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IRELAND/IRISHNESS IN TRANSITION: CONOR MCPHERSON'S "THE WEIR"[1]

DEĞİŞMEKTE OLAN İRLANDA VE İRLANDALI KİMLİĞİ: CONOR MCPHERSON'IN "THE WEIR" ADLI OYUNU

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Abstract
As a contemporary Irish playwright who is well-known for his monologue plays, Conor McPherson (1971-) illustrates the changing process of Irishness within the scope of clashing traditional and modern values in The Weir. In the early twentieth century as a result of the nationalist and isolationist policy, Irish identity was constructed as rural, agricultural, and Catholic, but it began to change with the impact of the Celtic Tiger referring to an economic boom starting in the mid-1990s. In this article, The Weir is analysed as a transition play representing the 1990s in terms of the collision of the old and the new Irishness with regard to social, sexual, and religious values. This paper aims to examine and discuss Ireland and Irishness in transition within the context of rural-urban, traditional-modern, local-global dichotomies escalating by the impact of the Celtic Tiger period.

Öz
Daha çok monolog türünde kaleme aldığı oyunları ile bilinen çağdaş İrlandalı yazar Conor McPherson (1971-), The Weir (1997) adlı oyununda geleneksel ve çağdaş bağlamda çatışan İrlandalı kimliğinin değişim sürecini ortaya koyar. İrlandalı kimliği, 20. yüzyılın başında uygulanan milliyetçi ve soyutlayıcı politikanın sonucunda kırsal, tarımsal ve Katolik olarak inşa edilirken, 1990'ların ortasında başlayan Kelt Kaplanı adı verilen ekonomik büyümenin etkisiyle değişmeye başlar. Bu makalede The Weir, toplumsal, cinsel ve dini değerler bağlamında eski ve yeni İrlandalı kimliğinin çatıştığı, 1990'ları temsil eden bir geçiş oyunu olarak ele alınır. Kelt Kaplanı döneminin etkisiyle artan kırsal-kentsel, geleneksel-modern, yerel-küresel ikilemler kapsamında değişmekte olan İrlanda ve İrlandalı kimliği, The Weir adlı oyunda incelenir ve tartışılır.

Introduction

The contemporary Irish playwright Conor McPherson (1971-) is very well-known for his use of monologues, associated with the Irish storytelling tradition, in his plays dealing with Irishness and Ireland. McPherson started to write in the 1990s when Ireland underwent an economic boom known as the "Celtic Tiger" affecting every level of Irish life and leading to a reconstruction of Irishness. Therefore, his plays take place "*at the intersection of Ireland's new economic and emotional freedoms and its ancient moral imperatives, both inside and outside the theatre*" (Wood 7). In this respect, McPherson examines and challenges the established values and norms of identity, sexuality, and religion by exploring his characters' struggle "*to face down the dilemmas, confusions, inequalities, opportunities and pleasures of living*" (Chambers and Jordan 17). Through the personal narratives of his characters, he explores a new sense of Irish identity which is in transition from rural to urban and from traditional to modern due to the impact of the changing socio-cultural and economic circumstances, as seen in *The Weir.*

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[1] This article is an abridged version of the first chapter of my unpublished MA thesis entitled "Transitions in Irishness: Conor McPherson's The Weir and Shining City" (2016).

The Weir, commissioned by the Royal Court Theatre, was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, on 4 July 1997. The play was highly successful and received the Evening Standard Award for Outstanding New Playwright and London Critics' Circle Most Promising Playwright Award. Written during the Celtic Tiger period, *The Weir* depicts a fading rural Ireland and Irishness trapped by the past but craving the future. In the play, the existing norms and values of rural Ireland are disrupted by the penetration of new values into the rural way of life as a result of modernisation, urbanisation, and globalisation which modify the demographic and socio-cultural structures of rural Ireland. Accordingly, this paper aims to examine and discuss Ireland and Irishness in transition within the context of rural-urban, traditional-modern, and local-global dichotomies escalating by the impact of the Celtic Tiger period.

Considering the significance of the title, it actually points out a specific historical event in Ireland which McPherson makes use of symbolically. The Electricity Supply Board (ESB), established in 1927, was "*responsible for operating the power station then being constructed on the River Shannon and providing electrical power throughout the country. [...] By the 1970s, nearly all of rural Ireland had been electrified*" (Biletz 128). It was a great enterprise for the newly independent Ireland, and

> [n]othing before or since has had such a profound impact on the social and economic development of Ireland, especially in the rural areas and farming communities. [...] Modernization was taking place in Ireland, even if the pace sometimes seemed imperceptible. (Hachey 179).

However, Irishness in the early twentieth century had an anti-modernist stance by associating modernity with Britishness due to their nationalist discourse. Despite this perception, the construction of the weir can be considered both as a huge step for Ireland as a re-affirmation of its independence from Britain and as an indicator of a modernisation process in the country. As Kerrane emphasises, "*the weir seems to represent the modernization of rural Ireland*" (116) even though it caused severe impacts as well. It is explicit in the play that "*the Shannon Scheme as an icon of modernity and progress was being contested by the inscription of a scarred landscape*" (Hazucha 74) because it destroyed natural landscape and became an obstacle on the migration route of fish. For these reasons, the weir encompasses economic, socio-cultural, and nationalistic implications within itself.

