

A “second coming”: Appraising Relational Ethics and Moral Economy through Animals in Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland: Donal Ryan’s *Heart, Be at Peace*

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Abstract. This article analyses the representation of new realities faced by individuals and communities in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland in Donal Ryan’s novel, *Heart, Be at Peace* (2024). It draws upon approaches to moral economy and relational ethics, and examines the use of animal metaphors and comparisons for this portrayal. Set ten years after the financial crisis of 2008, Donal Ryan’s novel depicts individuals who adapt their lives to new ways because the neoliberal, ultra-capitalist Celtic Tiger failed to deliver on many of its promises. The article provides a comprehensive analysis of most characters of the novel and how they are compared to animals. This enables the examination of the various discourses of relational ethics exchange and moral economy within the Irish rural community represented in the novel. Ultimately, this article contends that Donal Ryan’s *Heart, Be at Peace* represents how socio-economic issues from the past are replaced by new ones and how the novel conveys the idea that unlearned lessons from a recent past result in the repetition of mistakes and harmful patterns in contemporary Ireland.

Key Words. Irish literature, moral economy, relational ethics, animals, Donal Ryan, *Heart, Be at Peace*.

Resumen. Este artículo analiza la representación de las nuevas realidades a las que se enfrentan individuos y comunidades en la Irlanda post-Tigre Celta en la novela de Donal Ryan, *Heart, Be at Peace* (2024). La investigación se basa en enfoques teóricos de economía moral y ética relacional, y examina el uso de metáforas y comparaciones de animales para esta representación. Ambientada diez años después de que Irlanda fuera golpeada por la crisis de 2008, la novela de Donal Ryan retrata a individuos que adaptan sus vidas a nuevas realidades, una vez que el Tigre Celta, neoliberal y ultra-capitalista, no cumplió todas sus promesas. El artículo proporciona un análisis de la mayoría de los personajes de la novela y cómo son comparados con animales. Todo ello permite el examen de diversos discursos de ética relacional y economía moral dentro de la comunidad rural irlandesa representada en la novela. En última instancia, este artículo defiende que *Heart, Be at Peace* de Donal Ryan representa cómo los problemas socioeconómicos del pasado son reemplazados por otros nuevos y propone la idea

de que las lecciones no aprendidas de un pasado reciente se repiten en errores y patrones dañinos en la Irlanda contemporánea.

Palabras clave. Literatura irlandesa, economía moral, ética relacional, animales, Donal Ryan, *Heart, Be at Peace*.

This article analyses the representation of new realities faced by individuals and communities in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland in Donal Ryan's novel, *Heart, Be at Peace* (2024).¹ It draws upon approaches to moral economy and relational ethics and examines the use of animal metaphors and comparisons for this portrayal. As with Ryan's multi-award-winning debut *The Spinning Heart* (2012), *Heart, Be at Peace* is set in the same small town in rural Ireland but ten years after the financial crisis of 2008. It is also divided into 21 chapters, which are entitled with the name of the same characters. It can be read as a sequel, but also independently. Ryan's novel depicts individuals who adapt their lives to new ways because the neoliberal, ultra-capitalist Celtic Tiger failed to deliver on many of its promises. The article analyses the way in which Ryan's novel represents the realities arising in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, which, as Epinoux claims, is "exploring new sustainable political, economic and social forms, and cultural identity" (2016: 3). Through the examination of discourses of relational exchange and moral economy within this rural community, this article contends that Ryan's *Heart, Be at Peace* represents how socio-economic issues from the past are replaced by new ones and how the novel conveys the idea that unlearned lessons from a recent past result in the repetition of mistakes and harmful patterns in contemporary Ireland.

From "Celtic Tiger" to "Celtic Phoenix": Moral Economy and Relational Ethics

In their 2014 research on the domestic, moral and political economies of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, Keohane and Kuhling analyse Ireland after the economic bust and wonder what is yet to come. To do so, they refer to the final verses of W.B. Yeats's poem "The Second Coming", which reads: "and what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?" (Yeats 1991: 235). They see in Yeats's poem the representation of history and society through periods of recurrence and reiteration. For Keohane and Kuhling, Yeats's poem alludes to the cycles that characterise civilisations and economies, generally "marked by moments of dissolution of order, liminality and the imposition of a new order" (2014b: 1). Originally published in November 1920, Yeats's "The Second Coming" describes the sombre atmosphere of post-war Europe. It was a period of overall social, economic and political cataclysm, much represented in modernist literature. Yeats considers all these when he writes: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / mere anarchy is loosed upon the world," (Yeats 1991: 235). When analysing Donal Ryan's fiction, Yeats's verses could be applied to the description of the red metal heart, set in the front gate of the main protagonist's father's cottage, in Ryan's *The Spinning Heart*. That heart is: "skewered on a rotating hinge [...] a flaking, creaking, spinning heart" needing "to be scraped and sanded and painted and oiled" (Ryan 2013: 9). Ryan uses the gate heart to represent the dysfunctional social atmosphere and the drastic effects of the collapse of the Celtic Tiger in a small rural community in Ireland. Yeats's verses also add that: "Surely some revelation is at hand; / surely the Second Coming is at hand,"

¹ Donal Ryan's works include six novels: *The Spinning Heart* (2012), *The Thing About December* (2013), *All We Shall Know* (2016), *From a Low and Quiet Sea* (2018), *Strange Flowers* (2020), *The Queen of Dirt Island* (2022); and a collection of short stories: *A Slanting of the Sun: Stories* (2015).

