ABEI Journal – The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies, v. 27, n. 2, 2025, pp. 155-169.

"He is a perfect horror!": "Freakish" Bodies and Behaviours in Oscar Wilde and Twentieth-Century Literature

"Ele é um perfeito horror!": Corpos e comportamentos freak em Oscar Wilde e na literatura do século 20

Maureen DeLeo

Abstract: *Oscar Wilde has had a pervasive influence on Irish writers and writers abroad. His influence stems from the self-styled myth of his persona and the memory of his life after his death in November 1900. His fiction and drama have cemented his literary longevity, with film adaptations of his works and continued stagings of his plays. Writers of fiction in particular have directly or indirectly been influenced by the long shadow cast by Wilde. The following article examines the influence of the physical and behavioural 'other' in Wilde's short fiction on the works of Patrick Pearse (1879-1916), Pádraic Ó Conaire (1882-1928), and Flannery O'Connor (1925-1963). For these authors, including Wilde, individuals who are perceived to be 'freaks' or 'freakish' are essential for their unique ability to reflect or to reveal truths, particularly those which are uncomfortable about those who ostracise and other them.*

Keywords: *Oscar Wilde; Twentieth-century Literature; Disability Studies.*

Resumo: *Oscar Wilde exerceu ampla influência tanto sobre escritores irlandeses quanto sobre autores de outros países. Essa influência deriva do mito autoconstruído de sua persona e da memória de sua vida após sua morte, em novembro de 1900. Sua ficção e seu drama consolidaram sua longevidade literária, com adaptações cinematográficas de suas obras e contínuas*

ISSN1518-0581 | eISSN2595-8127 | DOI 10.11606/44t77k76

montagens de suas peças. Escritores de ficção, em particular, foram direta ou indiretamente influenciados pela longa sombra projetada por Wilde. Este artigo examina a influência do "outro" físico e comportamental na ficção breve de Wilde sobre as obras de Patrick Pearse (1879–1916), Pádraic Ó Conaire (1882–1928) e Flannery O'Connor (1925–1963). Para esses autores — incluindo Wilde — indivíduos percebidos como freaks ou freakish são essenciais por sua capacidade singular de refletir ou revelar verdades, especialmente aquelas desconfortáveis, sobre aqueles que os ostracizam e os transformam em "outros".

Palavras-chave: *Oscar Wilde; Literatura do século 20; Estudos da deficiência.*

Dan Goodley writes that '[d]isability has the potential to disrupt how we typically understand the world' by 'challenging ideas and ideals that we take for granted' (Goodley 3). Disability appears in Oscar Wilde's writing, most notably in his short fiction. Characters who are deemed to be 'freaks' or 'freakish' by other characters because of a physical disability or behavioural patterns that disturb and disrupt the world around them in order to reveal uncomfortable truths about that world. The ways in which Wilde positions these characters in his fiction is mirrored in works by other Irish writers, such as Pádraic Ó Conaire (1882-1928) and Patrick Pearse (1879-1916) and the Irish-American writer, Flannery O'Connor (1925-1963). Although these three writers are not in direct reference to Wilde, they each partake in conversations of social estrangement in their respective cultural contexts. Pearse and Ó Conaire both experienced a form of social estrangement that can be equated to disablement in an Irish cultural context. Pearse was considered socially awkward by his peers, and he grappled with his English background, while Ó Conaire struggled to find his place socially in Ireland, and, like Wilde, left Ireland for England. O'Connor was also othered as a Catholic in the Deep South, a culturally and religiously Protestant area of America. These three writers can be found in conversation with Wilde, who uses the body as a site of revelation and of truths revealed through uncomfortable conduits echoes itself in Gothic works Irish and American Gothic traditions.

To define disability is a complex task as the term and its connotations have changed throughout different periods in time in response to various factors, including those which are

socially and politically motivated. In the Victorian era, the normal and abnormal human body was a social and literary fascination. Julia Miele Rodas asserts that 'the presence of disability in Victorian fiction indicates more than a mere reflection of actual disabled persons in the culture. It points also to an underlying anxiety and ambivalence regarding this presence, a grappling with identity, a desire to experiment with places and roles' (Rodas 372). Wilde's body of work constantly experiments with different identities, particularly those which have been othered, and their roles in their respective spaces. The body and physical appearance are othered, for example, in Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), in which Dorian has been othered by Basil Hallward for what he (and others) sees as extreme physical beauty. Wilde, however, also looks toward what is perceived as ugly and freakish, and it is through this body that truths are revealed.

