
IRISH STUDIES IN SPAIN – 2006

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José Francisco Fernández

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Introduction

José Francisco Fernández, March 2007

It has not been a bad year with regard to books with an Irish content published in Spain or published elsewhere by Spanish scholars. The slow but steady count of monographs that invariably appear every year in this field is an indication that Irish studies occupy a significant space of their own in Spanish academic circles. A couple of significant factors have called my attention to this year's batch: the first is the

highly specialized nature of some of the publications. May this be a sign of maturity, of coming of age, when the time of general introductions is long past? When one reads Carolina Amador's study of bilingualism and language shift in the early novels of Patrick MacGill, or the volume devoted to single motherhood in Ireland, edited by Ramblado-Minero and Pérez-Vides, one can hardly quarrel

with this view of things. All right, then, let's enjoy the tranquil pleasures of adulthood, which also imply gracefully accepting (and entering into a fruitful dialogue with) the complexity of the topics under study, tending towards "an understanding of culture that makes space for confusion and misunderstanding as well as exactitude and objectivity" (C. Connolly, 2003. *Theorizing Ireland*. Houndmills: Palgrave, p. 2).

The second relevant element has been the pervasive influence of Irish studies in all kinds of recent publications that perhaps in the past would not have taken into consideration this area of knowledge. Take for instance the recent volume *All in All: A Plural View of Our Teaching and Learning*, ed. M. J. Lorenzo Modia (Universidade da Coruña, 2005). Among the articles in this book, devoted to connecting new trends in English language and literature with their application in the EFL classroom, there are two highly revealing chapters on the teaching of Irish literature and the teaching and learning of Irish short stories. Or consider a recent book of proceedings published as well in Coruña: *Periphery and Centre II*, ed. Rubén Jarazo (2006). Among the articles of this heterogeneous collection dealing with all aspects of English philology, one finds seven articles focusing on Irish topics (two of them on the special relationship between Galicia and Ireland). As can be appreciated, Irish studies have found a comfortable place in conferences and publications currently taking place in Spain under the general and misleading name of "English Lit."

This fact is part of a natural process and it could not have been otherwise, but will the coming years hold opportunities for consolidation? There is an excellent article by David Clark and María Vidal Rodríguez-Sabio in one of the books reviewed below (*The Scallop of Saint James*) "Joyce como material didáctico: El ejemplo de 'Clay'", which under its innocent title hides a passionate plea for the teaching of literature in a dehumanized world. The authors do not say, and perhaps it was not their intention to do so at all, but it is possible to detect a latent anxiety about the forthcoming changes in English philology in Spanish universities. In the new market-oriented, highly competitive environment, universities have to take into

account a number of external factors when designing their master's degrees. How will Irish literature fare in the new system?

Despite the uncertain future, the tone of this review is still optimistic. 2006 was indeed a good year for Irish studies in Spain. Naively, one tends to think that with such promising books as the ones discussed below, there is a strong position from which to defend the permanence and reinforcement of Irish culture in Spanish universities.

N.B. There is one thing that bothers me. No luck with Beckett this time. Only one volume in Spanish was published during the year of Beckett's centennial anniversary, *Encuentros con Samuel Beckett*, by Charles Juliet (Madrid: Siruela, 2006). It is more a personal recollection than a serious study, and hardly a significant contribution to Beckett studies. Maybe next year.

Amador Moreno, Carolina P. 2006. *An Analysis of Hiberno-English in the Early Novels of Patrick MacGill. Bilingualism and Language Shift from Irish to English in County Donegal*. Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press. ISBN: 0-7734-5808-5.

If every year in this section there is a work of remarkable erudition, the 2006 title corresponds to Carolina Amador Moreno's study. The author is a Spanish scholar who teaches Hiberno-English at the School of English and Drama at the UCD and who has chosen as corpus for her linguistic analysis the first books of Donegal writer Patrick MacGill (1891-1963), because of the special characteristics that these texts offer. MacGill was almost uneducated; before becoming famous for his harsh depiction of the life of labourers, he had been a farm-worker in his native land and seasonal labourer and navy in Scotland. His first two novels, *Children of the Dead End* (1914) and *The Rat Pit* (1915) became best-sellers in their time, despite their weakness of style and lack of narrative structure.

