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## IRISH STUDIES IN SPAIN – 2013

Constanza del Río-Álvaro (ed.)

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## Introduction

**Constanza del Río-Álvaro**

*The scene opens with a long shot of Spanish President, Mariano Rajoy, addressing an audience of EU delegates from a platform. The camera tracks slowly to a close-up of Rajoy's face beaming with self-satisfaction while he recites the exceptional macroeconomic data in Spain. Cut to a crane shot of a busy commercial street in the centre of any Spanish city. The camera descends and focuses on a young man, kneeling on the floor, hands crossed in prayer, begging for money and food. Then it pans to another beggar, then another, then another, then another.... All the while, Rajoy's voice-over is heard, now spelling out the wonders of the Spanish government's economic measures: labour market reforms, cuts on education, health, social services, funds for culture, etc... Cut to extreme close-up of newspaper headline: "The breach between the rich and the poor has widened enormously from 2007 to 2012: 13 million people are neighbouring the poverty line in Spain". Cut to medium close-up of a woman working at her computer, absorbed in her keyboard and screen while she writes a paper on the use of the definite article in San Juan de la Cruz's poetry or on a deconstructive reading of Harry Potter novels, for that matter. Fade out.*

As every year since its foundation (2001), in 2013 the Spanish Association for Irish Studies (AEDEI) celebrated its International Conference (University of Cáceres, 30 May-1 June) under the heading "Voice and Discourse in the Irish Context". Scholars from European and American Universities participated in this successful academic and social event, very effectively organised by Carolina Amador and her team. Three are the conference happenings that I would like to highlight here. First, Nuala NíChonchúir's talk on her first novel, *You* (2010). As suggested by its title, the novel opts for second person narration, a rare choice that may sound awkward to the reader and is difficult to sustain convincingly for a whole narrative (authors like Edna O'Brien – *A Pagan Place* (1970) – and Joseph O'Connor – *Ghost Light* (2010) – have tried this narrative option as well, with better results, in my view, in the case of O'Connor). NíChonchúir's "experiment" seems to have connected with readers, as proved by the excellent reviews of the novel. In the second place, *His and Hers* (2009), a film by director Ken Wardrop, inspired in his mother's life which explores how we share life's journey with the

opposite sex; after watching the film the conference participants and attendants had the opportunity of discussing it with the director in a public interview. Finally, famous Irish actor Denis Rafter performed his new one-man show based on the miserable last days of Oscar Wilde's life, entitled "Beloved Sinner". As part of the social programme of the Spanish Association for Anglo-American Studies (AEDEAN) 37<sup>th</sup> International Conference, Rafter performed as well the play *The Irish Bululú* in the University of Oviedo, 13 November 2013. In this piece, Rafter traces Irish cultural and literary influences on his work as actor by interpreting Shakespeare's songs, soliloquies and sonnets interspersed with Irish songs, stories and dance. In November as well, the University of Granada hosted a two-hour seminar, "Women and Literature in Ireland: Two Irish Poets in Conversation", where poets Gerry Murphy and Liz O'Donoghue read some of their most representative poems and discussed their work: main themes and literary influences, relationship between nationalism and gender, and the surfacing of female writes on the Irish literary scene. The recent vitality of Irish theatre and performance

arts reached Spain last year with the staging of Martin McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1997) (*El cojo de Inishmaan*), the first play in McDonagh's *The Aran Islands Trilogy*. The Spanish production was directed by Gerardo Vera, a prestigious figure on the Spanish scene. The play ran first for six weeks (18 Dec. – 26 Jan.) in the Teatro Español (Madrid) and is now being shown in the Teatro Infanta Isabel (Madrid, 12 March – 20 April, 2014) to both audience and critical acclaim. When asked about possible connections between the world of the play and Spanish society, Vera mentioned that certain characters and stereotypes could be linked to rural areas in the North of Spain and to Valle Inclán's poetic world (*El Cultural*, 13 Dec. 2013). José Luis Collado, author of the Spanish version and translation, elaborates on these connections referring to a similar vital and optimistic attitude to life which he links to the classical *carpe diem*. Collado has made a great effort to remain faithful to the play's Hiberno-English, impossible to translate literally, by trying to find likely equivalences for every phrase or paragraph while preserving the formal richness that such a celebrated author as McDonagh deserves. A cast of first-rate Spanish actors and actresses, an excellent text and a spare mise-en-scene guarantee the play's success. A production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) (*Esperando a Godot*), by now a classical play if there is one, was staged in the Centro Dramático Nacional (Madrid) in April 2013 by actor and director Alfredo Sanzol. He has always vindicated the common sense and coherence of Beckett's theatre and affirms that "there is nothing more absurd than to say that this play is absurd" (*El País*, 18 April 2013, *my translation*). Sanzol also condemns the common-place vision of *Waiting for Godot* as a static work where nothing happens, and refers to the constant physical activity that the actors have to display. For him, Beckett's play is particularly meaningful in our present juncture since, in it, Beckett laughs at people who would rather wait than live, and reminds us that life is what is going on and not what we are waiting for. Sanzol's version of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) (*La importancia de llamarse*

*Ernesto*) was running at the same time in the Teatro Fernán Gómez (Madrid). On the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 2014 a production of Brian Friel's *Translations*, translated into Catalan, opened at the Biblioteca de Catalunya (Barcelona); though scheduled to run until the 9<sup>th</sup> of March, its relative boxoffice success led to its being extended for another week. Next years' section on *Irish Studies in Spain* will carry a review of this interesting production.

Somewhere in between literature and the plastic arts, the work of Oliver Jeffers, a transnational artist who was born in Australia, then lived in Belfast (he graduated from the University of Ulster in 2001) and now lives and works in Brooklyn, was shown in the Valladolid IlustraTour festival with a workshop entitled "Mostrar y contar: palabras e imágenes con diferentes sabores" ("Showing and Telling: multi-flavoured words and images", *my translation*). Jeffers is well-known for his illustrated children's stories, most of them translated into Spanish (*Cómo atrapar una estrella y Perdido y encontrado* [Fondo de Cultura Económica de España, 2006], *El corazón y la botella* [Fondo de Cultura Económica de México, 2010] o *Este alce es mío* [Fondo de Cultura Económica de México, 2013]). Jeffers refers to the Irish tradition of storytelling and comments on the role of humour and stories in Irish society: "Ireland has had a terrible history and we have always told stories so as to remember and to forget. We cannot boast about our *cuisine*, but we delight in recounting how awful our grandmothers' stews were" (*El País*, 6 July 2013, *my translation*). Dora García, a Spanish multidisciplinary visual artist, presented a complex exhibition in the Centro José Guerrero (Granada, October 2013) entitled "Continuarración: sobre sueños y crímenes" ("Continuarration: on dreams and murders"). "Continuarration" is a portmanteau word combining "continuation" and "narration" ("continual narration") that appears in *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939, 205:14) and plays on the reading experience of the book in one's hands.<sup>1</sup> One of

1. I would like to thank David Pierce for informing me on the original location and meaning of the word.

the three chapters of the exhibition, “The Joycean Society”, is related to one of the three works shown and one of the three films projected. In the video, a group of people read and reread the same book together (continuarración). It has taken them eleven years to finish it, yet when they reach the last word, a cryptic “the”, they start again from the first word, “riverrun”. Like *Finnegans Wake*, the book seems to be inexhaustible, open to countless interpretations and infinite in nature, to the point that the world appears to exist just so that the reading-room can materialise.

Joyce is also behind *Lo desorden* (Madrid: Alfaguara 2013), a title difficult to translate – maybe “The Intractably” could be an equivalent. This is a collection of short stories written by the members of La Orden del Finnegans (The Order of Finnegans Pub), founded in 2008 by a group of Spanish writers – Eduardo Lago, Jordi Soler and Enrique Vila-Matas among others – all of them worshippers of *Ulysses* (1922) and heterodox Bloomsday practitioners (not following rules is part of their creed), who always finish their Dublin pilgrimage in the Martello Tower and then proceed to Finnegans Pub to drink Guinness. These writers share what they call the “Finnegans way” of writing: that is, the challenging and demanding writing followed by Joyce, of course, but also by other writers such as Thomas Pynchon or David Foster Wallace.

