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Um breve olhar no jardim de rosas de Maeve Brennan – A experiência de não pertença das protagonistas dos contos em *The Rose Garden*

A brief perspective on Maeve Brennan's Rose Garden – The experience of Non-Belonging in the Protagonists in The Rose Garden's Stories

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RESUMO

Este artigo revisa os principais assuntos explorados pela escritora irlandesa Maeve Brennan na coletânea de contos The Rose Garden, considerando os contos divididos em grupos temáticos. Ela estava atenta ao grande número de mulheres irlandesas migrantes chegando sozinhas aos EUA em função da falta de empregos na Irlanda. A partir da observação de mulheres marginais aos padrões sociais vigentes, Brennan expõe vícios da sociedade nova-iorquina e dá voz a um grupo que comumente não ocupava o protagonismo na literatura da década de 1950: mulheres imigrantes, feias, solitárias e vivendo o último estágio da vida adulta antes da terceira idade.

Palavras-chave: Literatura de autoria feminina; Protagonismo feminino; Literatura americana/irlandesa

ABSTRACT

This article reviews the main subjects explored by Irish writer Maeve Brennan in The Rose Garden's short stories, considering the stories divided into thematic groups. She was attentive to the impressive number of Irish women arriving alone in the USA due to of the lack of jobs in Ireland. From the observation of outsider women, Brennan exposes the vices of New York society and gives voice to a group that usually did not play a leading role in the literature of the 1950s: immigrant, lonely and ugly women, and women living the last stage of adult life before becoming elderly.

Keywords: Female authorship; Female protagonism; Irish/American literature

INTRODUÇÃO

Maeve Brennan was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1917, and passed away in New York in 1993, aged 76. She worked as a journalist and a writer, producing mainly short stories. Brennan is an important figure both in the Irish diaspora and the literature of migration as well. In *The Rose Garden*, Maeve Brennan turned to themes related to Irish women migrants in the United States and middle-aged lonely women. The main aim of this article is to divide *The Rose Garden*'s stories in thematic groups and highlight the main features of each group, considering them as possible subjects for future investigations.

Some years after her passing, in 1997, Christopher Carduff published a new edition of *Long-Winded Lady*, a compilation of forty-seven of Brennan's chronicles for *The New Yorker,* first published in 1969 by William Morrow & Company, in Brennan's original selection. Carduff's arrangement, however, has nine more pieces published in *The New Yorker* in Brennan's column "The Talk of the Town". The editor also compiled her short stories with Dublin as a scenario in *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin*.

In 2004, Angela Bourke, a scholar in Irish oral tradition and literature, wrote the biography *Maeve Brennan: Homesick at the New Yorker.* Without much information about Brennan's childhood or personal life, Bourke focused on Maeve's career in New York and her last years. These last years of the writer's life were a sad chapter. According to Frawley (2006), who wrote a review about Bourke's Maeve Brennan's biography:

> Brennan's writing has received minor interest from scholars, but she remains unknown enough that major university libraries still lack *The Visitor*, reprinted by New Island in 2001; other volumes remain out of print and are as elusive as the workings of her own life seem to be (Frawley, 2006, p. 168).

While Breenan's first books started to be published, she began to show signs of mental disease. She spent more of her time as a journalist writing about fashion

and style and was recognized for elegance, but started to see unkemptness in her own appearance in old age. She appeared uncombed in appointments, and her eccentricities went beyond the entertainment tone. Around 1970, she became paranoid and alcoholic. She was hospitalized several times until she lost her ability to provide for herself and became homeless. She had been seen sleeping in the *The New Yorker* toilet, according to the biographer Angela Bourke.

Curiously and sadly, the lives of keen women, circumscribed by living in ladies' hotel toilets, are described in two of her narratives, written decades before Brennan's illness. Betty Trim, in "The Anachronism" (1954), and Mary Ramsay, in "The Holy Terror" (1950), are intelligent, economic, observers, used to the routine of a small and inelegant place (people going to toilets to release themselves, and it can be disgusting, considering public rooms). Above all, the two characters are extremely lonely. They are stereotypes of astute Irish women focused on survival, hardened by a miserable past, and who abdicated from femininity and happiness.