There are three main models of disability: medical, social, and cultural. The social model '[presents] a social and political problem that turns an impairment into an oppression either by erecting barriers or by refusing to create barrier-free environments' (Davis 33).[1] The medical model focuses on an individual's physical disability, and it 'treats disability as a disease in need of a cure' (Davis 49). The third model, cultural disability, demonstrates the ways disability is understood and responded to by a given culture (McRuer 53). These models can be applied to Irish and Southern American cultural contexts. While the medical model is not necessarily tied to the authors mentioned earlier apart from Flannery O'Connor, the social and cultural models are certainly applicable to all of them.

While Wilde identified culturally as Irish, he left Ireland to settle in England, and it was here that he cemented his literary reputation. Following the trials and his release from prison, Wilde was socially othered and forced into exile under a pseudonym. The writers that this article examines were similarly othered in these models. Pearse, for example, was self-conscious of his English heritage, and he strove to great lengths to be considered culturally Irish by those around him. His literary works are largely written in Irish, and he heavily involved himself in the cultural nationalist movement. Pearse's conscious decision to write in Irish was partly informed by a desire to not be seen culturally as Irish. Ó Conaire, like Wilde, left Ireland for England, though he eventually returned after being socially othered for being Irish in London, which is an experience he expresses in *Deoraíocht* (Exile) (1910). As stated earlier, the medical model would apply to Flannery O'Connor, who suffered from the side effects of lupus. Socially and culturally, however, her short fiction partakes in the same conversation as

Wilde, Pearse, and Ó Conaire. O'Connor was born and raised as Catholic in Georgia, a state that is socially and culturally deeply attached to Protestantism.

The social understanding of the 'normal' and 'abnormal' human body was taking shape during the nineteenth century, the effects of which carried into the twentieth century. Lennard J. Davis states that the 'necessity for the average citizen in social thought was paralleled by the need for the average citizen in ideology' (Davis 93). As result of this societal need to categorise and define normal/abnormal, there was a focus on 'the production on the ideological level aimed at the creation of average... nonheroic, middle-class, "real" citizens. In this sense, real means average' (Davis 93). At the start of the nineteenth century, statistics were being sought to reinforce what and *who* was to be considered normal or standard (Davis 105). The human body functioned then (as it still does) as a social signifier. One's outward appearance can suggest certain lifestyle choices or medical histories stemming from those choices, in addition to conditions with which that body was born. Historically, medical conditions originating from disease or birth sometimes would force people to seek employment in freak shows. Freak shows highlighted and demonstrated in real time the body that was deemed to be strange, unusual, and, above all, abnormal. The body that went against what was understood to be the social norm or the average was something to be seen as less than human. Wilde's engagement with the othered, 'freakish' body is a crucial exposition of that which is perceived as 'normal'.

Wilde's short fiction often highlights that which is seen to be strange and unusual. His short story, 'The Birthday of the Infanta', was published in *A House of Pomegranates* in 1891 and it is especially notable for its centring of what perceived as freakish.[2] Its protagonist is a dwarf hired for the purpose of entertaining the Infanta on her twelfth birthday. He is seen by her and the other children as the highlight of the day's entertainment, delighting them by 'waddling on his crooked legs and wagging his huge misshapen head from side to side' (Wilde 192). The narrator mentions that the Spanish Court has 'a cultivated passion for the horrible' (Wilde 192) implying that the day's starring entertainment is part of what is, for the court, essentially a collection of curiosities – people who they have othered as entertainment objects and amusements solely for their perceived strangeness. Justin T. Jones notes that the language of this story pays significant attention to aesthetic, which thus makes the introduction of the Dwarf into this space a sharp contrast (Jones 889). The Dwarf's 'presence ultimately provides the greatest danger to the aesthetic stability of the Infanta's palace of art' (Jones 899). Although the Court collects him for the purpose of using his physicality as a means of entertaining the

party, the danger he presents is the revelation of an uncomfortable truth: the Infanta, although a child, is not as innocent as she appears. It also reveals another uncomfortable truth about the Court itself: the individuals therein are willing to *collect* individuals they see as freakish. The act of collecting people who are othered for their appearance, as is the case with the Dwarf, provides a disturbing revelation about those who fall under the definition of 'normal' or 'standard'. The Dwarf, then, offers an exposition of this truth through what is objectified and, as Goodley states, 'fetishised' by the norm (Goodley 4).