But the "navy writer" had an acute linguistic awareness which compensated for his lack of formal education and, according to Amador Moreno, his novels provide an accurate record of his characters' speech. This is particularly relevant for the study of Hiberno-English; first of

all, because there are hardly any data on Northern Hiberno-English before 1951; and secondly, because MacGill grew up in a bilingual area in a key period (beginning of the 20th century) in the process of language shift. His early novels, therefore, become valuable documents to study the situation of bilingualism current in Donegal at the time.

Amador Moreno does not avoid thorny issues, that is, these are works of fiction, so should the speech of the characters be taken as faithful representations of real speakers? Amador Moreno studies the problem in detail and confirms the exceptional features of MacGill's writing: "...the language that we find both in the narration and in the dialogues of these two novels, should perhaps not be taken as pure, well-planned fiction, strictly, but as a way of rendering the form of language that an uneducated person, with no literary background, no experience as a novelist as Patrick MacGill, resolved to explore" (40).

The systematic and methodical arrangement of this study sends the reader back to a previous academic dissertation of Amador Moreno; there is a disciplined sweep of all the aspects concerning the research, the command of bibliographic sources is impressive and the extensive consultation of specialized dictionaries confirms her deep knowledge on the subject. In short, this is a noteworthy study of high academic merit.

Domínguez Pena, Mla. Susana, Margarita Estévez Saá and Anne MacCarthy (eds). 2006. *The Scallop of Saint James: An Old Pilgrim's Hoard*. Weston, FL.: Netbiblo. ISBN: 0-9729892-4-2.

Another book about James Joyce? as Anthony Burgess would have said. Well, yes, but this is a good one, and with a couple of interesting surprises too. (Burgess also wrote that any book on Joyce would be far from being the last or anywhere near the last). The editors, all lecturers in the English Department at the University of Santiago de Compostela, have transformed the proceedings of the 16th Conference of the Spanish James Joyce Association, held in Santiago in April 2005, into a lively and readable two-volume sequence (see the next entry) which

proves that imagination and good taste can be at work without diminishing the quality of the edited texts.

For a start, the present collection of articles begins with a short story by Irish writer Joseph O'Connor, the well-known author of *Star of the Sea*. The idea behind this unusual disposition is to show the pervading influence of the master in contemporary writers. O'Connor's "Two Little Clouds" is a homage to Joyce's "A Little Cloud", or rather, the translation of Joyce's story into 21st century Dublin. A reading tip: go straight to the end of the book after reading O'Connor's story. The last article of the collection, written by José Manuel Estévez Saá, provides interpretative insights and useful comments on the motifs that both authors share through time.

After this introduction, the book makes its entry into the core of the matter with an article by the doyen of Joyce scholars in Spain, Francisco García Tortosa, who writes here on the Joyce industry, on the superfluous activity of much criticism and on the apparent disconnection of professional critics and readers in general. As on many other occasions he takes *Ulysses* as his key text and encourages the philological, cultural and historical study to decipher the multiple layers of reality displayed in the novel. This process, he insists, should not act to the detriment of the reader's enjoyment of the book.

Continuing with our interactive revision of *The Scallop of Saint James*, the reader is advised to jump again to an article well-advanced into the book. In "Translating repetitions in *Ulysses*" María Luisa Venegas Lagüéns exemplifies what Prof. García Tortosa stated in the previously mentioned article about the need of a conscientious approach to literary texts. Venegas Lagüéns and García Tortosa are responsible for the most recent translation of *Ulysses* into Spanish; published by Cátedra in 1999 and which is currently in its fourth edition. This article is an insider's view on the workings of the translator's process. Venegas Lagüéns explains many of the problems they faced, the compromises they reached and the decisions they took concerning a crucial aspect of Joyce's novel, the abundance of repetitions. In their Spanish translation they basically decided to keep them when there was a clear function behind their use and to suppress

them when another priority was more important. The article reveals how the translator's task is a matter of instinct, hard study, exhaustive research and ample consultation in a fruitful interchange with the source text and the target context.