(Yeats 1991: 235) which can help in the analysis of references to any type of revelation or second coming in *Heart, Be at Peace*.

In their analysis of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, Keohane and Kuhling use Yeats's allusion to a rough beast: "somewhere in sands of the desert / A shape with lion body and the head of a man, / is moving its slow thighs," (Yeats 1991: 235) to refer to a "second coming". Yeats alludes in his poem to the Sphynx: a mythological half-human, half-animal creature with a lion's body and a human head, present in Egyptian and Greek art and legend. The most famous one was the winged Sphynx of Boetian Thebes, which terrorised people by demanding an answer to a riddle: "what is it that has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?" Each time the answer was incorrect, the Sphynx devoured a man. Eventually, Oedipus, king of Thebes, solves the riddle: "man, who crawls on all fours in infancy, walks on two feet when grown and leans on a staff when old", and the Sphynx kills herself ("Sphynx").

It is not coincidental that Keohane and Kuhling use Yeats's reference to a mythological creature to examine post-Celtic Tiger Ireland.² For a start, the Irish economic phenomenon (ca. 1995-ca. 2007) was a roaring and proud Celtic Tiger. But, since the 2008 bust, Ireland has continuously been given names to address its socioeconomic situation, many times adopting animals or mythological creatures as referents. For instance, in order to compare the political economies of different countries, Ireland was part of acronyms that examined country grouping heuristics, much used to describe socioeconomic outcomes. As a "peripheral" European Union country, Ireland was included in the PIIGS (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, Spain), a "less-than flattering nomenclature" used in examining these countries which, as Brazys and Hardiman contend, "have experienced severe economic downturns, budgetary and debt crises, and interventions by international institutions" (2015: 23). For Brazys and Hardiman, however, the inclusion of Ireland in this group is "under-explained" and "arbitrary" as it did not share the "locational or cultural ties that prompted the original 'PIGS' grouping" and the "macroeconomic fundamentals" of Ireland differed greatly from those of the other countries in the acronym (2015: 24).

Not only that. The gradual but swift recovery of the Irish economy has also received the name of another mythical creature: the phoenix. This creature embodies the idea of cyclic recurrence and recalls Keohane's and Kuhling's use of Yeats's "The Second Coming" for their analysis. In Ireland, the phrase "Celtic Phoenix", as Smith and Workman explain, "became widespread towards the end of the 2010s in economic commentaries" (2023: 325). Although the phrase "Celtic Phoenix" may evoke the term "Celtic Tiger", for Ward, it "substitutes the image of a ruthless, rapacious predator with the immortal figure of the phoenix – a periodically self-immolating and miraculously resurrecting bird of myth" (2023: 325). Ward believes that the phrase "Celtic Phoenix" has been "the consensus name" attached to the "re-emergence of Ireland's booming 'Celtic Tiger' economy [...] after the post-crash recession and before the post-Covid one" (2023: 334-7). However, she wonders whether any lesson has been learned from the "Celtic Tiger" years or whether the so called "Celtic Phoenix" entails the restoration of former neoliberal inequalities. Donal Ryan's *Heart, Be at Peace* is set during the times of the "Celtic Phoenix" and before the COVID-19 pandemic. It uses metaphors and comparisons of nonhuman myths and animals to represent the social and economic realities faced by the individuals in an Irish rural community. This article analyses the recurrence of these metaphors and draws on the theories of moral economy and relational ethics to explore the representation of the realities of these individuals.

² For Kirkpatrick, "nonhuman animals have figured powerfully in representations of Irishness" (2015: 1). For her, the use of animal representation in Irish literature and culture over time helps in the exploration of discourses of Irish culture, politics and society. Likewise, O'Connor states that "'Irishness' has been closely associated with rhetorical constructions of the 'animal' and 'animality'" (2022: 1) and that the representation of the animal has been present in Irish fiction up to today.

The analysis of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland as represented in Ryan's novel draws on moral economy theory to approach, following Sayer, the "ways in which economic activities, in the broad sense, are influenced by moral-political norms and sentiments" (2000: 80). Generally speaking, the values that characterise a moral economy constitute, as Sayer claims, "the responsibilities and rights of individuals and institutions with respect to others" (2000: 79). According to Fassin, this tradition of moral economy follows "certain arrangements of social practices based on a specific web of values and affects characterizing a given group in a given time" and "moral" is the term to be stressed in the binomial (2020: 217). In the case of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, as Keohane and Kuhling claim, "catastrophe follows when the moral principles of general economy are violated and inverted from reciprocal gift exchange to trickery and theft" (2014a: xv). They wonder whether, in today's Ireland, there exists "the possibility of conversion, of an alternative, of turning around from the prevailing tyrannical neoliberal political-economic theology, which entails imagining and articulating a radiant ideal with normative and creative power" (Keohane and Kuhling 2014a: xv). Keohane's and Kuhling's ideas are in line with both Ward's worry and Epinoux's claim above. The analysis of the post-Celtic Tiger society represented in Ryan's novel below examines, how, as Adelman contends in his definition of moral economy, societies advocate an ethical moral economy, most of the times based on justice and honesty, when they "narrate capitalism differently, a story other than the triumphal conquest of liberal economics told as an epic about ever rising and expanding freedoms" (2020: 191).

