
IRISH STUDIES
ROUND THE WORLD - 2014

Patricia A. Lynch (ed.)

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Reflections on Irish Writing in 2014

Patricia A. Lynch

The context for the literary scene in Ireland in 2014 has been as follows: the recession still continues with the focus in the past few years on the introduction of two new taxes, that on property and especially that on water supply. It could seem that the latter is the last straw for many people, and the tax has led to much public agitation and position-taking by politicians. For some people it seems ludicrous, as in this climate water just keeps cascading down out of the skies, summer and winter; it is not surprising that one 2014 novel is called *History of the Rain*.

In spite of the recession, there is no shortage on the literary front. 2014 saw no let-up in book publications, book awards, literary festivals and conferences. The combined ACIS/CAIS (American Conference for Irish Studies/Canadian Association for Irish Studies) conference in UCD, for example, attracted a record number of participants and lovers of Irish literature from all over the globe as well as Ireland.

2014 also came in the middle of the years commemorating the founding events which led to Ireland's achievement of independence as a post-colonised state. This is proving to be a major fact of life for the citizens of Ireland, not just its historians, arts lovers and literati. John O'Callaghan describes the situation wryly: "The commemoration circus is in town and it is unlikely to break for an interval until the end of Ireland's so-called 'decade of centenaries', 2013-23" (see below). His review looks at two famous incidents of gun-running which supplied ammunition for the 1916 Rising. 2014 was also the centenary of the First World War, but I was unable to get a reviewer for books on Ireland's participation in this world-shaking combat. A 2013 novel based on the events of Ireland's War of Independence, *A Nightingale Falling* (PJ Curtis), was in 2014 adapted for a movie of the

same name, and seen in our cinemas. It featured the events which followed the arrival of a badly-wounded Black-and-Tan officer at the home of two sisters who were the last scions of an aristocratic Anglo-Irish family, and was thus a new interpretation of the Big House motif in Irish literature.

The year also saw the millennial anniversary of a major medieval event which put a limit to the Viking invasion of Ireland: the victory of combined forces under Brian Boru in 1014 over the invaders. What was once regarded as a straightforward engagement of Irish versus Vikings we now know to have been much more complicated, as Colin Ireland's review of *Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf* shows.

A literary centenary, that of James Joyce's short story collection *Dubliners*, was commemorated in the similarly-named collection, *Dubliners 100*. The editor's project was to get "fifteen contemporary Irish authors 'covering' the fifteen original stories of *Dubliners* to mark the collection's centenary" (Morris viii). Another contemporary Dublin author, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, here reviews the book, which adds another layer to the commentary. As the collection includes so many different authors, it seems fitting that the review should be extended.

Aside from centenaries, Joyce will always be in fashion, and the reviews include one by Tim Conley on the contemporary burning issue of the environment in his regard: *Eco-Joyce*. Other reviews on non-centenary topics look at the work of contemporary women poets, of a novel by a woman writer, of a critical assessment of the work of dramatist Brian Friel, and the music of the Celtic rock band Horslips.

The contributors to this work come from Brazil, Canada, France, Ireland, Spain, and the USA, thus showing the extent of international

interest and participation in Irish literature.

To end on a optimistic note, there are many new books by well-known Irish authors due to appear in 2015: for example, works by Belinda McKeon, Christine Dwyer Hickey, John Connolly, Gavin Corbett, Kathleen MacMahon, Paul Murray, and last but far from least, Anne Enright (*RTE Guide*, January 3-9, 2015: 30). As I write, Anne Enright has just been appointed Ireland's first Laureate of Fiction. Listening to her on Radio Éireann this morning, January 30, she says that she will be an ambassador for Irish fiction, involving much travel, and teaching duties in both Dublin and New York.

One of the 2014 books read by me was Niall Williams' *History of the Rain*. This very readable book tells a tale of family tragedy, in a saga fashion, as the Swain family philosophy of the Impossible Standard (37) makes each generation aim at and fail to reach it. The men of this English family are all heavenly-minded, mainly clergymen, until one member who has survived World War One comes to Ireland on the basis of an inheritance which was meant for the son of another family. Here he works on the land, and when it is ready invites his father over to visit. When the old man does not come, Abraham Swain stops believing in God and starts to believe in salmon. His life's work then becomes angling for this fish, and writing a book about it. The next generation sees Abraham's son Virgil, born, raised and educated in Ireland, and coming into contact with influences that help to put a space between him and the family fate. The chief of these is his meeting and falling in love with a rural Clarewoman, Mary MacCarroll, whose family have lived for generations on a small farm beside the river Shannon, and coming to live with her and her mother. Virgil and Mary have twins, Aenghus (Aeney), and Ruth who is the narrator. Virgil and Aeney succumb to the family fate, and Ruth seems destined to die from a mystery illness, but by book's end she is in recovery and being courted by a young Clareman. So the curse might seem to pass from the family at last. Ruth carries in her several dichotomies: between living and dying; being both English middle-class and rural Irish by inheritance: "We have mixed

metaphors and outlandish similes for breakfast.

When you transplant a little English language into a Clare bog, this is what happens..." (36); a girl who "writes like a man" (14); a teenager who has known the greatest sorrow and the most sustaining love.

The interest in the salmon which begins with Ruth's grandfather is a very frequently recurring motif in the novel. Apart from the fishing imagery, the myth of Fionn Mac Cumhal, who accidentally eats the Salmon of Knowledge, is cited. The salmon is a phallic image (36), and Aeney and Ruth "swam down the river Mam" (128) to land in the love of their family. It is intimately connected with the rain and the river Shannon which threatens to flood their home and land, and it takes away Aeney one day. There are many parallels in this novel with Marina Carr's play *Portia Coughlan*; the twins, boy and girl inseparable; the boy an angelic person who drowns in the river, and whom his sister seeks after for the rest of her life; in Ruth's words, separated from her shadow she seeks to reunite with it always (104).

This might seem from the above to be a depressing book. It is also heavily intertextual, to the greatest extent of any novel of my acquaintance, which might make it very ponderous. What redeems it from both is the wonderfully wry humour of the narrator, Ruth, which rarely fails her as she lies in her "boat bed", ill and seeking to understand her father and life, as the rain constantly washes down the skylight. Another attractive feature of the book is its descriptiveness. In depicting the area and its inhabitants, they seem to come alive to the reader: "The village has three pubs, all of which the Minister for Fixing Things Not Broken wiped out when the drink-driving laws changed and petrol stations started selling Polish beer. ... At the end of the village is the Post Office which is no longer a Post Office since the Rationalisation, but following the edict Mrs. Prendergast refused to surrender her stamps ..." (44-5). The recession of these decades is a prominent feature of the locality, but fails to break the local people, like Ruth herself. Humour can conquer so many adversities.

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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: 61-68, and "Language Usage and Social Categorisation in Brendan Behan's Play *The Quare Fellow*", *ABEI Journal 15*. São Paulo: Humanitas, 2013: 125-136.

Medbh McGuckian

by Borbála Faragó

Cork: Cork University Press / Maryland: Bucknell U.P., 2014

ISBN: 9781782050889

246 pages. €49.00. Hardback

Reviewer: **Viviane Carvalho da Anunciação**

In the poem “On Ballycastle Beach”, Medbh McGuckian invites the readers to a moment of poetic discovery. Simultaneously addressing an unresponsive interlocutor, she points to the deceitful nature of language, as the fourth line of the second stanza proposes: “words are traps / Through which you pick your way”. Additionally, the metaphor suggests that these traps are the symbolic path chosen by the reader in his or her interpretative process, given the fact that traps can also have the colloquial meaning of personal belongings. This is exactly the strategy used by Borbála Faragó in order to explain the intricate relations of Medbh McGuckian’s poetry. Instead of falling back on obvious feminist readings or obscurantist deconstructionist analyses, the critic investigates the creative performance of the poet in its complexity and totality. Even though the task is indeed challenging – due to the symbolic and polysemic nature of McGuckian’s *oeuvre* – the author could master it through a detailed attention to the poems and careful consideration of McGuckian’s thoughts about art and personal distresses.

In order to fulfill her objective of reading Medbh McGuckian’s poetry as “performative creativity” (10), Faragó chooses a chronological approach. Throughout five chapters, she examines issues such as feminism, political affiliations, death, spirituality, religious influences and poetic psyche. This multiplicity of themes gives the reader a clear account of the importance of McGuckian’s poetics. Moreover, the chronological interpretation allows the critic to draw parallels between the historical situation of Northern Ireland and the ideological discussions of the poems.

The first chapter is dedicated to the “formation of the creative self” (10) in McGuckian’s first four collections, *The Flower Master* (1982), *Venus and the Rain* (1984), *On Ballycastle Beach* (1988) and *Marconi’s Cottage* (1991). Stressing the importance of the National Poetry Competition prize and the problematic relationship between the poet and her first publishing press, Oxford University Press, Faragó explains how the poet started her career with the demanding task of expressing self in language. According to the critic, poems such as “The Singer” and “The Seed Picture” stress that McGuckian’s dynamics of writing tend to “failure in success” and “collapse in completion” (21). This failure is further developed in the volume *Venus and the Rain* (1984) which explores feminine worries, such as post-partum depression and the function of the female muse for a woman poet. Another important question that the critic raises is that of “an involuntary happening of poetic creation” – which is directly linked to the poet’s physical change on account of becoming a mother. An important poem for this period is “The Dream-Language of Fergus”, which represents, simultaneously, her own *ars poetica*, and the opening of her practice to the reader’s creative and active interpretation.

The second chapter of the volume is dedicated to the “politicized aesthetic” of the volumes *Captain Lavender* (1994), *Shelmalier* (1998), and *Drawing Ballerinas* (2001). Given that the 90s was a crucial decade for the resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland, the poet’s work did not ignore the grievous situation of her own historical time. In search for a “quest of conscience and the formation of a creative self”

(68), politics is addressed through “hidden allusions and metaphorical twists” (71). Poems such as “Script for an Unchanging Voice” and “Dream in a Train” exemplify McGuckian’s technique of seeing politics as a multilayered parchment.

Quoting Slavoj Žižek’s understanding of Adorno, Faragó argues that *Drawing Ballerinas* represents an “enabling impossibility” (82) in which politics is transformed into an imaginative consciousness rather than a definite stance. In this way, in order to avoid propagandistic opinions, the poet creates a spiritual engagement with violence and death.

The third chapter examines the volumes *The Face of the Earth* (2002), *Had I a Thousand Lives* (2003) and *The Book of Angel* (2004) in which McGuckian incorporates religious discourse and iconography in order to expand the creative scope of her poetry. The critic identifies a subversion of biblical passages and a reversal of spiritual meanings as a depiction of the creative process, like a painful and harmful practice. The poem “Rain” and “The Gas Curtain” are instances of this method, since they describe her words as hazardous material that injure the linguistic soil. Another relevant poem is “Navicella”, which engages with the Renaissance fresco of the same name by the artist Giotto. Continually reflecting on the meaning of religious parables and symbols, the poet meditates on faith and how those images can lead to a “Virgin-Mary-like acceptance of” (104) Christianity. Another icon that is appropriated by McGuckian is the angel, which proposes alternative ways of communication, especially prayer, for angels act as mediators between

heaven and earth. This is also a way for the poet to deal with the issue of identity in Northern Ireland.

The last chapter of the book examines McGuckian’s latest poetical volumes: *My Love Has Fared Inland* (2008), *The Currach Requires No Harbours* (2010) and *The High Caul Cap* (2012). Faragó asserts that they represent an introspective journey in which existence is seen as hurt bodies which do not render easy interpretations. The analysis of poems such as “The Nth of the Marchember” and “Kaluza’s Law” portrays the poet as a witness of death and decay. While the former shows McGuckian at her mother’s deathbed, the latter represents the speechlessness of the trauma caused by a disturbing loss. Summarizing the plurality of themes in McGuckian’s poetry, the last chapters reaffirm the centrality of “performative creativity” in her work.

Essential to any postgraduate student or literary critic that is engaged with Irish and Northern Irish poetry, *Medbh McGuckian* is a book that offers a thorough panorama of McGuckian’s *oeuvre*. By being faithful to the problems and difficulties posed by the poems themselves, the critic constantly reminds the readers of the subtle poetic subjectivity that is constructed by her work. Since the book does not focus on a specific theme, it is also a resourceful study for those who seek to pursue further research McGuckian’s poetry. However, the most significant accomplishment of the volume is to demonstrate that McGuckian is an essential poet not only for feminist or historical criticism, but for universal poetics.