There are two reasons why Maeve Brennan connects with the literature of migration. First, she was an immigrant herself, having fled Ireland in 1934 when she was seventeen. The Brennan family headed to Washington because her father, Robert Brennan, who had taken part in Ireland's independence fights against the United Kingdom some decades earlier, assumed the role of political representation of the Republic of Ireland in America. In the new place, Maeve graduated in English. A second reason is that one of her themes in the short stories gathered in *The Rose Garden* is Irish women working as maids in the USA. In a period when women were not the main characters in literature unless they were rich and extremely beautiful or married to some important male character, Brennan wrote female characters working as servants, lonely, ugly, with crooked legs, and inspired by real people. The writer was attentive to the impressive number of Irish women arriving alone in the USA due to of the lack of jobs in Ireland.

According to Maureen Murphy, in the article *The Irish Servant Girl in Literature*,

at the end of the nineteenth century, "the pattern of Irish emigration to the United States is a unique feature of western European migration to America" (MURPHY, 1998, p. 133) as women dominated it. Despite this female prevalence, there is much more male emigration literature. Having this in mind, academic research in Maeve Brennan's literature, which gives attention to young Irish immigrants, has even more relevance. Murphy highlights the differences in what writers pictured in poems and ballads, such as the Irish immigrant poet Edward Cronin. In texts with men as main characters, the male voices describe their own sense of loss leaving Ireland, while the female voices are concerned with their mothers and family rather than with their challenges or losses, which implies the biggest sense of female altruism. Most of the time, the heroines of these ballads are strong-spirited, resourceful, brave, gentle, generous, pious, and ethical. Self-sacrifice is another of the attributes of the Irish emigrant servant girls, while male Irish heroes have fortune and success. Some writers created the men's immigrant characters as the ones that succeed through hard work and strong morals, but the women's immigrant characters as the ones that sacrifice themselves in the name of family, employers, and church. While the man's hero is rewarded with fortune, the servant girl is often rewarded with a return to Ireland.

The feeling of not belonging influenced Maeve Brennan's work, as did the dichotomy of gathering features of two different places, Ireland and the United States. Besides the lack of belonging, which is a characteristic of the literature of migration, and the fragmentation, indicative of post-modern literature, Maeve Brennan's writings contain universality traits, as we can identify with her approach to existential conflicts such as loneliness and aging.

The Rose Garden was first published in 1999. It is a compilation of twenty short stories with most of them have women as their main characters. Brennan's writing focuses on women who are lonely, strange, outsiders, not interesting at first sight, sometimes ugly, and most of the time at a certain age when they could be considered spinsters or losers, according to certain morals. As McWilliams says

about exile in the writing of Brennan, "she expresses a particular concern for lost, poor, or abandoned souls, and for outsiders, new to the city and finding their way" (Mcwilliams, 2014, p. 103).

Despite being widely known in the United States during the decades of 1950 and 1960, Brennan was practically unknown in Ireland, even though Dublin was the setting of many of her stories. The sense of being an outsider is a recurrent image in the narratives of literature about migration, with the author writing about their homeland being in a different place or with some characters not feeling connected or comfortable in the place where they live. Brennan humanizes the theme of migrants (which can be considered extremely actual and relevant nowadays because of the number of migrants for different reasons) in the figure of Irish maids living in the United States. Some Irish maids working in the United States were depersonalized, with their names replaced with the umbrella nickname "Bridget"[1] or "Brigit", a name considered ordinary in Ireland. Some Irish women were called "Bridget" in the family's houses in which they used to work in the USA because it was easier to say than their Gaelic names.

Writing narratives about the "Bridget" issue, Brennan shows herself aware of the toughness of life for these characters of real life in 1950s and 1960s. In this regard, she emerges as an attentive writer of vicissitudes to what women migrants, her countrywomen, were subjugated. About the name Brigit, Murphy explains:

> In Irish folklore, Saint Brigit is often described as a servant girl or as performing servant girl's duties. The name itself is associated with servant girls so much so that the Oxford English Dictionary defines Biddy as '... the familiar abbreviation for Bridget used chiefly in the United States for an Irish maid or servant. (...) Irish servant girls recall they were often addressed not by their own name but as Biddy or Bridget (...) It is an appropriate connection but it is the example of St. Bridget, perhaps as much as anything, that reinforces the image of the selfless Irish servant girl not only as she appeared in Irish-American fiction but, what is more important, as she appeared to herself (Murphy, 1998, p. 146).

[1] Philomena, a movie directed by Stephen Frears, 2013, mentions it too, based on a real story.

