Introduction

This article will investigate the novels *The Master* (2004) and *Brooklyn* (2009) as narrative representations of the complexity and shifting conceptualization of gender, especially as far as character and plot are concerned. For this, an analysis of narratorial methods with an emphasis on the differentiation between focalizer and narrative voice, proves indispensable.

My starting point is the pattern of a chiastic attribution of gender traits in the two novels, an interpretive model based on several articles about 18th-century fiction published in the 1990s. They explain the development of the *topoi* of *man of feeling* and *woman of sense* in English literature from the early 18th century to Jane Austen (Goebel 1998 and 1999). According to these studies, the characteristics of the opposite sex in the course of the 18th century are variously assigned to fictional gender roles, thus showing that it is possible to transcend segregative binary structures in gender.

Though the process was reversed again at crucial points in the history of the late 18th century (Schabert 1992), the venture of attributing features such as emotionality to male fictional characters and rationality to their female counterparts has turned out to be illuminating. It revealed that there are alternatives to genderized images of men and women and the corresponding fictional gender roles. In the following I will examine whether a similar fictional re-shaping of gender also occurs in the two contemporary novels by Colm Tóibín under investigation here.

If we were to hypothetically apply the chiastic model of gender markers to Tóibín's latest novels, this would mean that the presumed 'feminine' attributes defined as such by Victorian literature and culture are ascribed to the male protagonist of *The Master*, whereas the 'masculine' scenario of an adventurous voyage to an unknown land is assumed for the central character Eilis, the young woman from the mid-20th century in *Brooklyn*.

In doing so, we presuppose a more or less neat attribution of gender markers, which may be redistributed by a creative writer. My argument tries to clarify first whether the chiastic pattern is suitable for *The Master* and *Brooklyn*, and, in a second step, in how far the new awareness with regard to shifts in gender concepts is referential in the sense of portraying the social reality at the time of the story or whether it is caused by gender being an area of contestation and dispute that is around the turn of the second millennium.

I do not want to conceal the fact that the idea to further investigate this chiasm was partly inspired by listening to the writer himself at the beginning of a public reading from *Brooklyn*, which had recently been published in German translation, in Cologne on 3 November 2010. Tóibín remarked that he had thought it would be interesting to create a plot about a young Irish girl's emigration to America, an enterprise which, he believed, in the mid-20th century was most often undertaken by men and represented in male (auto)biographical writing. Thus a traditionally masculine-gendered plot was constructed for a female protagonist. Part II of this article aims to investigate how this is achieved in *Brooklyn* and whether the gendered...
story of leaving, long-distance travel, and immigration is 'translated' into a feminized experience.¹

I.

_The Master_, a novel based on biographies of Henry James's life at the fin-de-siècle, has to be re-examined after several publications have observed its hero's 'inner emigration,' the 'voyage in' that may have been caused by his suppressed homosexuality, but certainly contributed to making him the avantgarde modernist writer of the late Victorian era. In both novels discussed here, as in Tóibín's earlier work, "the themes of outsidership and isolation are again central" (Harte 2010, 348 n. 1). While in _Brooklyn_ the figure of the emigrant/immigrant epitomizes the conflict of inclusion versus exclusion, the biofiction _The Master_ emphasizes the tension that the fictional Henry James constantly experienced between his artistic seclusion in 'a room of one's own' – to him a voluntary exile from the outside world – and his social life as immigrant, traveller, and famous writer, changing places between the United States, England and Ireland, Italy and France. _The Master_ does not avoid the topic of the protagonist's presumptive homosexuality or his feeling of separation from other human beings, which takes on a sense of elitist exceptionality in the course of his middle years, but the narrative voice shies away from explicitness. As recent criticism is keen to point out, the reader who expects "a new gay hero" (Matz 2012, 114) or "dirt on Henry James" (115) in Tóbín's novel is disappointed. Matz seems to insinuate that the writer fails to fulfil the requirement or misses the opportunity to be more 'progressive' in anticipating what his audience might want to read: "[t]he sexless Henry James can really interest contemporary readers only up to a point. The sexual James, especially one whose artiness was just sublimated sexual tension, would seem to speak to us more directly" (114). While the supposed reader's expectations may remain controversial, especially considering the theory of sexual sublimation, the author Tóibín, according to Matz, clearly resists this temptation and preserves "the old James" (114) "in the place of frank realities" (130). In spite of this restraint the 'Henry' of _The Master_ is not the one documented, for example, in Leon Edel's biography, where the homosexuality of the famous writer still is not referred to.