Viviane Carvalho da Anunciação lectures in English language poetry and edits the e-journal *Almatroz* at the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil. At the moment, she is a visiting scholar at the Centre of Latin American Studies at the University of Cambridge, where she teaches Portuguese and does research. Her current project involves tracing the intercultural dialogues between Concrete Poets in Brazil and the United Kingdom. Viviane has completed her Ph.D. at University of São Paulo and Queen’s University, Belfast. Her thesis, *Exile, home and city: the poetic architecture of Belfast*, was shortlisted as one of the best theses of the year 2012 at the University of São Paulo. A book version of her work will be available in March 2015. She also has published articles on Concrete Poetry and translations of Northern Irish poets, such as Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon.

Eco-Joyce: The Environmental Imagination of James Joyce

by Robert Brazeau and Derek Gladwin (eds.)

Cork: Cork University Press, 2014

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296 pages. €39. Hardback

Reviewer: **Tim Conley**

The impetus for an ecocritical study of James Joyce is in some ways obvious and yet cannot be taken for granted. On the one hand, it seems surprising that the widening body of cultural theory aimed at reevaluating what it means to write about “nature” has not been brought to bear on Joyce, at least not in any extended discussion. After all, Joyce is the author of bird girls, flowers of the mountain, and “hitherandthithering waters” (*FW* 216.04). On the other hand, it should not be taken for granted that a particular mode of discourse, however current or fashionable (and not merely *because* it is current or fashionable), is suitable and illuminating for every subject. Herein lies the problem in presenting such readings of Joyce: the need to reasonably situate Joyce’s works within ecocriticism for specific and justifiable purposes, though these purposes may be broad and even somewhat open-ended.

The editors’ introduction to *Eco-Joyce* makes heavy weather of this task, basically arguing that because “ecocriticism is now central within contemporary scholarship” (2), Joyce studies ought to get on the bandwagon. Although Joyce’s works tend to be set in urban landscapes, readers are assured, he is nonetheless a keen observer of natural environments. This simple enough proposition is made in the introduction and wearily repeated in too many of the essays, to the point that an otherwise amenable reader might begin to entertain doubts about it. Such redundancies tend to flaw themed collections such as these. While it is not necessarily a problem that two essays share the same subject (both Brandon Kershner and Christine Cusick examine city spaces), the editors might have suggested or imposed strategic constraints to allow the various essayists to get more quickly to their respective focus.

Touchstones, by contrast, can unify. Many of the book’s fourteen essays draw upon Kate Soper’s *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-Human* (1995) and Timothy Morton’s *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007), and very few fail to refer to the works of Lawrence Buell. “Joyce’s fiction,” remarks Garry Leonard in the final (and perspicacious) essay of this collection, “has always been a purifying fire purging various critical approaches of any hyperbole their unexamined assumptions might allow” (246). So it proves here, for the very notion of “environment” is often a struggle to define in essays that range from measuring how Dublin’s Vartry Water Scheme flows through *Ulysses* to bringing Heidegger to Stephen’s aesthetic theory in *A Portrait* and considering Joyce as a travel writer. Joyce’s oeuvre is itself an environment of terrific complexity and contradiction, one in which readers discover, as Cheryl Temple Herr writes, “the impossibility of disentangling purity from pollution, humanity from excrement, post-colony from empire, and past from present” (39).

There are plenty of these kinds of insight to savour. In looking closely at the wonderful arboreal nuptials of “Cyclops,” in which Jean Wyse de Neaulan weds Miss Fir Conifer of Pine Valley, Yi-Peng Lai does some impressive newspaper research into the popular debates about afforestation in Ireland (95), and proposes that Vico may play a bigger role in Joyce’s imagining of this episode than has hitherto been noted. Greg Winston reminds us that Leopold Bloom “belongs to a generation that would remember the time before water became directly available inside most middle-class Dublin houses” (144), a fact that helps explain the fulsome answer to the question about such ready

flow from the tap in “Ithaca”. Leonard’s essay underscores how modality, not visibility itself, is ineluctable, and thereby suggests that the history of the natural world is inscribed in and by our sensual perceptions, a point that is made all the more urgent by climate change: “These days, we are all Icarus, heading straight for the sun, unless we heed the warning of Ovid’s Dedalus, a warning expressed with elegance and vigour by the best ecocriticism” (248).

It is probably not surprising to find that *Finnegans Wake*, an overgrown wilderness of a text, comes in for a good deal of attention here. Herr provocatively asks: “Is the *Wake* an ecologically progressive text?” (47) before going on to highlight the “cosmic confirmation” that Pare Lorentz’s 1937 film *The River* may have signified for the author of “Anna Livia Plurabelle” (54-56). In one of the most fertile essays in the collection, Erin Walsh proposes an “ecology of the pun” at work in the *Wake*, a book which “sees mind and world as interchangeable concepts” (74). Though Walsh plausibly contends that word-world correspondence “exceeds metaphor,” I don’t see why it must also preclude “the materiality –the thing-ness– of the word” (76), for what is an ecology if not a configuration of material relations? On just this point Fiona Becket forcefully poses a kind of challenge to ecocriticism, which, in her view, “should acknowledge the importance of a Marxist ecology as part of its theoretical framework” (25).

And just as there are berries worth plucking,

there are others (inevitable in these kinds of collections) which seem not quite ripe enough for the jam. Bonnie Kime Scott’s “Joyce, Ecofeminism and the River as Woman” raises the subject(s) of its title but declines to form an argument as such. Eugene O’Brien asks (with Stephen Dedalus) whether excrement can be art, but pays no mind either to the fact that Lynch, with whom Stephen is talking, is a confessed consumer of dung, or to the shitty scribbles of Shem the Penman. We might beg leave to doubt whether the “difficulty” that occurs between Gabriel and Lily in “The Dead” is, as Robert Brazeau breezily says, “purely Gabriel’s creation, of course” (220), and wonder about the knowing sweep of James Fairhall’s assertion that “for Joyce there could have been nothing humorous about Issy/Lucia’s moving away from childhood and biological initiation into womanhood” (237).

Eco-Joyce is a handsome volume, but needless typos and editing oversights bedevil it. The names of several writers, scholars, and even Joyce’s characters are misspelled, among them Michael Begnal, Sean Latham, Friedhelm Rathjen, not to mention somebody called “Virginia Wolfe” (10). The first word of *Finnegans Wake* is not “riverunn” (83), and there is no Italian word “riverrun” (110; there is “riverran,” as the misquoted Rosa Maria Bosinelli has pointed out). Instances of such pollution aside, *Eco-Joyce* represents a promising opening of the field.

Tim Conley is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Brock University in Canada. His most recent books include *Doubtful Points: Joyce and Punctuation* (co-edited with Elizabeth M. Bonapfel, 2014) and *Burning City: Poems of Metropolitan Modernity* (co-edited with Jed Rasula, 2012).

Dubliners 100. 15 New Stories Inspired by the Original Dubliners

Edited by Thomas Morris
 Dublin: Tramp Press, 2014
 ISBN: 978 099 2817 015
 215 pages. €15. Paperback

Reviewer: **Éilís Ní Dhuibhne**

The introduction to this volume mainly focuses on the life and thoughts of the editor, Thomas Morris. “At a recent wedding reception I had to be told that I was using the wrong spoon for my soup”. However, buried amongst the amusing if somewhat irrelevant personal anecdotes, are some useful insights. “Being familiar with the original versions of these new stories will undoubtedly refract the loveliest of lights across Joyce’s own work, offering new readings and entry points into the originals (they could even be read as creative essays on Joyce’s stories”) (xi).

Having begun to read the new stories as independent or “stand alone” works, I found that I was missing something. Joyce. Unless you know every one of the originals inside out, by far the best way to savour this new collection is to read each story alongside the original which inspired it. As Thomas Morris points out, the new stories throw light on Joyce’s work, and vice versa. Of course the new versions indeed work independently – some are sturdier than others – but all are more interesting when considered in the light of the master text. It is definitely a case of one and one equalling considerably more than two.

Dubliners 100 follows the arrangement of the original collection, published in 1914. So it starts with “The Sisters” and ends with “The Dead”. We are not told whether the writers chose the stories they “cover”, to use Thomas Morris’s useful term borrowed from the terminology of the popular music world, or whether the allocation was an editorial decision. My guess is that some sort of compromise arrangement occurred – I find it hard to imagine that anyone would pick “Ivy Day

in the Committee Room”, say, if they could work with “The Dead” or “Clay” or “A Little Cloud.” But perhaps this is to be too subjective. Everyone to his favourite *Dubliners* stories.

Whatever happened, the writers, Thomas Morris tells us, had carte blanche to do anything they liked with the stories. “I asked them to “cover” the stories in whatever way they saw fit.” So how did they use this privilege?

There is more than one way to be inspired by a pre-existing story. A writer could base a new story on the main character, or one of the minor characters. She or he can use its storyline to structure a new version fleshed with different details, take its theme and base a newly invented storyline on that. The choice could be to emulate the style of the original – not a bad exercise for any writer, when the original style is Joyce’s in *Dubliners* (mimicking later Joyce, always a temptation for a young writer, seldom produces palatable results.) Of course, the new story can do several of these things simultaneously – take the old structure and characters, and nevertheless create something original and new. This is what storytellers in the oral tradition, and writers drawing their sources from tradition (such as Chaucer, or Boccaccio, sometimes Shakespeare) always did. The injunction to make everything new, including the very skeleton of the story, is a relatively new idea in the history of literature. Taking a ready-made bones and dressing them in new flesh and clothes is a practice as natural and old as the hills. Not surprisingly, this is what most of the writers of *Dubliners 100* do with Joyce’s century old stories.

Mary Morrissy, John Boyne, Donal Ryan,

Andrew Fox, Oona Crawley, Michelle Forbes and Elske Rahill, all recreate stories closely based on the original characters and storylines. John Kelly remains most faithful of all to “his” original, “A Little Cloud”, and, possibly as a result, his is one of the best stories in the collection. (The original is one of the best in *Dubliners*, which helps.) Evelyn Conlon, Belinda McKeon, Paul Murray, and Sam Coll are fairly faithful, but not as respectful as the former group. Patrick McCabe and Peter Murphy write stories whose links to the originals are minimal – McCabe’s a matter of underlying theme, and to some extent voice, while Murphy tells an entirely different story which contains some references to “The Dead”, the template he chose or was lucky enough to be allocated.

The most usual method of recreation is, one could say, a sort of translation. The original storyline and characters are transferred to our times. Locations tend to remain the same, with more or less precision – sensitively and sensibly, since the main point of *Dubliners* is that it is set in Dublin and about Dubliners. Props representing modern times abound; technological gimcracks – computers, the internet – are deployed in several stories. Actual clothes – often described by Joyce – are of course updated. A favourite device is to switch gender – Eveline becomes a boy called Evelyn, the schoolboys of “An Encounter” are schoolgirls, and so on. Very impressively, some writers catch the style of the original tale – a style which Joyce changes from story to story, depending on the imagined voice of his main protagonist – and run with it. John Boyne, for instance, transfers the rhythm of Joyce’s prose in “Araby” to his own version, and Andrew Fox perfectly captures the register of the young bloods in his take on “After the Race”. Other writers, such as Peter Murphy, just stick to their own voice.

Although they were not required to do this, to my knowledge, almost all writers, with one possible exception, located their stories in the present day, or, in a few instances, in the relatively recent past. Theoretically, someone could have chosen say Viking Dublin, or Dublin in the future, or even Joyce’s Dublin. It seems natural, however, to honour Joyce’s ambition, of

documenting the inner and outer reality of Dubliners’ lives in his day, by dealing with the Dublin and Dubliners best known to the new writers. The decision of the writers to write about the world as they know it raises interesting questions about some of the primary functions of good fiction. Is documentation of life as we observe it one of our goals? (I think it is. We are mostly anthropologists, among other things.)

Since, as a short story writer, I often resent the fact that collections of stories are reviewed collectively, since each story is a complete work of art in its own right, and deserves the critical attention given to a novel. I have asked for permission to reproduce my response to each of the fifteen stories here. This makes for a very long review, I am afraid. But it is the only way to do anything like justice to the short stories. These sometimes cursory responses are, in essence, notes on the stories, each one of which I read in conjunction with its begetter.

Patrick McCabe: “The Sisters”

Patrick McCabe opens the volume with “The Sisters”, one of a group in *Dubliners* dealing with the loss of childhood innocence. It is the story of the dead priest who once dropped the chalice on the altar and who subsequently lost his wits. The story is told by a schoolboy, a neighbour who used to be an altar boy for the priest, and provides us with a wonderful example of Joyce’s technique. Everything is seen from the point of view of the boy, who is intelligent and highly articulate, but inexperienced and innocent. The reader is allowed to suspect there is more to the priest than the boy understands – that his illness was caused by something less innocent than the accidental breaking of the chalice. But this is never fully explained.

