
IRISH STUDIES IN SPAIN – 2008

Reviews by

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Introduction

Children’s literature. Many of us who spend days dealing with books and burning our midnight oil working on intricate papers normally forget to turn to the basics of reading: those elemental and fascinating first pages when the world was unknown. Parents should have a say on what children read. Whether they take notice or not of what we say is a different matter altogether. When you are a teenager it is perhaps a question of independence, and even good taste, not to read what your parents recommend. But still, done in an indirect way, a book carelessly forgotten on a table, a passing remark at lunch, can ignite the interest of the boy or girl in a worthwhile read.

The monopoly of children’s literature in the English-speaking world, and far beyond those limits, must be granted to the indisputable force of the Harry Potter series. Since the publication of the first novel in 1997, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, J. K. Rowling has managed to create a symbol of our times whose influence has been multiplied by the cinema. Suddenly it seems as if Harry Potter has always been there, like any Disney cartoon character (he is Warner’s, actually). Whatever may be said against the Harry Potter phenomenon, it has promoted reading amongst children and teenagers to unbelievable limits, and this is something not to be taken lightly. J. K. Rowling

tapped into the world of magic, which is a fertile ground for the imagination, and despite its bland texture her books also deal with death and incomprehension, with alienation and segregation by the muggle world, something kids may empathize with.

It is true what American short story writer Dave Eggers says, we tend to dismiss the enjoyment and capacity of today's children for literature, turning to stale phrases like "children do not read today as we used to" or "books are being destroyed by a digital conspiracy". Children do respond positively to good books, sometimes with more interest than adults, that is why I believe attractive material should be provided to them.

If someone is interested in finding an alternative to Harry Potter perhaps you would like to make the acquaintance of *Artemis Fowl*. *Artemis*, sometimes dubbed as the dark side of Harry Potter, is the creation of Irish writer Eoin Colfer. He was born in Wexford, the birthplace of the most prodigious craftsman of English writing in Ireland today, John Banville, and was a primary school teacher (he was also the son of teachers: children simply had to come up in his books). The *Artemis Fowl* series share with Harry Potter the existence of a parallel universe of fantasy. In the stories created by Colfer, it is a whole civilization of fairies who live in the centre of the earth, unknown by the humans who inhabit the surface. *Artemis*, a child prodigy who is keen on recovering his family fortune, has discovered their existence and strives to get the gold from the magic creatures.

There is another important difference between Harry Potter and *Artemis Fowl*. The latter is the son of an Irish mafioso and his activities are termed legally dubious. *Artemis* is cool, arrogant and deftly uses new technologies. He is accompanied by Butler, his bodyguard, who is heavily armed. Another interesting feature of the books is that Colfer introduces the rhythm and tension of detective thrillers into the realm of magic. Holly Short, an elf who is the first female admitted to the special police force of the fairies, the Lower Elements Police (yes, the LEPrecon), owes much of her style and jargon to the American cop series we have seen on TV hundreds of times. *Artemis* and Holly will be the

point of connection between both worlds and their adventures are hectic and nerve racking.

Although *Artemis* becomes more humane as the series progresses, Colfer avoids presenting the world of adults in a decaffeinated way: the picture of *Artemis*'s mother, a neurotic woman confined to her bed, who hears voices and suffers from lapses of memory, is quite disturbing. Additionally, as regards the protagonist's distinctive qualities, he is Irish, and Colfer does not offer any resistance to interiorize some stereotypes of Ireland in his books, as the following examples prove: "Por fortuna, el resto del mundo daba por sentado que los irlandeses estaban todos chiflados, una teoría que los propios irlandeses no hacían nada por rebatir" / "Pero a pesar de todo eso, si existía una raza por la cual las Criaturas sentían cierta afinidad, esa era la irlandesa (...) si las Criaturas estaban en verdad emparentadas con los humanos, tal como sostenía otra teoría, lo más probable es que hubiese sido en la isla Esmeralda donde había comenzado su historia" (*Artemis Fowl*, 2001: 79). Nevertheless it has also to be said that *Fowl*'s ultra cool personality, surrounded by high tech gadgetry in his Dublin mansion and with CNN permanently switched on in his study, offers a modern image of a young Irish lad of our times that offsets any clichés about the Irish that the author may introduce elsewhere. Five of the six *Artemis Fowl* novels that Colfer has written so far have been translated into Spanish. All of them, from *Artemis Fowl* (2001) to *Artemis Fowl V- La cuenta atrás* (2007) are published by Montena and translated by Ana Alcaina.

