
IRISH STUDIES ROUND THE WORLD - 2006

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Introduction

David Pierce, February 2007

2006 was a year for memories. If you punch into Google 'Beckett Festival' and '2006', you come up with over 500 entries. All round the globe, the world celebrated the centenary of the great Irish writer. The cover of the May 2006 issue of *Books Ireland* carried John Haynes's photograph of John Hurt in the Gate Theatre production of *Krapp's Last Tape*. The 2006 issue of ABEI *The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies* carries on its covers a portrait of Beckett by

Louis Le Brocquy and includes a range of stimulating essays on the Irish dramatist, seen from a Latin-American perspective. I have taken this opportunity to ensure that in this issue of *Estudios Irlandeses* there were reviews of Beckett books. Paul O'Hanrahan, who is a founder-member of Balloonatics Theatre Company and who gave performances of Beckett's early prose in 2006, kindly agreed to review a collection of essays edited by

Christopher Murray as well as a book of stunning Beckett photographs by John Minihan. The year also saw the publication *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett* edited by C.J. Ackerley and S.E. Gontarski.

Other memories on offer to the reading public witnessed a return to the period 1916-23 as well as to the recent Troubles. For the earlier period, titles included *Roger Casement in Irish and World History* edited by Mary E. Daly; *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Fein Party 1916-1923* by Michael Laffan; Sebastian Barry's historical novel *A Long Long Way*. As for the Troubles, this continues to exercise those charged with making sense of that troubling period. Titles include *The Bloody Sunday Inquiry: The Families Speak Out* edited by Eamonn McCann; *Sinn Fein: 1905-2005 – In the Shadow of Gunmen* by Kevin Rafter; *The Men That God Made Mad*, a book by Derek Lundy telling the lives of three of his Protestant ancestors; *Hunger Strike: Reflections on the 1981 Hunger Strike*, edited by Danny Morrison, is a collection of pieces by novelists and poets, former prisoners and activists reflecting on the deaths of the ten republican hunger strikers.

Complete with photographs, *Vanishing Ireland* by James Fennell and *Turtle Bunbury* is a book of memories and contains a series of interviews on traditions and a way of life in danger of vanishing from the landscape. *Magnum Ireland*, edited by Brigitte Lardinois and Val Williams, provides a survey of Ireland from the 1950s to the present through the lens of

Magnum photographers. *The Sailor in the Wardrobe* by Hugo Hamilton, the son of a German mother and Irish father, follows on from his earlier fine memoir *The Speckled People*. *Final Witness: My Journey from the Holocaust to Ireland* by Zoltan Zinn-Collis recounts the passage from Bergen-Belsen to Ireland where he was adopted by Dr Robert Collis, who raised him as his own son. And *The Best Cartoons of Tom Matthews* collects together cartoons of a lifetime.

The year also saw new books of verse by Medbh McGuckian, Thomas Kinsella, David Wheatley, Robert Greacen, Paul Muldoon, Derek Mahon, Mary O'Malley, Mary O'Donnell, and Seamus Heaney (reviewed below), and new collected and selected editions of verse by Gabriel Rosenstock, Michael Longley and Greg Delanty, as well as Frank Ormsby's *The Blackbird's Nest*, a useful anthology of verse by poets from Queen's University Belfast. Also of note this year was Conor McPherson's new play *The Seafarer*, Marina Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow*, Edna O'Brien's *The Light of Evening*; Tim Robinson's *Connemara: Listening to the Wind*, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, the film script by Paul Laverty, and *The New Hennessy Book of Irish Fiction* edited by Dermot Bolger and Ciarán Carty.

As ever, I am very grateful to the reviewers of the titles which follow. All of them are of interest and they underline the commitment of scholars to the growing field of Irish Studies round the world.

Re-mapping Exile: Realities and Metaphors in Irish Literature and History.

Michael Böss, Irene Gilsen Nordin and Britta Olinder (eds).

Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus UP, 2005, 256 pp.

Reviewer M. Teresa Caneda Cabrera

For a long time now, the theme of exile has loomed over the Irish literary imagination. The mythic self-imposed expatriation of writers like James Joyce, whose Stephen Dedalus defends in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* that estrangement from Ireland, together with silence and cunning, is a mandate for the artist appropriately speaks for the “exilic condition” of Irish (artistic) experience. The idea that exile has played a fundamental role in the construction of Irishness lies at the heart of this collection of eleven essays by a group of scholars from universities of Denmark and Sweden who, the editors explain, offer a reading of Irish literature, history and culture with the aim of reflecting on some of the historical, sociological, psychological and philosophical dimensions of exile in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Following closely the work of Kerby Miller (*Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, 1985) and Patrick Ward (*Exile, Emigration and Irish Writing*, 2002) among others, the contributors explore the intricacies of Irish narratives of exile through a variety of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches, ultimately suggesting the heterogeneity of a concept which cannot be accounted for through narrow and rigid definitions.

Michael Böss’s essay “Theorising Exile”, the first and longest in the collection, appropriately provides a theoretical framework for the rest of the contributions. Böss is keen to distinguish a number of categories in analysing exile, including the political, religious, social, economic, and inner. The critic is primarily concerned with the way in which some of the already existing perspectives on exile may become relevant for the present discussion. Thus, he revises the works of a diverse group of authors including Edward Said, Miller, Ward, as well as other specialists in the field such as the American Hispanist Paul Ilie and Andrew Gurr,