Apart from these chapters, the book is full of substantial essays, not only in the first section, which deals with aspects of Joyce's work, but in the second section as well, which examines the relationship of Joyce to other artists. Carmelo Medina Casado explores how different aspects of censorship affected Joyce's work (it offers an interesting aside on the grants Joyce received from England); Jose María Tejedor Cabrera's article begins with a consideration of the role of windows in Joyce (windows as metaphors for an inner activity) and he also considers Joyce's oeuvre from the perspective of pictorial criticism. Jefferey Simons comments on *Ulysses's* interaction with orality when considering the long history of accidents in the edition of the text, as if the novel were resisting a final closure.

The stories of *Dubliners*, and "Clay" in particular, are given a special relevance in a number of articles, since they are considered from a Gothic perspective (Sixto Rey), a feminist point of view (Fernández Rodríguez), or taking into account the elements related to games in them (Cissell). María Teresa Caneda questions widely accepted notions concerning *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. For her, Stephen's process of rebellion is essentially another way of inscribing himself in the collective history of his country. Caneda's analysis shows that the protagonist of Joyce's novel ends up representing himself in the voices around him, which is an interesting point to reflect on.

As regards Joyce and other authors, the possibilities for future discussion are equally fruitful. To mention just a few, Benigno del Río finds similarities between the Hades chapter in *Ulysses* and the medieval genre of *Dance of Death*; J. M. Alonso Giráldez claims a strong influence of Joyce on Borges; Ian MacCandless and Francisco Martínez Torres study the presence of Wagnerian motifs in Joyce, and Marisol Morales Ladrón considers the

ambivalent attitude that Flann O'Brien felt towards his most admired fellow Irishman.

Domínguez Pena, Susana Mla., Margarita Estévez Saá and Anne MacCarthy (eds). 2006. *Ireland in the Coming Time. New Insights on Irish Literature*. Weston, FL.: Netbiblo. ISBN: 0-9729892-5-0.

Writing in 1992, the late professor of English literature at the University of Alicante, Brian Hughes, whose articles are gathered in a volume reviewed below, stated that the field of Irish studies "has suffered in Spain from the scattered, isolated and episodic nature of the publication of critical material". Were he alive he would be positively surprised to see how things have changed for the better and this volume testifies that 15 years later Irish studies in Spain is an area of lively debate. *Ireland in the Coming Time* collects and expands a number of papers which were presented at the 16th meeting of the Spanish James Joyce Society. The present edition belies the idea that a book of proceedings should be dull. Of course it is both a strength and a weakness to put together such a heterogeneous collection but, just like in the previous volume, the editors have succeeded in presenting their work with style.

The book opens with a short story by Juan Casas Rigall, and it is followed by an article by Antonio Raúl de Toro Santos, director of the Amergin Research Institute of Irish Studies, the academic centre which sponsors these two volumes. His paper enters the field of historical research, revealing new details on the literary links between Galicia and Ireland. Plácido Ramón Castro was an outstanding member of the generation of Galician intellectuals of the 1920s who tried to expand the cultural realms of his native land searching for congenial sensibilities in Ireland. He travelled to the Blasket Islands in 1928 and de Toro Santos's chapter is a precise account of that journey.

Manuela Palacios's article on women poets in Galicia and Ireland does not follow de Toro Santos's text, but I would like to make a comment on it here to stress the impact of Irish studies on Galician scholars. Manuela Palacios has written extensively on the literary relations

between both cultures, and here she addresses the differences and similarities between the new generation of Galician and Irish women writers who have engaged in a critique of the canon. Her article offers perceptive insights, as when she states that bilingualism may be a source of pain and grief, or when she writes on the critique of religious representations of female figures made by Irish women poets and says that their Galician counterparts have not carried out such an exhaustive revision of Catholic themes.