In the field of non-fiction translations, I would like to start with a volume on Joyce that gathers interesting texts by V. B. Carleton and Catherine Turner – together with a Prologue by Simone de Beauvoir and French photographer Gisèle Freund’s portraits of Joyce – under the general title *Joyce en París o el arte de vender el Ulises* (Madrid: Gallo Nero, 2013. Trad. Regina López Muñoz). This is an attractive book, excellently edited, which includes the first Spanish translation of Carleton’s *James Joyce in Paris: His Final Years* (1965) and de Beauvoir’s original prologue for that book. Turner’s piece is a translation of the sixth chapter of her work *Marketing Modernism between the Two World Wars* (Amherst and Boston: U of Massachusetts P, 2003). I strongly recommend *Joyce en París*

to anyone interested in Joyce, literature in general and strategies on how to market “difficult” literary works. The recent English edition of George Bernard Shaw’s *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism* (Richmond: Alma Classics, 2012) – originally published in 1928 without the last two chapters (on Sovietism and Fascism) which were added in a 1937 re-edition – has probably been the reason for its Spanish translation. *Manual de socialismo y capitalismo para mujeres inteligentes* (Barcelona: RBA, 2013. Trad. Dolors Udina) makes use of a convincing rhetoric through which the Irish writer launches his attack against capitalism. Yet, since he never was a radical socialist – he was a member of The Fabian Society – he advocates for a kind of socialism that has much to learn from the technicalities of capitalist industrial production and discipline. Shaw wants particularly to convince moneyed and cultivated women, lately given the franchise, to vote for a progressive candidate. Finally, another non-fiction work published in Spain in 2013 is Colm Tóibín’s *New Ways to Kill Your Mother: Writers and their Families* (2012) (*Nuevas maneras de matar a tu madre*, Barcelona: Lumen, 2013. Trad. Patricia Antón de Vez). This is a collection of pieces combining features of the essay genre and the narrative text in which Tóibín discusses the stormy family relationships of some sacrosanct names in world literature, together with how these relationships affected their work and careers. Writers such as Jane Austen, Tóibín’s much admired Henry James, his own compatriots Yeats, Synge and Beckett, Thomas Mann, Jorge Luis Borges, Tennessee Williams or V. S. Naipaul fill Tóibín’s pages. Tóibín is one of the few contemporary Irish writers most of whose books have been published in Spanish, perhaps due to his connections with Spain: he lived in Barcelona in the mid-nineteen seventies and owns a house in the Catalan Pyrenees.

Irish poetry is represented by a translation of Thomas MacGreevy’s meagre poetic production: *Poesía Completa* (Madrid: Bartleby, 2013. Trad. y ed. Luis Ingelmo). MacGreevy had the misfortune – and the courage – of writing

experimental modernist poetry in the Ireland of the 1920s and 30s, with the result that his value as a poet was only acknowledged in the 1970s, after the edition of his *Poems* (1971). Luis Ingelmo has made a comprehensive editorial effort to decipher and clarify the often abusive intertextual apparatus used by MacGreevy, a follower of T. S. Eliot's and Ezra Pound's poetic practice. To end, there are three Irish novels that I would like to mention briefly here. First, *La muerte del corazón* (Elizabeth Bowen, Madrid: Impedimenta, 2012. Trad. Eduardo Berti), a translation of Elizabeth Bowen's novel *The Death of the Heart* (1938), set in London in the interwar years. Second, Maggie O'Farrell's *Instrucciones para una ola de calor* (Barcelona: Salamandra, 2013. Trad. Sonia Tapia). The original, *Instructions for a Heatwave*, came out in 1972. And, lastly, John Boyne's *El pacifista* (Barcelona: Salamandra, 2013. Trad. Patricia Antón de Vez), perhaps not a very appropriate

title for *The Absolutist* (Boyne, 2011). Boyne is a popular and very prolific novelist whose work is also regularly published in Spain.

Two other novels, Edna O'Brien's *Las chicas de campo* (2013) and Samuel Beckett's *Mercier y Camier* (2013) are more extensively reviewed below, since these two important Irish narratives were translated into Spanish for the very first time in 2013. The section includes as well a review on a scholarly monograph on Walter Starkie, written by Jacqueline Hurlley, an academic affiliated to the University of Barcelona, and another review on a collection of essays – *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland* – edited by Pilar Villar-Argáiz. To cap it all, this year's section ends with a monographic study on Irish noir written by Bill Phillips, where he pays particular attention to writers whose work seems to have attracted Spanish readers: Benjamin Black, Tana French, John Connolly and Ken Bruen.

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*Walter Starkie: An Odyssey* by Jacqueline Hurlley  
 Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013  
 ISBN: 978-1-84682-363-3, 368pp.

Reviewer: **Verónica Membrive**

Little is known about Walter Starkie (1894-1976), the Irish Hispanist, scholar, musician, travel writer and wandering minstrel, who, from 1940 to 1954, as the first director of the British Council in Spain, was able to foster and preserve cultural relationships between Spain and England despite political turmoil. This manifold figure enjoyed popularity in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due mainly to his travel writing, which recounted his wanderings around Romania, Hungary, Italy and Spain. The Dublin-born scholar proved to be quite elusive, and scattered information has created blanks regarding his life and contributions. The scholar Jacqueline Hurlley (University of Barcelona) has coped masterfully with the odyssey of compiling and assembling the whole lot of available data, giving birth to an excellent tribute to this unknown, multifaceted and “much mythologized subject” (Hurlley 2013: 6).

Hurlley, who had already published an advance of Walter Starkie’s biography for the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the British Council in Spain in 2010, now offers this wide-ranging text covering “Don Gualterio’s” life from cradle to grave. From the very beginning, Hurlley states her methodology, approaching Starkie’s life story through Benton’s concepts of *histoire* and *récit*, emphasizing her difficulties to apply the latter concept in the case of Starkie, her ultimate purpose being “to challenge the mushrooming myths, to deconstruct the sustained image of ‘that merry wanderer’ and to unravel the ‘complex’ character registered in recent scholarship” (7). Hurlley divides Starkie’s life into seven chapters structured in three parts and the text as a whole brims with documentation, including such details as every single article published by the Hispanist in *The Irish Statesman* and *The Irish Independent*, among other newspapers, allowing the scholar to trace

Starkie’s almost constant whereabouts.

The first part, *The Welding of a West Briton*, includes Starkie’s birth in Harrow House, Ballybrack in 1894 and extends to his years as student at Trinity College Dublin and his London job at the Colonial Office when he was 23 years old, before going to Italy with the Y.M.C.A. as a volunteer during the First World War in 1917, just after the Easter Rising. Especially noteworthy is Hurlley’s description of Starkie’s upper-middle class family, which belonged to the Ascendancy, even though both parents professed Roman Catholicism (20), and his family’s influence on the construction of Starkie’s identity, in which, as Hurlley asserts, “performance is a fundamental notion” (4). When describing Walter’s childhood years in Killiney, Hurlley makes an oblique revision of Enid Starkie’s memoir, *A Lady’s Child* (1941), a book that very much contributes to portraying the Anglo-Irish family’s evolution during the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and that describes the character of those children “who are shaped, and sometimes distorted, by its imprint” (Grubgeld 2004: 79). Like Elizabeth Bowen or Samuel Beckett, Walter Starkie grew up at a time in which class anxiety and loss were a consequence of the “performance of identity” (Kennedy 2005: 179) resulting from the combined factor of the Ascendancy’s declining influence on the new nation and the gradual emergence of the Catholic middle classes into a position of power. Like Joyce’s Gabriel Conroy in “The Dead”, Starkie is accused of being a West Briton; what is more, sometime later, during his university years, his relationship with James Stephens made his unionist allegiance totter. Hence perhaps the plethora of –and sometimes apparently conflicting– ways Starkie defines himself in his travel books: sometimes as Irish, sometimes as English, sometimes just as a

wandering minstrel or a fiddler.

In part two, *Courting Carnival*, which covers Starkie's years in Italy with the Y.M.C.A. while travelling with the itinerant band The Riviera Concert Party, his penchant for wearing his roving mask is thrown into relief. Hurlley shows that at the same time as Starkie met his wife-to-be, Italia Porchietti, his filofascism and enthusiasm for Mussolini's rhetoric (he even interviewed him) start to become evident, a tendency that will pervade his entire life and will be reported in his travel writing of the thirties. After occupying the first Chair of Spanish at TCD and having Samuel Becket as a student (Whinston 2011: 1), he made his first trip to Spain in 1924 and he gave lectures at the Residencia de Estudiantes at the time when figures such as Lorca (whom he met), Buñuel, and Dalí were attending the famous institution.

