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## IRISH STUDIES ROUND THE WORLD - 2013

Patricia A. Lynch (ed.)

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## Reflections on Irish Writing in 2013

Patricia A. Lynch

Today in Ireland, we have moved from serious recession to what is hoped is the beginning of a new and better fiscal era. Recently Ireland exited the World Bank bail-out which had caused it to lose its economic sovereignty. Now the last of the rating agencies has updated Ireland's bonds from Junk status to Investment Grade. However, serious unemployment and lack of opportunities for young people mean that emigration, especially to Australia and Canada, is a strong feature of the lives of most Irish families. This has led to an increased use of technology; people who never before used a computer now use Skype to keep in touch with their extended families abroad. While there are some improvements in the situation at home, for example, an increased number of new jobs, there are still serious problems to be faced. New forms of tax have been evolved, in the areas of property and water. The country is still racked by scandals over unusually high expenditure of public funds, of which the most prominent is the payment of €50 million to consultants in setting up the new company Uisce Éireann/Irish Water to regulate the national supply and billing of water.

Reasons for hope persist in the economy. The nationwide promotion of an event called the Gathering has led to increased tourism, which was helped by the fine weather of a good summer, a happening that always helps morale. Literary, dramatic and film festivals still continue. Limerick is the first Irish City of Culture for 2014 so there will be plays, concerts, festivals of all sorts, historical talks, exhibitions, museum projects, arts and antiquities. Not only will the sports events be out of doors but there are to be lighting displays of architecture, the creation of a community garden, parades, and a play staged on a boat in the River Shannon.

Theatre will be a marked feature of Irish cultural life in the coming year. The company Druid after forty years are still continuing to produce old and new plays; at present they are touring Dion Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn*. Druid is to stage a new play by Tom Murphy soon. Not all theatre companies have had success: a special committee was tasked in the past year to review the quality of performances at the premier national theatre, the Abbey, to ascertain if its productions were "world class", and the results were not favourable. Articles in *The Irish Times* give details of the membership of the committee and the ratings which they gave the various productions, ranging from enthusiastic to not reaching "an acceptable standard for professional theatre presentation" (O'Toole 2014b). One of these plays, a new Frank McGuinness work, *The Hanging Gardens*, received one of the higher ratings. Though the reviewer did not consider it as one of McGuinness' better works, the performance of Niall Buggy in the main role was praised in various newspaper reviews at the time of staging. I had the good fortune to see this production, and what struck me was not so much its place in the McGuinness canon as its similarity to Brian Friel's work. Among other facets were the Donegal setting, the struggling writer, and a dysfunctional family which achieves some sort of redemption at the end.

In the field of fiction new books still come out. Two by Donal Ryan, *The Spinning Heart* and *The Thing About December*, have jumped from obscurity to fame. Appropriately for the coming year, Donal lives in Limerick, and is contributing well to the cultural scene. Some recent books, fiction and non-fiction, which I wish to review for this issue of the journal are *The Crocodile* by

*the Door* (Selina Guinness 2012), *The Devil I Know* (Claire Kilroy 2012), and *Staring at Lakes* (Michael Harding 2013).

To begin with *The Crocodile by the Door*, this book is many things. First of all, though autobiographical, it represents an update on the theme of the Big House, bringing it up to 2012. The subtitle claims that it is “the story of a house, a farm, and a family”. Tibbradden is a relict of a lost world which saw this area of parkland on hills sweeping down to the sea as one of a chain of similar parklands which in older times belonged to similar Ascendancy families. It is the property of a branch of the famous brewing family, Guinness. The book is imbued with a very strong sense of tradition, with frequent references to something which a great-great-grandfather or other ancestor planted (1). In a style reminiscent of many Big House narratives, the house and property are in a semi-ruinous state, and the narrator and her family stagger from crisis to crisis in an effort to keep the ship afloat. Over the decades, the Guinness family have had to sell off parts of the land to fund themselves. The newer generations have to take over after bad administration which has run the property down, leading to back-breaking work on the farm and in the house, as well as having to face tough decisions about the future. The hard work involved in this labour ties the young heiress and her husband even more to the place as she states that “sweat creates an attachment beyond talk of property and prices” (4). They have strong ties to a local school, St Columba’s, which once catered solely for children of the landlord class, and it forms an outpost to the house and to their way of life. Similar to the situation in Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent*, there is an interdependent family which is tied by service and loyalty to the landlord’s family. The Kirwans have worked on the farm and lived in a listed but tumbledown cottage on the estate for many years, and their whole life is bound up with continuing to inhabit it, so much so that when they believe their tenancy is threatened it leads to tragedy for the father of the family. Similarly to Thady Quirk in Edgeworth’s narrative, the Kirwans insist that what has been traditionally done must be continued. The heavy burden of

their expectations leads to even greater responsibilities for the young owner.

There is a very strong sense of place in this text, so much so that the reader can clearly envisage the estate rolling down almost to the sea, and gain a cartographic sense of the whole area, and its presence in relation to Dublin city. Every field has a name (208). This immediacy is even greater when it is juxtaposed with the maps and designs of the developers who wish to buy a section of the property. The narrator not only has a continuing family attachment to her ancestral home, but it has become her Arcadia; as a child when she came here to her grandparents and uncle, she “always felt as if [she]’d come safely home at last” (21). When she comes back 20 years later, it is to stay.

This is a woman’s autobiography, a love story of a man and a woman, and also the story of the love these two bear for the place. The reader is struck with admiration for the narrator’s frankness and especially her courage. She has to handle at the same time being a committed academic, while taking on the new roles of wife, mother, stepmother, farmer, and business woman. She becomes a carer also for the aged and disabled Kirwans, and does not shirk the duty of going straight to the body of her hanged employee when she receives the news of his death. In these early years as owner of the place, she has to deal also with developers and planners; these wish to acquire some of the property to extend a golf course which they intend to relocate from another area where their purpose is to build houses. The “crocodile” of the title refers to the head of a crocodile shot by a great-granduncle, and turned into a confidential letterbox for the family. The narrator sees it as “a guardian of the house, or a god to be propitiated” (7), but also a symbol of discretion, and respect for the privacy of individuals in the family. The crocodile takes on another type of allegory when it comes to the narrator’s dealings with developers. For a long time, there is to-and-fro diplomacy and legal issues played out between the parties. The family would be comparatively rich and could afford to renovate all of the property if they accept the offer. Eventually the narrator feels “shocked and betrayed” when she finds out that the land may

be going to build a housing estate, which has not been divulged to her, and a gagging clause is to be inserted which would prevent her from objecting to any further plans the developer may have for the site (227). In the end, the narrator cuts off the deal. In March 2009 that company goes into receivership.

There is a meeting at developers' offices, described as being in a conference room which looks out over the reedy waters of the Grand Canal, where "the suits" glide in and introduce themselves "in the hushed tones of corporate etiquette" (214), and discuss the business while the owners are reduced to being on the sideline. The locale and personages in this scene have a distinct similarity to another in a work of fiction, Claire Kilroy's *The Devil I Know* (2012). In Kilroy's work,

[t]he boardroom occupied the penthouse suite of one of the glass towers. A panorama of cranes spanning the horizon was engaged in a courtly dance. One step, two step, swing to your partner, and part. Ten men were seated around the boardroom table and the most senior man stood at the top (138).

The book combines Ireland of the noughties with its castles in the air of worldwide finance and eventual downfall, with a type of medieval morality play, where it gradually becomes apparent that the narrator is a pawn in the game of the devil as he speculates and negotiates. It has Gothic elements all through: like the former work the narrator, too, is a titled member of a former Ascendancy family which has fallen on hard times, and his personal ruin is tied to that of his ancestral castle. The castle contains a dungeon and a priest hole with a crucifix, and it starts to keen when Tristram's hour of destruction approaches. There are strong elements of the undead; the narrator regularly encounters Larney, an old retainer with a fondness for pointed riddles, whom he later finds to be long dead. Not only that, but Tristram himself is probably one of their number; he revives after being proclaimed dead in a hospital, he is very pale, his hands are always remarked on as being cold, "Death warmed up" as his associate Hickey says (288), and while he may drink, he never seems to eat. It is a strongly intertextual work, beginning with

the opening quotation from Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* which situates Howth and the St Lawrence family in both place and fiction. Some of the other quotations used by the author are taken from real-life utterances of prominent politicians and financiers in recent Irish life. This controversial use ties with other ironical elements, such as the fact that Tristram's Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor is actually the Devil, who is the "higher power" of the seven steps to recovery. It has two timelines, that beginning in 2006 when the original events happened, and another in a time in the future; March 2016 will be the centenary of the Easter Rising which began the movement for Ireland's independence, when he appears before a court or tribunal to answer for his part in the misdeeds. At this tribunal, the members do not want to know the names of all those in the Golden Circle which facilitated the financial downfall of the country, because "[t]wo of you, after all, were there" (153).

The next work is, like the first, autobiographical. Michael Harding's *Staring at Lakes* (2013) has won many prizes, for example, the Bord Gais Energy Book Club Awards gave it the title of Non-Fiction Book of the Year, it won the John Murray Show Listeners' Choice Award, and the Irish Book Awards' National Book Tokens' Non-Fiction Book of the Year.

The work is compelling in many ways. Chief of these is his use of description and his power to convey atmosphere and colour. This applies to local detail such as the description of kittens killed by the tomcat as "lying like small wet gloves in the rain" (297), to his impressions of a trip in modern Mongolia; from the ancient Buddhist monasteries whose only inhabitants may be a troop of small boys in ragged robes, to the nomadic tribespeople living in yurts in the snow, to the effects of sun, snow and trees at a remote lake. This applies also to his vivid evocation of the lives of old people living in isolation in various parts of Ireland, to whom he shows a remarkable kindness and empathy.

Allied to this is his powerful use of symbols. The most notable is that of lakes, as in the title; "when we look at a lake, our mind expands" (290). He grew up in the lakelands of Co. Cavan, lived

beside similar bodies of water in Co. Fermanagh, then near Mullingar, and finally went to live overlooking Lough Allen in Co. Leitrim. They represent for him places of leisure in which to swim, fish and boat. A more gloomy aspect is that of watery suicides, but they become for him ultimately places where he writes, and where he and his wife go to spend time together in silence like other older couples. Allied to this is his use of bird symbols, especially that of swans on lakes, a symbol which he shares with the work of W. B. Yeats. The swans symbolise the lifetime choice of a mate, in contrast to the more undignified ducks, but he uses also more threatening images of mythic birds which in his illness he envisages as coming to pluck out his insides.

