‘What’s it like being Irish?’ The return of the repressed in Roddy Doyle’s *Paula Spencer*

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‘The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads.’ (Roddy Doyle, *The Commitments*)¹

In a notorious incident in January 2002, a young Chinese man, Zhao Liulao, was beaten to death in a late-night fight in a Dublin suburb, after being taunted by racist youths. This death occurred against a background of reports of increased attacks on immigrants in the north inner-city area of Dublin, in an area designated in media accounts as ‘Little Africa’. (Luke Gibbons, *Beyond the Pale*).²

In a recent, brief essay, ‘Green Yodel No. 1’, Roddy Doyle stresses that Irish identity is in an exciting period of transformation because of the influx of immigrants from such places as Nigeria, Latvia and China. Instead of a reactive response to preserve Irish homogeneity, Doyle welcomes the chance for the Irish ‘to invent new stories, new art, new voices, new music. . . . New love stories, family sagas, new jealousies, rivalries, new beginning and new endings. We live in exciting times, if we want them.’³ Doyle himself has begun to celebrate these new beginnings in what he calls ‘episodic short stories’ which feature racially heterogeneous immigrants.⁴ For example, in ‘I Understand’ we are exposed to the life of an undocumented male African immigrant who works two unskilled labour jobs and is threatened by local thugs to join their drug-running outfit. Eventually he finds friendship with co-workers and potentially romantic love with a local Irish girl.⁵ In ‘Green Yodel No. 1’ Doyle provides the first page or so of ‘I Understand’, and then claims: ‘What’s the narrator’s name? I don’t know, but I have a short-list of good ones. What happens in the story? I really don’t know. . . . Will it end happily? Yes, it will. It’s in my hands, and I’ll make this one end happily’.⁶ With this story and others in the recently released *The Deportees* (2007), Doyle has established himself as an advocate of diversity who creates narratives in order to combat racism in Ireland.

Although Doyle's 2006 novel *Paula Spencer* overtly revolves around the 48-year-old recovering alcoholic Paula Spencer, Doyle packs as many details concerning the new multicultural and multiracial Ireland as he possibly and plausibly can. Doyle first created Paula Spencer in his 1996 novel *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*. In the ten years between the Paula Spencer narratives not only has Paula's life changed, but all of Dublin has undergone a transformation. As Doyle's indigenous-working-class-white-Irish-Catholic-Dubliners spokesperson, Paula bears witness throughout the novel to the societal, cultural and economic changes in Dublin. In fact, Paula specifically references the intense period of immigration following Ireland's economic prosperity of the 1990s. The Irish Census of April 2006 shows that in the four years since the previous survey, the Irish population grew by 322,645.⁷ This statistic becomes more meaningful when we consider that non-Irish work permits went from fewer than 6,000 in 1999 to about 50,000 in 2003.⁸

In the conclusion to my critique of Irish novels published between 1989 and 1999, I noted that the rapid economic growth of the 1990s and the wave of consumerist global culture that would follow in its wake would present a new set of issues for Ireland:

While the so-called Celtic Tiger roars on, another more subtle change is taking place in the Republic and will be an issue of contention in the coming decades. With the wealth of successful economic globalization comes the attraction to Ireland by refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as a migrant work force. An increase in diversity, a multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural population looms in Ireland's future. The conservative reaction in England to a multiracial and multiethnic society has been extreme. Race riots and politicians' proclamations that England is becoming a 'mongrel race' are just two examples of the unpleasant side effects of a global economy.⁹

In *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland* Bryan Fanning confirms some of my predictions when he reports that the British 'new racism' is now emerging as an extreme conservative reaction in Ireland, where it similarly attracts a segment of the white, economically deprived population. According to Fanning, the conservative reactionary questions the refugee's right to stay in Ireland, 'why did you come here? When are you going back, when will you leave Ireland?'¹⁰ This position leads Fanning to comment: 'in common with British "new racism", the fears of the dominant community of being swamped, usurped or exploited by black and ethnic minority minorities have been portrayed as reasonable'.¹¹

In my above account I was anticipating the future that Ireland would face with multiculturalism; however, I failed to note that Ireland

already had logged several centuries of Irish-Ireland racism toward Jews and Travellers, in particular; racism that had nothing to do with colonisation or Britain. For example, the founder of Sinn Féin and well-known anti-Semite Arthur Griffin, who also participated in the Limerick Pogrom of 1904–06, was the author of numerous anti-Semitic essays, including this editorial printed in the *United Irishman* in 1904:

No thoughtful Irishman or woman can view without apprehension the continuous influx of Jews into Ireland . . . strange people, alien to us in thought, alien to us in sympathy, from Russia, Poland, Germany and Austria – people who come to live amongst us, but who never become of us . . . Our sympathy – insular as it may be – goes wholly to our countryman the artisan whom the Jew deprives of the means of livelihood, to our countryman the trader whom he ruins in business by unscrupulous methods, to our countryman the farmer whom he draws into his usurer's toils and drives to the workhouse across the water.¹²

These early documents defeat claims that the Irish cannot possibly be racist or xenophobic because they have very little or no experience of racially or culturally different people. Yet, even in the 1990s the idea of the Irish as racist 'innocent' persisted:

On the one hand, Irish insularity was seen as responsible for discrimination because it generates fear of foreigners, and of cultural and physical differences. On the other hand, Irish insularity and homogeneity means that Irish people lack knowledge about other societies and cultures, and have no experience of living with difference. So from this perspective, Irish people do not intend to discriminate, they simply do not know any better, yet.¹³

This depiction of 'Irish insularity', published in the 1998 *The Irish Are Friendly but . . . : A Report on Racism and International Students and Racism in Ireland*, overlooks, due to its focus, other areas of Irish racism, most obviously the discrimination against Travellers in terms of cultural and racial Otherness that predates the famine.¹⁴

In the twenty-first century, according to Doyle, the question 'What's it like being Irish?' no longer comes from 'a Guinness commercial or a *Bord Failte* promotion', but is essentially 'unanswerable'.¹⁵ As he is already comfortable with the role of intercessor for the subjugated with *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, it is not surprising that Doyle attempts to rewrite the stories of 'racist youth' and discredit those who promote Irish homogeneity. Doyle exposes the fiction that the patriarchal-white-Catholic-Irish-male is the definition of authentic Irishness. No one would have thought of Paula Spencer as 'typically Irish' in the late 1990s, but Doyle brought domestic violence and chronic alcoholism to

national attention with *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*. In the novel Doyle challenges masculine-dominant Irish narratives, and the entire legal and cultural system which by 'turning a blind eye' in effect sanctions domestic violence and masculine heterosexual dominance. In the first novel, Paula corresponds at almost every level with the identifying characteristics of the battered wife syndrome; Charlo Spencer, her husband, too, follows closely the 'textbook' case of the abuser or batterer:

a history of temper tantrums, insecurity, need to keep the environment stable, easily threatened by minor upsets, jealousy, possessiveness, and the ability to be charming, manipulative and seductive to get what he wants, and hostile, nasty and mean when he doesn't succeed. If alcohol abuse problems are included, the pattern becomes classic.¹⁶

Charlo's abuse of Paula extends across the full spectrum of punishment and domestic violence. According to Pat O'Connor in *Emerging Voices: Women in Contemporary Irish Society*, late 1990s Irish heterosexual society still harbours the idea that women should serve the emotional, material and sexual needs of men. Her study indicates that in Irish society, in comparison to other EU countries, women still perform 'the bulk of household labour, including the care of children – despite the fact that they are increasingly participating in paid employment, largely on a full-time basis'.¹⁷ This cultural and societal setting provides sufficient evidence to suggest that women are still not equal to men, and that masculinity in the Irish context preserves its dominance. Power is not individualistic but tied to an elaborate system of privileges. O'Connor theorises that images of masculinity ultimately legitimise physical dominance and violence:

The idea that the ability and willingness to use force is a 'normal' element in the definition of masculinity and hence an element in the social and cultural construction of heterosexuality offers a potentially fertile source of legitimisation for male violence whether in physical violence towards a spouse or indeed towards any woman, and also in pornography, rape, and sexual abuse. Evanson (1982) has suggested that the causes of marital violence were 'the deeper assumptions of husbands that they have a right to dominate and the powerlessness of wives which make them legitimate outlets for aggression which cannot be vented on others'. Typically, however, such issues and those relating to men's greater cultural value, and the legitimacy of their dominance, are ignored.¹⁸