The year 2008 also saw the publication of a book for children set in Ireland written by a Spanish author, something quite unusual. Laura Andújar Lorca's first novel, *El trébol de Kinsale* (Madrid: Anaya, 2007) concerns the adventures of a young Spanish woman who, before starting her degree in *Filología Inglesa*, spends the summer holidays working at a B&B in Kinsale in order to improve her English and relax after her Selectividad exams. Inevitably she will meet a handsome young Irishman, and will discover the mysterious disappearance of her landlady's husband. Despite a somewhat unsatisfying end, it is a good book for teenagers, the boiling concoction of feelings and emotions typical of

that age is well treated and the plot is intriguing, having at its centre a clover-shaped jewel which was taken to Spain after the battle of Kinsale in 1602. It presents a picturesque, mild, humorous and sympathetic view of Ireland: “Estos irlandeses están como cabras” (19), says the owner of the B&B at one point. The protagonist also does a bit of travelling, so it can be a nice introduction to Ireland for young readers. Who knows, when they grow up they might eagerly write the kind of books that are presented below. Sounds frightfully middle aged.

PS.- Irish topics appear in the most unexpected places, which is always a symbol of the dynamic nature of Irish literature. Two highly commendable articles, by David Clark and Carmen M. Fernández Rodríguez, which connect Irish and Australian literature, were published in the monograph of the journal *Antípodas* (2008), which aptly bears the title *Australia and Galicia: Defeating the Tyranny of Distance*. But other compelling works were published last year: Pilar Villar-Argáiz’s *The Poetry of Eavan Boland. A Postcolonial Reading* (Dublin: Maunsel and Company) is an accomplished book; Nórdica Libros completed its project of editing all of Flann O’Brien’s forgotten fictions with *La boca pobre*, the publishing house Sexto Piso produced an amusing booklet with Jonathan Swift’s *Instrucciones a los sirvientes*, Brendan Behan’s *Mi Nueva York* was published by Marbot, and John Banville’s *Imágenes de Praga* by Herce. So many things, so very many things.

Alberro, Manuel, ed. and trans. 2007. *Lebor Gabála*. Gijón: Trea. ISBN: 978-84-9704-329-8.

Leabhar Gabhála or *The Book of the Invasions* has been translated for the first time into Spanish and this by itself is a major event, an outstanding circumstance in the field of Irish publications. It is sadly remarkable that it has not attracted the attention it deserves.

The book is a medieval compilation written by monks in the 12th century which tells the story of the different groups of people who arrived at the Irish shores in ancient times. It is based on myth and legends passed from generation to

generation, but as editor and translator Manuel Alberro says in the introduction, one should not underestimate the importance of mythology in understanding the beliefs of a nation: “Los mitos son una forma de formular explicaciones válidas, pero no necesariamente realistas, de condiciones humanas fundamentales” (10). The editor thus vindicates the power of legends to explain what history cannot really handle: the realm of fantasy and dream, the universe of images and visions which ruled the lives of mankind in times which have fallen into oblivion. Manuel Alberro is probably right when he claims in the introduction that no other nation in the world can compare to Ireland as to the interest displayed by scholars and writers in the recovery of old tales and folklore, and he mentions the tradition of the seanchaí, the archives of the Irish Folklore Commission, and the impulse given by W. B. Yeats to the recovery of old legends. The introduction to the actual translation itself is complete and instructive, informing on the origins of Celtic mythology, its relation to similar sources of ancient wisdom in Wales or in continental Europe, and on the four main cycles of the Irish Celtic sagas, *The Book of the Invasions* belonging to the first one. There is also precise information on the several manuscripts in which the *Lebor Gabála* can be found.

The chronicle itself tells the story of the five groups of invaders of Ireland in ancient times: Cessair, Partholon, Nemed, Fir Bolg and Tuatha Dé Danáinn, which arrived in Ireland before the last and definite wave – the Gaels or Milesians, the sons of Mil – who conquered the island fully and established themselves there from the coast of present-day Galicia. The narration of the invasions reproduces in Spanish the style of ancient annals, with long genealogical lists that reach back to Noah. It is a tale strewn with primary instincts, sins committed fighting for the land, and there are echoes of the Ancient Scriptures and even of the journeys of Odysseus. It probably has not got the lyricism and poetic evocativeness of other ancient texts such as *Beowulf*, but the story is engaging in several parts, particularly in everything connected with the voyages of ships loaded with warriors, travelling from distant lands such as Greece, Scythia, Egypt or Spain, towers that are built and

later destroyed, epidemics that kill invaders, battles that are won and later lost. According to the *Lebor Gabála* the first invasion was commanded by Cesair, daughter of Noah, the first woman who attempted the conquest of Ireland “forty days before the Flood”, in an expedition with 50 women and 3 men (one of the males, the text reads, died from “the excess of women”).

