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Sanja Radmilo Derado
University of Split, Croatia
sradmilo@efst.hr

Economization of Self: Constructing a Female Neoliberal Subject in Eílís Ní Dhuibhne's *Fox*, *Swallow*, *Scarecrow*

Abstract: The paper focuses on the interdisciplinary textual analysis of Eílís Ní Dhuibhne's *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow* which addresses the complex human condition under the absolute reign of capitalism in the context of the Irish transition toward a neoliberal state. By relying on new economic criticism, the paper argues that this novel represents some of the silenced and, at the same time, most destructive aspects of the Irish iteration of neoliberal capitalism and its predominantly fictional character in the 21st century. By zooming in on the protagonists' constant search for self-actualization amid the Irish economic and real-estate boom, the narrative reveals the confusion and desire inherent in the neoliberal state of mind which thrives on constant striving for materialistic self-fulfilment. Although the neoliberal paradigm introduced into the Irish public discourse the belief that women are finally in a position to realize themselves as active subjects and to enjoy benefits they had been denied in the past, this process is presented here as incomplete. Namely, the paper shows that at the height of Irish economic prosperity, within the short-lived and superficial social idyll, the characters live in a new form of capitalist colonialism in which they still encounter strong, albeit radically shaken social taboos such as class differences, poverty, extramarital affairs and women's financial dependency in a marriage. The paper argues that the female neoliberal subject ultimately fails to adhere to the neoliberal paradigm on her journey toward self-assertion. She creates her own counter-space through her attempts to balance her intimate desires with the expectations placed on her as a wife and a mother. Threatened by unforgiving societal pressures, constructed counter-space critiques the neoliberal expectations of self-empowerment, but also challenges the patriarchal structures and traditional roles still imposed on women in modern Ireland.

Key words: neoliberal subject, contemporary Irish fiction, textual representation, neoliberal state, reign of capitalism

1. Introduction

Towards the end of the 20th century, as the influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland began to decline, the doctrine of neoliberalism started to dominate all spheres of life. Mikowski (2014) points out that the individual's freedom, as

opposed to entrenched obedience and collective repression under the dictates of the Catholic Church and conservative morality, finally became a right available to everyone. Furthermore, Keatinge (2014) sees such trends as key turning points in Ireland and places the beginning of speculation on the real estate market in that period, which he sees as one of the key causes of the Irish economic collapse.

Irish women's literary voices, with a certain time lag from the period of the Celtic Tiger, gradually became an illustrative site of literary criticism of neoliberalism, since the neoliberal economy, especially in the period of recession, showed its destructive sides, creating fractures and divisions in society (Brah, Szeman and Gedalof, 2015). Contemporary literary criticism recognizes that Irish women writers have been slow to enter into a dialogue with the Irish neoliberal reality (Cahill, 2011). The trend is also highlighted by Coughlan (2004), who points to the unfair neglect of women's contribution to the literary representation of the contemporary Irish economic moment and cites Anne Enright, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, and Anne Haverty as authors who in their recent prose engage with social changes in Ireland during and after the period of the Celtic Tiger.

According to Kennedy (2003), the reign of neoliberalism in Ireland introduced the belief that women are finally in a position to realize themselves as active social subjects and to enjoy previously denied rights. However, the Irish neoliberal novels by female authors present that process as incomplete and non-linear. Like many contemporary Irish female authors, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne finds her protagonists equally in urban Dublin and the suburbs, among members of the middle class, and in an often falsely idyllic everyday life that serves as a mirror to the fragmented image of individualism, anonymity, consumerism, and wild urbanization. At the peak of economic prosperity and among the material fragments of a short-lived and superficial social idyll, the female protagonist lives a life that reveals the flaws and chasms of a neoliberal society dominated by self-marketing and fractured human interactions. As the majority of characters in this novel, she engages in superficial conversations and equally superficial relationships as she struggles with still existing societal taboos such as self-objectivisation, emotional intimacy, rejection and desire. In particular, the analysis aims to show that the issue of re-positioning gender roles in a newly transformed Irish society remain open and require further investigation (Ging, 2009).

The fact that women's literary production which tackles the consequences of the capitalist, open-market economy on Irish society largely stagnated during the period of economic prosperity (Bracken and Harney Mahajan, 2017) indicates the need for female writers to come to terms with the liberal, progressive and multicultural face of Ireland that wants to cross paths with the ghosts of its complex past (Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin, 2002). With that in mind, this study will show how the strong anchoring in the context of contemporary social and economic turmoil in Ireland is transversal in nature, as it questions the space that is somewhere between the 'tiger' and 'post-tiger' social moment, a space located

within the materialistic landscape of strong 'financialization' society (Negra, 2014; Negra & Tasker, 2014). There are no direct references to the term Celtic Tiger in this novel, as Pierse (2014) notes, indicating a deliberate avoidance of clear links with the complex extra-textual economic reality. Nevertheless, the effects of that period on the individual and society lurk in the background, which shows that it is possible, as McGlynn (2017) points out, to write a novel that criticizes neoliberalism without falling under the influence of its ideology.