There is also 'implicit colluding' on the part of the government officials with those who commit domestic violence; only one in five women, in a recent study on domestic violence, actually report violence to the Gardai. The women in the study stated that the men who committed the violence

were rarely arrested.¹⁹ In fact, O'Connor reports that based on the level of funding available to combat domestic violence, to train social workers to recognise signs of abuse and help the abused, Ireland clearly perceives this violence as a 'private problem'. The private versus public distinction is paramount. If domestic violence was rare and an infrequent occurrence, then it would be such an anomaly that it would be taken seriously and the offender punished. But if domestic violence is widespread and frequent, then it is accepted (by the police, other males in the family, the neighbourhood) because it is so *common* and because the culture and legal system sanction it. Therefore, the battered woman syndrome exists because, at some level, society and culture support this kind of manifestation of power.

In *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* Doyle presents the reader with the inside version of this 'private problem' indicating, at least implicitly, that this problem is *not* private. Instead, this 'private problem' ravages the family and from there unfurls exponentially outward into society. In an interview Doyle states that the novel comes out of his experience of screenwriting for a BBC television series, *Family* (1994), in which the last episode is from the wife's point of view. Pleased with the episode, Doyle believed that there was an entire novel to be written from this woman's perspective. As it turns out, Doyle was writing the book when the episode was broadcast:

When I started the novel, the episode was broadcast in Ireland, and then there were all sorts of denunciations. There's virtually nothing in the novel that is in the television series, which is very gritty, very hard hitting. And the denunciations came from all sorts of politicians, from priests, my old teachers union, virtually everybody queued up to condemn it in some way.²⁰

When Doyle is asked, 'What was their problem with it?', he replies that he became the subject of religious sermons and a target for condemnation by those claiming he was, 'undermining the sanctity of marriage. Which of course was exactly what I was doing'.²¹ Ironically, in *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* both Paula and her sister Carmel turn to marriage as a way to flee their abusive father.

In the first novel about the Spencers, the motivating force of Paula's narrative is her need to grasp the relevance and impact of Mrs Fleming's murder. The reader has had a few instances of Charlo's treatment of Paula, but not a full account. Near the end of the novel Paula acknowledges the reader's perverse desire to know *exactly* what Charlo did to her, 'Ask me. Ask me. Ask me'.²² With a 'Here goes', Paula provides the reader with a ghastly list of injuries she suffered at the hands of Charlo:

Broken nose. Loose teeth. Cracked ribs. Broken finger. Black eyes. I don't know how many. A ruptured eardrum. Burns. Cigarettes on my arms and legs. He dragged me around the house by my clothes and by my hair. He kicked me up and he kicked me down the stairs. Bruised me, scalded me, threatened me. For seventeen years. Hit me, thumped me, raped me. He hurt me and hurt me and hurt me. He killed parts of me. He killed most of me. He killed all of me. Bruised, burnt and broken. He never gave up. Months went by and nothing happened, but it was always there – the promise of it. (pp. 175–6)

Charlo is a characteristic wife-batterer who mixes physical abuse with emotional and psychological terror for the victim. Yet, whereas most batterers feel that they have a defence for their behaviour ('I lost control') or a justification ('she provoked me'), Paula presents Charlo as never apologetic, and always in control. Many times after Charlo has hit or beaten Paula, he baits her and asks her how she got that black eye:

– Where'd you get that?

– What?

– The eye.

It was a test. I was thumping inside. He was playing with me.

There was only one right answer.

– I walked into the door.

– Is that right?

– Yeah.

– Looks sore.

– It's not too bad.

– Good.

He was messing with me, playing. Like a cat with an injured bird. With his black armband, the fucker. Keeping me on my toes, keeping me in my place. Pretending he didn't remember. Pretending he'd never seen black and red around and in that eye before. Pretending he cared. (p. 181)

In other parts of her narrative, Paula blames herself, which is typical of a woman in abusive situation, and yet she now sees the absurdity of her own culpability: 'He hit me, he hit his children, he hit other people, he killed a woman – I kept blaming myself. For provoking him' (p. 170). One aspect that is certain, Charlo's behaviour is sanctioned by the authorities and by Irish culture. When visiting a doctor about her injuries, Paula is asked if she had been drinking: 'Have you had a drink Mrs Spencer?' And friends and family members ask her what she said to him to provoke him: 'Did you say something to him Paula?' and ultimately: 'Why did you marry him then, Paula?' (p. 171). Judged

culpable by society, Paula wins our sympathy as Doyle shows clearly that she is not only a victim of Charlo, but of Irish patriarchal society. At the end of the novel, instead of a major catharsis, Paula reconciles what she is able to at this point in her life; perhaps this is more faithful to a 'realistic' narrative of a woman who has been mentally, physically and psychologically abused for nearly twenty years.