The book provides a fascinating account of an evil race, the Fomorians, a caste of half-monsters, always lurking in the margins who engage in battles with the successive groups of invaders, until they are finally defeated by the Tuatha Dé Danánn. As is usual in other medieval manuscripts, the scribes introduced references to Christianity in what is basically an account of heathen myths.

The episode concerning the Milesians and their definitive conquest of Ireland demonstrates the existing connections between the northwest corner of the Iberian peninsula and the Celtic tribes of the North Atlantic regions. From the town of Brigantia, Ith, the son of Breoghan saw a solitary island in the mist, and impelled his tribe to travel there. Subsequent battles are narrated in detail and the presence of Aimirgin, the Milesians’ druid, adds a prophetic tone to the narration. The book ends with a list of notes provided by the editor which connect the legends in the book with proper names, festivities and geographic locations of today’s Ireland. *Lebor Gabála*, in short, is a valuable and necessary contribution to Celtic mythology and Irish legends for Spanish scholars.

Altuna, Asier and Cristina Andreu (eds.)
2007. *Re-Writing Boundaries. Critical Approaches in Irish Studies*. Barcelona: PPU.
ISBN: 978-84-477-0996-0

The book of proceedings of the V International Conference of the Spanish Association of Irish Studies, held at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona in May 2005, has become, thanks to the efforts of Asier Altuna and Cristina Andreu, a varied and well-informed collection of articles on Irish studies. It is enjoyable and thoroughly academic at the same time.

The general topic of the Tarragona conference was “Re-writing Boundaries”, which is an adequate theme for a conference on Ireland. Northern Ireland, as will be seen, has an important presence in many of the articles. The book opens with an excellent paper by Christine St. Peter on the work of three contemporary Irish writers, Éilis Ní Dhuibhne, Colm Tóibín and Anne Enright, whose ambitions to travel inside and outside Ireland testify to the international quality of Irish writing today. New maps are being drawn by these authors in their own way, transgressing boundaries that are not only physical, but mental as well. Tóibín’s travelogue, *A Walk Along the Irish Border* (1990, 1987) is given a full and complete account, set together with the narratives by Enright and Dhuibhne in its adequate context: “They [the young people of Ireland] ran away because the old maps were suffocating and they needed to make new ones, experimenting with their bodies in often dangerous but sometimes liberating ways” (24).

Novels which deal with the Troubles in Northern Ireland have an ample representation in *Re-writing Boundaries*. Esther Aliaga Rodrigo writes about Robert McLiam Wilson’s *Ripley Bogle* (1989), a pessimistic narrative with regard to the effects that place can exert upon the individual. Belfast, as it does appear in other similar novels, will represent the territory of violence where no ambivalent attitudes are possible. Hatred and guilt will be the consequences of a malignant spirit spawned by the condemned geography of the city. The Troubles are also a threatening presence in Jennifer Johnston’s *The Gingerbread Woman* (2000), a novel that is the subject of an article by María Losada and Bendición Olivares. As Jennifer Johnston once said, “We are all burdened by the past, by our own history, by our culture (...) for all sorts of historical reasons we handle the past very badly, and maybe in the next millennium (...) we will have learned”. Perhaps this is the reason why Losada and Olivares stress the aspects of Johnston’s novel that point towards regeneration and the therapeutic power of literature.

Another writer that was bound to appear in a book dealing with boundaries is Brian Moore.

Although he spent most of his life in Canada and in the US, he evocatively remembered the streets of Belfast in *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955) or in the thriller belonging to his last period *Lies of Silence* (1990). Andrés Palacios Pablos analyzes the exhaustive political radiography of the city that Moore sketches in this novel. “The Irish border”, writes Palacios, “rarely prevents the territory from making an enormous impression on its inhabitants, often caught up between rejection and adherence, thus creating a new psychological frontier, a new dilemma added to their specific identity” (71).

In dealing with the territory of violence in Northern Ireland the most gripping and sharpest fiction that has probably been written on sectarian murders could not be far away. Eoin McNamee’s *Resurrection Man* (1994) is the main topic in two central articles of the book: Stephanie Schwerter relates McNamee’s fiction to Daniel Mornin’s *All Our Fault* (1996) and Glenn Patterson’s *That Which Was* (2004). Karen Yanuba Lezama, on her part, connects the story of Victor Kelly with Bernard Mac Laverty’s novel *Cal* (1983). While Schwerter focuses on Belfast’s topography of division in her selected versions of the city, Karen Yanuba stresses the medical, mostly pathological dimension of the murderers, the appalling human drama depicted in the novels under study. Again, the tragedy provoked by the conflict prevents, particularly in the story of *Cal*, any escape from the boundaries of violence. In the case of Victor Kelly’s story McNamee points to the dangers involved in overstepping physical and psychological landmarks.