Furthermore, Wood states that "*the title suggests the benefits of inhibiting the natural flow of emotion and behaviour, including sexuality. [...] the restraining of their natural impulses makes possible a more reasonable form of energy, one which serves the order of loving relationship*" (50). Unlike Wood's suggestion, the weir, or rather the opening of the gate to let the water flow may be a reference to getting rid of all the restrictions and letting people burst out, thereby allowing them to communicate and to heal their inner worlds. In a way, *The Weir* is a play about the disclosure or flow of emotions via the stories the characters tell. As McPherson asserts, "*[o]n one side it is quite calm, and on the other side water is being squeezed through. Metaphorically, the play is about a breakthrough. Lots under the surface is coming out. It's resonant of two worlds, the supernatural and our ordinary world past and present*" (qtd. in Gussow). Moreover, Hazucha thinks that

> the weir also stands metaphorically as a place where old world values collide with, and are restrained or diverted by, new world values produced by an Ireland that in the span of little more than a single generation was wrenched from its rural, unelectrified past into a modern nation-state. (70).

In other words, the weir is a symbol of the old and new worlds side by side. Unlike what Grene holds about the weir, that is, it "*acts as a metaphor for the controlled release of emotion through talk and story-telling among the five characters, [but] not as a symbol of a stage in the modernisation of Ireland*" (*The Politics...* 261), the weir symbolises a change in the society not only economically and culturally but also ecologically. In this context, the weir is a token of transition in rural Ireland.

Attachment to the land as a part of rural identity is prevalent in Irish society. It is because "*the cultural nationalism that was a major force behind the movement for independence believed that Ireland's destiny was to be a rural, agrarian society*" (Daly 22) as opposed to Britain. Therefore, not only is it about their rural lifestyle but also cultural nationalism has strengthened the land-based identity of the Irish through the association of land with Irishness. Besides, their commitment to the land engenders a sense of communal identity. Since they develop close social interactions based on kinship and neighbourhood within their communities, and solidarity among them is very important to keep the peace as well as social and cultural continuity in the countryside. McPherson demonstrates this devotion to the land or inscription of Irishness over the land through the character of Brendan who refuses to "*sell the top field*" (*The Weir* 15) despite the insistence of his sisters who are only interested in "*new cars for the hubbies*" (15). He disregards material gains on account of his "*attachment to the place*" (15). Having spent all his life in rural Ireland, Brendan feels integrated with the land, in line with Barker's definition of "*identity as regulatory discourses to which we are attached through processes of identification or emotional investment*" (245). Moreover, Hazucha argues that Brendan "*half-believes the land has been inhabited by fairies since time immemorial, and partly […] he believes it would be sacrilege to let go of land that has been handed down from generation to generation by his ancestors*" (71). The land is a sacred entity for the Irish as evidenced by the tradition of *dinnsheanchas,* "*the mythic lore of places*" (Bertha 163) as each place embodies mythological or spiritual qualities. Their belief in the sacredness of the land also reinforces their sense of rural identity. Irishness, in this respect, represents a territory-based identity Irish people define and associate themselves with.

However, Brendan's sisters who are "*[c]hecking their investments*" (*The Weir* 15) can be regarded as evocative of rural Irish identity being gradually replaced by an urban and capitalist identity, as called to attention in the dialogue below:

> JACK: They've no attachment to the place, no?
>
> BRENDAN: No they don't. They look around, and it's … 'Ah yeah …' you know?
>
> *They laugh a little.*
>
> It's gas. (15).

In the early 20th century, "*Irish culture [...] was defined in terms that insisted on its supposed spiritual superiority to the crass materialism and philistine utilitarianism associated with English industrial modernity*" (Cleary 67). However, during the Celtic Tiger period, modernisation and urbanisation reached their peak and reshaped the whole society. Subsequently, "*urban residents even more quickly adopted Western materialism at the expense of those values associated with rural life in Ireland*" (White 142). As the play clearly illustrates, the established rural myth is shattered and materialism begins to take over the Irish who consequently cast aside their spirituality and rural values. Attachment to the land, too, vanishes. In short, the rural setting in *The Weir* stands for the Irishness established in the first place and now on the wane.

Pub culture, widely accepted as a fundamental part of Irish identity, was a prominent and maybe even indispensable feature of Irish communal life. As Scanlan argues,

> a lively social institution that offers participants solace, companionship, and entertainment, for some, it becomes almost a family. Traditionally conversation is an Irish art, honed in the pub where storytelling, fiddle-playing, and singing are the main entertainments, rather than televised sports. (101).

Therefore, the pub is considered "*as an important resource for the constitution of Irish collective cultural identity, community, solidarity and sociability*" (Kuhling and Keohane 80). The five characters in the play gathering in a pub form a small local community – even though one of them, Valerie, is initially an outsider, she joins them immediately – and tell stories to one another. There is a friendly and warm ambience in the pub as the relevant stage direction suggests: "*There is a fireplace, right. There is a stove built into it. Near this is a low table with some small stools and a bigger, more comfortable chair, nearest the fire*" (*The Weir* 13). The atmosphere of the pub allows them to feel comfortable and talk easily. Thus, they find consolation in solidarity together, because all these characters are somehow lonely and alienated from the outside world. McPherson also says that "*the drinking gives them [the characters] licence. They can say anything – they're drunk! So you can have these massive mood swings, explore anything you want*" ("Conor McPherson Lifts the Veil…" 82). Therefore, alcohol acts as a catalyst for the revelation of the stories. In this respect, the pub becomes a very convenient setting for McPherson to discover or expose rural Ireland on the wane and its concomitant communal sense of identity which is in the process of surrendering to capital means.

