Julian Gough’s story “The Orphan and the Mob” (hereafter “The Orphan”) was awarded the 2007 National Short Story prize by a unanimous panel composed of Monica Ali and A.S. Byatt, among others. Panel chair Mark Lawson declared to The Guardian at the time that “the comedy, energy and originality of both plot and voice set [“The Orphan”] ahead of the other contenders” (Crown). Gough’s story had previously been published in the March 2006 issue of Prospect Magazine, and it became widely available online after the prize, both in written and spoken form. BBC radio 4 broadcast a spoken-word version of the prize-winning story, read by Beckett actor Conor Lovett; another version now features in the spoken literature album Sticky Ends and Unexpected Twists (2012). The story has been a favourite read at academic and literary gatherings—one particular instance (witnessed by the author of this article) at the July 2011 International Flann O’Brien Centenary Conference in Vienna, where Gough’s hilarious reading placed his story firmly and explicitly under the aegis of O’Brien’s comic spirit.

For all its short-story credentials, however, “The Orphan” is not technically an autonomous piece of short fiction but the opening part of a novel, Jude: Level 1, published shortly after the story was awarded its prize. Over five years and another novel later, “The Orphan” has become not simply the prologue to Jude (as advertised on the book cover), but the prequel to a still unfinished trilogy, comprising Jude: Level 1 (2007) and Jude in London (2011)—the last volume, Jude in America, has yet to be published. “The Orphan and the Mob” is not an isolated case since another of Gough’s stories, first published in The Financial Times in 2003, is now an episode from the novel Jude in London. Its plot takes Gough’s main character, Jude, through a nonsensical depiction of the Irish financial bubble and collapse of recent years. It was adapted in 2012 for live performances, first as a radio play on the BBC, then as a stage play for the Galway Arts Festival. Chronology is significant here, since the adapted excerpt had officially been part of its wider narrative for over a year before it was picked up again as a short story.
Beyond the obvious financial reasons for publishing parts of a yet unfinished book, the fate of these stories reflects a specific relationship between author and readership through the very physical malleability and versatility of their format, narrative structure and delivery. By virtue of their changeable short-story-to-fragment status, “The Orphan and the Mob” and “The Great Hargeisa Goat Bubble” raise the question of genre.

The question of genre, or rather, genre-mangling, is all the more relevant for an author whose blog signature is “the novel reinvented, while you wait,” and whose interest in the many forms of contemporary storytelling has gone as far as to author the concluding narrative for cult video game Minecraft. As the singer of 90s rock band Toasted Heretic, Julian Gough is firmly grounded in live interaction and oral performance. As a multimedia fiction writer and commentator with an up-to-date blog and twitter account, he does not fit the stereotypical picture of the bookish writer. His novels themselves have drawn mixed reactions, from the very enthusiastic to the very sceptical. In his review of Gough’s first novel, New York Times critic Richard Eder stated that “Mr. Gough is a clever writer; he is simply not, or not yet (judging from this first effort), a very good novelist: one who makes the demands on himself that even a comic romance requires.” John Banville remarked to The Guardian in 2010 that Gough’s “notion that shouting the word ‘feck’ (...) and being grossly scatological will make him seem echt Irish only harms his argument” (Flood). The fact that Julian Gough won the 2012 National Short-Story Award for his latest story iHole (also, as a result of the prize, broadcast on BBC 4) may suggest he is more of a short story writer than and novelist, yet his expanded stories/novels are now also recognised in their own right since both Jude: Level 1 and Jude in London were shortlisted for the Bolinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize, respectively in 2008 and 2012. Whatever the official status of his stories may be, Julian Gough has made clear that his aim was to distort and play with the notion of genre in fiction writing.