The whole book is told in a natural speaking voice, which is very easy to follow, even where he is theoretical and philosophical. There is a knowingness in this voice, and one can envisage some hearers becoming complicit with his expressed views and more questionable adventures. Though the book deals with analyses of depression, the male menopause, and similar serious topics, it is also humorous and ironic. Humour is a strong undercurrent in the work; the author can see the funny side of encounters such as that with a lady of extreme right-wing views in a Roscommon library; the latter intersperses strong views about capital punishment, and restricted education for working class people, with complaints about the non-availability of cream buns, to which the author responds: "You're dead right there, Mrs E..." (135).

This book reflects the progression of Irish life, its economics and politics, both as participant and observer. This ranges from the dangerous sectarian disputes and killings in his parish in the North of Ireland, the seeming plenty of the turn of the century followed by the fall into serious recession, the scandal of clerical sexual abuse of children, and the influx of migrants attracted by the seeming prosperity who lend colour to his life, especially the girls.

There are darker sides to this book too. The comedy is contrasted with other less humorous scenarios such as the domestic morning when his wife is still in bed, the child is whingeing, and the

dishwasher is too full, while on a world scale a woman has been executed in Texas. Here he says that there was no avoiding the world in all its ugliness; meanwhile he seems to do nothing to remedy either the little or the large in this situation. The reader cannot help noticing that in all the situations where he has to make a choice, whether in leaving the priesthood, in leaving his marriage, or in moving to another home, he makes it completely in relation to himself, without consultation with others. He understands the male menopause very well, and attributes his attempts to philander to the fact that he missed out on the chance to be a "hunter" when he was young. His efforts to attract women often lead to humiliation and failure, and he is ruthlessly honest about such encounters.

The writer's childhood helps to explain his coldness and isolation with regard to family members. He was rejected emotionally at his birth by his mother who wanted a daughter, his father was a much older man, and his only sibling plays a part very late in the book. A significant part in distancing him from human contact is played also by a male clerical teacher in stunting his emotional growth and self-image, and this memory surfaces every time he feels low. To refer to his immediate family he uses the rather impersonal designations of "the wife" and "the daughter" with omission of their names. This isolation contributes to his depression which is overpowering especially later in his life. Consequently he has an infatuation with father figures (262), and a great desire to belong to groups. The writing of his illness which leads to mental and physical collapse is moving and honest, and the misery is extremely well conveyed. Not less impressive is the way in which he gradually comes to an acceptance of life which leads to healing. In this however, he has a tendency to over-generalise, attributing his own conclusions to humankind in general, to "people" and to "we":

Perhaps a brave new world is coming where people accept that life ends in the graveyard and that heaven is a poppycock of the unconscious mind (307)... When we abandon all our beliefs and dogmas that are spun in fear and when we release ourselves from anxiety ... (310).

This memoir has its faults, for example, an uncertain structure in its division into four parts which fit uneasily with each other, but in general

it is easy to see how it retains its bestseller status week after week. It is very hard to put down, and repays multiple readings.

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**Dr Patricia A. Lynch** is retired from the University of Limerick. Her research interests include Hiberno-English as used in Irish literature, Irish folk medicine, Post-Colonial Studies, and Stylistics/Literary Linguistics. She is co-editor of *Back to the Present, Forward to the Past*, 2 vols, 2006, Amsterdam: Rodopi, and author of a number of articles, most recently "New Uses of Traditional Healing in Contemporary Irish Literature", *Estudios Irlandeses*, No. 7, 2012, pp. 61-68, and "Language Usage and Social Categorisation in Brendan Behan's Play *The Quare Fellow*", *ABEI Journal* 15. São Paulo: Humanitas, 2013. pp. 125-136.

*Viewpoints. Theoretical Perspectives on Irish Visual Texts*

by Claire Bracken and Emma Radley (eds.)

Cork: Cork University Press, 2013

ISBN 978-1-85918-496-7

278 pages. €39. Paperback

Reviewer: **Irene Gilsenan Nordin**

This collection sets out to provide new points of view in Irish cultural studies by presenting a range of theoretical positions that follow the trend of recent scholarship in Irish Studies, adopting a “holistic” approach to Irish cultural representation. Such an approach is indeed very welcome in the Irish critical landscape as it re-examines established discursive practices and offers a broader scope of theoretical paradigms that otherwise have been neglected in traditional criticism. In the introduction to the collection, the editors commend the views promulgated by scholars such as Patricia Coughlan, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, Colin Graham, Geraldine Meaney and Joseph Valente, among others, for their desire to “disrupt established frameworks.” They then cite from the introduction to *Irish Postmodernisms and Popular Culture*, where the editors of that collection, Wanda Balzano, Anne Mulhall and Moynagh Sullivan, refer to the “suspicion of theoretical paradigms” that has been the legacy of the primarily neo-Marxist and post-colonial approaches to Irish studies, established by the Field Day Project. According to Balzano et al., this suspicion was directed at theories other than those of the narrow and limiting established ideology, and dismissive of new paradigms for perceiving Irish identity, since these theories were considered “complicit with the corrupting influences of globalization itself” (10). The theories listed in this category include feminism, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, philosophy and queer theory, theories which the editors present in this collection with a view to providing more pluralist approaches to contemporary Irish culture.

The cultural landscape that is sketched at the beginning of the collection, whilst set against the backdrop of the debilitating effects of the fall of the Celtic Tiger in 2008, and the ensuing economic collapse, visualizes a surprisingly vibrant Ireland. The first visual image that is given is that of the Discover Ireland advertising campaign from 2010, with a picture of contemporary Ireland as a “bright, multicultural, family-friendly, seductive and fun-filled visual place” (1), where images of surfers, hikers, and happy, smiling people engaged in similarly untraditional Irish pastime activities are juxtaposed with images of the traditional aesthetic of “old” Ireland. Launched in the wake of the Icelandic volcanic ash cloud, and the resulting disruption to air travel across western and northern Europe, which took place in April 2010, the Discover Ireland advertisers hoped that the campaign would encourage Irish citizens to stay at home and take a so-called “staycation,” rather than heading off to more exotic lands for their holidays. The image alluded to here is that of a cultural space that is in the process of redefining and rearticulating itself, and the collection itself aims to examine this process and carry out the well-timed task of exploring these visual representations of Irish cultural life, both past and present.

Consisting of fourteen essays by a wide variety of researchers from various fields of Irish studies, the main questions posed in the collection are how iconic cultural currencies are perceived, what kind of ideological frameworks are used in imagining Irishness, and if these frameworks can be imagined differently (3). The collection is

divided into three sections: discourse, form and identity, with each section focusing on different aspects of visual culture. The section on discourse concentrates on exploring new paradigms to analyse image-based texts, and new methodologies relating to how visual texts are coded both in Irish culture and Irish critical discourse. Thus the aim is to establish a relational link between the texts and the discourses in which they are read. Two very interesting essays in this section are by Cheryl Herr and Barry Monaghan, both of whom focus on narrative as experience, rather than narrative as meaning. Herr uses as her starting point the concept of “habitus,” as outlined by Pierre Bourdieu, in her study of Thaddeus O’Sullivan’s *The Woman Who Married Clarke Gable* (1985), a film nominated for a BAFTA Film Award for Best Short Film in 1986. (One needs to overlook here the misspelling of Bourdieu and the incorrect date for the release of O’Sullivan’s film, given by the editors in their introduction). While Herr’s comment that the film has received little commentary since may have been accurate at the time of writing, 2013 saw the digitally remastered reissue of the film, together with the screenplay and a collection of critical essays, in the volume *The Woman who Married Clark Gable: Thaddeus O’Sullivan*, edited by Lance Pettitt and Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos (Sao Paulo, Brazil: Humanitas 2013). Herr demonstrates that the established primarily psychoanalytic interpretation of the film can be usefully supplemented by a reading that places social practices at the centre, exploring how the camera focalises a “socially embedded way of being” (29). Herr’s application of the Heideggerian concept of *Dasein* admirably underlines the simple everyday triumphs over characters’ personal desires and motivations, reminding us that Irishness is not a given condition that can be described at any given time, but rather a “continual participation in a world that is always being made and unmade before our eyes” (41). Barry Monaghan explores what he terms the “phenomenological narrative shift” in two feature-length films by Lenny Abrahamson: *Adam & Paul* (2004) and *Garage* (2007), and considers the manner in which meaning-making

takes place, suggesting that the specific qualities of each film invite two very different modes of presentation. Monaghan convincingly argues that in terms of cinematic coding, while *Adam & Paul* is presented in Beckettian mode and “plays with language as poetic game” (56), *Garage* engages with more existential issues. Thus the essay demonstrates the so-called dramatic shift by Abrahamson from conventional cinematic coding in the earlier film to a certain “empowerment of spectatorship” (56) that focuses on the film’s relationship with the world, as presented in *Garage*.

The second part of *Viewpoints: Theoretical Perspectives on Irish Visual Texts* deals with form, in terms of the related concept of intertextuality and how the visual is represented in the interaction between theme and form. Emma Radley, in her psychoanalytic analysis of the Irish horror film genre, adopts the linguistic theories of Julia Kristeva, and examines the Irish horror film in the context of Kristeva’s theories of the semiotic. By exploring the signifying space that emerges when national and genre are combined, Radley suggests that genre in the context of the national cinema is “refigured” to become a dynamic force that is disruptive of the symbolic discourse. Thus, she interestingly argues, a rupture is created which produces a new discursive site, a rupture that is – as she explains in true Kristevian terminology – “intertextual, heterogeneous and profoundly ‘in-process’” (111). In contrast with the nostalgic image of the “simple peasant” presented in some American films, such as *The Quiet Man* (John Ford, 1952), *Darby O’Gill and the Little People* (Robert Stevenson, 1959) and *Waking Ned Devine* (Kirk Jones, 1998), Radley convincingly argues that Irish horror films, such as *Shrooms* (Paddy Breathnach, 2007), *Dead Meat* (Conor McMahon, 2004) and *Isolation* (Billy O’Brien, 2005), deconstruct and challenge the rural ideal of Ireland that appears in traditional signifying structures, creating a potential space of signification that allows new forms of representation to emerge.