In Irish medieval literature, Brigit is the name of the three daughters of the Dagda, "the good god and is described as the god of the druidism or magic of the Tuatha Dé Dannan". Tuatha Dé Dannan means "The peoples of the Goddess Dannan", and they were the fifth group to invade Ireland and are said to have occupied Ireland before the ancestors of the Gaels settled there (Rees & Rees, 1961, p. 2). Brigit "is described as a poetess... a goddess whom poets worshipped, as her two sisters, both of the same name as herself, women of healing and smith-work" (idem, p. 30), also described as a goddess. Three is an important number in Irish culture and appears many times in medieval literature, associated with the times something has to be said or happen to materialize or become true in magic spells. There are three Brigit, and they gather the abilities of poetry, healing, and working with iron (smith-work), three important features for a servant in the Middle Ages. It can be suggested that the name Brigit has been associated with providing services since ancient times. "Furthermore, names corresponding to (...) Brigit (...) occur as names of divinities in inscriptions of the Roman period in Britain" (idem, p. 31), which has led more Irish Catholic families to give this name to their daughters, and it has become popular.

This important issue is addressed in Brennan's short stories "The Bride" and "The Servant's Party", among others valuable to the literature of migration, such as women that travelled alone to start a new life abroad. Maeve Brennan met some of the Irish women working as maids who inspired her narratives in American houses, during dinners to which she was the person invited – the Irish woman occupying the other end of the board.

Besides giving voice to women immigrants, Brennan's narratives with New York as scenery focus on details of daily life. The writer believed that clothes could tell a lot about people. Because of this, and because fashion was her métier of writing in *The New Yorker,* she makes rich descriptions of the characters' clothing. Many of her stories underline the desire for shelter and the stability of a home, free from the imminence of evictions promoted by real estate speculation in the America's big city, a desire that

probably the writer shared with her characters because she lived most of her life in hotel rooms. She saw the transformation of the city in the decades 1950s and 1960s, an urban remodelling which consisted in demolishing houses to raise skyscrapers. and that had collaborated to the atmosphere of losing what was +taken for granted in direction to the irruption of a suffocating and lonely environment in New York.

The short stories featuring real estate speculation as a theme have main characters living in New York hotels or precarious places. They are "The Daughters", "A Snowy Night on West Forty-ninth Street" and "I see you, Bianca". We could still consider "The Door on West Tenth Street" under the same thematic cluster because it is set in New York streets, but I prefer to set this one (and maybe "I see you, Bianca" could be part of two groups of stories) in a group in which animals are the main characters and the world view is given through their eyes. In these pets as the main character's group are the two stories above mentioned and other that are set on the beach. They are "A Large Bee" (1962), "The Children Are Very Quiet When They Are Away" (1963), "In and Out of Never-Never Land" (1963), and "The Children Are There, Trying Not to Laugh" (1968). All the short stories in this last group, except "I see you, Bianca" if we consider this one altogether, have as main character a black Labrador retriever called Bluebell and they were inspired by a dog exactly like this that was Maeve Brennan's own dog. There are several cats also in these short stories and Bianca is a white cat main character in the short story possible to belong in two groups. Brennan also had several cats. All of them, cats and Bluebell, appear in the preface, which is a piece originally written to her column in *The New Yorker*, in 1976, under the title *A Daydream*.

THE BRIDGET'S PLACE

After her marriage, Maeve Brennan lived in a refined part of New York, named Sneden's Landing, where she met Irish servants. The fictional place in which her stories are set, called Herbert's Retreat, is located, like Sneden's Landing, 30 miles from New York, on the East side of the Hudson river. This is the setting of the narratives "The View

from the Kitchen" (1953), "The Anachronism" (1954), "The Joker" (1952), "The Stone Hot-Water Bottle" (1954), "The Divine Fireplace" (1956) and "The Servant's Dance" (1954), in which some of the characters appear repeatedly. The plots are about apparently trivial incidents, but beneath a surface of normality lurk employers' weaknesses in a counterpoint with the strength and the morality of the servants. These short stories retake an Irish tradition of stories with "witty servants", which, according to Palko (2007), is called in Irish Studies "tricky servant tradition", and brings together narratives in which the employer represents a fool or a personality tainted by vices, while his servants are enlightened and cultivate morality habits. This tradition has grown in Irish orality as a way to mock the English landlords and employers during centuries of exploration.