Hurlley's extensive description of "Walter the Wanderer[*'s*]" (Hurlley 2013: 159) roamings around Hungary and Romania in *Raggle-Taggle: Adventures with a Fiddle in Hungary and Romania* (1933), and especially around Spain during the thirties in his two travel books *Spanish Raggle-Taggle: Adventures with a Fiddle in Northern Spain* (1934) and *Don Gypsy: Adventures with a Fiddle in Barbary, Andalusia and La Mancha* (1936) occupies most of part three: *On with the Motley*. At a time when travel books on Spain were very popular, Starkie, although mentioning some of his rather well-known predecessors such as George Borrow, John Ford or Théophile Gautier, decides not to follow their same strategy when depicting the country. Wearing his Quixotic mask, the wandering minstrel goes beyond the Romantic British attitude of superiority and abandons the description of tritely picturesque 19<sup>th</sup> century

Spain. Starkie's perusal of Spanish society and politics proves profound as he decides to collect remnants of all social classes, from the gypsies to important political or cultural figures, offering very detailed accounts in which, as Hurlley asserts, "the frontiers between fact and fiction become blurred" (2013: 178). As she mentions, the books could "function as a vehicle for anti-Marxist discourse" (188) and his fondness for Franco's Spain can be inferred in the texts. However, although Starkie does not choose silence (159), he inclines towards prudence in his travel books on Spain, not displaying his political allegiances openly. Nevertheless, the array of characters he meets and speaks to reveal his tendencies. Why else would the conversation between two British men regarding Gibraltar, showing a clear positioning in favour of the land's belonging to the British empire, not have been included in the Spanish edition of *Don Gypsy* (1944)? Maybe to avoid censorship in Franco's Spain since this was an uncomfortable topic? In the last pages of her biographical story, Hurlley focuses on Starkie's significant work as first director of the British Council in Spain after leaving his positions as director of the Abbey Theatre and professor in different U.S.American universities. Although Hurlley, true to her established objectives, gives special attention to Starkie's travel writing in the thirties and forties, a similar analysis to that of Starkie's last travel account of Spain –*The Road to Santiago: Pilgrims of St. James*, published in 1957– would have been equally stimulating. In conclusion, this biography provides the reader with a many-sided perception of the multifaceted Irish scholar; thus, *Walter Starkie: An Odyssey* is strongly recommendable for those interested in a first-rate account of the Hispanist's epic voyage.

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**Verónica Membrive** is a research student in English literature at the University of Almería. She earned her Master's Degree in English Studies at the University of Almería in 2011 and is currently writing her Ph.D. dissertation on twentieth-century Irish travel writers in Spain. She has delivered papers on Walter Starkie and his travels in Spain. Her field of research is Irish Literature, with a special focus on the relationships between Ireland and Spain.

*Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland. The Immigrant in Contemporary Irish Literature*,  
Pilar Villar-Argáiz (ed.)

Manchester: Manchester U.P. 2014

ISBN: 978-07190-8928-2, pp. xx, 267

Reviewer: **Asier Altuna-García de Salazar**

*Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland* contains a wide range of critical studies on the representation of the multicultural, multinational and multiethnic discourses in contemporary Irish literature. The studies included in this volume constitute a salient contribution to the debate of how migration into Ireland – a distinctive feature that in the last decades reversed the stigmatizing influx of net emigration of the Irish towards places outside the emerald isle – has been represented in Irish literature. The period covered in this study spans from the 1990s up to the second decade of the twenty-first century. As many other parts of the world, during this period Ireland faced a globalization process that was going to contest the belief that, compared to other parts of the world, Ireland was anomalous, different or exceptional. Besides, globalization was going to (re)address former concepts more deeply than expected. In the particular case of Ireland – both north and south of the border – identity, culture, language, community, politics and the arts were going to acknowledge the effects of migration into her shores in a somehow characteristic way. For many literary and cultural studies scholars, the profound impact of migration has questioned the validity of former pillars that seemed to have characterized what was traditionally known as “Irish”. The miraculous economic boom of the Irish *Celtic Tiger* triggered a belief in the necessity of new politics of recognition and a wider pluralist agenda in Irish society, before recession and the bail-out, in what seemed to be the end of Irish monoculturalism. Accordingly, this “new” Ireland experienced a rapid “questioning” of concepts such as identity, ethnicity, culture and nationalism. And all this would find representation in literature. The editor of the present volume

correctly sets all these issues as central key elements of debate and analysis in the literature of an Ireland that embraces the idea of a new multicultural society. The volume certainly fills a “research lacuna” now that events and developments in many areas after the collapse of the *Celtic Tiger* can be seen in perspective. This volume addresses what Michael Cronin calls the “shift from *extrinsic alterity* to *intrinsic alterity*” when concepts such as identity, ethnicity and culture are examined. By acknowledging this shift, the critic of any culture pays greater attention to “those elements within the culture that speak of contact with the wider world rather than seeing foreignness, difference or alterity as elements without or external to the culture”.<sup>1</sup> The present volume successfully presents new critical views on multicultural Ireland in literature. The volume’s academic depth and Villar-Argáiz’s editorial mastery in the selection and distribution of the studies make this volume a clear and definitive exemplar of how literary visions on multiculturalism in Ireland were in much need of scholarly assessment.

Declan Kiberd’s foreword precedes the four sections into which the volume is divided. Kiberd attaches the idea of the “worlding” of Irish literature not so much to the globalizing trend of the Irish economy over the last twenty years, but rather to the profound change in what was expected from an Irish writer within Ireland and in the wider world. Thus, readers and publishers saw the necessity to widen the successful label “Irish interest”, a label that seemed to include

1. Cronin, Michael. “Small Worlds and Weak Ties: Ireland in the New Century.” *Journal of Irish Studies* 22 (2007): 63-73; 70.

narratives that occurred only within the island and on the same “usual” themes, topics and stories. Now, for many Irish writers, “Irish interest” happened also outside the island; and, furthermore, new stories started to appear as a result of the inward migratory flows that Ireland was rapidly experiencing. Following along Kiberd’s line of thought, the editor of the volume, after a comprehensive introduction to the idea of what multicultural Ireland could stand for in contemporary theatre, poetry and fiction, divides the volume into four parts that address the obstacles and challenges of this “new” multicultural arena: first the (re)thinking of this new Ireland; second how it accommodates itself within the idea of a postnationalist society; third the coming to terms with the Irish past in such a new situation; and, finally, a closer analysis of gender perspectives and power structures within this multicultural discourse.

The seventeen chapters that constitute this volume cover theatre, fiction and poetry and include the main contemporary Irish writers who incorporate this new literary vision into their work. In the first section, McIvor addresses the impact of the representation of the immigrant in theatre with a special focus on Irish community arts, which albeit limited has offered a significant perspective. Tucker’s analysis of Doyle’s and Keegan’s fiction opens the notion of multiple Irelands in one. Turning to poetry, Villar-Argáiz examines how nationhood can be modulated by race and ethnicity in poems by Colette Bryce, Mary O’Donnell and Michael O’Loughlin. Estévez-Saá’s concern is with the representation of multiculturalism in the so-called Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger novels. Roa White starts the second section approaching the fictional reconsideration of identity and nationhood from a hyphenated perspective in Roddy Doyle’s *The Deportees* (2007) questioning whether Ireland could now be considered a “nation of Others”. Starting from the idea of a hyphenated identity,

Zamorano analyses Hugo Hamilton’s fiction under the prism of identitarian hybridity as a means to explain the way in which identity could be transformed in Ireland. The short story is the main concern of Fogarty’s chapter, in which she approaches the anxieties that inform much fiction in Ireland, including those of the attendant new Irish. In the poetry of Sinéad Morrissey, Leontia Flynn, Mary O’Malley and Michael Hayes, Poloczek finds a way of (re)writing old tropes with the new “polyphonic” ethnic migrants. Part three opens with Murphy’s approach to the liberating encounter of these new realities in Dermot Bolger’s plays. Following Welsch’s transcultural concept, Shrage-Früh sees how the notion of identity is represented in Irish poetry. This idea of a more inclusive and fluid form of identity is also the concern of King in his approach to Hugo Hamilton. O’Donnell tackles racism as a consequence of migration and considers how it is expressed in Irish fiction. To end this section Armstrong offers the idea of tourism as triggering a cross-cultural space in poetry. Part four opens with Reddy’s assessment of motherhood and gender issues in Boylan’s *Black Baby*. The idea of family reconfiguration in terms of gender is also central to Balzano’s approach to Emer Martin’s *Baby Zero*, a chapter where it is stated that interculturality is still an issue in Ireland. For Loredana Salis, Dublin is the central site of many visions of multiculturalism in Ireland. Crime fiction and the representation of immigrants are for David Clark another salient way to approach a new multicultural Ireland.

*Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland. The Immigrant in Contemporary Irish Literature* represents, thus, an illuminating, comprehensive and challenging first full-length publication on migration to Ireland and its representation in Irish literature. The volume is of great interest to scholars and both graduate and postgraduate students of Irish Studies.