This analysis of the representation of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland in Ryan's *Heart, Be at Peace* combines a consideration of the tenets of moral economy with some of the postulates of relational ethics. In so doing, it aims to examine the actions of most characters in the novel against the backdrop of both economy and ethics. Relational ethics, following Austin, generally points to an "approach to ethics that situates ethical action explicitly in relationships and responsiveness to our commitments to one another" (2008: 748). In this vein, as Metz and Miller also contend, most ethical standpoints are "fundamentally relational" because they conceive of "moral status, right action, or good character as constituted by beneficent ties or other bonds of sharing" (2016: 1). Likewise, Gergen understands relationality as that which reassesses individual and communal values as these derive from the "participation in a social process" (2019: 16). For McNamee and Gergen, relational ethics favours, ultimately, the idea that individual responsibility is replaced by relational responsibility (1999). Ryan's *Heart, Be at Peace* represents the interactions of all the characters within their rural community at a time in which Ireland was recovering from the impact of the 2008 Celtic Tiger bust. The novel narrates the relations of these individuals, who had been the victims of liberal economics and a lack of ethical relations in their community in the past. Ryan addresses in his novel a possible re-assessment of relations from an ethical point of view during the economic resurgence of the Celtic Phoenix.

From *The Spinning Heart* to *Heart, Be at Peace*

In *The Spinning Heart* and *Heart, Be at Peace* Ryan repeats a similar structural division: the same setting and number of characters, which follow the same order of appearance. *The Spinning Heart* unfolds in rural Tipperary, when Ireland is about to be hit by the Celtic Tiger recession, and belongs, according to Flannery, to a group of novels that "reflect the crash in form and content" (2022). For Flannery, novels by Donal Ryan, Anne Haverty, Justin Quinn, Claire Kilroy, Deirdre Madden and Paul Murray, among others, have interrogated "the politics of narration, faith and investment, morality and accountability, debt and affects, such as guilt and shame, and the accruals of the speculative" (2022). Their narratives constitute "instructive artefacts of post-Celtic Tiger fiction" (Flannery 2022). The twenty-one characters in *The*

Spinning Heart fail to speak as one, and although a polyphonic novel, monologues dominate and each character's language is fraught with "introspection and internal dialogism" (Altuna-García de Salazar 2019: 95). Ryan represents a greedy Ireland where individual and collective traumas highlight "the legacy of distrust and disconnectedness of the community" (Mulrennan 2016). All the characters face the new risks triggered by the greed of the village's construction company owner, Pokey Burke, who did not pay Revenue tax for his workers. The atmosphere of success and affluence made no one care about the norms being respected. They "all thought [they] were feckin elected" (Ryan 2013: 13). Pokey's actions provoked a domino effect and all neighbours end up exposed to precarity, migration, violence, distrust and even murder. As Huang claims, all the characters are "compelled to come to terms with the discrepancy between past affluence and present distress" (2022: 79). Structurally speaking, according to Wagner in her review of the novel in *The Guardian*, the plot "never moves in a linear fashion" and, as readers, we have to map "the connections between one voice and another" (2024). Donal Ryan repeats this fictional strategy and universe in *Heart, Be at Peace*. The stories intertwine, interrelate and feed back in a cyclic and recurrent way. But this time animal metaphors and comparison are introduced in the stories. Besides, Ryan also uses metafictional strategies of intertextuality and metatextuality in the novel, making allusions to both *The Spinning Heart* and *The Thing About December*.

Heart, Be at Peace is set 10 years later, when as Wagner contends, "the financial emergency that afflicted this small town may have faded, but new troubles – opportunities, to some – have arisen to take their place" (2024). As in *The Spinning Heart*, the representation of all the characters' lives in *Heart, Be at Peace* is connected to the village economic ecosystem. On this occasion, however, Bobby Mahon, Pokey Burke's former foreman, runs his own construction firm and has provided work for those neighbours who had lost their employment with Pokey after the 2008 financial crash. Bobby shows a commitment and responsibility with respect to his community. This is based on a more traditional and intergenerational understanding of economic values, which foster relational proximity and moral sentiments, as opposed to former neoliberal, greedy and individualistic practices. Bobby's ethical behaviour contrasts, however, with the involvement of some individuals – Pokey Burke among them – in profitable drug trafficking and illegal businesses. These turn economic and relational exchanges to theft, violence, murder and distrust in this small-knit Irish village. As a result, violence runs through the village in various forms: against drug addicts who do not pay their debts, against defenceless elderly people and, more crudely, as Edwards claims, in instances of "traditional" ideas of masculinity amongst young people who accept and perpetrate violence against women (2023). This new setting raises the concerns of parents, neighbours and the police who try to come to terms with situations that condition the relational modes and economic transactions in the village. In *Heart, Be at Peace*, Ryan depicts drug trafficking as a disintegrating factor within a community striving to recover in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. In her analysis of *The Spinning Heart*, Jaime de Pablos examines the impact of socio-economic and political issues on the characters of the novel. For her, "by portraying a problem, very often, political and/or economic in nature, the author [Donal Ryan] denounces the ideological patterns and the socio-economic structures that generate it, thus implying that a societal reform is needed to solve it" (2024: 59). In *Heart, Be at Peace*, Ryan portrays the socio-economic effects of drugs in the community. In so doing, he brings attention to the lack of both relational ethics and the practice of moral economy has on the village. In the novel, some characters opt for the fast money drug trafficking offers. They disregard the efforts of relational re-construction and sound economic development needed after the collapse of the Celtic Tiger.