Patrick McCabe is one of very few writers in this anthology who has chosen to depart radically from the original, leaving behind its storyline and even its setting. His narrator is also a clever schoolboy, who witnesses a tragedy which he dimly understands, and loses some of his innocence. McCabe’s story deals with the accidental burning of a terrace of houses in a small country town. He emulates, fairly successfully, Joyce’s style in “The Sisters”, in a

story which is more rambunctious and highly comedic than the original, although that too has some zany moments – particularly in the reproduction of banal but colourful dialogue.

Mary Morrissy: “An Encounter”

This is another story of the loss of innocence. Mary Morrissy transfers the essence of “An Encounter” – an encounter between two schoolboys and a paedophile, who masturbates to his own mildly pornographic script – to a contemporary setting. The boys are replaced by girls and she tells the story using the second person – rather daringly. The setting of Joyce’s story is the river Liffey and Ringsend, which Morrissy replaces with the Dodder and Terenure, respectively (reminding one that the Dublin of the work is very specific and very confined. Its southern boundary is Ballsbridge, its northern Drumcondra, and it extends no further west than Chapelizod. Bray, Greystones and Skerries are mentioned, but as summer holiday destinations. Nobody in *Dubliners* lives in Rathmines or Rathgar or Ranelagh, let alone Terenure – although plenty of people did live in those suburbs at the turn of the 19th century. The original “An Encounter” is serious in tone, with an extremely strong sense of place, and brilliant in its production of the monologue of the strange man encountered by the mitching schoolboys. Morrissy’s story is richer in humour than Joyce’s. She mirrors his rich evocation of a Dublin place, and, although she sticks in the main to his structure, she gives her story a most unJoycean twist in the tail – which is typical of her own storytelling and extremely effective. By managing to be true to herself and her own talent and way of writing, while simultaneously reflecting “An Encounter” (one of the best stories in the original collection), she provides one of the most memorable stories in the new collection.

John Boyne: “Araby”

John Boyne succeeds in capturing the very rhythm of Joyce’s prose, and writes his version of “Araby” in the lyrical, sad first person tone of the original. He faithfully maintains the location of North Richmond Street, and sticks closely to

the master storyline. Instead of being in love with an elusive girl, his narrator is attracted to a boy, Mangan, who invites him to a rugby match. The hapless narrator walks northwards to Fairview – rather than south to Ballsbridge – and arrives as the match is almost over. Mangan is there, but all but ignores him. The narrator has a truly Joycean epiphany – “The part of me that would be driven by desire and loneliness had awoken and was planning cruelties and anguish that I could not yet imagine.”

John Boyne sticks closely to the original story, to its theme, its plot, its character and even its style. His is a simple account of youthful desire followed by disappointment and an insight into a sad nature of life. It conforms exactly to the shape of the short story designed by Joyce. “If reality is primarily a transcendent, timeless ideal or a projection of human desire for transcendence, the best way to reflect this is to construct narratives that centre on revelatory moments when that ideal or desire is manifested”.

Donal Ryan: “Eveline”

In Donal Ryan’s story, roles are switched. The eponymous heroine becomes an Irishman, Evelyn, who is in love with Hope, a trafficked girl from another country. The bureaucratic residency problems encountered by refugees, and slaves who are trafficked into Ireland involuntarily, are referred to. The story ends just as Joyce’s does – the Irish lover, now male, abandons the foreigner, in this case drawn by a sense of duty towards his mother. The theory that Eveline is a code name for prostitution in Victorian literature may have influenced his decision; possibly it is co-incidental and his Hope is merely a new version of the Argentinian sailor of the original Eveline.

Theme and content rather than style are what inspire him. He allows Hope a bigger role than the sailor gets in Joyce’s story – which is a stream of Eveline’s thoughts almost exclusively – but sticks more or less to the shape of the original. It is not set in Dublin, though – I prefer the modern versions which retain the Dublin setting, so crucial to the point of the original collection. Joyce’s *Dubliners* brings us on a quite

specific tour of the city, Eveline's territory being the North Wall, and perhaps the East Wall.

Andrew Fox: "After The Race"

Joyce's story covers bigger swathes of the city than he usually can manage, since his characters in this story are in a car, unlike most of the others, making do with the tram or shank's pony. The story is a snapshot of a summer evening in town in the company of rich young men without much ambition – the sort of people we encounter in *Brideshead Revisited* – somewhat wild, hard drinking, chaps, not long out of college. His main character has been to "Dublin University" and also Cambridge. It's a look at the lives of the golden set, perhaps nouveau riche, but that seems not to be the main point. These are the sort of people Joyce himself would have known well in UCD.

Andrew Fox stays close to the theme and characters of the original. A group of wealthy students, one the son of an Irishman who made good during the boom, live it up in New York. Modernised, the motor race is replaced by a run in Central Park. Otherwise, the action – après-race drinking and debauchery, gambling, followed by the usual sad epiphany, the anticlimax, the little death, the hangover, the cold dawn of the morning after the night before. Fox rises to the style of the original too. He doesn't emulate its style exactly, but he translates it to the contemporary equivalent. "After The Race", dealing as it does with educated young bloods, has a richer and more complex register than the tales of children or unsophisticated girls and women. The story demands a certain sophistication in its style, and this is impressively achieved.

Evelyn Conlon: "Two Gallants"

In Joyce's story of class, sexism and exploitation, Corley and the more sensitive Lenehan plot to borrow money from a "slavey". The style is sophisticated enough apart from the dialogue. Lenehan (surely rather like Joyce himself) is educated and the register reflects this.

One of the most structurally solid stories in the original collection, it has a stronger plot than

usual in the epiphanies or snapshots: pathos, disgust, humour, good dialogue and sex are not unusual in *Dubliners*. But this story has an ingredient we don't often encounter there: a bit of tension.

Evelyn Conlon moves it from October to September (indicating that she notices the season of the original story. Most months, seasons, weathers, and times of day, are represented in the original *Dubliners*. Even that, he thought of, as he patterned his collection! Care with the tiny details is always the mark of the master craftsman.) Conlon's story is written in a colloquial smart style which is her own but mirrors the smartly youthful tone of the original. Trinity College is mentioned in "Two Gallants", and Conlon locates her story in the college, at a Joyce conference. This allows for much ironic commentary on the Joyce industry. For the story line, she uses the original idea – two young male students concoct a plot to steal a girl's essay. Things don't go according to plan, however – gender roles, expectations, have changed, since 1914, and Conlon's is perhaps the most original and optimistic story in this new collection. It also reveals an understanding that the society which Joyce describes has changed in some fundamental ways, and that this affects fiction. Joyce's *Dubliners* is a revolutionary work of literary art but it is also a work of social realism. His characters suffer due to the conventions, mores and laws of the time: gender inequality is a strong theme, as is the abuse of children and class inequality. But some things have changed in Dublin, and Conlon is one of the few authors in the new collection to focus on the shift in gender politics which is one of the most radical changes to have affected Ireland. Many aspects of the human condition never change. But some attitudes and behaviours do. History is progressive. It is not as easy for two gallants to cheat a girl as it was a hundred years ago – although they can, of course, try.

Oona Frawley: "The Boarding House" (and Elske Rahill: "A Mother")

The original story is one of those in which Joyce lampoons a middle aged, managerial type of woman – the only kind of woman for whom he

has little sympathy, in *Dubliners*. Old women, young women, poor women, he always treated with great compassion. But the competent matron is a figure of fun to be derided. Mooney, of “The Boarding House”, and Mrs Kearney, “A Mother”, are portrayed so convincingly as ridiculous and nasty harridans that the reader joins with him in condemning their controlling ways. Even Joyce had a blind spot, and was trapped by history, as we all are. In ridiculing middle aged women – and pitting them against young beautiful women, their daughters – he conforms to a tradition as ancient as Aristotle. But should 21st century writers agree with him?

Oona Frawley, and Elske Rahill who writes a version of “A Mother”, don’t question Joyce’s gender politics in these stories, or question it much. They both write very entertaining versions of the originals, translating the ghastly female characters, pushy and overbearing, into modern settings. Oona Frawley’s take on Marie Mooney is clever and impressive, acknowledging that attitudes to sex and marriage have changed dramatically. Her Mrs Mooney, instead of forcing a marriage, challenges her son-in-law about his interest in on-line porn. In Elske Rahill’s imaginative, zany funny, story, Mrs Kearney is a translated from her original form, as a pushy mother who wants her daughter’s performance fees to be paid, to a crazy upholder of traditional family values. Both mothers are control freaks in the original stories, but Joyce’s values in these pieces in particular can bear scrutiny. Most women writers I know would have difficulty in agreeing with Joyce that it is OK not to pay a woman artist according to her contract. In general, we no longer believe that it is ok to impregnate a young woman and dump her. While Frawley’s and Rahill’s stories have many admirable qualities, I sense they have both been seduced by the power of Joyce’s storytelling and an opportunity to reassess the gender politics of the master has been lost.

John Kelly: “A Little Cloud”

John Kelly sticks closer to the original template than any other author, transferring Joyce’s comparison of two lives, one in the fast lane and one in the ordinary humdrum of marriage in

suburbia, to our times. Chandler is now a journalist in RTE, Gallaher a hot shot writer in New York. They meet in the Merrion Hotel (which somehow doesn’t have the exoticism, the magical wonder, that Corless’s has, for the original Chandler – but one sympathises with Kelly. There is nowhere so exotic, so unattainable, really, nowadays – I can’t think of a restaurant or hotel in Dublin that would seem so impossibly glamorous to an RTE journalist as Corless’s does to Little Chandler.) I loved this respectful treatment. Kelly’s story is essentially a faithful translation of “A Little Cloud” to the lifestyle and idiom and Dublin of today. The simple approach is often the best, in all art, and this was one of my favourites. Interesting that it is used by the writer who is more of a non-fiction writer than a novelist, usually. Whatever the motive for the approach, it is eminently effective.

Belinda McKeon: “Counterparts”

McKeon sticks to the office setting of much of “Counterparts”. She moves the office to New York, which may not be such a good idea, but the theory seems to be that the internet, social networking and so on, mean that it doesn’t much matter where you are. We live in a global society, as it is said, rather than a few streets stretching from the Tolka to the Dodder. Her protagonist, the translation of the unlucky and hapless Farrington, is addicted not to alcohol but to the internet. She’s not popping out for a pint every hour but she wastes an awful lot of time on Facebook, and finally gets her comeuppance. “Counterparts” is one of the most disturbing stories in Joyce’s collection – the tale of Farrington, an alcoholic, who “is bullied by his wife when he is sober and who bullies her when he is drunk.” Pawning something, he spends a night drinking heavily in various Dublin pubs, many with names still familiar to us. Then he comes home and beats his son savagely for no reason. Joyce is a skilled exponent of mimesis rather than exegesis, the “show don’t tell” method of writing, and nowhere is this used to better effect than in this story.

Although there is a child abuse element in Belinda McKeon’s story, it lacks the raw horror of the scene in Farrington’s cold and dark kitchen

– this is not her fault, by any means, but signals a characteristic of the new collection as a whole. The up-to-date settings – whether on-line or physical – seem to lack the vigour, the atmospheric power, of the Joycean settings. Nostalgia plays a part in this reaction, undoubtedly. But there is more to it than that. Joyce conveys the sensuality of his settings – its concrete texture, its light and shade, its heat, even in contemporary places. I don't know why, but suspect it has to do not so much with the writing as with the quality of the places themselves.

Michelle Forbes: “Clay”

Maria is a tiny single woman who works and lives in a laundry in Ballsbridge – The Dublin by Lamplight Laundry – (is this a “refuge” for “unmarried mothers” or “fallen women”?). She crosses the city by tram to Drumcondra, on Hallow Eve (as it was still called in Dublin when I was a child). Two mishaps befall her. Some plumcake she buys in the city centre is mislaid, or perhaps stolen, on the tram. (Plums usually suggest sex in Joyce – “what is a home without Plumtree's Potted Meat? Incomplete”, we read in *Ulysses*). In the divination game involving saucers, she selects not fruit but clay, meaning death. The hostess surreptitiously removes the saucer and replaces it with one containing a prayer book, and Maria is none the wiser. The story closes with a heartbreaking rendition of Balfe's song, “I dreamt I dwelt in Marble Halls”, by Maria.

“Clay” is a perfect short story. Neat as an apple, it is one of the very finest in the original *Dubliners*. Aesthetically, it beats “The Dead.”

Two very tiny things happen – her plum cake is stolen, Maria selects the saucer containing clay. It is a cliché to say a whole life is contained in a story... and indeed it is a lie, because of course plenty of detail is missing. But such a tiny story, about tiny events, can give us the deepest understanding and insight into a life. Joyce manages to be infinitely compassionate; he pities Maria, we pity Maria, everyone pities Maria. On the other hand, we also see that she is content with her life, restricted as it is. She is loved, if at arms' length. Even this he portrays. The voice – the story is told in Maria's simple style, short

sentences, vivid images of ordinary life: “She had lovely ferns and wax plants”.