In "The Divine Fireplace", Bridie (a shorter name for Bridget or Brigit) appears. She is the Irish maid of the main house in Herbert's Retreat, Leona's house. In this short story, we can see that she is a leader among the servants, the wise one, older and more clever than the other girls, the only one to think about all the meat ruining in the freezer, as is the case in the story told by Stasia. In "The Servants' Dance", Bridie is the leader who suggests the boycott under which no servants would ask the employers to dance and, thus, make a fool of them. "The Divine Fireplace" narrative reinforces the role of appearances and the superficiality of friendships, but the hidden fireplace suggests something unseen for those people. Something that is near them and at the same time they cannot see or enjoy properly. The hidden fireplace which Mrs. Tillbright did not know about in her kitchen is a metaphor for that beautiful environment the owners do not realize. All of them are so busy impressing each other that they miss the chance to enjoy the good things around them.

A place to live in is the matter in many of *The Rose Garden*'s short stories. In the Herbert's Retreat stories, the place itself works as a character. The characters in these stories are always worried about what their neighbours will think about their houses if the houses are fancy and elegant enough for that place, and most important of all,

how much of the river Hudson view they can glance by their terrain. They are depicted as unhappy and shallow people, living shallow lives.

There is one character that appears repeatedly in the Herbert Retreat's group of stories, Charles Runyon, who lives in a hotel but spends most of the weekends in the Retreat because he has women friends there. In Leona's house, he has even his own room and he repays her friendship (because nothing is free in a place like that) with his supposed accurate taste for fashion, receptions, and everything good and expensive. It is not a stable relationship, since Leona is the host and the one with money, but she is not confident and needs Charles's opinion and company. As far as Charles knows he is the one with power, despite being poor and homeless. Except for his power over Leona, Charles has nothing in life. He lives in a hotel, as many of Brennan's characters and as the writer did herself. He has not a good job and needs a job to live, unlike his friends at the Retreat who have rent and inheritances. Charles is a lonely loser in life, spending his time with superficialities, intrigues, and dry martinis. That is the kind of empty life that is the target of Brennan's social criticism concerning the New York "high society".

Thus, Herbert's Retreat is the place of Charles, insecure women, unhappy marriages, and the Bridgets, the Irish servants who run the kitchens and gossip about their employers' lives when they have a break. The maids are treated as utensils of the houses: "Bridie belonged to the house" (Brennan, 2000, p. 5). All of the Herbert's Retreat universe that compounds the first seven stories of *The Rose Garden* is summarized in the first of the short stories, "The View from the Kitchen". The title indicates the point of view in the narrative, Bridie's point of view that is privileged by the narrator.

"The View..." encapsulates the issues addressed in the other Bridget stories and has Bridget herself as the main character. It is an important story to understand Brennan's style and themes. It is about bourgeoisie obsessed with the view of the Hudson River but incapable to see themselves and build strong relationships. Their relations are with money, status, and appearance, as we can understand by the fragment: "in every house the residents have contrived and plotted and schemed and

paid to bring the river as intimately as possible into their lives" (Brennan, 2000, p. 3).

A view of the river works like a seal of superiority in that community. At the same time, it is ironic how they want "to bring the river inside their houses", because the way they act differs a lot from what a river represents, with its alive flow, gregarious interactions, taking with it stones and pebbles, changing the soil around with fertility and different kinds of life. The characters living in Herbert's Retreat are separated from the city, as if willingly stuck in a meander of civilization, thirty miles above the city, looking down onto the people living against concrete and asphalt. They are not in movement like the river water and not gregarious with other people, but standoffish and arrogant, as this fragment shows:

> All the people who lived at Herbert's Retreat own their own houses. Newcomers can seldom get a foot in (...). The tone and welfare of the community are guarded by a board of trustees. There are almost no restrictions on the behaviour of children and animals belonging to the community, but there are iron restrictions against strange children and strange animals (...)
> The most important fact, not vague at all, about Herbert's Retreat is that only *the right* people live there (Brennan, 2000, p. 4 and p. 94, emphasis ours).

Opposing this idea, in this first short story, there is the belief of moral superiority of the servants, as the employers are pictured as people who drink a lot and are petty. Leona, one of the owners, is a cold woman who replaces husbands as one might change cars. Her maid Bridie has an interlocutor, Agnes, a newly arrived maid. Through their dialogue we know about Leona, Charles, and other people in Herbert's Retreat, but it is not a reliable narration, since Bridie does not even disguise her disapproval of her employers and the way they live. The reader could know all Bridie's thoughts through the narrator, but the interlocutor Agnes functions to give Bridie's discourse the tone of irony that is better developed by direct speech.