The community represented in *The Spinning Heart* suffers the post-Celtic Tiger financial emergency. The community portrayed in *Heart, Be at Peace*, as Mellett claims, "faces contemporary challenges including social media, drugs, illegal industries that threaten local

children while the older generation struggles to protect what they hold dear” (2025). Both *The Spinning Heart* and *Heart, Be at Peace* represent an Irish society immersed in unavoidable cyclic periods of economic boom and bust attended by their social impact. They depict an Irish society – a “heart” – unable to be at peace. As Jim Gildea, now a retired policeman in *Heart, Be at Peace* recalls, in their village, “Madness comes circling around. Ten-year cycles, as true as the sun will rise” (Ryan 2024: 172).³

Animals, Moral Economy and Relational Ethics in *Heart, Be at Peace*: An Analysis

Heart, Be at Peace revolves around Bobby Mahon, as is the case with *The Spinning Heart*. Bobby’s development as a character triggers the main actions of the novel. His personal situation is characterised by his relationship with his friend Seanie Sharper, Bobby’s commitment to his neighbours and his concern with drugs in the village. The use of animal metaphors in the description of Seanie and Bobby’s friendship begins when Bobby goes to Seanie’s brother’s stag in Amsterdam. Seanie records a video of Bobby apparently coming out of a brothel, which goes viral on *WhatsApp* after Bobby leaves the group. Seanie gets furious about this and starts acting “like a **dog**”⁴ (Ryan 2024: 5) towards Bobby. Even though Bobby has always helped Seanie and his wife, Réaltín, Seanie behaves as a “sneaky low-down **rat** bastard” (5). In an instance of a friendship based on toxic laddism, Seanie keeps “**bulling** all that day” (5) with texts he sends to Bobby’s mobile phone, which termed Bobby’s act in Amsterdam as a **GOAT** (6). Bobby thinks, at first, he is described as a “billy **goat**, a **puck**, a **ram**, a creature bred to reproduce” because of his indecent behaviour as a married man. However, **GOAT** means: “Greatest Of All Time”; an expression used among “lads that did well” (6). Bobby is the victim of Seanie’s distorted view of love, manifest in Seanie’s visits to therapy or his relationship with his wife. At therapy, Seanie describes his shrink as a “**foxy** auld one” (110) and uses Bobby’s Amsterdam incident so as not to feel so bad about himself if Bobby starts acting as Seanie would. As for Seanie cheating on Réaltín, his behaviour is described by her as that of a “demented fucking **lizard**” with his “tongue flicked out” (49). Réaltín regards the woman of the affair as a “**bulldog** chewing a **scorpion**” (48). However, Réaltín forgets about her husband’s affair when she sees the video of Bobby. Even if Bobby gave her a job with his wife Triona after the 2008 financial crisis, when Seanie “begged Bobby and me [Triona] to give her work” (190), Réaltín envies what they have. More so, she likes gossip when this involves Bobby. She rejoices at the idea of “the saint, the great saviour, the martyr, the hero, coming out of a whorehouse like the **cat** that got the cream” (53). Aware of their commitment to their neighbours, Bobby and Triona always help Seanie and Réaltín when they are in difficult times. Their relationships with Seanie and Réaltín have been ruled by ethical relations in a social process. These are characterised by an idea of relational responsibility within the closer community. Seanie and Réaltín do not act in the same way in return.

As opposed to Seanie’s and Réaltín’s behaviour, most neighbours are grateful for Bobby’s involvement in the welfare of the community. This is the case of Denis, who kills Bobby’s father in *The Spinning Heart*. In *Heart, Be at Peace*, Bobby visits Denis in prison and starts a friendship with him. When Denis gets out, Bobby even subs jobs to him. Denis has seen drug dealers in prison but values Bobby’s responsibility towards him. Sentiment trumps economic greed. Accordingly, Denis opts for “moral” economic activities rooted in the community not characterised by fast money. The same can be said of Denis’s wife, Kate, a former owner of a crèche in *The Spinning Heart*. After the closing of her crèche, she accepts

³ Ryan starts his novel with a quote from Gerald of Wales’ *The History and Topography of Ireland*. The quotation refers to the rising and setting of the sun and how humans make “no wonder” of the importance of the beauty and strangeness of such daily cycle, which they take for granted.