When the Dwarf loses his way in the palace, he stumbles across a room full of mirrors. This moment is a rupture not only for the story itself, but for him as well. It is here that he realises at last that the children were not as innocent in their enjoyment as he believed; he sees that they were laughing *at* him because of his appearance. For the first time, the Dwarf sees that he

> [is] misshapen and hunchbacked, foul to look at and grotesque. He himself was the monster, and it was at him that all the children had been laughing, and the little Princess who he had thought loved him—she too had been merely mocking at his ugliness, and making merry over his twisted limbs For the first time he has seen himself and he comes to the horrible realisation as to why he was brought to the palace (Wilde 201).

The Dwarf not only comes to the realisation that he was being mocked for his physicality, but that the children, especially the Infanta, were not as they seemed. For the first time, he sees that they were not as innocent, and thus not as beautiful, as he believed. Wilde exposes the potential for beauty to be false and cruel, and that it may instead be true ugliness. Beauty, then, is something that can be weaponised and used to target those who are, in the case of the Dwarf, socially disabled. Although the Infanta is seen by the Dwarf as beautiful because of her physical appearance and her behaviour, he comes to realise that her beauty is purely superficial. Her behaviour and treatment of him exposes the ugliness of her character, ugliness that is brought into his consciousness as result of his own body. He sees that the children mock him because he is understood to be outside of what is deemed 'normal'. This mockery comes from the unlikely source of a child, the image of which is most closely and traditionally held to be innocent and pure. The Infanta is, if anything, a source of great cruelty. She demonstrates her cruelty most strongly when she is told the Dwarf will never dance again: she 'frowned, and her

dainty rose-leaf lips curled in pretty disdain' (Wilde 202). Her disapproval, rather than any sympathy, is what shines through in this moment.

Realisations stemming from the physicality of the othered body appear in Pádraic Ó Conaire's novel *Deoraíocht*. Like the Dwarf, the protagonist, Micil O'Maolain, is othered because of his perceived freakishness. After a road accident in London, his leg is amputated, and he is unable to find any work to support himself. He returns to his native Ireland, where he joins a circus as part of its freak show. As stated earlier, employment in a freak show was often the only economic option available to disabled persons. Micil is frustrated by the effects his amputation has on the course of his life, and he intentionally alters his physical appearance to appear more freakish. He grows out his hair so that is 'falling down around my shoulders' and 'it hides my face when I shake myself. But my face is so well painted that I am not permitted to hide it (Ó Conaire 37).[3] David Connor 'highlights "animality theories" that historically viewed Black and disabled people as less than human: the freak shows of the 19th Century that displayed non-European and impaired exhibits as 'exotic' and 'repulsive' attractions' (Goodley 104). Micil embodies the wild man performer, an individual who blurred the lines between human and animal, that was fixture in 19th and 20th century freak shows. If freak show owners 'could not afford to import troupes of exotic foreigners', they would specifically seek out 'working-class Irishmen' to perform as wild men (Durbach 147). The novel is set shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, and freak shows 'were a major site of employment for disabled people before 1930' (Garland-Thomson 131). Micil is now out of place in his own country as people he once knew see him only as a freak show attraction because of his disabled body and socially estranged status as a wild man. He performs to the expectations that he knows that the audience has of him, but in doing so he reveals an uncomfortable truth about his situation. He must not only perform in this way, but that he must adhere and cater to this expectation that has been placed upon him because of his missing limbs and his outward appearance. The audience pays to gawk at what they see as a freak, someone who is so unlike themselves as to appear completely abnormal and thus, to them, entirely exotic.