With *Paula Spencer* Doyle moves from speaking for all women who must endure men like the insidious Charlo and the Irish cultural and legal system that sanctions domestic violence, to portraying one who advocates tolerance and acceptance of racial diversity in the new Ireland. While Doyle does not disappoint the reader in regard to Paula's amiability and our empathy towards her ongoing struggles to overcome her past, *Paula Spencer* lacks the urgency of Paula's psychological crisis following Charlo's death at the hands of the Garda in the first novel. The new novel opens with Paula returning home from work and the acknowledgement that she has been sober 'four months and five days'.²³ As she walks home she thinks to herself, 'This place has changed' (p. 2). This thought stands independently on the page and it will be in course of the next several pages that we understand what it means: new money and new people replacing the old. Paula muses to herself, 'it's changing, the whole place. One of the old shops is a café now, opened a few weeks ago. An Italian place, real Italians in it. Not chipper Italians. Selling bread and coffee and oil and other expensive stuff Paula would love to load up on' (p. 12). These references begin the novel's constant charting of new Dublin. The new Dublin is characterised by immaculate and expensive shops in place of the grungy and provincially Irish shops, along with the foreigners who work in the new and old shops, and the foreigners with whom Paula works. In many respects, just as Joyce charted the day in the life of turn-of-the-century Leopold Bloom, Doyle maps a year in the life of twenty-first-century Paula Spencer.

In fact, one might quarrel with Doyle concerning the intent of his novel. Does he want to tell the story of a victimised recovering alcoholic, whose every reflection concerning her children invariably deals with her guilt and sorrow because she neglected them when she was drinking, or does he wish to use her as a vehicle to record and to interact with multiracial Dublin – a mouthpiece for 'New stories, family sagas, new jealousies, rivalries, new beginnings and new endings'?²⁴ For the first half of the text, especially, Doyle wants to be an advocate for the immigrants in Dublin. It seems that every few pages the novel records Paula's amazement as she strides through her old neighbourhood or takes the DART to work. In some ways, it as though she has just awakened

and discovered that Dublin now has 50,000 immigrants. In the novel there are two particularly insightful instances of the newly awakened Paula that show her interacting with multicultural Dublin. In each example Paula empathises with the immigrants. In the second example she has to identify and compare her life to theirs, which leads Paula to suddenly see herself as no longer *Irish*.

With the first example we encounter the new Dublin with Paula at the shops. In the midst of a passage where Paula is thinking about her children and her sisters, the reader is treated to the new grocery shopping experience that Dublin now affords. Still patronising the old shops and noting that this is the unfashionable, old Dublin, Paula remarks that 'The women on the check-out are nearly all foreign. That's the only real change' (p. 24). Mixed in with thoughts about her sisters and kids, the narrative strays into 'contemporary African politics':

There's an African woman on the check-out. Nigerian, or one of the others. What other African countries do they come from? Paula doesn't know. There are wars everywhere; you could never keep up. It's the first time she's seen a black woman working here. Good luck to her. She's lovely. Her hair up in a scarf. Her long cheekbones. Lovely straight back. (pp. 25–6)

This is not Joyce's hegemonic white Ireland, and Doyle wants to make sure that you understand that multiracial people are everywhere – in the most common of daily places – on the DART or in the Spar. In this way, Paula's musing upon the African woman is natural enough: taking note on the woman at the market, the meat shop or pharmacy is an everyday occurrence. When Paula's thoughts turn to Charlo, the text further accentuates the positive in the immigrant: 'What would Charlo think? she wonders. What would he have said about it? Charlo was her husband. He died before all these people started arriving. Before the Celtic Tiger thing' (p. 26). On the one hand, Doyle is tracing out the contours of identity in contemporary Ireland with Paula attempting to think through a would-be reaction by Charlo to the immigrants in new Ireland. On the other hand, there is something a little uneven about this mental dialogue. Doyle wishes to give the reader a tour of multiracial Ireland and encourage us to be sympathetic to it, yet at the same time he has to position our female protagonist in a practical situation or all is lost in terms of realism. Therefore in two pages of discourse, Doyle has Paula discuss the prevalence of multicultural workers, Charlo from the last novel, his death, 'the Celtic Tiger thing', and to establish Paula's tone of acceptance, admiration even for these 'foreigners':