⁴ References to animals or creatures are highlighted in bold throughout this article.

any job that brings her money, except for illegal ones. Kate babysits and works in “Chippers and hairdressers [which] are the two recession-proof businesses” (121).

As for Bobby’s concern with the problem of drug dealing affecting the community, he really believes something has to be done. More so, when young people are at risk. Quoting his wife, Triona, Bobby recalls how “they’re dealing right there on the street in Nenagh [...] you can order drugs by text and they’ll deliver to your door” (11). As with everybody else in the village, Bobby knows the names of the drug dealers, especially that of Augie Penrose, the main leader. Bobby shows responsibility towards his closer community. He considers he has to act against the dealers, “as fathers, as men” or else, their “kids could get sucked in and hooked” (112). In *Heart, Be at Peace*, most characters suffer the fallout from the drug trade. They consume drugs, get involved in drug dealing, deliver drugs, hide drugs, steal, blackmail, attack and extort neighbours for money. In the novel, Ryan represents a problem, which started with the Tiger, but is still present in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. As Windle *et al.* explain, drug consumption already boomed during the Celtic Tiger period – due to higher disposable personal income, reduced parental control and changing attitudes towards drug use (2023: 29). This phenomenon prompted, as Ferriter contends, gang feuds, murders, blackmails. The number of drug offences has been constant over the last fifteen years, as Gardaí records show (2024: 361). A 2021 report in *The Irish Times* informs that drug consumption has not fallen and one can see, as Lally claims, “young lads selling drugs on Snapchat and Instagram, cycle and van couriers or even taxi men selling or delivering” (2021). In the novel, all these consequences of drug dealing and consuming trigger unrest and fear. As in *The Spinning Heart*, in *Heart, Be at Peace*, Pokey Burke is the primary source of problems. This time, he introduces illegal businesses and drug dealing to the community. This happens when he returns home after his self-exile caused by his former unethical behaviour towards his neighbours, as seen in *The Spinning Heart*. In *Heart, Be at Peace*, the narrator of the second chapter, Josie, Pokey’s father, still believes Pokey must have learned from his mistakes in the past. Josie tries to get Pokey “to make things right somehow for all the people he’d wronged” (Ryan 2024: 14). However, Pokey sets up a language school for immigrants with a friend from Malta. The school is conceived as a “licence to print money” (18). The place turns out to be a fake school supplying work visas for people from outside the EU. Although Pokey told his father that he “felt a duty to every man and woman who arrived” (24), he used it for his individual benefit. He violates, thus, the main tenets of moral economy, as he did in the past. Pokey’s profit, once again, clashes with the ideas of relational ethics that prioritised commitments to one another in society. In *Heart, Be at Peace*, Mags, Josie’s daughter, explains to her father the Josie-Pokey relationship and Pokey’s commitment to his closer community with the myth of Phoebus and his son Phaeton. Mags recalls how Phoebus drives a chariot drawn by **winged horses**, as he was responsible for the dawn and sunset. Phaeton wants to drive his father’s chariot, even if Phoebus warns him of the dangers: “in the heavens, the **scorpion** and the **bull** and the **crab**, and the fiery mettle of his **horses**, their unwillingness to submit to any hand but his” (21). Phaeton disobeys his father, drives the chariot, but cannot control his father’s **horses**. As a result, the **horses** “bolted across the firmament, dropping so low that they dried the oceans and scorched the fertile earth to barrenness” (21). Jupiter, the god of gods, killed Phaeton with a bolt of thunder for his disobedience and unruly behaviour. In the novel, the classical myth turns real when a police inspection finds out that Pokey’s school had registered 2,000 Bangladeshi students but no classes were taught. The school is also a cover for drug dealing. On finding “neatly packed bags of powder” (25) in a shed near his house, Josie feels a thunderbolt like that of the Greek myth and dies of a heart attack. Pokey opts for quick illegal money, represented as the **winged horses** of the myth, disregarding the welfare of the village. He misunderstands his role in his community and does not act ethically. Instead, as Josie states, Pokey firmly believes that “a man can defy the balancing of the simple equation that has effort on the one side and reward on

the other” (18). In the end, Pokey repeats the same mistakes that caused harm to his neighbours in *The Spinning Heart*.

Once the backbone of social and economic relationships in the village is introduced, Bobby’s help towards his neighbours and Pokey’s illegal drug dealing, the rest of the community adapt to and suffer from these differently. Lily’s granddaughter, Millicent, resumes her relationship with her grandmother, starts visiting her and both exchange secrets. Lilly even tells Milli where she keeps most of her savings in her house. Lily got all her money from prostitution with men and magic charms and spells with women. The relationship changes when Milli starts to see Augie Penrose, the leader of the drug dealers. Milli is rapidly infatuated with Augie even if, as she says, the tattoos of a “white and black **dragon**” (146), a knife and a gun, already hinted at Augie’s violent nature. Ryan refers to Augie’s uncle, who is none other than Eugene Penrose, the bully of *The Thing About December*. In their toxic relationship, Milli is not allowed to use her mobile, so as not to be tracked. For Lily, Augie is a “**ratty-looking fucker**” (30). However, Milli wants one of Lily’s magic spells to make Augie love her forever. Lilly says it’s not possible. From then on, Milli acts as a wild “**vixen** with her teeth and claws set to savage any predator that threatened her litter, and she was yowling and kneeing the very same as a creature of the night” (34). Lily wants to protect her granddaughter because the Penroses are the “sorriest pack of mangy **dogs** that ever pissed against a tree” (31). In a turn of their story, Augie gets jealous on seeing Milli with a male friend and acts violently towards Milli, in an instance of toxic masculinity. To obtain his forgiveness, Augie asks Milli to break into Lily’s house and steal all her money. The effects of drug trafficking condition the relationships within the village. These even affect the trust and ties between granddaughter and grandmother, breaking the ethical commitment to one another in the most personal cell: the family.

