
IRISH STUDIES ROUND THE WORLD

The Year in Review – 2016

Christina Hunt Mahony (ed.)

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Introduction

Christina Hunt Mahony215

John McGahern and the Imagination of Tradition

Stanley Van Der Ziel

Bertrand Cardin218

This is the Ritual

Rob Doyle

Juan F. Elices220

The Boys of Bluehill

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin

Luz Mar González-Arias222

Aeneid. Book VI

Seamus Heaney (tr.)

Nicholas Grene224

The Stinging Fly: In the Wake of the Rising

Sean O'Reilly (ed.)

Christina Hunt Mahony227

The Rising. Ireland: Easter 1916

Fearghal McGarry

Rebels: Voices from the Easter Rising

Fearghal McGarry

Elizabeth Malcolm229

Louis McNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time

Tom Walker

Louis McNeice: In a Between World

Christopher J. Fauske

Michael A. Moir, Jr.232

Granta 135: New Irish Writing

Sigrid Rausing (ed.)

Auxiliadora Pérez Vides234

A Batalha das Estéticas

Munira H. Mutran

Miguel Ramallete Gomes236

The Glorious Heresies

Lisa McInerney

Aida Rosende Pérez238

Introduction: 2016 – The Year in Irish Studies

Christina Hunt Mahony

I have taken up the position of Reviews Editor just as the centenary celebrations and commemorations for the Easter Rising were beginning. It will be difficult to give an overview of the cultural outpouring that Dublin and all of Ireland has experienced this year, made more impressive by considering the obstacles needed to be overcome. Much of the Rising was, of course, Dublin centred, and while ceremonies were conducted and great crowds gathered at Arbour Hill, Kilmainham and the GPO, Dubliners struggled with LUAS and bus strikes, and making their way through a city centre beset by construction. Nationally we were buffeted by the vicissitudes of an unfamiliar form of minority government, demands for the repeal of the 8th amendment to the constitution, a staggering housing shortage and Irish administrative scandals that marred the glorious accomplishments of the athletes at the Summer Olympics in Brazil. All the same the pair of O'Donovan brothers from Skibbereen, who rowed their way to victory, captured the hearts of the country. And with mention of such a beautiful place on the far western shore, and for those of you who have already made your way along The Wild Atlantic Way, I can report you can now explore a similar path in The Ancient East - a tourism incentive that includes no fewer than seventeen counties (lest anyone feel left out!).

It seemed as though every cultural institution in the country was fully invested in the centenary. The National Concert Hall pulled out all the stops, if one can make use of a musical pun, showcasing a range of creative and intellectual talent in its *Imagining Home* series of seven concerts that included literary, political and dramatic elements. One of these, *On Revolution*, curated by Colm Tóibín, featured lectures by Joseph O'Neill and a group of international writers whose personal experience of revolution put The Rising into a broader perspective. The programme included music by Donnacha Dennehy performed by *Crash Ensemble*. Another night in this series at the NCH, *The Literary Imagination*, included discussion with John Banville, Ann Enright, Eavan Boland, Nuala Ní Dhomnaill, John Montague, Paul Muldoon and others, while subsequent programmes showcased Irish language writing, and a dramatic performance of Beckett's *Not I* and *Footfalls* by noted interpreter Lisa Dwan.

RTE, as national broadcaster, presented an impressive assortment and number of original and vintage programmes on both radio and television. *Fire in the Blood*, a four-part series on The Celtic Revival, included an investigation of Lady Gregory's crucial role in Ireland's cultural awakening, narrated by actor Derbhle Crotty; Douglas Hyde's importance to the Irish language revival, narrated by Fiachna Ó Braoináin, was followed by the visual arts component of the Revival signified by the work of Harry Clarke, presented by singer Camille O'Sullivan. The series finished with an analysis of Michael Cusack's development of the GAA, narrated by Anna Geary. Yet another four-part series, *Ireland's Rising*, took the centenary out of Dublin and into the Four Provinces and was presented by Fiona Shaw, Ryan Tubridy, Ann Doyle and Jim McGuinness – with respective concentrations on Cork, Galway, Wexford and Donegal. An independent documentary devised and narrated by archivist Catriona Crowe, *Life Before the Rising*, made viewers aware of the ordinary lives of Dubliners before they were overtaken by revolutionary events. Another independent programme, an import, was Bob Geldolf's, *A Fanatic Heart*, a stunning and original two-part documentary on Yeats, broadcast first on BBC and subsequently on RTE. Meanwhile smaller budget offerings seemed to cascade out of the Montrose Studios – on radio Myles Duggan's

Sunday evening “History Show” produced gem after gem; “Sunday Miscellany” offered suitably themed programmes, and took to the road; and John Bowman’s selection of relevant programmes from the archives was a revelation – especially those interviews of Rising participants and survivors reminiscing in old age. Most of the RTE centenary programming remains available in podcast and other playback functions.

The National Library’s flagship exhibition, *Rising*, was on view for eight months at The Photographic Archive in Temple Bar, an accessible and popular venue for thousands of visitors to Dublin. The library’s huge 1916 digital project, “The Seven Signatories and Their World” placed 90,000 images online for diasporic and worldwide participation, while the National Archives released yet more crucial documents for researchers and the general public alike (see the review of *The Stinging Fly* in this issue). Meanwhile on Ely Place RHA president Mick O’Dea’s tribute exhibition, “The Foggy Dew”, showcased four large canvases of pivotal sites during Easter Week and included three-dimensional figures, such as a representation of Daniel O’Connell, for whom the Sackville Street location of the most intensive fighting during the Rising would be renamed. The exhibition also reminded us that the original RHA on Lower Abbey Street was destroyed by fire during Easter Week. O’Dea’s work included a dramatic script and was toured at provincial arts centres. And on Dawson Street, The Royal Irish Academy offered a lecture series on 1916 as a Global Event, and on Easter Monday hosted an unusually varied programme of lectures and discussions with emphasis on the material culture of the 1916 era, including the clothing worn by the rebels and the graffiti in Kilmainham Gaol.

Nothing could compare, though, with the official events. An audience of 2,000, with tickets obtained by lottery, heard a combined choir of 1,100 voices perform a new work by Shaun Davey, *A Nation’s Voice*, with text written and recited by poet Paul Muldoon in the open courtyard of Collins Barracks on Easter Sunday. President Michael D Higgins and wife Sabina presided over commemoration after commemoration, perhaps most poignantly at the wreath-laying ceremony on Easter Monday at the GPO.

After the events at Easter there was the expected range of summer school – that notably Irish institution. In Kerry Listowel Writers’ Week featured Lucy Caldwell, Danielle McLaughlin and Anakana Schofield, all new names on the literary horizon. Meanwhile the venerable Merriman Summer School’s participants included historian Diarmuid Ferriter (a very busy man during this commemorative season); women artists were well-represented by, among others, poet Bidy Jenkinson and playwright Marina Carr. Later in the summer Geraldine Higgins and Ronan McDonald directed The Yeats Summer School in Sligo, given a centenary theme which presented Yeats as “the poet of the Irish Revolution”; The Kilkenny Arts Festival included a major session on the ever-contentious figure of Roger Casement, and The Parnell Summer School in Wicklow looked beyond the immediacy of The Rising under the heading “The Embers of Easter”.

IASIL held its 2016 conference at University College Cork attracting keynote addresses by Jahan Ramazani and Luke Gibbons, readings by Rob Doyle and Lisa McInerney, and a round table in honour of the 50th anniversary of Frank O’Connor’s death. In September, in a similar commemorative register, The Seamus Heaney Homeplace was opened in Bellaghy, County Derry – a stunning facility with interactive exhibits and a replica of the poet’s Dublin study.

Because many of our interests are focused on literature we can’t lose sight of the output of new and heralded Irish novelists in particular in 2015-16. Eimear McBride followed up her award-winning debut, *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* with the equally hailed *The Lesser Bohemians*; and for his second book Rob Doyle published a volume of short stories, *This is the Ritual* (see review in this issue). A prolific Donal Ryan published his fourth book in as many years, *All We Shall Know*. I was present in the impressive surroundings of TCD’s

Dining Hall to hear Doireann Ní Ghríofa's name announced as this year's Rooney Prize winner, and seated in the room were so many former winners they couldn't be counted without some awkward craning of the neck – Glenn Patterson, Ann Enright, Frank McGuinness, Eugene O'Brien, Kevin Barry and more.

Fortuitous re-interpretations of Irish texts in other media continue. Bailey's winner Lisa McInerney's *Glorious Heresies* has been optioned for a TV series, which the author shall adapt for the small screen herself. Oscar-nominated novelist and screenwriter Emma Donoghue has published *The Wonder*, which returns her to the world of historical fiction at which she excels; and Colm Tóibín has gone from being a novelist whose work, *Brooklyn*, has appeared in an award-winning film, to being a scriptwriter himself. *Return to Montauk*, which he has written in collaboration with Vollker Schlöndorff, is based on a novel by Max Frisch. Mike McCormack's *Solar Bones*, won not only the Goldsmith's prestigious prize for innovative fiction, but also a Bord Gais Irish fiction award. Later in the year two venerable figures in Irish fiction, Sebastian Barry and John Banville, had major publications – Barry's *Days Without End* returns to members of his fictional McNulty clan now placed in nineteenth-century America, while Banville devised another example of recent Irish innovation in literary autobiography. *Time Pieces* is a photographic and personal memoir of the city.