One of the good things of volumes of a diverse nature like this one is to find specialized articles which handle controversial issues where no easy solution can be reached. In her chapter on Edmund Spenser's role in Irish writing, Anne MacCarthy is shrewdly alert to the justifications and contradictions of editors of Irish verse for including this canonical author. It should be remembered that Spenser wrote about Irish topics but at the same time he was part of the English colonizing force in Ireland. MacCarthy dissects editions of Irish poetry of the nineteenth and early twentieth century and reveals the ideological criteria behind the selection of Spenser's poems in these early manuals. The English literary establishment is criticised for toning down Spenser's involvement in the realities of his time and place, but Irish criticism is equally questioned for borrowing a famous writer in order to add prestige to their literature.

Two of the academics who write for this volume choose as a topic of research lesser known authors: Marina Filgueira offers a contextualized explanation of Penelope Aubin's *The Life and Adventures of the Lady Lucy* (1726), a novel set in Ireland, and Begoña Lasa writes on a best-seller of the late 18th century, *The Children of the Abbey* (1796), by Regina Maria Roche.

Two scholars write on W. B. Yeats: J. Manuel Barbeito applies the Irish author's esoteric system to Clint Eastwood's film *A Million Dollar Baby* (2005) and on Yeats's own poem "Men improve with the Years" (1916), while Nazareth García Seijas reads the Nobel Prize winner's poetry taking into account a supernatural perspective. By the way, what do you say in Spanish: "yeatsiano" (García Seijas)

or "yeatseano" (Barbeito Varela)? Just curious.

Other articles cover an ample ground of Irish authors and Irish-related topics: the Irish origin of Heathcliff, classical references in Brian Friel's *Translations*, the figure of the grandmother in the work of Thomas Kinsella and Richard Murphy, Medbh McGuckian's recent poems or the "big house novel" in contemporary Irish writing. The book ends with an article on Bernard MacLaverty's fine novel *Grace Notes* by Margarita Estévez Saá.

Franco Aixelá, Javier (ed). 2005. *Thistles. A Homage to Brian Hughes. Vol. 1. Works.* Alicante: Universidad de Alicante. ISBN: 84-609-5628-X.

Scottish-born Brian Hughes (1951-2003) was professor of English literature at the University of Alicante. He was an enthusiastic teacher and a brilliant scholar with a distinguished career in the teaching of literature. His early death left his colleagues laden with grief, only partially relieved with the publication of these two volumes (see next entry) intended to be a homage to the departed friend. As José Antonio Álvarez Amorós states in the introduction to the first book, which consists of a collection of Hughes's articles, there were many areas which attracted his colleague's attention (legal English, Hispanic studies, theory and practice of translation) and he also excelled in the teaching and researching of Irish literature, being one of the harbingers of Irish studies in Spain. The present volume comprises, among other readings, his writings on Irish culture and literature, and I will focus on just those texts in these brief notes.

As early as 1984 Hughes was writing on the latent war in Northern Ireland, when the situation was at a dead end. He insisted on the necessity of a deep historical analysis to understand the causes of the conflict. Even though he divided the blame on the different parts involved, Hughes wrote then that in many cases sectarian violence hid questions of economic privilege.

In other articles on Northern Ireland, Hughes's concerns veer toward the poets: John Hewitt, John Montague, Seamus Heaney and Derek Mahon. He denied the term 'regionalists' for these artists, and described their confidence

in the exploration of their cultural identity. For Hughes, these four poets endeavour to find a common ground for a divided land and offer, in his opinion, complementary visions of community. Hughes's erudition is not only evident in his exhaustive rendering of an author's work (as he does in another article on John McGahern's fiction, for example), but also in extracting the deep substratum that reflects that author's influences. Any specialist can write on McGahern's novels, but Hughes discovers the haunting presence of Samuel Beckett, and adds the latter's most obscure works as evidence.