the author of “the first systematic investigation of the theme of exile in modern literature” (29). Among the questions Böss addresses are the connections between emigration, exile and nationalism. In reference to the latter he observes that as a consequence of the institutionalization of a Catholic-Gaelic notion of Irishness, after the establishment of the Free State, a new form of exilic experience found its expression in the work of disenchanted and alienated writers eager to represent “the visions and identities of those who felt excluded—or socially and culturally ‘exiled’ from the nationalist project” (29). The section on “Exilic Writing” relies perhaps too heavily on Ilie’s seminal book *Literature and Inner Exile: Authoritarian Spain, 1939-1975* which, as the title eloquently indicates, is mainly a study of Spanish exilic writing during Franco’s dictatorship. Böss underlines the existence of significant links between Ilie’s thesis and the observations of Irish scholars, specifically in reference to the discourse of exile and the “subversion of hegemonic discourses of identity” (33). Of particular interest is Böss’s survey, towards the end of the chapter, of the new meanings of exile which have emerged in the context of a late-twentieth century characterized by the embrace of the local and the global, as discussed by Richard Kearney and others. the author of “the first systematic investigation of the theme of exile in modern literature” (29). Among the questions Böss addresses are the connections between emigration, exile and nationalism. In reference to the latter he observes that as a consequence of the institutionalization of a Catholic-Gaelic notion of Irishness, after the establishment of the Free State, a new form of exilic experience found its expression in the work of disenchanted and alienated writers eager to represent “the visions and identities of those who felt excluded—or socially and culturally ‘exiled’ from the nationalist project” (29). The section on “Exilic Writing” relies perhaps too

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Böss is also the author of another essay in the collection which explores the challenges faced by Irish Catholics immigrants to Canada. Through an exhaustive examination of the biography and political trajectory of the revolutionary Thomas D'Arcy McGee (1825-1868) and of the writer Mary Anne Sadlier (1820-1903), who wrote a narrative of the life of McGee, Böss sets out to demonstrate how the two Irish figures illustrate the typical process of negotiation that takes place when, as a result of migration, a particular ethnic community must forge a new social order. Although the author surveys a great deal of territory, including discussions of McGee's numerous contributions to several journals, and although he places a great deal of emphasis on explaining that both McGee and Sadlier were "ethnic leaders" who contributed to the acculturation of Irish Catholics in Canada, his conclusion remains somehow weakened by his ambivalent treatment of 'ethnicity', both seen as a stigma or "a thing of the past" (86) and yet presented as essential in a process of acculturation developed "through ethnic leadership" (86).

Billy Gray's essay focuses on examining the work of the Anglo-Irish essayist Hubert Butler (1900-1991) who, the author claims, was for many years "read through a veil of resentment" due to his position "as a member of the Irish landed gentry, and an agnostic, liberal protestant in an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic nation" (47). Thus, Gray proposes to re-examine Butler through the exile theories of Joseph Wittlin and Jan Vladeslav (whose name is absent from the

contemporary Irish feminist thought or feminist scholarship in general. Yet, as the sketchy analysis of Eavan Boland's poetry reveals, much can be gained from feminist approaches which discuss women poets as subjects-in-exile in the context of a debate on gender and exile in Ireland.

One of the most sophisticated and intriguing essays in the collection is the contribution by Irene Gilsenan Nordin, who focuses on an examination of the exilic subject in the poems of *The Second Voyage* by the woman poet Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin. Gilsenan Nordin argues that the central theme here is an experience of "existential exile and estrangement which is often associated with transformational moments of perception" (192). Throughout her consistent analysis of Ní Chuilleanáin's poetics (mainly the juxtaposition of images of fixity and flux), Nordin convincingly demonstrates that the in-betweenness of the speaking (exilic) subject affords a "place where the infinite possibilities of language exist as a liberating and empowering force" (192). Ida Klitgard's essay "(Dis)location and its (Dis)contents: Translation as Exile in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Finnegans Wake*" focuses on exile as an experience of linguistic displacement. However, Klitgard's main analogy — "when translating a work of literature [. . .] that literary work is sent to exile" (110) — remains unclear throughout the discussion mainly because the invocations of deconstructionist thought, as when she quotes J. Hillis Miller's notion that "translation is the wandering existence of a text in perpetual exile" (111), seem to be de-contextualized, or at least out of tune with the general style of the rest of the essay. Despite it being a slightly uncooked piece of work which draws on too many names and disparate ideas, the essay touches on some of the most fascinating aspects of Joyce's work. I specifically regret that some of her intriguing statements about Joyce's linguistic and cultural hybridity had been insufficiently explained and developed as they would deserve.

The realm of contemporary fiction is represented in the volume by Hedda Friberg's essay on John Banville's *Shroud* and Åke Persson's discussion of internal exile in Roddy

Doyle's *The Barytown Trilogy*. According to Friberg, Banville's postmodern novel exemplifies exile in the domain of simulacrum. Thus, drawing mainly from Baudrillard's early *Simulacra and Simulation*, she argues that the deceptive shape-changing quality of the protagonist Axel Vander shows the traits of a variety of inner exile typical of espionage fiction which speaks also for the decentred subject of postmodernism. Picking up on the notion of inner exile, Persson, for his part, discusses Doyle's novels as representative of "the systematic socioeconomic exclusion" (198) of the urban working classes in the context of a mythical Irish identity which is characterized as Gaelic, Catholic and rural. Interestingly, the critic demonstrates that, far from being simply comic texts "outside of Irish public history", the novels contest hegemonic versions of Irishness (much in the style of the political uses of humour by other contemporary Irish writers). The volume includes also an excellent discussion of the representation of diaspora identity in three 1980s albums by the songwriter Van Morrison.

Through such a wide-ranging and lucid analysis, the author, Bent Sørensen, provides an engaging examination of Morrison's notions of Celtic brotherhood, "a hybrid between American New Age philosophies and Irish identity positions" (159), as he gradually and effectively reveals the intricacies underlying Morrison's own diasporic position.

Re-mapping Exile: Realities and Metaphors in Irish Literature and History is an interesting work which succeeds in offering an enlightening exploration of the issue of exile within a variety of academic fields and from plural perspectives. This collection maps out the extremely complex and controversial uses of the concept, ultimately revealing that what is at stake in the debate over exile in Ireland is the idea of a conflicting relationship with the Irish homeland. In this respect, the volume makes a valuable attempt to incorporate alternative notions of exile within the contemporary critical debate on the topic, thus making an important contribution to the current state of Irish Studies.