The final section of the collection addresses representations of identity, with essays including Colin Graham’s insightful analysis of

representations of identity in Irish photographic artists Joe Duggan, Hannah Starkey and John Gerrard, and Claire Bracken's excellent study of the construction of modern identity in Deirdre O'Kane's characters, Helen and Lorraine, in two television series, *Paths to Freedom* (2000) and *Fergus's Wedding* (2002). Bracken deftly draws on the theories of feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray to demonstrate that the cultural construction of post-feminist womanhood, as depicted by both these characters, is a product of phallogocentric capitalism, which – as she puts it – deploys the feminine “as object of support for a neo-liberal economy that continues to value masculinity as the dominant marker of power” (171). Bracken concludes that critiques of capitalism in Ireland need to carefully consider feminism and gender in relation to structures of representation, otherwise the traditional image of “woman as symbol-support of the nation” that has been central to Irish national discourse from colonial times to the time of Celtic Tiger will endure (183). Jenny O'Connor's essay is an interesting analysis of the concept of “becoming woman” in Neil Jordan's films, in which she offers new perspectives on the philosophical nature of Jordan's cinema. O'Connor sets out to demonstrate that the theories of Deleuze and Guattari focus a discussion on the “possibilities and potentialities of mixtures, hybrids and in-between spaces, as they attempt to move beyond phallogocentrism” (200), and convinces the reader that such an approach is indeed effective. The essay concludes that while Jordan may be accused of establishing the “wo/man (rather than the woman)” as the destabilisation of the patriarchal order, he still manages to put forward, as O'Connor very elegantly declares, “the power of the hybrid, the possibility of the rhizome, the potential of the multiple to unsettle the binary rationality by which we live” (214).

Two of the essays in this final section address films already examined in sections one and two of the collection: Zélie Asava's essay on race and gender in the mixed-race female heroine of O'Brien's *Isolation* and *Boy Eats Girl* (Stephen

Bradley, 2005), and Fintan Walsh's essay on representations of the self in an analysis of “queer representational aesthetic,” in Abrahamson's films *Adam & Paul* and *Garage*. These essays are well-argued and well-presented, and offer new insights on the works in question. However, even if they adopt different approaches to those adopted by Monaghan and Radley in the essays on the same films presented earlier in the collection, one wonders if the editors could not have used the opportunity to broaden the scope of the collection and focus instead on other works.

*Viewpoints: Theoretical Perspectives on Irish Visual Texts* is generally an exciting and very worthwhile collection that imaginatively reflects a changing dynamic Ireland and offers new ways of perceiving the cultural discourses that these changes have created, at the same time as it examines present ideological frameworks and explores how these can be envisaged differently. The editors, Claire Bracken and Emma Radley, have succeeded admirably in bringing together an entertaining mix of essays, focusing on visual cultural narratives, that show an openness to different representative perspectives and give the reader rewarding new insights into visual representations of Irish cultural life, both past and present.

**Prof Irene Gilsenan Nordin** is Professor of English at Dalarna University, Sweden, and has recently become a Fellow of Strömstad Academy. She is Founder/Director of DUCIS (Dalarna University Centre for Irish Studies). Her scholarly work is mainly concerned with contemporary culture – especially Irish poetry – with a focus on representations of place and belonging. Her most recent publications include *Transcultural Identities in Contemporary Literature* (Rodopi, 2013), and *Urban and Rural Landscapes: Language, Literature and Culture in Modern Ireland* (Peter Lang, 2012). She is president of SWESSE (Swedish Society for the Study of English).

***Irish Myth, Lore and Legend on Film / Reimagining Ireland – Volume 27***

by Dawn Duncan

Bern: Peter Lang, 2013.

ISBN 978-3-0343-0140-4

171 pp. €47. Paperback.

Reviewer: **Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos**

Dawn Duncan, Professor of English and Global Studies at Concordia College – Moorhead, Minnesota, USA, is recognized internationally for her expertise in Irish Studies. In *Irish Myth, Lore and Legend on Irish Film*, volume 27 of the series *Reimagining Ireland*, produced by Peter Lang, she demonstrates the maturity of a qualified scholar, teacher, writer, and leader in academic organizations. The book is interdisciplinary in its approach, global in its scope, and originated from teaching practice.

One of Duncan's previous works as a researcher and writer, *Post-Colonial Theatre and Irish Drama, 1800-2000* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), became an integral part of the theoretical debates that prevailed in the field of Irish theatrical studies until recently, and added an element of interdisciplinarity to the discussion, by introducing arguments based in sociolinguistics. Her role as a leader in the academic milieu, as a long-standing member of ACIS, The American Conference for Irish Studies, and executive member of IASIL, The International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures, lends her work an international scope to be found in the output of few critics. Finally, as its introduction states, the book results from teaching practice – in the “Global Studies” and “Film Studies” programs at Concordia College. She expresses gratitude to her students for enabling these programs to bear fruit in a scholarly project: “I especially want to thank my students in my seminar on ‘The Magic of Myth in Literature and Film’ for going with me on a learning journey that inspired my research (...) which then expanded to become the larger project contained herein” (ix).

Two themes – journey, and the function of myth, lore and legend – are the main templates that structure the five chapters of the book. These five chapters examine nine films based in stories that tell the life journeys of heroes or heroines – and are unified by relation to a theoretical basis proposed by Carl Jung, and adapted by Joseph Campbell. The films she analyses are: *Into the West* (dir. Mike Newell, 2002); *The Secret of Roan Inish* (dir. John Sayles, 1994); *In America* (dir. Jim Sheridan, 2002); *The Quiet Man* (dir. John Ford, 1952); *The Matchmaker* (dir. Mark Joffe, 1997); *Michael Collins* (dir. Neil Jordan, 1996); *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (dir. Ken Loach, 2006); *Veronica Guerin* (dir. Joel Schumacher, 2004); and *In Bruges* (Dir. Martin McDonagh, 2007).

Some of these films are better known than others, or have been more successful commercially. No predominant chronological criterion was applied to their selection or grouping. The unity and structure of the publication is ensured by the interdisciplinary dialogue with the Jung/Campbell thesis, aided by other theoretical and critical interventions, which are always in dialogue with previous criticism of the corpus selected for analysis.

As an initial example, Chapter I – “Irish Images on Film and the Hero Journey: A Theoretical Introduction” – appropriately puts forward the assumptions that will guide the next four chapters, centred on the life-arc concept, constructed by Joseph Campbell, known as “The Journey of the Hero”. According to Duncan, this is “integrally linked to moving from childhood to adulthood, gaining along the way ‘the courage of self-responsibility and assurance’” (2).

Chapter 2, “Childhood and the Magic of Myth”, is an analysis of the first three films in the study – *Into the West*, *The Secret of Roan Inish* and *In America*. Together, these films most clearly represent the journey of the hero as “the movement from childhood to responsible individual capable of giving to others” (3), in which the protagonist children are “called to adventure because they must break the paralyzing hold of grief on their families” (4).

Chapter 3, “Falling in Love and the Lore of Matchmaking”, includes *The Quiet Man* and *The Matchmaker* in its central corpus of “texts” to illustrate a further step in the arc-life of heroes or heroines: “Only after reaching responsible individuation, a sense of wholeness and well-being, is the mature individual ready to be able to enter into a mutual love relationship with another” (3).

Of the five chapters, the one most embedded in historical context, Chapter 4 – “Serving Society and the Legend of the Rebel” – is also the one that explores some of the most successful films in this study, and some of those most widely previously discussed, with the exception perhaps of *The Quiet Man: Michael Collins* and *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*. The acclaimed masterpieces by Neil Jordan and Ken Loach are analysed in equally masterly fashion in terms of the narratological cultural appreciation of the film that constitutes Duncan’s approach. This chapter uses the template of the journey to focus on another step for the responsible adult in his progress: finding a way to serve society – which, in Irish films, has most often been coupled with sacrifice for the nation.

The closing chapter of Duncan’s itinerary, “The Journey of the Contemporary Anti-Hero”, intentionally subverts her own route, and is possibly, therefore, the most creative one. She explains: “There is also merit in troubling the frame of this arc, which is why this book ends

with a consideration of how all of this might be both put to use and turned upside down with an image of the Irish anti-hero and the complexities of criminality and heroism in *Veronica Guerin* and *In Bruges*”.

There is much to recommend in this volume. Passionately written, humanistic in spirit, entertaining as text, and academic in approach, *Irish Myth, Lore and Legend on Film* offers a new scholarly toolkit for those in the field of interdisciplinary studies: it considers film as cultural writing; is anchored by psycho-anthropological theory; and is embedded in historical context. Moreover, the book fits perfectly into the purpose of the series of which it is a part: “Reimagining Ireland interrogates Ireland’s past and present and suggests possibilities for the future by looking at Ireland’s literature, culture and history and subjecting them to the most up-to-date critical appraisals associated with sociology, literary theory, historiography, political science and theology”, as the publisher submits. Without avoiding controversial subjects, the author positions herself within the contemporary debate, provoking and encouraging the audience’s active engagement in the journey proposed.

So let the readers now speak!

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***Up the Republic!: Towards a New Ireland***

by Fintan O'Toole (ed.)

London: Faber &amp; Faber. 2012

ISBN 9780571289001

227 pages. Paperback. £8.99

Reviewer: **Alfred Markey**

In the wake of the collapse of the Celtic Tiger the question of political renewal has, of late, been much in the air in Ireland. Perhaps most visible has been the programme of the Fine Gael-Labour government, elected in 2011, to bring about a 'democratic revolution' which was most clearly signified in the proposition to abolish the Seanad. The eventual referendum was narrowly defeated in October 2013 and while the more sanguine interpretations of the result have suggested that it was due to a public reaction against what was perceived as both crass populism and the machinations of a political elite to reduce the forum of democratic debate, the truth is that the participation in the referendum was worryingly low. In fact, as polls have indicated, far from suggesting a renewal of political interest, the rescue of the Seanad appears, if anything, to be the rearguard reaction of older voters cognizant of the role the upper house of the legislature has historically played in ensuring a diversity of voices and discourses in Irish politics. In "Citizens or Subjects? Civil Society and the Republic", Fred Powell's contribution to *Up the Republic!: Towards a New Ireland*, he quotes the Irish President, Michael D. Higgins as follows:

Public participation is now falling in every institution of civil society. The norms of a shared life have little opportunity of being articulated. That is the inescapable other side of the coin of globalization, which is the unaccountable economy on a world scale. That is why it is necessary for the Left to outline the case for a new and vibrant citizenship that can vindicate such values as solidarity, community, democracy, justice, freedom

and equality. These values can be achieved by giving them a practical expression in a new theory of citizenship (O'Toole 2012: 161).