In the theatre, The Abbey and The Gate rose to the centenary occasion with duelling productions of, respectively, O'Casey's *The Plough* and *Juno*. *The Plough and the Stars* was part of The Abbey's larger programme, "*Waking the Nation 2016*", which also included a production of Frank McGuinness' *Observe The Sons of Ulster*. The latter was, of course, a tribute to yet another centenary – of the Battle of The Somme. The Abbey's centenary programme's notable lack of female professionals of all kinds resulted in a very successful year-long campaign, "*Waking The Feminists*", which lobbied at policy-making levels to assure equality for women in the theatre in future.

The Dublin Theatre Festival weighed in with divergent and mightily impressive offerings. The site-specific and innovative collaboration by ANU and dance troupe Cois Céim was housed in a former tenement in Upper Dorset Street and titled *These Rooms*. Audiences were thrust into the world of *The Rising* as experienced by ordinary people. And, for the heartier of theatregoers, there was Theatreclub's *It's Not Over* (and it wasn't – for four and a half hours!), a twenty-first century remake of *The Plough and The Stars*. Its promotional material suggested, rightly, that its makers would take no prisoners. Festivalgoers could also attend the launch *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre* at The Abbey. With 41 chapters ranging over more than a century of theatre, the volume addressed both literary and theatrical aspects of drama, plus the work of directors, actors and other theatre professionals.

As the year began to draw to a close NUI Galway made its contribution in the form of three days of academic and cultural events under the umbrella of "*The Centenary Conversations*", covering the themes of citizenship, culture and identity. The academic side of the event, entitled "*The Promise and Challenge of National Sovereignty*" drew participants from Princeton and Oxford who joined their Irish counterparts on the podium. And, to close, the fringe events offered considerably more whimsical fare such as that by Paddy Cullivan (of the satirical revue *Callan's Kicks*), an equally satirical Leviathan cabaret event and a humorous History Ireland Hedge School.

I am sure I have missed many worthy accomplishments, appearances and other offerings of interest to *Estudios Irlandeses* readers, but as you can see, it has been a busy year, and one that has confirmed the vitality of Irish Studies in all its manifestations.

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Dublin. She has taught at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Georgetown University, and The Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. She is the author of *Contemporary Irish Literature: Transforming Tradition* (St Martin's, 1999), and the editor of *Out of History: Essays on the Writing of Sebastian Barry* (Carysfort Press, 2006) and *Report of the Irish Forum: The Future of Irish Studies* (Prague, 2006). Dr. Mahony is a member of the Executive of the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures and sits on the editorial boards of the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* and *Estudios Irlandeses*.

John McGahern and the Imagination of Tradition.

Stanley van der Ziel

Cork: Cork University Press, 2016.

ISBN: 978-1-782051-64-0

305 pages

Reviewer: **Bertrand Cardin**

In this book, Stanley van der Ziel examines how John McGahern's imagination was informed by his extensive reading of and thinking about classic literature. He aims to elucidate how the aesthetic principles and ideas the Irish writer found in the authors he admired are reflected in his own fiction. McGahern's imagination is here considered as deeply "traditional" because his work is part of a larger tradition that is, according to van der Ziel, "a potential for progression and growth", and part of a long chain of literary continuity that "must always be renewed". McGahern reshapes tradition in his own image, and casts new light on the works that come before, but also after him. As the introduction of the book puts it, a truly "traditional" writer uses the lessons from the past "to shape a body of work that is so unique and individual that it forces future writers to take renewed stock of the shape and the values of the tradition".

For McGahern, writing was a form of dialogue with all the great authors who had come before him. He was fond of repeating W. H. Auden's description of the writer's relationship to his forebears: "breaking bread with the dead". In an essay, he wrote that "To continually break bread with such company is almost as necessary for our spiritual lives as plain bread is for our daily sustenance".

The purpose of this book is not to identify quotes from other books – which would be difficult for there are few of them – but to isolate and comment upon some of the major ideas McGahern took from his eminent predecessors. It demonstrates how his fictional oeuvre can be read in the light of various literary traditions within which it operates. In a way, this book is a history of literary and aesthetic ideas reflected through the eyes of one particular "solitary reader" who happened to become a writer. The latter developed his artistic vocation in the 1940s: at the age of ten, the young John McGahern had free access to the private library of his Protestant neighbours, Mr Moroney and his son. Thus he could read hundreds of books and consolidate his classical education, a life-changing experience. McGahern would never have become a writer without this opportunity.

The book is divided thematically and chronologically. It is made of chapters which look in detail at the main ideas McGahern borrowed and adapted from some of the Irish, English and European authors whom he most admired, and whose stamp can be discerned on his own thinking and conception of literature. Each chapter makes reference to relevant aspects in the work of authors from different historical periods – English Romantic poets,

Victorian novelists, modernist writers or Post-war philosophers. Of course, the chapter about Yeats and Joyce, which includes more examples than others, is particularly fascinating. Likewise, McGahern's intimate connections with Shakespeare, Proust or Beckett are very stimulating.

Some of these analogies are quite convincing, particularly when they are explicitly acknowledged, and probably intentionally introduced by McGahern in his prose – many examples are borrowed from Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* or T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Some others are just vague allusions and are thus more debatable. By definition, the allusion is implicit, suggestive, more or less detectable and its perception is often subjective. Indeed it depends much more on the reader's shrewdness than any other intertextual practices: it can go unnoticed and can also be suspected where nothing is alluded to. Van der Ziel makes rapprochements from clues which can be considered as questionable. Besides, he is very much aware of his subjective approach, as he proves to be very careful in his interpretation: "the title of the story may contain, the allusion seems to recall..." (199).

It would have been worth wondering if the intertextual connections in McGahern's work are intentional, if the writer is aware of them, and if the substitutes – the intention of the work and the intention of the reader – are valid and relevant as regards textual interpretation. It is regrettable that the concept of intentionality is never really dealt with here. Similarly, the distinction between the notions of "influence" and "intertextuality" is not developed, but only referred to incidentally in an endnote (note 45, page 248), which may be considered insufficient by some. In view of the general topic of the book, a more theoretical discourse was expected.

In addition, as McGahern is here presented as a link in a long chain of prose writers, his influence on the following generation of Irish authors could have been further analyzed. Indeed some echoes of his work are clearly detectable in the fiction of Colm Tóibín, Colum McCann or Claire Keegan. McGahern's place in a long continuing tradition could have been more clearly highlighted. A whole chapter would have given convincing examples, and would have opened up new and extensive research areas. Instead, only one and a half pages in the epilogue refers to his literary heirs.

These reservations notwithstanding, *John McGahern and the Imagination of Tradition* is a most valuable contribution to the critical apparatus about McGahern's literary production. It also deserves credit for enhancing an original aspect of the work that has been left uncharted so far. Doubtless, van der Ziel's book fills in a gap. Besides, it gives readers the opportunity to take a fresh look at McGahern's prose and to arouse in them a fertile reflection on all forms of interaction.

Bertrand Cardin teaches at the University of Caen, France, where he is the director of the Master's Degree in Applied Foreign Languages. His most recent publication is *Colum McCann's Intertexts. 'Books Talk to One Another'* (2016), published by Cork University Press.

This is the Ritual.

Rob Doyle

London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

ISBN 978-1-40886-53-78

208 pages

Reviewer: **Juan F. Elices**

After listening to Rob Doyle at the most recent IASIL conference held at University College Cork in July I was eagerly anticipating reviewing *This is the Ritual*, his first collection of short stories. Before the publication of this volume, his award-winning debut novel *Here are the Young Men* (2014), which explores the uncompromising lives of three Dublin teenagers in the Celtic Tiger days, turned Doyle into one of the most promising voices in the Irish literary panorama. “On Nietzsche”, the story he chose to read in Cork, is probably one of the most vibrant and ironic of a collection in which the author draws on some of the issues and situations he had already examined in his opera prima, focusing more extensively on the very act of writing and its underlying complexities. *This is the Ritual* presents a wide array of characters, scenarios and topics that the author dissects with a scalpel and, sometimes, from rather excessively graphic viewpoints.

The book opens with “John Paul Finnegan, Paltry-Realist”, a story that revolves around Doyle’s views on the commodification literature is currently going through and the consequences this has on the reading public. Through the aggressive and occasionally vicious language of John Paul Finnegan, a fake writer whose only achievement is to have founded the so-called “paltry-realism” mode, of which he is the only practitioner, Doyle’s story encapsulates very interesting reflections upon the state of contemporary Irish literature and how commercial interests normally prevail over the quality of this or that particular work. The dialogic structure of this story, in which Finnegan seems to be addressing Doyle’s fictional persona, hides behind a very critical view upon the way some Irish literary icons have now become mere sightseeing attractions. It is no wonder that, according to the prevailing tone of this short story, the author inevitably refers to how Irish literature and James Joyce specifically, have been lately prostituted for the sake of attracting tourists and making profit. Finnegan, an obvious Joycean parody, vilifies Bloomsday as he insists that it is born out of hypocrisy: Ireland celebrates the glory of a book that not many have read and whose real interest for the ordinary people seems to be the passage in which Denny’s sausages are mentioned in “Calypso”. Even though it might sound a bit reductive on Doyle’s part, Ulysses does contain an allusion to this meal and brand and it seems like the perfect excuse to take advantage of Bloomsday’s commercial impact worldwide. It is very telling, then, that among all the richly literary passages Doyle could have selected, he chose this one and ended up focusing on a massive group of contemporary Dubliners and tourists eating sausages in a sort of Pantagrueian fashion.