Augie’s gang and their dealings affect the whole community. Timmy recalls one of Mickey Briars’ many stories about Augie molesting the parents of a village lad who dies of drug abuse and his drug debt is handed over to his parents. Mickey has a conversation with Augie about this issue that Timmy witnesses. After this, Timmy feels “a weirdness in the air ever since, a heaviness kind of” in the community (59). Mickey, whose father was a captain of the Irish Volunteers, introduces stories about his own family, whilst talking about the drug situation in their community. In one of these stories, Mickey also tells Timmy he hides a barrel bomb under his kitchen floor from the times of the civil war and that he has a nephew who will write his biography. Mickey talks to Jim Gildea, who believes that the country is divided up into little kingdoms controlled by drug dealers who get their revenues from their illegal transactions. For Jim, “each kingdom is broken into earldoms, and all the little earls must pay their tribute in full” (59).

As for Brian, he was also at the stag in Amsterdam and is ashamed of Seanie’s behaviour of laddism towards Bobby. Brian is another young member of the community who suffered from unemployment in *The Spinning Heart* and had to emigrate to the US. In *Heart, Be at Peace*, he recalls how his life is now ruled by his drug addiction that started there. Back home, he now has a drug debt of €30,000 and does little jobs for Augie to repay it. For Brian, although in a different time period after the Celtic Tiger, people suffer the same old stories based on lies. He compares the repetition of the same mistakes in Ireland to an “**ouroboros**” (67), the mythical creature eternally eating its own tail. Brian is “caught with a few bags in the toilet of a country pub” (106) and his whole family is threatened by Augie’s gang as he owes them money. Brian is defended by the village lawyer, Hillary. After helping people such as Seanie and Réaltín, Hillary now advocates for people with no choice. She feels she has a commitment towards her neighbours. She states she is sick of a society that has not learned anything after the collapse of the Tiger and everything that got them there. Hillary regrets “the selfishness. Everyone always

suiting themselves [...] entitled to experience everything, no matter the cost to other people” (105).

The cases of Lloyd and Trevor can be approached together. Both kidnapped Réaltín and Seanie’s son, Denis. Lloyd is imprisoned for this and Trevor is interned in a mental hospital. Lloyd is writing a novel with monologues (Ryan’s allusion to *The Spinning Heart*) and is reading a journalist’s novel (this time an allusion to *The Thing About December*). Lloyd shows relational problems and creates an alternative reality to understand life after his parents divorced and his half-brother does drugs. On talking to a therapist in prison, Lloyd sees himself as “**Schrödinger’s** dead and alive **cat**” (128). The cat’s representation of the thought paradox, which explains that one reality and its opposite are both correct, suits Lloyd’s comprehension of reality. Lloyd tries to rehabilitate whilst in prison. However, he also leads a cartel that deals with drugs in the area. As for Trevor, his behaviour is presented as if he were a **beta dog** (72). He is a second in command and not a leader, as Lloyd is. This is how he acts to trick people. He uses his mother’s county council home used to process the drugs delivered to him by Lloyd’s cartel agents. But, Trevor, now a “Rain Man” (93), is also watched by Augie and his people. One of them is Jason, who cuts cocaine and delivers it on a motorbike. Jason also works as a guard at Pokey’s school. Jason spends his life avoiding work but when he engages in “a profitable enterprise [drug trafficking], it’s different” (97). He realises that the problem is “how to make it all [the illegal money] look legit”, when drug dealing “hides nearly one full **spiderweb**” (97). Jason’s girlfriend, Sonya, takes care of Trevor’s mother although her task is to supervise Trevor for Augie’s gang. She is watched by the police, who watch her “like **hawks**” (93), asking her about the continuous visits to Trevor’s house. Trevor is eventually captured by the police for drug trafficking.

In the last four chapters of the novel, events unfold rapidly. The characters, Mags, Pokie’s sister, Jim Gildea, the ghost of Frank, Bobby’s father, and Triona have their final say about the situation in the community. For Mags, Pokey has always been up to no good and she sententiously states that “some things definitely never change” (162). She knows Pokey’s dealings with drugs caused their father’s death. After seeing that her brother has not learnt any lesson from his past and present dealings during and after *The Celtic Tiger*, she is pessimistic about the future of the community. For her, time seems to “cloud our minds [and] doesn’t heal any wounds” (162). Mags admits that her brother’s actions over the last 10 years have caused a breach in the way that commitment to one another ethically and economically used to function with older generations. Mags realises this when the village doctor sees her dead father. Dr. Roche feels that “death was dismantling the world he’d known all his life, gradually evacuating all of his certainties” (164).