**Dr Asier Altuna** is a full-time lecturer in English at the University of Deusto, Bilbao and director of the *Erasmus Mundus* Master of Arts in Euroculture. He has published on 19<sup>th</sup> c. Spain and the Basque Country in Irish writing, and multicultural and transcultural Ireland. He has edited *Re-Writing Boundaries: Critical Approaches in Irish Studies* (PPU, 2007), *New Perspectives on James Joyce: Ignatius Loyola, make haste to help me!* (Deusto UP, 2009) and *Rethinking Citizenship: New Voices in Euroculture* (Groningen UP, 2013).

*Mercier y Camier* de Samuel Beckett

Edición, traducción e introducción de José Francisco Fernández

Málaga: Editorial Confluencias, 2013

168 pp. ISBN: 978-84-941691-8-2

Reviewer: **María J. López**

After the Second World War, Samuel Beckett entered an extremely fruitful period of artistic production, taking a crucial decision in the development of his literary career: turning from the English language to French. The first extended text to emerge out of this decision was *Mercier et Camier*, written in 1946. Not finding an editor then and being later left aside by Beckett himself, the novel was not published until 1970. The English translation intermittently occupied Beckett from 1970 to 1974, when it finally came to light in John Calder's publishing house.

The Spanish text under review here is the translation of Beckett's 1970 English version by José Francisco Fernández, a leading scholar of Beckett, whose deep critical knowledge of the writer and insightful intimacy with the linguistic texture of his works are at the basis of a rigorous and engaging translation. This publication, furthermore, fills in a great gap in the field of Spanish translations of Beckett's oeuvre. Although in 1971, Félix de Azúa translated for Lumen the French text of *Mercier et Camier*, the translation of the English version had never been done, and both texts – the French and the English – constitute in fact two different works.

As opposed to the critical tendency to regard Beckett's translated versions of his texts as almost identical twins with respect to the originals, Connor (1989) explains that whereas that is certainly so when the writing of the original and its translation took place in a more or less simultaneous manner, the two texts tend to reveal important differences when there was a long time gap between both acts. In the case of the two versions of *Mercier and Camier*, Beckett

introduced elements in the English text that reinforced the Irish component,<sup>1</sup> but the most obvious difference is the amount of material that Beckett decided to cut out in the English translation: around 12% of the original French text. Connor points to the fact that many of these omissions relate to the two characters' links with the everyday world, so that the English text reinforces the effect of a narrative in which the protagonists are strangely cut off from ordinary people and objects. This narrative is certainly a strange story which tells of a journey by two tramp-like friends who walk around a city that resembles Dublin and get out of it, but only to return to it. In the meantime, they watch dogs copulating, meet odd characters in bars and other public places, have inconclusive conversations and continually worry about their possessions – a sack, an umbrella, a raincoat, a bicycle. The pair of characters, the tramps, the aimless journey, the attachment to ordinary objects or the absurd dialectical exchange: *Mercier and Camier* anticipates elements that will become central in later major works such as *En attendant Godot* (1952) or the texts of the *Trilogy*, *Molloy* (1951), *Malone meurt* (1951) and *L'Innommable* (1953), and that have come to be seen as quintessentially Beckettian ones.

The novel is divided into 8 chapters, grouped into four sections, after each of which a "Summary of two preceding chapters" or "Resumen de los dos capítulos anteriores" is provided in the form of a list:

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1. See Kennedy (2005) for an analysis of the obscure way in which the novel relates to the birth of the Irish Free State.

Comienzo.  
 Encuentro de Mercier y Camier.  
 Plaza de Saint-Ruth.  
 El haya roja.  
 La lluvia.  
 ... (58)

The Spanish edition includes an index that indicates this division into chapters and summaries, an added element that alerts the reader to an unexpected and baffling aspect fully in accordance with a strong metafictional dimension highlighted by the figure of the narrator. This narrative voice, which tells us of Mercier's and Camier's actions, words, and even thoughts and feelings, is a detached and often impatient and irritated one that calls attention to the gap between action and account. The first overt metatextual sign comes early in the novel, after a grid that registers the different times of Mercier's and Camier's missing chances to meet: "What stink of artifice!" (4); "¡Qué embrollo más apestoso!" (27), a remark that inaugurates a series of comments on the arbitrariness and constructedness of narrative.

In stylistic terms, *Mercier and Camier* occupies some kind of middle ground within Beckett's work. On the one hand, it is still partly indebted to Beckett's early narratives – *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, More Pricks than Kicks, Murphy* or *Watt* – and their baroque and convoluted language, which appears from time to time in *Mercier and Camier* and which Fernández perfectly recreates: "Sufría de la cadera horriblemente, con un dolor punzante que le bajaba como un disparo hasta la nalga y le subía por el recto hasta las tripas, llegando a la altura del píloro, culminando, de hecho, en espasmos uretroescrotales que le provocaban unas ganas de miccionar cuasi incesantes" (33). In the case of obscure and archaic references, word games or terms in foreign languages, Fernández tends to keep the original ones, a wise decision that reinforces this erudite dimension of the text: "omniomni" (48), "*treponema pallidum*" (61), "*Potopompos scroton evohe*" (64), "*gemütlich*" (68).

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However, for the most part, and as explained by Fernández in his Introduction, *Mercier and Camier* "es una obra marcada por una actitud de austeridad, concisión y exactitud que será la característica fundamental de su producción literaria posterior" (20). And it is here that one of the main strengths of Fernández's translation lies; in his ability, when demanded by the original text, to choose words and phrases grounded on the particular and the concrete, and removed from the allusive, the vague or the abstract: "Tras un breve silencio, Camier empezó a reír. A Mercier, a su debido tiempo, también le entró la risa. Entonces rieron juntos a carcajadas, agarrándose de los hombros para no desplomarse" (88). Fernández skillfully endows each passage of the novel with the linguistic style and tone it demands: the evocative and descriptive beginnings of chapter IV (85) and chapter VII (137); the conversational directness of dialogues, as in Madden's speech in chapter III: "Aprendiz de carnicero –dijo el viejo–, aprendiz de pollero, aprendiz de matarife, encargado de funeraria, sacristán ... ¡y venga un cadáver tras otro!" (63); or the humorous moments that, as usual in Beckett, abound in the novel, like the moment in which Watt makes a cameo appearance and gives the following witty description of the protagonists: "El larguirucho se cree que es San Juan Bautista, del que seguro ha oído usted hablar, y el canijo, aquí a mi derecha, no se atreve a sentarse por miedo a que

se le rompa el culo de cristal” (156).

This edition by Confluencias has an attractive design where the drawings – both on the cover of the book and on the black pages before and after the text, and which incorporate Beckett’s own doodles – beautifully evoke familiar elements from Beckett’s world, together with its playful and surrealist character. Fernández’s illuminating Introduction provides the reader with all the essential information about the text and the edition, which adds the following postscript: “Has probado. Has fracasado. Da igual. Prueba otra vez. Fracasa otra vez. Fracasa mejor”. These words, coming from Beckett’s 1983 *Worstward Ho*, have in a way become a Beckettian motto. *Mercier and Camier* certainly anticipates the

failure, impotence, ignorance and dissolution that are going to become prevalent in later works. It is a pivotal work that, both in thematic and stylistic terms, works as a bridge between Beckett’s early and late production, and that is central in order to come to terms with the implications of Beckett’s momentous decision to adopt the French language. Fernández’s fully successful achievement is to make the reader experience those implications through the Spanish translation of an English text; to make the reader experience that, as put by Kenner (1973), writing in a language one has learned in classrooms entails “vigilance”, “deliberation”, “detachment” and “awareness” (83).

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*Las chicas de campo* de Edna O'Brien  
 Traducción de Regina López Muñoz  
 Madrid: Errata Naturae, 2013.  
 300 págs. ISBN: 978-84-15217-58-9

Reviewer: **Sara Martín**

A pesar de su larga y prolífica carrera literaria, Edna O'Brien (Tuamgraney, Condado de Clare, 1930) es casi un enigma en las estanterías de las librerías españolas. De más de 30 publicaciones en inglés, que abarcan el período que va desde 1960 (no empezó a escribir hasta que emigró a Londres, donde aún reside) hasta la actualidad e incluyen sobre todo novela, pero también relatos, memorias, autobiografía, poesía y teatro, en España sólo se habían traducido cuatro de sus libros. El criterio que se ha seguido a la hora de seleccionar qué obras traducir y publicar en nuestro país, es todo un misterio. En 1972, la editorial Grijalbo publicó *Agosto es un mes diabólico* (*August is a Wicked Month*, 1965), la cuarta novela de Edna O'Brien. En ese mismo año se publicaba en Inglaterra la octava novela de la autora irlandesa, *Night* (1972), que sería traducida y publicada en España como *Noche* (1992) veinte años después por la editorial Lumen. Vuelven a pasar casi dos décadas, diecisiete años para ser exactos, hasta que la obra de Edna O'Brien de nuevo ve la luz traducida al español, esta vez de mano de Espasa-Calpe y por partida doble: en 2009 se publicó la novela *La luz del atardecer* (*The Light of Evening*, 2006; última novela de O'Brien hasta la fecha) y la biografía *Byron enamorado* (*Byron*, 2009).