Other than the pub, storytelling is held to be a well-known characteristic of Irish culture. The tradition of storytelling, albeit in decline in recent years, seems to be carried on by McPherson in the form of monologues. In the play, storytelling "*becomes the privileged point of communication between the narrative act and the element of folklore or, more precisely, it is the most important product of the interaction between the two, the most explicit manifestation of the persistence of a tradition*" (Carrassi 45). For the playwright, storytelling or monologue operates as a vehicle to help the characters redeem themselves by letting them articulate their past, feelings or regrets that are otherwise tough to tell. However, storytelling is not only a revelation or redemption for the characters but also it is a way upon which they build their identity. As Jordan argues, "*[i]dentity is fabricated thus as much out of the narrative structure as it is out of the variable of performance*" (360). Cummings remarks exquisitely: "*I have a story, therefore I am. This is the lifeblood and essence of McPherson's troubled heroes*" (303). Wallace explains further: "*[T]he characters, in the telling of their stories, in effect talk themselves into existence*" (5-6). Storytelling, hence, is a means to affirm the reality and existence of the characters since, otherwise, they are more likely to be engulfed in their loneliness. Most of the time they are incapable of communicating, therefore it is the only way to speak out and express themselves. It is, indeed, an exploration of the self through the narratives. As Bauman asserts,

> [t]he 'era of identity' is full of sound and fury. The search for identity divides and separates; yet the precariousness of the solitary identity-building prompts the identity-builders to seek pegs on which they can hang together their individually experienced fears and anxieties and perform the exorcism rites in the company of others, similarly afraid and anxious individuals. (10).

Through this exorcism, they create and recreate their identity out of the narratives. Storytelling, then, appears to be a kind of recognition, affirmation, and acknowledgement for the characters.

Furthermore, through the stories, McPherson explores not only the personal but also the socio-cultural circumstances and events of the 1990s. At a socio-cultural and economic level, the stories "*might well be emblematic of a flailing Irish nation and its desperate endeavour to come to terms with the advance of modernity*" (Fogarty 19). To illustrate, Jack reflects the waning of identity based on the land in his story about Maura Nealon who heard an uncanny knocking at the door "*in the fifties when the weir was going up. [...] And [there was a] fierce load of dead birds all in the hedge*" (*The Weir* 37). The weir did harm to nature and the land which embodies Irish spiritual beliefs and values, as maintained in the *dinnsheanchas* tradition. Dantanus explains that "*[f]or Irish people in this world the local and the natural are infused with culturally specific material realities that express a culturally specific otherworld of supernatural spirits*" (289). Thus, the close relationship between rural Irish culture and nature appears to be broken, which shows itself through such ghostly occurrences. Moreover, whereas Finbar and Jack's stories discover the realities of the living conditions of rural Ireland, leading many people to move to urban areas or immigrate abroad, Jim and Valerie's stories point out the child sexual abuse scandals of the 1990s – all of which will be elaborated later. In this respect, it can be argued that McPherson combines the Irish storytelling tradition and personal narratives to examine the changing Ireland within the familiar context of Irishness.

To further dwell on the fact that McPherson employs the monologue form is important to be able to understand contemporary Ireland and Irishness. During the 1990s and early 2000s, Ireland became a modern country dealing with the realities and demands of modern society, especially as a result of the Celtic Tiger economic boom. With the increase of individualism and urbanisation, the Irish started to speak for themselves individually, rather than as a community leaving behind their national narratives, which can be taken as the reason why monologue was employed prevalently in Irish drama of the 1990s. McPherson, moreover, states that "*the Celtic Tiger [...] was a massive explosion of change and of confidence in Ireland [...] [Playwrights] dramatized what it felt like to be so alienated from what was going on, and that's why I think there were so many monologues at that time*" ("Interview with Conor McPherson" 287). Besides, due to the influence of Catholicism, monologue can be regarded as a ritual of confession as the characters in the play are looking for a kind of redemption for themselves. The religious aspect of Irish society seeking absolution, thus, was projected into the monologue form. Therefore, monologue is very significant to understand the Irish psyche and their cultural attitude.

The supernatural as an inevitable part of the storytelling tradition is a highly functional element in McPherson's theatre. Ferguson discusses that "*[t]he ghost story is a repetitive processing of recurring loss through the trauma-driven process of mourning*" (15). Similarly, Llewellyn-Jones defines the supernatural, or specifically the ghosts as "*unconscious echoes of the[…] repressed emotions*" (98). McPherson also points out in his interview with McGinn that

> [s]ome people might look at my work and say it's ghost stories. [...] But I think we live within a mystery. We don't understand what's beyond the known limits of what we perceive. I'm motivated by an existential longing to understand what the fuck is going on in life, really. What is all this? ("Interview: Conor McPherson").