Seamus Heaney

District and Circle

76pp., Faber and Faber. London, 2006.

£8.99 0 571 23097 0

Reviewer: Sabina Müller

Heaney's original district is the rural County Derry of his childhood. At its centre lies the Mossbawn pump, the *omphalos*, as described in *Preoccupations* (1980). In *District and Circle* the poet still draws on childhood memories but he also intertwines these with concerns of a post-9/11 society. In that sense his 'district' has become increasingly global in reach.

The opening poem of this volume, "The Turnip-Snedder," returns to farmwork, "an age of bare hands / and cast iron," the "double-flywheeled water-pump" and more than familiar Heaney-speak: "it dug its heels in among wooden tubs / and troughs of slops." But when "the handle turned / and turnip-heads were let fall and fed // to the juiced-up inner blades," a grimmer note is struck, and, with the "raw sliced mess" that is dropped "bucketful by glistening bucketful", the atmosphere for the entire volume is set.

"Anahorish 1944" harks back to "Anahorish" in *Wintering Out*. In that first poem there is an almost magical understanding of names: Anahorish (*anach fhior uisce*) is the 'place of clear water'; the nature of the place – Eden-like – revealed in the name. In the new poem the water is soiled and we realize how much the younger poet selected to convey a certain impression – an impression an older Heaney can bear to qualify, for now the place is violated from within and without: "We were killing pigs when the Americans arrived," and there is "gutter-blood / Outside the slaughterhouse" as two lines of soldiers advance, "guns on their shoulders," "[h]osting for Normandy."

With *Sweeney Astray*, *Beowulf* and other texts Heaney has also made a name for himself as a translator. In *District and Circle* he includes pieces from different places and times. "Poet to Blacksmith" is a translation of an Irish poem in

which Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin asks Séamus MacGearailt to make him a spade "to take on the earth, / A suitable tool for digging" and "best thing of all, the ring of it, sweet as a bell." Here Heaney comes full circle, taking up again his early signature poem "Digging."

"*After the Fire*," a translation of Rilke's "Die Brandstätte," makes clear what impact any kind of disaster, ancient or modern, has on human beings. It tells of the gruesome work of the "son of the place" who drags "an out-of-shape old can or kettle / From under hot, half burnt-away house-beams." It also tells of the gulf such an experience opens between those who have suffered loss and those who have not. Thus the son has not only lost home and family but has to understand that he is now a "foreigner" among his neighbours. "*After the Fire*" offers a view at close range where the individual's fate is rendered palpable. "Anything Can Happen," by contrast, is more distanced. It is an adaptation of Horace (*Odes*, 1, 34). Here the allusion is to 9/11: "Anything can happen, the tallest towers // Be overturned, those in high places daunted, / Those overlooked regarded." But while we certainly agree with the general message, we would probably not want to link the event to Jupiter's wrath.

With the title poem we enter the London Underground and share a passenger's uneasy feelings after the bombings of July 2005. The poem ends with the train finally departing and gathering speed. In the closing adjective Heaney shows his mastery, for here he catches the essential in a single compound:

And so by night and day to be transported
Through galleried earth with them, the only relict
Of all that I belonged to, hurtled forward,
Reflecting in a window mirror-backed
By blasted weeping rock-walls.

Flicker-lit.

The poem is also a descent to the underworld featuring many of the typical elements known from classical and medieval literature. They have formed part of Heaney's repertoire since "Station Island," "The Golden Bough" or "The Crossing" and seem, like the sonnet form (used more than ten times in this volume) perhaps somewhat exhausted.

Similarly exhausted is the Tollund Man, who reappears in the sequence "The Tollund Man in Springtime." This is the fourth time that the bog man is invoked and I agree with William Wootten that "Heaney risks one return too many." Nonetheless, the title poem and "The Tollund Man in Springtime" beautifully complement each other, the first describing a descent, the second a kind of resurrection.

With the death of Heaney's parents the thought of personal loss has assumed greater importance in his work, and especially in *The Haw Lantern* and *Seeing Things* Heaney worked on the theme. With advancing age the circle widens to include the death of fellow poets as well as thoughts of one's own mortality. Not all texts succeed. "Stern," written in memory of Ted Hughes, is not convincing. Yet "Out of this World" is a fine piece commemorating Czeslaw Milosz. Heaney's own favourite and probably many readers' is "The Blackbird of Glanmore." Here the poet is greeted by a blackbird sitting on the grass when he arrives at Glanmore. Pausing, lines he "once translated / Come back: 'I want away / To the house of death, to my father / Under the low clay roof.'" This thought leads on to his brother Christopher, who died as a child in a

road accident. Heaney again doubles back and now provides an impressive companion to the early "Mid-Term Break," where he saw his brother in a "four foot box as in his cot" – "a foot for every year." But only later a neighbour pointed out that he noticed a blackbird in the time before the death – a folk omen. In "The Blackbird of Glanmore", Heaney takes stock when he sees himself as a "shadow on raked gravel // In front of my house of life." There is a valedictory note since the poem closes with the blackbird on "the grass when I arrive, // In the ivy when I leave."

District and Circle is a carefully designed volume. The existence of disruptive forces is not denied but, as always with Heaney, things fall into place – sometimes too neatly. There are no loose ends, everything is connected. The title itself is well-chosen and packed with meaning. It can, for instance, be linked to the end of "Station Island," where Joyce advised the poet: "When they make the circle wide, it's time to swim // out on your own." Heaney has swum out, yet one wishes that he could not only have liberated himself from others but also from familiar forms and themes on which he relies perhaps too much in *District and Circle*. Nevertheless, the present volume is a much more satisfactory achievement than *Electric Light*, and looks with admirable courage and serenity at the tasks that are now at hand.

The Thriller and Northern Ireland since 1969

by Aaron Kelly

European Cultural Transition, Ashgate, 2005, 213 pp.