Esta escasez de traducción al español de la obra de Edna O'Brien no se corresponde con la aclamada trayectoria de la autora, cuyos méritos literarios han sido reconocidos a nivel mundial en numerosas ocasiones. Entre otras distinciones, O'Brien cuenta en su haber con el premio Kingsley Amis por *The Country Girls* (1962), el

premio europeo de literatura de la Asociación Europea de las Artes por *House of Splendid Isolation* (1995), y el premio Bob Hughes de literatura irlandesa en reconocimiento a toda su carrera (2009). Por supuesto, la escritora fue considerada escandalosa e inapropiada en Irlanda, hasta tal punto que, como nos recuerdan al final de la edición española de *Las chicas del campo*, el párroco de su aldea quemó varias copias de su primera novela en un acto público en la plaza de la iglesia.

Afortunadamente, a finales de 2013 Errata Naturae, que se autodenomina un proyecto editorial de carácter independiente, ha decidido hacer justicia a la gran dama de las letras irlandesas y se ha propuesto la noble tarea de darle coherencia a su obra para el público español. El primer paso para ello ha sido publicar por primera vez en español el debut de la autora, *Las chicas de campo* (*The Country Girls*, 1960), al que seguirán las otras dos novelas que completan la trilogía de *Las chicas de campo*, esto es, *The Lonely Girl* (publicada por primera vez como *Girl with Green Eyes*, 1962) y *Girls in their Married Bliss* (1964), así como la más experimental *A Pagan Place* (1970).

*Las chicas de campo* narra, desde la perspectiva de una Caithleen adulta, las aventuras y desventuras de ésta y su amiga de infancia Baba, desde que abandonan su pequeño pueblo rural al oeste de Irlanda en su adolescencia hasta su primera decepción amorosa en Dublín, pasando por una claustrofóbica estancia en un internado católico. Dicho así, parece que se trate de una mezcla de la típica *Bildungsroman* con el

género romántico, tan a menudo asociado a la escritura femenina. Sin embargo, tras esa forma inocua, se esconde un contenido realmente subversivo para la época. Aunque es cierto que a día de hoy nos cueste comprender el escándalo que supuso *The Country Girls* en la Irlanda de la década de 1960, ya que incluso las escenas más tórridas nos puedan resultar *naïves* y algo descafeinadas, en realidad lo subversivo del debut de Edna O'Brien radica en el simple hecho de enfrentar al lector con la realidad de la Irlanda contemporánea (Coughlan 2006: 180). A través de Caithleen, experimentamos la claustrofóbica existencia de una mujer cualquiera en la Irlanda de mediados del siglo pasado, donde las rígidas normas del patriarcado y el catolicismo construyen, limitan y reprimen la identidad femenina. En este sentido, el lector español puede encontrar paralelismos con *Nada* de Carmen Laforet que, aunque ambientada en la Barcelona de la posguerra española, también resultó novedosa por la exploración de la subjetividad femenina de su protagonista, así como por el fiel retrato de una España empobrecida y encorsetada por el catolicismo que esta novela supone; una realidad asfixiante en la que la única esperanza de libertad se sitúa, como en la novela de O'Brien, en la metrópolis, lejos del retardatario mundo rural.

Con una protagonista que parece ser consciente de que los roles que la sociedad le ha impuesto no son más que una construcción, Edna O'Brien desconstruye en su primera novela el concepto de feminidad, así como las ideologías sexuales imperantes en la época e, incluso, lo que significa ser irlandés (Greenwood 2003: 21-5). Vemos, por tanto, que lejos de tratarse meramente de una novela de temática romántica, *The Country Girls* tiene de hecho un gran trasfondo político. Efectivamente, una binarización de géneros tan extrema, con unos ideales de mujer pura y sufridora dependiente de unos hombres hipermasculinizados, es fruto en gran parte de un cierto tipo de nacionalismo irlandés. Como han señalado varios autores, la independencia de Irlanda vino acompañada de una limitación continuada de los derechos y las libertades de las mujeres “por el bien del nuevo estado” (Pelán 1996: 49; Ingman 2002: 255).

No obstante, lo cierto es que, a pesar de la buena labor de la traductora Regina López Muñoz, que contextualiza con sus notas a pie de página algunas referencias culturales que de otro modo pasarían desapercibidas para el lector, como por ejemplo canciones de moda en los 50 o que el perro de la familia Brady se llama Bull's-Eye por un tipo de caramelos, el ambiente puramente irlandés se pierde en la traducción. En cuanto a las informativas notas a pie de López Muñoz, se echa de menos alguna con relación a la historia entonces reciente de Irlanda. Por ejemplo, “the Black and Tans” en la edición española son simplemente “los soldados británicos”, por lo que un lector que no esté familiarizado con los acontecimientos históricos y políticos en la Irlanda del siglo pasado se pierde los matices (post)coloniales presentes en la novela. La vivienda de los Brady también merecería una mención propia a pie de página, ya que en el texto original se puede inferir que se trata de una de las “Big Houses” que fueron arrebatadas a los protestantes, pero el lector medio español no tiene por qué saberlo ni darse cuenta si no se le señala de algún modo.

Sin embargo, el sabor irlandés se pierde no tanto por una falta de contextualización histórica y cultural como por la inevitable pérdida de los acentos en la traducción española. El único caso en el que se conserva perfectamente el deje extranjero es con la casera austríaca y su marido, para los que la traductora ha optado por utilizar un español chapurreado mezclado con expresiones en alemán, tal y como hace O'Brien en el original. En el caso de Willie, el joven escocés que trabaja en la misma tienda que Caithleen, Regina López Muñoz opta por una especie de acento andaluz (“mae” en lugar de “madre” o “mío” por “miedo”) que, aunque sirve para diferenciar geográficamente al personaje, para nada lo sitúa en Escocia. La mayor pérdida, no obstante, viene con el acento y expresiones irlandesas de la mayoría de personajes, incluyendo a la protagonista. Una de las palabras típicamente irlandesas que se repite hasta la saciedad a lo largo de la novela es “eejit”, pronunciación literal de “idiot” en boca de los irlandeses, que en español se ha quedado en un simple “idiota”. Cuando Mr. Gentleman

describe a Caithleen como “an Irish colleen”, en español aparece “una moza irlandesa”, perdiéndose así el matiz propiamente irlandés que la palabra “colleen” lleva implícito. O por ejemplo, cuando, recién llegadas a la casa de huéspedes, Baba le indica a Caithleen que no deben ayudar a recoger si no quieren acabar convirtiéndose en “skivvies”, en español se ha traducido como “criadas”, conservando el significado pero perdiéndose el regionalismo irlandés de la palabra original. Así las cosas, no es de extrañar que el acento cantarín de Cork del taxista que las lleva a la casa de Dublín, que en el original, además de anunciarse por la narradora, también se puede leer en el propio personaje (‘Dju say something?’), en la traducción española sea simplemente mencionado por la narradora, tras un neutral ‘¿Ha dicho usted algo?’ por parte del taxista.

En suma, a pesar de la inevitable pérdida de sabor irlandés, *Las chicas de campo* es una más que aceptable traducción de *The Country Girls*, que anuncia los que seguirán siendo temas fetiche a lo largo de la producción literaria de O’Brien: familias desestructuradas, padres alcohólicos, madres sumisas, y mujeres en busca de su propia identidad en medio de una sociedad cuyas normas son rígidas y asfixiantes. Ante todo, esta

apuesta de la Editorial Errata Naturae se trata de una necesaria aportación al mundo editorial español que, aunque nos llega con más de medio siglo de retraso, no es por ello menos valiente e interesante. Lo que no deja de ser curioso es que España haya tenido que esperar a una editorial emergente, dentro de una colección que podría considerarse de rarezas (“El pasaje de los panoramas”, colección en la que se enmarca *Las chicas de campo*, busca “encontrarse con el Otro y lo exótico”, según la web de la editorial), para que una de las obras más canónicas de una autora llegue al público español. Quizás esto nos sirva para reflexionar una vez más sobre el papel periférico que Irlanda parece seguir teniendo frente a la metrópolis inglesa. Esperemos que sigan apareciendo nuevas editoriales como Errata Naturae que permitan dar voz en España a ese “otro”, tan cercano culturalmente a nosotros, que es Irlanda. Si algo positivo puede tener la pérdida de sabor irlandés que padece la traducción española, es que acerca aún más una realidad y unos personajes que bien podrían haber salido de la España franquista, donde el patriarcado y la iglesia católica subyugaban la vida de sus mujeres, tal y como sucedía, y en parte aún sucede, en la República de Irlanda.