Both Bridie and Agnes are Irish immigrants in the USA. Bridie stamps her religious tradition by making Catholic comparisons or allusions when she is bitter. This is the case when she explains to Agnes how Mr. Harkey is not a good person and she can guess it because of his job as a credit manager: “One of the ones that does the dirty work. When our blessed Lord was crucified, he was standing there holding the box of nails” (Brennan, 2000, p. 12). The fragment also alludes to a Catholic belief in a connection between poverty and purity, which can condemn jobs and careers dealing with too much money and power.

Brennan’s main characters are always solitary people, even when they are part of a couple or belong to a big family. In “The Gentleman in the Pink-and-White Striped Shirt” the character Charles Runyon, who appears in many of Herbert’s Retreat narratives as a guest with influence because of his friendship with some of the women owners, is shown in an state of decay that is aligned with the decay of the hotel where he has lived alone for thirty years. Charles is a constant visitor in the rich and glamorous condominium, but no one is allowed to visit his room in the hotel, which is a way to preserve his poverty from the view of others and, thus, keep his room and his real being as a mystery: “Charles occupied a unique and privileged position at the Retreat. Leona and her friends regarded him as their infallible authority on the rules of gracious living and on the shadowy and constantly changing dimensions of good taste” (Brennan, 2000, p. 41). His permanence in the retreat relies on that women’s insecurity and need for approval. Together with Nicholas, from “I see you, Bianca”, Charles is one of the few male characters. Even so, Charles’ homosexuality and traces of femininity can be inferred from the way he behaves and rejects Leona when her first husband died, getting far from her until she gets another husband. According to what Bridie suggests in the first story, spending the night at Leona’s house is only safe for Charles when Leona is finally married again.

UGLY, STRANGER, AND LONELY WOMEN

Another group of stories is composed by “The Bride” (1953), “The Holy Terror” (1950), “The Bohemians” (1962), “The Rose Garden” (1959), and “The Beginning of a Long Story” (1961). These stories’ theme is feminine loneliness. From this group, only the first narrative does not take place in Dublin. “The holy terror” and “The Anachronism” feature as main characters lonely women in middle age, both working as ladies-room servants in hotels, a stereotype that interested Brennan, as already mentioned. These characters, Mary Ramsay and Betty Trim, are sharp, rigid, and disciplined people, who exert their little power as personal revenge. In fact, they are extremely sad people living automated lives.

For both Mary Ramsay and Betty Trim money and a steady job are the two most important things in life. McWilliams (2013) considers Brennan is making connections with some personal identities of Irish woman servants and the economic structures to which they were bound. Both of them have a kind of reckoner way of thinking. They measure people, attribute some value to people, and price anyone as goods to be sold or bought, like in: “Betty’s mean little eyes surveyed Liza. I could buy you and sell you, m’lady, she thought” (Brennan, 2000, p. 31) and “she said often and often, ‘I can price anyone’” (idem, p. 161). They reduce people to monetary transactions, maybe because they feel reduced from human beings to only workers as well.

All of the women’s main characters in this group have some feature that make them different, so they all seem to raise issues of not belonging. In “The Holy Terror”, the first of Maeve Brennan’s short stories written, the threat of being homeless haunts the main character, and this would be a theme of interest in Brennan’s whole career. After working for years as the ladies-room servant and occupying one room in the sedate Royal Hotel, in Dublin, Mary receives the notice that she will be replaced and must leave the place.

In “The Bohemians” and “The Rose Garden” there are couples joined by chance, with no love or affection involved, and the main characters are in their forties, like

Maeve was when she wrote these stories. Some of the servants had to choose between life in American homes and the uncertainty of marriage. Being alone and having faced a new world once, crossing the Atlantic, all they want is security. These women are portrayed in Brennan's short stories as Mary and Betty, for whom money accumulation and steady employment became ends in themselves.