Micil resents himself for the choices (or lack thereof) that have been given to him following the accident. Rather than a literal mirror that prompts propulsion into self-realisation, Micil's audience reflects back at him who he has become through accident and self-creation. The audience, like the Infanta and her guests, delight in the body they see as freakish, because, for them, he is merely an entertainment object. At the same time, Micil's audience expresses horror at his appearance and behaviour because he embodies the abnormal. He is particularly struck by his

would-be lover's reaction to seeing him in the cage. As he looks around at the audience's reactions, Micil becomes outraged, saying, 'Anger took hold of me. Madness and rage and hatred took hold of me' (Ó Conaire 46).[4] Micil hates that he has become the abnormal and freakish other. Crucially, Micil also consciously others himself. Unlike the Dwarf in Wilde's story, he is conscious of his body. He is aware that, because of his disability, he cannot secure steady employment outside of what he sees as his only real option: being a performer. He uses his body in a deliberate way to serve as entertainment.

This same self-awareness and the objectification of one's body for entertainment is seen in the Southern American writer Flannery O'Connor's short story, 'A Temple of the Holy Ghost' (1955). O'Connor's story revolves around a trio of young girls, two of whom attend a freak show. The two fourteen-year-olds, Susan and Joanne, attend a Catholic convent school and they have been advised, to their great amusement, by Sister Perpetua to tell boys that their bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost (O'Connor, 'Temple' 238). Their developing bodies are important religiously, socially, and morally, something which is highlighted by the instruction to not only view but to tell would-be admirers that their bodies are sacred sites. They jokingly refer to themselves as 'Temple One' and 'Temple Two', and dress themselves in a way that suggests they are older than their ages, taking delight in wearing high heels, red skirts, and lipstick. They alter the appearance of their bodies in a way that pleases them and rejects the notion of it being a sacred space, at least from a more conservatively Catholic perspective. They know that they will likely attract the attention of boys dressing like this, and so they will be given the opportunity to play out what they feel is the punchline to what has become a joke by saying, 'Stop sir! I am a Temple of the Holy Ghost!' (O'Connor, 'Temple' 238). They do not take their own bodies seriously, nor do they demonstrate the maturity to understand that there is a reason(s) to safeguard their bodies.

Susan and Joanne have an encounter at the freak show that they are too young and inexperienced to understand. In a tent they see a hermaphrodite, whose body is on display for two separated audiences made up of men and women. James W. Horton argues that the hermaphrodite 'symbolizes and unifies in his/her person virtually all the major characters and the kinds of subject/object relationships they experience. In so doing, the hermaphrodite implies that everyone is a temple of the Holy Ghost, like him/herself' (Horton 36). This unification of duality in a singular host space, the 'freakish' body, forces the revelation that the girl undergoes when she later dreams of the hermaphrodite, whose image is only relayed to her

by Susan and Joanne. Although the hermaphrodite's presence in the freak show is, like Micil, for entertainment, a truth is revealed in that presence. Susan and Joanne repeat to the girl that the hermaphrodite says, 'God made me thisaway and if you laugh He may strike you the same way. This is the way He wanted me to be and I ain't disputing His way. I'm showing you because I got to make the best of it' (O'Connor, 'Temple' 245). The hermaphrodite, unlike the Dwarf, is able to accept how their appearance affects their treatment socially. This matter-of-fact manner pushes back onto the audience an uncomfortable truth. While they have paid, like Micil's audience, to gawk and stare and potentially mock, the othered individual embraces their otherness. Unlike Micil, who expresses anxiety at having become the physical other, the hermaphrodite fully accepts that this is the body they have. They also remind the audience that this body, while it does not fall under the norm, is still a possibility that can be encountered outside of a freak show.

The direct confrontation that the girls experience is comparable to the Dwarf seeing himself in the mirrors. While the Dwarf cannot accept his body, the hermaphrodite has accepted their body as well as the social disablement that results from having this body. Like Wilde, O'Connor works with duality to reveal a truth about someone or something. In Wilde's story, the Dwarf's reflection prompts the realisation that the Infanta is not as innocent and beautiful as he believed, while the child's self-realisation stems not from a physical reflection of the othered body, but from a description of an othered body. The hermaphrodite is, unlike the Dwarf, able to take some control of the audience. Before showing their genitalia, they threaten the audience with the reminder that they could be '[stricken] the same way' if they do not behave appropriately (O'Connor, 'Temple' 245). The girl imagines the hermaphrodite in the role of a preacher, a figure of religious authority with social power and influence, and she combines what they said prior to lifting up their dress with what her cousins said about the body being a temple of the Holy Ghost. She thinks of the hermaphrodite saying, 'If any anybody desecrates the temple of God, God will bring him to ruin and if you laugh, He may strike you thisaway. A temple of God is a holy thing' (O'Connor, 'Temple' 246). During Mass at the convent school, she merges the hermaphrodite's body with the consecrated Host, and she thinks that the monstrance that contains it is like 'the tent at the fair that had the freak in it' (O'Connor, 'Temple' 248). The body, for the girl, has become othered because it is something that she cannot comprehend or begin to properly visualise. Her best attempt

at trying to understand what her cousins have seen is by likening it with a familiar image of Christ's body as the transubstantiated Host.