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## Irish Noir

**Bill Phillips**

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This article will look at four contemporary Irish crime writers: John Connolly, whose Charlie Parker novels are set in the United States, and who writes closely within the American tradition; Ken Bruen, whose Jack Taylor novels are set in Galway, but which also owe much to the hard-boiled and Nordic traditions; and Benjamin Black and Tana French, whose novels are largely set in and around Dublin, and are more closely related to the psychological tradition of crime writing such as that practised by Georges Simenon or Patricia Highsmith.

Although John Connolly was born and lives in Dublin his best known novels are set in the United States where he now spends part of his time. His first Charlie Parker novel, *Every Dead Thing* (1999), introduces us to his dark, troubled hero, an ex-policeman in search of the killer of his wife and daughter. The Parker series resonates with echoes of the genre. The prose is strikingly similar to that of James Lee Burke's, whose Dave Robicheaux detective series began with *Neon Rain* in 1987. Much of *Every Dead Thing* is set in Louisiana, as are Burke's Robicheaux novels, but of particular note is both writers' fondness for a melodramatic, almost gothic style of narration of the kind employed by Cormac McCarthy. Both authors, who favour first person narratives, have a liking for declamatory phrases beginning "I came to believe..." or "I knew then that some terrible blackness had descended..." (*Every Dead Thing*, 146). Connolly acknowledges Burke's influence on his website, and also confesses to borrowing names from his favourite authors' works, which no doubt explains the name of a minor character

in *Every Dead Thing* – Clete – a rather unusual name, but also that of Dave Robicheaux's best friend.

Robicheaux and Parker, the fictional detectives, share certain characteristics too. Both are ex-policemen turned private detective, although Robicheaux soon returns to the force, while Parker's unofficial status, since he does not even have a licence, is recognised purely through his reputation on the street: he is "the Detective". In keeping with the tradition of the genre, both are recovering alcoholics. In the early days of hard-boiled crime, a bottle of rye to accompany a stakeout was a sign of toughness and masculinity, and that both Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, still the two most celebrated writers of the genre, were chronic alcoholics did not seem to dispel this belief. Over time, the whisky has remained, but its glamour has evaporated. Robicheaux and Parker keep company with a once fast crowd: James Sallis's Lew Griffin, Walter Mosley's Easy Rawlins, or George Pelecanos's Nick Stefanos. Alcoholics to a man. They are all, also, violent, but especially Robicheaux and Parker, for whom violence is a means of resolving those difficulties the law cannot reach, and for which, therefore, there is little need for regret.

Their particular penchant for unrepentant violence may well be linked to their belief that evil walks the world; the only possible explanation for the foul crimes that the novels describe. This is controversial. Most crime novelists over recent decades: Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Robert B. Parker, Ian Rankin, Deon Meyer, Henning Mankell or Dennis Lehane – to

mention only a few outstanding writers in a very crowded field – use their novels to dissect and criticise society. Indeed, Dennis Lehane, in an interview published in *Estudios Irlandeses* argued that “[t]he movement that came out of American crime fiction at the beginning of the 1980s, and then extended well into the 1990s ... took a much more social approach to the novel. It was all written by men and women who were concerned with the underclass” (Menéndez Otero 2012: 110). The rise in popularity of crime fiction over the last century can be attributed to a late nineteenth century loss of faith in which the spiritually consoling priest is replaced by the rational detective – Poe’s Dupin, and Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes being the genre’s archetypes. For the rationalist and social reformer, the existence of evil as an explanation for crime is a dead end. Detectives might as well give up and the populace resort to human sacrifice in appeasement of the gods, since no rational attempt to understand crime, its motivations and causes, will be of any earthly good. To be fair to Burke and Connolly, their protagonists’ opinions are not necessarily those of their creators, and the invocation of evil can always be viewed through the lens of psychoanalysis, yet these two crime authors are relatively unusual in a genre which consciously turns its back on the supernatural, and leaves the incorporeal to the genre of horror fiction. Connolly is frequently called upon to defend his interest in the supernatural, and his website includes a large number of interviews which deal with the subject. Not surprisingly, he justifies the mixing of the horror and crime genres, but also argues, with some justice, that horror is a particularly Irish tradition:

While I’m Catholic, there is something appealing to me about allowing the supernatural to collide with Protestantism in a story. I suppose I feel that Catholics have a pretty high tolerance for mumbo-jumbo, and for all the whistles and bells that go with their faith, but again it’s probably also the influence of that earlier, British tradition. It may also have to do with the fact that while Irish writers have always written supernatural fiction, its most famous Irish practitioners have all been Protestants: Bram Stoker and *Dracula*, Sheridan

Le Fanu and *Uncle Silas*, Charles Maturin and *Melmoth the Wanderer*, even Oscar Wilde and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

<http://www.johnconnollybooks.com/qa.php>

Connolly appears to have deliberately sought out models in American crime writing in order to facilitate his entry into a genre which has not, until recently, been associated with his native Ireland. Another likely influence on his work is that of the above-mentioned Robert B. Parker – indeed, Connolly’s choice of surname for his protagonist (apart from Jazz musician Charlie ‘Bird’ Parker) sounds remarkably like an act of homage to the man known as the Dean of American crime. Parker started out as a professor of English literature at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts where he wrote his doctoral thesis on the work of Raymond Chandler (Parker’s own fictional detective, Spenser is, in turn, an oblique homage to Chandler’s Philip Marlowe: Spenser and Marlowe both being sixteenth century Elizabethan poets). However, Connolly’s greatest debt to Parker (Robert B, that is), is his dialogue. Arguably the greatest of the hard-boiled quipsters, Spenser is never at a loss for words, especially when it comes to annoying the authorities or, their mirror image, the dons, pimps, mobsters and made men of organised crime, and Connolly’s Parker, especially in the earlier novels, appears to mimic the master almost to perfection.

I find that the translator of Connolly’s novels, Carlos Milla Soler, has taken quite a few liberties with the original text, but I am not convinced that this is a bad thing. Connolly’s prose is often rather overblown, melodramatic and portentous, and the translation into Spanish tends to reduce this. In chapter 45 of *Every Dead Thing*, for example, we are given a Gothic description of early anatomical studies: “They are the ‘flayed men,’ who stand in dramatic poses, displaying the movements of the muscles and the tendons without the white veil of the skin to hide it from the eye of the beholder” (1999: 387). This is translated as “En posturas efectistas, muestran el movimiento de los músculos y los tendones sin que los oculte el velo blanco de la piel” (2004: 355).

The laudable decision to remove the unnecessary and clichéd expression “of the eye of the beholder” is a great improvement on the original. Unfortunately, Milla Soler’s freedom with the original text sometimes leads him to make strange decisions. Further in the same chapter we are told that “In eighteenth century Florence, the practice of anatomical modelling reached its peak” (388). For some reason, in the translation, it is “En la Venecia del siglo XVIII...” (355), a shift in space which a brief consultation reveals to be entirely unjustifiable given that the anatomical modelling under discussion did, apparently, take place in Florence.

Ken Bruen’s Jack Taylor novels (of which there are so far ten) are, in my opinion, the most exciting and original of contemporary Irish crime fiction. In common with John Connolly, Bruen’s novels share certain characteristics with a number of American crime writers of recent years such as Walter Mosley, George Pelecanos and, especially, James Sallis. All four write against the hard-boiled tradition and are noticeably postmodern in their playful treatment of the genre. Firstly, the status of the private detective is questioned. Mosley’s detective, Easy Rawlins, is a black man in 1960s Los Angeles, and as such, a private detective licence is, simply, unobtainable. The same would probably be true of Sallis’s Lew Griffin – also a black man – and of Pelecanos’s Nick Stefanos, if it ever occurred to them to ask for a licence. They are all, also, heavy drinkers, though Rawlins cuts down as the series develops, but Stefanos and Griffin, particularly the latter, remain unreformed alcoholics. Finally, their abilities as detectives are seriously at issue. In fact Lew Griffin, whose main activity as a detective is to find missing people, can boast a zero success rate. Stefanos and Rawlins are somewhat more adept, but all too frequently the consequences of their actions are deeply harmful to themselves and others – in direct opposition to traditional crime-solvers, such as Hercule Poirot and Sherlock Holmes, whose deeds restore the world to its previously reliable, bourgeois serenity.