¹ In fact, although Tóibín's statement that Irish emigration as a female experience has rarely been narrated in autobiography or fiction is correct, emigration of single young women was obviously frequent (cf. White 2005; Gray 2007; Stoddard 2012).  
² Cf. Puschmann-Nalenz (2011, 268). See Walker (2004, B 12). Matz points to Sheldon Novick's biography of James's early years (1996) and focuses on Tóibín's representations of Henry James's infatuation with Paul Joukowsky and his intimate encounter with later Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. While the latter is more physical, the former is restricted to the mere longing "to gain access to Paul's rooms" (Tóibín 2004, 10), and thereby to the locked-in self.
Ann Douglas’s study *The Feminization of American Culture* reveals the ambiguities of a movement in American Victorianism which gradually spread throughout religion – Calvinist Protestantism, to be precise – and literature and which the critic associates with mass and middle-brow culture, sentimentalization and enfeebled fondness (Douglas 1977, e.g. 8-11). She comments on the historical Henry James’s concern with ‘feminization’ in a different sense, namely his acquaintance with the rapidly growing number of women writers during the last two decades of the 19th century, as follows: “Henry James, observing the dominance women writers exercised over the field of fiction in the 1880s, was well aware that a revolution had taken place; fifty years before, feminine authors had been few and frequently challenged” (96). Worried by the fact that some of them had to subsist on writing (Douglas 1977, 62; 260), James nevertheless acknowledged the significance of a few individual authors (Douglas 1977, 260-261). In *The Master* the character of Constance Fenimore Woolson and her relationship to James initiate the *fin-de-siècle* debate about the professional female writer and the prevailing concepts of femininity (Brosch 2012, 305-307).

The ‘Master’ in his middle years, after he has failed as a dramatist on the London stage, is portrayed by the internal focalizer as strikingly introspective and an observer of others and of society. He feels at ease only with those who, like his sister Alice, share his isolation or, like Constance – herself a novelist and expatriate with “her power of lonely industry” (Tóibín 2004, 246) – respect his exceptional existence as an artist. There is merely a “thin slice of society that managed to notice them” (247) – an exemplary quotation which illustrates the divergence between the self-image and the burgeoning public reputation of the protagonist. ‘Henry’ is in addition represented by the narrator as a man who, though asserting his masculinity, is uncertain how he relates to a man or a woman and afraid of gossip with sexual overtones. Several decades before the 1990s, during the Civil War, his inclination to protectiveness and caring and his abhorrence of war made him an outsider in his paternalistically structured family; this is reflected in flashbacks (175-178). Though his privileged family background and pretexts of ill health (161-164) enabled him to escape conscription (178), the ambivalent feeling of being exiled, banished or left alone (66) accompanied his youth and later re-emerged in situations when he was confronted with death or memories of the dead. As a mature adult he is shown to lack affection and to tend to shun profound human ties.

Endless and repetitious discussions among his family members (92-94) of gender as the fixed ‘nature’ especially of the female sex display his family’s static and conservative views. They cannot, however, divert ‘Henry’ from his vocation as an artist who deeply feels his seclusion, the subjectivity of his perception and the inevitability of his remaining single and apart. The sensitivity of the internal focalizer and an almost delicate vulnerability of the self dominate the representation of the protagonist, as much as they govern “those super-subtle, refined, arch suppositions” (Matz 2012, 115) of James’s own prose.3 It is, however, the accentuated domesticity of this man, represented in *The Master* with a tinge of irony, which strikes the reader as borrowed from ‘the feminine,’ especially in the Victorian context. The importance of the home, and finally his home in England, promising “calm work, calm days – a beautiful small house and this soft summer light” (87), is a constant source of bliss to this cosmopolitan writer. On the surface he is ‘at home’ in European capitals and

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3 In spite of a few insights into the legacy of Impressionism in *The Master*, I disagree with Matz’s evaluation in his article (e.g. 115-116); see also below.
upper-class society as well as in East-Coast America – and finally most happy as owner of Lamb House in provincial Rye in Sussex. Being to others an expatriate, an American immigrant in Britain and a well-travelled celebrity, he adores the rooms, the garden, the daily cycling to the shore and taking care of the details in his home. After several long-term visits "it came to him in a flash: when he walked into the upstairs rooms of Lamb House, and into the room where he himself would sleep, he believed that he had come into the room where he would die" (132). He felt, on signing a long-term leasing contract that was likely to "take him to his tomb" (132), that this place was his destination. To have made such "steep commitments" (132) – to a place – (commitments which would last until he died) also causes fear in him, as it does insurmountably in regard to human beings. Like an epiphany, mysterious and embracing, "[h]e had found his house, he who had wandered so uneasily, and he longed for its engulfing presence, its familiarity, its containing beauty" (132). It had an inclusive, insulating presence. For the narratee, however, the perception is not restricted to the focalization of the protagonist. Occasionally, narrowness, the wryly discerning narrative voice makes us feel, characterizes the awareness of the middle-aged, already renowned and wealthy writer, whose development in regard to material culture is perplexing. A man "gentle and polite," cultivated and (self)satisfied in his "small empire" (200), worrying about his domestic servants, he is depicted as a true bourgeois and a 'feminized' person as opposed to the demonstrative worldly toughness in keeping with the notion of masculinity of his New England origin.