The physically disabled body is treated poorly to reveal uncomfortable truths in O'Connor's story, 'Good Country People' (1955). Joy, who legally changes her name to Hulga to reflect her feelings toward herself and her body following a childhood hunting accident, sees herself as superior to those around her because of her education. When a young man purporting to be a travelling Bible salesman calls on them at their farm, Hulga views him as someone who she can toy with and teach a lesson. Manley Pointer continually returns to her false leg, telling her that he thinks she is 'brave' (O'Connor, 'GCP' 283). Hulga has no reaction to what can be read as condescending or patronising, but she does panic when Manley Pointer removes her leg and abandons her, helpless, in a barn. Pointer has by now revealed that his intentions were not innocent, and that he only pursued her out of morbid curiosity. He has done this before with disabled persons, usually collecting trophies of his triumph over them, such as a glass eye from another woman (O'Connor, 'GCP' 291). He also takes Hulga's glasses, without which she cannot see clearly, as a trophy. Without her means of having clear vision and mobility, Hulga is left crying out for someone to come help her because she is unable to leave the barn.

The place here is important. Both Manley and Hulga have attempted to dehumanise the other, but it is Hulga who is ultimately left the victim. She is left behind in a barn, a place associated with domesticated livestock, which in turn suggests Manley sees her as an animal. Her amputated leg and the prosthetic that she wears are what draws him to her, and her leg is ultimately what leads to her dehumanising treatment. O'Connor herself expressed that this particular episode reveals an uncomfortable truth to the reader. She wrote that when Manley takes Hulga's prosthetic, 'the reader realizes that he has taken away part of the girl's personality and has revealed her deeper affliction to her for the first time' (Westling 511). The removal of her leg and Manley's dehumanisation force Hulga to realise what O'Connor felt was an ugly truth about her. Hulga, who feels she is superior to those who are in her day-to-day life, seizes the chance to exercise what she considers intellectual and philosophical superiority over Manley. His taking her leg forces her to realise that, in this barn, she is not who she thought. Hulga realises that she is everything she despises in other people.

Goodley argues that 'people with impairments are ignored, pitied, patronised, objectified, hated, mocked and fetishised' (Goodley 4). Like the Infanta, Manley Pointer

objectifies and fetishises the body that he perceives as freakish. Hulga is a *thing* rather than a person as he reduces her existence – and her body – to her false leg. In turn, his treatment reveals uncomfortable truths about both Hulga and him. Not only is his language patronising toward her, but his actions are as well. After she removes her leg at his behest, he asks her to 'show me how to take it off and on' (O'Connor, 'GPC' 289). She complies, and he then does it himself, saying 'with a delighted child's face', 'See!... Now I can do it myself' (O'Connor, 'GPC' 289). Things take a darker turn when he sets her leg out of her reach, and he ignores her demand to put it on again. It at this point that Hulga undergoes a similar self-realisation as the Dwarf. Manley dismisses her obvious concern, saying, 'Leave it off for a while. You got me instead' (O'Connor, 'GPC' 289). The physical removal of her leg from her body and it being placed out of reach forces Hulga to realise and acknowledge that '[w]ithout the leg she felt entirely dependent on him' (O'Connor, 'GPC' 289). The disabled body reveals that Manley, like the Infanta, is not who he appears. He is more sinister than meets the eye, as is the Infanta. They are both seemingly unlikely sources of cruelty – one presents himself as an unassuming Bible salesman, and the other is a child – and they each take a twisted pleasure in their objectification and mockery of the disabled body. Both the Infanta and Manley Pointer think very little (if anything at all) of what they have inflicted upon the Dwarf and Hulga, and they both leave them behind.