Ken Bruen’s novels follow the pattern of the postmodern American model but take it, if possible, to an even greater extreme. Jack Taylor

is an ex-Garda, thrown out of the force for punching a TD, a member of the Dáil. He, too, disdains the conventionality of a PI licence though his reasons for doing so are, he claims, cultural: “There are no private eyes in Ireland. The Irish wouldn’t wear it. The concept brushes perilously close to the hated ‘informer’. You can get away with most anything except ‘telling’” (2010: 11). His cases are never exactly solved, certainly not in the traditional manner, but then the detection itself tends to play a rather small part in the novels, serving to provide what little plot there is, and little else. Taylor is a chronic alcoholic, downing quantities of Guinness with Jameson chasers, although he also turns to cocaine and other drugs as a desperate means of reducing his alcohol intake. He is capable of quite savage violence, though he is more likely to be the victim of a good beating.

As well as Bruen’s obvious debt to American hard-boiled fiction, he also shares much in common, and may be included in, what has come to be known as Nordic Noir, which includes the currently popular Scandinavian cohort, and, closer to home, the Scottish sub-group, Tartan Noir. Among the best-known of these writers are Sweden’s Henning Mankell, and the Scottish writer, Ian Rankin. Both writers’ work has been turned into successful television series, so successful in fact that in both cases two series with different actors have been made about both fictional police detectives. Mankell’s Inspector Kurt Wallander has been played by both the Swedish actor Rolf Lassgård, and the celebrated Irish thespian, Kenneth Branagh. Rankin’s Inspector Rebus, meanwhile, has been played by the Scottish actors John Hannah and Ken Stott. Not to be outdone, the Jack Taylor novels, are slowly and rather erratically being filmed as TV movies with the Scottish actor Iain Glen playing Taylor. The specific characteristics of Nordic Noir relate mainly to the weather of northern Europe: the cold, wind, rain and, in Scandinavia, the snow, which both literally and figuratively cast gloom upon the dark northern latitudes. This is reflected in the depressed and dour character of the people, and particularly that of the damaged detectives. At the same time, given northern Europe’s relative wealth, the novels question the

benefits and desirability of affluence, particularly when injustice, inequality and distress have not disappeared, but are merely swept under the carpet.

Bruen's books are particularly relevant here because they coincide with the boom of the Celtic Tiger and its subsequent collapse. Writing in the journal of the Irish American Cultural Institute, *Éire-Ireland*, Andrew Kincaid argues that the Celtic Tiger in fact inspired and is best represented by noir fiction, with Ken Bruen at the forefront:

The Celtic Tiger [produced] a literary type that represented the violence, ugliness, the distrust, the moral conflicts, and tempo that are inherent in its moment. The books of this genre capture this fast pace of cultural change — immigration, growth of attendant cosmopolitanism and racism, housing bubble, newly wealthy and upwardly mobile young workforce (Kincaid 2010: 41).

Indeed, it seems to be the moral and psychological damage inflicted by prosperity, rather than its precipitous decline, that particularly concerns writers such as Bruen. It is as if the events of the last six years have been a sharp (and desirable) lesson in hubris rather than a painful readjustment to an economic meltdown largely the responsibility of an unscrupulous financial and political elite.

Jack's drinking, which inevitably leads him into trouble, is also one of the means by which Bruen observes contemporary life in Galway, where the novels are set. Chief among Jack's concerns is the search for a decent pub, all of the favourite watering holes of his youth (he is in his fifties) having been turned into theme pubs, wine bars and chains catering to tourists and foreigners. The same is true of the shops, the book stores and the hotels, indeed the very soul of Galway has dimmed. This is not merely an exercise in nostalgia, but a serious comment on the effects of the economic boom, the tearing down of the old merely for the sake of the new, the loss of neighbourhoods and community, and the growth of consumerism. Jack's escape into drunkenness is also a communion with an Arcadian past with Guinness his Orphic sacrament.

Another means by which Bruen avoids the

burden of plot and detection is to write lists. There are lists of showbands, street entertainers, clothes, poets, items for breakfast, professions and books, merely to mention some of those to be found in *The Guards* (2010). As a consequence, the novels are actually quite short with, as well as the lists, poems, quotations (often from American crime writers), songs and other miscellanea occupying a good proportion of the printed page. The mix, surprisingly, works well, contributes to the readability of the novels, and endows them with a character all of their own.

This unusual style is potentially problematic for the translator, but Antonio Fernández Lera (2005) has done a good job. My only queries about the Spanish edition of *The Guards* are, I suspect, of an editorial nature. Firstly, the translation of the title: *Maderos*. The original title, *The Guards*, is a translation into English of "Garda", short for *Garda Síochána*. But "the guards" not only makes reference to the Irish police force, it also alludes to the activities of the novel's protagonists, and particularly Jack Taylor, who has a vocation — misdirected and wayward though it may be — to care for people. Consequently, a title involving the word "guardia" would seem to me more appropriate, and less pejorative. Equally, throughout the novel, the word for "garda" or "guard" is translated as "policia". I see no reason why the original Irish could not have been used, or the more obvious Spanish translation, "guardia".

There are other small issues, such as the placing on the page of the numerous, above-mentioned lists. In the original they are on the right of the page, in the translation, on the left. I do not know why. I rather prefer them on the right.

John Banville, writing under the name Benjamin Black, has produced a number of crime novels about Quirke, a pathologist in 1950s Dublin. The first of the series is *Christine Falls* (2006), in which Quirke investigates the death of a young woman after her body mysteriously disappears from the pathology department. Quirke, it turns out, has all the characteristics of the contemporary detective. Firstly, of course, he is not a detective at all, but a doctor. He drinks too much, and his life has been blighted by the

loss of his beloved wife twenty years earlier. During his investigation he is duly beaten up (a fate common to the fictional detective of the twenty-first century – his hard-boiled twentieth century predecessor could usually count on at least giving as good as he gets), but persists in his enquiries until the truth is fully exposed. This includes the discovery that his niece is really his daughter, his wife's father something of a bad lot and the Catholic Church is engaged in the practice of taking new-born babies from those mothers it considers to be immoral and unsuitable, and passing them on to parents and institutions which will bring them up properly. The plan, apparently, is that such children, once grown up, will choose the church, either as priests or nuns. Black's crime novels are of the quiet, atmospheric sort, in which the objective is to reveal, rather slowly it should be said, the mind of the imperfect protagonist. Quirke is less than heroic, yet he is stubborn, and in the meantime 1950s Dublin is described in loving detail. Black seems to have created a hero who in some ways represents a stereotype of Ireland itself. He is cultured and literate, yet a drunkard. He is troubled, yet irresponsible; caring, yet ineffectual; sociable yet dysfunctional; larger than life, yet diminished. He is maimed by the loutish representatives of the Church and the state, and is powerless to retaliate. He crosses the Atlantic, to Boston, in a recreation of the Irish diaspora, only to find the same institutional powers at work.

For those who like slow, gentle, psychological dramas, then Benjamin Black is the man. Strangely enough, John Banville's 1989 novel, *The Book of Evidence*, was also about a murder, though it is not considered a crime novel. Perhaps because the protagonist and narrator is the murderer rather than a detective. The traditional model of detective fiction has been exploded so thoroughly that it is no longer at all clear whether it even still exists. It is strange, then, that Banville chose to write his crime fiction under a different name, on the assumption that he was writing a different kind of novel. Banville himself claims, rather provocatively, that he finds it faster to write as Benjamin Black because Black novels are a different form of art:

Banville books take two to five years to make. It takes three or five months to make a Black book. Real crime writers are furious when I say this. Because they think I am saying it's easy. That's not what I am saying at all. Banville books are high literature – it's a different way of working (Birnbaun 2011).