Powell, Professor of Social Policy and Head of the School of Applied Social Studies at University College Cork, invokes Higgins's ideas, published in the 2011 collection of essays *Renewing the Republic*, both to draw attention to the extent to which under the influence of the all-pervasive values of the Celtic Tiger Irish people became self-absorbed consumer subjects rather than active citizens engaged in society, and to stave off the apocalypse of "post-politics" by proposing new paradigms of political engagement. Powell summarizes: "The challenge that President Higgins has presented is essentially about the need for a new political fiction to take the narrative of the Irish Republic forward. It is very clearly framed within the language of civil society: community, inclusive citizenship and sustainability" (O'Toole 2012: 161).

Powell himself goes on to outline *Ten Principles for Critical Citizenship* as an intellectual and practical blueprint for the creation or imagining of a new Republic for Ireland. His proposal is exemplary in that it is founded on the exercise of in-depth scholarly enquiry and practically applicable ideas. In short, his are the values of the public intellectual concerned not just with personal professional advancement within the academy but rather with encouraging a vibrant intellectual community and an active civil society which interrogates its inheritance of republicanism.

While Powell's essay perhaps most schematically articulates the relationship between scholarship and politics, all the contributions to *Up the Republic!* are based on broadly similar values which encourage active critical reading, an urgent reexamination of what the Irish Republic means and should mean and, as part of this process, a nuanced dialogue with the history of ideas and with the founding values of republicanism.

Following an inspiring epigraph from Tom Paine which eloquently speaks to the dilemmas of the current age, the tone of the volume is explicitly set by the opening essay from editor Fintan O'Toole. "Do you know what a republic is?": The Adventure and Misadventure of an Idea" appears designed to awaken the reader from any complacency about the nature of the Irish state. Starkly outlining the consequences of the economic bailout by revealing how, in effect, "the Irish constitution had been quietly suspended" while the German parliament imposed its will on the Irish executive, O'Toole proceeded, in his characteristically polemical style, to largely claim that the Irish Republic was a sham (O'Toole 2012: 2). The official declaration of the Irish Republic in 1949 was, he pointed out, the third of its kind, preceded as it was by those in 1916 and 1867, with the truth being that none of these had been followed by political realities in which authentically republican values achieved any genuine traction.

Drawing on the work of Philip Pettit on classical republicanism, O'Toole underlines the important role of genuinely republican systems of government in ensuring citizens' right to non-domination by others, a concept which he contrasts with non-interference, a value more appropriate to liberal and neo-liberal political regimes such as that of the Celtic Tiger period in Ireland. This renaissance tradition of republicanism is also valuable for O'Toole in view of the importance it affords both to mixed government –the division of power between the executive, judiciary and parliament– and crucially the role of citizens to "keep the republic on its toes", to, in Pettit's words: "track and contest public policies and initiatives" (O'Toole 2012: 19). By contrast, O'Toole identifies the Rousseau tradition of republicanism as in part

responsible for the authoritarian strain which he associates with IRA violence and the tendency of the Fianna Fáil political party to arrogantly see itself as the expression of a very narrowly conceived national will. Given Ireland's current bind, O'Toole diagnoses that the people have to "unlearn" this negative republican inheritance and fight for one in which citizens have to fulfill their duty to create a new reality marked by justice and equality:

It is, in these days, rather unfashionable to suggest that people have a duty to educate themselves. But there's no way round this embarrassing truth. The basic precondition for a republic is that the people know what they're doing. That they should 'know what a republic means'. At the risk of obnoxious arrogance it has to be admitted that, in general, the Irish people do not know what a republic means (O'Toole 2012: 48).

Unquestionably, *Up the Republic!: Towards a New Ireland* is an invaluable contribution to Irish political and intellectual debate, perhaps even the most significant volume published since the beginning of the recent crisis. Besides the contributions of O'Toole and Powell, it includes essays by perhaps the foremost world authority on republicanism, the above-mentioned Philip Pettit, and from Iseult Honohan, author of a number of important books on this key political concept. The book thus goes quite a distance to filling that gap in public knowledge identified by O'Toole. Interesting legal perspectives are provided by Tom Hickey and Dearbhail McDonald, while the political scientist and *Sunday Independent* columnist Elaine Byrne contributes with an essay, "The Democracy of a Republic", which deals with the highly interesting *We the Citizens* project for political renewal which she initiated with a number of fellow academics.

Besides the authority achieved through the participation of Pettit, the book's significance can be gauged by the presence at its launch, in November 2012, of President Higgins himself. In his remarks at the opening, Higgins pointed out that it was not the "usual practice" for the President to launch books but that this was an exception (Higgins 2012). It very much chimed with the values of his own presidency which he had defined as being one of "ideas". Indeed,

although not explicitly stated by Higgins, the volume can be seen as a continuation of the debate to which he has added much, both in his collection of essays *Renewing the Republic* and in his speeches which have championed the importance of more complex public debate and the protagonism of public intellectuals. Crucially, the President also points out one of the collection's strong points, emphasizing that it is

not just about cursing the darkness. Many of the contributors understand that a crisis of this severity also represents an opportunity to start again; to renew the Republic; to articulate shared values that allow all our citizens to fully participate in economy and society; to question the paradigms of theory that constrained our policy options; to imagine other possibilities that allow us as a people to move beyond anger, frustration or cynicism (Higgins 2012).

Higgins concludes in reference to the collection's last essay, "Law, Poetry and the Republic" by proposing a template of renewal consistent with his own championing of what he calls a creative society, stating that "we need reminding that the language that will serve us best is as Theo Dorgan puts it 'disciplined language in the register of human passions. Poetry is the living language raised to the power of imagination'" (Higgins 2012).

In such resonant and inspiring reflections and in the potential for reinvention apparent in the rigour, authority and force of its argumentation, *Up the Republic!: Towards a New Ireland* contains much that Ireland would do well to heed. And much that would help avoid another sequel to its current humiliation, so brilliantly evoked in the cover illustration of a contemporary Sisyphus pushing Ireland up what is a very steep slope indeed.

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**Dr Alfred Markey** has taught at the universities of Vigo, A Coruña and León, lecturing in both English language and literature, the latter primarily on postcolonialism and the twentieth century. His research centres on Irish studies in relation to postcolonial theory and in a comparative context, as evident in his PhD dissertation, entitled *From Ireland to Equatorial Guinea: A Comparative Study of Sean O'Faolain and Donato Ndongo*. He has published mainly on twentieth century Irish literature with an emphasis on the work of Sean O'Faolain, particularly his role as a public intellectual. His current research focuses on the cultural and political intersections of the Irish and black worlds.

***Ireland Through European Eyes: Western Europe, the EEC, and Ireland 1945-1973***

by Mervyn O'Driscoll, Dermot Keogh, Jerome aan de Wiel (eds.)

Cork: Cork University Press, 2013

ISBN 978-185918-464-6

Hardback. 500pp. €49.

Reviewer: **Edward Moxon-Browne**

Once famously described by a French historian as “an island behind an island”, Ireland’s relations with the European continent have been mediated both by its peripheral geographical location and an ambivalent relationship with its nearest neighbour. Early work on the attempts by Ireland to overcome its relatively marginal position in the European consciousness by Hederman (1983) Maher (1986) and Keogh (1989) all examined the problem from an Irish perspective. The volume under review here fills an important lacuna in the pre-accession story of Ireland’s ‘tortuous path’ towards EEC membership by looking at the relationship from a European perspective. Thus the book is structured around six ‘national’ chapters defining, respectively, the evolution of policy of each of the original Six founding members; and one final chapter that synthesises these diverse national positions into policy preferences of the two principal EEC institutions: the Council and the Commission. Inevitably, there is some instructive overlap between this section and the foregoing chapters, but the authors have painstakingly traced the nuances between divergent national perspectives out of which a “Community” position is forged in Brussels. Each country chapter opens with an historical account of popular perceptions of Ireland by the Six. Here a mosaic of positive and negative images combine: the xenophobia whipped up in Ireland by the erroneous belief that large tracts of land were being bought up by Germans; the affinity between Flemish and Irish nationalism; and a mixture of wartime memories in the Low Countries: some resentment at Irish neutrality

but also gratitude for Irish aid to the famine stricken population. In analysing the Irish approach to the EEC, the national chapters are dominated by a series of recurring themes among which the most important are: the need to take account of Britain’s application to join the EEC; Ireland’s ‘neutrality’ and non-membership of NATO; and the extent to which the Irish economy would require special ‘derogations’ to facilitate membership. An important cross-cutting theme that provides a complicating *leitmotiv* behind Ireland’s efforts to maintain its diplomatic profile among the Six, is the perceived resilience of the Franco-German axis that tended to frustrate the efforts of other member states to drive a wedge between the two on occasions where, as was often the case, France found itself in a minority of one. By far the most important factor influencing Ireland’s approach to the EEC between 1960 and 1972 was the parallel attempt by Britain also to gain accession. Ireland was forced to navigate a delicate course between, on the one hand, emphasising its separate approach while on the other hand being unable to argue that if Britain was refused entry, Ireland would proceed with its own application regardless. The delicacy of this approach was further accentuated by the fact that some members of the Six saw “association” as being preferable to full membership for Ireland (on account of its fragile industrial base). This explains why when Britain’s application was twice rejected (in 1963 and 1967) Ireland immediately set about keeping its own application alive in the capitals of the Six. The relative diplomatic invisibility of Ireland made it all the more important to remind the Six