After this insightful opening, the rest of the stories delve into social outcasts, failed and unrecognized writers and characters that cannot cope with a deep sense of unredeemed guilt. “No Man’s Land” is a brilliant recollection of the Ballymount area in South Dublin, where the anonymous narrator wanders around until he comes across a mysterious man with whom he ponders the most existential side of the human condition and the inevitability of death. It goes without saying that this story is full of echoes of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and the way two individuals whose life seems to be trapped in a suffocating cul-de-sac find a space that provides them with a certain sense of relief and mutual understanding. Their need

to find answers to questions that cannot possibly be resolved enables Doyle to build up a powerful philosophical debate between two ghostly figures dragged into a physical and spiritual limbo from which they are unable to escape.

Because *This is the Ritual* is a deep exploration into the lives and deeds of individuals whose isolated existence renders them completely invisible, their social dislocation and inability to maintain long-standing relations leads Doyle to construct characters determined by their own excesses. Drugs, alcohol and sex are key elements in this collection. The author's detailed and explicit description of sexual scenes, which are sometimes on the verge of pornography, reveal the most animalistic side of the human being and place us face to face with our own depravity. This is precisely the case in "Barcelona", in which Doyle presents a female protagonist for the first time in this volume. Alicia, an Irish girl just arrived in one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Europe, is unable to maintain a stable relationship and is solely interested in one-night stands that do not involve any kind of feeling or sentimental attachment. The narrator incorporates himself into the story, in a metafictional trick, as a man that Alicia meets up with after closing up the restaurant where she is a waitress. From their dialogue, the reader gets to know that both come from Ireland and that they seem to be staying in liberal and bohemian Barcelona as a way to move away from their repressed lives back home. In a similar vein, "The Turk Inside" portrays a depressive, solitary male character searching for true love, but which is here left unrequited. Once again, this man recurs to sex, drugs and alcohol to escape from his despondent and miserable reality and to hide behind his own failures.

It seems, though, that the central core of this collection is heavily sustained by several stories that gravitate around writers. Perhaps, this is where Doyle shows his artistry to greatest advantage, as he manages to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality by creating or recreating the lives of an array of different authors that, in most cases, emerge from Doyle's vivid imagination. Besides "John-Paul Finnegan, Paltry-Realist", Doyle seems to be particularly fond of this kind of literary figure as an excuse to explore the issues that prevail in *This is the Ritual*. In "The Glasgow Novels of Malcolm Donnelly", "Fredrick Mulligan, Life in Flames" and "Martin Knows Me – the Lonely Struggle of David Haynes", Doyle reflects again upon the very act of writing and how this process eventually exposes the most egocentric and obsessive side of a human being. In these three stories, Doyle focuses on the same human and literary profiles, namely, the isolated, unsuccessful and unrecognized figures whose work never sees the light of day due to their inability to face the underlying reality of writing. One by one they turn to drugs and alcohol to reconcile themselves with their own failure. Within this group of literary narratives, "Paris Story" is the most incisive and critical. The author approaches the very hostile environment that lies behind this context and the tensions that emerge among authors, publishers, reviewers and all those directly or indirectly involved in this industry. Once again, guilt forcefully emerges as the element that guides the story. Doyle attempts to show how it can permeate a relationship that is established between a writer who has published an ill and destructive review about a book written by the woman who will become his wife.

All in all, Rob Doyle's *This is the Ritual* exhibits not only the author's current talents but also points to a very promising career ahead. However, it should also be argued that this collection falls short in that it fails to present a wider and more varied spectrum of themes and literary registers. The author certainly evinces his skill to anatomise the most sordid aspects of the human condition, but, at the same time, the writing is flawed by details that are superfluous and rather repetitive. Evidence of Doyle's literary background is certainly apparent and impressive and his ability to capture our own frailties is indisputable, yet there are moments when his style is gratuitously affronting. The future that awaits Rob Doyle will, no doubt, be brilliant but this short story collection shows that he is still a long way to go.

Juan F. Elices is Senior Lecturer in English Literature and Director of the Language Centre at the University of Alcalá (Spain). He has conducted extensive research on theory of satire, dystopia, alternate history and censorship. His publications include various books and scholarly articles and his current research interests focus on the sociological and literary manifestations of the Irish economic boom and on the Irish dysfunctional family.

The Boys of Bluehill.

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin

Loughcrew: The Gallery Press, 2015.

ISBN 9781852356217

72 pages

Reviewer: **Luz Mar González-Arias**

The Boys of Bluehill is Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's latest collection of poetry, published a few months before her appointment as Ireland Professor of Poetry in May 2015. Summarising what a collection of poetry is about is a rather impossible task but there are several themes that recur throughout this book. Among these are the power of memory and the incorporation of people and things from the past into our present-day lives. In this regard, the opening poem – “An Information” – becomes a manifesto of sorts for the poetic persona: “I returned to that narrow street / where I used to stand and listen”. These two lines set the tone for poems that will be melancholic at times but mostly liberating in their coming to terms with what once was, but no longer is.

Irish literature has often been under attack for what has been perceived as its generalised lack of engagement with contemporary issues, namely the economic boom, the subsequent recession, and the resulting austerity policies. For Aingeal Clare, reviewing *The Boys of Bluehill* for *The Guardian*, is not an exception in this respect when she wonders why the poet doesn't “speak more directly about contemporary Ireland”. However, Ní Chuilleanáin's insistent examination of the past – be it distant or recent, private or collective – invariably connects past and present, even organically so.

The Boys of Bluehill abounds in descriptions and perceptions of places to which the speaker returns after a long absence or where she no longer belongs – “Yes, I lived there once”, comments one of the characters in “The Binding”; “I might go back to the place / where I was young”, read the opening lines of “Youth”. The past tense in these instances is non-negotiable and mirrors the speaker's realisation that the landscapes of her childhood and youth – whether real or imagined – have been utterly transformed by the passing of time: “the holly tree we knew so well is taller / so the clock on the town-hall tower no longer tells us / the time” (“Outdoors”). In “Who Were Those Travellers” the poetic voice acknowledges the transformation in the eponymous characters, who “are not / elemental as before, exile has changed them”. This realisation is not always devoid of pain or, at least, some degree of nostalgia: the “something” that “has intervened” between the past and the present of those travellers is unreachable and the moving figures end up fading “from the earth one by one”. The poet utilises fluid imagery throughout the book to signify change, so that “nothing is stable” (“From Up Here”) and everything becomes a matter of perspective. In this respect, painting plays an important role in this collection and the distance that the painter needs to see his/her piece with some degree of clarity is also adopted metaphorically by the poetic voice in

order to discern the world “*whose shape / can best be seen in the distance, dark against the sky*” (“Distance”). However, we often get the feeling that such different perspectives are all real and equally valuable, in what becomes a very postmodern conception of history and memory: “This is real, ... , like the hours of your past, / those roots with their population / of slugs and slaters” (“From Up Here”).

In some of these poems the material traces of the past, as well as the artistic representations of that past, are conceptualised as what stays put while life moves on, flows and changes. And so, in “The Incidental Human Figures”, the poetic voice is describing the scenes in an etching by Piranesi. Line after line Ní Chuilleanáin lists the different characters in the composition and the activities they perform in a way reminiscent of John Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn”. Where the Romantic poet stated that “[h]eard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter”, Ní Chuilleanáin speaks of the shepherd trailing behind his Biblical sheep “whose tinkling bells you cannot hear”, and also of “the old tune played on the keypad” that “freezes in memory, locked / in the moment I wrote it there” (“I Used to Think”). Similarly, the images our memory retains, though changeable and unstable, are also portrayed as eternal, acquiring in this way the never-ending quality of materiality – “They are dancing still beside the river” (“An Information”) – and, one could add, will always be. As opposed to this, human life is subjected to the cycles of time and this contrast between the eternal life of the material and the transient dimension of humankind is not painfully poignant but infused with the freshness of renewal and transformation. And so, in “Passing Palmers Green Station” the protagonist hurries past the station where “for years [she] would step down to the platform / and climb up the long stairway to the road”. The melancholic tone of the first lines is counterbalanced by the realisation that “everything lost on earth can again be found”, albeit in a different form. In “The Knot”, which is probably the collection’s most graphic example of this philosophy, a glass butterfly that had been hanging in the house for years suddenly “loosed the knot” that tied it to the ceiling. Far from being blown to smithereens, the beautiful decorative object is described as “falling into its freedom”. The reversal of expectations – the breaking of the glass is not an end but a new beginning – is also vividly visible in the many instances of liminality found in the collection. Liminal spaces can be interpreted as neither here nor there, not fully belonging anywhere. However, there is a much more positive reading of in-between-ness, namely the capacity to inhabit more than one space simultaneously. The liminal is then conceptualised as the productive space where magic can happen – its potential inexhaustible – and therefore an apt metaphor for the poetry itself. In many of these poems Ní Chuilleanáin shows her preference for shadowy boundaries. As Nessa O’Mahony has noted, many of her characters are “pressed up against a window or at a portal of some kind”. The poetic voice seems to be more comfortable in this liminal zone, which lacks a final definition or shape and where full belonging is not possible. It is the potential inherent in the uncertain and the undefined that she seems to be most interested in: “With the door wide open, still hesitating, / this is the moment when for once she feels more at ease” (“Fainfall”).