Reviewer: Laura Pelaschiar

In the last 35 years, the Northern Irish Troubles have spawned over four hundred thrillers and a gathering list of critical studies. These studies have undergone phases of detraction and of appreciation (but mostly detraction). Aaron Kelly's book adds to this list with a contribution that represents a moment of triumphant critical recuperation –or rather “redemptive transcription” to use his words– of the genre.

Although many theoretical muses are invoked, the main framework of reference is the Fredric Jameson aesthetic of cognitive mapping, which allows Kelly to hypothesize the existence of a dialectic between *repressive* and *redemptive* modalities (its ideological and utopian dimensions). The thriller, far from being mere propaganda at mass culture level or escapist entertainment, becomes a location of political promise and social orientation by virtue of its dual modality. In its capacity to expose the contradictions and conflicts of the various levels of society and to supply a cartography (understanding) of the social totality, it uncovers the Great Crime behind all crimes: the “vast inscrutable logic of the global conspiracy of global capitalism itself.”

Kelly performs his redemptive transcription in six chapters, two of which –the Introduction and the conclusion entitled “Towards a Political Aesthetics”– are essentially theoretical. The middle four deal with specific concerns of the form under examination. The book also offers full translations in English of two short essays by Brecht and Benjamin on crime fiction which have never been previously translated.

The first chapter is devoted to the figuring of Northern Ireland in the British Troubles Thrillers (i.e. those written by non-Irish authors) as a “representational void” which can contain a very

comfortable and legible nightmare (the Troubles) in place of a bigger nightmare which cannot be consciously contemplated (English history and its social fracture). Problematics of home are focussed upon in the second chapter with a partial employment of Joep Leerssen's auto-exoticism, which helps detect the “allochronic” tendency to depict Northern Ireland as a site of a de-historicized, essentialistic and immemorial trauma (the sectarian conflict), immune to and bypassed by History. This chapter also elucidates the way in which the form exposes the crisis in the filiative (Said's term) ideologies of Irish Nationalism and Unionism, in other words their parallel promotion of the country and its traditional form of life as the only site for family, religion, kin and happiness.

Chapter three tackles a classic theme in Northern Irish criticism: the depiction of Belfast and urban space. In line with earlier interpretations, Kelly exposes the dehistoricising “infernalization” or Gothicization of Belfast. This is something readers of Northern Irish literature are all too familiar with, for it is perhaps the most obvious example of a repressive modality in the genre. The redemptive modality can be detected once it becomes clear that the city, thanks to its heterogeneity and multiple codes, becomes a “repository of transgressive narratives and histories” which stand in opposition to the nation. Thus the filiative ideologies of Nationalism and Unionism and their organic figurations of Belfast as a puzzle of tribal units (Belfast's sectarian ghettos) are thrown into disarray. The post-Marxist approach allows the author to add that, since the dominant symbol of darkness and bleakness is the shipyard, Belfast's gothicization also betrays the terror of

the form's political unconscious: fear of the working class. Interestingly, Kelly rejects the many recent redemptive figurations/readings of Belfast as postmodern location of multiple possibilities. For Kelly, Belfast is a post-modern city which perpetuates the commodification and technologization of capitalism, whereby the urban contributes to the mortification and exclusion of the working class, forced to live in sectarian ghettos and excluded by the gentrification of the postmodern and pluralistic city centre.

Constructions of gender are analysed in chapter 4, where the main point is a critique of the conventionally held view of the thriller as a teleological and masculine re-affirmation of order. In the Troubles Thriller the assumption of the existence of a "homogeneous male gaze" is dismantled because "scopic violence" (male gaze) is not exclusively directed onto the feminine, but also on other forms of masculinity (here a greater number of textual examples would have made the argument easier to subscribe to). It is therefore possible to find a 'stratification of masculinities' challenging the absolutism of feminist criticism which considers the thriller an expression of misogyny and conservatism. Even the macho figures which abound in the texts attest to the failure of masculinity operated by late capitalism, when the feminization of labour and the market (women working outside the house) and the consequent recodification of the family (men do change nappies nowadays) have dissolved traditional concepts of manhood. Two traditional arenas of male power and authority –workplace and family – are dissolved in late capitalist society. Kelly also focuses on the presence of the *femme fatale* (Lacan's *sinthome* is employed here) and on the recurrent association of homosexuality with state corruption (of which perhaps more textual examples would have been welcome) to conclude with the possibilities that the Troubles thriller written by women can offer for the articulation of a new and challenging system of gender representation; this interesting aspect is left under-explored because, in spite of the author's goodwill, Troubles Thrillers written by

women are few and –from what one can gather– not terribly inspiring.

The final chapter leads us through a sort of trance-like trip of theoretical *jouissance* which begins with Nietzsche and continues with Jameson, Berman, Foucault, Ahmad, Deleuze and Guatarri, Barthes, McCracken, Lacan, Žižek, Thompson, Althusser, Steve Neale, Lodge, Barthes, Peter Brooks, Jayne Steel, Daniel Gunn, Benjamin. The trip ends anticlimactically with a formal reflection (via Barthes and Mandel) on boredom, since, Kelly explains "for all the thrills and pleasure and the aesthetics I have attempted to elaborate, it is amazing how fundamentally boring many of these texts actually are". Such a statement, after 156 pages of sweated concentration, might discourage the reader, who nevertheless should not desist: not so much because, as we are told, boredom is actually "the formal site of utopian longing and impatience with the Big Other's fantasy of 'law and order' and an anticipation of historical awakening" but because in the final pages Kelly makes interesting polemical statements about the state-controlled aspects of the Peace Process.

Kelly's study first saw light as Ph.D. dissertation and to an extent the book here reviewed suffers from this dissertational origin: Kelly's skill at negotiating his way through complicated theoretical frameworks is extremely impressive but the abundance of pages dedicated to the background information and pure theory (a dissertational prerequisite) at times forces the object of its analysis to play second fiddle, and this is a pity. A hostile syntax at times distracts from the stimulating argument of Kelly's discourse, while the author's fascination for unusual Latinate words (actuation, attenuation, tessellation, exudation, constellation, suturation, sequestration, summation, imbrication, rumination, evisceration are but a few that come to mind) makes even an Italian or French mother-tongue reader yearn for some healthy Anglification. Nevertheless *The Thriller and Northern Ireland since 1969* undoubtedly offers a rich and stimulating post-Marxist original reading of a by now well-explored literary form.

Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry: 'The Work has Value'

Ed. by Donald E. Morse, Csilla Bertha, and Mária Kurdi.

Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006, pp 342.

Reviewer: Lionel Pilkington

From Skibbereen to Seattle or Surrey to Saskatoon you are almost certain to encounter, somewhere, the writings of Brian Friel. Whether as a forthcoming play in production, part of a university or secondary school English Literature syllabus, or in the drama section of the local bookshop, for the contemporary English-speaking world the work of Brian Friel exercises a formidable cultural appeal. Friel's attraction lies in the persuasive accessibility of his narratives: in particular, the neo-naturalistic theatricality with which Friel's writing deals with a widely shared transnational experience, the impact of capitalist modernity on a traditional society. Moreover, the sheer extent and prodigiousness of Friel's writing –since the late 1950s 2 short story collections, 24 original plays and 7 adaptations– means that his work comprises a cultural history of contemporary Ireland. It chronicles, that is, some of the effects of Ireland's transition from a political system based on ideas of economic independence and national unity in the early 1950s to what is now its much-trumpeted orthodoxy: a consumer and profit-oriented export economy based on low personal tax, lower corporate tax, down-graded public services, and massive multinational inward capital investment. From the beginning, Friel's work tends to concede –albeit elegiacally and occasionally scathingly– the absolute inevitability of this transition. Ireland's surrender to late capitalist modernity is registered regrettable ('We are no longer even West Britons', Friel wrote in 1972, 'we are East Americans'), but also as a philosophical and emotional necessity. The young male protagonist in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964) feels compelled to emigrate from County Donegal not so much for economic reasons but in order to reconcile his public and private self; at the end of *Translations* (1980) the audience is left in no

doubt as to the necessity of adopting English as Ireland's vernacular because this is part of the inexorable process of modernization from which the only escape is retaliatory violence and republican irredentism. Again in *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) we are left with the sad incommensurability of modernity and the traditional, broken world of the Mundy sisters. Characters' efforts at resistance either are ostentatiously ineffectual or exacerbate their subjection. To no small extent, therefore, an understanding of Friel's literary achievement is a project very closely bound up with how we in Ireland understand ourselves.

Extracted from the *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry* is a collection of 14 critical essays that deal with the full corpus of Friel's drama, from early plays like *The Gentle Island* and *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* to later and more recent works such as *Wonderful Tennessee* and *Performances*. The collection also contains an interview with Richard Pine, author of an early monograph on Friel and a champion of a religio-philosophical approach to Friel's work. Subtitled somewhat defensively 'The Work has Value', the coherence and consistency of *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry* lies in its reiterated emphasis on the ontological depth of Friel's writing and the need for close textual analysis. With very few exceptions (notably Michael Parker's essay on politics and sexuality in *The Gentle Island*), this is a collection that is hostile to political and historical readings of Friel's plays.

Notwithstanding this substantial constraint, *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry* is a remarkable achievement. It brings together a range of well-written essays and is rigorous throughout in its detailed and unanimously appreciative studies of Friel's *oeuvre*. Thus Csilla Bertha and Donald

Morse's useful study of artist figures in *Crystal and Fox* and *Wonderful Tennessee* relates Friel's conception of the artist as diviner to the traditional Irish figure of the storyteller or *seanchaí*. Similarly illuminating is Giovanna Tallone's close textual study of *Faith Healer* and *Crystal and Fox*. Tallone notes the way in which both plays reflect Friel's ambivalence to his craft: his view of theatre as adumbrating a potentially powerful utopia that is presented at the same time as on a par to the illusions of charlatans and mountebanks. The fit ups or travelling shows alluded to in *Crystal and Fox* and *Faith Healer*, Tallone avers, are both 'remnants of a lost tradition' of mumming and 'the symptoms of a deeper disquietude.' What they reveal is Friel's preoccupying interest in the idea of the artist as liar and the idea of the artist as a transforming magician. For Ger FitzGibbon, in an outstandingly nuanced reading of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, *Translations* and *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel's ambivalent view of theatrical representation is both a thematic and structural feature arising from Friel's belief in the 'hermetic seal of individual existence' and in the individual's even more compelling desire to deny or escape this existential isolation. Certainly, as FitzGibbon argues, Friel's plays suggest that language distorts privacy and theatrical performance is a masquerade, but these plays also suggest that alternative and more effective modes of communication lie in the wordless possibilities of music, dance and ritual. Complimentary to FitzGibbon's essay is Richard Allen Cave's examination of the moving body in *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *Wonderful Tennessee* as a study of the nature and function of ritual in contemporary life. Like Richard Pine, Cave views Friel's involvement with Field Day in the 1980s as a regrettable restriction, temporarily limiting Friel's ability to explore the 'private metaphysical quest of individuals'.

Close attention to language and to the numinous aspect of dance, music and stage movement in Friel's plays is a consistent and praiseworthy emphasis in this collection. Thus Christopher Murray's thoughtful reading of *Translations* argues that Friel's play may be considered as a palimpsest of an older nationalist and Irish language tradition. Not only do the stage conventions of *Translations* evoke an impression of two languages as one, but the play's thematic concern with translation as adaptation serve to dramatize the process of palimpsest itself. That the rubbing out and writing over of another language is a crucial feature of *Translations* is reiterated in Márton Mesteházi's short essay on the difficulties of translating this play into Hungarian. Instead of drawing attention to the radical semantic differences between two languages (a project to which Friel is opposed in *Translations*), Mesteházi rendered the play's Hiberno-English expressions – 'Be Jasus', 'footering about', etc – in terms of rural Hungarian idiom: easy to understand but with a definite flavour of the still-to-be-modernized countryside.