A more literally objectified body is described in Patrick Pearse's short story, 'Bairbre' (Barbara) (1907). The story opens with a description of what appears to be a disabled woman named Bairbre, only for the narrator to reveal that Barbara is not a woman, but a little girl's doll. She appears to have both physical and mental disabilities. Her social life is extremely limited, presumably because of her disabilities, and 'she didn't ever speak with anybody, but with [Brídín] only' (Pearse 21).[5] The description of her body immediately others her: she is 'blind, 'bald', and '[i]t's not well she could walk, for she was one-legged, and that one leg itself broken' (Pearse 21).[6] Bairbre, like Hulga, is visually impaired and she is missing a leg, and, like Hulga, she appears at least partially dependent on someone else. In a twist, however, Bairbre is revealed by the narrator not to be a woman, but a little girl's doll. Bairbre thus is revealed to be an object rather than a living being. Although Bairbre is perceived as ugly and unusual, Brídín adores her and treats her as though she were her child. This changes, however, when Brídín receives a new, conventionally beautiful doll with blonde hair, white teeth 'like pearls', and a rosy complexion (Pearse 29).[7] This is in stark contrast

to Bairbre, who is bald, missing an eye and a leg, and who can only speak with the help of Brídín's imagination. Bairbre is cast aside in favour of Niamh, the new doll, until Brídín's life is threatened. After her mother saves her from catching herself on fire, Brídín realises that her mother was alerted to the danger by Bairbre, who threw herself off a dress onto the floor, the sound of which caught her mother's attention.

Bairbre's visual and physical impairments are further highlighted by her being a toy. She is largely reliant on Brídín, who provides her with speech and movement. Brídín removes these from Bairbre once Niamh enters the scene, which leaves Bairbre, like Hulga, helpless. Similar to how Wilde positions the Dwarf in 'The Birthday of the Infanta', for Pearse, the disabled body that is seen as ugly and freakish reveals an uncomfortable truth. Brídín views herself as Bairbre's mother, something which makes her abandonment of Bairbre even more jarring. Bairbre's bodily self-sacrifice also reveals that there can be ugliness in that which is seen as beautiful, as is the case with the Infanta. Niamh does not take any action to save Brídín, and it is because of this inaction that Brídín is finally able to see the truth behind Niamh's beauty. Brídín realises that physical beauty is not the only attribute worth having. Niamh, then, demonstrates no empathy or any kind of emotional response to the life and death situation Brídín finds herself in. The Infanta has a similar lack of emotional response to the Dwarf's death, and at one point she even laughs at the idea of him being unable to dance (Wilde 202). The objectified body reveals, in the case of these two children, emotional immaturity. The Infanta, however, unlike Brídín, demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of what she sees before her. This is not dissimilar to the three girls in 'A Temple of the Holy Ghost' who cannot fully comprehend what it is they have seen or heard about.

Perhaps, however, of all of Pearse's ill-treated characters, one of the most striking and enigmatic is the Deargadaol, or the Black Chafer. In 'An Deargadaol' (The Black Chafer) (1916), the titular woman is banished from her community by the local priest for an unspecified transgression she is said to have committed. She is entirely devoid of any physical description, and her age is not provided. Her true name also is omitted by the narrator. She is othered by her secular and religious communities because 'she is a cursed woman' (Pearse 58).[8] The only indication as to the severity of her alleged actions is in her title, which is an allusion to 'one of the three most cursed beasts in the world' (Pearse 57).[9] She is socially othered as she is forced to live in isolation in the mountains where she has no interaction with the people in the village. Her physical removal from the community and her peculiar behaviour in requesting that the narrator's young daughter visit

her in compensation for saving her from drowning, only serves to enhance the strangeness that is attached to her character.

The climax of Pearse's story comes when the Deargadaol is found 'cold dead' in her bed (Pearse 60).[10] Following this, the narrator explains that '[t]here wasn't any luck on me or on my household from that day out' (Pearse 60).[11] His wife dies in childbirth and his livestock all perish from disease. Without any means of income, he is forced to wander Connemara, sharing his experience with the Deargadaol presumably for charity. His tragic encounter with this ostracised woman reveals an uncomfortable truth about her situation. No one can say exactly what her alleged sin was, and her identity is long forgotten. The community's treatment of her, and their lack of compassion and care for her, reveals that, at their core, they themselves are not who they purport to be. It seems, then, that, for Pearse, the community that ill-treats the individual who commits a serious transgression against that individual and themselves.