Is it in the simplest of his stories that Joyce is at his very best? The words, the sentences, the images, in this story are clear and sharp as diamonds. It functions perfectly on the surface as a clear tale of Maria's visit to Drumcondra, and it functions at a poetic level: she loses her plumcake, she dreams of marble halls. Anyone who doubts the sheer wondrousness of what I have recently heard condemned as “social realism” in literature should read “Clay” and think again.

Michelle Forbes homes in on the tram – Maria travels by tram, and a hundred years later, we have a new tram in Dublin, the Luas. Her protagonist, Conor, is too fat, whereas Maria is too small and thin (she looks like a tiny witch); fashions in weight were different a hundred years ago, when being too thin suggested illness, as obesity does today. Forbes, like John Kelly, performs a fairly direct translation of “Clay” to modern Dublin. His journey is from town to Cherrywood. It's Halloween. Conor meets various types – a dressed up child, a pregnant woman who is not offered a seat, a teenager who wants to buy drugs – on the tram. His character is similar to Maria's. He is a good worker, polite, well regarded, generally seen as on the margins of life, by everyone. Like Maria, he has dreams of love and happiness. “C'mon baby make my dreams come true/Work me boy do the thing you do” is a good modernisation of “I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls” – and the clay on his shoes (picked up on the derelict Nama site surrounding Cherrywood Luas stop) is an impressive enough translation of the clay on the saucer – if not as readily meaningful.

Forbes sticks largely to Conor's voice in her narrative, with just the occasional slip into literary language – “outside, the black dampness of the night seemed to have licked the streets clean and spread the houses sideways in pristine streaks” is nice, but the lesson to be learnt, for a writer, from “Clay”, is stick to the voice. This is one of the stories in the original *Dubliners* where Joyce is absolutely faithful to his character's idiom and way of thinking – he never slips out of Maria's perspective, even when she is blindfolded.

And she sees the world, when not blindfolded, with a precision which is unsurpassed elsewhere in the book. Forbes is to be commended for recreating Maria in a convincing modern form (Conor, like his model, is very lovable), and for painting a picture of the new Dublin. That is a very bleak picture, in which the colour and rich textures of the city are replaced by derelict sites, and plum cake by drugs and Mars bars, ancient Hallowe'en games by the internet, may reflect the reader's perspective rather than anything else. Even names like "Drumcondra" (especially perhaps Drumcondra) are more evocative, richer, than names like "Cherrywood" (although it has the hint of plums in it.) But in a hundred years time, who knows? Nostalgia colours our reading of the original *Dubliners*, which seemed much harder edged when it came out than it does today.

Paul Murray: "A Painful Case"

"Mr Duffy abhorred anything which betokened mental or physical disorder." This is the most eventful story in *Dubliners*. Stuff happens: an adulterous relationship, alcoholism, a death on a train track. Anna Karenina is condensed into a short story. Anna Karenina without sex, and a Vronsky who is more like Karenin than Anna's dashing lover. The terrain is ambitious too... we're outside the canals, we're in one of Dublin's most picturesque suburbs, Chapelizod, in a house with a view of the river. The style is educated, pompous, as befits the voice of a bank official who spends his evenings at his landlady's piano or at a concert or the opera, whose bookcases include the complete Wordsworth and *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, albeit arranged according to weight and size of volume (although, in fairness, sometimes you have to do this, as librarians and bibliophiles know).

Given that "A Painful Case" is one of Joyce's most eventful short stories, it is appropriate that one of Ireland's most imaginative and lively writers chose it or was chosen to "cover" it. Paul Murray skilfully balances fidelity to the original with wild invention. His James Duffy is a true reflection of the original in his emotional paralysis. Like him, he lives in Chapelizod, and takes exercise in the Phoenix Park. He loves music, and eats in restaurants, but only because he

is a restaurant reviewer, successful because he is so vitriolic (nothing makes such entertaining reading as a cruel hatchet job.) The new James Duffy's hard little heart is melted, not by a married woman, but by a monk in a silent order who manages a monastic restaurant, Tacito. The storyline progresses, and follows Joyce's as to main plot points, but Paul Murray's own gift for comic writing cannot be suppressed. Joyce can be amusing, and "A Painful Case" is rich in irony, but far from hilariously funny. Paul Murray, one of our most gifted young writers, succeeds in combining rollicking comedy and real tragedy in his version, in what is probably the most original version in the new book.

Eimear McBride: "Ivy Day in the Committee Room"

"Look at all the factories down by the quays there, idle! Look at all the money there is in the country if we only worked the old industries, the mills, the ship-building yards and factories. It's capital we want". From abroad.

Plus ça change.

"Ivy Day in the Committee Room" is written almost exclusively in dialogue, whereas most stories in *Dubliners* contain little enough conversation. Crofton, the young ineffective canvasser, doing it for the money, is the only silent one among the bunch of nattering politicians. Crofton is the observer – like the watchful, introverted people we mainly meet in *Dubliners*. Politics is all talk, seems to be the message, in this tale which is more play than short story. It is many people's favourite, but I should admit that it is the one I like least.

A challenge, then, for Eimear McBride. And indeed, all writers know that committee meetings, parties, large gatherings, are always challenging. In folk narrative, there is a pattern called "The law of two to a scene", and it's a useful ancient storytelling technique for any story writer to bear in mind. One to a scene may work even better, in a short story. In "Ivy Day", we have – eight or nine. Definitely more than a quorum. The silent Crofton – possibly Joyce's alter ego, anyway a good representation of the quiet writer – is the one who is most memorable.

He all but disappears in McBride's version,

which transfers “Ivy Day” to the night of the downfall of Bertie Ahern (I think.) She tells the story exclusively in dialogue, retains most of the names. Interestingly, the dialect used is not much different from that of a hundred years ago, and nevertheless rings true. Relying only on talk – no internet, mobile phones, the other devices which flag our new age in most of the stories – what her version mainly demonstrates is that, at the core of politics not much seems to have changed over the century. At the heart of the system are groups of men chattering in rooms. (Today, there might be a token woman... though quite possibly not).

Elske Rahill: “A Mother”

Although it is open to interpretation, its last lines suggesting ambiguity, the story of how Mrs Kearney, mother of the pianist Kate, fights against a barrage of men to obtain her daughter’s fee for performing in the Antient Concert Rooms, has a misogynistic ring to it. In folktales, literature and drama, for centuries, no character is as derided as the mother of marriageable daughters. Mrs Kearny is Mrs Bennett, only more intelligent. Is Joyce on her side? Definitely not 100%. She is in the right, she is mistreated, but she is still represented as ridiculous and dislikeable. We are not enjoined to pity her as we pity, say, Maria, or Eveline, or the hapless Mrs. Sinico (it’s ok to be a middle aged woman if you are vulnerable in love... but then you will probably have to jump under a train in the closing scene).

Elske Rahill, however, takes the wholly negative view of her heroine, and focuses on her interest in Irish (very marginal in the original). In this story, a link is made between the Irish language and conservatism – a link which indeed exists, in my extensive experience of Gaeligeóiri, but is far from universal among us. Moreover, it is a cliché. Of course, it is true that Joyce held negative views of the Irish movement, and it is reasonable to mirror them in the new version of his story. The exaggeration of his misogyny is less endearing. Alas, it is all too easy in fiction to pit an older woman against a younger one, and I have often been guilty of exactly the same thing myself, in my fiction. We should all beware of

our blind spots. This, I realise, is a political and personal judgment but, as an Irish speaker, daughter of a Gaeltacht man, I find anti-Irish-language fiction offensive (I find it offensive in Joyce), and I don’t understand why it continues to be acceptable, much more acceptable than other forms of racism. Subjective, I know, but there it is.

As a story, this one is highly entertaining and imaginative, and many people will love it.

Sam Coll: “Grace”

Mr Kernan bites off the tip of his tongue, while drunk. He is visited by his friends, who drink in his bedroom, chatter idly about popes, literature, people, religion, and decide to renew their baptismal vows. The story ends with a scene in a church, where the preacher enjoins them to balance their moral books before the divine auditor examines them. Not one of my favourite stories, it is rich in dialogue, designed to reveal the pompous ignorance of the Dublin middle classes. This is one of Joyce’s comic, social stories – one of the sub-group of “dialogue” stories, including also “Ivy Day..” and “The Dead” (part one.)

Sam Coll transfers the story to contemporary Dublin, and writes it in a lively version of Joycean English which one encounters often in creative writing classes, and which could be called “faux Joycean”. It has little resemblance to the style of the original story, though it reflects indirectly the style of the dialogue there. Perhaps this is deliberate – the story is about pretentious people and the style reflects this.

Peter Murphy: “The Dead”

“The Dead” is generally regarded as the jewel of *Dubliners*. I have always so regarded it, and focussed on it in my reading and consideration of the short story. Indeed it is a great story, but this re-reading of the entire collection highlights contenders for “best story in the book.” “A Little Cloud”, for instance. “Clay”, “A Painful Case”, “Counterparts”. All are magnificent examples of great modern short stories.

“The Dead” is a two-part story. It combines a social story with a quiet interior story – in short,

it enjoys the best of both worlds, and represents the two types of short story created in *Dubliners*. First we have the party for the 6th December, with its dialogue and chatter and array of Dublin types; then we have the interior story of Gabriel, of his desire for love and sex, ending with the frustration of that desire: the disappointed bride, the poetic epiphany, absolutely typical of *Dubliners* in general.

Gabriel is an educated literary man, so the voice is sophisticated Joyce – not servant maid simple or drunkard rambunctious. Just ordinary literary prose.

Peter Murphy departs radically from the original story – even farther from his model than Pat McCabe from his. He is having none of it. Instead he spins a yarn, possibly set in the future, or in no time known to us, in what I think is a successful invented language, possibly intended to represent travellers' cant. The narrator is washed up on an island, comes upon a sort of book club assembled around a fire in Bargytown on Sea. They tell a tale of the burning of the library in the town a week earlier, in which all books except for that containing "The Dead" perished. Someone retells "The Dead", it is generally derided, and it, too, is burnt. Any story worth its salt can't be explained so much as felt in the blood and bones", "The Doc", says.

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Conclusion

Rereading the original *Dubliners* alongside its new counterpart in the form of *Dubliners 100*, reminded me of how brilliant the original work is. Of how vivid, how sharply focussed, how evocative, all of Joyce's snapshots of various kinds of Dubliner, various age groups, various classes, various places, various atmospheres, various seasons, times of the day, weather. Various restaurants, various places to go on a Sunday. It is like a brilliantly shot film of Dublin, capturing every shadow and nuance with his supersensitive lens.

The unifying themes are Dublin, and the young Joyce's view of the city as a place where everyone was congealed in a sort of paralysis. If the stories were about the sexual act – instead of about sexual relations, as most of them are – they

would all narrate *coitus interruptus* – in most cases, *coitus non startus*. What is desired is never attained, and often what is desired is sex and/or love. Or, sometimes, dreams of a better life – marble halls, Argentina, the glamorous life of London – are briefly envisioned, hoped for, crystallized in a song, and thwarted. In other words, *Dubliners* harbour the desires common to most human beings no matter when or where they live.

The new versions all understand this.

They take on board several aspects of the originals. The characters are as a rule taken as given, dressed in modern clothes, sometimes given a gender change. Props are updated – technical devices in particular abound. The (sacred) Dublin settings are generally maintained, new aspects of the old places sometimes highlighted, sometimes not. On the whole, a sense of continuity is evident.

Apart from clothes and gadgets, not much appears to have changed. The new *Dubliners* are as disappointed in their dreams as the old *Dubliners*.

The influence of the original almost demanded this. But is it valid? *Dubliners* the original is a literary work. My re-reading of it impresses upon me that it is indeed one of the greatest books ever written in Ireland. And it is also a work of social realism. Joyce shows us what a goodly selection of *Dubliners* were like, as they went about their daily lives. He shows us what they looked like – the physiques of almost every key character is described in detail – where they lived, what they wore, ate, where they worked. He goes inside their heads and hearts and reveals their secret desires and disappointments.