Brian Moore and Brian Friel are also subject to the analysis of Prof. Hughes. When considering Moore's fiction he distinguishes between the earlier novels, in which the author renders female characters with understanding and sensibility, and the works of his middle period, where Moore is not far removed from "the style and assumptions of some of the popular subgenres of contemporary popular fiction" (52). As regards Brian Friel's famous play, *Translations*, Hughes is right to assert that Friel draws many of his themes from the history of Ireland, and language is shown as an effective medium for directing the truth towards an intended target.

There is a whole section in the book devoted to Seamus Heaney, on whom Hughes wrote his Ph. D. dissertation and published a well-known bilingual anthology (1993).

The most important aspect of his approach to Heaney is his refusal to simplify the complexity of his poems. Instead, he casts light on each of the several sides of that prism which is the poet's art. Hughes's articles on Heaney become a thorough revision of the author's progress, from the sensual presence of rural life in his earlier poems to the responsible concerns of his later period: "Heaney's acceptance of his Ulster inheritance involves an honest, and crippling, sense of incapacity: inability to transcend the force of unjust law, powerlessness to transcend the trap of history and the dead weight of custom" (82). Another section focuses on a very different poet from Northern Ireland, Derek Mahon, who presents an interesting contrast to Heaney.

It has to be said that the present edition

provides accurate information on the origin of all the articles (dates of publication, sources, etc.). It is, in short, a respectful and dignified edition of Brian Hughes's writings.

Mateo, José y Francisco Yus (eds). 2005. *Thistles. A Homage to Brian Hughes. Vol. 2. Essays in Memoriam*. Alicante: Universidad de Alicante. ISBN: 84-609-5629-6.

In this academic tribute to Brian Hughes made by different specialists, mainly from Spanish universities, Irish literature had to occupy a predominant place: nine out of twenty-two chapters are one way or another related to Irish literature and culture. In this way the volume turns into an overview of Irish Studies in Spain, a state-of-the-question report, thanks to the variety of topics it covers. In many of the chapters a debt is acknowledged to the pioneering work of Brian Hughes.

In the group of essays related to Irish themes, I should mention two essays on Seamus Heaney. María Antonia Álvarez expands on the poet's life-writings, and traces the evolution of Heaney's early biographical poems, from the use of elemental poetic resources to the exploration of wider surroundings. María Martínez Lirola, for her part, applies a systemic-functional framework to one of the most precise, moving and emotional poems of Heaney, "Follower". For a complementary and differing reading of the poem perhaps it would be interesting to read the translation made by Beatriz Villacañas in a special issue of the *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* (No. 5, November 1992) edited by Hughes himself with the contributions of "a small but dedicated group of scholars". In the famous poem the speaker recalls his admiration for his father, and how their positions are now reversed. The article pays attention to the lexicon of the poem and how the author creates the context through the choice of words.

Antonio Matarredona Santonja writes on the authorial intention of Brian Friel in *Translations*, producing an exhaustive analysis of the play. Encarnación Hidalgo Tenorio sheds new light on the public response met by the writers of the Abbey Theatre. Hers is a detailed argumentation in which three of the most representative plays of

the movement, Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen*, Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, and O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*, are considered as "unsuccessful theatrical experiments" because they offended the audience of their time and deviated from the expected conventions.

María Jesús Lorenzo Modia explores the evolution of Medbh McGuckian's poetry, considers key aspects of her work, such as the writer's adherence to the Catholic faith, and comments on an unpublished poem "The Sands of St. Cyprian", which is included in the article. Poetry is also the concern of Ake Persson, who writes on the concept of the fantastic in Brendan Kennelly's work. John P. Sanderson considers the manipulation that is exerted in the process of making a film, and chooses Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins* (1996) to show the modern tendency in the film industry to use a number of narrative techniques to present their historic representations as if they were actual facts. Francisco Javier Torres Ribelles defends a better critical status for Synge's collection of articles "In Connemara" and, finally, Francisco Yus writes about cultural representations using Irish comedian Dave Allen's monologues as material for his analysis. The book confirms the usefulness of this kind of practical, direct criticism: scholars applying the tools of their trade (erudition, curiosity, close reading) to the clarification of highly sophisticated cultural products.