The question I wish to examine in this article is what “The Orphan and the Mob” brings to our understanding of the Irish short story, and how the seemingly blurred distinction between short story, story and novel in Julian Gough’s work also reflects a current state of contemporary fiction worldwide. The many influences and echoes to be found in “The Orphan” follow the reflexive, meta-fictional trend of contemporary western fiction, and its ambiguous structure reflects Gough’s explicit goal to do away with what he considers the crippling structural limitations and formal boundaries of his fellow Irish writers. Gough observes:

Irish literary writers have become a priestly caste, scribbling by candlelight, cut off from the electric current of the culture. We’ve abolished the Catholic clergy, and replaced them with novelists. They wear black, they preach, they are concerned for our souls. Feck off. (...) The only area where Irish writing is thriving in Ireland itself is on the internet, because it’s a direct connection, writer-to-reader. Blogs captured, and capture, Ireland in a way literature no longer does. (“The State”)

For all Gough’s ill-tempered and disingenuous accusations, “The Orphan,” with its Irish theme and comic exuberance, obviously displays influence from a long Irish tradition of satirical (short) fiction. My analysis of this story will rely on two of its main elements: its narrative themes and satirical purpose, and its open-ended, multi-faceted structure. How do the themes and structure of the narrative affect the structure of the story itself? What makes this story a viable, self-contained short story? How does our contemporary understanding of seriality affect the already complex definition of the short story as an autonomous literary genre? “The Orphan” reflects the evolution of (Irish) fiction writing
today, as it leads a hybrid literary tradition of orality, literacy and seriality into the contemporary modes of literary communication.

**Jude’s Adventures in Ireland**

“The Orphan” is about a boy who accidentally urinates on a Fianna Fáil minister during a monument unveiling ceremony in the Tipperary countryside. The story is told retrospectively in the first person by the hero, confession-style, with a disingenuously teasing first sentence offering us the clue to a yet unexplained drama: “If I had urinated immediately after breakfast, the Mob would never have burnt down the Orphanage.” The first-person narrator then proceeds to give us his name and address in a parodic rendering of Joyce’s *Portrait*:

Jude
The Orphanage
Tipperary
Ireland

This incipit sets the story’s main themes: Irishness, filiation and identity, farcical comedy.

Jude is an ingenuous 18-year-old who leads a group of younger boys from his orphanage to attend a speech by (fictional) Brünhilde DeValera, the Fianna Fáil, “Minister for Beef, Culture and the Islands” (7). Brünhilde has come to the orphans’ remote part of the Irish countryside to open a newly minted national monument, “the Nation’s most famous Boghole, famed in song and story, in History Book and Ballad sheet” (6), named after her great-grandfather’s cousin—the Irish Republic’s spiritual father, Eamonn De Valera. The problem, of course, is Jude’s relentless bladder. After excruciating efforts to contain his fateful urge, Jude finally decides to hide behind the stage curtain and finds a miraculous hole in which he blissfully relieves himself—only to be caught red-handed (or rather, pants down), urinating in Dev’s National Boghole: “I feel, looking back, that it would not have gone so badly against me,” says a contrite Jude, “had I not, in my panic, turned and hosed Brünhilde De Valera with urine” (13). Jude’s bladder blunder is the first climactic scene in the story, and it partially solves its allusive incipit. It also sets the stage for the second part of Gough’s farcical plot, the destruction of the orphanage by an infuriated crowd of Fianna Fáil farmers who vow to avenge their desecrated Hole. After everything has been reduced to ashes, Jude leaves Tipperary: this is where the short story ends and the rest of the novel begins. At this point, if the story remains unclear as to its genre—long, short, interrupted?—one thing is certain: it is an Irish story which brings together both specific and generic references to Ireland’s politics and culture. Gough’s satirical comedy stems from this hybridity, since it addresses contemporary political and social questions, as well as the enduring intensity of colonial and bucolic stereotypes. In the speech scene, the comically bovine Brünhilde De Valera betrays her true feelings towards the European Union:

“Although it is European money which has paid for everything built West of Grafton Street in my Lifetime... And although we are grateful to Europe for its Largesse...”