that Ireland was still waiting eagerly in the wings. The authors explain that Britain's case for EEC membership was itself one of several issues that divided the governments of the Six, with France (at least under de Gaulle) fearing a systemic dislocation of the Community as a result of British accession, while the Netherlands and Belgium took a much more positive line, seeing British membership as providing a useful counterweight to Franco-German hegemony. Although West Germany favoured British membership, it was "not prepared to jeopardise German-French relations, even for the U.K." (73). The question of Ireland's non-membership of NATO was also used by some governments as a pretext for arguing that Ireland could not be fully committed to the political goals of the EEC: West Germany took a strong line on this while the Belgians were more relaxed. However, France's own position on Irish non-membership of NATO softened after 1966 when de Gaulle withdrew from NATO's military structures, and developed its own nuclear capability. Thus the West German view that NATO and EEC membership should overlap eventually found less support, and when the USA tried to push this view, President Rey of the Commission reportedly told US representative Richardson that Irish reasons for non-membership should be "now apparent to Mr Richardson" (an allusion to the emerging conflict in Northern Ireland in 1969) p.367. When the final breakthrough for Irish membership of the EEC arrived it was due to a happy synergy of circumstances that was largely outside Ireland's control. The departure of de Gaulle profoundly altered the Community's landscape. Fortunately, the new leaders in France and Britain were enthusiastic Europeans: "The *rapprochement* between the two leaders who had the same vision of a Europe

of States and who managed to establish a climate of confidence was a good omen for enlargement" (377). The evolving conflict in Northern Ireland might have derailed the simultaneous accession of Britain and Ireland to the EEC, but the authors explain that, remarkably, Anglo-Irish relations were able to compartmentalise the accession negotiations in a way that facilitated the entry of both countries with no rancour. Meanwhile the Commission in Brussels was keeping a close ear to the ground in Northern Ireland, and its conclusion that the EEC would provide a helpful context for a resolution of the conflict in the long run, but that no quick-fix solution could be envisaged, proved to be remarkably prescient. In 1970, the Commission representative in the UK told President Rey that "the volcano is there, and it is still active" (373).

The contributors to this book have delved deeply in the diplomatic archives and contemporary newspapers to produce a volume that is rich in detail, yielding a fascinating mine of information for anyone interested in the long and winding road towards Irish membership of the EEC.

**Prof Edward Moxon-Browne** is Professor (Emeritus) and formerly Jean Monnet Chair of European Integration and Director of the Centre for European Studies, at the University of Limerick. Previously, he was Lecturer and then Reader in Politics at the Queens University of Belfast. He has held visiting appointments at Wesleyan University, Hollins University and Harvard University, in the USA; at the Corvinus University in Budapest, and the UN Peace University in Costa Rica. His publications reflect research interests in European integration, the politics of ethnic conflict, and peace studies.

***The Otherworld: Music & Song from Irish Tradition***

by Ríonach úí Ógáin and Tom Sherlock (ed.)

Dublin: Comhairle Bhéaloideas Éireann, 2012

ISBN 978-0956562838

160 pp. £25 (Paperback with 2 CDs)

Reviewer: **John L. Murphy**

Twenty years in the making and drawing from the National Folklore Collection's musical and narrative archives stretching back nine decades, this inviting book presents the words and sounds of those who relate tales from the otherworld. Editors Ríonach úí Ógáin and Tom Sherlock define this expanse as "a domain relating to the preternatural, an alternative realm parallel to or sometimes beyond human earthly existence". Having visited it, glimpsed it, or heard music from it, people tell tales and play songs.

What they offer confronts the mystery of the world beyond, and it provides for many puzzled by loss or wearied by drudgery a chance to enter the imaginative sphere. The fantastic leaps out to pull in the wanderer, but it often repels or threatens those humans tempted or foolish enough to cross its border.

The results, compiled here with two CDs of forty stories and songs in both Irish and English, represent but a smidgen of the material at UCD, but they allow researchers and students to listen in on recordings, as well as to follow along with transcriptions and photographs which enrich this well-designed (by Red Dog) text. Voices from all but Offaly, Derry, and Longford contribute individual and communal memories. The value of this edition rests in its thematic range and bilingual accessibility into this lore.

For instance, the juxtaposition of Irish and English, urban and rural, widens the perhaps expected territory investigated here. Told by Meg Doyle in Dublin's Ringsend or Edward Kendellan in Stonybattery, the tale of the banshee

(a popular choice for many interviewed) from 1980 balances out the preponderance of rural material collected *as Gaeilge* in earlier years.

Following Doyle's report, the famous fiddler Micho Russell from Doolin in Clare plays "The Banshee Reel" as the text includes a photograph of a local holy well and a placename report (originally in Irish, translated) on a local hill associated with keening cats "wailing and shrieking".

Séan Ó Catháin tells a legend of Petticoat Loose, who "among other crimes" in Munster, "drowned a school master in Coilleagán and killed infants". The action damning her was being drunk "and about to have a child" while Sunday Mass was being said. It's a bit confusing, but the haunting nature of such tales, perpetuated widely and doggedly, supports the popular warning of the fate of a "fallen woman".

On the other hand, "Amhrán an Frag" comically contrasts a frog's entry across the domestic threshold (as told to the Conamara teller as if real) with an invented song by Peadar Ó Ceannabháin likening that intrusion to "the fight in the gap of the fort/ *an troid a bhí I mBearná an Dúin*". The mock-heroic, complete with the amphibian converted into a "mermaid's husband dressed in women's clothing" conveys the manner in which the everyday inflates into the epic.

Fear, humor, and respect mingle in such reactions to the uncanny. Meeting the devil at the crossroads and learning a rousing tune, for example, can conjure up the clever retort of the

human player confronted by the revelation from the next world. Jigs stolen or learned from devious faeries repeat the prevalent notion that pipers suddenly appear among humans to play before vanishing as quickly. Máire Ní Bheirne of Teelin passes on such an account to Donegal collector Mícheál Ó Domhnaill in 1974, and from here, the reel “Tiúin an Phóbaire Sí” passes (and takes on two more titles in English) into the repertoire of the group Altan, widening its audience and broadening the scope of the living tradition.

Also common and continuing today is the tacit admonition to those walking about not to enter the realm of those who often are given, for fear of summoning them or a curse, no name but “them”. The widespread notion that metal and water protect the man or woman from the fate dangled by the fairy hosts or the *sí* attest to the enduring (and quietly persisting, or at least not denied) awareness of a mysterious presence hovering near farms and villages, in circles, forts, bushes, trees, or cairns.

Associations of venerable places with the otherworld fill many pages here, such as Fionnbhearra (Cnoc Meá near Athenry in Galway) and Áine (Cnoc Áine near Teelin in Donegal). Most of Ireland is covered, and much of the past century. Collectors for the Folklore Commission, such as Tom Munnely, Seán Ó hEochaidh, and Caoimhín Ó Danachair (who looks quite the indefatigable itinerant in his leather vest and pipe) garner credit as the predecessors to the current editors and their colleagues, who wrote down and taped such material. The compact discs show the results, originally on acetate disc, cassette, reel-to-reel

tape, digital audio, minidisc, and memory sticks. While the technological progression proves the passing of time for its archivists, the variety of places in which the fieldwork was conducted reveals the way such material was gathered: in the fields, in a car, or at home.

Labeling this as tradition does not detract from its ongoing relevance. As the editors remind us, Tom Munnely titled a paper “They’re there all the same” when it came to the question of belief. Elusive or vague as Irish responses may continue to be when asked about the truth of “the good people” or the banshee, the popularity of Samhain, bonfires, vampires, lotteries, and prophecy persists despite a purportedly secularised mindset today. One wonders after perusing these attractive pages and hearing the creaky fiddles or bold voices from the recent past what folklorists a century hence will say about us.

**Prof. John L. Murphy** coordinates the Humanities sequence at DeVry University's Long Beach, California campus. His Ph.D. is from UCLA in medieval English literature. Irish language reception by English-language culture, Irish republicanism, Beckett’s purgatorial concepts, Jews in medieval Ireland, the reception of Buddhism by Irish intellectuals, folk-rock in Irish counterculture, and the presentation of otherworldly, liminal states in medieval and modern literature illustrate his published research. He reviews books and music over a broad range of topics in print and online, and he contributes to *PopMatters* and the *New York Journal of Books* regularly.

***Secrets of the Irish Landscape***

by Matthew Jebb and Colm Crowley (eds.)  
 Cork: Atrium: Cork University Press, 2013  
 ISBN: 9781782050100  
 233 pp. Hardback, €29

Reviewer: **Patrick O'Connor**

Amplified with the subtitle “the story of the Irish landscape *is* the story of Ireland,” this book purports to provide a comprehensive revelation of the Irish landscape. Landscape is an attractive, seductive and ambiguous term, and the Irish landscape for those who learn to read it aright may be the richest record we possess. After a day traversing one of our signature peninsulas the poet, Seamus Heaney, wrote “You will uncode all landscapes/ By this: things founded clean on their own shapes,/ Water and ground in their extremity.” Thus the poet may lay claim to the art of landscape divulgence, just as the editors of this volume lay claim to the unfolding of a “remarkable story.”

Jointly edited by Colm Crowley, Head of Production, RTE, Cork, and Matthew Jebb, Director of the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin, this cornucopia of secrets of the Irish landscape largely reflects their duality of interests. Crowley needed a “good story” to freight a television series for RTE, and in giving it orientation Jebb summoned the formidable figure of Robert Lloyd Praeger, one of Ireland’s greatest naturalists and wanderer, author of the classic book *The way that I went*, first published in 1937. Praeger rendered the botanical wonderland of Ireland. This book pays due homage to him.

It is a pity, however, that both television series and book miss out on one of Praeger’s talismanic sites, the Hill of Uisneach, near Ballymore, Co. Westmeath, which is set in a wonderfully *bocage* landscape, and proclaims the heart of Ireland. It is the hill at centre, Ireland’s best-kept secret (apart from the joint archaeological excavations

of Praeger and R.A.S. MacAlister). Their findings reveal that it is layered in multi-period trace elements. It is, moreover, dotted in knarry thorns, and an enduring enigma to stake a primal claim.

