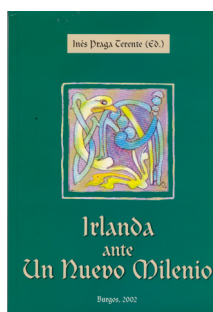


# “Who are you?” “I am Ireland” – *Mise Eire*” – (in the 21<sup>st</sup> century)



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In the “Foreword” to the publication of the essays presented at the Spanish Association for Irish Studies (AEDEI) held in Burgos in 2002, Inés Praga tells that in Gaelic Ireland there was a literary genre called “aisling” (a vision), in which a wandering poet would meet a beautiful woman whom he would address and ask “Who are you?” to which request the woman would answer “I am Ireland” – “Miss Eire” and would go along to narrate her misfortunes. We understand that this literary genre, that brings together poet and nation, has been re-enacted and metamorphosed through the centuries to the present moment, no less in the papers presented at the conference of Irish Studies that took place in Burgos in which the authors have tried to address different aspects of “Miss Eire. Hence, these writings cover a wide range of subjects: cultural, linguistic, educational, cinematographic and literary that affect Ireland as it enters the new millennium.

In “The Cultural Greening of Britain” Rosa González Casademont deals with the shifting but still conflictive relationship between Ireland and England. If González Casademont quotes Terry Eagleton (2000) saying that “[it is] cool rather than corny to be Irish” (p. 17) showing the growing English interest in “things Irish’, on the other hand, she cannot help remarking that “all that glitters is not gold” since two recent reports on human rights and race equality in Britain (Parekh 2000; Myles 2000) have shown that in spite of the notorious success of a some Irish artists, businessmen and “well educated young emigrants”, a great portion of the Irish migrants in England suffer from a demeaning stereotyping. González Casademont addresses this topic through her critical reading of the TV comedy *Father Ted*, the theater play *Stones in his Pockets* and the musical *The Beautiful Game*, all recently staged in Great Britain.

As for Ireland’s long-term cultural relationship with Spain, it is presented in the article by Eduardo de Gregorio Godeo “A Challenge for the New Millennium: New Directions in Research on the Early Cultural Relation between Ireland and Spain” and Marie Byrne’s “The Irish College in Seville (seventeenth century). While the first article brings a reading of Spanish influences in early medieval Ireland through a detailed

study of Isidore de Seville, and the remarkable influence of his Latin works on the Irish literary production of the seventh century, Marie Byrne's article traces the history of the Irish College in Seville, founded in 1612.

The question of literary relationship between Ireland and Spain is discussed in "The Spanish Cid: A Hero Prototype in Anglo-Irish Literature: 1810:1850" by Asier Altuna García de Salazar who discusses how "Spain, Spanish history and literature, especially with the figure of the Cid [Rodríguez Díaz de Bivar] acted as important points of interest for the Anglo-Irish writer, not only as sources of a past of glory and splendour, but also as present instances in the discursively historical conflicts and culture of the time" (p. 52).

The theme of nationalism and the revival of Gaelic is raised in the very interesting piece by Antonio R. Celada "The Necessity of De-Anglicising Ireland de Douglas Hyde: Todavía un Reto para el Nuevo Milenio?" which offers an acute and detailed reading of the speech delivered by Douglas Hyde (1860-1949), when he was appointed President of the National Literary Society in 1892. In his famous speech, "The Necessity of De-Anglicizing Ireland", he urges the Irish to introduce a deep change in their country, through a revaluing of the Gaelic language, "...not as a protest against imitating what is *best* in English, for that would be absurd, but rather to show the folly of neglecting what is Irish, and hastening to adopt, pell-mell, and indiscriminately, everything that is English, simply because it is English". Celada explains that for Hyde, Ireland's big mistake had been its imitation of foreign values at the risk of demeaning their own. In this way, they had "ceased to be Irish without becoming English".

From a linguistic perspective, Mary O'Sullivan tackles the differences between English and Hiberno-English in her careful study "Hiberno-English and the Present Perfect". Along the same lines, Patricia Trainor deals with the same topic in "English as it is spoken in Ireland". As for education in Ireland in the age of information technology, María Yolanda Fernández Suárez offers a detailed study of the subject in "Ireland on Call-Recent Developments in Education".

Irish cinematographic productions, focusing on the Irish question, also find their place in the present volume in two articles. In the first one, "Irish Cinema and the New Millennium", Maite Padrós Fabregó discusses Irish movies from the 1990s and suggests that, surprisingly, the films that have had the highest level of acceptance among foreign audiences are those that perpetuate "stereotyped representations of Ireland" while those production of higher artistic value that have had great acceptance by both Irish critics and audiences, have been ignored abroad. On the other hand, in her article, "El conflicto norirlandés y el uso de la violencia en *In the Name of the Father* (1993) and *The Boxer*"(1997) Tamara Benito de la Iglesia analyzes how both movies reconstruct historical events and also how the violence brought about by those events, namely "The Troubles" that started in Northern Ireland with the division of the island in the late 60s, produced tension between the individual and the community.

Last but not least, Irish literature has been given ample space in the present anthology bringing several essays that cover, among other issues, topics related to the

woman's question as is the case of "Albert Nobbs: El travestismo femenino como fórmula para ocupar espacios laborales vetados a las mujeres" de María Elena Jaime de Pablos, in which the author discusses how in this short story George Moore ironically transvestites its feminine character to get a man's position in the labour market.