James's memories of the Newport home show his early awareness of an urge to enjoy withdrawal inside his parents' house as a kind of solitude that is also connected to his artistic personality. The description of art nouveau in reference to the discovery of a bunch of "back numbers of the Revue des Deux Mondes, complete with its salmon-coloured wrapping, which sang to him in the privacy of his room like a choir of angels" (159) signifies a separate universe in the 'room of his own,' a space filled with indulging sensual perception, rather than a stifling locked-in death-like existence. It is the life of the invented mind, of the richness of imagination by which domesticity and interiority are constituted and highlighted. That this is called "pseudo-impressionism" by a literary scholar and criticized as occasionally crossing the borderline to Kitsch (Matz 2012, 123-124) – as exemplified above – may surprise in the context of the overall very positive response to The Master. Matz deprecatingly calls it a belated legacy of Modernism in 2004 and claims that the novel thus provides, together with some traits of postmodernism, "a critical record of modern aesthetic history" (124). As a matter of fact, there exists an undeniable connection between Impressionism, subjectivity and perspectivization. Nevertheless, my argument is that the self-reflexivity of the artist figure and the metanarrative subtlety of focalizer and the narrating voice highlight the dawn of Modernism in the 1890s.
instead of merely testifying, as Matz believes, to "a belated period style meant to confer highbrow distinction on The Master" (130), borrowed by a chronicler of historical narrative methods.

When the hero James was in his 20s, in Newport, "[t]he shut door of his room, and his being left alone there, became the governing comfort of his life" (Tóibín 2004, 159), as his memories reveal. At this early point, James's home-loving sense of privacy is clearly distinguished by the narrating voice from his family's tedious "surrounding dullness and domesticity and patriotism and religiosity" (159), towards which he feels the alienation and unease typical of youth and an incipient sense of separation. Later in life he cherishes the limited range of every-day worries he has as owner of his house in Surrey in spite of the fact that he has known neither the compromises of married life nor the cares of parenthood (246).

Domesticity, one of the hallmarks of British Victorianism and another distinctive quality of the female upper- and upper middle-class character, is occasionally ironized, in contrast to features such as the importance of family and details of human relations, introspection and suffering. These characteristics are, however, remodelled in The Master by integrating them into the portrait of the artist as a middle-aged man (e.g. 200-208). It has been stated in genre studies that the fictionalized male artist up to the early 20th century was constructed with features traditionally associated with femininity, such as physical weakness or ill health, extreme sensitivity, shyness and reluctance to join company.7 Huf's summary (1983, 1-6) of the male and female artist's fictional images comes to the conclusion that in these portrayals feminine features are indeed assumed for male artist figures and vice versa. Moreover, The Master's strict internal focalization transfers the discursive marks of Victorian femininity to the fictional James's perspectivization as distinct from the narrative voice whose role frequently seems to consist of ironic refraction. On the Künstlerroman, the novelistic genre with which The Master shares many characteristics, a famous philosophical critic has already remarked that this type of narrative "is only possible when […] the artist no longer merges into the life forms of his environment" (Marcuse 1978, 12; my translation). The dominant contemporaneous gender concepts, which the artist cannot fully share, certainly belong to these "life forms." Introspection and the observation of the subtleties of human relationships in the male artist figure corroborate the image of a "new and contradictory masculinity" (Brosch 2012, 310) in Tóibín's portrayal. For the author Henry James, whose biographers have repeatedly documented the stations and events of his life, the imaginative narrative reconstructs a state of consciousness that characterizes the beginning of Modernism in the arts, while the writer's image as perceived by his immediate environment in this representation reflects the cultural fault lines of the late 19th century.8

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8 Of special interest in this respect are the dialogues between Henry James senior, William and 'Henry.' Both father and brother discursively construct a masculinity where a man, especially an American, is sure of his place in society, his country, and in the world, while Henry dissents. As can be seen below, the male characters in Brooklyn, however different they are from the intellectual James family, share this certainty.
II.

Whereas this 2004 hybrid novel fictionalizes a biographee who for more than a century has been a historically eminent and much researched figure, *Brooklyn* creates the youth of a completely fictional ordinary character. Unlike the Henry James of *The Master*, who protects his inner self from publicity, Eilis is a marginal figure whose parochial life hardly interests anybody beyond the limits of family and neighbourhood in a small town on the south-east coast of Ireland. The protagonists of both novels, however, are characterized by their silence and introversion (Updike 2004; Schillinger 2009; Costello-Sullivan 2012, 195-196).

The reasons for Irish emigration in the mid-20th century are identical for men and women in *Brooklyn*: unemployment and little opportunity to improve one's standard of living by finding a qualified and well-paid job, especially for the young. Thus Eilis Lacey's three brothers have already left Enniscorthy and Ireland to live and work in Birmingham. As her elder sister Rose, her senior by ten years, is the bread-winner for her widowed mother and for Eilis, a hierarchical structure that reverses the generational order of parental authority is established. The very opening displays a figural pattern familiar to the reader of female (auto-)biography: a sister, who supplies a contrastive parallel to the main character, is associated with the protagonist. In *Brooklyn* the prime distinction of the sister does not lie in her solidarity extended to the protagonist, but in the distribution of gendered characteristics. As indicated by her very name, 'Rose' represents the more glamorous attributes of femininity such as beauty, liveliness, and love of her family to the point of self-denial in staying with her mother without getting married (Tóibín 2009, 30); she embodies caring, popularity, even vanity. But she also possesses a number of qualities considered characteristic of masculinity: apart from being the provider with a good salary who counts out the pocket money for her little sister and influences her mother, she is full of energy, athletic, gregarious, self-reliant, responsible, active. Yet it is Rose who dies in her early 30s in small-town Ireland when her timid sister, who is considered a wall-flower, has lived in New York for more than a year.