Matthew Jebb’s introductory essay parades the Irish landscape as a “fabulous palimpsest.” It draws in particular on the Clare Island Survey, which was masterminded by Praeger in 1909, to count as one of the most significant biological surveys ever undertaken in Europe. Jebb points the way to secretive places – Lough Boora, Mount Sandel, Céide Fields and Corlea. He points up the “strange meandering ribbons of gravel that lie across the midlands of Ireland like inverted – riverbeds.” These are eskers, once primal roads, and residual havens of limestone-loving plants that festoon the vast prairies of raised central bogland.

To follow, and running to a total of 23 chapters, there is a veritable *pot pourri* of insight into the natural, biotic and cultural dimensions of the Irish landscape. The impact of the Quaternary Era shows greatest coherence with three separate contributions from specialists. Of these, Paul Dunlop’s on “the glacial landform system of the last Irish ice sheet” strikes best pertinence for its exposition of the fine, fresh glacial topography of moraines, eskers and drumlins that still bestows modality to much of the Irish landscape. Indeed as Dunlop points out, the term “drumlin” originated in Ireland, and yields a much-loved topographic and toponymic region, usually referred to by the term of “drumlin belt.”

Thereafter stand-alone chapters mostly prevail. Topics as diverse as evolution of the Irish coastline, our first forests, our exotic heritage of Arctic and Mediterranean plants, and dendrochronology or tree-ring analysis, help to set in place Ireland's physiographic and biological inheritance. A trio of archaeologists detail the formative stages of human occupancy. There are contributions on Ireland's Stone Age settlers, our first farmers, and the series of transitions that underpinned the human and artefactual dimensions of Bronze Age-Iron Age-Gaelic Ireland.

For the chapter on the impact of Christianity by Tomás Ó Carragáin, "a cross-carved landscape" serves as metaphor. The great monastic site of Clonmacnoise is posited as the supreme exemplar. Its cathedral is the largest surviving early medieval building in the country. Appropriately a stunning photograph of the fronting Cross of the Scriptures sets off the scenic splendour. Cathedral and Cross were commissioned in 909 by King Flann Sinna of the Southern Uí Néill, in collaboration with the abbot Colmán. On the cross O'Neill is commemorated as "king of Ireland," a telling illustration of the fusion of lay and ecclesiastical power. A chapter on the "Viking impact" similarly emphasises its constructive effect on urban genesis and trade.

This book of essays is nothing if not eclectic in the variability of topic it espouses, a point illustrated by such eye-catching contributions as Michael O'Connell's exposé of the Burren, north Clare. That is a cultural as well as a biogeographical landscape, full of reclusive places. Superb montages of photographs parade their charm. A cognate world is that of turloughs (temporary wetlands to produce a lake-strewn winter landscape), and Micheline Sheehy Skeffington is to be commended for her map of all recorded examples in 2006, which shows a high correlation with distribution of the element *poll* in townland names. Pioneering archaeologist, Seamus Caulfield, also takes the reader to a western setting, the Céide Fields of north Mayo, contenders for the title of "Europe's oldest surviving dairy fields!" The beckoning West is summoned further in the dry stone-walling technique to delimit the fields of Árainn at Iris Oirr, a setting in which Féile na gCloch is

hosted every September.

Standing singularly, Eamonn Kelly's "The cruel goddess: death at the boundary" offers a tantalising extension to Pádraig Ó Riain's work on boundary association in early Irish society; the theme of food production is essayed in the contributions of Regina Sexton and Éanna Ní Lamhna; contributions on the paper landscape of Ireland as represented by estate maps and the austere beautiful Ordnance Survey 1:10,560 sheets c.1840 are made by Patrick Duffy and Matthew Jebb respectively; and juxtaposed at the end, "Famine and Landscape" by Richard Collins and "Landscape and Irish Identity" by Peter Murray, make for an incongruous pairing.

Overall therefore there is a dearth of thematic unity to this well produced, large-format book, which is lavishly illustrated with maps and photographs (many in full colour), and permeated by the questing spirit of Robert Lloyd Praeger. As "fabulous palimpsest" in Matthew Jebb's term or "book or parchment much written upon and written over," the Irish landscape is thoroughly humanised. We live in a superbly coded land. The portrayal of its secrets in this interdisciplinary and multi-authored volume should induce the discerning reader to go outdoors, look, and see. Then think about what we see.

**Dr Patrick J. O'Connor** is the author of eighteen books, including six volumes of poetry. He was awarded the Irish Historical Research Prize by the National University of Ireland in 1987 for *Exploring Limerick's Past* and in 1989 for *People Make Places*. Accounted a "distinctive and distinguished geographer," he has authored three major works on Ireland: *Atlas of Irish Place-Names* (2001), *Fairs and Markets of Ireland: a cultural geography* (2003), and *Seeing through Counties: geography and identity in Ireland* (2006). An avid reader of local landscapes and writer of local studies, he lives near Newcastle West, Co. Limerick. Patrick has latterly turned to memoir writing, and with two volumes already published, *The New Houses* (2009) and *So long to Coolanoran* (2011), he is planning a third. A *Collected Poems* is also contemplated. Patrick J. O'Connor best describes himself as geographer and poet (*tireolaí is file*).

***Great Deeds in Ireland: Richard Stanihurst's De Rebus in Hibernia Gestis***

by John Barry &amp; Hiram Morgan (eds.)

Cork: Cork University Press, 2013

ISBN: 978-190900-572-3

Hardback €39. 544pp in Latin and English

Reviewer: **Riana O'Dwyer**

This handsome volume is a new edition of a 16th century account of the Normans' arrival in Ireland, written originally in Latin by Richard Stanihurst, and published in Leiden in 1584. The Latin text is fully reprinted, accompanied on facing pages by a new English translation of the complete work. This is the first text chosen for publication by the Neo-Latin Seminar at University College Cork, following three years of weekly interdisciplinary seminars in which many leading academics participated. Its editors are John Barry of the Classics Department and Hiram Morgan of the History Department at UCC, who have distilled the discussions of the Seminar and the contributions of many other scholars in libraries in Ireland and across Europe. The resulting book is truly worthy of the Renaissance intellectual atmosphere that it celebrates, as European and Irish scholars wrestled with the aftermath of the Reformation and the political struggles that ensued.

This new edition includes a comprehensive Introduction by the editors; the original Latin text and its translation into English; Stanihurst's Appendix on *Topographia Hibernica* by Giraldus Cambrensis (1187); Stanihurst's own Subject Index to his 'books on Irish affairs'; an early list of Errata; the texts of two 'Privileges' (an early form of copyright protection); followed by the scholarly apparatus of this edition: editorial notes to the translation, a bibliography and index.

To understand the significance of the original text and this translation, it is helpful to consider the career of Richard Stanihurst, and to place him in the context of his time. Born in 1547, he

was the son of James Stanihurst, Recorder of Dublin, who was Speaker of the Irish Parliament in 1558, 1560 and 1569. He was, in today's terms, a higher civil servant, working for the English administration in Dublin. In fact, members of the Stanihurst family had occupied similar roles since 1395 (Lennon 13-24). The Reformation, however, posed a challenge for families such as this and for their patrons, the Norman nobles, who were the leading landowners in Ireland.

Richard Stanihurst was educated at Kilkenny Grammar School, at Oxford University and, for a time, at the Inns of Court in London. His father, it appears, was preparing him to become part of the Dublin administration like himself. In Oxford, however, Richard was the pupil of Edmund Campion, the future Jesuit martyr (canonised in 1970). Campion had been ordained deacon in the Anglican Church in 1564, but was already turning back to Catholicism when Stanihurst knew him. Campion came to Dublin in 1570 and stayed for several months with the Stanihurst family, attending a session of the Irish Parliament while James Stanihurst was Speaker. However, he was already under suspicion of political intrigue, and went into hiding near Dublin with the Barnewall family (whose daughter Janet later married Richard Stanihurst). In 1571 Campion left Ireland secretly and went to Douai on the continent. However, while in seclusion, he had written 'Two Bokes of the Histories of Ireland', based on the volumes available in the Barnewall and Stanihurst libraries, which became one of the source texts (along with *Expugnatio Hibernica* by Giraldus

Cambrensis) for Richard's later writings on Irish history.

After the death of his father in 1573, Richard Stanihurst became tutor to the children of Gerald FitzGerald, Earl of Kildare. In 1575, together with his wife, Janet Barnewall, he accompanied the young heir, Garret FitzGerald, Lord Offaly, to London, where he spent the next few years. While in London, Raphael Holinshed asked Stanihurst to complete the Irish portion of his *Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande*, which had already been written up to 1509. However, Stanihurst's account did not meet the approval of the Privy Council, and he was called before it to explain himself. His defence was successful, and he was allowed to rewrite the problem sections of the text. Holinshed's *Irish Chronicle* was published in 1577.

However, Richard Stanihurst's young wife died in childbirth in 1579, and his pupil Garret FitzGerald died in 1580. In Ireland, the Munster rebellion was in progress and the Earl of Kildare was suspected of involvement. In London, it was known that Edmund Campion, now a Jesuit priest, had returned to England. Because of his associations with them, and the general atmosphere of suspicion that prevailed, Richard Stanihurst was arrested in August 1580 and imprisoned for a time. However, he was released eventually and went to the Netherlands, where in 1582 he published a translation of the *Aeneid* at Leiden, where he registered as a student of languages. Although Leiden belonged to the Protestant United Provinces, there was religious toleration at the university at the time, and several prominent Catholics were working there. Here, in 1584, Christopher Plantin published Richard Stanihurst's *De Rebus in Hibernia Gestis*, with a dedicatory preface, an Introduction comprising the first book, three books of narrative history, and an appendix.

Stanihurst wrote his book in Latin, the international language of scholarship at the time, and a natural choice for an author who was addressing an audience in Europe, rather than the more limited readership that might read Holinshed's *Chronicles* in English. For exiles like Stanihurst, the public opinion that mattered was

that of the scholars, theologians and nobility who were concerned with events not on a national, but on a European scale. Stanihurst might no longer be able to return to Ireland or Dublin, but he could give his country some prominence in the circles in which he was now moving- not specifically Catholic as yet, but university circles where scholarship was prized and where knowledge and debate was disseminated by printing.