She's beautiful. Charlo would have called Paula a lezzar for thinking that, for saying it. It's funny, she doesn't know if he was a racist or not. She hasn't a clue. She'd know these days quickly enough. They're all over the place, the foreigners, the black people. Is that racist? They're all over the place. She doesn't know. She means no harm. It's just a phrase. And she doesn't mind it. She likes to look at all the foreigners. Some of them scare her a bit. The Romanians, the women. They're a bit frightening – wild, like they've come straight out of a war. But most of them are grand. (p. 26)

Readers of *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* know that Charlo would be in the group with the 'racist youths', maybe leader of the gang, who beats to death foreigners in places like 'Little Africa'. Therefore, evoking Charlo, especially with his 'lezzar' label for Paula, further unites the disenfranchised Paula and the immigrants. From a patriarchal heterosexual perspective, is there anything more threatening to the masculinity of a man like Charlo than being completely sexually excluded and unwanted by women? Doyle's strategy to unite the victimised and those of minority status subtly evokes empathy from the reader.

Although Paula is compassionate toward most of the non-Irish in the novel, she is keenly aware of the fact she is working alongside and at the same level as the immigrants. These 'foreigners' are doing the work that the Irish no longer have to do: cleaning houses and offices, washing dishes, and all forms of manual labour. The 'real' Irish, like Paula's sister Carmel, are buying apartments in Bulgaria in anticipation of its joining the EU: 'When Bulgaria joins the EU the value of those apartments will go through the fuckin' roof' (p. 29). On the bus, en route to the pertinently named 'Marley Park' where Paula and several other women will clean up the grounds after a concert, Paula reflects on her past and the wasted years. Intensely aware that she is the only white woman on the bus, Paula reflects:

She's a failure. She shouldn't be in this van. She should be outside, looking at it going by. On her way home from work. Already home – on her way out again. Irishwomen don't do this work. Only Paula. . . . Ten years ago there wouldn't have been one black woman on this bus – less than ten years. It would have been Paula and women like Paula. Same age, from the same area, same kids. Where are those women now? Carmel used to do cleaning and now she's buying flats in Bulgaria. (p. 56)

Paula answers our question 'What does it mean to be Irish?' by stating that she is not Irish: she is a subordinate just like the Africans, Romanians and Latvians in Ireland. The immigrants and Paula are tethered to bottom of the economic class system in Ireland. Abused for

twenty years of her married life and a faithful alcoholic for another ten, Paula missed the 'Celtic Tiger' wave; most other 'Irishwomen' caught the wave, but Paula didn't because she was drowning in vodka at the time. Similar to many of the immigrants who came to Dublin to escape persecution, poverty and war, Paula, too, was a victim, first of Charlo, and then, second, of alcoholism and poverty.

In this way, to be Irish is redefined to include only those who prospered during the boom years of the 1990s. In 'Speed Limits: Ireland, Globalisation and the War against Time', Michael Cronin defines the problem in terms of driving metaphors: those who prospered and entered fast-moving consumerist society and those who failed, like Paula, to do well in the 1990s and who are now in the 'slow lane'. The slow lane is not only failure to prosper, but failure to participate in post-modern global culture; it is a failure to live in your own time:

Stasis is stigma. Those who are grounded by poverty, disability or prejudice are keenly aware of an isolation that is both social and geographical. They are Irish locals who can watch the Irish globals riverdancing from Paris to Paraguay but who find themselves trapped in the slow lane of neglect and indifference.²⁵

However, it is uncanny in that the 'more things change, the more they stay the same'. If we recall that Doyle's 1987 novel *The Commitments* featured impoverished characters from Northern Dublin who sought refuge in aligning themselves with black Americans, then twenty years after *The Commitments* the alliance of lower-class Dubliners with racial minorities could be seen to come full-circle in *Paula Spencer*. The metaphor that Paula uses, that she should be on the outside looking into the bus of multiracial cleaners because she is white Irish, should, in fact, be turned inside-out. Paula is the one outside looking in at post-Celtic-Tiger Ireland: the Italian shop with 'real' Italians who sell costly coffee and olive oil, her successful daughter Nicola's expensive presents, her sister Denise's very-middle-class affair with a dad at her son's school and Carmel's property investments.