For McPherson, the supernatural is a means of making sense of the world. The writer also discloses that

> I can't escape our superstitions. I even have a slightly scientific explanation for it. For thousands of years Ireland was the most

> westerly point in Europe. So Irish people lived with the sense of the beyond. And we internalised that. So it became part of our mythology and it's still very strong. ("Conor McPherson")

Ireland is "*the place right beside the beyond*" ("UCD Connections…") according to McPherson. It has been isolated from the rest of the world for such a long time that its alienation gives Ireland this peculiarity of insularity and spirituality. As Chambers and Jordan explain,

> the ghost stories and the personal narratives suggest a persistent haunting, a past that cannot be let go of, as memories retard momentum into the present, and alongside this, grief, fear, stubbornness, cussedness, or other forebodings impact on the choices in the lives of the plays' characters. (13).

The supernatural, hence, is an expression of the beyond for the playwright, a manifestation of the past in the present and loss or guilt, which comes back either to disturb or to redeem the characters. It seems the Irish belief in spirituality and mysticism enhances these supernatural encounters as a response to the incipient events happening in the 1990s, as reflected in *The Weir*.

The stories in the play, as mentioned before, help explore Ireland of the Celtic Tiger period and exhibit what was happening under the surface, especially in terms of religion. In the 1990s, the media was shaken rigorously with news about child sexual abuse cases: "*[i]n the late 1990s television programs began to air allegations of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse at state-funded orphanages and industrial schools run by religious orders that dated back to the 1940s and 1950s*" (State 353). These were enough to unsettle the Catholics and to diminish their trust in the Catholic Church. Worse still, it was discovered that the religious authorities tried to cover up the truth by sending the paedophiliac priests from one post to another. Brown states that "*credibility [of the church] was profoundly challenged as the decade wore on: a spate of clerical child abuse and other sexual scandals set the church in the dock of public opinion in a way that would have been unimaginable in the recent past*" (367). For many years, Catholicism had been considered an indispensable part of Irish identity due to the historical continuity between them. However, in the current circumstances of the 1990s, strict adherence to religious activities was weakened, though not dissolving completely. Still "*religious identity continues to play a significant role in the cultural heritage of many Irish people, whether it manifests itself privately as a latent sense of denominational affiliation or more publicly in times of personal* *trauma, social celebration or communal conflict*" (Inglis 133). O'Toole explains further that "*Catholicism in Ireland has been a matter of public identity more than of private faith*" (*The Lie of the Land…* 65). Today Catholicism is constructed as a cultural and public phenomenon in Ireland.

McPherson marks these cases of child sexual abuse in *The Weir* in order to reflect upon the changing Ireland and the debunking of the old values. Jim's story realistically illustrates these events in Ireland, thereby showing how the Irish psyche is unsettled by these crises. He narrates that a priest from Glen looked for some people to bury a middle-aged man, *"[w]hich was an odd thing anyway. Like what was he doing coming all the way over just to get a couple of young fellas?*" (*The Weir* 48-49). It was a secret funeral, and there were just two people, the dead man's parents, attending it. After he and his friend, Declan Donnelly dug a grave for the deceased, "*Declan went off to get a taro to stretch over … the … grave*" (50). While Jim who was so sick with the flu was waiting for his friend, a man came out of the Church and told Jim that they had dug a wrong grave and took him to a grave "*[l]ike a new enough one. A white one with a picture of a little girl on it*" (50). Later "*he … sort of touched the gravestone and he went off, back into the church*" (50-51). A few days later, while resting at home, Jim realised who the man was through the paper his mother brought him. He says:

> […] on the obituaries, there was a picture of your man whose grave we'd dug. And you know what I'm going to say. It was the spit of your man I'd met in the graveyard. […] the fella who'd died had had a bit of a reputation for em … being a pervert. And Jesus, when I heard that, you know? If it was him. And he wanted to gown in the grave with the … little girl. Even after they were gone. It didn't bear … thinking about. (51).

Jim's story about the paedophile refers to the scandalous events in the 1990s, or rather the priests' wrongdoings and hypocrisy about sexuality, which is ironic for the reason that "*the creed that the Church, since it is not a human institution at all but a divine one, can do no wrong*" (O'Leary 238). These events became a real turning point in terms of the perception of religion for the Irish.

Another reference to child sexual abuse is in Valerie's story about her deceased daughter, Niamh. As she narrates, Niamh was always scared of the dark and had sleep problems. Valerie asked her

> 'what's wrong, when you go to bed?' But in the daytime, you know, she wouldn't care. Night-time was a million miles away. And she wouldn't … think about it. But at night … there were people at the window, there were people at the attic, there was someone coming up the stairs. There were children knocking, in the wall. And there was always a man standing across the road who she'd see. (*The Weir* 57).

After her death, as Valerie tells, Niamh phoned her and reiterated her fears about the man across the road who "*was looking up and […] was going to cross the road*" (60) to reach her. The chaotic atmosphere of the 1990s created by the child sexual abuse scandals is obvious in this narrative. When considering the 1990s, the man across the street "*means harm to the child, and that harm is likely to involve sexual abuse*" (Fitzpatrick 62). These scandals disturb the Irish psyche so much that a mother cannot help but think her daughter may be sexually assaulted by any man even if she is dead. The charges of child sexual abuse in the 1990s were markers of a corrupt society and religion which the Irish had promoted above anything else until then. McPherson, thus, portrays a contemporary Ireland in which such stories become prevalent.