The first book of Stanihurst's work is devoted to a description of the geography of the country and the condition of its people. In his dedication, he explained that he wished, 'by making a written record, to drag our country out of a long-drawn-out darkness and to stir people abroad to an awareness of our excellent island.' He wished also to correct misunderstandings about both the Gaelic Irish and the English of Dublin. He identifies himself as one of those 'who live in the English province and are sprung from British stock'. Books 2 to 4 contain an extended narrative of the Anglo-Norman Conquest of Ireland: 'the wars and glorious victories of ancestors who crossed from Britain to Ireland' covering the first forty years of the Norman settlement in Ireland, up to the beginning of the thirteenth century. There are many set-piece descriptions, such as the account of Strongbow's arrival in Ireland, which occupies most of Book 3. The fourth book deals with the establishment of the Normans in Ireland after the death of Strongbow, and their interactions with King John. This takes the account up to the beginning of the thirteenth century. Working mainly from the account of Giraldus Cambrensis in *Expugnatio Hibernica*, Stanihurst made several mistakes that the editors discuss and contextualise. As the editors also point out, Stanihurst is credited with first using the term 'Anglo-Irish' to describe the descendants of the Normans, developing the phrase recorded by Cambrensis in a speech by Maurice FitzGerald: 'vt sicut Hibernicis Angli, sic & Anglis Hibernici sumus', translated 'Just as we are English to the Irish, so are we Irish to the English'. To complete his work, Richard Stanihurst added an Appendix to his historical account, consisting of excerpts from another

Cambrensis text, *Topographia Hibernica* (1187), with his own notes attached.

Richard Stanihurst's text did not have quite the positive impact he intended. The controversy it generated is well discussed in the pages of the Introduction, making use of annotations in surviving early copies of the text as well as reactions in print. The editors' communications with libraries all over Europe are well documented in the list of Acknowledgements, which is an impressive record of the thorough investigations that they undertook. It would have been useful, for the sake of completeness, to

include a full biographical note on Stanihurst. His life is described in some detail up to 1584, the date of publication of *De Rebus*, but his further activities up to his death in 1618 are not described, apart from a passing reference to his second marriage in Antwerp and that he later became a priest. This aside, *Great Deeds in Ireland* is an important and seminal book, which should be recommended to every university library and be on the reading list of all those with an interest in the intellectual life of late sixteenth-century Ireland and Europe.

### Work Cited

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**Dr. Riana O'Dwyer** was Senior Lecturer in English, School of Humanities, National University of Ireland, Galway until retirement in 2012. She served as Chair of the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL) from 2003-2009. She has published on Joyce, modern Irish drama, Irish studies, and Irish women novelists of the nineteenth century, which comprise her central areas of research interest.

***Performing Feminisms in Contemporary Ireland***

by Lisa Fitzpatrick (ed.)

Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2013

ISBN 9781904505624

Paperback. 230 pp. €20.00

Reviewer: **Tina O'Toole**

Edited by Lisa Fitzpatrick, who teaches drama at the University of Ulster, this collection foregrounds work by scholars, practitioners, and activists in the field of contemporary Irish performance. Opening with Derek Speirs' arresting photograph of the 'Pill Train' in May 1971 which captures the public staging of Irish feminist resistance, the book charts the subsequent history and experience of feminist performance. Fixing individual moments in that history, contributors confirm some gendered clichés associated with Irish theatre (for instance, that women are not as well represented as men at all levels of the profession; that canonical Irish drama and its reception is a masculinist domain), while countering others by advancing new perspectives on contemporary Irish drama and its staging, both inside and outside formal arenas.

Foundational essays by Sara Keating, and by collaborators Charlotte Headrick and John Countryman, explore women's participation in contemporary Irish theatre. Keating's discussion of the 2011 Dublin Theatre Festival underlines the growing significance of site specific performance, citing Louise Lowe's recent work as one example of this kind of theatre, in which women are visible at all levels of the production. This is a timely piece given that Anú Productions, with Lowe as Artistic Director, achieved significant public attention and critical acclaim in the summer of 2013 for its "Living the Lockout" project (recently nominated for a Jury Prize in the *Irish Times* Irish Theatre Awards). Headrick and Countryman explore the disjunct between contemporary Irish-based work where women playwrights and directors are now achieving

prominence, and the international staging, reception, and anthologising of Irish drama, which is still a male-dominated field. Amplifying these issues, essays by Maria Kurdi, Brenda Donoghue, and Susanne Colleary home in on specific representations of gender and sexuality onstage, considering the work of Irish women writers and performance artists such as Teresa Deevey, Marina Carr, Miriam Gallagher, Stella Feehily, and Maeve Higgins.

Tom Maguire and Carole-Anne Upton's thought-provoking exploration of gender binaries in Irish myth attempts to "renegotiate women's representation on the Irish stage" (80). Dealing with two stagings of material from the Ulster Cycle (Storytellers' Theatre production of Mary-Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy's *Women-in-Arms* (1988) and Big Telly's *The Pursuit of Diarmaid and Gráinne* (1999)), they outline the spatial liberation of the female figures, and the emphasis on gender fluidity in both plays (87; 89). However, they concede that despite the apparent radicalism of this work, each play nonetheless "sets the agency of the women as a source of threat to their own people" (89). Furthermore, highlighting the marginalization of women in "the specifically masculine sphere of violence" onstage, they suggest that this has more widespread application in the culture: "Even Derry Playhouse's recent Theatre of Witness production *I Once Knew a Girl* (2010) ... found it difficult to present openly the violence in which female members of paramilitary organizations were involved" (89).

Considerations of women's agency and armed dissent are apposite in this "decade of centenaries".

In their fine essay on the reception and memorialization of Constance Markievicz, S. E. Wilmer and Mary Caulfield lament the “scant efforts” made to represent women in nationalist iconography and in the Dublin cityscape specifically (although the recent naming of the Rosie Hackett Bridge following a public vote may be an optimistic sign of things to come). Providing a “thick description” of Markievicz’ life and career, Wilmer and Caulfield outline her diverse contributions to national culture as a writer, public speaker, and activist across a range of organisations and publications in the revolutionary period and beyond. Throughout, the essay attends to Markievicz’ self-conscious performativity as a militant, her investment in the narrative of Joan of Arc (whom she played in a suffragist pageant in 1914), and her ongoing engagement with theatre both as public spectacle and as an impetus in the national struggle. The received idea of “the Countess” tends to fix on that well-known photograph of her in full uniform which, Wilmer and Caulfield suggest, is perhaps “too iconoclastic to gel with Irish notions of female modesty and subservience” (100). This conclusion is based on one of the few monuments to Markievicz in Dublin, a domesticated one in which she is represented in a modest ankle-length skirt and blouse, alongside her dog, outside the swimming pool named after her (109).

Extending the impetus of site specific work mentioned earlier, several essays in this collection focus on community-based and activist arenas for feminist performance. In her introduction, Fitzpatrick signals the intention to enliven “the performances of everyday life that mark and shape identities” in order to “consider the ways in which feminism is ‘performed’ in everyday life by ordinary women” in contemporary Ireland. This move is evident, for instance, in Jacinta Byrne-Doran’s exploration of the “intergenerational influences” on working mothers, and in Fitzpatrick’s own essay which focuses on the interaction between domestic violence in the lived experience of Irish women

and its representation onstage. Fitzpatrick’s work on the reception of such plays in the 1990s is useful; the line from one contemporary review, “Brothers, I think this is one for the Sisters” is particularly revealing (189).

Something of the grassroots creativity and determination of feminist activism is in evidence in Megan Buckley and Julia Walther’s analysis of second-wave publishing, and the more recent interventions foregrounded in Fiona Bloomer’s treatment of parades and the pro-choice movement in Northern Ireland. That same energy animates Alyson Campbell and Suzanne Patman’s account of Ruth McCarthy’s queerzine activism in the 1990s and 2000s, which they describe as “an irreverent but vital response to a prevailing culture of conservative heteronormativity” in Belfast at that time (224). McCarthy’s recent achievements as Director of the OUTburst Queer Arts Festival may be seen as a sign of how much has changed in that city in the meantime. Interventions such as these, perhaps, suggest ways in which activism and performance can interact to provide new directions for future development.

Taken as a whole, this collection provides informed insights into Irish theatre, to the wider sphere of performance, and to the achievements of Irish feminist activists in the culture over the past four decades. Achieving what it sets out to do, *Performing Feminisms in Contemporary Ireland* makes a welcome and timely contribution to Irish studies and to gender studies.

**Dr Tina O’Toole** is a lecturer in English at the University of Limerick. Her publications include the essay collection *Irish Literature: Feminist Perspectives* (2008; co-edited with Patricia Coughlan); *Documenting Irish Feminisms* (2005; co-authored with Linda Connolly); and *The Irish New Woman* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

***The European Avant-Garde: Text and Image***

Selena Daly and Monica Insinga (eds.)

Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012

ISBN-10: 1443840548. ISBN-13: 978-1443840545

xxv + 232 pp. Illustrations. £44.99. Hardback

Reviewer: **Jonathan L. Owen**

Introducing this original, well-researched collection of texts by emerging scholars about Europe's avant-garde movements, King's College Emeritus Professor of German John J. White identifies a telling tendency in earlier literature on the subject to refer to "*the* avant-garde" – as though the internally unstable, geographically dispersed and sometimes ideologically opposed range of artistic-political groupings that dotted interwar Europe could be considered a unified and monolithic 'macro-movement'. Clearly this collection is concerned with the avant-garde as a plural, conflicted phenomenon, and with extending our awareness of avant-garde activity beyond familiar reference points. Thus the book includes chapters on countries not generally acknowledged to have produced avant-gardes of note – Poland, Ireland – and on artists who are either little remembered or whose alignment with avant-garde modes and creeds may be controversial – Joyce, Pirandello, even George Bernard Shaw.

White's introduction gives a welcome précis of the current state of Avant-Garde Studies, commending the discipline's profitable interaction with other academic fields such as "gender-, translation- and reception-studies" but suggesting that it could benefit from further exploration of exile as a determining and widely shared condition of twentieth-century avant-garde artists. In this way White adumbrates some of the major themes of this collection, which is divided into sections covering, in order, the representation of the body; the translation of avant-garde texts (as well as the avant-garde translation of texts); identity and exile; and the transnational relations and legacy of the avant-garde. Of all these concerns, the focus on bodies

and gender is the least original, even if Fiona Noble's discussion of Dalí's "violated bodies" in the first chapter offers a corrective to prior scholarship, for which Surrealist dismemberments were merely misogynist attacks. This first thematic section might also seem slightly out of place considering the inter-cultural emphasis that makes the other three sections a coherent whole. In practice, however, these early chapters do connect to themes pursued in the later ones, with, say, the study of the dissolution of gender binaries by Dalí or fellow Surrealist Claude Cahun (in Rebecca Ferreboeuf's chapter) complementing the issues of cultural and aesthetic liminality explored elsewhere.