In what I am calling the return of the repressed, Doyle's preoccupation with the marginalised in Dublin occurs at both the psychological and the socio-historical levels. First, Doyle is unable to resist repeating the stories of the disenfranchised – from *The Commitments* to *Paula Spencer* to *The Deportees*, which again features Jimmy Rabbitte from *The Commitments*. On one level, Doyle cannot stop 'racist youth' no matter how many stories he makes end 'happily'. This repetition compulsion, of course, parallels Freud's theorising in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* when he ponders why his grandson stages the *fort/da* game:

‘The child cannot possibly have felt his mother’s departure as something agreeable or even indifferent. How then does his repetition of this distressing experience as a game fit in with the pleasure principle?’²⁶ The answer Freud formulates is that the child lacked control over his mother’s departures and returns so he enacts a simulation of ‘gone’ and ‘there’ in an attempt to master the situation:

At the outset he was in a *passive* situation – he was overpowered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an *active* part. These efforts might be put down to an instinct for mastery that was acting independently of whether the memory was in itself pleasurable or not. . . . We are therefore left in doubt as to whether the impulse to work over in the mind some overpowering experience so as to make oneself master of it can find expression as a primary event, and independently of the pleasure principle. For, in the case we have been discussing, the child may, after all, only have been able to repeat his unpleasant experience in play because the repetition carried along with it a yield of pleasure of another sort but none the less a direct one.²⁷

According to Freud, what starts out as a game of mastery becomes a game of punishment: ‘Go to the fwont!’ exclaims the angry boy when he wishes to make something gone (*fort*).²⁸

In order to take back control over the plight of the working class and poor of Northern Dublin in his fiction, Doyle enacts scenes of personal and social trauma and repulsion which are repeated from text to text. While many might consider *The Commitments* only a comic novel, there are objectionable experiences in it that Doyle repeats in *Paula Spencer*. For example, early in *The Commitments* Jimmy’s now-famous pep talk to his band aligns the Barrytown working class and poor with the racially Other and disenfranchised:

– The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads.

They nearly gasped: it was so true.

– An’ Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland. The culchies have fuckin’ everythin’. An’ the northside Dubliners are the niggers o’ Dublin. – Say it loud, I’m black an’ I’m proud.²⁹

Late in *Paula Spencer*, Doyle stages a return of the repressed:

If she stops working, she never worked. She’s never been happy with it, but it’s all there ever was. And all there is. If she doesn’t do it, other people will. She knows, she sees them. It’s why they’re here. Go back to your own fuckin’ country. That’s not her; that’s not Paula. There’s plenty of work. (p. 248)

So, what happens when the Irish are no longer the ‘niggers of Europe’ because of economic prosperity and the country’s ability to reinvent

itself for the twenty-first century? They become the oppressors. Paula's moment of uncertainty shows that, lurking in the back of her mind, she does not want to be in the same group as the new 'niggers of Europe', the immigrant workers in Ireland.

With the novel *Paula Spencer* we are at a crossroads of Irish identity. In Doyle's universe, Paula and her immigrant cohorts are the truly Irish, 'the niggers of Europe', as a long-suffering, economically depressed people. Yet, in terms of the rest of Ireland and the idea of global Ireland, Paula and the immigrants are decidedly not Irish. Doyle is pushing against the wealthy, insular Ireland by repeatedly creating stories about the marginalised and the victimised. In new Ireland, those generally held to be the most un-Irish people in Dublin are always the characters Doyle defends as belonging to Dublin.