Ramblado-Minero, María Cinta and Auxiliadora Pérez-Vides (eds). 2006. *Single Motherhood in Twentieth-Century Ireland. Cultural, Historical, and Social Essays*. Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press. ISBN: 978-0-7734-5621-1.

The publication of this book should be understood as an act of rebellion. Women openly writing on a fact –pregnancy outside marriage– that has haunted the Irish social conscience for decades, as Breda Gray writes in the preface: "This was a century then when shame operated as a regulating emotion that served to conceal and expel certain women's bodies from public

visibility"(i). The volume aims to explore the diverse facets of single motherhood in Ireland, a phenomenon which has caused much suffering to women due to the religious and ideological constraints of Irish society. It offers an interdisciplinary perspective for one single purpose: to write a chronicle of women who deviated from the norm.

The different chapters are selected from the papers presented at the conference of the same title which was held at the University of Limerick in June 2004. As has been stated, the most outstanding feature of the book lies in the variety of approaches employed to address the issue: unmarried motherhood is considered from the point of view of representations in popular culture, taking into account its socio-historical perspectives, and analysing its representation in contemporary film and literature.

The volume opens with a plenary lecture given at the conference by Gerardine Meaney, from UCD, which helps to contextualise the phenomenon of single motherhood in Ireland in the 20th century: the maternal body, she writes, was repressed to such an extent, that it became a ghost. For Meaney the building of a masculine, white identity for the postcolonial nation excluded deviant aspects of female identity.

The 1937 Constitution is a recurrent topic in many articles of the book, as well as the social realities for single mothers: emigration, isolation, seclusion, etc. This is particularly relevant in the second section of the book, where there is plenty of useful information on the situation of lone parents in contemporary Ireland, but one cannot help being drawn towards section three, which deals with the treatment of the Magdalene Laundries in literature and film. For many viewers from outside Ireland the film by Peter Mullan *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002) was the first time we had heard of the existence of the Magdalene Asylum System, where women who failed to conform to the established ideal of purity were locked in. The article by Aida Rosende-Pérez on Peter Mullan's work provides the necessary clues and a clear analysis to understand the discourses of repression that were articulated to justify the establishment of these institutions. This is followed by an article by

Paula Murphy in which Peter Mullan's film is also discussed, together with Marita Conlon-MacKenna's novel *The Magdalen*.

Other chapters in the book consider a number of literary works where the question of single motherhood is given a prominent role: Roddy Doyle's *The Snapper* (1990), Mary Morrissy's *Mother of Pearl* (1996) or Edna O'Brien's *Down by the River* (1996), among other titles.

Yeats, W. B. 2006. *Encrucijadas. Edición bilingüe. Traducción, prólogo y notas de Ibon Zubiaur*. Madrid: Bartleby. ISBN: 84-95408-61-9.

There is no other option but to welcome the first translation into Spanish of Yeats's first book of poems, *Crossways* (1889). There is a general tendency to prefer his mature poems (condensed, enigmatic, prophetic); but as the editor and translator of this edition, Ibon Zubiaur, claims in the preface, these are not just samples of

juvenilia, but poems of exceptional beauty which point towards future themes that the poet would later address fully in his work. Zubiaur's starting point is a deep knowledge of the author's cultural background. He acknowledges, for instance, that the poet's treatment of Indian and Celtic myth in this first collection is more a question of creating an evocative atmosphere than establishing a precise setting.

Zubiaur is also aware of Yeats's struggle to force his poetry into the desired rhythmic patterns. His was not an easy, fluent process of composition, but the result was always colourful and intense. Zubiaur's bilingual edition is therefore highly recommended for the empathy he shows towards the Irish author, and for the felicity of expression, like in this favourite line from "Anashuya and Vijaya": "What know the pilots of the stars of tears?" "¿Qué saben de las lágrimas los pilotos de estrellas?"