An insight into previous research on the literary representation of the economic aspects of Irish modernity reveals that this area is still under-researched. All the more so Ireland emerges as a kind of "economic anomaly" (Cronin, Kirby & Ging, 2009, p. 2) in the context of contemporary economic criticism. That is a possible reason for the epistemological gap in interdisciplinary approaches to the links between economics and the contemporary Irish literature. Therefore, of special interest to this study is how Ní Dhuibhne deploys superficiality and fractured relationships as stylistic devices aimed at unveiling the shortcomings of the neoliberal era in Ireland. As she unmasks class distinctions, conformity, indifference and drive towards individual self-fulfilment as dark spots of Irish neoliberal era, Ní Dhuibhne manages to subvert some of the constitutive elements of this economic system thus critiquing the system in which "to be better is to feel better" in the eyes of society (Ahmed, 2010, p. 8).

2. New Economic Criticism and the Neoliberal Novel

New economic criticism as a theoretical paradigm was strongly imposed for the first time in the 1990s, when the first studies that considered literature using economic paradigms and tropes appeared. This phenomenon coincided with a trend observed in the field of economic sciences, which was the growing use of methods and expressions typical of literature to present certain hidden metaphors. Research at the intersection of economics, culture, and literature goes back a little further into the past, more precisely to the 1970s, when the so-called first wave of studies in the field of economic criticism surfaced as a response to the formalist approaches to the literary text that dominated criticism in the second half of the 20th century. In parallel with the wave of changes that began to occur globally in various aspects of life and culture since the 1970s, literary theory struggled to find new approaches to literary texts that would encompass a wider social horizon and bring it into the literary world. Economics imposed itself as one of the more powerful disciplines with the potential of theoretical networking.

Since then, two iterations of the new economic criticism have been established (Osteen and Woodmansee, 1999). The first is clearly defined by theoretical studies published in the late 1970s and 1980s, and the second is represented by research from the 1990s onwards. Strong mutual interactions between economic and literary

discourse have been established during the later phase of economic criticism. Among the most influential studies of the first phase of economic criticism are those by Marc Shell (1978) and Kurt Heinzelman (1980). Both authors discuss the tradition of poetic language in economic discourse as a central thread of their studies but also reveal economic discourse as a permeating element of many literary works. Heinzelman is the first to talk about "imaginative economics", which deals with the structure of economic systems based on imagination and fictitious concepts, and about "poetic economics", which analyzes the use of fictionalized economic discourse in literature (12). The schism between the two social spheres, the private and the public, political and economic, is highlighted by Thompson (1996), who attributes to the literary text the role of the messenger of the hidden, silenced, and private world, while the discourse of political economy takes over the entire public sphere and imposes itself as the dominant narrative of the masculinist world. Through a diachronic analysis focused on changes in the concept of value, Thompson establishes that all contemporary discourses in the field of humanities and economic sciences are equally conditioned by "the new conceptualization of money from treasure to capital and the consequent reconfigurations of money from concrete bills to papers" (2).

The dematerialization of money has turned into a series of hard-to-understand transactions with 'plastic' or 'invisible' money. There was a transition from one representational paradigm to another and it is precisely this issue that captured the most attention of recent economic criticism. In the studies of the later phase of economic criticism, for which the name 'new economic criticism' has become established, a certain departure from earlier theoretical studies can be seen already in that some authors accept the theory of homologies of the earlier generation with some scepticism and turn to consider the influence of some other discursive practices on the literary text. Finally, the new economic criticism examines capital through its symbolic and representational power not only in the monetary but also in the social context, in which it participates by shaping the subjectivity of each individual participant in social symbolic practices.

In the following chapter, we consider the concept of capital in the era of neoliberalism through two aspects – capital as a concrete material category of (not) owning financial resources and capital as a social category, i.e. as a social status. In doing so, we rely on Pierre Bourdieu (1987) and his distinction of different forms of capital such as economic, symbolic, cultural or social capital. Bourdieu claims that "social capital is based on resources based on social ties and belonging to groups" while symbolic capital is created as an accumulation of "different types of capital at the moment when they are recognized and perceived as legitimate" (4). Social capital is based on an individual's belonging to a group, while modes of perceiving social capital condition symbolic capital. The study will show how the contemporary Irish women's narrative, which is concerned with presenting the Irish version of neoliberalism, takes place in the contact zone between poverty