She paused to draw a great Breath. (…)

“Grateful as we are to the Europeans...

... we should never forget ...

... that ...”
... they ... (…)
... are a shower of Foreign Bastards who would Murder us in our Beds given Half a Chancel!” (8)

Brünhilde’s tirade is greeted by a standing ovation as she launches into a eulogy of the incorruptible heart, soul and loyalty of the stereotypical Irishman, and proceeds to invoke the great heroes of independent Ireland. That a German-sounding Brünhilde should display such fierce Europhobia here only adds piquant to the scene, as Gough humorously caricatures his nation’s ambivalent feelings towards the EU. Coincidentally, at the time the story was first published, Irish opinion was considered generally favourable to the European Union, with “Seventy-three percent of Irish people feel[ing] that Ireland’s membership of the EU [was] a good thing,” according to the 2006 European Commission opinion poll—Irish voters were still two years away from their resounding “no” to the Lisbon Treaty.

As Gough’s farcical satire fleshes out the comic stereotypes of contemporary Ireland, its “eight-lane Motorway[s]” and its enormous car parks (8), he also draws from a seemingly indestructible stock of colonial clichés: in the speech scene, the cheering audience start to “leap up and down roaring (…), the younger and more nimble mounting each other’s shoulder,” thus mimicking the ape-like Irishmen of 19th century British caricatures. Back at the orphanage, Jude’s relationship with the Brothers recalls the iron grip of the Catholic clergy on Irish education since the 1830s, as well as, closer to us, the continuing stream of sexual abuse scandals made public from the 1990s onward. Gough’s black humour thrives in the endless opportunities for sexual innuendos and wordplay: “I found most of the young Orphans hiding under Brother Thomond in the darkness of the hay barn (…) he was maintained erect only by the stiffness of his ancient joints” (4).

Gough’s contemporary rendering of the bawdy tales of an ancient storytelling tradition is only an instance of the satirical ballet of stereotypes he orchestrates in “The Orphan.” In doing so, Gough puts a current spin on an old literary tradition of continental and Irish satirical writing, from Rabelais to Swift and Flann O’Brien. As Jude’s intemperate bladder recalls Swift’s scatological satire, his euphemistic depiction of the Brothers’ “desultory beating” of the orphans is an obvious tribute to the best satirical pages of O’Brien/Myles na gCopaleen’s Cruiskeen Lawn.2 The story’s wacky exuberance offers us a miniature cartography of Ireland, at full speed, first through a prized sample of the Irish countryside (“We hopped over a fence, crossed a field, waded a dyke, cut through a ditch, traversed scrub land, forded a river and entered Nobber Nolan’s bog” (6)), then in the apocalyptic frenzy of the burning orphanage. Along the way, Gough pays tribute to Flann O’Brien’s nonsensical writing and black humour. This literary and satirical filiation is explicitly acknowledged in the front cover of the published book.3 There is also a touch of Monty Pythonesque extravagance when a priest is changed into a statue by molten lead falling from the burning roof, and Jude escapes the Mob dressed in drag: “[I] slipped into a charming blue gingham dress (…). The crowd parted to let me through, the Young Farmers removing their Hats as I passed” (21-22). Finally, Jude’s ingenuous tone and naïve ignorance of the wider world, together with his eventual departure for a picaresque journey through Ireland, humorously echo Voltaire’s Candide on the verge of his eye-opening adventures across the world.