There is an advantage, therefore, to the somewhat stern anti-political approach that is adopted either implicitly or explicitly by the vast majority of essayists in this volume. It facilitates a consistently detailed attention to the complex texture of Friel's plays, to the intertextuality of the plays as a whole and to their relationship to broader theatrical and cultural traditions. Donald Morse, Csilla Bertha and Mária Kurdi are to be congratulated for producing an extremely well-edited collection of searching and appreciative essays. *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry* will make a substantial contribution to Friel criticism and to Irish theatre studies.

Samuel Beckett-100 Years,

edited by Christopher Murray

Dublin: New Island, 2006, 172 pp.

Paperback ISBN 1905494084 €14.95

Hardback ISBN 1905494297 €39.95

Reviewer: Paul O'Hanrahan

Samuel Beckett-100 Years is the published version of a series of radio talks, known as the Thomas Davis lectures, which were broadcast earlier this year on RTE Radio in Ireland in honour of the Beckett Centenary. Produced by New Island, the book is, perhaps surprisingly, one of the few Beckett publications to be published on the occasion of the writer's centenary by an Irish company. Edited by Christopher Murray, as a compendium of papers by different commentators its format is not unlike that of the 1929 work of Joycean exegesis, *Our Exagmination*, to which the young Beckett himself notably contributed a memorable and useful essay in explication of Joyce's method in *Finnegans Wake*.

A comprehensive refutation of the stereotype of Beckett as a minimalist writer, this collection shows how ample and diverse is the world he created. It also demonstrates how well Beckett's writing stands up to different forms of analysis ranging from the historical, social and philosophical through to the literary, theatrical and poetic. Murray has assembled a strong, largely Irish-based team, for the task, with the contributors including academics from the fields of literature, drama and philosophy, actors, a biographer and a novelist. Well-known names include John Banville, Terence Brown, Anthony Cronin, Declan Kiberd, and Barry McGovern. Apart from an understandable reliance on Beckett's *Three Dialogues*, which contains the writer's irresistible comments about "having nothing to express and nothing with which to express...together with an obligation to express", there is remarkably little repetition and, in general, the lectures dovetail together well to form a substantial survey of Beckett's achievements, one hundred years on. To give just one example, Brown's emphasis on the

Dublin locations in Beckett is immediately followed by Gerry Dukes' tracing of the influence of the French Vaucluse region on the terrain of *Waiting for Godot*.

The book's aim of looking at Beckett anew, on "firm Hibernian ground" as the editor calls it, liberates it from a dependence on academic trends and is only occasionally let down when a tendency to avoid reference to other criticism results in the airing of well-worn critical commonplaces. Murray himself explores the combination of tragedy and comedy in Beckett's work using the recently published play, *Eleutheria*, to good effect. Terence Brown provides a strong piece of social and historical analysis, usefully locating Beckett in a comfortable Protestant upper-middle-class elite that was thoroughly shaken by the political upheavals in Ireland between 1916 and 1922, before identifying this as a primary source of the sense of displacement and placelessness which haunts his work. Declan Kiberd concentrates on the 1938 novel, *Murphy*, which he rightly describes as underrated, and illustrates how Beckett presents the awkwardness of human relationships, particularly between the would-be lovers, Celia and Murphy. However, I depart from Kiberd's view that the book is an attempt "to document the plight" of the Irish in England. There are insights into the emigrant's woes certainly, but Beckett is an incidental sociologist and doesn't react as quickly as some of his critics to depict a national culprit: he has bigger psychological fish to fry.

Dermot Moran and Richard Kearney examine the philosophical ramifications of Beckett's work, Kearney discovering an intriguing parallel between contemporary notions of "virtual reality" and Beckett's depiction of a world between the imaginary and the real. The theatre

of Beckett is covered from a number of different angles with contributions from Anthony Roche, Katherine Worth and Rosemary Pountney. Pountney provides useful practical advice for anyone interested in staging Beckett by drawing on her own experience of performing *Rockaby* and other plays. Similarly, as one of the foremost theatrical interpreters of Beckett, Barry McGovern writes with authority about the singular suitability of radio for his work, allowing as it does for storytelling by voices in the dark rather than through the presence of embodied actors. He goes on to trace similarities between these radio voices and the breathy "panting" monologues which give such anonymous energy to works such as *The Unnamable* and *Not I*. Possibly the most satisfying essay in the book comes from J.C.C. Mays, whose cogent text-based readings reveal a consistently poetic sensibility throughout the writer's work.

John Banville mixes anecdotes with an analysis of the literary quality of the late prose. I was surprised by his comment that he found something "almost of Enid Blyton" in the childhood memories in *Company*, as to me these sensitive recollections are carefully framed and controlled. However, what did strike me about Banville's essay was his citation from the middle-period prose piece, *From an Abandoned Work*, of an astonishing "tender passage" about the body decomposing into the earth. If Banville finds elements of the traditional novel in Beckett's late work and praises his "interesting plots", Anthony Cronin, by way of contrast, interprets the seminal novels of Beckett's *Trilogy* as resisting the lyrical and uplifting qualities of literature and identifies "savage and exaggerated realism" as their defining stylistic feature. He also offers a definition of "Beckett man" as an anti-social, alienated loner, aware of inferiority, reacting in fear and possessing only the rags of moral and civic responsibility.

This collection has much to recommend it to both the academic and the general reader. Each essay affords insight into the works of Beckett and the points of contention which arise as an inevitable by-product of the book's diversity of approach encourage the reader to articulate his or her own point of view. Throughout, the book's

avoidance of academic jargon and a palpable and laudable desire to communicate. Although appeal for the non-specialist is enhanced by the the visual dimension of Beckett's work is not covered on this occasion, nonetheless in mapping a considerable area of the author's terrain, *Samuel Beckett-100 Years* provides routes –and roots– for making further excursions into the depths of Beckett's imagination all the more rewarding.