and wealth, i.e. on a thin line that separates the subjects into those who strive for social acknowledgement enabled by the new economic paradigm, and those who are, for various reasons, thwarted in their social ambitions and remain entrenched on the margins with no sign of moving forward. Every social shift in neoliberal society is based on the idea of personal responsibility for one's own position in society to reduce public spending and state support, but also to encourage personal productivity and the economic profit of the individual and society as a whole. This is because the fundamental aspect of the contemporary neoliberal capitalist system is economization (Rose, 2000, p. 6). It encompasses all those procedures that enable economic processes to aggressively penetrate those spheres of human life in which they were not openly present until then, such as the institution of marriage, taking care of one's health, achieving personal satisfaction through creative work, and the like. The imperative to shape an entrepreneurial spirit whose goal is market success that defines the private and professional sphere of the individual is one example of the extension of economic relations to the private spheres of life in the neoliberal system. Bröckling (2015) explains this imperative with the term "entrepreneurial self" (22), which in the neoliberal context means that economic logic begins to govern the non-economic domains of human life, evaluating all individual activities exclusively through the prism of efficiency and market success. Furthermore, Foucault (1988) asserted that efficiency, measured by the logic of cost and benefit, is used to evaluate all social programs, but also the success of individuals. In a neoliberal context, this means that human life is governed by a constant competition for money, power, ability and youth. The individual self is therefore constantly encouraged to change, improve and adapt to a society that produces only two categories of subjects – winners and losers (Bröckling, 2015). An individual constantly strives for a more meaningful and productive life for himself, his family, and the nation whereby the neoliberal system, through public policies of market competition, and thus the creation of unlimited entrepreneurial opportunities for self-realization, internalizes the individual's desire for a meaningful and happy life (Paska, 2022). Therefore, self-fulfilment is achieved exclusively through the economization of personal experience. As the analysis will show, the novel exposes the true neoliberal consciousness based on self-fulfilment by equating the concept of happiness entirely with finance and material values. Anna Sweeney, the central character of the novel, exemplifies the vulnerability and insecurity of female subjectivity when placed in front of the public mirror. She epitomises the culture of neoliberalism built on the imperative of conformity to materialistic values and any failure to conform to that social dictate is regarded as weakness.

Discussing the economization of personal experience in the era of neoliberalism, Nilges (2015) states that, when considering the relationship of literature to neoliberalism, it is necessary to determine how literature relates to material reality. He claims that literature today must be considered through its active role in

representing neoliberalism, whereby it must not be understood only as a passive note on social changes, nor as a 'subordinated' object of neoliberalism, but as an ontology that coexists with neoliberalism and which builds and changes our perception of social and economic changes in the modern world. To understand the depth of this relationship, Nilges further argues, we should "avoid a limiting consideration of this relationship on the line of subordination-autonomy" (360) and instead analyze this relationship as a relationship of mutual mediation and conditioning, whereby a series of active forces conditions the realization of a neoliberal novel. Thus, it is claimed that the concepts of market regulation and social regulation form a strong relationship in the era of neoliberalism, since capitalism is a socially regulated phenomenon just as society and its culture are spheres regulated by capitalist movements and the crises that capitalism produces cyclically.

The opening up of Ireland to global markets since the mid-1990s caused certain shifts in the balance in Irish society, whereby women, quite expectedly, are no longer exclusively passive subjects of the traditional social order, but become active bearers of the family cell and participants in the decision-making process. Although Anna, the main female protagonist in *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow* is a dissatisfied housewife married to a successful, socially recognized husband, with a career in real estate, her social status and life in the affluence of the 'new' Ireland is refracted through the prism of her continuous questioning of the idea of marriage as a social convention as well as idealized self-image she strives to project. At one point in the novel, Anna asks herself: "Was that what marriage was like for everyone? How could they really know? People lied about these things as a matter of course, to themselves and to their friends." (91). Anna seeks escape in unsuccessful attempts at writing science fiction books for children, but the repeated rejection of her manuscripts points to the futility of ambition and a misdirected desire for personal fulfilment.

Neoliberalism, a political and economic ideology characterized by free-market capitalism, deregulation, privatization, and individualism, profoundly shaped Ireland's ethos. In particular, it had significant implications for gender roles and female subjectivity. As Ireland shifted towards a more market-driven economy, neoliberal policies reshaped the labour market, social services, and cultural norms, with varying impacts on different categories of society. According to Coulter (2015), the representation of Ireland as a destination that would offer highly qualified labour to foreign capital was in reality based on false premises because Ireland was ranked only in "shameful forty-third place on the list of developed countries in terms of the quality of Internet services" (2). Indeed, the only attractive factor in attracting foreign capital and the globalization of the Irish economy, Coulter further argues, was the fact that American corporations received the green light from the Irish government to open their branches in Ireland, where in return they would receive significant tax breaks without the obligation to leave part of their profits in Irish banks. Therefore, any model considering Ireland's

representational paradigms from the early 2000s to the present needs to take into account that Ireland has been economically transformed based on many weak and unsustainable assumptions, primarily economic. Consequently, rather than being a result of an elaborate global master plan, the period known as the Celtic Tiger, represented in the analysed novel, "was the outcome of a complex set of unfolding, interconnected, often serendipitous, processes held together by a strategy of seeking to attract and service FDI" (Kitchin et al., 2012, p. 1306). These processes are also reflected in how female roles shifted towards a self-optimizing, independent woman, with emphasis on personal responsibility often obscured the structural barriers that women continued to face, including pay inequality, and domestic care burdens. Women were encouraged to take personal responsibility for overcoming these obstacles, which sometimes resulted in internalized pressure and feelings of failure when they could not meet these high expectations.