Not all the protagonists of the fictions concerned with The Troubles are male. Laura Filardo and Ana María Iglesias conduct an analysis of three short stories by Brenda Murphy, who was personally involved in Republican activism during the late 1970s. Using the tools of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Filardo and Iglesias establish the links between the conscience of the protagonist in Murphy’s stories, a female republican prisoner, and the wider power relationships in this highly politicised environment.

Apart from the question of Northern Ireland, other rich and up-to-date articles are on offer in

the selection made by Altuna and Andreu. Aída Rosende Pérez informs on recent artistic projects in Ireland made by women artists who react in various ways against the silences imposed on the female body. Eibhear Walshe writes an intelligent article on two fine novels published in 2004, Colm Tóibín’s *The Master* and Emma Donoghue’s *Lifemask*. Of the two, Tóibín’s book has grown in stature with the passing of time, so it is very adequate to examine Walshe’s article (probably one of the first critical assessments made on this novel) which explores past discourses of sexual repression.

María José Carrera immerses herself in the complex territory of Samuel Beckett’s biography (or “autography”, as Porter Abbott suggests) as regards to a volatile and fragile piece of writing of Beckett’s middle period as section XI of *Texts for Nothing* (1950-51). In her discussion of this text, Carrera establishes connections with eighteenth-century philosopher George Berkeley, Dante’s *Divina Commedia* and Beckett’s own film script of 1963.

What is particularly interesting, I feel, in a volume of essays, is the research done on neglected works, the display of hidden connections, the discovery of unknown documents. Here Jordi Lamarca Margalef reveals the story of the “Cartas Irlandesas” that politician José María Lizana published in *El Noticiero Bilbaíno* between April 1880 and October 1881. At a moment when the Basque were concerned about the suppression of their “fueros”, José María Lizana looked towards Ireland in an attempt to explain to the readers of the newspaper the situation in Ireland as regards Home Rule. It is a pity that no details on Lizana’s connection with Ireland are provided by the author of this revealing article. Likewise, María Teresa Calderón Quindós examines a poem that Seamus Heaney wrote for Amnesty International in 1985, “From the Republic of Conscience”.

The book is completed by other solid and specialized articles by Juan Francisco Elices Agudo, Pilar Villar Argáiz, Constanza del Río Álvaro, M^a Yolanda Fernández Suárez, Asier Altuna and Carolina Amador Moreno, among others contributors.

Behan, Brendan. 2008. *Delincuente juvenil*. Sonia Fernández Ordás, trans. Coruña: Ediciones del Viento. ISBN: 978-84-96964-35-8.

Brendan Behan's most famous novel, *Borstal Boy*, has at last been translated into Spanish, fifty years after it was first published. It was high time somebody carried out the project of making a Spanish version of this fascinating autobiographical book, and the merit should go to Ediciones del Viento, a Galician press that is adamant in recovering forgotten classics in the English language, including *Los días de Birmania*, by George Orwell, or *Viaje a una guerra*, by C. Isherwood and W.H. Auden.

Behan was arrested in Liverpool in 1939 for carrying explosives into England. He was a member of the IRA and that would only be the first of a series of different offences for which he was to be sent to prison. *Borstal Boy* is an account of his temporary stay in prison waiting for trial and his subsequent sentence to three years' borstal detention. He could not be sent to jail for a longer sentence as he was not yet 17.

What stands out in the narration of his period of detention is, undoubtedly, the protagonist's narrative voice, the fluent current of memories from a young conscience. Behan tells everything from the point of view of a 16-year-old who is receptive to the warmth of friendship, idealistic, naive, resentful of the screws or jailers who treat him badly (curiously enough, those of his own persuasion: "Los celadores católicos eran los peores. Y los católicos irlandeses, los peores de los peores", 81), almost grateful to those who are kind. His happiness when he is given a particularly good meal, or when he is allowed to read a good book, or simply when he is warm in his cell makes the reader tune in with a flow of empathy towards the protagonist.

He is shown to be a truly convinced and fanatical member of the IRA, who has learnt by heart from an early age, and without questioning, the creed of Irish Nationalism, which enables him to deliver a political speech to the judge who sends him to borstal. But at the same time he can't help being friends with all kinds of people, regardless of their nationality: "It seemed a bit

disloyal to me that I should prefer to be with boys from English cities than with my own countrymen and comrades from Ireland's hills and glens"/"Me parecía un poco desleal querer estar con chicos de ciudades inglesas antes que con mis propios paisanos y camaradas de las montañas y los valles de Irlanda" (193).