In her monograph on contemporary Irish women poets, Lucy Collins contends that the tension between past and present in Ní Chuilleanáin’s work creates “gaps in meaning” and “formal challenges” for the reader. Indeed this poet has often been labelled as cryptic or too intellectual. *The Boys of Bluehill* is not an essay book to read, its multiple meanings unfolding gradually and steadily. However, the intellectual quality of the work is never at odds with lyricism. In “Juliette Ryan and the Cement Mixer”, for instance, the poetic persona meditates on beauty and order – a well-known theme for lovers of poetry – and lists different stimuli for the sensory pathways in what becomes a display of synaesthesia and lyrical metaphors. The “breathing surface”, the “fragrance like spice enticing from the kitchen”, that “pulse beating behind the embroidered veil” – the commonplace is again connected to the darkened, the

hidden, or the forbidden and dangerous in order to inspire sensorial responses. When the potential brutality of the cement mixer comes into play we are ready for the desire that will ensue: “her brother grabbed / her elbow in case she did touch and finished / losing the hand”. The poem ends with the poetic persona, naturally, also wanting to touch, “as if reaching out to lay my hand on velvet / or on the skin of a muscular chest”, or as if laying a hand “on the mane of the dark blue sea”.

The “Coda” for the collection is provided by Ní Chuilleanáin’s translation of the anonymous 9th century Old Irish poem “Song of the Old Woman of Beare”, a text that has inspired other contemporary Irish poets such as Leanne O’Sullivan and that is spoken in the first person by the ageing protagonist. The poem is rich in sea imagery, the cycles of high and low tides and the seasonal changes in landscape signifying the passing of time and its effects on the Woman’s corporeality. Although saddened that she is ageing, the Old Woman is glad she lived her life to the full – “I wore out my youth first, / and glad I did” – but can’t help being haunted by memories and images from the past. In tune with the rest of the collection, the last lines of this poem point towards the freedom, albeit of a melancholic kind, that can be found in letting go: “All that the high tide saw / Low water drags away”.

The Boys of Bluehill is a collection about memory and the past and about how it all merges into the present in different forms. In “Somewhere Called Goose Bay” the final question is “how / to cope at all with the past”. The answer can be found by returning once again to the volume’s opening poem: “whatever you are holding, / ... let it go / let it lie until it is blown to the river” because, as the poet’s father once reminded her, “they [words, memories, troubles] need not last forever; / the need not lay you forever low” (“Direction”). It is in the tension between preserving memories and letting go that the beauty and value of these poems reside. Ultimately, *The Boys of Bluehill* acknowledges that one cannot completely return from these forays into the past, a part of us utterly transformed after the journey.

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Aeneid. Book VI.

Seamus Heaney

London: Faber, 2016.

ISBN: 978-0-571-32731-7

53 pages

Reviewer: **Nicholas Grene**

“For the contemporary reader, it is the best of books and the worst of books”, comments Seamus Heaney, in an Afterword for his translation of *Aeneid*, Book VI, left as a fragmentary draft at his death.

Best because of its mythopoeic visions, the twilight fetch of its language, the pathos of the many encounters it allows the living Aeneas with his familiar dead. Worst

because of its imperial certitude, its celebration of Rome's manifest destiny and the catalogue of Roman heroes. (51)

He admits in the Introduction, that the concluding section of the book with its rollcall of Aeneas' descendants and sickeningly sychophantic praise of Virgil's patron Augustus Caesar was an unrewarding exercise "that had to be gone through with" (ix). But having undertaken a version of lines 98-148 of "The Golden Bough" as far back as *Seeing Things* (1991), and used Book VI as a template for his autobiographical sequence "Route 110" published in *Human Chain* (2010) he determined to undertake a translation of the full book, in part "to honour the memory of my Latin teacher at St Columb's College, Father Michael McGlinchey" (vii).

This is typical of Heaney, a man and a writer of multiple pieties: attachment to locality; familial love; loyalty in friendship; solidarity with colleagues; reverence for his poetic predecessors, whether Virgil or Dante, Wordsworth or Hopkins, Yeats or Kavanagh. Indeed, in his life and work he gave back to that term "piety" something of its original depth and resonance. For many generations, piety has not been a fashionable virtue. While in Homer we may enjoy the wiles of "wily Odysseus" and even empathise at times with the moody strength of "fleet-foot Achilles", "pius Aeneas" has put many readers off Virgil's duty-bound hero. Heaney avoids those sanctimonious associations by using variants on the term "devotion": "Aeneas, devoted as ever" (l. 12), "In mourning, none louder, more devout than Aeneas" (l. 240).¹ If "devout" still suggest religious faith, "devoted" shades satisfactorily into the secular.

The most basic problem for any translator of Virgil's epic is what to do with the metre. In "The Golden Bough", Heaney followed the lead of the earlier Irish poet C. Day Lewis in seeking to reproduce the Virgilian hexameter. But the hexameter, with its six-foot line of dactyls and spondees, is hard to sustain over an extended sequence, and has a way of sounding artificial or even bathetic in English, with little of the concise precision of the Latin. The "natural" English rhythm for narrative or dramatic verse is iambic pentameter. For Book VI, Heaney came up with a brilliant compromise: a five-beat line that approximates to Virgil's dactylic rhythm, but allows for a supple flexibility that the full hexameter precludes. We can see the difference in the final lines of "The Golden Bough" contrasted with the same passage in the later version: "If fate has called you", the Sybil instructs Aeneas on the plucking of the sacred branch,

The bough will come away easily, of its own accord.
Otherwise, no matter how much strength you muster, you never will
Manage to quell it or cut it down with the toughest of blades.²

This becomes:

The bough will come away in your hand.
Otherwise, no strength you muster will break it,
Nor the hardest forged blade lop it off. (ll. 201-3)

Heaney's other great work of translation was of course his *Beowulf* (1999), now so widely studied by university students of English. In it he forged a modern equivalent of the Old English line, two parallel rhythmic units bound together by intricate alliteration. He takes this skill over into his Virgil in occasional lines: "And every dead end he himself had devised" (Dedalus on the labyrinth) (l. 46), the Fury Tisiphone with her whiplash "Lapped and lithe in her right hand, in her left / A flail of writhing snakes" (ll. 775-6). But often, also, the

alliteration crosses from one line to another, enhancing the onward movement: the horribly mutilated Deiphobus in the underworld, “his face/ In shreds – his face and his two hands -- / Ears torn from his head” (ll. 665-7).

Everywhere in his Book VI, there is characteristic Heaney vocabulary, the animated language that produces his own rich effects of tone and texture. But often what looks like pure Heaney turns out to be a quite precise rendering of Virgil. “Michael McGlinchey”, he says in the Introduction, “created an inner literalist” (p. ix) in him. So, for example, there is the Trojan fleet landing at last in Italy:

Anchors bite deep, craft are held fast, curved
Sterns cushion on sand, prows frill the beach. (ll. 5-6)

Who but Heaney would have risked the apparent frivolity of that “frill” for the boats lined up on the edge of the shore? In fact it is a fairly close approximation to Virgil’s “praetexant”, with its suggestion of a woven fringe. And Aeneas and Achates, told by the Sybil that one of their comrades had died, speculate on which one, in “the give and take of their talk” (l. 219); it is not that far from the original “vario sermone”. Just occasionally Heaney allows himself a modern literary obeisance, as when Aeneas shrugs off the Sibyl’s warning of troubles to, “I have foreseen / And foresuffered all” (ll. 147-8), echoing Eliot’s Tiresias in *The Waste Land*. The translation is characteristic, too, in its preference for hard Anglo-Saxon words, monosyllabic verbs and nouns, making feeling and movement concrete. Sometimes these are specifically Irish usages, as in “scringe” = “to make a harsh or creaking or grinding sound” -- Aeneas hears from within the torture-chamber of hell, “the fling and scringe and drag / Of iron chains” (ll. 775-6) -- but not in most other cases, such as the “scrunch and screech / Of hinges” (ll. 778-9). The preference for such Germanic over Latinate forms even when translating Virgil helps to remind us that, proudly Irish poet that he was, Heaney could also write deeply English English poetry. Not for nothing Heaney dedicated *Beowulf* to the memory of his close friend Ted Hughes.

In their “Note on the Text”, Matthew Hollis of Faber and Heaney’s daughter Catherine tell of the draft manuscript of Book VI that Heaney left at his death marked “Final”. There is an obvious poignancy in this last work of dazzling beauty coming to us from beyond the grave, Aeneas’ descent into the underworld a fitting memory of the dead. But it must bring home again what we all felt on 30 August 2013. This was not a great career coming, honour-laden, properly to its close. This was the tragic loss of a great poet at the very height of his powers.

Notes

¹ The line numbers here are those of Heaney’s version, which do not follow those in the original.