Another Mary, Mary Lambert, from the short story that lends its title to the book, has one leg shorter than the other, which, in her opinion, occurred because of the twisted stairs of the house where she lives since she was born. It is as if everything in Mary's life was divided in two and one half does not fit the other. Like the comb she shares with her husband, Dom. The comb was broken in half. Mary is accustomed to using the coarse-toothed half for her long hair, and Dom uses the fine-toothed half for his "lifeless hair" (Brennan, 2000, p. 184). The house she always lived in was made of "two corner houses that had been knocked into one" (idem, p. 185) and it did not work properly, the final construction was ungainly and uneasy. The stairs are like the spine of this strange house. It is strange as well, with some steps narrow and others wide, besides others that "started wide and narrowed to nothing at the other side (...) but no one had ever been known to slip on it, because it forced respect and attention, and people guarded themselves on it" (idem, p. 186). Mary had her identity formed by the contrasts of this house and its stairs. Mary's crooked body and asymmetrical house could be seen as a metaphor for Ireland, disunited by political and religious issues. The lame leg could be Northern Ireland, which is smaller, or it could be the Republic, which is more vulnerable to economic crises as it does not have the financial support of the United Kingdom.

Mary Lambert grew up aware that she is ugly and awkward and she developed the habit of scaring people in the street when she believes they are judging her walk and fat body. Besides this scary and rude personality, Mary has a secret side, which she shows nobody. Once a year, she is amazed by the nun's rose garden opened to visitation, even if she never knew about the forsythia blooming, which was the

most beautiful time at the garden. We can infer Mary does not experience complete happiness, considering that even in the place she likes the most, the only place where she experiences something sublime, she is not allowed to be aware of the completeness of what happens there. Both of these characters called Mary seem to renounce all femininity and to be glad to scare and shock people by the way they look.

Contradicting the expectations raised by its title, "The Beginning of a Long Story" is about a failed marriage on the verge of ending. It shows a young couple who lives in Dublin that does not communicate. Their younger daughter is a Bridget. Will she be one of the many migrants to the USA and because of this will the story be a beginning of a long story, a story of young Irish women called Bridget, baptized like this or not, working as servants in another country?

In "The Beginning of a Long Story", Brennan explores a kind of loneliness like the one experienced mainly by women from decades earlier, women that used to give their lives to raising children and looking after the household, because they had no right to live differently. The narrator prioritizes the point of view of the eldest child, eight-year-old Ellen. Little by little in the narrative, Ellen is being aware of how sensitive her mother, ready to help people, but exploited and excluded by the father with whom there is no real communication. This story talks about the worry about appearances. However, unlike the Herbert's Retreat's stories, where the residents want to look better or richer, here there is a struggle to not being looked down upon by the neighbourhood, as we can infer from the mother's opinion: "it was very important to keep up the appearance of a place, especially here in Dublin, where the people were only looking for an excuse to look down on you" (Brennan, 2000, p. 208).

So, there is an element of shame running through the stories, which intersects with the power imbalances perceived in society. It is ironic how the mother thinks the women on the farms in Ireland had no life at all. This explains her feeling of not complete adequacy in Dublin, but still she is happy for being in the city, even if living in the city means she has no life at all. Her routine is cleaning the house and cooking for

her husband and children. To some extent, society works by inclusion and exclusion. Böss and Nordin, in *Re-Mapping Exile* (2006), quoting Frank Parkin's theory of "social exclosure", according to which "property, ethnic origin, language or religion are used by hegemonic groups as part of a strategy by which they acquire privileges for themselves by preventing 'outsiders' from getting access to material, social and cultural resources" (Boss; Nordin; Olinder, 2006, p. 23). The father acts with a kind of symbolic violence against the mother by denying her his company when he has some free time or day off and by prioritizing Ellen instead of his wife:

> He often went in there to have an hour to himself after tea (...) he went to see a play in town, but the mother never went with him, because she had the children to mind. (...) He liked to go for long walks in the Dublin hills (...) in the summertime he often went to Wicklow and had a few days by himself (Brennan, 2000, p. 220).

Considering how the narrative develops, we can infer that Brennan is criticizing the fact that some women were treated like slaves. Only the father could enjoy what the city offers as entertainment and for the woman the endless household chores was what remained. As part of the criticism of the way women were supposed to live or the way of life that was imposed on women, this group of stories contains rambles as metaphors for freedom.