He learns to be tough in prison, to fend for himself and to get in trouble only when it is absolutely necessary. He tells with candour that he reads books avidly and finds comfort in the rituals of the Catholic Mass.

Reading *Borstal Boy* in Spanish makes one reflect on the impossibility of translation in general. There is nothing particularly wrong with this much needed version. In Sonia Fernández Ordás's text the reading is fluent and easy (with occasional mistakes: it hurts the eye to read a reference to "W.B. Yates" on page 42). I do not know if there is any other option for the title than *Delincuente juvenil*, although this one leaves to one side the idea of confinement and reclusion associated with borstal or "correccional de menores". Something similar happens with the slang, swear words and the peculiar accents of the prisoners that appear in the novel. It is simply not possible to convey the expressive force and wit of many expressions. The phrase "I'm after using it" must be "acabo de usarlo", but it misses all the colour of Hiberno-English. "Fugh off" is not simply "jódete", there is a lilt and a grimace that goes with that expletive, but there is no possible way of putting it in a different form.

Fernández Ordás gives an updated and modern version of the dialogues in colloquial Spanish, most of the time presenting a more literal interpretation when in the original the narrator employs a euphemism or an idiom. The interested readers can check for themselves how the expressions "pull your wire" (p. 133 in the translation) or "not worth a light" (p. 211) are turned into Spanish to see this particular point. In any case, the optimism of Behan's personality shines through in the Spanish translation as it probably would in any language. The small linguistic adjustments do not distract readers from the many rewards of reading this book.

Carrera, María José, Anunciación Carrera, Enrique Cámara and Celsa Dapía, eds. 2008. *The Irish Knot*. Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid. ISBN: 978-84-8448-455-4.

No less than 37 articles, plus an introduction on the conceptual image of the Celtic Knot, are presented in this book of proceedings of the VI International AEDEI Conference, which took place at the University of Valladolid in May 2006. It was a fruitful academic gathering and naturally it was bound to produce a complete and exhaustive volume which, in many ways, it is a state-of-the-art book on Irish studies today. The editors have taken pains to include a wide selection of papers presented at Valladolid and as is common in any AEDEI conference, the reader will find articles on Irish economy, politics, history, film, media, etc. as well as a consistent number of articles on literary criticism.

The Irish Knot is comprised of seven sections, but instead of classifying the papers according to their discipline (linguistics, history, literature, etc.) the editors have gathered the different groups of articles around an idea expressed in the heading, so that in each chapter we can find articles on various topics but subtly joined together. It is a daring approach and the editors must be credited for the original distribution of the contents. The arrangement may give the initial impression of disorder, but as they make clear in the introduction, the editors want to reflect on the influence of the Celtic Knot, that evocative symbol of interwoven lines whose meanings are part of an ever evolving flux. The arrangement of the essays is made “in imitation of Irish plaitwork, of its tying and untying, to allow for the freest and most abundant associations” (19). The titles of the headings, taken from the lexical field of manuscript culture, are also an indication of the editors’ intention not to get trapped by rigid systems of thought, to liberate ideas and to give pre-eminence to the imagination in their view of Irish culture. “Historiated Capitals”, “Illuminations”, “Palimpsests”, “Matrix Lingua” are some of the headings of the different sections. Under the title of “Variance” (Chapter 5), for example, we can find an article on the influence of the influx of immigrants into Ireland

on recent literature, an analysis on the dichotomy rural Gaeltacht/urban Ireland in Éilís Ní Dhuibhne’s *The Dancers Dancing*, a Lacanian approach to James Joyce’s “The Dead” and two articles on the Ulster-Scots contribution to cultural hybridity in Northern Ireland. “Variance” refers to the multiplicity of variations of a normally absent original, as in medieval manuscripts. It therefore becomes an appropriate title for a section dealing with multiple identities in Irish society.

All the articles collected in this publication should deserve a comment: in the first piece we find a survey of Irish economy in the 20th century made by an economist, John Bradley, who is sympathetic to the workings of the imagination. It is worth reading. His reader-friendly approach to economic matters is really welcome. Bradley explains that both failures and successes in Irish economy depend on long-term policies made by those in positions of influence, and insists on the importance of conceptual frameworks that underpin policy actions.