² Seamus Heaney, *Seeing Things* (London: Faber, 1991), p. 3.

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The Stinging Fly: In the Wake of the Rising.

Sean O'Reilly (ed.)

Issue 33, Volume two

Dublin: Stinging Fly Press, Spring 2016.

ISBN 978-1-906539-53-5

288 pages

Reviewer: **Christina Hunt Mahony**

The Stinging Fly, founded by Dubliner Declan Meade, is best known as a literary magazine, but also functions as a publisher of monographs of new Irish fiction. Nearly two decades on the scene now, *The Stinging Fly* has achieved a level of venerability, having discovered and fostered many new writers who have gone on to award-winning stature.

Many of Meade's discoveries appear within the pages of this themed volume on the centenary of The Easter Rising. They might be considered to constitute a Who's Who of new Irish writing, including editor Sean O'Reilly, Kevin Barry, Belinda McKeon, Lisa McInerney, Paul Lynch, Dave Lordan and many others. The volume also includes the work of some more established writers, like Glenn Patterson, Donal O'Kelly, Aidan Mathews, Desmond Hogan and Patrick McCabe – and not all the work is creative writing.

Catriona Crowe's excellent "How Do We Know What We Know?" not only seeks to make us aware of historiographic practice, but alerts us to the extent of archival material made available in recent years (especially from the Bureau of Military History) and which archival sources remain closed to the public or difficult to access (like many Land Registry documents). The relevance to literary studies may seem remote, but Crowe emphasises that Joyce Studies in particular has benefitted greatly from the digital publication of the 1901 and 1911 census. UCC scholar Hillary Lennon's examines the fictional representation of historical events from 1920s Ireland, in the aftermath of the Rising – specifically in the short stories of Frank O'Connor.

There is a healthy leavening of irreverence in this volume, as one might anticipate. The history of literary magazines is, after all, somewhat subversive by nature. Kevin Barry writes a wonderful riff on his patriotically noteworthy name, but, no, he was not named for the martyred patriot famed in song, but rather after a cousin killed in a motorcycle crash. Several contributions, while keeping to the overall theme, place us very much in the Ireland of today – HASHTAGRising by Val Nolan is a poem composed entirely in twitter format, and Anthony Hegarty's *Remembering at a Civil Union* relates overcoming a ban on political texts at a ceremony to celebrate a gay partnership.

In the guest editor's preface Sean O'Reilly is direct in his intentions for this issue – It would, he states, "open up an alternative space for writers to re-read and respond to the events of that East Monday, the background and the legacy, and to the Proclamation itself, a founding document of the Republic, outside of the official events and memorials planned by the government of the day. . . ". O'Reilly is particularly mindful of the language of The Rising, the words which were used, published, to convey the demands for freedom. He instances not just the Proclamation, but also manifestos, pamphlets, posters, the texts of public lectures and other evidence of the importance of writing and writers in the lead up to and events of 1916. O'Reilly also fuses graphically the events of our distant and recent pasts, explaining that the first time he ever saw a copy of The Proclamation he was queuing with his father to pay his respects to the first of the Hunger Strikers to die in 1981. That words could be so powerful as to occasion death struck the boy O'Reilly at the time, and obviously

remained with him. His introductory essay ends with the challenge – “What, reader, is your new word for Freedom?”.

There isn't, perhaps, as much poetry in *In the Wake of the Rising*, as one might like, but what is here is both evocative and provocative. There are a couple of titles in Irish, including one for a poem by Julie Morrissy - “*i measc mo dhaoine*” – but the poem is written in English, as is the contribution by bilingual writer Doireann Ní Ghríofa. Her “Split Villanelle” is a technically brilliant exercise on the nature of both the spoken and the written word.

The most interesting and original of the contributions make use of historical fact as it applies to family history or personal experience. One such effort is “Martial Law” a poem by Aisling Fahey. It's opening lines set up the parallels between the personal and the public –

*Mary Purcell, my grandmother, was born in April 1916,
Week of the Easter Rising.
On the same road as she was being delivered, a two-year-old
Child ran from the neighbour's house,
For what?*

The neighbour's child was one of the sixteen children killed in The Rising – information of which we've been made aware recently by such publications as Joe Duffy's *The Children of the Rising*.

Similarly Lia Mills' prose essay focuses on the random nature of violence and urban terrorism and its contested validity. Mills effectively weaves explicit detail of the deaths of combatants and civilians during Easter week a century ago with conjectural threats that mimic contemporary headlines all too familiar to us all – “You could be standing in line at a bank with the news on continuous feed.” Mills wonders if Dubliners awoke to such mayhem in the streets in this century if they would support the activists, and she too weighs the power of language in revolutionary times, emphasizing the need to differentiate rhetoric from reality. *In the Wake of the Rising* is not just an eclectic postmodern *omnium gatherum* of takes on Easter 1916. It is a thoughtful and thought-provoking collection that illustrates well the diversity of response this centenary has occasioned in Ireland, and just how far the nation has, and hasn't, come.

The Rising. Ireland: Easter 1916.

Fearghal McGarry

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

ISBN 978-0-19-960597-2

365 pages

Rebels: Voices from the Easter Rising.

Fearghal McGarry

London: Penguin, 2012.

ISBN 978-0-141-04127-8

363 pages

Reviewer: **Elizabeth Malcolm**

According to Fearghal McGarry, the 1916 Rising is the “most controversial event in Ireland’s modern history” (*Rising*, 8). In addressing this controversy, McGarry’s two books trace important new developments in the century-long historiography of the Easter Rising that has become almost as controversial as the event itself.

From the 1920s onwards, accounts of the Rising focused especially on two of its leaders, Patrick Pearse and James Connolly. Both men had published prolifically during their lifetimes and bequeathed to future generations a large body of polemical writing. Pearse, as a devotee of the faith-and-fatherland school of nationalism, appealed especially to the dominant Fianna Fáil Party, to republicans and to the Catholic Church; whereas those inclined more to the left, than the right, of politics directed their adulation at Connolly, the Marxist champion of workers’ rights. The other five signatories of the 1916 proclamation of a republic were pushed into the background, although some of them, notably the dogged old Fenian Tom Clarke and the tireless young organiser Seán MacDermott, actually played a more important role in bringing about the Rising than did either Pearse or Connolly. Writers argued endlessly over Pearse’s objectives and whether he really intended the Rising as a “blood sacrifice”; or they debated why Connolly had apparently abandoned his internationalist working-class ideals to join a rebellion led in the main by middle-class Catholic nationalists.

Uncritical public celebration of the Rising reached its peak during the 50th anniversary in 1966. At that time, the president of the Irish Republic, the taoiseach (prime minister), plus other senior politicians and civil servants were all veterans of the Rising. The 1916 generation dominated politics and public affairs in the Republic for half a century, most notably in the person of Éamon de Valera, who lived until 1975. He, though, was by no means the last Rising veteran: a handful survived to the end of the century.

After 1966, however, things changed rapidly. The Troubles in the North, beginning in 1968-9, led some to challenge the morality of violence as a political weapon. Clergy and historians in the South, like Fr Francis Shaw and Professor F.X. Martin, had already started to publish articles and documents drawing upon traditional Catholic just war theory to question whether the bloodshed of the Easter Rising was really justified, given that an Irish Home Rule Act had been passed in 1914 and was due to come into force immediately World War I ended. Politicians too were having second thoughts about celebrating the Rising amidst the carnage of the Troubles. The Provisional Irish Republican Army claimed that the 1916 declaration of an all-Ireland republic legitimised its armed struggle to overthrow British rule in the six counties and re-unite Ireland by force. Southern politicians, like Dr Conor Cruise O’Brien, criticised the 1966 celebrations for having encouraged republican violence, while others attempted unsuccessfully to reclaim the Rising from the Provos. In the end, though,

governments found it easier to ignore anniversaries or tone down celebrations. Military parades in Dublin on Easter Monday largely ceased during the early 1970s and did not resume until the 90th anniversary in 2006, while the 75th anniversary in 1991 was an extremely low-key affair. Not until 1998 and the Good Friday Agreement, which it was hoped marked the end of the Troubles, did re-evaluation and celebration of the Rising in the Republic finally become less fraught.

Perhaps the most significant recent development in the Rising's historiography has been the opening to the public in 2003 of the archive of the Irish Bureau of Military History. The Bureau was set up in 1947 by de Valera to gather first-hand testimony from surviving participants in events between 1913 and 1921: that is especially the Rising and the War of Independence, but not the 1922-3 Civil War. Information was also gathered from clergy and from some former police and military personnel. In all, 1,773 witness statements and other assorted records were collected over a period of ten years. However, the government decided that the material would not be made available until after the last witness had died. That did not occur until 2003. (The Military Service Pensions Collection, released online in 2011 at militaryarchives.ie, is another major new source of data on those who took part in the Rising, but McGarry's books were written before this material became available.)