The main problem for most of them is lack of sex, love and money. Sexual mores have changed completely in Dublin since 1914. The iron hand of religion holds little or no sway (Paul Murray gets this – as he has to imagine hard to find an illicit love that has even a tiny shock effect.) Gender politics have changed fundamentally, as Evelyn Conlon reveals in her story. The types of *Dubliners* who are typical are different from Maria and Mr Duffy and Mrs Mooney. While new professions – television journalists, restaurant critics – are represented in *Dubliners 100*, mostly

we encounter white natives, dressed in new clothes. The surface has changed, but the hearts are the same. If I were trying to find fault, I would say that in general opportunities to explore the possibility of deeper changes in human nature, then and now, have been lost. Not altogether, though. Some of the new authors flag the change in attitudes to sexuality, to gender, to religion, to the human body. In the cases of those who do not, they may simply reflect the fact that much has not changed.

Content is one thing. Literary art is another (though everything is connected.) As I have heard one of the authors saying in an interview about the project, she feared it. *Dubliners* is a hard act to follow. Joyce was a young writer when he wrote these stories. But he was a very educated, clever, sensitive and skilful one. He had, it is clear, extraordinary gifts. Who would stand comparison with him?

For me, with every respect to the new writers, the great pleasure was in going back to the original *Dubliners* and asking the question: what makes it so good? How does he do it?

The snapshot simile for Joyce's stories is a bit of a cliché. But a photographic analogy is the only one I can come up with to sum up what his prose can do. He selects, with great care, various Dublin types: Maria the little spinster in the laundry, the swashbuckling students, romantic or adventurous schoolboys, a priest, a middle class married couple, and so on. He places them in the familiar settings – schools, houses, shops, streets. The stories happen at selected times of the day – morning, afternoon, evening, night, in various

weathers, and at various seasons – spring, summer, autumn and winter are represented, as are some significant and rather typically Irish holidays, such as Hallowe'en and Little

Christmas. The selection of characters, places, times, and weathers, is careful. The scenes are representative, the pictures beautifully composed to show the truth as seen by the photographer. There is light and shade (very evident, and conscious, in, say "The Dead"). And there is the high resolution.

It is the latter, I think, which is hardest to emulate. Joyce had a gift for it, which few writers possess. His writer's eye, unlike his real eye, had clearer vision than most people's. It is almost impossible to reproduce, in modern guise or any other, the perfection of his prose.

But it is always worth trying.

Dubliners 100 is an excellent project. It throws light on Joyce in a writerly, creative way. Like many good books, like the original *Dubliners*, it makes a strong mark on the reader, and it is inspiring to the writer. It opens doors; it makes one realise that one could spend one's whole life writing about people who live between Drumcondra and Ballsbridge, and that would not be a bad literary life.

As he knew.

What does Joyce do in *Dubliners*?

Portrays a selection of *Dubliners* in a variety of Dublin settings.

Little things happen to the characters, or, if you like, almost happen and don't happen. Their dreams are never matched by reality.

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne was born in Dublin. She has written eight novels, six collections of short stories, several books for children, plays and scholarly work. She is a well-known literary critic. Her short story collections include *Midwife to the Fairies*, *The Inland Ice*, and *The Pale Gold of Alaska* and *The Shelter of Neighbours*. Among her novels are *Cailíni Beaga Ghleann na mBlath*, *Hurlamaboc*, *Dunamharu sa Daingean*, *The Dancers Dancing*, and *Fox, Swallow Scarecrow*. Numerous literary awards include The Bisto Book of the Year Award, the Readers' Association of Ireland Award, the Stewart Parker Award for Drama, the Butler award for Prose from the Irish American Cultural Institute and several Oireachtas awards for novels in Irish. *The Dancers Dancing* was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction and she was awarded the Irish Pen Award for an Outstanding Contribution to Irish Literature in 2015. Her stories are widely anthologized and translated.

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Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf

by Seán Duffy

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Reviewer: **Colin Ireland**

Brian Bóraime (anglicized as Boru) is one of the most intriguing figures from Irish history and, although plenty of legend has accrued to him, he is remembered as the single Irish king to most successfully unite the island of Ireland. The pivotal battle for which he is most famous, the Battle of Clontarf (*Cluain Tarbh* “bull meadow”), now a comfortable suburb of modern Dublin, has become iconic in Irish nationalist history and is considered Brian’s greatest success despite the fact that he did not survive the conflict. Our stereotype of this battle fought in 1014 has the Vikings of Dublin, allied with certain Leinster families and armies and fleets of Vikings from abroad, in conflict with Brian and his Irish alliance, including some Viking kingdoms, gathered because of his success as “emperor of the Irish”. This informative and entertaining volume is very well written and leads the reader gracefully through the intricacies of Brian’s family background, through his personal life and into his public, political career that shaped so much of tenth- and eleventh-century Irish politics and international relations. In order to recreate this complex picture for us, the author must use a rich array of original sources including Irish chronicles and annal entries, as well as sources from abroad, such as Welsh and English chronicles and sources from the continent. One of the most contentious of the original sources is the propagandistic *Cogadh Gáedhel re Galluibh* “The War of the Irish with the Vikings” written at least a century after the events it depicts.

Brian’s rise to power and fame would not be predictable from his family background. Until his time the Irish polity had been dominated by

extended family groups referred to as the Uí Néill who can be divided into northern divisions (Cenél Conaill and Cenél nÉogain) and southern divisions (Clann Cholmáin and Síol nÁedo Sláine) with these two southern groups occupying the Irish midland territories of Mide and Brega. The dominant extended family in the south of Ireland were the Éoganachta who had themselves always been overshadowed by one or the other of the Uí Néill groups. At the time of his birth, the extended family to which Brian belonged, Dál Cais, would not have seemed to hold any prospects for someone with ambitions on an Ireland-wide scale, let alone to have his influence extend beyond the island.

The author leads us through the tenth-century intricacies of his family background and the achievements of his father Cennétig (74-81) and his brothers Lachtna (82) and Mathgamain (82-91). We know that his mother was Bébin (74-5, 93), daughter of Aurchad mac Murchadha, king of Iar-Chonnachta. An interesting aspect of his immediate family background is the unusualness of his personal name. Until his own time Brian is seldom recorded as a personal name, but since his time it has become one of the most common Irish names and has spread worldwide because of its popularity in the English-speaking world (93-5).

We know the names and something of the background of four of his wives, and nine of his children can be traced in the records, six sons and three daughters (99-102). His wife Mór was from a south Connacht family, Uí Fhiachrach Aidne. His sons with her were Murchad, Conchobar and Flann. Another wife, Gormlaith, is very famous in her own right and deserves

separate study (e.g. 99-102, 170-71). She had in the course of her lifetime three powerful husbands (234). One of them, besides Brian, was Amláid Cuarán, a king of Dublin whose son, Sitruic, was a key opponent of Brian at the Battle of Clontarf. Gormlaith's brother, Máelmórda mac Murchada, was a king of Leinster and a powerful rival of Brian and an opponent at the Battle of Clontarf. Donnchad, Gormlaith's son with Brian, became Brian's successor after the battle. A third wife, Echrad was of an obscure family the Uí Áeda Odba. She bore Brian a son named Tadc. A fourth wife, Dub Choblaig, was the daughter of Cathal mac Conchobair, king of Connacht. Of Brian's three daughters, Sláine was married off to Sitruic, king of Dublin; Sadb was married to Cian of the Éoganachta Raithlind in Munster; and Béibinn (named after Brian's mother) was married off to Flaithbertach of Cenél nÉogain in Ulster. Brian's own marriages, and the marriages of his daughters, give a very clear sense of the practice of strategic marriages to attempt to create alliances and cement relationships. It is very rare in the history of Western Europe to be able to trace so thoroughly the personal background of a figure who lived over a thousand years ago.

One of Brian's early rivals was Máel Sechnaill, king of Tara, and a member of the Clann Cholmáin branch of the southern Uí Néill. At the start of Brian's career, Máel Sechnaill would have been considered the most powerful king in Ireland. Among Brian's great achievements is the fact that he not only superseded Máel Sechnaill in political and military power, but successfully co-opted him as an ally in the later campaigns that saw Brian achieve the status, by 1002, as the most powerful king of Ireland with Máel Sechnaill as subordinate. This was achieved largely through what is known as the Bleanphuttoige Accord of 997 (116-9) in which Brian and Máel Sechnaill agreed to split Ireland north and south between themselves. But Brian soon out-maneuvred Máel Sechnaill, making him subordinate through battle, but eventually gaining his fealty.

One way for Brian to gain island-wide political control was to engage the power of the church at

Armagh which, as the see of St Patrick, claimed ecclesiastical primacy throughout Ireland. By linking his political and military power to the ecclesiastical influence of Armagh he helped control rivals such as the Cenél nÉogain of the northern Uí Néill. Sometime between 1005 and 1012, he was enrolled into the Book of Armagh, a ninth-century dossier documenting the importance of St Patrick, in the presence of his spiritual advisor, Máel Suthain (*Calvus Perennis*) as *imperator Scotorum* "emperor of the Irish", the first time such a title had been recorded for any Irish king. It was also truer of Brian than of any previous Irish king. He came closest to uniting the entire island under his single kingship. Brian was by this time advanced in age, perhaps in his seventies, although estimates vary because his birth date is uncertain.

The Battle of Clontarf (1014) is the one event in Brian's career that has shaped his reputation in subsequent Irish historiography and legend. As noted above, the author has drawn on a broad array of original sources to recreate the alliances and political strategies of the participants. Because the battle is so important in Irish history, it generates much debate and controversy from historians. This work cannot pretend to have found all the answers and solved all the dilemmas, but the author argues so lucidly that any reader will come away with a clear sense of what the options are in the vast arguments accruing around these momentous events. Surprisingly, the Annals of Inisfallen, which can be assumed to have had a southern bias in favour of Brian, offer the most succinct entry concerning the Battle of Clontarf of all the Irish annals (174-7). The Annals of Ulster, by contrast, fill out the details and have a tone that favours Brian and his efforts (177-98), despite that fact that he was killed at the end of the battle and did not survive to implement further the unification of Ireland under a single king. Duffy argues that the favourable tone of the annal entry may be the result either of the ecclesiastical bias generated from Armagh, or the entry may have drawn on information found in the *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh* (179). Interestingly, the later Annals of Loch Cé expand the number of Norse fighters

and imply that the Dublin Vikings along with their Leinster allies were joined by Viking fighters from the Orkneys, Hebrides, and other areas in the Irish Sea region and in Britain. It would appear that a lot of the myth making began to appear early and continued apace.

A “high-kingship” over all of the island of Ireland was never more effectively achieved by any king except for Brian. When we examine the “high-kingship” as practiced previous to

Brian, one would assume that an Uí Néill contender would have been the most likely candidate. For that reason alone, Brian Bóraime is all the more interesting and important in early Irish history. Seán Duffy leads his readers lucidly through the complications of the early sources and, while not all historians will agree with his analyses, he has cast a beacon of light where formerly there had been darkness and shadow.

Colin Ireland is retired as resident director for Arcadia University’s College of Global Studies in Ireland. He is the author of *Old Irish Wisdom Attributed to Aldfrith of Northumbria: An Edition of Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu* (1999). He co-edited with Maria Tymoczko a volume of essays for the ACIS entitled *Language and Tradition in Ireland: Continuities and Displacements* (2003) as well as a special volume of *Éire-Ireland* 38/1-2 (Spring/Summer 2003).

Frog Music

by Emma Donoghue

London: Picador, 2014

ISBN: 978-1-4472-4974001

403 pages. €16. Paperback

Reviewer: **Marisol Morales-Ladrón**

Throughout her prolific and multifaceted career as a writer that has traversed literary genres and nationhoods, Irish-Canadian Emma Donoghue has kept re-inventing herself. The exploration of an array of discourses, both fictional and factual, which mainly gravitate around dislocation and displacement, informs many of her plots. From her lesbian romances *Stir-Fry* (1994) or *Hood* (1995), and her often provocative and subversive short story collections, to her academic and literary history books, Donoghue has developed an appeal for characters that stand outside the margins of society. Troublemakers and misfits, on one side, or sophisticated eccentrics, on the other, informed the worlds of her historical trilogy composed of *Slammerkin* (2000), *Life Masks* (2004) and *The Sealed Letter* (2008). More recent publications widened the author's interests to include emigration, as it initially emerged in *Landing* (2007), the revision of the motherhood theme under appalling circumstances, which gave form to her literary hit *Room* (2010), and transnationalism, an issue that conferred cohesion to her collections of short stories, *Touchy Subjects* (2006) and *Astray* (2012). Following on that, Donoghue's latest whodunnit novel, *Frog Music* (2014), inspired by historical events, encapsulates most of her literary concerns. While the narrative delves into the resolution of a crime that had remained unsolved for over a century, the so-called "San Miguel mystery", it further engages in matters of crosscultural connections, motherhood, emigration, gender subversion, identity and race. With a talent for telling and re-telling, dressing and re-dressing, in *Frog Music* Donoghue works

around characters that come from the few actual records that were rescued from the big San Francisco earthquake and fires of the early 20th century, as well as from court documents and newspaper accounts. Set in California in the year 1867, at a time when an epidemic of smallpox and a stifling heat wave took many lives away, the novel revolves around French-origin protagonists and multicultural characters, who live in "the foreignest city in America" (Donoghue 2014: 162). The novel opens on September 14th, in The Eight Mile House, placed at San Miguel Station, the setting of the crime. However, without transition, the account shifts back to the moment a French woman educated in America, Jenny Bonnet, violently runs into Blanche Beunon, another French *émigré*, with her high-wheeler (cycle). Interestingly, this scene bears echoes of Donoghue's previous historical novel, *The Sealed Letter*, not only in the reworking of the sudden encounter of consequential repercussions, but mainly in how the plot is built around an emerging friendship, which will shatter the pillars that sustained Blanche's life as a glamorous burlesque dancer and entertainer for men in the downtrodden area of Chinatown. Coincidentally, the level of intimacy between the two women, revealed only at the very end, will also be the source of much distress as regards the resolution of the crime.