Alfred Markey deals with the 90th anniversary of the 1916 Rising, which had taken place in 2006, a short time before the conference. At the beginning of that year the President, Mary McAleese, had delivered a speech which provoked a heated debate in Irish cultural circles on the nature of the celebration itself. Each anniversary of the Rising in recent decades had been somewhat of an assessment of the current thinking which prevailed at the time, and in 2006 the demonstrative and effusive celebrations in the streets of Dublin indicated that the Revisionists’ discourse was at a low ebb. Alfred Markey gives voice to everyone in the debate and exposes with ironic detachment each point of view. He also points out the most striking paradox related to the celebrations: the more those inspired by 1916 move away from its example, the more the Rising is honoured.

David Clark writes wisely on a much neglected genre, the Irish historical novel, and examines the problems raised by its relation to “true”, historical events. He takes up James Cahalan’s argument that Irish historical narrative should deal with political events that the authors themselves did not personally experience, and the problems that this definition conveys.

Rod Stoneman, who was Chief Executive of the Irish Film Board in the 1990s, tells in an interesting article of his period as the head of this institution, as well as the successes and failures of Irish cinema. He believes that the Irish Film Board had to promote those projects which represented the diversity of Irish society. It was a period of dynamic change in the economy and it triggered a renegotiation of both gender and class structures. In his opinion, the policies of the Board had to move away from inauthentic and stereotyped images of Ireland and support initiatives which grew from contemporary experience. Although plenty of work is being done nowadays in this direction, his general view is pessimistic: "But overall film work that demands a more active spectator is currently confined to the thin cultural margins of society" (95), he writes.

Rosa González Casademont writes on contemporary Irish cinema too, and focuses her contribution on a number of documentary and feature films which take up painful events and personal stories from Ireland's recent past. González Casademont explores the revisionist impulse in contemporary Irish cinema, including a series of films from Northern Ireland which have revisited the Troubles as a first step towards reconciliation. She reveals the shortcomings of contemporary Irish cinema, how financial or health scandals have not found an echo on the big screen, or how recent films on traumatic events related to the Catholic Church have not made a proper analysis of the conditions that allowed those events to take place. For Rosa González, a documentary such as *The Rocky Road to Dublin* (1968) provides much more serious criticism on the dark aspects of Irish society than many more recent films.

With the passing of time, more and more articles in recent volumes of Irish Studies examine the consequences of the 1998 Belfast Agreement. The two contributions in *The Irish Knot* dealing with post-agreement Northern Ireland do so in a competent and efficient way. Chris Gilligan writes on the use of images of children in the photographic portrayals of the peace process. At the outset Gilligan notes that images of children are used in newspaper articles and front covers of books to transmit the

concepts of hope, innocence and vulnerability.

These are certainly adequate and well-accepted ideas that reflect the hopes and fears that many people feel regarding the Peace Process. Gilligan goes further in his interpretation of the pictures and reveals that in many cases there is an essential fiction in the production of images: these photographs of children are seldom natural, neither are they the product of a casual glance. There is normally a preconceived intention behind them as well as the work in setting up the shot before the photos are taken. Gilligan insists on analysing the "interpretative framework" that surrounds the images, including the ideological position of the viewer, and urges us to be critical and alert to any attempt towards manipulation. Meaning is not inherent in the images, but arises from our relationship with them.

Laura Filardo, on her part, applies tools from the area of Cognitive Linguistics to interpret the words of the main political leaders of Northern Ireland after the signing of the Belfast Agreement. She draws heavily on the Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), devised by Jonathan Charteris-Black, to unearth the conceptual metaphors behind the speeches of political leaders Gerry Adams (SF), John Hume (SDLP), David Trimble (UUP) and Ian Paisley (DUP). The article provides an exercise in searching for clarity behind the muddled political discourse. Laura Filardo sheds light on the ambiguity used by politicians and the way they employ a metaphor-loaded language to legitimise their position and delegitimise their adversaries'. It is revealing to learn who makes more use of metaphors in their speeches.

In a book on Irish culture such as this, it is not surprising that a number of authors receive special attention, and in *The Irish Knot* there are some relevant contributions on Seamus Heaney, W.B. Yeats and Flann O'Brien, but I would like to make a final comment on an erudite piece on Samuel Beckett by David Pattie, from the University of Chester. Pattie starts off with a reflection on the inner voice heard by many Beckettian characters, a voice that does not help to clarify anything in the narrative. The characters usually end up mirroring the ramblings of the voice while they confront the ruins of a broken world. It is no wonder that the

search for silence becomes a constant longing in all Beckettian texts: “Quietism has always exercised a compelling hold over the Beckett protagonist from Belacqua on” (162). Beckett’s reaction to a ruined world is compared by Pattie to Walter Benjamin’s writings which deal with a new paradigm for art after the 1st World War. Benjamin famously defined modern urban life as a series of shock experiences and he theorised on the need of the artist to develop a protective coating that could filter out the impact of city life. Pattie conducts a comparative analysis of Benjamin’s critical writings in order to explore how Beckett delved even further, presenting a world in which the individual is so shocked by experience that he only envisages complete decay, which would explain the dream-like quality of many of his texts. With articles like this, *The Irish Knot* pays readers the compliment of some fine interpretations of the work of relevant writers.