In the case of Jim, he sums up the recurrent and cyclical nature of economic and social change; most of the times characterised by madness and how this affects the community. However, he draws the line between Bobby’s behaviour and that of Augie and his gang. For Jim, Bobby “measures himself against the well-being of the people around him” (171). Never looking for recognition and true to his “unstoppable” ethical and moral commitment towards his community, Bobby “gave himself the task of building back up the whole village”, and that is why “there’s men alive today” (171). Jim is, however, aware that the drug dealers are never out of business either. Augie and his gang are **rats** infesting the community. Even if Jim wants to convince Bobby of the “futility of vigilantism” (174), he is worried about the rage he sees in Bobby as his nostrils flare “like a **bull’s**” (175). When Bobby faces Augie for the first time, Bobby’s “face was blood red and his lips were back from his teeth like a **dog’s**” (113). After that violent encounter, drug dealers put a price on Bobby’s head. From then on, the whole village speculates about a future fight between Bobby and Augie. For Rory, who works for Bobby, Bobby is like “a **bull** going around. There’s no pleasing or placating him. Every man has his head down” (134). Rory agrees with Bobby’s idea that the whole village has “a duty to

stand up to them [the dealers] (134). As with the case of Jim, Rory is a pessimist and believes that, “Everything falls apart. All things turn towards chaos” (141).

The ghost of Frank dead perceives chaos and danger when he sees his son, Bobby, coming to his former house. It is then that Frank sees Brian approaching and carrying a gun to kill Bobby. But, Brian, with tears in his eyes, decides against it. Frank believes that he can go up to heaven now, once the metal heart at the centre of the gate has stopped spinning. His son’s goodness has worked in the solution of most problems in the community, and the spinning heart can be at peace.

In Triona’s final monologue, the reader finds out that Bobby tells her about the Amsterdam photo. She already knew, but wondered how laddism still functioned amongst men. She refers to the “foolish strut of men among men, the way they have of insisting on reducing the world to a set of basic rules, reverting to all their adolescent types” (193). Now, a photo of Seanie and Bobby, taken by Lampy Shanley, shows them making up and hugging, like a “pair of **apes**” (134). As for the drugs issue, this has stopped now. A bomb has killed most of the dealers. The national press has come to the village and they are “buzzing around like **flies** on dead meat” (186). In a surprising turn of the novel, Pokey, now the chairman of the drugs task force gives a speech in a meeting in Nenagh Scouts’ hall before the whole community. His words explain how “from the ashes of that terrible conflagration rises for us an opportunity. To keep drugs off our streets. To keep our families safe from the evil of organized crime” (188). In a final instance of relational ethics, Pokey advances the need of an economic ecosystem that is more moral. He begs the community that: “it’s up to each and every one of us to play our part in ensuring that the void they have left is never filled” (188).

Results and Conclusion

Ryan’s representation of the socio-economic discourse of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland in *Heart, Be at Peace* intertwines with the characters’ relationships amongst one another within the community. Ryan portrays in his novel examples of economic greed, illegal behaviour, systemic violence and, as an opposition to these, some ways in which these problems are solved and reform can be eventually achieved, if the community responds to these ethically and morally. The novel favours the definition of a moral economy, which, following Fassin, conceives that “what is produced, disseminated, appropriated, or contested is values and affects” (2020: 218). Ryan’s *Heart, Be at Peace* represents ideas of moral economy and relational ethics in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland that, following Adelman, offer “ways to rethink human interdependence beyond the market” (2020: 192). As seen above, Ryan’s depiction of community relations uses references to animals and mythical creatures as metaphors and comparisons to appraise these socio-economic issues. Many instances of domestic animals – **cats, dogs, goats and bulls** – can be grouped into common and popular phrases used to describe everyday relations and character behaviour within the community, such as couple relations (Lily and her former boyfriend), masculine friendships (mainly in instances of laddism and stereotypical prejudice, as in the case of Seanie and Bobby), families (the Penroses), following commands (Trevor) or as metaphors for strength (Bobby). Other animals – **gorillas, flies, birds, rams, vixens, foxes, pheasants, hawks, serpents, scorpions and lizards** – are used in particular references attached to specific relational aspects. Some of these carry negative tones that influence character reactions and feelings among one another, such as gossip, love affairs (Millicent and Augie, Réaltín and Seanie, Seanie and his holiday affair), cheating (Seanie), institutional policing (Jason and the police, Kate, Denis and the police), violence against younger girls (Millicent) and amongst men. Biblical references to animals are also present. For instance, Jim Gildea recalls all that Bobby is doing for his community as part of his take on relational ethics. Bobby is, then, compared to “Our Lord in Gethsemane. Like Jesus in the

garden before His Passion” (173-4); Bobby is the **lamb** that will be sacrificed for the welfare of the community in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland.