Wilde, Ó Conaire, Pearse, and O'Connor all experienced social othering as a result of their bodies and behaviours. All three writers had lived experiences of social and physical disablement. Wilde, particularly during his 1882 American lecture tour, leaned heavily into the public's image of an aesthete. His wardrobe and long hair reflected this image, and he consciously made a spectacle of himself. Following his release from prison, Wilde was forced into exile on the Continent, never to return to England. This was a form of social disablement. With the stigmata of the nature of the trials and his sentence, Wilde could not return to the life he had prior to his sentencing. He was marked as an other, albeit one that was socially considered dangerous because of its blatant rejection of societal norms. Wilde, as a result of his trials and imprisonment, became socially impaired according to the social model of disability. The only way for him to rejoin society was abroad, under an assumed name, and to maintain a low profile.

Ó Conaire left Galway for London, where he felt that he did not truly belong, a sensation that is a form of social disablement not unlike what Micil experiences while he resides in London. Later in life Ó Conaire became an alcoholic as an adult and shortly before he died in Dublin he reported feeling intense stomach pains. Like Micil, he appears to have been unable to truly attach himself to a single place. He left his partner and their children behind in London. Although during his time in London Ó Conaire worked in an office, Irish emigrants often took manual labour jobs. They, as Angela Bourke states, 'did the heaviest and most dangerous work in building England's canals and railways, and **…** many were crippled in accidents' (Bourke 65). Following such accidents, many, like Micil, would have had their employment prospects severely limited.

Particularly toward the end of his life, Pearse insisted on being photographed in profile because of a lazy eye, a condition he had from childhood. This made him self-conscious to the point where he avoided being photographed facing the camera directly. Pearse's behaviour was noted by his contemporaries as unusual, with one of his former pupils describing his unusual and distinctive communication style with Willie, Pearse's younger brother, as 'weird in the extreme' (Dudley Edwards 124). The brothers would talk to one another, sometimes in public spaces, in a manner akin to baby-talk. Pearse was thought of as being strange during life for his behaviour and, sometimes, for the fervour with which he devoted himself to the cultural and militant nationalist movements.

O'Connor was othered by both her body and her faith. As a Catholic in the Deep South, an area of America that remains predominantly Protestant, she was marked as unusual. In 1950 she was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, but a year later she was re-diagnosed as having lupus (Profitt 76). O'Connor became reliant on crutches to help her move around her farm in rural Georgia. The disease, which caused her father's death, ultimately led to her passing in 1963.

The body perceived as freakish reveals truths that are often uncomfortable and, at times, are difficult to comprehend. Wilde, who is inextricably linked with various instances of being othered, positions the Dwarf as a conduit of truth. Upon seeing the Dwarf, the Cactus exclaims, 'He is a perfect horror!' (Wilde 193). The Dwarf functions as a conduit for the uncomfortable truth that he is not the true horror. Near the end of the story, Wilde constructs a telling sentence that reveals this truth: 'The Infanta! It was a monster, the most grotesque monster he had ever beheld' (Wilde 200). The Infanta, the cruel child who mocks the Dwarf, is the story's true monster. Through him Wilde reveals that beauty and innocence can not only be misleading, but these things can also be abnormally cruel. Wilde's use of the perceived abnormal to expose the true freakishness of the normal echoes itself into twentieth century literature. The figure of the freak is an essential exposer of uncomfortable truths. A subconscious Wildean tradition of physical and social estrangement echoes throughout Irish cultural heritage and in O'Connor's religious heritage of the Deep South.

Notes

[1] Davis clarifies this point saying that he is not referring to literal or physical barriers, but metaphorical ones.

[2] 'The Birthday of the Infanta' was first published in Paris Illustré under a different title in 1889.

[3] 'ag tuitim anuas ar mo ghuailnibh', 'An ghruaig úd i n-aimhréid 'n-a slámmannaibh móra ionnus go bhfoluigheann sí m' éadan nuair a bhainim crathadh asam féin. Acht tá m' éadan chomh breágh daithte sin is nach bhfuil cead agam a fholughadh' (Ó Conaire 34).

[4] 'Ghabh fearg mé. Ghabh cutach buile agus fuath mé' (Ó Conaire 43).