Eilis, the "good girl" (6), does what she is told when her employment situation is considered unsatisfactory by others: she emigrates from Ireland to the United States. In this way she fits into the pattern of traditional femininity much better than the plot about the hazardous enterprise of emigrating alone to an unknown faraway country would lead us to expect. The two characters who cause her to undertake this adventure are a Catholic priest on leave from New York and her dynamic sister. Both are figures of authority to Eilis as well as to her mother – if they say it is better to go than to stay she will do so.10 The protagonist therefore has more resemblance to the numerous married women who emigrated to the United States accompanying their husbands in the hope of a happier life overseas. However, in the eyes of the family and of Eilis, the step to do this on her own is much bolder than the boys' emigration to England (24), since long-distance migration is considered exceptional for a single

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9 Valuable background knowledge about Irish emigration in the 1950s is supplied by an article that also examines two life narratives by women (Gray 2007). Tóibín's novel thereby also appears as a contribution to the fight against 'collective amnesia with regard to Ireland in the middle decades of the last century' (Gray 2007, 112), a purpose Gray's article attends to.

10 Gray cites the example of a 19-year-old woman's memoir, who "was identified as the one to go, a decision made by others" like every detail concerning her departure (Gray 2007, 116). "Mary" experiences the same sense of depersonalization as Eilis when going through the procedures of emigration.
woman. It appears nevertheless to be more promising than what her brothers have done, based on expectations created by reports from America. Remoteness, both in a geographical and in a social sense, is associated by the internal focalizer with Brooklyn, her destination.

The attraction of and motive for emigration lie in the modest hope for more qualified and better paid work. Eilis, who has never been outside the county in which she grew up, does not seek adventure or the experience of travelling, nor is she inspired by the different socio-political opportunities as yet totally unknown to her. But she is not driven by sheer poverty or a hostile environment, either. However, since in her local Irish community nobody will offer her an interesting and rewarding occupation or even pay much attention to her, she may as well leave. The difficulty of coming to such a decision is eased by the fact that there are no serious external obstacles: her mother will be well provided for and looked after by her sister and there are neither other dependants nor close friends who might desperately miss her. Moreover the priest – whose figure embodies paternal clericalism and the symbolic presence of the dead father as well as complicity with the girl's relatives across the Atlantic – upon her arrival promises her, a familiar, that is Irish, environment. The diasporic community will receive her and provide accommodation, office work and socializing in Father Flood's own parish (23). His description of opportunities in the US seems to affirm, as does Eilis's subsequent reflection, that immigration is by no means a gendered experience: "someone who was hard-working and educated and honest," Father Flood believes, must easily find a job (23, emphasis added), and "no one who went to America missed home" (24, emphasis added). The 'decision,' taken by others for Eilis at first shocks her because it contrasts with her disposition and socialization which have led to her being marginalized and dependent. She is aware that the circumscribed life in a parochial environment is all she knows (27-28). Until Father Flood's visit her mother had been her role model – one of unquestioning conservatism that appears almost fatalistic, but promises at least emotional, if not material stability. Eilis leaves her place of safety, determination and dependence. Henceforth, insecurity becomes the main characteristic of the girl's next stage in life: that of being an immigrant. How radical the change triggered by her departure can be to her reveals itself when she is overcome by a feeling similar to what she felt after her father's death when the coffin was carried from their home; in America it is homesickness which reduces her to a state of being 'orphaned' and leading a ghost-like existence (67-68). The imagery used in this passage represents her geographical and social dislocation – her being without place or purpose – as a death of the self in "the tomb of a bedroom" (70), being locked in and locked out, a situation from which she can hardly escape. To Eilis solitariness and isolation mean prison or, worse, the grave; her self depends on the sense of participating in a community.

Eilis would not seek opportunities in a distant country on her own initiative and is certainly not a very self-confident or spirited character with a tendency to emancipation or discovery. With 'her' plans to emigrate – which are not really her own at all – she frequently appears as a stand-in for Rose, her energetic and highly committed sister, who works out for her all the details before her departure. During the crossing, which proves a physical ordeal because of the stormy weather, Rose is substituted by Eilis's cabin-mate Georgina, an experienced traveller and a shrewd, daring young woman who visits her family in Ireland every year. Like Rose she is a complementary 'mentor' figure that contributes to the novel's quality of a female 'dual

Anglistik, Volume 25 (2014), Issue 1
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biography. Through a device similar to peripeteia in drama – used twice in *Brooklyn* – Eilis returns to Ireland almost two years later, after her sister's death. She states that her dead sister has continued to be her "great example" (229), but the narrator leaves no doubt that in her home she has become "Rose's ghost" (218), whose stand-in for the family she now is. The sometimes ambivalent closeness between the sisters seems temporarily reduced by their spatial separation; however, after they are separated one will die a symbolic and the other a physical death while their bond reaches even beyond the grave. This tie remains stronger for Eilis than that to her mother, a circumstance which she finally realizes, for "she had always had Rose standing between her and her mother" (205), whom she has to face without this 'shield' after her sister's death.