With regard to what constitutes Irishness, the concepts of family and marriage occupy a special place due to the Catholic Church and the State policy. The family with children is regarded as the basis of Irish society and therefore protected and promoted by both the Church and the State. However, celibacy and bachelorhood/spinsterhood have become local colours in rural Ireland since the Great Famine with which the demographic structure changed. As Gilleard states, "*[f]rom a society that for over a century had been young and growing it [Ireland] was transformed in less than half that time to one that had shrunk and aged*" (29). Moreover, because the land, now, was given to just one son as a result of the Famine, the others were left only with two options, that is "*either to emigrate or to remain at home as relatives assisting on the farm, with little hope of ever breaking out of the pattern of perpetual bachelordom or spinsterhood that had been devised for them*" (Lyons 52). Thus, the marriage pattern changed because of the ensuing emigration. According to Arensberg and Kimball, "*[t]he country people are the ones among whom marriage is latest in Ireland, bachelorhood and spinsterhood most common, fecundity greatest*" (195). Guinnane also states that "*Ireland's most distinctive demographic trait was its very high level of permanent celibacy. […] By 1911 nearly one-quarter of both males and females in their late forties or early fifties had never married and were unlikely ever to do so*" (21). Besides, celibate life and sexual restrictions in rural

Ireland were likely an inevitable outcome of Catholicism because, as Foster writes, "*traditional Irish preoccupations with obligations to family and kin militated against irregular sexual connections, and social disapproval of illegitimacy was marked in remote rural areas*" (341). Consequently, celibacy and bachelorhood/spinsterhood turn out to be long-standing features of rural Ireland. McPherson's *The Weir* portrays bachelorhood as a typical motif of rural Ireland through the three "*single fellas*" (16), Jack in his fifties, Jim in his forties, and Brendan in his thirties. As Jack says: "*Me and Brendan are the fellas on our own. Jim has the mammy to look after, but we're, you know, you can come in here in the evenings. [...] You know, there's company all around. Bit of a community all spread around the place, like*" (44). McPherson, thus, illustrates the demographic structure of rural Ireland realistically where these single fellows seem to form a little community for themselves.

Whereas the play manifests that bachelorhood remains dominant in rural Ireland as is reflected through the abovementioned male characters, it also portrays the changing perception towards sexuality. Starting from the 1960s, with the debates about contraceptives, abortion, and divorce, and especially in the 1990s, family and sexuality became more flexible issues in Irish society. These controversial matters were opened for discussion in light of nascent social and cultural factors. People's attitudes towards family and sexuality were modified to a great extent. As O'Mahony and Delanty state, formerly

> [p]eoples' relationship to religious authority and values was the primary determinant of their experience of social organisation and personal freedom in most areas of everyday experience. After independence, when the power of the state was harnessed to support and expand the existing institutional power of the Church, Irish society was organised to a very substantial extent on theocratic principles of social integration. (138).

Therefore, especially with the weakening of the strict Catholic norms of sexuality and family, the Irish started to experience sexual freedom regardless of the traditional Catholic teachings. In the play, Jack who is still a bachelor in his fifties had a girlfriend once, but she left for Dublin in search of a better life in the 1960s. They continued their relationship for a while as Jack explains:

> I went up a few times like. But … I was going up for … you know … she had a room. A freezing, damp place. I was a terrible fella. It became that that was the only thing I was going for. I couldn't stand being away. I don't know why. Ah, I'd be all excited about going up for the

> physical … the freedom of it. But after a day and a night, and I'd had my fill, we'd be walking in the park and I'd be all catty and bored, and moochy. (*The Weir* 67).

Although Jack and Jim are "*the last representatives of a once-vibrant rural community*" (Mathews 157), Jack enjoyed sexual freedom out of wedlock, which points out dynamic social and cultural structure. Jack and/or his real-life counterparts seem to be much freer now as the restrictions on sexual activities and birth control practices have been relaxed, and contraceptives are made available to everyone. As Pringle reflects, "*[t]here has been a very marked trend towards secularisation since the late 1960s, as reflected by a relaxation of the laws governing censorship and contraception*" (43). The relaxation of these strict norms manifests that *The Weir* is rather a transition play showing the shift from the old to the new values because what was considered Irishness so far is challenged by the new world values. Pelletier affirms that "*[e]conomic success, the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' phenomenon, and its attendant socio-political consequences, has given the country a new confidence whilst challenging or eroding the old markers of Irish identity*" (98). This new confidence, thus, leads the Irish to redefine themselves and their status in the world.

Emigration is an irrefutably significant part or experience of Irish society, representing yet another element of local colour. Emigration from rural to urban areas, regarded as an Irish phenomenon, was obligatory for many Irish from the years of the Famine to the 1960s. In the 1960s, there was a movement in reverse for a short period, but it all started again in the 1980s and lasted until the 1990s. McPherson represents this very peculiar Irish situation in *The Weir* through Jack's girlfriend, Brendan's sisters who are city-dwellers mostly after material interest as mentioned before, and Finbar. Jack's girlfriend's migration from rural Ireland to Dublin coincides with the economic improvement of the 1960s after the abandonment of Éamon de Valera's (1882-1975) protectionist economic policy. Then, "*[i]ncreased industrialisation exacerbated the flight from the land. Many people moved to the cities and, in particular, to Dublin*" (Keogh 111). Jack narrates the story about his girlfriend as follows:

> We were courting for three, years, and em … 1963 to '66. But she wanted to go up to Dublin, you know. She would have felt that's what we should have done. And I don't know why it was a thing with me that I … an irrational fear, I suppose, that, kept me here. And I couldn't understand why she wanted to be running off up to Dublin, you know? And she did in the end, anyway, like. (*The Weir* 67).

