nor rejects their explanations and remains silent. What prevails in her story is that she subtly opposes these men. Their attempt to provide her with a rational explanation, for Morin, manifests Valerie's challenge of these men as "her mastery of storytelling also enables her to put an end to the advances of the local patriarchy" (2014, p. 1109). This idea is also useful in understanding the pub's heterotopic quality. As Valerie becomes the dominant figure of the pub, she subverts the patriarchal order in their community, challenging the patriarchal social and cultural codes of Irish society. Accordingly, the pub works against the powerful structure of society and emerges as an alternative place with Valerie's agency. Valerie's active participation also initiates another process and takes on a new dimension to storytelling. It now offers psychological relief rather than traditional entertainment. Her catharsis even triggers Jack to talk about his loss of a lover. His ex-girlfriend's marriage to another man and her invitation of him to the wedding really agonise him. His sharing of this

personal story is a result of Valerie's account. Her presence not only denounces the masculine structure of the pub but also calls for a change in the established practice of storytelling.

In response to the altering dynamics of Ireland in transition, the pub juxtaposes the ancient in its presentation of modern Ireland. More tellingly, the activity of storytelling attributes a specific function to the pub, recalling Foucault's explanation that "heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society and the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another" (Foucault, 1984, p. 5). The pub, accordingly, turns out to be a refuge for the characters in crisis and enables them to find relief after sharing the similar experiences of modern people in Ireland. Valerie and Jack both suffer from personal crises and feel regretful and lonely after the loss of loved ones. This is consistent with Foucault's classification of heterotopia for primitive and modern societies. He first refers to the "crisis heterotopias" of primitive societies, clarifying that "there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis" (1984, p. 4). Then, he mentions "heterotopias of deviation" in today's world as places for "individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm" (Foucault, 1984, p. 5). Crudely speaking, the attendance of the distressed characters at the pub, like Jack and Valerie, converts the place into heterotopia, regarding its being a place for those in crisis. This aspect strongly establishes the pub as a heterotopic site. To some degree, the play's characters retain the pub as a hideout place because of their troubles. While "increasing fragmentation and individuation" define contemporary Ireland (Keohane & Kuhling, 2003, p. 135), the sense of community that pub members develop helps them relieve past traumas and suffering of loneliness. Those in crisis, in other words, create the alternative community in the pub, resisting the progress of Celtic Tiger society. Even though the pub can be seen as a place of leisure to spend time idly for either tourists or locals, it can still be associated with heterotopic qualities as S. Spanu (2020) highlights the heterotopic attributes of leisure sites concerning Foucault's "crisis or deviation heterotopias, meant to resolve an imbalance or restore 'normality' (the balanced individual), all in support of the official ordering" (p. 434). After telling their stories, the characters, each time, have moments of laughter (McPherson, 1999, pp. 34, 35, 36, 39, 40, 42, 52, 62) and the way that they attempt to offer rational explanations to each story (McPherson, 1999, pp. 58-59) reveals their restoration process. Read in this way, the pub provides itself as an example of heterotopia since the characters rehabilitate themselves after having moments of relief throughout their visit.

On the brink of this idea, it is probable to suggest that Ireland, on a broader scale, may be in a state of crisis regarding the past traumas of violence, domestic troubles and sexual abuse in the country. Such troubles, either on national or individual scales, are transmitted to the reader/audience through storytelling in *The Weir* on the grounds that

> [t]he fantasy of mastery is first and foremost a symptom of the unmasterable character of trauma. Not only does this fantasy hold open the possibility of experiencing and representing trauma, but it also makes possible the endurance of the traumatized subject in process of (processing) trauma. (Gana, 2014, p. 84)

The haunting ghosts of old and new stories reveal the troubles striking in the collective memories. Therefore, the pub as a representation of Ireland becomes a crisis or deviation heterotopia.

More important still, Foucault delineates heterotopia "a placeless space" (1984, p. 4) and clarifies his definition with an example of a mirror, as stated above (1984, p. 4). In this example, the mirror is not related to utopia, but rather a heterotopia in the sense that the mirror displaces the person looking at it by making one discover his/her absence as the reflection of the body is seen in a different location (Foucault, 1984, p. 4). This idea of absence and presence can be traced in the play in two ways. The first one is the photo that the characters look at when Valerie searches for the history of the place. In the pub, the photographs call her attention, and they particularly talk about the photo of the weir constructed in 1951: "1951. The weir, the river, the weir em is to regulate the water for generating power for the area and for Carrick as well" (McPherson, 1999, p. 27). The photo is functionally used as an allusion to the play's title. It pictures the weir, a dam, which converts the energy of water into electricity. This is the initial point for the modernisation process although it ruins nature and the course of life in Ireland as exemplified in the story about the fairy road. Hazucha acknowledges that the photo of the weir stands for "the long-awaited arrival of industrial development and modernity to this part of the country" (2013, p. 75), but it grounds "the reality of environmental degradation [and] the human misery created in the wake of this significant habitat alteration" (2013, p. 72). Thus, the photo becomes a symbol of this new era of conflicts in Ireland.