A German review denies that Tóibín has a real interest in psychology and claims that he avoids psychological exploration of his characters which he skilfully replaces by the description of behaviour (Auffermann 2010, 50). This is convincing, especially when *The Master* is also taken into consideration. In addition, other forms of pictorial, non-analytical representation of the mundane are used in *Brooklyn*: the special emphasis on the body, on physical appearance and conditions highlights the female protagonist's perspective. The structure of the narrative, the imagery, and the main character's thoughts become as 'telling' as Eilis's often contradictory behaviour: a homodiegetic narrator very persuasively unfolds her introspective, mostly unvoiced reflections to the point where the reader succumbs to the "illusion that the characters reveal themselves almost independently of the narrating voice" (Tayler 2009, n.p.). Generally, "domestic detail and its chronicling of simple jobs and lives" (ibid.) fill much of the focalizer's limited view in Ireland as in America. This is a feature that for another reviewer signifies "a very ordinary mind" (Hussein 2009) – an evaluation that also makes Tóibín's Henry James appear in a peculiar light where he is concerned with domestic detail. In addition to the meticulously represented "banality of the quotidian" (Hussein 2009), the novel leaves out or underemphasizes the most dramatic moments that usually form the landmarks of emigration: the actual departure as 'burning one's boats,' only told in short flashbacks, the arrival in Manhattan, expected with a high degree of suspense and anxiety, the impressive sights in the New World, and also the actual return to Ireland that merely stresses the strength of the heroine's ties to her family. The structural peculiarity of 'skipping' eventfulness – signified by the empty spaces and lapses of time between the four parts of the novel – paradoxically grants a special kind of freedom to the narrative: the freedom to highlight the perspective of the protagonist and show, by thwarting the expectations of an ordinary reader, that for the main character the New World outwardly reveals itself as the old world (Hanks 2009), except that now virtually nobody seems to care about her. Gradually, "Eilis finds herself in a social and cultural space that perpetuates the norms and mores of her culture" (Costello-Sullivan 2012, 205) without paying any attention to her person or offering a new perspective. It is the representation of this

11 I use this expression in analogy to the term "‘dual’ or ‘double’ Bildungsroman" (cf. Tönnies 2013, esp. 51-53), a genre to which Tóibín's latest novel exhibits several parallels. The contrastive duplication of the heroine can be considered a hallmark of the anglophone female novel of development in the late 20th century. *Brooklyn* has been described by diverse reviewers as "a classical coming-of-age story" (Houston 2010) and as "a novel about a woman's maturation" (Dollacker 2009), thus associating it with the novelistic genre of character development. Costello-Sullivan even calls *Brooklyn* "a kind of diasporic Bildungsroman" (2012, 190).

12 In contrast to Tayler and several other reviews, which show considerable reserve in praising the novel, Costello-Sullivan regards *Brooklyn* as the peak of the author's literary career (2012, 189 and n. 1).
"cage" (Hanks 2009) or "tomb" (Tóibín 2009, 70) of place and mind the protagonist has arrived in which expresses the feminine-gendered universe and perception. This sense of confinement also illustrates the floating semantization of space as compared to the contrasting significance of the closed room in *The Master*. A feminized experience in combination with an exciting, traditionally male plot model is narrated as "the proper stuff of fiction" (Showalter 1999) – in a male-authored novel which allows the reader to critically view the patriarchally shaped image of femininity while being engaged in its detailed representation.

In spite of her accumulating knowledge of social stratification in an immigrant nation, Eilis's world continues to be small and, in content and structure, very similar to the one she comes from. It is organized by the matronly Irish landlady of her boarding house where she works among single women of her age, origin and occupation, by the workplace where she lives as shop assistant – for which Eilis is over-qualified – with other women, and by the Church. The duties and occupations associated with these new spheres of her life are the determinants of her existence. "The Reluctant Emigrant" (Schillinger 2009) Eilis misses emotional warmth and a sense of belonging, but she does not really experience anything new except the feeling of alienation and emptiness. While homesickness is not specific to her sex, as hinted at in her memories of her last conversation with her youngest brother (Tóibín 2009, 70), the crucial change for her is brought about by her encounter with the young Italian Tony, which leads to a romance followed by a hasty secret wedding and turns the period of acclimatization into a seemingly 'typically female' appropriation. It contains, nevertheless, signs of Eilis's outgrowing the prototypical life of a woman, while the young man – like, later on, her Irish suitor Jim Farrell – acts out the role of the conservative male partner who is always sure of his place in the world (236; 242).