Naturally, historians swooped on the Military History archive once it was opened to the public. A number of books have since been published based upon it, with McGarry, a young historian working at Queen's University, Belfast, leading the charge in terms of the Rising. It is important to bear this background in mind when reading McGarry's work. His book *Rebels* consists wholly of selected extracts from witness statements, while his narrative account *The Rising* depends heavily upon them. Rather than a top-down approach that sees 1916 through the aspirations of a Pearse or Connolly, or the plans of a Clarke or MacDermott, McGarry adopts a bottom-up approach, attempting to understand what the 2,000 or so rank-and-file male and female members of the Irish Volunteer Force, Cumann na mBan and the Citizen Army imagined they were doing and how they experienced that traumatic week. Did they see themselves as embarking upon a "blood sacrifice", or did they believe that a republic was achievable; did they question the morality of the violence they were unleashing upon their fellow Dubliners, or were they convinced that their cause warranted such extreme measures?

Invaluable though the witness statements certainly are, McGarry is quick to alert readers to the fact that they are also heavily mediated. To begin with, they were collected thirty to forty years after the Rising, when memories had doubtless faded or been distorted by subsequent events. Witnesses were interviewed and questioned by Bureau staff; however, it appears that potentially sensitive, but important, questions were sometimes simply not asked. Many who had played a crucial role in the Rising did not offer testimony, most notably de Valera himself. Nevertheless, despite such caveats, McGarry amply demonstrates the value of the Military History archive. From these first-hand accounts a different Rising emerges from that portrayed during the 1966 celebrations. It is a more complex, indeed chaotic, event. There is still much heroism recalled on the Irish side and much brutality reported against the British, but new players come to the fore who were almost invisible in books published at the time of the 50th anniversary. Women feature more prominently, as also do civilians, including children, and British soldiers, some of whom were in fact Irish-born.

The witness statements also throw new light on the vexed question of motivation. Diverse goals and expectations are immediately apparent. Some Volunteers did not even realise initially they were joining a rebellion, believing that the mobilisation was just another tiresome training exercise; yet others, in their testimony, gleefully characterise themselves as soldiers "going off to war" (*Rebels*, 151-9). During the fighting, while most of those in

command were aware that the country had not risen to support them and therefore their cause was doomed, many of the rank-and-file continued confident of victory. Desmond Fitzgerald, father of the future Fine Gael taoiseach, admitted to feeling “depressed and distressed” when he heard Volunteers “talking of victory”, as he knew their leaders did not share this optimism. Indeed, the “blood sacrifice” theme is by no means dispelled by the witness statements. Tom Clarke was noted for his practical approach to revolution, yet he was reported to have stated unequivocally in the GPO: “we shall all be wiped out”. But he said this “almost with gaiety” because he believed they had already achieved the goal of ensuring that Ireland’s case would be heard before the peace conference at the end of the war (*Rising*, 154-5).

During the 2016 centenary celebrations, a number of books appeared devoted to the roughly 200 women who took part in the Rising in Dublin; and McGarry too uses eye-witness accounts by women extensively in his books. But, unlike most other writers, he also devotes attention to women on the other side: that is to the crowds of women who took the lead in abusing the rebels or in looting. Some male witnesses reveal in their statements that, as well as having no qualms about shooting at soldiers or police, they also had few qualms about shooting at women. On occasion, officers were forced to intervene to prevent their men killing unarmed working-class women who had been shouting foul abuse or throwing well-aimed stones. Connolly and his Citizen Army appear to have been especially angry that, rather than joining or supporting the rebels, many of the inhabitants of the city centre’s appalling slums instead took enthusiastically to looting. Connolly ordered looters to be stopped and their booty confiscated; if they resisted, they were to be shot (*Rising*, 142-8; *Rebels*, 171-9).

The historiography of the 1916 Rising has evolved significantly, if somewhat erratically, over the last 100 years and, without doubt, it will continue to evolve into the future. McGarry’s fine books mark a notable milestone in this evolution. They put us more closely in touch with the hour-by-hour events of Easter week as experienced by rank-and-file republican men and women and, in doing so, they offer a vivid and fascinating grassroots perspective on what continues to be the most disputed event in Irish history since the Great Famine of the 1840s.

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Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of His Time.

Tom Walker

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

ISBN: 978-0-19-874515

216 pages

Louis MacNeice: In a Between World.

Christopher J. Fauske

Sallins, Co. Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2016.

ISBN: 978-1-911024-09-5

176 pages

Reviewer: **Michael A. Moir, Jr.**

Recent years have seen a steady increase of the number of books, essays, and journal articles published about the Northern Irish poet Louis MacNeice, long regarded as a minor member of the Auden Group by all but a few stalwart supporters like Edna and Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, Terence Brown, and Peter McDonald. It should come as no surprise that MacNeice's revival occurs at a time of great political and economic upheaval; of all the poets associated with the Left in the 1930s, MacNeice's skeptical, sardonic voice was perhaps the most critical of both existing institutions and the possibility of revolutionary change. His complicated relationship with Ireland, the country of his birth, and his adopted homes in England and, briefly, America, is mirrored in the politics of the contemporary European Union and the debate over the United Kingdom's inclusion in it. MacNeice's "hybrid" identity as an Irish poet resident in England has been much discussed, though recent work has tended to place him primarily in an Irish context. The two works under review, both with much to recommend them, are part of this trend.

Christopher Fauske's book is probably the more accessible of the two for a newcomer to MacNeice. The title, drawn from the early poem "Spring Sunshine," highlights the liminality that is so much a part of MacNeice's work, and the book aims to situate the poet in a series of biographical and historical contexts – his personal and family relationships, his studies at Marlborough and at Oxford, his work for the BBC during and after the Second World War – while stressing the environment of near-constant churn and upheaval in which MacNeice lived and worked. Fauske begins with a chapter on MacNeice's poetic afterlife, charting his effect on others who knew him and some of the poets who came after him, like Anthony Thwaite, with whom MacNeice shared an office at the BBC, and Seamus Heaney, who tried to pin down MacNeice in his quincunx of poetically significant Irish castles. Throughout each chapter, Fauske relates MacNeice's work to that of his contemporaries in England and in Ireland, demonstrating that he is a poet who belongs to both places and to neither. Fauske, who has written a biography of John Frederick MacNeice, the poet's prominent clergyman father, returns here to examine Louis' fraught relationship with his father and other family members.

The value of Fauske's book lies in its attempt to synthesize MacNeice's various contexts into a brief, readable literary biography, perhaps less detailed than Jon Stallworthy's 1995 life of MacNeice but with closer attention to connections between life and work. There is little close-reading of individual poems here, but Fauske's purpose does not seem to be to dissect individual lines so much as to provide a comprehensive picture of MacNeice as a poet and as a man, no easy task given the complicated and peripatetic life he led.

The task of contextualization that Tom Walker undertakes in *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of His Time* assumes more familiarity with MacNeice and with mid-20th century Irish literature than Fauske's book. Walker's primary purpose seems to be to challenge the once-pervasive notion that MacNeice was not particularly engaged with events in Ireland, apart from rugby matches, and that the rejection of Ireland voiced in the 1935 poem "Valediction" entailed a serious commitment to staying out of Irish business. In this engaging and well-researched book, Walker demonstrates that MacNeice was not only aware of and involved in the Irish literary scene of his own time through his friendships with W.R. Rogers, Sam Hanna Bell, and others, he also made use of much older Irish material. MacNeice's use of the 11th-century Old Irish *Immram Mael Duin* as the basis for his radio play *The Mad Islands* is well-known, but Walker's examination of MacNeice's notebooks turns up references to the 9th-century *Pangur Ban* and Irish street songs.

Perhaps MacNeice's most important connection to the world of Irish poetry is his admiration for W.B. Yeats, which was apparently mutual; Walker shows how much MacNeice respected the older poet (despite the rather flippant portrait of Yeats he paints in *The Strings are False*) and that Yeats regarded MacNeice as among the most promising of the rising generation of "radical" poets. MacNeice only wrote in a specifically Yeatsian idiom when he was trying to achieve a particular effect, as in poems like "Western Landscape" and "Neutrality" that Walker argues use imagery borrowed from Yeats to satirize the regionalism of John Hewitt and the provincialism of F.R. Higgins – both poets with whom MacNeice enjoyed cordial personal relations, even if he did not share their artistic predilections.

Two books on a poet once considered minor do not add up to a renaissance in MacNeice studies, but the slow but steady stream of excellent work being done on this poet once thought so difficult to place suggests that his reputation is still on the rise. The turnaround in MacNeice's poetic fortunes is evidence of what can happen to a poet's reception when liberated from a limiting context – in MacNeice's case the left-leaning poets of the so-called Auden group, with whom he had relatively little in common apart from age and education – and examined through a different lens. These two studies can be added to David Fitzpatrick's biography of MacNeice's father (which attempts to dismantle the image of the father constructed by the son) and Edna Longley and Fran Brearton's collection of essays from the MacNeice centenary conference in Belfast as important contributions to our understanding of a poet who has always been appreciated by poets; it's just taken the academy some time to catch up.

Michael A. Moir, Jr. is Assistant Professor of English at Georgia Southwestern State University, USA, where he teaches courses in British, Irish, and Global Anglophone literature. He is a member of the American Conference for Irish Studies and the Canadian Association for Irish Studies and is currently working on a study of imaginary spaces in Louis MacNeice's radio plays.

Granta 135: New Irish Writing.

Sigrid Rausing (ed.)

London: Granta, Spring 2016.