The recurrence of **rats** and their related adjectives is significant and is mainly attached to drug dealers, although not exclusively as we have instances of vile behaviour referred to in the cases of Seanie, Augie or press reporters. However, drug dealing is regarded as the main social and economic problem in the village and the reference to **rats** is pivotal. In a conversation between an angry Bobby and Jim Gildea, Jim convinces Bobby of the difficulty of getting rid of the drugs problem by comparing it to **rat** poisoning, where Ryan uses this animal metaphor to refer to the dealers and their proliferation in today’s Ireland: “Rentokil will never go out of business, I said, because every rat you trap or kill will have a dozen more on its tail, and each of them dozens will have a dozen more to take their place” (174).

Ryan’s use of more mythical creatures, such as the **winged horses** in the Phoebus myth, the indirect reference to the **phoenix** at the end and to the **ouroboros** offer deeper significance and can be linked to some of the main tenets set in the introduction of this article. The first two describe Pokey Burke’s behaviour, which has conditioned relations and the economy of the village, both in *The Spinning Heart* and *Heart, Be at Peace*. Whereas the Phoebus myth is used to address Pokey’s greed and individualistic lack of control – which results in his father’s death, the reference to the **phoenix** offers redemption and a second chance – best seen when he is chosen as the chairman of the local drugs task force. Pokey represents the Biblical prodigal son, “dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (188). As for Ryan’s reference to the **ouroboros**, this shows recurrence and highlights the futility of change, which recalls Yeats’s verses alluded to above. In the novel, the character Brian – who had been affected by the Celtic Tiger crash before and was forced to emigrate from Ireland – compares the socio-economic situation of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland to an **ouroboros**, that snake or dragon of Egyptian and Greek myth, symbol of eternal cycles of destruction and re-creation (“Ouroboros”). History, individual and community behaviour and unlearned lessons repeat after the 2008 bust: “Isn’t it funny how history repeats and repeats? Like an ouroboros eating itself over and over again, we come back upon ourselves doing the same things in different ways, different settings for the same old scenes” (67).

In the final twist of the novel a bomb explodes in Mickey Briar’s home, which kills the main drug dealer, Augie Penrose, and his gang: the main menace to community life. Triona retells how Mike’s nephew – whose existence is unknown in the village – had been harassed by the gang and had to do something against it, helping the community too: “Mickey Briars’s one-man war, his secret crusade against local organized crime” (186). In the novel, the bomb is explained to be “one of a pair of barrel bombs that had been deployed against Crown forces at Templekelly, Ballina, in 1920, by Captain Jeremiah Cranty of the North Tipperary Brigade IRA, Mickey’s father” (187). One of the bombs exploded during the Irish War of Independence (1919-1922), the other one was brought home on Mickey’s father’s shoulders. Coincidentally, the first bomb explodes the same year as W.B. Yeats publishes “The Second Coming”: 1920. The past comes to save the present. Recurrent cycles remain. We can equate Mickey Briars and his action against drug dealing in the community to Oedipus solving the Sphinx’s riddle, in Yeats’s poem. Even the ouroboros is the recurrence of boom, bust and abuse.

Donal Ryan’s portrayal of moral economy and relational ethics appraised through animals and mythical creatures in *Heart, Be at Peace* constitutes an effective fictional strategy to represent the realities faced by individuals and communities in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. Ryan’s “bestiary” – which includes a variety of domestic and wild animals together with mythological creatures – offers comparisons and metaphors to achieve his aim. The animal and mythological creature metaphors used to refer to the socio-economic situation of Ireland since the 2008 economic downturn – tiger, beast, sphynx, pig, phoenix – raised questions at the beginning of this article: does Ryan represent a “rough beast” in today’s Ireland? What is its

menace? Does the solution lie with people and their moral economy and relational ethics? Is Irish society immersed in cyclic periods of economic boom and abuse? Can the heart of the novel be at peace? Ryan represents in *Heart, Be at Peace* individuals and a community that struggle to recover from the 2008 bust through economic relations based on the responsibility towards and welfare for the whole community, although the menace of drugs hampers ethical and sound social interaction, which evinces that lessons still have to be learned.

In *The Spinning Heart* and *Heart, Be at Peace*, although Pokey Burke is the main catalyst of problems, he is not dedicated a proper chapter – we could ask why? – and Bobby Mahon remains the hero, even though he is about to resort to violence reduce the risks to his community. In *Heart, Be at Peace*, Bobby is the neighbour who advocates relational ethics within his village, always centred on the understanding of what moral economy entails. His actions follow those fundamental values and principles of fairness and justice, referred to before. Bobby knows he has a responsibility with respect to others and needs to maintain the network of values and affects which characterize a given group at a given time, more so now, when most of the community's older generation dies in *Heart, Be at Peace*.

As for a continuation of the stories in *Heart, Be at Peace*, it seems likely that Ryan is not finished with writing about his fictional community. Many reviewers believe that “several characters warrant more than one chapter and the story could have returned to them” (Liu 2024). Most surely, we can expect another novel by Donal Ryan, a “Third Coming” – that unveils Mickey Briars's family secrets and represents this rural community during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond – after this “Second Coming”. This could include the portrayal of recurrent “rough beasts” lurking in contemporary Ireland and the idea that more lessons can be learned, so that the heart(s) of his fiction can be eventually at peace.

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