Samuel Beckett: Centenary Shadows

by John Minihan

London: Robert Hale, 2006, 124 pp.

Paperback ISBN-10: 0-7090-7913-3 £17.99

Hardback ISBN-13: 978-0-7090-7913-2

€24.99

Reviewer: Paul O'Hanrahan

That Beckett was well served by the photographers he cultivated is clear not only from the excellent exhibition of the work of John Haynes organized earlier this year by Reading University and recorded in the book, *Images of Beckett*, but also in this more eclectic volume which celebrates the work of Irish photographer, John Minihan.

This compilation of Beckett-related black-and-white and colour photographs by Minihan is framed by a number of short written pieces, either reminiscences or biographical information about the writer. Following an interesting introduction by the author in which he explains how he developed a relationship as a photographer with a reticent Beckett, a written piece by John Oliver Wallace encapsulates Beckett's early life. This is accompanied by a short series of photos of "Beckett's Dublin", which serves more as a sample than as a treatment of the theme. It is followed by a memoir by actress Billie Whitelaw of working with Beckett on plays such as the premiere of *Not I*, which is intriguing on account of the intimacy of her theatrical relationship with the writer and the latter's unorthodox directorial approach as shown in comments on such matters as the importance of "not acting".

Some of the famous Beckett photos are here such as the one of him viewed from behind, satchel on back, walking up the street in Hammersmith after a rehearsal at the Riverside Theatre in 1984. There is a particularly strong sequence of pictures of Beckett in performance which ranges from student productions in Cork to readings by Dame Peggy Ashcroft and Harold Pinter. Here the diversity of photos of *Godot* tells its own story about how this play responds to a variety of approaches and features actors such as the late Donal McCann, not normally seen in a Beckett context. If ever the shibboleth of "gloomy Beckett" needs to be dispelled, the terrific photo of Felicity Kendall as a flirtatious Winnie in *Happy Days* does it at a stroke.

An intriguing section on "Beckett in Paris" follows, with photos of Beckett's favourite restaurants and one of his library, where his copies of Ellmann's Joyce biography and of Patrick Kavanagh's *Complete Poems* can be clearly discerned. The centre piece of this section is Minihan's photo of Beckett in 1985 in the cafe of the PLM Hotel in Paris, coffee cups and cigarettes on the table before him, sad wisdom

replete in his eyes. The book ends with a short concluding piece by Desmond O'Grady, mainly about meeting Beckett in 1954, plus a miscellany of photos of Beckett memorabilia and various reflections on the subject.

Minihan's photographs of Beckett's 1980s productions in London at the Riverside in Hammersmith neatly complement Haynes' book which captures the essence of Beckett's work at the Royal Court Theatre in the 70s. My one caveat is that the structure of the book could have been usefully clarified at the outset by a contents page; this reservation, however, is a small matter in a handsomely produced book in which Minihan's photographs are consistently striking. His portraits are excellent and even his work which is not related to the stage has a strong dramatic quality. The book provides an ideal way of dipping into Beckett and would make a good present for anyone interested in modern theatre; for the devotee it earns its place on the shelf as a tribute to John Minihan's photographic talent and commitment to defining the elusive world of Beckett.

The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture

ed. by Diane Negra

Durham, North Carolina and London: Duke University Press, 2006

Reviewer: Joan FitzPatrick Dean

The agonized contortions of the Irish Literary Revival to define the authentically Irish can today seem like exercises in scholastic futility. Katharine Tynan advanced the belief in "an Irish note...a rainbow of all colours where none conflict". Yeats's Celtic Twilight posited a distinctive Gaelic golden age that he hoped modern Ireland might recover. The advanced nationalist press developed its own linguistic code for what it thought was authentically Irish. In the controversy over the 1907 premiere of *The Playboy of the Western World*, Synge was vilified for importing alien influences that, like salacious English newspapers, polluted Irish purity. On the other hand, works that conformed to the advanced nationalist agenda were praised as "racy of the soil".

A century later, cultural studies finds Irishness no less fascinating, especially after the 1990s and its worldwide vogue for whatever was recognizably Irish: pop music, "authentic" pubs, Celtic design and dancing extravaganzas as well as traditional music, theatre, memoirs, poetry and fiction. In this post-modern context, however, the analysis of Irishness has moved from exclusivity to inclusivity.

Five years after 9/11 you can see a large Irish flag flying from the back of a fire truck in midtown Manhattan, something that in the twentieth century might only be seen on St. Patrick's Day or, more likely, might not be seen at all. What the display may mean is uncertain, debatable, problematic.

In addition to her own introduction and concluding essay, Negra includes eleven essays on subjects ranging from the Country and Western singer Garth Brooks through the television series "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" to the high school curricula on the Irish famine adopted in the states of New York and New Jersey. Collectively these essays resemble a

series of Polaroid snapshots –their strength in capturing a particular moment compensates for what they may lack in depth of field or breadth of vision.

Similarly, the keynote in *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture* is the assertion that Irishness is hardly unambiguous; it is both "nothing and everything".

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Most of the essays examine how American popular culture has commodified, marketed or performed Irishness. Indeed, the book might be subtitled the uses of Irishness. Only one of the essays, Sean Griffin's piece on Irishness in the Fox studio's wartime musical films like *Sweet Rosie O'Grady*, *Coney Island* (both 1943), or *Irish Eyes Are Smiling* (1944), is not focused on the late twentieth century.

Some of the anthology's most successful essays –Lauren Onkey's essay on Van Morrison, Maria Pramaggiore's study of pregnancy in recent Irish film and Michael Malouf's analysis of Irish-Caribbean hybridity in film and music – explore the ways in which Irish filmmakers, writers, and musicians accommodate and identify selectively with foreign, especially African American, influences.