The 2007 award panel had praised the story for the energy of its plot and voice. As the narrator-hero concludes this episode of his adventures, his self-consciously polyphonic tale places him clearly outside the realm of the “lonely voice” defined by Frank O’Connor
in his 1962 study of the genre. O’Connor defined the short story as a modern art form, distinct from the tradition of storytelling because it is no public art. As opposed to interactive storytelling, the short story is “a private art intended to satisfy the standards of the individual, solitary, critical reader” (84). The second element in O’Connor’s analysis also finds “The Orphan” at odds with his clear-cut definition of the genre: for O’Connor, the short story does not have a hero but a “submerged population group” (86), i.e. representative tokens of their class. Jude the orphan may be a barely identified character in the tale (he only has his first name and does not know his origins), but his very quest for identity makes him a hero more suited to a bildungsroman than to a short, epiphanic snapshot of Irish country life. Gough’s story draws from many traditions, from literature and popular culture, and both its mode of delivery and narrative structure make it a hybrid genre addressed to group audiences and isolated readers alike. Having determined that this is indeed an Irish satirical tale, we must now turn to the story’s pragmatic structure in order to examine further its relationship to the short story genre.

Story, Interrupted

The themes of lost identity and exile in “The Orphan” reflect what Heather Ingman describes as the “nomadic, fragmented identity of the Irish short story that, at its best, indicates an awareness of other worlds, other possibilities shadowing this one” (260). However relevant his story is as a satirical picture of contemporary Ireland, Julian Gough himself described its structure not as a short story but “like the bit at the start of the Star Wars trilogy, where Luke Skywalker is working on his uncle’s farm, and then the planet’s destroyed, and he has to go off on his galactic quest and discover his destiny. Except set in Tipperary” (Crown). The question of structure is paramount here, since “The Orphan” is in fact the prologue to a very long, winding quest that takes Jude through Ireland, then London, and finally leads him to America. The story has been published in different forms; let us first examine its original, prize-winning format.

“The Orphan and the Mob” was first published by *Prospect Magazine* in March 2006; the original text is still available online (although only partially for non-subscribers). The story follows the usual format of articles in printed and online magazines and newspapers: it has a headline (the story’s title) and a subhead (which is typographically distinct from both title and text): “Were it not for the need to pee, Jude might discover the secret of his birth.” Magazine articles are clearly distinct from a published volume since their very format is more explicitly dialogic; they address their readers in a way that the volume does not. The internet further adds to this dialogue since it enables readers not only to leave comments, but also to share the text with others on social networks, something that Julian Gough himself is keen to do. The newspaper/periodical and its internet version bring together two distinctive elements. With high-end technology comes infinite reproduction and virtually limitless distribution of the story; on the other hand, the headline and subhead format hail back to the traditional storyteller drawing in the public with a catchy phrase. Throughout his long career as a chronicler for the *Irish Times*, Flann O’Brien played with the hybrid nature of the newspaper as his pseudonymous persona, Myles, followed in the footsteps—albeit with a satirical pointe—of the traditional storyteller-by-the-fire. Gough explicitly inscribes his multi-media stories in the Mylesian tradition of satirical, and often farcical, self-conscious dialogism, while introducing us to the realm of the hypertext and the internet.
blog. Twentieth century and contemporary writers have largely demonstrated the hybridity of Irish fiction through genre-bending and multi-media adaptation: from Frank O’Connor’s radio storytelling to Beckett’s radio plays and Roddy Doyle’s cinematic adaptations, Irish fiction orchestrates a constant back-and-forth between oral storytelling, theatrical performance, cinematic production and written narrative. Gough brings a digital twist to this ongoing experimental literary tradition by ushering us into the age of the online story: a rhizomatic, digressive structure in which hypertext links, open-ended user participation and instant messaging prevail. Gough’s digital-age storytelling thus reflects the continuing importance of orality in Irish fiction while expressing a radically new sense of space, place and temporality through online interaction.