O'Toole explains that "*[t]he center of economy began to shift from the kind of rural peasant society that the Revival had concentrated on, toward a new, uncertain urban world*" ("Shadows over Ireland"). Unlike Jack who prefers to remain where he is with a commitment to his rural way of life because of "*an irrational fear*" (*The Weir* 67), his girlfriend chooses a life in urban Dublin, cutting her ties with the soil and therefore with communal and spiritual solidarity.

Similarly, Finbar also "*went to the town to seek my fortune. And they [Jack, Jim, and Brendan] all stayed out here on the bog picking their holes*" (26). He actually talks about "*these country fellas*" (26) with contempt and takes them as local colours. Disdain for the country seems to be the characteristic of city life which symbolises progress, opportunity, and modern way of life. As Hachey asserts, people living in urban areas "*have tended to drift away from the traditional emphasis on hearth and home. More open to differing lifestyles, they find the lack of 'progress' in traditional Ireland frustrating and backward*" (257). However, as Horgan points out, "*rural migrants to Dublin inevitably became sort of internal exiles, guilty of both renouncing their past, and threatening the future of their nation*" (41). Since, in a way, they distort the image of Ireland as a rural idyll and "*the Catholic insula sacra: a unique spiritual haven of traditional folk simplicity, free from all the evils of modernity*" (Hutchinson 140). Despite this ambivalence in Irish attitude towards emigration, people like Jack's ex-girlfriend, Brendan's sisters, and Finbar are inclined to go to urban areas because of the broad opportunities that urban life provides.

In the 1990s, emigration was reversed by the impact of the Celtic Tiger and a "*dramatic shift [took place] from being a country impaired by chronic unemployment and emigration until the 1980s to being a host-culture for immigration in the 1990s*" (Gibbons 105). Irish people also began to return to Ireland or to "*[r]eal Ireland, community, [which] is somewhere else, in the country, in the inner city*" (Varenne 107). McPherson expresses this change: "*[w]hen the Celtic Tiger started to crank up, you could see people starting to come back. This was unheard of. That people were moving back from America! When we grew up emigration was the only show in town. That was my generation's mindset*" ("Conor McPherson"). So, that was something new for Irish society, reversing anything settled and known before. Besides, the immigration pattern also accelerated to a great extent leading to new problems. Growing urbanisation in the Celtic Tiger period caused a movement from urban to rural areas as city-dwellers wanted to find peace away from the crowd and noise of the city, leading to suburbanisation or repopulation of rural areas. Hence, the traditional pattern of rural-to-urban migration changed because of the population growth in the cities, especially in Dublin.

As Elliott and Lemert state, "*[i]n a metropolitan, urban world – under the pressures of the city crowd and the alienating structures of economic exchange – individual identities are necessarily egoistic, calculating and blasé*" (39). After her daughter's death, Valerie could not cope up with her grief and had no one to lean on. Even her husband did not share in her grief. The individualistic and overcrowded life in the city seems to prevent Valerie from finding comfort after her daughter's death. Therefore, she goes to rural Ireland to find peace of mind, as she says:

> JACK: Have you got any plans or that, for … here?
>
> VALERIE: Not really, I'm just going to try and have some …
>
> JACK: Peace and quiet.
>
> VALERIE: Mm.
>
> JACK: Jaysus, you're in the right place, so, ha? (*The Weir* 44-45).

Since rural Ireland "*is a space of sanctuary and re-integration, fundamentally opposed to the city, which is aligned with decay, loss and dysfunction*" (Chambers and Jordan 6) for Valerie. In other words, rural Ireland is considered as the real Ireland and the symbol of Irishness with its sense of community, solidarity, neighbourliness, and kinship, which renders urban Ireland an unfamiliar and foreign entity. What Valerie seeks in the countryside is idyllic peace away from the noise and turbulence of the metropolis.

Furthermore, increasing globalisation in the 1990s opened debates about the definition of Irishness because Irishness was promoted as archaic, rural, and traditional for tourism whereas there was a developing modern and urban Irishness at the same time. As Lonergan evaluates, "*identity and meaning are being reconstructed as tokens in a chain of commodity exchanges: the Irish mind, the Irish, the Irish workforce – all are up for sale, with essentialised qualities given an economic value in the global marketplace*" (189). Such commodification of Ireland arises many controversies because *"[e]ither tourism is seen as a 'Good Thing' which brings in money, creates jobs and facilitates regional development or it is seen as intrusive, exploitative and uniquely destructive in its commodification of peoples and their cultures*" (Cronin and O'Connor 3). Besides, as Clancy argues, this image "*also harkens up themes of discovery, invasion and colonialism in a manner complementary to tourism*" (92). Therefore, tourists are seen as not only discoverers but also invaders

(93) of the Irish landscape, which recalls the colonial exploitation of the land and its natural resources. The image of an archaic Ireland is, in a sense, being sold to tourists under the name of cultural tourism which is, Deane writes, "*a profitable means of converting culture into economics*" (148). In this sense, tourism essentialises Irishness as rural and archaic, thus undisturbed by modernisation, despite the fact that Irishness is becoming urban and modern as well as global.