Spanning one month, between the sudden encounter and the murder, and trial of Jenny, the narrative fragments into scenes that invariably move backward and forward in time, only connected through the brief reference to the date introduced by the narrator, in an attempt to avoid

confusion. Interspersed in the account, phrases in italics that represent the protagonist's unvoiced thoughts, lyrics from songs, words in French and other metatextual resources abound, building a fabric of patched discourses that the reader needs to disentangle in order to make full sense of a story told in a clear filmic style. Also, as Donoghue had done in her previous historical novels, there is an Afterword where she details the sources of, and difficulties with, her research, song notes and a glossary of French words.

Relying once again on liminal characters that transgress social and gender expectations, Donoghue places Jenny Bonnet at the centre of her story. Fond of cross-dressing, she is first introduced as: "Not a man's, Blanche realizes. Not a boy's, even. This is a girl, for all the gray jacket, vest, pants, the jet hair hacked above the sunburned jawline. One of these eccentrics, on whom the City prides itself" (13). At twentyseven, Jenny, the "he-she-whatever" (14), prides herself on wearing trousers – at a time when such behaviour was persecuted –, carrying a revolver and earning her living as a frog-catcher. In fact, always ready to get into trouble, she has just been released from jail due to her offensive appearance. As a truly feminist character well ahead of her time, she wisely argues that carrying a gun gives her the power that can make up for the presumed weakness of her sex: "Why should your lot have all the fire-power? As they say, God made men and women, but Sam Colt made them equal" (48). In a seeming contrast, Blanche works as a well-regarded prostitute and dancer, lives with Arthur Deneve, her *mac*,¹ and both make a *ménage-à-trois* with their old friend Ernest Girard. Many years have passed since the three of them were employed at the Cirque d'Hiver in Paris and Arthur had adopted Ernest almost as a brother. Leading a classy bohemian life, much above their means, defending free love, drinking and spending the money Blanche earns, the two men find themselves trying to come to terms with the unexpected changes brought about by Jenny's

hasty appearance, whose inquisitive questions will trigger Blanche's wish to recover her neglected son. Consequently, the resolution of the murder of an outlaw woman, Jenny Bonnet, is the spark that ignites the story, while the narrative travels worlds beyond such enigmas to explore the more intertwined issues of friendship, abject motherhood and female desire.

In fact, the complication of the plot is initiated by Jenny's discovery that Blanche gave birth to a baby the year before and that he is being nursed out in a so-called "farm house"; in truth, an orphanage for abandoned children. Although Blanche defends herself by arguing that it was the way she had been brought up, separated from her parents for several years, the awakening of a maternal instinct previously unknown to her will prompt a ceaseless search for her son P'tit, and a journey into motherhood. Blanche admits that she knows nothing about children and that she even finds it difficult to relate to her own. Yet, his apparently misshapen body and his inability to express emotions make her wonder whether "he may have been born a little lacking. That perhaps all those things she did with all those *michetons* while she was carrying P'tit inside her did some obscure damage" (82). The parallelisms between P'tit's underdeveloped body and Jack's, the narrator-protagonist of *Room*, who looked extremely weak and undersized, cannot pass unnoticed for an attentive reader of Donoghue's novels. If in the latter, the author explored the strong mother-child bond established under damaging circumstances, in *Frog Music* Donoghue presents the opposite, abjection, which is finally and ironically overcome throughout the actual experience of mothering itself.

Much in tone with Donoghue's previous concerns about unsentimental motherhood, humorous passages balance out Blanche's apparent selfishness and unmotherly feelings. When she discovers the inhospitable and shabby place where her son is kept, in which babies share cribs in twos and threes, sleep in their own dirt and nobody picks them up or cares about their needs, she is utterly shocked. However, when she holds him up, the narrator resorts to a parodic subversion of received interpretations of the mother-child bond: "[Blanche] Registers a surge of warmth against her bodice. *Love*, she

1. At the end of the novel, there is a glossary of French words. *Mac* or *maquereau* is used in the book with the meaning of "boyfriend of a prostitute" (399).

thinks in shock, love flaring up between herself and this sobbing baby, love so hot she can feel it on her skin. Then the heat dies away and she realizes what it is: he's pissed on her" (96). Under this light, *Frog Music* could be said to be as much about the process of mothering as *Room*, even though the portrayal of a detached, unconventional mother enables the author to challenge the maternal instinct as a valid definition with which to encompass the much more contradictory and complex experience of mothering. Soon after Blanche recovers her son, her commitment to such a "wretched, ugly, beloved baby" (286) will be absolute. In fact, she leaves her job at the House of Mirrors in spite of the good money she made there, minds him full time and prioritizes his needs over Arthur's, who is on the verge of dying from smallpox.

Simultaneous to the motherhood plot, a parallel action focuses on Blanche's murder accusations against Arthur and Ernest, as she believes herself to be the real target and Jenny's death the result of an unfortunate mistake. Since Arthur has run away with her money, has sold her property and has taken her son away from her, she trusts the journalist of the *Chronicle* with part of the story, while she hides information from the officials, who do not seem to be interested in a petty crime that involved the murder of a downcast. Blackmailed by Ernest to whitewash Arthur's name, whom she has defamed in print, she is threatened with not seeing her son again. Her final quest tracking him around town will turn into a journey towards the discovery not only of Jenny's murderer but also of Jenny's true self and concealed past. Jenny's traumatic childhood,

neglected by a drunken mother and sent to an industrial school where she was bullied by troublemakers and whipped by teachers, had placed her in the hands of an abusive *mac* and had eventually led her to try to commit suicide. As Blanche disappointedly comes to realize, everything she'd done, Jenny had done before, even though she had pretended to be genuine, "a dazzling original, the exception to all the rules of womanhood?" (249).

The fact that Jenny will always remain a mystery to Blanche is further emphasized in the unexpected resolution of the murder offered in the novel, to fill in the gaps left by such an unsolved and long-forgotten crime. Considering that the eventual outcome involves a twelve-year-old, who had made his own judgments upon the relationship between Blanche and Jenny, the novel finally comes to suggest that what killed Jenny was jealousy, homophobia and prejudice. Such a closure also clashes with the bafflingly happy reunion between Blanche and her son, and her move to Sacramento where she intends to start a new life setting up a dancing academy. Moreover, in an uplifting tone, the last paragraphs of the novel introduce a refreshing rain that will symbolically clean up the suffocating atmosphere and that will convey the much desired change: "Rain's whipping down hard now, hard enough to cut the autumn's long fever and wash this foul old world clean" (372). One could end up by stating that with *Frog Music* Emma Donoghue has come full circle in her amalgamation of themes and concerns that have indelibly left an imprint on her faithful readers.

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Horslips: Tall Tales, The Official Biography

by Mark Cunningham

Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2013

ISBN 978-1847175861

288 pages. £24.99. Hardcover

Reviewer: **John L. Murphy**

At last, musicians played traditional tunes in a lively, innovative way that made an Irish boy feel “proud” rather than “pathetic”. So Maurice Linnane recalls when he heard Horslips as a boy on the radio, in this large-format biography of the pioneering 1970s Celtic rock band. Mark Cunningham, himself a musician and producer, integrates reminiscences from each of the five members, along with archival material from photos and media. This handsome design intersperses thoughtful analyses and entertaining stories into editorial commentary on gigs, recording processes, albums, critical reception, and career moves.

Having grown up with Beatlemania, as well as an eclectic exposure to Irish music and culture, four of the five musicians first met in 1970 to mime a “suitably hairy” band for a Harp commercial. Three of them worked in advertising and promotion; the real band they then formed was determined to remain in Ireland and to retain control of not only its music but marketing and presentation. Bassist Barry Devlin defines this “funky ceilidhe” approach to “deconstruct tunes and use them as the basis for new material”; Violinist, guitarist, and concertina player Charles O'Connor agrees that the band would “transfer melodies” from traditional sources. By the end of 1971, they electrified dancehalls in more ways than one. Appealing to the emerging glam rock movement, they dressed in leather, snakeskin, and even curtains from Clery's. Suitably, they also blended a bold visual look with fresh sounds.

Horslips may have confessed no “cultural responsibility to incorporate the traditional

context; it just evolved” as keyboardist, piper, and flautist Jim Lockhart avers. But it captured attention soon, as the band knew not only how to work the media but to work themselves in an intelligent, disciplined fashion. By 1972, their self-released debut, *Happy to Meet, Sorry to Part* made them Ireland's first home-grown rock success. Follow-up *The Táin* mingled Yeats' treatment of Cú Chulainn with Old Irish sources, bypassing Thomas Kinsella's translation as “too recent” for lyricist and percussionist Éamon Carr. These “indigenous” inspirations mingled with superheroes and Marvel Comics for Carr, a poet who also began to sprinkle into songs his verse patterns filtering both the Beats and Basho.

Turlough O'Carolan's life story flowed into their third album, *Dancehall Sweethearts*, but that and its overproduced, more mainstream if lackluster follow-up loosened the intricate fit of rock with folk which had made their first pair of LPs critically and popularly successful. An acoustic Christmas-themed album mid-decade revived their spirit, enthusiastic reception on tours at home and overseas increased, and by 1976, their arguably most consistent and most powerful record emerged. A teenaged guitarist, soon to be known as The Edge, attended his first rock concert at Skerries. He was so impressed by Horslips that he resolved to join classmates who became U2. A triple-movement “Celtic symphony”, the *Book of Invasions* managed to slip a stanza stolen from Swinburne and what Carr calls a “Bowie-esque whiff of alienation” into a confident examination of origin myths.

The Famine and immigration continued as themes in *Exiles* (1977) and *The Man Who Built America* (1978). The latter used Mici Mac Gabhann's memoir *Rotha Mór an tSaoil* to ground its narrative. Reflecting this novel mix of Irish heritage and American reinvention, Devlin and O'Connor appear to have sought a polished, slick musical delivery, in an era when arena rock and punk competed for loyalty among fans split over the merits of progressive rock's concept albums and mythic lore. The other three musicians preferred to ground a "stadium rock sheen", as guitarist Johnny Fean puts it, within a firm foundation balancing an accessible radio-friendly sound with their obvious strength, as shown best in *Táin* and *Book*, of a carefully constructed interplay of Irish narrative and trad tunes.

Devlin reminds readers of the band's lucky inheritance. They grew up exposed to both rock and Irish music, and they learned as they grew older from traditional players. Unlike their English peers, Horslips had no need to create a song-cycle about elves: "We're pinching from a culture that's alive".

Cunningham's book understandably relies on storytellers who regale us with life on the road as well as in the studio. While cultural examination is unsurprisingly understated compared to tall tales (with their Irish license plates and accents, they get mistaken for subversives in a jittery Troubles-era London and Wales, as well as for the Baader-Meinhof Gang in Germany), a reader nonetheless gains some sense of how Irish identity infused their music and lyrics, and their

concerted effort to retain an image that would appeal to all in their divided homeland as well as far afield, during a tumultuous era. One senses that, as Devlin produced some of U2's early demos, those four Dubliners learned some crucial lessons about a similar ambition to stand for an island which united disparate factions.

This underlying legacy endures. Despite the band's weariness by their last studio album in 1979 to reconcile its image as "conceptual rockers" into a "post-punk landscape", upon which U2 would capitalise, their live act ensured their enthusiastic reception past their breakup in 1980. Cunningham documents the subsequent careers of the five men in a variety of the fine arts, their legal battle over reclaiming rights to their songs, the remasters and reissues of their twelve albums, museum exhibitions on their Irish impact, and their eventual reunions from 2009 on.