O’Flaherty, Liam. 2007. *El delator*. Gabriela Bustelo, trans. Barcelona: Libros del Asteroide. ISBN: 978-84-935448-8-1.

In recent years a group of independent publishing houses are leading the way in the publication of Irish authors in Spain. While major companies show little interest, as it is not considered profitable enough, these small presses are offering emblematic books of Irish literature to readers, minor classics such as *The Informer* (1925) by Liam O’Flaherty, but also all the lesser-known novels by Flann O’Brien (a commendable work initiated by Nórdica Libros) or Brendan Behan’s autobiographical novel *Borstal Boy* (1958), published by Ediciones del Viento (see above). Editorial Alfama, from Málaga, will be soon publishing Aidan Higgins’s fine novel *Langrishe, Go Down* (1966) (*Langrishe. El declive*) another milestone of contemporary Irish literature that remained to be translated into Spanish, and which will see the light thanks to the determination of imaginative editor Antonio García Maldonado. The main drawback is that these presses cannot normally afford to print large quantities and they quickly sell out. In any case, it would not be adventurous to say that thanks to these initiatives a growing

interest in Irish authors is taking place in Spain.

There had been some previous translations of *The Informer* into Spanish, but an updated version was necessary. Many of us first knew of the existence of this novel thanks to the mesmerising film adaptation by John Ford in 1935, a black and white masterpiece in which the subtle use of light seemed to accuse Gypo Nolan of his felony. The novel should be seen in the context of the historical and political climate when it was published, when authors like O’Flaherty made their heroes the testimony of disenchantment with the recently created Free State.

It is difficult to understand why the name of the prologuist, Antonio Rivero Taravillo, who writes a witty and well-informed introduction, appears alone on the front page, without any mention of the person responsible for this translation, novelist Gabriela Bustelo, whose name is found in the inner pages. Gabriela Bustelo tackles the text with energy and gusto, and she is able to offer quite a few exciting paragraphs. It is always difficult to translate colloquial language, particularly slang belonging to Hiberno-English, and Bustelo consistently maintains an adequate register of vulgar Spanish in the transcription of the characters’ speech. In this new version the different men that take part in the action sometimes seem to speak “castizo”, in the style of the idealized talk of working-class youths from Madrid, but the threatening atmosphere of O’Flaherty’s novel is perfectly rendered: down-trodden individuals from neglected neighbourhoods, shabby streets, and broken people.

The novel has a basic structure, unilineal and with hardly any digressions, which makes it fast-paced and powerful. The figure of Gypo Nolan, the brute giant, member of a revolutionary organization who informs on a friend, is a character who deserves to be on the list of great archetypes of world literature. The way he is presented, driven by impulse, his incapability of producing a coherent alibi or how he squanders the reward money makes this a gripping story of treason, guilt and remorse: “Desde el instante infernal en que había abierto de una patada la puerta de la comisaría de policía, su vida entera se había sumergido en una impenetrable nube

negra de la que no parecía poder escapar” (83).

Palacios González, Manuela and Helena González Fernández, eds. 2008. *Palabras extremas: Escritoras gallegas e irlandesas de hoy*. Coruña: Netbiblo. ISBN: 978-84-9745-198-7.

Palabras extremas, the title being taken from a poem by Ana Romaní, is a comparative study of contemporary Galician and Irish women poets, or more precisely, a volume of articles in which the visions presented by both literatures are juxtaposed, set one next to the other, revealing threads of connection and divergences. The book is, in part, the result of a research project, “Poesía y género: Poetas irlandesas y gallegas contemporáneas” funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education (most of the members of the research group are contributors to the volume) and it is published as part of the Irish Studies Series, already its seventh volume, by Netbiblo and the University Institute of Research in Irish Studies, dependent on the University of A Coruña.