The following chapter aims to show how the Irish version of neoliberalism increased wealth and living standards for many, but leaving out those who could not keep up with the fast-tracked economic boom. The wealth and the benefits were unevenly distributed, leading to significant social inequalities. With neoliberal policies emphasizing market participation and self-reliance, more women entered the paid workforce. The expansion of the service sector and economic liberalization created new job opportunities for women, particularly in part-time, flexible, or precarious positions. However, this economic participation was often characterized by lower wages and less job security compared to male counterparts. Neoliberalism promoted an ideal of individualism, but women still found themselves navigating the tensions between paid work, unpaid domestic responsibilities, and attempts at establishing their voice in the public domain. Although neoliberalism also reshaped women's sense of subjectivity in Ireland, emphasizing individualism, self-reliance, and personal responsibility, the analysis will attempt to show that this shift was not altogether thorough.

3. *Fox*, *Swallow*, *Scarecrow* as an Irish neoliberal novel

Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow (2007) by Eílís Ní Dhuibhne is a contemporary version of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, with which it enters into an undisguised intertextual dialogue. Namely, Ní Dhuibhne uses the motif of a female protagonist through which she represents the strong social progress of a nation and the turn towards liberal, Western values. The novel engages with the core of the Irish neoliberal system using elements of realism, social satire as a critique of capitalist social conventions, and romantic stories about protagonists who strive to affirm their subjectivity through the search for excitement outside the traditional framework of marriage. Like her Russian predecessor, Ní Dhuibhne intends to address the challenges that economic changes bring to society. In addition, the author questions

the role of past texts in constructing the narratives of the present. The aspect of the complex and networked temporal relations between the past and the present, and their potentially non-linear relations at different levels, is one of the fundamental questions that Ní Dhuibhne focuses on. In this sense, one of the questions the author deals with is the question of the unfinished past that constantly returns and imposes on the present in new ways while reshaping it.

Ní Dhuibhne rejects the hegemonic discourse of linear time, viewing temporal relations as a series of simultaneous time flows that are pushed to the margins of human cognition, which constantly destabilize the established historiographical discourses of the time. To point out the need to look at the relationship between the past and the present, especially in the context of the ideology of progress and economic prosperity, Ní Dhuibhne uses some of the deeply rooted binary oppositions within Irish culture. First of all, it is about the urban-rural relationship, which to this day remains a key determinant of Irish national identity and which, in contemporary theoretical considerations, must be viewed precisely through the relationship of different levels of temporality that complicate contemporary conceptualizations of Ireland. The idea of binary oppositions as the basis of Irish identity is also represented by Richards (1999) who claims that the entire Irish historical narrative is based on the (in)stability of power relations between dominant, hegemonic representations and opposing ones. As an example, he cites colonial power relations, then later nationalist visions of a 'true' Ireland, and visions of economic progress in modern times as another form of hegemonic representation. In this context, Richards continues, the former binary opposition between the indigenous, rural west of the country on the one hand, and the urbanized, modern east on the other, in an era of economic prosperity, raises the question of authentic 'Irishness' and reverses the hegemonic discourse of modernization, causing a "repositioning of 'Irishness'" whereby one side of the opposition, the urban and advanced one, asserts itself as the only acceptable Ireland, while the west of the country becomes "a weight on the development of the country and the mental health of the nation" (102). This is a question of central importance to Eílís Ní Dhuibhne as she explores and undermines all the hegemonic narratives of the present that destabilize Ireland's perception of the past. She does this by digging deep into the conflicting time-space relations on which the ideas of progressive history rest. At the same time, she focuses on those relationships that are incorporated within the ruling hegemonic discourses of progress that shape the self-perception of the Irish, as well as the global perception of the Irish identity.

The reader is introduced to the heart of Ireland's economic success, when the Celtic Tiger is in full swing. There is no sign of the coming recession and the main character, a children's writer of questionable literary talent, Anna Kelly Sweeney, lives a dream life in an era of economic prosperity in the elegant, southern suburbs of Dublin, in the district of Killiney, with her husband Alex and son Rory. Her life in an expensive house owned by her husband Alex, a successful real estate broker,

takes place mainly between numerous literary events and book promotions that have become desirable social activities. Unsure of her literary abilities, but with a burning desire to leave her mark on children's literature, Anna sporadically, and not overly ambitiously, engages in writing in a hidden corner of her glamorous house. The activity of writing is isolated and concealed from the rest of the family circle, which indicates the diminishing importance of intellectual activities and professional affirmation in the era of material well-being. Anna is a representative of the new generation of the Irish well-to-do, completely indifferent to everything that even remotely resembles a social issue:

> Thinking about the government, or about politics, or the environment, always wearied her. What was the point? What could she do about any of the country's problems? She swept her annoyance about the car park outside Leinster House out of her mind with one swift stroke, like an energetic house-cleaner. Brushing problems under the carpet was a skill she had long-ago perfected, especially if they were other people's problems. Instead of worrying about the ills of society, she amused herself by observing them. (2)