A couple of slips show: a transcription has Devlin remarking on an "alter" boy and elsewhere crediting the short story "The Trusting and the Maimed" to "Flannery O'Brien" rather than O'Connor, which nonetheless might have made Myles na gCopaleen chortle. But overall, research results in a welcome survey of the band's Irish impact. A thorough discography is appended; supplemental sources are listed, including my article in *Estudios Irlandeses* 3 (2008): 132-142. The band's genial discussion, enriched by those who join them here, creates an enduring appeal. This recommends *Tall Tales: The Official Biography* to those who will be quite happy to meet them, and surely sorry to part.

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*, *Spectrum Culture*, and the *New York Journal of Books* regularly.

The Howth Gun-Running and the Kilcoole Gun-Running. Recollections & Documents

Edited by F.X. Martin. Foreword by Éamon de Valera (1964)

New Introduction by Ruán O'Donnell & Micheál Ó hAodha. New Foreword by Éamon Ó Cuiv (2014)

Dublin: Merrion/Irish Academic Press. 2014 [1964]

ISBN 9781908928658

288 pages. €19.95. Paperback, 15 black & white photographs

Reviewer: **John O'Callaghan**

The commemoration circus is in town and it is unlikely to break for an interval until the end of Ireland's so-called "decade of centenaries", 2013-23. Such is the volume of output of the industry that fatigue might set in amongst both consumers and performers even if the role of politicians and government was not so pronounced. Jockeying for position at prospective parades is taking precedence over archives, libraries and scholars. History and commemoration are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but the relationship between the two is troubled. Contemporary advocacy of pluralism is admirable but if the pursuit of inclusivity involves the adoption of simplistic dichotomies or the weaving of intricate processes of change into seamless narratives, historians have a responsibility to complicate things. A prescriptive focus on a "shared" past and the associated promotion of the notion of one common future is not good history. A more honest approach might be to identify and explain the roots of and reasons for difference. A mature state should not be afraid of its history.

For all who wish to understand the developments of 1913-23, and the motivations, aspirations, and opinions of some of the era's protagonists, this publication is timely. It can act as a primer for the uninitiated or a valuable reference text for the student or expert. To coincide with the 100th anniversary of the Howth and Kilcoole gun-runnings in the summer of 1914, Merrion/Irish Academic Press reissued the original 1964 F.X. Martin-edited volume on these crucial episodes in the revolution. Happily, while it may have one foot inside the commem-

oration tent, it remains a classic history text. It describes what really happened rather than engaging in wishful thinking about what might have been. This version includes the important additions of an introduction by Ruán O'Donnell and Micheál Ó hAodha, dramatic new photographs, and an index. All of these make for a better experience for the reader.

The most striking feature of this work, however, as it was fifty years ago, is the gripping tale that it tells of the astounding seaborne operation to illegally land black market weapons. The narrative unfolds through the fascinating collection of diary entries, letters, eyewitness accounts, reports and other contemporaneous documents. The truths of complex plotting, courage, daring, missed rendezvous and improvisation, perilous transfers of precious cargo, running repairs in capricious conditions, and the ebbs and flows of luck are all laid bare. The combination amounts to an extraordinary historical record of a key moment for twentieth-century Ireland.

The smuggling reached its successful conclusion only days before Britain declared war on Germany. Yet the issue that had dominated public debate in Ireland over the previous years was not the probability that the increasing militarisation of European societies would reach the logical conclusion of conflict. Rather, it was the demand of the nationalist majority for Home Rule – a limited measure of control over domestic affairs for a Dublin parliament with basic necessities of sovereignty such as control over defence and foreign policy, trade and policing remaining at Westminster. This moderate

claim proposed nothing so extreme as a republic and reflected realism regarding the balance of power in Anglo-Irish relations. Unionists, who were predominantly Protestant and had their power base in north-east Ulster, feared Home Rule as a threat to their political, cultural, civic, economic and religious interests. Home Rule was equated to “Rome Rule”. Unionism resolutely refused any concession and demonstrated readiness to defy the common will and even parliamentary opinion. The Orange Order had taken the lead in drilling and arming men since 1911 and, against a backdrop of progressively hardline oratory, the Ulster Volunteer Force came into being in early 1913. The soon-to-be gunmen were stepping out of the shadows. The Irish Volunteers were founded in late 1913 with the aim of securing Home Rule. A wary Dublin Castle, observing two hostile formations of hundreds of thousands of men on the island, banned the importation of arms that December.

The separatist Irish Republican Brotherhood secretly infiltrated the open militia that was the Irish Volunteers and manipulated it into an instrument of insurrection in 1916. From the outset, financial resources were being amassed throughout Ireland, Britain, and Irish-America, as well as in Europe. But the Ulster Volunteers, supported by powerful conservative interests at home and abroad, again led the way. Under the eyes of the state apparatus, they brought 25,000 German rifles and three million rounds of ammunition ashore in April 1914, principally at Larne in county Antrim. Loyalist hawks celebrated a military and political victory, amplifying their paramilitary firepower and substantiating their rhetorical challenge to Home Rule. The relatively underwhelming nationalist

response was to purchase 1,500 bargain basement single-shot, 1871 designed Mauser rifles and 50,000 rounds of ammunition, also in Germany. Still, they served a purpose.

Sailing through storms and close encounters with the Royal Navy, the bulk of the consignment was brazenly delivered to Howth in broad daylight by the *Asgard*, with the former British soldier and best-selling spy novelist, Erskine Childers, at the helm. The blaze of publicity which followed meant that the delivery to Kilcoole was, literally, a much more shadowy affair, conducted under cover of night. The coup enhanced the prestige of the Irish Volunteers, radically altering external perceptions of the organisation and increasing its capabilities. While many Ulster and Irish Volunteers soon fought for the same side against the Kaiser (as did Childers), 1,500 of the rebels who stood against the British Empire in the Easter Rising carried Mausers.

The Howth and Kilcoole gun-running episodes highlight a number of related dynamics of the campaign for independence. At the heart of the story are the contributions to the positive advances of 1913-23 made by two groups which are often unheeded – the “Anglo-Irish” gentry and women. The Enlightenment Protestant radicalism of Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen may no longer have been the defining features of Irish republicanism, and it did not feature to any great extent the anti-Catholicism and anti-clericalism that characterised its continental counterparts, but a progressive, secular vision could still unite a diverse array of patriotic personalities, among them Erskine and Molly Childers, Roger Casement, Alice Stopford Green, and Mary Spring-Rice. That alone makes Howth and Kilcoole worthy of commemoration.

Dr John O’Callaghan lectures in St. Angela’s College, Sligo. Among his publications are *Revolutionary Limerick: The Republican Campaign for Independence in Limerick, 1913-21* (Irish Academic Press, 2010), *The Battle for Kilmallock* (Mercier Press, 2011), *Subversive Voices: Narratives of the Occluded Irish Diaspora* (Peter Lang, 2012). *Con Colbert* (O’Brien Press, 2015) forms part of the “16 Lives” series, the first set of biographies of the sixteen rebels who were executed after the 1916 Easter Rising. O’Callaghan’s next book, *The Irish Revolution, 1912-23: Limerick*, will be published by Four Courts Press.

Pagan to the Core

by Máíghréad Medbh

Dublin: Arlen House, 2014

ISBN 978-1-85132-088-2

108 pages. €15. Paperback

Reviewer: **Manuela Palacios***

Pagan to the Core is Máíghréad Medbh's sixth collection of poetry, although she has also written long and short fiction that has appeared in ebook and other formats. Apart from her stories for children and her translations of Galician poetry, she has published a book of aphoristic reflections on solitude, *Savage Solitude: reflections of a reluctant loner*, published by Dedalus Press in 2013.¹

Pagan to the Core consists of two parts: a revised edition of *The Making of a Pagan* – a collection written in 1988 and 1989, and published in 1990 by Blackstaff Press, Belfast – and a new second section entitled *The Disaffected Country Girl and A Minor Metropolis*. In her introduction, Medbh refers to the first sequence of poems as a response to the conviction that the personal is political, and as a necessity to vent her anger and push past the fear of exposure. The expression of rebelliousness in writing always reminds me of Virginia Woolf's indictment, in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), of Charlotte Brontë's manifestations of anger in her fiction. Woolf's censure may sound paradoxical, because angry passages also abound in her essay, but I am inclined to believe that what Woolf actually detested was didacticism and the intrusion of a narrator's digressions in fiction. There is no risk

of didacticism in Medbh's poetry since, apart from being "honest and direct", she is concerned with "the organic representation of each chosen moment and thought", as she claims in her Introduction (7). Each experience lived by the protagonist – and the poet presents this sequence of poems as highly autobiographical – is methodically wrought so as to turn it into a poetic gem. There is no need to resort to T.S. Eliot's strategy of impersonality as he defends it in his famous essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), because Medbh's choice of tropes, rhythms, onomatopoeias, line breaks, stanzas, etc. is deeply personal. Medbh actually succeeds in transforming the real into art without compromising truth.

"I can't imagine life without a closed front door, / a curtained night and secrets in the room", says the speaker in "The Boreen" (26). However, in *The Making of a Pagan* – the first sequence of the book – the poet opens the door widely so that we can enter and share the speaker's secret dreams and nightmares, her pain and joy, her fear and determination, and we take part in children's games which train us in feminine and domestic roles. The family in which the protagonist is raised is no haven of peace, as patriarchy seeps through the walls with its tyranny and oppression. There are, however, several moments of bliss and hopefulness, as in "Her Lap", which begins with one of those very effective couplets that open, and sometimes close, some of Medbh's

1. For more information on the writer, it is worth visiting her always updated web page www.maighreadmedbh.ie.

* This review has been written in the context of the project "Ex-sistere" (FFI2012-35872, funded by the Spanish Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad and the ERDF), for research on contemporary Irish and Galician women writers.

poems: “Her lap is a country / where promises hang open” (14). The maternal figure, delicious smells from the kitchen, and nursery rhymes conjure up memories of safety and the comforting touch of the mother’s body. For a moment, death and darkness are kept at bay, though the monster is not far away, always lurking. These are poems that interrogate the world and the self: “I study humans through the microscope of myself” (“On Calls” 35).

The title of the first sequence, *The Making of a Pagan*, suggests a *Bildungs*-poetics which explores the stages in personal (physical, psychological and social) development and the making of a poet in a country like Ireland which, until not that long ago, encouraged religious piety and self-repression while enforcing strict social control. The new book title, *Pagan to the Core*, reaffirms the poet’s rebelliousness against the moral and social corsets of that past “but in a way still present, time”, as Medbh reminds us in the Introduction (8).

Contrary to the frequent, though puzzling, practice of combining poetry sequences that have little in common, there is a very smooth transition from the first part of this collection to the second one entitled *The Disaffected Country Girl and A Minor Metropolis*. The poet Paula Meehan, at present also Ireland Professor of Poetry, in her informative and perceptive back-cover endorsement

of Medbh’s new publication, identifies some key themes that can be traced through both parts: “This is courageous poetry, charting the journey of the female soul through an almost clinical exploration of the female body’s desires and vulnerabilities”. The rural past still impinges on the urban present: “memory is a favourite chocolate” says the poetic persona humorously in “Picturesque Newcastle West” (104); but we now come across a plurality of focalizers and perspectives, and the present “you” finally becomes reconciled with the past “she”: “You love her at last” (105). A wide panoply of characters inhabit the “minor metropolis”, but though their paths cross, the people seldom meet, as the oxymoronic title “Urban Eremitic” illustrates to perfection. A poem that stands out as we reach the final pages is “When I was Ant”, with its trickster and elusive speaker: “When I was ant, tick, beetle... / I am axe, knife, whisk and can opener, cyborg... / I am aardvark, rabbit, badger, city cat, fish in a bowl, everything” (97-98). There abound here experiments in perspective that remind me of the opening paragraph in Virginia Woolf’s “Kew Gardens” (1919). The adventurous, imaginative range and the sophisticated poetic craft of poems like this one are excellent proof of Máighréad Medbh’s challenging and enticing verse.

Manuela Palacios is Associate Professor of English Literature at the University of Santiago de Compostela in Spain. She has directed three national research projects on contemporary Irish and Galician women writers that have been funded by the Spanish government. She has edited and co-edited several books in relation to this topic: *Pluriversos* (2003), *Palabras extremas* (2008), *Writing Bonds* (2009), *Creation, Publishing and Criticism* (2010), *To the Winds Our Sails* (2010) and *Forked Tongues* (2012).

Modernity, Community and place in Brian Friel's Drama

by Richard Rankin Russell

Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014.