In spite of her visible change, which is remarkable only to those who had known her in Enniscorthy and which renders her more attractive than before in every way (227, 230), Eilis remains vague – towards each of the men, towards each of the two places, and with regard to the two worlds, each of which appears hazy when seen from the other shore. Retrospectively, Brooklyn even becomes an emotional "ordeal" (232). While both her suitors aim at binding her as fast as possible before her departure in order to stress the temporariness of her absence – the Italo-American plumber by a clandestine marriage, the Irish pub-owner by a proposal and official engagement –, she remains undecided, which is expressed both by the internal focalizer and by the close-up narrator. She wishes she had not married Tony (217) and briefly thinks about a divorce, but she also wishes that she had not betrayed him through her closeness to Jim Farrell (236). That place can "assert itself" (Schillinger 2009) is proved by the feelings she holds towards Tony and Jim: she feels closest to the one who is nearer. Her identity is strengthened by, and even constitutes itself in the actual relation to another person: mother, sister, father figure, friend, or lover. It collapses without these ties and definitions.

Eilis's emigration and return on leave to what she once more considers her home create a feeling of arbitrariness in her 'choice,' and she briefly imagines the 'unlived life' that an unequivocal decision will necessarily induce. Indeed there is a third option, embodied by her sister Rose and fantasized by Eilis: to pursue a career of her own as a professional woman and possibly to remain single (Tóibín 2009, 230). Since the narrator has continuously guided the reader he knows already that this is not a viable alternative, with or without a husband.
Back in Enniscorthy, the decision is once more made for her when her former employer confronts her with her knowledge of Eilis's American lover and secret husband, knowledge which has been intimated to her by the Brooklyn landlady. Urged on by the triumphantly made revelation of scandal by the unsympathetic and almost hostile shop-owner who had treated her in a condescending way before her emigration, Eilis opens her mind to her mother. Expressed in the taciturn manner which all three women of the family have, she simply communicates the fact of her marriage after weeks of silently staying at home. Her mother's unambiguous retort, loving but stern, "Eily, if you are married, you should be with your husband" (248), is affirmed by her daughter's brief consent which causes her speedy return to New York and an evasive note to the Irishman who wants to marry her and who promises social betterment to the now apparently exceptional young woman. Both mother and daughter can be considered "subject to disciplinary discourses of ideal Irish femininity," as are the women of autobiographical oral reports (Gray 2007, 130).13

The novel's surprise ending – Eilis's return to the US – underlines the male-authored female perception of a woman's obligation and unavoidable self-denial – of both mother and daughter – as controlled by the ambience of the post-war years and the social setting. Gender concepts outwardly are still firmly grounded, never negotiated, and 'unproblematic' for women and girls of humble origin in a small community in Catholic Ireland. The narrator here apparently reproduces an image of femininity that is rooted in patriarchy. The authorial imagination, however, subverts this view by creating a protagonist endowed with many shades of anxiety and indeterminacy. The hazardous plot of 'uprooting' an individual by emigration becomes a symbolic representation of woman's 'departure' in a wider sense. Though her disturbance seems ephemeral, the protagonist is literally as well as metaphorically unsettled: to leave behind accustomed relationships and concepts and dare to evade them causes alarm, to hold on to them, resignation. By an imagined material dissolution of boundaries – migration – the narrative opens up a considerably wider horizon than the perspective offered by Eilis, the good girl. To her consciousness new opportunities appear nebulous. Confronted with the tradition that her behaviour has to be inoffensive, she is aware that she will inevitably hurt either of the two men or disappoint all those for whom certainties are unshaken: "she saw all three of them – Tony, Jim, her mother – as figures whom she could only damage, as innocent people surrounded by light and clarity, and circling around them was herself, dark, uncertain" (236-237). This notion is frightening to her, since she is still subject to traditional values. A 'loss of innocence' has indeed taken place; but the burden felt by her on account of her offence in having had pre-marital sex is negligible compared to her uneasiness about her future life-pattern. The attainable freedom is not that of the perceptive female character but that of the narrating agency that does not completely identify with her. Trapped in the gender concept of a young woman whose life and happiness consists of duties – filial, marital and religious, while the most important duty is that of pleasing others rather than pleasing herself – the protagonist is subject to anxieties. The narrating instance exceeds the obedient protagonist's own focalization and exposes in figural representation that her inner troubles and pains are related to gender concepts and conventional life plans. The unreliable reader might

13 I disagree with Costello-Sullivan, who wants to see an insulting break with her mother in Eilis's resolve to return to her husband (2012, 118). The narrative shows that this is the mother's wish and that her ensuing silence and withdrawn behaviour are caused by the anticipation of her youngest child's final departure and her own marginalization.
perceive in the text only the disturbance and insecurity of the protagonist or, as one American reviewer does, the female in search of a new identity in New York (Houston 2010), but in contrast to The Master, which hinted at the evolution of a new masculinity, an alternative concept of femininity remains obscure in Brooklyn. Rose and, to a lesser degree, Georgina are Eilis’s twin sisters whom she loses or absorbs in the second half of the novel. While she misses Rose, she gradually appropriates some of her abilities and part of her role.\textsuperscript{14}