As Paula struggles to stay sober, work and keep the fragile relationships with her children intact, we are constantly reminded of her years after Charlo's death, during the prosperous years of the mid- to late 1990s. These reflections provide the Other of 'Irish' identity and lifestyle; not the lifestyle of wealthy Europe flocking to Dublin – such as Becks and Posh Spice's wedding in 1999 – but the lifestyle of ordinary Dubliners with problems who have not quite copped on to globalisation. One would think that the pain of being abused for twenty years and addicted to alcohol for nearly thirty years, and the devastating effects on her children that are endlessly recounted in *Paula Spencer*, would be enough hardship for Paula. But there is another level of suffering in the novel – that is, Paula's twenty-first-century realisation that she has been deserted by her country. As I have shown, Doyle's return of the repressed repeatedly records life from the perspective of the poor and marginalised in Dublin in order to challenge the complacent, homogeneous view of Irish identity. *Paula Spencer* confirms that, historically speaking, the repressed will always *return*, despite the Arthur Griffiths of Ireland, as assimilation of multicultural immigrants in Ireland in the twenty-first century is imminent. Or, at the very least, in Doyle's fictional world of multiracial, working-class Dublin in the era of new Ireland, the stories of the oppressed he will 'make end happily' in an effort to overcome, once and for all, the return of the repressed.

Notes

- 1 Roddy Doyle, *The Commitments* (New York: Penguin, 1995), p. 13.
- 2 Luke Gibbons, 'Beyond the Pale: Race, Ethnicity, and Irish Culture', in Andrew Higgins Wyndham (ed.), *Re-Imagining Ireland* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), p. 51.

- 3 Roddy Doyle, 'Green Yodel No. 1', in Higgins (ed.), *Re-Imagining Ireland*, pp. 69–71.
- 4 Ibid., p. 70.
- 5 Roddy Doyle, 'I Understand', *McSweeney's*, 15 (2004), pp. 39–65.
- 6 Doyle, 'Green Yodel No. 1', p. 71.
- 7 *The New York Times*, 19 August 2007, p. 3.
- 8 www.migrationinformation.org: 'Ireland: A Crash Course in Immigration Policy', p. 1.
- 9 Jennifer M. Jeffers, *The Irish Novel at the End of the Twentieth Century: Gender, Bodies, and Power* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 178.
- 10 B. Fanning, S. Loyal and C. Staunton, *Asylum Seekers and the Right to Work in Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Refugee Council, 2000), p. 21. Quoted in Bryan Fanning, *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 24.
- 11 Fanning, p. 24.
- 12 Arthur Griffith, *United Irishman* (13 January 1904). Fanning, 42.
- 13 From *The Irish Are Friendly but . . . : A Report on Racism and International Students and Racism in Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Council for International Students, 1998), p. 6.
- 14 Fanning, p. 48.
- 15 Doyle, 'Green Yodel', p. 70.
- 16 Lenore E. Walker, *The Battered Woman Syndrome* (New York: Springer Publishing Co., 1984), p. 203.
- 17 See Pat O'Connor, *Emerging Voices: Women in Contemporary Irish Society* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1998), pp. 69–70.
- 18 See O'Connor, pp. 70–1. See also E. Evanson, *Hidden Violence: A Study of Battered Women in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Farset Press, 1982).
- 19 O'Connor, pp. 70–1.
- 20 See the Roddy Doyle *Salon* interview with Charles Taylor at www.salon.com/books/feature/1999/10/28/doyle/Index2, p. 3 (accessed on 28 August 2007).
- 21 Doyle, *Salon* interview, p. 3.
- 22 Roddy Doyle, *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (New York: Viking 1996), pp. 175–6. All subsequent references are to this edition and will appear in the text.
- 23 Roddy Doyle, *Paula Spencer* (New York: Viking, 2006), p. 1. All subsequent references are to this edition and will appear in the text.
- 24 Doyle, 'Green Yodel', p. 69.
- 25 Michael Cronin, 'Speed Limits: Ireland, Globalisation and the War against Time', in Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin (eds), *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy* (London: Pluto, 2002), p. 62.
- 26 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), p. 15. In this famous example, Freud's grandson throws a spool out of his cot and announces *fort* or 'gone'. As the child reels the spool in, he states *da* or 'there'. Thus,

according to Freud, the child is staging his mother’s departure and return in order to gain mastery over the situation. The child goes from passivity, the inability to control the departure, to mastery, the ability to control the departure, with the game. Freud notes that *fort* is only bearable because of the promise of *da*.

27 Ibid., pp. 15–16.

28 Ibid., p. 15.

29 Doyle, *The Commitments*, p. 13.