Lack of empathy and focus on personal interest are among the constitutive elements of the new liberalism, which is based on the idea that the modern subject is often indifferent to important economic and global problems. Superficial fulfilment has taken precedence over all other ambitions and over the creative process itself. This is clearly presented through self-reflection on her own limits in the context of the commercialization of writing:

> The only thing she really believed in was her ambition to be a successful writer, by which she meant some sort of mixture of famous, bestselling and good. But she had never considered why she wrote or why she wanted to write a 'good' book, or what good such a book could do for its readers. Such questions – questions regarding the meaning of literature, or of writing – were never discussed in her literary circles. (75)

Anna's perception of achieving personal happiness in a fast-paced, commercial environment is closely related to public acknowledgment. Happiness is not internal but rather equated with commercial success and financial compensation, there is no other alternative for happiness. Anna's somewhat vague, fluid ambition is to "achieve personal happiness" (75), although she is not sure how this is achieved. She harbours an intimate contempt for the weaker Other, for everyone who for her is a symbol of failure in the new, modern society, even though she is unable to formulate her own firm beliefs about her own identity. The author thereby exposes the neoliberal consciousness by equating the concept of happiness in a liberalized society entirely with finance and material values which makes Anna believe that "when she was a bestselling, successful author, she would also be perfectly happy" (76). A deeper understanding of the creative process is set aside and one only has to "wait for success to happen" (76), as it were, without dedicating too much thought to it. Anna's only desire is to live "a successful, bestselling sort of life,

just as the writers wanted to produce a successful and bestselling book" (76). She considers "contentment and routine" something that the "ordinary people like Gerry and Olwen, wanted in life" (75). Anna is vague with all her beliefs, values, and ambitions. Thus, we find out that she is "vaguely agnostic, vaguely socialist, vaguely capitalist, vaguely materialistic, vaguely spiritual" (75). Her identity is completely in line with the neoliberal mantra of eternal striving for greater achievements and this leaves her emotionally paralyzed until her tragic end.

In the background of her weak literary ambitions, not only her identity is questioned, but a whole series of social and economic paradigms are analyzed that have shaped contemporary Irish society and imposed somewhat transgressive behaviours legitimized by the neoliberal order. Namely, in this new, consumerist Ireland, material goods and real estate and values are social masks that conceal the true nature of the individual, their intimate desires, and unfulfilled aspirations. This method of representing neoliberal anxiety is further enhanced by the exceptional attention paid to descriptions of interiors and exteriors as objects of desire and identity determinants in a society of prosperity. Those materialistic determinants keep Anna and her social circle in a bubble of eternal present in which she is surrounded by an idealized imagery of unlimited possibilities, where any alternative future is unimaginable. It was simply "unimaginable, unconscionable, that the civilization to which Anna and Alex belonged could disappear. What could replace it? How could they imagine anything other than what there was now, planes and city breaks, computers, four-wheel drives, new books every week, concerts and operas and a constant stream of easy entertainment on the television […]" (119). For her, as for those living the Irish success, an absence of material things would be a true failure. For her, after a certain level of wealth had been reached, there was no point in accumulating more. Although her husband provides well for her and their son, making it unnecessary for her to seek employment and be independent, as neoliberalism would have it, she does not "understand why he continued to work and slave, accumulating more and more property, when he must have known it was unnecessary" (87). However, her thoughts are directed to her son's future and his financial security as the only important family legacy: "Still, she enjoyed the security of knowing there was so much money in their bank accounts, that Rory would have his own apartment or house as soon as he was old enough to want it, that financial worries would never be theirs" (87). The effort to ensure security and wealth is exclusively linked to exhausting work which is the foundation of the capitalist value system. Despite that, certain inherited gender roles remain unchanged in her family so much so that Anna, sometimes arriving home late in the day, finds the fridge and the table empty, realising that although she had been married o her husband Alex for a long time "she could still not understand why he could not cook, even to the extent of putting a pizza in the oven" (197). Although neoliberalism played a crucial role in reshaping gender roles and family dynamics, with long-term consequences for women's economic and social status in Ireland, patriarchal practises and gender roles were not necessarily re-configured in every

individual case and in every household (Lynch & Lyons, 2009). Anna's role within the family unit, despite the possibilities and the societal pressures, remain traditional, with clear division of expectations regarding decision-making in household matters. That has never been, and it is not now, in Anna's case, a male domain.

