

Summary

This thesis sets out to explore the theme of loneliness and self-determination in contemporary Irish short stories in relation to the gender of the main protagonists, how the major shift in gender roles and especially the position of women in Irish society changed in relation to the Celtic Tiger. As society in Ireland is traditionally patriarchal and family-oriented, there are many social expectations attached to one's gender that often get to play a crucial part in the person's life. The situation the characters in the stories is further complicated by their placement – rural areas versus towns, marginalization of some individuals due to their difference from the majority and one's social standing. Attention will be paid as well to the stereotypes and the struggle to define oneself due to the present outer circumstances shattering the protagonists' identities and therefore leaving them feeling displaced and isolated, left out of the community, consequently affecting their happiness and enforcing their feeling of loneliness.

Frank O'Connor claims that the genre of short story is defined by "an intense awareness of human loneliness" mainly affecting the "outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society," yet contemporary Irish short story focuses more on the self-realization and the feeling of failure and displacement of often seemingly successful individuals. Loneliness as a common feature of contemporary Irish short stories needs to be redefined with all the social, cultural and economic changes in Ireland since the 1990's. This thesis analyzes the extent to which loneliness and the feeling of abandonment is related to the turbulent transformation of Irish society brought on by the Celtic Tiger and how contemporary Irish short stories treat the intertwining of loneliness and the societal development of this era. All the stories discussed in this thesis were written between 1991 and 2012 and are concerned with or were influenced by the contemporary affairs in Irish society. The thesis is divided into

three chapters: the first will discuss the deconstruction of Mother Ireland archetype sacrificing herself for others in Claire Keegan's "Men and Women" (1999) and Dermot Bolger's "Winter"(2003); the second describes the mainly male take on emotional numbness, fulfilment of social and gender roles, desire for social approval and fitting into the community using Kevin Barry's "Beer Trip to Llandudno" (2012), Billy O'Callaghan's "The Body on the Boat" (2008) as well as Philip Ó Ceallaigh's "Walking Away" (2009). The focal point of the third chapter will be the contemporary themes and critical issues in Ireland in Roddy Doyle's "The Pram" (2007), Joseph O'Connor's "Mothers Were All the Same" (1991) in addition to Colm Tóibín's "A Priest in the Family" (2006).