In the introduction, written by Manuela Palacios and Helena González, the object of study is placed in its context: from the historical connections of both lands, Ireland and Galicia, to the outstanding participation of women from both literary traditions in the last decades. There is a clear interest on the part of the editors of going beyond blurred definitions of their subject matter and in this sense the book offers a fair account of what has been happening in Galician and Irish writing with regard to women, such as the immersion made by Irish women poets in their physical and emotional experiences, resulting in the corporeal quality of many recent poems, or the cultural activism of Galician women poets, contributing to a redefinition of themselves in a specific social frame: “Son años de democracia bajo un gobierno gallego conservador que quiere momificar lo gallego como folklore y en este contexto la poesía de autoría femenina, que se multiplica en varias tendencias estéticas e ideológicas, representa un camino de normalización, renovación y modernización” (xxiv).

The book’s structure serves the interested reader extremely well: it consists of two parts, the first being devoted to academic essays and the second offering a more flexible approach, with creative essays and interviews. Furthermore, the six chapters of criticism are presented in an attractive form, complementing each other in many ways. In the first one María Xesús Nogueira writes about landscape in Galician female poetry, while in the second one Manuela Palacios delves into the presence of nature in Irish women poets. Similarly, chapter five, written by María Xesús Lama, is concerned with the rewriting of myths by Galician women poets while in the following chapter Luz Mar González Arias connects Irish poetry with classic Greek archetypes. In the chapters dealing with Galician writing, Rosalía de Castro, the founding figure of Galician poetry, is frequently mentioned, as well as how contemporary women have handled her legacy.

In her article María Xesús Nogueira explains the metaphors hidden in landscape as presented by Galician poets. Rural views are still markers of identity but women poets draw a picture of life in the country that is far from idealized. The sea, informs Nogueira, is frequently related to intimate experiences by women writers and it is interesting to know that many of them took part in collective publications in response to the infamous sinking of the oil tanker *Prestige* in November 2002 and its subsequent ecologic disaster on Galician shores.

Manuela Palacios examines from an ecofeminist perspective the conceptualization of nature by Irish women poets. She convincingly persuades the reader that the poetic tradition in Ireland has been blind to the real conditions of women as regards pain, labour, anguish and emigration. Without imposing a homogeneous scheme on her topic, she discusses the contradictory feelings towards nature in the poetry of Eavan Boland, Paula Meehan and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill.

In the third chapter Helena González studies the peculiar use of language characteristic of what she calls the “escritura violeta” or literature influenced by feminist theories. Poetry in Galicia in recent times, she claims, has become a rich and fertile ground for experimentation.

Emblematic poets such as Chus Pato, Xela Arias, María do Cebreiro or Emma Conceiro have acted against conventional rhythm and versification, constructing hybrid artefacts which break the boundaries between genres.

Laura Lojo, in the fourth chapter, successfully explains a varied range of modes of writing in a non-reductive way. Her topic is the female body in contemporary Irish poetry and she offers a wide panoramic view of the different subjectivities that have explored this theme. There has been indeed a reaction against an idealized woman being the poetic muse of the male writer who identified her with a subjected nation; women poets have superseded such views with complex incursions around the body: sexuality, the rewriting of maternity, the relationship between mothers and daughters or biological processes such as menstruation.

In the fifth chapter María Xesús Lama pays attention to the presence of myths in Galician poetry. Luz Pozo, she explains, grounds some of the poems in her book *As arpas de Iwerddon* (2004) on legends connected to *The Book of the Invasions* or *Leabhar Gabhála* (see above), with poems dedicated to Breogan, Ith or Amirgin, reinforcing her longing for a union with Ireland, “a terra segregada de nós como unha xesta”.

Luz Mar González Arias, in the last chapter of the first part, reveals that in contemporary Irish poetry women writers recover female classical figures: Penelope, Cassandra, Helen of Troy, Medusa, Philomela... in a liberating attempt to express their multifaceted gender identities.

The second part of the volume begins with an essay by poet and academic María do Cebreiro which presents an insider’s view of the Galician

world of letters. In her view, Galician poetry during the 1990s has presented the female body in an accommodated way, not being belligerent enough, and María do Cebreiro admits that her opinions on this matter have created a controversy with other women poets. Irish artist Anne le Marquand Hartigan explains her reasons for writing in a splendid essay translated into Spanish by Manuela Palacios. She writes about the joys of writing, the artist’s need for support, the activity of literature as an act of love and liberation. In a text interwoven with her own poems she speaks of Ireland as a place where words are important, respected, taken care of.

The book ends with four short talks with some relevant women poets from both shores. María Xesús Nogueira speaks with Chus Pato and Ana Romani. Luz Mar González Arias, likewise, interviews Mary O’Donnell and Delia de Fréine. Do read these interviews, they contain spirited comments and deal with important issues concerning contemporary poetry.

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