Gough published his story separately as a self-contained entry in his blog, with a comically explicit catch: “Here you go. ‘The Orphan and the Mob’: a free, award-winning, and slightly rude story, to celebrate ‘The iHole’ making the shortlist of the BBC International Short Story Award.” He then introduces the story and asks for comments: “Any questions? Ask them in the comments below, or mail me here. In fact mail me anyhow, say hello, and I’ll tell you what I’m up to, and send you the odd free story and poem.” Gough’s mode of storytelling is that of an ongoing, if fragmentary, conversation with readers, in which open discussion, poems and stories naturally follow one another in the chronological unfolding of the blog. In the blog, the text of “The Orphan” is a single entity made up of separate, unnumbered paragraphs. The end of the story is made explicit (“END”); it is immediately followed by a picture of the whole book with an enticing caption (“Jude’s continuing adventures, on Amazon...”) and by the “post a comment” section. The overall para-textual apparatus emphasises the story’s hybrid nature, at once interactive, self-contained tale and fragment.

Orality is of course the unambiguous star of the show in the BBC broadcast and recorded versions of the story. The story remains, however, a hybrid: a written story, read by an actor. The tale partakes of the theatrical performance while retaining its basic format of written narrative fiction. The oral rendering of the story by a single but versatile actor’s voice raises another question: is the broadcast story the exact same as its printed double? The corpus I have at hand is not, unfortunately, the BBC broadcast (only available online for two weeks after its original air date), but the subsequently released album form, with the story read by Irish actor Charlie De Bromhead. This recorded version makes small but significant changes to the original text, which can mostly be justified by the needs of oral delivery from a distant source lacking the gestures and mimics of a live performance. Long, meta-fictional sentences are often shortened in the narrative section, thus highlighting direct speech dialogues. The Spoken Ink and BBC recordings vary slightly (thirty-five and thirty minutes respectively), which seems to attest to alterations of the text to fit specific oral formats. This in itself might not be relevant to our reflection on the short story genre, but for the fact that it shows how malleable Gough’s text is, how adaptable to its pragmatic context. Again, we seem to be back to the tale-telling tradition where a basic narrative thread takes on multiple shapes according to its actual context of utterance: time, place, audience and storyteller may affect the form and delivery of the story. The author of the present article was among the audience at a public reading of “The Orphan” by Julian Gough. The reading/performan ce lasted about 15 minutes and corresponded to about half of the published story: it stopped after the first climactic scene and was understood as a self-contained funny story complete with the final punch
line—the farcical snapshot of Jude urinating on an irate Brünhilde De Valera. That the story could be cut short with a different ending raises the question of genre much more pressingly than its other narrative features (satirical story, oral tale), since it brings us to the usual quandary of whether the short story is its own genre simply by virtue of being short.

This leads me to the version of “The Orphan” more readily available to the common reader of printed books: the so-called prologue to Gough’s novel, Jude, Level 1. In the book, “The Orphan” has lost its title. It corresponds to chapters 1 to 10 of the novel. The volume itself is divided into three parts: “Tipperary” (chapters 1 to 15), “Galway” (16 to 44) and “Dublin” (17 to 72). Chapters are extremely short, especially in the first part of the volume; the shortest is chapter 7, whose 10 words mark the transition from the De Valera scene to the burning down of the orphanage. An unsuspecting reader could logically deduce that the short story indeed corresponds to the bog hole episode, since it would gratify our sense of unity of time, space and action. The story carries on however, and sees Jude back at the orphanage, in pressing discussions with the “Master of Orphans,” Brother Madrigal, to learn the truth about his origins. This second part of the story greatly differs from the first since its purpose is to lay out the narrative suspense leading to a three-volume saga. When the mysterious letter addressed to Jude is all but reduced to ashes, Jude is left with only a burnt corner and three decipherable words.

Gents
anal
cruise.

The secret of my origin was not entirely clear from this fragment, and the tower was beginning to collapse around me. (21)

Jude’s realisation that he must leave signals the transition from a comic sketch to a longer narrative:

My actions had led to the destruction of the Orphanage.
I had brought bitter disgrace to my family, whoever they should turn out to be.
I realised with a jolt that I would have to leave the place of my greatest happiness.