Such photos are notable for the collective memory in the sense that they "represent the power of the archive where collections of snapshots in personal and/or community life activate the representation of entire cultural histories, which are also records of social activities and human interconnectivity, effectively acting as a kind of proof of cultural discourse" (Trench, 2012, p. 172). Correspondingly to Trench's claim, the photo makes them think and talk about the transformation in the country. It is also undoubtedly true that the weir generates electricity on a figurative level and changes the atmosphere of the local environment. In a metaphoric reading, it evolves into a motive behind the stories of the characters. Thus, the weir appears to

> symbolise the damming of emotions, for just a weir holds back what appear to be deep, calm waters, so too have the characters kept their emotions closed off the world. Over the course of the night spent in the local pub, the characters tell their stories, freeing their pasts and thereby their emotions and their selves. (Kent, 2002, p. 29)

As the characters remember the construction of the weir through the photo, it is actually the agency of the photo that leads them to tell stories. It is important to grasp this point because the photo functions in the heterotopic space of the pub with the idea of absence and presence. The construction does not happen in the present time when they look at the photo, but it is present with them as they recall the moment. It prompts the viewers to move in time and other spaces through their recollection of memories. When the past and the present consolidate in this way, the sense of displacement the photo evokes resonates with Foucault's example of the mirror which creates an illusion of absence and presence in a heterotopic way.

The second layer of Foucault's explanation can be tinged with the play itself, as it shows a mirror to the reader/audience. The juxtaposition of several sites in one place is evidently valid

for theatres, and he remarks that "it is that the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another" (Foucault, 1984, p. 5). The theatrical stage for this play can be regarded as heterotopic, since it takes the audience to another realm where they contemplate the Irish past and contemporary period as the characters compensate for national and personal troubles in their storytelling. On the one hand,

> [s]urrounding the snug warmth of the bar – the place where the stories are told – McPherson creates two off-stage, imagined landscapes. One is everyday and normal. In this realistic version, Brendan's top field is simply a potential source of income from tourists and old Maura Nealon's place is just a house. The other, shadowy, landscape is created by the ghost stories. (Cousin, 2007, p. 36)

On the other hand, the reader/audience is drawn into the real and imagined spaces in the place where they read/watch the play. As they read/listen to the stories, the theatrical stage's heterotopic nature becomes evident since they reaffirm a traditionally cultural activity by assuming the role of listeners at a time when contemporary Irish society does not employ storytelling in a conventional way. Additionally, the adjacency of real and unreal places separates the reader/audience from daily life and leads them to break away from the flowing time in the real world as time is temporarily halted while watching the play. Therefore, they engage in a heterotopia while observing the change from the local to the global, the old to the modern and the traditional to the contemporary. Moreover, this experience can be explained in another interpretation of heterotopia by Tompkins. She refers to the scenery, the elements on stage to create the atmosphere of the play's setting, as "constructed" space, whereas the places that the play alludes as "abstracted spaces," and heterotopia emerges between the two (Tompkins, 2014, p. 75). From this vantage point, the play's pub is a constructed space, and various places in the characters' stories are abstracted ones. The reader/audience located in-between the two goes through a heterotopic site. Although Tompkins dwells on this interpretation to highlight the connection between the play's imaginary setting and the place of performance, it offers a limited perspective by overlooking the heterotopic character of constructed or abstracted spaces. After the analysis of the play's heterotopic setting, as conducted in this paper, Tompkins's angle can be considered to contribute to the heterotopic nature of settings in *The Weir* by pinpointing the audience's experience of heterotopia in the theatre.

Conclusion

McPherson amalgamates the real and the imagined in the setting of *The Weir*. The transformation of the rural Irish pub to a global site, notwithstanding the community's resistance to globalisation represented through the dislike of tourists, enables the playwright to create a heterotopic space where the past represented with storytelling becomes modern with the psychological dimensions of this act. In line with Foucault's contextualisation, the play's pub exemplifies the traits of heterotopia as a site of crisis, a place to juxtapose other spaces, a zone to disrupt the flow of time, an arena with an access mechanism and a multilayered location at the intersection of ancient and modern Ireland. On the individual and collective levels, the pub lands the characters in socio-psychological space as a shelter, in new dynamics of glocal economics as a zone of finance and in a site of the construction of identities. The heterotopic

pub enables them to penetrate into personal and national troubles together by juxtaposing old values and modern traits by means of storytelling in the local site. Considered together, the pub also excavates another understanding of heterotopia by Hetherington as he defines the concept concerning society in modernity with "multiple and shifting meanings for agents depending on where they are located within its power effects" (1997, p. 51). The pub's multilayered representation of other spaces can also be deemed heterotopic in Hetherington's discussion. The heterotopic pub unpacks the nation's history and personal past experiences in its multiple layers.

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