An attempt to distance oneself ideologically from the burden of the colonial past and the violent denial of indigenous identity is subverted by continuous interweaving with the visual experience of economic well-being. Anna thus regularly visits glamorous book promotions in heritage buildings that recall past times:

> They made their way through a few lobbies and into the big old hall, with high painted ceilings, where Grattan's parliament used to assemble before the Act of Union ended the Irish parliament and brought them all over the water to Westminster, resulting in the decline of the status of Dublin as the second capital of the empire. From this decline the city had now, two hundred years on, recovered so completely that Dubliners believed there was not on earth a more desirable place in which to live, at least in the winter months (all successful Dubliners now had a place in France or Spain for the summer). (12)

The fluidity of time relations and the apathy of existence exclusively in the present moment are sources of satisfaction and sure signs that her happiness, although without a firm foothold, can only be reached now because the past is erased and the future is difficult to comprehend. Time is a commodity that has value only when it is usable and when it serves for the additional accumulation of capital. Anna's husband Alex "never allows himself a single moment of idleness" so every moment of the day is predetermined for a specific activity such as "one hour three times a week in the gym, half an hour with the daily newspaper on Sunday morning, and the like" (10). He never wasted "not even a second of his time. That was the key to success and a morally justified existence, in his opinion" (10). The challenge to the linear concept of temporality is at the core of the neoliberal novel, which problematizes the flow of time as a chronological sequence based on Deleuze's theory on the coexistence of temporal categories (Deleuze, 1994). This idea is elaborated by Al-Saji (2004) by remarking that the eternal present thus conceived cannot adequately describe the flow of historical time since it looks at the past as a completed present, and the future as a present that has yet to happen. The author engages in alternative considerations of temporal categories whereby history and memory are inexorably intertwined with the present, forming a rounded structure that subverts the extra-literary hegemonic discourse of memory erasure.

Awareness of the possibility of a different fate in another time will also appear in the moments when Anna repeatedly notices the same homeless man on the streets with an outstretched hand who reminds her that there is a parallel world in a parallel time. This element also points to the subversion of the hegemonic discourse typical of the ideology of neoliberalism, and it is about the social perception of the existence of individual responsibility for social failure. Namely, neoliberalism in Ireland, as well as in all Western societies where it imposed itself as a dominant ideology, promoted

an attempt to "mobilize specific ideas and political practices to achieve certain goals that will benefit the minority and their ability to accumulate capital" (Gilbert, 2013, p. 18). Neoliberalism promotes the idea of self-preservation and personal interest without collective responsibility. Structural inequalities are not the focus of neoliberal ideology, so the relationship of reciprocity between economic practice and cultural ideologies will strengthen the neoliberal idea and impose it as the only possible system of values. Everything that happens to the individuals is down to personal responsibility, which allows the system to distance itself from individual failure or social invisibility. Social inequalities are thus not a structural problem, but rather a matter of the individual's choices. In other words, in the neoliberal world, personal failure is the result of "the wrong attitude of the individual, and by no means a matter of structural conditions based on stratification based on the principle of race, class and gender differences" (Halberstam, 2011, p 3).

In numerous places in the novel, the author addresses the fleeing concept of social awareness in the neoliberal Ireland. For instance, Chapter One features an imagery of modernised urban landscape of Dublin through which the Luas, a super-modern tram that connects affluent city areas with those less so, is presented through Anna Sweeney's feelings as a passenger on the train. She observes the surroundings as the train passes "chic apartments, their balconies rubbing shoulders with almost equally chic corporation houses" (1) that kept the neighbourhood alive and well in the era of fast-track growth. As the train enters "Adelaide Road – the modernised version, all windows, and transparency, where once there had been high hedges and minority religions" (1), Anna is unnerved by the seductive voice of the train announcer which "reminded Anna of Marilyn Monore's" and, she was certain, "had been designed to soothe her and her fellow passengers" (1). As in many later chapters, the author's attention is turned to the fluidity of time-space relations in the new era. In this opening scene, Anna enjoys her daily trips to shiny shopping malls and glamorous social events. Still, she is constantly aware of the announcer's Donegal Irish accent which, to her, is a reminder of times gone by, the Irish long-forgotten past. To her, it is "like a voice from fairyland or the world beneath the wave, from some place aeons away from the land of the Luas" (1). Furthermore, her daily routines are based on her attempts to fit in and to be perceived as successful. As with all the other women she sees around her, she feels a constant urge to represent her, but also her husband's financial success. Hence, as she enters one of the most popular Dublin's commercial centres, Anna's thoughts are focused entirely on her appearance because "she would not have bothered changing clothes to go shopping, but after one unpleasant occasion when she had dropped into the Dundrum Centre in an old anorak and baggy trousers, she realised one has to dress up for this particular consumer experience" (40). Again, the author hints at the overwhelming social exclusion of the economically weaker groups in the new Irish society by affirming Anna's sense of security in her social position, thanks to the fact that in that magical consumer palace, there are no groups that she considers 'ordinary' and 'inappropriate', i.e. not worthy enough to visit such

