

Abstract

English title and keywords:

Memory in the Novels by Dermot Healy

- Dermot Healy, Irish literature, Irish novel, memory, collective memory

Despite his large and diverse body of work Irish writer Dermot Healy remains somewhat ignored by scholars. However, his formally diverse writing which spans from novels and short stories to poetry and dramatic work is without a doubt worthy of critical response. One of Healy's themes is an engagement with the formation of memory and with how an experience transforms in the mind of its 'experiencer' and changes into what from a certain perspective may be regarded as fiction. Stemming from his own life experiences the author engages a topic common to all human beings and plays with the concept of memory and its possible distortion in his autobiography *The Bend For Home* (1996), as well as in his plays and poems. His autobiographic work can be seen as a background for the theme; however, the present thesis will focus on Healy's novels, starting with *Fighting with Shadows* (1984) through *A Goat's Song* (1994), *Sudden Times* (1999) to his final novel *Long Time, No See* (2011).

In these books and in the characters that Healy presents we are able to observe individuals with diverse personal histories who return to individual experienced events through reconstruction and in retrospect. The thesis will examine these characters' memories, look at what details the readers learn and what remains undisclosed both in terms of what the characters themselves either do or do not remember and what (and why) they are not willing to tell; moreover in the case of the memories described it will look at the characters' bias. The thesis will ask why certain memories are emphasized, what language is used to describe them and whether these memories appear as an image, a sound or a simple undertone. The thesis will also look at characters experiencing involuntary memories and both conscious and unconscious recreations. In cases where we are able to observe both the experience and the memory that stems from it the thesis will then also look at the transformation from the experience itself to its fictional version. Although the author tended to limit his focus on male characters, his scope is wide in that he portrayed individuals from different strata of society, writing

about labourers, policemen and writers, as well as both the young and the old. Healy also portrayed both characters experiencing physical or emotional exile and characters involved in everyday life, offering a wide range of possible memory processes.

Humans necessarily remember certain things that they deem important while forgetting insignificant episodes. However, the processes of memory are not so simple; there are many other inner workings of the mind and reasons for remembering, reinforcing or forgetting and the thesis will engage with this theme through Healy's novels. Finally – and most importantly – the thesis is going to examine Healy's examination of individual memory in relation to collective memory, particularly in regard to the individuals' experience of remembering, fictionalizing or forgetting and its relation to the construction of Irish cultural and collective memory, using the work of memory scholars from Jan and Aleida Assmann to the following generations of researchers.