Narrated in a very enticing manner "'The Birth of Our Lives Has Come': Somerville and Ross as Ascendancy Women Writers" by Silvia Díez Fabre, intertwines the biography of the two impoverished cousins Edith Somerville (1858-1949) and Violet Florence Martin (1862-1915), members of the Ascendancy, who instead of getting married, according to convention, set up a writing partnership, and the plot of their almost autobiographical novel *An Irish Cousin* that narrates the plight of a woman faced with the decline of her own social class, her personal choices, as regards marriage, and family responsibility.

In "Irish Women's Discourses in Mary Lavin and Edna O'Brien's Short Stories" María Amor Barros del Río shows how, in their short stories, these two prominent writers of the Irish tradition discuss the controversial concept of "Irishness" from a feminine perspective through the narrative of the apparently insignificant daily life of ordinary women that, when looked closely, acquire the status of representations of Irish history.

One of the most enlightening articles in the present collection, in the sense that it reconsiders an apparently innocent genre like the fairy tale is "Espacios Invisibles, Espacios de Silencio: Emma Donoghue y su Re-visión de los Cuentos de Hadas" by Marisol Morales Ladrón in which the author intelligently shows how this genre, through the didactic value that has been traditionally assigned to it has, for generations, masked the hegemonic values of patriarchal society implicit in it. In this context she considers the feminist re-writing of popular tales by Emma Donoghue in her collection *Kissing the Witch* (1997). Women related topics are also raised in "La iglesia Católica y la Mujer en la Poesía de Austin Clarke" by Leonardo Pérez García and "Revising Women's Inclusions in Irish Anthologies of Poetry" by Ana Rosa García García.

In his revealing article "From Furrow to Jet Stream, From Worry to Wonder: Heaney and the Space of Writing" the Portuguese writer Rui Carvalho Homem focuses on the relationship between "space" and "place", a central issue in those countries that like Ireland, have undergone the colonial experience. He quotes Carter *et al* (1993, p. xii) who pose the question "How [...] does space become place?" To which they answer "By being named [...] Place is space to which meaning has been ascribed". Carvalho Homem gives another turn to these reflections by adding that "If discourse is acknowledged as that which defines places within space, then literature and geography cannot but approach and mirror each other". In this context he goes on to consider the representation of space in places in the poetry of Seamus Heaney.

Though from a different perspective, the question of "place" is also raised in the article "John Hewitt: singular representante de una estirpe de colonizadores" by Maria Celsa Dapia Ferreiro where she interestingly assumes the perspective of this poet

from the Ulster, descendant of a long line of English colonizers who, after several centuries on the island, claim the soil as their own in spite of their lineage.

The issue of “Ireland” as place is also implicitly suggested by Antonia Rodriguez Gago in her article “Irish Beckett” in which, as she herself puts it, her aim is to show “how deeply Beckett was influenced by the Ireland of his childhood and youth, especially by the landscape, the mountains and the seaside of the South of Dublin and also by the marginalized people living in this area – tramps, beggars and common people”. Also, in his outstanding article “Sean O’Faolain: Still Here and Now”, Alfred Markey returns to this author’s texts to show how, already in the 60s, the Irish landscape was not a smooth “space” but “a place” criss-crossed by a hybridity that ran against the grain of the homogenizing discourse of nationalism and, hence, forecast the present conflicts with Nigerian and Romanian immigrants.

In his article “Martin McDonagh’s Demythologisation of the West of Ireland” Víctor Muñoz i Calafell analyzes the centrality of the West of Ireland in Irish literature to then show how this playwright “laughs at and finally destroys the myth resulting from this setting”. Along the same lines “the myth of rural Ireland, as a repository of the nation’s soul” is reconsidered in “Archetypes exposed: Murdering the Irish Matrix in Patrick McNabe’s novels” by Ana Esther Rubio Amigo, while Eva Herreros in “Flann O’Brien’s *At-Swim-Two-Birds*: A Brief Incursion into Irish Mythology?” shows how for O’Brien myth is “a device to carry out an extended enquiry about the concepts of selfhood, community and the value of literature through the exploration of the *author-figure* and his stature in the community”.

Language, as a literary strategy, is a central concern for several of the authors who contributed to the present volume. Hence, Carlos Villar Flor in his article “Comedy Versus Tragedy in Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman*” centers his discussion on “the double nature” of O’Brien’s humor as shown in *The Third Policeman*. In this light, he contrasts O’Brien’s “peculiar blending of humorous techniques and language – his unusual combination of comedy, parody and Irish crack –with the intimidating undertones of fear, darkness and threat”. Also, in “Language as a Means of Incommunication in Samuel Beckett’s *Molloy*” José Francisco Fernández Sánchez considers what he sees as Beckett’s failed attempt “to transcend language and turn it into a system like music”.

Finally, language as trope is also one of the central issues of Rosana Herrero Martín’s reading of “The Encroachment of Realities over Dreams in Brian O’Friel’s *Give Me Your Answer, Do!*” in which she argues that Friel pays constant attention in his craft to three main devices, one of them being, “the fictive powers of language” and its immense creative, transcendental potential”.