Tana French also writes psychological crime fiction, and like Black's, her novels are rather slow – she does not specialise in high-speed action, tough-guy cops, or tortuous plotting – and there are many readers who prefer this kind of gentler, more ruminative pace. Her first novel, *In the Woods* (2007), is about a Dublin detective with a tragic past whose investigations place an increasing strain on his mental equilibrium. This seems to be French's method. In her recent novel *Broken Harbour* (2012), a multiple murder takes place on a remote housing estate some distance from Dublin which has been left unfinished and abandoned by the now bankrupt construction company, victim of Ireland's economic collapse. The detective assigned the case has – surprise – a troubled past. Indeed, his professional life, despite his own insistence on his unusually high success rate, is marked by an unexplained black cloud – a botched investigation. The novel's plot is almost non-existent: murder, crime scene investigation, suspect caught, not very unexpected or sharp twist at the end, and the truth revealed. Most of the novel, like Black's *Christine Falls*, seems to be an exploration of the detective's mind. "Scorcher" Kennedy, the first-person narrator and protagonist, has a great deal to say about police work and how he believes it should be done. He is a strong believer in detachment and putting across the right image; he claims to be an excellent detective, with an unusually high solve rate, yet he is only a detective sergeant (most fictional police detectives are inspectors) and at first the novel appears to be the exploration of one man's self-delusion. Yet this is only partly true. Kennedy does not turn out to be especially incompetent, instead, he is let down by the two people – his disturbed sister and his inexperienced partner – who owe him most for his generosity and tolerance. This, of course, is rather ironic, given that Kennedy's professional philosophy is to

remain detached, but that, presumably, is the point.

These four novelists share certain features. One of them is alcohol. The bottle, as mentioned above, is a fixture of detective fiction, and this is its role in John Connolly's fiction, which is firmly embedded within the American hard-boiled tradition. Benjamin Black's *Christine Falls*, on the other hand, seems to use Quirke's drinking as a means of contributing to the evocation of 1950s Dublin. Pubs and bars are lovingly described, and we meet drunken poets and other eccentrics in a rather clichéd portrayal of boozy Ireland. Rosa González, in a soon to be published chapter on Irish culture argues that Ireland's reputation for excessive drinking is factually inaccurate, pointing out that "Ireland was only 14<sup>th</sup> out of 50 European countries in terms of alcohol consumption". Significantly, however, it is the portrayal of Ireland as a drinking nation, particularly on the screen, that maintains the myth – a myth that Benjamin Black also contributes to. Ken Bruen's depiction of alcohol is slightly different. Firstly, Jack Taylor's addiction is not glamourised, but presented as sordid, debilitating and ugly. Similarly, most of the pubs he frequents are deeply unattractive, while alcoholic vagrants make frequent appearances, either as a backdrop to Galway's disintegrating city centre, or as victims of the economic crisis. Even more than his American contemporaries, James Sallis and George Pelecanos, Bruen probes mercilessly into every last shameful detail of an alcoholic's life, the hurt he does to himself, and even more so to others.

Another common feature, again also common in Irish culture, is the Catholic Church. For Benjamin Black, in *Christine Falls* the Church is the great villain, tearing new-born babies from their mothers' arms, controlling and perverting the lives of the faithful and stooping, whenever necessary, to threats, violence and murder. Given the frequent scandals, particularly to do with child abuse and that of vulnerable, young, pregnant women, Black's depiction of the Church's crimes is never anything but authentic. Bruen, also, makes frequent and angry reference to the Church. Indeed, his third Jack Taylor novel, *The Magdalen Martyrs* (2003), takes as its

background the same horrific events as *Christine Falls*. From the late eighteenth century until the 1990s, thousands of unmarried, pregnant, Irish women were imprisoned in convents, forced to work in the so-called 'Magdalene Laundries', their babies taken from them, and then condemned to a life of drudgery. The Irish government has, in recent years, apologised for the fate of these women.

In all of Bruen's novels, not only *The Magdalen Martyrs*, the Church is criticised, particularly through the unpleasant figure of Father Malachy, a chain-smoking, foul-mouthed, unChristian priest. He was "my old arch enemy, my nemesis," says Jack at the beginning of *Cross* (2007: 7). But it is important to note that Father Malachy is the living representative of the Church as institution, not as faith. The fact is, despite everything, Jack remains a believer. Brought up a Catholic, he still automatically crosses himself at the start of a journey, frequents churches, and occasionally prays. Bruen's portrayal of faith, then, is probably that of many people brought up within a strongly religious culture – Jack is not blind to the institution's failings – indeed, they make him furious, but he embraces his somewhat nostalgic personal belief as an inherent part of himself, his origins, his culture, his past, and his identity.

Increasingly, as the Jack Taylor series progresses, the devil in person makes an appearance. So much so that the eighth of the novels is called, simply, *The Devil* (2010). Bruen's novels, though dealing with deeply serious issues, like to give the impression that they are not serious, but playful. Perhaps this is the reason for the devil's growing protagonism. Nevertheless, it seems to be a characteristic of Catholic authors, or of authors working from within a Catholic culture. As mentioned above, both John Connolly and the American writer James Lee Burke frequently cite evil, or the devil, as the cause of tragedy and disaster. Burke's novel *In the Electric Mist with the Confederate Dead* (1993) is the most given over to supernatural affairs, but in recent years he has turned increasingly to concern for humanity and government incompetence as reflected in his 2007 novel about hurricane Katrina, *The Tin Roof*

*Blowdown*. Connolly, however, became increasingly obsessed with the devil and his novel *Black Angel* (2005) can more fairly be described as a horror story than a crime novel. He seems to have come back down to earth more recently though – *The Reapers* (2008) is a relatively standard romp within the contemporary American crime tradition.

Finally, as Bruen's novels particularly exemplify, the economic crisis plays an important

part in recent Irish crime fiction. Tana French's *Broken Harbour*, apart from its psychological exploration of a garda's mind, is also strongly centred on the human consequences of the economic downturn. The murdered family – father, son and daughter – were killed as a direct result of the anguish brought on by Ireland's financial meltdown and in particular, the bursting of the construction bubble.

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*Christine Falls* 2006  
*The Silver Swan* 2007  
*The Lemur* 2008  
*Elegy for April* 2010  
*A Death in Summer* 2011  
*Vengeance* 2012  
*Holy Orders* 2013

#### Editions in Spanish published by Alfaguara

*Christine Falls* — *El secreto de Christine*, trad. Miguel Martínez-Lage, 2007.  
*The Silver Swan* — *El otro nombre de Laura*, trad. Miguel Martínez-Lage, 2008.  
*The Lemur* — *El Lémur*, trad. Miguel Martínez-Lage, 2009.  
*Elegy for April* — *En busca de April*, trad. Miguel Martínez-Lage, 2011.

*A Death in Summer* — *Muerte en verano*, trad. Nuria Barrios, 2012.  
*Vengeance* — *Venganza*, trad. Nuria Barrios, 2012.

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*Christine Falls* — *El secret de Christine Falls*, trad. Eduard Castanyo, 2007.  
*The Silver Swan* — *L'altre nom de Laura*, trad. Eduard Castanyo, 2008.  
*The Lemur* — *El Lèmur*, trad. Eduard Castanyo, 2009.  
*Elegy for April* — *A la recerca de l'April*, trad. Eduard Castanyo, 2011.  
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*The Magdalen Martyrs* 2003  
*The Dramatist* 2004  
*Priest* 2006  
*Cross* 2007  
*Sanctuary* 2008  
*The Devil* 2010  
*Headstone* 2011  
*Purgatory* 2013

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*The Killing Kind* 2001  
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*The Black Angel* 2005  
*The Unquiet* 2007  
*The Reapers* 2008  
*The Lovers* 2009  
*The Whisperers* 2010  
*The Burning Soul* 2011  
*The Wrath of Angels* 2012  
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*The Black Angel* — *El angel negro*, 2007.  
*The Unquiet* — *Los atormentados*, 2008.

*The Reapers* — *Los hombres de la guadaña*, 2009.  
*The Lovers* — *Los amantes*, 2010.  
*The Whisperers* — *Voces que susurran*, 2011.  
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#### **Editions in Catalan, published by Edicions Bromera**

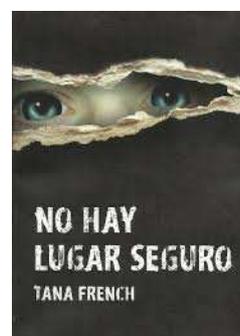
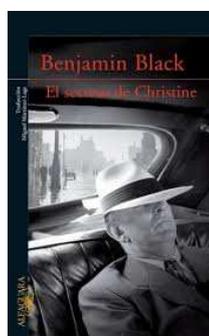
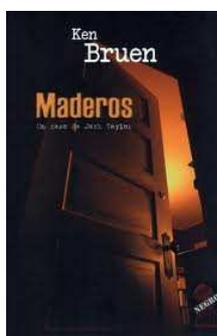
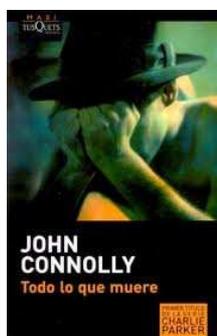
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Received 20<sup>th</sup> February 2014

Last version 27<sup>th</sup> February 2014