The conservative image of femininity outlined here includes the marked absence of self-determination in a young woman who lives as a dutiful and kind member of her community for twenty years and after emigration still feels more comfortable when she fulfils the expectations of her social background, while at the same time she sees herself being urged into something she does not fully want to call her own. She is not only a reluctant emigrant, but a reluctant bride and a reluctant, restrained girlfriend as well; she has even become a reluctant daughter upon her return to Ireland, where she shows eagerness only in exercising her newly acquired professional skills. The atmosphere of departure and the metaphors of transition or temporary existence – light and darkness, the sea, the voyage, swimming and a dream of flying – reinforce elements of the story and the themes of liberation and danger.\textsuperscript{15} The discursive emphasis on stability with the simultaneous diegetic lack of stability is perceived as contradictory by the implied reader. S/he finds the protagonist’s articulated view of herself as hazy and aimlessly wandering, which contradicts her internalized gender concept, corroborated in the texture of the narrative. These discrepancies additionally disclose femininity as performative, relational, and contingent. As a result and in congruence with Judith Butler’s theory, the notion of a ‘fixed’ identity can be recognized as over-simplified or essentialist. The view of a fragmented identity that postmodern narratives suggest, however, is counteracted by the novel’s affinity to the genre of female biography which proclaims a unified self, albeit one whose development has to undergo “palimpsestic placement[s]” (Costello-Sullivan 2012, 190).

Eilis barely realizes that her emotions deviate from the accustomed or approved scripts and can be called an “uncritical character” who never considers complaining (Schillinger 2009), let alone resisting. Impressions of uncertainty and circular movements prove disconcerting to several of the reviewers, who as resistant readers are critical of the novel’s thematic restrictions, bordering on the parochial (e.g. Hanks 2009), and the narrative’s twist to what can be mistaken for a clichéd romance. It is one of the purposes of my argument to claim that this dissatisfaction is produced not by the representation of the material Tóibín is dealing with, but by the material itself, the translation of a plot model of excitement, opportunity and promises of liberty into a female experience grounded in mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century Ireland. While Brooklyn, like Enniscorthy, metonymically signifies not just an imagined place, but an era or the philosophy of a country – a ‘cultural space,’ to use Costello-Sullivan’s term –, the promise to become part of the land of the free and the home of the brave proves hardly relevant for this protagonist, nor can America appear as the land of unlimited

\textsuperscript{14} Tönnies (2013, 59) maintains that such a character constellation may “suggest a single self-split into two halves.” Focusing on difference, Brooklyn inverses the “failure” and “success” of the two sisters in the course of the novel: Eilis rises from inferiority, while Rose descends into it.

\textsuperscript{15} The statement by Harte about Tóibín’s earlier novels, that the motifs of “marine spaces are properly read as enabling metaphors for the transitional state of contemporary Irish society” (2010, 333), is taken up below.
opportunity from the male-authored feminized perspective. One critic's observation that "America serves as an idea of freedom, but for Irish female emigrants under the care of the Irish diasporic community in Brooklyn, freedom can seem illusory, available only beyond the boundaries of parish and respectability" (Stoddard 2012, 155) is absolutely to the point. Eilis's portrayal hyperbolically specifies this generalizing statement, since she even remains ignorant of the ideas of freedom and emancipation in America. Accordingly, restrictions based on her cultural conditioning are in her perception not felt to be primarily repressive, but familiar and to provide security.

III.
The reader of Tóibín's fiction notices an intriguing transformation of the migration theme in *Brooklyn*: that of a highly sophisticated protagonist's emigration experience known from *The Master* into that of "the country girl" (Tayler 2009). 'Henry,' when visiting an aristocratic English family in Ireland after his failure on the London stage, was on his own and "wished for the view of an American brought up on ideals of freedom and equality and democracy. For the first time in years, he felt the deep sadness of exile, knowing that he was alone here, an outsider" (Tóibín 2004, 47). He identifies with the principles that are constitutive of his nation, underlined by the *syndeton* in the text, and feels alien among people in the old world which exhibits features of class-consciousness, imperialism, ignorance of and indifference to the world 'outside.' Eilis, unaware of the ideals on either side of the Atlantic, almost dissolves or, metaphorically, 'dies' in this diasporic situation where she at first cannot emotionally relate to anybody and misses being appreciated by others. During a slow learning-process she is confronted with diversity in ethnicity and nationality, but, tellingly, not in religion; she, the other women, and Tony are devout Catholics. Her personal identity, belatedly reinforced by her 'feminine' performance in social work and a love-relationship, is threatened by the immigration experience, whereas 'Henry's' becomes more distinct in the foreign country, which heightens his awareness of his national identity. His feeling of being 'exiled,' which he harboured as a young man in Newport in the bosom of his family, has been converted into the factual reality of the expatriate in Britain. As "a man away from his own country, [...] a mere watcher from a window" (47), he does not participate in the circle of English acquaintances in Ireland; instead, he becomes a close but detached observer and judge. Once more spatial retreat, which accentuates his separateness and also keeps playing on overtones of the homoerotic theme, attenuates his sadness and secures his identity with the concluding statement: "[a]bruptly, he left the Hall and walked briskly back to his own quarters" (47). The fictionalized artist's view of himself is that of an individual separated from his environment and often standing in opposition to it. Living temporarily in exile, described by Maurice Beebe in his classic study as the artist's 'natural' state from the Greek myth of Daedalus to James Joyce (Beebe 1964, 21; 260), 17 is shared by the fictional Henry James. The narrative voice makes us believe that Eilis never reaches the level of awareness that would enable her to reflect on her unease. Therefore the sentence "that