a place. Her sense of self-worth is enhanced as she notices that, during her visits, there are no "old people here, hobbling around with their trolleys, or flabby women with streaky orange hair and plastic bags, the kind of people you found shopping in the afternoon in ordinary places" (40). The cynicism of these observations reflects the neoliberal society's disdain for the weaker and those who cannot take care of their material well-being. Anna also notices that there are no men in those places during the day, only "young women with good coiffures and elegant bags bearing the logos of the most fashionable shops and smiling brightly at one another as they made ironic comments" (41). This imagery reveals the complex issue of gender roles whereby men in the neoliberal era are expected to work hard and provide for their families, while women are (re)positioned to their traditional roles of caretakers, mothers, and wives who gladly accept the passive role within family units. Still, they are no longer confined within the four walls of their homes, as the previous generations of Irish women were. The women in neoliberal Ireland are well provided for and are asserting their roles as socially accepted model wives of the neoliberal era. The 'new' culture accepts only those capable of fitting into the hegemonic narrative of glitz and economic prosperity. Other members of the community are invisible and marginalized. The shiny surfaces of shopping malls, reflective surfaces, shops, and office buildings on the Luas route are reflections of the capitalist lifestyle. Glass, as Armstrong (2008) suggests, is simultaneously a means of effectively providing insight into the tempting possibilities offered by commercial spaces, but also a means of controlling human senses because they distance the consumers inside the glazed spaces from everything noisy and undesirable outside the glass space. According to Armstrong, the transparency of the glass membrane of this double world inevitably creates "double meanings - the artificially created aura of consumerist experience and urban pastoral confronts the spectacle of visual pleasure, economic exploitation and common spiritual renewal" (133).

Yesterday's pillars of society became homeless overnight, leading to even greater social and class polarization in Ireland. By placing the homeless person on Anna's daily routes, the author presents the figure as a constant threat of poverty and as a reminder of the instability of the neoliberal paradigm. In a neoliberal society, poverty is seen as a weakness while class differences in the era of plenty feature as a taboo subject. Social inferiority of the homeless man who is constantly present in Anna's daily walks around Dublin, undermines Anna's confidence and increases her sense of insecurity as she passes him by in the street. That way, the urban landscape of *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow* is used as another subversive feature of social stratification, but also as a means of erasing the past from collective memory. Ní Dhuibhne thus uses the city train as one of the characters and links the parts of the new topography of Dublin with a fast electric tram called 'Luas' (the Irish word for speed). Luas connects the city centre with the elegant, residential parts of the south and south-east of Dublin. The Luas lines were introduced in the 2000s, when the economic boom was at its peak and when investments in infrastructure were extensive. The first

paragraph is also a detailed scene of Dublin, through which the Luas move, carrying contented and happy people can admire Dublin's landscape. This urban scenery has completely changed, erasing the traces of past times and introducing clear signs of social stratification typical of advanced neoliberal societies:

> From the new glass bridge which spanned the inscrutable waters of the Grand Canal, the tram purred downhill and glided gently into the heart of the city. Like a slow Victorian roller-coaster, it swerved through Peter's Palace, passing chic apartments, their balconies rubbing shoulders with almost equally chic corporation houses, genteel vestiges of democracy that had contrived to survive in this affluent area. Then it swung nonchalantly onto Adelaide Road – the modernised version, all windows and transparency, where once there had been high hedges and minority religions. (1)

The author sets the scene of a big cat moving through the jungle. In other words, a strong symbol of the economic progress of the city and the country is given 'tiger' qualities, thus the Luas as a symbol of Irish brilliance is imposed as the embodiment of economic well-being. The soothing, sophisticated voice of the station announcer also contributes to this, lulling passengers into a state of calm and contentment. At the same time, this means of transport becomes a symbol of the many binary oppositions on which this text rests, primarily those between urban prosperity and rural isolation, the rich neighbourhoods of Dublin and the poorer ones, and between successful individuals and those who beg on the street. Compared to the flashy and fast Luas that transports successful, well-dressed people to the posh parts of the city, to some of the business or residential parts of the metropolis, the west-to-east train is slow, dirty, and inefficient, miles away from Ireland's aspirations to join the capitalist universe. This train is the complete opposite of the Luas; it symbolizes the past, what is left behind, what is old, and what cannot keep up with the fast pace of development. Finally, it symbolizes death: "[…] a few old age pensioners waited patiently on the platform with their trolleys, for who knew what? The train to Ballybrophy, maybe, or the death coach, whichever came first" (56). Such binary oppositions indicate the instability of the fundamental paradigms of the economic order in Ireland while the sophisticated means of transport introduced in the era of national prosperity acts as the ultimate signifier of social and economic stratification. Space as a signifier, but also as one of the novel's key protagonists, is deconstructed at different places in the text and at different levels. For instance, Anna's husband Alex participates in the development of new spaces that significantly determine the backbone of the city, but also contributes to the real estate bubble caused by the disproportionately large volume of affordable housing units:

> Anna was uninterested in finer details but knew that he had sold off almost all his equity and was sinking everything into a new venture, an entire block of apartments in one of the new south Dublin suburbs, which, although not top of the market at present, are predicted to rise exponentially in value since they are had been designated one of the new transport hubs in the city: close to the DART, the proposed Luas extension, and the M50. Around such hubs, the

> new satellite dormitory suburbs – even Alex would not abuse the language by calling them towns – were going to mushroom in the next phase of development. So they said in the property supplements. (262)

The language used to emphasize the speculative nature of financing and hyper-construction is visible through phrases such as *was sinking everything*, *were predicted to*, *were going to*, *so they said*. This kind of entrepreneurial spirit is rejected as an anomaly in this novel and reshaped not as a signifier of the dynamism and energy of society in economic growth, but as a distorted pathology that promotes alienation and stratification within society and the historical continuum.