Whereas Noel Ignatiev famously argued that the Irish in America rejected solidarity with

racial minorities and emulated their hegemonic masters in order to "become white", several of the authors in this collection argue that many Americans appropriate Irishness as a variously defined white "Other". Often that appropriation expresses solidarity with others that earlier generations of Irish immigrants abused and scorned. Perhaps more often, Irish-Americans look to the misfortunes of Irish history so that they, too, can partake of the culture of victimization. The discussions of Irishness as a coded "Other" whiteness recur with frequency and inclusivity, covering a remarkable range: from white supremacist hate groups in the South to the New York City fire department and New Jersey soccer moms.

There is an underlying optimism in most of these essays in that they attribute agency to individuals and groups rather than to an oppressive globalized and commodified culture. In the 1990s and before, commentators

frequently expressed anxiety about American cultural imperialism. The Celtic Tiger and the marketability of all things Irish have refocused interest away from the loss of Irish identity to a confident acknowledgement of the mutability and malleability of Irishness.

Although some of the essays have an unsteady grasp of history (evident, for instance, in the assertion that John Ford was born in Ireland or that "the Great Chain of Being [is] an Enlightenment racial ranking system"), *The Irish in US* vividly documents how eager Americans have been to embrace Irishness and redefine it to suit their own multifarious purposes. Together the essays may tell us more about Irish-America in general and New York in particular than about Ireland in the late twentieth century, but this is an engaging collection of lively and timely essays.

The Body and Desire in Contemporary Irish Poetry
ed. by Irene Gilsenan Nordin
Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006

Reviewer: Shane Alcobia-Murphy

The visually striking cover image for *The Body and Desire* is a production still taken from Mo White's *At the Table of Fine Graces* (1999). Presented at the Crawford Gallery's critically acclaimed 0044 exhibition, the single-screen video projection juxtaposed the artist's prostrate body floating by the bottom of the screen with background images which, in the artist's words, "involved private gestures" (finger-biting lips, rubbed eyes and bellybuttons). White's artwork conjoins the public and private spheres and initiates the viewer into disjunctive, yet enabling, perceptive modes, effects also evoked by the contributors to Nordin's timely, challenging and richly rewarding collection of essays.

Broken into three thematically discrete sections, the book explores differing aspects of how the body is encoded in Irish culture. Entitled "The Body Politic: Territorial Reconfiguration and Desire", the first section analyses the body as the locus wherein identity is constructed, with each contributor usefully applying French poststructuralist theory –Kristeva, Lacan, Foucault, Derrida– in their readings of contemporary Irish poetry. The editor ought to be commended for judiciously placing Scott Brewster's contribution as the opening essay as it rather brilliantly surveys the strategies and tropes utilised by poets when representing the violently fragmented body: as a spectacle, "a site upon which we can read political violence"; as the site of elegiac practice, the locus of a purifying ritual; as a site wherein the consolations of elegy are resisted. Brewster contrasts the ways in which the poetry of Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Michael Longley and Paul Muldoon is marked by what Kristeva terms "abjection", whereby the violently fragmented

body disrupts identity – the abject is opposed to "I", it is the site where the "I" is expelled – and is the liminal space wherein meaning collapses. Notably, Brewster offers an original and provocative reading of Heaney's Bog poems, rejecting the current view that interprets their mythological scheme as inferring a deterministic continuity to the violence; rather, the bodies depicted therein are unsettling and undermine any assumptions that there is a "symbiotic continuity between landscape, history and cultural identity". The high point of the chapter is, arguably, the corrective reading of Longley's elegiac practice. Rather than viewing his unsuccessful attempts to "purify the defilement of violent death" as examples of representational failure, Brewster demonstrates how the poet deliberately refuses to "resolve the ambivalence provoked by the corpse": he neither sanitises nor sanctifies the dead.

An opportunity is missed, however, to tackle the one poet who uses Kristeva as an exemplar: Medbh McGuckian. Her poem "To Such a Hermes" is made up of textual quotations from Kristeva's *The Powers of Horror* and engages both formally and thematically with abjection and the dissolution of identity. Still, McGuckian is the star turn of this collection, with a quarter of the essays devoted to her work, the most notable of which is perhaps Eluned Summers-Bremner's article (also from the first section). This represents an important intervention in McGuckian Studies by demonstrating how the maternal body in her work is often figured by violence, loss and discontinuity, rather than presented as an overt celebration of femininity.

The collection's second section investigates the desexualisation (and consequent silencing) of

women in Ireland and demonstrates how poets like Eavan Boland and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill both dispute and disrupt the invidious male-authored dyadic construction of the female/national body, how they critique, subvert, and re-inscribe the traditional gendering of the body, and how they demythologize the traditional iconography of Irish womanhood. This section is the most coherent of the three, with each of the essays covering the same thematic concerns, but from differing perspectives. My own favourite is Michaela Schrage-Früh's because she cites from the (lamentably) neglected poets such as Rita Ann Higgins and Mary Dorsey.

The third section is the most original of the three, focusing as it does on philosophical concerns: "the body as a site of mediation between individual experience and the human condition". For example, Holmsten's Levinasian reading of McGuckian's work persuasively argues that her presentation of an unstable self, which is often commented on, ought to be viewed within an existential frame. However, the argument on the poet's confrontation with

Otherness could have been strengthened by referring to the works by McGuckian that are directly made up of textual fragments from Levinas. Helen Blakeman's chapter on McGuckian's poetics of mourning can be usefully read in conjunction with Brewster's, focussed as it is on the fragmented body and on ineffable loss. The chapter is noteworthy not simply for its Freudian reading, but also for the close attention it pays to the poet's text. Unusually for an article on McGuckian, Blakeman offers a close reading of a single text – "Drawing Ballerinas" – and this adds a clear focus to her argument. Her contention that, despite its eschewal of elegiac closure and consolation, the text still presents poetry as a regenerative force, is utterly convincing. The editor's own article on the body as a liminal threshold in Eilean Ní Chuilleanáin's poetry functions as a fitting close to the collection and heightens this reader's anticipation for her forthcoming monograph on Ní Chuilleanáin (Mellen Press, 2007).