McPherson depicts the influence of globalisation in *The Weir* showing how tourists tread rural Ireland to discover and invade the land. The locals like Jim, Jack, and Brendan deem tourists outsiders and intruders. They always call tourists "*the Germans*" (*The Weir* 22) even though they may be from Denmark or Norway. Brendan is particularly irritated by them: *"[t]he two of yous [Jim and Jack] leaving me standing behind that bar with my arms folded, picking my hole and not knowing what the hell is going on*" (72-73). Jim and Jack prefer not to go to Brendan's pub for a few weeks because of tourists. Besides, the lands are cleared for tourists' campsites and caravans. Therefore, the tourist gaze of the land, the locals, and their cultural practices disrupts the familiar environment of the Irish while it brings financial gain to Ireland. As Grene states, *"[c]omic complicity with this mild xenophobia is encouraged in the audience as part of the play's underlying resistance to modernity*" ("Ireland in Two Minds…" 304). Tourism is seen as a threat not only because of its commodification of Irish culture and landscape but also because of the ongoing clash between modern and traditional values as seen in *The Weir*. The setting of the play is a traditional rural Ireland advertised for the tourist gaze, yet it also discloses a changing Ireland which "*celebrates the gentle and the unspoken civilities of local life at a time when these attributes are perceived, in wider Irish society, to be under threat by the brash, consumerist ethos of the Celtic Tiger*" (Mathews 156).

Especially the Irish pub, as an Irish local colour across the world, attracts tourists because, as Cronin and O'Connor explain, "*[t]here is the association of the Irish pub with a social centre creating opportunities for the tourist to have the 'craic' which may be seen as a combination of easy conviviality, sociability, witty conversation and music*" (8). Thus, the Irish pub is promoted globally "*as a key marketing motif*" (McGovern 83). Besides the Irish pub, tourists also find something magical about Ireland. Finbar tells Valerie how "the Germans" admire the landscape in the rural part of Ireland:

> FINBAR: You get all the Germans trekking up here in the summer, Valerie. Up from the campsite.
>
> […]
>
> They do come up. This'd be the scenic pat of all around here, you know? Em. There's what's? There was stories all, fairies be up there in that field. Isn't there a fort up there?
>
> […]
>
> The Germans do love all this. (*The Weir* 33).

The supernatural, integrated into the storytelling tradition and inscribed on the land, draws tourists' attention. For them, Ireland is a spiritual and magical place to be explored.

It is significant to remark that some of the Irish benefit from the commodification of Ireland and Irish culture by adapting themselves to these circumstances. In the play, unlike Brendan, Jim, and Jack, Finbar sees visitors to their country as money incarnate and he does not feel disturbed by their presence. Hazucha describes Finbar as "*the voice of the New Ireland: unwaveringly self-confident, full of capitalist bravado, and a staunch advocate for land development and tourism*" (75). İnan also states that "*Finbar represents the successful cosmopolitan businessman who can adapt with the global world economy while other characters are stuck in their inner lives in this secluded part of Ireland*" (67). Finbar is indeed comparable to the investors of the modern and global world, following individual success and material gains. Hall asserts that "*the modern age gave rise to a new and decisive form of individualism, at the centre of which stood a new conception of the individual subject and its identity*" (602). Finbar stands for this new kind of individualism that emerged from the economic progress in the Celtic Tiger period.

In conclusion, *The Weir* explores Ireland and Irishness in transition within the context of rural-urban, traditional-modern, and local-global dichotomies escalating as a consequence of the Celtic Tiger economic boom in the 1990s. The playwright examines the transformation of Irish society and culture within a typical rural setting along with its peculiar local colours like storytelling, pub culture, bachelorhood, emigration, and Catholicism, all acknowledged as parts of traditional Irishness. The title especially refers to a real historical moment symbolising the old and new Ireland side by side going through a certain change in terms of modernisation. In this context, it is seen that rural Irish identity promoted as the Irish identity seems to be fading away while some of the people seek their fortune in the cities, thereby cutting their ties with the land or rurality by prioritising material interests. Besides, individual values and materialism started to infiltrate into and threaten communal lifestyle and solidarity in rural Ireland as illustrated by Brendan's sisters' persistence in selling the lands to have more money or by Valerie who moves from urban to rural Ireland to find comfort away from the city life. In the 1990s, with the impact of the Celtic Tiger economy, the immigration pattern was reversed in that people began to come or return to Ireland, which was something unseen before in the history of Ireland. Valerie's case also demonstrates how the rural-to-urban migration pattern was transformed during this period. McPherson, moreover, illustrates the changing perception towards sexual and familial norms, previously imposed by the Church and the State, as some of the characters have sexual freedom out of wedlock and feel less restrained considering the established socio-cultural and religious dictates. Besides, during the 1990s, the revelation of the clerical child sexual abuse dating back to the 1940s and 1950s and covered up by the Church itself changed the attitude towards Catholicism which had been held above anything else before. The playwright, thus, sheds light upon contemporary Ireland whose established norms and values are shattered. Furthermore, globalisation in the 1990s led to a reconsideration of the image of Irishness because Irishness was essentialised as archaic, rural, and traditional for tourists while there was a growing modern and urban Irish identity. Despite its financial aspect, tourism is regarded as a threat because of its commodification of Irish culture and landscape. Considering all, as Hill puts it: "*The Weir begins a movement away from discord about the Celtic Tiger, and towards acceptance of it and of the resulting reconfigurations of Irishness*" (70). Within the scope of rural-urban, traditional-modern, and local-global dichotomies, the play exhibits a hybridised Irishness: on the one hand, the Irish try to preserve their traditional characteristics but, on the other hand, they try to conform to or resist what they consider modern, urban, and global. All in all, by means of the stories, McPherson portrays a contemporary Ireland in transition as a result of the Celtic Tiger economic boom.