[5] 'nár labhair sí le haon duine riamh ach le Brídín amháin' (Pearse 68). In Joseph Campbell's English translation of the story, Brídín is rendered as 'Brideen'.

[6] 'caoch', 'plaitín', '[n]í go maith a bhí in ann siúl, area bhí sí ar leathchois agus bhí an leathchos sin féin briste' (Pearse 68).

[7] 'le péarlaí' (Pearse 76).

[8] 'gur bhean mhallaithe í' (Pearse 102). The title is translated in English as 'The Black Chafer', though it is sometimes rendered as 'An Dearg-Daol' or 'The Dearg Daol'.

[9] 'na trí feithidí is mallaithe ar an domhan' (Pearse 100).

[10] 'fuar marbh' (Pearse 104).

[11] 'Ní raibh aon rath ormsa ná ar mo chomhluadar ón lá sin amach' (Pearse 104).

Works Cited

Bourke, Angela. 'Legless in London: Pádraic Ó Conaire and Éamon a Búrc.' *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 38, no. 3 & 4 (Fómhair/Geimhreadh/Autumn/Winter 2003), pp. 54-67. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/eir.2003.0003.

Burkle, Howard R. 'The Child in Flannery O'Connor.' *The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin*, vol. 18 (1989), pp. 59-69. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26670077.

Davis, Lennard J. *Bending Over Backwards*. New York University Press, 2002.

Durbach, Nadja. *Spectacle of Deformity: Freak Shows and Modern British Culture.* Berkeley, University of California Press, 2009

Edwards, Ruth Dudley. *The Seven*, London, Oneworld, 2016.

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. 'Making Freaks: Visual Rhetorics and the Spectacle of Julia Pastrana.' *Thinking the Limits of the Body*, edited by J. Jerome Cohen and Gail Weiss, State University of New York Press 2012, pp. 129-143.

Goodley, Dan. *Disability Studies*. 3rd ed, London, SAGE Publications, 2024.

Horton, James W. 'Flannery O'Connor's Hermaphrodite: Notes Towards a Theology of Sex.' *The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin*, vol. 23 (1994-95): 30-42. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26670323.

Jones, Justin T. 'Morality's Ugly Implications in Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 51 (Autumn 2011), pp. 883-903. https://www.jstor.org/stable41349042.

McRuer, Robert. *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, New York, New York University Press, 2006.

Ó Conaire, Pádraic. *Deoraíocht*. 2nd ed, Baile Átha Cliath, Comhlucht Oideachais na hÉireann.

---. *Exile*. Translated by Gearailt Mac Eoin. Cló Iar-Chonnachta: Indreabhán, 1999.

O'Connor, Flannery. 'A Temple of the Holy Ghost.' *Complete Stories*, Faber & Faber, London, 2009, 236-248.

---. 'Good Country People.' *Complete Stories*, Faber & Faber, London, 2009, 271-291. Pearse, Patrick. 'Bairbre.' *Gearrscéalta*, curtha in eager ag Cathal Ó Háinle, Cló Thalbóid, Baile Átha Cliath, 1999, 68-81.

---. 'Barbara.' *Short Stories*, translated by Joseph Campbell, UCD Press, Dublin, 2009, 21-35.

---. 'An Deargadaol.' *Gearrscéalta*, curtha in eager ag Cathal Ó Háinle, Cló Thalbóid, Baile Átha Cliath, 1999, 100-104.

---. 'The Dearg-Daol.' *Short Stories*, translated by Joseph Campbell, UCD Press, Dublin, 2009, 57-60.

Profitt, Jennifer H. 'Lupus and Cortiscosteroid Imagery in the Works of Flannery O'Connor,' T*he Flannery O'Connor Bulletin*, vol. 26/27 (1998-2000), pp. 74-93, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26674746.

Rodas, Julia Miele. 'Mainstreaming Disability Studies,' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 34 (2006), pp. 1-84.

Westling, Louise. 'Flannery O'Connor's Mothers and Daughters.' *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 24, no. 4 (Winter 1978): 510-522. https://www.jstor.org/stable/441199

Wilde, Oscar. 'The Birthday of the Infanta.' *Complete Shorter Fiction*, edited by Isobel Murray, Oxford UP, Oxford, 1980, 185-202.