ISBN: 978-1-90588-1956

256 pages

Reviewer: **Auxiliadora Pérez-Vides**

Volume 135 of *Granta*, edited by Sigrid Rausing (Granta's publisher), is a much-welcomed collection of new Irish writing. It is certainly remarkable that one of the most prestigious literary publishers in the English-speaking world devotes this issue to recent artistic innovations in Ireland. As the editor observes in the introduction, the literary boom taking place in the country alongside the "exceptional quality" of its literature, testifies to the import of showcasing recent Irish productions internationally. To gather such a sparkling assortment in a limited space is not an easy task, but the result presented here is quite fair. The twenty pieces that comprise what Rausing calls a "country issue" allow the reader to take a quick glimpse of what is being produced on the island in a variety of genres: memoir, fiction (including short stories and excerpts from upcoming books by renowned novelists), poetry and also photography. Taken together, they constitute a substantial approach to the thematic preoccupations and stylistic experimentations of contemporary Irish artists from different generations and backgrounds.

I was immediately captivated by the front cover, which features Eamonn Doyle's black-and-white photographs of four of the authors – Belinda McKeon, Colm Tóibín, Lucy Caldwell and Colin Barrett. Focusing primarily on their eyes, the photographer displays them looking sideways or simply not staring at the camera. This technique also extends to the images of the rest of the writers included in the collection, who are beautifully photographed by Doyle as well. The photos symbolically spotlight the intense energy of their literary gaze at the past, the present and the future of the country. Indeed, photography occupies a central position in the volume, which attests to the relevance of this artistic medium to a projection and discussion of the current Irish artistic milieu. In this light, the photo essays by Doug Dubois, Birte Kauffman and Stephen Dock render in a very compelling way the strong attachment to the social and natural environment experienced by three disparate Irish communities: a group of teenagers and their coming of age in a Cobh neighbourhood at the risk of social exclusion; Irish Travellers' timeless bond with animals and nature, and Belfast denizens from both Republican and Loyalist areas in context with the socio-political architecture of the city, respectively.

Similarly, reading the selected texts bears out the fact that artists, whatever mode of expression they employ, are vital agents of cultural interpretation. The authors' sharp eye for the ordinary and their sensitive practice of intimate introspection demonstrate how Irish literature continues to enlighten us to many of the elements of the island's broader cultural order, including an understanding of Irishness itself. The complexity of Irish identity keeps being interrogated and negotiated more often than not through the art of the nation. Thus, through the lens of the narrators and poetic personas we are provided insights into the everyday predicaments of individuals inextricably linked to the current state of affairs in the country. Unplanned pregnancies, awkward family relations, economic difficulties, sexual awakening and the residual stranglehold of religion are, among other themes, brought to the fore in an attempt to emphasize their ongoing grip on the configuration of identity on the island. In "Here We Are", for example, Lucy Caldwell examines the silencing of lesbian sexuality and the concomitant prejudices faced by two teenage Belfast girls who imagined

themselves living “free” in their future, our present. Other determining factors for subjectivity underscored in the collection are place and landscape, especially in Kevin Barry’s moving description of Cork as the city that was formative to him; or in Sara Baume’s lyrical story of two cousins who meet at a wedding and “understand how much more powerful than them the crop is, how much vaster than them the field is, how every root and shoot and leaf and grain is commanded by Field”.

With the same intensity and evocative spirit, the poems by Leontia Flynn, Tara Bergin and Stephen Sexton describe personal episodes in which individuals struggle with the constraints of their immediate social reality. A similar vein is perceived in the pieces by authors with a longer literary career – Colm Tóibín, Emma Donoghue and Roddy Doyle – that delicately expose the psychological drives and dilemmas of a range of characters whose existences raise wider questions about human experience. In the case of Tóibín, his story “A Visit to The Zoo”, set in present-day Berlin, can be considered a philosophical essay on family expectations, life and death. Likewise, Donoghue’s text – an extract from her latest novel, *The Wonder* (2016) – initiates the reader into the intriguing tale of a nurse dealing with a case of “fasting girls . . . reabsorbing, subsisting on their own menses”, directing the reader once again to a revelatory discussion of the female body. And finally, Roddy Doyle’s work-in-progress – “Smile” – closes the collection with a piercing narrative of violence and abuse in which a boy is bullied for being “a queer” and the favourite of the French teacher, Brother Murphy.

On a personal note, this collection has been very illuminating, not only for having rekindled my interest in the short story genre, but also for bringing forward some parts of longer texts that I am looking forward to reading soon. Most gainfully, *Granta* 135 has introduced me to the work of new favourites Lucy Caldwell, Sally Rooney, Sara Baume, John Connell and Belinda McKeon. However, at this point I must also note that, although the editor seems to have made a big effort to balance the choice of male and female writers, gracefully solving the gender bias that has characterized many anthologies of Irish literature to date, the recent production by non-Irish born writers seems to have been overlooked. Without the direct voices and experiences of these immigrant communities, who articulate firsthand an increasingly multicultural Irish society, this taxonomy of the New Ireland and its writing is effective, heterogeneous and polivocal, but in the final analysis, incomplete. Notwithstanding this reparable weakness, the collection adds to the recognition of Irish literature, and it will be of interest to readers eager to learn what both emerging and established Irish authors are engaged in at the moment.

Auxiliadora Pérez-Vides lectures in English at the University of Huelva, Spain. Her publications include *Sólo ellas: familia y feminismo en la novela irlandesa contemporánea* (2003) and the co-edition of *Espacios de género* (2005), *Single Motherhood in Twentieth Century Ireland: Cultural, Historical and Social Essays* (2006), *Gendering Citizenship and Globalization* (2011), and *Words of Crisis/ Crisis of Words: Ireland and the Representation of Critical Times* (2016). She has published extensively on the representation of gender, motherhood and the body, covering the work of Irish authors like Catherine Dunne, Mary Rose Callaghan, Edna O’Brien and Mary Leland, among others.

A Batalha das Estéticas.

Munira H. Mutran

São Paulo: Humanitas/FAPESP, 2015.

ISBN 978-85-7732-263-3

190 pages

Reviewer: **Miguel Ramallete Gomes**

Munira H. Mutran's *A Batalha das Estéticas* (The Battle of Aesthetics) is an anthology, with informative headnotes, of critical texts by George Moore, Oscar Wilde, and William Butler Yeats, collaboratively translated into Portuguese by Mutran and Alzira Leite Allegro. This book combines two strands of Mutran's substantial body of scholarly work, building not only upon her 2002 monograph, *Álbum de Retratos. George Moore, Oscar Wilde e William Butler Yeats no Fim do Século XIX: Um Momento Cultural*, but also on her organization of two anthologies (1996; 2006) of Irish short stories translated into Portuguese. Above all meant for a student audience, this anthology will also be of great use to anyone interested in Irish literature and culture. Indeed, in less than 200 pages, Mutran provides an excellent introduction to the critical thought and literary work of these three authors, as representative instances of a larger shift in literary practices and aesthetic tenets during the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century.

The first half of the book opens with a general introduction followed by three sections in which translations of carefully chosen excerpts of critical texts by Moore, Wilde, and Yeats are presented and briefly commented on by Mutran. The final bibliography, although it could also have included more recent references, is balanced and a good starting point for further reading. In her well-argued introduction, she sets the boundaries of the anthology: from Paris to London and Dublin, during the passage from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, as several movements, such as Romanticism, Realism, Aestheticism, Decadence, and Naturalism, proposed radically different ways of representing reality. Mutran begins by pointing out that the battles fought by these movements are themselves versions of much older artistic oppositions between imitation and creation, and makes it clear that the terms themselves, "romanticism" as well as "realism", are multi-faceted and open to interpretation. Mutran thus employs a unifying device for the three main sections of the book, namely the metaphors of the mirror, the veil, and the lamp, as used respectively by Stendhal, Wilde, and Yeats. She then introduces the role of the writer-critic as essential in understanding the dialogues between writers, artists, and critics during this time, a series of creative interactions that Mutran pursues well into the period of Modernism. Such dialogues not only helped to establish these writers' diverse positions, but also contributed to challenge and modify their aesthetic tenets.

The first section of the anthology, entitled "George Moore: In the Labyrinth of Choice, the Door to Realism", is based on a set of autobiographical texts, namely *Confessions of a Young Man*, *Hail and Farewell*, and *Conversations in Ebury Street*. As with the other two sections, this is introduced by a brief biographical outline. Making use of several excerpts from Moore's accounts of the quarrels around Impressionism, Mutran underlines an important inter-artistic thread that is also present in the excerpts by Wilde and Yeats. Moore's initial distaste for the Impressionists is soon replaced by a growing admiration and the belief that a new aesthetics and new values must be found; his own literary efforts, starting with decadent poems and short stories are shattered by reading Zola, after which Moore attempts to find a naturalist aesthetics applicable to poetry. His subsequent disillusionment with Zola leads him

eventually to Balzac as the model for his literary form of choice, the novel, whereby Moore declares his escape from what he perceives as the shallowness and stagnation of Aestheticism, Naturalism, and Symbolism.