ISBN : 978-0-8156-3331-0

318 pages. \$39.95. Hardback

Reviewer: **Martine Pelletier**

Richard Rankin Russell's volume joins a distinguished and impressive list of monographs devoted to Brian Friel, whose status as Ireland's most prominent twentieth century playwright is now established beyond dispute. *Modernity, Community and place in Brian Friel's Drama* succeeds in breaking new critical ground and appears as a most timely and thorough engagement with its topics. Russell's main strength is his decision to focus on a limited number of plays rather than seek to cover the entire *oeuvre* of the dramatist. By limiting the scope of the work in terms of the material examined, the author is able to delve deep into each of the plays he has chosen, offering careful and often illuminating detailed readings of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, *The Freedom of the City*, *Faith Healer*, *Translations* and *Dancing at Lughnasa*. The selection is largely unsurprising; the plays in question rank among the dramatist's best-known, best-loved, most critically-acclaimed and often-produced works, with the possible exception of the more controversial *The Freedom of the City*. Russell thus chooses to deal with the canonical works, starting with Friel's first major success in 1964 and ending with the play that earned him the most impressive international recognition in 1990.

The monograph deliberately takes its place among the growing body of critical writings engaging place and space in Irish studies, following in the wake of Gerry Smyth's 2001 *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* and including, in the field of theatre studies, Helen Hausner Lojek's *The Spaces of Irish Drama* (2011) and most recently *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* by Chris Morash and Shaun Richards (2013).

Russell argues in his introduction that Friel's "complex theory of drama has evolved as it plumbs the depths of a series of physical and metaphorical places: literal rural landscapes; the cityscape of Derry; the built environment of particular edifices; and sites of the body, mind and human heart." In his introduction Russell insists on place being grounded "not in stasis but in flux", recognizing that flux is a central concept and motif in Friel's drama, that flux is the essence of place. The playwright who, in 1970 said he hoped he could "write a play that would capture the peculiar spiritual, and indeed material, flux that this country is in at the moment" has consistently written of home as fluid and unattainable, often indeed as undesirable and flawed. Those contradictory impulses run deep in his imagination.

But Russell is equally keen to engage with the other key concepts that feature in his title, namely community and modernity. If he borrows from ecocriticism and the phenomenology of place, using Gaston Bachelard and Edward Casey, his readings of modernity are also informed by the works of Nicholas Daly, Stephen Toulmin and, in an Irish context, Joe Cleary. It would be inaccurate to describe Friel as nostalgic, yet the study demonstrates how the playwright repeatedly harks back to the negative impact of what Russell calls a "reductive modernity" on Ireland's rural culture whilst nonetheless recognizing the need for that culture to open up and attempt to "humanize modernity".

Of particular interest are Russell's analyses of the encounters with the industrial world and machines in the plays, whether it be the gramophone or the plane in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, the theodolite in *Translations* or the radio

in *Dancing at Lughnasa*.

Community in Friel's work, Russell argues, is either under threat from modernity or deeply flawed, yet the craving for moments of community or reconciliation remains a potent force, inviting the creation by various protagonists of imagined or alternative communities, and ultimately the participation of the theatre audience in the formation of a temporary community at the invitation of the playwright.

In the first chapter devoted to *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, Russell shows how the central character of Gar is seduced by a stereotypical urban American culture. In spite of his eagerness to exile himself from a disabling rural Irish culture, Gar will find it impossible to embrace his new life in the land of modernity and opportunity, becoming trapped in a disabling nostalgia for the communal life and small place he felt he needed to leave behind.

The second chapter, entitled "The imagined ghostly community of *The Freedom of the City*" is the only one to focus on an urban environment as the play is located in Derry and is strongly evocative of the tragic events of Bloody Sunday. It functions, as the author suggests, "as an extended meditation on place and displacement within and outside of Derry". Using Derrida's concept of hauntology, Russell analyses the constitution in the Guildhall of a fragile and temporary community of the three main characters who are doomed to become the fall victims of the twin abstract forces of Irish tradition (the Church, the balladeer) and modernity/rationalism embodied by the judge, the photographer, the various experts.

In the analysis of *Faith Healer*, the emphasis is on ritual and performative space. Russell argues for a positive reading of the tragic death of Frank Hardy which goes largely against the grain of most Friel criticism. The connection between Frank and his killers generates a community of sorts and the embracing of ritual is, the author suggests, a critique of modernity and a recognition

of the power of a need shared across the communities in Northern Ireland. Whilst not always fully persuasive, such a reading is a welcome challenge to more traditional interpretation of Frank as chiefly a figure of the artist or shaman.

With *Translations*, the focus shifts towards modernity, and the subtitle "lamenting and accepting modernity" captures the ambivalence at the heart of the play and of its interpretations. As Baile Beag is about to become Ballybeg, the fragile community of the hedge school comes under pressure from within and without, Ireland's rural culture falling victim to the modernizing, industrializing imperatives of both England" and O'Connell. Russell's reading of the hedge-school community may occasionally sound overly positive, just as his reading of the love scene as offering genuine hope of reconciliation suggests a whiff of wishful thinking, but his interpretations force useful reassessments of the potentialities of the text and of performance.

The final chapter devoted to *Dancing at Lughnasa*, that "most emplaced of all Friel's dramas" brings the study to a close with a discussion of cultural change, the power of memory and the love of place in a play that resonates so strongly with Friel's own family history.

Russell concludes that "What persists is the community Friel has created with us, his readers and audience members." If some of his readings remain open to discussion or fail to fully convince, Russell's own thoughtful, sensitive and well-informed engagement with the plays and the critical material on Friel through his chosen focus on modernity, community and place is always thought-provoking and often illuminating. The real or imagined community of readers and scholars of Friel's work will undoubtedly feel "at ease, if not always at home", in Russell's study, as he teases out the complex and often contradictory narratives of home and exile, cultural change, communal adaptation or dislocation which lie at the heart of Brian Friel's drama.

Martine Pelletier is a senior lecturer in English and Irish studies at the University of Tours in France. She has written numerous articles on contemporary Irish theatre, notably on Friel and Field Day. She has written the introductions to the eleven French translations of Friel's plays by Alain Delahaye published by *L'Avant-Scène Théâtre* between 2009 and 2011.

Eavan Boland

by Jody Allen Randolph

Cork: Cork University Press, 2014

ISBN: 978-1-78205-084-1

246 pages. €49.00. Hardback

Reviewer: **Gisele Giandoni Wolkoff**

For readers and scholars dedicated to contemporary Irish women writers, Eavan Boland has been a foundational name, particularly for the generations of poets who followed hers. Both her essays and poetry have contributed largely to the revision of the degree of influence of the canonical names in Irish poetry in contemporary times. They have also contributed to the debate regarding perceptions of Ireland and the places and spaces occupied by women on patriarchal ground. This has long been accepted as a worldwide consensus amongst scholars who have studied Boland's works. Yet, in spite of the several critical readings that started flourishing in the 1990s about her works, ranging from *In Her Own Image* and *Night Feed* to *Object Lessons* and others, there has never in my opinion been such a thorough, critical volume focused on the connections between the life of the poet and her works as this 2014 publication, *Eavan Boland*.

Dr. Jody Allen Randolph's critical publications cover topics that range from Caribbean authors such as Edward Kamau Brathwaite and postcolonialism in the early 1990s, to Irish literature and feminisms. The variety of topics, however, can be seen in conjunction with thoroughness of information and detailed criticism. For example, *Eavan Boland: A Sourcebook* already gathered thorough information about the diversity of Boland's writings in a highly organized manner. Yet, in spite of this impressively organized informational criticism, there has always been the lack of a single, biographically-oriented criticism on the writings of Boland. That is no longer true after the arrival of this 2014 volume *Eavan Boland*, due to the many issues which the

volume presents. It also manages to provide the reader with views that follow the poet's perspectives on Poetry, the life of the poet and the nation. The six chapters are preceded by an illuminating outline of the main issues to be dealt with in the succeeding pages. One of these issues is Eavan Boland's presence in the context of Irish writing and beyond it ("inside" and "outside" the Irish contexts, as Allen Randolph puts it). Another of them is the matter of influence in Boland and the voices of American poets in Boland's attempt to subvert the fixed categories of contemporary poetry. Once again, Allen Randolph's own World Anglophone Literature perspective will guide the way in which she presents us with her own views about the poet's proposal. Moreover, the chapters have to do also with an interrogation of the poet's role and the development of reflections upon matters of gender, nationality, exile and belonging, as well as the "double consciousness of place" to quote Allen Randolph's words. Together with all the aforementioned topics, there is also the issue of the space and place of women and their social lives, as well as how the poet's view on both, affects and gets affected by the changes in Irish society over the years. Throughout the book, Allen Randolph adopts Boland's own view of the intersection between the private and the public worlds. This can be translated into the poet's own life, her emotions, feelings and thoughts in communication with what went on in her environment, the history of Ireland and the influence that her public life in the USA had upon her private lyricism. In other words, Allen Randolph's writing is proof that Boland's ideas on the intermingling of a poetics of place and lyricism is not only plausible, but more than

necessary. It is some kind of ultimate device for the poet's survival in the chaos of displacement(s). In this regard, Allen Randolph states in the introduction that "[a]ny understanding of Boland's evolution as a poet must also take into account the profound changes in Irish society with which it coincided" (XVIII). The first chapter, "The Poetics of Origin", gives us a biographical account of her prose writing, already establishing the basis for an understanding of the poet's evolution throughout her publications. Following this, in "The Nexus of Influence" we come to understand how Boland was initially attached to W.B. Yeats, having her affinity with him confirmed by the experience of displacement on a biographical level, and how this point led Boland to start her own life as a poet as she entered Trinity College. The beginnings of her thoughts upon the nation and belonging are also established in this first chapter. At the same time, one can encounter and understand her dialogue with her colleague, the renowned poet Derek Mahon who, according to Allen Randolph, was "more interested in European literature than Boland was..." (36). In spite of Boland having referred to the greatest influences on her life as being her mother and husband, the writer Kevin Casey, Allen Randolph points to other influences in the life of the poet, such as Sylvia Plath. The chapters evolve as they present Boland's main literary preoccupations in her production, as highlighted in the third chapter, "From Patria to Matria". *The War Horse* is a transitional volume, "her first attempt at a poetics of place, and her first engagement with the Irish political poem." (47). Allen Randolph thus, defines Boland's poetics as a "poetics of place" (51) which is able to align private worlds and public realities. Once again, Allen Randolph shows the importance of Boland's life in Iowa and the writing of *In Her Own Image* and *Night Feed*, for example, she discusses the ways in which her time in the USA led the poet to absorb American poets and to include herself in the poetic publications of this other geography. With *In Her Own Image*, Boland introduces an understanding of the new dimension of the woman, as she herself had become a mother: from observer to participant. This comes in

conjunction with the theme of artistic control in *Night Feed* and the growing interference of ekphrasis and ethical aesthetics in Boland's poetry, such as the encounter Allen Randolph narrates between the artist Aileen Mackeog and Boland. From here on, the "systemic mistreatment of women in Ireland" is relevant for Boland's creation.

In this sense, the reader can gradually follow the transition of Boland's aesthetics from volumes such as *In Her Own Image* and *Night Feed* to *In a Time of Violence*, which comes along with the inevitable conjunction of the national and the feminine worlds, the public sphere and the private one. It also appears in the understanding of how the latter can only be represented along with the former. In the chapter "Out of Myth into History", Allen Randolph indicates that Boland's life in the USA led her not only to keep publishing her poems in American journals, but also to be more influenced by North-American poets, such as Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich. The question the critic poses is "What was it in the American poet's poems that so helped the Irish poet?" (99). This concern is ultimately connected with Boland's importance in the Irish poetic and political scenes, as shown in the last two chapters of the book. In "Changing the Past", the reader can acknowledge Boland's role in the debate surrounding the *Field Day Anthology*, along with other Field Day related and highly relevant issues, such as those of gender, nationhood, and the Irish poetic tradition. Moreover, this chapter signals the importance of the close friendship between Boland and former president of Ireland, Mary Robinson.

Allen Randolph starts the volume by reminding us that the poet proposes a dialogue of the older Boland with the younger one, which clearly appears in *Object Lessons*, in *The Lost Land* and in *Against Love Poetry*. This dialogue of the younger and older poet(s), as seen in the last two chapters, particularly reinforces Boland's development as a poet who is gradually more concerned with nationhood, motherhood and the maternal body, as representational strategies of reflections upon Ireland's changes. "Exiles in Our Own Country", the last chapter of the

volume *Eavan Boland*, gives an account of how *A Journey with Two Maps* offers a different way of looking into literary “geographies”, to an extent that reaches transnationality and inserts Boland’s poetics into the space of diaspora, and postcolonialism, where identities are dissolving

and barriers imperfect. Thus, Boland’s poetics allows for new identities to flourish, giving space to difference in a cosmopolitan world, the diverse Anglophone world, in which both Jody Allen Randolph, as literary critic, and Eavan Boland, as poet, move themselves and create.

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