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16 Costello-Sullivan, for all her textual exploration, never even mentions gender as one of the determining forces in the shaping of the protagonist's character and perspective.
Eilis has attempted to live in two worlds and finally must accept her status as a marginalized person, left to live in one of those worlds under compulsion” (Hagan 2012, 40), which tries to analyse the haziness of the internal focalizer and self-effacing caution of the intradiegetic narrator, must meet with critical reserve. Hagan's statement is incongruent if measured against Eilis's self-perception. Alone on her way back to America she can only comply with a melancholic smile with the demands on ‘what a woman got to do' by suppressing ideas of lived and unlived lives and by literally as well as metaphorically shutting out her sense of vision: “[she] closed her eyes and tried to imagine nothing more” (252). Tellingly, it happens during her train journey to Wexford that the life outside and inside is eclipsed for the sake of a second return. As a last contradiction hers is the return to a country in which she has barely arrived, but to a familiar life-concept to which she has agreed almost inadvertently: the certainty of duty. Marital duty supersedes filial duty, at least towards a mother, as the parent is the first to acknowledge.  

In spite of the linearity of the novel's construction of time, which adds to the apparent 'simplicity' of the central character, whose poor level of abstraction and self-reflexiveness form a contrast to the hero's sophistication in The Master, and in opposition to reviewers such as Pam Houston, I would call Brooklyn an open-ended novel without closure or teleological structure. A change of the heroine's situation has occurred, her views have somewhat expanded, but this growth – if it can be truly called that – leaves the main character suspended. The long journey has not turned into a successful or even a desired quest for identity, nor can the ending be called a happy one. The feminized plot of the immigration experience as the only escape from a stalemate has brought about little difference in the female protagonist, who 'decides' to live in America, whereas her sister, so self-reliant in a way, dies in Ireland.

The country's fictional image in Brooklyn confirms the statement that "[t]he period between 1922 and 1960 is often characterized as one of social and cultural stagnation in Ireland” (Meaney 2004, 67). While the novel thematizes a historical situation with its representation of nationwide stagnation during the 1950s, a phenomenon which definitely seemed to lie in the past, considering the rise of the 'Celtic Tiger' in the 1990s, it could also hint at the present. Fisher's statement that "the decline of Ireland since 2002/2003 is beginning to be reflected in Irish literature" (Fischer 2013) is confirmed by texts about the melancholia and oppressiveness of the era 50 or 60 years ago.

The chiastic model of gender conceptualization, from which this investigation started, cannot neatly be transferred to the novels of the early 21st century. Instead, we have to consider Tóibín's narratives as examples of a very complicated distribution of

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18 The perspicacity of Hagan's statements that "[i]n a sense, Brooklyn reverses Joyce's Eveline” (2012, 40) and "Eilis goes off to America [again] in much the same state as Joyce's Eveline stays in Ireland” (42) neglects gender-roles as a category that influences either girl's 'decision': Eveline feels bound by "the promise to her mother, the promise to keep the home together as long as she could" (Joyce 1965, 37) and to take care of her imperious father, while Eilis is urged to return to America by her self-effacing and sacrificing mother to keep the promise Eilis has given in marriage to be with her husband, leaving the mother alone. In both fictions the final action is produced by patriarchal gender concepts, stressed by the mothers in particular.

19 The misleading title of Houston's review already reveals her reading of the book: "A New Life: A Young Irish Immigrant Finds a Room of Her Own in 1950s New York." The new life seems to be very much like the old life, though in the New World a room of one's own 'buries' the protagonist.

20 On the female Black British Bildungsroman see Tönnies (2013, 51-53). She also stresses that uncertainty about the future frequently characterizes female Bildungsromane.
gender attributes, testifying to the changes in contemporary culture. In Brooklyn, the narrative with the newly gendered classical plot which presents a variation of the female novel of development, the internal focalizer barely questions the image of womanhood prevailing in the 1950s. The narrative voice, however, and the governing consciousness behind it emphasize indeterminacy while showing Ireland as the safeguard of an allegedly idealized female gender concept, not without a few border-crossings into parodistic narration. The Master integrates our recent cultural awareness both of portrayals of masculinities and the figure of the artist in literature. In the two novels the complexity of shifts in gender concepts and the doubts about the status of heteronormative notions are rendered stirring and thought-provoking by the figural representations. Another reviewer’s statement that Brooklyn signals a period of transition (Hussein 2009) may be true, yet not so much in regard to Tóibín’s personal career as a writer, but rather concerning the times narrated and the age in which these texts were produced.

Works Cited

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21 This is especially recognizable in the scenes after Eilis's first sexual experience with Tony, noticed and judged by her fellow-lodgers and landlady, who reports it overseas, and at a friends’ wedding in Enniscorthy.