In "The Bride", the ramble is a dream of the protagonist's youth that has not happened. Their parents had promised her a ride on a bus tour some Sunday, but they never allowed her to go. She could only experiment the freedom and happiness as a ramble. In "The Holy Terror", there is a suggestion for Mary Ramsay to take one week off her job as a way to get rid of her once. In this story, the vacation offered means not an expected freedom, but the preparation for her resignation. In "The Rose Garden", Mary Lambert only is herself one day each year, when she visits the hidden rose garden of which she dreams the whole year. It is a secret she keeps to herself because no one knows that she goes there or she likes flowers. The beauty of the rose

garden frees Mary from the ugly life in which she is imprisoned. In “The Beginning of a Long Story”, the father takes some time for himself and goes on long walks, which is a way of excluding the mother from each little happiness.

In the group of stories “The Daughters”, “A Snowy Night on West Forty-ninth Street” and “I See You, Bianca” the theme is the real estate crisis in New York with many old buildings being knocked down to give place to new and modern ones. These stories tell about a city under reconstruction, and the speculation forcing some people to live in hotel rooms or rent makeshift places. This is the case with Nicholas, the main character in “I See You, Bianca”, who lives in a two-room apartment and “no assurance that he will still be here a year or even three months from now” (Brennan, 2000, p. 251), not because he had decided to move out, but because his neighbourhood is falling apart. Ironically, his cat Bianca lives happily because she is sure to “have a floor” to land from her flights. Bianca is white as a symbol of peace, free as no other female character in Brennan’s stories, and does not need approval. She is freedom and hope. But she is also almost non-existent, almost translucent. By the end, she disappears, as any possibility of happiness in the changing city.

A STRANGE AND MAGICAL LITTLE HOUSE

The last group of stories has animals’ points of view, especially Bluebell’s. They are “I See You, Bianca”, “The Door on West Tenth Street”, “A Large Bee”, “The Children Are Very Quiet When They Are Away”, “In and Out of Never-Never Land” and “The Children Are There, Trying Not to Laugh”. The first of them is set in New York and introduces Bluebell to the reader, who can remember a reference to her from the preface. The last four of the above-mentioned stories are set at a cottage in the Atlantic Ocean, a house that is a miniature of a mansion beside it. The small house itself is a character in these stories and it is somewhat magical, like a place that only exists in the narrator’s dreams. It differs from a traditional house by the way it is divided. The idea of not owning a place to live is there, but now it is as if the house could disappear

in the mist:

> this strange little house, which wore such a temporary air that the first time she walked into it she said to herself that it was not a real house but an impossibility, not a house at all, and that she must rent it immediately, because it might very well not be there when she looked for it again (...) it is not real, not a real house, at any rate (Brennan, 2000, p. 284).

The giant house beside is never shown from the inside and contains something magical too, because it is inhabited by seven children that play with Bluebell and are always together. Besides Bluebell, there are six cats in the small house, like one pet for each child. Mary Ann Whitty is the tutor of the animals and an alter ego to Maeve Brennan, who had herself a black Labrador called Bluebell and some cats for years. Mary Ann also lived in the same places Brennan did in New York and East Hampton. The small and strange house seems to be the only place where both Bluebell and Mary Ann can be happy, and is similar to the place described in the preface, it is probably the same beach house. With that, somehow, the book closes a cycle. The stories in *The Rose Garden* can be presumed to be the woman taking a nap in the preface's thoughts.

CONCLUSION

Publishing her short stories originally in *The New Yorker*, Maeve Brennan has as her first readers middle-class Americans. What message does she want to convey by foregrounding Irish women working as maids, and telling stories about arrogant and rich Americans, fooled by smart and decent Irish servants? Brennan is calling attention of the New Yorkers by facing them with the immigrants "making the United States" as the working-class people. Irish servants took with them the base of housekeeping, and the good values, the strength to cross the Atlantic and start over in a new place in America. In the short stories compiled in *The Rose Garden*, Brennan wrote about

issues of power and visibility. On the one hand, there were the vast invisible masses, working-class people with little access to material or cultural capital. They can hardly neither afford houses, write for or read *The New Yorker*. On the other hand, there are those who own the properties, choose the view and shape discourse and perception.

By writing about the American arrogance for an audience of Americans as first readers, Brennan is bold and defiant, but this can explain the years that her work remained forgotten. She was not interested in creating bonds with readers from the USA by spoiling them, even publishing there, and that was maybe one reason why she had some success but was not loved and remembered for long. On the other hand, Brennan is still a modern writer by throwing light on themes such as non-standard women in their forties.

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