In addition, the Luas, a shiny symbol of the Irish neoliberal present which, in the eyes of its inhabitants, has finally driven the country away from its backward rural past, serves as a mirror in which Irish people can see themselves. By loading the economic, cultural, and social imaginary into this urban train, society only created the illusion of its indestructibility and moved away at high speed from unwanted memories of the past. The symbolism of the Luas for Ireland is emphasized by Balzano and Holdridge (2007), noting that it is "an emblem of social and political reality that functions as a polished mirror, a modern Lacanian mirror made of metal and glass held up in front of Irish people's faces to reflect themselves well as it circulates between signifier of the street and imaginary of the inhabitants" (107). This is another binary opposition of this novel, the one that juxtaposes inclusion and exclusion – social, economic, and ideological. Anna often boards this elegant train as it gives her a sense of self-satisfaction and security. Anna's cocoon will gradually disintegrate towards the end of the novel when a bizarre traffic accident, in which she dies on the tracks of the Red Line, marks a deviation from the path of success. Just like a shiny new train, Anna's life suddenly jumped off the rails at one point, and in the same way, the Celtic Tiger was stopped in its tracks soon after. Thus, state-of-the-art trains and commercial real estate that dominate urban landscapes of Dublin in the neoliberal era represent promises of "worlds without limitations, which fail to live up to expectations while constantly encouraging individuality so that genuine relationships are replaced by the search for immediate gratification and self-interest" (Pirnajmuddin & Saei Dibavar, 2020, p. 162). In that context, the study looked at *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow* as a neoliberal novel representing the dark spots of neoliberal market ethics. This dimension makes it a suitable medium for representing the Irish female experience in a society torn apart by neoliberal orthodoxy (Johansen and Karl, 2015).

4. Conclusions

In *Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow,* Ní Dhuibhne's female subject displays anguish and insecurity that lay bare the deceptiveness of neoliberal values. She is only a pawn in a game that gradually co-opts and destroys her. Namely, Anna abruptly dies

in a traffic accident when she stumbles and falls on the tracks of the Red Luas line – the one that takes passengers to less desirable parts of Dublin, those inhabited by those less fortunate than her. Towards the end, Anna grows more paralyzed in her actions and her decisions, and every attempt to get out of the socially determined framework causes apprehension and dissatisfaction. Her life is taken away from her by the shiny symbol of modernity and progress which, simultaneously, connects and divides people, both socially and symbolically. Enslaved by social norms and expectations, Anna's actions, emotions, and unspoken desires remain static and forever anchored in the eternal present, and from such a position of paralysis, she keeps trying to compensate for the lack of authenticity and the sense of self-worth. By not fully confronting her unfulfilled ambitions and personal weaknesses, this female subject indulges in consumerist abundance, but the analysis reveals that the neoliberal abundance loses its superficial glitter once hardships and failures are exposed. In constantly striving for reinvention and self-fulfilment, female subjectivity in the neoliberal era remains constructed on silences and internalization as any sign of weakness "in a competitive society which equates vulnerability with failure" (Carregal-Romero, 2023: 215) turns an individual into a social outcast. Thus, the female protagonist's often erratic and insecure behaviour unveils the chasm between the visible, social self and the private self as one of the key features of neoliberalism which, according to Nolan (2017), fails to provide an ethical stance towards individual suffering in the era of plenty.

Ní Dhuibhne's female subject displays social and intimate anxiety thus exposing all the inequalities and hypocrisies of the neoliberal culture. As the constant threat of loss and subsequent social exclusion hang over her head and as the silences in her marriage counterpart her husband's business successes, Anna realizes that her entire life is based on dysfunctional relationships and imposed silences. Although she longs for emotional healing and fulfilment, it is out of her reach because "healing only becomes possible when human needs and longings are addressed in mutually enriching and caring relationships" (Carregal-Romero, 2023, p. 229). Sadly, the female experience is presented as entirely economized, and, as such, it foregrounds the fractures and frustrations of neoliberal values. Consequently, the portrayed experience of the female protagonist reflects what Kirby (2002) refers to as the value system in which "the interests of the entire population are equated with the interests of a small elite who profit from this newly invented Ireland" (33). The study showed that the female experience in neoliberal Ireland is deeply enslaved by the logic of the free market. One that does not embrace the ethics of mutual connectivity and common interest. Such a mentality comes at a cost as it destabilizes the cognitive balance that the individual needs as it promises a false world of success while continually preventing the individual from fully accessing that illusion. In portraying such a condition, the author leads us to conclude that there is still no powerful alternative to dominant neoliberal values that reign free in Ireland.

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