(22)

This passage can be read at two different narrative levels. Plot-wise, it introduces the typically Irish themes of exile and identity, with a playful reversal of their usual relationship: Jude’s exile will enable his quest for identity, rather than cut him off from his roots. His final look at the orphanage launches him into his adventures. From a meta-fictional point of view, Gough points to the literary intensity of narrative fragments, because they create suspense, and because they implicitly acknowledge their allegiance to a bigger whole, be it a broader narrative or indeed a whole literary tradition: narrative fragments are strongly evocative because they resonate with other fragments. The fragmentary inner structure of “The Orphan,” with its diminutive 10 chapters, introduces us to Gough’s mode of storytelling, in the footsteps of Flann O’Brien’s narrative experimentations in his chronicles. Jude’s quest is a string of self-contained tales, brought together by the first-person hero and framed by his digressive journey through Ireland. Narrative fragments in the age of multi-media and interactive storytelling raise a final question, that of seriality and its relation to the short story.
Serial Storyteller

“The Orphan” is both a successful self-contained story and the initial part of a much longer narrative; this hybrid structure makes it akin to the opening episode of a serial narrative, and brings it closer to two other forms of fiction found in popular culture: television series and video games. An episode in a serial narrative must be autonomously consistent and function as a link in the wider narrative arc of the series. Jude’s initial escapade in “The Orphan” effectively provides a conclusion to its own original plot (the chase and destruction of Jude’s home) and enough unsolved elements to create suspense, since the story’s open-ended conclusion announces the next phase of Jude’s adventures. Jude’s letter fragment gives us the first clue in a long-lasting quest; readers expect the following episodes/chapters to follow the same logic and gradually help solve the initial mystery. The rest of the novel, however, is so digressive that it alters the original narrative altogether. By the time the reader embarks on the second volume of Jude’s adventures, the quest has become a satirical journey through the British Isles, only very loosely connected to its beginnings.

Jude starts off looking for an answer to his origins, but as he arrives in Galway (“the Sodom of the West”) he accidentally walks into a Supermac’s (local Irish equivalent to the ubiquitous American fast-food chain) and instantly falls head over heels for the foul-mouthed waitress. His initial quest becomes secondary when his “one true love” goes missing and he tracks her down to Dublin, only to lose her again. At the end of Jude: Level 1, Jude swims across the Irish sea towards London. The second instalment in the trilogy, Jude in London, was initially titled Jude: Level 2. Such titles are far from insignificant; they add another dimension to the narrative beyond the mere seriality of its fragments, openly acknowledging its resemblance with the randomly digressive, interactive structure of a video game.

Video games revolve around a basic narrative thread, and are organised serially, into levels. Jude: Level 1 is the first and easiest level of the story. If we understand the full implication of such a title, we not only expect a long-winded story arch maintained by ongoing suspense, but also a gradual complexification of the plot itself, so that the story becomes a trial for the reader as well as the main character. The first-person narration is a relevant part of the video game structure, since we are meant to identify fully with our persona in order to graduate to the next level. Pragmatically speaking, Gough’s reference to a video-game narrative contributes to his interactive game with the reader, while it partially justifies the actual increase in narrative complexity as the story progresses. As Gough explained in a 2011 interview, the story “was always structured like a computer game, with increasing levels of difficulty (...). You can read as far as you feel like, and then stop” (Smith 82).

Indeed, by the end of the first novel/level, Jude has witnessed a tsunami, the blowing-up of Charles Haughey’s private island and the graphic demise—James Bond style—of Haughey himself. In the second volume of the trilogy, the story has become so digressive and fragmentary (with most paragraphs made of a single sentence) that only the unchanging character of Jude keeps it together. Nonetheless, the narrator-hero’s recurring meta-fictional remarks and direct addresses to the reader maintain the initial pragmatic effect of “The Orphan”: that of a tongue-in-cheek, satirical tale addressed to a live audience of benevolent listeners.
In the age of interactive narratives, fan-fiction and innumerable sequels, Gough’s short story paradoxically offers us a glimpse into a sprawling, never-ending reflexive tale. Gough’s intention in writing his three-volume story was to “mirror the history of the novel”:

Level 1 is the traditional novel (...). So it’s a picaresque, with a strong, linear adventure, a quest for true love, lots of action (...). It’s Candide, it’s Gulliver’s Travels, it’s volume one of Don Quixote. Level 2 is the crisis in the novel (...). It doesn’t know how to go forward (...) it compulsively quotes from other novels, and from itself, in a demented and doomed search for an authentic moment. Level 3 is my idea of where the novel can go next. The postcrisis novel. The novel after theory. (Smith 82)

My contention here is that what makes “The Orphan” a successful short story in its own right is precisely that it explicitly presents itself as a fragment from a longer narrative as well as from a broader type of discourse, thus offering us a representation of the fictional story as a necessarily polyphonic, dialogic part of a greater whole—regardless of its length. In this respect, “The Orphan” tells us more about narrative fiction than about a distinct genre, be it the short story or the novel—although it partakes in both.

Gough pays tribute to the national traditions of oral tale-telling and Irish (post)modernist experiments with language and narrative structures, and roots his satirical narratives in contemporary Irish life. Yet his foray into the realm of internet storytelling also places him within a global trend of experimental fiction writing, whose inventiveness with narrative structure acknowledges our new, proliferating and fragmentary modes of communication. Together with other Irish contemporaries such as poet and performer David Lorgan (Patrick Kavanagh Award for Poetry 2005) and novelist and radio broadcaster Sinéad Crowley, Gough joins an international cohort of experimentalists, from David Foster Wallace in the United States to Eleanor Catton in New Zealand and Stewart Home in England. Gough’s storytelling is thus at once rooted and adrift, seeking both to capture the spirit of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, and to decipher the chaotic complexities of the global age, in a world that is—like his narrative structures—at once a microcosm and forever expanding.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

1. “The Great Squanderland Roof” was broadcast on BBC radio 4 on February 28, 2012, and was—according to its author—wildly popular, as was the more recent stage play, The Great Goat Bubble, first performed at the Galway Arts Festival in July 2012.

2. “I am, of course, intensely interested in education. I have every reason to be because I was disabled for life at the age of fifteen by a zealous master (although I had the laugh on him afterwards when I came back from hospital with my two hands amputated)” (O’Brien 243).


ABSTRACTS

“The Orphan and the Mob” a valu à Julian Gough le Prix National de la nouvelle en Grande-Bretagne, en 2007. Pourtant, ce récit n’est pas à proprement parler une nouvelle (“short story”) mais le premier chapitre d’un roman, Jude: Level 1, lui-même premier épisode d’une trilogie dont le dernier volume est encore à paraître. Le chapitre/nouvelle a été largement diffusé tant à l’écrit qu’à l’oral, sur internet et à la radio, et a posé, dès sa publication, la question de son format et de son genre. Entre nouvelle et fragment, le récit de Julian Gough est aussi une œuvre de l’écrit paradoxalement destiné à la représentation orale. Cet article s’attache à analyser la structure...
narrative et linguistique de ce récit, afin de déterminer ce qui permet de le considérer à la fois comme une nouvelle et comme l’épisode initial d’une vaste trilogie romanesque.

Julian Gough s’inscrit explicitement dans la lignée de Flann O’Brien, s’inspirant de sa verve nonsensique, de son humour et de sa fascination pour les relations complexes entre oralité et écriture dans les récits. La question de l’oralité poursuit et renouvelle, à travers la fonction centrale de l’anecdote comique, la longue tradition irlandaise du conte et de la récitation bardique. L’analyse de “The Orphan and the Mob” nous permet ainsi de définir quelques-uns des éléments qui font de la nouvelle irlandaise contemporaine un genre toujours renouvelé et un moteur crucial de l’écriture littéraire irlandaise.