Indeed, this book offers rich thumbnails of some of the avant-garde's more complex and awkward personalities, of artists, famous or obscure, who stood between countries or continents and between different national movements – for instance Italian poet and artist Ardengo Soffici, torn between the bellicose Futurist movement and the melancholic French poet Apollinaire, or Beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, self-conscious son of American and European literary heritages. We encounter displaced, eccentric and individualistic characters such as French-based, Surrealist-influenced Irish poet and publisher George Reavey, and Polish writer, painter and psychic adventurer Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz ("Witkacy"), as well as figures at the edge of the avant-garde who enriched it in defying its key tenets, like modernist luminary Ezra Pound, discussed by Giovanna Epifania. Rejecting the scorched-earth anti-traditionalism of a Marinetti, Pound believed in the power of translation to

remodel classical poetry in contemporary, experimental terms, to uncover the modernity of the past.

Alongside the artists' own straddling of cultural and national borders, this focus on translation makes for a study of how a single text may be pulled this way or that across aesthetic as well as linguistic boundaries, moulded to new avant-garde affiliations, its experimental character emphasised or attenuated. One of the most interesting chapters is Chih Hsien Hsieh's analysis of two Mandarin translations of Joyce's *Ulysses*, which reveals how conflicting interpretations of Joyce's achievement and its relevance for Chinese culture resulted in two very different translations, variously stressing the book's "ugly" realism and its formalist beauty.

Valid and engaging as the book's study of liminalities and hybridities is, the question of how precisely to define and delimit the avant-garde might have been addressed more consistently, especially when discussing such debatable exponents as Joyce and Shaw. In these chapters avant-garde credentials are more or less assumed, the question of what these comprise bracketed, even as such hard definitions as those of Peter Bürger are examined elsewhere. For example, while David Clare's discussion of Shaw's "reverse snobbery" makes for an entertaining and perceptive chapter, the extent to which this characteristic is avant-garde in any more than a generalised sense of "modern" and provocative is not satisfactorily answered. The potential for apposite connections is there – Shaw's Life Force as offshore counterpart to the continental avant-gardes' cult of barbarism and folk vitality? – but these connections could have been made explicit.

The book's chapters are short, often around ten pages or so, and this bite-sized approach makes the book an accessible read, as does the contributors' generally lucid and assured writing (the fact that most of the authors are still doctoral students or recent PhD graduates is betrayed only in the occasional tendency towards theoretical over-exposition or, conversely, in rare clusters of un glossed technical terms). In places, the chapters' brevity has not enabled much extension

beyond introducing a fascinating set of artistic alignments, but for the most part the authors use the limited space successfully, mixing close, penetrating textual analysis with wider cultural and historical perspectives. Chih's chapter, for instance, wisely restricts its comparison of translation styles to a single chapter of *Ulysses* (the daunting "Oxen of the Sun" chapter). The authors ingeniously locate the philosophical devil in the textual detail, as when Selena Daly uses Marinetti's decision to repeat the exclamation 'Higher!', in his Italian translation of his own play *Le Roi Bombance*, to confirm Marinetti's re-orientation of the work towards Futurism and its "striving for the Absolute".

If the formidable Marinetti is a slightly over-dominant presence here, this collection nonetheless offers an enjoyable array of lesser-known personalities and canonical figures seen from new angles. Similarly balanced is the attention paid to the two components of the book's subtitle, text *and* image, with consideration too for the relatively under-examined avant-garde medium of drama. The subtitle's conjunction itself proves telling, for the collection also does justice to yet another form of boundary-crossing, that intermingling and blurring of verbal and visual media that was so characteristic of the avant-gardes' still potent, still not fully assimilated, artistic radicalism.

**Dr Jonathan Owen** completed his PhD, on Czech cinema, at the University of Manchester. He has worked as an Associate Research Fellow at the University of Exeter and a Teaching Fellow at the University of St Andrews. His monograph *Avant-Garde to New Wave: Czechoslovak Cinema, Surrealism and the Sixties* was published by Berghahn in 2011 (paperback 2013). He has contributed to edited collections, published articles in such journals as *Framework* and *Canadian Slavonic Papers* and co-organised a symposium on Eastern Bloc Westerns. His research interests are East European cinemas and avant-gardes, animation, transnational cinema and cult cinema

***The Female Figure in Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's Poetry***

by Patricia Boyle Haberstroth

Cork: Cork University Press, 2013

ISBN: 10:1859184987. Hardback. 204 pages. £34.65

Reviewer: **Meg Tyler**

Patricia Boyle Haberstroth's monograph, *The Female Figure in Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's Poetry* has lucid force. Unlike other volumes of criticism devoted to literature and gender studies, jargon does not interfere with the readability of her prose. And even if you are not necessarily absorbed by discussions or conceptions of gender, her prose is clear and workmanlike enough that the book deserves attention. She is more interested in the poems than in doctrine. Haberstroth looks at Ní Chuilleanáin's verse with a quiet and likeable conscientiousness, as if she were carefully studying a portrait or landscape, trying to read as much out of it as she reads into it. It comes as no surprise then that she teaches in a department of Fine Arts. Her eye attends to balance and proportion. Her sensitivity to the details of the poems – as poems – and the oblique quality of their beauty pays off. This is in many ways an admirable work of criticism, not bogged down by its politics.

As Haberstroth remarks at the outset, "Ní Chuilleanáin's intention is not to write only for and about women, nor to present any unvarying truth about women's lives" (1). Instead, we are told, the poet argues for the "psychological importance of images." Ní Chuilleanáin "believes" that "a woman artist may also aspire towards creating an image of herself and her sex from a feminine point of view, and by a logical progression she arrives at an outlook on the whole of human experience which, by that originality of perspective, is able to explore what has been missed by the male vision." Haberstroth delineates the historical representation of women – as speakers and subject in Irish poems – as being one-dimensional. Ní Chuilleanáin, on the other hand, foregrounds them as "subjects and speakers." This creation of new images of women

provides an alternative to a "relentless narrative of male heroes" (3). Of male subjects in her poems, Ní Chuilleanáin once said: "I tend to see male faces in my poems as averted. Perhaps because I want to stress that I AM LOOKING AT THEM as usually the woman is being looked at" (13). Haberstroth envisions Ní Chuilleanáin as one who emphasizes the "materiality and sexuality of the female, reaching into folklore and myth to create new versions of older images, refocusing our views of the lives of nuns and saints so we see them in a new light" (21).

A strength of the book lies in the sections on Ní Chuilleanáin's incorporation of folklore, legend and myth into the poems. Folklore and fairytale play with and try to disrupt convention. Haberstroth cites the poet:

I think women in general are inclined to use folklore...the folk imagination is never able to leave women out. The structures and institutions find it easy to omit women, but I think that because of the way the folk imagination works, it always seems to come up with striking female images (71).

Like Wallace Stevens, Ní Chuilleanáin's eye is on the threshold of realms, the actual and the dream, the factual and the fictive. She is intrigued by crossings over into the other, where human and animal meet. She inverts the image of male hunter pursuing a female deer in "The Girl Who Married a Reindeer." But is the emphasis as much on the gender transmutation as on the messy divide between people and beasts?

There is a respect here for Ní Chuilleanáin's vision and understanding, especially about the poet's unwillingness to have her poems necessarily categorized as female. This is where balance enters the argument. Haberstroth also credits Ní Chuilleanáin's questions about the

poststructuralist arguments concerning voice – she feels her “poetry ha[d] a coherent subjective voice which she recognized as her own” (33). The gesture of foregrounding the female figure in a work of art may seem passé – we are no longer first-time readers of Betty Friedan. But it is worth remembering how vital a role Ní Chuilleanáin played in the arts in Ireland in the sixties and seventies, when few women poets featured largely or even visibly on the poetic scene. No doubt it took strength and resilience to craft a voice and give shape to a way of seeing that did not conform to traditional representations of the female (and by this I mean angel or shrew).

That being said, it is hard to think of many collections of poetry in which the female figure is not a central image. But there are plenty of poets who may give it less dignity than mystique. As Haberstroth writes,

In working against stereotypes, Ní Chuilleanáin takes advantage of the possibility for renewing an image. Not only does she undercut gender constructions as she portrays confident women working both in and outside the home, she also gives importance to domestic work, challenging the division of private and public realms and action which gives less importance to work inside the home (152).

What makes Ní Chuilleanáin a poet to reckon with is that the poems do not depend upon representing the female (image or otherwise) for their vitality. Her poems have an other-worldliness and astuteness that is beyond any gender categorization. For me, the poems do not announce a gender-affiliation but instead success-

fully lose the identity of the author (if anonymity is a condition of good poetry). Haberstroth is right to laud Ní Chuilleanáin’s ingenuity and persistence. While my sympathies lie entirely with the predicament of women poets who must write alongside men who receive perhaps undue amounts of public acclaim, I also worry about trying to persuade readers that a woman poet’s value lies primarily, or even largely, in her depiction or reinvention of the feminine or the female in the text. Invention is “the action of finding out.”

There is still much to be discovered in Ní Chuilleanáin’s poetry, which has, as Heaney says “second sight.” The breadth and reach of it move beyond circumscribed boundaries. As Ní Chuilleanáin writes in “Fireman’s Lift,”

We saw the work entire, and how the light

Melted and faded bodies so that  
Loose feet and elbows and staring eyes  
Floated in the wide stone petticoat  
Clear and free as weeds.

**Meg Tyler** is Associate Professor of Humanities at Boston University. She also chairs the Institute for the Study of Irish Culture and is currently editing a collection of essays on the poetry of Michael Longley. An essay on the poetry of Fanny Howe is forthcoming in *American Women Poets in the Twenty-First Century* (Wesleyan University Press).