In the following section, called “Oscar Wilde’s Aversion to the Mirror”, both Mutran and Allegro offer very fine translations of excerpts from Wilde’s best-known critical texts, such as “The Critic as Artist”, “The Decay of Lying”, “Pen, Pencil and Poison”, the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and “The Soul of Man under Socialism”. Wilde’s style and witty paradoxes come through clearly both in his bouts against Realism and mimesis and in his advancement of artists as those who create (or veil), rather than imitate (or mirror). In order to do so, Wilde opposes arts from other times and places to what he perceived to be the inartistic exactitude of naturalist writing. He warns about choosing modern topics, set against using stories such as Hecuba’s, which, because they carry no external message to Wilde’s epoch, can become a fit subject for a tragedy, very much as Wilde himself did with the story of Salomé. His defence of an art untouched by external criteria culminates in the declaration that art must be useless. It should lead not to instruction but only to a sterile emotion, without a message or any wish to influence.

The final section, entitled “For W. B. Yeats, the Mirror becomes Lamp”, is equally composed of elegantly translated excerpts drawn from some of Yeats’ most celebrated critical texts, including, among others, “A General Introduction to my Work”, “The Celtic Element in Literature”, “Symbolism in Painting”, “The Symbolism of Poetry”, and “The Autumn of the Body”. In these, Yeats begins by expressing a preference for romantic literature, at the expense of neoclassical authors; from the realists, and like Moore and Wilde, he singles out Balzac, while also addressing Stendhal’s “mirror” metaphor, to which he opposes a form of art that is expressive and symbolic, moved by a visionary energy, captured later in his symbol of the “lamp”. Yeats’ interest in essences thus leads him to choose an imaginative art based on myths and legends. The last three excerpts are longer explorations of Yeats’ most distinctive topics: the difference between allegory and symbol, once more with references to other arts; the difference between symbols and metaphors, based on their relation to things and essences, as well as on the difference between emotional and intellectual symbols; and a spiritual concern not with things, but with the essences of things. His section ends with an appeal for a return to mythic writing that, as Mutran explains, would be amply used as the “mythical method” of Joyce, Eliot, Pound, and, of course, Yeats himself.

This first half of the book is followed by a selection of representative literary works by the same three authors — Moore’s “Home Sickness”, from the short story collection *The Untilled Field*, translated by Augusta Vono; excerpts from João do Rio’s translation of Wilde’s *Salomé*; and Munira H. Mutran’s own translation of excerpts from Yeats’ *The Countess Cathleen* — as well as a translation by Onédia Pereira de Queiroz of James Joyce’s “Clay”. This final choice is explained in an afterword, entitled “The Victory of Synthesis”, in which Mutran briefly analyses each text in turn, as realisations of the topics discussed in the anthologised critical texts. Finally, her comments on Joyce’s “Clay” allow Mutran to illustrate persuasively the argument that Joyce produced a synthesis of the three paths followed by Moore, Wilde, and Yeats — that is — the modernist synthesis of myth and symbol in combination with creative Realism and Naturalism.

In short, not only will this anthology contribute to the promotion of Irish literature and culture in Brazil and other Portuguese-speaking countries, but it will also be of great use to students of these three Irish authors as well as of the history of nineteenth-century Aestheticism.

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The Glorious Heresies, by Lisa McNerney.

London: John Murray, 2015.

ISBN: 978-I-444-79866-9

371 pages

Reviewer: **Aida Rosende Pérez**

Ever since the publication of *The Glorious Heresies* (2015), Lisa McNerney has been repeatedly featured prominently among an exciting wave of young fiction writers whose distinctive voices are bringing renewed vitality to the Irish literary landscape. In 2006, McNerney's Twitter persona @swearylady had already become a household name, given the popularity of her award-winning blog, "Arse End of Ireland", where she offered a darkly comic take on underclass life in a Galway council state during the Celtic Tiger and after its demise. At that time, *The Irish Times* named McNerney as "arguably the most talented writer at work today in Ireland". And in 2015, *The Glorious Heresies* came to confirm she is an author with an extraordinary gift for language, humour, storytelling, and the creation of memorable characters. Her captivating first novel has not only garnered widespread critical and popular acclaim, but has also recently won the prestigious Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction (2016) and the Desmond Elliott Prize (2016).

In *The Glorious Heresies*, McNerney once again brings into the spotlight marginal lives, this time abandoning her native Galway to set the novel in post-crash Cork city. The plot revolves around the unintended killing of a man by a woman in her late fifties who has just returned to Ireland after a forty-year forced exile in England. The attempts by the accidental murderer's son, Jimmy, to dispose of the corpse in his mother's kitchen progressively disclose a web of intertwining stories that bind the novel's protagonists. The narrative follows Jimmy, the commander-in-chief of the city's criminal scene, as he tries to secure this position while protecting his mother, Maureen, from the penal consequences of the murder. It also follows Maureen who was banished to England as a form of punishment for her unmarried teenage pregnancy. She has been brought home by Jimmy, the son she was forced to give up at the time; and she is now tormented by a simultaneous quest for revenge for past grievances and redemption for her unintentional crime.

Other characters affected in different ways by the murder and its cover-up, include Georgie, a sex worker who knows well the old brothel that has now become Maureen's provisional residence and the scene of her crime; Tony Cusack, an alcoholic father of six whom Jimmy puts in charge of cleaning up the mess after the killing; and Ryan, Tony's eldest son and teenage drug-dealer. At the opening of the novel, fifteen year-old Ryan has decided to leave "the boy outside its own front door" and metamorphose into a "man" through the wonders of sex with Karine D'Arcy, the classmate with whom he is deeply in love. Spanning

more than six years, this transformation plays a central role in the narrative, and to a large extent Ryan's coming of age sets the pace of the novel.

Told from the perspective of these main protagonists, the story reveals itself as one and many, each character adding pieces to the compellingly crafted form of the novel. In the main, *The Glorious Heresies* is narrated in a third-person voice that filters the characters' accounts. These are interspersed with some chapters in italics that reveal Ryan's first-person thoughts and written letters to Karine; as well as one single chapter where the italics represent Karine's own memories of a key moment in her life. McInerney's dynamic prose and convincing dialogue, all permeated by a dark wit, bring her characters to life as complex, human, and simultaneously damaged and damaging people. You cannot consistently love, like, or hate any of them, and sometimes your allegiances can shift in the blink of an eye. But, unlike her imperfect creatures that frequently betray whatever trust the reader may place in them, McInerney's narrative rarely does.

The characters' interactions are played out against the backdrop of Cork city, which to a large extent becomes one more character in the narrative. The city is a nearly oppressive presence, in both concrete and abstract ways. Even so, Cork comes alive through McInerney's vivid use of its unique and memorable vernacular. In an enlightening article in *The Irish Times* in March of this year, the author acknowledges the essential role played by the Cork dialect as a means to "anchor her story, give it blood, let it breathe".

The city offers little to McInerney's misfits, who appear as active agents in the production of its socio-economic landscape, but repressed at its lowest level —"the corrugated shell of thousands of lives, all with their own part to play, fitting together like cogs, keeping the wheels turning. Doctors, dockers, dancers and dealers." As a microcosm of the nation itself, Cork city in *The Glorious Heresies* builds its apparent harmony upon the social marginalization of those whose existence and experiences (poverty, drug-dealing, prostitution, alcoholism, etc.) contradict the image Ireland wishes to project of itself. Often embodied in the narrative as "the neighbours", the city and, by extension, the nation turns its back to them. The novel's protagonists feel invisible, wilfully ignored and forgotten —"The neighbours knew. Why wouldn't they know? It takes persistence and dedication to remain oblivious". They are often silenced by shame, unable to vocalise their stories, to make their bruises seen. Even when the narrative is structurally built on encounters and connections, its thematic concerns paradoxically and effectively orbit around isolation and the kind of loneliness one can experience in the midst of a multitude.

Ongoing institutional neglect and active social exclusion are among the novel's main concerns, particularly when it engages with representations of and attitudes to sex, family, motherhood and — impinging on all these — patriarchal constructions of femininity and masculinity. Past and present are symbolically threaded, in this regard, by recourse to the metonymic image of the "Holy Stone" that becomes Maureen's improvised murderous weapon: "A flat rock, about a fistful, painted gold and mounted on polished wood, with a picture of the Virgin Mary holding Chubby Toddler Jesus printed on one side in bright Celtic colours". This relic seems to stand in the narrative for an Ireland whose theocratic Catholic past is generally perceived as long gone, and preserved only as marketable kitsch. However, the novel makes clear that the legacy of the church can still do much harm.

In *The Glorious Heresies*, Lisa McInerney portrays an Ireland that has not learnt "its history lessons" and continues turning a blind eye to the needs and rights of those who do not fit into picture postcard Ireland: "*And shame on you, Ireland, thought Maureen, four full decades later. You think you'd at least take care of your own?*". But there is also hope in this novel that urges us to "scale it down. Zoom in. Look closer", a critical step that may open the door to a more compassionate and inclusive society that actually sees and, most importantly,

cares about both the dismissed wrongs of the past and the injustices and inequalities of the present.

Aida Rosende Pérez is a lecturer in English at the University of the Balearic Islands, Spain. She is an active member of the research groups “Research Feninar Feminisms and Resistance: Theory and Practice” (University of Vigo), and “Literatures in English: Critical Perspectives and Creative Trends” (University of the Balearic Islands). Her current research focuses on contemporary Irish women’s writing and artistic practices, and covers different interests as the intersections of genre, race and nation, the discourses of nationalism and globalisation from a transnational feminist perspective, and feminist theories of the body, among others.