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Summary

Conor McPherson deals with the transformation of Irish identity from traditional to modern and from rural to urban in *The Weir* which illustrates the contesting nature of these dichotomies given side by side. As a result of modernisation, urbanisation, and globalisation, rural Ireland and its existing norms and values are disrupted by the penetration of the new values into the rural way of life. This paper aims to examine and discuss Ireland and Irishness in transition within the context of rural-urban, traditional-modern, local-global dichotomies escalating by the impact of the Celtic Tiger period.

The title, pointing out the construction of a power station in the 1970s, symbolises both Ireland's modernisation by providing electricity to the newly independent Ireland though damaging the ecological system, and a re-affirmation of its independence from Britain. It also refers to the collision of the old and new values in Ireland as well as the outburst of emotions by the characters.

McPherson depicts rural identity through an attachment to the land by the character of Brendan who refuses to sell his land that is regarded sacred in Irish culture. Unlike his girlfriend who left for urban Ireland or his sisters not caring for the land but prioritising material interests, Brendan bears a commitment to his rural life and identity. Traditional Irishness, hence, represents a territory-based identity.

Pub culture, regarded as a part of Irishness, engenders a sense of communal identity by establishing a sociable environment, thus leading people to tell their stories while alcohol acts as a catalyst for the revelation of the stories. However, individual values and materialism started to infiltrate into and threaten the communal lifestyle and solidarity as illustrated by Brendan's sisters' persistence in selling the lands to have more money or by Valerie, an intruder here, who moves from urban to rural Ireland to find peace away from individualism and materialism.

McPherson makes use of storytelling in the form of monologues. Storytelling/monologue helps the characters to reveal their minds and hearts. Therefore, it works as a vehicle for confession and redemption at a personal or micro level, and also to reflect upon the socio-cultural and economic circumstances of the 1990s. Moreover, with the impact of individualism, it also refers to individuals speaking for themselves. Besides, due to the influence of Catholicism, monologue can be regarded as a ritual of confession as the characters are looking for a kind of redemption for themselves. Hence, monologue was very prevalent in the 1990s as

individuals tried to communicate and assert their existence through their narratives. Jack reflects the waning of identity based on the land in his story while Finbar and Jack's stories explore the realities of the living conditions of rural Ireland, leading many people to move to urban areas or immigrate abroad. Jim and Valerie's stories about child sexual abuse also display the corruption in the society and religious institutions. Furthermore, as a part of the storytelling tradition, the supernatural that is common in these stories becomes an expression of the Irish psyche in terms of its reflection of loss and guilt or the past in the present.

In the 1990s, the media was shaken rigorously with news about child sexual abuse cases dating back to the 1940s and 1950s and covered up by the Church itself. Jim's story about the paedophile reflects upon the scandalous events in the 1990s, or rather the priests' wrongdoings and hypocrisy about sexuality. It is obvious in Valerie's narrative as well that her daughter was afraid of the man across the road who was likely to harm the child. McPherson marks these cases of child sexual abuse in *The Weir* to reflect upon the changing Ireland and the debunking of the old values.

Although family and marriage are promoted by the Church and the State, celibacy and bachelorhood/spinsterhood have become local colours in rural Ireland since the Great Famine with which the demographic structure changed, as is reflected in the play through three single characters, Jack, Jim, and Brendan. However, the play also illustrates the changing perception towards sexuality which became less restrained in the 1960s onwards especially with contraceptives. Besides, the debates about contraceptives, abortion, and divorce led to the rethinking of the concepts of family and sexuality. In the play, Jack enjoyed sexual freedom out of wedlock, which points out dynamic social and cultural mobility, as the restrictions on sexual activities and birth control practices have been relaxed, and contraceptives are made available to everyone.

Emigration, as an Irish local colour, is touched upon in the play through Jack's girlfriend, Brendan's sisters, and Finbar who moved to Dublin from rural Ireland since rural Ireland was thought to have nothing to offer to the young. However, in the 1990s, emigration was reversed by the impact of the Celtic Tiger and people began to return to Ireland or move from urban to rural Ireland to find peace away from the crowd and noise of the city. What Valerie seeks in the countryside is idyllic peace away from the noise and turbulence of the metropolis.

Globalisation in the 1990s opened debates about the definition of Irishness because Irishness was promoted as archaic, rural, and traditional for tourism whereas there was a developing modern and urban Irishness at the same time. While it brings financial gain to Ireland, the tourist gaze of the land, the locals, and their cultural practices disrupts the familiar environment of the Irish as Jim, Jack, and Brendan are irritated by tourists. Despite its financial aspect, tourism is considered a threat to Irish culture because of its commodification.

In conclusion, *The Weir* illustrates a contemporary Ireland in transition within the context of rural-urban, traditional-modern, and local-global dichotomies escalating as a consequence of the Celtic Tiger economic boom in the 1990s.